

曹源一滴水

Shodo Harada Roshi's Newsletter

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2003 New Year's greetings. To all of the people who are good friends of One Drop Zendo and to all of those with karmic affiliation to One Drop Zendo, I send wishes for a happy New Year from Sogenji. Since Rohatsu sesshin of last year, followed by the December reworking sesshin, 45 people of training have been sitting together, supporting each other. All of them, wanting to realize the Buddha's true law and make use of this most excellent season, have trained here together.

Celebrating the winter solstice and making mochi, ringing the New Year bell, we welcomed the New Year, the first of everything, in front of the altar of Daruma Daishi. Opening this New Year together in front of Daruma Daishi, vowing to do our training ever more energetically, we joined in a special tea, honoring this good fortune. At that time this poem was given:

To celebrate the new spring

At the ancient Zen temple

From East and West they gather,

The Ones of Iron resolve

More than the ritual sacrifice of many lambs' lives

The Great Vow energy is prized

The Dharma Light once again radiates

Throughout One Thousand Worlds

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To celebrate the new spring

At the ancient Zen temple

From East and West they gather,

## The Ones of Iron resolve

This New Year, in front of the statue of Daruma Daishi, with 42 in attendance, we celebrated this great joy. When we all gather here to do training, we are those of the iron foreheads, and our deep mind of the vow is our highest priority. Centered and anchored, not looking right or left, at this or that, without hesitating, without distraction, we vow to realize that true path in one straight line. We have gathered here with firm resolve to realize our mind's true source and to put everything we have and can muster into that task. This is truly an international gathering; from America, from Europe, from Asia, from all around the world, those who have come here are continuing their training.

More than the ritual sacrifice of many lambs' lives

The Great Vow energy is prized

In this way every year the New Year's vow is celebrated, but this cannot just be an empty ritual. At the time of Confucius there were many coups d'état and leadership was always changing hands. When there was a new emperor, the people were never really clear about their position, and at the same time the almanac would also change. When the almanac changed it meant that a new head of state had been recognized. The almanac was issued on the first of the month along with the changes of policy, and in recognition and celebration there was a ceremony on that day in which a lamb was always sacrificed. This year is also the year of the sheep or lamb in the Chinese calendar.

The almanac would change over time as the emperor changed, and each time the new era was welcomed with this ceremony and a great vow. Since the ceremony was also held at the first of each month, it became automatic and repetitive, and finally the meaning was lost. There was a man named Shiken who said that he felt so sorry for the lambs that were sacrificed. He called attention to the fact that at the beginning of every month a lamb was being slaughtered. If there was a true renewal of determination connected with this act, then maybe he could understand it, but the meaning was long gone and only the ritual remained. He felt that this was pointless, and argued that the ceremony should be ended.

Confucius said to this, "You have deepest regret for the lambs, but I deeply regret for that law. You feel sorry for the lives of the lambs, and that is no mistake, their fate is a pitiful thing. Yet, for me, were the law to disappear because of the lamb, that would be even sadder. For should that happen, then the law will no longer be observed."

If there is a law even barely alive, then at some time, in some place, the law can be brought back to full life. If we abolish it completely, then there will never be any possibility of that state of mind being reborn. From these words we see that even if something becomes ritualized, it can still be the

source of an opportunity for rebirth. This is the meaning of the Confucian metaphor. This is truly the way to view the bows we do every year in front of Daruma Daishi. Our celebration must not become ritualized. Every single person must use the power of the great vow to realize the true law of mind. Those who are gathered here are those who make that vow with great energy and deepest resolve.

The Dharma Light once again radiates

Throughout One Thousand Worlds

As long as there are still those who are living in this way, then the way of Zen and the Buddha Dharma and the truth of the Buddha's awakening will once again be brought into this world and give it great radiance.

In the olden times there was in China a great master name Unmon Daishi who once faced a large assembly of disciples. Unmon addressed the assembly and said, "I won't ask you about the days before the fifteenth of the month, but give me a phrase about the days after."

These fifteen days could be from the 15th of July or the 15th of January; what is important is not which month, but that what is past is no longer dwelt upon. Rather, at THIS very instant - how do you live? Say it! Speak it! This is what he was asking. We do not need to dwell on what happened last year once this New Year has begun. We welcome the New Year and decide what state of mind we will train with this year and in what way we will do our training from now.

Each of us has to manifest our own clear determination and clarify our essence. Master Unmon was asking his question in this way. To make a change like this of 180 degrees is the way of the Buddha Dharma. We have to let things that are past flow by in the river. If we are always going over and over and over the same old past events, our mind becomes stagnant, and soon we will be destroyed. The world is full of grumbling and discontent because of this. Instead, we must always be new, and new again, always flowing.

