

# **Five Wisdoms in Hollow Bones a dialogue between traditions**

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Through auspicious circumstance I met Dai En, now Hi Fu Roshi, and later Junpo Roshi. I attended the sesshin at Shambhala Mountain Center where we soaked in the power and goodness of just sitting, just being. The week was crowned by old dog Junpo giving dharma transmission to old dog Dai En at the Great Stupa of Dharmakaya. It was a spectacular event.

I had been invited to the sesshin to further a discussion about the possible blending of our respective Buddhist paths. My own root teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, was a master at integrating the profound Buddhist tradition with Western skilful means. He not only made esoteric tantric teachings accessible to lay Buddhists but incorporated many Zen practices and forms into Shambhala Buddhism. This was possible through his acquaintance with a number of Zen roshis. In honoring and following the ground they laid, Hi Fu, Junpo and I have had our own dharma discussions. This is also in keeping with what has been happening since my book, "The Five Wisdom Energies, a Buddhist way of understanding personalities, emotions and relationships" came out in 2002. I have had the good fortune to teach in a number of Zen communities in the United States and Europe.

A reoccurring theme is that Buddhism is encountering new challenges as it comes to the West. For instance, gender segregated monastic Zen has limited appeal in a culture that is unfamiliar with supporting it. Instead, the prevalent modality is a lay Buddhist community gathered around a Zen roshi. To respond to this situation, Zen roshis are compelled to find skillful ways to meet the needs of this much more diverse population. They are creating and adopting new forms and practices to guide their students. What has come about is that Junpo and Hi Fu have encouraged me to bring the five wisdoms teachings into the Hollow Bones community.

First of all, let's look at what each tradition has to offer. The primary practice of Zen is sitting meditation. There is no practice that has the potential for profundity as just

sitting, zazen. At the beginning level there is a watcher who is minding our business in making sure we keep to the discipline and not go to sleep or space out. When our practice matures, there is no watcher; thoughts are spontaneously self liberated, like a drop of water hitting a hot coal. In terms of a way to process our emotions and shadow states there is no better tool, if we are diligent. We can come back to sitting again and again as a trustworthy way to work with ourselves.

Yet, after we have deeply realized the primordial No! what do we do? There is Yes!, coming back to world. Of the ten Ox Herding pictures the last is returning to the market place, to the world. But what skills have we acquired to be in the market place?

The Vajrayana or tantric Buddhist tradition is all about who we are and how we are in the world, the relative world of people and situations. Our deep realization of ultimate or absolute reality allows us to experience this world as apparent yet empty of any inherent permanence. It is not empty emptiness but full emptiness. So we work with the texture or atmosphere of the phenomenal world. The apparent world is colorful, dynamic and powerful so we train in how to have the confidence and resourcefulness to meet it. As well, the realization of emptiness allows the Vajrayana practitioner to have the Mahayana view of putting others before ourselves. It uses many skillful means, lots of different practices, that focus on different ways that our mind gets caught by being in the world.

Practitioners of both Zen and the Vajrayana have the possibility of falling into “spiritual materialism.” This was a phrase coined by Trungpa Rinpoche to mean taking up a spiritual practice to aggrandize our ego. For instance, we could get caught up in the forms of Zen and elaborate practices of Vajrayana and miss the essence of the practice which is actually what is processing us. We also are prone to “spiritual by-passing,” creating an exterior demeanor of a dharmic person but refusing or neglecting to work with the inner turmoil we might be experiencing. This can create an uncomfortable incongruence between how we present ourselves and who we really are.

In reflecting on the differences of these traditions, we could use an analogy. Let’s talk about cows. If we tie our cow to a post, we could say we are taming it to just be there. We always know where our cow is but we don’t know much about our cow. If, on the other hand, we let our cow roam free, we begin to see that he goes to the shade when hot, to a watering hole when thirsty, and to a patch of grass when hungry. We begin to

get a sense of cowness, the essence of cow. We have a sense of the ambiance of their world. And of course if you ask them, "Does a dog have buddha nature?" they say...

The Hollow Bones community already has some forms and practices that are working to bring us more into the world. Sitting in a circle in a sesshin brings us more into a sense of community. There are also two striking places where there is a shift in energy. One is the "Pure Awareness" practice where we go around the circle and look into each others eyes. What a joy it is to watch people being so purely and delightfully themselves! The other place is the check in when, having been marinated in sitting practice, we have the ability to speak deeply our heart's truth. As well, Junpo works with an updated form of koan practice, Ego Deconstruction Protocol.

At the sesshin I was asked to present the five wisdom energies which have been a primary focus for me for over twenty five years. Whereas koan practice primarily works with the mind, the five wisdoms work with the energy states that we embody. This body of teachings is exemplary in working directly with our physical body, our emotions, and our deeply engrained mental patterns. They work with what we think, feel, say and do in relationship to people, places and situations. We have all five but are also all unique in our way of mixing them. We are both predictable and surprising to ourselves and others and can be quiet different in different situations.

The practice of the five wisdoms is in taking five different postures with colored glasses. The postures work with the channels and energy centers of the body. The basic premise is that these channels and energy centers are blocked and taking the postures flushes them out. Taking a posture is like opening a Pandora's box where we have a store of suppressed shadow states. As in most Vajrayana practices, the idea is to intensify our energy so it becomes more vivid. By doing the practice, we come up against the stuck energy in our body. We could get quite neurotically intensified or have some breakthrough with our energy and experience flashes of deep insight. Each energy is neutral and teeters on a razor's edge of confusion and sanity. By learning to stay on that razor's edge, we begin to align with our sanity. By knowing ourselves deeply, we actually can choose our sanity, our wisdom.

To begin with, the idea is to become familiar with our shadow states and begin to face them honestly. The strength of our sitting practice provides the stabilization to make the transformative process of the postures possible. Without our upright posture, the fundamental human posture, the postures could create excessive confusion. The

spaciousness of mind cultivated in sitting helps to ventilate the intensified energy states. We then can begin to make friends with our energies. *Maitri*, a Sanskrit word meaning unconditional loving kindness, is the key or catalyst in this alchemical process of turning our neurosis into wisdom. With maitri we have a fundamental change in energy. We experience maitri as a sense of relaxation, melting and spaciousness.

In doing the postures over a period of time, we come into our wisdom body. We see the inseparability of sanity and confusion. Light and shadow are inseparable when our heart is open. Whereas by taking the upright posture of just sitting we express our aspiration to come into pure awareness, in taking these postures we begin to see that there are many ways of being aware. Each posture brings up a specific pattern of energy. With each it is like entering a world, seeing the world through different lenses.

This practice is primarily done in community within a safe container infused with maitri. If we do not have enough maitri within ourselves in going through our processing our emotional states, the community provides it. At the sesshin, we only had a brief time to practice. Though it does not happen to everyone, I am always amazed that some people, after briefly taking a posture, come up with an extremely accurate description of their experience as it corresponds with that energy pattern. This was true at the sesshin as well.

I look forward to joining you in community with a shared sense of commitment to the journey that liberates.

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