

Self & Soul Koan, II
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Good evening to you, bodhisattvas, on this snowy spring evening. Some of us were thinking we should change the name of our fair city to Santa Narnia.

We've been talking for a while about the self and the soul, and we've come to the particular question of if there is a sense of awakening, buddha nature, or whatever you want to call it that's inherent in us, that's latent or potential in us, when it is actual, when it becomes actual, when there is awakening, is it possible that the self — by which I mean the sort of self with which we've become familiar with in meditation, the self whose difficulties get made blazingly, glorifyingly clear in meditation, the self that is bossy and judgmental and cowardly and all of those things — can that self be also redeemed in some way by the action of awakening when potential becomes actual and realized?

So, to speak a little bit ironically, is there such a thing as a 'good self'? I would say yes there is, and, so we're beginning to explore what that might mean. If we know so clearly what a problematic self is like, what's a good self like?

Last time we met I brought in a koan, because I thought it might be an interesting way to look at those questions, and it's traditionally called "A Young Woman Comes Out of Deep Samadhi," deep meditation. The back story to this is that on a distant planet in some other galaxy, all the buddhas of the world are getting together for, I don't know, their annual convention, their guild meeting, with their agenda of buddha concerns and their sharing of buddha strategies, I guess, of saving all beings. So that's the back story. And Manjushri who is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, the embodiment of wisdom, has explicitly been denied access to the meeting. He can't come. So that's kind of a curious thing.

Why is it Manjushri is barred from the meeting? But he's trying and in the end, he does get in, and instantly all of the buddhas except our historical earthly Buddha, do what's called in the koan 'returning to their original dwelling place'. So as soon as Manjushri shows up, all the buddhas return to their original dwelling place. And there's this sort of story that gets played out, which I will give you in just a second. And this story has something to do with a sense of the problematic self — what we've been called the mistaken mind, the mistaken consciousness —

and what it might be to redeem that consciousness. So I will tell you that this is an old story, pre-Chinese story, Indian story. But when it became a koan in China there was one change made in the story which I'll point out as we read it, and this one small change is the difference between it being a story and it being a koan.

So please take one and pass it on.

I'll just read it out:

Once Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, set out for a place where many enlightened ones had assembled with the Buddha. When he arrived, he found that all the enlightened ones were returning to their original dwelling place. Only a young woman remained, seated in deep meditation near the Buddha.

Manjushri asked the Buddha, "Why can the young woman get near your seat when I cannot?"

The Buddha replied, "Awaken this young woman from her meditation and ask her yourself."

Manjushri walked around the young woman three times, snapped his fingers once, took her up to the heavens, and exerted all his supernatural powers, but he couldn't bring her out.

The Buddha said, "Even a hundred thousand Manjushris couldn't wake her up. Down below, past lands as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, lives the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom. He will be able to bring her out of her meditation."

Instantly the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom emerged from the earth and bowed to the Buddha, who made his request. Delusive Wisdom stepped before the young woman and snapped his fingers once; at this she came out of her meditation.

So let me just make a couple of suggestions about ways to begin looking at the characters in the story, and if you go other places with it and have other interpretations, that's great, and I hope you'll talk tonight. In Chan, in Zen, in particular, and in the koan tradition most specifically, Manjushri, who is the bodhisattva, the embodiment of wisdom in all the Buddhist tradition in Zen and Chan and in the koan tradition, is actually the embodiment of a particular kind of wisdom. He's not the embodiment of everything we think of as wise. He's the embodiment of a kind of wisdom called in Sanskrit *prajna*, which is a clear, crystalline, pure clarity about things. We might think of it as insight, and it has a penetrating quality, so that Manjushri is often seen as carrying a sword, and it's a sword that just cuts through illusion and delusion and cuts through the knot, whatever the question is, just wants to cut through with the sword. So that's the quality of wisdom Manjushri embodies.

