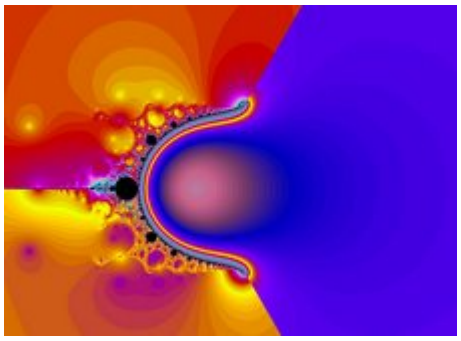
Starting Point

by Ven. Jinmyo Renge sensei
Dainen-ji, March 28th, 2009



So let's begin right here.

Right here, right now.

Open to this breath, these sensations, these colours and forms you are seeing, these sounds you are hearing.

And now, let's begin again. Open attention again, to THIS breath, THESE colours and forms, THESE sounds. And again. Now. In each moment we need to begin again.

Each moment of our lives is when – and where – our lives are. Each moment is the starting point for beginning to practise and each moment points to where and when we can practise.

In the teisho series, "Painting Reality" Zen Master Anzan Hoshin says:

> *Waking up to the possibility of Waking Up like this for even the slightest moment is hotsu-bodaishin , the rousing of the mind which seeks the Way. Sometimes this is called the thought of enlightenment, sometimes the Awakening of intelligence, sometimes enlightenment-finding mind, and sometimes the mind which follows the Way. Following the Way at first often involves finding all of the ways that we follow our own lead and lose our direction, take twists and turns that double back upon themselves. Occasionally we move past these and actually do the practice for a few moments. Eventually, the mind which seeks the Way stops seeking and finds the Way in not seeking. But then it finds that this isn't the Way either. The mind which finds the Way doesn't seek but doesn't not seek. It releases.*
>
> *When our hands are open, the Way fills them. When we release this, then the Way is our hands. When we release this, then the Way has open hands and we are how the Way unfolds.*

You have heard Teachers say over and over that mindfulness is not a state. It is an activity, something we actually do moment to moment. And despite that, we would like to turn it into something that we "have", something we can crank up like a machine and leave it running by itself in the background while we get on with the "really important stuff" in our lives — our "stuff and things".

But what's going on is really just the opposite. We crank up states about our stuff and things and leave them

running in the background. And the foreground. And to the sides. and hanging over our heads. We give so much attention to our henpen, our “stuff and things” that we believe that we are our stuff and things. “My job, my husband, my wife, my problems, my concerns.” Oh MY, oh MY oh MY.

Ooops.

Let’s start over. Begin again, right here, right now, with this moment, these sensations, colours, forms, sounds.

Where do you think we are going from here? Where is all of this going? Just here, just now. Here and now are the only place you ever are.

Stop with the figuring. The whole problem here is too much figuring. That’s never good. You try to figure out the past, but you are only right here, right now, thinking about the past. You try to figure out the future, but you are only right here, right now, thinking about the future. Your thoughts seem to create a sense of movement, of something happening, but you haven’t gone anywhere at all and there is nothing happening. You get “lost in thought”, but you’re not lost. You’re sitting right here. See the wall? feel your hands in the mudra?

But I WANT TO FIGURE SOMETHING OUT!

Leave it alone.

Begin again, right now, with this breath, this breath that breathes life; this breath that breathes in the airborne dusts of beings who have come and gone. Soon enough your dust will be in the air too, but for now you can breathe this breath. What does it feel like? What does it really feel like? What do these sensations feel like? Legs crossed, hands resting in the mudra, right here, right now?

A myriad of colours fill the delicate, moist globes we refer to almost dismissively as “eyes”. “My eyes”. Whose eyes? Oh, you mean this seeing through meat? Do you make the meat see? How could you do that? Certainly not by thinking about it. Open attention now to this extraordinarily spacious, luminous seeing. Allow peripheral vision to fall open. What do you see? What fills your eyes? You see the wall, you see other details to the left, right, up and down all at the same time. Do you also see the seeing? Do you see the graininess to the visual field? Do you see the space between yourself and the wall that also extends in all directions? Just see. Don’t squint in judgment of your passing thoughts. Just let seeing see, expansively, generously and stay out of the way.

