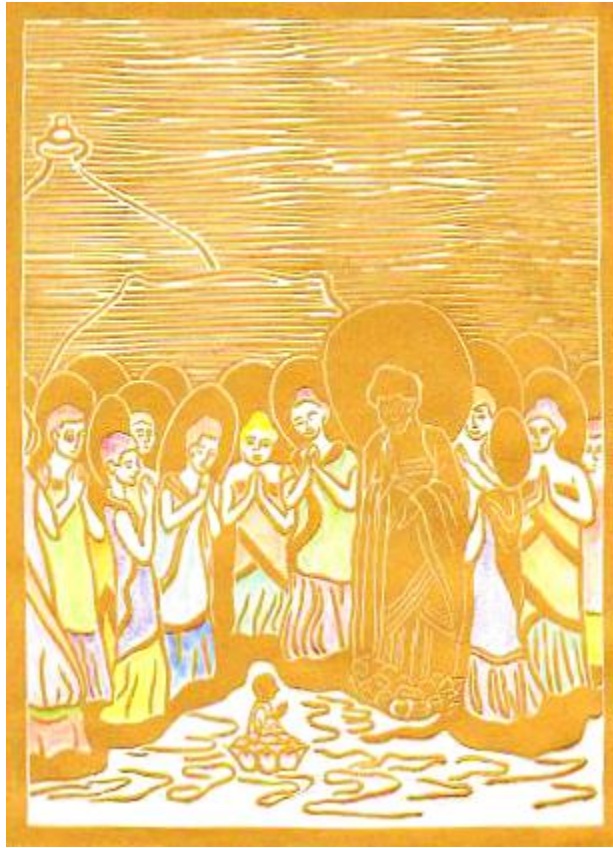


How to Grow a Lotus Blossom:
Reflections



**Essays about, and inspired by,
How to Grow a Lotus Blossom,
a book by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett**

by Rev. Koshin Schomberg

*This book is dedicated to Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett
and to all who follow in her footsteps.*

FOREWORD

*The gift of the Light of the Lord is everywhere;
The palace of the Buddha Nature is within
ourselves.—
The deep, true heart longs to go quickly
So that their happy meeting may occur soon.*

This book consists of two sets of short essays. The essays of the first set (Book I) are all about, or inspired by, teachings that appear in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom, Or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*, a book written by my teacher, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. My intention is to show that every part of this book contains teachings that have practical, helpful applications in ordinary daily life. Even the most seemingly esoteric spiritual experiences described in the pages of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* in fact only exemplify the wonderfully simple teachings of Buddhism—and Soto Zen in particular—at a very deep level. Deep Teaching shows how to do deep training; deep training results in spiritual experience that confirms the truth for oneself of the Teaching.

While, like all writers, I hope for sympathetic readers, I also hope that every reader of these essays will recognize that there is always more to every aspect of training and enlightenment than I or anyone else can either understand or explain. Nowhere in these essays am I saying, “Here is the explanation, and there is no more to it than this.” Rather, I am saying, “I think I have something to say about this subject that may be helpful.—And I am very aware that there is far more to it than I know or can explain.”

My main effort in doing the writing was to follow what I believed (and still believe) to be a sound spiritual instinct. I did not know where the narrative would go when I started writing. Again and again, I came to an impasse, only to find that the seeming impasse was in reality a new point of departure. And so the process of writing became a mirror of the spiritual life as I have experienced it. As in the rest of life, the key in writing these essays was always to look up, ask the Eternal for help, and trust.

In parallel with the essays that constitute the Reflections, I wrote a second series of essays (Book II) in which I attempted to show the way

in which the teachings embodied in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* have been reflected in the life of one of my master's disciples—myself. I do not suppose many people would have given me permission to write about them in such an intimate way, so I chose to write about my own life and training with a strong—and limited—focus on the way in which some of the events in my life reflect and confirm the teachings of my master. I named this narrative, “*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: Reflections in a Disciple's Life.*”

I wrote the two parallel narratives over a period of fifteen months. I made an internet website (www.howtogrowalotusblossom.org) for publishing the essays, and as soon as each successive chapter was written, it was published. Each set of essays forms its own “Book” within this book, and each is preceded by a Table of Contents and Introduction.

I strongly recommend reading the Introduction to each Book, and then reading the chapters in the sequence in which they are listed. This is the sequence in which they were written. Later chapters build upon the foundation laid down in the earlier chapters.

After concluding the two parallel narratives, I continued writing some short essays on related subjects and published them as “Related Writings” on the same website. These essays are included in this book in Appendix I.

At certain key points in my training, I have written a poem that helped me through a difficult period, or that expressed gratitude for the help that I had received. A few of these poems are included in this book in Appendix II.

When I quote from *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, I always quote from the second edition. Plate numbers given are from the second edition. Generally, I provide Plate numbers for the first edition in parentheses when they differ from the numbers in the second edition, though I may not always remember to do this. The second edition contains many more Plates than the first edition.

I begin each essay with a quotation. The quotes that are not credited to a particular source are taken from anonymously-authored Chinese writings on training and enlightenment. The main body of the Chinese text was translated into English by disciples of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. Rev. Master then reworked the English translation in order

to clarify the meaning. The spiritual depth and beauty of the resulting text is remarkable.

When I use the word “he” as a general term, I mean “she” as well as “he”.

I would like to thank all those who caught and reported typos as the essays were first being published on the internet, especially Geoff Nisbet and Ian Davros. I would also like to thank Rev. Mokushin Hart, Rev. Basil Singer, Rev. Hector van der Marel, Rev. Olaf Miller, and Rev. Clement Siddoway for their helpful advice and observations. Rev. Bennet Laraway gave sound editorial advice and comments on content and also re-formatted the text for publication as an e-book, and then arranged for that publication.

I would also like to thank Kaikan Czerniski for permission to use her linoleum-block print *Recognition in the Waveless Sea*. It is the picture on the cover of this book.

Finally, I would like to express my special gratitude to Rev. Alexis Barringer, who died in the second month of the writing of these essays, but who enthusiastically and sympathetically read the first chapters. Indeed, there never was a more sympathetic and generous-hearted friend.

I hope that all who read these Reflections will find something helpful in them.

Rev. Koshin Schomberg
North Cascades Buddhist Priory
May 1, 2015



Table of Contents

BOOK I

*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom:
Reflections*

BOOK II

*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom:
Reflections in a Disciple's Life*

Appendix 1: Related Writings

Appendix 2: Poems

Sources

Serene Reflection Dharma Association

Book I

HOW TO GROW A LOTUS BLOSSOM: REFLECTIONS

*Hold the back erect and still, but keep the body
relaxed.*

*In this way the wise purify their hearts,
Withdrawing into the secret refuge
Of their own inner Treasurehouse.*



TABLE OF CONTENTS OF BOOK I

Introduction

1. Some Keys to Understanding *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*
2. The Five Kenshos
3. Training and Enlightenment
4. Original Enlightenment
5. True Conviction
6. Need and Help
7. The Residual Buddha Nature
8. The Repository of Spiritual Need
9. The Refinery
10. Refining the Ore
11. Unsui
12. Asking
13. Offering
14. Waiting
15. Listening
16. Following
17. If it is Good
18. The Spirit of the Precepts
19. The Letter of the Precepts
20. One Calls, One Replies
21. The Inner Refuge
22. The Divine Medicine
23. Seeking the Key to Life Together
24. Kensho and Death
25. From Death to Rebirth
26. Help for Fear
27. Purification of the Heart
28. The Pearl
29. Opening the Gates
30. A Great Awakening
31. A Paradigm of Conversion
32. Letting Go and Receiving Back
33. The Buddha Land
34. Leaf and Wind
35. Harmonizing Heaven and Earth
36. The Army of Mara

37. The Kaleidoscopic Mind
38. Suffering and Suffering's Cause
39. The Cessation of Suffering and the Eightfold Path
40. Joy and Woe
41. Historical Roots of the Five Ranks
42. The First Rank: The Host Invites the Guest
43. The Second Rank: The Guest Turns Toward the Host
44. The Third Rank: The Host in Rightful Position
45. The Fourth Rank: The Guest in Rightful Position
46. Host and Guest in Undifferentiated Oneness
47. The Five Ranks: Help and Need
48. The Five Ranks: Conclusion
49. Conclusion

Introduction

The Purpose of this Book

In the spring of 1976, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, a Zen Master in the Serene Reflection (Soto Zen) tradition of Buddhism, was drawn into an extended and very deep meditation retreat. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death* was published in 1977. The book is a record of the events and experiences of that retreat.

I am a monastic disciple of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. (I still think of her and refer to her as “Rev. Master” and will do so most of the time in these essays.) I was a young monk in 1976, and my master’s retreat was a great catalyst in my own spiritual life. Indeed, I can never adequately express my gratitude for the help that her example and teaching gave me during that momentous year. And now, thirty-eight years later, and nineteen years after Rev. Master’s death, I continue to find an inexhaustible double fountain of guidance and consolation in the teachings embodied in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

If a man has found something that has proved *for him* to be the most precious thing in all the world, something to which he attributes the saving of his own life, it is only natural that he would long to share this wonderful treasure with others. In a nutshell, this is why this book was written. So, onwards and upwards!

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett was born in England in 1924. She was a gifted musician and composer, She received her formal education at Trinity College of Music, London, and held the degree of Bachelor of Music from Durham University. She was drawn to a religious vocation at an early age, though she was unable to fulfill her longing for the renunciate life until her mid-thirties. She studied Buddhism with the eminent Sri Lankan teacher, Venerable Professor Saddhatissa in London, and became a member of, and taught classes at, the Buddhist Society. She met the Very Reverend Keido Chisan Koho, Zenji, Chief Abbot of Soji Temple, Yokohoma (one of the two main monasteries of the Soto Zen Tradition of Buddhism in Japan) in London when he was on a visit to the West. He invited her to come to Japan to train as his

monastic disciple. In 1961, she left England and travelled first to Malaysia, where she was ordained as a monk by the Venerable Seck Kim Seng, Abbot of Cheng Hoon Teng Temple in Malacca. She then went on to Japan where she became the monastic disciple of Koho Zenji. She received Dharma Transmission from Koho Zenji and was named by him as a Dharma Heir. She served as Foreign Guestmaster of Soji Temple. After her master's death, she returned to the West. She founded Shasta Abbey in Northern California in 1970. She also founded Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in Northumberland, England, and is revered as the Founder of many other temples started by her disciples and grand-disciples, including North Cascades Buddhist Priory (the temple of which this writer is the abbot). Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett died in 1996. She left a profound legacy of Teaching.

When Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett arrived at Soji Temple as a new trainee, she was asked, "What do you seek?" She replied, "The Perfection of Zen!" Her training and teaching throughout the rest of her life demonstrated her commitment to living the *Perfection of Zen*. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* shows that Perfection in a unique and magnificent way.

Who was *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Written For?

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom is a book for anyone who is intuitively drawn to it and who finds, upon starting to read it, that it resonates deeply within their own heart.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom describes a great spiritual journey. It is a personal story that exemplifies deep spiritual Truth that is universal. In publishing this book, Rev. Master was not only expressing a compassionate longing to share with suffering humankind the Way to the cessation of suffering, but also expressing her deep respect for, and faith in, the spiritual capacity of other people. As the subtitle, *How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*, indicates, Rev. Master especially hoped that this book would prove to be of help to people coming face to face with death.

How to Get the Book

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom was first published in 1977 by Shasta Abbey Press. A revised and expanded second edition was published in 1993.

As of current date (March, 2016), *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is out of print, but the plan is to republish it electronically.

Meanwhile, if you wish to read *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* and have not been able to find a copy at a reasonable price (scarcity has driven up the price of both used copies and the few remaining new copies), please contact us at the following e-mail address:

tjsncbp@gmail.com

We have some copies of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* that we can loan out if the borrower is willing to put down a refundable deposit and pay the modest shipping cost both directions. (U.S. Postal Service media mail rates are very reasonable.)

Other Recommended Reading

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom was written by a monk who trained and taught in the Soto Zen (Serene Reflection) tradition of Buddhism. It should not be surprising, therefore, that this book is a thoroughly Buddhist— and thoroughly Soto Zen—document. I strongly recommend that anyone reading *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* also read other books by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, especially *Zen is Eternal Life* and *The Wild White Goose*. These books, as well as some of Rev. Master's recorded Dharma talks, are available as free downloads from Shasta Abbey. Just go to www.shastaabbey.org or google "Shasta Abbey." At the top of the home page click on "Teachings." This will take you to the Dharma page. ("Dharma" means "Truth," "the Teaching.") In the "Teachings" list on the left side of this page, click on "Publications" (near the bottom of the list) in order to access the books.

How to Read How to Grow a Lotus Blossom

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom is not "light reading." It is a pure and profound expression of religious experience and teaching. It has a powerful effect on anyone who reads it. Strong medicine is usually

best taken in small, regular doses. I recommend reading just one or two of the many short chapters (called “Plates” because the text of each chapter is accompanied by, and explains the meaning of, an illustration) at each reading. Read the text; look at the illustrations that accompany each chapter; be still with it; let it sink in.

If the reader finds that, part way into the book, it is all just too much, it *may* be best to put the book aside for a while. That does not mean that there is something wrong with either the reader or the book: it may be that the timing is not quite right yet. I encourage people to trust their own spiritual instincts and to keep an open mind and heart.

Generosity of Spirit

In Buddhism it is said that the gift of the Dharma far surpasses all other gifts. Rev. Master spoke of her spiritual journey in 1976 and 1977, as “the greatest experience of my life.” This experience made it possible for Rev. Master to train and teach at a deeper level *and point the way for others to do the same*. In the last paragraph of the Foreword to the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master explains why she is publishing the book:

“Fear of being laughed at, fear of being regarded as a publicity-seeker or a crank, fear of what the world may think may stop a lot of people from writing down, and being willing to admit to and share, what they do experience. I personally feel this to be wrong. In a day and age when far too many people are terrified of death, perhaps far too few are willing to admit to what they, themselves, have experienced when brought back from the door of death and far too many are afraid of what the medical profession and others will say if they speak of their experiences. If those who have experienced these things speak out, much fear can be removed, much joy can be experienced and much grief prevented. For these reasons I wish to share with the reader this great experience.”

Chapter 1

Some Keys to Understanding *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*

The Road Map

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett wrote several books. She said, “All my books are road maps.” A road map tells us how to navigate a landscape in order to go from one place to another. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is a *spiritual* road map, the map of a spiritual journey.

Every journey has a starting point. The starting point of this particular spiritual journey is shown clearly in the full title of the book: *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*. The journey begins with Rev. Master facing the very real possibility of imminent death. The first chapter of the book shows how she considered her options, and how she chose to let go of external things and turn deeply within through pure meditation. She *could* have gone in a direction of despair; she chose instead to go in the direction of true resolve and faith.

In the beginning of Rev. Master’s retreat, the spiritual landscape was bleak indeed. This reflected the intense and painful upwelling of unresolved spiritual need—unresolved spiritual jangles all lined up and in a rush to get HELP. Again, she *could* have tried to escape from the pain; instead she chose to meditate through it. Years of dedicated training stood her in good stead—and still, where she might have faltered and turned aside, she *freely* chose to go straight on into the darkness.

Our greatest spiritual needs require help from the ultimate Source of help. Nothing less will do. In order for this to happen, we have to surrender completely to our own True Nature, in Buddhism often called “Buddha Nature,” “the Eternal,” “True Self,” “Dharmakaya” (“Body of Truth”), “True Master”—there are many other terms that are used. In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master usually uses an ancient Soto Zen term “The Lord of the House.” (More about this term below.) The nature of the road map that is *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is therefore essentially very simple: it is the map that shows

how to surrender to the Lord of the House fully, and what flows forth from this act.

As Rev. Master continued on her way through a desolate spiritual landscape, the help flowed in to the spiritual need. And as this happened, the landscape gradually became less bleak. Eventually the journey passed through a terrain of great peace and beauty—a spiritual landscape of gratitude, love, and a vast and majestic expanse of Teaching—Wisdom—spreading to the horizon in all directions. How did such a great transformation happen? This question will be the subject of many of these essays.

The Buddha taught his disciples that they must find the Truth for themselves: “The Buddhas do but point the way; thou must go alone.” During the months of her retreat, Rev. Master experienced in great detail and depth the truth of the teachings of Buddhism. This should not be surprising, for she walked the Path that the Buddhas have walked, and to which They point. And, having walked that Path, she too points the way for those who *choose* to walk the same Path.

Where did the journey terminate? It never did. Rev. Master chose to go in the direction of the complete conversion of the spiritual need, its transformation into *enlightenment*. And for the rest of her life she continued to train—to *practice* what she had been taught during the months of retreat. She never claimed to be enlightened, or to be immune from error. She was not a savior. She was an ordinary human being who *chose* to follow her True Nature—and who, in an important aspect of that *following*, shared the merit of her training with others.

The Lord of the House

Zen Buddhism does not affirm the existence of a Deity that is separate from human beings and the rest of the world. But that does not mean that Zen Buddhism is “atheistic.” Rather, Zen Buddhism emphasizes that all beings possess the “Buddha Nature”—the equivalent of saying, in Western religious terms, that God is indwelling, or immanent, in all beings. The Japanese term “kensho” translates as “awakening to one’s True Nature (or True Reality).” The reality of the Buddha Nature is not something that can be proved intellectually. It has to be directly experienced. All beings possess the seed of such experience in the form of a pure intuitive sense that there is That which is greater than, yet not separate from, oneself. Under the right conditions, this seed

(which is the root of faith) can develop to maturity. Correct spiritual training and teaching create these favorable conditions.

The Buddha taught that the root cause of suffering is to be found in spiritual ignorance and craving. Ignorance of *what?*—Ignorance of our own Buddha Nature. Craving for *what?* Ultimately, craving for That which we think we have lost, or from which we believe we are separated, but which in fact is never separate from us even for a moment, being *all* of each of us—infinite, unconditional, all-embracing Love, i.e. our own Buddha Nature. In order for this ignorance to be enlightened, and this craving to find peace, our whole being must be oriented away from false refuges and redirected back (or inwards) toward our True Nature. At the deepest level this constitutes what is best described as a “reharmonization” of our body and mind with the Buddha Nature. This is the great theme of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

In Buddhism, many different terms have been used to designate the Buddha Nature: “Dharmakaya” (Body of Truth), “True Mind,” “Heart-Mind,” “True Self,” “Cosmic Buddha,” “the Unborn,” “Original Enlightenment” and “Great Immaculacy” are some examples. Mostly I use the term “the Eternal”—probably because it was the one Rev. Master used most often during a key period in my training. In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* she usually uses the term “the Lord of the House.” This term has its origin in Tang Dynasty China (ninth century A.D.), where the great master Tung-shan Liang-Chieh (in Japanese, “Tozan Ryokai”) and his disciple Su-shan Kuang-jen (Sozan Konin) developed a teaching describing the process of reharmonization with the Buddha Nature in terms of five stages (the “Five Ranks”). These five stages were described in terms of an analogy. In this analogy, the Buddha Nature is represented by the “the Lord of the House” (or “Host”) and our body and mind is represented by “guest” (or “vassal”). I will give a more detailed explanation of this teaching later in these reflections.

I do not think there is anything accidental in the fact that Rev. Master *instinctively* gravitated to the term “the Lord of the House” in the crisis of her retreat. This is the term used by Great Master Keizan (Japanese, thirteenth century) in the majestic opening chapters of his great work the *Denkoroku* (“The Transmission of the Light”), and in choosing this term he was harkening back to the above-mentioned

Chinese Masters who were regarded as the founders of the Soto (Chinese: “Tsao Tung”) Branch of Zen. And what is the quintessential “Soto Zen” teaching that these masters enunciated?—That of the Five Ranks, which paints with very broad strokes the process of reharmonization with the Buddha Nature. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* provides a much more detailed picture, but it portrays the *same process*.

The Law of Karma-Rebirth

The law of karma states that all of our volitional actions have consequences, and that these consequences *necessarily* (Rev. Master liked to use the word “inexorably”) flow out from their causes. Some kinds of actions *necessarily* result in the deepening of suffering, whereas other kinds of actions *necessarily* result in the lessening of suffering. Actions which express greed, hate and delusion result in the deepening of suffering. Actions which express genuine compassion, love and wisdom result in the lessening of suffering. Actions that are out of harmony with our Buddha Nature result in the deepening of suffering. Actions that are in harmony with our Buddha Nature have consequences that run in the direction of liberation from suffering.

There are three kinds of volitional action—actions of thought, speech and body. Of these three, action of thought is primary because it always precedes the others, and because so much of what flows forth from our actions derives from the *attitude of mind* with which they are done. Furthermore, even when our capacity to act in speech and body is extremely limited, we are normally still able to make important moment-to-moment choices in thought. In the words of the Buddha: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. . . . If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.” (From *Dhammapada*, Ch 1, translated by Max Muller.)

While our volitional actions have consequences in every aspect of our lives, the ultimate experiencing of karmic consequence is in *feeling*. The suffering that flows forth from evil actions is a *signal* flashing the

message *WRONG WAY!*. The peace of mind and heart that flows forth from right action is a signal flashing the message *RIGHT WAY!*.

The consequences of a volitional action can manifest in the immediate aftermath of the action, at a later time in the same lifetime, or in a future life. The law of karma cannot be understood in its full meaning without reference to the teaching on rebirth. This teaching was explicitly excluded from orthodox Western religion many centuries ago, and the materialistic dogma that has replaced religious dogma for many Western people also denies or ignores this teaching and the entire part of human experience that confirms its truth. A few years ago I read that someone had done a poll of ordinary Americans, asking many people whether they had experienced memories from previous lives. A substantial number of people (something like thirty percent, I believe) said that they had experienced past-life memories, but virtually all of them said that they kept it to themselves out of worry about how other people might react if they were to talk about their experiences.

The Buddhist teaching on rebirth differs in an important way from the concept of *reincarnation*, which posits an enduring self or soul undergoing a series of incarnations in different bodies and situations in accordance with its good and bad actions. This concept of reincarnation does not actually accord accurately with our most clear memories of past lives, for in such memories we are always aware that the person —or being—whose experience is being remembered is a *different* person from ourselves. This is in striking contrast to our clear memories from earlier in this present life, for even though there is a sense in which, because of constant change, we are not quite the same person as we were, say, a year ago, or when we were little children, we still remember things we did, and things that happened to us, in our life as being *our* past experience and not that of another person.

The correct understanding of rebirth is vitally important if one is to do deep spiritual training. While some memories from past lives can arise in consciousness as vividly as any memory from our present life, the fact that these are memories of events from the life of *someone other than oneself* provides a great support for the objectivity of perspective that allows one to both learn from the teaching inherent in these events, and also be a conduit through

which the compassion and wisdom of the Eternal can flow to the jangles of pain and confusion that we have *inherited* from that previous life. This is especially important in training with the hardest knots of spiritual pain and confusion inherited from the past—the knots of self-judgement.

On Visions

The illustrations in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* are as important as the text, especially in the second edition (1993), in which more time and effort could be devoted to the accurate pictorial representation of the experiences than was possible in the first edition. Rev. Master and the monks doing the illustrations took great care to accurately depict the *visual* aspect of her experience, just as the text describes as accurately as possible the emotional, physical and intellectual aspects. It is said that “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* exemplifies this maxim to perfection.



One of the first visions described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is represented in the above, which is based on the illustration in Plate I.

The text accompanying Plate I describes Rev. Master's understanding of the nature of the choice she is making—the choice to go into a great and daunting spiritual darkness in pure meditation, leaving the occupations and diversions associated with the opposites of complacency (the road on the right) and inadequacy (the road on the left) behind. She writes, “So, refusing to go down either road, I see nothing but the great mountain range before me. Over these mountains heavy storms rage. The mountain faces are sheer like glass. How can they be scaled by a being who has no knowledge of how to climb, no rope, no means of grasping the glassy surface?”

At the time of this experience, Rev. Master was so weak that she could hardly move. Obviously, she was not physically on hands and knees before a material mountain range, and she was not looking about her for a physical rope. She was *spiritually* on “hands and knees” before an awesome *spiritual* unknown. She was looking for the *spiritual* way forward, the *spiritual* tool for going into that immense spiritual darkness. The vision that she was having at the time, and that the illustration in Plate I so beautifully represents, is a visual *metaphor* for that spiritual experience. The use of the word “vision” as the generic term applying to such experiences derives from our strong human emphasis on the sense of sight: there can also be auditory “visions” and “visions” associated with the other senses.

Our physical senses convey information about the world around us. At its most basic material level, this information is essential for our physical survival. We can *see* the bus coming down the road in our direction, and we can then step out of its way; we can *hear* the sound of the glass breaking in the window above us and duck before it hits us; we can *smell* the gas leaking from the broken gas line and get out of the house before it blows up; we can *touch* the edge of the knife to determine how sharp it is before we use it. Genuine spiritual visions happen when *the Buddha Nature* takes charge of the functioning of the senses in order to convey spiritual teaching. This spiritual experience usually overlays, but does not obscure, the experience of the familiar physical world: Rev. Master often emphasized that while she was having the visions described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, she remained fully aware of her body and her physical surroundings.

This discussion of visions has been limited until now to visions involving the five physical senses. It is important to add that there is a class of vision in which there is no reference to, or mediation by, the physical senses. Visions of this kind can be described as “thought-sense visions.” (In traditional Buddhist teaching, there are six senses—the five physical senses and the sense through which we experience thoughts.) Such visions should not be confused with insights resulting from reasoning and analysis. Rather, they are *immediate apprehensions of Truth originating directly from the Buddha Nature*. They transcend the *seeming* dichotomy between intuition and intellect: they are pure intuitive insight manifesting in intellect. For example, when the Buddha said, “Oh monks, there is an Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated . . .” [in the *Udana Scripture*],” on what basis in experience could he have made such a statement? The answer is that he had spiritually *awakened to* this True Reality, and the truth of Its Unborn and Undying Nature was experienced directly in “pure intuitive insight manifesting in intellect.” Since the Buddha's time, many people who have followed in his footsteps have awakened to the Buddha Nature and come to know, *for themselves*, the truth of this teaching.

In the Foreword to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master distinguishes between genuine visions and *makyo*, a Japanese term indicating hallucinatory phenomena that beset some meditators. For most people, *makyo* (if it arises at all) dissipates within the first year or two of practice. But in a multitude of forms, *makyo can* manifest later in training, especially prior to a first *kensho* (genuine awakening to one's True Nature). One way to look at such experiences is in terms of a simple analogy. Imagine that a radio signal source is sending out a consistent, clear signal. Imagine that there is a radio signal receiver that is tuned “off” the right frequency, resulting in an unintelligible, unreliable noise. The more inaccurate the tuning, the more scrambled and confused the signal will *seem* to be. As the tuning improves, the signal is heard more clearly and more intelligibly. When the tuning is precisely right, the signal is received in full strength and clarity. When applied to the distinction between *makyo* and genuine visions, this analogy points out that *makyo* are the result of a “mistuned” spiritual “receiver.” When the tuning is right, genuine teaching is discerned where previously there was confusion and illusion. In other words, in the beginning of serious training in meditation and the Precepts, we

are relatively out of harmony with our True Nature, and this disharmony scrambles the “signal”; if training proceeds properly, we gradually come into an increasingly harmonious relationship with the Buddha Nature and genuine visions *may* happen.

One of the most intense and difficult forms of makyo is one that I call the “karmic horrors.” In its most extreme form, this kind of makyo affects relatively few trainees. Less extreme forms are not uncommon. The karmic horrors are a confused mishmash of what appear to be memories of intense, often-gory mayhem and suffering (present life, past life, or a combination of the two), accompanied by powerful emotions (such as fear, despair, horror, and hatred). The trainee who is going through this firestorm of horror must resolutely meditate, refusing to get caught up in the endlessly detailed memories (or seeming memories) and emotional drama. A true teacher can help a disciple through this spiritual ordeal, provided the disciple is willing to follow the teacher's instructions. It is *essential* to stay grounded in meditation *and* in ordinary daily life. The karmic horrors derive their power from a mass of unconverted karmic confusion and pain. It will take time—years of training—for the principal karmic threads to be unwound from one another so that the help of the Eternal can come to each one when all conditions ripen and the timing is just right. The training during those years should be seen as the gradual conversion of the main body of the spiritual pain and confusion. Only that which needs special attention, and in which clearest and deepest teaching about the Precepts is embodied, will need to be fully experienced in memory one day.

Genuine visions do not originate in selfish volition, physical or mental illness, spiritual confusion, or some kind of spiritual “possession” by immaterial beings. We can fantasize in a way that makes our fantasy seem real or almost real; a person suffering from hallucinations can have sense experiences that have little or no relation to material or spiritual reality. But a genuine vision conveys teaching *originating from our infinitely wise and compassionate True Nature* and relating to our real (not imagined) physical and spiritual welfare.

Rev. Master always emphasized that the *teaching*, and putting the teaching into practice, not the particular form in which the teaching is conveyed, is what matters. Some trainees have visions regularly. Some trainees have visions for awhile and then stop having them, or have

them much less frequently. Some trainees train for years or decades without having visions, and then start having them. Some trainees never have them, or *believe* that they never have them. (I suspect that all trainees eventually have “intellectual visions,” whether or not they have visions associated with the physical senses. But many people think of visions as being limited to the sense of sight, or to the physical senses.) For all trainees, “to live by Zen is to live an ordinary daily life.” Every aspect of that “ordinary daily life” is teaching and helping: the only question is whether we are *taking* our daily experience as teaching. What good would any number of genuine visions be to someone who is unable to learn from them and apply their teaching in daily life? To all who tend to be worried about the visions in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* I say, “Forget the external form of the experience and focus on the teaching. Look at the way in which Rev. Master takes the teaching to heart and puts it into practice.”

Rev. Master strongly cautioned that it is always a mistake—and one that can have serious consequences—to *try* to have visions, or, indeed, to grasp after what one imagines to be “enlightenment” by any means, and in any form, whatsoever. Rev. Master never tried to have visions or to get “enlightened.” She did her daily training and allowed the results of the training to take care of themselves. Her essential choice in the spring of 1976 was to wholeheartedly *do* that training in the midst of a great spiritual crisis. Rev. Master could not know when she began her retreat where it would lead. It turned out that this great crisis in her life was also a great spiritual opportunity. In choosing to meditate deeply and entrust her life wholly into the hands of the Eternal, she made it possible for the potential within that opportunity to be fully realized. All who choose to follow in her footsteps are the immediate beneficiaries of her great spiritual legacy.

Chapter 2

The Five Kenshos

*In the sea of suffering, the waters of karma are
flowing high;
In the river of desire, the evil current is streaming
fast.
Whose gift is the light of compassion, sympathy
and wisdom?
When we cross the stream we might perish in the
mass of water that has no end.
But the boat of Compassion appears and shows us
our Divine Endowment.*

Introductory Note

This chapter of these Reflections is intended to supplement the short essay on kenshos in the Foreword to the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (titled “Kenshos” in the first edition). Please note that training and enlightenment is one continuous, infinitely complex process. No one can fully comprehend that complexity, much less describe it adequately in words. Nonetheless, for those who wish to do deep training, the teaching of the five kenshos provides invaluable teaching. Just as Newtonian physics describes the behavior of large bodies accurately enough for us to put a man on the moon, even though the discoveries of relativity and quantum physics reveal a far more complex and puzzling world than is described in Newton's laws, so the teaching of the five kenshos provides an accurate, if abstract, representation of the full process of training and enlightenment.

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett taught that everyone goes through the same stages in training, but that everyone *experiences* these stages in their own unique way. Within the stage of the third kensho, in particular, different people may experience some of the sub-stages within the kensho in different order from one another. The Eternal meets the spiritual need of each individual with the exact form of help that the need requires, and at the exact moment that the help will be of greatest benefit. No one can fathom such Wisdom and Compassion.

But we can experience it. As Rev. Master wrote, “It is the *stages* of this particular path that the reader should carefully study, not so that he can have *my* experience, but so that he may have his *own*.”

The First Kensho

Imagine a great, windswept sea separating two lands. A person stands on one shore and looks in the direction of the other land across the sea, but it is far away and cannot be seen. The person feels a strong inner need to get to that land across the sea. Is one hearing in one's heart a distant call, a beckoning from a far-off land? There is a small boat at hand. But one would be going into unknown perils with no guarantee of safe arrival on the distant, unseen shore. The choice to set out on such a journey is a serious choice. Much time may be spent on the shore pondering the pros and cons of making such a journey.

Suppose our friend decides to begin the voyage. It is a vast sea and no land is in sight across the waters. How is this person going to know which direction to go? It would make sense to sail directly away from the shore. But when that shore is not in view anymore, how is one to navigate?

If others have made the journey and returned, providing directions for succeeding voyagers, that is a big help. But what if all the directions refer to a particular star that the voyager must identify and steer by? And what if one is having trouble identifying that star? One hunts and hunts, gradually eliminating the competing stars. And then one finds it. There is a great “Eureka!” moment, together with a flood of certainty that one *can* indeed make this journey. Though there may be times when clouds will obscure the star, it has not ceased to exist: it will always reappear to show the way.

The sea is the sea of suffering. The boat is the boat of training. The land from which the voyager departs is worldly life before beginning training. The land which is the voyager's destination is reunion with the Eternal. For all people who make this journey, there are five stages in the voyage. These are the five kenshos. The word “kensho” means “awakening to our True Nature.” So there are five stages of awakening. But it is equally true, and in some ways more helpful, to think of the kenshos as five stages in one *continuous process* in which the total spiritual need of the trainee receives the full help of the Buddha Nature.

The “Eureka!” moment in which one knows that one has found the guiding star is the first kensho, for in the first kensho one has the first great awakening to the Buddha Nature. At the beginning of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master wrote, “Whether I am well or sick, brightly alive or dying, hold fast to the Lord of the House.” This certainty of the Refuge of one’s True Nature is the great gift of the first kensho. How does one keep one’s course fixed upon the guiding star? Rev. Master wrote, “Nothing matters; mindfulness is all.”—In other words, let go of external things and meditate. *We look to the Eternal* through pure meditation.

This, then, is the first stage of the voyage across the sea of suffering: the reorientation of our mind and heart away from false refuges and toward the True Refuge of the Eternal. When we know how to take refuge in the Eternal, we are on our way. The Buddha designated the person who had reached this stage as a “stream entrant.” The Buddha also made it very clear that the first kensho is a new beginning, not an end, of training. It is said that the person who has experienced the first kensho will need, at most, seven more rebirths in the realms of suffering in order to complete the conversion of karma. That is very cold comfort indeed when one considers how much suffering can be packed into a single lifetime. “At most, seven more rebirths” can thus be understood to be saying, “Yes, you have had a first kensho. Good beginning! Now get on with it, because if you stop here, you are in big trouble! Greed, hate and delusion—the causes of suffering—still need to be trained and converted.”

The Second Kensho

Having left the shore and found the direction in which to sail, the voyager now traverses a great expanse of water, sometimes placid, sometimes turbulent, and hiding dangerous reefs and shoals that threaten to sink or ground the boat. The voyager quickly finds that it is one thing to identify the guiding star and another to keep on course when it is temporarily obscured by clouds, or when winds blow in a contrary direction, or when one has to go out of the way to avoid a reef.

This is the stage of the second kensho, an “on-going” kensho in which the course of training takes one through many moments of insight and

acceptance alternating with periods of spiritual confusion and pain. What is going on during this period, which usually lasts for years?

In the second kensho the trainee is struggling with deep-rooted habitual tendencies that result in suffering. These tendencies have been reinforced in this present lifetime, but their deep roots lie in the past-life inheritance, and it is only when we see the dark ignorance that characterizes the most confused and anguished parts of that past-life inheritance that we can fully appreciate why some of these habitual tendencies are so insistent and obdurate. This is called the “habit-energy” of karma. Of course, there is more to the second kensho than seemingly-interminable slogging through misery: there are the many “little moments that make one dance” as well—the encouraging reminders from the Eternal: “I am here with you through all the twists and turns. Keep looking up!”

The trainee is presented with many crucial choices during the second kensho. Karma “comes due” (a term I will discuss in a later essay in this series) in forms that challenge faith, certainty and resolve. Again and again, the trainee has to choose whether to go the way of the world and worldly religion, or whether to walk the lonelier and seemingly more risky path of deeper spirituality. In *Zen is Eternal Life*, Rev. Master writes that the evidence of successful training in the second kensho is willingness, “in face of all opposition, distrust and misunderstanding” to “carry on in the path he [the trainee] has chosen, truly caring nothing for material things, fame, fortune, reputation, honour, life or death.”

The person who has completed the second kensho is said to be a “once-returner,” meaning that, at most, one more rebirth in a realm of suffering will be needed in order to complete the conversion of karma. The trials undergone in the second kensho strengthen faith and willingness. And faith and willingness will be required when the trainee arrives at the great spiritual darkness that is the threshold of the third kensho.

The Third Kensho

In the metaphor of the voyager crossing the sea of suffering, the third kensho begins when the boat leaves the shallower waters with their reefs and shoals, and enters into deep water over which fierce winds howl, driving great waves that toss the boat and crash against its hull.

But as the boat sails on through the storm, the wind and waves diminish. At last the sun breaks through the clouds, the winds die, and the voyager sails across a bright and serene sea.

In the third kensho the deepest spiritual need finally meets the help of the Eternal head-on. The intensity of the spiritual darkness that precedes this “happy meeting” is proportional to the depth of the need. When the preliminary work of conversion has been completed in the first two kenshos, the unconditional willingness of the trainee makes it possible for the Compassion of the Eternal to transform great need into great enlightenment in the third kensho.

A great spiritual brightness accompanies the “happy meeting.” The light of Wisdom shines back over the whole stream of karma, illuminating all the tragic events, all the anguish and confusion, grief and despair, anger and self-judgment, the doubt and desire—and *all* are seen in their wonderful True Nature: “When we look upon the stream of karma with enlightened eyes, we see not a single speck of dust.” The path into the future is also illuminated, for a flood of Teaching shows how to live so as to stay fixed upon the “guiding star” of the Eternal through the constantly-changing conditions of daily life. This is the deep meaning of the Precepts, and in the third kensho the Precepts are comprehended at a new level. The single most important part of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* for all who long for full reharmonization with the Buddha Nature is Rev. Master's commentary on the Precepts in the text accompanying Plate XII. I will have much more to say about Preceptual practice in the pages that follow.

The trainee at the level of the third kensho is said to be a “non-returned,” meaning that, if any future rebirths are needed, they will not be in realms of suffering. This can be looked at like this: The deepest spiritual need has received the help of the Eternal and has dissolved into Immaculacy. However, at the time of death there still may be some unfulfilled purpose that requires a rebirth. For example, the trainee may, either before or after commencing formal training, have made a vow that has not been fulfilled at the time of death.

The Fourth Kensho

The voyager in our metaphor is now approaching the distant land toward which he embarked so long ago. Again shoals and reefs

appear. But now the voyager is much more experienced and more readily avoids the hazards. When they are not altogether avoided, he more quickly frees himself and continues on. Sometimes he sails through emerald islands surrounded by turquoise waters in which dolphins, fish and turtles freely swim. He sails on, and his heart rejoices in the voyage.

The fourth kensho is, like the second kensho, an on-going kensho. Just as the orientation upon the Eternal initiated in the first kensho is more deeply and thoroughly established through all the twists and turns of the second kensho, so the reharmonization of body and mind with the Eternal that takes place during the third kensho is deepened and broadened in the fourth kensho. There is *no limit* to the degree to which reharmonization can be developed through on-going training. Nor is there any lack of problems to be solved. But now the trainee knows how to turn to the Eternal for the solutions, how to “wait upon the Lord,” how to listen for the quiet prompting of the Heart, and how to follow gladly and willingly when that prompting comes.

Great Master Dogen's master told him, “Study in detail. Do not think it is easy.” The deep understanding of Preceptual Truth that is given in the third kensho flows forth into every aspect of daily life in the fourth kensho. The trainee finds the Love of the Eternal in joy and in sorrow, in tragedy and in triumph, in health and in illness. The training of illness, old age and dying is hard training. And it is Buddha.

The person who has reached this level of training is said to be an “arahant,” one for whom the conversion of karma is so complete—the spiritual need so fully met—that there is no longer a need for rebirth in any realm. The training of a person who so fully reharmonizes with the Eternal benefits all beings. The merit of such a life is incalculable.

The Fifth Kensho

At last the voyager reaches the destination and steps out upon the shore. He takes nothing with him, and the whole world is his. He is alone, and That which he sought in making this journey is with him wherever he goes. He is free to go on into an unknown land or to return to his boat and return to his land of origin in order to show others the way across the sea of suffering, but he will not *willfully* do anything. He came to this shore because Something called to him and he intuitively heard the call and said “Yes” to it. Now he will only go

where It leads him, for in truth, and beyond any possibility of the possibility of the possibility of doubt, It is *all* of him.

I believe I remember Rev. Master speaking of the fifth kensho as normally happening at the time of death. This makes sense to me. Just as the first kensho is a new beginning, I believe that the fifth kensho is a new beginning in which the merit of a lifetime of training dissolves into the infinite Ocean of Merit of the Eternal. This merit can then be used by the Eternal for the benefit of all beings. In this fifth kensho there is undifferentiated oneness with the Eternal. In Sir Edwin Arnold's majestic and beautiful words, "The dewdrop slips into the shining sea."

That which is called the "Bodhisattva Mind" is simply the unconditional willingness to be a vessel and instrument of the Eternal: "The leaf goes where the Wind blows and does not disobey the Wind." This willingness transcends all opposites. It originates in, and returns to, the Eternal. All we have to do is not obstruct its flow through clinging, self-judgment or fear. If at the time of death we can meet the infinite Love of the Eternal with the willingness that is wholly *of* the Eternal, then indeed will the leaf go where the Wind blows—to the benefit of all beings, past, present and future.

I think of the fifth kensho as a new beginning via the Eternal's dispersing of merit—the fulfillment of the first Bodhisattva vow: "Living beings are beyond numbering. I vow to row them to the other shore." The endless following of the Eternal is Eternal Life.

The Boat of Compassion

The boat in the metaphor that I have used in discussing the five kenshos represents training. The verse that heads this chapter of these Reflections refers to the "boat of Compassion," which represents the help flowing from the Eternal. We can get a more complete picture of the process of training/enlightenment by imagining the boat of training and the boat of Compassion sailing side by side through the sea of suffering. Most of the time, the voyager does not see the boat of Compassion that is always by his side. He has to trust that it is there. Yet, whether he sees it or not—indeed, whether he always *trusts* that it is there or not—it is always present, providing help in all need.

This relationship between our spiritual training and the help of the Eternal is the subject of Chapter 3 of these Reflections.

Chapter 3

Training and Enlightenment

It is heretical to believe that training and enlightenment are separable for, in Buddhism, the two are one and the same. Since training embraces enlightenment, the very beginning of training contains the whole of Original Enlightenment; as this is so, the teacher tells his disciples never to search for enlightenment outside of training since the latter mirrors enlightenment.

—Great Master Dogen

What is Training?

In Buddhism, “training” (or “practice”) refers to living in such a way as to harmonize with the Buddha Nature. The Buddha discovered, practiced and taught the Middle Way, a way of training that transcends two opposite forms of indulgence: indulgence of the passions; and indulgence of spiritual greed that attempts to “storm heaven” through ascetic self-denial. Both forms of indulgence result in the deepening of suffering. The Middle Way leads to the cessation of suffering.

The Middle Way is like a jewel with three facets: Precepts; meditation; and wisdom. For readers who are familiar with the Buddha's teaching of the Eightfold Path, these three facets break down as follows: Precepts (*Sila*)—Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood; meditation (*Dhyana*)—Right Effort, Right Meditation, Right Mindfulness; wisdom (*Prajna*)—Right Understanding.

I have already mentioned the practice of the Precepts and meditation, and I will have much more to say about both. But how does one practice wisdom? The key to the answer lies in the Buddha's teaching that *faith* is the root of wisdom. And how does one *practice* faith?—By “looking up” spiritually, choosing to hold fast to the quiet intuitive sense that there is an all-embracing, enduring Goodness and Compassion at the heart of existence. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*

shows how to practice faith in the midst of the greatest crises, and how faith blossoms into wisdom.

Different traditions within Buddhism emphasize different facets of the Middle Way. For example, the Zen tradition emphasizes meditation; the Shin tradition emphasizes devotional faith; the Vinaya tradition emphasizes the Precepts. But such emphasis can be misleading, for these three facets are really aspects of an indivisible unity. Therefore, if we try to do meditation practice without taking the Precepts to heart, we will continually undermine any progress that we might begin to make in meditation by acting non-Preceptually in daily life. Similarly, if we try to follow the Precepts without the benefit of the spiritual perspective provided by meditation, we tend to get stuck in a literalistic interpretation of the meaning of the Precepts, turning them into an externalized moral code, and miss the true *spirit* of the Precepts. And if we attempt to do either meditation or Preceptual training without faith, we will just stay “stuck in our heads,” as Rev. Master liked to say. That is, we will be stuck with the kind of externalized view of the Precepts to which I have alluded, and the practice of meditation will be stuck at the level of a kind of psychological exercise. One can spiritually starve on such a diet: “The portrait of a rice cake does not satisfy hunger.”

What is Enlightenment?

“Enlightenment” has a number of interrelated meanings in Buddhism. But there are two basic meanings from which all other meanings are derived. First, “enlightenment” refers to the experience of awakening to our True Nature. This is the meaning of “kensho.” Second, “enlightenment” refers to “Original Enlightenment.” Chapter 4 of these Reflections is devoted to this subject, so I will pass over it here.

Rev. Master's Foreword to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* reveals that there is a lot more to the “experience of enlightenment” than many people have thought. Rev. Master describes the first kensho as a “lightning flash”—that accords well with the idea of kensho as a great sudden awakening. But she describes the second and third kenshos as developing over a number of months or years. In this view, which is based in actual experience of training beyond the first kensho, kensho is a *process* of enlightenment with identifiable stages, or phases, some of which include “lightning flash” experiences of awakening.

One Process—Two Aspects

Imagine an old-fashioned barber pole with the parallel white and red spiraling stripes. Now imagine that the pole is rotating, so that you see a wave of red moving against a white background.—Or do you see a wave of white moving against a red background? Focus on the red, and the white becomes the background; focus on the white and the red becomes the background. Focus on both at once and they move together—two aspects of one unified flow. Let us call one color “training” and the other color “kensho.” If we look at the “barber pole” from a point of view which emphasizes our actions and the effort that we make, the “training” stripe is in the foreground. If we look at the pole from the point of view of the help *continually* being provided by the Eternal—and, in particular, major points at which we become fully aware of (awakened to) that help—the “kensho” stripe is in the foreground. If we focus on both stripes together, the “training” and “kensho” stripes are seen to be two aspects of *one process*.

Just as it makes no sense to view the red stripe on the barber pole as the *goal* of the white stripe, so it makes no sense to view enlightenment as the goal of training. Such a view assumes that training and enlightenment are two different things, one of which (training) can be a means of attaining the other (kensho), which is the end, or goal. But that is not how it really works.

Most of the time, it is easier to see our actions and our efforts than the ways in which the Eternal is helping us. After all, we are entirely responsible for our own actions and effort, so it is only natural that we would be mostly occupied with that side of things; we can trust the Eternal to take care of Its side of things. Moreover, spiritual ignorance makes beings blind to the help flowing from their True Nature. For these two reasons, the kensho side of the training/kensho process is easily overlooked.

This view of training and kensho as being two aspects of one process has important implications. They include the following:

- All people who are training are in the kensho *process*, whether they know it or not.
- It is just as true to say that kensho makes training possible as to say that training makes kensho possible.

- Anyone who can do spiritual training can experience kensho. It is not reserved for a special class of people.

Five Kenshos in One Meditation

The five kenshos are identifiable stages in one continuous process. We go through these stages again and again on many levels. I would like to use the example of sitting meditation to show how this happens at the simplest level. Since our experience of meditation is always changing (though what meditation really is does not change), and since the subject matter itself is infinitely complex, any description I can give is of necessity incomplete and simplistic.—But, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Right at the beginning of meditation we have a choice whether to just mark time, or to “sit up straight in the presence of the Buddhas,” making that gentle, but firm, effort to stay in the present moment. If we do the latter, we are in the “first kensho” phase of the meditation: getting properly oriented. It often happens that as our attention centers and comes to rest in the present moment, a backlog of feeling and thought will break into awareness—perhaps a memory of something done or not done that we regret (and the pain of that regret); perhaps a vague feeling of longing or the sharp edge of desire; perhaps worry, sadness, frustration, resentment, or self-blame. As we sit with whatever has arisen in awareness, we again have a choice: Will we attempt to dodge it by running into a pleasant thought? Will we try to shove it under the carpet and hope that it will just go away and leave us in peace? Or will we open our heart and let the Eternal's Compassion get at it? As we struggle through to the third option, we are in the “second kensho” phase of the meditation.

When that layer of suffering dissolves into stillness and is replaced by sympathy and compassion, we have reached the “third kensho” stage of the meditation. In this spiritual place, which is utterly free from wanting and judging, Preceptual teaching can be recognised and taken to heart. The “fourth kensho” stage of meditation is characterized by effortless flow and peaceful brightness. When the period of meditation comes to an end, we arise with quiet gratitude and a renewed sense of spiritual purpose. This is the “fifth kensho” phase of the meditation.

I think that most people who have done some serious meditation will recognize one or more of the stages that I have described in the above

lines. But as I wrote them I thought, “Someone is going to say, 'Wait a minute! Meditation is never like that for me.’” The description is intended to help. If it does not help, put it on the back burner and go on meditating!

The Eternal's Part

The above description of what I have found to be a not-uncommon experience of sitting meditation begins with an emphasis on “our actions and effort”—the “training” side of the training/kensho process. But implicit in every sentence is the role of the help of the Eternal—the “kensho,” or “enlightenment,” side. And the “kensho” side becomes more obvious as the description reaches, and then goes beyond, the “third kensho” phase of the meditation.

Take, for example, the first sentence of my brief description of a period of meditation: “Right at the beginning of meditation we have a choice whether to just mark time, or to 'sit up straight in the presence of the Buddhas', making that gentle, but firm, effort to stay in the present moment.” The help of the Eternal is not mentioned at all. But what drew us to sit down in meditation in the first place? And what is really happening when we “sit up straight in the presence of the Buddhas”? Whether we are aware of it or not, when we do genuine meditation, we begin with a prayer for help in our heart. We are “looking up” to That which is greater than ourselves. This is the *spiritual* meaning of “sitting up straight in the presence of the Buddhas.” And how do we know to do this? There is a deep and indestructible intuitive knowing that is entirely *of* the Buddha Nature, and that we draw upon whenever we do this. The innate capacity to look up derives from the Eternal Itself.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom shows a human being doing this “sitting up straight in the presence of the Buddhas” wholeheartedly. The book begins with Rev. Master contemplating her options and choosing to go deeply into meditation—or is it *allowing* herself to be drawn deeply into meditation?—It is both. When she writes of “holding fast to the memory of the [first] kensho,” she is expressing the meditative effort of keeping oriented upon the Eternal in the midst of great difficulty. *And* all along the Eternal is sustaining her, using the quiet reminder of the Great Immaculacy that she discovered in that kensho to help her through the firestorm of feeling that

happens when the deepest spiritual need is ready for the direct help of the Eternal's Compassion and Wisdom.

Another example: The entire description of the “third kensho” phase of the meditation, which could also be called the “conversion” phase, emphasizes the help of the Eternal. The “sympathy and compassion” are entirely *of* the Eternal: it is sacrilege for anyone to claim them as belonging to themselves. The “Preceptual teaching” is insight given so that we may continue on in the process of reharmonization with the Eternal. There is no form of help more crucial to the real welfare of living beings than the teaching embodied in the Precepts—the teaching about how to live so as to be true to our own True Nature.

The further we go in the process of training/enlightenment, the more we see the Hand of the Eternal at work in our life. That should not be surprising, considering that “kensho” means “awakening to our True Nature.” The opinion that That which we call “Buddha Nature,” “the Eternal,” “Cosmic Buddha,” etc. is really a kind of mindless, actionless substrate of existence is based in lack of actual experience. Infinite Love and infinite Wisdom can and do work within our lives and hearts.

Chapter 4

Original Enlightenment

*Surely I should not seek the Truth from others,
For then It will be far from me.
I am going alone now;
Everywhere I am able to meet Him.
I am not Him;
He is all of me.
When we understand this,
We are one instantaneously with the Truth.*

—Great Master Tozan

The Great Inversion

A Great Inversion in point of view happens in the course of training and enlightenment. When I think of this Great Inversion, I think of an hourglass containing sand. We begin with all the sand at the top. As the sand trickles through the narrow “waist” of the hourglass, it begins to collect in a little pile on the floor of the bottom compartment. Think of the hourglass in its original position with all the sand at the top. We can call the top compartment of the hourglass “belief in a separate self,” and the bottom compartment “certainty that the Eternal is.” The amount of sand in each compartment represents the degree of conviction. In the beginning of training, there is a strong conviction of the reality of a separate self. As training deepens conviction trickles (mostly imperceptibly) from belief in a separate self to certainty of the Eternal.

What is meant by “belief in a separate self”?—It must be stressed that the “belief” referred to here is a deeply rooted, stubborn and slippery conviction. It is imbued with darkest ignorance—and *always* at the heart of that ignorance, self-judgment. And what is a “separate self”?—I have often called it “the non-existent focal point of karma.” Here “non-existent” means that, just as the focal point of a telescope is not a thing in itself, but rather a point in space at which rays of light converge, so the separate self has no reality in itself, but is just a spiritual junction of confused belief, craving and spiritual pain. As soon as belief is invested in the idea of a separate self, suffering is

inevitable. *For the separation referred to is separation from the Eternal—separation from Infinite Love.* The conviction that one is separate from infinite Love causes a fierce craving for love: craving is rooted in ignorance.

The belief in a separate self and acts of self-judgment are mutually reinforcing. The more we judge ourselves, the more separate from the Eternal we believe ourselves to be; and the more separate we believe ourselves to be, the more unworthy we feel, and the more prone we are to drop the thought-hammer of self-judgment.

Of course, each being has an individuality separate from other beings. Each human being is a different person from every other human being. However, no being—and no human being—is separate from the Buddha Nature. One of the most common ways in which human confusion and suffering are deepened is by mistaking the seeming withdrawal of love by other people as the withdrawal of Love Itself. Human beings may feel love and hate, and they may manifest love and hate in their actions. The Love of the Eternal is in no way affected by, increased, or decreased by human feelings or actions of love and hate: *It is.*

There are those who seek to kill the selfish self through religious practice. This is like trying to strangle a shadow. Thus the Buddha, after years of trying to kill the selfish self, realized that such effort is futile. After showing kindness to his tormented body (he had been starving himself in a vain attempt to destroy desire), he “turned the stream of Compassion within [in pure meditation] and was enlightened.”

As the “sand” of belief piles up in the “certainty that the Eternal *is*” compartment of the “hourglass,” the top compartment—“belief in the separate self”—gets emptier and emptier. As more and more “sand” moves from top to bottom—as delusion converts to wisdom—we begin to see the separate self as illusion and unreality, and the tendency to identify body and mind with such an illusion is greatly weakened.

Think of the implications of such a point of view. If there is no separate self, there is no deluded self, nor can there be an enlightened self. There is no self that accumulates vices or virtues. There is no good self and no bad self. There *is* the flow of choice (action) and consequence, but there is no separate self within this flow. Rather,

this flow is itself *within* the Eternal. Even the dark and confused belief in separation from Love exists right within Love Itself. The separate self is an illusion, but even illusion is not apart from the Eternal. In fact, even the most deluded and horrific actions, as well as the suffering that inexorably accompanies and follows them, occur within that all-embracing Love: they are not It, *and* they are not apart from It.

The Great Inversion is the transition from the belief in the separate self to the certainty that this Immaculate, all-embracing, Compassionate Oneness is: “I am not Him; He is *all* of me.”

No-Self and the True Self

If there is no separate self, who or what is it that “awakens to our True Nature”?— “Awakening to our True Nature” happens as part of the flow of cause and effect: there is no need for a shadowy separate self underlying this flow. It is said in Buddhism, “Only volition is the doer of karma; only feeling is the reaper of karma.” And again, “No doer is there who does the deed, nor is there one who feels the fruit.” Both the deepening of suffering and the lessening of suffering happen in accordance with “causes and conditions” within the Great Immaculacy.

