

3: End It

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Dainen-ji, February 28, 1998

Previously, we have looked at The First Noble Truth which is that conditioned experience causes dukkha, suffering, unsatisfactoriness. The Second, this dukkha, this bad space, is caused by grasping; grasping after experiences, objects, anything to stop the petty nattering of self-image as it moans and whines. Today we are looking at the Third of the Noble Truths: The truth of the end of suffering; the truth that there is an end to dukkha.

Traditionally, what is experienced after these burning flames of craving, grabbing, clenching, have been seen for what they are and extinguished, is called “nirvana” which literally means “blown out”; or as Anzan roshi has said, “The complete removal of grasping after a self.”

Previously, we had the student standing as the Teacher talked to other students. The student reached out, grabbed a chanting text, and pulling it, and pulling the space tight, said, “I want to learn ALL of these.”

“Don’t do that!” That simple phrase bellowed by Zen Master Anzan Hoshin, exhibiting grandmotherly kindness, for a moment that knot in space created by the student by the grasping after some “one” who could have some “thing” was cut through and opened by the sword of the Roshi’s pointing. But only for the briefest of moments and then space closed down again and became hurtful, caused the student to suffer, self-image turning on that spit, turning in space, being burnt by the flames of grasping, by the flames of the klesas of passion, aggression, and stupidity. And then what happened?

Suffering, dukkha, is not pleasant. It is surprising that we make a choice to do so much of it over and over and over again. We experience a moment of clarity, a flash of understanding, contraction is released into open space, everything is round and bright for the briefest possible moment. That is who we are. That is what we must practise.

In the story of the student and the teacher there are many things to look at. There is far more to look at through the lens of our own experiencing than meets the eye or the ear at first glance. One day, the student, after having stirred up a very poisonous soup flavored with all sorts of stories about, “why he had said that to me” asked the Roshi, “Roshi, what was wrong with what I said? I just said I want to learn all the chants. Isn’t that a good thing to do?”

The Roshi explained, “It isn’t what you said. It is how you were when you said it.”

So, we’ve been told that practice and all the forms of practice are available to us to help us look into how we are moment after moment after moment. Everything, all the Teachings, are available for us, all around, all the time. But students can only understand what they can make themselves available for. So, “It is how you were when you said it”, of course, became another bone of contention; something to chew on, something for self image to use to justify itself. Well, I was fine. I was just interested. I guess I was a little tired at the time. [O-sensei laughs] I just don’t know why you say these things to me. [O-sensei laughs].

And then one day -and we don’t know when it is going to happen - we are sitting and we see the thought come up. We see the movement of attention into the propagation of that particular state. We see it clearly

enough that we are actually able to practise that moment. And what happens? It releases and opens. We are practising ourselves as we are.

So I would go back to the Roshi and say "Now I understand... if I, what if...perhaps, if I had spoken more slowly or bowed more completely?" Well, perhaps, that is partial.

And the Roshi would say and has said again and again and again and again "It is not what you said, it is how you were, when you said it. This is what you must see."

So to reiterate, the Four Noble Truths: The first one: conditioned experiencing causes dukkha, bad space or suffering. The second Noble truth: this conditioned experience is caused by grasping. The third: we can end this grasping, this bad space, this dukkha. And fourth: How? By practice.

Now these were, as we have seen, these four noble truths were presented by the Buddha to his first five students and it is said the Buddha based his presentation of the Four Noble Truths on the four questions that doctors, who were his contemporaries 2600 years ago, used in contemplating the treatment of the patient. The first was: is there disease and if so what is the disease? The second: What is the cause? Third: Is there a cure for the disease? Fourth: If the disease is curable, what is the proper treatment?

So the first, suffering, dukkha, bad space is the disease, not life. Life is not a disease, life is life. Suffering is the disease. What is it caused by? It is caused by grasping, it is caused by the tendency of self image to want to grab on to things to make itself real, to pull things to it, to create something that is solid, something that will let itself forget the pettiness and the insubstantiality of its very existence. Is there a cure for the disease? Yes, there is. There is an end possible to this suffering.

What is the proper treatment? Practise. And if we practise, over and over and over again, this moment, over time the tendency of this clinching, of this acquisition of self, is extinguished. We are no longer fooled by it. We, ourselves, are ennobled by the application of the Four Noble Truths to our own moment-to-moment experiencing.

Now curiously, I found out just before coming up here that one of the meanings for the words "noble" is "free from pettiness and meanness". The word itself comes from the Greek, "nobilus", "to know". Now I don't know if this is absolutely true, but I thought that this is so interesting because if we know how we are, if we know really what it is to be a human being, we practise that knowing and through that can free ourselves from the pettiness and meanness of self-image.

Nirvana is the release from, the absence of the longing or craving, for grasping, for pulling into being all the obstructions that obscure open experiencing. Nirvana is a condition in which our human potential, our capacities, the capacities of body mind are opened. As Dogen Zenji says in the "Fukenzazenji", "traps and cages spring open". And he goes on to say, "the doors of the treasure house fall open for you to do with, as you will". The treasure house of your life as it arises in this moment.

Sakyamuni Buddha lived and taught for 45 years after he woke up, he lived and taught in this world. For the Buddha, Nirvana and this world were one and the same. Nirvana is not a concept to be pondered and understood intellectually but is the actual realization of the clarity and perfect freedom of this moment, unconditioned by the contractions of self image. It is this moment as it really is. How do we understand it? We understand this through our practise of this moment with this bodymind.

Zen Master Anzan Hoshin says in "The Great Matter",

"Each moment presents us with a most precious opportunity, a most precious gift, whether we have a stomach ache or we are sleeping, or our bones hurt, or we are cold, whether we are feeling happy or we're meeting an old friend, no matter what our experience is, our experience arises in and as this moment. And this moment is the very gate, through which we can enter more completely into ourselves, as we are".

Thank you for listening.