

What Does it Take to Become Buddha?

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What does it take to become Buddha? Absolutely nothing, absolutely everything....although having a good sense of humour doesn't hurt.

To be a Buddha we must use every moment of our experience, be willing to receive richness and release poverty. To be a Buddha requires that we stop our games and learn how to be playful. To be a Buddha means that we must wake up, again and again and again to what all the Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors of the Lineage of Transmission have Awakened as.

To wake up we need to be able to sit when we are too tired or crabby to want to. To wake up we need to stand up and do kinhin just when we have stumbled on some state of peacefulness that we enjoy.

Yunju Daoying daiosho said, "If you want to realize this thing of Suchness, you must be a person of Suchness." Get it?

Suchness is the Reality of who we are all are. A Buddha is one who has Awakened to who she really is, the Reality which presents itself everywhere as everyone. Although we are all people of Suchness, although Reality is what we truly are, unless we realize this, we are not a Buddha.

Dogen zenji said, "You can't fabricate a Buddha through sitting or lying down." Get it? He said this in the Fukanzazengi, an essay concerned with how to sit and how to live as Awareness. His point is that although we sit, sitting is not something that can fashion us into a Buddha. A Buddha is someone who has no strategies, is not conditioned, does not move attention towards or away from anything at all. And so a

Buddha is not fashionable, is not concerned with how he appears to be. A Buddha is without strategies yet lives her life as a seamless activity of skillful means, using situations to Awaken others.

To wake up, we need a Teacher who can show us the nature of our experiencing through the process of Transmission. Transmission can take place anywhere at any time. The 10,000 koan and Recorded Sayings and Doings of ancient Zen Masters all recount such moments. You will notice that most of my Dharma Talks involve stories about our own Teacher, Zen Master Anzan Hoshin. This is because these stories are not only of contemporary situations but the heart of them shows the core of every one of the old stories, alive here and now. And what is Transmitted is who we all are and what here and now is. Sometimes it occurs when seated in the presence of the Teacher; sometimes it occurs when one is doing the laundry. So, of course, I have a laundry story to share with you.

About eight years ago, Rev. Dozan anagarika was visiting from Great Britain and one afternoon, the Roshi, Dozan anagarika and I went shopping. I could write a Dharma Talk about shopping with the Roshi, but I'll save that for another time.

This story is about a set of wind chimes we found in a shop that day. We didn't buy them, as they were quite expensive, but I remember that the Roshi was pleased with both the quality of craftsmanship and their tone.

During this time, I was not living in the monastery. I lived in a ground floor apartment not far from the Zen Centre and between sittings was making quite a project of making my living space as Zen-like as possible. I had stripped the walls bare, removed whatever I hadn't used, looked at, or thought about for six months and so on. Over the next few days, I kept thinking about these chimes and although I was on a very limited budget, decided that I should buy them. And so I did, and hung them on my porch. Now, you'd think that would be the end of that, but it wasn't, because a very inconvenient question began to form and as much as I tried initially to ignore it, it just would not go away.

You see, I could not ignore the fact that it was the Roshi who had discovered the chimes and it was he who recognized their quality and it was he who could not buy them for the monastery because finances were so tight, but it was I who was listening to them. And so, the melodic tone of the chimes began to take on a sour note that just could not be ignored.

I was pondering this one morning, while putting a load of laundry into the washing machine. I cranked the dial and the machine began its noisy labour. I remember leaning against the machine, listening to it chugging away. As I listened, there was a dawning of recognition that ultimately articulated itself as, "Well, I can always listen to the sound of the washing machine."

After all, the point of an ikebana or sho or arrangement of stones created by the Roshi is to help us to see. Chanting practice helps us to speak. Incense helps us to smell. The sound of the Roshi's shakuhachi or of the chiming of wind bells helps us to hear. As we open more and more to the simplicity of our experience and stop trying to be the one who sees or hears, the richer all colours and sounds become.

Decision made, I took the chimes down, repacked them in their box and drove to the Zen Centre. When I arrived, the Roshi was seated in the garden with Dozan anagarika. Very nervously, I offered the box. I was so nervous, in fact, that my hands shook. And this was because, of course, neither the Sensei nor Dozan anagarika knew anything about this little drama I had gone through, let alone what was in the box. At the time, I thought they might think I was completely nuts if I attempted any sort of explanation. Perhaps the

Roshi might think I was trying to curry favour or roll over like a dog to show my belly. I certainly felt exposed but it became immediately apparent that any idea we might have about the mind of a Zen Master is too simplistic and cartoon like to mean anything.

