

# Maintaining the Way

Dharma Talk by Ven. Shikai Zuiko O-sensei  
Dainen-ji, November 22nd, 2003



Thank you for taking the time to come to this Dharma Assembly entitled “Maintaining the Way”. On the poster, what you see is the kechimiyaku, the blood line of the Lineage. Lineage is our Ancestors. They are our family. They are the people who through many countries and cultures and times maintained the Way through the integrity of their own practice. Sometimes what we do is think of these people as being distant from us in the sense of possessing extra-ordinary capacities that we could never have. We can view them as giants, as icons, as something that we could never be. But that is not true.

You came here this morning and I’m sure there may have been one or two thoughts that came up for you such as “Why do I do this to myself? I’ve been working hard all week. I really deserve a good rest. I have much to do. Oh my goodness, why did I commit? Why? Why? Why?” Each of those thoughts that you noticed and practised with prove that you have what it takes to do this practice and to do exactly what the Lineage was talking about, which is Wake Up to the reality of who you really are before all of your embarrassing little stories.

Sometimes we don’t think of people, like the Buddha for instance, as people just like us because there are lots of stories around and we do like stories. And it is said that the Buddha, some 2600 years ago, after doing all sorts of things which we are all familiar with and which he may or may not have done, finally one day sat down under a tree and said, “That’s it. I am not moving until I’ve figured it out. I am not moving until I know what’s really going on and what it is to be a human being, what it is to be in this bodymind.” And so he sat and sat and sat through the night. We really don’t know how many nights that night actually was, but the stories say that “sometime during the night” he was assaulted by the “tempter”, Mara [O-sensei whistles

something reminiscent of the musical score from “The Twilight Zone”, evoking laughter from students]. And we all drum up our little pictures of what that was.

Now, Anzan roshi talks about Mara as being basically the forces of distortion. And when we fall into those distortions we cause ourselves to suffer. So you work during the week, so you were a little tired when you woke up this morning, so there was a thought about how there may be other things that you would prefer to do. So had you fallen into those thoughts, had you directed attention into that thought of the impossibility of attending today, we could say about you that you fell into and were seduced by Mara, the tempter. But you didn't. You recognized a thought as a thought and you put one foot in front of the other and here you are, right here, right now, in the year 2003, the 21st Century. For 2600 years, as we have said, men and women have done this practice. They have put their butt down on the zafu or a pile of straw or a rock or whatever was handy and practised this moment of their life by feeling the breath, by feeling the bones, sitting up straight, opening the eye gaze, and recognizing that in this moment, you are Buddha. You are Awake Awareness Itself. The practice is cleaning up all those obstructions that get in the way, that provide distractions and distortions for us.

Now, all families have stories. This family, this Lineage, has its stories. So pull up your zafu, set your hair on fire as you practise and we will go back in time so that you can see that calendar in your mind's eye, just like an old black and white movie: 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1998...way, way back to the year 1979.

Some of you weren't even born then, and in 1979 the population of the world was 4.37 billion beings - or people - there were more beings than that. The Shah of Iran had been ousted by the Ayatollah Khomeini; Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, and a black African was elected leader of that country; the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan; Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister of Britain. There was a nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in the U.S.; Vietnam and Vietnam-backed Cambodians announced that Phnom-pen, the capital of Cambodia had fallen and the regime of Pol Pot was over; Iranian militants seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran and took hostages.

We watched films: “Alien”, “Apocalypse Now”, “All that Jazz”, Monty Pythons “Life of Brian”. Leonard Cohen received the Order of Canada and Mother Theresa, the Nobel Prize. We listened to The Talking Heads “Fear of Music”; Marian Faithful grinding out “Broken English”; Roxy Music released “Manifesto”; David Bowie, “Lodger”; Frank Zappa “Sheik Yer Booty”. Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols died of a drug overdose in New York. Bob Marley released “Survival”. Punk met Reggae. The Village People released “YMCA” and inspired overalls as couture, releasing all of us from the hell of flares and bellbottoms. Designer jeans took off; the Walkman was introduced and “Trivial Pursuit” was the game.

