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"EVERY DAY IS A GOOD DAY"
Blue Cliff Record, Case 6

Gorrick's Run Zendo, Australia
April 15, 1993

This is the sixth story or case in the Blue Cliff Record.

Yun-men said: I don't ask you about before the fifteenth of the month (the fifteenth of the month is the full moon time); try to say something about after the fifteenth.

Yun-men himself answered for everybody: Every day is a good day.

Please sit comfortably.

The verse has some interest here, by Sue-to (sp??):

He throws away one and picks up seven.
Above, below and in the four directions there is no comparison.
Placidly walking along he stops the sound of the flowing stream.
Freely he watches the track of flying birds.

(Those two lines are used as koans in our introductory koan collection.)

The grasses grow thick; the mists overhang.
Around Sabuti's (sp??) cliff the flowers make a mess.
I snap my fingers. How lamentable is sunyata (emptiness).
Don't make a move. If you move, thirty blows.

This book was in the Yun-men school and Yun-men was a grand master of zen. I think it was Yun-men that Mr. Blyth, as Aitken Roshi always calls him, R. H. Blyth spoke of as being one of those great world figures like Shakespeare or Goethe, who come along once every five hundred years. Someone who was truly remarkable. You can get a little bit of the flavor from just this case alone. "Every day is a good day." You're either very foolish or you really know something if you can say that.

The fifteenth of the month is the time of the full moon and, traditionally, the full moon is associated with enlightenment and clarity. "I don't ask you about before that time; what about after that time." Nobody else could answer apparently, so he answered for himself and said, "Every day is a good day."

When Aitken Roshi did his final transmission ceremony, Yamada Roshi came to Honolulu to do the ceremony with Aitken Roshi's sangha. As part of the ceremony Aitken Roshi had to give a teisho and, also, a public dokusan. During the public dokusan Yamada Roshi sat behind him in a chair with a kyosaku over his

knees. All that psychic weight that somebody who's been doing zen for a long time accumulates, the kyosaku is a very light, easy thing to pick up and hit with. Yamada Roshi was doing koan seminars with some of the senior students and he asked us to come up and ask Aitken Roshi particularly obnoxious and difficult questions in front of everybody. What he asked me to do was to ask about this case; to ask him: What do you think about 'Every day is a good day'? So you can see from this that Yamada Roshi saw this as one of the ultimate true tests of zen understanding. That if you can really meet Yun-men, you will have such a heart at ease in a significant way. This is not a small thing.

Perhaps I should tell you a little about Yun-men, who is a very interesting character. He was not actually that easy going a fellow. He wasn't, 'Have a good day' sort of consciousness that he was talking about. He went to study with Mu-jo (sp??) (Mung-chou??) for some time, who was a very difficult teacher. He was very old at the time and kind of cranky and had this secret life in which he made straw sandals for the pilgrims and put them out. He would hide in his room all day making straw sandals and anonymously put these sandals out for people who would be on pilgrimage and wear out their sandals. There is something very touching about the sweetness that was inside this tough old fellow, but it was difficult to even get into his room. People would come to see him for dokusan and he wouldn't even open the door, dokusan. Yun-men went three times and finally was admitted. So something about his footsteps must have improved or his general field. The old teacher, who was in his nineties, opened the door a crack and Yun-men, being Yun-men, thrust it open and jumped in. The teacher immediately grabbed him and asked, "What is it!?" Yun-men immediately became stupefied, the way one does. Again, there is this creative stupidity that happens when we are undertaking a great thing. In any great shift in our lives we'll find some ?? , I think. But it's very pronounced in zen, isn't it, that we are really waiting for that apple to drop on our heads so that we can formulate some new arrangement of the world. He became dumb and his teacher, being a frail, helpless, ninety year old zen master, threw him out of the room physically and slammed the heavy iron gate. Yun-men didn't get his leg out fast enough and it broke his leg and he screamed in pain and at that moment gained enlightenment. So he was of the sudden school. There is something very moving to me about everything involved here; that the old man's harshness could have such a good result says a lot of good things about both the old man and his student. The timing was right. It wasn't like some simple little stress fracture. Yun-men walked with a limp for the rest of his life and had a hard time even sitting in zazen. But he stayed with his teacher for some more years deepening his insight until his teacher, at about a hundred, thought he was getting a bit long in the tooth to teach a real tiger so he sent him off to another teacher. To Hsueh-feng, actually, is who he sent him off to. He studied with Sue-feng until he became a successor in his line and was one of the founders of the koan lineage. All we have to deal with is chestnuts falling on our heads. This is very mild, isn't it? How the way has declined. How easy we have it.

