



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Winter 2004

Karma

The following is taken from a talk on the precepts given by Shonen Dunley on November 23, 2003

Karma is a central concept in Buddhism. The life we are living right now is dependent upon the countless actions of the past we have performed in this life and previous lives. By our actions, good or bad, we create the karma that determines the basic structure of our lives. Our future life and lives are dependent upon our present actions.

So much of the time we live our lives thoughtlessly, creating harm to others and to ourselves. We do this in ways large and small, in ways that are calculated and deliberate, as well as through neglect. Karma is best illustrated by the generation of plants. An action creates a seed that when conditions are right blooms as an effect. This in turn leads to further seeds that also sprout when conditions allow. Thus, from this simple principle, all of the various events and tendencies in sentient beings come forth.

Dogen writes: "The karmic consequences of good and evil occur at three different times. The first is retribution experienced in our present life; the second is retribution experienced in the life following this one; and the third is retribution experienced in subsequent lives. In practicing the way of the buddhas and ancestors, from the start we should study and clarify the principle of karmic retribution in these three times. Otherwise, we will often make mistakes and fall into false views. Not only will we fall into false views, we will fall into evil births and undergo long periods of suffering."*

Because karma operates either in the present life, next life, or subsequent lives, we sometimes see good people suffering terrible misfortune, while criminals enjoy prosperity and long lives. There is a ripening aspect of karma as well, in that the cumulative effect of many small actions can ripen into a powerful result.

Buddhist literature is filled with strange and fantastic karma stories. Whether or not one takes such stories as literal fact, like myths from all around the world

their power to instruct transcends historicity. Likewise, whether or not one believes in rebirth or karma, it cannot be denied that our present circumstances come from the connections we share with countless other beings of the past and present, and that the world of the future is entirely dependent upon our collective actions. Everything we do, say, and think has far reaching consequences and implications and our lives are not lived in a vacuum.

It is important to reflect upon our own shortcomings and ways that we have harmed others. We need to understand the karmic forces that have shaped our lives and how these forces cause suffering to others and to ourselves. When we face ourselves in this way we cannot help but regret all of the difficulties we have caused, time and resources wasted, pain we have inflicted on friends and enemies alike. From this regret comes the vow to do better, to refrain from continuing those thoughts, words, and actions that are harmful. This is called repentance.

Through sincere repentance we can make a radical break from the habitual tendencies that bind us to the wheel of suffering. Repentance is not a one-time affair. Like returning our attention to the breath, returning to Mu, we must repent again and again. We fall down, get back up, and continue.

Repentance in its deepest form is the realization of emptiness, and through this realization we reach the other shore. The three wheels of doer, deeds, and recipients are completely empty. Karma has no root, self has no root, the other has no root. Realization of emptiness is like the sun that melts away snow. When the true nature of mind is clearly seen, there is nothing that can stick to it. But it's not that there is a world of emptiness beneath the world of karma - karma itself is empty. To realize this is true repentance.

**Soto School Sutras for Daily Services and Practice*: "The Meaning of Practice and Verification (Shushogi)" I:5, Sotoshu Shumuchō, 2001

From Shushogi- The Meaning of Practice and Verification

Shushogi is a short collection of writings by Eihei Dogen compiled in the Meiji era by the layman Ouchi Seiran as a summary of the central teachings of Soto Zen Buddhism for laypeople to study and recite. The selection below was taken from Soto School Sutras for Daily Services and Practice: "The Meaning of Practice and Verification (Shushogi)" Sotoshu Shumucho, 2001

IV. Making the Vow to Benefit Beings

To arouse the thought of enlightenment is to vow to save all beings before saving ourselves. Whether lay person or monk, whether a deva or a human, whether suffering or at ease, we should quickly form the intention of first saving others before saving ourselves.

Though of humble appearance, one who has formed this intention is already the teacher of all living beings. Even a girl of seven is a teacher to the fourfold assembly, a compassionate father to living beings. Do not make an issue of male and female. This is a most wondrous principle of the way of the buddha.