As it says in the Diamond Sutra, "It is impossible to retain past mind, impossible to hold on to present mind, and impossible to grasp future mind." We talk about a now, but that is also changing and flowing away. In every single instant that actuality changes and exists anew. Our healthy mind and behavior and judgment are never caught on a past or a future and are not cushioned by our imagination. They are not even caught on the circumstance of right now, but rather flow like water, always transforming with the reality of this very moment.

"I won't ask you about the days before the fifteenth of the month, but give me a phrase about the days after." Not making any problem out of what has already gone by or what is to come - what about right now? Cut away

everything of the past! How about today? Master Unmon said these words to 500 or more monks, and no one came up with a single word in response. Master Unmon ended up having to answer his own question, saying, "Every day is a good day. Nobody could answer so I will have to say it myself, "Every day is a good day."

Every single day is truly a fine day, a paradise, the promised land and full of great good fortune. In this way Master Unmon replied. Of course these words, "every day is a good day," are known by everyone. They are easy and wonderful and we feel hopeful and happy when we hear them, but it also depends on how we interpret them. If everything in our daily world could be resolved just by hearing those words with our ears, that would be wonderful - if merely that could make us all happy and lucky, then just by saying those words, we wouldn't have to suffer. But Master Unmon does not offer these words in their superficial sense. For Master Unmon, even if a ball of fire comes flying at us from the sky, still, "Every day is a good day." Can we really receive everything that comes along in that way? If right in front of our eyes our own child is about to be hit and killed, as we are standing where we cannot stand to be, from within our incessant tears, can we actually say "Every day is a good day" and accept everything that comes along? If we are told that our spouse will die tomorrow, can we really still say, "Every day is a good day"? When everything that we have collected as possessions over many years is taken away in one fell swoop, can we really say, "Every day is a good day"? Ninety days of training doesn't make our whole environment and everything in it change; our world is the same. Our world is full of hate and resentment and conflict and contradiction - with joy and cruelty, things we love and things we hate. While some gain, some always lose; it seems so unfair, yet while living in a world like this, can we still say, "Every day is a good day"?

One of great merit like Master Unmon can say words like this. One who has tasted the worst possible conditions of life and drunk them all down, including the worst possible scenes, can say, "Every day is a good day."

As Zen Master Ryokan wrote "When there is catastrophe, catastrophe is fine; when there is good weather, good weather is fine; when we are sick, sickness is fine; when we die, dying is fine."

In this way Master Ryokan says the same thing as Master Unmon: no matter what comes along, accept it. If you are seriously ill, then become a sick person completely. Even if you are told you are going to be murdered, receive it, just as it is. We need to be able to see this firmly and clearly or our life will remain insecure. For this our mind has to become completely "Mu," or we cannot do this.

Master Mumon Ekai said that we have to do that Mu with all of our 360 smallest joints and our 84,000 hair pores. Does our body really have 360 small joints and 84,000 pores? That means that with every bone in our body and all the way down to our pores, we have to receive that Mu with

everything we are. We have to throw our whole being into that, from the bottoms of our feet to the top of our head. We throw it all into being that and realize this great doubt of Mu; we realize this absolute Mu, this state of mind, and this is the truth of "Every day is a good day." This is what we are being told how to do here. We become this "Mu," the very truth of it, with our whole mind and whole body. We become the total concentration of this Mu, completely.

We continue for twenty-four hours doing it from morning until night, becoming a complete fool engrossed in that Mu, without a single gap. We keep our awareness on that one point of Mu; we thoroughly become the very breath of Mu. It is not about understanding a "Mu" in our heads. It is not about a conceptual mind game of what it means to become nothing at all. In raising each hand and lowering each foot, we keep that Mu with each motion - seeing something, hearing a sound, feeling something; we do it with our entire body from morning until night, from night until morning. Whether we are sitting or standing, no matter what we are doing, we continue actualizing this. It becomes as if we have put a red-hot iron ball in our mouth, and we cannot swallow it down nor can we spit it out. With this state of mind we keep it going until there is no awareness of anything but that Mu. We have to do it to this point; doing it completely to this point is what is most important.

As Rinzai Zenji says, people in the world think that we do zazen and do practice and then we get enlightened, and that is why we do zazen. This idea is a big mistake. In twenty or thirty years an ignorant person doesn't become Buddha. We are so full of desires! Just look at us! If we don't eat and sleep we get so hungry and we cannot keep our eyes open. That is not Buddhism at all. We have to see that from the origin we have all already had this and are missing nothing whatsoever. It is not about having a Buddha Nature once we get enlightened. We have to believe firmly that we always have had this Buddha Nature. Even if we are not among the faithful and even if Buddha and God don't come to get us, we know we never have had any reason to be concerned and this is true of all sentient beings. We do not do training to become a Buddha. From our first birth cry we are Buddha; this is what Rinzai is teaching us.

