



Wind Bell

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TRANSITIONS

City Center resident Rosalie Curtis, Zen Center's graphic designer from 1991 to 2004, recently stepped down from that role and is now on the staff of Tassajara Reservations. Rosalie became our graphic designer following the death, in 1991, of Peter Bailey. Peter had developed the *Wind Bell's* current design and had had primary responsibility for designing and producing Zen Center's publications. That responsibility shifted to Rosalie and included producing the *Wind Bell*, the periodic schedule of events for City Center and Green Gulch, the Tassajara brochures, the mid-year and year-end letter and various other design and production projects.

In the last few years, Rosalie has experienced a significant shift in her practice life. She returned to Tassajara for a practice period and was the *shuso* (head student) for the Spring 2004 Practice Period at City Center. Shortly after that practice period ended, she discussed with Michael Wenger her interest in priest ordination.

For Rosalie, this shift created a conflict with the work required for Zen Center's publications and she proposed to Zen Center that she step down from

Zen Center President Vicki Austin, Michael Wenger, Jeffrey Schneider, and Jana Drakka offer their congratulations to Rosalie.



PHOTO BY RENSJIN JUDY BUNCE

the graphic designer role. Her priest ordination took place on April 23, 2005. Now that she is ordained, her intention is to focus more on zazen, and participating in the forms and practice life of the community.

Zen Center and the *Wind Bell* editorial staff extend their deep appreciation to Rosalie for her work as graphic designer. Her care, attention, and patience with the many, sometimes conflicting, demands of the work created consistently high quality publications that have served the needs of Zen Center and the wider community.

Rosalie's stepping down has led to Zen Center deciding to experiment with the outsourcing of its graphic design work. A new position of Content Coordinator has been created and Tanya Takacs has stepped into the role, gathering text, photos, and other elements for each project and interfacing with the graphic design firm, Giraffex. This issue of the *Wind Bell* is one of the first projects under this new arrangement.

PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGER



Rosalie Curtis steps down as graphic designer; Tanya Takacs steps in as Content Coordinator for Zen Center publications.

SHUNRYU SUZUKI ROSHI ON ZEN CENTER AND CITY PRACTICE

May 10, 1970

City Center, San Francisco

This morning I want to reflect on our practice in America that we began more than ten years ago. The purpose of Zen Center, as you know, is to provide a meditation hall, a place to practice zazen with a teacher. With this purpose we established a non-profit organization, and we acquired this Page Street building which we named the Mahabodhisattva Zendo, which reflects our practice of the bodhisattva way: to help others and to help ourselves.

We started the Tassajara Zendo because we needed a place where we could put everything aside and be completely involved, or maybe not completely, but almost completely, in our practice. For a human being, this "almost" is always necessary or else we cannot survive. "Almost" is actually the secret of practice. We can practice our way almost completely. That we have this special zendo means that we can practice in a more traditional way so that we can better understand what Zen actually is. It is difficult to have a full understanding and to know what we are doing here unless we know the background of our practice.

It is like knowing your family [way]. When you know your friend's family, you will know your friend much better. Even though you think you know your friend, if you do not know the background of your friend, it is difficult to understand your friend.

But the most important thing will be how we practice the bodhisattva way—to help others and to help ourselves. This point is missing in Japan. The



PHOTO BY GENE DE SMIDT

New Cabin 15 with creek-side deck completed this Spring at Tassajara.

original bodhisattva way is to help ourselves and simultaneously to help others. In Japan we help others but we forget to help ourselves. Sometimes it is good that it should be like that but when zazen practice does not follow we will lose our way. We may be easily enslaved by people. That is not the bodhisattva way.

Without losing ourselves in the [complications of] city life, we should know how to help others. That is the point. Whatever we do we should do as a Buddhist. To be Buddhist does not mean just to practice zazen in a nice calm building like a hermit. That is not our way. Wherever we are, to help others without losing our practice is the Mahayana Bodhisattva way.

For the realization of our way, we should keep our practice as simple as possible so that as many people can follow it easily. Here I must say "as much as possible" because our human life is already complicated and difficult. So when I say "simple way," you may think, "If I go to Zen Center, they are observing very simple way, much simpler than our mundane way." But that is not permissible. I think we must have almost the same difficulties as people have in their city life. Wherever we are it doesn't make much difference. It is because of the way we think that we have a very complicated life.

So even though you come here, your life cannot be simpler than city life. The difference is that we are enjoying our complicated life, while many people in the city are involved in various things and become confused. You come here so that you can help, and offer a seat to as many people as possible. Therefore we must have some rules which should be very practical so that we can practice our way more efficiently, and share our facility with more people. We must make our best effort to fulfill our bodhisattva spirit. Because we open our facility to our neighbors, we will constantly have new students. To share this building with new students, we should give them some guidance and show them some example of our practice so they can feel better here. In order to help them we must have some skill. That is why we have Tassajara. So new students when they come, if they want to stay here longer, can go to Tassajara. And after acquiring a way to help people you can come back to Page Street to help. In this way, I think we can fulfill the purpose of Zen Center. This is the main structure or spiritual structure of Zen Center and Tassajara.

kind of framework was the result. I think this is a very meaningful thing. The so-called bodhisattva way appeared in this country without knowing what it was.

You call this building “Page Street”—maybe “300 Page Street” or “Page Street Zen Center” or—I don’t know [laughs] and Bodhisattva Zendo. When we say “Maha Bodhisattva” it sounds like something great. Maybe “Bodhisattva Zendo” will be enough. But if we say “Maha Bodhisattva Zendo,” maybe more people will come [laughs]. But that is also a part of bodhisattva practice. I think Zen Center should reserve the name “Maha,” and each one of your homes will be a “Bodhisattva Zendo.” This building is the “Maha Bodhisattva Zendo” where there are many small zendos. Each residence here is a small zendo. To come here, I think each one of you must have struggled pretty hard. We are pretty fortunate to be here and to practice here in its pure sense.

As you know, Buddhism is very, very old and the Buddhist spirit has penetrated every corner of our culture in Japan, China and India. Buddhism is like a great river, extending its branching streams into various mountains and fields. But the running water is the same: sometimes muddy, sometimes clear. But water is water. Muddy water can be pure water, and pure water can sometimes be muddy water. We should not reject the branch of the river because the water is not so clear. We should accept whatever the river might be. And we should not forget that all the water is originally the same. Through zazen practice you will find pure water in muddy water without being attached to purity or clarity of water.

Dōgen Zenji said that Zen practice is for everyone, whether they are clever or dull, man or woman, old or young. He said Zen is for everyone because he could



PHOTO BY MITSU SUZUKI

A favorite photo of Suzuki Roshi at Page and Laguna in the early days of San Francisco Zen Center.



PHOTO BY GENE DE SMIDT

see pure water in muddy water. We practice zazen here to find our pure spiritual practice in the city life even when not being aware of it.

This practice is not something you can compare with ordinary activity. Only when you have this pure practice can you understand. So, if you want to help people in a true sense, I think you should at least go to Tassajara and practice for a long time.

I want to share this burden with many people as much as possible. But we need your help. With your help I think we can share the great burden that was given by our successive teachers.

Physically, I feel much better this year. So I might survive [laughs]. I don't know how long, but let's try hard.

