

PRECEPTIONS



**CEN
TRE
OF
GRAV
ITY**



from the 2010-2011 Precepts Course at Centre of Gravity

And fantasy it was, for we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word.

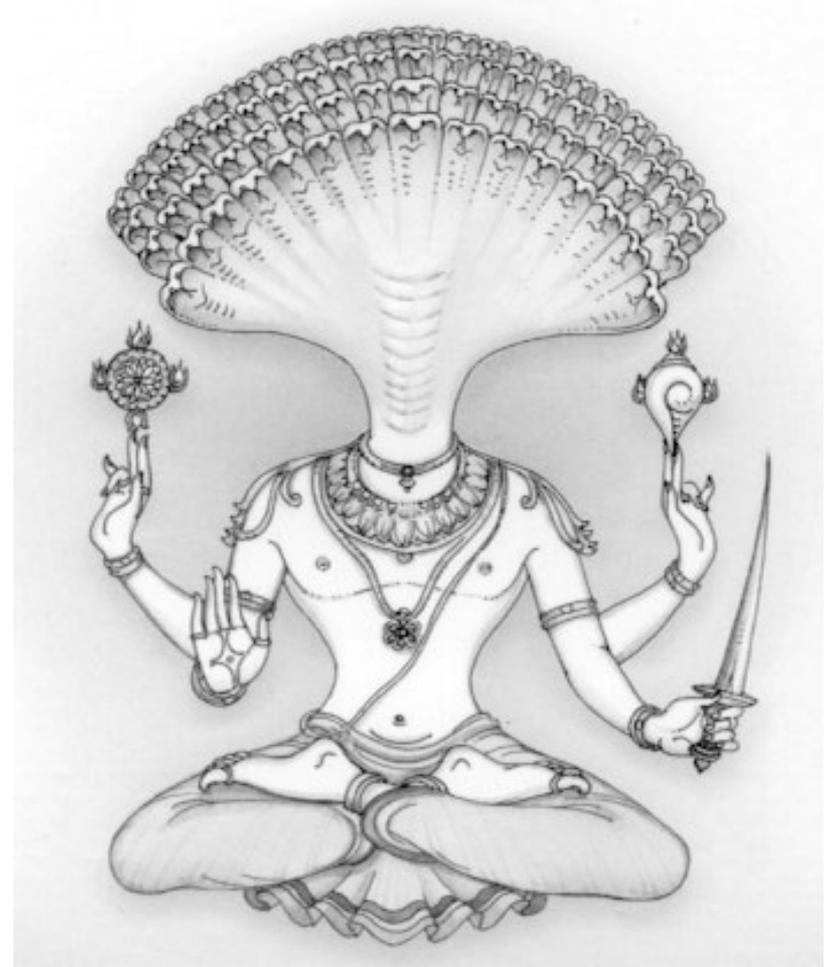
THE BLUEST EYE by Toni Morrison

“A Zen master’s life is one continuous mistake.”

Dogen

The Five Yamas

Ahimsa	Non-Violence: Recognizing that I am not separate from all living beings. This is the precept of non-harm.
Satya	Honesty: Speaking the truth as I perceive it and not deceiving anyone. This is the precept of honesty.
Asteya	Not Stealing: Being satisfied with what I have. This is the precept of not taking what is not given freely.
Brahmacharya	Wise use of Energy: Encountering all with respect and dignity. This is the precept of chaste conduct.
Aparigraha	Non-greed: Using all the ingredients of my life. This is the precept of generosity and non-acquisitiveness.



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Table of Contents

<i>page</i>	2	Prologue
	4	I Introductions
	20	II Ahimsa: Non-Harming in Speech
	36	III Ahimsa 2: Non-Harming in Speech
	62	IV Satya: Honesty
	82	V Asteya: Non-Stealing
	96	VI Brahmacharya: Sexual Healing
	114	VII Brahmacharya 2: Touch the Ghost
	136	VIII Aparigraha: Generosity
	158	IX Wordless Speech



Prologue

A commitment to ethics begins with recognizing that everything we do makes waves. These waves begin in body, speech, and mind, and ripple through our lives and the lives of those around us. Although we often think of ethics as rules, choosing an ethical way of life is also an expression of deep interconnectedness.

Patanjali, the 200 C.E. yogic sage, famously wrote that there were eight limbs of yoga practice, and the first was named the yamas. How do we get along with one another? There are five yamas, or restraints, and the practice of these yamas is the lens through which relationships can come into focus.

For six months in 2010-2011, a course was offered at the Centre of Gravity in Toronto, led by Michael Stone. It was designed for people with busy urban lives who are dedicated to exploring the foundations of deep practice. Practicing yoga postures or sitting meditation every day are only some of the tools of the dharma. We need different tools for different jobs. Do you have the right tools to address the myriad layers of your life?

Dukkha (suffering) is not just inside us - it also manifests in our relationships with people, money, sex, the body, the environment, and institutions. Taking these precepts is a practice of committing to building a culture of non-harm, honesty and respect for all creatures. It's also recognizing that we live in an imperfect culture and that we'll fail ten thousand times in our efforts to awaken.

If formal practice can be deepened, so can the meaningful and creative day-to-day work of our lives. It's essential that our practice links up with everything we do. It's essential that we don't hide in our practice or in our relational lives. Otherwise, years go by and nothing really changes. This is the heart of an engaged dharma practice.

This little book includes transcriptions of Michael's talks, responses from the group, and supplemental materials, including a steady back beat of found poems cribbed out of the excellent books of British child psychologist Adam Phillips.

Preceptions

I Introductions

A talk by Michael Stone

*Remembrance Day,
November 11, 2010*

First Words

This course that you're about to undertake is a practice, and the way that I think about practice is that it takes your ideals—and all of us here probably have some high ideals—and actually makes them real in our lives. That way what we think of as our life and what we think of as our practice are seamlessly integrated.

Ritual

In most cultures you reach a certain age and undergo rituals. One of the things that any anthropologist will tell you about this culture is that we don't have much ritual. There's not too much that we do to mark certain times of our lives—certain passings, births, deaths, anniversaries—so this course offers a formalized ritual. It's about undertaking the practice of making the dharma the centre of our lives. Over the next six months this course will be the centre of our lives, and everything that we do will flow out of it.

Bloodline

It's like the blood. As some of you know, mostly I'm not that interested in lineage. But I actually think the blood lineage from the Buddha all the way to all of you is ethics, is the precepts. In Zen practice, where the term “precepts” comes from, when you gather as a group you chant all the names from the Buddha to your teacher. And unlike in India, in Korea, China and Japan they kept track of history, so sometimes it would take you fifteen minutes to chant from the Buddha, all the way through all the teachers (usually they were all men) to your teacher, who up until recently was probably a man also. Joan Halifax has a chant they do at Upaya where they chant all the women ancestors in their lineage. I think the bloodline that connects us to our awakened ancestors is the precepts. It's the one thing that you find in all the lineages that stays the same.

We're going to spend the day today talking about intention and the seriousness of heart that it takes to drop into what we're going to explore and really let the practice into your life. So that you can let your life flow out of this, and at the same time to be able

Preceptions

to concentrate your mind, your body, your money, your job, your sexual life, your shopping patterns, your real estate interests, your subscriptions... to distill all of these so that they flow through the precepts. It's really easy to talk about non-violence or honesty, but to actually be able to do this with your whole life requires some commitment, and also some training.

I: Introductions

Your Life Is Not Your Life

Another piece of this course that is really important is that your life is not just your life. Even when we think about our history, “Oh I ate such and such,” or “I was married to so and so...” There is a so and so, there is a such and such. Our lives don't belong to us. Our lives are inextricably woven through the ecological and social spheres, so everything that you do really makes a difference. That's a really important part of what we're going to explore over the next six months.

Sitting Etiquette

What I'd like to do to get us rolling is go through a little bit of etiquette that's involved in sitting down on your cushion. When you sit down on your cushion, this cushion is the seat. The word in Sanskrit is asana, which is a royal seat. When you sit down on your seat there's a particular way to do this. Why don't we all stand up? First of all, this bottom rectangle should be set up so that the crease, which is where you slip the cover over, should always be



Preceptions

facing away from the front of the room. You want to make sure the crease is towards your buttocks when you sit down.

When you come to your cushion you're going to bow to your cushion. When you bow you bring your palms together, and you bring the tip of your highest finger, which should be the same for most of us, to the same level as the bridge of your nose. And then you'll turn to the right and bow to the room, and then you'll sit down. You don't have to do it all at once. You can go to the front of the cushion, it's good to have your feet together, then bow, then turn to the right, and bow, and sit down. There's no need to make it any more formal than that.

I: Introductions

If you have a position in the room, if you're a priest, or a time-keeper, or the drummer (who is usually the timekeeper), usually you have your elbows higher up than anyone else. It's a little detail that you can experiment with. It's part of the etiquette. All these small maneuvers create a kind of ritual in our practice that makes us pay attention. When you walk into the room, and you just kind of have all your stuff around, and you pick your nose, the quality of our alertness is not as strengthened. When we add these little details, we try to pay more attention to the way we sit down, the way we organize our cushion, the way we stand up, the way we are with each other. I think you'll see when you get the hang of these little details, which we're going to do a lot of in this course, it's hard to go on without them. It just seems obvious that there

should be some dignity to all these movements, because they make us pay attention.

When you're at home, or when you're at other practice centers, please continue to do this now for the rest of your life.

Depth

I think that there are plateaus that we have in our practice. You have a certain part of your practice that's working in your life, usually it's in a particular area, and then it starts to plateau. In the last year I have seen so clearly how much depth there is for me to move in my life, and whenever I start to do so, I feel that because there's a community here, we can also do it together. I feel sometimes that community inspires people to really go for it, to really look clearly and not just to "know things" about your life, but to really look clearly. For me that's the heart of this practice, to really be able to see how life works. And in doing so, how can I reduce the stress and suffering in different areas of my life? I feel I can't say it enough. There's so much depth in this practice.

What Is a Practice?

I think that Centre of Gravity has grown and I hear onlookers at fashion extravaganzas say things like, "I practice at Centre of Gravity." You hear this a lot in the Yoga world. "Oh you know, I practice this and I practice that." Sometimes this question arises,

Preceptions

I: Introductions

“Well what do you mean? What do you mean you practice?” What is a practice, what does that actually mean? Part of creating this course is to say: this is what a practice is, and here is how you can practice. I feel like the announcement of this course inspired many people, most of whom are here, and it also made a lot of people run, and that was really interesting to watch. If you say you have a practice, and you come to Centre of Gravity, and if practice is the centre of your life, well let’s see. It’s interesting to see people get scared away, and I think at many other times in my life I would have done the same thing. So I’m here as a commitment to myself, to look at my life, and I’m also here for all of you, to support you as best as I can. Knowing that you’re going to do what you want with this course.

Groups

We’re here in a group. For all of us, groups constellate many kinds of anxieties: of excitement, of fear, of joy. Sometimes a group like this can bring out the absolute best in us, and sometimes it can do exactly the opposite. Some of us really thrive in groups, and some don’t, but I think over the next six months, most of us will feel both these things. We’ll feel places where it’s great to be here together in this sangha, and places where other people are difficult to tolerate. That’s the nature of being in a group. So what I’d like you to do is find a partner, maybe someone sitting next to you, and I’d like you to share with them what you think is going to

be the main trigger for you being here in this group. We all know what excites us; we’ve just talked about that. But how do you think you might get triggered being in a group? Can you give a concrete example?

For example: I don’t like talking to a partner, and if I have to start talking to a partner I’m probably going to start hiding a little bit, because it’s hard for me to be honest with a stranger. Or: I don’t want to be seen to be making a mistake in front of all these strangers. We committed to being honest, and I haven’t been very honest this week. And that’s something I don’t want to be honest about.

So again, you don’t have to name how you might get triggered, because you might not be. But you know what your triggers are, right? I just want you to share that with your partner.

Stirred Up

It’s so important to recognize as a group that our practice is going to have more energy because of our group dynamic, and also that we’re going to be challenged. After the first couple of sessions, we’re going to start getting into some pretty intense work together, inquiring into our lives and livelihoods, our commitments. It requires some psychological resilience. So, for example, if you’re in a partner exercise and something gets stirred up, in order to work with this whole group, because you have a commitment to this group also, you need to be able to feel what you’re feeling and

Preceptions

I: Introductions

also drop it and come back to the group. And sometimes when we hit on certain patterns it's hard to do that. So I really encourage you to work with the partner that you're going to have by the end of the day, but also to have some support when you're going through this course. It could mean having a counselor, a psychotherapist, or maybe one of the people who do interviews at Centre of Gravity: Angela Ross, Ronit Jinich, Simone Moir, Pat Smith, Monica Burr. Things might get stirred up that you need to process. I hope that they do. And if you feel that something is arising and you're feeling overwhelmed and you're coming into the group and there's something that you haven't dealt with, whether with another person or just yourself or just being here, it's really good if you're taking care of that. That means you're practicing, it doesn't mean that the practice isn't working. Does that make sense? So when you're feeling anger or sadness or whatever it is, please make sure that you have the resources, and know in advance where you can go, who you can turn to, in order to take care of it.

Obligations

I think a lot of us on the left think about our rights. For instance, I have a right to come here and practice if I put my money down. But I don't think we talk a lot about obligations. In order to have rights and freedoms—it's Remembrance Day today, so this is in the background—we also have particular obligations. The first obligation is an obligation to yourself, that you're really going to

show up. And when you get snagged, you're still going to show up. Another obligation you have is that when we're not meeting as a group, you're going to have a partner, and you're really going to show up with that partner. So you're going to support your partner, and they're going to support you. This is a really important obligation. Sometimes it's easy to talk about community, but community only works when you really have to do something. I've spent a lot of time in Northern Ontario, and in Northern Ontario nobody talks about community, but when it snows you shovel your neighbour's driveway. And to me this is a strong community. I encourage that here, that we're supporting each other in this process and that we think not only in terms of our own practice, but the support we can bring to others. This is really important.

Partner

I'm going to ask you to find a partner, and you'll meet that partner every week that we're not meeting. What does it mean to meet a partner? It means to meet their body, face to face. Skyping, internet, telephone—it doesn't work. And you're going to have home work. When the Burmese monks were here I asked them how they stayed connected to their practice. One of them said that the practice that's most important for them was that every week, in the evening, they all sit and share together where they've broken the precepts. They just listen to each other. They don't give feedback and nobody gets punished. Isn't that nice? I think a lot of

Preceptions

us punish ourselves, or we worry about being honest about where we broke a precept, because we're going to get punished. We're going to get an "F." But in this course we're inviting you to share with your partner the places where you notice that you can't meet the ideal, or that you've crossed over.

I: Introductions

Dana

The next step of that is dana. The way this course is organized, is that there's a fee for the course, some of it pays for supplies like this book, the ceremony at the end of the retreat, for the rent here, for various costs that arise, for having a bank account, for having Nicole do administration, and paying guest teachers when they come. So in addition to the course fee I ask for dana. Dana is the root of the English word "donation." I actually think of dana more as generosity and interdependence. Dana means accessing one's own quality of generosity, and recognizing the interdependence of teaching and your support. This has been a central thread of Buddhist practice and community since the time of the Buddha. In order for me to teach I also need to pay the rent and I also need to live.

Giving lets our hearts step out of the all too common profit and loss mentality of our society. It creates empathy and builds connections based on the true value of shared experience. Dana also keeps us connected to our financial commitments and how and where we give. The amount you give depends on your circumstances.

Heart Sutra

Every day we'll start with the Heart Sutra. For those of you who are not familiar with the Heart Sutra, this is a Chinese chant; it's usually described as the whole of Buddhism in a nutshell. If you're not familiar with the Heart Sutra, then you can listen to the talks on the website from a couple of years ago. If you're looking for a book to explain what it's all about, I highly recommend *The Heart Sutra* by Red Pine.

Yamas

There are five yamas. In the yoga tradition there is not a ritual of taking precepts. But in every form of Buddhism there is. So what we're doing is taking the Buddhist format of precept practice, and we're using the five yamas which you find in classical yoga, and we're putting them together.

Course Reading

I expect that you're reading at least two hours a week. There are four books for this course, and we'll read them in this order.

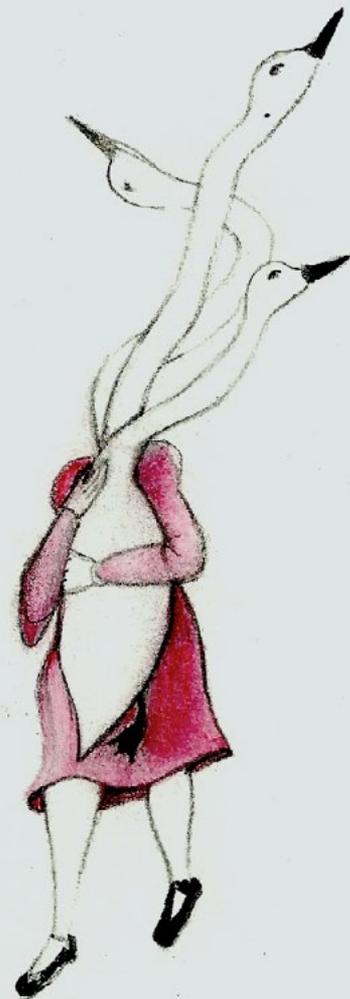
1. *Mind of Clover* by Robert Aitken
2. *Living with the Devil* by Stephen Batchelor
3. *Yoga For a World Out of Balance* by Michael Stone
4. *Great Awakening* by David Loy

Sitting Practice

Every day I expect that you're meditating. I hope you have a cushion set up in a place in your house and that you're sitting either for a 30 minute period or a 45 minute period that's timed by a proper timer. No holidays. Sitting: following the breath, experiencing mindfulness of breathing. It's important that you time the meditation, because the timer is the container of the meditation practice. We're really trusting in the timer, so you set it up in a place that you can't see it. I encourage you to pick the same time every day, early in the morning for instance, especially during the Precepts course when so much of what we're cultivating needs to be spread around during the day. It's really good to start the day in stillness.

Journal

I would like you to keep a journal every day, based on whatever precept we're studying. Part of your homework is going to tie into this journal. The journals will never be shared publicly; you'll just keep it for yourself. If you live with someone, please tell them that the journal is private, so you really feel you can write in this journal about what is coming up for you in this course and what we're studying. You might journal in the evening, just before going to bed is a good time.



On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored

by Adam Phillips

Curiosity is always opportunism.

A repertoire might be more useful than a conviction.

People have traditionally come to psychoanalysis conversation because the story they are telling themselves about their lives has stopped, or become too painful, or both.

A phobia protects a person from their own curiosity.

The phobia, which hoards the past, can be the one place in a person's life where meaning apparently never changes; but this depends upon one never knowing what the meaning is.

The profoundest way of recognizing something is through hiding it from our self.

Symptoms are a way of thinking about difficult things, thinking with the sound turned off.

The first world we find outside is, in part, a repository for the terror inside us, an elsewhere for those terrors and objects that bring us unpleasure. And that world we make outside is the world we need to get away from. It is the place, or one of the places, where we put the objects and desires we wish did not belong to us. To be at home in the world we need to keep it inhospitable.

The developmental question: what is unbearable about oneself and where is one going to put it?

What do we want most to dwell near to?

Only the impossible is addictive.

What constitutes a risk for us is an important clue as to what we value.

Ruthlessness gives way to ruth.

And creativity – what Winnicott later called creative living – involved the search for, and attempt to establish an idiom, an environment, a relationship that could survive a person's most passionate destructiveness.

"I am in my work like a pit in its fruit." Rilke (he becomes the seed of himself)

In the course of development, and apparently to different degrees, the body has to lose its overwhelming immediacy for the child, to become the child's most paradoxical belonging. Composure would begin as the way the child responds, at least initially, to the intimated demand by the mother, in the face of the child's desire for her, that the child alter the form of its self-presentation. An original clamour becomes a calculated social poise, a distinctive awkwardness that bears witness to the child's struggle for acceptable forms of excitement, for ways in which he can be seen to be a desiring object without losing face. Children are the people who can't leave.

What is the unconscious problem that your belief solves for you, or the wishes that it satisfies?

In Freud's terms we don't believe, we wish; and above all we wish to believe.

Monotheism is linked to imperialism. It represents a triumph of the mind over the body.

It is as if the body produces and worships idols and the intellect produces the sublimated rigours of monotheism.

