

## Harada Tangen Roshi

When I was young, I went to war as a Kamikaze pilot. I had firmly made up my mind to give my life because I wanted to protect my parents, my brothers and sisters and my friends. Other pilots went before me, giving their lives in that final flight. I waited my turn. My turn did not come. The war ended just when I was about to fly. I was devastated, because I could not carry out my commitment to help. I wasn't able to serve. I felt useless. All my comrades had given their lives and here I was, still alive, to what purpose? After that, again and again, just on the brink of death, my life was miraculously spared. You too are perfectly protected. It just isn't obvious to you. You are receiving all the care, protection and guidance and love of all the universe. You just haven't been able to see it yet, but you will.

Before I started my zenpractice my life was spared over and over, and yet I couldn't rejoice in life. I couldn't appreciate it, not yet. I felt only anguish and despair. Those who had died, was their death in vain? Did they die and that was it? These questions stayed with me. It took over my mind. It was during that time that I was fortunate to be given an audience with the great master who was to become my teacher, Daiun Roshi. He told me that first time that I met him that he understood my suffering. He told me that I could come to be in peace. I had sought to help those of our own country. I still wasn't able to see beyond the narrow category of my own countrymen. My view still so very, very limited. But he told me that first day that life does not end with the death of this body. True life does not disperse like a mist. Knowing true life you can be at peace.

My teacher told me: "You yourself, you are still alive, so that you can forever and ever, follow the path of giving. You can steadily ever, ever more, give your life to save others." Even with the death of this body, the genuine life continues. There *is* something that does not die. My teacher told me that if I really wanted to understand the meaning of life, eternal life, that it would take all the determination and effort that I could possibly muster. Without thorough-going single-minded determination and effort, you will not be able to know Truth, to find the solution to your question, your problem. You will not realize truth if your aim is unclear and if your practice is weak. If you are going to think along the way that you have given all you could possibly give, you won't make it. You must continue, continue this one doing. He told me, as I tell you today, that my resolve must be absolute. I must be prepared to persevere with single-minded conviction and effort. I knew then that I would carry through. Will you carry through?

That is not to say that it was always easy for me. I struggled mightily, as you struggle. But I stuck with the practice. The one single way of practice. I made no excuses for myself. I did not allow my practice to fade out in feelings of discouragement. There were rough, rough times. Even times when I thought I was not going to live through it. But I stayed with the practice, no matter what. And this is what each one of you must do.

I remember that there were times when I could no longer breathe, times when all went dark before my eyes, times when I thought I was going to pass out. But even then I refused to give in to my old self-centered patterns of behaviour. I did not try to adjust the practice to do it my way. I stuck with the simple practice that was given to me.

I cannot stress enough to you the absolute importance of sticking to your practice no matter what. No adjustment is required, no calculation is needed.

I went through the same thing that you are going through now, so I can tell you from personal experience what you must do. You must give your life to *this*, and refuse to let anything, any

thoughts, ideas, attitudes, get in your way. Your “yes” must be open. Your resolve must be of steel.

(...)

Even though some people seem to be blessed and joyous, that doesn't mean that they have or that you have true peace of mind. Not deeply, not really. So ask yourself: are you really going to be all right, no matter what?

There is a stone here in the graveyard upon which these words are carved: “We were once just as you are now, you will become as we are now.” How is that? The fact is: everyone passes on. Impermanence is swift. No matter how blessed you may feel in your present circumstances, how easygoing, how secure and pleased you are: you cannot hang on to that world. It will be jerked out from under you. Impermanence is swift. The lining of your present life is death. The problem of life and death is no one else's problem. It is yours to deal with.

And then there are the many desires. You can't get what you want, it never seems quite right, never enough. Dissatisfaction and frustration seem to surface. There are so very many people who worry about what would seem to be no problem at all. Liberation from suffering. The more you know of this world, the more you see it to be a giant exhibition of suffering. Everywhere you look, you see plenty of examples of misery.

What about you? Have you no pain, no suffering, no worries, no fears? If you honestly think: “Hey, not me. I can meet it as it comes, go with the flow, I am not afraid, I can always be at peace,” then you *are* fooling yourself, giving yourself license, seeing yourself for what you are not. You are caught up in a self-notion, clinging to an ego-idea. And lost in that self you cannot hear the cry or see the tears of others. If you can overlook those tears, you are not a person of great peace of mind.

