# BEING UPRIGHT

## ZEN MEDITATION AND THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS

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REB ANDERSON

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## ALSO BY REB ANDERSON

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(Rodmell Press, 1999)

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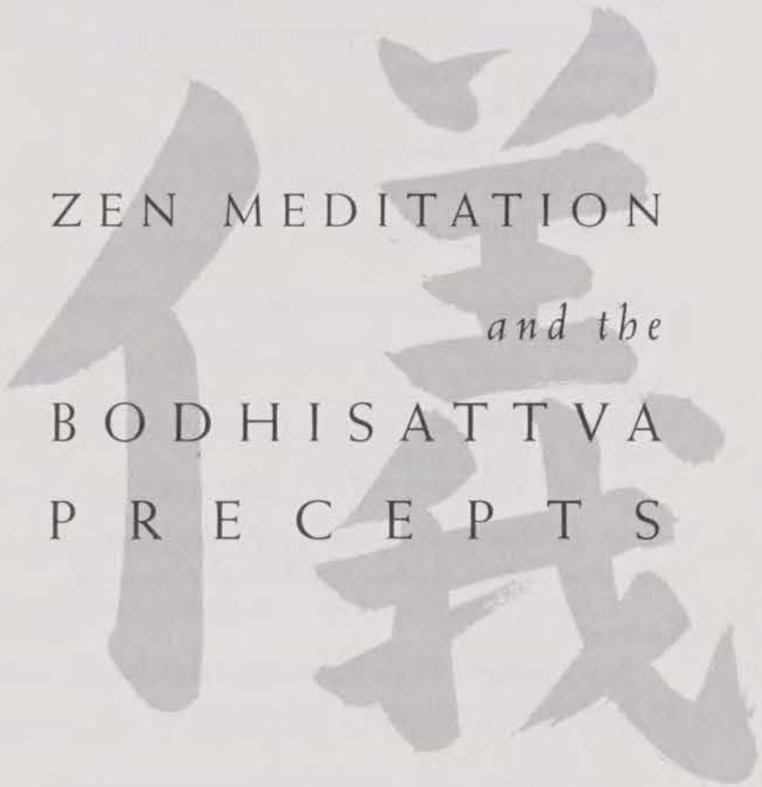

Reb Anderson

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# TO THE ANCESTORS OF UPRIGHT SITTING:

Homage to our great original teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, source of the bodhisattva precepts.

Homage to the radical liberator, Bodhidharma, who brought our bodhisattva precept lineage from India to China.

Homage to our lofty ancestor of eternal peace, Eihei Dogen, who expressed the essential meaning of the precepts in the Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts.

Homage to Eihei Dogen's great disciples, the priests Sen'e and Kyogo, who produced the Essence of Zen Precepts, presenting their teacher's deep meaning in the vast context of Indra's net.

Homage to the compassionate scholar-monk Banjin Dotan, who rediscovered the Essence of Zen Precepts and republished the light of the precepts for later generations.

Homage to the whole lineage of buddha ancestors who have received, practiced, and transmitted these precepts for the welfare of the world.

Homage to our compassionate founder in the United States, Shogaku Shunryu, who first conveyed the bodhisattva precepts to me.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I DID NOT WRITE THIS BOOK on my own. It is the fruit of the generous, enthusiastic, careful, and concentrated efforts of many people. This book evolved from a ten-year dialogue with my fellow dharma students, my family, my editors, and my publishers.

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For about a year I met with a group of Zen priests and read through Kazuaki Tanahashi Sensei's and my rough draft of the translation of the Essence of Zen Precepts. Our discussions were very helpful in editing the text. This group consisted of Eijun Linda Ruth Cutts,

Furyu Nancy Schroeder, Setsuan Gaelyn Godwin, Meiya Wender, Shoji Pat Leonetti, Taiyo Lipscomb, Taigen Leighton, Shosan Victoria Austin, Naiko Jordan Thorn, and Myo Lahey.

Once the translation was completed, Tanahashi Sensei suggested that I write a further commentary or give talks on these ancient teachings in order to make them relevant to our modern world. Following his advice, I gave a series of lectures on the text during a ninety-day practice period at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. These teachings were very well received, and many of the practice period participants enthusiastically encouraged the publication of this material. Several people expressed a willingness to transcribe the talks, but in the end it was Shosan Victoria Austin who did almost all the work. I deeply appreciate her immense effort and great devotion to the precepts in general and to this project in particular. After the talks at Tassajara, I continued to give lectures on various aspects of the precepts, such as confession and renunciation, and Martha Wax generously and skillfully transcribed a number of these.

The next step was editing and rewriting the transcriptions of the talks into a form appropriate for a book. During this stage, Setsuan Gaelyn Godwin went over the material with me—word by word, sentence by sentence—discussing, correcting, and revising until we were both satisfied. From this point on, Gaelyn continued to give help and encouragement in innumerable ways until the book was finished. My gratitude for her kindness, skill, and devotion is boundless.

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May all beings be helped in their endeavors as I have been helped in this one.

# INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, during my term as abbot, the Tibetan teacher Tara Tulku came to teach at the San Francisco Zen Center and asked me some questions about our practice. He asked me, "In your meditation, what is the object?" I said, feeling a little embarrassed, "Well, we don't have any object. We practice objectless meditation." And he said, "Oh. We have that objectless meditation, too, in Vajrayana, but it is the most advanced meditation. Usually practitioners work for many years before they can do objectless meditation."

He also asked me, "What stages are there in your training?" I said, "Well, in a way, we're mostly concerned with not falling into stages. It's part of our tradition." I told him the story of Seigen Gyoshi going to the Sixth Ancestor and asking, "How can I avoid falling into steps and stages?" And the Ancestor said, "What have you been practicing?" Seigen said, "I haven't even been practicing the Four Noble Truths [that is, I haven't even started the beginning practice]." And the Ancestor said, "Well, what stage have you fallen into?" And Seigen said, "How could I have fallen into a stage if I haven't even practiced the Noble Truths?"[1]

Then Tara Tulku said, "Wow! That's very advanced, to be working on not even slipping into or clinging to the various stages of meditation." And I thought, How subtle, how pure Zen is. Then he said, "Well, I talked to some of your students, and there are certain things about Mahayana Buddhism that they don't seem to know." While Tara Tulku was teaching at the Zen Center, he emphasized some basic aspects of the bodhisattva path, such as paying homage, making offerings, practicing confession, and the precepts. At that time, several people came to me and asked, "Why don't we make offerings

to buddhas and bodhisattvas? Why don't we pay homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas?" I said, "We do, every time we chant before a meal." And then they'd say, "Oh." These things were so built into our day that they took them for granted or didn't even notice them.

In a similar vein, Theravadin teacher Achaan Chah once remarked that the buddha dharma has three aspects: *dana* (giving), *sila* (precepts), and *bhavana* (cultivation, or meditation practice). But when Westerners come to practice, they aren't interested in giving or in precepts. They just want to do the meditation.

During the early days of Zen in the United States, most of us were primarily interested in sitting, which we considered the essential practice of the Zen school. We were not so explicitly or consciously exposed to the teachings of giving and ethical behavior, the first two practices of a bodhisattva. As a result of not being sufficiently exposed to these basic practices, I feel that our understanding of the fundamental intention of "just sitting" was incomplete.

In fact, a number of Zen teachings seem to encourage a reliance on *zazen* (sitting meditation) to the apparent exclusion of the precepts. The Zen master Rujing said, "We don't need to recite scriptures, offer incense, practice confession, and so on. Only sitting is required."[2] And Zen master Eihei Dogen said that in the true dharma, zazen is the straight way to correct transmission. Zazen is all the Buddha taught. Zazen includes all the precepts.

One of the beauties of Zen, especially as taught by Dogen, is that it emphasizes so strongly the pure, true, and ultimate teaching. But there is a provisional or conventional teaching also. Only if people are thoroughly familiar with the conventional teaching will they be able to understand the ultimate, true teaching.

## *My Personal Journey*

My own contact with Zen began in the 1950s. When I was in my early teens, *Life* magazine published a series on world religions. I

remember a photograph of a Buddhist sitting in a beautiful meditation posture. I was attracted by the simplicity of the dark rectangle of the human body on the tatami mats. The caption of the picture read, "In deepest thought." It made sense to me that our bodies should reflect the beauty and depth of our thinking.

It was later, when I was in college, reading stories about Zen monks and their extraordinary compassion, that I said, "I want to be like that." In these Zen stories I encountered dynamic examples of people who were doing good and being kind. And somehow they were accessible. The examples of compassion in Christianity were often too remote for me to think of emulating them, such as bringing somebody back from the dead or walking on water. That kind of doing good didn't seem relevant to my world. But doing good by being kind, or letting go of attachment, or being flexible in a helpful way, did seem relevant.

The more I studied and practiced meditation, the more grateful I felt to have found this sitting: so simple, so all-consuming, so all-embracing, and so effective. But practicing alone was difficult and inconsistent. I tried to get my friends to sit with me, but they didn't stay with it. Eventually, I realized the necessity of having the support of fellow practitioners and an experienced teacher. I heard about a group of people studying with a Zen teacher named Suzuki Roshi in San Francisco, and in 1967, at the age of twenty-four, I left graduate school to join them.

What was Suzuki Roshi like? I'm tempted to say that he was quiet, kind, attentive, and interested in everything, but these words don't describe him adequately. He was constantly changing. In one of the first talks I heard him give, he told us that he wasn't enlightened. I thought, Oops! I've given up my academic career and all my friends to study with this man, and now he tells me that he's not an enlightened teacher. But then I thought, He's still the best I have ever seen, so I'll stay. The next week he gave another talk, and this time he said, "I am Buddha," and I thought, This is more like it.

I wasn't really concerned about whether he was enlightened: I just wanted to practice Zen with him. I still do. I decided fairly soon in my practice that I would make myself available to him, and if there was anything he wanted to teach me, I would be there to be taught. I would make myself like a piece of furniture in his life that he would have to deal with.

The *zendo* (meditation hall) in the Zen Center's first location was on the second floor. There was a long stairway with banisters leading up to it. At the bottom of the stairway there was a newel post with a round top on it. Every time Suzuki Roshi went upstairs or downstairs, he would put his hand on top of the post for support. I wanted to make myself like that post. If he wanted to show me something, I was there to be shown. If he wanted me to help him, I was there to help. I didn't think of it in terms of doing things to get him to like me or to please him, but just to make myself available for whatever relationship was appropriate. I didn't expect him to be my friend, but I wanted him to be my teacher.

This way of relating to him worked very well, because he would call upon me to lead the chanting or make the offering during the service. In the Japanese tradition, learning is generally 80 percent watching and 20 percent instruction. Sometimes he would ask me to do these things without training me beforehand, because I was always there observing him. After two or three years of practicing closely with him, I asked him if he would ordain me as a priest. He said that he had been thinking about it himself, and a couple of months later my head was shaved and I was ordained.

My main motivation in becoming a priest was to be like him. The fact that one of the main components of the ceremony is receiving the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts was not important to me. Receiving the precepts was just part of the process of becoming more like my teacher. I wanted to be able to practice the way he practiced. I wanted to be able to respond in the compassionate way he did. I wanted to be intimate with the essence of his practice.

## XVIII BEING UPRIGHT

A month before I was ordained I became director of the San Francisco Zen Center's City Center, where he lived. I was also the *ino*, the person in charge of the meditation hall and the formal practice. Because I held these two leadership positions, I got to work with Suzuki Roshi very closely. From the earliest days of my practice with him, many questions arose in my mind. I would write them down in a notebook, so that whenever I met him, I would have questions to ask him.

He was always very accommodating. He never said, You're asking too many questions. But I sometimes felt that I was taking up too much of his time with my own questions and would restrain myself. Once I was in positions of leadership, I found many more questions to ask him, about caring for the temple and the meditation hall. But now I felt that the questions weren't just for me, so I didn't have to restrain myself anymore.

Because I was in charge of the building, I assigned myself a room next to his. Every time he entered or left his rooms, he had to walk by my door. I sometimes left my door open so he could stick his head in and comment on what I was doing. I became his informal attendant, and he would call upon me for various forms of assistance, such as changing light bulbs and repairing his television. I would check to see if the antenna was connected and the TV was plugged in, and I was usually able to fix whatever problems he had. He seemed to think I was an electronics genius.

In March 1971 he asked me to be his attendant for a *sesshin* (meditation retreat) he was leading in Portland, Oregon. During a meditation session he suddenly slumped forward and put his head on the ground. When I asked him what was the matter, he said that he had a tremendous pain in his abdomen. He asked me to finish leading the sesshin. At the end of the retreat, he was still in considerable pain and was spitting up bile. On the plane back to San Francisco, I found it difficult just to sit in my seat next to my suffering teacher.

When we got off the plane, his wife and his secretary were waiting. They offered him a wheelchair, but he said, "I don't need the

wheelchair: I'm a Zen master." At the time I wondered what he meant by that. When we got back to the Zen Center and went up to his room, he did something that I had never seen him do before. He untied his robe and dropped it to the floor. I thought that he must be in tremendous pain not to follow his usual way of carefully folding his robe. The doctor was contacted and an ambulance soon came to take him to the hospital. This time, instead of a wheelchair, a stretcher was brought. But he didn't say, I'm a Zen master: he just accepted the stretcher.

In the hospital he had his gallbladder removed, and although he didn't tell us at the time, it contained a malignant tumor. After he recovered from the operation he seemed to be getting better; in some ways, he seemed to be even healthier than before. But I remember during one of his talks, he turned and looked me right in the face and said emphatically, "Things teach best when they're dying." I thought to myself, Why is he saying that so strongly? I couldn't bring myself to understand what he was telling us about himself.

Around that time he was preparing to go to Tassajara, our mountain retreat center, for the summer. As it turned out, that was the last time he went to Tassajara. I heard from the students who were with him that he really poured himself out in his teaching. Although I did not hear those talks in person, I later read the transcripts of them. The talks emphasized the practice of the bodhisattva precepts. As he felt his death approaching, he gave more and more teaching on the Zen precepts.

When he came back from Tassajara at the end of the summer, he was exhausted and his skin was yellow. We thought he had hepatitis, and for a while everyone was very careful not to catch it from him. Then we found out that it wasn't hepatitis but liver cancer. He gathered his close students together and told us in September 1971.

Because my room was next to his, I had the opportunity to help him during his final illness. He no longer gave formal lectures or *dokusan* (practice interviews), but for a while he was still able to go to

the zendo and sit with us. Gradually, going up and down the stairway grew too difficult for him, and some of us would make a chair with our crossed arms and carry him up and down to the meditation hall or the community dining room.

He was receiving shiatsu massage and moxibustion from a Japanese priest who was living in the temple, and I asked him if I could sit in the room while he received these treatments. I said, "I'll be quiet. I won't ask any questions." He agreed. So I watched him being massaged and watched him respond to the little cones of herbs as they burned down on his back. When the masseur became sick, Suzuki Roshi asked me to take over. Because I had been there, watching carefully, I was able to step in.

Although I loved practicing with Suzuki Roshi in the traditional forms of Zen, these last months of being with him informally are inscribed in my bones. I was very fortunate to have a lot of personal contact with him. His illness progressed much more rapidly than anyone thought it would. Instead of having two or three years to live, he died about three months after the announcement of his cancer. He didn't take any painkillers, and he was in great pain. He said at one point that he felt as though he were being tortured. Although some of his capacities seemed to diminish, his kindness and concern for his students did not decrease. He continued his great teaching right to the end.

Zen masters often die in a formal sitting posture or even standing. Suzuki Roshi's way was to die reclining. He died during the first period of the meditation retreat known as *rohatsu sesshin*, which celebrates the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha. He died upstairs as downstairs 132 people sat upright in the meditation hall. His life flowed into the practice of his students.

## *The Essence of Zen Precepts*

In 1983, after sixteen years of formal meditation practice, I received dharma transmission and precepts transmission in a long and elabo-

rate Soto Zen ceremony of confirmation called *shiho* (inheriting dharma), which took seven days. In dharma transmission, you are given a robe, a bowl, and other ceremonial objects, and receive teachings that illuminate the practice of enlightenment. Through dharma transmission you become an ancestor of the tradition. You come to represent buddha's body. In precepts transmission you are entrusted not only with practicing and protecting the precepts, but also with continuing the bodhisattva precepts lineage. Through precepts transmission, you become the blood of buddha.

In the process of studying for this ceremony, I had my first glimpse of the deeper significance of the bodhisattva precepts. I read in a document called the Blood Vein *(Kechimyaku)*, "It was revealed and affirmed to the teacher Myozen that the precept vein of the bodhisattva is the single great condition of the Zen gate."[3] Receiving the precepts of the bodhisattva is the single, unique cause and condition of entering into Zen! I was surprised: this had not been emphasized during my sixteen years of practice.

For many years, even though almost every day I chanted the first three bodhisattva precepts—taking refuge in buddha, dharma, and sangha—I was not fully and consciously engaged in this practice. Now I learned directly from Dogen's mouth, "In the beginning, in the middle, and in the end, in your life as you approach death, in death, after death, and as you approach life, always, through all births and deaths, always take refuge in buddha, dharma, sangha."[4] This basic practice, so fundamental to all Buddhists, is one that many Western Zen students do not fully appreciate. And I wondered if we were really practicing upright sitting in accord with the fundamental intention that Dogen taught.

I began to search for writings and commentaries by other Zen teachers on the precepts. I remembered a Japanese text that Dainin Katagiri Roshi had recommended to me ten years earlier, the Essence of Zen Precepts *(Zenkaisho)*,[5] compiled by the eighteenth-century monk and scholar Banjin Dotan. At the time Katagiri Roshi warned

me that the understanding of the precepts presented in that text was so unusual that the text might not seem to be about the precepts at all.

The Essence of Zen Precepts is a compilation or interweaving of four different texts, which I envision as four concentric circles, each one including and amplifying its predecessors. At the center is the primary text of the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts. The second circle is a brief thirteenth-century commentary on the precepts by Dogen. This text, known as the Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts *(Kyojukaimon)*, is very important in the Soto Zen lineage. It is recited as part of our monthly confession ceremony at the San Francisco Zen Center.

The third circle is an exposition or amplification of Dogen's commentary, as taught by his successor Sen'e, and recorded and published by Kyogo in 1309. When, 450 years later, Banjin Dotan discovered this text, he was so deeply impressed that he republished it with his own preface, admonitions, and extensive footnotes. This fourth circle, which includes the three inner circles, is called the Essence of Zen Precepts.

A Buddhist scholar and friend, Dr. Carl Bielefeldt, helped me to locate Banjin's text, and I began the work of translation with the artist, translator, and peace activist Kazuaki Tanahashi Sensei. I was surprised and moved by the radical and compassionate understanding of the precepts expressed in this text. The Essence of Zen Precepts presents the bodhisattva precepts primarily from the perspective of their ultimate or liberating meaning (which is beyond doing and not-doing), and is less concerned with their conventional or literal meaning (what to do and what not to do). This distinction is of vital importance to this book, and will be explored further in Chapter Six, "The Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts: The Teaching of the Two Truths."

Initially, I considered publishing our translation, but after reading the admonitions at the end of the preface, I decided against it. In the preface Banjin warns explicitly that the text should not be sold in bookstores, should not be left lying about where an uninitiated per-

son can read it, and should not be given to those who have not received precept transmission. The message is clear: to receive the ultimate meaning of the precepts without being grounded in the conventional meaning is inappropriate and potentially harmful.

Yet I was deeply inspired by the liberating perspective of this text and wanted to make it available to a wider audience. I was encouraged by Tanahashi Sensei and many others to give a modern commentary, presenting the ultimate meaning within a broad conventional perspective, so that it could be appropriately received and practiced. In response to these suggestions and requests, I gave lectures and classes for four years; they served as the basis for this book. My intention here is to approach the precepts not as rules to be worried about, but as ways to realize Buddha's enlightenment and compassion.

Studying the Essence of Zen Precepts, I began to see the vital interdependence of meditation and ethical conduct, and how it is relevant not only to Zen practitioners but to anyone working in a socially responsible way and committed to a life of compassion.

If you are a person who devotes your life to the welfare of others—as a nurse, teacher, or social activist—meditation practice can protect you from burnout and open your eyes to a deeper understanding of ethical concerns. Bringing a contemplative dimension to your work allows you to honor your convictions while remaining open and flexible, even in the middle of chaos and confusion. If you are a parent or child, friend or lover, listening to the other with an unprejudiced heart, while fully expressing yourself, is a way of practicing the precepts that brings enlightenment into your relationships.

For the Zen practitioner, the bodhisattva precepts are not a side issue: they are at the core of the process of awakening. As Suzuki Roshi said, "Receiving the precepts is a way to help us understand what it means to just sit." When you practice the precepts, meditation comes alive. This integration of precept practice and meditation practice, whether on your cushion, at the workplace, or in a relationship, is what I mean by "being upright."

## XXIV BEING UPRIGHT

chapter one

# RECEIVING THE PRECEPTS:
## *The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony*

*What good is there in revering me and my teaching*
*if you are all the while violating the precepts?*
—Shakyamuni Buddha

THE SIXTEEN GREAT BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS are the gate to authentic Zen practice. They offer a way to bring the stillness and silence of sitting into active expression in everyday affairs, a way for compassion to enter all aspects of our lives. They are the life vein of upright sitting. These precepts are intended for those who dedicate their lives to the liberation of all living beings.

Shakyamuni Buddha and his successors agree that these precepts are not just moral or ethical imperatives or orders that are given by someone else and that we're supposed to follow. Rather, they are a map of buddha's world, and through them we can realize ourselves as buddha.

The Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts can be divided into three groups or sections: the Three Refuges, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Grave Precepts. The Three Refuges express our vow to take refuge in the Triple Treasure: buddha, dharma, and sangha. The Three Pure Precepts are vows to embrace and sustain forms and ceremonies, to embrace and sustain all good actions, and to embrace and sustain all beings.

The Ten Grave Precepts teach us to abstain from killing, stealing,

misusing sexuality, lying, intoxicating mind or body of self or other, speaking of others' faults in a disparaging way, praising self at the expense of others, being possessive of anything, harboring ill will, and disparaging the Triple Treasure. Put in a more positive way, the Ten Grave Precepts encourage us to protect and nurture life, to be generous and respectful of others' property, to use sexual energy in an appropriate way, to tell the truth, to maintain a clear mind and body, to speak of the virtues of others and our interdependence with them, to be generous in all material and spiritual matters, to practice loving kindness and nonviolence, and to respect and protect the Triple Treasure.

The Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts are recited as part of a number of Soto Zen ceremonies. In the bimonthly confession ceremony, which is one of the oldest Buddhist ceremonies, practitioners gather on the full and new moons and formally confess their past actions, pay homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and recite the precepts. In funeral and memorial services, the priest confers the precepts upon the deceased person. In the marriage ceremony, the precepts are recited by the wedding couple as they make their vows to live together. The officiating priest does not directly ask the couple if they will receive and continue to observe the precepts, but there is an implied commitment on the part of the couple to practice them in their marriage.

Giving and receiving the precepts takes place primarily as part of the bodhisattva initiation ceremony. During this ceremony, the officiating priest, known as the preceptor, gives the initiates the Three Refuges, and then asks them three times, "From now on and even after realizing buddhahood, will you continue this truthful practice of taking refuge in the Triple Treasure?" Each time they say, "Yes, I will." In the next section, the preceptor asks them, "Abiding according to these Three Pure Precepts, even after realizing buddhahood, will you continue to observe them?" Later they are asked, "Abiding

according to these Ten Grave Precepts, even after realizing buddhahood, will you continue to observe them?" Each time they say, "Yes, I will." The initiates are making a stronger statement of commitment than in the confession or wedding ceremony.

## *Who Is Eligible?*

Most people who take part in the precepts ceremony have been practicing Zen meditation regularly for at least three years, although some people who have been practicing intensively for six months might be ready. After being given permission to take the vows, there is usually a period of six months of preparation and practice before the ceremony. These preparations include sewing a *rakusu* (buddha's robe), studying the ceremony and the precepts, and doing other special practices, such as prostrations. Sometimes there is a week-long meditation retreat leading up to the ceremony, including lectures and discussion on the precepts and time for individual study.

From my point of view, anybody who understands the basic practice of taking refuge in buddha, dharma, and sangha is eligible to participate in this ceremony of receiving the precepts. Taking refuge means that you align and orient your life toward Buddha's example and toward enlightenment. You align yourself with the teaching of the enlightened ones, the teaching of selflessness, and the teaching of the precepts. You also align yourself with the community of those who are practicing in this way. Furthermore, you commit yourself to practice right conduct and to help all beings. You actively work on not killing, not stealing, and so on.

But the main sign of readiness is that students want to receive the precepts enough that they have the courage to ask for them. Making such a request is an ancient tradition. In asking to receive the precepts there is an admission that we don't practice all by ourselves: we need help from the whole universe in order to practice the way fully.

## *Asking for Help*

Some people sincerely want to receive the precepts but have difficulty making the request. Often people come to me and say, "I want to start sewing." For some reason it's easier for people to say that they want to sew than to say that they want to receive the precepts. Sewing, I guess, isn't a big moral commitment. So I say, "What do you want to sew?" They say, "A robe." And I say, "For whom do you wish to sew this robe?" They say, "Well, for me." I say, "You're going to wear the robe? Usually you receive the precepts with the robe." And they say, "Well, I want to receive the precepts."

Then I say, "If you want to receive the precepts, then I suggest that you ask for permission to receive the precepts." People often have a difficult time saying, May I receive the precepts? or Would you please transmit the precepts to me? When they finally ask that question, they often burst into tears. When you actually ask, "May I receive the precepts?", you touch something very deep in yourself. And people have a hard time showing the heart that wants to receive the precepts and knows that they need help to receive them. You're actually asking the Buddhist tradition to help you practice these wonderful precepts. It's a vulnerable, tender, and sweet moment.

It is hard for a lot of people to face up to what they're doing. They're taking a big step. They're dealing with something very important in their lives, and they're vulnerable in the process. They're putting themselves out there and saying, I want to be good. I want to practice like a bodhisattva. Will you help me?

The ceremony is also a time for your friends and relatives to witness your commitment. After the ceremony they sometimes ask, "Are you actually going to practice this?" I sometimes say to the community, "As witnesses, please help these people live up to the values that you heard them espouse today. Please support them. Expect this of them." That's another aspect of the ceremony.

## *What Makes You a Buddhist?*

I sometimes ask people who have received the precepts if they consider themselves to be Buddhists. Many of them say no. If I say, Do you consider yourself a Zen student?, then they're more likely to say yes. If I ask, Do you have a commitment to the practice of the precepts?, then they almost all say yes.

The precepts ceremony is a formal way to enter the Buddhist path. But some people, particularly those in the United States, don't like to be labeled an "ist": Communist, capitalist, or Buddhist. They feel more comfortable saying, "Yes, I am entering Buddha's way, but I don't think of myself as a Buddhist."

Other people don't want to get caught up in the institution. So I say to such people, "You can receive these precepts and still have no obligation to the Zen Center. You have an obligation only to the precepts." Each individual who takes part in this ceremony finds a different personal meaning in it.

## *The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony*

To provide the reader with deeper insight into the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts, this book follows the order of the bodhisattva initiation ceremony as it is currently practiced at most Soto Zen centers throughout the world. This ceremony has two main parts: preparation and receiving the precepts. During the preparation phase, the preceptor begins with an invocation and pays homage to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and ancestors of the precept lineage. After a formal renunciation of selfish attachments, the initiates receive a new name and a traditional Buddhist robe. Finally, there is the formal practice of confession, and the preceptor sprinkles water on the initiates and the assembly as a sign of purification. The initiates are now ready to receive the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts.

After receiving the precepts, the initiates are given a document

called the Blood Vein *(Kechimyaku)*, which is a list consisting of all the disciples of the precept lineage from Shakyamuni Buddha up to the preceptor of the ceremony and the initiate.

When we receive the precepts, we also vow to maintain them. We vow to *continue* to take refuge in the Triple Treasure, to practice the Three Pure Precepts, and to observe the Ten Grave Precepts. The precepts need to be continually maintained, because the conditions of our lives are constantly changing, and the significance of the precepts is different in every situation. The precepts have no fixed meaning. In such a changing world, how will we maintain these precepts after we receive them? Only by being upright in the midst of everyday confusion will we come to understand what the precepts are calling for at each moment.

chapter two

# ENTERING BUDDHA'S WAY:
## *Dependent Co-arising*

*Invoking the presence and compassion of our ancestors*
*In faith that we are buddha*
*We enter buddha's way.*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

IN THE BODHISATTVA INITIATION CEREMONY, we begin by invoking the presence of all great and enlightened beings. We invite them to sustain and support us as we enter buddha's way. We open our hearts and minds to their wisdom and compassion. We can practice this invocation on a daily basis, formally or informally, calling upon all buddhas and bodhisattvas to sustain us during the day in our practice and our everyday affairs.

What is the central teaching of the buddha's way, and how did Shakyamuni Buddha himself come to realize this teaching? Shakyamuni was born into a noble family in the foothills of the Himalayas in the fifth century B.C.E. His father was a ruling prince of the clan of the Shakyas, and the name *Shakyamuni* means "sage of the Shakyas." His mother died in childbirth, and he was raised by a loving aunt. His father gave him a very sheltered upbringing. He was not exposed to the natural course of events of life. He was protected from seeing people who were sick, aging, dying or dead.

But one day, when Shakyamuni was a young man, he managed to escape from this cocoon, and he saw for the first time disease, aging,

and death. He was deeply shocked because he realized that he would have to live through these things himself: thus he awoke to his own suffering. He had to admit that he was repulsed by the aging process, and he was embarrassed by his own discomfort. It didn't make sense to him that he should feel uneasy.

In his father's house, Shakyamuni had been very comfortable. Now he realized that there were tough times ahead, and he wasn't ready for them. He didn't like feeling so squeamish about normal things in life, such as the sores on an old man's body or the smell of a sickroom. He wanted to face life and death in a more dignified manner. He wanted to be free of his fear and discomfort.

So Shakyamuni left his family and his comfortable home in search of a way of coming to terms with the circumstances of life. He studied with a number of spiritual teachers and became adept at various practices that might lead to liberation from life's problems, but they didn't give him a contented heart. He was still anxious and ill at ease.

One of the paths that Shakyamuni tried was the way of asceticism and mortification: denying and negating his physical being. He didn't give himself adequate food, clean himself, or indulge his body in any way, in order to become free. He lived as an extreme ascetic for a long time, taking, according to legend, only a sesame seed a day, but he still did not understand much more than when he had started. He was on the verge of starving to death when a young milkmaid offered him milk with a little rice. When he drank it, life came back into him.

Shortly thereafter, Shakyamuni went down to the river to get some water. When he put his bowl in the water, it floated upstream, against the current. He realized that the time had come for him to settle the issues of birth and death. He resolved to sit beneath a tree and not move until he understood the things that were troubling him.

Shakyamuni sat down beneath a *bodhi* tree on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month. He was an advanced yogi and could sit for a long time in pain. But as he sat there, various demonic forces came to challenge him and tempt him to move.

One of the demons said, "Who do you think you are, to sit by your own power and realize the way?" This brought some doubt to his mind, and he thought, Maybe I'm being arrogant. I'll check with the Earth to see if I'm doing this on my own or together with the great Earth. So he touched the Earth with the fingertips of his right hand, and asked the Earth, "Do you witness and support my sitting still?" The Earth shook six ways, and a great roar came up from the Earth like a thousand voices saying, Yes, young man, you do not have to move from this spot.

Feeling the support of the whole Earth to realize the way, Shakyamuni was able to remain upright. During the night he attained various shamanic, or occult, powers: the divine eye (the ability to see what is out of sight); the divine ear (the ability to hear the inaudible); the knowledge of past lives; and the knowledge of other people's minds. Finally, in the middle of the night, he realized the nature of suffering, which he later expressed in the teaching known as the Four Noble Truths:

> This is suffering as it has come to be.
> This is the origin of suffering as it has come to be.
> This is the cessation of suffering as it has come to be.
> This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering
> as it has come to be.

As Shakyamuni meditated on the nature of suffering, his wisdom eye gradually opened. He saw that all things in the universe are deeply connected, mutually create one another, and therefore have no inherent, independent existence. He later called this vision *pratitya samutpada* (dependent co-arising). Everything is born and dies through the complete support of all other things. We are embraced and sustained by all beings, and we embrace and sustain all beings.

The future Buddha sat unmoving throughout the night, absorbed in this meditation on interdependence. He realized that suffering arises from the condition of not understanding the true nature of the self and its lack of independent existence. Again and again he

checked and verified this revolutionary insight, until he was released from all self-clinging. Finally, seeing the morning star at dawn, he was profoundly awakened and relieved of all suffering and distress. At that moment he said, "I, together with the great Earth and all living beings, attain the way at the same time."

Because of their interdependent nature and lack of inherent existence, all things together with their conditions are unattainable, mysterious, and inconceivable. Thus the newly awakened Shakyamuni cried out in joy, "Wonderful, wonderful, all beings in the world are buddha nature." Only through being upright could he face the awesome, overwhelming beauty of this dependently co-arising world. As the poet Rilke writes:

> For beauty is nothing
> but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able
> to endure,
> and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
> to annihilate us.[1]

The fundamental delusion of human beings is the belief that we exist separately and independently from the rest of the universe. There is the whole universe, a human thinks, plus something—and that something is me. Once we misunderstand ourselves in this way, it is inevitable that we will be primarily concerned with this isolated, precious self. We will single-mindedly focus on protecting and promoting our separate, individual welfare. Ignoring our close connection with all beings, animate and inanimate, we will act selfishly, through greed, hate, and delusion.

When we feel independent or separate from others, we feel anxious about whether they really care about us. We worry that they don't approve of us or support us, and we may be tempted to lie about what we think and feel in order to gain their approval and support. Feeling separate from others and feeling threatened by their lack of approval, we may deny who we really are.

Sometimes we feel an unwholesome desire or lust in a relationship because the other person seems so remote and unobtainable that we're afraid of losing that person entirely. In such a situation we might be tempted to misuse our sexuality, or to avoid our anxiety through addiction or intoxication. We might try to manipulate the situation to get something from the other person that he or she doesn't really want to give, which is a form of stealing. Whenever we deny our basic connection with other beings, the bodhisattva precepts are broken.

Dependent co-arising explains how suffering is born, and points to the way that freedom from suffering is realized. It is Buddha's teaching in a nutshell. By understanding how all things arise together, you shift from viewing yourself as acting upon and realizing all things, to a new vision of seeing all things coming forth and realizing you. You change from thinking on behalf of only yourself to thinking on behalf of all things. Instead of using yourself to realize the world, you see that the world uses you to realize yourself, and this is the same as the world using you to realize itself.

When you begin to understand interdependence, you're grateful for everything that happens in your life, because everything that comes to you is the buddha dharma, or Buddha's teaching. You turn toward the very situation where you feel pain and anxiety, with an intention to understand it more deeply, and you immerse yourself in the life of your present understanding.

If you were certain of interdependence, you would be happy to live together with all beings in the midst of suffering. You would no longer be afraid of suffering. You would no longer run away from the world, where people are deluded.

If you don't trust interdependence, then you normally try to get out of the world of delusion. You try to fix the situation by your own personal efforts. But trying to get out of the world where you suffer because you believe yourself to be independent only reinforces that same world. Those who understand interdependence are happy to

live in the midst of whatever life brings without trying to fix it by their own power. They understand that any sense of independence is simply an illusion, but that sense persists, given our human perceptual equipment.

Understanding interdependence, you do not try to distance yourself from any manifestation of life. No matter how painful it is, no matter how deluded, you do not feel separate from it, and therefore you don't try to get away from it. You also don't run after it. You just deal with whatever comes up without trying to manipulate, negotiate, or finesse the situation.

Being upright in the midst of whatever is happening is the way to understand Buddha's teaching of dependent co-arising. In being upright, you let your selfishness just be selfishness and your suffering be suffering. You don't try to change yourself or others. You don't try to improve yourself or others. You don't turn away from or lean into your suffering. You don't even prefer happiness over suffering. Then you discover that not meddling with the world of suffering is freedom from the world of suffering.

As Dogen says, "To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things."[2]

chapter three

# PAYING HOMAGE:
## *The Bodhisattva Vow*

*Homage to all buddhas in the ten directions*
*Homage to the complete dharma in the ten directions*
*Homage to every sangha in the ten directions*
*Homage to our first teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha*
*Homage to our succession of bodhisattvas and ancestors*
*Homage to Zen Master Eihei Dogen*
*Homage to Great Teacher Shogaku Shunryu*
*Now may their presence and compassion sustain us*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

AS PART OF THE INVOCATION of the bodhisattva initiation ceremony, we pay homage to every manifestation of buddha, dharma, and sangha in all ten directions, that is, everywhere throughout the universe. Then we honor all the teachers and great beings of our particular precept lineage, starting with Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, and continuing through Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, down through the ages to Suzuki Roshi, my first Zen teacher and founder of the San Francisco Zen Center, whose formal Buddhist name is Shogaku Shunryu.

Paying homage to this succession of bodhisattvas and ancestors, we not only praise them and ask for their support, we also make a gesture of commitment to follow their way. We align ourselves with the path of understanding and compassion that these ancient

ones followed. In this way we vow to become bodhisattvas.

A bodhisattva is a being who is selflessly devoted to enlightening others. This is the essence of Dogen's vow:

> Awake or asleep
> in a grass hut,
> What I pray for is
> to bring others across
> before myself.[1]

In the bodhisattva initiation ceremony, we do not say the bodhisattva vow explicitly, yet it forms the background for receiving the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts. During the monthly confession ceremony, however, and often at the end of lectures and classes, we recite together the Four Great Bodhisattva Vows:

> Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them.
> Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.
> Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them.
> Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

The first of these four vows, "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them," is the fundamental vow of the bodhisattva: the intention and commitment to save all living beings. When you vow to turn toward the welfare of others, you are affirming all life and expressing your desire to live fully in each moment, no matter what the moment brings.

The next three vows are required in order to fulfill the first vow. In other words, in order to save all beings, you vow to attain complete enlightenment. You can help a great deal without being completely enlightened, but if you want to help everybody in the fullest possible way, you need to accomplish these next three vows.

At the San Francisco Zen Center, the second vow is translated as "Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them," but the original Chinese actually reads "Afflictions are inexhaustible." The word *afflic-*

*tion* can be misleading, because it implies a negative experience. In reality, we are just as likely to be distracted from our vow by positive experiences. By vowing to end all delusions we mean that we will not let *any* experience—positive or negative—divert us from our intention to live for the benefit of all life.

The third line reads, "Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them." We say "enter," but the Chinese character means, literally, "I vow *to understand* them" or "*to learn* them." We recognize that everything that comes to us is a gateway to the truth, and we vow to use every meeting with every living being and thing as an opportunity for realizing the truth.

The last of the Four Great Bodhisattva Vows is "Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it." In other words, there is no higher achievement than Buddha's enlightenment. We say "I vow to become it," but this can also be translated as "I vow to accomplish it," "I vow to manifest it," or "I vow to attain it."

