

Guided Contemplation Sunday 27 October (Transcript): Your Original Face is Always Changing by Sono

Welcome back everybody. The basic instructions for guided contemplations are simply to continue your meditation practice, continue just sitting as you would normally, and just allow my words to pass through you, your mind, you don't have to hold onto them. And I will leave more silence than in a dharma talk.

Let us start by contemplating our Great Bodhisattva Vow:

I vow to awaken with all beings. Or, for love of the world, I vow to save all beings. We vow to take care of all beings - all sentient and non-sentient beings. This is our vow we bring to our Zazen practice as Zen Buddhists.

The title of today's contemplation is "your original face is always changing". It comes from the story of the sixth ancestor, Eno, a story that is retold in case 23 of The Gateless Barrier collection of koans. After the sixth ancestor was given the robe and the bowl by the fifth ancestor he was cautioned to flee to the mountains because the monks not accepting the transmission. He fled to the mountains and he was followed by one of the senior monks, the head monk, called Ming, who eventually caught up with Eno at the top of the mountain. He tried to take the robe and the bowl but he couldn't shift them. And at that the moment Eno turned to Ming and said:

"Don't think good, don't think evil. **At this very moment**, what is the original face of Ming the head monk?"

And at that moment, Ming had a realisation. He realised his true self; he realised his true nature. This was later presented as a koan question to zen students. Often the question is phrased:

"What is your original face before your parents were born?"

So, we do have some clues: don't think good, don't think evil. Don't get caught up in dualities, opposites. And what was your original face before your parents were born, before your mother and father were born, again, mother and father, this duality, so realising your original face prior to dualistic consciousness, which is what the koans are all about.

"At this very moment" is another clue. This moment is your original face which is always changing.

“What you see is the way” – Just sit and your original face immediately appears. There is nothing hidden. There is no secret.

What is it that we see when we see our original face?

Seeing means really becoming one – seeing your original face, realising your original face, is becoming one with your original face.

In koan zen we are urged to become one with our koan, to become one with mu. In just-sitting practice we are urged to become one with just-sitting. And in becoming one we forget our separate self. We forget our self-consciousness – we just become one with this moment - and this oneness is what we already are. No need to go seeking for it far and wide, it is already here and immediately present.

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One of the great Indian Ancestors of our Zen lineage, Nagarjuna said, “The mind that sees into the flux of arising and decaying, and recognises the transient nature of the world, is called the way-seeking mind”. Our zen practice always begins with *Arousing the Way-Seeking Mind*.

The way-seeking mind is the mind which sees impermanence, interdependence and the non-substantiality of the self. And being just this moment, we realise Compassion’s Way.

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There’s a beautiful gatha in our OzZen sutra book, which also captures this very well. It’s called *Peaceful Dwelling as Change itself*. It goes like this:

Unceasing change turns the wheel of life,

And so reality is shown in all its many forms.

Peaceful dwelling as change itself,

Liberates all suffering sentient beings and brings them to great joy.

(Repeat)

This is teaching us how we save, or liberate, or awake with all sentient beings. It captures the two fundamental aspects of Buddhist meditation – our zazen practice:

Calm abiding (Shamatha practice in Sanskrit) and Seeing things as they are (which is *Vipasyana*). In our zen practice, they are not linear, we don't do calm abiding first and then move to insight practice – they are two sides of the same coin.

Zazen is both calm abiding and seeing things as they are. The balance between the two – we need them both. If we only have calm abiding without insight or illumination we can sometimes just drift along so we need that kind of clarity that comes with silent illumination. Seeing things as they are. We also need to bring that sense of calmness into seeing things as they are. Certainly, as preparation for our everyday life when things as they are can catch us by surprise. When the rug is pulled out from underneath us. that's when our calm abiding can kick in.

This combination of calm abiding and seeing things as they are leads to what is called in zen *Kensho*: it simply means, seeing into one's true nature, which mean's realisation of one's Buddha Nature. Realisation of Buddha nature is realising impermanence and realising you are impermanence itself. Then our practice life becomes a constant performance of impermanence. Remember we don't practice as a means to an end, we don't practice in order to realise, practice and realisation are one unity and never ending for as long as we live.

Practice is continuous, never ceasing, until our life comes to an end. Practice includes Realising our original face was nondual right from the start; and realising that our original face is always changing – from moment to moment. Hence there is nothing to hang onto. Nothing to hold onto.

Peaceful dwelling as change itself.

In other words, there is nowhere to dwell. We just embrace being change, we embrace being impermanence.

When we practice zazen with a calm mind we can experience great joy in realising our impermanence, believe it or not! We realise there is nothing permanent we can find that is suffering.

