

Raise the Bodhi Mind

from *Appreciate Your Life* by Taizan Maezumi Roshi

IN HIS PRECAUTIONS ON PRACTICING THE WAY (Gakudo Yojin-shu), Dogen Zenji emphasizes the importance of raising the bodhi mind. Dogen Zenji expresses it beautifully: We raise the bodhi mind not just one time but a hundred times, a thousand times, ten thousand times. Raise that bodhi mind!

All of you are raising the bodhi mind. What *is* bodhi mind? It literally means enlightened mind, awakened mind. The very first time that you decide to seek the very best way to live is beginner's mind, very fresh, first mind. Brand-new mind! And each time that you seek the very best way to live, you raise the bodhi mind. When you raise the bodhi mind, at that time you are awakening yourself. When you raise that mind the first time, at that very moment the Way is perceived. The mind with which you seek enlightenment is also the bodhi mind, the mind of enlightenment.

Seeing the impermanence of life is also raising the bodhi mind. What is this impermanence? Everything is constantly changing. If we say that anything is permanent, it is not quite right. But is this true? I believe in something that is permanent. I truly believe that the life of this *it*—this Buddha nature—is permanent in the sense that it is always here with me, as my life!

Shakyamuni Buddha expounds this in the *Lotus Sutra*:

Even though as an expediency I enter into nirvana, my life is not going to be extinguished. Constantly, I am residing here [at Mount Gridhrakuta]¹ and unceasingly expound the dharma.

What is constantly residing here? What is the life of coming and going and yet never leaving? How is Mount Gridhrakuta realized in your life right now? Wherever you are is the place where Buddha expounds the dharma. So raise the bodhi mind, that mind of the enlightened heart, and see this impermanence of life that is constantly residing here!

In his *Precautions on Practicing the Way*, Dogen Zenji emphasizes the importance of faith. He says that when you practice the Buddha Way, you must have faith in the fact that you are already in the midst of the Way! There is no confusion, no wavering; it is very straightforward. Keep away from all upside-down views. In our life and the life of the buddhas and ancestors, is there any part that must be increased or decreased, added or subtracted? No

such change is necessary. There is no mistake or error. Your life in the midst of the Way means that your life is the Way itself! Have faith in this! *This* life is the life of all the buddhas and ancestors. They have all experienced their lives in this way.

Dogen Zenji is so kind. He does not tell us just to blindly believe in the Buddha Way. First, he says, raise strong faith in the fact that your life is one with the Buddha Way. Then, clarify this! Experience the Way as your life and experience your life as the Way. Transmute that faith into wisdom and according to that wisdom, practice! You do not need to worry about when you are going to be enlightened as the result of your practice. Trust yourself! You are no other than the Buddha Way itself to begin with!

In Zen practice we speak of three prerequisites for practice: great faith, great doubt, and great determination. In a way, these are contradictory. If you have great faith, where does great doubt come from? When you really have great faith, that is enough. But a person who has such great faith is hard to find, for it must be faith that you and the Buddha Way are one, not faith in something that comes out of your own thoughts. This is an important distinction, do you see?

Great questioning, or great doubt, is to investigate this very point. You say, "The Buddha says such and such; Dogen Zenji says such and such; I believe in such and such. And yet, somehow I can't really accept how my life is. Where do I get stuck? Why can't I have such majestic faith that takes care of everything?" The more you seriously penetrate into faith, such questions will simultaneously occur.

So you question, what is this? What is great faith? What is the Buddha Way? What is the dharma? Who am I? What is it? The more serious faith you have, the more serious the questioning that may or may not arise. If this questioning does arise, it is ideal to focus on. Then the third prerequisite, great determination, naturally follows. The more serious you are in resolving this matter, the more desperate you feel, the stronger your determination becomes, and a clearer, quicker answer is realized. What is that answer? The answer is already there as your life. Your life is no other than that!

By such an awakening, you assure yourself that this life has always been the Way. The awakening experience is important, but relatively speaking, it is rather minor. What is more important? This life that we are constantly living minute after minute is most important. Our practice is here! Now! How to do it? In fact, you are doing it. Please, I do not know how to say it: focus or unfocus. Focus in the sense that this life is the life of the buddhas! Live it and clarify it! On the other hand, if we are trying to figure out what to do with our so-called limited or confined conscious mind, then unfocus. Let go of that. Forget about it!

Have good trust in yourself. Have good faith in your practice. Sit well and unconditionally open yourself up. Experience your zazen as the zazen of the buddhas and the awakened ones. This is the most effective, most appropriate life to share together.

1. The location where the Buddha preached the *Lotus Sutra* (referred to earlier as Vulture Peak)—Eds.