

Rev. Masaki Matsubara
Week Four, *Zen and the Work of Everyday Life*
March 27, 2017
“Oneness”



The *Diamond Sutra* says: "Arouse the mind that abides in no place." Arouse the mind that abides in no place. In Japanese, [*speaking Japanese*]. I think that this line is one of the most important Zen ideas. All the Zen ideas [are] in this line.

Again, "Arouse the mind that abides in no place." This doesn't mean simply “no attachment.” Rather, more importantly it means, living in the moment. Or, more flexible response. Or, oneness.

Let me tell [you] how I came to understand this line. Obviously, as you [probably] know, this [is the] line the sixth [Zen] patriarch, Huineng, is said to have [reached] his enlightenment upon hearing.

Let me start with my experience. My experience [that] I had [at] the monastery when I was a first-year practitioner. Originally, I was planning to leave the monastery after one year, because monastic one-year practice is enough. I told my family as well, "OK, after one year, I will come back." Then after one year, I was assigned to conduct a funeral. Before that, I had studied how to offer funerals, and I had a confidence, much confidence, [in] chanting as well. Because I started to learn reading sutras, or chanting, when I was three. My mother said when I was three, I was already memorizing [the] *Heart Sutra*.

I have two brothers. Every morning at six o'clock, my grandfather took us to the main hall and we [would chant for] 45 minutes every morning. I had much confidence, strong confidence, for chanting. And then after one year I had to conduct a funeral—the funeral of a girl, a 24-year-old girl, who passed away from cancer. But still, I thought [to] myself, I can do it. Then the temple master took me to the funeral, then we were invited to [the] waiting room, and the master said to me, "Double-check everything was OK, setting was OK," at the funeral place.

I went there, and what I saw was, a little white coffin, covered by [a] white wedding dress, which she [was] supposed to wear. She passed away, again, at the age of 24 with cancer, and she had a

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boyfriend. She [would say], "Why [do] I have cancer? I have a dream, I have a dream to get married soon with my boyfriend." Her parents [said this] to me. That [was] a moment my confidence became so weak. I was overwhelmed by that sadness. Then, when the funeral started, my body started to shake. I couldn't chant. I couldn't chant the sutras, which I had memorized since I was three.

I was shocked. Maybe I felt a little scared. All the sadness of hers overwhelmed my confidence. And then my master, during the funeral, said to me, "Go back to the waiting room, and then sit to meditate for 15 minutes. Then come back." I was so shocked because I have never seen that situation. Usually I must have said, "I will not say that." So I thought I had [made] a big mistake. But the master said, "Just go. Sit quietly. 15 minutes. And then come back."

I went back to the room, just sitting. I tried not to think anything; I tried to let go [of] all the thoughts I had. After 15 minutes, after my mind calmed down, [I] came back. The teacher said to me, "Are you ready?" I said, "Yes, I'm ready, I'm ready." I still remember this situation. I can imagine [it], visually. He said, "Matsubara are you ready?" "Yes, I'm ready." "So now you can take my job." And then, I started to chant.

I started [to] chant, in silence. Still, I couldn't read sutras. I was facing the coffin, and crying, but I was reading sutras with tears. Then after the funeral, [her] parents approached me, and the father said to me, "Thank you Kakku-san." Kakku-san was my monastic nickname at that time. "Thank you, Kakku-san. She will finally rest in peace." And then [my] teacher said, "Probably, you had a lot of confidence to conduct [a] funeral, but don't forget, always, beginner's mind." Then, at that time, he gave me this word: [*speaking Japanese*]. "You have a mind, but you have to apply your mind flexibly in any situation given. If you have a confidence, it's fine, but do not forget beginner's mind. Beginner's mind is very important."

