

Wherever You Stand 19: Yoka daishi's (Yongjia) Shodoka: Song of Liberation part 8

by Ven. Shikai Zuiko O-sensei
Dainen-ji, June 8th, 2013

Good morning,
and welcome
to THIS moment,
the only moment that's going on in your life.

THIS moment.

Previously on "Wherever You Stand" ...
I left you with a verse from Yoka daishi's "Shodoka":

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

Very important:
don't lose your practice,
there's no need to lose your practice.
Thoughts come up
thoughts that have ideas about what practice is
and how it should be
and you would be
if your practice were good,
really good...

Well, of course you would be all-knowing,
all-seeing,
all-powerful...
Crowds would part as you walked along
[laughter]
people would bask in the glory of
YOU...

It's not going to happen.
[more laughter]

But,
self-image,
that contraction into a sense of self
with a story about how it is and how the world is,
about what's going on,

has a multiplicity of these kinds of beliefs
that come up when you're walking or sitting,
speaking or silent,
moving or staying,
that come up on all sorts of occasions in all sorts of moments,
but you,
the Knowing of experiencing,
know what to do:
the moment you notice anything,
practise that moment of noticing.

But,
this is very difficult
because we are sucking away on our old stories about what's going on
and
how we would be
and
how we should be
and
where we should be going
and
where practice should be taking us.

It's very common for students to ask questions similar to this:

"Sensei..."

"Yes?"

"Sensei, it's not going anywhere!"

"What? What's not going anywhere?"

[laughter]

"My practice!"

"Oh. Where do you think it should be going?"

"Uh... Uh... Well, I don't really know..."

There is only this moment,
look how rich it is!
Look at what you've actually noticed.
You noticed a thought,
the comment about
"it's not going anywhere"
is a thought.

Duh!

At that moment,
the moment of seeing it,
regardless of the content,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
whether you are walking,
standing,
sitting,
lying down,
cooking,
speaking,
silent,
moving,
staying:

practise.

See clearly in this moment,
you practise
and the obstruction of that belief
is released.

So it is easy to see in moments like that
how the belief that
“it’s not going anywhere”
if followed,
can take you further and further away from actually practising,
but when through their great benevolence,
the Teachers and Practice Advisors go:
“Hold on, wait, what are you doing?”
and point out what is happening,
you can practise at that moment
you can learn...

Oh well, sometimes self-image will offer up other things to practise with,
such as:

“That bitch! Constantly criticizing me! I’m doing the best I can!”

Which of course are all lies... [laughter]

But regardless of the content,
they’re thoughts,
so when that gets pointed out,
practise with them.

The title of this series,
"Wherever YOU Stand"
is exactly directed at YOU,
and the maturing of YOUR practice.

*Be calm even when facing a sword
and your clarity will never be poisoned.*

Interesting, remember, many monks, some Dharma Ancestors have faced the sword and been beheaded.

Huike, the Second Chan Ancestor was beheaded around 593, which means that he died only 120 years before Yoka daishi. So when Yoka daishi was 40 Huike's death would only have been 80 years before. That's not long before.

So these are moments that were very vivid, most likely, to people practising and studying around the time of Yoka daishi.

What happened 80 years ago from today, which would have been in 1933? Now, only some of us were alive anywhere close to 1933 [giggles] but it's easy, we can go to our computer, if you want to have a little fun when you get home and if you have the time, look up what happened in 1933 and see how much you might actually remember from stories about what happened in 1933[fn]I was encouraged as suggested to do a search on events that happened in 1933 and found the following: Hitler became German Chancellor, Roosevelt was inaugurated; he said: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" and launched the New Deal, Prohibition was repealed in the United States, the original King Kong movie was shown, the board game "Monopoly" was invented, Erwin Shrödinger won the Nobel Prize in Physics, and Michael Caine, Roman Polanski, Yoko Ono, Joan Collins, and Willie Nelson were born. -Ryoshin[/fn].

Same process, except for the computer part, would have gone on amongst Yoka daishi and his contemporaries as they talked about Huike and possibly Bodhidharma...faced the sword.

There is a story you may remember from this series, that Bodhidharma may have in fact been killed during a massacre. It's highly unlikely but it's a possibility.

But the fact is monks and practitioners have "faced the sword", so:

*Be calm even when facing a sword
and your clarity will never be poisoned.*

*Our Teacher Sakyamuni met his Teacher Dipamkara
only after practising patience through countless eons.*

Dipamkara, in Sanskrit and Pali, means "The Lamp Bearer", and there are slightly different names but they crop up in Tibet, Nepal, Vietnam, Mongolia.

So we can see how widespread practice and Buddhism actually was.

A Buddha, an Awakened One of the past, Dipamkara, was said to have lived on earth 100,000 years and was

one of a thousand Buddhas before Sakyamuni, and was said to have reached enlightenment eons prior to Gautama Siddhartha.

It is said that one of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, destroyed by the Taliban in 2001—and I did refer to that in “Every Breath You Take”—was said to have been Dipamkara.

In Chinese Buddhism, Dipamkara, Gautama Siddhartha, and Maitreya are referred to as the “Three Buddhas of the Three Times”:

The Three Buddhas of
the past: Dipamkara,
the present: Gautama Siddhartha,
and the future: Maitreya.

Another verse:

*Birth and death follow each other ceaselessly.
Awaken directly to Unborn Reality*

Unborn Reality: the Reality of THIS moment of experiencing.

Whose experiencing?