After arousing the thought of enlightenment, even though we cycle through the six destinies and four modes of birth, the circumstances of this cycling themselves are all the practice of the vow of enlightenment. Therefore, although until now we may have vainly idled away our time, we should quickly make the vow before the present life has passed. Even if we have acquired a full measure of merit, sufficient to become a buddha, we turn it over, dedicating it to living beings that they may become buddhas and attain the way. There are some who practice for countless kalpas, saving living beings first without themselves becoming buddhas; they only save beings and benefit beings.

There are four kinds of wisdom that benefit living beings: giving, kind speech, beneficial deeds, and cooperation. These are the practices of the vow of the bodhisattva.

"Giving" means not to covet. In principle, although nothing is truly one's own, this does not prevent us from giving. Do not disdain even a small offering; its giving will surely bear fruit. Therefore, we should give even a line or a verse of the dharma, sowing good seeds for this life and other lives. We should give even a penny or a single blade of grass of resources, establishing good roots for this world and other worlds. The dharma is a resource, and resources are the dharma. Without coveting reward or thanks from others, we simply share our strength with them. Providing ferries and building bridges are also the perfection of giving. Earning a living and producing goods are fundamentally nothing other than giving.

"Kind speech" means, when meeting living beings, to think kindly of them and offer them affectionate words. To speak with a feeling of tenderness toward living beings, as if they were one's own infant, is what is meant by kind speech. We should praise the virtuous and pity the virtueless. Kind speech is fundamental to mollifying one's enemies and fostering harmony among one's friends. Hearing kind speech to one's face brightens one's countenance and pleases one's heart. Hearing kind speech indirectly leaves a deep impression. We should realize that kind speech has the power to move the heavens.

"Beneficial deeds" means to devise good ways of benefiting living beings, whether noble or humble. Those who encountered the trapped tortoise and the injured bird simply performed beneficial deeds for them, without seeking their reward or thanks. The foolish believe that their own interests will suffer if they put the benefits of others first. This is not the case. Beneficial deeds are one, universally benefiting self and others.

"Cooperation" means not to differentiate; to make no distinction between self and others. It is, for example, like the human Tathagata who was the same as other human beings. There is a way of understanding such that we identify others with ourselves and then identify ourselves with others. At such times self and other are without boundaries. The ocean does not reject any water; this is cooperation. It is because of this that water collects and becomes an ocean.

In sum, we should calmly reflect on the fact that the practice of the vow of arousing the thought of enlightenment has such principles; we should not be too hasty here. In working to save others, we should venerate and respect the merit that allows all living beings to receive guidance.

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Sangha News

Shila Ango Opening Ceremony

On Sunday, January 4, 2003, the opening ceremony of the shila angu will take place. The shila angu is a time to focus on mindfulness, moral conduct, and compassionate action. During the ceremony, Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, will be enshrined and remain on the altar for the entire training period to symbolize the focus of the angu.

We will begin as usual with two rounds of zazen beginning at 8 a.m., followed by the ceremony. After the ceremony, Ken Morgareidge will give a talk.

Gaitan

In many traditional zendos, both in this country and in Japan, there is a space called the gaitan just outside of the zendo. Gaitan means outer sitting platform, and is a space where newcomers and those who are late or have duties that interfere with sitting a whole period of zazen sit.

As a replacement for public zazen and a way to help interested people get started with sitting before attending a seminar, we have created a gaitan in the dorm space near the dining room. It also serves members who arrive late, have to leave in the middle of a round, or are on-call with work duties.

The gaitan is a considerably less formal space than the regular zendo. Movement is allowed during sittings, and it is possible to leave early if necessary. Newcomers make an appointment to receive instruction for their first visit, and are shown the basics of zazen and zendo etiquette. They sit without wearing a robe and do not participate in chanting or other ceremonies that may take place (the exception is Sunday, as the public is already welcome to attend chanting and teisho). Following initial instruction, they are welcome to come as often as they like, but cannot join in the regular training or sit in the zendo until they complete a seminar.

It is hoped that the gaitan will make the Center more accessible to the general public, as well as serve sangha members who have obligations that make attendance at regular sittings difficult. It can also be a less threatening way for a person to ease into practice after attending a seminar.

