

Every Breath You Take (Dharma Talks 100-138)

Dharma Talks by Ven. Shikai Zuiko sensei

Commentaries on Book Eleven of the Avatamsaka sutra, translated by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi and Ven. Shikai Zuiko sensei

Every Breath You Take 100: Seeing a Castle

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, March 5th, 2011

There's one thing that you can be sure of and that is that if you're feeling the breath right now, you're feeling the breath right now.

Yeah.

That's about it. [students laugh]

Well, actually no, there's another thing you can be sure of: At some time, there will be a last out breath, and it will happen to you too, no matter how you try to avoid it.

That's a fact.

Now, yesterday was an interesting kind of day, there was a lot of sunlight, there had been a snowstorm the day before, yesterday a lot of sunlight and all that snow was melting and you could kind of smell the spring, and kind of see spring in the colour of that sunlight... but today: more snow.

Increasingly,
we can't even tell what the weather is going to be,
so may as well give up that kind of effort
and just realize that as long as we're feeling the breath,
when we are feeling the breath,
if the breath is present
and the bodymind is wrapped around that breath
and it's breathing in and out: You're alive, you can practise.

So anything that you notice,
and that means anything, there's no exclusions,
you don't have to engage in a lot of discussion
with yourself
about this being a place to practise and this not being a place to practise,
this dharma or thought being okay to indulge in
because after all, it is about practice,
it's about self-image glorying in how wonderful it will be when it wakes up
and it can glow over the rest of the universe,
basking in its wonderfulness.

But that's a thought.

The moment you see it, (it doesn't matter that it's there,
it doesn't make you this kind of person or that kind of person,
there's nothing that does that in the realm of thoughts and feelings,
or seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling...)

So whenever you notice anything,
like it, don't like it: Doesn't matter,
hope and fear: Doesn't matter.

Feel the breath,
sit up straight,
open the eye gaze,
while you're alive
because no corpse can practise.

Today is in a way kind of a historic occasion, this is verse 100 in the "Every Breath You Take" series.

100!

Seeing a castle,
"May all beings
Be strong and firm in body
And tireless in mind."

So the next time you see a castle, raise that verse!
Now, just kidding, but remember,
1600 years ago when these verses were written,
there were large buildings built to surround the treasure that belonged to the king
or the leader,
or whomever could grab the most stuff.

They would put it somewhere, build a fortress around it to protect it from those outside who
might want to grab it, and to provide a place where people could hide out in bad times.

Well, 1600 years ago, people didn't know that that castle, however strong it may have looked
would crumble.

King Ashoka, apparently, built a vast complex with lots of figures around it, lots of turrets, lots
of walls, lots of fountains and ponds, and although bits and pieces can still be seen today, the
rest has crumbled.

We know, the way these people 1600 years ago didn't know, that if you dig down underneath
some ruins, particularly in places that have a longer history of habitation than our fair land,
you'll come across bits and pieces from the last building or castle or fortress or fort that was
built there.

So something in Victorian times was being built, they dig looking for what was there before,
they use the bricks and stones that they find to help in building the new thing.

Digging a little deeper over time, you find that that Victorian thing had been built on a 16th
century impregnable fortress or castle that would stand inviolable for centuries.

What is it? It's bits and pieces of rocks and mortar.

Dig down beneath that and there's something from the 1300s.

And so it goes until we're back to the iron age, these things that human beings built to last
forever just don't.

Seeing a castle,
"May all beings
Be strong and firm in body
And tireless in mind."

Well, okay, we can spend many hours at the gym encased in shiny spandex, clutching giant
bottles of water as we—(we don't drink, have you noticed that? We don't drink water, we
re-hydrate. It just sounds so much more important!) [Sensei and students laugh]

But, no matter how shiny the spandex,
no matter how buff the body gets,

no matter how many miles are pumped out on that bicycle,
there is no way that the ravages of time and the inevitability of dropping—and you never
know when—can be held at bay.

But we like to live in a fantasy world.
We like to believe our stories that if we just get it right,
if we can get the right combination of goji berries, raisins and walnuts,
which are really really good for us and antioxidants,
that somehow or other the process is going to stop.

Let me be very clear,
I am not saying that a person cannot go to the gym, or should not go to the gym,
or take a class in some sort of stretching to keep those joints and tendons and muscles
flexible, I'm not saying that at all.
I'm not saying that you can't eat goji berries
but what we can do is look into—
and this is what you're learning to do—
look into the reality of the thoughts that arise.

And as we sit,
endlessly bored,
in front of that white wall,
some of the stories that we uncover in those thoughts
might surprise us.

Did I really believe that if I had a pedicure every three weeks that me feet were going to stay
22 years old?
Apparently, but it doesn't happen.
You cannot hold it at bay.

It's fun to see these things!
It's amusing,
it can help you navigate a social culture that is demonstrably insane.
It's getting crazier and crazier which is a lot of fun as well.

But, we can wish that we have strong and firm bodies
and that they are always going to stay that way,
but it's foolish.

We can wish that if we can just get enough sleep,
we'll never be tired again.

We can wish that we are not going to get sick, but the funny thing is,
you never know.

You can do “all the right things” and then out of the blue: There you are, it's confirmed.

“Well, what it is...you have congestive heart failure.
Five to ten for you.”

Fuck. [Sensei and students laugh]

So, what can you do?

Well, you recognize that these are little signposts.

You know, you can get treatment for aspects of congestive heart failure, but it simply means
that the pump's wearing out.

So because the pump's wearing out, it's not working as well as it used to and fluid follows
gravity and accumulates in the lower limbs.

They have drugs for that.

That's great.

That's wonderful,

but it doesn't mean that the pump has been revitalized,
not at all.

So as we sit and see how thoughts come up, how feelings come up as we look into this process of perception and cognition, we can be more reasonable about our expectations around the activities that we choose to spend our time on.

You can't outrace the grim reaper.
You never know what's going to happen.
But, you can develop an equanimity,
you can develop the capacity to see how,
as this moment is the only one going on,
whatever you have to deal with can be dealt with in a non-hysterical fashion.

“Oh no! Not me! Why me? Aaaaaaarg!”

Well, because you're a human being.
You were born, that means it's inevitable.

But you can enjoy this moment, no matter what's going on because you start to understand that when attention goes into a story about what's going to happen, you can make yourself feel unhappy about something that's not even going on in this moment.

This becomes very obvious when we put one foot in front of the other,
when we recognize that wanting or not wanting to sit,
liking or not liking sitting
means nothing other than they're dharma,
moments of experience,
a moment to practise mindfulness,
to feel the breath,
to sit up straight,
open the eye gaze,

if you're walking to feel those feet walking,
on the snow or on the pavement,
getting in and out of the car.
What does liking or not liking have to do with it?
Nada.
Nothing.
Moment of practice.

So we start to see as we sit in the formal environment of practice that really,
in this moment, there is no problem.
In this moment, there is no problem.

So we're tired.
So what?

You feel the breath,
you sit up straight, you
open the eye gaze,
this may uncover an unquestioned assumption that if you just practise thoroughly enough,
you won't be tired.

Well, that's a piece of nonsense.
Tiredness comes up. It's not a problem.
When you notice it,
feel the breath, sit up straight, open the eye gaze
and you can even be kind of pissed off
at someone like me who's saying these things in this moment,

that's okay, that's not who you are,
it's a moment of experience,
you can practise with it.

So even though all castles fall eventually, this little verse has been around for 1600 years, it's Saturday morning, you're here, I'm here, we're all here together.

Imagine that!

We're all alive in this moment and
we can practise basic mindfulness
and through
that practice
uncover the truth of experiencing,
which is
that this moment is the only thing that's going on.

What's the problem?

The verse:

Seeing a castle,
"May all beings
Be strong and firm in body
And tireless in mind."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 101: Seeing a Capital

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, March 19th, 2011

This morning, the sun's up and out.
You can feel and smell and see
spring after a long winter.

But hey, it wasn't as long as many others and we don't even know whether it's over yet.

But nevertheless,
the squirrels are running around,
the birds are outside singing.
If you look closely at some of the trees,
you can see the beginning of buds.

Spring,
seasons
changing.

You can feel the breath moving your bodymind in and out.

[A student has a series of coughs, tries to stifle them.]

So you've noticed something different occurring.

You might have thoughts about it.

That moment, that moment of noticing the thought,
the moment of noticing the tickle in your own throat,
is a moment to feel the breath,
to sit up straight
to open the eye gaze, to practice this moment of experiencing.

[Sensei takes her glass of water to the coughing student]

It is the only thing going on.

We can't know what's going to happen next—

ever!

We can't make the assumption that we're going to have another breath.

Why should we?

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

Seeing a capital,
"May all beings
Gather all qualities of virtue
And always be delighted and joyful."

Well, that sounds good, doesn't it? To wish that all beings be delighted and joyful?

And the "capital", well,
it's "capital" with an "al",
from capitalis - of the head,
from capit - head,

usually meant to refer to an area of a country, province, region or state regarded as enjoying primary status, usually, but not always, the seat of government.

In architecture, "capital" is the crowning member of a column,
and in the alphabet
the larger of two typefaces,
uppercase, the larger,
used for emphasis.

Well in the context, say, of the preceding verse which was talking about a castle,
let us assume that the capital they're talking about would be an area that is of importance,
like Ottawa, the capital which radiates out its influence to the rest of the area, the rest of the country.

So seeing one,

"May all beings
Gather all qualities of virtue
And always be delighted and joyful."

That's certainly a good wish to have, isn't it?

A good reminder.

Now remember, when these verses were written 1600 years ago,
most probably in northern India, there was,
as there is today, a lot of coming and going.

Caravans would go out along the Silk Road.

So they'd be travelling through areas, provinces, states, and there would be centres of influence. So this reminder would be handy for travellers.

It has in it, however, the potential for misunderstanding.

"Always be delighted and joyful."

Well, is that even possible?

And this is English, which is a translation of Sanskrit, which would have been a translation from Pali, and not being a scholar myself, I don't know exactly what word was used, I don't know exactly what was meant...

but we can make an assumption

as it is talking about practice

that through the continued and continuous effort of noticing moments of contraction,

and feeling the breath,

feeling the whole bodymind,

allowing attention to open

as it does when you feel the breath,
sit up straight,
and open the eye gaze,
there is a sense of liveliness and lightness that occurs in the bodymind.

And in a governing situation,
where there are
people who are making decisions to benefit all the people,
wouldn't it be nice
if the decisions were made from that sense of lightness,
that sense of being a human being,
with the full capacities of the bodymind available,
and to do something that will benefit all beings.

Now, obviously, this hasn't been the case in the course of human history.
We're in a time when most recently, a tremendous geographical event occurred around Japan.
Destruction.

We're surprised, and it's not the first, and it's not the last,
but we're surprised that the crust of the earth seems to be in flux,
seems to be shuddering.

Maybe it's trying to shake us off? [giggles]

If we're given a piece of chocolate or a hard candy that has liquid inside,
and if we poke some holes in it
and drain that liquid out,
we're not surprised if over time,
the outer crust dries and breaks,
because the dynamic of that piece of chocolate has been disturbed.

Now, for who knows how many years,
we've been sticking our straws, we've been drilling,
into the earth, sucking out that liquid centre,
and maybe the same kind of result as with the chocolate is occurring.

It just makes sense,
you cannot go on draining liquid out of something that is not replenished and expect it to
have no effect on the container.

But that's just a moment in time, that's just a little bit of imagination.
But maybe people should be thinking about things like that,
and maybe if the moments that people experience when making decisions were open,
delightful
and joyful

different decisions might be made...
but that's all speculation on my part.

But having experienced myself
the difference between making a decision to do something
when the energy of attention is invested in a contraction,
and the difference apparent when there's the open expanse of experiencing
and a decision is made to take an action...

there's a vast difference.

Wouldn't surprise me if you've actually experienced it yourself,
each and every one of you.

When we are compelled and controlled by states, well,
we may not make the best possible decision,
we might stand firmly entrenched in our head,

firmly entrenched in the rightness of our view
and not see perfectly simple things,
actions that we can take
because ...
after all...
it's somebody else's...
responsibility.

So when things are open, action becomes easier.
We decide to do something and it's done.

Whereas when we're caught up in contracted states,
we talk to ourselves about all that we have to do,
and how we'll never be able to get around to doing all of it,
and in the course of that...
energy that is coiled in upon itself,
convincing us of the impossibility of what we have to do,
in the course of time and the effort involved in that...
generally,
we could have done whatever it was
that we were lamenting to ourselves about.

So lightening up is always a good thing.
Lightening up releases the capacities of the bodymind and
actually makes it possible
to make choices as to how to use the energy of the living bodymind
in this moment
in ways that are useful.

So wishing that
or putting forth the idea that
all beings gather all qualities of virtue
and always be delighted and joyful
is a nice little thought.

It can remind you
when you notice anything at all,
any dharma,
any moment of experiencing,
to feel completely
the whole bodymind in the whole moment.
And have some fun!

So the verse again:

Seeing a capital,
"May all beings
Gather all qualities of virtue
And always be delighted and joyful."

But hey,
but hey...
the idea that self-image wants to generate that you're always going to be joyful,
that you're always going to be delighted,
that you're always going to be happy...

may not be the case.

Things happen,

events occur that can make us sad.

There's nothing wrong with being sad.
Seeing something that causes us to have that reaction
can often make us
look more completely into our understanding
of the world and
how things are.

A student asked me the other day if they practised more and more completely, would that mean that they wouldn't have any feelings, that they would be stoic?

Well, in a word: No.

What it does mean is that the sensitivities of the bodymind are opened,
what the senses experience becomes more and more acute,
more and more subtle,
but because we don't hang onto particular patterns and states
because we see how that happens

and how it can drag down and condition bodymind's experiencing,
what is experienced can be sharper,
it can be more delightful,
it can be more touching.

So don't worry about not feeling things,
you will,
you might even feel more,
no, you will feel more than you actually feel when you're clouded by states,
but it doesn't linger in the same way,
you don't make a meal of it in the same way.

But I'm glad that people are asking these kinds of questions because it allows us to explore in daisan, explore more completely what's actually spoken of, so thank you very much for every question you bring.

Once again:

Seeing a capital,
"May all beings
Gather all qualities of virtue
And always be delighted and joyful."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 102: Seeing People in a Forest

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, May 21st, 2011

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

has the oxygen in it that you need for the bodymind to maintain itself.

Trees, forests, woods are essential to the ongoing quality of air.

We don't often think about that, really.

Oh well, we might get a little excited and say: "Save the rain woods"

—we don't say that, do we,
we say "Save the rainforests",
woods just doesn't seem right.

We forget things like where we sit right now was once woods,

a forest, giant pine trees,
then settlements started to occur because of the woods,
because of the forests,
and as recently, for example, as 1996,
when we first came to what is now Dainen-ji,
what we had surrounding the building, the grounds had a... lawn.

A lawn!

So, very quickly, knowing the history of lawns because they are associated, always have been, with conspicuous consumption, and an overt display of incredible wealth because people could throw up their hands and say: "Look, we don't need our land to grow things to support us, so we'll have a LAWN! Never mind those peasants over there starving, they can work on the lawn."

So today's verse, what does this have to do with today's verse? Well...

Seeing someone in a forest,
"May all beings
Be worthy of the honor and acclaim
Of shining beings and of humans."

So how often do we see a forest?
How often do we wander in a forest or in a wood?
Well we're really lucky because thanks to the ongoing efforts of students supervised by the shissui, Saigyo chiden at this point, we are building our very own, basically, forest or woods. Now what's the difference between a wood and a forest? Well we tend to think of a forest as being bigger, but actually they're kind of interchangeable, a forest being defined as an expanse of woodland, woods being defined in certain dictionaries as a small forest.

So, the verse says "forest"
and probably because this was written 1600 years ago, in India, at that time, I think forest was where a lot of people, a lot of monks went practise. We hear of forest monks, people who would go off into the bush, find a tree trunk, sit in it when it was raining and then sit out, consumed by bugs while it wasn't raining...

I don't know about you
but I never would have made it in that kind of a situation, quite frankly,
just between you and I, it can get bad enough in here! [students laugh]
And here we are protected
and we have the soft zephyrs of the woods, let's say,
and we have outside the windows green, and there are only a few bugs,
and they're actually practising,
those daddy long-legs,
they're quite funny. [Sensei and students laugh]

You see them with their four pairs of legs all crossed,
sitting on the wall, it's so cute.

So a forest.

If we're wandering in a forest,
well we never know what we're going to meet, do we?
All kinds of things can present themselves.
In our very own little woods and forest area,
if you're up early in the morning, you might meet a raccoon family.
They come parading across,
the big fat mama with the fluffy fur,
little babies with their little bandit masks on,
they go over to the water and rub their little hands in it
and they swim around.

They even did that when the koi were in the pond, and they never bothered the
We kind of figured out the reason for that was that
these are urban raccoons,
what do they know about fishing? [students laugh]
How many ponds are there in their environment?
Not very many.

And if you happen to hang around,
you might be lucky enough to see a skunk
or a parade of skunks.
You've probably smelled their offerings,
but they'll come, wandering their little pathways,
dressed in their very best,
appropriately it's black and white, go figure.
It's so cute!

And then there are the cats.
This is a recreational park for cats.
Cats love wild water.
It doesn't matter, they don't know
that the water is going round and round
to them it's wild water and
they much prefer that to any water in a bowl.

Now, Shiro, the big white cat,
the protector of the monastery grounds
and he runs a tight ship...[students laugh]

with a kind of live and let live policy

There are certain times when those other
neighbourhood cats, the big maned coon cat,
the grey fluffy one with the white moustache,
the very thin black one,
the kind of trout/mackerel patterned elegant skinny cat,
they can come in for a few drinks of water,
but it seems they have very defined areas where they can go
and how long they can stay.
That's all pretty interesting.

So here we are,
we're in our forest and
we never know who we're going to meet. It could be a shining being.

Now what's a shining being?
We've heard of these shining beings.
They crop up in the mythology of Buddhism.
They're so perfect,
they're so perfect they just shine
and the fact of their belief in their own perfection
kind of gets in the way
of their realized practice
but that's okay.

So when you're out wandering through
whatever woods or forest or urban jungle,
you never know who or what you're going to meet,
but maintaining your practice—
and this is not being all stiff and “Zen studenty” about
because that's a pain, really,
it's a pain in your muscles and
it's a pain in everybody else's you know what...
people going on about how they are a Zen student,
so perfect!

So drop that part
if you ever happen to notice it comes up.
And how do you drop it?
You drop it
by feeling your feet on the forest floor,
in this case,
in the metaphor,
standing up straight,
feeling the breath,
opening the eye gaze,
practise that moment.

Then you are as you are,
and whatever you are meeting,
whatever type of being it may be:
a little raccoon, a skunk, some random person on the street...
the fact of the matter is: it's fresh
it IS that moment,
and it is the only thing that's going on
and it is the only moment that you can practise.

Here's a little interesting fact: when I was working in West Africa, we'd trek off through big trees with big leaves, and one day I said: “Oh, this jungle, I'd always dreamed of being in a jungle” and people thought I was crazy because they referred to it as a forest. So regional differences in the understanding of words and what's being talked about crop up all the time.

Forests are rich with mythologies.
Nearly every culture has all sorts of deities and monsters
and just interesting “hanger abouts” in forests
and we see them portrayed.
A very famous one from Britain is the so-called Green Man.
You'll see a lot of that in architecture,
it's a vegetative display with the face of a human.
The Celts have all sorts of goddesses
of the forest and so on.

From the earliest times there has been this recognition that forests or woods or jungles,

whatever we want to call them, are terribly important to human beings and that it is an interactive situation.

When we get a chance in modern urban culture, we will on holidays, such as this weekend is, pack up our food and our kids into our SUVs and take off to find a forest, hopefully near a lake, so we can celebrate the holiday. So for those of you who are going to any sort of wooded area, even outside the door of the monastery, I'll remind you of the verse again:

Seeing someone in a forest,
"May all beings
Be worthy of the honor and acclaim
Of shining beings and of humans."

So the birds are chirping away. The zephyr-like wind is cooling us.

Oh yes, one more thing: [singing}

If you go out in the woods today
You're sure of a big surprise
If you go out in the woods today
You'd better go in disguise
For every bear that ever there was
Will gather there for certain because
Today's the day the teddy bears have their picnic.

Picnic time for teddy bears!
The little teddy bears are having a lovely time today
Watch them, catch them unawares
And see them picnic on their holiday

See them gaily dance about
They love to play and love to shout
And never have any cares
At six o'clock their mummies and daddies
Will take them home to bed
Because they're tired little teddy bears.

Have fun in the forest!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 103: Entering a Village to Beg for Alms

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, June 4th, 2011

The Flower Garland Sutra, from which the Every Breath You Take verses were extrapolated, was written some 1600 years ago in a totally different part of the world, but the bottom line:

we're talking about human beings,
and the process of being a human being is the same for every human who has ever walked on the face of the earth.

Now, the distinction of course between other primates and humans is one which is very human-centric, because "we are the deciders, we decide what's what. This whole universe was put here for US, was it not?"

At least, that seems to be the basis of our general attitude towards what's going on.

When we sit, we're looking into the actual process of being a human being moment to moment, we're getting a chance to see all sorts of things: patterns, movements of attention, and projected on that white wall, how we view ourselves and how we view everyone else

around us.

Now remember, the process of being a human being is the same for all human beings. The content, the meaning we make out of things we have experienced varies according to place in history, time in history, geographical location and so on, so the meaning we make depends upon the various mythologies of the particular tribe or group that we happen to have been born into.

You're sitting there on those zafu, where did those zafu come from? Well, they came from the generosity of others, people that you may never have met contributed to the fact that there's a wall in front of you, that there's a whole building, some 10,000 square feet of building and in the Canadian context, we can say in a very old part of Ottawa.

Gee whiz. It's almost, well, under 150 years old. How ancient is that? Not very when we compare it to what was going on in the part of the country, the part of the world where these verses were written, which would have been in the East.

Today's verse:

Entering a village to beg for alms,
"May all beings
Enter the profound realm of Reality,
Without obstructions of attention."

The profound realm of Reality, which is of course
this very moment
free from your stories about what's going on
free from your little pictures caused by the sound of that airplane going by.
The room is filled with sounds,
you're in this room
that was provided through generosity.

Now, "alms" have an interesting, the word has an interesting background and interesting usage. It evolved from the Greek and what it does in fact mean is "charity", which can have a downside because out of it can develop attitudes of being charitable, giving things to others, so of course we enter into, with just the slightest little twist, the desolate marketplace because after all, if we gave, well then aren't we owed something?

And in contemplating this particular verse, it occurred to me that alms or charity, when viewed in that light could possibly be the reason why there aren't all that many people practising anymore, particularly in certain areas of the world where practice apparently started, because listen, hey, if you can pay, you can rent somebody else to do it for you.

"I'm gonna give that monk his dinner. I'll get merit, I'll get to go to the Pure Land and I won't have to sit zazen."

Well, isn't that just the attitude of commerce that controls many interactions?

When you're sitting in zazen, you're learning to see self-image and its little deals in its own little desolate marketplace.

"Now, if I do this for so-and-so, that's really going to reflect well on me and if it reflects well on me, well, okay, we don't believe in like "merit" or like "the Pure Land" here, but you know, I might get a nod from someone influential..."

That just doesn't happen at random to other people in some sort of isolation, it happens all the time. Fortunately when we're sitting, we get to see how we've taken on certain attributes of the culture without realizing it. We get a chance to see subtle aspects, and then we start to realize as we've been practising how to free ourselves from these obstructions, that we don't have to do that. Any pattern can be present, any pattern, any strategy, any attitude can present itself freely when you're sitting on the cushion.

Fortunately, you are the Knowing of it, you are not that pattern. You don't even have to feel embarrassed about it, and trust me, we all have moments when we can feel chemicals racing through the bodymind, turning our faces violently red. Do we want that to happen? No. It'll wear out too, as you practise, as you start to see that many of those patterns that capture your attention are really and truly not who you are, they're just something going on. When you take them less seriously, they will, as it were, take you less seriously and the mechanisms that release those powerful chemicals into your system that can cause you to sweat and turn purple, will lessen.

This is an easing of stress on the bodymind,
so have some fun with it.
Those are knowns,
all of them,
any pattern,
anything that is experienced
by the the bodymind is
a dharma, a known, a moment of experience:

You're not it.
You are the Knowing of it.

At the moment of recognizing that,
you practise because
you've experienced a moment o
waking up to Reality.

Isn't that terrific?
Little moments all get strung together eventually until
there is just this profound realm of Reality
and there the bodymind is
and there Knowing is,
the only place where it can actually be,
which is
Right Here
Right Now.

And it's always
Right Here and
Right Now.

We can't put a little fence up and say: "There, that's it, I've nailed this moment, I've nailed Now, I've nailed Right Here."

Can't be done kids. Doesn't work. We've all tried it. We've all tried on our little attitudes of being wise, of being tolerant, of being understanding, of being this way and that way: a "good Zen person"...

Well forget it, throw it all away.
Doesn't matter what comes up in this moment,
welcome it,
you're seeing it,
you are the Seeing of that moment of Reality.
You don't have to act it out in any way, shape, or form.

So there we go: alms.
Alms: you cannot buy it with any money, any foodstuffs, any services, any little gifts.
Can't be bought, you have to do it in this practice,
You are the only one who can do it,
only your ass can sit on that zafu,

only your breath can be noticed by Knowing,
so there's no way to engage in deals in the desolate marketplace,
so give that up.

Now, recognize that generosity or dana is a completely different thing. It's a nicer word, for one thing, dana or alms... Well, I have a little trouble with the "al" part, other people do too, we could end up with "arms". [Sensei and students laugh]

But okay dana, what is dana? It's this f
Who asked?

And there you are, did you ask for that bodymin
Did you ask for that Knowing?
Did you put in your little orders saying:

"Well look, I'd like some patterns which make me a real asshole in certain situations..."

Did any of you do that?
I didn't but yet, sometimes I have been and it's nice to be able to see when that happens,
particularly when you are facing that wall
because then you're not going to drip it all over somebody else.

That moment of seeing whatever pattern is present
is a moment of clear seeing
is a moment of engaging in reality
and you didn't do anything in that moment to have it happen
because when you're lost in something,
guess what?
You're lost in something,
then for no reason whatsoever - bedang!
You're seeing it.

Feel the breath,
sit up straight.
Don't hold onto anything,
you don't have to,
and it's impossible, there is nothing that can be held onto.
How neat is that?
Then what you can do is learn through your own experience that you can respond honestly to
what presents itself in any situation.
You don't have to pander
you
don't have to shape what you say,
you
don't have to present things in a way that
you
think is politically correct
or very Zen-like
because there is no such thing.

We've never been presented with this moment before,
we've never been presented with this life in this moment before,
so all we can do is kind of bumble along
and do our very best.
And that can be kind of fun.

Now in certain areas of the world, alms are how monks actually survive. They'll go around
once a day and collect food or food is given to them, and of course the people who give reap
benefits. There must be some giant book somewhere, some giant akashic record saying:

“Oh yeah, gave this much rice over the course of their lifetime, so you're going to be up there behind those shining beings. No, I'm sorry you can't be in the first row, the first row is for the people who gave millions. You understand, don't you?”

Well, it doesn't work like that apparently.

So in our situation, what can we do? Well, it's a good thing to wish that all beings enter the profound realm of Reality without obstructions of attention because then we might have a chance of being somewhat, at least, honest moment to moment, because we're not captured by our fears about what's going on because we've seen them as patterns.

We get asked a question,
we can answer honestly.
Someone doesn't have to agree with us,
we don't have to agree with them,
but as we learn,
we don't have to take it personally either.

That can be a tough one,
trust me.

The verse again:

Entering a village to beg for alms,
"May all beings
Enter the profound realm of Reality,
Without obstructions of attention."

Anytime any obstruction is noticed...

“What did she say an 'obstruction' was? What's under 'obstruction' in the dictionary?”

Anything that is known,
anything that presents itself to Knowing is,
when there is the slightest movement of attention towards it,
an obstruction.

It doesn't have to be really big,
it doesn't have to be really awful,
we don't even know that we have these more subtle ways of judging what should be practised
and what shouldn't be practised.

Sometimes people even think they're practising only when they're in the Hatto
or only when they're in the Zendo,
only when they've got that zafu.

Well, we start to see that's not really true,
because again,
thanks to the generosity of many,
we have the opportunity to learn that:

hey this is

we could say,

“whole body learning”,

we don't really want to say th

because then it could be perceived as being in the realm of self-help, so that is not what I'm
saying, but...

the whole bodymind learns

and unless you're some creature out of the Wizard of Oz who changes bodyminds or heads
to go to work, to go to the dentist, to go to the library, to interact with relatives,

unless you're one of those,

it's this bodymind that is trotting out to do all those different things with all those different

people.

So what you learn here through the generosity of others is what goes with you when you go out to do these other things.

It can be interesting to notice the switching point
and it itself is a known,
and at the moment of noticing,
what do you do?

Well you practise that moment of noticing,
of clear seeing
that hint,
that moment of the profound realm of Reality.

And have some fun with it!

I think I'll just read it once more before we close:

Entering a village to beg for alms,
"May all beings
Enter the profound realm of Reality,
Without obstructions of attention."

And, may all beings have fun!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 104: Coming to Someone's Door

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, June 25th, 2011

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE
from the moment you first took a breath,
or more accurately,
since mechanisms of survival...
since being a human being kicked in ...
and your little lungs expanded...
and you went: "WAAAAAAAAA"
and you were born into the world,
every breath you take
lets you know you're alive.

And, while you're still alive, check it out:
in this moment, you are still alive...

Now, some of you might hold out the faint hope that this condition is going to last forever.
Well. Well. Well.

It won't.

this breath you're breathing in right now
could be the last in breath, but what a way to go! [students giggle]
We should all be so lucky.

The end of the sitting,
the gong has rung,
everyone else is getting up for kinhin,
but so-and-so isn't...
Kinhin is ready to start,
but so-and-so is still sitting on their zafu!

I wonder how long it would be until someone said: "So-and-so, it's time for kinhin."

And nothing happens.

Some brave soul takes a step over, gives a little poke, and there's a slow toppling towards the wall. [Sensei and students laugh]

[Sensei claps] Well done, you become a legend! [Sensei and students laugh heartily]

Everyone's hopes and fears realized: "I'm going to die if I continue sitting here any longer!" [more laughter]

We just don't know what's going to happen.

Today's verse from The Practice of Purity:

Coming to someone's door,
"May all beings
Enter all Gates
Of Awake Awareness."

Well, we've all had occasion to come towards a door. This morning, you walked towards a door. Some of you in your rooms at home, some of you in your rooms in residence here in the monastery, some of you walked up that path to the front door of the monastery, and did you have in your mind the little verse:

"May all beings
Enter all Gates
Of Awake Awareness."

Well, perhaps in one form or another, perhaps not articulated, there was that sort of wishing and hoping and dreaming.

Now remember, these verses were written 1600 years ago but people did have doors and doorways, and they too were people just like you. They were born, they took that first breath in, they did all the things that human beings do because the process of being a human being is the same for all human beings since the beginning of whatever demarcation line was arbitrarily chosen to be the gateway between primates and humans.

So the process is the same,
the meaning we make out of what we experience moment to moment
is very, very different,
and when meaning becomes beliefs
or beliefs make the meaning of our lives,
we're on the way to problems,
not just for our self, but for everyone.

We don't have to think about it for very long
to come up with examples
in our own lives when we had beliefs
about what was going to happen,
beliefs about who we are and how the world is.
We sat, perhaps, in front of the television set
and watched actions take place that were in fact beyond our comprehension,
beyond our experience,
actions of extreme brutality
by humans just like us against other humans just like us
and against every other possible species that we could encounter
because face it:
beliefs are nasty, they're unnecessary and very, very nasty.

I'm not going to elaborate on the nastiness because you can figure it out for yourselves.

I can't elaborate because if I do,
I just might break down and weep because we humans have wasted our potential in so many ways.

Well, "wasted our potential",
we've just wasted our energy in so many stupid ways because of being consumed by passion, aggression and stupidity.

So at some point for each and every one of us, we had a moment when we said to ourselves:
"Wait a minute, there's got to be something more, this is not the totality of my life, I can experience something more, I know it, but I just don't know what it is."

And for each and every one sitting in this room,
we pitty-patted up some pathway and entered someone's door.
In this case, the someone was the door of the Lineage.

You've heard the words "Dharma gates",
well interestingly,
the word gate comes from the same word source as door, as does mouth, actually.
And it wouldn't surprise me, although I couldn't track this down, it wouldn't surprise me if in fact dharma came from the same background as door because Sanskrit it was something like "dwara" (??? - I looked this up but couldn't find it) so we're not going to get into the root of the word but we will say each moment of experience is a door,
is a gateway,
a dharma that can be entered through into the larger expanse.

So, we come to someone's door.
What do we want when we enter that doorway?
Well, often it's not what we get.
We'll enter a doorway,
sometimes having this vague feeling that
if we can just get enough information
that we will be wise, and of course better than everybody else,
because that's what self-image does.

Self-image, that contraction into a sense of self
with its beliefs about who it is and how the world is,
wants to acquire things,
wants to adorn itself,
wants to turn itself out as bigger and better
and more beautiful
than everyone else.

Well, it doesn't exactly happen that way...

We come to the door seeking to learn about who we really are and how the world really is,
and that is not necessarily an easy process.
Not only can it be difficult on the bodymind, because sitting still for thirty minutes may be one of the most difficult things that any one of us has ever done,
and the bodymind gets stretched, literally,
and its knees hurt,
and its bum aches,
and its back gets all twisted up,
and of course
it blames practice
because self-image will try to blame anything it experiences
on anything else, rather than,
(as we learn, that's not who we are,)

so rather than taking that on as who we are, saying:
"yes indeed, I am just too old...
this is just too painful...
I can't stand it...
I don't need this...
I'm better than everyone else without it...
I'm worse than anyone else so I'll never be able to do it..."

we start to recognize that
as being the same old script
that everyone has run through
for themselves
at one time or another
to a greater or lesser degree.

As soon as you recognize that [Sensei claps] you've recognized thoughts.
See it, don't be it!

Practise at that moment.
Feel the breath,
sit up straight,
practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment,
and as you do that you are, metaphorically, entering a dharma gate of Awake Awareness.

So you keep on doing that
and the fact that it is possible
as you experience
means that it is possible for you
to do it again...

and again...

and

again.

It's going to get the information, eventually, through your own experience
that you are not who you thought you were,
you never were,
and the world is not how you thought it was,
nor was it ever.

I'm going to read you a little poem now, written in December 1990 by someone called Shikai
shamini during a December O-sesshin.

Backpacking the Straight Path,
Instructions for the Zendo

Bare bones, bare flesh
only

Leave the backpack of self-image
Parent, child, male, female, straight, gay, old, young, black, white, older, younger
at the door,
with your shoes and socks.

Pick it up on the way out.

Too heavy?

Unpack in suchness
and the load lightens.

Now, the purpose of that of course is just to point out that we all carry with us a backpack of stuff, beliefs about how we are and how the world is, quite simply, and when we recognize that, we're presented with many moments as we see the individual items, many moments when we can practise that moment of clear seeing, that moment of recognition, that moment of Awake Awareness.

Now in a Dharma Assembly by Anzan Hoshin entitled "Backpacking the Straight Path", which was done in January 1991, he says:

"The whole point of the Dharma is to put the Dharma to work for you in your life so that you can apply it."

And so you are learning to apply it. I recommend that you read that Dharma Talk, "Backpacking the Straight Path" because it addresses questions that come up for all of you, such as:

What is meant by "straight path"?
What is meant by "direct path"?
What is meant by "kensho"?
What is meant by "daikensho"?

Now, I could repeat those things for you,
but
not gonna do it, not gonna do it.
You can look it up,
that's a much better way.

So as you walk this straight path, moment to moment,
and the straight path does mean that it is direct,
you're not going to get a lot of little sidebars, even though self-image loves little sidebars.
There really isn't any straight path,
there really isn't any direct path,
there really is only this moment,
so when you notice anything at all,
recognize: it's this moment.

Feel the breath,
sit up straight,
practise the whole bodymind in this moment.
Wake up to Awake Awareness.

Now, when you're coming to someone's door
and oh, hey,
did any of you ever go on a date,
and you had to walk up that path to the door,
and all those thoughts that you might have had,
or you went for a job interview
and all those thoughts that you had,
thoughts about how you were and how the world was
and how the whole thing
was going to turn out...

