

## On Dualism/Nondualism

### Sesshin Book/[Embracing Mind](#)

#### *From Chapter One: Tapas*

At first Buddha studied with two meditation teachers, but was not satisfied with their teaching, so he turned to very hard tapas practitioners. Their ascetic practices included stopping breathing, stopping eating. Day and night they sat, without lying down. For many months they did not take a bath in the river. They were just dust and skin. Kids came around and teased these practitioners with sticks and little pebbles but they didn't move or respond.

The basic idea of tapas was dualistic, the separation of body and mind. It was believed that the spirit dwells in a transient body, so the purpose was to release the spirit from this limited, dense, sometimes filthy and chaotic, body. It was the visible vs. the invisible, restraint vs. freedom.

After six years of vigorous practice of tapas Buddha went into the river to bathe. Afterward, he could only crawl to the shade of the tree. Offered food, he ate and began to recover his strength. While sitting there, Mara came to tempt him, whispering in his ear, "You look so exhausted. Your chance of achieving enlightenment is only one out of a hundred. You'd better get up and take care of your body." But he continued to sit. In the end, what Buddha found was that body and mind are inseparable, an inseparable entity. They differ from each other, but without one, the other cannot exist. So he quit observing his existence as a dualism, and turned to diligent, earnest, continuous practice, guiding him to the purpose of life.

#### *From Chapter Three: Dualism, Armies of Mara*

A human being is a very complicated existence. From ancient times we have been struggling with dualism, which can be described as the recognition of our reality at the same time as we long for perfection. Dualism is the split between reality and our ideals. We always face both. There are always two paths in front of you, and when you take one the other disappears. Then again two paths appear. In Indian Buddhist thinking the samsaric duality, the mundane world and the ideal world, always appears, and no path is seen between the two. In a book where you see heroes in the samsaric world, and darkness and brightness fighting each other, finally brightness wins. In Nietzsche's Zarathustra, "Superperson," a similar idea of bodhisattvahood is seen. Instead, often in our own experience, we may feel that sitting only brings us questions instead of

answers. But if you settle on an answer, and feel that is the end of your questioning, that is not so good. You find you have to let go of your vigorous effort to maintain purity, because with purity, dry simplicity comes, where there is almost no life. You become a closed system, all blocked off. In that closed system, when noise or a chaotic situation comes, you try to block it off. In other words, a cushion can be very soft at first, but it gets harder and harder and harder! Maybe you need a better cushion! Instead, you remember your bodhisattva nature, and over and over again you plunge into the suffering world without hesitation.

When you look into the dialectic, "yes or no" and go beyond it, "right or wrong" and go beyond them, that is how to solve the dilemma of two truths. Buddha's sitting is beyond pure and impure, holy and unholy. It is not something you understand. It's indescribable. If you explain it, it becomes something which you don't know yet, and yet when you are experiencing sitting with all of us, that understanding is here with you.

### **The Armies of Mara**

When Buddha was recovering from the hard tapas practice, he found some munja grasses, tied them together and knit them, making something like a zabuton and zafu. At midnight of the first night, armies of Mara came to destroy him. There are nine different kinds of Mara: Desire, all kinds of desire, and also fear, as well as the endless thirst of love, and doubt. Illusion is another kind of Mara, when you get a little vain and begin to think you are different from other people. Mara is not something frightening, a fierce warrior who comes to cut your neck and split you in half. Rather, Mara dwells in the unknowing being which is you, and in the end you are completely lost. Nowadays we can say those are internal realizations. But when you read Buddha's biography, you believe it could be true, that some people came to him from "out there." The story is that Mara later confessed that Buddha was unable to be tricked. He followed him as soon as he left home, for seven years, but ended by saying, "I'm like a useless crow who picks at the rock. My beak is all bloody. Buddha is like a rock. Arrows cannot penetrate him."

