

GORRICK'S RUN SPRING SESSHIN OCTOBER 2008

ROSHI SUSAN MURPHY TEISHO 2: Who has defiled you?

Today I'd like to take up the second of the three questions put by the monk to Xitou, that we began to explore yesterday. The first was 'How do you get free?' to which Xitou replied, 'Who has bound you?' The second question put was 'What is the Pure Land?' - by implication, 'Where is it and how do we reach that state?' And Xitou replied with another well-aimed question. 'Who has defiled you?'

So, what is the Pure Land the monk is talking about, this state of blessedness in which nothing can trouble anything else? There's an old human dream that we have, as human beings, that we have somewhere somehow lost or misplaced Eden. It goes by many different names, but it's a very old and informative dream. That there was a lost golden age, that we once knew paradise. It's sometimes a very important step in the story that we had a fall, a very important Fall from grace. The story implies that there is no easy way back but only an exceptional sacrifice, by someone else on our behalves in one great story, or in another, by an almost brutal turning of ourselves inside out in order to regain that lost state of purity.

I think everybody here would understand a sense of at least a misplaced wholeness, that kind of haunting that we can sense in ourselves, that there is a greater wholeness than this. There is a greater wholeness than the way my life is going right now. There is somewhere, a more unmixed wellbeing. It's a very honorable dream at that point. But the residue of this dream of a pure land, the residue of this lost wholeness dream, is such things as shame, and depression, inadequacy and at the root of them all, some form of self hatred. So when Xitou asks, 'Who has defiled you?' that's a very kindly and deep question in reply.

Are you defiled? And if so, who is creating the sense of defilement? And are you willing to let that continue? And if so, what does it create? Once more, we are invited to look right into that great, bottomless well of *Who?*

If you look at the dream of purity it is almost always an attempt to manage self-hatred. If we are not aware of this – and sometimes even if we are - terrible things can happen in the name of purity. And we can do terrible things to *ourselves* in the name of purity. I think it's possible that every hurtful act is the transference, either to others or to ourselves in fact, of some sense of supposed impurity that we cannot bear in ourselves. So it's a kind of curse, endlessly passed on.

Maybe the whole great journey of losing paradise is on behalf of the tremendous joy of finding it. Of finding not purity, restored, but of finding something more like joy reconciled with what we are and always truly were, in a state of creative peace with human frailty – humanness itself. This is reunion with who we really are, it is not recovered purity at all. It's actually meeting ourselves whole. And that blessed wholeness has to include the great, rich, hazy mixture that we are.

Let me tell you a story that will be familiar to some of you, not perhaps to others. It's the story of the true Chien. Wuzu raises as a koan an old folk story, which involves - of all things, in a tradition that rarely mentioned women - a young girl. Once, in a provincial town on a great river - probably now in these days a dammed river, but that's another story - lived a young girl, called Chien. She had grown up next door to her cousin, the boy called Chou, and they had played together from the time they were tiny. So they just quite naturally loved each other. One day in passing, Chien's father said to them, perhaps in fun, 'When you grow up, you two will marry'. And they would have giggled and run off to play again, but they always remembered it, and they believed at some level that they were betrothed to each other, and of course this shaped the way they began to grow up into adulthood.

But as was the way in old China, when Chien came of marriageable age, a more important kind of suitor was found, an official, a powerful older man who expressed interest in her. And her father agreed to marry her to this man. This came as a great blow to Chou and Chien, though neither would have spoken a word of protest Chien's father. Filial duty would not hear of it. But Chou thought, 'I can't possibly hang around here. It would be better if I went off, moved away'. So as the sun was setting he prepared to set off in a boat up the river away from the whole catastrophe. But just as the dark was falling and was undoing the rope that moored the boat, he heard footsteps along the river bank. It was Chien, calling out 'Wait for me, please wait for me'. And he stopped and joyfully welcomed her into the boat. They sailed away together to the next province, where they got married and had two children and lived happily ever after - almost. For they had moved into that very thick part of their young adult lives where everything is so busy you can hardly remember a minute ago.

But as the time went by Chien did begin to remember, she was haunted by this sense of something lost, something astray, something deeply wrong. Her filial ingratitude towards her father weighed on her terribly. She had left him without a word and she felt that she had betrayed him. So, six or so years later down the track, she came to Chou and said 'We have to go back, we have to go and face my father and reconcile with the family'. So they got back in to the boat and sailed down river until they came back to Chien's family home, or nearby. Chou said 'You wait here, I'll go ahead and see how things are up there at the house.' And he went bravely up to the house prepared to take the brunt, not knowing what kind of reception he might find but fearing the worst. When he knocked on the door, there was his uncle and father-in-law who welcomed him with open arms and said 'Ah, how good is it to see you. We were so worried about you. We always wondered what had happened to you!'

