

What a Coincidence

Senior's Dharma Talk upon the occasion of Taiko-tokudo

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Yesterday, snowflake after snowflake fell, each one so small and light, melting almost instantly when it landed on the cheek. Tree branches were dusted with snow and the ground was covered in white. This morning during Jodo-e, the celebration of the Buddha's enlightenment, we offered incense outside in the sharp cold and could look up at the morning star, and Wake Up as the Buddha did.

In the "Fukanzazengi: How Everyone Can Sit", our Lineage Ancestor Eihei Dogen zenji says *You've got what you need, the treasure of this body and birth, so don't waste your time*".

What is this treasure of body and birth? We have these arms and legs, fingers and toes, a spine and head, eyes and ears. This breath keeping us alive moment after moment. Whatever our life situation, whatever our apparent problems, this practice of realization is available to us right here and now, in this very breath, as we make ourselves available to it.

Ah, that's the catch. We do have to make ourselves available to the practice.

Perhaps you think that this life living as you isn't quite as it should be. Perhaps you convince yourself that if only things were different.... then you would be able to Wake Up.

...if only I had started sitting when I was younger, there wouldn't be so many aches and pains to distract me. ...if only work wasn't so stressful, I wouldn't have to battle states of angst and anxiety. ...if only my wife/husband/partner was nicer to me, there wouldn't be this sense of grudge needling at me. ...if only I were older and retired, I'd have enough time to attend all the sittings and do a retreat every week.

When we identify with and follow states of poverty, the miserliness of self-image gives rise to endless litanies of limitation, and we blind ourselves to the treasury of human birth. Opening past states and stories, we can open to the richness of reality.

Reality says: You are alive. Feel the breath. Feel into the posture of the bodymind sitting on the zafu. See the colours and forms. Hear the sounds. Recognize that any experience whatsoever that you notice, including the states and stories and feeling tones, is arising amidst and together with countless other details in this vast expanse of experiencing, and none of these details, none of the thoughts and feelings, are who you are.

Making the choice to practise - to release poverty and accept richness - allows us to become available to the Shobogenzo, the Treasury of the Eye of Utter Reality.

In the teisho "If Parshva Doesn't Inspire You" from the series "Turning the Wheel of the Way", the Roshi says:

"Somewhere between being born and dying, we have come upon this practice of zazen, this gift of the Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors in this life of ours. In each moment of our practice, we meet birth and death in the coming and going that is our lives. But what we are practising is alignment with birth and death and also that which is without birth or death, the Shobogenzo-neh-an-myoshin: the Treasury of the

Eye of Reality, the unsurpassable radiant Knowing which is beyond reference point, the nirvana of the Buddhas."

Traditionally it is said that the rarity of making use of a birth as a human to be more than a skinbag and to receive the Teachings is compared to the odds of a turtle swimming in a vast ocean and surfacing only once every hundred years, coincidentally putting its head through a yoke floating on the water.

And yet here we are. Practising as a student of this Lineage, the jewels of the treasury spill forth all around us and as us.

In the teisho "The Treasure House", the first in a series of commentaries on Eihei Dogen zenji's "Katto: Entwining Vines", the Roshi says:

"The Transmission of the True Eye of Reality, unsurpassable Radiant Knowing, Shobogenzo, Nehan Myoshin is what is transmitted from Ancestor to Ancestor.

It is the life thread, the myomaku, the bloodline that flows through the body of Reality.

It cuts through self and other, it brings together self and other.

Self and other become so entwined through this bloodline that there is only room for the vastness of reality in this intimate embrace.

Because you see, because you hear, because you touch, taste, smell and think and feel, you are radiantly free, because all that you are presents itself as ways of knowing, because everything that you think that you are, anything that you could point to as being "me" is merely something known, something arising within Knowing.

You are radiantly free."

The treasury of Luminosity is not some special state that we can upgrade to, for a bit of relief from our usual tiring and tiresomely familiar ones. It is not a state at all. It is the fact that who and what we are is beyond all our stories of poverty, beyond any reference point, and we can feel it right here, in our fingers and toes. It is the flickering candlelight on the Butsudan, and the sensation of cloth against skin. It sounds as the wind moving through the trees, and the breath of the person sitting beside you.

We have the immeasurable good fortune to be alive here and now, and to be able to exert this Practice of Realization that Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi and the Lineage of Awakened Ancestors offer to us.

This practice of whole-bodily mindfulness, of releasing poverty and accepting richness, has continued through 2,600 years because of the efforts of ordinary women and men who became Buddhas simply by choosing again and again and again to practise completely.

As the Roshi often reminds us, each moment matters. Do not waste time.

Alive right now, I can practise with this breath. This skinbag, breathing in and out, chooses to practise embodying the Dharma until the Dharma embodies who I am.

You can do this too. Oh, look. A room full of zafu. What a coincidence.