The Touchstone 20: Fudo Myo-o Part 2

presented by Ven. Jinmyo Renge sensei
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In the previous Dharma Talk I spoke a little about the Bodhisattva known as “Acala Vidyaraja” in Sanskrit, or Fudo Myo-o in Japanese. He is also known by the name “Acalanatha”. Ācala” means “immovable” and “nātha” means “protector”. He is immovable because he is Awareness in Itself and Awareness does not move. Awareness is the context in which everything comes and goes. He is also not a “he” or a “she”, male or female, of course, but the traditional texts use the convention of saying “he” so that is what I will use here.

Fudo is immovable because he is always as he is and to represent this he stands chained to a rock. Who chained him there? He did, just to make sure. This also represents the determination of Teachers and monastics to work for the liberation of beings from confusion.

A sword is upraised in his right hand and a looped cord is held in his left hand. He is blue-black in colour, surrounded by a sea of flames and he appears to be very fierce. He has one eye that looks up, while the other looks down, and he has a fang that protrudes over his upper lip and one that protrudes over his lower lip. As strange as all of this might seem at first glance, to the practised eye of a monastic, every detail of Fudo-o’s appearance conveys instruction.

He is indigo, blue/black in colour, perhaps similar to the deep blue/black sky of late evening. The blue/black represents the vastness of sunyata, or emptiness. in our Lineage, he is often shown wearing black monastic robes. Chinese or Japanese paintings and statues usually show Acala wearing the clothing of a king or ruler because he is the unshakeable and immovable Lord of Luminosity.

“Luminosity”, as we use this word does not carry the meaning of some sort of heavenly light. “Luminosity” is a way of speaking of “Knowing”. It’s not code for a god or some sort of entity. It’s not a form of pantheism. Please bear in mind that the Bodhisattvas we have been discussing are not meant to be understood as people or entities or representatives of an entity. They are sets of instructions.

Acala looks up with one eye and looks down with the other in order to see through the higher and lower realms of the “Six Realms of Being” at the same time.

The six realms are useful as a description of the various states of mind and behaviour that people fall into. They are: the hell realm of contraction, of being completely convinced of the densest states of fear and rage; the realm of hungry ghosts, in which one is thoroughly overwhelmed by a sense of poverty and neediness; the animal realm of going from eating to shitting to sleeping; the human realm of lust and fickleness; the realm of the asuras or titans or warlike gods who are caught within a continual struggle to achieve dominance, and the realm of the devas or shining beings who are sunk in bliss and self-satisfaction. These are all states that people fall into.

So Acala sees into all of these realms with eyes that look up and down simultaneously. And as to how he sees them – as the Roshi says in the teisho “The Fire: Acala Vidyaraja:

> *Fudo Myo-o’s eyes glare wrathfully, without fear. No compromise is to be seen in them, because he realizes that each thing is always workable, no matter how loathsome, no matter how full of longing, no*

matter how desperate, no matter how distracted, no matter how anxious, no matter how asinine, no matter how cowardly, or how arrogantly we might be, all of these states are workable. What is it that is aware of them? What is it that is aware of your thoughts and feelings? Who are you, really?

This is the realm of luminosity in which all apparent worlds are rising and turning. This is what is seen so clearly by the eyes of Acala Vidyaraja.

Acala Vidyaraja holds a looped cord in his hand, sometimes described as a lariat or a rope formed into a lasso. In Buddhist texts such as the "Sadhanamala", the Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Kandarpa are said to be evil because they cause endless rebirths. So one interpretation of the rope or cord is that Fudo uses it to bind these Hindu gods as well as those who are ruled by passion, aggression and stupidity.

In our Lineage the cord is symbolic of the Precepts. Acala is chained to the rock on which he or she sits or stands by the vow to liberate all beings. He is enveloped by the flames of passion, aggression and ignorance which consume the beings who live in this hell realm of confusion and grasping.

The sword he holds upraised in his right hand is the sword of insight or Prajna, which cuts through confusion. The Roshi says in the teisho "The Fire: Acala Vidyaraja":
In his left hand, he holds a cord, a rope, which binds each thing to its own nature, which allows each thing to be as it is in its true nature of luminosity. This is also the cord of the precepts. The sword of wisdom and the cord of the precepts mean that we must each practice completely. No matter how deep our insights might be or how grand our little spiritual experiences might seem, they are of no use whatsoever unless we apply them in each moment of activity, in each thing that we do, in how we are. How we are must be rooted in the nature of things as they are. Our activity, our speech, each thing that we do, must be rooted in this moment as it is.

Now you may be asking yourself what this practice has to do with you, because you haven't been given instruction in it, you haven't been told to do any sort of practice associated with Fudo Myo-o, and this may be the first time you've heard of him.

For anyone who practises for more than a few weeks, it becomes increasingly clear that it's really easy to waver in your resolve. The slightest turbulance in your life can seem like enough of a reason not to sit. Feeling a bit unwell can seem like enough of a reason not to sit. Being on vacation can seem like enough of a reason not to sit. Just feeling like you don't want to sit can seem like enough of a reason not to sit.

But for those who are here, who have practiced for weeks or months or years, you've had to learn to stand firm. Or at least a bit firm. You know that there are states that will come up that say that sitting is too difficult. And you know that if you feel the breath and feel the body and pay attention to putting one foot in front of the other is not difficult; neither is sitting down on a cushion; neither is sitting there for five minutes; for ten minutes; for 30 minutes. And that's as long as you need to sit. You also know that sometimes old habits of thought or feeling will come up: states of boredom, runaway discursiveness, restlessness, fear, confusion, euphoria, silence – any of these and many others might come up in your practice. And you know that all you need do as soon as you recognize that a thought or a feeling or a storyline is taking up your attention is to come back to the touchstone of the breath at the diaphragm and tanden, to open to whole bodily sensation and seeing and hearing and begin again. And over time, you can also learn that you can

practise opening to reality not just when you are sitting, but all of the time and this has a profound effect on your life.

The practice of basic mindfulness is very simple and it is very powerful because of its simplicity. It has a depth and breadth that need to be fully explored before one is given other practices to do. And this is because ALL of the more advanced practices come from the practice of basic mindfulness. Without that, the rest would be meaningless. So we begin by establishing a very strong, very stable practice of basic mindfulness.

By practising basic mindfulness, by coming back to the touchstone of the breath again and again and again, you are strengthening attention. You stop wobbling quite so much. You stop falling falling into states and storylines quite so much. Increasingly you recognize them for what they are – simple fabrications. You're less convinced by them and so more often you make the choice to open past them by coming back to the touchstone of the breath from which to open to the whole of your experiencing. It doesn't matter what the content of the thoughts and feeling-tones are telling you. It's the fact that you can recognize that they are thoughts and feeling-tones. They're like ghosts. In reality there are no ghosts, and it makes no sense to say that "some" ghosts are more real or less real than others. All of the thoughts and feeling-tones you propagate and follow are like this. None of them make sense. Open around them.

What happens when you open around them? You begin to practise Knowing (capital K Knowing) instead of talking to yourself about stuff you think you already know. You begin to practise an immediacy and directness of experiencing that is alive and fresh in this moment and the next.

Fudo Myo-o is sometimes depicted in statuary or scrolls seated, practising the immovability of Awareness. Sometimes Fudo is shown standing, representing the Activity of Aware Space, luminosity vividly radiant as all experiences.

So let's sit now, and allow attention to fall open to the touchstone of the breath, the sensations of the body, the colours and forms and sounds. Acala sits on a rock, enveloped in flames. You sit on a zafu and zabuton, enveloped in the vividness of experiencing. Practise opening to that.