Wherever You Stand 23: Yoka daishi's (Yongjia) Shodoka: Song of Liberation part 12

by Ven. Shikai Zuiko O-sensei
Dainen-ji, July 20th, 2013

Previously on "Wherever You Stand"
looking into the "Shodoka", Yoka daishi's "Song of Liberation"
we ended with these two little verses:

> *One nature pervades all natures.*
> *One thing holds all things.*
>
> *One moon is reflected in all waters,*
> *all these reflections are one moon.*

Awareness IS the Only Condition.
All that is arises as the Display of Awareness.
This IS the Seamless Expanse of all that is.

So here you sit
and this Reality
is of course
what you are
practising.

Dharma with a big "D"
the Teachings of Reality
the Teachings of How Things Really Are.

With a little "d"
"dharma":
a moment of experience
any moment of experience that is experienced by the bodymind
that is known by the bodymind
can be practised by you
as the Knowing of these dharma.

How easy is that, huh?
How easy?

Not simple…
Or, simple but not easy.

Why?

Because we complicate, we complexify.

Why do we do that?

Because it is what we are used to doing.

We come to practice believing that we are our thoughts and feelings,
that they are the most important things about who we are and what is going on
and it's big shock when we get told:
"Oh fuck your thoughts and feelings."
[laughter]
Or something similar…

That's not what you are,
they are dharma
moments of experience.

And what do we do at the moment of noticing a dharma?
What do we do?

STUDENT: "Sit up straight, feel the breath".

Good!

What do you do over here?

Come on, take a chance!

A DIFFERENT STUDENT: "Sit up straight!"

Feel the breath!
Yes indeed!
So there's been sort of,…a word that's come up a lot…recently is "spiritual", right?
Is this "spiritual"?
Is this a "spiritual" practice?
Well the word itself, "spiritual", comes from spiritus: the breath.

So, spiritual…
If you're alive, you're breathing.
If you're breathing, you're alive,
so you can do whatever it is you're going to do,
and in this case,
at the moment of noticing anything whatsoever,
feel the breath,
sit up straight,
open peripheral vision,
practise that moment of clear seeing.

Isn’t that fun?

Now, new verses by Yoka daishi,
written some 1300 years ago,
and why did he write them?

Because it was a compilation of what he understood the Teachings to be
and obviously they made such an impression on him
that he wanted to pass on
he wanted to write,
he wanted to exclaim
he wanted to sing the
Song of Liberation.

> *The Realm of Reality of all Buddhas is my own nature,*
> *my own nature is all the Thus Come Ones.*

Here he’s simply saying Tatagatha, Suchness, Thus Come,
this is who we are,
we are Awareness itself,
we are the Knowing of knowns.

> *One stage of practice contains all stages,*
> *without form, without thought or action.*

That is just how things are.
That is Reality.
And no matter how much we get in there and entangle ourselves
in the seaweed of our beliefs about who we are
and how the world is and so on…
no matter how much we do that,
there is an opportunity that will present itself for you to see what’s going on
and at that moment of clear seeing,
feel the breath,
sit up straight,
open the eye gaze.

You know what to do,

you just have to do it.

And showing up is how you do it.

It’s not a matter of setting up a strategy
that will get you to some dream you might have
about how you will be when you wake up,

that’s a thought,
that’s a belief,
so when you see that, actually do the practice:
feel the breath,
feel the whole bodymind,
sit up straight
and see what happens.

That is what you do.

There is no magic formula or equation
that you will find
if you think about it a lot.

What you’re doing if you’re thinking about it a lot
is allowing that seaweed that’s trapped you
to wrap itself more tightly around you
so that you really do feel like one ball of contraction
living out some nightmarish kind of dream.

Well, see it!
Feel the breath,
allow those things just to drop away,
which is what they will do
on their own…
when you practise…

> *In a finger snap eighty thousand doors are open*
> *and three great eons vanish in an instant.*

So “eighty thousand doors”,
“dharma gates beyond measure”:
a lot.
Each moment of experience is a dharma,
each moment of recognizing it shows you very clearly it’s a gate.
What do you have to do to open that gate?
Well, you don’t really have to do anything,
the gate is already open
but by practising
at that moment of clear seeing,
you are actually doing what the instructions tell you to do,
and these instructions have been going on for some 2600 years
and they’ve been written about for some 1300,
well more than that, but
Yoka daishi’s “Shodoka” was written in 713, 1300 years ago.

In this stage, in these verses of the “Shodoka”,
Yoka daishi is bringing forward what he learned from his Teachers,
and in this case from Hongren,
who was the Fifth Chan Ancestor,
very significant in the history of Chan.
It is said that at the monastery which his Teacher had founded,
his Teacher Daoxin had founded,
there were a thousand monks.

