

Good morning.

It's good to be back, I was gone for three weeks. I got back on Tuesday, doing a bit of co-leading Zen and Yoga workshops in CA. Three workshops back to back, almost, a couple of days in between. It was a great experience.

There's a lot of connection between Zen and Yoga. Buddhism and Yoga. Some doctrinal sticking points between the two as well (soul, not-soul), but it was fun to bridge some of the gaps and connect in that way to the body. Most Yoga practice in the West is asana Yoga practice. The postures. So it was really nice to get into the body and into the meditation and find the connection.

Anyway I'm not really going to talk about that today but it was on my mind when I was walking down the stairs.

I wanted to read a quote from Dogen Zenji, our first ancestor in Japan. We chant a lot of things in our liturgy by him, and this is called "only a Buddha together with a Buddha."

I wanted to talk about this and about zazen, the fundamental practice of our school:

If one has unsurpassed wisdom, they are called Buddha. When a Buddha has unsurpassed wisdom, it is called unsurpassed wisdom. Not to know what it is like on this path is foolish, what it is like to be unstained. To be unstained does not mean that you forcefully try to exclude intention or discrimination or that you establish a state of non-intention. Being unstained cannot be intended or discriminated at all. Being unstained is like meeting a person and not fixing what they look like. Also it is like not wishing for more color or brightness when viewing flowers or the moon. Again, we should recognize that just as it is inescapable for spring to be simply the spirit of spring itself, and for autumn likewise, to be the beauty and ugliness of autumn itself, even if we try to be other than ourselves, we are ourselves.

So I wanted to talk about this quote in the context of our fundamental practice of sitting, zazen. How many of you have had zazen instruction? Do you remember your instruction? How many of you are zazen instructors?

So when I was at Tassajara I did zazen instruction a lot. It's been a couple of years since giving instruction but it's really simple, right? Some complications for the forms but the sitting itself is really simple. It's straightforward in this school. Just sit. That's it. Just sit. Do something else? Stop that. Just sit. It's very simple. There is some emphasis on what you are doing -- upright posture, adjust your legs, fiddle with your robes if you have them, no tight clothing and so forth, but you take a posture. It's a

posture of awakesness -- it's upright. And then you pay attention to your breath and to the feeling of the posture and your mudra against your hara with your thumbtips touching. But it's all very, very ordinary. It's all ordinary details. You're not paying attention to your third eye gazing upwards to the heavens or anything like that -- none of the visualization of Maitreya Buddha sitting behind you pulsing virtuous feelings into you, and so forth. Those are different meditation practices -- not zazen. It's not counting your breath but you can start that way. Zazen is just sitting, with awareness. And ideally, with non-judgmental awareness to be completely open to the arising of momentary phenomenon as it comes and goes. Moment after moment, these ordinary -- so ordinary -- details; so ordinary they are extraordinary -- of one's passing moments.

Another big part of just sitting is that whole feeling of trying to attain something -- leave that behind too. Leave your ideas of attainment behind. Just sit. When you notice that you have some idea of attainment, what do you do with it? Acknowledge it. Be aware of it -- oh look, attainment ideas are here! Nothing is excluded in the momentary awareness -- the stomach grumbling, did I eat this morning? I'm hungry. Whatever it is -- nothing is outside the scope of what you are aware of. Don't go into it with the feeling that I'm going to attain something -- but we do this anyway, and that's okay too. Attainment.

We take care of the details of posture and breath because these things ground us in the current moment. We sit, we're breathing, whether or not we are thinking about attainment or not. Suzuki Roshi said, "To take this posture itself -- it could be any posture that you take deliberately with the intention of just sitting -- whatever it is for your body -- there are certain postures that are energetically juicy than others (full lotus) -- whatever you can sit in, so you are awake and alive. So maybe lying down is harder because of the possibility of falling asleep but if that is what you need to do then do it. Suzuki Roshi has this great quote in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*:

"To take this posture itself is just sitting. Your mind starts to wander about. You have your own body and mind right here when you do not try to attain anything. The most important point is to be aware of your own physical body."

So it's not about some metaphysical state where flowers start falling from the sky. It's not about anything, really. So if judgment arises, what happens? Just be aware of it.

