

# The Touchstone 22: Mahavairocana Part 2

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This breath in this moment. Feeling into this breath, opening to the whole body and mind and the fact of experiencing right now brings us into reality.

Throughout this series of Dharma Talks I have tried to provide you with a touchstone you can use to understand the beginnings of Zen practice and how it matures and deepens.

When we do the practice of chanting in addition to zazen, we have as the most basic chants the Three Jewels and the Ten Proclamations.

The Three Jewels describe what the Buddhas and the continuing Lineage of Zen Ancestors realize:

*Awareness is the Only Condition.  
All that is arises as the Display of Awareness.  
This is the Seamless Expanse of all that is.*

The Ten Proclamations are an ancient assembly of symbols that describe facets of how we realize through practice what Buddhas Wake Up to.

*Namu, Mahavairocana Buddha.  
Namu, Sakyamuni Buddha.  
Namu, Acala Vidyaraja.  
Namu, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.  
Namu, Manjusri Bodhisattva.  
Namu, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.  
Namu, all Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas.  
Namu, all beings throughout all times, all directions.  
Namu, Mahaprajnaparamita, Mother of Wisdom.  
Namu, the Lineage of Awakened Ancestors.*

These too are touchstones that provide very condensed descriptions of how to practise and what practice is and how it unfolds. But, of course, because they are so brief they use symbols and metaphors such as the mythological Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, the vidyaraja Acalanatha, and the non-historical primordial Buddha Mahavairocana. As with all of the forms of Zen practice as presented by Anzan Hoshin roshi, there are very good reasons why we chant these old words and names and use these old symbols. They provide instructions, touchstones, for us to use now.

Mahavairocana Buddha is where the Ten Proclamations begin, what practice ultimately realizes, and where I will put down this touchstone series of Dharma Talks.

As I said last time, Mahavairocana Buddha is difficult to talk about. I asked Anzan Hoshin roshi how to describe Mahavairocana Buddha and he answered my question with a question:

*“What is brighter than light?”*

Often the best answer to a question can be a question that goes deeper and leads us further, past the limits of our previous understandings.

All that we see, all colours and forms, each other’s faces, the wall, the floor, the sky, we see only because of light. Most of the time this is reflected light, meaning that light reflects off of an object and into our eyes. Look at almost any object - a cup, a pencil, a zafu, your cat, a building - and what you are seeing is reflected light which your brain translates as ‘cup’, ‘pencil’, ‘zafu’ etc. What you are knowing as ‘pencil’ is your perception of a pencil as reflected light. It is not what the pencil actually is. It’s not solid.

When you recognize that you are experiencing a state, that is possible because states are not solid either. All states are transparent to the Knowing of them. This knowing is traditionally called Komyo, or Luminosity. Komyo means “bright brightness.” “Myo” has the meaning of the first light of morning spreading on the horizon. And this is the Radiance spoken of by all of the Awakened Ancestors through the Buddha’s Dharma. In the same way that you can see objects with your eyes because of reflected light, you are able to see states, thoughts, feeling-tones, storylines because they are the radiance of the luminosity of Knowing. And this is what makes it possible for you to open all around and past them. You are not the states; what you think of as ‘you’ and all of the states ‘you’ experience arise within Knowing or Luminosity as its radiance.

Mahavairocana, the Buddha that is before all historical Buddhas, is the primordial or “always already” condition or situation of Awareness or Knowing or Experiencing. This is luminosity, the knowingness that is active as whatever is known. Each known is the radiance of that luminosity.

*“What is brighter than light?”*

We misunderstand that what we tend to understand about ourselves and the world is only the product of our own tendencies. Tendencies are how our attention and cognition arrange our perceptions. Zazen is the straight path laid out for us by the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, to understand how we have understood ourselves and the world and move past this into a world we cannot imagine. Imagination is just more of our tendencies, irresponsible to reality. Every time that we wake up from what attention became entangled into, we become more capable of taking responsibility for being Buddha, truly awake. Zazen is not about pretending to be a Buddha but about receiving and taking this responsibility and the freedom that it reveals.

Through zazen, the reality of Mahavairocana becomes not just where we live but who we always really were.

In 1227, Eihei Dogen Kigen zenji wrote in the “Fukanzazengi” or “How Everyone Can Sit”:

*Primordial Awareness is in essence perfect and pervades everywhere. How could it be dependent upon what anyone does to practise or realize it? The movement of Reality does not need us to give it a push. Do I need to say that it is free from delusion? The vast expanse of Reality can never be darkened by the dust of presumptions. Who then could believe that it needs to be cleaned of such dust to be what it is? It is never separate from where you are, so why scramble around in search of it?*

*The thing is, if there is the slightest gap, sky and earth are ripped apart. If you give rise to even a flicker of like and dislike, you lose your mind in delusion. Just suppose you become puffed up about your*

*understanding and inflate your little experiences: You think you have seen the truth, attained the Way, recognized the Luminosity of mind and can grasp at heaven. You might think that these initial jaunts about the borders are entering the realm of enlightenment but you've lost the Way of complete liberation.*

*May I point out the one from Jetavana, the Buddha, who was himself Primordial Awareness and still sat for six years? And how about Bodhidharma transmitting the seal of Awareness through doing wall-gazing at Shaolin temple for nine years? The echo of those are heard even now. If this is how it was with the great ones and their diligence, then how about you in your own practice? You should stop chasing understanding through juggling words, allow the external seeking of your mind to collapse upon itself and light up your own nature. Doing this, the bodymind will drop through itself spontaneously revealing your Original Nature. If you wish to be realized in Suchness, immediately practice Suchness.*

*Don't give rise to the mind's common concepts, the judging of thoughts and observations. Don't sit to become Buddha because you can't fabricate a Buddha out of sitting or lying down.*

*Once you have found your posture, breathe in and out deeply, sway left and right and then settle firmly and steadily. Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Be Before Thinking. These are the basics of zazen.*

Today, during this Dharma Assembly, please let us use this moment to practise the Suchness of the posture, the Suchness of breath, the Suchness of the tanden, the Suchness of the whole body with these arms and legs and eyes and ears. Let us use the priceless jewel, the touchstone of this breath in this moment to unfold Suchness and be enfolded within Suchness.