Freefall

Presented by Jinmyo Renge sensei while training as “Osho”
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We are born in freefall and we die in freefall. Each moment arises and falls away and leaves nothing behind because there is only this present moment, a moment that is never something that is present but is only a presencing. There is always a falling away and this is where and how we live and die. The Buddha called this annica or impermanence; the Prajnaparamita Teachings call this sunyata or emptiness; Eihei Dogen zenji called it uji or Being-time. Now and then, Anzan Hoshin roshi has called the falling away of now to then as “freefall”.

Between birth and death we spend a great deal of energy trying to tame freefall, trying to make impermanence permanent, trying to make it appear to be as solid as possible. If we pay attention to our experiencing as it actually is, then it is obvious that it is not solid. But by ignoring the details that make each thing what it is and agreeing to the ensuing distortion, we can make the impermanent seem permanent. The process of contraction we refer to as self-image creates and sustains a sense of separation by ignoring the rising and falling of experiencing. It instead fixates on one dharma, or moment of experiencing and then another and then another, freezing and congealing attention into stories of self and other which give rise to further fixation and contraction. Self-image is very ritualistic in its thinking and from this ritualistic thinking comes the notion that if we do things “right” then everything will work out; and of course it doesn’t because stories and feelings have nothing to do with how anything is or how things work. Everything drifts and shifts and simply will not stay the same, not even for a moment. And moment-to-moment we have no way of knowing what we will experience in the next moment. Right now the wind might make the windows rattle or we might hear the sound of a bird call or the ikebana could fall over. Experiencing unfolds as continuously changing details and we change too. In this moment the future is falling away with each microsecond of breath we take. It doesn’t even fall past us, because we fall away with it.

In the teisho entitled “Tumbling” in the series “Wild Time: Commentaries on Dogen zenji’s Being Time”, the Roshi says,

This moment is itself a gap, a hole.

There is nothing substantial to it at all.

It is this coming and going that comes "from" nowhere,
goes "to" nowhere.

The movement of moments
is not an orderly procession.
Moments do not march according to the dictates
of some principle of movement.

Each moment rises, tumbles, falls away.

There is no underlying principle
that holds any thing, any time, any place in place.

Everything is always
in freefall
without even the certainty
of somewhere to fall from or to.

The only place is here.

The practice of zazen, of attending to our experiencing as it actually is, is sitting in freefall. It is not about cultivating a state or a way of "being". There is absolutely no strategy that you can apply during zazen that will give you anything that self-image hopes to achieve or acquire because the practice does not care about your agendas. Trying to make the mind still or quiet does not work. Trying to arrange yourself in this way or that way doesn't work. Hoping that God or Buddha or something the Roshi doesn't actually talk about or name – but you hope he is speaking of in code – is going to carry you up into the light and make it all alright or some such thing… just won't happen. What the practice will do if you actually do it, is take everything away from you – all of your ideas and beliefs about who and what you are because who and what you are is not any of your thoughts and feelings, ideas and beliefs.

I'm quite sure that as soon as I said those words, "who and what you are", many of the students sitting here this morning started thinking about what that might mean. Very often students will hear or read a phrase associated with the Teachings and think that they should think about it. Nothing could be further from the truth. On hearing the words you understood what you understood in that moment and that is all there is to it. You cannot stand apart from your understanding to understand something. To understand further, your understanding must change and in the context of practice this requires deepening practice through doing the practice. So listen, read, and let questions that come up simply float in freefall and come back to your practice instead of fixating on a question or an idea, trying to figure out answers or new interpretations. If you start trying to figure anything out you will only achieve what I sometimes refer to as "lift-off". But the space you rocket into is nothing more than mental space and there is nothing there except more thoughts which are only space knotted within space.

The contracted space in which storylines take place is gravity-free, free of consequences. Within it, anything

can seem to be true. You can draw mental maps, cobble together strange fabrications of meanings and link them all together in ways that seem quite profound to you but are just nonsensical. A student who was at one point spending a great deal of his sitting time orbiting in mental space summed this up quite nicely when he said “All this feels to me like a huge mind vortex that I am unable to escape.”