On the weekend of January 12th to 14th a huge blizzard brought many cities, including Ottawa, to a standstill. At that time I was producing and directing for the CBC in Ottawa and I made an extensive trip to Britain, where I had the worst bad hair day ever: a frizzy permanent, burnt hair actually, in a very pricey hair boutique on King's Road. I looked as if I had shredded wheat glued to my scalp.

In Southern Ontario, in a barn, Joshu roshi gave a teisho to monks, including Anzan Hoshin, then “Sensei”. The teisho was “Water Burns the Stone”. The location: Hakukaze-ji, or “the Barndo” in Southern Ontario. Little did I know at the time that I really didn't have to worry about my bad hair.

*Water Burns the Stone*

Teisho by Ven. Yasuda Joshu Dainen roshi  
Hakukaze-ji, 1979

[originally printed in "Zanmai" Issue 1, Winter 1989]

*"Effort, effort, effort. Your shoulders are stiff, your foreheads are tight, your knuckles are white and your underpants smell. What's wrong with you? We are only three days into this sesshin. Where do you think you're going?"*

*"One moment of just sitting is one moment of enlightenment." These are the words of the Buddhas and Dharma Ancestors. These are words of a dead bald man, Dogen Kigen zenji. One instant of true practice is one instant of enlightenment. True practice is true effort. True effort is true non-effort. True non-effort is without mind so it is Mu-shin (no-mind). Mu-shin is right this moment now. This is instantaneous enlightenment: enlightenment occurs in each instant. Without past, without future, without even "now", seeing clearly is practice. Anzan sensei has a phrase which I like: "It does not matter what is seen, it is the seeing that matters."*

*Now what do I see? I see you. Peek-a-boo. I see a bunch of ragged monks trying to struggle to get into the next moment; away from fear and pain or into bliss or Mu or something. But this moment holds your quivering bodies and minds firmly, hai? Now, this moment is not a thought you can hold to. It is just now. Practise in this way.*

*Shugyosha! (Practitioners!) Where are you going in such a hurry there in your lotus postures? To the washroom? To the kitchen? To dokusan? If you come to dokusan, I won't be able to get you out of this. Dokusan is still this moment. The Sensei won't be able to get you out. You're here, in this moment. Dokusan is face to face meeting with the Teacher's mind. Zazen is dokusan, is face to face, with this moment. This moment, any moment is true dokusan with all the Buddhas and Ancestors because the mind of all Buddhas is this moment.*

*Your smelly bodies and smelly minds are this moment. Smelly Buddha! (laughs) this moment is your body and your mind. All of your karma of past minds, past actions, has unfolded into this moment and is this moment. Hai, you don't have karma, whether good, whether bad; this body, this mind is your karma. So here it all is! Here it all is! These thoughts, these struggles, these joys. All of you is here, right now.*

*Breathe in, breathe out, okay? If you try to make some "nirvana" your home, you only hide forever in your own in-turned minds, your personal safety. Nirvana has no place, no time. You cannot get to it. It is always HERE (shouts and bangs teisho table with staff). Breathe in, breathe out. If you make struggle your way, you lose your way in a dark forest of tense muscles, tense thoughts. Relax.*

*Oh, but wait! (BANG!) If you relax too much, you are lost in a pile of loose, slack thoughts and flabby posture.*

*So what is the right way? Well, that's up to you. This body and mind of yours is the Way, the Way of all Buddhas. You have to find out by experience the sharpest mind, vastest mind. Vastest, Vast-est. My pronunciation, please excuse. Vast-est MIND, vast-est BODY is this body-mind. You have to find this. But of course I have something to say on this matter.*

