

Cracking The Matrix^[1]

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If you know the good visage, do not hold on to externals.

(Your) mind-spirit is your true teacher.

The problems and riddles (gong'an, a Chan Buddhist term) posed by men of old should be investigated,

(But) your own school (of thinking) must be spread about.

Little by little you come to penetrate your past enlightened nature,

More and more you show forth your compassion of old.

When your compassion and purity are both (re-) established,

You will attain sudden enlightenment and absolutely nothing will bind you.[2]

I have been talking about the experience of cracking the matrix for some time now. I even went back to the movie, The Matrix to review the exact words which were said in the movie to describe the matrix.

Morpheus says to Neo: "It is everywhere. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes, to blind you from the truth."

Neo responds accordingly: "What truth?"

Morpheus: "You are a slave in a prison. You can't be told what the matrix is. You have to see it for yourself."

Yes, we live in a world of delusion. It is the matrix of separation, I and other, and we don't even know it. You have to crack the matrix yourself through a direct realization experience. It still needs nurturance of many years of daily practice and the step by step transformation of our identities. But then gradually and naturally, we become one with the Dao. A contemporary Catholic mystic Bernadette Roberts describes her experiences of seeing it for yourself: "it is a raw, pure and unadulterated reality without the imposition of concepts and ideas." [3] Indeed, this message confirms the old saying, seeing is believing. And I must emphasize the suddenness of the experience. Yes, despite our daily practice of zuowang meditation where we cultivate the virtues of wuwei and doing things naturally, without desires and expectations, there are moments of awakening which transcend our ordinary perceptions of reality. Even Wang Chongyang (Wang Zhe), founder of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) School of Daoism during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries acknowledged the suddenness of the awakening experience. In one of his poems (the full poem is offered above), he states: "You will attain sudden enlightenment and absolutely nothing will bind you." [4] These awakenings are sudden, and unpredictable when they occur. And, it is possible for them to occur at a very early stage of spiritual practice, as my following story reveals.

A Personal Account of Cracking The Matrix

Grant me the self-indulgence to tell you about my first "sudden" awakening experience. The story begins when I was 21 years old and attending the University of Oklahoma during the early 1970's. I had been studying and meditating in the Zen tradition for less than six months. One afternoon, I was reading Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind by Shunryu Suzuki out loud to my roommate. The words about Buddhanature, enlightenment, etc., suddenly hit me like a sledgehammer, cracking my ordinary consciousness into something else. I excused myself from my roommate, not knowing what was happening to me. I decided to walk over to my Zen teacher's house for the evening meditation session. But, on the way out of the building, passing a window on the second floor, I got a glimpse of the large oak tree in front of the house. It stopped me in my tracks. Every branch, every leaf of the tree was shining brightly in the afternoon sun. It wasn't simply that I was seeing all the leaves, there was more. I was seeing all the leaves simultaneously in a heightened awareness. There was no separation between them, like the net of Indra, all interconnected. This experience was so overwhelming that it brought tears to my eyes, and I remember thinking to myself, I better get out of here before someone sees me. I immediately left the house and started walking down the street. The next thing which happened was equally remarkable. The neighborhood I lived in had a sizable number of unfriendly country dogs. More than once I had close encounters with them, and didn't care to walk alone in the area. But now, something was different. Perhaps the energy I was radiating was sensed by the dogs because all of a sudden a pack of them came out of nowhere and they were all

heading for me. Due to the state of mind I was in, I wasn't affected by the sight of these dogs merging on me. I walked, and they followed, immediately behind me, as if I commanded them to do so. As I walked on, they gradually left my presence. Next, arriving at my Zen teacher's house, I said nothing, and sat with the others for the evening's meditation. Nothing Special. Except that it was the most perfect session of "just sitting." No leg problems, no distractions, no-mind. Afterwards, I left without saying anything to the teacher, I thought, why bother, everything was perfect. This direct experience of everything lasted until I went to sleep. Waking in the morning, my old consciousness returned. However, the experience left its mark permanently on a deep level.

