

Praise This World to the Angel
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This world — complicated, beautiful, and painful — is the world of our awakening. Our awakening is *made* of this world just as it is. All of it. Awakening doesn't come from some other realm like a bolt from the blue and you don't go to some other realm when you awaken. Your awakening is the unfolding of an ability to see what has always been here. To see more and more reliably those aspects of things that have been hidden. It is seeing what is in front of you. It is seeing this world more precisely.

Awakening is not static. It's not the same through all time and space. It co-evolves with us. Every time someone or something awakens, awakening itself changes. It used to be in the old stories that people were awakened by the *tock* of a stone hitting bamboo, the view of peach blossoms blooming across a chasm. Now people awaken on freeways, in the third *Matrix* movie — best review I ever heard, two thumbs way up. It doesn't stay the same. Your awakening is not my awakening. My awakening couldn't possibly be the same as yours because it wouldn't be yours if it were. By the way, the world doesn't care at all how you awaken, so don't be a snob about it. Don't be fussy. Take whatever the world offers.

The truth is that you're already awakening. It's true that sometimes it happens like a flash of lightening. It also happens, more often, like a flower whose petals slowly unfold over time.

If we think we have a clear idea of what awakening is, if we have a fixed opinion about it, we might miss the way it comes, at the movies or on a freeway.

There's an old story we've told before about the man who decided that he would sit down and begin meditating and he wouldn't stop until he saw Krishna. Krishna saw this and was moved by the man's dedication and perseverance so he decided that he would manifest himself to the man. He walked up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder. The man said, "Go away, I'm waiting for Krishna."

Throw away whatever ideas you have about your awakening. Throw away the idea that it is fixed and unchanging and will make you fixed and unchanging, eternally happy, eternally blissful, eternally peaceful. Whatever you fantasy is, throw it away.

If you have had tastes of awakening and they were beautiful to you, throw them away too. People sometimes think that when they begin to open, when they have a taste of the vastness, their job is to get back there, to get back to that moment again. We become like Orpheus, descending into the underworld trying to find Eurydice. Trying to bring back what is already gone.

Orpheus turned to look at Eurydice as they were coming up from underground, and in turning to look at her she disappeared back into the underworld. You can't find your awakening behind you. You cannot find it in what is already gone. You can only find it in front of you, exactly in this world, exactly as it is in front of you right now.

If you are a painter and you've learned how to do something particular with color and line, you don't think *I have to go back to the moment I learned about color and line, that's the true thing*. A painter realizes that she is now the painter who understands something about color and line. The gift has already been given and the gift has already changed. It is already becoming what the painter does with it.

It's the same with the nature of your awakening. Don't limit yourself by thinking you have to get back to something. You are the person who has already experienced that. You are the person who already knows that. You are the person already awakening. Be *that* person. Move forward with that. We have to embody the gift, not expect it to save us.

Which of these versions of yourself is likely to be more helpful? You're a dissatisfied seeker who is certain you know what it is you are looking for and have great doubts about ever being able to find it. You've developed elaborate defense mechanisms to guard against the doubt you're feeling about whether you will ever be able to find it. And because you've got the defense mechanisms against the doubt that you'll ever be able to find it you're sure you know exactly what it is before you even start on the road. Does that sound familiar? Because of all that, you live in a primary ambivalence about the search you are on. Okay, that's a common version.

Here's another version : you are someone with no big ideas about what you are doing, where you are going, or what you're looking for. You're someone comfortable with *I don't know*. In being comfortable with *I don't know* you become open to whatever presents itself, in whatever way it does. In being comfortable with *I don't know* you have some kind of implicit faith that all you have to do is walk. You know that you are not looking for the path of

awakening, you are already walking on it. You are this person, in this place, on the path of awakening. These two versions of yourself, this is something you have power about. You can choose one or the other.

If you are already walking the path of awakening, if there is some awakening already within you, what's it like to live like that? If awakening is what you want, why not live what you already have? I want to talk about one or two aspects of living as though you are already awakening.

An old Chinese teacher Huangbo said, "Compassion really means not thinking of others as needing to be saved." As soon as you hear it, don't you just know that's right? When we think of others as needing to be saved, what a separation we are making between ourselves and those others. All of a sudden there is a doer, an act, and a done-to. There are all kinds of ideas about what we might do and what might work. Maybe that is not a good place to start. Maybe Huangbo was on to something.

I want go back to Rilke again tonight, to suggest a kind of relationship with others that might be close to our own experience of awakening. Rilke talked a lot in both his prose and his poetry about 'Things' with a capital T. About what they are, how we come into relationship with them, and how we might become intimate with them.

Rilke has some of the most perfect definitions of what *tathagata* is. We have been talking lot about tathagata these last two retreats, which is really seeing things for exactly what they are — our projections, our opinions, and our ideas dropping away — so that the thing itself is vivid. The thing itself fills the universe and we see that. We turn on each 'Thing' what Simone Weil called "a just and loving gaze." That's tathagata, seeing with a just and loving gaze.