*First I must say something about matter of Teacher and student. You have to find your own Way. You are your own Way. However, delusion is from no-beginning, is beginningless. No matter how much you sweep the room of your mind, the dust of continual birth and Death, of concept after concept, image after image, continues to fall all over the floor, the furniture, covers up the windows. So it is easy for you to deceive yourselves. Student's mind and Teacher's mind are same Buddha's mind so Teacher must show student it is only this mind, must exert himself from bones and belly until there is nothing left of him for the sake of his students. Students must exert themselves to understand Teacher's mind through understanding their own minds. This is zazen! This is dokusan! My Way is not your Way. You cannot copy, cannot dress up in Teacher's mind. Enter this moment, have true entry into this moment of zazen, teisho, dokusan, work, sleep, eating and it is this Way, beyond mine, beyond yours.*

*I'll tell you a little story. But it's not a bedtime story so pay attention, sit straight. Now, once upon a time....was a master named Gutei, Gutei daiosho. Gutei was master and was called Teacher of one finger Zen. When asked a true question, Gutei always answered truly by holding up his finger like this. Ya, this is how Gutei would seize the moment and seize the student in the midst of the student's circumstances. No matter what question, Gutei would just do this one finger answer. "What is Buddha?" One finger. "My knees hurt, what should I do?" One finger. What is Gutei Saying? Hold up finger, hold up finger, always, hai? Why? What is Gutei's mind? So students would wake up like this. Really. (laughs)*

*Now Gutei had a jisha (attendant) who had taken to answering questions about his master's Teachings by imitating his master, holding up his finger. I think you all remember this koan. Gutei grabbed hold of this student one day, grabbed his jisha when he was doing this, and brutally hacked off his finger. OUCH! Don't worry, it's only a teaching story, okay (laughter, Roshi laughs). As the jisha ran away crying, sobbing, Gutei called out his name. The jisha stopped and turned. Gutei held up his one finger. The attendant Woke Up. Hai. Nice story. But, in the same way, if you try to use my way for your way, I will brutally hack it away because your Zen cannot be fake Zen, pretend Zen.*

*To understand Teacher's mind is to understand the mind of the Buddhas. This means to understand your mind. Have dokusan with yourself! Have dokusan with your breath. Have dokusan with your koan, with your zafu! It is no distant thing. It is right here. Right here is Gutei's finger Zen. Raise the mind of the Way like Gutei held up his finger, raising his finger just like this. Sit just like this.*

*How should we practise? Too much effort is delusion, struggle. Too little is delusion. You can't struggle into enlightenment and you can't just listen to me say that this moment is it and pretend that you are living it. You have to practise fully, with pure samadhi, pure awareness. Seeing, seeing.*

*And in each instant is instantaneous enlightenment. In the Soto Way cause and effect is simultaneous. In Rinzai, cause is one thing, effect another. Now, naturally, both of these views are bullshit and gospel truth. What we have to do is practise without end, without goal, without strategy. Strat-e-gy. Each moment of true effort is both enlightenment and the Path to enlightenment. True effort is like water. It flows and fills the hollows, it goes where it needs to. Subtle. Subt-le. You can't hold water back with your bare hands and can't push it forward. It moves freely, clearly. Slowly, water will burn away the rocks of your delusions. Always water is fresh. Quickly, water flows.*

*Okay! Enough. If you remember any of this, remember that water burns the stone."*

[The following is based on the text, "Quick to Strike: a Brief Biography of Ven. Yasuda Joshu Hakukaze roshi" by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi, originally printed in "Zanmai": Issue 7, Winter 1991]

And in 1979 that teisho ended in that moment and monks, including Anzan Hoshin roshi, practised that moment of enlightenment, that moment of clear seeing. Joshu roshi, your grandfather in Dharma was 84 when he presented that teisho in Hakukaze-ji. He was born in 1895 in Japan, into a Samurai family. And as with all Samurai families of that time there was a great deal of difficulty as they were entering the new Meiji Era, the era of western civilization, the stuff of the time, the Meiji Era of westernization. Their role in society was becoming more and more meaningless and many families had great debts that they had incurred with the previously despised merchant class.