Mara's temptation is something very familiar in our experience. The more we try hard, striving toward perfection, or toward a goal, the more the opposite force occurs. When you climb a mountain, toward the peak, the hardest climb occurs. When you dive in the ocean, you go to your limit and you feel like dying before you start to come up again. Desire to succeed, we experience naturally. We get hungry when we don't eat for some time. Hunger tells of the desire for food. This life has many needs without which it cannot be sustained. Without sleep an army of exhaustion, dullness, denseness, sleepiness, comes. That is Mara. Without sleep, we can hardly recover life. Without food we can hardly sustain this life. Without sexual desire, we are unable to continue generations. Without

being known by others, we cannot sustain this life. Nothing is wrong with these needs, so we have a great army within us. What shall we do?

#### ***From Chapter Four: Dualism as Skillful Means***

There have been many centuries of discourse about whether human nature is essentially good or essentially hopelessly bad. You could argue either way. Someone said that to appreciate a good thing, you show an example of a bad thing. Is that right? The human condition is very much arranged to reveal constant dualism, and the continuous struggle of living is an example. This is a dilemma unless we realize that this dualism is prepared for the sake of skillful means. On one hand, we want to become all-sided, all-knowing existences. And on the other, we eternally want to keep the secret of our self. You don't want to be known by anybody, not because of sinfulness, or your many errors, but to remain in a pure, unknown state. Yet you want to know everything about everything and everybody. We go back and forth, knowing that in the end we have to give up everything. We know that it's best to keep light-bodied, light-minded, very close to zero, but before that we want to have everything. Before you lose everything, you want to have everything. Isn't that strange! The more you strive for purity, the more the realization of yourself is hopeless, helpless, an unreachable, stained realization. The countless contradictions within us are examples of dualism. What shall we do?

#### ***From Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch***

**“Section 23.** Now that we have repented, let me give you, good and learned friends, the discipline of the Three Refuges that frees one from the attachment to differentiated characters....Good and learned friends, I exhort you to take refuge in the Three Treasures - The Buddha, who is enlightenment; the Law, which is the correct doctrine, and the Order, which is purity....The scripture merely says to take refuge in the Buddha within the self; it does not say to take refuge in another Buddha. If we do not take refuge in our own nature, there is no place in which to take refuge.”

#### ***Kobun's comments:***

With the Sixth Patriarch, Zen started to be present in Buddhism. The Chinese text translates as “returning, or coming home,” to the root, the beginning point from which you see things. This is the point we reached toward in repentance. It is pure mind. Triple Treasure is here, in pure mind, not somewhere different from yourself. This “purity” is not the opposite of “impure,” it is the original face of

things. Starting with faith, you will find out for yourself by facing the delusions of dualistic thoughts in zazen.

**“Section 44.** ... another monk named Shen-hui ... asked, ‘Your Holiness, when you sit in meditation, do you see [your mind] or not?’”

The Great Master rose and beat Shen-hui three times and asked him, “As I beat you, do you feel the pain or not?”

Shen-Hui answered, I am both pained and not pained.”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “I both see and do not see.... I see means that I see my own mistakes and trouble all the time.... I do not see means that I do not see the mistakes and sins of the people in the world... your being pained and not being pained are instances of birth and extinction. You do not even see your own nature. How dare you come and insult people?...Now you are yourself deluded and do not see your own mind, and yet you come and ask me if I see!”

... Shen-Hui paid reverence and became a disciple. He did not leave the Ts-ao Mountain but always remained at the Great Master’s side.”

*Kobun’s remarks:*

This conversation has many levels. My feeling of this discussion is of a large typhoon swallowing a small wind. Shen-hui spoke to the Sixth Patriarch in a public meeting. He was asking, “When you do zazen , is it clear?” When I sit, I can ask, “How is your zazen?” There is a big difference when one who doesn’t have zazen asks. The Sixth Patriarch said, “If you don’t understand, you will ask about it forever.”

[Reading from another text] “The Master says, ‘My seeing is self-knowing.... If your seeing is self-knowing also, you don’t need to expect my delusion.’” It means, if you bring deluded mind, you cannot see. And if you see, you wouldn’t bring this deluded question. In the beginning, we often have this kind of unprepared question. It’s a very sharp question: “When you sit in meditation, do you see your mind or not?” This “seeing” is the same word as kensho. This ken means seeing, not with two eyes, but with one eye. In other words, “Are you an enlightened person or not, doing this zazen?” The young monk was very sharp, but this sharp question had to be asked not because of the master, but because of the young monk’s own problem.