The conviction that there is a self separate from the Eternal is a spiritual prison. The Buddhist teaching of “no-self” is neither an abstract concept of existential philosophy, nor a ruse devised by masters for the purpose of boggling the minds of their disciples: it is a finger pointing to liberation from that prison of delusion and anguish. What does that liberation look like? What does someone who experiences it understand? Look at Plate LXIV of the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (Plate XLIII of the first edition) and read the accompanying text. It is important to read the entire text, but here are some of its threads:

“The Light of the Lord of the House, the Heart-Mind, irradiates the infinity of space—within Its centre I may not say that It is empty; I may not say that It is not empty. It is unstained, immaculate; I am not It, It is all of me . . . Nothing is born, nothing dies. We shape our fears from emptiness and unto emptiness they return. The only seeming *real emptiness* is fear; the Lord enfolds emptiness and is not empty nor is it not not empty. Within the Lord all senses, form, thought, all

things cease and nothing ceases; there are neither old age nor death and there is no ceasing of old age and death as the world understands them. . . . Life and death, body and mind fall away naturally for they no longer apply. . . . All-acceptance is the key that unlocks the gateless gate. Within this place there is no suffering, no coming, no going, no ceasing, no Way. There is only endless training, appearing here, disappearing there, going in and out, always BECOMING Buddha.”

One of the great Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* says, very simply, “To fully penetrate the truth of no-self is to realize the True Self.” The metaphor of the hourglass conveys this very well, for it represents the conversion of deluded belief in self into *true conviction*—the certainty that the Eternal *is*. Again, I recommend reading the full text accompanying Plate LXIV of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (first edition: Plate XLIII). “Nothing is born, nothing dies” equals “there is no separate self.” “Within the Lord all senses, form, thought, all things cease and nothing ceases . . .” equals “there is the True Self—the Eternal.”

“Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.”

—from *The Diamond Sutra*,
translation by K. Saunders

Magnificent Faith

“To truly study the Way is to try to penetrate it and, in order to do so, one must forget even the slightest trace of enlightenment. One who would train in Buddhism must first believe completely therein and, in order to do so, one must believe that one has already found the Way, never having been lost, deluded, upside-down, increasing, decreasing or mistaken in the first place”

This passage is from Great Master Dogen's “Lecture on Training” (*Bendowa*). He first tells the trainee to let go of all opinions about, and attachment to enlightenment. In this context, he is thinking

particularly of attachment to any progress that we have made in training and any realization that we have had in the past. He then advises the same with regard to dwelling upon past and present delusions and mistakes: let it go. We need to bow to both complacency and self-doubt and move on past them. Complacency says, “I’m fine. There is nothing I need to do.” Self-doubt says, “I can’t do it.”—If we let them have the upper hand, both prevent us from doing the things that are truly good to do. The cure for both is to go forward in *magnificent* faith—faith in Original Enlightenment.

What is “Original Enlightenment”? And why is faith in Original Enlightenment vitally important?

Since there is no such thing as a self separate from the Eternal, there can be no such thing as an *enlightened* separate self. Yet people have kensho experience—they awaken to their True Nature. This happens when a grudge held against oneself dissolves, and the Immaculate True Nature of ourselves and all existence is experienced with our entire being. “Original Enlightenment” refers to the fact that That to which we awaken in the experience of enlightenment never *was, is, or will be* confused and deluded. That which is not confused or deluded is enlightened. And this is *our* True Nature, not something external to us. Therefore, this Original Freedom from Ignorance—Original Enlightenment—is *our very own* Original Enlightenment, even though we do not own It: we belong to It; It does not belong to us.

At the beginning of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* we see why it is vitally important to trust in Original Enlightenment. Rev. Master writes (Plate II):

“How do I climb that which is sheer and glassy? By going straight up, by not thinking whether I will live or die, by not thinking I am inadequate or adequate, male or female. . . . [I] will not listen to the voice that whispers, “Go back. You are too weak, you cannot do it. You have not been good enough to climb this mountain; you have not done enough to train yourself—you do not know how to climb.” And I say, “Quiet. I *can* climb and I *will*.”

The illusion of self is a prison. We can climb out of that prison, but to do so we need to stop doing the things that keep us locked up. We can have a focus other than that of the virtues and vices, enlightenment and delusion of an illusory separate self. We can reach toward, open

our heart to, the True Self, letting go of the running tally of good and evil, right and wrong, success and failure. To drop the score-keeping and walk with childlike trust into the great Unknown is *magnificent faith*—faith in Original Enlightenment. To quote Great Master Dogen once again:

“They who believe that they are already within the Way are truly rare but, if you can truly believe it, the opening and closing of the Great Way are understood quite naturally and the root of delusion and enlightenment is seen as it is.”

There is no more eloquent, accurate portrayal of faith in Original Enlightenment than *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

Chapter 5

True Conviction

*The tangled roots of karma conceal our
Buddha Nature.*

*If we neglect our study of the elementary
principles of what is true and what is not,
We will submit to disharmony and harm,
Cutting ourselves off from the deep Truth.*

The Act of Believing and the Act of Disbelieving

There is no more important act than the act of believing or disbelieving, for other actions of thought, speech and body follow upon actions of believing and disbelieving. When we say that we “have” a particular belief, we are using a rather confusing mental and verbal shorthand to indicate that we keep *choosing* to believe that a proposition or idea is true. Suppose, for example, that I say that I believe that the earth is spherical in shape. If I look closely at my constantly changing experience, I can see that each time I think of the earth, I choose to believe a whole set of propositions about its nature, one of which is that it is spherical. At any time, I *might* make another choice. But once I have been convinced by whatever facts and/or opinions I have taken as adequate proof that the earth is spherical, I say that I believe that the earth is spherical. And then I might just say, “The earth is spherical” and omit any mention of belief.

The same process is involved in the act of *not* believing. For example, I do not believe that the earth is flat like a pancake. If someone tells me that the earth is indeed flat, I will *choose to disbelieve* this statement unless some pretty cogent proof can be presented. But suppose someone presents me with evidence that convinces me that the earth is indeed flat. When I *choose* to be convinced, I say that I have “changed my belief” about the shape of the earth.

Trust

The Buddha was concerned about the potentially serious consequences of the act of believing and the act of disbelieving. He told his disciples that they should not *do the act of believing* with

respect to any teaching until they had proved it true in their own experience. But the Buddha did not tell his disciples that they should *do the act of disbelieving* when they were presented with a teaching that they had not yet proved true for themselves, for choosing disbelief closes the mind and heart of the disciple.

The Buddha taught the Middle Way that transcends all opposites. The *willful* act of believing and the *willful* act of disbelieving are opposites. Like all the opposites, they lead to suffering. Willful belief is dogmatism (“blind faith”) and willful disbelief is sceptical doubt. The Middle Way in belief is *choosing* to keep an open mind and heart, neither professing belief nor professing disbelief until one has proved the teaching to be true for oneself.

This *choice* to keep an open mind and heart, refraining from both dogmatic belief and sceptical doubt, is *trust*. Trust and willingness are two sides of the same coin. Trust and willingness are upward-looking and bright. Mistrust and willful insistence (or “clinging,” to use the classic Buddhist term) are downward-looking and dark. I cannot overemphasize that trust is a *choice*, a mental *action*. It is not a magical quality that some people possess and other people lack. Spiritual training is a process in which the effort to trust is a *continuing* effort: yesterday's trust is no guarantee that today I will trust; and today's trust is no guarantee of future trust. Similarly, no amount of mistrusting in the past can prevent me from trusting in this very present moment, though habitual mistrust certainly does not make trusting easier.

Imagine a traveler who wishes to traverse a great territory full of hazards. He has never been there before. A guide is available to lead him to his destination. Obviously, the traveler is not going to benefit from the guide's experience if he insists that he already knows the way: if that is so, why hire the guide? This is the problem with dogmatic belief. And if the traveler insists that the guide must be mistaken about the route he has taken whenever the route goes through particularly hazardous terrain, he will turn back or launch out on his own and get lost. This is the problem with sceptical doubt. The guide cannot carry the traveler, cannot do his walking for him, but a good guide can lead a willing and trusting traveler through the perils to the destination. The disciple is the “traveler”; the master is the “guide.”

Experience-based Understanding

The traveler who follows a good guide will come to know the landscape for himself. He will learn how to negotiate the perils encountered along the way. And he will be able to lead others as he has been led. How does this education happen?—By learning *through one's own experience* in the course of the journey. This is what Rev. Master meant when she said, as she often did, that she had found, or proved, something to be “true *for me*.”

There are many questions that spiritual training does not answer. Some philosophical, cosmological, or historical questions are commonly mistaken for genuine spiritual questions. The Buddha called such questions “questions not leading to edification” and encouraged his disciples not to worry about such matters, but to keep their focus on their own training. An example of a question not leading to edification is the question whether the universe came into existence at a particular moment in the past, or whether it has always existed. Even if we ever learn the answer to such a question, neither dwelling on the question nor finding the answer will lead to the real cessation of suffering.

If we focus on doing the actual training, keeping all the questions on the “back burner” and trusting that the training will lead to the answers that we really need to find, spiritual understanding develops naturally—mostly quietly and imperceptibly. Every bit of spiritual experience puts another piece of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle into place until a beautiful and awe-inspiring picture is glimpsed. No one ever sees the whole of this picture—it is infinitely large and infinitely complex. As Rev. Master once told me, “Even the greatest Zen master never knows the *whole* truth.”

No Knowledge, No Attainment

Suppose that tomorrow morning I awoke and found that I had dreamed my whole life of training: Rev. Master never existed in reality; I had never meditated, become a monk, trained—everything was just a dream.—Well, here I am; it was a great dream. Now that I am awake, what am I going to do?—What is to stop me from training today just as I did in the dream?

Relative to this present moment, the whole of my past is just a dream. In this present moment I make my choice: I choose where to focus my attention; I choose whether to look up or down; I choose to turn within in meditation, or not to do so. This present moment is all I have to work with. In this very present moment, I am making a new beginning. I call this the “zero reset”: returning to the present moment, letting go of the past, not fretting about the future—“having nothing, knowing nothing, wanting nothing.”

Is this “zero reset” a kind of knowledge, a kind of understanding?—Perhaps. But if it is, it is only realized by continuing to push the “zero reset” button—by continuing to return to the mind and heart of meditation. It is not a kind of knowledge or understanding that one can cling to. As Rev. Master often said, it is like holding one's hand in a moving stream of water: grasp after the water, and the hand comes up empty; leave the hand in the stream, and hand and stream are one.

In this present moment, spiritual need arises; in this present moment, help moves toward the need; in this present moment we are *shown* by the Eternal what is good to do. We do not have to take a great load of accumulated knowledge and virtue into this present moment: the Eternal will show us the step that we need to take; and the Eternal will show us how to take it. In this view of spiritual understanding, insight arises from, and returns to, the Great Immaculacy. There is no such thing as “my” knowledge, “my” attainment, “my” realization. In Great Master Dogen's words, “They travel fastest who are not there.”

The “form is only void, void is all form” of the Heart Sutra—the “Scripture of Great Wisdom”—is saying, “Everything you have and are arises and passes continually within the flow of Immaculacy. Do not create and perpetuate ignorance by clinging to external things *or* by clinging to spiritual experience and understanding. Relax into the Great Immaculacy in perfect faith.”

Blood and Bones Certainty

The Eternal *is*. The “blood and bones” certainty that the Eternal is itself just *is*.

In one of my favorite movies, one of the characters says, “Even people who hate their mothers love their mothers.” And I say, “Even people who do not think that they have the 'blood and bones' certainty that

the Eternal *is* actually do have it. And they—or some other being in their stream of karma—will one day realize it.” The certainty that the Eternal *is* is not knowledge as the world thinks of knowledge. It is not a concept, a proposition, a theory, a mental or emotional state. We cannot comprehend what it is intellectually, and we cannot make it more clear by using more words to explain it. It just *is*.

Degrees of Certainty

The feeling that we associate with “being very certain” of the truth of a belief or an opinion can be very misleading. Rev. Master often cautioned us, “Be careful when the certainty comes.” In general, acting on the basis of emotions is a risky business. Nonetheless, the fact that emotions sometimes attend upon our beliefs does not in itself prove that those beliefs are either true or not true. Feeling is one thing; the truth or falsity of belief is another matter altogether.

We can—and continually do—assess with accuracy the reliability of our experience. In the parallel narrative to this one, entitled *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: Reflections in a Disciple's Life*, I describe some key aspects of my training, including a number of spiritual experiences of various kinds. I can look at many of the experiences that I describe in terms of a kind of sliding scale of certainty. For example, I have experienced a number of past-life memories. In some of these memories, I re-lived one or more key events with such vividness and intensity that I could no more doubt the accuracy of such a past-life memory—even though it is a memory of something that happened to another person—than I can doubt the accuracy of the most vivid and intense memories of my own lifetime. Some other past-life memories have had no emotional intensity at all, but just a crystal clear memory of particular events and, conveyed with that memory, a clear and simple teaching. These memories have the same degree of certainty as the more intense ones. Then there are several past-life memories that were less intense and less clear. One or two were sufficiently vague that I have always questioned whether I was really seeing what I thought I was seeing. So here there is a whole range of certainty about memories. Apart from the fact that I am writing about past-life memories rather than memories from my own life, this differs not at all from my experience of certainty with regard to my memories in general. I have very vivid and clear recollection of some events in my life; other memories are less clear; many are vague.

Experience-based understanding provides us with grounds for greater or lesser certainty about the wisdom—or lack of it—of volitional actions. We all know with a high degree of certainty that if we put our hand into a flame, we are going to feel pain. Extend that principle a little and the Precepts pop up. For example, I know with a high degree of certainty that if I lose my temper I will feel awful afterwards. There was a time when I did not know this, but I learned through experience, just as I learned through experience that fire can cause pain. The law of karma is a great teacher.

There are places in the “Reflections in a Disciple's Life” where I say that I was “shown” something, by which I mean to convey the fact that I experienced “pure intuitive insight manifesting in intellect”—a kind of vision. (Please see Chapter 1 of these Reflections. Scroll down the page to the essay entitled “On Visions.”) I regard such experiences as completely normal, especially for anyone who has done many years of serious Zen training. Such experiences are far more common than most people know. As in the case of past-life memories, people are afraid to talk about their intuitive experiences because they think—and not without reason—that they will be doubted.

We all know that people can suffer from delusions that God, or the saints, or spirits, or the devil, or the Buddha, or the Cosmos are confiding in them, or telling them to do things. The fact that we can be deluded, however, does not prove that we are not capable of experiencing genuine intuitive insight.

In general, some of our experience is highly reliable, that is, conveys accurate information, and some is less reliable. For example, a person can take a hallucinogenic drug and have sensory experiences that have little relationship to the world around him. No one wants someone in such a confused state to be driving a car. When not under the influence of a drug, however, the same person might be able to drive competently on a freeway in rush hour in heavy rain. This comparison between reliable and unreliable sense-experience is not fundamentally different from the comparison between genuine—reliable—spiritual experience and delusive—unreliable—experience. In both cases, “the proof is in the pudding”: we find through experience whether or not information has been accurately conveyed. I have found that “pure intuitive insight manifesting in intellect” is entirely reliable. But please note that the fact that a teaching has been accurately delivered

via intuition is no guarantee that it will be correctly understood and wisely used. Just as our driver can make a mistake in driving even though his senses are all functioning reliably, so we can be given completely reliable teaching by means of intuitive insight and still make mistakes. The delivery of the message is part of a continuing process of training, not the final step.

True for Me

Religion is about our relationship to our True Nature. This relationship is inherently private. While there are many ways in which we can help or hinder one another in our spiritual life, in the end each of us has to do our own training—or not. No one can do another person's training for him.

When we find what is true *for me*, it is true whether or not anyone else in the world believes it to be true. Rev. Master used to say, “The real Truth does not *insist* on truth.” It is enough to do our own training and find what is true *for me*: that others do or do not find it true for them is their business. This does not mean that it is not good to offer teaching when it *is* good to do so. But an offering can be freely accepted or freely refused. Therefore, “When the Buddha taught, the unbelievers were allowed to depart.” Buddhism is a religion for spiritual adults who know at all times that they are volunteers in training.

We live in an age in which dogmatism and scepticism war with one another for supremacy in the minds of human beings. And this is so even though dogmatism and scepticism are both rooted in self-doubt. Yet we always have the capacity to look up. That capacity is rooted in the Buddha Nature Itself and is indestructible. In the long run, it wins out.

“If you want to become one with the TRUTH, as one fire combines with another fire, throw away selfish opinions, old emotions, arrogance and obstinacy and learn the TRUE MIND OF THE LORD with the naive mind of a child.”

—Great Master Keizan

Chapter 6

Need and Help

*The Master said, “Open yourself to the Unborn,
Embrace, as well as show, the True Heart.”
The Great Immaculacy is broad, boundless and
hard to see;
But the moonlight of faith enables us to perceive
the solitary mountain peak of our True Nature.*

Spiritual Need: Suffering and Suffering's Cause

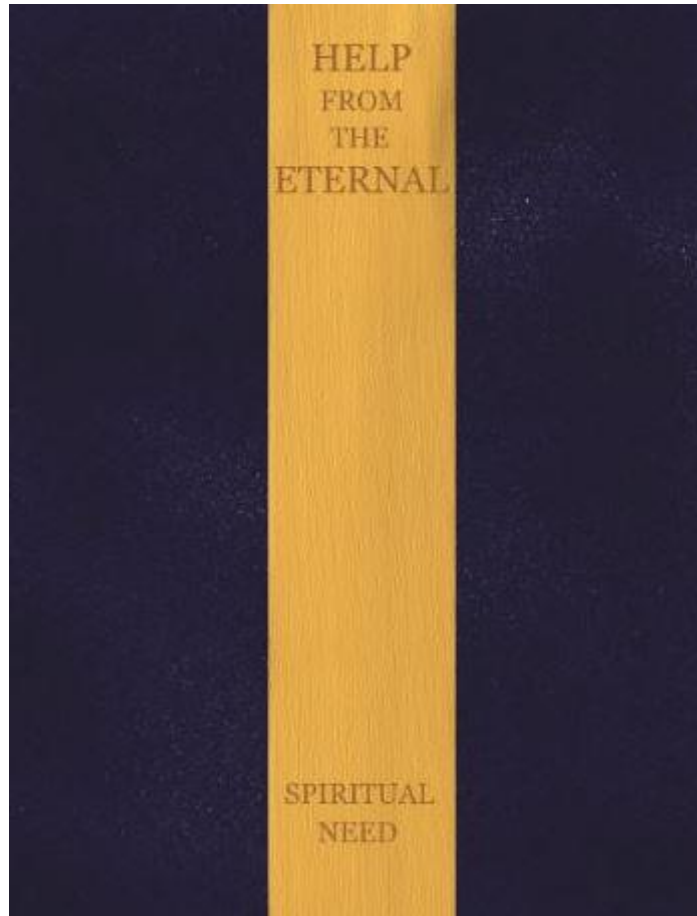
We can be confused about the nature of need. Consider the case of a person with a broken leg. Such an injury can be very painful. When we are in pain, we tend to think that getting rid of the pain is the greatest need. But pain is a signal of a deeper need—the need for the broken leg to heal, for example. And, in fact, even if the pain is temporarily deadened, the pain will continue to return until the injury has healed. So if we want to solve *both* the problem of the pain and the problem of the cause of the pain—the broken leg—we have to attend to the physical injury.

Just as physical pain is the signal that the body needs help, spiritual pain is the signal that spiritual help is needed. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is the story of how one human being's spiritual need received the Help of the Eternal.

A substantial part of the first half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is a description in pictures and words of the present- and past-life causes of suffering. Some of the causes of suffering lay in Rev. Master's earlier life. The deeper roots of suffering lay in her past-life inheritance. Ignorance and longing, tragic misunderstanding and confusion, grief and despair, and, above all, bitter self-judgment—the actions and experiences of beings whose jangles of confusion and pain we have inherited show the deeper origins of the suffering that we experience in this present life.

All of the present-and past-life causes of suffering *are* the spiritual need. In the following picture, “spiritual need” is shown at the bottom of a column. At the top of the column is “Help from the Eternal.” The

column represents one spiritual reality—for now, let us call it “meditation”—within which need and Help exist as two poles. Somehow, Help and need must come together within the context provided by meditation. In order for this to happen, there is something that we must do and there is something that the Eternal must do. The “happy meeting” of need and Help is the subject of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.



“Help meets need” is a process that passes through a few simple, but essential, steps or stages. This may remind readers of the discussion of the “five kenshos” earlier in these Reflections.—It is all the same process looked at from different perspectives of position and scale.

Meditation Stage One: Beginner's Mind

The starting point for the process through which our spiritual need will receive the Help of the Eternal is always the same: we have to ask for It. There are many ways in which the asking manifests—the Eternal always recognizes and responds to a sincere asking. Here

“sincere” means that we do not include any expectation in the asking: we cannot be trying to steer the process and at the same time be doing the complete and unconditional trusting that is necessary.

The deepest prayer arises directly out of the need itself. But it is our choice whether we will point that asking in the direction of the Eternal. We are helped in this by the Buddha Nature Itself. Rev. Master writes, “No matter how great the darkness there is still light to be found therein by those who truly look. . . . One can jump into hell so long as one is looking up. At all times the Buddha is appearing in hell and in this world.” (Plate XLIV; Plate XXVII, first edition.) Here “hell” should be understood as “the place of deepest suffering.”—In other words, even within the greatest suffering, if we will but look with the eyes of faith, we will see the workings of Infinite Love. This is how it is possible for ordinary people to recognize and to manifest compassion within the most painful—even horrific—circumstances.

Does one have to be a saint in order to do this?—No. Rev. Master writes of this first column, “When I meditate I must do so in the place of ordination—the mind of a beginner is the purest of all minds . . .” (Plate LIV; Plate XXXIV, first edition). How does a beginner come to the genuine religious practice of meditation?—With an intuitive awareness of spiritual need, with humility, and with an open mind and heart.

This first column shows the fuller spiritual context of the Buddha's First Noble Truth: “Suffering exists.” It shows our suffering humanity taking refuge in the Buddha Nature in faith and in stillness. And it shows that That to which we hold fast with faith and right effort is always available to us in the midst of all difficulties, all confusion and all pain. Yes, suffering exists. *And* Infinite Love is with us through all suffering, and leading us toward the cessation of suffering.

Meditation Stage Two: Strewing Flowers before the Buddha

When we offer all that we are and have *at this very moment* to the Eternal we are in the second stage of meditation.

This “offering” sounds fine when we are full of compassionate thoughts, when we feel love and tenderness, when our mind is focused in the present moment and serene. All of that makes a great offering.

But what about desire, fear, anger, grief, frustration, restlessness, confusion, doubt, despair, shame, guilt, regret, pride, ambition, argumentativeness, envy, prejudice, hate? How does one offer this dark and mucky stuff?—By choosing to keep the heart open to the Eternal, allowing the dark, mucky stuff to be there when it is there, and to go away when it goes away. “Do not grasp after that which arises in meditation, and do not push it away.”

This offering is *sange*—a word for which there is no adequate translation in English, but which contains aspects of the meanings of “self-forgiveness,” “contrition,” “acceptance” and “confession.” But the best definition I have ever seen (and I do not remember where I saw it) was “strewing flowers before the Buddha.” For “sange” means to open our mind and heart to the Eternal without blame and without excuses, making an offering of everything that we have, are, think, have done and feel. It is not just compassion and tenderness that are flowers that can be spread before the Buddha. All the darker aspects of our humanity are also flowers that can be spread before the Buddha. The Eternal knows how to help the need that is contained within these flowers of pain and confusion. *Sange* is entrusting *everything* within us to the Love of the Eternal. This Love never judges, despises or condemns, but always does the best for everything. It will do the best for whatever we present to It.

In response to this offering, the Love of the Eternal does indeed flow to all that within us that needs help. Suffering's cause has deep roots which need to be exposed if the Help is to get at them. Therefore, the way in which the Love of the Eternal manifests in this second stage of offering is as a spiritual scouring that exposes deeper layers of spiritual need. This can entail exposing layers of pain along with layers of cause.

This second stage shows the fuller spiritual context of the Buddha's Second Noble Truth: “The cause of suffering is craving rooted in ignorance.” It shows how we bring the cause of suffering to the Eternal in meditation. And it shows that the cleansing and scouring (or “reaming”) Compassion of the Eternal flows forth to our need.

Meditation Stage Three: The Flow of Wisdom

When we orient our attention toward the Eternal (meditation, first stage) and present our spiritual need (meditation, second stage), we

cease to ignore the Teaching that is always flowing forth from the Eternal. This is the third stage of meditation.

Rev. Master describes this third stage of meditation as “the Dharma constantly given to those willing to receive it” (Plates XLIV-XLV; Plate XXVII, first edition). The Dharma is the Teaching, the Truth. The term “Dharma” is most often used to designate the traditional teachings of Buddhism. Here the term definitely means “the Teaching flowing from the Buddha Nature Itself”—this is the Teaching that is “constantly given.” Rev. Master also writes: “I must stay in this state [of meditation] at all times when dealing with worldly matters of whatever nature—government officials, lawyers, people caught up in fame and gain—all must be met from the standpoint of meditation with the mind at peace and the heart open . . .” (Plate LVIII; Plate XXXVI, first edition).

From this position of meditative effort, one can entrust every thorny problem to the Eternal, waiting patiently for the teaching that will help the need. As noted above, timing is critical, and very often the way forward will not appear until it is actually time to take the next step. It is essential to remember that the Eternal is the One in charge, not oneself. This helps us to be patient. But it also helps us move as quickly as necessary if and when the “green light” goes on.—Senior partner: the Eternal; junior partner: me.

The teaching that comes from the Eternal is usually suited to a particular need manifesting within complex conditions. If we insist on the explanation of why it is good to do an action (or not to do it, as the case may be) after we are given the teaching that the action is in fact good to do (or not do), we throw a wrench into the works. The Eternal will not lead us to break the true spirit of the Precepts; but that does not mean that we will get an explanation of why it is good (or not good) to do a particular act. In the end, we have to decide whether it is more important to actually follow the lead of the Eternal or to insist that we cannot act until we understand everything that we want to understand.

We do not have to be a special kind of person to receive the Eternal's Teaching. Nor is It ever far from us. Anyone who has sat down to meditate in a state of some confusion about what is truly good to do in a particular situation, and got up from meditation less confused, and with a sense of the direction in which to proceed, has

experienced the flow of Wisdom to need.—All we had to do is settle down, stop running around in our head, and allow the Eternal to get a word in edgewise.

The Wisdom of the Eternal belongs to the Eternal, not to any person. To be wise in the true spiritual sense of the word is to be content to know nothing except how to turn to the Eternal in childlike trust in all need.

Meditation Stage Four: Healing Love

The darkest ignorance is the ignorance that comes with and from willful acts of self-judgment. No one can convince us of our unworthiness of the Love of the Eternal unless we willfully give our assent to such a belief. No other act sends the wheel of karma careening down the mountain like self-judgment. As soon as we judge ourselves as being separate from Infinite Love, a fierce longing to reunite with Love is born. In how many tragic ways do beings strive to reunite with Love when in fact the separation was, is and will be an illusion!

Wherever there is the conviction of separation from Love, there is a spiritual wound of grief and longing. Just as Wisdom flows to ignorance, so the infinitely tender, compassionate Love of the Eternal flows to the wound of “saddened love” in the fourth stage of meditation. Rev. Master describes this healing flow of Love in the following words: “Sometimes that which comes forth is compassion, sometimes love, sometimes understanding, always it is the water for the healing of the spirit . . .” (Plate LIX; Plate XXXVII, first edition).

Just as Wisdom belongs to the Eternal, so does Love belong to the Eternal. If we try to seize hold of love, make it ours, and use it willfully, the Eternal will stand back and allow us to persist until we realize that we are making ourselves miserable. It is enough to know the Eternal; it is enough to love the Eternal. Wisdom and Love can make the best use of us when we are content to listen for the guidance of the Eternal, doing that which is good to do when it is good to do it without concern about how we appear to others.

Again, one does not have to be a saint in order to know this Love from one's own experience. Every time we sit down to meditate in a pained state and arise a short while later with a more peaceful, less anguished

heart, we are experiencing the healing Love of our wonderful True Nature. What did we do?—Only give Infinite Love the opportunity to help that which was, is and will forever be part of Itself.

The third and fourth stages of meditation show the fuller spiritual context of the Buddha's Third Noble Truth: “There is the cessation of suffering.” For when the cause of suffering has received the Help of the Eternal, suffering ceases. “Suffering ceases” must here be understood in its primary meaning, which is that suffering is no longer *perpetuated* through non-Preceptual action. Thus the cessation of suffering cannot be separated from what we *do*, for it is always our choice that starts the wheel of suffering rolling again—or not. And so the third and fourth stages of meditation also show the fuller context of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path—the life of training.

Meditation Stage Five: Unborn and Undying Meditation

The above four stages of meditation are successive steps in a continuing process of training and enlightenment. They are also simultaneously existing aspects of one Meditation which is the natural activity of the Buddha Nature. Different aspects “light up” in our experience at different times in accordance with causes and conditions, but all the aspects are always present.

Rev. Master called this fifth stage of meditation, very simply, “The Buddha within.” (Plate LX; Plate XXXVIII, first edition.) It can also be called “Eternal Meditation.”

All seeming opposition between the spiritual and the mundane is harmonized within Eternal Meditation. This harmony is not static; it is not a heaven. Suffering exists; there is a cause of suffering; there is the cessation of suffering; there is a Path leading to the cessation of suffering—all are within Eternal Meditation. If we grasp after fleeting things, whether they be physical or spiritual, we blind ourselves to Eternal Meditation. But that is only our blindness; Eternal Meditation is still there.

Meditation is a *refuge*. This refuge is always with us. We may temporarily blind ourselves to it. We may temporarily forget it. But it will never leave us. We call it “meditation” and think of it as a practice that we do. In truth, what we call “the practice of meditation” is our

choosing to make room for Eternal Meditation in our mind and heart, our choosing to entrust ourselves to It.

I think of Eternal Meditation as “Eternal Following”—*glad* following, following wherever the Eternal leads in unconditional willingness and unconditional faith, through heaven and hell if that is what is *good* to do, through birth and death if that is what is *good* to do, dissolving into Infinite Love and being reconstituted as Its vessel if that is what is *good* to do. I wrote a short poem in 2002 expressing what this Eternal Following means to me. It is the fourth poem on the “Poems” page and is entitled “[Following.](#)”

Chapter 7

The Residual Buddha Nature

*I ask, “Within Immaculacy, who is the true believer?”
It replies, “Your Eternal Lord.”*

Turning Within for Help

We take up the serious practice of meditation when we become aware at a deeply intuitive level that we need help of a kind that cannot come from outside ourselves. There is no proof or guarantee that we can find that help within ourselves. But somehow we know the help is there, and we are drawn to meditate in order to access it.

This is so very simple: an intuitive recognition of need; and an intuitive drawing within, rather than looking to external things and other people, for the help that can satisfy that need. This is the place from which one starts a great spiritual journey, a great spiritual adventure. And it is the place to which one returns again and again in order to continue the journey and the adventure.

In the beginning of that journey, we have to fly on faith. That is, we have to trust that there is a refuge to be found by turning within—a refuge that, from the more externalized, worldly point of view, can seem unreal and unattainable. After all, one cannot see it with the eyes, touch it, hear it, and so on. Or so it seems. Yet somehow we *know* that that inner refuge is there. It is not a “head” knowing; it can be said to be a “Heart” knowing. (I capitalize the word “Heart” because I am not speaking of the physical heart or the emotions.) This is the “knowing without knowing” of pure spiritual intuition.

The Glowing Embers

Fortunately, people who have done a great deal of contemplative training have been able to look back upon their experience with enlightened eyes. They have attempted to describe what it is that we intuit right from the beginning of our practice of meditation—indeed, what it is that *brought* us to that practice.

Imagine that we are in a very dark room. In the middle of the room is a brazier or hearth—perhaps just a circle of stones within which fires

are made. There is no fire burning at present, but there are a few embers that softly glow in the dark. The metaphor of embers glowing in the dark has been a favorite way in which contemplative Buddhist monks have described our innate capacity to look up spiritually even in the midst of great confusion and pain. In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* this capacity to look up is represented by a beam of light that shines through even the darkest clouds. The metaphors are somewhat different, but the point is the same: there is always an inextinguishable spiritual Refuge within ourselves

In the midst of great difficulty, the refuge of our Heart may seem far away. In truth, It is always with us. And there is always a trace of It to which we can hold if we will but let go of externals and truly meditate. This “ember glowing in the dark” can be said to be a *residual aspect* of Buddha Nature in that, even when our brain is utterly confused and blinded to the Buddha Nature, we still have the capacity to intuit It. So it is as if there is a *residue* of Buddha Nature that no amount of confusion and pain can cover over and obscure from spiritual sight.

Fanning the Embers

When we practice meditation, and when we make the effort to bring the mind and heart of meditation into all conditions and circumstances of our daily life, we guard and nurture our residual Buddha Nature. It is as if we sit by the hearth in the dark and gently and continually fan the glowing embers.

What happens when we fan embers?—They glow more brightly. When they glow more brightly, the darkness is illumined, Thus does meditation and the practice of the Precepts penetrate and illumine the darkness of ignorance. For while those embers can never be fully extinguished, we can do a very good job of convincing ourselves that there is no refuge within our own Heart. When we train sincerely, we open our mind and heart to our own True Nature and allow It to remind us of Itself in all difficulty and in all need.

When the embers are fanned with Bodhisattvic willingness, the flame of longing love appears. The love that we experience as our love for the Eternal thus originates in the residual Buddha Nature. In other words “our” love is a part of Infinite Love. We can be a conduit or instrument of this Love, but we do not own It and we do not create It. The ignorance that blinds us to the Source of all love, and the

confused clinging and hatred that comes from this ignorance, are the root causes of suffering. Yet even within the darkness of darkest ignorance the embers of our residual Buddha Nature softly glow and quietly wait.

The Residual Buddha Nature and Karma

The residual Buddha Nature reveals Itself amidst all the twistings and turnings of our karmic inheritance in the form of the underlying purity of intention of all actions. Beings do actions that result in suffering—sometimes terrible suffering—not because they are evil by nature, but because, in their ignorance, they act out of “greed, hate and delusion that have no beginning.”

Insight into the residual Buddha Nature within our karmic past does not come from theorizing, but as a result of direct intuitive insight into the motivation of particular actions. With such insight, sympathy extends even to those who perpetrate the greatest misery upon living beings. *And* neither the underlying purity of intention nor sympathy prevent the law of cause and effect from functioning fully. The law of karma is inexorable: suffering inevitably follows non-Preceptual action.

This teaching that there is *both* an underlying purity of intention *and* the full functioning of the law of karma in all human action is one of the most important teachings of Buddhism. And, like all Buddhist teachings, we can prove it true for ourselves. This takes time and much training. While we are working on it, we need to remember that if we willfully refuse to recognize the residual Buddha Nature of another person who we view as having perpetrated evil, we ourselves perpetrate evil. As the Buddha said, hatred does not cure hatred. Sooner or later, we will turn upon ourselves the very hammer of judgment that we drop on another person. No matter what anyone else in the world does, each person makes his or her own choices and will reap the consequences thereof.

The understanding of this teaching thoroughly permeates Rev. Master's wonderful Commentary on the Precepts (Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII). As she says in one place in the Commentary, “Look with the mind of a Buddha and I will see the heart of a Buddha.” It is easy to see the heart of a Buddha in a saint. It is not so easy to see it in a Hitler. Yet both saint and sinner had, have and

always will have the wonderful, inextinguishable residual Buddha Nature. The actions of the saint result in a preponderance of merit; those of the great sinner result in a preponderance of misery. *And* there is a Path that leads to the full cessation of suffering: guard, treasure and nurture the residual Buddha Nature.

Chapter 8

The Repository of Spiritual Need

The fundamental nature of the Unborn can be found within the body and the fundamental nature of the body can be found within the Unborn.

The Unity of Body and Mind

The nature of the relationship of body and mind has been the subject of philosophical speculation for over two thousand five hundred years. For over a century, theorists in the field of psychology have weighed in on the subject. And in recent decades, some scientists have attempted to explain all mental phenomena in terms of physical (usually chemical) processes. The point of view of Zen Buddhism on the relationship of body and mind is neither philosophical nor psychological nor materialistic reductionist. The experience that comes from the serious practice of meditation provides a spiritually pragmatic reason for asserting that body and mind are two complementary aspects of a complex unity.

The simplest proof of the unity of body and mind is obtained by noting the way in which physical posture in formal meditation affects attitude of mind. Two aspects of physical posture are particularly important. These are the position of the spine and the state of relaxation of the abdomen. The spine must be upright without being rigid. The abdomen must be fully relaxed. These features of correct posture in meditation are facilitated not by muscular effort, but by the way in which the pelvis tilts forward when we sit correctly on the cushion (or bench or chair—the same basic principle applies to all ways of sitting). (For readers who are new to meditation and for more experienced meditators who wish to review the instructions on how to sit correctly, a link to my video instructions on meditation is included at the bottom of this page.)

Correct sitting greatly helps in cultivating a bright and upward-looking, serene and accepting attitude of mind. The uprightness of the spine is especially helpful in nurturing the “bright and upward-

looking” aspect of the meditative mind. The relaxation of the abdomen is especially helpful in nurturing the “serene and accepting” aspect of the meditative mind.

Rev. Master translated a Japanese term for the meditation practiced in Soto Zen, *moku sho*, as “serene reflection.” It can also be rendered as “silent (or still) illumination” or “peaceful brightness” or “all-accepting brightness” or “upward-looking serenity.” All these terms express the two aspects of the attitude of mind that is nurtured through the uprightness of the spine (“bright and upward-looking”) and the relaxation of the abdomen (“serene and accepting”).

This description of the correlation between physical posture and mental attitude is a rough approximation. It provides a simple explanation of the reason why the physical posture is so important in formal meditation. It can serve as a gateway into a deeper truth, for it turns out that the “attitude of mind” that is “nurtured” in formal meditation was always there, being an aspect of our Buddha Nature. When we meditate truly we *allow* what was always there to manifest naturally by ceasing to do that which obscures it. From this deeper perspective, we are not so much “nurturing” or “cultivating” an attitude of mind as allowing the Buddha Mind to manifest in and through our body and mind.

Great Master Dogen said that our body is “deeply significant.” In Zen training, we attempt to make the best possible use of the body through practice of the Middle Way—the path of compassionate discipline and respect that transcends the opposites of willful wallowing in sensual indulgence and willful denying of the body's needs. Body and mind are impermanent, coming into existence and passing away in accordance with causes and conditions. This impermanence does not make them evil and unclean: they arise and pass within the Great Immaculacy. And they *can* be the vehicles of enlightenment.

Karma and the Body

There is a deep mystery in the process through which karmic “jangles” of grief, delusion, fear, hatred, horror, longing and self-judgment coalesce and are reborn in a new life form. Within this mystery is the deeper mystery surrounding the process through which merit is allocated to the raw jangles of spiritual need in order to shepherd them to the Love and Wisdom of the Eternal.

Our body is the repository of spiritual need. Karmic jangles of confusion and pain and are held as knots, or blocks, of tension throughout the body. Particular organs of the body hold particular blocks. A common and well-known example of the relationship between such a jangle and a particular organ is provided by the relationship between worry and the stomach. People who are especially prone to worry often develop ulcers and other stomach problems. All of the other organs have similar relationships with particular karmic jangles. Some examples include grief and the lungs (deep sobs come right out of the lungs), fear and the kidneys, anger and the liver, and disappointment (saddened love) and the heart (beings can literally die of a “broken heart”).

The knots of tension can have their origins in our past-life inheritance. Or they can have been created in this life. In either case, correct spiritual training—meditation and the practice of the Precepts—makes it possible for the Love and Wisdom of the Eternal to soften and loosen these knots (or blocks). As they soften, they release into feeling. Feeling is the “reaper of karma,” and each knot of spiritual need is a piece of karma that must come fully due in order to be fully helped. This is why serious training can trigger such deep emotions, and sometimes painful sensations, weakness and other bodily symptoms. As can be seen in the first chapters of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* great faith and determination are required when this process is happening at a deep level.

Karmic Debt and Repayment

Rev. Master's master used to caution people, “If you meditate you run the risk of being grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha.” In other words, when we meditate truly, we are inviting our karma to come due so that all the spiritual need can get the Help of the Eternal, and in the process we are in for a very rough ride at times.

What does it mean to say that karma “comes due?”—Imagine that a man is sitting on a bench in a park eating his lunch. He has a big lunch and everything is wrapped in paper and plastic. As he eats, he drops the wrappers to the ground. By the time he is done with his meal, litter is strewn all around the park bench. He leaves the park a dirtier place than when he arrived. In this metaphor, willful non-Preceptual action is represented by the man's strewing of litter. The

mess that remains is the karmic debt, that is, some form of spiritual mess that is going to have to be cleaned up by one means or another. The “mess” can also be seen as a big lump of spiritual need. Somehow this mess has to be cleaned up; somehow the need has to be met. When time runs out and the clean-up *has* to happen (the need has to be met), karma has “come due.”

Now imagine that someone sits down on the park bench right after the man who left the litter. This person also eats his lunch in the park but does not drop any litter. But neither does he bother with the litter that the first person has strewn around the bench. This second luncher finishes his meal and leaves. The park is no dirtier, but also no cleaner. This second person represents someone who has lived a moral life but who has not done much in the way of cleaning up the inherited karmic mess. This person has not left a karmic debt, and neither has he paid off much of the inherited karmic debt.

Imagine that a third person comes along and sits down to have lunch on the park bench. This person does not strew litter. At the end of the meal, he pauses to clean up around the bench. When he leaves the park, it is a cleaner, brighter place for his having visited it. This person represents the person who undertakes the cleansing and conversion of karma through serious meditation and training in the Precepts. This person has done more than live a good life. He has repaid the karmic debt, that is, enabled all the spiritual need stored within the body to find its way to the healing Love and Wisdom of the Eternal. This person will not pass on a mess of his own making, or of another's making, to another being: the cessation of suffering has been realized.

Examples of all three of the kinds of people represented by our three lunchers can be found in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. Please see Plates XIII-XVIII (first edition, Plate IX) for examples of the first two. For the third we have the example of Rev. Master herself.

But what if no one cleans up the litter that was strewn around the park. Eventually the wind comes up and scatters the litter widely. Here and there a piece will be picked up by someone and properly disposed of. Some pieces will eventually get covered in leaves and dirt and gradually decompose. In the long run, everything is part of nature and will be included in nature's endless recycling of matter. Here the wind represents the Compassion of the Eternal, which directs every bit of need to an appropriate form of Help. The natural processes of

decay and recycling represent the many ways in which karmic debts are repaid.

Not infrequently, a person who has inherited the karma of someone who willfully harmed others will be given the opportunity to show compassion to someone—or some being—who has inherited the karma of a person (or being) who was a victim of those willful acts. Or the person who inherited the victim's karma will be given the opportunity to show compassion to a person (or being) who inherited the perpetrator's karma. For perpetrators tend to judge themselves very harshly at the time of death, and those who inherit the karmic jangle left by such a person need to know human compassion and forgiveness. And sometimes separate karmic streams interweave in victim/perpetrator relationships through a number of lifetimes in each stream of karma. A person may have inherited victim karma from one life and perpetrator karma from another, and karma of the corresponding perpetrator (in the former case) and victim (in the latter) may have been inherited by another person. In such cases, opportunities for the cleansing and conversion of karma may manifest in very complex ways within the relationship of the two people who have inherited such interwoven karma. There are innumerable variations on this theme. Particularly heavy karma, that is, willful non-Preceptual actions that are especially desperate and horrific, such as the worst forms of willfully trying to wreak vengeance upon (cause pain to) others, may come fully due through an extreme form of victimization, through insanity, or through rebirth in realms of extreme suffering. Such ways in which karma comes fully due are not pleasant, but neither are they punishment. They constitute a very strong signal: “WRONG WAY!”

One of the Buddha's disciples was murdered after having become deeply enlightened. The Buddha explained that this was a consequence of willfully non-Preceptual acts of someone whose karma the disciple had inherited. Enlightenment does not free us from the full functioning of the law of karma: that which was sown must one day be fully reaped. Enlightenment *does* free us from the bonds of ignorance—from enslavement to greed, hate and delusion. That is, the liberation realized through enlightenment is liberation from the *perpetuation* of suffering. And it is not just liberation *from*: it is liberation *to* truly follow our own wonderful True Nature.

As is so often the case in discussing the teachings of Buddhism, the concepts of “karmic debt” and “repayment” are rough approximations to truth which cannot be carried too far. Such metaphors have their use and can convey helpful aspects of the truth. The *whole* truth is beyond our powers of comprehension.

Looking Up and Looking Down

From a worldly point of view, karmic debt and repayment manifesting through successive rebirths may appear to be a fantasy—or final proof of the ultimate futility and injustice of existence. Is our karmic inheritance a kind of original sin loaded at birth upon an innocent victim who must now struggle along through life with misery that he did not create?—From life-denying ascetics to the philosopher Schopenhauer, there have been those who have espoused such pessimistic points of view down through the centuries.

There is an alternative to such counsels of despair. From a more enlightened point of view, the process of rebirth is the expression of cosmic Compassion of infinite patience: all spiritual need continues to be given new opportunities to find its way to the Help of the Eternal. Beings who died in some degree of spiritual confusion and pain left jangles of spiritual need that we “picked up” at birth. Our impermanent body, subject to illness, old-age and death, is the precious repository of this spiritual need. Therefore, the life of this transitory, suffering body *is* the opportunity for a load of need to be helped.

The Eternal leaves it up to us whether we will despair because of the painfulness of existence, or whether we will accept suffering and train so as not to perpetuate it. We are free to look down or to look up. Those who insist on looking down find plenty of proof that life is futile and unjust; those who choose to look up find plenty of proof that the Compassion of the Eternal extends to and through all existence.

Chapter 9

The Refinery

*It is said that enlightened men cleanse their hearts with stillness
And withdraw into the Treasurehouse of this secret place, the hara.*

Stillness and the Hara

The instructions on how to meditate can make it look like a physical and mental exercise rather than a religious act: “Sit in a position with the spine upright and the abdomen relaxed; keep the eyes at least partly open; put the left hand in the palm of the right hand with the thumbs touching tip to tip, forming an elongated oval; then sit still and let your thoughts come and go, and every time you notice that you have got “hijacked” by a thought, bring your attention back to just sitting in the present moment.” But, of course, there is much more going on right from the beginning than meets the eye.

It is not uncommon for meditators to experience a shift in the perceived center of meditation in the body from the head to the hara. (Caution: This happens naturally: it is very unwise to try to *make* it happen. It happens quite suddenly for some people; for others it may be so gradual that they never even notice it.) The *hara* is the region of the body extending from the sternum to the lower abdomen. The stillness of meditation is experienced—eventually, if not necessarily at first—as centering in the hara.

In deep meditation—“samadhi”—the hara can be experienced as a great cave or reservoir of stillness. This stillness is an aspect of the Buddha Nature and is not created by us, nor can it be destroyed: it *is*. Down through the ages, Buddhist teachers have spoken of “entering samadhi,” or “being drawn into deep meditation”: they never say—because they never experience it this way—“I made a great stillness with my mind.”

The stillness is not a thought or a feeling (or sensation), but it does not require the absence of thought and feeling. Rather, thought and feeling arise and pass as waves arise and pass on the surface of a great

ocean, the depths of which are still. When meditation goes very deep, the thoughts and feelings coming and going on the surface seem far away and unreal in comparison with the stillness. No one can experience the vastness of this stillness without awe and reverence.

Why do we experience this stillness as centering in the hara?—All I can say in answer to this question is that there is a *spiritual* dimension to every aspect of the body. Every aspect of our being, and of all existence, is *of* the Eternal.

Attachment to Stillness

Just as we cannot create or destroy the stillness, we also cannot hold on to any experience of it. The stillness *is*: our *experience* of it, like all our experience, is transitory. A willful effort to cling to the experience of stillness results in a delusional state that, from the point of view of genuine spirituality, is like living death. This is called “quietism.”

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes her choice to keep going in her training beyond “delusive peace” (Plate XII; Plate VIII, first edition). It is not an accident that Rev. Master's great Commentary on the Precepts makes up the main body of the text accompanying the Plate entitled “The Lake of Quietism.” The choice came down to this: “Do you want to spend what time you have left attempting to clutch at an illusion of peace? Or do you want to continue walking a difficult path, but one that leads to the true cessation of suffering?” Rev. Master chose the latter option. To walk that path, she had to understand Preceptual Truth at the deepest level.

Stillness and Activity: The Twofold Practice

In the Homeric epic poem *The Odyssey*, Penelope, the wife of Odysseus waits for her husband's return from the Trojan war. Odysseus's return is delayed and eventually he is presumed to be dead by most people, but not by his wife. Penelope is pestered by suitors who wish to marry her and gain control of Odysseus' lands. Penelope tells the suitors that she will choose one of them when she has completed work on a tapestry. She works on the tapestry each day, but each night she secretly picks apart most of that day's work so that the tapestry never gets completed.

Practicing meditation without taking the Precepts to heart is like Penelope's making and unmaking the tapestry: any progress in meditation is undermined by non-Preceptual action. On the other hand, training in meditation and training in the Precepts strongly reinforce one another, for they are really two aspects of one spiritual process. To truly meditate is to take refuge in our own Buddha Nature. To take the Precepts to heart is to follow the Eternal—to willingly allow It to guide our actions—through all the twisting and turning of daily activity. The Buddha Nature and the Eternal are one and the same. The term “Buddha Nature” emphasizes the Refuge within ourselves to which we turn in meditation—the *immanent nature* of the Eternal. The term “the Eternal” emphasizes the *transcendent nature* of the Eternal: while it is true that we possess the Buddha Nature, it is also true that the Eternal is infinitely greater than ourselves.

When we take refuge in the Buddha Nature in meditation, we see more clearly how to refrain from doing that which is not good to do, and how to do that which is good to do. Thus meditation helps us live the Precepts. When we take the Precepts to heart we are reminded to keep turning for refuge to our True Nature in the midst of activity, and thus training in the Precepts helps us hold fast to the mind and heart of meditation. This is called “the twofold practice of living from the Buddha Nature and following the Eternal.”

Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts is the best and most detailed description of the twofold practice of which I know. She writes, “Do not do anything unless it is 'good;' do not do anything unless I have first asked the Lord of the House if it is good for me to do it. Do nothing whatsoever in a hurry; do nothing whatsoever on the spur of the moment unless I know the *certainty* given by the Lord of the House; know that I must take the consequences of what I do if it is not a full-digested act . . .” (Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII). For “Lord of the House” we can read “Buddha Nature.” For “asking the Lord of the House,” we can read, “turn for help and guidance to our own Buddha Nature in pure meditation.” Later in the same paragraph she writes, “. . . when the still, small voice within my mind and heart says, 'Yes,' I must obey that teaching. When it says 'No,' I must *not* disobey that teaching. When the Lord speaks, spring up joyfully to answer; then, indeed, it is good to do anything whatsoever; *know* that the Lord will *never* break the Precepts.” The “still, small voice within

my mind and heart” is the guidance of our own Buddha Nature. The “springing up joyfully to answer” is the following of the Eternal through all the challenging circumstances of our daily life.

The twofold practice of taking refuge in the Buddha Nature and following the Eternal harmonizes the seeming opposites of stillness and activity. We are drawn into stillness *when it is good*; we go out into activity *when it is good*. This “going in and out” is as natural and vital to our spiritual life as inhaling and exhaling are natural and vital to our physical life. Without the “going in” we become scattered and impulsive and do things that are not *good* to do; without the “going out” we get stuck in passivity and inaction and fail to do the things that are *good* to do.

The Cave of Transformation

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes certain key events as happening in the hara. Plates XXV-XXVI (Plate XIV, first edition) are particularly important in this regard. She also depicts the receiving of teaching in a number of illustrations showing a monk sitting in meditation with the hara represented by a building with open doors. Inside the building (a temple, I am sure) are different symbols representing different aspects of training and enlightenment. (Plates L-LII; Plate XXXII, first edition.) The open doors represent body and mind being open to the Eternal.

Since the stillness of meditation is experienced as centering in the hara, the general spiritual context of experiences described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* as happening in the hara is a context of deep meditative stillness. This stillness should not be mistaken for a kind of negative void in which nothing is happening. Important spiritual work happens within the stillness. It is deep work and it is quiet work, and the Doer of the work is the Eternal.

The Eternal does not force Its Compassion upon us. If we occupy ourselves exclusively with external things, we get stuck in activity and end up mistaking relative unrealities for True Reality. When we let go of external things for a while and drop down beneath the flow of thought and feeling, we allow the Help of the Eternal to flow to suffering's cause—our true spiritual need.

When the causes of suffering are brought to the stillness of the Buddha Nature in meditation, the “ore” of our spiritual need is worked upon by the Compassion and Wisdom of the Eternal and transformed into aspects of enlightenment. Therefore stillness (and, thus, the hara) is called “the cave of transformation.”

Initiating the Refining Process

The causes of suffering—greed, hate and delusion—always manifest in pairs of opposites: willful (impulsively non-Preceptual) action and willful inaction; lust and revulsion; clinging and hatred; complacency and inadequacy; dogmatic belief and sceptical doubt; elation and despair. We tend to swing between these opposites. But when we bring the opposites into the stillness of meditation, the swinging diminishes greatly. When this happens at a deep level, it is as if the opposites are contained, and orbit, within tranquility. The opposites do not destroy tranquility; tranquility does not destroy the opposites. And neither of the opposites destroys the other. The selfish self is not killed, but converted.

Once the opposites are contained within stillness, we are not being run around by our karma: the Eternal can get a word in edgewise. Now our spiritual need (the opposites, karma) must be brought together with the residual Buddha Nature—our innate capacity to look up—which is the aspect of our Buddha Nature that can never be fully buried in ignorance and pain. To exercise faith is to hold fast to our residual Buddha Nature. (See Chapter 7 of these Reflections for a discussion of the residual Buddha Nature.)

Our body is the repository of spiritual need. The spiritual need (karma, the opposites) is the ore that is to be refined—the raw material of enlightenment. The residual Buddha Nature is the source of the fire of faith and longing that will work upon the ore. The stillness of meditation is the spiritual context within which the process of conversion happens. Therefore, the ancient teachings say that “body, karma and residual Buddha Nature meet in the all-embracing womb [of stillness—the hara].”

In Chapter 10 of these Reflections, we will look in more detail at the greatest of all mysteries—the process of spiritual conversion.

Chapter 10

Refining the Ore

*Before confusion was caused, all was deeply
within the Unborn:
Leakage of the Water of the Spirit was not allowed.
By splitting the Treasurehouse open to its center,
we trample upon both inner and outer Heaven,
Destroying both with our actions.
When the Wheel turns in the opposite direction
to this,
Then It has the form which reflects the excellent
Light
And you are on your way to enlightenment.*

Origins of Spiritual Need

Rev. Master once asked her master, the Very Reverend Koho Keido Chisan Zenji, how the wheel of suffering was set in motion in the first place. He replied, “By accident someone started the course of karma.” In other words, it only takes the combination of ignorance and changing circumstances—and *Presto!* the wheel of birth and death is set in motion. A moment of shock, a moment of confusion, a moment of looking down—this is enough to start the course of karma.

We need not look for first causes in order to see how suffering is created and perpetuated. If we study ourselves and our own karmic inheritance in the light of meditation, we find both the *kind* of confusion that set the wheel of suffering rolling in the distant past and, more importantly, the way in which the wheel will continue to roll into the future if we allow it to do so.

There is an alternative to perpetuating suffering: we can turn the wheel in the opposite direction and undertake the process of conversion. The enlightenment and healing of saddened love by the Wisdom and Love of the Eternal is at the heart of this process.

Saddened Love

Rev. Master referred to the process through which the wheel of suffering is set in motion as the “saddening of love.” I do not remember Rev. Master using the term “saddened love” prior to her retreat in 1976. But during that retreat she gained deep insight into the causes of suffering, and she also experienced the Love of the Eternal in great depth. She saw that this Love is our birthright, but that we easily doubt It. When we willfully doubt It, we “look down.” Whenever this happens, an imaginary gulf between ourselves and Love opens up.

