

Wind Bell

Fall 1992

“Speaking of the Unspoken”

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Shortly before Dogen Zenji died, he was with his close disciple Tetsu Gikai; he was talking to him about the method for transmitting the bodhisattva precepts. He said, "Please come closer." And Gikai came over to the edge of his bed and stood by his right side, and listened. And Dogen Zenji said, "In this present lifetime, there are ten million things that I do not understand concerning the Buddhadharma of the Tathagata. However, concerning the Buddhadharma, I have the joy of not giving rise to evil views. Depending on the correct Dharma, I certainly have 'correct faith.' It is only this fundamental intention that I have taught, nothing else. You should understand this."

What I want to talk about today is my personal journey, my personal search for this fundamental intention which the Buddhas teach. I don't know quite where to start, but I might start when I was about eight years old, sitting in my room by myself, looking out the window, and I heard a ringing in my ears. I didn't know what it was, and I thought, "Perhaps this is my conscience. I think something's bothering me." A couple of years later I decided that I would do whatever gave me the most gain in my social world, and as a twelve-year-old, what gave me the most gain was to be as wild and outrageous as possible. I got lots of attention from my friends for being a wild boy. Whenever I did anything naughty, they got excited and praised me; they looked up to me as the leader at causing trouble. I was a hero in my school for causing trouble. Then I met a man, a big man, a strong man, and he noticed what I was doing. He loved me, and he told me that when he was young, he was just like me. He looked at me, and he said, "You know, it's actually quite easy to be bad. What's really difficult is to be good." I thought, "He knows," and I decided at that time, "I'm going to try to be good."

However, shortly after, I forgot my decision. And then about a year later I was able to realize somehow that I had a lot of problems, that I was suffer-ing -that I was anxious about unimportant things, like how I looked, whether people liked me or not, and how popular I was at school. I realized that if I could just somehow be kind to everyone, all my problems would drop away. And again I decided, as sincerely as I could, to try to be kind to everyone. However, this decision was made in the quiet of my own room at home, and as soon as I got to school I always forgot. I continued to forget for a number of years more, and somewhere along the line I read some stories about Zen monks. I heard about the way they conducted their lives. I read about Hakuin Zenji, and about Ryokan. When I read their stories, I remembered my childhood vow. When I heard about how these men lived, I said, "This is the way I want to be. This is the way to be free of all my problems and troubles with people."

I wanted to be like these Zen monks, but I had no idea how to become like them. I kept reading, and gradually I found out that all these people shared in a certain practice. I thought, "Perhaps they're not so good just by chance. Perhaps they're not so successful in being kind just by luck. Maybe they all do some kind of exercise that promotes this kind of compassion." And I found out that what they all did was sit. So I started to sit. The more I sat and the more I studied, the more wonderful I found this sit-ting. The more I heard teachings about it, the more grateful I felt to have found this sitting-so simple, so all-consuming, so perfect, and so effective.

So I practiced sitting for a number of years, enjoying it very much. But to tell you the truth I forgot, in a way, my original motivation: to be a compassion-ate person, to be a good person. I forgot about that, and just practiced sitting. And also, to tell you the truth, I didn't hear much teaching about being good and about being compassionate. I didn't hear it at the Zen Center where I practiced, and I didn't hear it from people at other Zen centers either. But it didn't seem to be a problem, because the sitting itself was so all-inclusive and wonderful.

Practicing this sitting, there was a strong emphasis on wisdom, on insight. There was a strong emphasis on the fundamental of sitting with no gaining idea; of a practice that has no sign, no stages, no gain, and fundamentally no thinking. All these instructions and indications as to the core of sitting I found totally adorable. It never crossed my mind that people didn't understand-especially that I didn't understand-what that meant.

Then, after practicing for about sixteen years, I received what we call *shiho*, Dharma Transmission. In the process of Dharma Transmission, I read at the bottom of the document called the Precept-Vein, *kechimyaku* (those of you who have lay ordination or priest ordination in the Soto School may have read where it says), "It was revealed and affirmed to the teacher Myozen that the precept vein of the bodhisattva is the single cause of the Zen gate." Receiving the precepts of the bodhisattva is the single, one, unique cause and condition of the Zen gate.

I felt somewhat surprised; this had not been emphasized during my sixteen years of practice. And I came to understand from that point that the gate to this signless, stageless, objectless, gainless, beautiful practice of sitting-the gate to it is these bodhisattva precepts. And I thought, why haven't I heard this before?

More and more I'm realizing and finding Zen teachings, Dogen's teachings, which confirm that the precepts are essential and fundamental. Just before he died, Dogen Zenji said to Gikai, "In our teaching, the transmission of the precepts is the most important condition."

