Kinhin: The Dignity of the Buddha

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What you're doing now, what you are practising now, is zazen. It is sitting Zen. Practice while sitting.

Kinhin is walking practice. That's not practice of walking because we know how to walk or rather, bodymind knows how to walk. We don't need to learn how to walk, or do we? Hmm…What is it, really?

The word kinhin means sutra walk in Japanese. In traditional Buddhist cultures there's a customary practice of circumambulating. Walking around sites designated as sacred and reciting mantra or sutra. Sutra are records of a talk or discourse by the Buddha. A talk about practice. More generally, sutra can mean a presentation of Awakened Mind. As we step forth in kinhin, we are embodying that presentation of Awakened Mind.

In the Four Gates of Zen Practice, Zen Master Anzan Hoshin says, *….kinhin means to feel a step when taking a step, in other words, to take a complete step.*

When the bell rings for kinhin and we start to begin to change the posture from the posture of zazen to the posture of taking care of the zafu and the zabuton, to the posture of standing up, often, we are not aware of the richness of detail actually present in each of these moments. Often, very often, self-image will have busied itself with thoughts of, "when, when, when will the bell ring? Ring the bell, ring the bell, please." We make deals with ourselves, "Please, let me sit here without screaming. Please, let me sit here without screaming." And we will find that, because of our tendency to believe the stories that arise, we are not aware of the completeness of each moment, but are making a choice to focus attention into one aspect of that moment.

When we stand, when we feel the knees lift from the floor, when we feel the heels touch, when we feel the hipbone rotate in the hip as the torso Straightens, when we feel the shoulders fall down and back as we lift the hands into shashu mudra, when we feel the breath causing the rib cage to fan out as we breathe in, when we feel the neck delicately straighten to support the head, when we feel the alignment of the ears over the shoulders, the alignment of the nose over the navel, when we feel the eyes Widen, when we see the wall on the other side of the Hatto in our peripheral vision, when the gaze opens, when we see the colours and forms in front of us, when we step forward, present in this moment, feeling the left foot lift from the floor, feeling this change in the temperature as the skin of the foot is raised higher from the floor, as we notice the knee joint bending and the space around the bones, as we feel the breath rising and falling, as the foot steps forward and the air rushes between the toes, as we feel the contact of the heel on the floor about half to three quarters of the way down the length of the other foot, as we feel the heat of the skin of the left foot reaching out to the skin of the right foot, we are feeling into this moment. The foot contacts the floor, heel first, then the outer edge of the foot, the ball of the foot and then we feel the ball of the big toe on the floor and the gentle shift in balance occurs.

We are walking without walking. As Keizan zenji said in his instructions about kinhin: *Walk without walking, silent and unmoving.*

Anzan roshi has said: *It is not mindfulness of walking, stepping, or even of a step. It is mindfulness of this*

step, and this step, and this step.

The postural alignment is as that of zazen or sitting. But, we're standing.

The back is straight. The head is up. The hands are over the solar plexus in the Shashu mudra. The right hand is in a loose fist with the thumb and index finger forming a ring. The left hand is over the right hand and the thumb lightly hooked into the ring of the right hand. The shoulders are relaxed, down and back. The elbows are gently away from the sides. The Shashu mudra for the hands is used for walking and standing and we bow with hands in the Shashu posture as well.

Walk without walking, silent and unmoving. You don't need to look at your feet. They're there. They are at the bottom of your legs. You can feel the step. You don't need to see the floor to step forward. You don't need to turn your head to feel the person walking behind you. You don't need to look around to see where the other wall of the Hatto is. But, should you notice yourself doing any of these things, recognize that as self-image distracting itself from this moment and use that moment of noticing distraction, that moment of clarity, to feel the breath, feel the space around the body, feel the step, feel the foot on the floor.

As the Roshi says in The Straight Path: *Just do the practice*. Just do the practice. Just do kinhin. Take a complete step. Notice the richness of detail that presents itself as your life in this moment.

Keizan zenji also said: *Walk like a mountain.* Walk like a mountain.

Anzan Hoshin roshi has said: *Taking a step in mindfulness is itself a presentation of the wisdom of the Buddha.*

Paying attention to your life is the presentation of the Buddha's wisdom. When you take a complete step, you are stepping directly into the wisdom of the Buddha and uncovering yourself as Buddha. Experiencing the dignity of awake awareness is experiencing and expressing the dignity of Buddha. The dignity of life, of your life as expressed by this bodymind in this moment as it steps forth in kinhin.

Anzan Hoshin roshi says: *Touch the earth as you step out.*

Quietly, balanced, the breath, the seeing, the hearing, the tasting, the touching, the feeling, the smelling. This moment complete. This moment complete. Walk without walking, silent and unmoving.

Thank you for listening