The instant that the imaginary gulf between ourselves and the Love of the Eternal was created, a longing to bridge the gulf was born. Thus craving is born out of ignorance. Beings hunt for something to take the place of the Love from which they believe themselves to be separated. Yet externalized longing is easily and frequently disappointed. We desire to hold on to those we love, yet separation is inevitable. We desire health and become ill. We desire happiness, yet all beings experience pain. And so on. Where there is little wanting, there is little room for disappointment. Where there is great wanting, there is the possibility of great disappointment.

The chief ways in which we experience the disappointment of desire and clinging (insistent desire) are as sadness, grief (deeper, darker sadness), anger and despair—in that order, according to the degree of desire and clinging. Feeling is the “reaper of karma:” these states of feeling are signals of spiritual need.

Rev. Master often reminded us, “The world is not subject to our personal will.” There is no enduring refuge within impermanence. We cannot make the world conform to our wishes through willpower or through wishful thinking. The disappointment of externalized longing continues until one day someone cries out, “I don't wish to continue down this path of suffering! Help!”

Our Part and the Eternal's Part

Just as gold was always contained within the ore from which it is refined, so the Love of the Eternal was always contained within saddened love. Our love, however much it may be confused, constricted and rendered desperate, is still *of* the Love of the Eternal.

The Love and Wisdom of the Eternal can heal and enlighten each knot of saddened love in our karmic inheritance *provided* that we do our part in training. The opposites—generated out of saddened love—must be kept contained within the limits of the Precepts and the stillness of meditation. When “leakage” occurs (when we lose our grounding and act willfully), we need to return to the mind and heart of meditation. Above all, we must continue to look up.

We need to do our part in the work of conversion. And we need to *not* try to do the Eternal's part: “*Only* the Lord of the House can *cause* the fountain of wisdom, compassion and love to flow properly; the whole purpose of the brain is to furnish us with accurate information—it is a computer in the service of the Lord. . . . [At the time of genuine spiritual surrender] the brain cries out, 'I give up; I am a servant [of the Eternal] and no master.’” (Plate LX; first edition, Plate XXXVIII.)

By looking for help to the Eternal and by opening our heart in offering, we make it possible for the Love of the Eternal (in the “washing,” or “reaming,” mode) to expose the spiritual need. This is like exposing a seam of metal-bearing ore so that it can be mined and refined.

Refining the Ore: The Flow of Wisdom Through and To Particular Need

There is the Buddha that shows us what to do, and there is the Buddha that shows us what *not* to do. The major knots of spiritual need in our karmic inheritance are used by the Eternal to show us what not to do. This is essential teaching in the process of conversion, for we can be greatly helped in our efforts not to repeat the mistakes of the past if we understand what those mistakes were. Key examples of such teaching are to be found in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* in Plates XIII-XVIII (first edition, Plate IX) and Plates XXIII-XXIV (first edition, Plate XIII).

It is important always to remember that our past karma always has the potential to influence our choices. The knots of saddened love show us the origins of our own longings, and of our tendencies toward self-judgment and despair. Whether a particular jangle was made yesterday or a thousand years ago, it is a vehicle of teaching. Note that the teaching that flows through spiritual need is itself addressing our *continuing* need to harmonize more deeply with the Eternal. Thus,

this teaching can help us throughout our lives *if* we take its lessons to heart. Indeed, insight into the teachings embodied in major karmic jangles can deepen through the years, and one can find many ways in which key events in our karmic past illuminate the meaning of present events.

That which is confused and pained is not necessarily of no use. The help that we can derive from our karmic inheritance in the form of teaching shows that every aspect of it functions as a Bodhisattva for us now and in the future. The Eternal tirelessly uses *everything* for the good of all beings.

There is also teaching that flows *to* the need. Again, *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* contains excellent examples (see the same Plates mentioned above). Note that Rev. Master sometimes addressed teaching to a particular being from her past-life inheritance as if it was actually present. In a sense, it *was* present, not in physical body, but as a part of Rev. Master's own conscious experience at the time. We are not identical with beings whose karma we have inherited; *and* all that is left of them is now in us. Our body and mind can be the vehicle by means of which the Help of the Eternal flows to spiritual need of ancient, or more recent, origin. And we can be enlisted by the Eternal to give the teaching that is needed in order to give peace of mind and heart. We can do this *if* we are listening to and following the counsel of our own True Nature.

The flow of Wisdom through and to spiritual need is an essential part of the process of conversion. For spiritual conversion involves a major change in the way in which we view and understand the world. We are shown the ways in which externalized longing, self-judgment and despair perpetuate suffering so that we can do things in a different way. The Help of the Eternal flows as teaching to particular knots of saddened love so that ignorance can be enlightened. When this happens, the “obstacles dissolve” into Immaculacy and a shower of merit is released.

Refining the Ore (continued): The Flow of Love Through and To Particular Need

“There is nothing from the first.”—This statement may not sound like a description of Infinite Love, but it is. From the point of view of our wonderful True Nature all our thrashing about in confusion and pain

is unreality. There is just the Great Immaculacy within which beings, their actions, and the consequences of their actions arise and pass as reflections arise and pass in a mirror. Nothing sullies or diminishes the Great Immaculacy, and It never despises, judges, or scorns. It is vast, benevolent Love beyond our power of comprehension. Our knots of saddened love contain the conviction of separation from that Love. They need to experience It and know It.

This is *the* great mystery of conversion—the way in which infinite Love heals the wounds of saddened love. When the Water of the Spirit (which is one name for that Love) flows to and through hardened knots of the conviction of separation from Love, they dissolve away. That which has judged itself, and believed itself, to be unworthy can at last rest in true peace. It is amazing how clean the universe is seen to be when we are not looking down!

Human love can play a crucial role in this process provided that “the gift of sympathy and compassion” is understood to derive from, and return to, the Eternal. We must be good disciples of the Eternal—good listeners and good followers. Then, when it is called forth by the Eternal, human tenderness can greatly help that which has believed itself to be spurned by man. Again, this is clearly shown in the above-mentioned Plates of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

Pure Gold

When the refining process is complete, the pure gold of the Buddha Nature can be clearly seen. There always was a refuge within our own Heart, our own Buddha Nature. And there always was the possibility of following the Eternal. Just as the gold was always present in the ore, even if not seen, so the Buddha Nature has always been present within all spiritual need, all knots of saddened love. Our karmic inheritance is the raw material of enlightenment. When we look back upon the stream of karma with enlightened eyes, we see not a single speck of dust.

Chapter 11

Unsui

When you are able to drop external things, leave behind worldly attachments and live in purity, then you can enter right inside the Treasurehouse of the Buddha.

The Purpose for Living

Whenever a great swatch of spiritual need finds its way to the Help of the Eternal, the question of one's purpose for living arises. This can be understood as, “Important work accomplished.—Where do we go from here?” This question came to the forefront in Rev. Master's retreat in 1976 immediately following her deep sange (confession and conversion). For Rev. Master, the answer to the question, “What is your purpose for living?” was, “My purpose is to be a monk.” (Plate XI; first edition, Plate VII.)

But what is a monk?—She describes the bewilderment that initially accompanied this question: “I have been a monk for many years but—what is a monk?” One possible answer to this question then arises: Perhaps the meaning of being a monk lies in living—or trying to live—in perpetual tranquility. Rev. Master considers this possibility and recognizes that there has to be more to the meaning of being a monk than this: “It is beautiful to sit beside this lake [of stillness] but what is the point? To sit beside a lake looking at the moon for eternity? This is all? . . . A voice whispers, 'Delusive peace is unmasked. This is the lake of quietism. Here you do *not* stay.’” (Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII.)

And so, recognizing that if she tries to hold on to the experience of stillness and tranquility she will bog down in delusion, Rev. Master goes on in search of the true meaning *for her* of being a monk.

Harmonizing Body and Mind

After letting go of “delusive peace” Rev. Master writes, “If I am to be a live monk I must *know* the harmony of body and mind for the body

will not know peace until the mind ceases from evil.” (Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII.)

“The body will not know peace until the mind ceases from evil.”—This statement shows Rev. Master's understanding of the fact that non-Preceptual action—which always originates in non-Preceptual action of *thought*—causes knots of tension in the body. These knots of tension store spiritual need. Suffering is the signal that the spiritual need exists and is waiting for the Help of the Eternal.

How can the mind cease from evil? This question is answered in Rev. Master's great Commentary on the Precepts (Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII). Here we see that the mind will not cease from evil as long as we willfully ignore our True Self, the Buddha Nature (or Eternal, or “Lord of the House” [please see Chapter 1 of these Reflections for an explanation of the ancient origins of this term]). Somehow we have to orient ourselves toward, and bring our actions of thought, speech and body into alignment with, our True Self.

Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts emphasizes the importance of using pure meditation to distinguish actions that are truly good to do from those that are not good to do in each situation that arises. Rev. Master understood that “pure meditation” is far more than quieting the mind: it is taking refuge in the Buddha Nature. To “take refuge in” someone or something is to turn to him or her or it for help. This is why “asking the Lord of the House” receives so much emphasis in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. I will discuss this “asking” in some detail in Chapter 12 of these Reflections.

The aligning of our actions of mind and body with our True Nature is the meaning of “knowing harmony of body and mind.” And for Rev. Master, devoting one's life to harmonizing body and mind with the Eternal is what it means to be a monk.

Renunciation of the World

Rev. Master used to say, “We retreat in order to advance.” In the context of monastic renunciation of the world, this means separating (“retreating”) from the world for the purpose of giving oneself wholly to the Eternal. Renunciation would be a bleak choice indeed if it was just a turning *from* the world. It is because it is a turning *toward* the Eternal that it is the true Path of Ancient Buddhas.

There is the formal renunciation of the world at the time of monastic ordination. And then there is on-going *training* in renunciation, which is a continual challenge. Monks cannot be shielded from their own karmically-inherited deluded views and externalized longings. Nor, in the long run, can they be shielded from exposure to the doubt and confusion embodied in the opinions that circulate in the world around them. Daily life offers innumerable opportunities to choose what we will put our faith in, what we will value in our deepest heart, what we will hold fast to.

Training in renunciation is letting go of shadow-refuges *and* holding fast to our True Refuge, the Buddha Nature. Even in the darkest, most difficult conditions, we can turn in pure meditation to the Buddha Nature for help. Then we find the light of the “residual Buddha Nature”—the innate, inextinguishable capacity to look up—within ourselves. The beginning chapters (Plates) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* show Rev. Master in great darkness and difficulty. And they show her turning *away* from worldly paths that lead to despair, and turning *toward* the Buddha Nature. When she writes at the end of the text accompanying Plate III (in both editions), “Better by far to bleed upon the mountains; better by far to trust in, and remember, the kensho,” the “kensho” to which she refers was her first great experience of the Buddha Nature. Remembering the kensho was a way of holding fast to the Lord of the House in the midst of great darkness.

One can love the world *and* renounce the world for a greater Love. In the ordination ceremony of the Soto Zen tradition, the new monk recites, “Being apart from my family in order to seek the Truth, I vow to help others.” We train for self *and* other; we renounce the world for self *and* other. Why?—Because within the Eternal there is no real distinction between self and other: need is just need, wherever it happens to be located; Help is just Help, wherever and however It manifests.

Renunciation is not remote from the experience of anyone who has truly meditated for even a single moment. Great Master Dogen's words, “Cut all ties, give up everything. Think of neither good nor evil, consider neither right nor wrong.” describe the attitude of mind of renunciation. And these words occur in an explanation of meditation (*Fukanzazengi*, which translates as “Rules for Meditation”) that is

used by both monastic and lay trainees. “Cut all ties, give up everything.” could also be expressed as “Offer all that arises and passes to the Eternal.”—“Think of neither good nor evil, consider neither right nor wrong.” could also be expressed as “Do not worry about external things: entrust everything to the Eternal.”

This offering and entrusting is the true mind and heart of the monk. Whenever *anyone* truly meditates, the mind and heart of a monk manifests. All beings possess the Buddha Nature, and there is no difference between the meditation of beginner and Zen master, monk and layman, man and woman.

Some trainees continue to live in the world in order to fulfill important responsibilities, yet through sincere training develop the heart and mind of a monk. When the responsibilities are fulfilled, some of these trainees become monks. There is a long tradition in Buddhism of people quietly disappearing into monasteries when their family responsibilities have been fulfilled.

But most lay trainees never become monks. The path of the lay trainee is not an inferior path to that of the monk. Both lay trainees and monastic trainees walk in the footsteps of the Buddhas. It is for each of us to determine which path is right for us, and then to live the finest life that we are able to live within the limits of the path that we have chosen.

Cloud and Water

Though Rev. Master and others have used the English word “monk” (as well as some other terms such as “priest” and “priest trainee”) to translate words from Asian languages (mostly Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese) that denote those who have renounced the world in order to follow in the Buddha's footsteps, there is no English word that fully conveys the meaning of the Asian words. English words such as “monk,” “nun,” “priest,” “hermit,” and “friar” tend to have meanings that derive from the beliefs, practices, discipline and institutions that developed in Christianity over many centuries. There is overlap of the meanings of these terms with the meanings of Buddhist terms, but there are also differences.

One term that Rev. Master particularly liked, and frequently used in teaching her disciples, was the Japanese word *unsui*. This word is

written in two characters. The character for “un” means “cloud.” The character for “sui” means “water.” So “unsui” literally means “cloud and water,” but it is used to denote Buddhist monks (priest trainees), male and female.

As a cloud goes where it is blown by the wind, so the renunciate follower of the Buddha goes where the Wind of the Buddha Nature blows. As water flows on and on in rivers and streams and clings to nothing, so the renunciate trainee goes on and on in training, continually letting go of externals in order to hold fast to, and harmonize fully with, the Lord of the House.

Chapter 12

Asking

*Great Avalokiteswara views all the world in truth,
Free from defilement, loving, knowing all, full of
compassion;
He must always be prayed to, adored for all
eternity.*

—“The Scripture of Avalokiteswara Bodhisattva”
from *The Lotus Sutra*
translated by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

The House of Ego

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts immediately follows the description of her deep experience of *sange*. *Sange* is spiritual house-cleaning. The deep *sange* of the third kensho that Rev. Master describes in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* actually dismantles the house of ego—the illusion of a self that is separate from the Eternal.

Liberation from the dark and painful confines of the entrenched delusion of self is a wonderful thing, but it will not last if one heedlessly rebuilds the house of ego. The deep wish, the deep *resolve*, to live in a way that does not recreate the spiritual prison of ego is the motive for the thorough, meditative study of the Precepts that resulted in Rev. Master's Commentary.

A Path of Faith

How is the house of ego made?—By willfully ignoring our True Nature in actions of thought, word and deed.

How can we live in such a way as *not* to re-make (or continue making) the house of ego?—By *ceasing* to ignore our True Nature.

How can we cease to ignore our True Nature?—By choosing to take refuge in It, and by choosing to seek and follow Its guidance.

These questions and answers provide an abstract overview of the teaching embodied in much more detail in the Commentary on the Precepts. They outline a magnificent and challenging path of faith. Yet there is nothing in the Commentary that is not contained within a single moment of true meditation, and there is nothing within it that has not been taught for centuries in Mahayana Buddhism, and in Soto Zen in particular.

A True First Step

Great Master Dogen cautioned his disciples, “If your first step is false, you will immediately stumble.” (*Fukanzazengi*—“Rules for Meditation”) The truth expressed in these words is strongly emphasized in Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts. The wheel of suffering is easily set in motion, but difficult to stop. A moment of inattention, an impulsive action, a careless word—all can have serious and long-lasting consequences. If this is true of actions of speech and body, it is even more true of actions of thought: beings can and do sentence themselves to lifetimes of misery through a single act of self-judgment.

So making the “first step” a true and sound step is very important. This is why there is such an emphasis on “asking the Lord of the House” in the Commentary on the Precepts. We have the Buddha Nature. We can take refuge in the Buddha Nature through meditation. And in that mind and heart of meditation, we can ask for the guidance of our wonderful True Nature.

This *asking* is a true and sound first step. The way in which Rev. Master took this step is described repeatedly in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. The emphasis is always on identifying and doing that which is *good* to do in a particular situation, and on identifying and refraining from doing that which is not *good* to do. As we shall see, *asking* initiates a meditative deliberation in which the Help of the Eternal is sought, but in which we also have a continuing responsibility.

Confusion About Asking

Asking the Eternal for help is a simple act. Yet it is amazing how the simplest aspects of the spiritual life can be obscured and complicated

by confusion. There are a number of ways in which confusion about asking manifests.

The darkest and most despairing confusion about asking is found in the belief that there is nothing to turn to for help. This belief is a hard shell formed around a great knot of spiritual confusion and pain. Even after experiencing *kensho* (“awakening to our True Nature”), a trainee can have one or more such karmically-inherited knots of confusion and pain: part of us can “get it,” while other parts of us are still very much in the dark. Continued training will soften that hard shell of delusion until one day even the toughest knot is dissolved by the Wisdom and Love of the Eternal.

Confusion can also manifest in the form of the opposites of pride and inadequacy. If we believe we already have (or should have) all the answers, we do not think of asking the Eternal for help. Nor will we ask for help if we are convinced that we are unworthy of the Eternal's attention, or that we have no capacity to hear the Eternal's response.

Confusion in asking can also manifest as asking for miraculous delivery from the consequences of our own actions. The Help of the Eternal is not magic: It will no more free us from the functioning of the law of karma than It will free us from the functioning of the law of gravity. On the other hand, we can turn to the Eternal for help in *accepting* forms of karmic consequence that are hard to bear.

Confusion about asking does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle. What better reason to ask than the need to find our way through clouds of confusion?

The Why and How of Asking

The choice to ask the Eternal for help is a choice that has consequences. The consequences can be serious, and it is important that the reason for asking be based in real spiritual need. As emphasized above, there is no better reason to ask for the Help of the Eternal than a deep wish to keep the true spirit of the Precepts.

In its most basic form, asking happens every time we look up spiritually. The capacity to look up—and the capacity to ask—is rooted in the Buddha Nature Itself. We all have this capacity and nothing can destroy it. This asking does not require words, but it can make use of them. It can be called “the prayer of the heart.”

We can ask for the Help of the Eternal with childlike trust. This keeps our asking in alignment with the prayer of the heart. Childlike trust is sincere, reverential, straightforward and non-insistent—and simple: a moment's pause and “Please help” is sometimes all that is possible in a difficult situation, and often all that is needed. The Eternal knows what is in our heart, for there is nothing in us that is not *of* the Eternal.

The prayer of the heart is an intrinsic part of the practice of bowing. We can bow and ask for help. We can bow and give thanks. We can bow for the sake of bowing. There is a Soto Zen teaching that Rev. Master passed on to her disciples: “When bowing ceases, Buddhism itself will cease to exist.”

Finally, as mentioned above, in asking we initiate a process that we need to keep up with. I will explore another aspect of this process in Chapter 13 of these Reflections.

Chapter 13

Offering

The Divine Light lives in ourselves and opens our inborn ability to realize perfect Wisdom.

The Altar of the Heart

In Buddhism, the altar in a meditation hall, ceremony hall or shrine represents the altar of our own Heart. The statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva on the altar represents the Eternal, usually with an emphasis on one or more of Its aspects. Just as the statue of the Buddha or Bodhisattva sits atop the altar, so the Eternal must sit atop the altar of the Heart if we are to truly meditate. Rev. Master put it in characteristically down-to-earth terms: “The first thing that we need to do in religion is get down out of God's seat.” The junior partner cannot take the place, or do the work, of the senior partner.

The offering of incense, flowers, light (through candles), food and water has the general meaning of offering *everything* to the Eternal. This is an intrinsic aspect of meditation and the logical and natural next step after asking the Eternal for help. When we meditate truly, we place everything that arises in consciousness upon the altar of the Heart, entrusting it to the Eternal.

Roses and Skunk Cabbage

The flowers on the altar represent all life offered to, and looking toward, the Eternal.

Our life includes flowers that have beautiful fragrance and flowers that stink—and many flowers between these two extremes. The flowers of joy and the flowers of grief both belong on the altar of the Heart, as do love and hate, doubt and dogmatism, hope and fear—all the opposites, all the passions, all our thoughts and desires, emotions and sensations.

To the Eternal, all our offerings are the same. Infinite Love does not discriminate or judge. Roses and skunk cabbage are both *of* the Eternal, though roses have a beautiful smell and skunk cabbage stinks to high heaven. It is our choice whether or not we will put something

on the altar of the Heart: the Eternal will not make the choice for us. However, if we do choose to offer, the Love and Wisdom of the Eternal will then be able to do their transformative work upon any spiritual need contained within the offering.

Not Holding On, Not Pushing Away

Offering is not the same as holding on. The very word “offering” implies generous-hearted giving. The attitude of mind and heart in offering in meditation is conveyed in the words, “Not my will, but Thine.”

Offering is not the same as pushing away. This point may not always be clear, for we can make a gift to someone of something that we do not want to keep.—“Here, you take it; I don't want it.” If we try this with the Eternal, we get a big “return to sender” notice in the form of increased tension and spiritual dis-ease. Offering is not the same as dumping.

If a particular offering has pain in it, we will feel that pain when the offering is placed upon the altar of the Heart in meditation. This is where we learn in detail why greed, hate and delusion are called “the causes of suffering:” when we make a real effort to sit still with them, the pain coiled up in them is felt and seen for what it is. This is why it can be so hard sometimes to meditate. We may experience our struggle with spiritual pain as an inability to concentrate and stay present, as physical and spiritual tension, and as vague discontentment and dis-ease.—These are all symptoms of underlying pain.

What can we do about such pain?—The answer to this question has two parts. First, keep placing the pain on the altar of the Heart, neither holding on to it nor pushing it away. To do this, we must be *willing* for the pain to stay on the altar of the Heart (and therefore in consciousness) as long as it is *good* for it to be there. Second, be open to the teaching that the pain conveys about the causes of suffering.

Doing the first part makes it possible for the Love and Wisdom of the Eternal to work upon the cause of the pain, thereby eventually allowing the pain to dissolve. Doing the second part makes it possible for us to take Preceptual teaching to heart so that we can refrain from doing actions that create more spiritual pain, and instead do that

which is *good* to do. The first part is an important aspect of “living from our Buddha Nature.” The second part is an important aspect of “following the Eternal.” Here again we encounter the *twofold practice of living from our Buddha Nature and following the Eternal*.

Offering in Faith and Offering in Gratitude

The offering that comes out of need is an offering made in faith. The offering that comes out of need that has received the Help of the Eternal is an offering made in gratitude.

When we ask the Eternal for help, we ask in faith. Then we need to place that for which we have sought help upon the altar of the Heart in the faith that the Help is there, whether we see It or not. The offering thus grows right out of asking; and offering keeps the arrow of need on track in its journey to the Help of the Eternal.

The upwelling of gratitude signifies that need and Help have met, and that need is being helped. “Out of gratitude to the Buddhas and Ancestors I give Dharma, I give wealth, I give life itself—strength, youth, beauty, wealth, everything that I have and, even then, I cannot give thanks enough for one second of Their true training; I can never repay Their kindness to me. Only by my own true training is this possible and then, again, there is no repayment: it is just the work of a Buddha.” (*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII.)

Asking points our spiritual need toward the Help of the Eternal; offering opens the need up so that it can receive the Help of the Eternal. Our responsibility in the work of conversion does not end with offering, as will be seen in Chapter 14 of these Reflections.

Chapter 14

Waiting

Silent and still, speechless and very well concealed within this Place without words, there is the Truth that directs all things.

Purifying Fire

All beings love, for Infinite Love is the reality of all existence. Yet love that is warped even a little by the illusion of self becomes possessive and insistent—then saddened, then darkly grieved, then angry, then deeply deluded.—And since all this suffering is rooted in love, it can truthfully be said that we break our own heart out of the best of intentions.

An arrow of need that is launched toward the Eternal in asking is easily thrown off track by saddened love: we ask for help, but often cannot let go of the opinions, desires and expectations that blind us to the help that we seek. By placing these opinions and desires on the altar of the Heart, we let go of our insistence. But it can come roaring back again and again, blowing that which was offered off the altar. Love has immense power, and that power, which *can* be expressed in transcendent *selflessness*, also imbues love that is warped by the illusion of self.

How can we cope with insistent love?—By patiently *waiting* in meditation—in the contentment of our own Buddha Nature—while the wind of insistence calms down. In this *waiting* we pick up that which has been blown off the altar of the Heart and put it back. And we do this again and again. Each time we thus renew the offering, insistence loses some of its energy—it loses it *to* the fire of faith and willingness, so that as insistence dissipates faith and willingness strengthen: “I must have.” converts into “I am willing!”

In this way, human love is purified of self and reverted back to its primordial state of being an emanation of the Love of the Eternal. Now it can take its guidance from the Eternal. Love that is guided by delusion deepens suffering. Love that is guided by wisdom does that

which helps beings be a spiritual success, each individual being in his (or her, or its) own way.

The Place of Waiting

We tend to think of waiting as a form of inactivity that has little or no importance: we wait in anticipation of something that we are waiting to happen, or something that we will do. The *waiting* that is an aspect of meditation is not mere passivity. It can require great effort. And it is as important as any other aspect of meditation.

During the time of waiting, the vessel of our mind and body is being prepared to receive the Eternal's response to the prayer of the heart. In order for this preparation to be accomplished, we must *not* anticipate the response. We must be content to have nothing but the Eternal, know nothing but what the Eternal may reveal to us. Thus we use the effort of a spiritual adult to maintain childlike trust in the face of all doubt, fear, desire, and worldly praise and blame. This allows the Help of the Eternal to flow to spiritual need without obstruction.

The time of waiting is the time in which we are most tempted to abandon our spiritual effort. Fortunately, the patience that can be found in meditation is more than human virtue. It is an aspect of the Buddha Nature. We can withdraw within, concentrate the mind, and take refuge in the Iron Man—"the patient endurance of the Uncreate." In this spiritual Place, external things do not matter, the passage of time does not matter, loss and gain do not matter: the Eternal *IS*.

"In the darkest place the Lord gave me all of the teaching and in the lightest place His teaching remains the same. During my kensho in 1963 He gave me the same teaching and He will give it me again at the hour of death—NOTHING MATTERS—what a magnificent, peace-bringing teaching this is."

—*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*
(Postword; first edition, Plate XLI)

The Back Burner

We cannot sit in meditation all the time. There are things that need to be done, responsibilities that need to be fulfilled.

If we have sincerely asked, and if we have wholeheartedly offered, we can do our waiting within both stillness and activity, turning within in meditation when it is *good* to do so, and going out into activity when it is *good* to do so. The key is to work at keeping the same attitude of mind in both stillness and activity.

We can ask; we can offer; and most of the time we can wait. And the fact that we *can* wait can be a great comfort when we are meditatively “cooking” a problem. We do not *have* to act impulsively. Nor do we have to get stuck in passivity, deluding ourselves that “sins of omission” are less real and less consequential than “sins of commission.” We can wait for the guidance of the Eternal in each area of need. We can trust that clarification on how to proceed in each of these areas will come at the right moment, and that we will be able to do what is *good* to do.

At any one time, I can identify many questions that I am keeping warm on the “back burner” of meditation. Some have been there for a long time (even years), some for only a few hours or days. It helps to have a *big* back burner.

Sooner or later every genuine need is met, every genuine prayer is answered. In Chapter 15 of these Reflections, I will discuss the effort that we need to make in order to comprehend the answer when it is given.

Chapter 15

Listening

*Because of our desire to apprehend what we do
not yet understand,
The meaning of things will be revealed.
By awakening that which has not yet been awakened,
We will draw close to the Unborn
And allow It to become the moving force in our lives.
Do not retain rebellious feelings or lazy tendencies;
Instead, nourish the residual Buddha Nature!
Once one grasps the all-embracing Light,
The house of self can no longer be seen.
By listening to what cannot be heard, we warm
the root of our existence.
By looking at what cannot be seen we will bring
peace to our fears.
That which makes us wander about in what is
uncompassionate and hard to bear
Will naturally change.*

Listening to What Cannot be Heard

The still, small voice of our wonderful True Nature does not have to manifest in the form of what we think of as a “voice.” It can be “heard” without the medium of sound. So the *listening* that is an aspect of meditation is an *intuitive* listening, and when we “hear” that which we are listening for, it is an *intuitive* hearing.

One summer day many years ago I was lying on my back looking at the sky. It was a clear day and I was in a lovely mountain meadow. It was early afternoon. Suddenly, for a fraction of a second, I saw a star in that blue sky. I tried to find it again, but could not see it. I have never doubted that I really did see a star. And I have since heard that this happens to other people also.

I did not see that star in a blue sky in full sunlight by *trying* to see it. I did not *want* to see a star, for I had not the slightest idea that it was

even possible to see one in full daylight. I was just relaxed and *not looking for anything*.

Just as a relaxed person gazing into a blue sky can see a star when all conditions are right for that to happen, so a person who has relaxed into the stillness of meditation can hear the still, small voice of the Eternal *when all conditions are right for that to happen*. There may be many such conditions that must be right in order to hear the voice of the Eternal, and it is unlikely that we need to be aware of most of them, but two have been identified in the story of my unintentional meadow star-gazing: we must not be *wanting* and we must not be *trying*.

But how do we listen without wanting or trying?—If I have asked for help, would I not be wanting the response and trying to hear it?—The answer is that if we have offered up everything, we have offered up wanting, and if we have offered up wanting, we will not strive (try). And if we have given the meditative effort of waiting to the process that was set in motion by asking and offering, the *habit-energy* within wanting and trying has been gradually re-directed into willingness. And this entire process has opened mind and heart and made them receptive. Now we must *trust* our innate capacity to hear the voice of the Eternal, and be *willing* to receive the teaching and to follow the guidance that the Eternal gives.

Offering flows out of asking; waiting flows out of offering; listening flows out, and is an integral part, of waiting. This is one flow, one process, one natural movement of the Heart. It is *living from our Buddha Nature*.

Timing

In this wonderful meditative process, we get out of our imagined position in the driver's seat and allow the Eternal to teach us. The functioning of genuine spiritual intuition is entirely controlled by the Eternal. During the time of asking, offering, waiting and listening our mind and heart turn toward, and open to, the Eternal. Thus we restrain willful impulsiveness, and respect, and attune our attention and effort to, the *Eternal's* timing.

Sometimes the response to a sincere prayer is immediate. For example, in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master describes

several instances in which she asks the Eternal for guidance and gets an immediate answer. But often a response comes after a period of some duration. Sometimes a response is not fully apprehended until a long time has passed—perhaps months or even years.

We do not need to doubt ourselves or the Eternal when we seem to get no immediate response. Our job is to get out of the driver's seat and to *stay* out of it. *Every* sincere prayer receives a response. But often the timing is not yet right for the response to be given and/or apprehended right away. In every such case, it is worth the effort that we put into patiently waiting with an open heart. When all conditions have fully ripened, the Help of the Eternal will flow to our need.

Penetrating the Teaching

Receiving a teaching is not the same as *understanding* the teaching that has been received. Sometimes understanding is immediate. Sometimes it comes within a short time. Sometimes it comes only over a long period of time. Learning is a complex process. We can encounter confusion and bewilderment in studying any subject, especially in the beginning. This is as true of the process of learning initiated when we apprehend teaching from the Eternal as it is true of any other form of learning.

One reason why it can take time to penetrate the meaning of a teaching is that teachings apprehended in spiritual intuition can be scrambled as they work their way through layers of karmically-inherited confusion and pain. This is especially true prior to deep spiritual conversion, but it *can* be true at any time because, as Rev. Master often reminded us, no matter how far we have gone in training, we can always at least *potentially* be influenced by karma.

If a teaching has been scrambled, or if for any other reason the meaning of a teaching is not yet clear, we need to meditate further. In fact, the need to meditatively de-scramble, or otherwise penetrate the meaning of, a teaching is itself another form of spiritual need which can evoke the same asking, offering, waiting and listening. So we end up with meditative wheels rotating within wheels.

And this complex meditative deliberation can be happening at deep levels within ourselves of which we are not aware most of the time. I cannot too strongly emphasize that the “steps” that I am describing

are always present in even a single moment of genuine meditation. As our training deepens, we become more aware of these aspects of meditation, and more skilled and confident in consciously making use of them. *And* we always return to just sitting with an open heart. The Eternal is the One in charge: we can trust this every step of the way.

Chapter 16

Following

When the Buddha does all, and you follow this doing effortlessly and without worrying about it, you gain freedom from suffering and become, yourself, Buddha.

—Great Master Dogen, *Shoji*
 (“Life and Death”)

Stepping into the Unknown

Genuine asking is done in faith, and the process of meditative deliberation that it initiates is done in faith. This process culminates in a *following* that must also be done in faith. Such action is neither willfully reckless nor willfully cautious: it is *just* following in faith.

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master writes, “When the Lord of the House gives you His teaching, listen attentively and respectfully, and quickly, loudly, reverently and obediently say, ‘YES.’” (Page xxix; first edition, Page 176)

Note that Rev. Master does *not* write, “. . . listen attentively and respectfully, and make sure you get an explanation before you say, ‘Yes.’”

Unknowing is not the same as ignorance and confusion. However, it may *look* like ignorance and confusion if we are clinging to intellectual clarity. In reality, while unknowing is obscure to the intellect, it is an environment in which our spiritual intuition is completely and contentedly at home. There is an *intuitive* clarity which is utter obscurity to the intellect. Rev. Master called this intuitive clarity “blood and bones certainty.” It is the clarity of the “that” (*that* an act is *good* to do, or not *good* to do, in a particular situation) rather than the “why.”

When all conditions are fully ripe, and when we are not willfully blocking our own ability to receive the guidance of the Eternal, we are shown the step that is *good* to take—no more, no less. If we look down and hesitate at the critical moment for action, our hesitation can result in a proliferation of confusion and suffering. Yes, we *might* get

it wrong if we take that step into the unknown. But we *will* get it wrong if we bog down in doubt and hesitation.

Timing

Following is doing that which the Eternal has shown is *good* to do, *and* doing it when it is *good* to do it. *Following* is also *not* doing that which is not *good* to do when it is not *good* to do it. Timing is of the utmost importance. At one moment a particular action may be *good* to do; in the next moment it may not be *good* to do.

We all experience the importance of getting the timing right every day. We may not survive if we walk across an intersection at the wrong time, or take a breath at the wrong time when swimming. We can make a true statement at the wrong time and spread confusion and grief. At another time the same statement might greatly help someone.

This “now it is *good*, now it is not *good*” requires us to train in mindfulness so that we can catch the Eternal's signals. While the process of meditative deliberation that I have described (asking, offering, waiting, listening) can be spread over an extended period of time, it is all telescoped into a moment of meditation, a moment of pure awareness. Whether a signal be a literal green or red stoplight, or a purely intuitive spiritual “green or red light,” if we are not stuck in opinionation and insistence, we are capable of moving very quickly to do that which is *good* when it is *good*.

Catching the Lord

When I was young monk, Rev. Master frequently challenged her monastic disciples with the question, “Can you catch the Lord?”—I have always assumed that this was a question that she was challenged with as a young monk. I now know that it means, “Can you catch the signal from the Eternal and act upon it without doubt or hesitation?”

Some spiritual “green and red lights” are particularly strong signals. Strong signals indicate important opportunities or dangers. We ignore these signals and refuse to obey them at our peril. Here are two examples of strong signals from my own experience:

One day I was resting in my room and “heard” the words, “Put your kesa on and go to the meditation hall.” There was no scheduled

meditation at the time, but I put on my kesa and went. When I got there I found that one of my disciples was sitting in meditation. I sat down and meditated also. After a short while my disciple started weeping. I took him to my office where he experienced the first kensho.

Once many years ago I was transporting some items in the temple truck from Seattle to our monastery. Just before leaving, I got a clear intuitive sense that I should wait, stay the night in Seattle, and drive to the monastery the next day. I ignored this message. Within a few miles, I had an accident. No one was hurt, but the temple truck was wrecked.

The first story is an example of a strong “green light.” The second story is an example of a strong “red light.” In one example I did that which was *good*; in the other I did not. In one case I trusted; in the other I did not. In one I was willing to follow; in the other I was not. In neither case was I given an explanation of why the choice toward which the Eternal pointed me was *good* or not *good*. And in neither case did it make the slightest difference to the Eternal whether or not I chose to follow the guidance that the Eternal had provided: whether we follow or not, Infinite Love continues to love. And whether we follow or not, we get the consequences of our actions. I have found again and again that I much prefer the consequences of following the Eternal to the consequences of ignoring the Eternal.

Everything Given Up—the Important Thing Given Back

There is always a price to pay for following the Eternal. We always have to give something up in order to take that next step into the unknown. We easily forget that one day we will die and *everything* except the Eternal will be lost. Every act in which we follow the Eternal is a *willing* surrender of that which we will inevitably lose one day anyway. And in this very willingness we are left over and over again with *just* the Eternal—which means that we are left with Love beyond our wildest dreams.

Chapter 17

If it is *Good*

To think of neither good nor evil will help us to still our bustling liveliness.

The Opposites of Good and Evil

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master emphasizes the *if it is good* that is “beyond” right and wrong and good and evil.

Some people who have claimed to find a way “beyond” good and evil are really just glorifying a particularly foolish brand of selfishness. The philosopher Nietzsche comes to mind as an advocate of this kind of delusion. Such philosophies are characterized by utter ignorance of the law of karma. Clearly, Rev. Master did not advocate amorality. She well knew, and strongly emphasized in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, that the law of karma is inexorable and universal: all beings reap what they sow. There are no “supermen” who live a karma-free existence. Yet if Rev. Master did not advocate amorality, neither was she content to live in the spiritual prison of the opposites—including the opposites of good and evil. So how are we to understand the *if it is good* that is beyond good and evil?

Perhaps we can start by looking at the opposites of good and evil. All the opposites are generated from a mistaken point of view. They all originate in the illusion of a separate self—a personal identity, or ego, separate from the Eternal. This is as true of the opposites of good and evil as of all other opposites.

When self is the reference-point, we view as “good” actions and conditions that support and preserve the self, and as “evil” actions and conditions that undermine and destroy the self. In other words, that which keeps me and mine afloat in the sea of impermanence and suffering is good, and that which threatens to sink me and mine is evil.

My health, my possessions, my family, my friends, my life, my happiness, my nation, my wealth, my knowledge, my reputation, my compassion, my honor, my religion—this is “good”; anything that

threatens the “me” and “mine”—this is evil. We can expand the “me” and “mine” into “us” and “ours”: our health, our possessions, our family, our friends, and so on. This expansion does not change the basic reference-point, which is still that of an illusory self.

Further expansion of the “me” and “mine” does not release us from the prison of the opposites. We can love justice and hate injustice, love kindness and hate cruelty, love fairness and hate unfairness, love liberty and hate tyranny, love virtue and hate vice, love our planet and hate that which damages our planet, and so on. If love is paired with hate, it is still imbued with self. Together, saddened love (for such it is) and hate keep the wheel of suffering rolling.

Living at the level of the opposites is an endless merry-go-round of opinions, likes, dislikes, loves and hates. And always there is the flow of changing conditions and circumstances that keeps exposing our attachments and aversions for the shadow-realities that they are. There is no enduring refuge within the opposites. There is no cessation of suffering while we remain imprisoned in good and evil.

Jail-Break

If we are to break out of the prison of the opposites, we must have a reference-point other than the illusory separate self, or ego. All beings possess the Buddha Nature. It is our true and enduring Refuge, and It (and It alone) *can* replace the illusory self as our reference-point.

That which is not made and which cannot be unmade; That which knows neither gain nor loss, neither self nor other; That to which saint and sinner, sage and fool, are the same; That which loves with a Love that cannot turn to hate because everything is equally part of Itself—this is the reference-point toward which we can orient through meditation and the practice of the true spirit of the Precepts. Our own Buddha Nature, not some external person, agency or power, holds the key to our spiritual liberation.

If we are to *act* in harmony with our own True Self, we must, insofar as we are able, view ourselves and others as our Buddha Nature views us, and act in relation to ourselves and others as the Buddha Nature acts. This is what we seek when we meditatively consider “if it is *good*.”

Panning for Gold

In panning for gold, a miner swirls a mixture of sand and pebbles and water in a wide, shallow pan, periodically pouring off some of the water and lighter material. This swirling and pouring off process is repeated again and again. The heaviest material stays in the pan. If the miner is lucky, some bits of gold—a very heavy substance—will remain in the pan when all the other material has been washed away.

When we are meditatively considering what is *good* to do, we usually have a number of options. Somewhere among the options is one that is most in harmony with our True Nature. By meditating with the question of what is *good* to do in a given situation—asking, offering, waiting and listening—we allow the Water of the Eternal's Love and Wisdom to move through the options and carry all away except the one that is spiritual gold.

The spiritual gold that remains is the *good* that transcends good and evil. Of all the options, it is the one that will best serve the genuine spiritual welfare of everyone involved in a particular situation. In Rev. Master's wonderful expression, it will do that which “helps everyone be a success in his own way.” Since all are *of the Eternal*, how could it be otherwise?

Recognizing and Using the Gold

Imagine that a gold miner wears glasses that filter light in such a way that he sees only in shades of grey. He could have a pan full of gold and not know it. If at any point in our spiritual panning for gold we put the glasses of the opposites back on, we will not recognize spiritual gold even when we have found it.

Again, imagine that our gold miner has found the gold and recognizes it. But imagine that he then balks at using it. The gold that he has put all that effort into isolating is of no use to him or anyone else until he does something with it. Even so, when we have identified that which is *good* to do, we can balk at doing it.

More than once when I have found the *good* that is beyond good and evil in a particular situation I have wished that there was an easier way. More than once I have struggled to find the willingness to do that which is truly *good* to do. More than once I have been unwilling to do it and backed away, always to regret my choice later. More than once I

have found the willingness to do that which is *good*, but hard, to do, always to find later that, however messy and painful the short-term consequences of such action might be, the long-term consequences did indeed do the best for everyone.

The True Spirit of the Precepts

The true spirit of the Precepts is found in and through the “if it is *good*.” All the Precepts, as Rev. Master often reminded us, telescope into the One Precept—”Take refuge in the Buddha.” And at the deepest level, the term “the Buddha” refers to our own Buddha Nature. Action that comes out of taking refuge in the Buddha Nature will express the true spirit of the Precepts even when, as sometimes happens, the more literal meaning of one or more Precepts is violated.

Because the Precepts all telescope back into the One Precept, the Precepts are not a code of ethics or set of rules. They are *reminders* to take refuge in the Eternal when we begin to wander back into the confusion of the opposites. They are reminders that there is a *good* beyond good and evil.

Whether we make willful choices and perpetuate suffering or willingly follow the Eternal, we get the consequences of our actions. The irony of action that derives from the illusion of self is that the person we most hurt is ourselves. The wonder of action that derives from our True Nature is that it always does the best for everyone and everything, even if there are messy and painful short-term consequences, and regardless of whether anyone—even the person who does the action—recognizes the benefits.

Chapter 18

The Spirit of the Precepts

A pacified heart and a truthful body lead to the Real, the Still, the Unborn.

Purpose

The “spirit” of the Precepts is the *meaning* of the Precepts. And the meaning of the Precepts is found in their purpose.

What is the purpose of the Precepts?—To help us be *true to our own True Nature*.

And

I am not you; you are not your neighbor: we are different beings. Each of us makes our own choices and gets the consequences thereof. This shows that *All is Different*.

While I am not you, and you are not your neighbor, we are all equally *of the Eternal*. I cannot act toward you as if you are not *of the Eternal* without hurting myself; you cannot act toward your neighbor as if your neighbor is not *of the Eternal* without hurting yourself. This shows that *All is One*.

Rev. Master taught that when we view the world with enlightened eyes we “see with both eyes,” that is, we see the *All is One* and the *All is Different* simultaneously. She went on to say that when we see the world in a deluded way we “see with only one eye,” that is, we see either the *All is One* or the *All is Different*, but not both together.

To see only difference is to see without sympathy. To see only Oneness is to see without comprehending the nature of individual responsibility. To act on the basis of either one-sided point of view is to create suffering for ourselves, and sometimes for others as well.

How do the Precepts help us see with both eyes?—By “lighting up” in consciousness to signal when we are seeing with one eye only. Thus, for example, if I start to find fault with others, seeing only with the “All is Different” eye, the Precept “Do not speak against others” might

start flashing a warning. Or if I start to gloss over the potentially serious consequences of a contemplated course of action, seeing only with the “All is One” eye, the Precept “Do not say [or think] that which is not true” or the Precept “Do not sell [or buy] the wine of delusion” might light up.

And behind this “lighting up” of the Precepts is the *spirit* of the Precepts—the purpose of the Precepts. When the purpose of the Precepts is *our* purpose, then the Eternal uses the Precepts to help us be true to Itself.

Conscience

The word “conscience” means “to know,” or “to be conscious.” Although the English word “conscience” did not originate in Buddhism, it seems to me to convey better than any other English word the Buddhist concept of our innate capacity to recognize that a particular action is *good* to do, or not *good* to do, in a particular situation. This capacity is rooted in the Buddha Nature Itself.

When Rev. Master writes of asking, listening to, and following the guidance of the Lord of the House, she is describing a process in which the full power of meditation is brought to bear in considering matters of conscience—“truly important matters,” as she expressed it in one place.

What is a “matter of conscience?” I think of a matter of conscience as being any problem in which I have an intuitive sense that my choice may have serious consequences. A problem can *appear* to be relatively insignificant from a worldly perspective, but in fact be a genuine matter of conscience. Our own past experience, and, to some extent, the experience of others, can be helpful in determining the gravity of a problem. But in the end, the best indicator is our own spiritual instinct.

Many times, I was privileged to see Rev. Master apply meditation and the Precepts in seeking the best course of action. In every serious matter, she asked the Eternal for help and meditated deeply. And often a unique and surprising course of action would emerge from thus turning to the Source for help. Sometimes she would say, “Everything in me says that is the thing to do.” Whenever she said that, I knew that any discussion was at an end. A difficult

situation was not necessarily instantly transformed into sweetness and light; often the path that she chose was a hard one. But it did the *best* for everyone, especially in the long run.

The true voice of conscience is always in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Precepts. And it *never* ignores the letter of the Precepts, even though sometimes it may be *good* to break one Precept in order to keep a higher Precept.

The Higher Precept

It is never *good* to violate the spirit of the Precepts. That is, it is never good to willfully ignore, and act in a way that is contrary to, our True Nature.

It is never *good* to willfully misconstrue and violate the letter of the Precepts.

Sometimes it may be *good* to break a Precept in order to keep a higher Precept.—And there will be consequences. Always our volitional actions have consequences.

How can it ever be *good* to break a Precept?—Life is complex and messy. The best examples of breaking a Precept in order to keep a higher Precept are drawn from the mess. Consider the situation of people who chose to hide Jews and others who were being rounded up to be sent to concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe. These people were engaging in deception, but they did it in the service of an act of compassion requiring great courage and unselfishness.

While it is technically correct that this is breaking the Precept “Do not say that which is not true” in order to keep the higher Precept “Do good for others,” I doubt that anyone was thinking along these lines. Rather, people would have been thinking in terms of following their conscience, or being true to something within themselves, or serving God by serving their fellow man.

This is the Higher Precept. It can never be adequately expressed in words. We have the Buddha Nature; we are *of* the Eternal—and we can follow It. We can be true to It. We will not always get it right, but the Eternal does not keep score. When we miss the mark, we can accept the consequences, learn from our mistake, and keep going.

Every day offers new opportunities to act in harmony with our wonderful True Nature.

Chapter 19

The Letter of the Precepts

From these Precepts comes forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the Buddha's influence: this is the merit of non-action and non-seeking—the awakening to True Wisdom.

—Great Master Dogen, *Shushogi*
(“What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment”)

The Lifeblood of the Buddhas

In Soto Zen, the Precepts are called “the Lifeblood of the Buddhas.” Lay trainees receive the Precepts from a monastic Preceptor upon formally becoming a follower of the Buddha. Monks receive the Precepts from their master when they are ordained, and again at Dharma Transmission.

Formally receiving the Precepts is an important event in the life of the trainee. And it is an important step in taking the Precepts to heart. But truly taking the Precepts to heart so that, as Rev. Master often said, they become our “blood and bones”—that is the work of a lifetime.

We are always volunteers in training. The Precepts are not forced upon us; they are not commandments. The Precepts are often expressed very simply in the form of an imperative statement: “Cease from evil,” for example, or “Do not kill.” This is the form used in the ceremonies in which the Precepts are given and received. But after the recitation of each Precept, the person receiving the Precept is asked, “Will you keep this Precept or not?”—So we are given an opportunity to *volunteer* to take each Precept.

There are stories of people being given all the Precepts except one because they do not believe that they are able to keep that Precept. This usually seems to have been connected with the way in which a person makes a living. For example, a man who kills animals for food

might ask to take all the Precepts except “Do not kill.” Again, a woman who has been sold into prostitution might ask to take all the Precepts except “Do not indulge [or misuse] sexuality” (a Precept that is sometimes expressed more generally as “Do not covet”). In traditional societies, it can be very difficult, even impossible, to change occupations, especially in the case of people who might be living in some degree of slavery. Buddhism has always been a pragmatic and non-judgmental religion, and monks will seek ways to help people do their training within difficult circumstances.

I have a favorite way of thinking of the Precepts that strongly emphasizes the voluntary taking of the Precepts to heart. I do not remember the source of this way of taking the Precepts. The general form is as follows: “I undertake the rule of training [or Precept] to . . .” Here are some examples: “I undertake the rule of training to take refuge in the Buddha;” “I undertake the rule of training to cease from evil;” “I undertake the rule of training to refrain from speaking against others.”

Who are the Precepts For?

The Precepts are for one person. If I take the Precepts to heart, then I am that one person. If you take them to heart, you are that person. If everyone in the world takes them to heart, each person is that one person.

“Each man his karma makes and must carry for himself.”—I can only do my own training. Whether or not any other person in the world takes the Precepts to heart is not my business. If I try to make it my business, I will immediately fall into fault-finding, which is non-Preceptual action. When I act non-Preceptually, I hurt myself.

The above does not mean that I do not *wish* for all beings to know the benefits of training in the Precepts: I do wish for this. And it so happens that when I walk the path of the Precepts myself and do not worry about others, I help this wish come to pass, for all Preceptual action makes merit available to the Eternal to use for the genuine good of all.

Above all, the Precepts are for every being who recognizes that he, she, or it *needs* the gift of the Precepts.

Another *And*

We need the true *spirit* of the Precepts *and* we need the *letter* of the Precepts.

We undertake training in the Precepts in order to be true to our own True Nature. This “being true to our own True Nature” is the spirit of the Precepts, and it is not so easy to do. We need all the help we can get. The various formulations of individual Precepts, and various compilations of Precepts, passed down through the centuries embody deep insight. Why would we not treasure them and try to put them into practice?

Some Buddhist sects formulate individual Precepts in ways that emphasize certain aspects of their general meaning. For example, the Precept often rendered along the lines of “Do not use substances that adversely affect the mind” or “Do not misuse alcohol and drugs” is expressed in Soto Zen as “Do not sell the wine of delusion.” Again, the Third Pure Precept, the most ancient wording of which *may* be “Purify your own heart,” is expressed in Soto Zen as “Do good for others,” reflecting the Mahayana emphasis on the Bodhisattvic nature of training.

In some traditions, the number of Precepts formally taken by the laity is different from that taken by monks. And some traditions may have Precepts that are absent in other traditions.

Such formal differences are not in themselves important. The ways of expressing and grouping Precepts may differ: Preceptual *Truth* is always the same. In other words, the *letter* of the Precepts may vary, but the *spirit* of the Precepts is immutable.

Windows

When we take the Precepts to heart, we are drawn to consider the motives and impacts of our actions. Every Precept is a window into our own heart.

If we allow the Eternal to lead the way in this self-examination, we avoid turning it into self-blame. Guilt makes us more desperate; it does not help us see clearly and make wiser choices.

How do we “allow the Eternal to lead the way in self-examination?”—By keeping our focus on maintaining a meditative attitude of mind

and heart. In this way, we stay sufficiently still and open to recognize Preceptual teaching *when it arises naturally in the course of daily life*. In other words, to fully make use of the gift of the Precepts, we need to practice meditation.

Flashing Lights

How does Preceptual teaching arise naturally in the course of daily life?

Imagine that you are driving down a long winding mountain road in dark and dangerous conditions. You have to do the drive; there is no getting out of it. But others have gone before you, and some of them have placed flashing yellow lights at the most dangerous curves in the road.

These flashing lights have built-in sensors and sophisticated electronics and software. Each light knows the speed you are going and the conditions of the road. The light flashes faster and brighter when your need is greater (when you are going too fast and/or the road is wet or icy) than when you are in less danger.

When we take the Precepts to heart, they function like these flashing lights. Man gave us the Precepts, but the Eternal uses them to signal us when we are in spiritual danger, and adjusts the signal to our exact need. No one drives the dark, winding road of life without having hair-raising moments, but we do much better driving when we pay attention to the signals that are the Precepts.

UnBuddhist Even if True

During her retreat and kensho in 1976-77, Rev. Master came to understand the Precepts in new depth and clarity. My frequent references to her Commentary on the Precepts in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (Plate XII; first edition Plate VIII) is proof enough of the reverence with which I regard this teaching.

One aspect of the deepening of Rev. Master's understanding was expressed in a phrase that she began to use, "UnBuddhist even if true."

If I dwell on difficult and painful events with a downward-looking attitude of mind, I may be convinced that I am seeing the truth. And, in fact, my recollection (and/or analysis) of events may be perfectly correct, as far as it goes. But if I am looking down, I am not seeing the

Buddha Nature of the events. Therefore, my dwelling on the events will constitute non-Preceptual mental action even though the recollection (and/or analysis) is true. In such a case, it can be said that I am wallowing in a lesser truth and failing to see the greater Truth.

If I go down this path, I will quickly fall into fault-finding. Perhaps I will then reinforce the problem by speaking against others—saying something true, but not *True*. This is a path that begins in truth with a small 't' and ends in Misery with a big 'M.'

In such a case, I need to do more than keep the letter of the Precept, “Do not say [or think] that which is not true.”—I need to turn within and find the generous-hearted, upward-looking attitude that originates in the Buddha Nature. In other words, I need to keep the true *spirit* of the Precepts.

The Precepts

The Precepts as practiced in Soto Zen are divided into three groups: the Three Refuges; the Three Pure Precepts; the Ten Great Precepts.

The Three Refuges:

Take refuge in the Buddha.

Take refuge in the Dharma [the Buddha's Teaching].

Take refuge in the Sangha [those who follow the Buddha's Teaching].

The Three Pure Precepts:

Cease from evil.

Do only good.

Do good for others.

The Ten Great Precepts:

Do not kill.

Do not steal.

Do not covet.

Do not say that which is not true.

Do not sell the wine of delusion.

Do not speak against others.

Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others.

Do not be mean in giving either Dharma or wealth.

Do not be angry.

Do not defame the Three Treasures.

Chapter 20

One Calls, One Replies

One calls and one replies; one points and one appears: this means 'no deliberate thought; no natural thought:'—THIS IS YOUR REAL LORD.

—Great Master Keizan, *Denkoroku*
 (“The Transmission of the Light”)

The Origin of a True Vow

A genuine spiritual vow is a response of *willingness* to a call from the Eternal.

The call from the Eternal is Love reaching out to that which is *of* Itself. Our longing, and then our willingness, is elicited by the call from the Eternal. For there is nothing within us that is not *of* the Eternal.

Rev. Master said, “Before we longed for the Eternal, the Eternal longed for us.” Yet Infinite Love does not *insist* on love: the Eternal waits for our response of willingness with limitless patience.

In this very lifetime, we have the opportunity to shepherd a load of spiritual need back to the Eternal. In a genuine spiritual vow, we sign up for shepherding service.

Yes!

The Eternal asks us whether we are willing to do the shepherding. But the Eternal does not show us what we will be getting ourselves into if we say, “Yes!”

We say 'Yes!' and do not know
Where our willingness will go.

Anyone who responds “Yes!” to the Eternal's call is in for many surprises: it is the great adventure of the spirit. Of course, continuing on in the way of the world also has some surprises, but its basic character is well-established and can be seen in the expectations and

disappointments, striving and anguished self-reproach, killing and being killed, births and deaths that make up every karmic stream.

