

Shakyamuni Buddha:

He wore the same robes and held the same bowls throughout his lifetime. From the time he began teaching he was not alone even for a day or for an hour. He did not reject offerings from humans and devas. He was patient with the criticism of people outside the way. Wearing the pure robes and begging for food, the Buddha's lifetime of teaching was nothing but continuous practice.

Parshva:

Parshva was in his mother's womb for sixty years before his birth. Did he seek the way in the womb? Eighty years after his birth, he left his household to study the way. It was one hundred and forty years after he was conceived. Although outstanding, he was older and more frail than anyone else. In the womb he was old and after birth he was old. However, he did not mind people's criticism and had unrelenting determination. That is why after only three years his endeavor to attain the way was fulfilled. Upon seeing him and being inspired by him, how could we be slack in our endeavor? Do not be hindered by old age and frailty.

Mazu:

Mazu, when expounding dharma and saving people, did not say anything that might discourage anyone from practicing zazen. Whenever new students arrived, he would allow them to intimately receive the mind seal. He was always the first one to engage in communal work and was not lax even when he was old.

Yunju:

When practicing alone in his hermitage was fed by a heavenly being, but when he went to practice with Hongjiao the heavenly being looked for him for three days and couldn't find him. He was able to let go of that supernatural support and devote himself to continuous practice.

Among the buddha ancestors of the past, many received offerings from devas. However, after they attained the way, the devas' celestial eyes could not see them and demonic spirits could no longer communicate with them. Be aware of this. When devas and gods follow the practice of buddha ancestors, they have a way to approach them. But when buddha ancestors actualize going beyond, devas and gods have no way to find and come close to them. So Nanquan said, "As I lack the power of practice, a spirit is able to find me." Know from this that to be seen by spirits means that your power of practice is lacking

Changqing:

He said, "I lived on Mount Gui for twenty years. I ate Mount Gui's rice and shit Mount Gui's shit. I was not studying the words of Ancestor Guishan [Lingyou] but was just taming a water buffalo, wandering around all day long." Know that raising a single water buffalo is the sustained practice of living on Mount Gui for twenty years. Ancestor Guishan had studied in the assembly of Baizhang. Quietly think about and remember Changqing's activities of those twenty years. There are many who study Guishan's words, but the continuous practice of not studying the words of Ancestor Guishan is rare.

Zhaozhou:

Zhaozhou once said to the assembly, "If you do not leave the monastery in your lifetime and do not speak for five or ten years, no one can call you speechless. Even buddhas would not know what to make of you." Zhaozhou expresses sustained practice in this way. You should know that not speak for five or ten years may have the appearance of being speechless, but because of the merit of do not leave the monastery and do not speak, it is not the same as being speechless. The buddha way is like this. One who is capable of speaking but doesn't speak is not like an ordinary person who has not heard the voice of the way. Thus, unsurpassable continuous practice is not leave the monastery. Not leave the monastery is total speech that is dropping off. Most people do not know, nor speak of, going beyond speechless. No one keeps them from speaking of it, but nevertheless they don't speak of it. They do not discover or understand that to go beyond speechless is to express thusness. How regrettable! Quietly engage in the sustained practice of not leave the monastery. Do not be swayed east or west by the winds of east and west. The spring breeze and the autumn moon of five or ten years, unbeknownst to us, have the ring of emancipation beyond sound and form. This voice is not known to the self, not understood by the self. Learn to treasure each moment of sustained practice. Do not assume that not to speak is useless. It is entering the monastery, leaving the monastery. The bird's path is the forest. The entire world is the forest, the monastery.

Xiangyan:

Xiangyan cultivated the way with Guishan. When Xiangyan tried to come up with one phrase of understanding, he could not utter it even after trying several times. In anguish, he burned his sutras and books of commentary, and took up the practice of serving meals for many years. Then, he climbed up Mount Wudang, to visit the remains of Huizhong, National Teacher Dazheng of Nanyang, and built a retreat hut there. One day when he was sweeping the path, a pebble flew up and struck a bamboo. At the crack he suddenly had realization. Later he became abbot of the Xiangyan Monastery and maintained the practice of one bowl and one robe. He lived his life discreetly in this monastery of extraordinary rocks and clear springs, and rarely left the mountain.

Linji;

When Linji was at the assembly of Huangbo, he planted cedar and pine trees with Huangbo. Huangbo asked him, "Why are we planting so many trees deep in this mountain?" Linji said, "First, for the landscape around the monastery. Second, as a landmark for later generations." Then he hit the ground twice with his hoe. Huangbo held up his staff and said, "That's why I have just given you thirty blows." Linji heaved a deep sigh. Huangbo said, "When you receive my teaching, it will flourish in the world." In this way, know that when they planted cedar and pine trees after attaining the way, they were carrying hoes in their hands. When you receive my teaching, it will flourish in the world is a result of this. Transmit person to person and directly point to this ancient example of planting trees. Both Huangbo and Linji planted trees.