And I've heard that in other Buddhist traditions, for example the Theravada tradition, there is a similar pattern. The Theravadin teacher, Achaan Chaa, said that the Buddhadharma is *dana*, giving, *sila*, precepts, and *bhavana*, cultivation or meditation practice. But when the westerners come to practice, they aren't interested in *dana* and *sila*. They just want to do the *bhavana*.

And I think that during the rise of Zen in America, as my life somewhat shows, many of us started sitting right away; we were primarily interested in the essential practice of the Zen school, the sitting. We were not so explicitly or consciously exposed to the teachings of giving and ethics, for example, the first two paramitas. As a result of not being exposed to these fundamental practices, I feel that our understanding-or my understanding of the fundamental intention of sitting, was perhaps ... not so correct.

There are numerous statements in Zen which assume that we know that the precept vein is the fundamental. Therefore, when Zen teachers say, like yesterday, Narasaki Roshi quoted Master Rujing- "We don't need to recite scriptures, offer incense, practice repentance, and so on. Only sitting is required." And Dogen Zenji said, "In the true Dharma, zazen is the straight way to correct transmission. Zazen is all

the Buddha taught. Zazen includes precept practice." They are not saying we shouldn't practice repentance and precepts. They're just trying to show us what these practices really are.

So one of the characteristics, and, I feel, the beauty of Zen, especially as taught by Dogen Zenji, is that it is so strictly the pure, true, and ultimate teaching. But there is a provisional teaching also. And if people have never been exposed to the provisional teaching, there is a possibility of misunderstanding the ultimate, true teaching. So that some Zen students actually think, "Precepts are not important." Even some Zen scholars say that precepts are the weak sister of the Buddhist practices, that really Buddhist practices are meditation and insight, and precepts are not so important. Why do they feel that? Partly because when they look at the published teachings on Zen, they don't see much on precepts.

A few years ago the Tibetan teacher Tara Tulku came to teach at this Zen Center, and he asked me some questions. He said, "In your meditation, what is the object?" I said (I felt a little embarrassed in a way), "Well, we don't have any object. We practice objectless meditation." And he said, "Oh. We have that objectless meditation, too, in Vajrayana, but it is the most advanced meditation. Usually practitioners work for many years before they

can do objectless meditation." And he also asked me, "What stages are there in your training?" I said, "Well, in a way, we're mostly concerned with not falling into stages. It's part of our tradition." I told him the story of Seigen Gyoshi going to the Sixth Ancestor and asking, "How can I avoid falling into steps and stages?" And the Ancestor said, "What have you been practicing?" Seigen said, "I haven't even been practicing the Noble Truths (that is, I haven't even started the beginning practice)." And the Ancestor said, "Well, what stage have you fallen into?" And Seigen said, "How could I have fallen into any stages if I haven't even practiced the Noble Truths?" Then Tara Tulku said, "Wow! That's very advanced, to be working on not even slipping into or clinging to the various stages of meditation." And again I thought, how subtle, how pure Zen is.

Then he said, "Well, I talked to some of your students and there are certain things about Mahayana Buddhism which they don't seem to know about." And while this teacher was at Zen Center, many people came up to me and said, "Why don't we do this, and why don't we do that?" In fact the things they were asking about we *were* doing, but they hadn't noticed. For example, they said, "Why don't we make offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas? Why don't we pay homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas?" I'd say, "We do, every time we have a meal." And then they'd say, "Oh."

These things are part of our tradition, but, in fact, people often don't even know it. So they don't know it; that's fine, in a way- it's so subtle, they don't even know it. Still, I wondered, and I was concerned. So I thought perhaps it would be good to tell people that we do make bodhisattva vows, that we actually are bodhisattvas, that we do pay homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas, that we make offerings, that we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It's not that these practices are only for other Buddhists who don't know the subtle teachings of Zen.

For many years at Zen Center I never really noticed that I had taken refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Now I've learned, again from Dogen's mouth, through Dogen's life. As he was dying, what was he doing? The last practice he did was to walk around a pillar upon which he had written, "Buddha, Dharma, Sangha." And he said, "In the beginning, in the middle, and in the end, in your life as you approach death,

in death, after death, and as you approach life, always, through all births and deaths, always take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha." This basic practice, this fundamental practice, which all Buddhists do, many Zen students never even heard about. It was said, but we didn't hear it, because it wasn't emphasized strongly enough. In some way our sitting practice is so essential, so profound, that we may feel we can overlook some of these more basic practices.