It is this experience and several others I've encountered over the years which make me believe in the necessity of seeing through the surface appearance of things. I love the essence of the zuowang approach, but I feel it runs the risk of deluding the practitioner into thinking that the gradual path is all there is. I really love this next quote by a Zen Master on the need for the awakening experience:

"Until we realize the Way (Dao) by satori, we cannot help but be agonized by our own delusions. It is like binding ourselves with rope. To free ourselves from the agonies of the dualistic world, we must forget ourselves in Samadhi at least once in our lives." [5]

Here is another example of cracking the matrix by a well-known writer on Buddhist and Daoist spiritual practices. This is an interesting account taken from the book on the life and experiences of John Blofeld, [My Journey in Mystic China: Old Pu's Travel Diary](#). This book was written by Blofeld in Chinese during the last years of his life while living in Thailand. Daniel Reid, a qigong and Daoist author, and also a great lover of Chinese teas, living in Australia, translated it into English, it was published in 2008. It's a revealing story of the real man John Blofeld who wrote so extensively about Chinese Daoism and Buddhism, but yet, struggled so intensely with his own worldly passions. Below is a rather lengthy quote on his experience of cracking the matrix. This may have been Blofeld's only direct experience of the really real:

Blofeld's Cracking The Matrix

"At that moment, a very peculiar sensation suddenly arose within me. All of a sudden, he, I and everything in the space between us, while still retaining their external appearance, seemed to condense into an inseparable singularity, as though we had suddenly dissolved into one amorphous entity. This dimension of existence gave me a feeling of great joy. For a short while, my mind was mesmerized and my spirit was lost, but at the same time, I knew that this condition was definitely not a distorted fantasy. The strange thing was that although I felt very happy and at ease in that state, I also felt that I could not withstand this man's spiritual power much longer, and that if I did not soon break free of his gaze, I might never return to the normal world, and so I quickly lowered my eyes and terminated that mysterious sensation.

But Old Dzung had definitely caused me to experience the phenomenon known as "myriad objects uniting into one whole," and for a very short time I had entered into this mysterious dimension. I'd like to discuss in more detail the meaning of this so-called "uniting as one whole" phenomenon, both from the perspective of Taoist teaching as well as modern science. When Old Dzung fixed his penetrating gaze on me, I definitely and very clearly, perceived the inseparable and boundless nature of all phenomena. That is to say, my perception at the time was that even though all objects had their own separate relative identity, at the same time they were also all completely unified as one primordial entity. That of course defies logic, and is a principle that lies beyond rational debate. I had long ago learned from my Buddhist and Taoist studies about the relative nature of reality, and that only through a higher level of wisdom could one really understand the true nature of phenomena. And yet, in only a few fleeting moments, Old Dzung had given me a direct experiential perception of the fundamental nature of reality." [6]

The words that Blofeld uses to describe his experience are so similar to my own story. And, I am sure that Blofeld (if he were alive) would agree with me when I say that the experience of cracking the matrix leaves a residue on one's psyche never to be forgotten. This reminds me of a long time ago when I had several Catholic monk friends, and we talked about these kinds of things. They said they know many fellow monks who had similar powerful experiences as youths. And it was those early experiences which motivated them to live the rest of their lives as monks. Perhaps the sudden awakening experience is the fuel for the long gradual work of refining the spirit.