A symptom is always a state of conviction.

If I can think of it, it isn't what I want. —Randall Jarrett

We can be worried but we can't be dreamed.

Worries can be punishments for wishes.

When we worry, what are we trying to eat?

Kissing: the mouth's elegy to itself,

Perversion: knowing too exactly what one wants

Kissing involves some of the pleasures of nourishment in the absence of eating.

One's real life is so often the life that one does not lead.

Each insight is the product of a specific blindness.

We are being perverse whenever we think we know beforehand exactly what we desire.

To know beforehand is to assume that otherness, whether it be a person, a medium, an environment, is redundant, that it brings nothing.

To speak is always to be spoken for.

Waiting for an experience of anticipation.

Part of the fantasy of greed is to eat up one's appetite.

It is difficult to enjoy people for whom we have waited too long.

The project of self-knowledge is itself the problem, symptom masquerading as cure.

Belief is a form of cruelty.

The obstacle reminds me of what I want.

Satisfaction is the death of possibility.

Poor obstacles impoverish us.

The fluency of disorder, the inspirations of error.

Wittgenstein: What is the picture? How do we see the frame we bring to experience?

To know what one fears is to know what one wants.

To assent to our repertoire of fears.

II

Ahimsa: Non-Harming in Speech

A talk by Michael Stone

November 25, 2010

Ahimsa (in speech)

The next time we meet the theme that we're going to be exploring is ahimsa or non-violence. The first way we're going to look at non-violence is non-violence of speech. I would like you to talk with your partner in two meetings over the next two weeks. I want you to spend the hour, half an hour each, talking about how you're practicing non-harming of speech internally and externally. And this is going to be what you're journaling about, and this is what I'd like you to focus on in the next couple of weeks in your own life. Not causing harm to yourself in the way that you talk to yourself, and not causing harm to others in the way you speak to them. Or listen to them. It's about communication, non-violence in communication, which means not having the intention to cause harm.

When it comes time for you to talk to your partner, I'd like each of you to take turns speaking freely, while the other person is listening. So let's say between 20 and 30 minutes of talking, and then the other person talks for 20 to 30 minutes, and then at the end take 10 or 15 minutes to process. What are you talking about? You're going to share what it's like really looking at your life

through this lens. What's come up for you? Where does it work, where doesn't it work? This process only works if you're honest.

So the first yama is ahimsa, which means not having the intention to cause harm. And of course you know many of us cause so much harm with our words, don't we? The way we talk to ourselves, the way we deflate ourselves, the way we inflate ourselves. The way we do that internally actually affects the way we talk to other people, so it works both ways. The clarity we have in the way that we communicate with ourselves is actually related to the way we talk to others. Whether we're working inwardly or outwardly, the psychological grooves are very similar. We all know that people who judge others a lot tend to judge themselves even more.

Every yama is divided into body, speech and mind. What falls under the guideline of speech? Email, telephone, skype, chat-rooms. I could even go through my day today and give examples of where I could have spoken with a little more kindness.

Probably we all could.

Preceptions

II: Ahimsa

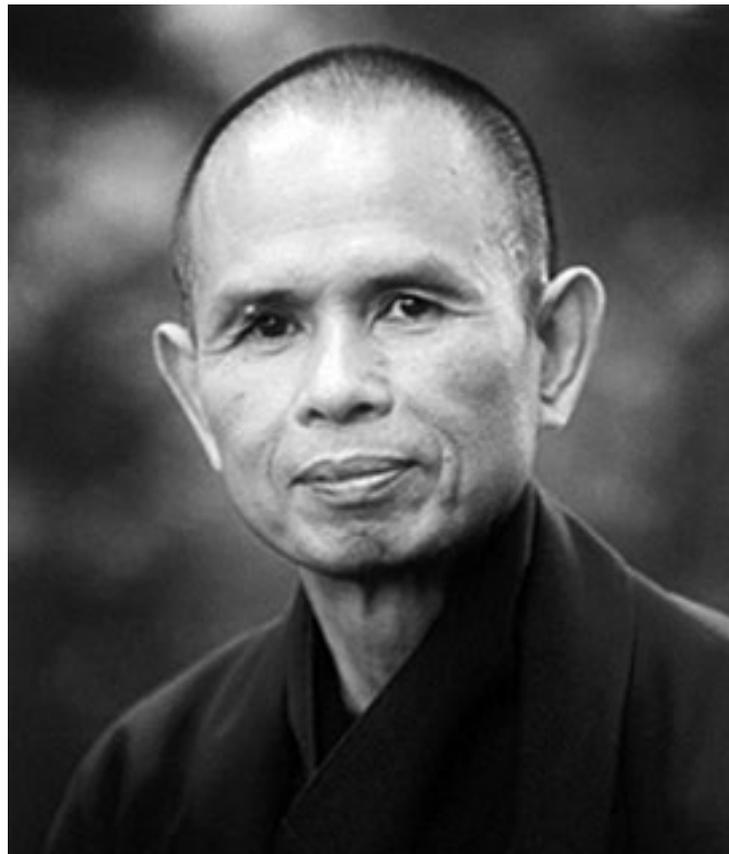
The way our time together will be structured is that we'll chant, and then I'll speak, but mostly we are going to be working together with groups, triads and partners exploring how this is going for you. If you're not practicing it, it's going to be hard for you to participate, when the time comes for you to be in a group. So I really encourage you to go into this, not having any intention to cause harm with speech.

Thich

Please open your book to Thich Nhat Hanh's *14 Mindfulness Trainings*. Number 9 is Truthful and Loving Speech:

Aware that words can create suffering or happiness, I am committed to learning to speak truthfully and constructively, using only words that inspire hope and confidence. I am determined not to say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people, nor to utter words that might cause division or hatred. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain nor criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will do my best to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten my safety.

That's an interesting way of thinking about speech, isn't it? Because he covers something a lot of us don't think about, which is when you don't speak. Sometimes keeping our mouth shut is also a kind of violence. The reason I'm mentioning this is to give you a sense that paying attention to speech is very deep, it's not just



about whether you've said something unkind to someone. It also includes something we haven't said, or when we're not listening. Or when someone else is speaking in a way that is violent towards us, what do we do with that? These are all ways that violence and non-violence occur in speech.

II: Ahimsa

Non-Violent Mascara

A friend of mine says that the precepts are your eyelids. Eyelids are kind of interesting, aren't they? Because you don't notice they're there, but if you think of your eyelashes for example... I don't wear mascara, but if I did I would probably see through mascara all day. If you look at the world through your eyelashes and eyelids, they help shape what you see. The precepts are like your eyelids, they affect the way you see your life. They affect the way you see everything around you, internally and externally. So your mascara for the next couple of weeks will be non-violence of speech internally and externally. If I was like Marina Abramovic (the Serbian-born, performance art queen), I would have a cartridge of mascara that has non-violence of speech in it. I would hand them out to all of you so you could put it on every morning. We'd sell them at Art Metropole.

Friend

I love to tell the story of Ananda, who was the Buddha's right hand man. He actually made a deal with the Buddha where in he offered to be his assistant and in exchange, if he ever missed a teaching or didn't understand something, the Buddha would explain it to him. Ananda, of course, is most famous for being the only person in the Buddha's circle who didn't get enlightened in the Buddha's lifetime. Just before the Buddha died, Ananda was really upset, because the Buddha was sick. Ananda asked, "Is having friendship about half of a spiritual practice?" The Buddha said, "No, it's the whole practice."

In Buddhism there's a term you hear a lot which is "a spiritual friend." It doesn't mean someone you go out dancing with. But it might. It means somebody that you're practicing with. Someone you can talk with who is not an analyst. They don't analyze your experience, it's just a friend you can call up and say "Hey, I couldn't sit today. I was so anxious." You just call them to tell them that. So that there's somebody else that's witnessing your process. And they don't offer feedback necessarily. They might call you and say, "I just told my lover to go to hell." And you don't start analyzing and say, "Well actually, in the Buddhist world there is no hell and there's no self, so it's not a problem." You just listen. The whole of spiritual life is good friendship.

Stephen Batchelor: Compassion As Awakening

Dharma practice has survived through a series of friendships that stretches back through history—ultimately to Gautama himself. Through friendships we are entrusted with a delicate thread that joins the past with future generations. These fragile, intimate moments are ones of indebtedness and responsibility. Dharma practice flourishes only when such friendships flourish. It has no other means of transmission. And these friends are our vital links to a community that lives and struggles today. Through them we belong to a culture of awakening, a matrix of friendships, that expands in ever wider circles to embrace not only “Buddhists” but all who are actually or potentially committed to the values of dharma practice.

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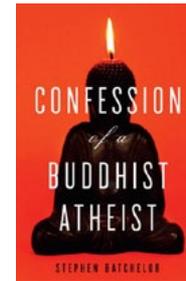
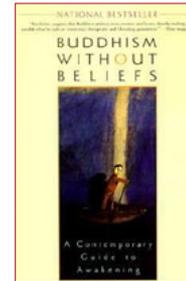
When we are faced with the unprecedented and unrepeatable complexities of this moment, the question is not, “What is the right thing to do?” but “What is the compassionate thing to do?” This question can be approached with integrity but not with certainty. In accepting that every action is a risk, integrity embraces the fallibility that certainty disdainfully eschews.

Ethical integrity is threatened as much by attachment to the security of what is known as the fear of the insecurity of what is unknown. It is liable to be remorselessly buffeted by the winds of desire and fear, doubt and worry, fantasy and egoism. The more we give in to these things, the more our integrity is eroded and we

find ourselves carried along on a wave of psychological and social habit. When responding to a moral dilemma, we just repeat the gestures and words of a parent, an authority figure, a religious text. While moral conditioning may be necessary for social stability, it is inadequate as a paradigm of integrity.

Occasionally, though, we act in a way that startles us. A friend asks our advice about a tricky moral choice. Yet instead of offering him consoling platitudes or the wisdom of someone else, we say something that we did not know we knew. Such gestures and words spring from body and tongue with shocking spontaneity. We cannot call them “mine” but neither have we taken them from others. Compassion has dissolved the stranglehold of self. And we taste, for a few exhilarating seconds, the creative freedom of awakening.

Buddhism Without Beliefs by Stephen Batchelor



Books by
Stephen Batchelor

II: Ahimsa

Ahimsa by Marcella Hettinger

Ahimsa is the precept of nonviolence, of recognizing that I am not separate from all that is. Ahimsa is “non-killing”—not peace—because it presupposes that there will be harm. There will be harm. But in recognizing that I am not separate from all that is, I must therefore vow not to live at the expense of other life in body, speech, and mind. To do so would be to live at the expense of myself, because there is no “other life.” And because there is no “other life,” in practicing ahimsa I must welcome everything, and push away nothing. Pushing away creates separation from that “other.” But we are not separate.

We are instead empty of thing-ness, and thus interdependent on a relationship that is always changing, and because of that intangible, ungroundable change, what is “right action” changes too. Here is a favorite poem of mine.

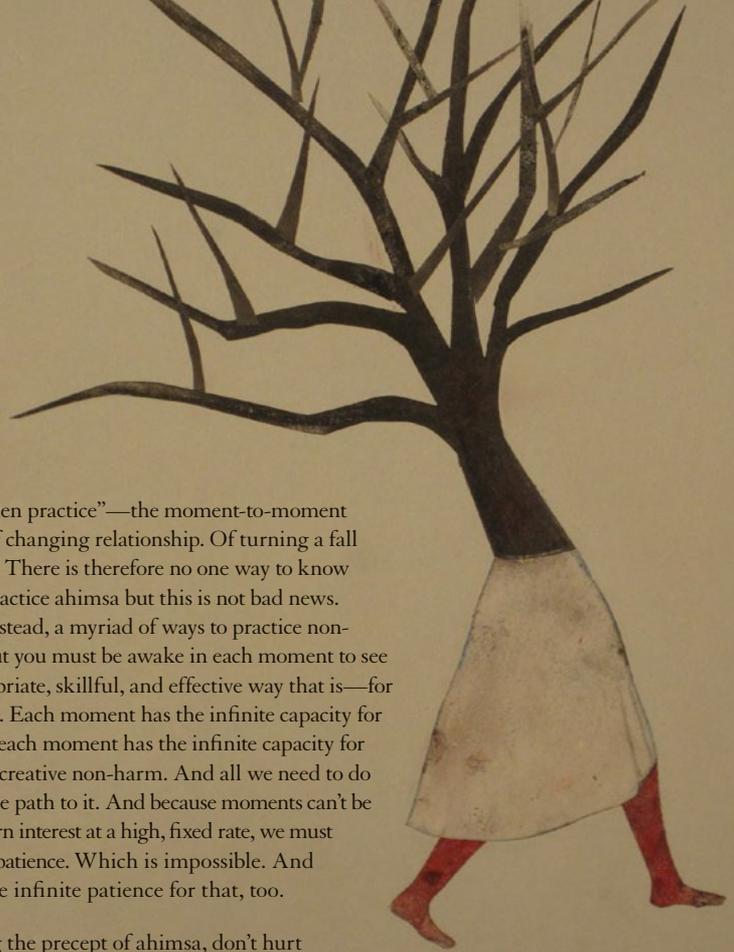
The Fall by Russell Edson

There was a man who found two leaves and came
indoors holding them out saying to his parents
that he was a tree.

To which they said then go into the yard and do
not grow in the living room as your roots may
ruin the carpet.

He said I was fooling I am not a tree and he
dropped his leaves.

But his parents said look it is fall.



This is “sudden practice”—the moment-to-moment imperative of changing relationship. Of turning a fall into autumn. There is therefore no one way to know ahimsa, to practice ahimsa but this is not bad news. There are, instead, a myriad of ways to practice non-violence—but you must be awake in each moment to see which appropriate, skillful, and effective way that is—for that moment. Each moment has the infinite capacity for failure. And each moment has the infinite capacity for imaginative, creative non-harm. And all we need to do is find a single path to it. And because moments can't be banked or earn interest at a high, fixed rate, we must have infinite patience. Which is impossible. And we must have infinite patience for that, too.

In upholding the precept of ahimsa, don't hurt anyone, and be kind to yourself. Every moment. Every moment.

II: Ahimsa

Prescription

There is a violence, a harming, contained in the language that we use, the way it cuts apart one object, one face, one moment of light, from another. It is a blunt instrument of cutting, forever divvying up the world into named boundaries. This arrangement of wood is a table. That arrangement of wood is a tree. There are some social frames that adopt languages of their own, sub-species of languages, specialist argots and jargons. Some of these may soften the violence inherent in, what shall we call it, the usual way language is used? (Is there already a violence in the word “we”—in the many assumptions this word conjures—this necessary obliteration of differences. How can there ever be a we? And how, recognizing our already interdependent intimacy, can there be anything but?) The hospital, the specialist’s office, the doctor’s appointment, are places where the hyper-specified language of science can sometimes be used with violence, as it is conjured by professionals who need to keep from feeling what is happening to their patients, so that they can keep on functioning. It is a language that is there, and not there, at the same time. So particular, so specifically nestled into your organs, into the deepest cavities of the body. And at the same time, so far away, as if you, the patient, were an object, a collection of organs on an examining table, a tissue sample beneath a microscope. How to recognize these inevitable patterns of language harm, and know how to negotiate them? Especially as they arrive at exactly the moment when we are at our most vulnerable.

Thinking back now on the problems expressive language presented to me, I am amazed by their currency, their tenacity. Hearing ‘civilized’ languages debase humans, watching cultural exorcisms debase literature, seeing oneself preserved in the amber of disqualifying metaphors—I can say that my narrative project is as difficult today as it was thirty years ago.

Toni Morrison



Wednesday 7:47

by Pat Rockman

I wake this morning slightly anxious and tight
it's still dark because at this time of year
it's always dark when
I open my eyes.

Unusually my lids are heavy, slightly encrusted with sleep,
not the usual springing open to meet whatever is out there.

This morning I see that I feel traumatized
this is not ahimsa.

I am feeling violated, harmed, hurt, vulnerable, tearful,
a pain that is now recurring
thoughts that are repeating
creating a groove from the past into the present.

Seeing my beloved quiet
tight lipped
holding his leg and rocking in pain
as if this might soothe
as if his leg were a baby
which it isn't.

Seeing him in this white bed curled up
unable to find a relief
except perhaps through amputation but that would simply bring other difficulties.

The worst form of cruelty may be ignorance and indifference to the pain of
other beings.

There's a part of his body screaming in agony as his immune system attempts
to expel an invader from a closed space
an impossible endeavour without assistance
and the professional assistance is not perfect of course
much of it uncaring or irritable or stupid or condescending
and in some ways it is worse to know (like him, I am also a doctor)
to know so much
to see so much
to be part of the underbelly and yet
now seeing as always it doesn't matter
because there is no real protection from anything
only the uncertainty is certain
only everyone gets their quotient of pain as the author reminds us
and you either get it at the front end, the back end or in the middle
no matter how charmed, how rich, how beautiful, how old, how strong.

We are all small, hiding in our grandiosity
staving off terror by believing in some idea of ourselves
and then there is everyone else
not seeing how clearly everyone is doomed if it is
us against them
if there is no—A Him Sa
if we do not love
if we do not see that there truly is no difference
like when we were high on mushrooms and my lover was playing the piano and
getting off on the Ya-Ma-Ha—a short piece of poetry repeated with a bell of laughter.

Preceptions

II: Ahimsa

And yet sometimes it has to be us against them in an effort to make something clear
to teach
to nurture
to save
to wake up—god damn it!
To try to show that there might be a better way but not the TTC
perhaps humans sprouting wings and taking away all the guns and
feeding all the starving people
and eliminating prejudice
and really being kind when someone is sick or hurting
and not always assuming the worst about someone when he or she does
something “wrong,” whatever that is.

But I see that
I have been nurturing my anger and hurt
looking for blame
to strengthen, to carry me forward because this is so much easier than
crying and feeling sad and helpless and scared.
Better to inflict violence
to give in to my prejudice
to love my own hatred
to reach through the phone and grab the hospital resident
(expressing her condescension and dismissiveness)
by the throat and rip her tongue out of her head.
Better to see her eyes widen while I smash her pretty blonde face in
and watch her superior expression flee as she realizes that things are not
as she believed.

So much more useful than this constriction in my diaphragm
this vision of a future that will arrive in some variation
that is not Goldberg.
It will not be a piano jazz rhythm by an odd genius locked in a room creating
but rather some unrelenting roller coaster until it just comes to a
full stop.
Unless we are lucky to go painlessly, quickly, easily with a chance to say
good-bye like some fairy tale death that has a reality somewhere in some form
or
someone wouldn't have made it up.

Like heaven where you go to sit above the clouds
with all the angels and God is a white, bald man
with a big beard and a staff
and the music doesn't drive you crazy
even if it does sound like WalMart because you're dead
and now you just think it's the best.
And if your heaven is different, maybe there is Bacchus
and wine and grapes and bare-breasted women
to meet your every need.
I'm not sure what happens to dead women and children.
In this case maybe they just become men
and that's heaven for everyone.
Or maybe there really is Indra's net
and we all just become gorgeous jewels radiating from vertices, infinite
and unimaginable expressing the unfathomable interdependence that is life.
More likely there is nothing.

III

Ahimsa: Non-Harming in Speech, part 2

A talk by Michael Stone

December 2, 2010

I wanted to talk about the first aspect of the first precept we're exploring. The precept of ahimsa or non-violence, or not having the intention to cause harm. One of the ways I've been translating it lately is not living at the expense of other life. That's not a traditional translation, but I think it works. This is true for body, speech and mind.

Teachers

I don't talk too much about my teachers, I don't know why. I think it's because they live inside me in a quiet way. A lot of people have controversial teachers with crazy wisdom and there are really good stories about them, but I don't have teachers like that. They're very grounded and earthy. I also think I don't talk about teachers so much because it's a little bit like meditation experience. As soon as I tell you about my relation with my teachers, then you might compare that to your relationship with me—or with other teachers you have. Similarly, when I speak about my experiences in meditating, I know there's some part of everyone listening that is comparing it to their experience, and sometimes it's helpful and sometimes it's not. One of the people with whom I study is

Norman Feldman, and if you know Norman he's a pretty quiet guy most of the time. I already had a teacher before I met Norman, and I wasn't looking for another. But I was spending some time in Los Angeles, really inspired by Trudy's work, and she said if you're going to be teaching, then it's really important that you have a teacher that lives close to you. So I went and saw Norman and the first time we met it didn't go so well.