It's sometimes called objectless meditation -- but it is just as easily objectful meditation. When you have objectless meditation you're not trying to focus on one kind of metaphysical object -- no union with the divine, no focus on the feeling of the breath in the nostrils, etc., at the exclusion of everything else.

If it's object-less, it's also subject-less. It's not a focusing down or a bearing down on a particular object at the exclusion of others.

So when we sit in this way we are paying attention to this moment, and then the next, and then the next, and part of paying attention is -- what are we doing there? Are we going in with a question? Are we analyzing something? What is the feeling state of turning towards the next moment? What is the intention there? It's very subtle, and hard to catch, but when you pay attention, pay attention to everything and you might discover that there is an inquiring mind that wants to grab ahold of something and make it the center of everything. Or it might be a really open mind that is just merely curious about what happens next. Am I dreading the next moment? What's the next moment going to bring me? Or is it looking to the next moment in wonder? These are all very different feelings, and we might notice these as we sit.

Do we do anything about these feelings? Do we try to fix them? Do we say: no, no, I have an inquiring mind so I must stop this particular line of inquiry. Do we do that? Is that what we are trying to do? NO, WE ARE NOT STRAYING FROM THE MOMENT, etc. Is there a should or a shouldn't here?

So what does this mean: without cutting anything off, and turn towards the next moment and ask it: who are you? What are you? What is this?

There's a koan that Dogen really liked, not a part of the standard collections, but. It's about other ancestors:

Nanyue went to see Huineng, the 6th ancestor in the Chinese lineage.

This young monk comes to see the master and presents himself to the teacher and the teacher says "Where do you come from?" And Nanyue says from over there with another master. And the teacher says "What is it that thus comes?" And Nanyue is a little befuddled. He is speechless, so he decides I'd better go sit. So he sits for like 8 years. And at some point during the sitting he figures he has some understanding and goes back to the teacher and he says I think I have some understanding. So the master says what is it that thus comes? (Repeating this question.) Nanyue says speaking about it won't hit the mark. So the master says does it depend on practice or realization? And Nanyue says it is not that there is no practice and realization, it is just that they cannot be defiled. At which point the master approves and says I am like this, you are like this, and all of the Buddha ancestors are also like this, and then they share tea together.

So going back over this: defiled. Can't be defiled. It's not that there's no practice and realization, but that they cannot be defiled. This is the question

of zazen in each moment. It's not a question you get an answer to that you then check off. What is it now? What is it now? And how about now? And now? Every time, are you awake, are you open, are you curious, is there investigation? Is this investigation tainted with the sense of needing to know? Is it pure curiosity and wonder? If it is "tainted" with needing to know, or some kind of inquiring mind, that's what's happening in the moment. Are you aware of it? The next moment comes and it's a totally different moment -- are you aware of that? That's a really big deal to know that the next moment is really a different moment.

I don't know about you but usually I am so caught in my stories that I connect these disparate moments together with a thread of consistency that is really manufactured.

So Nanyue replies: speaking about it won't hit the mark. Kind of a typical Zen answer, right? You're not going to speak about it because you know that I'm going to whack you if say something about it. Just like in the original quote I read: being unstained is like meeting a person and not fixing what they look like.

So Nanyue says speaking about it won't hit the mark, but the master is not really satisfied with this answer. Does it depend on practice and realization? Effort? Intending? Attainment? Realizing something? This is a duality. Does it depend on practice and/or effort?

Nanyue says it's not that there is no practice and realization, it's just that they cannot be defiled. So I just wanted to pause and say something about effort because it can be very confusing when we hear that there isn't supposed to be any effort. Anyone that practices in this tradition knows that there's actually a ton of effort happening. What brings you to the cushion or to take the precepts? What brings you to want to study? This takes effort.

Suzuki Roshi again: "Strictly speaking, any effort we make is not good for our practice because it creates waves in our mind. It is impossible, however, to attain absolute calmness of mind without any effort. We must make some effort but we must forget ourselves in the effort we make."

