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Right posture

The popular culture of America pays a great deal of attention to sports, and we are into the play off season for baseball, the start of the NFL, and tennis and soccer continue throughout the year. We give a great deal of attention to these, and what always strikes me when I think about sports, is the importance of posture. The batter keeps his eye on the ball and has a particular posture about batting. People have posture in football, and it's the same in tennis. There is a particular posture for each of the sports. There is a posture for playing musical instruments, a particular posture that allows you to do the best with that particular instrument. And of course posture is particularly important in meditation. If you were to ask, "What is the most important thing in meditation?" I would have to answer "posture!" It's the key thing.

I also want to add that I feel that posture was an extremely important aspect of those men lasting seventy days in the mine in Chile, because although posture is about the body, posture is also about the mind. The mind and body are one and reflect one another.

Last April, I gave a talk saying that we are not trapped. The notion of being trapped is a wrong thought in spiritual practice. At that time I was talking about the miners in China who were in a landslide, and we had had some people in the United States' mines also. Then not long after we have this event in Chili, and it is a remarkable story of heroism, faith, trust and community and real Mental Posture.

I don't know how I would do in such confinement. We have here tonight 31 of us, nearly the amount of people who were in the mine. So, let's stay here together for seventy days !! And see how we do together!! Imagine, all of us in this room, seventy days in this space, in blackness. Seventeen of those days we would not know whether anybody was searching for us. And we would ration this meager amount of food among thirty-one people, and remain composed, remain trusting one another and not panicking. Above the ground, the rescuers were about to give up after two weeks, and the women pleaded with the president of Chili, and said, "We can see them, and we know they're alive." They could feel them alive - the wives and the mothers and the children could see them. So the rescue continued and on the 17th day, they found the men through a hole the size of a cup. They were able to send up a little written note that said "We're all here alive, 33 of us!" It's such a remarkable story! Finally on the 70th day to see them coming up in this phoenix capsule, is just so stunningly beautiful. The collaboration of countries, and the love and the composure is such a stunning teaching for all of us.

So, we have this question of posture: that they could be of such a mind together, to truly experience this cooperation and trust !

Of course there are all kinds of physical teachings around posture. If we sit up, it allows the breath to breathe, it allows us to oxygenate the body. Do that and you'll stay so much younger, longer in your life, just by oxygenating your body, by breathing in the correct way that the body is meant to breathe. Most of us have forgotten how to breathe properly. We have to be re-taught how to do that. It is also this nature of the energy then that works well in the body, when we sit in good posture. The energy is allowed to be properly exercised, and if somebody looks at us, it's a big difference in how we work together when we are confident and we hold ourselves well. We hold the body with the sense of respect and a sense of knowing and understanding the sacred nature of this vessel. The mind goes along with the composure of the moment. When we do sit up well, when we hold our posture correctly, and we breathe well, we are able to be present in the moment. Just here, now ! We often have absorption in something else, that is not exactly present right at the moment where we are.

Perhaps tonight you had just a little bit of exercise in that, because we put down all of our networking devices when we come into the Zendo. We sit facing the wall, and we give away all of that imaging that we see on these devices. We just put that away for this brief time to remind us what we are, and to remind us who we are. That we are Buddha-Nature, that we are not the made-up personality on Facebook that we suppose. Every single person intuitively knows that. Deep down we know that. We know that we are something more than the made-up self. We don't have to come to Buddhism to know that. We know it deep down in the heart's core.

So, our posture in Zazen says that Buddha Nature is who and what we are, and Zazen is about Awakening, Enlightenment, Realization. All those three words mean the same. It's about Enlightenment and actually we are the body of Enlightenment, the body of Awakening, when we sit in the posture. You can look at the statue of the Buddha and you can see that the Buddha is in this posture, a perfect posture that anybody can take. This posture of meditation is the most excellent energetic posture known to human kind! So whether we sit on a chair, or we sit on the cushion, when we sit in meditation in this practice, we are the whole body of Awakening, the whole body of Enlightenment. Of course, this is yet to be realized. Our practice is naturally to realize that, but we are already that. Because we are already Awakening, it's there for us to realize, it's not something that we apply to ourselves, we already are that.

