

08.12.24 Guided Meditation: The Morning Star

Introduction

This guided meditation on Rohatsu Day, the 8th day of the 12th month, 2024, is called The Morning Star - in celebration of the Buddha's awakening on seeing the morning star.

Read page 15 from Nothing is Hidden by Barry Magid:

I imagine him sitting under the tree after all those years of struggling to master his mind and body, struggling to master the secret of life and death. Suddenly, he looks at the star, twinkling in the sky, and realizes the star hasn't struggled at all in order to be just what it is, to be perfect, just as it is. And he thought, I too am just what I am, I'm exactly like that star, manifesting my nature perfectly moment after moment. And everything in the world, like me, like the star, is fully, perfectly, expressing its own nature. Everything in this moment is a Buddha, a perfectly realized being. What a shame not to realize it, what a shame to imagine that a star - or any being - needs to become something more than it already is. What the star already is, however, is not some Platonically pure or eternal essence of "star-ness," but ever-changing. Perfection and change aren't opposites; they turn out to be synonyms. Not only don't we have to change in order to become perfect, our perfection manifests moment after moment in change itself.

Long Pause.

Christianity has the star of Bethlehem. We have the morning star.

There is nothing special or supernatural about our morning star – yet as Barry so beautifully captures in that paragraph – the morning star is

perfect just as it is, and it twinkles and changes from moment to moment – and we are all just like that morning star!

Pause.

During this guided meditation I will take you on a metaphorical journey through three phases of Zazen as we sink deeper and deeper into *being just moment* and how this moment discloses itself to us – leading us into our core practice of Shikantaza:

1. Settling in and building the Dwelling: Settling and claiming our sense of home leading to a sense of stability or samadhi.
2. Forgetting the self that you came with.
3. Receiving, attuning and befriending – receiving guests – inner and outer – which prepares us when we end our formal zazen to respond to the calls of the world.

Phase One: Settling in and building the dwelling (ten minutes)

Begin by settling in – to start off with you can count the breath, or follow the breath – just allowing the breath to breath itself -

Settling into your home, recognising this very body and this very place as your home.

This practice is founded upon a deep trust in our original enlightenment – the practice of Zazen is exactly re-enacting the

Buddha's sitting with the morning star. We sit with a deep trust in our original goodness and the goodness of the world we dwell within. Not goodness which is the opposite of evil – but absolute, intrinsic goodness.

In essence, zazen is attuning ourselves to what it *feels* like to simply be – being here – existing in the world – we explore the existential feelings of being. What does it feel like to be?

Long Pause.

Sometimes we find ourselves feeling estranged from ourselves, disconnected from ourselves – we are aware of sense of anxiety –

This is a good time to sit. Because if we allow ourselves to sit with the anxiety, to be open to experiencing our anxiety it will disclose to us our authentic self.

Once we have found our authentic self we begin to settle and sink back into our original self, the self that was always here even before our parents were born.

As we continue to settle and as our relaxation deepens we may find ourselves discovering a deep well of compassion or gratitude which rises up from the depths of our being – tenderly embracing us and the world within which we dwell.

We also discover we are being here together with others. The world includes all the ten thousand things but it also includes being here with other human beings.

Being here together as sangha friends. Supporting each other's practice of being at home here together. Breathing together ...

We need to build our nest and settle. How do we build our metaphorical nest? By setting into silence and stillness and becoming absorbed in being here in this moment.

Not seeking and not avoiding.

Letting yourself become silence and stillness. Silence and stillness are the foundation of your house, and your loving attention builds the dwelling. Your loving attention binds each moment together in a seamless continuity.

Long Pause.

As we continue to settle we feel a sense of stability sometimes characterised as sitting like a mountain. Restlessness or resistance to being here begins to dissolve. We find our place on this earth, beneath

the sky above. The stillness enhances this and gradually we become more absorbed in this moment and a feeling of samadhi arises – a deep sense of relaxation and surrender to this moment.

In our zazen we practice existing here within our immediate experience – our sensations and perceptions, without grasping or aversion. Thoughts rise and pass and we cease trying to control our experience – to gain pleasure and get rid of discomfort. This is what is meant by “opening the hand of thought” – we let go of holding to self-centred thoughts – worry thoughts, desiring thoughts, dreaming thoughts, planning thoughts – rise and fade away back into emptiness.

We move naturally and gradually from counting the breath, to following the breath, to simply just sitting. We leave everything alone – forgetting the self that we came with.

We stop avoiding being our own authentic self, we stop disowning our self by chasing after fantasies and distractions. What is this authentic self we have been avoiding?

Phase Two: Forgetting the self that you came with:

To study the Buddha way is to become intimate with the self. To become intimate with the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is

to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind, as well as the bodies and minds of others, drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no trace continues endlessly – Master Dogen.

What does Dogen mean when he says to become intimate with the self is to forget the self? What is the difference between the self we wish to become intimate with and the self we wish to forget?

The self we wish to forget is the self that is the barrier to experiencing intimacy with our authentic self. The self we forget is the divided self, the separate self, the individual karmic self.

