Wherever You Stand 13: Yoka daishi's (Yongjia) Shodoka: Song of Freedom part 2

by Ven. Shikai Zuiko O-sensei
Dainen-ji, April 6th, 2013

Previously on "Wherever You Stand"…

We've looked at and followed in the footsteps of
Bodhidharma
Huike
Sengcan
Daoxin
Hongren
and
Huineng…

to end up
looking at the "Shodoka: The Song of Freedom",
written by Yoka daishi,
somewhere around 713 C.E., Common Era,
and
the translation we are using
which appears in "The Treasury of Luminosity", a Great Matter Publication,
the translation
is by Yasuda Joshu roshi and Anzan Hoshin roshi.

Last week—or was it last week? Yes it was—we looked at the first few verses.

> *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.*

And in looking at this we are being told
over and over and over again
through these words

that all experiences come and go
everything that is
experienced is
experienced
by
the bodymind.

That's how it's always been,
and what you are doing
right now is
looking into the experiencing of
the bodymind
moment to moment.

Without the bodymind,
there is no experiencing.

The bodymind is how anything at all is known,
how any dharma,
or moment of experience
is experienced.

Now

that's self-evident

just as it is self-evident
that
each of you manage
to see thoughts as thoughts,
manage
to feel the breath and feel the whole bodymind
and put one foot in front of the other
so that you could arrive here
in this moment
feeling your gluteus maximus on the zafu
seeing the wall in front of you
feeling the breath
and
feeling the experiences,
the dharma,
experienced by
the bodymind.

It's self-evident
that you saw some

of the whining of self-image,
some of the reluctance
some of the recoil…
otherwise you wouldn't be here,
you'd be in your bed,
perhaps trying to grab another few minutes of z's
or reading a book
or reading a magazine
or just goofing off
because it's Saturday morning and it's spring!

So congrats!

Props to each one of you!
[laughter]

Keep on doing what you're doing,
which is basically
following through.

To review the first few verses…

You can realize the Realm of Reality, the Dharmakaya to be objectless.
All we have is the experience or the dharma of objects:

"Awareness IS the only condition"
as the first line of the "Three Jewels" states

"All that is arises as the display of Awareness"
as the second line says

"This is the seamless expanse of all that is"
as the third line says.

There's nothing to be done about it
but to see the various ways in which
we human beings can confuse ourselves,

and that we do confuse ourselves is self-evident.

Experience the zafu.
The zafu does not exist as an object in your bodymind,
it exists only as an experience,
something experienced by the bodymind,
through the feeling of the bones and muscles contacting that zafu.
That indeed is again self-evident.

So we continue on with the verses:

Completely realizing
the Realm of Reality to be objectless,

…does not have objects in it.
The zafu, an object, can only be experienced.

Completely realizing
the Realm of Reality to be objectless,

one finds oneself the source of all things
and one's own nature to be Awake Awareness.

The five aggregates arise and decay like
aimless clouds,
the three distorted orientations come and go
like bubbles on water.

So, Realm of Reality: Dharmakaya,
still with me?

one finds oneself the source of all things

…of all dharma,
the bodymind is what experiences.
We are the Knowing of those experiences.
That is what is being practised.

The five aggregates,
what we are talking about here are the skandhas,
what are called skandhas:
form, basic reactivity, habitual patterning, symbolization, and consciousnesses.

I am not going to go into a great deal of detail about these because a lot has already been spoken and written about these skandhas or aggregates.

What is important to remember is:
experience comes first,
and whether we call it a skandha, a klesha,
whether we call it Jennifer or Peter,
the experience comes first,
the language comes second,
and that is how it has always been since the beginning of human beings…
I'm not even going to say "primates",
we'll say "human beings",
that's enough to deal with.

[laughter]

So, first of all, experience
and then language to describe it.

So a long time ago, and probably it was someone who was fed up with actually sitting, and so they decided to write about it, they said: “Okay, this will be really useful. Rather than sitting, I’m going to take it all apart, give it names and write treatises on what it is.”

Don’t confuse the experience with the language about the experience.
Experience first,
language second.

And be careful,
I’m not saying language is not a good thing,
language is a great thing

and it’s best when it’s spoken out loud,
particularly to another person… [laughter]

… because if you are talking to yourself
with your half-baked theories
that you’ve picked up
on goodness knows what street corner,
you’re wasting time,

so sit up straight,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind
feel those experiences,
those dharma,
and
practise.