Well, should you be doing these things again,

you have something else to do,
you have the opportunity to recognize
hey: moment of clear seeing.
Thoughts and feelings rise and fall.
Life and living as Awake Awareness
isn't the lack of thoughts and feelings
it's the ability to see clearly
exactly what's going
moment to moment.

So remember this little verse, let it just resonate through:

Coming to someone's door,
"May all beings
Enter all Gates
Of Awake Awareness."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 105: Entering a House

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, July 2nd, 2011

EVERY BREATH TAKE...

And who is it that takes that breath?
Do you really take it?
Or is that a linguistic convenience?

Oh well, never mind.

Every breath you take has been informed by the breath that has left other beings who have been in this room before you,
is informed by other beings who are in other places
and even in other times
so really can we talk about "pure" air?

But the fact is we are living in and breathing in and out some sort of soup which could be, again a metaphor and as metaphors go, kind of stretching it because the air, although it may be humid is not liquid as such...

Oh my, oh my! Words are so so slippery, aren't they?

But they can turn into what we take to be the ABSOLUTE TRUTH, and we are RIGHT, and others who do not believe as we believe, who do not do as we do are WRONG.

Gee, isn't that how countries run?
Isn't that how groups operate?
Oh well, back to the verse:

Entering a house,
"May all beings
Enter the vehicle of Awakening as Awareness,
Always equal throughout all times."

Now, "vehicle", what are we talking about?

"Where do I catch that vehicle? Is it a number 12, a number 7, or a number 86? And how often does it come along?"

Well, vehicle comes from the Latin, vehiculum: to carry. So a vehicle is anything that carries, that is a medium through which something is transmitted, expressed, or accomplished. My

intention is not to insult anyone
but language, as we say, is slippery and it is changing.
When we say vehicle, we tend to think first off of something with four or eight wheels that carries people in it. So here we're talking about the vehicle, the Teachings of Awareness which carry the possibility for each and every one of you and for all beings who follow the instruction of
sitting up straight,
feeling the breath,
feeling the whole bodymind,
to wake up to the fact that you are Awake Awareness,
and that this has always been the case
for everything
for all times.

So it's not a matter of there being different capacities or skill sets that people have to have to practise.

Each and every person has what it takes.

When we first start to practise, we have entered upon, we have put our little footsy wootsies on the Straight Path.

OMG!

We carry all sorts of ideas, usually unpleasant, and usually having to do with denial of things that we like,
we have put our foot on the Straight Path and with each step we have the opportunity to notice how attention is
and at that moment of noticing,
to practise mindfulness,
to feel the breath,
to sit or stand up straight,
to feel the whole bodymind.
Another step,
another opportunity.

Now, practising mindfulness is the beginning of the Straight Path and it goes on and on until somehow very subtly it changes into what may be called the Direct Path. Now, the Direct Path begins when any kind of categorization of experience is given up.

So you may find yourself just sitting there,
just standing there,
just walking
without that metaphoric labelling machine going:

"Tick tick tick tick: nice day!"

"Tick tick: oh, cool breeze."

"Oh, look at that."

"Oh, how are you?"

"Oh, what's going on?"

sending out this constant stream of categorizing:

good

bad

not so good

not so bad

hope

fear

like her

hate her

he's cute

oh, she's ugly...
On and on.
All of that drops away and there's just experiencing,
and the Direct Path,
which of course is no path at all,
neither is the Straight Path,
these are just words to point to instruction,
words that can allow people to talk to,
and give instruction to a room full of people.
It would be pretty difficult to do it without words.
Think about it for a moment right now.
It may give us a chance to have another little doze,
but instruction could not get passed along.

So there you are, you're on the Direct Path,
labelling's not happening,
directly attending to the process of experiencing.

Hmm.

And you notice
how you tend to notice after the fact,
we tend not to notice something that's not happening.
So after a while we may notice that we're not falling for our stories about what's going on
because our stories about what's going on aren't there
and haven't been there...

Wow!

What will we say in daisan?

(Little sidebar with the hope of a comedic effect.)

Now the Direct Path, as I said is the opening and broadening of the Straight Path, but
whatever we call it, each moment that there is
waking up as Awareness itself
is THIS moment of waking up
as Awareness itself.

When something starts to come into that and attracts attention,
basic mindfulness:
feeling the breath
sitting up straight
opening the eye gaze.
It doesn't matter how far along the Direct Path you may be,
that is always there for you.

Now, in *The Straight Path: Zen Teachings on the Foundations of Mindfulness*, there's a poem
that Anzan Hoshin roshi wrote about the elements of the Direct Path within the Straight Path.
Since this is a holiday weekend, and we're at a party, I thought I would provide some
entertainment.

Tourist's Guide to Zazen:
one easy step

People run this way and that,
looking for good things to see,
trying to avoid anything ugly.
Since they are so afraid of anything ugly,
they carry this fear around with them
and everything they see is ugly.

What are you looking for?
What is it that you see?
What is it that sees?

Give up the game of good and bad,
happy and sad
and just see what is seen
just hear what is heard
just sense what is sensed
just know what is known.

I'm no tour guide
I have no holiday package to offer
But if you want to come along with me,
I'll show you what I've seen.

First of all, before we start,
you should know that
wherever you are
is always right here.

Each place
is the same place.

No, I'm not kidding.
Although it might seem like a funny thing.

Actually, it's a funny thing
that you have never noticed it.

Oh, something else:
each place
is nowhere at all
because all places are here
and "here"
is not really a place.

Here is just
being aware.

I see you're confused.

Well, before we go on
perhaps we should just sit down.

Let's sit down
right here
in the midst of everything.

Just sit up straight
and pay attention
and just be aware
of being right here.

Pay attention
not just with your mind
(because, after all,
it's the mind that's confused;
the rest is all right).

Pay attention
with your back,
your belly, your breath.

Ears over the shoulder,
nose over the navel;
body in balance
will bring the mind around right.

That's right.

After all,
since the mind
is always running around

and the body is always
right here, right now,

if you want to understand
how each place is the same place
and that each place
is no place,

right here
is the place to start.

Oh, didn't I mention it?
Our tour has begun.

Entering a house,
"May all beings
Enter the vehicle of Awakening as Awareness,
Always equal throughout all times."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 106: Seeing Those Who Refuse to Make Offerings

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, July 9th, 2011

Just this morning, I'm starting to feel somewhat better, but forgive me if I should start coughing.

A really strange thing happened and again, I don't want to get too personal about things, but I went to the doctor to have an annual checkup and when I was there, the nurse said:

"Now, good, we're going to give you a couple of shots. One is for tetanus and the other is for pneumonia."

And I think I got pneumonia from that shot! Is this a plan to get rid of seniors? [Sensei and students laugh] because apparently now this shot is something that seniors are supposed to get.

However, aside from that, the fact of congested lungs does make it more uncomfortable to breathe. It makes it painful to breathe, and it's a very good reminder that with

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

you're breathing in the life that lives as you and if that breath doesn't get taken in, well,

it's goodbye to you.

The meat drops

and you're no longer you,

you never were really,

but you're now someone else's problem.

Today's verse is about making offerings and each time actually you step inside the door of the monastery, you are offering yourself to the Dharma. You're offering yourself to learning the Teachings of Reality so that, as Dogen said, you'll study the self and eventually through studying the self, you'll drop through it.

You recognize that there is no self whatsoever.

There is Awareness in itself and this bodymind,

which is how you are aware of anything at all.

The verse:

Seeing those who refuse to make offerings,

"May all beings

Never turn from

The ways of supreme virtue."

Now, what do we mean? "Seeing those who refuse to make offerings"?

Offerings to what?

And what business is it of ours anyway?

But, that's how we are.

Self-image peers out from behind its eyes and looks around:

Who's giving more?

Who's getting more?

Because in the usual social context, that is how we judge and how we are judged.

A long time ago, when I first took monk's vows, I decided I'd like to give myself a little present, so I ordered a very nice mala, a 108 bead black glass mala. I was really pleased with it. It certainly signified something. I put it on, went and met with the Roshi, then Sensei. He said:

"What's that?"

I said: "It's a new mala, isn't it beautiful?"

He said: "Yes it is, give it to me."

So I did, because I'd forgotten the part which says that with anything that a monk purchases or is given, the first thing they do is offer it, and since there were only the two of us, there was no doubt as to whom it should have been offered in the first place. I had just forgotten that part.

I've never forgotten that part ever again.

What is the point of all of that? Well, what you are doing is you're offering up body, breath, speech, and mind, as a monastic, to the Dharma. So, that is, one could say, a supreme offering.

It doesn't mean anybody's perfect, not at all. That's why we study. That's why we sit here and go: "Yadda, yadda, yadda", in the hopes of saying one thing or showing one thing that will help students look more clearly into how they are in each moment.

So what do you do when you notice yourself peering out from behind the eyes, looking around saying: "Boy, is she ever cheap? They didn't do blah blah blah..."

But of course, none of us in this room ever do anything like that, we never have thoughts like that, do we? No, not at all! We're just all loving, all encompassing, all nicey nicey. [Sensei laughs]

Well, maybe I'm alone! [students laugh]

So, I'm going to ask a favour of you. I'm going to ask you to draw your attention to your right hand and pick it up in a little fist and put it front of your chest. Good! You all did it, that's amazing, there was very little reluctance, that's a good sign.

Now, you've got that little fist. Usually we point with our index finger, so point with the index finger as if you're pointing at someone who is refusing to make offerings, so that one finger is pointing out. Look down at your hand. Look where the other three fingers are pointing. [students laugh in recognition]

Where are they pointing. Go ahead, say it out loud.

Student: Me! [Sensei laughs]

Exactly! So, that can be really helpful. You can put your hands down now, but it can be really helpful to remember that when we notice things, or maybe have a critical thought, it's not that we're a bad person because that critical thought is there, or because we're comparing ourselves to someone else. It's not a matter of having to get rid of all of those kinds of contractions and thoughts and then we'll really be able to practise.

It's a matter of using the environment that we interact with to show ourselves the habits and patterns and tendencies that we may not have noticed before.

So remember: if you're looking around and seeing "those who refuse to make offerings"... and how would we know anyway, really? But, we're looking around and we're being critical of others, or having any thoughts whatsoever about others, remember those three fingers that point right back to you. You are the one who can practise with what's going on with you.

Sangha, the larger community around us,
all help us see more clearly how we are
because we see the reactivities,
we see the tendencies
and that's great because each time you see anything at all,
any known,
you have the opportunity to practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

You don't have to worry about being clean of all of those thoughts and tendencies before you can practise,
they're just stuff going on,
they're just leaves in the wind.
They are the very things that can help you practise more and more deeply.

The whole point of the Dharma is to put the Dharma to work for you in your life so that you can apply it.

None of the things that arise within Awareness,
none of them
are who you are.
They're things arising in the Awareness of them,
that is what allows you to practise,

And you can practise,
it doesn't matter who you are,
it doesn't matter who you think you are,
it doesn't matter who others think you are,
you can use every moment to see more clearly into the process of perception and cognition
and to open it up more and more completely.

The verse again:

Seeing those who refuse to make offerings,
"May all beings
Never turn from
The ways of supreme virtue."

And virtue: manliness or courage.

Isn't that interesting? It has the same root as virile and up until the 17th century that word was basically only applied to men, and then in the 17th it was applied to the moral conduct, the sexual conduct, especially of women. That's just an aside...

But virtue, doing the right thing, and sometimes it's a risk because doing the right thing may mean actually thinking about what it is we're doing to look into what's going on. Now, monks have the Shingi, which are instructions for monastic behaviour, how one checks things out. In the case of the mala, it says very clearly in the Shingi that the senior should be consulted and that the senior should be offered that which the junior has. Well, I just, as I say, forgot about that part.

I'll never forget about it again and it is useful to have these types of guidelines, which is what they are, to look into how we are.

So, virtue.

Hey, doing the best we can with the information we have at hand.
That is helping us offer ourselves up to the Dharma,
the Teachings of Reality and each and every one of us can do it.

And where do we do it?

Well, not just while we're sitting in the Hatto,
not just after we've opened the door to the monastery and entered,
but in every moment.

This does not mean that we carry some idea with us as to how we should be as a Zen student,
not at all,

but we can recognize
that any moment we recognize
anything about experiencing
is the only moment we can recognize that moment of experiencing
and it is the moment that we can practise.

We're practising that moment of clear seeing,
that moment of waking up to Reality.

So once again... [Sensei coughs] ... I think we'll end here.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 106: Seeing Those Who Refuse to Make Offerings

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, July 9th, 2011

Just this morning, I'm starting to feel somewhat better, but forgive me if I should start coughing.

A really strange thing happened and again, I don't want to get too personal about things, but I went to the doctor to have an annual checkup and when I was there, the nurse said:

“Now, good, we're going to give you a couple of shots. One is for tetanus and the other is for pneumonia.”

And I think I got pneumonia from that shot! Is this a plan to get rid of seniors? [Sensei and students laugh] because apparently now this shot is something that seniors are supposed to get.

However, aside from that, the fact of congested lungs does make it more uncomfortable to breathe. It makes it painful to breathe, and it's a very good reminder that with

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

you're breathing in the life that lives as you and if that breath doesn't get taken in, well,

it's goodbye to you.

The meat drops

and you're no longer you,

you never were really,

but you're now someone else's problem.

Today's verse is about making offerings and each time actually you step inside the door of the monastery, you are offering yourself to the Dharma. You're offering yourself to learning the Teachings of Reality so that, as Dogen said, you'll study the self and eventually through studying the self, you'll drop through it.

You recognize that there is no self whatsoever.

There is Awareness in itself and this bodymind, which is how you are aware of anything at all.

The verse:

Seeing those who refuse to make offerings,

"May all beings

Never turn from

The ways of supreme virtue."

Now, what do we mean? “Seeing those who refuse to make offerings”?

Offerings to what?

And what business is it of ours anyway?

But, that's how we are.

Self-image peers out from behind its eyes and looks around:

Who's giving more?

Who's getting more?

Because in the usual social context, that is how we judge and how we are judged.

A long time ago, when I first took monk's vows, I decided I'd like to give myself a little present, so I ordered a very nice mala, a 108 bead black glass mala. I was really pleased with it. It certainly signified something. I put it on, went and met with the Roshi, then Sensei. He said:

“What's that?”

I said: “It's a new mala, isn't it beautiful?”

He said: “Yes it is, give it to me.”

So I did, because I'd forgotten the part which says that with anything that a monk purchases or is given, the first thing they do is offer it, and since there were only the two of us, there was no doubt as to whom it should have been offered in the first place. I had just forgotten that part.

I've never forgotten that part ever again.

What is the point of all of that? Well, what you are doing is you're offering up body, breath, speech, and mind, as a monastic, to the Dharma. So, that is, one could say, a supreme offering.

It doesn't mean anybody's perfect, not at all. That's why we study. That's why we sit here and go: "Yadda, yadda, yadda", in the hopes of saying one thing or showing one thing that will help students look more clearly into how they are in each moment.

So what do you do when you notice yourself peering out from behind the eyes, looking around saying: "Boy, is she ever cheap? They didn't do blah blah blah..."

But of course, none of us in this room ever do anything like that, we never have thoughts like that, do we? No, not at all! We're just all loving, all encompassing, all nicey nicey. [Sensei laughs]

Well, maybe I'm alone! [students laugh]

So, I'm going to ask a favour of you. I'm going to ask you to draw your attention to your right hand and pick it up in a little fist and put it front of your chest. Good! You all did it, that's amazing, there was very little reluctance, that's a good sign.

Now, you've got that little fist. Usually we point with our index finger, so point with the index finger as if you're pointing at someone who is refusing to make offerings, so that one finger is pointing out. Look down at your hand. Look where the other three fingers are pointing. [students laugh in recognition]

Where are they pointing. Go ahead, say it out loud.

Student: Me! [Sensei laughs]

Exactly! So, that can be really helpful. You can put your hands down now, but it can be really helpful to remember that when we notice things, or maybe have a critical thought, it's not that we're a bad person because that critical thought is there, or because we're comparing ourselves to someone else. It's not a matter of having to get rid of all of those kinds of contractions and thoughts and then we'll really be able to practise.

It's a matter of using the environment that we interact with to show ourselves the habits and patterns and tendencies that we may not have noticed before.

So remember: if you're looking around and seeing "those who refuse to make offerings"... and how would we know anyway, really? But, we're looking around and we're being critical of others, or having any thoughts whatsoever about others, remember those three fingers that point right back to you. You are the one who can practise with what's going on with you.

Sangha, the larger community around us,
all help us see more clearly how we are
because we see the reactivities,
we see the tendencies
and that's great because each time you see anything at all,
any known,
you have the opportunity to practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

You don't have to worry about being clean of all of those thoughts and tendencies before you can practise,
they're just stuff going on,
they're just leaves in the wind.
They are the very things that can help you practise more and more deeply.

The whole point of the Dharma is to put the Dharma to work for you in your life so that you can apply it.

None of the things that arise within Awareness,
none of them
are who you are.
They're things arising in the Awareness of them,
that is what allows you to practise,

And you can practise,
it doesn't matter who you are,
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The verse again:

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"May all beings
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The ways of supreme virtue."

And virtue: manliness or courage.
Isn't that interesting? It has the same root as virile and up until the 17th century that word
was basically only applied to men, and then in the 17th it was applied to the moral conduct,
the sexual conduct, especially of women. That's just an aside...

But virtue, doing the right thing, and sometimes it's a risk because doing the right thing may
mean actually thinking about what it is we're doing to look into what's going on. Now, monks
have the Shingi, which are instructions for monastic behaviour, how one checks things out. In
the case of the mala, it says very clearly in the Shingi that the senior should be consulted and
that the senior should be offered that which the junior has. Well, I just, as I say, forgot about
that part.

I'll never forget about it again and it is useful to have these types of guidelines, which is what
they are, to look into how we are.

So, virtue.

Hey, doing the best we can with the information we have at hand.
That is helping us offer ourselves up to the Dharma,
the Teachings of Reality and each and every one of us can do it.

And where do we do it?

Well, not just while we're sitting in the Hatto,
not just after we've opened the door to the monastery and entered,
but in every moment.

This does not mean that we carry some idea with us as to how we should be as a Zen student,
not at all,
but we can recognize
that any moment we recognize
anything about experiencing
is the only moment we can recognize that moment of experiencing
and it is the moment that we can practise.

We're practising that moment of clear seeing,
that moment of waking up to Reality.

So once again... [Sensei coughs] ... I think we'll end here.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 107: Seeing Those Who Make Offerings

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, July 16th, 2011

Hi! What's your name? Where do you come from? Been here long? Are you having a nice time?

Oh.

Well.

There:

shoulders rising, falling,

heart beating,

maybe you can hear it your ear,

oh and there might be little signals from various parts of the body,

maybe it's being stretched a little bit beyond how it has been stretched,

and you might have noticed,

sometimes there's a tendency to want to focus on it,

you know and self-image will say:

"I'm having the roughest time ever!"

which of course is silly

because one of the things, really, if we scratch the surface of our ideas

about who we are,

how the world is,

and what we're doing here,

when we scratch the surface, we kind of uncover something,

perhaps it's not fully fledged,

perhaps it's not fully expressed,

but this idea that, hey, what's really going on?

Why do we human beings keep doing horrible things to each other?

Why do I sometimes notice that I have these ideas that I'd like to do horrible things to someone else?

And we scratch the surface, go a little bit deeper, and there may be this realization, however momentary, that the process of being a human being is the same for every human being who has ever walked on the face of the earth. And as we practise even more thoroughly, we start to see that hey, we're not our thoughts and feelings, those are things happening that we are aware of.

And wait a minute, there's just the Awareness, even of this sense of a "me" and sometimes we might hear a little voice going:

"Sit up straight,

feel the breath,

open the eye gaze"

and we practise that moment of clear seeing,

that moment of seeing reality.

We were caught up in a thought,

we're not caught up any longer,

that is the moment of clearly seeing what's going on.

You practise it and you get better at it.

Over time, all there is is this clear seeing, the tendency to be pulled and swayed by random patterns and contractions drops away, and what Dogen said about studying the self when we sit in zazen, studying those moments of contraction with little beliefs about who we are and how the world is, drop away and all there is is this clear seeing.

And we recognize that it's possible for everyone,
now,
in the past,
(and we know about the past because people have written about it,)
and now,
we're sitting here right now in this moment,
which is the only thing that's going on,
and we do not know what's going to happen in the next moment to each one of us or to all of
us,
but that's life.
No point in worrying about it,
but if you notice a moment of worry,
you've noticed a contraction,
you've noticed a set of dharma or experiences that you have labelled "worry"
or that I've said were "worry" or that were listed under this word "worry"
which of course is just a word to point to experiences.

And so you practise.

And finally, she said, I'll read the verse: [students giggle]

Seeing those who make offerings,
"May all beings
Forever abandon
The three contracted paths and destinies."

We like stuff like this, there's a number: three! It's a great number, huh? Three. Two has some
kind of an exclusionary sense, but three, it's balanced, it's like this little tripod. And "three
contracted paths and destinies", now self-image likes this too, it's like one of those
questionnaires in magazines, so, here we go.

What are the "three contracted paths and destinies" that are referred to here?

"Senso: birth in the hell realm, or states of extreme claustrophobic contraction."

Been there, okay.

"Gaki: states of extreme sense of poverty."

Been there.

"Shikusho: states of dull fixation on eating, excretion and sleeping."

Hey, haven't we all at one time or another fixated on these three contracted paths and
destinies? Do we have to?

No!

And do they exist somewhere as things that we can capture and then kill or starve or throw
away?

No, not really.

They're ways that people have used to describe contractions that arise that when followed
can lead us to states of, how shall we say this?

States of doing really stupid things,
often,

and often these really stupid things are things that we don't want to do at all, in fact, all the
time, let's face it, they're things that we do not want to do.

We don't want to fixate only on eating, excretion and sleeping,

but yet when you look at your own experience, your own patterns,

the content that self-image has filed away as being absolutely essential,

you might find that there are little lists,

little lists about what we should eat to get our desirable result,
how much we should excrete and when,
and then how we'll never get enough sleep, the old "8-8-8"
and we, of course, forget that the old "8-8-8"
which used to be something like 16-6 and 2 for everything else, in the time of the Industrial
Revolution, when our lives started to be "organized"...

So anyway, we fixate on this and we think: "Okay, if I can get these all in line and get rid of
them, then I'll really be able to practise."

It is very interesting, very revealing, and very important to notice, in your own experience,
this statement of "when I get these things over with, then I'll really be able to practise"
because that is a misunderstanding.

These things and variations of them, claustrophobic contraction, poverty mind, and the
animal realm—(actually I have a little problem with that because I really like animals you
know, and they do more than just eat, shit, and sleep but anyway,) this is what's called
classically "the animal realm".

If we find that in our experience we have this idea we have to get rid of all of them,
we're wrong,

and that, of course,

is a statement of self-image saying we have to get rid of all of these things
and then we'll be able to practise.

You practise with them,
in the midst of them.

When they come up you have an opportunity to see them for what they are,
recognize that they are not exclusive to, as it were your self-image,
but are the stuff that people have dealt with since the beginning of people.

But here you are, you're sitting in front of a white wall and have this marvellous opportunity
to actually practise very clearly, very simply with all of this stuff.

So when you notice anything,

(and you do not have to sit there with a little checklist and say: "Is this one that I should
practise with?"...)

No, that's the business of self-image, being this accountant.)

...you notice anything,

you don't have to decide

bad or good

worthwhile, not worthwhile,

just feel the breath,

pull up,

open the peripheral vision.

There, you've practised it,

you've practised mindfulness.

And a little aside: those of you who are interested in things such as mindfulness may have
noticed that over the past couple of years there has been an increase in the number of
mentions of the word "mindfulness" in popular media. Science is now saying "hey, yeah, what
people need to do is notice when they're fixated on something, then notice other things that
are going on, such as the breath."

So science is finally catching up to 2600 years of mindfulness practice instruction.

Isn't that wonderful?

So it's very clear here for you, sitting in front of the wall:

notice anything,

sit up straight,

feel the breath,
open the eye gaze.

There.

I wish I could say: "Done",

I wish I could take this little stick here and go "pft!"

And there would be fairy dust that comes out and it happens for everybody all at once,
that would be great but that's not possible.

But, what we do have, and what we can recognize is that those flickering, what shall I call them... thoughts that you may have had about how the world would be a better place if people did not go around acting out contracted paths and destinies, acting this sense of poverty by grabbing for everything they can get their hands on to fill up their bank accounts, or just becoming so fixated on eating, shitting, and sleeping that they're ignoring many of the truly heinous things that are actually going on in the world...

...but, this is not a political movement.

What we're noticing,

and what we may have known,

and what we're getting words for is

the fact that we do not have to act out from any of these contracted states.

And sitting in front of that wall, you see it moment after moment after moment.

And how is this all possible? Well, it's all possible in the particular instance of White Wind Zen Community and the Northern Mountain Order through offerings that have been made to build this room, this building that is now a monastery, and the offerings have come in many shapes and forms, and are freely given.

And why do we do this?

Again because we might have this vague sense that this knowledge,

this process of Waking up to Reality is indeed valuable

and in spite of talk that's gone on in the past about the Dark Age of the Dharma,

that perhaps in spite of the many instances where something

that was called "Dharma"

turned out to be simply another manifestation of social culture with all its tendencies,

but maybe wrapped up in a black or a brown robe,

believing it's "one with everything", with a bunch of like-minded people,

and nice, "so let's have some tea and talk about how we all felt about the sitting."

[Sensei laughs] I mean really?

So, we think okay, here it is, it's clear, and it should be made available. To whom? Well, each and every one of us benefit from it.

But, we see in social culture all sorts of pleas for explanation about what's going on...really?

Questions about how to live a life that will not be based on exclusion.

And then we might have an inkling that "wow," there are other people who may not be sitting in this room who might have vague ideas that the world would be different if all beings could be happy, peaceful, and free.

Those people might not even be born yet, but who knows, they might end up right here in this very room?

But don't cross your fingers, don't hold your breath, and there's no point in getting all mawkish and sentimental, but:

Seeing those who make offerings,

"May all beings

Forever abandon

The three contracted paths and destinies."

So here we sit.

All different...

sizes, shapes, colours, ages...

Some of us have come from halfway around the world to be here in this moment right now.

Sometimes some of us might think that "hey, we're from another planet!"

Some of us might think "hey, they're from another planet!"

Doesn't matter, those are thoughts and feelings and when expressed skillfully can sometimes be kind of funny.

Because let's face it, it's a very peculiar situation we're in, we human beings.

In a way it's kind of absurd.

But here we are, sitting in front of that wall, and that wall was made possible by many people, most of whom you've never met.

That's kind of nice.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 108: Seeing the Alms Bowl Empty

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, July 23rd, 2011

Seeing the alms-bowl empty,

"May all beings

Be open of heart

And without afflictions."

Now, an alms-bowl was for many, probably millions of people over the course of the history of Dharma, a very real object. Monks in certain traditions were reliant upon the generosity of others for actual food, and an alms-bowl was used to collect offerings from individuals to support the activities of, say, a monastery that may have been involved, in other traditions as well, in providing for the poor, and other acts of charity.

Today, in 2011, we don't really have an "alms-bowl", but what we have and what's available are resources that are given to support the activities of various undertakings. But say, when we look into our metaphoric "alms-bowl" and see it empty, the first thing that we may tend to do is to contract and drum up all sorts of stories about how horrific everything is, how the very building is going to fall apart because we have no resources and we do then become, even individually, stingy, stingy with our efforts because so much of our energy is going into making up stories about what's going to happen.

And the stories we make up on any given occasion, let's face it, self-image, the contraction into a sense of self, doesn't really require anything to start its activity of spinning from a contracted state stories that do cause affliction, not just to the individual spinning the story, but like ripples in a pond, little bits of horror to a greater or lesser degree—and I exaggerate of course in this instance—but they impact on others around, they impact throughout whole situations, causing affliction to a greater or lesser degree.

This contracting into a sense of a self with a story about how things are is not something that's confined to the Hatto, it is not as if this only happens when you're sitting down facing the white wall, then this would be something like confession, you know, when you go in and you blurt out all sorts of heinous things that you may have thought or done and become absolved and then you go out and interact with the world again in more or less the same ways because nothing has been resolved.

So when you're sitting in the Hatto or the Zendo looking at that white wall, you're seeing how you are. You are, as Dogen said, looking into the self, that formation of beliefs about who you are and how you are and how the world is, turning it into what, in a rather benign way we might call a "personality"

and we really don't question into very much in life in general,
but we sit in front of that wall and we start to see when contractions of self-image come up
(and they don't have to be so called "big deals")
you can see contraction into a sense of "me"
and a story:

"Well, I should do something about this... but I don't want to put myself in a bad light, so
maybe oh everyone will just forget about it, I won't do anything."

So we complexify the situation because by not doing anything,
by not taking action—which may put self-image at risk in its own view because it never wants
to be exposed for the lying, cheating fraud that it is—I'm not exaggerating! [students laugh]
These tendencies are not who you are and face it: we've all done stuff, or had stuff happen to
us that didn't really prop up who we might think we are.
Stuff happens.

Now, at the beginning of the sitting, half way through the bowing round, finally, something I'd
been avoiding by flicking my toe underneath my kunsu happened: The toe got stuck in a little
space in the hem where the thread had started to unravel.

OMG! [students laugh]

So I thought: flick, flick with the toe again.

It did not come off.

I stood up and I could feel the fabric straining from the top to the bottom and it's a really old
kunsu, so it could've been ripped and I'd be left in front of the butsudon in my knickers.

[students laugh]

Might have been fun for you [more laughter]

my only choice: I had to lift my foot up and remove the offending hem, the offending fabric,
from the toe.

So then: do I say something or not?

Well, it might have looked kind of funny just to reach out, take the toe, lift the thing,
and maybe you all knew what was going on,

or maybe you all thought I was just in some sort of senile dementia, I don't know! [giggles]

An informed populace can act more sanely.

So there we go.

Toe.

Freed.

Things can proceed.

So what would happen? I mean there are all sorts of stories.

When we take any sort of action whatsoever,

when anything happens to us whatsoever,

we have to make choices as to what to do and

sometimes the choices we make tend to be less than useful because we start to believe the
stories we tell ourselves about why we did or didn't take such and such an action

and that contracted action does in fact lead to affliction.

Now, this wish that's put forth:

"May all beings
Be open of heart
And without afflictions."

Well, that's nice. That's a wonderful thing,
and we can just let our imagination go and
if we were in a situation where all beings were open of heart,
so much could be accomplished.

We know that because we live with it every day.
The cushions you're sitting, on, the floor that supports those cushions,
the whole building is here
because
of open hearts.

Now this is not some sort of miracle factory,
it doesn't mean that you won't die,
that's not what it's about.
Offer body and breath and mind and resources up and you won't get ill?
No, we'll never be in a situation where we have relics on the wall that are blessed
and that if people come and bow in front of them and
leave generous donations,
they'll be healed.
Nothing like that.

But, what has been proven over and over again,
that when we are open of heart to ourselves,
not just to others,
when we recognize,
"yes, we are human",
" yes there are things that can afflict us",
and when we focus on them,
or build up any sort of stories around them,
or try to pretend that they're not there,
or try to pretend that they mean something about who we are,
we're causing ourselves problems,
we're causing ourselves to create difficulties that weren't there before we started to create
them, and sitting in front of that white wall shows you that process and
over time, patterns of self-image do wear out
because
they do have to be followed in order to be reinforced.

And it makes sense.
This pile of organic material that we call a bodymind
has impressed upon it
all sorts of habits and patterns.

The bodymind itself does not decide whether something is useful or not
because when we're trying to run it,
when we believe that we are the Knower of that bodymind,
rather than the Knowing,
we take away from the bodymind a lot of its ability to function
with its own intelligence.

So when we can release the bodymind to do what it does, which is be the bodymind, we as
Knowing can experience the effects.

So sometimes we may have a lot of resources,
sometimes we may not have many,
there's always something that can be done.

I was reading a little item today, as a matter of fact, which was saying that today with this
heat wave we've been having, that Hydro Ontario had been expecting that there would be a
great increase in the amount of power used for various and sundry things. But guess what,
because of simple actions, that apparently numerous people are taking, the expected overuse
did not occur. So you know, every time you change a light bulb, or every time you turn off a
light, every time when you leave a room you just take into consideration the use of resources,

we as a collective apparently, saved resources. [Osho claps in congratulation]

So it is possible.

But what we have to do as individuals is be mindful.

And we can be more mindful when we actually practise mindfulness,
and the practice of mindfulness is not leaving the Hatto and saying:

“Now, I'm going to be mindful, I'm going to notice everything!”

No, that would be the creation of a state,
that would be the creation of an image of a self
that is strategizing
and trying to do an activity that it cannot do.

But, when we follow instruction and recognize that when we notice anything—and this is a
very difficult word for people to actually understand—
anything,
that's ANYTHING
whatsoever,
any dharma, any moment of experience,
what do you do?

You feel the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

You can start by noticing the breath,
and without making a list,
notice that you don't have to make a list to notice
seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling,
breathing in and out.

It's all there,
that's all knowns
and you're the Knowing of it,
so Knowing can practise,
no matter where it is.

And with that comes the ability to see things more clearly,
the ability not to believe your BS
about how you're too this or too that to actually pay attention,
to actually notice what's going on.

And you may note then that there's a big drop on the affliction meter,
because by not following usual habits,
you've gained some freedom
and when you continue to do that
when you continue to practise mindfulness
by noticing this moment
and this moment
and this moment,
hey!

Who knows what can happen?

The verse again:

Seeing the alms-bowl empty,
"May all beings
Be open of heart
And without afflictions."

Now, sometime when that “alms-bowl”,
and be that a bank account,

or be that an alms-bowl, a literal bowl where we toss our change,
or be that whatever it is,
we may notice there's a little [sharp intake of breath]
perhaps a tiny little contraction in the stomach thinking:
"Oh there's not enough..."

As soon as you notice that:
notice the context within which it's arising
which is this mass of organic material
that you insist on calling "me"
which is wrapped around the breath,
which has already presenced itself enough to Knowing
that that moment of contraction is actually seen.

So.
Stand up straight,
feel the feet,
feel the hands,
and that happens in a space of time which is shorter
than it takes to say it.
And if you notice that you're saying it,
well, practise again
because you've noticed something about how experiencing is
in that moment.

So once again:

Seeing the alms-bowl empty,
"May all beings
Be open of heart
And without afflictions."

Do what you can.

Enjoy yourself.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 109: Seeing the Alms Bowl Full

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, July 30th, 2011

Did it ever occur to you that every fart and burp and exhalation that's ever been done by any
air breather anywhere on the planet any time is part of the air that's breathing you in and
out?

[Sensei and students laugh]

Am I wrong? Huh?

What? You thought maybe these things didn't happen? You thought maybe they didn't return
to the air from which they came?

Wake up!

Smell
the...
coffee!

Coffee! [more laughter]

It's a very strange thought but it's true.

So that very breath redolent of everything that's ever passed on this earth is part of your experience right now and a very important part.

Without that breath that's being pulled into the bodymind by the actions of the muscles of the respiratory system, by the expansion of the lungs and then as that happens, the breath before is emptied out and goes as an exhalation back into the mix which surrounds you as you sit right there.

It's in front of you, behind you, to the sides of you, above your head, it's in this room, it's in the hallways, it's in the Zendo, it's everywhere in the monastery, it's in the grounds, it goes through the trees, the birds breathe it in and out, the birds: breathing it in and out, the squirrels: breathing it in and out, the raccoons: breathing it in and out, so there it is, this great mess, this great chaos of life.

So you might as well notice that breath around which all these cells, not even the same one to the other, some of them not even human exist in and on and as this thing we call the bodymind.

So there you are, what are you going to do? Well, when you notice anything at all, anything (that's an all-inclusive word), anything, any dharma, any moment of experience, practise the fact that you're being breathed in and out, the bodymind is interacting with the context around it, the bodymind is interacting with itself, and you as the Knowing of all of that, take that moment of noticing any dharma, any known, and practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

And:

Seeing the alms-bowl full,
"May all beings
Completely fulfill
All the ways of virtue."

Okay. And I mean this: tell me a virtue. Shout it out, anyone, use that breath, send it out over your vocal chords.

[Student:] Patience.

Patience is a virtue.

We understand that,

we've been brought up with for one thing, a kind of sexist little verse which I'm not going to say, about who has patience and who doesn't.

Patience.

What does it mean, patience?

Well, it means taking a risk, actually, recognizing that many components must come together in any moment so that anything at all can get done, and sometimes pushing is the worst thing that you can possibly do.

Waiting,

patience,

it means waiting,

letting things take their time.

[Student:] Generosity.

Generosity.

Yeah, helping fill the alms bowl.