After he was enlightened he went to Hsueh-feng. When he arrived there, he came out from the assembly which took a lot of courage in front of a thousand people. The teacher would stand there and if you had the courage, you came up and spoke and said:

Where is buddha?

Hsueh-feng said: Don't talk in your sleep.

(Again, stupefying him, I think. The same thing. Not a harsh thing. Sometimes people think it's harsh. It's not. It's just a barrier put here.)

Yun-men bowed and stayed there for three years.

One day Hsueh-feng asked him: What do you see?

Yun-men said: My view doesn't differ in the slightest from that of all the sages since antiquity.

Something happened in those three years.

Here's this great story about Yun-men. He eventually inherited a temple of a person called Ling-shu (sp??).

For twenty years Ling-shu did not appoint a head monk. He used to say things like: Today my head monk was born. And later: My head monk is tending oxen in the fields. Then he would say: My head monk is travelling around on pilgrimage.

(People didn't say anything about this. After awhile I think some of them went, "Oh, yeah.")

One day he ordered the big temple bell to be struck and ordered everybody in the congregation to assemble to receive the head monk at the gate. The congregation was dubious about this, but Yun-men actually arrived (came limping in). Ling-shu immediately invited him into the head monk's quarters to unpack his bundle. People called Ling-shu the knowing sage Chan master because he knew this sort of thing.

(Somebody said, "This says so much about Ling-shu, doesn't it? And I said, "No, it says a lot about Yun-men, actually." The world received him. His karma was right.)

Once King Liu (sp??), the Lord of Kwang (sp??), was going to mobilize his army. He intended to go to the monastery personally to ask the master Ling-shu to determine whether conditions were auspicious or not.

(You get yourself in trouble if you're a zen master. Whichever way you answer, something bad will happen.)

Ling-shu knowing of this beforehand sat down and peacefully died.

The Lord of Kwang was angry about this and said: Since when was the master sick?

The attendant answered: The master has not been sick, but he just entrusted a box to me which he ordered me to present to you when you arrived, your majesty.

The Lord of Kwang opened the box and took out a card which said: The eye of humans and deities is in the head monk in the hall.

The Lord of Kwang thereupon dismissed his soldiers and invited Yun-men to appear in the world at Ling-shu monastery.

(This is how Yun-men got himself a temple. Surprising things do happen.)

I think this story is very interesting in a lot of ways. Not so much for that sense of the mystery of the dharma which floats around it like dawn mist on the river, but seeing the level of real issues that we have to deal with through a zen approach. Zen is obviously not something that you can leave in a temple here. Ling-shu had this great warlord come to him who obviously wanted to declare war. It's very hard to hold back a general when a general really wants something. He didn't want to get involved with this, but there was no way he could not be involved with this. How to keep your integrity in this situation is very interesting. He had a solution which was novel but very successful. He just went on somewhere else. You can see the kind of courage and integrity he needed just to make his way through this mine field. He must have felt it to be such a dangerous situation that it required his complete sacrifice here. That he had to just let go of any plans he might have had to do anything else when this great situation came up. He had to just walk out and leave everything to Yun-men. Still, it seems that he chose his successor very well. We find ourselves faced with real life situations like this where we must choose and either choice is bad. It's a great situation for zen wisdom to appear.