Chou was totally taken aback and he said 'Well, hang on, aren't you mad at me, I came expecting to ask for your forgiveness for running away with your daughter.' He had trouble going on because his father-in-law was standing there staring at him blankly, until he finally said, 'Which Chien is that? Chien has been sick in bed all this time ever since you went away.' Chou protested, angrily, ' She's not sick, we've been married for six years, we've got two children, don't mock me like this!' They stared at each other, until Chien's father said, 'Come inside, let me show you something, follow me.' And he took him into the house to Chien's bedroom, where a young woman lay, sick in bed - unmistakably Chien, though very thin and pale. And he said, 'Look she hasn't spoken, she can't speak but she can understand'. He said 'She's been sick like this since you went away.' He spoke to this Chien in the bed, and said 'Chou tells me you ran away with him'. The sick woman just looked at Chou, smiled and remained silent. Chou was very bewildered but he said 'Okay, now you come with me down to the river, I've got something to show *you*.'

He took the old man down to the boat where Chien was waiting. And when she greeted her father, he said to her, 'If you really are my daughter, I have nothing but love for you. But there's something I don't understand, come, come with me back to the house'.

As they were walking back up the path they saw that Chien had risen from her bed and was coming down. The sick Chien was approaching the smiling well Chien, they were coming together, they were meeting, at last. They stood in front of each other. 'How I have longed for you', they said, and they embraced and they melted into each other so that there was only one Chien to be found, showing no sign illness, in fact more radiant and mysterious than ever before. Chien's father said, 'She was sick like someone drunk, someone in a drunken stupor, but now I understand that her spirit soul was separated, her spirit was absent'. And Chien said, 'I never realized that I was at home all the time. I saw Chou leaving home in anger, I dreamt that I ran after his boat. But now I can't say

which one I really was. Which was I, the one who went away or the one who stayed at home?’

Wuzu raised this story as a great question and said, ‘The woman Chien and her soul separated. Tell me, which is the true Chien?’ And that remains a great question: Which is the true Chien? the true Nell? the true Jason? And by implication, how do we lose sight of that and touch with that, how do we defile it or get so mixed up about it?

There’s many things I like about this story. At one level it touches a very poignant recognition that I think everybody harbours in some form, not unrelated to the lost paradise story, perhaps: That there are some parts of us that we split off in some way, usually under pressure from outside, and leave behind. Something precious and fundamental stays undeveloped, we seem to abandon something important in ourselves and we probably tremble, thinking ‘I’ve lost that forever’. It might be our love of drawing, our joy in writing or doing things with our hands. It might be our ability to trust, or love, or feel anguish, or anger. It might be some secret thing we always knew we were meant to be. It might be our more fully realized and essentially untroubled state of self.

One thing the story seems to be saying is, that in the very place that enforced a split, the untouched or unrealized part of ourselves remains, as if sick - unable to speak, but very much alive. The father was oblivious in simply deciding to marry off his daughter to somebody completely foreign to her, betraying her love for Chou, injuring her spirit. Nevertheless, back there in the family home or original place where an injury took place, back there in the deepest part of ourselves, that part of our true self may be lying sick or inert, but it is resilient, it’s alive. I find that interesting at a psychological level, about this story. But perhaps tonight it’s here to tell us something that lies deeper than psychology can reach about forgiveness and reunion, about recognition and embrace.

I've got a friend I've had since 4th class. She didn't discover until she was around the age of 10 or 11 that she was Jewish, that her father had lost an entire family in the holocaust, that she had two sisters she would never meet, that he had lost his wife, he'd lost his mother, his father, his brothers, his business - his whole life. And that she had been raised in a kind of bubble of unreality and extreme carefulness, designed to protect her from even knowing that she was Jewish, even here safely in Australia. But her parents, who had met in the aftermath of war, decided to let her know when she was around that age. A few years after that she was standing in the kitchen one day when she asked her father a question that she asked people at that time, in fact I remember her asking me the same question. And the question was, 'What is the most important thing in life?' And her father said very simply, 'To forgive'. I find it remarkable that a man who had so *much* to forgive knew that this was the most important thing in life.