But then I wondered, do we really understand, and are we really practicing zazen in accord with the fundamental intention which Dogen Zenji taught? Do we have correct faith? Is it possible that as we practice the Buddhadharmā, some evil, some upside-down, some perverted kind of thinking is coming up and arising in our mind as we practice? I don't say it is or isn't. I just say, are we wondering about that?

We always say, "Just sit." But it's pretty hard to understand what that means. Suzuki Roshi said, "Receiving the precepts is a way to help us understand what it means to just sit." But then we hear for example the beautiful Zen story yesterday, something like: A monk asked a Zen teacher, "What about precepts, samādhi, and wisdom?" The teacher said, "I have no useless furniture in my house."

This, again, is such a beautiful teaching. And it means, of course, that zazen includes the precepts, the concentration practice, and wisdom. But I think, in my case, when I heard that teaching, it de-emphasized those practices, de-emphasized my concern for the precepts which I think allowed me to not study the precepts as thoroughly as I might have had I heard from the beginning that the precepts are the most fundamental cause of the Zen gate. When I hear that teaching and then apply myself to the study of precepts, a kind of integrity comes into my sitting, I believe, I trust, which helps it be just sitting in its true sense. Without the precepts I don't think I can understand what it means to just sit.

When the Zen teacher refers to precepts, concentration, and wisdom, saying that we don't have any unnecessary furniture in our house, I think he means that the precepts are not anything extra in our lives. You can't be a good meditator or a good meditation teacher if you don't understand the precepts. These precepts are not a side issue; they are at the core of the process of awakening. What has not been emphasized, and what I'm trying to emphasize at Zen Center now, is that although there are no precepts outside Zen, there is also no Zen outside the precepts. Similarly, there is no Bodhisattva vow, no wish to save all beings outside zazen, but also there is no zazen outside the wish *to* save all beings.

Again, after I had practiced for several years, I read Tientung Rujing, Dogen's teacher. Every time before he sat, he would think, "Now I sit in order to save all beings." And he encouraged us *to* practice in this way. Somehow, before that I hadn't really deeply heard this teaching. Maybe this omission was a skillful device of the early transmission of Zen to America. But now I feel that we need *to* realize that there is no Bodhisattva Vow—no real effective wish to save all beings—outside of zazen, and no real zazen outside of the wish to save all beings. There's no compassion in addition to upright sitting, and no upright sitting in addition to compassion.

Yesterday, Narasaki Roshi talked about the three monkeys. I don't know the origin of these three monkeys; apparently the three monkey teaching has been in Japan for a while. It's also fairly old in the West, isn't it? The way I heard the teaching of the three monkeys was "Speak no evil, see no evil, and hear no evil." Is that the way you heard it? Yesterday, it was translated as "no seeing, no hearing, and no speaking." "No seeing evil, no hearing evil, and no speaking evil," which partly means no seeing other

people's faults, not speaking of other people's faults, and not listening to people who are talking about other people's faults. This is a regular Buddhist precept, right?

And on the deeper level of upright sitting itself, it's just straight "no hearing, no seeing, and no speaking." Narasaki Roshi also said that nowadays everybody's quite enthusiastic about hearing about other people's faults, and speaking about other people's faults, seeing if we can find out what's wrong with other people. Many people make a good living trying to find out what's wrong with the way people cook, the way people write, the way people make art, the way people make movies: find out what's wrong with them, tell everybody, and everyone else can tell everybody. This is our way now, right? Intense looking for, hearing about and speaking about the faults of other people.

But he also said that we need a fourth monkey on top of these three, a fourth monkey of non-thinking. In other words, if we practice "not seeing, not speaking, and not hearing evil" with some fixed idea of what that means, this still can cause problems. In order to understand the precepts we must practice non-thinking, *hishiryo*. If we engage in these three practices, and think about them and understand them only by our own thinking, we will have a tendency to say, "This is right, and that is wrong. This is ethics. I am ethical; I am helping people." Therefore, we need the fourth monkey which protects us from self-righteousness, by deeply reminding us that even the precepts are empty of inherent existence, that is, we only understand them in dramatic conversation with all living beings.

The fourth monkey is the non-abiding mind of upright sitting, the mind far beyond this world of virtue and non-virtue-the realization of blankety-blank freedom. The precepts must be practiced with this mind of upright sitting in order to be received and lived, and not held to in some limited, fixed way. Receiving the precepts, we must practice upright sitting; we must practice non-thinking. However the tricky part for Zen students is that in practicing non-thinking, sometimes we also forget about the precepts. If we don't receive and practice these precepts, the true meaning of non-thinking will not be transmitted to us. But if we don't practice non-thinking, the true meaning of these precepts will not be alive in us.