Gradually, in an educational process spanning lifetimes, a seed of enlightenment works its way up through layers of ignorance until, one day, an heir to this legacy of longing and grief awakens to the truth that the wheel of suffering will roll on and on into the future *without end* unless *someone* stops it. Thus, while the person who says “Yes!” to the call from the Eternal cannot know what lies ahead, he has some sense of what *would* lie ahead if he ignores the Eternal's call.

The Reluctant Bodhisattva

“All Bodhisattvas, when converted to the Truth for the first time, search therefor, but their minds are hard and set and cannot be broken.”—This statement, recited by the ordaining master to the new disciple during the monastic ordination ceremony in Soto Zen Buddhism, aptly conveys the dilemma of the “reluctant Bodhisattva”—the person who has begun to awaken to the truth that worldly life is an endless round of suffering, but who clings to the familiar—and above all to his own *opinion of himself*—and resists the call that draws him into the Unknown.

It is not infrequently the master's unpleasant job to pry the disciple's fingers loose from their tight grip on the familiar. Yet, as a verse in the Bible says, “God loves a cheerful giver,” and sooner or later each person must freely choose to let go—or freely choose to *not* let go. We are a reluctant Bodhisattva when we choose to not let go. We are a willing Bodhisattva when we choose to let go and fall *looking up* into the Unknown.

We can be a reluctant Bodhisattva one day and a willing Bodhisattva the next; a willing Bodhisattva one moment and a reluctant Bodhisattva the next. There is no enduring self that has the quality of “reluctance” or the quality of “willingness;” there is no permanent state of being mired in reluctance and no permanent attainment of willingness. From hour to hour and day to day, we *choose* to say “Yes” or “No” to the call of the Eternal.

Therefore, it is *always* a mistake to underestimate our own capacity, or the capacity of any other being, to hear and respond to the Eternal's

call. The hard and set mind of the most reluctant Bodhisattva can dissolve in an instant into unconditional willingness.

The Vow that Takes Us

Where did that initial “Yes!” come from?—Even if it was colored by old habits, old emotions, and old opinions it came from a deep Place within us.

One day—and always when we least expect it—the old habits, old emotions and old opinions are not in the way. Great Master Dogen calls this “body and mind dropping away.” Then the Real Vow surges up and bursts forth in a great “YES!” Who called?—Was it not the Eternal?—Who answered?—Was it not the Buddha Nature Itself through the vehicle of body and mind?

We take the Precepts to heart, and one day the One Precept *takes us*.

Far Away and Nearby

I think it is worth reading the chapter in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* entitled “The Spirit Rises to Greet the Lord” (Plates XXVII-XXIX; first edition, Plates XV-XVI) with the above discussion in mind.

Spiritual experiences of great depth and clarity show the *meaning* of more seemingly mundane, yet genuine, experiences. Every time self is out of the way and we respond in *reflexive* willingness to the call of the Eternal, that which is *of* the Eternal rises to greet the Lord. The unselfconscious willingness to undertake that which needs to be done—that which is *good* to do—partakes of this *rising*, as does the unaffected expression of gratitude and the quiet and completely private welling-up of love—love for the Eternal and love for all that is *of* the Eternal.

Appearances can be very deceptive. When we are trudging through darkness and confusion, we may feel as if the Eternal is a million miles away. Yet when a single beam of light pierces that darkness for a moment, we see that That which seemed to be so remote is right beside us. Its call is a call of Love; the response that it elicits is a response of Love. And That from which the response originates is very nearby indeed, for It is our own wonderful True Nature.

*High amidst the floating clouds
One who has realized the Truth
Rises up to the Lord at dawn.*

Chapter 21

The Inner Refuge

If we do not take refuge in the Buddha within ourselves, there is no other place for us to retreat.

—*The Platform Sutra,*
translated by Wong Mou-Lam

Refuge and Need

If anywhere in the universe there are beings who believe themselves to be perfectly safe and happy, they are not likely to be searching for a refuge. Beings who are conscious of their own need for help search for a refuge.

Many temporary refuges are available. But finding an enduring refuge is not so easy. When we have found temporary refuges and then experienced the shock of losing them, we long for the refuge that will not one day dissolve away.

The purpose of religion is to *reunite* us with the Refuge that is not born and does not die.

The Buddha Refuge

The first of the Three Refuges is the refuge of the Buddha. “I take refuge in the Buddha” originally had the meaning “I take refuge in the human being who has realized Buddhahood.” This is still *part* of the meaning of this refuge, but there is more to it than that.

Zen Buddhism emphasizes meditation as the central (though not the only) vehicle of training. In teaching, Zen emphasizes that all beings possess the Buddha Nature, that we can take refuge directly in our Buddha Nature through pure meditation, and that this leads to *awakening* to our True Nature. With these emphases in training and teaching, it is understandable that from the first days of its flowering in China some fifteen hundred years ago, the Zen (Chinese *Ch'an*) masters have taught that the Buddha Nature Itself is the deeper meaning of “Buddha” in “I take refuge in the Buddha.”

This teaching is clearly evident in the quotation from the *Platform Sutra* that heads this chapter of these Reflections. And here is another striking example of the teaching from over a century earlier: In the course of an exchange, dated to the year 535 A.D.. between the Second Zen Ancestor and Seng-tsan, who became his disciple (and, eventually, the Third Ancestor), Seng-tsan asked the master, “Since I have met you, I know the Sangha, but what are Buddha and Dharma?” The Second Ancestor replied, “Our True Heart is the Buddha; our True Heart is the Dharma; Dharma and Buddha are one, and so is Sangha.” (This story is told in *A History of Zen* by Dr. Y. H. Ku.)

Rev. Master often said that all the Precepts telescope back into “Take Refuge in the Buddha.” The Second Ancestor's teaching that our True Heart is Buddha, Dharma and Sangha expresses the same truth.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom is permeated with the understanding that the deep meaning of the Refuge of the Buddha is to be found by taking refuge in our own True Nature. I recommend studying the discussion of the Buddha Treasure in the Commentary on the Precepts (p. 36; first edition, p. 45), and also Plate LX, “The Buddha Within” (first edition, Plate XXXVIII). In the years following her great kensho, Rev. Master sometimes expressed the First Refuge as “I take refuge in the Eternal.” Here again, the ancient Zen emphasis is reaffirmed—and in a new form.

The Golden Age

I am always at a loss how to convey a sense of the excitement, hope and profoundly re-invigorated spiritual purpose that pervaded the early life of Zen Buddhism. Buddhism had been in China for several hundred years and was a well-established religion with Imperial patronage when the Zen movement emerged, triggered by the arrival of a monk from India who strongly emphasized the practice of sitting meditation—Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma and the heirs of his Dharma Transmission taught that we can meditate as the Buddha had done and discover *for ourselves* what the Buddha discovered. These masters turned their backs on fame and gain and single-mindedly practiced the Way of Ancient Buddhas.

The first Zen masters taught that we do not have to resign ourselves to the view that in our own lifetime we can only hope to make merit that can be added to merit gradually accumulated through many lifetimes

so that one day, in a distant future, someone can realize enlightenment. They taught that Enlightenment—the true Life of Buddha—is here and now, and that we can awaken to this Truth in the twinkling of an eye.—And they not only taught it; they *did* it.

This same excitement, hope and spiritual purpose manifested fully for myself and many other people during, and in the years following, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's great kensho and retreat in 1976-77. It is for each generation to rediscover that there is an Unborn and Undying Refuge, and that we can turn toward It in pure meditation. When one person meditates truly, the door is opened for others to do so also. When one person awakens to his own True Nature, the longing to do this is catalyzed in others. This is how the Way of Ancient Buddhas passes *through* master to disciple.

Shakyamuni Buddha died 2500 years ago; Bodhidharma died 1500 years ago; Dogen died eight hundred years ago; Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett died 19 years ago. Yet this very day our True Refuge is right within each of us; It has not diminished through the years. It is no less accessible now than it was at any time in the past. This very day is the Golden Age of Ancient Buddhas.

Do not yearn for two thousand years ago.; at the present time, if you practice the TRUTH wholeheartedly, Makakashyo [the disciple of the Buddha looked back to in the Zen tradition as the direct recipient of the Buddha's Transmission] will not enter Mount Kukkutapada; he can come here. Therefore the warm flesh of Shakyamuni [Buddha] is now and always here and the smiling of Makakashyo is now and always new; if you can find this spiritual place, you can accept the Truth directly from Makakashyo and Makakashyo will accept it from you; not only can the VERY TRUTH pass through to you from the Seven Buddhas—you will discover that you *were, are and will be* the

ancestor of the Seven Buddhas. The VERY TRUTH is here, eternally, beyond all ages.

—Great Master Keizan, *Denkoroku*
("The Transmission of the Light")

Chapter 22

The Divine Medicine

*Both the self and the True Heart
have a healing function.*

The Dharma Refuge

The Sanskrit word *dharma* (Pali: *dhamma*) is a word rich in meaning. It can be translated into English as “truth” or “law.” In Buddhism, “Dharma” (with a capital “D”) designates the Teaching that flowed forth from the Buddha's Enlightenment, and that shows the Way to the cessation of suffering.

The Zen masters who emphasized that the Buddha Refuge is, in Its deepest meaning, the refuge of our own Buddha Nature also emphasized that the Dharma Refuge is, in Its deepest meaning, the Teaching that comes *from* the Buddha Nature. Thus, just as Rev. Master sometimes expressed the First Refuge as “I take refuge in the Eternal,” so she sometimes expressed the Second Refuge—the Dharma Refuge—as “I take refuge in That which the Eternal teaches.”

The Teaching that comes from the Eternal always addresses need. In the widest sense, the Dharma is all the Help that flows from the Eternal to our need. Thus, another way of expressing the Second of the Three Refuges is, “I take refuge in the Help of the Eternal.”

Taking Refuge through Bowing

We take refuge because of need, and deep need cannot afford to be fussy about the form taken by that which comes to its aid. Therefore, if we wish to open mind and heart to the Help of the Eternal, we cannot find a better training principle than the one discovered by Rev. Master in the first months of her training as a monk: “I must take everything that happens as being for my good.”

Would we ever learn anything of any use to ourselves or anyone else if life slavishly catered to our hopes, desires, expectations and demands?—There is no better teacher than the disappointment that exposes the causes of suffering within ourselves. But we will not recognise that teacher if we do not adopt an accepting and upward-

looking attitude of mind. Fault-finding—complaining—turns one into a blind man who walks through a palace full of treasures while being convinced that he is in a slum.

Bowing helps. We can bow with our whole body; and we can bow just with our mind and heart. But we will learn how to bow with mind and heart much more easily and quickly if we practice bowing with our body.

Just as we can say, “I want to hurt you” with a clenched fist, so we can say, “I offer everything into Your hands” to the Eternal with our whole body when we raise, and then lower, our open hands—palms turned upwards—in a full bow. This offering must not be confused with attempting to throw something away. When we try to get rid of the painful thought or feeling, the cause of suffering is strengthened: self cannot solve the problem of self. When we offer, we make room for the Eternal to help us *in whatever way is in our genuine best interest*—which is fully known to the Eternal, but not to us.

Medicine

The Dharma is the “Medicine that cures all suffering.”

The Eternal is the Master Medicine-Maker and can make healing medicine out of even the most bitter and poisonous herbs. Thus, when worked upon by the Compassion and Wisdom of the Eternal, the hardest knots of confusion and pain in our karmic inheritance produce the Divine Medicine. That is to say, not only are these karmic jangles helped, but the merit that was buried within them is released. This merit can manifest in many ways—in understanding, for example, or sympathy, or the refusal to go down a path of delusion. Thus, that which has received help becomes a vessel of the Help of the Eternal. This is part of what is meant by “the healing function of self.”

There are two great complementary aspects of the Divine Medicine: Love and Wisdom. The two aspects are always present, though frequently one is more evident than the other. Thus, to go to the Dharma for refuge at the deepest level is to open body, mind and heart to the healing Love and enlightening Wisdom of the Eternal.

One *and* Many

The Truth is never in opposition to Itself. It is impossible that the Dharma as comprehended by Shakyamuni Buddha could be fundamentally different from, or opposed to, the Dharma as comprehended by Bodhidharma, or that either of these could be fundamentally different from, or opposed to, the Dharma as experienced by Rev. Master in her great kensho in 1976-77. *And* everyone who realizes the Truth experiences and expresses It in a unique way: All is One *and* All is Different. Thus the same Truth is found and affirmed down through the centuries, *and* It is continually manifesting in new forms in accordance with the needs of beings.

Rev. Master often said, “The real Truth does not *insist* on truth.” It is impossible to have an argument about the real Truth: the very fact that someone wishes to argue means that he is ignoring the real Truth. Arguments about religious doctrines and practices would cease altogether if we were to limit ourselves to talking about what we have found to be helpful *in our own experience* and true *for ourselves*.

In this little essay, I have spoken of the Dharma as “Teaching,” as “Help,” as “Medicine,” and as “Truth.” It is the Teaching that flowed forth from the Buddha's Enlightenment *and* the Teaching that flows forth from our own Buddha Nature; It is the Help that the Eternal provides in all need; It is the Divine Medicine that cures all suffering; and It is the Truth of the Way to reharmonize with our wonderful True Nature that Buddhas Transmit to Buddhas and Ancestors Transmit to Ancestors.

Chapter 23

Seeking the Key to Life Together

*There are no two lawful gateways to the world of the Wheel of the Law.
For a true master there is a natural feeling of respect and reverence.*

A True Vessel

The Third of the Three Refuges is the Sangha Refuge. In its most literal (and limited) meaning, the word “Sangha” refers to the community of renunciate followers of the Buddha—the *bikkhus*, or monks. Some Buddhist teachers and organizations adhere to this literal meaning; some widen the meaning, at least in some contexts, to include all those who follow in the Buddha's footsteps, either as renunciates or as “householders”—lay trainees.

In Parts XXI and XXII of these Reflections, I explained that Rev. Master sometimes expressed the taking of refuge in Buddha and Dharma as “I take refuge in the Eternal” and “I take refuge in That which the Eternal teaches,” respectively. In line with this deeper understanding of the First and Second of the Three Refuges, she expressed the Third Refuge as, “I take refuge in those who know the Eternal.”

At first glance, this view of the Sangha Refuge might seem to limit the Sangha to a small, exclusive membership. In fact, the reverse is true.

Rev. Master sometimes said that, at any one moment, the newest trainee might be the most genuinely senior person in the monastery, that is, the most truly in alignment with the Eternal. Everyone has the Buddha Nature; everyone has the capacity to listen to, and follow, the Eternal. Therefore, at any given moment, any person *might* be the one who most truly “knows the Eternal.”

In the *Platform Sutra*, the Sixth Chinese Ancestor (*Hui-neng*; Japanese: *Daikan Eno*) says, “A passing foolish thought makes one an ordinary man, while an enlightened thought makes one a Buddha. A passing thought that clings to sense-objects is klesa [fetter], while a

second thought that frees one from attachment is Bodhi [enlightenment].”

When the deepest level of taking refuge in the Sangha happens, it is clear that help comes *from* the Eternal *through* a willing human being *to* someone's spiritual need. I have been fortunate to be on the receiving end of such help many times—sometimes via my master, sometimes via a fellow disciple, sometimes via my own monastic or lay disciple, sometimes via another lay trainee. Truly, the Eternal makes no distinction of senior or junior, monk or lay trainee, male or female, old or young: all vessels are equally *of* Itself.

“Knowing the Eternal” does not refer to intellectual knowledge. If any being serves as the vessel of the Eternal's Help for even one moment, in that moment that being *is* the Sangha Refuge, whether he, she or it is aware of the fact or not.

Is

The Eternal brings us to our true Sangha Refuge when all conditions are right for this to happen. There is a saying, “When the disciple is ready, the master appears.” (It is also true that when the master is ready, the disciple appears.) While the master is alive, the master is the main (not the only!) refuge of the Sangha for the disciple.

Members of the Sangha die; masters die; disciples die: the Sangha Refuge does *not* die. The vessels that the Eternal uses for conveying Its Help are *of* Itself; therefore It never lacks for vessels.

Since the Eternal provides the Sangha Refuge for all who walk the Path of reharmonizing with Itself, we never have to worry about who is *not* the Sangha Refuge. There is an *is*, and that is sufficient; whether or not there is an *is not* is not our problem, and must be left in the hands of the Eternal.

A Clear Sky

When we study and cherish the teachings of the Buddhas and Ancestors, we are taking refuge in the Sangha. When it is *good* that we meditate with others and we do so, we are taking refuge in the Sangha. When it is *good* that we seek advice (or some other form of help) from Sangha members and we do so, we are taking refuge in the Sangha; when it is *good* that we walk a lonely path, and we train for

self *and* other, we are taking refuge in the Sangha. When we seek the Key to Life by walking in the Way of Ancient Buddhas together with all who follow the Eternal—past, present and future—we are taking refuge in the Sangha.

Here, again, are the Three Refuges as Rev. Master expressed them when she wished to emphasize their deep meaning:

I take refuge in the Eternal.

I take refuge in That which the Eternal teaches.

I take refuge in those who know the Eternal.

Chapter 24

Kensho and Death

If a man, when he is about to die, can only regard the five aggregates [body; feeling; thought; volition; consciousness: in other words, body and mind] as void [meaning “void of a self separate from the Great Immaculacy”] . . . if he can only awaken to this in a flash and remain free from remaining entanglements of the Triple World (past, present and future), he will indeed be one who leaves the world without the faintest tendency towards rebirth. If he should behold the lovely sight of all the Buddhas coming to welcome him and yet feel no desire to go towards them, if he should behold devils and evil forms surrounding him and yet have no fear, remaining oblivious to self and at one with the Absolute, he will indeed achieve the formless state.

—Great Master Hsi-yun (Japanese: Obaku Kiun),
quoted by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett in Ch. 7 of
Zen is Eternal Life

Trial Run

Rev. Master taught that the best preparation for death is to do correct spiritual training and experience kensho during one's lifetime. Kensho is “awakening to our True Nature.” At the moment of death the opportunity to reunite fully with our True Nature manifests naturally—not just for the person who has experienced kensho, but for everyone. So kensho *can* give a very helpful “trial run” for death, provided that one has not abandoned training after experiencing kensho.

The Eternal does not judge us during our lifetime and does not judge us when we die. Whatever karmic shadows may accompany us to the moment of death, the manifesting of the Light of the Eternal at the moment of death is an opportunity to surrender fully into Infinite Love. The experience of that Love in our lifetime can greatly help us

turn toward It in childlike trust and unconditional willingness at the time of death.

The Bardo Realm

Very frequently, however, beings die in ignorance and confusion so that, instead of offering everything into Infinite Love at the time of death, they look down in despair and self-blame. When this happens, the opportunity for full reunion with the Eternal at the time of death is missed. But that is not the last opportunity!

For a period of up to seven weeks (forty-nine days) after death, other opportunities manifest. At the end of this period (if not sooner), spiritual need that has not found its way back to recognized reunion with the Eternal is reborn in one or more of the realms of existence. Such rebirth is itself an introduction into a new world of opportunities: all spiritual need will eventually find its way to the Help of the Eternal.

The period of up to forty-nine days between death and rebirth is itself a kind of rebirth-realm in miniature—the *Bardo* realm—in which a “mind-body” (or “spirit-body”) of the dead person undergoes a journey that begins in spiritual brightness and continues on in increasing darkness as the karmic shadows of past actions manifest in dream-like forms.

The initial period of brightness lasts ten days. If someone has shied away from the full brilliance and majesty of the Eternal that manifests at the time of death, the Eternal is willing to use forms that are more familiar, less intimidating, yet still recognizable as wholly good and compassionate. These benevolent forms are an encouragement to look up, let go of self-judgment, cease to cling to the illusion of a separate self, and *accept* the offer of full reunion with the Eternal.

Around the tenth day after death, the bright and benign forms are replaced by fierce and threatening ones—karmic consequences of “confusion of mind.” There is no better teacher than karmic consequence, and the threatening “beings” that now manifest can be thought of as the expressions of a Compassion that is willing to *appear* not to be compassionate in order to try to get the message across: “If you continue along this downward-looking path, the wheel of suffering will roll on and on! Wake up! Let go! Look up!” In other

words, if gentle persuasion does not work, the Eternal is willing to do some vigorous remonstrating.

If neither consolation nor remonstrating is able to get the confused spirit to look up, then the karma of self-judgment comes fully due, and the stage is set for the process leading directly to rebirth.

Rev. Master always strongly emphasized that beings look into the “the mirror of Karma,” which is the mirror of their own memory, and, seeing their past actions, *judge* themselves and *sentence* themselves to rebirth in a particular rebirth-realm.

Paths of Compassion

Some Buddhist traditions, including Soto Zen, identify six rebirth realms: a realm of ease and happiness (the heavens); a realm of intense suffering (the hells); a realm of striving to obtain power (the asura realm); the animal realm, in which killing, eating and reproducing are the main occupations; the realm of bodiless spirits afflicted with craving and doubt (hungry ghosts); and the human realm.

Clearly, each of these rebirth-realms is mirrored in certain aspects of human life. For human beings sometimes know ease and happiness; sometimes intense and unrelievable pain; sometimes ambition; sometimes animal needs and desires; sometimes unsatisfiable cravings and doubts; and sometimes responsible action deriving from concern for the welfare of others as well as oneself.

When beings sentence themselves to rebirth in various realms, I can imagine the Eternal saying, “You are free to reward yourself or punish yourself by rebirth in any of these realms; you are free to attempt to make repayment in any rebirth realm for karmic debts that you have judged that you owe; you are free to try a new course of action in any realm to which you sentence yourself.—In *all* realms, and in *all* circumstances and conditions, I will be right beside you, and you are free to seek my Help at any time and in any place.”

And so spiritual need that has not been resolved either during a being's lifetime, or during the brief sojourn of the spirit in the Bardo realm, manifests in a new form of existence—a new being—in some rebirth-realm. This new being has *inherited* all, or some part, of the previous being's karma, and is now the custodian of all, or some part,

of that being's unresolved spiritual need. The new being is also the beneficiary of whatever meritorious karma it may have inherited from that previous being and/or from any other source. The new being is not the same person as the previous being, nor is it entirely different from it: there is no enduring self, ego or personality that continues on from one lifetime to the next.

Each knot—or “jangle”—of spiritual need is a time-capsule of greed, hate, and/or delusion *and* it is the precious *potentiality* for enlightenment. These time capsules work their way toward the Help of the Eternal along tortuous and convoluted paths in the realms of rebirth.

Dark to Light and Light to Dark

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom describes Rev. Master's spiritual journey in 1976-77, beginning in great spiritual darkness and culminating in great spiritual brightness. Rev. Master sometimes pointed out that the progression from spiritual brightness to spiritual darkness so often experienced in the Bardo realm is the reverse of the progression experienced in kensho.

Dark to bright: in kensho, spiritual need finds its way through darkness to the Help of the Eternal. Bright to dark: when opportunities to receive the Help of the Eternal at death, and then in the Bardo realm, are missed, spiritual need must continue on in the darkness of ignorance, longing and pain.

The following diagram shows the *return process* in kensho (meaning the return to the Eternal) in the blue diagonal line on the left and the *forward process* in the Bardo realm (meaning the continued rolling of the wheel of suffering) in the blue diagonal line on the right. In kensho, there is a great enlightenment of spiritual need—the awakening to the Infinite Love of the Eternal. If the opportunity to dissolve into full oneness with the Eternal at the time of death is missed, and if subsequent opportunities are missed, spiritual need descends into darkness, eventually moving toward the light of one of the realms of rebirth (shown in the bottom right corner of the diagram—six colored beams of light for the six rebirth-realms).



The lights of the rebirth-realms are not opposed to the Light of the Eternal: as Rev. Master was careful to point out, they derive from that Light and signal that the Help of the Eternal never abandons any need. In our confusion and shame we may look down and turn away from a Love that is beyond our comprehension, but that Love will never turn away from us. It waits with infinite patience as we wander in realms of ignorance, desire, anger, ambition, and even happiness—and when we are ready to turn toward It fully, It welcomes us to our True Home.

In Chapter 25 of these Reflections, I will discuss some of the kinds of spiritual experience that support the teachings about death, the Bardo realm, and the realms of rebirth.

Chapter 25

From Death to Rebirth

Should a man seek the Buddha outside of life and death he is as one who turns his cart to the north whilst heading for Eschu, or as one who tries to see the north star whilst looking southwards: by so doing, that which is the cause of life and death will be increased and the way to freedom lost sight of.

—Great Master Dogen, *Shoji*
 (“Life and Death”)

The Problem of Evidence

The starting point for obtaining evidence in support of any theories about what happens when you are born as a human being and then live a human life is to actually be born as a human being and live. Similarly, the best starting point for obtaining evidence in support of any theories about what happens after death is to die and experience what happens.—But if one is dead, it is not so easy to report back on one's experiences.

Most religions offer explanations about what happens after death, and these theories are not easy to prove or disprove. In this chapter of these Reflections, I would like to give my reasons for believing the teachings about death, the Bardo realm, and the realms of rebirth that I have described in Chapter 24 of these Reflections. As will become very clear, my personal experience in these areas is limited. Yet insofar as I do have experience, it confirms to my satisfaction the Buddhist teachings that I learned from my master.

The Moment of Death

There are a number of reasons why I believe the teaching that at the moment of death the Light of Infinite Love manifests fully, and that we can choose to unite with It—dissolve into It—fully in that moment. Some of these “reasons” are not easy to put into words. But I can give two reasons here.

The first reason is that for a few days immediately following my kensho in 1977 (described in Chapter 2 of Book II, “Reflections in a Disciple’s Life, the parallel narrative to these Reflections), I experienced a quiet longing to die. I can best characterize that longing as “love longing to fully reunite with its Source.” I must emphasize that this longing arose and passed naturally: I did not seek it, and I did not try to hold on to it. And it never would have occurred to me to act upon it in a willful way by taking my own life. (Suicide makes a big karmic mess for oneself and others, but especially for oneself and for those who inherit one’s karma. It is a *very* bad idea.)

This longing was accompanied by a great certainty that death is not just extinction, and that it is not just the gateway into the eternal life of a soul, ego or personality: it *is* a gateway; and it *can* be a gateway into Something that utterly transcends human understanding—“Love beyond our wildest dreams,” as I have heard Rev. Master express it.

The second reason is that people who have had “near-death experiences” (a term coined by Dr. Raymond Moody, a pioneer in researching these phenomena) describe just such a manifestation of Love at the time of death.

Only one of my grandparents, my father’s mother, remained alive at the time that I became a monk in my mid-twenties. I was able to visit my grandmother once a year during her last years. About a year before she died, she told me the story of her own near-death experience in a very matter-of-fact way. She prefaced the story by telling me that she was not afraid to die, because she had experienced clinical death during surgery many years before. She briefly described the Light that appeared before her as her body’s life-sustaining functions shut down, and the Love that emanated from that Light. It was not her time to die, so she came back into her body (with some reluctance, if I remember correctly) as the doctors worked to revive her.

I do not think my grandmother had ever heard of near-death experiences. We had never discussed such matters before. She was not a Buddhist, and we had what amounted to an unspoken agreement that we would not get into discussions about religion and politics (very helpful for maintaining a friendship). She loved me and she knew that I loved her, and she wanted me to know that when she died she would be alright. She knew from her own experience what

happens at the moment of death. I believed her when she told me her story, and I believe her now.

The Bardo Realm

I do not know whether people ever remember experiences from the Bardo realm in the way that they sometimes remember experiences from their past-life inheritance. I have found, however, that sometimes one person can be aware of events that happen in the journey of another person's spirit-body through the Bardo realm.

I have experienced this awareness in two ways. Sometimes these two ways may be closely linked with one another, but I do not see why that always has to be the case.

The first way is through *empathy*. When two people are very closely linked karmically, and one of them dies, it *can* happen that the other person will empathically experience something of what the spirit-body of the deceased person is going through in the Bardo realm. I experienced this once myself following the death of a friend. For weeks after the death I recognized that I was sharing this person's experiences, especially in pure feeling. Then one day it stopped. There was no gradual diminishing of the intense feelings: they continued at a certain level of intensity—and then suddenly and completely switched off. For some reason, I thought of counting the number of days that had elapsed since my friend's death: the intense feelings stopped on the forty-ninth day—the day traditionally identified as the day on which the journey through the Bardo realm culminates in rebirth.

I believe that an empathic bond between beings can be used by the Eternal to help the spirit-body of the deceased look up spiritually. If this is so, then it is especially important for those closest to someone who has died to keep their own heart and mind turned toward the Eternal in faith. In this way we can provide real spiritual support for, rather than a negative drag on, someone we love.

It is vitally important to know that it is one thing for the *Eternal* to make use of an empathic bond; it is another altogether for us to willfully meddle in a very complex and serious process. All we have to do is continue to do our own training, allowing the Eternal to use the merit of that training in whatever way will benefit beings.

We can offer merit for those who have died just as we can offer merit for those who are alive. However, I generally recommend that people offer merit when it is *good* to do so, and refrain from assuming that it is always *good* to offer merit. When I once told Rev. Master that I wanted to offer all my merit for the welfare of beings she responded, “Don't do that! Keep some for yourself! You *need* it.”—A strong caution about playing God when offering merit!

The second way in which I have become aware of events transpiring in another person's spirit-body's sojourn in the Bardo realm is when I have received a strong and clear intuitive sense that I needed to fulfill a priestly function. A Buddhist monk fulfills a priestly function when he or she points another person toward the Eternal. The performance of a priestly function that addresses the need of someone who is going through the Bardo realm involves giving the right teaching at the right time and in the right way.

I like the word “journey” to describe the spirit-body's movement through the Bardo realm because, when we think in terms of making a journey, we recognize that the traveler makes choices along the way: he is not just passively being carried along by forces over which he can exert no influence. Important choices are made in the Bardo realm. As in life, so in the Bardo realm, some choices propel one more deeply into suffering, and some choices move one in the direction of the Eternal. And as in life, so in the Bardo realm, one can bog down in doubt, hesitation, fear and confusion. Then it is that the Eternal may tag a person who is still alive to deliver a message.

The stakes are very high in the Bardo realm. It is very important that the giving of teaching to someone in the Bardo realm happen as a result of listening to, and following, the Eternal. I cannot too strongly emphasize that the actions of the person giving the teaching must come from that Place that is beyond desire, expectation, hope and insistence; even the best of intentions has to be got out of the way so that one is *just* delivering the message. In countries with a long Buddhist tradition, families of a deceased person usually prefer to have a very senior monk do this job—if it is needed.

The message is delivered by going to an altar, perhaps doing some bows and offering incense, and then giving the teaching just as if the deceased person were standing right there. In doing this, the priest entrusts the message to the Eternal and leaves it to the Eternal to

work out how the message is delivered. If the message originated with the Eternal, and if the person who delivers the message is staying rooted in meditation, the Eternal will take care of the rest.

It should be obvious from the above that going to spiritualists and engaging in activities such as séances in order to contact deceased family members and friends is just asking for trouble. And people who ask for trouble always find it. The best way to help both ourselves and our deceased loved ones is to entrust them into the hands of the Eternal and fully *let go* of them.

Rebirth-Realms

We are all very familiar with one rebirth-realm—the human realm. And we live in close association with another—the animal realm. *That* these are in fact rebirth-realms is proved if and when we remember any part of our past-life inheritance from the human and/or animal realms.

I suppose it will be difficult enough for some to give credence to the possibility that humans can inherit the karma of animals, though I know this to be true from my own experience. How much more difficult might it be to keep an open mind about the possibility that humans can inherit karma from beings who were neither human nor animal?—This is an area in which I have no personal experience, that is, I have not remembered any past life that was neither human nor animal.

Nonetheless, I know that there are rebirth-realms beyond the human and animal realms. I have no idea whether these realms are precisely as described in Buddhist texts. But I know that there are intelligent beings who are neither human nor animal, and who do not have a material body, as we understand the concept of “body.”

I know this because for almost thirty years I lived and trained in this temple with such a being. This being became the temple Guardian. How this happened, and the place that this benevolent spiritual friend and protector has had in my life, deserves its own chapter. The chapter on the Guardian of North Cascades Buddhist Priory is Chapter 20 of the parallel narrative to these Reflections: Book Two—*“How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: Reflections in a Disciple's Life.”*

There are other reasons why I believe that there are rebirth-realms in addition to the human and animal realms. In what I have written here, I have emphasized my personal experience, and I have done this because, as the Buddha and Rev. Master both taught, the most certain and reliable beliefs are rooted in personal experience. But, of course, that does not mean that one cannot trust the experiences of others. As always, there is a Middle Path.

My general approach in dealing with descriptions of phenomena of which I have little or no experience is quite simple: if someone tells me something that rings true deep within me, I tend to accept it at face value; if it does not ring true in that way, I do not doubt it, but I also do not fully believe it—I put it on the “back burner” and wait to see what comes next.

This means that, while I have not remembered non-human and non-animal past lives, and while I would describe my personal experience of phenomena such as visitation by ghosts as “very limited,” I am not a sceptic. In fact, when trainees have confided in me about such matters, I have generally found their descriptions of events to be highly credible.

A word about “ghosts.” It is not uncommon for people to be visited shortly after the death of a relative or friend by the “ghost,” or spirit, of the deceased person. There is always a purpose in such a visit. Sometimes this purpose is just to say, “I am fine. I love you. Good-bye.” Sometimes the person who has died is having difficulty letting go of someone he loves; sometimes it may be that the deceased person is trying to communicate to a third party to look after someone he loves. It is best to straightforwardly address the purpose of the visit so that the spirit of the deceased person can move on to its true destination. As in all other matters, one can turn to the Eternal in pure meditation for guidance on how best to proceed; and one can turn to the refuge of the Sangha when human help is needed.

As in the human realm, and as in the Bardo realm, so in all other realms, clinging only deepens confusion and suffering. In all realms and in all worlds, the Way to the cessation of suffering is to be found by taking refuge in our wonderful True Nature.

Chapter 26

Help for Fear

No bodhisattva who is a real bodhisattva clings to the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality.

—*The Diamond Sutra*
translated by A. F. Price (slightly paraphrased)

A Message of Hope

In the Foreword to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (entitled “Kensho” in the first edition), Rev. Master makes it very clear that she sees a great similarity between her experience of kensho and the experiences described by people whose bodies have briefly undergone clinical death and then been revived. And she expresses very clearly her hope that more people will share with others their experience of what happens spiritually at the time of death:

“In a day and age when far too many people are terrified of death, perhaps far too few are willing to admit to what they, themselves have experienced when brought back from the door of death and far too many are afraid of what the medical profession and others will say if they speak of their experiences. If those who have experienced these things speak out, much fear can be removed, much joy can be experienced and much grief prevented. For these reasons I wish to share with the reader this great experience.”

In publishing *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master very deliberately took the risk of being doubted and criticized in order to help people approach death with faith rather than despair, and certainty of the Love of the Eternal rather than terror. And she encouraged others who were able to speak about death from actual experience to take the same risk in the service of the same compassionate purpose.

Fear of Death

It is important to distinguish between the natural fear of death and the terror that is the consequence of deluded views. The former helps

living beings pay attention to, and avoid, genuine threats to their survival. The latter is a form of suffering that signals the presence of great spiritual, rather than physical, need.

Body and mind are impermanent. To insist that body and mind, or any part or aspect of body or mind, can constitute an enduring refuge is to cling to the illusion of “a self within the senses.” This clinging to the illusion of self is the cause of the terror of death. The cure for this clinging is to let go of the illusory self and surrender to the True Self—the Buddha Nature, which is not born and does not die.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom shows a human being consciously and deliberately choosing to do exactly that letting go of the illusory self and surrendering to the True Self. Stories of near-death experiences show people encountering, with varying degrees of preparedness, the Light of the Eternal (the True Self) at the moment of death.—The central message of both descriptions—one of kensho, the other of the near-death experience—is the same: there *is* a true and enduring Refuge, an Infinite Love that waits for us and welcomes us when we turn toward It in childlike trust.

When It is Good

To willfully and unnecessarily cut off the life of any living being is a tragic mistake with serious consequences. On the other hand, to willfully and unnecessarily attempt to prolong life and avoid death is also a tragic mistake with serious consequences. The former mistake denies the Buddha Nature of life; the latter denies the Buddha Nature of death.

There is a time when it is *good* to live, and there is a time when it is *good* to die. Similarly, there is a time when it is *good* to help others live, and there is a time when it is *good* to allow others to die. How can we discern when it is *good* to do one thing and when it is *good* to do another?

The Eternal points the way. If we turn toward the Eternal for help in all matters of real need in our life, we will have got important practice for doing it when we are approaching death, and when those who we love are approaching death. This is a major incentive for meditating.

Self-Judgment and Acceptance

Rev. Master sometimes cautioned, “Do not see evil where evil does not exist.” There is no part of human life in which this is more important than in the attitude that we take toward death and dying. The inability to accept death with an upward-looking mind and heart often contributes to those despairing acts of self-judgment that form the dark core of the hardest knots of spiritual need.

If we view death as the purposeless extinction of life, then we are more likely to despair at the prospect of our own death or the death of someone we love. And if we then hold ourselves responsible for the manifestation of this purposeless extinction, we drop the hammer of self-judgment upon ourselves and send the wheel of suffering careening off into dark and anguished grief and self-reproach.

Neither life nor death is purposeless, and death is not mere extinction. We do not have to romanticize death in order to accept it: it is *enough* to “allow the sight of the dead to enter consciousness” and bow.

The fact that life is impermanent is a constant reminder that life is precious, and that it is a spiritual opportunity that should not be wasted. Death is not just the end of life: it is a *continuation within change* in which further spiritual opportunities manifest naturally. Therefore, the whole of our life is a preparation for dying in the finest way of which we are capable.

Chapter 27

Purification of the Heart

Without purification, the seed of Buddhahood does not mature.

After purification, he who becomes Buddha Manifests the True Nature of a Buddha.

Innumerable Beings

Every trainee has the potential to save innumerable beings, thus fulfilling the first of the Four Bodhisattva Vows: “However innumerable beings may be, I vow to save them all.” And this is accomplished by doing one's own training *thoroughly*.

The following diagram shows the way this “salvation of innumerable beings” works.



The two blue lines encompass the karmic past, present and *possible* future of the trainee. The lines intersect in the trainee's present life.

The arrow near the bottom of the diagram shows the direction in which time is moving, from past to future.

The area enclosed by the lines to the left of the intersection represents the spiritual need inherited from previous lives that is getting the Help of the Eternal through the vehicle of the trainee's present training. This is *salvation of living beings of the past*.

The light at the point of intersection of the lines represents the fact that the trainee's present training is saving the “beings” of greed, hate and delusion in his own mind. This is *salvation of beings in the present*.

The area enclosed by the lines to the right of the intersection represents the merit of the trainee's training as it will continue to manifest in the future after his death. This is *saving innumerable living beings in the future*. Note that this area is larger than the area enclosed by the lines to the left of the intersection: the merit of genuine spiritual conversion flows on and on into the future, leaving the darkness of ignorance behind in the same way that a rocket leaves its boosters behind as it escapes the hold of earth's gravity.

The light of merit is not entirely enclosed by the lines. This represents the fact that the merit of one person's training extends naturally to others, especially those with whom there is a close karmic connection. Note that this sharing of merit continues on into the future.

Sentient Beings of the Mind

This understanding of the meaning of “saving living beings” was strongly emphasized in the teachings of the first Zen masters, as can be seen in the following passage from *The Platform Sutra*:

“When we declare that we vow to save an infinite number of sentient beings, what does that mean? It does not mean that I, Hui-Neng, am going to save them. And who are these sentient beings? They are the delusive mind, the deceitful mind, the evil mind, and such like minds—all these are sentient beings. Each of them has to liberate himself by means of his own True Heart. Then the liberation is genuine. Now, what does it mean to liberate oneself by one's own True Heart? It means the liberation of the

ignorant, the delusive and the vexatious beings within our own mind by means of right views. With the aid of right views and wisdom (*prajna*) the barriers raised by these ignorant and delusive beings may be broken down so that each of them is in a position to liberate himself through his own efforts. Let the fallacious be liberated by truth, the deluded by enlightenment, the ignorant by wisdom, and the malevolent by benevolence. Such is genuine liberation.”

—translated by Wong Mou-Lam,
slightly paraphrased

This wonderful passage from a classic text of early Zen interprets the best known of the Bodhisattva Vows in a way that keeps the focus on doing one's own training, thus hearkening back to the historical roots of Buddhism. It is remarkable in three additional ways: first, it clearly states that the wisdom of our own True Nature, which is innate within us and not externally acquired, is the source of spiritual liberation; second, it implies that all forms of ignorance contain within themselves the potential for corresponding forms of enlightenment, which is the secret of conversion; and, third, it expresses the understanding of no-self. (With regard to this last point, note that the sentence, “It does not mean that I, Hui-Neng am going to save them” might also have been rendered, “It does not mean that there is an 'I', Hui-Neng, who is going to save them.” This would be wholly in accord with the Sixth Patriarch's thinking.)

The Third Pure Precept

Rev. Master's explanation of the Three Pure Precepts in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (Plate XII; first edition, Plate VIII) not only shows how to train in such a way as to set the stage for this spiritual liberation of the multitudinous “sentient beings” within one's own mind, but adds another dimension.

This added dimension is revealed in Rev. Master's explanation of the Third Pure Precept, “Do good for others.” Rev. Master considers the possibility that her actions might unintentionally “set up a chain of causation that will cause others to do wrong.” She adds, “I cannot stop *him* [another being] doing harm, for each man his karma makes and

must carry for himself, but I can do that about myself which will prevent *me* from accidentally starting the course of karma. I must think carefully of my every act. I may not cause another to make a mistake in Buddhism.”

Note that nowhere does Rev. Master mention the kinds of activities that are commonly thought of as “helping activities.” Yet paradoxically, by resolutely keeping her focus on her own training, and thereby rooting herself firmly in the Eternal, Rev. Master provided a true Sangha Refuge for many people.

Chapter 28

The Pearl

*How comes this one pearl, so bright and warm?
It is as big as a pill and is golden yellow in color.*

The Secret Place

We have the capacity to withdraw into a Secret Place deep within our own being. Storms may rage; shadows may arise and pass; beings may threaten, or carp and criticize: right in the midst of all of it there is a spiritual Place wherein is to be found true safety and boundless peace.

The world knows nothing of this Place. Yet beings find their way to It by groping in the dark. There are many shadow-refuges that promise what It alone can provide. The suffering that results from going down these sidetracks teaches us that there is something that does *not* work. So we keep looking for the one thing that *does* work.

Some of these sidetracks are vicious; some are virtuous. But there is only one true Way. This is not an “ism.” It is pure meditation. People call it by different names. Names are only words: they point to something, but are not the thing to which they point. Therefore, the names do not matter. Some call it “meditation.” Some call it “contemplative prayer” or the “prayer of silence.” Probably there have been many words in many languages.

Beings do pure meditation without knowing they are doing it. But one day something happens that creates the illusion of loss of this Secret Place: “By accident someone set the wheel of karma rolling.” Then commences the long, tortuous journey toward enlightenment. At some point in this journey, which spans lifetimes, beings rediscover meditation as a *practice*.

The practice of meditation *must* be combined with correct teaching. Practice and teaching are as the two hands in the gassho: they mutually complement and support one another. Correct teaching helps us realize that we do not have to settle for second best: there is the Perfection of Zen.

Because of this need for correct teaching, the master-disciple relationship exists. The master's job is to be a living reminder to the disciple that there *is* the Secret Place and that he—the disciple—has the capacity to take refuge in It in pure meditation.

In the Shadowy Hall

The Secret Place is *sensed* as centering in the hara—roughly, the upper and middle abdomen. Yet It cannot be limited to any physical location, for It is spiritual in nature.

In Plate XXVI (first edition, Plate XIV) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, we see the paradigmatic transformation that happens in the course of correct spiritual training. This Plate is entitled “Appearance in the Hall of Shadows,” and in it Rev. Master describes the spiritual embracing of a key knot of pain and confusion from her past-life inheritance, its subsequent vanishing, and then the appearance in its place of a teardrop-shaped pearl of golden light—which then transforms into the appearance of a tiny golden Buddha sitting within the shadowy hall of the hara.

What is happening here?—A knot of spiritual need that was formed when a being despaired, believing itself to be utterly cut-off from the Love of the Eternal, has rediscovered that Love through the vehicle of Rev. Master's faith, willingness and sympathy. The vanishing of the being that despaired signifies the final unraveling of the knot of confusion and pain—the dissolving of the spiritual block.

The manifesting of the golden pearl in the hara signifies the enlightening of ignorance. Yet the enlightening of ignorance would not be possible were it not for the purity of intention that lies at the heart of even the greatest knot of confusion and pain. Therefore, this bright pearl *is* our own innate purity of heart and that of all beings. It is by means of this innate purity of heart that the “sentient beings of the mind” liberate themselves.

The transformation of the pearl of purity of heart into the golden Buddha sitting within the shadowy hall signifies that innate purity of intention is rooted in the Buddha Nature Itself and that, in the mind and heart of the person within whom the causes of suffering have been truly converted, the Buddha Nature sits enthroned in its rightful place. If the Buddha Nature is what we truly are, and if we have

awakened to this truth, why would we not seek Its guidance, listen to It and follow It?—Why would we not treasure and take refuge in our Secret Place?

Chapter 29

Opening the Gates

The Buddha Nature, that we already possess, naturally discloses the Origin, which is the Eternal—the fullness of the Unborn from which we come.

The Precious Field

Our body and mind come into existence in accordance with causes and conditions, and they pass out of existence in accordance with causes and conditions. Yet the impermanent and conditioned nature of body and mind should not be taken to mean that they are insignificant. To the contrary, they are the precious vehicle of spiritual training and the field within which, if we are willing, the Eternal does Its work of helping spiritual need.

This Help that the Eternal provides does more than do away with confusion and pain: It transforms them into enlightenment. As this happens, a great flood of Teaching is released. And, when all conditions are right for this flood to happen, the Eternal prepares our body and mind to receive it.

Rising and Returning

In Plates XXVII-XXIX (first edition, Plates XV and XVI) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, entitled “The Spirit Rises to Greet the Lord,” Rev. Master describes the rising of the golden Buddha in the hara to the crown of the head, and then the return back to the hara. (Note: This chapter of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* immediately follows the chapter entitled “Appearance in the Hall of Shadows,” which I discuss in Chapter 28 of these Reflections.)

What is the meaning of the rising of the golden Buddha, and its return to the hara?—I have said that the golden Buddha that has appeared in the hara represents the Buddha Nature. The rising and returning of the golden Buddha traces the path of the circulation of the Water of the Spirit—up the back to the crown of the head, then back down to the “well” in the hara.

What is this circulation?—It is the flow of the Love of the Eternal through that which is *of* the Eternal—our body and mind.—Yet in reality there is no “our” or “my”: there is *just* that which is *of* the Eternal, the rightful and natural function of which is to be the pipeline of this *flow of Immaculacy*.

The golden Buddha pauses at the crown of the head. I believe that this signifies that the Buddha Nature is opening the Gate of Immaculacy. The full recognition of the Eternal happens from and through the crown of the head. This will be evident in coming chapters of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

The golden Buddha then moves down to the “Heavenly Heart”—the so-called “Third Eye,” or “Wisdom Eye,” in the center of the forehead. The golden Buddha leaves an imprint of itself upon that spot. I believe that this signifies that the Buddha Nature is opening the Heavenly Heart to receive the Teaching.

The golden Buddha then returns to the hara via the pathway down the front of the body. I believe that this signifies that the Buddha Nature is the True Lord of the “house” of body and mind, *and is so perceived when our spiritual vision is no longer clouded by confusion*, and that Its rightful place is the very center of our being and of every aspect of our life.

The hara is now filled with light, whereas before it was “the shadowy hall.” I believe that this signifies that Great Enlightenment is dawning—as, indeed, will be very evident in the next chapters of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. Thereafter, there will be times when the hara will be experienced as the shadowy hall and there will be times when it will be experienced as being full of light—and there will be times when it will be experienced in other ways: the Eternal *is*; our experience changes constantly.

Reclaimed for the Perfection of Zen

This circulation of the golden Buddha signifies the fuller reclamation of body and mind by the Eternal. It is the second stage of a three-stage spiritual “big bang.” The first stage was signified by the appearance of the pearl of golden light in the hara and its subsequent transformation into the golden Buddha. The third stage will be discussed in the next chapter of these Reflections.

Chapter 30

A Great Awakening

*The Water of the Spirit flows full and gently forth,
Deeply flooding the root and the trunk;
Within and without nothing is produced: It is
immaculate.—
Nourish long and well your Sacred Self!*

The Third Stage

In Plates XXX-XXXIII (first edition, Plates XVII-XIX) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes a spiritual experience of the greatest significance.

It is important to bear in mind that this experience happened immediately subsequently to other experiences (see Chapter 29 of these Reflections) and continuously with them. Taken together, these events make up what I have described as a “spiritual big bang.”

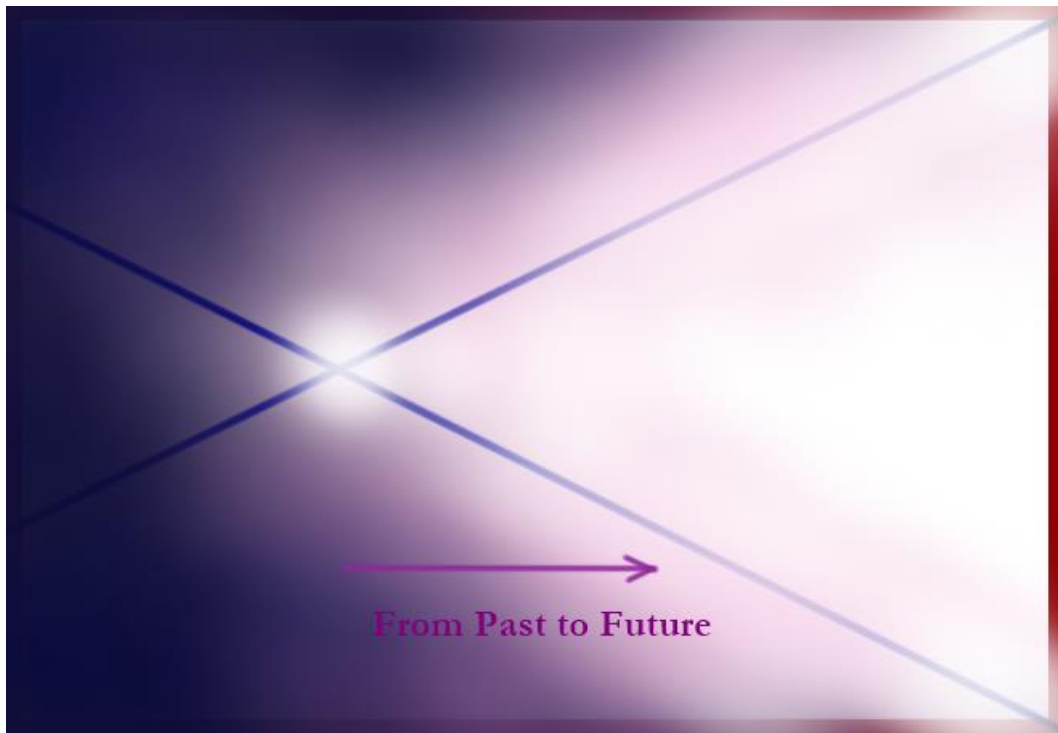
I find it helpful to think of this “big bang” as happening in three stages—though, again, it is really one continuous flow. In the first stage, a great knot of spiritual need fully unravels and dissolves, and in its place there manifests the seed, or pearl, of Original Enlightenment—the Enlightenment that was always at the heart of the knot of spiritual need in the form of pure intention. In the second stage, this pearl of Original Enlightenment manifests as Buddha Nature Itself and traces out the path of the circulation of the Water of the Spirit. In the course of this circulation, three areas in the body are particularly *blessed* and opened: the crown of the head; the center of the forehead; and the hara.

Each of these areas of the body has a particular spiritual function. The crown of the head is the part of the body that opens in conscious recognition of the Eternal: love opening to its Source. The center of the forehead opens to receive the Teaching. That is, it opens in recognition of Truth. The hara is the area in the body where the deep stillness of meditation—which is really the deep and imperturbable stillness of the Buddha Nature—is experienced as centering.

In the third stage of the spiritual big bang described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the Heavenly Heart—the Wisdom Eye in the center of the forehead—is blasted fully open and, simultaneously, the Water of the Spirit floods through the body. The Light of the Eternal streams in through the Heavenly Heart. The Gate of Immaculacy at the crown of the head opens, and this opening is experienced by Rev. Master as being “like a lotus blossom crown” atop her head.

Significance

This three-stage spiritual big-bang constitutes the pivotal event of the great kensho described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. The following diagram, which will be familiar to readers of recent essays in these Reflections, shows why this is so.



The area enclosed by the blue lines to the left of their point of intersection represents the karma of this life and past lives that has been unscrolling in the first five months of Rev. Master's retreat, and that has been getting the Help of the Eternal and the help of man.

The bright light that manifests at the point of intersection of the two blue lines represents the three-stage spiritual big bang. This “big bang” can be thought of as coming—kerplunk!—fully into alignment with the Eternal—a great opening to Cosmic Love and Wisdom. The

final (or third) stage of this aligning and opening happens in an instant and is experienced by Rev. Master as being “struck by the Sword of Buddha's Wisdom.”

The area enclosed by the blue lines to the right of the point of intersection represents the flood of merit that is being released. From the time of the big bang onwards until the end of her retreat the spiritual brightness will be as intense as the darkness was intense in the early days of the retreat.

This great opening to the Eternal is the very heart of the reharmonization of body, mind and karma with the Eternal. The Eternal makes great use of the person who undergoes this process. In Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, the Eternal found a true vessel of Its Love and Wisdom—a vessel of the Perfection of Zen.

Chapter 31

A Paradigm of Conversion

*This tiny little room, our body, is the
treasurehouse of the Relics of the Buddha;
It is as small as a mustard seed on Mount Sumeru.
Now it is nearly purified enough to become one
with the Unborn.
Once body and mind drop away you will know
That there is a Place to which the Water flows back.*

Sharing the Wealth

To the Eternal, all of existence is part of Itself. It will make the best use of every part of Itself *for the good of all that is of Itself*. Therefore, there simply is no such thing as enlightenment that can be limited to one individual: the enlightenment of one individual *is meant to benefit all*—and, in fact, *does* benefit all.

The great kensho experienced by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett in 1976-77, and described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, was like the eruption of a great spiritual volcano. Some of the merit that flooded into the world from this eruption manifested in the form of Teaching remarkable for its depth, clarity, and practical applicability. This Teaching is for any and all who wish to study It, treasure It, and put It into practice. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett could no more keep this treasure of Teaching to herself than the moon could wander off on its own path and leave earth's gravitational field behind.

In Parts XXIX and XXX of these Reflections, I have discussed the “spiritual big bang” of conversion and awakening that lies at the heart of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. Throughout these Reflections, I have emphasized that even the most seemingly esoteric spiritual experiences described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* are the very deep experiencing of processes that are experienced by everyone who truly trains in meditation and the Precepts. Since this is so, the deepest experience sheds light on the meaning of spiritual experience at all levels, and on the process of training/enlightenment itself. With this in mind, I would like to walk through the stages of the “spiritual

big bang” again, relating each stage to ordinary daily training in meditation and the Precepts.

Three Teachings of a Tiger

At the very beginning of her retreat, Rev. Master chose to turn within in meditation rather than taking refuge in external things that would only dissolve away and leave her in despair. This led very quickly to the complete letting go of externals and “holding fast to the Lord of the House” in pure meditation, which established the right spiritual focus for all that followed: “Nothing matters: mindfulness is all.”

What followed was the unscrolling of Rev. Master's karmic inheritance, beginning with this lifetime and then seamlessly going back through her past-life inheritance. In this process, Rev. Master found in detail how beings in her karmic stream had ended up in despair. This culminated in the memory of the life of a tiger that was captured by men and caged. In its terrible despair it bashed its head again and again into the bars of the cage until it had a stroke and its back legs were paralyzed.

