

Zenju Earthlyn Manuel
Week 2, *It's Beyond Me: Freedom from Managing Your Life*
March 9, 2015
“Taking Refuge in Freedom”
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Greetings, hi. This is Zenju and welcome to Part Two of this four-part series on freedom from managing your reality or, I like to say, your life. So welcome to Part Two, and we're going to start with silence again as we did in the last—in Part One. And then we'll move into Part Two. So if you would sit with me for a moment and allow your breath to lead your listening.

And we're going to talk about freedom from managing this great, unsurpassed life. We're just breathing, allowing the unfolding and settling in. And letting the breath do the listening. And I'll ring the bell, and you may open your eyes.

I'd like to share a poem with you as I did in our last session and the poem for this session is called “The Way of Dust”:

We live in the realm of dust, in which we find corners, and walls to cling to, we might lie or hang there together, thinking we are the corner, or the wall, until the wind comes from the door being opened, and our dusty selves are sent off to another part of the room, or perhaps if we are lucky, we will be blown out the window into a greater mystery of life.

So I'm going to read it one more time. “The Way of Dust.” We live in the realm of dust, in which we find corners, and walls to cling to, we might lie or hang there together, thinking we are the corner, or the wall, until the wind comes from the door being opened, and our dusty selves are sent off to another part of the room, or perhaps if we are lucky, we will be blown out the window into a greater mystery of life.

So I wrote that some time ago feeling very much like the dust. Feeling very much like the corner or the wall, going to cling to. In that life, when the doors open, something comes in and just blows—myself, that dust—into another part of the room or out the window into a greater mystery of life.

And I'm sure we've all experienced things like that: Loss. It could be death, grief, sadness, something comes in – or it could be happiness that just blows our minds and joy that just blows our minds, and we're suddenly in a greater mystery of life. And so that's why the topic – freedom from managing our lives – that our managing our reality, that there's something greater, something that is beyond our management that opens the door and just blows us into a greater mystery than we ever could imagine.

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And so I thought this topic very good for these times in which there's many things blowing us out of our corners, blowing us off the walls, blowing us down the street, blowing us into a greater mystery. What is it? What is happening, you know, in our lives?

So last week—and I'm going to look at my notes—last week we talked about freedom and we tried to put freedom in a context so that, because there's many definitions of freedom and liberation and so the context that we're looking at freedom is looking at the way or the process of life in the way that it unfolds naturally and how integral it is to everything in its unfolding. And we imagined it like a river, like ourselves, our life like a river. And that water, just flowing over the water. You know, just moving on its own, just like our breath, how it just moves on its own.

And so that's the context in which we're looking at freedom, and I asked in the last session towards the end for us to make a commitment to freedom and to—and how we would do that is to relieve ourselves of managing our lives. And then how would we do that and bring freedom in?

And so I asked us to look at the three jewels of Buddhism, of the teachings of Buddha's teachings and that is dharma—buddha, excuse me—buddha, dharma, and sangha. So I asked us to make a commitment to freedom and to take refuge from management and to look at the three jewels of Buddha, dharma and sangha.

But I asked to look at these three jewels as examples, where the Buddha is an example of freedom, and dharma an example as a path of freedom, and that sangha is an example of companionship in freedom. That's sangha. So that's Buddha, dharma and sangha. So I hope that—I asked you to take a walk. I hope that your walk, if you took one, that it was and that you were able to sit with the question of last week.

And the question last week was: “How can we secure or manage our life that is groundless by nature?” How can we secure or manage a life that is groundless by nature? Even that question should bring some relief. That's why I like questions. They do open up your heart. They open up your heart and take away some of our concrete perceptions of what we believe.

So I want us in this session to look at the example of freedom. And that would be Buddha, the example of freedom. So Buddha means “the Awakened One” and there were many awakened ones and beyond Shakyamuni Buddha, he was Siddhartha before he became Shakyamuni Buddha. And *Shakya* was the tribe in which he belonged and he was a teacher of that tribe. So Buddha, the historical Buddha, was Siddhartha who became Shakyamuni. In this context I'd like us to look at

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buddha in terms of what it means, the Awakened One. And there were many awakened ones. And they were called “Buddha” or “Lord” if people could understand or felt an awakening or saw an awakening and they could understand life better by sitting with this awakened one.

And so I would like us to consider that an example of freedom is awakened one, that an awakened one could become you; it could be someone you follow, not necessarily Buddhist, but someone in which you hear something that awakens your heart, something that awakens beyond what your mind could even conjure, something beyond which you could even imagine.

And so that would be an example of freedom, you know, a buddha, an awakened one in your life. Someone that you could take a refuge in or something that you can take refuge in as a teacher that could help you when you’re overwhelmed with managing your life. And so we’re going to look at that more and try to understand this awakening. And I think maybe we’ll do that by story.

So one of the stories I like to talk about or share, and maybe many of you know, it’s a very—it’s a teaching story that many of you know. And I’m not going to even tell the whole story. Basically, it’s that story where the person is walking down the street and they don’t know there’s a hole in the path.

