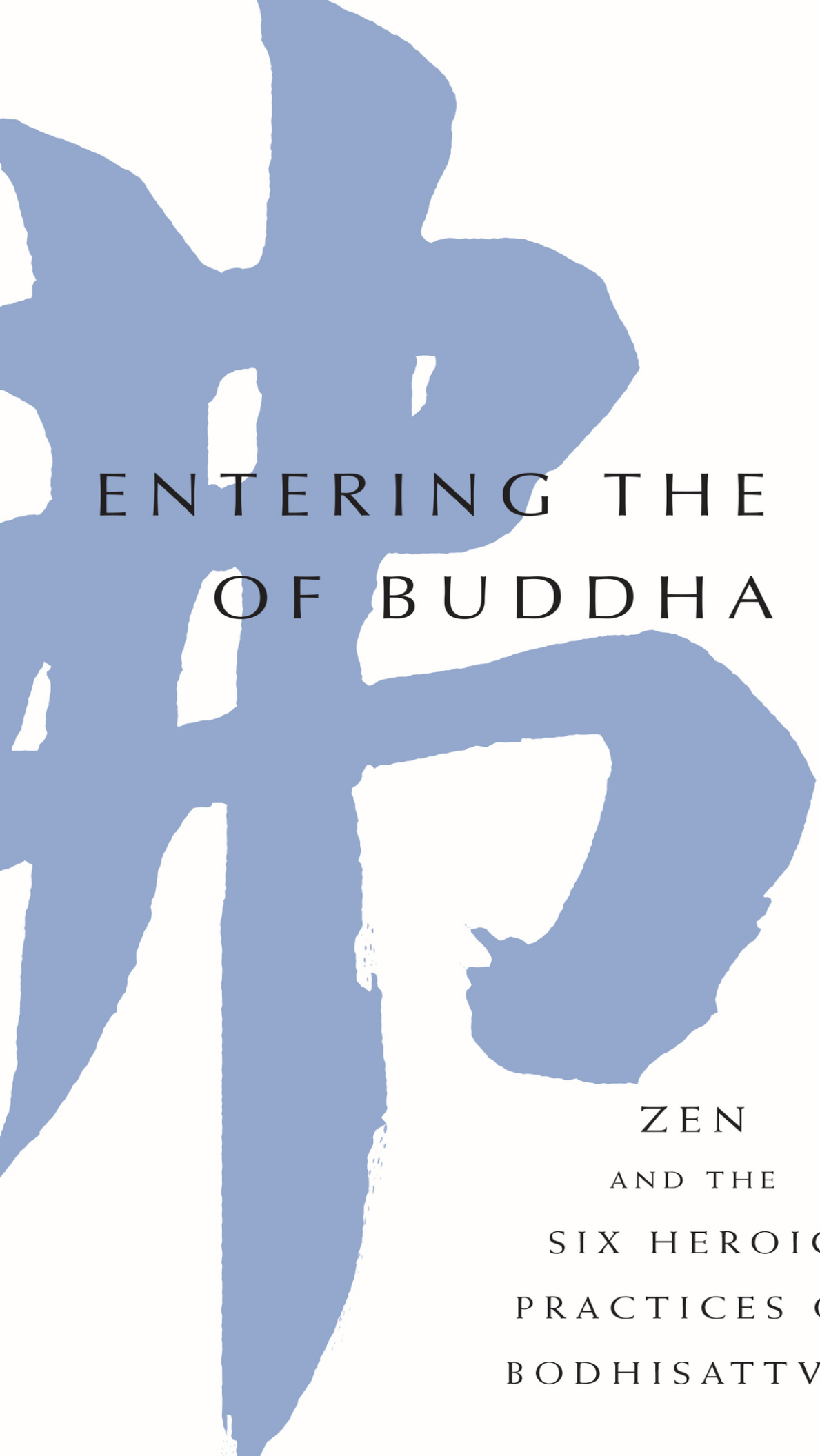

ENTERING THE MIND OF BUDDHA

佛心

ZEN AND THE SIX HEROIC PRACTICES OF BODHISATTVAS

REB ANDERSON

“This book offers highly practical and accessible guidance for an everyday bodhisattva life dedicated to fostering an awakened, compassionate world. It is also deeply grounded in traditional Buddhist texts and philosophy. Based on his many decades of teaching, Tenshin Anderson Roshi graciously explores the six transcendent bodhisattva practices, sharing illuminating stories both from his residential community and his personal life. Reb reveals Intimacy, with self and others and all beings, as the heart of ultimate awareness.

These teachings unravel expectations, as when he indicates that true generosity may include welcoming acceptance of our own embarrassing, ungenerous responses. Reb expresses the value of patience amid the processes of frustration and challenge. In truly practicing effort, overwork may reflect laziness. The essence of concentration involves letting go of discursive thinking, not suppression of thoughts. This lively, insightful work elaborates these and many other helpful encouragements to radically realize our own deep selves, and thus to develop our beneficial connection with all beings. Going beyond all these practices, perfect wisdom returns to joyfully renew wholehearted commitment to compassionate engagement. This book will be a valuable resource for both beginning and experienced practitioners or students.”

—TAIGEN DAN LEIGHTON,
author of *Faces of Compassion* and *Just This Is It*

“One can feel Reb Anderson practicing the six perfections in the writing and offering of *Entering the Mind of Buddha*. Guiding us through these teachings, Reb generously, joyously, patiently interweaves traditional and contemporary Zen stories from a life of teaching and living in community, as well as his personal family life

—thus clarifying the heroic path of the bodhisattva and encouraging us to open to the real possibility of walking this path starting now."

—LINDA RUTH CUTTS,
Senior Dharma Teacher, San Francisco Zen Center

"Inspiring, warm-hearted, and wise, Reb Anderson's book is true to the timeless teachings and true to twenty-first-century life. Focusing on the root practice instructions of Mahayana Buddhism, he seamlessly brings together the wisdom and stories of a life of Zen practice with a profound knowledge of Dharma."

—BEN CONNELLY,
author of *Inside Vasubandhu's Yogacara* and *Mindfulness and Intimacy*

"*Entering the Mind of Buddha* is a dharma jewel offered by Tenshin Anderson Roshi as a fruit of more than fifty years of studying, practicing, and teaching at a Zen community. This book is readable, practical, and profound."

—SHOHAKU OKUMURA,
author of *Living by Vow* and *Realizing Genjokoan*

"This exquisite exploration of the interconnections among the six paramitas reveals new aspects of their mutually intensifying effect on each other and opens them up for use as powerful tools in daily life."

—KONJIN GAELYN GODWIN,
abbot of the Houston Zen Center and director of the Soto Zen
Buddhism International Center

ENTERING THE MIND OF BUDDHA

ZEN *and the* SIX HEROIC PRACTICES OF BODHISATTVAS

Reb Anderson

Shambhala · *Boulder* · 2019

Shambhala Publications, Inc.
4720 Walnut Street
Boulder, Colorado 80301
www.shambhala.com

Cover calligraphy by Kazuaki Tanahashi

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Anderson, Reb, author.
Title: Entering the mind of Buddha: Zen and the six heroic practices of bodhisattvas/Reb Anderson.
Description: First edition. | Boulder: Shambhala, 2019. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018060872 | ISBN 9781611806533 (pbk.: alk. paper)
eISBN 9780834842458
Subjects: LCSH: Paramitas (Buddhism) | Bodhisattvas. | Zen Buddhism.
Classification: LCC BQ4336.A53 2019 | DDC 294.3/444—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018060872

v5.4
a

DEDICATION

Homage to all buddhas in ten directions
Homage to the complete dharmas in ten directions
Homage to every sangha in ten directions
Homage to the perfection of giving
Homage to the perfection of ethics
Homage to the perfection of patience
Homage to the perfection of effort
Homage to the perfection of concentration
Homage to the perfection of wisdom

CONTENTS

E-mail Sign-Up

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was born out of a teaching that I offered during a weekend retreat at the Mt. Madonna Center in 2011 titled, “Working for the Welfare of the World.” The retreat theme was the six *paramitas,* the basic forms of bodhisattva training.

Following the retreat, one of the participants, Karen Mueller, had a conversation with another participant, Shokuchi Deidre Carrigan, in which they discussed their experience of the weekend. They shared the view that the teachings had offered a comprehensive view of Zen practice that was new to them and included deeply helpful ways of understanding Zen practice within the context of daily life and family life. This shared vision was one of the main inspirations for the book.

Sometime after that conversation, Karen asked if she could transcribe the talks and discussions and work on transforming them into a book. In response I said something like, “If you would find such work enjoyable and encouraging to your practice, I could support that. However, if you lose interest and the work is not enjoyable anymore, please don’t feel any obligation to continue and please don’t have any expectation of the work being published. I don’t know if I will be able to be involved in it.”

Karen started working with great devotion, diligence, and enthusiasm. After many months of transcribing and editing the talks, she began asking various dharma friends for help and feedback, to which they responded generously. Friends came together to read the early drafts. The material was re-edited many times with the assistance of friends, and additional material was added from other teachings I gave in 2011 up to the present.

Many people provided helpful feedback as this material made the transition from oral teachings into written form. This includes a group of intrepid readers from the Arcata Zen Group: Milli and Michael Quam, Lynda McDevitt, and Barbara Maderas. As the manuscript continued to evolve, David LaFever, also from the Arcata Zen Group, provided additional feedback. Others who read the manuscript in various forms and provided suggestions and encouragement include: Bert Dyer, Roberta Werdinger, and Fred Sampson. In spring 2017, John Sheehy read a portion of the material and encouraged submission of the manuscript to Shambhala.

The early versions of the manuscript provided a foundation within which later teachings on these topics could be incorporated. In the later phase of the editing, Karen gave me tremendous encouragement and feedback and incorporated our conversations into the manuscript. Also in the later phases of this work, she worked closely with the editors at Shambhala.

I would also like to acknowledge some of the many other people who participated in this endeavor.

Thanks to Brajesh Jerry Friedberg who has invited me to offer weekend programs at the Mt. Madonna Center for more than twenty years. Thanks are also due to the people who attended the initial teaching at the Mt. Madonna Center in 2011 for their kind attention and discussion, which helped to illuminate these teachings. Some of those present included: Shokuchi Deidre Carrigan, Elizabeth and Leon Olson, Paul and Kate Page, Jack and June Erwin, Marjorie Yasueda and Dale Knutsen, Judy Pruzinski, Angela Nielsen, Jessica Thomas, Fred Sampson, Dona Haber, Amanda Kairys, Bruce Christie, Elizabeth Ury, Susan Leslie, Betsy Appel, and Lucetta Swift. Additional material was drawn from other teachings at the Mt. Madonna Center, Green Gulch Zen Center, No Abode Temple in Mill Valley, the Yoga Room in Berkeley, Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery, weekend workshops in Santa Barbara, CA, and private conversations with students. I offer my appreciation and gratitude to all of those who participated in these teachings for their thoughtful attention and questions.

I give my thanks to members of my family for allowing me to share some of their stories and examples of what I have learned from them.

Paul Page diligently recorded the original teaching at the Mt. Madonna Center and made additional recordings at teachings given at Mt. Madonna and in Santa Barbara. Charlie Wilson recorded teachings given at No Abode and the Yoga Room and other places, which also became a part of this manuscript. He has also created an archive for my teachings on the Engage Wisdom website where these and many other audio teachings can be found.

Dona Haber was one of the participants in the original program at Mt. Madonna, and she provided warm, consistent support and assistance in editing this manuscript throughout the many stages of its development. Eleanor Howe was crucial to the process of revising and refining the chapters on concentration and wisdom during the three-month Practice Period at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in the fall of 2017. Eleanor also provided substantial editorial assistance on the entire manuscript prior to its submission to Shambhala.

Thanks also to Dave O'Neal at Shambhala who expressed his initial support and interest in this book from the beginning of this publication process and to our editor, Matt Zepelin, who has provided insight, enthusiastic support, and editorial assistance to bring this manuscript to publication, as well as to our kind assistant editor, Emily Coughlin.

This book would not exist without the efforts of all of these people. I feel profound gratitude and appreciation to all those who have helped throughout this process. I pray that the fruit of these labors brings each person who contributed and many other beings great peace and encouragement in the practice of the bodhisattva path.

INTRODUCTION
The Invitation

Bring forth as much as you can of love, of respect, and of faith!
Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints!
Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas,
Taught for the weal of the world,
For heroic spirits intended.

—*The Prajñāpāramita Sūtra in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary*[1]

A MONK ONCE ASKED the ancient Chinese Zen master Yunmen, "What is the teaching of the whole lifetime of Buddha?" Yunmen replied, "An appropriate response."[2]

These words are simple, but it is often difficult moment by moment to realize an appropriate response to the complex and turbulent world in which we live. Fortunately, there are teachings and practices to show us the way in this great endeavor. At the heart of this book is the assertion that the six heroic practices of bodhisattvas are the appropriate response of the buddhas.

These practices invite us to enter the mind of buddha. They are based on the bodhisattva vow to become buddha in order to benefit and liberate all living beings.

The six great paramita practices of bodhisattva heroes and heroines of enlightenment are called generosity, ethical discipline, patience, heroic effort, concentration, and wisdom. These practices are methods of training bodhisattvas to leap beyond duality, suffering, and delusion, while also leaping beyond enlightenment. These great, transcendent practices arise in communion with

buddha. They are a path of training in being fully ourselves and allowing things to be fully themselves. From that fullness, an appropriate response comes forth. These teachings help us to understand the dynamism and vitality within the stillness and the silence of the buddhas.

Bodhisattvas are beings like us who aspire to the unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening that is buddhahood. *Bodhisattva* is a Sanskrit word frequently translated into English as "enlightening being" or "the mind of awakening." One Tibetan translation of *bodhisattva,* however, is "enlightenment hero." In Sanskrit, the six bodhisattva practices are called the six *paramitas,* which is commonly translated as the "six perfections." The word *paramita* literally means "going beyond." This going beyond can be taken in various ways. It may be understood as going beyond suffering. Another sense of it is that the paramitas go beyond themselves and beyond our ideas of what they are. Through them we transcend both the world and our ideas of practice.

The paramitas invite us to train in innumerable ways in order to become thoroughly and completely ourselves. This may seem ironic because we usually think we are already ourselves when we begin this path of the heroic bodhisattvas. But we don't understand what it means to be fully ourselves, and therefore, we do need training. When we are fully ourselves, we see that our lives are fragile and that we can be tender with our fragile lives. When we are tender, our lives do not become less fragile. Rather, through our deep acceptance that life is fragile, the door to an appropriate response opens. This is the door to the activity of wisdom.

When we meet things in this way, we are able to respond to things as they are. We are generous with our lives. We are also careful, gentle, tender, mindful, patient, relaxed, open, and undistracted. Even in the beginning stages of spiritual practice, when we open to things as they appear to us, we are opening to myriad possibilities for a kind, skillful, and flexible response to emerge. As we proceed through this book, we will consider how this simple teaching by

Yunmen about the Buddha's lifetime is expressed in each of the six paramitas and how it is fully realized in perfect wisdom.

Upon hearing this teaching, some people may wonder, "Shouldn't I intervene and energetically oppose the terrible injustice and cruelty I see in the world?" These teachings do not say that we should or should not intervene. Intervening is sometimes an appropriate response, and sometimes it is not. It may be hard to believe that the appropriate response will come; however, all the horrors of the world that we see are calling for our compassion. When we engage fully in these practices with all beings, with monsters and with angels, an enlightened response manifests spontaneously.

When we first engage with these transcendent practices, we do so according to our idea of them. As we practice with them we discover that they are not only what we think they are. They are also beyond our thoughts and understanding. We begin by practicing with our *idea* of generosity, our *idea* of being ethical and patient, and our *idea* of diligent effort. By training this way, we come to the perfection of wisdom wherein we realize the actual practice of giving, which is free of our ideas about giving. The actual practice of moral discipline leaps beyond our ideas of morality and realizes the morality of the buddhas. And so on through each of the six paramitas.

Bodhisattvas train in these six heroic practices in the conventional world in which we find ourselves. These great practices help us to be kind and compassionate within the limits of our understanding of the world as it appears to us. They help us to offer our compassionate and kind action in the conventional world, and, at the same time, they train our minds so that we open to wisdom, which is the realization of the ultimate and inconceivable nature of reality. When these practices are perfected by wisdom leaping beyond, they free us from our limited understanding. They help us realize the place where we really are—the only place from which an appropriate response is fully realized.

The Seed of Bodhisattva Practice

Bodhisattvas vow to live for both the welfare *and* the liberation of all beings. To accomplish this, they wish to attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment; that is, they wish to realize buddhahood. Bodhisattvas are beings just like us who wish to become buddhas. The heroic bodhisattva practices of the paramitas protect and nurture our intention to find a kind response to the world of suffering, and, simultaneously, they open us to the realization of perfect wisdom that liberates all beings.

There is an infinite number of bodhisattva practices included in the six perfections. These six practices may be divided into two categories. The first three are for the welfare and benefit of beings; the second three focus more directly on the liberation of beings.

By training in the first three practices, we benefit our bodies and minds, and we benefit the world around us. At the same time we also create the foundation for wisdom that will liberate us together with all beings. These practices first help us to care for the conventional world, which is the place in which suffering occurs. We train to welcome the mind that experiences suffering so that it can be liberated. When we engage deeply with these practices, we are able to observe how we are practicing generosity, ethics, patience, heroic effort, and concentration. Practicing this way prepares us to open into perfect wisdom, in which we meet reality face-to-face and all beings are liberated within that meeting.

The Order of the Six Paramitas

In the reality of buddha's awakening, these six practices all occur together simultaneously, and each practice includes all of the others. However, they are often taught and learned sequentially. In the *Saṁdhinirmocana Mahāyāna Sūtra,* Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, asks the Buddha, "How does one know the order of the teaching of these six perfections is like this?" The Buddha replies, "Avalokiteshvara, it is because the six perfections serve as bases for progressively higher achievements. Bodhisattvas who do not focus on their bodies and physical resources

—those who practice generosity—achieve ethical discipline. Those who guard their moral practice become patient. Those who have patience initiate heroic effort. Those who initiate effort achieve concentration. Those who achieve concentration attain wisdom that transcends the world."[3] Each of the paramitas is supported by the practices that precede it, and each supports what succeeds it. In turn, each one deepens and transforms the practices it is built upon.

These six paramitas may be seen as practices to deal with forms of ignorance, beginning with the grosser and continuing on to work with the more and more subtle. For example, the perfections of generosity and ethics antidote ignorance in the form of greed. They help us to let go of our wish to possess things. The perfections of patience and enthusiastic effort antidote ignorance in the form of aversion and laziness. These practices enable us to allow things to be themselves, and they help us to remember and to protect our aspiration to save beings. The perfections of concentration and wisdom antidote ignorance in the form of delusion; they help us to realize ultimate truth. The six paramitas are an open-ended and endless process of training.

Generosity is the foundation upon which all of these bodhisattva practices rest. Traditionally, in Asia, the first thing people learn about Buddhism is generosity. Children are taught to practice giving. Then they are taught ethics. They are praised when they are generous and encouraged when they are careful. They learn to be patient with brothers and sisters and with hard work. They also learn to be careful in school. They are not usually taught meditation right away.

Many people in the West first learn about Buddhism as adults. They begin, especially in Zen, by wanting to focus on meditation or concentration practice. In our contemporary world, people often hear about concentration practices or mindfulness meditation and seek out places that teach such practices. When we start with these practices, we may struggle and feel frustrated if we begin without first establishing a foundation of generosity. When we encounter difficulties with concentration, if we look carefully, we may notice that we are not being generous with our difficulty with

concentration. We may be trying to practice focused tranquility before we have established a gracious and welcoming attitude toward distractions and tension. When we are striving to find peace or immediate relief from suffering in our practice, we may notice that we become tense, agitated, and distracted. Sometimes we hate being distracted. Sometimes, instead of hating our distracted state of mind, we might hate what we think is causing distraction—for example, the person sitting on the cushion next to us. When we are not generous with our distraction and compassionate to our restless or snoring neighbors, our attempts to practice concentration will be frustrated. So, in this presentation of the paramitas, we begin by first training in generosity with our ordinary life.

Considering the paramitas in this order also helps us understand and respond skillfully to the obstacles we encounter in our practice. When our concentration is not energetic and stable, we may find it helpful to refresh our effort by remembering our aspiration, or it could be appropriate to reinvigorate our effort by the practice of resting. Resting is part of heroic effort; overwork is a form of laziness. When we notice that we are losing touch with our aspiration and our energy is waning, we can look to see whether we are being patient with the difficulties and frustrations we experience in our practice and in our lives. When we are impatient with our practice and concerned about our progress, or lack thereof, we can notice whether we are practicing ethics wholeheartedly, or whether, instead, we are trying to get something from our practice. When we have trouble being upright and ethical, we can look to see whether we are generous or if, instead, we are resisting giving or receiving some aspect of our life and our practice.

Generosity is joyful, and we need joy in order to devote ourselves continuously to these challenging practices. When we practice giving first, our ethical practice is informed by generosity, and thus our ethics are protected from becoming judgmental or dogmatic. By practicing ethics, we have more confidence in relaxing and calming down, which is necessary for meditation. When we practice generosity and ethics together and then practice patience, we are

able to open to our experience without trying to control it. Patience supports us to be fully present in our lives so we can make the heroic effort to liberate suffering beings.

We usually begin with some enthusiasm for practice. This is beginner's luck. As our aspiration to liberate beings is clarified through the first three paramitas, we are able to bring forth even greater effort that will support us in the practices of concentration and wisdom. Joy comes when we cultivate all of these practices in this way. When they work together, these practices support a concentration that opens us to wisdom.

Zen Is Great Compassion

When we look at the literature of Zen, the word *compassion* does not often appear as a headline, but it should. In Zen practice, it is assumed that we are bodhisattvas and that we aspire to practice compassion together with all beings. Because this assumption is so basic in the context of Japanese Zen, sometimes it is not even mentioned. Great compassion is the ground of perfect wisdom, and the teachings of the buddhas are about how to purify and deepen compassion.

In many traditional Zen stories the students bring their practice of compassion to a teacher, and the teacher responds in such a way as to help them become free of any impurities in their compassion. For example, some students may be practicing compassion toward all beings while still thinking that those beings are separate from them. In that situation, the students are working diligently to be compassionate but do not yet understand that other beings are not separate from them. Perhaps they think that people will be better after they save them, or the students may think that when people become enlightened those people will get something. Thinking in those ways is not in accord with how wisdom works. In those situations, the teacher just points out that the "others" they are trying to help are themselves and shows the students that they have not yet fully understood the practice of compassion. So in Zen, we

have the basic practices of compassion, and we have many teachings and stories to hone our compassion and purify it from all dualistic forms of thinking.

When we open to wisdom, our practice does not end; it continues with a deep and dynamic understanding of our connection with all beings. We experience ongoing, moment-by-moment practice of all six paramitas wherein the appropriate response of the buddhas blooms. Many of the most famous Zen stories don't mention compassion, but they are actually stories about how to free compassion from the impurities of dualistic thinking. Most of the ongoing open-ended work of the Zen bodhisattva is kindness and compassion in the form of the first five paramitas. Wisdom is the final touch on the masterpiece of great compassion.

The Six Heroic Practices

In the bodhisattva practice of the paramitas, compassion and kindness are developed and conveyed with increasing skill. The first three practices bring benefit to living beings. When we engage in the first three practices with beings who are suffering, including ourselves, we offer our gentle, kind presence and attention.

The second three—where we develop heroic effort, concentration, and wisdom—are practices that go beyond benefitting sentient beings to liberating them. The perfection of wisdom (*Prajna Paramita*) perfects the other five practices.

The First Practice: Giving
Dana Paramita

Generosity comes to life in the world of living beings by welcoming them and by being gracious to whatever arises and ceases. Other words for generosity include giving, graciousness, and welcoming. In the training of generosity, we focus on giving and receiving our life and our practice wholeheartedly, and on offering our life and

practice as a gift. As the practice develops, we come to understand that every arising and ceasing is a gift. When we are generous, we become fully grounded in the way things really are. Thus, when our giving fully flowers, it becomes perfect wisdom.

The Second Practice: Ethical Discipline
Shila Paramita

Ethical discipline focuses on being attentive to all our actions of body, speech, and thought. Ethics is about responding with attention, care, and tenderness to animate beings, including ourselves, and even to inanimate beings. It is to be upright without leaning into concerns for personal gain and loss. All of the great bodhisattva practices are encompassed in the precepts of ethical training. For some people, at some times, the practice of ethics may include a formal ceremony of commitment to the bodhisattva precepts.

The Third Practice: Patience
Kshanti Paramita

Patience is the ability to sit calmly in the center of all suffering. Other words for patience include presence, endurance, forbearance, and tolerance. Patience is not waiting for painful circumstances to go away. It is not attempting to control our experience. Patience is not trying to get away from physical and emotional discomfort, and it is not wallowing in them. The practice of patience is supported by generosity and ethics, and in turn, it protects them. Training in patience encourages us to be wholeheartedly present with whatever comes and goes. We will need great patience in order to enter the practices of heroic effort, concentration, and wisdom.

The Fourth Practice: Heroic Effort

Virya Paramita

Heroic effort is energetic and joyful about the bodhisattva work of realizing unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening for the welfare and liberation of the world. Other words for heroic effort are enthusiasm, diligence, vigor, energy, and joyful endeavor. This practice includes developing and renewing our energy to work wholeheartedly with all of the other practices. We need energy to train in the first three perfections, and we will need even greater and more heroic energy to practice the last two. Training in heroic effort is a pivotal point in the process of bodhisattva training. It is a point at which we pivot from the first three practices, which bring benefit to beings, and turn toward the practices of concentration and wisdom, in which we begin probing the nature of reality with the intention to liberate all beings.

THE FIFTH PRACTICE: CONCENTRATION
Dhyana Paramita

In the Zen tradition, concentration means having a mind that is tranquil, focused, and able to deeply contemplate all phenomena. It is a state of awareness that is undistracted from the bodhisattva intention of living for the welfare of all. Our bodhisattva concentration develops in the service of the vow to save all sentient beings. It is infused with generosity, ethical discipline, patience, and joyful effort. As we will see in a later chapter, the perfection of concentration arises simultaneously with the perfection of wisdom. Throughout this book we will be using the words *concentration* and *meditation* interchangeably. Both of these terms include two aspects of practice. One is focusing our attention and becoming tranquil. The other is contemplating teachings and other phenomena in a state of tranquility.

In the background of the discussion of concentration and meditation, there are Sanskrit words which may be familiar to the

reader from other contexts. These words include *dhyana, samadhi, shamatha, vipashyana,* and *prajna*.[4]

The Sixth Practice: Perfect Wisdom
Prajna Paramita

Prajna Paramita is never-ending practice. It is wisdom that leaps beyond wisdom. The first three practices ground us in conventional truth. Perfect wisdom does not abandon conventional truth. It depends on becoming intimate with this foundation through the practice of the first five paramitas. Perfect wisdom is the profound understanding of our true nature and of our true relationships with all beings. Prajna Paramita constantly evolves and is always fresh within ever-changing circumstances. It is an intimate face-to-face conversation with all beings—the spontaneous, appropriate response of all buddhas.