Mindfulness of Speech

The first time we met I told him about something I was planning. I said to Norman that I was inviting a well-known teacher to come to Toronto so that he could teach our sangha, and that he would be coming next June. Norman says, "Well I know him, and I know that he's not coming next June." I replied, "He's not coming yet, but I've invited him." "Well just because you've invited him doesn't mean he will be coming. You've only asked." It really pissed me off. You don't know me that well, and I'm just trying to express something. But he was really focused on this. "You're saying that this teacher is coming to Toronto, but I know that he's not. And I know that you've invited him." He had a really



III: Ahimsa 2

good point. Because what he was calling me on was the ethics of mindful speech. There's the assumption of oh yes, this will happen. So many of us have learned this already; I just learned it again, thinking I had a lease on another space and then it didn't work out. How do we speak about something as it's happening in present experience? Sometimes we can see the way we exaggerate; I think that's what Norman was highlighting for me.

Needless to say that when I left Guelph that day, I decided I would never study with Norman.

I have an interesting relationship with Norman. We talk often and I ask him for a lot. And he knows that he's quietly supporting what's turning into a large and thriving sangha here in Toronto. He doesn't have energy for a lot these days, but he really has energy for supporting us from a distance. So even as we're gathering here, I can feel Norman and Molly are around.

Support

I think part of a teacher's job is to support students, but students who are stretched out. When you're a parent you need to let your child stretch out a little bit, and be in that place where they feel support and take a step away. For instance, when young children are nursing, what tends to happen is that when a child is learning something new they need more nursing. When a child starts getting teeth, starts walking or talking. The child goes out into

the world with their legs, arms and voice. There are marked phases, for instance, this is the walking time. And this is also the time when they need more from their mother. Breast feeding is a metaphor for having the support of a caregiver. You see this with kids, the more they go out into the world, and stretch themselves, the more they really need support. I don't actually think you can have a relationship with a teacher unless you're stretched a little bit. The more you stretch, the more you need the support of someone who is grounded and human and who has also been stretched.

Sangha and Dharma

This is the teaching of the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha. One of the ways we get support is in the sangha, in the partner exercises that you've been doing together. I hope one of the things we're building is support for each other. But you can't have a sangha without the dharma. A sangha without the dharma is just a group of people. You don't go to the supermarket and say, "Oh, the sangha!" The depth of a community's commitment to the dharma defines the power of the sangha. Likewise, you can't have the dharma without the sangha, because otherwise it's just philosophy. You can't really see this practice live without community, and you can't have community without the dharma. It goes both ways.

Looking After Each Other

That's how we check in, just like a student who is stretched out checks in with his teacher. Just like a kid who is stretched out asks, "Where's my dad?" I can see this with my son. When we're in Trinity Bellwoods Park, one of the things he likes to do is walk around the whole park by himself. The first 20 times he did this I had an anxiety attack picturing every awful thing that could happen to him. And then, on his 21st walk, I walked a little further afield as it was getting dark, and I saw him looking over his shoulder, seeing if I could see him. I think we all do this with each other. That feedback is so important.

The job of the teacher is to help you think about your life in a different way. The job of the sangha is to help you think about your life in a different way, and the job of the dharma is to help you see your life in a different way. When you have a problem, you go and talk about it with your teacher, and the teacher listens. If they can't listen they're probably not the teacher you need. Often the teacher hands you back a new problem, which is like a riddle or a koan. I don't think people really go to others to get answers, even though that's what we think we want. Tell me what to do. But at a deeper level an answer is not going to be satisfying. I think part of the job of each of us is to support one another, and not to give advice. The tendency when we listen is to try to solve the problem. But listening to others helps you to listen to yourself more patiently. Then you



have to do the hard work of the practice on your own, no one else can do it for you. Don't you wish someone sometimes could do it for you? Just a little bit?

Disappearing

Maybe some of you who get to know me over the next years, until I disappear, will learn that I have nothing to give you. It's a bit disappointing, and I've seen how people have come here wanting me to give them something, and then don't come back. Enkyo Roshi once told me that after she gives students their first koan to work with, they come back and the first time they present an answer or a response to her, it's often not the right one. There's still more work to do. Sometimes it takes a few years to get through the first koan. She said if someone doesn't get it the first time, there is a 50% chance she will lose them as a student. The student arrives and expects the teacher to give her something, but Roshi says, "No, you have more work to do." Here we're working with precepts that happen suddenly, there's no prescription for working with them. The precepts are the most sudden practice, they're about how you respond in this moment. That's why we said last week that the precepts are like your eyelashes. You're always looking through them. When you train yourself in this way, your experience of each moment is more immediate and creative.

I have nothing to give you.

III: Ahimsa 2

I read a poem on Tuesday night that started like this, "Coming empty handed, going empty handed." The only thing I can really pass on to you, and the only thing this community can pass on to you, is the spirit of this practice. The energy of the practice starts to mould us, and in moulding us, what seems like a very gentle practice starts to become more sudden and immediate.

We've begun with a focus on language. There's a wonderful passage I came across this morning defining what karma is. "Pick up a speck of dust and the whole world comes with it." I think you'll notice this as you start to practice mindfulness of speech, that you look in one little area just how we talk to ourselves—and we can see all of our habits show up in one syllable.

Compassion Gymnasium

There are three different levels of studying the precepts, this ethical way of being in the world. The first level is the literal level. Ahimsa means non-violence, so: do not kill. The second way we can take the precept is more psychological. What is motivating me to be violent? Another way you can define the term psychological is compassion. Compassion-ology anyone? Mathieu Richard says, "Practice is a compassion gymnasium." You just work your compassion muscle all day, by using your eyelashes and your intentions. I think the third level of the precepts is the koan level. Or the impossible level. The precept as a koan presents us with a question. When Bernie Glassman had his insight into the fact that all desires cannot

be satisfied, he made a vow to move from LA back to New York City and end homelessness. He's still working on it of course, and that's the koan level of a precept. I'm going to live my life in a way that serves, and it's impossible. I'm going to vow to serve all sentient beings, and it's impossible, and that's what we're going to do. I am not going to kill, and it's impossible, and that's what I'm going to do.

III: Ahimsa 2

Three Levels

There are three levels, the first is the literal level. Don't hurt anyone, and be kind to yourself. I think this level is really important to start with. There's no need with the precepts to feel guilty or worried, or to get uptight. Omigod, I'm going to fail the course! If he knew what I did this week... It's not about punishment. Don't hurt yourself over the intention of not hurting anything. The first level engages restraint. Don't get angry, there's no need. And then, with the second level, you can investigate why you wanted to be angry. First, I'm going to be quiet and sit down. This time I'm not going to act on my feelings right away. Even though every part of my body wants to tell this person how awful they are, and that they are the cause of all my suffering.

The second level is the compassionate level, the softer level. What's going on here? Why am I speaking to myself in this way? Why do I want to speak to someone else this way? It's a level of investigation. The third level comes back to the first point again, the literal understanding, but committing to it in a way that's not

philosophical. It's not an ideology. I would define the last piece of the precept as a riddle; it is an invitation to enter the impossible.

When I really study the other person's actions, the person who I feel has caused me harm, I can recognize that he's lived a restricted life, and I've lived a restricted life, and that's why he's acting the way he does. I need to sit with that, but it's not philosophical anymore, because you've taken the time to be in the pressure cooker. The point of this course is to enter the pressure cooker.

Refuge

I want to read a little passage by Norman Fischer and his description of treating the precepts as refuges. In the Pali language the word *sarana* means: refuge, protection or shelter. Refuge is an especially good translation, because in Latin *re fugere* means to fly back; taking refuge means to fly back home, to fly back to our most ancient true home, the place we really belong. As we say in Zen, returning to our true nature is to take refuge in Buddha. That is who we most truly and deeply are. To take refuge in Buddha is to recognize this true home, and to return to it over and over again as the primary commitment of our lives. There's a wonderful Wang Wei (699—759) poem that goes something like this: "I follow the stream back to its source and watch the clouds pile up." Usually we think of the source of the stream as its mouth. But actually if I follow the stream all the way back to its source I find clouds, this is exactly what the precepts do for us. You follow

your intentions back to their source. And what do you find? They are always in motion, echoing the circular action of our lives. To see the circular nature of a river and a cloud and the precepts is to see the feedback loop of who we are. Then we can see how our actions sculpt us.

III: Ahimsa 2

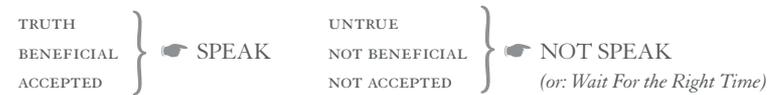
Lastly, what the precepts teach us is contentment, to be satisfied with what we have and to listen to everybody. Even the people and places inside us, and outside of us, that we have a hard time listening to. The precepts are a helpful way to listen to all the whispers that we might not give a lot of attention to, because usually we're trying to grab a little extra. There's a wonderful New Yorker cartoon showing a red light drawn across a six lane highway, with a number of cars lined up. Each vehicle has a dream bubble above it, as each dreams of being a better car. There's a Ford dreaming of a Mercedes, and a Porsche dreaming of a Ferrari, and a small bus dreaming of a larger bus. This is how we live so often, always trying to grab a little extra.

In summary, the precepts offer wise restraint. When I originally wrote *Yoga For a World Out of Balance* the original title was "Restraint in Times of Unrestraint." My publisher said, "Restraint? That's almost not an English word anymore. Who uses the term restraint?" The only people I know who use that term are from Eastern Europe; people who are used to not having as much. I just came back from Austria where you can't get a vegetable,

not even an onion, and all I thought was, "Imagine if they had Whole Foods here, it would be the greatest thing." But when you go to people's houses they do so much with so many fewer choices. I think the precepts teach us how to have this wise restraint, and how not to try to get something extra from everything.

Truth Chart

One of the Buddha's talks has been schematized into a chart, so that we can turn it into a practice we can do with each other, and with ourselves. The chart looks like this:



What I like about this chart is that it starts in a very black and white way. Can you really look at what you're saying to yourself right now and see if you're being honest? Is it true? I just came back from Vienna, and usually I teach first in Copenhagen where there's such great dialogue. The students are amazing because everyone in Denmark has a PhD, but the culture of communication in Vienna is so different. When you speak to someone they just sit there, and you have no idea what they're thinking or feeling. I experienced myself in Vienna as quite boisterous. Then I started doubting myself because there's a cultural context that's changed.

III: Ahimsa 2

Is this a good class? Am I saying anything that's relevant? After the first couple of days I thought I had done a terrible job, and that my teaching was very poor because things weren't mirrored in the way I'm used to. Then I realized that nothing about my teaching had changed. I'm actually giving the same talks I gave in Copenhagen, and feeling really connected to what I'm teaching, but the way I was speaking to myself about it was quite negative. And this negativity wasn't honest, because when I was clearer about how I was speaking to myself, I realized I was giving the same teachings and feeling really connected to it.

Dead End Sign

So before you speak, ask if it's honest or not honest. Can you do that within yourself first of all? Is the way I'm speaking to myself honest or not honest? If it's true, is it beneficial? Within your own reflection, speaking to yourself internally, ask yourself, "Is this beneficial, the way I'm talking to myself right now?" Some of you know the metaphor I like to use: mindfulness of anything is a dead end sign. Usually dead end signs are placed at the end of the road, which is not so helpful. You start going down the street and there's no sign, and then when you get to the end it says dead end. Mindfulness practice means trying to pull the sign to the front of the road, but of course it can also work if you're half way there. You start down the road and somewhere along the way you think oh, this is a dead end. The goal eventually is that even though



you never get rid of the dead ends, you can recognize them as they arise. You notice: if I start talking to myself this way, I know where this is going to lead. It's going to lead to a night of emotional ice cream. Even if something is true and it's beneficial, can you accept it? Are you in a place where you can receive it?

III: Ahimsa 2

If you're going to speak to someone and it's untrue, don't speak it. But if it's true, before you speak it: is it beneficial and can you accept it? If you can't accept it, don't say it yet. If you can accept it, speak it. What? Am I really going to stop and do this? I'm going to ask you as homework to really plug some of the core ways that you speak into this format. If it's not beneficial, and it can't be accepted, or if it's beneficial and it can't be accepted—reflect on it—(this is where the investigation really comes out)—and then wait for the right time. There may be something that's beneficial that you can't really work with right now. A break up is a good example. In a break up, there's something that you may need to say to someone. But if you said it, it wouldn't be beneficial to them or to you. Maybe in a year. Maybe in 100 years. This is what happens when you break up, you gain so many insights, and they're compounded with each other, and naturally you want to express them, you want to tell your ex everything about the relationship that didn't work. But if you did that, and most of us do... actually, neither of you can really take it in. This is really where the hard wisdom comes in.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Whenever we're on a silent retreat, Norman Feldman always says: when you go home and people ask you how the retreat was, don't tell them unless they really want to know. Most don't want to hear; the questions come out of decorum.

Waiting and Not Knowing

Can you really listen to yourself? There's something that comes into focus about ourselves during a breakup, but right now your work might be just finding a new apartment, and now is not the time to get into the psychological murk of it all, maybe next week. Or you might notice something, but every time you think of it you feel horrible, and right now you need to get that new apartment. And once you have the new apartment, then you can start processing. I was with someone for a number of years and after we split, the person I talked about it the most with was Chip. Chip assured me, "You won't know why this happened for about 3 years." That was so helpful. "You have a lot of insight, and everything you're saying is so accurate. But actually... you won't know for a few more years down the road." I was so deflated, I thought I had such a good interpretation, but Chip's words simultaneously came as a relief. Oh, I don't have to figure this out. This is where the wisdom comes in. The wisdom it takes for you to acknowledge in yourself where you can't really accept or work with what is arising.

Blame In, Blame Out

When there's something that's too overwhelming to work with I write it down and put it on my altar. I park it there. It's not parked there until I can feel comfortable with what I'm going to face up to. It's not about feeling comfortable with what you're going to tell yourself. It's about being willing and ready to hear the truth of this moment. We could even ask: is there really resiliency? Can you look at something and be able to bounce back from it, to have the right proximity, so that you can look at it for a couple of hours, or let it seep into you as you make dinner, and then be able to recover? So that it's not completely devastating. Marshall Rosenberg talks about blame in and blame out. When you see something that you really need to look at, the tendency of our first response when we can't work with it is either to blame in or to blame out. Oh, it's all because of me. Or: it's all them. I think that's a sign that you can't accept it, or work with it yet. Here's a good exercise to determine whether your first impulse is to blame in or out. It has to do with your navel, if it's an innie or an outtie. We'll try to avoid using specialized physiological terms like this in the future. But there's a direct correlation. People with an innie navel blame themselves, while people with an outtie navel blame others. Could it be true? We're going to do a study. Researchers are on the way.

Knowing is not just pleasurable. It is also about knowing difficult truths.

Prince Abhaya Asks the Buddha a Question

Buddha: "Venerable sir, someone asked the Buddha, when learned Brahmins, and learned householders and learned recluses, after formulating a question, go to see the Buddha and pose the question, has there already been in the Buddha's mind a thought: If they come to me and ask me this question I will answer it this particular way. Or does the answer occur to the Buddha on the spot?"

In other words, if someone comes to you to talk about non-violence, do you already have the answer? Or does the answer occur on the spot? Do you see how the dharma is trying to move away from being an ideology? This is part of the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness of speech.

"As to that prince I shall ask you a question in return and answer it as you choose. What do you think prince? Are you skilled in the parts of a chariot?"

"Yes, I am."

"What do you think prince? When people come to you and ask, 'What is the name of this part of the chariot?' Has there already been in your mind the thought: 'If they come to me and ask me what part of the chariot is this, I will answer them thus.' Or does that answer occur to you on the spot depending on what they're pointing at?"

Preceptions

III: Ahimsa 2

“Venerable sir, I am well known as a charioteer, skilled in the parts of a chariot. All the parts of a chariot are well known to me. That answer would occur to me on the spot.”

“So too, prince, when learned nobles, learned Brahmins, learned householders, and learned recluses, after formulating a question, then come to the Buddha and pose it, the answer occurs to the Buddha on the spot. Why is that? Because the element of things has been fully penetrated by the Buddha, through the full penetration of which the answer occurs to him on the spot.”

In other words, you go through the flow of the chart, and the purpose is to sculpt yourself, so when the shit hits the fan—he doesn’t use this term I don’t know why—knowing what to do occurs on the spot.

I have a friend who is really emotional. She’s an artist and uses her advanced skills in her artwork. When I ask her how she feels she can talk with a precision that I’ve never experienced before, describing where it is in her body, it’s amazing. And then she asks, “How are you doing?” And I can only answer, “Pretty good.” But actually she can’t ever step out of her emotions. To take a break and do anything else, without the emotional accompaniment, is almost impossible. I would say the same is true about analyzing emotions. Most of us are pretty psychologically acute, and the tendency when our emotions arise is to comb through them and analyze them. That can also be a way of attaching these feelings, and the stories around these feelings, to ourselves.



Thich Nhat Hahn says,

Truthful and Loving Speech: Aware that words can create suffering or happiness, I am committed to learning to speak truthfully and constructively, using only words that inspire hope and confidence. I am determined not to say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people, nor to utter words that might cause division or hatred. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain nor criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will do my best to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten my safety.

What I love about Thich Nhat Hahn's teaching in general is that it's always action-oriented. It's not just observing what you're speaking, it's doing something about it. That's why I really hope that when you see this chart, you don't see this as a philosophical way of looking at your life, but a training for how we can use words. If you live in a way that you don't have a strong embeddedness in community, then actually we may not be able to see some of these practices, because we're not communicating much with others. But for those of us living in a city, where we're in communication all the time, to be able to take care of how we speak about ourselves, and to take care of the way we speak and listen to others, is so important because the health of the community depends on it. Like gossip. We don't usually gossip in a positive way. Did you hear about what she did? When you read those gossip newspapers at the supermarket when you're checking

out, so and so lost 50 pounds and still looks like... it's so negative. We feed off the negative gossip.

Homework

I want you to use this chart, and the next time you meet with your partner, I want you to take out the chart and go through it. Give one example of speech internally and one specific example of speech externally. Walk your partner through the chart. Maybe there's an example internally of a statement that is true, maybe there's an example externally of the untrue, or honest/not-honest. Do 10 minutes internally, 10 minutes externally. Something that's going on this week. When you talk about the internal, it's obvious you're connected. When you're talking about the external situation focus on what's going on for you in relationship to the other person. It's about how you're speaking. The Buddha has a nice saying that when you're not mindful of your speech it's like you have an iron circle stuck in your throat. Can you imagine? Every word is released, everything comes out. You couldn't do head stands.

The next work we're going to do is to talk about non-violence in the mind, but only after we work with speech. You can't clearly look at your own mind, unless you get the speech part down a little bit. In your sitting practice, you might notice how working with non-violence of speech is going to start to affect the quality of your mind; really being able to look clearly at a mind that is causing harm, and a mind that is generous and compassionate.

Bullshit

There are two monks who live across the river from each other. They tease each other a lot. One day after meditating together, they have a little conversation. The first monk says, 'Tell me, what do you think of my sitting posture?'

The second monk responds, 'Magnificent. Just like the Buddha.'

Seeing this as an opportunity to tease his friend, he asks, 'So what do you think of my sitting posture?'

'Like a pile of bullshit.'

He remains quiet and leaves, and the one who thinks he has a magnificent sitting posture goes home and tells his sister.

