



"Sosaku" -- Japanese: Production; Literary Creation; Creative Writing
April 2017

Time

By: R. Toth/Sun-bin

What is time?
There are seconds, minutes, hours;
days, weeks, months;
years, decades, centuries.
There are periods, eras, and eons;
time never stops---or does it?
If we compare our life to that
of the universe,
we're not a blink of its proverbial eye.
We're not even a pre-blink muscle twitch.

I used to count my days in prison.
The numbers rose to the thousands;
too depressing.
I switched to calendars;
18 and counting.
That sucks too.
Focusing on each moment helps soften
the blow.
As long as I can make it through
this moment,
Time doesn't matter.

Timeless

By: Douglas Stream (Tojin)

When I read Sun-bin's words about time
I remembered what Dogen Zenji taught
about time and I felt compelled to share
it. Dogen wrote in Uji (The Time-Being)
that: "The way the self arrays itself
is the form of the entire world. See
each thing in this entire world as a
moment of time. Things do not hinder
one another, just as moments do not
hinder on another. The way-seeking mind
arises in this moment. A way-seeking
moment arises in this mind. It is the
same with practice and with attaining
the way. Thus the self setting itself
out in array sees itself. Thus is the
understanding that the self is time."
As Sun-bin said, "We're not even
a blink in the proverbial eye of
the universe", however as inmates
"serving time", time is certainly
something we consider a great deal.

Time according to Dogen, is experienced from moment to moment; actual experience occurs only in the present. Past was experienced in the past as the present moment, and future will be experienced in the future as the present moment. Time passes and things do not remain unchanged. A moment seems to be an extremely small segment of a long span of time. Yet past is remembered as past in the present moment and future is experienced as future in the present moment. Each moment carries all of time. Thus a moment has an aspect of timelessness. In this respect, "now" is eternal.

The Arch of Two Hands

Ras Uhuru (Norman C. Green, Jr.)

The mind needs only the barest hints and the most subtle of ambient influences before it can be catapulted on a fascinating journey.



1. Before you enter the arch, you smell distinctive flavors of flowers mixing together, fusing strawberry/vanilla/maple.
2. The smells initiate a *want*, then...desire for breakfast or pastry snack or some blossomed fruit.
3. Your heartbeat speeds up a few notches in excitement & great expectation. Instinctively, you take a deep breath as soon as you take one step past the threshold.
4. You feel...as if you have stepped through a portal into another dimension.
5. You are absorbed in the culture as you yourself absorb and observe it.
6. Each step on the rock bed, your steps....a little lighter and you do so unconsciously
7. The subtle hum of the water tracing and trickling sub rosa down the laddered steps, traversing its own universe.
8. Sonorously dulcet to your mind, body and spirit. The flight of the colorful butterfly guides your vision and sight. Bubbles of the koi debut to the synchronized exhales of your scented breath, as if the strawberry/vanilla/maple has perfumed your mouth.
9. The curvy and wavy lines in the sand curve their crest and trough through the *hanami* snow display of pink rain and driest touch. Welcoming and moving you along nature's choice of movie or play.
10. The trees stabilize your thoughts and legs, creating comfort. The grass invites you to swim in its ocean and crawl in its ponds and lagoons. But picnic you will not on those precious green blades. And at this end is the end. The fragrance parachutes its presence !!! Par excellence, love--all bar none!
11. Those scents this time --could they cause a doldrum? For what shall be missed as memory catalogues this cataclysm, while making notations of hope for what hopefully --lies before you and your eventful return to the garden with the arch of two hands.
12. One hand extends from the heavens to earth. And one to the heavens from earth.

one to you and one to me
one from me and one from you

Is this the way we were created with two hands?
Zazen! For two paths?

Hanami: a Japanese term for flower-viewing, particularly the custom of strolling beneath the flowering arches of cherry blossoms in the spring.



in a word...persistence

I would like to introduce you to a friend of mine; the most important and influential friend I have. My friend's name is "persistence," maybe you recognize the name. So what is persistence? Rooting through the dictionary didn't provide me with a definition that acceptably matched the image of form for this essential characteristic that I have worked diligently to develop within me.