The Metaphor of the Lotus Plant

The lotus flower is often used as a symbol for perfect wisdom, and the lifecycle of a whole plant—with its seeds, roots, stem, flower, and fruit—may also serve as a metaphor for the path of bodhisattvas and buddhas.

The seeds need to be nurtured in order to realize their potential and eventually produce flowers, fruits, and new seeds. They must germinate and sprout into roots and stem. To grow, the seeds must sink down through warm, still, and muddy water. They must become embedded in the mud of the earth. As the seeds germinate and send forth their roots and stem, they develop a deep relationship with the mud. Together the mud and the sun bring nutrients and energy to the plant from below and above. The roots go deep and wide, and the stem extends upward to the surface of the water and the sun, finally entering into the open air.

The lotus plant's relationship with earth, water, sun, and air supports and sustains the growth of the entire plant. As this process continues, the stem rises into the air and sends out leaves. Eventually, a bud forms. When the time is right, the bud opens into a wondrous flower with marvelous colors and sweet, subtle scents that fill the air. The seed and the flower are both stages in the manifestation of the fruit of the lotus that will be exposed when the petals of the flower open.

Wonderful things happen when lotus plants bloom. The flowers open fully in daylight and close at night. When the flowers close in the evening, they make a warm enclosure in which insects sometimes find refuge overnight. When daylight comes, the blossoms open again, and the insects are released. Eventually, this process of opening and closing of the flower reaches a conclusion. There is a final opening, and the flower does not close again. The petals drop away, and now the fruit with its multiple seedpods is fully exposed.

At this point, the life of the plant is concentrated on maturing the fruit that contains seeds for generations to come. The new seeds that have formed within the mature fruit are related to the seed of the plant from which the fruit has grown, but they are not exactly the same as the seed that produced them. These are new seeds with new opportunities to create new plants.

After some time, the stem no longer holds the fruit above the water; it droops, delivering the fruit with its seedpods into the muddy water. When that happens, the seeds begin to swell within the pod. In time, the pressure from the swelling becomes so great that the seedpod explodes out of the water, sending seeds into the air and back into the water and mud.

Like the lotus, buddhas grow from seeds and produce new seeds. We call the seed of buddhahood the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*[5]), which is the wish to realize buddhahood and awaken all beings. This altruistic aspiration is protected and maintained by training in the six perfections. It is nurtured by the practice of the perfections in our interactions with the suffering of all sentient beings. The suffering of beings is the muddy water in which perfect

wisdom grows. It grows in the silence and stillness of meditation. It eventually becomes the flower of perfect wisdom and the fruit of buddhahood. The altruistic aspiration for awakening arises from the intimate communion of buddhas and sentient beings. The intimate communion, in our buddha nature, of the purity of buddhadhood and the impurity of sentient beings. The full realization of our buddha nature is buddhahood.

The lotus plant is in deep, intimate relationship with the silence and stillness of the muddy water and with the warmth of the sunlight and the freshness of the air. So too the aspiration for awakening together with the practice of the six perfections is fully rooted in the world of birth and death and bursts forth into the transcendent light of awakening.

> A monk asked Zhao-zhou, "Does a dog have buddha nature or not?
>
> Zhao-zhou said, "Yes."
>
> The monk said, "Since it has, why then is it in this skin-bag?"
>
> Zhao-zhou said, "Because it knowingly and willingly transgresses."[6]

Bodhicitta knowingly and willingly transgresses, serenely plunging into the muddy water of the world of sentient beings. The seeds of bodhicitta do not germinate in midair. They germinate in the stillness of our meditation, in the midst of the dark and complex richness of sentient beings, and in the warm sun of the buddhadharma.

As the seed of bodhicitta germinates, it sends deep roots of compassion into the mud of our lives. In this process, attentiveness and care are required so that our practice does not lose energy and focus as it deepens. The practices of compassion remain rooted in the mud and carry the energy of bodhicitta to help with the maturation sentient beings. All of this activity works together in supporting the seed to become the lotus flower of perfect wisdom.

As the flower of perfect wisdom matures and the petals drop away, the energy of our efforts is concentrated into the fruit of buddhahood and into transmitting new seeds of wisdom. New seeds—that is, the new insights that come from our practice—will not be identical to the insights that gave rise to them. In a way, these new seeds of insight were present in the original seed of bodhicitta, but now they have matured through our practice.

Just as the new seeds of the lotus flower re-engage with the earth, so too our new insights continue to engage in intimate communion with the earth and the world of sentient beings. These new insights will give rise to new fruits and to new seeds that have the potential to adapt to changing circumstances of the world. Our vow is realized in the flowering of perfect wisdom.

Do You Sense a Wish for Buddhahood?

In a sense, this whole story, from seed to fruit, describes an aspirational process. Many people wish to help others, but they have not yet discovered the aspiration to realize buddhahood for that purpose. If we look into our hearts and minds, and discover the aspiration to help beings, and we take care of that wish, it may eventually grow into the aspiration to realize buddhahood. Is there a wish for the welfare of beings in your heart? Do you sense a wish for buddhahood?

As we continue on our path, we will awaken to the reality that our entire life and practice is not something that we do alone. We understand that our practice is a gift to us from all beings and a gift that we give to all beings. This is the ultimate truth of our life. Perfect wisdom is the thorough understanding of this generosity—a state wherein we meet the Buddha teaching the dharma face-to-face.

THE FIRST HEROIC PRACTICE

THE PERFECTION OF GIVING

A Generous Heart

May we, together with all beings,
Realize the emptiness of the three wheels:
Giver, receiver, and gift.

—Meal chant, San Francisco Zen Center Liturgy

GIVING IS THE WARM HEART of bodhisattva practice. Generosity attends and responds with kindness to whatever turns up, including people and events we find challenging. It is graciously receiving all aspects of our life. When it is perfected, the joyful practice of giving includes all bodhisattva practices.

There was an old woman and a young man who lived in Japan, or maybe it was China. The young man deeply respected the old woman, and he received various teachings from her. At one point, the young man was going away from the old woman, and he asked her if she had any parting instructions for him. She said, "No matter what happens, I try to say, 'Thank you very much. I have no complaints whatsoever.' " The young man tried to practice that way but was not able to do so consistently. Some time later, he was able to meet his old teacher again. He said to her, "I'm sorry to confess that I have failed to practice what you taught me." The old teacher responded, "Thank you very much. I have no complaint whatsoever." This is a story about wholehearted generosity.

The ancient meditation master Huangbo instructed us to meet whatever comes with no mind.[1] This could be rephrased as an

instruction in meeting whatever comes with complete relaxation. I see the bodhisattva spirit of generosity at the heart of this teaching.

In the early years, the Buddha's teachings did not occur in monasteries or formal training centers. Wherever the Buddha met people, he met them with complete relaxation and openness. He gave them the teaching of kindness, and they practiced it. We could say that the Buddha's presence transformed each place he went into a training center. When we practice being kind and generous to whatever is happening, welcoming our lives with a generous heart and mind, we are also in a training center. When we don't remember to welcome whatever is coming, even though we may be in a building that is called a training center, we are not realizing the center of training at those times.

The buddhas recommend that we remember to practice generosity as we practice all of the other paramitas. For example, if we don't practice giving, our practice of ethics will not become fully mature. The river of generosity flows through all of the other practices.

Three Aspects of Giving

There are three types of giving. The first is generosity with material things, which is how we may conventionally think about being generous. The second is the gift of fearlessness. The third is generosity in sharing the dharma, which includes letting ourselves be ourselves, letting others be themselves, and not being attached to our own thoughts and feelings. Letting go of material goods is often difficult, but it may even be more difficult to generously let go of what we think and feel.

The Gift of Material Things

One form of generosity is giving our money, energy, and material resources. This kind of giving is definitely a part of generosity, but it is not the whole story. We can also give things that don't belong to us

—flowers on the hill, clouds in the sky, the bright full moon—wishing that all beings could enjoy them.

When we begin practicing generosity, we may have some difficulty with this practice. But as we persevere, we develop the capacity to be gracious with our difficulties. We will eventually give up even the idea that we are the giver. In reality, our life and material resources are given to us and given away all the time, but when we imagine that we own them, we might not notice this unceasing process of generosity.

When we notice that we are being possessive, the practice of generosity begins with welcoming our possessiveness. Then, instead of focusing on things as our possessions, we can see that they are gifts that have been given to us. Once we understand that they are given to us, we are more able to give them away. When we practice generosity in this way, we set the stage for the practice of ethics.

Once, somebody gave me a beautiful new automatic pencil. When I came home, I showed it to my wife and said, "Look at the nice automatic pencil that was given to me." She said, "Can I have it?" And I said, "No." I wasn't ready to welcome her request and give her the pencil. But I did welcome that I wasn't ready. I felt stingy and embarrassed, and I accepted that I felt that way. I thought, "Here's this wonderful person who has been so kind to you, and you're not ready to give her a pencil. Silly boy!" How embarrassing! But, I didn't beat myself up by being stingy toward my stinginess, which would have temporarily blocked the perfection of giving. I had a good night's sleep. The next morning when I got up, the automatic pencil came to mind again, and by that time I was ready to give it to her. So, I did. By accepting my unreadiness and my embarrassment, I became ready.

Working with stinginess is an inevitable aspect in the process of perfecting generosity. Sometimes we do feel stingy. When we feel that way, we may want to hide it from ourselves or from others. In these circumstances, we might even give a gift in order to hide our stinginess. Thus we may appear to be generous but actually we are not ready to wholeheartedly give the gift. In fact, we are being

ungenerous toward our own feelings. This stinginess toward our stinginess is a betrayal of who we are in that moment and temporarily blocks the perfection of giving. Being kind and acknowledging our stingy feelings opens the door to wholehearted giving.

The Gift of Fearlessness

We can also practice generosity by offering the gift of fearlessness in our daily lives. The practice of generosity protects and liberates us from many forms of fear. In buddhadharma, fear is often taught as being of five types: fear of loss of life, fear of losing control of our mind, fear of loss of reputation, fear of loss of livelihood, and fear of speaking in front of a large assembly.[2] Bodhisattvas overcome these five fears through the practice of generosity. When they practice generosity wholeheartedly, they give away everything. Because they are constantly giving everything away, they don't lose anything. Therefore, they are not afraid. Our fears are burned away in the intense joy of generosity.

When I was a very little boy, I lived with my family in an apartment building. Six bigger boys also lived there. These boys were two, three, four, and five years older than me. Instead of bullying me and keeping me in the position of the littlest boy, they loved and protected me. They promoted my freedom. They taught me that I could be myself and interact with big boys. When we were wrestling or playing rough together, they taught me to pat them and say "uncle" when the roughhousing got to be too much. And when I did, they would let me go. Basically, they taught me that I did not need to be afraid of big boys. I think they enjoyed having a little boy that they could take care of and love. I was like their mascot. Later, when I met other boys who were bigger than me, if they bullied me, essentially I would say something like "uncle." Those boys would usually listen to me too, because they could sense the confidence that the big boys in my apartment building had given to me. Rather than being a little guy that everybody could pick on, I learned that I was a little guy that

they could be kind to and respect. And, the big boys learned that too. Those boys in my apartment building gave me the gift of fearlessness by being kind when they played with me. This was a great blessing for which I am deeply grateful.

Bodhisattvas receive the gift of fearlessness from the buddhas, and in turn they share it with all sentient beings. Receiving the gift of fearlessness sets the stage for us to offer this gift to others. We can learn to welcome everything, including our own failures. When we learn to welcome everything wholeheartedly, we become fearless, and that helps others to become fearless also. And learning, through the practice of generosity, to welcome everything that comes also helps us to fearlessly welcome the teaching of dharma.

The Gift of Dharma

When buddhas sit, when buddhas talk, when buddhas walk, when buddhas eat rice and drink tea, all this is the gift of dharma. Bodhisattvas aspire to offer all their actions of body, speech, and mind as dharma gifts. We have received the gift of dharma, and now we have an opportunity to give it to others.

The *Lotus Sutra* depicts buddhas and bodhisattvas waiting calmly and patiently until beings properly request teachings, and then they wholeheartedly offer the dharma to those beings. Sincerely requesting the teachings is also a great gift of dharma. In many Mahayana scriptures, when teachings are conveyed, they often begin with bodhisattvas giving the gift of a question.

In the history of the Zen school we also see many examples of teachers questioning students, students questioning teachers, and teachers questioning teachers. When bodhisattvas ask questions, they don't ask for the purpose of getting something. Asking questions is one of the ways that bodhisattvas give the gift of dharma. They want their questions to be really helpful. They ask their questions for the benefit and happiness of many beings.

Asking questions as a gift of dharma is illustrated in a text called The Concentration of Heroic Progress (*Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*).[3]

This scripture begins with a bodhisattva named Drdhamati thinking to himself, “I would now like to ask the Tathagata a question that would be such as to protect the lineage of the Buddha, the lineage of the Dharma, and the lineage of the community.” He goes on to say that he would like to ask the Buddha a really good question that will liberate all beings from suffering and bring peace and happiness to all beings. He seeks to ask a question of such value that anyone who has not given rise to the aspiration for supreme awakening will do so upon hearing his question. The scripture goes on to list many other wonderful things he wishes his question to accomplish.

Then Drdhamati arose from his seat, arranged his upper robe over his left shoulder, placed his right knee on the ground and his left knee up, extended his joined palms toward the Buddha, and said, “Bhagavan, I would like to question the Tathagata on a small point, if the Tathagata gives me leave to ask a question.” The Buddha saw that Drdhamati was thinking about asking a really good question, and he gave him permission to ask his question. He calls Drdhamati a good child of the dharma and says that he can see that Drdhamati wants to ask a question to greatly benefit beings. After repeating all the benefits that Drdhamati aspires to and launching into outrageous praise of this bodhisattva’s questioning, the Buddha tells Drdhamati to ask his question.

Drdhamati asks a magnificent question: “What is the Samadhi through which the bodhisattvas completely obtain [unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment]?” This is just the beginning—the question goes on and on. It’s a long and complicated and really endless question. When he finally finishes his question, the Buddha says to Drdhamati, “Excellent! Excellent! O Drdhamati, you question the Tathagata on this subject for the welfare and happiness of many beings, through pity for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of the great body of beings, humans, and gods, for the protection of present and future bodhisattvas. Know this. You have planted good roots. You have honored and served innumerable Buddhas…of the past. You have trodden the paths. You have overcome all delusion and adversaries.”[4] The Buddha goes on at

length about all Drdhamati has done that enabled him to ask such a great question. And then the Buddha starts his answer, which constitutes the rest of the scripture. Such questioning is one of the great forms of bodhisattva generosity.

Some years ago, I was intensively studying the *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra* with others during a formal retreat—a *sesshin,* which is Japanese for "mind-gathering." During sesshin, we usually don't talk on the telephone or check email and voicemail. A young man, who was also my friend and my assistant, thought that because he was assisting me, he should check email and phone calls in case someone needed my help.

One evening during a break in our sitting meditation, he heard his phone ringing, and he thought, "Okay, I will answer it." So, he picked up the phone and heard a woman offering him the opportunity to get a new credit card. As a sweet bodhisattva, he listened to her praise of the virtues of this credit card. After he listened for some time, he thought, "Maybe it would be good for me to ask a question." He didn't think about it being a question that would liberate all beings, but he probably did want to help the woman, and he definitely wanted to help me. So he asked her, "Do I have to have a certain income in order to get this credit card?" She said, "Yes, you do. How much do you make?" He said that he was a Zen priest and told her the amount of his tiny stipend, which was definitely not enough income to have this credit card. And with some surprise, she said, "Where do you live?" Then he described how he lived at a Zen center. After he told her about the temple and his simple, meditative lifestyle for a while, she said, "Can I live there?" And my friend said, "Yes, you can." Then she asked, "Can I smoke there?" And he said, "Not really, except in a limited way. There is a smoking area, but you can't smoke in most places. You can't smoke in the meditation hall or in your room or in the kitchen, but you can smoke in the outer parking lot." As far as we know, she hasn't come yet, but maybe after she quits smoking, she will come.

At Zen temples, we have limited areas for smoking and unlimited areas for asking questions. The Buddha praised Drdhamati's

question, and I praise my assistant's question.

Our Physical Bodies Offer Us the Gift of Dharma

Generosity toward our bodies also helps us to receive the gift of dharma. There are many aspects to this surprising gift of dharma. Having a body makes it possible for the dharma to be taught and received through our vocalizations and physical gestures.

Furthermore, when we are intimate with our body and nurture it, it teaches us about interdependence in a very direct and immediate way. When we attend to our body, we see that it is not separate from the things that appear to be external to it—air, water, food, our genetic inheritance, the bacterial organisms in our guts that help to digest our food, and so on. When we are generous with our body, we will eventually see that it depends on everything that is not our body.

When we see the body and think we own it, that sense of ownership is what I call "self." Seeing such a self, we can contemplate it. We have to practice generosity for quite a while to be able to calmly contemplate this sense of ownership. In this way, the body and sense of ownership offer us the gift of dharma.

Our bodies also generously offer us the dharma of impermanence. When a healthy body is given to us, we may forget that it is subject to impermanence. Forgetting the impermanence of the body, we may become intoxicated with its health and strength. Becoming intoxicated, we will act unskillfully. When we remain aware of the impermanence of health, we will not be intoxicated. In our sober state, we can be filled with joyful gratitude for our health, and this gratitude may in turn help us to be joyfully mindful of the impermanence of our body. Thus our body becomes a dharma gift. The practice of generosity warms us up to not clinging to the appearance of a healthy body, and it sets us up for realizing freedom.

Bodhisattvas care for their bodies so that their bodies can support dharma practice. Taking care of our body means giving and using it for the practice of generosity rather than taking care of our body to

keep it from changing. For me to study and teach the dharma, my body has to be in a certain condition. I try to support my biological being through such things as exercise, diet, and rest, so that my body will support the practice.

The way we take care of our physical limitations can be a gift of dharma. When we are generous and kind toward our body, appropriate forms of practice for our particular body emerge. Toward the end of his life, Shakyamuni Buddha had pain in his back. At one point, when it was time for him to give a dharma talk to the community, he was unable to sit upright as usual and instead he reclined next to his dharma seat. He gave his senior disciple, Mahakashyapa, his robe and had the student ascend the dharma seat to give the talk that day. Later, toward the end of his life, when the Buddha was ill, he assumed a reclining posture for his final teaching. In both cases the Buddha offered the limitations of his body as dharma gifts.

When pleasant experiences arise, we often try to grasp them. When we wholeheartedly welcome them we are able to let them in without grasping. It is the same with unpleasant experiences such as depression and anxiety and other things we don't like. Clinging to, grasping, or hating the various experiences of our body is not the same as welcoming them. Welcoming means just letting the experiences be the way they appear to us. When we do this, we are applying the teachings of generosity. If we are practicing, and a body appears that seems to be dying, we can realize that it is another gift of dharma and another opportunity to wake up. When we are generous with our body, it can reveal the truth to us and help us to realize the emptiness of giver, receiver, and gift.

The Boat of Compassion

Case 41 in the *Book of Serenity* is called "Luopu About to Die." When the Zen teacher Luopu was about to die, he had a deep and difficult conversation with an elder monk named Yancong.

At the end of the conversation, Yancong said, “I don’t understand.”

Luopu said, “You should understand.”

Yancong said, “I really don’t.”

Luopu shouted and said, “How miserable!”

[Another] monk asked, “What is the teacher’s meaning?”

Luopu said, “The boat of compassion is not rowed over pure [smooth] waves.”[5]

Thereupon Luopu died.

The turbulent waters of our life are calling for compassion. In such cases, we begin the practice of compassion by welcoming the rough, impure waves surrounding us. When we find ourselves surrounded by waves of negative judgment and fear, it is possible to say, “Thank you very much. I have no complaint whatsoever.” The vast ocean of afflictions is where we are being called to row the boat of compassion.

The Gift of Feedback

In giving, our hearts open. We open to our vulnerability and the vulnerability of others. In such a state of openness and tenderness, it might be painful to receive the feedback that our gifts are not appreciated. We might feel that we are being rejected. Knowing this, we might hesitate to express our generous feelings because of our fear of the pain of rejection.

When we do express our generous feelings and think that we are rejected, it may be difficult to welcome this feedback. However, when we are gracious to our feelings of rejection, we are awakening to feedback as gifts.

For example, after generously working to make a meal for our family and offering it to them, some family member might say, “I hate this.” This feedback may be painful to hear. Yet if we resist this

feedback, it may be because we are identifying with our beneficent role of being the giver.

When we do not resist difficult or challenging feedback about our giving, we can see that the feedback is helping us to not get stuck in any fixed position in the fluid process of giver, receiver, and gift. Thus, with the help of others, we can realize the emptiness of giving, its ultimate meaning, and the perfection of giving.

The Gift of Interpersonal Boundaries

When we consider the practice of welcoming whatever comes and being generous toward everything, we might wonder if offering boundaries is included in the generosity of bodhisattvas. And it is!

Offering boundaries in our relations with others is a great gift. In the practice of giving, it is essential that we express our boundaries and respectfully request that they be honored. This kind of communication is absolutely necessary for maturing and perfecting our practice of giving. It is also necessary in realizing the intimacy of giver, receiver, and gift. To be truly generous with others, we have to be generous with ourselves. Being generous toward others includes being respectful of them, and in order to be respectful of others, we have to respect ourselves as well. Without being generous and respectful toward ourselves, the practice of generosity cannot be fulfilled.

The phrase *setting boundaries* is often used when speaking of giving a special kind of feedback to others. I prefer the phrase *giving boundaries* to include this in the practice of giving. As bodhisattvas practice making everything they do into a gift, it may be that saying "no" is the appropriate gift in certain situations. One who wishes to work for the welfare of all beings needs to learn this. If someone is being cruel, the bodhisattva can say "no" as an act of generosity. On the bodhisattva path, we have the opportunity to learn how to give a generous and powerful "no!" The compassionate "no!" is given without attempting to manipulate or control. In such a case, we don't expect the others to go along with us. If they don't, we might give

them another gift. Reiterating a boundary as a gift is not the same as trying to manipulate or control.

People whom we love and who love us may want to see how we are vulnerable. That is to say, they might want to see if we can be hurt. This is particularly true of children. This is part of their exploration to find boundaries in their relationships. Understanding the necessity of their exploration of boundaries, we can generously let them know if they hurt us.

One time my grandson offered me the gift of pinching me and asking, “Does that hurt?”

“No.”

Then he pinched harder.

“Does that hurt?”

I said, “No.”

Then he pinched again and asked, “Does that hurt?”

And I said, “Yes.”

Then he pinched again and asked, “Does that hurt?”

And I said, “Yes, and now I need you to stop.”

Another time, he approached me with a hammer looking as though he was going to hit me. I said, “Please do not hit me with that hammer.” Then he appeared as if he was going to make another attempt. Feeling great love for him, I said, “Would you like me also to hit you with a hammer?” And he said, “No.” I didn’t really mind that he wanted to hit me with a hammer, but I did not want him to get in the habit of thinking this was an appropriate way to relate to humans or animals. So, as a gift to him, I asked him to stop. Such gift exchanges with him were such a joy!

In the next chapter, on the practice of ethics, there is a story about a time when I offered a boundary to my daughter as a gift. The story illustrates how giving the gift of boundaries requires careful, courageous attention in order to be ethical. Bodhisattvas cannot just give gifts without being careful about how they give them.

The Gift of Formal Boundaries

Once, my teacher, Suzuki Shunryu Roshi, surprised me be saying it's all right to be informal with our acquaintances. However, for intimate relationships we need some formality.

One of our Zen ancestors, Liangshan, studied formally with Tongan. He served as the teacher's attendant, which involved taking care of the teacher's robes.

> Once, as he handed the teacher his robe, Tongan asked him,
>
> "What is the business under the [bodhisattva's] patched robe?"
>
> Liangshan had no answer.
>
> Tongan said, "Studying the Buddha Way, not understanding this business is most painful. Now, you ask me."
>
> Liangshan said, "What is the business under the [bodhisattva's] patched robe?"
>
> Tongan said, "Intimacy."
>
> Hearing these words Liangshan was greatly awakened.[6]

In the midst of their formal relationship, teacher and disciple awakened to intimacy together.

In wedding ceremonies, couples often offer each other formal vows in order to live together intimately in peace. In Zen practice, it is essential for realizing intimacy that the teacher and disciple formally agree to some limitations and boundaries in their practicing together. They make commitments to each other to meet and practice together at specific times and places. If and when they are not able to fulfill their commitments, they talk about it.

There are appropriate and inappropriate ways to be intimate. In the Zen that I transmit, we formally agree that certain actions are not appropriate at some times and places, and that other actions are not ever appropriate to our intimate relationships. For example, in

formal private interviews, sometimes people have asked, “Can I give you a hug?” I say, “If you want a hug, it would be appropriate to do it outside this room in a public place.”

In the next chapter, we will expand on this subject of formal intimacy when we discuss the first bodhisattva pure precept of embracing and sustaining regulations and rituals.

Seeing Our Whole Life as a Gift

Welcoming is the act of graciously receiving whatever comes. It may be clear to most of us that we do need some training in order to be gracious toward unpleasant events. It is often less apparent to us that we also need to train ourselves in generously meeting pleasant events. In order for our practice of giving to eventually become continuous and unending, we need to remember to practice generosity with both pleasant and unpleasant situations.

Once upon a time I was riding a bicycle in Houston. As I was riding, I was pushed to the edge of the road by a truck and was forced to turn into a driveway. When I turned the wheel, it hit a bump, and I was thrown down onto the cement really hard. It felt like the top of my thighbone had been hit with a baseball bat. When that happened, I didn’t say, “Thank you very much.” My first reaction was to say, “Shit.” In the next moment, I remembered to practice giving, and I said, “Relax,” which was a shorthand way to say, “Welcome, life.” And then, while I was lying on the cement next to my bicycle, a car full of women stopped right next to where I was lying and asked, “Do you need any help?” I said, “I’m not sure, but please don’t go away.” Then a man came and stood over me with an umbrella to shade me from the hot sun, and a young man offered to take my bike home for me. People came from every direction to help me. If we just say, “Shit,” we may not see that everything that comes is a gift.

Sometimes it is possible to have the generous response immediately, without missing a beat. But often we have an unwelcoming response first. Our ungenerous responses may be embarrassing to notice; however, noticing them is integral to

realizing the perfection of giving. When we see that this is not how we want to respond, we can remember our aspiration to be generous and return to our practice. This is a way to train in generosity.

Being generous with pleasant experiences is exemplified in the practice of concentration wherein highly pleasant states of being arise and our concentration is perfected by not being attached to bliss and giving it away. We will discuss this form of generosity further in the chapter on the practice of concentration.