Arouse the mind that abides in no place. Let me introduce one more story. After leaving the monastery, I came to the United States as a priest. I started to study Zen at the Colorado

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University. Again, I had a lot of confidence. “I know Zen”—that kind of confidence. But reality is different. Studying Zen at the university [and] studying Zen at [a] monastery is completely different. Then in my mind, [my] teacher's voice [would] come up, even now, always. "Do not forget this line." [*Speaking Japanese*] "Arouse the mind that abides in no place. Beginner's mind. Beginner's mind. Study there at university with beginner's mind, you don't know anything about Zen. Study Zen at the university with beginner's mind."

Even now, as Masaki Matsubara, who is a scholar of Zen, as well as a priest, I am working usually as a priest in Japan. And I am working as a scholar in the United States. I have found two Masaki's within myself. Sometimes I don't know, “who am I?” My name is Masaki Matsubara, and my Buddhist name is Kakuju Matsubara, and I said to myself, when I use Kakuju Matsubara, I'm working as a priest. When I [am] using Masaki Matsubara, I'm working as a scholar. But obviously, it didn't work for long.

I always have an internal conflict of dual Masaki Matsubaras. Who am I? In Japan, I'm working as a priest. At the same time, other Masaki says, "You are also a scholar." In the United States, I'm working as a scholar, but somewhere I can hear the voice say, "You are also priest." Who am I? Where is my beginner's mind? I also always say [to] myself, "Masaki, you are only one person. You don't have two." It's same idea as two sides of the same one hand. Scholar, priest, still Masaki Matsubara.

In Japan, even [when] I'm working as a priest, [I am] always bringing [in the] other Masaki Matsubara scholar. Here in the United States, when I'm working as a scholar, [I] still bring another Masaki Matsubara as a priest. Studying Zen academically [and] studying Zen practically, those are different. But we cannot separate, like I have, “which one is Masaki, priest or scholar?” [The] most important thing is, [that] we need to bridge, amalgamate, studying Zen academically and studying Zen practically, both sides. Sometimes it is very hard to do that. I know it is not easy. I was like that; “I'm Zen priest, I know Zen, I don't need to study.” But actually I didn't know anything about Zen.

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Always bring beginner's mind. Beginner's mind creates an endless, bottomless capacity to study. Also, from my experience as a Zen priest in Japan, I think what we need to do from Zen tradition in the more global context today is remember the beginner's mind, or this line: "Arouse the mind that abides in no place."

How can we [explain] Zen in the U.S. context? If we bring Zen from Japan directly to the United States, it doesn't work. What I learned at the monastery, I brought directly here, but it was not understandable. It was not acceptable. The reason is that, every culture has its own culture. We need to understand that culture. Based on that culture, we need to be flexible. Now, what we need to do, as Japanese Zen [practitioners], for the coming generations in this world is that, we need to find Zen that can be applied in [a] more global context. We need to change. We need to change.

Change doesn't mean completely eliminating what Zen is. We need to [be] flexible. We need to adjust to the culture in which our Zen will be delivered. "Arouse the mind that abides in no place."

I gave my story of [the] funeral, and also of two Masakis. But [the] question is, who is the person who realized that I was crying and [that] I could not chant at the funeral? Who is the person who realized that I had two Masakis? To find that Zen means to find that person. To do meditation means to have a conversation with that person. That is Zen, and that is meditation. We can do this. And everybody can do this. We can deepen our conversations with those persons of our own, and as the result, we deepen ourselves with changes. It is certain that meditation helps this.

From the standpoint of listening to neuroscience, these changes in deepening one's self are not just happening in our experience. They are actually happening in our brains. Neuroscience says that, what we think, what we do, and what we pay attention to changes the structure and the function of our brains. In other words, it is like the software can change the hardware. In fact, MRI studies have shown those changes in brain structure before and after acquiring a specific

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skill. What is the point here? My point is that we can intentionally change our brains with training. Again, we can intentionally change our brains with training. And meditation brings this training.

Meditation is trainable. Then we can deepen ourselves. Therefore, Zen is trainable. For this practice, we need a mantra, which is, "Arouse the mind that abides in no place." Again, this doesn't mean simply no attachment. Rather, it means being in the moment, or beginner's mind. This gives us freshness, immediacy, and oneness to our everyday life.