

Hakuin's Prescription
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[As a plate of cookies is passed around :] So, it's come to that! Competing with Oreos ...
[Laughter]

Tonight's lesson comes from Hakuin. Hakuin was a Japanese Zen Master of a couple of hundred years ago. At that time in Japan, Rinzai Zen had become extremely successful, identified with all of the ruling institutions of the country, rich and powerful, and virtually moribund. Hakuin moved out to the country and found himself a dilapidated little temple in the country. He started working with farmers, housewives, teashop ladies, and innkeepers. He single-handedly completely revitalized and remade koan zen. Such was the force of his genius and the power of what he did that every contemporary Rinzai koan master in the world is a direct descendent of Hakuin.

Hakuin gives us a history lesson about how it is we come to be sitting in this room together. It's called "Hakuin's Prescription for the Penetrating-One's-Nature-and-Becoming-a-Buddha Pill" :

My name is Yusuke Odawara.
I've been a pharmacist since before my parents were born.
Listen to me for a second about the effects of a certain medicine.
The pill I'm talking about is called
Penetrating-One's-Nature-and-Becoming-a-Buddha.
Its active ingredient is Direct-Pointing-at-Human-Mind.
If you take this pill, you'll cure all your suffering and the causes of your
suffering.
You can rest easy, far from the diseases of the three worlds of greed, hatred,
and ignorance,
and get relief from the aches and pains of going round and round and round in
the six realms.

The medicine is Prince Siddhartha's.
As you all know, one day he suddenly left home and went on a pilgrimage,
seeking special herbs.
Out of this came four kinds of pharmacological texts, with more than five
thousand and forty volumes.
His apprentices transmitted the Becoming-a-Buddha pill, which is the essential
cure for the suffering of sentient beings.

In China the school split into five houses, while *this* and *that* were going on.
For instance, Huike's arm-ache was cured.
So was Yunmen's limp, and Baizhang's nosebleed.
Lots of other things happened — too many to talk about.
It was franchised to Japan, where twenty-four pharmacy branches were
opened.

Now I run that Company, the Original Family Store.
I'll tell you the recipe for the pill :
First, cut a piece of Zhaozhou's cypress tree from the garden and pound it in
the Sixth Ancestor's mortar.
Then add Great Master Ma's West River Water,
knead it with Hakuin's one hand,
shape it into a ball with Juzhi's finger,
wrap it with Xuansha's white paper,
and write on it :
"Penetrating-One's-Nature-and-Becoming-a-Buddha Pill,
Manufactured by Rinzai Company, Zen County."
When you swallow this pill, you'll throw up swollen knowledge,
and the cathartic effect won't fade.
Chew it well, chew it well — it will stay with you coming, going, standing, or
sitting.
Gulp it down, let it rest below your navel.
It doesn't cost a cent.

Well, that's my little pitch.
I can't keep myself from saying, "Won't you take my pill?"

So this week we are taking the pill. We are passing the pill amongst us, swallowing it
down, and I wanted to talk a little bit about one aspect of what that means. In the old Chinese
texts, the words that are used to mean enlightenment are things like awakening, and that's
something we are all doing this week, right? And also becoming intimate, and that's
something that has been happening a lot these days; there's been a lot of becoming intimate.
Another word that is used quite often is realization. That is the word I want to talk about
tonight. Realization means to make real. It means to make actual, so that it has an effect in the
world. It has a lovely double meaning of understanding — *I realize, I understand* — and also *I
make real; I make something happen in the world*.

One of the things we need in this tradition, which has a very fragile foothold on this
continent, is people who can translate not just the languages that this tradition comes from,
but the mind, the minds from China, the minds from Japan. What they were really trying to

say. We need people with a great combination of scholarship and imagination in order to make this transition happen. I'll give you an example that springs immediately to mind. Often you will hear injunctions, in zen centers and in zen talks, not to read. That is based on this old Chinese idea that Zen is a special transmission outside the scriptures, not based on words or phrases. So it gets turned into this little thing, *Don't read*. But when you go back and you read those Chinese words and you try to translate what they were saying into our own times, you find out that actually they had a tremendously sophisticated understanding of what reading was — and that that injunction was something quite different than what we make of it today.

Chan came from India to China, first as a great body of texts that needed to be translated and digested. So the first part of what those old teachers meant when they said that there was something beyond words and the texts, was that you can read those books and think you get it but you can't, any more than we could read an owner's manual for a car and think we understood how to drive; it's a different thing.

That is a good point. We know that this is a *practice*, this is something you do. At the same time, these were people who called reality the Great Text, and they had a postmodern understanding about texts and reading. Everything was a text : facial expressions, gestures, what people said, what people did, political situations, cultural movements, all of it. They read it as a text, much as is done today in the academic world.

If you remember the story when Fayen realizes something and goes to speak with his teacher, before he even says a word the teacher starts dancing. He has read the text of Fayen's awakening, and he is responding to it. So it's important that we have, again, the scholarship and the imagination to understand what these things were and what they meant, so that we don't reduce a grand, glorious invitation like *Read the Great Text* into a petty little injunction not to read books during a retreat. Do you see what I am saying? It's important.

Some of us have to care about that, some of us have to do that hard work, and some of us have to support that hard work being done. If you feel like *I just come for the sitting and maybe a talk or two*, that's fine. There are one or two people in this room who have been bitten by that particular snake and who have already lost their lives.