To try to become a Buddha or to try to become the Dharma is a way to hell. To think that these are outside of us is also a ticket to hell. To seek for a Bodhisattva, or something special, or something to be thankful for, or to do something good for people in the world, or to try to make merit, this is all making more karma. The Buddhas and the patriarchs are people who do not have this kind of confusion in their mind. Rinzai is clear on this. Someone who does not find it necessary to hold on to such things, we call a Buddha or a patriarch.

There are many ways to hold on to the concept of the thirty-two marks of the Buddha, or a concept of nirvana, or the Four Noble Truths of birth, sickness, old age, and death, or a concept of the twelve karmic links such as

that of Chinese medicine, or naikan introspection. One can look at a pine tree, or a body of fresh water, or concentrate on a bell's sound to align the mind. One can look straight within or attempt not to give rise to one single thought, but if this is what Zen amounts to then it is only a conceptual human activity. Rinzai Zenji says this exhaustively.

Shinran Shonin, the founder of the Nembutsu practice, said the same thing. To have such a dualistic idea as all things becoming Buddha is a great mistake. To only not even think about whether you will be saved or not, to only continue the Nembutsu (repeating of the Buddha's name) completely and totally, that is all there is to do.

"It is said that repeating Nembutsu will give us birth in the pure land but I know nothing of that, nor do I know that it might be something to give us karma to go to hell. I don't know anything about those or about anything whatsoever." Shinran Shonin, who can say it this way, is certainly doing it totally. We are told to do the Nembutsu, but that kind of repeating of the Nembutsu is actually not so simple and casual. To do it thinking we will get this or that and wondering why we have to do it and wondering what we will get out of it - we all have thoughts like that, but there is no true Nembutsu when we are thinking that!

Even if in doing the Nembutsu I might fall into hell, as Honen Shonin said, even if I died and went to hell from saying that, I would have no regrets whatsoever. It has to be this firm. It is not about doing the Nembutsu and going to heaven; even if we say it and go to hell we must not have one single regret. Why is that? Because there is no other practice that I can do, I cannot do some kind of splendid practice, so going to hell is a given for me, for me there can only be Nembutsu even if it takes me to hell. Because I believe totally in Shinran Shonin's words whether I go to heaven or hell is of no concern. How few can believe this thoroughly and completely! It is not a simple path. Have we truly actualized our Mu to that degree? Zazen is not for developing our power of samadhi. Nor is it to become a Buddha, nor is it for realizing kensho. These are irrelevant. Doing our Mu will we go to hell or heaven? Will we be enlightened or not? Why do we do this Mu? When we can throw away everything completely and totally, then it becomes Nembutsu as well.

For those who are left there is only doing the Nembutsu. It is the only path to follow, to become, to do, and to realize; there is nothing but this! We have to be able to realize this, or else we cannot casually say, "Every day is a good day." To do one whole week of Osesshin is to demand that of ourselves, and to do sanzen is to get rid of all those ideas of good or bad, to have them all taken right out from under us. When we do zazen without sanzen, zazen's essence gets distant. In sanzen, again and again all of our ideas are taken out from under us until there is nothing whatsoever left to say and there is only that "Mu," that "Namu shaka muni butsu." It cannot be done only with our head. Because we still don't become totally serious, we cannot realize it completely. We have to do it totally and completely in this

way.

To do it to where we cannot possibly retreat is that world of swallowing down a red-hot iron ball, to the right the sea of fire and to the left the hell of water, and there is one small narrow path that continues on, and that is the path of the Nembutsu. The Pure Land sect teaches this way, and it is the same for our Mu. Continually doing that Mu is the only help we have, and when it gets to this point, there is no more division into "self power" and "other power." Only by arriving here can the deepest faith be born. Everything else disappears but this. Then the deep faith is born and our true life energy is then realized directly and clearly. What is important is this deep direct experience, and all religions are the same when they come to this point. There are contradictory things taught by religions, but here we drink down those distinctions and differences and dive into where we cannot hold on to such differences and distinctions and go to the world of deepest belief and faith. Here no more ideas or dualistic distinctions can remain, or "Every day is a good day" becomes only a concept and a pat phrase.

From morning until night we have to just do that Mu in one straight line, becoming it completely until we burn up every last one of our arguments and explanations. Then that which has burned these all out will do the cleaning of the muck and murk and spit out all of the mozo. We can then know for the first time that clear pure mind with which we were born.

"To see with the ears and hear with the eyes is beyond any doubt. The sound of the raindrops dripping from the eaves."

This is a poem of Daito Kokushi. It is a matter of course that our ears hear and our eyes see, but when we perceive the raindrops from the eaves falling, it is not a world of mental understanding. They fall drip, drip, drip, and this is not a mental concept but an actuality. They fall. Only hear that actuality. We can hear it even if we do not try to hear it. Just because we have kensho does not mean that we can see and hear them. Even if we do not do zazen they drop and we can hear them. If they fall we can hear them, and that is our original nature and clear mind.