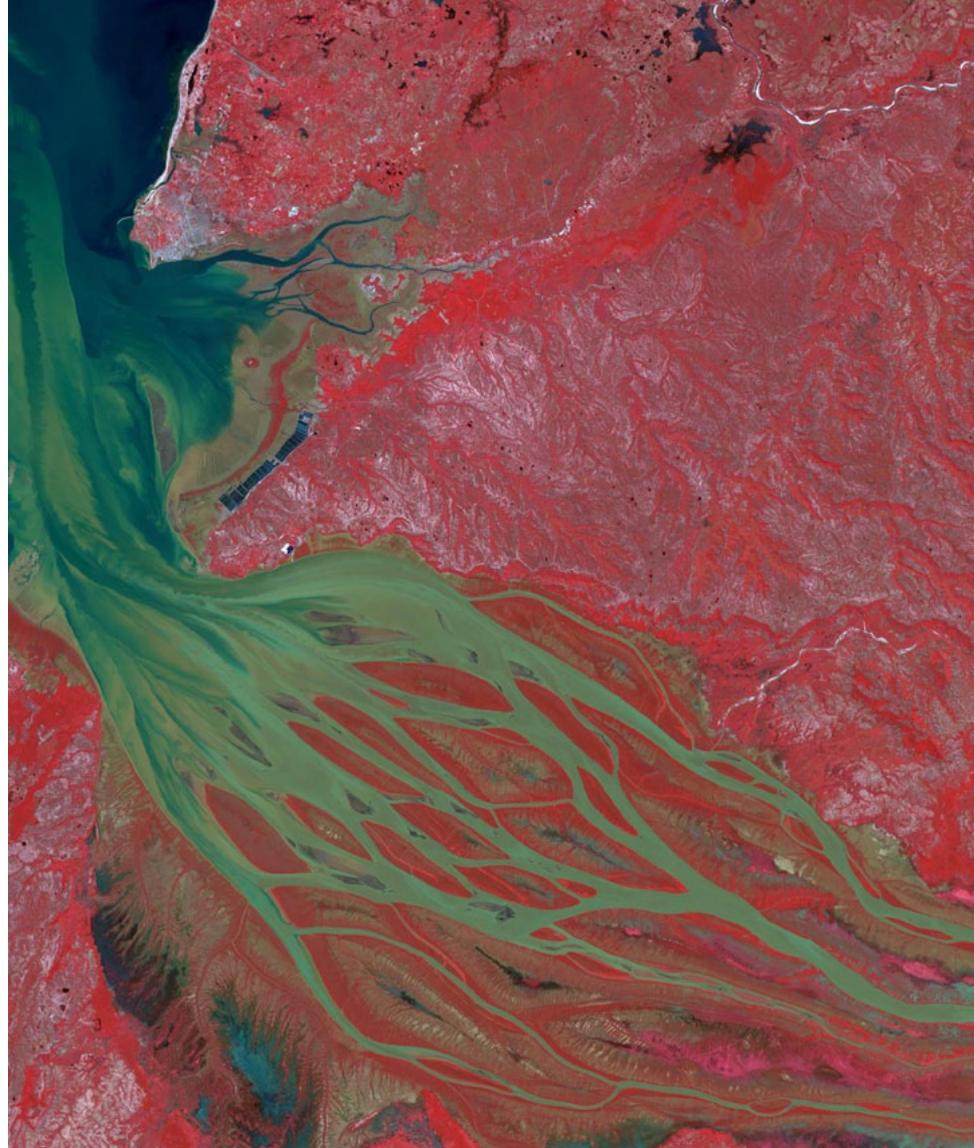
'Hey, I won the dharma combat.'

But when he recounts it to her, she says, 'Brother you lost.'

He asks, 'Why did I lose?'

She tells him, 'It was because his mind is like a Buddha, that he could see that your sitting posture is like a Buddha. And because your mind is bullshit, that's all that you can see.'

Isn't this true? When our mind is always competitive we feel that everyone is competing with us. When we're in a rush everyone is too slow. When we're angry, everyone is irritating. When we're spiritual everyone is a materialist. When we're violent internally that's all we see out there, that's how we express ourselves. That's why this practice happens in two ways, inwards and outwards. We're going to look at the way we speak to ourselves first so that we can take care, and not confuse this language with knowing.



Going Sane by Adam Phillips

Our torments have made us more imaginative than our consolations.
No one is famous for his sanity.
We make distinctions when we fear the links.
The word is like a dream we have been unable to interpret.
An unfashionable term that has never quite gone out of fashion.
Adaptation means losing the life you think you are protecting.
It is the way you avoid suffering that makes you suffer.
Words can be delivered more or less prosperously.
Sanity is this talent for not letting whatever frightens us about ourselves destroy our pleasure in life.
We are only pessimistic because we expect to get what we want.
The pleasure of mastery replaces the pleasure of gratification.
Wanting is always a species of prediction.
Simply because we have been children, our sexuality is going to be an uneasy mix of the imperious and the servile; and any account of our sexuality that attempts to obscure this will be misleading.
“Happiness is the belated fulfillment of a prehistoric wish. For this reason wealth brings so little happiness.” (Freud)
By freeing us to disapprove, it protects us from whatever else we may be feeling.
Torture is far more imaginative than erotic life.
Through revenge, fantasy in the adult who was once that child secures himself again; reinstates a lost safety net in the form of a triumph.
He needs to dominate where he was once dominated.
Desiring the parents, the forbidden pleasure of childhood, is replaced by not desiring the parents, the secret pleasure of adulthood.

What the child receives as enigmatic and always puzzling messages about his parents' sexual relationship—the mime show of family life—the adolescent begins to uncover and reenact.

Adolescence—one of the greatest sociological inventions of the post-war period.
Sinfulness was the only way of being free to describe our most urgently forbidden pleasures.

What is transgressive about both acts (masturbation and suicide) is what might be called their selfishness, the ruthlessness of their satisfactions. In both acts what is dispensed with is the need for other people, either permanently or temporarily.

It is the sacrifice of self-recognition that sponsors forbidden pleasure.

The malign nostalgia of blame.

Are there stories we can tell about ourselves that are not about the past?

A capacity to be depressed means being able to recognize something that is true—that development involves loss and separation, that we hurt people we love and need—and that we are prepared to bear the grief and guilt. In this sense, depression makes us real. It deepens us.

Winnicott once referred to depression as “the fog over the battlefield.”

Appetite can destroy the best things about appetite.

We often have to invent an object of desire in order to invent something new about our desiring.

Adults use money to wish with.

The infantile pleasures of being loved, adored, stroked, held, cuddled, infinitely attended to and responded to, and thought about; of only sleeping, eating and playing, these are the truly satisfying pleasures.

The sane adult is always smuggling his childhood into the future, refashioning his childhood pleasures as legitimate adult interests.

The sane would not think it was worth dying for anyone's sentences, including their own.

IV

Satya: Honesty

A talk by Michael Stone

December 16, 2010

Repentance

I was speaking with a yogi friend this morning. He asked, “What is this precepts course you’re teaching. What’s it about?” Such a good question. I said today we’re working on atonement. “What’s that?” he asked. I said, “It’s repentance.” He said, “Oh, that sounds like religion.” I said, “Yes.” That was the extent of our conversation.

Learning

In Japanese, the word for repentance or atonement is sangay. I like the English word for atonement because it’s actually at-one-ment. The Japanese term sangay is actually made up of two words: sang is confession, and gay means regret. I think this is a fabulous way of translating atonement: confession of regret, or confessing what we might regret. When we use these words—confession or regret—it sounds to our western cultured ears that they have specific religious connotations. But when I meditate on this notion of confessing something that we may regret, I think we can boil it down to learning. I think this is how we learn. We do something unskillful and then we see it. It gets brought to our attention, and

when it’s brought to our attention we have an opportunity to learn. It really reduces our blindness because seeing clearly is the practice of atonement.

Honesty Equals Stop and Turn

Confession is related to vidya, seeing clearly. A lot of us don’t want to see clearly. Yesterday Ronit and I met and we were talking about these terms—vidya and avidya—seeing and not seeing clearly. The way I used to translate avidya is not having the desire to see—which is a bit of a stretch of the prefix “a” which means “not.” Because it’s not only that we don’t see, but that we don’t really want to see. Is this true for you? For example in taking this precepts course, there’s a natural resistance. I want to see and I don’t really want to see. We’re human, and as I said on Tuesday night, the goal of this practice is just to become a person. As people we’re clumsy. But we can’t just stop at the fact that we’re clumsy. Sometimes we can see it, and even more rarely, we’re willing to turn around and say OK, I’ve been clumsy. To forgive ourselves, maybe to forgive others. At the heart of the practice of honesty is the ability to stop and turn around. Just like in the Angoli Mala

sutta, when the murderer Angoli Mala is chasing the Buddha. What does the Buddha do? He turns around. And in turning around to face Angoli Mala, Angoli Mali turns around to face himself, to look into his own heart.

IV: Satya

Whenever I talk about this practice as being religious people start squirming. When I think about having a spiritual practice, that term doesn't mean that much to me, but inside, I talk to myself as if I'm having a religious life. Taking the precepts is a religious practice. It's a practice that's connecting to that part of us that is internally a monk or a nun. I think we all have this part of us that is religious, that desires to have some nourishment in that area of our life.

Deep Traditions

I grew up Jewish, and I didn't know many families where the Judaism that they practiced really ran through their whole life. I was turned off Judaism when I was young, because there was a lot being said, but not a lot being lived. As a young person, you pick up on that right away. But once I left my roots, and started meeting people who really had a Jewish practice, I realized how deep that tradition is, with all of its prayers and rituals. It's inspiring actually. For me, there is something about studying the precepts that brings back this energy—it is a practice that wants to become a habit. It's not so much that you set an intention at the beginning of the day: I am going to be honest. But you develop a habit of stopping and turning to look into your heart. What motivates us

is repentance, is atonement, is honesty, where we can really look at our lives, and look honestly, and that way of looking is itself a vow taking, and the vow means including everything. So when I say the word “religious,” what that means to me is a set of internal practices and also a very profound vow to include everything in our practice.

Past Lives

In the Tibetan tradition, one of the ways you do this is to think about your past lives. If you had past lives you can't remember, then most likely you have to acknowledge that you've been a murderer, you've been a mother, a father, a grandparent, a mechanic, a teacher, a cow, grass, CEO of a CEO, a president, a prime minister. You've locked people up, you've been locked up. I think this is a helpful thing to imagine sometimes. All the worst things you could ever do—you've done them, it's already in your DNA. I think this is a fun and imaginative way of thinking about our history.

Honesty, Compassion, Service

Compassionate beings know how to be of use because they've worked with their own heart, and they can see where they've been unskillful and clumsy and forgive themselves, and then they can serve others. But if we can't look at our own shadows, then we can only be of use in the way we like to be of use, and that's kind of narrow.

Lying

The successful lie creates an unnerving freedom. It shows us that it is possible for no one to know what we are doing. The poor lie—the wish to be found out—reveals our fear about what we can do with words. Lying, in other words, is not so much a way of keeping our options open, but of finding out what they are. Fear of infidelity is fear of language.

MONOGAMY by Adam Phillips

Bullshit

There's a book that came out a couple of years ago called *On Bullshit* by philosopher Harry Frankfurt. "While liars need to know the truth to better conceal it, bullshitters are interested solely in advancing their own agendas, and have no use for the truth." The book's premise is that a person who lies has greater sensitivity to the truth than someone who bullshits. There are examples of how someone who is lying, feels in their body that they're lying. Whereas someone who becomes inflated or deflated in themselves, who goes around bullshitting, becomes numb. I think one of the reasons for taking up the vow of honesty is because we live in a culture that doesn't value being honest with your body, or speaking honestly. Every day we're sold versions of what we should be, and what our values should be. Kierkegaard said that soldiers can't kill when they're by themselves, they can only kill when they are in groups. I think that sometimes the rhetoric of our culture

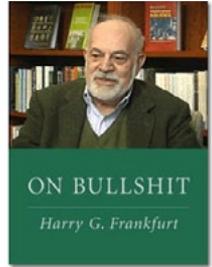
fools us into believing in versions of ourselves that are not honest. And that's really what we're going to focus on today. In these chants we acknowledge that all of the unskillfulness that we've ever committed comes from greed, anger, or from being confused. Part of this practice is just to be honest about that. My translation of unskillfulness is clumsiness. When I can think of myself as a clown doing stupid things it helps me ease in to where I'm not skillful. Part of our job—especially when we're in a crowd, or when we have an internal crowd—is to really be in touch with our heart, and what's true for us. I think that people who have the most skill in getting through the holidays are those who get the flu before the holidays, because they've been wiped out, and they have to take care of themselves.

Cultivating Community

Sarah: How do you atone without being self-indulgent?

Michael: Sometimes when you can't be awake, you just notice that and it paves the way. Otherwise the practice can become so idealistic. Sometimes all we can do is have warm tea and try to survive the party.

Another part of honesty is speaking, and speaking honestly means speaking from your heart. Even when what you have to say isn't popular. That's actually the most courageous kind of honesty—when you take the risk of saying something that is not the status quo.



The work of cultivating community is exactly that, for us to be really honest with each other. If there isn't honesty, things get vague, and vagueness always creates misunderstanding. That is a hard practice.

IV: Satya

Honesty, Not Truth

Lori: What about when you're speaking honestly from your heart, but what you say is painful for the person you're speaking to?

Michael: The reason why non-violence comes before honesty is that non-violence always tempers honesty. It's important to be honest, but it's also necessary to be diplomatic. If your intention is not to cause harm, then it's OK to say it, because you're not responsible for how the listener feels. It's really important to speak what's true for you, but also to know that what's true for you isn't The Truth. And that can get confusing. That's why I don't translate this yama as truthfulness—which is usually how it's translated—but as honesty. That's an important distinction in relationships, isn't it? To get in touch with what's true for you, but to know it's not The Truth. If you want to make it more complex, or more real, it means understanding that what is true for you in this moment may not be consistently true for you. It's not the objective truth of a situation.



Fog

On western soil, and especially in this community, we mix traditions. So, for example, the way we're running this precepts course is we're taking the five Yamas which are from the tradition of Patanjali, and we're treating them as precepts or vows. That's one way we mix traditions. One of the things that happen when you mix traditions is that you end up in a fog, because you don't have a structure. I personally like the fog, and I think one of the things that happens in a fog is that you get surprised by what you find. You really have to trust yourself and your practice, and you have to rely on other people to help us all find a way in the fog. I think life is more like a fog than a structure. I think honesty is an important light in the fog. It's good to acknowledge that we don't know, that our life is like a fog. The reason why I say that our practice is religious is because that's the part that helps us through the fog. And over time, the discipline that comes from courses like this really help us navigate the fog, without being foggy.

Changing Truth

The exercises we're doing are about keeping language and feeling connected. And over time being able to appreciate those feelings and not have one fixed story about them, so that the story can continually change, and we can stay connected to our feelings at the same time.

When I was working as a psychotherapist I had a client whose sister was raped by his step father. The family had a lot of strong feeling about it, there were three therapists, and we all worked together with the three siblings. It was really intense, the trauma in this family, and five years into our work it turned out the story wasn't true. The daughter had made it up, and was doing this to split the family up. And suddenly all those feelings that had felt so honest were exposed as a fabrication. I was the therapist and this possibility had never occurred to me, it had all seemed so real. We were exploring everyone's real feelings that came up—only to learn five years later that it wasn't true. That was an incredible learning experience for everybody. Just because you feel something, and it's true for you, it doesn't necessarily mean that that's what reality is. That's why relationships are so difficult. We all prefer to imagine: oh, I feel this way, therefore it must be true for all of us.

The only way to keep feeling and shifting truths connected is through metaphor. That's why for those of you who teach any kind of body practice, some of the best ways you can teach are through metaphors. People get it right away because you're not teaching a technique, you're teaching a feeling. You're sharing a feeling. Metaphor is the lie that tells the truth.

Self Portrait, Rear View by Sharon Olds (b. 19 November 1942)

At first I almost do not believe it, in the hotel triple mirror
That that is my body,
In back, below the waist, and above the legs
The thing that doesn't stop moving when I stop moving
And it doesn't even look like just one thing
Or even one big double thing
Even the word saddlebags has a smooth calfskin feel to it
Compared to this compendium of net string bags
Shaking our booty of cellulite, fruits and nuts
Some lumps look like bon bons translated intact from chocolate box to buttocks
The curl on top showing slightly through my skin
Once I see what I can do with this, I do it
High-stepping to make the rapids of my bottom
Rush and ripple like a world wonder
Slowly I believe what I am seeing
A 54-year-old rear end, once a tight end
High and mighty, almost a chicken butt
Now exhausted as if tragic
But this is not an invasion
My cul-de-sac is not being used to hatch
alien cells, bald peas, gyroscopes, sacks of marbles
It's my hoard of treasure, my good luck
Not to be dead, yet
But when I toss the main of my ass again
And see in it a clutch of eggs, each egg on its own as if shell-less, shudder
I wonder if anyone has ever died looking in a mirror in horror
I think I will not even catch a cold from it
I will go to school to it, to Butt Boot Camp
To the video store where I saw in the window
My hero, my workout jelly roll model, my apotheosis –
Killer Buns.

From: (<http://www.virginia.edu/waneismakers/newsmakers/olds.html>)



No Kings

'Just think what it would mean,' Ferenczi wrote to Freud in 1910, 'if one could tell everyone the truth, one's father, teacher, neighbour, and even the king. All fabricated, imposed authority would go to the devil—what is rightful would remain natural.' Ferenczi understood like nobody else, even Freud perhaps, the revolutionary potential of psychoanalysis. He knew that people speaking differently to each other changes the world (it is noticeable, though, that the people he wants to speak the truth to, in so far as they are explicitly gendered, are men). Ferenczi doesn't tell us why or how being able to tell everyone the truth—whatever one conceives that to be—would destroy those forms of oppressive authority. But it is as if Freud, in his reply to this letter, hears this as a wish, which it must also have been, for freer talk between the two of them. Freud was certainly, as Ferenczi was quick to tell him, father, teacher, and king to him. 'I feel myself to be a match for anything,' Freud replies cannily, 'and approve of the overcoming of my homosexuality, with the result being greater independence.' For Freud, freedom, at least consciously, was in overcoming, silencing, his homosexual self; for Ferenczi, independence would be in its free expression. Freud sensed, I think, that Ferenczi's fantasy of honesty, of people saying anything and everything to each other, was also a fantasy of symbiosis, of there being no differences between people (if we tell each other everything, it is as though we never leave each other out). And yet, in psychoanalytic treatment, one can begin to understand how speaking freely has become a mortal danger for someone. Saying whatever comes into one's mind was something Freud believed one should do in analysis; Ferenczi wanted the

psychoanalytic relationship to be the paradigm for social relations. But it would have to be a version of psychoanalysis in which the analyst could tell the patient whatever was on his mind a well. Mutual interpretation, and mutual free-association. No kings.

TERRORS AND EXPERTS *by Adam Phillips*

Honesty

by Mike Hoolboom

The three syllable word I like to use for confusion and uncertainty is: honesty. In wide shot, from the vantage of another planet, or even a tall building, it seems crisply defined. But the closer I get the murkier it appears. Here are a couple of reasons why.

Psychoanalysis has come up with this shtick it calls transference. Transference means that I'm not only talking to you, instead, I'm holding onto two or three early childhood action figures and projecting them onto everything around me. When I read a book I'm back taking milk from my mother. My zafu, my cushion, of course, is my dad, cheek to cheek once more, good old dad, steady and reliable and indifferent. Actually in my case, my father is my mother, but that's another story. What transference means is that I am creating my listener. I'm producing them (I mean you) out of my admittedly limited repertoire of guest stars. In this room, for instance, there are many people whose practices are "better" than mine. No no, don't hide your faces away, I know that it has made you deeper, kinder, more ready to serve—or at least so I imagine—and as a result, everyone of you looks like my mother.

Oh yes, as soon as I walk in here I think, “Mama mia, what are you doing here?” And they say you can never go home again. How is it possible to be honest when I can never quite reach across the infinite space of my private movie theatre and take the faces of my parents away from your face? Remind me, please. Who are you again?

IV: Satya

The second thing about honesty in speech is that, try as I might, every time I open my mouth I always say the same thing. And the uncanny thing is that as soon as you hear it, you play it back to me, as if it was something you’re thinking too. This is what a conversation sounds like with my best friend.

I told him, “Listen to me.”

He replied, “Oh, listen to me!”

I wondered aloud, “Listen to me? Listen to me?”

He insisted, “Listen to, listen to, listen to ME.”

Listen to me is the first demand of every speech act—but the demands don’t end there, in fact, I have a long list. So even while it seems I’m trotting out some bonbon about what I did last night or recounting a fave movie scene, what I’m doing at the same time is stuffing my lines with demands. Love me. Aren’t I smart and charming? Love me. Please disappoint me in a reliable way. Love me. Love me even though I just did the one thing you said you could never love if anyone ever worked up the nerve to actually

do that thing that is the root, the very place that every un-loved and unlovable thing comes from.

So tell me—between the face swapping, the personal movie theatre, the all-season demands that make language possible—where is honesty in any of this? Do you think you can help me with that? Dad?

