

# Yaza 2014: Perigee Moon

by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi  
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Some two-thousand six-hundred years ago more or less, Siddhartha Gautama sat beneath the branches of a pipal tree, which since then has been known as the “Bodhi Tree”, the “Tree of Awakening”. The shadows lengthened. The sky darkened into night. And Siddhartha Gautama just sat.

Despite all of the strategies of concentrating attention to create this state or that state and the cosmologies that described these various states as being more or less real than other states of mind, he simply abandoned all strategies and techniques and just sat: breathing, seeing, hearing, feeling whole-bodily. He sat determined to question deeply into the question of suffering and its causes, the nature of confusion, and ultimately the nature of experiences and of Experiencing. And so, throughout the night, he simply sat, exposing himself to Experience as it actually presented itself, releasing all strategies of attention.

He sat all through the night, and in the morning, looking up, he saw the Morning Star. At that moment, he realized the nature of experiences and of Experiencing and had realized freedom from suffering through releasing obstructions of attention. The Mahayana sutras express this as the statement, “I and all beings together realize the Buddha Way”, the Way of Awakening.

This realization was not something that had been whispered to him by the Morning Star. It was not proclaimed by the Morning Star. It was not symbolized by the Morning Star. It was just that in that moment of seeing, the nature of seeing became clear, the nature of hearing became clear, the nature of feeling became clear, the nature of experiences and of Experiencing became clear.

What we call the “Morning Star” is actually the planet Venus brightly reflecting the light of the Sun through the lightening sky of the dawn. Siddhartha Gautama, who, since this point in time of awakening to his own nature, the nature of all beings, has been known as “Sakyamuni Buddha”, did not know that the Morning Star was the planet Venus. He did not need to know this information. There was nothing about the star that caused the realization; it was simply his openness to the fact of seeing.

Since that moment, the Buddha Way — the Buddha Dharma — has been proclaimed, has been practised, and has been realized. And since that time, many practitioners, many masters and students, have sat throughout the night.

It has long been our tradition in the White Wind Zen Community to use July, the hottest month of the year in our part of the world, to commemorate, to celebrate, Sakyamuni Buddha’s sitting throughout the night by ourselves sitting throughout the night. While I hope that we sit in each moment deeply questioning into the nature of experiences and the nature of Experiencing, commemorating the Buddha’s sitting is not a matter of thinking about the Buddha’s sitting; it is simply a matter of sitting as the Buddha sat.

We are not sitting in order to struggle against sleepiness. We are not sitting in order to stay up for twenty-four hours as some kind of achievement. In fact, if you’ve had some naps or rest before coming this evening, that would be good. We sit to enjoy sitting: to simply sit through the night because it’s fun and because it’s hot outside during the day, and because it’s much more pleasant to sit all night than to sit through these hot sticky days. Many people leave the city to go on holidays, to go on vacations. Monastics are always on

holiday, are always on vacation, are always having fun and don't need to go anywhere to do that. What we really like to do is to sit; and so that's what we're doing. And so I hope that this evening you have a wonderful time.

Now, this evening, July 12th, 2014, is an occasion on which there is a full moon. And the moon is not only full, but it is closer in its orbit around the Earth than it generally tends to be. This is called the "perigee". As it's closer to the Earth, depending upon the angle with which we see it, the haze and clouds that might be present in the sky, the Moon can be 30 per cent brighter and almost 15 per cent larger, which is fun.

And so perhaps if you go outside during one of the free periods of our yaza — of our sitting throughout the night — you might look up and see this bright full moon. As with sesshin or Dharma Assemblies or retreats, while we might have free periods, these are not regarded as breaks from zazen and kinhin and the various forms of our practice, but simply as opportunities to practise moving, standing, walking, sitting, as we more commonly do without forms: to drink tea, to have some breakfast, mindfully in each moment. As with sesshin and Dharma Assemblies and retreats, then, regardless of what you see, the point is to open to the activity of seeing, the activity of hearing, the activity of feeling, the activity of the whole body-mind and the whole moment in each moment throughout the night.

Still, if you happen to look up and see this bright full moon, that's nice. And so despite the fact that throughout this yaza you should practise only functional talking, if you do happen to look up and see the moon, it could be appropriate to point it out to someone else who has not seen it as simply and as clearly as you can.

There is a traditional saying that people miss the reality of their own experiencing, of their own experiences, because even when there is a finger pointing at the moon, we tend to look at the finger instead of the moon. We tend to become caught up in who is pointing, and what the pointing might mean, and whether they are pointing at us. Whether they are pointing as if we were too stupid to notice something. Whether they are pointing while wagging their finger or not. Instead of simply looking at what is being pointed to.

Even if you do see the moon that is being pointed out, more important than seeing the Moon is to be alive to the activity of seeing. Each colour, each form that is seen, each sound that is heard, anything that is known at all, arises within Knowing, is the activity of Knowing presenting itself as knowns: the activity of Experiencing presencing — becoming actualized — as experiences. All experiences are always pointing to the Experiencing that they arise within. See this. Hear this. Feel this. Know this.

Whether two-thousand six-hundred years ago. . . whether this morning or tomorrow morning . . . whether next week, or next year, or two-thousand six-hundred years into the future: in each moment of Experiencing, all experiences arise within it as its display.

So now, in this moment and throughout the yaza, please practise this and enjoy this: enjoy yourselves.