And so they walk down the street and they fall in the hole. And then so they might do this a couple of times. Or they start to, you know, try to manage the hole, but they end up falling in the hole again or they come very close to falling in the hole. Or they may take another street, you know, or they take another path and suddenly—you know, some people say, “Well, that’s the teaching. You took another path; you don’t have to keep falling in the hole.” That’s one teaching.

And that is a way of, you know, managing one’s life, so that’s a management to go to another street—or to go around the hole even is a management of life. But what would be a greater understanding of it, if we were looking—if we were to look at Buddha as an example, as an awakened one, who became awake to everything and everyone as interrelated; he became instantly awakened to that—if we look at that kind of awakening and we were to talk down the street with that very same hole, then we would see that hole as ourselves.

We would see that hole in the street as ourselves. Now that’s another teaching of that story. There’s many teachings to that story. But I like to hold onto the teaching that that hole is me. If I’m walking down the street and I see it, rather than managing it, going around it, finding ways

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not to fall in it—or even if I fall in it—I fall into me. If I go around it, I go around me. If I go down another street, then I’m actually avoiding myself.

So those are all kind of different ways of managing our reality. The hole becomes some kind of reality to us. You know, if the hole is just like, that hole is my life. It’s in my life. It’s my life right now in that moment. And that is being awakened to what Buddha taught is everything and everyone is interrelated. So the hole, the road, everything is Zenju in that moment.

And so that is a way of seeing freedom and experience freedom using Buddha’s example of everything and everyone is interrelated. So we’re very lucky. We’re very fortunate to already have examples of freedom in our lives and very fortunate that we can take refuge in these example – this example of Buddha, this example of freedom, of liberation.

So, phew, we don’t have to manage. Whoo! Take a breath. Whoo! Let it go. Allow life to be. Oh! There’s the hole. There’s that hole again in the sidewalk, in the street. There’s me again. Oh, there’s me again. So this is something I have learned in my life as a practitioner of Buddha’s teachings as I walked with his sense, his awakened wonderful awakened, transmitted awaken-ness to us. His wakefulness to us. He transmitted that to us in his teachings.

And so I walk with that. And so the question, I want to offer a new question: Given our old question was in last week—it’s not an old question. I’d still like you to walk with it, actually. The question last week was “How can we secure or manage a life that is groundless by nature?” This week is: If you are managing your reality, your life, how can you come into a full blossom of that which is unknown to you at this time? Long question. If you are managing your reality, your life, how can you come into a full blossom of that which is unknown to you at this time?

So if I go around to another street or around another corner instead of, you know, around the hole, going around the hole in the street, how can I come to what might occur to me if I were to just meet the hole? Just walk up and meet it as myself. What awakening would occur in that moment? What blossoming could happen that I’m not even aware of?

If I manage it and go around I could miss that blossoming. If I go down another street, I could miss that blossoming. But if I’m willing to be right there with that hole in the street what of me is being mirrored and presented.

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I could tell you immediately: fear! My greatest fear: I'm going to fall in a hole. Oh, I get to meet that and say, “You're afraid of falling in the hole. You're afraid. You're afraid. You're fearful of falling in that hole. And then if you fall in the hole, you'll crack our head and if you crack your head you might bleed to death and no one's gonna find you.” I mean, we could go on. Or “They'll pick you up and you'll be put in an ambulance and taken off.”

Whoa. I can meet that fear and see that and I could go, “Oh, I'm afraid of what is going to happen.” Now that's a blossoming actually, to be awakened to that, in that moment to stand at the hole and see. I'm awakened to that fear of death, injury, disability, the ending of my life without me having made it to where I thought I was going to go. Oh, my gosh, this is it. This could be it.

So, to me, if I use Buddha as an example of freedom and I take refuge in that, I can be more relieved of that fear and I can also see the fear at the same time and see it as my mind, engaged in a future, engaged in suffering, and engaged in not being satisfied with ending my life at this time, because I have so many things on my to-do list, my bucket list as people have now—bucket lists. So I want to share another story. It's very short.

So recently I experienced a bout of homelessness, and I think I've had several bouts of homelessness throughout my life and – but the recent one I think I experienced more of the taking refuge in the example of freedom, which was Buddha and being awakened. And so in this recent bout of homelessness it lasts for about two months. My home was mold-infested and we had to leave and just kind of be about in the world without our things. We had some things, a few clothes, and it was very stressful, but actually it was very magical in the sense that everything happened, we were taken care completely.

When I was homeless in the past I met it with anger, rage, disappointment, even the thought of “I'm not going to become what I thought I would become in my life. Look at me, I'm a disaster.” And in this last time meeting the homelessness—like looking at that hole, just being right there looking at it, allowed me a freedom to not manage it, to not go looking for home, to not manage all the people that were trying to help us have a home or any of these things and not to manage the mold or the landlords of any of these things.