So then we get into:

> *The five aggregates arise and decay like*
> *aimless clouds,*

…they come, they go,
form, basic reactivity, habitual patterning, symbolization, and consciousnesses…

These words describing experiences help us to see
that these experiences rise and fall,
they come and go
like clouds in the sky.

the three distorted orientations come and go
like bubbles on water.

The “distorted orientations” are the three kleshas
of passion, aggression, and stupidity,
which, again,
are words to describe experiences.
These do not exist as objects somewhere,
and it is said in some texts that the combination of the five aggregates is called a “being”.

Well that in my view is kind of backwards.
There’s a being that is experiencing the five aggregates and the three kleshas,
and that words are used to describe what is being experienced.
Do not confuse experiences with words about experiences.

Realizing Suchness…

Tathagatha

… neither self nor things exist;
in one moment cause and effect are liberated.

“The Song of Freedom”.

Your job, the one that you’ve taken on willingly,
is to sit and look into the process of being a human being,
being you.

What do you have to do about it?

Nothing really,
but when you do notice anything,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
you as the Knowing of the experiencing of the bodymind,
are practising that moment of clear seeing,
and out of that
more clear seeing arises.

That just makes sense because that’s what you’re practising,
and as with anything that is practised,
done over and over again,
you get better at it.

The bodymind gets better at self-liberating

because the self,
the thing we think of as “me”
is seen for what it is:
a distortion,
a contraction into a sense of self with a story about how it is and how the world is,
and the story is
a thought.

> *If anything I say is untrue*
> *may my tongue be pulled out for countless eons.*

Well…

> *In a single moment of direct awakening*
> *to the Zen of Reality as a continuous presencing,*
> *the six perfections and countless skillful means*
> *are complete.*

Once again, the six perfections, the six paramitas, are things that you have heard about before, read about before, and if you want to read about them further, what can you do?
Little g, double o, little g, l, e.
You don’t even have to walk to get a book.

The six paramitas or perfections are
not stages,
not techniques,
they’re descriptions,
again descriptions of facets of the mind of practice.

The six perfections:

Dana paramita:
giving, generosity,

Shila paramita:
having to do with morality or ethics or doing the right thing, thinking about what we’re doing and making sure that what we do does not harm,

Kshanti paramita:
patience, seeing how we can get all worked up when things don’t go our way and various and sundry facets of that,

Virya paramita:
energy, bringing energy to your practice, pulling yourself together so that you can actually sit up straight when you notice something, so you can actually feel the breath, so you can actually open the eyes, even if you’re very tired.

The moment you notice that the eyes might be shutting down a bit,
you can open them
there's nothing saying they're not going to close down again, but for that moment of clear seeing,
for that moment of seeing clearly that the eyelids have shut down,
you can practise a little virya, a little energy.

Dhyana paramita:
actually doing something, actually sitting down to look into moment to moment experiencing,

Prajna paramita:
the paramita of wisdom.

Out of this come skillful means,
countless skillful means,
and this arises from the ability to work with situations in order to liberate beings.
And how is that learned?

It's learned by practising and working with being in situations where the stated objective is to liberate beings,
and as you know through the chanting of the Samu chant, for example,
each one, each student, each monk
is offering up what they do,
what they are going to do
for the benefit of all beings.

"May all beings be happy, may they be peaceful, may they be free."

So you can see that as Yoka daishi in the "Shodoka: The Song of Freedom"
is stating over and over again
this practice is about

THIS moment of experiencing,
THIS moment

which is the only thing going on.

When you notice anything,
practise mindfulness of breath and bodymind,
and out of this,
and at that very MOMENT
there is freedom from whatever was occupying attention.

That is also self-evident.

I'm going to read these verses once again without interruption.

Shodoka: Song of Freedom

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.

Completely realizing
the Realm of Reality to be objectless,

one finds oneself the source of all things
and one's own nature to be Awake Awareness.

The five aggregates arise and decay like
aimless clouds,
the three distorted orientations come and go
like bubbles on water.

Realizing Suchness, neither self nor things exist;
in one moment cause and effect are liberated.

If anything I say is untrue
may my tongue be pulled out for countless eons.

In a single moment of direct awakening
to the Zen of Reality as a continuous presencing,
the six perfections and countless skillful means
are complete.

Next time:

The six realms of existence are a dream…

Thank you for listening.