So in order to save all living beings, we need to free ourselves from all kinds of delusions and afflictions. We need to use every opportunity, every experience, as a door to the truth, and we need to attain complete, authentic awakening. These are the Four Great Bodhisattva Vows.

Not everybody who comes to a Buddhist meditation center wants to take the bodhisattva vow. You may come primarily to help yourself and perhaps a few other people. At first you can't honestly say that you want to save all living beings from suffering. You may feel that such an enormous project is beyond your capability or even beyond your wildest thoughts. It's good that you're honest, but would you like to learn how to make that vow?

If you can't quite buy making the first vow, start by exploring the other three. How do your afflictions prevent you from making the vow to save all beings? Perhaps you feel that you don't have the time or capacity to make this commitment. It's true that you have a limited amount of time and energy, but you don't have to be *afflicted* by

that fact. You don't need to have limitless powers in order to become a bodhisattva. Your limitations do not interfere with your helping people. In fact, it is through those very limitations that you will learn how to help people.

Helping others entails learning how *you* are helped. In order to heal others, you must learn to heal yourself. Learning how to give to yourself is part of learning how to give to others. If you are stingy with yourself, you will be stingy with others. When you understand how everything is given to you, you will be able to give everything to others.

This relates to the third vow: everything that comes to you is an opportunity for truth. All the things that you consider to be limitations to or interference with loving others are actually opportunities for you to realize the truth along with other beings. Ironically, wanting to help others before you help yourself does not mean that others are actually helped before you are. As a bodhisattva, you may want to help others before you help yourself, but, in fact, as soon as others are helped, you are helped. You and others attain the way simultaneously.

Finally, the fourth vow is a natural unfolding of the third vow. When you vow to become one with buddha's way, you vow to see things as a buddha sees them. Not only is everything that comes to you an opportunity to discover the truth, but everything that comes to you *is* the truth. Everything is buddha's teaching. When you see beings who are suffering and you know how profoundly good they are, you don't feel discouraged from working for their welfare. It may be hard, but you feel compelled to offer help, because you want them to see how incomparably wonderful they are. You want them to wake up.

In Sino-Japanese there is a beautiful expression for buddha's mind: *ji-hi-ki-sha-mu-ryo-shin*. *Ji* means "to love beings just as they are, beyond any desire for them to be any other way." *Hi* means "to be concerned for their suffering." *Ki* is "to rejoice and feel delight about all beings." *Sha* means "wanting to give everything to them." *Mu-ryo*

means "all of these things beyond all measure." *Shin* means "heart" or "mind." It is the mind of love, concern, joy, and generosity without measure.

The bodhisattva vow is the wish and the commitment to become intimate with everything—not just humans and animals but plants and inanimate things. You need to be as intimate with all matter as a great sculptor is. When you see a block of marble or a piece of steel, you see it as a dharma gate. The American sculptor and creator of mobiles Alexander Calder became intimate with steel. From material that seems inert and intractable he created objects that are light, joyful, and full of movement. He overcame the affliction of thinking that he couldn't do certain things with certain materials.

In a similar way, we make judgments about people that prevent us from being intimate with them. We think, This person is a drug addict. That person is crazy. That other person is my enemy. It would be hard to be intimate with such people. Those thoughts by themselves are okay, as long as they don't turn into afflictions, as long as they don't block you from seeing that person as a gate to the truth. It's hard to become intimate with even one being. Where do you start?

To become intimate with someone means to meet that person or that being without taking all the knowing to yourself. It means entering into a relationship where you don't know exactly what's happening, where you don't decide unilaterally what's going on. If *your* view is the only one that matters to you, then there will be no intimacy.

One of my favorite dialogues of Plato is called "Lysis," in which Socrates has a discussion with Lysis and another young man about the meaning of friendship. They talk for quite a long while about what different people think friendship is, each time concluding that that's not it. Finally, Socrates says, "If anyone were overhearing our conversation, they would think we were crazy, because we've been talking about friendship all this time, and we know less about it than when we started."[2] I did, too, after reading it.

But all the way through I felt that Socrates really loved his students. He asked them questions and he listened carefully to their answers. He didn't say, Gee, this conversation's going nowhere. We have no better handle on what friendship is than when we started. Let's call it off. We're losing ground here. They got more and more intimate and less and less certain that their own opinions were right. Socrates became more and more devoted to helping them think deeply, rather than helping them get ahold of something.

When you vow to save all beings from suffering, you're not vowing to figure out what's going on with them and offer a quick solution. When you're talking to somebody and the conversation starts going in some direction that you don't like, you vow to see the direction it's going as a dharma door. You vow to see your not liking it going in that direction as a dharma door. You recognize your impulse to get it back on track as trying to get control of the conversation. You see how you're afflicted by your opinions. You want to save all sentient beings, but you think you can't save them if they go off in the wrong direction. Even that delusion can be a dharma door!

The willingness to make this vow to plunge into life, not turn away from it, comes from communion with the buddha. And communion with the buddha comes with being upright. You can't make it happen by yourself, and nobody else can make it happen for you. When you practice being upright, you begin to let down some of your defenses, and this vow comes and meets you.

One evening Shakyamuni Buddha was out walking by himself. When night fell he went over to a potter and asked, "Can I stay in your shop tonight?" The potter said, "There's already somebody staying there. You'll have to ask him if it's okay." So the Buddha asked the other man, "Can I stay here with you?" This person, who was also a yogi and a meditator, said, "Yeah, there's room here; you can stay here, too." And they sat together in meditation throughout the night.

In the morning Shakyamuni Buddha thought, This guy is a good meditator. Maybe he'd like to hear some teachings. So he asked,

"Under what teacher did you enter into this spiritual path?" The yogi answered, "I entered under Shakyamuni Buddha. He's my teacher." Buddha said, "Have you ever met Shakyamuni Buddha?" The yogi said, "No, I've never met him. Don't know what he looks like." Then Buddha asked, "Would you like to hear some teaching?" And the yogi said, "Sure, pal. Lay it on." He spoke something like that to Buddha, not disrespectfully but casually.

Shakyamuni Buddha gave a wonderful teaching called The Exposition of the Elements, and the yogi listened attentively. He didn't know it was Buddha, but he was open to learning from whomever it was, and it sounded pretty good to him. About two-thirds of the way through, the yogi was enlightened, and he understood who was talking to him. When Buddha finished, the yogi said, "I've been waiting to meet my teacher, and now I've met him. I'm sorry that I didn't recognize you at first, and that I talked to you so informally."[3]

Bodhisattvas want to be an ordinary buddha who walks around and knocks on the door and says, "Can I stay here?" When they see someone who's ready, they give that person the teaching. They see a way to help, and they're successful at this wonderful task of waking people up.

Of course, the yogi in this story was open to the teaching. Sometimes people aren't open. Sometimes they won't even let the buddha in the door. So as a bodhisattva you might have to stay outside. Even if people let you into the house, it might not be the right time to give the teaching. You might have to wait for the right conditions to arise.

Sometimes a bodhisattva offers the teaching even if people don't seem to recognize the opportunity. Suzuki Roshi once led a ceremony with some of the priests at the San Francisco Zen Center, where we received new robes. They were a different style from the ones we had had before, so after the ceremony we asked Suzuki Roshi, "How do you put on these new robes?" He got up and walked away. Then we asked another teacher, Katagiri Roshi, "How do you

wear them?" Katagiri Roshi tried to explain, but his English wasn't very clear, and we couldn't follow his instructions. Then someone pointed to Suzuki Roshi, who was over in the corner putting the robe on. Sometimes you don't notice when someone is showing you the very thing that you asked for. In this case, it took us a while but we finally got it.

You don't have to say anything in particular or do anything in particular to be helpful to people. You become a bodhisattva by wishing for your own happiness as well as the happiness of others, and by opening to your own experience in a loving way. When you love yourself and are kind enough to yourself to be who you really are, you're showing others what they need to do in order to be free. You're showing them what it's like to be present in the middle of suffering. You're right here in the world, just like them. You know about fear and anxiety, but you don't run away. This is the way you join hands with people and walk together through birth and death.

The birth of the bodhisattva vow of compassion has been praised by all buddhas and ancestors as precious, powerful, and auspicious beyond measure. It is, at the same time, very tender and vulnerable to being lost or forgotten. Therefore buddhas of the past taught that the deep desire to help all living beings realize supreme awakening before we do is the most important thing to protect. A bodhisattva protects the spirit of this vow the way people protect their beloved children. This vow is very fragile: its life is often hanging by a thin thread. You may clearly see that being kind to others would end your problems, and then a moment later someone is rude to you, and you forget all about being kind. In a sense this whole book is about how to protect and bring the spirit of compassion to complete maturity by being upright, which is to receive, practice, and transmit the great bodhisattva precepts.

chapter four

# RENUNCIATION:
## *Letting Go of Attachments*

*Walking the path of the bodhisattva is accomplished through the spirit and actuality of renunciation. . . . Renunciation is an unsurpassable way of harmonizing body and mind with the buddha way. When you give up attachments, you are free. You are buddha.*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

HOW IS RENUNCIATION BORN? The first step in the practice of renunciation is finding that we have something to renounce, and what we have to renounce is our delusions. Delusions come naturally to us, because in our normal perceptual life we tend to see things as being "out there," existing on their own. We see people over there. We see walls over there. Even our own feelings seem to be over there, somehow separate from us. Whatever we're aware of we tend to make external and see as being outside ourselves.

Once you externalize the world and feel separate from it, you feel isolated and threatened, and so instinctively you try to grasp it. This grasping creates anxiety or pain. So the next phase in the process of renunciation is recognizing that people are anxious and suffering. Most people are anxious, but they think that they're not supposed to be, so they pretend that they're not. They walk around thinking, I'm fine, but little things show you that they don't feel so fine. If you scratch their car, they fly into a rage. Or if you tell them that they're

going to get fired, they break down in tears. Things like that show you that they're not so unafraid.

According to Shakyamuni Buddha, it's normal for human beings to be anxious, because it's normal for human beings not to understand themselves. When you don't understand yourself, you're uncomfortable and scared. When you realize that you're anxious, Buddha's teaching is to practice being patient with it.

Practicing patience with this anxiety will lead you to freedom from delusion and anxiety. When you practice patience, you give yourself a gift. You wish for yourself to be happy. You want to understand what this suffering is based on and be free of it. You begin to develop compassion. Practicing patience leads to the next stage, which is the mind of renunciation—not quite full renunciation, but the willingness to let go of attachments and deluded views.

There's a Japanese Zen term called *nyushin*. *Nyu* means "soft," "gentle," "pliable," or "meek," and *shin* means "mind" or "heart." Zen master Dogen once asked his teacher, "What is this mind of the bodhisattva?" The teacher said, "It's this soft and flexible mind." Dogen asked, "What is this soft mind?" His teacher said, "Soft mind is the willingness to let go of your body and your mind."[1]

How do you develop soft mind? You sit in the middle of the world of all suffering beings, which just happens to be where you are right now. Each human being is the center of the world of all suffering beings. You just sit in your place, with your suffering, with your pain, and you feel the pain of all other beings around you. All buddhas are sitting in that place. They don't sit on the edge of the suffering, in the suburbs of the suffering. They sit in the downtown of suffering. Each of us is already there, but if you want to be a buddha, you should sit in the middle of that feeling.

If you sit in the middle of your own suffering patiently—which means lovingly—wishing yourself and others to be free of this suffering while accepting it in its current manifestation, soft mind arises. Your mind and your heart are tenderized, and you develop the

willingness to let go. When you sit patiently, you see more and more clearly that your suffering comes from holding on to what doesn't need to be gripped. Your body and mind don't need to be held. In fact, holding on is painful and makes you afraid. When you're not afraid, you don't hold on to your body or mind: you just let them function.

When you see that holding is the source of pain, you want to let go. Wanting to let go is not the same as letting go, but it prepares you for letting go. So basically, you sit in the middle of your feelings, practicing patience, and a willingness arises, a wish to let go. As you keep dealing with things on an ongoing basis, patiently and compassionately, the time comes when there is letting go. What is let go of? The delusion that you're separate, that you have to hold on to yourself. You gradually see that you're not separate, and then you let go. Or you let go, and then you see that you're not separate.

That's how renunciation happens. Normal human life—delusion, anxiety, and pain—and then patience and compassion give rise to the mind of renunciation, the willingness to let go. Then actual letting go happens, is realized. Renunciation is not something that you need to do: it's something that you need to realize. Generally speaking, in Buddhist practice, the things that you're encouraged to realize are things that are already so, but that you don't understand. You're already released, you're already liberated, but you don't know it. Renunciation is the way you come to know it.

The famous Zen example for developing the practice of renunciation is pulling a bow, practicing archery. One of the first books I read about Zen Buddhism was *Zen in the Art of Archery* by the German writer Eugen Herrigel.[2] His archery teacher explained that you take the bow, pull the bowstring back, and just hold it. This is like normal human life: you're holding on to something and it's a strain. His teacher told him to hold the string until it was released, but not to release it.

Herrigel held the bow for many hours of practice, and he got real-

ly tired of holding it—just like we get tired of holding on to body and mind. Then he got the idea that he could let go of the string without letting go of it by just holding it half as tightly. So he held it half as tightly, and half as tightly again, and kept halving his grip until, finally, the string went without him letting it go. He had figured out a way to let it go while he was still holding on.

The teacher saw his clever trick and kicked him out of the school. Herrigel begged for years to come back, until finally the teacher agreed. He went back to the practice of pulling the string and just holding it. No more tricks. He just patiently experienced the suffering of being a human who thinks he's holding something. One day the string released, and it was as if it passed right through his fingers, just as his teacher had described it. He didn't let go of the string: it went.

The string is already released, but we don't generally understand that. You have to pull the string as a metaphor for your delusion until you understand that the string is already released. You have to sit with your life and feel how you hold it, and be willing for the release to happen. It will happen spontaneously, because it's already so.

There are two forms of resistance to renunciation. The first is holding back because you're afraid and are trying to get things under control. The other hindrance is overdoing: you let go of too much. If you overdo the giving, then you may hurt yourself or somebody else. For example, you may decide to give up all your possessions. But you may give up more than you're ready to give up and regret it. Or maybe you give up possessions that belong partly to your family, and that causes problems. Or you give more of your energy and your time than is really good for you at this stage of your development. That's a kind of resistance to practicing the level of renunciation that is appropriate for you. So the question often arises, How can you let go of your attachments without disowning your responsibilities?

A friend of mine has two small sons. One of them is perfectly normal and healthy; the other one has some birth defects. Of course, he wants his second little boy to be healthy and happy; he wants him to

be free of pain and well adjusted to life, but he knows that this little boy is going to have a hard time because he's different from most other kids. He wishes the best for his little boy, but he also accepts that this child has problems.

His wife doesn't want him to accept that their son has problems. She thinks that if he accepts the problems, then it means that he doesn't care, and if he doesn't care, then he might not work for his son's welfare. She wants her husband to be anxious and worried the way she is, because she wants some support, which is reasonable.

So my friend has the challenge not only of caring for his son and accepting his son's condition, but also of accepting that his wife doesn't like the way he responds to the situation. But he can't be worried and angry just to give her support: that's not the way he wants to do it, and I agree with him. I think that he's better able to help his son if he's not angry and afraid, better able to help him if he's accepting. If you don't accept the way your son or your daughter is, then you drain yourself every moment and pretty soon you burn out, because you're weakening yourself by this devotion rather than enlivening yourself. You're looking down on the way the other person is, and you're looking down on your experience. It's not being friendly or patient with yourself, and it's not the way that renunciation is going to be born.

How would I cope with this situation? I have problems, my son has problems, my wife has problems, and my wife has problems with me. This is difficult. I wish myself well, but I don't try to be somebody else. I am present in the midst of these difficulties, and I'm willing to let go of my attachments. I accept that my wife doesn't like my attitude and wish that she would be free of not liking my attitude. I accept that she's that way and hope the best for her. I accept that I'm this way and hope the best for me. I accept the way my son is and hope the best for him. I don't run away from my wife. I stay close to her, not afraid to be near her suffering and her disapproval of me, but willing to be me. Being willing to be me means letting go of me.

As long as I'm holding on to me, I really can't be myself fully.

Once you free yourself from attachment and anxiety, you can take better care of yourself and those you love, because you're courageously available. You have lots of energy, because you're not wasting energy resisting what's going on, and you're not afraid to enter into whatever is appropriate. You are better able to see what's appropriate, because you have been training yourself by looking at suffering and its conditions. You see how suffering works, and you want to let go of the conditions of suffering. By practicing patience you have been developing gentleness and kindness toward yourself and training yourself in love and compassion, so you're much better able to take care of things.

Some people think that you can't be happy and really be compassionate, but caring about people to the utmost is happiness. When you care about others and want the best for them and also aren't grasping, it frees you from anxiety. Renunciation is letting go of your desire to control, so you can appreciate and bring love and happiness to suffering beings.

Letting go doesn't mean that you deliberately set about to change or manipulate your state of mind: it means that you don't hold on to it. When you're feeling anxious, you can practice wishing to be free of anxiety, fear, and anger. Sometimes when you do this, you feel more relaxed and less anxious. But it also might intensify your anxiety and bring you closer to seeing its roots.

If you wish yourself well while you're feeling anxious, then that naturally leads you to the source of the anxiety. If you try to get rid of your anxiety, then you're distracting yourself from facing it. You're not practicing love: you're practicing aversion. You practice being upright to generate love, not to generate states of mind. States of mind come and go, and happiness comes and goes; but love can be developed so that it doesn't come and go.

Love is the context of our study of renunciation. Love creates a stable environment for our deep work. A state of mind is not stable, but

a loving attitude can be. We can develop a constantly loving attitude toward other people by letting go of our ideas of how to love them. When we love people without attachment, we don't abandon them. This is what loving kindness means for a bodhisattva.

chapter five

# CONFESSION:
## *All My Ancient Twisted Karma*

*All my ancient twisted karma*
*From beginningless greed, hate, and delusion*
*Born through body, speech, and mind*
*I now fully avow*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

SHANTIDEVA SAYS, "One law serves to summarize the whole of the Mahayana. The protection of all beings is accomplished through examination of one's own mistakes."[1] Confession completely purifies our bodies and minds. Practicing it alone or together with others reawakens the heart of compassion and the appreciation of others' virtues. Confession clears away all the obstacles to fully receiving the bodhisattva precepts. Therefore confession is usually practiced at the beginning of ceremonies when the precepts are given.

To me, the word *confession* means "the admission of our actions." It is a literal and formal acknowledgment of our deliberate actions, or *karma*, in terms of body, speech, and thought. This meaning corresponds with what we call formal confession in Soto Zen. (Another mode of confession, called formless or ultimate confession, will be discussed later in this chapter.)

### *Formal Confession*

Formal confession can be done alone, within your own heart, and

that is certainly of great merit. However, in order to realize the complete and inconceivable function of formal confession, you must practice confession in the presence of another. When nonvirtue is brought forward out of the dark, you are more able to fully recognize and therefore confess it. Such confession before the face of another can be practiced in front of a statue of a buddha or bodhisattva, in front of a teacher, or in the presence of community members within a ritual context. There are an infinite number of possible ways of practicing formal confession. The essential point is that you honestly, sincerely, and thoroughly reveal your unwholesome actions.

The realization of the full, liberating function of formal confession must entail elements of regret and remorse. By "regret" I mean that you feel that you have made a mistake, wish that you had not committed the action, and sincerely intend to refrain from doing so again. Such regret and steadfast intention to refrain from nonvirtuous action is supported by feelings of remorse. Etymologically, *remorse* means to "bite again." [2] The complete, purifying power of confession involves tasting again the bitterness of your nonvirtue. It may be useful to distinguish between remorse and disgust about your actions. *Disgust* is a feeling of "rejecting or loathing what you have done" and may undermine a steadfast sense of responsibility for your actions, whereas remorse has more the feeling of revisiting the scene of the crime and deepening your sense of responsibility.

In the bodhisattva initiation ceremony we repeat three times,

> All my ancient twisted karma,
> From beginningless greed, hate, and delusion,
> Born through body, speech, and mind,
> I now fully avow.[3]

We also chant this verse during our monthly bodhisattva confession ceremony, sometimes called the full moon ceremony.

Bodhisattvas continuously confess their nonvirtue. Because delusion occurs moment after moment, confession must also be moment

after moment. Bodhisattvas continuously see and admit their own delusions and nonvirtuous deeds. Less enlightened people confess less often. The most unenlightened and dangerous people are those who think that they never do any nonvirtuous deeds at all. The greatest darkness for the human mind is to believe that you never do anything wrong or hurtful or stupid. Conversely, continuous confession of nonvirtue opens the gate to great light. Confession of wrongdoing is an act of awakening.

But the enlightened mind is not just noticing and admitting nonvirtue moment by moment: Nonvirtue, nonvirtue, I'm sorry, I confess, clinging, clinging, attachment, attachment. That's part of what's going on in the bodhisattva's mind, but that's not all. Simultaneous with this thorough inventory of neurotic activity there is an all-encompassing loving kindness and compassion. Confession is an expression of the mind of compassion. The more that you resist acknowledging your neurosis, the less compassion and appreciation you feel for yourself and others.

We human beings are driven by thoughts that we take to be real: conscious and unconscious beliefs of right and wrong, good and bad, and existence and nonexistence. In formal confession we admit that we are driven by such thoughts, and at the same time we feel remorse for being driven by such thoughts. We admit that we are ordinary human beings, without becoming discouraged and giving up our aspiration for enlightenment. When I admit that I am as I am, I allow myself to be so, and I realize that buddha allows me to be so, too. Buddha allows all things to be just as they are, in all their particular and limited ways. Buddha's compassion embraces me just as I am right here and now, with the purity of complete forgiveness.

Admitting who you are, you are purified. Being purified, you can now go home to awakening. Right away you are rewarded for your honesty: you can go back to perfect awakening. You forgot for a moment that you are driven by vain, empty thoughts, and that you moved away from your home through that forgetfulness. The fur-

ther you get from being ordinary, the harder it is for you to admit who you are. The less that you admit who you are, the more that you feel unforgiven and trapped in who you are, and the further you feel from buddha's compassion. Distance from yourself is distance from buddha's compassion.

One day a monk came to me and confessed that she was confused and discouraged, and had lots of fixed views and ideas about things. She was feeling lost in a swirl of delusions. I asked her what her practice was in that situation. She answered, "To love everything." I asked, "Do you love even the confusion, discouragement, and fixed views?" She replied, "I don't run away from them." Loving confusion and discouragement does not mean that you like them, that you think that they're good, or that you indulge in them. It's more like you sit still—not by your own power and not by the power of another. You just stay with it.

In practicing formal confession we are fully aware of how we are driven by our thoughts and at the same time we feel remorse for being driven by such thoughts. Fully confessing our human vanity, we are able to forgive ourselves and experience that we are forgiven.

## *Formless Confession*

The practice of formless or ultimate confession is based on formal confession but goes beyond it. In formal confession we fully recognize and acknowledge our karmic deeds. In formless confession, according to Dogen, we "quietly explore the furthest reaches of the causes and conditions"[4] of these actions. Formal confession refreshes and purifies us from the consequences of our self-centered actions of body, speech, and thought. Formless confession reaches to and removes the roots of these actions.

Formal confession prepares us for meditation. Formless confession is the meditation process itself. It is being upright. Formal confession is the work of finding your place and taking your seat, in the

midst of all your ancient twisted karma. Formless confession, according to the Lotus Sutra, is to "sit upright and contemplate the true characteristics of all things."[5] The true character of all things is that they have dependently co-arisen. When we contemplate this truth, all the karma accumulated from beginningless time melts away like frost in the warmth of the morning sun.

Formless confession is not realized by you or by someone else. It is not realized through your own power or someone else's power. It is realized through genuine faith in your true nature. Through genuine faith in the buddha, dharma, and sangha, you become confession itself. When you become confession, you transcend the wound of separation between yourself and all beings.

chapter six

# THE SIXTEEN GREAT BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS: *The Teaching of the Two Truths*

*Without a foundation in the conventional truth,*
*The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.*
*Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,*
*Liberation is not achieved.*
—Nagarjuna, *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way*

IN ORDER TO AWAKEN to the complete significance of the bodhisattva precepts, it is necessary to understand the teaching of the two truths of the Middle Way (*Madhyamika*). These two truths are known in Buddhist tradition as *samvrti satya* (conventional truth) and *paramartha satya* (ultimate truth).

Conventional truth refers to our everyday, commonsense understanding of the existence of things. In this context, the precepts are primarily concerned with doing and not doing and with good and bad. Ultimate truth is not circumscribed by human thought or judgment with all its fallibility. Thus the ultimate meaning of the precepts transcends ordinary reality and is beyond action or nonaction.

Understanding the conventional meaning of the bodhisattva precepts is absolutely necessary, but it is not sufficient for realizing the ultimate goal of the bodhisattva. As Nagarjuna says,

> Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
> The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.

> Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
> Liberation is not achieved.[1]

With a thorough understanding of the literal and conventional import of these great precepts as our point of departure, we must step forth and enter the realm of their ultimate meaning.

## *Great Ancestor Yaoshan Weiyan*

The story of great ancestor Yaoshan Weiyan illustrates how we move from the conventional meaning toward the ultimate meaning of the precepts in our practice. Yaoshan Weiyan left his home to become a monk when he was sixteen. He studied the scriptures and commentaries thoroughly and observed the precepts scrupulously. One day, after many years of practice, he lamented sorrowfully, "A true person ought to purify himself apart from the laws. Who would believe that it is simply a matter of being scrupulous about trifling actions?"

Right away he went and called on great ancestor Shitou (Stonehead). He said, "I know something about the canonical teachings of Buddhism, but I've heard that in Zen you point directly to the human mind to see its essence and realize buddhahood. I really don't understand this and beg you to be so compassionate as to teach me."

Shitou said, "Being just so won't do, not being just so won't do either, and being just so and not being just so won't do at all. How about you?" Yaoshan was at a loss. Shitou said, "Your affinity is not here. Go to Master Mazu's place for awhile."

Following these instructions, Yaoshan went to visit Master Mazu and set forth the same question. Mazu said, "Sometimes I make him raise his eyebrows and blink, sometimes I don't make him raise his eyebrows and blink. Sometimes raising the eyebrows and blinking is all right. Sometimes raising the eyebrows and blinking is not all right. How about you?" At these words, Yaoshan was greatly enlightened.[2]

When we begin practicing the precepts, we, like Yaoshan, are

concerned with our actions as individuals. We take meticulous care in all our dealings not to lie, not to take anything that is not rightfully intended for us, and not to harm others. We consider all the circumstances surrounding our behavior and, in consultation with others, make careful moral judgments. Through such deliberations we make our best personal effort to fulfill the literal meaning of the precepts. We live in the world of right and wrong, good and evil: the conventional world.

Practicing the precepts from this perspective, we receive firsthand confirmation of the laws of action (*karma*). We experience the fortunate results of wholesome actions and the unfortunate results of unwholesome actions. We develop a deep, abiding confidence in the worldly laws of causation. Good actions lead to good results, and evil actions lead to bad.

We are now in the realm of the first two of Buddha's Four Noble Truths. We acknowledge the truth of suffering, and we understand the truth of the causes of suffering, for we see what boundless pain and anxiety arise from selfishness and ignorance. Facing up to the reality of the way things are, we want to overcome suffering and heal disease, both for ourselves and for other beings. This marks the birth of compassion and is the foundation of our bodhisattva vow to live for the greatest benefit of all beings. Without this compassion we cannot arrive at the ultimate truth as revealed in the last two of the Four Noble Truths, namely, that there is liberation from suffering and a path to liberation from suffering.

But even with such confidence and clarity, we still feel constrained and anxious. Aware of the potential consequences of our actions, we worry about making the slightest mistake. We feel increasingly uneasy about what is beyond our limited vision and understanding: the ocean of invisible and immeasurable forces, "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."[3] We sense that our whole situation is unstable and unpredictable, like trying to navigate in open water without knowing what either our position or our direction is.

Only by practicing wholeheartedly according to the literal meaning of the precepts can we fully experience the limitations and frustrations of the conventional approach. The conventional approach is flawed in its design, because it is based on the fundamental human delusion that we exist separately from all other beings, from the mountains and rivers, and from the trees and grasses of the great Earth. The literal meaning of the precepts can never be realized by separate personal effort. In fact, the attempt to practice these bodhisattva precepts by yourself is always at odds with their liberating significance. Ultimately, we realize that practicing with this conventional dualistic perspective is one continuous mistake.

When we don't practice the precepts thoroughly, we can hide behind our own shortcomings. We can think that if we tried harder or practiced more carefully, then we could free ourselves of anxiety. But when we practice the precepts impeccably, we realize that our basic understanding is limited and incomplete. As Dogen said, "When dharma does not fill your whole body and mind, you think it is already sufficient. When dharma fills your body and mind, you understand that something is missing."[4]

Yaoshan Weiyan had dedicated himself sincerely to the bodhisattva precepts, but he understood the precepts as fixed things. He was still practicing with them in a literal and dualistic way and could not free himself from ongoing anxiety.

When he first approached great ancestor Shitou, Yaoshan confessed his feeling of inadequacy. "I've been studying Buddha's teachings for a long time, but I still don't understand who Buddha is or who I am. I don't understand the relationship between me and Buddha. I've heard that Buddha is happy and free, but these practices are not giving me unassailable freedom or a contented heart."[5]

Shitou's response expressed the ungraspable light of the precepts and pointed to the true nature of the human mind. "Practicing the way you've been practicing won't do, practicing in the opposite way won't do, and combining the two won't do at all. There's no place to

stand: you can't do this by your own power. How about you?" Yaoshan could not respond to Shitou's question. He was still trying to find a place to stand, still trying to grasp the ungraspable, "like a mosquito mounting an iron bull."[6] But the ultimate meaning is revealed in a place where you can't grasp ahold of it.

Meeting Master Mazu, Yaoshan had another chance. Mazu described his situation, "Although it's ungraspable, I can still wiggle my eyebrows or not. Sometimes a wink captures the ungraspable and sometimes it doesn't. Without trying to grab anything to help you, you just live your life from the precept light. Right now, how about you?" Zen practice pivots on the question "How about you?"

This time Yaoshan did not try to grasp the light of the precepts, nor did he run away from it. He remained upright and therefore he was illuminated. He awoke to the world where everything we do is possible only because of the support that we receive from and give to all beings. After this realization, the precepts were no longer something external that he imposed on himself, but instead emerged from him as natural expressions of his understanding of life. He knew what to do, without deliberation. But this attainment came only after many years of fruitless attempts to realize the precepts by personal power.

We approach the ultimate meaning of the precepts not through the use of discriminating consciousness. We realize the ultimate meaning by being upright and entering into an awareness of our interdependence with all beings. This awareness is the mind of buddha, from which all the precepts naturally arise.

As Wansong (Ten Thousand Pines) writes, "Understanding the meaning based on the scriptures is an enemy of the buddhas of all times; deviating one word from the scriptures is the same as devil talk."[7] This dynamic tension is a fundamental aspect of the path of the bodhisattva.

I have heard some teachers say that Zen is not imitation, and others say that Zen is imitation. It is not appropriate to copy our ancestors, and yet we practice exactly the same way as our ancestors. Our

present response must be in complete harmony with the way of all buddha ancestors, while at the same time being the most creative and appropriate response to our present circumstances. If we don't attach to the traditional teachings and do not deviate from them at all, then how will we practice? This question is pointing directly to the nature of mind, which is the source of freedom. It also points directly to the heart of compassion, the source of the precepts.

As I write this, I am aware that I do so within the little circle of my present limited understanding of the bodhisattva precepts. In this way I bring forth my personal effort as an offering to the ultimate, nonpersonal significance of these teachings. At the moment of doing so, I sense that just beyond—and far beyond—the horizon of my individual awareness, there is a response to my small but heartfelt effort. I trust that the inconceivably great meaning of the bodhisattva precepts is coming to meet me and complete me. Reaching the limits of practice as a separate personal activity, we are ready to receive help from the compassionate realms beyond our discriminating awareness.

## *The Practice of Compassion*

We realize the intimate connection between the conventional truth and the ultimate truth through the practice of compassion. It is through compassion that we become thoroughly grounded in the conventional truth and thus prepared to receive the teachings of the ultimate truth. Compassion brings great warmth and kindness to both perspectives. It helps us to be flexible in our interpretation of the truth, and teaches us to give and receive help in practicing the precepts.

Dogen teaches that rigidly holding to the conventional understanding of the precepts violates the precepts. The compassionate approach is to respect the conventional truth in the context of nonattachment, never losing sight of the ultimate goal of the precepts. In

fact, a bodhisattva sometimes finds it necessary to break a precept in the conventional sense in order to fulfill the compassionate purpose of his or her life.

In order to benefit all living beings to the fullest extent, bodhisattvas vow to enter the limiting, often painful ways of the conventional world, accomplish them thoroughly, and then, by understanding their ultimate significance, transcend them. Bodhisattvas further vow that after realizing transcendent liberation they will let go of the ultimate and return to the conventional world, join hands with all beings, and walk together with them through birth and death. As the traditional saying goes, "They go up and attain awakening and then come down and transform beings." Their vow is to continue this cycle until all animate and inanimate beings throughout the universe are restored to blissful peace and harmony.

For a bodhisattva, the bright red thread of the vow of compassion runs through the conventional and the ultimate truths: the vow guides and protects the bodhisattva in all modes of practice and in the transitions between them. The power of the vow rescues those on the solitary peak and sends them back into the wild weeds. If they have fallen into the wild weeds, then the vow raises them up to the summit of the solitary peak.

The two truths are presented separately in order to promote understanding, but in practice, neither aspect is more or less important than the other. Each approach, when fully realized, completely includes the other. Those who have realized the ultimate meaning are still completely devoted to the conventional approach to the precepts. Realizing the ultimate is useless and even dangerous if you can't go back to the beginning and practice with everyone. In the end, the two truths are thoroughly integrated in the bodhisattva's heart by the practice of compassion.

chapter seven

# THE THREE REFUGES:
## *The Body of Buddha's Mind*

*I take refuge in buddha*
*I take refuge in dharma*
*I take refuge in sangha*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

I TAKE REFUGE IN BUDDHA, I take refuge in dharma, I take refuge in sangha: these are the first three bodhisattva precepts. So simple, so common, so ordinary for disciples of Buddha, and so essential for the true practice of the way.

According to Dogen, the essence of the true transmission of the buddha dharma is taking refuge in the Triple Treasure.[1] Dogen was an energetic and creative person, brilliant, gifted, and sincere. He sat in meditation with awesome intensity and profound stillness. He studied the ocean of Buddha's teachings with impeccable thoroughness and care. Out of boundless compassion for his students and for all future generations, he wrote the incomparable Treasury of True Dharma Eyes (*Shobogenzo*), which has been translated into many languages and is studied deeply worldwide. He is one of the most innovative, profound, and influential thinkers in the history of the buddha way.

As Dogen approached death, what practice did he choose? Did he enter into the utmost serene and radiant concentration? Did he perhaps give his final, transcendent exposition of the authentic dharma? This is what he did: on a long piece of white paper he wrote

three large black characters: *buddha*, *dharma*, and *sangha*. He hung this paper on a pillar in his sickroom. In his great illness he roused himself to walk around that pillar, and as he walked he chanted, "I take refuge in buddha, I take refuge in dharma, I take refuge in sangha." He brought his whole life energy forward to walk around these three jewels. He gave his whole life to buddha, dharma, and sangha, which means that he gave his whole life to all living beings.

The expression "take refuge" is translated from the original Pali, *sarana-gamana*. *Sarana* refers to "a shelter, protection, or sanctuary, some place of peace and safety." *Gamana* refers to "the act of returning." The English word *refuge* seems quite appropriate, because it carries the sense of both "place" and "going back." It is synonymous with *shelter* and *protection*. It is anything to which you may turn for help or relief. The Latin root *refugere* means "to flee" or "to fly back."[2] When we take refuge in the Triple Treasure, we are flying back to our true home.

*Buddha*, *dharma*, and *sangha* each have at least three different levels of meaning. *Buddha* is "unsurpassed, correct, and complete awakening"; it is "a person who realizes such awakening"; and it is also "the transformation of beings." *Dharma* is "freedom from any difference between ourselves and buddha"; it is also "the truth that is realized by a buddha"; and it is "the transformation of that truth into scriptures and other forms of teaching." *Sangha* is "harmony"; it is "the community of those who practice the truth realized by a buddha"; and it is "the release of beings from suffering and bondage to the world of birth and death."

Suzuki Roshi said that we can't practice the way without adoring the Triple Treasure, and that taking refuge is an act of adoration: adoration of awakening, adoration of the teaching of awakening, adoration of the community of beings who practice the way of awakening, and adoration of all life. In all traditions of Buddhism, veneration of the Triple Treasure is the basis of ethical practices and compassionate vows.

## *Taking Refuge in Buddha*

To take refuge in buddha means to take refuge in what you really are. What you really are is already attained, always, every moment. What you really are is buddha. You don't have to work at what you are. Part of what you are is what you think you are, but what you think you are is not all of what you are. It is just an aspect of what you are. Being buddha means being unattached to your thoughts about what you are. If you think you are a worthy person or an unworthy person, not grasping those thoughts is buddha. But, in fact, being a person who has such thoughts is a necessary condition for realizing buddha.

Another part of what you are is a human being who keeps running away from what you are, who keeps trying to be something else. If you think that you are worthy, then you want to hold on to feeling worthy. If you feel unworthy, then you may want to change or somehow fix yourself. In other words, you can be distracted and undermined by your ideas about yourself. In that sense, you flee from yourself. Of course, you can never really run away from yourself: that is only a delusion. You need to balance this delusion of running away with the recognition that it is a delusion, that you didn't run away. Returning to buddha is an antidote to running away from yourself. To come back, to just be the way you are, including all your delusions, is to take refuge in buddha.

When you take refuge, you are not trying to be something else. If you are a person who is trying to attain something, then in the act of taking refuge you don't try to be somebody who is not trying to attain something. If you're someone who is not trying to attain something, then you don't try to become someone who is trying to attain something. You work with what you are. Taking refuge in buddha means trusting that you are buddha.

Trusting that you are buddha does not mean that you identify yourself with buddha. It's not something special about you that makes

you buddha. It is simply you being you that is buddha. It is not that you're a virtuous person, so virtuous that you're a buddha, but that you being you *is* virtue. Maybe relatively speaking, you have a little bit of virtue or maybe you have a great deal of virtue, but that is not important. The point is that being what you are is your fundamental virtue. Even though people vary in relative levels of virtue, each of us completely possesses this buddha virtue.

When I take refuge in buddha, I don't take refuge in my good points or my skillful behavior, and of course I don't take refuge in my shortcomings. I take refuge in me being me. That is my indestructible virtue, which never is lost except by me forgetting it or not facing up to it. To take refuge means to give up running away from home. It means to recognize my responsibility to live in accord with my buddhahood.

When you take refuge in buddha, when you go back to being fully yourself, you begin to see how you are connected to and depend on everybody, and how everybody depends on you. In other words, the first refuge really contains the other two. When you take refuge in buddha, you begin to understand the teaching of interdependence, which is taking refuge in dharma, and you honor your connection with other beings, which is taking refuge in sangha.