Another quote from “Painting Reality”:

> *When our eyes open and the world paints the brilliance of colours, then seeing is lit up. Our ears, fingertips, the nuances of sensation of fabric touching the nape of the neck are all alight. There might come the old reaction of shrinking away or of trying to claim and own and carry this brightness back into our old nest of old views where we can rub up against it. But it’s just the sensation of fabric against the nape of the neck and so we realize that they cannot get what we usually hunger for from this. After all, these are just ordinary sensations, just colours and forms and sounds and yet they are extraordinary. It is not a matter of having seen something beautiful or luxurious. There is just clarity, vividness, richness to the seeing itself. There is something satisfying about this in itself. If we do not react with the usual greed*

and aversion, then there is more space allowed for spaciousness to present itself.

Ssshhh.

Stop talking to yourself. Stop looking to see if you have an opinion about what you are noticing. Listen, right now, to the sounds that move as waves moving through space which can be both heard and felt. The world speaks as the sound of bird call, the distant sound of traffic, a voice, an exhalation. Shut up and listen. Open past your chatter by opening attention to what the ears are actually hearing instead of talking over everything. Have you ever been trapped in a room with someone who just will not shut up? They want to go on and on and on and have no idea how boring and tedious they are. Well, when you natter away to yourself endlessly, you're worse than that because you don't just drown out another person. You drown out reality. Shhhh. Listen! Listen right now to what you are hearing with your ears.

You can do this. Everyone in this room is here because at some point or another, in some way or another, each of us have recognized that how we experience experience has something to do with how our attention is arranged. And through doing this practice, we have seen again and again that although we can be brittle, angry, petty, self-consumed, we are also capable of stepping past our states, to open to Openness. And when we do that even for a moment, we have a taste of a kind of friendliness towards ourselves and others, a grateful appreciation of the simplicity and fullness of experiencing and a sense of wonder at simply being alive. And we know that if we could apply that understanding to the rest of our lives, in how we interact with others, in the decisions we make, our lives could be expressions of that simplicity and richness.

And then we forget what it is that we came here to do.
Begin again.

In *Shinjin Gakudo: Study of the Way Through the Bodymind* , Eihei Dogen zenji says:

> *"In giving rise to this thought of enlightenment, the entire realm of experiencing arises. Although conditions are rooted in this enlightenment-finding-mind, this enlightenment-finding-mind is never conditioned. This enlightenment-finding-mind and all conditions are this single hand held out as one hand, and one hand clasping all beings as this single hand. Thus, rouse this thought of enlightenment in all the conditioned realms of being: utter contraction, hunger, dullness, and aggression."*

Begin now. Open attention to THIS breath and allow the thoughts to dissipate into the open space in which the bodymind arises. Feel the sensations of the bodymind sitting on the zafu, the sensations of thumb touching thumb in the mudra. The whole posture is dignified and yet so delicate. There are so many subtle sensations. And in feeling into these you are feeling into reality. Before and beyond anything you think or feel, reality must be your starting point.

Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, at any time of the day or night, reality must be your starting point. Don't blunder about making ill-considered decisions, flailing about in distorted interpretations and assumptions about what is going on. You only stir up confusion by doing that. Cut through the swirl of confusion by allowing attention to fall open to the details of things as they are. This is your starting point, whether you are standing in a bank line or having a conversation, at work, at home, everywhere you go, in everything you do. Your practice on the zafu provides you with the information you need to do this. But you

need to make the effort to integrate what you have understood all of the time, as much as possible, even when you are not sitting.

“But” (students pretty much always have a but) “This is boring. There has to be more.”

Of course there’s more, but until you can stay in the room and stop filling up the space with the stuff you toy with, there isn’t more than the stuff you toy with. You don’t allow enough room for “more”. Give up the toys and then we can talk about “more”. “More” is not hidden from you. You make yourself unavailable to it.

But here we are again. Come back to right here. THIS BREATH. THESE SENSATIONS. THESE COLOURS AND FORMS. THESE SOUNDS. You want “more”? This is how “more” unfolds. More advanced instruction does not come about because a student is curious. Churning up theories, wishfully trying to stretch your mind into imagined “realms” will get you nowhere. Practising in, as, and through the bodymind, wordlessly questioning into experiencing is how the inherent wisdom of the bodymind can present itself.

No, really. Really, really, really.

You, over there, stop that. Don’t fold down into yourself like that. Stay out here with the rest of us, with the rest of the world. You and the world are not separate. Each thing interpenetrates every other thing right here, right now. All there ever is, is right here, right now. Align with this moment of present experiencing. Come out of hiding to be who you really are. You are not your thoughts and feelings.

Nothing obstructs the seeing of the wall and the wall. Nothing obstructs the sensations of the breath and the breath breathing. Nothing obstructs the arising of a sound and the hearing of a sound. But by following and propagating thoughts and feelings, attention can become so coarse that the world can seem obscured.

We start again.

This is the starting point and here is where we can begin, again and again.