How about another one?

[Student:] Equanimity.

Equanimity.

Balance.

Maintaining, not going off-centre.

Anything else?

[Student:] Honesty.

Honesty, yes.

Honesty: being able to see what a situation is, what's unfolding and being able to tell, in the best possible way, what is necessary to make something clear, to take responsibility for one's self, not being pushed into self-motivated actions.

Another one?

[Student:] Wisdom.

Wisdom.

Wisdom, yeah.

Being able again,

(see they start to all relate together: patience, equanimity, honesty, wisdom,)

being able to sit or stand,

depending upon what's going on,

and see how each thing is related one to the other,

being able to see that you can't take them apart,

that each informs the next one so

having the wisdom,

the understanding that there are many points of view in any situation,

to take that into account when any decision is made,

to recognize through your generosity

through willingness to take into account the needs of everyone else,

the needs of the larger,

and to do what's necessary,

and patience: to take the time to see,

to take in as much information as possible before making a decision.

that people actually will say,
the old folks who were actually participants will say that
it was the best time of their life.
Now that may strike us as weird
but there was a common purpose
and we do seek purpose.
Self-image wants purpose.

“What's my purpose?
What's the purpose of my life?
What's the purpose of life?”

Well, life basically has no purpose.
There have been lots of cosmologies created to give a sense of purpose,
to provide the answers that self-image seeks.

“What can I do, say or give so that I'll be alright in the afterlife?”
That's a very common story.

Well, we don't have a common story.
We don't have a story at all.
What we have is right here,
right now.

Your purpose?
Well you might have individual stories about what it is.
You might come here because you want to change something.
You might come here because you want to know what's going on
really.

One thing that you may all have in common is that there were these moments
when there was a recognition that there was more to be known about
the reality of being a human being
than was provided by the stories about being a human being
and what you should do when and to whom.
So eventually you found your way to this zafu.

And the alms-bowl is full, you have enough to eat, you have a roof over your head, and are
basically pretty safe.

Now mammals,
mammals learn when they have full bellies they don't have to forage for food, say,
because there's plenty,
they don't have to worry about where they're going to stay
because they have a secure place.
They have time for fun, and that's what they do.
More and more human animals, oops,
human beings,
we often don't like to be associated with those with fur and feathers,
we don't like to accept the fact that we're very closely related to the larger primates,
but the larger primates when they're full of food,
when they have a secure place,
what do they do?
They play and they explore.

Squirrels play and explore.

Now human beings,
when they have that alms-bowl full,
tend to have a lot of leisure time and as we can see in the everyday social culture,

when there's plenty,
people often go looking for plenty more
because it's not very long before they go:

“What the? What am I doing? There's gotta be more than all these clothes, all of these shoes, all of these drinks, all this screwing around, all this jumping up and down to music, there's gotta be a bit more.”

So they keep seeking.
Some,
they keep seeking.

So we can I think say, from the feedback that those who've studied social culture are receiving, that indeed we're in that kind of a situation where plenty has bred a lot of discontent.

Now, you look at the movies and
what we see is a burst of movies that say one sex in particular
can get into all sorts of trouble,
go to all sorts of places,
trash all sorts of other people's dwellings,
do all sorts of horrible things and then
go back home and be welcomed
as if what they did was really cute.
And the sex that is opposite to them will roll over and
praise them for being so,
oh, how can I say this without pointing a finger?
So testeroney!

I think you know what I mean. So you watch the culture and that's one of the messages that people are getting.

But there are those who are not satisfied with that.
There are those who are saying
it's not even funny,
it's actually really sad, and
some of those are people who are actually coming up with that particular product...

So.

Alms-bowl full:

"May all beings
Completely fulfill
All the ways of virtue."

Well that would be nice but nothing ever gets completely done, and sitting right here, this moment is full, it is completely fulfilled.

When you notice anything at all, that's the moment when you sit up straight, feel the whole bodymind in the whole moment and practise because the way things are going, it certainly wouldn't be surprising let's say in five years, ten years, some of you will be sitting facing students who've come to say to you:

“What's going on? There's something wrong.”

And you'll have to, if you choose to take those steps, answer them.
And the best way you can answer them is through your own experience and understanding of the possibility of opening past the fixations and patterns of a culture that has never experienced the empty alms-bowl, when it's always been full.

It's a dirty job, but hey, somebody's got to do it.

Thank you for the risk you took in actually allowing that breath to push out over the vocal chords and come up with some words that are commonly understood to be virtues.

I'll say the verse again as you're breathing in that air filled with squirrel farts, badger breath [Sensei and students laugh] methane...

Seeing the alms-bowl full,
"May all beings
Completely fulfill
All the ways of virtue."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 110: If Treated Respectfully

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, August 6th, 2011

EVER BREATH YOU TAKE
allows you to practise
because
you're alive.

Every breath people take
allows them to walk and talk
and sing
and yell
and give instruction
and explain themselves.

So every breath,
let's face it
as we face the wall
where these things can become more and more apparent,
every breath is important,
every breath is a touchstone
to this moment
which is always and ever was and ever will be
the only thing going on.

So use it and use it well.
Use it to open your understanding of this moment
and what it means to be
a human being
in this moment.

The verse:

If treated respectfully,
"May all beings
Respectfully practise
All the Teachings of the Buddhas."

Well, that reminds me of a song.

I'm not going to use my breath to assault you or offend you in any way,
but some of us may remember:

“R.E.S.P.E.C.T. Find out what it means to me.”

In the case of Otis Redding, who wrote that song in 1965, it was followed by:

“Sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me.”

Or maybe that was Aretha Franklin in 1967 who, through the singing of that song written by Otis Redding, a man, turned it into what became an anthem of the feminist movement. The song “R.E.S.P.E.C.T.” became one of the best songs of the Rhythm and Blues era. It was on a list, it was number 5 on Rolling Stone's list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.

Wow. It was on a list of Songs of the Century by the Recording Industry of America and the National Endowment of the Arts.

Well why was that? It was a great song, you could really rock out to that song on the dance floor, and I remember hearing people of all shapes and sizes and hues and predilections yelling out: “R.E.S.P.E.C.T”, hands in the air pumping.

Why?

Was it that the song itself, that the music was so much better than or vastly superior to other songs written by other people? Or other songs written by Otis Redding? (Who, by the way, if you haven't listened to him, was fantastic! And as every mention of him said, died very young.)

There we are, what was it about that song?

I think, and this is just my own opinion,
I think it was because of the “R.E.S.P.E.C.T”.

Respect.

I think that's something that everyone wants
even though they may not know exactly what it is.

And in the case of the particular song by the artists who sang it, Redding, Aretha Franklin and many others, the presentation of the song by the writer,

it was sort of: “be nice to me, Honey, when I get home after I've brought you the bacon”
and so on,

“be nice to me by giving me a little something something” [giggles]

and the same message was embedded in the Aretha Franklin song.

Why?

Because

“words”, the meaning depends upon the understanding of the people who say it and hear it. The word itself “respect” comes from the Latin, as many do, and it does tend to mean and it means from the Latin that there's a looking back, the “re”, looking back.

Specere: look back at, regard, consider.

So inherent in the meaning of that word is context, looking back, seeing some of the history, seeing some of the context from which the individual came, and recognizing that beings, human beings do go through a lot. They acquire information, they make decisions, they make choices and in this case, which ends them up on that funny little round cushion in front of a white wall that isn't really white, because there's no such thing as white, there's no such thing as black, there's no such thing as absolutes for these things that we tend to throw around. It's nice that we do because the use of the word “white” brings up a certain sense, a certain aesthetic, the use of the word “black”, a certain aesthetic, the use of the word “blue”, again a certain aesthetic based upon our own individual experiences of that particular word.

So,

If treated respectfully,
"May all beings
Respectfully practise
All the Teachings of the Buddhas."

And Buddhas, plural, wow, wait a minute!

Wasn't there just one?

What is this "Buddhas"?

Well, if we've attended the early morning formal sitting, if we've done any chants, participated in any chanting, we've heard of the Buddhas before Buddha.

Right?

So what does it actually mean, the word "Buddha"?

Well here's a chance to respectfully look into that question by questioning into the origin and the meaning.

"Buddha" means one who has woken up, not just bleary-eyed from a sleep, but metaphorically and here it gets interesting because all words are metaphors really, they're not the experience, so we have metaphors about metaphors about metaphors, but we need these things, we need these words. These words can confuse us which is always good because when we're confused we've dropped a certain set of assumptions and beliefs we might have, something's happened, we can no longer hang onto: "Well this is the way it is because I believe it" because something has started to open that and we're left with nothing to hang on to.

Psst!

There was nothing to hang onto anyway, but we may not have known that.

So.

We look: Buddha, Buddhas.

So the Buddhas before Buddha, all those people who woke up to the nature of Reality, through their experiencing of it.

Then Gautama Siddhartha, who one day said: "That's it, I'm done with all these crazy practices, I'm gonna just sit right here. I'm not chasing around anymore, searching other beliefs about how things are to replace the ones that I might have had. It's obvious to me that none of those things have any substance. Not only that, but they get in the way."

So he sat and he sat,
nobody knows exactly how long,
and he realized he was none of his thoughts and feelings about how things are.
Thoughts and feelings: dharma,
moments of experience: dharma,
seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling
that was, is, seen and heard and tasted and felt and smelled...

Wow!

Experienced by the senses.

Experienced by the bodymind.

And what I really am is the Knowing of those,

I am not those.

Wow.

So, having realized that completely, no longer fooled by any storylines about who he was and what's going on, dude started to walk around, have a look at things, and knowing that he was not any of his stories about who he was and how the world is, he was, I can only speculate here really, but he probably was smiling, because he wasn't assaulted by all those vagaries of thoughts about who he was and how the world was, he saw them for what they were. So he probably was walking around light of step, sunny of countenance, and looking pretty damn good.

So people would come up and say: "Wow, you look different than I. Here I am, with my rags and tatters, even though I have some money and food and so on, I still feel as if I'm clothed in rags and tatters and life isn't all that good. What are you carrying and can I have some?"

He says: "No no no no no. I have uncovered the nature of Reality."

And people were saying: "Give me some, give me some."

And he said: "No."

And I'm sure there were a few instances when he said: "Okay, I'll take you as a student, I'll teach you"

but of course, people were still living at home. So they'd come for a couple of hours, he'd teach them a few things, and then they'd go back and fall into their old ways, seduced by convenience.

So eventually, Gautama Siddhartha said: "Look, that's it, I'm not taking anybody as a day tripper. Period. So if you want to know what I know, if you want me to teach what I know, you are going to have to leave your comfy little home behind." And even if it was a hovel, it might still have been more comfortable than sleeping out under the stars. But then again, maybe not.

So that was how the first monastic sangha came about. Home-leavers. They left home and Gautama Siddhartha was able to teach people what he had uncovered, the process of waking up to the nature of Reality. And because he came from the same background as these people, we can assume he knew what they were dealing with, he could respect what they were going through through looking at and looking back onto his own experience.

And so out of that, over a couple thousand years, through thousands and thousands of people who practised this waking up, we end up with a Lineage, a line of people who, through face to face encounter, discovered this waking up to Reality, through doing something really simple, actually, which is:

when you notice anything,
feel the breath,
sit up straight,
that's it,
pull yourself up through that sternum,
allow the bones to align,
allow peripheral vision to open,
and you notice that
whatever little, funny, sordid, depressing, scintillating, story you were engaged in,
just drops away.

Thoughts can still be there,
they come and they go,
human beings have thoughts
human beings have feelings
but none of them are,
none of them have the power to
be the definer or define who you are.

You're the Awareness of them.
You are the Knowing of the experiencing of the knowns
by and as the bodymind.

Hey, how easy is that?
But we see through the process of practice how we get in our own way,
with our stories of impossibility.

Self-image: contraction,
not one, many,
into a sense of a self,
that whines away usually,
it whines or it aggrandizes

and then there's this full spectrum in between.

But as Dorothy Parker said when giving a review of a play: "It ran the gamut of emotions from A to B." [laughter] Well pretty well, that's what self-image does. It's predictable.

So we sit and we start to see our stories, and we start to see there's a remarkable similarity. They do run the gamut of emotions from A to B, and you just get bored with them after a while, and it just gets easier and easier through the experience of having the contraction of self open, the experience of seeing how these random thoughts had congealed into sometimes very rigid belief systems about who we are and how the world is. All of that starts to drop away.

So, through our own experience,
and that is what our understanding must be based on,
through our own experience,
we start to actually develop a respect for the practice
and for all those who have come before us,
and who teach us the practice,
and for our fellow students
because we start to realize
that yeah,
everyone pretty well goes through the same stuff,
is afflicted by the same stuff
to a greater or lesser degree,
and somehow or other when we can get past the
oh, let's say... oh... the defeat, the humiliation of
not being unique...
we can see that this is a good thing.
That allows,
when the contractions of self-image drop away,
it allows more and more clearly
the expression of
who we really are and
what we're actually really interested in,
what skills we might have.

When we drop the "BS" of say,
being "humble", which is another pattern we may develop or may have developed,
when we get over the idea of the dropping of self by refusing to use a capital "I",
using a little i with a dot on it,
I mean come on folks...
But people do things like that,
so we drop that one too,
but we do start to see and understand
through our own experience
that there's something very valuable,
and some of us, and some of you—us meaning all of us so you are included in that—
some of us may decide
that this is so valuable,
that this information is so valuable
that we will follow along that path
and do our best to pass this information on
to others who show up at the door
asking to be taught.

So.

The verse:

If treated respectfully,
"May all beings
Respectfully practise
All the Teachings of the Buddhas."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 111: If Treated Disrespectfully

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, August 20th, 2011

With this breath, let me thank you for the pleasing visual you are, each and every one of you, providing. It's so nice to see that social divisions, be they along the lines of sex or gender or position or wealth or achievement or belonging or affiliations are totally overcome by all of you.

There you are,
respecting the bodymind that allows you to practise,
in your white jubon and your black kunsu.
The monks of course all in black.

It looks great! And maybe you don't know this, but it is really important, looking good.
[students laugh]

And really, I've said many times in the past, it's better to look good than to feel good.

But, what you notice is that when things are in order, when there's a respect shown for the way you body forth, it brings something additional, it does bring a sense of dignity, a sense of feeling good.

You're not always going to feel good. No one ever does, but those constrictions and contractions that cause us to feel this way and that way can be seen and this is what you're learning to do.

So EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE,
or every breath that takes you,
every breath that is pulled into the bodymind,
sending its little molecules of oxygen
and its little particulates of this that and the other
coursing through the bodymind,
allows you to practise,
it lets you know that you're alive
so you might as well notice it, okay?
You might as well do that.

And when you do that,
when you actually notice the living bodymind,
when you notice that the belly's moving in and out with that breath
and that you're not doing it
or that "YOU're" not doing it, (air quotation marks)
"you're" not doing it.
The bodymind is doing it.
Amazing.

If you had to do it, if the thing you think of as you had to be aware, had to know each and every breath that was pulled in and expelled, none of us, trust me on this, none of us would have made it this far in our lives because our little attention spans—until we start actually practising—are really, really short and they flit around, as the Roshi said, like monkeys.

THIS shiny thing and THAT shiny thing and THIS focus of attention and THAT focus of

attention...

all surrounding this major contraction into a sense of "me".

So you feel the breath.

Bodymind's alive,

it sits up straight,

it starts to make itself known

without the thing you think of as you actually doing it

which can be quite surprising.

What do you have to do about that?

Makusa.

Do nothing.

The breath is there,

there's a knowing of it,

the bodymind has started to balance itself out,

it's started to sit up straight,

the peripheral vision has started to open.

That's why you're seeing all these things.

Oh my goodness, you're not really doing any of that.

Oh my goodness.

The verse today.

If treated disrespectfully,

"May all beings

Not act in ways

That are constricted."

"If treated disrespectfully..."

Well, right there there's a major clue. "Disrespectfully." In order to come to that conclusion, guess what?

No guesses? [Sensei laughs]

There has to be a contraction into a sense of self that responds in a certain way to what's going on and puts words to it. It has to be that.

So, those words whether uttered to others or uttered to oneself, are thoughts, and it's a display of patterns, stuff that we've learned to do.

Now, when we travel to different cultures, when we have access to people who come from different situations, when we read or go to the movies, we see instances of behaviours that have been misunderstood. There's a very famous one and I think I mentioned it a long time ago in a Dharma Talk, but when an army went into Tibet, an army of colonizers was marching along and the people along the way were sticking their tongues out and so the people in charge were getting quite upset about this, as were the soldiers, thinking they were being disrespected, but when it was looked into, it was found out that this sticking out of the tongue was actually a sign of respect.

We all know that in some cultures when a hand is held with the palm out it means stop. In other cultures it means "come here", totally opposite.

So, when we run across these things, how, particularly in these days when people travel hither and yon, here and there, and come very quickly to different situations, unless we are knowledgeable of all the customs, we can misread once we start to ascribe motivations to things. That's quite interesting because a lot of the time, when we get into that, well, all the time, when we get into that, when we get into ascribing motivation to someone else, we're

making up a story.

Now, this can even be based on how we see ourselves to be in certain situations, but we can't even trust that because you know what an asshole self-image is. It contracts into a sense of self that is say, all lovey-dovey to a person in a certain situation; the next instant their back is turned, and there's a contraction into a sense of self saying nasty things about them.

We've all seen ourselves do that and in different situations there might be different expressions of that, but bottom line is we can say it's a total waste of time.

So, when you recognize any effect from any cause in any situation, you know what to do, which is: see it.

They are all knowns.

Everything that is known by the bodymind is a known or a dharma.

Everything.

Very difficult word to understand.

Everything and anything.

We're not used to thinking in an all-inclusive way.

We have our own little biases,

our own little prejudices,

our own little exceptions,

our own little piles of black stones and white stones:

this one's good, this one's bad,

that we tend to base our actions upon.

When we see that tendency, we have a moment of clear seeing.

We as Knowing of the knowns

that bodymind is experiencing

can make the choice to practise whole bodily mindfulness

with the whole bodymind,

in the whole moment.

That is what to do.

There's no point in following.

We need take no stance whatsoever.

We can recognize that depending upon the situation, whatever we're saying or believing is disrespecting us is a totally subjective opinion.

We people, we human beings like stuff that is just like us, we like other human beings who are just like us, and this is being treated now as if it's big news. People have found out through studies done on websites, relationship websites, that people are likely to pick as the perfect match people who look just like them.

So we like people who act just like us in situations. If someone is a gabber—that's an old fashioned word, it was big in the 50's, "she's a gabber!"

"He's obviously hiding something because he never says anything."

Well we start to understand through our own experience that there are all kinds of people and it doesn't mean anything. Some people like to talk. Some people like to talk in situations. Situations vary. Some people may not be big talkers but we can get very busy judging because they're not like us.

So when we see our own patterns, eventually, and there's no meter on your zafu, there's no meter on your practice so you can't say how long "eventually" is going to be, but some time you start to have a glimmer of: "Oh, that's not me, that's a pattern."

"Oh, that's not them, that's my pattern."

And at that point there might be a very gentle or a very strong rush of blood to your face with

that recognition that ooh, you might have done that a whole lot of times in the past. But the past is the past, nothing you can do about it except recognize it was there, except recognize in that moment of clear seeing that the process you've engaged in has caused you to see things, to understand things, to experience things in a way that is vaster than you had before.

And over time that tendency for that warmth and that redness to pop up does in fact dissipate.

So "If treated disrespectfully"... Well, really what does that mean?

So I'll leave that with you, I'll leave that to you as a little think piece which you may or may not use, but you don't have to actively use it for it to be in effect, but it can happen that there's a new perspective provided on the way you see things, know things, experience things, and what you do with that.

And also we can recognize that try as we might, we really don't know and can't know what anyone else is doing or understanding. It's conjecture on our part.

And we start to notice and start to understand through our own experience how the forms, the way we deploy the bodymind in certain situations, how the forms are a tool that help us see things about what we're experiencing. We might not have known that when our name was called for daisan or a practice interview, that immediately we went into think mode.

"What are we going to say? How best to say it? Will it impress?"

Until one day, one moment, oh! We see that flurry of thoughts and we actually recognize that that moment of seeing them is a good moment, that is a moment of clear seeing, and we remember to practise the whole bodymind.

So over time, we see that thoughts can come up but we don't have to act on them. We don't have to do anything with them. They are not "our" thoughts, but what we can take responsibility for always is our actions.

And we all know that actions that come from constriction and contraction really don't do anything useful. We can see that in any situation whatsoever, from one to one, up through the tribe, up through the nation state to a global level, contraction, constriction that is answered by contraction and constriction simply causes problems.

Now, our own problems that we cause may not be biggies but the process is exactly the same as that which leads to genocides, is that which leads to all manner of abuses of all manner of beings. The process is the same.

That's a good thing to see.

So there you sit, you're practising the process of practice. Practice is a process, as is your life.

So there you sit in your white jubon, you can feel the jubon on the bodymind.

You can feel the kunsu,
you can feel how it touches the flesh,
you can feel how it moves as you breathe in and out,
you can feel what shifts and changes as you sit up straight,
ears are over the shoulders,
nose over the navel,
peripheral vision: open,
as you sit there practising the process of practice
and the process of bodymind.

If treated disrespectfully,
"May all beings
Not act in ways
That are constricted."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 112: Seeing People With Modesty

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, September 3rd, 2011

So the air you're breathing in and out
covers the whole world,
even inside rooms,
moves through the trees—
we have a different name for it,
it's higher up in some places, high up over mountains
and then because of changes in its composition,
we call it something else.

But that air is moving, it has been since the beginning of, what?
Time?

Forever, as far as I know.

So, the air, the air you breathe has wrapped itself around naked bodies, bodies that are covered up, animal bodies, anything that's an air breather has been caressed and covered by the air we're breathing.

Today's verse, seemingly very simple but
when we look into it,
we can start to question
as we must do with anything,
what's being talked about.

Now that air that was wrapped around the naked body,
a bodymind perfectly happy and accepted by other bodyminds
around it as being in a perfectly normal state.
It would walk around covered only by the air,
yet if someone saw it eating,
it would get all embarrassed.
That's interesting.

Someone at one point in history might have looked at a table and become, apparently, all lustful because of the legs on the table. So legs became limbs and we'd cover them up because we didn't want anything to incite passion. (some say an urban legend)

Someone came up with the idea that it would be helpful,
and again saving people from their coarser drives,
to develop little covers that you could slip over dogs' and cats' tails that would cover,
well,
you know what's at the end of the tail closest to the body.
(check it out on-line)

So we've come up with some pretty strange ideas...

The verse:

Seeing people with modesty,
"May all beings
Act with discretion
And dress appropriately."

Now another version, another translation of this verse, which you may remember is around 1600 years old, another version is:

Seeing people with conscience,
"They should wish that all beings
Act with discretion
And cover their organs."

[Sensei and students laugh]

Well indeed, unless you're playing it and I mean like a musical instrument, really, they should be covered, whatever it is.

So of course modesty is something that is in fact contextually bound in interpretation. Now the word "modest" first came up in the 16th century when it had to do with how people should comport themselves, and it comes from Latin modestus, the English being "moderate" and "kept within due measure". So moderation.

So when we look at the history of how people decorate themselves to carry themselves about in everyday culture, we come across all kinds of interesting things.

Now, another definition of modesty is:

- .the quality or state of being modest,
- .absence of self-assertion, of arrogance and presumption,
- .humility,
- .respecting one's own merit,
- .natural delicacy or shame regarding personal charm,
- .purity of thought,
- .manners,
- .due regard for propriety in speech or action,
- .the quality of being modest,
- .lack of pretentiousness,
- .simplicity.

Now, again, it must be contextually bound. You look here at "modest" and you see "covered up, without the organs showing".

"Immodest": the opposite, but is it that simple?

Well if we're interested in looking into how people choose to cover the bodymind, we can find all sorts of elements of history and if we're interested in that kind of thing, it can be a lot of fun to look into it.

Now, up until the 16th century, as far as we know, this "keeping within measure" wasn't really much of a question because say, in the beginning of early Christianity up until the 14th, 15th, 16th century, the Christian era, people involved in Christianity chose to basically dress men and women alike in shapeless tunics of a moderate colour, probably kind of muddy, at least that's the way I picture it, part of it being that there weren't the dyes available to the mass of the people that for instance we have today. There was a lack of ornamentation, except of course for those would could accumulate the means to ornament and decorate and that ornamentation and decoration was meant to be looked at and to be seen and to be decoded as a sign of power.

During the Renaissance, emphasis started to shift to the shape of the body. Fashion became something that hugged the body: short, fitted jackets for men, tight hose, prominent cod pieces. Women: snug busts and daring décolletage. So was that modest or immodest? Well we weren't there but if it was the prevailing fashion of the style-minded, the Renaissance fashionistas, well of course it would just be regarded as how things are and the more you put out, the more you changed, the more you emphasized, the more it would show some sort of status.

We can see remnants of that, it's not even remnants of that today, we see the presencing of that type of approach to embellishment. So there had been a major shift from preoccupation

with the spiritual to a very definite interest in, shall we say, worldly matters.

Now, around the 16th, 17th century, modesty started to be used to write about how women should be and women were being portrayed as more lustful and unruly than men. Early feminists came up with arguments for female modesty resting in nature. For example, the female physique: parts were covered naturally with hair and didn't require that they be touched during bodily functions. So that's kind of funny.

Charles Darwin wondered why birds, why in the avian world the more luxuriant and brilliant the male bird was "dressed", why was that? What was its purpose? He came to the conclusion that females of that species, and perhaps it could go onto other species as a sexologist picked up on it, female birds were less lustful and more discriminating than males and had to be enticed by showy plumage.

Sartorial expressivity in the 18th century, 19th century was associated with aristocratic splendour and was very popular until men started to wear trousers because colourlessness and practicality were associated with work and activity. Colour and ornamentation was left to women.

Napoleon the 3rd said the only appropriate wear for men was Englishmen's business suits, riding habits and military uniforms. The task of representing the opulence of the age fell to women and was carried out through fashion. Women wore muslin dresses that were so fine they could be seen through, especially if they were wet. And of course on certain occasions people would wet the dresses so that they would become more transparent. Modest or immodest? Well it's not a question that we need to consider because of course—oh wait! Wet t-shirt contests! [Sensei and students laugh] You can't cover everything.

So standards of modesty and immodesty vary widely and wildly according to the part of the world, according to the tribal and cultural norms. It's interesting but we don't come up with and can't come up with one definition of what this means that doesn't have us looking outward at what others are doing which of course is interesting.

But, with practice, we start to see those shifts of attention, how self-image wants to look out and wants to make judgements:

"Modest."

"Stands up in front of everyone and laughs louder than everyone else."

"Immodest. Look at that. Can see their bum."

Now a person may be doing an activity that requires the best thing that they can do for the activity is to wear tight trousers, such as say yoga, such as say horseback riding and so on. So there are many conditions, but what we want to notice is how and when this occurs and for whom, for us, for each and every one of us, because that allows us to see more and more clearly habits and patterns.

The narrowing of attention, self-image looking around for a target, looking around for something that it can comment upon to itself and to others: That's interesting.

Now, it doesn't mean you can't comment about something, not at all. In fact, informed comment can be useful and entertaining, but what we want to see is that the creation of self and other, that contraction into a sense of self that says: "that's immodest", becomes a condemnation. We want to see how that occurs.

The verse again:

Seeing people with modesty,
"May all beings
Act with discretion
And dress appropriately."

So of course in the context of the monastery,
we have guidelines as to what is appropriate dress and
what is not appropriate dress and
interestingly, if you've noticed, it is non-gender related.
And we may notice in ourselves, which is where we really want to look,
we really want to see how patterns are there,
what beliefs are there,
what can be questioned into,
what's unquestioned,
we may notice certain tendencies,
we may notice wanting to hang onto certain types of dress,
certain styles of dress,
certain definitions.

When we see it, we can
at the moment of noticing any contraction into a sense of self
with a little belief about how it is,

feel the breath,
pull up through the upper torso,
feel the hands and feet,
feel the rest of the bodymind
because we've recognized a portion,
a tiny portion of reality:
the capacity for contraction,
the capacity for thought,
the capacity for attention to fall into that thought,
whatever it might be,
and to base its actions upon that.

That's great, you're seeing more and more and more about the actual process of perception
and cognition,
you're seeing more in this process of what Dogen described as "studying the self",
and you have more opportunity to practise that moment of clear seeing,
so you won't be fooled by your own assumptions about what's going on,
about how you are and
about how the world is.

Now, of course, as it says in the verse, it would be nice if "all beings acted with discretion",
using the most skillful of means all the time to do and to express
what needs to be done and needs to be expressed...

But hey, we're learning, aren't we?
Each time we see in our own manner,
ways in which we express ourselves too forcefully,
ways that can be interpreted as and
may be the product of patterns of arrogance,
(but who's judging?)
we can just notice what's going on,
we can notice what that cause is,
the response caused in others,
and then we may decide we're going to shift it,
try another little approach that is perhaps
less forceful, aggressive, or
mealy-mouthed or
whiney.

So we have an infinite capacity for seeing how we actually are and

we have an infinite capacity for practising that moment and
we have an infinite capacity for making choice and changes
that can only help improve whatever it is that we're doing.

That would be nice.

Seeing people with modesty,
"May all beings
Act with discretion
And dress appropriately."

So when you get that on your invitation... "act with discretion and dress appropriately" RSVP
not required.

Have fun!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 113: Seeing the Shameless

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, September 17th, 2011

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE
can be used,
you're in the perfect position to use
every breath you take
to blow away some of the cobwebs
some of the dustballs
that have accumulated around your little nest of beliefs
about who you are and
how the world is,
those little moments of contraction
that sometimes we just want to hold onto,
describing our understanding of who we are,
our understanding of how the world is;
it's old news.

So let the breath that's moving you in and out
blow them all away.

Today's verse:

Seeing the shameless,
"May all beings
Go past shamelessness
And live with care for all."

Shame. Shame. Pretty old word. Came from the Greek: "to cover". That's come up in almost
all of the Germanic languages, English, covering one's self, this common expression of
shame... But guess what? That's not what we're going to talk about.

"Seeing the shameless", now what does that mean? Well that word brings forth our own
particular point of view, so what is "shameless"? What does it mean? Someone is shameless
because there's this pair of low-riding jeans that exposes their underwear? Is that an
expression of shamelessness? Is that a person being shameless? Or is it maybe just a
misguided sense of fashion? [Sensei and students laugh]

And I must tell you every time I see these belts going around someone's upper thighs holding
up someone's pair of jeans, I know I'd get arrested, but...
There used to be something called in the British public schools, debuggging. Which is going up

to someone and going fffff! [sound like pulling down someone's pants]
But we don't do that and I don't want you ever to think about that again. [more laughter]

So shamelessness, being without this contraction into a sense of a self, self-image, that has a story about what's going on.

The other night, a long, long time ago, someone was called for daisan and they pitty patted downstairs and opened the door to the Zendo and stuck their head around. I raised my hand and said: "Go and ring the bell". So they went back out in the hall, rang the densho and came back in.

I said: "What happened?"

"Well, I was so busy thinking about how I was going to tell you that I was so mindful for the past two weeks that I forgot..." [Sensei and students laugh]

Now this is what forms are for,
they are ways of doing things,
they are tools that can allow us to see these things.

So we looked into it a little bit and we had laughed just like you laughed when the student so seriously made the statement and then saw how ridiculous it was, and then said:

"You know, as soon as I stuck my head in the door and you pointed, I knew exactly what had happened and I wanted to laugh, but I thought if I laugh, that's somehow shameful. I'm supposed to be taking this very seriously. Wait, maybe that's a problem!" [Sensei laughs]

So we carried on a bit looking at the very recent events from a "forensic" point of view, what had happened and what did this person think had caused it, and they were right on when they could look at it, when they could see it.

So there was a sense of shame,
this was the word that the student chose to use,
a sense of shame about having fucked up by not ringing the densho,
of being seen and pointed to and having to go back and do it again.
Still, self-image had this story going that perhaps no one had noticed
because self-image is
crazy.

How many times in your own experience has there been a sense of shame about something,
a story about how you should have been other than you were,
and that this was something to manufacture a whole pile of feelings about?

Now these feelings that become manufactured by the bodymind are there,
there's no question about it because the bodymind learns things,
it learns patterns and
a pattern is something that's repeated so something happens,
a myriad of activities of the bodymind go into play and an effect is produced.
Depending of course on circumstance,
it may be repeated,
the same effect may come into play and
we may start labelling it as "shame".

In fact, there was an industry for a while, it may have—I hope it's kind of worn out—built on toxic shame in the Self-Help sections of your local bookstore. Toxic? Sure, yeah when biochemistry is put into effect that produces a pattern, there are all sorts of ramifications, but we won't go there.

So imagine what it would be like if you, and that student who felt shame for wanting to laugh, imagine if the shame never arose...
Imagine how with the recognition that any pattern that comes up and is seen

is a good thing,
you don't have to take a position pro or con,
bad or good about it,
but yet you can see when this happens... another good thing.
But we do spend a lot of time and
have spent a lot of time trying to cover up how we are
so that we can present some mythological self
that is different than it is in that moment.

What a waste of time! And how injurious that can be.

So by recognizing that each time we notice anything
is a moment when we can practise that moment of noticing,
that moment of knowing,
that moment of clear seeing,
and this will enable us to see more.
So we start to see more clearly the mechanisms that come into effect.
In a sense,
it starts to seem as if time slows down.

Something occurs, we make a mistake.
Did we make a mistake or did a myriad of details or dharma come into play all at once and
obscure our sense of what was going on?

We can learn to see that.
It does not mean that we are not experiencing the sweaty armpit,
perhaps, for those who sweat only in one armpit [laughter],
the change in colour and temperature of the visage as blood vessels dilate and we blush...
those things can still be going on because the bodymind has learned to do something.
It's very intelligent.

But as we start to notice
and as we start to notice
and as we start to practise with those myriad of details,
rather than identifying with them,
we will find over time
that being described by or describing ourselves by those events
ceases.

Here's another thing that's really interesting: you may not notice that something is not
happening for quite a while.
It may have not happened for some time.
We're not really good at noticing things that are not happening.

So you sit,
you walk,
you're feeling the whole bodymind,
something occurs,
it produces an effect in the bodymind,
you notice it,
you start noticing more of the details of it.
With each moment of noticing,
you feel the whole bodymind
wrapped around that breath
in the whole moment.

Over time,
patterns wear out
because they have to be repeated in order for them to sustain themselves.

But the bodymind has a way of learning things very vividly.
Now some of you may have done this before,
but imagine right now, imagine a lemon.
A lemon.
Imagine that colour, that wrinkly skin, that shape.
Imagine yourself walking over to that lemon,
reaching out,
picking it up.
The closer you bring it to you,
the more you can notice the scent of that lemon.

Now, very carefully pick up an extremely sharp knife.
Cut that lemon in half.
Put one half down, pick up the other half.
Cut it in half.
Bring one half, which is now one quarter of the lemon,
put it in your mouth,
bite down on it and suck.

[Sensei and students laugh]

Now, where's the lemon? What provoked that response, that little response in your mouth?
Something the bodymind learned.

Every thought, every moment of experience the bodymind experiences produces an effect, so
it's not surprising that when we find ourselves in a situation where we may have experienced
what we call a sense of shame, that biochemistry is released, little guys get busy with their
wires and pulleys and say:

“Okay, okay, here we go now, we're going to produce those pyrotechnics! You guys over there
responsible for the reddening face, get to it! You guys that are headed to the armpits with
those buckets, get to it!” [Sensei and students laugh]

And this effect is produced and if we've called it “shame”,
that label can be slapped on,
but Knowing,
which is what each and every one of us really is,
can recognize all of that as knowns,
dharma,
moments of experience,
and feel the effect in the bodymind.

We're learning to practise with what's actually going on
because to say that this should not be happening
is insane.
If something is happening,
it's happening,
it's part of the reality of the moment.
Use the noticing of it to notice what else is going on.

That's what you're learning to do.
Over time, you will not be trapped by labels for biological events.
“Shame” will cease to be part of how you describe yourself.
And over time, the effect will not be produced,
it will be worn out.

So recognize that you can talk about anything in daisan,
that the fact that a thought comes up does not mean that you are that thought,
not at all.

The sciences are starting to recognize that this is true, big news now. People have been working to design headbands and whatnot so that things can be put on the head so that with thoughts, things can move, choices can be made. This is good news for quadriplegics and other disabled people. We're fortunate that we can recognize, we're recognizing that thoughts have an effect, and when we see it we can practise in that moment so that we do not need to be pushed and pulled around by patterns that have been formed by random and chaotic events.