When I think of that, I always contrast it in my own mind with a bit from a poem by Robert Pinsky, who talks about the “hand in the dark, untying the same knot that the hand tied in the light.” Which is a very cool image and I think speaks a lot to our experience, you know, of what is conscious and what is unconscious, what happens in the light, what happens in the dark, and how we’re always working at the knot, kind of over and over and over again. So that’s a kind of contrasting view to the wisdom of Manjushri that cuts through.

The one change I mentioned that got made when the story was turned into a koan is that in the original story the bodhisattva who gets drawn up from underground to bring the woman out of samadhi is called the Pure White Bodhisattva. So the Pure White Bodhisattva in the koan becomes the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom. That must be important because that’s the change they made. So instead of having a contrast between two figures representing an absolute sense of clarity or purity, you’ve got that on one side and delusive wisdom, of all things, on the other side, who gets the better of Manjushri. For the purposes of this conversation we’re having about self and soul I want to invite you to think about the young woman deep in samadhi, insensible to the world around her. Think about her perhaps as this buddha nature or awakening in potential. It’s not yet realized; it’s not in the world, but it’s so deep inside of her that it, for all intent and purposes, is potential. Because one of the important, critical parts of this tradition is that it’s not awakening as long as it’s just an interior event. Awakening is not something that happens inside each of us one by one by one by one. Awakening is something that happens and then is born into the world. And it’s when it comes into the world that awakening is fully realized. So she’s the potential for that. And even though in deep meditation, profound meditation, not yet there because not yet born.

Okay, so with all of that kind of introduction there’s so many interesting questions in this. You know, I mentioned before the one about why do they all return to their original dwelling place when Manjushri shows up, but I think it might be good to just go straight to the heart of the question this koan raises : What is this apparent duality between Manjushri and the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom? What is delusive wisdom? That’s seems to go against everything we’re doing, you know. So what is that?

Again, maybe just to get things started, I will mention that probably the greatest contemporary commentator on this koan, Shibayama Zenkei, said that the Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom is the bodhisattva of differentiation, is the wisdom of differentiation.

Manjushri is the bodhisattva of equality; to Manjushri everything's equal, everything has equal value. The Bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom is the one who makes differentiations between things. In the traditional Chan koan way, expressing this is to say that in the world of Manjushri, which is sometimes called the Crystal Palace, there's no standing up, sitting down, walking around, because why would you bother to do anything, because nothing is any different than anything else. There's no point in standing up or sitting down or walking around.

Whereas when you have differentiation then you have the ability to freely stand up, sit down, and walk around because you see the differences between those things, and you can apply that to any circumstance. But in the simplest sense : if what I want to do is go to sleep, whether I am standing up or lying down, is going to make a lot of difference to the quality of my sleep. So that's the beginning of an understanding of differentiated wisdom, the wisdom of differentiation. Usually for most people for most circumstances it's better luck to lie down to go to sleep than it is to stand up, whereas for Manjushri, you know, it doesn't matter, *I'm just going to do it.*

Let's explore a little bit about what delusive wisdom might be, and what its relationship to Manjushri's wisdom of equality is, and what happens if — this is Chan and Zen, so we have to presuppose that if there's an apparent duality we're going to destroy the duality; we're going to use Manjushri's sword to cut into one instead of cutting into two, so we're going to cut it into one, okay?

What about that? How do you respond to the idea of delusive wisdom?

Does it seem like an oxymoron?

Q1 : It feels like the skill to navigate through my own self-deception, the murkier stuff.

JIS : So the implication there would be it might be worthwhile coming to know something about that murky stuff, that self-delusion.

Q1 : yeah.

Q2 : Well it's hard because delusion is a pejorative term, and that it is paired with wisdom is the oxymoron. That's just challenging. Why is seeing differentiation clearly deluded? I don't know if it's just a matter of language or translation difficulties or whether it's just... What does delusion mean?

