

Deep In The Mountains I : Introduction  
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Good evening everyone. Welcome, Bodhisattvas. It's wonderful to be here in this place, specifically with you. It's grand.

There was a time in Australia when the federal government was working with the Aboriginal people to be certain about territories and boundaries and to establish Aboriginal land rights. They sent surveyors and cartographers from the coast into the great desert heartland of Australia to meet with the Aborigines. They decided that they would get together and show each other their maps.

The representatives of the federal government brought beautifully detailed topographical maps of the area, and they laid them down on the table. Then the Aborigines brought out *their* maps, which were songlines : paintings of the ways they walk from sacred place to sacred place and of the deep mythological story of the landscape with all of the important events marked, and they put that map down next to the topographical map. Nobody could speak for about ten minutes.

In that moment there was a sense of understanding—a complete understanding—of something that comes from putting very different viewpoints down next to each other and looking at them together. I feel that we have gotten a beautiful topographical orientation to this place today. What I would like to do tonight is lay down next to it the very beginnings of a sketch of the spirit map of this place.

In classical Chinese, when you're talking or writing and mention high mountains and flowing waters, everybody knows that you're speaking about friendship. It's not exactly a metaphor, but it's a signifier that this is something about friendship.

So here we are in this place of high mountains and flowing waters. Let us speak a bit about friendship. It seems to me that that is one important part of the bodhisattva vow. What is our friendship with the world? There's something here about the quality of our friendship.

A little while ago I was speaking about the relationship between teachers and pilgrims and how, in the tradition, pilgrims are called clouds and water, so they are like Changsha wandering in the mountains. They go here and there. They come and go. They wander. They change shape. They're always moving. If we take Linji's language, we might say they are willingly choosing the role of guest, or more intimately, they are always guesting ... coming and going, not staying anywhere for very long. Always changing — clouds and water.

The teachers often have mountain names : Dongshan, Deshan, Yaoshan, Yangshan, all those “shans” are mountains. They are the ones who stay put, the ones who deeply root somewhere, the ones who give a place for mountains and waters to move and change. So we might say that they are willingly taking the role of host. They are always hosting. When these hosts, these mountains, meet these guests, these clouds-and-waters, they ask questions of each other. The mountains always ask the clouds-and-waters, “Where have you come from?” which, because there is no tense in classical Chinese, also can be translated as, “Where *are* you coming from?” And when they leave again they always ask, “Where are you going?” The clouds-and-waters always answer with sayings like, “I'm on pilgrimage.” The mountain asks, “What is pilgrimage like?” The clouds-and-waters say, “I don't know.” And the mountains say, “Not knowing is most intimate.”

To be a guest, to be a cloud-and-water, is to not know deeply, but to be on pilgrimage. The pilgrims always ask the mountains, “What's the scenery like at your place?” “What does it look like there?” “What is the terrain?” “What is the landscape?” “What can you see when you stop and are still?”

I'm not really talking about two different kinds of people. I'm talking about two different ways that each of us is. Each of us is mountain; each of us is clouds-and-water. And we're not even talking about a kind of oscillation between one state and another, we're talking about dropping down to that place where we know that mountains and clouds-and-water are the same thing.

It's as though there is one hand, and sometimes it's closed and sometimes it's open. Sometimes it is abiding deeply someplace, like a mountain. Sometimes it is abiding nowhere, like clouds and water. Then over time, in our friendliness to the

world, in our *deep* habitation of the bodhisattva vow, we begin to see that both of those things are true simultaneously, that it is our very ability to abide deeply in that place where it's all one. All the vows are on the same ground and they're the same vow.

It is our ability to abide deeply there that allows us to move, moment by moment by moment, abiding nowhere, taking no position, having nothing to protect, nothing to defend. It's not being caught in the opinions and the habits of a position, a place—abiding nowhere, but knowing that it is our abiding deeply on the ground where all vows are the same, that enables us to abide nowhere, moment by moment by moment, and to love both those things in ourselves and in the world around us.