The depth of Truth is bottomless. Your interconnection is bottomless. A single grass in the field is perfect Buddha. How utterly one are all things. The grasses, the trees, the great earth, the great sky, all being is born in relation to all things. This is the true self, the perfect self. No matter what: all is goodness. However, because of deluded perception beings fail to realize their inherent Buddha-nature. Truth is universal and complete. Can you receive and embrace thoroughly this one truth?

(...)

There is something urging you to look deeper, something which seeks to be known: don't you see it yet? Isn't it clear yet? You are sitting here because you cannot help but seek truth. The genuine seeks to know itself. Truth is seeking truth. That is why you are here, putting heart and soul into meditation. Your time of awakening *will* come. *No one* is hopeless. Life is not mean. No one is left out. There is no one who is more or less Buddha than any other. True nature is never lost, never hidden from you. It only seems that you have to go looking for it.

But you have long lifetimes of fooling yourself, protecting your self-cherishing. When you have come to life again, to awakening, it will be so clear that there is no “self” and other.” There is no opposition, just this one reality. What appears as opposition is simply the result of the self-centered view, which is of course the incorrect view. This bad habit and wrong view causes untold suffering, for yourself and for others. And you will continue to create suffering

as you go on living in falsehood. You will continue to experience suffering, fear, a sense of lacking, and you're not helping anybody.

What you think you are, who you think yourself to be is so entirely mistaken. Grasping "self" you obviously fail to see who you really are. You try to hold what cannot possibly be held, for where is there anything fixed? Change is swift. Because you try to hold on you feel so much anxiety, it's inevitable. How could you know true satisfaction? Dissatisfied you look restlessly out here, out there. Your base-camp is "I, me, mine." You grasp it, you seek to rely on it. You are relying upon a phantom. You grasp this phantom-self and ceaselessly try to satisfy it. What lengths do we go through to gratify the self. We get what we want for a time and then we lose it, up, down, up and down. We try to rely on our clever thinking. How could there be any true peace of mind? How could you even begin to give to the great universe as you receive? Your compassion could only remain half-baked, locked as you are in "I, me, mine." You are doing your practice because you have determined to receive life as it is, to come home to Life. You *will* meet with true self.

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We human beings rely on our discriminating intellect. How arrogant we are. "This is mine, this is what I deserve, credit should come here, this is the way it should be." We compare in contrast and in so doing we shrink our world so small. We get so down on ourselves. We feel so very sorry for ourselves. And, by turn, we are so proud of ourselves. We wonder why the world doesn't turn as we think it should. We become so dark and down and then we joke to cover our insecurities. Lost in self we can't help wondering "where is the value of this, what am I doing this for?" We wonder if there is any meaning in what we are doing.

What about you? Are you clear, crystal-clear, about what you are doing? What are you living for? Birth, aging, illness and death come quick. Your world as you know it is pulled out from under you in a flash.

It seems no time ago at all that I first met my teacher Daiun Roshi for the first time. I could only judge the world by my own hard held beliefs. We have to break through this, to see the beauty. And here, some fifty-five years have flashed by. Now, here. All the universe is embraced in the One. I can assure you that all is well. All eternity is now, here. Bold, clear, dignified. Now, here, so vivid, so alive, filled with joy, waiting for you to see it. "I will do whatever I can to benefit another." This is just life as it is, naturally.

Please, please see it: *everything* is alive. Great, great Alive. This is the happiness of all happiness. And this "now here" can never be destroyed. The light of your eternal life is shining brightly, *now*. What joy there is in this radiance. Please, take care of yourself, your shining Buddha-self. Become ever more able to appreciate your Buddha-self. That is not to say be arrogant. There is nowhere anyone to feel small, no one to be made small, no one to feel superior, no one toward whom you could feel superior. So who are you to feel vain and proud when your very source is all being? You are supported, you are nurtured, you are guarded by all being. Thanks to all being, together, one, is all the universe. This breath is breathed, so close, always one, always together. Please never forsake the limitless treasure which is you yourself. Be in touch, simply do not look away. Grasp nothing, hold nothing. There is just now, here, fresh, new, alive. Now. Just do you practice with all good grace.