Letter

(after Jan. 22, 2011, an all day sit at Centre of Gravity)

Dear Michael,

...I watched my partner’s spine as I breathed. I watched him. Breathing. All day. I watched him breathe in front of me. I watched and I breathed and I was totally, totally silent. Then at the end of the day, as I was leaving, I said goodnight and he said goodnight and then I realized I saw the whole thing. I cried. I saw the whole thing, the whole him, the whole of the both of us. Our lives. What else is there?

And then I realized I knew him better than I know my husband.

The Trouble

by Amy Manusow

The trouble with honesty is that it is rooted somewhere in between silence and language, in spaces unobstructed by noise, and yet it can only be expressed with words or actions. I really started to notice this curious sub-lingual quality of honesty by reflecting on my weekly meetings with my partner. I found myself showing up with the same attitude every time. I would say to Rae Anne, “I really don’t feel like talking this week. You go first. No I mean it! I’ve seriously got nothing to say,” and she would kindly oblige me, sharing her thoughts and feelings with me for twenty minutes, and then it would be my turn and I would reluctantly let a few sentences trickle out, my gaze fixed on the timer in front of me, and before I knew it, twenty minutes had disappeared and I would go into overtime, scrambling to tie up the loose ends of my many thoughts.

It became somewhat of a running joke between us, a knowing smile spreading across Rae Anne’s face the moment I mentioned my lack of anything worthy to talk about. There was something so peculiar about the way my initial words belied the things inside me that were evidently seeking expression. That such a sharp disconnect could exist between what I thought I felt, and what was actually capable of coming out of my mouth when given the time and the space, amazed me each and every time I noticed it happening. This phenomenon made me extremely self-conscious

in my relationships with others, but especially in my relationship with myself. Communication itself already invites so much potential for misunderstanding, and now I not only have to worry about someone misinterpreting my words, I have to worry about my words misrepresenting what’s going on inside of me.

So it turns out that the most difficult thing about honesty isn’t necessarily finding ways to express it, but finding honesty itself. I am concerned that honesty is so often shrouded by habitual reactions and patterns of speech. I do think it’s possible to locate honesty, but I often wonder what the point of all this self-inquiry is when it only seems to dangle an unattainable ideal (that I have vowed to attain) in front of me. Honesty is a dynamic process. It changes over time; over minutes and seconds, but honesty also means recognizing that there is no one single truth at any given moment. I’m not sure I’ve gotten any closer to finding the honesty within myself, but at least I am starting to know where to look. When searching for honesty, it is especially helpful to respectfully and compassionately tell your many selves to be quiet. After that, you wait and see what comes up in the absence of noise. You wait and you listen, you listen and you wait. And eventually, with any luck, the incessant human need to verbalize will be replaced by a feeling, and when your actions and words spring forth from this feeling that is cultivated by sitting still and creating space, they will be infused with honesty.

As It Is

by *Mina Arakawa*

IV: Satya

In the class where we talked about honesty, we did an exercise. We all stood with eyes closed and imagined we were naked and looking at ourselves in the mirror. Is any part of our body missing from the image in the mirror? At the end of the class, we were given a homework assignment to document our body every day in the medium of our choice. In my the mirror of my imagination, I didn't think any parts of my body were missing. As I was doing my first self-portrait drawing, however, I realized that the parts that were missing were the details that indicated signs of aging. They were missing because I chose not to "see" and I wished others would not see them. In private, however, I obsessively investigate them with a mixture of fascination and denial. These details, including wrinkles, texture of the skin, parts of the body that have changed shape, threaten the image of my body that is no longer fitting with the actual body.

With these self-portraits, I was going to be honest with what I saw. Once I started, I cared less what each of the parts and details of the body represented. Instead, I saw shapes as shapes and lines as lines without judging so much what they represented. I also started to try to break habitual patterns I have when I draw a human body. Almost all the drawings are done using my left hand, my non-dominant hand, which I feel is less subject to habits and patterns of movement, ways of seeing and thinking. I also noticed that

the order in which I moved from parts to parts within the body was always the same and that I spent more time on breasts and abdomen and less on feet, arms and hands. I consciously reversed these patterns. I realized that the body image is unstable—the way I perceive my body changed day to day depending on how I was feeling. Self consciousness, as it always relies on imagined eyes of others, is also unstable and unreliable.



V

Asteya: Non-stealing

A talk by Michael Stone (notes taken by Pat Rockman)

February 3, 2011

Walls and Waves

Wouldn't it be nice if you could chant the Heart Sutra and find atonement and start clean again? Just kidding. Let's leave clean for dishes and camera lenses.

The Heart Sutra is a Chinese text. It is a chant that talks about fear—fear as walls in the mind (now there's something to meditate on). Why are there so many walls? They are reinforced because of fear and our inability to work with greed, anger, ill will and delusion.

Like waves coming toward you, the sand and environment are changing and you are changing, within and without. These patterns will keep coming up over and over, but they just won't matter anymore. Some of us think they will stop, but they won't. The desires of the hungry ghosts—of greed, for instance—show us that we will be fine even if they are not satisfied. And of course they will never be satisfied.



Ballet Genetics

When I went to anatomy class in a yoga teacher training course, the teacher demonstrated how some skeletons are able to do some poses while for others they are unattainable. This is due to genetics. In England, ballet students receive a pelvic x-ray to determine the possibility of them ever really becoming ballerinas. If their anatomy won't allow it, they are told not to bother because they will just get injured. This news produces a perhaps predictable mixture of relief and frustration.

I think it's so sad when we are hooked by the geometry of the form and when we are attached to the story of what it (yoga or the practice) will do for us. This is greed. Your practice can show you this. Practice is about seeing your thinking. It is not about how to change your thinking.

Teacher and Student

Student: When someone has undergone the “great death” of enlightenment—what's it like?

Teacher: She can't go by night; she can only go by daylight. (In other words: you are in the light, not the nighttime, you are out in the open). Your practice becomes public. You express and reveal yourself. Your practice is visible. Your relations with others is your practice, the way you are in the world is your practice. You are daylight.

Field

Drshiti is the gazing point in Sanskrit. It is the “field” or Davsha. The field is not a singular point. There is a foreground and background. The field is wide. When the eyes are open in meditation they are being trained not to pick and choose. The gaze is receptive. Train with the eyes open so that everything becomes equal.

Democracy begins with the eyes. We can look from the back of our head with a receptive gaze, allowing whatever is present to come forward, instead of using our eyes like hands—grabbing at experience, turning it into my seeing, my wanting, using the eyes to reinforce the sense of my world. Most of the time we use the sense door of looking to separate one object from another, to distinguish and categorize, to project our likes and dislikes, our preferences. In other words, we use this sense door to keep ourselves separate from the world. We look out in order to create an inside. To build the home of me.

Sitting might be viewed as the heart of honesty. It is hard to look honestly from moment to moment. Often our looking is about what we might get. I turn every scene in front of me into a picture and wonder: “What's in it for me?” Terms like enlightenment should be a verb, not a noun; it's something that you express. For example, you can put away your zabuton with two hands so that it becomes an example of enlightened or mindful activity. To use both hands, as Dogen urges the cook to do, all of us cooking away

V: Asteya

in the kitchen of our life, means that one hand knows what the other is doing. Do you remember that expression? The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. I recently received an e-mail from someone that was so filled with unconscious hopes that I didn't know how to reply. The letter showed me what this person was unable to tell themselves. The unconscious is always at work, we're always showing more (and less), telling more (and less) than we intend. But the practice urges us to use both hands, to be awake, to use our intention like a flashlight so that we can see what we are doing, and what others are doing.

Three Levels

There are three levels to each of the precepts:

1. Literal, e.g. don't kill, don't steal
2. Compassionate level, to self and others
3. Insight, where every ethical value is seen as a riddle, a conundrum, a question. This is the level that intersects with meditation.

Uncatching a Thief

The effect of stealing is greatest on the thief. My computer was stolen while I was in the airport. I went to the police to file a report. I saw the policeman and his gun. I couldn't stop looking at his gun. I started thinking about the thief and what could happen if he was caught. He could get shot. He might be suffering anxiety. He may



be feeling nothing, particularly if he is a really good thief, and this lack of feeling might have the worst effect on him with respect to his life and how he lives it. I told the policeman I didn't want to file the report. I didn't want the thief to be caught. In fact, the thief is always caught by the act of stealing itself.

V: Asteya

Compassion

I stole stickers as a kid and ultimately started to feel for the places that sold them. In the middle of the night I covered their windows with happiness glue, and for weeks afterwards good fortune stuck to the owners. They were still pretty bummed about the missing stickers though. This is the compassionate level.

Koan

The last level is a question. You just show up regardless of preference, whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, and you ask, "How am I going to meet every moment?" Not stealing is defined by being satisfied with what I have. It is about having gratitude. Do you have what you need to practice? Mark Whitwell says that what you need for practice is "a nice floor." You should see Mark's floor. It gives him a massage and makes him breakfast. His floor is nicer than most people I know.

Entering a Room

In anatomy class, I notice a physical lack of mindfulness. People are throwing their mats out and eating in the room. Thinking about how you walk into a room is important. It's part of how you express your practice. The beginning of a gesture, a conversation, the entry into a space, the way you open a door to a car. How do you show up for the first note of every piece of music in your life? If you can let it ring through you, if you can open your ears to hear it, then you're really present, you're practicing. Everything is a practice, and practice begins with the beginning.

Strong and Silent Type: An Introduction

During a yoga training, Richard Freeman was introducing Pattabhi Jois. He simply stood by him until people were still and quiet and had shown up.

Thich Peels a Tangerine

Thich Nhat Hanh came to give a talk and arrived walking very slowly. It took him thirty minutes to walk to the podium. He sat down and peeled a tangerine extremely slowly and then ate one piece. This is teaching at the koan level.

Putting the precepts into practice is about expression. You can talk all you like, but then you have to express them in what you do and how you live.

Not Stealing

At the koan level, how can we not steal? We can think about this on many levels: materially, spatially, and with respect to time.

Bodhidharma offers this definition of not stealing (try reading this without your eyelids): Your nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the unattainable dharma, not having thoughts of gaining is called the precept of not stealing.

How should you meditate? Perhaps you could start by not having ideas about gaining anything. (This was the first meditation instruction Michael received.)

Dogen: “The self and the things of the world are just as they are. The gate of freedom is open.” You’re fine without the iPad; you’re fine just the way you are. Dogen says everything is a doorway.

Exercise: Take these two definitions of not stealing by Dogen and Bodhidharma and explore them on three levels: literal, compassionate, and koan.

(The group I was in:)

Bodhi Dharma

Literal: If you have the thought of stealing, don’t do it. If you notice the thought, don’t entertain it.

Compassionate: When you have the thought, or if you indulge in stealing, don’t judge others or yourself. Be kind but not indulgent.

Koan: Don’t think you know yourself. As soon as you get attached to a view, you are stealing.

Dogen

Literal: If you see a flower, don’t pick it. This closes the gate.

Compassionate: Appreciate the beauty of the flower. When you see wanting, realize the flower is for everyone.

Koan: Being with things as they are reveals that there is no need to have gain or loss. There is freedom in acceptance, in the willingness to let go of wanting.

Someone wrote: We buy things we don’t need with money we don’t have for impressions that don’t last.

The literal level is a rule, especially in community: don’t steal.

At the compassionate level it means knowing what you feel and what you are doing and the effects your actions have on self and others.

At the koan level you can't enter by knowing or by theory. You must do. After the cameras roll the director calls out, "Action!"

With respect to the yamas we begin with the first yama: ahimsa or non-violence. This comes before honesty. Look at the notion of honesty and its relationship to gaining. How do you arrive by daylight? How do you do this in your life?

V: Asteya

Koans

The trick with a koan is that you don't answer it. You become the question. You don't know how things are going to happen in your life. You just have to let go. Steven Batchelor says, "You can only carve a path out of contingency."



We desire to be in community together, but there's no centre to this Centre of Gravity. Every moment is the centre. That's what makes us so Canadian. We have taken the form of the great donut. We are donut dharma.

Dear husband,

I don't understand. I have been loyal to you, like a loving animal to his master. We have lost our unborn child; my arms are empty and you're not holding my hand. Instead you ask me, "Why are you crying? You're a strong women, move on with life!" With deep regret, I know the moment had passed me by and I didn't allow myself to feel the grief.

At this moment it is Sunday evening, 17th April. As I look out of the window the moon is full and bright and I struggle writing this part. I say to myself, I am okay and I have a master plan. Yet all kinds of emotions are flowing through me and tears are pouring down my face. Right now, I am experiencing the feeling of grief and accepting the end of a ten year marriage.

I don't want to steal from myself anymore, but honor and value the healing process. I want to give myself the riches of inner life, the joy, love and pain one is allowed to feel. Yet just like the unborn child, that didn't belong to me, neither do these tears or emotions. I can only accept where I am right now at this present moment.

My practice of Asteya is translated into an appreciation for life, embracing all the seasons that come and go. There is no right or wrong way to live this life; I just have to live it.

My heart received a beautiful koan by Dogen. "The self and the things of the world are just as they are. The gate of freedom is open."

Rupi Saran

Terrors and Experts

by Adam Phillips

Fear attempts to save the disappearances.
Only the familiar is ever in disguise.
It is the making coherent of a life—the forcing of a pattern—that people often suffer from.
At the end of reason comes persuasion.
What I want is what makes wanting impossible.
Every gift is a possible future theft.
There is a kind of intellectual melancholy in this loss of a third sex that never existed, and so can never be mourned.
A world of paradox is a world without revenge.
The opposite of fetish is adventure.
But what kind of body?
I am like everything except myself.
Spontaneity is a delight only for conformists.
The language of pleasure and the language of justice are inextricable.
The child's most sacred attribute: doubts about self.
Pleasure is its own punishment.
Animals who make promises.
A talent is not a weapon in every culture.
Doing something properly is a way of not doing it differently.
The unconscious describes the part of us that joins without fitting in.
Freud discovered that people live under assumed names.
Answers merely interrupt questions.
In the mirror one always sees oneself looking.

V: Asteya

We are not in search of wholeness...we are in search of good ways to bear our incompleteness.
Prescription begins when curiosity breaks down.
Belief domesticates desire.
In the absence of trauma, there is nothing worth knowing.
You can only tell yourself a secret by telling someone else.
People speak each other's disowned voices.
In Freud's view we become what we cannot have, and desire (and punish) what we are compelled to disown.
Suffering turns privacy into secrecy.
Because of this, interpretation is required.
Madness is the need to be believed.
Every fear is a wish.
Who has met everyone?



VI

Brahmacharya: Sexual Healing

A talk by Michael Stone

February 3, 2011

So we're moving along in our precepts course, we've mastered (cue ironic string section) not harming, honesty, and not stealing, which is the practice of really being satisfied with what we have. There's a logical next step which is to be satisfied with what we have, and then be wise with sexual energy. For a monk this is really simple, it means celibacy. There's nothing else really to say. The practice is celibacy and that's what you do. For the householder this is a little more complex. This is what I hope we can explore today. I could cite all kinds of places in the Pali Canon where there are rules about how a monk should practice. But I think they might sound far away and foreign and not as applicable to those of us who are not monks or nuns. So our approach today is to explore what it means to recognize sexual energy and to be able to work wisely with it. And I can't help but refer to my own training in psychology where early on, Freud thought that when you encounter energies that are unconscious, one of the ways they first manifest is as sexual energy. And although his theories changed, especially in the first fifteen years of his career, sexual energy for Freud was a problem when it wasn't handled well and that never changed. We all know this, right? We live in a culture where sex appears

everywhere, and yet somehow it's still something that is hard to talk about. Maybe we value friendships or relationships where sexual energy is something we can talk about, but sometimes those are rare. Maybe sexual energy is still as unconscious as it was in Vienna a century ago.

Brahmacharya

Brahmacharya literally translated means to live like brahma, the creator God. Whenever I think of brahma I think of a two stroke motorcycle engine that goes brrrrmm, brrrrmm. It means acceleration, and to have pistons fire and to build cities and make art and architecture and grow things. It means to live like brahma, which is taking creative energy and doing something with it. What is sexual energy? Biologically, it's creative energy. To live like brahma is to do something with that energy, to build with it. That's why Thich Nhat Hahn encourages us to be aware of what we're creating. This is true even in queer sexual relations. Every time you engage sexually you're planting something. It may not literally be a baby, but you're making something. Luce Irigaray has a wonderful line where she says a family begins with two. Not

Preceptions

with three, but with two. As soon as you have two people together you've created a family. And the effect of your action reverberates, and every way that it reverberates is the making of a family.

The difficult question is how we decide which kinds of loving are acceptable. The language of pleasure and the language of justice are inextricable. By being a new way of saying this, psychoanalysis [or Buddhism, or Yoga, or this precepts course] can be recruited either to consolidate our prejudices or to show us what our prejudices are for.

VI: Brahmacharya

Adam Phillips

Three Levels: Literal, Compassion, Koan

We're going to talk about how to take sexual energy and work with it in mind, body and speech, internally and externally. And at the same time there are the three levels of the precepts that we've always been looking at. The first is the literal, the second is the compassionate level and the third is the koan or mystery level. I thought we would start today with a koan. I came across this koan by typing into Google the words "sex koan." What showed up was a list of all the koans where women are the main characters, and it only ran about two pages. There are very few koans that feature women, and this is one of them.



The Old Lady's Enlightenment

One morning an old lady experienced an awakening while cleaning up after breakfast. She rushed over and announced to Master Hakuin, 'The Buddha has filled my body! The whole universe radiates! How marvelous!'

'Nonsense!' Hakuin retorted, 'Does it shine up your asshole?'

The old lady gave Hakuin a shove and shouted, 'What do you know about enlightenment?'

They both roared with laughter.

The opening line suggests something pretty radical. The woman who becomes enlightened is not a usual candidate; she's obviously not a nun. If she is cleaning up after breakfast, usually it means she has a family, and she's working so that one day, when the nest is empty and she doesn't have to be a householder, she can wake up. And she's waking up in the middle of cleaning up after breakfast. That's a beautiful line right there. And maybe historically more radical than we can appreciate. Then she rushes over to Hakuin. Now most of you know Hakuin, he's the person who commented on the Heart Sutra and wrote about beads on a tray. He's a really problematic guy, hard and intense; he was someone who liked to poke at everything. He was also one of the important calligraphers in Japan. He would be the person you'd go to, to see if your awakening is real or not. So as soon as she's awakened she goes to him and says the Buddha has filled my body, the whole universe radiates. Hakuin tests her and says it's nonsense. She gives him a

shove back, and they both fall over laughing. They're equal now. What I love about this story is that the awakening also happens inside your asshole. When was the last time you looked in there? I don't want you to answer that. Maybe we'll get to that later. Awakening, or being awake, penetrates everywhere.

Laxative

Trungpa Rinpoche used to have this line: "Dharma practice is a laxative not a sedative." That goes well with the asshole koan. It opens you up to a wider spectrum of what can move through you. Wherever you're tight or contracted or have repression, the energy will flow there. Sexual energy is just one energy amongst many that will flow.

Tectonic Plates

Traditionally in Buddhism, especially in early Buddhism, there are three different levels that our practice happens at. The first is the unconscious level, practice is taking place in a realm that you can't see and don't know. Something is working on you, but you don't even know how it's working. Have you ever woken up from a dream, and you can't remember it, but you feel like something's shifted? It's as if you had psychic tectonic plates that start shifting, but you can't talk about it to yourself. You can't name what's happened. Practice happens at this unconscious level, and the precepts work at this level too. When we become aware of the kind of

energy that moves through us, it moulds us at a deep level that may be preverbal.

1. The first level is latent or unconscious; we can't see it.
2. The second is what's arising in direct awareness. This is what we access in meditation.
3. The third is what they call a surging stage, where it's out of control. We're just carried away, whatever the emotion is. Much of the time emotion moves from latent to surging without any awareness.

VI: Brahmacharya

Reactivity

Sexual energy is an energy, like anger energy, envy energy, jealousy energy. When sexual energy arises, usually the first thing we do with it, like we do with every kind of sensation, is we have attachment or aversion towards it. Either it's pleasurable and we want to repeat it, or we have aversion. Oh no, this is bad. Not now. This is dirty. And once we have expressed attachment or aversion, we think it's mine. That's my sexual energy. For there to be a subject, a me, there has to be an object. Whether it happens in body, in speech or mind, when we're caught in sexual energy, thinking it's my sexual energy, and then there has to be something out there. This is how ignorance operates, how avidya (not seeing clearly) operates. Avidya always takes process and turns it into a noun.