In fact, the practice of taking refuge in buddha opens your eyes to all the other precepts. Not killing, not stealing, right conduct, and working to help other beings: all these come from the condition of you being you. The condition of you being you is the source of peace and the source of love.

In essence, to take refuge is to give up all alternatives to being buddha, to being yourself. When you see and accept that you have no such alternatives, you naturally and spontaneously go forward on the path of buddha. When you are willing to throw yourself completely into your everyday life, moment by moment, you are taking refuge in buddha, dharma, and sangha.

## *Appeal and Response*

Wholeheartedly taking refuge in the Triple Treasure brings forth all our life functions: effort, courage, energy, and vulnerability. In this coming forth, there are also elements of appeal, request, and inquiry.

If taking refuge is the return flight to our own true nature, the appeal is not made to something outside ourselves nor to something inside ourselves. It is made to the great openness of being that transcends outside and inside and from which nothing is excluded.

If we want buddha's wisdom and compassion to be revealed through our lives, we must commune with buddha. Referring to this communion, the Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness says,

> The meaning is not in the words,
> Yet it responds to the arrival of effort.[3]

The meaning of saying, "I take refuge in buddha" is not in the words, but it responds to our devotion in saying these words. Complete awakening comes forth to receive the gift of our living effort when we think and say, "I take refuge in buddha."

If our devotion is total, if we give our whole lives to being awake, then there will be a complete response: awakening will be realized. If we devote our entire lives to the dharma, then the teachings of awakening will come alive. And if we dedicate our whole being to sangha, the community of all beings, then the community will appear in this world. This is the meaning of the jewel mirror awareness. It clearly reflects our devotion, whether our efforts are partial or total. In this realm we get back exactly what we give. When we hold back from awakening, it may seem that awakening holds back from us. Even this reflection of our holding back is spiritual communion. The Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness also says that "appeal and response come up together."[4] In the realm of this intimate communion, we don't appeal now and get a response later. Past and future are cut off, which means that they are completely present.

Katagiri Roshi once stood in front of the altar in our meditation hall and said, "Line up the incense burner with Buddha's nose, the center of the Buddha statue. If you place them in a straight line, then your mind will be straightforward." Lining them up straight corresponds with the arrival of your energy. You thus appeal to your relationship with buddha. As soon as you make this effort, your mind and heart are aligned with buddha. It's not that you line up these objects and then later, as a result of such effort, your mind becomes aligned. At the moment of alignment, your mind is straight and honest.

The straightforward mind is the mind of a bodhisattva. This straightforward mind does not expect anything in return for its being thus. Its being thus is its own reward, its own realization of freedom from suffering. Childlike acts of devotion, such as arranging objects on an altar, are immediately and inconceivably the realization of complete awakening. Our wholehearted effort of lining up an incense burner with a statue's nose is the extreme boundless joy of the buddhas in ten directions, past, present, and future. Still, the human mind may doubt that such straightforwardness is liberation itself.

Suzuki Roshi once told us about a young monk whose father was also a Zen priest. When the boy was about to enter the practice at Eiheiji, the Monastery of Eternal Peace, his father gave him this advice: "When you get to Eiheiji, you will see that there is a big bell there. You will probably get a chance to ring it, early in the morning. You will ring the bell, and after each ring you will bow. When you ring the bell, just ring the bell. Still, when you ring it, remember that with every ringing of the bell, the great wheel of buddha dharma turns one degree."

The boy went to Eiheiji, and he did get his chance to ring the bell. He rang it joyfully, with his whole heart, just as his father had taught him. When the abbot heard the ringing of the bell, he was deeply impressed. He wondered who was ringing the bell that way and asked to meet the young monk. The boy later became a great teacher.

The person who gives naturally receives joy, and the person who

receives gives joy. Just ring the bell with your whole heart, out into the great whatever-it-is. When you ring it in this way, you are putting your life on the line, and you are being met. In such a meeting, buddha is coming alive, dharma is coming alive, and sangha is coming alive.

When you take refuge and give your devotion to the buddha way, there is always a response. All the buddhas and ancestors say, Welcome home. Glad to see you. We've been waiting. Now the family is back together. It's a concert, not a solo performance.

Even if you deeply want to return to your true home, still the question may arise, If buddha nature is all-pervading and completely present in ordinary daily life, then isn't it a contradiction to do anything to realize this? Why is there the need for concerted effort, such as sitting upright and taking refuge in the Triple Treasure? These two practices offer opportunities to engage this contradiction. Unless we find a way to exercise our contradictory nature, we are not fully being ourselves. It seems that we must do something extraordinary in order to realize our ordinariness. It seems necessary to enter into some special practice with our whole hearts in order to see that we don't need to do anything special at all. This contradiction, if unengaged, can become a stumbling block rather than an opportunity for self-fulfillment.

Taking refuge in buddha, dharma, and sangha, we return home to our true nature. Having returned, we are ready to receive the Three Pure Precepts: the design of our original true nature.

chapter eight

# THE THREE PURE PRECEPTS:
## *The Shape of Buddha's Mind*

*I vow to embrace and sustain forms and ceremonies*
*I vow to embrace and sustain all good*
*I vow to embrace and sustain all beings*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

THE THREE PURE PRECEPTS describe the structure and fundamental design of the enlightened mind. All buddha ancestors have vowed to constantly practice them. For those who dedicate their lives to the welfare of all beings, these precepts indicate a straightforward and unobstructed path to realization of their vows.

According to Soto Zen tradition, the Three Pure Precepts evolved from the Teaching of All Buddhas, which is one of the best-known and most highly revered teachings among all schools of Buddhism:

> Refrain from all evil,
> Practice all that is good,
> Purify your mind:
> This is the teaching of all buddhas.[1]

The first recorded instance of this ancient formulation is found in verse 185 of the Dhammapada, one of the earliest texts of Theravada Buddhism, written in the Pali language in the fifth century C.E. The Dhammapada is a collection of *gatha* (four-line verses) attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha himself.

## *Refrain from All Evil*

To "refrain from all evil" means "to abandon all inappropriate actions of body, speech, and mind." For bodhisattvas, behavior is inappropriate when it is not in accord with their vow to realize liberation for all beings before themselves, that is, when it either undermines or does not promote the fulfillment of this vow.

Before we engage in any action, we try to consider our motives in the light of the bodhisattva vow. If this is not practical, we examine our motives as the situation unfolds. We may ask, In this situation, what is most beneficial for others? Is this action putting the welfare of others before my own? If we discover that our motives are selfish or deluded, then we may be able to drop the impulse immediately.

Sometimes, even though we know that certain actions are unwholesome, we are not able to abandon them right away. In such a case, if we continue to be mindful of their unwholesome quality, confess our misdeeds, and study their conditions and effects, we will eventually see how suffering dependently co-arises with these actions. When we thoroughly understand how wasteful and vain these actions really are, the impulse toward them will spontaneously drop away.

Sometimes deluded impulses arise so quickly and powerfully that we are barely able to acknowledge them and recognize their unwholesome quality. When we feel overwhelmed by selfish impulses, we may have to temporarily disqualify ourselves from any kind of action in order to prevent harm. We may need to take a "time out."

The admonition to refrain from evil implies that evil has no ultimate reality. It would be impossible to refrain from or be free of evil if evil were ultimately real. This does not mean that we can dismiss or disregard the appearance of evil in the world. We must not only refrain from all evil, but also realize its power.

The manifestation of evil is something that we need to acknowledge as pervasive and dangerous. The path of liberation from evil involves respecting its power in the same way that we respect the

power of a deadly disease. Just as we study the causes and conditions of a disease to find its cure, we study the causes and conditions of evil to discover the means to refrain from it.

The root of all evil is misunderstanding the nature of self and other by actively ignoring the interdependence of self and other. Evil comes from turning away from the vivid world of creation, where the self can never remain separate from other beings. It is a denial of the ever-changing flux of sensory experience. Evil is a turning away from life. The full realization of refraining from evil comes with waking up to the teaching of interdependence.

## *Practice All That Is Good*

To "practice all that is good" means "to wholeheartedly live life based on freedom from the illusion of an independent self." It is to awaken fully to the interdependent self, and to express such a self.

The word translated as "good" in the original Pali is *kusala*, which also means "wholesome," "virtuous," and "skillful." *Kusala* is derived from *kusa*, the name of a tall grass that Shakyamuni Buddha recommended for making meditation seats. The early monks would gather blades of this grass, pile them up, and cover them with their sitting cloths, thus making a good cushion for sitting meditation. The kusa grass protected the monks from crawling bugs and the crawling bugs from the monks.

These blades of kusa grass had very sharp edges, so that in the process of collecting it, you could easily cut your hands if you were not mindful and careful. Thus the skillful gathering of kusa was called kusala. The word then came to mean skillfulness in general.

## *Purify Your Mind*

To "purify your mind" means "to practice the first two precepts with the right attitude." It is a kind and gentle encouragement to let go of all dualistic, selfish motivations in your practice of refraining from

evil and practicing good. In this teaching I hear Buddha encouraging those of us who think that we possess an independent self and can therefore act from our own personal power to refrain from all evil and practice all good by transcending our dualistic karmic consciousness.

## *The Three Pure Precepts*

The Teaching of All Buddhas is often associated with the Theravada school of Buddhism, also known as the Way of the Elders, which began on the Indian subcontinent and gradually spread throughout southeast Asia. The form of practice known as Soto Zen is a branch of the great movement known as Mahayana. The Mahayana, or Universal Vehicle, arose later in India and eventually traveled through central Asia to China, Korea, and Japan, and also to Tibet and Southeast Asia, all the way to Borneo.

Mahayana Buddhism was marked by the emergence of the bodhisattva ideal. It reinterpreted early Buddhist teachings, such as the Teaching of All Buddhas, in the light of the messianic vow to save all beings. Several hundred years later, these bodhisattva precepts were expressed by teachers of the Zen tradition as the Three Pure Precepts:

> Embrace and sustain forms and ceremonies
> Embrace and sustain all good
> Embrace and sustain all beings

The Three Pure Precepts pay homage to the bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism in the context of monastic life and practice, which reflects the origins of Zen.

## *Embrace and Sustain Forms and Ceremonies*

"Embrace and sustain forms and ceremonies" is essentially the same as Shakyamuni Buddha's ancient teaching to refrain from all evil. This

formulation of the bodhisattva precepts states positively what was stated negatively before. By wholeheartedly embracing and sustaining the forms and ceremonies of Zen practice, you abandon the self-centered way of living, which is the source of all evil.

In practicing these forms, the selfish concerns of the student will eventually show themselves in some form of resistance. The student may, for example, rebel against the regulations or be overly submissive and obedient. In other words, resistance can manifest as practicing with these forms either too loosely or too tightly. In this way, embracing the forms and ceremonies of Zen practice can expose our self-clinging, and bring it into the light, where it can be completely abandoned.

## *Embrace and Sustain All Good*

"Embrace and sustain all good" is an amplification of Shakyamuni Buddha's admonition to practice all that is good. The expression "embrace and sustain" is used to translate the character *setsu*, which appears at the beginning of the Sino-Japanese version of each of the Three Pure Precepts. This character has a wide range of meanings and both an active and a passive aspect. It includes the sense of guiding and also the sense of already being connected and engaged.

The pictographic elements composing the original character convey this active–passive dynamic. On the left is the symbol for a hand, conveying the idea of actively giving a hand. On the right are three symbols for the ear, implying passive, receptive listening. The character means simultaneously embracing and sustaining and being embraced and sustained: embracing and sustaining all good and being embraced and sustained by all good. We might interpret the character *setsu* as encouraging us to be three-fourths observant and one-fourth actively helpful. First we should receive and understand the situation and then give a hand appropriately.

## *Embrace and Sustain All Beings*

In the third Pure Precept, Buddha's teaching to purify your mind is transmuted by the bodhisattva vow into "embrace and sustain all beings." For a bodhisattva, the mind is purified by working for the welfare of others. Refraining from evil and practicing all good is not about purifying or improving yourself. It renounces the intention to benefit or transform yourself. Such self-centered intention would be an obstacle to the bodhisattva's vow to realize great awakening for the welfare of all beings before yourself.

The Three Pure Precepts are called pure because they have been purified of all duality. They are so simply stated that a three-year-old child can understand them; yet even a person with eighty years of experience may not be able to practice them. The practice of these precepts is like walking a ten-thousand-mile iron road, yet all bodhisattvas vow to walk this long and joyful path.

chapter nine

# THE ABODE AND THE SOURCE:
## *Embrace and Sustain Forms and Ceremonies*

*This is the abode of the law of all buddhas.*
*This is the source of the law of all buddhas.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

THE TRUE, OR LIBERATING, NATURE of all things is formless and inconceivably wonderful. It cannot be grasped, but it can be realized through the forms of everyday life. By giving up our habitual personal styles of deportment and bringing our body, speech, and thought into accord with traditional forms and ceremonies, we merge in realization with buddha. We renounce our habit body and manifest the true dharma body. This is renouncing worldly affairs and entering the buddha way.

The buddha way is all-pervading and free of limits. Yet without some container in which to practice, it cannot be fully realized. When correctly understood and practiced appropriately, the traditional rules and procedures of Zen training provide a context within which student and teacher together can realize selflessness and practice wholeheartedly, wholesomely, and in harmony with all beings.

Being upright and gentle is the appropriate attitude with which to practice these forms and ceremonies. To be upright is to be intimate with them. The intimate practice of these regulations is neither rigid nor loose. In intimate practice, you find a balance that is neither submissive to nor defiant of the tradition. Embracing the precept in this

way, there is no practitioner separate from the form: person and precept are one. Intimately embracing and sustaining these forms and ceremonies, your attachments to body and mind immediately drop away, and you realize selflessness.

In general terms, this precept is an admonition to be impeccable in time and space, including being on time for practice events, eating what is offered, not misusing or wasting the resources of the community or the natural environment, using things in an appropriate manner and returning them to their proper places, and observing the prescribed physical postures and verbal protocols.

Paying careful attention to the concrete details of daily life provides the opportunity to be initiated into the authentic tradition. Furthermore, this attention to detail sustains individual and group practice throughout the many years of Zen training. Finally, the practice leads to subtle and profound discussion between teachers and students for clarifying the dharma.

## *Being On Time*

Zen is, in a nutshell, being on time. Not being early and not being late is Zen. When you are early, there is no self who is early. There is just *being early*. When you are late, there is no self who is late. There is just *being late*. When you are on time, there is no self who is on time. There is just *being on time*. This selfless practice of being on time is inseparable from great awakening.

Once I asked Suzuki Roshi, "What is right effort?" He said, "To get up with no hesitation when your alarm clock rings." On a later occasion, during one of our week-long meditation retreats, the early wake-up bell was rung at 3:30 A.M. instead of the usual time of 4:30 A.M. People came out of their rooms and informed the bell ringer that he was an hour early, so he stopped ringing the bell and proceeded to walk up and down the halls of the temple telling people that they could go back to bed. My room was next to my teacher's. As I came

out of my door, I saw him already dressed in his robes, walking to the meditation hall. Following the bell ringer's instruction, I went back to bed and rose again at the second ringing of the bell.

When we were all sitting in the meditation hall, Suzuki Roshi said, "The bell was rung this morning. When I heard it, I came down to sit. But when I arrived, none of you were here. I sat for a while but no one came." Then he yelled, "What do you think we are doing here?!" Then this old Zen master got down from his seat, came over to my seat, the one closest to his, and hit me with his teacher's staff in the traditional way on the shoulder with all his strength. He grunted as he hit me. Then he proceeded to hit each student, more than one hundred of us. By the time he finished, he seemed tired. He was hitting lightly and no longer grunting as he hit. I think that we all felt how deep his love was. He gave his all to show us that, for a student of Zen, there is no higher teaching than the precept: At the sound of the bell, put on your robe and go to the meditation hall, with no hesitation.

We not only practice being on time, but also being at the right place. As an opportunity for training your body and mind, you may voluntarily commit yourself to practicing a daily schedule of meditation, either alone or in a group. Once you realize that you want to follow such a regimen of practice and commit yourself to doing so no matter what, you will not fail to learn something about yourself.

When I was in my twenties, Suzuki Roshi gave me the responsibility of overseeing the daily schedule of events in the meditation hall. I kept the attendance of all the students and was responsible, together with my teacher and other students, for the quality of discipline in the temple. One evening shortly before the beginning of meditation, Suzuki Roshi, the master of the temple, came to me and asked my permission to miss meditation that night. He said that some students wanted him to go to the movies with them. I remember that he said, "Please excuse me." I said, "Of course. Please have a good time." I was honored that he respected my position and responsibility

enough to consider talking to me about his own practice. I was even more impressed that my teacher, a monk almost forty years my senior, was able to discuss his conduct with me even to the point of asking me for an exception to his usual commitment to the schedule. Now I see that he had to do this in order to impress upon me and others how important these regulations are in establishing the buddha way in the United States.

When I was in my early forties, I studied at a monastery in the countryside of southern Minnesota. There I practiced with an excellent yet rather frail and elderly teacher named Narasaki Ikko Roshi. Although I was young and strong and could walk much more quickly than he, I noticed that he almost always got to the meditation hall first. As I watched more closely, I saw that he was able to do this even though he walked to the hall more slowly than I did, and my housing was no farther away than his. As I watched even more closely, I noticed that the key factor was that he left before I did. As a matter of fact, he left just as the bell sounded. Then I watched to see how it was that I didn't leave just as the bell sounded. I noticed that I was usually in the middle of some activity and that I didn't immediately give it up. I discovered how my greed was preventing me from keeping up with the frail and elderly monk. Once I gave up whatever I was involved in as soon as I heard the bell, I would naturally arrive at the meditation hall before the old teacher, which is the appropriate order of arrival.

Some years later, when I was abbot of the Tassajara Zen Monastery, Narasaki Roshi came from Japan to visit. After he arrived, one of his attendants came to tell me that Narasaki Roshi was very tired from his travels, so it would be good if he could retire early in the evening, which would mean not following the evening meditation schedule. The attendant said that even though he was tired, the old teacher would follow the schedule unless I, as the abbot of the monastery, asked him to retire early. Just then the old teacher happened to come by, so I said, "Narasaki Roshi, please do not come to

the evening meditation tonight. I would like you to get some extra rest because of your long travels." He seemed very happy at the prospect of some well-needed rest, and said in Japanese, "Thank you very much." He retired early that night. I was deeply impressed by his discipline and humility in the practice of the first Pure Precept.

## *Eating What Is Offered*

Another important and difficult regulation for practitioners of the buddha way is to eat and drink moderately, to cast aside all worldly affairs in the realm of nourishing our bodies. This regulation is often phrased as "Eat only what is given at the time it is given."

Suzuki Roshi's primary teacher was Gyokujun So-on Roshi. He was physically a very strong man. He studied the traditional art of archery; they say that no one else was strong enough to string his bow. He was also a very strict Zen teacher. When Suzuki Roshi was a young monk, he practiced with So-on Roshi together with six other young monks. One day the teacher served them leftover daikon pickles, some of which were beginning to rot. Some of the young monks decided not to eat what was given, but to secretly bury the pickles in a shallow grave behind the temple. To their amazement and horror, their teacher went digging behind the temple and found the buried pickles. He washed them, cooked them, and served them to the monks again. This time the boys ate the pickles.

When Suzuki Roshi told us this story he said that, upon finally eating these recycled pickles, he more deeply understood the meaning of food. All the other monks eventually ran away from this teacher. He would have run away, too, he said, but he didn't know that he could. A vital part of becoming buddha is not knowing how to run away from your teacher or from the practice of the precepts. I am so glad that he didn't run away. This childlike innocence and freedom from cleverness is necessary to realize this precept and is essential to being upright.

Suzuki Roshi, like most modern Japanese Zen monks, grew up eating white rice. When he and his students opened the Tassajara monastery in 1967, the cooking staff had a bias in favor of brown rice. It was the heyday of Zen macrobiotics, and brown rice was considered to be much more healthful than white when thoroughly chewed. Suzuki Roshi liked brown rice and even gave a wonderful lecture about how in the process of thoroughly chewing brown rice, we realize the spirit of our practice. However, in the setting of our formal meal practice in the meditation hall, he was not able to eat very much brown rice because of the limited time of the meal, and he lost more than 10 percent of his weight in the first few months.

Suzuki Roshi was physically a small man, and it was dangerous for him to lose that much weight. His wife and some of his students encouraged him to take special meals of white rice and other foods separately in his cabin. He refused and continued to eat with the monks in the meditation hall. His own health was not as important to him as establishing a clear and rigorous discipline in the monastery. He felt that it was necessary that he set the example of such practice for us young and rather literal-minded monks. He may have sacrificed some years of his life so that the monastic discipline of Tassajara could be established and flourish. Some might say that he was wrong to endanger his health in this way. In fact, it was only four years later that he died. For him, the health of our practice was a higher priority than his own health and long life.

## *Formal Meal Regulations*

In Zen it is said that we eat before *and* after enlightenment, so the practice of eating is vitally important in both approaching and unfolding realization. There are many regulations and ceremonies included in our formal meal practice. There are detailed procedures for how to make offerings to the buddhas and ancestors and how to dedicate the merit of our offerings to the welfare of all beings. There

are various ways by which those who are receiving the meal express respect for one another and for those who are serving them, and for the servers to express respect for those being served. There are also opportunities for practicing mindfulness and expressing our gratitude for the meal and our awareness of how our interdependence with all beings has brought us our food. For example, whenever the server and the recipient meet, they bow to each other, both before and after the food is served.

One of our favorite condiments in American Zen centers is *gomashio* (fresh-roasted sesame seed salt). So delicious! At the San Francisco Zen Center we have a special way of placing the spoon in the bowl of sesame salt in order to express gentleness and respect. When offering the bowl to someone, it is considered most polite and considerate to have the spoon handle pointing away from the recipient. And when the recipient returns the bowl to the server at the end of the meal, the position of the bowl is reversed so that the spoon handle points away from the server, as a way of returning the gesture of respect. Following this practice usually gives rise to feelings of closeness, kindness, and mutual regard. If someone fails to follow the procedure, due to inattention, lack of instruction, or even disrespect, there might arise some feeling of offense.

I once joined the formal meal practice at another monastery in the United States, where it was considered polite to place the handle toward the recipient. What was considered polite in one monastery was considered rude in another. Back home, when I told our community about this, many people felt relieved of a rigid sense of what constitutes politeness and respect. These regulations are not absolutes. They are our human attempts to express our utmost devotion to one another and to manifest, through bodily conduct, our understanding of the interdependence of all life.

## *Not Misusing or Wasting the Resources of the Community or the Natural Environment*

I heard an encouraging story about two monks, Chinshan and Xuefeng, who were on pilgrimage in the mountains. Once in the course of their journey, Chinshan stopped to wash his feet in a stream, when he saw a vegetable leaf floating by. He rejoiced and said, "There must be a man of the Way in these mountains; let us follow the stream and seek him out." Xuefeng said, "Your eye of wisdom is cloudy; later on, how will you judge others? His carelessness about material blessings is such as this; what is he doing, dwelling in the mountains?"[1]

A moment later they saw a monk coming at a furious pace from upstream, running to catch the leaf. Observing this example of concern for the resources of the natural world and human world, the pilgrims decided that it would be good to visit the mountain person after all.

For Dogen, the "mountains and rivers of the immediate present are the manifestation of the path of the ancient buddhas."[2] We care for everything in the natural and human-made world with utmost respect and devotion. Dogen had a deep veneration for and adamant protectiveness of the great and small trees in the mountains that surrounded Eiheiji (Monastery of Eternal Peace), and he resisted all unnecessary logging there. When people wanted to needlessly cut down excellent trees, he steadfastly refused to give his permission. Dogen's vow to save all living beings extended to all trees, grasses, pebbles, and rocks. Long after he passed away, people wanted to build a memorial hall for him at Eiheiji. They planned to build something big and wanted to cut down a giant cedar. But their saws could not penetrate the tree. The monks of the monastery felt that Dogen's immovable vow to protect and save all beings had entered the tree.

Shakyamuni Buddha recommended that his monks plant and see to the care of five trees during their lifetimes. Throughout the Buddhist world the practice of reforestation and revegetation has been

followed around many temples and monasteries. Suzuki Roshi told me that part of the inspiration for the Buddhist name he gave me, Tenshin, came from the name of one of the abbots of his home temple, Rinso-in, who had devoted a great deal of his life energy to planting trees, which have become the forests around Rinso-in. *Rinso-in* means "Temple of the Forest of Elders" or, as I think of it, "Temple of Trees Manifesting the Way of the Ancient Buddhas."

For more than twenty years, community members have gathered at our Green Dragon Zen Temple, just north of San Francisco, to plant trees in the fields and on the surrounding hillsides. We have planted thousands of Douglas fir, native live oak, Monterey pine, and coastal redwood trees. Even though we do not cut down trees for our use, we use building materials that come from trees cut down in other parts of the world, and therefore we want to replenish those resources.

## *Attaining the Way Is Ceremonies*

The Chinese characters for *ceremony* and *meaning* are closely related. These characters are both transliterated as *I* in Chinese and *Gi* in Japanese. The pictograph for *ceremony*, which appears on the cover of this book, has the radicals for *meaning* and *person* embedded within it. Thus ceremony brings meaning to the person and the person embodies meaning. A ceremony is a concert or a dance between person and meaning.

The character *I* can also be translated as "right conduct," "loyal," "faithful," "public-spirited," or "duty to one's neighbor." Ceremonies provide a way to unite all these wonderful qualities with our personhood.

Dogen says that ceremonies are the essence of the teaching. Attaining the way is ceremonies. In Soto Zen the everyday ceremonies of meeting and greeting one another remind us of our ultimate concern in practicing together, which is the welfare of all

beings. Meeting and greeting one another are like burning incense and making full bows to great awakening. Entering the room and meeting our teacher in a private interview is a great recollection of the ultimate truth. Greetings of "Good morning" and "Good night" are the utmost invocation of our deep concern for others. Because of their immense and awesome import to our practice, such greetings are transmitted and performed ceremonially, that is to say, in established and traditional ways.

## *Bowing*

In Soto Zen one of the ways of receiving dharma from our teacher is receiving our teacher's manner of bowing. When I join my palms together in a gesture of respect toward any being, animate or inanimate, I feel the hands of my teachers embodied in my hands. I feel my teachers' presence in my joined palms. I also feel the presence of their teachers, all the way back to Shakyamuni Buddha.

Dogen said that when there is bowing in this world, the buddha way flourishes; when there is no bowing in this world, the buddha way perishes.

Suzuki Roshi's second teacher was Kishizawa Ian, from whom he said he received most of his understanding of Dogen's mind. Ian studied with a great teacher named Nishiari Bokusan. One day Bokusan said to Ian, "You are not my disciple." Ian said, "What?" Bokusan said, "You are not my disciple." Ian said, "What's your reason for saying this, teacher?" Bokusan said, "When I am sitting formally, you bow to me. But when I come out of the toilet, you don't bow to me. Therefore you are not my disciple." Ian finally understood Bokusan's intention. He became his successor through the practice of bowing.

Many Western students of Zen have some resistance to the formal practice of bowing, especially the practice of full prostration. This resistance can manifest itself as being unwilling to practice the bow or being overly enthusiastic in practicing the bow. Such resistance is

good: it is through working with it that you find the balanced, upright attitude with which bowing is practiced by the buddhas. Finding the place of balance between belligerence and obsequiousness reveals the selfless path of the awakened ones, where a bow is just a bow.

The practice of bowing offers an opportunity for cutting through all dualities of self and other, sentient being and buddha. In our tradition we have a formal verse that we sometimes recite while bowing:

> The one who is bowing, the one who is bowed to
> Their nature, no nature
> My body, other's body, not two
> Plunging into the inexhaustible vow
> Living in harmony with all

As Suzuki Roshi said, "When you bow, there is no buddha and no you. One complete bow takes place. That is all. This is nirvana."

## *Sitting Meditation and the Cosmic Mudra*

Buddha's upright sitting is beyond sitting or lying down. It is simply the dharma gate of peace and bliss. It is thorough emancipation and totally culminated enlightenment. The traps and snares of forms and ceremonies can never grasp it, and yet, in the formal practice of sitting upright, the essence of being upright is encouraged and realized.

In the classical form for our ceremony of zazen, you sit cross-legged, either in Lotus Pose *(Padmasana)* or Half-Lotus Pose *(Ardha Padmasana)*, in an erect posture, not leaning forward, backward, right, or left. The ears are in line with the shoulders, and the nose is in a line with the navel. The eyes are open and gazing gently downward. The mouth is closed, and the tongue is placed against the roof of the mouth, with the tip touching the backs of the upper teeth. The breath is soft and quiet through the nose. We rock gently from side to side before finally settling into a steady, immobile sitting position.

The hands are held in what is called the Cosmic Concentration Mudra. *Mudra* is a Sanskrit word that means "circle," "ring," or "seal." The palms are up, one on top of the other, with the thumb tips gently and precisely touching, forming a beautiful oval ring. The hands are held against the body. The baby fingers touch the abdomen at the center of gravity of this posture, two or three inches below the navel. The back of the lower hand lightly touches the heel of the upper crossed leg. The arms are held away from the torso in such a way that an egg could be placed under the armpits.

Suzuki Roshi taught that forming the mudra in your hands with a full mind means that your mind pervades your whole body. He also noted that at first you may feel some restriction in practicing with this mudra. When you are not disturbed by the restriction, you have found the meaning of the imperturbable mind of effortless practice.

The way that you hold the hands together depends on the way that you hold your entire body. It includes the way that you hold your wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, shoulders, neck and head, upper back, lower back, both sides of your torso, and, of course, your abdomen and legs. The whole body is involved in this way of holding the hands. The whole body brings forth this mudra, and this mudra brings forth the whole body. Concentrating on the mudra, you concentrate on the whole body. Thus holding your hands in this ceremonial way, you realize the interdependence of all the different parts of the body.

The dawning of this vision of the interdependence of the whole body opens upon a greater vision of the interdependence of your body with all animate and inanimate beings throughout the universe. Just as the whole body brings forth the mudra and the mudra brings forth the whole body, the body brings forth the whole universe and the whole universe brings forth the body. When you practice upright sitting with this mudra, you've got the whole world in your hands. Thus it is called the Cosmic Concentration Mudra.

## *The Ultimate Meaning of Forms and Ceremonies*

It is not the intention of the buddha ancestors that these forms and ceremonies be used as programs to control ourselves or others. Rather, they provide support, like a trellis, upon which the profuse and abundant forms of the buddha way can bloom and proliferate. They are freely given by our tradition and are meant as offerings of clear and gentle guidance and support, not as shackles to bind us.

Nonattachment is the essence of the practice of embracing and sustaining forms and ceremonies. Finding the perfect balance between observing the forms and letting go of them, you realize the liberating potential of this first Pure Precept. Although these forms and ceremonies offer excellent opportunities for the realization of the true path of awakening, their appropriate application always originates together with the circumstances in which they are practiced. Because they are interdependent with these circumstances, they have no inherent nature.

When practiced properly, these forms are beautiful expressions of the interdependence of all things. Their true nature is that they have no fixed nature. For this reason, although we practice these forms with precision, strength, and meticulous attention to detail, we are all the while applying the forms with a gentleness and flexibility that arise from the awareness of their true nature.

As Suzuki Roshi said, "What we are doing here is so important that we should not take it too seriously." We should never take this precious practice so seriously that we lose our sense of humor. One of the wrong views that Shakyamuni Buddha warned his disciples about was the rigid adherence to the conventional understanding of the forms of discipline. It is not that the conventional understanding is wrong, it is just that we should not rigidly hold to it. Although paying attention to minute details of our conduct and bringing our behavior into accord with the precepts is necessary in order to realize the

true import of the Buddha's teaching, this effort is not sufficient for the realization of the ultimate goal.

During the Tokugawa era in Japan (1603–1868), a monk named Tetsugyu, which means "Iron Bull," was serving tea to the warlord of Sendai when his dharma brother Cho-on, or "Tidal Sound," dropped by the tearoom. Lord Sendai invited Cho-on to join them for tea. Tetsugyu chose an especially precious antique tea bowl that Lord Sendai had given him and put it down on the tatami mat to make tea. In the midst of the moment of appreciating the great beauty of the tea bowl, Cho-on suddenly reached out with a ceremonial stick he was carrying and smashed the tea bowl. "Now look at the authentic tea bowl that exists before birth," said Cho-on.

Tetsugyu turned pale and nearly fainted, but Lord Sendai was able to stay present. He said to Tetsugyu, "I gave you that tea bowl, but I would like you to give it back to me now. Before you give it back, please have it glued together and have a box made for it. On the cover of the box, I ask that you write the name of the bowl, which I now give as The Authentic Tea Bowl Before Birth. I will reverently pass the bowl on to my descendants."[3] Tetsugyu was holding on to an authentic ancient form. Cho-on broke the form. These are two extreme ways to relate to an authentic tradition: holding on and breaking. One monk was shocked when the form he was holding was broken. Although Cho-on demonstrated the vitality that can only be realized by going beyond the form, he did not understand how to care for the form and bring it forth in practice. Finally, Lord Sendai put it all back together and even went beyond breaking the form. Going beyond form is transmitted by a form. This is what is especially transmitted in Zen.

Although regulations are essential for human beings to realize selflessness, a bodhisattva must always be ready to give them up if they are in any way harmful to living beings. Furthermore, it is in accord with the compassionate spirit of these precepts to happily change

any of these forms and ceremonies if doing so would bring greater benefit to beings.

In the traditional forms and ceremonies of Zen, students of buddha dharma have a wonderful means to bring their body, speech, and thought into alignment with their formless true nature. Formlessness is transmitted through these forms and ceremonies: given, broken, renewed or refreshed, put back together, and transmitted again.

Not only must we go beyond the forms of practice, but we must also go beyond our teacher's understanding of the practice. It is a principle of Zen practice that, in order for the tradition to survive, "the student must stand on the teacher's shoulders." The transcendence of the way of your teacher must be based on mastery of and total devotion to the teacher's way. Only those who are completely committed and devoted to a tradition, have realized that tradition, and are carriers of it, have the authority to change it. This is the spirit of Bodhidharma's special transmission outside the teaching. If we really love and are devoted to a tradition and to those who represent it, we must eventually disagree with it and with them. Thorough alignment with a tradition and the teacher representing it involves a struggle of mutual resistance and some disagreement. Experiencing disagreement is a necessary element in the process of arriving at ultimate and complete accord. Once I said to Suzuki Roshi, "I am always comfortable with you. How is it that we never have any disagreements?" He said, "We will eventually." As it happened, he died before we could realize any disagreement.

The difficult struggle of realizing true love's agreement through disagreement is demonstrated in Shakespeare's story of King Lear and his daughter Cordelia.[4] Tragically in this case, the king is unable to understand in time that such disagreement might be part of his daughter's love and the orderly transmission of his authority. The process of transmission seems to fail. Cordelia, who is the only one of Lear's daughters who really loves him, is also the only one who has

the courage and conviction to honestly disagree with him. In order to be true to him and honor their relationship, she has to take the risk of losing his favor. Because she loves him, she has to renounce the safe and easy path of flattering him by her docile agreement. Her sisters, who really care nothing for their father, selfishly express their agreement in order to gain his favor.

Part of Lear's tragedy is that in his blind arrogance he does not see his true daughter. He does not understand that the living transmission of his authority rests in his ability to accept devotion even in the form of unflattering disagreement. Toward the end of the story Lear finally comes to understand that Cordelia has always been his true, devoted, loving daughter, but by then it is too late. Perhaps every vital student–teacher relationship eventually comes to such a challenging and potentially tragic confrontation. The annals of Zen contain many stories of this moment. Such stories show that, in the dynamic, living transmission of the buddha dharma, when teacher and disciple are in truly profound accord, they must eventually give up the security of agreeing with each other and enter into the risk of disagreement. There is a plantlike passivity in following exactly in the footsteps of wise and compassionate awakened ancestors, but we must go beyond this passive security and enter into a relationship of animal risk. Grrr!

## *Beyond the Monastery*

The forms and ceremonies of the buddha ancestors are just their everyday activities and are often compared to eating rice and drinking tea. When you are living, working, and playing beyond the monastic setting, however, you might wonder how to practice the precept of embracing and sustaining forms and ceremonies. How can you practice in situations where these traditional forms are impractical? How can you set up forms that are appropriate to your everyday activities?

Once I taught a class on this first Pure Precept to a group of Zen students who lived as householders and practiced regularly with an urban sitting group. One woman tried to practice this precept in her daily life by doing whatever she was doing wholeheartedly, with complete awareness. I told her that that sounded good: it sounded like the upright practice of this first Pure Precept in her everyday life. "But I have a question for you," I said. "How do you know that you are not just dreaming that you are doing whatever you are doing wholeheartedly, with complete awareness?"

With whom do you establish the standards of practice in your daily life? The ancestors warned us not to set up standards on our own. Without support, how do you know that you're not just practicing according to your dispositions and going along with your prejudices? In order to practice this precept, we all need someone in our lives to whom we are accountable, someone whom we have asked to give us feedback on our practice, someone to guide us in finding a balance in the midst of our likes and dislikes.

Whether you live inside or outside a monastery, you need this kind of support in your practice. You need to take refuge in sangha: get together with dharma friends and agree upon ways that you can help one another practice being upright and intimate with the forms and ceremonies of daily life. If you have already established standards of appropriate conduct, then be sure that you have an understanding of accountability with your friends, so that you can support one another to realize balance and intimacy with these forms. If you can establish and sustain such standards and dharma friendships, then you can practice the first Pure Precept and realize selflessness just as it is done in Zen monasteries.

chapter ten

# PRACTICING AND BEING PRACTICED: *Embrace and Sustain All Good*

*This is the teaching of unsurpassed complete perfect awakening,*
*and the path of practicing and being practiced.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

BY FAITHFULLY PRACTICING the first Pure Precept and embracing traditional forms and ceremonies, we are freed from selfishness and evil action and may then enter the joy of liberation. The bliss that graciously arises from renouncing all selfish concerns is the source of embracing and sustaining all good.

The ultimate intention of the second Pure Precept is to realize all goodness together with all beings. In other words, practicing this precept is intended to actualize the entire world as the embodiment of all goodness. All true goodness of body, speech, and thought spontaneously arise without the slightest deliberation from the joyful beings who are free from all selfishness. Every action of such upright, joyful beings manifests great beneficence upon the Earth.

In the conventional practice of this precept, we gradually develop skillfulness and warmth in all our relations with the objects of our awareness. By "objects" I mean to include all other beings as well as our own actions of body, speech, and thought. By practicing with our body, speech, and thought as objects, and with animate and inanimate objects throughout our environment, we are laying the foundation for the ultimate practice of good that finally sets all beings

free. The primary qualities of working with all these objects are kindness, gentleness, compassion, precision, carefulness, respect, devotion, and attention to the minute details of all objects. Developing these qualities, we approach and finally embrace the totality of embracing and sustaining all good.