This deep knot of spiritual pain and confusion was able to come fully to the surface of consciousness to receive help because Rev. Master consciously chose *not* to go down a path of despair. This shows a universal truth of training/enlightenment: Before spiritual need can be helped by the Love and Wisdom of the Eternal, it has to be contained within the Precepts; if we let spiritual need—greed, hate and delusion—call the shots, desperation, longing and confusion will proliferate.

It is often the case that that which man has injured needs the love of man in order to heal. Rev. Master says to the tiger, “I love you so very much; more than anything I have ever loved in my entire life.”—Here Rev. Master is the willing vessel of Love to *the spiritual need* inherited from a being who died in pain and confusion.

This shows another universal truth of training/enlightenment: When we meditate truly, we allow the Love of the Eternal to flow to every part of our being—including the most pained, confused and ugly parts. When we sit still with an open heart in the midst of fear, grief, despair, desire, anger, doubt—anything and everything that can arise—we do the same essential spiritual act that Rev. Master did

when she loved the suffering tiger. It does not matter that it may not *feel* as if we are loving anything at all; it does not matter that we may have no intellectual clarity, no insight, no understanding about what is happening within us. All that matters is that we do the meditation and *trust* the Eternal to do the work within our heart.

So much pain and confusion, so much thrashing about in lifetime after lifetime, comes from a moment of looking down. As Rev. Master says (again, addressing the knot of spiritual need inherited from the tiger), “For a moment you doubted your true nature long ago and so caused the karmic memory that lies within me. We will never doubt again and so the time of wandering [in lifetimes of pain and confusion] is over, our cage [of ignorance] has disappeared.”

This is the most important lesson of all: Look up, not down!

Vanishing Within the Hara

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the vanishing of the tiger within the hara initiates the “spiritual big bang.”

Every time we sit down to meditate with a troubled mind and a tense body and get up thirty minutes later with a peaceful mind and a relaxed body we experience the *dissolving of the knot of pain and confusion within the hara*. It may be that there are extended periods within which we experience no such relief. During such times (which can go on in some cases for months or even years) one has to fly on faith—and if one cannot fly, then walk; and if one cannot walk, then crawl. Eventually, every obstacle *will* dissolve if we will but continue our training in meditation *and* the Precepts.

Note that the dissolving of a knot, or jangle, of spiritual need happens in the hara, not in the head. We will not solve the koan by running around in our heads about it. Within the “hall of shadows” of the hara—the stillness of meditation, which is really the stillness of the Buddha Nature Itself—the Eternal effortlessly does that which we can never accomplish through our own efforts alone.

The Pearl of Original Enlightenment

“There is nothing from the first.”—This enigmatic-sounding statement explains the appearance of the pearl of Original Enlightenment within the hara, that is, within the stillness of meditation.

“There is nothing from the first” means that in reality there never was anything separate from our wonderful True Nature. Therefore, that which believed itself to be separate from the Love of the Eternal was simply mistaken. Under the influence of this ignorance, beings do terrible things to themselves and to others, yet *always* they are *simply mistaken* in their ignorance. At the heart of this simple mistake is love that has lost sight of its Source. Yet love that is lost in ignorance *was, is and always will be* entirely of the Eternal. This is the pearl of Original Enlightenment.

What a wonderful day it is when the knot of pain and confusion dissolves and That which was always at its heart is revealed—the Immaculacy of Nothingness, the Immaculacy of our wonderful True Nature!

This pearl of Original Enlightenment is within each of us. No matter how far we may wander in confusion and pain, we carry the pearl with us and within us. How could Love ever abandon us when It is always within us?

Every time we sit down to meditate in spiritual darkness and rise up thirty minutes later with a brighter and lighter heart, we experience the pearl of Original Enlightenment.

The Buddha Within

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes the way in which the pearl, or seed, of Enlightenment transforms into a tiny golden Buddha sitting within the shadowy hall of the hara—within the stillness of meditation.

This golden Buddha represents our own wonderful True Nature—which is the True Nature of all the beings in our stream of karma, all spiritual need, all existence.

What does this mean *in practice*?—It means that at one moment I can treasure and take refuge in the Buddha Nature, and at another moment I can ignore It: it is my choice. It means that one being can awaken to the Buddha Nature while another sinks into deeper ignorance and confusion. In other words, the Oneness of existence does not *force* Itself upon us: All is One *and* All is Different. Our True Nature is in no way separate from the Eternal; it is not a soul or ego; it is not “mine” or “yours.”—*And* it manifests as the True Nature of me

and of you, of this being and of that being. It is One *and* It manifests within all difference.

If I am free to ignore the Buddha Nature, I am equally free to take refuge in It. If I can blind myself to It through willful actions of thought, speech and body, I can also awaken to It through Preceptual training that brings actions of thought, speech and body into alignment with It. If all beings except one turn their back upon the Buddha Nature and walk in paths of confusion, that cannot stop that one being from taking refuge in its True Nature. If all beings except one choose to walk in the Way of Ancient Buddhas, that cannot stop that one being from walking in a path of confusion.

Every time we turn within, looking to our own True Heart for help and guidance, we take refuge in the golden Buddha within the hara.

The Circulation

After the golden Buddha appears within the hara, It then rises up the back to the crown of the head, pauses at the crown of the head, moves to the center of the forehead and leaves an imprint of itself there, and then moves back down the front of the body to the hara. Then it sits within the hara in golden light.

The rising up from the hara: This is the upward movement of the Water of the Spirit—the stream of upward-flowing Love. This upward-flowing is greatly strengthened when we look up spiritually, for when we look up spiritually we are *choosing* upward-flowing Love instead of downward-sinking despair. When we *offer* everything to the Eternal in pure meditation, we are offering everything *into* the stream of upward-flowing Love.

The return to the hara: This is the return movement of the Water of the Spirit to the well, or reservoir, of the hara—the stream of return-flowing Love and Wisdom. This return-flowing is greatly strengthened when we turn within in meditation, for when we turn within in meditation, we are *choosing* return-flowing (or inward-flowing) Love and Wisdom rather than outward-seeking greed. When we *listen* within stillness, we are listening *within* the stream of return-flowing Love and Wisdom.

Pausing at the crown of the head: Opening to the Love of the Eternal. When we meditate with our heart open to our wonderful True Nature

in simple, childlike faith, we become an open pipe through which spiritual need can find its way to the Eternal's Help. Never doubt the merit of a moment of true meditation!

Pausing at the center of the forehead and leaving an imprint: Opening to the Wisdom of the Eternal. When we meditate with our heart open to the Teaching of our wonderful True Nature, we allow It to help and guide us. We take the Teaching in at a much deeper level than that of the intellect. It is a mistake to think that training and enlightenment always provide intellectual clarity: sometimes clarity is there; sometimes it is not; sometimes it is *good* that clarity is there; sometimes it is *good* that clarity is completely absent. The “blood and bones” certainty that the Eternal *is* is worth more than all the intellectual knowledge in the world, and no amount of intellectual clarity will take its place.

Truth Beyond Words

As is so often the case in these Reflections, in writing the above I am very conscious of the limits of words to convey the meaning of that which, in the end, we must experience for ourselves. I am also very conscious of the limits of my own experience and understanding. I know that I have only ever seen the “tip of the iceberg” of deeper spirituality. Above all, I am reminded again of the treasure of Teaching embodied in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, and my heart bows in gratitude to the great-hearted woman who shared her experiences with the world through this book.

Chapter 32

Letting Go and Receiving Back

Originally it was natural for us to know the true fire [of Love] and where we came from.

Going and Returning

In discussing the significance of key events surrounding Rev. Master's past-life memory of a tiger, I abstracted from one very important part, which merits its own chapter in these Reflections.

At the end of the text accompanying Plates XXIII-XXIV (first edition, Plate XIII) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes her realization that a delusional element has entered into her love of the tiger. With great grief, she lets go of the tiger, gives it the Precepts, and does a Segaki ceremony for it. (*Segaki* means “Feeding the Hungry Ghosts.” Segaki is a memorial ceremony in which scriptures emphasizing the Compassion at the heart of existence are recited. The Teaching is spiritual food for all that is starving for Truth (the “hungry ghost”). The merit of the ceremony is offered for the benefit of the deceased.)

After letting go of the tiger in this way, Rev. Master found that another step was needed: she needed to “accept the tiger back into me and not discard it.” But how was this to be done?—She found the answer, which was to “open myself completely to the tiger whilst saying no to Mara.” (In Buddhism, Mara is the personification of delusion.) She says, “Come, enter me, all that is good within this tiger, but anything that is not of the Eternal Lord must stay outside.” There then follow events that I have discussed in Parts XXIX-XXXI of these Reflections.

Letting Go

All forms of existence have a birth, a life and a death. We think of birth, life and death as belonging exclusively to sentient beings, but in fact it is only the *way* in which birth, life and death occur in sentient beings that is unique to those forms of existence.

Rocks are formed in various ways, exist in those forms, and decay and pass out of existence. Atoms and their constituent particles come into

existence, have a duration (in some cases, very long, in others very short), and at some point “die.” Thoughts and feelings arise and pass in consciousness. And so on.

Birth, life and death constitutes a continual process of transformation. Death does not end this process: it initiates new beginnings. Rocks on a mountain are eroded by rain, wind, ice and the heat of the sun, breaking down into smaller rocks and then into tiny grains of sand or even smaller particles of clay. Eventually these little bits of matter may end up in sedimentary deposits at the bottom of a sea, forming new rocks. Subatomic particles smash into other particles and give rise to a shower of new particles. One thought leads to another thought; one state of feeling gives rise to another state of feeling. Living beings die, body and mind undergoing transformations that become the basis for new life.—And so we should add “rebirth” to the list: birth, life, death and *rebirth*.

However much we may love another person, an object, a state of affairs, a feeling—anything whatsoever—we cannot keep it from undergoing the natural processes of decay and death—and rebirth.

Rev. Master was given twenty-four hours of “oneness of love with my tiger.” That was the “lifespan” of the experiencing of love *in this way and at this time*. But the Love of the Eternal is infinite: there is always more to It than we will experience in any one way and at any one time. And there was more to the tiger than Rev. Master could realize until further transformations happened: a *spiritual* rebirth was on the immediate horizon.

And so Rev. Master needed to let go of her beloved tiger, returning love to its Source. The grief that she experienced in doing this is the grief that we experience when we lose that which we love. Yet if we are not willing to lose it when it is time for it to go, we darken grief and hurt ourselves—and we may hurt others also. But it works both ways, and if we *are* willing to let go when it is time to let go, we greatly benefit ourselves—and *others*. Rev. Master was willing to let go.

Receiving Back

At the time of letting go, Rev. Master did not know that something would be given back. Always we go forward into an unknown; always

the greatest need of all needs is the need to look up and trust the Eternal.

In saying “No” to Mara, Rev. Master was expressing determination not to bring the despair of the tiger back to life in her present or future actions. Greed, hate and delusion have the Buddha Nature, but that does not mean that it is *good* to walk in a path that indulges greed, hate and delusion. Scorpions have the Buddha Nature, but that does not make me want to play with scorpions.

It became clear to Rev. Master after completely letting go, that she somehow needed to accept the tiger back into herself. It is so often the case that we give something up only to be given it back. It is up to us whether we will willingly accept, and make wise use of, that which is being returned to us.

In accepting the tiger back into herself after saying “No” to Mara, Rev. Master recognized the innate purity of heart within the knot of spiritual need. This innate purity of heart derives directly from the Buddha Nature Itself. It is always present even within the greatest confusion and most horrific non-Preceptual action. Love may be thrown off its mark, yet love itself is always *of* the Eternal.

The Beneficiary of Inherited Merit

Together, the “No” to Mara and the accepting back of “all that is good within this tiger” constitute the choice to go on in the Path of the Precepts *together with* the karmic inheritance. And it is a good thing that Rev. Master made this choice. For in making it, she allowed the merit that had been locked up within the knot of spiritual need to manifest fully. Thus she became the *beneficiary* of the merit of another being's life, just as the spiritual need of that being was the beneficiary of her sympathy and faith.

Thus, the redemption of our karmic inheritance is made possible through our training, *and* we are the beneficiaries of the merit within our karmic inheritance. We give help *and* we receive help.—And now abstract from the “we” and the implied “them”—that is, abstract from all ideas of self and other— and what is revealed is that the Help of the Eternal flows to all need, whatever its origins and whatever way it finds expression at a particular time and in a particular place. Who can fathom the compassion encompassed within this truth?

Whenever we act Preceptually, whenever we truly meditate, we give our body and mind to be the vehicle of the Eternal's activity of Compassion. *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* clearly shows the attitude of mind and heart that makes it possible for this process to happen at the deepest level *and* it shows what the process looks like at the deepest level.

Chapter 33

The Buddha Land

If we can realize our own True Heart at all times and behave in a straightforward manner on all occasions, in the twinkling of an eye we may reach the Pure Land and there see Amitabha.

The Platform Sutra
Translated by Wong Mou-Lam (slightly
paraphrased)

Two Halves of One Flow

While the narrative of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* describes a continuous flow of experience, it can be helpful to view it as dividing into two sections of roughly equal length. The first half of the narrative describes Rev. Master's journey through the first two of the Buddha' Four Noble Truths: "Existence is permeated with suffering" and "The cause of suffering is craving rooted in ignorance." The second half of the narrative shows how the journey continues through the third and fourth of the Four Noble Truths: "With the cessation of craving and ignorance, suffering ceases" and "There is a Path [the Eightfold Path] that leads to the cessation of suffering."

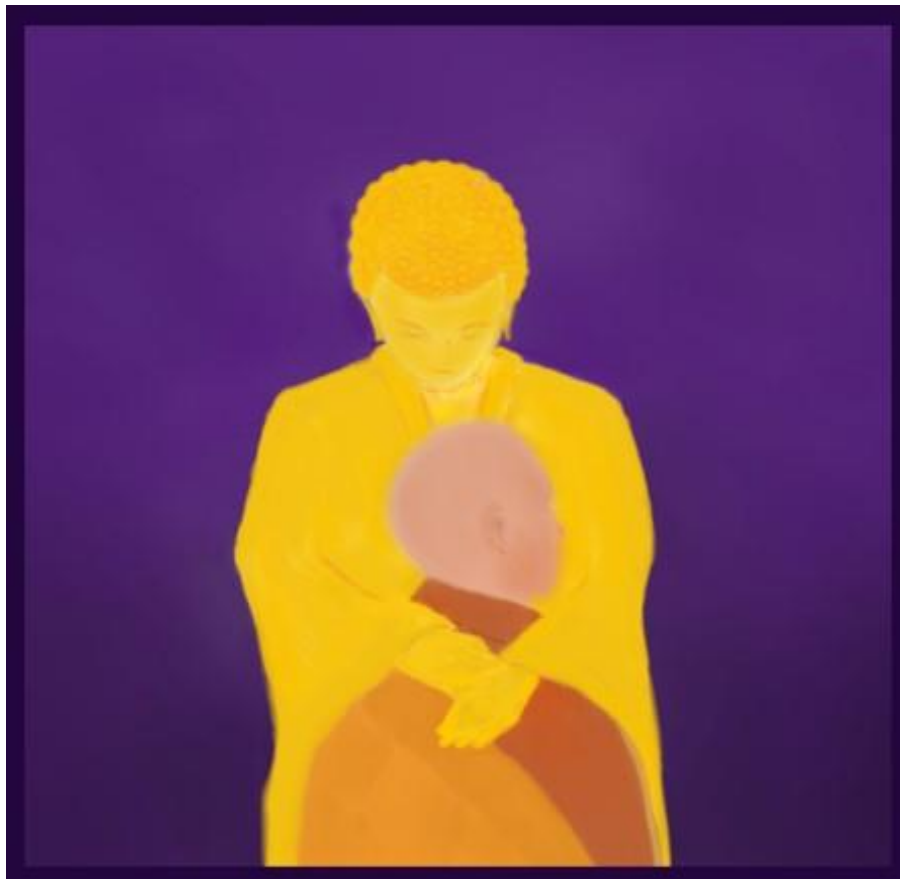
The point of transition between these two halves of the narrative is very clear: it is described in Plates XXV-XXVI (first edition, Plate XIV), entitled "Appearance in the Hall of Shadows." (I have discussed this critically important part of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* in Chapter 28 of these Reflections.)

As I have observed elsewhere in these Reflections, the second half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is very bright. It is bright with the light of ecstasy and beauty; and it is bright with the light of a great flood of Teaching. It is as the beautiful blossom of the lotus plant that rises above dark water and opens to the sun, though most of its long stem is still submerged and its roots remain fixed in the mud. The "flower" of enlightenment grows on the "stem" of training, and both training and enlightenment develop from, and are nourished by means of, the "roots" of faith and pure intention,

which can never be pulled out of the mud of our karmic inheritance. In fact, the mud provides the nutrients that are essential to the survival and well-being of the lotus plant.

Recognition

In the text accompanying Plates XXXV-XXXVI (first edition, Plates XXI-XXII) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, entitled “Recognition in the Waveless Sea,” Rev. Master describes the experience of being approached, touched, and then embraced by “a magnificent golden being.” This embrace culminates in a flood of the Water of the Spirit. Rev. Master says, “It is as if I am bathed in warm, golden light.”



The golden being is an emanation of the Cosmic Buddha (the Eternal). What is an “emanation?”—It is a form in which the Eternal manifests aspects of Itself in order to help beings. There are an infinite number of possible emanations. An emanation is Love adapting to the particular need and dispositions of that which is *of* Itself. To a Buddhist, Love might manifest Itself in forms cherished by Buddhists; to a Christian, It might manifest in forms cherished by Christians; and

so on for people in all religions. Or it might manifest as a dearly loved family member or friend, or as pure light, or *in any other way that will cause a particular being the least worry and fear, while providing the greatest assurance of that Infinite Compassion that lies at the heart of all existence.*

The waters of a “waveless” sea are very still, and the waveless sea represents the deep stillness of the Eternal—the stillness of meditation. In Soto Zen Buddhism, “Recognition” refers both to seeing, or intuiting, the Buddha Nature in another being, or in any situation, and to *choosing* to acknowledge the Buddha Nature in another being, or in any situation.

We can bow in recognition of the Buddha Nature in others; and we can experience others' recognition of the Buddha Nature in ourselves.—Yet we may ask, “What is it within us that recognizes Buddha in another? And what is it in another that recognizes Buddha in us?”—The answer is that That which recognizes Buddha in any being and in any situation *is* Buddha. In other words, the Buddha Nature Itself recognizes the Buddha Nature Itself.

This Recognition is all-acceptance: it is “Buddha bowing to Buddha.” In the experience of Recognition described by Rev. Master in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the all-accepting Love of the Eternal embraces her and flows through every cell of her body, every aspect of her mind. The illusion of separation from our wonderful True Nature has dissolved, and this Infinite Love is the Reality that is revealed.

The Love of the Eternal does not turn off and on. Whether we see It or not, It is always there. Rev. Master looks out at a sea of lotuses and sees millions of lotus flowers. When we believe ourselves to be separate from the Love of the Eternal, the clouds of confusion and pain are obscuring the truth from our spiritual sight. It is only our own judgment of ourselves, our own looking down, that causes us to believe that the Eternal does not extend Its boundless Generosity to us, that It does not Recognize us as part of Itself. When these “clouds in a clear sky” of self-doubt and self-judgment dissolve into Immaculacy, then we see That which was always with us, and to which we belong for all eternity. And then we see that this very realm of impermanence *is* the Buddha's Pure Land in which all beings sit within their beautiful lotus flowers.

The Beautiful and the True

The experiences that Rev. Master describes in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* have a sensory aspect—color and form, physical sensations, sometimes even sound. Rev. Master's words, and drawings and paintings as well, only go so far in conveying the beauty of the spiritual visions that are described in the second half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*: inevitably, there is a gap between the vivid experience that Rev. Master is describing and even the most sympathetic reader's capacity to imagine what it was like.

Rev. Master experienced these latter visions in beautiful colors and forms. Yet without the spiritual *meaning* of the experience, even the most beautiful colors and forms are like an empty envelope that conveys no message. Indeed, the deeper beauty is found in the unity of form and meaning—form conveying meaning; meaning giving depth to form. “Recognition in the Waveless Sea” stimulates the reader's imagination to rise above distinctions of self and other, enlightenment and ignorance, greater and lesser—to rise above all opposites and all pettiness of mind and heart in contemplation of a Love that is infinite.

Chapter 34

Leaf and Wind

Although our own merit for Buddhahood may be full ripe, it is our bounden duty to use all this merit for the purpose of enlightening every living thing: at all times there have been those who put their own Buddhahood second to the necessity of working for the good of all other living things.

—Great Master Dogen, *Shushogi*

(“What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment”)

Heaven is Transitory

The importance of carrying on with one's training through and beyond even the most blissful experiences, is a recurring theme in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. It first manifests early in Rev. Master's retreat (see Plate X, “Heaven is the Most Dangerous of All Places;” first edition Plate VI), and then again shortly thereafter (see Plate XII, “The Lake of Quietism;” first edition, Plate VIII). It manifests a few months later when Rev. Master realizes that she has to let go of her beloved tiger (Plates XXIII-XXIV; first edition, Plate XIII), and then again a few days later when Rev. Master wishes to stay at the edge of the waveless sea in the chapter entitled, “Recognition in the Waveless Sea.” It manifests again two days later, as is described in the chapter entitled “Do Not Stay in Heaven.”

True heaven is to experience the Love of the Eternal, and every such experience, which is an essential aspect of the coming to full fruition of meritorious karma, is precious. The experience of the Love of the Eternal strengthens certainty and faith and encourages us to continue to walk the Path, reminding us that even the longest and deepest periods of spiritual darkness and pain are transitory. When we experience the flow of Love, when we experience the peace of oceanic stillness, it is only natural to want the experience to continue.—It is natural to want it, but it is folly to try to hold on to it when it is time for it to dissolve.

The deepest spiritual experiences, including the deepest ecstasies, share with all our other experiences the common feature of being impermanent. The law of karma makes no distinction between “worldly” and “spiritual” objects of attachment: all clinging results in suffering. Heaven is ours to enjoy when it is present, but it is not, and never will be, ours to cling to and claim as our possession and our achievement. Should we do the latter, we will succumb to spiritual pride, which, if persisted in, will take us to very unheavenly, painful states of mind and body. We open both the gates of heaven and the gates of hell with our own actions of body, speech and mind.

The experience of ecstasy is a gift from the Eternal. We can bow in gratitude whenever we receive this gift. And we can bow again in gratitude as we willingly let go of the gift when it is time for it to return to its Source. When we “go on beyond” ecstasy, we neither reject heavenly experience nor resent its passing: we just continue doing our spiritual training. This training is done for its own sake, not for the sake of experiencing bliss. Yet if we continue to train for the sake of training, leaving the possibility of our future experience of ecstasy in the hands of the Eternal, we will in fact be doing exactly that which leads to such future experience. As Great Master Dogen wrote, “If you do these things [meditation and training in the Precepts] for some time . . . the Treasurehouse will open naturally and you will enjoy it fully.”

Ecstasy and Responsibility

If we are blessed in any way and in any degree with the gift of ecstasy, we have the responsibility to *in some way* return the gift to the great ocean of merit from which it came. Yet I am not the Eternal, so how can I give the gift of ecstasy?—The answer is that I cannot give the gift of ecstasy, yet I *can* do my own training, which includes making an offering in my daily life. “It is an act of charity to build a ferry or a bridge.”—Any action done with a pure and unselfish attitude of mind and heart returns the gift to the ocean of merit. We do not know the merit of our training, and that does not matter: perhaps we are most fully made use of by the Eternal when we have no idea of the use to which the Eternal is putting us.

For Rev. Master, who was a Buddhist monk with many disciples, this responsibility naturally focused on her duties as a priest and teacher.

She writes, “If I do not make the Buddha Land appear for those around me I am unfit to be a priest. . . . However much I wish to sit above in the beauty and stillness it must be my pleasure and my joy to bring them [her disciples], should they so wish, to this blissful place that they may meet their True Lord.” (Plates XXXV-XXXVI; first edition, Plates XXI-XXII.)

We do not have to go hunting for the responsibility: the Eternal will reveal it. The question is whether we will be *willing* to accept the responsibility when it manifests in front of us.

The Wind

Every day and every situation is a new opportunity to follow the Eternal. Perhaps that following will take us to a heavenly state for a while; perhaps some heavy karma will come due and we will be precipitated suddenly into a state of misery. Wherever the following takes us, the important thing is and always will be the following itself: “The leaf goes where the Wind blows and does not disobey the Wind.”



Again and again during her great retreat in 1976-77, Rev. Master chose to surrender to the Wind of the Eternal's Will rather than cling to any temporary state of bliss. And this is how she lived the rest of her life. In so doing, she fulfilled the Bodhisattva Vow to “save all sentient beings before realizing full Buddhahood.” Yet when one clings to nothing whatsoever, including ecstasy and even Buddhahood itself, what is it that manifests fully in one's daily life?—Buddhahood.

In surrendering fully to the Wind, the leaf becomes one with the Wind, and the true Way of Ancient Buddhas appears in this world of impermanence and suffering.

Chapter 35

Harmonizing Heaven and Earth

One summer day a Zen teacher sat fanning himself when a monk asked, “Since the nature of wind is stationary and universally present, why do you use a fan?” The teacher replied, “Although you know its nature to be stationary, you do not know why it is universally present.”—“Why is it universally present?” asked the monk. For answer the master merely continued fanning himself and the monk bowed: the True Way of Transmission and enlightenment, which is the result of real experience, is the same as this. One who thinks that fanning is not needed simply because wind is stationary by nature and requires no fan since it can be sensed, understands nothing whatsoever of its nature and its eternal presence: it is because it is eternally here that the wind of Buddhism makes the earth golden and the rivers run with ghee.

—Great Master Dogen, *Genjo-Koan*
 (“The Problem of Everyday Life”)

The Receding Sea

In the ninth month following the beginning of her great retreat, Rev. Master experienced a vision in which it seemed as if the waveless sea were about to engulf the Buddha Land. She writes, “It [the sea] had already reached the little house which enclosed the fountain when I realized that the only person who could stop it was me. I grasped my will with all my might and commanded it to recede and it did so just a little.” (*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Plate XLII; first edition, Plate XL.)

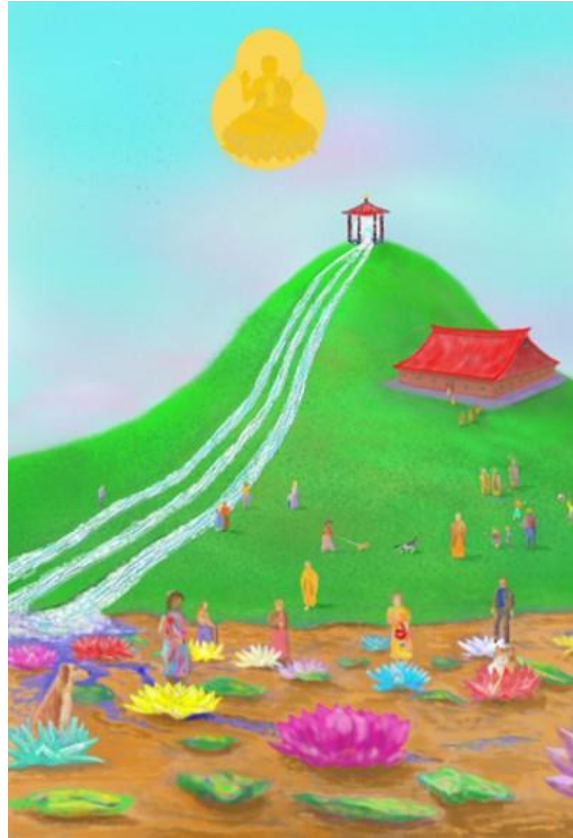
The wavelessness of the waveless sea is the stillness of meditation—ultimately, the stillness of Buddha Nature that lies at the heart of all existence. The waters of the waveless sea are the waters of temporal existence itself. The engulfing of the Buddha Land by these waters

therefore represents the tendency of deeper spirituality to be obscured by the turmoil and confusion of worldly life.

The fountain at the top of the hill is the fountain of the Water of the Spirit—our *experience* of the Compassion, Love and Wisdom of the Eternal (note that there are three streams of water flowing down from the fountain at the top of the hill). As the water of the sea threatens to swamp the Buddha Land, the fountain seems to dry up. In other words, as we become more and more swamped in worldly longings and worries, the spiritual confirmation that the Eternal *is*, and that the Love of the Eternal is always present, diminishes. Thus earth diminishes heaven—if we allow it to do so.

Grasping the Will in the Right Direction

The next morning Rev. Master experienced another vision in which the sea continued to recede until all the water was gone and the bed of the sea was exposed. She writes, “The lotus blossoms withdraw their stems as the water level sinks, drawing them deeper and deeper into the earth until the blossoms rest on the newly-revealed ground. The beings in them step off onto the earth and mingle with the people of the world, appearing as ordinary beings, whether human or animal. The fountain, which had seemed to almost dry up last night, now flows freely again—and heaven and earth are one.”



As I have emphasized throughout these Reflections, we cannot hold on to any transitory experience, including the most deeply spiritual and ecstatic. Yet we can exercise our volition in a direction that avoids the willful blocking of such experience. In other words, we can meditate and train in the Precepts.

When Rev. Master grasps her will and prevents the waters of the sea from totally engulfing the Buddha Land, the choice that she is making is the choice to re-ground herself in pure meditation, letting go of worry about external things.

All human beings go through times when they struggle under the weight of worldly responsibility and worry. This chapter of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* teaches that we do not have to let ourselves be swamped. We have the choice to look up. When we do this, we know with the certainty of faith that the Buddha Land is right here in the midst of the turmoil, pain and confusion. We have the choice to do sange and offer all our worry, fear and longing to the Eternal in meditation. We have the choice to open our hearts to the Teaching and Compassion of the Eternal. We have the choice to bow to the Buddha of daily life.

Bodhisattvas Appearing as Humans and Animals

Everyone and everything that manifests within our experience provides help and teaching. It is up to each of us whether we will recognize and make wise use of this help and teaching. It is folly to search for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas outside of ordinary daily life. If I do not recognize Buddha today, when will I do so? If I do not recognize Buddha here, where will I do so?

The Buddha Land and this sangsaric realm of suffering are not separate from one another. If we look with the eyes of Buddha, we will see the heart of Buddha in humans and animals—and in all this wonderful and painful world. It is by grasping the will in the direction of training that the Buddha Land and the realm of sangsara are known and seen to be one.

If we combine the teaching of the visions described in “Heaven and Earth are One” with the teaching of the visions in which the dangers of clinging to heaven are exposed (see Chapter 34 of these Reflections), we get the following simple lesson: Do not cling to ecstasy *and* do not neglect the spiritual and diminish heaven.

Chapter 36

The Army of Mara

Passion is overcome only by him who has won through stillness of spirit the perfect vision. Knowing this, I must first seek for stillness; it comes through the contentment that transcends worldly attachment. . . . To overcome the power of darkness I center my thought, drawing the spirit away from vain paths and fixing it straightly upon its true Refuge.

Santideva, *Bodhicharyavatara*
(*The Bodhisattva's Path of Training*)
Translated by L. D. Barnett (slightly paraphrased)

Mara

In early Buddhism, the lowest (sensual) realms of existence were thought to be ruled by Lord Mara. On the night of the Buddha's enlightenment, Mara attempted to prevent the Buddha from realizing enlightenment.

Mara represents all that arises within us that would hold us back from awakening fully to our wonderful True Nature. And, indeed, everyone who approaches this awakening experiences the arising of doubt, desire and fear. And when one is very close to the awakening, the shadows seem most real, most enticing, most intimidating.

Rev. Master often emphasized that Mara is the servant—perhaps the least appreciated servant at that—of the Eternal. Mara has a job to do, and does it very well. It takes real faith to continue on in training when our deepest doubts, desires and fears are arising. Mara is therefore that within each of us that *might* hold us back (if we allow it do so), but that also thoroughly exercises us in faith.

Mara is the personification of the deepest spiritual adversity. In such adversity, we have the opportunity to learn to truly turn to the Eternal for help. To do this, we must be willing to stop running around in our heads about external things; we must, in fact, be willing to know

nothing, to relinquish all insistence, to allow all doubts, theories and opinions to dissolve—we must be willing to simply *be* a human being who needs the Help of That which is greater than oneself.

While it would be very unfortunate to succumb to Mara's enticements and threats, it would be equally unfortunate to view Mara as the enemy. For that would be to view part of ourselves as being beyond redemption. When Rev. Master encounters the “army of Mara” (*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Plates XXIX and XX; first edition, Plate X), her reaction is first to sit still and remain firm in her resolve, and then to *offer compassion* to all the distressed “hordes of Mara.”

The Gathering of Need

The “army of Mara” is the result of the coming due of a tremendous amount of karma. This “army” thus consists of a great mass of spiritual need that has been gathered together and is groping its way toward the Help of the Eternal. It comes to the threshold of that Help *as* spiritual need, that is, as greed, hate and delusion. And because it is greed, hate and delusion, it contains a great deal of anguished confusion—confusion that may make it turn against and attack that which holds out the very Help that it so needs. It is like a frightened, angry child who confusedly strikes out at those who love him and offer refuge.

The army of Mara manifests shortly before the pivotal events described in Plates XXIII-XXXIII (first edition, Plates XXIII-XXIX) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. In other words, the great gathering of spiritual need happens just before the Help arrives. I believe that the gathering of need happens in *anticipation* of that arrival. The need may manifest in desperate and confused ways; it may even manifest in ways that undermine its own deepest wish—yet still it has come to meet That which can indeed help it.

And here we can see why the combination of stillness and compassion commences the deepest work of conversion: it is because the very gathering of the hordes of Mara, the very arising of the distilled essences of greed, hate and delusion, is itself the expression of Cosmic Compassion. The Buddha Nature of all that seems most remote, even opposed to, deepest spirituality *can* be seen through the veil of shadows: one only has to sit still and look up.

The Immaculate Heart of the Three Poisons

Conversion is possible because that which needs conversion already contains the seed of enlightenment within itself. The three poisons (or “three fires”) of greed, hate and delusion contain this seed of enlightenment.

Greed is the simplest of the three poisons.—”Something is missing and I need to acquire it” lies at the heart of greed. At the deepest level, this sense of an absence of something that must be acquired grows out of the conviction of separation from the Eternal—separation from Love.

Hate is militant greed: “Something is preventing me from acquiring that which is missing, and I must destroy this obstacle.” Or, “Something threatens to take (or has taken) that which is precious to me, and I must destroy it before it can do so (or take vengeance upon it for having done so).”

Delusion is a shell of unreality built around the pain of greed and hate: “The hell with it! It [the desired object] is no damn good anyway.”

Delusion feeds back into greed, because the denial of the fire of longing does not put out the fire. Rather, it increases the strength of the conviction of separateness from that which one longs for, thereby intensifying desperation.

Thus greed leads to hate; hate hardens into delusion; and delusion feeds back into, and intensifies, greed. This is the “outward flowing” of karmic causation. The painful consequences of allowing oneself to be swept along in the outward flowing put a blowtorch to the seat of the pants, a powerful incentive to seek the true cessation of suffering. And when we are finally driven to turn for help to the Eternal in our need, the way of the “backward” (or “return”) flowing manifests naturally.

For, all the while, sitting there at the heart of greed, is that simple—and very innocent—longing. The wild extremes of greed, hate and delusion have not killed that longing which is in essence the longing for the Eternal. They have made it more desperate, but they cannot kill it. And because it is always there, there is always the *potential* for conversion. And this simple longing only has to be turned away from

external things and refocused on the Eternal in order to blossom into deeper spirituality.

This is why meditation—pure contemplative surrender to our True Nature—is the essential spiritual act and the key to enlightenment. Quieten mind and heart; allow longing to turn back toward the Eternal; be *content* to know the Lord of the House. This makes possible the wondrous transformation of the passions into aspects of enlightenment.

Every Buddha Has A Rightful Place

Just as one's own externalized longing creates discontentment with one's own spiritual sitting place—dis-ease of mind and body—so the externalized longing of other people and other beings can cause them to seek in someone who is undergoing the deep process of spiritual conversion that which they must find within themselves.

This attraction to a person who is doing deep training is not a bad thing: it can be a catalyst for the deepening of one's own spiritual life. Yet, again, when greed, hate and delusion are present in a high degree, that which might begin as attraction can easily turn into an attack. Remember that desperate greed turns into hate: “If you won't give it to me, I'll take it by force.” And hate turns into delusion: “If I can't get it by force, I can deny that what you are doing is real.” (This last step shows the root of doubt.)

This attempt to force something out of someone who is training deeply, or to vigorously deny the reality of what that person is doing, is the basis of the “attack” of the “army of Mara.” Rev. Master's response is to give teaching that points those who are looking in the wrong direction toward their own *rightful place* of training.

Clearly, there was a non-human element in the horde of Mara that manifested at this point in Rev. Master's great kensho. To such beings she says, “You already have all the aspects of a Buddha in your own way in your own true place; return to that place. . . . *Your* true place is not here with men. You *will* return to your rightful place where indeed you *are* a beautiful Buddha. There the seas of your merit cannot be counted.”

As I have explained in my description of the Guardian of North Cascades Buddhist Priory (see Section XX of the parallel narrative to

these Reflections in Book Two), there are types of beings who have an immaterial existence. Sometimes such a being becomes entangled with humans in a relationship that is the result of, and sustained by, confusion. Such entanglement is full of pain. And in confusion and pain, it is very difficult for beings to recognize their own wonderful True Nature.

Rev. Master understood that beings so entangled were as much in need of the Dharma as any other beings. And so, while expressing clear recognition of the Buddha Nature of such beings, she provided the teaching that would cut through the confusion. In effect, she was saying, “In remaining here, you are trying to do the impossible. You no more belong here than a fish belongs out of water or a man belongs in the sky.” This is a teaching that points directly to *acceptance*. We all have limits, and we only make ourselves and others miserable when we willfully deny that these limits exist.

But Rev. Master does more than point out that there are limits that have to be respected. She holds out her faith and certainty that these beings share in the Life of the Eternal. They are not demons to be exorcised: they are Buddhas-to-be who only need to find their own true sitting place in order to realize their wonderful True Nature.

“All beings possess the Buddha Nature.”—Whenever we trust this teaching and act on the basis of this trust, we find confirmation of the teaching's truth.

Chapter 37

The Kaleidoscopic Mind

If one can transcend motion and rest [i.e. attachment to either activity or stillness], the world has been fully entered; the signs of becoming a True Buddha are shown whilst searching, attaining, knowing enlightenment and experiencing Nirvana, and these are all existence, time, flow.

—Great Master Dogen, *Uji*
 (“The Theory of Time”)

Acceptance of Change

Throughout these Reflections, I have emphasized that spiritual training and enlightenment is a continuing *process* within which there is no static state of attainment. No state of body and mind lasts forever. The truth of this teaching is constantly verified in experience.

For those who long for eternal rest or eternal paradise, the above teaching does not provide much comfort (though those who have been afraid of an eternal hell may find consolation in the fact that hellish states too are impermanent). But those who are willing to accept change with a positive attitude of mind find that they are living a continuing adventure into the unknown—an adventure of unfolding spiritual opportunities and challenges in which faith is *always* needed.

Riding the Wave of Change

Non-clinging is the key to riding the wave of change. If one is not clinging, what is one doing?—Looking up and offering. And so faith and willingness (generosity of spirit) constitute the real heart of non-attachment.

If we trust the Eternal and are willing to follow where the Eternal leads (faith and willingness)—and to follow *gladly* (generosity of spirit)—then any state through which we pass is an aspect of enlightenment. Our life becomes a kaleidoscope within which aspects of enlightenment constantly manifest, dissolve, re-arrange

themselves, dissolve—ever-changing *and* ever-revealing the Eternal Life of the Unborn.

The basic rhythm of the spiritual life is the rhythm created by the periodic alternation of being drawn within in pure contemplation and going back out to do that which needs to be done in the world: this is the meaning of “Go in and out.” And neither the contemplative nor the active aspect of what is in fact one spiritual flow ever manifests in precisely the same way twice.

Many Changing Aspects; One Root

In the text accompanying Plates L-LII of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (first edition, XXXII), entitled “The True Being,” Rev. Master writes the following description of the way in which she is shown that aspects of training and enlightenment arise and pass in accordance with the need of the moment *and* all the while the root of all these aspects is to be found within pure meditation—ultimately within the Buddha Nature Itself:

“During the night I am conscious of sitting still in the center of the golden lotus [in the hara]. The doors are open to the world and golden light streams out of them. That which is standing in the centre of the golden flower is now the new-born Buddha with one hand pointing up and the other down; He is standing in the centre of the column of light which has entered my head and this column is in the centre of the golden flower. The column and the Baby Buddha melt into a diamond nyoï which is exactly the shape of my spine; it changes into a lotus blossom, then into a lotus pod, then into a bud, into a dragon with five whiskers and into the elephant with five trunks that curl up into these same five columns. It constantly changes from one to the other. I understand that sometimes I am the diamond sceptre which penetrates the universe; sometimes I am the lotus blossom, sometimes I pour out the seeds of the Dharma; sometimes I am the defender of the faith [represented by the dragon] and sometimes I am holy [represented by the elephant's patient strength]. And all of these things find their root in the centre of the golden lotus within my hara.”

This passage is dense with Buddhist symbols. “Sitting still in the center of the golden lotus” refers to pure meditation. The “doors” of the hara are “open” and “light streams out of them:” this describes the all-accepting, all-embracing greatheartedness of the Buddha Nature—

everything is *of* the Buddha Nature; “all dharmas are pure [in this context, “dharmas” means “modes of existence”].” We open ourselves to this spiritual Reality and radiate It to the world in pure meditation. The new-born Buddha standing within the golden lotus in the hara represents our own True Self that can be seen when the dust of greed, hate and delusion has been washed from mind and heart. The column of light is the Oneness and the Immaculacy of all within the Eternal. The diamond nyoi (diamond sceptre) represents the “Absolute upright” as It manifests within our own body and mind in pure meditation *and* as It permeates the whole of existence, whether beings are aware of the fact or not. The open lotus blossom represents enlightenment. The lotus pod represents the Dharma—Truth—in readiness for germination in the minds and hearts of beings. The lotus bud represents burgeoning potential for enlightenment. The meaning of dragon and elephant are shown in the last two lines of the above quote (see my comments in brackets).

There are many aspects of training and enlightenment, and all are rooted in the Buddha Nature. The spiritual meaning of the act of meditating is that we get out of the way of the Buddha Nature, which is in fact our own True Self. Then from this True Center of our being the aspects of training/enlightenment manifest naturally in accordance with what is *good* at any particular moment and in any particular situation.

And none of these aspects of training/enlightenment belongs to, or is a property or attainment of, an ego-entity or self. As Rev. Master often pointed out, we can put our hand in the river of enlightenment and be one with its flow, but if we try to grab or possess that river, we come up with an empty hand.

Chapter 38

Suffering and Suffering's Cause

It is very difficult to be born as a human being and equally difficult to find Buddhism. However, because of the good karma that we have accumulated, we have received the exceptional gift of a human body and are able to hear the Truths of Buddhism: we therefore have the greatest possibility of a full life within the limits of birth and death. It would be criminal to waste such an opportunity by leaving this weak life of ours exposed to impermanence through lack of faith and commitment.

—Great Master Dogen , *Shushogi*
 (“What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment”)

Impermanence, Pain and Longing

All beings know suffering through experience, for all beings experience pain. Yet this alone is not the same as realizing the First Noble Truth, “Suffering permeates existence.”

The realization of the First Noble Truth comes when we recognize that there is *no external way of escaping either the impermanence or the pain of existence*. We long for something that will not just dissolve away in the stream of change. We long for a state of being in which there is not dis-ease. Because of this longing, the First Noble Truth can also be expressed in the following way: “No external refuge can satisfy the deepest longing of the heart.”

Cause and Alleviation

If I break my leg it will hurt. And I will know that the cause of the pain is the injury to the leg. So we know through experience that physical pain has causes.

If we love someone and that person dies, we experience grief. Grief is painful. We know that the grief is caused by the death of the person we love. So we know through experience that pain of spirit has causes.

Yet neither of these ways of recognizing causes of pain constitutes realization of the Second Noble Truth: “The root cause of suffering is craving based in ignorance.” Realization of the Second Noble Truth begins to seep into our consciousness with the dawning of awareness that we carry the cause of suffering with us wherever we go and whatever we do: the *root* cause of suffering lies within ourselves *as attitude, belief and mental habit*, not in external things, other beings and external conditions.

This is why we can alleviate pain in many ways and still suffer deeply. It is why beings can think of themselves as happy and be creating suffering at the same time. It is why we at last seek a *spiritual* solution to what is, at its root, a spiritual problem.

The Responsible Party

At this level of the true root of suffering, there is only one person in the universe who can hurt any individual. That person is himself. For example, another person can say nasty things about me, beat me, even kill me. While none of that is pleasant, it is also true that none of it gives impetus to the wheel of birth and death *for me and my stream of karma* unless I act (or react) in a non-Preceptual way.

This is not to deny the existence of cruelty and injustice. It is to say that cruel and unjust actions most truly and deeply hurt those who perpetrate them, and this becomes very evident in subsequent rebirths. Those who nurture thoughts and feelings of resentment against those who do cruel and unjust actions will themselves eventually do cruel and unjust actions.

Out of ignorance of the way in which the law of karma works, beings suffer injury at the hands of others, nurture resentment, indulge hatred, seek vengeance, perpetrate evil, and in consequence again suffer injury at the hands of others. We can only cut through this cycle of injury and perpetration by positively accepting adversity. The following teaching attributed to Great Master Bodhidharma shows how the understanding of karma/rebirth can help us do this act of acceptance:

“When those who search for the Path encounter adversity, they should think to themselves, 'In countless ages gone by, I've turned from the essential to the trivial and wandered through all manner of existence,

often angry without cause and guilty of numberless transgressions. Now, though I do no wrong, I reap the consequences of my past actions. Neither gods nor men can see when an evil deed will bear its fruit. I accept the consequences of my past actions with an open heart and without complaint of injustice.'“ (From *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, translated by Red Pine, slightly paraphrased.)

The focus in this passage is on attitude of mind and heart. It is important not to willfully misinterpret this teaching: it is not advocating any particular course of physical action in any situation; nor is it recommending (or not recommending) pacifism, quietism, or any other “ism.” It may or may not be *good* in any particular situation to intervene in order to prevent cruelty and injustice. The point of this teaching is that if one acts out of greed, hate and delusion, one harms oneself, regardless of what anyone else may or may not do.

Body, Mind and the Eternal

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master captures the essence of the spiritual dilemma expressed in the first two Noble Truths in simple words: “The body will not know peace until the mind ceases from evil.” (Page xxix; first edition, p. 176. In the first edition, the wording is a little different, but the essential meaning is the same.)

When our mind is in harmony with the Eternal, that is, when we are truly meditating, the cause of suffering is disengaged. This benefits, and is expressed within, the body in many ways. But the beneficial consequences of harmonization with the Eternal do not extend as far as bodily immortality: body and mind are mortal and remain mortal regardless of the depth of training and enlightenment.

At the deepest level of harmonization of body and mind with the Eternal, the cleansing and conversion of karma accomplishes the resolving of all spiritual need, thus stopping the rolling of the wheel of suffering into future rebirths. This does not mean that there may not be *Bodhisattvic* rebirth, which is the rebirth of merit, not need. Bodhisattvic rebirth—if it happens—may unite merit with a new batch of need so that the merit can guide that need to the Help of the Eternal.

Thus Rev. Master's statement that the body will not know peace until the mind ceases from evil has deep implications. For if first we substitute the term “karmic stream” for “body,” and then look at the

insight expressed in this simple sentence from a slightly different angle, an awe-inspiring spiritual vista opens before us.

Here is step one: “The karmic stream will not know peace until the mind ceases from evil.”

Here is step two: “When the mind is firmly grounded in the Great Immaculacy, there *is* the cessation of suffering.”

Chapter 39

The Cessation of Suffering and the Eightfold Path

The deepest truth lies in Oneness. It is due to ignorance that the Jewel of Enlightenment is mistaken for a piece of brick. When one is suddenly awakened to the Truth, one realizes that one has always been in possession of the real Jewel. . . . When we know that between this body and the Buddha Nature there is no real difference, what is the use of seeking after Nirvana?

—Great Master Hui-Ke (Eka)
—translated by D.T. Suzuki in *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (slightly paraphrased)

Cessation

The second of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths—"suffering is caused by craving rooted in ignorance"—clearly implies that the ultimate source of suffering lies within ourselves, not in external circumstances. This means that if I wish to do something about my own suffering at the level of its real origin, I must find a way to change my own attitude of mind. This *might* be difficult—perhaps very difficult, *maybe* even impossible. It all depends on whether it is possible to eliminate or transform ignorance and craving. On the other hand, at least I am not having to try to change the whole world and everyone in it, which is clearly impossible.

Throughout these Reflections, I have emphasized that if we try to destroy greed, hate and delusion, we actually only succeed in making them more powerful. Again, this is a teaching that can be verified in experience. The effort to destroy greed, hate and delusion in oneself is called "asceticism." The Buddha tried it and found that it did not work. Many people have tried it in many different ways. I tried it for a short time just a few months before I found the Path of Buddhist training that I have followed for over forty years. Asceticism did not work for me.

So we cannot destroy the causes of suffering. But can we somehow change these causes so that they cease to generate suffering and instead generate something else? The Buddha's answer to this question was a resounding “Yes!” Craving *can* be transformed into compassion and ignorance *can* be transformed into wisdom. As this happens, the rolling wheel of suffering *becomes* the rolling wheel of training/enlightenment—the onward flow of beneficence and compassion.

The Buddha's Third Noble Truth states that when the causes of suffering cease, suffering itself ceases. But He never equated the cessation of suffering with an existential vacuum—mere annihilation. *The cessation of suffering is not extinction of the onward flow of existence, but rather the transformation of one mode of that flow into another.* What are these “modes?” One mode is the “raw material of enlightenment” mode; the other is the “enlightenment” mode. In other words, craving and ignorance, and all the willful actions that flow out of them and reinforce them, constitute the *potential* for compassion and wisdom, and all the non-willful actions that flow out of them and reinforce them.

The Third Noble Truth can thus be re-phrased in the following way: “When craving and ignorance are being transformed into compassion and wisdom, the cessation of suffering is happening.”

Generating Enlightenment

How does such a transformation happen? The Buddha answered this question in the Fourth Noble Truth, “There is a Path that leads to the cessation of suffering.” He identified eight aspects of this Path (see *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Plate LXI; first edition, Plate XXXIX). These eight aspects are themselves grouped in three categories that provide at a glance the basic outline of correct spiritual training: Preceptual practice (*sila*); meditational practice (*dhyana*); and wisdom practice (*prajna*). The Buddha called this Path the “Middle Path” because it avoids and transcends both worldly wallowing in pleasure-seeking and the misguided spiritual effort to storm heaven by trying to destroy the causes of suffering within oneself (asceticism).

Whenever we do correct spiritual training in any of its aspects, we are doing work of spiritual transformation. So the Middle Path is not just a path that leads to a far-off goal of enlightenment. To follow the

Middle Path is to train *in*, not just *toward*, the cessation of suffering.

There is no cessation of suffering without *continual* training. This very day, I am free to do my training or not to do it. When I do it, the cessation of suffering is happening. When I drop my training, the cessation of suffering comes to a halt and the creation of suffering starts up.

Again, if I am doing my training, then the potential within me for compassion and wisdom is being actualized. If I drop my training, then that potential remains in its “raw material” form of greed, hate and delusion (craving and ignorance).

Thus it is up to me whether I will live a life in which the causes of suffering roll on and on, resulting in the inevitable flourishing of all kinds of misery, or whether I will live a life in which compassion and wisdom have the opportunity to manifest. If I do the latter, I am training in the cessation of suffering by walking the Buddha's Middle Path.

Nirvana

The full cessation of suffering is called “Nirvana.” Many years ago I read that the word “nirvana” originated in a verb that meant “to cool by blowing.” The idea is that in the Buddhas the passions—greed, hate and delusion—have cooled and no longer rule mind and heart; they have been replaced by compassion, love and wisdom.

Realization of Nirvana does not result in personal immortality or extinction; nor is it rebirth in a heaven. It is not the achievement of any kind of static, unchanging mental, physical or emotional state. The problem with all such views is that they are all based in the illusion of a separate self. It simply does not work to attribute “realization of Nirvana” to a personal identity, self or ego. The Eternal, not my or your or the Buddha's body and mind, is the True Reality.

All the confusion vanishes when we realize that “Nirvana” refers to “living from one's True Self.” Or, more accurately, “Nirvana” is a term that applies when “the Buddha [in this context “the Buddha” refers to the Eternal] does all and we follow that doing effortlessly,” to use Great Master Dogen's words.

Once again we see the importance of letting go of ideas of static attainment. Do not worry about the final cessation of suffering: today, train *in* the cessation of suffering. Do not worry about the final cooling of the passions: today, train *in* the conversion of greed, hate and delusion into compassion, love and wisdom.

Chapter 40

Joy and Woe

*It is right it should be so:
Man was made for joy and woe;
And when this we rightly know
Through the world we safely go.
Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.
Under every grief and pine
Runs a thread with silken twine.*

William Blake
From *Auguries of Innocence*

The Great Grief

All things pass. All objects, all experiences are transitory. All beings are born, live and die. The objects, experiences and beings that we love are all transitory.

Existence is permeated with suffering. There is pain in sensation.

There is no enduring refuge within the transitory. All that we cling to dissolves away.

Because of beginningless greed, hate and delusion, beings wreak terrible havoc upon one another—no more so than when they are pursuing ideals.

Beings are born, live and die in dark ignorance of where their True Refuge lies. The spiritual need that they carry struggles on, and is often intensified, through lifetime after lifetime.

All of this is why there is the Great Grief.

Joy

There is an Unborn, Uncreated, Unformed, Undying—a True and Eternal Refuge. All beings possess the Buddha Nature; all beings possess the capacity to take refuge in the Eternal—to take Refuge in their own True Nature, the “Iron Being” within.

Birth and death, the flow of existence, the making and perpetuating of suffering, the discovery of the Path of true liberation from suffering, the cleansing and conversion of karma, the discovery of our wonderful True Nature, the endless following of the Eternal—all of this happens within the Great Immaculacy. There *was, is, and will be* nothing separate from the Great Immaculacy: “There is nothing from the first.”

There *is* Nirvana; there *is* the cessation of suffering. There is the True Way of Ancient Buddhas.

There is a true spiritual purpose to life. Life is not meaningless; suffering is not meaningless. We can understand this purpose. We can live in such a way as to be true to our own True Nature.

There is Compassion. There is That which knows the deepest longing of our heart. All spiritual need one day finds its way back to the Help of the Eternal.

All of this is why there is Great Joy.

Swimming in the Ocean of Sangsara

We cannot know Great Joy if we have not known the Great Grief. We have to know what we are saved from.

It is possible to drown in the Great Grief. The first half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* shows how to keep swimming—how not to drown. The key is faith—looking up in the midst of the greatest darkness and pain; holding fast to the Lord of the House.

Bowing in Great Joy

Nothing stifles Great Joy like the insertion of ego into the flow of love and gratitude.

Nothing helps avoid the insertion of ego into the flow of love and gratitude like bowing. “Endless bowing” is the very heart of the Way of Ancient Buddhas. The second half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* shows how to do endless bowing.

Chapter 41

Historical Roots of the Five Ranks

*Transitory things are fundamentally unreal;
Because of wrongly grasping after them as if they
were True Reality
Ordinary people revolve in the prison of birth and
death.*

—*Avatamsaka Sutra*
 (“The Flower Ornament Scripture”)
 translated by Thomas Cleary [paraphrased]

One and Many

The teaching of the Five Ranks has its origins in the development of Chinese Buddhist thought and practice that preceded the Ch'an (Zen) movement. In particular, the conceptual foundations of the Five Ranks were laid by the masters of the Hua-Yen School of Buddhism, which took as its principal text the Avatamsaka Sutra. The Hua-Yen masters explored the relationship between the “All is One” and the “All is Different.” The “All is One” is the realm of deepest reality—the oneness of all existence within the Eternal. The “All is Different” is the realm of the transitory, which, in comparison with deepest reality, is ephemeral. There is no real separation between these two “realms,” for the transitory and ephemeral is the changing face of the Eternal.

