

Rev. Masaki Matsubara
Week One, *Zen and the Work of Everyday Life*
March 6, 2017
“Life Is Being Lived”



The 20th Century Japanese Zen Master Yamada Mumon once said, "I know from [the] coolness of this morning's breeze that, [that] I am embraced by something great and vast." Another Japanese Zen Master, Kono Taitsu, who is a first disciple of Mumon says, "life is being lived." Again, Mumon said, "I know from [the] coolness of this morning's breeze, that I am embraced by something great and vast." Taitsu says, "life is being lived." How do we understand these two sayings?

Let me tell how I came to understand these two sayings.

When I was 25 years old and I was the third year practitioner at Zen Monastery in Japan, I developed sudden, serious meningitis. I was hospitalized, in total for three months, and had to take rest at home for another three months after that. I took, in total, 6 months to recover [from] this illness. My parents, my friends, my fellow practitioners, they all worried about my physical [state] and they were thinking I was going to die or that at least I would have brain damage or physical disabilities.

Honestly, even now, I really don't remember what happened. I don't remember how I was carried to the hospital. I really don't remember how I was examined in the initial stage at the hospital. [The only thing] I remember now is that when I woke up, when I opened my eyes, I was on a bed, a small bed, and surrounded by white walls in the room.

Six months later, in the summer of 1998, I returned to the monastery. One evening I was sitting in meditation at the meditation hall. All the windows of meditation hall, all doors of [the] meditation hall were open, so [it] was like I was sitting in the nature, I was sitting with the nature.

Suddenly I was surrounded by the orchestra of evening cicadas, brought by a gentle breeze. It is through this decisive experience that I had a chain realization that the orchestra of evening cicadas seemed to welcome my return to the monastery and also that I was not living.

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I was not living but I was being lived.

This was not an interruptive insight but a pure realization. This was a penetrating insight. This was a power of listening to the silence. Listening to the silence means learning from hearing, learning from seeing, learning from tasting, learning from touching, learning from smelling, and learning from feeling.

Through the meningitis experience my physical [body] may have been weaker but my mental conditions have been stronger. "I know from [the] coolness of this morning's breeze that I am embraced by something great and vast." "Life is being lived."

My experience with the evening cicadas at the monastery, in the summer of 1998, brought to me lots of Buddhist ideas, [one of which is] dependent origination—dependent origination, or *pratityasamutpada*.

In the text Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha says, "that when this exists, that comes to be; with arises of this, that arises; when this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases." This is the core idea of dependent origination.

Buddha says again, "that when this exists, that comes to be; with arising of this, that arises; when this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases."

This idea of dependent origination implies three things: First, phenomena or cause through conditions. Second, all that comes into being is dependent of something else. Third, this occurs precisely because of the nature of existence, which is emptiness. This idea of dependent origination is something rich, vast, joyous, quiet and confident.

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Think of this dependent origination in our human relationships or in our every day life. We are always, always dependent on others in any situation, in our every day life. Let me repeat this, we are always, always dependent on others in any situation, in our every day life.

There is no exception about this. When we really, really understand this fact, the word grateful will come out our mouths naturally: grateful, grateful. We become grateful for everything we see, we hear, we touch, we smell, we taste, and we feel.

Mumon said, "I know from [the] coolness from this morning's breeze, that I am embraced by something great and vast." Taitsu says, "life is being lived." Zen is not sitting [in] meditation all day at the temple. Even Zen does not mean meditation itself. Zen is to find that grateful in our everyday life. Taitsu said, "life is being lived, that life, that life is a continuation of the very moment of the here and now. No need to think of the past, no need to think of the future. Our present is only becoming our past, in this sense there is no present." The *Diamond Sutra* said, "one cannot apprehend a past thought, one cannot apprehend a future thought, one cannot apprehend a present thought." Let me repeat this: one cannot apprehend a past thought, one cannot apprehend a future thought, one cannot apprehend present thought.

Zen, or being Zen, or doing Zen, is what this *Diamond Sutra* really means, and Zen teaches living in the moment. Zen teaches living in the moment.

We can find the true happiness in living in the moment and in being grateful for every day we have, day by day. Again, Zen teaches living in the moment, no need to think of the past, no think of the future. In a sense, [don't] think of [the] sad present, just be in the moment, just be in the moment.

Yamada Mumon said, "I know from [the] coolness of this morning's breeze, that I am embraced by something great and vast." Kono Taitsu said, "life is being lived."

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Life is being lived.

Thank you very much.