

Wherever You Stand 12: Yoka daishi's (Yongjia) Shodoka: Song of Freedom part 1

by Ven. Shikai Zuiko O-sensei

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Previously on "Wherever You Stand"...

...we've followed the flow of Teachings from

Bodhidharma

to Huike

to Sengcan

to Daoxin

to Hongren

to Huineng...

and to Yoka daishi, which is Japanese for Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh or

Great Master Chen-chio

also known as, in Japanese, Yoka Gengaku,

who was a scholar and a monk

who was born in 665 and apparently died in 713, the same year as his Teacher Huineng, the Sixth Ancestor.

Just for a moment,

picture the spring wind and

picture in that spring wind

a page of a calendar with a whole year on it...

2013 floating away in the wind

2012...

2011...

1998...

1987...

and they flip back and back and back

1300 of them,

and we reach the year 713.

It's really not so long ago,

and without the work,

without the Teachings of the six Chan Ancestors, and

without the practice and study of Yoka daishi,

we would not have the "Shodoka",

the song or poem about practice,

of instructions about practice,

which was written by Yoka daishi in the late 600s or early 700s,

definitely we can make the assumption it was written before he died in 713.

Yoka daishi became a monk within the Tendai or Tien-tai school when he was eight years old.

Now it's not unusual to come across accounts of people who became monks or who started practising, or who ruled countries before they were teenagers. There was a totally different understanding of children and adults in years past than there is today where they are kids until they're 47 years old and crawl out of their parents' basements. So at eight, nine, ten, if the capacity was there, if the inclination was there, young people often ended up becoming monks, so to regard them as the same as the same age young people today is definitely a limitation in your understanding. The cult of childhood is something that's happened only within the last 100 years or so.

So he became a monk within the Tendai or Tien-tai school when he was eight years old. Studying the Teachings, studying the sutras and the commentaries made him realize that he actually had to practise, he actually had to put his tiny pre-teen bum down on a cushion. Apparently he built himself a hermitage and shut himself up there for many years, practising chi kuan, the union of shamatha and vipashyana, and hearing rumours and stories of the Teachings of Chan, probably when he went to get food or perhaps when people stopped by his hermitage, he took up Chan sitting or zazen.

Sound familiar?

Recall a story of Joshu roshi, Anzan Hoshin roshi's Teacher who was sent off or went off to study and who ran away and then was followed by his Teacher who praised him for running off to do a hermitage and that apparently led to the great capacity of Joshu roshi for understanding how human beings are, how they can actually practise, how zazen and the practice of the forms are absolutely essential to this process of, as Dogen phrased it, "studying the self" and waking up to;

THIS moment

the only thing that is going on.

Now, there's an excerpt from "The Transmission of the Lamp, the Record of the Lives and Sayings of the Great Chan Masters in China", which was made available by Anzan Hoshin roshi:

The Great Master Ch'en Chui, (Yoka daishi), arrived at Tsao Ch'i carrying a gourd and wearing a bamboo hat. He circumambulated three times the master's seat. Striking his monk's staff down once, he stood proudly before him.

The Sixth Ancestor, (Huineng) said,

"Monks must keep the three thousand departments and eighty thousand rules of minor conduct. Where does this venerable one come from that he is so proud?"

Ch'en Chui said,

"The matter of Birth and Death is great, impermanence is closing in fast."

The Ancestor said,

"Why don't you experience no-arising and understand that which does not move?"

Ch'en Chui replied,

"Experiencing is the non-arising state, understanding is originally unmoving."

*The Ancestor said,
"Right, that's how it is."*

*After a moment Ch'en Chui moved to leave, and the Ancestor asked,
"Aren't you leaving a bit too fast."*

*Ch'en Chui answered,
"Originally I am unmoving, how can it be too fast?"*

*The Ancestor asked,
"Who is it who knows this not-moving?"*

*Ch'en Chui answered,
"You're the one giving rise to discrimination."*

*The Ancestor said,
"You understand the meaning of the Unborn. Stay over for one night."*

And so Yoka daishi stayed at Tsao Chi, Huineng's monastery, overnight. This was the only meeting with the Master who gave him Transmission but it was all that was needed. This one night, this one moment of Transmission, this one moment of true entry, was based on the moment to moment practice that Yoka daishi had made in the hermitage, walking, reading, meeting various Teachers, practising, practising. Moment to moment practice until his practice was just this moment.

Now we all understand through our own experience that it is difficult
to drag ourselves out of bed in the morning,
to take a shower,
to push our hair out of our eyes,
to brush those teeth,
to towel off.

Who wants to do all of that?
If we'd rather just sleep,
if we'd rather just read about practice,
just read about mystical bullshit,
well the forms,
the discipline of the schedule which we have committed to,
will point out the arising of these thoughts about what we "would rather do".

That is pointing to what we call in our technical language of practice,
self-image,
a contraction into a sense of self with
a story about how it is and
how the world is.

The basic propaganda? The basic storyline?:
Unsatisfactory.

"I would rather be doing THIS than that."

"I would rather practise my own understanding, which of course is better than THEIR understanding, because I am wiser, smarter, more all-knowing than they are."

Who are "they"? Well, anyone else who presents anything.

We learn to see this process of self-image,
contraction into a sense of self with a storyline and
we have something that we can do,
we have the antidote:
the moment of noticing
anywhere in that process,
feel the breath,
feel the bodymind wrapped around that breath
feel this whole moment
in the only place it is happening and
ever has happened
[O-sensei strikes the floor]
NOW!

We make all sorts of stories up that try to seduce us
into believing that "now",
this moment,
the only thing going on is
unsatisfactory.

Isn't that sad?

This means
when we take it to its logical point that
everything we do
anytime
anywhere
is simply wrong and
something else should be happening.
That is insanity.

