

Honolulu Diamond Sangha

Spring 2018

RECORD OF EASE CASE 4: THE BUDDHA POINTS TO THE GROUND

Teishō by Michael Kieran

When the World-Honored One was walking with the sangha, he pointed to the ground and said, "This is a fitting place to erect a temple."

Shakra, king of the gods, took a stalk of grass, stuck it in the ground, and said, "The temple is already erected." The Buddha smiled faintly.

Let's begin with—

Wansong's Pointer:

As soon as a single mote of dust arises, the whole great earth is gathered up there; with a single horse and a single lance, the borders are opened. Who is this person who can be master in any place and meet the fundamental in everything?

As soon as a single mote of dust arises, the whole great earth is gathered up there;

It's like the master Fengxue said, "If one raises a speck of dust, the nation prospers. If one does not raise a speck of dust, the nation perishes."

It's not exactly that a single mote of dust contains



Haleakalā, Maui, Hele Mālie, May 2018. Photo by William Albritton.

the whole great earth—it's just that there really are no lines dividing a mote of dust from everything else. There wouldn't be a mote of dust without you and me and everything else. So when the mote of dust moves, everything moves.

with a single horse and a single lance, the borders are opened.

So that he would not lose sight of this fundamental matter, every day Master Ruiyan would call out "Master!" and answer himself, "Yes!"

Then he would say, "Be awake!" and would reply, "Yes!"

"Never be deceived by others!" "No, no!"

Each time he calls, all of it—the mountains, rivers, and clouds, mosquitos and microbes, all thoughts feelings, and all beings are gathered up in that call: "Master!"

And at the very same time everything is released—his house, his bed, his food, his money, his toothbrush....keeping nothing for himself. Beautiful. Refreshing. This is not a state of mind that is manufactured or forced. The whole universe calls. The whole universe answers. The nation flourishes; you and I prosper, the Buddha-dharma thrives. Master Ruiyan shows this well, but it's exactly the same with each count of your breath, or each Mu. With your intimate participation, the arbitrary borders of self and other created by our thinking fall away, and the hens in the back yard are clucking contentedly with your own voice.

Who is this person who can be master in any place and meet the fundamental in everything?

Well?

The Case:

When the World-Honored One was walking with the sangha, he pointed to the ground and said, "This is a fitting place to erect a temple."

Shakra took a stalk of grass, stuck it in the ground, and said, "The temple is already erected." The Buddha smiled faintly.

When the World-Honored One was walking with the sangha,

The World-Honored One was walking with the sangha. When did this happen? When and where was it that the World-Honored One was walking with the sangha? If we assume this happened a long time ago in India, the Buddhadharma is far away. In his Mountains and Rivers Sūtra, Dōgen Zenji says, "If walking had ever rested, the buddhas and ancestors would never have appeared; if walking were limited, the buddha dharma would never have reached us today." To appreciate the World-Honored One's walking we must investigate and be intimate with our own walking. Every kinhin, every trip to the bathroom or the dining hall is our chance.

he pointed to the ground and said, "This is a fitting place to erect a temple."

Uh oh. Now there's trouble. It's just like the great Japanese master Daio Kokushi said:

Wishing to entice the blind,
The Buddha has playfully let words escape his golden mouth;
Heaven and earth are ever since filled with entangling briars.

At this **Shakra took a stalk of grass, stuck it in the ground, and said, "The temple is already erected."**

Who is Shakra? What is he doing walking with the Buddha?

This is not so much the Vedic god Shakra, but rather a Buddhist and far less bellicose version. He is typically described in Buddhist texts by his full name and title Shakra, king of the gods. As such he is a god of great power and long life, but also subject to death and rebirth. According to traditional

Buddhist teachings, heaven, the realm of devas and gods is one of the six realms that deluded beings migrate through in accord with their karma. Interestingly, it is only in the human realm that beings are able to practice the Buddha Way and gain enlightenment and liberation from rebirth and suffering. It's too good in the heavenly realm and too difficult in the lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts, fighting demons and hell. So even the god Shakra is a disciple of the Buddha, who may one day have the good fortune to be born as an ordinary human being and to realize liberation from continued rebirth.

Sometimes people tell me with considerable consternation that they don't believe in "reincarnation"—assuming, I suppose, that belief in reincarnation is somehow a requirement for Zen practice and that I, and others who practice Zen, share this belief.