\Without persistence there is no meditation, there is no transformation. Without persistence there is no progress, no growth, no evolution, no love, no enlightenment.) Without a friend like persistence I am doomed to a colorless life of mediocrity.

To me, persistence is more than a friend--\to be of maximum effectiveness I must become persistence. To me, persistence can be described as an "unrelenting, unwavering determination to endure." Five words to summarize the essence of one.)

\As I filtered friendlessly through the ash and rubble of the life that I had destroyed, I came to realize that if I were to have any chance of success--and the survival it would bring--that I had to make a friend of persistence. And I did, it wasn't easy, but I made that friend.)

\Persistence is the will to continue into the teeth of the storm; to endure the trials, tribulations and seemingly insurmountable odds to survive, flourish and grow. Persistence is the unrelenting will to strive. Persistence isn't about winning, it isn't about results, persistence is having the unwavering determination to take just one more step, the next step in the transformative journey. The courage to take that step and to take it now. If that isn't what life is really all about then I don't know what is. So what is persistence? I am persistence, as my friend became me.)

Michael Schinkten
R.G.C.I.

Thinking for Change -- Tomyo -- Roberto Coronado

Some people resist change more than others. In small or big ways, we all do. It is a well known phenomenon which in physics is called inertia. Every physical body will stay in the same path until something happens, friction, a collision, a disintegration, something must happen to change the trajectory of a body. Otherwise, it will not change on its own.

The mind has lots of inertia, too. For example, I've known only one way to tie my shoes or brush my teeth since age five. I always use the same familiar sequence because it is just that, familiar. Behaviors are all the same. Once learned, they resist change.

The mind is a complicated world in which thinking, feeling and doing things are all interconnected. Think of the mind as a gigantic safety net laid under the path of a trapeze artist to prevent her from getting hurt if she falls. The mind is a well affixed safety net to support your flying persona, your identity and your sense of how to feel, conceive and respond in every contingency. If it feels safe it is because it keeps us safe. But "safe" does not mean "always safe" or "safe forever."

For many, me included, inability to change has boiled down to fear. Fear to perform unsafely on the trapeze of life. Fear to step out of the comfort zone provided by the old and familiar ways. Fear of not being in the world as I have come to enjoy it. There is fear in doing things differently and pride in doing well what we already know how to do. Pride comes from being an expert at what we do, and to be viewed as an expert by others. Think of the "cool cat" in your prison unit. His attitude, the way he connects with people, the way he talks and moves. He is an expert at "being cool." Unknowingly, he, you, me, we have all perfected our ways of being in the world for years, decades in fact, ever since birth. For that reason, because we have rehearsed so much, change is not easy. It requires work.

What kind of work? For starters, thinking work. Thinking for change is the name of a program in my institution that provides mental tools to interrupt old familiar ways of doing things. Every time we react poorly, or we bottle up anger or magnify or minimize events, a new thinking routine is put in place to interrupt and redirect thinking.

There is nothing new in using thoughts to intervene before they cause us trouble. Buddhists have been doing this for twenty-five centuries. It's what we do when we sit to meditate, repeat sutras, practice the bodhisattva's precepts, act selflessly and prop up empathy. This is what no-self means. Giving up our old familiar ways, rocking the mind's inertia, denouncing the sense we have that we are always in the right and that there's no need to do differently.

Dependent origination challenges us to never forget that everything is connected to all else. Mentioning the self is the same as talking about your character, your social

persona, the way you sway, talk and live, everything. Self is who we are, and all we do carries with it the stamp of approval of the self. You cannot change part of it. Only changing all of it will do.

The good news is that "all of it" does not mean "all of it at once." Our Buddhist practice is a practice for life which gives plenty of time to work in small increments. The better news is that after awhile, a new inertia sets in by which we come to view continuous change as a new normal. A new way of being in the world. It all starts with thinking for change.



Purification of the Mouth

May the guardian jewel of speech
expel the impure air in us.
May the guardian of our tongue
Direct us to say what is upright.
Let our health be enhanced
and the spirit be cultivated.
May the guardian of our teeth
help us to retain the good and reject the evil.
May the guardian of the throat
let out the tiger's roar.
May the guardian of vital energy
nourish the sweet nectar.
May the guardian of the mind hasten the
completion of the golden elixer,
and help us to understand the mystery
of the origin.
May the guardian of thought cultivate
the sweet saliva,
so that the breath of the Tao
will stay with me forever.

