



The Oak Tree in the Garden

Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

Living the Precepts

Our Zen practice is not real Zen practice if we leave it on the cushion at the end of the formal sitting. Until we fully embody the Bodhisattva Precepts we cannot consider our practice anywhere near complete—and it's still not complete even then, not until every single being is liberated and at peace. Living the Precepts is the most difficult of our practice endeavors; habit patterns that have come into being through lifetimes are not eradicated in an instant, and unfortunately this is a point about which many Zen students—including senior practitioners—delude themselves.

The mark of a truly senior person of spiritual practice is humility; to assume any other stance is to not yet understand true practice. It does not matter how many sesshin we have sat nor how many koans we have “passed”; if we cannot be humble there's much work yet to be done. (And even if we are humble it's likely there's still much work to be done!)

But before you have visions of yourself as Sisyphus, eternally rolling that boulder up the hill, only to have it roll down just before you reach success at the top, it's important to recognize that even to have begun practice is a truly significant and positive step. Furthermore, we have the experience and guidance of all those who went before us and showed us both where we can trip ourselves up as well as how to proceed in the vital work of seeing clearly and letting go those sticky habit patterns. We have also the Eightfold Noble Path and the Paramitas—the Perfections of Character—as models and as guidelines. And we have the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts—descriptions of

the behavior of an enlightened being—to hold up as examples and inspiration.

It's important to note here that it's easy to look at someone else and see their faults and at the same time completely overlook our own shortcomings. Somewhere in the Bible there's a sentence that speaks to that—something about seeing the mite in our neighbor's eye and missing the log in our own. Elsewhere in the Bible Jesus is quoted as saying, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” as he came to the rescue of a woman who was being stoned for adultery. The development of compassion is a vital part of our Zen practice, and that development includes recognizing that though we may easily see where someone else is falling short, we are so often blind to our own challenges in the same direction. In fact, a sign of progress in our practice is when we begin to see where we ourselves are caught in delusion and acting unskillfully. When that happens it's easy to assume our practice isn't working and that we're becoming worse for it, when actually what is happening is the opposite: we're simply beginning to see more clearly. The veils limiting our perception are beginning to thin out and our vision is little by little gaining clarity. It's a time to take heart, for our practice is beginning to work!

At the same time, remembering how we thought we saw so clearly before and knowing that we may actually be seeing a bit more clearly only now, it's important to recognize that there is undoubtedly much more of our own dysfunction that we are not yet seeing. When we can recognize that we tend to play a version of that old parlor game of “telephone” with ourselves and miss the truth of our behavior, it's truly humbling and we're not so inclined to condemn another

over what we perceive as their unskillful behaviors.

It's not comfortable becoming aware of our own negative habit patterns, and it's quite tempting to deny them. To do so would be a sad mistake, however, for becoming aware of our shortcomings is the necessary prerequisite to doing what is necessary to change them. That said, it's all too easy to do what John Welwood, psychotherapist and long time Buddhist practitioner, calls "doing a spiritual end run around your issues" in his book, **Toward a Psychology of Awakening**. We lose a precious opportunity if we make that end run, for if instead we go straight into the pain of recognition it usually brings enough remorse that the next time the habit pattern driving that particular unskillful behavior begins to rise up, it's as if we remember the pain and regret of recognition, and it brings forth a determination not to indulge in that way of going about things again, and accordingly the habit pattern is seriously weakened. It may try to limp back up again, but each time we choose not to live in the way of that negative habit it is weakened, and eventually, if we persist, it will no longer be there.

We have the Bodhisattva Precepts as guidelines. The Bodhisattva Precepts are not the Vinaya Precepts (the Rules for Monks and Nuns), which serve more to direct overt behavior; the Bodhisattva Precepts apply to all levels of behavior of thought, speech and action and go far beyond the day-to-day directives of the Vinaya. With this writing we won't be getting into the deepest aspects of the Bodhisattva Precepts; this is taken up in our koan work when we take up the Jujukinkai—the Precept Koans.

Not to kill, but to cherish all life.

On the surface this seems straightforward; most of us would not want to kill anyone anyway—though some might let that Precept slide if we hunt animals for food or (hopefully not) for "recreation" or for trophies. But there's a deeper meaning to this Precept, as there is with all the Bodhisattva Precepts. When we hold an opinion about or an image of a person, we deny the

possibility of change. This is a very real kind of killing, and just as powerfully negative as firing bullets, even as most of us engage in that subtle killing without even realizing it.

*Not to take what is not given,
but to respect the things of others.*

*Not to misuse sexuality,
but to be caring and responsible.*

Not to lie, but to speak the truth.