Welcoming Missed Opportunities

Every moment is an opportunity to practice generosity. And, every moment is a chance to miss the opportunity—but that is not the end of the story. When we miss an opportunity, that is another opportunity. It is the opportunity to graciously and sincerely acknowledge the miss and thus practice generosity *and* ethics.

Sometimes when we miss an opportunity we may feel discouraged or embarrassed. Noticing this and welcoming it restarts our practice and gets us back on the path of generosity. As we continue to walk on this path, we train ourselves to welcome any stories about ourselves that we don't like. We learn to say, "Welcome, missed opportunity!"

One night when I was in college, I had an experience that helped turn me toward Zen practice. I was riding my motor scooter past a bar on the way to my apartment. I saw people outside the bar fighting and falling all over each other and vomiting on the street. I thought, "I do not want these people in my house." I did not want to be close to them. I wondered about what kind of person I was to reject these suffering people, and I felt bad about that.

Around the same time, I was reading stories about Zen people who were able to sincerely welcome all the diverse forms of life. I wanted to learn this kind welcoming, but I was not ready. I was afraid of them. I could see that I needed training in compassion, so I went to study Zen.

As bodhisattvas we vow to learn to meet all beings, including those who are different from us, with great compassion. In doing this, it is our responsibility to learn about the biases of our social conditioning. This can be deeply difficult and embarrassing work, but it is really called for on the bodhisattva path. If we are uncomfortable or frightened of those who are different from us, we need to awaken to our cultural conditioning and learn to welcome our fear and discomfort. In doing so, we can learn to also warmly welcome those who appear to be different from us.

When we are in a place where we are not feeling generous, we may be able to find some other place where we do feel generous. For example, if we are not generous with a particular person, perhaps we can be generous with our own inability to be generous. If we can't do that, we can move our attention somewhere else in order to get in touch with generosity again. Through this process of training, we may come to feel and act generously toward people and situations we previously could not welcome. Then maybe the next day, we see somebody else that we don't feel generous toward, so we start all over again.

The Perfection of Giving

The perfection of giving is wisdom that realizes the interdependence, inseparability, and insubstantiality of giver, receiver, and gift. All three are present in each moment of generosity, whether we see this or not. This means that the perfection of generosity is one of the forms of the perfection of wisdom.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas practice for the welfare of others. They are not primarily concerned with promoting their own happiness. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are filled with joy to be showing people how they too can be joyful.

When we are generous for the welfare of others, we are immediately joyful ourselves. We instantly realize nirvana. If we have not learned to wholeheartedly give and receive for the welfare of others, we will not be able to be at peace and ease ourselves. It might

happen that a teacher is happy before the student, even though the teacher is primarily concerned with the student's happiness. We practice generosity because we want to help others learn to practice it.

According to the Buddha's teaching, when you practice giving, ethics, and patience for my happiness, you will be happy right away, and eventually I will be too. When thinking that way twists your mind and makes you feel like a pretzel, if you are a pretzel for your own welfare, you will just feel twisted. If you are willing to be turned into a pretzel for my welfare, you will be happy too.

Generosity sets us up to be present, silent, and still with what is real. Through the practice of giving, we are warming up to letting go of everything in every moment, which is perfect wisdom.

THE SECOND HEROIC PRACTICE

THE PERFECTION OF ETHICS
A Virtuous Life

The precepts of compassion roar like thunder,
The kind heart is wondrous as great clouds,
Pouring Dharma rain of sweet dew.
—Lotus Sutra

BODHISATTVA ETHICAL PRECEPTS are ultimately beyond words. Out of great compassion, the buddhas return from silence and stillness and give us precepts in words to help us realize the true precepts. In this chapter we will offer words for the sake of realizing the bodhisattva precepts that words cannot reach. While we do this, we also remember that the true precepts are living together with us right now in silence and stillness.[1]

All the Great Vehicle teachings of the buddhas are given in order to inspire, encourage, and illuminate the ethical responsibility of bodhisattvas. The ethical responsibility of bodhisattvas is to realize unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening for the welfare of all living beings. These precepts are the way we are truly living together with all beings. The bodhisattva precepts are the source of all buddhas and the origin of all bodhisattvas. They include and promote all six heroic practices. Our thoroughness in the practice of bodhisattva precepts realizes perfect wisdom, which is the liberation of all beings.

In order to awaken to the complete significance of the bodhisattva precepts, it is necessary to understand the teaching of the Two

Truths, first elaborated by the Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*) school of Buddhism in ancient India. These two truths are known in Buddhist teaching as conventional truth (*samvriti satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramartha satya*).

Conventional truth refers to our everyday, commonsense understanding of the existence of things. From this point of view, the precepts seem to be primarily concerned with doing good and not doing evil. Being grounded in the conventional meaning of the precepts is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient, for realizing their ultimate meaning. Ultimate truth is not circumscribed by our ideas. The ultimate meaning of the precepts transcends ordinary, conventional reality, and it is beyond our understanding. When we have given our thorough attention to the literal and conventional import of these great precepts, we are then able to step forward and enter into the realm of their ultimate meaning.

In the tradition that I have inherited, we have a form of ethical discipline called the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts. My current understanding is that this version of the precepts originated in thirteenth-century Japan with Old Buddha Eihei Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in Japan.[2] In his "Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts" (*Kyojukaimon*), Dogen Zenji says, "These precepts have been protected and maintained by all buddhas and have been mutually entrusted from buddha to buddha and mutually transmitted from ancestor to ancestor. Receiving the precepts goes beyond the three times; confirming these precepts penetrates throughout past and present [and future]."[3]

In this way, these precepts have been transmitted down to the present. Now we perform formal initiation ceremonies giving these Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts to assist and guide people who aspire to the bodhisattva path. Thus we offer a ceremonial process for formally entering the buddha way.

All these words and rituals are for the purpose of awakening to the highest truth of the buddhadharma. These words and ceremonies are provisional truths in service of realizing ultimate truth. By wholeheartedly opening to and embracing provisional truth, the

ultimate is revealed. Within this revelation, we see provisional and ultimate as one and the same. Then, we can let go of the ultimate and reenter the provisional. We join hands with all beings and walk together through birth and death on the endless path to buddhahood.

The Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts

THE THREE REFUGE PRECEPTS

Going for refuge in buddha.
Going for refuge in dharma.
Going for refuge in sangha.

The first three precepts are refuge precepts. They are going for refuge in the eternal, all pervasive, all-inclusive Triple Treasure. They are the body of the awakened mind. When we go for refuge in buddha, we return to and rely on our original nature, which is pure and fully endowed with the wisdom and virtues of all buddhas. The first bodhisattva precept, going for refuge in buddha, includes all the other precepts and all six of the heroic practices of bodhisattvas. Going for refuge in dharma and sangha completes going for refuge in the body of buddha's mind.

THE THREE PURE PRECEPTS

Embracing and sustaining regulations and rituals.
Embracing and sustaining all good.
Embracing and sustaining all beings.

The three pure precepts are the shape of the awakened 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 the realization of their bodhisattva vows.

These threefold bodhisattva pure precepts have evolved from Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching in the *Dhammapada*: "Doing no evil, Engaging in what's skillful, And purifying one's mind: This is the teaching of the buddhas."[4]

THE FIRST PURE PRECEPT:

The Abode and Source of the Law of All Buddhas[5]

In the Mahayana, the first pure precept—embracing and sustaining regulations and rituals—is a way of positively rephrasing Shakyamuni Buddha's precept "doing no evil."[6] I am using the word *evil* to refer to actions of body, speech, or mind arising from and defiled by self-clinging. By wholeheartedly practicing the regulations —the forms and ritual ceremonies of Zen—we learn to see our self-clinging and abandon it. In this process we also abandon self-centered ways of living, which are the source of all evil. These regulations and rituals are given to us for the purpose of realizing the ultimate truth of the precept, "doing no evil."

In this tradition, regulations and rituals are usually practiced within a community in which all of the members aspire to perform the same ceremonies and observe the same regulations. When we practice in community in this way, we mutually commit to the practice of the precepts with others, and all understand that we have committed to practicing these precepts together with them. This arrangement provides the opportunity to give and receive support and feedback, which is necessary in order to realize the fullness and selflessness of "doing no evil."

When a person feels inspired to receive these precepts, the first step is to request them from a preceptor in the lineage. In the tradition I am part of, once their request has been accepted, we offer a ceremony in which both lay and monastic aspirants receive formal initiation into the bodhisattva precept lineage. This ceremony of giving and receiving the precepts is called "attaining liberation." It is

a ritual enactment of our commitment to the bodhisattva path in which we commit to a life of working for the welfare and liberation of all beings. Before and during the ceremony, we ask the preceptor to give us these precepts, and we formally commit to enter this path. These are the precepts of all buddhas. Commitment to them is the same as the commitment of all buddhas. When we commit to them, we join in the commitment of all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Throughout this process—before, during, and after receiving these precepts—we need feedback. The precept initiation ceremony is an explicit and implicit request of the community and of the teacher for feedback and support in our practice. In order to realize the fullness of the precepts, we also need to allow ourselves to be called into question about our practice. We need a teacher and a community in this process of being called into question.

Long ago, on a rainy night in Japan, a monk named Nan-in received a visit from another monk, named Tenno. Tenno had finished his apprenticeship and become a teacher. Since it was raining, Tenno wore wooden clogs and carried an umbrella. After greeting his guest, Nan-in asked: "I suppose you left your wooden clogs in the entryway. Please tell me if your umbrella is on the right or left side of the clogs." Tenno did not know where he had placed his umbrella. He could see that he was unable to practice mindfulness of forms moment after moment. Though already a teacher, he became Nan-in's student and studied six more years with him to fulfill the bodhisattva precept of regulations and rituals.[7]

We can imagine ourselves coming in out of the rain and putting our rain shoes in the entryway and setting our umbrella next to them and then saying, "Good evening, teacher!" The teacher observes that her student looked like he was in a hurry to get that wet stuff off, and she asks, "I wonder if you did that mindfully? On which side did you put your shoes, and on which side did you put your umbrella?" The student turns around to look. The teacher doesn't have to actually say, "You weren't mindful." In the story, the student realized he wasn't mindful, so he stayed and trained longer. After six more years of training, he learned to pay attention to what he was doing.

Because of the shoes and the umbrella and the entryway, a ritual arises. The form is to pay attention to where we put our shoes and our umbrella, as well as how we enter the room. If we agree to that ritual of paying attention, the teacher can ask us about it. Our fellow practitioners also can watch and wonder whether we are mindful in the way we enter a room. Even if they think we look mindful in the way we do something, they still might ask us, "Do you feel you were respectful and mindful when you set that bowl down?" And we might reply, "Well, I give myself a B-minus because my attention did flicker a bit. I had a few moments of forgetfulness in the process of setting the bowl down."

In order to fully practice these three pure precepts, we must commit to being mindful of them. One of the meanings of mindfulness is to remember. If somebody who has committed to the precept of regulations and rituals appears to have forgotten them that person is in a situation where feedback might be helpful. People often ask me for support in being mindful of the precepts. They say something like, "If you see me veering off course in the practice of the precepts, would you give me some feedback?" And I say that I would be glad to do so when I see such an opportunity. For example, I might see someone and wonder if she is being mindful of the regulations and rituals, and I might ask, "Would you like some feedback on your practice?" She might say that she does not want feedback in that moment, but later she might say, "Okay." And then I would give her some feedback on her practice of the regulations and rituals.

I might ask, "Were you mindful just as you picked up that broom?" Or, "Were you present just now when you bowed?" The practitioner might say, "I think I forgot. I remember bowing, but I think I was not really present."

Practicing these regulations and rituals realizes the ultimate truth of *doing no evil*. When we are mindful and really paying attention, in that moment we protect and maintain the precept of doing no evil. It is possible to be mindful in one moment and then slip and not be mindful in the next moment. When we receive feedback about our

lack of mindfulness, or we notice it on our own, we can return to mindfulness again in the next moment. Noticing and receiving feedback of our shortcomings in practicing regulations and rituals is part of the bodhisattva practice of confession and repentance, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

THE SECOND PURE PRECEPT:

The Path of Practicing and Being Practiced

The first pure precept is the purifying precept. By practicing it we are able to engage all bodhisattva practices free of self-clinging.

The second pure bodhisattva precept is embracing and sustaining all forms of wholesome conduct. It corresponds to the Buddha's early teaching to "engage in what is skillful." The boundless ocean of bodhisattva practices is included within this simple statement. The second precept encompasses all six of the heroic practices that are offered in this book.

THE THIRD PURE PRECEPT:

Taking Self and Others Across

The third pure precept is embracing and sustaining living beings. The essential point of this book is embracing and sustaining all beings so that they may enter and realize the buddha way. Every word in this book is given for this purpose. This precept corresponds to the Buddha's early teaching, "purify your mind." The bodhisattva's mind is purified in the process of bringing beings to maturity—that is, to buddhahood. The way the bodhisattva purifies her mind is through working to mature others.

THE TEN MAJOR PRECEPTS

Not killing.

Not stealing.

Not misusing sexuality.

Not lying.
Not selling intoxicants.
Not slandering.
Not praising self at the expense of others.
Not being possessive.
Not harboring ill will.
Not disparaging the Triple Treasure.[8]

The next set of bodhisattva precepts is called the Ten Major Precepts.[9] These precepts may be interpreted conventionally as prohibiting wrong actions and stopping evil. Practicing them in that way is of great benefit to others and to ourselves. However, when we fully realize these precepts we go beyond conventional truth, and we enter into buddha's mind. Then we see our original purity and understand that these are buddha-nature precepts. Our practice of not killing is, first of all, to protect all beings from harm. Ultimately the precept of not killing is to realize our true relationship with all beings, which is the activity of the awakened mind. The ultimate activity of the awakened mind is to free all beings so that they can live in peace. The same is true for all ten of these major precepts.

The point of these practices is to benefit all beings. By compassionately practicing this way with our imperfections, our intention is that all imperfect beings be liberated. Because this is such an important point, I would like to reiterate: We do not adhere to these practices for the sake of our own purity. As we have seen, the first paramita is generosity. When, in our practice of generosity, it seems to us that it would be helpful to others if we didn't follow these ethical practices literally, we do not follow them. That is an essential point in bodhisattva practice.

Consider the following example. If someone is looking for a person whom they want to capture and harm, and they ask where that person is and we know, we still might say, "I don't know." In one sense it is a lie, and there may be negative consequences in our lying in this case, but if it benefits others we can accept such consequences

for ourselves. We have violated the literal meaning of the precept of not lying yet we have upheld its spirit. We helped both the person being sought and the one intending to be cruel. Thinking like this might twist our mind a little. If it is for the welfare of others, bodhisattvas let their minds be twisted. The truth we are telling is that we want to protect and benefit all beings.

Benefitting others is a higher priority than my being perfect. There's nothing about me that is as important as benefitting others. If my being a trash heap helps others, I wish to be a trash heap. If being tidy will help others, I will be tidy. Sometimes being a mess is of great benefit to others. When being a mess is beneficial to others, I want to be a mess.

The Essence of the Bodhisattva Precepts

The heart of the bodhisattva precepts has four aspects. The first aspect is that the precepts are received correctly from another. The second is that bodhisattvas, in the presence of the preceptor and the great assembly, express their aspiration to wholeheartedly practice the precepts. The third aspect is that when bodhisattvas become aware of their shortcomings in the practice of the precepts, they avow their mistakes and feel embarrassment or regret. The fourth is that bodhisattvas develop ever-deepening mindfulness and respect for these precepts.

Once bodhisattvas have received the precepts from a respected preceptor and have aspired to sincerely practice them, they become aware of their shortcomings in the practice and might feel keen embarrassment about those shortcomings, especially in relationship to others who are also practicing them. This embarrassment may be especially strong in relation to their generous preceptor who has given them the precepts. They may also feel deep regret about their behavior when they have not really honored and respected their deep gratitude and sincere aspiration to fully practice the precepts.

This embarrassment is part of a compassion practice that we call confession and repentance, or avowal and regret. In this third aspect

of practicing with the precepts, we might notice that we have trouble being kind to ourselves when we make mistakes. When that happens we can also confess and repent our unkindness to ourselves. Just as we begin being generous by showing generosity to our stinginess, we begin being compassionate by being kind to our own inability to be kind.

This is the truthful practice of confession and repentance. Our great founder in Japan Eihei Dogen says, “By revealing and disclosing our lack of faith and practice before the buddhas, we melt away the root of transgression by the power of our confession and repentance. This is the pure and simple color of true practice, of the true mind of faith, the true body of faith.”[10]

Through this process of acknowledging and regretting shortcomings, the bodhisattva protects and renews their commitment to the ethical precepts that they have received. In doing so, the bodhisattva is freed of regret.

We may fail many times in this process of confession and repentance. When we do, we feel embarrassment and regret. We confess our forgetting, we receive the precepts again, and we aspire to them again. And, perhaps we fail again. We repeat the cycle of receiving, aspiring, failing, confessing, and repenting many times. Through this process our capacity for devotion to the precepts is ever deepening.

In the bodhisattva precept initiation ceremony at San Francisco Zen Center, after the formal statement confession and repentance, the aspirants are asked, “From now on and even after realizing the body of Buddha, will you continue this truthful practice of confession and repentance?” And the aspirants respond, “Yes, I will.”

In perfect wisdom, we realize a mind that is naturally in accord with these precepts wherein the precepts are spontaneously expressed in all the actions of our daily life. This is because our body and mind have been trained into the service of these practices. The practice of the precepts gives rise to perfect wisdom, and perfect wisdom gives rise to the precepts. We continue effortlessly and

spontaneously to receive and practice these precepts in perfect wisdom. In this way, we realize Yunmen's appropriate response.

Infusing Our Practice of Ethics with Generosity

The spirit of giving pervades the language of the precepts. They are *given* to an aspirant and they are *received* from a preceptor in a lineage descended from Shakyamuni Buddha.

Bodhisattva precepts are about practicing uprightness without identifying with it or possessing it. If we get involved in the "virtue business," it is best to be drawn into it so completely that we are its servants, rather than masters or possessors of it. When virtue owns us, we don't have to remember it, because we have given ourselves to it. It is more enlightened to let virtue take over our lives, rather than for us to try to take over the virtue business. Perhaps we have harassed ourselves to be upright in the past, but if we devote ourselves to virtue thoroughly, so that it takes over, we can be good servants of it. Then there will be no need to pressure or harass ourselves. Our ancestor Dongshan, the founder of Soto Zen in China, had the dharma name Liangjie, which can be translated as "Good Servant."[11]

Sometimes it is difficult for people to find a generous way to practice the precepts. They may feel that they have to rigidly attach to the precepts so they won't violate them. For instance, they might think they must strongly grasp the precept of not killing because otherwise they might kill. They may try to control their behavior, and in doing so they might miss the meaning of the precept. This precept is not about preventing killing; it is about realizing the awakened mind. When we understand the precept of not killing, there is no need to attach to it. Even when we realize these bodhisattva precepts, the world where there is killing does not evaporate. When we wake up to the precepts of the buddhas, we realize great compassion that we then demonstrate in the ordinary world of birth and death. Rigid attachment to ethical precepts may promote killing.

When we receive these precepts as a gift, say “thank you,” and generously give them to others through our actions of body, speech, and mind, we are more likely to realize them. Forgetting that the precepts were given to us may hinder us from practicing them generously. How wonderful for these precepts to be given to us so they can practice themselves through us and we can give them away. How wonderful that we can be deeply devoted *and* unattached to them.

Bringing Ethics to Our Generosity

Giving our attention to what we do is a way of being both ethical and generous. When we give a gift, if we want it to function fully as a gift, we have to pay attention to the way we give it. For example, I could toss a heavy chunk of gold to someone and think it was great to give them such a big gift. But if it is a big piece of gold and I just toss it, I could hurt the recipient.

Giving a big gift might be so intense that we can barely look at the person we are giving it to. We might cry, or the recipient might be so moved by the gift that we can hardly stand to see their gratitude. Sometimes we can’t bear to witness the consequences, and so we look away, but witnessing is essential to ethical giving.

We have a responsibility to follow through with our giving, to see how the receiver is receiving our gift. Looking away is an ethical mistake. Part of being undisciplined in our ethics is thinking we don’t have to pay attention, but looking is part of the intimacy of giving. In the practice of the bodhisattva way, big gifts require ethical precision and ethical follow-through, and so do little ones.

One of the most important stories in my life concerns a time when my youngest daughter came back from college for the summer. She told us she had the intention of getting a job, but she had trouble following through. Day after day, week after week went by, but still no job. As we approached the end of the summer, I was planning to go away into the mountains to lead a three-month practice period (an intensive period of residential meditation practice), and my wife

—the mother of this grown, capable woman who was our daughter—said, “Do not leave her with me if she’s unemployed.” We agreed that we would talk to her together and that we would tell her, “If you don’t get a job in the next week, we want you to move out.” She agreed to meet with us, and as we started the conversation, my wife said, “I changed my mind. I don’t support this idea anymore.” So I said, “Okay. Your mother changed her mind, so now I want to tell you that your father, whose mind hasn’t changed, still wants you to move out of the house if you don’t get a job in the next week.”

That was the gift I gave her. When I gave it to her, I looked into her eyes, and I kept steadily and lovingly looking into her eyes until I finished this difficult message. I was not trying to control her. I was making a request of her, and I didn’t know how she would respond. I looked at her even though I do not like seeing the look on my daughter’s face when I am giving her a gift that I think might not please her. I wanted to give this great gift of love from her father, who thought she was in an unwholesome situation and wanted her to follow through with her intention to get a job. In fact, she looked like she did not like what was being said. It was really difficult to stay present, but fortunately, I managed to stay right with her as I delivered the message, and she also was able to be present and not look away as she received it.

If we deliver a message like this one, and we don’t pay attention when we give it, we won’t see how the recipient receives our gift. They may freak out and drop it. When we are present and deliver the gift carefully, we can notice how it is received. If we start to deliver it, and we notice that the recipient is having difficulty receiving it, perhaps because it’s too heavy, we can hold it *together* with them, to help them receive it fully.

If my daughter’s face had indicated that she was unable to be present and receive my message, my mind might have changed. As I was delivering this message, I stayed right there with her and I watched her face to see how she was receiving it. As it happened, even though she didn’t seem to be pleased by the message, she

received it quite well. That is to say, she was present when she received it, and she didn't turn away.

If she hadn't gotten a job by the end of the week, I don't know what we would have done. That would have been another discussion, and we would have gone on from there. It would have been another opportunity to practice the bodhisattva precepts.

But we didn't get to the end of the week. The next morning, she asked me if I could give her a ride to San Francisco. We went to San Francisco together, and I swam in the Bay while she went looking for a job. After my swim, when I came out of the locker room, she was sitting outside waiting for me. She had gotten a job. It had taken her about an hour to do it. She was, and is, a beautiful, energetic, compassionate, intelligent person, and when she wants to do something, it gets done. I imagine that when she met a prospective employer and said, "I want to work here," the employer said, "Well, yeah. You are welcome to work here." So that was that.

In this conversation with my daughter, I was not trying to please her. I was giving her a request from her father. I was not trying to control her. I watched her carefully, looking into her eyes when I gave her the request. In return, she gave me gifts I wasn't expecting and surprised me in a wonderful way.

The essence of this story, and what made it so important for me, was our meeting face-to-face. The bodhisattva precepts are actualized in being present and not turning away from the intensity of meeting the face of the other. This changed my relationship with my daughter, and it changed my relationship with everybody.

When we wish to give a gift, it is often a good idea to find out first if the other person would like to receive it. For example if we wish to offer some help or assistance, we might ask, "May I help you?" Ever since my granddaughter was two or three years old, when I saw that she was having difficulty accomplishing some task, like opening a bottle or a package, I would often ask her if she would like help. I have done this many times, and she almost always says, "No" and continues to try to do it herself. After struggling for a while, she often

says, “I need help here.” But still I say, “Would you like me to help you?” And she says, “Yes.”

Another time I was walking down the streets of San Francisco and came upon a man lying on the sidewalk. I knelt down and asked him if he needed any assistance. He said, “No I’m fine, but thanks for asking.”

We go through this ritual of careful offering and receiving of assistance over and over again. This is allowing ethics to infuse our practice of generosity.

Being Upright and Careful with All of Our Actions

The practice of ethics is being conscientious with the three kinds of action: actions of speech, actions of body, and actions of thought. For our actions to be upright, it is appropriate to be attentive and careful about how we think. It is important to be mindful that dreams and stories appear in consciousness and that we might be tempted to grasp them as reality. Mindfulness of the dreamlike quality of our thinking and of our tendency to grasp our dreams as real is essential for the humble practice of ethics.

Being Upright in Speech

Bodhisattvas vow to be attentive and careful when they speak. They are careful when they speak about others. They don’t disparage people or beings, including themselves, for lacking a certain skill or ability or for having a certain opinion. Bodhisattvas are mindful of how they speak about people. They aspire to not disparage others who hold different political views because bodhisattvas see all beings as being deserving of appreciation and respect. We have to be generous and careful in the way we relate to our imagination and dreams and our stories about people when we speak about them.

Being Upright in Physical Actions

I aspire to remember that I want to be kind with whatever comes. In order to fully realize generosity, I want to be careful of how I pick things up and put them down; my intention is not to control them but to enact a practice of mindfulness.

The physical posture of being upright helps to remind me of all the other ethical practices. There may not always be another person around to give us feedback on our ethical practice, but our bodies are always there. In the early days at San Francisco Zen Center, when we were learning how to practice together intensely, some of my friends were trying to control their bodies and minds, and this made their practice too difficult. By attempting to control themselves, they made Zen practice into something that they dreaded. They sat too long, in too much pain, and they were not kind to themselves. After a while, they thought, "Zen is too hard," and they quit.

If we take on the discipline of being upright with our posture and commit to that, we can notice when we are not upright, and we can remember to try again. If we wish to be upright in our posture, and we try to do that, and we also try to be kind as we do it, this is an ethical exercise. When we notice difficult guests such as fear, anger, or illness in our bodies, we have an opportunity to receive them with care and attention. When these difficult guests come, we can try to be upright with them.

I have found that attempting to control my body drains my energy for practice. I have learned from experience that I have to find a comfortable and kind way to sit upright if I am going to be consistent and energetic in my practice.

I spend quite a few hours sitting—in the meditation hall (*zendo*), in the interview room where I meet students individually, and in other situations of daily life. These days, I don't push myself much beyond my patience. I try to sit up straight, to lift up my ribcage and lengthen my body. I don't wish to force myself to be upright, but I do wish to *be* upright. However, I have noticed that I can slip from wishing into forcing. I knew how to be forceful before I started practicing meditation, and I have many stories about my attempts to control my body and seeing how sad and disrespectful that is. Even

though I still do that a little in the interview room, mostly I try to find a way to sit that is not too painful. I don't want others to be harmed by my impatience with my life. I regret my attempts to control myself, and I especially regret my attempts to control other humans and nonhumans.

