

Wherever You Stand 20: Yoka daishi's (Yongjia) Shodoka: Song of Liberation part 9

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Previously on "Wherever You Stand" ...
we were looking into Yoka Daishi's "Shodoka: Song of Liberation"
and the point that he has been making over and over again
is that
you can practise
wherever you are
whatever it is
that's going on.

It's the same bodymind
that sits
that walks
that stands
that has a drink of water
the same bodymind
that plays a musical instrument
that plays with a cat
that walks the dog
that cooks
that drives...

there are myriad moments of experiencing
that can be noticed
and can be practised,

thus:
wherever you stand,
you CAN practise.

Now students, in their keenness, fall for statements of self-image,
that contraction into a sense of self
with a belief about how it is
and how the world is,
and they say:

"I want to deepen my practice, what can I do when I'm not sitting on the zafu? What can I incorporate? What complexity can I bring into my life that is going to actually mature my practice faster?"

And the answer is simply,
well

when you notice
you've set up this strategy,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
practise that moment of noticing
this drive to incorporate more
towards a goal.

All you can do,
all anyone can do
all anyone has been able to do
since the beginning of practice
is
practise at the moment of noticing anything at all.

Of course there can be reminders,
you may choose to wear a small jizu or wrist mala
which can remind you for a certain period of time
that you're practising,
but we forget very quickly what that thing is doing on our wrist.

We could have a few rocks on our office desk,
and for the first little while,
however long that little while might be,
those rocks might remind us to practise
but then we just don't see them anymore,
before you know it,
there's a paperclip in the space where the rocks are,
and then there's a couple of rubber bands that have been placed around one of the rocks
and it's just become part of the usual office detritus
because that's the way human beings are.

At the moment of noticing it:
first thing, feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind
and do whatever it is you do next.

Now picture Yoka daishi 1300 years ago
and he is sitting, one assumes,
perhaps in his room or in the shuryo or study of the monastery,
a monastery or a temple, if that's where he was,
and he has his ink and his brush
and he's gone through the full preparation
of scraping the material to make ink into a powder,
mixing it with water,
charging his brush,

and writing.

1300 years ago there was no electrical light,
there was no gas light,
there were no computers,
no typewriters,
so this would have been done by the flickering of a candle
if the sun had gone down,
but he felt it was so important to pass on,
to leave a record
or just,
and this may very well be the case,
he felt it so important to write down what he had understood,
without necessarily any view in mind
that 1300 years later in Ottawa, Ontario,
on a rainy June morning
that we would be studying an English translation of his words.

The first verse for today:

*Charity given within conditions for heavenly reward
is like shooting arrows into the sky.*

*When its force is spent, the arrow falls
just as beings go up, then down.*

*The realm of conditionless action is not like that:
it is a direct leap into the realm of Those Gone Into Thusness.*

*Go to the root, leaving the branches.
It is like the bright moon reflected in a crystal.*

So many times,
and we've all done it...
well, okay I can't say all of you have done it,
but I've done it,
I've done something and with the best of intentions:

"Okay, I'll do this thing for this person or this situation"
and it's done in a heartfelt way,
yet a while later,
and that while can be days, weeks, months,
self-image has a peculiarly long memory,
it will go:

"But but, I did this for you! Why are you treating me like this? I've been so generous to you!"

Well this is the kind of thing that's being talked about.
You cannot do things with the idea of getting a reward for them,
that's—what should we call it?
—that's merchant mind,
that's bartering and trading in the desolate marketplace,
and it just doesn't pay off.

Remember Bodhidharma?
Remember when he was summoned to meet Emperor Wu.
Emperor Wu told him with great pride all that he,
the Emperor, had done:
building temples,
giving money and support for the monastic community,
and he asked Bodhidharma:

"What merit have I gained?"

Bodhidharma looked out from under his big bushy eyebrows and said:

"None whatsoever."

Well the Emperor wasn't necessarily pleased at that moment,
but that's how it works
or doesn't work.
Doing things for a reward is really very, very self-concerned,
it really takes no account of the actual situation
and of others involved in it,
it's just greedy.

And we're asked by Yoka daishi
and all of the Ancestors in this particular Lineage
leading up to this "Shodoka"
we're asked to notice how we are
moment to moment,
we're asked to notice patterns that we've acquired as they arise,
they need not define who we are.

The moment of noticing them
is the moment when we can practise,
no matter what we're doing.

We could be standing talking to someone
having a let's say spirited discussion,
but as the Roshi has said,
if you're not feeling your feet
you don't have a leg to stand on.

So if you're not feeling your feet,
if you're not feeling the whole bodymind,
if you're not feeling the breath
you are in that instance given, having a heated discussion,
you're totally involved in thoughts,
you're totally being pulled by old patterns.

That doesn't need to happen
and it will wear out.

You can be in mid breath,
you can be in mid rant
and the moment you notice it,
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
practise.

You just stop whatever you're doing.

If you happen to be with a Practice Advisor or a Teacher,
there's nothing to stop you from saying:

"I'm seeing it"

or

"I'm practising now, I just saw it."