WAYS TO BE A SOTO ZEN PRIEST IN AMERICA

by Lewis Richmond

(with contributions from Michael Wenger and Taigen Leighton)

At the present time, priest ordination seems to be the way that we in Soto Zen explicitly and formally acknowledge a person's deep lifelong commitment to the practice of the Way. However, there are a variety of ways that ordained priests actually express their practice. And if an ordained priest gravitates to a profession or role in which he or she rarely wears robes, performs ceremonies, leads zazen, or does any of the things that priests typically do, then how is that different from being a committed layperson?

In this essay, we explore nine different roles that are already being adopted by Soto priests: *temple priest*, *monk*, *pilgrim*, *monastery teacher*, *scholar/author*, *therapist/healer*, *social activist*, *worldly sage/hermit*, and *lay teacher*. It is unclear whether, going forward, all these roles require priest ordination, or whether there is a larger category of "deeply committed practitioner" in which priest ordination is one of many possible forms of acknowledgment.

The important issue for now is training. What do priests and other deeply committed practitioners need in the way of training to be able to succeed and persevere in the American society of today? We examine several different areas of priest training—monastery life, *dokusan*, emotional transformation, textual study, livelihood, internship, and peers. Some of these areas of training are already well established; others are not. The kind and range of the training we need is an ongoing question—perhaps one of the most important for the next generation of our tradition in America.

The "Buddhist Priest": A Brief History

Soto Zen priests in America mostly follow the model used in Japan since the mid-nineteenth century, when the Buddhist priesthood was secularized by the government. At that time, Buddhist monks were permitted—even encouraged—to marry, have families, and participate in the family structure of Japanese society. This notion of such a "priest" is unusual in the history of Buddhism. In the rest of the Buddhist world, anyone who is not a *bhiksu* or *bhiksuni*—a monk or nun following the monastic precepts of celibacy and poverty—is a layperson. Since many of the clergy in the West do have families, the notion of a married "priest" fits in with our cultural norms. Still, a Soto Zen priest in America does not yet have a well-defined social role. There are very few existing temples or groups, and priests who wish to lead a temple must usually first create one. American Zen priests are not all becoming temple priests or monastery teachers, either. This fact influences what kind of training priests should have, as well as the larger issue whether, in performing some of these roles, it is necessary to be ordained at all.

Kinds of Priests

Temple priest. To the extent we are imitating the Japanese model, this is the vocation that American Soto priests are presumably training for. But where are the temples? At this early stage in the development of American Soto, there are already more priests than there are temples (or sitting groups). It seems that we are training people for jobs that do not exist! Also, a person may not have the inclination or wherewithal to start his/her own group, or may be more interested in remaining a monk rather than becoming a temple priest.

In Japan, where staying in the monastery indefinitely is not generally an option for Soto priests, much of a priest's training takes place in the home temple. Suzuki Roshi himself spent only a relatively brief time in the training monasteries. The rest of the time he lived and practiced with his teachers in a regional temple, where he mostly tended a congregation of laypeople. Of course, temple priests can and frequently do have their own priest disciples. One of Suzuki Roshi's principal teachers, Kishizawa Roshi, was for a time the temple priest of a small sub-temple nominally under Suzuki Roshi's larger regional temple.

There are also existing American models for priest/minister training, in the seminaries of Christianity and Judaism, covering what we might call practical priest craft: counseling skills, psychological work, finances, dealing with boards of directors, and temple management. Internship of some kind is fairly common also. There is no better way to train for a job as temple priest than to spend time in a temple under the supervision of a more experienced mentor.

Monk. Not every priest is destined to become a temple priest. Those who practice best in an environment of structured schedules and strict limits are more suited to be lifelong monastics. As we attempt to replicate Buddhist institutions in our own time and place—both with monasteries and local temples—it is important for us to understand the differences between a monk and a priest, both in how they express their spiritual practice, and in how they are trained.

The primary responsibility of a temple priest is to take care of laypeople and encourage others to practice. The primary job of the monk is to take care of the monastery and to cultivate his or her own practice. The temple priest needs to deal directly with issues of money and livelihood—to turn the material as well as the Dharma wheel; the monk, for the most part, abjures these concerns. The temple priest takes care of a congregation's spiritual and life cycle needs, such as births, marriages, funerals, crises, and counseling; the monk generally does not.

The different training needs of monk and temple priest will undoubtedly clarify and develop as time goes on. What is important now is simply to understand the difference, so that trainees have a sense of what track they are following.

Pilgrim. One mode of spiritual practice that has been common for monks in every Buddhist tradition has been the practice of pilgrimage. The Buddha himself was a home leaver, with no fixed abode. Pilgrimage practice balances residential monastic life. The strength of monastery life can become a weakness when the

Sojun Mel Weitsman celebrated his 75th birthday in July 2004 and led the 75th Tassajara practice period this winter.



PHOTO BY GENE DE SMIDT

monastery becomes a kind of surrogate home, a comfortable place one is reluctant to leave.

In America, it is not clear yet what form the practice of Buddhist pilgrimage might take. In pilgrimage practice one finds out how to respond to unexpected and difficult situations that never occur in monastic life. The basic vow of the pilgrim is to face any kind of difficulty and uncertainty with courage and steadfastness; going out and getting an ordinary job might be one way to fill that bill in this society! Another key feature of the pilgrim is to visit various teachers—perhaps in Asia or elsewhere in America—thereby testing and deepening one's practice, and experiencing many different styles of practice.

Monastery Teacher. The monastery is our primary training ground. It is the place where the inner transformation takes place that trains priests to manifest Dharma wherever they go. The role of monastery teacher is exalted in Zen; all of the great masters of the classical period of Zen were monastery teachers.

The Japanese training monasteries often have the best teachers in Soto rotate through the monastic teaching positions—abbot, *godo*, *tanto*—without staying permanently. Whatever the merits of this system, we should be aware that this has not been our style in America. The few monasteries we have are led either by life-term founder/abbots, or by a rotating system of teacher/leaders who are themselves permanent residents. To the extent monastery teachers are training their own replacements, this may not be a bad system; but to the extent they are training temple priests it may be important to take a closer look at the Japanese model. The best teachers for temple priest trainees may be other experienced temple priests.

Another aspect of the Japanese model that we might adopt over time is the small, regional training temple. As these develop, it would give more American priests with a bent toward monastic life and training an opportunity to express this teaching.

Monastery teachers need much the same training as temple priests—especially in the area of *dokusan*. Of course, we would expect monastery teachers to develop special expertise in monastic rules, forms and rituals: *oryoki*, ceremonies, robes, and so on.



Senior Dharma Teacher
Blanche Hartman attends
an anti-war demonstration.

Scholar/author. Some priests develop a special affinity for textual study and scholarship. There are many examples of American Soto priests who have become Buddhist scholars, and who are now making important contributions to the understanding of Dharma in the West. We in American Zen are deeply dependent on Buddhist scholars to help us understand the authentic tradition, since most of us do not read the original languages. From that standpoint, the priest/scholar is probably as important now as at any time in Buddhist history.

Therapist/healer. We already have many examples of therapist priests, nurse and doctor priests, hospice worker priests, pain management priests, and so on. The Buddha himself was often known as the Great Physician or Healer, and there is much basic affinity between the function of Buddhist priest and the role and profession of helper/healer. Over time we may see the priest as therapist/healer become one of the important ways that Buddhism integrates into the mainstream of Western society.

Therapist/priests in particular are distinct from other priests in at least two ways. First, they have a livelihood; and second, they receive thorough training in the interpersonal skills so necessary in both therapy and dokusan.