Here is Rilke on that :

These Things, whose essential life you want to express, first ask you *Are you free?* (Isn't that wonderful? *Are you free?*) Are you prepared to devote all your love to me? And if the Thing sees that you are otherwise occupied with even a particle of your interest, it shuts itself off. It may perhaps give you some slight sign of friendship, a word or a nod, but it will never give you its heart, entrust you with its patient being, its sweet sidereal constancy, which makes it so like the constellations in the sky. In order for a Thing to speak to you, you must regard it for a certain time as the only one that exists, as the one and only phenomenon, which through your laborious and exclusive love is now placed at the center of the universe.

That laborious and exclusive love which places thing after thing after thing after thing at the center of the universe, that is tathagata and that is your awakening. They are the same thing.

What gets in the way of this kind of relationship with things? Well the first and easy answer is what the old Buddhists called, in shorthand, *dukkha*, which is the unsatisfactoriness of things. But if we think about that for even a second, the problem is not the unsatisfactoriness of things, it's rather our feeling that things are unsatisfactory that gets between us and other things.

If we are walking this path of awakening, and if we know that it does have something to do with freedom, what would it be like to look not for what's unsatisfactory, not for what's wrong with someone else or a situation, but to look for what freedom already exists or might be possible in the situation?

When we come at things with our ideas and our projections and our preconceived plans, we can feel how we are bound by that. Can you feel how you bind everything else with it, too? If you look at me and I remind you of your difficult father, I am as bound as you are by that in your heart-mind. I have as few possibilities in your heart-mind as you do. If you drop the projection suddenly I am free and you are free and there is no telling what becomes possible.

This afternoon you read Rilke's *Ninth Duino Elegy*. One of the things I think he is doing there is pressing against our identification with the thought world, with our ideas about things, our projections. He pushes against our identification with our ideas, our belief that our ideas are ourselves. In bringing things themselves up, Rilke moves from the process of our thinking to nouns, to stuff, to tathagata. He says :

Perhaps we are *here* in order to say house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window — at most column, tower ... But to *say* them, you must understand. Oh, to say them *more* intensely than the Things themselves ever dreamed of existing.

This is tathagata : house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher. Seeing each thing filling the universe, piece by piece.

We were talking last night about how Rilke loved Cezanne's paintings because Cezanne didn't paint *I love this*. Cezanne painted *Here it is*. That's what Rilke is talking about when he

says *Move to the nouns. Move to the things. Here it is. Here it is.* Thing after thing after thing after thing with none of our ideas, none of our projections between us and them.

We can find this freedom when we come into a tathagata relationship with things. Again, it's not bringing something new in, it's experiencing what's already here. The freedom is already here, we just miss it. All we have to do is stop missing it. We're back to when the barrier stops you, when you can't move forward or backward or stand still. When the barrier stops you, the only thing you can do is become the gate yourself.

When he was asked, "Who are you?" Zhaozhou answered, "East gate, west gate, north gate, south gate." We see things as tathagata when we are free of what binds us. We are north gate, south gate, east gate, west gate. Then all the gates are open for whatever wants to come in. For whatever bit of the world wants to present itself to us.

When we open the gates we open to the possibility of co-creating with the world. The world comes into us, the world penetrates us, fills us, and we diffuse into the world. In that mutual mixing, something new is possible. Something that never existed before and will never exist again. Right around here is something so important about the human task. Let's just suppose that the human task is not to be saved by jumping out of this world and into the vastness, but exactly the opposite : becoming free so that we can tow the vastness into this world.

Rilke had a stunning image to express this. For him it was as though the universe were an immense blind angel looking into itself, looking into the universe, but unable to see. Our job as human beings is to praise this world to the angel. To describe this world, to reveal it, to that vast blind angel, who longs to see itself.

One of the ways he expressed that is like this, where he described how we convey tathagata to the angel who is tathagata itself :

Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one. You can't impress *him* with glorious emotion. In the universe where he feels more powerfully, you are a novice. So show him something simple which formed over generations; lives as our own, near our hand, and within our gaze. Tell him of Things. He will stand astonished as *you* stood by the rope-maker in Rome or the potter along the Nile.

Here it is. Here it is. Here it is.

In another place he said:

It is our task to imprint this temporary, perishable earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its essence can rise again, invisibly, inside us. We are the bees of the invisible. (We are the bees for that blind angel.) We wildly collect the honey of the visible to store it in the great golden hive of the invisible.

What would it be like if our relationship with the vastness was not that we will be saved by it? What would it be like if instead our relationship with the vastness is somehow to bring it into this world? To take that blind angel by the hand, walk around, and say *Here it is, here it is*? Praising this world is seeing the tathagata of everything, and it's our freedom. This process of revealing the world to the blind angel is how we make our awakening our own, our particular and irreproducible expression of getting free. If we bring the vastness into the everyday we make something happen that can't happen in any other way.

There is a woodworker. One day he is noodling around in his shop and among the scraps of all the jobs he's been working on suddenly he sees puzzles and games. He begins to make intricate puzzles and games out of wood scraps, revealing something to the blind angel, bringing something new into the world. Here it is, here it is.

Someone works with children with learning disabilities. She finds their ability to read, uncovers it so that it is revealed to them. Here is our dharma, this process of revelation for each of us that we extend to each other. What we reveal will be different for each of us, just as our awakening is different for each of us.

Awakening would be here without us, but it wouldn't be the same. It wouldn't be the same without you. Already it lives inside of you, already you live inside of it. Here it all is. Everything co-evolving, things revealing each other, this world, the world of your awakening.