So here you sit on your little grindstone,
your little round zafu,
grinding away at these stories that come up,
at this process of the formation of a self by
simply noticing what's going on in this moment,
noticing what has always been going on, and
that which was always going on,
THIS MOMENT

and out of that comes freedom
from conditioned experiencing.

So Yoka daishi,
having sat,
having experienced the truth
of the fact that
there is only this moment,
had learned to pay attention,
had learned to simplify attention,
had learned to notice the strategies of self-image,

was practising the Way,
just letting each breath breathe itself,
just noticing this moment,
knowing what to do without effort,
allowing the knots of self-image to just
fall away of their own accord.

There really is nothing to do.

We're not used to that.
We are used to complexity.
If a situation is not complex,
we have many ways
that we can make it so.

There's breathing in and out.

Self-image will go:

"but it's not deep enough, I've got to breathe more deeply, I'm not breathing properly, maybe I'll go and take one of those breathalist courses that works with the breath, yes, that's what I'll do, that will affect the nervous system."

Well, we really don't have to do that
while we're sitting on the zafu in formal practice,
and formal practice,
the word itself gives it away,
formal means zazen,
sitting Zen in a certain specific way that is simplified,
that is down to the bare bones of it
so that
we can see the way
we make things complex.

Learning to see those moments,
we remember,

or the bodymind reminds us that
there's breathing, that
there is seeing and
hearing and
tasting and
touching and
feeling and
smelling,
that
the fact that
there is only this moment is
self-evident.

Just imagine...
self-evident.

We uncover that which has always been the case
through
sitting in this moment
and practising,
through walking with hands in shashu,
feeling the feet
on the floor,
the stairs,
feeling the change in temperature and texture from
wood to linoleum,
to shoes,
to outdoors,
to feeling the hand as we open or close the door,
to bringing the feet together,
to feeling the whole bodymind,
to raising the arms to bring the hands together in gassho,
to bow...

By using the forms,
we are given the opportunity to see
how we are in each moment,
to see the reluctance and recoil and
the stories we make up,
to learn to recognize them,
to bring forth the capacity to
simply notice the breath and the bodymind
in this moment,
wherever we stand,
walk,

lie down,
eat,
go to the washroom,
have a shower,
push our hair out of our eyes,
cut our toenails,
wash our clothes,
breathe the changing air from inside to outside,
all of the activities of the bodymind
moment to moment
give an opportunity to practise.

Take it!

What do you have to lose?

Well, if you don't take the opportunity
to notice your life,
you might die having never known that
you were actually alive
but were rather
living some sort of
dream.

The Great Matter is birth and death,
life does slip by and time is gone.
Right now...
Wake up!
Wake up!
Do not waste time.

Practice is nowhere else but here,
and it was ever thus.

Your life is nowhere else but here,
and it was ever thus.

You, who you really are, is nowhere else but here
and it was ever thus.

Uncover it!
Practise it!
Have some fun with it!
Open up to Reality,
to what is really going on.

Just sit,

no matter what arises,
just sit,
just walk,
just eat,
just enter into your life.

So. Back to 713 C.E. Yoka daishi has written the “Shodoka”, the Song of Waking Up to Reality, of instruction about practice.

Have you ever seen one of the Way?

*Beyond action and beyond learning,
one is at ease,*

*not struggling against delusion
or grasping after the truth.*

*One sees the nature of ignorance
to be itself Essential Awareness,*

*and the illusion of one’s own body
is the Realm of Reality.*

Now the main point of the whole text is that “the nature of ignorance is itself Essential Awareness and the illusion of this body is the Dharmakaya, the body of Realization, the Realm of Reality.

Even the mind of liking and disliking, the mind of confusion, the mind of fabrication is itself Essential Awareness or Buddhanature.

Noticing this breath,
this thought,
this sound
is the gate of
True Entry to the Way of Awake Awareness.

Thoughts arise, dwell, and decay
thoughts self-liberate into their own essencelessness.

When you wake up from the thought,
where has that thought gone?

You hear these sounds and they’re gone.
What is this experience?
What is this hearing?
What is this seeing?
What is this coming and going?
It is this moment itself.

Whether you are confused or clear,
it is this moment itself,
there is no place else to go
and there is no need to go anywhere else.

Working with this, one opens to Buddhanature or Awake Awareness or Essential Awareness and finds one's own body to be the root of all worlds, which means that everything you are experiencing is experienced with and as this bodymind.

Now, a moment,
this is self-evident is it not?

How could you experience anything without
experiencing it
with this bodymind?

The wall arises in the seeing of it in Awareness itself,
the wall is Awareness itself,
looking at the wall,
looking at the floor,
looking at your hands,
this moment is Awareness itself.

Simply practise in this moment,
and that's the key word:
simply.

Simple.
Keep it simple.

The eMirror that comes out today has in it a continuing of teisho 2: "Mr. Daruma" in the series "Bodhidharma's Eyes".

During his nine years of zazen Bodhidharma taught by his practice. Whenever anyone approached this monk from the land of the Buddha to enquire about the Way, they would find him sitting. They would ask their questions and he would answer by continuing to sit. Bodhidharma knew that these sutras, these questions and any answers he could give would be worse than useless if they were approached on the basis of already deluded views. So he tested these potential students in this way. All that they had to do was to sit down next to him. But instead, after a few minutes, they would just shake their sleeves and shrug and wander off again to find some Teacher who would quote the Diamond sutra or the Heart sutra or the Pure Land sutra to them.

Sound familiar?

Really, we do like to chat it up,
we like to chat it up
under the name of "spirituality"

sometimes.

Well, if you do that here
you'll be told to just sit down,
face that wall, and
at the moment of noticing anything at all,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind.

Wherever you stand,
you can do this.

Thank you for listening.