Social Activist. The Buddhist priest as social activist is a somewhat new phenomenon. Historically, the Buddhist clergy have taken a neutral approach to government, social justice and reform, and have tended instead to cultivate their monasteries as exemplary models for the society at large. But we are now seeing many Buddhist priests working in movements for peace, social justice, and the environment as the primary expression of their Bodhisattva vow.

Some Buddhist priests have taken extensive training in non-violent protest techniques. There may be other, more specifically Buddhist, training methods that will develop over time.

Worldly Sage. The worldly sage essentially means someone who lives immersed in the world, conducting themselves like an ordinary person without any formal role as a priest or teacher, but who maintains an inner affinity to vows and the Dharma and continues to practice zazen. The worldly sage may also represent one stage in the life and training of a conventional priest. There was a tradition in Zen to encourage a monk who had finished his training to "disappear" for a time, living invisibly, before re-emerging to be a teacher. We need to distinguish the worldly sage, who is living according to some firm intention, from a priest who has essentially given up. In some ways the worldly sage mode of priest is the most difficult to sustain, but it may be possible, even preferable, for some for whom the

conventional archetype of visible religious leader does not suit their character or inclination.

One variant of the worldly sage is the hermit. Not all “hermits” are complete recluses. There is also the hermit who lives in a city apartment, leads a life devoted to practice, and is available as a mentor or teacher to whoever comes to visit—all without leading a group or temple or adapting other characteristics of the temple priest. Ryokan, the Soto priest/poet/hermit of seventeenth century Japan was like this.

The priest as artist or poet is a time-honored mode, especially when the art is directly connected to the religious practice, e.g., *thanka* painting, statue carving, and temple building.

Lay Teacher. The converse of the worldly sage is the lay teacher, i.e., someone who is willing and able to be a visible teacher of the Dharma, but who has not taken priest ordination, does not wear priest robes, perform ceremonies, ordain others, and so on. Clearly there are already many lay teachers in American Soto Zen, and some Soto Zen lineages are primarily being continued by lay teachers. In the San Francisco Zen Center laypeople can be *shuso* (head student) during a practice period just as a priest can. We have also created a rank called “Dharma Entrustment” which is essentially mid-way between the stage of *shuso* and full Dharma Transmission, specifically to acknowledge and empower lay teachers who have the experience and capacity to teach under the general supervision of a fully transmitted priest/teacher.

The existence of the lay teacher model stretches our thinking about priests.



PHOTO BY CHARLIE POKORNY

In March, Wendy Johnson helped at Green Gulch with the Jizos for Peace Project.

If someone can be fully empowered to teach the Dharma, then what is the point of being a priest? Is the priest then simply someone who specializes in ritual and ceremony? I think most would agree that a priest is much more than that. But working our way through the layers of tradition, Japanese culture and history, and determining the authentic meaning of "Dharma Teacher" for America, is a task that may occupy us for generations.

Clearly, there is overlap in this categorization of priest modes. There are a number of priests who fit more than one of these categories, as well as priests who have moved from one category to another over time.

Kinds of Training

There are three areas of near universal agreement about the core requirements for priest training: *zazen*, *dokusan*, and monastic or intensive training. *Sesshin*, living in close daily contact with one's teacher in a temple setting, and traditional monastery life are all examples of intensive training. Monastery training in particular is itself about the body in the same way that *zazen* is, and like *zazen* operates both at the outer level of the physical body (acclimating to cold, discomfort, etc.) and the inner level of energetic transformation. If nothing else, it teaches someone how to stand, sit and walk!

Monastic Life. Monastery training is most easily accessible in America to those in centers that have a working monastery. We at San Francisco Zen Center should remember that the gift of Tassajara and the ready opportunity for monastic training is a privilege. Other smaller centers may need to develop their own methods of intensive training.

Dokusan. *Dokusan* is an important area of training in its own right. Some may say that experiencing *dokusan* with one's own teacher is training enough. But that is like saying that being in therapy qualifies one to be a therapist. Therapist training requires several years of course work, internship, supervised therapy-in-training, and finally testing and licensing by the state. In contrast, in many centers a temple priest or monastery teacher, once authorized, begins seeing people in *dokusan*, and may receive little supervision or peer feedback thenceforth.

Yet the power and responsibility of the Zen teacher over a student's entire life is typically greater than that of a therapist over his or her client; we are only now beginning to see a national association developing (The Soto Zen Buddhist Association) to set ethical standards and norms.

Dokusan itself is not one thing. Sometimes it may be department advice, sometimes therapy, sometimes life counseling. And while *dokusan* is not primarily

therapy, the interpersonal skills needed by a Zen teacher in dokusan are much the same as those needed by a good therapist. These include the ability to listen closely, to understand the deeper intent behind a person's words, to know when to intervene and when to keep silent, and most of all, to know how not to harm. Zen teachers, like therapists, need to know about transference and idealization, temptations of power and sexuality, and the difference between true intimacy and exploitation/idealization.

How can we develop a successful form of complete dokusan training that takes into account our American culture and psyche? There is a lot of thoughtful experimentation going on, both inside and outside the Soto Zen tradition. In *vipassana*, teachers in training graduate from observing their own teachers conducting interviews to being observed conducting interviews by their teacher; this is modeled after the supervision techniques of therapist training. One Soto priest has entered a primarily Christian program for Pastoral Counseling; he records his dokusan interviews on tape (with permission of his students), to be reviewed later by his teacher-mentor.

Some of us might be uneasy with the notion of a third person involved in our dokusan. Perhaps there are other forms of private or semi-private interview in our tradition that could be adapted to serve as training venues. In early Chinese Zen, spontaneous interchanges between teacher and student often took place in front of the assembly, during work, or in a chance encounter with others present. Dōgen's *Eihei Koroku* mentions occasions in which monks visited the Abbot's quarters in small groups. Certainly we need to weigh the tradition against the need, in these early days of American Dharma, to attain a basic competence in private instruction. Knowing something well is not the same as being able to teach it well.

Emotional Transformation. When Tibetan teachers are asked about the Zen tradition (to the extent they know about it) their response is usually, "Oh, that is just Dharmakaya practice"—meaning, a practice that emphasizes Absolute reality, or emptiness. In the Tibetan tradition, meditation to realize the Absolute is only one of many practices, and it is not generally taught to beginners. In China Zen was not a separate school of Buddhism, just a collection of monks in the large monastic establishments of China that wanted to emphasize *dhyana*, or *ch'an*, that is, zazen (or meditation) practice.

Although there are passages in which Dōgen appeared to criticize other forms of Buddhist practice—specifically in *Zuimonki* and *Bendowa*—it would not be an accurate reflection of his views to think that he always advocated an exclusive emphasis on zazen practice. Soto Zen fundamentally embraces the totality of



In May, Grace Shierson and Mary Mocine received dharma transmission from Sojun Mel Weitsman at Tassajara. Also pictured are Vicki Austin, Alan Senauke, and Blanche Hartman.

Mahayana Buddhism; we should be open to practices other than zazen that help us as Americans encompass Mahayana's full transformational potential.

Tibetan Buddhists use the term "relative practice" to describe practices that lead to emotional transformation in the realm of daily activity and interpersonal exchange. Realization of the Absolute is not by itself enough to burn away all one's "ancient, twisted karma" of habitual emotional responses; additional training to continue transforming the psyche in the light of realization is needed.

