

09.06.24 The Song of Zazen

This morning I'm going to be giving a guided meditation or a guided contemplation on the Song of Zazen by Hakuin.

So with guided meditations or guided contemplations it's a different kind of listening to when I'm giving a lecture on Buddhist philosophy. Just allow my words to come and go in the background like the sound of the birds singing or the hum of the cars going past. Don't concentrate too much on what I'm saying. Just let the words meld into the background of your environment. Don't even worry too much about the meaning of the words. And at the end of the contemplation, I will recite the Four Great Vows and then the zoom session will finish at 11:00 and our friends in the Sawtell Zendo will continue sitting till 11:30.

So please make yourselves comfortable.

I'll commence with a reading of the song and then say a few words as I go along about it.

Hakuin Zenji's Song of Zazen

All beings by nature are Buddha, as ice by nature is water;
Apart from water there is no ice, apart from beings no Buddha.
How sad that people ignore the near and search for truth afar,
Like someone in the midst of water crying out in thirst,
Like a child of a wealthy home wandering among the poor.

Lost on dark paths of ignorance we wander through the six
worlds; From dark path to dark path we wander,
When shall we be freed from birth and death?
For this the zazen of the Mahāyāna deserves the highest
praise: Offerings, precepts, Pāramitās, Nembutsu, atonement,
training—
The many other virtues-- all rise within zazen.

Those who try zazen even once wipe away immeasurable
crimes—Where are all the dark paths then?
The Pure Land itself is near.

Those who hear this truth even once and listen with a grateful heart,
Treasuring it, revering it, gain blessings without end.
Much more, those who turn about, and bear witness to self-
nature, Self-nature that is no-nature,
Go far beyond mere doctrine.

Here effect and cause are the same,
The Way is neither two nor three.
With form that is no form,

Going and coming, we are never astray.
With thought that is no-thought,
Singing and dancing are the voice of the Law.
Boundless and free is the sky of samādhi!
Bright the full moon of wisdom!
Truly, is anything missing now?
Nirvana is here, before your eyes,
This very place is the Lotus Land,
This very body, the Buddha.

All beings by Nature are Buddha. All beings, excluding none, including all.
Not just human beings, but all beings. Your friends, your family, the people
you don't like, Donald Trump.

All beings are Buddha.

As ice by nature is water.

Our true nature is Buddha, but sometimes it appears as ice as well.
Buddha being oneness or emptiness; vastness; formlessness and then
separateness. Oneness and separateness. Oneness becoming
separateness, separateness flowing back into Oneness.

Apart from water there is no ice.

Apart from beings, no Buddha.

Buddha nature requires beings to manifest as Buddhas. The interdependence of oneness and separateness.

In Mahayana Buddhism you'll sometimes come across the three bodies of the Buddha: The Nirmanakaya, the earthly body. The body that we are embodied in our human body. The historical Buddha and the bodies of all of us are one kind of body that we're talking about in Buddhism, the transformation body. Then there's the enjoyment body or the Bliss body the Sambhogakaya, the Heavenly Body; and then there is the Dharmakaya. Our Universal body, our essential nature. And they are identical. Essential nature, oneness, emptiness, is identical to the form this body that we are currently all embodied in.

You are Buddha. Buddha recognizing Buddha. Only Buddha's can recognize Buddhas.

We don't always recognize it, but we come together, in practice-enlightenment, Dogen's non-dual understanding, we don't practice to become enlightened, we practice because we're expressing the enlightenment that's already here. Sitting zazen, and the reason why this poem is called a song, it's a celebration. They're celebrating our Universal buddhahood. All we have to do is sit zazen and everything is complete. Although sometimes it doesn't feel like that. It might feel more icy. If we hold an ice cube in our hands for long enough it starts to feel painful. Sometimes we can think of the ice as being symbolic of samsara or suffering. When we are disconnected from our Buddha nature. Then we sit

zazen and zazen opens our heart and our heart is very warm and it slowly melts the ice. Transforms us. Transforms our greed, anger and ignorance into non-separateness from just this moment, manifesting as compassion for ourselves and others.