If it is true that there is this True Reality, and if it is true that there is no real separation between It and transitory existence, there still remains the question of how we can directly experience this truth. To do so, we will need more than intellectual study and concepts. As one Zen master said, “The portrait of a rice cake does not satisfy hunger.”

There are times when the teaching runs ahead of the training; there are times when the training runs ahead of the teaching. But in the long run, teaching and training must be fully harmonized in order for the deepest religious experience and the deepest level of spiritual conversion to manifest in human life. In the lives of the early Zen masters, training caught up with teaching. And when this happened, the teaching was deepened and made more practically applicable.

Dark and Light in *Sandokai*

The teaching in Great Master Sekito Kisen's poem, *Sandokai* (“Harmonizing the Real and the Apparent”) shows the way in which the bridge between Hua-Yen teaching and the later teaching of the Five Ranks developed during the first few generations of Zen masters.

Sandokai employs a number of paired opposites to express the relationship between the Eternal and the transitory. “Dark and light” is one of these paired opposites, and it happens to be one that goes back to the symbolism employed by the Hua-Yen masters.

Imagine for a moment that you have just walked into a room and closed the door behind you. Now you stand still just inside the room. There are no windows along the walls and there is no artificial source of light: you are in complete darkness. Imagine that this room is filled with objects of many types and sizes. You cannot see them because there is no light. But they are there nonetheless. Within this darkness, there is no possibility of discriminating one object from another because there is no light to see them by.

In *Sandokai*, “darkness” represents the unity of all existence within the Eternal. Just as in the dark room there is no ability to visually discriminate one object from another, so within the Eternal there is no fundamentally real distinction between self and other, right and wrong, male and female, etc. In other words, Infinite Love does not pick out one thing to love more than another: It only loves infinitely.

Now imagine that a light gets turned on in that dark room. Suddenly, all the objects are revealed. On one side of the room is a sofa; across the room from the sofa is a chair; the sofa is different from the chair.— And so on. In other words, a great multiplicity is now seen.

In *Sandokai* “light” represents the multiplicity of existence. In this aspect of existence, we distinguish between self and other, right and wrong, male and female, etc. And how could we survive if we could not make such distinctions? If I cannot distinguish between a bus and a mouse, I will eventually end up getting run over by a bus.

Sandokai teaches that oneness and multiplicity are two aspects of one True Reality. If our attitudes and actions are not in harmony with this True Reality—the Eternal—we become lost in the multiplicity, that is, we become the spiritual prisoners of our own confusion by doing that

which the Eternal does not do: clutching at some things and hating others. We may partially awaken from this spiritual sleep-walking and then make the mistake of clinging to oneness and despising multiplicity. This only “compounds delusion.” What is needed is the genuine *harmonization* of our attitudes and actions with the True Reality of the Eternal. This is the purpose of Zen training.

Consider the following lines from *Sandokai*:

Within all light is darkness
But explained it cannot be by
darkness that one-sided is alone.
In darkness there is light
But here again by light one-sided it
is not explained.

If we apply the above explanation of the light/dark metaphor to this text, it can be re-worded as follows:

None of the many forms of existence is ever separate from the Eternal,
Yet each being has its own independent existence (and responsibility, in the case of intelligent life) that cannot be understood just in terms of its oneness with the Eternal.
Similarly, the Eternal is never separate from the forms of existence, which are Its external appearance,
Yet the Eternal can never be understood or realized through externals alone.

For the Zen trainee, the practical implications of the teaching expressed within these few lines include the following:

The fact that all beings possess the Buddha Nature does not stand against the fact that each being makes, and must carry, his/her/its own karma. Therefore, the correct understanding and practice of the Precepts is essential. (I draw this implication from the first two lines.)

Because we possess the Buddha Nature (that is, because we are *of* the Eternal), we have the capacity to awaken to our wonderful True Nature. We cannot do this by taking refuge in externals. If we would realize our True Nature, we must turn within in pure meditation. (I draw this implication from the third and fourth lines.)

It is because I am doing the training that goes with this teaching that I interpret these four lines from Sandokai in this pragmatically religious, non-philosophical way. Zen Buddhism—and especially Soto Zen Buddhism—has always been characterized by such pragmatism. In the next few chapters of these Reflections, we will see how this practical application of teaching to daily-life training manifests in Great Master Tozan's Five Ranks.

Chapter 42

The First Rank: The Host Invites the Guest

*In the third watch of the night
Before the moon appears,
No wonder when we meet
There is no recognition!
Still cherished in my heart
Is the beauty of earlier days.*

—Poem on the First Rank
Great Master Tozan

translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki in *Zen Dust*
quoted in *A History of Zen* by Dr. Y. H. Ku

Terminology

Great Master Tozan (Chinese: Tung-shan) built the teaching of the Five Ranks on the conceptual foundations established by the Hua-Yen masters and the early Zen masters, including Great Master Sekito Kisen, author of *Sandokai*. Both Sekito Kisen and Tozan couched their teaching in terms that have a strongly philosophical flavor, even though their purpose for doing so was purely religious. For example, the First Rank, which is the subject of this chapter of these Reflections, is *Cheng chung p'ien*, which is commonly translated as “the Absolute within the relative.” I see peoples' eyes glaze over when I use terms such as “the Absolute,” “the relative,” “the Real,” and “the phenomenal.” One of Tozan's disciples, Sozan, did suffering humanity a great favor by expressing the teaching of the Five Ranks in terms of the relationship of “Host and guest” (or “Lord and vassal”). This was one way in which this teaching was made more accessible to ordinary people.

The metaphor of Host and guest strikes me as a particularly happy one for modern people; for, while we may have only a vague idea of the what it was like to be the vassal of a lord, we all know something about what it is to be a guest in someone's house. We have some sense of the obligation of a guest and the generosity of a host. So in

discussing the Five Ranks, I will use the term “Host” to refer to the Eternal; I will use the term “guest” to refer to the individual human being.

Sozan named the First Rank “The Host sees [i.e. looks toward] the Guest,” and this is a big step forward in the effort to make the name of the first of the Five Ranks more readily comprehensible. But another step can be taken, and I am taking that step by designating the First Rank as “The Host *invites* the guest.”

The Invitation

Rev. Master said, “Before we longed for the Eternal, the Eternal longed for us.”

Within all beings, there is a call from the Heart, a beckoning from our wonderful True Nature to return into “full recognized reunion” (to use Rev. Master's expression) with Itself.

Since it originates in our Buddha Nature, this invitation to return to our True Home is always present. It is an invitation, not a command. We are free to ignore it, and we are free to listen to it and accept it. Infinite Love does not force Itself upon the beloved: It is willing to wait.

Moving

If we accept the invitation, we have to move into the spiritual unknown. It is never the case that we accept the invitation, have a nice visit with the Eternal, and then are set for life—no more problems. Accepting the invitation is *always* the beginning of an adventure. There is always an element of risk. In Great Master Dogen's words, “Always we must be disturbed by the Truth.”

This First Rank, “the Host invites the guest,” is a constant element in the spiritual life. I encourage the reader to be careful not to think of this First Rank (or any of the other Ranks) just as a stage one goes through at a certain point in the spiritual life, only to be left behind as one progresses to another Rank. The Ranks are *both* successive stages in the spiritual life *and* aspects of spiritual experience that manifest again and again—and also (in varying degrees and in varying conditions) simultaneously.

The Invitation and The Search for the Master

The search for a human master is a natural response to this invitation (or call) from the Eternal. And only when we are truly accepting the invitation will we recognize our true human master. The recognition of one's human master has to happen at the level of pure spiritual intuition: one's *True Heart* says “Yes!” in the presence of one's true human master even if one's head is confused. Since in the course of training the disciple's head is often confused, it is vitally important for the disciple always to remember that that “Yes!” happened and that it was real.

Other Perspectives on the First Rank

The invitation from the Eternal appears in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* as the light that pierces the dark clouds in the First of the Five Columns, and that is always to be seen if we will but look up in faith.

The invitation from the Eternal is what reminds us that we can turn toward the Eternal and ask sincerely for help. This sincere asking (or opening of the heart) is the first of the Five Aspects of Meditation.

The comprehension of the Buddha's First Noble Truth, “Existence is permeated with suffering” is made possible by the fact that the invitation from the Eternal is always quietly resonating within our mind and heart, whispering to us that there is a True Refuge, and that nothing else in the universe can satisfy our deepest longing. This inherent unsatisfactoriness of transitory existence is the deeper meaning of *dukkha* (suffering).

Chapter 43

The Second Rank: The Guest Turns Toward the Host

*A sleepy-eyed grandam
Encounters herself in an old mirror.
Clearly she sees a face,
But it doesn't resemble hers at all.
Too bad, with a muddled head
She tries to recognize her reflection.*

—Poem on the Second Rank
Great Master Tozan
translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki in *Zen Dust*
quoted in *A History of Zen* by Dr. Y. H. Ku

Accepting the Invitation

Great Master Tozan's poem on the First Rank shows that, while the invitation of the Eternal is always present, we are not always heeding and accepting the invitation. (To review Tozan's poem on the First Rank, return to the beginning of Chapter 42 of these Reflections.)

In the Second Rank, the guest *heeds and accepts* the Host's invitation. In other words, in the Second Rank, we open our hearts to the Love of the Eternal in pure meditation. This is the deepest spiritual meaning of “offering.”

In turning toward the Eternal in offering, we stop seeking a refuge in externals. Therefore, accepting the invitation extended by the Eternal always has the aspect of renunciation. Yet this renunciation is a positive act, not life-denying asceticism. Great Master Dogen's words in *Rules for Meditation*, “Cut all ties; give up everything.” mean “Offer everything you are and everything you love into the hands of the Eternal and trust completely.” We offer up a lesser love for the sake of the greatest Love.

Clear Heart, Muddled Head

As Great Master Tozan's poem on the Second Rank (at the top of this chapter) shows, the offering of which I speak may be done in the midst of considerable confusion. If we had to have intellectual clarity on how to offer, and what we are offering to, in order to successfully do the offering in meditation, no one would ever do it. Fortunately, there is That within us that can just *do* it; It does not need intellectual clarity.

Here is another way of saying the same thing: The invitation from the Eternal helps us turn toward the Eternal; then, as we do this, the Eternal guides us in opening more and more to Its Compassion. Thus, the offering in meditation happens whenever we turn toward the Eternal and then *refrain from veering off in other directions*.

The Eternal is the most beneficent of hosts. If we say “Yes!” and are willing to put our money where our mouth is (spiritually speaking), we will find that the Eternal does all the heavy lifting. Even so, since saying “Yes!” to the invitation from the Eternal gets all our spiritual need lined up to receive the Eternal's Help, and since some of that spiritual need comes in the form of deep delusion, clinging, anger, grief and fear, we are going to go through a process that at times will stretch our faith and patience to the limit.

Cleansing the Heart

We should not be surprised when the Eternal takes us up on our “Yes!” by showing us the ways in which we have done harm to ourselves and others. Then we have the opportunity to do *sange*—accept responsibility for our actions, experience the sorrow that actions based in attitudes that deny the Buddha Nature have loaded the heart with, and allow the Compassion of the Eternal to flow through this sorrow and guide us to a deeper understanding of Preceptual action.

This cleansing process is an essential part of the Second Rank. Rev. Master sometimes referred to it as the “wash cycle” of the Eternal's cosmic washing machine. We take the Eternal up on Its invitation by turning toward It and opening our heart in pure meditation; then we are popped into the washing machine, and round and round we go. Gradually, the illusion of uncleanness is washed away: the Great

Immaculacy was, is, and always will be the True Reality of ourselves and all existence.

Perspectives on the Second Rank

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the aspects of sange and spiritual washing are emphasized in the Second Column.

In the Five Aspects of Meditation (“Offer wholeheartedly”), the aspect of offering is emphasized.

In the Buddha's Second Noble Truth (“The cause of suffering is craving rooted in ignorance”), the cause of suffering—that is, the spiritual need that is made available to the Compassion of the Eternal whenever we accept the Eternal's invitation—is emphasized.

Chapter 44

The Third Rank: The Host in Rightful Position

*Within nothingness [Immaculacy] there is a path
That leads away from the dusts of the world.
Even if you observe the taboo
On the present emperor's name [i.e., even if you
maintain complete silence],
You will surpass that eloquent one of yore
Who silenced every tongue.*

—Poem on the Third Rank
Great Master Tozan
translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki in *Zen Dust*
quoted in *A History of Zen* by Dr. Y. H. Ku

The Guest Recognizes the Host

If there is no real separation from the Eternal, why do we not always recognize the Eternal in all situations and in all beings?—Because our spiritual vision is clouded by greed, hate and delusion.

When our spiritual vision is *not* clouded by greed, hate and delusion, the Great Immaculacy is everywhere to be seen. It is our spiritual vision that has changed, not It.

When mind and heart are sufficiently washed clean of the illusions that blind us to the Great Immaculacy, then it can be said that the Host is in its *rightful position* in **ITS** house—the house that we once thought of as “our” body and mind, but which in reality was always the Eternal's. This is the Third Rank.

The Beneficent Flood

When the house of body and mind (which is the house of karma) has been washed clean, a flood of Teaching is released. This beneficent flood is one of the signs of genuine conversion. The deepening of understanding of Preceptual Truth is an essential part of this flood,

for once the house is cleaned it is vitally important to know how to avoid dirtying it again.

Preceptual Truth is more than the aggregate of all the Precepts. Preceptual Truth is rooted in the rightful relationship of Host and guest—the Eternal and our individual will. In this rightful relationship, the guest does not try to abrogate the authority and responsibility of the Host. In other words, we (the guest) stop playing God in thought, word and deed. The alternative to playing God is to allow the Eternal to help, guide, teach and lead. This is not subservience: it is following our *own* True Nature; it is being true to what we *truly* are.

Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (Plate XII; first edition: Plate VIII) shows (insofar as words are capable of showing) how to do this deep Preceptual training.

Perspectives

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the flood of the Eternal's Compassion and Wisdom is emphasized in the Third Column, which corresponds to the Third Rank.

In the Five Aspects of Meditation, the emphasis is on waiting patiently, that is, taking refuge in the stillness of the Buddha Nature so that it is possible to hear and follow the guidance of the Eternal.

In the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, the Third Noble Truth—"When craving and ignorance cease, suffering ceases"—corresponds to the Third Rank. For craving and ignorance cease when the process of cleansing and conversion in the Second Rank is complete.

Chapter 45

The Fourth Rank: The Guest in Rightful Position

*When two blades cross points
There's no need to withdraw.
The master swordsman
Is like the lotus blooming in the fire.
Such a man has in and of himself
A heaven-soaring spirit.*

—Poem on the Fourth Rank
Great Master Tozan
translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki in *Zen Dust*
quoted in *A History of Zen* by Dr. Y. H. Ku

Great Potentiality

Here is a question: Why is there a Fourth Rank? Things are looking very good in the Third Rank: the invitation from the Eternal has been accepted; a spiritual clean-up has happened; the house of body and mind has been refurbished in the beneficent flood of Teaching. Why not just stay in the Third Rank?

Throughout these Reflections, I have emphasized that training and enlightenment constitute a *process*. There is no static state of attainment within this process or, indeed, in any other area of human life. The beneficent flood of Teaching is not given so that the trainee can sit around polishing his halo. The Third Rank is a new beginning, not an end—a new beginning in which there is great *potential* for full reharmonization with the Eternal.

The Rightful Position of the Guest

Great Master's poem on the Fourth Rank (at the top of this page) begins with the following lines:

When two blades cross points
There's no need to withdraw.
The master swordsman

Is like the lotus blooming in
the fire.
Such a man has in and of
himself
A heaven-soaring spirit.

In another of his poems, “The Most Excellent Mirror, Samadhi” (*Hokyoammai*), Tozan says, “To make to meet two arrows in mid-air goes far beyond the skill of ordinary man.” I think that “two blades cross points” means “two blades meet point to point”—like the arrows meeting point to point in mid-air.

The metaphors of the sword blades and arrows meeting point to point, as well as that of the lotus blooming in fire, express the seeming impossibility—*from the delusory point of view of self*—of acting directly from the Buddha Nature: the “superior activity of No-mind” of which Tozan speaks in *The Most Excellent Mirror, Samadhi*.

But it is not impossible to listen to, and follow, our own True Nature. It is in fact the natural next step when the house of body and mind has been cleaned in the Second Rank and then refurbished in the Third Rank.

To put it in more general terms, in the Fourth Rank guest is *in harmony with* Host so that body and mind become the field and vessel of the Eternal's Compassion, Love and Wisdom. This is the guest's rightful position.

Additional Perspectives on the Fourth Rank

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the flow of healing Love of the Eternal through body and mind is emphasized in the Fourth Column. This is another way in which body and mind is a vessel of the Eternal.

In the Five Aspects of Meditation, the Fourth Aspect is “Listen carefully.” This meditative attentiveness to the promptings of our own True Nature is the basis of acting from the Buddha Nature.

In the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path that leads to suffering's cessation is detailed in the Fourth Noble Truth. Note that at the deepest level of training, the Eightfold Path becomes less the prescription for how to train than the *description* of the natural,

unselfconscious living from the Buddha Nature. In other words, it becomes the description of the Fourth Rank.

Chapter 46

Host and Guest in Undifferentiated Oneness

*Who dares to equal him
Who falls into neither being nor non-being!
All men want to leave
The current of ordinary life,
But he, after all, comes back
To sit among the coals and ashes.*

—Poem on the Fifth Rank
Great Master Tozan
translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki in *Zen Dust*
quoted in *A History of Zen* by Dr. Y. H. Ku

The Stench of Holiness

Self-judgment and pride are two sides of the same coin. Just as it can be difficult to refrain from dropping the hammer of self-judgment on ourselves when we make (or think we have made) a big mistake, so it can be difficult to refrain from congratulating ourselves when we get it right (or think we get it right).

In terms of the Host/guest metaphor, we might characterize spiritual pride as “the guest takes credit for that which came from the Host.” When we suffer from spiritual pride, we give off what Rev. Master referred to as “the stench of holiness.”

Spiritual need has deep roots; spiritual conversion takes time. It is possible for very noticeable progress to be made in the process of reharmonization with the Eternal while still falling into self-judgment or pride at times.

Rev. Master pointed out that in the Fourth Rank, there is still some trace of the stench of holiness, that is, there is still a tendency toward spiritual pride. After all, look how far one has come!—Oops, there it is again.

A cautionary note: It is important not to confuse genuine spiritual certainty—whether manifesting within oneself or in the actions of others—with spiritual pride. The two are completely different things. Nor is it helpful to confuse genuine humility with self-doubt. Again, the two are completely different things.

Coal and Ashes

So here we are at the Fifth Rank, “Host and guest in undifferentiated Oneness.”

Now there is no stench of holiness. And there is no clinging to “being or non-being”—that is, there is no clinging to life as we know it, or to death as we know it; to existence as we know it, or to any idea of emptiness. There is just “The leaf goes where the Wind blows and does not disobey the Wind,” whether that be in the context of living an ordinary daily life, or in the context of the surrender of what we think of as “our” life into the hands of the Eternal at the time of death.

In the Fifth Rank, self-judgment and self-congratulation—indeed, the very belief in an enduring self or ego-identity—are shadows on the horizon of consciousness. One *might* get involved again with these shadows, but why would one do so when there is the reality of the Great Immaculacy?

“Coming back to sit among the coal and ashes” means that in the Fifth Rank the trainee accepts this present situation—whatever it is—as Buddha. Where is there *not* the Eternal? Where is there *not* the Love of the Eternal?

Perspectives

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the Fifth Column is the Buddha Nature of this very body and mind. When the Buddha Nature manifests unhindered in and through our lives and our actions, the Fifth Rank is realized.

In the Five Aspects of Meditation, the Fifth Aspect is “Follow gladly!” Wholehearted following—the leaf in oneness with the Wind—is one way to characterize the Fifth Rank.

There is no “Fifth Noble Truth.” I would say that if there were a Fifth Noble Truth it would be the same as the Fifth Column in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

Chapter 47

The Five Ranks: Help and Need

*Supreme Mind in words can never be expressed,
And yet to all the trainee's needs It does respond.*

—Great Master Tozan
“The Most Excellent Mirror, Samadhi”
(*Hokyoammai*)

Another Perspective on the Five Ranks

Throughout these Reflections I have often referred to the “Help of the Eternal” in relationship to our “spiritual need.” What do the Five Ranks look like when we replace the terms “Host” and “guest” with “Help” and “need?”

Here are the two versions for comparison:

Sozan’s Five Ranks	Help and Need
The Host invites the guest.	Help beckons to need.
The guest turns toward the Host.	Need turns toward Help.
The Host in rightful position.	Help flows to need.
The guest in rightful position.	Need is enlightened.
Host and guest in undifferentiated oneness.	Converted need is one with Help.

Need and Help in Oneness

The Fifth Rank in the second of the above two versions of the Five Ranks is expressed as “Converted need is one with Help.”

When spiritual need is enlightened, it does not just vanish. Rather, it re-manifests in converted form. The Eternal can then use this converted form of spiritual need to benefit others. Thus, need does indeed become one with the Help of the Eternal.

This transformation of need to Help is made use of by the Eternal during the lifetime of the trainee; and it is made use of by the Eternal after the death of the trainee. The on-going flow of the merit of training is the Bodhisattvic stream of karma.

The Wheel of the Dharma

The Five Ranks are as the five spokes of a revolving wheel: there is no static state. Thus, it is possible to rotate through all five of the Ranks and then start all over again with the revelation of a new layer of need. Then the merit of all the training we have done can be used by the Eternal to help the exposed need. Thus we walk hand in hand with our own wonderful True Nature. To follow where It leads, no matter what the cost, is to live the Perfection of Zen which Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett so magnificently and so humanly exemplified.

Chapter 48

The Five Ranks: Conclusion

*When your heart becomes the same as the world
of Immaculacy
It will manifest the laws of Immaculacy
And realize its True Body, the Great Immaculacy,
Which transcends existence and non-existence, life
and death.*

Process and Perspective

Imagine that you are an astronomer who is studying the Milky Way—the galaxy of which our solar system is a tiny part. Imagine that you have access to the best telescopes of all kinds located all over the globe. No single telescope will tell you everything about our galaxy, but each telescope will provide some unique and valuable data.

All the telescopes are looking at one galaxy. All have somewhat different perspectives on that galaxy. By combining the information gained from a number of these perspectives, we come to a better understanding of the Milky Way.

The teachings of Buddhism are like telescopes trained upon the amazingly complex and beautiful spiritual galaxy that is the process of training/enlightenment. There are many, many smaller telescopes and a fair number of large ones scattered around the Buddhist “globe.” The teaching of the Five Ranks is one of the large ones.

As I have discussed each individual Rank, I have compared it briefly to teachings that provide other perspectives on the process of training/enlightenment: the Five Columns from *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, the Five Aspects of Meditation, and the Buddha's Four Noble Truths.

Each of these teachings is another “telescope” aimed at the same spiritual “Milky Way” that the “telescope” of the Five Ranks is aimed at. It should not surprise us that the spiritual “Milky Way” looks pretty similar from the perspective of each of the widely-scattered “telescopes” trained upon it. Nor should it surprise us that each

“telescope” provides its own uniquely clear view of some features of the process of training/enlightenment.

Astronomers sometimes use telescopes located at great distances from one another on the surface of the earth in combination in such a way that, in effect, these different telescopes together constitute one great instrument for studying the heavens. That is how I view the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Five Ranks, the Five Columns, and the Five Aspects of Meditation. Each teaching is as a facet of one great Jewel of Teaching. And, of course, these are not the only facets of the Jewel. I think that there must be no limit to the number of facets to this Jewel. I only know about a few of these facets, but I am sure there are many, many more. Perhaps there is a facet for every single person who follows in the Buddha's footsteps.

Essence and Experience

Is it possible to identify one essential feature, or a number of essential features, shared by all these perspectives on training/enlightenment?

Here is one such essential feature: Each of these teachings came alive for someone in the course of that person's actual experience of the process of spiritual conversion—the process of reharmonization with our wonderful True Nature. So each of these teachings reflects that person's own experience, while at the same time key aspects of the experience are generalized into a series of steps or stages that may be of benefit to others as they walk the Path.

Here is another essential feature: The practice of pure meditation—the meditation discovered, practiced and taught by the Buddha—provided the doorway to the deep spiritual experience within which each of these teachings arose: “The means of training are thousandfold, but pure meditation must be done.” (Great Master Dogen)

The Absolute Upright

Note that the first step in each of the teachings acknowledges the existence of an urgent spiritual need. In the second step of each of the teachings, the nature of this need is clarified, and the nature of the Help that will address the need is either adumbrated or explicitly stated. The later steps in each teaching show the way in which the need is helped.

The need of which these teachings speak is the deepest of all needs; the Help is the greatest and deepest of all helps. Contrary to what many people believe, Buddhism is a religion, not a philosophy or a way of life. The issue that lies at the heart of Buddhist training and teaching is the same issue that lies at the heart of all religion. In the long, confused and often tortuous history of religion, human beings have groped for a cure for the spiritual dis-ease within their hearts. Many of the “solutions” that they have thought that they have found have in fact exacerbated ignorance and suffering. Yet the fact that we can be so thoroughly confused does not prove either that the spiritual need is not a real need, or that the Help does not exist.

The Buddha found that Help. Many people who have followed in His footsteps have found It. What does it matter to the Source of that Help whether we call It “Buddha Nature,” “the Eternal,” “Nirvana,” “the Great Immaculacy,” “No-self,” “the Unborn,” “Infinite Love,” “Great Wisdom,” “Great Compassion,” “Vairocana Buddha”—or “God”? There is That which is greater than oneself; there is a Refuge that we can turn to in all need—and in gratitude and love. It is the “Absolute Upright” that holds the whole of existence—me, you, and all our spiritual need—within “Its own delicate balance.”

There have always been those who have a burning longing to find that “Absolute Upright” for themselves—to take refuge in It directly.—Not just to read about It; not just to learn about It from others. The Path described in the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Five Ranks, and the Five Columns is for people who have this burning longing. The Path described in these teachings is the greatest of all adventures. And yet it is a Path that is walked one step at a time—one *realistic, possible, do-able* step at a time.

I wish every success to all who would walk this wonderful Path.

Chapter 49

Conclusion

Both your life and your body deserve love and respect for it is by their agency that Truth is practiced and the Buddha's power exhibited: the seed of all Buddhist activity, and of all Buddhahood, is the true practice of Preceptual Truth.

—Great Master Dogen, *Shushogi*
 (“What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment”)

The Precious Vessel

The physical body is the vessel of the Water of the Spirit and the reservoir of our karmic inheritance, which is also our *potential* for enlightenment.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom contains many references to the body and to the bodily experience of the Water of the Spirit. This is a theme that Rev. Master explored in more detail in her later teachings. These later explanations are adumbrated in Plate LXVI of the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. It should be noted that while Rev. Master went into more detail in later explanations, her understanding of the spiritual role and significance of the body was thoroughly established in the great kensho in 1976-77 that is described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

Nowhere in human life is the fundamental unity of body, mind and spirit more clearly exemplified than in the practice of Serene Reflection (*shikan taza*) meditation, the chief physical feature of which is the combination of a naturally upright spine with a deeply relaxed abdomen. We have made a series of short instructional videos in order to help people learn to meditate correctly. Getting the posture right makes a huge difference! These videos can be accessed through our website: www.northcascadesbuddhistpriory.org

Inexhaustible Riches

Every time I open *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* I have the feeling that I am coming to its teachings for the first time. I am now concluding these Reflections, and once again I have that sense of wonder: *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* contains an inexhaustible wealth of teaching.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom provides practical advice that I have found again and again to be helpful in a way that no other advice is helpful *for me*. I continue to need that help, and so the teachings in this book continue to resonate in my heart and in my experience.

Just before the Buddha died, He told His disciples to make the Dharma Itself their teacher. Rev. Master died twenty years ago, and still her teaching guides and sustains me. Of course, there is much that I do not understand. That is alright, for the Truth appears naturally, responding to all need. I may not always be attuned to It, but It never fails to be attuned to my need—and the need of every being in all realms, all worlds, all times.

The experiences that Rev. Master describes in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* are her experiences. Yet the vast wealth of teaching in this book is for all beings. I hope that these Reflections have helped—or will help—at least one other human being to come to a better appreciation of the spiritual riches that are to be found in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

Finally, to all who have read any or all of these essays, I would like to say, “Thank you!” from the bottom of my heart.

Book II

HOW TO GROW A LOTUS BLOSSOM: REFLECTIONS IN A DISCIPLE'S LIFE

*The Eternal is as rivers and streams,
Flowing on and on in inexhaustible abundance.
Always nourish the plant in the deep valley!
Water it with the Water of the Spirit.*



TABLE OF CONTENTS OF BOOK II

Introduction

1. Background
2. A New Beginning
3. Becoming a Buddhist
4. Contemplative Aloneness
5. The Great Circulation in a Day
6. Two Arrows in Mid-Air that Meet
7. Parinirvana
8. The Promise
9. Surrender
10. Rules of the Game
11. Looking Up
12. Tools for the Journey
13. The House of Precious Jewels
14. Soothing Balm
15. The Return Flow
16. The Gift
17. No Speck of Dust
18. The Way of Ancient Buddhas
19. Benevolence
20. The Guardian
21. Working the Mother Lode
22. Eternity
23. Master and Disciple
24. The Eyes of the Spirit
25. The Ears of the Spirit
26. Alone and With
27. The Begging Bowl
28. The Everyday Mystical
29. Reality
30. Innate Wisdom
31. The Cleanness of the Water
32. Conclusion

Introduction

*There is eternal Nirvana, there is eternally
shining Light,
But we have to do the meditation that makes us
aware of Them;
There is eternal Light, there is Peace and Quiet
forever,
But we have to do the meditation that makes
Them known to us.*

Another Kind of Reflection

As I said in the Introduction to “*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: Reflections*,” my life was profoundly changed as a direct result of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's great experience of enlightenment in 1976-'77. In the following pages, I describe some of the ways in which the teachings expressed in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* have been confirmed in my own experience. In this, I am not so much “reflecting upon” these teachings, as showing how they have been “reflected in” my own experience—my own life.

The essays that constitute these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life” were written in parallel with the essays in “*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: Reflections*” and published on the same website. This second narrative is intended to show that ordinary people such as myself—people who suffer and who carry their fair share of weighty karma—can find practical help for their spiritual need in the teachings so magnificently expressed in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

In writing about my own life and experience in the following pages, I have deliberately abstracted from almost everything that has happened in my life—and almost *everyone* who has been important to me. I am deeply grateful for the help I have received from many people throughout my life. In the context of any normal autobiographical work such omission would be inexcusable. But if this narrative has an autobiographical quality, it is also very limited in its focus. This limitation is imposed by the purpose of the writing, which is to show as clearly and as simply as possible the “reflections” of the teachings of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* in an individual human

life. I apologize to those who I would not, under any other circumstances, fail to mention with respect, love and gratitude.

Chapter 1

Background

*This Thought of Enlightenment has arisen within me, I know not how.
It is as a blind man who finds a jewel in a dung heap.*

Santideva, *Bodhicharyavatara*
(*The Bodhisattva's Path of Training*)
Translated by L. D. Barnett (slightly paraphrased)

The Search

As far back as I can remember, I always somehow *knew* that God exists, and I was searching for God. I cannot remember a time when I did not know that God *is*, nor can I remember a time when I was not searching for God. I use the word “God” here, rather than the words I usually use now, such as “the Eternal” and “Buddha Nature,” because I grew up with the word “God,” and that was the only word I knew to describe what I was seeking until I found Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and her disciples. That to which such words point is the Reality; the words are just words.

I was raised as a Protestant. We attended Baptist and non-denominational Evangelical churches. We went to good churches with good pastors. The only pastor whose actual teaching I remember loved to talk to his large congregation about the love of God, and when he did this I could see how much *he* loved God in return. But, for me, something was missing, and, try as I might, I could not find what I longed for in the religion in which I was raised. I had to find my own spiritual Path, I had to find my true teacher. That does not, in my mind, constitute a criticism of the religion in which I was raised. I am grateful to it. In the end, I just needed to walk a different Path.

The single greatest transforming event in my early life happened when I was 21 years old when I first saw my brother (who was three years younger than me) in the intensive care unit of a hospital shortly after

a terrible head-on car crash. He was unconscious, and remained so, for nine days. The moment I laid eyes on him, a great wave of love swept up through me and I *knew* without a shadow of doubt that I would change places with him in the blink of an eye if it were possible to do so. I was aware that this love was not of my creation, and there was not a shred of self in it: it just *was*.

My brother survived but suffered some brain damage. He was a very innocent person who suffered deeply. He began speaking openly of committing suicide. My parents tried to prevent this, but it is very difficult to prevent someone who is determined to commit suicide from doing so. My brother committed suicide a few months after his accident.

It is strange and wonderful how we can be deeply shaken by events and not really be aware of how shaken we are. The experience of unconditional love, and of the death of someone who I loved so much shook me to my core. Yet even as I became more desperate, I remained unaware of what was happening within me. But I began to take risks that I had never taken, and I began to lose interest in things that had been very important to me. I did some very foolish things, but, looking back, it seems as if I was living under a protective mantle of compassion.

I can distill the description of the first 24 years of my life into four words: “searching, longing, love and pain.”—*Searching* for God; *longing* for love; finding human *love*, and sensing that something was still missing; feeling the *pain* of grief and desire and self-hatred.

The picture I have painted in these few words is of an ordinary, confused young man with a deep spiritual longing. Something changed in my life in my early twenties: I discovered what might be called the “perfection of human love”—a love pointing *beyond* human love; and I began to realize that I was suffering. It is said in Buddhism that “when the disciple is ready the master appears.” Love and suffering got me ready to be a disciple of a true master.

Finding the Path

One way of describing the change that was happening within me in my early twenties was that I was gradually awakening to the Buddha's First Noble Truth: “Suffering exists.” I had been suffering all along,

but it is one thing to suffer and another to *accept* that, whichever way you turn, suffering is *there*, present and unavoidable. A shell of delusion that was buffering me from awareness of the pain that permeated my life began to dissolve the moment I experienced that wave of selfless love on seeing my brother in the hospital. In the year following my brother's death I began to have episodic attacks of deep fear. They were always triggered by some external event, but it gradually began to dawn on me that the real cause of the fear was within me, not in external events.

When I was 22 I began to instinctively find my way to a secluded place and sit still. I might start by trying to think about something, but the fear would well up so powerfully that it would drown out the thoughts. To cope with the fear, I had to sit very still and let myself feel the fear without trying to push it away. I knew nothing about meditation as a formal practice. I did not know that I was beginning to do meditation. I found that by being still within the fear, not only was the fear gradually quieted, but often it was replaced by gratitude. It was as if the very fear itself was being *transmuted* into gratitude. Yet this feeling of gratitude would not last: like the fear, it would pass away. Before long, the fear would come back. Yet, looking back now at that wonderful and anguished time in my life, I think that each time I went off by myself and sat through a fear attack, my confidence in this approach to dealing with spiritual pain was strengthened. The feeling of gratitude was a *signal* to a young man who was careening about in the dark: “Come this way!” The fear also was a signal: “Spiritual need requiring help!” The fear kept coming back because the underlying need was still there, waiting for help. Part of that help would have to come from me; but the greater part would have to come from the Eternal.

I had unknowingly stumbled across a key feature of the deepest Teaching of Buddhism, and one that is at the very heart of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*: all the “negative” aspects of our experience are the raw material of enlightenment. One can make, through non-Preceptual action, more suffering out of this raw material, which adds to the total amount of raw material that will have to be processed one day. *Or* one can apply the principles of correct spiritual training—Preceptual practice, meditation and faith—to the raw material, and thereby experience *for oneself* the miracle of transmutation—or, to use the word Rev. Master most often used, *conversion*.

A few months after I began doing this quiet sitting, I read my first book about Buddhism, *The Buddha's Way* by Ven. Prof. Saddhatissa, a Theravadin monk who (as I found out many years later), had taught Rev. Master when she was a young woman in London. This book was a revelation to me. I took copious notes. But I was very confused. I began to seek instructions on how to meditate. I tried different kinds of meditation—all from reading. For two months I also tried a kind of ascetic denial of the body's needs, which only made me weak and did not destroy desire—which, mistakenly, I was attempting to do. I badly needed a teacher.

In the spring of 1973, just before my 24th birthday, I read a scrawled note in a natural food store. This note said that monks from Shasta Abbey were leading retreats in Eugene, Oregon on Saturdays. When I saw this note, I somehow knew this was for me, though I had never heard of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett or Shasta Abbey. I went to a retreat and as soon as I saw the monk—Rev. Gyozan—I felt a kind of “click” down in my abdomen. I knew without a doubt that I had found what I was looking for. Rev. Gyozan and Rev. Shuyu were starting a temple in Eugene. Before long I was living there and training with them.

I had only a very vague idea of what it meant to be a Buddhist monk. But I knew this was the way I wished to go. I asked to become a monk and was ordained by Rev. Shuyu in October, 1973.

For the next two years, I lived and trained most of the time in small temples in Eugene, Oregon and Berkeley, California. I trained under the guidance of disciples of Rev. Master—Rev. Shuyu and Rev. Gyozan in Eugene, and Rev. Mokurai in Berkeley. I feel much gratitude to these monks now, and more than a little sympathy for what they had to put up with from me. I also trained for shorter periods at Shasta Abbey, where I finally met Rev. Master. In the winter of 1976 I moved to Shasta Abbey to live and train for the indefinite future. In April I received Dharma Transmission from Rev. Master. By the end of May she was in her great retreat. My life was about to be turned upside-down and inside-out.

The Bottom Drops Out

As I said in the Introduction to these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life,” I am writing this narrative with a very limited focus. I am describing just enough of my life and my training as a monk to trace out as

clearly and simply as possible the “reflections” in my own life of the teachings in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. The richness, complexity and continually-arising challenges of Zen monastic training are not the subject of this narrative. I will discuss briefly only what I see as the major thread of my early monastic training here, for the confirmation in my own life of the teachings of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* has been the direct consequence of the way in which that thread continued on through 1976-77.

I began my training as a monk with a strong determination to apply meditation in my daily life. Of course, I kept getting doused in the fear that I have described above. Beneath that fear were even darker states that I sometimes glimpsed, but could not have described in words. Now I know that they were self-hate, a deep conviction of unworthiness, and—sometimes—despair. For two prolonged periods in the first two years of my monastic training I experienced being “doused” in the fear on a daily basis. The fear would arise at a certain time each day in a great flood. I would concentrate my mind on whatever I was doing and just let the fear be there. If I struggled against it or tried to distract myself from it, the pain would become unendurable. So, once again, this *Buddha* of fear was teaching me to meditate. And again, as had happened before I became a monk, when I meditated within the fear, after awhile—a few hours, usually—the fear would be replaced by a flood of gratitude.

There were times when the question of whether I would ride the fear, or whether it would run me right out of monastic training, hung by a thread. I chose to keep going. And others helped me to keep going.

When Rev. Master went into full retreat, she was at the Berkeley Buddhist Priory in the San Francisco Bay Area. Shasta Abbey is almost 300 miles from the Bay Area. The monastic community was told that Rev. Master was very ill and that she had released her disciples. At the time, the reason for the decision to release us was not clear to me, but since I was not looking to be released—and no one else seemed to be looking for it either—I just carried on with my training. Looking back, I realize that I trusted Rev. Master more than I knew at the time.

Two memories from the summer of 1976 have always stood out in bold relief in my mind. First, at a meeting of the community in which a few seniors who had gone down to see Rev. Master shared their

understanding of what was happening with her, one senior (Rev. Master Jisho) said, “It looks to me like a kensho.” Another person said it looked like a nervous breakdown. Rev. Master Jiisho's statement that it looked like a kensho (experience of enlightenment, literally “awakening to our True Nature”) rang true with me, even though I had only a vague idea what that might mean. Second, I have always remembered how difficult formal meditation was for me during that summer. I just could not seem to be mentally *present* in meditation. I would get up from meditation wondering, “Where *was* I during that meditation period?” But then I would decide to trust the meditation and not judge it or myself.

Rev. Master came back to the monastery in September. It was immediately clear to me that *something* had changed in a huge way. Rev. Master described her spiritual journey during the last few months in clear and simple terms. She spoke openly of having memories of past lives, which I had not heard her do before. Looking back, I see that I intuitively recognized that the same opportunity that had opened up for Rev. Master was opening up for me. But there was a vitally important question: Is this what I truly wanted? It was as if a great chasm had opened up before me where previously I had thought there was solid ground.

For two months the question of whether this was what I truly wanted was an open question. I would put my toe in the deeper water and then shoot in the opposite direction. I experienced two past life memories during this time. The first of these memories showed me the horror and black despair of a man who committed suicide after murdering someone. Yet, as had happened when I first saw my brother in the hospital, a great wave of compassion swept through me, and there was no distinct break between the horror and the compassion that followed. It was also very clear that this person was a different person from myself: his actions were not my actions, though I had inherited his karmic jangle of pain and confusion.

The purpose of memories of past lives, some of which can be very intense and vivid, is easily misunderstood. I will not dwell on it here, but will discuss it in one of the essays in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom—Reflections*. Suffice it to say here that I was being shown how deeply anguished and confused some major constituents of my karmic inheritance were. Helping such need find its way to the

Eternal is not a walk in the park. It is as if I was being asked, “Are you *willing* to do the training that will enable this spiritual need to get the Help of the Eternal, no matter how long it takes and no matter what the cost?”

For two months, my answer to that question was, “Maybe.—But maybe not.” The experiences of past lives did not allay the deep fear that was in me, nor did the fact that they so strongly confirmed the truth of an important part of Rev. Master's (and the Buddha's) Teaching prevent me from having doubts. A few years later I was clearly shown that “All doubt is rooted in self-doubt.” There were times during these two crucial months when I doubted Rev. Master, but I was really doubting myself. It was my own version of “the voice that whispers, 'Go back. . . . You cannot do it. You have not been good enough to climb this mountain . . .’” (Plate II of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*). In one form or another, this doubt has visited me every time I have been offered the opportunity to go deeper in training.

The days passed. I was stuck with my fear and doubt, and that dark chasm in front of me was getting deeper and darker. As I look back almost forty years later, I see myself at that time as exemplifying the metaphor of having a red hot iron ball in the mouth, and being unable to swallow it or spit it out. I asked if I could do a private meditation retreat. Rev. Master gave me permission to do this. But I was banging my head into a spiritual wall that simply was not ready to dissolve. After a couple days, Rev. Master came and told me to rejoin the normal training schedule of the monastery. She was very kind, but she made it very clear that “storming heaven” would not get me anywhere. She told me to pick up my hammer and go back to work (I was in the construction department of the Abbey at the time). I trusted her and did as she said.

By the time of the fall monastic retreat in December, everything and everyone that I had been clutching at in a vain attempt to avoid being pitched into that yawning dark chasm had dissolved or pulled away. I sat that retreat in spiritual darkness. I was utterly without hope. One can be without hope and yet not despair. I found something beyond hope and despair in meditation. The last night of this retreat, all the monks come before the abbot one by one and ask a question. When my time came, I knelt before my master and expressed my situation in a few words. I used the metaphor of the man who built his house upon shifting sand,

which I remembered from the Bible, to express how lost I felt. Rev. Master replied simply, “Just don't worry about external things.”

There was no clap of thunder, no flash of insight. But I *heard* that simple answer with my whole being. I was still in the same great spiritual darkness, but now I knew how to go forward through it. At the beginning of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Rev. Master placed a one-page section entitled “I am *Glad* that I Became a Monk.” One of the teachings on this page is “Nothing matters; Mindfulness is all.” This is the same teaching as “Just don't worry about external things.” I put this teaching into practice as if my life depended on it. The doubts fell away: I needed to focus inwards and meditate for all I was worth, and I simply could not afford the luxury of doubt. Another way to put it is like this: At this point the petty doubts that were trying to prop up a struggling ego were transformed into Great Doubt. When I look back on that precious time now I can only think, “How fortunate I was to become a monk! How fortunate I was to find my master!”

Chapter 2

A New Beginning

If you are in a hurry to practice the Truth, soon you can meet Buddha; in daily life Shakyamuni was, is and will be walking, stopping, sitting, lying down, talking and seeing by, in, through and with you and is not separate from you even for a moment, being all of you.

—Great Master Keizan

Great Doubt

After the fall monastic retreat in early December, 1976, I lived enveloped in a great spiritual darkness, and the practice of meditation, both in the Meditation Hall and in every activity, was my sole focus. Whenever my attention started to stray, I would feel so sick at heart that I would immediately come back to the present moment. Plate IV of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is a very accurate representation of my spiritual state at this time: I was on hands and knees spiritually, but I was moving forward, and I had a deep intuitive conviction that the Path I was walking was the right one. In the narrative of Chapter I of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life” I have described briefly the way in which I was first drawn to quiet sitting in the midst of intense fear without ever having been formally introduced to meditation as a religious practice. I have also described how, as a new monk, I applied meditation in the midst of the activities of daily life (“mindfulness”) as waves of fear swept through me. I was now in a greater spiritual darkness, but the spiritual effort that I needed to make was the same effort that I had made before. Rev. Master had told me, “Just don't worry about external things.” I took this to mean that I needed to turn within and meditate, letting go of *everything* else. This is what I did.

The darkness in which I was enveloped contained that same deep fear, but even deeper and blacker self-hatred and conviction of utter worthlessness. I had had glimpses into these darker regions before, but now I was immersed in them. Formal meditation became a great refuge for me. This was not because the darkness was any less at this

time. But I was drawn so deeply within in meditation—deep down into the “hara” (physically, the region from the sternum down to the pubic bone)—that I would experience a blessed relief from the pain: it was still there, up at the surface, but “I” was down below it in an indescribably *safe* Place. At this time, I began to quietly get up before the wake-up bell and sit in meditation. And when the bell came around, I literally *ran* to the Meditation Hall.

I also began to weep in a way I had never done in my life. I would weep through the whole of Morning Office. I would stand and sing, and tears would pour down my face and soak my upper robe. As this happened, great waves of longing love rose up my body and burst into consciousness in feeling. So many times during the next year I heard Rev. Master respond to a question with the words, “Just *long* for the Lord of the House.” This was the “longing love” that I was experiencing.

Somewhere I had acquired a copy of Thomas 'A. Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. I read a little from this book each day during this great crisis in my life. I still have this book and greatly value its teaching, of which the following passage is an excellent example:

“If thou intend and seek nothing else but the will of God and the good of thy neighbor, thou shalt thoroughly enjoy inward liberty. If thy heart were right, then every creature would be unto thee a looking-glass of life, and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so small and mean, that it doth not set forth the goodness of God. If thou wert inwardly good and pure, then wouldest thou be able to see and understand all things well without hindrance. A pure heart penetrateth heaven and hell. Such as every one is inwardly, so he judgeth outwardly. If there is joy in the world, surely a man of pure heart possesseth it. And if there be anywhere tribulation and affliction, an evil conscience best knoweth it.”

The Eternal is not narrow-minded and uses all things to help us. I have my share of Christian karma, and I believe that my reading of *The Imitation of Christ* at this time provided a form of teaching that I could more easily comprehend. Such means are not infrequently employed. On Page 43 of the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus*

Blossom (Plates XIII-XVIII), Rev. Master describes how she had a Christian absolution read in order to help bring peace to a karmic remnant inherited from a woman who died without absolution and who, at the time of death, “longed for absolution of her sins in the words of her old Church.”

The state that I was in at this time is sometimes called “Great Doubt.” All things, all beings, all spiritual, mental and emotional states of beings possess the Buddha Nature. The Buddha Nature of sceptical doubt is revealed in Great Doubt. Sceptical doubt denies the validity of anything that challenges complacency. Great Doubt denies the validity of any external refuge. This state is expressed in the Litany of the Great Compassionate One: “All, all is defilement, defilement, earth, earth. Do, do the work within my heart.”

Awakening

During the two months that I was in this state, I was fortunate indeed to be living in a monastic community led by a great Zen Master. I can imagine well-intentioned relatives and friends of a person going through this in the world looking for a good mental hospital to which they can have him committed. I was withdrawn in intense concentration; I spoke almost not at all; and I know that the great pain I was in was clearly evident to everyone around me. Yet I was left entirely alone. I did my job; I followed the schedule—and I *cooked* that anguished spiritual need over the fire of meditation for all I was worth. Looking back now, I am very conscious of the fact that the merit of the training of everyone in the monastic community was helping me look up in the midst of the darkness. The Sangha Refuge is.

In early February, 1977, Rev. Master stopped by the place where I was working. Ostensibly she was just taking a look at how the work was progressing. But I know now that she had received “the green light” from the Eternal: It was time to give Koshin a hand. She gently asked me how I was doing. I do not remember my exact words, but somehow I communicated that I needed help. She said, “Is there anything we can do?” We arranged that I would come to her house in the evening and do some meditation. I stayed until everyone else had left. Rev. Master went to bed in the room next to the one I was meditating in. All was very still. I was close enough to Rev. Master

that I could ask a question in a normal voice. I asked, “How do I step off this cliff?” Rev. Master heard me, but did not answer. The answer came from within me, “Just live in free fall.” I said it out loud. Then I went back to my own room and went to bed.

In asking, “How do I step off this cliff?” I showed that there was still a remnant of expectation in my heart. The answer, “Just live in free fall.” was telling me, “There is nothing you can cling to, so just let go completely.” Somehow, I must have done this.

Three days later, on February 8, Rev. Master again came to my workplace. That night I again went to her house. This time there was just her and Rev. Master Daizui, her head chaplain, who had been with her, and given great assistance to her, throughout her retreat. Rev. Master Daizui said something to me about the love that I showed in my work, and the rocket went off. A great blast of energy went up my back and through my whole body. And then the memory of some very painful events from my childhood flooded my mind and I saw myself as a boy—a boy and something more: an immaculate Being. In a matter of seconds this immaculate Being travelled up my back to the top of my head and then came down the front of my body into my hara. Rev. Master thundered, “What is your purpose for living?” I cried out, “I want to *love!*” My mind and body were instantly flooded with indescribable Love and with the equally indescribable certainty of full Recognition of the Eternal. I cried out, “My Lord and my God!” and great waves of the Water of the Spirit—Love beyond human comprehension—swept through me. I had found That for which I had been searching my entire life.

Confirmation of the Teaching

This experience changed my life so deeply that I tend to think of it as the real beginning of my life. While both faith and understanding were deepened in this experience, there is really one great Truth to which I awakened on the night of February 8, 1977: the Eternal *is*, and the Eternal's Love is vast beyond my power to comprehend. (For me, this is *one* Truth, not two Truths. It would not be true to my actual experience to describe as being “two Truths.”) As I wrote right at the beginning of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life,” I cannot remember a time when I did not know that God *is*, but this was the

intuitive “knowing without knowing” of faith. On the night of the kensho I *experienced* the Eternal with my whole being.

In the Foreword to the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (called “Kenshos” in the first edition), Rev. Master writes:

“In the first kensho one goes through all the stages mentioned in this book as taking place in the third kensho with this difference:-in the first kensho the stages flash by so quickly that the whole kensho is only comprehended as one flash. One goes, as it were, from earth to heaven by rocket, or a lightning bolt, with no time to take notice of the journey before one has arrived. The third kensho takes place slowly and deliberately with plenty of time to comprehend each step of the way. For example, in the first kensho one jumps, of necessity, beyond the opposites and *knows* for ever afterwards that one *has* jumped. In the third kensho the opposites are looked at slowly and dispassionately and then *deliberately* discarded; the first kensho is a swift comprehension of grace; the third kensho *starts* as a *deliberate* act of will.”

When I read this passage I marvel at its accuracy. Compare, for example, Plates XXIII-XXIX of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* with my description of the karmic jangle from my childhood and the appearance of the “immaculate Being.” What I experienced in a few seconds, Rev. Master experienced over a period of four days. In its essence, the experience is the same because the process of conversion is the same regardless of the level at which conversion happens. The relative levels of Rev. Master and myself with respect to the complete conversion of karma were very different at this point: she was very far along in the process; I was just beginning. But the process is the same. Rev. Master used to say that there are not greater and lesser kenshos: every experience of the Eternal contains the *whole* of Enlightenment.

This kensho saved my spiritual life. It was a new beginning of my life and my training—a *beginning*, not an end. Within minutes of that great flash, I was conscious of the constituents of self beginning to “reboot.” One layer of the spiritual need had dissolved into the Great Immaculacy. But many more layers, some of them deeply anguished

and confused, still existed. Life would be easier for a short time. Then it was gradually going to get very difficult.

Chapter 3

Becoming a Buddhist

The Buddha Nature offers to the untrue and the uncompassionate that which is hard to bear, its cleansing energy.

Bull Riding 101

The kensho that I experienced in the winter of 1977 was the “lightning flash” spiritual awakening featured in so many Zen stories. As Rev. Master often observed, the stories do not say much about the years of training prior to the lightning flash. I would add that they also say little about the trials that follow the first kensho.

The *immediate* aftermath of my kensho was a spiritual honeymoon. I was head over heels in love with the Eternal. I had never experienced such joy and gratitude, and this was accompanied by greatly deepened confidence in the Path that I was walking. From that time until the present day I have never doubted my purpose in being a monk or the rightness *for me* of the particular way of training—Soto Zen—to which I was drawn so many years ago. This is not to say that I have not suffered from doubt—but, as I shall show, it was doubt of another kind.

Even the most perfect honeymoon has to come to an end so that important and difficult work can be undertaken. In life in the world, a honeymoon is the prelude to making a family. In spiritual life, the “honeymoon” is the prelude to a deeper conversion of karma. In traditional married life, two partners tackle together the hard work of raising their children. In spiritual marriage, we are partnered with the Eternal in the work of conversion. We cannot do the Eternal's part of this work. And the Eternal neither does our part for us nor forces us to do our part. Always we are responsible for our own actions; and always we are volunteers in training.

I cannot identify any one moment during the next two and a half years as being a particular high or low. Meditation was often deeply peaceful and still. But in the midst of daily activity, I would often swing between emotional extremes—mostly on the bright side of the emotional spectrum, but as time passed, the swings went further into

the dark side. During one period of a few months, I struggled with a mixture of fear and anger. Looking back on that period now, I am reminded of a bull rider in a rodeo trying to stay on a leaping, twisting Brahma bull. During a quieter period of a month or so immediately following this wild ride, I was able to see more clearly the mistakes I had made during the “bull ride.” Each meditation for a week or two was like looking in a mirror, and I did *sange*.

“Sange” means “contrition.” Sometimes Rev. Master defined it as “contrition and conversion.” Sometimes she called it “confession.” Sometimes she said, “Sange is self-forgiveness.” It can also be called “self-acceptance.” It is all these things and more. It is “sitting up straight in the presence of the Buddhas,” admitting our actions of thought, word and deed that are not in harmony with our True Nature, accepting the consequences of these actions, and resolving to work on the problem that has been seen, admitted and accepted. Sange leads naturally to taking the Precepts to heart. Sange is *not* indulgence in guilt and self-blame. Sange is the way to train *with* our humanity, rather than treat it like an enemy.

Rev. Master describes very deep sange in the text accompanying Plates VII-IX in the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. (This text is not in the first edition.) The fierce beings in the visions depicted in Plates VII-IX represent the proddings of our own conscience, insisting that we admit the truth to ourselves. I say “to ourselves” because there is no mediator who can grant absolution or require acts of penance. This does not mean that it is not sometimes good to confess to another human being, but it is important to emphasize that sometimes it may be good to do so, and then again sometimes it may not be good to do so. How do we know which is which?—By meditating with the question of what is good to do.

While riding the wild bull of the passions, falling off and getting back on, I was learning that one *can* fall off and get back on again and again. I was learning that there is no person, force or entity that can prevent us from continuing on in our training: it is always *our* choice, and ours alone, whether we continue to keep getting back on the bull. I was learning that the Eternal does not keep score of our seeming successes and failures: the Love of the Eternal *is*; we may temporarily blind ourselves to It, but It will never abandon us.

The Longing of Ages

During a particularly busy time in the spring of 1980 when I was only occasionally in the meditation hall for regular meditation periods, I decided that, no matter how tired I was or how late at night it was, I would sit in formal meditation in my room before going to bed.