Textual Study. Clearly, priests need to become familiar with the core texts of Buddhism and of Zen. In the Shunryu Suzuki lineage, these include the *Heart Sutra*, *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra* (on which Suzuki Roshi lectured extensively), the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the *Parinirvana Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and Suzuki Roshi's own recorded teachings. As Soto priests, we also study Dōgen both in classes and privately with our teacher. Although Suzuki Roshi's and Soto's approach to koans is rather different than in Rinzai, a Soto priest should have good inner and outer familiarity with the koan literature too. During his lifetime, Suzuki Roshi encouraged us to study *Abhidharma* and other core texts of the *Theravada*, and this effort continues. Beyond that, there is much in the vastness of Buddhist scripture that can be illuminating and helpful for us in our work as priests.



The third meeting of the Northern California Zen/Chan-Catholic Dialogue took place at City Center in January and discussion focused on the concept of transformation.

Not all kinds of priests need the same degree of familiarity with these texts; worldly sages, therapist/healers, and social activists may not refer to these texts on a daily basis in the same way as monastery or temple priests. But along with monastery training, a thorough grounding in the core teachings of Buddhadharma and the Zen tradition cannot be neglected. Suzuki Roshi's lectures often seemed spontaneous and free form, but he admitted that he studied hard before every one. His teacher had told him, "Always study before giving a dharma talk, not because you will necessarily use what you study in the talk, but for the sake of studying itself."

Livelihood. In this generation being a Soto Zen priest in America is not always a livelihood. We could take proactive steps to help temple priests develop an ancillary livelihood that suits their skills and inclination—not as a distraction from their primary vocation, but as a way to support it. Even in Japan, many Soto priests supplement their income with other work. Some part of the priest training curriculum could be devoted to working with candidates to assess their job skills and inclinations, and help place them, as part of their internship practice, in paying jobs—perhaps with non-profit organizations who would welcome the presence of an experienced meditator in their midst.

Suzuki Roshi used to say that a priest should have at least two distinct areas of skill or expertise; in the monastery this might be cooking and finances, for example. For American temple priests, this might be priest/teacher and some outside profession or livelihood, like gardening.

Internship. Monastery training is necessary, but the notion that everything we need to be successful priests will come from zazen is maybe a bit unrealistic. That is why temple priests in Japan apprentice to the abbots of their own home temples, assisting in all kinds of ways while developing practical experience.

Peers. When we examine the situations of American Soto priests who have faltered because of ethical misconduct or some other grievous lapse, *isolation* is a common theme. This is true for anyone in a position of authority and power. A peer might be “someone of equal power and authority to yourself who can say something difficult for you in a way that you’re able to hear and trust.” How many of us really have peers like that? And how many of us actively seek them out when we don’t?

Conclusion

Once when Suzuki Roshi was asked what it meant to be a priest in America, he replied, “I don’t know.” We must all concur. At the moment we are, we might say, in the “Wild West” phase of Soto Zen in America. There is some discomfort in this situation, perhaps, but we also ought to find a way to enjoy it. In a hundred years, if Buddhism has survived and prospered here, people will imagine that they do “know” what it means to be a priest, and then they will have a different kind of problem.

Until then, let us—in the spirit of Zen’s early Chinese founders— remain flexible, creative, and open-minded. Who knows what might happen?



Chikudo Lew Richmond lived and trained at San Francisco Zen Center for fifteen years and was ordained by Shunryu Suzuki. In 2003, he helped found the Vimala Sangha in Mill Valley, with the mission to teach and practice the traditional teachings of Zen Buddhism in the context of modern American householder life. He is also author of three books: *Work as a Spiritual Practice*, *A Practical Buddhist Approach to Inner Growth and Satisfaction on the Job*; *Healing Lazarus, A Buddhist's Journey from Near Death to New Life*; and *A Whole Life's Work, Living Passionately, Growing Spiritually*.



LECTURE BY ACHARYA GAYLON FERGUSON

March 5, 2005

City Center

I would like to begin by again expressing appreciation for your founder, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi Daiosho who was an inspiration to my own teacher Vidyadhara Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in terms of planting the true Dharma in the West.

I thought to just go ahead and talk some about natural wakefulness this morning. The word “natural” is connected to the word “nature.” So when we say “true nature” or “original nature” it has some connection with what we generally mean by “nature” as in going to Muir Woods or being by the ocean—what people call experiencing nature. Often the images for what fundamental nature is like are images that are taken from nature, in the other sense of nature. For instance, in my tradition it is often said “nature like the sky.” Our original nature is as spacious as the sky. The sky has the sun in it, or the moon in it, or rain, hail or clouds. All of that can take place in the sky of our original nature. So sometimes it’s called the “sky-like nature.”

And sometimes it’s compared to the ocean—that it has the vastness that we sense standing by the ocean. In fact my own teacher’s ordination name is “Ocean of Dharma”—Chogyi Gyatso shortened to Chogyam meaning, Ocean of Dharma, Ocean of Truth.

In the nineteenth century in Tibet there was a famous teacher named Patrul Rinpoche who said this nature was like a meadow, wisdom is like a meadow in which various things can grow. Of course, Suzuki Roshi also talked about a spacious meadow.



PHOTO BY JANA DRAKKA

In the tradition these images have been used for our original nature, nature meaning something that is not manufactured. We live in a time in which there are powerful multinational corporations, but none of them produce the sky, however powerful or productive. We don't pay a monthly bill for the sky. So nature doesn't come about by polishing a tile. Nature is what's originally there, always already present.

There are different names for this nature in Buddhism. The most familiar name is Buddha nature; our nature is said to be the nature of an awakened one. It's the essence of those who have gone to truth, to the heart essence—*tathagatagarbha*. This nature is also sometimes called an awakened heart. In my tradition we use the word *bodhicitta*. *Bodhi* means awakened; it's related to the word *buddha*. *Bodhi* means wakeful. And *citta* means heart or mind. So an awakened heart.

This awakened heart is the inseparability of compassion and emptiness. These can't be separated any more than you can take wetness away from the water. They are together from the beginning. So no true emptiness without compassion, and no true compassion without emptiness. That inseparability then can manifest as being helpful. How to be helpful instead of a nuisance is part of the unfolding of that nature.

Another name for this nature is "basic goodness." We are fundamentally good—that is our ground nature, beginning. I don't know if there is a Sanskrit word for this. In the Tibetan it is *doma nyi sangpo*. *Sangpo* means good and *doma*



The wider sangha celebrated Lou Hartman's 90th birthday at City Center in early June.

means primordially, from the very beginning, originally good.

Trungpa Rinpoche's Dharma heir, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, discusses this in his book *Turning the Mind into an Ally*:

When I'm teaching, people often ask me questions in hopes of hearing some esoteric truth. They seem to want me to tell them a secret. But the most fundamental secret I know is rooted in something that we already possess—basic goodness. In spite of the extreme hardship and cruelty we see throughout the world, the basis of everything is completely pure and good.

I thought perhaps we could contemplate a little what happened to that original nature becoming involved in greed, aggression, ignoring and numbing out. What's that process? How did that happen? Discussing the sitting practice of meditation, Mipham Rinpoche says, "The human mind is by nature joyous, calm and very clear. We aren't creating a peaceful state; we are letting our mind be as it is to begin with." Still, you wouldn't describe human history as the product of people whose minds were joyful, calm and very clear, if you think over the last hundred years. How is that? What happened?



PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGER

Rev. Cecil Williams with City Center residents Donna Carter and Siobhan Cassidy at the Annual Benefit event in April. The 2005 Honorees, Rev. Cecil Williams, Gladys Thacher, and Brother David Steindl-Rast, were selected for their demonstrations of wisdom and compassion in their lives and work.

According to the tradition, there is a moment of misunderstanding. There is some kind of mistaken perception, some mis-recognition of how things are. The usual example used in the Indian texts was: "There is a rope. It's not that there's nothing. It's not just completely hallucinated. There is a rope, but the rope is being mistaken, taken in the wrong way, for a snake." There is some fundamental misperception and on that basis, a whole bunch of deluded things start to take place. One might be very fond of snakes and say, "How can we have more and more snakes? Maybe I should breed snakes. Snakes have a particular color and I really like these snakes. And who has the best snakes? Are your snakes better?" Even though there's not a snake to begin with.

Or one might be afraid of snakes and hate snakes and set about to kill snakes. "The world would be a better place if we killed all the snakes." And again this is based on a misunderstanding. Pema Chodron often speaks of it that way. A little misunderstanding ends up having big consequences.

Actions that are based on that misunderstanding we say have a cause and effect relationship. What happens is the more we act on that basis, the more ingrained that misunderstanding is. So there's an ingraining process. You can speak of making a groove of "The more I'm grasping towards snakes, and getting certain

snakes and wishing for a better snake,” the more there’s the sense of “Well, there is a snake.”

This is called karmic patterning—that we have trained ourselves in certain ways. And that has a certain momentum. If a car starts rolling down the hill, it gains momentum. So even once we roll into the zendo or meditation center, all of that previous activity has patterned us in a certain way and that still goes on even when we sit on a zafu. We have a particular view or intention—previous actions and perceptions—which lead us to speak a certain way and act a certain way. And that reinforces that fundamental misperception. Or not. It can either bind us further or free us. This goes around and around in that way—*samsara*. How does someone become a hungry ghost? How do they come to embody that hungry ghosting around which comes through greed and constantly approaching life or the world as something to grasp and get more of? Hungry ghosts are said to have tiny necks and big stomachs and are never able to satisfy that craving, that thirst. How does someone become a jealous god or *asura*? By envy, by always looking to see how someone else is doing. “How are they doing? Do they have more? Am I ahead or not?”

In the beginning this is a flexible situation. Like working with clay. You can shape it in different ways. But it hardens over time. The pot actually has a certain shape. So one can even come to embody that greed or that jealousy or envy or anger. This is individual karmic patterning. Usually when we say cause and effect, we think of an effect—does it cause harm or does it help? But also the effect



PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGER

San Francisco Zen Center is grateful to all who helped make the Annual Benefit a success.



PHOTO BY MICK SOPRO

The Children's and Family Program is thriving at Green Gulch.

shapes further cause. It shapes the attitude, the outlook and the state of mind of the person who's doing the particular actions. So we go around in that way, digging ourselves in.

What I wanted to contemplate with you this morning was not just that individual level of patterning. We are, according to the tradition, dependently arising beings. We arise in relation to many other beings. So that means that there isn't just individual patterning, but we are also part of communities and neighborhoods and society and culture. That has also shaped us. We are not isolated from the societies and the cultures that we've grown up in. And they have that same process of actions repeated again and again and again—a certain momentum. They're a part of what we roll in to the zendo with—not just our individual patterning, but what is going on in the whole society, that also. It is the members of the society that begin to sit meditation.

So if we were to look and see what kind of actions you might find in the society—this doesn't require a long-range research study or anything. We could just take something that anyone could see if they were to look at our society. Are there any actions that people repeatedly take? Sure. Many, many. But the one I wanted to focus on was shopping. Just to take note of the fact that in our society, everyone shops. We shop for food, we shop for clothes, shop for books, shop for. . .

And that shopping activity carries over into areas that you would think “That doesn't make sense. You're not going to go to Macy's for that, right? Why

are you still shopping?" So it carries over into areas like relationships. People shop for relationships, shop for the perfect relationship, the best relationship. And even within a committed relationship, people often shop for the best moments in that relationship. "Could we get back to how it was last week? That was a better moment. We're here, but could we go back over to there?"

And, in terms of spirituality and spiritual tradition and awakening to our true nature, we find that even on the cushion, we shop for the right moments. Even if we call them the moments of no-gaining, we're still looking for how many moments of no-gaining. Right? And it's not to blame, or provoke any sense of guilt or shame; but we're arising in a society in which a lot of shopping goes on. Some serious shopping—from people who hire personal shoppers and so forth to Walmart or whatever. I acknowledge that people are shopping at different levels of acquisitiveness. But almost everybody is shopping in some way. Very pervasive activity, shopping.

So this is kind of a joking way of bringing up something that my teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche noticed and talked about when he came to this country thirty-five years ago. And he called it spiritual materialism. His first book in North America is called *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. I think it must have been quite striking to a person from a completely different culture and society. Like "Hmm. Real spiritual supermarket here! This and this and this and two of these and one of these."

In the tradition people have talked about spiritual materialism. I don't think it's just in our time or in our place. One of the lineage ancestors in my tradition is called the *Karmapa*. There have been seventeen of them now. And the third Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpai Dorje, who lived roughly around the time of Eihei Dōgen Zenji [13th century] said, "The greatest spiritual materialism is believing that one has to manufacture Buddha nature." So again we have this sense of manufacturing versus what's natural or present by nature. Trungpa Rinpoche often talked about the materialistic outlook. The motivation is based on a sense of lack, of something not right or not here, some sense of "I need to fix it." It's approaching oneself, one's practice and others from the point of view of there being something fundamentally lacking, wrong, inadequate, not enough. And therefore I need to acquire either something material, or some idea, or teachings or some spiritual state, some meditative state. I need to acquire that to make up for, to supplement this lack, what's missing.

So the shopping is motivated by that sense, as we see in advertising. The ads never say, "You're fundamentally good as you are—and therefore you should come to our store." They say, "You don't quite have—whatever. And if you buy this, you'll belong. People will love you. You'll have friends and you'll be happy and



you'll have a sense of well-being." And so it touches into what is a human longing to be loved and to be genuine among others. But it hooks on to that with, "Okay, you need to acquire this in order to have that. You want that in your life, then get this, have this."

There are various kinds of materialisms—of form, of speech, and of mind—talked about and taught in the tradition. And when we have the materialistic outlook, there is a motivation to fake it to acquire something from outside to make up for this sense of something missing. I think that's constantly linked to producing something by faking it so I will acquire what I'd like to acquire. There's a sense of something lacking: "I need to get something. I need to acquire something. And if I pretend over here, people will not see who I really am, what I'm really like and I'll be rewarded for that." We learn how to be a successful fake in that way.

We might even approach our practice that way. We have an image of the ideal meditator, what a buddha, what a bodhisattva would be. She would be like this. And so our practice is then devoted to being that ideal. It kind of hovers, that ideal, and we're trying to make ourselves be like that rather than be as we are.

Suzuki Roshi, in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, says that there is a misunderstanding about naturalness, that natural doesn't mean just come as you are—but a deep sense of naturalness. In that sense we discover naturalness. But you see that the materialistic approach and the original nature approach are exactly

opposite of each other. The materialistic approach is the sense of something lacking that then tends toward faking to acquire it. And the fundamental nature approach of original goodness is that since we are from the very beginning basically sane, fundamentally wise and compassionate, then we can be truly genuine. That would be more than enough. To be truly genuine. And from that point of view, meditation practice is the radical practice of genuineness. To be genuinely bored, to be genuinely joyful, whatever it might be. To be genuinely in one's body, speech and mind in the very moment.