There are more Precepts regarding speech than of any other category, for speech can be a producer of great pain and suffering. Moreover, these Precepts on speech are the most difficult for most of us to abide by. A Dharma sister who is also a Zen teacher once said, "The more I practice, the less I want to talk. It's so very easy to cause suffering through speech!"

Not to cause others to abuse alcohol or drugs, nor to do so myself, but to keep the mind clear.

*Not to speak of the faults of others,
but to be understanding and sympathetic.*

This last, along with the next one, is another of the Precepts regarding speech, and this is perhaps the most difficult to keep of all those in that category. There is something about gossip that is innately pleasurable in our culture, yet again, it is the source of untold suffering. It often comes back to bite us, too. If you don't want to be talked about derogatorily, don't talk about others in that way.

Not to praise myself and disparage others, but to overcome my own shortcomings.

*Not to withhold spiritual or material aid,
but to give them freely where needed.*

*Not to indulge in anger,
but to practice forbearance.*

Anger is pervasive in the world these days; at this writing there are wars and skirmishes and suicide bombings and all manner of suffering fomented through anger. And anger can fuel negative speech so terribly easily. Yet most people in the world today are not taught how to work with anger when it arises. We're often taught that to express it is not appropriate, and as children often punished for doing so. At one time quite a few years back in the therapy community it was thought that the best way to get rid of anger was to beat pillows or scream—which was certainly better than kicking the family dog, yelling at your children or beating your wife. But it turned out that that actually reinforced anger even as it seemed to release it, and so thankfully, that way of dealing with it has fallen out of fashion.

So what DO you do when you feel that heat rising, when you're tempted to act it out? Once again, the teachings of Longchenpa, the Buddhist master of fourteenth century Tibet, describe a true antidote:

“Though attachment, aversion, dullness, pride, and envy may arise, fully understand their inner energy; recognize them in the very first moment, before karma has been accumulated. In the second moment look nakedly at this state and relax in its presence.

Then whichever of the five passions [lust, anger, stupidity, arrogance, and jealousy—and here we could add a host of other emotions] arise becomes a pure presence, freed in its own place, without being eliminated. It emerges as the pristine awareness that is pure, pleasurable, and not conditioned by thought.”

—from **You Are the Eyes of the World**

When we try to follow these instructions it's not easy, for we're highly conditioned to do the opposite and try to suppress or hide from those challenging feelings. There's a significant learning curve. But it's guaranteed that if we persist and persist and persist in moving in that direc-

tion, eventually we will be able to finally become one with whatever the difficult feeling is—and it's certainly not limited to anger—then we will experience the real sense of release and relief that comes from doing so.

*Not to revile the Three Treasures—
Buddha, Dharma, Sangha—
but to cherish and uphold them.*

This is the last of the Ten Cardinal Precepts, which are part of the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, and the final one dealing with speech. To speak ill of a Sangha member or of the teaching is to revile the Three Treasures, and can cause untold suffering within a Sangha. At its worst it can completely destroy a Sangha. This is not about not “calling a spade a spade” with regard to misconduct; it's about gossip, about complaining or spreading malicious tales about one person to another. The Sangha is a true jewel, meant to offer support to everyone; when this is denied through inappropriate speech, everyone suffers. When we revile a Sangha member we are also reviling the Buddha—our true, clear and perfect nature. When the teachings—the Dharma—are denigrated, it can discourage people from engaging in the very practices that can liberate.

Periodically we have Jukai—the Ceremony of Receiving the Precepts, and in fact we will have Jukai at HVZC on March 10 in 2014. (Whenever someone receives a rakusu—as some of you experienced when Genshin received his rakusu and Buddhist name this past November—that person does Jukai, and anyone else present in the zendo at the time is welcome to take part as well.) The ceremony always begins with a ritual of repentance during which we acknowledge our unskillful behavior, our misdeeds, and resolve not to engage in those behaviors again. This allows a clearing of our mind so that when we vow to keep the Precepts as we recite them with earnest determination to do so, they rest on more fertile ground. Of course it's understood that one Precepts ceremony is not going to wipe out millenia of habit patterns, but it's a significant beginning, for intention is very powerful. And we can remember that, although it takes an

aircraft carrier five miles to stop once it begins to run the propellers backwards, and another five miles to turn around and move in the opposite direction, it CAN be done!

The most important thing is to keep trying, and to have faith that as we continue to do so we will gradually make inroads into negative habit patterns and weaken them to the point eventually of extinction—and uncover the innate perfection that is our true nature. Uncovering this little by little, we are increasingly able to live the compassion and wisdom we are born with, and gradually we begin to embody the Bodhisattva Precepts 24/7. What incredible freedom! What incredible joy! What incredible gratitude!