I encourage right posture whether you continue to sit meditation or not. I encourage right posture in all activities, just for the development of one's mind and for the health of the body. No matter what your faith tradition is, I encourage that. We all need that kind of practice of composure in this very difficult society that we have right now, that is so full of turmoil, that is so full of easy reaction, and easy put down and argumentation and belittling, name calling and intolerance.

So this posture allows us when we are confronted with some situation, to remain composed. It allows us to be dignified. It helps us express the dignity that our spiritual traditions are teaching. Every single spiritual tradition is about human dignity, about respect.

But, we do have to practice it. We can't just think that it's there within the tradition, it really has to be exercised and practiced in the same way that a ball player has to practice looking at the ball and practicing his swing. In actually exercising and practicing it, we begin to develop the spiritual stamina that takes us through the potential for any kind of event. Anyone of us could get stuck anywhere, although most of us in this room are probably not spelunkers, so chances are that we probably don't get stuck under ground. But we don't know that actually. We live in a very fragile part of the country that could have cataclysmic disaster at any time, we could be buried under anything.

So the practice of presence, the practice of right posture and composure within whatever spiritual tradition we are, gives us some stamina for those times when it's called forth in us.

I just wanted to say those few words, I'm intensely grateful to have seen the last man come out of that amazing tunnel in Chile. Just to come up through that claustrophobic tunnel is pretty heroic, but there was not much alternative there. It was also an act of heroics for five men, five rescuers to go down there and to be with them, to help lift them up, and then to come back again. It's an astounding story of a great teaching for all of us.

I wanted to open this up to some questions. All questions are good questions. So what's on your mind ?

Student :.....What is wisdom ?

Teacher : Well wisdom is what we grow toward. It's always there, and available to everyone. It's very difficult to say what that is, because wisdom is a continual action that is available to us at any given moment. I can't necessarily arrest it and say "here is what it is," but if I saw it in action, I could point toward it. So it's a living pulsating ability in us to act in a way on behalf of the goodness of others, or ourselves. It's a way to be in the world on behalf of others. To make a better world. Again, nobody owns wisdom, and we might do something that has great wisdom in that action and the next moment do something really foolish. So it isn't something that we can necessarily arrest in ourselves, but we practice with it always, and as we continue to practice which is wisdom, we grow toward knowing that wisdom is our more likely direction. That is our practice. I think just getting older, my experience is, I'm not quite as foolish as I used to be. I can save for myself the trouble of repeating the same foolish activity, and that's wisdom. It's wisdom, not to continue in the same mistakes.

Student : The disciplined self is involved with our practice. Is there a way the practice can succeed in any other treatment?

Teacher : This practice is excellent for addiction, because every single person is addicted. It isn't just people who have alcohol or drug addictions, those are the ones we typically point to. But every single person has an addiction of one kind or another. This practice allows us to understand that that is not who we are. It allows us to let go of the habitual connections that we

have made around all kinds of things and not take another form of one addiction in order to get rid of the other addiction. It is to see into the nature of addiction itself, to see through it, and to allow ourselves to be released from addictions. So this practice is excellent for that.

We should all know what our addictions are. Maybe you never thought about it, because maybe you don't drink too much or you don't take drugs, that maybe you are not addicted. I challenge you in your life to look to what you are addicted to. What kind of thought patterns are we addicted to? Habitual addicting thought patterns that we have developed that are harmful, that undo us in our relationships, various foods, or all kind of things. There are all kinds of possibilities of addiction. When we really look at that, just as a study, not as a condemnation of ourselves, but just as an undertaking study of oneself - which is what Zen practice essentially is, study of oneself and to understand what we are doing in this life and how we are living - so just to know what that is, without condemnation, without pointing a finger at ourselves, to really, really, know ourselves. Zen practice is character development, that's what it's about. In that sense, once again right posture - just to tie this in a nice bow - gives us the opportunity to look in ways that are non-condemnatory, non-judgmental and are revelatory, that show us who we are, how we've been living, what we've been doing. Through this study of ourselves we are liberated, released from the continuous binds of suffering that we make in our lives.