In this practice of just sitting, we are not going to study our individual karmic self that is constantly seeking to satisfy its own desires – useful though that maybe. In this practice we forget that self by wholeheartedly engaging in feeling completely absorbed in just this moment of sitting. Just allow your divided self to fade into emptiness along with whatever thoughts are arising and passing.

Long Pause.

In many ways, when we first begin practice, we are lost in various worlds of suffering. Worlds of hatred and aversion. Worlds of greed and addiction, where we can never be satisfied. Worlds of fear and anxiety. Worlds of preoccupation with gossip – all revolving around me, me, me. We have lost our authentic selves. We need to return to ourselves as authentic presence and possibility - in order to realize how lost we have been in our relentless preoccupation to control that which cannot be controlled. To improve that which cannot be improved.

We start off not knowing who we are – then eventually we realise that “not knowing” is intimately who we truly are.

A mystery.

Long Pause.

Then, when we find our authentic self, the self which was here all the time, we *forget the self* that was preoccupied with what other people think, that was preoccupied with some version of gain and loss.

The divided self cannot coexist with the self that recognizes itself.

The self that feels itself.

When we find our authentic selves, we find ourselves as being in the world and the world sings us into being – we are found by the world and actualized by the myriad things in the world.

This stage of zazen can be called self-releasement or self-forgetting – when our usual sense of being a separate self disappears or dissolves. We forget this self in uniting with this moment.

When we give ourselves completely over to this moment the awareness of a divided self, a self that needs protection disappears (Jan Chozen Bays, page 203).

Our relaxation deepens.

Long Pause.

To forget the self in zazen is to be at one with this moment.

We can also experience forgetting the self in *everyday life*:

We become one with vacuum cleaning, we become one with listening.

What do we forget when we forget ourselves?

We are forgetting our dualistic self in the act of uniting with our practice. Hence practice and realisation are one.

It is nonseparation and Zen is living a life of non-separation.

“Zazen itself is dropping off body and mind” Okumura, p. 87.

Phase Three: Receiving, Attuning and Befriending – receiving guests – inner and outer:

Once you have recognized and claimed your home, and have begun to find yourself at home in it, then you are able to open the doors generously to the entire universe, welcoming everyone in with warmth and hospitality, sharing the abundant treasures therein with all beings who come your way – Ruben L. F. Habito

We describe our zazen practice as not a means to an end – not a means to becoming enlightened but as way of becoming attuned to being at home in this world, of being at one with this body, and the world.

When we have forgotten our defended self, our guards are down. We are ready to receive, to attune, and to befriend all our guests.

When we have settled, and forgotten our self-centred self, we place our welcome mat at the door.

This begins the process of receiving, attuning and be-friending. This may start with attuning to and befriending our own feelings about self and world.

Simply ask yourself, how do I feel?

How do I find myself in the world right now?

Open to receiving and attuning to your feeling body. Befriending your feelings ...

Give yourself some time to attune ...

Long Pause.

Who knows what unexpected guests may arrive ...

Bow and welcome them all!

Prior to practice we would never take the time to attune ourselves to our authentic selves – we were so busy avoiding ourselves, running around being busy, we never took the time to become intimately acquainted with ourselves.

Now we can give to ourselves the ultimate gift of love – complete attention ...

Long Pause.

We begin to explore the feelings of being here – a process of becoming attuned to our sense of *being* presence - what does it feel like to be present – do I feel at home, at ease and at peace or do I feel anxious, uneasy, not at home. Then if I feel ill- at ease – can I sit with that and allow myself to explore that?

Our being manifests itself by how it feels – and in attuning to how we feel we find our authentic selves. The self that remains when we have subtracted all the roles we have been socialized into. And we feel ourselves as possibility ...

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s, there are few.” Shunryu Suzuki.

Long Pause.

Once we are attuned to ourselves, we can attune to other beings.

First, we welcome the strangers within ourselves and make them feel at home by showing them hospitality. How do we show them hospitality?

By giving them our attention, feeling their feelings, listening to their story if needed or simply helping them feel safe in our non-judgmental presence. Embracing them with our compassion.

In the same way we give attention to ourselves we can give the same attention to others. This practice will then allow us to be in the world with others, and to be attuned to others and befriend others.

Welcoming others in the same way we have welcomed the estranged parts of ourselves.

We always find ourselves in some kind of situation and this constitutes our ongoing reality. Zazen prepares us for meeting each situation as it arises with an open heart and mind.

Zazen transforms our relationship with the world from a self-centred orientation characterised by fear or anxiety to a feeling of the world being our home – and we love our home. This also includes befriending our fear and anxiety.

Zazen allows the self to rest in Zazen simplified as simply being there.

Zazen does zazen.

Conclusion

We are practicing being here, free from the self of attachment and aversion – free from desire for this moment to be other than what it is.

Our authentic self, settles on the original self. The dualistic self is forgotten.

Zazen is not a means to an end, but the ongoing practice of realisation of this moment.

By keeping a spacious mind through whatever physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions which arise, we are awake to their transience,

and at the same time come into a direct feeling- intimacy with the texture of our authentic feelings. Thus, we become increasingly able to flow in connection with the inevitable changes and difficulties that life brings.

Thank you for your kind attention this morning and for your wholehearted participation in OzZEN throughout 2024, and I look forward to many more gatherings together in the New Year. Enjoy your life!