Thank you.



PHOTO BY DAVID HAYE

LECTURE BY ABBESS JIKO LINDA CUTTS

August 15, 2004

Green Dragon Temple

The Eight Awakenings of Great Beings

Today we begin a seven-day meditation retreat, sesshin. *Sesshin* means to gather the mind, to touch the mind, to convey the mind. And sesshin is a practice that can open us to our own life in a whole new way. I recently came back from another kind of sesshin—it *felt* like a sesshin—participating in a humanitarian delegation to Colombia, South America. There were many similarities: a group of people embarking on a journey together, the lack of free time, the scheduled nature of our days together. And then also the practices of finding stability, staying open, listening, mindfulness. All the practices that come up in sesshin came up for me very strongly on this journey. One of the main reasons I wanted to go on this delegation was that my daughter, Sarah, was co-leading it. As some of you know, she has been in Colombia for the past year as a human rights worker. She lives in a peace community which has declared itself neutral in Colombia's armed civil war. I wanted to see for myself what the situation was.

So I'd like today to talk about a particular teaching that has been very helpful to me, and connect it to some of the experiences and practices and teachings that I was working with while on this trip.

The teaching I've been looking at is traditionally understood as the last teaching that the Buddha gave, the last admonitions that he wanted his followers to hear. Dōgen Zenji, the founder of our lineage in Japan, also referred to these teachings just before he died, in a chapter or fascicle of *Shobogenzo*, entitled "Eight



Winter fog at Tassajara.

Awakenings of Great Beings.” In a postscript, Koun Ejo, Dōgen’s main disciple, writes, “It would be a good idea to copy this chapter and preserve it. It is the final instructions of Shakyamuni and the final bequeathed teachings of the late master [Dōgen].” So it is held up as something quite important.

The first awakening of great beings is the awakening of having few desires.

The second awakening is to know how much is enough, or to be content.

The third is to enjoy tranquility and serenity.

The fourth is the awakening of diligent effort.

The fifth is not to neglect mindfulness.

The sixth is the awakening of practicing meditation.

The seventh awakening is to cultivate wisdom.

The eighth is not to be engaged in hollow discussions.

Each one of the eight is connected to and includes the others, so, having few desires is knowing contentment and enjoying tranquility, etc.

The first awakening of great beings is to have few desires. It doesn’t say in this admonition that you must get rid of all desires. We actually find that desires can be supportive in our life—wanting to have formal practice be central in our life or wanting to have good relationships. The Great Awakening is talking about desires such as coveting objects that belong to other beings, intensely seeking after things and breaking the precepts in order to get them. The Buddha said, “Those who

have few desires do not seek for fame and gain and are free from them, so they are without such troubles." There's a troublesome, disturbing quality when there are lots of desires. When we have few desires we're also protected from the dangers of wanting to flatter other people. Those with few desires are not pulled around by their sense desires and are able to find stability.

I recently came across a very interesting book called *Sex, Time, and Power* by Leonard Schlain. Human beings, primates, have opposable thumbs. Schlain describes a theory that all greed, this grasping mind, is connected to the fact that we primates have opposable thumbs. We can actually grab stuff and carry it for long distances. Other animals don't do that. They use their mouths to carry food and their young, but they don't carry inanimate objects and hoard or take somebody else's stuff. Fascinating also is the fact that we can hold on to one thing and let go of another—grab and release at the same time. This, according to the theory, seems to be the basis of bartering and our economic life. Great damage is done with the acting out of the concepts of, "This is mine. I am going to take it. You're not going to get it from me." Worlds upon worlds of suffering are linked up with this.

The peace community we visited is in a corner of Colombia that is extremely fertile and strategically located. There is an enormous amount of desire and greed for this area from all quarters, including multinational corporations. People who want the resources and control are doing what they can to forcibly remove those people who live there—indigenous people, farmers, *campesinos*, who have been settled on their land for a long, long time. One of the main tragedies that's happening in Colombia is that there are three million displaced people in the country. That's the third largest number of internal refugees after Sudan and Angola. The number of assassinations and disappearances and massacres and kidnappings in Colombia is among the highest in the world.

There's a lot of risk for the people who are determined to stay on their land

Sarah Weintraub, a member of the peace community, and Linda Cutts in Colombia. Community members there are targeted for their non-violent resistance. For this reason, their names are not published.





PHOTO BY RENSHIN JUDY BUNCE

Frank Carbajal, John Martyn, Sherri Nordwall, Ken Sprengle, Natalia Sznajder, and Lucy Xiao receive the precepts, rakusus, and dharma names during a jukai (lay ordination) ceremony at City Center in April.

and they've asked for help from the international community because of the human rights violations, like disappearances, forced displacements, assassinations, massacres, and all of the unspeakable crimes that are being perpetrated with impunity by various armed groups. It is a peace community because they've said to the world, "We will not take up arms. We will not sell arms to any of the armed actors. We want to live in peace, tend our farms and we're living nonviolently." That's their pledge to the world. Because of this they are targeted by all the armed actors—the army, the paramilitaries, and the guerillas. Since 1997, 165 people who are members of, or somehow related to, this peace community have been killed.

When I visited the community where my daughter has been living it was wonderful to see a way of life that enacted the teaching of having few desires. This could probably be said about any traditional farming community anywhere in the world—people who live very simply, yet feel that they have everything they need. Although there is little choice for the members of the community about living simply, and this is different from voluntary simplicity, it reminded me of camping—that feeling of contentment when you're out camping and you've got your pack and your food and you forget about a house full of stuff and an apartment full of things and your bookshelves and you have just enough. There's a happiness that arises there.



PHOTO BY RENSHEIN JUDY BUNCE

On May 22, Jeremy Levie and Erin Merk were ordained by Abbess Jiko Linda Cutts at Green Gulch. Shown here with Abbot Paul Haller and Rev. Furyu Schroeder.

The second awakening of great beings is to know how much is enough or to be content. How do we know when enough is enough, what are the limits? This is a very hard thing for us to practice—to know what is enough. In the commentary on this second awakening, it says you already have things in your life and one needs to work within those limits and use well what you already have. To know how much is enough is enjoyment, contentment, and peacefulness. If you want to be free from suffering, contemplate knowing how much is enough.

We can practice this with food, with our material possessions, with all our sense desires. All of these awakenings, as I was saying, flow into each other, so being content, or having few desires, we know how much is enough. They're linked.

The community we visited, La Union, is by some standards a poor community. It took us an hour and a half to get there by mule. It's in the rainforest. A community member said, "Que bonita La Union!" "How beautiful here." And it is very, very beautiful and simple. The villagers live in very small wooden buildings, some with dirt floors. And they say, "We have everything we need." They talked about how bountiful it is. When the mangoes are ripe, there is so much fruit that they can hardly eat them all. And there are so many avocados, when they're in season, they feed them to the pigs! They brought over big baskets of avocados when we arrived. You can't make enough guacamole! The closeness to the natural

world with which they live, and their feeling that they are well taken care of and have everything they need, supports their feelings of serenity and contentment.