It's turning whatever is showing up into something reifiable (into an object), and whenever you get reification you get deification. And then sexual energy is an object, it's a deity, it's something that is too big to contend with and omnipotent.

Holding

I think this is the problem that most of us fall into. It's my sexual energy so I better do something with it. Or not do something with it. I better act on it, or I better get rid of it. And then we don't actually get to see what it is. When sexual energy arises, it arises physically as feeling and sensation, and then it has stories. Layers and layers of stories. The stories flow through gender, culture, through your history. Now the key with sexual energy is that it's impersonal. It's the natural world in human form. The key in our practice is just to hold it, with really open hands. Not to contract around it. There is nothing wrong with sexual desire, it's a fantastic thing. If people have sexual desire that they have never spent time with, and they try to push it away, it grows roots in other places, and will show up somehow.

Falling Backwards

Carl Jung says that if you don't make something that is unconscious conscious, then you risk falling into a hole backwards. Has anyone ever fallen into a hole backwards? Like with any energy, if you repress it, it goes into the compost and starts growing and multiplying and getting smelly, rich and fertile. What I like about this koan is that it's a reminder that when you're awake, you're awake to everything, even to your asshole.

Sometimes there are certain energies, or parts of sexual energies, that we don't want to be awake to. Like certain layers of sexual

energy are allowed (that's me), while others are unacceptable (that's not me). But the problem is not the sexual energy, the problem is the clinging and the craving and the attachment to outcome.

Nicole: Brahmacharya is most frequently translated as "the wise use of sexual energy". Yet the term "wise" leaves the teaching a bit ambiguous. What is considered wise? Do we take the familiar view of sex as sin? Are we to be celibate like Buddhist monks and nuns? For me, brahmacharya becomes clear in reference to the other precepts. Is it hurting yourself or another? Is it dishonest? Are you being greedy? Are you taking something which is not being freely given? Non-harming, honesty, non-greed, and non-stealing become the filters through which sexual energy must pass in order to be considered wise.

Sex Scandals in the Zen Tradition

Zen Lands in America

Early on in American Buddhist practice there was a real obsession with meditation. People just wanted to go on retreat and sit. The focus of practice was meditation, and it also happens that in those first 40 years there were a lot of scandals in Buddhist organizations, one after another. Often the scandals involved students with each other and teachers with students. Actually it's still going on. Just last year Eido Shimano Roshi was finally thrown out of his Zen centre in upstate New York for having numerous affairs with his students.

The following are comments and reactions from practitioners who were affected.

Eido Shimano Roshi

Perhaps the best way to describe this is to share what happened to me when I learned about Eido Roshi's affairs. It was three or four years after I'd been practicing at the NY Zendo, many years ago. I was shocked, stunned, couldn't eat or sleep for several days. Beside myself, I talked about it to a dear sangha member, Kushu, (no longer alive). We were up at Dai Bosatsu Mountain. I said to him, 'How can this be? The Zen practice here is so profound, the zazen so powerful, the teisho's incredible... the dokusan piercing. I don't understand it. I loved Eido Roshi so much, and now this!!' Kushu's answer was very straightforward and simple. It changed my life.

He said, 'You only think you loved him. But you only loved your dreams about him. When you can see not just your dreams about a person, not just what you want him to be, but all of who he truly is, and still love him, then you're doing something! That's love.' That became my life koan. I returned home from the mountain that day forever changed. That is my practice... to see everything about a person and still love and accept them. Eido Roshi has shown great, great patience with me, and with others. Our zazen practice is hard. We all fall down over and over. Doesn't he deserve great patience as well?

Deep, heartfelt gasshos to all,
Eshin Brenda Shoshanna"

...

VI: Brahmacharya

Having moved beyond the fairy tale of dharma transmission, Zen communities can begin work on truly thorny questions. Why did so many of the Asian 'masters' who came to America, especially during the 60s, behave in ways that to the objective beholder seem narcissistic, even sociopathic? What was their experience coming to maturity in monasteries and ashrams? Were they damaged in some way as children? And how, today, can the traditional Hindu and Buddhist emphasis on 'non-attachment' be meaningfully taught in an America where many suffer 'attachment disorders'—an inability to receive or return love?

To matter much in America, Zen must undergo its own painful Protestant Reformation—the deconstruction of lineage. This will free practitioners to learn from trained and accountable teachers in the spirit of the Buddha's final admonition: 'Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Seek salvation alone in the truth. Look not to assistance to anyone besides yourselves.'

<http://genkaiku-again.blogspot.com/2011/02/eido-tai-shimano-continued.html>

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Preceptions

Most certainly this matter has raised intense reflection and questioning of 'institutional' Buddhism. It is possible that 'The Shimano Affair' may provide the catalyst for bringing about a revolution of transparency within World Zen in America and Japan. We are perhaps witnessing the making of a revolution in Buddhism.

VI: Brahmacharya

*Rev. Kobutsu Malone,
Sedgwick, Maine*

<http://genkaaku-again.blogspot.com/2011/02/eido-tai-shimano-continued.html>

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...To put it simply, Eido Shimano is an embarrassment to Buddhism, including all of Zen Buddhism, and Japanese Buddhism, in particular. I am concerned that if you, as his Board and monks do not take action, we will be sanctioning this kind of egregious abusive, gender-biased, predatory, misogynistic behavior in our temples and monasteries. We vow, as Buddhists to do no harm. I urge you to end the harm, and end it now.

The sexual abuse of women is no small matter globally. It takes profound commitment to deal with this issue. Humbly, I feel that we as Buddhists need to clean up the scene in our own backyard, and clean it up now. We all share this karma, and we must share the correction process as well. Compassion tells us that, and we have to not only listen but as well to act. Thus these letters you are currently receiving... Please heed them, and heed them well.

I do feel deeply about this issue since so many women have passed through my zendo diminished and damaged as a result of having been subjected to sexual boundary violations by their teachers; some have been physically abused; others have been psychologically intimidated and then forced into sex. Some women were plainly deluded and hungry for acknowledgment, and in some way, power; others were coerced, shamed, and some were threatened; others were entranced and tricked. In the end, after all is said and done, most have wanted to abandon their Buddhist practice, finding Buddhism too passive and uncaring, if not dangerous...

*Letter from Roshi Joan Halifax
regarding Eido Shimano,
December 31, 2010*

www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=155962831118899

...



Scandals

One thing that was happening in his community, which I think is a lesson that a lot of other communities learned, is that Asian teachers would come over from Asian cultures alone into this culture with no teacher or community or colleagues. So the focus of the practice turned towards what the students wanted, which was meditation, and ethics were left out. As the practice started showing up on this soil, no one wanted to learn about ethics, they wanted to get concentrated and achieve nirvana. But over time what happened was that after these scandals started, more and more of these Buddhist communities started to have boards. They would set up a board of directors and the teacher would be employed by the board, who would keep an eye on what the teacher was doing. I think that model has really helped American Buddhism. These kind of scandals are still going on, but not like they were in the 1970s and 1980s. A great book on this topic is called *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at the San Francisco Zen Center* by Michael Downing.

VI: Brahmacharya

Amazon.com review:

“Why did the richest, most influential, highest flying Zen center in America crash and burn in 1983? Novelist Michael Downing wondered the same thing, and after three years of interviewing members and poring over documents, his *SHOES OUTSIDE THE DOOR* tells the story. Womanizing, BMW-driving Richard Baker was the abbot and visionary behind the rapid growth of the San Francisco Zen Center, but in many ways he was the antithesis of his teacher and predecessor, the inimitable and revered Shunryu Suzuki, who would choose the bruised apples out of compassion. After the early death of Suzuki, a blind and driven cult formed around Baker, seemingly filling the void until this ‘Dick Nixon of Zen’ finally slept with his best friend’s wife and brought his world crashing to the ground. Working with direct quotations from students and workers of the Center and its many enterprises, Downing delivers a page-turning exposé of a community that is as laudable as it is laughable. And as an outsider to both the community and Buddhism, he does it with wit and an even hand.”

Brian Bruya



Sila

Buddhadharma: Of Buddhism's three trainings—sila, samadhi, prajna (often translated as morality, meditation and wisdom)—there has been less emphasis on sila in the West. Would you agree?

VI: *Brahmacharya*

Lama Palden Drolma: Thrangu Rinpoche, one of the top scholar-yogis, explained sila as meaning “cool.” He likened it to a cool breeze in a hot country. It brings relief and happiness, since it cools the fire of desire that's burning us up. Since our runaway desire isn't ultimately going to fulfill us, the contentment with what is and with what we have brings a breath of fresh air. Paying attention to ethics, to integrity, brings us more in alignment with our true nature. It provides the conditions for awakening by aligning us more with our inherent buddhanature. Acting in an ethical way, having conduct that is beneficial to oneself and others, creates the karma and the conditions that help us awaken... It's a sense of alignment with deeper principles of truth and reality and with our fundamental nature, which is basic goodness. In the traditions that most of us in the West grew up in, there is usually the sense that there is some problem at the core of who we are.

Andrew Olendzki: Rules in the context of sila also afford refuge. The laws of cause and effect mean that the harm you do is going to not only hurt the people around you but come back and hurt you. Even if you feel disinclined to obey them, having a set of rules that you sign on to gives you a kind of protection from yourself, as well as a protection for everyone else. It's a gift of harmlessness that you give the people around you. Seeing sila as a refuge and

a gift takes some of the edginess out of the “you must obey the rules or else” point of view...” The Buddha emphasized intention as the driving force of karma. What you do is less important than the intention behind how you do it...

Lama Palden: The understanding of interconnectedness that is at the heart of the dharma, and the practice of equanimity that springs from it, offered a huge breakthrough in human consciousness—a transcendence of the principle of preserving one's tribe, which is the source of so many ethical codes. Today we're finding that it's more relevant than ever as we're becoming so aware of our interconnectedness. The highest alignment within our hearts is to understand our interconnectedness and appreciate that we really want to protect and try to enhance the life of every sentient being.”

SEX, LIES AND BUDDHISM

Buddhadharma, The Practitioners Quarterly, Summer 2010

VII

Brahmacharya: Touch the Ghost

A talk by Michael Stone

March 3, 2011

Where is the Love?

The main difference between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism is that in Mahayana, the maha (majority) move away from the pursuit of becoming a buddha and instead hope to become a bodhisattva, which is someone who puts aside their own enlightenment in order to enlighten others. The way I imagine this is that you're trying to wake up everything around you through the way you are. From the Mahayana perspective you can't study that in a sutra. You can't get that even by following ethical rules. Sometimes they're helpful. But the Mahayana split because in a certain sense it wasn't helpful anymore to have so many lists and rules. The question that the Mahayanas posed to the Theravadans was: where is the love? So instead of becoming a buddha, our goal is to live as a bodhisattva, which is someone who serves and awakens others. You're trying to get everyone out the door, and you're letting them go first. Over and over again. Until the last slug and worm and blade of grass is served.

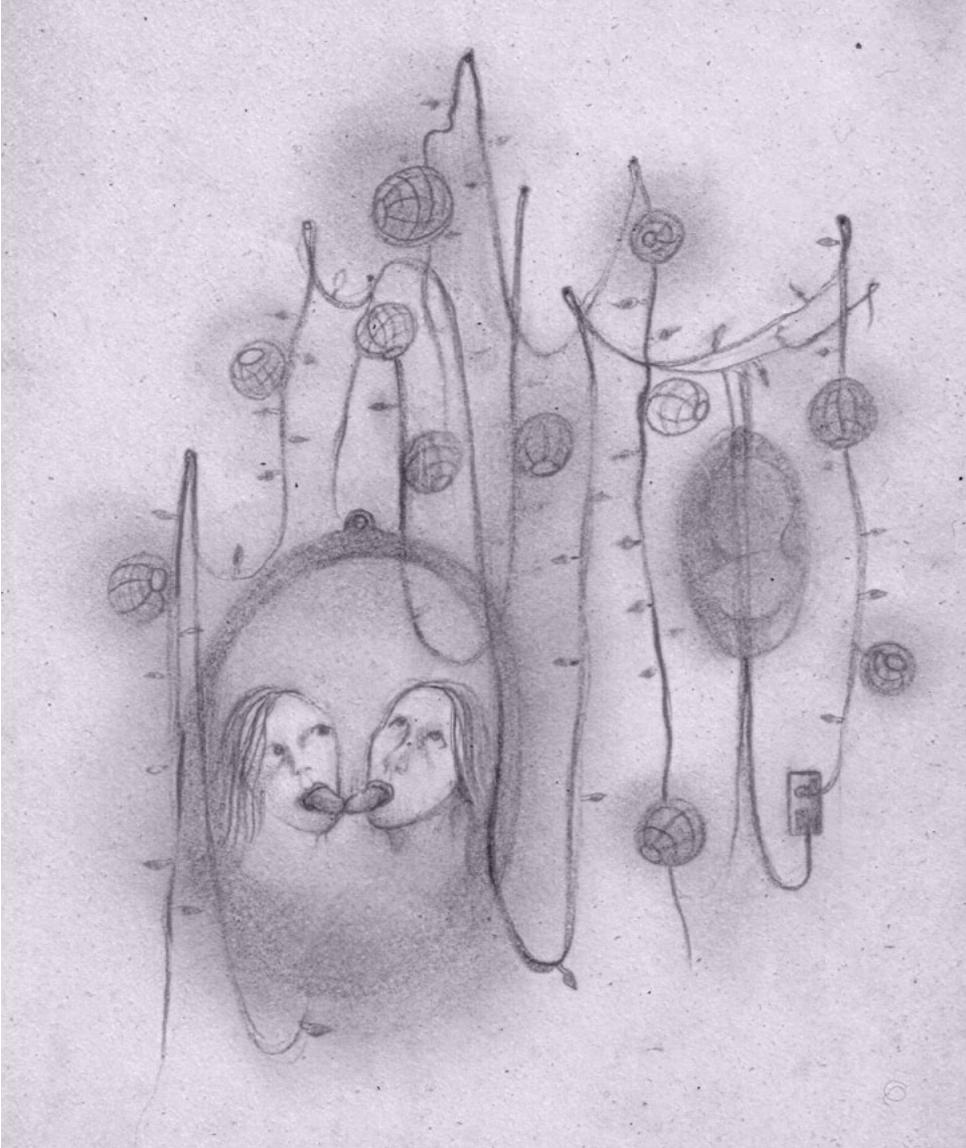


Here and Gone

The Heart Sutra takes this very far. If you really get the Heart Sutra, then you should abandon the Heart Sutra and just chant *Gate. Gate. Paragate. Parasamgate. Bodhi Svaha*—which usually gets translated into English as “Gone gone beyond.” Usually people say this in a funeral, that someone now is gone. They’re not just gone, they’re gone beyond, and they’re not just gone beyond, they’re gone beyond, gone beyond. Today scholars are retranslating it etymologically, and have found that the words actually mean: “fully arrived.” To be fully gone means to be fully arrived, and that we arrive together. This is what we’re chanting when we’re chanting the Heart Sutra.

Vampire

I’ve been thinking a lot about the Heart Sutra when thinking about sexual energy because one of the things that Mahayana Buddhism is suggesting to us is that if we’re all interconnected, if we’re all buddhas and bodhisattvas, then we’re all on the same path, and misusing sexual energy really shuts down our path. It obscures the path. Not misusing sexual energy means not doing harm. I think we can all connect brahmacharya and ahimsa (the first precept). Mostly harm comes from greed, anger and confusion. In the realm of sexual energy, most harm happens out of greed. One of the ways this is often translated is rapacious sexual energy, which I like to think of as greedy sexual energy. I looked



Preceptions

up the word rapacious and it comes from the word raptor, which is something that preys on other life, like a vampire. The misuse of sexual energy has a lot to do with the last precept, which is greed, *aparigraha*.

VII: Brahmacharya 2

Lust Koan

Since Roshi's been here, I've been going through my old Ikkyu book which she quoted a few times. I wanted to read this poem which consists of just this single line: "This lust, my ceaseless koan." Sexual greed arises from two things: one is craving and the other is objectification. To really have craving you have to have an object, and we all know that the more you objectify something, the more you really feel ungrounded. And maybe the belief in objects out there is really our deepest wound, and is what we're really trying to heal in our practice.

Using Both Hands

In the sexual act with another person, if you don't use your whole body, this is a way of misusing sexual energy, of stealing from yourself and your partner, of harming and being greedy. I'm sure that no one in this room has ever done this, but it's possible apparently.



Right in the Middle

Sexual energy is something to be respectful and careful of. If you avoid it you freeze, and if you grab it you burn. Somehow we have to be right in the middle, and I think for people that are not in touch with sexual energy, it's dangerous. I've often wanted to say in certain spiritual communities, that if you haven't felt sexual energy this week, then you're a walking time bomb in your community. I see this so often, where people cut off that part of their life, cover it over, and then it inevitably explodes in some way.

I also think that being intimate with your emotional and sexual wounds brings sexual greed to an end, because maybe sexual greed is motivated by not being connected to our wounds. And as I said earlier, maybe our greatest wound is the constant process of objectifying, which we've all done.

Loveless Love Story

I wanted to read a story about Eshun that is told in both China and Japan. There is a temple where twenty monks and one nun practice, and the nun's name is Eshun. They sit in Zen meditation and allow men and women to practice together, especially because Eshun was so keen on learning the form. Many monks secretly fell in love with her. You all know this from going on retreat, you go on a silent retreat and spend ten days watching someone's spine and you fall completely in love with them... then there's also the

vipassana enemy and father and lover... and then on the last day when you get to talk you can't believe that you were interested even for a moment. This is a good experience because you can see what your obsession is really made of. So anyway, several monks fell in love with Eshun, and one day one of the monks slipped a note into her sandal. She opened it and discovered it was a love letter. But it was unsigned. So after the dharma talk, Eshun stood up and said, "Whoever wrote me the love letter, stand up and come embrace me." No one stood up. What's the point of this story? She is saying: if you really love and want me, stand up. This is a good example of not owning up to sexual energy, especially in the context of community.

One of the things about sexual energy is that whether it gets acted on or not, as soon as there's sexual energy you create a new life. You can do this with gay sex, with contraception, if you're infertile, it has nothing to do with having a baby. Once you have sexual energy with someone then you have created a buddha, and if it's not seen, or avoided, this is where the trouble starts.

Touch the Ghost

On Monday night I gave a talk at Mt. Sinai hospital, and a patient who has Parkinson's talked about how he had an experience in brain therapy, deep brain stimulation, where afterwards he had hallucinations. He would see someone in front of him in the hallway, and then he would go up to that person and touch them, and the hallucination would vanish. This is the way he would deal

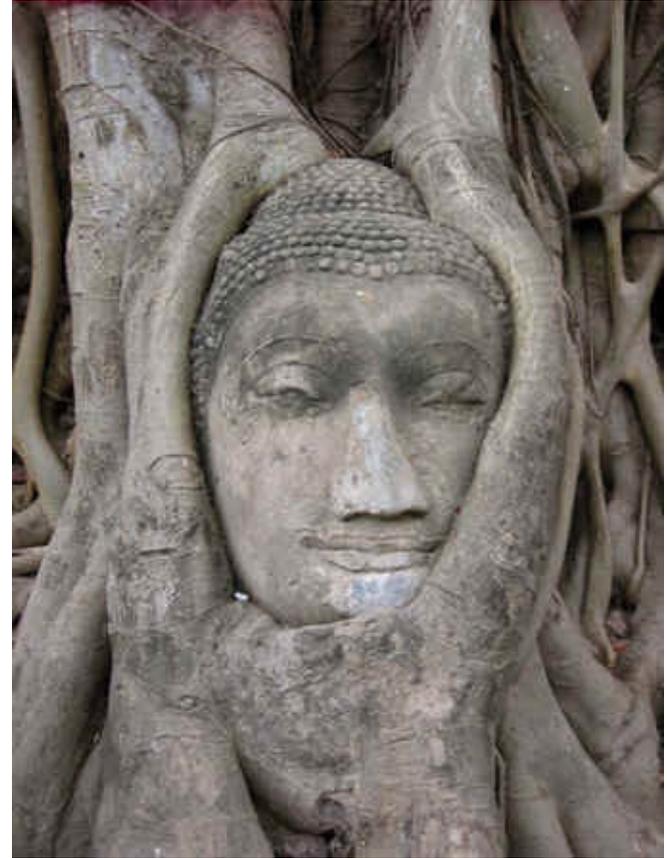
with his new form of seeing. No one could have taught a better meditation technique. When sexual energy arises, you have to touch it to see that it's not real. It's not you, it's a fabrication, it's a condition. But it's also real, you can't say it's not there. For him, the people in the hallway were there. But when we fix this energy in space, then it causes suffering.