JIS : I don't think it's a translation difficulty in this case. I really think it's about, in most if Buddhism over time, the world is seen as a delusion — a delusion, an illusion, a dream, a fantasy,

a bubble, foam on the water, all that, all those kinds of things, you know, dew drop. And so I think one of the things that's happening here is that Chan is coming right at that, coming right at that fundamental buddhist assumption that the world is a delusion. And saying, *Yeab, really?* And coming right at our immediate assumption that because it is a delusion that there's something wrong with it.

Q2 : Yeah, because all the synonyms that you named off. My sense of delusion is that there's something untrue about it, but there's nothing untrue about *dukkha*. It's just ephemeral. So why do we have a negative cast about it?

JIS : Yeah. I think that's a really important question. Why do we have a negative cast about it?

Q3 : Well I think that delusive wisdom has a special relationship with the deep meditation, that delusive wisdom has a certain rapport with deep meditation that Manjushri doesn't have. Delusive wisdom has a way of relating in some way, maybe more personally and to the deep meditation, and...Delusive wisdom, I think the thing that's delusive about it is that it's kind of always changing. Sometimes it's relating to you in deep meditation sometimes it's relating to you, it's delusiveness as separation has all the delusive qualities, say, attachment, aversion, those kinds of things. So sometimes it has the quality of relating to deep meditation and sometimes it doesn't. And I think the thing there is that it's not so much the world that's the illusion; it's the way that delusive is relating to the world that can be the illusion. It's like in the 3rd Noble Truth, right, it's our attachment that causes the problem. It's not the circumstances of our situation; it's the way that we're relating to our circumstances, either through attachment or nonattachment. So delusive wisdom has the quality to be in either one.

JIS : You said that you thought delusive wisdom had a particular relationship to samadhi, to deep meditation. How do you see that particular relationship?

Q3 : It's like when I look into meditation myself my deluded mind is looking at the state of awareness. My deluded mind is starting to perceive the greater self that it's a part of, so it has that very sort of personal way of perceiving that greater aspect, that is particular to me.

JIS : So it's you looking, it's you in particular looking, and that 'you in particular' that you relate to delusive wisdom.

Q3 : Yeah, it's either deluded, lost in its fantasies, or it's more present and aware of the greater nature that's around us.

Q4 : I get this image of Adam and Eve having sort of a reverse enlightenment, and [unintelligible] the delusive wisdom of differentiation in good and evil, or that represented when they saw that they fell from grace they lost whatever state they were in and supporting and were cast out.

JIS : That's interesting. That's great. Thank you. So it's sort of a good-news-bad-news. Good news is you have the ability to see things you could never see before, but the bad news is you're out of the garden.

Q5 : There's absolutely a truth in literature for it; it's called *The Fortunate Fall*.

Q1 : So would it be a koan if he was called the Bodhisattva of Adversity rather than Wisdom.

JIS : That's a really good question. I think it would.

Q1 : I don't think I understand the point where it flips into being a koan. I'm kind of interested in that. What is it that becomes the koan when, you said it went from Pure White Wisdom to Delusive ... and that's enough to bring it into the realm of koans.

JIS : Mm Hmm. Because then you've got a tension between Manjushri and...

Q1 : Yeah! Because crystalline and pure white are the same thing. So it's got that differentiation that brings it into the realm of the koan.

JIS : Okay now that's interesting, if that differentiation is what brings it into the realm of a koan when we're talking about delusive wisdom being the wisdom of differentiation.

And then, the resolution of the koan comes when the apparent duality — there is differentiation, but duality is a delusion — so, the apparent duality is resolved, again. So you've got this kind of constant coming together and then falling apart, coming together and then falling apart, you know. Are you following that?

Q6 : I don't follow how it's resolved.

JIS : We haven't gotten there yet. But how it's resolved is the person / woman who made the change in the name of the bodhisattva turned it into a koan and put it in a book and said "Everybody, this is a koan," wrote a poem about it and he talked about a 'god mask' and a 'devil mask,' each giving an elegant performance. And so he's suggesting that Manjushri and Delusive Wisdom, they're just masks, they're just appearances, and that behind that is the same elegant performance that appears in different forms. Through that can you see the way toward resolving it?