During all the twenty-four hours of the day we continue until we realize that place where there is no division between inside and outside, that most pure state of mind. After one week, two weeks, one year, two years, we reach that ultimate place of no separation between inside and outside. Our state of mind and Mu become fully one, everything we see and hear, all of our functioning, our tasting, our smelling are all one Mu. Within that we gather everything. Filling the heavens and earth without any sense of our body, there is only Mu existing. We become like one who has seen a dream and cannot describe it. We simply reflect it, as it is, but have no way of understanding it or of expressing it. This state of mind is called the great death. This state of mind has to be realized and entered and then it is an explosive conversion and the heavens will be astonished and the earth shaken. In this way Master Unmon Ekai has told about this great death

where there is no more seam between self and other; impossible to be divided, we become the flowers, the stars, the sound of the stream, and the ringing of the bell.

As Rinzai Zenji says, "Our true nature is not something we can decorate with studies or money or zazen or the various practices or with the gathering of merit." It is not necessary to decorate it. It is exactly as it is. It doesn't increase or decrease because we have done training. It is exactly as it is; there is nothing that can decorate it. There is nothing we must first know to be the Buddha Nature, like yoga or tai chi or chi kung. Everybody makes this mistake, thinking we must first learn this and learn that. That is only something with which we mistakenly think we want to decorate our selves. You cannot decorate the original nature; there isn't anything in all in the heavens and earth with which to decorate our true nature. It is that true nature which decorates the whole of nature, the whole universe. It manifests all decorations, hearing the rain drop drip, drip, drip. Oh! How quiet and peaceful it is! It decorates in this way, the moon rising up over the mountain - how beautiful! The maple leaves are such a bright color, and in our bellies the flowers are so fully blooming! It is all decorating! All the grasses and trees! It decorates with all of these! How it is so beautiful! It is so lovely! It decorates everything! Nothing in the heavens and earth can decorate our Buddha nature, but our Buddha nature decorates everything.

If we think this world is so terrible it is because we are moved around by external events. While nothing can decorate our true nature, we try, and then become melancholy. With that nature we should instead decorate the whole world! That which is right here, right now, that which hears these words and is right here, that is the most excellent decoration in the whole world, the most splendid. Because we don't realize this completely, we are pulled away, looking at this and that, thinking one of them is better and being tugged around. We are not missing anything at all, but it is as if something is covering over this Buddha nature, like an eggshell or rice hull. If our Buddha Nature is manifested as it is, then we don't need to cover it over at all, but because we cannot take off that eggshell or rice hull we all get caught on our egos and stuck on various things.

So how can we take off that shell, how can we break through that layer? It cannot be done with power because it is our own consciousness. We have to not look aside, but with our own awareness see our own awareness. That is Mu and Nembutsu, and it is not about how long we have done it but about seeing directly that which is doing that Mu and Nembutsu. From morning till night and night till morning we have to not let go of it. We must keep that awareness right in hand like a bird that is warming its egg without separating from it, so that the chick's life energy breaks right through that eggshell. The rice feels the light and warmth even underneath the earth and pops through the hull from the inside out, not from the outside in. The life energy vividly surges through. This is zazen and Nembutsu; that which heats up that life energy is the Mu, the Namu Amida Butsu.

If we think that if we say Mu we can or cannot realize kensho that is dualistic. Is it someone else who has this Buddha nature? Say Mu or not say Mu? There is no such dualism, only Mu again and again and again.

“For the person who is straightforward and courageous, becoming a Buddha happens in one single mind moment” When we realize that completely we can for the first time understand what Master Unmon Daishi meant by “Every day is a good day.”

Life is first of all this truth of being true nature. Being awakened to this is the base. Rather than understanding that truth mentally we must experience it directly, and with that experience we can see clearly what to do. If we do not realize that essence, then we look always outside ourselves for everything and we get confused. If humans' true nature is understood totally, then if the wind blows the grasses naturally wave, and as the water flows and gathers the pool grows. The outside world and our mind move as one. We often feel when we do zazen that we are not moving at all. We feel that everything is moving right toward us, the zendo, the hondo, and the jikido. If we think we move it is because our mind is moved around. If we become strongly rooted, then we see that it is not we who move but everything else that moves toward us, and this is the state of mind of “Every day is a good day.”

It all comes right to us, so there is nothing to be afraid of. No matter what difficult work comes to us, there is nothing to be moved around by because we have not sought it, it has simply come to us. This is the truth of Buddhism and Zen, which must be realized and discovered.

During this coming year to not be moved around by external things but to realize our own essence as deeply as possible is our great vow.

Back to the [top](#)



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