I just met the homelessness as it was in my life as me, as me, as my life. And in that management I began to understand a phrase that's chanted all the time in the *Heart Sutra* at the end, “Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha. Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.”

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I understood it suddenly, like it was awakening me, that something is leaving you in this homelessness without. Something is leaving and emptying out of your life and I was able to sit with not even figuring out, “Whoa! What was leaving? Get my pen out and write it down; put it in my journal.” No, I said, “Something is leaving: *Gate gate*,” meaning, “gone, gone, going beyond, going beyond,” you know, and allowing that to be what I walked with and that being an example of what Buddha gave us, an example of freedom from managing my life, an example of just being in my heart, following Buddha and being in my heart with my life.

And so I was able to see that homelessness is inherent in life. It’s inherent in all of our lives, but yet we’re shown this thing about stability. We’re shown, you know, “Get a house and then you’ll get a thirty”—you buy a house, really—“You should buy a house,” and you get a thirty-year mortgage, and you’re stable if you do that: “You’re a stable person.” And you’re seen as stable. But all along, perhaps maybe even those people are experiencing homelessness by many things going on in their lives and the homelessness has various qualities and it comes out in various ways.

Maybe there is a fear of not being able to pay the mortgage or one not being able to pay rent, you know. Because we’re housed doesn’t mean we’re not homeless, those who are housed. You know, so homelessness I began to understand as something that is inherent in our lives.

And so instead of managing my homelessness, managing the reality, quote unquote reality, managing life, I was able to see Buddha as an example of freedom, Buddha as Awakened One, and just be with the homelessness that was before me and watching it unfold and how it unfold—in the end it was one glorious story, one glorious story—even if I had moments of angst, which I had less of than in my previous experiences of homelessness. In previous experience of homelessness I even felt that, you know, discouraged about life. In this last one I felt neither hopelessness, hopefulness or discouraged, none of that.

I was just there. I wasn’t like, “It’s gonna be better and bigger,” or “bigger things are coming to me. Oh, it must be, oh, something great is going to happen now, because you’ve gone through so much suffering. The next moment means you’re going to get a mansion. Yay!” No, it didn’t mean any of that.

It didn’t mean that, “Oh, Zenju’s getting ready to learn something; in the end of this homelessness she will have learned it and she will have gotten it together.” No, it didn’t mean that either,

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although I might have tried to do that. I went over in my mind managing, “What did I do to get here? What did I do? What did I do? What did I do? What did I do?”

That’s a management rather than “What is this homelessness? What is this life, this right now unfolding?” Not even what it is. Being in it. Not even asking a question. Just seeing myself blossoming in it, because there’s a blossoming going on. And I don’t even know what I’m blossoming into. And so I’m offering that as, in this series, I’m offering that as a relief to you to use *buddha* as an example of freedom or a teacher or what teaches you. And to understand that everything and everyone is related, interrelated. You know, interrelated.

I am related to homelessness. I don’t avoid it because it’s not part of my life—“I’m so special”—it’s part of all of our lives. And I don’t mean to go look at homeless person and say, “Yes, he or she is part of my life.” They are. You don’t even have to do that. You can just be with your own homelessness and know it and know it when it arises. And know it when it arises in your life and blossom in it.

So let me take another look in my notes and make sure that I’m covering the things that I would like to cover in this session.

So I think I have covered everything in this session for Part Two and I just wanted to remind you that, or discourage you really, from looking out for objects in front of you. That was something that I wanted to add and that helped. That is part of our management. We’re always looking for an object, like I said, that house or that car or that job or that thing that we’re managing.

And so we spend all our lives managing and then wait for a vacation on Fuji Island, you know, somewhere down the way. So anyway, I’m going to stop here actually. You can cut that part out. You can cut that part out, that last part.

Anyway, the homework for Part Two is to take a walk with the question and here’s the question again: If you are managing your reality, your life, how can you come into a full blossom of that which is unknown to you at this time? If you are managing your reality, or your life, how can you come into a full blossom of that which is unknown to you at this time?

Okay. So take a walk with that this week. Notice what you’re going after and trying to manage. Let it go, see just, walk with what’s in your life right now. What’s in front on you right now? And

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so I'd like to read the poem with you. I mean, excuse me: I'd like to read the poem one more time.

“The Way of Dust.” We live in the realm of dust, in which we find corners, and walls to cling to, we might lie or hang there together thinking we are the corner, or the wall, until the wind comes from the door being opened, and our dusty selves are sent off to another part of the room, or perhaps we are lucky—or perhaps if we are lucky, we will be blown out the window into a greater mystery of life.

So I'm going read it one more time. “The Way of Dust.” We live in the realm of dust, in which we find corners, and walls to cling to, we might lie or hang there together thinking we are the corner, or the wall, until the wind comes from the door being opened, and our dusty selves are sent off to another part of the room, or perhaps if we are lucky, we will be blown out the window into a greater mystery of life.

And let's sit with silence in that, silence for one moment.

Thank you for listening to Part Two, and I look forward to seeing you for Part Three. Be well.