They also know where things come from. When we arrived, they made us a traditional corn cake called *arepa*. To make an arepa, they first have to plant the corn, tend the corn, and then harvest the corn. Then they strip the dried corn from the cobs and grind it by hand. They make that corn meal into a patty and fry or grill it. Then they offer it. And that is how you have an arepa! They brought them over fresh as gifts to the visitors. They know where it comes from and what is wasteful. There's an understanding which is probably understood by communities throughout the world who live like this. I think often in more industrialized countries, we long for this, when we feel this kind of interdependence, and live this simple way, we do feel a peacefulness, a contentment.

Traditionally the Buddha taught that one who is constantly led by the five desires is pitied by those who know how much is enough. In La Union they have lots of animals, which is their wealth. There are great sows with little piglets that run in and out of the houses, and lots of chickens. The villagers asked Sarah if she owned pigs and she said, "No," we didn't have pigs.

And they said, "Do you have a cow?"

"No, we don't have a cow."



PHOTO BY GENE DE SMIDT

Through the diligent effort of many, Cabins 14 and 15 were completed at Tassajara. Here, Jack West works on the framing for the skylights.

"Chickens? Do you have at least chickens?"

"No, we don't have chickens."

"Do you have to buy everything from a store?" And she said, "Pretty much. At Green Gulch we have crops, but pretty much, we buy everything."

And they said, "Oh. *Que pena*—That's too bad. You have to buy everything from a store. Oh, such poverty!"

So in this community, having few desires and knowing how much is enough, the sense of interconnectedness of life is very clear.

The third awakening of great beings is to enjoy serenity and tranquility. And the Buddha said, "If you want to have the joy of serene non-doing, you should be away from the crowds and stay alone in a quiet place." Now, you can think of this literally, like those of you who are on your way to Tassajara, but I don't think this is an admonition for everybody to stop, quit their jobs, and go into the Los Padres National Forest. I see it as finding tranquility and serenity each day of our life. In all the activities throughout the day we find our practice place. This may be coming to your cushion each day, or your yoga mat, the practices of bowing, meals, in every action of walking, talking, lying down, standing, or sitting—all are practices of enjoying serenity and tranquility away from the crowds and the noise. You don't have to go far. Can we find our tranquility and serenity here? Dogen calls this serenity "tranquil and unintentional peace." And at this time in our lives, in this world of war, each one of us needs to make ourselves a place of peace—with our dharma brothers and sisters, with our families, with those who disagree with us, with those who we feel are hurting others. Can we find a place of tranquility and peace and work from there?

At a yoga-Zen workshop I co-led at Tassajara this summer with Judith Lasater, she talked about the frontalis muscle across the forehead. Studies have shown that pressing this muscle triggers the relaxation response. We hold our foreheads pretty naturally, when we hear some bad news, for example. When somebody's not feeling well, or is feverish, you touch their forehead; or stroke their head. This is something we do for each other and for ourselves. And in yoga practice, there's the child's pose which is very much like our full prostration. We bow to the Buddha; we plunge into the bow and our forehead touches the floor. Can we feel completely at peace and relaxed there when we do our full bows? This is finding serenity and tranquility in our actions. Maybe the next time you bow, see if you can feel some relaxation that's there. Just pay attention without trying to be a devotional person or trying to be sincere. Forget all that. Just throw yourself into the bow and rest your forehead on the floor, practicing the third awakening, to enjoy serenity and tranquility.

Many people in Colombia are working for human rights and to create places



PHOTO BY TANYA TAKACS

of peace. But, as soon as I said I was going to Colombia, people here said, “Oh, the drug trafficking!” I think our associations with Colombia, supported by the media, are that it’s a place where there’s drug trafficking and that’s about it.

We met many Colombian grassroots groups that are doing human rights work of all kinds—lawyers who don’t have to be doing this work but are trying to work for a negotiated peace and reparations and social justice. One of the groups we met with was a women’s organization called *Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres*, the Women’s Peaceful Way. They were working with women who face terrible situations in their neighborhoods—disappearances, detentions, assassinations. The group had created a space of tranquility and serenity where it is safe to go to and to express to one another what’s going on. In the middle of dangerous situations, in the middle of war, in the middle of conflict, the importance of a space like this is hard to measure—we too can find a way to do this together.

The fourth awakening of great beings is diligent effort. Diligent effort is “to engage ceaselessly in wholesome practices” and it is “devoted effort.” You can see how, if you’re finding places of serenity and tranquility, that diligent effort flows right from there. Diligent effort doesn’t turn back. Picture a thread of water that, over time, will break through and will form a hole through rock. Or the image of putting the pot on the fire and keeping the heat on ’til the food is cooked. This is ceaseless effort, diligent effort. If we keep slackening, or starting and stopping, then we never get that sense of transformation in ourselves. I think this diligent effort

is the secret of all our endeavors. Everything—the secret of the arts, the secret of sports, the secret of relationships.

This is the diligent effort of thousands of Colombians who have chosen to work for human rights. They could be doing other things, yet they are working for peace at great risk, at the risk of their lives. To the Colombian government, the human rights workers, even though they are nonviolent, have been lumped together with leftist insurgents and are seen as the “internal enemy.” To meet with these people who are dedicated, clear thinking, unwavering, and who are not turning back was, as someone said, “to be in the presence of heroes.” I felt that as well. One description of bodhisattvas’ practice is that they are heroes who put on the “armor” of living for the benefit of all beings and go fearlessly into any realm. Once you take this vow and work with diligent effort that doesn’t slacken, this becomes a way to work with fear.

The fifth awakening of great beings is not to neglect mindfulness. In this teaching it says if you want to seek good counsel and work with good friends, it’s a good idea not to neglect your mindfulness, which protects you. If we lose mindfulness, we can lose all of our virtues very easily.

One of the delegation’s meetings, perhaps the most difficult for me, was with a colonel of the Seventeenth Brigade of the Colombian army. There’s a ruling from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to the Colombian government that this community should be protected and we wanted to hear how that was being done. The colonel started out the conversation by saying, very proudly, that his brother was studying at the School of the Americas in Georgia. I could feel a jolt go through the group of peace activist delegates. “I’m a man of war,” he said enthusiastically. We had heard about this particular person because he had been accused by human rights groups of human rights abuses, including torture. I think



Green Gulch's tanto (head of practice) Meiya Wender receives the offering tray on Buddha's birthday.

PHOTO BY KARA ANDRADE

this may be the first person I've confronted, who has been accused of torture. In his office was a sign that said, "That which is controlled, works." In terms of our practice of not trying to control things, and allowing the 10,000 things to come forth and reveal themselves, that sign was so blatantly coming from a very different place. My effort at this time was not to abandon any person, any being. My practice was to meet this person as a human being—to be respectful, to listen, to be open, and to ask myself—how was he brought up? How is it that he was taught to think and act in this way?

It was my effort to realize that this person is like this through causes and conditions and I knew too, that with those conditions, I would be in the same situation. How can we be open to people in our family and community and at work who think and act very differently from us? Can we be peaceful and mindful with them as well as with those who believe the same way we do? This was a practice of staying mindful of my own thoughts and states of mind and body, watching the closing up and vowing again to stay open and to listen. This was very challenging.

The sixth awakening of great beings is the awakening of practicing meditation. "To abide in dharma without being confused or disturbed is called 'stability in meditation.'" The other awakenings of not having a lot of desires, serenity, tranquility, and diligent effort all help us to stabilize in meditation and support calmness. Just to sit, daily or weekly, and to make this a focus of our lives helps us find and establish our stability in these times of great instability.

