

EVERYDAY ZEN: IMMOVABILITY IN MOVEMENT

Hakuin Zenji (1686-1769), said, “To practice Zen in movement is superior to doing so in the stillness of meditation. You should always be one with everything and not deviate, and you must be awakened to your true self in your daily life, while walking, sitting and lying down.” The purpose of our sitting practice is to realize, as Shakyamuni did under the bodhi tree, just this fact: “I and all sentient beings are essentially Buddha.” Once we have realized truly this fact, this reality, we must express it at any time and any place, in every moment and in every place, throughout our daily life with all of its activities, troubles and inconsistencies. Our Zen must be activated and expressed in all areas of everyday life. It is essential to bring forth our Zen mind in our everyday activities.

Our sitting practice of zazen is the centerpiece of all practice. We sit in silent concentration, counting our breaths or just listening or becoming one with the koan. The basic discipline of zazen lies in not being caught again and again by the oncoming thoughts and delusions, and instead going into *samadhi* where Heaven and Earth are one, and our mind and body have dropped away.

However, even if we sit once or twice a day, there is still the large majority of the day when we are not sitting in zazen. Therefore, it is necessary for us to be always aware of our true Buddha nature throughout the twenty-four hours of the day without deviation. We cannot forget it even for a moment. Yasutani Roshi (1185-1973) admonished us to “ always direct yourself, twenty-four hours a day to the place beyond knowing. Train diligently. Time is like an arrow, so be careful....” No doubt we each have experienced the difficulty to which Hakuin refers in maintaining our Zen mind throughout the day. Even to do so for a few seconds at a time has its challenges whether we are eating our meal, doing our work, washing our face. Nonetheless, it is important, essential, that we never cease to forget self

and that we become one with what we are doing. The ideal is to train ourselves to attain immovability in movement. We do this by breathing and letting go and by forgetting self and uniting, mind and body, with whatever work we are then doing. By emptying ourselves we become one with the activities of our life, deeply absorbed. To be thus thoroughly united with each thing is the true essence of *mu*. It is the state of both physical and spiritual liberation to which training in moving Zen is directed. When we read, we only read; when we write, we only write; when we walk, we only walk. Whatever we may do, we do it only. This state of ‘only’ transcends time. There is no idea of time in the world of ‘only’. In this way the power of concentration generated from our sitting practice of *zazen* is applied to our activities, in the movement of everyday life, and the power of integration cultivated in the events of our everyday life is transferred to our meditation in stillness. The arrows point in both directions. Each sustains and supports the other. This bringing of movement and stillness into one is called “the two-fold discipline of movement and tranquility.” Neither of these aspects of practice can be neglected.

Hakuin Zenji returns frequently to this theme of immovability in movement. He writes that some people “sit with their eyes closed and with their heads bent low. And they sleep to their heart’s content everyday in order to get rid of their wild thoughts.... They know nothing about training to achieve immovability in movement. They should be called self-indulgent, stubborn, pseudo-Zen people.” If we do not train to maintain our Zen mind throughout the day, our *samadhi* mind will be lost and dispersed the moment we stand up from *zazen* and are touched by the dust of the world of movement.

The Third Patriarch, Seng-ts’an (Sosan, d. 606?) said, “The lotus flower glows in the flames of the fire when Zen is practiced in the midst of desire.” This was his evident appreciation of the immovability of the Absolute achieved through

training in movement. Let us practice zazen, and practice training in movement throughout the day. Talking, laughing, walking, eating, working, moving the limbs should all be integrated into one and the same *samadhi*. When we master the activities of our day in this way, this is enlightenment. This is what Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) meant when he said, “That the Self advances and confirms the ten thousand things is called delusion; that the ten thousand things advance and confirm the self is called enlightenment.” In other words, if you are pulled off-center by something external to yourself, you give that something a substantial reality it does not possess. This is what Dogen calls delusion. But if you allow what is outside you to enter and you become one with it and then let it pass, you remain centered, immovable. This is what Dogen meant by enlightenment.

When the wife of a certain lord asked master Suzuki Shosan (1579-1655) for his advice about Zen practice, he asked her first to sing for him. After she had finished singing, he chided her, saying, “ Do not try to make the tune sound beautiful by singing in such a plaintive voice. Sing firmly in such a way as to bring your voice from your abdomen.” We need to do this also when we recite the sutras. It is another opportunity to practice immovability in movement. If we concentrate our whole spiritual power in this way and forget everything, thoroughly absorbed in the chanting or reciting with all our might, our power of concentration will be nurtured and our high spirits will be utilized even when we are not actually singing or reciting.

In case 19 of the Mumonkan, Chao-chou (Joshu, 778-897) asks Nan-chuan (Nansen, 748-835), “What is the Way?” Nansen replies, “Ordinary mind is the Way.” If you think ordinary, busy, dualistic, mind is the Way, you miss the koan’s essential point; if you think ordinary mind and the Way are separate, you also miss it. But when a bank clerk counts the number of bills, when an accountant keeps the books, when a pilot manipulates the control lever, when a bus conductor clips the

tickets, they will all conform to ordinary Zen Mind of the Way if they work unselfconsciously in the spirit of zazen without sitting. We have each moment to be alert enough to do everything in the spirit of zazen. Master Shido Bunan (1602-1676) wrote a verse:

If we know how to practice zazen without actually sitting,
What obstacle should there be,
Blocking the Way to Buddhahood?

When we practice in this way, we bring forth that mind which dwells nowhere, that mind which is not attached nor caught by anything. We laugh at things that are funny and are sad when things go poorly, but there is nothing at all from where this comes forth. From this place of nothing at all these all come forth, and in this way we become one with the world around us. When something funny happens, we become funny happening; when something sad happens, we become sad happening. We are thus always new and fresh. This new fresh mind is Buddha, every moment Buddha.

In case 19, Chao-chou (Joshu) asks Nan-chuan (Nansen), “Should I try to direct myself toward it?” Nansen replies, “If you try to direct yourself toward it, you betray your own practice.” The most important point in all of this is to forget yourself. What we do most of the time is just the opposite. We think of ourself continually. Like Joshu, we are completely self-conscious. There is always the sense of ‘I’ doing something. But, when you truly forget yourself, then, as Maezumi Roshi tells us, “the other shore is where you stand and the Buddha’s life is your life.” Moment after moment, every moment Buddha.