Buddhas Do Not Attempt to Control Living Beings

Bodhisattvas vow to benefit and liberate all beings, and they renounce trying to control anyone, including themselves. Buddhas do not try to control unenlightened people into enlightenment. When buddhas were bodhisattvas, they learned to be devoted to beings; they also learned how to be generous, vigilant, and careful in all relationships. They may have tried to control beings many, many times before they understood that trying to control beings is antithetical to the practice of giving and is a big mistake. Trying to control living beings is not appropriate to awakening.

Bodhisattvas learn about the mistake of confusing giving with controlling when they pay attention to the ethical shortcomings in their giving. They learn to give gifts of support and even allow people to reject their gifts. In this way, they are assisting people to wake up. The wonderful generosity of enlightening beings, bodhisattvas who are beings just like us, is matured when it is joined to ethical discipline. The practices of generosity and ethics help us and others begin to understand our true relationship, our true nature. When we feel distance from somebody, practicing generosity in an ethical way helps to free us of that sense of distance. Likewise, the practice of generosity helps us to kindly notice, confess and repent, and return anew to our intention when we make mistakes.

When we welcome a difficult guest, such as fear, confusion, depression, illness, or an impulse to control ourselves or other beings, it is helpful to be careful and respectful of the guest. When we have generously welcomed challenging guests such as these into our house, we need to be very careful. This kind of carefulness is ethics. In this teaching, there is no end to the process of awakening and no

final damnation. There are only temporary damnations. These bodhisattva practices are the way we wish to engage in our lives, and yet we often forget. When we recognize our lack of practice, we have the opportunity to confess and repent and reaffirm our intentions so that our lapse becomes a part of the process of learning the true dharma.

Practicing generosity encourages us to welcome and be gracious with our lives and with our practice. Ethics encourages us to be upright and careful in all of our actions, including our generosity. The next practice, patience, rests on the foundation of generosity and ethics. Patience encourages us to develop the ability to be present in our practice of giving and ethics with each situation in each moment. Working in this way is working for the welfare of beings.

Buddha-Nature Precepts

Bodhisattva precepts are buddha-nature precepts.[12] That is to say, they are buddha-making precepts. The *Mahayana Parinirvana Sutra* says, "All living beings have buddha nature."[13] Therefore these precepts are for us. Buddha nature is a relationship; it is not a thing in and of itself. It is a relationship of our original purity with our temporary and adventitious impurity.

These precepts are concerned with realizing perfect awakening. They show us the true meaning of doing all good and refraining from all evil. They are not for eliminating impurity but for realizing the non-duality of purity and impurity in buddhahood. Understanding buddha nature is seeing that it encompasses defilement as well as purity. As we said in the introductory chapter, buddha nature is the pure fruit of enlightenment immersed in the muddy water of delusion. The altruistic aspiration for great awakening (bodhicitta) comes forth from within this intimate relationship.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra,* in a chapter titled "The Manifestation of the Tathagata," the Buddha says, "Now I see that all sentient beings fully possess the wisdom and virtues of the buddhas [their purity]. It

is only because of misconceptions and attachments [their impurity], they do not realize it."[14] The Buddha saw the need to teach the bodhisattva precepts to people who do not realize that their original nature is pure. The Buddha also saw that he needed to teach beings how to practice with their misconceptions and attachments so that impurities would drop away. He transmitted the buddha-nature precepts for these purposes.

These buddha-nature precepts are not a self-improvement project. They are for self-realization. Bodhisattvas are in the process of realizing their pure and perfect original nature wherein they wake up from dreams of self-improvement. Buddhas are not intending to improve sentient beings whose original nature is pure. Their deep intention is to help sentient beings to actualize their original nature and thus realize buddhahood.

One of the most often-repeated statements by Suzuki Roshi is, "You are already perfect just as you are. And you need some improvement." I would like to turn the teacher's words slightly and say that we are already perfect just as we are, and we may need some improvement in order to see that.

Case 56 in the *Book of Serenity* tells a story called "Spiritual Uncle Mi and the Rabbit."

> As Dongshan and his spiritual Uncle Mi were walking along, they saw a white rabbit run by in front of them.
>
> Mi said, "Swift!"
>
> Dongshan said, "How!"
>
> Mi said, "It's like a commoner being made a prime minister."
>
> Dongshan said, "Such a venerable old person still says such words!?"
>
> Mi said, "Then what about you?"
>
> Dongshan said, "Generations of nobility, temporarily fallen into poverty."[15]

When Uncle Mi saw the rabbit run in front of them, he said, “Swift!” He thought that it was like a commoner suddenly being made a prime minister. That is to say, it is just like an ordinary person suddenly becoming buddha. However, Dongshan understood that the ordinary person has fully possessed the wisdom and virtue of the buddhas for generations and is only temporarily fallen into the poverty of misconceptions and attachments. Dongshan’s comment, “Generations of nobility, temporarily fallen into poverty,” alludes to a story told in chapter 4 of the *Lotus Sutra* about a child from a wealthy family who wandered away from home and was lost for many years.[16]

Bodhisattvas wish to awaken to the non-duality of our original wealth of wisdom and our temporary fall into the poverty of delusion. The “Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi” says, “It is not within the reach of feeling or discrimination. How could it admit of consideration in thought?”[17] Uncle Mi had a hard time trying to understand this non-duality with his human intellect, so he offered an image of the fast-moving rabbit as a metaphor for a rapid, dualistic transition from delusion to enlightenment. His young friend, Dongshan, pointed to their original non-duality. Indeed, this non-duality is *not* within reach of human feeling or discrimination.

It might be really irritating when we cannot understand these profound teachings with our human intellect, so we might have difficulty accepting them. And, what do we do with this irritation? I pray that we say, “Thank you very much. I have no complaint, whatsoever!” Irritation is an opportunity to respond by expressing buddhahood through the practice of the bodhisattva precept of generosity.

When irritation comes we may not be able to respond with “thank you very much.” Sometimes when things happen to us, we may think, “It is too difficult; this is not fair; I don’t want to deal with this; it’s not worth my time; this is not my job.” Each of us has our own list of complaints. This string of complaints offers various expressions of resistance to embracing and sustaining all beings. Irritation is also a being, and we may sometimes resist meeting it

with compassion. Not understanding is a being too, and we sometimes resist embracing that. But, we can take care of these beings. We can compassionately care for our not understanding and for our irritation about the limits of our understanding. These feelings of irritation are more opportunities for us to express buddhahood.

The Four Universal Vows

> Beings are numberless; I vow to save them.
> Afflictions 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 the Four Great Vows is, "Beings are numberless; I vow to save them." This is not saying that *I* will save them. The understanding of our intimate relationship with all sentient beings—our buddha nature—is what saves all sentient beings, including ourselves. This kind of knowing and illuminating liberates us from the illusion that other people are separate from us. Our good friends, the buddhas and great bodhisattvas, transmit this teaching to us.

The second of the great vows is often stated as, "Afflictions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them." I would restate this vow as, "Afflictions are inexhaustible. I vow to exhaust them." The word *affliction* includes greed, hate, delusion, and all other worldly passions. To exhaust them does not mean to get rid of them. It means go all the way to the end of them. At the end of affliction is no affliction. We realize the end of afflictions by wholeheartedly practicing the perfections with them. We explore them in a generous, careful, and patient way so that we can come to the end of them.

In the "Genjokoan," our great ancestor Eihei Dogen tells us that if we try to reach the end of an element without moving in it we will not be able to reach the end.[18] The same applies to the element of affliction. We will reach the end of affliction by moving in it

exhaustively. If we say afflictions are inexhaustible and vow to end them, we may miss the paradox in the vow, which is that we are vowing to exhaust the inexhaustible. Vowing to end them sounds like they are exhaustible, and we are going to get rid of them. But they are not exhaustible, and we can't get rid of them. Inexhaustible afflictions do not exhaust themselves. They are exhausted by our practice of the perfections. Bodhisattvas vow to exhaust them. We exhaust afflictions by thoroughly engaging them with great compassion.

The perfection of ethics is the realization of buddhahood. These bodhisattva ethical disciplines are about transcending right and wrong by compassionately engaging with right and wrong. Being a good person is wonderful. These precepts are about being a good buddha. This practice requires diligence and wholesomeness. In order to exhaust affliction, we need to be called to account—confessing, repenting in conversation with others, and verifying the truth of the precepts. All of this activity occurs within the realm of feeling and discrimination, but when we practice this thoroughly afflictions are exhausted. And in that exhaustion we come to the end of affliction. We see and understand buddha nature.

The Zen Precept of Stillness and Silence

These buddha-nature precepts may be summarized as one precept of stillness and silence. Therefore I, together with our buddha ancestors, pray that:

The great assembly will receive the precept of stillness and silence,
Will remember the precept of stillness and silence,
Will practice the precept of stillness and silence,
And will transmit the precept of stillness and silence in all actions of daily life,
In all actions of body, speech, and mind.

THE THIRD HEROIC PRACTICE

THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE
Radiant Presence

Turning away and touching are both wrong.
For it is a like a massive fire.
—"Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi"

BUDDHAS ARE SITTING IN THE MIDST of fierce flames, turning the wheel of dharma. A ring of fire surrounds every buddha's meditation seat. Buddhas sit at the center of the suffering of all beings, and they have developed the capacity to be open to boundless suffering. This capacity is the perfection of patience. These flames give off heat and light. They represent both the burning heat of suffering and the opportunity for spiritual illumination. We too sit at the center of all flames of suffering. The inexhaustible expressions of impatience are included in the flames of suffering, in the endless ways of turning away or touching the flames. Turning away, we freeze; touching, we burn.

Impatience takes many forms, including anger, hate, rage, contempt, aggression, disgust, nausea, rejection, aversion, ill will, and violence. The third heroic practice offers us the opportunity to develop the capacity of the buddhas and bodhisattvas to be open and to listen to all the cries of the world. This is how we are practicing together with all buddhas and how they are practicing together with us.

Patience involves learning to be present and upright with all our experiences without turning away or touching. It is our capacity to accept how things really are, and it is necessary for buddha's

wisdom. Developing the capacity to tolerate relative truths warms us up to tolerate ultimate truth.

In our ordinary experience we are challenged with all kinds of hardships, pains, and insults. These challenges offer us many opportunities to practice patience moment by moment. This is the experience we call *samsara*. It is the world of cyclic birth and death, which is suffering. The experience of samsara lives together with another experience called *nirvana,* which is peace and freedom. In nirvana there is no birth and no death. In the mature and wholehearted practice of patience in the midst of birth and death, we realize that birth and death and nirvana are one and the same.

Perfecting Patience in the Ocean of Living Beings

As bodhisattvas, we live our life by vows and acts of compassion in the ocean of living beings. In this way, bodhisattvas walk the path of the buddhas. Bodhisattvas learn to be patient and present with the pleasure they may feel when they appear to be skillful or when they get something they think they want. Bodhisattvas also learn to be patient and present with the pain that comes when they are unskillful or when they get something they don't think they want. To live our lives on the path of the buddhas, we have to let go of our fears of personal suffering and of not being in control of our lives. Otherwise, fear will undermine the bodhisattva life of vow and compassionate action. Fear doesn't stop us completely, but sometimes it stops us temporarily. We sometimes slip away from acts of compassion into acts that are not generous, ethical, or patient because fear distracts us from our vow to be compassionate.

It is possible to become so concentrated that we enter into an excellent, pleasant place where there is no painful sensation. Buddhist sutras describe certain heavens and states of meditative attainment where there is no discomfort. It is hard to train in patience in those blissful states. Fortunately or unfortunately, those states do not last. If we haven't trained in forbearance, when we leave those pleasant states and experience pain or insult we can easily lose

patience; we might become violent, aggressive, harsh, or just plain crabby.

In the first paramita, the practice of giving, we focus on welcoming what comes to us and making our practice a gift. In the second paramita, the practice of ethics, we give our attention to being upright and ethical in our actions of body, speech, and mind. These two practices support us now in the practice of becoming patient with the imperfections and discomforts that we experience in our life, including frustration at our own lack of skillfulness. Practicing patience, in turn, deepens our ability to generously offer others the gift of fearlessness.

When we carefully pay attention to our actions of body, speech, and mind through the practice of ethics, we begin to see whether we are patient or not. In one of my earlier books, *Being Upright,* I wrote this in a discussion about the precept of not harboring ill will: "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. When you practice patience, the path of harmful anger is blocked. You can face pain and relax and breathe with it."[1]

Patience is being present with our experience. It's not turning away or touching. When we can be present with heat and cold, tiredness and sleepiness, or with people attacking us, we develop our capacity to also be present with the emptiness of phenomena. If we are patient, we don't move toward emptiness, and we don't turn away from it. We don't try to control ourselves to prevent turning toward or turning away from anything. This is the activity of generosity functioning within patience. Patience, in turn, protects our generous heart when insults and afflictions come upon us.

Sometimes people confuse patience with self-control. Someone told me that when he feels something unpleasant, he wants to try to control his reaction to it. Sometimes he thinks he is protecting others from his anger in that moment. However, I do not recommend attempting to control ourselves or others. If we think it is a good idea to control ourselves, we may also think it would be a good idea to try

to control others. This is not the practice of patience. I recommend instead that, when we find ourselves attempting to control our feelings of fear, anger, or frustration, we remember our wish to be generous, ethical, and patient in our dealings with ourselves and with others. Instead of attempting to control ourselves or others, we return to our aspiration to express an appropriate and compassionate response. Trying to control people and situations is stressful and draining. Being aware of our energy level may help us to notice when our care slips into trying to control. Patient compassion is not draining.

The Three Aspects of Patience

Buddhas teach that patience has three aspects: patience with hardship, patience with harm or insults from sentient beings, and patience with the non-arising of phenomena.

PATIENCE WITH HARDSHIP

Sometimes it is hard to be upright in the present, in the place where we are, without leaning a little bit away from this place, and without leaning a little bit into thoughts about the past or dreams about the future. When pain comes, sometimes we think, "I can't take this any longer" or "How long is this going to go on?" When our lives, our relationships, or our jobs seem boring, we often go looking for something more interesting. We try to go away from the present moment when hardship comes in the form of pain or boredom.

Even when we are in pleasant situations, we sometimes lean into imagining pleasure in the future and miss our life in the present. When my daughter was a little girl, she had a friend whose parents were separated. This friend, also a little girl, traveled from Oakland to Boston and Boston to Oakland to be with each of her parents. She had trouble with the hardship of her parents being separated. She said, "When I am with my dad and I'm going to go back to my mom, I am so excited to see my mom that I don't pay attention to my dad.

And when I'm with my mom and I'm going to go see my dad, I get so excited about seeing my dad that I don't pay attention to my mom." She understood the sadness of loving her dad and loving her mom and not being fully with either one of them, and she articulated this so well.

This little girl described how it felt by telling another story. She imagined really wanting a Cabbage Patch doll for Christmas, and actually receiving a Cabbage Patch doll. But then somehow the doll gets mixed in with wrapping paper and the whole bundle gets thrown out. Looking for the doll, she can't find it. Where's the doll? Maybe it got thrown out with the wrapping paper! So she runs down to the garbage and sees the garbage truck driving away with the Cabbage Patch doll on the roof of the truck. She said that when they find really nice stuff in the garbage, sometimes they put it on the roof of the garbage truck. So she imagined running outside and seeing the thing that she treasured being taken away because she wasn't really present when she received it. She was so excited opening her presents that she buried the Cabbage Patch doll in all the wrappings, and so she lost it. This little girl could see that what she was doing with her parents was just like that. She actually came up with that example.

It is said that we cannot make a buddha without patience, and we cannot fully practice patience without encountering suffering. Suffering is required to make a buddha. But when we are in pain, we can practice with the smallest possible dose of it. There is a place for pain medication, and there is a friendly way to deal with pain without trying to kill it, control it, or distract ourselves from it. Some of us might say, "I will never be able to do that," which is a way of saying we think that maybe we can't become a buddha. It is true that if we cannot become that patient, we cannot become a buddha. But the buddhas' teachings say that if we practice this way, and keep on practicing, we will become so patient that eventually we will be able to stand anything without feeling ill will toward anybody. If we can be that patient, we can become buddha. In the meantime, we can practice patience and be on the path to buddhahood.

In the past, during interviews with students, I have sat so long that I have gone beyond my capacity for patience with discomfort. My lack of patience with my own physical pain has sometimes fostered a lack of patience with others. I don't push myself beyond my endurance anymore, and that helps me be more patient with others.

Patience matures and is perfected by being present with our discomfort in the smallest units of time and space. It is helpful when we try to be present and gracious in each moment of pain, to be with the most present part of the present—that is, to be in the smallest unit of "now." To be in the present with pain, and to be focused and undistracted in that moment, *is* patience. We can be really tolerant of pain that way. Through the practice of patience, we can bring our warm heart to each present moment. We can welcome pain and pleasure and insult and praise in each moment.

It is sad when we don't fully participate in our life. When we feel how sad that is, that sadness is ethics working in us. It's repentance. This kind of regret encourages us to be more attentive and to return to the practice of patience. When we are trying to generously give ourselves, we can check to see whether we are present. And if we are not present, we may notice that we feel sorrow. Our sorrow says, "At the next meeting, I want to give myself and be fully present." If we are not present next time, again we feel sorrow. And again, we say, "I wish to be present." Eventually, when we train in patience, we learn to sit in our seat right in the middle of our life.

PATIENCE WITH HARM OR INSULT FROM SENTIENT BEINGS

This is an old story from the *Jataka Tales,* which are stories told about the Buddha-to-be during his many past lives on the long path to buddhahood. In this story, the Buddha-to-be was called *Kshantivadin*. *Kshanti* is a Sanskrit word for patience. The etymology of the word refers to *capacity*—having capacity, for example, for pain. *Kshantivadin* means someone who is on the path of patience.

One day a king came with a large retinue into the forest where the yogi Kshantivadin lived, and the monarch and his courtiers had a party there. After the party, the king fell asleep, and his concubines wandered off. They discovered Kshantivadin sitting in a forest glade, and the yogi gave them some teachings about the practice of patience. As he did that, he was also patient with the pleasure of the situation and patient with the beautiful ladies.

When the king awoke, he found the yogi with his concubines, and he felt that Kshantivadin had robbed him. The king became very angry. The concubines begged him, "Please, don't be angry with this yogi. We thought you were asleep and didn't need us." But the king did not listen to them, and he said to Kshantivadin, "What's your practice, false yogi?" The yogi replied, "My practice is patience." The king said, "Oh yeah?" and chopped off Kshantivadin's hands. Then the king said, "*Now* what is your practice?" Again Kshantivadin responded by saying, "My practice is patience." Then Kshantivadin provoked the king a little by adding, "You are trying to test my patience but you don't know where to find it." The king demanded, "Where is it?" The yogi said, "It's deep within me." So the king continued to cut him. Each time, he said, "What's your practice now?" And the yogi replied calmly, "My practice is patience, but you do not know where my patience lies." Finally the king stormed, "Where does your patience lie?" Kshantivadin said, "Deep within my heart." Then the king kicked him and walked away.[2]

At the time of this story in India, yogis were respected as persons who had great power. The king's general was afraid that the yogi would use his power to hurt the king, so the general went to the yogi and begged him, "It's all right if you get angry at the king, but please, do not destroy him." Kshantivadin replied, "I am not angry. I am not going to hurt him. I only wish the king well." In the story, Kshantivadin had no ill will for the king who mistreated him. Kshantivadin could have said, "I am not a false yogi. I am not a false practitioner of patience. I am practicing patience, and that is why I do not have ill will toward you or toward the king. No matter what is done to me, I will not have ill will toward anybody." In this story,

Kshantivadin is amazingly, super-humanly, super-divinely patient with insult and physical assault. He did not feel ill will toward the one who administered many insults and abuses. Kshantivadin was able to receive these difficult gifts from the king and to be present with the situation.

I sometimes wonder if somebody cut me up whether I would be able to be patient and generous with that person. We may wonder if we want to be as patient as Kshantivadin was. Being a grandparent is nice, because it's possible to imagine that if one of your grandchildren accidentally chopped off your fingers, you might be patient and not have ill will toward them. Sometimes, people we love and who also love us might do something that hurts us, physically or emotionally. We might be patient with them and not have any ill will toward them, even as we ask them to stop hurting us.

In the chapter on giving, I told a story of offering my grandson a boundary when he pinched me. The boundary was my gift to him, but it was also part of my practice of patience. Because I was practicing patience with my own discomfort at that time, my asking him to stop was a gift to him. Otherwise, it would most likely have been an attempt to control him. When we are patient with our own pain, we are better able give a boundary or say "no" as a gift, rather than saying "no" out of reactivity or fear.

We may experience insult and disapproval physically in a particular part of our body. When we feel pain in a specific place in our body, we can learn to be present with that sensation. I find that the sensation of pain in my body is a being that is calling for compassionate presence. When I give my compassionate presence to that being who is calling for it there is healing and peace with the pain. We can do this with many different types of pain in different parts of our body. When we do, we are taking care of the pain-filled being in us who is calling for patience.

One of the stories that drew me to Zen was about how one of our Zen ancestors responded to both insult and praise. In this story, Hakuin Zenji was falsely accused of impregnating a young girl who lived in the village near his hermitage. When her parents and the

villagers came to accuse him, he said merely, “Is that so?” When the baby was born, Hakuin received the infant and cared for the child with the help of a wet nurse. Sometime later, the girl confessed to her parents that a village boy was the father of her child. Those who had accused him earlier came then to reclaim the child and to praise Hakuin. In response to their praise, he simply said, again, “Is that so?”[3]

Hakuin was patient when they blamed him, and he was patient when they praised him. The story does not say that he did not care that they blamed or praised him. It also does not say that he didn’t feel anything. If it said that he didn’t feel anything, it would make the story much less interesting to me. In this story, Hakuin Zenji was patient with others, he was patient with his feelings when he was blamed, and he was patient with his feelings when he was praised.

Big insults can sometimes be easier to welcome than little ones. Sometimes people find it quite natural to be patient and accepting of the big shocks that come to their lives because they see that trying to control those situations is useless. Sometimes it’s easier to be present with huge shocks because we can see that complaining is a distraction from being patient with our pain. We may be able to say, “I’ve been practicing in preparation for this big one my whole life and here it is. I’m ready to meet this.”

But when little insults come, we may think being patient is not necessary and that complaining is appropriate and will get us what we want. I might say, “I don’t need this. This is ridiculous.” In a way, this is insulting the insult. Sometimes the insults where we forget our practice of patience are very small. For example, if we call a helpline and think that the person who answers should be helpful and we also think that they are not, we may feel justified in being impatient and rude to them. Part of what makes this a difficult situation is that we had an expectation. Being patient with small insults and frustrations in our relationships is at the heart of the practice of patience. In order to have continuity in our practice, we need to be ready to meet both the big and the small frustrations with patience.

Patience with the Non-Arising of Phenomena

Practicing patience with the suffering that arises from hardship and insult is in itself of great benefit to oneself and others. Perhaps its greatest benefit is that it makes us ready for the third kind of patience. It is hard to open to all these forms of suffering in the world of birth and death, but it is even more difficult to open to the ultimate truth of all things.

The *Great Perfect Wisdom Heart Sutra* says, "All phenomena are marked by emptiness. They neither arise nor cease." Seeing that they neither arise nor cease is seeing how all phenomena are marked by emptiness. Patient acceptance of the non-arising and non-ceasing of phenomena is a capacity of mature bodhisattvas and buddhas. It is the capacity to open to the ultimate truth of emptiness.

How can we open to the revelation of the ultimate truth of emptiness? It is by opening to the truth of our intimate relationship with all beings. The *Lotus Sutra* says in chapter 2 that only a buddha together with a buddha can fully realize the truth of all things. This intimate face-to-face transmission of buddha together with buddha is possible when bodhisattvas develop the capacity to be patient with intimacy. Patient acceptance of ultimate truth is the same as patient acceptance of the intimacy of all things.

Being Patient with Intimacy

A friend told me that, one morning as I walked by, I joined my palms and bowed to her. She bowed in return, and then she said, "Good morning." As she spoke she noticed that she looked away. She noticed that, as she started to speak, she lost her presence. We can get so excited about the intimacy of saying good morning to our friend that we forget to pay attention during the meeting. Speaking requires an intense form of presence because we have to pay attention to ourselves, to the other person, and also to the act of speaking.

We often have trouble bearing the intensity of intimacy. There are physical hardships, like heat and cold, and illness. There is also the difficulty of the pain we feel for others' suffering. Then there is the hardship of being intimate without turning away or touching. There is the difficulty of being upright in the face of gain or loss, approval or disapproval, as we enter into the deep cave of intimacy.

It's often hard to be present when we're close to realizing intimacy in our relationships. We may be concerned with whether others approve of us or not. In such a situation, we need to take care of our wish for approval so that we don't lean away from the center of the experience of intimacy. As we develop our ability to be present with the challenges of actualizing intimacy, we increase our ability to wholeheartedly and generously welcome our lives, and we are able to be more fully ourselves. Then, we are also able to let go of ourselves and offer the gift of fearlessness to others so that they too can be fully themselves. In this way, patience enhances our generosity.

Once I was on a trip with Suzuki Roshi when he became very sick. He was leading a sesshin in another city, but he experienced really strong pain, and he couldn't stay. He had to go to the place where we were staying to lie down. He asked me to stay and finish the retreat for him. When the sesshin was over, we got on an airplane to return to San Francisco. I was given the seat next to him. That was my seat. He was sitting in his seat, and it seemed to me that he was doing a pretty good job of sitting on his seat in the midst of all his pain. The seat I was given was right next to him, but I resisted just sitting in my place. I noticed that I was thinking of being somewhere else rather than sitting there next to my suffering teacher. I knew I should sit there and be where I was. I was his attendant, after all, and my responsibility was to be there for him.

Suzuki Roshi was not insulting me. It was just hard for me to be present with his pain. It's like taking care of a sick baby. The baby isn't insulting us, but it's often hard and painful to be with a baby's suffering.

On that flight back to San Francisco, I watched my mind get ahead of itself and behind itself. I could see my mind go all over the place. I

was embarrassed at how silly I was. I wanted to be with my teacher, and of all the students in the world, I was the one who got to sit next to him at that moment on that plane. But look at the student he got! All the others, who may have been able to sit in the seat next to him, were not there. It was me, the person who couldn't stand the discomfort of being near his pain, who was there.

When you're sitting next to your dear teacher, what do you do? Do you tell jokes? Do you say, "How are ya feeling?" Are you silent? Do you talk? Do you sing a song? I didn't think there was anything I could do to help him other than being fully there. I had been around him for a while. He had already given me the teaching that the best way to help him was to sit in my seat. I did usually sit in my seat, and because I did he gave me opportunities to sit near him. I was there because usually I sat in my seat. And he might have thought, "Oh, he sits in his seat so he would be a good person to be my attendant. He probably could stand the intensity of being with me." So when his pain got turned up, I was embarrassed that I was missing this great opportunity to be with him. From then on, I really gave myself to trying to not run away from the opportunity of being where I was when he was nearby.

