

Chop Wood, Carry Water

We are collectively being forced to adapt to new challenges on a daily basis. That is the one constant in 2020. Most successful people are very goal oriented, but the lack of auditions and live performance opportunities has put a proverbial wet blanket on the motivation of many musicians. We can make new goals for ourselves during this time to satisfy the need for the dopamine release that accompanies our reward system, but I think this is a chance for another perspective shift. Western culture defines happiness in the materialistic context of “being or having”. People think that winning the job, buying the car, etc. will bring them long term satisfaction and the ever elusive “success”. The inherent problem with this attitude is summed up in a simple quote: “No matter where you go, there you are”. I believe this is originally attributed to Confucius, but I will always associate it with Buckaroo Banzai (The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension is a worthwhile watch for fans of 80s movies, and I believe far outperforms its 68% Rotten Tomatoes rating). Essentially, whatever circumstance you are in becomes your new “norm”, and whatever issues you brought with you will still be present when they cease to be masked by your change in circumstances, income, etc. The easiest visualization for this is the idea of the horizon. If it is your goal to reach whatever horizon is in view and define your happiness with this attainment, you are soon faced with the realization that there is ANOTHER horizon now in the distance, and the happiness you feel for the moment is replaced by the realization that there is something new out of your reach. There is only one antidote to this endless pursuit, but it has a decidedly non-Western approach.



The full quote that inspired the title of this article is a famous Zen Koan: “Before Enlightenment; chop wood carry water. After Enlightenment; chop wood, carry water.” These simple phrases defy outright understanding, but they force you to reflect and find a deeper meaning that may be difficult to clothe in language. For you it may mean something along the lines of “don’t look for satisfaction in external things; look within”. For me it has many meanings, but for my musical life it translates into a call to greater mindfulness:

Fall in love with the process of “becoming”.

Being present while practicing and performing is its own joy and reward. If you can’t find it now, any satisfaction in a new circumstance will be fleeting at best as you realize that “there you are”. The process of Becoming is by its very definition a journey without an end. It is one of the main reasons that I chose the life of an Artist. I didn’t want to wake up one day in my 30s and feel like I was punching a clock every day at work because I had done all there was to do and figured out everything there was to figure out. Of course, this inevitably leads to periods of angst and frustration as nothing permanent is ever attained. Clearly it is not all smiles and sunshine. This brings us back to the idea of “happiness”. Happiness is a state and not a trait. I prefer Joy. I am not “happy” when I am having a challenging, unfocused day of practice, but I can find joy in the struggle and the knowledge that I am participating in the process of becoming.

There is a sobering conversation that I have with many aspiring bass players. When I ask them, “What are your Goals?” if the response is “To get a Job”, I know we have some work to do. If your prime motivation is to “get a Job”, you will not “get a Job”. This usually causes a stunned look and awkward silence. If your goal is to become the best player/musician/Artist that you can, people will want to play with you. The path is focused on the process of growth itself without the constant need for an external reason “why”. Ultimately, I hope you come to the realization that it is not even about bass playing or music. How you do anything is how you do everything.

“Do what you’re doing while you’re doing it.
Don’t do what you’re not doing while you’re not doing it.”



FRACTAL FRIDAY TOPICS!

Please submit comments or suggestions for future topics to davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com

FRACTAL FORUM(S)!

IMPORTANT! NO FORUM ON 11/15!

Every Friday on Zoom at 7PM PDT!

Every SUNDAY on Zoom at 10AM PDT!

Visit www.fractalbassist.com to get the invite(s). Everyone is welcome at either or both times.

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This invite-only YouTube channel will be a continuation, development and place to share these ideas and principles. Although the entire Fractal Fingering course and samples are available online and at DiscoverDoubleBass.com, this channel will provide a forum for more in-depth content and to address questions on a more individual basis.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

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