How sad that people ignore the near

And search for truth afar.

Like someone in the midst of water

Crying out in thirst.

Like a child of a wealthy home.

Wandering among the poor.

Back in the old days in the 60s and 70s, we thought we had to search for truth afar in the exotic lands of India or Japan, when the temple was right here beneath our feet. This very body, as it says later on in the poem, is Buddha. There is no need to go searching anywhere. You just have to be one with this body and this moment.

These metaphors of "crying out in thirst in the midst of water" or "wandering among the poor when you're already wealthy" come from various stories in the Buddhist sutras about Buddha nature. And how Buddha nature appears to be hidden and hence we go in search. Stories like the jewel, representing Buddha nature, being simply attached to one's clothing, but hidden. Or the Prodigal Son returning to the father, these kinds of stories

are all about recognizing the wealth that was always here, the treasure that is always here. But sometimes it's hidden by greed, anger and ignorance. Confusion primarily. Confusion about who we are.

Apart from beings no Buddha.

Beautiful. These are the two realities - both 100% real - the reality of Oneness and the reality of separation - and both are equal - both are equally important.

We all start off in the world of separation. This is where we always start off in our practice and that's where we spend most of our lives, but then hopefully at some point, sometimes even before we come to practice, we have some kind of recognition or realization of Oneness. Then we bring that realization of Oneness back into our sense of being separate only knowing that we're all one as well, we integrate these two insights. Called the non-duality of duality, so we come back to our everyday lives and we're able to express ourselves from separateness, but also coming from the place of non-separateness at the same time, both within ourselves and towards others. And sometimes we forget - and that's perfectly fine because Enlightenment is an ongoing activity practice-enlightenment moment by moment. Sometimes we recognize it in this moment and sometimes we forget it. But the more we remember it, the more chance we have of remembering it.

We come back, and awake, again and again and again, and again - Awakening is never final - even the Buddha is still practicing.

In this poem we're starting at the end. It's a song - a celebration of our completeness as Buddhas when we're sitting in zazen, everything is

complete. We don't have to go in search anymore. But then we may forget again. Sometimes we find ourselves lost again on these dark paths of ignorance and confusion. Wandering through the six worlds, the six worlds of human beings, hungry ghosts, animal beings, Heavenly beings. All these different states of self or states of Mind where you can rotate through during a single day. The hell realm. The Heavenly Realm. The realm of the fighting Demons. Then we realize the significance and preciousness of this gift of being born in a human body. This human body is the body that allows us to awake to our Buddha nature. The Heavenly Realm is no good. It's too comfortable. We need some discomfort. We need some form of suffering in order to awake. And be freed when we realize the Oneness, we realize, the unborn and the undying, the non-dying the non-being born, that's being freed from birth and death.

Everything that we practice in Zen, the precepts, bowing practice, mantra practice, atonement practice, offerings, are all within zazen.

Zazen is not restricted to sitting on a chair or a cushion. We bring our zazen into our life, everyday lives. We don't leave it at the zendo door. We leave and continue to practice our zazen every moment of our lives.

Zazen is expressing the enlightened activity of reality - that is, as it is, right now. This is it. Zazen is being one with simply just sitting this moment, whatever you're experiencing right now. Letting go of aversion and attachment, the desire to be somewhere else or the desire to have something that you don't have. Letting go of all of that and simply being one with this moment, we are enacting and reenacting Buddha's Enlightenment right here, right now. In this body, in this place, right now. How wonderful!

Even one sitting of zazen or even maybe one moment of zazen, wipes away immeasurable crimes. In other words, it wipes away our karmic consciousness. All the consequences of our past actions that were carried out through ignorance are wiped away in this one moment of non-separation from this moment in zazen. That is why we call atonement at-one-ment. Being at one with this.

