

Wherever You Stand 18: Yoka daishi's (Yongjia) Shodoka: Song of Liberation part 7

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Thank you for showing up today,
it speaks to your understanding of practice
and the strength of your practice
because I'm sure there might have been one or two little thoughts saying:
"Ach... Why?... It's too hot..."

But you saw them for what they are:
thoughts,
moments of experience,
dharma.

You may or may not have actually remembered
feeling the breath
and
feeling the whole bodymind

but something happened,
you cut through it
and step after step after step
here you are.

And I do appreciate it.

We will continue on with our look into, our study of the "Shodoka" by Yoka daishi.

The "Shodoka" is variously called:
"The Song of Liberation"
"The Song of Freedom"
"The Song of Enlightenment".

Previously on "Wherever You Stand"
we have looked into how this song or doka came about.

The Teachings that were transmitted,
that were passed on through different generations,
reaching Yoka daishi, who in 713 came up with this statement,
this expression of the Teachings as he had learned them...

*If folks argue and slander you, let them:
they are playing with fire, trying to burn the sky.*

Well, the sky can't be burnt can it?
And playing with fire, inevitably, we will burn
most likely,
ourselves.

So the advice here:
don't get involved in the arguments,
don't argue with...

If people slander you,
if people say nasty, malicious things,
let them.
You don't have to respond.
It is all about them,
it's not about you.

All you can do is practise at the moment that you notice
the dharma that you do notice,
that moment of experience
that reactivity.

Practise,
feel the whole bodymind,
feel the breath,
release everything into the open space of experiencing.

*When I hear them, their words are drops of nectar
and show me that this moment is free from conception.*

What is going on in any moment
is what's going on in any moment.

There is no need to try and figure out what it is that's going on.
There is no need to say
this person is saying this to you
because they are so enormously fucked up that they
have to vent somewhere...

You have no idea...
none of us have any real idea
what is going on with another person.
It's mind-reading,
it's speculation,
it's a cheap carnival side show.

So forget it!

It doesn't really matter!
What is going on with other people
is what is going on with other people.
It is their responsibility.

So when you notice
and hear
what may be being said to you or about you,
use what is seen and heard
to actually practise.

You can see the effect that it has on you
and this can give you some insight
into the effect that you have on other people
when you're acting out your stupidities.

Over time, it stops.
There's no need to do anything
and as a side bar here:

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody in the whole world did that?
Right now, as I speak,
all over the world in this moment,
there are people being shot,
there are animals being tortured,
some in the supposed service of feeding humanity
some just because people see a poor puppy and decide to cut its paws off
just because...

These things do happen.

There's no reason for them
except people are
focussed in
on random thoughts about
what they're doing.

So if everyone were practising,
we could have a thought about cutting the paws off a puppy,
but we WOULDN'T DO IT!

We'd see if for what it is,
we would not wear itchy fuzzy hats and
go out and beat up women
just because they're women.

And that happens in well—

the warm fuzzy hats, the itchy fuzzy hats happen only in a certain part of the world—
but the beating up of women,
the beating up of the defenseless,
the beating up and mutilation and raping of...
six months old babies
happens
not just in some other place, some other time,
but right here right now on this continent.
These things have happened and will continue to happen.

But imagine if everyone practised
and saw thoughts as thoughts...

Imagine the difference it would make?

But there's no point in getting all dreamy-eyed
and living in a "Well what if...? Wouldn't it be wonderful if?..."

You can just say "yeah, it would be great"
and do your own practice
because every little bit helps.

*Abusive words are disguised blessings
and my abusers good teachers.*

Now you remember Bodhidharma, he's right up on the wall
(referring to a zenga by the Roshi on the wall in both the Hatto and the Zendo),
you remember the stories about Bodhidharma when various people are said to have reviled him. One of his
rivals who became a Dharma brother is said to have hit him in the teeth with iron beads and knocked out his
front teeth. Bleeding from the mouth, Bodhidharma just turned and walked away.

This so impressed the person who had inflicted the wound that he eventually followed and studied with
Bodhidharma.

So when everything's nicey-nicey
and everybody's minding their own business
and smiling
and we have forgotten to say:
"well they don't really mean that smile"
so we just accept it for what it is,
that's terrific.

But when tough times come,
when there's a rough patch,
that's where a lot can be learned.
About who?

About YOU.

We can see how we are.

And we can practise at that moment.

*This mind has room for slander and abuse
and is itself unborn compassion and patience.*

There's lot of room for everything.

Everything that is happening is accommodated
in the space of Open Reality.

That is just a fact.

*Penetrate both the Transmission and the teachings,
practise harmonization and radical insight with brilliance,
unclouded by notions of "voidness".*

Now "voidness" is another misunderstood word.

Sanskrit's "shunyata" or "emptiness".

And people make various misinterpretations of this word.

Some think emptiness means sitting as an empty vessel,
like nothing is happening at all...

maybe that's dead...

It's certainly not being a living human being in this moment
and whatever is going on,
goes on.

Thoughts come and go,

colours

forms

sounds

come and go.

That's experiencing.

That is Reality.

In the third century, Nagarjuna, a Buddhist master taught that (and he of course said it in most likely Pali or Sanskrit):

Emptiness wrongly grasped is like picking up a poisonous snake by the wrong end.

Misunderstanding will bite you.

Misunderstanding will poison your practice.

As the Roshi has said: "If we misunderstand our practice, we will practise our misunderstanding."

So when we misunderstand what is meant by "voidness" or "emptiness",
we may sit practising like
some crazed housewife
with magic sponges
trying to wipe out every thought
every feeling
every moment of experience
so we're sitting there in blankness...