If there was not that ability in us to forgive our lack of wholeness, and the lack of wholeness of others, if that was not there, we wouldn't even have this fragile degree of civilization that we hope we have. It would be...it would be utterly barbaric. So much depends upon this turning back towards the wholeness that embraces the whole of humanity, rather than one that dreams it can be purified, rendered pure. Any injury that offers forgiveness a chance to enter and confirm human being-ness – identify and confirm the sort of strange alchemy that we are as human beings - may be worth the price of admission. And at its base, every act of forgiveness forgives and resolves 'defilement', 'impurity', 'human'.

This is a very strange business, it's like those words of Chuang-tzu, 'Because the way was wounded, love became complete'. It's evident in the Chien story. The direct path into reality for human beings can be an oddly crooked and wounded-looking path of wisdom. We seem to need the path of suffering to arrive whole at last, and human.

There is a poem by Kevin Hart that touches into the woundedness of Chien. It's called *The Companion*.

'There is a man who will not let me sleep,
Each night he comes and trembles by my side.
He cannot be touched, yet wind disturbs his hair.
He cannot touch, yet shadows cover me.

Each night he comes and trembles by my side.
I reach towards him and he fades like day.
He cannot touch, yet shadows cover me.
I hide within myself and he draws close.

I reach towards him and he fades like day,
I hear him but he does not speak a word.
I hide within myself and he draws close
And stretches out both arms as if in pain.

I hear him though he does not speak a word
The sound of someone breathing, wind in trees,
He stretches out both arms as if in pain,
'I come to wound you and to heal the wound.'

'Because the way was wounded, love became complete'. A very strange business, with Christian echoes in this poem. But from a Zen point of view, you see, we can't take some kind of accounting sheet to the great empty sky, to the fullness of our mind, we can't. We can't take it and bring it to bear on the way a tree grows, or a bird swoops upon a frog, or water rests in a puddle. We can't legislate the stars, we could try, but I don't think you can possibly legislate even a pair of mating snails on the path. We're not here for perfection, we're not here for purity, luckily, unless we can recognize perfection in what is, just as it is.

Because we never really ever controlled anything, except at best our power to restrain our worst impulses.

The story of Dogen's enlightenment points into this, as Shunryu Suzuki tells it: "Dogen Zenji became interested in Buddhism as a boy as he watched the smoke from an incense stick burning by his dead mother's body and he felt the evanescence of our life. His feelings grew within him and finally resulted in his attainment of enlightenment and the development of his deep philosophy. When he saw the smoke from the incense stick and felt the evanescence of life, he felt very lonely and that lonely feeling became stronger and stronger and flowered into enlightenment when he was 28 years old. And at the moment of enlightenment he explained 'There's no body and no mind'. When he said 'No body, no mind' all his being in that moment became a flashing into the vast phenomenal world, a flashing which included everything, it covered everything. It had immense quality in it, all the phenomenal world was included in it, an absolute, independent existence. That was his enlightenment. starting from the lonely feeling of the evanescence of life he attained the powerful experience of the quality of his being. He said, 'I dropped off mind and body, the dropped away body and mind.' Because you think you have body or mind, you have lonely feelings and when you realize that everything is just a flashing into the vast universe you become very strong, and your existence becomes very meaningful. This is Dogen's enlightenment. This is our practice, our enlightenment."

That enlightenment that Suzuki is describing is as natural as reality itself. Moment after moment everything is coming right now out of nothing. This very evening, this wind is blowing out of nothing. This breath is breathing from nothing. Each thng brings the universe into its existence right now! This is the moment of creation, this moment, a creation event. That's the quality of beginner's mind and we value it deeply. That's the true state of things, that is the joy of things. This naturalness is not sloppiness, it's not letting things go to wrack and ruin. It's much more like a kind of condition or state of no trouble - like the

little pebbles up there on the altar, quite untroubled. They have no trouble being with no trouble. We have a bit more trouble being with no trouble. It's easier with a stone than it is with us. That's good, that's our, that's our human schtick, and we must value it, it's us. We have to work at 'untroubled' because we have such a strong bent towards thinking that we actually have something – something good, something not so good.

In a way, yesterday's talk of 'I don't know', of not knowing, that's the giving back of everything you know, giving it all back to the universe, and enjoying the great freedom of not 'having' a single thing. And when we no longer think we have something, then we finally belong to everything. And we finally have everything to give away, to others. So when we act from there, ask nothing, clear of self, belonging instead to everything, then what we do is true activity, true, clear and whole. It's like that absolutely key moment when Chien reaches for Chien and says 'How I have longed for you'. Fully here, fully human, the koan of humanness resolved just *exactly* in that profound yearning and turning towards reunion.

There is an expression in Zen for the most important thing, and it is 'the hazy moon of enlightenment'. Like beginner's mind, it is most highly praised and prized. Keizan wrote a beautiful poem about it.