In Soto Zen we have encouragements, such as "There is no place on Earth to spit," by which we mean that there is no place on Earth that is not sacred. There is no place on Earth that is not suitable for the realization of the buddha dharma. In this practice we refrain from handling things carelessly, noisily, or needlessly. All things are treated with the utmost respect. Light and inexpensive things are picked up as if they were heavy and precious. Doors are opened and closed quietly and gently. Our actions are performed in such a manner as to be pleasant and inspiring to all others, animate and inanimate: gentle and encouraging to the door, and kind and careful toward our sitting cushion. Every bodily posture and facial expression is an excellent opportunity to encourage and generate love and compassion.

Suzuki Roshi taught us a way of practicing with the straight-backed wooden chairs in our dining room in San Francisco. At our original temple in Japantown, we always ate our meals together seated on the floor in the meditation hall, but when we moved to our new temple, at 300 Page Street, we had a new venue for practicing together: a dining room where we could share our meals. The dining room is on the floor above the zendo, and it has a tile floor.

When we first started using the dining room for meals, some students carelessly slid the chairs around on the floor, which made quite a bit of noise. It was especially loud down below in the meditation hall. Noticing this, our teacher kindly asked us to carefully lift the chairs and quietly set them down, rather than slide them around on the floor. As he said, "These chairs already offer us convenience. Sitting on them is quite convenient. We don't need to go any further and move them in whatever way seems convenient to us. We have the time to take good care of these chairs, just as they take good care

of us. We are able to pick each chair up, to lift it off the ground and to set it where we want it, and then to quietly sit down. When we are done using the chair, we can carefully lift it up and put it back. We can practice in this way."

A simple practice such as this offers many opportunities to assemble goodness in the world. It expresses respect and gratitude for the chairs, the floor, the meditation hall, and anyone sitting in the hall. It expresses gratitude for the kindness of Suzuki Roshi and for the bodhisattva way. Practicing good with the body in this way, you realize how the chair, floor, and meditation hall help and care for you, and how you help and care for the chair, floor, and meditation hall. Thus being mindful of your body, you gradually come to witness the dependent co-arising of awakening with chairs, floor, meditation hall, and all beings. The way to realize awakening is to realize the interdependence of each thing as it appears before you right now. Each and every thing in the world can reveal the dharma, if you give it your utmost respect. This is especially true of anything you have abandoned or rejected—those things that you do not think deserve your utmost respect.

Many ancient Buddhist meditation texts contain verses that you can recite to yourself while going about your ordinary daily activities. These are ways to celebrate the great compassionate vows of bodhisattvas, and to generate and maintain your focus on the greatest welfare for others. Although bodhisattvas are concerned for the welfare of others before themselves, in order to accomplish their work they must also care for their own bodies appropriately.

For example, all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sentient beings really appreciate a person who takes good care of her mouth, teeth, and gums. Dental hygienists especially appreciate this good care. They already have job security because our teeth and gums will eventually degenerate, so they are really encouraged when they see that we care for them. It shows that we respect teeth just as they do, that we are willing to do the work that they do, and that we respect and

appreciate the hygienists themselves. If you take very good care of your teeth and kindly present a clean, well-cared-for mouth to this person who is dedicating his life to the care and welfare of your body, it shows gratitude for his work and inspires and encourages him to go on and do his best in caring for others. Seeing such a mouth he may say, "You are really doing a good job on your teeth. You made my day! Finding one clean mouth, I can keep going."

Every day as you brush your teeth you can wish for the welfare of all beings, especially your dental hygienist and dentist. Bodhisattvas vow to present clean, fresh, bright smiles to all beings. We make this offering with the hope that all beings will be encouraged by our clean mouths and friendly smiles. In this way we take care of our own bodies for the welfare of others.

Before brushing your teeth, holding your toothbrush in your joined palms, you can recite,

> Holding the toothbrush,
> I vow with sentient beings
> To attain the right dharma
> And purity spontaneously.

While cleaning your teeth, you can think to yourself,

> I vow with all sentient beings
> To turn toward the pure and spotless dharma gate
> And to completely enter into awakening.

After brushing your teeth, you can recite,

> Using the toothbrush every morning,
> I vow with sentient beings
> To attain teeth strong enough
> To gnaw all the illusions.

While washing your face, you can think in your heart,

> As I wash my face with water,

Let all sentient beings
Attain the pure dharma gate
And be unstained forever.

You can create many other verses to accompany your daily routines. Such practices help to generate and maintain the warm heart of great compassion.

Another way to cultivate the second Pure Precept is through your speech. Motivated by a warm and kind heart, a bodhisattva vows to communicate with others honestly, speaking gently and endearingly to them. As Dogen says, "It is kind speech to speak to sentient beings as you would to a baby."[1]

When you do not practice kind speech, your vision is limited. Then even when others are practicing kind speech, you may have difficulty noticing and appreciating their efforts. On the other hand, when you begin to practice good in this way, you see kind speech everywhere. By practicing kind speech, your vision is transformed. Through this simple practice of good, you can come to realize the vision of all buddhas and witness the buddha nature of all beings. Therefore a bodhisattva joyfully vows to practice good through speech, never giving up, lifetime after lifetime. Those who hear your good speech, just like those who see your bright and kind smile, will be deeply touched. They will never forget it.

All the actions of daily life are great opportunities for practicing good and deserve exhaustive study. In very complex situations, you may need to consult with others before acting, to make sure that you have looked deeply enough into your motives and satisfied the conditions of goodness.

Suzuki Roshi's wife, Mitsu, whom we called *Okusan* (meaning "Mrs.," a humble and respectful way to speak to the woman of the house), said that when we see something good to do we should do it without delay. Once when I was having tea and pickles with Okusan in her kitchen, she told a story about a situation requiring careful

deliberation. She was invited to attend an awards banquet to honor some leaders of the Japanese community in San Francisco. One man was being honored for his great contributions, and Okusan thought that his family should also be recognized and honored. She said that in Japan when a person accomplishes something great, everyone understands that it would not have been possible without the support of others, especially the family.

But before making this suggestion to the master of ceremonies, she consulted with two friends who were sitting nearby. Fortunately, she had a range of counselors. One person she described as being quite a modern woman who represented a more liberal and flexible view of decorum in such situations. She asked her and the woman agreed that it would be good to honor the rest of the family. Then Okusan consulted an older woman whose views were often strictly traditional on such matters. That woman also thought that it would be appropriate to mention the family. So at the banquet Okusan boldly stood up and joyfully expressed her gratitude and appreciation for the whole family. The audience was in thunderous accord, so it did seem to be a good thing to do. She saw the possibility of good, she deeply considered and consulted with others about its appropriateness, and she immediately acted.

Sometimes people tell us that we are being helpful, but that does not mean that we are helpful. At other times people tell us that we are not being helpful, but that does not mean that we are not being helpful. However, in our attempts to learn how to practice good, the evaluations of others are essential. We cannot decide by ourselves whether our conduct is good. The determination of goodness is arrived at through the consideration of all living beings.

## *The Ultimate Meaning of Embrace and Sustain All Good*

From the perspective of conventional truth, the dualistic world of self and other, you can practice good while still believing the self to

be separate from others. It is normal to begin this way. By practicing according to conventional truth, you lay the foundation for realizing the ultimate significance of this precept.

The ultimate meaning of embracing and sustaining all good goes beyond all doing. Embracing and sustaining all good means not doing anything at all: it means being free of doing and not doing. It is simply the selfless absorption of a sentient being in just being a sentient being. Right now all sentient beings are just being sentient beings, but very few accept and realize this.

For a sentient being to practice the ultimate good means not to move. How do you realize not moving? By fully settling into all aspects of your experience: your feelings and your perceptions. Not moving means to be fully congruent with yourself. You go down to the bottom of your experience, as all buddha ancestors have done, and enter the proverbial green dragon's cave. Graciously and gently, you encourage yourself to fully inhabit your body, speech, and thought. You may even command yourself to be obedient to yourself, and to come all the way in and sit down.

This pure obedience of the self to the self is the goodness and virtue of the self. Although no one issues the invitation, and the guest is not other than the host, you invite the self into the self and become both host and guest of the self. Once the guest arrives, you continue your kindness, gentleness, and attention to every detail, so that the guest feels entirely welcome and can settle into immobile sitting. This unmoving presence in just being yourself is what is meant by unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening.

chapter eleven

# TAKING SELF AND OTHERS ACROSS:
## *Embrace and Sustain All Beings*

*It is transcending ordinary and sacred,*
*and taking self and others across.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

AFTER REALIZING SELFLESSNESS by the practice of the first Pure Precept, and being empowered with the immense joy and enthusiasm of the second Pure Precept, your body and mind are flexible and receptive—ready to be transformed into whatever is needed for the welfare of all beings. This transformation is the fulfillment of the bodhisattva's third Pure Precept. Absorption in the good of selfless liberation spontaneously overflows into nurturing all beings and helping them to mature. Empowered by the realization of the Three Pure Precepts, you will gladly do whatever is beneficial not only for humans but for all living beings.

Once there was a whooping crane born in a zoo in Texas. She was named Tex. Whooping cranes are an endangered species, so Tex was given special care and attention. Like many social animals, whooping cranes undergo a learning process called imprinting, in which they form a strong bond of attachment with a role model, usually a parent. Tex, however, was separated from her parents, and she imprinted on her human male caretaker. When she was mature enough to mate and bear offspring, she was introduced to a male whooping crane, but she was uninterested in males of her own

species. Because the Texas zookeepers were unsuccessful in mating her, she was sent to a special center for the preservation and propagation of whooping cranes in Wisconsin. There she was placed in the care of another human male.

The reproductive process of whooping cranes involves a ritual in which the female is aroused by a mating dance performed by the male. When the female is aroused by the dance, she stands and her egg descends into the proper position for fertilization. Because she had imprinted on humans, her caretaker realized that it might be necessary for a human to perform the dance. He studied the whooping crane mating dances, made a male whooping crane costume for himself, and performed the mating dance for Tex. His dance was successful: Tex was aroused and got up to dance with him. Her egg descended and she was artificially inseminated. The egg was brought to term and delivered, but the shell was too thin, and the embryo did not survive. Whooping cranes mate only once a year, so her caretaker had to wait for another year before trying again.

The next two years repeated the failure of the first attempt. Finally, her caretaker decided that it was necessary to give Tex exhaustive attention during the period of gestation. He built a little hut for her, covered the floor with soft straw, and, after her egg was fertilized, he moved in with her. He made an area for her nest and slept next to her. Nearby he had a desk, his typewriter, and other work materials so he could continue his work and still be near her. He even accompanied her when she went foraging for food. His constant presence seemed to make her more calm, relaxed, and able to concentrate. This time the shell of the egg was stronger, and the embryo was more vital. The infant crane hatched successfully and eventually reached maturity. This is the kind of boundless, meticulous, and loving devotion that the selfless bodhisattva extends in protecting and caring for the welfare of living beings.

The great master Yunmen was once asked by a monk, "What was the Buddha teaching his entire lifetime?" Yunmen answered, "An

appropriate response."[1] Throughout his life Shakyamuni was primarily concerned with what was appropriate for the edification and liberation of whomever he was facing at the moment.

Buddhas and great bodhisattvas such as Yunmen have "no other purpose than to melt the glue and untie the bonds for you, to pull out the nails and wrench out the pegs,"[2] in order to liberate all beings. They are able to be kind and helpful under all circumstances, in all realms of being. They join hands with all beings and walk through birth and death together with them. This is their only wish.

Because bodhisattvas have given up picking and choosing and just walk straight ahead on the buddha way, every situation is an opportunity for guiding and benefiting beings. Throughout their daily lives, and even on the verge of death or when about to be born, they cut off all side roads and just strenuously and ceaselessly embrace and sustain all beings.

If you wish to join all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in their great work and play, you may do so simply by being upright in all circumstances and being very kind with yourself and others until we all understand who we are.

Once when I was driving into the mountains that surround our monastery at Tassajara, I was listening to the radio and heard a wonderful story. A cantor named Michael Weisser and his wife, Julie, had moved with their family from Chicago to Lincoln, Nebraska. (In Jewish tradition a *cantor* is one who "sings or chants the liturgical music and leads the congregation in prayer."[3]) They felt that their children probably would be exposed to less anti-Semitism there than they experienced in the big city. As it turned out, the Grand Dragon of the White Knights of Ku Klux Klan of Nebraska, Larry Trapp, lived there. When he found out that the Weissers were living in Lincoln, he turned his ongoing campaign of hate mail and phone threats against them.

Of course the Weissers were alarmed to experience such violent prejudice and were at first quite angry. However, after some time,

the cantor had a change of heart, because he felt his faith taught him to love his enemies—and he wanted to put his faith into practice. Julie agreed and they contacted the Grand Dragon by phone with friendly intentions.

The Weisser family found out that Larry Trapp was a diabetic, confined to a wheelchair, and gradually going blind, so they called and kindly offered to help him with his grocery shopping. His first response was an angry no, but after a pause his mood changed, and he thanked them for offering. The Weissers continued in their attempts to embrace their enemy. Finally, Michael suggested that they prepare a dinner and take it to Larry Trapp's apartment. He reluctantly accepted their offer.

When one of the cantor's friends heard about their plan, he admonished Michael for going too far. Nevertheless, the Weissers did go to Larry Trapp's apartment. It was a dark and sad place, with pictures of Hitler on the wall, but the dinner went fairly well. Gradually, Larry Trapp softened and his hostility subsided. He told the Weissers how his father had taught him to hate everything that was different from his white, Christian family.

Later, when speaking of that dinner, Larry Trapp explained that he just couldn't resist the Weissers anymore. He had never known love like that before in his life. Larry Trapp completely let go of his hatred and was transformed. He resigned from the Klan and wrote formal letters of apology to groups representing African-Americans, Native Americans, and Jewish-Americans. When diagnosed as terminally ill, he even moved in with the Weisser family and converted to Judaism before his death.[4]

In order to fully practice the precept of embracing and sustaining all beings, we must become aware of and finally include whatever we have abandoned or rejected. The fairy tale *The Sleeping Beauty* teaches us how the act of exclusion makes whatever is excluded more powerful, and how closing our eyes to one thing closes our eyes to everything.[5]

In *The Sleeping Beauty*, blessed with the birth of a beautiful daughter, the king arranges to have a great banquet to celebrate her birth. Although he wants to invite all the important and powerful people in the land, there are not enough place settings at the table to accommodate them. Of the thirteen great fairies in the kingdom, he invites only twelve. After they bestow blessings on the princess, the fairy who was excluded suddenly shows up. She puts a curse on the kingdom, saying that when the girl is fifteen, she will prick her finger on a spinning needle and die.

The twelfth fairy comes forward and, although unable to completely remove the curse, amends it: when the girl pricks her finger, she and everyone in the castle will fall into a deep sleep for one hundred years. The king tries to prevent this from happening but cannot. Everyone in the castle falls into a deep sleep, and thorn bushes grow up thickly all around the castle. Word spreads throughout the land that there is a beautiful princess in deep sleep inside the castle.

Throughout the years many young princes try to get in to awaken her, but they cannot get through the barricade of thorns, and many die a sad death trying. But after one hundred years, one young prince approaches the castle and, because it is the right time, the barricade of thorns spontaneously parts and allows him to enter. When he finds the sleeping beauty, he kisses her and she awakes, along with everyone in the castle. They all live happily ever after.

When you allow whatever has been abandoned or excluded to enter your life, it tends to wake you up and open your eyes. How can you become more aware of the things that you have denied or rejected? By being balanced and upright in the midst of whatever is happening. All these things will come out of hiding and reveal themselves to the person who sits upright. As Franz Kafka writes, "There is no need for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't even wait, be completely quiet and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it can't do otherwise; in raptures it will writhe before you."[6]

Once these material and immaterial beings have removed their masks, it is important to give them full and unprejudiced attention. Paying attention to whatever has been rejected will reveal a world in which all beings are embracing and sustaining one another, which thus completes our vision of dependent co-arising.

In order to develop this vision, we are required to make a sincere effort to see through the eyes of all others, especially those from whom we feel most alienated: enemies, former spouses, estranged parents, and other races and classes of human and nonhuman life. Although you cannot actually see through others' eyes, the effort to do so opens your eye of wisdom.

By remaining upright and not turning away, you will be rewarded finally by becoming intimate with every being that you meet. Once you realize intimacy with all beings, you will no longer be tempted to grasp or categorize the beings that you meet. This is not just a personal realization: it helps all of us when any one of us accomplishes this.

Meeting all beings in this way, you come face-to-face with those aspects of yourself and your relations with others that you had heretofore found difficult or impossible to study. Forgetting yourself, you are able to embrace and sustain the most difficult manifestations of being. Embracing and sustaining all beings, you are finally able to meet your self completely.

Now we are ready to receive the teaching of the Ten Grave Precepts: the activity of buddha's mind.

chapter twelve

# THE TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS:
## *The Activity of Buddha's Mind*

*A disciple of buddha does not kill.*
*A disciple of buddha does not take what is not given.*
*A disciple of buddha does not misuse sexuality.*
*A disciple of buddha does not lie.*
*A disciple of buddha does not intoxicate mind or body of self or others.*
*A disciple of buddha does not speak of the faults of others.*
*A disciple of buddha does not praise self at the expense of others.*
*A disciple of buddha is not possessive of anything, especially the dharma.*
*A disciple of buddha does not harbor ill will.*
*A disciple of buddha does not disparage the Triple Treasure.*
—The Bodhisattva Initiation Ceremony

THE TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS indicate a way of wholesome living that arises spontaneously from the ground of our buddha nature. They are buddha's wisdom in action and are the natural expression of a compassionate heart. The practice and realization of each precept enacts the ancient Teaching of All Buddhas, namely, refraining from evil, practicing good, and purifying the mind.

Even though they read like prohibitions, the Ten Grave Precepts are not given to prevent us from acting in unwholesome ways, but

rather are meant to awaken us from delusion. When our actions come from delusion, the violation of these precepts is a natural consequence. Therefore their purpose is not to control or limit living beings in any way, but to encourage the fullest flowering of life.

In interpreting the meaning of one of the Ten Grave Precepts, perhaps the most helpful and readily available commentary is the other nine. For example, if in contemplating a sexual relationship you are unsure whether sexual greed is involved, consider if there is any intention to deceive others about this aspect of the relationship (lying). Inquire whether there is an urge to intoxicate, to take what is not given (stealing), to be possessive, or to express anger. In violating one of the precepts, all the others are violated, if only subtly. In fully realizing one of the precepts, the others are upheld.

Similarly, if you feel an overwhelming certainty—to the point of self-righteousness—about the meaning of one precept, contemplating how the other nine apply may be helpful in gaining a wider perspective. Examining one precept through the lens of the others may broaden your compassionate view of that precept. Consulting the other precepts protects you from a narrow understanding and supports the realization of their complete meaning. Finally, meditating on the interdependence and mutual support of the Ten Grave Precepts shows that no individual precept has any independent, fixed meaning.

## *The Ten Grave Precepts and the Sangha*

Anyone who is committed to practicing the precepts is in danger of becoming self-righteous or puritanical. When you're a beginner, you're more likely to become fanatical about them, because you're afraid that if you're not absolutely strict, then you'll lose sight of your commitment. If you're in this initial, self-righteous phase, then it's important to remember that by taking refuge in the sangha you're practicing as part of a community.

As part of a sangha you expose your fanaticism to more mature practitioners, who, having worked through their own self-righteousness, can help you to open up to other possible meanings of the precepts. They can show you that although your understanding is valid as one particular aspect of the truth of the precepts, there are other possibilities, including some of the thoughts of people who disagree with you. Listening to the experience of other practitioners, both senior and junior to you, will naturally soften your vantage point and help you to relax your understanding.

At the other end of the spectrum, you may fall into complacency and avoid examining your life for fear of arousing anxiety. You don't usually emerge from complacency unless some crisis presents itself. If you're complacent, then something has to wake you up, either from the inside or the outside.

Most often, you wait until an experience of pain and suffering breaks through your denial system, but a kind and generous person can also open your eyes to your life and help you to notice your pain. Then you realize that you don't want to be complacent, because life is really wonderful. This generous being makes you feel, I want to do more than just get by. I want to be generous, too. Or you might see something beautiful, and that beauty opens you to both the beauty and the pain of your life.

In a sangha, the complacent people have to bump up against the fanatics, and the fanatics have to run up against the complacent people. Each group can learn from the other. The fanatics need to relax more, and the complacent people need to open up to the anxiety of the self-righteous fanatics. The more mature and balanced people in the community can help those who are leaning to either of the extremes.

If you are committed to the precepts, you need to be in dialogue with other practitioners in order to remain honest about your practice. Otherwise, you can get caught up in your own fixed ideas of what the precepts are. The precepts are never what you think they

are or what I think they are. They are something that all of us arrive at together.

For instance, if you give me something, then I may assume that you want me to have it—that you have given me a gift. But if I ask you for confirmation, then you might say to me, Well, actually, I felt coerced into giving it to you. You kind of forced me to give it away. If I don't consult you, I might assume self-righteously that it was a gift and never find out that in your eyes I was breaking the precept of not stealing. If I ask you about it, and you assure me that it was a gift, then I can be more confident, not because of my personal opinion but because of your confirmation. When you begin to take other people's views into account, you move from a self-centered interpretation of the precepts to a more compassionate understanding.

## *The Ten Grave Precepts and Sitting Meditation*

The spirit of your meditation should always be in accord with the precepts. When you're sitting in formal meditation posture, you may not be literally killing anything, but in subtle ways you might wish to annihilate certain states of mind or certain feelings. Or you might get angry at your neighbor in the meditation hall and wish him or her harm. If you're harboring thoughts of ill will toward anyone, then you're out of balance in your meditation. If you let these thoughts drop away, then you can return to a more upright attitude.

Just as you consult the other members of your sangha, you can take the Ten Grave Precepts to the cushion one by one and check to see whether your sitting meditation is in accord with each of them. For example, you can apply the precept against taking what's not given to your sitting meditation to see if you're trying to get something that has not been given to you by your life. Are you willing to work with what you have in terms of your state of body or mind, or are you hoping for more or less than what you have? If you are sitting in the spirit of taking something that's not being given to you,

you are not being upright, and in a sense you are out of line with the precept of not stealing.

Similarly, if you don't work gratefully with what's happening to you, then you're slandering your experience by saying, This experience is not good enough for me to meditate upon. I want some calmer or happier state. By checking to see if your meditation is in accord with the precepts, you can use the precepts consciously as guides in how to meditate. If there's a lack of accord, then the precepts themselves will help you to find the proper way of sitting or standing or walking.

When you sit upright, being open and attentive to whatever comes, you satisfy all the precepts. As the great American mystic Henry David Thoreau writes, "You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns."[1]

When you sit with the attitude of not trying to gain anything out of the sitting, you don't kill what's happening to you. You don't wish for something else; you don't use your sexual energy to manipulate your state; you don't lie; you don't use what's happening to intoxicate yourself; you don't slander what's happening; and you don't take sole credit for what's happening. You are also not possessive of whatever is happening, if it happens to be good. You don't get angry with what's happening. You don't disparage the Triple Treasure, because you are working in the way that a buddha would work. Working with the truth of what is happening, you are joining the community of those who work in this way. When you maintain this nongaining approach to sitting, you realize all the precepts.

chapter thirteen

# LET THE BUDDHA SEED GROW:
## *Not Killing*

*Life is not to kill.*
*Let the buddha seed grow*
*and succeed to the life of wisdom*
*of the buddha taking no life.*
*Life is not killed.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

THE PRECEPT "NOT TO KILL" literally means "not to take life under any circumstances throughout the universe, with no exceptions." No form of intentional killing is permitted, directly or indirectly. The simplicity of this conventional viewpoint is wonderful. It is easy to understand, thus making the practice of this precept quite accessible. Here is a gate to the marvelous path of the bodhisattva. Here is the seed of buddha's life of wisdom.

Although the conventional meaning is clear and simple, it is not easy to practice. There may be times when the practice seems to come with effortless ease, for example, when you feel no impulse to kill. You perceive that the present situation entirely supports not killing, and your own personal well-being will be maintained or promoted by not killing.

There are other times when you are viciously insulted and abused by your fellow humans and feel deep pain, but by diligently practicing patience, you do not become angry, and the thought of killing them

does not arise. Here again, the conventional practice of the precept is not difficult. On the other hand, when you are hurt, you may lose all patience and actually think of killing another human being. At that time you violate the precept in terms of mental action: the karma of thought.

Under most circumstances, acting on such a thought would not advance your own welfare or the welfare of your loved ones, so it is not difficult to refrain from killing. However, when you are full of righteous violence and seemingly justifiable murderous impulses, and it seems that acting on these feelings will protect you or promote personal gain and that not acting on them may be to your detriment, such as in defending your home and family, not killing could become quite difficult. In such cases your vows may need to be very strong. Sometimes it's easy and we practice this precept, sometimes it's easy and we don't. Sometimes it's difficult and we still do practice it, sometimes it's difficult and we don't.

What about more subtle cases, where we implicitly or indirectly support others to kill, such as in allowing our government's military activities or capital punishment? Is this in accord with the conventional meaning of this bodhisattva precept? No, it is not. One who lives for the welfare of all beings may in no way willingly support or be a condition for any killing.

The Brahmajala Sutra says that "if a Buddha-child kills with his own hand, causes a person to be killed, helps to kill, kills with praise, derives joy from killing, or kills with a curse, these are the causes, conditions, ways, and acts of killing. Therefore, in no case should one take the life of a living being."[1] This precept reminds bodhisattvas of their compassionate vows to be kind and make every effort to protect and liberate all living beings.

Killing is the most extreme expression of ignorance. It is a radical turning away from the true meaning of life and death. Killing shows disrespect for the miracle of all life. It also demonstrates a cruel disregard for the kindness that we have received from all other living beings. It is a wound in our deep and joyful connection with all life.

Killing emerges from ungratefulness for the most valuable gift of the universe. The killer shows a profound lack of appreciation and gratitude not only for the lives of others, but also for his or her own precious life. Killing wastes the seed of buddha's wisdom. Its ill effects can never be fully described.

In the conventional world, life and beauty can be killed. Just as they are born through the appreciation and support of the entire universe, they are creations of the entire universe. Death is also born through the appreciation and support of the entire universe. We don't say that life is better than death. We just say "no killing life."

How is life killed? Life is killed by nonappreciation and nonsupport. This nonappreciation, this killing of life, is the concentration of all nonvirtue. By killing life, you close the door to the peaceful world of the Triple Treasure and open the gate to torment, intense fear, and bottomless despair. In killing, the natural processes of dying and death, which coexist with a full and happy life, are transformed into hideous monstrosities.

If we accept in our hearts this strict interpretation of the precept, we may come to share a feeling of responsibility for the killing that is happening worldwide. Despite our grief about and opposition to such killing, we may still see that in fact we are a part of it.

Those who aspire to the bodhisattva path must learn to acknowledge full responsibility for the woes of the world. When we deny responsibility for the killing going on worldwide, we violate other precepts: we praise ourselves for not killing while blaming others for doing so, we speak of others' faults, we lie, and so on. As part of the process of developing the inconceivable heart of compassion, bodhisattvas vow to accept all blame without any quibbling.

## *The Compassionate Meaning of Not Killing Life*

How does compassion help the bodhisattva practice this precept? How does the precept help the bodhisattva develop compassion?

How can others help us to practice this precept, and how can we help others?

After honestly and thoroughly practicing and meditating on this precept and carefully observing your conduct in your everyday life, you may come to see that you are constantly failing to be in accord with this teaching of Buddha. Your feelings of remorse may become very heavy; you may feel despair at your lack of virtue and skill in practicing this precept. However, such despair can become nourishment for a fuller realization: although no one else can practice this precept for you, you also cannot practice this precept alone.

At such a moment of despair, while continuing to accept responsibility for your actions, you may need to call for support from the Triple Treasure. You can invoke the presence of the great compassion of the universe, which lives everywhere, including in your own heart. If you call forth such compassion wholeheartedly, you will remember that you willingly entered this painful world of killing, and you will be buoyed up out of your discouragement. You will enthusiastically renew your bodhisattva vow and steadfastly continue in your practice of not killing life.

## *Not Eating Meat*

The Brahmajala Sutra further admonishes bodhisattvas against eating meat. This scripture says that a bodhisattva who deliberately eats meat destroys the seed of great compassionate buddhahood. Therefore, bodhisattvas must not willfully eat the meat of any living being.

Chan master Shitou confidently demonstrated this spirit even before he became a monk. The hunters around his home village were afraid of demons and spirits and made sacrifices to mollify them. It was their practice to slaughter oxen and offer their carcasses and wine libations to the demons and spirits. When young Shitou saw this, he demolished the shrine and freed the oxen. He repeatedly destroyed the sacrificial shrine; even the elders of the village could not make him stop.

At Zen Center's Green Gulch Farm we have ceremonies to acknowledge the intentional and unintentional killing that is part of our farming and gardening activity. As part of one ceremony we specifically noted and dedicated the merit of our ceremony to the "little sparrows, quail, robins, and house finches who have died in our strawberry nets. Young Cooper's hawk who flew into our sweet pea trellis and broke its neck. Numerous orange-bellied newts who died by our shears, in our irrigation pipes, by our cars, and by our feet. Slugs and snails whom we have pursued for years, feeding you to the ducks, crushing you, trapping you, picking you off, and tossing you over our fences. Gophers and moles, trapped and scorned by us, and also watched with love, admiration, and awe for your one-mindedness.

"Sow bugs, spit bugs, earwigs, flea beetles, woolly aphids, rose-suckers, cutworms, millipedes, and other insects whom we have lured and stopped. Snakes and moths who have been caught in our water system and killed by our mowers. Families of mice who have died in irrigation pipes, by electricity in our pump box, and by predators while nesting in our greenhouses. Manure worms and earthworms, severed by spades, and numerous microscopic life forms in our compost system who have been burned by sunlight. Feral cats and raccoons whom we've steadily chased from the garden. Rats whom we have poisoned and trapped and drowned. Deer, chased at dawn and at midnight, routed by dogs, by farmers, by fences and numerous barriers.

"Plants: colored lettuces, young broccoli, ripe strawberries, and sweet apples, all who have lured animals to your sides, and all plants we have shunned: poison hemlock, pigweed, bindweed, stinging nettle, bull thistle. We call up plants we have removed by dividing you and separating you, and deciding you no longer grow well here."[2]

You may ask, What's the difference between eating meat and eating cultivated vegetables? Is it just that the cries of the animals are easier for you to hear than the cries of the vegetables? Don't bodhisattvas listen to the cries of the entire world?

Receiving this precept, whether we eat meat or not, our hearts are open to the painful dilemmas involved in supporting our lives. Even though I draw a line somewhere and say that I will eat only certain things, this precept teaches me not to close my heart to whatever suffering or harm might be entailed in feeding my body. After drawing such a guideline for myself, there continues to be some danger that I may become rigid or self-righteous in my practice of it. Open-hearted bodhisattvas vow not to hold rigidly to their understanding of the precepts and are constantly vigilant about the arising of self-righteousness.

When Suzuki Roshi and his students founded Tassajara, a Zen monastery in California's Carmel Valley, they decided to have no meat with their meals so that vegetarians would feel comfortable practicing there. But once when Suzuki Roshi was riding to Tassajara with one of his young students, he said that he was hungry and asked to stop at a restaurant. The young man was a strict vegetarian and said that there was no place nearby that served vegetarian meals; he asked to keep driving until they found such a place. Soon Suzuki Roshi said that he was getting really hungry and asked to stop at the next restaurant. They went inside and the young man ordered a grilled cheese sandwich, and Suzuki Roshi ordered a hamburger. After taking a bite of his hamburger, he said, "I don't like this. Could we please trade?" So they traded. Suzuki Roshi ate the grilled cheese sandwich, and the vegetarian ate the hamburger.

When we Zen students eat formally, we chant, "Innumerable labors brought us this food; we should know how it comes to us. Receiving this offering, we consider whether our virtue and practice deserve it." Receiving this precept means to deeply consider all the beings who worked to bring our food to us and whether the good we are doing in this world renders us worthy of it. As long as we continue to eat life in order to sustain life, such deep consideration must never end.

## *Abortion*

In considering how this bodhisattva precept of not killing life applies to the question of abortion, we need to open our hearts and consider what is most beneficial for all concerned: the embryo, the mother, the father, and all living beings. This is the enormous perspective of these precepts.

On several occasions unmarried, pregnant women have come to talk to me about whether they should carry their babies to term. In these cases there was no serious illness or sign of genetic abnormality, and the mother felt no lack of love for the baby. The main problem was almost always a feeling of insecurity about receiving sufficient support to be able to provide a good home for the baby. Hearing their stories, and feeling optimistic about the possibilities of good lives for their babies, I have encouraged them to carry the baby to term. When appropriate, I also have offered help to them during the pregnancy and after delivery. If, after such encouragement, they have still lacked confidence about receiving support from others or confidence in their own abilities as mothers, I have suggested that they consider adoption. I have informed them that I know many people who would love to adopt their baby.

We live in a time when many people feel strongly that there should be laws to prevent women from having abortions. Although I have not yet felt that it was appropriate to encourage abortion, I can imagine situations where I would support it. Although I have never counseled anyone to have an abortion, I do not feel that there should be laws preventing safe abortions. If there are laws that prohibit abortion, which force a woman to have a baby even against her will or better judgment, then there should be laws that ensure a decent home for the mother and child.

## *Euthanasia*

How does the practice of euthanasia relate to this precept of not killing? Euthanasia is the practice of inducing the painless death of a living being for reasons presumed to be merciful. When beings are suffering greatly, could it be in accord with the compassionate spirit of this bodhisattva precept to take some action that would induce their deaths?

Bodhisattvas are oriented toward the highest welfare of other beings. Although they might be happy to assist in some wholesome way to reduce suffering, they are primarily concerned with complete liberation from suffering. "Mercy killing" temporarily reduces a being's level of misery, but it might interfere with his or her spiritual evolution toward enlightenment. Such actions are not real compassion, but what I would call sentimental compassion. Even if a person asks us to help in her suicide, unless this would promote her spiritual development, it would not be appropriate for us to assist her. And who of us has the ability to see whether such an action would in fact be conducive to a person's greatest welfare? Is the supposed action coming from true compassion or from impatience with our own discomfort in seeing a loved one's suffering in the process of dying?

Once a friend discovered a deer who had broken one of her back legs trying to run through the deer fence that surrounds the garden at Green Gulch Farm. He told me that he wanted to "put her out of her misery," and asked me as a Buddhist priest to be present while he helped the deer to die. I agreed and we went to where the deer was lying peacefully next to the fence. Although I could see that her back leg had a compound fracture, the deer was still and quiet, even with us standing close by. I saw no signs of distress or suffering. I chanted a scripture intended to invoke great compassion, and when I had finished, my friend took an ax, raised it in the air, and brought it down on the poor deer's neck. I guess that I was assuming that one blow would be the end of it, but it wasn't. Now the deer was distressed. My

friend raised the ax and brought it down again and again. What a horror it was to see this person trying to help the deer but not helping at all! He finally killed the deer. I do not feel that our action emerged from true compassion.

Another friend of mine had a six-year-old nephew named Robert Thomas, who was called R. T. and had Down's syndrome. Like many such children, he was very sweet and lovable: he didn't seem to have the ability to hate or be cruel. R. T. also had a malignant brain tumor. He received radiation and chemotherapy, and the cancer went into remission, but the little fellow lost his hair in the process. When my friend went to visit him one day, he was sitting cross-legged on the kitchen counter, looking just like a little buddha, with his bald head and round, happy face. Later R. T.'s cancer returned and he began to have seizures, which, of course, were very painful for everyone.

During this difficult time my friend considered whether she should advise her sister to begin to let go of R. T. She had further fantasies that the doctors might be able to hasten the process of dying and shorten the duration of suffering for R. T., his mother, and the whole family. One afternoon while thinking such thoughts my friend was walking through the hills overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and a song came into her head: "The Red River Valley." She was surprised and wondered why it would come up at that time. A little later she visited R. T. in the hospital. Sitting on his bed she gently held him, with one hand on his stomach and the other stroking his back. Suddenly, the words of the song came back to her and she understood:

> From this valley they say you are going
> We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile
> For they say you are taking the sunshine
> That brightens our pathway awhile
>
> Come and sit by my side if you love me
> Do not hasten to bid me adieu

But remember the Red River Valley
And the one who has loved you so true.[3]

## *The Ultimate Meaning of Not Killing Life*

In practicing not killing, we must be impeccable and thorough in our relations with all living beings. But this effort, by itself, will never set us and all beings completely free. We cannot stop ourselves from killing or enter the realm of buddha's inconceivable freedom just by thoroughly exercising and acting upon moral deliberations and judgments. Nor can we enter this realm if we overlook or neglect them.

Buddha ancestors have transmitted this first Grave Precept to guide and encourage us in the deep consideration of life and death. As Dogen says, "succeed to the life of wisdom of the buddha taking no life." This is an instruction for how to bring meditation into our daily lives and for how to bring the precept of not killing into our formal meditation.

For example, in cleaning house I often come upon spiderwebs in which there are living spiders. Here is an opportunity to become mindful of the precept of not killing life, to stop in the midst of my activity and consider what's really most important. Do I remove the one who creates the web along with the web? I find that it is possible to take down the spiderwebs without hurting the spiders. They are very quick and intent upon avoiding my dust mop.

A spider expert told me that the dusty, visible webs are no longer useful to the spider anyway. But I must admit that I not only wish the spiderwebs to be removed but also the spiders. I have to deeply consider my commitment to this precept in order to clean and also protect the spiders' lives from my selfish impulses. Sitting upright in the midst of the impulse to kill realizes its cessation. Such an awareness transforms housecleaning into a meditation that nurtures the seed of buddha's wisdom.

How does this precept apply to formal meditation practice? Meditation can be seen as a parallel of housecleaning. We may think that we're supposed to clear away the cobwebs from our body and mind, so that the unobstructed truth will be revealed. In fact, throughout the millennia of Buddhist practice many people have understood meditation in this way. However, unless meditation is grounded in an awareness of the dust and obscurations of the mind, we cannot see the ultimate truth: there isn't really any dust to wipe away. If you try to kill ignorance, then you will kill the actual life of your body and mind. If you face your pain and ignorance uprightly, tenderly, and respectfully, then the truth will be revealed. Thus the precept of not killing life comes alive in formal meditation.

Every manifestation of your body and mind is life. This liberating vision is graciously revealed when you are upright and gentle in the midst of whatever is happening. The first Grave Precept is about protecting life. Ultimately, this is not accomplished by restraining the impulse to kill but rather by bringing it out from behind you, exposing it to the light. Sitting completely still and mindfully observing your impulses to harm or kill living beings, you realize the mind that cannot support such impulses in the first place.

This precept of not killing life is not about restraint, but rather about liberating our actions from delusion. It is concerned with awakened mind, which needs no restraint at all: what it needs is a more and more complete and unfiltered expression in this world. This precept is a cry to unleash our full potential as living beings.