That's appropriate because we've seen it,
we know what's going on
but your willingness to see is there.

*Understand the jewel of liberation
and use it to benefit yourself and all others.*

*The moon rises over the river,
wind moves in the pines*

Things are as they are.

all through the night. Purity. Calm.

Yaza is coming up when we do sit all through the night,
starting at 10 pm and ending at 8 in the morning,
so I do hope those of you who haven't participated in Yaza as yet
will do that
because that particular period of sitting

presents limitless possibilities for practising.

We have to see over and over again,
and you will see as you sit during Yaza,
that thoughts are there:

“Oh it’s the middle of the night.”

“Oh, I’m so tired.”

“Oh I’ll be a wreck tomorrow.”

The main point of seeing those things is to recognize
that they are spinning futures that are not assured.

One,
you don’t know whether you’re actually going to make it through the night,
I mean your heart could stop, let’s face it,
it’s going to happen to all of us at one point or another...
That could be quite dramatic.

You don’t know whether you’re going to be tired in the morning,
and what often happens,
students have reported, and in my own experience:
the morning comes
[O-sensei sings:] “Morning has broken....”
and there’s energy!!
Much to their surprise...

And there could be tendency to fall into some kind of “new agey”:
“It was so powerful...”

That’s another story,
but it’s a thought,
it’s words,
it’s a moment of experience,
it’s a moment to practise.
Great!

And gradually,
gradually,
and this doesn’t mean that we’re stupid people,
but it takes as long as it takes
to start to recognize
that the stories that we tell ourselves,
those thoughts that rocket around
really
have no basis in Reality,
they are fabrications,

they are illusions.

They can affect us
when they're left to run riot.

We've all had the experience of saying:
"Oh, I'm so tired, I'm SOOO tired..."
and we notice that guess what?
Our little eyes start to close,
and we start to shut down,
creating a trance for ourselves.

So we do respond to self instruction.
So you don't want to do that,
as soon as you see it
[O-sensei snaps fingers]
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
practise that moment of clear seeing.

Back to Yoka daishi:

What does this calm mean?

*Vividly see the precepts of Essential Awareness
and the seal of the mind-ground.*

*Dew, fog, clouds, mists
are the true robes of our bodies.*

Now here the "precepts of Essential Awareness"
started with "The Three Jewels"
which are the first set of precepts
that students take or are given,
and we chant "The Three Jewels" at the beginning of sitting rounds
as we did today.

I'm going to read a bit from the Roshi's treatise on receiving the precepts: "Kyojukai-mon"
which was originally written by Eihei Dogen Kigen zenji
and Keizan Jokin zenji
and what I'm going to read was presented at the River Road Zendo
by Anzan Hoshin roshi in 1986
and has subsequently been revised several times.

*To completely penetrate the Precepts is to completely penetrate one's habits and limits and to enter into
the whole moment, leaving behind what is already behind. The Precepts remind us of the basicness of this
amazing world when we have complicated it with our fabrications. As delusion arises, it does so against*

the background of the Precepts and so can be clearly seen. This seeing is already wisdom. Thus delusion and wisdom can arise together, providing some freedom from the claustrophobic density of a confused bodymind. At this point we can provide ourselves with the opportunity to choose how we are. This choice can than further wisdom or deepen confusion depending on our choice. The more that delusion arises, the more that wisdom is triggered. When wisdom displays itself fully, there is only wisdom with no room for delusion.

*The vast blue of the sky
a thousand birds
a thousand clouds.*

*The darkening sky.
A thousand stars
a thousand clouds.*

*In all of this
WHAT IS IT?*

Back to Yoka daishi's verses:

*The monk's bowl that subdued dragons,
the staff that calmed fighting tigers
with the sound of its hanging rings

are not just relics from some old fable
but symbols of the Thus Come One's precious Teachings.*

Now you remember the story of the monk's bowl and the robe
that Bodhidharma gave to Huike
and the staff that's referred to
"that calmed fighting tigers"
is a staff that had rings on it
that monks would have with them as they went through the forests
and the rattling of the rings
would let people and all other beings know
that they were coming.

Point being here
that these were not fables
we still have and use these symbols of the Teachings
in recognition of the Lineage of Ancestors
that have transmitted these Teachings.

*Don't seek truth or avoid delusion:
both are wholly empty, without form.*

*Neither empty nor formless,
this is the body of the Buddha.*

So I'll leave you with those thoughts.

When you notice anything
there's no need to decide whether it is
truth or delusion,
it's the noticing
THAT's where you practise,
you don't need to sort through
to determine if this is a place to practise,
and this is not.

But it can be interesting to see
that often these choices are made,
and now you're starting to see them
you don't even know that you've made choices.

So wherever you are
whatever you're doing
the moment you notice anything:
feel the breath
feel those feet,
feel the arms and legs
feel the tip of your nose
feel your ears
feel the hairs growing
feel the breath moving in and out

and have a good time!

Sing that Song of Liberation
in your own way,
and have fun with it!

Thank you for listening.