Yellow Emperor, Emperor Yao, and Emperor Shun:

Dogen's commentary:

In the continuous practice of the way of buddha ancestors, do not be concerned about whether you are a great or a modest hermit, whether you are brilliant or dull. Just forsake name and gain forever and don't be bound by myriad conditions. Do not waste the passing time. Brush off the fire on top of your head. Do not wait for great enlightenment, as great enlightenment is the tea and rice of daily activity. Do not wish for beyond enlightenment, as beyond enlightenment is a jewel concealed in your hair. If you have a home, leave your home. If you have beloved ones, leave them. If you have fame, abandon it. If you have gain, escape from it. If you have fields, get rid of them. If you have relatives, separate from them. If you don't have name and gain, stay away from them. Why should you not remain free from them, while those who already have name and gain need to give them up? This is the single track of continuous practice. To forsake name and gain in this lifetime and practice one thing thoroughly is the vast continuous practice of the Buddha's timeless life. This continuous practice is bound to be sustained by continuous practice. Love and respect your body, mind, and self that are engaged in this continuous practice.

Even when you are uncertain, do not use this one day wastefully. It is a rare treasure to value. Do not compare it to an enormous jewel. Do not compare it to a dragon's bright pearl. Old sages valued this one day more than their own living bodies. Reflect on this quietly. A dragon's pearl may be found. An enormous jewel may be acquired. But this one day out of a hundred years cannot be retrieved once it is lost. What skillful means can retrieve a day that has passed? No historical documents have recorded any such means. Not to waste time is to contain the passage of days and months within your skin bag without leaking. Thus, sages and wise ones in olden times valued each moment, each day, and each month more than their own eyeballs or the nation's land. To waste the passage of time is to be confused and stained in the floating world of name and gain. Not to miss the passage of time is to be in the way for the sake of the way.

Once you have clarity, do not neglect a single day. Wholeheartedly practice for the sake of the way and speak for the sake of the way. We know that buddha ancestors of old did not neglect each day's endeavor. Reflect on this every day. Sit near a bright window and reflect on this, on mellow and flower-filled days. Sit in a plain building and remember it on a solitary rainy evening. Why do the moments of time steal your endeavor? They not only steal one day but steal the merit of many kalpas. What kind of enemy is the passage of time? How regrettable! Your loss of time would all be because of your negligence of practice. If you were not intimate with yourself, you would resent yourself. It is not that buddha ancestors lacked family obligations and attachments, but they abandoned them. It is not that buddha ancestors were not bound by relationships, but they let them go. Even if you are bound by relationships, you cannot keep them. If you do not throw away family obligations and attachments, the family obligations and attachments will throw you away. If you want to cherish the family obligations and attachments, then cherish them. To cherish the family obligations and attachments means to be free from them.

Part 2 Long story of Bodhidharma and Huike

A demon beat the bones of his own corpse for his unwholesome past actions, and a deva bowed to his own skeleton for his wholesome past actions. Thinking upon the time when your body will turn to dust or mud, you should care about the future generations without self-concern. Then, those who see your remains will be moved to tears. Even if you turn to dust or mud, leaving a skull that people might want to avoid, you will be very fortunate if you engage in continuous practice of the true buddha dharma.

Thus, do not fear the suffering from cold. Suffering from cold has never crushed the way. Only be concerned about not practicing. Lack of practice leaves a person divided and hinders the way. Do not be put off by the suffering from heat. Suffering from heat has never crushed the way. Only be concerned about not practicing. Lack of practice leaves a person divided and hinders the way.

The Buddha accepted an offering of barley for horses as food for himself. Sages of olden times lived on bracken in the mountains. These are excellent examples for both buddhas and laity. Do not be like a demon looking for blood or milk. A day of fully engaged activity is the continuous practice of all buddhas.

Reflecting quietly, we know that even if Bodhidharma had come from India thousands of times, without the continuous practice of Huike there would not be a great number of students and practitioners today. Now, as we see and hear the true dharma, we should express our gratitude to Huike. Most ways of expressing gratitude may miss the mark. Giving up the life of your body is not enough. A castle is not solid enough, as it can be taken by others or given away to a family. The life of the body can be given to impermanence, a lord, or a crooked way. Therefore, none of these are suitable offerings. Continuous practice, day after day, is the most appropriate way of expressing gratitude.

This means that you practice continuously, without wasting a single day of your life, without using it for your own sake. Why is it so? Your life is a fortunate outcome of continuous practice from the past. You should express your gratitude immediately. How sad and shameful to waste this body, which has benefited from the continuous practice of buddha ancestors, by becoming a slave of family, and surrendering to their vanities, without noticing the fall! Or, the body may be mistakenly given to that horrendous robber, the demon of fame and gain.

If ever you value fame and gain, then be compassionate to fame and gain. If you are compassionate to fame and gain, you will not allow them to break the body that can become a buddha ancestor. Being compassionate to family and relatives is also like this. Do not think that fame and gain are phantoms and illusions, but regard them as sentient beings. If you are not compassionate to fame and gain, you will accumulate unwholesome actions. The true eye of study should be like this.

Thoughtful people in the world express gratitude for receiving gold, silver, or rare treasures. They also express gratitude for receiving kind words. Who can forget the great gift of seeing and hearing the Tathagata's unsurpassable true dharma, being aware that this is itself a rare treasure of a lifetime? The bones and skulls of those who did not turn back from this continuous practice are enshrined in seven-treasure pagodas, receiving respect and offerings by humans and devas. When you become aware of such a great gift, you should attentively repay the mountain of benevolence, without allowing your life to disappear like a dewdrop on the grass. This is continuous practice. The power of this practice is that you yourself practice as an ancestral buddha.