Another time at Tassajara, a visiting priest, who had been the chanting master of the great Eiheiji monastery,[4] came to Tassajara to teach us chanting. As I was about to leave San Francisco for the monastery, Suzuki Roshi said to me, "While you're at Tassajara I want you to learn chanting from him." And so, I studied chanting with him while he was at Tassajara.

After I had trained in chanting with this priest during a three-month practice period, Suzuki Roshi came to Tassajara and asked me to come to his room and chant for him so that he could see what this teacher had taught me. I was happy that he asked me to do so. I had come to Zen Center to be with him and to show him my practice, and now he was giving me an opportunity to be with him to do just that. So I chanted, and he listened. Then he gave me some feedback on the chanting. I chanted, he watched, and I wanted to walk out of the room. I had his full attention, and I didn't exactly want to run out of

the room, but I did want to walk out. He wasn't beating me up or criticizing me. He was just intimately suggesting changes in the way I breathed and the way I moved my tongue and lips and throat and jaw. He was offering minute adjustments for my body and mind. He was being intimate with me, which is why I was at Tassajara in the first place. And I wanted to walk out. I said, "I don't want to take any more of your time, Roshi." And he said, "It's okay. You can stay." I don't know if it was one or two or three times, but I kept trying to get out of the room. At the time, I didn't confess to him, "Roshi, I'm trying to get away from you. It's so ridiculous. I learned this chanting so that you could work with me on it. And here I am, and here you are working with me, and I don't want this intimacy. And at the same time, I do."

Sometimes we want to get away from the center of our life because being fully present there is so intimate and intense, and we feel our vulnerability. At the center of our life, we are not in control, and we are being adjusted by everything. When Suzuki Roshi was adjusting my chanting, I just said, "I don't want to take any more of your time." I didn't say, "I don't want you to give me any more of what I came here to receive. I can't stand the blessings that I'm receiving. They are too much." That's a little like saying, "I can't accept this blessing, because what would I have to give you in return? This is all too much."

When we resist intimacy by hesitating or being excited, and notice our hesitation or excitement, we find our way back to the center of intimacy. As we do this, we expand our capacity to be at the center of our life. This is how we engage with and plunge into the pivotal function of all buddhas.

One day I said to Suzuki Roshi, "Why do I never have any problems with you?" And he said, "You will someday." But he died before those problems arrived. I never had problems or anger with him because he died so soon.

Since ancient times, the work of intimacy has been at the heart of the Zen lineage. In the *Book of Serenity,* there is a story called, "Dongshan's 'Always Close.' "

A monk asked Dongshan, “Among the three buddha-bodies, which one does not fall into any category?” Dongshan said, “I am always close to this.”

Later a monk asked [Dongshan’s great disciple] Caoshan,

“What is the meaning of the late teacher’s saying, ‘I am always close to this’?” Caoshan said, “If you want my head, cut it off and take it.”

Sometime later, Zen master Baoning Yong commented on this wonderful story.

This closeness is heartrending if you search outside;
Why does ultimate familiarity seem like enmity?
From beginning to end, the whole face has no color or shape,
Still your head is asked for by Caoshan.[5]

All of us have opportunities to be frustrated and angry with our teachers or other people with whom we are intimate. Whenever we realize intimacy with anyone, they become our teacher. Even if we are frustrated and angry with them, our job is to be at the center of our frustration and anger. We might want to turn away from how we are feeling in this intimate relationship. We may like it or dislike it. We might be tempted to touch or turn away. We may get excited or hesitate. When we are in pain and afraid of more pain, intimate communion is still going on, but it’s hard to not resist both the pain and the intimacy. But when I touch or turn away from intimacy, I am not patiently taking care of what has been given.

Patience in Birth and Death

By being thoroughly patient and present in the midst of birth and death, the door of peace and ease opens. Practicing this way, we are on the threshold where samsara and nirvana meet and we awaken to

their non-duality. Another way to say this is that birth and death are pivoting with no birth and no death. Samsara and nirvana pivot on each other.

In Zen training temples, there is usually a thick wooden board suspended by ropes that is hit with a mallet to announce periods of formal meditation. A poem is usually written on the front of this board:

> Great is the matter of birth and death.
> Impermanence is swift.
> Be mindful and awaken to this!
> Don't waste time!

First of all, we are told that birth and death are a great matter. This is a serious statement. Then we are told to awaken to this. This grave situation of birth and death is a setup. When we are patient with this grave situation, we can wake up to its punch line, which is the radiant peace and bliss of nirvana. Those who are patient and sit at the center of birth and death are allowed to laugh.

The twelfth-century Japanese poet-monk Saigyo wrote:

> This leaky tumble-down grass hut
> Leaves openings for the moon.
> Now I gaze at it.
> All the while, it was reflected
> In the teardrops fallen on my sleeves.[6]

Those who sit patiently in their leaky tumbledown hut of birth and death are allowed to laugh. Accepting the seriousness of samsara is a setup for the peaceful smile of nirvana. When we sit upright and patient in the midst of birth and death without wallowing in its gravity and seriousness, we can laugh at ourselves for missing that nirvana was always right here.

To the extent that we are unwilling to be present and patient in the sufferings of birth and death, we are unable to understand that nirvana is here all the time. To the extent that we are able to fully accept the suffering of samsara, we are able to see that that is nirvana itself. In that place, we are free to laugh or cry.

Then there is a second setup in the poem written on the wooden board, which is the statement "Don't waste time." This too sounds serious, but its liberating punch line is that we cannot waste time. It takes most Zen students a long time to understand that time is really never wasted. "Wasting time" and "not wasting time" pivot on each other. If time were permanent, we could waste it, but it's not.

Zen students may have to hit that poem with the mallet many times before they realize its unwritten depths.

When I was chanting for Suzuki Roshi, I was afraid of what my teacher was seeing and thinking about me while I was chanting. I was tempted to get away from how I felt when he was attending to me so intimately. I was turning away from my fear and embarrassment. On the airplane I was impatient with the discomfort of sitting next to him, and I was impatient with not knowing how to help him. I felt that I was avoiding my responsibility to sit at my place. But, here is the punch line. I did *not* waste these opportunities. These precious opportunities were fully lived and are still alive. And I can share them with you. Telling these stories makes those events not a waste of time.

Even though we don't waste time, we may think we do. It is hard for us to sit patiently at our place in the center of our lives. Another way to say this is that it is hard for us to sit at our dharma position. By telling our stories of wasting time, again and again, they become a masterpiece of storytelling wherein we are always sitting at the creative center of our lives together with the buddhas and all beings.

Sometimes we wish to run away at the same time that we want to sit at the center of our lives. I have a friend who, when she was little girl, sometimes went to a playground that had a large, spinning wheel children could ride. They could run around it and jump on the wheel as it started spinning, and they usually sat on the

circumference of the wheel where it spun faster. Being a little girl who had a Zen practice in her future, she liked to sit at the center of the disk. She didn't have to fight to sit in that position. Maybe because she was just a little girl, everybody supported her to sit at the center. They seemed to be happy to sit around the periphery. As the wheel started spinning faster and faster, everybody eventually flew off except the little girl at the center. She was so fortunate to be supported to sit at the center. She just pivoted. She didn't resist sitting in the center. She lost the fun of flying off the wheel, and she lost the fun of the struggle to stay on the wheel as things started to spin, but it was fine with her to sit there in the middle. There were other times when she couldn't find the middle, or she couldn't stand to be in the middle. Sometimes, she resisted the middle, and hesitated to sit there. Being patient is learning to stay in the middle of the whirl of our life. No one is forcing us to do this, and everyone is giving us this opportunity.

The Patience of Buddhas

In the chapter on generosity, we discussed the gift of fearlessness, which encourages us to be patient and present even with situations that scare us. The pivotal activity of the buddhas occurs where we are. Buddha is like us and can only be buddha *as* us. If we are afraid, that is an unavoidable, necessary condition for buddha. It is our responsibility to neither turn away from nor touch wanting to run from fear. If I have already started to move away from sitting in the center of my life, I need to notice it, confess it, and then call upon all the practices of compassion to help me remain at the center with the pain and the fear. The paramitas are practices for compassionate bodhisattvas, and they help us live at the center where we can see the pivotal activity of all buddhas.

Practicing in this way, we can be at the place where everyone is supporting us and we are supporting everyone. This is the place where we actually are. In this way of being at the place where we are, there is a knowing that doesn't touch, turn away, or try to control.

There is an illumination, which doesn't face or oppose conditions. When you want to touch, don't touch the wanting to touch, and don't turn away from the wanting to touch. At that time, wanting to touch is at the center.

We are entering into a practice of welcoming our life. When we practice in this way, we get more skillful at it, and we will eventually become wholehearted with pain and pleasure in each moment. We can learn to love the lives we are given. We can learn to be compassionate to our lives even though we don't especially like certain aspects of them. We start loving our lives by being generous toward them. Then we are careful (ethical) and patient.

All these things are a setup for a great joke, but we have to be patient with the setup before we understand the punch line. The joke is that we think sentient beings exist outside of our own mind. The punch line is that each person we see is just our mental image of an inconceivable reality. It can take a very long time before we come to see this situation as funny. Nirvana is experiencing the joke of samsara.

When we believe that things are not us, that is delusion. It is a delusion to believe that I am separate from you, or that you are separate from me. Thinking that way is painful. It's a delusion when my mind says that this thing I am seeing, which is a presentation of my mind, is something other than my mind. Patience makes it possible for us to be present with our experience so that we may see through this delusion in its innumerable forms.

As we will see in the chapter on the practice of concentration, being present through pain, hardship, praise, or blame supports the calm illumination of our sitting meditation. When fear comes, if we don't push it away, we are able to donate it to the fear bank instead. When we let go of fear and walk the bodhisattva path, we see that things are not something to turn away from or touch. In this way, we are able to joyfully walk on and able to joyfully sit at our seat.

Many times we forget to practice what we want to practice. When that happens, we can learn to be patient with our forgetfulness and the sorrow that may arise in us when we notice our unskillfulness.

When we perceive our unskillfulness, then we can be generous and ethical with the discomfort we feel. To practice this way is to learn patience.

When we are generous, ethical, and patient with all of our experience, we can be relaxed and playful. When we are relaxed and playful, we can open to the inconceivable, creative process of the whole world. Being open to the creative process, we can enter it. When we enter it, we can understand it. Understanding it, we realize liberation in the middle of creation.

The awakened ones, the buddhas, have learned how to sit upright with pain and pleasure. Buddha is kind to all beings even when she has pain. Buddha is not distracted from caring for other beings by her own suffering because she doesn't have suffering when she feels pain. She just feels pain. Pain does not distract her from caring for beings. She takes care of her pain, and therefore an added layer of suffering does not complicate the situation. Buddhas are able to be present in a body that has pain. They have learned how to acknowledge that something really hurts and to ask, "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

The "Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi," which contains the lines at the beginning of this chapter, begins, "The teaching of suchness is intimately communicated by buddhas and ancestors. Now you have it. Keep it well." We take care of these teachings by not touching or turning away from our lives. In this way, we are able to realize the intimate face-to-face transmission, which is given to us as our nature. Further instructions in this song say that when we are excited we fall into a pit, and when we hesitate we miss the precious moment. Getting excited and jumping toward something, we miss it. Hesitating and shrinking away we also miss it. When we do any of these things, we spend quite a bit of time in retrospective regret. We are instructed to watch out for this. Staying present is the best way to work with pain and pleasure.

When bodhisattvas are patient, their failures don't discourage them, and they don't get attached to their successes. Bodhisattvas want others to be happy, and at the same time, they are not trying to

get away from the pain they feel when they see others being unhappy. Bodhisattvas are patient and willing to suffer a very long time to help beings. Combining patience with generosity and ethics, bodhisattvas are able to deeply consider their aspiration and vows in the practice of heroic effort.

Patience is a great virtue. Being patient means learning to be fully present and intimate with each moment of our life. Training in patience sets the stage for entering into joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom. What a joy to continue this practice together!

THE FOURTH HEROIC PRACTICE

THE PERFECTION OF ENTHUSIASM
Joyful Effort

If you say that you do not need to fan yourself because the nature of wind is permanent and you can have wind without fanning, you will understand neither permanence nor the nature of wind.

—"Genjokoan," *Shobogenzo,* by Dogen[1]

IN JAPAN, TO BE A ZEN PERSON has been described as being a vigorously jumping fish. The Japanese word for this is *kappatsupatsu,* which is onomatopoetic for the sound of a fish joyfully jumping and splashing in water. This term is often translated as lively, active, and vigorous. The fourth bodhisattva paramita—the perfection of joyful effort—is for the sake of generating, refreshing, and maintaining vigor in our practice. This heroic effort is especially necessary when we plunge into the practices of concentration and wisdom.

Generosity, ethics, and patience are wholesome and beneficial expressions of compassion. Some enthusiasm and effort are useful from the beginning of the path, and we have employed our energy to develop these first three practices. Through patience, we have plugged up some of the places where our energy drains away. Now we are ready to move forward into the practices of liberation. We are ready to generate the keen and enthusiastic energy necessary to realize the practices of concentration and wisdom.

Beginning Zen students are often graced with enthusiasm for practicing sitting meditation and listening to the teachings. After some time, however, many of them tell me that their practice has

become stale and that their energy has gotten stagnant. They feel like they are forcing themselves to practice and just going through the motions. At such times, I ask them if they are engaging in this fourth practice of enthusiasm, and they often say they are not. It's almost as if this bodhisattva practice were a secret. They don't understand the necessity to create and renew their zeal for practice. In preparing for the work of concentration and wisdom, which free all beings from affliction so that they may dwell in peace, we need to renew and enrich our enthusiasm.

The bodhisattva vow is the most grandiose of all human ideals. In the stories of classical heroes and heroines like Psyche, Parsifal, and Don Quixote, they are often depicted as foolish. One of the reasons bodhisattva effort is called "heroic" is because we foolishly enter into this work wholeheartedly even though we don't fully understand what we are getting ourselves into. Despite the limitations of our understanding of what we are doing, our enthusiasm is deepened and strengthened as we remember and clarify our aspiration.

In order to be filled with spiritual energy, we have to exercise it by remembering our aspiration in all the activities of our daily life. Hearing that the buddha way is perfect and all-pervading, we may question why we have to make such great concentrated effort. Even our great ancestors wondered about this.

In the final section of his "Genjokoan" Dogen Zenji responds to this question with an anecdote.

> Mayu, Zen Master Baoche, was fanning himself. A monk approached and said, "Master, the nature of wind is permanent and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, do you fan yourself?"
>
> "Although you understand that the nature of wind is permanent," Baoche replied, "you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere."
>
> "What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" asked the monk.

The master just kept fanning himself.

The monk bowed deeply.

The actualization of the buddhadharma, the vital path of its authentic transmission, is like this. If you say that you do not need to fan yourself because the nature of wind is permanent and you can have wind without fanning, you understand neither permanence nor the nature of wind."[2]

Aspiration Is the Well-Spring of Energy

Aspiration is the source of our energy as we walk the bodhisattva path. The word *aspiration* is related to the words *respiration* and *inspiration*. Its etymology is "to breathe into or to breathe onto." Bodhisattva practice arises through our aspiration. And aspiration continues to breathe life and spirit into our practice.

We need vigorous enthusiasm for the practices of liberation—the practices of concentration and wisdom that loosen, uproot, and transcend all afflictions. Aspiration is not the word we usually use to refer to mundane wishes, like our wish for breakfast. Here, I am referring to bodhicitta, the mind of awakening. This aspiration is the deep and vast intention to become buddha for the welfare and liberation of all living beings, the mountains, rivers, and the great earth. Our spiritual energy is based on this aspiration for the peace and freedom of all beings.

One of the ways the word *bodhicitta* has been translated into English is as *bodhi-mind*. Bodhi-mind is a thought, a form of thinking, that arises and ceases. It does not arise from ourselves. It does not arise from others. And it does not arise from itself. It arises in the midst of the spiritual communion of buddhas and sentient beings. It is born of the intimate interaction of self and other. Bodhi-mind arises in the world through the call and response of sentient beings and buddhas.

There are four modes of spiritual call and response. In the first case, we call for compassionate guidance but do not perceive that we

are calling. At the same time there is a compassionate response, but we don't perceive it. This imperceptible form of communion is always present and uninterrupted.

The second mode of spiritual communication is one in which we know that we are calling for guidance, but we do not perceive a response. We might think, "I called for help but it didn't come." In the third case, we don't perceive that we are calling, but we do perceive that guidance is being offered. This type of communication might be summarized as "I didn't ask for your help," and sometimes we might even add "Leave me alone." In the fourth and final kind of spiritual communion, we perceive that we are both calling for and receiving compassion. This is what we might normally think of as a conversation.

The thought of awakening can arise in any of these four modes of communion. All four apply to the process of requesting and receiving the bodhisattva precepts and vows. The full blessing of all bodhisattva practices is realized in the midst of innumerable forms of spiritual conversation on the path of awakening. Whether we know it or not, we do not practice alone on the bodhisattva path. We practice together with all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sentient beings.

When the thought of awakening first arises, it is fragile and vulnerable. In the beginning, it is like the flame of a candle that can be blown out by a gentle breeze. At this stage, it is easily lost and forgotten in the turmoil of our daily life. The thought of enlightenment needs to be cared for and protected by the practice of the six perfections. By practicing the six perfections, this way-seeking mind grows and grows until finally it is like a great forest fire, which only grows stronger when the winds blow.

Some people think they are coming to practice just to help themselves. Whether they think so or not, they are also on the path of helping others, but it may take them a long time to realize that. Others think, right from the beginning, that they are coming to help the whole world and not just themselves. Even those who understand they are there to help others may not understand that being of the greatest help to all living beings entails becoming buddha and going

beyond buddha. “I want enlightenment for all beings, and I want to become buddha for the sake of all sentient beings.” This is such an amazing thought!

Many people come to practice Zen without being aware of having the aspiration to become buddha for the weal of the world. People come to practice with all kinds of aspirations—to have less suffering, to achieve better concentration, to become part of a community, to get some control over their life, or for many other reasons. When students hear me talk about the aspiration for buddhahood, they sometimes ask if they can continue to practice Zen if they don’t have this great aspiration. I always respond by saying, “Yes, you are welcome to practice even if you don’t feel such an aspiration.” When I started practicing Zen with Suzuki Roshi, I wasn’t aware of having such an aspiration. I felt that I needed support and guidance in order to practice Zen, so I went to a Zen center to receive support from a teacher and a community. I did not think that I was going there to help the teacher and the community. Now I see that I went to there to help the teacher and the community, but at the time I was not aware of it.

One summer at Tassajara, during a talk I heard Suzuki Roshi use the phrase “my disciples,” and I wondered who his disciples were and, in particular, was I among them? After the talk, I asked him, “Roshi, who are your disciples?” He said, “I don’t like it that I think this way but my mind thinks of two kinds of students. One kind is here for themselves; others are here for the sake of others. The ones who are here for others are my disciples.” I still wonder about this, but now I see that is why I went there and stayed for more than fifty years.

The intention to benefit ourselves is related to the aspiration to benefit all beings. If we cultivate the intention to benefit ourselves with compassion, it will grow to include others. For example, it can grow into the wish for the well-being of our grandchildren. The wish for the well-being of our grandchildren can be cultivated so that it is extended to a wish for the welfare of all children. From there it can grow to include adults. From there it can grow yet again to include

people whose race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or political views might have previously seemed frightening or suspicious to us, even in ways that we are not aware of. Eventually all humans are included. Then our aspiration can expand once again to include all living beings, the mountains, rivers, and the great earth. When our aspiration becomes like this, we may come to understand that this is a job for a buddha.

Clarifying and studying our intention through the practice of heroic effort brings us more energy and commitment for practice. To be able to fully enter concentration and get ready to enter wisdom, we have to return, over and over, to our aspiration because it is the wellspring of our enthusiasm for continued practice. All six great bodhisattva practices help us care for our aspiration, and our heroic aspiration fuels all six practices.

Even advanced practitioners get tired and need to rest and refuel their enthusiasm. Refueling comes from reflection on what we want to do. Initially we may discover our aspiration by seeing beautiful examples in the practice of others; later we may be able to practice looking deeply within ourselves to rediscover and clarify our deepest intention. This reflection generates and maintains a deep, intense interest in practice. Bodhisattvas enthusiastically aspire to enlightenment, and they aspire to the enlightenment that is expressed by these practices.

Vow

As we continue to explore and care for our intention, we may eventually realize that the appropriate next step would be to commit to our aspiration. In this next step, we vow to live in accord with our aspiration. The main difference between vow and aspiration is that a vow involves a commitment, a promise.

Vowing to endeavor in the six perfections nourishes our aspiration in new ways. Once the vow is made, all of the bodhisattva practices of generosity, ethics, patience, enthusiasm, concentration, and wisdom protect and sustain it. The vow is the basis for our practice. Our great

and vast vow supports, sustains, and strengthens our practice. And in turn our practice renews and revitalizes our vow.

Expressing our aspirations in the form of vows can also be a way of calling for help from others. The vows may be given to us and received by us in a formal ritual enactment of our commitment to the bodhisattva way. Through this expression of our vows, we request that all buddhas and ancestors, members of our family and community, and all sentient beings come forth to support and witness us in manifesting our aspiration. Our spiritual friends remind us of our aspirations and vows and support us to be steady, energetic, and joyful in our practice.

The bodhisattva precept ceremony, which we discussed in the chapter on ethics, is an opportunity to make a formal commitment to the bodhisattva vows through body, speech, and thought. After giving them the precept vows, I ask the intiates, “Abiding according to these bodhisattva precepts, from now on and even after realizing buddhahood, will you continue to observe them?” When I witness the initiates saying, “Yes, I will,” I am repeatedly wonder-struck by the sincerity and the purity of their hearts at that moment. At that time I formally say to them, “May you always be like this.” I do not expect that they will always follow through with these vows, and yet I sincerely pray that they will always be like this. Because I don’t expect people to follow through on these vows, I don’t get discouraged or disheartened when they don’t. I just ask them again if they want to practice these vows. If they do want to, I encourage them to devote themselves to the truthful practice of confession and repentance, which is a compassionate way to maintain and repair their vows.

Consistent and Steady Practice

Consistency is another aspect of heroic and diligent effort. When we commit to these practices, it is necessary to find a way do them that can be consistent and continuous. In general, I support finding a level of practice that we can realistically sustain on a daily basis. So,

we try to find ways to practice that are compatible with sustainable effort.

Reflecting on our aspiration, over and over, is necessary. Once a day is really good. Twice a day is great. A million times a day is not too much. For example, there is a story about a wonderful Zen master named Zuigan.

> Every morning Zuigan called out to himself, "Master!"
> Then he would answer, "Yes, sir!"
> "Are you awake?!"
> And again he would answer, "Yes, sir! Yes, sir!"
> "Now all day long, do not be deceived by others!"
> "I won't, I won't!"[3]

Our determination doesn't necessarily last through the night. So, when we wake up in the morning, if we don't remember to check and recommit, we might forget. That does not need to be the end of the story though, because if we have built a consistent pattern of practice, even when we don't remember to renew our vows in the wonderful way demonstrated by Zuigan, still when we get out of bed in the morning we may find ourselves walking to our place of meditation and sitting upright at our seat and waking up to the bodhisattva vow.

One of the first questions I asked Suzuki Roshi was, "What is right effort?" He said, "Getting up with no hesitation when the alarm clock rings."

Some people meditate all night. I feel fine about that unless that leads them to not be able to be awake in their daily life. In monastic practice, people sometimes do so much extra meditation that they fall asleep during regular meditation times with the community. In that case they are overdoing it in one way and underdoing it in another. This is not the steadfast practice that heroic effort requires. I suggest being less excessive, so that we can be more consistent. Some parents with young children aren't able to meditate first thing

in the morning without waking up so early that they then fall asleep during the day. In each situation, I suggest finding the way to be consistent. Perhaps a parent can do Master Zuigan's self-inquiry practice while washing their face in the morning, and then find time to meditate in the evening after children have gone to bed.

Joyful Practice

As we contemplate cause and effect, we come to understand the buddhas' teaching that all of our actions have consequences. As our understanding deepens, we become more and more joyful about practicing virtuous actions that are generous and that we believe will be beneficial. Even before we fully know what virtue is, we will be encouraged and inspired about practicing it.

An important aspect of having enthusiasm, or warm-hearted practice, is to reflect on how good it is to act in accord with our aspirations. In this way, we discover the joy that is living at the heart of our bodhisattva vow. In practicing with others like this, we are filled with great joy in practicing together and helping each other.

I think it is good for me to practice generosity, patience, and ethics by being careful with and reflective of my actions. I think it is good for me to develop a concentrated, relaxed, flexible, playful, and buoyant state of mind so that I can listen to and hear the teachings, deeply understand them, and thus wake up to enlightenment. I am happy to do these practices because I think that doing them brings joy to the world. Thinking that way, over and over, brings more and more energy for practice.

Buddhas practice giving, ethics, and patience for the welfare and liberation of others. They are joyful when they practice this way, but they don't do these practices to promote their own happiness. They do it for the happiness of others. That is part of the process of enlightenment. We are not trying to get joy through our practice. Our practice is joy.

Resting or Rejection as a Practice

Another aspect of heroic effort is called resting or rejection. It is appropriate to rest when we are fatigued. Rest is part of the bodhisattva's enthusiasm. We can rest heroically.

We also need to reject practices that we have done long enough and practices that are too advanced for us. It is appropriate to be careful; that is, we need to be generous, ethical, and patient with every level of our practice.

Sometimes we may notice that it is easier to continue doing something than it is to stop. In that situation, it is a form of laziness to keep doing it. This relates to the idea of inertia, which is that physical objects at rest tend to remain at rest, while physical objects in motion tend to remain in motion. We could say that inertia is the laziness of nature. We often have inertia like that about our efforts. Sometimes it's hard to stop when we need to stop. It is an effort to stop when we want to go on, but if we don't stop when it's appropriate, we start making mistakes. To rest when rest is called for promotes our ability to make continuous effort. Not resting promotes grumpiness and mistakes.

It may be surprising to hear that overwork is a form of laziness, but it is. Once we get momentum going, it is often easier to keep going mindlessly on autopilot than it is to stop. People recognize that when we remain at rest too long, that is a form of laziness, but they often do not recognize that it can also be a form of laziness to continue doing what we are already doing rather than doing the more difficult thing, which is to stop.

Taking on things that are too advanced is another form of laziness. It's not careful or ethical to take on things that are too advanced. It's also somewhat arrogant to take on practices for which we are not ready or to try to do them alone when we need help. It would be like swimming in a river when the currents are too strong for us or trying to climb a mountain by ourselves when we really should invite someone to come along with us. Some time ago I took a trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, and it would have

been lazy to try to do so by myself rather than going with people who have experience with boats and the river. When we're arrogant we may think we can do anything and that we don't need help. Being aware that something might be too advanced for us or that we might need help is part of heroic effort.