This is good news!

So when you see something in your own experience,
no matter what you call it,
recognize there's the little contraction into a sense of a self,
with its electronic labeller,
it's going rat-a-tat, typey tap,
"SHAME" - slap!
"GUILT" - slap!

So as soon as you see that, you just say: "Look at that! Wow, I've recognized something about experiencing. Oh yeah, feel the breath, sit up straight, open the eye gaze."

You practise that moment of recognition and over time that tendency wears out, and wouldn't it be nice if everyone could go past shameless into shamelessness? By flipping their understanding of the word, by flipping and recognizing that our usual descriptions of shameless and shamelessness tend to be outward oriented, formed by—no one knows who or what really really—and lost in the vast vat of time.

The verse again:

Seeing the shameless,
"May all beings
Go past shamelessness
And live with care for all."

May all beings be happy,
May they be peaceful,
May they be free.

And you know what?

That means you too.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 114: Receiving Fine Food

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, October 1st, 2011

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE...

Wow, still alive!

Great,
chance to practise.

Best to do it while that breath is still going on,
given that feeling the breath is vital to mindfulness of breath and body.

So feel the breath,
sit up straight,
open the eye gaze,
practise the whole bodymind in this whole moment,
as people have been doing for,

some say 2600 years,
but it was probably before that that this was started,
then lost in time,
but fortunately,
the instruction, the information has been passed down to us,
not directly, of course,
nothing every happens totally directly,
there are many influences that come into play.

Today's verse:

Receiving fine food,
"May all beings
Fulfill their aspirations
And be free from envy and craving."

“Well where do I get some of that food?” someone who might be being eaten up by envy and craving might ask. Well, we know what we're talking about...

The next verse which we will be talking about is “Receiving Poor Food”. So fine food and poor food. Bottom line is that in Dogen's Zen, both fine and poor should be recognized as being food and being equal, and being intimate with that fact.

When we enter into the *kuin*, or kitchen, when we enter into eating and cooking in this practice, this fact of giving careful attention to whatever it is we're doing is repeated over and over and over again and we learn it more and more completely.

“Cooking Zen: Zen Master Dogen's instructions to the Kitchen Master and On How to Use Your Bowls” was published by Great Matter Publications in 1995. It was edited by Ven. Anzan Hoshin sensei, at the time, and translated by Anzan Hoshin sensei and Yasuda Joshu Dainen roshi. Now, at the time that this was published, I was the *tenzo*, having taken up the duty of *tenzo* from the *Roshi*. And at that time, *Jinmyo osho*, now *tenzo*, was *shuso*, both of us helped in proofreading this little text. Now, the question becomes, and I'm sorry, I don't like to use the word “little”, I'm not demeaning it in any way, it's a small text, it's small in size and it's very light in weight but it's heavy with information for you to use to mature and ferment your practice.

Now “Cooking Zen” came from Zen Master Dogen's experiences. He, in the 1220s, I believe, became somewhat dissatisfied with the way practice and the understanding of practice was being carried out and taught in Japan. He was, of course, already a monk. So he set off to go back to the source to find out what was really going on. He and a fellow monk who was also a friend and a Teacher of Dogen's, took off and they went to China.

Now, at that time, you can appreciate that this may have been a very difficult bit of travel, certainly not like today. Travelling was fraught with perils, including bandits and so on, well there's a resurgence of bandits now, apparently...

Anyway, Dogen went off to find out more. He was incredibly affected by an old monk that he met in the port of Ningbo, or near the port of Ningbo. This elderly monk, who it is said had been a monk for 69 years, was out in the midday sun drying mushrooms. He was the *tenzo*, he was responsible for the nutrition of the monks who were practising and he did not take this lightly. He was laying out the mushrooms, they were drying in the sun, and Dogen asked why he didn't have an assistant, because he was pretty old, why wasn't someone else doing this?

And the monk, whose name was Lu, said: “Other people are not me”.

So you know, if you want something done, what do you do? You want it done properly what do you do? You do it yourself, right? [Sensei laughs] So he took his responsibilities very seriously.

And Dogen said: “Venerable Sir, I can see how you follow the Way through your work, but still,

why do this now when the sun is so hot?"

The tenzo said: "If not now, when?"

Dogen zenji spent time at Tiantong Shu because he recognized there something very different was going on in this monastery, that the practice of Zen, which is the practice of your life, was being practised with the life of the practitioners. He spent a great deal of time finding out what the practices were around cooking food, taking care of very important aspects of monastic life.

Out of his experiences came the essays which you will find in "Cooking Zen".

Okay, so, how come in Japan there was no attention, at that time, to monastic cooking and feeding and so on, and there was in China? Apparently, Dogen zenji came across, and was again, very affected by, a book of Zen Monastic Standards by Chan Yang Chin Qi, published in 1102 or 1103. So that would make the book some 110 or 120 years old at the time that Dogen came across it.

And where did that one come from? Well, in the Vimalakirti Sutra, the Recorded Teachings of Vimalakirti, who was a lay monk, it was said: "When we are intimate with food, we eat. There is intimacy with all things. When we are intimate with all things, we are intimate with the food we eat."

So what was he talking about? What was being talked about by Vimalakirti? And what was considered to be so important that it affected deeply the monk who wrote Zen Monastic Standards, and from that, affected Dogen zenji's approach to practice, and affected the way we do things here today?

A lot of this comes down to, and a lot of understandings come down to, how things are translated, because there is no one word that will cover Pali, Sanskrit, various Indian dialects, Chinese-various dialects, Japanese, and then English. So we have people who are doing their very best to bring information from various sources to the people that they come in contact with. This has always been the case. This is how people transmit information.

Now, the Vimalakirti Sutra, Vimalakirti lived in India, so the first translation of this sutra apparently happened around 188 C.E. and this was a monk from Kusana, which was part of Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, in around the Peshawar Valley, and he went to China, he went from there to China.

So what Dogen had encountered from Vimalakirti's writings about attention to and equality or intimacy of reality went with him. He thought it was a good idea.

Then there was another translation by Kumarajiva, 400 C.E. Now we're getting to about the point where there's a meeting of information and so on that results in and affects the verses in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Practice of Purity, which we're reading today.

I'm going to read to you Anzan Hoshin sensei's brief notes on translation:

The Vimalakirti Sutra said...

...forgive me, you've heard it, I said it just a few moments ago, but if you're anything like me, once, twice or two hundred times can only help you retain the information....

When we are intimate with the food we eat, there is intimacy with all things. When we are intimate with all things, we are intimate with the food we eat.

The Roshi's notes:

In The Recorded Teachings of Vimalakirti, I translate this passage as:

"Subuti, you can have this food if you can understand the equality of all that is through the equality of forms, and if you can understand the sameness of all the

qualities of Awakening through the equality of all that is.”

In the Vimalakirti, the passage specifically concerns freeing Subuti from an understanding of practice and realization that depends upon a series of categorizations through which experiences are sifted into wholesome and unwholesome thoughts and behaviours...

So store the “sifter”!

...into the continuous recognition of all experiences as inherently unthinkable and as the display of the radiance of experiencing.

Dogen's use of the passage requires a different approach to translation. For example, in order to make clear the particular nuances of its use here, I used the word “intimacy”, rather than the phrase “equality of” despite the play with the term “equal” that continues to develop in the next paragraph. One of the reasons for this is that the playfulness does not seem to be apparent to most readers, the term “equal” immediately summoning a sense of abstraction. I hope the relationship between “intimacy” and “equality” as used in this translation are evident.

So even today, and I do mean even today, information is transmitted from one person to another using different words and different experiences. I emphasize “today” because just this morning, we received an email from Tettsu, who is in residence at Harrow. Well, “in residence”, actually the Zendo is in his house, has been for some years, and that's where Saigyo chiden started, no you didn't start there, did you? It was before that, the other road, but you sat there and did a lot of work there. Anyway..

So we get an email, thanking Jinmyo osho for the eMirror and how useful it is to students who are at a distance as well as those who are near, and saying in response to the information about what to do with colds and coughs and so on, that in the Zen Centre of San Francisco, Shunryu Suzuki roshi recommended that students bury their face in the crook of their arm when they're going to sneeze because that then muffles the sound as well as taking away bacteria and germs from the hands. He also says, and I quote: “This form may have come from Eihei-ji”.

So we see, people exchange information. Is there any way which we can absolutely nail it down and say that those who wrote the verses for the Avatamsaka sutra, The Practice of Purity, were affected by what they had come across in the book Zen Monastic Standards by Chin Qi? We can't say for sure, but you know if I were a betting monk, and if there were any way of going back to check on it, I bet that's how it happened.

You know, someone says: “Did you hear what they're doing at such-and-such? You hear what they're saying at such-and-such?”

So that's responsible for a lot of misinformation as well as for a lot of valuable, clear, precise information. This is what we do as human beings and why would a thousand years ago be any different.

So I present that to you just as something to bear in mind when you're coming across the Teachings. Don't fall for a word and say that this is the only word, especially if it gets into being logos, because we all know what that might lead to. And if we don't know, I'm not going to tell any stories right now about... no I won't, I won't! We'll just leave it at that.

Dogen's was a very radical guy with a very non-dualistic approach to the Dharma and to issues of gender and socialization, and he was devoted to practising what is true without compromise, moment after moment after moment, day in, day out, and he was therefore a big threat to... I think the Roshi had a lovely word... what was it? [looking through her notes]

...“ecclesiastical monoliths”.

So some of his supporters, some of his fans gave him a piece of land up in the mountains. He literally had to get out of town and he founded Eihei-ji way up in the mountains, where, should you have the fortune to go there, you will be presented with a small town where you can buy, as souvenirs, all sorts of things such as bamboo pickle forks. There's also paintings of Dogen zenji and Bodhidharma on black velvet, but we wouldn't want those... But pickle forks because “a monk's mouth is a furnace”, and as you know from having done oryoki, that third bowl, which is the pickle bowl, is also useful when you are cleaning your oryoki set.

Now, in Dogen's time, the pickle that was in that third bowl was picked up with the hashi and used to clean the other bowls, so the pickle was actually used to clean. There's also a little saying about pickles that refers to practitioners: if you as the pickle practitioner are dropped in a barrel of brine, despite your struggle, you are going to get pickled... [students laugh, Sensei laughs]

...so if you keep showing up! [more laughter]

So yes, food plays a very important part and the way that food is taken care of is the responsibility of the tenzo who is responsible for filling those furnaces of monk's mouths. One of Dogen zenji's advices to the tenzo was that each thing be treated carefully, no discrimination, thus receiving fine foods was no better or no worse than receiving poor foods.

The verse again:

Receiving fine food,
"May all beings
Fulfill their aspirations
And be free from envy and craving."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 115: Receiving Poor Food

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, October 15th, 2011

Beautiful autumn day today in this year 2011,
and not only that,
it's this moment,
everywhere, all over the planet,
it's this moment.

That's amazing!

And this moment is not isolated from all the other moments that have gone before.
No, because they arise in this moment
as part of this moment as well.

So when we sit facing the wall, as you're facing,
what we're doing is taking in information on how to practise
this bodymind that's sitting
right there,
being breathed in and out,
how to practise with this bodymind,
which basically is the same
as every other bodymind that's ever practised,
or not practised, for that matter.

Isn't that interesting?

The verse, written somewhere around 400, 401 C.E., some 1600 years ago, by people whose

names we don't even know, out of their experiencing, which we would be surprised to find is remarkably like our own. Oh sure, the styles may be different, but on the whole, very little has changed.

The verse,

Receiving poor food,
"May all beings
Without fail receive
The taste of practice."

“What? We're talking about food again? What is it with food? People are always talking about food...”

Well, let's face it, human beings from the beginning, whenever that was, are born, they breathe in and out, they poop, they reproduce, each and every human being does these things. So we put things in our mouth, we chew on them, and that allows us to keep on doing whatever it is that we're doing as this human bodymind.

Zen Master Dogen, who was born in 1200, travelled, as we've touched on previously, to China, and why did he go there? Well, he was already a monk, he'd been a monk since he was 13, he was a Tendai monk then, and what he was experiencing in Japan in that monastery on Mount Hiei, wasn't cutting it. I think he may have said to himself:

“What the?... This can't be all there is to this Dharma... There's gotta be more. I'm gonna track it down.”

So he travelled to China with his Teacher, Myozan. And it was in 1225 that he met Rujing who became his Teacher and with whom he learned this practice, the practice of Reality, the practice of things as they are. A major difference to what he had experienced in Japan was that each and every moment, whether sitting zazen or not, was a moment to practise, it was that simple: realized practice, bodying forth the Way, moment to moment.

And Zen Master Dogen was incredibly affected by his experience and by the people he met.

I'm going to read a recounting from a book called “Dogen's Formative Years in China, an historical study and annotated translation of Hokayoki” by Takahashi James Koderia. This one is from Chapter 2: The Chief Cook from A-yu-wang Mountain.

During his three months aboard ship, an incident occurred that had great significance for Dogen. Dogen describes it at length in the Tenzo kyokun. In the middle of the fifth month of the sixteenth year of Chia-ting, (1223), while Dogen was conversing with the head of the Japanese crew off the coast of Ch'ing-yuan, an old monk appeared aboard ship. He was the chief cook, (tien-tso, Ja. tenzo of A-yu-wang Mountain and he had come to purchase Japanese mushrooms. Originally from Szechuan province, he had been away from home for forty years and was now sixty-one years old. After visiting many monasteries in all corners of China, he eventually came to study under Ku-yun of A-yu-wang mountain. He had been appointed chief cook during the summer of the previous year. He had travelled thirty-four to thirty-five li to purchase mushrooms from the Japanese ship to use in making gruel (mien chih). Dogen was deeply impressed with the devotion of the old monk and asked him to stay the night on the ship. The chief cook declined the offer for fear that it might interfere with the normal procedures at his monastery the following day. Dogen wondered why someone else could not prepare the meal in his place. He asked why a monk as senior as this one remained as chief cook and did not instead engage in sitting and meditation in pursuit of the Way. The old monk laughed loudly and said to Dogen:

“My good man from a foreign land, you still do not comprehend discipline (pan-tao; Ja. bendo); you still do not know the words (wen-tzu, Ja. monju).”

Dogen was startled by the reply and proceeded to ask him the meaning of discipline and of words. The old man said:

“If you still do not understand them, come to A-yu-wang Mountain some day and study the meaning of the Teachings.”

Having spoken, he stood up promptly and left before dusk.

The chief cook's reply disturbed Dogen profoundly. This marked a clear division between his earlier quest for the final answer to the Great Doubt and his renewed aspiration for the attainment of the Way. The chief cook opened a wholly new path to enlightenment. It was a radical shift from Dogen's intellectual quest for the recognition of the centrality of singleminded discipline.

In the seventh month, in early fall, after a three month separation, Dogen went to T'ien-t'ung Mountain to see Myozan. The chief cook of T'ien-t'ung Mountain was a monk named Yung. from Ch'ing-yuan. One day after lunch, Dogen saw him drying mushrooms in front of the Buddha Hall. He was supporting himself with a bamboo staff. Although the sun was hot enough to burn the roof tiles, he wore nothing over his head. Bathed in perspiration, he was exerting himself in drying the mushrooms and seemed to be in pain. His back was arched like a bow and his eyebrows were as white as a crane.

Dogen approached the old monk and asked his age.

“Sixty-eight,” replied the chief cook.

“Why don't you use the help of the lay workers?” asked Dogen.

“Others are not I,” said the old monk.

“You are in accord with the Dharma but the sun is scorching, why do you have to work now?”

The chief cook answered: “If not now, when can I do it?”

Dogen stood still and could not utter a word. As he walked down the corridor, he deeply realized the importance of physical work.

After the intensive summer training session, the chief cook whom Dogen had met on the Japanese ship off the coast of China came to T'ien-tung Mountain to visit Dogen. The old monk had left A-yu-wang Mountain as chief cook and was on the way back to his home in Szechuan. Dogen records how deeply moved he was by his visit. He started talking about the earlier subject of conversation on the ship, namely discipline and words. The chief cook said:

“To study the words is to know the origin of words; to strive in discipline is to probe the origin of discipline.

Then Dogen asked, "What are the words?"

"One, two, three, four, five," replied the chief cook.

Dogen asked again, "What is the discipline?"

"The entire universe has never concealed it," the monk replied.

Dogen was deeply greatly indebted to the chief cook for his understanding of the words and probing the discipline."

And out of these impressions, out of these encounters that affected Dogen zenji came many essays, many Teachings on how to practise moment to moment and this is what we're doing: practising moment to moment. This is why when students come for retreats to the monastery, things are as they are, so that they can use the totality of this tool which we call a monastery, and the monks, which we might call tools from time to time... [lots of loud laughter from Sensei and students] however, let's face it kids!...

So each and every thing,
each word,
each piece of artwork,
each chance,
each tool that rings out to tell you,
each instrument that rings out to tell you
what's going on
is something to be used by you
to see more clearly
how the bodymind is
in this moment,
to see what patterns,
what orientations,
what beliefs
coming of the contraction
into a sense of self
are present.

And, by feeling the whole bodymind wrapped around the breath, the tendency to get caught up in these things drops away.

Now, when we read the verse "Receiving Poor Food", we might hear the word "food" and just want to isolate the verse and say: "well, it's just talking about the stuff that we can eat". Well, yes, it's saying cut through dukkha, basic unsatisfactoriness. If you have poor food to work with as the tenzo, or anyone who's preparing food, you put the same amount of effort that's coming out of your practice into the preparation of that food. If it's rich food, fine food, well, good, same amount of effort going into it, this non-discrimination that we have talked about, this equality of experiencing that we've talked about, this harmony of approach to any situation that we've talked about is present in these verses.

Now, we don't discriminate, we don't say "well, this is a poor person, they can't be a student, this is a fine person, they can be a student" that doesn't happen. So there's no discrimination, no dissatisfaction with individuals who come to practise. Oh sure, we may have little likes and dislikes but they are patterns, they have nothing to do with that person, that person we could say is a tool that allows you to see the patterns that come up in your experiencing, providing you an opportunity to work with them.

So dukkha, basic unsatisfactoriness occurs in all sorts of times and places and has obviously.

It's mentioned in verses written around 400 or so, then Dogen zenji's experience in China when he started to actually look into the importance for practice that every moment offered and the importance of practising in every moment as whatever is presented by the bodymind shows itself and is seen by Knowing.

Starting to recognize that everything that bodymind experiences is a known,
it's a dharma,
a moment of experience,
it is at it is,
it's neither better nor worse than any other moment of experience,
there is that equality,
that intimacy that we're experiencing that goes beyond description,
because "its meaning is not in words"
its meaning is in putting your ass down on that cushion
time after time after time
and seeing into experiencing more and more clearly,
using that clear seeing to actually practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

And what are we?
Well, we could say we are all food for the Dharma,
we enter into practice
we don't really understand what's going on,
some of us might go a little further,
we have a hint
we have a taste of practice
and sometimes we like the taste
and sometimes we just want to throw up in our mouth
but that's life isn't it? [laughter]
That's life,
so we see it
and with practice we have something that we can do
rather than falling prey to self-image
and its beliefs about how things are.

And we may look at ourselves
and even though self-image,
that contraction into a sense of self
comes up with all sorts of reasons
why we're not capable of practising,
no matter how much you look on your body,
with no matter what kind of magnifying glass,
there is no "use by" date,
there's no little bar code,
so everyone enters into practice
equal.

Just a fact.

In the Fukanzazengi, which Dogen wrote as well, in 1227, and you're all familiar with this:

Practice and realization are the deportment of this very bodymind, beyond sight and sound, before thinking and analyzing. Since this is as it is, it doesn't matter if you're clever or stupid; the distinctions distinguish nothing. Whole-hearted practice is the Way.

So each and every moment presents itself as it is.
When you notice anything,
you've noticed a moment to practise.

Feeling the breath,
sitting up straight,
noticing seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling,
noticing what's already there,
and if you happen to notice yourself scanning around,
checking to see if you're doing it right,

hooray!

You've noticed something else!

You've noticed another pattern of self-image.

You use that:
you feel the breath,
you sit up straight,
and over time
they wear out.

So there you are,
you're just a little niblet for the mouth of the Ancestors
who can gnash their teeth away
on your flesh and bones and marrow
and all the gristly bits,
and you can hear them spitting out some...
oh sorry, won't go there...

But yeah, we're food for the Dharma.

So have fun with that!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 116: Receiving Soft Food

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, October 22nd, 2011

Complexes of cells
sitting on black cushions,
facing the white wall,
being breathed in and out,
the oxygen fuelling and firing that process
of digestion and
the ultimate growing of more cells,
little factories.

Well, if you want to call it "you" or "me", that's fine,
colloquialisms for convenience of communication, you can say "you" and "me",
no problem.

Today's verse in the Every Breath You Take series:

Receiving soft food,
"May all beings
Be steeped in compassion,
Their minds becoming gentle."

"Receiving soft food." Soft food that travels over the taste buds, gets swallowed down, gets digested, goes into building cells, creating food for the Dharma from food.

Soft food. Soft food. Like congee, for example. Congee, which is served often in the

monastery, soft and lovely, which traditionally has been mentioned in a verse that has been chanted sometimes after the morning meal, this is mentioned in "Cooking Zen: Zen Master Dogen's Instructions to the Kitchen Master and on how to use your Bowls" by Ven. Anzan Hoshin sensei, at the time. The verse is this:

This meal arises from the labour of all beings
Its ten benefits nourish bodymind
And strengthen pure practice.

From a footnote:

"The ten beneficial effects of congee (shuku):

- 1) healthy colour
- 2) provides physical strength
- 3) gives longevity
- 4) comforts bodymind
- 5) purifies the tongue
- 6) helps to detoxify the stomach and bowels
- 7) helps to prevent colds
- 8) quenches hunger
- 9) quenches thirst
- 10) strengthens excretion and urination."

Soft food that has been passed through the hands of the many to get to your stomach.

"Steeped in compassion."

Compassion.

We like that, we hear it mentioned, it's mentioned a lot. What does it mean? Well, the "com" part is obviously "with". The "passion" part comes from the same root as words such as "patient, one who suffers". So, to suffer together with others, or to recognize the sufferings of others, then take action to help.

So you're sitting on your cushion.

You're noticing that moment of noticing anything at all,
which is the only moment that you can practise the whole bodymind,
wrapped around the breath,
in the whole moment.

So what about compassion when you're sitting facing that wall?

Well by looking into the process of the bodymind,
the process of perception and cognition,
you see how attention narrows
into a construct of a self with a belief
about how it is and how the world is.

Over time,

you start to understand that this process
of being a human being
is the same for all human beings and
out of that understanding
arises the understanding
that what you're experiencing and
how you're experiencing it
is how everyone experiences,
so we start to understand the root of suffering.

Now it is said that the Buddha said this, not in these words of course: "it is possible to travel the whole world in search for one who is more worthy of compassion than oneself. No such person can be found."

So by sitting,
practising your own experiencing
of the Knowing of the experiencing of the bodymind,
you are developing the understanding that
when noticed,
these contractions into a self
that cause dukkha, basic unsatisfactoriness,
which leads to suffering to a varying degree,
by practising at the moment of noticing
experiencing open and
patterns that cause you suffering
dissipate over time.

It is the same for everyone.

Things that we name “pain”, “fear”, “sorrow”, other forms of dukkha which have become patterns of dukkha, can open, leaving more room to actually know the experiencing of being a real human being, living in this moment, knowing in this moment the process of being a human being. Once the understanding is there that this is the same for everyone, we may tend, we do tend to view others and our experiences of others in a different manner.

A student said to me just this week:

“You know, relatively, I haven't been doing this for a long time and I don't understand it really, but I've noticed a lot of things. The most important thing to me that I've noticed is that previously I thought issues were black and white, that was it, I was very judgemental. Black and white, and this wasn't useful for me in my work environment. Now I'm seeing that's not the case, that this tendency I had to judge others very quickly wasn't useful. I'm really surprised, I'm finding that I'm different with them and they're different with me, so even for that it's worthwhile carrying on with this practice, even though I don't yet really understand what I'm doing.”

Now, another way of looking at the bodymind is that its experiencing, its patterns are actually being gnawed away at by the Teachings passed down by the Ancestors. Sometimes it's been spoken of as those teeth of the Ancestors chewing up and softening all those gristly bits so that you do become more gentle with yourself.

There can be less rushing to judgement of yourself. You see the pattern. It takes a while for patterns to wear out, and you know, why judge yourself? There are others around—not in this room, not in this monastery—(hahaha)- there are lots of others around who will be quite willing to judge you, if you ask them. So let others do it, forget about it.

And bear in mind, what others think about you is none of your business anyway.

When you notice yourself judging yourself,

and we can call this reactivities, we can call it habits and patterns,

but when you notice it and it comes up:

“Oh I wish I would have, I should have... Why didn't I? Oh I'm such a...”

When you notice anything with that kind of a tone or texture,

feel the breath,

sit up straight,

feel the whole bodymind,

practise that moment because that's a moment of clear seeing,

part of the process of experiencing in that moment.

Over time, those things tend to wear out

and you actually have a lot more room to breathe when that happens,

you're a lot lighter.

And that's a good thing!

So you received soft food, prepared for you by all sorts of beings,
and it nourished the bodymind,
growing more cells so the bodymind can carry on.

And from time to time when you're sitting on the zafu,
making yourself available to the Teachings,
you have moments of insight,
of understanding what's actually being spoken of,
what you're actually experiencing.

You start to notice the wonder of waking up from the contraction of a thought,
and the breath opens,
the bodymind opens,
the ears open,
all the muscles drop their stress in that moment.
There's a moment of insight.

Now, during Fusatsu in 1989, or after Fusatsu of 1989, actually on the 16th of August, the Sensei (at the time) gave me a book and in the front of it he'd written a verse:

a thousand hands,
a thousand eyes
one heart
each thing
all beings.

insight is just a flash in the
pan unless you turn up the
heat and use it to cook whatever
falls into it to make a meal
for all beings.

At that time I was the tenzo at Zazen-ji and most likely that morning, even though I don't remember it, most likely that morning or the day before we had had congee.

So

When you're

Receiving soft food,
"May all beings
Be steeped in compassion,
Their minds becoming gentle."

It's a very gentle day. Gentle wind. Soft, moist air. You're being breathed in and out. Cells are doing what they're doing.

So enjoy yourself, you're alive!
It won't last... [laughter]
but have fun in the meantime!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 117: Receiving Coarse, Hard Food

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, October 29th, 2011

Boy oh boy, it's autumn for sure now.
The leaves are scattered on the ground.
You walk over them,
they crunch, crunch, crunch.

Squirrels are running madly back and forth,
trying to find food that they can bury so that when they go back a little while later to check it,
they can move it and bury it somewhere else... [students laugh]
I've seen this!

But yeah, and those leaves,
once they were just nascent,
when they were buds: potential.
Then they became fully leaves.
At the height of their display, they start to decay
and then eventually,
with a combination of temperature, light,
they fall off the tree and fall to the ground
and there's nothing that can be done to make them be back on the branch.
We can't immerse them in water, hydrating or rehydrating them,
we can't make them a different colour,
we can't do anything to return them to the way they were.

It's kind of like our life, isn't it?

Now life, any life, the life of the leaf requires nourishment,
the life of the squirrel requires nourishment,
the life of each and every one of us requires nourishment,
which segues nicely to today's verse:

Receiving coarse, hard food,
"May all beings
Be without attachments
And cut through mundane craving."

Now whatever pops into your mind with the word "food",
maybe it's a nice burger,
maybe a nice piece of fruit,
maybe a nice piece of fresh bread slathered with butter,
but let's look at the word "food" this way,
as it is used in many cultures, writing about many things:
sense data,
experience,
as well as the sustenance of life,
it can be the experience of life.

It's interesting, the evening meal, yakuseki, means "medicinal food". So the bottom line is,
food is the most medicine you'll ever take in in your whole life.

What do you do when the love of your life requires more care than can be provided at home
and after 61 years of marriage? You're forced to live apart and you miss her terribly. My
goodness. What do you do when you receive such coarse, hard food?

Well this one 90-year-old makes the best of each day and stays as healthy and active as
possible.

There really is not much of a choice, when life hands you lemons, the saying is you can make
lemonade. And it is interesting, there are lots and lots of expressions that use food.

"She/he is the apple of his/her eye."

"Bring home the bacon."

"This is a bread and butter issue."

“Ah, it's a piece of cake.”

“He's a big cheese.”

“They're like chalk and cheese' - the complete opposites.

“He's a bad egg...”

“...but she's as cool as a cucumber.”

“Something fishy here!”

“This is a meat and potatoes issue.”

“Nah, it's as easy as pie.”

“Look at that, mutton dressed as lamb.”

So these idioms are interesting and fun, and there are zillions of them, well not really zillions of them, that would be an exaggeration. Let's face it, we human beings surely do like to exaggerate, we surely do like to look at the most everyday, ordinary things, turn them upside down, and we won't say “lie”, let's just say we say things—to ourselves—without really thinking about them. And when we do that, we can reinforce those “mundane cravings”, the mundane cravings that things should be as they are not, things should be different.

“There's a basic unsatisfactoriness that needs to be fixed before my life will be complete and happy and it'll be full, I'll be content.”

Well, that doesn't happen but you can recognize, that is at the basis of most of the lies we get told.

Now some of us in this room have grown up with the culture of media and advertising, which means we've been lied to big time from the get go, and it can be a little confusing as we start to sit and face ourselves as we face that wall, and see some of the stories that we tell ourselves and that we believe.

A man died recently who was the CEO, I guess, and founder of a company that made devices with the name of a fruit, and there's a book out now about this man, and in describing this man, the book said that he had magical qualities, he was able to work with the people and to speak to them and to bring them along in such a way that they could “do the impossible”...

There's a lie right there, embedded right there. If they could do it, was it impossible? Yes, no? What do you think?

Student: No.

No! That's right, how could it be impossible if they could do it? [Sensei and student laugh]

Yet these kinds of things are accepted unquestioningly. It goes into the “mutton dressed as lamb syndrome”. We're told that we're supposed to present ourselves in a way that makes us seem younger than we actually are if we've gone over a certain age, and this is not limited to one gender, it covers all genders, and I say “all” because I don't really understand how many there are... [Sensei and students laugh] Gender is an artificial role, really, anyway, that's a whole different issue... but it affects everyone.

So industries are built on this marketplace, which is so rich, it sucks so much money out of people's wallets, selling them tanning and bleaching and changing the colour of and taking some off, and putting some in to produce this perfect... well that's what they say... this perfect embodiment of a human being.

It would be kind of funny, but we really believe it and we end up heartbroken. It affects all sorts of people.

There are two recently deceased dictators who hennaed their hair. When the cap fell off one

of them, his curly locks were revealed to be a giant comb-over and there was something very sad about that. [laughter]

So we fool ourselves, we lie to ourselves. The whole industry of food culture is basically a lie, based on a lie. There is one pairing of words that I think should be stricken from the language and it would be of great benefit to many: comfort food.

Now, what the? [laughter] ... do we need comfort for? Our "achey-breaky hearts"? The fact that after hours at the gym, we weren't like a 14-year-old again?

But this slide into lying to ourselves is insidious. We want to lose weight, and yet we hide our favourite molasses cookies under the bed... But no, it wasn't us, self-image says: "I couldn't help myself!" which of course is bull.

When we can be more clear about what it is we want to do, we can start to make choices that are reasonable, that will actually be the ones that will help us get where we want to go, and when that is based in reality, the reality of the bodymind, life can become more simple and that can take a lot of weight off the bodymind.

Another thing I think that needs to be changed, it gets said a lot, particularly as you get older, people will say: "How old are you?"

You say, "well, I'm 70".

They say: "Oh my goodness, you don't look... that old..."

Now what the.....is that about? Somehow or other this culture says you can't be who you are, that it is somehow flawed, you are somehow deeply flawed.

Lots of messages like that around. How many of them do you take to be the truth? How many of them prop up the image you have of a self, making your life more difficult?

If your life could be more easy,
if your life could be lighter,
would you be willing to,
oh just for the fun of it,
when you notice a thought about how things are,
a thought about how you can't do this anymore,
how would it be if you just felt the breath,
sat up straight,
and opened the eye gaze,
actually practised mindfulness in the moment?
Bearing in mind,
you do not have to be sitting on a zafu to practise
the moment you notice something about experiencing,
how cool is that?

You have everything you need to do the practice no matter where you are, no matter what you're doing and it's no big deal.

Self-image, contraction into a sense of a self, makes it into a big deal because of its lies and whispers.

"You can't do it. You can't do it because you're too this, you're too that, you're too the other way..."

As soon as you notice that,
you've noticed a moment of clear seeing,
you're seeing thoughts,
that's the moment when you practise,
by feeling the breath,
sitting up straight,

you're practising the whole bodymind in the whole moment.

It's no big deal,
but it can make a significant change in how you are.

Life presents lots of "coarse, hard food".
Most of the things that we set out to do
don't turn out the way we thought they would
because guess what?

We're not in control of most things.

We can have the best of intentions,
but when we're lying to ourselves,
and the lie can be,

"I'm too old to do this",

"I'm too short to do this",

"I'm too impatient to do this"

and that takes over...

Well, you're aiding and abetting in self-assassination,
so give it up!

Feel the breath,

sit up straight,

open the eye gaze.

Have some fun with

THIS moment

no matter how it is presenting itself
and with what.

There can be a myriad of sensations,

but in order for there to be

"don't and don't like"

there has to be thought about what is going on.

Recognize it as thoughts.

Recognize that as a moment of clear seeing.

It doesn't matter what the content is,

you don't need to sit behind the eyes like some little accountant going:

"Good, don't have to practise that one"

"Good, don't have to practise that one."

"Oh, negative, better practise here..."

What you want to do is recognize that the little accountant,
that fantastic fictional contraction into a sense of self
is a place to practise.

As soon as you notice that happening,

feel the breath,

sit up straight,

open the eye gaze.

And when you are receiving "coarse, hard food"...

"May all beings

Be without attachments

And cut through mundane craving."

Now wasn't that a walk in the park? Wasn't that a piece of cake?

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 118: When Eating

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, November 5th, 2011

So
see, hear,
feel the breath moving in and out of the bodymind...
How can you see it?
Well, if you're paying attention,
if you're noticing,
you can notice that everything changes
with the movement of each breath into the bodymind:
how the skeleton is arranged,
how the muscles are arranged,
how the eyes are seeing,
is all subtly changed as little movements,
little muscles that change and open.

So
there it is,
the breath that's breathing you,
moving in and out,
whistling through the caverns of the nasal passages,
inflating the lungs,
inflating those little bags that make up the lungs,
then the mysterious process of gases going across membranes...
Well, it's a good thing that the the thing you think of as you
doesn't have to know all the steps in order for that to happen
because none of us would make it
if we had to be responsible,
set into motion
what needs to be done
to keep the bodymind breathing.

Now one of the things that we know that we have to do,
and all beings need to do,
is that we have to nourish the bodymind,
so that leads us quite neatly, in my opinion, to the verse:

When eating,
"May all beings
Be nourished by joyful practice
And filled with delight in Reality."

Now what do we mean by "joyful"?
What do we mean by "joy"?
Often, what we understand to be joy is something external to us
that distracts attention away from
our usual thoughts and feelings
about who we are and how the world is and what's going on.

So we become involved in all sorts of concentration states, which we may classify as "joyous",
or "joyful", or giving us joy. Does this mean that we have to go the other way and give up
anything from which we extract a feeling that we interpret as joy?

No, of course not. We can learn, though, to recognize that there's a constant interplay
between bodymind and the world. Bodymind is how anything at all is known, and we are

really and truly the Knowing of what is happening with the bodymind,
the Knowing of the Reality of the experiences of the bodymind in each moment.
That's what you're practising.

I came across kind of a neat word:

zuiki,

to feel appropriate enjoyment when participating in practice,
the joy of engaging in beneficial activity,
including ceremonies and other formal practice activities.

This is from Chapter 18 of The Lotus Sutra, The Merit of Appropriate Joy, which describes the zuiki of the bodhisattva upon hearing the Dharma or upon seeing others' good deeds or resultant happiness.

In the sutra, the bodhisattva Maitraya says to Nagata, "after the World-Honored one's passage into extinction, if there is one who hears this scripture, and if one can rejoice appropriately, how much happiness shall be obtained?"

...so the recognition that when one person has a moment of seeing,
knowing Reality,

We've spoken already about how each known,
each dharma
is equal to each and every other
dharma or moment of Reality.

In the Dharma for Taking Food, the Fushukuhampo, it says: "If you can remain the same with food, all dharmas also remain the same. If all dharmas are the same, then also with food you will remain the same." This is from a text called "Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community".