So for example, oftentimes if you go to zazen instruction, you might be told start by counting the breath 1-10, and just try following the breath if you can do that. Maybe just be aware after you have mastered that part. Counting the breath is not zazen but it might be preparing you to just sit. If you go into the zendo and you are all over the place in your mind, that might just be all-over-the-place-in-your-mind-Zazen. But it might help you to calm down a bit and actually see that you're all over the place -- because usually being all over the place occludes the fact that that is actually happening. But that's not quite just sitting.

So what is this defiled? Defiled by what? By gaining an idea of attainment? Someone spoke a few weeks ago about the "me plan" -- living in accordance with the "me" plan. This is actually how most of us live -- that's just the way it is. We are the center of the universe and whether or not something is good/bad/neutral is determined in terms of how it affects me or my plan. And when we turn towards a spiritual practice: Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, etc., it's kind of opening up that notion of "me" to something bigger than just us. Whether or not that is God, or higher humanity, or all beings, etc., just something larger.

So maybe this defilement is about following the me plan.

But maybe it's more simple: just this thing we do when we look at a flower and want it to be a little brighter.

There's a full moon today: it's supposed to be a supermoon or a giant moon or whatever. In viewing the moon did anyone have any opinions about it? That's supposed to be a super moon! Not really! It doesn't really look that super!

We do this all the time -- we have an expectation and then something doesn't conform to that. And then it either exceeds things, and we're great, or it falls short, and we're bummed out.

I mean, it's a flower: how can we really fault it for being that particular shade of pink as opposed to more orange or whatever it is?

Think about the Dogen quote again.

So we have this idea of defilement in the one koan and then Dogen talks about this idea of staining.

Earlier in this fascicle there is another point on this. This is also Dogen:

When you realize Buddha-dharma you do not think this is realization just as I expected. Even if you think so, realization invariably differs from your expectation. Realization is not like your conception of it, what you think one way or another beforehand is not of help for realization.

That kind of flies in the face of making effort, right? Usually we make effort because we think it's going to help. I'm going to do this so I can "get" this state of mind or this clarity.

Whatever you think about the realization before realization comes isn't really helpful for getting there. However, he says, although realization isn't like any of the thoughts preceding it, although that's true, this is not because such

thoughts were actually bad and could not be realization. Since you were seeking elsewhere you thought that such thoughts could not be realization.

Elsewhere. So let's see what happens in zazen -- we open to the moment. Dogen is talking about staining -- it sounds like he is saying that looking at the moon and wanting it to be a different way. Brighter flowers. Looking at our own practice and wishing that we were more settled, kinder, gentler, wishing that we were a different way. Wishing for the person in front of us to be a different way. This is this taintedness that Dogen is talking about.

Sitting in zazen, turning to the next moment, what is the mind that turns to the next moment? Is it open and curious and allowing? Sometimes. Right? And oftentimes it's just not. In case you're wondering at this point -- oh, this sounds like a real bummer -- staining, defilement, and this is what we do -- what a bummer. There's this part of these stories: to be unstained does not mean that you forcefully try to exclude discrimination or intention, being unstained cannot be intended or discriminated at all. So what happens when you turn to the moment and you find the part of you that is wishing for you to be a different way?

Do we beat that out of ourselves? "No, this is staining!" We might. But can we return to the question -- what's really happening now? With as much spaciousness, curiosity, in that moment, without judgment. Now, again, to say without judgment does not mean that we then judge the judgment that's there. That's just more judgment -- judgment atop judgment. So can we turn without judgment to our judgments and just say: oh look, judgment. There I am, judging. And now I'm judging judgment. And so on. Can you be open?

One of the workshops I did -- the three Zen/Yoga workshops -- the last one was on "restorative Yoga". Has anyone ever done that? (A couple of people).

My co-leader's name is Brit -- in restorative Yoga, at least how she teaches it, you use all of the props you have available. You get into a very very comfortable posture -- a totally nourished state where your hand might be over here and tweaked just so slightly. It looks like you need a little pillow for your hand there, it's tweaked. And then you lie there for 10-15 minutes, deeply relaxing. And if you fall asleep, whatever. But you try to soak up this completely relaxed, nourished, comfortable place -- to fully enter it. What a great thing. It sounds great -- but when you do it, it's like why don't we do this more often? Why don't we give this to ourselves?

