

# No Big Finish

Shuso Hossen Dharma Talk

by Ven. Mishin Roelofs, godo (while training as Shuso)

October 10, 2003 , Honzan Dainen-ji

Now, don't take it personally, but this really is not about you. And this is not a problem. It is not about me either. Look around - colours, forms rising and falling, sounds coming and going, the sensation of the breath moving the bodymind in and out; you are probably feeling the knees. Our life arises all around us, as us, without any separation.

As Roshi says, the Dharma is much too intimate to be personal. Reality is too intimate to be personal. But we don't have to believe this. We prove it to ourselves over and over and over again each time we sit down on the zafu if we do this practice and open to the reality of this moment as it actually is.

Over 700 years ago, our Lineage Ancestor Keizan Jokin zenji compiled the Denkoroku, the Record of the Transmission of Luminosity. 700 years later, our Teacher, Zen Master Anzan Hoshin, translates it for us, yet another gift to help students to recognize what is obvious, but which we keep missing. Let's see what they offer:

*Case 43: Liangshan Yuanguan*

*The Forty-Second Ancestor was Master Liangshan. In Liangshan's studies with Tongan the Latter, he is asked, "What's going on under those ragged robes?"*

*Liangshan does not know what to say.*

*Tongan says, "In practicing the Dharma, if you don't reach this point, it's the most painful thing. You ask me and I'll say it."*

*Liangshan says, "What's going on under those ragged robes?"*

*Tongan says, "Intimacy."*

*Liangshan has a great awakening.*

Now, isn't that the way it always is in the koan. CLAP [Mishin shuso claps her hands abruptly] and someone Wakes Up. Is it really this simple to Wake Up to the intimacy of our lives? Could I do it right now? Could you? The Dharma teaches us that we can.

Looking on the web, Yourdictionary.com defines intimacy as *marked by close acquaintance, association or familiarity; relating to or indicative of one's deepest nature; essential or innermost; marked by informality and privacy; very personal, private; of or involved in a sexual relationship*. This is not at all what the Dharma means by intimacy. It is not a feeling tone, or an idea about how we are in relation to someone or something else. And it has very little to do with romantic or sexual relationships, or even friendship.

True intimacy slices completely through perceptions of self and other, your stuff and my stuff. It is complete exposure to this moment as it is. It is who we are.

The Hakufu-ha, or White Wind stream of Soto Zen practice, speaks of shi-mitsu or four intimacies: body, breath, speech and mind. This is what Anzan Hoshin roshi Teaches, what we practice through bowing, through zazen, chanting, studying teisho, oryoki, kinhin, dokusan, daisan and practice interviews. The list goes on.

Practice is a process of receiving Transmission, of the student aligning body, breath, speech and mind with the Teacher and the Teachings. The Teacher shows the student his mind and slowly, or perhaps quickly, the student can realize this mind for themselves.

When I was a general student, I borrowed "The Tenzo kyokun: Instructions for the Tenzo or head cook", from the office library. Something happened when I read it, and all I knew was I needed a practice interview .

So I found myself seated across from Shikai O-sensei, blurting out " I want to be tenzo."

Shikai O-sensei didn't bat an eye. She simply said "Well, you'll need to be a monastic."

"I know," I replied. But I didn't know. I had no idea what this would mean. In fact, the longer I train as tenzo-anja, or assistant to the tenzo, Jinmyo sensei, and under Roshi, the more I realize that I really didn't know what I was getting into.

At that time, it was simply obvious that the only thing that made sense was to do this practice, to commit body, breath, speech and mind completely into this process of practice, and to make it available for others. Now going further, I vow to live this life as Roshi describes it - on purpose, to liberate all beings and fulfill the Four Great Vows.

Training as a monastic in this environment that Roshi has established of rigorous and continuous practice, together with the examples set by Shikai O-sensei and Jinmyo sensei, is learning to turn the wheel of continuous practice. This is the opportunity over and over again to open to the Vast Space of experiencing, and to realize the intimacy of this moment. No part of Dainen-ji is too large or too small for this.

What does it mean to be a monastic? Well, I can say that so far, practising as a monk has met none of my expectations. None of my hopes or fears, and none of my assumptions.

There is always just the freshness and vitality of right now, of these colours and forms, and sounds, and sensations. It is waking up each day at what may seem to others to be just way too early, with the opportunity to practise this Way of Awakening that unfolds each moment as the complete intimacy of Reality. Doesn't this sound like fun?

**Roshi:** Alright, big finish...

Laughter from the assembled practitioners.

**Roshi:** That's it?

**Mishin shuso:** That's it Roshi. Now I liberate all beings.

**Roshi:** Big finish, big finish. Come on.

**Mishin shuso:** It is fun.

**Roshi:** Ah. Stand up with the nyoi (the nyoi staff). Turn around, keep turning around, clockwise.

Ladies and gentlemen, are there any objections whatsoever to Mishin training in the post of shuso? Come you “dragons and elephants!” Surely there must be some objection. All right.

(To Mishin shuso) Don't say I didn't warn you.

And now, just as Mishin shuso said, we will all chant The Four Great Vows.