Pain is a feeling, while seeing relates with the eye or mind. Pain relates, not just with mind, but with skin, muscle, bone, too. Both of these questions, asking whether your zazen is clear or not clear, true or not true, whether you feel pain or no pain, are on a dualistic level of understanding. In Buddhist thinking, “dualism” refers to birth and extinction, arising and corruption. People often ask, “Is he enlightened or not?” “Is Kobun enlightened or not? I don’t think so!” But

the problem is not whether Kobun is or not, but whether you are, or not! If you say, "He is not enlightened," you are not enlightened.

When you measure, it is like putting a one-foot ruler up against a huge rock, and saying it is one-foot tall. Actually, it is a huge rock. If someone says you are deluded, that means he is deluded. He doesn't see what you actually are. If you really see another person's problem, you feel, "This is my problem." If you cannot feel another's pleasure, or their pain, even if you listen to and see them, you are a total stranger. You can imagine what is going on in this conversation between Hui-neng and Shen-hui. One is seventy years old, the other is a little boy of thirteen. How do you feel when the master hits Shen-hui? Does he hit him very hard, not too hard? You can feel that you are Hui-neng and you hit him not too hard, and not too soft.

When you don't feel the other's pain or pleasure, it's like a narrow entrance which only one person can go through, but three persons, all at once, want to go through. It is "me first." The three of them need to become very slender, but they don't want to! So if you don't die, you cannot go through this very narrow gate. If you die, you can go through and come out really alive. What shall you do?

**"Section 53.** The Great Master said, "My disciples, take good care of yourselves. I leave with you a verse, called 'Emancipation through the Realization of Real Buddhahood in One's Own Nature.'

....The Transformation-body, the Reward-body, and the Law-body -  
All Three Bodies are originally one body.  
If one seeks in this body his own realization,  
That is the cause for the perfect wisdom to realize  
Buddhahood...."

*Kobun's comments:*

Nirmanakaya is your very visible body, when you realize Buddhahood. Transformation body, another name for it, relates with our practice of following Buddha's way. It is like, when you want to be a flower, you become a flower; when you want to be a thief, you do the thief's thing, and you realize what a thief is. So practice, itself, is realization. This word, nirmana, means "roll of mind." When we see something, when things appear, that is called nirmana. It is a very ordinary thing we are always experiencing. Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, is called "Nirmanakaya Buddha," who actualized the Reward body and the Law body on this earth. And when we realize, when our true nature is realized, we become Shakyamuni Buddha, as the Transformation body. There is no division of Shakyamuni Buddha's body and our present body.

Reward Body and Law Body can also be experienced. They cannot be expressed but they can be experienced. You don't need to ask others, "Am I Buddha?" when you realize this is it. Law body, Dharmakaya, and Reward body, Sambhogakaya, are usually invisible, but when Transformation body, Nirmanakaya body, is realized, all three arise as one body. So three bodies are not three. It's just one thing, one body. To realize this body, we were born and we are living in this way. It is not a matter of pride. When you hear the world of sound, see the world of light, when you recognize a time, these are Reward body. When you see the forms and shapes and colors of all beings, that is Reward body. When you breathe air and feel that the air is breathing you, when you even get rid of the sense that you are breathing, then you understand air is Reward body, and you are also Reward body. You do not recognize "I am breathing, air is breathing me," there is just breathing. True respect toward our own existence depends on this idea. This is acceptance of the joy of Buddha, which is Sambhogakaya. Dogenzenji wrote a poem about this:

"The form of mountains,  
Sounds of valley,  
All my Buddha's figure and voice."  
You have to say, "my Buddha's body and voice" because it's not someone else's.