Now, that is also something that was translated by the Roshi in "Cooking Zen, Zen Master Dogen's Instructions to the Kitchen Master, and on How to Use Your Bowls".

Another sutra says: "Name and Reality are both equal. All are equal in stainlessness."

Zen Master Mazu said: "In looking at the Total Field of all Possibilities, there is nothing but this Total Field. The same can be said of Suchness, the Ultimate Nature, and the sheer facticity of things. This kind of equal is not a matter of how one thing is related to another, but of what is utterly so through unequaled and utter Awakening".

So, remember the first of the Three Jewels: "Awareness is the only condition".

Knowing, which is what you are, Knowing of knowns is knowing Reality, is knowing dharma, many moments of Reality, without distinction, without separation.

"All that is arises as the display of Awareness."

So every known, every dharma, every moment of experience shows you that Awareness is the only condition and this is the fact that you are practising.

This is awakening to the utter seamlessness of Primordial Reality and each and every thing. This kind of equality which holds that all things are the display of Truth is only grasped completely in the Transmission between Buddhas and Buddhas through radical investigation of the true form of all things.

And this is what you are doing right now,
you are engaged in radical investigation into the True Form of all Things.

You are the Knowing.

Each time you notice any known whatsoever and
use that moment to feel the breath,
to practise the whole bodymind,
which is effortless,

the more that you do it...
the more you will have opportunity to delight in Reality,
no matter what's going on.

When you are eating food,
when you are walking here and there
when you are listening to music,
when you are talking to someone else,
when you are raising your hands in a bow,
you are experiencing,
and will delight in Reality
when you start to see that no matter what story is present,
it's not a problem,
the problem is stepping into the story and putting it on like a very tight uncomfortable suit
and believing that
that is all of the reality of the moment.

That is simply not true.

And you prove it to yourself each time you feel the breath and sit up straight.

Thus meals are the naked display of all things, which is grasped completely only
through the transmission between Buddhas and Buddhas. When eating is intimate
with all things then the nature, embodiment, effect, activity, primary causes and
secondary conditions of Suchness are here in this naked presencing of the truth.

All things are eating and the other way 'round. All things are the transmission
between Buddha and Buddha. Through the Teachings and practice, "food" is that
which flows as joy.

So the verse:

When eating,
"May all beings
Be nourished by joyful practice
And filled with delight in Reality."

So allow yourself to be eaten up by Reality,
allow that contraction into a self
with its little fabricated views
of how things are,
how you are,
how the world is,
allow it to be eaten up
by the breath,
by the bodymind moving,
by seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling...
and may you have
joyful practice.

(And I know sometimes that's hard to believe...)

But fortunately, you don't have to believe it.
The moment you remember to
feel the breath,
sit up straight,
and open the eye gaze,
you can experience it.

So keep on doing as you're doing.
And eat up each moment of Reality.
Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 119: When Tasting

Every Breath You Take 119: When Tasting

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, November 26th, 2011

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE
brings with it all manner of sensations
that are felt,
heard,
seen,
tasted,
and they're all happening right now in this moment,
which is the breath that's breathing you in and out.

We do have a
habit,
a tendency,
a pattern,
of dividing things up,
dividing up the bodymind into
this part and that part
as if somehow they were all separate,
rather than being one interactive whole
that is affected by anything that's experienced.

When tasting,
"May all beings
Taste utter Awake Awareness,
filled with the ambrosia of the deathless."

Well, "the ambrosia of the deathless",
how appealing is that?
And how has that been understood and misunderstood?
Many ways, I'm sure.

Another translation of this verse from "The Practice of Purity" reads:

When tasting flavour,
"They should wish that all beings
Attain the supreme savour of Buddhahood,
and be filled with the elixir of immortality."

Well! Pull me one of those elixirs! [students laugh]

So we can see how misunderstandings might arise.

Now, taste, also known as "smatch" in Middle English, (from which comes, by way of the Proto-Indo-European languages: shmeck, gustation, gustatory).

Well, usually what we're talking about:

the traditional five senses, and one of them is taste, which is on the whole experienced most immediately by the taste buds on the tongue.

Probably because of the tendency we have to want to label things, we say "well this is where

it happens, this the only place where it possibly could happen, and not only that, there's a place on the tongue that tastes sweet, another one that tastes bitter, another one that tastes sour, another one that tastes salty..." and recently in the West, another: umami.

Well, we can throw that division out because now it is being said by scientists that we taste all of these over the whole tongue. That's nice.

Scientists have also thrown out another popular belief fairly recently, that belief being that at birth we have all of the brain cells we'll ever have, so if we overindulge in various ways and kill them off, they will never be replaced. Not true. Brain cells are just like any other cells, they do reproduce, they replace themselves.

So there we have it: we eat,
and it's not just food that we taste,
we can pick up tastes that are in the air,
we can pick up the taste of smoke,
leaf fires burning this time of year.
If we pass by a garbage bin
and it's,
you know, "buzzing" a bit,
you can taste it a little bit,
it's not that you pick up some of it and put it in your mouth,
but reality is such that everything that is experienced, everything that the bodymind comes in contact with is experienced by the bodymind.

Now this morning, I stubbed my toe big time and there was a metallic taste in my mouth the moment it happened. Why is that? I don't know, it just was there. Obviously something had happened and the bodymind had responded in the ways it responds and so I noticed it.

When you are actually practising mindfulness,
when you've actually practised moment to moment,
at the moment that you notice anything at all,
you start to notice that indeed,
there is a taste of Awake Awareness,
it is the taste of the Reality of that moment,
which is experienced by the whole bodymind.

There's another verse which comes from the Dhammapadda, an ancient text, it says:

Mindfulness is the path to the deathless,
Heedlessness is the path to death.
The mindful do not die,
But the heedless are as if dead already.

So we'll allow a little literary license here because we can not possibly know what mindbodies have experienced those words, how they translated them, how they've understood them and how they end up with "the mindful do not die", but let us just say, actually I'll say it for us because I'm the one who's talking, let's just say: "the mindful do not die" should not be taken literally.

But "mindfulness is the path to the deathless"
it is the path that leads to this moment,
which is a path, really, without beginning, without end,
it's a metaphor.

Here we are,
there is only this moment,
that's all there ever was, that's all there ever will be
and because that breath is flowing into the lungs,

because that breath is expanding the ribs,
because that breath is doing what it needs to do,
the bodymind is still alive
and you can still practise.

You are the Knowing of the knowns
of the moments of experience of the bodymind,
and that is what allows you to practise.

You as Knowing,
the Knowing of dharma or knowns,
can, at the moment of noticing anything:
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind.

In an instant [Sensei snaps fingers] like that,
sixty mind moments have gone by in the space of that snap of a finger,
and so you are practising Awake Awareness,
you are practising the “ambrosia” of this moment,
you are opening to,
you are allowing the bodymind to open to,
(also because “you” being a linguistic term,
there's no one in there that is YOU,
but we can for the sake of ease say “you”)
you are experiencing knowns of the bodymind in this moment,
you are the Knowing of that,

And so you can bust some other myths
each time you feel the breath and feel the whole bodymind,
you are busting the myth that there's a “you” sitting up behind the eyes,
looking at this and that and the other thing,
that there's a “you” that is chewing away on this moment,
and if it contains food,
that you are tasting,
that you are tasting.

You're not tasting, the bodymind, the taste buds are receiving information and the fact that
you have language means that you can decode those tastes and put them into language that
may or not be universally accepted as being a description. But bear in mind, there's not one
description that will fit everybody because we don't taste the same things, we do not have
the same responses as the guy next to us. Some of us may go “mmm!” and another one may
go “ick” with the same experience. That's very important to remember, otherwise we can
make assumptions that simply are not true.

So, enjoy the fact,
enter into the fact as completely as you can,
that if you're breathing, you're alive,
you can taste the Reality of this moment.

If you're a formal student, you can listen to teisho that address this topic in more detail,
teisho by the Roshi in “The Anatomy of Awakening” series, so I'm not going to go into a great
deal of anatomy in this moment because then I would be doing something that you can do for
yourselves. If you're really interested, all you have to do is go to your computer and google
and you can read up and find all sorts of interesting things that can enhance your
experiencing and understanding of what's going on with the bodymind.

What I can wish for you is that you and all beings wake up, filled up with the ambrosia of the
deathless.

The verse again:

When tasting,
"May all beings
Taste utter Awake Awareness,
filled with the ambrosia of the deathless."

Taste this moment,
right here, right now.
Take a big bite out of it.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 120: When Finished Eating

Dharma Talk presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, December 10th, 2011

Can you hear them?
Can you hear little feet running around through the trees?
Can you hear little teeth [Sensei makes chewing sound]
All over the world, beings are eating,
all beings are eating,
beings must eat.
And what do they do when finished eating?

Well, if Shindo and Kitsune (the kitten and the adult cat who live in the Sensei-ryo) are any indication of what certain beings do when they're finished eating, they play around for a while with the energy from the food, then they lie down and sleep.

Now, human beings on the whole don't do that. In some countries where it's very hot, they might take the nap during the hottest part of the day, but on the whole there are things to do. And in fact, we've convinced ourselves as a species that there are so many things to do that we don't really have time to eat. We drive our car into a fast food place, we order, we jam it down our yob, we throw away the refuse, the paper, the packaging and we get on with it, going on with the next thing that we don't really have time to do anyway...

But here you are, you're sitting in front of the wall.

You are practising zazen as taught by, basically, Eihei Dogen zenji, who in the 1200s, already a monk in Japan, recognized that there might be something missing and started a trek that took him back to, took him in fact to China, tracing back the roots of practice.

And what did he see? What impressed him very very much was a tenzo, an elderly monk who was seeking out mushrooms to cook for the monks whose responsibility it was for him to feed.

Eating.

So each breath that you take, that goes in your body, nourishes you in a certain way, but you do need to eat, and here's a little verse:

When finished eating,
"May all beings
Accomplish all tasks
And fulfill the Teachings of the Buddhas."

So, let's see, if called upon to put it into a few words,
what are the "Teachings of the Buddhas"?
Wake up! Wake up to Reality!
See the stories for stories, and liberate all beings.

An impossible task, one might say,
but each and every one of us can do our part by noticing what's going on,
by practising in a formal environment,
as you're doing right now,
which in a way is like a laboratory.

You're sitting in your little test tube,
and you are the experiment.
You're sitting there,
and you've eaten,
you're finished eating
and now that energy that has been given to the bodymind,
and as it says in the chant before eating:

“This meal arises from the labour of all beings”

Well, that should be a clue right there
to the interrelatedness of everything.

So, through the labour of all beings,
you're sitting there in front of that wall,
and when you notice anything whatsoever,

it's an all-inclusive statement,

when you notice anything,
you've noticed a known.

You are really the Knowing.

Now, for a while,
and how long is a while?

Well, it varies.

For a while you have believed that somehow or other,
you're sitting up there behind the eyes,
wearing this outfit called a body.

Then we start to realize
that body and mind arise together,
you can't really take them apart.

Hmm.

We might have found that piece of information a little shocking when we first came upon it,
and you might notice if you read and watch and listen, that the word “bodymind” or
“mindbody” presents itself almost every day in various ways in various popular media, as
does the word “mindfulness”. 25 years ago, this was not the case, it was new and the word
“Zen” too was unfamiliar, to, I venture to say, most of the population, but now we hear it
everywhere, usually used inappropriately, but more and more, people are recognizing that
there's more to being a human being than the rules and regulations and belief systems that
people have grown up with, or are growing up with, lead them to believe.

So we sit and we practise,
we're practising, as I said,
zen as taught by Eihei Kigen Dogen zenji,
who could be said to be the person who established what we know as Soto Zen,
and if you read—and
I really encourage you to read and listen,
and sometimes to do both with the same text,
not necessarily concurrently—

your understanding of what you are doing
as you're sitting there,
being breathed in and out,
and as Knowing noticing knows or dharma,
or moments of experiencing,
and using that to practise the whole bodymind in the whole moment,
you recognize you understand more now than you did when you started.

You may say: "Oh yeah, well I read 'Cooking Zen' way back when..."
and then you may break through the wall of self-image's incredible laziness
and actually pick up a book,
flip a page,

and recognize: wow!

It's as if you had never read this before,
never come across it before,
because you actually understand a lot of what is being spoken of and written about.

Now, on the back page, the back cover, this is written:

Everyday zen, the essence of Dogen zenji's teaching, is a process of embodying realization in all our lives. Eating, walking, sitting, speaking, listening, cooking, are all opportunities to realize who we are beyond our assumptions and to actualize ourselves as that which embraces all beings and worlds. Dogen zenji's profound instruction on cooking and eating in the zen monastic training environment provide everyone everywhere with teachings on how to use ourselves and our daily lives to prepare and serve the feast of reality. Eihei Dogen (1200 - 1253) was the founder of Soto Zen, his teaching and practice survive today as the vigorous and subtle fountainhead of almost all western zen teachers and practice centers.

And here you sit, how did you get here?

There you sit!

Being breathed in and out.

And you, you've travelled quite a way to get here, to sit a retreat for the next few days, to really marinate yourself in this practice.

And you over there, with your ideas about how impossible all this is because actually, you really are, oh well you're old and you don't have as much energy as you used to do and it's just all too difficult.

Well, recognize that as a story and use it to add a more subtle flavour to your understanding.

Anything,

anything at all

that we come across is something that can be used
to open our understanding and realization
of our life as it is in this moment
even further.

Now with the Samu chant, we chant

May all beings be happy,
May they be peaceful,
May they be free.

And wouldn't it be wonderful if that indeed were the case?

Wouldn't there just be a world where... oh wait!...

Wait! Wait a minute!

What would the newspapers print?

What would the radio programs talk about?
What would the television news programs be like
if there weren't these centres of massacre, horror and devastation to talk about?

Well, perhaps they could talk about who won the regional cooking contest!
Because all beings have to eat.

Now in the Fushukuhampo, which is part of "Cooking Zen", Fushukuhampo: How to Use Your Bowls:

it was always a concern to Dogen that his teachings be understood not as something new imported from China, or as a particular school or sect, but rather as simply the continuation of what the Buddha had practised and realized, and that was the actual essence of practice, the True Dharma, or the Shobo.

So, the Shobo, or True Dharma is not something that you put on like a Sunday hat, that you put on when you put your hand on the front door of the monastery and walk in, not at all,

it is something that is practised by the whole bodymind,
the whole bodymind marinates in it and so each step that you take
wherever it is that you go is affected by what that bodymind,
and that bodymind,
and that bodymind,
and that bodymind learns as it sits,
cooking away in the formal practice of this moment.

So when you're eating, when you've finished eating, when you're thinking about running around on the Savannah to hunt down something that you can eat next, this little verse might come to mind:

When finished eating,
"May all beings
Accomplish all tasks
And fulfill the Teachings of the Buddhas."

And be sure to do the dishes.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 121: When Presenting the Teachings

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, December 17th, 2011

When presenting the Teachings,
"May all beings
Attain unobstructed eloquence
And display everywhere the essence of the Teachings."

We have ideas, each and every one of us, about what the Teachings are, and where they are presented, and these depend upon our understandings of and about what is taught. The Dharma, the Teachings of Reality, are about your life in this moment. The Dharma as we understand it and practise it has been taught for 2600 years and keeping the essence available to anyone who wants to practise is important.

Human beings get caught up in the views of self-image,
they get caught up in distraction,
love bells and whistles,
love being holier than thou,
love being on the top of the heap.

These are patterns,
no matter who is doing it and where,
it's not who they really are,
it's patterns that have been picked up by usual mind,
the mind that's not practising,
the mind that's not sitting itself down,
looking into this moment of experience
and this moment of experience
and this moment of experience.

Now, "eloquence", well, we all know what that is, don't we?
But unfortunately
we do that with a lot of words,
we go: "yeah, yeah, yeah, I know what that means"
and we actually are very unclear about what it means.

Eloquence means:
.speaking
.having the faculty of speech
.fluently persuasive and articulate
.effective in expressing meaning

So, throw away your ideas about flowery language,
throw away your ideas about complex patterns of expression,
because unless they are effective in expressing meaning,
they're just adornments, things to play around with, things to have fun with.

"When expressing the Teachings" it's nice to understand that the meaning of any communication is the result that it gets. That's true no matter what you are communicating about, so the clearer the better and that is why, although Teachings are presented in a formal setting such as the Hatto, with students facing the wall, they are also presented in each and every moment of a Teacher's life, or a monastic's life.

I want to be clear: I'm not saying that these are perfect people who do everything perfectly all the time, that's impossible, and we fall by the wayside sometimes because we're now living in a world where lying is an accepted part of the social fabric.

Think about it: they're everywhere:
If I drive that car... I'm not going to have all of my emotional needs satisfied.
If you wear your hair in such a way... you are not going to have a top hit.
If you wear those high heels... you're not going to become an object of desire for all the worthwhile and desirable men and women in the world.
It's not going to happen.

We're surrounded by lies. We have the Web, where people lie like crazy. They post stuff that's not about them, it's about some fictional character.
And we wonder why we're constantly disappointed.
Is it a lie to put up something, to say something, and to name it as being said by someone else? Yes, of course it is. You're trying to fool the public! You're trying to fool people you don't even know. Shame on you! Stop it.

So, you must practise in order to teach, in order to present the Teachings.
You have to be willing to lay yourself open,
to accept any questions that come up for students or for anyone,
a casual contact at the gym, someone asks a question, you answer it to the best of your ability because you are presenting the Teachings,
no matter what you are doing,
no matter where you are doing it.

It does sound terribly onerous, doesn't it?

But it is not!

Because when the contractions of self-image,
those beliefs we have about who we are and how the world is,
are seen and practised at that moment of clear seeing,
over time we cease to believe that chatter.

Now, we might have moments of embarrassment when we realize that in the past, before we
knew, before we practised thoroughly, we'd actually believed that bullshit, that's okay.
That's life, that's just what happens.

And remember: manure is needed for those flowers to grow.

Manure the root that nourishes your unfolding.

So it's not you, you're the clear seeing of that contraction into a self with a belief about who it
is and how the world is.

Interestingly, when we are told that we can practise with anything, we don't believe that.
Self-image sits back, twirls its little moustache and says: "Yeah, yeah, but I'll be the judge".

So when you notice that,
you practise there,
that is part of any...thing.
Anything is all-inclusive.

Any moment

of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling, breathing in and out,
anything
is a known.

It is, in Sanskrit, a dharma,
a moment of experience.

There are so many, they can't be counted.

You're familiar with this? [Sensei tries to snap her fingers] Oops! Wish I could snap my fingers
properly... [students laugh] Sixty mind moments—major!—in the snap of a finger. So the
moments, mind moments, dharma, they really are "numberless as the sands of the river
Ganges"... they can't be counted...

And you are the Knowing of any known whatsoever.

See how easy it is?

Knowing... knows.

At the moment of noticing anything at all,

feel the breath,

sit up straight,

feel the whole bodymind,

open around it,

however we want to code it in language...

you practise in that moment.

Over time, the tendency [Sensei rubs hands together] wears out,
the butt against the zafu grinding, [still rubbing hands]
those patterns to dust [grinding, then blowing the "dust" away]
liberates you from conditioned experiencing.

Do you want to be liberated from conditioned experiencing? [one student says: "Yes"]

There's one! [Sensei and students laugh]

So, that something that held its hand over your mouth:

feel the breath, sit up straight,

practise that moment of contraction into a sense of self

that had its story about what's appropriate and what isn't appropriate.
Because that's what happened.

So,

When presenting the Teachings,
"May all beings...

... now it doesn't say "may all Teachers, may all monks"
it doesn't say that,
not in this translation, not in other translations that I've read,
nowhere,
it says "all beings"
so we wish for everyone
that they could attain unobstructed capacity to be effective in expressing meaning.
Wouldn't that be great?
Wouldn't it make life a lot easier?

You ask someone if they like such and such, and they say yes or no.
You ask someone if they want to do such and such, and instead of saying: "well, I'd really love to" which really is the precursor to "no"
[Sensei laughs]... if people just said what they meant!
[Sensei and students laugh]

I for one at my advanced age really don't have time for all the lying, it's so transparent.
You don't need to, nobody needs to. The only thing I can think of where it might be useful
would be in solving crimes, but that's another story.

So please,

When presenting the Teachings,
"May all beings
Attain unobstructed eloquence
And display everywhere the essence of the Teachings."

So as we go about our daily business doing whatever it is we do, driving buses, speaking to people, guiding people, looking after other beings, express everywhere through how you say what you say and how you do what you do, the essence of the Teachings.

And have fun with it! Life is so much lighter when you don't have to carry around the weight of unnecessary stuff, especially when it's stuff that you have to keep track of so that you don't get tripped up by it... We've all been there...

I think I'll read the verse again:

When presenting the Teachings,
"May all beings
Attain unobstructed eloquence
And display everywhere the essence of the Teachings."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 122: When Leaving a Place

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, December 24th, 2011

G'day! [students laugh]

So, here we are, the capital of Canada, heart of the Ottawa Valley and it's COLD! So if you were outside and walking here, or bicycling—can you believe that? Bicycling here!—well the

little nose hairs would become icicles... But we're Canadians, aren't we, most of us? Canadians seem to pride themselves on being able to put up with the cold.

It's also surprising that you're here. Who would've thought? Go back in time 20 years... Do you think on a very cold morning, Christmas Eve day that you'd be sitting in a Zen monastery, looking at a white wall, looking into the process of perception and cognition of a bodymind, and 20, 30 years ago, we would not have known what the word "bodymind" or "mindbody" actually meant because it wasn't common parlance. But here you are, and disciplined: willing to learn.

When grumblings came up,
if they came up,
about what you'd rather do,
you saw it for what it was:
a thought.

One foot in front of the other
and here you are!

And you might have even remembered to feel the breath
and feel the whole bodymind.

Now this has been going on for 2600 years. Not here because probably 2600 years ago, this still might have been part of that inland sea, I'm not sure, but there wasn't much happening in this part of the world with human beings, this particular part of the world. In other parts of the world there were all sorts of trade routes with all sorts of exotic items being trekked back and forth across Asia from Africa, so things were quite busy.

2600 years ago, Gautama Siddhartha sat down and said: "What the... is going on? I'm going to find out."

He did all sorts of strange things, most of which we will probably never know exactly, until one day he said: "That's it, I'm not doing any more things, I'm just going to sit here". And then he discovered that he was not his thoughts and feelings, those were just things going on, and the process of mindfulness practice was transmitted from person to person.

1600 years ago, in northern India, the verses were written that we're looking at in "Every Breath You Take", a portion of the Flower Garland Sutra, the Avatamsaka Sutra.

Today's verse:

When leaving a place,
"May all beings
Penetrate Awakened experience
And move past the three conditional realms."

Eh? Hmm. Well.

Now, remember, we're talking 1600 years ago, we're talking about words and understandings of a practice that were written and spoken about in Pali, and in Sanskrit, and in Chinese, and in Japanese, and here we are today, and I'm reading you the English verse, which was translated basically by Anzan Hoshin roshi with a little help from me, and was translated by someone else, by many others, I'm sure. The one I'm going to recite today was from "Flower Ornament Scripture" as it was called, "A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra by Thomas Cleary".

When they leave a place,
"They should wish that all beings
Deeply enter enlightened knowledge
Forever leaving the Triple World."

Eh? [Sensei and students laugh]

Now it's really a wonder, isn't it, that anything got passed along that made any sort of sense because there are so many meanings that can be put to almost anything. So when we talk about the "three conditioned realms", and "the Triple World", what's being talked about is the triloka, three worlds.

Now, these were realms of existence as understood and expressed at least 1600 years ago. As we know, people will develop ways of expressing their understanding of what they uncover when they're actually sitting and then some will go on to paint a larger picture, which may be somewhat fanciful, but isn't that just what human beings do?

So the triloka, the Three Worlds: the bottom one, the lowest one was called the kamaloka, the sensuous world, the realm of desire is how we chose to express it when writing out these verses, and it is said to be, and was said to be, the least refined of these worlds. In the kamaloka, there is said to be eleven realms in which experience, pleasurable or not, is dominated by the five senses. Seven realms are favourable destinations and include the human realm and some realms are occupied by devas. Four are bad destinations, which include animal and hell realms, the lowest realms.

So if you're going to google "loka.com destinations", you don't want to fill out that application. Feel the breath, sit up straight and pass on that one.

The next one is the rupaloka, the shikikai, which is the realm of form as we translated it, or also known as the fine material world and here there are 16 realms inhabited by divas—devas! Devas, sorry! [Sensei and students laugh] who experience extremely refined degrees of mental pleasure. These realms are accessible to those who have attained some level of dhyana. Aha! Mark that word, highlight it. Dhyana. It's a key... manage to temporarily suppress hatred and ill will—phonies—said to possess refined bodies of pure light. The highest of these realms in the rupaloka, the pure abodes, are accessible only to those who have attained non-returning, the third stage of awakening. This, and the immaterial world, rupaloka, make up heavens or sada.

And number three, arupaloka, which is the highest realm, the immaterial world, or as we translated it, the realm of nothingness, there are four realms within this, accessible to those who pass away while meditating in the formless dhyana. There's that word again: dhyana.

"Dhyana" is an interesting word because it can refer either to meditation or meditative states and in early texts, it was spoken of as a state of full body awareness in which mind becomes very powerful and still but not frozen. So in a way they're still talking of a separation, but let's put that aside and say: okay, dhyana, sitting, feeling the breath, sitting up straight, awareness of the whole bodymind. This, dhyana, the word, in Sanskrit, travelled to China, where it became "Chan" which in turn became "Zen".

So, what you're doing, sitting up straight, feeling the breath, feeling the whole bodymind, is something that's been done basically for 2600 years, but there have been lots of sidebars because we human beings want to get stuff. So, if we can "attain", we want to attain, we want to move from the kamaloka to the rupaloka, then to the highest realm, so things were devised, ways of speaking were devised, to explain to people what was going on in these different realms and how they could get there.

Now, at a certain point in history, whenever that may have been, "dhyana in Theravadin literature is starting to mean an abiding in which the mind becomes fully immersed or absorbed in the chosen object of attention.

Now of course you have immediately recognized that that is not this practice.

When we notice that we were absorbed in an object of attention, whatever it might be,

that moment of clear seeing is the exact moment when we practise.

So we can see how cosmologies start, and of course we have no, I have no reams and reams of paper with things written on them that I can track down and say: "Hmm, this is where it

started, this is the guy who came up with this particular story". Nobody has that. What we have is understandings, way of expressing that change over the years. In our own experience, when we think about that 20 or 30 or 40 years ago, we go: well, 20, or 30, or 40 years ago, there was no talk about—at least in the Ottawa Valley among any of the people that I knew—of meditation or meditating or mindfulness. But hey, now, it's everywhere! Really interesting.

Certain people in the medical community are saying that certain ills are best treated by, as a colleague said to me: just getting on with it. So that sounds a bit like what happens when you're practising. Thoughts and feelings come up—don't even bother labelling them because the labelling of them often produces effects in the bodymind that perpetuate whatever that unease, that anxiety or that stress was.

The moment you notice whatever it is:
feel the breath,
sit up straight,
actually practise in that moment.

So, over 2600 years,
an approach, a way of looking into what it means to be a human being
has been passed from Teacher to student,
Teacher to student as students become Teachers,
until here we sit with a very radical approach to practice
without frills,
without cosmologies.
There you sit,
in this moment.

Feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
sit up straight.

And that's what we're doing, however, there are many descriptions and it's fortunate that there are and it's interesting because if we're a person who likes to understand what it is that we're doing, we want to look into the roots of it, we want to look into different facets of what it is that's going on, we start to discover how things change, how meanings change.

When we hear someone say: "Well, you Buddhists, you believe in reincarnation don't you?"
Well, should that happen to you, a good response can be:

"Could you tell me more of what you're talking about?" because you might quickly discover it's all about what they're talking about, that's it, so there's really no need for you to enter into any discussions about anything.

Smile and get on with it.

Now there are lots of books around, one of which I did read to get a nice description from one point of view about Buddhist cosmology. It's called "Thirty-One Planes of Existence" edited by John T. Bullett and it was part of a series: "Access to Insight".

Quote:

In Buddhist cosmology, there is no eternal heaven and hell. Born into a particular realm according to past kamma, and at the moment of death, when kammic force is worn out, they die, taking rebirth elsewhere, according to their kamma, and so the wearisome cycle continues.

These cosmologies started a long time ago, some say the Buddha taught them, and we don't really know that because he didn't write anything down, and apparently no one wrote anything down until some 200 years later. So there were lots of little brains and fingers cooking the words, cooking the understanding before it was put on a plate for us, so we don't

really know what was said at the time.

But the idea of kamma was that each action has consequences extending beyond our present life. Act in skillful ways and there will be a favourable rebirth. Act in unwholesome, unskillful ways and there will be an unpleasant rebirth. One wanders through samsara, the round of birth and death, propelled from one birth to the next by the quality of our choices and our actions.

So it's not a big stretch of the imagination that perhaps this approach or cosmology really did get people to think a little bit about what it was that they were doing because who wants to come back in a hell realm, as it were?

Now, I very carefully want to say; I am not saying that inherent in the practice that we do there is the idea that if you do your practice, if you don't act out your states, there will be a nice rebirth for you. No. I'm not saying that at all. I'm introducing to those of you who may not have spent time on their own looking into the different aspects, the different ways of presenting the understanding of the world and human beings' place in it, an entry point.

So if you choose, you will find there are all sorts of ways that you can look into historical background, you can look into how stories of beliefs evolve, and you can have fun with it.

I'll go out on a limb and say: just don't believe it to be the truth, it's fanciful.

If you find yourself sitting on the cushion, sitting on the zafu
wondering if there is reincarnation for you,
recognize: that's a thought.
That's what you have to know,
you've recognized a thought.
That is a dharma,
a moment of experience.

Wow!

Feel the breath,
sit up straight.

That's what you do when you notice anything at all.

Now "dharma", more language, forgive me those of you who have heard this before, dharma in Japanese is "ho". So when you see pictures and cards, and when you hear the music, and when there's Santa going: "Ho ho ho!"...

Dharma
Dharma
Dharma

Moment of experience
Moment of experience
Moment of experience

with a big R:

Teachings of Reality
Teachings of Reality
Teachings of Reality

HO HO HO!

Have a good time!

Thank you very much for listening. Thank you very much for showing up. I was surprised because really I thought there would only be the monks and a couple of formal students here. Yeah! Happy Holidays!

[laughter]

Every Breath You Take 123: Entering a Bath

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, December 31st, 2011

I typed "Japanese bathing monkeys" into Google, just before I came to the Hatto because something I found incredibly pleasurable, numerous times is to look at these guys and gals bathing in hot springs in Japan.

And it is snowy out here today...

Unfortunately, we don't have monkeys

and we don't have a hot spring,

but in the summertime we do have

a pool, two pools, and

we have a waterfall, and

in the afternoons in particular,

you can see birds,

crows, pigeons, grackles, sparrows, chickadees, all taking their turn to bathe in the water.

At nighttime, oh anywhere between say nine and three,

you might see raccoons bathing in the pool.

So bathing is something that not only human beings like to do,
but primates, orangutans in particular, love to bathe.

I saw one who even learned to use a washcloth,

wringing it out and patting away at her face. [students laugh]

So today's verse is about guess what?

Entering a bath.

Entering a bath,

"May all beings

Enter the knowing which knows the nature of all knowns,
throughout the three measures of time."

Now, is that not just what you are doing right now?

You're bathing in the Ocean of Reality,
you're uncovering the fact that you are the Knowing
which,

from time to time,

knows the nature of all knowns,

but

over time,

with continuous practice,

you will know

"the nature of all knowns, throughout the three measures of time",
the past, the present, the future.

"Entering a bath..."

Now very seldom, in my experience, do we actually think about people say, 2600 years ago having a bath, taking a bath, which of course was quite different from the way we do it. They didn't walk into, for example, that often advertised bath for the elderly with the little door on it. [laughter] You open the door, you step in, and you don't step, of course, into the water because there's no water, how could there be? Because if there were water in the bath, you would open the door and all the water would come out and your wrinkled, boney sack would go rolling across the bathroom floor. [lots of laughter] You have to enter, sit, and then endure as the bath fills, but that's an aside, that's a sidebar. [more laughing]

But, say, 2600 years ago, what was up with this bath and this bathing?

Did people bathe?

Well of course they did.

Of course!

So the Buddha and his rag tag bunch hit the road eventually and they were travelling and

there are little stories about the Buddha seeing one of the home-leavers lying in a pool of his own puke, and

he had to say to the people around: "Like, help him! He's obviously sick!"

So out of that type of interaction came the Vinaya and other rules for monasticism such as :
"I vow to care for the ill."

So a lot of the rules of deportment were for very practical reasons.

At that time, bathing, as they were on the move,

they might bathe in rivers and so on,

so there were rules: don't bathe upstream from the elders, and don't pee in the stream upstream from the other people.

So very practical things.

And then of course these became embroidered as the rituals of bathing started to take over.

There were rules as to what people could rub themselves with to clean.

You weren't allowed to use certain sorts of sticks that were carved and incised that must have felt quite nice.

They weren't allowed to rub up against trees,

they weren't allowed to rub up against each other!

[Sensei and students laugh]

But they could use their hands to help others bathe the back and so forth, with permission of the others.

So we can see how rules developed, understandings developed and so on.

Now, at that time, like 2000 years ago, there were records in the Vinaya, which are the rules of deportment, there were records of things called "hot air baths", quite sophisticated.

They would be built over an elevated basement faced with brick and there would be stone stairs from there up to wooden structures and there would be a fireplace and seats all around,

so people could go in there and

have a good sweat,

then they would get shampooed down,

then there would be a bathing pool.

Apparently the book that I was reading, the sourcebook, was written in 1903, which again is like a long time ago, really, 1903... but there were still some of these bathing facilities in fairly good order, not for use but to have a look at.

Another, something that's called the Dekanekaya, was an open air bathing tank, flights of stairs leading down to it, which were carved and decorated.

So 2000 years ago bathing was something that apparently people enjoyed doing and went to a great deal of trouble to arrange facilities for.

Now, this was not just in India,

but before that in and around that time,

the Romans were busy building bath houses,

building aqueducts and so on,

so human beings and their search for water,
which not only was for drinking
but for cleansing the body,
was pretty well universal.
We just don't tend to think about it as we step into our showers.

The verse, again, is a reminder that when one is entering a bath, (and these verses were written 1600 years ago, so the bath being entered at that time most likely was a public bath), the thought was raised:

"May all beings
Enter the knowing which knows the nature of all knowns,
throughout the three measures of time."

So it's a call for practising mindfulness and
when you are entering the bath,
you
can raise it
as well.

Now, trends and understandings and so forth travel, they do now and they did then. They did 2000 years ago, 1600 years ago...
The practice, the bathing practice,
the importance of bathing and so on
seems to have travelled from India into China, and
Buddhists were responsible for taking many of the understandings of the bath, cleansing, and its importance into China.

There is another text written about Chinese Buddhism (and as people are prone to like to have numbers of things, and to like to have facts,) in this text it said that the Buddha said there are seven things that should be provided in a bath house. In Chinese monasteries, there was an office of Bath Master responsible for the bath house.

The seven things it is said the Buddha said should be provided were:

- .fuel
- .pure water
- .bean pod soap
- .ointment for massage
- .ashes for body powder
- .willow twigs for toothbrushes

and

- .underwear.

After bathing, it was said the monks were able to cure themselves of seven kinds of sickness, and the donors of bathhouse supplies would accrue seven kinds of meritorious karma.

In China, the monks and the monasteries opened their bathhouses to the general public, taking upon themselves the promotion of public health as one of their duties. That approach seems to have travelled to Japan where in the 1200s, along major roads, one might have found public baths which were built by monks in association with monasteries and which anyone could use, commoners, samurai, nobles, men,

women,
children,
anyone living in the area, and
as these bath houses were along major roads,
any itinerant travellers who were providing snake oil and
mats and
sake,
entertainment for the townspeople.

So, the travelling of understandings reaches down to us today and there is a Verse of the Bath, written by Joshu Dainen zenji and Anzan Hoshin roshi, to replace more awkward traditional verses:

As we bathe this body in the midst of all beings,
May we purify bodymind within and without.

So when one does take vows as a monk,
there is something called the "Saijo-shingi; The Department of Radiance",
which is a description of the rules of deportment for monastics,
and we won't go into the details of it right now,
we'll save it as a surprise for those who may take that route... [laughter]
no, I'm just kidding but
things are recommended
like full bathing once a day,
except during sesshin when the number of people makes it impossible,
and as we know,
in Japan in the public bath houses,
you do not go directly into the bath because that would be bathing in dirty water.
You have a shower first,
often with a hand held shower device,
you sit on a little stool,
you soap yourself up,
you rinse yourself off and
then you step into the hot soaking tub and
...think of the monkeys.