And so there's another really important question : How are they the same thing?

Q7 : I think it's almost like two sides of the same coin in the sense that Manjushri is trying to ask the question : Do you have any delusive wisdom? And this woman in deep meditation probably doesn't, and so he can't cut through or bring her out of deep meditation. And I think about Delusive Wisdom, here's a person who's sort of in the midst of awakening, and so she can clearly see what Delusive Wisdom is, and that is why she is able to respond when Delusive Wisdom is saying, "Do you recognize me for what I am?" An awakened person is able to see clearly what delusive wisdom is and able to see what delusive wisdom is in me from inside looking outside.

JIS : That's lovely. So at the end of the koan we have this huge moment where she wakes up, that's awakening. It's not potential anymore; it's become actual, and you're pointing to it's her recognition of Delusive Wisdom that actually wakes her up. And that something calls us from the world. We're not called by eternity to wake up; we are called by a dew drop, or a beer can in the road, or the sound of a stone hitting bamboo, or a peach blossom. That's what calls us to wake up.

Q8 : And Manjushri is slightly deluded, I think. You had said everything is equal in his mind, but he obviously can't wake this woman. So either everything is equal or everything is not equal, and so it's the flip side. That's how I'm interpreting that. He has some delusion.

JIS : That's great. So you're starting to mix them. Manjushri's got a little delusive wisdom, and Delusive Wisdom obviously has some Manjushri so he can wake her up, right?

Q6 : And also, the Buddha. He's asking the Buddha why am I not near you? And Buddha's saying you find out for yourself. It's almost like you question her and see her awakening. To me it seems like Manjushri is near him in some way, because this woman is in deep meditation and she's almost awakened, and almost pure inside maybe, and the point in time Manjushri came up cannot find any differentiation in herself and her ego, or whatever.

JIS : Yeah, so it's as though Manjushri wants to do the one move he knows which is to cut. He wants to separate them [the Buddha and the woman], and you can't. So this is important : Why can't you separate the Buddha and the woman? Why are they inextricable? How is that so?

Q7 : Last week you said that the instant the Buddha thought of Delusive Wisdom, he appeared. And what went through my head at that point was that even the Buddha hasn't

banished his delusions, but he knows how to deal with them when they arise. Um, I lost your question.

JIS : Why is it that they're inextricable?

Q7 : We have our delusions and we're always going to have them...I think. But it's how we deal with them.

JIS : So that would seem like an important element of Delusive Wisdom. We have our delusions but we have a good relationship with them. And we're not in their thrall as much, yes?

Q7 : Yes.

Q2 : So you can have a right relationship with delusion.

JIS : Yeah.

Q2 : Because it's really just the differentiated world, right?

JIS : Yeah.

Q7 : There's a hint of method.

JIS : There's no method about it. [Laughs]

Q8 : Well Manjushri walks around her a few times and then he snapped his finger. Delusive Wisdom just snaps his finger, so....[Laughter]...not that 3 times is wrong, but...

JIS : So that's sort of interesting. Manjushri he has a slightly instrumental view. He's got to work it out here; he's going to keep it at a distance and do what he has to do with it, whereas you sort of have this image of Delusive Wisdom right up in her face, you know?

Q3 : There's another translation of Manjushri I've read : the Bodhisattva of Correction. He makes corrections to states of consciousness. There's a corrective quality and so then there's maybe the implication that Delusive Wisdom is sort of this uncorrected state, just seeing things as they are.

JIS : Nothing that needs to be corrected. It's like the answer to a question that's not being asked.

Q2 : And doesn't want to be asked.

JIS : We have to stop now, but I'd like to keep going with this, so please, if you want to, spend some time with it. Carry it around with you. Think about it. Dream about it. Meditate with it as you wish, and we'll come back to it next week.