This is one of the seven Taoist purification chants. It reminds me to be conscious of what I think and say at all times. This is exactly the same as what the Buddha taught, right thought, right speech.

What we think becomes what we say and do. Guard your thoughts and words at all times and you'll remain sure-footed on your path.

R. Toth/Sun-bin
R.G.C.I.



There is Nothing Lacking

In wandering through the Tao te Ching on my journey I came across, "When you realize there is nothing lacking the whole world belongs to you." Truer words of wisdom were never spoken. To me, the causal aspect of this epigram, "when you realize there is nothing lacking," speaks volumes unto itself. That sums up the elemental essence of my practice, my journey---the realization that nothing is in any way lacking---that things are as they should be without the need of my intrusive concerns or intercessions.

The pressure is removed; a weight has been lifted and along with it the stresses and strains inherent in the expectations of everyday demands vaporize. Nothing is lacking---including you, including me. When I truly realize that nothing is lacking I am free to breathe, free to live, free from the restrictions of self, free to discover new lands.

The second half of the quote, "the whole world belongs to you," appears as anticlimactic. On first glance it almost sounds like it licenses materialism but that illusion, like all illusions, lies fragile only on the surface waiting to be dissolved. "The whole world", and more importantly, the "belonging" metaphorically represent an infinite limitlessness that comes in mirrored reflection associated with the understanding that "there is nothing lacking."

And so it is stated, eloquently, simply: "When you realize there is nothing lacking the whole world belongs to you." Remember that if it touches you, memorize it---consider making the depth of its message an integral part of your own essence along the way on your own journey.

Michael Schinkten
R.G.C.I.

Knowledge

We live in a world where the selfless sharing of knowledge is no longer a virtue. The more knowledge you give away, the more will come to you. The more you hoard, the less you will accumulate. Be compassionate to others. What do you have to fear by being open and sharing your knowledge?

R.Toth/Sun-bin
R.G.C.I.

MEETINGS OF THE DOC SANGHA

RCI

New teacher should begin in
April. Check with Chaplain

TCI

Penney Johns
8:00 - 9:00 a.m.,
weekly

KMCI

Meru Doug Szper
9:30-11:00 a.m.
1st, 3rd & 5th Thursday of the month

WSPF

Steven Spiro
Buddhist Study Group
Every other Thurs. a.m.

FLCI

Jan Sheppard
Schedule TBA
Check with chaplain

RGCI

Koshin Bob Hanson
9:00-10:30 a.m.
1st & 3rd Friday of the month

NLCI

Koshin Bob Hanson
1:30 - 3:30 p.m.
1st & 3rd Thursday of the month

DCI

Paul Norton
9:15-10:45 a.m.
3rd Tuesday of the month

WCI

Paul Norton
12:30 - 2:00 p.m.
3rd Tuesday of the month.

CCI

Koshin Bob Hanson
12:30 - 2:15 p.m.
3rd Monday of the month

SRSTC

Koshin Bpb Hanson
5:45 - 7:45 p.m.
One Wednesday each month

REECC

Larraine McNamara-McGraw
Penney Johns
12:30- 2:00 p.m.
Thursdays

OSCI

Steven Spiro
Jan Sheppard
1:00 - 2:30 pm.
Every other Monday

WRC/WWRC

Manju Bill Frackelton
MEN: Wednesdays
2:00 3:00 p.m. Study Group
3:00 - 4:30 p.m. Service
WOMEN: Thursdays
8:00 - 9:30 a.m.

GBCI

Shojin Be Alford
Mondays
8:00 - 9:00 a.m.

Sosaku is published four times annually by the Milwaukee Zen Center. Our goal is to present an opportunity for the Buddhist practitioners in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to share the teachings of the Buddha. It is our hope that through your submissions a message of compassion, understanding, and tolerance will develop among all prisoners, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike.

Submissions may be in the form of articles, essays, letters, poetry, and artwork. Artwork should be of a size requiring little reduction, preferably no bigger than 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 11. Thanks to everyone that contributed. The deadline for the August issue is July 20. Send Material for consideration to:

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