When I was studying koans we had this text which was this barely legible, fourth-generation photocopy of an eighth-generation mimeograph of some antique text originally set on the Gutenberg press. It had all of these charming typographical errors in it. One of my

favorites was in this koan I'm referring to about the turtle-nosed snake loose in the dharma hall, and who's been bitten by this snake. It came out as a warning against 'poisonous snacks' in the meditation hall – which works, too. [Laughter] So there are people who have eaten of the poisonous Oreo cookies and will do this. But whether or not you choose to do that part, whether or not that part calls to you, there is this question of realization. No matter how many hundreds and thousands of hours you spend sitting, and no matter how many koans you work with and how many talks you listen to, and how many of those Great Texts you read and all the rest of it – no matter, no matter, if you don't realize your practice, if you don't make it real in the world, it is not ripe, it is not mature, and it is not complete.

Let's remember that this practice was forged in very difficult times. It was created as a response at a couple of different times of great political and cultural turmoil in China. This practice didn't grow in a vacuum; it didn't grow in isolated meditation halls way up in the mountains away from everything that was going on. It grew in warfare and civil war and refugees and persecutions, invasions and all of that. Because it was a way that people could deal with those events in their lives, and a way that they could participate in a way that felt useful.

It was very lucky, after the initial period of disruption, then to have about three hundred years of peace and prosperity in the Tang dynasty to flower. And thank heavens it did, because enough happened that it attained a critical mass, so that it still exists a thousand years later, which is quite something when you think about it.

But at the end of that time when Buddhism went out of favor with the Imperial Court and it was viciously suppressed in the country, Buddhism virtually died out in China — except for Chan. That was the one practice that survived. And one of the reasons certainly was that it didn't require a lot of apparatus, a lot of special stuff. It didn't require very much at all except your own heart and mind and a willingness to keep asking questions, to keep wondering, keep opening your heart, no matter what was going on. And so it survived. It got carried in pockets across China and then across the seas to Japan, and so on to here. So we carry the practice around with us; it's infinitely portable, one of the beautiful things about it. You put it in your pocket, you go, and you have everything you need, anywhere you are.

How do we realize it? How do we make it happen? I was thinking because of Sarah [Bender]'s and my talk the other night on sympathetic joy (God, that was just last night,

weeks and weeks and months ago, we did that talk), and I remembered a Daoist quote from Zhuangzi, who was the second great Daoist philosopher. He was talking about what made a great leader of people. He said, "People never even mention her name, for she lets things find their own joy." What a beautiful motto that would be for an ethics or a social action of sympathetic joy.

We don't have to go out and fix everything. We don't have to go out and remake the world in our image. We just have to work, each of us, in the ways that create the circumstances for people to find their own joy. And what are those circumstances? Decent places to live, clean water, educated children, less warfare, more food, food better distributed. What would it be like to trust that if we did that, people would find their own joy? That's what I want to encourage you to consider as you realize your awakening, as you realize what it is you have come to understand and get here in these times we spend together in the meditation hall.

What can you do to help provide the circumstances in which more human beings can find their own joy? I don't have the illusion that by Tuesday morning there will be a significant change in Colorado Springs because we're all back there. But we don't do it because we think we're going to win. We don't do it only if we think there's a good chance that things will turn out well. We do it because we *have* to do it. What else can we do? Because *that* is the expression of our awakening. That is our realization. And it is as natural as breathing and sitting and walking and feeding each other and smiling.

Sometimes we can think about the stories from the past and think that that was another time, those were other people, those were special people. This is the age of the Degenerate Dharma; that's not us. But the truth is that we were them and they are us. We, nobody else, are Tokimune watching for Genghis Khan's fleet to come across the sea to Japan, and then seeing it and saying, "The great thing has come." That is us. We are Fayuan and Yuanjian, his teacher, in their tender parting scene where Yuanjian lets him go so that he can realize fully his own understanding. We're Ryokan playing with the children in the village. We're Lingzhao, throwing herself down next to her father when he trips, saying, "I saw you fall, so I'm helping." We are Demon Girl, who was a nun at Tokeiji in Japan. Tokeiji was right across the street from the great temple of Enkakuji. Women weren't allowed to go listen to the lectures there; they had to prove their understanding in order to get in. So Demon Girl went steaming over to the gate at Enkakuji demanding admittance, and the gatekeeper said, "You

must answer this question : What is the place out of which all of the ancestors and buddhas have come?" She grabbed his head and pushed it into her pelvis, and she said, "This is the place out of which all the ancestors and buddhas have come." We are Demon Girl. She is us.

In our own time, we are Ruth Fuller, who was asked to translate her Japanese teacher's great work on koan zen. And yeah, she translated it and she wrote a few footnotes, and the *footnotes* that Ruth Fuller wrote to her teacher's treatise on koan zen are the single greatest modern work of Rinzai Zen. And we're Senzaki Nyogen, relocated during WWII from Los Angeles to Heart Mountain Camp, here in the Rockies, whose six-by-six-foot bedroom at Heart Mountain was during WWII the only functioning zendo in America.

We are them. They are us. This is our way. This is our medicine. These are our pills. Whether you choose to write the next great book of footnotes to somebody else's work, or to teach the children, or to provide better neighborhoods, whatever it is you do, that is not separate. That is not different. That is not the other part of your life. That is the fullness of your realization, of your meditation, of your awakening. It is partial, incomplete, and not yet cooked until you have opened your hands in the world and helped create the circumstances by which all beings might find their own joy.

Thank you.