So we are doing this retreat -- and I noticed that they had Brene Brown's book on vulnerability. Saw her on a TED talk about shame & vulnerability. I noticed this book in the workshop and it felt like this is enlightenment. Total peace, total need, total non-wanting, etc., you're just in this lovely space.

So then it's my turn to go on. So let's talk about our suffering! And my co-leader is like GAH. It's pretty funny.

People were a little -- oh. Oh, really? I thought I was kinda here to relax and get un-tense. And it's true. We are here for that. But I felt bad about bringing up this: how do you suffer? How you do get stuck? I also feel like: they just rested for 20 minutes, now's the BEST time to really get into that!

But this motion of going this way first, and then that way -- we kinda got into a groove and it kinda reminded me of the line: front and back of the foot in walking. Sometimes you have to go forwards with this foot, and then back with the other one. Or this Rumi poem about the opening and closing of the hands being like the opening and closing of a birds wings. It's just how this functions sometimes.

The question is: what's happening now? Are we open to it? Are we willing for the moon not being as perfect as we'd like? How about ourselves?

Brene Brown has done this research on shame & vulnerability, and in her research she talks about how you cannot selectively numb emotions or feelings. You can't say I don't want to feel these things, but I want to feel joy and creative and so on. Down with shame, depression, vulnerability, and so forth. You don't get to pick and choose -- or if you do, you're going to shut something important down.

This is in part what Dogen is talking about, I think. You don't get to pick and choose. When you meet the person that is right in front of you -- whether it be yourself, your partner, your child, your enemy, and so on -- be open to what is. You might notice that you discriminate: my five point plan for accomplishing X. You're always carrying something into the situation -- karma. It's not about trying to exclude things from the situation though, but rather just about being who we are and being completely aware of our environment.

Of course if we can leave that judge, great. But what if it sticks around? Open to it. This is what it is to be judged. This is judgment, can I really be fully aware of this moment?

There's a class that Graham is doing on causation and the other night we were talking about the 12-fold chain of causation. The first link is ignorance, and it goes all the way through to the sense doors and contact and feeling all the way up to birth/old age/sickness-and-death, etc. It's kind of a model of how we are stuck in conditioned existence. Starting with ignorance to what? To the truth? To how things actually are. Starting with ignorance and leading all the way into craving, attachment, becoming, old age, sickness & death, and then going right back to the starting point of ignorance.

But there's this other wheel -- starts with trust. Trust in what? We did this exercise where Graham asked people to talk about the qualities in other people that make them trustworthy. Worthy of trust. People came up with a bunch of different qualities.

But what about this other kind of trust? All of these kinds of trust that we have conventionally are evaluative in nature -- they can always disappoint us. What is it to look at this from a stepped-back point and see all of us on the wheel of dependent origination together? To trust the process that this is where we are -- trust that we are human. It is not dependent on whether or not someone is late, or keeps their word, or gossips, or whatever -- we're human. Conventionally speaking these things might be trust factors or pieces of how we determine trustworthiness. But what is it to trust the process? We don't need to fix things, or change things, and we can trust that just showing up and being with what is happening is actually enough.

A researcher in town does research on self-compassion. She makes a distinction between self esteem and self compassion. The former is evaluative/comparative, and is based on things like: hey, I'm talented. I'm better than average at X. Sometimes when children are praised based on talent vs. their effort, it turns around and bites them later on. Effort is not dependent on anything other than effort. But talent comes and goes, and no matter how talented you are, someone will be more talented sometime. But self-esteem arrives at someone else's expense, actually, compared to self-compassion. It's always available. Esteem is: I'm better. Compassion is universal -- just because I'm compassionate to you doesn't mean that I'm now at a lack for someone else. It's actually quite efficient that way.

So it's regardless of the circumstances -- self compassion. In the same way, trust can be regardless of circumstances. If you trust the process, you can be open to whatever happens. In zazen when you turn towards the next moment not needing it to be a particular way, you have this deep capacity to be aware of it without judgment. Judgment may arrive next, but you can be aware of that too. blanketing everything with this awareness, something shifts. Not that we're in it for the shifting, but with this curiosity this is what we find.

I want to end with the Dogen quote again.

