Yaza 2013: What Comes Out at Night

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Even in the midst of the bright light of day, almost all of people's actual lives are hidden from them. The colours, forms, sounds, sensations, fragrances, tastes are hidden from them because they hide from the actuality of all of these colours and forms and sounds rising forth and falling away as the actuality of each moment of their lives throughout the day and night. Taking a step, they don't feel the feet. Opening a door, they forget to close it behind them. So aimed towards where they are going, sometime they even walk into glass doors or even wooden doors.

We sit in rooms. We walk down hallways. We go up and down stairs. We pass windows. We pass doors. We pass each other. But for the most part, people are not free to move in the vast space of their own lives because they have locked themselves away where there are no windows, there are no doors, but only the claustrophobic closets of their hopes and fears.

Sitting in this room right now, this moment arises as these colours and forms and sounds, these sensations, this posture of zazen. I ask you to please allow yourself to open to what these can reveal to you about your life as a whole.

Do you notice that in each moment of seeing the wall, the wall is always different? Each breath as it is breathed is always a different breath. With each angle of the head, each blink of the eye, your seeing of the room changes–your experience of the room changes. And the room, this Hatto (this Dharma Hall), is all only about the nature of your experiencing of it.

You sit within the room; but the room arises within your experience of it. Each set of eyes, set at whichever angle it is at momentarily, sees the room. The room is seized within the seeing, but opens itself as the seeing. Your seeing of the room, the presencing of the room, are intimate with each other. And your experience of the room, and your experience of the room, and your experience of the room, and my experience of the room, are all intimately aspects of the presencing of the actuality, not only of the room, but of Experiencing in itself. No moment of seeing the room is what the room is. My seeing of the room is not what the room is. Your seeing of the room is not what the room is. But what it is, what seeing is, who you are, who I am, is directly present in the sheer fact of the experience.

In the bright light of day, as you walk through rooms, through hallways, out on the streets, under trees, through long grasses, feeling water, sweating in the heat, hearing the sounds of birds and of traffic, and perhaps of your own breath: all of this is arising within your seeing, your hearing, your touching, tasting, smelling, thinking and feeling as a whole. And as you walk on the street or under the trees, there are hundreds and thousands of sets of eyes watching you pass: in between the leaves, resting on the bark in the shadows between the branches, in the drops of rain still resting on moss or clinging to a leaf. There are birds, there are insects, there are squirrels all around you and overhead.

Even walking in the midst of a forest in which we know there are numberless beings present, for the most part we don't see them. But they're watching us: all of these eyes gazing and staring and blinking. And we are arising within their experience of us.

And as night falls, some beings go to sleep. Others rouse themselves and walk and climb and fly: in the sky, on the ground, on the walls, between the floorboards, in between your eyelashes. In each moment, we are always in the midst of innumerable lives, all of which are also the Life that lives as each of us.

The practice of yaza — of sitting throughout the night — is simply an opportunity for us to see what comes out at night in us. It is not that it is so vastly different from what occurs when we sit during the day; otherwise, it would be almost pointless. What we experience through the activity of sitting, whether in the morning or the afternoon or the evening or late at night or very early in the morning, are all aspects of how the body-mind is in that moment. And by opening to how it is in that moment, we begin to recognize something that is not so much the same in each moment, but something that is always already the case about each moment, each day, each sense, each being, each life.

We practice yaza annually in the White Wind Zen Community for several reasons. First of all because it is the month of July and it is the hottest month of the year in Ottawa. And so sitting at night is much more comfortable than sitting during the day. And so yaza is not an endurance test — it is not something to grit the teeth for and to tense your muscles and to push your way through: you're here to have fun.

We also practise yaza because how we are throughout the cycles of body-mind throughout the day and night can be subtly different: sitting at three o'clock in the morning does feel different than sitting at three o'clock in the afternoon.

And so this evening, I hope that you allow yourselves to see what comes out at night. If moment-by-moment you release yourself into this moment, it will be you.

So please, tonight and throughout the night, and into the morning, please, enjoy yourselves.