At San Francisco Zen Center we have seven-day retreats where we do sitting and walking meditation from early in the morning until late at night. Sometimes people who are not experienced with so many hours of sitting wish to join the retreat. In such cases, we usually recommend that they try a one-day sitting before they commit to a seven-day sitting. Other times, people who have quite a bit of experience enter into the retreat, feel they have made a mistake, and want to stop. In those cases, it is in accord with the practice of heroic effort to have a conversation with a teacher whether stopping is appropriate. Sometimes it is right to stop; sometimes it is not. Not stopping when it's enough is also a kind of laziness.

To engage in heroic effort means avoiding the pitfall of taking on practices that we might quit halfway through. When we want to try a more advanced practice, it is good to talk first with an experienced friend or teacher. There are times when our friend or teacher might say, "Fine. I think that's appropriate for you." Other times, they might say, "I think this would be too much right now. It might be better to try it later." Sometimes it is better to prepare by doing another practice that is also good and is at the right level of difficulty for us. Later, when we feel confident that we will be able to follow through with the advanced practice, it can be reconsidered. Having that conversation with people we trust and respect is part of the bodhisattva's heroic effort.

Of course, when we think that something is not helpful or we are going to hurt ourselves or others, it is good to stop. But sometimes we want to stop because we are not practicing patience with the difficulty of doing the things we have committed to. We may want to get away from the frustration, disappointment, or dislike we feel toward some aspect of the situation. For example, we may not see

any results from our practice and think that is a good reason to stop practicing. It is also good to consider this together with a teacher or experienced friend before giving up a commitment.

Part of heroic effort is to ask for and receive assistance in making decisions. Through conversations in the midst of great difficulties, we will eventually be able to heroically engage and complete the most advanced practices.

The Perfection of Heroic Effort

Bodhisattvas vow to enter the wisdom of the buddhas and to help other beings to enter wisdom. Bodhisattvas don't necessarily think their actions are helpful, but they definitely *want* their actions to be helpful. Our vows help us to make this effort even though we know that we cannot understand exactly how this works until the vow flowers into perfect wisdom. The process of perfect wisdom begins with our aspiration to carry all beings beyond suffering into a life of peace and freedom. When we commit to this aspiration, it becomes the bodhisattva vow. We will look more deeply into the relationship between our vow and the development of wisdom when we consider the *Diamond Sutra* in the chapter on perfect wisdom.

The Path to Buddhahood

The practice of heroic effort comes in the middle of the six paramitas. Effort is needed from the beginning as we learn to give generous attention to our lives. But it is hard to generate the great energy we need in order to make a heroic effort before learning to be generous, ethical, and patient. The first three practices expand and refuel our compassion as we move into advanced practices of concentration and wisdom. In order to fully direct our energy toward these last two practices, we need to be confident and wholehearted in our aspiration.

The aspiration to realize enlightenment for the welfare of all beings is the seed of buddhahood. The practice of concentration is based on this aspiration. In Zen we take care of this aspiration, protect it, and are supported and energized by it. In the process, we sometimes forget what we are intending to do or get frustrated by what seems to be a lack of progress. We are always moving forward on the bodhisattva path, but it may not look that way to us, and then we may fall into despondency or self-contempt. Such times are big opportunities. They are feedback that we are forgetting to be compassionate—that is, generous, ethical, and patient—with our forgetfulness. By remembering these practices of compassion, we can once again return to our great intention. Forgetting and frustration are not our meditation, but our meditation is the way we compassionately care for our forgetting and frustration. To be great practitioners, we have to keep returning to our original aspiration in order to sustain our enthusiasm to become heroes of enlightenment.

All buddhas have worked, are working, and will continue to work at remembering their aspiration. When buddhas were bodhisattvas, they worked at remembering their aspiration, and forgot it anyway, got frustrated by their forgetting, and returned to their effort to remember again and again. If we share their aspiration, we need to do this too. As we do this, we are able to bring our warm and enthusiastic energy to all of these heroic practices. To the extent that we have been successful in training in giving, ethics, and patience, we can now realistically dare to aspire to the practices of concentration and wisdom. Our aspiration develops in such a way that it can support the development of generous, warm-hearted, flexible concentration—concentration that continuously and joyfully remembers the welfare and liberation of all beings.

THE FIFTH HEROIC PRACTICE

THE PERFECTION OF CONCENTRATION

The Dharma Gate of Repose and Bliss

Eyes of compassion observing beings
Assemble an ocean of blessing beyond measure.
—Lotus Sutra

GREAT COMPASSIONATE VOWS LIVE in the hearts of bodhisattvas. By becoming concentrated in their vows, bodhisattvas deeply settle into, protect, and finally become completely one with them. Supported by the power of concentration, they are eventually able to stand steadfast in an unstable world and act in accord with their vows no matter what comes. With imperturbable presence, bodhisattvas can deeply observe all forms of life with eyes of compassion. They concentrate on their vows, join hands with all beings, and walk through birth and death together. This concentration is the dharma gate of repose and bliss.

This chapter could also be titled "The Perfection of Meditation." We use the expressions *seated concentration* and *seated meditation* as overarching and interchangeable terms for the totality of great awakening on the bodhisattva path. In Chinese, this practice is called *tsochan*; in Japanese, it is *zazen*.

The word *meditation* is often used to refer to focusing one's attention and becoming tranquil. It may also be used to refer to deeply contemplating teachings and other phenomena. I would like to use the word *concentration* in these two ways also. So the word

concentration will refer to focusing our thoughts and becoming tranquil. And it will also refer to deeply pondering phenomena in tranquility. These words will be used to refer to the practices of both calming and contemplation. In addition they will refer to the results of these practices—that is to say, silent stillness and illumination.

Bodhisattva tranquility is an open, undistracted, flexible, and calm awareness. It is a state of awareness that follows naturally from the first four perfections. The essence of training in concentration is letting go of discursive thought, letting go of thinking. It is not the suppression or elimination of discursive thought. This tranquil mind is not a blank slate, not directionless—it has a clear orientation, which is the thought of realizing peace and freedom together with all beings. As our concentration deepens, it opens to the reality that we are not practicing alone, and that our practice is the same practice and same enlightenment as all beings. In this way, we naturally enter into unsurpassed, perfect wisdom.

Many people come to practice Zen before the bodhisattva vow has arisen in their awareness. People have often come and told me that they do not have the bodhisattva vow to attain awakening to liberate all beings. They admit that they just want benefit and liberation for themselves. The following discussion of concentration can be used both by bodhisattvas and by those who do not see themselves as bodhisattvas.

We begin the practice of concentration by being generous. This includes being generous toward our mind even when we are distracted. When we are gracious toward distractions, we immediately become more tranquil. Our ability to be generous enables us to wholeheartedly make our practice of tranquility into a gift for the welfare of all beings. Do we wish our practice to be a gift? When we ask this question, we might notice whether our asking is also a gift, or whether we are asking in order to get answers.

We can use our training in ethics to consider if we are trying to get anything out of our practice. It's not ethical to take what is not given, so trying to gain anything other than what we are being given is an ethical infraction.

We have developed patience to be present with whatever comes, and now we can notice if we are trying to get away from any painful feelings of body or mind or trying to hold on to the pleasurable feelings that may occur during concentration. If we are doing those things, we are not practicing patience. Calm, tender, and joyful concentration requires us to neither abide in pleasure nor push pain away.

In the practice of heroic effort, we have energized and sustained our enthusiasm for practice. We have contemplated our vow to realize the true dharma and to teach it for the benefit of all beings. When we remember how wonderful it is to be gently focused on our aspiration and we feel joy at that thought, we are practicing the fourth paramita, and the energy that arises from this can then be given to the practice of concentration.

In practicing tranquility, it is good to check regularly to see whether we are practicing it together with its cohort of practices. Concentrating on the welfare of the world opens into the realization that we are practicing together with all beings. In this way, concentration and wisdom arise together.

Tranquility Practices

There are yogic concentration exercises for developing a calm, concentrated body and mind that have been used by Buddhists and non-Buddhists for millennia. When we do these exercises consistently, they come to fruition as a deep state of calm abiding in body and mind. All of these exercises essentially involve learning to let go of discursive thought.

Many people try to attain concentration without practicing the first four perfections. Without the support of the first four practices, we are not ready to relax and let go of our thinking. We may feel that it would be irresponsible to let go of some forms of discursive thought. In the good company of the first four practices, we develop trust that we can both let go of our thinking *and* be responsible at the same

time. Once we have realized this gentle mind of calm abiding, we can fully embrace and sustain our bodhisattva vow.

The word *discursive* comes from the Latin root meaning "wandering back and forth." Some people think training in concentration involves suppressing discursive thought, which is also called "thinking." It is more accurate to say that concentration follows from generously letting go of discursive thought. Discursive thought refers to all the patterns of conceptual thinking, including logical reasoning, planning, argumentation, intuition, imagination, daydreaming and nightdreaming, and all kinds of wandering thoughts.

When one is able to let go of discursive thought moment after moment for some time, that effort comes to fruition as calm abiding. Thinking may still occur in calm abiding. If it is not grasped, it will not disturb our tranquility. On the other hand if thinking arises in tranquility and we grasp it, our tranquility will be disturbed by the grasping. In bodhisattva meditation, thinking is not eliminated *and* it is not grasped.

In chapter 16 of the *Lotus Sutra,* the Buddha says, "I am always thinking." The Buddha is thinking, "How may I lead all living beings to enter the Unexcelled Path and quickly to perfect the Buddha-body?"[1] This discursive thought is always present in Buddha's deep tranquility without disturbing it. Buddhas may think, "May all beings be happy," and "May all beings quickly enter the buddha way." But, they don't grasp those thoughts. They calmly offer them as gifts.

Dogen Zenji taught that the thought of bodhicitta is present in the mind of bodhisattvas from its first arising to its final realization in buddhahood. In this way, there is thinking from the beginning to the end of the path. Mature bodhisattvas are always thinking of their vow, but they do not grasp it.

It is said that our great ancestor Bodhidharma[2] encouraged us to pacify our minds without using any contrivance. We can give up discursive thought without concentrating on an object; however, people often find it easier to start with an object, such as breath or posture. When we do this, we give our attention fully to breath,

posture, or to some other chosen object of concentration. In this way we reduce and simplify our discursive thought and thus we are able to begin letting go of it. But there are many other ways to do this. Bodhisattvas can train in letting go of wandering thoughts by playing golf, by cooking, by tightrope walking, dancing, singing, playing the piano, and innumerable other ways.

In life and death situations, we sometimes let go of discursive thought and focus quite easily. Once I was at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, deep in the mountains near Big Sur, and I had a speaking engagement scheduled in San Francisco. The day before I was to leave, there was a snowfall so heavy that four-wheel drive vehicles couldn't get through the snow on the roads. I had to use cross-country skis to get out. Skiing on top of the mountain at sunset was utterly beautiful. Because I was not an experienced skier, I had to be very focused on just moving forward. There was just step, slide, step, slide, step. There was very little space for discursive thought. There wasn't space for looking around or even for thinking how beautiful it was. Without forcing anything, mind and the whole world gently became one point, free of duality. There was only profound, joyful awareness.

Focusing on Posture and Breath

Mindfulness of posture and breathing are among the most common aids to letting go of our thoughts and thus calming the mind. The practice of giving up thought is basically this: in the posture, there is just the posture; in the breathing, there is just the breathing.

One way of following the breath that Suzuki Roshi taught is to follow the exhale as it comes out the nose and down in an arc outside the body ending at the abdomen below your navel. Inhaling, imagine the breath coming back into the body and imagine it rising up through the body and ending at the nose where the exhale begins. After following the breath like this for a while one might notice a natural pause or space at the top of the inhalation and the bottom of the exhalation. When we enter into a state of fully engaging breath, it

may appear as if the breath stops. It doesn't really stop; what stops is the belief that the breathing and the breather are two separate things.

Being coercive is not conducive to the concentration practice of bodhisattvas. When I was young and new to Zen practice I heard an instruction to control body, breath, and mind. Counting each exhalation was suggested as a way to control the breath and develop calm. When I tried this, frequently I lost count, so I would go back and start counting from the beginning. At a certain point, I decided I *had* to coerce myself in order to be consistent in following my breathing, and I *had* to count it correctly. I threatened myself with physical pain—to stick a pin in my thigh—if I noticed that I forgot the practice.

Under this threat, I never actually needed to stab myself, and I got myself almost entirely under what I thought was control. This felt really mean and dead, and it was not what I came to Zen practice to learn. Before I came to Zen I already knew how to be mean. I came to learn to be kind, flexible, and relaxed in body, speech, and mind, but instead of becoming more open, I was becoming more closed. I almost succeeded in ruining my precious practice by that kind of oppressive cruelty. Nobody told me to be *that* hard on myself, but I was. I forgot that I was doing this practice out of love. Fortunately, I realized that if I continued trying to control myself in this joyless way, I was going to quit. I stopped being excessive in my effort to concentrate. By not being too hard on myself, I have been able to continue and haven't quit. But, in fact, some of my friends who also practiced with me sincerely were too hard on themselves and did quit.

Since that time, more than fifty years ago, I have not forced myself to follow my breath. Now when I wish to practice mindfulness of breathing, I do so. There's an inhale; there's an exhale. I notice it, and I enjoy noticing it, but I don't try to control myself as I did when I was young. In our Zen style of walking meditation (called *kinhin* in Japanese) I'm quite consistently mindful of my breathing, because the steps explicitly follow the breath.

When I am sitting still and noticing the breath moving through me like a soft breeze, I am not focusing on breathing. I am just enjoying it. That does go along with giving up discursive thought about breathing, about my life, and about my death, about Buddhism. My breath sometimes surprises me when I am sitting. It's such a lovely process.

When cultivating calm abiding in sitting, we are also being mindful of posture. Often I have the experience that mindfulness of breathing helps me to nurture and realize upright posture. As I focus on my posture and breathing, there is also some discursive thought in noticing how they work together. This simple discursive thought is conducive to letting go of discursive thought. Through mindful attention to posture, discursive thought is released and our mind and body become more subtle, soft, and focused.

Some people can enter a very deep state of concentration just by working with their posture. As I mentioned above, there are many forms of art that promote and realize concentration. For example, great dancers learn to concentrate deeply on their posture, their breathing, and the relationship between the two. Dancers may be quite distracted when they are not dancing, but when they are dancing and focused on their posture and breath, we are enraptured by the beauty of their concentration.

Deeply Respecting Body and Mind

When we engage in concentration practices, we need to be respectful of our body and mind. When we consciously attend to our body and mind with tenderness and care, our body and mind are simultaneously transformed in a way that is conducive to concentration. By deeply expressing kindness for our limited body and mind—the body and mind that are perceptible—we open to a concentration that realizes the unlimited and imperceptible body and mind of buddha.

Bodhisattvas take care of their mental and physical needs in order to care for the needs of others. For example, if we want to carry

someone to the top a mountain, we may need to put on our hiking boots. In this case, we don't put our boots on just to make our feet comfortable. We put them on in order to help others up the mountain. This is the buddha way.

Of course, this applies to our cultivation of seated concentration. When sitting in the cross-legged, upright concentration posture for many hours and days at time, I have sometimes experienced physical pain and discomfort. In the past, there were times when I sat for so long, and pushed myself so hard through the discomfort, that I temporarily lost the ability to be relaxed, open, and present with the pain. Sometimes, I still experience pain and notice my body and mind becoming tense in response, but now I hear this as a call for compassion. And a compassionate response does come, and relaxation comes with it.

Zen students often ask this old priest if, after all these years, I have less pain than when I started practicing. I tell them that pain still sometimes comes to visit. I don't know if there is less pain; but I am quite confident there is more compassion.

There are three basic types of physical discomfort that I notice in upright sitting. The first is discomfort that I know from experience does not damage my body, so I can confidently and responsibly continue to sit still with the unpleasant sensations. I don't change my posture the moment I feel uncomfortable. But if I notice that I am tensing up in response to the pain, I may change to a posture that supports being kind and loving with my body while still training in concentration. In that case, relaxing with the pain is a great joy.

A second type of physical discomfort is one that I know, from past experience, may be harmful. For instance, when my posture results in pressure on the sciatic nerve, I have experienced that this discomfort may create pain and harm that lasts beyond the meditation period. When I experience such discomfort, I calmly and quietly adjust my posture to take pressure off the nerve. If that doesn't relieve the pain, I may take a break instead of continuing to sit.

A third type of discomfort is one in which I lack experience to know whether it will be damaging or not. Sometimes, with experience, I learn that this new discomfort is not a problem. But until then I treat it as though it might be the harmful type. Until I am able to verify whether it is harmful or not, I experiment carefully to find the appropriate response to this type of pain. This whole process involves trial and error to ascertain whether the pain is harmful or not.

Basically, when pain comes to visit, I try to genuinely and graciously welcome it. This is not liking or disliking. It is sincerely welcoming it. Then I practice being careful and tender toward it. Then I practice patience with it. Then I am diligent with it. Working with pain in this way, we become calm, open, and undistracted from the bodhisattva vow.

During the first three years of practicing with Suzuki Roshi and his students, my practice of sitting was often quite hard, especially during the long retreats. But then, surprisingly, all the difficulties seemed to evaporate. I wondered if that was all right. Was I being too easy on myself? So I went to Suzuki Roshi and told him about the situation. He said, “Practice now may not be difficult for you.” Then he picked up a piece of paper and said, “In origami, after we make a difficult fold, we press on it so that the fold settles down into itself.” By pressing on the fold for some time, the fibers in the paper relax into the fold. Hearing this story I accepted that practice was, at least temporarily, not difficult, and I wondered when the next challenging situation would come. The next day it did.

Sometimes bodhisattva practice is hard. Sometimes it’s not. I have learned how to not make it too hard on myself or others. I have been able to joyfully continue all of these years. Even when we remember to listen to and respect our body, life can still be hard. But when we observe these difficulties with eyes of compassion, an ocean of blessing beyond measure is realized. Since I learned to be kind to all the difficulties that arise in practice, I am more and more grateful for the opportunity to practice tranquility together with the community. I think how amazing it is that I’m supported to sit, moment by

moment, day after day, with all beings. I just keep sitting still and quiet.

Concentration on the Welfare of the World

Being open and focused on awakening for the welfare of the world is a bodhisattva concentration. When we focus on our breath, we offer it as a gift for the benefit of others. Buddhas are always focused on the welfare and liberation of others and on how to help people enter the path that will bring them peace. Well-trained bodhisattvas focus in the same way, and we can contemplate and follow their example. If we notice that we are not continuously concentrated in this way, we can return to our aspiration and renew the magnificent energy for awakening to the way.

In practicing concentration, blissful feelings may arise. Among worldly pleasures, the bliss of concentration is said to be the highest. At such times, there may be a risk of holding on to the bliss, and thus forgetting to listen to the cries of the world. There is a danger of losing the grounding of our relationship with all sentient beings. In contemporary idiom, this could be called using concentration as a "spiritual bypass." When we feel bliss, we may think that we can dissociate from the mud of the mundane world and fly away into the skies of ecstasy.

There was a time, after I had been practicing for a while, when I felt like I could leave the earth and fly away into blissful freedom. Fortunately, at that moment, my friends noticed this attempt to dissociate from the mud of the world and helped me return to earth. The moment we notice bliss in our concentration, we have an opportunity to generously give the bliss away. When we do, we may notice that we also have given away the sense of someone who is giving it away. When we say, "Bye-bye bliss!" we may also see the imagination of an independent self going bye-bye too. Giving away the bliss and the sense of an independent self perfects concentration. In this way, our concentration becomes united with wisdom.

We do all of these heroic practices, including concentration, for the welfare of others. We do not practice concentration to make ourselves into excellent meditators, to experience the bliss of tranquility, or even to acquire insight for ourselves. We vow that our practice of concentration will be helpful to others. We wish to be in the world in a way that offers our practice as a gift to the great earth and all living beings.

Up to this point, we have been speaking of focusing and calming concentration practices that may be relatively easy to comprehend, although they are not always easy to do. We have mostly discussed concentration without mentioning its relationship with wisdom and insight. Now we are ready to say that in mature bodhisattva practice, tranquility is united with insight. This mature practice depends on the unwavering vow to realize unsurpassed enlightenment and teach the true dharma for the welfare of all beings.

"Train Yourself Thus"—The Buddha's Instructions to Bahiya

In the following story, the Buddha shows us how to simultaneously develop tranquility and insight. When we contemplate this teaching in a state of tranquility, our contemplation is insight meditation.

In the early scriptures, there is a story about a yogi named Bahiya.[3] Bahiya was revered and honored as a worthy one. But when he was alone, he wondered whether his understanding was complete. While he was wondering about this, a deity came to him and told him that his understanding was not mature, but fortunately there was an Awakened One who could help him. So Bahiya immediately set off to meet the Buddha.

At that time, it was customary for monks to beg for food, and this encounter between Bahiya and the Buddha occurred while the Buddha had gone into a town with his disciples on a begging round. Bahiya found the Buddha and asked him for a teaching for his own welfare and bliss, and the Buddha responded, "Now is not a good

time, Bahiya. We are engaged in begging." Bahiya said, "We don't know what dangers await us. Please teach me for my long-term welfare and bliss." Again the Buddha responded, "This is not a good time, Bahiya." Bahiya persisted. He requested teachings from the Buddha a third time and said, "We don't know what dangers await us. Please teach me for my long-term welfare and bliss." After hearing Bahiya's third request, the Buddha began to teach him.

The Buddha said to Bahiya:

> Herein, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: "In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized. In this way you should train yourself, Bahiya.
>
> When, Bahiya, for you in the seen is merely what is seen…in the cognized is merely what is cognized, then, Bahiya, you will not be 'with that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'with that,' then, Bahiya, you will not be 'in that.' When, Bahiya, you are not 'in that,' then, Bahiya, you will be neither here nor beyond nor in-between the two. Just this is the end of suffering.[4]

Our deluded egocentric consciousness usually thinks that we are with things, or we are inside of them or outside of them, but when this training is mature, in that moment, there is no being inside or outside. There is no identification or dis-identification. This is freedom from suffering. It is spontaneous perfect wisdom in which the bodhisattvas' appropriate response comes forth.

The Buddha gave Bahiya this training in letting things be themselves and in letting them go. Then he added, "When for you, it is like this…there's no here or there or in-between, and this is the end of suffering." This means that when Bahiya is like this, he will have a new relationship with everything. He will not abide in anything anymore; he will not be with or not with people, neither in them or not in them.

In this story, Bahiya entered into perfect wisdom immediately. Then the Buddha went away. Not long after this conversation with the Buddha, Bahiya died when he accidently got between a mother water buffalo and her calf. It turns out that Bahiya was right in saying, “One of us might die this afternoon.” Despite what appears to be unfortunate ending to the story, Bahiya realized the Buddha’s teaching when it was given to him, and he also realized this teaching for us.

To some, this story about Bahiya might seem to be about his personal liberation. They might think Bahiya was doing his practice just for himself, by his own will and intellect, but that is not so. Bahiya was practicing together with the Buddha for our welfare. Some may see this story as an instruction for developing a calm focus. Others may see it as instruction in insight. I see this teaching as instruction in concentration that includes wisdom.

The instructions that Bahiya received sound simple, but they are hard to practice fully. The teaching is to meet all phenomena wholeheartedly without adding or subtracting anything. In doing so, we are allowing them to fully be themselves. When we do this, we realize that we are not in them or with them. At the same time we see that we are included in them and they in us. Allowing the seen to be just the seen, we intimately meet our lives and the world with all its joys and sorrows, face-to-face. There can be states of concentration without wisdom, but there can be no wisdom without concentration. This deep concentration, which the Buddha taught to Bahiya, arises simultaneously with wisdom.

The six paramitas are training for bodhisattvas to let the seen be just the seen and thus realize awakening together with all beings. This simple teaching is included in each of the six paramitas. Together they train us to find the place where we are, so that we are able to allow ourselves to be ourselves and all phenomena to be themselves. When we deeply allow ourselves to be ourselves and allow things to be themselves, we enter a concentration where all things meet face-to-face and see their own true nature. When we are ourselves in this very moment, and let things be, from this place an

appropriate response to the present moment comes forth spontaneously. This is perfect wisdom.

The Seated Concentration of Buddhas and Zen Ancestors

Our compassionate founder Dogen Zenji said, "The seated meditation that I am speaking of is not [just] learning tranquility. It is totally culminated enlightenment. It is the dharma gate of repose and bliss."[5] He and other Zen ancestors have used many names for the seated meditation of buddhas. They call the buddhas' practice "Jewel Mirror Concentration," "Self-Fulfillment Concentration," "Ocean Seal Concentration," "King of Concentrations Concentration," and "Self-Realization Concentration."[6]There are infinite names for the buddhas' concentration. In these concentrations, the practice of the individual and the enlightenment of the individual are the same practice and same enlightenment as that of all beings. This is a great enigma that may be difficult to accept, trust, and understand.

We might wonder—how is our practice of meditation the same as that of all beings? How is our enlightenment the same as that of all beings? How is our limited, conceivable practice related to the unlimited, inconceivable practice of buddhas? By being thoroughly compassionate with our limited, conceivable practice of concentration, we open to and enter the unlimited and inconceivable concentrations of buddhas, wherein we all awaken together.

Having made great personal effort in concentration, we may be surprised to hear about the union of concentration and wisdom. This may be different from the way we have been thinking about our effort and practice. As limited beings, we may feel uncomfortable as we contemplate leaping into the unlimited union of concentration and wisdom. When we feel uncomfortable, we need to be gracious, upright, and patient; this includes giving up the idea that we are in this practice alone. In deep concentration, we let go of it and go

beyond it. We need to be firmly established in our practice of generosity, ethics, patience, and effort in order to open to the concentration practice that is perfect wisdom, which is not done by ourselves alone.

In this practice, wisdom arises simultaneously with concentration. People often think of concentration as one thing and wisdom as another, but we are now speaking of the perfection of concentration that goes beyond itself and is united with wisdom. This concentration is the dharma gate of peace and freedom for all beings.

All of the paramita practices occur in the dharma realm of perfect wisdom, where nothing exists independently of everything else. We may not realize that our sitting meditation is a phenomenon that co-arises interdependently with the entire universe and us, but in reality, we do not do anything by ourselves, including meditation. When we see sights and hear sounds fully engaging body and mind, all duality is transcended, and our concentration practice naturally opens onto wisdom.

No matter how we are practicing, our personal effort includes everybody, and everybody's effort includes us. In the buddhas' self-fulfillment concentration, self exists in the process of not abiding in itself. We see that the self is received and given. When we practice wholeheartedly, we see that this is not only our personal practice, and we let go of ourselves. When we care for our vows by practicing concentration along with the heroic practices, we enter into the practice of perfect wisdom. By being fully rooted in concentration, the lotus flower of wisdom blooms.

To repeat, the self-fulfillment concentration is equally the same practice and the same enlightenment as the individual practitioner and all beings. In this concentration, the self is constantly received and given away. This concentration is the liberation of egocentric consciousness; we are focused on the reality that self is constantly being given, received, and given again, endlessly. This is the pivotal activity of buddhas and Zen ancestors that includes everyone. When we practice wholeheartedly in this way, our practice includes everything. It is caring for the whole universe and being cared for by

the whole universe. In this way, buddha's practice is the same as our practice and the practice of all beings. This concentration is profound insight.