The Roshi saw my nervousness, lightly gestured for me to come closer and said "It's all right." He smiled brightly as he took the box from my hands, looked directly into and through my eyes and said, before opening it, "Well, you can always listen to the washing machine."

There is a word in the Japanese text of *Uji* or *Being-Time* by Dogen: "Kappatsupachi" — it means the sound of a fish slapping its tail. Unmistakable, distinct, crisp. A moment of Transmission is like that - simple, direct, it is what it is. So I didn't say anything. The Roshi smiled and said, "Where should we hang them?" If any of this had been about me, I would have said "outside your window." But neither of us suggested that and so, for over seven years, the chimes hung over the front door of Zazen-ji, where they sang into the busy activity of Somerset Street West, for Anzan Roshi, for all students as they arrived, and for passers-by who would take the time to notice.

Anzan roshi spends endless hours with students, listening to their stories, entering into their experience in order to show them what it takes to be a Buddha. I was recently thinking about one of these informal conversations between the Roshi and a student that I was also present for. The student was describing being very tired, coming home and wanting only to go to his room. But he was intercepted by someone in the hallway who wanted to talk....and talk.....and talk. The Roshi listened to this with his eyes lowered and then slowly brought his gaze up. And then he said "You should have said that you were going to sit in zazen ." The student said "Yes, I only said I was going to sit". This exchange was very quick, and may seem almost trivial, but what I saw of it was far from trivial. This is some of what I saw:

Firstly, the Roshi had not been told by the student that his reason for wanting to escape this meaningless conversation was in order to sit. In fact, the way he told it implied only that he was tired and wanted to go to bed.

The Roshi not only filled in the missing information, but told him what he had actually said and then told him what he should have said to make himself clear to the other person. And this was done so seamlessly and effortlessly that the student missed it altogether.

But there was something else that I noticed, something that I've seen many times before. Just a moment or so before the Roshi had asked me to straighten up and so I was more attentive than I would ordinarily have been. When the Roshi raised his head, he did so very slowly. I was seated just a few feet from him, watching attentively. As his eye gaze lifted, as closely as I can describe it, it was like seeing sunlight shining through water. And the light, as it shone right to the bottom, exposed everything, rocks, plants, small creatures, mud, all exposed in minute detail by the light. Similarly, in that moment, all of the stances, states, hopes and fears experienced by both myself and the other student were exposed in minute detail.

This is traditionally called Komyo, or Luminosity. Komyo means "bright brightness." Myo in particular 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 Ones, as taught by the Buddha.

Sounds great doesn't it? But wait, I'm not finished yet. You see, a true Teacher will teach by example, but then insists that the student take responsibility for what is shown. Get it? So, how do you take responsibility

for having seen, having experienced a moment of komyo? Here is an example.

A few days later, I was feeling very sad. I don't really know why. Often when I feel sad, there really isn't a reason for it that I can find. But, as is the case for any other student, there is a strong tendency to try to find one. I was sitting alone, observing the fragments of thoughts and feeling tones trying to assemble themselves into some sort of coherent storyline and noticed that my eye gaze had lowered. I raised it slowly and looked out the window. Sunlight was streaming through the trees and the sky was brilliant blue.

It was bright bright. And in this brightness I saw that I had a clear choice. I could be sad or I could open to the brightness and allow myself to be as transparent as water, the sadness no more than a detail, along with the mud, rocks, plants or other small creatures. And that was what I needed to vow to do, as a monk, in order to take responsibility for myself and for others. And that this would mean to release every fear, every sadness, every sorrow, every apparent obstacle, both my own and other's into this Luminosity.

I hovered on the edge of a decision, just as I had with the wind chimes, but not for too long. I knew right from the start that this practice would cost me everything and I was right. You would not believe the number of well-intentioned, stupid stances, ridiculous states and petty nonsense I've had to give up. Seven years ago, I signed a blank cheque and gave it to the Roshi. I mean an actual piece of paper made out like a cheque. When I handed it to him he laughed and handed me a contract that he had written up. This blank cheque is hidden somewhere here in Dainen-ji, but I don't think I should tell you where it is. Well, here's a hint: any monk here could figure out where it is in about three seconds.

So what does it take to become a Buddha? Absolutely everything, absolutely nothing. And a sense of humour doesn't hurt.

It is impossible to try to figure out how this wonderful practice works. Feeling the breath, hearing a note of a bird's song, coming alive to this moment, even if only for a moment, is wonderful, so amazing, that sometimes I cannot help but laugh.

The Roshi tells a great joke. He says it is his favourite knock knock joke. Like this practice, it is subtle, easy, but a continuous challenge:

Knock, knock

Who's there?.....

Have a good morning.