What most people think of as reincarnation is premised on some sort of an everlasting soul or enduring self, but the Buddha made clear in his teachings that there is no such self or soul. What then could reincarnation, or more properly "rebirth," mean in Buddhism? It is no other than *Samsara* itself—a beginningless, endless cycle of ever changing conditions—sometimes sublime, sometimes hell-like, sometimes insatiably hungry, sometimes full of passion fighting the good fight, sometimes very ordinary and plain.

These are the six worlds the Buddha spoke of and it's not hard to see that living beings are constantly living in these changing conditions throughout their lives. And once in a precious while, we are just a simple ordinary human being who has the chance to practice the Dharma and see through the whole beginningless endless cycle. Such human rebirths, whether for a hundred years or a few moments on a day like today, are precious indeed.

Back to our case: Shakra took a stalk of grass, stuck it in the ground, and said,

"The temple is already erected."

Nice move by the king of the gods.

As I think some of you know, the original Chinese texts of Record of Ease and Blue Cliff Record contain comments or "capping phrases" inserted into the dialogs of the main case. These were added by the later masters who collected the cases and compiled the texts. At the point in the text where Shakra puts a stalk of grass in the ground and says, "the temple is already erected," master Wansong reveals a bit of his own light adding the comment, "Repairs won't be easy." Well, that's for sure, and repairs no doubt will be needed.

At Shakra's presentation—
The Buddha smiled faintly.

Isn't that wonderful? Many translations leave out the "faintly" and say only "The Buddha smiled." I don't know why they do that. It's very clear in the Chinese.

The Chinese term here means "small, minute, subtle." It was a little smile, a subtle smile. A soft smile. Maybe the eyes soften a bit too.

See how Shakra, king of the gods erects a temple: He takes a stalk of grass, sticks it in the ground, and says, "The temple is already erected," and the Buddha smiles a faint smile.

Don't misunderstand this as a put-down. A small smile is not less of a smile than a big smile; it's exactly a small smile, a faint smile, a beautifully compassionate smile. Thich Nhat Hanh instructed his students to sit with a half-smile. Maybe it's a bit like that—a little half smile.

The Buddha has compassion for the gods too, stuck in their heavenly worlds—not feeling the sufferings of the many beings. Still, it's a beautiful thing—sticking a stalk of grass in the ground to erect a temple. And the Buddha smiled a faint smile, a warm smile, an appreciative smile. How fitting. How exquisite.

But how can it match cleaning the walls of the Pālo-lo Zen Center residence hall and rolling on some fresh paint. How can it match hearing the motor of the lawnmower slowing a bit as the cutting blade

engages on a warm afternoon and a little perspiration drips down your brow?

Maybe Shakra was a bit enthralled with his powers and great insight and he misunderstood old Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni just pointed to the ground and said, "This is a fitting place to erect a temple."

Indeed it is. There's no place quite like it. There really isn't. Each breath is just like this. Each bell, each crow of the rooster. Even your tiredness and your doubts. The temple is erected right there. But we may wonder, what does calling it a temple add to it? A temple is a temple to be sure; city hall is city hall, and Walmart is Walmart, each exquisitely itself.

Let's take a look at master Hongzhi's verse for this case:

On the one hundred grass tips, boundless spring—
Taking up what's at hand and using it freely.
The sixteen-foot-tall golden body, a collection of
virtues
Casually extending a hand, entering the red dust;
Within the dusts, he can act as host
From beyond transformations, he comes as a guest.
Wherever he is, life is sufficient—
Not disdaining others who are more adept.

On the one hundred grass tips, boundless spring—

This line echoes a story about Layman Pang and his family.

Once the Layman was sitting in his thatched cottage, when he suddenly exclaimed, "Difficult, difficult, difficult—like trying to store ten bushels of sesame seed in the top of a tree!"

"Easy, easy, easy," returned Mrs. Pang, "just like touching your feet to the ground when you get out of bed."

"Neither difficult nor easy—on the one hundred grass tips, the ancestors' meaning," said Pang's daughter, Lingzhao.

This is Pang Lingzhao, Honored One that we remember in our ancestor dedication: "Neither difficult nor easy—on the one hundred grass tips, the ancestors'

meaning." On the one hundred grass tips, the meaning of no meaning—Hongzhi calls it eternal spring. Never the same and never changing. Fresh and untrammelled, from the very beginning. What could difficult or easy have to do with it?

Taking up what's at hand and using it freely.

As Dōgen Zenji says, The treasure house of precious things opens of itself. You may take them up and use them any way you wish. Each circumstance provides the particular forms of fulfilling our Four Infinite Vows: shopping for groceries, having that conversation you've been avoiding, stepping out into the moonlight, taking a nap.