Though we have vast billows ranging to
the clear blue sky in autumn,
How can it compare to the hazy moon on a spring night?
Some people want it pure white,
But sweep as you will, you cannot empty the mind.

'Though we have vast billows ranging to the clear blue sky in autumn' – that's an image of vast emptiness, all the forms of the world just vast billows of emptiness, as far as you can see right to the great autumn sky. The autumn sky is the sky of giving everything away. How can that compare to the hazy moon on a spring

night? Some people want it pure white, but sweep as you will, you cannot empty the mind, you cannot empty the heart, and so we are blessed indeed, with the hazy human moon of enlightenment. For us, the perfection of each moment is found right in the midst of imperfect life. How could it be otherwise? We are each other, we are a very impure, mixed and marvelous thing from the beginning. As human beings, we are everything that our consciousness can possibly include. Sometimes I think the only imperfection on the planet is the dream of perfection itself, deeply troubling to the earth. Have a look around you. Go back as far as you like in human history and have a look at how millions have died as a result of the perfection plans of others, and how many are dying of that right now. Or how the planet itself is beginning to die of this toxic dream of a perfect, a perfectly easy, a perfectly comfortable technologized unnatural life in which the troubling thorn of the imperfect can be extracted from human life and set aside.

A dream of emptying the mind has inside it a fear of the mind and its productivity, a fear perhaps of reality and its productivity and the troubling appearance of one thing after another and of course disappearance of one thing after another as well. It is a dream of purifying reality itself, at some level, to the measure of a human fear. Suffering after suffering arises right here: reality, uncorrected, is seen as something to be suffered.

But you know we can also get too obsessed with suffering, another aspect of this purity/impurity business. It is quite true that the Buddha taught the truth of suffering, arising not just from clinging or craving or thirst but also quite as much from anger, or ill-will, from ignorance, suspicion, arrogance and so on, any state of mind that puts us outside ourselves, 'left out to die on the mountains of the moon', as Rilke expressed it.

But the Buddha equally taught reunion, he taught the reunion that we have just been touching on in the story of the true Chien. The Buddha himself also speaks of 'Dwelling happily, dwelling at ease in things as they are.' That beautiful

embrace 'How I have longed for you'. That is the gesture of knowing your suffering, recognizing it, identifying it, embracing it entirely, and including our own agency (Who has defiled you?) This is pointing not just to the joy of the untroubled state, it's offering an ultimate, practical good sense.

There's a poet who hung around en a bit and was a member of the Beat generation. He even popped up in one of Jack Kerouac's novels, *Big Sur*, as Dave, I think. Anyway he was actually a poet called Lou Welch, and one poem of his gave the name to Nelson Foster's zendo, Ring of Bone, in the Sierra mountains of California. Here's that poem:

'I saw myself
a ring of bone
in the clear stream of all of it
and vowed always
to be open to it
that all of it might flow through
and then heard
'ring of bone'
where ring is what a bell does.'

So I trust you can hear the practical wisdom in this. To allow our human bones to be a ring, mortal and resounding ring, through which it all can flow, all of it, unimpeded, nothing turned away, nothing left out. That clear stream is like emptiness itself, clear water, no back, no front. That clear stream is the flow of all of us, muddy, hazy human beings. Each thing one of the branching streams that flow in the darkness, bright streams in the dark. Each of us a bright stream flowing from the dark, unknown source.

Zen practice is valuable as a means to bring human beings to practical wisdom - to the intelligence that can live and act in the present, to bring us to the present,

to where we can read the flow and agree to it, become it, complete agreement. Flexibility is very practical wisdom, flexibility is the sign of the Zen life itself. When you think about it every tiny detail in the living world is a kind of hymn to flexibility and adaptability. You might choose to call it evolution, but really what that is is complete agreement with conditions in change. And if we fail to accept conditions in perpetual change, we are dinosaurs. The eye of an insect or the fin of a dolphin or these little tiny wings shed by ants that you find on your cushion at the moment, or the bone structure of a human being, or the astonishing structure of the human brain, the human mind. All of them have come into being as expressed and fine-tuned agreement with conditions in perpetual change. So what can we do but join it, agree with it?

So please let us cherish the hazy moon of spring, of humanness. Let our human bones ring with it, as we sit here, entirely ourselves. Not the good bits, not the bad bits, but all of it, all of us. Who can possibly defile *all of it*? Emily Dickinson said, '*All is asked of all*'. So that's it, that's reunion, that's the Pure Land and it's always right here, and luckily we can turn to it anytime.

It's as close as this breeze touching us now, and your own next breath.