YOUR experiencing,
and YOUR experiencing,
and YOUR experiencing,
and YOUR experiencing,
and YOUR experiencing,
the experiencing of each and every one of us.

Here we sit in the same room,
but each and every one of us have in this moment
a different experience,
a different perspective,
a different orientation to this room in this moment.
That’s just a fact.

*and be free from joy about fame
or sorrow over loss.*

There’s no need to be concerned about fame,
about something that may be achieved in the future.

If people know your name,
so what?

(Especially if it’s on a cheque, that’s nice,
it can help support your practice.)

But to get caught up in how you are perceived by other people

is a fool's game.

The phrase "or sorrow over loss"
does not mean that you are not going to feel sad,
that you are not going to be touched by experiencing,
that the fact of birth and death
of thoughts in this moment
of people
of fish
of dogs, cats, squirrels, friends, relatives...
horses, cows, chickens,
and on and on...
are facts of life.

We can and may be more or less touched by these events,
but there is certainly, again,
no need to wear our
[in an overly 'sentimental' tone:]
"profound sorrow about the cruelty of death"
around our neck like an albatross,
stinking as it rots.

That's just silly.

Why bother chaining yourself
and describing yourself
by events
by moments
that have long passed?

Reality is:
you never know what thought might drift through,
you never know when there might be a thought about a loved one,
long dead,
that passes through,
and you get that little salty feeling around the nose.
That's being human,
that's joyful,
the capacity to have memory of,
to be reminded of
the lives of other beings,
it can be a joy,
it can remind us of the capacities of the bodymind
it can remind us of what it is to be human,
but we don't need to carry it all around and accumulate it
like a giant trash bag until it just gets too heavy to bear.

Put it down!

Feel the breath
feel the whole bodymind,
wherever you stand.

*Stay in hermitages
in mountains and valleys amongst the pines.*

*Practise joyfully in vacant cabins.
Live free from complexity.*

*Understand Reality and your actions are without effort
unlike the actions of the usual person.*

Yes, now, self-image will latch onto the simplest things,
it will say:

“Oh well, Yoka daishi says that we should stay in mountains and valleys amongst the pines because that’s where we can really practise.”

Well, that’s not what’s being said,
we can really practise wherever we are.
It is not circumscribed by geography,
by weather—
and by that I mean rain, shine, not wondering “whether” I should sit or not—
[giggles]
it need not be dictated to by any situation that is occurring,
wherever you are,
you can practise.

Notice the many ways in which habits of thought,
habits of understanding that the usual mind,
the mind that is not practising,
tends to carry on.

The usual mind,
the mind that is not practising,
has boxes of thought,
or boxes that thought can be put into:
the box of how you are when you’re at home,
open the lid:
a certain set of ways of being,
close the lid:
How you are when you’re at work
another set of ways of being.
Next box:

how you are when you are at the monastery,
and this, often, in the beginning of practice,
will happen when the door opens, or when you open the door
and there's a snap into being another person,
being a very "Zen" person.

So you learn to see these things,
this putting on different ways of appearing,
to whom?
To others, it's being done for others,
and the sad thing is that mostly, in the world,
they don't notice.

Why?

Because they're just like you,
that's why.
The usual mind is one that is concerned mostly with what
IT is doing,
there's very little, often, concern for what others are doing,
unless of course it can make YOU feel good.

So you start to see that
and you start to understand that
there's no need to have these little boxes, little boxes, little boxes,
because they are figments of your imagination,
they are thoughts.

So when you notice it:
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind.

This does not mean that you can or should,
as some have done,
adopt a kind of "California" attitude of
"Oh man, I'm just going with the flow, it's like a very 'Zen' way to be. Nothing's going to disturb my Zen."

That's just another little box
and another way of showing a lack of understanding
of actually practising
because practice is something
that you DO
it is not a belief that you have about yourself
or about anyone else.

Now, the word "usual" as in "usual person";
"usual" is a way of describing the mind of a person who is not practising.

It does not indicate that they are better than you are
or less than you are,
it's just a way of saying
"yeah, well, that's the usual mind",
the mind of social culture,
the mind whose assumptions are unquestioned.

The mind that is practising is "ordinary mind",
the mind that is very ordinary
in that it is as it is
in this moment
which is uncluttered by
thoughts
and feelings
and beliefs
and patterns.

Now sometimes it can seem like an incredibly difficult task
to sit there doing nothing,
[O-sensei laughs]
doing nothing at all,
except noticing how you are.

But because we have these beliefs
that have been accumulated through the years
about what we think should have happened,
sometimes sitting there doing nothing facing the wall,
in comfort
(birdsong in the background
nice temperature...)
can seem like the most arduous, awful thing in the world.
As soon as you notice that, you've noticed a thought.

Feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
open to the vast expanse
of the experiencing of this moment
as it actually is.

So practise wherever you
sit
stand
walk
lie down
cook
eat

dance
watch TV
listen to music
play music
write poems
paint...

You CAN practise
wherever you are
and whatever you're doing,
but this is not to be confused with formal practice
which you are doing right now
sitting on the zafu
facing the wall
in the "lab"
looking into the moment to moment experiencing of the bodymind.

You as the Knowing of the experiencing of the bodymind
practise HERE
so that you can practise joyfully,
so that your actions will be without effort,
so that you will be having fun
wherever you are
and whatever you're doing.

It's just true.

That is how it is.

So welcome
to THIS moment...

and this moment...

Yadda yadda yadda...

Thank you for listening.