This word, "reward," is very dualistic. Because we are human, we speak like this. In another example, we may say, "I hold this paper like this." But Sambhogakaya, Reward body, includes the whole thing, so we could also say, "This paper is holding me." The paper doesn't need to express this, but because of our body, we speak. With words, all of our actions are for the use of humankind, but if we see things in a very pure state, there are no words. So when we express Sambhogakaya, it comes through words, forms, through the five senses. When you point to the moon, this action is like using words. You can say, "see the moon." But words and finger are not moon. If you seek Buddha outside it is a dualistic way. You see just a shadow. But if you seek Buddha inside, it means you seek Buddha within yourself. Buddha is realizing Buddhahood.

### **From *The Heart Sutra* book**

pg 27 "...only when form exists is emptiness realized. It means that without form there is no way to realize that emptiness exists. Without form, there wouldn't be emptiness. It's not like a vacuum, or mere voidness.

Your individual body, the continuing experience of being an individual, remains a very, very important thing. Your physical body and how you live is the only chance you've got to express the truth.... I used to put a lot of importance on the mental and spiritual element in zazen, but more recently I feel that exactly the

same weight of importance is in my live body. If there is perfect awakening, it is not just or mind, it is for body, too.”

pg 33 “In Mahayana Buddhism, to study this Indian idea of emptiness is the main subject. It translates as “conditioned origination.” Looking at this bag (holding up a purse), I don’t know what’s in there, but by holding it like this, to feel emptiness means my concern penetrates into all helpers which brought this to me. You can imagine one hundred million hands which made this bag possible. Not only that, but this material is part of a cow. That portion of the cow, when it was alive, from which this part was made, somehow it is almost impossible to imagine. So it is not just the word ‘empty.’ Maybe we should used ‘nonsubstantiality,’ because of the innumerable conditions which made this possible. ‘No substantiality’ doesn't mean just ‘no self’ or ‘no existence.’”

***From Ben Connelly, Inside Vasubandhu’s Yogacara.***

pg. 6 “Mahayana, or ‘Great Vehicle,’ Buddhism arose at the start of the first millennium as well, but it took a radical turn. Rooting its thought and practice in a small body of Early Buddhist teachings, it put an enormous emphasis on nondualism, often described as emptiness, or interdependence. Over and over again Mahayana sutras point out that everything we think or believe is rooted in dualistic thought, and thus none of it is ultimately real, and all of it leaves us in a web of our mind’s making. We may say there is day and night, but these are not actually separate phenomena. They are interdependent, empty of separation, not-two. You can’t have day without night; they interdependently are. Absolutely everything that can be conceived or spoken is like this. Mahayana teaches that what you think or believe something to be is conventionally useful but not the absolute truth, and that seeing connection, rather than separation, is the ground of compassionate freedom of mind. Mahayana teachings often suggest that the dualisms of Early Buddhism and the categorizations of Abhidharma are a distraction from realizing liberation right now through unconceptualized nondualism. In general the Early Buddhist schools’ emphasis on the path of personal liberation and attainment of nirvana, and the Mahayana idealization of the bodhisattva’s path of devotion to universal enlightenment, were often seen as in direct contradiction.”

pg. 151, 152 “Mahayana sutras deconstruct dualistic conceptions to point toward a mind that is completely liberated from divisions and separation, a mind that is free and intimate with everything, a mind of infinite compassion. Seeing through dualisms, or seeing their emptiness, is held up as absolutely central to enlightenment. In the Heart Sutra, the most widely chanted text in most Mahayana schools, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, the embodiment of compassion, teaches that form is emptiness and emptiness is form...

If you find the concept that form is emptiness hard to grasp, that is just fine. The language of nondualism presents an ungraspable vision of the world. If all phenomena are empty of self-nature, there is nothing to hold on to and nothing to reject. There is no ground on which suffering can originate.”

pg. 157-158 “The material in the first half of the ‘Thirty Verses’ recommends practicing mindfulness of phenomena, particularly the five universal factors and beneficial and afflictive emotions. The later verses, in keeping with their relationship to Mahayana Buddhism’s great emphasis on the nondual nature of phenomena, suggest a different kind of practice - one not based on observing an object, which creates a duality.

