

Winter 2009

Dharma Talk

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based on a dharma talk given July 22, 2007 at Clouds in Water.

Our Busy Lives (Yunyan Sweeps the Ground)

Most all of us feel that our lives are too busy. This is our predicament. The American mantra is "I'm too busy; I'm too busy." So maybe that's why we're all here at a Zen Center--to find out how we can take back our life.

"I'm too busy." I'm a mom of two teenage boys. I have the job of head of this center. I'm married. I have a household unlike my monastic colleagues. So I'm trying to figure out, "what would a Zen teacher do in this situation?" For the past months, I have been working on this koan:

As Yunyan was sweeping the ground, Daowu said, "Too busy."

Or you could also read it as a question: "Too busy?"

And another translation says, "Working hard?"

Yunyan said, "You should know there's one who isn't busy."

Or the other translation says, "What is not working hard?"

Dauwu said, "If so, there's a second moon,"

What Dauwu is noticing here is that the world just got split into two. One that is busy and one that is not busy. This is a problem in our non-dualistic Zen practice. We aspire to see everything working together as a whole.

Yunyan held up the broom and said, "Which moon is this?"

Oh! a terrific comeback! He got back to Zen. Everything is included in the activity of this moment. That's our practice. Everything, the sacred and the ordinary, busy and non-busy, are dynamically working in the present moment of sweeping the ground.

There is no escaping the busy-ness of our lives. Even on my day off or on vacation, my mind finds a way to feel busy. This human realm (in the Buddhist concept of the 6 realms) is a

realm of construction. Human beings love to make things. It is our nature to construct. Skyscrapers, civilizations, art and culture. But the way we hold the construction is what creates samsara (or the world of cyclic pain). We get very involved in and attached to that which we construct. Being attached to our projects makes us busy and tired. We are drained by hanging on to the results of our actions.

Zen practice allows us to get in touch with and feel that which is unconstructed. What is the life energy which is beyond, or beneath human construction? And going further than that, what is the emptiness, the perfect peace, the one who is absolutely not busy? This is the under-current of life which includes everything and also includes nothing –It includes the space between planets, the space between our words, the space between our activity. And yet, as this koan so beautifully demonstrates, it is not outside of our present moment activity – it is not outside the broom and our sweeping.

The commentary to the koan continues:

***Good people, as you eat, boil tea, sew and sweep, we could say,
as you do your email, as you listen to your answering machine, vacuum,
load the dishwasher, put birdseed out, make the budget
you should recognize the one not busy—then you will realize the union of
mundane reality and enlightened reality.***

This is the biggest lesson I learned from my teacher Katagiri-Roshi--that the two realities merge in the present moment, and the practice is to be there and feel that merger as we're living our life. The sacred and the ordinary come together as we are living our life, moment after moment after moment.

One commentary to this koan said, *He was empty-handed, yet holding the broom.*

This is a poetic way of saying: how do you do your life so that you remember that everything is a mystery and that you don't get attached to the results of your efforts? Underneath the waves of construction and our stories, there is this essence of life that is beyond our lives, our careers, our children and our achievements. There is something going on here that is quite miraculous. And sometimes we know this. No one can be in a birthing room, or a dying room, for example, and not know this. What happens to a person when they die? We don't know.

Even Einstein didn't know, and doctors and politicians don't know. We have to be open to "nobody knows" in our life. And when we are, a very rich quality comes in to what we're doing.

So, why do we work so hard? When I investigate and observe my mind while I'm working so hard, I realize that most of the tension is because I'm not doing it empty-handedly. I'm doing it with a layer of evaluation, a layer of achievement, and a layer of doubt. I'm not just doing what I'm doing in this moment. Much inner mental commentary pulls me off the moment and all of these thoughts drain my energy.

Doing exactly what we are doing, feeling exactly what we are feeling with no extra commentary is "holding up the broom". It is not making two moons or two realities separate from each other. We are not creating the duality of busy (mundane) and not busy (absolute). As Dogen explains it: every moment or activity is a moon. In these images, the moon represents the undercurrent of the one who isn't busy and "sweeping the ground" represents our moment-to-moment activity.

Dogen's poem in Eihei Koroku:

***Who sweeps the ground and also sees the moon?
Holding up the moon, his sweeping truly is not in vain.
Within tens of thousands of moons is placed this moon.
Although called the second, how could there be a first?***

I love the sentence and the compassion of Dogen when he writes, "*His sweeping truly is not in vain.*" For me that means, my karmic life, my everyday activity is truly not in vain, or useless or "just a delusion" My tasks when done with an open heart and empty hand is the position of the Buddha-field. My life moments are the moon and are never in vain or trivial.

Katagiri Roshi writes in, *This Moment is the Universe*:

"We tend to see practice in terms of time, as if we were climbing a ladder step-by-step. This is not the Buddhist idea of practice. When you climb a ladder you do so with your eye on the future. With this idea of practice

***there is no peace and no spiritual security, only a hope for the future.
Refined action is not like this. From the beginning, from the start of the
action, it lies in peace and harmony. To express this, Dogen used a
particular term—gyo-ji. Gyo means action, and ji means to maintain, to
keep, to sustain, or preserve. The character ji has two parts: one is a
hand; the other is a sanctuary. The hand holding a sanctuary. Sanctuary
here means the universe. Wherever you may be, your life is sustained and
supported by the whole universe. The main purpose of human life is to
maintain this sanctuary, to maintain this connection with the universe. It is
not to climb a ladder to develop our own personal life.”***

In this quote, Katagiri roshi is emphasizing that in each moment, the eternal source is present. Our job as Buddhist practitioners is to maintain, keep, sustain, and preserve the connection between this moment and the universe. Each moment, each thing, each person is an expression of eternity or the source of life and we can see and treat them in this way. Your daily life is exactly the same as the source of human life.

How do you remember to observe this in a Buddhist life? We have what we call mindfulness practice, so that during the day you have reminders, or interruptions, to remember what you're trying to do. We can interrupt the swirling busy-ness of our life and return to the activity of this moment. This is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the main purpose of human life. The main purpose is not to construct and construct and construct. The main purpose of a Zen life is this merging of the mystery and the ordinary in the moment. With this reminder, we can drop our obsession with the details of our stories and constructions and we can return to the timelessness of the activity of the moment and bring “the one who is not busy” forth into this world of form. We can then relax, we can then trust, and miraculously, all of a sudden and with a different mental attitude, my life becomes “not busy” and can even become a joy!

In conclusion, I'll quote again from Katagiri Roshi:

***Entering the mud, entering the water,
a Bodhisattva enters this moment of life.
Going into delusions,
paying attention to the delusion***

We figure out what each delusion needs.

Each moment, each thing, each person

is an expression of eternity or the source of life.

We can see this and treat all of our moments in this way.