The Yasuda family was almost penniless and when he, Joshu-to-become, was proven to be inept in social graces and with no apparent aptitude that would help the family address their financial concerns, the boy was sent off to live with, and become a student of, his uncle, a Soto Zen priest and master, Hanumatsu Daiji. Daiji daosho was a monk in the Hakukaze Stream of the Soto Lineage. Now this is a line of hermits and ragged mountain monks and Daiji daosho lived in a small ramshackle temple called "Tenku-in", "Empty Sky Temple".

Now, living with Daiji daosho in these circumstances was not at all to the young boy's liking, but he received ordination as a novice monk and he was named Joshu after the famous Chinese Tang Dynasty master because, as Daiji daosho said, it was not at all certain whether or not "this dog of a boy had Buddha nature or not". A month or two of cold gruel and grueling ice cold, as Joshu roshi described it to Anzan Hoshin roshi, and after interminable hours of zazen and scrubbing floors, he decided that he would fare much better as a beggar on the streets. So he escaped through the window one night. He ran away and found himself lost in the mountains, no shelter, and he was afraid to return to the temple even if he could have because he had no idea what his weird old uncle and Teacher would do to him and he didn't want to find out.

Well, the Teacher didn't bother to look for him for a couple of days and finally, though, he did and he found him huddled, shivering, in a lean-to that he'd put together of fallen branches against a rock face. Daiji Tenku just said that he was out strolling and just happened to find Joshu. "In any case", the Master said, "I'm surprised at your diligence and deep sincerity. I never would have thought that a boy like you who seemed to be so lazy and arrogant, would have the spirit to go off by himself like this in order to do a hermitage retreat or some solitary, intensive zazen. All the great monks and Teachers of our Lineage have done this kind of practice and so I am deeply moved to find you like this. I am so deeply moved that I can hardly speak. Still, while I admire your strength and determination I think that these conditions are a little extreme. It's a good thing that I just happen to have some rice balls and some tea with me." So saying, he helped Joshu to move his lean-to to a more sheltered location, he built a fire and left him some quilts and food, gave him some instructions for his practice, and promised to return the next day to bring him more food and to give him dokusan.

This was Joshu's first hermitage and it lasted for two weeks. Following this the young monk's appetite for Zen became insatiable. He ate his way steadily through every Teaching that Daiji daosho had to offer. He chewed his way through the "Shobogenzo" of Dogen zenji, the three main koan collections, and received his Master's Transmission when he was barely 20. His name at Shiho was "Dainen" which means "great thought instant" which means that in the arising of each moment of experience he knew the actual nature of experiencing.

And here you sit at Dainen-ji today, the monastery that was established by Anzan Hoshin roshi, “Great Thought Instant Temple”, “Great Moment of Experience Temple”, “Great Actual Nature of Experiencing Temple”. When Joshu received his Teacher’s Inka or full Transmission, he was given the name “Hakukaze” or “White Wind”, a name that all Teachers of this Lineage bear after the great Master, Sogaku Hakukaze.

Sometime in the early 1920s, he went to Soji-ji, at the new location in Yokoham, and to Eihei-ji. He went to Eihei-ji mainly to learn their extremely detailed oryoki style. After this, Joshu sensei continued to practise with his Teacher at Tenkuin and in hermitage, and as had Daiji daosho, to avoid becoming a parish priest within the organization of the Soto Zen Church. He taught a few students here and there but none seemed to him to show much promise at realizing the mind of great and perfect practice.

