

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Play

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Lin-chi (Rinzai) asked Huang-po: "What is the clearly manifested essence of the Buddha Dharma?" Huang-po hit him. This happened three times.

Lin-chi then went to Ta-yü. Ta-yü asked, "Where did you come from?"

Lin-chi said, "From Huang-po."

Ta-yü asked, "What does Huang-po have to say?"

Lin-chi said, "I asked him three times, 'What is the clearly manifested essence of the Buddha Dharma?' and he hit me three times. I don't know whether I was at fault or not."

Ta-yü said, "Huang-po is such an old grandmother. He completely exhausted himself for your sake. And you come here asking whether or not you were at fault!"¹

With this Lin-chi had great realization, and exclaimed, "Ah, there is not so much to Huang-po's Buddha Dharma!"

Ta-yü grabbed hold of Lin-chi and said, "You bed-wetting little devil! You just finished asking whether you were at fault or not, and now you say, 'There isn't so much to Huang-po's Buddha Dharma.' What did you just realize? Speak, speak!"

Lin-chi jabbed Ta-yü in the side three times. Shoving him away, Ta-yü said, "Huang-po is your teacher. It's not my business."²

¹ Robert Aitken and Kōun Yamada, trans., *Shōyōroku*, mimeo, Diamond Sangha, Honolulu and Haiku, Hawaii, Case 86.

² Ruth Fuller Sasaki, trans., *The Recorded Sayings of Ch'an Master Lin-chi Hui-chao of Chen Prefecture* (Kyoto: Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), pp. 50-52.

PLAY

A lot can be said about this case, but I just want to take up a single point. How much is “not so much”? How is it that “not so much” gave rise to such a vigorous tradition that thrives to this very day?

Of course, Lin-chi was not the only teacher in our lineage who talked about the poverty of the Buddha Dharma. When a monk asked Chao-chou, “Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?” Chao-chou said, “Mu.”³ The monk didn’t need to ask what that Mu amounted to, he already knew that “Mu” meant “nothing at all.”

According to the *Ts’ung-jung lu* (Japanese, *Shōyōroku*), the monk went on to ask, “All beings have Buddha-nature, how is it that the dog has none?” Chao-chou said, “Because of its inherent karma.”⁴

Karma and Buddha-nature, the substantial teaching of all the Buddhas and its empty content—these sets of relative and absolute, the universe and the void, are one in our play as Zen students, thanks to our marvelous heritage.

Huang-po, Ta-yü, and Lin-chi, Ma-tsu and Pai-chang, Ju-ching, Dōgen, and all the other great ones fooled with themes of essence and phenomena to enlighten us. One of my early Japanese teachers and I used to argue about “play.” His understanding of English may have been a factor in our disagreements. For him, play was limited to children, baseball and theatre. I understood play as the nature of interaction, not only human interaction, but all of it. Puppies are more frisky than dogs, but even an old dog knows it’s a game.

Interaction is play because it doesn’t amount to much, or even to little. On your cushions in the meditation hall, nothing impedes your interaction with thoughts. You view one thought-frame after another. When your thoughts wander, and you notice what has happened, then easily and smoothly you return to focussing on Mu. When the bell rings for the end of the period, you bring your hands together, rock back and forth, swing around on your cushions, and stand up.

In the workaday world, again, interaction is play. Nothing impedes your response to your child’s demands. When the telephone rings, you

³ Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 95 ff. “Mu” is the Japanese pronunciation of the pertinent ideograph, and “Wu” is the contemporary Mandarin pronunciation. However, I am told that “Mu” was probably the pronunciation in Chao-chou’s time.

⁴ Aitken and Yamada, trans., *Shōyōroku*, Case 18.

type "save" on your computer, pick up the receiver, and say "Hello."
When the bus reaches your station, you get off promptly.

Farmers sing in the fields
Merchants dance at the market.⁵

The Layman P'ang wrote:

How wonderful, how miraculous!
I draw water, I carry kindling!⁶

When Joanna Macy and I spoke at a Buddhist Peace Fellowship meeting in Sydney recently, we were challenged from the back of the hall by a group of evangelical Buddhists. Are you surprised that there could be evangelical Buddhists? Evangelism is a character trait, and is not limited to any particular religion. These people were born-again Buddhists, firmly convinced that "Dharma" and "Karma" are entities with certain fixed qualities and tendencies. Joanna and I told them, each in our own way, that no concept is solid or absolute, and that even "Buddha" self-destructs. Their Dharma was not ours. They became angry because they didn't know our interaction was play, an inning in the joyous game of time and space, giving and taking with empty universal nature.

"All the world's a stage." We play roles: Zen teacher, Zen student, parent, spouse, friend, worker, pedestrian, and so on. We play "as if," to use the Hindu term, as if we were Zen teacher, student, parent, and so on. The child plays house, as if she were a mother. The mother plays house in exactly the same way.

He himself took the jar
and bought wine in the village;
now he dons a robe
and makes himself the host.⁷

⁵ Sōiku Shigematsu, *A Zen Forest* (Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1981), p. 100.

⁶ Cf. D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Third Series (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1976), p. 86.

⁷ Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust: The History of the Kōan and Kōan Study in Rinzai (Lin-chi) Zen* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1966), p. 112.

PLAY

And when the play doesn't make you laugh, that doesn't mean it isn't play any more. Tragedy is play too, tragic to the very bottom, perhaps, but still play.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle by Francis Beaumont taught me that the audience creates the play, and the play is not confined to the stage. A druggist and his wife are patrons of the theatre, and she doesn't like the way the play begins. She stands up in the audience and starts directing things. Her paramour, the druggist's apprentice, is introduced as a new character, the Knight of the Burning Pestle, with a pestle in flames inscribed as a crest on his shield. We then have a new play, and the separation between audience and actors is broken down. The inner fantasy of druggist's wife is acted out on stage, and thus inner and outer too, lose their barrier.⁸ This is only possible because matter is insubstantial, and there is not a speck of anything to interfere with our complete interpenetration.

In the world of play, a druggist's apprentice becomes a knight, a child becomes a father, a dog becomes a baby, and the insurance agent, throwing off his worries about declining sales, transforms himself into a prince and seduces his tired wife and the mother of his brood, who in turn becomes a ravishing, masked beauty at a mummers ball.

In a well that has not been dug,
water from a spring that does not flow is rippling;
someone with no shadow or form
is drawing the water.⁹

This is Zen play. Where is the person with no shadow or form? On the stage of the interview room, you dance your response.

That person with no shadow or form inhabits a dream world that is no other than this world. Traditional people confirmed their dreams in this world with ceremonies, and then re-entered the dream world again by re-enacting their ceremonies. We do the same with our ceremonies. We dedicate the merit of reciting our sutras to our ancestors in the Dharma, and to our parents and grandparents who have died. Are they

⁸ Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Andrew Gunn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁹ "Miscellaneous Kōans," mimeo., Diamond Sangha, Honolulu and Haiku, Hawaii.

AITKEN

listening? Of course they are. Nakagawa Sōen Rōshi once said to Elsie Mitchell, “Of course there are bodhisattvas and angels living up in the sky!”

This is all possible because there is not much to Huang-po's Buddha Dharma, or to anyone else's for that matter. And as to the Buddha-nature of the dog, or of you or me, “Mu!”