The idea of practicing nonduality is problematic, since it’s kind of hard to know how to do something that already both exists and doesn’t exist. For instance, one of the higher states of meditation (dhyanas) described in Early Buddhist texts is ‘neither perception nor nonperception.’ How does one do that? In the largest body of texts on the subject, the Prajnaparamita sutras, we are not given very clear instruction. In the Heart Sutra, we learn that prajnaparamita (the perfection of wisdom) is nonduality and that Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, by practicing this perfection of wisdom, liberates everything from suffering. We don’t however, get instructions in how to practice the perfection of wisdom, how to practice nonduality. Nonduality is, by nature, slippery and ungraspable, but there are some texts that can give us clues on how to practice it.

In Early Buddhist texts, we find two aspects of meditation practice - vipassana, or insight, and samatha, or calm abiding. They are understood and explained quite differently among the schools of Buddhism. One of the first known Yogacara texts, the Samdhinirmocana Sutra, lays them out in a distinctive way that clearly inspired aspects of Vasubandhu’s verses. It defines vipassana as the practice of mindfulness of phenomena recommended in the first half of this work and samatha as practicing ‘the observation of nonconceptual images.’....

### ***From Embracing Mind: Rohatsu, Chapter Twelve: Different Practices***

#### **Vipassana and Shamatha**

The eighth consciousness, alaya vijnana, includes all existences as your own self. This includes mountains, trees, clouds, whatever you experience. Although you still retain your individuality among all existences, when you are in alaya vijnana, you have no words to say "I and thou, I and you, I and that," or "they, he or she." It is all "I," so to speak. This alaya vijnana is a rather fundamental, universal consciousness which we all depend on. It is a somewhat theological concept, which relates to Vipassana and Shamata meditation. Vipassana, Shamata, are two vocabulary words which are actually inseparable, like mind and body are



inseparable. Yet, from the mind side, there is no body, and from the body side there is no mind. But we were born to see our existence from both aspects, and the two adjoin and make sense. So if you say, "I am a pure materialist," you are saying there is only matter in this world. If you say, "There is no matter, every existence is nothing but a manifestation of mind," that is also a possible perspective. However, if you rely upon only one aspect, you always have a problem. This conversation has been an endless debate among humans, and the philosophical settlement is still unresolved.

Listen to the creek. You stop hearing it when I am talking but the creek becomes loud when your mind is in the state of shamatha, a deep degree of shamatha. Vipassana, insight, perseverance, increases. You have memories relating to the sound. You can imagine what kind of creek it is. Not a huge waterfall, it's a tiny creek, running here and there hitting rocks. You see a long, long pattern of the creek. With every objective image which comes to you, your shamatha and vipassana are always working together. As a process of establishing your meditative function, with vipassana you go in. Your concentrated mind stays on each object, one at a time, for some length of time. You observe the flame of a fire, not only how it burns and moves, but memories of your life from ancient time comes back to you. You see reflections of the sun, sometimes direct sunlight, or you stare at the light of a sunset, and many insights come to you, as if the sun is talking to you as your mother or your father, as life-giver to you. Especially when you experience the warming moments in the sunrise, your body starts to understand the relationship of your body and sunlight. At the moment of the sunrise or sunset, light penetrates into your body at the "third eye." While listening to the water, when you face each other in the sangha, what that water, various sounds of running water, brings to you, is understanding of each other, going very deep.

**From Ben Connelly, *Inside Vasubandhu's Yogacara.*, pg. 193, 194**

"In the last line of this work, Vasubandhu refers to the Mahayana concepts of three bodies of Buddha: the manifestation body, the bliss body, and the Dharma body. In Sanskrit, these are known as nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, and dharmakaya, respectively. In simplest terms the manifestation body refers to the physical, historical body of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, the bliss body refers to the groundless bliss of liberation; and the Dharma body refers to nondualism, limitlessness. In Mahayana Buddhism we think of Buddha's enlightenment as being the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena, of the complete nondualism of everything. Since nothing is separate from Buddha, this was his realization: everything is Buddha. When my teacher stunned my young, troubled and new-to-Buddhism self by saying 'you are Buddha' all those years ago, she

was using a teaching based on the idea of the dharmakaya. Nothing is other than Buddha, that is what makes it Buddha. It is not something else-it's just this.