During a soaking bath, there are descriptions of how best to carry this out and it's based in being mindful of what you are doing, which is always a good thing. People are always encouraged to have their shower first, and then when a tub is available to them to fill it up because soaking is a nice thing to do, and following tradition, especially on days with a four and a nine in them because those four and nine days in old times in the monasteries was when the monks would get all cleaned up and do their shaving and so forth.

So, a four or a nine comes up, you can perhaps think of that, take a nice bath, fill up that bathtub, shower first. As you step into it and sit in seiza, you can feel the difference in temperature, you can feel the relaxation that the hot water provides. Then, after a few moments in seiza, you can stretch out, being careful not to splash water around outside of the tub. When it's time to get up, you go back into seiza, let the water start to drain out, towel yourself down when the water's all gone, towel your feet, drying them thoroughly, and leave the bathroom in good order, all the while thinking about

... all beings
Enter the knowing which knows the nature of all knows,
throughout the three measures of time."

Now bathing can be just about washing dirt off, or it can and has been regarded as a ritual purification with water. These things are both perfectly acceptable.

Bathing cleanses the body,
relaxes the body, refreshes,
and before receiving empowerments and taking vows,
the washing of the bodymind,
the washing of the feet
can help to remind students of what it is that they are doing,
they are washing their understanding,
they are washing the bodymind,
they are being given
and accepting vows
which will enable them to practise
the Practice of Purification
more thoroughly,
the Practice of Realization
more thoroughly,
the cleansing of contractions
that can poison the experience of this moment.

So, please, have fun next time you come in contact with water, be it a shower or a bath, use it to refresh your mindfulness, even though there's no zafu present... and, look up the monkeys.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 124: While Washing the Body

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, January 7th, 2012

There may have been murmurings
from those contractions
into a sense of self
when you awoke this morning....
Murmurings commenting on
what you could and couldn't do,
what you are capable of,
what you are not capable of,
but regardless,
it's self-evident:
you saw them,
you felt the breath,
one foot in front of the other.

You may have walked to the washroom,
you may have washed your hands and face,
you may have had a shower.
One foot in front of the other
through that torrent,
perhaps in some cases, in some instances,
that waterfall
of reasons why all of this
is just impossible.

But here you sit, as the Roshi has said, with your mind running down the wall,
but here you sit with the flesh and the muscles and the blood
coursing over that bony structure
coursing over that skeleton
falling into gravity.
You're sitting up straight and you're feeling the breath,

you're noticing those moments of waking up
from the distraction of a thought
from comments about a feeling...
You're feeling the breath,
you're sitting up straight,
you're opening the peripheral vision,
practising the whole bodymind
in THIS moment.

And here, at Dainen-ji,
you have all manner of things to help you look into how you are,
how this bodymind which may be called:
Senbo or Endai or the Chiden or Ryoshin or Hanna or Jack or Doug
and please,
if something comes up saying:
"How come my name wasn't mentioned?"
recognize that contraction into a sense of a self with a little story:
feel the breath, sit up straight,
open the eye gaze.

Welcome to this moment.

You have forms that help you look into this moment of experience.
Forms are tools,
they are ways of comporting the bodymind in certain situations.
They include verses that can be recited,
either out loud or just to yourself in certain situations.

One of these verses is:

While washing the body,
"May all beings
Purify body and mind,
Inside and out."

Wouldn't that be wonderful?
Wouldn't that be wonderful
if everyone were practising?
If everyone in the whole world were noticing that contraction into a sense of self with a story
about how it is and about how the world is?

So eventually that sense of self
and everything else being other to it
could be just washed away completely,
could be just ground up
in this giant recycling machine
that we call the Universe...

But that's not going to happen.
At least not in my lifetime,
probably not in yours either,
but, wouldn't it be nice?
Since we have imagination, why not use it?

Now, the verse from the The Practice of Purity, the one we are studying, the one I just quoted,
which I'll quote again:

While washing the body,
"May all beings

Purify body and mind,
Inside and out."

This verse, which was written around 1600 years ago, formed the base of the Soto Mokoyoku No Ge, which is:

As we bathe this body
In the midst of all beings,
May we purify bodymind
Within and without.

There's another verse, The Verse of Cleansing:

As we cleanse with this water,
May all beings
Enter the nature of equanimity,
And realize purity.

Now, as I was coming up the stairs, it occurred to me that last week I may have made an attribution and not quoted the correct verse. I may have quoted another verse as Joshu Dainen's verse, but Joshu Dainen's verse is this:

Attention, attention.
All is always stainless,
each form is always formless.
Aligning ourselves with the Way,
each dharma is always Buddhadharma.

Now,
Attention! Attention!
Each dharma,
each moment of experience that is known by Knowing
is Buddhadharma.

You're waking up to that moment of experiencing
and using that opportunity
to feel the breath,
to sit up straight,
to open the eye gaze.

You're using that moment of clear seeing,
you are practising that moment of clear seeing,
and of course when we practise anything,
we get better at it,
the more we practise anything,
the better we get at it,
including waking up,
including clear seeing.

So bodyminds...
bodyminds enjoy being washed,
and we are very fortunate in that
in order to accomplish this washing,
basically what we have to do is
walk into the washroom and turn a tap.

Well it wasn't like that when I was a girl... Some 60 years ago in a region not very far from here, there was no running water in the house. So of course, that meant that if nature called

in the middle of the night, it involved stomping out through crusty snow into a very cold area where one did what was necessary. And then for the washing after, the washing the hands, back to the house, ankles red from boots that had filled with snow, cracking the ice on a wash basin to wash hands.

Now, where did that water in the wash basin come from? Well guess what? I'm going to tell you.

What happened was this:
a bucket, a galvanized bucket,
I am ten, eleven years old,
with a galvanized bucket in the middle of the winter,
down to the river,
which had quite a current.

Now, there were several other houses in that area, so there was a communal hole in the ice, and if the hole had frozen over, a neighbour would have left an axe beside it.

So, tromp, tromp, tromp out on the icy covering for the river,
bang, bang, bang:
cracking the ice,
putting the bucket through the hole in the ice,
and then the wonderful shock as your arm almost got ripped from its socket
as the current of the water filled the bucket.

It was all very very exciting!

Then, the bucket of water back to the house:
trudge, trudge, trudge...
on top of the wood stove in a basin,
and then came washing.

First the hair, then the face, then the body, then some bits of clothing.
We were very, very economical in our approach to the use of that water.

But enough of that, enough of that, things were worse and they are worse in lots of places in the world right now.

However, not for us,
and because of that,
because things are so easy on the whole,
that's right, I said "easy",
now don't you feel ashamed for saying
"it's all so difficult"?

It's so difficult getting out of bed,
it's so difficult walking down the stairs,
it's so difficult doing these dishes...

Things are easy:
walk into the washroom, turn on the tap,
as much (most of the time) hot water,
water to your liking
as you need!

So, because of that, we tend not to pay too much attention
to what's going on around us,
but because we're practising,
we have the use of these forms,
we have the use of these verses
to help remind us that
in this moment,

well, for one thing:
we are not
the centre of the universe.

We never were, but it's so interesting how a contraction into a sense of self really believes that it is the centre of the universe, it's the best thing that has ever happened, and it's also the worst that has ever happened, and that can happen almost simultaneously, but until we start to take the time to pay attention to our life as it happens, wrapped around the breath of this moment, we tend not to notice the obvious.

Now part of sitting practice,
part of long days when you're doing
retreats or Dharma Assemblies,
or sesshin or O-sesshin
is that the body goes through natural cycles of fatigue,
and let's face it,
this whole body activity,
when it starts at 4:30 in the morning
and ends at 9:30 at night,
can make the bodymind a little tired.
So if you find that you are tired,
or you're just not with it,
or you're dozing off,
you can use the fact that you can walk into a washroom,
you can turn on a tap and water will come running out of it,
to help revive yourself.

Now there actually are instructions about, and recommendations about a sequence you can follow for helping wake up a bit:

Put a small amount of cold water in a sink or basin.
Scoop up the water with both hands and rinse in sequence:
the forehead,
the eyebrows,
the eyes,
the nose,
the nostrils,
the chin,
and behind the ears.
Pick up a little more cold water and slap both cheeks simultaneously.
[the Sensei vigorously slaps both cheeks a few times]
It will help wake you up!

Now, that doesn't mean that you're going to stay alert and rested, the way you were after that moment of going...
[Sensei slaps cheeks again a few more times]
....but it can help.

So, the verse again:

While washing the body,
"May all beings
Purify body and mind,
Inside and out."

Now, Anzan Hoshin roshi has written:

True purification involves not merely washing the bodymind with water, but with washing ki with kokyo, washing the student with the Teacher, washing space with space.

Now of course this will mean different things to different students, depending upon how their practice is in the moment. People have been writing about these aspects of practice for a long time. Dogen zenji was writing about it in the 1200s and in the Senjo chapter of the Shobogenzo, Dogen zenji teaches that:

Originally, neither water nor body is pure or impure. All things are suchness, as well, neither water nor body is originally moving nor immobile. All things, including the Teachings of Awake Awareness are thus. Water, therefore, cannot purify bodymind. Maintaining the Teachings and acting aligned with the dignity of the Shingi purifies bodymind. Thus, the body and mind of the Buddha and Dharma Ancestors is transmitted as this very body and mind, and through this we are actually able to see and hear the Teachings of the Buddhas and Ancestors. This purification is the actualization of measureless merit. The right time to truly practise the dignity of this body and mind is the moment when all of the timeless facets of complete activity exert themselves, thus, the essential practice of bodymind exerts itself.

Anzan roshi:

When we bathe in the midst of this moment, realizing that that which lives as us lives as all beings, we are always in the midst of all beings, and in the midst of that in which all beings and worlds arise.

I'll repeat Joshu Dainen's verse again:

Attention, attention.
All is always stainless,
Each form is always formless.
Aligning ourselves with the Way,
each dharma is always Buddhadharma.

And it's that simple.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 125: In the Heat of the Day

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, January 21st, 2012

In the heat of the day,
"May all beings
Cast away countless afflictions,
Allowing them all to end."

In the heat of the day... well... [Sensei and students laugh a little]

I'm sure you all have a memory of what it was like to be outside just a few minutes ago when we experienced cold, very cold, and in this room sit people who are entering into their third decade of life on this planet and everything in between up until entering into the eighth decade, so between the bunch of us we've experienced all sorts of conditions.

Now, self-image,
that contraction into a sense of a self with stories,
many stories about how it is and how the world is,
likes to think that its story is unique,
that its story is different from everyone else's story.

Now, the details as to time and place
and who was involved
and what you look like
when you look in the mirror
and see in photographs
or on a piece of film,
now all of those things might be slightly different...

but basically,
basically,
they're pretty much all the same,
and that can be deflating for self-image to recognize
that no matter what the story is that's getting in its way,
it's not unique.

Self-image likes to believe that
it is having the most difficult time of all with practice,
everyone else in the room is just sailing along, tickety boo,
it however,
because of its circumstance is having the worst possible time,
after all, everything rests on its shoulder,
it has to do everything for everybody else,
it actually is the smartest,
but no one's really recognized that,
everyone else is so fracking stupid they can't see the merit,
the stellar qualities,
the absolute perfection of
ME.

ME ME ME ME ME ME ME ME ME ME

That's what causes the obstructions,
the afflictions that crop up
which,
when we allow attention to fall into them,
get in our way,
causing endless problems.

You know, if you start to look into the content,
not to analyze
but just to jot down in a repertorial way
the content of some of those stories that afflict you,
you might just surprise yourself at how quickly bored you'll get
because the stories really are not very interesting
and they're based in
basic dissatisfaction,
that's the story,
that's the main story:
dukkha
bad space
basic unsatisfactoriness.

“Well, everything's great, it really is, I'm really getting it, yeah, but maybe if my hair were a different colour, maybe then things would fall into place even better, yeah that's it! That's what I'll do!”

“Everything's great, I'm really having a nice time today practising, everything's really open, it's very, very open—“ and the gong goes and we realize we haven't actually practised because attention has become so interested in the attainment of this marvellous openness that there has been no attention left, as it were, to notice what's actually going on.

So really,
we were sitting there fantasizing,
afflicting ourselves
with this story of something that we had attained,
but now we've lost...

and it's all such bullshit.

Thoughts are thoughts,
doesn't matter what the content is,
the moment you notice it:

feel the breath,
sit up straight

THAT's all you have to do,
and that's a rather long way of saying:
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind in the whole moment,
which happens in a snap,
that's what you are building on.

So, whether the weather is cold or hot,
whether it's freezing
or you're melting because of the heat
you can always do this very simple practice.

What is that?
Who's having this thought?

“Yeah, it's easy for you to say it's simple....”

Anyone in here having such a thought [twitters from students] Oh, it must be left over from years before...

Wait, wait a minute! I used to do that! I used to get terribly reactive when I used to hear the Roshi say: “this easy and joyful practice”... expletive deleted...

But, we're learning to see how these things happen,
how any movement,
anything that comes in contact with the bodymind,
including the bodymind itself
produces an effect.

Certain situations may become routine
because we become so used to the effect that they produce.

Practice is about waking up to this moment,
and you practise that
by recognizing a moment of waking up
from anything
a thought
a feeling

a colour
a sound
form,
seeing a portion of reality:
practise that moment of clear seeing,
and
you'll have more of them.

So, in the heat of the day,
in the cold of the day,
in the heat of contraction,
in the coolness of opening,
you can practise,
and through that practice
obstructions,
the things that get in our way,
the things that seem to wrap around us like seaweed,
can open
and fall away

and once they fall away completely,
they don't come back.

So, in "The Practice of Purity" it says:

In the heat of the day,
"May all beings
Cast away countless afflictions,
Allowing them all to end."

As I've said before,
it would be great if every being practised,
there would be an end to all kinds of,
at the very mildest,
unseemly acts,
and there would be a lot more room for
everything and everybody
to unfold.

But that's not going to happen,
but each one of you can notice
and practise,
that's what you're learning to do...

And have fun with it!

Thank you for showing up today.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 126: After the Heat when the Cool Comes

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, February 4th, 2012

With EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE
bodymind is letting you know
you're alive!
in this moment,
so you can practise,

no matter what's going on,
no matter how the temperature is,
whether it's hot,
whether it's cold,

whether you're feeling heat
or whether you're feeling cool,

whether you're feeling tired,
whether you're feeling sore...

All of these things are moments of experience,
the moment you notice anything about experience,
about experiencing,

recognize:

you're the Knowing of that,
you have the capacity to

feel the breath
to feel the whole bodymind in the moment

and through the act of doing that,
you are wearing away habitual patterns and tendencies
you are wearing away the kleshas
of passion, aggression, and stupidity.

The process of being a human being is the same for all human beings,
that's why what was written 1600 years ago is still pertinent,
is still very much to the point.

The verse:

After the heat when the cool comes,
"May all beings
Experience completely Reality
And their heat be cooled."

So are we talking about the heat of the weather?
Are we talking about the heat that is generated when attention folds into
some story about what's wrong,
and as that attention feeds the story of self-image,
there are effects in the bodymind that can be felt,
we can heat up
and often when states such as anger have been fed
they can seem to be
very hot
very dangerous...

we can be reminded that the flames of
passion, aggression, and stupidity
can be worn out.

So, a little warning here:

when you notice that you are in a state
of any sort, really,
it's the wrong time to make any sort of important decision.

Interestingly enough, in our own experience,
when we have anger,
when we have anxiety,

when we have any of the labels that we like to apply to this amalgam of sensations that bodymind is feeling,
well that's when we really want to say something to somebody,
we feel compelled...

So do your best:
feel the breath,
feel the feet,
feel the bodymind,
and stuff it!

Bite your tongue if you have to,
sit on your hands if you have to,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
and wait for that passion,
wait for that state to pass before making any decision,
before saying or doing anything.

What you're actually doing is recognizing that flame of burning
passion, aggression, and stupidity,
and by feeling the breath,
feeling the whole bodymind,
you are jumping into that Ocean of Reality,
you're saying:
that's not the only thing that's going on.

There's seeing, and hearing, and tasting, and touching, and feeling, and smelling...
there's the objects of the senses that are seen and heard,
and tasted and touched and felt,
so this state that self-image is firmly convinced of,
is NOT the only thing going on,
and you have the choice,
you can feel the breath,
you can feel the whole bodymind.

NOW, self-image,
that contraction into a sense of self
often will pull out things from years ago:
slights and insults and little feelings and instances
that it's completely convinced of,
and throw them onto that pyre
so that we can get a really good blaze going...

But recognize that those too
are moments of experience,
those too are dharma,

so they're just there.

So take a big chance:
feel that breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
jump into the Ocean of Reality,
[Sensei hisses and students laugh]

...let it burn out...

The verse again:

After the heat when the cool comes,

"May all beings
Experience completely Reality
And their heat be cooled."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 127: When Reciting the Discourses

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, February 18th, 2012

Well you rode here on the breath,
oh
maybe your feet might have been dragging a little bit...
maybe self-image was hanging around your neck like a stinking albatross
or maybe
you noticed breathing in and out
and you noticed the party that
was the senses at play!

Regardless, here you are,
you released whatever obstructions arose,
maybe not wanting to
but isn't that just what self-image does?
It's a real party pooper. [laughter]

No matter how well things are going,
there may be an observation:

"Oh, things are going well!"

And then...
contraction starts:

"But, I know that's just the surface, and I know that this old pattern is lurking there, I can feel it still..."

And guess what?
If we feed attention into it,
there you'll be—
party shut down
only one thing going on:
the grumbling
the mumbling
the bitching
the whining
of the prick that is
self-image.

Don't believe any of it, okay?
It can be there, you can hear the content, it doesn't matter.

Feel the breath and sit up straight,
open to everything else that is going on,
everything else that is the Reality of the moment,
which is perceived by the bodymind,
which is wrapped around the breath,
which is known by you
who are the Knowing of all those knows.

Today's verse:

When reciting the Discourses,
"May all beings
Be aligned with the Teachings of the Buddhas,
Through unwavering mindfulness."

When reciting the Discourses,
"May all beings
Be aligned with the Teachings of the Buddhas,
Through unwavering mindfulness."

Well.

As you go about your day,
you'll notice things,
you'll read things,
you'll see things,
and you can use your imagination,
nowhere in practice does it say that you should not use your imagination...

...but just imagine when you notice something
what it would be like if everyone,
if all beings were unwavering in mindfulness?

This would mean of course that the actions that get played out
and then get seen,
get written about,
get filmed,
get broadcast,
get talked about,
wouldn't be happening.

There wouldn't be people getting into arguments on the corner,
there wouldn't be people begging and lying,
begging "to get a cup of coffee",
but we know what they're really going to do with the money..
[Sensei and students laugh]

It's such an everyday occurrence, this lying,
it's around us everywhere
it's like a fungus,
we don't even notice.

Advertising lies,
politicians lie...
bus schedules lie! [more laughter]

But imagine, just imagine what it would be like,
if "all beings were unwavering in mindfulness"...

Oh someone might be standing in the grocery line
and there might be a little old lady dithering
trying to get that last penny out of the little tiny change purse,
and the person behind them might be seething,
the person behind them might want to reach out and say:
"Here, I'll pay for that!"

[Sensei laughs]

...but they wouldn't do it.
They could see what's going on.

We can see when energy rises
and attention starts to focus on one thing,
and we've learned the consequences if that's allowed to play out,
or if we haven't really allowed it to play out
in the extreme fashion that we might fancy playing it out—
we know how destructive it can actually be.

So we feel the breath
feel the grocery cart handle in our hands,
feel our feet sweating in our winter boots because it's a little warm today
and we feel into that moment of experiencing.

And if everyone did that,
just imagine the difference in the world...

For one thing, we might not be standing in a grocery store lineup as we know it today,
where there's so much waste,
not just of the edible products,
but the packaging,
the packaging, folks...

It might be all different.
If we looked at situations that arise every day
with the mind of practice,
the world would be a radically different place.

Now, "alignment"... it says here in the third line:
"be aligned with the Teachings of the Buddhas".

Now what exactly does that mean?

Well, we've got texts,
we have CDs,
we have digital files,
we have a mass, a wealth of information about
practice as we practice it here,
about the history of practice,
that we can read or listen to any time we want to.

We don't have to trek miles to hear someone that we've heard about speak,
we can if we want to,
but we don't have to
to get the information.

Now bear in mind as well,
even if we were living in the time of Gautama Siddhartha,
chances are we may not, like most, have met him,
we may not, as most, have put our ass down on some kushu grass
and actually sat...
because hey,
it's easier to believe something, isn't it?

It's easier, we believe,
when something is transformed into a
Buddha
and it sits on a shelf,
or it sits on our coffee table,
that it is an object representative of a supreme being
and we can just,
oh light a few sticks of incense,

bob up and down a bit
and put all of our troubles in front of this representation
of some sort of magical reality.

That's easy.

But, to get up in the morning when it's still dark,
to put your little feet on the floor,
in spite of the grumbling that may go on,
to pitty pat eventually down to the Hatto,
or up to the Hatto,
or to the front door and put your boots on and out to the car,
that is difficult because it's real.

But you do it and with each step,
you feel the breath,
you feel the bones of the living bodymind,
you feel
the heat
the cold
the breath moving in and out,
you see
the colours
the forms,
you hear
the sounds,
you feel
the clothes on your body,
you feel
the temperature of the air...

It's a party when you're paying attention!
Because no matter what's going on,
it's interesting.
It ceases to be interesting
when self-image contracts into a sense of self
that's busy judging:

“Well, this is okay, but uh, the last time I sat a retreat by 4:30 in the afternoon, my knees
were a wreck...”

...and we don't recognize
that what we're actually doing
is creating conditions
that may very well help that “wreckage of the knees”
present itself.
The bodymind is incredibly intelligent.

But, when you feel the breath when you notice that grumbling,
you feel the whole bodymind,
you're actually
practising in that moment,
you're actually
“aligned with the Teaching of the Buddhas”,
you're actually
“unwavering in mindfulness”
in that moment
and what a difference it would make

if everyone did that.

Don't hold your breath
waiting for everyone else to do it.

It wouldn't be very successful anyway
because even though there have been times in our life
when we might have thought for a moment:
"I'm going to hold my breath until I die, then they'll be sorry!"
[laughter]

The bodymind just doesn't... [laughter] it just doesn't.
The bodymind literally has a mind of its own,
it doesn't care, really—
although it will be informed by
the thoughts of self-image—
it doesn't care about that kind of content.

Oh, it can be made to feel really bad,
literally,
as the biochemistry goes whipping through the bodymind,
having an impact on the chest,
tightening the muscles,
bending the head forward,
narrowing the vision so it's closing time, folks, for the party...

Feel the breath
when you notice that.

I mean really feel it.

Feel
those over 200 bones in the bodymind,
feel
the air on your skin
feel
the clothes on your skin
see the seeing
hear the hearing
practise
mindfulness in this moment

and you're the only one who can do it...

...but wouldn't it be nice? Oh well, oh well.

The verse again:

When reciting the Discourses,
"May all beings
Be aligned with the Teachings of the Buddhas,
Through unwavering mindfulness."

Thank you for listening.

Enjoy the party!

Every Breath You Take 128: If They Should Meet a Buddha

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, March 3rd, 2012

You stepped through whatever entanglements and obstructions might have arisen on the way to arriving at that seat.

You felt the breath,
you felt the whole bodymind,
you practised.
You opened the front door
you walked in
walked up the stairs
feeling the breath
in every moment
feeling the whole bodymind
in every moment
and
here you are listening to some old boring monk
going on and on
about
...well...

"I don't know, it's all so confusing, there are so many words, so many different names, oh my goodness, and I have so much to do!"

So, alright, I'll try not to go on and on too long,
and in fact since maybe this verse—
and I'll read the verse:

If they should meet a Buddha,
"May all beings
Become All-Pervasive Richness,
Dignified and adorned with all."

And in the text we see that beside "All-Pervasive Richness" there is a '24'. When we look down at the bottom of the page it says: "Fugen (Samantabhadra)". "Fugen" is Japanese for "Samantabhadra", which is in Sanskrit.

"Samantabhadra", who was a Bodhisattva,

"Fugen", who was the same Bodhisattva,
(and just a sidebar:

along with "Monju", "Manjusri," was the name of one of the two fast breeder nuclear reactors in Fukui province in Japan. Buddhists got upset that these Bodhisattvas were disrespected but that's a little sidebar...)

And what does Fugen mean? What does Samantabhadra mean?

Universally good, universal goodness, virtue and worthiness, symbolizes diligent practice.

Another sidebar: (in Shingon, Fugen presides over a memorial service held on the 28th day after death and Samantabhadra—one who is all-pervading good, same as Fugen, one whose beneficence is everywhere -is one of the most important Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism. He is also the protector of all those who teach the Dharma and is regarded as the embodiment of the wisdom of non-discrimination, essential sameness.)

Samantabhadra is often depicted with Shakyamuni and Manjusri. Samantabhadra is

sometimes pictured on a six-tusked elephant, represents the power of wisdom to overcome all obstructions. The six tusks represent overcoming attachment to the six senses.

So, Samantabhadra is representative of what we can all aspire to,
which is essential goodness,
which comes about through practice
which enhances the capacity
to see situations with clarity and
to make decisions and choices and
take actions that
are actually useful.

Now, it can be kind of fun to look at situations in day to day life,
situations that one comes across in the news,
situations that present themselves and say:

What would be different if these situations were handled by people who practised?
What difference could it make to all beings?

I will leave it to your imagination,
I don't want to coerce you
into thinking in a certain way
about anything other than practice,
but I encourage looking at possibilities because
you might find that encouraging as well
and you might see more and more clearly
the benefit that can accrue through practising
that essential clarity that is
present when each moment is
unobstructed.

And how does that unobstruction occur?

It's a process,
practice is a process,
just like your life is
a process.

So you put this process called the bodymind down on a zafu
in front of a wall
and at the moment of noticing anything
(you don't need to go even as far as judging...)
If you start to judge good or bad,
"should I practise here or not?"
Then at THAT moment,
practise
because you're seeing that little tyrant,
self-image,
coming in,
wanting to make choices.

It sounds good, the story sounds good
but you go:
"wait a minute... I don't need to discriminate between this and that.
There is this essential sameness of dharma."

Any time you notice
anything,
any dharma,

that's a moment of clarity.
Feel the breath,
sit up straight,
practise that moment.

Now, Samantabhadra is also associated with actions, what you do. In the last chapter of the Avatamsaka sutra, and bear in mind, the verses are from the Avatamsaka sutra, Chapter 11, but in the last chapter, the Buddha states that Samantabhadra bodhisattva made ten great vows in order to practise thoroughly as a Buddha.

The first one:

To pay homage and respect to all Buddhas.

Second:

To praise all the Buddhas.

Third:

To make abundant offerings, to give generously.

Fourth:

To repent misdeeds and evil karma.

Number five:

To rejoice in the merits of others.

Six:

To request the Buddhas to continue teaching.

Seven:

To request the Buddhas to remain in the world.

Eight:

To follow the Teachings of the Buddhas at all times.

Nine:

To accommodate and benefit all living beings.

Ten:

To transfer all merits and virtues to benefit all beings.

So Fugen or Samantabhadra was an "all beings" kind of guy or gal. So not just one, not just someone who is high up in the hierarchy, you figure you'll get something back, but to take that urge to benefit and to apply it to all beings...

what a different world it would be.

Every evening during sesshin or O-sesshin, at 8:42pm, we chant The Vow of Samantabhadra. So those of you who chant and have chanted the vow of Samantabhadra, please join in. We will chant it as we do it during the closing during sesshin and O-sesshin, and sometimes it gets chanted on Wednesday morning. But The Vow of Samantabhadra is something that I enjoy a lot. I hope you do as well.

Sensei chants the title:

The Vow of Samantabhadra

Sensei and students chant:

Then Samantabhadra, being in Vast Openness,
set forth an elucidation of eons and of the
movements of times as the points of inexpressible
Fields of Awakening and of worlds one after the other in the form of this Vow:

1: HONOURING THE AWAKENED ONES

To those Lions amongst the people who throughout
the three times have come into this world of ten directions,
to all of these without exception,
I offer body, speech, and mind.

2: PROSTRATING BEFORE THE AWAKENED ONES

Through the virtue of the vow of acting as All-Pervasive Richness,
in the presence of those who are the Outshining,
I prostrate before them all,
bowing with bodies as many as the atoms of all their Fields.

On a single particle are seated as many Awakened Ones as there are particles,
surrounded by the children of the Lineage.
Thus I see that the Total Field of All Possibilities
is filled entirely with the Outshining.

With inexhaustible oceans of praises,
with every sound in the ocean of sounds,
proclaiming the virtues of all the Outshining,
I praise those who have Gone Into Joy.

3: PRESENTING VAST OFFERINGS TO THE AWAKENED ONES

Rare flowers and garlands,
instruments of music, scented oils, fine parasols,
the best of lights and most excellent incense,
with these I make offerings to the Outshining.

Elegant robes and superb scents,
incense powder as high as Mount Meru,
all of the best and most distinguished splendour,
I use to make offerings to all those who Outshine.

Offerings both vast and supreme
I visualize for each of the Outshining Ones.
I, through the power of faith in the Activity of All-Pervasive Richness,
honour and make offerings to all the Outshining.

4: REPENTANCE BEFORE THE AWAKENED ONES

All wrong actions from beginningless time,
stemming from passion, aggression, and ignorance,
arising through body, speech, and mind,
I now repent having committed.

5: BEING JOYFUL OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OTHERS

Whatever merits all the Outshining, all the children of the Lineage,
all solitary and noble practitioners of past and present,
and all worldly ones may have throughout these ten directions
I rejoice in them all.

6: REQUESTING THE AWAKENED ONES TO TURN THE WHEEL OF THE TEACHINGS

All you who are Radiance in all worlds in all directions,
you who have Awakened as Awareness and realized unobstructedness,
I ask you, who have set forth the Path,
to turn the supreme Wheel of the Teachings.

7: BESEECHING THE AWAKENED ONES TO LIVE LONG

Those who might wish to pass into the Traceless,
with palm to palm, I beseech you to yet remain,
for eons as many as the atoms of all the Fields,
for the joy and benefit of all beings.

Whatever small virtue I may have gathered,
through these prostrations, offerings,
repentance and rejoicing, requesting and beseeching,
I dedicate it all into Awakening.

May the primordial Awakened Ones
and those who dwell now in all worlds in all directions
be honoured and those yet to come
fulfill their vows and Awake as Awareness.

May whatever Fields there are in all directions
be excellent and completely clear.
May they be pervaded by the Outshining
and the children of the Lineage, beneath the tree of enlightenment.

May all sentient beings there are in all directions
be of good health and joy.
May the aim of all those in the Round of Being
be aligned with virtue and their wishes fulfilled.

As I live my life in the practice of realization,
may the memory of all lives in all states be clear;
in every lifetime, through birth and death,
may I always go forth into homelessness.

8: LEARNING CONTINUOUSLY FROM THE AWAKENED ONES

Practising as have all those who Outshine,
fulfilling the practice of All-Pervasive Richness,
may all activities be unobstructed purity,
always free of stain.

In the languages of shining beings and naga dragons,
of demons and of humans,
whatever forms of communication there are amongst all beings,
in all of these may I unfold the Teachings of Reality.

May those who practise radical truth
never stray from Awakened Intelligence.
May all obstructions and signs
be completely extinguished.

I will move through the paths of the Fields
free from cause and effect, afflictions, and distortions,
like a lotus flowering above the water,
like the sun and moon moving unhindered by the sky.

Extinguishing the misery of all contracted realms,
bringing all beings into joyfulness,
I will act always for the liberation of all beings
throughout all regions and ranges of all Fields.

According with the ways of all beings
while acting only to fulfill the practice of realization,
may all my activities throughout all eons
be the Activity of All-Pervasive Richness.

May I always be in the company of those
who are practising the practice together with me.
Through embodiment, meanings, and knowings,
may I live as the only aspiration which is true.

Those who have benefited me,
who teach me the practice of All-Pervasive Richness,
may I always be together with them
and may none of my actions be out of alignment with them.

May I see the Awakened Ones face to face,
together with all those who are children of the Lineage.
May I always offer them everything
throughout all times, without fail.

Maintaining the Teachings of Reality of the Outshining,
shining forth the practice of realization,
fully purifying all activities into All-Pervasive Richness,
let me live as this throughout all my lives.

As I move through all realms of Being,
may I learn inexhaustible virtue and intelligence.
may I be an unending treasury of radical insight and
skillful means, of the harmonies and of freedom.

In a single point are Fields as infinite as the particles of all Space.
In those Fields are seated those beyond reference point,
the Awakened Ones and the children of the Lineage.
Through practice of All-Pervasive Richness
may I come to know them all.

In the space of the width of a hair,
in every region without exception,
may I understand the oceans of Awakened Ones and oceans of worlds
through my practice which pervades all times.

May I always understand the pure speech of the Outshining Ones,
and how they adapt the Teachings of Truth
to what seems to be true to the various beings,
and so in a single sound set forth an ocean of tones.

Into the infinite voices
of all the Outshining Ones throughout all times,
may I penetrate through the power of Knowing,
circulating as the Wheel of the Teachings.

May I enter the gates of all eons
in a single instant of time,
through entering through the moment
which sets forth the measure of past, present, and future.

In this single instant
I see all the Awakened Ones of all times.
Through the freedom of illusion-like presencing
may I penetrate their infinite sphere.

I will presence within a single point
all Fields displayed throughout all times.
Thus I will understand the vast array
of Fields of Awakening in all directions.

I will come into the presence of all those Pathfinders
who have and will show the worlds to be Radiance,
and learn their Teachings
before they become Traceless.

9: LIBERATING ALL BEINGS

Through the swift power of subtle perception,
the force of the Vast Path, the universal gate,
the power of the practice of all virtues,
the power of all-embracing warmth;

Through the power of completely pure Richness,
the force of unobstructed Knowing,
the power of insight, skillful means, and of practice,
may all the forces of Awakening gather.

Thus the momentum of tendency is purified.
The power of defilements is cleared away.
The strength of distortion is broken.
This is the fulfillment of the Activity
of All-Pervasive Richness.

Oceans of Realms are purified.
Oceans of beings are liberated.
Oceans of points of experience are seen through.
Oceans of realization are plumbed to their depths.

Oceans of activities are purified.
Oceans of vows are accomplished.
Oceans of Awakened Ones are honoured.
May I practise without ceasing for oceans of times.

May I completely accomplish all the aspirations
of all Awakened Ones of all times.
May my practice of the Activity of All-Pervasive Richness
unfold as Awakened Awareness.

10: DEDICATING ALL ACTIVITIES INTO REALIZATION

I dedicate all activities
that they might be the same as all those who practise
as All-Pervasive Richness,
foremost of the children of the Outshining.

Through stainlessness of embodiment, meanings, and knowings,
through acting as stainlessness in the stainlessness of all realms,
may my practice be no other
than All-Pervasive Richness.

May I fulfill what Manjusri has vowed
and practise universal Pervasion of Richness.
Tirelessly, throughout each moment to arise
may I accomplish this.

May my practice be without an edge
and there be no limit to virtues.
Exerting limitless practice let my understanding
be the inconceivable magic of Reality.

As far as Space itself extends,
as long as all beings exist,
as long as the momentum of compassion continues,
as long as this may my vow endure.

One might offer to the Awakened Ones of All Fields
the ten directions filled with precious jewels

and offer happiness to humans and shining ones
for as long as time lasts at all...

But whoever has even a moment
of recognizing their own capacities to open to Openness
through hearing this supreme vow
will have received the greater merit.

Whoever sets forth this Vow of All-Pervasive Richness
will abandon the paths of contraction
and not follow along with those who live in compression
but will come to face Infinite Radiance.

They will gain that which is great:
the ability to live in truth and use their birth as a human
to quickly unfold themselves
into All-Pervasive Richness.

Those who have committed even the five worst crimes
under the influence of confusion,
can immediately dissolve them
through the presentation of the practice of Richness.

Endowed with insight, distinction, nobility,
a member of the family of the Awakened Ones,
one will be immune to delusion and limited views
and be honoured throughout the three worlds.

One will move quickly to the seat of Awakened Awareness
and abide there for the benefit of beings.
Awakening as Awareness, turning the Wheel of the Teachings,
the array of distortions will be overcome.