Dōgen says, "If you gather your mind, it will abide in stability." Sesshin means "to gather the mind." So each day, we can gather the mind and sit in stability. Dōgen also said that if you gather the mind and abide in stability, then you will understand birth and death, the arising and vanishing of all things in the world. The world wants us to make the time, whatever our particular meditation lineage is—to just sit down and make practice a priority in our lives.

I felt from the people in the farming community that they had a kind of stability in their work life: the meditation of taking care of cacao and banana and plantain. This is a meditative act. You have to be gathering your mindfulness and be stable and abide with all things as they arise and vanish in order to take care of land, plants and animals.

When we practice stability, our mind is not scattered. Then we're able—and this leads right into the next awakening—to carefully maintain an embankment that holds the water of wisdom and understanding.

The seventh of the awakenings is to cultivate wisdom. Cultivating wisdom comes out of this meditative stability. There are three kinds of wisdom: the wisdom of hearing, *śrutamayi prajñā*; the wisdom of reflecting and turning



Gathering our hearts and minds at City Center.

things, contemplating what you've heard, *cintamayi prajña*; and stabilizing and incorporating this wisdom through your own practice, *bhavanamayi prajña*. This awakening, then, is listening, contemplating, and then incorporating, making it our own in our body. Dōgen and Shakyamuni Buddha both taught: "If you have wisdom, you are freed from greed," which brings us back to the first awakening of having few desires, of ending greed. Wisdom and being free from greed are connected. You understand the non-duality of self and other, mind and objects.

The listening aspect of cultivating wisdom was a big part of our work in Colombia. There is great power in listening. Sometimes all it takes is just for someone to hear what you have to say. You know the listener can't fix it or change it, or make it better, yet you have been heard. I can't emphasize enough the healing quality of being heard and knowing someone has listened to you. We heard testimonies from community members and human rights workers who are trying to work for so many people, for the displaced, for the disappeared, telling the stories of unspeakable things that have happened. It was as if they were testifying for truth and reconciliation. While listening, I practiced staying open, and after hearing, made an effort to reflect on the material, to further clarify it, to keep it in mind.

One of the groups we heard from was made up of young people who started working for peace because people in their families had been assassinated. There's a military draft in Colombia and every male is expected to go into military service



In April, thirty-seven people from the Spirit Rock and San Francisco Zen Center Diversity Committees met to discuss our diversity work and to brainstorm ideas and action plans for the future.

after high school. If you cannot show that you have completed your service, you are not able to finish college or get a job. These young people decided to nonviolently resist the draft. In Colombia, to resist the draft could be a life and death decision. Accompanying these young people during this very courageous act were Colombian human rights workers who were also at great risk. We saw videos of them burning their draft cards and demonstrating in very wonderful, colorful, creative ways. This group also goes into the schools and teaches nonviolence.

The day we visited they were at a demonstration on behalf of a group of young musicians who had performed political protest songs and who were now being detained by the government forces. The young people wore t-shirts saying, "I too am *Pasajeros* [the music group], detain me!" In Colombia it's not an "It's-Sunday-let's-go-to-the-march" decision to demonstrate; it could be a life or death decision for these young people. We heard their stories. Thousands of Colombians are working throughout their country for human rights, not just international people.

The last of the awakenings of great people is not to be engaged in hollow discussion, not to engage in idle discussions or frivolous talk. The Buddha taught that to experience realization and be free from discriminatory thinking with thorough understanding of the way things are, we have to let go of hollow

discussion, which is disturbing to the mind and will not support all the other practices. That's how they all fit together. "If you wish the joy of serenity, cure the sickness of hollow discussions," says Dōgen. And there's also joy in letting go of hollow discussion. In our sesshin practice we observe silence for seven days. People often feel a great energy by not dissipating their energies through a lot of verbalizing.

In Colombia, the practice of right speech was incredibly important. We were very carefully advised that we were in a war zone, and that to use idle speech and unthinkingly, for example, say the name of someone, could endanger a life. Although we were taught security precautions around speech, it was hard to remember them. We found that when we came out of a meeting we were very enthusiastic and everybody was talking and chattering in the van or taxi; but we were not free to speak openly in restaurants, on public transportation, or on the street. If anyone forgot, we had a little signal: someone would say, "I think you need a piece of chocolate." That was our phrase that meant, "You're talking too much, how about eating some chocolate and keeping your mouth shut!" This delegation of Americans was so used to being able to speak whenever, with whomever, about whatever, at the top of their lungs and so we had to help each other quite a bit. Mindfulness around speech and the importance and power of words have never been so clear. This offering of chocolate happened not infrequently.

I was also struck by the power of speech in the arts. I'm sure you're familiar with how important poetry, writing and the arts were in Soviet Russia. Books would be smuggled out into the rest of the world because you couldn't say and express yourself freely. It was a life or death decision to write. People would pass poetry in whispers and memorize each other's poems. It was too dangerous to write them down. It is the same in Colombia. We visited a group, a collective that lives and works together, that performs street theater about what is going on in Colombia. The power of speech and poetry and the arts in a situation where you're not free to speak, the beauty of what people are willing to do to express the truth—I don't think I have experienced it quite the same way here. We saw one of their pieces about the "disappeared" enacted right in a poor neighborhood. In Colombia there are thousands of people who are taken away without a trace. Usually there is no body ever found. The families mourn their loss and never find out the truth of what happened, nor have any closure. The theater collective put on a show that was filled with strong images and symbols. The actors used stilts and tumbling and wonderful costumes to bring forth their message about the pain of the situation of the disappeared. One of the strongest images was of a mother looking for her college-age son who had been taken. A person, carrying a big basket, comes to her wanting to sell her back his bones. The bones of her son. As

a theatrical piece, it was one of the strongest images I've ever seen enacted and it came from a true story—all the mother wants is something of her child.

The Buddha was said to have pleasing speech and to have spoken only when four things were present: it was truthful, beneficial, and the right time and place. In the practice path of the arts and words, there is no time for hollow speech. We heard beautiful, clear, strong speech, where each word counts.

Being in Colombia was a wonderful opportunity for me to be aware of these practices. I offer these thoughts on the Eight Awakenings of Great Beings, to take up, listen to, and reflect on, and find a way to have them come alive in our lives.

I want to leave you with a quote from a person in the peace community. The question to him was "How can you keep going in the face of all these difficulties?" He said, "One of the fundamental things is the love for what we have around us. This is a hope we have, an alternative for life. We look at this as a process and see that there have been many difficulties but despite this there are many good things. Part of our consciousness and our resistance is that we know why we are doing this. We do this so the kids can grow up and become leaders." He also said that "we know there are many people who are with us and support us, and we feel that love."

Post Script: On February 24, 2005, there was a massacre in the Peace Community of *San Jose de Apartado*, which Abbess Linda Cutts had visited. Eight people were killed including one of the founders and leaders of the peace community, Luis Eduardo Guerra. The other people were family members including children ages 18 months, 4, and 11. The community has become displaced and its members are living in a very difficult situation.

RELATED ZEN CENTERS AND GROUPS

Buddhism is often likened to a lotus plant. One of the characteristics of the lotus is that it throws off many seeds from which new plants grow. A number of Zen centers have formed which have a close relationship with San Francisco Zen Center. A partial list of these follows:

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www.emptynestzendo.org

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