This apparent prison of spinning storylines is only attention folding on in itself. And all around all of this mental activity the world is unfolding in freefall. Let the mind fall into the body and let the bodymind open to reality as it actually is. When attention is allowed to open past what Dogen zenji described as our “small circles of self-concern” into the directness and immediacy of the sensations, colours, forms and sounds, then the bodymind IS sensations, colours, forms, and sounds. There is no need for a “middle-man”, to think about or interpret experiencing. Each thing is what it is and needs no embellishment.

Another example of how complicated it can get is what I refer to as “the hall of mirrors”. One gets lost in the hall of mirrors by taking up the stance of an observer, watching oneself practicing, which leads to the project of trying to see the watcher which in turn leads to trying to see the watcher that is watching the watcher and so on, like two mirrors facing each other reflecting the same image into infinity. “I’m looking back to see if you are looking back to see if I am looking back at you”. A student who had got himself thoroughly lost in the hall of mirrors described this quite well when he said “If I look at you or anyone, I am already looking back at my self, as my self seen through you as my self. I am all names and forms and the light that makes the picture show glow.”

Oh my. At the time he really thought this state was a good thing and what the Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors present in the Dharma.

There is only one bodymind sitting on the zafu. Practice this single bodymind.

I have a story for you about practising single bodymind that also describes an interaction between Joshu Dainen roshi and a monk. This story was written by a monk named Endon who was a student of Joshu roshi’s during the time that Anzan Hoshin roshi was also training as Joshu roshi’s student. Endon wrote:

> *“Having dokusan with Joshu roshi involved striking a densho bell, waiting for him to strike a gong, entering after a standing bow, doing three full bows to the floor, then staying kneeling in seiza with forehead to the floor. Roshi would say, “Koan?” after which you would recite the koan and then he would say, “Well?” and you would give your answer. Then generally he would hit you on the back or the back of the head or whatever and strike the gong to signal dokusan was over. You would do three full bows and leave, bowing at the door.*
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> *“Once I did my bows and had my head to the floor and was kneeling in seiza when suddenly I farted — loudly — and a real sewer smell enveloped me. Joshu roshi said, “Not answer for this koan.” Then he tapped me on the head with his nyoi stick three times and said, “Good answer to your stinky ‘meaning of your life’ question though, neh?” We both laughed for about five minutes. He pulled me up so I could laugh more freely and join in with him in laughter. The eye contact was really amazing. As always, I knew he could see both who I tended to be but also who I really am. After a while we fell into silence and then he said, “Endon-san, stinky asshole is okay but stinky mind is not. Asshole, mind, arms, legs, ears, nostrils all together and all now alla time. All broken up is like butchered pig left out in bright sun. Stinks. All together. Okay? Please? Thank you. Thank you so much.” Then a long pause. I slowly put my head back to*

the floor and Roshi struck the gong and I stood up.

"As I turned to go to the door I farted again and Roshi loudly whispered, "I know. Still not answer to koan. And you pile too much things in your bowls. Greedy is stinky. But you," and he paused, "you are not stinky."

Practise with the whole bodymind. Thinking about the practice or the Teachings, thinking about your "life" while sitting is pointless. It will bring you nothing. The instructions you receive for basic mindfulness practice tell you again and again to open around any thought or feeling that comes up instead of focusing on them and propagating them. So it doesn't matter whether the thoughts seem to be about practice or anything else – they're all equally junk.

The Roshi also says in "Wild Time":

Our thoughts never "arrive."
There is nowhere that they come from,
nowhere that they go to.

In the very arising, in the presencing,
in the arriving of the thought,
"Look! Look!" and you will see

there is nowhere that it comes from,
nowhere that it goes to,
in its coming and in its going.

It has no directionality at all.

It is simply a tumbling,
in freefall.

Our thoughts, our feelings, our understandings, arise now,
and cannot stand apart from this "now" to understand it.

But, in their very presencing,
they reveal themselves as this tumbling, this freefall.
Do you understand?

"Look! Look!"

It is very important to recognize the difference between thinking about practice and actually practicing. Right now, are you actually feeling the movement of the breath at the diaphragm? Are you feeling the tanden? Are you opening to the sensations of the whole bodymind sitting on the cushion? Is attention open to peripheral vision? Is attention open to the hearing? Are you making the effort to open to all of these details at the same time, in the same breath, with each breath, practising whole bodymind?