Every living and non-living thing (if there *is* anything that's non-living) is also abiding deeply and nowhere, and also has a vow.

So what about those vows of the others? What about the vows of the others in *this* place, which offer themselves to us in an almost embarrassing beauty – a beauty that makes us shy for its magnificence?

The last time I was here on this land, I was doing a retreat with my beloved elder brother, Stephen Karcher, who is a genius of the *Yijing*, the ancient book of divination of China. We did a ceremony which was about calling on an ancestor to bring us something. In the ceremony, much to my great surprise (because for other people mostly these were personal ancestors—a grandmother or a beloved uncle) who came walking down the riverbank toward me but the Great Horse Ancestor Ma. Ma was in some ways the true beginning of our lineage.

Great Ancestor Ma came walking down the riverbank, and this put me in a state of some confusion and uncertainty. It was so surprising, so unexpected. I went to bed that night full of surprise and unexpectedness. I woke up in the morning in the dawn and opened my door to look outside, and standing right outside the door of my cabin was a horse. The Great Horse Ancestor was placidly waiting for me to open the door. I say that out of deep respect for the power of this place, and I say that, holding the question. In that moment my own vow was clarified. And what was the vow of that horse? That's what I want to know. What was the vow of that horse, in that moment, standing there in the dawn?

When I talk about vows being enacted, sometimes something happens that is helpful to us personally, or pleasing, or makes a good story. But there are also tigers and dragons in these mountains, and we might encounter them, not a placid horse.

There was a transformation in ancient China, called “passing through the mouth of the tiger.” You might find for moments or days that you are passing through the mouth of the tiger. That too is the vow. It is the vow of the tiger. It is the vow of the dragon. It is the vow of this mountain to bring you into confrontation with that. That too is friendliness. That too is an *enormous* kindness to us. So *please* be grateful for that. Please be generous in your response to the moments when the tigers show up.

One of the great mountain stories in our tradition is about a pilgrim named Wuzhou who goes to Mount Wutai in northern China on the border with the wild lands. He’s looking for Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom. The belief was that Manjushri lived on Mount Wutai, and Wuzhou could go there and meet him, and he does, but he doesn’t know that that’s what’s happened. He doesn’t know it’s Manjushri he’s met. I want to bring in one moment when this mild-mannered head of temple, which is really Manjushri, has asked Wuzhou a question he can’t answer, and he decides to leave.

He leaves the temple that Manjushri has created. He created it because Wuzhou is wandering in a very wild and dangerous place and he needs shelter for the night. But Wuzhou can’t stay there, and he leaves. A young boy accompanies him. When he gets to the gate of the temple, he turns to the young boy and asks, “What temple is this? What place is this?” The young boy points behind him to the mountain, indigo in the dusk, and Wuzhou turns to look. When he looks back the boy is gone, and the gate is gone, and the temple is gone. He’s standing there on the mountain in the wild place, indigo in the dusk. It’s in that moment that his journey truly begins.

That is my wish for you: that the temple shelter you as long as the temple needs to shelter you, as long as you need it, and that when the moment comes, companion and gate and temple disappear, and you are alone on the mountain in the dusk ... and your journey truly begins.

That Great Horse Ancestor and his best friend Shitou, whom he never met, did something amazing: they said to all of us down through the centuries, “That self you are looking for, that true self, isn’t just in here [pointing to chest]. Don’t just look down. Don’t just look inside. Raise your eyes and look around you because everything you see is that true self.”

Here in this place raise your eyes to look. The fire at the center is well tended and well cared for by the leadership in this retreat. You can afford to look up. You can afford to look out. You can afford to recognize that your self is *not* just located deep inside of you but everywhere here in the meadows and in the mountains and on the water and in the trees. All of that is you. And it is saying in its vow, “We have been awakening for millions and millions of years. Please, join us.”

Thank you.