There is no-one who suffers. This is also liberating for sentient beings, to realise there is no intrinsic substantial permanent self which suffers.

So why is there so much suffering?

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When we resist our true nature we suffer. We create suffering and we suffer ourselves. When we resist the fact that we are impermanence itself. We don't want to accept this. We want to hang on to what we think is permanent, whatever it may be, whatever form we think permanence takes.

When we refuse to recognise and accept that our true nature, our true self, is impermanence itself we suffer.

This doesn't mean that we don't cry when we experience the loss of someone we loved. It doesn't mean we don't cry when we resist the destruction of habitat. When we witness the death of innocent civilians and children. It doesn't mean we don't cry when we witness pollution in the seas, in the rivers and the air.

It just means we accept that life is birth and death, there is no life without birth and death, birth and death is the way. This moment needs to die in order to give birth to the next moment.

This moment, of, conditions the birth of the next moment, whether it is on an individual or collective level. We cannot escape our history in that sense. But each moment is a fork in the road. We can choose to calmly abide as impermanence itself or we can seek to escape it.

But there is no escape from birth and death, there is no escape from change.

We are really a series of moments or events; we are a happening; not an essence or substance.

This moment is our original face – nothing hidden. Each moment changing faster than the blink of the eye.

We are already nondual. We are already in the world. We are inseparable from the world. We are the world and the world is you. There is no barrier. The barrier is gateless. We are the opening. Practicing Zazen is practicing opening our heart and mind.

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When we hear the sound of a bird, no problem. We can be one with the sound of the bird. We can be one with the sound of cars passing by, with the sound of leaves fluttering in the wind, with the sound of rain gently dropping on the roof. However, what happens when we hear the sound of a critical comment, a critical voice directed at ourselves?

In these moments, our calm abiding, our oneness with the world is often interrupted, creating a rupture in our seamless being-in-the-world – all of a sudden we are catapulted into self-consciousness. We are no longer at one. In that moment we fall out of the garden of Eden. And of course, there is a long history of this on both the collective and individual level. We fall out of the garden of Eden from a very young age and trauma intrudes and we start to construct a world in which we identify as a separate subject which we have to protect at all costs. Every small “t” trauma is another wedge into separateness. Every stab in the heart, every hurt, another wedge into separateness. And then we forget our original face and our natural functioning in the world. It slips into the background and we take it for granted and it remains unnoticed and we identify with and perform being a separate self, and sometimes, if the truth be told, we can enjoy the drama of being special and sadly we forget our true nature.

But of course, this is the way of all things. We must fall out of the garden of Eden, before we can recognise consciously the garden of Eden. We must lose it before we can find it. That is what draws us to this practice whether we know it or not.

Our home is calling us. It never ceases to call us back.

In our zazen practice we RETURN to our original face before our parents were born. And we return home again and again and again, till we start to be able to reclaim our original home. To recognise it.

How do we recognise it?

Well, our original face is always intimate with itself. Our original face recognises itself without any effort on our part, we just have to get out of the way.

That's why zazen can be seen as a practice of disclosure. What is concealed becomes revealed when we sit.

We see the tree and we are simultaneously aware it is me that is seeing the tree. We see the star and we are simultaneously aware that we are seeing the star. The star is inseparable from my perceiving it. Shakymuni Buddha looked up at the morning star and said, "that's me!".

Or we could say the star sees me! Or we look at the flower and the flower sees me.

We could say the sound hears the sound.

You can verify this right now -

Who is hearing the sound?

Who is seeing the sky?

Or is it the sky that is seeing you, and the sound that is hearing the sound, or the sound that is hearing you?

You are the sound and you are the sky.

In fact, we could say our world which we love, our world self is also embedded in the great Cosmos. We could say -

We are the Cosmos, experiencing itself in human form.

The Cosmos needs human being to experience itself and to become aware of experiencing itself.

We live as human beings in the world. Being needs human to realise this world. Being in the world means we are also embedded in the Cosmos. You could say, the Cosmos itself is timelessness. That time comes into being with human being. Impermanence you could say, from a subjective perspective is lived time, we are time or temporality – each moment is finite and ultimately each human being is finite. Only the Cosmos is timeless.

We are birthing and dying each moment within the infinite realm of the Cosmos. Birth and death is what time is for human beings.

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Let us calmly abide, realising we are impermanence itself.

Let us share this with each other, with the world and with all beings.

Let us help all beings and liberate them from clutching and grasping and holding on to the illusion of impermanence.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings be well.

May all beings live with ease.

May we all live and love this world together.