The sixteen-foot-tall golden body, a collection of virtues

There it is! Wansong throws in another marvelous capping phrase here: The sixteen-foot-tall golden body, a collection of virtues—"How are you?" Wansong quips.

The traces the ancestors left behind for us, don't try to explain things, they show us how it's done: The sixteen-foot-tall golden body, a collection of virtues—"Oh! So good to see you. How are you?" Like that!

Zhaozhou used to say:

"Sometimes I take a blade of grass and use it as a sixteen-foot golden Buddha. Sometimes I take a sixteen-foot gold Buddha and use it as a blade of grass. Buddha is compulsive passions, compulsive passions are Buddha."

A monk asked, "For the sake of whom does Buddha become compulsive passions?"

The master said, "For the sake of all people Buddha becomes compulsive passions."

The monk said, "How can they be escaped?"

The master said, "What's the use of escaping?"

See how he does it? "Buddha becomes compulsive passions"—Buddha becomes a blade of grass.

"What's the use of escaping?" — A blade of grass becomes Buddha.

On another occasion a monk asked Zhaozhou,

"The sixty-six-foot-long golden body of Buddha.
What is it like?"
Zhaozhou said, "Put on a fresh under robe."
The monk said, "I do not understand."
Zhaozhou said, "If you don't understand, ask
somebody to cut it off for you."

CUT !!!

Casually extending a hand, entering the red dust;

The Buddha enters the dusty world, in response to the sufferings of beings. No suffering, no Buddha. That's just how it works. But don't worry, in case you hadn't noticed, suffering does not seem to be in short supply.

Within the dusts, he can act as host

Without hesitation, lying down in the tiger's jaws, entering into any problem or difficult circumstance and finding room to move, to turn around and be turned around. Acting as host means being at home where there is suffering—the lotus grows in the muddy lowlands, not in the high mountains.

From beyond transformations, he comes as a guest.

Within the dusts she can act as host but in the godly realms she is a guest—this is not her native place.

Wherever he is, life is sufficient—

Our practice is the practice of completion, the enactment of sufficiency and completion. From the soles of our feet, and from our blood and bones, comes the Buddha's call to step off the endless treadmill of becoming and enter the temple right under our feet.

Not disdaining others who are more adept.

If I'm walking too slowly, please go ahead. Shakra and the gods have great powers. That's so wonderful. But we need to do some work on our residence hall bathrooms. Anyone know a skilled and reliable contractor?



Carolyn Glass, beloved sangha member
July 12, 1947 - November 13, 2017

Grace Note

by W.S. Merwin

It is at last any morning
not answering to a name
I wake before there is light
hearing once more that same
music without repetition
or beginning playing
away into itself
in silence like a wave
a unison in its own
key that I seem
to have heard before I
was listening but by the time
I hear it now it is gone
as when on a morning
alive with sunlight
almost at the year's end
a feathered breath a bird
flies in at the open window
then vanishes leaving me
believing what I do not see

Michael read *Grace Note* at the memorial service for our dear friend. It was a poem Carolyn especially liked. (Reprinted with permission from Maui sangha member W.S. Merwin)

Becoming Buddhist: Hidden Dharma Made Visible

by Joel Merchant

After a temple service at which I officiated, a friend asked: "How did you become a Buddhist?" I lived my first 17 years in the northeast. I discovered these islands on the way to college in Japan, and have lived in Hawai'i since 1965. But I cannot escape, nor want to, that part of me looks like a mainland haole raised in New England, so questions about being Buddhist are common.



The important part of sharing my story is to provide a chance for you to reflect on your own. What we see is that people are different because the details of our stories are different. What's more important is what we have in common: we share the human story.

After the end of his life, the Buddha's teachings remained present in the world, ready for people to discover the treasure of the dharma. We come into contact with it, each in our own way, in our own time, through reading, listening, talking with others, maybe being born into a Buddhist family, or because a guide points it out in a way we can understand.

I was born after my father left for the war in Europe. My mother and I lived with her mother—for three years, I had two mothers. After my father returned and my parents adjusted to two more sons, a semblance of family life and a too-small house, I continued to spend days with my grandmother. It wasn't until many years later that I learned that my grandmother had lost her first child, a boy. For her, I was that son, reappeared. We became very close.

When I was 11, she was diagnosed with cancer, had surgery, and died.

That was my introduction to the experience of suffering.

I've had Buddhist teachers who explain "*suffering*" this way: life doesn't always go the way you want. But it is how we respond to an event we don't want—we fight it, we rage against it—which results in suffering. Her death was my introduction to grief. I struggled to understand. I suffered. I was also, interestingly, aware that I rejected what others, of various faiths, told me about her death being god's will. The experience left me feeling very much alone, wondering, searching, and—looking back from a later time—getting ready.