Sangha Workdays

Because we are able to get so much needed work around the temple done at sangha workdays, they will now be held one Sunday per month during the shila angu. The format is slightly different, in that the time scheduled is shorter (8 a.m. - 12 p.m.) and they begin in a manner similar to samu with zazen, a tea ceremony, and a short talk. Like the old workdays, the

atmosphere is relaxed and informal, with a spirit of joyful work together. The workdays are an excellent opportunity for committee projects, and committee chairpeople should contact Peggy Sheehan if they have something in mind.

A signup sheet will be posted for the workdays in the foyer. Supporting members should attend at least one per training period.

New BOD Members

At the November sangha meeting Linda Hardesty, Karin Kempe, and Ken Morgareidge were elected to the Board of Directors. They will take the places of Jim Hubbell, Patty Kelley, and Mike Tabor, whose terms have expired. Our thanks to departing Board members and best wishes to newcomers.

Jukai

At the ceremony of Jukai held on November 30th, 2003, the following people received the precepts for the first time. To receive the precepts is to formally become a Zen Buddhist and to embrace the bodhisattva path. Our congratulations to Greg Cicciu, Marilyn Clancy, Josh Devitt-Mather, Mickey Devitt-Mather, Randy Garrison, Kathleen Hardiman, Gail Keefe, and Joseph Kinczel.

Lay Ordination

Lay ordination will now take place as a separate ceremony from Jukai in order to give it the proper treatment that it deserves. On Sunday, March 7th, Jean Hanna, Patty Kelley, and Cathy Wright will be lay ordained into the Lotus in the Flame Order. Ordination represents the highest commitment one can make to the path of Zen and to this temple. Ordinands go through a period of extended training with Sensei during which they study and are tested on Buddhist doctrine, and sew a rakusu (a bib-like garment that represents the Buddha's robe).

The Lotus in the Flame Order serves as a council of senior practitioners within the sangha that works with Sensei in developing training forms and addressing issues of practice and relationships in the community. Everyone is encouraged to attend the lay ordination ceremony to bear witness to this important rite of passage.

Weekend Sesshin

The Center will hold a weekend sesshin February 20-22. The sesshin will begin on Friday at 7 p.m. Saturday will be similar

to the day of silence of a regular 7-day sesshin. On Sunday, participants will join in the zazenkai/teisho schedule. The weekend sesshin will conclude at 3:30 PM Sunday. Cost for the sesshin is \$100. Please fill out a regular sesshin application.

Talk and Discussion of the Paramitas

The paramitas will be discussed during the talk and discussions scheduled during the next two Shila angos. The paramitas, or perfections, are ten areas of character development that are undertaken as part of the bodhisattva path, namely the perfection of giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, aspiration, spiritual power, and knowledge. Each discussion will focus on one of the paramitas. There will be two rounds of sitting and then a member of the Lay Order will give a short talk on the paramitas and facilitate a discussion. Those interested in studying the paramitas beforehand are encouraged to read *The Practice of Perfection* by Robert Aitken. For a classical Indian text on the paramitas and the bodhisattva path in general, the *Bodhicharyavatara* by Shantideva (various translations) is suggested.

Birth Ceremony

A birth ceremony for Hoag Holmgren and Leda Swan's son Anders has been scheduled for Sunday, February

1, following the taped teisho. Please come and help welcome Anders into our Sangha!

Missing Software

The office is missing the CD-ROMs and manuals for the Adobe Publications Suite. These include PageMaker, Photoshop, and Illustrator. If you have borrowed these and forgotten to return them, please bring them back to the office as soon as you can.

Upcoming Events

Shila Ango Opening Ceremony	January 4
Workday	January 11, February 15, March 14
Kannon Ceremony	January 15
Zazenkai	January 25
Repentance Ceremony	January 29
Birth Ceremony	February 1
Parinirvana Ceremony	February 12
Weekend Sesshin	February 20-22
Zazenkai	February 22
BOD Meeting	February 25
Lay Ordination	March 7
Repentance Ceremony	March 9

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