Giving - the Dana Paramita

As we continue our work of taking our practice deeper, seeing more and more clearly, living more and more by the Bodhisattva Precepts, the focus of our lives also begins to subtly change. One of the ways it can change is with regard to more and more fully embodying the Perfection of Giving, the Dana Paramita. What follows is how this unfolds in the day to day life of a Zen practitioner

Last week at lunch a friend, M., mentioned that she was having out patient surgery and I asked if there was someone I could get in touch with after the surgery to inquire how it went. She gave me the name and number of a mutual friend and I got in touch with him the morning after the procedure.

Richard said that M. was in pain and running out of meds and that she would really enjoy some company. I packed up some food and headed over to where she lives, which is just a few miles from the tiny mountain village I live in. I stopped at our friend Richard's on the way and he came along with me.

M.'s surgeon had given her a very limited amount of pain medication and it was clear that she was going to need more so we spent

part of the afternoon on that weekend trying to locate her surgeon or a local doctor who could write a refill for M.'s pain meds. Weekends are not the best time to track down doctors. We were finally able to accomplish this late in the afternoon and made arrangements to pick the prescription up the following morning when the local doctor could come by the clinic he worked in and get a prescription pad.

I met the doc and his wife at our little bistro on Sunday morning and we had scones and coffee before I took off to pick M. up and drive down the mountain to a nearby town that had a pharmacy.

During the weekend it kept occurring to me that so many individuals are willing to pitch in and help when someone needs them. To me this is the heart of our practice. I am deeply moved by the willingness of others who drop what they are doing and find the time to lend a hand when someone is in need.

My teacher, Issan Dorsey, started a hospice in San Francisco during the AIDS epidemic. We had practiced together for over 15 years at San Francisco Zen Center when the epidemic started and we bought two houses in the Castro district of San Francisco. The Castro is an area that has been occupied by the Gay community for a very long time. The houses were side by side so we took the outside walls out and joined the houses together making an eight-bed hospice, a living area for us, and a zendo. I lived and worked at Maitri with Issan until his death in 1992. He frequently brought people to the hospice who were homeless and asked us to give them a meal, shower and a bed for the night. He stressed that our job was to take care of each other.

As I have grown older I feel fortunate that I have been healthy throughout my life and can still fulfill Issan's teaching 'to take care of each other.' I admit that sometimes I have bargained with the powers that be to keep me healthy and I will happily help take care of others who need my help.

At first when I began working for hospice I was afraid that I would say or do something inappropriate to one of the people I was taking care of. I had had very little experience with death. I soon realized that there is ‘no wrong way’ and that I needed simply to show up, be compassionate and present and that was a gift to the person who was ill.

There have been many great rewards for me in doing this throughout my life. I have gained immeasurable confidence to reach out and ask for assistance when it is needed to help someone, and that has spilled over into my finding the ability to ask for help when I need it myself. I am more comfortable with people than I was before I began caregiving and I have had the privilege of developing a much deeper understanding of others than I had before I started as well as a better understanding of myself.



Danger! Danger!

Most Zen Students today are able to reach a state of serenity in which their minds and bodies are no longer troubled by afflicting passions, and their attachment to past and future is cut away so that each moment contains all time. There they stop and abide contently like censers lying useless and forgotten in an ancient cemetery, cold and lifeless with nothing to break the silence but the sobbing of the dead spirits. Assuming this to be the ultimate Zen has to offer them, they are unaware that what they consider an unsurpassed realm is in fact obstructing their true self so that true knowing and seeing cannot appear and the radiant light of extraordinary spiritual power (jinzu) cannot shine free.

-from **The Essential Teachings of Zen**
Master Hakuin

These are the words of the 18th-century Japanese Zen master, Hakuin Ekaku. Things

haven't changed much since then, and it's something to be aware of and steer away from. What he described might be called the Siren's call of Zen—only in this case it's calling us to the Land of Sloth rather than to shipwreck on Sybil or Carybdis—and just as in that ancient tale, it has the power to leave our practice abandoned.

It was assumed, in America back in the 1950's when Beat Zen was what was mostly heard about regarding Zen, that one did Zen practice to attain a mind state of peaceful lack of inhibitions, where doing whatever you felt like whenever you felt like it was real “Zen” no matter how inappropriate or pain-producing it was. Alas, how far from the truth! Peace, yes, but a vibrant, living peace in which, no matter what chaos or challenge enters our life we're not caught and sunk by it but can function freely and clearly, and we naturally do what is most optimal in each moment. It's not about living in some zoned-out artificial state of “serenity” that is removed from feeling. It is, rather, where the cutting edge of the work of Living the Precepts, of 360-Degree Practice is found—and it's challenging. At the same time, what better work a person can do in their life!