Jump ahead three years to high school. I loved wandering around the once-forbidden library book stacks. Exploring one day, I noticed a sign: "Asian philosophy." This intrigued me. I had become a good friend of an Asian-American classmate, whose mother spoke no English, and whose living room seemed exotic because it had a family Buddhist altar, alive with incense fragrances and offerings of fruit, which I wondered who ate when they became too ripe.

In the library that day, I looked through a book of collected teachings of a long-ago Buddhist philosopher. His life and mine were separated by a thousand years, so it surprised me that he spoke to me about my experience of loss and grief.

It is important, he said, to understand life-such-as-it-is. To do that, he explained, pay attention.

That comment and the story of the Buddha's students, who asked, "Are you divine?" No. "Are you a magician?" No. "What are you?" and the Buddha's reply, "I am awake," affected me greatly.

That day in the library, age 14, with a teacher I didn't know, was my first experience of receiving (going to) the dharma for guidance. The elements

combined: time, place, a curiosity greater than the pain of a death, a young person's struggle to understand, a readiness and receptivity. That's how the dharma arrived in my life. There began a lifelong interest in Buddhist teachings.

By the time I left for college, I described myself as almost the only Buddhist in Rhode Island. Not too many years later, a childhood acquaintance from the North Smithfield Friends Meeting helped start the now-thriving Providence Zen Center. In college, I lived with a young man from Thailand. My philosophy professor was a Zen practitioner, and my major professor had lived in China. There was ample opportunity to talk about Buddhism, and become familiar with different traditions.

Wanting to live in a Buddhist country, I became a university student in Japan. That led to graduate work in Asian studies at the East West Center, which led to teaching at one of our high schools. During this time I became active at the Buddhist Study Center. Later in my education career, teaching Buddhism in America at the UH Religion Department, I decided to return to Kyoto for tokudo and ordination. That led to my helping to start the Pacific Buddhist Academy and becoming its first chaplain.

Buddhist teachings have become more meaningful as I've aged. They have helped me to survive my daughter's death and serious health issues. The teachings have helped me recognize suffering when it appears, know what it looks like and how to respond. The teachings have shown me that change is life's single predictable, continuous event.

This is the nature of life-such-as-it-is: Things happen, often without warning, without a chance to prepare. Suffering, however, is optional. It depends on how we view what is happening to us. From the Buddha, we receive the gift of dharma. We are shown that there is a way of being in the world, and a path we can follow which will result in the cessation of suffering.

Here are some of the lessons I have learned in life and practice:

Have the courage to live a life true to myself, not just the life others expect. Whatever I'm going through, others have felt something similar. Be compassionate. Do my best to reduce the suffering of others. My first thought each day is how I might be kind to others and myself. Be open to change. It's the only thing I can count on. Live a good and honorable life.

When the Buddha was dying, he gave a final message to generations to come:

"Be a lamp unto yourself, be a refuge to yourself."

The Buddha was urging us to see this truth: although you may search the world over trying to find it, your ultimate refuge is none other than your own being.

The Buddha was saying he was not the only one with this light. All humans have this essential wakefulness. This open, loving awareness is our deepest nature. Trusting this opens us to the blessings of freedom.



Hele Mālie backpackers, Haleakalā, Maui, May 2018.

Highlights from the Calendar

We gather for Zazen most Sundays from 9 to 11 am, and most Wednesdays from 7 to 9 pm, followed by tea. Variations on that schedule, and special events, are highlighted below. Please see, or download, our full calendar from our website, diamondsangha.org, call us at 808-735-1347, email to info@diamondsangha.org, or find us on FB.

June, 2018

6/3 – 7/18, **Intensive Practice Period**. Schedule includes Zazen/dokusan on Sundays, 9 – 11 am and Monday through Thursday evenings, with dokusan on Monday and Wednesday. All evening programs are from 7 – 9 pm. Please see our pdf or google calendar pages for specifics. Early morning zazen will be from 6 – 7:30 am during the IPP.

6/3, Sun: **Zazen/Dokusan and Opening of IPP**, 9 – 11:30 am, tea.

6/10, Sun: **Zazenkai/ Dokusan**, 8:30 am – 4 pm. Bring a brown-bag lunch for the 11:30 – 12:30 lunch period. There will be a dharma talk at 1:00 pm. All are welcome for all or part of the day.

6/12, Tues: **Beginner's Mind Forum**, 6 – 7 pm. A time for informal discussion and questions about practice. All are welcome.