This whole issue of 'Every day is a good day' brings up, for me, the issue, for what is enlightenment, then? It's an odd thing to try and describe what enlightenment is. I gave a talk a few months ago, a moderately large, for me, public talk in Berkeley. It was a fairly long talk, about forty minutes I suppose, and I probably spent about a minute of it speaking about enlightenment. Ninety-five percent of the questions I was asked after the talk were about enlightenment. There's some sort of obsession that can gather around this word, which is, I guess, okay. We have to just accept that and do something interesting with it. To describe enlightenment, I think, means to find some language beyond it in which it can be talked about and I don't think that's completely possible. It is a language problem, but we can play with it a little bit. It seems that there are these great shifts in us that seem to clarify us, don't they? It's like this fire suddenly illuminates everything. Sometimes these shifts are very small, but they seem great. We hear a child calling out and we hear that voice as if it's coming from inside us. We see a tree move and we feel that we just moved. So even this small taste of the great world of zen is so interesting and compelling that we tend to get very attracted to it. Some people have big tastes, I suppose, a big mouthful of it.

In zen we also think of ourselves as the sudden school rather than the gradual school. I still feel I'm not sure what this means. When I see people who obviously belong to a gradual school, that helps me find out a little bit about what the sudden school might be. One of the ideas of gradual school is that it happens over many eons. This is an idea that comes from the sutras. Many, many lives are needed. So the idea that you might get anywhere in one life in terms of realization in itself is a sudden school idea because from that point of view our life is a rather brief span. It only took me eighty years to pass my first

koan. Wow!

The other obvious use of the term sudden is that there are these shifts in us that are utter. There is an irreversible quality to consciousness and it has its imperatives and its demands. Once we have seen something it's very hard to un-see it. We can if we work at it and drug ourselves and if we're rather self-destructive, but it's hard to un-see something once we've seen it. Once you have a particular point of view it's very hard to go back. So shifts in point of view is a matter of doing something entirely, isn't it? It's just something that happens to us. That is the sudden thing as well.

I think that everybody's path is unique. I've heard quite a lot of enlightenment stories and have witnessed quite a lot of enlightenment stories, many of which never happened, and some of which are very genuine and powerful. There just doesn't seem to be any set way. When you read the old accounts, you'll get a very strong idea there is a set way. I was wondering why I don't teach the way some people I originally took as models teach. You know, from the kensho factories of the world. I do respect those teachers. Three Pillars of Zen was a book that was very influential for me and many people. Yamada Roshi wrote a great deal of that book, though he doesn't get credited, which was one of the problems between him and Kapleau Roshi. He wrote a great deal of that book and collected those stories. Yamada Roshi is someone I respect a great deal. There's something good there, but I realize that the kind of people I want us to become are different from that. I don't want us just to value that blinding flash of insight. I think it's because that's not what I want for myself. When I first began teaching I didn't know anything else to want or anything else I was supposed to do, and I think I really did value that a lot. Well, I still do. But I valued that, perhaps, in the wrong way. More than I do now. Now I still value it, but the background has appeared as well. I see the background much more. That is a much wider thing. It's about this inner upheaval that even changes the cell membranes, we might say. It's something that seems to just go on and on in us. So there really is that insight and sometimes that's a blinding flash that knocks us off our feet, but sometimes it's not. I don't care which. I really can't bring myself to care which in myself or others. It's the transformation that's interesting. There's this inner shift in what I call character. Character is an interest of many peoples and many times. It's an old Tang dynasty interest, a very old Chinese interest actually and it's always been a major interest of the zen world. This is something that's not a matter from the narrowness of piety in religion of following the rules. The character is held together, mediated by what I'm calling integrity, which is what makes the precepts something inhabitable and wide and full. Without that something too narrow happens. There is a clarity, but the life is too narrow. Somebody described it to me as this narrow, coonlike consciousness that squeezes out wisdom drop by drop in this tiny, rather meager fashion. That's not enough.