VII: *Brahmacharya 2*

Angel in a Red Dress

When I first started practice I went to go live at the Kripalu Centre for a little while, and when there were special events, everyone would dress in white. It also came out within a couple of years that a lot of people were sleeping with the main teacher, Amrit Desai, who was eventually forced to leave. One day a Jungian analyst from London, Ontario named Marion Woodman arrived. She gave a talk on the archetype of the prostitute while wearing a red ballroom dress. What she was pointing out both in her talk and her dress was the shadow of the community. It was a really interesting moment.

There's a free book you can download from the internet called *Broken Buddha: Critical Reflections on Theravada and a Plea for a New Buddhism* by S. Dhammika. It's a story about a Theravadan monk studying in Asia, and the shadows of Buddhist practice. One of the wonderful stories he tells is that one day while he was at the monastery, two sex workers arrived because they were interested in Buddhism. He was impressed with their courage,



and brought them inside the monastery. According to the rules, a monk isn't allowed to be alone with a woman, and a sex worker isn't allowed to be inside the monastery, and he received a real punishment for having done this. He ended up teaching the dharma to these two women and he uses that experience to critique institutional practice. It really changed things for him.

VII: Brahmacharya 2

Ikkyu

Ten day retreat in a monastery
made me restless.

The red thread on my feet is long and unbroken
If one day you come looking for me
Just ask for me at the fishmongers,
in a tavern, or in a brothel.

Talking about this poem he says, "When some people are thirsty they dream of water, when some people are cold they dream of fire. Mostly I dream of a girl's boudoir. That's my nature." These are words from a famous Japanese monk. Here's his last poem:

"A gorgeous prostitute wears silk robes that hang open about an inch."

That inch is his koan. That one inch. The point of these precepts is to really notice craving, and greed and anger and also delusion in the sexual realm. There's not one way to act. Mostly when you read about sexual energy in Buddhist scriptures it seems as if there's a way to act. I think we need to contemplate that, so that

we can acknowledge this energy in our lives, and act appropriately. For Ikkyu, the silk blouse on a prostitute is hanging open one inch, and it's hard not to remember Roshi's teaching this weekend, and the poem she read by Ryokan: "One minute of sitting, one inch of Buddha." What is that inch for you?

The Sangha of Your Own Life

I've never been in any kind of yoga or Buddhist community where they've ever actually covered this topic, in as many hours as we have. I'm not saying this to make us all feel ethical, but only to say that it's rare that people take this precept and think about it. It's a rule and it sits there and people have their own internal or private relationship to it. But I've never encountered as much communication about it as we've managed. I'm just happy that we're able to do this.

Becoming aware of what you reject in your own body and psyche, and in other bodies and psyches, is yoga, is healing. It is intimacy. Some people who have been traumatized can't fully be in their bodies. I think it would be naive to believe that we fully heal all the time. There may be experience residues that are too traumatic to go near again. Or maybe certain relations with others trigger those wounds, but just being aware of that is being complete. Being aware of what you reject is the sangha of your own life. To be intimate with your sexual wounds uncovers sexual greed. It heals sexual greed. Often when we think of sexual greed we

Preceptions

think of acting out, doing something with our greed, but another way is acting inwards: withholding for example. In psychotherapy, one of the most usual kinds of abuse is withholding, it's not striking out. Anybody who has been in a long term relationship probably knows a little about this.

VII: Brahmacharya 2

Some of you have used sexual energy wisely, and used your wounds to become a path of healing. And maybe some of you in sexual relations have been healed. And maybe some of you are the healer, and you've helped other people heal. Maybe some of you are too much on one side, other people are healing you all the time, or you're always healing other people. I really encourage you to reflect on your own life.

Monogamy by *Adam Phillips*

It is the cynical who are dispiriting because they are always getting their disappointment in first.

The only tradition we can experience is the present moment.

The most difficult people to be unfaithful to are one's parents.

Anyone who believes in the value of suffering makes us wonder whether they have found a way to enjoy it.

A couple is a conspiracy in search of a crime.

People have relationships not because they want to feel safe—though they often think they do—but because they want to find out what the danger is.

Only the child who somewhere feels safe can take risks. Adults are less daring than children because they can never feel safe.

Why are we more impressed by the experience of falling in love than by the experience of falling out of love?

We can never be quite sure whether we are competing for something that doesn't exist, or winning a competition in which no one else is competing.

Our erotic life is an attempt to make a politics that is too good for the world.

Having your cake just in case you want to eat it.

Trust is a risk masquerading as a promise.

For some people the most important thing is that they have found something that doesn't end.

We have couples because it is impossible to hide alone.

The fetish most people need is often simply the name of the relationship, its official title.

Each new person shows us that there is something else to want, but usually in the guise of someone else to want.

Monogamy and infidelity: the difference between making a promise and being promising.

Brahmacharya: Notes from the Sangha

How would you write the precept of brahmacharya, the wise use of sexual energy? What is important, where should the emphasis lie, what words can you conjure to create a vow?

VII: Brahmacharya 2

Lori Johnson: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Sarah McCarthy and Colin Fleming: For one to be sexually ethical, one must explore the potential psychic and physical consequences of sex. What we often imagine to be innocent sexual encounters can be hurtful. In an effort to support one another through the vulnerability and pain that intimate relations expose people to, both parties must be willing to explore the potential consequences of their engagement. This means willingness to explore the most harmful consequences and doing their utmost to create a safe, supportive environment in which a relationship can grow.

Angela Carpenter: The expression of energy—be it sexual, physical, emotional, mental or spiritual—affects all beings in a positive, negative or neutral way. Bring awareness to how you express and receive all energy.

Mina Arakawa and Grant Hutchinson: I acknowledge that sexual energy, which can be profoundly creative and destructive, does not belong to me alone but spreads into the natural world, and is the natural world. Looking deeply into this energy that seems so

intimately my own, I vow to attend to it in body, speech and mind, as an expression of my interconnectedness with all beings.

Sam Snidal and Nicole McNamara: Sexual energy is used wisely when it is not harming self or others, is honest, without greed, and expressed within the context of mutual understanding. Seeing sexual energy clearly—*vidya*—is seeing it as impermanent, a creative process without attachment to an outcome.

Melissa Campagnolo: For me, brahmacharya is the wise and skillful use of sexual energy that respects, cares for, and nourishes the long term physical, mental and emotional health, rights and commitments of all involved. It leads to a greater happiness, well being, intimacy and interpersonal connection.

Pat Rockman and Mike Hoolboom: They're going to speak as if they know, as if they are reading tomorrow's newspaper, a manifesto filled with hard won truths. But the only truth is this: that every statement and assertion is actually a question. Yes, the only truth is that they will come bearing questions, but like you perhaps, they like to dress up their questions, to bring them to the masquerade ball, where they can appear all dolled up as certainties. How they love to disguise their convictions. This act of concealment, this turning of questions into what looks like answers, is much more important, of course, than what they seem to be talking about.

Preceptions

VII: *Brahmacharya* 2

The difficult question is how we decide which kinds of loving are acceptable. Understanding does not inform our morality, our morality informs the ways we have of understanding. The language of pleasure and the language of justice are inextricable. By being a new way of saying this, psychoanalysis [or Buddhism, or Yoga, or this precepts course, or your life] can be recruited either to consolidate our prejudices or to show us what our prejudices are for.

Adam Phillips

Pat said: The wise use of sexual desire means knowing when to feed it and when not to. You can make it bigger or smaller, but there's nothing to get rid of. There are gross and subtle ways of feeding it. Gross: I want to have sex with you. Subtle: Stylish emails. The gross feedings are fairly obvious, the practice resides in being aware of the subtle ways we project desire.

Monogamy

Monogamous sex is so often tied up with love, and love is in short supply. It's a seller's market. Claude Steiner and Hoagy Wyckoff call the way we deal with sex in relationships "the stroke economy." There's a limited amount of touching, there's just not enough to go around. Oh yes, some senior clerk at Goldman and Sachs is already working out a futures market in touching. Using both hands is going to become an expensive proposition. When you belong to me, monogamy acts as romantic imperialism. My



kingdom is you, the kids, the house, and then me, myself and mine begins to thin out and fray, and whatever is on the far side of that edge needs to be shunned and spit out. It's not me, I won't have it, not in my pants, not in my house, not under my roof. Monogamy means always knowing who I am. The rules and the certainty that shine out from between the eyebrows of the rules, act as a sedative, an anxiolytic like ativan or xanax.

Preceptions

Emotions are something else we think we own: My feelings, my stories and especially my pain. Oh my pain, have I told you about my pain? My pain makes me so special. No one has ever felt pain like I've felt pain. I am going to write the bible of pain, and then I'm going to sign it, every morning for the rest of my life.

VI: Brahmacharya

What is the wise use of sexual energy in a marriage where the sex is, as it so often is, non-existent, or stuck in a rut. Either there's no rutting at all, or else, only rutting in a rut. Can't you help me? I'm only rutting in a rut. Perhaps the wise use of sexual energy means bringing someone else in. Only that doesn't make me feel safe. Doesn't safe sex usually mean: clinging to a view? Pat's father said, "Marriage makes for great companionship, but lousy romance." Monogamy often begins with love, and then becomes, most of the time, another opportunity for clinging, grasping and attachment, to hang on to what we (think we) have.

Our front stage behaviour means that we act as if we were monogamous, but our back stage behaviour often says something quite different. If thoughts are also actions, as the Buddhists insist, then everyone, in every couple, is non-monogamous. Non-monogamy is the rule, not the exception.

Monogamy can be the restraint, the necessary bondage, that produces freedom. Inside that container, a ground for practice is established. On the cushion, I watch every breath as if it's the first

breath, each one singular and unique. On the pillow, I kiss you again and again for the first time. Let's call it kissing practice.

But wait. Monogamy isn't just about sex, there's also emotional monogamy. Steve is a man who is poly-platamorous, which is a word that Pat has made up. It means that he has intimate relations with many women that are platonic. Poly-platamorous, it's going to be on t-shirts soon.

Sexual energy is a flow, a dynamic process between people. Part of the point of sexuality, not that it needs a point, is to enter into what we don't know. How do we handle uncertainty as it arises? The feeling of risk and the anxiety attached to not knowing. How I love to make up rules so I can manage my anxiety, my not knowing. Perhaps monogamy isn't based on love, but on anxiety management, and fear of loss. Is the administration of the body, allowing our fear to enter every pore; is this a wise use of sexual energy? The wise use of sexual energy might mean being awake to managing the uncertain and unknown as it arises from the flow of sexual interaction. Non-harming, not stealing and honesty are the foundations. A last question: Is it possible to build an entire culture founded on the misuse of sexual energy?

On Flirtation

by Adam Phillips

Flirtation is a form of skepticism.
The fascination of what is unconvincing.
States of conviction conceal the sense in which we are continually making our mind up.
People who are good at waiting may have nothing better to do.
No loss, no morality.
Definitions are sustained by exclusions.
Flirtation: the calculated production of uncertainty.
An adult is always a child who has failed.
A repertoire rather than a fate.
There is a history that our competence conceals.
Accidents are reminders that we are living too few of our lives.
Whatever is turned away from is marked as a danger to be faced or a loss to be mourned.
Judgment is fundamentally a question of whether something is edible.
Reading a book is a later version of feeding from the mother.
Repression (and all defense mechanisms) are ways of retaining things by getting rid of them.
The past, ghost-written as desire, is driving us into the future.
Memories become forms of forgetting.
The past is in the remaking.
Repetition is forgetting in its most spellbinding form.
Transference—this unwitting repetition of early relationships—reveals the way one is continually inventing and reinventing the people one is talking to.
Did I dream that right?

Some people would never have fallen in love if they had never heard of love.
One's history never begins with oneself.
Fantasies are reliable because they can't be achieved.
We police ourselves with purposes.
I choose objects to speak the secret language of myself.
Ambition is a blackmail of distraction from the actual disorder of experience.
John Lennon's life would not have been better if his parents had never separated because it wouldn't have been his life.
Devotion is always a parody of its object.
What one is loved for in a family becomes a fate.
Only mediocrities develop.
One of the most widespread diseases is diagnosis.
We hold ourselves together by keeping things apart.
What I really am is what I am unable to imitate.
Intellectuals are rarely impressed by people who are happy.
What is unthinkable turns to the body for expression.
Theory: where the tame things are.
How can we return to the future?
Even our most concerted projects are forms of sleep walking.
The pleasures and freedoms of misunderstanding.
We are not humiliated by our acts but our ideals.
One way we can get to know people is by betraying them.
We can suffer most as adults from not being able to let others down.
The real problem of adolescence is that most people can't sustain it.
Our most intense erotic attachments are to our categories.
And so on (and off).

VIII

Aparigraha: Generosity

A talk by Michael Stone

March 17, 2011

Nuclear Peace

Good afternoon. Maybe today when we're studying together we can hold Japan and everyone affected, including us—by the earthquake and tsunami—in our hearts. I thought I'd start with a passage from an email I received yesterday from Peter Levitt. For those of you who don't know Peter Levitt, he's an American Zen teacher and incredible poet and translator of Dogen. He currently lives on Salt Spring Island. Here's part of an email he wrote.

To really allow in what is happening, and the scope of it for the Japanese people, their future, much less their present losses, is a cause of incalculable sorrow. I don't mind being in that with them, but I sure mind them being in it at all. The Japanese people were sacrificed so that all could see the horror of nuclear war. And now they have been sacrificed again in less than seventy years so that all may see the horror of nuclear peace when faced with actual life and its circumstances, as opposed to drawing board nuclear perfection. It's a horrible sacrifice to have to make and I grieve for them as one of many who do.



VIII: Aparigraha

I think Peter said it well. Part of this course is about recognizing interdependence. I think one of the interesting things about this situation that we're all touched by is how we're all embedded in it. So much of the suffering that we're watching in Japan is not just from an earthquake, but from the human-built world, and the effect of the human-built world on humans. So there are some lessons that all of us can learn, but the first is to really feel what's going on, in whatever way you feel it, and throughout the day it might be different. One of the ways we feel now as humans is that we have this social media where our hearts can open to something so far away. It's at such a distance and it's so close at exactly the same time.

Together

I wanted to talk about the precept of aparigraha. As some of you know, my interest is in bringing together Yoga and Buddhist practice. And the style of Buddhism that informs the way we're approaching the precepts is Mahayana Buddhism, which holds this notion that one of the best ways we can live our lives is to aspire to live as a bodhisattva, which is someone who gains the tools necessary to serve others. We see this as a part of a process of waking up. We don't wake up alone, and we don't just serve others, we wake up with others. We're all doing this together, so we need others in order to practice.

Material Lens

Early western interpretations of both Yoga and Buddhism looked at both as psychological, rational practices, and I think this is how Buddhism is being incorporated into our culture right now, especially at a university level. But it also accounts in part for Buddhism's newfound accessibility. It's logical, there's no real belief system and it can help you. I think this view and attraction arises because it's a contrast to the religion that many people grew up in, or many people's parents grew up in, which is faith-based and maybe even a little superstitious. Buddhism is so appealing by contrast. You hear descriptions of the teachings of the Buddha as a kind of secular, scientific, verifiable teaching. I think a lot of people who hear the dharma taught that way, when they go to Buddhist countries, can't believe what they see because traditional Buddhism doesn't look like that. It's what we've done through our material lens with Buddhism and how we're able to receive it. That's one of the reasons we're looking at *The Lotus Sutra* on Tuesday nights, to stretch the way we take in these teachings.

Mahayana practice: "Yana" means vehicle and "maha" means great, which basically means you can carry a lot of people in your vehicle. It really emphasizes a fullness of emotion in practice. It underlines the desire to unite with other people in their suffering. To really feel another's suffering and to connect with them in their suffering and to love each other with big religious love. Big fat religious love. Also what you find in Mahayana practice is devotion

and gratitude to community, to the interdependence that is community. So many of us get caught up in spiritual practice with the desire to get somewhere, and sometimes we can forget about the way we open the door for somebody.

Spectrum

One tendency in Buddhism is the desire to escape samsara. There is a wheel of habit, of conditioned existence, that we're in, and one's tendency in practice is to try to get off the wheel. Another tendency in the practice is to feel a devotion to all human beings, and this is like a spectrum with two ideals at either end. One is to get out of here, and one is to serve every single being—until every fish and creature is served. I don't know about you, but when you read the bodhisattva vows, perhaps the first one makes sense to you. "I'm going to serve all beings." And then it becomes more and more impossible. "I'm going to attain the Buddha way." How do you attain the Buddha way? By seeing there's nothing to really attain. How do you save all beings? By seeing that there are no other beings. That the attainment comes from seeing yourself connected to all human beings.

In the western vipassana culture, which many of you are familiar with, there's no ritual, it's a culture of meditation, and if you really drop deep into the nature of reality, it's a bare bones way of transmitting that tradition. I'm stressing western vipassana. In western Zen there is some ritual, but when you start reading *The Lotus Sutra* and you hear about the 18,000 worlds and the

法華義疏卷一

大妻上宮王秘
此是集非海彼本

夫妙法蓮華經者蓋是穩厚功善合為一同之豐田七百也
壽轉成長遠之神藥若論通釋如未應現長古之大急者
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80,000 bodhisattvas, and light coming from between the eyebrows of the Buddha, that's rarely touched on. And likewise you see this in Western Tibetan Buddhism, where the colours and deities are interpreted as archetypes, or potential energy patterns in you. I would say that western Buddhism is not so emotion focused, it's not so devotional, and maybe it's attractive for that reason. The danger of that versioning is that it doesn't really get to the koan level of ethics, of the precepts.

VIII: Aparigraha

Real and Unreal

For Mahayana Buddhism everything begins with emptiness, and once you see that the foundation of everything is empty, you're free to do what you want. You can teach in innumerable ways, but you see that the core structure is not fixed. If you asked a traditional Mahayana Buddhist practitioner 800 years ago: are the deities in the 18,000 worlds really there? They would probably say no, and then they would probably say that nothing is real. Everything is real and unreal, so everything is as real as you and as unreal as you. As real and as unreal as radioactivity.

We really believe that our thoughts are real and our emotions are real. And so we're real. Or we don't believe that we're real, but we still think that our emotions are the most real thing we can experience about ourselves. But other realms are definitely not real. I'm a little more real than another realm, aren't I? We experience ourselves through our material lens. I think that Buddhists of the past

didn't really have the material hysteria that we do; they weren't so literal and really valued the imagination. I think our imagination is impoverished, I think if you don't have an imagination you can't hold the feelings that are flowing through us. I wanted to talk about the relation between imagination and the precepts in order to talk about greed.

Imagination, which meditators are really down on, is actually the most real thing that you have. It's what organizes what goes through your senses, it's more real than your nose, and to know what your nose is, you need your imagination. In order to know what your eyes see, you need your imagination. It's actually through your imagination that you intuit interdependence. I think imagination can hold us in a more real way than our thoughts or our eyes, and in the modern world we've created such an emphasis on materialism that we've crowded out imagination. You can fly anywhere in the world within twenty-four hours, materially, but not necessarily imaginatively.

Your Thoughts Are Also the Natural World

How would you define the difference between imagination and thinking? It's like having some respects for thoughts, especially the ones that aren't yours. Say you're writing a sentence, and you want to explain something. What you reach for to explain something is a metaphor. You can't really think your way to a metaphor, it arrives from somewhere else. Sarah Selecky has a wonderful

exercise that she uses in her writing courses, we should try it. Try to remember your first phone number, the earliest one you can remember. Just close your eyes and think back. Then she gets the group to remember a number three phone numbers ago. The purpose of the exercise is to feel in yourself the two different places you went to. You go to different places; the information comes from different places. It's a nice exercise to see how imagination is not always something you think, it's how the natural world comes to you in the form of a metaphor or a good idea. It's not that it doesn't get reworked; it's immediate and an addition at the same time.