Whoever will maintain, communicate, or recite
this Vow of the Activity of All-Pervasive Richness
without any doubt are attended to by the Awakened Ones
and the fruit of this shall be Complete and Utter Awakening.

What Manjusri has realized
and what Samantabhadra has realized,
I who follow their paths will realize
and thus I dedicate everything to this virtue.

All those who are the Outshining of the three times
have proclaimed that this is the best dedication.
And so I too dedicate all my virtues
into the supreme Activity of Richness.

At the moment of death
may I release all obstructions
and see Infinite Radiance face to face
and dwell in Sukhavati, the Field of Bliss.

May I there embody my vows
and accomplish them fully.
As long as there are worlds
I will work for the benefit of beings.

In that Field of Bliss,
I will arise as a flowering forth
and face to face with Infinite Radiance

my own unfolding as Awakened Awareness will be set forth.

Receiving this glimpse of my own unfolding in that place
I will set forth as infinite forms in all directions.
As the Activity of Awakening
I will benefit all beings.

Whatever merit I might have through chanting
this Vow of the Activity of All-Pervasive Richness
may all beings' vows of virtue
be accomplished right now.

Through the infinite merit realized through
the Vow of the Activity of All-Pervasive Richness,
may all beings drowning in the torrent of obstruction
enter into the higher orders of Infinite Radiance.

[Strikes on gong as Sensei and students bow to end the chant.]

Now wasn't that fun?

And just picture this:

You've been sitting zazen,
you've been doing kinhin,
you've been doing oryoki,
you've been practising since,
well,
all the time,
really,
each moment of those
24 hours...
but long days, long nights, and then:
The Vow of Samantabhadra at the end of the day!

So, by practising when you're chanting that, the tendency to want to fall into complaint about the knees can sometimes be opened permanently, so even though the knees may, oh get "tetchy" from time to time later on, it really doesn't bother you much.

So, thank you again, and the verse once more from Every Breath You Take:

If they should meet a Buddha,

So listen, how are you going to tell who is a Buddha and who isn't a Buddha?

[students laugh]

How are you going to tell because there are all sorts of stories of these characters getting up to all sorts of things, so what can you do?

What can you do?

You can't really pick them out,
so I guess you'll just have to take the wisest possible action in any given situation
and act as if all beings are that.

If they should meet a Buddha,
"May all beings
Become All-Pervasive Richness,
Dignified and adorned with all."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 129: Seeing a Memorial Site of the Buddha

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, March 31st, 2012

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE
reminds you that there's
this breath
and that wrapped around
this breath
is the bodymind
that knows the context of its experiencing,
and
responds to it,
and that you are really
the Knowing of this bodymind.

You're not this bodymind.
You're the Knowing of it,
so any time you notice anything at all,
ANY known
or dharma
or moment of experience,
you're reminded:

Feel the breath
sit up straight...

which is a long way
of pointing to the fact that
there is
this moment
and the bodymind is alive
in
this moment.

Today's verse:

Seeing a memorial site of the Buddha,
"May all beings
Be as honored as is this shrine,
Receiving the offerings of shining ones and humans."

Well, what do we make of this?
Memorial site?

Well, when we take "memorial" back to, as far as people seem to have taken it in meaning,
we come up with the Latin word "memor": remembering, mindful.

So, seeing something that can cause you to remember or be mindful of the fact that actually,
you are a Buddha.

"Oh no, not me, not me"
"I can't even sit here",
"I keep falling asleep",
"my knees keep hurting",
"my back",
"oh it's painful."
"Everyone else seems to be doing fine".
"I'm a fraud, I'm a fraud... "

“If they look into me, they'll see that actually I'm really vastly superior to them. “

[students laugh]

“Wait a minute, though, wait a minute, that's a thought! Ugh. I've done it again. I've done it again.... Okay okay, I'll call it... what will I call it? I will call it-troublesome! That's it! So when I'm asked 'How is your practice?' I'll say 'it's troublesome, it's turbulent today',”

so then they will know that I'm really trying,

but

it's

so

difficult.”

But there you sit! One could say, a living memorial to the Buddha, to waking up to this moment of experiencing, and when we chant the Samu chant, we're chanting:

May all beings be happy

May they be peaceful

May they be free

... ALL beings...

But then we think: “alright, alright, so a shrine has to be outside of ourselves, it has to be something that the bodymind can look at and get some feeling about...”

Shrine is defined as a place of religious devotion or of commemoration,

so there are all sorts of shrines around,

and there are all sorts of Buddhist shrines around,

but what are they really talking about?

Well,

they're talking about,

in some cases,

artifacts, ruins,

that can point us to the fact that a couple of hundred years after Gautama Siddhartha,

the historical Buddha,

apparently the first dude to discover the practice of mindfulness,

or if not to actually have discovered it,

to actually teach it to people.

We might find that say in India, near a place near Sarnath—sorry the column of Sarnath is now in a museum in India, but there was a column there which had been put up by a man named Ashoka. This King Ashoka had been quite the guy, killing a lot of people, apparently he was kind of nasty and of little patience and when his father died and he came to power, he gave tests of loyalty—rumour has it—to all his ministers, and those who didn't pass the test were killed.

Nice, very nice.

But then, Ashoka the Warrior engaged in warfare and as a result of one particular war, the Kalinga war, in which he did participate and which helped expand his empire from Afghanistan, to Pakistan across most of India and down south to a very small place that was not actually part of his empire, to Bangladesh. Huge, this was his empire.

Well, after the Kalinga war, rumour has it that Ashoka wandered on the battlefield: thousands and thousands of dead, stinking and decaying, vultures overhead waiting to do their job of cleaning up, and the wailing of the bereaved, caused him to say to himself: “enough, enough. This is not useful for all beings.”

And it is said that he embraced the Teachings of Buddhism, or the Teachings of Gautama Siddhartha, and the Teachings that he did take on as being the main principles of the Dharma in his understanding were:

- .non-violence,
- .tolerance of all sects and opinions,
- .obedience to parents,
- .respect for Brahmins and other religious teachers and priests,
- .liberality towards friends,
- .the humane treatment of servants,
- and
- .generosity to all.

And he had many edicts which were carved on stone pillars and the walls of caves and they are still around and they contain information that may be the first written information about the actual Teachings of Gautama Siddhartha. Interesting.

He also, when he came to power, or when he had this realization, in his adaption of non-violence, included the unnecessary slaughter of animals. Hunting and branding were made illegal. He let prisoners leave prison for one day a year. He built universities, attempting to raise the education and ambition of the commoners. He built water transit and irrigations systems. He built hospitals for animals and for people and he renovated major roads throughout India.

And again:

equality, regardless of religion, politics and caste.

As I said, the source of much of our knowledge of Ashoka and Buddhism were in these inscriptions which were carved on pillars and rocks throughout the empire. He built the Pillar of Ashoka, which interestingly enough has four lions at the top of it and the lion is on the flag of the Republic of India today.

Ashoka helped, as well, neighbouring countries. He built hospitals, monasteries all over southern and central Asia, and he helped to organize the Third Buddhist Council in 250 B.C.E. (before common era).

He helped out the neighbouring countries with doctors, hospitals, inns, wells, medicinal herbs, engineers. He planted trees both in his empire and neighbouring countries. He was the first emperor in history to ban slavery, hunting, fishing, and deforestation. He banned the death sentence and asked neighbouring countries to do the same.

Now, many of the pillars of course, promoted Ashoka, saying how he had conquered these particular countries, he had spread Buddhism as far away as Greece and Egypt, and all in all what a wonderful person he, Ashoka, was. But that's what people do.

He also claimed that he encouraged the development of herbal medicine for human and non-human animals in his empire and other territories.

Here is something that was quoted from Rock Edict 2, of the Edicts of Ashoka:

Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Ashoka's domain, and among the people beyond the borders, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputras, the Keralaputras, as far as Tamraparni and where the Greek king Antiochos rules, and among the kings who are neighbours of Antiochos, everywhere has Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Ashoka, made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals.

Now, he was quite a builder as well and the remains of a lot of the buildings, a lot of canals and irrigation systems can still be seen.

Ashoka also had constructed 84,000 stupa and it is said that the reason for the 84,000 is the

belief, at that time, was that that was how many atoms or particles made up a human bodymind.

Ashoka helped spread Buddhism as far as Sri Lanka, Ceylon, where there are many temples and monuments and memorials to Buddhism, to Buddha.

So it's an interesting study and I hope at the very least you are encouraged to get on that computer and use that wonderful access to information to uncover some of the stories that have been spread over these thousands of years.

Imagine, I mean just get a picture of what Ashoka was able to accomplish with certain principles...

In what I've read, there's not a mention of zazen, however, in some of the carvings, some of the depictions of people, people are actually depicted with their legs crossed, sitting down, so who knows?

But all we can do right now,
is notice those legs,
notice those hands in the mudra,
recognize that this is something people have been doing for 25, 2600 years.

When you notice anything at all,
any dharma,
any moment of experience:
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind in this moment.

When you see each other,
in a way, we can say,
it's a memorial,
the bodymind,
yes, the one that you have planted on that cushion,
is a memorial of the Buddha,
a memorial to waking up.

When you're doing kinhin
and you go past the rupa,
when you go past the Butsudan,
the Platform of Awakening,
that's a memorial site, one could say.

Now we don't have any relics like painted fingers, painted finger bones, teeth, hair, and so on...

People accumulate these kinds of things but that's just silly.

This is a living practice,
it's not a practice that focuses on one person
that's going to do it for us.

Now, I'd love to do it for each and every one of you
if I could,
but it doesn't work that way.
There is no little fairy dust wand,
that I can say 'pfoot!' There you are! I did it for you!
You've now Woken Up.

It's not how it works,
you do it yourself,
but you do it in this very moment....
and you too can receive

“the offerings of shining ones”.

This moment of experiencing,
this very moment
is luminous and shines,
so why not,

why not?

If not now,
when?

If not here,
where?

Who?

Have fun!

Thank you for listening.

Oh, before I sign off, I'll read the verse again:

Seeing a memorial site of the Buddha,
"May all beings
Be as honored as is this shrine,
Receiving the offerings of shining ones and humans."

Have fun, glowing...

Every Breath You Take 130: Inspired by the Sight of the Shrine

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, April 7th, 2012

It's funny, isn't it, the phrase:

“You take my breath away”

... is a compliment? [laughter]

EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE
every breath that the bodymind takes
filling the lungs up
sending oxygen throughout the blood
into the many different areas of the bodymind
where that mysterious exchange of gases goes on
that “live” needs...

every breath you take
lets you know that you're alive.

Imagine if someone came up to you and said:

“You take my breath away”

...and then, if it were literal, what would happen?
Well, they would drop to the floor like an overripe fruit.

Anyway, we've been talking about memorials and shrines to the Buddha, and this was from
The Practice of Purity, the Avatamsaka sutra, the Flower Garland sutra, (and recognize that
this stuff was written 1600 years ago, and not all at once in one place, I'm sure, but bits and
pieces come together,)

people talk,

people travel,
they pick up information,
they wrote it down,
and then other people from different places
read it
or they heard about it
and they translated it,
and changed it and so on...

So what we have with these verses,
is an approximation,
basically,
which of course all words are,
they are not the experience,
they are an approximation,
a description,
an attempt to,
using words,
communicate something that is understood or observed.

So every breath you take,
you can be, as the verse says,
"inspired by the sight of the shrine."

Inspired by the sight of the shrine,
"May all beings
Inspire by the sight of them
All shining beings and humans."

So this means you,
them is us.

Another translation of this:

Reverently gazing at the shrine,

...isn't that different?

Is that not different than being "inspired by the sight of the shine"?

Reverently gazing at the shrine,
They should wish that all beings
Be looked up to by all
Celestials and humans.

Well of course I prefer our translation:

Inspired by the sight of the shrine,
"May all beings
Inspire by the sight of them
All shining beings and humans."

So here we sit.
We don't really have a "shrine" room,
one really isn't necessary
because
the whole monastery is here
so that you
can mature your practice,

and it is
the practice of Awake Awareness,
the practice of recognizing
that
you are
Buddha,
you are
Awake Awareness,
you are not
all the stories that you tell yourselves
about who you are and how the world is.

Each one of those is a contraction,
a great contraction or a small contraction
with a story about
how you are and how the world is...
... and they do seem to be endless...

But recognize that
each moment of seeing anything;
a contraction,
a thought,
a feeling,
a sight,
a sound,
any moment at all of noticing anything at all
is the only moment that you can practise

and you do that by

feeling the breath
feeling the whole bodymind
opening the eye gaze

and what will happen,
and it WILL happen,
is that eventually
you won't believe any of that crap
about who you are and how the world is

the stories that come up about
what an idiot you are,
how you made that stupid mistake,
so-and-so must never make those kinds of mistakes,
only I, in this whole company, am the one not able to do the practice...

or...

look at those mofos
I'm the only one that knows how to actually do the practice,
I am the Enlightened One
it's all on me,

I'm the one!

So we see all of them as simply being
the process of perception and cognition
arrayed in a certain way
and as you seem them,
and as you at that moment of clear seeing,

as you remember to actually practise that moment of clear seeing,
you have more moments of clear seeing,
until eventually all there is
is this clear seeing,
this depiction
this understanding of the vastness and brightness
of THIS moment of experiencing,
as you step forth embodying the Way.

And as you step forth embodying the Way,
you do not know who may be looking at you,
you do not know what you may inspire in others,
and the truth is that our very presence does affect others,
each thing does make everything else what it is.

So you have the opportunity
by the very fact that you're alive
by the very fact that you're actually looking into the process of perception and cognition,
you have available the capacity to step beyond
those sordid little concepts about who you are and how the world is
without acting in any way,
without doing any acting whatsoever,
by being who you really are,
who you truly are,
you can shine forth
as a living embodiment of Awake Awareness.

No biggie. No biggie.
Right now
is the only time that this can happen.

So you're sitting in the Hatto
we have a depiction of the Buddha,
one who has Woken Up to the actual nature of Experiencing.

Is that Gautama Siddhartha?
I don't know.

Rumour has it that there were no images of that person until some 400 years after his death,
so what we have are depictions of something that people did.

It's so obvious:
people sat down,
people looked into experiencing,
and there are innumerable
rupas, statues, depictions
of the fact of doing this.

Are they representing one person?
Unlikely, very unlikely.
But representing qualities that are available to each and every human being.

Now, we have had this experience of someone being inspired by how the Teacher did
something and it inspired that individual to continue to practise, moment after moment after
moment, even when the going got rough...

So you don't know who is looking at you, do you?
You may as well be the best you can possibly be.

Now, these shrines and sites of shrines have inspired people. Recently, within the last ten
years, we have heard about the Bamiyan Buddhas that were blown up. Now I'm not naming

any names because everybody likes to blow stuff up, apparently, but these were incredible. They were huge, huge statues that were built at Bamiyan in the Hindu Kush Valley and there was the Silk Road, a trade route which went between China, India, and some say into Egypt and into the Roman colonies. It had a lot of traffic on it.

So these buddhas were built, apparently between the 3rd and 5th century, C.E. The large one was 53m tall, 175 feet, and is said to have represented Vairocana Buddha, which is that light shining through the universe. The smaller one, 36m, or 120 feet, is said to have represented Sakyamuni Buddha.

They were visible for miles, apparently, along the Silk Road, this trade route with people coming and going, coming and going, and it is said that their faces were copper masks, and their hands were copper covered. Their robes were various colours. Initially, the reconstruction, which involves looking at little pieces of rubble and so on with great big microscopes, shows that originally the robes were blue with a pinkish corallish kind of lining. Then somewhere down along the line when fashion changed, they were painted bright red.

So picture this:

you're travelling in the hot sun,
you're travelling along the Silk Road,
and miles away you can see
this gleaming in the sun—
probably nicer to look at than the Golden Arches— [giggles]
but, shining out...
and you can hear people saying,
who have seen this for the first time:

“Well what's that?”

“Look at that over there, what is it?”

And it would be standing out because these statues would stand out because they were carved into the hillside, which apparently at that time the rock itself was quite non-vivid, according to things that have been written, and it would be dusty...

Then...

There this bright and shining and seen!

Someone said: “You know, that's, that's the Buddha.”

“Well, what's that? What's the Buddha?”

“Well, what it is is someone who....”

So information travels.

It travelled just like it travels now, but it didn't travel as quickly as it travels now.

So each and every one of you
have memories of what it was
that inspired you to end up where you are
right now.

You had information
you had inspiration,
you followed it up.

It may have taken you many interesting places
on the way here.

Now, the Bamiyan Buddhas were key symbols in the rise of Mahayana Buddhist teachings, and one thing that the Mahayana did, and apparently even then, 4th and 5th centuries C.E. was emphasize the ability of everyone, not just monks, to “achieve enlightenment” in some

traditions, or “wake up”, and as we know, that travelled down through the years to Dogen who wrote “How Anyway Can Sit” which you have read and chanted and heard in the Fukanzazengi.

Bamiyan was also kind of a Holiday Inn for travellers and pilgrims because there were myriad caves in the cliffs, carved right out of the rock. Many of them were lived in by thousands, it is said, of Buddhist monks, and others were available for traveling merchants, monks, and pilgrims.

So you know how it goes...
people meet,
they sit down,
they might have a little tittle,
they talk about what's going on,
what's going on where they came from,
what's going on where they're going...

information spreads.

Now today those caves are homes for refugees from Afghanistan and the wars.

And here we sit,
benefitting from little particles of information that filter down
about what was happening
what was going on
15, 1600 years ago
when these verses were being written.

A lot of what was being written about
a lot of what we can read about
was informed by places,
by sights and sounds
that we may not ever see,
but
people are still
people.

That process of being a people
being a person amongst peoples
is still the same for everyone.

Self-image might like to hold onto its ideas
about how different we are
from the others

but it's not true.
Absolutely not.

The process of being a human being
is the same
and that is why it is possible
for people,
no matter where they come from
no matter what their conditions
to practise.

The meaning we make out of our experiences
of course
is very affected by social culture
that is still the case as well,

but here we sit,
facing a blank wall,
looking at the functioning of
the process of perception and cognition,
recognizing
at the moment of noticing anything whatsoever
that that's a moment of clear seeing,
we can practise that
and through that process,
habitual patterns
do wear out,

until all there is,
truly,
is this moment of Awake Awareness,

which was always the case,
but now you recognize it,
you recognize that
is

all that there is
and there's no room
for the extra stuff
and there is no need
for the extra stuff
because the extra stuff
has just all dropped away
and
you go about whatever you do
bodying forth the Way.

So as you move about the monastery,
as you move about your day,
as you move about in your travels,
should you be in the vicinity of a shrine,
you can raise this verse:

Inspired by the sight of the shrine,
"May all beings
Inspire by the sight of them
All shining beings and humans."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 131: Bowing Their Heads Before the Shrine

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, April 21st, 2012

A few moments ago, we all brought our hands together in gassho,
and brought the whole bodymind down to the floor
in a bow
in front of the Butsudan,
the Platform of Awakening.

We then breathed in and brought the bodymind up
and then we did it again,
and we did it a third time.

Then the hands still together,
bowed over in front of the Butsudan
while we were standing,
then
put the hands in shashu.

We're recognizing that what we're here to do
and what we're reminded of by the Butsudan
and the rupa on top of it
is the fact that we're practising
this practice of
waking up to reality.

Is it a shrine?
Which is what the verse has been talking about...

Well, it depends on your interpretation.
We can say it's a shrine to the fact of practice,
which is what we're doing,
it can remind us what we are doing,
but I can assure you,
there are no little toenails of the Buddha in that Butsudan anywhere,
and it seems in fact that there are so many shrines and so many bits
that that must have been a very unusual person indeed...

But shrines are not of course only made by people who are following the practice of Gautama
Siddhartha. Shrines have been made by people for the longest time, maybe 35,000 years,
maybe 50,000 years, who knows?

Taking something,
putting it in a special place
doing special things in front of it,
and often,
engaging in commerce;
we'll leave an offering because we're going to get something.

Now, in some places, even in Canada, the offering can be something like walking on your
knees up a flight of, I forget exactly how many stairs, in the hopes that you'll be cured of your
ailments. I suppose that includes what's happened to the knees walking on them up those
many many flights of stairs... [Sensei and students laugh]

But there are shrines all over the Ottawa Valley,
not of course Platforms of Awakening,
not containing relics of the Buddha,
but promises,
and they do make nice outings if you happen to want to ride around in the Ottawa Valley.

One of my favourite shrines is in Arnprior: the first chip wagon in this area, [lots of laughter]
still making the best french fries. That's a sidebar.

Today's verse:

Bowing their heads before the shrine,
"May all beings
Move past the perspectives
Of shining beings and humans."

Wow.

"Move past the perspectives
Of shining beings and humans"...

What are we talking about?

Well, when we latch onto any perspective,
any idea,
any contraction into a sense of self
with a little belief about how it is and how the world is,
we will find if we look fondly—
and I'm saying fondly, we don't want to be harsh with ourselves—
we may find that we have put ourselves,
from time to time,
in the position of a shining being,
radiating forth our innate goodness and superiority to everyone in the room.

Other times we've contracted into a sense of self and said:
“But I'm only human...”

That's what human beings do.

“But I'm really hungry, I'm really hungry, I want something to eat right now! I want it I want it right now!”

... falling into another perspective of what's going on in the moment.

So really, of course what we are being reminded of is that
any perspective can be seen
can be known,
it is a known,
whatever it is,
it's a known,
you don't need to settle there,
it is simply something going on in the Landscape of Reality of that moment.

You are the Knowing of it,
you are seeing it clearly.

At that moment,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
practise that moment of clear seeing,
thus moving past the taking of any perspective whatsoever.

You don't need it.

Now, the forms that we use in Dainen-ji
can help us see the perspectives that we tend to hold onto,
and until we see them,
there's nothing really we can do about them,
but forms,
all of them
from bowing in front of the Butsudan,
bowing at the door,
how we respond when it is time to end the sitting round,
to take care of our cushion,
to get up,
to stand,
to walk in kinhin,
show us how we are.

Now, sometimes in these actions
there can be a bit of scurrying as people try to get to “their place”

at the top of the heap,
in their view.
This is holding onto a perspective.

Sometimes, people will develop—
because this is what people do,
and they have done it since the beginning of people,
since the process of being a human being is the same for all human beings—
sometimes a perspective of ownership will come up
and that raggedy ass whiny little self-image goes:
“that's MY zafu, that's MY spot”

So you see it.

No problem,
that's not you,
you're the Knowing of it,
that is a dharma, a known,
a moment when you can practise.

Feel the breath,
stand or sit up straight,
open to the full Landscape of Reality.

And we start to see that our little,
I'll use the phrase again: “raggedy ass”
poverty mind,
that's how that can be described,
we feel that somehow or other there's something lacking,
so that if we don't get to our “proper” place
that we're missing out on something,
that somehow we are demeaned,
or that somehow we have a right to that particular place.

Again: perspective, perspective, perspective.

I encourage you all, always, to read the eMirror. Today's quote from a teisho series “Seeing Eye to Eye: Commentaries on Ehei Dogen zenji's Yuibutsu Yobutsu” by Anzan Hoshin roshi, it says:

Whatever we might manufacture within thoughts is of no consequence. If realization were what people think it might be, it wouldn't be worth thinking about. Realization arrives through realizing reality, like water flowing into water, like the sky moving as wind and breath. What is realized is beyond deluded ideas about realization.

As Dogen sees it, as I see it, as the Lineage of Awakened Ancestors and all the Buddhas of numberless worlds see it, there is no delusion and no realization. There is just this primordial open luminosity.

Do you see?

So, any perspective whatsoever
is simply a mote of dust in the sunlight,
it's simply something that can be known
and opened.

If it's got words,
it's a thought, folks.

Feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,

sit or stand in that open luminosity.

The verse again:

Bowing their heads before the shrine,
"May all beings
Move past the perspectives
Of shining beings and humans."

Thank you for listening.

Happy moving day!

Every Breath You Take 132: Circumambulating the Shrine and Circling the Shrine Three Times

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, May 5th, 2012

Still breathing?

Good.

Notice it,
and while you're at it,
notice the whole bodymind:
seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, feeling, smelling,
THIS moment
wrapped around the breath
and you are the Knowing
of the experiencing
of that bodymind.

As long as there is still breath
whistling through cavities,
you have a chance to practise.

For 2600 years people have been doing this practice,
bare bones as it may be.

Two verses today, a "twofer":

Circumambulating the shrine,
"May all beings
Act always without bias
And unfold knowing the nature of all knowns."

...and you ARE the Knowing,

the bodymind is how anything at all is known,
the nature of all knowns:
that interaction
between bodymind and context,
and being the Knowing,
looking into this matter of your life
can show you all sorts of habits and patterns and tendencies...

Oh my!

And seeing them,
you do have a choice
to be without bias.

Thoughts come up!

Well, bodyminds experience thoughts,
but no matter what the content of that thought is,
we do not have to act it out,
we can see it in this moment,
we can see the nature of that known,
and since obviously
your first choice of action is to
feel the breath
to feel the skeleton sitting up straight,
to notice
seeing hearing tasting touching feeling smelling
and all the experiences,
all the knowns of the bodymind,
your choices as to what to do with content and situations
are many,
and the tendency for patterns to drop away happens
and more and more you will find yourself without bias
because bias, after all,
when we look at it,
is believing one story only
and making our choice of action
be driven by that one story or perspective.

And as we know,
one perspective means that you're leaving out all the rest,
and it is the cause of social ills
which we experience day to day.

Circling the shrine three times,
"May all beings
Constantly see the path of Awakening as Awareness
With attention unobscured by recoil."

So, to see, understand,
that this Straight Path,
which is always right here,
a pointless point,
waking up to that fact
each time anything at all is known by Knowing
increases the fact of awakening,
increases the opportunities for seeing that fact
of waking up clearly
so that over time,
all that there is is
Awakening
as Awareness
without any obscuration whatsoever.

Interestingly enough, self-image—
that being a phrase used to describe a contraction in the space of experiencing
with a belief about how you are and how the world is—
is often a recoil from this moment.
There can be a moment of experiencing,
and you've all experienced them,
when there is simply openness and lightness

and then self-image gets in there going:

“Yowza! This is it!”

And we focus on that,
attention moves to that statement,
that thought,
which is trying to grab onto what it has experienced
and is following a really limiting tendency
that human beings have
which is to believe that
only when we've talked about something is it actually happening.

Now, it doesn't really matter whether there is anyone else around to hear it,
we will talk to ourselves.

Now, those are
thoughts.

A moment of lightness and brightness,
a moment of openness
can literally, for a moment,
take our breath away.

We don't have the breath in mind,
we can feel it,
but we're not talking to ourselves about it,
things seem open and light
but that makes us experience something
that self-image is more that willing to hop forward
and describe as
fear.

“I'm so afraid... What will happen? If I'm not who I think I am, who am I? Oh oh...”

And contraction can get tighter and tighter
and we wrap it around our neck like a scarf
obscuring that freedom.

So recoil from THIS moment of experiencing is what's being talked about.

Free from recoil,
all there is
is open experiencing,
all there is
is Awake Awareness.

So each time you notice anything at all,
recognize,
it's a moment of waking up
practise at that moment
and you will practise faster than you can talk to yourself about it,
faster than I can talk about it,
and over time,
all there is is that freedom
and clarity
and lightness.

So back to the shrines, we've been talking about shrines for some time. Now it does seem
that this process of being a human being is very very similar for human beings all over the
world at all points in history. It would seem that whether we are in India, Tibet, China, South

America, Australia, United States, Britain, all over Europe, no matter where we are and no matter what century we might be living in, we will get together and we will come up with rituals. It could be we come up with them because then we really don't have to talk to each other about anything [students laugh] we're just doing this thing and this thing of course is centred around some object from which we expect to GET something.

The circumambulating, and we all know what that means... "Ambulating": walking, right? "Cir98cum": around. Circumambulating around the shrine...

Now, there's a story, the Hindus circumambulated. Parikrama: the path surrounding something. And there's a legend about that of course. Lord Shiva asked his two sons to circumambulate the universe to gain worldly knowledge. One of the sons spent decades going around the world on his peacock. Ganesha walked around his father, a full circle three times.

The Lord Shiva said: "What are you doing?"

He said: "Ah, father the world contains within you, Lord Shiva, my father".

So of course he, suck up that he was, won.

So there's a long history of circumambulating various structures, various symbols, and it's pretty hard to take things apart and say this point, this day, at this time, was when the Buddhists decided that they were going to circumambulate, but it would seem that they picked it up from people who were already doing it.

They would circumambulate around sacred structures, shrines, stupa or images, and in some of these areas that were set up for circumambulating, it was said that the whole structure grew outwards from where the shrine was to become a three-dimensional mandala which represented Mount Meru or Sumeru, which was a sacred mountain in Jain cosmology.

The Jains were around at about the same time as the beginning of Buddhism. So it would seem perhaps logical that the Buddhists were informed by the Jains of circumambulating and creating structures that represented Mount Meru, the centre of the physical, metaphysical, and spiritual universe.

There are circular routes around the Tibetan holy city of Lhasa; one of these was 9km long. In India, there is another one, circumambulating 108 times in the Hindu Pancha Kruchi. In Nepal, pilgrims circle the Kathmandu Valley to visit four Ganesha shrines. In Australia, Aborigines circle their holy mountain of Uluru. In Machu Pichu, people circumambulated.

Amongst the longest circumambulation is one in Japan where an island is circumambulated for 1600km. Now of course, some people were saying, "Well this is just a little too far..." [laughter] and this circumambulation was miniaturized so that it became a lot easier.

The circumambulation of three times around a structure was considered in Buddhism to be a gesture of faith and respect to the Three Jewels:

This is Buddha.

This is Dharma.

This is Sangha.

or, as we say it:

Awareness is the Only Condition.

All that is arises as the Display of Awareness.

This is the Seamless Expanse of all that is.

Another place where there was circumambulating going on was in the caves of Dunhuang in China, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Now, between 336 and 1400 C.E., this area of caves was a major stopping point on the Silk Road, and the Silk Road was a major trading road, and people traded not only goods but information, just like they do now.

You're in a place, you're with strangers, people talk, and maybe it was a case of "what happens in Dunhuang, stays in Dunhuang" we don't quite know.

And this sacred portal, as it came to be regarded, was seen to be the portal through which Buddhism entered China. Travellers along that Silk Road, along that trading route would donate money to have their safe journey to or from China immortalized or celebrated, or remarked upon by having a painting, by donating money to have a painting made. So there were thousands of paintings displaying all sorts of situations and deities.

We have here, of course, a deity from which women in particular, wanted favours, so you circumambulate three times around Kuan Yin, or Guan Yin. These were women who wanted to conceive, so this deity or representation was seen to be the giver of family, and I wonder what happened if they walked around backwards? Was that some form of birth control? [laughter]

And at Dunhuang was found the first printed book in the world, and apparently it was produced there as well, around 868 C.E., and this would be the Diamond Sutra, so the caves at Dunhuang are rich in visual representations of various and sundry Buddhist iconography.

The pilgrims who donated money also apparently had the belief that the commissions for paintings that they were buying would help guarantee their rebirth in paradise. Of course it was a trading route so it's not surprising that a merchant mentality seemed to have been going on at Dunhuang, big time.

So we walk in kinhin. We could say we're circumambulating the room, but that might be a little heavy duty, it might bring in certain aspects that are not applicable here.

An interesting fact; in Islam there is also circumambulating around the big black shrine at Mecca, but whereas it would seem most circumambulation is done in a clockwise direction, there it is counterclockwise.

So we are not in the habit of circumambulating,
but should we,
as we are walking in kinhin
happen to remember that feet upon floors,
feet upon the ground,
feet walking one in front of the other
has happened and is happening even as I speak,
we may remember this verse:

Circumambulating the shrine,
"May all beings
Act always without bias
And unfold knowing the nature of all knowns."

You can recognize that what you are doing in this moment
and in a moment of walking one foot in front of the other
is actualizing the Knowing
of the nature of all knowns.

The second verse:

Circling the shrine three times,
"May all beings
Constantly see the path of Awakening as Awareness
With attention unobscured by recoil."

A reminder:
when you notice anything whatsoever,
the flickering of a light

the flickering of a thought
the flickering of attention
the flickering of an eyelid
the flickering of an eyelash
the flickering of understanding...

feel the breath
feel the whole bodymind
and practise as what you really are.

Have fun with it!

Thank you for putting one little foot in front of the other little foot this morning, and arriving at this moment right here right now.

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 133: Praising the Virtues of the Buddhas

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, May 19th, 2012

[sound of an airplane is heard from outside]

So you've notice perhaps attention moving to the sound of the airplane...
no problem!

Feel the breath,
sit up straight,
practise that moment of
noticing clearly a dharma,
or moment of experience.

As long as the breath is moving in and out
and,
importantly,
in again...

you're alive!

The bodymind is alive
and you can practise.

It's spring right now and all sorts of things are coming alive after being dormant.
There is all sorts of activity in the grounds.
We can hear the birds tweet tweet tweeting:

"I'm a good catch, baby, I'm a good catch! Come and look at my nest! Look at how I can fly through this alley!" [laughter]

All sorts of things going on.

But there is also
throughout the world,
beings breathing out for the last time,
untold numbers
numberless as the sands of the River Ganges
are breathing their last breath,
releasing it into the air.

Some quietly,
some not so quietly,
some peacefully,
some in great agony,

some in palatial conditions and environments,
some in conditions and environments that would horrify us.

So as it says on the han:
"the great matter is
birth and death,
life slips past and time is gone.
Right now,
Wake up! Wake up!
Do not waste time!"

Today's verse in this Every Breath You Take series:

Praising the virtues of the Buddhas,
"May all beings
Fulfill all the virtues
So continuously extolled."

We'll try that one again:

Praising the virtues of the Buddhas, (and it's a plural, Buddhas)
"May all beings
Fulfill all the virtues
So continuously extolled."

We can name three virtues, three primary virtues of Buddhas, or Awakened Ones, those who have woken up to the actual nature of experiencing:
prajna, karuna, and upaya.

These work hand in hand and are the virtues of the activities of the bodhisattvas, the Buddhas, who have all vowed to guide beings to liberation.

Prajna is direct insight, wisdom, or perfect knowing.
Breaking the word down: "pra" means transcendent,
"jna" means knowing,
transcendent knowing,
knowing which encompasses everything.
In Zen this is often referred to as "awakening".

Here, in our teachings at the White Wind Zen Community,
this is often translated as "radical insight"
or "perfect knowing"

because
it is the direct experience of the Awakened Nature,
and it shatters the terms and reference points of self-image,
of that contraction into a sense of a self
with its belief about how the world is and how it is.

Before those contractions into a sense of self—
and again, this is not, self-image is not referring to one thing,
it's not referring to a higher self, or a different self, or a evil twin self,
no it's just a phrase
just describing moments of experience
which are a contraction into a sense of a self
with a belief about how things are,
belief about how it is
and how the world is.

And we do believe them

until we see them
through the actual practice of sitting down in front of that wall,
learning to see the actual nature of experiencing,
learning to recognize that each moment of clear seeing
is a moment to practise, and,
as with anything,
as we practise, guess what?

Hey, we get better at it,
bodymind gets better at that clear seeing.

So we have prajna as a virtue of the Awakened Ones,
those who have woken up to the Actual Nature of Reality,
which is what we're teaching here,
the means,
the method, and
the monastery
so that you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and oh, not you.
[Sensei and students laugh loudly] Just kidding!

...can wake up yourself and find that whatever you are doing is guided by the virtues of
prajna, karuna, and upaya.

Now,
karuna:
compassion, active sympathy, gentle affection,
all actions that help to diminish the suffering of others,
and this is an outstanding quality of all bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

Compassion extends itself without distinction to all sentient beings.
This is not about being compassionate to someone because they're your boss
and you'll get a little something out of it, (there is another name, involving a colour for that
type of... but we won't go there.) [laughter] We definitely won't go there.

All beings.

And so that's birds.

We had a little bird that Ryoshin found in the basement of all things the other day,
and she picked it up, she brought it to me, we looked at it, it seemed quite lively.
We put it in a box and got information and called the Wild Bird Centre,
and then it was taken out to the Wild Bird Centre and treated.
Unfortunately the little bird died because it had been internally wounded. Maybe it had been
bitten by something.

But there was the little bird, so what's the other choice?
The choice is you can leave it there flopping around in the basement so that its life is
extended for perhaps a little while, but it suffers, there is no question about it.
Birds, fish, cats, dogs, cows,
they suffer when they're injured,
they need to be taken care of.

We have karuna which extends to all beings,
and often we have to make choices as to what we're going to do.
That can make life interesting, and there are all sorts of things,
as you progress through practice, as it were,
and as you enter into it more deeply, you have guidelines.
The precepts are templates or guides that you can use to look at situations as you decide
what is the most appropriate action.

