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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

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A.C.N. 005 701 806 A.B.N. 42 611 496 488

33 Brooking Street, Upwey, Victoria 3158, Australia

Email: wbu@bdcu.org.au

Website: www.bdcu.org.au

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May You Be Well And Happy

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Summary

This narrative is based on teachings provided by an anonymous Ch'an Master about a very famous Haiku by Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), a poet who perfectly reflects the spirituality of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism.

THE USE OF MASTER BASHO'S HAIKU (HOKKU) FOR MIND TRAINING

Originally, Haiku meant a versifying amusement done by two or more persons. Hokku was the first half of the improvised poem, but it developed into an independent art of composing something humorous.

Master Basho gave quite a different tone to both haiku and hokku. Basho's poetry in its religious background was a union of Tendai philosophy with the naturalism and quietism of Zen and Taoism. (1)

A Ch'an Master, who wishes to remain anonymous, has given the author permission to use his Teaching delivered to his Disciples. The Meditators' minds are guided by the Master's skillful use of a commentary on Basho haiku. To preserve the request of the anonym, the Teaching has been edited.

The Teaching

We hear the sound of cicadas coming in and out, crying. With what heart do they cry! Basho wrote a poem about it. He said:

Ah! the Stillness
Penetrating into the rocks;
A cicada's chirp.

Basho did Zen wholeheartedly, looking for his true homeland wrote the poem that all of you know so well:

The ancient pond,
A frog makes the plunge:
The sound of water.

The ancient pond... can you really see Basho's old pond? Basho's old pond is the central point of this haiku - the old, ancient, ancient pond! If you don't see that old pond, you won't really hear the sound of the frog plunging into it.

Every year, we have the symphony of the cicadas. Some years it's blistering hot and other years it's pretty cool. Some years there will be winds and other years, it is still. Nothing changes. This nothing changing... If you see it and know it, then you know Basho's old pond.

Things always appear to be changing. These days they seem to be going pretty fast. The cicadas' voices seem not to change, but yet these cicadas are not the same as those singing last year, are they? The cicadas live three

years in the earth, getting ready to be born. And then they fly out into the world and they live three days! But they aren't lamenting their short lives. They're just singing their hearts out.

What is it that doesn't change? Where is it? The wind blowing gently, the cool breeze on a summer day, does it come from somewhere else? If you know that it doesn't come from somewhere else, then you know, too, that it doesn't go anywhere. The wind blows and there are some who say, "Ahhh, it's cool!" And there are others who take it for granted. And there are still others who don't notice the wind at all. How different the same world appears to each. The cool breeze in summer doesn't change. Yesterday and tomorrow is always included in today, always perfectly included. There's not a day that doesn't include yesterday and tomorrow.

A simpler way of saying this; that all of life is always right here, perfectly now. If there is today, then there is tomorrow and yesterday. Now is limitless - limitless past and eternal future. The depth, weight and value of now, today! This is what we have got to realize - to become aware of the depth, the weight, the value, the perfection of now.

We say, "Now/here," but just "now" is enough. The question is, "are you really alive, really living this now?" You are receiving all of the universe. This is the world that Shakyamuni Buddha awakened to - just this, just this perfect now, this perfect togetherness of now. This now, that Shakyamuni Buddha awakened to, is your life, the life of each and every one of you, with no exceptions. Everyone is living eternity. That's just how precious you are. If you awaken to the preciousness of what you are, then, if you receive one day of life or three days of life, like the cicadas, one day or three days is like receiving all of eternity. We say that if you don't awaken, then a hundred years of living is living without knowing who you really are, and how precious you are.

We have happy times and sad times, down times and sometimes miserable times, when we feel envy, hatred and anger. And there are waves of going up and down, when we all experience like the moss on the ground. What we have to know, what we have to search for, is the ground that the moss is part of. Otherwise, if we just stick to the surface, to the up and down, we can't be certain of anything.

So, we are here to seek that which is certain truth, your own truth, the truth of your own existence. That truth is everything in the universe, this person and that person, people who are close to you, people who seem very, very far away. All people are living one life - this is certain. The lives of all beings are one. When we awaken to this, then birth and death don't touch us.

Living this now, years of life is now, here, completely one with everyone, with everything. No limits; no distance, no walls. All beings are endowed with the wisdom of Buddha. All beings are Buddha. The crying of a baby, the crying of cicadas, the frog that jumps into the pond. That pond, a frog, plunge. You must smile at its calmness. This is living the Pure Land, thankful for cool breezes here, now - the wind of your true life. It's just for you to open the window and let it blow through.

We step onto the path - Ahhhhhh!. Basho's poem:

Ah! This path
With no person travelling it;
The autumn twilight!

Please walk carefully, step by precious step. Treat the world with your heart in gassho (chorus). That is living your days in the Pure Land. Ryōkan's (Soto Zen Master) death poem:

What shall be my legacy?

The blossoms of spring,
The cuckoos in the hills,
The leaves in autumn.

Dedication

May this Teaching benefit many beings. With a deep sense of gratitude for permission to publish the Ch'an Master's Teaching, the author wrote an appreciation as follows:

WIND BLOWS
WIND STOPS
THE MOST VENERABLE MASTER
SAID: THE WIND OF YOUR
TRUE LIFE.
BODHI DHARMA IS NO CLOUD

THANK YOU.
John D. Hughes

References:

1. History of Japanese Religion, M. Anesaki, Pub. Charles E. Tuttle Co. Japan, 1963 pp.291 - 293.