What method am I proposing to break open "conscious activity and sensory involvement" as Livia Kohn calls it in her new translation of the Zuowang Lun: Sitting in Oblivion, The Heart of Daoist Meditation? If I am not content with the mere practice of sitting in oblivion, (which I highly value as the essence of Daoist meditation) what am I offering, suggesting as an alternative? I like what Livia Kohn, perhaps suggests, in her chapter on the Buddhist Dimension in the practice of Daoist Zuowang meditation. She talks about the "breakthrough" effort required for the experience of "a sudden opening of conscious" and even admits that this is different from the "Daoists who emphasize the slow, one-by-one overcoming of inherent patterns in gradual progress." [7] And then, this is where it gets interesting, for me. Livia explores the Chan (Zen) practice of solving riddles or koans to "break open the conscious mind and let universal mind come to the fore." [8] Livia also points out that Daoists never developed this method as deeply as the Buddhists, but some similarities exist in the Chuang Tzu, for instance, "What is really me? Am I Zhuang Zhou dreaming that he is a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he is Zhuang Zhou?" [9] And let's go back to Wang Zhe and the poem I quoted from earlier. He also recommended the study of Buddhist koans as a cultivation method: "The problems and riddles (gong'an, a Chan Buddhist term) posed by men of old should be investigated." [10] This is a reference to the Sudden school of Zen practice, known as Rinzai, and still practiced today. And if you are not familiar with Wang Zhe and Quanzhen Daoism, it was this school of Daoism which sparked a revival in Daoist interests in the Middle Ages, and continues to this day in its many sects, for example the Longmen Dragon Gate sect, and outside of China, the recently formed American Dragon Gate Lineage. So, is there a Daoist koan that is capable of cracking open the conscious mind, and at the same time, remain faithful to the Zuowang practice? I suggest the koan of asking: what is the direct experience of Not Two? Or, more simply, just ask: Not Two? References to Not Two as a core Daoist principle are found throughout the Daoist and Buddhist scriptures, as well as within the writings and sayings of masters. Below is one of my favorite quotes on not two things.

Bill Porter in his most inspiring book, Road to Heaven, asks a prominent Daoist master, Jen Fa-jung, the abbot of Loukuantai Temple: "What's the goal of Daoist practice?"

Man's nature is the same as the nature of heaven. Heaven gives birth to all creatures, and they all go different directions. But sooner or later they return to the same place. The goal of this universe, its highest goal, is nothingness. Nothingness means return. Nothingness is the body of the Dao. Everything is one with nothingness. There aren't two things in this universe. To realize this is the goal not only of Daoism but also of Buddhism. They seek only the Dao, which is the nothingness of which we are all created and to which we all return. Our goal is to be one with this natural process." [11]

And here is a quote from a Buddhist and Daoist text which makes clear references to saying Not Two as part of a spiritual practice.

The Faith Mind Sutra

In the mind without effort
Thinking cannot take root.
In the true Dharma world
There is no self or other.

To abide in this world
Just say “Not Two.”
“Not Two” includes everything.
Excludes nothing.[12]

In responding to the koan of Not Two, it is tempting to respond with similar examples as above. But this would miss the point. It would be like the Zen story of pointing at the moon’s reflection in the puddle and call out, “look there’s the moon.” Not Two doesn’t point out at the illusionary moon either, it points directly to the formless Dao, and without words. Blofeld in his book, *The Secret and Sublime: Taoist Mysteries and Magic*, further highlights the importance of not relying on the intellect to know these things: “The Tao and the myriad objects are not two!” He says it’s “a mystery that can be apprehended but not explained. It is not enough for you to suppose (with the intellect) that you know these things. You must perceive them directly.”[13] And what is it that Blofeld says we should know directly? “The Buddhist doctrine is that the spotless, illimitable Void perceived during mystical illumination is pure mind in its quiescent state, while the unending flow of appearances falsely conceived to be separate objects is pure mind engaged in the play of thought. To use a telling Taoist expression, these are not two!”[14]

Working with Sitting in Oblivion Working with Not Two!