It was very difficult to establish a temple or to Teach in the years before and during the buildup to the Pacific war because the government was acting to suppress Buddhism and support Shinto as the state religion. Since the 1860s, great waves of anti-Buddhist sentiment had crashed down again and again, driving many monks into lay life as their temples were burned down. There had been an attempt to unify the three main Zen Schools, the Rinzai, Soto and Obaku, in order to make them easier to control. During this time great schisms appeared in the Soto School until a central bureau was formed to monitor and minister the income of the various main temples and their daughter houses. Many Buddhist temples were seized by the government and converted into Shinto shrines or just shut down altogether. In response to this the climate amongst the various Japanese Buddhist Schools became one of obsequious accommodation to government and military policies. As well, Zen had often in Japan’s history, been misused as a means to justify acceptance of, and spiritualization for, whatever military or political establishment was dominant. Joshu roshi would later speak of hearing a teisho at a Rinzai temple, in which the Teacher said that “The sound of one hand is the land of the rising sun”.

In this environment the young Teacher avoided having very much to do with what he saw as a loathsome and heartbreaking corruption of the Dharma. This attitude led him into severe conflicts and made him decidedly unpopular. Joshu roshi once told Anzan Hoshin roshi of an incident in which a major hierarch of the Soto Zen establishment was speaking to him of the necessity of nations to develop and show their strength and power and of Japan’s imperial right to colonize and control Manchuria, China, and Asia as a whole. Outraged, the Sensei pulled an iron fan from his yotai and snapped it against the other monk’s crown. “Where is there anything which is a nation? Can you feel that? Can you? This is what is going on, right now, right here. This moment has no room for nations, wars or control.” The hierarch did not seem to appreciate Sensei’s little Teaching.

Soon after this, in 1934, Joshu sensei left Japan and traveled through Asia. For the next 20-odd years he journeyed from Manchuria to mainland China, to Korea, Burma, Thailand, and India. There he studied the different ways in which the Dharma was understood, practised, and taught. He had seen in Japan that the Dharma was corrupted whenever it became part of a society’s life and culture instead of remaining a practice for realizing liberation. And so he wanted to see how the Dharma was affected by different cultures and what this meant about how the peoples of those cultures would be able to realize the Dharma.

After this he returned to Japan, around 1952. His Teacher’s temple, Tenkuin, had been confiscated by the government and had later burnt down. Hanamatsu Daiji roshi was still active, living, and Teaching, here and there in the homes of students. Joshu roshi began to Teach and eventually gave Transmission to three students, one of whom, Nishitama Myoko, was a woman. It had been customary for women to receive

Transmission as the Teacher of nuns and of lay women, but such Teachers could not themselves Teach men or give Transmission. The situation of Soto Zen nuns began to improve in the 1970s. This set off another disagreement with some elements in the Soto Zen establishment, some of whom still held grudges since the 1930s, for Joshu roshi's anti-war statements. In disgust, Joshu roshi left Japan for the last time in 1964 and began to travel throughout Asia, Europe, and even America. Apparently he traveled incognito and without a passport of any kind.

In Europe in the late 1960s he met a group of young people who began to study with him. One who received the Dharma name, Mushin, and later was ordained as a monk, was a Canadian who owned some farmland in southern Ontario. He offered this land to Joshu roshi to use to establish a monastery. Soon after this the Roshi and a band of ragged hippie-generation students arrived near Hamilton and began to convert a small farmhouse into the Abbott's quarters and bathing facilities, and an old barn into a Zendo. This was Hakukaze-ji. The community once swelled as large as 25 monks. And we are approaching the time of year when our Abbott, Anzan Hoshin roshi, goes into hermitage in memory of the death of Joshu Dainen roshi.

We maintain the Way by the integrity of our practice in each moment. When we feel the doorknob of Dainen-ji in our hand and we open that big main door and step inside, we are leaving the world of social convention and culture behind and entering into a timeless moment, a place unaffected by the conventions of social culture which has almost destroyed the Dharma. Use each moment during this Dharma Assembly today to look into patterns as they arise and make a choice to practise noticing that moment of experience, to practise what is true. Each moment of seeing the truth of your experience is the only moment that you can practise, is the only moment that you can maintain the Way. It is the same moment everywhere, for all beings, all times.

Thank you for listening.