We humans have an infinite capacity for delusion. For example, we imagine that we can act independently of other living beings. "Not to kill" refers to actions that emerge from the awakened mind that has gone beyond all self-centered actions, the mind that realizes action in concert with all life. Not killing life is the concerted activity of all beings. It is the celebration of all life working together in harmony with the entire universe.

This precept is the activity of buddha's mind in meditation on life

and death. Life and death touch each other intimately. They in no way hinder each other. There is no life without death. There is no death without life. Life is not death and yet life and death are indivisible. They identify each other.

Life does not change into death. Death does not change into life. Life is just life; death is just death. Life and death are not before and after. In reality, death vividly and peacefully coexists with the fullest expression of life. The ancient buddhas realized that the principle of life cannot be destroyed. In other words, killing cannot be established in the fullness of life. The fullness of life is realized in supporting and appreciating all other beings and in understanding that we are fully supported and appreciated by all life.

Referring to the total dynamic of the entire universe in the ten directions, the ancients coined the term *zenki*, "the whole works." *Zenki* means "everything," and it also means that "everything is the working of the whole, and the whole is working through everything." Life is one of the things that manifests the working of the whole universe. Death is another. The ancient Zen master Yuanwu says, "Life is the manifesting of the whole works. Death is the manifesting of the whole works. Filling up the great empty sky, upright mind is always bits and pieces."[4]

All life and each life are manifesting the whole universe and are the working of the whole universe. Life cannot be hindered anywhere. When you don't understand this, you may feel threatened by other beings, and the impulse to harm or kill may arise. At that very moment, realize that every threatening bit and piece of the universe actualizes your true life of freedom. This is the central mystery of the first Grave Precept.

The ultimate intention of not killing life is to realize buddha's infinite life and infinite wisdom. This ultimate intention is realized by the practice of this precept, which is limitless devotion to all beings in the entire universe. Life is not killing. Not killing is life. Not killing is the life of buddha.

chapter fourteen

# THE SUCHNESS OF MIND AND OBJECTS: *Not Stealing*

*In the suchness of mind and objects,*
*the gate of liberation is open.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

THE PRECEPT OF NOT STEALING, or as we express it in the bodhisattva initiation ceremony, not taking what is not given, immediately follows and extends the precept of not killing. Stealing is extremely harmful to our well-being, but if we are deluded, then it is quite natural and unavoidable that we steal. When we are deluded, stealing cannot be stopped; when we awaken, we cannot be forced to steal. Not stealing is a way of living that naturally arises from our buddha nature.

Our fundamental human delusion is the belief that mind and object are really separate, and that self and other have independent existence. With such a belief, we have the basic mental conditions for stealing, and stealing will inevitably arise. Approaching this precept from the conventional perspective, we endeavor not to steal anything. We use extreme care in all our dealings not to take anything that is not rightfully intended for us, and we don't encourage, support, or allow others to do so either. We must thoroughly take the bitter medicine of this literal approach before we are ready to receive the sweet fruit of the ultimate meaning.

In Zen tradition there are many stories that emphasize the seri-

ousness of even minor acts of stealing. According to the Lalitavistara (a biography of Shakyamuni Buddha), "If you commit the five deadly sins [killing your father, killing your mother, killing an arhat, shedding the blood of a buddha, or creating a schism in the sangha], . . . you can still be saved. However, if you steal sangha property, you cannot be saved."[1] The Heroic March Scripture *(Surangama Sutra)* states, "If the stealing mind cannot be removed, the dusts of the sensual world cannot be left behind. Although one may presently manifest much wisdom and concentration, if one has not gotten rid of one's stealing, then certainly one will fall into evil destinies."[2]

Stealing can be motivated primarily by greed, without involving the thought of harming others. When I was a kid I wanted a whole army of toy soldiers—more than I could afford to buy. So I stole them from a dime store. When I arrayed them around the house, my astonished parents asked me where I had gotten the money to buy all these soldiers. I lied and said that I hadn't been depositing the money they regularly gave me and had used that money to buy the soldiers. They checked my bank account, and I finally confessed that I had stolen the soldiers. When we're children, our desire for objects is compelling. As we grow older, we find ways of disguising, diverting, or denying these impulses.

Although we usually associate stealing with greed, it can also be motivated by anger or resentment. For example, you may feel mistreated by your employer or supervisor and want to take revenge upon her. It might be dangerous to confront her with your grievance. You might feel afraid to tell her about your feelings. Stealing can provide a venue for your aggressive feelings without dangerously disclosing them. Blinded by your anger, you might not even notice that you are stealing, but rather feel that you are merely treating her as she deserves to be treated. Actually, this kind of stealing is even worse than that motivated by greed, because it is driven by the intention to harm. Here there is a confluence of stealing, ill will, deceit, and praising self at the expense of others.

Stealing can be brought about by confusion or carelessness in our actions. For example, suppose a monk does correspondence on behalf of his temple. If he writes personal letters at the same desk where he transacts temple business, then he needs to be careful about using temple stamps for temple letters and personal stamps for personal letters. On occasion he may be tempted to borrow temple stamps for his own personal use, intending to replace them later, but he might forget, like the monk who forgot to return the bundle of kindling. As recorded in The Source Mirror Collection (*Zongjing-lu*), "Tao-ming, a monk in the Sui province, borrowed a bundle of kindling that belonged to the sangha. He [used it to] heat water to wash his feet. He forgot to return the kindling, and later died. Xuan Xu, a monk in the same dormitory, once saw Tao-ming in a dream and mysteriously talked with him. [He learned that Tao-ming's] feet burned for more than a year."[3]

This is a problem that any of us might run into. The difficulty arises from laziness or an unwillingness to make the effort required to keep track of minute details and follow through appropriately. Situations such as this need to be studied meticulously. We cannot practice upright sitting if we overlook these common, nitty-gritty little questions about material things that present themselves to us. It is not very pleasant, sometimes, to do this work, but if we study the precept of not taking what is not given with complete uprightness, it bears great fruit.

Sometimes we have a chance to gain from a shopkeeper's mistake. My wife saw a very nice necklace in a shop with a price tag marked $21.00. She was surprised at the price because the necklace looked more expensive. She asked the cashier if he was certain about the price. He was and she happily bought the necklace for $21.00. She asked the cashier to check with the manager just to be certain that it was the right price and he agreed to do so. Later my wife received a call from the shopkeeper. He said, "You were right: we made a mistake. The price was supposed to be $210.00." My wife said, "Oh,

that's what I thought it would cost. I don't want it." When she took it back, they thanked her very much and gave her a lifetime 10 percent discount.

When you practice the precept of not taking what is not given in this scrupulous way, you see how it relates not only to objects but to all your relationships. If you accept credit for work that someone else has done, if you don't acknowledge the help that someone has given you, this is taking what is not given. If you enter into an agreement with someone who is unclear or uncertain about what is expected, this can be a form of stealing. If you enter into an agreement that you have no intention of keeping, this is also a form of stealing. In fact, many of our personal conflicts revolve around the issue of taking what is not given. Each side feels that the other is taking advantage of the situation in an unfair way.

In discussing this precept, students often have difficulty finding examples of stealing in their own behavior. But these same people readily admit how often they take things that are not wholeheartedly given. When you consider the precept from this slightly different perspective, you can see how the stealing mind permeates our lives and our relationships, and you begin to realize the value of being utterly meticulous in all your dealings. At this point, the old stories from Zen tradition that once seemed excessively harsh are illuminated through your deeper understanding. For instance, The Commentary on the Perfection of Wisdom (*Zhidulun*) tells us, "Gavampati took a grain of rice to see if it was ripe. It could not be returned to its original place [on the stalk]. Because he committed this action, he was born as a cow for five hundred generations. Later he became an arhat but still regurgitated his food [like a cow]."[4] When you fully acknowledge your stealing mind, you can accept that the whole world turns on a grain of rice.

Another of my favorite stories about not taking what is not given is from The West Lake Annals: "When Chan master Dajiao was abbot of Ashoka monastery, it happened that two monks were arguing end-

lessly over alms. The director of monastery affairs could not stop them, so Dajiao called them to him and upbraided them in these terms:

"'Once when Bao Gong was judge in Kaifeng, one of the people reported on his own initiative that someone who had entrusted a hundred ounces of white gold to him had died, and when he tried to return the money to the man's family, the son would not accept it. So he asked the judge to summon the son and return the money.

"'Bao Gong thought this admirably extraordinary, and called the son to talk to him. The son declined the money, saying, "When my late father was alive, he had no white gold to entrust privately to another house."

"'Since both men, the trustee and the son, continued to firmly refuse, Bao had no choice but to give it to a monastery in the city, for unseen blessings to propitiate the deceased.

"'I saw this with my own eyes. Even people in the mundane world are still able to be so aloof of wealth and look for what is right, as this story illustrates. You are Buddhist disciples, yet you are so shameless.'

"Finally Dajiao cast them out, according to the rule of Chan communities."[5]

## *The Compassionate Perspective*

The novel *Les Miserables* is the story of Jean Valjean, who is imprisoned for stealing bread.[6] He is treated brutally in prison. He is punished by the mind of stealing. However, he does not see the mind of not stealing, and his heart becomes harder and harder. He escapes from prison and begins to steal again.

By chance he meets a bishop, a disciple of Jesus, who offers him food, lodging, and friendship, but Jean Valjean continues to live in his separate self-existence, in the stealing mind, and will not come out. He shrinks back in distrust. One night, after the bishop has gone to

sleep, he steals some silver plates from the dining room. He is captured by the police, who bring him back to the bishop and accuse him of being a thief. The bishop maintains that Jean Valjean isn't a thief; that he gave him the plates. The police are bewildered and go away.

After they leave, Jean Valjean admits that he stole the plates, and wants to know why the bishop said that he didn't steal them. The bishop looks at him kindly, and reassures him that he didn't steal the plates. The plates were given to him. To prove his point, he gives him a pair of silver candlesticks, too. Finally, Jean Valjean's eyes open to the precept of not stealing. He breaks down and breaks open the shell of his belief in his separateness from all beings. He sees the suchness of mind and objects being demonstrated to him, and he awakens. Thus buddha's wish is granted. This is all the buddhas want: they want us to open our eyes to the wisdom of not stealing.

Then the bishop tells Jean Valjean that with these gifts, he has bought his soul and he will never again be able to do evil. From now on, his soul belongs to God. Soul is the interdependence of mind and objects, of self and other. The story goes on to show how this soul is incapable of forgetting the precept of not stealing. Jean Valjean spends his life showing what it means to not steal, again and again. At times he is tempted, but after this deep glimpse of buddha's mind, he is never again completely fooled.

The thief comes from delusion. He is shown nonstealing, awakens to the suchness of mind and objects, and finally enters steadfast uprightness. He in turn shares that awareness and the teaching of not stealing in the world. The bishop, coming from uprightness, shows the teaching of not stealing and awakens the thief. They simultaneously complete each other. This complete meeting and intimacy is the precept of not stealing.

The relationship of Master Shexian with his student Fayuan provides an example of a bodhisattva violating the literal meaning of the precepts in order to benefit others. "Priest Shexian Guixing was a

stern and aloof old teacher who was respected by the monks. A group of monks, including Fayuan of Fushan in Shu Region, and Yihuai of Mt. Tianyi in Yue Region, came to practice in his community.

"It was a cold and snowy day. On their first meeting Shexian shouted and drove them out. Not only that, he threw water around the visitors' room, so everyone's clothes got wet. All the visiting monks fled except Fayuan and Yihuai. They arranged their robes and continued sitting in the visitors' room. Shexian came and, in a scolding voice, said, 'If you two monks don't leave, I'll hit you.'

"Fayuan approached Shexian and said, 'The two of us came hundreds of li to study your Zen. How could a dipper full of water drive us away? Even if we get beaten to death, we will not leave.'

"Shexian laughed and said, 'You both need to practice Zen. Go to the monks' hall and hang up your bags.'

"Later Shexian asked Fayuan to serve as head cook. At that time, the assembly was suffering from Shexian's aloof style and unappetizing food. One day Shexian went out to the nearby village and while he was away, Fayuan took the key to the storehouse without permission, got some noodles and oil, and made a delicious morning meal for the community. Shexian returned earlier than expected and, without saying anything, joined in the meal at the monks' hall. After the meal was over he sat outside the monks' hall. He sent for Fayuan and said, 'Did you get the noodles and oil from the house?'

"Fayuan said, 'Yes, I did. Please punish me.'

"Shexian told him to estimate the price of the noodles and oil and to compensate the community by selling his robes and bowl. Shexian then gave him thirty blows and expelled him from the monastery. Fayuan stayed in a nearby city and asked his dharma brother to plead with Shexian to pardon him, but Shexian would not. Fayuan also pleaded, 'Even if I am not readmitted, I would like to request permission to visit and practice in the community.' But Shexian did not approve it.

"One day Shexian went to the city and saw Fayuan standing in

front of a travelers' shelter. Shexian said to him, 'This shelter belongs to the monastery. How long have you been living here? Have you paid your fees?' He told Fayuan to calculate his fees and make the payment. Fayuan was not disturbed. He carried his bowl in the city, collecting food. He sold the food and made his payment to the monastery. Later Shexian went to the city and saw Fayuan begging. He returned to the monastery and told the assembly that Fayuan had a true intention to study Zen and finally called him back."[7]

Both master and disciple had to go beyond the conventional understanding of not stealing and of compassion in order to finally meet in the full realization of this precept. The disciple violated the literal meaning of the precept by stealing. Apparently, his intention was to steal for the benefit of others. If so, he acted in accord with his bodhisattva vow. However, the teacher's response probed his action to assess the depth of his understanding of the precept. The disciple was severely disciplined for going against the conventional meaning of the precept, and his response demonstrated his compassionate spirit. The disciple never lost heart or complained about his teacher's severity. The teacher, on the other hand, was severe in his discipline in order to make sure that his student was not being sentimental or careless in his kindness to his fellow monks. In the end, the integrity and compassion of both Shexian and Fayuan are awesome.

## *The Suchness of Mind and Objects*

The great bodhisattva precept of not stealing continues and extends the practice of the first Grave Precept, not killing. The first Grave Precept is ultimately an appreciation of the oneness of all life and a meditation on the dependent co-arising of life and death. The ultimate meaning of the second Grave Precept is realized by clearly observing the suchness of mind and its objects.

What is the suchness of mind and objects? It is the interdependence of mind and objects. Objects are anything in the entire universe

of experience—not only material objects, but thoughts, feelings, and memories as well. In this context, mind is consciousness, which dependently arises together with objects. Thus mind and objects have no independent existence: they exist only codependently and cooperatively.

If we continue to be upright, even in circumstances where pain and anxiety are present, eventually the separation between self and other, mind and object, is revealed as insubstantial and ungraspable. When we contemplate this suchness of mind and objects, all our obsessions drop away. We are freed of all self-clinging dispositions. Then, as Dogen says, "the gate of liberation is open." Mind is not enlightenment. Objects are not enlightenment. Enlightenment appears in the suchness of mind and objects. Self is not enlightenment. Other is not enlightenment. Enlightenment appears in the suchness of self and other.

Bodhidharma's way of contemplating the suchness of mind and objects was to make the mind upright like a wall: "Outside, when meeting objects, don't activate the mind."[8] Just face the dependently co-arisen object. If anxiety should happen to appear, then this indicates that the mind has been activated. The instruction is to study the object without trying to figure anything out; clearly observe the object just as it has come to be. Such contemplation does not mean to analyze the object into elements, but rather to face the appearance of the object and see that it is nothing more than the nexus of its various conditions.

Bodhidharma further teaches, "Inside, there is no coughing or sighing in the mind."[9] That is to say, we don't reject, grasp, or in any way meddle with mind objects. The wall-like mind is innocent of all meddling and gaining ideas. If we practice thus, whatever the object is, then it will take off its mask and reveal its true face, saying, I am you: you are me.

Being upright and settling into the suchness of mind and objects, you take what is given and do not take what is not given. In upright-

ness you can see that everything is you. If there is one thing about yourself that is obscure to you, that feels separate from you, then you will feel some dent in your wholeness, and that one small dent will force you inevitably to try to fill it. When you try to fill it, it will feel as if you are taking something without permission—that you are stealing. You will not understand that what you fill it with is a gift.

The life of this precept comes forth from awareness of how your own life is born of and sustained by the kindness of all animate and inanimate beings throughout the universe, and how all beings are supported and sustained by your life. Aided by such awareness, you witness a free-flowing giving and receiving between self and other. You understand that everything you see and hear is your self, and thus you forget your limited, independent self. At the same time, your self is fulfilled and overjoyed.

When you are fulfilled in this way, you no longer yearn for external objects, and the precept of not stealing is accomplished. For all those who wish to practice and realize this great bodhisattva precept of not stealing, there is an authentic and unsurpassable path offered by the buddha ancestors of the Zen tradition: it is simply to sit, stand, walk, and even recline with complete gentleness and uprightness in the midst of all other beings.

The Zen monk Ryokan, a fine poet, lived in a little hut on the mountainside overlooking the Sea of Japan. He had few possessions. One full moon night, a thief came to visit. Ryokan was not at home, so the thief entered, but he found nothing to steal. Ryokan returned and caught the thief and said, "I'm sorry that you came all this way and didn't get anything. Here, have my clothes." And he gave the thief his clothes. The thief was surprised, but he took the gift and stumbled off into the moonlit night. After he had left, Ryokan, standing naked in the moonlight, cried out, "Poor fellow, he didn't get much! I wish that I could give him this full moon, too."[10]

I read this story a long time ago, and it opened my eyes to buddha's precepts and attracted me to Zen. I was a thief and Ryokan showed

me the precept of not stealing. With open eyes, I glimpsed the inconceivable beauty of Ryokan's heart and the suchness of mind and objects. At that time I felt great affinity with Ryokan, and I wondered how my heart could be more like his. Now I trust that being upright is the gate to Ryokan's heart.

chapter fifteen

# NOTHING IS WISHED FOR:
## *Not Misusing Sexuality*

*Because the three wheels are pure,*
*there is nothing to wish for.*
*All buddhas are on the same path.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

The precept of not misusing sexuality means not to harm. It also means to bring forth benefit: not just a little benefit, but the greatest and highest benefit for all beings. Misusing sexuality derives from greed, which is a rapacious desire for more than one needs or deserves. *Rapacious* is related to the word *raptor*, and means "excessively grasping or covetous" or "living on prey."[1] Sexual greed is, similarly, feeding some kind of demon with live prey: a kind of vampirism. It is seriously harmful to our precious lives. Bodhisattvas sincerely vow to protect and liberate all beings from such greed.

How does sexual greed arise? Self and other are seen as separate. We project reality upon the separation. From a belief in the reality of this perception, the peaceful mind of the oneness of self and other is obscured. This belief wounds our consciousness, and the wound is a source of anxiety and pain. A powerful impulse arises to reunite the split mind. If this other were really other, then we could live without being in union with it, but because it is not really other, our yearning is very strong. Sexual greed is powerful, because at its root is this deep pain of separation. We will do almost anything, grab onto any-

one, if we feel it will help close the painful gap and heal the wound. We must recognize that in our wounded state we are dangerous to ourselves and to others as well.

Acting out sexual greed is actually a form of stealing, sexual stealing. The precept of not misusing sexuality is concerned with reversing this process of wounding. It points to a way of turning from sexual stealing to sexual healing.

The process by which we separate ourselves from others and then feel greed for them is also carried out in relationship to our own bodies or to our own sexuality. We may exclude some part of the body from our sexual experience, or identify our sexuality with just part of the body. It is quite difficult to remain upright and aware of the things that we, either consciously or unconsciously, have rejected. Therefore, the first step in reversing this process is to face our woundedness and greed to whatever extent they exist. Next, we must gradually become intimate with the wound and with the greed. This is bitter work, but it is necessary, for unless we are intimate with the greed, we are susceptible to it from inside and outside. The more we face up to our woundedness and greed, the closer we are to seeing how they arise together, and the more we are able to protect beings from the harm of sexual greed.

In this lifetime we are all sexual beings. In order to realize the enlightenment of the buddhas, we must be intimate with our whole sexual being. Moment by moment, standing, sitting, walking, or lying down, we vow to be intimate, to be upright, with this great ball of fire. If we turn away from our sexual passion, then we freeze and beings are harmed. If we grab it, then we are burned and beings are harmed. But if we just stay close to it, walk around it, always in touch with the fact that we are sexual beings, neither identifying with nor distancing ourselves from our sexuality, then we gradually become intimate with it. From this intimacy, appropriate sexual conduct spontaneously emerges. We know this infinite warmth and love are there, but we do not reveal it until the time is right. We vow to stay upright,

to stay close to our passion. Constantly working with it, dancing with it, it is always there, and we are present, too. It may get stronger or weaker according to circumstances, but we are working with it all the time.

In monasteries throughout the world the sexes are usually segregated. Some monks and nuns misunderstand the point of this segregation and think that it means they should hide or deny their sexual feelings. The point of the segregation is, on the contrary, to allow the monastics to be clearly aware of their sexuality: able to study it thoroughly and use it as an opportunity for complete enlightenment.

In Japanese Zen monasteries genders are not usually mixed, but in one monastery there were twenty male monks and one female monk. Her name was Reverend Eshun. The others will remain anonymous to protect the guilty. They all studied and practiced meditation together with a noted Zen teacher. As recounted in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, "Eshun was very pretty even though her head was shaved and her dress plain. Several monks secretly fell in love with her. One of them wrote her a love letter, insisting upon a private meeting.

"Eshun did not reply. The following day the master gave a lecture to the group, and when it was over, Eshun arose. Addressing the one who had written her, she said: 'If you really love me so much, come and embrace me now.'"[2]

This bodhisattva precept is not saying that sexuality is bad. It is also not saying that sexuality is good. If we think about it, we will see that sex is at least a little bit good, because sex is a condition for the appearance of baby buddhas, baby bodhisattvas. It is also good because it is an arena for the realization of perfect enlightenment. It requires great clarity and compassion to be upright in a nongreedy way in the dynamism of sexual situations.

This precept is also not prescribing the practice of celibacy. Although it is not about celibacy, it does address how celibate people can live healthy lives. Whether we are celibate or not, being upright is the way to integrate our sexual feelings with our other feelings.

We do not need to go looking for sexual feelings and bring them over here to integrate them. If we just sit still long enough, they will all come to visit. When they come, we study them. When we study them, we leave them alone, neither trying to use them nor allowing ourselves to be used by them. If we can sit there in the middle of such passionate feelings, then gradually integration will be realized.

It is better to have things out in the open than hidden away. Some people have very little sense of where or what their sexuality is. Perhaps they have been so careful not to hurt people, especially themselves, or they have been punished so much for being a sexual being, that they have pretty much denied the whole thing. If you have not seen any sign of your sexuality recently, you are a walking time bomb. You have created an ideal breeding ground for all kinds of depravity, sexual or otherwise. Integrating anything that you have denied into your life is, of course, quite difficult, so if you have strong, conscious sexual feelings, then you are lucky. If you have an active and engaging problem with your sexuality and face up to its challenges, you are certainly on the royal road to settling the great matter and realizing ultimate freedom.

## *The Compassionate Meaning of Not Misusing Sexuality*

There is a famous Zen story about a monk who was offered just such an opportunity. "There was an old woman in China who had supported a monk for over twenty years. She had built a little hut for him and fed him while he was meditating. Finally she wondered just what progress he had made in all this time.

"To find out, she obtained the help of a girl rich in desire. 'Go and embrace him,' she told her, 'and then ask him suddenly: "What now?"'

"The girl called upon the monk and without much ado caressed him, asking him what he was going to do about it.

"'An old tree grows on a cold rock in winter,' replied the monk somewhat poetically. 'Nowhere is there any warmth.'

"The girl returned and related what he had said.

"'To think I fed that fellow for twenty years!' exclaimed the old woman in anger. 'He showed no consideration for your need, no disposition to explain your condition. He need not have responded to passion, but at least he should have evidenced some compassion.'

"She at once went to the hut of the monk and burned it down."[3]

Although the monk did not appear to be misusing sexuality, he did not demonstrate the compassionate skill of one who is intimate with his sexuality. We can speculate that he may have been shocked to find himself overcome with desire, and his cool response was a cover to maintain his reputation as a pure monk. Although his response seemed to protect the young woman and himself against indulging in sexual greed, his coldness hurt them both. In any case, his patron was not pleased or encouraged by the way that he handled the situation, and neither was the young woman.

Even though you try to restrain your sexual desire in order to protect beings, you may still harm them if you are not upright in your restraint. Cold disdain for another's humanness is fundamentally cold disdain for your own humanness.

Sometimes it is helpful and necessary to draw a line. The monk in the preceding story drew a line, but it is not clear that his action came from a warm heart or even that he intended to be helpful. Although it can be very difficult to do, lines can be drawn in the midst of sexual passion, clearly, kindly, and even with a sense of humor.

In times of famine the daughters of farmers in Japan *sometimes* allowed themselves to be sold to brothels in order to save their families. It was considered an act of self-sacrifice and filial piety. Under such circumstances, these women did not necessarily lose their self-respect; they were sometimes called lotuses in muddy water. The following story took place during the Tokugawa era.

"Zen master Mokudo when passing through the capital Edo was hailed by a prostitute from a second-storey window. He asked how

she knew his name and she replied: 'When you were a boy on the farm we were neighbours; after you became a monk there was a bad harvest, and so I am here.' He went up and talked to her and she asked him to stay the night.

"He paid her fee to the house, and gave some more to her. They talked of their families till late, and then the bedding was spread and she prepared to go to bed. He sat in meditation posture. She plucked his sleeve and said: 'You have been so kind, I should like to show my appreciation. No one will know.'

"He said to her: 'Your business is sleeping, my business is sitting. Now you can get on with your sleeping, and I'll get on with my sitting.' And he remained unmoving the whole night."[4] He drew a line with clarity, kindness, and good humor.

The precept of not misusing sexuality is not cold. It is given in order to reveal the sublime and subtle warmth of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Rooted in inconceivable, boundless, and all-pervading loving kindness, the awakened ones find the appropriate response to sexuality. It is the expression of a burning desire to benefit all beings.

Spiritual teachers also have to face the question of how and when it is appropriate to reveal or express the warmth and affection that they feel for their students. One of my main reasons for coming to the Zen Center was to study with Suzuki Roshi. He was not what I had expected in a Zen teacher, but he was the best one that I had ever seen. I looked for every opportunity to study with him. I knew he noticed me, but he was cool with me. One elder student told me that Suzuki Roshi was cold to him, even though he had been very active in the practice and close to Suzuki Roshi. I was heartened to hear that.

After practicing with him for about eighteen months, I told Suzuki Roshi that I wanted to go to the Zen Center's monastery, Tassajara. He told me he wanted me to learn to chant from Tatsugami Roshi, who was coming from Japan to teach. Then Suzuki Roshi took my hand, which he had never done before. As he shook my hand, the warmth of all the buddhas and all the ancestors came through his

small hands, and I knew that those years of coolness had been for my benefit. If he had shown me affection too early, before my practice was settled, then it could have been very confusing. I might have been distracted, trying to get more of that. But he left me alone so I could be sure that I was at the Zen Center for the practice of the dharma, not just for his attention. Perhaps he could see by my behavior that my primary reason for being there was not to get his approval but to practice with him, to enter his practice and the practice of all the buddhas. His warmth meant a great deal to me, but even if I did not get it, I would still keep practicing with him forever. Then he gave me a hint of affection, and showed me his love. I will never forget that moment.

Spiritual awakening is without image: it is awakening from our deluded belief in the world of images. Although awakening is beyond all images and experiences, when it first manifests in the realm of conceptual experience, it may do so in terms of sexual imagery and energy. One student saw a shaft of clear, warm light enter a dark cave. In the following poem, Dogen uses sensual imagery to convey a profound insight:

> Windless, waveless,
> There in the midnight water
> An abandoned boat,
> Swamped in moonlight.[5]

In working with sexual imagery and energy, both teacher and practitioner must be very careful. It is the teacher's responsibility to put the student's highest welfare foremost. The teacher must be clear and must not confuse or allow the student to confuse sexual imagery and energy with actual sexual activity. This is one reason why, in order to protect the student's practice, a teacher should not get sexually involved with a student. Some spiritual teachers have not clearly set these limits, and we've seen the disastrous consequences for individual practitioners and for whole communities.

When Suzuki Roshi came to the United States without his wife, some of his students misconstrued his great warmth. Once a student hid in the temple and came to his bedroom in the night. He kindly escorted her out. Unfortunately, in response to such misunderstandings, he had to restrain his warmth, which was deeply painful for him. As his wife once told me, if he had not been able to set this boundary, then the Zen Center would not have survived. When she joined him, it helped to clarify the situation, and he could more safely express his loving feelings.

## *The Ultimate Meaning of No Sexual Greed*

Intimacy with your sexuality is the ultimate fulfillment of the bodhisattva precept of no sexual greed. Intimacy with sexuality means that there is a deep understanding of no separation between self and other. This is using sexuality to purify sexuality. Realizing this intimacy is like putting the last piece into place in a jigsaw puzzle; it is like the moment when you finally learn a great poem by heart.

A friend of mine once said, "You know, I love sex, but sometimes a good tackle is even better." He was a football player. When we really meet, it is just good: it is intimacy and sexual greed is pacified. Such intimacy is more than just satisfying: it is settling into and being healed by the reality of our sexual nature, without turning away and without touching. It is finding a way of dancing in perfect harmony with the rhythms of our sexual passion.

Eventually, the time comes when a human being appears before you as a brilliant and shining god or goddess, acting as a mirror reflecting your wholeness. This reflection reveals the dazzling promise of orgasmic unity and the bliss of the complete integration of your whole being. In the face of this near and almost tangible realization of your potential, you may find it intolerable to remain upright. In your state of deep longing you may feel inexorably drawn into some extreme reaction to this reflection of your divinity. Feel-

ing the anticipation and excitement of being so close to what you have yearned for, you may greedily take what is not given. Or you may, in your agitated state, hesitate and miss your chance to finally meet and realize your whole self. In either case, you will later deeply regret having misconstrued your self as other and the action you took based on such a mistake.

But if you can stay present in the face of this radiant image of your whole self, you will come to see that the reflection is not other and that what you have yearned for is already accomplished. You can just intimately join your palms and bow to this god or goddess who is the present reflection of your wholeness, understanding that all along the apparent other was saying, Wake up: I am you. These gods and goddesses are saying, Do not grab me or run away from me. Just be upright and gentle with me, and you will realize who I am.

When the great master Nanyue first met his teacher, the Sixth Ancestor Huineng, Huineng said, "What is it that thus comes?" Nanyue said, "Even to say it is 'this' misses the mark." Huineng said, "Then is there no practice and transformation?" Nanyue said, "I don't say there is no practice or transformation. I just say it cannot be defiled." Then Ancestor Huineng said, "This nondefilement, this purity, is the way of all buddhas. I am like this, and now you are like this too."[6] What is it that thus comes? Can we stay present for that question at moments of the most intense and bright sexuality and not even then say, "It is this"? To say, "It is this" creates a wound in our sexuality. To leave it alone is upright sitting, and that seals the wound and heals our sexuality. Then there is no sexual greed, there is no longing anymore.

A monk once said to me, "When I am in certain situations, I can't imagine anything else to do." I said, "That's good: that's like uprightness." The practice of being upright is renouncing the ability to imagine some alternative to what is happening right now. Wishing for alternatives to what is presently occurring is confusion. It leads to discontent and complaining. This kind of confused complaining is a

form of greed that is very close to sexual greed. By giving up wishing for alternatives, we inevitably move straight ahead on the path of freedom.

When Marlon Brando was in acting school, the instructor asked the class to imagine that they were chickens roosting in a coop, and that an atomic bomb exploded nearby. The students were asked to do what they thought chickens would do in response to the blast. All the students but Brando went into wildly hysterical reactions. But Brando just continued to sit on his roost. He was able to imagine not being able to imagine doing anything else. He was able to imagine no imagination.

When we are overwhelmed by sexual feelings—completely entranced by anxiety and barely able to breathe—to be upright is to realize that there is no alternative to whatever is happening. It is not to say, What should I do next? Where do we go? What do we do with this? It is just to face the radiance. We use the situation to purify the situation.

When we really meet the god or goddess of our dreams, at the moment when we face that person, we give up our smart ideas. We are no longer clever enough to imagine anything else. We just enjoy the meeting. That's it. We don't think, What's next? Should we go to a club? Shall we take a walk? We just face ourselves. If there is the slightest separation, the slightest wiggling, then we may do something very harmful: we may grab the divine and lose it, or we may run away from it and lose it. Once we have lost it, by grabbing or by running away, we will forever regret what we did, and we will yearn for it, saying over and over, Next time, I'll just be there. I won't grab. Just let me see her again. Just let me be near him again. That's all I ask. Fortunately, it turns out that we get another chance: it's not too late. But in that yearning, although it is not so bad, there is the beginning of greed, which can turn into rapacious desire. We must have immaculate relationships.

The precept of no sexual greed is the gate to true upright sitting.

In traditional Zen practice we use various physical postures, or ritual *mudras*, to embody the buddha way. Many religions around the world share the mudra of joining the palms (*gassho*) in prayer, or as a gesture of reverence and respect. Joining our palms together is an opportunity to actualize the precept of no sexual greed. When we completely give ourselves to the joining of our palms, there is at that moment just palms joined. At such a moment we do not imagine anything else. The whole universe in ten directions is just our palms joined. Thus we realize the confidence of a buddha. This is not great sex, but it is great intimacy with our sexuality and with all the other elements of our whole being. At such a moment we are at peace, we are content, and the precept of no sexual greed is actualized.

The same principle holds for the central ritual mudra of Zen practice: the mudra of sitting upright. At the very moment of sitting upright, there is nothing but just sitting upright. You meet your body with your body and do not think of anything further. At such a time the entire sky turns into enlightenment, and the whole phenomenal world becomes this mudra. The world of sex is sitting upright, too. Whenever you do anything with such complete warmth and devotion, it is the same. Creating a work of art, cooking a meal, or cleaning house: any action of body, speech, or mind, when done in this spirit of complete devotion, without imagining anything else, and without the slightest separation between yourself and the task, is the same. This is immaculate sexuality.

chapter sixteen

# THE DHARMA WHEEL HAS ALL-INCLUSIVELY TURNED:

## *Not Lying*

*The dharma wheel has all-inclusively turned.*
*There is no excess, there is no deficiency.*
*One complete moistening of sweet dew*
*bears fruit as actuality and truth.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

THE CONVENTIONAL MEANING of *lie* is "to speak with the intention to deceive" and "to misrepresent, withhold, or hide some aspect of the whole truth." From the compassionate perspective, there might be occasions when violating the literal sense of this precept is justified in order to avoid harming others. During World War II, for example, members of the Resistance movement throughout Nazi-occupied Europe endangered their own lives by lying in order to protect Jews and others in hiding from being taken to prison or to concentration camps.

In the practice of the bodhisattva precepts, our ultimate concern is for the welfare of all beings. We therefore extend the meaning of "not lying" to include "not speaking in a false or harmful way, or standing by in silence when others speak in a false or harmful way." All speech based on self-concern is false or harmful speech, and speaking the truth naturally arises from selflessness. When we are caught in self-protection and self-promotion, we cannot speak the

truth. In the end, truth speaking is the only way out of bondage to self-concern.

Self-concern and the anxiety that arises from it are part and parcel of the human condition, so I am not saying that we shouldn't be selfish, but rather that by admitting and being mindful of selfishness, selflessness and truth-speaking can spontaneously arise. Freedom from selfishness does not come from pretending that we are not selfish. It is realized through the complete study of our selfishness. Practicing no false speech helps to reveal our self-concern and thus liberate us from it right in its midst.

Not only is speaking the truth difficult when we are entangled in self-concern, but lying itself provokes anxiety because of feelings of shame and fear of being caught in the lie. Because we feel anxious and uncomfortable when we are aware that we are lying, it's easier for us to lie when we are unaware of doing so. Thus carelessness and self-deception smooth the path of deceiving others, and we can lie more convincingly if we are lying to ourselves. With the aid of such denial, we can be confidently self-righteous even when we're lying. Furthermore, lying is easier if we lack the wholesome self-respect that comes with a commitment to speaking the truth.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught the Eightfold Path to freedom. He called the third aspect of this path right speech. In the original Pali, *samma* does not mean "right" as opposed to "wrong." It means "right" in the sense of being "comprehensive" or "complete." Buddha's right speech is reflected in four of the Ten Grave Precepts: not lying, not speaking of others' faults, not praising self at the expense of others, and not disparaging the Triple Treasure.

On the negative, prohibitive side, Buddha taught that right speech involves refraining from lying, speaking of other's faults, harsh speech, or idle chatter. On the positive, or encouraging, side, right speech involves much more: it embraces the whole range of non-harming and beneficial speech. In my experience, many people who do not struggle with the precepts of not killing, not stealing, not mis-

using sexuality, or not using intoxicants are almost always struggling with questions about right speech. For many, precept practice is primarily concerned with understanding and manifesting right speech.

The precept of not lying is intimately involved in the practice of all the other bodhisattva precepts. The dharma wheel of this precept turns all-inclusively, challenging us in every aspect of our lives. For many of us, conscious and unconscious lying, intentional deceit, and lies of omission constitute an immense field of delusion and confusion throughout the interpersonal relations of our daily lives. It is particularly appropriate that this precept is placed between the precepts of not misusing sexuality and no intoxicants, because lying and deceit are inextricably involved when there is inappropriate sexual behavior or substance abuse. The hallmark of abusive and addictive behavior is that we feel that we have to lie about it.

## *Speaking the Truth*

Although in most circumstances honesty is the best policy, speaking the truth can give rise to conflict or even threaten to rupture a relationship. If you feel powerless or insecure in a situation, you may pretend that everything is all right in order to maintain a semblance of peace and harmony. You may withhold information not for helpful reasons, but because you are afraid of what will happen to you: you may lose the person or provoke his or her anger. For example, if Dad is an alcoholic, the family may pretend that he's not, because if they bring it up, he may physically abuse them. Mom doesn't want the kids to see her get hurt, so she doesn't bring it up. And the kids don't bring it up either, because they don't want Mom to get hurt or themselves to get hurt.

But even in a situation such as this, you should risk some disturbance in order to tell the truth. You don't bring it up when Dad is drunk and Mom has no help, because that might be harmful to everyone.

You wait for the right time, but you intend to tell the truth eventually.

The primary harm to yourself of not telling the truth is that after a while you forget that you are lying, and your mind becomes deluded and confused. Telling the truth is really hard: it takes courage and attention. And you can't tell the truth all by yourself: you have to work it out with others.

There are wrong times to tell the truth. The Buddha said that you should not speak when what you have to say is false and harms, when what you have to say is false but doesn't harm, or when what you have to say is true and harms. If what you have to say is true and harmless, even then you should wait for the right time. The right time to deliver your message skillfully is when you and the other person are both being upright. You choose a time when you feel grounded and alert, when you are not afraid of alienating the other person, and when you feel the other person can receive what you have to say even if it is painful to hear.