“Things just arise and pass away one after the other, one is fully merged with the natural processes and completely free from all reactions, feelings, classifications, and evaluations.”[15] This is the heart of Zuowang. In the silence of the mind, the question naturally arises, what is the true meaning of Not Two? Free from concepts, the mind in all its clarity and purity stays with that deep yearning to know the Dao intimately. The mind turns away from the superficial answers which tease you into thinking that you know what Not Two means. You say to yourself-stop being a fool by listening to your thinking mind. Instead, rest in the open space of freedom from thought, freedom from reactions to seeing, hearing, feeling. Even freedom from mechanically asking, what is Not Two. It is not a mantra, repeatedly asked. And, we are not trying to forget one kind of thinking, merely to replace it with something else. The important point is “to sustain the sense of questioning, not the repetition of the words.”[16] Allow the questioning to “penetrate deeply” into the quiet mind.[17] And, just as in Zuowang, forget the past, forget the future, just “sit on the meditation cushion, investigate” Not Two “and awaken to its meaning.”[18]

Postscripts

1. You are no longer a slave in a prison. The Matrix.
2. “At the time of the Great Awakening we will all wake up and see that it has all been just a dream.” Chuang Tzu[19]
3. Don’t think that I am saying, that when you experience, or realize Not Two directly, that you will have attained something new, or something like that. What I am saying is that you will have realized that there is “nothing to attain” and what you have realized-experienced is nothing other than what was there all along. And yet, what you did realize was something not readily accessible to ordinary consciousness, but was in fact, “a sudden opening of consciousness.”[20]
4. “The beauty of the Dao is that it is something that must be personally experienced.”[21]

Footnotes

- [1] Cracking The Matrix is Part 2 of the article, Daoist Zuowang Meditation I wrote in 2008. It can be found on my web page in the Articles link: www.dragongateqigong.com It was also published previously in Qi-Journal.
- [2] The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters. Stephen Eskildsen. State University of New York Press. 2004. Pg. 22.
- [3] Bernadette Roberts-Wikipedia free encyclopedia.
- [4] Ibid., Stephen Eskildsen. Pg. 22.
- [5] The Gateless Gate, The Classic Book of Zen Koans. Koun Yamada. Wisdom Publications. 2004
- [6] My Journey in Mystic China, Old Pu's Travel Diary. John Blofeld. Translated from the Chinese, Daniel Reid. Inner Traditions. 2008. Pgs. 234-235.
- [7] Sitting in Oblivion, The Heart of Daoist Meditation. Livia Kohn. Three Pines Press. 2010. Pg. 114.
- [8] Ibid. Livia Kohn. Pg. 115.
- [9] Ibid. Livia Kohn. Pg. 115.
- [10] The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters. Stephen Eskildsen. State University of New York Press. 2004. Pg. 22.
- [11] Road to Heaven, Encounters With Chinese Hermits. Bill Porter. Mercury House. 1993. Pgs. 56-58.
- [12] Zen Sourcebook, Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan. Edited by Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo and Judith Roitman. Hackett Publishing. 2008. Pg. 17.
- [13] Taoist Mysteries and Magic. John Blofeld. Shambhala. 1982. Pg. 184.
- [14] Ibid. John Blofeld. Pg. 196.
- [15] Sitting in Oblivion, The Heart of Daoist Meditation. Livia Kohn. Three Pines Press. 2010. Pg. 99.
- [16] The Way of Korean Zen. Kusan Sunim. Translated by Martine Batchelor. Weatherhill. 2009. Pg.61.
- [17] Ibid. Kusan Sunim. Pg. 65
- [18] Ibid. Kusan Sunim. Pg. 66.
- [19] Chuang Tzu, The Inner Chapters, The Classic Taoist Text: A New Translation of the Chuang Tzu with Commentary. Solala Towler. Watkins Publishing. 2010. Pg. 41
- [20] Sitting in Oblivion, The Heart of Daoist Meditation. Livia Kohn. Three Pines Press. 2010. Pg. 114.

Note: The full statement is mine.

[21] Recitation of Scriptures: Preserving the Tradition of Daojiao. Article presented at 6th International Conference on Daoism, Loyola Marymount University. Christina Barea. 2010

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