I'll tell a few enlightenment stories. I have a friend who was enlightened in a very classical way. He sat very hard for a long time and put aside his life, as I did and some others of you have at various times. He would sit and he really didn't get anywhere very much except his sitting got better, samadhi got better. He would go in and Roshi would say, "What is Mu?" He'd say, "I don't know," and go out again and there we were. But he'd hear a sound and it would go through him and he'd start to shake, or

something would fall on the roof and his body would vibrate, or the sound would seem to be coming from inside him. He thought this was propitious. One day he was in the zendo (in that zendo many people would sleep in the zendo). He was sitting up at night and people were lying in their sleeping bags around him snoring. You know how people snore in different overtones. It can be pretty loud. I had a roommate once who used to scream in the night. Somehow it was right in sesshin. It was good to be his roommate. I used to feel like he opened me up when he screamed. I used to feel such compassion for him and the only way I could offer my compassion was just to hold that scream for him because he couldn't hold it himself. So my friend was sitting there holding all these snores, having them pass through him. In the teisho for some reason that nobody any longer remembers, the Roshi had mentioned this phrase, "headless corpses and corpseless heads." He'd be going Mu and this phrase started to drive, to take over his consciousness, 'corpseless heads and headless corpses; and corpseless heads' and he's sitting down there with all these people purring around him snoring and these 'corpseless heads and headless corpses'. After a while he decided to get up and go to bed. He got up and went to bed. He lay down in bed and he turned over in bed, he couldn't get comfortable. At that moment, he said, the whole world turned over, everything shifted, and he thought, "Oh, that's nice," and he went to sleep.

I'm reminded of when the Duino Elegies came to Rainer Maria Rilke, the one when he was at the castle, he was worried about a business matter and he went out to walk on the balcony of the Duino Castle overlooking the Adriatic and suddenly this great poem that he knew he had been ready for his whole life began to come to him, which was the Duino Elegies, and at the same it was the solution to the business problem. So he went in and finished his business letter and then sat down and wrote the elegies. It was like this. So my friend just went to sleep. That was the right thing to do next. When he woke up in the morning everything was shining; everything was glowing. The very interesting thing was he went to his teacher and he couldn't explain this to his teacher. The teacher just rang the bell and he left. It took him months, maybe six or more months, to begin to find a language where the two of them could talk about this experience. You can see you have to digest things. Even in its most classical form there's a digestion period.

I'll tell you another story because I think it's a nice counteraction. There's another friend of mine, actually a student of mine, who wasn't even working on koans because she didn't really like performing very much and she felt she couldn't get the idea of performance separated from the idea of doing koans. It was just too much like university examinations. This is a common experience, I think. So why do koans? She wasn't doing koans and she was just--and I couldn't ever completely work out what she was doing, actually, but she was sincere. I decided when in doubt, don't worry about it. It didn't make sense, but it seemed all right. What do I know? I'm just the teacher. She would sit and meditate and years went by. She was sincere, but her life seemed a bit thin in a lot of ways. She was one of those sincere zen people who seems to have given up, perhaps, a little too much for zen not realizing that that was zen, too, that they were giving up. Gradually she started to take up--I guess hearing me talking about koans--but I think just she herself just took up one of the koans. It sort of leaked into her consciousness. It took her up a little bit, but she really wasn't working on koans. There was no sense from me that she was

working on koans. She was just walking around and she was meditating and some pain from her early life, her father. Many of us in zen who were not well-mothered and well-fathered come to the universe to do that for us. She had all this pain. This sort of huge access of feeling. She was trained as a scientist and that wasn't really her bag. But this came up for her. She felt like she wasn't supposed to be doing this in zazen, but she decided she'd just weep away in the dojo because it seemed real authentic and so she did that. She came into me and was talking to me and told me stories about her father whom she'd hardly known. The few stories she knew about her father. That was what dokusan was all about. Then that stopped and everything was still for awhile and this koan came back into her mind. She walked into dokusan one day and she had a crushed beer can in her hand. I thought, well, this is interesting. She just walks into dokusan, just strides in and puts it on the altar, laughing. She'd found herself roaming this retreat center and it was beautiful, but it had been trashed some. There was some public access to some parts of it. She'd been walking around by the bayshore picking up beer cans. She'd been moved to do this during sesshin, mysteriously, and she'd followed the impulse, which in that case was the right thing to do. As she picked one up, she realized that it was buddha and she was buddha and the tree was buddha. Everything was buddha so she naturally brought buddha back to put on the altar and spent the rest of the sesshin laughing, sometimes aloud in the zendo. She was a very quiet reserved person. And that's another story and a totally different path. Her path since has been different. Her path hasn't been a rush through koan work as my other friend did. Her path has been to get a relationship that she liked in her life. She's good at koan work and it holds her and she will finish her koan study. That's a very, very important thing, but each koan she tries to relate to her world.

