

FINDING BUDDHA

In the *Zazen Wasan* (Song of Zazen), Hakuin (1685 – 1769) tells us that “This very body is Buddha.” You have heard, read and recited this many times, but have you let it sink in? Have you realized it, become one with it? If you want to find Buddha, look at your own hands. Whose hands are these? There is a koan in the collection of Miscellaneous Koans in our koan curriculum which asks, “How does my hand differ from Buddha’s hand?” If you want to find Buddha, look at your own hands, your own face, your own legs and feet. If you really look, you will find that everything is already here.

Hakuin also tells us: “How sad that people ignore the near and search for truth afar.” There is no need to go searching, no need for pilgrimage. Everything is clear and always has been clear. From the beginning, there has been no need for effort or struggle. Simply realize your unity with the Tao right where you are. A student asked Great Master Ma-tsu (Baso, 709 – 788), “How do I accord with the Tao?” The Master replied, “I have not accorded with the Tao since the beginning of my training.” In other words, no effort is required; no “accord” is necessary. Right where you are is the Tao. Right where you are is the Way. It flows from where your heart is.

You must see this, experience this, for yourself. No one can do it for you. There is a fable that a monastery cook was stirring the soup one day when out jumped Manjusri. The cook hit Manjusri over the head with a spoon and said, “Get out of here. We don’t need you.” A very good tenzo. No help is necessary. No help is possible. No one else’s hands will save the many beings. No one else’s mind and heart will open with compassion. Only this Buddha sitting still in this room, right here, right now.

Most often in our practice we are clinging to something, to many things: happiness, sorrow, resistance, fear, old hurts. Too often and far too long we have lived with the expectation that somehow, some way, sometime, we shall develop, improve, complete ourselves. Then we shall fulfill the gift of this life. We make that completion, that fulfillment, contingent on something out there – a person, a teaching, an acquisition. Not only do we live life like that, but we also come to spiritual practice like that. Much of this practice involves recognizing where we are still invested, still clinging, still trusting something other than the complete truth of our own perfection. Whatever it is that snags you, let it go. You do not need to throw it away. All you need to do is open your heart, and the swirling universe will take it from you. There is a Zen saying that you meet the silver cliffs and the iron mountain in zazen, but the silver cliffs and the iron mountain are none other than yourself. The wall you meet, the abyss into which you fall, is none other than your own original face. See the wall for what it is. Fall into the abyss until you can see all the way through. Then you will see and experience that there is no Buddha other than the one in your own skin. That one is a real Buddha. That one has existed from the beginningless past and will

pervade through the endless future. Another of our Miscellaneous Koans says “The true Buddha is sitting in the house.” How do you come forth and show this true Buddha?

Practice with this awareness of your true nature. Let the silence within deepen like the shadows moving across the room. When shadows move across the floor, no dust is stirred. The mind is like this. In time it becomes deeper, lighter, and you will be able to see more and more clearly. You will see that your own heart is the same as the heart of the giant fir trees, the same as the heart of the birds and squirrels, rabbits and caterpillars, stones and clouds. Your life at this very moment is infinitely precious. It always has been. The purpose of this practice is to awaken to this truth, to your true nature and to your natural beauty and virtue.

Whilst walking one day, the Buddha stopped, pointed to the ground and said, “This is a wonderful spot to build a temple. One of his students stepped forward, placed a blade of grass in the ground and said, “The temple has been built.” Shakyamuni smiled. Certain places are considered good sites for building a temple, but the most wonderful spot is inside each of us. The bodhisattva who placed the blade of grass in the ground is also placing a flower in each of our hearts. Each one of you sitting here is building a beautiful temple – you lack nothing for doing so. Your very body, your very heart, is a beautiful temple.

In case 9 of the *Wu-men Kuan* (Mumonkan), a student asks the priest, Ch’ing-jeng (Koyo Seijo, c 10th century): “The Buddha of Supremely Pervading Surpassing Wisdom did zazen on the Bodhi seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not attain the Buddha Way. Why was this?” The priest replies, “Your question is exactly to the point.” The student persists: “But he did zazen on the Bodhi seat! Why could he not attain Buddhahood?” To which the master replies, “Because he is a non-attained Buddha.”

So, here is this earnest student asking the master about something he has heard or read. The master replies that his question is exactly to the point. In other words, each of us is sitting zazen and sitting and sitting – for a long time, and all we ever find is I, this one, just me. Yes! That is exactly the point. The student, however, does not get it and persists: “But he did zazen on the Bodhi seat. Why could he not attain Buddhahood?” We can all identify with this fellow. How many times have we said to ourselves, “I am doing everything right. How come I don’t get it?” Because we do not see what is right in front of us. What Shakyamuni realized under the Bodhi tree is that all beings are already enlightened, but just have not awakened to it. Or, as Master Lin-chi (Rinzai, d. 866) said in commenting on this case: “One does not attain Buddhahood. The reason is that Buddha cannot become Buddha again.” Can water get any wetter?

This story goes to the heart of our notions of what is supposed to happen to us as a result of practice. Why after attending so many sesshin and zazenkai and sitting daily has so little seemingly changed? At least not changed in the way expected? The student in this story *understands* but he has not *realized*. Understanding is intellectual, and implies a separation – a gap – between the one understanding and that which is understood. Realizing closes the gap; it is being one with what is realized. This very body really is Buddha. This one sitting here really is Buddha. Really.

Even realizing this, however, is not yet enough. One must actually embody and live the Buddha life of non-attainment. Apart from you yourself, apart from me myself, there is no Zen. Enjoy your Zen life of a true Buddha.

There is a Zen poem, which speaks of this:

Let us admire the moon and cherish the flowers.
Thus we should like to live.
Never try to become Buddhas
And ruin this precious life

In his poem, *Verses on the Faith Mind*, Master Seng-ts'an (Sosan, d. 606) finishes by writing: "One thing, all things. Move among them and intermingle without distinction. To live in this realization is to be without anxiety about non-perfection. To live in this faith is the road to non-duality, because the non-dual is one with the trusting mind." How do we live this truth? How do we verify that resting nowhere is precisely this moment of *thusness*, this point of reality which is all of reality? We sit. We stand. We walk. We eat. We move in the world and intermingle without distinctions. We live in the trust of the non-dual, live in the trust of intimacy with the trusting mind. The trusting mind is the mind of non-duality, the mind that realizes and acknowledges its own completeness, its own uniqueness and its full union with all creation in one stroke, this life we are sharing together, precisely as we are, buddhas everyone.

Do you get it? Not so fast. In his book, "Zen Master Raven," Aitken Roshi writes that Zen student woodpecker asked Raven Roshi about Shakyamuni's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. Raven said, "Something is still missing." Woodpecker then said, "That is what Buddha realized, isn't it – just this morning star?" Raven ruffled his feathers and said, "No!" Later, woodpecker asked fellow student porcupine about this. Porcupine said, "Something is still prevailing." Woodpecker then returned to Raven Roshi and said, "I'm trying to get to the

bottom of this. You said, ‘Something is still missing,’ but porcupine said, ‘Something is still prevailing.’”
Raven Roshi replied, “Porcupine adds perspective.”

What is that perspective? We share this very life together, each of us a Buddha. Your presence here today is a manifestation of your buddhahood and of your virtue and an expression of the mystery which is your life. And yet, and yet – something is still missing, and something is still prevailing. What is it?

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