Super-peaceful mind states are generally considered *makyo*—“devilish phenomena”—in real Zen practice, and something to abandon interest or involvement in. The nature of *makyo* is that it is tempting, enticing, whether it is manifesting as a super-serene mind state or a state of fear or a head full of visions or auditory hallucinations. The super-serene mind state is the one to be most careful of for it seems to be the most tempting. It's not uncommon, in fact, for some Zen folks to assume that entering such a mind state means they've had a *kensho* experience—which is why it's so important to work with a teacher who has actually had *kensho* and can tell the difference between the real and the false.

In the Vimalakirti Sutra it is written: “Enlightenment is the arrival at detachment, through freedom from all habitual attitudes.” But this detachment is a true mind state of not needing

things to be a certain way; it's not the detachment expressed in, for example, saying to a friend ill with cancer, "You know it's all illusion anyway, and there's no one really who is hurting, right?" That kind of detachment expresses a lack of empathy, a lack of compassion. Rather, the detachment spoken of in the Vimalakirti Sutra is the ability to allow things to be as they unfold and not to need to manipulate them to our liking. In this kind of attachment there is true freedom, in which no matter what the circumstances we can be at peace because we don't need them to be a certain way. It is the freedom to allow unbiased response to circumstances, as in diving into a river to help someone who is drowning. It is an advanced state of practice.



You think that you can only establish true practice after you attain enlightenment but it is not so. True practice is established in delusion, in frustration. If you make some mistake, that is where you establish your practice.

--Unknown



"The last of the human freedoms is to choose one's attitudes."

- Victor Frank



It's interesting how we freeze our view of particular people. We exaggerate certain aspects we see in others, thereby freezing them into narrow, unproductive categories of relationships and limiting our ability to feel close and act out of a sense of intimacy. We lock them into certain patterns of behavior, and then, because we see these attitudes as solid, influence others to stay in those patterns: "This person is just..."

—from **A Truthful Heart**, by Jeffrey Hopkins

Term Intensives

During the Fall holiday season—Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Kurban Bayram (the Muslim holiday honoring Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to God)—it's easy to get caught up in the festivities, shopping, and family visits and let the practice take second place. Of course there is a Buddhist holiday, too—December 8th, which marks the Great Awakening of Siddhartha Gautama beneath the bodhi tree—but with Christmas trees being sold before Thanksgiving, and the period between Halloween and New Year's being a major shopping period in any given year, there's lots to pull us into the general holiday rush of activities.

Once the dust has settled, however, a Term Intensive can get us back to uncovering that important work of letting go negative habit patterns and clarifying our mind, allowing a greater upwelling of our innate compassion and wisdom. A Term Intensive is just what the title implies: a prescribed period of time—usually two to six weeks—during which the person engaging in the Term Intensive adds extra practice time and events to their usual practice schedule. This can be extra periods of sitting. It can be a certain number of prostrations each day—best to start with no more than twenty-five a day if you still want to be able to walk up and downstairs without agony. It can be to do chanting at home. It can be to commit to a certain number of hours a week beyond your usual, in helping out at the Center. It is your choice.

Term Intensives can be done as a group or solo. How to begin? Head to the HVZC website—www.hvzc.org—and download a Term Intensive Form. Fill it in and, if you'd like to work with Mitra-roshi on it, mail it to her at Mountain Gate or hand it to her when she arrives to lead the 4-Day Sesshin at HVZC. If you'd like to work with Sozui-sensei, then hand it to her.

After you turn in your Term Intensive Form, the teacher you've chosen to work with will meet with you in person, via email, or via Skype, at regular intervals to see how things are going for you and to help keep you on track.

A number of people have taken advantage of this practice shot in the arm, among them, Fugen, who did many Personal Term Intensives from the first time they were offered right up to announcing his intention to begin another one on what would have been the Monday following his death.

Term Intensives work: They're limited, so you don't feel you're having to commit to whatever additional practice you choose forever, and you've got the support and encouragement of the teacher. Go for it!



The living self has one purpose only: to come into its own fullness of being, as a tree comes into full blossom, or a bird into spring beauty, or a tiger into lustre.

- D.H. Lawrence



If only you would turn your mind inward, in deep daily meditation, you would find the source of all true, lasting happiness existing right within the innermost silence of your own soul.