With karuna, well,

it must be accompanied by prajna, by wisdom, radical insight,
because if it's not, the quality can become merely a feeling tone.
We can be very sympathetic, passive about how we are in situations.
We can feel pity,
which is not pleasant no matter which side of that you're on,
and it is disabling,
it is not compassionate.

So, karuna and prajna, principle virtues.

We hear this "continuously extolled" in many different ways in the teisho, in Dharma Talks, in things that we read, texts that we read, so these virtues are continuously presented. They're not virtues in the sense that you put them on like little brownie badges, "Rescued a bird? Here you are, here's your Bird Rescue Compassionate Being badge, and when you get six, you get a free trip to the movies."

Doesn't work like that.

But karuna with prajna can help each and every one of us make better choices about the actions that we take in situations.

Often situations occur very quickly,
so as you become more and more steeped in practice,
as you read and study and involve yourself
in conversations
and questions
and answers
about practice,
it starts to permeate every aspect of your experiencing.

So we have karuna, we have prajna, and there is always something going on that has to be dealt with.

What do we need?

Upaya: skillful means and methods.

This requires prajna to have the wisdom of adapting action to circumstance,
and
this is according to the four aspects of
person, place, appropriateness, and amount.

Like anything, this is something that is learned through the doing of it.

You can't really write down in your little book everything
that you're supposed to do in every situation because
you will recognize that what you are doing
is trying to institutionalize life.

That's not useful to anybody.

That is self-image acting out its usual stuff.

It doesn't want to make a mistake.

Self-image never wants to make a mistake
and when it does,
when something happens
it does its very best to point its fingers
at anything around
other than itself.

So it's a blamer.

Person, place, appropriateness, and amount.

Upaya: the ability of a bodhisattva or a Buddha to guide beings
to liberation

through skillful means,
and this involves all possible methods
from
straightforward talk
to pointing
to perhaps in some circumstances
raising the voice,
perhaps yelling,
whatever is necessary
to present the Teachings.

Now, the historical Buddha, it is said, made great use of upaya, adapting what was said or done, how it was presented, to those whom were being presented with the Teachings. Those of you who have chanted The Vow of Samantabhadra at the close of every day of a sesshin or O-sesshin will have noticed of course that many of the verses say quite explicitly, once you understand the code, that this is what is being talked about.

In the languages of shining beings and naga dragons,
of demons and of humans,
whatever form of communication there are amongst all beings,
in all of these may I unfold the Teachings of Reality.

Now this is interesting because we start to find,
as we notice what's going on around us,
the closer we come to the Teachings 24/7,
that there are many ways of teaching beings being presented.
A Teacher may ask us to do something,
and self-image will look at its little social calendar and say
“well I really want to do this thing...”

It takes a while—
and I'm saying this from my own experience, okay?
I'm not pointing my fingers at anyone in this room, okay?
—it takes a while to recognize
that the Teacher is asking you to do something for a reason,
which may not be apparent to you in the moment.
And why is that?
Because you're being invited into,
as it were,
the mind or the space of the Teacher,
but that is not yet your space.
Not that anyone can claim it as such.

Sometimes the Teacher will ask us to do things that we may not understand the full ramifications of, and we may resist, self-image may come up with all sorts of reasons why this is not a good thing and say insanely stupid things like: “but what if you asked me to kill somebody?” Well that's just argumentative and it's not surprising that a Teacher might look at you and say:

“Tsk tsk tsk. Poor thing.” or “Are you crazy? What do you think you're doing?” or, quite simply:
“well, if it were me being asked to kill somebody by the Teacher, I think I would call the police!”

So we sometimes can involve ourselves,
self-image can get itself involved to the point
where it might lose any sort of rational thought.
But these things can all be quite amusing
and can go down in the history of practice,

who knows,
maybe showing up one day as a koan.

Another verse from The Vow of Samantabhadra:

As I move through all realms of Being,
may I learn inexhaustible virtue and intelligence,
maybe I be an unending treasury of radical insight and skillful means,
of the harmonies and of freedom.

So once again, we're reminded, each time we chant that verse or come across it, or read it just for fun, what's going on.

Another one:

May I always understand the pure speech of the Outshining Ones,
and how they adapt the Teachings of Truth
to what seems to be true to the various being,
and so in a single sound set forth an ocean of tones.

So taking the Teachings of Truth,
reconfiguring it in a way
by whatever means possible,
to reach the intended student or recipient.

So this, we can see again how flexible the Teachings actually are,
and how self-image wants to get in there
and freeze that flexibility.
And that's okay, that's just a pattern.

When you see it:

feel the breath
feel the whole bodymind
actually practise.

So there is a constant rhythm and flow,
rhythm and flow,
constant questioning,
constant observing,
and this is not an effort,
it's just how things are.

You're alive in the moment.
You have eyes and ears and a mouth to speak,
you're breathing in and out,
you can practise.

Through the power of completely pure Richness,
the force of unobstructed Knowing,
the power of insight, skillful means, and of practice,
may all the forces of Awakening gather.

So again, an expression of how things are
a recognition of the power of insight,
prajna,
the power of upaya,
skillful means,
the power of compassion,
together are the forces of Awakening.

And that's what you're practising,
each time you notice anything whatsoever
about your experiencing,
and practise that moment.

The verse again:

Praising the virtues of the Buddhas,
"May all beings
Fulfill all the virtues
So continuously extolled."

So go for it!

Here you are, have fun!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 134: Praising the Marks of the Buddhas

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, May 26th, 2012

The verse:

Praising the marks of the Buddhas,
"May all beings
Unfold the body of Awake Awareness
And realize formless truth."

“The marks of the Buddhas...”

Now, some may have heard of the marks of the Buddha,
some may have visions of arms like elephant trunks,
heels that stick out like rooster's feet
marks on the hands and the feet of the wheel, the spoked wheel sign,
and there may come images of legs like a lion,
images of a beautiful gait, like that of a king elephant,
a stately gait like that of a king lion,
a beautiful gait like that of a swan,
a majestic gait like that of a royal ox.

So, people being people, over the centuries have come up with all sorts of interpretations and understandings of what a Buddha or Buddhas look like, and it's understandable why this has happened, it's really no different than what we do today.

It is important to remember that obvious as it sounds when it's mentioned, there were no photographs, no drawings, no videos, nothing on YouTube, no films about the Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha. In fact, it wasn't until several hundred years after this person that we call the Buddha, the original Buddha, the original One Who Had Woken Up, even though there were, and we reference them, Buddhas before Buddha, there have been people who woke up to the actual nature of Reality.

But remember, there were no images, and for the longest time, it is said that the Buddha, this Teacher, this object of reverence, was represented only by symbols such as footprints, big big footprints in some cases, an empty chair, a riderless horse, or an umbrella. Later, the tradition of sculptures was established and this was done in the Gandahara region, now Kandahar of Afghanistan, and it was roughly the 2nd century C. E. before such representations came to be made and came to be accepted.

As I've mentioned before, this part of Afghanistan was on a trade route, a trade route between

the East and the West, and cultures met. Romans and Greeks travelled along these roads, Chinese travelled along these roads, they met in the middle and as happens with travellers, especially travelling salesmen, we've all heard the stories, right? "Let's stop and have a little drink in the pub and let's talk." So, before you know it, there may have been mythic representations it would seem, of this character called "The Buddha". And we know that in Bamiyan there were huge statues, two of them, metres tall, so that would go into the mythologies of the traditions:
the sixteen foot tall body of the Buddha.

In the Digha Nikaya: Discourse of the Marks, 32 characteristics of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, are explained. The 32 characteristics are the 32 characteristics of a great man. (Why are we not surprised?)

And these 32 characteristics were also regarded as being present in Chakravartin kings. So I'm going to go through the list:

Level feet:

.sometimes this is translated as flat feet, flat feet with a pronounced heel, flat feet with a very large heel reaching out the back. So we start to see how in the minds of people who are afflicted with this terrible disease of being people, half-listening most of the time, making their own interpretations, and passing on something that is even more exaggerated. I think we're all familiar with that in one form or another, never of course having done so ourselves... but having witnessed it, having seen it in the culture, having experienced it from a simple little fish, for example, that might have been six inches long, but becomes a two foot long pike in the retelling.

So, we exaggerate, we tell stories. As long as we don't take it too seriously, it's pretty interesting.

Second one:

.thousand-spoked wheel sign on the feet, which in some texts are also described as being "smooth as a tortoise shell" thus being able to be grounded on the earth.

Long, slender fingers:

In some descriptions, connected with a web of light, and apparently this web of light came because of being generous, speaking kindly, giving encouragement, and setting an example for all by acting in accord with the previous three. Well this probably—it IS quite an important thing; being generous, speaking kindly, giving encouragement. That's something we can get into, is it not? And I think that we need not fear having, or even welcome if we're that type, a "web of light" between our fingers.

Pliant hands and feet:

.And in some other texts, this Pali interpretation, this Pali tradition of "pliant hands and feet" also was understood to mean that no matter how old, the skin was unwrinkled, like an infant that fed on mother's milk.

(Now, we better not let that one get out or we'll be besieged with all kinds of people coming to practise so they will be wrinkle-free. Well, we have some examples—I'm only talking about myself—that this is not the case.) [laughter]

Toes and fingers finely webbed, full-sized heels. Or: fingers and toes extremely long. It's also said that this comes from saving animals, or it's attributed to the fact that animals who were about to be slaughtered were saved.

Now, we've also talked about King Ashoka, who 300 B.C.E., in the kingdom which covered most of India, set up hospitals for animals as well as people, made hunting forbidden, and so we can see how mythology might have been created out of this and then the virtue of that transposed onto a human, or somewhat human, figure. King Ashoka also raised the columns that had an elephant, a horse on the top of the column—and a lion because the lion became part of the flag of India.

Arched insteps:

So therefore the feet couldn't have been flat, so by “level”, they must have meant something else. Maybe they meant they were both the same size, maybe they meant that they both legs were the same size. We will never know because no one has any pictorial representation of Gautama Siddhartha, nothing has ever been found.

Thighs like a royal stag.

Hands reaching below the knees:

Well, definitely we are primates but the hands “reaching below the knees” might take it just a little step closer to our primate brothers than we might—and sisters, (sorry about that)—than we might want to be.

A well-retracted male organ:

.in other texts-recessed and concealed, because he, the Buddha, never revealed confidences.

The height and stretch of the arms were equal:

This is a really interesting one because that is what the Vitruvian Man of Leonardo Da Vinci shows, that the outstretched arms and the height of the figure were equal. Vitruvius was an architect born approximately 80 or 70 B.C.E. He was Roman. He died 15 B.C.E. He travelled and lived in North Africa, Spain, Gaul, Turkey. He was writing about this ideal human being around that time, so bits and pieces of that might have gotten talked about and spread and ended up in a description of the Buddha, but we'll never know.

Every hair root was dark-coloured.

The body hair was graceful and curly.

There was a golden-hued body:

. Well that's not surprising considering the part of the world that Gautama Siddhartha lived in, and the “golden” would be on lighter rather than the darker scale, which it's better to be, apparently.

He had a ten-foot aura around him.

Soft, smooth skin.

The soles, palms, shoulders, and crown of the head were well-rounded.

The area below the armpits was well-filled. So this was a person who was “built”, it would seem.

He had a lion-shaped body.

The body was erect and upright.

There were no hollows between his shoulder blades.

And in the Pali texts it said he was like a bodhi tree, or like a banyon tree actually, in Pali. So he was like a tree.

Full, round shoulders.

He had 40 teeth, with those on the upper being equal to those on the lower:

So 20 teeth in each jaw. Something terrible has happened because we have 32 teeth, less the wisdom teeth if they're out, which gives us 28, so he must have had quite a smile! The teeth were white, even, and close. The four canine teeth were pure white.

He had a jaw like a lion, and saliva that improves the taste of all food. So that's maybe reference to the fact that whatever he was given to eat was welcome, and probably people were complimented for their cooking.

His tongue was long and broad, it could reach the top of his head, his ears, and his chest. This was said to have happened because he was always speaking kindly to others, and treating them as gently as an animal licking its young.

The voice was deep and resonant.

The eyes were deep blue.

Eyelashes were like a royal bull, or a cow in some texts.

Between the eyebrows there was a white curl that emits light. There was a hair that apparently could be pulled out so that when it was straight, it reached a great distance. When it was released [Sensei makes a spring sound, as though the hair has bounced back and coiled on the forehead] it would snap back into a curl between those eyebrows.

There was a fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head. And some texts say the head was shaped like a royal turban, or ushnisa.

The 80 minor characteristics or secondary characteristics of the Buddhas are, some say, and it seems to be the case, simply a more detailed look and finer fabrications based on the 32 major marks because that's what we human beings like to do. We like to look at things, if we're the type of person who likes to do that, and we will pick it apart and come up with more, become more and more detailed about it.

So you are quite welcome to "google" this yourself and have some fun with it. And, as I've said, there are no representations of the Buddha extant, and he was only represented in artistic form in roughly the second century C.E.

Now, a scholar, many scholars in fact, have concluded that the followers of the Mahayana, which is where this practise springs from, played no part in that past in developing and introducing statuary and other depictions of the Buddha. The Mahayana seem to be only interested in becoming Buddhas.

So here you sit in front of that wall, fingers and toes, eyes, ears, nose, breathing in and out, recognizing that just like that human being, Gautama Siddhartha, who sat down under the bodhi tree 2600 years ago, you have everything that you need to wake up to that actual nature of experiencing, to join that list of Buddhas.

And have no fear, you will not develop rooster feet,
your arms will not turn into elephant trunks,
and you will get wrinkles.

So have fun with all of this!

Any time you notice anything whatsoever,
ANYthing,
it's a dharma,
a known,
a moment of experience,
you're the Knowing of it,
practise the fact of that moment
of clear seeing.

Once again, the verse:

 Praising the marks of the Buddhas,
 "May all beings
 Unfold the body of Awake Awareness
 And realize formless truth."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 135: Washing Their Feet

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, June 2nd, 2012

To quote the Roshi: "Without hesitation, each drop of rain."

Listen.

You can hear raindrops hitting leaves,
cleaning them of dust.
We can hear the falling rain splashing from the car tires...
We can hear raindrops hitting plastic covering wood.

Those raindrops at some point in time,
some point in history,
were and will be at some point in the future
part of the breath
that is breathed in and out
air-breathers
including humans.

Today's verse:

Washing their feet,
"May all beings
Fulfill the bases of subtle perceptions,
Moving as unobstructedness everywhere."

And there is a footnote in the text on subtle perceptions: "the four bases of subtle perception" as written of in the Shinyoisoku (rddhipada) are: "determination, consciousness, effort, investigation".

So, absolutely necessary to mature practice,
these subtle perceptions
when applied,
when understood moment to moment,
will mature practice
and will inevitably result in obstructed Knowing,
all the time,
enabling you,
each one of you,
to move as unobstructedness everywhere,
to do what needs to be done.

"Unbelievable!" self-image might say...
self-image: a contraction into a sense of self
with its problem orientation
with its stance of basic unsatisfactoriness.
Nothing's ever good enough,
and by this time you've probably noticed that
the thing that says there's a problem
is the problem.

What to do?

Simple:

Simple.

Feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
allow the rib cage to open

and the lungs to expand
see the seeing
hear the hearing
and all this has happened several times
since I've been talking about it.

It's faster to do it than to talk about it
so why waste any time thinking about it?
Allow the bodymind to be itself,
to be unobstructed.
Anytime
anywhere.

Now, "washing their feet".
Well, we've washed our feet this morning.
Have we washed anyone else's feet?
Well, not really. Not really,
but we can look into this foot washing business
and it does seem to be a trans-cultural thing
that washing someone else's feet
is not only being of service
but in many instances has moved into the desolate marketplace
of acquiring something for doing something,
acquiring merit for splashing water on a child monk's feet
as they are returning from their begging rounds,
which goes on today, apparently.
I myself have not seen it but I've seen pictures.

Remember, when these verses were written, some 1600 years ago, they were written in an area of the globe that was let's say, dustier most probably than we are familiar with today. So when people would come to another person's house, they would take care of their feet, clean them off before entering barefoot. And if the person was someone that the householder considered worthy of more merit than they were, they would wash the feet of that person.

When you think that most households at that time would not have had running water, indeed this service involved a lot of determination on the part of the person washing the feet and this of course became ritualized.

In many monasteries, for example, in that part of the world, you would and will wash your feet before entering so as not to dust up the place.

So there were stories told of course, because we human beings like to tell stories, and whether this actually happened or not, we will never know, but there is a story involving the Buddha and Rahula, who was his son and who became a monk, who eventually in the course of his practice was known for his knowledge and precision in esoteric practices and his desire for instruction in the Dharma and this was apparently a bit of a switch about because when he was a kid, he used to lie just for fun, at least that's what the story says, just for fun. One day the Buddha was coming to visit Rahula in the monastery. Out of respect and because it was what people do, Rahula prepared a bucket of water to wash the Buddhas feet.

After his feet had been washed and the dust of the road had been removed and lay in the bucket, the Buddha said: "Rahula, drink this water, son." And Rahula said: "No! The water is dirty therefor it cannot be drunk."

And the Buddha said: "Similarly, you don't put hard effort into your practice, you don't purify your deeds, and you don't speak the truth. Your head is full of poisons. And that, dear boy, is the same as the dirty water."

So the Buddha said: "Pour the water away."

Then he said: "Rahula, now that that bucket is empty, let's put some rice in it, rice for eating."

"OH! No! We can't do that Buddha, it's dirty, it can't be used for food."

And the Buddha said: "Similarly, you don't practise the precepts. Your heart is full of dirt. How can your heart contain the food of the Dharma?"

Then the Buddha lightly kicked the bucket over. Rahula was startled.

The Buddha said: "Rahula, are you afraid the bucket is broken?"

"No, the bucket is for washing feet, it's for rough use, so it doesn't matter if it's broken."

The Buddha said: "Similarly Rahula, a monk who doesn't practise the precepts won't be loved or respected by others. You'll not attain enlightenment if you don't smarten up and do what you have vowed to do."

And it is said that over time Rahula was a changed person.

And it is said that later the same day the Buddha told Rahula a parable about how a war elephant protects his trunk because it is the weakest part of the elephant.

"Similarly Rahula, you should take care of your speech because you are vulnerable to bad karma if you continue to lie and continue to practise bad speech."

Mean what you say and say what you mean.

Rahula became a changed person. It is said he woke up and was foremost in esoteric practices and diligence in studying in the Dharma.

This little story is from a translation by a Mr. Lee done in 2002 from "Ten Imminent Disciples of the Buddha" by the Reverend Ching Yun.

So there are many variations on this particular teaching story.

So wash your feet, don't lie.

In Thai society and many others, the head is considered to be clean and sacred whereas the feet are dirty and it's an insult to wave your feet at someone while you're sitting down, or to use your feet to push something aside.

There are still vestiges of this that it is disrespectful when we situations with our elders and have our feet pointing at them.

As I said before, many devout Buddhists feel honoured to wash the feet of monks who are returning to the monastery after receiving alms.

There are vestiges of the fact of water and the fact of drinking and washing in two little bowls, two little water offerings which in some places are said to be symbolic of one for drinking and one for foot washing. And again, remember the importance of this because people did walk around in very dusty situations, far dustier than most of us would experience, so washing the feet before entering a building, and before engaging in certain activities would be very important.

Clear water is mixed with sandalwood or incense when the feet are being washed in the form of an offering to an Enlightened or Awakened being, and the symbolic meaning of water has always been purification.

By cleaning the feet of the Awakened Ones, the Buddhas, we are cleansing ourselves of our negative karma. Self-image always gets in there, bartering in the desolate marketplace: "I'll wash your feet, for that I'll get good karma".

By making offerings to clean the Buddhas feet, we are really cleaning the feet of our own mind.

Well, I really don't know exactly what they're talking about by "the feet of the mind" but

your guess is just as good as mine, so perhaps that will help you remember the verse:

Washing their feet,
"May all beings
Fulfill the bases of subtle perceptions,
Moving as unobstructedness everywhere."

I think it's worth repeating the four bases of subtle perception: determination, consciousness, effort, and investigation.

Now, investigation is something that can only be done by you.
You look into your own experiencing.

The determination to put forth the effort
when you know a known,
to actually practise,
to feel the breath,
to feel the whole bodymind,
to wake up to Reality.

Oh, just for fun, once again:

Washing their feet,
"May all beings
Fulfill the bases of subtle perceptions,
Moving as unobstructedness everywhere."

Thank you for listening.

And the drops of water are still at it
unobstructed.

Every Breath You Take 136: When Going to Sleep at Night

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, July 7th, 2012

Oh go ahead,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
open peripheral vision
there really really really is
only this moment
but now it's gone,
it's another moment.

Any time you notice
anything at all,
practise that moment of Knowing,
that moment of noticing,
that moment of clear seeing.

That's what you're practising.

You're not practising like some obsessed housewife
washing dirt off her doorstep,
you're not practising to wear out those thoughts
be they dirty or clean
it doesn't matter
you're not practising like one of those giant pink erasers
so that you can get every little smudge

that you believe is present
in the way you are
off.

No no no no,
not at all,
you're practising this moment,
and it is full of dharma,
moments of experience,
moments of experience,
known by the bodymind,
and you're the Knowing of them.

The verse today is familiar to anyone who has ever sat a retreat
and who has ever attended sesshin or O-sesshin
where the Verse of Sleep,
the Shushin-ge is chanted:

When going to sleep at night,
"May all beings
Calm all things
And uncover the stainless mind of clarity."

Now, if I were a betting kind of monk, I'd be willing to bet that many who have chanted this
verse didn't know that it was written some 1600 years ago. That's neither here nor there but
it can tell us certain things, it can tell us that people have been practising for a long time, it
can tell us that people are awake and then they are asleep, that bodyminds need to sleep and
that bodyminds need to be reminded of what it is that they are doing when they are
practising.

So:

When going to sleep at night,
"May all beings
Calm all things
And uncover the stainless mind of clarity."

So this part of the Soto-shingi, the way that things are done, comes from the Avatamsaka
sutra, from these verses of The Practice of Purity.

Now, there's something else that's in some places, some circumstances, for some length of
time people have said to themselves at night, or in a group at night, now it goes:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Who could sleep after that? [loud laughter from students]

The point being that the latter, the one that I just spoke very clearly promotes contraction into
a sense of a self. It's very useful for solidifying these beliefs that we are this bodymind and
that life is full of hazards and that we better ask somebody else to do something about it
because we're incapable.

The verse that was in the Avatamsaka sutra, the verse that we translated in The Practice of
Purity is a reminder to oneself that there's a wish that all beings, now fortunately it doesn't
say all human beings, because let me tell you there are some days when human beings are
right at the bottom of my list [Sensei laughs] of beings that you want to do something for!

[students giggle]

But, "May all beings", everything,
every little snake,
every little frog,
every little kitten,
every cat,
every dog,
every horse,
every pig,
every cow,
and on and on
and lions and tigers and bears oh my!
All beings!
Trees, clouds, water,
may everything
be calm.

And there is also the instruction and the reminder that
through sitting in front of that blank wall
looking at and uncovering your moment to moment experiencing,
you are uncovering the stainless mind of clarity.

Now in this Lineage a mirror is often referenced when speaking of mind and the reference is
that just as a mirror is never stained by anything that is reflected in it, so this thing we call
"mind" is not stained by thoughts and feelings and sensations, by anything that arises within
it.

That's impossible.

In order for there to be an impact of experiences, there has to be—let's call it an "enabler",
someone who says: "Oh, I am those patterns". Oh my does that not sound a little bit like what
we describe in this practise as "self-image"? A contraction into an image of a self with a belief
about how it is and how the world is.

So this little verse is saying:
if we all care about all beings,
we do want to take care of them,
we do want to calm all things
because we've all recognized that
the disruptions that occur
in oneself when patterns are followed,
in relationships when patterns are followed,
in the larger social group,
in social culture,
in nation states when patterns are followed...
These disruptions aren't necessary
and they aren't useful.

So by sitting,
by looking at moment to moment experiencing,
by resolving to fall for none of it,
to use none of these random and chaotic events,
experiences, dharma,
that arise
to define who you are,
you are allowing that greater space to be available,
you're just seeing these things for what they are,

just like leaves blowing in the wind,
like motes of dust in the sunlight,
they're just occurrences.

You are the Knowing of experiences,
dharma.

Bodymind is how anything at all is known.

You've all had moments of understanding how actually self-evident that is
but then—self-image gets in there and says:

"I understand!"

and as the Roshi has said,

"once you think you understand, understanding is gone".

So, when you notice anything whatsoever,
anything,
practise that moment of clear seeing.

The verse again:

When going to sleep at night,
"May all beings
Calm all things
And uncover the stainless mind of clarity."

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 137: Awakening From Sleep

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei
Dainen-ji, July 14h, 2012

The good news:

each and every one of you
woke up this morning...
put one foot in front of the other
to come and practise
the practice of Waking Up
to the Reality of your life,
Waking Up
to this moment.

As long as there's breath
moving that bodymind
in and out,
you can practise,
you can be present
for your own life.

Isn't that amazing?

Isn't it amazing how we tend not to think about things like that,
before we start to practise,
perfectly obvious things
such as

"this moment is the only moment that is going on".

We are reaching the end of the Every Breath You Take series.

Today we are looking at the last verse, in fact, from "The Practice of Purity":

Awakening from sleep,

"May all beings
Realize each thing as it is,
Pervading the ten directions."

And last week, the verse was "When Going to Sleep at Night".
The arrangement is interesting.
It presents a presumption that in fact
you are going to wake up the next morning.
"When Going to Sleep at Night" might have given the presumption
that you are not going to wake up in the morning
and that if you didn't,
well,
something: the breath, the soul, whatever you want to call it
might have been taken away from you.

But no, we have:

Awakening from sleep,
"May all beings
Realize each thing as it is,
Pervading the ten directions."

Now each thing does make everything else what it is.
That has always been the case,
that is the case
and that will continue to be the case
and that's not just our silly little understandings
about who we are
and how the world is
and our little concerns about our place in things
and whether we're being one upped
or whether we are one upping,
whether we're more intelligent than or less intelligent than,
taller than,
smarter than,
and so on...
and on and on
with all the things that a contraction into a sense of a self
with a belief about how it is and how the world is
would like to hang on its person
as little charm bracelets
or merit badges
or signals of some sort of status.

So each thing does make everything else what it is
and this verse,
again written in a land far, far away,
many many many,
1600 years ago approximately,
is still chanted.

Where?

Here.

By whom?

By those attending sesshin or O-sesshin.

We chant it first thing in the morning.

We gather in the Zendo.

In the wintertime, there's no light, really to speak of, it's very dark out and we chant:

As we wake this morning,
may all beings
realize each dharma as it is
pervading the ten directions.

So this chant is a reminder of the Reality of experiencing in this moment.

We wish that all beings realize the nature of Reality completely.

Each and every one of course
from their own ten directions,
from north and south and east and west,
northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest,
up, down,
because the ten directions are not a solid and stable thing
that originate in one point,
but as with the three times,
are part of your life in this moment of your experiencing.

Now, you can if you would like to set the course for your day,
recite this little verse to yourself as soon as you wake up.

Wake up!

You can do it in bed if you like,
have it running in your mind,
in your thoughts,
through the whole bodymind:

As we wake this morning,
may all beings
realize each dharma as it is
pervading the ten directions.

which at that moment is you reminding yourself
of what it is that you're practising,
which is the Reality of experiencing,
which is, as Joshu roshi said,
practising to be a real human being,
not to be swayed by the stories and thoughts and beliefs
and unquestioned assumptions
about how you are and how the world is.

So it's there, use it,
it's another little tool to help you
open your practice further.

But you know how it is, huh?

Self-image comes up:

"Well you know, I'm just, I have to have a cup of coffee before I can do anything..."

That's bullshit

as are all of the stories that we tell ourselves.

You know,

you know how it goes,

we've all done it.

"Well, I really want to practise every day, I really want to do it, but you know, I have a very demanding job and I get tired and so I can't sit still and upright for 30 minutes."

That's bullshit
because practice is something you can do up to the point of death.
You can be lying there waiting,
as it were,
for that last breath to leave,
and you can still practise.

So there's no excuse.

What it is,
as with anything,
it's a matter of doing it,
seeing all the things that get in the way of you doing,
and you'll start to notice that they are, oh,
castles, walls, barricades made out of nothing.
They can seem to be
and have been recognized throughout the history of Dharma,
they can seem to be solid,
they're called obstructions and obscurations,
but when you start to see them for what they are:
thoughts,
that's it.

There is no thought that can come up and strongarm you
and make you do anything.

There is the illusion that this can happen,
and today SCIENCE, the MEDICAL FIELD are saying
you know, mindfulness practice can help us with a lot of the things that plague us,
a lot of the ills that plague us.
So, hey, 2600 years, that's not too long, is it?
Better late than never.

So people are starting to realize:
yes, thoughts can be perpetuated
or not.
When you see them you can do something
or not
so there is a choice.
We need reminders, however, that's just the case,
we're training,
we are training ourselves.

Now, we can have a little pocket full of treats if we want,
as long as we don't bring it into the Hatto or the Zendo,
so each time you—
or during your formal sitting at home—
each time you notice a thought is a thought, give yourself a little treat.

[Sensei laughs]

But the actual treat presents itself,
the treat of open experiencing,
the treat of this moment
as rich and full as it is
no matter what's going on.

So treat yourself to that.

And I'll be quite willing to make available the text for the Verse of Awakening for anyone who
would like it. They can have it handy on a little card near where they sleep, you don't have to

do it out loud, but it can set the tone for your understanding of who you are and what you're doing.

It can be quite helpful.

So the verse again:

Awakening from sleep,
"May all beings
Realize each thing as it is,
Pervading the ten directions."

Have fun with it!

Thank you for listening.

Every Breath You Take 138: Child of the Awakened Ones

Dharma Talk Presented by Ven. Shikai Zuiko o-sensei

Dainen-ji, July 28th, 2012

"Child of the Awakened Ones, if wakeful ones use their intelligence in this way, they will unfold all supreme and wonderful qualities, which cannot be shaken away by any shining beings, demons, monks, aristocrats, celestial musicians, violent shining beings, and so on, nor by any who have only a hearsay knowledge of the Teachings or those who self-fabricate enlightened states."

This is the summation of the "Every Breath You Take" series.

This is number 138.

The "Every Breath You Take" series is from the Avatamsaka sutra, Chapter 11, verses written some 1600 years ago all about practice,

all about YOU!

Now when we hear "Child of the Awakened Ones"

our tendency is to think:

"Oh yes, someone else, this has nothing to do with me..."

But there you are sucking on the tit of the Ancestors,
sitting in front of that wall,

I mean

face it:

you are provided with the nutrition to grow your practice,
that's what you're doing,
Child of the Awakened Ones.

And in the summation there is a naming of beings:

"shining beings,

demons,

monks,

aristocrats,

celestial musicians,

violent shining beings,

and so on,"

and again our tendency is to put this outside of ourself

these become beings,

things who will attack us,

things that we have to be wary of.

Well, the "be wary of" part is correct,
because often in many of the Teachings,

there are described
"shining beings, demons, monks, aristocrats, celestial musicians, violent shining beings, and
so on,"
and there is talk of the
Ten Realms of Existence,
the six mundane:
human,
animals,
hungry ghosts,
ashyuras
heaven,
and hell.

And another way of looking at that is:
states,
moments in time
when there is a contraction in the bodymind,
your bodymind,
that has a belief about how it is
and how the world is,
and our behaviour fits into,
exhibits,
or
shows these different realms.

The human realms,
the animal realm
where the concern is basically eating, pooping, reproducing.

The hungry ghost realm,
and those hungry ghosts:
skinny, pale, long fingers, big eyes,
tiny mouths:
a visualization,
a representation of poverty mind,
that which says:
"Please Sir, give me more!"

and we reach out with those little graspers
to get something that we believe,
that self-image believes
will fill
that basic unsatisfactoriness.

So when we hear these references,
when we take them to be talking about
right here
right now,
we can recognize that no matter what we call it,
when there is a contraction
into a sense of a self,
with a belief about how it is
missing something,

or
having everything better than everybody else,
a better human being,

a better representation of a monk,
whatever the belief might be,
it is self-image dancing around.

The moment you see it:
practise!

Practise what?

Well, practise the only thing that's going on,
which is

this moment,

and when you notice something
in this moment,
there is a moment of clear seeing,
there is a moment of waking up to Reality.

Feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
that is what you are practising.

Now the statement also says that
"the supreme and wonderful qualities" that have been unfolded,
which are the qualities of a real human being,
the ability to recognize what is going on
in this moment,
which is the only thing that's going on
ever,
anywhere.

There are those, and they are things that we do and have experienced ourselves,
the fabricating of "enlightened states",
the fabricating and the believing in
"hearsay knowledge of the Teachings"
is something that's been going on
at least for 1600 years because it's talked about here.

In a footnote to the text, the Roshi notes that what is being talked about is
"shomon", in Japanese, or "sravaka" in Sanskrit,
"engaku" or "pratyekabuddhas" in Sanskrit.

The "shomon" were "voice hearers" and they refer to the immediate disciples of the historical Buddha who had the opportunity to hear the Buddha first hand. The Mahayana, into which this practice falls, also uses this term for those individuals who studied the Buddha's Teachings and contemplate them in an attempt to attain enlightenment for themselves, in contrast to "bosatsu" or, in Sanskrit, "bodhisattvas", who strive to aid others as well as themselves.

And there are the "pratyekabuddhas", "engaku" who try to read enough to practise forms, to practise ways of being enough to observe the world and the changes of nature, and through this realize the impermanent nature of everything, and see how things arise as a product of cause and conditions. That's the heart of the "pratyekabuddha", these are practitioners who gain many insights and realizations from observing the world.

Now, "sravakas" or "pratyekabuddhas" can develop purity of conduct and a high degree of wisdom, however, they are not able to attain the full degree of awakening of a Buddha.

Why not?

Because they're falling for the words about it,
they are falling for the experiences
rather than the clear seeing of dharma,
or moments of experiencing
and
practising in that moment.

Now, we do know that we LOVE to be able to fit ourselves into categories.
If we read a category about anything, we will try and fit ourselves into it.
What we want to see is that pattern
that is self-image
trying to create a place,
to establish a place
for itself.

Well, if there's only this moment,
all you can ever be
is in and of this moment.

There is no "place",
there's just this.

In today's eMirror, (Volume 16 No. 30 for those who are not present today and who may hear this in the future,) the beginning of teisho 4, "What a Buddha Knows" from Anzan Hoshin roshi's commentaries on Dogen zenji's "Yuibutsu Yobutsu, Seeing Eye to Eye", he says:

There is nothing to entangle you, nothing to be attached to. No matter how crazy and confused and contracted you were a moment ago or even right now, you don't have to be stuck with it.

To quote Dogen zenji:
"The total universe is the gate of liberation."

You need no other gate. And you can enter it anywhere at any time. To truly understand this, you must know that you cannot enter it, you cannot pass through this gate of liberation as if it were a doorway. Why? Because it's open on both sides of the door. There is no door. The gate of liberation is Mumonkan, a gateless gate.

All there is is this moment
right here
right now.

How startling is that, really
when you live it
when you feel the breath
when you feel the whole bodymind?

This is it.

Now, this is the last of the Every Breath You Take series. This was started in November 2007. That was about two years after I was given the diagnosis of congestive heart failure because of an enlarged heart.

Now, quite frankly, I did not think at the time that I would reach this point of finishing the whole thing. [Sensei laughs] So I delayed a bit in starting it, I thought:

"What's the point? Why start something you can't finish?"

And then I realized that was just stupid. So I thought, well, I'll start it, I'll do my best, we'll see what happens.

Well, here I am, for better or worse.
Here I am.
Here you are.
All sorts of things have changed for all of us,
including, you know,
my heart went back to a normal size.

The doctor says: "Well, really we don't know, we go for the norm when we're talking about stuff." [Sensei laughs]

But here we are!
This moment,
the only thing that's going on
ever.

This is your life.
Welcome to it.

When you see it clearly,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind
and you too,
you
Child of the Awakened Ones,

"... if wakeful ones use their intelligence in this way,

and of course, the "this way" is a reference to the 137 verses that have preceded,
which of course we all know by heart...

they will unfold all supreme and wonderful qualities, which cannot be shaken away
by any shining beings, demons, monks, aristocrats, celestial musicians, violent
shining beings, and so on, nor by any who have only a hearsay knowledge of the
Teachings or those who self-fabricate enlightened states."

Thank you for listening.