Our personal practice may be different at different times, in sitting, walking, working, and playing. Each of us is continuously involved in personal activity; at the same time, no matter what we are doing, we are also in face-to-face communion with all things, whether we know it or not. This is the self-fulfillment concentration. When I remember this practice, I am making a personal effort. Remembering this practice energizes and makes my personal practice complete.

All buddhas practice together with each of us. Our great ancestor Dogen encouraged us to remember this. Whether we remember this or not, the buddhas are constantly practicing together with us, and their practice is the same as ours. We are each working on something, making some particular effort—and our personal effort is imperceptibly pervading all things and is pervaded by all things. No matter what we are doing, it is thus. This is the sitting meditation of all buddhas.

Chapter 2 of the *Lotus Sutra* says, "Only buddha together with buddha realizes the ultimate reality of all things." The seated concentration of buddhas is "only buddha together with buddha." This meditation is what our Zen ancestors called face-to-face transmission. How can we open to the revelation of the ultimate truth of all things? It is by opening to the truth of our intimate relationship with all beings. The face-to-face transmission of buddha together with buddha is possible when bodhisattvas develop the capacity for intimacy. Acceptance of ultimate truth is acceptance of the intimacy of all things.

When we meet wholeheartedly in face-to-face communion with all beings in the ceremony of seated meditation, we embody intimate communion with all buddhas. When we meet our entire life in this way, this is self-fulfillment concentration.[7] The practice of the buddha way is meeting in face-to-face communion. Our main practice is to be mindful of one practice, which is the way we are

practicing together with all beings. This meditation imperceptibly accords with all beings and all times.

THE SIXTH HEROIC PRACTICE

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM
Body and Mind Dropped Off

Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom—Maha Prajna Paramita!

THE TEACHING AND PRACTICE of perfect wisdom is intended for bodhisattvas, heroes of enlightenment. Although one may wonder upon hearing this if one is a bodhisattva, I feel that *all* living beings are bodhisattvas. Whether we know it or not, we are all on the same path to perfect enlightenment for the welfare of this world. At this moment all buddhas are setting an example for bodhisattvas, sitting upright in stillness in the middle of the fierce flames of suffering, sitting at the center of all suffering beings, turning the wheel of dharma, gently transmitting the great perfection of wisdom.

Many wisdom teachings will be offered in this chapter. They are intended for contemplation within a state of deep tranquility and openness, wherein perfect wisdom will be realized.

As I begin to speak of perfect wisdom, I feel awe and am deeply moved by this great wisdom, the reliever of all suffering and distress. Please excuse me for using the word "holy," but if anything is holy, it is the perfection of wisdom. Who am I to even speak of it, feeling that my words will never reach it?

The perfection of wisdom is the ultimate heroic practice of bodhisattvas. When we are wholehearted in living our daily life as the practices of generosity, ethics, patience, enthusiasm, and concentration, complete intimacy with ourselves and all beings is possible. This intimacy is reality. Actualizing this intimacy is the great perfection of wisdom.

When we remember and practice the six paramitas in our daily lives, we open to the realization that we are not anything external to the dynamic process of giving, ethics, patience, heroic effort, and concentration. Under the auspices of perfect wisdom, the first five practices leap beyond all ideas of their function, and thus they become the function of wisdom going beyond wisdom. I use the phrase "perfection of wisdom" to refer to wisdom that is constantly leaping beyond itself and taking all the other five practices along with it.

At the beginning of this book there is a story about a time when a monk asked Yunmen, "What was the teaching of (the Buddha's) whole lifetime?" and Yunmen answered, "An appropriate response." The appropriate response of a buddha emerges in each situation from the perfection of wisdom.

Perfect wisdom is dynamic and does not abide in anything, not even itself. This non-abiding and leaping are what the old-time buddhas call "stepping off the top of the hundred-foot pole." Hearing about this, one might feel surprised or even frustrated that wisdom cannot be realized by the intellect. When we are relaxed and gracious with this situation, leaping will come. Attempting to analyze and understand wisdom through the intellect is like clinging to the pole.[1]

The Perfection of Wisdom Is the Leader

The perfection of wisdom is the leader and guides the other five perfections to ascend the path to buddhahood. The perfection of wisdom is the process by which the other five practices come to embody the organ of vision that takes all beings to buddhahood.

The perfection of wisdom is generosity that fully welcomes whatever comes and does not abide in giver, receiver, or gift. These three elements are inseparable in the bodhisattva generosity that carries beings to nirvana; this transport to nirvana is possible because giver, receiver, and gift are empty of independent existence. Bodhisattvas carry all beings to nirvana without abiding in the idea

of the existence of carrier, carried, or carrying. This is perfect wisdom in the form of giving.

The practice of ethics lives in the heart of the perfection of wisdom. Bodhisattvas practice ethics, and when they practice ethics in accord with perfect wisdom, they don't lean into transgression or non-transgression. Perfect wisdom is being upright at the center of both transgression and non-transgression. Bodhisattvas practice ethics and wisdom together by being upright with killing and with not-killing. We can't fully engage with our lives without ethical discipline. Ethical discipline includes questioning and being questioned in each moment about what is the compassionate, appropriate response. And it is questioning and responding without clinging to question or response.

The perfection of ethical discipline requires being called into question by others. At some point, we may think we understand the teachings on bodhisattva ethics. Perfect wisdom protects us from becoming complacent in our understanding and thus becoming self-righteous in our ethical discipline. Being called into question by others makes our practice of ethical discipline more wholehearted. If there are no questions, we miss the heart of ethics, and if we miss that, we also miss out on the heart of perfect wisdom, which continues the process of renewal and re-creation of ethical practice.

The heroic practice of patience is to remain imperturbable and upright at the center of all suffering. Without leaning into past or future suffering, we are able to fully inhabit our true dharma position, from which we can care for all beings. Through the perfection of patience, bodhisattvas can be present and open to the frustration of their attempts to grasp the teaching of the buddhas with discriminating consciousness. Being relaxed and present with this frustration opens onto the perfection of wisdom.

The perfection of heroic effort draws from the wellspring of our bodhisattva aspiration and thus infuses the other heroic practices with sweetness and vitality. Heroic effort brings the energy of our aspiration and vows to all of the practices of the paramitas. It enables bodhisattvas to engage deeply and energetically in the tender and

relaxed process of not apprehending anything, which is perfect wisdom.

The wonderful state of bodhisattva concentration is also necessary in our meeting face-to-face with all sentient beings. The process of meeting beings and guiding them to peace and freedom lives in the context of concentration. The bodhisattva's concentration is brought to perfection when we give away the bliss of tranquility. By relinquishing our personal bliss, concentration is perfected and we are able to relax and be playful in our commitment to carry all beings to peace. The bodhisattva practice of concentration carries out this work without being rigid or abiding in thoughts of carrier, carrying, or carried.

Devotion to the Perfection of Wisdom

Many people associate Zen with perfect wisdom and with wondrous, spontaneous activity, and these associations are totally valid. However, many people, especially in the West, do *not* associate Zen with devotional practice. They might be quite surprised—as I was—to learn that training in Zen temples and monasteries in Asia is deeply and thoroughly devotional. I know some students of Zen in the West who are not interested in devotional practice, and yet the path of perfect wisdom and buddhahood is nothing if not devotional. The path to buddhahood is the path of complete devotion to buddha, dharma, and sangha—to the awakening, to the teachings of awakening, and to the awakening community.

In the temples and monasteries where I practice, we pay homage and offer praise on a daily basis to what is most precious in our life. The welfare, happiness, and peace of all beings are precious to us. Therefore, perfect wisdom is most precious, because it is the liberation of all beings from all suffering and distress.

During the morning service at Green Dragon Temple[2], after reciting the *Heart of Perfect Wisdom Scripture,* we sing a hymn of praise to the perfection of wisdom. We wholeheartedly chant:

Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom, the lovely, the holy.

The Perfection of Wisdom gives light.

Unstained, the entire world cannot stain her.

She is a source of light and from everyone in the triple world she removes darkness.

Most excellent are her works.

She brings light so that all fear and distress may be forsaken and disperses the gloom and darkness of delusion.

She herself is an organ of vision. She is a clear knowledge of the own-being of all dharmas, for she does not stray away from it.

The Perfection of Wisdom of the Buddhas sets in motion the wheel of Dharma.[3]

With this homage, we affirm that our Zen practice is devoted to the realization of perfect wisdom for the welfare of all beings and the great earth. Zen practitioners aspire to embody and express perfect wisdom in all the activities of daily life.

Perfect Wisdom Scriptures

In his great awakening, Shakyamuni Buddha discovered and thoroughly understood the dependent co-arising of birth and death. He also discovered and realized the dependent co-arising of the cessation of birth and death. The world of birth and death, which he called samsara, dependently co-arises, and the world of the cessation of and freedom from birth and death, which he called nirvana, also dependently co-arises. Going further, Shakyamuni perceived that *everything,* including his own realization, is dependently co-arisen. The dependently co-arisen realization of nirvana is non-conceptual perfect wisdom.

Some Buddhist practitioners and scholars say that the articulation of dependent co-arising is the central philosophy of the Buddha's

teaching. Certainly, it is a centerpiece of what is sometimes called the first turning of the dharma wheel. Following the teaching of the first turning, later teachings arose, which were given for the sake of helping bodhisattvas to realize there is no basis for apprehension in the first turning of the dharma wheel. Briefly speaking, the teachings of the first turning offer a conceptual approach to liberation from birth and death.

The perfect wisdom scriptures are called the second turning of the dharma wheel. They offer a non-conceptual approach to liberation, an approach based on the emptiness of all phenomena.[4] Among the innumerable scriptures on perfect wisdom, the two most studied and celebrated in the Zen family are the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*. They are intended to protect people from clinging to the marvelous teachings of the first turning.

Later on, there was a third turning of the dharma wheel. These teachings were offered to protect bodhisattvas from a nihilistic understanding of the teachings of the second turning. If bodhisattvas understood the second turning correctly, there would be no need for the protection of the third turning.

The process of the dependent co-arising of phenomena, as taught in the first turning, is inconceivable, and the Buddha knew it. But, for the sake of sentient beings who live in the realm of conception, the Buddha offered a conceptual, conceivable teaching for realizing inconceivable wisdom. For example, the Buddha taught a conceivable version of dependent co-arising, called the twelve links of causation. However, the Buddha's ultimate purpose in offering a conceptual version of dependent co-arising is for the sake of realizing the lack of a basis for grasping phenomena, which we call perfect wisdom.

Zen and the Diamond Sutra of Perfect Wisdom

The *Diamond Sutra* has a long and intimate association with the Zen school. It is celebrated in our liturgy, taught and commented on by our teachers, and it serves as an object of deep and diligent

contemplation by our students. The *Diamond Sutra* also has a marvelous place in the life of the great fountain of Zen, the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng.[5]

Huineng's family name was Lu, so prior to beginning his study of the *Diamond Sutra,* he was known as Layman Lu. Unfortunately, his father died early, leaving Layman Lu and his widowed mother to suffer in poverty. He supported his mother and himself by selling firewood. One day a customer purchased some wood from him and had Layman Lu deliver it to his shop. Outside the shop, Layman Lu heard a traveler reciting a scripture encouraging bodhisattvas to give life to a mind that has no abode.[6] Hearing the words of this sutra, Layman Lu's mind opened into awakening. He asked the traveler what scripture this was, and the traveler replied that it was the *Diamond Sutra of Perfect Wisdom*.

The traveler also told him that the *Diamond Sutra* was one of the main teachings of the Fifth Ancestor of Zen, named Hongren, and that he (the traveler) had obtained the scripture from the Fifth Ancestor at his monastery in Huang-mei Prefecture.[7] Hearing this, Layman Lu felt a profound aspiration to travel the long distance from southern to northern China to meet the Fifth Ancestor and receive the transmission of the teachings face-to-face.

Fortunately, one of his customers gave Layman Lu ten ounces of silver to enable him to provide for his mother in his absence. So off he went, on one of the greatest adventures in the history of perfect wisdom. He met his teacher, received the robe and the transmission of dharma from him, and thus became the Sixth Ancestor, now called Huineng. From him, the lotus flower of perfect wisdom bloomed into the five schools of Zen.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, I traveled to China with a group of Zen comrades to make a pilgrimage to the monasteries of some of our ancestors. On the morning that we were going to visit the monastery of Huineng and pay our respects to the Sixth Ancestor, as I was leaving my hotel room, my wife said to me, "I wish you well as you go now to meet your ancestor." Hearing these words, my whole body resounded with joy. We approached the

temple gate, and as we entered I felt joy. Unexpected goose bumps arose all over my body, and tears started to flow from my eyes. We walked forward and climbed the stairs of the great hall of the monastery, and we entered. My body felt moved to offer prostrations. The usual number is three, and three were offered. And yet the bowing continued, and then there were nine bows, and the bowing continued, and the sweat started flowing, along with the tears. And the bowing continued, until it seemed that the bows would never end. And yet, at what seemed like 108, the bowing stopped. The robes were soaked, and the heart was joyful, to meet the ancestor who was born of perfect wisdom.

The Bodhisattva Vow in the Diamond Sutra

At the beginning of the *Diamond Sutra,* the Buddha's disciple, the venerable Subhuti, expresses great gratitude for the most rare blessings that the Buddha offers to fearless bodhisattvas. Then he asks the Buddha how a good son or daughter should set forth on the bodhisattva path, how they should stand, and walk, and care for their thoughts. The Buddha praises Subhuti for his wonderful question.

Then the Buddha says that those who wish to set forth on the bodhisattva path should give rise to a thought like this: Whatever kind of living beings that there are or possibly could be throughout the universe, I will lead them all to complete liberation, that is to say, to true nirvana.

Bodhisattvas are living beings like us who vow to meet all living beings and work together with them intimately. They vow to embrace and sustain all beings and carry them to nirvana. Another way to say this is that bodhisattvas vow to embrace and sustain all beings so that those beings will mature and allow themselves to be carried to nirvana.

Bodhisattvas are trying to carry us to nirvana, but we may not be ready right now. We might feel that we have some worldly affairs to take care of before we go. For example, we may feel that we want to hold on to our body and mind a little longer before we are ready to

drop them off. If you have any resistance to being taken to nirvana because of business concerns or other affairs that you need to attend to, please take care of those concerns now so that you can get to work on perfect wisdom.

The *Diamond Sutra of Perfect Wisdom* also says that bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, is our true nature, but training and time are required to realize it. Just as in the story of the lotus flower, the six heroic practices of the paramitas are the roots that grow out of the seed of bodhicitta and engage with kindness and compassion in the mud of the conventional world—that is, with the world as it appears to us.

Our bodhisattva vow is the basis of all of the heroic practices, including wisdom. In turn, all of these heroic practices of bodhisattvas protect and keep our vow alive. It is necessary to remember our vow, but we want to remember it without holding on to it. I pray that we will remember the vow without clinging to it. I pray that we will remember the vow to attain perfect enlightenment for the welfare of this world and that we will not abide in that vow by thinking it is something that belongs to us. The vow is given to us in the fullness of generosity that understands the unity of giver, receiver, and gift. Bodhisattvas trust their vow, and they are present right here with their own suffering and with the suffering of others. By walking together with all sentient beings through birth and death, bodhisattvas and sentient beings transcend suffering together.

When We Save Beings, No Beings Are Saved

Then comes the first big surprise of this perfect wisdom scripture. The Buddha says that although limitless living beings have been led to nirvana, not a single being has been led to nirvana. And why not? If in a bodhisattva the idea of a living being should take place, then he or she is not properly called a bodhisattva. And again, why so? Because he or she is not called a bodhisattva in whom the idea of a self or a being or a person takes place. The Buddha is not saying that bodhisattvas are barred from ever having the idea of a self, a being,

or a person—they would not be able to mix with suffering beings if they were unable to use these provisional tools. I understand the term "take place" to mean that a bodhisattva does not take ideas of self or being or person to be ultimate truth and does not adhere to them as such.

Realizing the way things are is what saves people. We play the role of a savior because our vow to save beings comes from the reality that there is no basis for apprehending or grasping saviors or beings. In reality, there is no abiding in the salvation process or in saved beings or in saviors. In trusting our vow we also trust that we should study where the vow comes from. Our vow comes from ultimate reality and realizes it. Accepting that the way we are is that we are included in all beings and all beings are included in us, as bodhisattvas we wish to devote our life to beings who don't really exist except in intimate relationship with us.

Bodhisattvas wish to carry all beings to nirvana, but in reality, there are no beings that are carried and no one to do the carrying. Bodhisattvas wish to go together with all beings beyond suffering and enter nirvana with them. In the positive sense, *nirvana* is a word that means peace and liberation; on the other hand, *nirvana* also means the cessation of all hindrances to peace and freedom. The root of the word *nirvana* is to blow out, as in to extinguish or blow out the flame of a candle. It is the extinguishing of everything that interferes with peace and freedom.

In the *Diamond Sutra,* vow or aspiration comes first, followed by the surprising practice of perfect wisdom. When we embrace the vow and practice perfect wisdom, wisdom protects the vow by helping us to not abide in it. As one of my friends says, "The ultimate protection of the bodhisattva vow is realization of the ungraspability of all things." Another way to say this is that realization of the emptiness of the vow is what protects the bodhisattva vow. When we know we can't grasp the vow, we will let go of it. It's like opening our hand.

The rest of the sutra instructs us how to apply this teaching and work for the liberation of all beings without grasping the idea of a being, a person, or a self—without clinging to any ideas. It teaches us

how to lead all living beings into the realm of liberation, the realm of self not-self, the realm without me and mine, which does not arise or cease. The teachings of perfect wisdom are for the sake of protecting and nourishing this all-inclusive bodhisattva aspiration.

The Logic of the Mind of No Abode

The *Diamond Sutra* repeatedly expresses a somewhat surprising logical formula to help bodhisattvas train in perfect wisdom. I call this the logic of perfect wisdom, or the logic of non-abiding mind. It could be stated in this way: The very reason that A is A is precisely the reason that A is not A. Therefore, we speak of A. The Buddha expresses such startling logic in this scripture in a discussion of harmonies of buddhafields. He says that if a bodhisattva says, "I will bring about harmonious buddhafields," he or she speaks untruthfully. And how so? Harmonious buddhafields, as no harmonious buddhafields, have been taught by the Buddha, therefore the Buddha speaks of harmonious buddhafields.[8]

The teaching here is that there is a reason that things come to be. A thing comes to be itself by the pivotal support of everything that is not itself. Things do not come to be of or by themselves, but through the support of everything other than themselves. All phenomena are nothing more or less than the support of everything other than that phenomenon. Therefore, the very reason a thing is itself is precisely the reason that it is not itself. This is the logic of non-abiding mind.

Right after the Buddha demonstrates this logic of non-abiding mind in speaking of harmonious buddhafields, he strongly encourages bodhisattvas to give life to a mind of no abode. Such a mind does not abide anywhere, or in anything; it does not abide in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, or mind objects. This is the mind of perfect wisdom, a mind that does not dwell in anything. Layman Lu, the future Sixth Ancestor, awoke upon hearing this section of the *Diamond Sutra*. Several years ago, a generous bodhisattva offered me a little temple in which to practice and teach perfect wisdom. When I was asked to name the temple, wanting to

honor the *Diamond Sutra* and the Sixth Ancestor, I suggested naming it No Abode.

A Little Girl Demonstrates the Mind of No Abode

One of the most important teachers for Suzuki Roshi was Kishizawa Ian Roshi. I heard that Kishizawa Roshi once said that without the mind of an infant we cannot become buddha. The innocent mind of an infant is realized in the wholehearted non-abiding mind of an adult.

If we look deeply enough, we can see that all phenomena, not just buddhas, are demonstrating the mind of no abode. For example, one day my wife and I and our daughter were at the beach by a lake, with another mother and her son, both of whom attended the birth of our daughter. The children were both about two years old. They were sitting in the sand, buck naked, eating strawberries. My daughter pointed at the little boy, and said, "What is that?" His mother said, "That's a penis." Then the little boy pointed toward my daughter and said, "What is that?" And my daughter responded, "It's a strawberry." Can you see the mind of no abode in action?

The *Diamond Sutra* tells us aspiring bodhisattvas that if we hold on to the idea of a living being, a person, or a self that we are escorting to nirvana, then we are not being a bodhisattva. We take care of living beings and carry them beyond suffering to peace and freedom only when we do not apprehend the idea of a being, a person, or a self that is carried. Bodhisattvas aspire to work closely with all beings without grasping or clinging to any ideas about the beings with whom we are working closely. Bodhisattvas care for beings without trying to control them. This is how bodhisattvas carry beings to nirvana. If they have ideas of persons or living beings, bodhisattvas engage so fully with their ideas that they exhaust those ideas, so that they don't abide in them or cling to them. In this way, they are not trapped in the idea of who the person is or of what suffering is.

When we dream that there is something to abide in, our dream is not in accord with the teachings. When we believe such dreams are something other than dreams, we are not abiding in perfect wisdom. This teaching says we take care of beings without abiding in them, take care of colors without abiding in them, take care of our ideas without abiding in them. It says take care of active (*karmic*) consciousness without abiding in it. Just in case we might think about abiding in anything, the teaching says let that thought go.

When we practice the paramitas, we become so intimate with conventional, storied appearances that we open to the ultimate truth that all of these appearances are vast selflessness and vast insubstantiality. As we open to that, we study ultimate truth along with continuing our study of conventional truth. When we become skillful at studying both of them together, we see the wisdom of conventional truth and the wisdom of ultimate truth. Then, we are able to turn wisdom to our main focus, which is the welfare and happiness of beings. But now we look at the welfare of others from the viewpoint of wisdom, and from the viewpoint of wisdom, we can truly see what welfare is and know how to work on that. We are intimate with buddha. Once we are awakened to wisdom, we can look at the welfare of others from that perspective.

Training in Perfect Wisdom

Hearing the Buddha's encouragement to bodhisattvas to develop the mind of no abode, those who aspire to be bodhisattvas might also aspire to realize such a mind. To realize such a mind, some training is required. Shakyamuni Buddha and our buddha ancestors have offered many instructions for training for such realization.

The reader may remember the story of the Buddha's teachings to Bahiya in the preceding chapter on concentration, where the Buddha said, "Train yourself thus…" This instruction is sometimes given as a teaching for an individual for the purpose of realizing wisdom and liberation for one person. However, this is also an instruction for bodhisattvas who vow to meet phenomena fully on the path of

wisdom and liberation for all beings. The Buddha's instructions to Bahiya, "Train yourself thus: in seeing just the seeing, in hearing just the hearing…" is for the sake of meeting phenomena fully, letting things be themselves, and not abiding in them or in anything else.

Wholeheartedness

Superficially, we might think we are not fully engaged, or that we have a choice about being fully engaged, in caring for beings. This way of thinking is samsaric. In reality, we are always deeply and wholeheartedly caring for all beings. By "wholehearted," I mean deep and intimate engagement with each and every being. This is the peaceful world of perfect wisdom. Our real relationships are deep, but we often cannot see how deep and wholehearted they are. When we look half-heartedly and we see things in that way, we are more or less nesting in an abode. But, when we are nesting, we can notice we are nesting and confess it.

One of my first work assignments in the monastery at Tassajara was to repair broken water lines after a storm. Another friend and I went to fix the breaks. We fixed the first one. Then we went to fix the next one and I said to him, "Let's go back and fix the break." He knew what I meant. We fixed the first one but we didn't do it wholeheartedly. We fixed it thinking about the next break and the one after that. We didn't give full attention to this one, and we knew it. So we went back. I didn't confess, "Jim, I think we did a lousy, half-hearted job on that last joint and I think we should go back." I just said, "Let's go back." And he understood. We both recognized our lack of engagement with the pipes, with each other, with the water, and with the springs and the mountains from which they flowed. We often can sense when we are veering away from wholehearted engagement, and we can recover from it by acknowledging our partial engagement and going back to work.

When we are stuck we may also notice that we are hesitating, resisting, or feeling disengaged. For example, we can sense it when we are looking away from the pain of others or when we are

wallowing in our pity for their pain. When we confess that to the buddhas, the process of confession and repentance melts away the root of our half-heartedness.

The Great Wisdom Beyond Wisdom Heart Sutra

Over and over again in the perfect wisdom scriptures, we are told that if a living being can hear these deep teachings on perfect wisdom without becoming frustrated or terrified, then such a being may be able to travel the path of the bodhisattva. Even before we fully understand these teachings, they are given to us to see and listen to, recite and remember, memorize, accept, contemplate, and live in all aspects of our daily life.

The *Great Wisdom Beyond Wisdom Heart Sutra* is even more shocking than the *Diamond Sutra* because it rejects all the intellectual teachings of the first turning, including the teachings of dependent co-arising. These wisdom teachings are for bodhisattvas, beings who aspire to and commit to realizing buddhahood in order to benefit all living beings. They may not be appropriate for someone who has only the aspiration for personal liberation. With this warning, I will now reveal more startling implications of perfect wisdom, which is the lack of a basis for grasping any phenomena.

In the *Heart Sutra,* the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, is deeply practicing Prajna Paramita.[9] In this sutra, Avalokiteshvara fully embraces conventional reality and uses conventional words and phrases—that is, she embraces language—to initiate us into the ultimate truth, which is beyond words. Avalokiteshvara studies active (karmic) consciousness and sees that it is empty of independent existence. This realization relieves all suffering. In doing these practices, she sees ultimate truth. Then Avalokiteshvara, sitting in the midst of such vision, deigns to speak with us.

Wisdom contemplates conventional truth in a thorough, wholehearted way. In the wholeheartedness of their practice, bodhisattvas embody the pivoting of conventional and ultimate

truth. When we practice with conventional truth through the six practices of the paramitas, we open to ultimate truth. Opening to ultimate truth without thorough study of conventional truth at the same time is not healthy wisdom. It is a kind of insanity. When we open to ultimate truth about things without first being grounded in generosity, ethics, patience, diligence, and concentration with conventional things, that is not real wisdom, and it can lead people to abide in dangerous dissociative states.

If we care for our stories through these six great, heroic paramita practices and we are kind to our stories—not only for ourselves but also for the welfare of all beings—then, as we look at conventional truth, we can open to the possibility of realizing the ultimate truth of these conventional things.

The sutra says that in practicing this way, Avalokiteshvara sees that all five categories of existence are empty of own-being. She sees the emptiness of all phenomena and says, “All five aggregates are empty.” The five aggregates are categories of phenomena within deluded self-consciousness. Avalokiteshvara is practicing perfect wisdom and realizing that the aggregates of form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness lack a basis for grasping. She sees that there is nothing to hold on to.