At that time in the history of Chan, it’s also said that Hongren had taught or his Teachings had been heard and understood and practised by eight or nine out of ten monks. It’s kind of vague, it doesn’t really say in the piece that I was reading whether they were part of that thousand or whether there had been a spreading of the Teachings.

So he’s very significant. Hongren and Daoxin had, as you may remember, founded the East Mountain Teachings, what became known as the East Mountain Teachings, the Teachings of Pure Mind or of Awareness Itself, which is something that you can recognize right here right now as what you are doing.

> *Names and categories and being without them*
> *have nothing to do with Perfect Knowing.*

So some may, because they have a liking for it,
study the history of practice,
study the different schools,
remember them,
put them together,
and this is important,
but it is not necessary for you to do it
in order for you to wake up.

What you have to do
is
do the practice.

If you’re interested in studying the history,
by all means, it’s encouraged.

> *It is without praise or blame,*
> *It is without boundaries, like space.*
>
> *It is wherever you stand.*
>
> *It is free of struggle and searching.*
>
> *It cannot be held or released.*
>
> *Give up the search.*

It is here.

And “here” means
right here
right now.

What is being written of
is what was explained
which was transmitted by
the Ancestors
right up to Joshu Dainen roshi,
Anzan Hoshi roshi,
me,
Jinmyo sensei,
and all of you.

You have everything you need to do the practice.

Back to the verse again:

Its silence speaks, its speech is silent.
Its great giving opens the door wide.

If you ask me what doctrine I teach
I’ll tell you it’s Vast Awareness.

So here we have reference to Yoka daishi’s Teacher, Huineng,
who was the Sixth and last of the founding Chan Ancestors.

And remember, Huineng was, apparently, an illiterate,
from his works, from his Teachings, was compiled, some say,
“The Platform sutra”
which, some say, was a repository of Chan Teachings
up to the second half of the eighth century
and was fundamentally about Awareness itself.

No one can agree or disagree with this
and even the shining beings can only speculate.

Having practised this for many years,
I have no choice but to tell you the truth.

So Yoka daishi practised with his Teacher, Huineng for a number of years,
and, apparently, he was doing such a practice before he came across Huineng.
Huineng recognized that he had an understanding that was realized

and gave acknowledgment to that fact.
As Yoka daishi says in these words exactly:

Having practised this for many years,
I have no choice but to tell you the truth.

Why?
Because it can help people to understand what it is that they are doing
and how they can notice when they're getting lost in their strategies of achievement,
and by "strategies of achievement"
I mean wanting to collect things,
wanting to collect, oh, let's say, koan,
wanting to collect something that seems more difficult or more challenging.

Well there's nothing more challenging
than actually sitting zazen.

The other things, the other forms and aspects of practice are great,
but zazen in the basic practice
and out of that comes the realization,
Dogen called it "studying the self",
the realization
of who you really are.

Back to the verses again:

"Raise the banner of the Teachings,
proclaim the Teachings of the Lineage."

Such was the Buddha's command to Caoxi.

In the Indian records, Mahakasyapa was the first
to receive and transmit the Lamp
and then down through twenty eight Ancestors.

Through the First Ancestor Bodhidharma
the Teachings of Reality came east to the Middle Kingdom,

through Six Ancestors who received the robe,
and then to countless who have realized the Way.

So, to refresh your memory,
the Six Ancestors Yoka daishi is recognizing are:
Bodhidharma, the first one,
Huike
Sengcan

Daoxin
Hongren
and Huineng.

Truth does not stand alone, the false doesn't exist alone.
When ideas of 'being ' and 'non-being' vanish
all is empty.

The teachings about twenty emptinesses
are intended to disentangle you;
All are the display of this one body
of the Thus Come.

Mind arises with experiences as its objects.
Subject and object are dust on a mirror.

Free of dust, the mirror shines.
The Actual Nature is known
when mind and things do not arise.

In this Age of Ending and this sad world
suffering beings resist the truth.

So we'll stop here for today
and next time we'll pick up at exactly this spot.

Just in case you might be encouraged to do a little research and reading on your own,
I'll read the last three verses.

They'll trigger something in you
and you might want to go do a little search
and see what you come up with.

Mind arises with experiences as its objects.
Subject and object are dust on a mirror.

Free of dust, the mirror shines.

Sound familiar?

The Actual Nature is known
when mind and things do not arise.

In this Age of Ending and this sad world
suffering beings resist the truth.

Have fun with this,
and as this evening is Yaza,
some of you are attending.

There's a possibility there could be thoughts during the day
about what it's going to be like,
and I'm willing,
from my own experience over the years
to say that most of your thoughts are going to be about how difficult it might be.

Most important this is:
they're thoughts.

A thought is a dharma,
a moment of experience,
a known.

You are the Knowing.

When you notice it, what do you do?

STUDENT: "Feel the breath, feel the bodymind."

Yes!…

Yes!

So we'll give it that old Bodhidharma "oomph", okay?
[laughter]

Thank you for listening.