Buddha said that you should not speak the truth when it is harmful, but we need to distinguish between what is *harmful* and what is *hurtful*. Sometimes people tell you the truth and it hurts a lot, but it is very helpful. For example, someone might say to you, I'd like to talk to you about the way that you treated that person. Would you like to hear about that? And you say, If you think it might be helpful to me, then I do.

When she tells you how you harmed or discouraged the other person, you feel terrible. It really hurts you to hear these things about yourself, but it doesn't harm you. At the very least, it encourages you to be honest with yourself and to pay attention. If you can listen to this painful information about yourself, then you can begin to take responsibility for your actions. You understand how powerful you are and how you might be harming others. Being upright in the midst of your discomfort, your mind opens to the dynamics of interdependence with others.

## *Right Speech and the Community*

When members of the sangha practice right speech, it generates trust and harmony within the community and becomes a strong support for others' liberation. On the other hand, when members of the sangha speak falsely or act in a way that encourages others to use false speech, it brings about a deterioration of trust among people in the community and undermines the practice of liberation. Those who are committed to the welfare of others should use extreme care in what they say and how they say it.

When a member of the sangha hears about or observes what appears to be misconduct on the part of friends or close associates, what is the appropriate response? How do you honestly bring up such issues without rupture or betrayal of the relationship? My own Zen community faced a period of great upheaval in the early 1980s, due in part to difficulties with the practice of no false speech.

Early in 1971, when our abbot, Suzuki Roshi, realized that he was dying, he recognized the need for appointing his successor and set the process in motion. After much consideration, he decided to recommend a senior student, Richard Baker, who had been studying at a Zen monastery in Japan for several years. Upon learning of Suzuki Roshi's choice for the next abbot, the board of directors of the Zen Center confirmed his recommendation.

Shortly after this decision, Suzuki Roshi called me into his kitchen for a cup of tea and told me that he wanted me to be the next abbot's attendant. He said, "I command you to do this," and I said that I would do as he asked. I wondered why he had used the word "command," which he had never used before; he had always made his requests gently. Later, when Suzuki Roshi was much weaker, he called me into his bedroom and asked me if I understood why he had commanded me to be the next abbot's attendant. "No," I said. He then said, "You will find him to be very different from me, and I don't want you to leave the Zen Center because of that. I want you to stay and

help the Zen Center. That's why I want you to be close to him."

During the last five years of his life, Suzuki Roshi ordained sixteen of his American students as priests. Because of these priest ordinations and the opening of Tassajara monastery, the practice at the Zen Center became more priest-oriented, formal, and monastic during his final years. Because Richard Baker had been away in Japan during this time, Suzuki Roshi asked me to advise him about the forms of practice that we had developed during his absence. My position as his attendant would, theoretically, be an ideal way for me to carry out such an advisory role.

The new abbot seemed overwhelmed by his concerns for the institution. He became more involved with administrative work and spent less and less time in the meditation hall and meeting with students. I tried to tell him that we didn't need to expand the institution: we could all practice together without the Zen Center growing larger. But he gradually convinced me that the Zen Center was so rare, wonderful, and important in our society that sacrifices of formal practice were justified.

For the next twelve years I held positions of responsibility that kept me in close association with Baker Roshi. He was, to me and many others, a charismatic, intelligent, and lovable leader. He was able to gather together many talented and devoted people and accomplish remarkable things. He created the impression that the Zen Center was the best show in town. The Zen Center became a kind of Camelot, and little by little, it became very important to the members of the community that they be included in this inspired vision. Many of us became afraid to say or do anything that might precipitate our exclusion from this magical place.

In retrospect, I see that in the midst of this brilliant vision of the Zen Center, a style of organizational secrecy developed. There was an unspoken assumption that certain things should be regarded as privileged information and shared only with people higher up in the organization. This inside information could be used to enhance your

power and extend your territory for personal gain. Sharing such information with peers was not considered safe. If you had ideas for change or problems with how things were going, you were expected to talk to your boss before you talked to your coworkers, your subordinates, or even your spouse. Newcomers quickly learned that they were not to talk about their personal meditation practice with peers but only with their teacher.

There was a sense that the more zealously you worked, the more secure your position. Working long hours for the Zen Center, even to the point of sacrificing formal meditation practice and neglecting family obligations, promoted your sense of inclusion in the creative power center of the community. When the wife of one of my dharma brothers complained about him spending so much time at the Zen Center, he replied, "Don't you realize that we're creating culture at the Zen Center?" Feeling ashamed of her lack of appreciation of this great work, she stopped complaining. Those who questioned the status quo often experienced an immediate rebuff, a subtle or gross drop in status, or marginalization in the community.

Although I appreciated many things about Baker Roshi, some of his behavior troubled me. I was concerned about the scale of his expenditure of Zen Center funds to support his activities as abbot. During that time the Zen Center was growing, and its financial resources were rapidly expanding. There was a great deal of money coming in and going out. A large part of these resources was going to support the abbot's activities and the expansive projects that he was interested in. Throughout the years many people, including Zen Center presidents and treasurers, questioned and resisted these expenditures, but it was difficult for an individual to give voice to a disagreement with the abbot. Openly expressing opposition might have been viewed as ingratitude for all his good work. It might even have been seen as subversive: detrimental to his authority and to the health of the community. Often the officers wound up talking to me because I was the head of practice. Looking back, I can see that on

some occasions I did not have the courage to practice right speech under such circumstances. I tended to favor harmony with the abbot at the expense of complete honesty with him. On these occasions I would recommend to the officers that perhaps the best that we could do would be to honestly record the expenditures and let history judge what was right.

There were some occasions when we were steadfast in our opposition to an expenditure. Baker Roshi once brought a request to the officers to purchase the largest, most expensive model of BMW for his own personal use. After a long discussion, the officers and practice leaders refused to approve the expenditure. The next day Baker Roshi went ahead and bought the car, and the community paid for it. There was grumbling, but the leaders of the Zen Center did not demand that he return the car.

Within our community we were working with guidelines for sexual conduct that Baker Roshi himself had proposed. The basic guidelines were that sexual relationships not involve lying or deceit; that sexual relationships not be harmful; and that student and teacher not have a sexual relationship with each other. I still feel that these guidelines were good. Within our community Baker Roshi severely disciplined anyone who violated the first two guidelines, and whenever he heard about another community in which a teacher had a sexual relationship with a student, he taught us to strongly condemn it and recommended that the students "stop feeding the teacher." Ironically, these guidelines provided a way for us to address his own behavior later.

At some point I became aware of and concerned about the abbot's extramarital sexual activity. As far as I knew at that time, this involved people who were not his students and who were only marginally associated with the Zen Center. When I asked him about these affairs, he told me that he had talked to his wife and that she felt fine about it. It did not seem to be my place to question their marriage agreement. Based on what he said, it seemed as though he was not

going against the guidelines that he had proposed for our community.

Throughout a number of years, with increasing frequency, members of the Zen Center came to me and expressed their misgivings, doubts, and distress concerning these affairs. After listening to these complaints I would usually suggest that the concerned parties go directly to Baker Roshi to express their grievances. Sometimes when people talked to him directly they were encouraged by his response; at other times they were discouraged. Because of his inaccessibility and my lack of skill at that time, many complaints that I should have brought to his attention went unaddressed, and resentments accumulated.

A general climate developed where the abbot was isolated from questions and disagreement from the community. I remember warning him that sometimes even his assistants were afraid to approach him with negative comments. Although I discussed some of my questions and criticisms with Baker Roshi, I kept many of them to myself; I often didn't tell even my wife.

My wife was not Baker Roshi's student. She felt that I was sometimes unreceptive to her when she privately questioned or criticized his behavior, and this was true. I was already hearing enough about these problems and did not want to hear any more. Yet when she expressed herself directly to him at a meeting with Zen Center leaders, I was amazed by and proud of her courage. No one had done this before. She opened the way for others to disagree publicly with the abbot.

For a long time I was unaware that, from almost the beginning of his abbacy, Baker Roshi had been secretly engaged in a sexual relationship with one of his students. Eventually, shortly before I received dharma transmission from Baker Roshi and formally became his successor, a senior student confided to me that she had been sexually involved with the abbot for a long period. She was, she said, no longer in a sexual relationship with him, and she found his continuing sexual innuendos terribly distressing: she felt that they were con-

tributing to her physical illness. I was so upset that I couldn't think of what to do. I felt extremely angry and, as I would describe it now, quite self-righteous. I thought that if I went to him directly with all my anger, it might provoke him into a defensive position. I could picture this powerful person mobilizing his great personal energy and institutional authority, finding a way to minimize or explain away the problem, and discrediting me as an alarmist. I knew from experience that he was capable of mustering tremendous support and protection against anything that he disagreed with or felt threatened by. On the other hand, I was afraid that if I went to others first and told them about his alleged misconduct, my behavior might be interpreted as some kind of power play intended to bring the abbot down.

If I went to the more sympathetic senior members, I might create a division in the sangha between those who would believe my report and those who would either not believe it or who were so loyal to him that they would consider his misconduct a minor infraction, insignificant in comparison with his strengths. Unable to see a way toward any beneficial response, I kept this terrible secret to myself for a long time. Now I see that I was a coward. Keeping this information to myself was false speech: I lied by omission. I let my concerns for myself and for the harmony and dignity of the community stop me from speaking what should have been spoken.

I tolerated this painful dilemma until, a year or so later, one of my peers told me that the abbot had started another sexual relationship with one of his students, and that the student's husband was so upset that he was contemplating suicide. Because I had been informed by another senior member rather than by the distraught student directly, I felt that I could be part of sharing this information without creating division within the community. Together we informed the board of directors. When we confronted Baker Roshi, he admitted to the group that he had become involved with the married student. Board members expressed deep feelings of sorrow and disappointment.

After much painful deliberation, the board resolved to ask the

abbot to take a leave of absence, suggesting that he use the time for retreat and contemplation. As the person who was perceived to be closest to him, I was asked to present this resolution to him. When I did so, he was stunned but agreed to the suggestion. The board members informed other senior members about the situation, put the resolution into writing, sent it to our membership, and had a series of general meetings to which the entire community was invited.

A question arose at this point about whether to extend this disclosure to the wider society and, if so, how such a communication should take place. Now another aspect of our dilemma emerged: on one side, there was an impulse to protect the good name and reputation of our community; on the other, there was a wish to express the integrity of our community by honestly and openly disclosing the whole story. Several leaders felt that we should publish a brief report in our widely distributed magazine, *Wind Bell*. In my role as liaison between the abbot and the board, I spoke to Baker Roshi about how we might inform our wider membership and society at large. He told me that he very much did *not* want a report to appear in *Wind Bell*: he thought that such a report would make it more difficult to resolve the situation. He said that if I allowed such a report to be published, then our close relationship would be finished. He would consider my permitting such a publication as a personal betrayal.

At a subsequent meeting with the board, I told them about his feelings and, out of my loyalty to him and sympathy for his wishes, I suggested that they consider not making this report public. The board's response was, in effect, If you really demand it, then we won't publish this report. I realized that my opposition would be tantamount to asking some board members to act in a way that violated their own sense of integrity. After anguishing about this for days, I finally concluded that blocking the publication would not protect either Baker Roshi's or the Zen Center's reputation, and would probably lead to more distrust, confusion, and unhappiness. In the end I did not oppose the publication of the article.

The revelations that emerged in our meetings and that were published in our magazine, *Wind Bell*, caused a virtual tidal wave of positive and negative emotions to roar through the Zen Center community. Some people felt angry, discouraged, disappointed, and betrayed. Others, however, felt greatly encouraged; in this environment of open disclosure they were finally able to express many other things that they had been holding inside for years. Some people who had never before been able to speak coherently in front of a group became eloquent in this new environment.

As time went on, other sexual affairs involving the abbot and his students came to light, sending further shock waves through the community. After a decade of being discouraged from questioning the abbot and other leaders, and awkward verbal communication about problems in the community in general, we were not prepared to deal with this crisis. The process was explosive and disorienting. Violent and even murderous thoughts arose in the hearts of some community members. Prior to this, we Zen students had thought that we worked together well—but that was in silence. We had thought that we were dealing skillfully with whatever negative mental states arose, but when we started speaking about them, we were often unskillful. We didn't yet understand how to speak of our negative emotions in a harmless or beneficial way.

At general meetings with Baker Roshi, people said such things as "You are a shithead," or "You are a Nazi," to a person whom they had previously treated with the greatest respect and veneration. The pendulum swung from unquestioning trust to condemnation. Some people went from seeing the abbot as a buddha to seeing him as a devil entitled to no respect. The way that we had spoken to and about the abbot throughout those years had obscured his humanness.

During this time, in a conversation with Suzuki Roshi's wife, she told me, "Everyone is pointing just at *him*. They need to look more at themselves." She also said, "Suzuki Roshi's way was not to hate." I didn't feel that she was saying that we shouldn't be talking, but that

we should do so with self-reflection and kindness rather than with projection or hatred. I wanted to share her comments with community members, but again I was afraid to do so: I was afraid that I would be perceived as trying to protect the abbot from justifiable expressions of pain, disappointment, and anger. Most important, I was afraid that community members would think that I was asking them to deny what they were feeling, to not speak their truth. Not being completely free of my own self-righteousness, I was unable to bring forth Suzuki Roshi's simple teaching.

Looking back now, it seems surprising that I couldn't convey this teaching from Mrs. Suzuki to the community, but I was in a state of shock. In a boxing match, when you see one of the boxers staggering around the ring, you don't understand why the other boxer doesn't just go over and knock him out. It looks so easy. But I know from my own experience in the ring that the boxer who seems to be in good shape can hardly even see the other boxer or lift his arms. I felt as though I were walking through mud up to my eyeballs, as though I were living in the midst of a Greek tragedy. I gradually learned that not all the wisdom about how to proceed through this turmoil had to be brought forth by me. It came from the sangha: no one in particular was the supreme teacher.

I hoped that if the sangha could continue to honestly address these painful problems and our shared responsibility in their creation, we could heal the wounds in our community, thus opening the door to a new, more honest, and more courageous way of living together. However, while still on leave of absence, Baker Roshi submitted a letter of resignation, which the board of directors and most of the community accepted. Shortly thereafter, he moved out of the Zen Center.

Many of us were disappointed that the abbot left before we were able to finish the process of healing. Although many of the Zen Center's members and outside advisers felt that it was no longer appropriate that he continue as abbot, most of us had hoped that there

would be a way for him to stay in the community and continue to practice with us. The overall effect of our attempt to practice right speech led to an understanding in the community that it was vitally important for each of us to speak our own truth and to encourage and support others to do so. This painful episode showed us the disastrous consequences of not practicing right speech.

Although our community was initially very unskillful in our attempts to speak about these serious problems, I have heard from people in other groups who have encountered similar crises with their leaders that the way that we handled this crisis provided great inspiration, encouragement, and guidance.

I hope that in telling this story I have been in accord with the precept of no false speech and spoken in such a way as to convey respect for all concerned. In writing from my own point of view, I have tried to acknowledge my own shortcomings in dealing with these painful events, in hopes that doing so may facilitate a deeper healing of relationships in our community.

## *The Ultimate Meaning of "No False Speech"*

When you're sailing in a boat, you can see the circle of water around you, but not the whole ocean. If you that think the circle of water is the ocean, then you are incorrect. Likewise, if you wholeheartedly attempt to tell the truth without being aware of the limitations of your vision, then your words will be a further enactment of your ignorance. If you are aware of your limited vision, which is a step toward telling the truth, then you will be somewhat anxious about whether you are telling the whole truth. Feeling such anxiety, you may hold more tightly to your limited view as the truth, and, to assuage the anxiety, try to prove that it is true. On the other hand, if your attempt to speak the truth is grounded in the recognition of your own limits of vision, then the truth will be realized and you will be freed from your anxiety.

The truth is not realized just by me saying what I think is the truth. Truth arises when my truth is offered, but not placed above the truth of others. The whole truth is realized in the marriage of the minds of all beings. As is said in some wedding ceremonies, "I plight thee my troth." In other words, I endanger my truth to you. The truth is not held on my side or on your side. I endanger my truth to others in the faith that I will thus be liberated from my own small truth and realize the oceanic truth. I can never see beyond my own circle of water, and yet, being aware that my circle is just a circle and not the ocean, I am liberated from it.

The ultimate meaning is that your truth at this moment is just that. To make more or less of it would not be upright. Practicing no false speech guides you into uprightness, and uprightness guides you into no false speech, but you will never have a final understanding of the precepts or of being upright. No one can measure the ocean of what being upright means. With an upright mind you contemplate your experience in a state of wonder. Out of such a mind of selfless wonder new revelations of meaning constantly arise.

chapter seventeen

# EVERYTHING IS INVIOLABLE:
## *No Intoxicants*

*Where nothing can be brought in,*
*everything is inviolable.*
*This is exactly the great brightness.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

THE PRECEPT of not intoxicating the mind or body of self or others[1] is for all of us who have difficulty remaining upright in the midst of our suffering. It encourages us to trust being upright, instead of using intoxicants, as the best way to deal with our restlessness, anxiety, and pain. In the turbulence of our changing lives, with their waves of pain and pleasure, it is difficult to be quiet and still. But as Dogen says, "Here is the place; here the way unfolds."[2] Without any tampering or manipulation of what is happening, the way of freedom from suffering unfolds here.

The word *intoxicate* means "to poison."[3] In the broadest sense, anything we ingest, inhale, or inject into our system without reverence for all life becomes an intoxicant. Whether we speak of intoxication or substance abuse, the essential issue here is that we are dissatisfied with our current experience. We may dislike or feel bored with our experience and wish to bring something in to change or end it. We may be fairly satisfied with our experience but want to bring something in to modify it a little. Or we may enjoy our experience and wish to bring something in to prolong or intensify it, because we

anticipate that it will not last. All these examples share a common thread: a lack of appreciation for life.

Among the various things that we use to change our state, some are more harmful than others. The great yogi Neem Karoli Baba says that food is the best intoxicant. Although it is considered less addictive than alcohol or nicotine, we can still use food in an addictive and even life-threatening way. We can also bring things in through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the skin, or the mind in such a way that no matter what it is, it becomes an intoxicant.

One autumn I visited my old home in Minneapolis. I had not seen a Minnesota autumn for twenty-five years. The cold weather of Minnesota brings out bright colors in the leaves that are not brought out in milder climates. But the period when the most vivid colors come out lasts a short time, so if it rains or the wind blows strongly, you might miss it. That particular autumn was very sunny and cold when the leaves turned. They were intensely colorful and the wind did not blow. The week that I was there, each day was utterly radiant: bright blue skies, white clouds, green grass, azure lakes, and brilliant red, orange, yellow, brown, and green leaves. I not only saw the colors, but had myriad memories from my childhood and adolescence of walking through, raking, and burning leaves: such beautiful sights and smells! I had a blissful week of nostalgia and beauty; it was worth the twenty-five-year wait. I was satisfied and happy to have been able to see such an autumn again.

Then it rained and all the colors were more subtle and quiet, but still very beautiful. I was out driving in the countryside, and I noticed a thought come up in my mind: It is so beautiful, but it would be a little better still if the sun were shining. In the face of beauty, we may find it difficult to be upright and not lean into wishing for some slight adjustment of the color. It does not seem like such a terrible thing, to wish for a little sunlight. But this precept is gently indicating a way of being upright that is so much at peace that you are free of the impulse to bring something in. You do not reach for anything: you

are content with the gray sky. If you want to realize the bodhisattva precepts, then you should not blithely dismiss the natural and lazy human tendency to try to manipulate situations. At its beginning it seems innocent, but it is not innocent. Innocence is to not touch things at all. Innocence is not even to think of another color.

At the conventional level, the precept of no intoxicants is understood as encouraging us to control our behavior by not using addictive substances to manipulate our state of being. Ironically, using individual effort to try to control our behavior is itself a violation of the ultimate meaning of the precept, because it is akin to manipulating our experience.

This may seem a strict interpretation, but in fact many of us attempt to lead our lives with such an attitude. Perhaps we need to practice sincerely with this attitude in order to directly and fully experience its futility. We need to practice the path of personal restraint in order to realize the abusiveness of this approach.

If there is no impulse to bring something in to modify your state of body or mind, then restraining is not an issue, personal effort is not an issue, and control is not an issue. On the other hand, if you feel an impulse to turn away, to modify your sacred being, refraining or restraining are no longer possible, because the impulse has already happened. The demon of manipulation and substance abuse, although not completely successful, has done a good day's work. Even if today you do not physically take the next step, if the demon can rouse the same impulse again tomorrow, you are hooked. That is why people who practice substance abuse therapies say at their meetings, "Hi, my name is So-and-so and I'm an alcoholic." Not drinking does not necessarily mean not having the impulse to drink. You can admit that because you still feel the impulse to drink, you are an alcoholic. Admitting an impulse is different from trying to control yourself. Saying "I'm an alcoholic" really means "I'm not in control of myself, and I'm not going to get control of myself." This is quite enlightened. By such an admission you acknowledge that it is not by personal

effort that you become free of these abusive impulses.

The impulse to abuse has to be graciously uprooted from some deeper place. You need to understand how the impulse to change your state arises. This impulse to modify and manipulate and thus abuse your precious life comes from turning away from what Dogen calls "the great brightness" of your being. In this great brightness, nothing can be brought in. Being upright with this great brightness, you have no desire to bring something in.

How do we turn away? The independent self is threatened by the great brightness, where there are no things to hold on to. We want to get a fix on it, to make it into a thing, to bring something in. Seeing this tendency we say, "I'm an alcoholic," "I eat compulsively," or "I'm a chain smoker." We should admit it. But that is enough. No further attempts to control are appropriate, although we may need to try, to find out that it is futile. If we do not try it, then we may still imagine that control is possible. If we are not sure, then we have to try.

A friend of mine from the early days of the San Francisco Zen Center, a lovely man—big, strong, sensitive, poetic, and talented—became a heroin addict. Throughout the years he would come to the Zen Center strung out and ask me to help him get off drugs and start practicing Zen again. He would return to practice, get off heroin, recover to some extent, and start feeling better. But when he met pain or frustration, he would start using heroin again and leave—round and round. One time he said, "You know, Reb, we get up in the morning, wash our faces, and go to sit in meditation. Then, when we go out and look at the sunrise, we feel good, we feel clean, we feel alive, we are happy Zen students. But at just such a happy moment I always think, It would be better if I had some heroin in me." Now my friend is in prison for seven counts of rape and one of kidnapping. He was so clear and beautiful when he was straight and upright.

Facing the great, bright fullness of our being where nothing is brought in and nothing needs to be brought in is being upright. Sitting upright in this brightness, we study the precept; the precept will

tell us its secret, its beautiful, simple secret, just the way we can understand it.

*Stabat Mater* is a sublime piece of music by the Italian composer Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, who died when he was twenty-six. The Latin *stabat mater* means "the mother stood." The mother it refers to is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She stood! That's all she did. She would have done more if she could, but she couldn't. Her son was being tortured to death. I imagine her anxiety and pain, standing on the hill near his cross. She stood and he cried. They both had a hard time settling into their work. Even her son, the man on the cross, had his moments of doubt. Did all the world want what was happening? Finally, he settled into his pain, realizing that just hanging was his destiny. He doubted no more. His mother did the same. In fact, she showed him what to do. In this wonderful piece of music we hear the mother as she stands and we hear the other women crying out for him and for all beings.

In such moments of great pain and anxiety, our work is to be present in this pain and anxiety. We listen to it: we do not mess with it. This is not easy: it is just necessary. We are all doing this work to some extent, but we must be thoroughgoing. We must give our whole being to it. We must give our sexuality to it. We must give our appetite to it. We must give our anger to it. We must give everything to just being totally present with whatever has come to be, completely resigned to what is happening, with imperturbable peace and composure. Fulfilling this responsibility, we actualize the great brightness, where nothing can be brought in and everything is inviolable.

According to this understanding, many things can be used in such a way that they become intoxicants: coffee, tea, chewing gum, sweets, sex, sleep, power, fame, and even food. When we don't fully experience life as it is manifesting itself at this moment, we become possessed by craving. In a state of craving we may want to bring something in to tighten us or loosen us, to pep us up or calm us down,

to sharpen the mind and body or dull it, or to give us pleasure or take away pain. We do not trust that what we have come to be in the moment is precisely buddha. We disrespect the current manifestation of this precious life. Whenever the use of a substance or a state of being is based on craving, it becomes an intoxicant. Even the use of good medicine, in a state of impatience and craving, can become an opportunity for poisoning the spirit.

Once a monk came and told me a story about himself. For weeks he had been in a state of torment, and he did not know what to do. His meditation practice was not working, and he could think of nothing to bring in to change his state; he had nothing but his suffering. He could not think of any way to manipulate himself or pull himself out of his torment. His pain was all he had to work with. Then, one evening during dinner in the monks' hall, the situation turned. As the meal servers came in with their pots of food, he realized that the servers were himself, the pots and the food were himself, all the other dining monks were himself, the monks' hall was himself, and his suffering was himself. He couldn't remember who he was, and he couldn't remember that he was suffering.

Throughout the meal this monk tasted the one flavor of buddha's teaching: the flavor of liberation, the flavor of self-forgetting, and the flavor of release from suffering. This poor monk, who was unable to think of any way to change his state, came to be thus. Being unable to control his experience, being unable to escape from his experience, he just sat upright in the midst of his experience of torment. Thus the utterly blessed nature of all being came to visit this simple monk, actualizing the ultimate meaning of the bodhisattva precept of no intoxicants. He entered the pure land where nothing can be brought in.

In the midst of this blessed realization, however, he slipped from his poverty and stupidity. In his great happiness he started feeling rather clever and imagined that now he might be able to control his experience after all. He thought of ways that he might bring some-

thing in to prolong and control his happy realization. Thus he made an object of his precious experience and tried to bring it into himself, for himself. How sad. In his meddling self-concern, he fell from accord with this bodhisattva precept and almost immediately returned to a state of torment.

After all this he asked me, "Well, now what? Is it back to hell?" I said, "Yes, but I hope you can be upright in hell." Being upright is not just another device to manipulate your situation, to get you out of hell. It is to be upright just to be upright, for the sake of all beings. Being upright is not for the sake of improving your self or your situation. In fact, being upright is forgetting your self-concern. Being upright and self-forgetting allows the dharma flower to open in whatever circumstances come to be. The dharma flower is already opening everywhere throughout the universe. The opening of the dharma flower can be realized in any experience, in any time, and in any place, if we uprightly receive and practice this magnificent precept of not intoxicating mind or body of self or others.

This bodhisattva precept is about liberating all other beings from addiction to improvement before oneself. Once a monk told me that his ultimate concern in this life was to completely let things be just as they are. Shortly after that, he told me that he wanted to stop thinking always of his own desires, to stop being concerned always with what he wanted. This second desire contradicted his ultimate concern. To try to stop obsessing about what he wanted was to obsess about another thing that he wanted. His desire to try to improve himself in this way was just another selfish desire. Doing something to try to improve yourself is not this bodhisattva precept. Trying to improve others is not this bodhisattva precept. This precept is about liberating self and others from self-concern. It is precisely about not using anything to improve anybody, and using everything to help everybody. This precept is about dropping all self-concern and appreciating all beings just as they are. When this selfish monk accepts himself and allows himself just to be himself, all his energies

turn to the welfare of others. Being himself with no desire to improve himself or his circumstances shows others the path of liberation from self-concern. In this way, this selfish monk just being this selfish monk saves all suffering beings.

I had a friend who started practicing Zen in prison, where he was sentenced for selling drugs. Someone gave him a copy of Suzuki Roshi's book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice;* he read the book and decided to practice. After his release from prison, he came to the San Francisco Zen Center and practiced very wholeheartedly. He was a good monk. He sincerely received the bodhisattva precepts and eventually became a priest. Then he gradually tried to make things more interesting and exciting. He started to use cocaine and even became a cocaine dealer.

After I heard about his cocaine use, we agreed that he should formally withdraw from the priesthood. We were both unhappy with the situation, but he couldn't bring himself to make the commitment to stop using cocaine. Sometime later he asked to talk to me again; by then he had become even more deeply involved in the drug world. He was feeling sorry and worried about where all this would lead, but he still wasn't interested in stopping. He asked me why I wasn't telling him to stop, and I said, "You never asked me to." If he wanted to stop, then I would try to help. I would tell him that he wanted to stop. As it was, I couldn't find a way to help him. I don't know if my response was appropriate. The end came when he accidentally killed himself with an overdose of heroin. The more I think about him, the more I miss him, and the more I wish that he were still alive so I could try again to help him find out what he really wanted to do with his precious life.

One time before all this happened, he and I were running in a park and we found two 1-dollar bills. He asked me what I thought we should do with the money. I don't remember my answer, but I remember the sweetness and innocence with which he asked me about the appropriate use of our found money.

*In the Name of the Father* is a movie about a young man and his father who are unjustly imprisoned.[4] Throughout the years they get to know each other very well because they are confined in the same cell. I was touched by the scene in which they are lying in their separate beds, the father with his back turned to his son, after the son has taken LSD with some other inmates. The son asks if anything is wrong. The father says that he's worried about his son, that he's ruining himself. The son, who is concerned for his father's health and feelings, says that he won't take any drugs for the rest of his father's life. The father says that he wants his son not to take any drugs even after he dies. The son agrees and asks his father if he's happy now. Yes, the father says.

Watching this story, I first identified with the father. I felt that I, too, would be happy if I knew that my son and everyone else would make that commitment not only until I died, but even after I died. When bodhisattvas receive the precepts they pray that all beings will come and join in receiving the precepts. I don't want to practice by myself: I want everybody else to practice, even after I'm dead. I can also identify with the son, the one who made the commitment. Receiving and caring for the precepts involves both hearing the commitment from others and making the commitment yourself. You do not hear and make commitments by your own power, nor can anyone do it for you. It's a mysterious process that happens in communion: it is born in that way.

Intimacy with all things is the way to live in peace and harmony with them. Freedom from all things is realized through intimacy with all things. These two statements apply to both so-called worldly things and to spiritual matters as well. In all circumstances, turning away and grasping both miss the point of intimacy. Anything you actively turn away from or ignore comes to exert some influence over you. The more energetic the ignoring, the more power you give to what is ignored. The thing does not actually have this power in itself. Its power depends on your refusal to pay attention to it. *Grasping*

means "to be indulgent or inappropriately involved." When you meet with an especially precious or dangerous phenomenon, you may find it particularly difficult to achieve intimacy. As the old buddha Dongshan says,

> Turning away and touching are both wrong,
> Because it is like a massive fire.[5]

Seeing the dangers of material and psychic toxins, there is a natural tendency to turn away from them, to reject them. You might even come to turn away from and reject those beings who indulge in them, which is the ultimate violation of the bodhisattva's vow. When you refuse to pay close and loving attention to addicts and issues of addiction, you render yourself subject to addiction.

We need to acknowledge that beyond the harm that comes to the individual user of intoxicants, there is a concomitant disaster that puts the entire world at risk. I want this precept to be idiomatic, to live on the streets of this country and the world. I want it to be cool not to take drugs. I want it to be cool to realize buddha's mind and thus not to need to bring in anything. I want all beings to realize who they really are and thereby see that they don't need to be any different from who they are.

Announcing our vow to help all beings realize this precept, we need to find a way to bring up the message of this precept skillfully, as a public service, in such a way that the maximum number of humans are encouraged to actually practice it. Joyfully sharing the study and practice of this precept with others can serve as a reminder of the almost inconceivable horror of violence and cruelty, the immeasurable suffering, that arises from the use of intoxicants, which itself arises from the impulse to modify our present experience. In doing so, I hope that we can acknowledge and guard against our own self-righteousness. We must remember that all of us have this impulse very close at hand. All of us are capable of wishing to turn the sun up a little brighter.

The precepts are all one thing: they are buddha's mind. They show the ways that we get distracted from buddha's mind. Each way of distraction from buddha's mind is also a way of reunion with buddha's mind. The precepts show how we lean away from our buddha nature, and they are the road back.

chapter eighteen

# THE SAME PATH:
## *Not Speaking of Others' Faults*

*Within buddha dharma,*
*all are on the same path, the same dharma,*
*the same realization, the same practice.*
*So the faults of others will not be discussed,*
*and confusing speech will not occur.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA taught primarily with speech. Nagarjuna praised the Buddha, the teacher of dependent co-arising, as the foremost of all speakers. This precept of not speaking of the faults of others is words about words. It is talk about talk. By receiving and transmitting this precept, the bodhisattva's attention turns to face an extremely dynamic and potentially very beneficial or very harmful combination: the critical, discriminating capacities of the human mind uniting with the mystery and power of speech.

Discussing the faults of others can be very harmful. It can even be a condition for sending nations of people into war with each other. On the other hand, there are *koans* (teaching stories) in Zen in which a critical comment pointing out someone's fault in public has been an occasion for great awakening and complete liberation.

What is meant here by speaking of the faults of others? First of all, it is speaking of others with the intention, conscious or unconscious, to cause disrespect or disharmony between people. This phenomenon

could be called slander. Here, *slander* means "to intentionally make defamatory statements that are injurious to the reputation of another person." This is not speaking of another person's faults directly, face-to-face with that person: it is speaking to others about someone's faults, either in front of the person or behind the person's back. The harmful intention may not be fulfilled: the slanderer may wind up being the one who is disrespected by the audience.

When I was a teenager, I had a friend (I thought he was my friend) who, whenever I became interested in a girl, would make some comment about her, noting some little trait about her that would make me think that maybe I shouldn't like her. It did not occur to me at the time that he might have been trying to keep me all to himself. One time I met a girl before he got a chance to say anything against her, and I finally had a girlfriend. When he came on the scene, it was too late. I had already realized that she was not a goddess and had accepted that. A slight negative comment can throw confusion and a lack of confidence into a person's heart.

For me, one of the most wrenching and painfully tragic stories is Shakespeare's *Othello*.[1] Othello, a person of noble bearing and a serene sense of power, listens to his trusted servant Iago, who cleverly and treacherously insinuates that Othello's wife, Desdemona, is unfaithful. Unbalanced by Iago's slander and unable to bring himself to uprightness, he cannot question Iago and uncover what he is doing. He puts his entire confidence in his treacherous servant and loses confidence in his faithful wife. He eventually loses his sanity as well, because he allows this poisonous slander to infect his mind without directly verifying it.

What is the source of Iago's treachery? People far more intimate with the play than I say that the character of Iago defies all attempts at analysis. Still, my sense is that the lowly, villainous, and unscrupulous aspects of ourselves, as represented by Iago, originate in self-concern, which seeks to discredit and overpower the great, dignified, and scrupulous others of the world. Iago, in all his complexity, represents

this tendency to speak in a demeaning and undermining way of those who most deserve our praise and gratitude. The unfaithful and jealous Iago strives to destroy the noble Othello by undermining his view of all those who are truly faithful to him. It is so painful to see or read the play and helplessly watch the devastating effects of Iago's cunning, self-centered speech. Meditating on this play, we might each wonder if our speech ever arises from the same source as Iago's.

It is vitally important that we not take hearsay about others' wrongdoing to be true without directly and thoroughly investigating it firsthand for ourselves. It is even more important that we not repeat such hearsay. Unless we meet what we hear of others' faults with a carefully questioning attitude, words of criticism can poison our minds against others. It isn't just the negative gossip that accomplishes the poisoning of our minds, but also our passive listening to it.

Because I have been living in a practice community for many years and serving in various positions of leadership, I am often approached by students who want to talk to me about others' faults. When I understand that one student is about to criticize another, I may stop him in midsentence and ask him if he has discussed the problem directly with the person in question. If he hasn't, then I suggest that he talk to the person directly, face-to-face, before talking to me or any other third person. If he does not wish to speak to the person directly, then he shouldn't be talking to someone else instead. If he is afraid to talk to the person, then I offer to assist in the process. After talking to the person directly, if he feels that he hasn't been heard and wants further support in getting his point across, I am willing to arrange this.

## *Beneficial Criticism*

Our compassionate ancestor Zen master Dogen had an incandescent commitment to maintaining the correct buddha dharma. He fiercely criticized anything that he felt to be misrepresenting it. Many

Western students have a hard time understanding how such intense criticism could be an expression of wisdom and compassion. It's hard for us, reading him across the centuries, to completely understand the total range of his motives. But perhaps we can look at his criticism to see if it encourages us to work by all means, including questioning and criticism of the teaching, with the clear intention of realizing peace, harmony, and respect among all beings.

When we see or hear about Buddhist teachers who seem to be abusing their authority in a way that undermines or misrepresents the Buddha's teaching and practice, what is the appropriate response? How can we bring up our concerns without creating division in the community? We must look deeply into our own hearts and see if our concern really is coming from a pure love for the teaching, untainted by a desire to lower anyone's respect for a teacher. Can we question and criticize a teacher or a teaching without looking down on him or it? Can we criticize a teacher in the spirit of utmost respect for all beings?

In speaking out against injustice, there is certainly the occasion to mention faults, but here is the challenge: can you speak not with the intention of dividing people but with the intention of uniting people? A bodhisattva *should* speak out against injustice in the world, with a heart that is free of self-concern, even if it appears that he or she is violating the conventional meaning of this precept.

When I first looked at this precept, I wondered if it meant that if this precept became the prevailing social policy there would be no more critics: no more movie critics or literary critics, ballet critics or music critics. Because I love critics, some more than others, I wouldn't like that. Critics' work is often art. When I read certain magazines, I turn right to the book reviews; I frequently don't have time to read the books themselves. Some critics take me right to the heart of the matter: I can just drink the nectar of their intelligence. Through their kind and helpful service they make the genius of great art more accessible to us.

A critic may speak of the faults of the writer, the producer, the director, the actors, or the dancers, but sometimes the way that she does this is beautiful and helpful to me and to the artists. If she is trying to make me respect a person less, that is a problem, and as a bodhisattva I vow to have a conversation with her about what her intention is. But in this world of dependent co-arising, in this world of conversation with all beings, in this world with a vast, warm heart, nobody gets kicked out. The critics are not banished. We do not want a society that is lobotomized. The beautiful critical capacity of the human mind can be used to the fullest for the benefit of all beings.

## *Harsh Speech*

A different but related aberration of speech is harsh speech: consciously or unconsciously speaking out of anger in a rough and unpleasant way. In this case, speech is directed toward an individual or group, not behind their backs or to someone else. Coming from a person who has a position of great power, trust, or authority, harsh speech can be extremely injurious. Just as a parent or teacher has to be very careful of his yes, his warmth, he must be equally careful in the use of his no, his coldness.

Suzuki Roshi said that in Zen, no is often a more emphatic way of saying yes. Teachers use no in an ironic way, as a rhetorical device. This no is actually the yes beyond yes and no. In Zen when we say, "Go away," it means, "Come back with a new and more true self." This is usually applied to more advanced students. It is a challenging coldness, encouraging them to go beyond their well-established practice, a disturbing word to break them free from their imperturbable composure.