If one has unsurpassed wisdom, they are called Buddha. When a Buddha has unsurpassed wisdom, it is called unsurpassed wisdom. Not to know what it is like on this path is foolish, what it is like to be unstained. To be unstained does not mean that you forcefully try to exclude intention or discrimination or that you establish a state of non-intention. Being unstained cannot be intended or discriminated at all. Being unstained is like meeting a person and not fixing what they look like. Also it is like not wishing for more color or brightness when viewing flowers or the moon. Again,

we should recognize that just as it is inescapable for spring to be simply the spirit of spring itself, and for autumn likewise, to be the beauty and ugliness of autumn itself, even if we try to be other than ourselves, we are ourselves.

Even if we try to be other than ourselves, we exert great effort, we are ourselves. We have all of these mechanisms built in to be better, more worthy, more perfect, etc., but we are still just ourselves. Can we include everything -- the difficult, the afflictive, as well as the joyful, the creative, the grateful? Remembering some of Brene Brown's insight into this process -- it doesn't work, we cannot selectively shut out just one thing that we don't like. It's all connected; wings opening and closing. Can we turn towards it? Whatever is happening, nothing is excluded.

Question or comments?

Q: I was just curious; I've been reading about some of the backlash in mindfulness in corporations. I haven't really formed a solid opinion about it. I was wondering what you might think about teaching mindfulness? Okay, meditate and you'll be more productive at work.

A: Yeah this is the impression I get: increasing innovation, creativity, productivity, etc. Sounds very attainment-based. Of course this tradition is very non attainment-based. In Dr. Brown's research she was asked this question as well. You can't actually go to those places without going to vulnerability, but when people ask her to come talk they actually ask her not to talk about that part. I think teaching in corporations can be done, and it has been done -- I heard recently that the CEO of some company is bringing all these practices into the workplace, and so forth, and people like working there more. Anything you can do to make people feel at ease and less anxious is a good thing -- put people into restorative yoga every day and let people relax into it. I think I need my anxiety or I'll never get anything done! When we're really able to be alive in our workplace though, what comes out might actually be different than when I'm acting in response to: I MUST, I *have* to, and so forth. Joy comes when we're able to relax and that can be so hampered by the anxiety. But the way to deal with that is to really take care of it like an anxious child: you don't lock an anxious child in their room (or shouldn't). So I think it depends on corporations that are interested in spending a ton of money on mindfulness education need to know that it just can't be -- people that are selling mindfulness as productivity needs to be better informed. You might actually start losing employees because your practices are unethical.

Q: If I'm experiencing compassion and awareness, I want to change certain things. I feel like I'm not really very accepting when this happens.

A: Yeah, I think that's true. But you have to be able to step back: this is the

moment by moment part, right? We hear that being untainted means that we can view things without trying to change them. But the meta-level means even accepting: Oh, I want to change this so badly. So going back to the 12th link to the 1st link: sickness, old age, and death right back into ignorance. Ignorance of what? Ignorance of the four noble truths, the first being the truth of suffering? At this point we're deep in dukka, and what we normally do in that space is try to figure out how to get out of it. Just take it until we get through it. But can we instead be open to it, feel it, etc.,? This is what it feels like to be alive and human. We can't numb out things and expect to have a full human life. There's pain, and then there's stepping into it with compassion. At that point there's a little less ignorance gripping us back into the 12-fold chain. We hear that compassion is not about trying to fix it, including not trying to fix the fact that we want to fix it. Be with it, feel it. It's actually quite profound -- things move. Realization is not dependent upon our thoughts about it. Whatever description of enlightenment you think of doesn't have to be the case -- if you instead step into each moment and are open, it can't be named. It can't be defiled by labeling or characterization. It's not that there is no practice and realization it's just that they can't be defiled.

Q: So what if someone wants to change you or doesn't accept who you are?

A: You walk into it, you breathe, you are aware of your posture and what is happening in you. Fully meet it and see what happens in the next moment. What might come out of you is hey, get off my back. Okay, that's what happened. Or maybe it's like, we really need to talk. And then they have a reaction. It goes so fast -- this is why it's helpful to come and sit when you're not actually amidst the interaction. Practice this paying attention in every moment; be aware of what it is that thus comes. And in the next moment, okay, something just happened, I just said something, something came out of my mouth.

Thank you so much.