From [\*Thursday Mornings with Kobun Chino Sensei as a Young Man\*](#)

October 11, 1973

## **Ego**

Ego, when you discover it, is a very good, very clear feeling. It is a very clear perception of the whole aspect, whole view, of your life. Maybe at first you feel something, kind of a question mark. You don't know, "Is this ego? Am I just... ego?"

"Vijnana... prajana... prajna," has this ego and pure self. In the Buddhist term, this ego has various faces. First of all, you don't know how big it is, and who you are, and who they are. "What is this?" Somehow you feel, "I am living and everything is okay." Like when you say, "American Buddhism," that is big ego, big ego. You don't know how big it is. Maybe it is the same size as the earth. That is American Buddhism! The same size as unsolved, unknown universes. American Buddhism has that kind of hugeness. In ancient times, Indian sages said, "kalpas," measureless universe, innumerable universes. This galaxy is just part of it. Yet, in this great sense, American Buddhism has to have the character of very big ego. And European Buddhism, too, it has very strong ego. You can smell it, smell the fragrance of ego! And it has some karmic, maybe traditional, historical background of each nation.

Usually ego is ugly, and doesn't want to show among people, but without letting people know, insists. That is ego. Most ego, I should say, is just imagination, just idea, just a memory, unforgettable memory, like the face of the past. "I was very famous when I was 25 years old. Now I am not so good condition, but I was fantastic!" That kind of vanity....

...Until we find the source of the big job, which has become a little ego, you don't recognize.... Finally you find, "Oh, that is myself, that time," and you become very embarrassed. Many times the ego is formed by social conditioning, a sense of position, "This is me, this is mine, that belongs to me, that belongs to others, mine is on this side of the line, others here...." Like the Pacific Ocean - there is no line, but it is divided, "... from this place, American nation, from this, Soviet, and Japan like this."

One thing is, we are a being which has a home. If we do not have any homes, just like air, there will be no need to speak of ego. Basic thing is, ego has to be appreciated, if it appears. It is not a thing to be hated. It tells you where you are. Like when some dangerous thing come close to you, even if you do not have any

egoistic idea, you begin to feel how to react to this force. In many ways, in social sense, our self, even it is pure self, takes the form of ego, to be discriminated and to discriminate.

STUDENT: In the relative world ....

KOBUN: Um hmm. This is very important point. When you say, the "self", in the sense of ego, Western people, European people, are really well-trained because they have had so long period of training in independence and freedom. To free yourself from all restraints and let all restraints be free from yourself, this is real good training. In the Orient this is not so well-trained. The Oriental people's feeling is more secureness of sociality. When you fit to some society you feel stable, and free. It's very interesting. Lately we see Japanese lone travelers, but mostly Japanese people move with three or four figures. In Chinatown still you see many Japanese travelers with groups.

When you ask if there was a sense of self in Shakyamuni Buddha, the Enlightened One, what do you think is the mind of Buddha? What is Buddha nature, what makes Buddha a Buddha? Or what is the content of Buddha nature? This is well-known, very familiar thing for you, now you understand what it is when I say so. Wisdom, compassion is the very, very thing Buddha nature is. You can remember that. And what wisdom and compassion is, is self which has no ego at all. "Wisdom, compassion" are very well-known words. We use them often and we have some flash, very deep experience. Sometimes we have a close, very close, friend, partner of life and you know what you feel, what is compassion, what is wisdom. But not all the time we feel that strong feeling of not depending. A deep feeling of owing, or acceptance, to be accepted, this kind of feeling. Not halfway acceptance, but total acceptance. Wisdom and compassion are the very contents of the all-being.... To let it appear, let it appear is to drop the self, drop the ego. It's a very strange relation. This point is a very important point.