VIII: *Aparigraha*

Asking the Dead

I remember once giving a talk at Esther Myers studio and there was a monk in attendance. I mentioned that I didn't believe in life after death. After the talk was over the monk said to me, privately, that "here in the west no one believes in life after death. In Tibet, on the other hand, we're absolutely sure that there's life after death." Our argument is that you can't verify what happens on the other side. You can't verify that there is life after death. And their argument is nearly the same: you can't verify that there isn't life after death. The point is that psychically, in our world, which is so focused on the material, we've lost something, and it's unstable to be so certain of one point of view. The great Mahayana teaching of *The Lotus Sutra* brings back a focus on the imagination, and shows that at the centre of any view is emptiness. You can't get fixed.



VIII: Aparigraha

I think without imagination we lose track of how to feel interconnectedness, how to feel love. We lose track of ourselves. The precept that we're exploring today is aparigraha, which is usually translated as not being greedy or not being stingy. Originally the way I was going to teach was to give you statistics about greed in our culture, but I think we know this already. So I thought we could work on the koan level, but I also want you to really use your imagination, to think about all the ways we can be acquisitive, all the ways we can collect more than we need. And of course the opposite is generosity.

I've retranslated aparigraha as non-possessiveness, and you can see if that's true for you. It's only in the last few days that I've been working with this translation. I also like stinginess, you could say that stinginess is turning away from relationship. Some of us are stingy with ourselves, some of us are stingy with others, and some of us with both. Aparigraha is not about repressing possessiveness or greed, it's about an active expression of the opposite. It's about generosity. On Tuesday I was really excited to have a couple of hours alone, and then my son's mother needed me to drive him to March break camp. And I did so with resentment. It messed up my whole day, because my day was planned. I was going to practice, and read *The Lotus Sutra* and have time by myself. Instead, I had to take him to camp. Maybe he picked up on it and maybe he didn't, but the act wasn't done with much generosity.

It's Thursday now and I'm getting over it. Some parents never get over it. You can also practice generosity when you're alone, when something really excites you and you want to share it with someone, that's a good thing.

Three Categories of Giving

There are three different categories in traditional Mahayana Buddhism for gift-giving. So again we're talking about non-greed in a positive sense: generosity. The first category is material gifts. The second category of giving is the gift of fearlessness. And the third is the gift of the dharma. I've added some other ones. Love. All your possessions. Your time. Privilege. Your body. Especially your body at death. How could we treat death as a practice of generosity? I have rarely heard anyone talk about death this way. Mostly we talk about death as a kind of taking away, which I think is a greedy way of thinking about dying. But what if you also think about death as a generous act? OK, I'm giving it away now, this thing that never really belonged to me.

Fearlessness

Material gifts are kind of obvious, it means giving within your means. Because we're focusing a little on the koan level, I really want to look at the gift of fearlessness. Traditionally, the gift of fearlessness means liberating beings from captivity, bondage or torment. I would say this includes prisoners, releasing prisoners, releasing birds... Fish farms, wild animals, kids, parents. Liberating beings by releasing them from our grip, our human grip. Another form of fearlessness is by recognizing that others are Buddhas.

Just as the precepts teach us to live in a way that is upright, we can use this posture to give something of ourselves to others, and maybe one of the best things you can give on a daily basis is your face. Really giving your face to the street car driver. Really giving your face to your friends. I have a friend who is a focus puller. Do you what that job is? It's a part of the camera team whose dedicated job it is to change the focus. She works on Hollywood films, and said that the more famous the actor is, the less you're allowed to look at them. There are some actors who, as soon as they're not acting, will wear shades, so no one will look into their face. Part of the etiquette of being a focus puller is never to look into the eyes of those actors. I thought this was really interesting.

I think there is a relationship between holding onto ourselves and the way we can let people into our own face. Maybe one of the ways you can use aparigraha is to really give your face away. And notice when you hide your face. And I'm not talking about your true face, the one you had before you were born.

Dependent Co-origination

Another form of fearlessness is dependent co-arising. This is an early Buddhist teaching on interdependence. Everything that arises, arises intimately connected or interdependent, or dependently co-originated, with everything else. So for example, in order for the eye to see a form, they arise together. The experience of eye consciousness and the form arise together. In order to be here and study this way, there's a teacher and a student, and eventually these conditions change, and maybe with some of you I'll be the student and you'll be the teacher. We play these games, and being able to see those games, to see that dependent origination, is also fearlessness.

Reb's Daughter

I want to read a little passage about that from Reb Anderson. If you don't know him, he is a Zen priest at Green Gulch Farms in San Francisco.

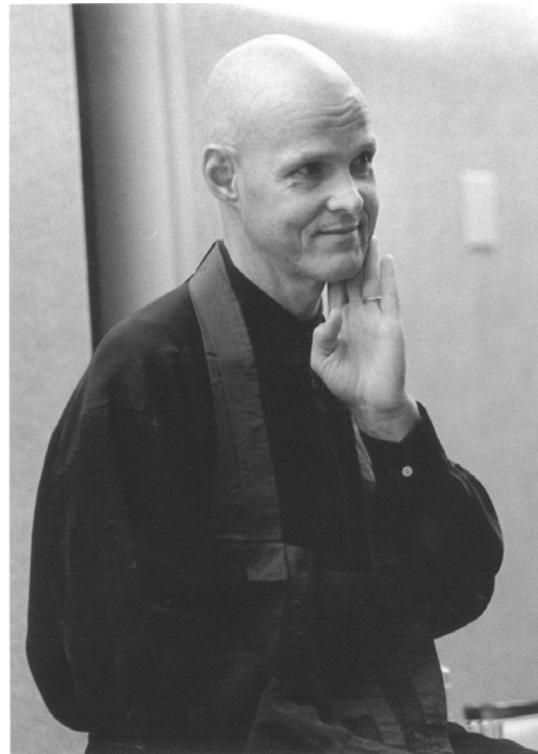
My students want me to give them dharma gifts— but what does my daughter want from me? She doesn't want to hear about Buddha dharma. But she does want her father to give her the dharma treasure. For a number of years my daughter felt frustrated in her relationship with me. Sometimes she would get angry and call me the worst names she could think of. She wanted to see if she could get to me, if she could rock her father's boat. And for a long time she couldn't. I would usually just laugh. As an infant she vomited in my face and I wouldn't mind. I trusted in her love so much, that nothing she could say could shake me. But her inability to move me was frustrating for her. She had to see that she could move me in order to realize our interdependence. Finally one day she was able to show me clearly and accurately something about myself and I was able to acknowledge it. We showed our interdependence, and that was a great moment in our life together, the dharma gift we gave each other.

That's beautiful, although I find it's written in a kind of cold way at the same time. I would like to talk to him about that. But it's true we can have so much equanimity that we're not human anymore and we don't feel. Here the daughter is trying to get her father to show something, that's fearlessness, and it's fearlessness for him to show it. Reb Anderson is a very powerful person,

he irons his robes before every session, he cuts a majestic figure. I can imagine how hard it is for his daughter to break down that wall, to find something real.

Imagination Refuge

To live without being greedy is not just to live without being greedy for things. It's about being generous, generous with your time and your face and your imagination. Sometimes I want to replace this last precept and simply say: take refuge in the imagination. To literally re-imagine the way you see the world, over and over again, as an act of generosity to your own mind, and the minds of others, to your own heart, to the hearts of others. To re-imagine the way you



VIII: Aparigraha

do your life is to be not greedy. I think ethics are a great way into the imagination. You need a strong imagination to hold your emotions; you need a strong imagination to hold what you think of as your life. Last week we talked about sexuality and sexual fantasies, you need a strong imagination to hold all that. But these days, I find for most of us, what we talk about is not healthy imagination, we talk about health. Are you healthy?

How do you get more healthy? That's what most people want. Health. I think it would be interesting the next time you think about your own health to also think about the health of your imagination. And what you can do to create elasticity in your imagination, because if there is some way for us to work in the fissures of nuclear power plants right now, it's going to be with our imagination. We have to re-imagine a life style that is more sustainable.

Summary

Fearlessness is a way of not being greedy, to not be scared of giving someone your face. Giving your face is like having a steady hand. You just give someone your face. Giving your face is also like giving an honest answer, an honest response. You can do this with people when they're locked up, who you've locked up, or with people who are dying, and if you've ever been with someone who is dead, it's really nice to give your hand to a dead person. I remember when my uncle died nobody was there. Just being able to sit with him, holding the hand of someone who was dead still

felt like giving. This is the inter-being level, the imaginative level, the koan level of aparigraha: not being greedy, not being stingy, not being possessive. Having generosity. Giving. Giving fearlessly.

In the Mahayana framework this division between what you're doing and how you're doing, isn't acceptable. In this framework it matters how you're doing and what, and why and where. All those levels matter. The reworking of the idea of karma from the Mahayana perspective is that it's not just what your intention is, in how you do your work, but that the actions you take actually make a difference. So it does matter what you do. I think this takes it to the koan level: it's quite idealistic. Your actions have to make a positive difference. It's easy to say that your intentions are really pure. You find a little bird on the ground and you pick up the bird, you kiss the bird and feed it organic seeds. I'm sure there's an app for when you find a bird. You take the bird home and put it on a raw diet and you cuddle it, and then you find out that the bird got kicked out of its nest so it could learn how to fly and you've just interrupted the whole process with your good intention. You didn't get it, you didn't see the cycle. Your intentions were good, but your actions were not so skillful in the grand scheme of things. This is the dance of aparigraha, this is what puts you into your life.

Parents-Children

I think a really skillful thing a parent can do is to teach the co-arising of parent and child so that children can see that their

parents are not their best friends. When the child needs to be a child there's a parent. And at other times the parent needs to be other things. And the child needs to be other things. But sometimes we hold ourselves in the alignment of parent and child and it's a disservice to the relationship; it takes some fearlessness to go into that territory. To see our parent as a person is an act of generosity.

VIII: Aparigraha

Asteya means not taking what is not given freely while aparigraha is more about hoarding. They're very closely connected, as every precept is.

The imagination piece is the underpinning of all of the precepts. Whenever we have a tendency to shut down experience or polarize and create binaries, that's when the imagination goes missing.

In the Heart Sutra not having walls in the mind is the end of fear. It takes courage.

When Enough is Enough *by Thomas Mann*

Our father assured us that once in our lives we could have as many cream puffs, Othellos and cream rolls at the pastry shop as we wanted. He led us into a sweet-smelling Paradise, and let the dream become reality—and we were amazed how quickly we reached the limit of our desire, which we had believed to be infinite.

Can you name your symptoms; do you know what your schedule of avoidances looks like? When you follow your exhale all the way down to the tone, to the tone that is singing on your very own pelvic floor... can you feel the limits of your life?

You know, there's a point in every loop where the music—snap—begins again. Perhaps we could call it not the turning point, but the unturning point. There's nothing wrong with this, OK? The hope is not to hunt your loops down and destroy them. But I'm just wondering if you can use your body-mind to feel your way along the seam of your own repetitions—just to observe, that's all. Just so that you could listen to your own music, your own private juke-box of symptoms, and find the unturning moment when the music starts again, when the music starts again, when the music starts again, and it feels so good.

“When it becomes intolerable one feels ‘stuck,’ when it’s comforting it’s called habit.” What does the music of being stuck sound like? And what does the music of habit sound like? Or does only one of those sound like music, while the other sounds like noise, bad noise, not me, not my life, that can’t be my life, I’m stuck, get me out of here, help me please, I can’t make the noise stop. I can’t hear the music in my life because there’s so much noise. What was once easeful and perfect and home is now the rut that I’m stuck in. Where is the unturning point? When does the unturning point, the helpful loop, become the bad infinity, the bad habit that I can’t get out of?

When do I become the person I need to escape from?

Houdini's Box

by Adam Phillips

Other people are what we attach our wanting to.

Much of our so-called erotic fantasy life appears to be a rather elaborate mapping of our escape routes from sex.

The fascination of porn—the most disparaged (and relished) of the popular arts—is that it is the genre in which life rarely imitates art.

We are only captured by what we have once been or wanted to be.

As in every erotic encounter, it is because something (or someone) has been so powerfully acknowledged, so starkly registered, that it must be fled from.

The wish to run away is a sign of affinity.

He kept his audience happy to be spectators.

Children never leave, only adults.

It was like being recruited for something without being told what it was.

Once it happens it can't be unhappened.

No one can be indifferent to being ignored.

To have experiences without having to go through them.

It was a satisfaction that deferred satisfaction.

I am the listening bank in whom he has invested some of his money, and from whom he wants advice about his emotional investments.

Because there is no demand, there is nothing to flee from.

Her apparent self absorption paradoxically frees his desire.

It's like being haunted by someone who wants to forget you.

Sentimentality is the prevailing vice of those who have doubts about their own virtue.

Fame is the modern word for permission.
Is an erection a risk?

Knowing what you want stops you from finding out what you want.

Mystery is the great secular commodity.

The secular war between the plan and the accident.

A life so starkly unmodern because it craved no publicity.

My symptoms keep an eye on me, my suffering provides stability.

His need to keep finding women to flee from.

You're so busy making choices that you never take any risks.

It is as though they have already read the story of their lives.



IX Wordless Speech

A talk by Michael Stone

April 8, 2011

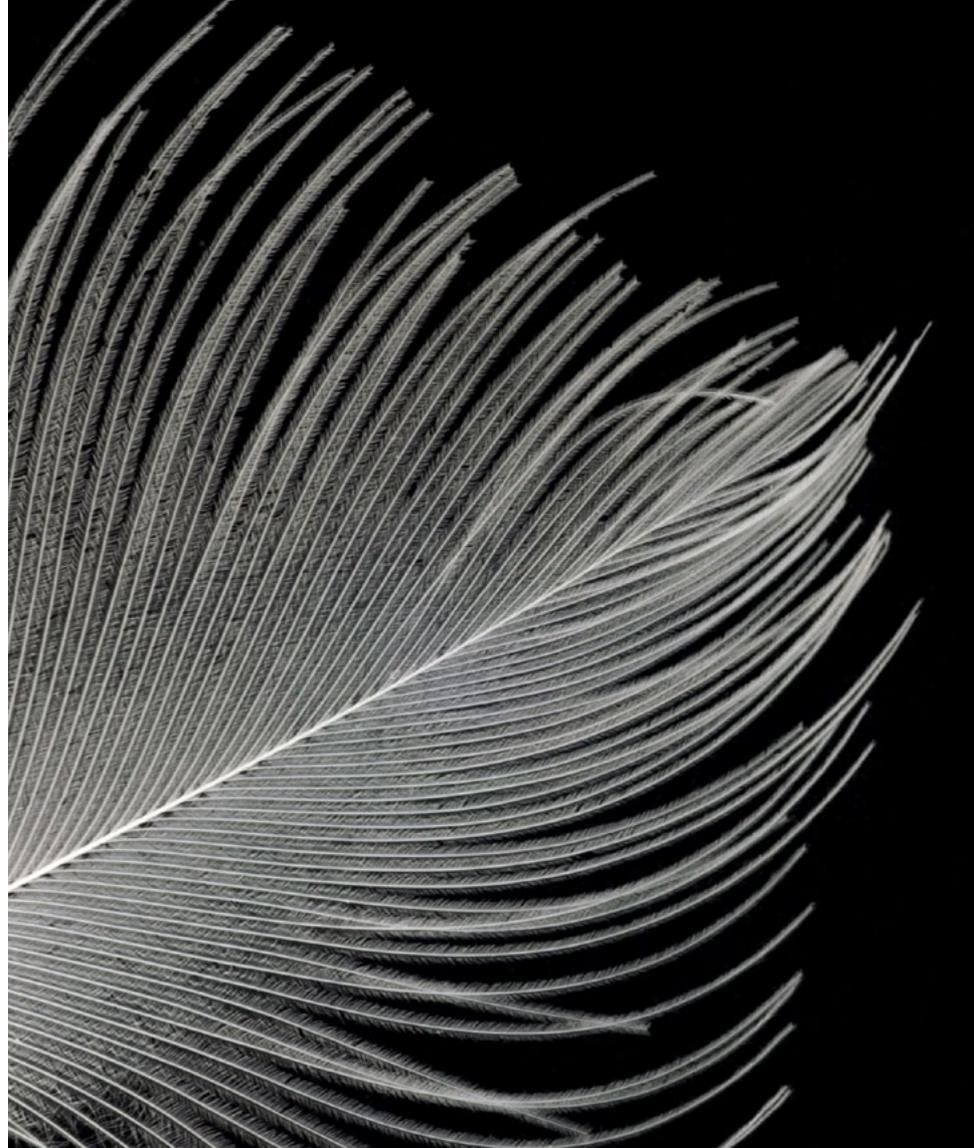
Wings

We have two wings that keep our practice flying. The first is compassion, the other is wisdom. The precepts offer ways of refining and constructing both of these wings. They offer the possibility to study our actions and their effects. Along with the action we name as stillness.

There is another level the precepts work on—the transcendent level. *The Lotus Sutra* delivers us to this place. We think the world is just this world, but *The Lotus Sutra* says everything is interconnected through space and time in ways we can barely imagine. This is the koan level of the precepts.

The Flower Sermon

Toward the end of his life, the Buddha took his disciples to a quiet pond for instruction. As they had done so many times before, the Buddha's followers sat in a small circle around him, and waited for the teaching. But this time the Buddha had no words. He reached into the muck and pulled up a lotus flower. And he held it silently before them, its roots dripping mud and water. The disciples were



Preceptions

greatly confused. Buddha quietly displayed the lotus to each of them. In turn, the disciples did their best to expound upon the meaning of the flower: what it symbolized, and how it fit into the body of Buddha's teaching.

IX: Wordless Speech

When at last the Buddha came to his follower Mahakasyapa, the disciple suddenly understood. He smiled and began to laugh. Buddha handed the lotus to Mahakasyapa and began to speak. "What can be said I have said to you," smiled the Buddha, "and what cannot be said, I have given to Mahakasyapa." Mahakasyapa became Buddha's successor from that day forward.

Wordless Speech

The Buddha had been asked by his sangha to teach on interdependence, and instead of speaking he reached for a flower. As the Buddha looked at the flower he smiled (wasn't he holding the whole world in his hand?), and Mahakasyapa smiled right along with him. He saw what the Buddha saw. (It takes a Buddha and a Buddha to realize this moment. The flower is also a Buddha.) The Buddha announces that no one understood the teachings except Mahakasyapa, and so Mahakasyapa received the transmission of the whole of the dharma outside the scriptures. This is akin to the koan level of the precepts.

Three Levels

There are three levels to the precepts: the literal level, the compassionate level and the koan level. The literal level of the first precept, ahimsa or non-harming, is simply: don't kill. The compassionate level is: how do you act that out? How can we live with and for others? And the koan level wakes you up to the mysteries of life. It's the level where the cooling breeze of enlightenment is always blowing.

Mahayana Buddhism understood the koan level of the Buddha's flower sermon. The precepts are not a matter of complete understanding, or of following eternal moral laws (do this, don't do that). Behind the precepts is the koan level, a deep and mysterious level. This is symbolized (in *The Lotus Sutra*) by the mirrored parasol where everyone can see themselves reflected in mirrors that carry reflections from one mirror to every other mirror. We are all part of each other. Nothing essential here or there, only conditions arising.

Note that in Mahayana Buddhism, teachings are not delivered with words, but embodied, performed and lived.

Ceremony

In receiving the precepts you are receiving the truth of your life: that you are a buddha. The precepts show us the power of our actions, and the power of sitting still. To see clearly, to speak with kindness, each gesture carries an infinite echo, touching everyone

Preceptions

around us. In a way, you could say that sitting meditation is only about the precepts, and that the precepts are an activity of the Buddha. If you are living your life with an understanding of the precepts, then you are a buddha.

IX: Wordless Speech

Of course, it's impossible to maintain the precepts. No matter what you do, you will wind up taking life. But you have to take the next step. You have to turn the page. Walk through the next door. How do we take the next step? With the lens of the precepts firmly in place.

Spirit Precepts

In medieval Japan when crops failed, bad spirits were often blamed, and monks were summoned to offer precepts to the demons. This is the shamanistic level of the precepts. When things are not going well, can we give precepts to all the winds that are moving through us?

True Grit

The precepts are not about sin or any ideas of purity: “Water that is too clean has no fish.” Therefore you should always maintain a measure of grime in your practice. Check out the lakes in Algonquin Park—those pure blue sparkling waters—but there are no fish there, mainly because of the acid rain. The water of your practice needs a bit of grit so that life can grow.

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