Suffering is relieved in seeing the profoundly selfless nature of all categories of existence. Categories of existence are superficial concepts super-imposed on existence. Our ordinary, conventional, karmic consciousness has a habit of superficially categorizing the inconceivable reality in which we are living. When we practice Prajna Paramita we see there is no basis for grasping any categories or anything in categories. Our ordinary vision is not adequate to the task of seeing that things offer no basis for us to grasp them. Our conventional vision cannot see emptiness, even when we think it does. Emptiness that can be an object of ordinary vision is not real emptiness. Emptiness is too deep to be apprehended in that way. Seeing the inadequacy of our conventional vision is the kind of seeing that relieves suffering.

The perfect wisdom scriptures offer words to help us go beyond conceptual approaches to liberation to a way based on the emptiness of all phenomena. This is why the *Heart Sutra* makes a *shocking* statement in reference to the Four Noble Truths. It says that, given emptiness, there is neither suffering nor the end of suffering, neither the arising of suffering nor no arising of suffering, neither the cessation of suffering nor no cessation of suffering, and neither a path to such cessation nor no path to such cessation.

Perfect wisdom is an organ of vision that sees that there is no basis for apprehending any of the twelve links of dependent co-arising. In expressing this vision of the emptiness of dependent co-arising, the *Heart Sutra* says that in emptiness there is no ignorance and no extinction of it and so on until we reach no old age and death and also no extinction of it. The *Heart Sutra* says in the perfect wisdom of emptiness, all the elements of dependent co-arising become innocent of our ideas of them, and thus there is freedom from grasping. This is the vision that is the true cessation of samsara, and the realization of actual nirvana in the *Heart Sutra*.

This is an example of how the perfect wisdom scriptures, the second turning of the dharma wheel, protects and frees us from clinging to the concepts by which the Buddha offered the wonderful first turning of the wheel of dharma.

Seeing that samsara offers no basis for grasping, and its cessation, nirvana, also offers no basis for grasping leads to a startling revelation of perfect wisdom: there is no basis for grasping the idea, or perception, that samsara and nirvana are different. Without any grasping, samsara and nirvana are identical. This implication of perfect wisdom is another of the startling surprises of the teaching of emptiness.

For me, this is a miraculous implication. This deep teaching renders those who can listen to it and accept it unafraid to enter the world of suffering in order to look after and liberate living beings. It makes it possible for bodhisattvas to wholeheartedly and mindfully plunge into the boundless sea of fragile living beings, wherein they may teach this deep wisdom to all. They can be like this because of

their vows, because they understand there is no difference between samsara and nirvana, and because they realize that there are no living beings to look after and liberate. This is the path of the heroes and heroines of enlightenment.

Perfect Wisdom Is Face-to-Face Transmission

The Zen tradition emphasizes intimate face-to-face transmission of the mind of buddha, the mind of perfect wisdom. Although there are innumerable stories of face-to-face transmission, perhaps the most frequently told is that of Shakyamuni Buddha and venerable Mahakashyapa. One day, the World-Honored One held up a flower, twirled it, and winked. Mahakashyapa's face broke into a slight smile. The World-Honored One said, "I have the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the sublime mind of nirvana. I now entrust it to Mahakashyapa." This story asserts that the inconceivable mind of the buddhas and the treasure house of all their dharma teachings are nothing other than such wholehearted, intimate meeting, face-to-face.

This story sometimes leads people to think that the Buddha gave the True Dharma Eye Treasury to Mahakashyapa, but that Mahakashyapa didn't give the True Dharma Eye Treasury to the Buddha. But in this face-to-face meeting, there is a call and response. In raising the flower and winking, the Buddha called to Mahakashyapa, and in response, Mahakashyapa's face cracked into a slight smile. In their meeting, Mahakashyapa called to the Buddha, requesting that the Buddha transmit the true dharma, and the Buddha responded by raising the flower and winking. Good job, Buddha! Good job, Mahakashyapa! Then the Buddha said, "I now transmit the entire Treasury of True Dharma Eye to Mahakashyapa." The inconceivable mind of nirvana is transmitted in both directions simultaneously in this meeting.

When we see this intimate meeting as perfect wisdom, we also see that the gift flows in both directions. Buddha gives the whole teaching to the student, and the student gives the whole teaching to

buddha. There's no buddha giving the whole teaching to the student without the student also giving the whole teaching to the teacher. The way they give it is by meeting face-to-face. The meeting is the whole teaching, which they give to each other. The inconceivable mind of nirvana is given and received by both. Otherwise, if buddhas were only doing the giving, and the great disciples were only doing the receiving, buddhas would be abiding in the position of giving and students would be abiding in the position of receiving.

In Prajna Paramita, the Mother of All Buddhas, buddha does not abide in the position of buddha, and the disciple does not abide in the position of disciple. By not abiding in a position, they realize perfect wisdom face-to-face. The Buddha's face was right there transmitting into Mahakashyapa's eyes, and Mahakashyapa's eyes were looking right back at the Buddha. Buddha teaches by face-to-face transmission, which exists in both directions simultaneously.

We are just like this. We are always giving our face and receiving the face of others. We and all beings are always listening and calling to each other for perfect wisdom in meeting face-to-face.

In Zen, we use the student-teacher relationship to realize the universal meeting of perfect wisdom. If we work on this relationship with one person thoroughly, we will open to how this is the case with every being and everything. For example, one of our Zen ceremonies is a ceremony of the student going into the teacher's room and meeting the teacher. This is another way of describing the one-on-one interviews I've spoken about in earlier chapters, called *dokosan* in Japanese. *Doko* means alone or solitary and *san* in this case means meeting. It means meeting alone, or a solitary meeting. It could be understood that the student is going into the teacher's room and meeting the teacher alone, but another way to understand this is that the student enters the room and when she gets there, there's only one person present. The teacher and the student *is* one person. It is a ceremony of intimate entrustment of the teaching of suchness where two people are also one.

Working thoroughly with even one person is a big challenge; it means also meeting the challenge of the other person meeting the

challenge. The encouraging thing is that if they meet the challenge, two people can realize the dharma for all people.

This is why bodhisattvas who wish to practice perfect wisdom are encouraged to give life to a mind of no abode by meeting every person, each phenomenon, fully, face-to-face. Full face-to-face engagement realizes non-abiding in appearances of self and other, and realization of non-abiding allows us to fully engage. Realization and full engagement support each other in this way. This is face-to-face transmission. This is the perfection of wisdom.

Bodhisattva wisdom helps beings by engaging intimately with them, which means engaging with beings without holding on to ideas of them. Bodhisattvas work to liberate people without holding an idea of who the person is, what liberation is, or who the liberator is. Even though you may have an idea of me, you can still liberate me face-to-face. When you care for me so wholeheartedly that you do not hold on to your idea of me, you are a bodhisattva. The way that liberation is realized is without you clinging to your idea of me. That is how you take me to nirvana without taking anybody to nirvana. That is what I mean by face-to-face transmission, and this is the authentic path of liberation.

The Original Face of Wisdom

We are sentient beings and we have faces. During my life, I have had many faces. One of the faces is the face I was born with. Now I have the latest version in a succession of faces, a lineage of faces that have been going on for more than seventy-five years. These are my finite faces.

I have also had, from beginningless time, another face, which is always present and is infinite. My finite faces are and have been in the foreground of this other, infinite face, which is in the background. This infinite face is the face I had before my parents were born. In Zen, this is often called our original face. When I wholeheartedly live my finite face, the finite face becomes the infinite face. In wholeheartedly receiving and giving, background becomes

foreground and foreground becomes background. This is the ever-present face of perfect wisdom. When I give and receive my face that way, the entire universe is my face. Intimate face-to-face communion is between a finite face and another finite face, and it is also between finite faces and an infinite face. All beings give and receive perfect wisdom in this wholehearted communion.

The meeting of faces in wholeheartedness is perfect wisdom. Our original, invisible, infinite face is the way that our face calls and responds to all faces. When finite faces meet in wholeheartedness, that meeting includes the infinite face in the background of the finite ones. The background is that *all* faces are at this meeting. When we meet one person wholeheartedly, we are meeting everyone wholeheartedly at the same time. When we meet wholeheartedly with finite faces and we do not abide in the meeting of finite faces, we open to the face before we were born. When perfect wisdom is practiced wholeheartedly with another person or with yourself, everybody is practicing perfect wisdom at the same time because everyone is included in you, and you are included in everyone. That relationship between you and everyone is perfect wisdom.

We are not able to see all the beings in the universe with our physical eyes. Our conventional life has evolved so that when I see you with my eyes, I might think I've seen you well enough. When I see that way, I think my vision adequately sees you, but really this kind of vision is abiding in what is seen and is not the wholehearted life of a bodhisattva. My ordinary vision is not adequate to wholehearted, non-abiding, intimate seeing of the other. In face-to-face transmission, I am not stuck in my vision of your face, or of my face, and you are not stuck in your vision either. Meeting face-to-face this way, we can realize that there is no basis for abiding in our faces. In this way, the doors of peace open for all living beings, even though there are no beings for whom the doors open. In face-to-face transmission, we are giving and receiving all the teachings of the buddhas, and in this transmission of the teachings, not a single thing is given, and not a single thing is received.

At the beginning of this chapter I said that the perfection of wisdom is the ultimate heroic practice of bodhisattvas. But the ultimate practice of bodhisattvas is *not* the ultimate practice of bodhisattvas. Transcendent wisdom isn't really transcendent. It's being able to start over again, fresh and fully alive. In the end, the bodhisattva goes back to the beginning. In realizing the sixth heroic practice, we are able to return to the first five and practice them wholeheartedly and spontaneously without obstruction.

The perfection of wisdom is like the lotus flower. After the seed of lotus has germinated, sprouted, matured, and flowered, eventually its petals drop away, revealing the fruit emerging from within the flower. The fruit eventually becomes too heavy to be held above the water. The stem droops, the fruit plunges back into the mud, and a new generation of seeds come forth. From these seeds, roots and stem sprout forth intimately embracing the mud and the water. This is like the first five perfections sprouting forth from the seed of bodhicitta and embracing all beings with infinite forms of compassion and giving rise to the flower of perfect wisdom. Thus, the never-ending practice of awakening begins again.

EPILOGUE
The Appropriate Response of a Wind Bell

The whole body a mouth hanging in emptiness
Not caring which way the wind blows
East, west, north, or south.
All day long, it sings Prajna Paramita
For all beings.
Ting-tong, ting-tong.

THE OLD BUDDHA TIANTONG RUJING[1] wrote the above poem called "Wind Bell," which celebrates the wind bell's ability to sing perfect wisdom in wind and in no wind.[2]

The wind bell is unconcerned with which direction the wind blows or how gently or strongly it is blowing. Like a buddha, it responds appropriately to the conditions at hand. At times, it offers sounds to signal the appropriate response. If the wind blows from the east, the bell moves west. It moves just the right amount given its weight, the earth's gravity, the strength of the wind, the temperature and humidity around it. In this process of responding to conditions without picking and choosing, its chimes may touch each other and make a sound. Or the chimes may not touch, and therefore they will make no sound. The wind bell has no preferences; it is beyond thinking. It has no fixed position, and because of that, it always responds appropriately to the given situation. It is like a spontaneously acting Zen master, responding appropriately and always singing the songs of perfect wisdom of the gentle buddhas.

I pray that our entire life, like the Buddha's, may be an appropriate response in face-to-face communion with all beings.

TENSHIN ZENKI, REB ANDERSON
Green Dragon Zen Temple
Autumn 2018

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

The Invitation

1. Edward Conze, trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* (Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), 9.
2. Yunmen Wenyan (864–949 C.E.) was a major Chinese Zen Master at the end of the Tang Dynasty. This story has been adapted from case 14 in *The Blue Cliff Record,* trans. Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), 94–97.
3. John Powers, trans., *Wisdom of Buddha: The Saṁdhinirmocana Mahāyāna Sūtra, Essential Questions and Direct Answers for Realizing Enlightenment* (Berkeley, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1995), 243–245. See also Reb Anderson, "The Ten Stages and the Six Perfections," chap. 8 in *The Third Turning of the Wheel: Wisdom of the Samdhinirmocana Sutra* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2012), 163–75.
4. *Dhyana* is a Sanskrit word often translated as "meditation" or "absorption." It has been transliterated into Chinese as *chan* and into Japanese as *zen*.

   Samadhi is a term closely related to dhyana. It may be literally translated as "to make firm or establish." It is a state of collectedness that comes through calming discursive thought. It is defined as one-pointedness of thought called *citta-eka-gata* in Sanskrit.

   Samadhi can be translated as "calm abiding." In its fully developed form, it is one-pointedness of thought.

   Vipashyana (vipassana, Pali*)* can be translated as "insight" or "wisdom" or more literally "highest vision."

Prajna may be translated as “wisdom,” “insight,” or “correct discernment.” It is closely related to and often used interchangeably with the word *vipashyana*.

5. *Bodhicitta* is translated into English in many ways, including: “the mind of awakening,” “way-seeking mind,” “thought of enlightenment,” “aspiration for awakening,” “bodhi-mind.”
6. Author’s translation from *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* vol. 48, no. 2004, ed. Takakusu Juniro (Tokyo: Suppan Kai, 1922–1933), 238.

1 THE FIRST HEROIC PRACTICE

The Perfection of Giving: *A Generous Heart*

1. Huangbo Xiyun (d. 850 C.E.) was a Chinese Buddhist teacher and student of Baizhang Weihei. The full version of this story can be found in translator John Blofed’s *The Zen Teaching of Huangbo on the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).
2. Anderson, *Third Turning of the Wheel*, 24.
3. Étienne Lamotte, ed., *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra: The Concentration of Heroic Progress,* trans. Sara Boin-Webb (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1998), 109–13.
4. Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 109–13.
5. Thomas Cleary, trans., “Luopu About to Die,” case 41 in *Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 179.
6. Author’s version of the story based on “Liangshan,” case 43 in *Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment by Zen Master Keizan,* trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), 161.

2 THE SECOND HEROIC PRACTICE

The Perfection of Ethics: *A Virtuous Life*

1. For a book-length discussion of the bodhisattva precepts, please see Reb Anderson, *Being Upright: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2002).
2. Dogen (1200–1253 C.E.) is the founder of the Soto Zen lineage in Japan. He is often called Eihei Dogen after the temple he founded at Eiheiji, which remains one of the main practice temples of Soto Zen in Japan to the present time. He is also sometimes referred to as Dogen Zenji. He was a prolific writer whose writings include the collections of essays and teachings that can be found in the *Shobogenzo, Eihei Kokorku*, and *Eihei Shingi*, which codifies monastic practice.
3. Eihei Dogen, "Essay on Teaching and Conferring the Precepts," (*Kyojukaimon* Jap.), author's translation with Kazuaki Tanahashi.
4. Gil Fronsdal, trans., *The Dhammapada* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2018), p. 47, v. 183.
5. See Anderson, "The Abode and the Source," chap. 9 in *Being Upright,* pp. 53–69 for an extensive discussion of the forms and ceremonies (the regulations and rituals) of Zen.
6. "Regulations and rituals" is a translation of the Sanskrit word *pratimoksha,* which means "that which is conducive to liberation." This term can also be translated as "forms and ceremonies."
7. Author's version of the story based on a story about Nan-in and Tenno in Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen & Pre-Zen Writings, "Every Minute Zen"* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1973), 32.
8. "Not disparaging the Triple Treasure" means not disparaging buddha, dharma, and sangha.
9. The Chinese character that is translated as "major" also has the connotations or "heavy," "grave," and "important."
10. Dogen Zenji, *Eihei Koso Hotsugammon,* author's translation with Kazuaki Tanahashi for the San Francisco Zen Center liturgy.

11. Dongshan Liangjie (807–869 C.E.) is the founder of the Caedong School of Buddhism in China, which became the Soto Zen lineage in Japan. *Liangjie* means "Good Servant." He is known in Japanese as Tōzan Ryōkai.
12. The Sanskrit word is *buddhadhatu,* which literally means "buddha element" but is usually translated into English as "buddha nature." The Sino-Japanese is *busho,* which is "buddha" and "nature."
13. Mark L. Blum, trans., *The Mahayana Parinirvana Sutra* from *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo,* vol. 12, no. 374 (Moraga, CA: BDK America, 2013), 180. This text is also sometimes known as the Nirvana Sutra. This late Mahayana text offers extensive teachings on buddha nature. This is not the same scripture as the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* from the Pali Canon, which discusses Shakyamuni Buddha's last days, his final sermon, and the community in the days following his death. An English translation of the *Mahayana Parinirvana Sutra* is available online at: https://www.bdkamerica.org/system/files/pdf/dBET_T0374_NirvanaSutra1_2013_0.pdf.
14. Takakusu Juniro, ed., *Avatamsaka Sutra,* author's translation from Japanese based on *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo,* vol. 10, no. 279 (Tokyo: Suppan Kai, 1922–1933), 272c.
15. Cleary, "Spiritual Uncle Mi and the Rabbit," case 56 in *Book of Serenity,* 237–40.
16. In this story, the bodhisattva is likened to a person who, in childhood, wanders away from home. He wanders for many years, forgetting his home and family, becoming increasingly poor, emaciated and needy. At the same time, the parents become increasingly wealthy and concerned for the welfare of their lost child. The parents always long for their son and search in vain for him. At last in his wandering, by chance the son reaches the city where the parents now live. He sees his wealthy parents from afar, but he cannot recognize them. The parents joyfully recognize the wanderer as their own son; however,

when they attempt to contact him by dispatching their attendants to bring the son he becomes even more frightened and fearful of being enslaved. He faints. The parents send some other servants to revive him, but when he revives he runs away in fear.

The parents understand their son is terrified, and they do not want to alarm him further, so they send emissaries dressed in dirty rags to offer him a job shoveling dung in their stables. The emissaries are instructed to offer him wages in advance. The son joyfully accepts the wages and agrees to work at this menial task. The parents, watching his diligence, are filled with compassion and wonder.

As time goes on, the parents offer their son better wages and more responsibility in small steps. The parents even disguise themselves in humble dress and approach him with respect. They offer him the gifts of a new name and a servant to assist him. The son gains confidence and self-respect through this process, and he now is able to accept these tokens, but he still does not realize that they are an indication that he is, in truth, a member of this great family. In this way the parents slowly nurture their son's confidence.

After some time, the parents make their son steward of their estate, teaching him the business of the great house. Eventually, they see that his mind is open and the time is right, and the parents arrange a great meeting of their relatives and servants, the king with his ministers, and the citizens of the town. At this meeting the parents announce to the entire assembly that this person who served them faithfully as laborer and steward for so long is none other than their dearly beloved son and the heir to their entire estate. Hearing this, the son joyfully realizes what was true all along.

Dongshan's comment means that we also are like this. We have only temporarily fallen into poverty. This story is a model of Zen training and realization.

In most English translations of the *Lotus Sutra,* the child is referred to as a son. This story is based on *The Threefold Lotus Sutra by Kosei,* trans. Bunno Kato, Yoshiro Tamura, and Kojiro Miyasaka with revisions by W. E. Soothill, Wilhelm Schiffer, and Pier P. Del Campana (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 2007).

17. "Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi" is a poem originally written in classical Chinese. It appeared during the Song Dynasty and is usually attributed to Dongshan Liangjie (Jap. Tōzan Ryōkai). It is also sometimes called "Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi." Translation by San Francisco Zen Center.
18. Eihei Dogen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobogenzo,* ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boston: Shambhala, 2012), 31–32.

3 THE THIRD HEROIC PRACTICE

The Perfection of Patience: Radiant Presence

1. Anderson, *Being Upright,* 182.
2. Author's telling of the story from the *Jataka Tales,* based on John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 35.
3. Reps and Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones,* 22.
4. Eiheiji is the monastery established by Dogen Zenji in Japan in 1244 for the training of monks in the Soto School. It is located in Fukui Prefecture and continues to be active as a major Soto Zen training monastery today.
5. Cleary, "Dongshan's 'Always Close,' " case 98 in *Book of Serenity,* 422–23.
6. Author's version. This poem was written by the Japanese poet-monk Saigyo (1118–1190 C.E.). A slightly different translation of this poem can be found in William LaFleur's biography of Saigyo, *Awesome Nightfall* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 86.

This leaky, tumbledown
grass hut left an opening for the moon, and I gazed at it
all the while it was mirrored
in a teardrop fallen on my sleeve.

4 THE FOURTH HEROIC PRACTICE

The Perfection of Enthusiasm: Joyful Effort

1. Dogen, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point," chap. 3 in *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boulder: Shambhala, 2010), 29–33.
2. Dogen, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point," 32–33.
3. Author's retelling of the story based on Reps and Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones,* 127.

5 THE FIFTH HEROIC PRACTICE

The Perfection of Concentration: The Dharma Gate of Repose and Bliss

1. Author's words based on Gene Reeve's translation of *The Lotus Sutra,* chap. 16 (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 199.
2. Bodhidarma is a name often used to refer to the founder of the *Chan*, or Zen tradition. Who or what this founder is will always be a great mystery. Students of the Zen school have been sincerely and playfully probing this mystery for a long time. May we now, for the welfare of the whole world, continue to study this mystery.
3. Story as told by the author. This story appears in the Bahiya Sutta, a section of the Udana Sutta. See John D. Ireland, trans., *The Udana:*

   Inspired Utterances of the Buddha (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997), 16–19.
4. Ireland, *The Udana,* 18.
5. Author's translation from *Fukanzazengi.*

6. "Jewel Mirror Samadhi" by Dongshan, also known as the "Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi," from the SFZC liturgy.

   All other references below are from the *Shobogenzo,* as translated in Dogen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,* trans. and ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi.

   - Self-Fulfillment Samadhi by Dogen is part of an essay called *Bendowa* or *On the Endeavor of the Way,* 5–7. It is also called Self-Receiving and Employing Samadhi and by its Japanese name, *Jijuyu Zammai.*
   - King of Samadhi Samadhis, *Shobogenzo,* 667–70.
   - Ocean Seal Samadhi, also known as Ocean Mudra Samadhi, *Shobogenzo,* 380–86.
   - Self-Realization Samadhi, *Shobogenzo,* 695–704.

7. Reb Anderson, "A Ceremony for the Encouragement of Zazen," in *Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains: Dharma Talks on Zen Meditation* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1999), 11–19.

6 THE SIXTH HEROIC PRACTICE

The Perfection of Wisdom: Body and Mind Dropped Off

1. Reps and Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones,* 157.
2. Green Dragon Temple is located at Green Gulch Zen Center in Muir Beach, CA.
3. Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom,* 135. These lines have been excerpted from a much longer passage and slightly altered in the "Hymn to Prajna Paramita" from the San Francisco Zen Center liturgy. The SFZC version is the version that appears in the text.
4. For more about the three turnings of the dharma wheel see Anderson, *Third Turning of the Wheel*, 5–15.
5. Dajian Huineng (638–713 C.E.) is often called the Sixth Ancestor of Zen in China. The *Platform Sutra* is said to be a record of Huineng's life and teachings.

6. *Diamond Sutra,* Section Ten C, translation by the author. The term translated here as "a mind that has no abode" may be variously translated as "without dwelling in any dharmas" or "without relying on any dharmas."
7. Daman Hongren (601–674 C.E.) is traditionally called the Fifth Ancestor of Chan, or Zen. He is said to be the teacher of the Sixth Ancestor, Dajiang Huineng.

   There is an oft-repeated, colorful backstory about how Hongren came to study with the Fourth Ancester, Daoxin. According to this story, an old man encountered Daoxin and asked to be Daoxin's student. Daoxin said that even if the old man learned about Zen, he was too old to transmit it to others. Daoxin told the old man that he would wait for him to come back in his next life. The old man then went away and met a young woman who was washing clothes by the river. He asked her if he could stay a while. Later, when it was discovered that she was pregnant, her family disowned her. When she gave birth, in the midst of her distress, she threw the baby into the river. Although the river was flowing, the infant stayed dry and was protected from harm. Seeing that, the mother understood that it was her responsibility to take care of this child. People called the child "a boy without a father's name." One day when the child was walking with his mother, they met Master Daoxin. When Daoxin saw the boy he asked the boy's mother to allow him to become his disciple. The mother was happy to give the boy away. The boy eventually became Daoxin's successor. In this tradition there is a feeling of deep sadness and gratitude for this woman's compassion and for the hardship that she endured in the process of being this child's mother. This strange and mysterious story reveals something of the shadow in the Zen tradition.

   Today if we visit the Fifth Ancestor's monastery we will find a building dedicated to his mother. I believe the name of the building is "The Hall of the Great Compassionate Mother."

In the story as it is told by Keizan, he says, “There is a name that is not received from one’s father, not received from one’s ancestors, not inherited from the buddhas, not inherited from Zen masters: it is called the buddha nature or the essence of buddhahood.” Keizan also comments, “Though bodies change, there is no separate mind, past, or present.”

Story adapted from Thomas Cleary, trans., *Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment by Zen Master Keizan* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 119–21.

8. *Diamond Sutra,* Section Ten C, translation by the author.
9. The Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, called Avalokiteshvara, is also known as Kwan Yin in China and Kannon or Kanzeon in Japan. This beloved figure is depicted at different times as either male or female.

EPILOGUE

The Appropriate Response of a Wind Bell

1. Tiantong Rujing (Japanese: Tendō Nyōjo, 1163–1228 C.E.) was Dogen’s teacher in China.
2. Author’s translation. A slightly different translation of this poem can be found in Michael Wenger, ed., *Wind Bell: Teachings from the San Francisco Zen Center, 1968–2001* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2002), xi.

INDEX

Note:Index entries from the print edition of this book have been included for use as search terms. They can be located by using the search feature of your e-book reader.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

REB ANDERSON is a lineage-holder in the Soto Zen tradition. Born in Mississippi, he grew up in Minnesota and left advanced study in mathematics and Western psychology to come to San Francisco Zen Center in 1967. He practiced with Suzuki Roshi, who ordained him as a priest in 1970 and gave him the name *Tenshin Zenki* ("Naturally Real, The Whole Works"). He received dharma transmission in 1983 and served as abbot of the Zen Center's three training centers (City Center, Green Gulch Farm, and Tassajara Zen Mountain Center) from 1986 to 1995. He is particularly interested in Buddhist yoga, philosophy, and psychology, and in the relationship of wisdom and compassion to the social and ecological crises of our times.

Tenshin Roshi lives with his friends and family at Green Gulch Farm and continues to teach at the Zen Center. He is author of *Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains: Dharma Talks on Zen Meditation*, *Being Upright: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts,* and *The Third Turning of the Wheel: Wisdom of the Samdhinirmocana Sutra*. In addition, his writings have been published in *Wind Bell: Essays and Lectures from the San Francisco Zen Center, 1968–2001,* and in numerous Buddhist periodicals including *Inquiring Mind*, *Tricycle*, *Turning Wheel*, and *Shambala Sun* (now *Lion's Roar*).

Reb leads meditation retreats and classes nationally and internationally. Other information, including his teaching schedule, can be found at www.rebanderson.org. Audio recordings of many of his dharma talks are available at www.rebanderson.org/talks.

Sign up to receive news and special offers from Shambhala Publications.

Or visit us online to sign up at shambhala.com/eshambhala.