This is something that is still something of a great mystery to us. How do we relate the great formal questions from the past to our actual questions, our informal, organically generated questions of the moment. I think we're still working with this. I was having a conversation with someone here the other day. She was saying that only after you've solved the koan can you see how it relates to your life and then you can see all the connections, but while you're working on it, it has no relation to your life. Isn't this the problem? That's something very frustrating. I think there's something that happens there. The koan seems to draw out blindness to the surface in a way, like a poultice used to do. I don't know if people use poultices any more with the idea of drawing the infection or the demon out of the body. The koan sometimes will do this. Often we're in this place where the koan is this dry, helpless thing that's just lying there on the floor and we have no relation to it at all. Zen practice becomes like that at some moments. This quite useless thing. What has this got to do with my life. I think that's a moment when a great inner compartmentalization that is already there in us has somehow come to the surface and taken us over. It is that way in which we keep the most important parts of our lives out of our practice sometimes and this can't be right. Like my friend was trying to keep her whole thing about her early childhood, which doesn't have to run her, but is also part of her story. She was trying to keep that out of her practice. Maybe because she'd held it out so long when it came in, it was a benefit. It was a real thing when it came in.

So we must find a way to connect with the questions of our lives.

The old stories and the old language are very helpful if we can find a way. One of the first things we need to do in order to have a good day is to have a bad one, I think. Until we suffer we don't understand about the need for enlightenment. We have to grow dark before we can grow light. I really do think this is true. Before we can find oneness there needs to be a separation. We really need to find out how dualistic we really are. Wu-men (??) says: With realization all things are one family; without realization all things are separate and disconnected. A very clear, conventional view here. The next line of the poem is: Without realization all things are one family. Yamada Roshi used to call this pernicious oneness. There's some way in which until that separation has occurred within us, we can't then get the union. Symptoms are very valuable. The new name for duka (sp??) is symptoms. That's why an illness can be a very creative thing, or some really neurotic obsessive behavior that we do and we hide from everybody and we only do late at night when nobody's looking. They're wonderful those things and we should bring them into our zen and look at them, and bring our zen into them because they're the form in which the practice is trying to appear. The koan is trying to appear in our lives in that form. Until you've got a symptom you're in trouble. You really need a symptom, preferably florid. It doesn't have to be florid; that's just my preference, that's just clear. But any symptom will do. Then we get our awareness into our pain. When you can get the awareness into the pain, you discover the pain itself holds the good day.

I don't remember his name, but there's a wonderful Korean teacher, who's one of the great master's of Korean zen, who set off on a pilgrimage to China with some friends. They knew there was no wisdom in Korea so they had to go off to China. They went off on pilgrimage but it was very, very difficult and his friends turned back gradually. He was crossing this desert and it was a frightening place. He was crossing it alone and after nightfall he came to this place where he could camp and he stopped. It was as if he was guided there, he felt. He stopped and there was a tree there and there was a bowl there with this most delicious water in it. Just pure water. He drank the water. He felt so supported by the universe and aided by the universe and he felt his pilgrimage was right. He went to sleep and he woke up in the morning and found that his bowl was a skull full of blood and stinking water with slime in it. He began to throw up, to vomit and as the vomit came out, he became enlightened at that moment. He decided he didn't need to go to China anymore and went back and became this wonderful teacher in Korea. That juxtaposition of the extreme suffering and then suddenly switching into the extreme beauty of the dharma and the rightness of the suffering in that case is a very strong feature of life. One of the things when we open to that, we open to the bodhisattva way. One of the main errors I make is because people are really a nuisance and obnoxious and crazy like most of us (well, all of us some of the time) is believing that people will continue to be that way. We have to be open to the possibility in ourselves of that change occurring. That very place that we're always protecting with cynicism or with fatigue or depression, or whatever we're protecting it with; being clever, looking good, that very place is the place of our change and it's out of there that enlightenment will come. That is the place where the koan really dwells. In some way we have to bring that out. If we can see that in others, that's great.

