# The Touchstone 21: Mahavairocana Part 1

presented by Ven. Jinmyo Renge sensei
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When you feel the touchstone of the breath, you are knowing the sensations of the breath. When you open attention to hearing, you are knowing the sounds and the spaces between the sounds. When you open attention to seeing, you are opening to the knowing of colours and forms. For a split-second at a time you know directly and without interpretation, and then you start thinking again. Because you still believe that knowing is about you, the knower, collecting knowns. This is how your practice gets really complicated. And yet, even when you are engaged in the ways you confuse yourself, sometimes you know that you are confused.

Whatever is known arises within Knowing. We can know nothing else other than the fact of knowing. There is nothing apart from Knowing in Itself to be known. This is sometimes symbolically represented by Mahavairocana, or the radiance of Knowing, or one might say, 'the Big Radiator". This Radiance does not radiate from somewhere to somewhere, it simply radiates.

Mahavairocana is the Primordial Buddha, the Buddha before all other Buddhas. All other Buddhas have a history, even if it is legendary. Mahavairocana is not a particular historical Buddha. He, or she, or it, is not bound by time because she is not anybody. It is what Sakyamuni Buddha and all other Buddhas who came after him Woke Up to.

The Brahmajala sutra, which Anzan Hoshin roshi translated with some assistance from me, describes a meeting between Sakyamuni Buddha and Vairocana Buddha:

> *Sakyamuni Buddha and that whole assembly had prostrated themselves together in homage before the feet of Vairocana Buddha, [and] Sakyamuni asked, "How can all living beings of earth and sky within these universes unfold the path of the Ten Stages of Opening to Openness? What signs arise when Wakeful Ones are about to realize the fruition of Awakening as Awareness? Amongst the numberless aspects that all originate from Buddha Nature, please present in detail what the seeds of all Wakeful Ones are.*
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> *Immediately Vairocana Buddha was filled with vast joy. The space manifested the actual nature of his luminosity, the original harmony of the Body of Reality which had become Buddha and which was always already so. He said to the assembly, "All you students of the Buddha, listen carefully, reflect well on my words, and apply them in practice. For incalculable hundreds of eons I have practiced Primordial Awareness and followed through with it. Releasing every thing merely usual and practicing to the highest edge of complete and utter Awakening, I became known as Vairocana, Inherent Luminosity.*
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> *I dwell within the Lotus Matrix of all worlds and realms, and the ocean of all worlds is contained within this lotus throne. This throne is an embrace of a thousand petals, each petal containing a universe, so that there are a thousand universes in all. I transform myself into a thousand Sakyamunis to occupy these thousand universes. Each universe in each petal contains, in turn, ten billion Mount Sumerus, ten billion suns and moons, ten billion sets of four continents including ten billion Jam-bud-vipas, each with its Sakya seated beneath a bodhi tree, opening to Openness.*

*While each of these Sakyamunis presents Primordial Awareness for Wakeful Ones which you have just asked about, each of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine Sakyamunis also give rise to ten billion Sakyamunis who, in turn, do the same.*

*Each Buddha within the thousand petals is a transformation of myself and the ten billion Sakyamunis are, in turn, transformations of these thousand Buddhas. I am the source of all of them.*

*Thus I am called Vairocana Buddha, the Awake Awareness Which is Originary Luminosity.*

So, we can see that while Mahavairocana Buddha is not someone with a personal history, it is a way of trying to talk about profound aspects of realized-practice.

If we want to know what the Buddhas Wake Up to, what Awareness in Itself is, what Mahavairocana is, the only way to do that is to be aware, fully, thoroughly and completely through moment to moment mindfulness which ripens into insight and then matures as the fruition of prajnaparamita. The Teachings symbolized and embodied by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the Continuing Lineage of Awakened Ancestors are sets of instructions and explanations that help us to open to the Knowing, the Luminosity of Awake Awareness.

So what we ultimately Wake Up to is symbolized by Mahavairocana, which contains and subsumes the Teachings of Fudo Myo-o, Samantabhadra, Manjusri and Avalokitesvara.

I will briefly review these:

Knowing never moves from what it is; it is the context in which everything comes and goes. This immovability of Knowing is symbolized as Acalanatha Vidyaraja or Fudo Myo-o.

Experiencing has a quality of spaciousness, of vast openness. Whatever appears to be experienced is the activity of vastness arising within Knowing. It is inexpressibly, all-pervasively rich and expansive. This is embodied as Samantabhadra, All-Pervasive Richness. The figure of Samantabhadra represents the culmination of all of the realizations and practices of Avalokitesvara and Manjusri.

Manjusri symbolizes the brightness and freshness of intelligence:  the precision and attention to detail required to actually practise with contraction.

Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, the activity of ceaseless Opening, hears the suffering of beings bound by contraction.

But just to be clear I must say this once again:  When we use the words, “Awareness”, “Openness”, “Knowing”, “Luminosity”, “spaciousness”, they are not code for some sort of god or entity or intelligent directing and determining force for the universe. We are not talking about a form of Pantheism. Nor are we talking about a feeling about things.

At the beginning of all formal sittings, we recite “The Three Jewels”, which state that:

*Awareness is the only condition.*
*All that is arises as the display of Awareness.*
*This is the seamless expanse of all that is.*

Every way of knowing and everything that is known are expressions of Knowing in Itself. When there is confusion or clarity, when you experience anger or impatience, or love or hate, there is the knowing of these. All that you can experience is experiencing and all experiences arise within awareness of them, and point directly to awareness.  Everything that presents itself as experiencing, anything that seems to stand out or stand forth, is arising within the knowing of it.

The Luminosity of Knowing which is radiant as knowns is symbolized, is indicated, is pointed to AS Mahavairocana Buddha. Realization is not a matter of knowing Mahavairocana but of realizing your true nature as Mahavairocana. And this is not a matter of knowing some "thing" but of opening how you know to the total field of knowns arising with the fact of Knowing.

As the Roshi has said,

> *The Total field of all possibilities cannot express what Awareness in Itself is, and yet everything that arises is the expression of Awareness in Itself.*

There is so much to say about this that there is almost nothing that I can say about it. And since I broke a tooth yesterday and it has been somewhat reconstructed and I feel like I have been hit in the face with a hammer but I want to talk with students in daisan, I will just leave this here for now.

The touchstone here is slippery because it is everything in all directions all around you. And that is exactly what people tend NOT to notice. Zen practice is how we can open past this tendency to what the Buddhas are, to who we all actually are.

This is why we have Dharma Assemblies, retreats, and Zen as such.

So let's get to it. Ready? No? Yes, you are.