

Bear River Meditation Group Lecture Series July, 2017

Scriptures, Sutras, Invocations - Chanted, Spoken, Unspoken

Talk 3: Unspoken Scriptures and the Unsung Sutras and Our Practice

*The unsurpassed penetrating and perfect Truth is seldom met
with even in a hundred thousand myriad kalpas.*

Now we can see and hear it. We can remember and accept it.

I vow to make the Buddha's Truth one with myself.

Talk 3: Unspoken Scriptures and Unsung Sutras and Our Practice

Books! The printed page! And by extension, a well packaged audio presentation - YouTube or a TED talk - or even an inviting blog! How much easier was it for me to give credence to "the truth" in this form. The truth in the form of my boss or my partner or my own heart was often a lot less accessible.

A significant shift for me - a life changing event, actually - occurred when I made the choice to "read" and engage with *The Sutra of My Boss*, *The Scripture of My Partner* and *The Mantra of My Own Heart*.

Rooted in the experience of recited and sung scriptures, I was able to be present in body and mind in a nonjudgmental way - breathing deeply, attending deeply, engaging deeply. Interactions with friends, enemies, or "just another face in the crowd" became liturgical events, the ceremonies of daily life. In them - as in reciting or chanting - I didn't have to prove anything. As in singing or saying a simple verse, I had nothing to fear or nothing to loose. I had the opportunity to be present in *the teaching of the other*.

Sometimes that teaching was clear, and I could resonate with the easy access of it. Sometimes the teaching made no sense and I could only sit in the presence of it, letting it be, appreciating what I could. But just as in a ceremony or at the spotlight, when I recited or sang a verse or a scripture or an invocation, I was still able to breathe - and thereby make space for - something larger than myself.

May I repeat what Rev. Master Daishin Morgan underscored: "*As scriptures are sung or recited, one cannot ponder the meaning in the way one can when reflecting on them with the intellect...* Some situations, some people, we just can't figure out. *We do not necessarily come away from (chanting) having learned something. One lets go of being an observer and becomes a total participant.* Yes, I can be present in myself in the presence of the other without fear or judgment or expectation.

Isn't this the real meaning of sympathy? As Dogen says

*If one can identify oneself with that which is not oneself,
One can understand the true meaning of sympathy...
...Sympathy is as the sea in that it never refuses water
from whatsoever source it may come;
All waters may gather and form only one sea.*

Rev. Master Jiyu teaches that we are all celebrants in the *ceremony of daily life*. And as celebrant we are not separate. We are connected to all we meet in our day, just as when we stand on the bowing seat, we stand for the whole community. Monk or lay person, we always have the opportunity to spread our mat wider.

Daily life is our ground of training. Great Master Dogen in the *Shobogenzo* says that "...the Great Enlightenment is synonymous with our tea and meals." In *The Rules for Meditation* he says clearly: ...there is only one thing, to train hard for this is true enlightenment; training and enlightenment are naturally undefiled; to live in this way is the same as to live an ordinary daily life. The koan DOES appear naturally in daily life. The **Genjo-Koan**, the koan of everyday-life, is our fundamental scripture. How do we recite or chant the **Genjo-Koan**, especially on "one of those days"?

Each being that I encounter is a scripture. Each person that crosses my path on any given day is an invocation. Each of those colleagues or friends that I take for granted is a mantra. When I encounter a living scripture, am I able to make space for the truth of the other? I may not understand but, just as in our meditation practice, I can allow the unsettling or the uncertain to be there - to arise, to abide, and to pass away.

In singing an invocation, I know I can give voice to meaningful truth. Can I do this when I encounter *The Scripture of the Other* in my daily life?

In reciting a mantra, I know to let go of that which constrains and tightens my breath. Can I let go of that which constrains and tightens in my relationships in daily life?

When I hold on too tightly to my self, to my agenda, to my image, I can't sing in the full voice that John Wesley encourages. My breath becomes shallow. I loose touch with my hara and with the mind of meditation. Reciting, chanting, singing - all are so valuable bring me back to the breath and - with the breath - to the mind of mediation.

When I refrain from harshness I can better appreciate *The Sutra of Each Being*. As Dogen describes another of the Four Wisdoms

*To behold all beings with the eye of compassion
And to speak kindly to them, is the meaning of tenderness...
...Whenever one speaks kindly to another his face brightens and his heart is warmed;
If a kind word be spoken in his absence, the impression will be a deep one;
Tenderness can have a revolutionary impact upon the mind of man.*

Speaking with tenderness is speaking in the mind of meditation. Tenderness is a reflection of that deeper breathing that is rooted in practice, in awareness.

When I express gratitude I can more clearly hear *The Sutra of Each Situation*. When I can accept the differences and the changes that are part of my daily life I can more clearly see the Buddha's Truth and see what needs to be done.

*If one creates wise ways of helping beings, whether they be in high places or lowly stations,
one exhibits benevolence...
...The stupid believe that they will lose something if they give help to others,
But this is completely untrue for benevolence helps everyone, including oneself,
Being a law of the universe.*

In chanting I am more alert to the possibilities of harmonization with "the other", whether it's the unison harmony of one accord, the pleasant harmony of easy blending or the clashing harmony of discord (dis-chord). There is room in the flow of the "invocation of daily life" for all of these. And, as RM Jiyu says in *Music Is Zen*, there are no mistakes in music.