Well that is not what is meant.
Thoughts are not the problem.

Believing that their content is true
and should push you into action
can be a problem.

Seeing a thought as a moment of experience,
seeing a feeling as a dharma or moment of experience
is an opportunity to practise
that moment of clear seeing
that moment of seeing Reality as it actually is,
which alive and fluid,
with many moments of experience,
moments as myriad as the sands of the River Ganges,
to use an old saw...

Now nothing that we hear,
feel,
touch,
taste,
see,
any experience
any dharma,
not one of these stands alone and separate from experiencing.
Nothing exists outside of Awareness itself,
as we chant in "The Three Jewels":

All that is arises as the Display of Awareness

So you cannot take things apart,
problems arise when we try and isolate
and take experiencing apart from experience.

Nothing stands alone,

all is flux,
all is fluid and ever-changing.

Once we start to understand that,
with the whole bodymind,
just sitting,
standing,
walking,
experiencing experiences,
we realize we don't have to do anything,
we don't have to move towards them,
we don't have to get rid of them.

Practise at the moment of noticing.

*I am not alone in this attainment
which Buddhas numberless as grains of sand
have displayed.*

Yoka daishi continues...

*I'll freely speak the lion's Roar of Reality
which strikes fear into the hearts of beasts.*

*As the elephant flees, forgetting his pride
the heavenly dragon listens silent and joyful.*

Now we hear of elephants and dragons being mentioned as descriptions of practitioners and their style of practice.

An elephant fleeing,
well that could be pretty awesome don't you think?
This great big beast,
one of the largest mammals on our planet,
forgetting his pride and fleeing from
"the lion's Roar of Reality".

Many of us have
moment to moment
fled from Reality
because as we start to see
the not too subtle machinations of self-image,
the contraction into a sense of self
with its beliefs about how it is and how the world is,
with its futile attempt to create a self that is apart from everything else going on,

this can cause us to try and flee from
what we are noticing through practice,
but an amusing thing is:
you can't get away from you!
[O-sensei laughs]

That's what we try to do!
That's why people drug and drink
and carry on and carouse
and do stuff like rabbits do, apparently... [laughter]
... to try and shut up
to try and quiet the voices of self-image
that are trying to do something that is
impossible.

And fleeing from that "Roar of Reality"
can make an awful mess,
can make an awful lot of noise.

We've all experienced that,
we've all had our flare ups
and breakdowns,
but because we inherently or intrinsically,
or because there's been a recognition that it's important to practise with these things,
we stay,
we carry on,
and that's the way it has to be.

So the elephant, you remember that, the elephant practitioner is someone that moves kind of slowly perhaps,
moves kind of slowly perhaps thoughtfully, takes a long time.

The dragon can be quick...

But again, this is an aside because we're talking about the "heavenly dragon" which
"listens silent and joyful".

So we can learn that we can be reacting like crazy
we remember to practise and
even though reactivities do produce responses in the bodymind
which can be very powerful
we may stand or sit wherever we are
and actually practise with that
rather than wasting the energy that's involved,
we can practise with it.

Back to the verse:

*In the past I've crossed mountains and rivers
searching for masters and teachings in Zen.*

So that was Yoka daishi's experience.

*Now I know the path of Caoxi and
my realization is beyond birth and death.*

Now, Caoxi is a town in Guandong and originally there was the Baolin Temple, constructed during the Tang Dynasty around 618. Huineng, the 6th Ancestor, became the Abbott of Baolin Monastery. Some say that the monastery was founded in 502 by an Indian monk...

Maybe, perhaps, this is pure speculation on my part, I'm just, originally, a country girl so what do I know? Maybe that was Bodhidharma... Could have been...

And Bodhidharma came to be remembered, as did Huineng, who was of his Lineage, came to be remembered for and understood as representing Zen's most essential insights.

The story which was told when we were looking into Bodhidharma, and I'll bring it again, Master Yin Tsung of Fa Hsin Monastery, impressed by Huineng, asked him to talk about how his Teacher, Hongren taught. Huineng said: "There was no teaching. The Master taught looking into self nature, the actual nature of experiencing. He did not teach focussing, concentration, or deliverance."

"Why not?" Yin Tsung asked.

Huineng said: "That is dual Dharma. The Buddhadharma is not dual. There is nothing separate from this moment.

So there was a view that the teaching of concentration practices,
the teaching of focussing was teaching something that would impede the actual noticing of Reality,
was introducing something extra,
and that the practice that was taught in the Buddhadharma
was to sit,
to look at what arises within experiencing
and to practise at the moment of noticing it.

Now Nanhuan Temple was, as I said, originally Baolin, and it was near the town of Caoxi. Huineng taught there for 37 years. Apparently, according to a recent tourist guide, the body of Huineng is still preserved there. So mummy arises again...

And in Caoxi there's a Buddhist Academy to this day near the Temple which teaches Chan Buddhism, Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism. This is near a famous hot spring. So you can go and study Buddhism and have apparently a good time at a spa.

And this, as we know, has been going on, this Teaching of how to practise, has been going on for 2600 years. That is a long time, it's surprising that anything at all, any records actually exist.

But they do, and more and more is presenting itself, is being uncovered, as scholars and archeologists continue their work.

So the last verse for today, a reminder:

*Don't lose your Zen whether walking or sitting,
be at ease in speech or silence, moving or staying,*

So remember:

you can practise
wherever you are
wherever you stand.

You know what to do
it won't hurt you
it does however,
tend to wear out the stories you have
about who you are and how the world is.

That can be pretty scary
because if you're not who you think you are...
with all your little props,
with all your little views...

Who are you?

Isn't that just the question?

Have fun with it!

Thank you for listening.