Somehow I knew that it was not the amount of time or the seeming quality (or lack of it) of the meditation that mattered. What mattered was that I was saying to the Eternal, “Regardless of how important the fulfilling of responsibilities may be, You are first in my heart.” I was fully conscious that this was the meaning of this sitting, and I did it faithfully even though sometimes I was so tired that all I could do was wobble unsteadily for a few minutes on my cushion before getting up and going to bed.

In the summer of 1980, I was among the small group of monks who accompanied Rev. Master to the temple in the Bay Area (the Berkeley Buddhist Priory—though at the time it was located in Oakland). One day we found a nest of newborn mice in the trunk of the car. The mother mouse was not with her babies and may have been left behind when we moved the car from one place to another. There were eight babies. I decided to look after them. I found a veterinarian and asked how to proceed. I followed the instructions and began feeding the mice every two hours round the clock (canned puppy formula fed with an eyedrop syringe). When I became too tired, another trainee kindly filled in for a few feedings so I could sleep.

I later learned that the survival rate for baby mice is not high. Over the next week, all but one of the baby mice died. After each death, I took the little body into the meditation hall and did the funeral ceremony for an animal. And each time I did this, I cried my heart out. I have a much better idea now, over thirty years later, than I had at the time why I grieved so deeply.

One morning shortly after this episode with the baby mice, I was meditating alone in the meditation hall. I “heard”—very clearly—the words, “Go to Rev. Master now.” I got up, went to Rev. Master's room and knocked on the door. She said, “Come in.” She was alone. I told her that I had been meditating and what I had heard. She was very still. She asked me, “What do you need to do?” I replied, “I need to meditate and study the Precepts.”

Rev. Master called her chaplains and the chief priest of the temple and asked that a room adjacent to the meditation hall be made available at once. So that very morning I was meditating on my own. But I was not alone for long, for it again came up clearly to ask to see Rev. Master. As soon as I was with her again, I dissolved in a great flood of the Water of the Spirit, as had happened in my kensho. And yet it was different, too. Now it was more like being reamed out by great waves of energy. I was in excellent health and could run for several miles without difficulty, but a few minutes of this reaming left me so weak that I could barely stand.

For the next few days I had one or two such episodes of “reaming” each day. Rev. Master was there to ground the whole process with her great faith, certainty and deep meditation. Then for several days I was drawn to look at particular actions that I had done before I became a monk. Again, I was doing sange. I remembered acts of unkindness that I had done as a child. I particularly remembered one boy who a number of other boys, including myself, would taunt until he became furious. I felt profoundly sorry. Children make choices; children make *karma*. I tried to locate this man (for, of course, if he was still alive, he would have been a man of my own age—thirty-one—at the time) in order to apologize, but did not succeed.

In the memory of one act in particular, I got a very painful lesson in the spiritual meaning of my actions. It was what one might call a “borderline” mistake—not clearly right or wrong as the world understands these terms. The problem was that I *knew* in my heart that it was wrong *for me* to do what I did, but I acted out of pure vanity and went ahead and did it. I had plenty of time to make my decision: it was not an act done in the heat of passion; it was a deliberate act. The deeper meaning of the keeping of the Precepts is to be true to one's own Heart. There is no such thing as a “little” act of willful disregard of our Buddha Nature.

I told Rev. Master about this act. She said that she had had something similar to deal with in her great sange in 1976. She pointed out the importance of meditating through the guilty feelings until we get to the point of acceptance and equanimity. If we act *impulsively* out of guilt or shame, we may set the wheel of karma in motion again. Always it is vitally important to place that which is pained and

confused upon the altar of the heart and allow the Eternal to show us what is truly good to do for both self and others.

I was also able to see that another, and very recent, “little” act also had great significance. I have mentioned my choice to sit in meditation for at least a short time before going to sleep. Although I knew when I made this decision what it meant *to me*, I had no idea how literally the Eternal takes *every* sincere expression of love and longing for Itself. Infinite Love does not force Itself upon that which is, after all, entirely *of* Itself. It has already chosen us; It waits and waits until we choose It. Rev. Master's master told people who came to his monastery to meditate, “If you meditate, you may be grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha.” If and when this happens, it is magnificent, but it does not bring happiness as the world understands the word.

Toward the end of my retreat I was given a teaching that I later realized was intended to prepare me for what was to come. I was meditating and I “heard” the words, “All doubt is self-doubt.” I was not doubting anything or anyone at the time, so I just put it on the “back burner” and carried on.

I remained in retreat for over a month. I sensed that what I was experiencing was a very important part of the fulfillment of an ages-old longing—and *my* longing—for full reharmonization with the Eternal. But the truth is that I had no idea of what had been set in motion by the great “reaming” waves of the Water of the Spirit.

The Water of the Spirit

What is the Water of the Spirit?—Rev. Master refers to It many times in different ways in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. But she identifies two main modes—“washing” and “bathing.” In the text accompanying Plate XLV (Plate XXVII in the first edition), Rev. Master writes, “I am infused with ecstasy in every part of my being.”—Infused with “a luminescent, spiritual water.” This is the washing mode. Further down the page she says, “I am again infused but this time it is different; it is a golden infusion that is also a bath . . . I am thrilled through and through again and again; it is cold, a very strange cold.” This is the bathing mode. In my experience, whatever mode It may be in, and however powerful or subtle It may be, It is always exquisite, always both physical and spiritual, always light rather than dark, and, above all, always Love.

To the best of my knowledge mainstream Western thought and religion are oblivious to the Water of the Spirit. Of course, genuine mystical experience has never been limited to any geographical area or culture, and I am certain that Rev. Master's description of the Water of the Spirit would fit right into the Western contemplative tradition at its height—which was several centuries ago. In China, the Water of the Spirit is called “Chi” (or “Qi”). Chi is a fundamental concept in traditional Chinese medicine, though I do not think that the spiritual meaning of Chi is well understood in Chinese medicine. I know nothing about Indian Yogic teachings and practices, but I think the “Kundalini” may be the same as the Water of the Spirit.

The Water of the Spirit can be very powerful. In one of the “reamings” described above, I knew that my life hung by a thread. Again I was in perfect health at the time. I knew that That which was flooding through my body with indescribable power was incapable of doing harm, and I had no fear. I was perfectly willing to die, but I knew intuitively that I would not die at that time.

The Eternal is always utterly practical, and the Water of the Spirit is used by the Eternal, and experienced by the trainee, in the form and mode that is perfectly suited to a particular need. The “reamings” that I have described are the “washing” mode of the Water of the Spirit experienced in great power. I think of the reaming as a flashflood of the Water of the Spirit, moving great spiritual jangle “boulders,” exposing and rearranging them so that they can be more readily worked upon in the course of training. The Water of the Spirit can be experienced in much more gentle, subtle ways. The Love of the Eternal can manifest with immense power, and It can be infinitely tender. It *always* works for the deepest and truest good of beings.

The Water of the Spirit is Love *and* Wisdom. As Wisdom, It moves in confirmation, and in service, of truth. I remember experiencing the flow of the Water of the Spirit upon hearing a popular song—Kenny Rogers' “The Gambler.” I heard the song a few times over a period of a month or two, and each time I would feel the Water move. I mentioned this to Rev. Master, who said such experience is completely normal. Few people would classify this song as a spiritual masterpiece, yet the words “you have to know when to hold, know when to fold, know when to walk away, know when to run” provide wonderful teaching and, in fact, Rev. Master sometimes quoted them

as an example of the “kaleidoscopic mind”—the mind that is free *from* clinging, and therefore free *to* follow the Eternal wherever the Eternal leads. It may also be that this part of this song was moving the Water of the Spirit in me at the time because there was teaching in it that I particularly needed to accept and understand—not just generally true, but true *for me*.

It is possible for people to experience the physical aspect of the Water of the Spirit and have no idea of its spiritual meaning. If the illusion of self and worldly motives are in the way, we are blinded to the fact that the Water of the Spirit is Cosmic Love and Wisdom flowing through our body and mind. This is like someone looking at Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa and seeing only little streaks of paint on canvas. But note that the Water of the Spirit does not hide Its meaning from us. It makes no distinction between sage and fool, saint and sinner, enlightened and deluded, converted and unconverted, spiritual and worldly: It *is*. If we attempt to cling to It, manipulate It or control It, we only steal from our own spiritual treasurehouse. If we trust It to do Its work within our body and mind—whether we are aware of its working or not—It will always do Its part of the work of conversion. All we have to do is keep our focus on our part of the work.

Bull Riding 201

In the Foreword to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master writes,

“In many ways the time between the first and third kenshos is the most difficult, as anyone who has had a first kensho knows, for the simple reason that the temptations to break the Precepts are much greater and far more subtle. The norm of human behaviour being set at what psychologists consider “healthy,” i.e. a person is well integrated and adjusted if he has a reasonable ego and a fair swatch of greed, hate and delusion with a little lukewarm morality thrown in, is of little comfort to one who has had a first kensho and finds that, in order to progress further, he must now not only *keep* his passions rooted out but also clean up the impregnations that they have left upon his

skandhas [body and mind] both in this life and in his previous ones.”

Truer words were never written!

The great “reamings” that I experienced in the beginning of my retreat in the summer of 1980 left me physically weak for a couple months and emotionally raw. For a short while during my retreat I was so sensitive that harsh sounds that I would normally barely notice became acutely painful. As time went on, I gained my physical strength again and this hypersensitivity faded, but I continued to experience raw emotions—some of them very dark and pained. Of course, I was continuing to do my training, so there was a powerful grounding of the emotional turbulence in meditation, mindfulness and the effort to keep the Precepts. But dark feelings and thoughts kept welling up from somewhere deep inside me, and I felt very confused.

Several months after my retreat ended, I was able to express my confused state to Rev. Master. I told her that it felt at times as if I was going mad. She responded, “You have been through a great shake-up. It will take time. Just keep going.”

It took seven years. I have often been grateful that I did not know what I would be going through beforehand. Yet even in the darkest places that I visited, I knew that the Eternal *is* and I knew that my hope lay in meditation. I wrote a poem sometime in the first year or two of this period in my life. It is the first poem in Appendix II. It is called “Cloud of Bright Darkness.” [[Click here to go to Poems](#)]

What was happening to me?—I was caught in the classic spiritual bind that either drives people further into training and enlightenment or drives them back into the world to seek a seemingly easier and safer route. I had experienced the Eternal in the first kensho, and then again in the great “reamings” two and one-half years after that kensho. Roughly speaking, “I” had got oriented toward the Eternal and then big chunks of my karmic inheritance had had their shells washed away in the reamings of the Water of the Spirit. But these karmic jangle “boulders” were still utterly in the dark about where “our” True Refuge was to be found. And while I wanted to be willing to pay whatever price might be required in the

process of conversion, I sensed that this price might be my life itself and part of me was scared.

There is absolutely nothing unique in this story. The “dark night of the soul” is a well-known phenomenon in all contemplative traditions. And there is simply no quick fix for the confusion and suffering that accompany this phase of training. Just as Rev. Master taught, there are always the “little moments that make you dance”—the moments of blessed relief, the gentle reminders from the Eternal, “I am still with you. Do not give up. Do not despair. Go on.” And then one is immersed again in the struggle to ride that wild bull.

When I look back on that period in my life, I am amazed at Rev. Master's patience. That “doubt that is self-doubt” was gradually working its way to the surface, and as it did so the spiritual strain intensified. Sometimes I would lose control and rebel. If I failed to get hold of my will pretty fast, Rev. Master would set limits, and she was not afraid to do this. When she did this with me, I always felt that I had rammed my head straight into a brick wall. I would meditate with it, then I would apologize. When I had moved on, Rev. Master was exactly the same as before anything happened. Like the Eternal, she never kept score.

People are wonderfully complex beings. We can live with great seeming contradictions. Even while I teetered on the edge of a spiritual darkness, I grew closer to my master. Indeed, during a period of eight or nine months in which certain circumstances made life particularly challenging for her, I was privileged to be someone who she relied on for practical and spiritual support. But when we came out of the crisis, something had changed for me. There were a few major identifiable threads that made up a web in which I increasingly felt myself to be trapped. But looking back with the benefit of hindsight, one thread stands out as the one from which all the others branched out: I was approaching a time in my spiritual life when I would have to be alone in a way that I had never been. And there was a deep fear within me of this aloneness, and a deep doubt of my capacity to survive it.

At the time, I was not aware of this fear, and my self-doubt was so externalized in an increasing tendency to find fault with others—especially my master—that I could not see it clearly for what it was. At no time did I question my monastic vocation or that Rev. Master was,

and would always be, my master. Again, we are complex beings. By the summer of 1985, I was in a state of deep agitation. I was still doing my training, yet I felt that I was being pulled in two. When I think of it now, I have an image of myself during this period in my life holding on to Rev. Master for dear life with my hands while the Eternal is steadily and with irresistible power pulling on my feet. And I am yelling at Rev. Master, “Look what is happening to me! Put a stop to it!”—Of course, the problem was that I was the one who had to let go, and, once again, I did not know how to do it. In fact, I did not even know I needed to let go. I was just confused and increasingly frustrated.

“Letting go” does not mean that I needed to cease to be a disciple of my master. It meant that I needed to rely on the Eternal more deeply. Rev. Master used to often quote the Buddha: “The Buddhas do but point the way; thou must go alone.” Up to this point in my training, at every major step Rev. Master had been right there to point the way and to help me keep grounded with her faith, certainty and meditation. But one day she would die, and, if I were still alive I would have to rely more on the Buddha Nature. In fact, as will be seen in the next chapter of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life,” I would need to do this before she died.

In the fall of 1985, I snapped. I blew up at Rev. Master, calmed down, apologized, blew up again, calmed down, apologized—and floated in a dark spiritual limbo. Rev. Master was very patient, but it was clear that this could not go on. Though I was in great spiritual pain and deeply agitated, it simply never occurred to me for a moment that I might leave the monastery. I had *no* concept that this could be an option for me, though I had seen many monks leave through the years. So in the end Rev. Master told me during one of my calm moments, “Perhaps you could take a priory [a small temple].”

Looking back, I am again amazed, this time by the trust that Rev. Master was showing in someone who was clearly not in ideal condition to be taking on the responsibility of teaching others. That night I awoke in the middle of the night and heard the words, “You are going to Seattle.” The next night I awoke in the middle of the night and heard the words, “You are going to do it in the country.” I never questioned these messages: they so obviously were given *to* me, and so obviously did not come *from* me. I knew almost nothing about the

area to which I would be going, though I had lived south of Seattle, in Oregon. Within a few days, I was on my way.

Sange

When I got to Seattle, I first stayed with members of the small Seattle meditation group. I began looking for property in the country. With the help of congregation members, I eventually found the property where North Cascades Buddhist Priory is now located. I continued to do my training. I never gave up meditation. But I was still in a delicate spiritual state. I was teetering on the edge of a great abyss, yet all I could do was go on with living and training. I gradually calmed down. In the summer I went down to see Rev. Master. I know everyone present felt the strain, but I was treated with great kindness. When we parted, Rev. Master said to me, “Whether or not you trust me, I *have* to trust you.”

Early in the fall of 1986, I wrote Rev. Master a letter of apology. Yet I ended the letter with the sentence, “I don't know whether I can ever be the disciple you want me to be.”—An astonishing statement. I *never* heard Rev. Master express any desire that I, or any other disciple, should be different than we were. She did not reply to this letter. What could she or anyone else say in the face of my self-judgment?

Also in the fall of 1986, I had a dream that my brother came to me and said, “You are going to go through a very difficult time, but you will come through it safely.” I recognised that I was being consoled prior to some kind of ordeal.

In early February, 1987 I moved onto the property where I would begin building the temple. It was another step toward taking on a deeper responsibility, yet there was a cloud of my own making between me and my master. Lay trainees are not clueless when their priest is in spiritual trouble. Two congregation members, both of whom became monks within a few years and are now masters (one is my most senior disciple), independently expressed their concern to me. In the end, I went down to the Abbey to see Rev. Master. She had the seniors meet with me but was not present. I again erupted. I was left alone while Rev. Master was informed of my state. She sent back the message that I could return to my temple, but that I was not to contact any person in the wider Sangha for three years.

I left immediately and started the five hundred mile drive north. I was in a strange state. I had no sense of the passage of time. I was sitting still beneath a flow of thoughts—complaints and self-justification. But I was not believing the thoughts any more. They just spun themselves out and dissolved into emptiness. When I was near Salem, Oregon, over half-way back to my temple, the thoughts stopped. I saw one thing clearly: It did not matter who was right and who was wrong: I was going to hurt the people who trusted me as a priest. I was just coming to a rest area by the freeway. I pulled over and went to a pay phone. I called Rev. Master. She answered the phone and I blurted out, “I’m sorry!” and dissolved in tears. Great waves of the Water of the Spirit swept through me. All the complaining, the fear, the resentment washed away in sange.

Recognizing that I was in no state to drive, Rev. Master had me stay where I was beside the freeway and sent two monks up to get me and drive me back to Shasta Abbey. When I arrived, I went to her at once. I bowed to her, knelt before her and said, “I have wronged you in thought, word and deed. I am truly sorry.” She reached out to me and embraced me with unconditional love. The shadows that had been between us—the shadows that I had created—were gone.

This began a sange that was different in scale from any that I had done before or have done since. It was as if I was vomiting up poison. For days it came up out of my bowels: pride, pettiness, anger, thinking and speaking against others, clinging, doubt—all had to be looked at without excuses and without blame; all had to be confessed and accepted without excuses and without blame; all had to be offered to the Eternal without excuses and without blame. This was about my choices, my actions alone: what anyone else in the world had ever done was completely irrelevant.

My problem never had to do with anyone but me. My doubts all came from my own self-doubt. My anger all came from my own self-hatred. At the root of it all was a dark lump of my own self-judgment. What had I been so angry and confused about?—I had not been able to accept the simple fact that nothing and no one can shield me from the consequences of my own actions, and of the karma that I have inherited. No one, including my master could do for me that which I could only do for myself. No one, including my master, could endure what I would have to endure myself. I was like a man out in the

middle of a dangerous river yelling “Help me! What's wrong with you that you don't save me?”—To which the master can only answer, “You *can* swim. Look up! Swim!” I began to be a Buddhist in the true sense of the word when I stopped complaining and started truly swimming on my own.

Rev. Master often said, “The master is not the Eternal *and* the master represents the Eternal for the disciple.” The Eternal uses the humanity of the master as a mirror within which the disciple can see, and choose to accept or not accept, his own humanity. At the same time, the master is used by the Eternal to *represent* Itself for the disciple. So at one and the same time, the master is a mirror of our most human traits and the representative of our own Buddha Nature. No master can be kind enough or wise enough for a disciple who refuses to accept his own humanity. And, as Great Master Dogen pointed out, even a foolish master can have enlightened disciples. The training of the master is the master's responsibility; the training of the disciple is the disciple's responsibility: it is that simple.

I remained at Shasta Abbey in retreat for over a month. As the time to return to my own seed of a temple grew near, I got the jitters, again doubting my ability to do the job that I had undertaken. How could someone who had been so shaky successfully fulfill such a responsibility? I asked Rev. Master whether I should go back or stay at the Abbey, and she in turn put the question to the senior monks. But in the end it was Rev. Master alone who made the decision. She called me into her office. She said, “Everything in me says that you should go back to your temple.” I heard this with great relief, because underneath the doubt I knew that this was something I had to do, something I *longed* to do. Despite the temporary self-doubt, I knew in my heart that I had to go back and swim on my own.

Bull Riding 301

What matters is not how many times one falls off the bull, but how many times one gets back on.

Chapter 4

Contemplative Aloneness

*The profundity of ourselves and things is deep.
Its mystery is hard for human beings to
understand.
The forward and return processes are full of
compassion;
The Great Immaculacy wards off all evil from our
long, contemplative aloneness.*

The Ore and the Gold

The process of spiritual conversion is the greatest mystery in human life. We neither see nor understand most of the process. It is as if our spiritual need is a great vein of gold ore which must be mined and then refined in order to obtain the pure metal of enlightenment. The mining process takes place deep in the mountain where it is very dark. The refining happens when the ore is brought to the furnace of meditation, there to be worked upon by the fire of Compassion and Wisdom.

The ore from which the gold will be refined is not bright and pretty. It may just be rough dirt and mud. Our spiritual need contains greed, hate, delusion, grief, confusion, doubt, regret—and above all, self-judgment. This is not pretty stuff, and there is no neat and orderly way to process it into the gold of enlightenment. By hook or by crook, we have to get it out of that mountain and into the furnace. It may be that we break some tools in the process—and perhaps break our skulls bashing around in dark mineshafts. But if we keep at it, the ore will make it to the furnace and the fire will do its work.

It is easy to think less of the ore than of the gold that is to be refined out of it. But if we despise the ore, we will not think that it is worthy material to laboriously mine and bring to the furnace. However confused and pained any aspect of our spiritual need may be, we can bring it to that furnace of meditation in faith and confidence. The fire of the Eternal's Compassion and Wisdom makes no judgment about

the ore that is placed in the furnace: it works on everything with the same tireless mercy.

All through my developing spiritual crisis from 1980 to 1987, I kept meditating and training. At times, I was a very messy gold miner. But I kept at it. Looking back at that time, I see the strength of my resolve, and I recognize the purity of intention that imbued it. And I see something much bigger. I see in the whole process, in all the ups and downs, all the twisting and turning, the Hand of the Eternal—mostly unseen by me at the time, yet always present. If this double reality of underlying purity of intention and omnipresent help from the Eternal is true for me, it is true for everyone. We can trust that foundational purity of heart in all other beings, and we can *entrust* all beings that we love to the Compassion and Love of the Eternal.

Following my sange in early 1987 I returned to my temple. I was alone in a way that I had never been alone before. And in contemplative aloneness, precious gold began to trickle from the furnace. This trickle culminated in 1993 in a quiet flood.

Loneliness and Aloneness

I trained in relative solitude for several years. I lived thirty miles from the nearest congregation members and over sixty miles from the house where our Seattle meditation group met each Wednesday evening. I drove up and back once a week, and sometimes travelled to other more distant meditation groups. But I always returned to my little trailer in the woods. I began to build the meditation hall building. Sometimes congregation members would come for a workday on the weekend. But again I was alone at the end of the day.

I had been alone a good deal before I ever became a monk. But this was different because I was in a different place spiritually. Each year for the first three years that I lived in this way, I felt pure loneliness for a few weeks in autumn. There was no despair, no sadness. I did not feel alienated from anyone or anything. It was just loneliness.

After the third year, something else took the place of the loneliness. It seemed as if the loneliness was converting into a quiet sense of *aloneness with the Eternal*. How can I describe this?—It is like having been in the middle of an open field surrounded by broken glass, and then finding one day that I was in a meadow full of lovely flowers and

soft grasses with no broken glass anywhere to be seen. Of course, the change that was quietly happening was within me, not in the world around me. I did not have to understand this change in order to be grateful for it.

Dependent Origination

During my retreat in 1980, it had come up clearly to study the Buddha's teaching of dependent origination (or “dependent arising,” or “conditioned arising”). I had tried to study this teaching at that time, but I quickly saw that I would have to put it on the back burner: I was not yet ready for it.

After the sange in 1987, it came up to look again at dependent origination. I found a good explanation of the teaching, and this time it made perfect sense. The term “dependent origination” is a rather highbrow-sounding term for the Buddha's description of how the wheel of karma/rebirth was set in motion in our past-life inheritance, how we tend to perpetuate it in our life, and how it will continue into future lives if we do not turn the whole process in another direction through correct spiritual training. In other words, the teaching of dependent arising is a detailed explanation of the Buddha's first two Noble Truths: existence is permeated with suffering; and the cause of suffering is craving rooted in ignorance. The way in which this works is shown in twelve successive steps, each of which arises out of (“depends” upon) the previous step. Furthermore, the steps are in one great cycle, so that the last step in the cycle leads to the first step, and so on in a continuing round of birth, confusion, suffering and death until someone pulls the plug on the whole thing.

I wrote a series of articles on dependent origination. We later published these articles as a little book. This book is now available as a pdf file at the website of North Cascades Buddhist Priory. I have put a link to this book at the bottom of this page.

The Buddha's teachings are amazingly simple and clear. But when they are obscured by ignorance, they are impenetrable. Sange literally opened my mind and heart to the Teaching. Note that the third of the “Five Columns” in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is “heaven penetrating earth,” which Rev. Master describes as “the Dharma constantly given to those willing to receive it.” (Plate XLV; Plate XXVII, first edition). What changed in me with the sange?—I let go,

and a greater willingness manifested. Note also that this third column follows the second, which is the Water of the Spirit in Its “cleansing” mode: sange. It all actually works exactly as Rev. Master describes in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

The Heavenly Heart

In early spring in 1990, I was meditating as usual in my little trailer. Suddenly, I felt the Water of the Spirit go up my back and over my head to the “Third Eye” or “Heavenly Heart” (the middle of the forehead). There was a kind of melting at the Third Eye and movement of the Water of the Spirit around the Third Eye in a circular path like a whirlpool. A deep compassion arose within me. A few days later, I was meditating and I was shown very clearly and dispassionately that, if I kept up my training, I would have the choice at the time of death whether to pick up more karma in order to shepherd it to the help of the Eternal. What happened next I can only describe as an instantaneous upwelling of unconditional willingness. There was no time for deliberation, no time for thought. The upward surge of willingness arose within my body and mind, but I could never say that it was “mine”—it just *was*. And yet it was not *not* my willingness. It was something much greater than me, and yet still it was my instantaneous choice.

Later in the spring I went down to Shasta Abbey for the monastic retreat. I had written Rev. Master a letter about this experience, and she talked with me about it while I was there. She said, “Yes, that's just how it happens.” Rev. Master was very precise and careful in speaking of such important matters. Note that she did not say, “Yes that's how it happened to me.” or “Yes, that's how it happens to everyone.” All I know for sure is that this is how it happened *to me*.

Shortly after my kensho in 1977, I began to have a quiet, but very firm, wish to formally take the Bodhisattva vows. I knew almost nothing about the Bodhisattva vows. I asked Rev. Master if I could take the vows. She told me to read some different forms of the vows. Then she made me wait a few months. She knew—as I now know—what a serious matter the taking of these vows is. She needed to be sure that I was certain about doing it, because she knew far better than I what I was in for if I really took them. When I did take them, it was in the Founder's shrine at Shasta Abbey. Rev. Master would not administer

the vows, but she was there as witness. She knew that this is a matter between oneself and the Eternal, and that one will be taken at one's word.

The way I think of my choice to take the vows in 1977 is, "I took the Bodhisattva vows." The way I think of what happened in 1990 is, "The Bodhisattva vows took *me*."

Ever since I left Shasta Abbey in 1985, I have retaken the Bodhisattva vows on the first and fifteenth of each month. I have always viewed the taking of these vows as being entirely between an individual and the Eternal. I would no more administer them to another person than Rev. Master would administer them to me, though I am willing to witness the taking of the vows if I believe that the trainee is truly ready to take them.

The experience that I have described here can be compared with that described by Rev. Master in the text accompanying Plate XXX of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (Plate XVII of the second edition). There are obvious differences. In general, when the Heavenly Heart opens, and in whatever manner one experiences this opening, one is going to be shown something very important.

The Great Circulation

After experiencing the opening of the Heavenly Heart, I began to have a recurring vision when I meditated. The vision was of a circulating stream of golden light.

It might be good to take a moment and say something about my own experience of visions. My general view of visions is expressed in the essay on visions in Part I of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom-Reflections*. I have put a link to that essay at the bottom of this page.

"Visions" is a general term applying to any special use made by the Eternal of the senses for delivering teaching. (There is another kind of vision as well. I discuss it in the above-mentioned essay, "On Visions," and will not go into it now.) I have already described some of the "auditory visions" that I have experienced. I have also experienced visual visions, and even olfactory "visions." When Rev. Master first spoke to us about the visions that are pictured in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, I had, as far as I knew, no experiential context for what she was saying. For a long time I thought I was "the kind of

person who does not have visions.” And here is the strange thing about that: I continued to think this even after I experienced genuine visions. This was my self-doubt: my “visions” *might* just be my imagination. I did not stop to think that I was never *trying* to have visions, and did not particularly care about them one way or the other, so that if I had one, there was probably something to it. Even with this element of confusion, however, I had an instinct that told me that what mattered, as Rev. Master is careful to point out in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, is the *teaching* being conveyed by the vision, not the form of the vision itself, nor, for that matter, the clarity or vagueness of the experience.

I have had visions when I was awake, and I have had dreams that I believe to be genuine visions. The latter have a certain indefinable “extra dimension of reality” quality and, usually, a clear teaching. I think the distinction between waking consciousness and sleeping consciousness (or seeming lack of consciousness) is another of those suspiciously superficial distinctions that do not hold up under close scrutiny. For example I have been aware in my sleep that I was meditating. At any rate, I am not going to try to second-guess the Eternal, and whether a teaching is given when one is awake or asleep seems to me a completely irrelevant concern: again, what matters is the teaching, not its vehicle.

Rev. Master treated the experiencing of genuine visions by herself or anyone else as being completely normal, *and* she never thought that *not* experiencing visions is indicative of a lack of genuine spirituality. She presumed—and I wholeheartedly agree with her in this—that the Eternal provides all of us with what we need.—And is it not a wonderful world in which there can be so much variety of experience? I have always found that taking true teaching to heart and applying it in my life is difficult enough without adding in worries and doubts about the form—or lack of form—in which the teaching has been conveyed. Visions do not make people saints; the absence of visions does not prevent people from training deeply.

A vision is not necessarily self-explanatory. While I understood at the time of experiencing this recurring vision that the ring of circulating light represented the circulation of the Water of the Spirit, I am no expert on the subject. I know that I have only ever glimpsed the “tip of

the iceberg.” Nonetheless, I would like to try to give some sense of the “Great Circulation:”

It is the circulation of the Love and Wisdom of the Eternal in our body and mind—always working for our true spiritual good.

It is the pathway of our cry for help rising to the Eternal and the healing Compassion of the Eternal descending to our need.

It is the stream of Compassion that carries the raw material of enlightenment (greed, hate and delusion) round and round in the cosmic “washing machine,” accomplishing the work of conversion.

It is the longing love that rises to the Eternal and the “peace that passes all understanding” that returns to the hara.

It is the pathway of bodhisattvic merit that picks up spiritual need and brings it to the help of the Eternal.

It is the “forward process” of the making of suffering and the “return process” of the cessation of suffering in one great cosmic cycle of incomprehensible Compassion.

It is the “going in” to take refuge in the Eternal in pure meditation and the “going out” to follow the Eternal through all the twisting and turning of daily life.

It is getting on the bull, riding the bull, falling off the bull, being trampled by the bull, getting back on the bull, riding the pacified bull, and rider and bull vanishing into Immaculacy.

It is endless training, endless following the Eternal, endless bowing, endless willingness.

It is Love beyond our wildest dreams.

The Flame of Love

The experience described above ushered in another period of retreat lasting a few months. And for the next three years I would be in and out of retreat even while I continued to build the temple, take disciples and travel to meditation groups. Within the first year, I began to experience strong devotional feelings directed, first, toward Avalokiteswara Bodhisattva, and then toward Amitabha Buddha.

I tend to think of the cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as representing the Compassion and Wisdom of the Eternal. To millions of Buddhists, Avalokiteswara (Kwan-yin, Kanzeon) represents tender Compassion and Mercy for millions of Buddhists. Amitabha Buddha represents saving Compassion and Benevolence. I have always thought that I must have inherited the karma of someone to whom this Bodhisattva and Buddha were very precious. For several months, my meditation and daily life were full of love for, and adoration of, this Bodhisattva and Buddha. And then the strength of this devotional focus gradually diminished.

Please note that I do not say that the cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are only “symbols.” At the same time, I have no personal experience of a separate Pure Land. I like the Sixth Zen Patriarch's explanation that the Pure Land is the pure mind and heart of the trainee. But I am not going to say that a separate Pure Land does not exist: I do not know.

Aloneness—aloneness *with* the Eternal—was a recurrent theme in my training during these years. Sometimes the emphasis was on the “aloneness,” sometimes on the “*with* the Eternal,” sometimes it was all in balance. Looking back many years later, it seems as if I was being prepared for my master's death.

In 1993 came the culmination of what I now look on as the most peaceful years of my life. Again I was in retreat. One day in meditation I experienced the upwelling of the Water of the Spirit to the crown of the head and an opening at the crown of the head. It felt as if a ring of flame or electricity was on the crown of my head, surrounding the place that had opened. It was not just open, but open *to* the Eternal in quiet love, adoration, worship, reverence, gratitude. I think of this point at the crown of the head as the “Gate of Immaculacy.” I believe I have heard Rev. Master refer to it as the “Heavenly Gate.”

The reader can compare my description of the “ring of flame” with Rev. Master's descriptions of the “lotus blossom upon my head” in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* (e.g. Plate XLIV [Plate XXVII in the first edition]). Again, each person experiences these things in his or her own way—and what is happening spiritually is *essentially* the same for everyone.

During this retreat I experienced what I knew at the time, and have known ever since, to be *perfect* contentment. So often in the year following her great kensho in 1976-77, Rev. Master would say, “It is *enough* for me to know the Lord of the House.” And often she would answer a question with, “Just *long* for the Lord of the House.” When all of our longing coalesces into the quiet flame of longing love for the Eternal, then indeed does the Treasure House open naturally, and then indeed is it *enough* to know the Lord of the House.

The experience of perfection of any kind is both an end and a new beginning. I had no illusion at the time that I experienced this perfect contentment that I would always *feel* such contentment. The contentment that I knew during that retreat never was just a feeling, and it never was my creation. It never belonged to me: I was allowed to experience it. It is an aspect of the Eternal.

Chapter 5

The Great Circulation in a Day

*The sound of the valley stream is his great Voice.
The colors of the mountains are His Pure Body.
In the night I have heard the eighty-four thousand
hymns,—
But how can I explain it in the morning?*

—enlightenment poem of Sotoba, a lay trainee

Introduction

My retreat in 1980 introduced me to my own natural contemplative rhythm. I had been training for seven years as a monk. Now I was of necessity having to learn to train completely outside the normal monastic schedule. I had to trust my own instinct as to what is good to do at any particular time. I was regularly drawn into deep meditation and then brought back out of it. I was regularly drawn to reflect upon my life. And, of course, the needs of the body have their own rhythms. The same principle of natural contemplative rhythm applies in ordinary daily training outside of the context of a retreat.

I will attempt to describe my natural cycle of meditation and activity, and show something of how it helps the work of conversion. Again, I use my own training as an example because it is what I *can* use. This is not intended in any way to be a prescription for the training of others. I do not assume that because a particular pattern has worked for me, it will work for everyone—or, indeed, *anyone*—else. In my own temple, we follow the normal daily schedule of meditation, ceremonial, work, etc. that I was trained with when I was a young monk. This schedule works well for most people suited to our way of training: it is moderate and balanced. For both monastic and lay trainees, I recommend beginning training with a strong emphasis on morning and evening meditation (perhaps morning *or* evening meditation for the new lay trainee). Like any responsible Buddhist teacher, I also strongly recommend training under the guidance of a qualified teacher, and meditating and training regularly with others who are doing the same practice and following the same teaching. Finally, I cannot overemphasize the importance of studying the

Precepts and taking them to heart. These are the foundations of correct training, and they make it possible to find one's own natural contemplative rhythm.

Finally, I would like to caution those who would look for shortcuts. Establishing a solid foundation of training takes years. There are no shortcuts.

Morning of the Contemplative Day

Rev. Master sometimes observed that the real day of training begins in late afternoon or early evening as the more active part of the day comes to a close. I found this to be true for me during my retreat in 1980, and it has been true ever since. My training day begins after supper with an informal period of contemplation done in “corpse pose”—that is, lying down. This is usually my deepest meditation of the day. It happens quite naturally and effortlessly. This time of relaxed contemplation is the perfect prelude to the evening meditation in the meditation hall with others. When we do not have formal meditation in the evening, the earlier contemplation is still complete in itself.

There are times when I have not been able to do this early-evening meditation. I am always very aware that when I miss it I am missing something important, and that if it were to continue to happen I would become depleted spiritually. This relaxed contemplation sets up the spiritual field of my body and mind for the night to come. It is as if the furnace of meditation in which the next lot of ore is to be refined is getting fired up during this meditation.

Ore Refining

During my retreat in the summer of 1980, I began to wake up and meditate in the middle of the night. I have done this somewhat irregularly ever since. There have been periods of up to a few weeks at a time when it has not happened, usually when I have been deeply fatigued. But most nights for the last thirty-five years I have done this midnight meditation.

Most of the time, the duration of this meditation is short—sometimes only a few minutes. I just sit up in bed and meditate, usually kneeling on my mattress. I do not light candles or turn on lights. For many

years I sat on my mattress in the middle of the night with a scattered, foggy mind. But I had learned not to judge the quality (or seeming lack of it) of meditation. I always trust that meditation is accomplishing good: that is enough.

This midnight meditation has been very helpful to me, probably mostly in ways I cannot imagine. I do not know whether it is true for everyone, but for me the hours between about midnight and 4 or 5 am seem to be a time when karmic tensions rise to the surface. I think that when they get right up to the surface I wake up. I have found that when this happens, it is very hard to go back to sleep unless I sit up and meditate for awhile. But if I do the meditation, then when I lie down again I usually fall asleep right away.

I think of this night meditation as a small investment of effort that yields big returns in refining the raw material—the “ore”—of enlightenment. Over many years, my mind has very gradually become less scattered and foggy during this meditation—an unexpected bonus.

There is another level from which I view and treasure this meditation: there is the whole expanse of the night in which to *be* with the Eternal. For years I sat in the night with a scattered, foggy mind, but with a glad heart.

Afternoon of the Contemplative Day

The time of morning meditation is late afternoon in the spiritual day that I am describing. Morning meditation is completing the spiritual work of the night. It is as if the gold refined from the ore is being poured into ingots. I view the morning expression of faith and gratitude in some form of morning service as being as important in my training as morning meditation. The morning chanting of scriptures, bowing and offering of merit mark the transition from the refining of the gold to putting it to use for the good of all beings in the activities of the day.

The gold is not mined and refined in order to be hoarded, but to be used with compassion and generosity of spirit. The hours between morning service and the midday meal are the main time of work. This is where the gold gets reinvested in the equipment and labor of mining. It is important to balance the practice of meditation with the practice of generosity. We receive innumerable benefits from the

Eternal through opening our hearts in meditation. In our daily work we have the opportunity to express gratitude to the Eternal through service to living beings who, after all, are *of* the Eternal. This is another aspect of the Great Circulation. I have always loved Great Master Dogen's observation, "It is an act of charity [generosity] to build a ferry or a bridge and all forms of industry are charity if they benefit others." Or, as a verse in the Bible expresses it, "Do everything as unto the Lord."

Night of the Contemplative Day

The afternoon is the night of the contemplative day. Just as the last hours of night anticipate the dawn, so the last hours of the day anticipate the drawing within in evening meditation.

I try to do quieter work in the afternoon. It is as if the mining equipment has been packed away and the ore is being transported to the furnace where it will be refined into gold.

Going In and Out

Meditation and activity alternate in this continual cycle. Meditation is the "going in"; activity is the "going out." This is like a spiritual inhalation and exhalation. When the mind and heart of meditation is brought into activity, this is called "mindfulness." When the mind and heart of selfless giving are brought into meditation, this is called "offering up." Thus there is "stillness in activity" and "activity in stillness."

I wrote a poem in the early 1990's about the "going in" side of this continual cycle, especially as it is expressed in meditating in the meditation hall with fellow trainees. It is entitled "Lord of our Hearts." There is a link to the Poems at the bottom of this page.

Chapter 6

Two Arrows in Mid-Air that Meet

*When the heart does not pick and choose, the
Unborn takes the lead.
When we no longer wander in confusion, our
karmic inheritance will know peace.*

*Success and failure, close by and far away—
These will no longer be opposites.*

Pre-leap and Post-leap Jitters

In the course of training, we make many leaps of faith. Most do not seem like very big leaps, though appearances can be deceptive. The bigger leaps are fewer in number. All leaps of faith are leaps into the unknown. Not surprisingly, I have always experienced the jitters before a leap. But there are post-leap jitters too. The pre-leap jitters can be expressed as, “What am I in for?” The post-leap jitters can be expressed as, “What have I got myself into?”

Training/enlightenment is a continual process. In this process, the pre-leap jitters are also post-leap jitters. Looking back on my training, if I focus upon one leap, such as that taken in the first kensho, I can see that there was apprehension (to say the least) leading up to it; and then there were years of struggle with the implications of the step that had been taken. This same post-kensho struggle is the pre-”sange of 1987” struggle, and so on.

Sometimes I have experienced these jitters as intense fear. But more often the jitters have had the quieter character of being “disturbed by the Truth”—one senses more is needed, more is to come, and one does not know exactly what that “more” is. The contemplative life does not leave much room for complacency.

I have not always known that I had the jitters before or after a leap: sometimes it only becomes clear in retrospect. But if I look back carefully and in detail at the course of my training, I can usually identify the thread of the jitters running and interweaving with other threads of experience. I have described in Chapter IV of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life” the experience in which I was shown that, if I kept up my training, I would have the option at the time of death of picking up more karma for conversion. I have also described the response of unconditional willingness that instantaneously arose within me. (See “The Heavenly Heart in Chapter IV.) I had a very quiet case of the jitters for the next five years after I took this leap.

Five Years Cooking a Question

From 1990 to 1995, I lived and trained with a question as my constant companion, though the question spent most of the time on the “back burner” of awareness. This was the question: If I am offered the choice at the time of death of picking up more karma to shepherd back to the Eternal, on what basis would I make the decision?

This question was of the utmost importance to me, and I had no idea what the answer might be. All the time I lived with this question, I could see that it was based on some kind of misconception. For example, I could see that if there is no separate self that undergoes the process of death and rebirth, then whatever “I” might decide at the time of death, “I” would not be the one who had to experience the consequences of my choice. This thought gave me no help whatsoever. I was stuck with a quiet worry about how I would make what seemed—and *seems*—to me to be a critically important decision with grave consequences (never mind for *whom!*).

So I went about my daily life, my daily training, with this question always hovering in the background. I never doubted what I had been shown about the choice that I might be offered at the time of death; I never doubted the willingness that had surged up within me: I just did not understand something very basic. And I knew that one day I would need to understand it. In the meantime, I was going through a wonderful time in my spiritual life, and I was never deeply distressed by my constant companion. It was a very quiet case of the jitters.

There are two aspects of ignorance. The one that gets us into big trouble is the aspect of “willful ignoring” of our True Nature. There is also the ignorance that is very simply *just not getting it*. The willful act of ignoring makes us more blind to the Eternal and to the law of karma. This blindness is the *just not getting it*, and out of this blindness we more readily do the willful act of ignoring. So my simple question, which exhibited the “just not getting it” type of ignorance, had considerable momentum of dark, willful ignoring behind it. This makes for a real spiritual question—perhaps a question that will only ever have urgency for one person. But if you are that person, you need help.

I had told Rev. Master about the experience that gave rise to my question shortly after it happened, but I did not voice the question. In

fact, I never came right out with the question. I had said “Yes!” in unconditional willingness, and although I was confused about what that implied, my allegiance was to that “Yes!” I trusted that somehow there *must* be a way to make the decision when the time came to make it. So even while I lived with the question, I *knew* that the Eternal would help me find the answer one day. So I let the question “cook” in my meditation and training for four years.

The Answer

There came a time when the question was fully cooked. The way I remember events unfolding is as follows: I wrote Rev. Master a letter in which I somehow managed to express my puzzlement without actually asking the question outright. I received no response. Several months later (I think it was in the first half of 1995), I was visiting Rev. Master at Shasta Abbey. I again wrote her a note without, again, coming out with the question directly. Toward the end of this visit, Rev. Master invited me down to her office for a cup of tea. I took a seat and the chaplain who was attending Rev. Master at the time discreetly vanished. Rev. Master just chatted for a while. I do not remember what we spoke about. After a few minutes, Rev. Master paused. She mentioned my note. She looked right at me and said, “The leaf goes where the wind blows and does not disobey the wind.”—I felt a very subtle and quiet movement within my hara. I knew that my question had been fully answered. The arrow of the answer had hit the arrow of the question head-on.

Leaf and Wind

In the metaphor of leaf and wind, the wind represents the Will of the Eternal and the leaf represents our personal will. When our personal will is not in harmony with the Will of the Eternal, we create suffering. Yet all the while, our personal will—indeed, all that we are—is *of* the Eternal: “I am not the Eternal, and there is nothing in me that is not *of* the Eternal.” And what is the “Will of the Eternal?” Rev. Master always emphasized that the Precepts describe the Will of the Eternal. In other words, to follow the Precepts truly is to follow the Will of the Eternal.

If this is so, there must be more to the Precepts than meets the eye.— Either that, or there is less to the Will of the Eternal than it seems there *has* to be. I had read Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts

so many times that I had it pretty well down in memory. Yet the essential point of that Commentary had always eluded me. This was not due to any lack of clarity in Rev. Master's explanation. Something in me was just not yet ready to understand the Precepts at the level at which Rev. Master was explaining them.

The choice at the time of death whether or not to pick up more karma and shepherd it back to the help of the Eternal does not seem at first to be a Preceptual choice. It does not have to do with refraining from killing, stealing, lying, etc. Yet it is indeed a Preceptual choice if we understand the Precepts as a description of a life lived in harmony with the Eternal. This way of viewing the Precepts emphasizes *Preceptual Truth*—the true *Spirit* of the Precepts. This is the focus of Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts. (The Commentary makes up most of the text accompanying Plate XII [Plate VIII in the first edition] of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. It is also available on the website of North Cascades Buddhist Priory: [Click here to go to this website. Then click on “The Precepts” in the menu on the left.](#))

What was I missing?—There was another leap that I needed to take so that the deeper causes of my ignorance could receive the help of the Eternal. When this happened in 1998, the door of the Precepts swung open. I will be discussing this period in my training in a later Chapter of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.”

Chapter 7 Parinirvana

*To be with the Cosmic Buddha and to play in the
Ocean of Nirvana—
How rare is the wonderful door of the Dharma
and
The Transmission of the early Buddhist Ancestors!*
...
*When your heart becomes the same as the world
of Immaculacy,
It will manifest the laws of Immaculacy
And realize the True Body of Immaculacy
Which is beyond existence and non-existence.*

The True Heart of Ancient Buddhas

In the winter of 1996 I visited Rev. Master at Shasta Abbey. During this visit, I took the opportunity one time when we were alone in her office to say, “I want to thank you for all you have done for me.” Rev. Master simply replied, “You did it all yourself, friend.”

It is true that Rev. Master could not do my training for me, and it never would have occurred to her to try. *And* for me, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett *was, is and will be* the living Buddha given to me by the Eternal to guide me into harmony with Itself. But the Eternal did not force Rev. Master to accept me as her disciple, and she was not forced to keep me as her disciple and continue to help me for over twenty years. Sometimes this help came as “the voice of thunder,” sometimes as great tenderness, sometimes as clear teaching delivered at precisely the right moment—but most often it came as the example of another human being accepting her own humanity and the humanity of other people, and resolutely doing her own training.

Another time, I had asked Rev. Master how I could show my gratitude—and I meant my gratitude to her in particular. She replied, “There is only one way—to pass It on.” Here “It” means the Transmission that has flowed through all the Buddhas and Ancestors down to Rev. Master, and on to—and through—her disciples and grand-disciples.

Merit from a Past Life

Many years ago I had a memory of a single scene from a past life. In this scene, a young monk—probably no more than twenty years of age—was walking beside an old, blind monk. The young monk was on the left side of the old monk and was supporting and guiding him with great tenderness. I was shown that I had inherited the karma of the young monk, and that Rev. Master had inherited the karma of the old monk.

When I think of all the help that Rev. Master gave me, my mind goes back to that memory of the two monks. Master Enan said, “The fact that we are in this boat [of training together] is due entirely to our good deeds in past lives; that we are blessed with the opportunity of spending the training period together in the same monastery is equally due to the same cause.”—To which I would add, “The fact that

we are able to train together as master and disciple is due to the same cause, and is the greatest blessing of all.”

The Dewdrop Slips into the Shining Sea

On the morning of November 6, 1996, I was in a local town doing errands. As I went about my business, some words ran through my mind over and over again: “That which we truly are is not affected by birth and death.” The Eternal really does look after us! Shortly after I returned to the temple, I received a phone call telling me that Rev. Master had just died.

As I said in the Introduction to these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life,” this narrative has a very limited focus. I have not described the decline in Rev. Master's health in her last years. I knew she was deeply exhausted because she told me so—factually and without complaint—and because I have eyes and could see how hard it was. I could also glimpse something of the depth and power of the meditation that sustained her and enabled her to continue to be the spiritual locomotive chugging up the track pulling so many people along with her. My immediate reaction upon hearing of my master's death was to say, “Great!”—because I knew that she was fully ready to go, and because if ever a human being needed, and had earned, a good rest, it was Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. The love of a spiritual child clings to the beloved; the love of a spiritual adult lets go of the beloved. *And*, being complex beings, we can let go and still grieve.

When I was meditating in the Founder's Shrine at Shasta Abbey with Rev. Master's body a day or two after her death, I was shown that at the time of my own death she would be there to greet me. I do not think of Rev. Master as being in any way separate from the Eternal. I do not try to understand any of this intellectually. I just trust it.

I also believe that Rev. Master was so much in oneness with the Eternal at the time of death, that she just dissolved into the Great Immaculacy, releasing a great shower of merit that continues to bless my life and that of all beings. In Buddhism, this is called “Parinirvana”—full, final cessation of suffering and reunion with the Unborn.

I wrote a poem shortly after Rev. Master's Parinirvana. It is called [“The Wind Bell”](#) and is the third poem in [Appendix II](#).

Chapter 8

The Promise

Do not follow thoughts of things that have already passed; do not welcome thoughts of things that are still to come; and do not cherish thoughts of things that concern right now. There is no better way to the Truth than to defend the pure and increase the clear. You must wish to renounce the world—then the merit of meditation has no equal.

Deeper Implications of Discipleship

While my master's death did not come as a shock, it was nonetheless a great catalyst in my spiritual life. I think I can best characterize the year and a half that followed my master's death as a time during which the deeper implications of my discipleship began to dawn within me. Many years later, I still have a sense of wonder at the compassion of the process that I was undergoing—a process of which I was mostly unaware in its early stages.

Having been a monk most of my life, I was used to experiencing unusual physical, mental and emotional phenomena. I have always trusted that only good can come of meditating and training, even if difficulty and pain are encountered along the way. And so when I began to be aware several months after Rev. Master's death that my brain was shutting off now and then for very short periods of time, I was not worried. When it happened, it was somewhat like going to sleep for a fraction of a second. But it was different from going to sleep in a way that I cannot describe. I do not think that it happened more when I was tired than when I was not.

I now know that these occasional episodes of brain shut-off were leading to a much more prolonged shutting off of the brain that I will describe in Chapter IX of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.” For those who encounter this phenomenon, I strongly recommend listening to and following your spiritual intuition about what is *good* to do—or *not good* to do. In the summer of 1997, seven or eight months after Rev. Master's death, I had an accident in the temple

pickup because I was driving and my brain shut off. Fortunately, no other vehicle was involved and no one was hurt, but it was a very close call and the truck was wrecked. The truck was overdue for permanent retirement anyway, but there are more responsible ways to dispose of an old vehicle than wrecking it on the freeway.

Before I set out, I was given a very clear intuitive warning that I should not drive that day. I ignored the warning. The lesson that I draw from this experience is that I need to obey the Eternal when the Eternal sends me a clear message. If Rev. Master had been alive and had told me not to drive that morning, I would have obeyed her. Rev. Master always taught, “The master is not the Eternal, *and* the master *represents* the Eternal for the disciple.” Well, now my human master was dead. The question right in front of me was, “Are you going to listen to, and follow, the Eternal the way you learned to listen to, and follow, your human master?” This was what I longed to do. And I needed help.

Preparing the Ground

In September, 1997, ten months after Rev. Master's death, I was again drawn into retreat for about six weeks. Here are some excerpts from a diary that I kept during this retreat. The excerpts are not in order by date:

The past week and a half has been the deepest self-examination of my life motivated by my need to know within myself how I am to fulfill the responsibility of my discipleship to Rev. Master and to the Unborn—how I am to be true to this discipleship.

In a dream I was sitting close to Rev. Master. Rev. Master said to me that one day there will be a whole garden of flowers growing above the head where first there is one lotus blossom. She said that one must help others walk in that garden. She said that the important thing is the bringing together of our karma and the Buddha Nature.

I pray that I may always warm myself at the radiant sun of the Unborn. However dark and gloomy it

may become, I can withdraw within and warm myself at the burner [of the hara] within which glow the embers of that Love beyond comprehension.

I feel that I made an implicit promise to Rev. Master that I would train in a particular direction in this lifetime. The direction is that of the reharmonization of my karma with the Eternal. I must always ask for help in doing this.

This retreat prepared the spiritual ground for the much longer retreat into which I was catapulted in the spring of 1998. In these excerpts from my diary I see a very sincere and very powerful wish to realize the promise inherent in true discipleship. I had no idea when I wrote these entries in my diary of the intensity and majestic scale of the experience that was now hovering on the horizon. A sincere prayer is always heard and answered. A sincere wish is a sincere prayer.

Chapter 9

Surrender

When we allow our senses to become absolutely still, the Heart of Heaven—the Buddha Nature—will be visible; It naturally contains the Divine Light which is exquisite.

The Iron Ball

At the time of Rev. Master's death, the monastic community of North Cascades Buddhist Priory consisted of myself and two disciples. Our temple had a small lay congregation, and in addition I was travelling periodically to several other meditation groups scattered around the Pacific Northwest. It was an all-out effort.

After Rev. Master's death the monastic community of our temple began to grow. Rev. Master Mokushin Hart, who is now Dean of the Serene Reflection Dharma Association, came to live and train here in the fall of 1997. Our monastic community and lay congregation have benefited from her teaching and training ever since.

Monastic life and training is often no less complex than life and training in the world. There are always problems and questions on my meditative “back burner.” In the last months of 1997 and the first half of 1998, one problem seemed particularly significant, and at times I was very worried. I meditated with it, and it gave me a good spiritual work-out.

Sometimes we are faced with a problem that we have not created, but which somehow has landed in our lap. We may be given insight into the past-life origins of such a problem. But in the end what really matters is how we train with the problem *today*.

For several months I trained with the problem. It was one of those “iron balls that cannot be swallowed or spit out.” In this classic spiritual dilemma, all conditions have to ripen in order for the solution to manifest naturally. Meditation and the Precepts must be given *equal* emphasis in training in order for the *internal* (spiritual) conditions to ripen fully. The Eternal will do all the heavy lifting in the

preparation of both internal and external conditions if we follow Its lead and do not interfere with the process by acting willfully. Internal and external conditions have to come into readiness at just the right moment: then timing is *everything*.

This process is far too complex to ever be fathomed intellectually. We have to *trust* with our whole being. Intuition can guide us through a darkness that is completely impenetrable to the intellect. By following genuine spiritual intuition, we can take the right step at the right time.

Countdown to Blast-Off

In 1997, we prepared to construct a new building that would contain some private rooms for monks as well as kitchen, offices, library and a second, smaller, meditation hall for formal monastic meals. Using a small bandsaw sawmill, I worked for three months in the spring of 1998 making lumber for our new building from trees that we had cut down on and around the building site. I jokingly referred to this as “the ninety days of pain.” In reality, the work was not painful, and it was the perfect follow-up to the meditation retreat that I have briefly described in Chapter VIII of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.” The work was a way to express gratitude. There are many ways of bowing, and I needed to do a lot of bowing.

At the beginning of April, Rev. Master Mokugen Kublicki came to our temple for an extended stay. She went into retreat as soon as she arrived. Rev. Master Mokugen's retreat would be one of the great blessings in the life of our temple and in my life.

In the beginning of May I gave Dharma Transmission to two monastic disciples, Rev. Basil Singer and Rev. Hector van der Marel, both of whom are now masters with their own temples. Now if anything happened to me, there were Transmitted disciples who could assist Rev. Master Mokushin in looking after the younger trainees in the temple and the congregation.

On May 21, I spoke with Rev. Master Mokugen about the problem that had been troubling me. Rev. Master Mokugen emphasized the importance of generosity of spirit. Her teaching helped me begin to fully release my worry into the hands of the Eternal.

