

THE TRIPLE TREASURE, Olympia Zen Center, Eido Frances Carney, July 15, 2010

You heard at the opening of the Ceremony, the offering to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha: “Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dharma, Homage to the Sangha.” The Triple Treasure it's called, it's a cornerstone of the Precepts, the central piece, the manifestation of practice, the Triple Treasure.

In almost all of the world's religions there is some triune principle, not all of them, certainly not in Islam, but almost all have some triune mystery to point to, and we have what we refer to as the Three Treasures.

I have a Mondo from Daido Lorie's book, CAVE OF TIGERS. A mondo is something that he practiced with his students. Mondos are fast moving dialog, back and forth, on some question about practice. The student presents a problem, the Teacher prods another question, the student responds. It's a dialog that unfolds a teaching at the central point of Practice and brings about a realization.

I picked this one out, out of thousands.

The student says: *I see the Three Treasures when I'm on the subway in New York City, and a group of teenagers get on. They're shouting and screaming and I see the clarity of the Buddha, the Purity of the Dharma and the Harmony of the Sangha.*

Teacher: *How is that any different from the days before you began Zen Practice?*

Student: *It's exactly the same!*

Teacher: *Was it there before you started Zen Practice?*

Student: *Yes.*

Teacher: *And it's there after you started Zen Practice?*

Student: *Yes.*

Teacher: *Then why practice?*

Student: *For the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.*

Teacher: *Oh, that's copping out ! What are those Three Treasures?*

Well the Mondo goes on from there, and of course in a small group, I was going to ask you to discuss and finish the mondo. What are those Three Treasures, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha?

When we say those words, the inclination may be to objectify them, to put them outside of ourselves in some way.

WHAT IS THE BUDDHA? WHAT IS THE DHARMA? WHAT IS THE SANGHA?

What are those Three Treasures?

Kobun Roshi said, “The realization of the Three Treasures as our own Self, is the recognition of the full completion of the Precepts”.

When we talk about the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, we're not so inclined to look into ourselves to ask, **where is the Buddha, where is the Dharma, where is the Sangha, who is the Buddha, who is the Sangha, who is the Dharma ?**

And yet when we take refuge in the Precepts, we take refuge in the Buddha, we take refuge in the Dharma, we take refuge in the Sangha. Who is taking refuge and where is it that we

are taking refuge, what are we taking refuge in? The Buddha is...that Buddha, maybe so, we can point to anything and say that's the Buddha! We have also to be able to point to ourselves and say that is the Buddha! We don't call ourselves the Buddha, that would be rude, that would be a misunderstanding actually, but where is the Dharma, what is the Dharma. When we take refuge we have to address ourselves with those questions. What is that, who is that, where is that? What is Sangha, where is sangha, who is Sangha?

Sangha is perhaps the first one, the first Treasure that we notice because we come together to practice, we come together to sit Zazen, and so it becomes very obvious to us that there is an assembly of people, people who come together for a particular purpose, a particular reason, and so this is visible. But the Sangha only appears if we appear, if we actually manifest Sangha, otherwise Sangha does not manifest. Sangha manifests because the Sangha comes together. Sangha walks in the door. A wider view of Sangha is of course the entire world. Sangha is also everyone and everything in existence. Sangha is not truly confined just to the group that practices. But for our purposes this is what we refer to as Sangha, the group with whom we practice because it is the Sangha-group with whom we polish ourselves, it is the central piece that is revealed in our midst. It is the people with whom we get to sit together to practice non discrimination, non discriminating mind. The most difficult that we are called on, to practice non-discriminating mind! And Sangha gives us great opportunity in that, because as I've said before, everybody in the world has something to annoy us, and we have something to annoy almost everybody in the world. So we get to practice up against these things that these people who may annoy, with whom we may disagree, and that we have perhaps no other reason to come together, except that we sit Zazen together. If we didn't sit Zazen together we might pass one another on the street, we might not be friends at all. But this common ground of the Three Treasures, common ground of Zazen is the central meeting point of the Sangha.

And then the Sangha sits within the entire realm of Dharma. There are various ways to think about the word Dharma. Dharma can be a particular teaching, Dharma can be a particular practice, Dharma can be how you use your toothbrush, how you wash your face can be the Dharma. And Dharma is actually everything in existence. That's its big meaning. And Dharma is also the Teachings given by the Buddha. So, we sit in this realm, everything that we are looking at, at this moment is the Dharma. Everything that we hear is the Dharma, that we smell, taste, touch, that we think, is the Dharma. All of it. There is nothing outside of that. So Sangha appears in that midst.

And then there is the principle of the Teacher within the Dharma and Sangha, the Buddha. There are various meanings around the Buddha. There is the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, who actually lived, a man, not a god, a man who brought us this incredible teaching. And then there is the Buddha-Mind that is the indwelling Mind that we carry, that is in us, inherent in us. Then we can think of the Buddha as All of Existence also, it's Buddha-Mind, it's all of phenomena.

All of them are together, actually cannot be separated one from the other. That great Triune Mystery. You cannot separate Dharma and Sangha from the Manifestation of the Buddha, nor can you separate the Dharma or the Sangha from the appearance and manifestation. Where one appears, the Treasure appears. And the realization, as Kobun Roshi said, the realization of ourselves as the Triple Treasure is that completion. That's big Realization, even bigger is the Manifestation. To really see that manifest, to understand it, is

manifestation. Realization is one thing, Manifestation is a whole other big thing. In anybody's life you have Realizations, then the question is, how do we carry that forward, how do we carry that out? That's the bigger piece! The more difficult one! To Realize Buddha is great, to Manifest the Buddha is supreme! That is the supreme Awakening, supreme to Manifest as Buddha. Manifest the Dharma.