The pure land itself reveals itself. We don't have to wander in search of the pure land. The pure land is here, this very body.

When we get this ...

When we get this ...

When we *really get* this - our heart opens - gratitude is spontaneous, sense of gratitude emerges and manifests. Be open to gratitude every moment of your lives. Especially when retiring at night before sleep and waking in the morning. Let your heart open, let gratitude manifest. It's already here.

And it's infinite number of ways we can acknowledge our gratitude. Could be simply for having a warm bed to sleep in at night time. Nutritious food. Loving friends and family. Allow yourself to enjoy that gratitude of where we live, the gratitude of being cared for, being loved. Let the gratitude fill your heart.

Treasuring it.

Revering it

We gain blessings without end.

This gratitude never ends, blessing never ends. This is truly the bliss body, the enjoyment body of the Buddha. The reward body that it is sometimes called - the fruits of practice: Love, kindness, gratitude, warmth, tenderness ... All the many virtues arise within zazen.

And here within zazen it's a perfect opportunity to turn about and bear witness to self-nature, self-nature that is no nature, and we go far beyond doctrine, intellectualization, belief. We go their directly, we leap out of samsara and realize it's always been nirvana. The other shore, it's always this shore that we're already on. This very body. Our true nature of non-separation, of oneness, our true nature equally manifest as our separate self. The two are identical, just different perspectives on reality. Both 100% oneness and 100% separateness. We are not one and we are not two. We're both. If I stub my toe you don't feel it. If you stub your toe, I don't feel it. That's separateness. But oneness is also equally present all the time. If oneness sometimes seems abstract, just simply notice when you're breathing in zazen. Just simply see how you're not doing the breathing, that your body is breathing, and your body wouldn't be here if it wasn't for all these other bodies and the great Earth itself. You could even say it's the great Earth that's breathing trees. All the beings, all the plants, even the rocks breathing. This beautiful blue jewel called the Earth, breathing being.

One body, with many arms reaching out to each other. Caring for each other as if it was our one body. Here in oneness there is no effect and cause. There's just simply one beyond words, beyond doctrine. Neither two nor three. Form is identical to no-form. No-form is identical to form.

We're never abiding anywhere. It's always dynamic, changing, coming and going, but it's always here. This moment. We are never lost. We're always

at home. We're only lost when we get confused. When the confusion goes, the clarity is here, we see that we've always been home.

No matter what we do, we are never astray from this one body, we're never astray from our true nature. We're never truly lost.

With thought that is no-thought or non-thought.

Dogen tells us, in his very famous teaching "Recommending Zazen to all People", sit and think not-thinking or no-thinking. How do you think no-thinking? Non-thinking. Or beyond thinking. In other words, we don't get caught in picking and choosing, this or that, we don't get caught in binaries, goodness/badness. We return to the one in zazen.

And then we have this lovely line: "singing and dancing are the voice of the law", singing and dancing are the voice of the Dharma. The sutras are always singing and dancing. Whether they are the birds singing, the humming of the cars, swaying of the leaf on the trees, even the sound of the lawn mower. This is all singing and dancing of the law.

Sensations you're experiencing right now, the movement of the breath, sounds in the environment, no inner or outer, all the Dharma singing. Cicadas singing. The waves singing. Be one with it all. And you will experience the boundlessness of your true nature. There are no limits to it. You will join in with the singing and the dancing, you will jump for joy, you will dance for joy, you will sing with joy, you will be boundless and free, like the sky of samadhi. They'll be nothing obstructing you. The full moon of wisdom will be bright, shining through you, shining through your transparency like the jewel of Indra reflected in all the other jewels, like the moonlight flickering on the water. You will be free.

And you will know in your heart there is nothing missing.

You will know Nirvana is right here before your eyes.

You will know this very place is the Lotus land.

And you will know this very body is the Buddha.