—Paramahansa Yogananda



The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment. And if this is a correct view of freedom, our chief energy must be concentrated on achieving reform from within.

—Mahatma Gandhi



Zen teaches nothing. It merely enables us to wake up and become aware.

—D.T.Suzuki

Lola Lee, Osho

Hidden Valley Zen Center was founded by a petite, vibrant woman named Lola Lee. She started out as a student of a self-proclaimed spiritual guru who called himself Vitvan, but after some years encountered Dr. Henry Platov, who was a European-born psychiatrist. He was also an Eastern Orthodox ordaine, and it is his hand-carved cross that rests at the corner of his photograph in the Founder's Wall in the foyer at the Center. Apparently he also was ordained a Buddhist priest, presumably by Sokei-an, the Japanese Buddhist priest who headed the Zen Studies Society in New York until his death. Dr. Platov trained with Sokei-an, and after his teacher's death went to Japan to continue training for a year. Lola Lee at some point began training with Dr. Platov, and he encouraged her to establish a sitting group, which began as The Order of Ancient Wisdom. Dr. Platov seems to have trained his students less in the Zen way than like George Gurdjieff, who was famous in the early 20th century as a spiritual teacher, trained his students, by putting them into circumstances that brought up their issues, then challenging them to sort it out and move beyond. (Gurdjieff is famous for chasing down an unpleasant old man who had been living in his communal house after the man left in disgust when the other members of the household stole his false teeth in an effort to discourage him from living there. When Gurdjieff learned of his departure, he ran after him and is purported to have said, "I will PAY you to live here!" Why? Because he was certainly showing the others where they were caught, and this is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher.) Another function is to teach students the tools they can use—and encourage that use—to free themselves.

Lola Lee built a thriving community of followers with her charismatic talks, though the group was not a residential group. Eventually, when she became too ill from emphysema to teach, she asked her students to find another teacher, and Mitra-roshi was invited to come and teach. It was only a week before Roshi was scheduled to lead the first sesshin at HVZC that Lola died.

January 7-14 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline for applications is January 3rd.

January 22-26 4-Day Sesshin; Roshi expects to be at HVZC January 21-28. Deadline for applications is January 16.

March 8 All-Day Workshop on Rinzai Zen; PLEASE NOTE: THIS WAS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED AS A WEEKEND SESSHIN. Roshi expects to be here Mar. 4-11; **Jukai Ceremony March 10!**

March 18-23 Elder Sesshin at Mountain Gate; deadline for applications is March 12.

March 26-April 2 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; deadline for applications: March 17

April 11-13 Vesak Celebrations. Vesak is the world-wide celebration of the Buddha's birth, and for HVZC it is a full weekend of celebrations, beginning with **Temple Night from 6-9 pm on Friday, April 11**, continuing with the **Ceremony of Bathing the Baby Buddha at 10 am on Saturday, April 12**, following which we will enjoy a **Potluck Meal**. Family and friends are invited to this joyous annual celebration! The next morning, **Sunday, April 13, Roshi will give a teisho** as part of the regular Sunday morning program, then we'll take down the Temple Night altars and restore the zendo to its usual appearance. More information will be sent out as we get closer to those dates. Roshi expects to be at HVZC April 8-15.

April 22-29 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline April 14.

May 14-18 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD and Women Partners of Veterans with PTSD at Mountain Gate. These retreats are limited to the women described above. Regaining Balance is

a non-religious outreach program of Mountain Gate. It is entirely free to the women it hosts, and except for airfare to New Mexico for facilitators living out of State, all facilitators are pro bono. There are real expenses, however, and donations are most welcome. A check made to Mountain Gate is tax deductible to the full extent of the law, and when so specified, will be used to help underwrite these retreats.

June 6-13 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline is May 30.

June 20-22 Weekend Sesshin; Roshi expects to be at HVZC June 16-23.

July 8-15 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline is June 24.

July 26-August 2 7-Day Sesshin. This is our only 7-day sesshin of the year, the only chance without going to Mountain Gate to do a full seven days of deepening practice. Yasutani-roshi used to say that to do a 7-day sesshin was to deepen one's practice to the degree possible otherwise only in two to three years of daily practice.

August 12-19 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline is August 1st.

August 22-24 Regaining Balance Weekend Retreat for Women Partners of Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate

September 17-21 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD and Women Partners of Veterans with PTSD at Mountain Gate. (see information above)

September 27 All-Day Workshop on Rinzai Zen, led by Mitra-roshi. Please go to www.hvzc.org to download an application form. Roshi will be at HVZC Sep 26-Oct 3.

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A monk in all earnestness asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West? Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the garden!"