We actually manifest the Dharma all the time, we can't live without the manifestation of the Dharma, everything we do is the manifestation of the Dharma, whether we know it or not. If we hold the big picture of the Sangha as everyone, and all sentient beings as the Sangha, then we can't miss manifesting the Sangha because we walk in and out of one another all the time. We walk in and out of these moments of relationships, wherever we go. We can manifest Sangha in the food-store, shopping. We can manifest Sangha and Dharma in that same moment. As I say they are not separate from one another. But the Sangha is the most visible for us.

So, the Teacher said “Then why practice?” The student says “for the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha” and the Teacher says “well that's copping out.” It's too easy, that's not a real answer.

What do you think came next? What are those Three Treasures? What happened next? What do you think the student said or did? Go on, answer!

Student

I understand that in a way when the Teacher asks “well has it been there before?” and the student says “yes”, and if it were me I would have said “yes”. Perhaps, I had realized that it had been there all along and it's why I would say, yes. But then....through practice you become aware of it and you learn to treasure it, to value it. Yes it has always been there, it's just now somehow obvious, you look at it in a different way...

Teacher

So, why practice?

Student

Well I would think, to deepen the awareness.

Teacher

The Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, what are those Three Treasures?

Student

I would say..everything

Teacher

OK, yes....

Other student: They're what I want to become, the width I am striving for.

Teacher: OK, were they there before you started Zen Practice?

St: I'm sure they were but not to my knowledge.

T: Were they there after you started Zen Practice ?

St: Yes,they were there both times

T:Yeah, so what are you striving for, if it's already there?

St:That's hard for me to conceive.

T:OK., Peace, May your life go well! It is hard to realize...

So, what did the student say next?

Other Student: I was out there, were I the student it would be something like to achieve an awakening of those within me. To strive to..

Teacher: Yes, once again there is a striving. Already said, there already were there before you came, they were there after you came. So what are those Three Treasures? I gave you a big hint.

St: Oh, yourself!

T: Very good, the next thing that the student said was “You are looking at them!” You are already looking at them.

It's a very difficult realization to see ourselves as Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. To see ourselves as the Triple Treasure, as the full Treasure of the Manifestation of the Buddha. As the opening blossom of the Three Treasures. It's really difficult, because just to say those words we tend to put them outside of ourselves. “The Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, must be something out there” and they're not, well they are but they are Realized at home, they are Realized in the handout that you have, you are the handout of the study. There is no other handout to take with you. This is it. This is the piece of paper that you take, this is where the Realization occurs, not in putting it out there. It's a big one to realize, an important Realization, it's a Gateway, the Realization of the Treasure, the caring for the Treasure. When we recite the Precepts, we promise not to abuse the Three Treasures, not to abuse the Buddha, the Dharma or the Sangha. This takes great care, that means that we must take great care of ourselves, not to abuse our own self as well as not to abuse others, not to abuse our relations and our connections in the world. Not to abuse the Buddha.

The Triple Treasure is a very wonderful, wonderful Teaching. It truly becomes the Gem that one holds when we Realize the whole meaning of the Triple Treasure. Even if we realize a little bit of the meaning of Sangha, and that manifestation and the goodness of Sangha, and how the Sangha serves to support us in our practice. But why do we practice, because we are the Triple Treasure.

It was Dogen Zenji's big question: Why practice if you already have, if you already are the Buddha? Well we practice because we are the Buddha, because we are the Dharma, because we are the Sangha, our practice is fully the manifestation of it!

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### Question

Could it be that perhaps we tend to define ourselves through external things, other people, instead of really going from within here and defining yourself ?

### Teacher

Well, the Realization of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, is not a definition! So, if we are looking to define ourselves, then I think we make a mistake. Because we cannot be defined. Let anybody try to define you and you know that's not what you are. We cannot define the Self. Of course we are conditioned to think that we are a particular personality, and a particular set of structure. We've come through a whole conditioning around that, and we tend to believe it. And we are all of those pieces of experience also, but that's not what we are talking about when we talk about the Self, and the manifestation of Buddha, Dharma,

Sangha. We're talking about something that moves in existence in a completely different way, not in our conditioned self. But it is always the conditioned self that we are working with in this relative world. This is what we have, this is the beginning point. But the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha is the Gem that lifts us out of that, that gives us this potential to know that we are not trapped in that at all. So we take refuge in this Treasure of Hope, this Treasure that can't be named.

Question

It's almost like it's inconceivable, who would one be without all the conditioning?

Teacher

You would be free and joyful. But you can be free and joyful in your conditioned self too! Yes you can, because we are as we are, we continuously polish ourselves, we polish the character in practice in Sangha. Always polishing, but we are also what we are and this is the grit that we work with. Without that grit we're finished. You don't need Sangha if you're all finished working, if you are so smooth that you don't need anymore work. Your character is so perfect, well then you are already Buddha, you don't need any further work. But for most of humanity, we have Sangha for this polishing that takes place in our character, and we are never finished. It never finishes. Perhaps as we go along we become a bit more transparent, and in Realization of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, that transparency then is a sign that we are hard at work in that then, with letting go of the attachments of the conditioned self. But it's never finished. And for most of life we have but glimpses into the Absolute. That's why the manifestation is so difficult, because those Realizations are perhaps moments in the history of our lives. But the manifestation then is the grinding work that we do on the cushion throughout our lives to, really hold the Dharma, to really hold the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. That is the hard work of Practice. And it's very joyful and freeing.

Question

Is the Dalai Lama a manifestation of that?

Teacher

We all are, you are. I think that the Dalai Lama is working on the manifestation as well as anybody. He is extremely simple, straightforward, honest, but very joyful human being. He is the first to admit that he too is always working on polishing his own character.

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