

In the Buddha's teachings, in the sutra that he himself wrote called the Dhammapada, in the very first stanza of that sutra he writes, "We are what we think, having become what we thought. The person who has difficult thoughts will have rough times which will follow them like the tracks that go behind the wheels of a cart. We are what we think, having become what we thought. When we have pure thoughts, our gladness will never leave us like the shadow which follows an object." What these words of the Buddha are teaching us is that we are born into this world to realize and experience our truest mind, our deepest original Mind, our True Master. To encounter that and experience it, to realize it directly is the reason for us being alive; it is what we have come into this world to realize. While saying that and knowing that we are endowed from the origin with this clear mind, it's not such an easy thing to experience it. Everybody has times of being angry, has times of complaining and being dark, even though we know it is not so easy to be in this place of pure, clear mind. And for that purpose many different religions have held many teachings sacred and important to be able to help us return to and realize and encounter this clear mind.

I understand this building we are gathering in is honoring St. Francis, with whom I have a deep connection; I have been to Assisi three times and been very much touched and moved by the way of mind of St. Francis, when I was there. As for St. Francis, his way of living was that of receiving alms and not holding any personal possessions but living in a way of entrusting completely. This way about St. Francis has influenced me. When he was served, in order to not be attached to material things if someone served him a delicious meal, he would sprinkle ashes on it so he wouldn't find it too tempting to be attached to. That was because St. Francis was aware that all human beings are susceptible to limitless desires, and it was one of his ways of practicing and prayer that he didn't want to be caught in that net. And he lived in the way of realizing the Beatitudes: "the Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." In this way of ongoing purification of his mind, that was one of the main points in how he lived his life.

There was a Zen master named Master Unmon in the T'ang Dynasty, and Master Unmon spoke to his assembly. It was the 15th of July probably, and he said, "I don't say anything about the days before the 15th of this month, but what I ask of you is to tell me one thing, say one thing, about the days to come. I don't want to know about what's already happened, what's gone. But tell me one statement, one word, one phrase, about from now on."

Now what this was probably about was the fact that when a person goes into training, traditionally in those days, for three months they cut off all relations with the outside world, and in those days they simply concentrate on the deepening of their practice. It's that day, the 15th of July, that that next three-month period begins. Before that period begins there is a part of the practice where every monk, every person in training, looks over and reviews their behavior. They look carefully and see how it has been in the time before that. And they can have the opportunity in front of their senior people to express how they could have done it differently, how they reviewed their behavior. People senior to them would say, "I remember how you acted on this day, and it would be better do be doing this..." It was a sincere check with people and with their own behavior. And from that day forward, from the 15th of July, the new training period would begin.

Year after year he would ask them this question, every year in July when the new training period came. And maybe he had many answers, maybe he was given answers, but none of them met his standards. And finally he had to say, "OK, nobody is giving the right answer to this question. I'm going to answer it for you." And his answer to that was, "Every

day is a good day.” And when everybody hears that our shoulders relax, we’re relieved to hear that every day is a good day.

But actually these words are slightly terrifying. And that’s fine if everything is going our way, so we could say, “Every day is a good day.” But we all know that we’re not going to live our whole life with everything going our way. We may have days when we run into a big sickness or some kind of natural catastrophe or war. We can never know what it’s going to be, and can we really say, no matter what has come to us on any given day, that every day is a good day? And while we look at it from this angle we can see that these are not just simple words to get the deeper meaning of. And if we look around and see how conditions are in this world, and the very situations that we run into, it’s not so easy to say that every day for everybody is such a good day.

This is not just a phrase about the days which we are happy to be thinking about, when those are a good day. There are days when we have all kinds of things coming to us, and at that time can we really let go of our anger and our greed, our delusions, our difficulties, can we say that every day is a good day?

To be able to become that state of mind we have zazen. To be able to realize that place in our clear mind where no matter what comes along we’re able to not be moved around but rather, to extinguish those flames of greed, those flames of hate, those flames of delusion, to enter the serenity, the true, deep mind of serenity, of the state of mind of nirvana. Zazen is the practice which allows us and helps us to go prior to that hate and that greed, that anger and that delusion, to know that place where those aren’t the point, where those are not what we’re involved in.

And that is what Master Unmon is teaching to his assembly: We’re not talking about what happened up till today. They had done that, they had gone over their behavior, they had reviewed it and seen it together. But from today how deeply can we live in that clear state of mind? How thoroughly can we not be moved around by our anger, how thoroughly can we not be moved around by our greed, how thoroughly can we not be moved around by our delusion, by our ignorance? Can we do that? and to do that is what he’s asking them to do in saying this.

We live in a world where our life is accompanied by pain, by suffering, by sadness. We do. We lose the person who is most important to us, or we have to live with the person we dislike the most. Or we can’t get what we think we really want more than anything, no matter how hard we try. Or we yearn for something so much but no matter how much we yearn for it we can’t get it. And to be seeing no matter who it is we are, we are all subject to birth and sickness and old age and death; there are no exceptions on this.

This is what Unmon is referring to: Don’t we all suffer from days when we can’t resolve this? If we can’t cut all that extraneous thinking, that anger and that greed, then we get crushed by our emotions. And that is why we have to realize and become that state of mind of knowing that every day is a good day, and with that knowing to cut through all of those things that are encumbering us in life, where suffering can come so easily, by realizing that it is in letting go of those emotional attachments that allow us to be in the state of mind where every day is indeed a good day. Not pulled around by things, but neither are we caught by things. In this way we can see how to move through it by not being pulled around.

Sometimes this state of mind can sound a little chill when we're not really feeling our lives. Somebody really close to us has died and everybody is saying, "Oh yeah, every day's a good day." But it's not so important to not feel these things; it's not the point at all to be told not to have any emotional response to things, but rather, not to be caught on those things and to know what it is that is prior to those emotions. So feeling them and acknowledging them and holding them precious, but to know where they come forth from. This is where the importance is of how to be in the state of mind of every day is a good day. We are born with this clear mind. We are endowed with it from the origin. But it's not about throwing away all of our history. Rather, to live a new, fresh state of mind all the time. We are made up of six billion cells and every single one of those cells is saying, "Let's live! Let's live!" Not to be drawn into an emotional place where we are drowning that but to be alive in a place where we know the source of all of those emotions and what it is to live.

Doing zazen, with each and every breath we cut away all our extraneous, unnecessary thinking and we don't pick up extra ideas about things, judgments, dualistic perceptions about things, that we don't need, that we're always carrying around with us. We don't get caught on our smaller, egoistic views, but then are able to see with our huge, spacious, original mind with which we are all endowed. As it was said before in the Beatitudes, those who are pure mind will be able to see God. Becoming one with the heavens and earth, then we can receive that truth and live from that place where we can see that truth and know directly that source of the whole universe.

And when we can realize and experience that place where there's not one single speck of anything extraneous in our mind whatsoever, then spontaneously and naturally we from the bottom up know of that deep love for all existence. It has always been there and we can experience it directly. In the middle of the deepest despair, to in this way see and contact and experience that huge state of mind that we all are, and within that, touching our deep mind we know our infinite capability we are all endowed with.

In these words, "Every day is a good day," is the ability to cut away all of those things that are extraneous, and from there realize that deepest faith, trust and belief we are already endowed with in that clarified state of mind. In what's called "Zen Phrases" or "Words of Zen" are almost always words that help us revitalize that clarified state of mind. It is my deep wish and vow that everybody will be able to feel that, not mentally but to experience it along when I make these calligraphies. Thank you.