According to Zen tradition, Master Ma shouted at Baizhang Huaihai so loudly that he was deaf for three days. The great master Linji enlightened many monks by shouting at, slapping, and hitting them. After years of shouting harshly and awakening many people, Linji

was about to die. He said to his great disciple Sansheng, "After I die, please don't destroy my treasury of the eye of truth." Sansheng said, "How would I dare destroy the teacher's treasury of the eye of truth?" Linji said, "If someone suddenly comes up to you and says, 'What about this?' what will you say?" Sansheng shouted. Linji said, "Who would have thought that my treasury of the eye of truth would be destroyed by a blind ass."[2]

This was Linji's ironic way of acknowledging his great disciple's realization. In this ceremonial way they mutually transmitted dharma to each other. Their harsh words were not spoken to an "other," but expressed their infinite love of the Zen tradition. These Zen masters demonstrate that the living dharma constantly transcends itself; the treasury of truth is constantly destroyed and always refreshed.

A great Zen master by the name of Hakuin was in Linji's lineage. He was a ferocious bodhisattva. All of the Rinzai (Linji) priests in Japan now trace their lineage from this one teacher; the other lines were overshadowed and died out in his presence. He enlightened untold numbers of students. He retired when he was fifty-eight because he could not say no anymore. His benevolence rose up from his *hara*, into his chest, into his neck, into his mouth, all the way up into his eyes, and all he could do was croon love songs to his disciples. Before he retired, Zen students came from all throughout Japan to study with him.

During Hakuin's lifetime there was a monk, Chodo, who had some realization of the state of nothingness. He told his teacher that he wanted to test his realization by visiting the great master Hakuin. His teacher said, "I don't think so. It's not time yet. This is just the beginning of your realization; stay with me longer." But Chodo would not be dissuaded. His teacher said, "If you insist, then at least take a letter of introduction from me." So Chodo traveled to Ryutakuji, a temple with a beautiful view of Mt. Fuji. When he arrived, Hakuin was taking a bath. Chodo immediately barged into the bathroom and presented his understanding. Hakuin, sitting in the bath, said, "If

things are the way you say, then you did not come here in vain. But you have had a long trip, so rest and we will talk later."

After an apparently leisurely bath, Hakuin emerged and met with Chodo formally. Thereupon Chodo presented the letter of introduction. Hakuin opened the letter and read it. The letter said, "This young fellow is not without some insight. However, he is of modest potential and inferior ability. Please deal with him skillfully." Hakuin immediately shouted at him, with fire coming out of his eyeballs, "Your capacity is small and your potential inferior. What good is it for you to consider what you have accomplished as the completion of our Great Work?"

Poor Chodo, having everything that he cared about snatched away, immediately went insane, and he never recovered. He went back to his hometown and built himself a little temple. He would go around the countryside and gather child monks and cats, and force them to come and sit with him. If the cats ran away, he would chase after them and beat them for breaking the rules. At the end of his life, Hakuin said, "I have taught many people; I hope I did some good. But I made two mistakes—Chodo and one other."[3]

Hakuin spoke harshly at the wrong time, and this became a condition for the manifestation of Chodo's insanity. Furthermore, Hakuin seems to have made the error of believing hearsay about Chodo without verifying it for himself. Teachers must be extremely careful about both these points.

## *Kind Speech*

Both speaking of others' faults and speaking harshly go directly against the bodhisattva practice of kind speech. As Dogen says, "Kind speech is not only praising others in a wholesome way and with a pleasant voice. Kind speech can bring benefit to the person spoken of and encourage and delight all others who are listening. Kind speech can transform the nation."[4]

An effective antidote to our tendency to speak of others' faults is the practice of praising and rejoicing in their virtues. When we see others' virtues, we should speak of them enthusiastically at the earliest appropriate moment. Rejoicing in the merits of others is extremely beneficial in and of itself. If we have trouble seeing others' virtues, then turning our attention around to contemplate our own shortcomings gives us a different perspective, making it easier for us to see the merits of others. In a fortune cookie I recently got, Confucius says, "When I see virtue in another, I vow to emulate it. When I see evil in another, I look at myself."

A violinist told a story about a recital he gave for the great cellist Pablo Casals. He played for the master, but partly because he was so nervous to be in the presence of Casals, he did not do very well, and he was quite embarrassed. Afterward, Casals gave him exuberant and extravagant praise, excitedly pointing out the excellent things that the violinist had done. The musician was actually angry, thinking that Casals was teasing him ironically about his mediocre performance. Some years later he performed another recital for Casals. This time, being more mature and less flustered by the presence of the master, he played really well. Again Casals exuberantly praised his performance. Then the violinist said, "I'd like to bring something up with you, sir. Some years ago I performed for you and did rather poorly, and yet you praised me highly. I did not understand what you were doing." Casals said, "Didn't you do such-and-such well? Didn't you do such-and-such very skillfully?" "Yes," answered the violinist. "I praised the skills you had," replied Casals. "As for the mistakes you made and the things you did not do well, I leave that to fools to criticize. My job is to praise."

## *Friendly Conversation*

The ultimate meaning of this precept brings you back to the fundamental human delusion of believing your perception that you exist

separately. Based on your trust of your independent self, you do not trust the other. Not trusting others, you are ready to see their faults and eager to talk about their shortcomings, in hopes of protecting yourself. On the other hand, when you realize the interdependent self, which relies on and is supported by all other beings, you naturally trust the other. You happily notice how kind and helpful others are; you speak of their merits and virtues out of sincere gratitude. From this point of view, you can understand how even those who resist and criticize you are actually facilitating your full self-expression. If you do not understand this, you may feel that those who resist or disagree with you are inhibiting your self-realization. You may feel the impulse to speak of their faults in order to undermine their credibility and neutralize the strength of their resistance to your way. However, it is only through such resistance that you can fully actualize your whole, interdependent being—your buddha nature.

This precept is not just concerned with refraining from speaking of others' faults. This precept is ultimately intended to graciously and thoroughly uproot all the obsessive impulses from which such perverted speech arises, and then fully develop the compassionate and liberating potential of human speech.

When you carefully, kindly, and thoroughly inhabit your body of afflictions, willingly accept your mass of confused and unwholesome habits of speech, and remain upright, the interdependent nature of all these obsessions reveals itself. This is a gift, not the result of willful analysis. You cannot pry an obsession open or kick it out. Rather, this revelation comes through friendly conversation between you and the obsession. You practice kind speech even toward your perversity: Good morning, how are you? Ah, you feel an impulse to trash somebody today? Why is that? By observing the impulse to speak of others' faults, you eventually see the dharma: the dharma in the obsession, the dharma in the impulse to be perverse. As a result of this friendly conversation, harmful habits of speech drop away. You realize their dependently co-arisen nature—their emptiness—and are liberated from them.

The light in all things is revealed through friendly conversation with them. Thus bodhisattvas maintain a dialogue with all things, animate and inanimate, whether inside their own hearts and heads, or outside. At every turn, they employ speech to discover and affirm the interdependence of all things.

Bodhisattvas can belong to any religion or profession. There was once a bodhisattva named Milton Erickson, a psychologist who lived in Arizona. He went to visit a man in the state mental institution who had been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. This man claimed that he was Jesus. The man would not talk to anyone who did not in some way acknowledge him as Jesus, and therefore no conversation was going on. When the Arizona bodhisattva arrived, he introduced himself, and said, "I understand, sir, that you are a carpenter." The man said, "That's right." Then the bodhisattva said, "Would you please build me some bookshelves?" The man replied, "Fine, I will." He built the bookshelves, continued his conversation with the bodhisattva, and was shortly thereafter released from his delusion and the hospital.

In the case of schizophrenia, as Gregory Bateson says, "It takes two to make one." That is, it takes at least two people living in different worlds who cannot communicate to make a schizophrenic. If someone says, I'm Jesus, and someone else says, No, you're not, then no conversation is possible. We have the conditions for speaking of another's faults: I am a doctor and he is a schizophrenic. A bodhisattva shares the same path and the same practice with the other person. A bodhisattva does not talk about other peoples' shortcomings. He or she talks intimately *with* people who have shortcomings. Therefore a healing conversation is possible, and both parties can become liberated from their separate worlds.

In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha says, "If one practices all virtues, is gentle, harmonious, upright, and honest, one will see me teaching now."[5] Dogen says, "Practicing all virtues means getting dirty in order to embrace beings who are mired in mud."[6] Practicing all virtues means getting wet, saving all beings who are drowning in

the ocean. Getting dirty and wet means admitting our own tendencies and calmly accepting our own obsessions, for the welfare of others. Sitting upright, we see buddha in the midst of these obsessions. We are then able to have thoroughly enjoyable and beneficial conversations with everything: with all sentient beings and with the precepts themselves. We will see that within the buddha dharma all practitioners are, as Dogen says, "The same path, the same dharma, the same realization, the same practice."[7]

chapter nineteen

# NOT AN INCH OF GROUND:
## *Not Praising Self at the Expense of Others*

*Buddhas and ancestors*
*realize the entire sky and the great earth.*
*Manifesting the great body,*
*in the sky there is no inside or outside.*
*Manifesting the dharma body,*
*on earth there is not an inch of ground.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

ONE OF THE MAIN WAYS that we express our attachment to self is our constant effort to present ourselves in a favorable light. We are anxious about whether we are worthy of being supported by the universe, uncertain that the world has enough love and resources to go around. We exaggerate our merits or lie outright in order to convince ourselves or others that we are praiseworthy. We often express self-praise by comparing ourselves favorably with others, thus either intentionally or unintentionally disparaging others.

Even if we don't openly express self-praise, in our minds we are always monitoring and judging our conduct to determine if it is worthy of praise or blame. Thinking of our merits and finding some skillful way to let others know about them is a fundamental function of the human psyche. On the conventional level, this precept is suggesting that we refrain from exercising one of our most natural and basic inclinations. We are being encouraged to study the impulse to

speak favorably about ourselves in any way that disparages others.

It would be deceptive to try to stop the self-praising impulse without first uprooting our self-cherishing stance. If we tried to stop it, it would probably just go into hiding. Then, because it would be operating with less conscious supervision, the impulse would be even more influential and harmful. As long as we cling to the self, the impulse to stop self-praise will be just another foolish act of selfishness.

In order to realize the full liberating import of this precept, we need to become aware of how our self-serving impulses are laced into and insinuated into our speech. We must thoroughly examine how we use words. Words are discriminating consciousness; words are also the way that discriminating consciousness enslaves itself. Observing how words enslave consciousness liberates discriminating consciousness.

This precept embraces the words *self* and *other*. Words exist conventionally. Through words, self and other dependently co-arise and are imbued with identity, and yet they are just words. If you study the self and clearly see that it is nothing more than a word, you will see that it lacks an independent self-nature. With this insight, selfish motives are exposed and dropped.

In the realm of dharma, ignoring the dependent co-arising of self is the equivalent of original sin: it is the fundamental human disaster. Not seeing how all beings kindly support and sustain our virtue and goodness, it is possible to speak of our own virtue as something separate from others. In such a state of ignorance you may speak of your virtue as appearing almost in spite of others. You forget that it is really only due to the support of countless others that you accomplish anything of merit.

Furthermore, indulging in self-loathing won't stop the self-praising impulse either. Thoughts of self-loathing are born of the same concern that generates self-praise. Both self-loathing and self-praise are tools in the service of self-concern.

Self-concern is often expressed by taking yourself too seriously.

Ironically, taking yourself too seriously is a form of disrespecting yourself: it is taking yourself for granted. Taking yourself too seriously means that you believe that your own ideas about your self are real. It means that you exaggerate your self-importance and underestimate your self-worth. In its root sense, *respect* means "to look again." You have a usual way of seeing yourself; to be respectful of yourself means "to look again." Take another look: perhaps you haven't seen clearly who you are. You may have overestimated or underestimated yourself.

As long as the basic illness of attachment to self has not been cured, self-praise and self-blame will reign supreme. In fact, receiving and practicing this precept is a way to become clearly and painfully aware of the attachment behind this deluded praise of the independent self. Being patient and upright with this self-centered pain sets the stage for the arising of a deep desire to renounce self-clinging.

## *Liberating Conversations*

We engage in two kinds of conversations: intrapsychic and interpersonal. These are two complementary aspects of studying the self. Intrapsychic conversations are those you have alone, with your self. They are conversations with your personal experience: with your perceptions, your pain, and your joy. Through conversing with experience, you completely settle into your experience of self and others. In Zen we call this just sitting. Sitting upright in stillness and silence, you "talk" yourself into thoroughly being yourself.

Throughout daily life, and even while sitting in meditation, you may habitually think in terms of your self as separate from your body. Even if you feel that the body belongs to the self, you may still feel as though you are separate and independent of your body. You can imagine that you are independent of what you think belongs to you. But upon deeper reflection you may see that it is not possible to be

separate from what belongs to you. Others are separate from your body. If you are also separate from your body, why would it belong to you any more than it belongs to others? By carefully pursuing this kind of conversation between self and body, you finally realize that there is no self separate from body, and there is no body separate from self. In this way you talk yourself into oneness with your body, and the belief in a self independent of the body drops off.

Zen students often ask, "Who is it who is mindful?" We seem to believe that there is some self lurking behind the awareness of the body and mental objects. But if you turn and look for this "somebody" behind your awareness, you do not find a self independent from awareness. By thoroughly contemplating such intrapsychic conversations between self, awareness, and its objects, you realize that there is no self aside from awareness and the objects of awareness. Awareness and its objects account for all experience. This is not to say that there is no self, it's just that there is no independent self. The self exists only in dependence upon mind and its objects. When you clearly observe the dependent co-arising of self, mind, and objects, the belief in a self independent of mind and objects drops away.

Being relieved of such narrow vision we joyfully and gratefully observe how any praiseworthy qualities that manifest through our being are entirely due to the kind support of others. With such vision it is not possible to praise self without mention of the virtues of others. Freed from the belief in an independent self, we first notice and then praise the virtues of others. Is there any greater happiness than this?

The interpersonal conversations are those we have with other humans, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, the great Earth, and the stars. Classically, when referring to this aspect of the process of self-study, we use the expression "to meet with the teacher and ask about dharma." Dynamic interpersonal conversation will eventually be necessary in order to bring bodhisattva practice to maturity. Such meetings are good at any time, but there are two occasions when they are essential.

The first is when a person is deeply discouraged and contemplates

giving up the study of the self. When people begin practicing Zen, they're often interested in becoming calm. They may not understand that the realization of unshakable composure involves facing up to their anxiety and pain. When my students start to experience this inner turbulence, they may come to me in despair, worried that their practice is deteriorating. Ironically, they're now embarking on the real practice of buddha's way. As they become more settled in their sitting, they're able to open up to deeper levels of disquiet. In bringing their despair to me, I have an opportunity to affirm that they are getting closer to the source of their anxiety and closer to understanding the self.

The other time when interpersonal conversation is urgently needed is when practitioners feel that they thoroughly understand the dependently co-arisen nature of the self and are completely liberated from self-clinging. In these circumstances, it is vital that they express their understanding in the presence of the other.

With this taste of wisdom, the Zen student may feel as though she could climb into the sky and fly through the air supported by all beings. At such a moment she is strongly encouraged to come back to Earth by meeting face-to-face with a teacher. She goes with perhaps a mixture of humility and pride to see if she can let go of the ultimate and join the teacher and fellow students in everyday practice. If she settles complacently into her realization without subjecting herself to such an encounter, she is traditionally said to have fallen into Zen sickness. Many famous Zen stories are about the moment when a monk visits a teacher to test his understanding and seek confirmation of his liberation from self-clinging.

If we want to study the dependent co-arising of self and other, then we must be upright and gently enter into conversation with all beings. This conversation is a pivot in the process of liberation: it is the point where we turn from self-clinging to self-forgetting. It is extremely joyful, but it is rarely easy. It requires complete presence and total devotion.

## *Stories of Liberation*

The history of liberation is stories: stories of those who entered into this conversation with all beings, struggled, and succeeded in being present with it as it unfolds. Is there any better work for bodhisattvas than just to be entirely devoted to others, in conversation, mutually co-creating the universe?

The following story about Zen masters Fayan and Xiushan demonstrates how to actualize the precept of not praising self at the expense of others. Fayan and Xiushan were dharma brothers who studied together with Dizang and continued to converse with each other throughout their lives. In his poetic introduction to this story, Wansong (Ten Thousand Pines) pays tribute to their loyalty and fidelity: "A pair of solitary wild geese beat the ground with their wings and fly up high; a couple of mandarin ducks stand alone at the edge of a pond. Leaving aside for the moment the meeting of arrow points, what about when the balance beam of a scale is cut?"[1]

What happens when a balance beam is cut? When friends disagree? "Fayan asked Xiushan, 'A hairsbreadth's difference is as the distance between heaven and earth—how do you understand?' Xiushan said, 'A hairsbreadth's difference is as the distance between heaven and earth.' Fayan said, 'How can you get it that way?'"[2] (In other words, you can't fully express no difference by repeating the same words. You have to do more than that to demonstrate arrow points meeting.) "Xiushan said, 'I am just thus—what about you?' Fayan said, 'A hairsbreadth's difference is as the distance between heaven and earth.' Xiushan thereupon bowed."[3]

Because of their deep appreciation of each other, these ancient masters could express disagreement without disparaging the other. Respectfully challenging each other in this way, they realized the precept of not praising self at the expense of others. The meaning of their words came forth in response to their devotion to each other and to the truth.

Let us quietly align ourselves with the subtle, interdependent spirit of their conversation. Being entirely devoted to others involves entering into such subtle conversation. Entering this conversation in the spirit of devotion to others, the self is unknown. This unknown self joins hands, spontaneously, effortlessly, and fearlessly, with all beings and walks together with them, life after life, death after death. Together we manifest the great body of the bodhisattva precepts. Together we realize the entire sky and the great Earth. In the sky, there is no self or other. On the whole Earth there is not an inch of other-ground. There is no praising self while forgetting about the kindness and support of others. Rather, we praise the unknown self, we praise the forgotten self, which is all things. We praise and express appreciation for everything.

Another snapshot in the Zen history of enlightenment illustrates this. The great teacher Magu of Bao-che was a disciple of Master Ma. After successfully completing his training with his teacher, Magu traveled around to test and seek confirmation of his understanding of the bodhisattva precepts with other noted Zen masters of the time. He visited the wise and compassionate Zhangjing. Arriving at Zhangjing's monastery, Magu did not follow the usual etiquette for visiting a teacher. He did not approach the teacher and bow, as visiting monks usually do. Instead, he boldly walked right in and circled the teacher three times without a bow. Then he stood at attention directly in front of Zhangjing and shook his ringed staff to announce his presence. This was his way of opening a conversation. Zhangjing said "Right, right."

Feeling confirmed, Magu traveled to visit his elder brother disciple, the great master Nanquan. Again he went straight in, walked around Nanquan three times, shook his ringed staff, and stood. Nanquan said, "Wrong, wrong." Magu replied, "Zhangjing said, 'right.' Why do you say 'wrong'?" Nanquan said, "Zhangjing was right. It's you who are wrong. What we have here is something that can be blown away by the power of wind. It eventually disintegrates."[4]

To express my appreciation of these masters, I wrote the following:

Right, right. Wrong, wrong.
Bodhisattvas don't praise one and disparage the other.
They always sit at the source and watch for the time when
right and wrong give birth to each other.
Thus they practice a way that is always fresh and always
disintegrating.
No one can put the fallen leaf back on the branch.

We Zen monks walk through the deep mountains and valleys, through the brightly lit streets and dark alleys of the cities of this world, with stories of ancient conversations up our sleeves, or in our bosoms, stories of people who enacted buddha's teaching together and realized the way, stories that encourage us to continue walking the path of devotion to the welfare of all beings.

When I bring food to serve my guest some breakfast, *I* is a word, *guest* is a word. Coming thus, I begin a conversation, which can be called breakfast. The question is, Will it be a deep breakfast? How do you realize its depth? Its depth is realized by entering the conversation and clearly attending to what is happening as we, together with all things, dependently coproduce breakfast. Every production dependently co-arises and conventionally exists through words: *me* and *you*, *cups* and *bowls*. This is the conversation. In such ordinary daily activities, the practice of the way can be realized. We can enter into the deep inner workings of the universe if we are present for the drama of what is happening. All the ingredients are being supplied. The words are here; the question is, How are we using them? Can we notice the opportunities being offered in the nonstop flow of words, the unceasing flood of conventional existence?

Conversing with the mountains and rivers, with grasses and trees, with each other, with our pain and anxiety—thus we bring each other to realization. Are you in the midst of such a dramatic conversation, or are you sitting on the sidelines of life, with eyes shut and ears cov-

ered? The great show is going on, the usual characters are playing their parts. Self and others, buddhas, bodhisattvas—all things—are playing their parts, all day long, all night long. Are you listening? Are you participating? Or are you just a lonesome self who cannot appreciate how it is that you dependently co-arise through dramatic conversation with all beings?

I would like to issue a fierce invitation to everyone to come and meet one another face-to-face in the spirit of devotion to the welfare of others. I hope that someone will come soon and rattle the ringed staff and stand upright before me. Nothing will be withheld from this person. Deep in our hearts we all want to meet such a person and be such a person. We all want to open our eyes and hearts with someone and finally see the truth. I would love to meet someone and create the universe together. I would love to open my eyes and see what is going on together with someone. How about you?

chapter twenty

# ONE HUNDRED GRASSES:
## *Not Being Possessive*

*One phrase, one verse*
*are the myriad forms,*
*the hundred grasses.*
*One dharma and one realization*
*are all buddhas and ancestors.*
*There has not been begrudging.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

DURING THE PAST FEW DECADES at the San Francisco Zen Center, we have been transmitting and reciting the eighth Grave Precept as "A disciple of buddha is not possessive of anything," or "A disciple of buddha is not possessive of anything, even the dharma." We might say, "A disciple of buddha is not possessive of anything, especially the dharma," because the dharma is the greatest jewel we have to offer.

During Suzuki Roshi's time we recited this precept as "A disciple of buddha abstains from being avaricious in the bestowal of teachings or materials." *Avaricious* means "immoderately fond of accumulating wealth." Even if you do not hold onto ordinary things of the world, the merit of that is insignificant compared with the merit of not avariciously holding onto dharma treasure. Suzuki Roshi's choice of words also brings up the danger of giving that is selfishly motivated: giving primarily to get something in return. It would be possible for a person to give in order to promote her own reputation as a generous

and virtuous practitioner of the bodhisattva way, giving with the hope that people would consider her generous and worthy of receiving even more gifts, which she could then distribute. As bodhisattvas, our giving is free from the desire to accumulate wealth.

This precept points to a disease and a wonder: the disease is stinginess; the wonder is giving. Stinginess is a tightness, a constriction of the heart. It is born out of ignorance of interdependence: not realizing how our lives are embraced and sustained by the kindness of all beings. Stinginess is turning away from relatedness toward isolation, and as we turn away from others we also turn away from ourselves. Being miserly, we don't give to others, and we give the bare minimum to ourselves. We don't allow ourselves to be ourselves. We do not appreciate what a good fortune it is to be born as a human being, in whatever form that takes. This is not being upright.

Charles Dickens's book *A Christmas Carol* is an eloquent look at this dynamic. In the story the old miser Scrooge is visited on Christmas Eve by a succession of ghosts. His psyche regurgitates past events that he has not been able to fully experience. The first ghost is his former partner, Jacob Marley. Marley is very upset. He's not a happy ghost. He comes to help Scrooge, to warn him how awful it is not to live life fully in each moment, to throw yourself into the give and take of all beings. Marley wails and clanks his chains. "'Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed. . . . Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused. Yet such was I! Oh! such was I.'

"'But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,' faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"'Business!' cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. 'Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business.'"[1]

That night, three more terrifying spirits visit Scrooge. Through

the fierce compassion of these spirits, Scrooge becomes aware of the horrors of his stinginess. On Christmas morning, he awakens to find himself still alive, for which he is ecstatically happy and grateful. By finally allowing himself to be himself, he unleashes his vast potential for "charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence."

Ultimately, the precept of not being possessive is not about repressing stinginess but about active expression: it is about giving. At the end of meditation retreats at Tassajara or Green Gulch, Zen students often ask, "How can we carry the spirit of this retreat back into our daily lives in the city?" Walk out the gate, go over the mountain, enter the city, and practice giving. This is the spirit of a bodhisattva's meditation retreat: to joyfully give up your serenity and bliss and reenter the ordinary world, joining hands with all beings. What matters isn't how deeply calm and joyful you become while meditating in the mountains, but how generous and compassionate you are upon reentering the hubbub of the world of suffering beings.

As Suzuki Roshi said, "It's relatively easy to be enlightened when sitting in the meditation hall. But the point of our practice is to extend the energy and composure of our sitting practice into daily life." Returning from the meditation retreat, kindly inhabiting your experience, being present with your posture and breathing, you are full of joy at giving. You give your face to the bus driver, you give your mindful physical presence to the salesclerk. You could go on like this until all beings are full of joy at the ever-present opportunity to practice giving.

Giving can be practiced even when you are alone. If you just think of giving, even a blade of grass or a piece of paper or anything that would be of benefit to someone, if you really want to give it, and feel full of joy and warmth at such a thought, this is giving.

Giving can be practiced even if you have virtually no material wealth to give or share. You can joyfully and sincerely practice giving by thinking of giving things that don't even belong to you. For example, a poor monk could imagine the excess wealth of some other

person being transferred in a beneficial way to those who needed it. Feeling extreme joy at such thoughts opens the heart so that if you were to come into actual possession of wealth, then you would be ready and happy to give it at the appropriate moment.

Traditionally, we speak of three broad categories of gifts: material gifts, gifts of fearlessness, and gifts of dharma. Recently, a friend expanded the list by adding a fourth kind: gifts of love. In a sense, rather than expanding the list, I think that she simplified it, because all gifts when truly given are gifts of love.

The practice of giving material gifts develops through becoming more and more intimate with the thought of giving: your own possessions, your merit, and finally, even your own body. Transcendent giving comes through imagining giving all these material things from the depths of your heart, without any feeling of stinginess, while at the same time thinking about the many benefits of sincere giving and the misfortune of not doing so.

Gifts of fearlessness take several forms. The first form is to liberate beings from physical captivity, bondage, and torment. This form of giving can manifest as liberating people from prison or saving them from drowning. It can also take the form of releasing birds, flies, or other wild animals who are in some way trapped or endangered. Protecting worms from cold and heat or saving insects and other small creatures from burning and drowning is also a form of giving fearlessness.

In "Birdfoot's Grandpa," poet Joseph Bruchac writes about practicing giving fearlessness:

> The old man
> must have stopped our car
> two dozen times to climb out
> and gather into his hands
> the small toads blinded
> by our lights and leaping,
> live drops of rain.

The rain was falling,
a mist about his white hair
and I kept saying
you can't save them all,
accept it, get back in
we've got places to go.

But, leathery hands full
of wet brown life,
knee deep in the summer
roadside grass,
he just smiled and said
*they have places to go to*
*too*.[2]

Another form of giving fearlessness is to implicitly or explicitly recognize another person as buddha, showing him respect and appreciation in such a way as to foster his self-respect and confidence. And finally, literally demonstrating fearlessness for the edification and encouragement of others is giving fearlessness. What is demonstrating fearlessness? It is being upright, willing to be who you are, and being that way so completely, fully, joyfully, enthusiastically, kindly, and compassionately, that others see and feel it and are inspired and encouraged to be fully themselves as well. You give yourself to yourself, and you give others to themselves.

The third and most precious category is gifts of dharma. This precept encourages the bodhisattva to find a way to transcend the separation of self from other, to be free from the discrimination of this from that. Ultimately, this precept is about the giving of the greatest treasure, dharma, in a way that is beyond any distinction among teacher, disciple, and dharma. The teaching of this precept cuts through the distinction of mind from objects and realizes their interdependence. When a teacher gives or expounds dharma thinking, This is a dharma treasure, this is simply a delusion. Can this be

regarded as giving dharma? No. Bodhisattvas sincerely want to give dharma treasures appropriately to all beings. However, they do not fall into believing the thought, This is a dharma treasure. The true dharma cannot be trapped in "this" or "that."

Furthermore, in the realm of buddha dharma, it is not I who teaches the dharma treasure and the other who receives it. It is not I who gives the dharma treasure to you. For a bodhisattva, such dualistic bestowal of dharma is not much different from a begrudging bestowal of dharma. It is, as one of our compassionate ancestors said, "the dharma of monsters and beasts." Bestowing buddha dharma is done together with all beings and does not abide in terms of teacher and disciple, donor and recipient, subject and object, or here and there.

Then how does a bodhisattva play the illusory game of student and teacher without being caught in its dualities? When I first came to study Zen, I wanted to be a student and to practice with a real Zen teacher. I thought that it was beautiful to sit upright, present and silent, waiting in line to meet the teacher and discuss the practice of Zen. It seemed so lovely to sit and wait and listen for the sound of the teacher's bell and then to strike the student's bell in reply; to stand up and walk mindfully to the teacher's room and enter. I wanted to play in that way, with those roles. I did not feel responsible for transcending the duality of those roles.

However, in the role of a teacher, having received this bodhisattva precept, I feel and accept the responsibility to practice giving and receiving beyond all dualities. How do you not become caught in these roles? You avoid such a trap by deeply studying and realizing the dependent co-arising of student, teacher, dharma, giving, and receiving.

How does this precept of not being possessive of the dharma apply to people who do not think of themselves as dharma teachers? What is their comparable treasure? Whatever would be most beneficial or liberating for beings is dharma treasure. Whether you know what it is or not, there's always something you can give that would be helpful.

Others may not be able to ask for it, but the dharma treasure is there, waiting to be given.

My students want me to give them dharma gifts, but what does my daughter want from me? She doesn't want to hear about buddha dharma, but she does want her father to give her the dharma treasure.

For a number of years my daughter felt frustrated in her relationship with me. Sometimes she would get angry and call me the worst names she could think of. She wanted to see if she could get to me, if she could rock her father's boat, and for a long time she couldn't. I would usually just laugh. As an infant she had vomited in my face, and I hadn't minded. I trusted her love of me so much that nothing she could say could shake me. But her inability to move me was frustrating to her: she had to see that she could disturb me in order to realize our interdependence. Finally, one day she was able to show me clearly and accurately something about myself, and I was able to acknowledge it. We showed our interdependence. That was a great moment in our life together, the dharma gift we gave to each other.

If you can give this treasure, then you will realize the ultimate concern of your life. You will fulfill your appropriate service to each being that you meet. Stinginess here means being afraid to find out the secret gift that will bring your relationships to flower. It's not enough for you just to give material things and to give fearlessness: you must also give this thing that is the heart's desire of all beings. How can you find it? How do you give it? In all your relationships, in each moment, ask the question, What is being asked of me? What is the most precious thing that I can give right now? This is the dharma treasure.

chapter twenty-one

# OCEANS OF MAGNIFICENT CLOUDS:
## *Not Being Angry*

*Neither withdrawn nor set forth,*
*neither real nor unreal,*
*here are oceans of illuminated clouds;*
*oceans of magnificent clouds.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

In our bodhisattva initiation ceremony the ninth Grave Precept is usually translated as "A disciple of buddha does not harbor ill will." This way of expressing the precept certainly has great merit, and I feel warmly committed to receiving and practicing not harboring ill will. The way I understand the precept using these words is that if you become inappropriately angry, then you are committed to not holding such anger in your heart.

However, when I was involved in translating the Essence of Zen Precepts *(Zenkaisho)* from classical Japanese, it became quite clear that this precept is more accurately translated as "A disciple of buddha does not become angry." It is one thing to give up anger and apologize for it once you recognize its inappropriateness: it is quite another thing to commit yourself to not becoming angry at all.

I have found that many people feel quite comfortable committing themselves to not harboring ill will, but the same people recoil from the awesome prospect of giving up all inappropriate anger. This is a much loftier aspiration, yet it is one that the bodhisattva joyfully

vows to practice and realize. Many sincere, honest people understandably question whether it is humanly possible to be entirely free from all harmful anger. This is the same as questioning whether it is possible to realize buddha's awakening.

There are those who, in order to attain the highest personal liberation, vow never to express either anger or desire. Practitioners of this way vow, for example, never to touch a member of the opposite sex, even if the touch is an expression of selfless love. Those who actually realize the sought-after equanimity are truly lofty spiritual beings. We call such venerable beings *arhats*, with a feeling of utmost respect, and bodhisattvas honor and revere their wonderful attainments. The root meaning of *arhat* is "one who burns away or dries up all passions and defilements." The arhats' concern for personal enlightenment, however, does not necessarily allow them to exhaustively penetrate the true suchness of all phenomena. Being primarily concerned with their own improvement, they crush the seeds of buddhahood. The sitting meditation of arhats transcends anger and desire, but it lacks great compassion.

Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, vow to do anything that will realize the greatest welfare for all beings. For bodhisattvas the passions are the field of blessings, and walking the middle path through this field is the way of awakening. This bodhisattva precept means not to be angry when anger is inappropriate, and to be angry when anger is appropriate. Anger is definitely part of human life; the question is how to live with it in a way that is beneficial rather than harmful.

How do we come to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate anger? First of all, by accepting and studying the teaching of all buddhas. When we say the teaching of all buddhas, we do not mean the buddhas of Buddhism as opposed to Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Here, the teaching of all buddhas is realized when all religions of the world go beyond themselves. The teaching of all buddhas means the teaching of the entire universe. What is the teaching of the entire universe? It is to refrain

from all evil, practice all good, and benefit all beings. Can we understand and accept that the whole universe is requesting us and teaching us how to live for the benefit of all beings?

Without a commitment to refraining from all evil and practicing all good, we will be deeply confused and unable to wisely discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate actions. Not accepting the teaching of the entire universe, if someone asks for our help or requests some good deed that is difficult or inconvenient for us, we might not want to comply with the request. We might even feel irritated and imposed upon, and become angry at the person for asking us to do some wholesome deed. In such a case we are getting angry when we should not: this is inappropriate anger. If, on the other hand, someone were to offer a reward for committing some unethical act that was easy and convenient, we might not necessarily be bothered; we might feel quite comfortable with the thought of carrying out the act. In this case we might not feel angry when, in fact, anger would be appropriate.

Hearing about this precept, people often ask, But what about injustice? Shouldn't we be angry about injustice? Anger with injustice does not necessarily violate the precept of not being angry. How is this so? Thoroughly studying ourselves in terms of these bodhisattva precepts, we come to see the light of the precepts. Seeing this light, we respond appropriately, in a liberating way, without any deliberation. The light of the precepts shows us the way, but anger and fear obscure the light. Still, being gentle, loving, and fearless with our anger, we become intimate with it, and the light reemerges.

If we experience or witness injustice in the world and we are intimate with it, we see the light of the precepts. If anger arises in this light, it is no longer personal anger. It is the energy and activity of all beings, and it is appropriate and beneficial. Keeping an eye on the light of the precepts, we will find the way of liberating action for all those concerned: the unjust and the oppressed alike.

One of Shakyamuni Buddha's most important teachings is called

the lion's roar, because his voice was so fierce and powerful that beings in all ten directions turned to listen. Buddha's roar was not an expression of anger, but his way of declaring that all beings fully possess the wisdom and virtue of the buddhas.

## *Inappropriate Anger*

The teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, the teaching of Zen, is the teaching of love, not hate. My teacher did not teach people to hate one another, he taught people to love one another. Inappropriate anger is completely antithetical to the way of the bodhisattva. It can be the source of violating all of the other precepts. When we are angry, we might even think of killing those who are most precious to us. When we are angry, we might think of stealing something that we don't really want, just to hurt someone. We might lie, even when it brings no gain to us personally. When we are angry, we can become angry at goodness itself.

In The Definitive Vinaya, sutra 24 of the Maharatnakuta Sutra says, "Upali asked Buddha, 'World-Honored One, suppose a Bodhisattva breaks a precept out of desire; another does so out of hatred; and still another does so out of ignorance. World-Honored One, which one of the three offenses is the most serious?'

"The World-Honored One answered Upali, 'If . . . a Bodhisattva continues to break precepts out of desire for kalpas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, his offense is still minor. If a Bodhisattva breaks precepts out of hatred, even just once, his offense is very serious. Why? Because a Bodhisattva who breaks precepts out of desire [still] holds sentient beings in his embrace, whereas a Bodhisattva who breaks precepts out of hatred forsakes sentient beings altogether.

"'Upali, a Bodhisattva should not be afraid of the passions which can help him hold sentient beings in his embrace, but he should fear the passions which can cause him to forsake sentient beings.

"'Upali, as the Buddha has said, desire is hard to give up, but is a

subtle fault; hatred is easy to give up, but is a serious fault; ignorance is difficult to give up, and is a very serious fault.

"'Upali, when involved in defilements, Bodhisattvas should tolerate the small transgressions which are hard to avoid, but should not tolerate the grave transgressions which are easy to avoid, not even in a dream. For this reason, if a follower of the Mahayana breaks precepts out of desire, I say he is not a transgressor; but if he breaks precepts out of hatred, it is a grave offense, a gross fault, a serious, degenerate act, which causes tremendous hindrances to Buddha-Dharma.'"[1]

(Please notice, Shakyamuni Buddha said that desire is hard to get rid of and not so bad; hate is easy to get rid of and very bad; and ignorance is difficult to get rid of and very bad.)

Sutra 24 continues: "'Upali, if a Bodhisattva is not thoroughly conversant with the Vinaya [the precepts], he will be afraid when he transgresses out of desire, but will not be afraid when he transgresses out of hatred. If a Bodhisattva is thoroughly conversant with the Vinaya, he will not be afraid when he transgresses out of desire, but will be afraid when he transgresses out of hatred.'"[2]

In my observation, this teaching of Mahayana Buddhism is not well appreciated or practiced in the West. Many Western practitioners of Zen seem relatively unconcerned with the arising of anger in their own hearts. I have not noticed clear admonitions in the guidelines of many Zen centers against indulging in anger. There seems to be much more overt concern with indulgence in desire, both sexual and other forms. There are often explicit and detailed policies relating to acting out sexual desire. Yet I have seen Zen students shout at each other violently, and subsequently seem to feel little or no remorse. They may even expend more energy attempting to justify their expressions of anger rather than apologizing immediately for any possible harm that may have arisen. They do not seem to understand that they have not only endangered the lives and well-being of others but, to an even greater extent, have jeopardized their own spiritual practice.

This same pattern seems to be manifesting in the contemporary debate about television programming: some people are upset about children and adults being exposed to explicit representations of sexuality but have less concern about depictions of violence and cruelty.

## *Appropriate Anger*

Warmth is a quality of life. Living beings are always receiving and expressing heat. The expression of heat can animate a person's body and voice, and can be experienced as aggressiveness. Aggression is part of being human. It can move things in patient, compassionate, and beneficial ways. It can also be impatient, disrespectful, and cruel, rejecting and harming living beings. The great question for bodhisattvas is how to harmonize with aggression appropriately and thus discover its beneficial function. It is a great and beautiful thing when the heat of aggressive energy functions beneficially.

This aggressive quality of being is both a great danger and a great opportunity. It has the potential to harm and demoralize, or to convert beings to the path of compassion. Underestimating this power makes it more likely that it will function as cruelty and destructiveness. Shrinking back and not engaging courageously with it will have the same effect.