6/17, Sun: **Zazen/Dokusan**, 9 – 11 am, tea, **Summer Sangha Meeting**, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm.

6/20, Wed: **Zazen/Dokusan with Question and Response**, 7 – 9 pm, followed by tea.

6/23, Sat: **Orientation to Zen Practice**, 9 am – noon. No preregistration is necessary and there is no fee.

6/25, Sun: **Zazen and Samu**, 9 am – noon, followed by lunch.

6/29, Fri: **Gather for Summer Sesshin**, June 30 – July 6.

July, 2018

7/1 – 7/6, **Summer Sesshin**. The temple will be closed from Saturday, June 30 through Friday, July 6 for our Summer sesshin (full-time overnight silent "retreat"). All are welcome to attend the Dharma Assembly with presentation by the teacher at 2 pm Saturday through Thursday. Please arrive a few minutes early and wait on the deck to be escorted into the zendo. Maintain quiet, please, and remain on the lanai; you may use the restrooms during kinhin just before the assembly.

7/14, Sat: **Orientation to Zen Practice**, 9 am – noon. No preregistration is necessary and there is no fee.

7/15, Sun: **Work Party** (informal work practice and Dharma Assembly), 9 am – noon. Followed by lunch.

7/18, Wed: **Zazen/Dokusan and Closing Ceremony for Intensive Practice Period**, 7 – 9:30 pm, followed by tea.

7/20, Fri: **Board of Directors meeting**, 6:30 pm, place to be announced.

7/20 – 7/28, **Vipassana Hawaii Retreat**. The temple will be closed all week. Please contact vipassanahawaii.org for registration or retreat information.

7/29 – 8/4, **Relaxed Period**. Temple is closed.

August, 2018

8/1 – 8/4, **Relaxed period**. The temple is closed and

there are no Honolulu Diamond Sangha programs mornings or evenings.

8/5, Sun: **Hiking Zazenkai**, 9 am – 4 pm. Trail location TBA.

8/11, Sat: **Orientation to Zen Practice**, 9 am – noon. No preregistration is necessary and there is no fee.

8/12, Sun: **Zazen, Samu**, 9 am – noon. Lunch.

8/19, Sun: **Zazen and Founders' Day Ceremony**, 9 – 11:30 am, tea.

8/21, Tues: **Beginner's Mind Forum**, 6 – 7 pm. A time for informal discussion and questions about practice. All are welcome.

8/25, Sat: **Sangha Circle Discussion**, 2 – 4 pm. Topic to be selected and announced.

8/29, Wed: **Zazen/Dokusan, Q & R**, 7 – 9 pm, tea.

September, 2018

9/2, Sun: **Zazenkai** (all-day sitting), 8:30 am – 4 pm, followed by tea. Bring a brown-bag lunch for the 11:30 – 12:30 lunch period. There will be a dharma talk at 1 pm. All are welcome for all or part of the day.

9/8, Sat: **Orientation to Zen Practice**, 9 am – noon. No preregistration is necessary and there is no fee.

9/9, Sat: **Work Party**, 9 am – noon, lunch.

9/12, 9/16, 9/19, **Dharma Study Series**, 7 – 9 pm on Wednesdays and 9 – 11 am on Sunday. We will have a Sangha Picnic as part of the festivities on 9/15, 11 am – 3 pm.

9/26, Wed: **Zazen/ Dokusan, Q & R**, 7 – 9 pm, tea.

9/30, Sun: **Zazen/ Dokusan**, 9 – 11 am, **Fall Sangha Meeting**, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm.

Pālolo Zen Center is Seeking a Temple Keeper

This is a training position for an experienced Zen student with a well-established practice. Preference will be given to applicants from Diamond Sangha centers or in an active teacher/student relationship with a DS teacher. We request a one-year commitment.

The temple keeper leads our small residential program of people who work or go to school while doing daily and weekly Zazen and samu together and with the sangha.

The temple keeper coordinates sangha work practice and related programs, and keeps the sangha and our Board of Directors advised of our facility's care and maintenance needs, so that together we can maintain the grounds and keep the aging buildings in good repair. We provide a room with private bath, waiver of sesshin fees, and a modest monthly stipend. Depending on the situation, a part-time job in the community may be possible.

To apply, please closely review the description of our residential program on our website, download and complete the residential application form, and submit it with a cover letter describing your qualifications.

For further information about this opportunity, please call (808) 735-1347, or email inquiries to info@diamondsangha.org.

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Temple Keeper, Palolo Zen Center: Vacant

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Spring Sesshin, PZC, March 2018
Photo by Kathy Ratliffe

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