

Yaza 2003: Night Falls

by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi
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As night fell, the shadows beneath the spreading branches of the pipal tree lengthened and deepened, and Siddhartha Gautama sat up straight. Facing into the night, facing himself, facing each moment of the coming and going of experience, Siddhartha Gautama unfolded himself as Sakyamuni Buddha. In that space beneath the pipal tree, in the space of his own body-mind, Sakyamuni Buddha unfolded the endless dimensions of the life that lives as him, as you, and as the falling of night and the breaking of day.

Since that time, practitioners of the Buddha Way have often sat through the night. In Japanese Zen monasteries, lights-out are often around 9 o'clock at night or 10 o'clock at night. During sesshin, a gathering for intensive practice, it is expected that following lights-out, that you will sneak out and do yaza — sit all through the night. The practice of yaza is thus something extra, something unusual, that we do just because.

New students often ask why we practise yaza. Well, that's why: Just because. Just for the fun of it. You know when you were a little kid, getting to stay up late at night was one of the best things that could ever possibly happen? Well, this is the best thing that can ever possibly happen because it is the only thing that is happening right now.

Sitting up straight right now facing the night, facing the wall, facing yourselves, is a tremendous opportunity. And it is an opportunity you will have moment after moment after moment all through the night. And when day breaks — when the sun rises — we will continue to sit.

Unfortunately, we do have to end at some time. But the time for facing yourselves, for facing the wall, for Zazen, is never past. The coming and going of each moment of your life is an opportunity to unfold for yourselves who and what you are beyond your strategies, beyond your fantasies, beyond your fears, beyond your hopes.

But that's enough talking, not only from me, but from you. So each and every one of you, shut up . . . and have a wonderful night.