If you are not actively engaged in opening attention to these details, it is because attention is invested in

something else. Whatever else it is invested in, release it by coming back to basic mindfulness practice. You will need to do this hundreds of times in each 30 minute sitting round. Please understand that there will never be a time in your practice when you will be told "Okay, you can drop basic mindfulness practice now because there is something you should think about. Basic mindfulness will always be the basis of any practice that you do and the instructions are very specific. We practice in, as, and through the bodymind by practising the posture, practising the forms, by paying attention to all of the sense fields and opening around and releasing any thoughts, feelings, states that come up.

In the teisho series, "The Secret Life of Manjusri", the Roshi says,

> *"If we are not open to seeing and hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking and feeling as a whole, if we are not alive to our senses, then nothing that we say or do makes sense. Everything is a fabrication. And if we do not understand that what we see and what we hear are activities of knowing arising within Knowing, that what we see and hear are the Radiance of Knowing, then we do not understand.*
>
> *"Because we experience a world of "things", when our experience is shaped and formed and distended and compressed by the contraction of self-image, the forms of practice, the Precepts, the relentless schedule of formal practice in the monastery, all provide a pebble in our shoes that causes us to at least slow our pace. When we don't regard the forms, the Shingi, the practice of moment-to-moment mindfulness as more things we have to do, then this irritating pebble becomes stone, water, wood, flower, flesh, breath, and sky. Each moment of mindfulness allows us to meet each moment more and more as it is. Meeting each moment more and more as it is, we uncover something which has always already been the case, something which is inherent about all experiences."*

The forms are a pebble in our shoe, a set of standards deliberately set in place to help us so that we can recognize whether we are in or out of alignment. These standards are the forms of practice through which we can practise and realize the truth of freefall.

The posture of zazen of is a very detailed, very nuanced form that we practise by paying attention to and with the posture throughout our sitting rounds. All of the points of mindfulness which make up the posture – the hands resting in the mudra, thumbs lightly contacting; the contact of the tip of the tongue against the hard palate, the teeth contacting; the alignment of head, neck and spine; the stability of the lower tripod formed by your backside on the cushion and knees on the zabuton; sitting motionless and practicing the instructions for basic mindfulness all of these are the pebble in your shoe that will show you how your attention is, moment after moment.

As we walk in kinhin, hands held in shashu, eye gaze soft and slightly lowered, we practise the same instructions for basic mindfulness that we do when sitting zazen and the form of kinhin shows us how our attention is moment after moment. The sensations of the foot change as it is lifted and moves through the space to take the next step; the sensations of the whole bodymind walking, present themselves as many sensations surrounded by spaces, as we move through the space of the room. The seeing opens to the colours and forms of the room which present themselves as play of shadow and light which you do not need to "organize", but simply notice, simply enjoy. Hearing hears sounds, together with the spaces around the sounds and as the bodymind moves through them, they rise and fall from nowhere, to nowhere. This freefall is infinitely rich, endlessly bright and you can never be separate from it because you are falling through it,

falling with it. This is the freefall of open experiencing and it is very, very different from floundering within mental space.

The Roshi gives us a wonderful description of the form of bowing in the teisho “Wild” from the “Wild Time” series. He says,

> *In practising three Great Bows*
> *before taking your seats to face the wall in zazen*
> *you are practising three instances*
> *of being in freefall.*
>
> *Down, down to the floor,*
> *the moment of standing has gone.*
>
> *But there is nowhere that it has gone to.*
>
> *The knees, the elbows, the wrists, the forehead, the backs of the hands, touch the floor, moment after moment,*
>
> *and each of those moments of touching the floor come and go*
> *but come from nowhere, go to nowhere.*
>
> *And in standing, in rising from the floor,*
> *you are still in freefall.*
>
> *And right now,*
> *no matter how still you might sit,*
> *you are still in freefall.*

There is nothing that we can hold onto to stop this falling of freefall because everything is always in freefall. Freefall is what everything is. Whatever you might have understood from this Dharma Talk was already understood in the moment of listening and cannot be understood further by thinking about it. So now let us all just sit up straight and face the wall and actually do what all of the Teachers of the Lineage have done and have told us to do, what all of the Teachings have told us to do: Practice.

Now I’ll shut up. And now you shut up too, please. Have a good morning.