One day my two-year-old daughter and I were walking down the sidewalk of a busy street. She was walking ahead of me, when she suddenly turned and started trotting quickly into the street. She got beyond my arm's reach and was on the verge of stepping in front of traffic. I immediately shouted with my full voice, "No!" My tone was fierce and aggressive, like a fast-moving truck. She stopped in her tracks and turned back toward the sidewalk. I felt no anger toward my daughter, but there was harshness in my voice. The strength of my shout surprised me, and I watched her response. Afterward she seemed calm and happy, so I felt that perhaps it was all right that I had yelled so fiercely. That one lesson was enough: I never again had

to tell her not to go in the street without holding my hand.

Once someone became angry at me and expressed this anger with fierce and fiery energy. It was appropriate, because it woke me up from my inattention to my own conduct. The anger that would have been appropriate for me to feel toward my own nonvirtue was reflected back so that I could realize my errors. As I looked in the face of the angry person, I realized that her face was not just the face of one person: it was the face of all those who trusted me and wanted me to realize complete integrity. I understood how rage can be beneficial when it comes at a moment when we can understand its deep meaning and wake up.

There are two schools of Japanese martial arts whose names refer directly to the upright approach to working with aggressive energy. The first school is called *judo*, or "the gentle way." The second school, *aikido*, may be translated as "the way of loving energy," or "the loving way of handling [aggressive] energy."

The founder of judo, Kano Jugaru, was once traveling on a ship in the Indian Ocean when a huge, belligerent man came walking along the deck threatening and physically harassing the passengers. Then he came to Kano, who was quite a small man. He gave Kano a push and was effortlessly flipped in the air upside down and placed back on his feet, standing upright on the deck, not at all harmed. The man was stunned and completely pacified. The main principle of the gentle way is to meet, redirect, and subdue the unbalanced aggressive energy of an attacker and bring the whole situation back into peaceful balance. Peace is realized in entering the flow—meeting and dancing with aggressive energy.

We can find a way to be kind even in circumstances of the most extreme aggressiveness. Even in the midst of war a bodhisattva vows not to be cruel. Toward the end of the battle of Waterloo, as the French were in retreat, a French cavalry officer stopped and dismounted, risking his own life in order to help a fallen comrade. Seeing this, an English soldier aimed his rifle at the French officer. The English soldier's commanding officer ordered him to stop, saying,

"Don't shoot that man. He is a kind person, endangering his life to help his wounded men." This English officer found a way to be kind even in the extreme heat of battle. The cause of English victory did not require the officer or the soldier to be cruel. Being kind to an enemy officer in this case was not in opposition to their responsibilities as soldiers.

## *Practicing Patience*

Patience is an antidote to anger and the primary condition for enlightenment. Through patience your vision clears and you see the dependent co-arising of pain, frustration, and anger. Practicing patience does not mean gritting your teeth and ignoring the pain, but developing and expanding your capacity for experiencing pain, opening wide enough to feel the pain without either running away or wallowing in it. When you practice patience, the path to harmful anger is blocked. You can face the pain, and relax and breathe with it.

Zen master Yunmen says, "All buddhas are constantly turning the wheel of dharma in the midst of fierce flames." There is pain around every buddha's meditation seat. It forms a ring of fire. Around this is another ring of fire, composed of anger, hate, rage, aggression, disgust, nausea, rejection, aversion, ill will, and violence. This outer ring is an expression of impatiently turning away from or trying to control the flames of suffering. At the center of this precept we acknowledge and honor the tremendous force of these reactions to pain.

The practice of bodhisattvas is to sit upright in the center of the world of universal suffering. Such compassionate beings listen to the pain of the world: they feel it, they ache with it. We are built to ache with it. We evolved to feel the hurt. The upright sitting of the buddha ancestors never forgets or abandons sentient beings. They sit in the middle of all the various forms of suffering in order to save all beings. In practicing this way we have the same heart as Shakyamuni Buddha, Bodhidharma, Dogen, and all their great disciples.

Sitting courageously at the center, we do not fight back or crumble in the face of pain. We do not get ahead of or lag behind the pain; we do not lean to the right or to the left of the pain. We honor and acknowledge all pain. We listen to all pain. The bodhisattva stays close to the pain without meddling or interfering. This is the path of Zen meditation. Sitting upright and clearly observing all suffering beings assembles an ocean of blessings beyond measure.

In *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, Albert Camus has good advice for the Buddhist yogi sitting in the middle of the fire of existence. He writes, "One may long, as I do, for a gentler flame, a respite, a pause for musing. But perhaps there is no other peace for the artist than what he finds in the heat of combat. 'Every wall is a door,' Emerson correctly said. Let us not look for the door, and the way out, anywhere but in the wall against which we are living. Instead, let us seek the respite where it is—in the very thick of battle. For in my opinion, it is there. . . . As a result, there shines forth fleetingly the ever threatened truth that each and every [person], on the foundation of his [or her] own sufferings and joys, builds for all."[3]

Some people feel that it is self-indulgent to spend time facing their own suffering, because it seems so insignificant compared with the tremendous suffering of others: people who are homeless, cold, hungry, diseased, afflicted by war, mental illness, and so on. Suffering such as this is indeed great, but we must be careful not to use the immense suffering of others as an excuse to avoid awareness of our own pain. In fact, if we refuse to listen to our own suffering, we will not really be able to listen to the pain of others. Admitting and being willing to feel our pain enables us to listen more fully to the suffering of others.

We must practice patience. We must courageously, carefully, and steadfastly walk to the center of our pain, sit upright, and listen to the cries of the world. We and other beings are in danger if we do not patiently face our pain and understand it. If we don't understand it, then all of our vital energies go to fuel deluded activity. On the other

hand, if we patiently observe how pain and anger arise, what their causes are, then those same vital energies will come to facilitate patience, compassion, and wisdom.

The poet-monk Xuedou writes:

> In twenty years of bitter struggles,
> How many times have I gone down into the
> green dragon's cave for you?
> This distress defies description;
> Clear-eyed patch-robed monks—don't make light of it.[4]

Bodhisattvas vow to face, to meet, to embrace, and to dance with the great green dragon of pain, anger, and frustration. In the heat and love and passion of this dance with the dragon, great winds and rain arise, forming oceans of magnificent, luminous clouds. These clouds rain down pure dharma bliss on all beings.

chapter twenty-two

# VIRTUE RETURNS TO THE OCEAN:
## *Not Disparaging the Triple Treasure*

*The body is manifested,*
*the dharma is unfolded,*
*and there is a bridge in the world*
*for crossing over.*
*Their virtue returns to the ocean*
*of all-knowing wisdom.*
*They are unfathomable.*
*Receive them with devotion and respect.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

COMING TO THE LAST of the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts, we are brought back to the first three: taking refuge in buddha, dharma, and sangha. At the end of our long journey, we recall the beginning. Now is a good time to remember that receiving and practicing these great precepts emerges from adoration of the Triple Treasure. The Three Refuges are the foundation of precept practice and of all bodhisattva vows. Not disparaging the Triple Treasure is at the heart of the practice of bodhisattvas, who live for the welfare of others.

The original Chinese character translated here as "disparage" could also be translated as "slander," "dishonor," "revile," or "censor." Our self-centered human thought is inexorably predisposed to censor, expurgate, distort, and disparage reality. Our self-centered perceptions naturally limit and lessen the vast interconnected complexity of

reality. Any speech or action that limits, obstructs, or reduces in esteem the wondrous grandeur of the infinite Triple Treasure goes against the spirit of this precept.

When Suzuki Roshi first came to San Francisco to teach Zen, he shopped for his own groceries and supplies. When he went to the vegetable market, he looked at the vegetables carefully, and when he found some that were damaged or spoiled, he would select those for purchase. He felt compassion for them and wanted to give them a good home in his stomach; he didn't want to leave anything abandoned and unappreciated in the market. He could see the buddha nature flowing into both damaged and undamaged produce. He was also able to see this same marvelous buddha nature in all the humans that he met. Of course he appreciated beautiful, healthy vegetables. He also appreciated beautiful, healthy humans, but when he saw damaged or defective specimens, such as myself, he would also fully attend to them and, in the buddha way, give them a good home. Thus I was able to become his disciple. This is one of the ways that Suzuki Roshi did not censor the Triple Treasure.

## *Protecting and Sustaining the Triple Treasure*

Suzuki Roshi often said that his main job as a Zen priest was to encourage people to practice upright sitting. This was his primary way of protecting and sustaining the Triple Treasure. For him, the most pure and direct way of sustaining the buddha treasure was just to be fully himself in each moment. His way of protecting the dharma treasure was to practice wholeheartedly with no gaining idea. And his way of protecting and sustaining the sangha treasure was what he called group practice—practicing together in harmony—which he upheld even to the detriment of his physical health.

In January 1983 I was initiated by Baker Roshi in a ceremony called Transmission of the Precepts (*Denkai*), which is part of the training and empowerment of a Soto Zen priest. The Transmission of the Pre-

cepts is a prerequisite for and inseparable from the Transmission of Dharma *(Dembo)*. By going through this ceremony, the Triple Treasure and the other bodhisattva precepts were transmitted and entrusted to me. I vowed to protect and sustain these precepts and not let them be cut off in the endless future. I thus vowed to encourage others to practice the precepts and to be an example of the practice.

On a beautiful, sunny day in December 1983, shortly after Baker Roshi resigned as abbot of the Zen Center, I was jogging through Golden Gate Park. I went into the bushes to relieve myself and discovered the body of an old man with his head resting on a log. As I looked more closely, I noticed a bullet wound on the right side of his head; near his hand was a revolver and an empty shoebox. I felt that he had intentionally come to the park and placed himself there to die. At first I thought of calling the police, but he seemed so peaceful that I did not want to disturb him. I felt that his spirit was still present. For some Buddhist practitioners it is customary to leave the deceased undisturbed and sit with the body for three days or more after death. So I sat with him quietly for a while. I planned to go back and sit with his body again and eventually call the police.

I told three fellow priests at the Zen Center what I intended, and they accepted my decision. After my third visit, as I was returning home, by chance I came upon a police officer in the park, and I told him about the body. He said that he was going off duty and asked me to call the station, but from his response I didn't feel that it was urgent to do so. On my fourth visit I took the gun and brought it home. I removed the remaining bullets and stored the gun in a trunk in my garage, without informing anyone of my action. I don't know what my motivation was at the moment of taking the gun, but I acknowledge that taking and keeping the gun was a violation of the precepts. On my next visit to the park the body was gone, and later one of the priests I had confided in showed me a newspaper article about the suicide.

My decision to keep the gun had unexpected consequences four years later. About fifteen months after I became abbot of the San

Francisco Zen Center, I was robbed at knifepoint in broad daylight right up the street from our city center. The thief ran off in an unhurried way, and I felt humiliated and angry at being overpowered by him. He had frightened me and I felt entitled to frighten him back. I remembered the unloaded gun and took it from the garage. I got in my car and drove after him. I didn't expect to find him, but much to my amazement, I saw him entering a public housing project. I parked my car and followed him with the gun in my hand, pointing down at the ground. Entering the project, I looked around, but didn't see him. What I did see was a police officer pointing a gun at me. The consequences of my outburst of anger and sense of entitlement came back at me very quickly. I was arrested, taken to the police station, and charged with brandishing a firearm. I was released that night after spending several hours locked in a cell. Eventually, the charges were dropped, and I was asked to do thirty hours of community service.

The morning after my arrest, I met with the Zen Center board members to tell them about the events and to express my remorse and shame. I then extended the circle of my confession throughout the Zen Center community. I found that most people I confessed to in person were very forgiving, but those who heard about it indirectly were more disturbed. In some cases they felt hurt that I hadn't told them in person. But I couldn't get to everybody before they heard from other people. In the following several weeks we held a number of jam-packed community meetings so that I could explain what had happened and respond to questions.

During this period, tremendous anger and disappointment raged back at me, but I also received great compassion and forgiveness from the community. These were difficult and painful weeks for me. The realization of how much I had disappointed people was almost unbearable. Several times I heard a voice inside say, I can't stand this, but my practice was to receive it all and not to turn away.

Some Zen Center board members responded initially by saying that this episode might make me a better teacher in the long run.

However, when the story got into the newspapers and received national coverage, there was added pressure from the outside world for the Zen Center to express unequivocal disapproval. Eventually, the board asked me to take a six-month leave of absence for study and reflection. When I was reinstated as abbot, I suggested that a second abbot be installed to share the power and responsibility of the office, and the board accepted this suggestion.

On both a personal and a professional level, I am still dealing with the consequences of this episode. Some people felt that I had committed an irrevocable betrayal of trust, and have discounted me and my teaching ever since. Others were more forgiving, but their trust in me and my integrity was permanently shaken. Even newer students, who come to the Zen Center and find out about these incidents, are sometimes confused and question whether I can be their teacher. These events are a helpful reminder—both to me and to others—of my vulnerability to arrogance and inflation. I see how my empowerment to protect and care for the Triple Treasure inflated my sense of personal authority, and thus detracted from and disparaged the Triple Treasure. This ancient twisted karma I now fully avow.

## *The Ultimate Meaning of Not Disparaging the Triple Treasure*

In commenting on this precept, Dogen begins by saying, "The body is manifested." In the tradition of Dogen, buddha's body must become your body; the blood vein of the precepts must become your blood. Your body must be realized as buddha's body; your blood as bodhisattva precept blood. In other words, you must respond to life as buddha responds to life. Only in this way can you become physically free of your visceral self-clinging. When your bodily presence and actions immediately demonstrate the first nine Grave Precepts, the dharma flower opens as your own body, and this tenth and final Grave Precept is realized.

In this final dharma realm, there is no opposition between right and wrong. Nothing is censored. No expression of life is expurgated, and thus we, like Suzuki Roshi and all the buddha ancestors, can see the ultimate nature of all things. Finally, this precept is realized by fully appreciating and supporting the self-expression of all life. We take refuge with respect and devotion, and open-heartedly embrace the unexpurgated Triple Treasure. This means that we see buddha, dharma, and sangha manifesting in all the phenomena of our everyday experience.

## *Not Disparaging the Buddha*

One of the most famous statements of Zen master Linji is, "If you meet the buddha on the road, kill him." This is Linji's compassionate warning about disparaging the Triple Treasure by a sentimental understanding of buddha as an object outside of ourselves. By these words Linji has protected many generations of Zen students from falling into our ingrained tendency of objectifying buddha. Linji is saying that if we find ourselves objectifying buddha, we must courageously give up such a view. I would add that if we find ourselves identifying with buddha, that is, taking our subjective experience as buddha, we should "kill" that subjectified buddha, too. The impulse to make buddha into this or that must be abandoned. Buddha is beyond subject and object, beyond all qualities and attributes. Closing the eye that sees buddha in terms of subject and object opens the wisdom eye that sees buddha beyond subject and object.

We may think that Shakyamuni Buddha was born into this world long ago, witnessed the suffering of the world, left home, entered the mountains, attained awakening, taught innumerable living beings, and finally, at eighty years of age, passed into perfect, inconceivable, blissful peace, and thus disappeared from this world. In this way we disparage the infinite life of buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha, in the Lotus Sutra, says that although he appeared in this way, his life span

was actually without end, and that he is always present. How can we see this eternally present buddha? If we practice all virtues, are upright, honest, gentle, and harmonious, then we will meet Shakyamuni Buddha and all buddha ancestors face-to-face, in every aspect of daily life.

## *Not Disparaging the Dharma*

Exhaustively studying and completely understanding the dharma is the ultimate meaning of not disparaging the dharma. It would be disparaging the dharma treasure to say that there are no past and future lives, that moral causation does not really function, that there do not exist beings who have traveled the path and attained nirvana, and so on. In this book I have recounted stories of karmic retribution. To say that we refuse to contemplate the possibility of these stories being literally true undermines the foundation for understanding the ultimate liberating significance of the precepts and is disparaging the dharma.

In traditional stories of Zen practice we see that this precept is realized through the mutual, full self-expression that arises in face-to-face encounters between student and teacher, between teacher and teacher, and between student and student. The stories of these encounters are prototypical of all the encounters of daily life. In all your encounters you must settle the self upon the self and meet the other in order to fully realize the dharma. This is easy to say, but difficult to realize in practice. Such a thorough settling with yourself and fully expressing yourself in the face of another who is fully expressing himself or herself requires all the virtues of Buddhist practice: generosity, mindfulness, patience, enthusiasm, uprightness, wisdom, and compassion. Such meetings between beings in this world are truly rare and wonderful.

The Lotus Sutra says that only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true suchness of all things.[1] Many people upon hearing this statement object by saying,"When Buddha was sitting under

the bodhi tree, he was alone; there was no other buddha with him." Although Buddha was profoundly awakened as he sat under the great tree of enlightenment and witnessed the morning star, this great awakening was not the exhaustive understanding of the true suchness of dharma. The true suchness of all dharma was thoroughly realized when Buddha successfully taught the dharma, face-to-face, to another being. At that moment, Buddha met another buddha face-to-face. At that moment, a buddha was together with a buddha, and the dharma was exhaustively realized in that meeting. Only when a buddha is teaching and transmitting the dharma is buddhahood fully realized.

Thousands of Zen stories testify to the possibility of the realization of such face-to-face meetings. There are also many stories demonstrating how difficult such a meeting is. But most of the stories recorded, cared for, and studied throughout the centuries are success stories—stories of enlightenment.

Xuefeng came to study with Dongshan. It is said that Xuefeng climbed Mount Dong nine times. This means that Xuefeng had nine major encounters with Dongshan. The history of their relationship, as depicted in these nine famous encounters, shows how extremely challenging it can be to meet another being face-to-face and fully express yourself.

Many of these stories occurred when Xuefeng was serving as the rice cook at Dongshan's monastery. One day while Xuefeng was washing rice, Dongshan came to the kitchen and asked, "Do you wash the sand away from the rice or the rice away from the sand?" Xuefeng replied, "I wash sand and rice away at the same time." Then Dongshan asked, "What will the assembly eat?" Xuefeng just covered the washing bowl. Although he fully appreciated Xuefeng's response, Dongshan said, "Given your basic affinities, you will probably be more compatible with Deshan."[2]

After failing to meet Dongshan, Xuefeng did in fact go to Deshan. By the time they met, Xuefeng was forty years old and Deshan was over eighty. As soon as he met Deshan, Xuefeng asked, "Does this

student have any share in this great matter which has been handed down from ancient times as the fundamental vehicle?" Deshan struck him and said, "What are you saying?" Hearing these words, Xuefeng had some insight.

Later while Xuefeng was traveling with his dharma brother Yantou, they were snowed in on Tortoise Mountain. The severe and serious Xuefeng sat up all night while Yantou slept. In the middle of the night Yantou woke up and asked him what he was doing. Xuefeng said, "When Deshan hit me, it was like the bottom of a bucket falling out." Yantou shouted at him and said, "Haven't you heard that what comes in through the front gate is not the family jewels? You must allow it to flow out from your own breast and cover heaven and earth. Then you'll have some small share of realization." Xuefeng was suddenly and greatly enlightened. He bowed to Yantou and said, "Today on Tortoise Mountain I have finally attained the Way."

Although Xuefeng stayed several years and studied with Deshan and is considered Deshan's successor, it was actually through the intimate face-to-face meeting between him and his elder brother Yantou that he was thoroughly awakened.

## *Not Disparaging the Sangha*

In the narrowest sense, *sangha* refers to "the community of monks and nuns." This meaning can be expanded to include all those who study and practice the buddha dharma and can even embrace all those who love the Triple Treasure, even if they don't study or practice buddha's teaching. Furthermore, in a very important sense, *sangha* can be understood as our "field of refuge": all those beings we turn to for support, encouragement, and teaching in our practice of dharma. This might even include those who are intentionally cruel to us, if we can understand that they are our great teachers. In the widest sense, *sangha* includes all beings and indicates "the harmonious interdependence of all beings."

Through the vision of the interdependence of all life, we receive dharma from all beings. In the conventional sense, to speak ill or even unappreciatively of the sangha, in any sense, violates this precept. Ultimately, we disparage the sangha when we overlook or close off any of these resources of awakening. We are in accord with this precept when we fully develop all these resources, moment by moment.

## *Being Upright*

When being upright is manifested, you directly experience the precepts as your body. Experiencing the precepts as your body, you do not disparage the Triple Treasure. Without physically manifesting upright being, the Triple Treasure is not fully appreciated or fully expressed, and your speech and actions will inevitably disparage the Triple Treasure, even though you do not intend to do so.

Dogen taught that the Triple Treasure is unfathomable, and he encouraged us to receive it with the utmost devotion and respect. Caring for the Triple Treasure means to have the utmost respect and devotion for all living beings. One who truly receives these bodhisattva precepts feels profound gratitude for the opportunity to meet, receive, study, and practice these sublime teachings. The devoted practitioner of these precepts inevitably comes to treasure them as the most valuable resources for the wonderful work of benefiting beings.

chapter twenty-three

# BLOOD VEIN:
## *Face-to-Face Transmission*

*The great precepts of all buddhas have been protected and maintained by all buddhas, and have been mutually entrusted from buddha to buddha, mutually transmitted from ancestor to ancestor. Receiving the precepts goes beyond the three times; confirming the precepts penetrates throughout past and present.*
—Dogen, *Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts*

AT THE END of the bodhisattva initiation ceremony at the San Francisco Zen Center, after the initiates have received the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts, they are given a document called the Blood Vein (*Kechimyaku*). This document shows how we are connected with all buddhas and ancestors through the transmission and practice of the bodhisattva precepts. It also verifies that we are the newest generation of the lineage and a source of its continuing life.

By studying the diagram of the Blood Vein, we realize that we are Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples, we are the ancestors' children. At the same time, we are buddhas ourselves, and the continuation of the lineage comes from our practice of the precepts. The lineage chart places Shakyamuni Buddha at the top. From his name a red line goes down through ninety ancestors—twenty-five hundred years—to the initiates in the present ceremony. The red blood line goes down through the Indian ancestors, through the Chinese ancestors, both Rinzai and Soto, through Zen master Dogen and the Soto Zen teachers in Japan, to Suzuki Roshi, and to us in the United States. After

passing through the name of the latest initiate, the red line returns to Shakyamuni Buddha to complete the circle.

Below the precept lineage diagram is an inscription that affirms that receiving the precepts is the one great condition for entering the Zen gate, and that the precepts were passed personally from Buddha, through successive generations down to the present teacher, "thus mutually flowing both ways eldest to eldest."

The blood vein of the precepts does not flow in one direction only. A teacher transmits the precepts to his or her students, but students also transmit the precepts back to their teacher and to their teacher's teacher, all the way to Shakyamuni Buddha.

The deep intention of the buddha ancestors is that future generations receive and practice these precepts. When you do so, you give fresh life to the essential purpose of the ancestors, and in this way your practice is transmitted back to them. When you practice the precepts, the buddha ancestors continue to live through you. Just as the life of your practice depends on them, the meaning of their practice depends on you.

As Dogen says of this mutual, face-to-face transmission, "It is like pouring water into the ocean and it spreading endlessly, or like transmitting the lamp and allowing it to shine forever. In thousands of millions of transmissions, the trunk and branches are one, breaking an eggshell by pecking from the inside and outside at once."[1]

## *Pecking In and Pecking Out*

The Zen master Jingching used the image of "pecking in and pecking out" to describe to his students how bodhisattvas help to nurture and liberate all beings. "In general, you monks must have the 'simultaneous pecking in and pecking out' activity; only then can you be called true patch-robed monks. It's like when the mother hen wants to peck in, the chick must peck out, and when the chick wants to peck out, the mother hen must peck in."[2]

Here we have an image of two different but communicating worlds, the world of the chick inside the shell and the world of the hen outside the shell. When the chick pecks, the hen pecks back. She responds according to the capacities of the chick. The hen does not get ahead of the chick in this process of liberation from the shell. If the hen pecks harder than the chick and breaks the shell before the chick is ready, then the chick might die. The hen waits and listens for the chick to peck. Although the hen could easily break the shell at any time, she patiently listens and carefully matches the chick's efforts.

I imagine the hen as just being present, upright, quiet, and attentively listening. When the chick pecks, she hears and responds appropriately. If the chick pecks softly, then she responds softly. If the chick pecks strongly, then she responds strongly. This process is one of mutual concerted effort. In effect, when the chick says, I'm here, the hen says, Yes, you're there. The chick says, I'm here! The hen says, You're there! The chick says, I'm really here! The hen says, You're really there!

This is like the Zen theater of the student–teacher relationship, and it is also like our communion with our own buddha nature. Although the timing of the teacher's input is extremely important, it does not come from discriminating consciousness. Rather, it bursts forth from nondiscriminating wisdom. The appropriate response does not come from the teacher or the student. It dependently co-arises with the arrival of all things. It spontaneously comes forth from the inconceivable realm of selflessness.

Referring to this wondrous function, the ancient master Xiangyan said,

> The chick pecks out, the hen pecks in
> When the chick wakes up, there is no shell
> Chick and hen are both forgotten,
> Responding to circumstance without error,
> On the same path, singing in harmony,
> Walking alone through the subtle mystery.[3]

Finally, the chick says, I'm so completely here that I'm out of here! and the hen says, You're so completely there that you're out of there! And because you're out of there, I'm out of here. In other words, her work of hatching is done. The student is liberated from the shell of delusion: student and teacher are both forgotten.

## *Huangbo's Dreg-Slurpers*

Not killing, not taking what's not given, not misusing sexuality, not lying, not intoxicating mind or body of self or others, not speaking of others' faults, not praising yourself at the expense of others, not being possessive, not harboring ill will, and not disparaging the Triple Treasure: this is the gate to being still and quiet. What is the living, changing, ungraspable life of the Triple Treasure? What is refraining from evil, practicing good, and saving beings today?

One day Huangbo went up to the lecture hall and said to his monks, "What are all you people seeking?" He took his staff and swung it around to chase them out of the hall, but they didn't leave.

He said, "You people are all slurpers of dregs. If you go on like this, how will you have today? Don't you know that in all of China there are no teachers of Chan [Zen]?"

Then a monk came forward and said, "What about those who guide followers and lead groups in various places?"

Huangbo said, "I don't say there's no Chan, just that there are no teachers."[4]

Before you first hear anything about Zen, you have no fixed ideas and know nothing about it. When you first enter the practice, you are quite open-minded and innocent. The practice seems like a wonderful, fresh-flowing stream of new possibilities. You wonder what it means to "just sit," what it is to take refuge in the Triple Treasure, to observe the Three Pure Precepts, and so on. After practicing and studying Zen and the bodhisattva precepts for a while, you may gradually develop some attachment to your ideas about Zen and the

precepts. Little by little, the practice may lose its flowing freshness and become somewhat stale. In other words, some sediment may begin to form, and you may become the kind of student Huangbo called a dreg-slurper. You may come, like Huangbo's monks, to hold some position in the hall and not be able to adapt or move when the teacher swings his staff. Suzuki Roshi said that what he liked most about American Zen students was that they didn't know anything about Zen. Their minds were empty and open to receive the teaching.

In the commentary on this case, there is a story about a wheelwright. (The etymology of the Pali word *dukkha*, which Buddha used for "suffering," has to do with a wheel that's out of round.) This wheelwright was named Lun Pian; he worked for a Chinese lord named Ji Heng. One day Lun Pian was planing a wheel outside the hall, and he saw Ji Heng reading a book by a window. "Lun Pian put aside his mallet and chisel, came up and asked, 'May I ask what you are reading, sir?' The lord said, 'A book of the sages.' Lun Pian said, 'Are the sages alive?' The lord said, 'They're already dead.' Lun Pian said, 'Then what you're reading is the dregs of the ancients.'"[5]

In China in those days a lord could have had his servant executed for speaking so disrespectfully. "The lord said, 'When a monarch reads a book, how can a wheelwright discuss it? If you have an explanation, all right; if not, then you die.' Lun Pian said, 'I look upon this in light of my own work. When I plane a wheel, if I go slowly, it is easygoing and not firm; if I go quickly, it's hard and doesn't go in. Not going slowly or quickly, I find it in my hands and accord with it in my mind, but my mouth can't express it in words. There is an art to it but I can't teach it to my son, and my son can't learn it from me. Therefore, I have been at it for seventy years, grown old making wheels. The people of old and that which they couldn't transmit have died. Therefore, what you are reading, sir, is the dregs of the ancients.'"[6]

If we hold to the view that the precepts exist or do not exist, or that the precept vein flows through one being but not through

another, then the precept vein is dead in us. When the precept vein is alive and flowing, there are no precepts, because the living precepts break free of all our categories of thought and live in everything. Buddha's precepts are taught as no precepts. "No precepts" means that there is only one precept. "One precept" means that Buddha's precepts are revealed through everything.

Shakyamuni Buddha was a revolutionary. He sat upright and revolutionized the spiritual tradition of his native culture. He did not mean to, but he did. It is said that he started a new religion, but before this he had become a master of the old tradition; then he could not help but turn the dharma wheel of the old tradition in the midst of the flames of selflessness. His mastery of and devotion to the old ways required and enabled him to make a startling and vital contribution. This is called going beyond your teacher. But we cannot go beyond our teacher, we cannot go beyond our tradition, if we do not love it completely, truly, madly.

Anybody who is herself completely will be a revolutionary. There has never been anything like you being yourself before. This refreshes, this transforms, this turns the wheel of dharma, and this happens in the midst of fierce flames that surround you—but you do not let anything that is not you be you. All around the flames of selflessness and renunciation are words that may seem to be saying, No, you cannot be yourself. If you have not renounced the world, which means to renounce all self-importance, words such as this will reach you and possess you. Then you will not be able to fulfill the simple but most difficult responsibility of sitting still and being yourself.

Jesus of Nazareth revolutionized his tradition. He was a revolutionary, but he was also a devout Jew, as far as I know. He sat and was obedient to what was happening, and that forced him to be the way he was. Muhammad was a fiercely devout and learned person and a revolutionary. Every generation of every living tradition is the same. Unless somebody says something that has never been said before, the tradition will die. Among the new things that are said, some will turn

out to be authentic, and some will turn out to be demon talk. The standard for authenticity is selfless devotion to being upright.

I have an image of us all being wheelwrights. We hold the dharma wheel in our hands, with one precept at the center and sixteen spokes around it. We have to find our own way to take care of this wheel of the dharma, this wheel of the precepts. Not going quickly or slowly, just being upright, the true way will come into our hands. Always taking care of these sixteen precepts, not being too hard and self-righteous about our understanding of what they mean, not being too soft or nihilistic about their practice, we continuously wonder, How do I receive them and practice them moment after moment in the changing flow of events? You may wish to grasp for the precepts, but then all you will get is dregs. If you do so, you should just admit your impulse to grasp and return to your real work of facing the situation as it is.

Receiving the precepts ourselves and assisting others to do so provides a way for us to gradually unite with all beings. Monks and householders alike receive the same bodhisattva precepts. Even though not all people seem able, like true monks, to devote their lives completely to just sitting and observing the bodhisattva precepts for the well-being of the world, true monks and householders can unite the entire cosmos in sincere conversation about these precepts.

## *The One Precept*

Though zazen and precepts seem to be two, we must awaken to their oneness. The Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts—the Three Refuges, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Grave Precepts—are really just one precept: Study the self. By studying the self to the end of study and beyond, we become intimate with the self. Being intimate with the self, we forget the self. With the self forgotten, all attachments to body and mind are dropped off. Freed from self-clinging, all obstacles to the bodhisattva vows also drop away, and we can finally

respond appropriately to the changing world of everyday affairs.

There are no side roads on this path, no alternatives, no choosing. Perhaps the most difficult thing is just to be ourselves. But in order to do this simple practice, we must renounce choosing and simply become the one who is chosen. As long as we're looking for alternatives to just being ourselves, we will be anxious, we will grumble, and we will complain. When we give up on any alternatives to the immediate circumstances of being ourselves, we inevitably go forward on the buddha way without any hesitation or deliberation.

Our ancestors taught that the entire universe echoes and resonates with every one of our actions. All things are so deeply connected that at the precise moment when you are just yourself, the entire universe is just itself. When you realize yourself, all things are realized. Being realized, you are liberated from suffering. When you are liberated, the grasses and trees, mountains and rivers, and all beings are liberated. When all living beings are liberated, you are liberated.

These sixteen precepts are a way to enter into the one precept. They are thoroughly comprehensive. They show us the meaning of the one practice of all buddhas. They are the body, shape, and function of the one precept. Receiving the one precept we enter the garden of real Zen practice. It is good in the beginning of our practice, good in the middle, and good at the end. In our final moments we students of Zen, receiving and caring for the one great precept, vow throughout eternity to unceasingly and wholeheartedly receive and maintain these teachings.

A solitary white cloud rejoices in the sky. The cloud is a way for us to rejoice in the sky. Of course, we can look at a blue sky and enjoy it, but the one cloud gives us another very particular chance to appreciate the blue sky. The practice of Zen is like the vast blue sky. Each of the precepts is like a beautiful solitary white cloud in this vast blue sky. With the precept in the vast open space of our sitting, we see how wonderful our practice is. The precepts give us a way to rejoice in the interdependence of our sitting with all beings and all phenomena.

# NOTES

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5. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Zenkaisho (Essence of Zen Precepts)," in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 82, no. 2601. Translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and the author.

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2. Eihei Dogen, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point (Genjo Koan)," in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 70.

## *Chapter Three:* Paying Homage

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2. Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (New York: Random House, 1999).

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2. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. "remorse."
3. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Kyojukaimon (Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts)," in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 82, no. 2601. Translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and the author.
4. Eihei Dogen, *Eihei Koso Hotsuganmon* (High Priest Eihei's Verses on Arousing the Vow), trans. Dainin Katagiri Roshi and Reb Anderson (San Francisco, n.d.), unpublished.
5. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Zenkaisho (Essence of Zen Precepts)," in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 82, no. 2601. Translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and the author.

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3. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Tucker Brooke and Jack Randall Crawford (1601–1602; reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), III:1:58.
4. Eihei Dogen, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point (Genjo Koan)," in *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 71.
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6. Ibid.
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4. Ibid.

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## *Chapter Eleven:* Taking Self and Others Across

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6. Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge, Mass.: Exact Change, 1991), 54.

## *Chapter Twelve:* The Ten Grave Precepts

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## *Chapter Thirteen:* Let the Buddha Seed Grow

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2. This dedicatory verse was part of a tree ordination ceremony held at the author's home temple, Green Gulch Farm. The verse was a collaborative effort of Wendy Johnson, Stephanie Kaza, and the author.
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4. Zen Master Yuanwu, quoted by Eihei Dogen in "Body-and-Mind Study of the Way (Shinjin Gakudo)," in *Shobogenzo*, vol. 2, 128. Author's translation.

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9. Ibid.
10. Author's version of the story of Zen monk Ryokan. For another version, see Paul Reps, ed., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1989), 12.

## *Chapter Fifteen:* Nothing Is Wished For

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3. Ibid., 24–25.
4. Trevor Leggett, *The Tiger's Cave:Translations of Japanese Zen Texts* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 165.
5. Eihei Dogen, "Shobogenzo (On the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye)," in *Dogen Zenji Zenshu*, ed. Doshu Okubo (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1969–1970). Author's translation.
6. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Jingdechuandung Lu (The Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp)," in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 51, no. 2076. Author's translation.

## *Chapter Seventeen:* Everything Is Inviolable

1. In Master Dogen's presentation of the fifth Grave Precept, he calls it "No Selling Wine," which is the same as the fifth Major Precept of the Brahmajala Sutra, "The Precept Against Selling Wine." In the Brahmajala Sutra, the admonition against drinking intoxicants yourself was the second of the forty-eight Minor Precepts. Although drinking wine yourself was considered an unwholesome act, selling wine to others for profit was considered a much greater wrongdoing, especially for bodhisattvas, who vow to put the welfare of others foremost in their hearts. A bodhisattva vows to help others bring forth clear wisdom; therefore, to act in any way that may bring about confusion in living beings' minds is contrary to the bodhisattva's fundamental intention.

The fifth Grave Precept was named for this more fundamental and greater error.

For the sake of our present generation, I have renamed this precept "No Intoxicants," rather than "No Selling Wine." Today the range of intoxicants is so wide that almost no list of specifics could be comprehensive enough. Also, I am referring to material intoxicants rather than to the state of intoxication, which includes excitement, happiness, and so on.

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2. Joseph Bruchac, "Birdfoot's Grandpa," *Entering Onondaga* (Austin, Tex.: Cold Mountain Press, 1978), 47.

## *Chapter Twenty-one:* Oceans of Magnificent Clouds

1. "The Definitive Vinaya," Sutra 24 of the "Maharatnakuta Sutra," in *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras: Selections from the Maharatnakuta Sutra*, ed. Garma C. C. Chang (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 270.
2. Ibid.
3. Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: The Modern Library, 1960), 208–209.
4. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Biyan Lu (Blue Cliff Record)," case 3, in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 48, no. 2003. Author's translation.

## *Chapter Twenty-two:* Virtue Returns to the Ocean

1. For the complete text, see Bunno Kato, Yoshiro Tamura, and Kojiro Miyasaka, trans., *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, 52.
2. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Dongshan-lu (The Record of Dongshan)," in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 47, no. 1986B, 501. Author's translation.

## *Chapter Twenty-three:* Blood Vein

1. Eihei Dogen, "Face-to-Face Transmission (Menju)," in *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 177.
2. Takakusu Junjiro, ed., "Biyan Lu (Blue Cliff Record)," case 16, in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, vol. 48, no. 2003. Author's translation.
3. Ibid.
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5. "Huangbo's 'Dreg Slurpers,'" case 53, in *Book of Serenity*, trans. Thomas Cleary, 223–24.
6. Ibid.

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Reb Anderson Roshi moved to San Francisco from Minnesota, in 1967, to study Zen Buddism with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, who ordained him as a priest in 1970. Since then, he has continued to practice at the San Francisco Zen Center, which includes Beginner's Mind Temple at The City Center (San Francisco), Green Dragon Temple at Green Gulch Farm (near Muir Beach, California), and Zen Mind Temple at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center (Carmel Valley, California). Anderson Roshi served as abbot from 1986 to 1995 and is now a senior dharma teacher. He is particularly interested in Buddhist yoga and psychology, and in the relationship of Buddhist wisdom and compassion to the social and ecological crises of our time.

Anderson Roshi is the author of *Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains: Dharma Talks on Zen Meditation* (Rodmell Press, 1999). In addition, his writings have been published in *Wind Bell: Essays and Lectures from the San Francisco Zen Center, 1968–1998* (Mercury House, 1998), and numerous Buddhist periodicals, including *Inquiring Mind*, *Tricycle*, *Turning Wheel*, *Vajradhatu Sun* (now *Shambhala Sun*), and *Wind Bell*.

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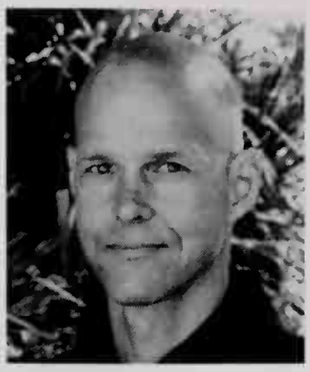

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