When I asked Aitken Roshi in his ceremony about Yun-men's good

day, he spoke about dying as being the good day, the time of dying. You can see how if you want to be a bodhisattva and help others, you have to permit them to do things like die when it's their time. If you think about how in our culture, we tend to hook people up a lot to machines--more in the U. S. than here, but still here at the time of death. For some people that's right because they have to live entirely within that dream of the culture and we can't live apart from it. But for some of us that's not right. We have to allow people their suffering so that that moment of transformation can come where we fully enter the suffering and find it is good and find that the goal is there. We don't even have to suffer, I suppose, to do this, but somehow the tradition is that we do. It says that without the great doubt it's hard really to get anywhere. And that suffering is the doubt. Suffering is a doubt about our place in the universe. It's a doubt about the nurturing quality of the universe for us. It's a doubt about our line to eternity and whether eternity will really support us in getting a job, or having a baby, or whatever it is, finding love, whatever it is, finding the way, getting breakfast. For many people it's actually even finding a meal. So that is the doubt and the doubt does seem to be necessary. That's the symptom in the place of pain. Then there is the great faith that is necessary, which is so contradictory, but it is also so important. Then there is the effort, the great effort that is necessary--the third of the legs. I always think there should be a fourth leg there. I think, for me, the fourth leg has something to do with love. You really need to love the way. You need to love the doubt and the darkness and the light and the obnoxious people you practice with and your own obnoxiousness and all that stuff. It is the doubt that we tend to omit sometimes and not value when it comes and not realize that if it becomes more excruciating, it's also closer to resolution. If you're in pain in your life and your situation is becoming worse; if not only do you lose your house and your family and your job, if you then get thrown in prison, maybe that's good. Maybe things are starting to culminate here. Maybe there's a pattern. Something is beginning to crystallize out of the solution. Something is appearing in the world. There is a shape happening. Then the effort and the faith and sincerity have something to work with.

In his verse Sue-to says:

 Around Sabuti's cliff the flowers make a mess.

(Sabuti meditated so well that the devas, the gods, the nature spirits started pelting him with flowers and Sue-to thinks this is all a bit much. Sit down and drink your tea, eat your porridge, and be quiet is his attitude.)

 Yuan-wu (sp??) says: Where is he, that stupid fellow. I snap my fingers. How lamentable is sunyata.

When he says it is the emptiness that is lamentable, he's saying that it's good to come out and engage with the world here. That that is the field of enlightenment. That is the reason that some teachers actually like to deal with lay people. Harada Roshi, who was really the modern founder of our tradition, is said to have liked to deal with lay people. He thought that it was so difficult to do it well as a lay person that if you managed to do it at all, you were probably in good shape. That in another sense it's easier as a lay person because you're always confronted with the stuff of life. It's harder to get that narrow, comfortable zone of consciousness and get stuck in it

because something will always throw you out, some doubt will arise, some symptom will appear and that symptom will save you.

At this time of sesshin what I might say about the good day is that it can relate to trust here, as well. That trust in the universe, trust in this afternoon, trust in our meditation, trust in time so that we don't become time focussed in the wrong way, trust in whatever is this great process that is working in us finding its own way to fulfillment if we get out of the way as much as we can and if we give it as much sincere effort as we can,

{Tape ran out, but I think you were close to the finish.}