In fact, as organist for our community, I've enjoyed participating in conferences of *The Hymn Society*, a delightful assembly of church musicians, composers, and text writers from throughout the United States and Canada. I once asked several of the participating organists what they did when they made a mistake in their accompaniments. Without exception they responded that they would play "it" - **the mistake** - they'd play it again, putting it into the context of the music itself, deliberately weaving it in melodically, tonally. They weren't afraid of an "unexpected note" as one talented organist called it. "Those unexpected notes opened doors for me." she said.

I remind myself that chanting and reciting are NOT about performance. And neither is my engagement with the *Scriptures of Daily Life*. Performance is subject to reviews, to evaluation, to judgment. Performance is looking to achieve something. Chanting, on the other hand, is an offering “without strings” or ulterior motives. Can I **just** be with someone without an agenda? Can I **just** do what needs to be done? Can I **just** keep the Precepts?

When we **just** do this, we’re acting with true generosity, true charity. Again, Dogen says

*Charity is the opposite of covetousness;
We make offerings although we ourselves get nothing whatsoever.
There is no need to be concerned about how small the gift may be
so long as it brings true results for,
even if it is only a single phrase or verse of teaching,
it may be a seed to bring forth good fruit both now and here after.*

In the **Shobogenzo**, Dogen says that “...the willingness to see clearly, without judgments or expectations, results in the emergence of True Practice.” I sometimes read that last line as “...results in the emergence of **True Enlightenment**.” Remember? Training and enlightenment **are** one and the same. So I can read it this way: **my willingness to see clearly, without judgments or expectations results in the emergence of True Enlightenment**. When we train, we are enlightened. And the signs of enlightenment are enlightened actions - when we act with charity, or tenderness, benevolence, sympathy. When we act with the Four Wisdoms.

Performance sets up opposites and, as Dogen says, *when the opposites arise, the Buddha Mind is lost*. Chanting invites us to a visceral understanding of one voice in the many and the many voices emerging as one. We breathe as one. We practice as one.

Performance requires an audience. Chanting, ceremonial, is rooted always in the “*temple of our own hearts*”. May we not only dwell in the temple of our own hearts, amidst the myriad mountains, but may we sit at ease therein and offer heart-mind-opening chant and space-making ceremonial.

I’d like to read Dogen’s reflections on his own practice from the **Shobogenzo Chapter 82 Shukke Kudoku**. He says

*I sit at ease within the forest grove. Tranquilly, my human failings are overthrown.
Through being impartial, I attain a singleness of mind,
the pleasure of which surpasses the pleasures of celestial realms.
Others may seek to gain wealth and honor, or fineries of dress or comfortable abodes,
but such pleasures lack true peace, since for one in pursuit of gains, there is no satiety.
Adorned in my patched robe, I go forth begging my food.
Whether moving or standing still, I am always one within my heart.
With my very own Eye of Wise Discernment,
I fathom the True Nature of all thoughts and things.
Within the sundry gates to the Dharma, I enter only to see that all are just alike,
So this Heart that understands The Way of things is tranquil,
for there is nothing that can surpass It within the triple world.*

Lay person or monk, our practice is one of accepting what is placed in our *begging bowl* in terms of health, relationship, work or any of life's offerings. Lay person or monk, whether moving or standing still, we can always be *one within our own hearts*. Lay person or monk, with our *very own Eyes of Wise Discernment*, we can choose to *fathom the True Nature of all thoughts and things*, truly seeking that which brings Abiding Peace.

Performance has a start and a finish. Chant is an on-going, "every-minute meditation. Each breath is the fundamental chant. And we can return to it in conscious and unconscious acts of faith and mindfulness.

In the coming week, perhaps you might pick one *Scripture or Invocation of Daily Life* to consciously encounter. Here are some suggestions, but please pick one from your own Scripture Shelf:

The Scripture of my Child
The Scripture of the One Who Is Always Late
The Scripture of the Loving one
The Scripture of the Rude One
The Scripture of the Dying One
The Scripture of the Chronically Ill One
The Scripture of the Unreasonable One
The Scripture of That Person Who Drives Me Nuts

What effect did your encounter with this *scripture* have? How did you participate in it? What impact does this encounter have on your practice? And how does it support your practice?

Thank you to all who have listened to this talk - and to the two preceding talks in this series. Please contact me through the Bear River Meditation Group website if you have any questions about the material therein.

And please do explore the references, both printed and audio.

And most of all, please do find time in your practice to recite, to chant, and to sing, all the while offering gratitude to Rev. Master Jiyu for her legacy of *Scriptures, Sutras, Invocations - Chanted, Spoken, and Unspoken*, and exploring further the many ways that these scriptures, sutras and invocations enrich and support our practice.

*I offer the merit of this Dharma Talk for the benefit of all beings,
known and unknown, in need of merit.
Homage to the Buddha. Homage to the Dharma. Homage to the Sangha.*