My diary entry for the next day, May 22, reads as follows:

“Last night I awoke in the middle of the night and meditated. From somewhere deep inside me I asked for help. . . . It feels as if there is a deep spiraling downwards and inwards into a great darkness. I know *He* is there. It is my choice now. I cannot go to Him wearing the clothes of self. I can only go naked. And it is time for me to choose. . . . I have the strong sense that all my effort in the end cannot do what I need to do. It [the Help of the Eternal] has to be *given*. I can accept It, but I cannot get It by striving for It. It is time to give up the fight.”

The whole day of May 22 I experienced pure terror. In my first years as a monk, I had experienced much fear, and the training of that time stood me in good stead now. Throughout the day my mind was intensely concentrated in meditation, though I was doing ordinary daily activities.

The Divine Light

On the morning of May 23 I went to the meditation hall and did bows. The following is part of a diary entry for that day:

“[After the bows] I felt as if I were standing on the edge of a great darkness fringed with light. I felt that there was a hard shell of self and a lovely brightness, and I felt my feelings jumping between the two. I felt the shell beginning to dissolve at its edges. I knew that I was letting go of something held back. . . . I looked up, not down. My face and body began to be infused with the “electric” feeling of the Water of the Spirit working on a major block. It grew steadily stronger until my whole body was filled with It. I knew I was being reclaimed by the Eternal. Light and darkness were completely interfused. I made *gassho* [placed the hands together as in prayer] and said quietly, “I love You, I love You.” I felt myself in the Great Current of the Light of the Unborn, completely owned by It.”

I have always thought of this as “surrender” to the Eternal. It opened my body and mind to the Help of the Eternal at a new level, as will be seen in coming Sections of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.”

Chapter 10

Rules of the Game

A pacified heart and a truthful body lead to the Real, the Still, the Unborn.

Shut-Off

With the spiritual surrender that I have described in Chapter IX of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life” I entered a retreat of indescribable intensity.

From the moment of that surrender my brain turned off, and it did not turn back on for several months. This is not to say that I did not have thoughts. Nonetheless, my brain would only function in certain ways and for certain purposes.

During this retreat my brain would work for receiving teaching. It would work for contemplating—not analyzing—the teaching given. It would work for reviewing and contemplating—not analyzing—the karmic history that unfolded before me.

My brain continued to function normally in some daily activities, but not in others. Anything requiring analysis or the simplest mechanical skill—areas in which I am reasonably competent—became extremely difficult and acutely distressing. Normal daily activities that did not involve figuring anything out were no problem—as long as they were done when it was *good* to do them. Most of the night and much of the day was occupied with deep meditation.

Rev. Master said that this “shutting off” happened to her brain in 1976. She also said that when her brain turned back on several months after she first went into retreat, it picked up exactly where it had left off.

The purpose of this shutting off of the brain is not hard to see. The surrender that I have described turns the controls of body and mind fully over to the Eternal so that a spiritual “100,000 mile rebuild” can take place. The brain is like the computer of the vehicle that is being rebuilt. The brain needs to be re-programmed. And the effort and energy that might normally be divided among many jobs and a

number of interests has to be concentrated in meditation and then used, when it is *good*, for contemplation of teaching given by the Eternal.

The Line-Up

Imagine a mechanical pinball machine. Down at the player's end of the machine is a channel or tube containing a number of little balls in a line. One ball at a time comes into alignment with a spring loaded rod (the plunger). The player pulls the plunger back, compressing the spring, and then lets go. The plunger drives the ball up near the top of the playfield, and it then bounces around as the player tries to guide it by means of flippers to where it will make lots of points. When one ball has disappeared down a hole or otherwise gone out of play, the next one in line feeds into position so that it can go on a similar adventure.

The retreat that I began on May 23, 1998 can be thought of as “spiritual pinballs.” Each ball is a lump of spiritual need. The “player” pulling the plunger and controlling the ball as it comes home to the Eternal is the Eternal.—The Eternal is the One in charge of the process. The playfield in which each ball of spiritual need bumps, shoots, and bangs around is the body and mind of the trainee. The purpose of the ball being fired up the playfield, and then all the bumping around as it works its way down the playfield, is the cleansing and conversion of karma. The name of the Game is “Cosmic Compassion.”

The evening of May 23, the day of surrender, I was made aware of the line-up of spiritual need. I wrote in my diary, “It seems that being reclaimed by the Eternal [in surrender] has beckoned all my karma and it is lining up for help.” This is the same process that we see in the first half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

The spiritual darkness that is experienced in this process is very intense, as is very evident in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.— Why is this so?—Because the spiritual need is so full of despair—despairing fear, desperate longing, and, above all, desperate grief. Each time a “ball” of need gets shot up the “playfield” of body and mind, a flood of pure feeling is released into consciousness. Feeling is the reaper of karma. And feeling is the ultimate messenger that delivers the

teaching about the causes of suffering. This is where one learns in detail that the law of karma is inexorable.

The spiritual light that is experienced in this process is also very intense. When deep spiritual need finds its way to the Help of the Eternal, there is great joy and gratitude. Light and dark alternate as the sequence of steps in walking.

Two Rules

During the first week of this retreat I was given the basic rules of the game. Each rule was taught through the vehicle of a past-life memory.

Rule One: No matter how horrific a person's actions may be, there is always a pure intention at their root.

The past-life memory in which this teaching was conveyed was that of an American Indian man who murdered white women. He reasoned that women bear the children; therefore killing white women would stop the population growth that was fueling the invasion by white settlers of tribal lands and the destruction of the native people and their way of life. And so out of great love for his people, this man did horrific acts. At the time of his death he realized what he had done. This memory, together with the man's deep spiritual pain, unfolded until I saw clearly that the cause of his desperate actions was love that was guided by ignorance rather than wisdom. Then I was shown that this tragedy unfolded within Immaculacy.

Rule Two: Everything—every person, every being, every object every action, every event—is Buddha.

The past-life memory in which this teaching was conveyed was that of a man who was killed by several other men with swords. The setting seemed to be a yurt. I was shown that every aspect of this event—the assailants, their weapons, the terrible injuries, the pain, the dying—is *Buddha*. That which is horrific, ugly and anguished is as much of the Eternal as anything else. There is no “more” and “less” in Infinite Love, and nothing is outside It.

Together, these two Rules provided me with the essential Teaching needed for enduring, accepting, and learning during the retreat.—And for the rest of my life.

Chapter 11

Looking Up

*Everyone shares this fundamental, all-embracing
Light,
Even when the Eternal Lord shines His Light
within our spiritual home
In greatest darkness.*

Safety

I had always hoped that the temple that we—the monastic and lay trainees of North Cascades Buddhist Priory—built would be used by the Eternal for the deepest spiritual work. In the spring of 1998, this was happening with two people in full retreat, one of whom was me, and other trainees in retreat part of the time.

At any one time, the monks who are not in retreat provide a protective buffer between those who are in retreat and the world. This is of the utmost importance, as Rev. Master points out in the Foreword (first edition, “Kenshos”) to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*:

“It is not always good to do deep meditation and training completely by oneself as the reader will discover as he reads on; nor is it wise to be in any place whatsoever where he can be much disturbed. The world is always anxious to push its way in when someone wishes to do something about himself. When advanced spiritual development is reached the world seems to treble and quadruple its efforts to distract and dishearten, as the reader will very soon find out, and it is then that faith in the memory of the first kensho is absolutely vital; one second of doubt, even the possibility of *thinking of the possibility of doubting*, can cause the spirit to despair and death is the result. True meditation is not for cowards; it is hazardous, perilous and magnificent. For this reason a place of absolute peace and quiet is necessary. You will also need a

friend or disciple who is perfectly willing to go to any lengths to keep the world from bothering you.”

In the spring of 1998, Rev. Master Mokushin and my disciples, especially my Transmitted disciples, formed this protective buffer for both Rev. Master Mokugen, who was still in full retreat, and myself. In addition, Rev. Master Mokugen and I were able to provide support for one another in our respective retreats.

Rev. Master's description of the risky nature of deep meditation is not an exaggeration. The spiritual surrender that I have described in Chapter IX precipitates the trainee into a process the intensity of which cannot be comprehended fully until one goes through it oneself. Even under the best of circumstances, there is no guarantee that one will physically survive. Unlike Rev. Master, who went into retreat in 1976 in a state of rapidly deteriorating health, I was in excellent physical condition on the morning of May 23, 1998. Yet during the next few months I lay wide awake most of the night, meditating, while my heart beat so powerfully that it rocked my body for hours on end. I was in full retreat for four months, and thereafter in partial retreat for several more months—and it took five years to regain my physical strength.

I was fully aware that I *could* die in undergoing the process that had been initiated with the surrender of May 23. But I had entrusted my life fully into the hands of the Eternal, and so I was not worried about whether I lived or died. I simply *knew* that if I did die, I would still be safe in the hands of the Eternal. However, it would never have occurred to me to *willfully* try to either extend my life or shorten it. Lack of attachment should never be mistaken for not giving a damn, which is just reckless despair.

Rev. Master emphasizes the grave danger of doubting, and, again, this is no exaggeration: the trainee must *look up as if his life depends on it*. Spiritual surrender initiates a great opening of body and mind, indeed, of the whole of our karmic inheritance, to the Help of the Eternal. Spiritual and physical forces of immense power are set in motion. There is an *upward* direction to this motion—both metaphorically “upward,” and literally upward in the body. To willfully doubt—to willfully look down—would be to suddenly block that upward-flowing spiritual movement. The powerful backwash of

such a willful choice could seriously injure or kill the body, and/or seriously unbalance the mind.

Therefore, while there is a need for the protection provided by other trainees, the greatest need of all is for the protection provided by our own wonderful True Nature. We *can* look up in the midst of the darkest place. Our capacity to look up, as I so often emphasize, is rooted in the Buddha Nature Itself. Indeed, this innate capacity to look up is so important and so indestructible that it is called “the residual Buddha Nature” in the ancient writings on reharmonization with the Eternal. As Rev. Master wrote, “Whether I am well or sick, brightly alive or dying, hold fast to the Lord of the House.”

Hands and Knees

Normally, our sensitivity to both internal and external phenomena is contained within a limited range that allows us to be sensitive enough to what is going on around (and within) our bodies to survive, but not so sensitive that we are rendered incapable of acting. There are conditions under which these limits may be stretched a bit, but, again, survival itself can become very difficult if our sensitivity level is either greatly raised or greatly lowered for an extended period of time.

In order for key aspects of our deepest spiritual need to be able to get the Help of the Eternal, they have to manifest fully in consciousness. And in order for this to happen, we are temporarily made much more sensitive. This heightened sensitivity is another reason why it is so important to have the protection and support of trustworthy people during a deep meditation retreat.

During the period of heightened sensitivity, which can last for several months, the trainee feels “skinless.” Sensations that would normally be overlooked or barely noticed can be felt intensely. As each knot of spiritual need comes to the surface to receive help, sensitivity—pain!—and the general level of spiritual tension both increase. Then even the most experienced meditators can have great difficulty remaining still and focused.

Several of the illustrations in the early chapters (“Plates”) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* show a human being crawling on hands and knees through a dark and forbidding landscape. This is how it *feels* when spiritual need is lined up for the Help of the Eternal. And this is

where one learns that in the darkest place, there *is* a true and enduring Refuge within our own True Nature; in the darkest place, there *is* the capacity to look up; in the darkest place, we *are* safe in the hands of an Infinite Love. This is where pure meditation and pure prayer are the same thing:

*“All, all is defilement, defilement, earth, earth.
Do, do the work within my heart.
Oh great Victor, I hold on, hold on!”*

Chapter 12

Tools for the Journey

*Now you must set to work on the meritorious
practice of meditation
And carefully, diligently and full of attention
Entrust yourself to the Imperial Mother.*

Everything Given

In the course of my retreat in 1998-99, I was shown again and again that everything that I would need would be provided by the Eternal.

And this was how it went. When deep meditation was needed, I was drawn within. When guidance was needed, teaching was given. When human help was needed, human help was available.

In the first days of the retreat, I was given teaching that helped me as I crawled, and then walked, through a great spiritual darkness.

Nothing Matters

The following excerpt from my diary is dated May 26, 1998, the fourth day of the retreat:

“As I meditated mid-morning, a flood of darkness arose. The words came into my mind, “Just be led.” I let the darkness fill me. Then came the words, “Nothing matters.” It was like being slammed against a great wall of polished black marble, and then sliding slowly down it spread-eagled. There was neither love nor lack of love, neither need nor desire. It was very still. Then I knew that He is present even in the darkest place. Gradually the meditation brightened. Yet that dark wall can be returned to; it is the place of complete surrender.”

“Nothing Matters” can also be expressed as “Let go of externals and hold fast to the Eternal.” This is the full religious meaning of meditation. In this experience I was being given the essential principle

of training that I would need to return to again and again in the difficult months to come.

The teaching “Nothing Matters” was given to Rev. Master at the gateway to the most difficult part of her great retreat and kensho in 1976 (Plates V-IX; first edition, Plate V of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*). It was given to me in a different form as I entered the most difficult months of my life. This teaching is not just for Rev. Master or for me. It is for all who need it.

Trust the Process

Later the same morning I was given the experience of the process of conversion that would be happening during the retreat. I believe that I was given such a clear experience of it at this point so that I would understand that even in the darkest and most difficult times, the essential spiritual work is taking place. I would not always see this clearly. I would need to *trust* the process. Here is an excerpt from my diary describing that experience:

“[Later] the Water of the Spirit was thrilling in my body. The words came into my mind, “He is *all* of me.” This was accompanied by deep gratitude. My hara [roughly, the abdominal area] felt full, round and golden. I felt that darkness in the lower hara was rising into the upper hara, changing to golden Light, and then streaming up and out. This afternoon I had peaceful meditations with a sense of lightness and brightness.”

The Zero Reset Button

Whenever I put gas in my car, I press the little button on the odometer that resets the odometer to “zero.” I came to think of the choice to return to the “Nothing Matters,” letting go of worries about externals and looking up in trust, as “pressing the zero reset button.”

No matter how many “spiritual miles” have been logged, at any point we can press the spiritual zero reset button and return to pure meditation.—Stepping into the unknown one step at a time; leaving the past behind, even the past of one moment ago; not looking to the future; not clinging to the present; allowing everything to

dissolve away from moment to moment; looking up, *trusting* the Lord of the House.

Chapter 13

The House of Precious Jewels

*When you reach the gate of the boundless,
primordial Unborn you will understand why It
withdrew Its Source.*

*When you understand that the Eternal is above all
things, you will understand why It conceals Its
Light.*

*When you see the Buddha Nature within a snail
and the Treasurehouse within a stone,
Then you will understand that our house is made
of precious jewels.*

Love and Loss

For four months I walked through the dark plain of love and loss. Again and again I would wonder at the seemingly limitless amount of grief that is stored in body and mind.

And I did not have to go looking for the cause of so much sorrow. As my karmic history, both from this lifetime and from my past-life inheritance, unscrolled before me, I saw exemplified again and again the theme of love and loss. Again and again, in different ways, I was *shown* that the loss that beings believe to be so real and final is *not* the true reality. Again and again I would be drawn to that Place in which there is no self and other, no loss and gain, no coming and going. Excerpts from my diary show something of this. (The following excerpts are in chronological order, but all were written on different days. Sometimes days or weeks separate one excerpt from the next.)

“I meditate, floating out into a Great Stillness. I give myself to It. In Its depth there is a sense of Great Holiness. ‘Koshin’ is just a little piece of flotsam drifting in this vastness. . . . Later I again float out into the deep stillness of meditation. Enlightenment and delusion, gain and loss—these things do not matter. It is *enough* to know the Lord of the House.”

“Now deep, quiet gratitude welled up: *He* had never deserted me. He had been with me all the time. Then I was seeing the Immaculacy of it all: one may dress Immaculacy in shabby clothes and It is still Immaculacy. . . . The Love of the Eternal seemed a Great Circle. Within the Great Circle is the little circle of human love. This Love—both Divine and human—is always with us. The important thing is to avoid being willful with It. When we act out of ignorance—grasping and pushing away—we convince ourselves that we are far from It. In fact, It is *all* of each of us. I know this now in a way that I have never known. I pray that I may train myself in being true to this understanding.”

“The past lives that I have experienced in the last few months were all seen to be *within* the Love of the Eternal—and I felt love for each of them. Everything was seen and felt to be Immaculate. People—beings—do the best they can under difficult circumstances. They become confused and lose sight of their True Refuge. But It never abandons them, nor does It cease to work for their good. The fact that the longing and pain in each of these lives is able to find a resolution in this present human life through spiritual training is proof enough of the Infinite Compassion of the Unborn.”

The Past-Life Inheritance

During this retreat, the darkest, most anguished aspects of my karmic inheritance came to the surface. Some of it was from this present life, but most was from the past-life inheritance. Some of these people—and one animal—were victims. Some were perpetrators. All needed to know the Love of the Eternal. And some had a special need for human compassion, sympathy and, in a few cases, forgiveness.

Some of these memories were rather vague and indistinct. In these cases, I always allow for the fact that I may be mistaken about what I think I am remembering. This is no different from the way my memory functions with regard to many events in this present life. But a number of past-life memories came up vividly and intensely, and I think of these as the “key” past lives. I believe that these particularly

vivid memories accompany the greatest spiritual need. And each of these past lives conveys particularly important teaching.

The darkest of all the memories of this time was of a young man who had murdered and then committed suicide. My first past-life memory many years before had been of his horror at what he had done in murdering another person. Now I experienced the despair that led to his suicide. I had never had suicidal thoughts and yearnings, but as this man's dark despair came to the surface, I felt a powerful urge to kill myself. This lasted for no more than a few hours and then diminished. As with a number of other major past-life memories, this one unscrolled in chunks rather than all at once, taking several days. And as with the others, the darkness gradually diminished as Compassion flowed to the anguish and confusion.

In the fourth month of retreat, I experienced one of these particularly vivid memories. The complete memory unscrolled in chunks over a period of about a week. This particular past-life was such an important part of my retreat, and it provides such a good example of the deepest spiritual need and the way in which it is helped, that I think it is worthwhile quoting at length from my diary. Here are some excerpts. Each separate excerpt relates what happened on a particular day, and all the excerpts are in chronological order:

“Rev. Master Mokugen and I were walking together. I was feeling very miserable. We stopped by the Guardian Shrine and I asked for help. I meditated. There was stillness, but also a deep pain, both physical and spiritual, in the hara. Tears came to my eyes and long, quiet sobs. The thought arose, ‘Why do they hate me so?’ Gradually, I realized that I was experiencing the dying thoughts of a man in a Nazi gas chamber. A great gust of sobs broke out of me. At times my breathing was labored and loud. As grief flowed out, I felt the Water of the Spirit in my upper body, especially the chest, like humming electricity. I saw that as the man was dying, he felt sympathy and compassion for those who were dying with him. I said over and over [expressing the man's inner cry for help as he was dying], ‘Please help me, please help me, please help me.’ My breathing became faster and

shallower. I knew the man was dying. The rapid, shallow breathing continued until it terminated in one long, slow exhalation in which all the breath was expelled. Then it just stopped for a long moment. This was the moment of the man's death. [But, of course, I started breathing again. I am not that man, though in me is all that is left of him.] Gradually I quietened. A flood of love for the Eternal welled up within me. I knew that this man was loved by the Eternal and by me—the Love of God *and* the love of man.”

“[During the next few days I experienced intense fear and grief.] The cause of the fear and grief that I have been feeling has showed itself. Men stormed into the house of the man who later died in the gas chamber. He was abruptly separated from his wife and children and taken away. He never saw his family again and never knew what happened to them. The grief and horror of this separation flowed out of me and I wept in great sobs.”

“[The next morning] more pain and grief welled up. I saw that the man had been a good, decent husband and father who took his responsibility as the family's provider seriously. He had felt responsible for the fact that his family was taken by the Nazis. I saw that the man had not known how to let go and trust the Eternal to look after his family. He had not known that death is just a moment in time, not an extinction. He had not known that death is a doorway opening to two possibilities: one possibility is that of directly returning to the Eternal; the other possibility is the more indirect, but eventually certain, route to the Eternal through rebirth. And both are manifestations of the Compassion of the Eternal.”

“I began to feel spiritual pain. I started quietly weeping. What came up was that everything had happened so quickly and so horrifically that the man who had died in the gas chamber had not had the opportunity to grieve for his family. I felt the

great sadness of losing one's whole family in an instant and never knowing what happened to them. I wept and wept. I felt the grief to be like the sorrow of the world that only Kanzeon—the Compassion of the Eternal—can comprehend and heal. I felt that Kanzeon was helping. The Water of the Spirit was like electricity in my upper body. I experienced a great love for Kanzeon, for the Eternal, for all those in my karmic stream.”

I will always be grateful for Rev. Master Mokugen's generosity to me during these difficult and wonderful weeks and months. Human stillness, understanding and sympathy, given at the right time and in the right way, *help*.

Precious Jewels

All the beings whose karma we have inherited, all the spiritual need that has come down to us from the past, all the pain and longing and grief—all of this is the precious raw material of enlightenment. Here is another short excerpt from the diary of my retreat:

“The gratitude and love for all the beings whose karma we have inherited is a fundamental aspect of the harmonization of our karma with the Eternal. It is a precious gift—not something that we create, but something that gradually comes of itself as a result of our willingness to be the vessel through which the Eternal does its work of healing and conversion.”

Chapter 14

Soothing Balm

*With no mind in affairs and no affairs in mind,
We leap out of the myriad illusions
Into the Real One, the Unborn.*

Reflection

Most days during my retreat in 1998-99 I was given a couple hours in mid-afternoon in which all the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional settings were returned to something approaching a “normal” setting—within limits. That is to say, during these periods of “normal time” I would not be drawn into deep meditation, or be holding on for dear life through a firestorm of intense feeling, or be plunged into the memories and lessons of the past.

The spiritual activity during these normal times was *contemplative reflection*. Contemplative reflection is not analysis. Trying to figure it out was not allowed—the brain was shut off for that kind of mental work. Rather, this contemplative reflection was a simple *re-view* of the experiences and teachings that were unfolding each day. It was a time given for *absorbing* what was happening. It was also a time in which insight into the bigger picture was given.

Insight within Unknowing

I think of this insight as *insight within unknowing* because it was always very clear that I was being allowed to *appreciate* something that I could never understand.

Many times in my drives to Seattle from our temple, I have passed some of the huge buildings where Boeing builds and maintains jets. These are not skyscrapers, but box-shaped structures, like giant warehouses. I have heard that one of these buildings located north of Seattle is the largest single-room building in the world.

Imagine that you are standing facing one of these buildings. Imagine that there is one door on the front of the building. It is like a gigantic garage door. It stretches the whole width and height of the building. As you stand there, right in front of the door, it slowly raises up,

revealing that the entire building is filled with one vast machine. There is no room inside for anything else. As you stare at this machine, you see that it is infinitely complex. All you can do is gaze at it in wonder.

This is exactly the image that always came to mind as, during these times of contemplative reflection, I was shown, and allowed to appreciate, the infinite complexity of karma/rebirth, and the vast stage on which it unfolds.

Cosmic Compassion

It was perfectly clear—given as part of the *insight within unknowing*— that this infinitely vast and complex mechanism of karma/rebirth functions as the expression of Cosmic Compassion. It always does the *best* for everything and everyone. There is no self-interest, no bias or prejudice, no judgment of good or evil, better or worse, worthy or unworthy within in Its utterly benign, just and dispassionate working. All genuine need one day receives help.

The contemplation of wisdom and benevolence on this cosmic scale was a great consolation to me. It was like soothing balm poured over painful skin abrasions. I could not cling to this consolation when, as happened every day for months, I was plunged back into the dark and turbulent waters of my karmic inheritance. Yet my faith and certainty were strengthened by this soothing balm.

Looking back now, seventeen years later, at these periods of quiet reflection, I marvel at the kindness of the Eternal. We may sometimes feel ourselves to be alone in a great darkness, but in reality we are born, live and die within Cosmic Compassion.

Chapter 15

The Return Flow

*The inner essence of the Eternal is the soaking
Water of the Spirit;
It can moisten all things deep in the earth of our
body and mind.
It can penetrate, touch and converse, like the
wind,
With all things in the highest Heaven of the Great
Immaculacy.*

Dark Grief

I think of the floods of intense, dark and desperate feeling that came rolling in day after day during the first four months of my retreat in 1998-99 as a “firestorm” of emotion. Feeling is the “reaper of karma,” and in these floods I was reaping what was sown in the creation of some of the largest knots of confusion and pain of my karmic inheritance. While fear, anger and despair all arose and passed at times, my most constant emotional companions during this time were longing and grief. And it is the grief that has always stood out most vividly in my memory.

Rev. Master once described to me the great flood of grief that welled up as soon as she entered full retreat in the spring of 1976. In 1998, I found that the same dark, anguished grief was in me.

The depth of grief is in proportion to the depth of love *combined with* the depth of conviction that one has lost that which one has loved. Herein lies the greatest pain of our humanity (an anguish that is not limited to man, however, for animals feel it too). And the greatest grief of all comes from judging ourselves to be unworthy of the Love of the Eternal, for there is no loss like the loss of Love Itself. Of course, one cannot really lose the Love of the Eternal, but, in ignorance, pain and confusion, beings lose sight of this fact.

Saddened Love

As the lined-up spiritual need of my karmic inheritance found its way to the surface of consciousness and then on to the Help of the Eternal, the spiritual skies began gradually and imperceptibly to brighten. After four months of retreat, the major knots of spiritual need had unraveled. The floods of dark grief were replaced by quiet sadness: “quiet” because it did not come in great emotional floods. Nonetheless, it was *deep* sadness. It felt as if I was in the middle of an ocean of sadness.

Again, feeling is the reaper of karma. Dark, desperate grief was *reverting to* sadness—sadness tinged with love (or, more accurately, love tinged with sadness): the “saddened love” of which I had heard Rev. Master speak many times.

Behind and beneath the long and varied history of karma lies love that became imbued with expectation. Inevitably, this expectation was one day disappointed. Then love was saddened. Each successive disappointment darkened the sadness. Desperate clinging, resulting in deeper disappointment, further darkened it. Eventually grief lived in a world that seemed apart from Love. This is called the “forward flow (or process)” —meaning that the wheel of suffering is being propelled “forward” into the future.

If the darkening of saddened love into desperate grief signals that the forward flow is happening, the *reverting* of dark grief to saddened love is a signal of movement in the direction of the “backward (or *return*) flow” through which our body and mind are *brought back* into (or *return to*) harmony with our wonderful True Nature. Therefore, the way of contemplative training that makes possible our return to harmony with the Eternal is sometimes called “the backward-flowing (or *return-flowing*) method.”

A Quiet Flow

Very gradually over a period of several months, the relative proportions of sadness and love in the saddened love that I was experiencing were reversed. At first the feeling of sadness was strongly dominant. But as the weeks and months passed, the sadness diminished and the feelings of love and gratitude increased.

Feelings are signals. These brighter feelings were signals that the Compassion of the Eternal was quietly finding Its way to the roots of spiritual need. Indeed, it seemed to me as if clean, healing water was seeping into every nook and cranny of body and mind.

This soaking Compassion was accompanied by teaching on how to live without re-saddening love. This is the subject of the next Chapter of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.”

Chapter 16

The Gift

*Everything in the world of form is born out of
ignorance;
When there is no fullness and no brightness
things need to become pure.
Examine everything until the Lord permeates the
entire flow;
Keep looking and you will see the Sun of the Eternal
Rising above the top of the mountain of karma,
Illuminating all with a rosy glow!*

The Gift Given

In recent Sections of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life” I have described a central theme that emerges in my karmic history—love and loss.

Some of the people in my karmic stream tried to prevent the loss of what they loved by killing others. This did not prevent loss; it only compounded the suffering of the perpetrator, as well as hurting others. Some experienced the loss of what they loved as a result of others' violence. These victims in my karmic stream died in various states of confusion and misery.

As these karmic stories unfolded in my experience during my retreat in 1998-99, a teaching emerged that is still changing my view of love and loss. This teaching has four points.

The first point: —Love is a gift, and all that we love is part of that gift.

The gift is given into our custody, and there is always a responsibility that accompanies our custodianship. We can use love wisely or unwisely: in either case, we will get the consequences of our actions. If we would love wisely, we are well advised to ask, listen to, and follow the guidance of our wonderful True Nature. After all, It is the Source of the gift.

Read the Fine Print

The second point: The gift is given *with conditions*. It is very important to read the fine print on the package.

Here is the fine print:

*This gift came from the Eternal and is of the Eternal.
Everything that arises also passes away: that which came from the
Eternal must one day return to the Eternal.*

The Gift Returned

The third point: We can *willingly* offer every gift into the hands of the Eternal.

We do not have to wait for disaster to strike to do this offering. We can do it every day. Offering lies at the heart of meditation.

Custodianship of the gift is different from ownership. That which is given to us to love and care for is *of the Eternal*: if it *belongs* to anyone, it belongs to the Eternal.

When we are separated from that which we love, from those we love, we can *willingly* return the gift, entrusting that which we love, those we love, into the hands of the Eternal. If we have trained in offering while we have had custodianship of the gift, we will find it easier to return the gift willingly when it leaves our custodianship.

The True Nature of Loss

The fourth point: Loss is an intrinsic aspect of the gift.

We can love with a love that is narrowed and ultimately saddened by clinging. But as clinging is converted, love is not lost. Rather, we awaken to Love Itself. The loss of all that arises and passes, the loss of all that is born and dies, is a certainty. But this loss is not the loss of Love Itself.

As long as we are alive, we will know the sadness of loss. But the *way* in which we have loved, and the choices we make when we are separated from that which we love, will determine whether this sadness takes the form of desperate grief, anger and despair—or whether it opens our hearts and minds more fully to the Infinite Love

which enfolds all arising and passing, birth and death, but which Itself neither arises nor passes, neither is born nor dies.

In the pain of loss, we one day cry out to the Eternal for help. And one day we come to the great dawning in which we see all that we have loved and lost contained within, and illumined by, the Love of the Eternal. Then we know *gratitude for loss itself*: loss is an intrinsic and precious part of the gift of love.

Chapter 17

No Speck of Dust

*When we perceive the purity of all existence,
It is as far-reaching as the boundless sky,
As clouds that change and fade away.*

Education

I found in my retreat of 1998-99 that I am the *beneficiary* of a very long, but very thorough, educational process. Each of the beings in my stream of karma is one of the teachers. And the law of karma/rebirth, which governs this entire process, always functions for the *true* good of all beings.

The best way to learn sympathy is to “walk a mile in the other fellow's shoes.” My stream of karma includes both people who murdered others and people who were the victims of murder. The long-term consequences of willful non-Preceptual actions manifest in future lives. Not infrequently, yesterday's perpetrator is today's victim—only “yesterday” may have been lifetimes ago.

Eventually, the teaching embodied in karmic consequence begins to seep through the layers of ignorance. One day, someone cries out, “I've had enough of vengeance, both on the perpetrating end and on the victim end. Help!”

The cry for help opens mind and heart as nothing else can do. Now the Eternal can start to get a word in edgewise. In fact, the Eternal has been waiting with infinite patience for this cry. Every sincere prayer is heard; every sincere prayer is answered. Now education can begin in earnest.

Immaculacy

Sincere asking and wholehearted offering (*sange*) open our mind and body to the Help of the Eternal, which then flows to our spiritual need. As this happy meeting happens, we come to see the world as it truly is. Where we had seen dirt and dust, we begin to see purity. What was the dust and dirt?—Only our own self-judgment. As Rev.

Master often said, “The only thing that stands between you and the Eternal is your own opinion of yourself.”

The separate self is an illusion; there is no enduring person or ego who is perpetrator in one lifetime and victim in another. Rather, there are just volitional actions and their consequences manifesting in a stream of karma spanning lifetimes: “No doer is there who does the deed, nor is there one who feels the fruit.”

Beings are born in accordance with causes and conditions; they make their choices, all of which have consequences; some choices perpetuate suffering, some lessen suffering. Beings die in accordance with causes and conditions. Merit and spiritual need coalesce, resulting in more rebirths in various forms and realms in accordance with causes and conditions. And this flow of existence is as reflections streaming across the face of the great round mirror of Immaculacy.

It is not the world around me that needs to change in order for me to recognize the Great Immaculacy. When I look down, I see dust and dirt; when I look up, I recognize Immaculacy.

As my retreat continued in 1998-99, and as I very gradually emerged from the darkest and most desperate karmic shadows, I began increasingly to look back upon the whole stream of karma and see *not a single speck of dust*. How can I describe my gratitude to the Eternal? Words will not do it. The only way to express the gratitude is to follow the Eternal endlessly.

Chapter 18

The Way of Ancient Buddhas

The Eternal is the whole of heaven, earth and living beings.

*Our parents gave birth to us,
But It is the true Source of our existence.*

*We must let It help us in order to return to It
And become the vessel of Its Water of
Compassion.*

*Our True Body, the Buddha Nature, then appears
And we revert to the state of the full moon that
reflects the Light of the Eternal.*

One Meditation, Five Aspects

The following is an excerpt from my diary dated June 13, 1998:

The Way of Ancient Buddhas

Ask sincerely.

Offer wholeheartedly.

Wait patiently.

Listen carefully.

Follow gladly.

The Five Aspects of Meditation in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*

I have written about these five aspects of meditation in Parts XII through XVI of “*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom: Reflections*,” the essays that parallel these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.” And I have taught about these aspects of meditation ever since my retreat in 1998-'99. Yet I am always a beginner in *doing* the asking, offering, waiting, listening and following. I am always re-discovering how much I need this teaching.

The teaching of the five aspects of meditation is essentially the same as the teaching of the five columns in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

The difference is that the teaching of the five aspects of meditation emphasizes *our* part in the process of training/enlightenment, whereas the teaching of the five columns shows our part *and* the Eternal's part. Furthermore, in the fifth column, the teaching points beyond all distinctions of "our part" and "the Eternal's part:" there *is* the Eternal, the "Buddha within."

The five aspects of meditation can all be seen in Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts, which was written during the first months of her great retreat and kensho in 1976, and which is found in the text accompanying Plate XII (first edition, Plate VIII) of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. Here is an example of each of the five aspects of meditation as it appears in Rev. Master's Commentary on the Precepts:

Ask sincerely.

"Do not do anything unless it is 'good;' do not do anything unless I have first asked the Lord of the House if it is good for me to do it."

Offer wholeheartedly.

"Since all possess the Lord, there is nothing to be given and nothing to be taken away, and still all things must be given, all things offered at all times and in all places."

Wait patiently.

"Do nothing whatsoever in a hurry; do nothing whatsoever on the spur of the moment unless I know the *certainty* given by the Lord of the House . . ."

Listen carefully.

"If I always face the Buddha I will always know Buddha; if I always listen to the Lord of the House there is no possibility of my ever killing anything."

Follow gladly.

"When the Lord speaks, spring up joyfully to answer; then, indeed, it is good to do anything whatsoever; *know* that the Lord will *never* break the Precepts."

Five Aspects of a Single Moment of Meditation

Here is a brief description of the five aspects of meditation as they manifest within a single moment of meditation:

Ask sincerely: looking up in faith.

Offer wholeheartedly: placing all that arises upon the altar of the Heart.

Wait patiently: remaining in stillness.

Listen carefully: focusing attention.

Follow gladly: going on in willingness!”

Chapter 19

Benevolence

*Supreme Mind in words can never be expressed,
And yet to all the trainee's needs It does respond.*

—Great Master Tozan,
The Most Excellent Mirror, Samadhi

The Unseen and the Unseeing

The Eternal is eminently practical in the ways in which It responds to need. And because the Eternal has no selfish interest, It continues Its benevolent activity whether we see (much less understand!) the way in which we are being helped or not.

I have described my retreat in 1997 in Chapter 8 of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.” In that retreat, I meditated with a question. Beginning in the spring of 1998, in the midst of another retreat, I was given the answer to my question. Yet at the time I did not see the way in which a question meditatively pondered in the fall of 1997 was answered very precisely and pragmatically the following summer. It is only in looking back seventeen years later that I am seeing this.

The Question

In the fall of 1997, I meditated with the question of the nature of my discipleship following the death of my master. This was a deep question.

Rev Master Jiyu-Kennett was, is and always will be my master: this was not in question. In the months following her death, I had a strong sense of the responsibility of my continuing discipleship. Of course, I am only one of my master's disciples. *And* “each man his karma makes and must carry for himself.”—I am responsible for my own training, and I felt that responsibility in a new way after my master's death.

Since the purpose of discipleship to a human master is the establishment and perfecting of discipleship to our “True Master” (as Rev. Master put it), the question that was in my heart following the

death of my master was, in its essence, the question of how to be a true disciple of the Eternal. This is a practical question: “I want to be a true disciple. How do I do it?”

Every deep spiritual question has its origin in deep spiritual need. Deep spiritual need cries out for the Help of the Eternal. There was a cry for help in my heart in the fall of 1997. It took several months for all conditions—both internal and external—to ripen. Then the answer came.

The Answer

The answer to my question came in many parts, and at many levels, simultaneously. Three parts of the answer stand out in my mind.

In Chapter 9 of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life,” I have described the spiritual surrender that initiated my retreat in late May, 1998. In this surrender, *everything* was released into the hands of the Eternal, including all efforts to find an answer to my question by means of my intellect. Now the Eternal had a much more open field within which to do Its work.

I think of this surrender as the first part of the Eternal's answer to my question. My experience of this great event in my life was that I allowed the door to open just a tiny bit, and then the Eternal majestically swept in and *reclaimed* that which is *of* Itself—all that which I think of as “me.”

I could no more think of this as “my” act of surrender than I could think of the light that comes from the sun as “my” light. When I was a boy, I often heard pastors in churches that our family attended speak of “giving all the glory to God.” If what the pastors meant is that we grieve our own hearts if we attribute to the exercise of our own volition that which the Eternal gives us out of Its infinite Benevolence, then I am in complete agreement.

The second part of the Eternal's answer can be expressed (with the help of a little imagination) as follows: “To train as My disciple, you need to orient more fully toward Me. In order for this to happen, I have to Help the spiritual need that you are carrying—especially self-judgment and dark grief. When my Help meets that need, you will be less confused about how to take refuge in Me, and you will hear My

guidance more clearly. Remember, it is always your choice whether or not you will pay attention to My advice and follow it.”

The third part of the Eternal's answer came in the very practical teaching of the “Five Aspects of Meditation,” which I briefly described in Chapter XVIII of these “Reflections in a Disciple's Life.” Again, this part of the Eternal's answer can be imaginatively represented in the following words: “If you wish to train in discipleship to Me, here is how to go about it: *ask sincerely, offer wholeheartedly, wait patiently, listen carefully, follow gladly.*”

Another Beginning

As I gradually emerged during the winter and spring of 1999 from the long retreat that had begun in May of the previous year, I knew that I was once again making a new beginning. The nature of training had not changed, and at the same time I had a new perspective on everything.

In the years since my retreat, I have marveled on many occasions at the wonderful, practical Benevolence of the Eternal. It sustained, healed and taught me during the most intense months of my life. It is right there in the midst of the sometimes-messy unfolding of the events of daily life. It lacks for nothing and seeks nothing for Itself. It always does the *best* for everyone.

For me, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's training provides the example of the highest level of training in discipleship to the Eternal. To train in discipleship in the Way of Ancient Buddhas is the greatest challenge, and the greatest privilege and joy, of which I know.

Chapter 20

The Guardian

There is nothing separate: what is “other”?–What is “I”?

—Great Master Keizan
Denkoroku (“The Transmission of the Light”)

A Benign Presence

In late winter of 1987, I moved onto the property that would become the home of North Cascades Buddhist Priory. During the first year or so of living on this undeveloped land, I became aware of the presence of a non-human, non-animal being that seemed to “come with the place.” That is, the being seemed to be attached to this particular locale.

Rev. Master had sometimes mentioned such beings. And I had read about encounters between monks and beings that were neither human nor animal in one or two books that Rev. Master recommended for our reading. Rev. Master always emphasized the importance of keeping our focus on our own training, and it never would have occurred to me to go out looking for such beings. Nor have I ever had any interest in “occult” beliefs and practices: life is complicated enough without sticking my nose in places where every instinct within me says it does not belong.

It was when I was meditating alone on the temple property that I sometimes sensed the presence of this being. I cannot adequately describe the goodness, benevolence and dignity that it radiated.

I told Rev. Master about this being. She listened and then made it clear that this was all completely normal.

A Sincere Wish

A few years after I moved onto the property, I sensed that the being was asking for something. Again, I spoke with Rev. Master about this. She encouraged me to continue to meditate until the nature of the wish became clear.

Some months passed, and greater clarity did come. The being was asking to receive the Precepts.

In our newly-constructed meditation hall, and with a number of lay trainees and one other senior monk present, and when all conditions were *right* for doing the ceremony, I formally gave the Precepts to a being who I had come to think of as our temple's Guardian.

During this ceremony, I knew beyond any possibility of doubt that this being was fully present in front of me, and was truly becoming a disciple of the Buddhas.

A Trainee

I have never seen our temple's Guardian. Two senior monks have told me that they have experienced visions of the Guardian. They described it as majestic and beautiful.

We built a Guardian shrine close to a spring, the waters of which feed a little waterfall that swells in the winter and then diminishes to a trickle during the summer and early autumn. I have always thought that there might be some special connection between the Guardian and this spring and its surrounding area.



The Guardian Shrine

—The inscription on the brass plate reads:

Whenever we pray, we receive without fail a sympathetic response.

For many years the Guardian's benign presence was an important part of the life of our monastic community. I have always viewed this being as a form in which the Compassion of the Eternal has been extended to me personally and to our temple. And I have always believed that the Guardian does its training in the way that is appropriate for it given the conditions of its existence—conditions of which I am almost completely ignorant. These things have not changed.—But something did change.

Expansion

I visit the Guardian shrine every morning. Perhaps two years ago, I began to sense that the Guardian was not here in the way that it had been here for many years. It seemed to be more distant.

Last fall (2014), one of the lay trainees told me that the Guardian was asking to leave. This rang true. After meditating with the question of what, if anything, we needed to do, and after discussing the matter with the monastic community, we did a ceremony at the Guardian shrine in which I told the Guardian that it was free to leave, and that, if it did so, it would leave with our gratitude and our blessing. During this ceremony, it seemed as if the Guardian expanded into something greater. Since we did the ceremony, I have felt that this being who has been such an important part of the life of this temple, and of my life, is no longer here. Yet still I go to the Guardian shrine every morning and bow in gratitude.

I do not know exactly what has happened to this magnanimous and kind being, but I believe that what I sensed during the ceremony was a deeply significant and wonderful transformation. As I have said, the Guardian does not seem to be here now. I keep thinking there is a vacancy in the Guardian position in this monastery at the present time. Yet I continue to feel the same connection to this being at a deeper spiritual level than that of separation: within the Buddha Nature, there is neither coming nor going.

Chapter 21

Working the Mother Lode

Our humanity and Buddhahood are like water and ice. To be afflicted by the three poisons [of greed, hate and delusion] is our humanity. To be purified by the three releases [from greed, hate and delusion] is Buddhahood. That which freezes into ice in winter melts into water in summer. Eliminate ice and there's no more water. Try to destroy our humanity, and there's no more Buddhahood. . . . Our humanity and Buddhahood share the same nature.

—From *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*
Translated by Red Pine (slightly paraphrased)

First Arisings

In the course of these reflections on my master's training and teaching, and the impact of her training and teaching on my life, I have placed great emphasis on the fact that greed, hate and delusion—the causes of suffering—are the raw material of training and the *potential* for enlightenment. Greed, hate and delusion are the spiritual mother lode: they only have to be properly worked in order to yield spiritual riches.

When a great deal of one's karmic debt has been repaid, and when many of the deeper roots of suffering have received the Help of the Eternal, there is still a need for continual training, and the fact that greed, hate and delusion continue to arise is a stark reminder of this need. As Rev. Master often reminded us, our past karma can always affect us at least potentially. It is our choice, however, whether we will run with the old karma or not.

The sooner we become aware of the arising of greed, hate and delusion in consciousness, the sooner we can begin the spiritual work that allows conversion to happen. Above all, the arising of greed, hate or delusion can serve as a reminder to withdraw within, take refuge in stillness, and ask the Eternal for help.

After over forty years of training, I continue to be amazed at how often I forget to do that asking. Again and again, I find in experience that when I need the Help of the Eternal and fail to ask for It, the consequences of my actions show me that I would have done better by asking than by launching out on my own. And, again and again, I find in experience that whenever I turn toward the Eternal for help in the midst of genuine need, I find that I am shown the way through whatever difficulties I am experiencing.

That “way through the difficulties” manifests just one step at a time. And each step must be taken in faith: intellectual clarity is not usually provided. Yet it is amazing that all that is needed is given at just the right moment whenever there is a genuine following of the Eternal. Thus, it is indeed better to follow the Eternal through hell itself than to bask in heaven while being ignorant of the Way of asking and following.

Greed

Without greed, we would not survive. Hunger lets us know that we need food. Without sexual desire, our species would go extinct. Other physical desires are related to other aspects of physical survival.

We need greed, yet greed can get us in a lot of trouble. We can crave things that do not promote health and survival, but that are self-destructive.

Here is a principle for training with greed: Refrain from doing that which gives a short-term benefit at a long-term cost. Here is another way of saying the same thing: Refrain from seeking any benefit that comes at the cost of another's loss.

These two formulations of a principle for training with greed sound different, but they are really identical in meaning because there is no enduring self or ego. Therefore, if I do that in the short-run that is bad for me in the long-run, it is the same as acting in a such a way that I gain while another person loses: “my” present gain can be at the expense of “my” future loss.

Greed converts to generosity. So another way to express the above principle of training with greed is in words that Rev. Master often repeated: “In each situation, do that which will help everyone be a success in his or her own way.” If we are following the Eternal, our

actions will naturally and unselfconsciously express this teaching, for the Eternal always does that which helps all beings be a success in their own way.

Sexual Desire

Just as the pleasure of eating exists so that we will indeed eat, and thus avoid dying, so the pleasure of the sexual act exists so that we will reproduce our species. The belief that the pleasure of the sexual act is an end in itself is a form of delusion, as is the belief that there is something inherently unclean in the sexual act.

The sexual act forms (or reinforces) a strong karmic bond between beings. This bond is *felt* as love. But even when it is not felt as love, this bond still exists, and is forged even in the most “casual” of sexual encounters. Therefore, there is in reality no such thing as “casual sex.”

Human beings take longer to grow to full adulthood than any other form of animal life on our planet. If we think about what it takes to support, protect and nurture children from birth to adulthood, we can see a very practical reason why the sexual act forms such a powerful bond between two people: people who share a great love for, commitment to, and loyalty toward one another provide a better home for children. Of course, there is a lot more to the love and commitment of a successful marriage than sex. My point is that the *potential* for a strong, loving and successful marriage is all coiled up, as it were, in the sexual act, and anything that has that much potential within it is inherently very powerful: handle with care!

The sexual act has the potential to be an act in which great love and tenderness are expressed and felt. It also has the potential to be an act in which selfishness, contempt and even violence and hatred are expressed and felt. In *either* case the karmic bond between beings is forged (or reinforced). In the latter case, however, great suffering will flow forth from the sexual act.

The sexual act spends merit. This fact is not in itself either good or bad: it just *is*. It is for each individual to decide how his or her merit is to be spent—and to reap the consequences of the choices made. It is wiser to spend merit in a genuinely worthwhile cause than to squander it recklessly.

Rev. Master emphasized that celibacy is a prerequisite for the blossoming of deeper spirituality in any human life: one has to stop spending merit for the purpose of reproduction in order to spend merit for the purpose of the deep cleansing and conversion of karma. (Note: The biological purpose of sexuality is reproduction. Therefore, whether people engaging in sexual activity think that they are spending merit for the purpose of reproducing their kind or not, that is what the merit is in fact being spent for: the functioning of the law of karma is not subject to our personal wishes.)

There is therefore a real—and positive—spiritual reason for monastic (renunciate) celibacy. But note that celibacy has spiritual efficacy only insofar as it occurs within the context provided by the combination of a genuine spiritual purpose *and* a contemplative practice emphasizing both meditation and the Precepts. The “contemplative practice emphasizing both meditation and the Precepts” is a *compassionate* practice. To judge the sexual part of ourselves as being base, evil and dirty is to “create clouds in a clear sky”—in other words, to violate the true spirit of the Precepts. Sexuality has the Buddha Nature: it is precisely because it is so *precious* that it needs to be handled with such care.

Most Buddhist trainees are not monks, but lay trainees. Some lay trainees gravitate toward celibacy, especially in later life. But many are not celibate. For those who train in the non-celibate, lay context, faithfulness to one's partner, moderation in indulging sexual desire, the expression of love, respect and tenderness, and the acceptance of *all* the consequences of one's actions are essential elements of training with sexuality.

Everything that I have said about sexuality and the Precepts applies to both heterosexual and homosexual activity and relationships.

Hate

Hate is the flip-side of greed. Where there is great wanting, there is the potential for great anger. For anger is the emotional impulse to remove an obstacle to the fulfillment of desire. Thus, in its rawest form, hatred is the emotional urge to destroy something or someone.

The experience of the feeling of hatred, and the realization of the potentially horrific consequences of allowing oneself to be swept away

by such a feeling, can shock a person into crying out to the Eternal for help.

The deepest hatred is the hatred that beings nurture in their hearts and minds toward themselves. Therefore, the practice of self-forgiveness is an essential part of training with anger. There is a Precept, “Do not speak against others.” This Precept also means, “Do not speak against *yourself*.” There is another Precept, “Do not be proud of yourself and judge (or blame) others.” This Precept also means, “Do not play God and judge (or blame) yourself.”

Contrary to a common belief, blaming oneself after making a mistake does not make it less likely that one will repeat the mistake. Rather, it adds another layer of pain and confusion over existing pain and confusion, thus making it *more* likely that mistakes will be made.

Most of self-forgiveness consists in ceasing to indulge the habitual urge to blame oneself. What is the alternative to self-blame?—Simply to admit that one has done what one has done (or not done what one has not done, in the case of a “sin of omission”), to accept the consequences of one's action (or inaction), and to resolve to do better. The recognition that one needs help in doing better, and turning toward the Eternal for that help, is an essential part of the deepest resolve to do better.

If we wish to forgive ourselves, we must be willing to forgive others; and if we wish to forgive others, we must be willing to forgive ourselves: there is no getting around this fact.

Hatred converts into compassion; self-hatred converts into compassion for oneself. Compassion is not pity; compassion for oneself is not self-pity. Nor is compassion an emotion, though it may be reflected in feeling. Compassion is generous-hearted acceptance. Its ultimate Source is the Love of the Eternal. Therefore it can be said that in applying the principles of training (meditation, the Precepts, faith) to hatred and anger we are opening our hearts to the Love of the Eternal.

Delusion

The belief that the totality of body and mind, or any part or aspect of body and mind, constitutes an enduring refuge is an illusion which is totally unsupported in actual experience. This “mistaken viewpoint of

body and mind” (to borrow Great Master Dogen's words) lies at the heart of spiritual ignorance.

And yet there *is* That which is a true and enduring Refuge. It is not a part or aspect of our body and mind; It is neither ego nor soul. Yet neither is It in any way separate from the body and mind of any being. The “blood and bones” understanding that this True Refuge exists lies at the heart of spiritual wisdom.

How does one go from ignorance to wisdom?—The “house of ego” is a spiritual prison. How does one break out of jail?

The prison of ego was made; it can be unmade. Ignorance was made; it can be converted.

How to Grow a Lotus Blossom provides the best guidebook for the unmaking of the house of ego and the conversion of ignorance into wisdom of which I know. At the heart of this book is great faith. Each of us possesses the seed of such faith—the pure intuitive “knowing within unknowing” that there *is* the Eternal, the Lord of the “house of body and mind.”

It is by *acting* upon faith that the prison of ego is unmade and ignorance is converted. For it was by acting upon despair and self-judgment that the prison of ego was made and ignorance deepened.

The key to acting upon faith is to look up, rather than down, spiritually. And the best way to learn to do this is to practice meditation. As I have so often found in my own experience, one should never underestimate the merit of a single moment of genuine meditation.

Chapter 22

Eternity

Follow the Path that leads to the Treasury of the Law and truly enter into Nirvana.

No Special Knowledge, No Special Attribute

How is it that I, an ordinary human being with no special qualities, no special knowledge, can write of Eternity—and can know that somehow, from some place within me, I write truly? Doesn't one have to be a very enlightened person, or a saint—someone special, someone rare—in order to know of Eternity?

I do not know anything about special people, special qualities, saintliness. I know something through experience about the pain of existence. I have known something of ecstasy as well. Yet as I write today, I am neither in great pain nor ecstatic. Yet I have come to know *something* precious, something wonderful of Eternity. And I long to say something about It in these Reflections in a Disciple's Life.

My master knew of and about Eternity. She entitled her first book *Zen is Eternal Life*. And she showed in the way in which she lived her life that there *is* Eternity and that It is worth more than anything.

Dust

Fame and gain, reputation, worldly achievement, security, happiness—all of this is dust in the eyes, dust that blinds us to Eternity *if we get caught up in striving to possess it, or in striving to hold on to it when, for a short time (and it can only ever be for a short time), we do possess it.*

This dust is unreal, fleeting, ephemeral in nature. This does not make it evil; it does not make it something to despise. It just means that it can never be a true refuge.

That which is unreal is not necessarily of no use. The Eternal makes use of everything in Its work of Cosmic Compassion. The suffering that comes from wholeheartedly pursuing a false refuge enables us to experience the great relief and gratitude of finding our True Refuge.

Immortality

The idea of personal immortality is a form of that dust of unreality, as is the idea of personal extinction. Both of these classic opposites share the same premise—that of the reality of an ego, enduring personal identity, or separate self.

As I have emphasized elsewhere in these essays, this idea of the reality of a separate self has no basis in actual experience and, in fact, constitutes a kind of spiritual prison *if we cling to it in any way*. When the illusion of the separate self begins to dissolve, we enter a great spiritual darkness. In the first half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes the way in which she entered and passed through that great darkness *looking up*. We may find that darkness to be painful and terrifying, yet it is our true spiritual friend. But to know this we *must* look up spiritually; we must refuse to look down in despair. We must *trust* with every fiber of our being: “Whether I am well or sick, brightly alive or dying, hold fast to the Lord of the House.”

If we take refuge in our own True Nature through pure meditation in the midst of that great darkness, we come to know *both* the fragility and impermanence of every aspect of our humanity *and* the indestructible and eternal Reality of our True Refuge. As the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* affirms, “To fully penetrate the truth of no-self is to realize the True Self.”

There is Immortality; there is Eternal Life. It is not *my* or *your* immortality; It is not *my* or *your* Eternal Life. Yet if we give up the “What’s in it for me?”—if we *let go* of all clinging to the illusion of personal gain (and desire for personal immortality is a form of desire for personal gain)—we are not left with a negative nothingness: we are left with “the fullest Nothingness you could ever imagine,” as Rev. Master expressed it.

The brain cannot comprehend It; words cannot express It. Yet It *is*, and It is Infinite Love, Infinite Wisdom—and infinitely beyond what man can conceive or say of love and wisdom. We can raise our heart to It in silent longing and in silent prayer. We can come to recognize Its mercy in the midst of joy and grief, happiness and pain, life and death. It is our very own True Life, yet if we clutch at It, It is nowhere to be found. Yet when we *just live* to the very best of our ability, and when

we willingly and uncomplainingly pay the full price of true spiritual adulthood, we know with blood and bones that Its Life is our life, and that Its Eternity is our true Immortality.

Ecstasy and Happiness

A few months before she died, Rev. Master told me, “Koshin, we don't need happiness: we know *ecstasy*.” In the second half of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, Rev. Master describes deep ecstasies and the wealth of Teaching that flowed forth during these experiences.

Happiness is the temporary result of temporary conditions in which desire is fulfilled. Ecstasy is the reaping of merit and is not dependent on external conditions: one cannot be happy in hell, but one can experience ecstasy in hell.

Genuine spiritual ecstasy is the opening of the window of our little, fragile body and mind to the Eternal. Ecstasy does not transmute body and mind and give them eternal life: they remain fragile, transitory. At the same time, ecstasy reveals that that very fragility and impermanence of body and mind is the external *appearance* of That which is eternal.

Thus, it is not a matter of impermanence *or* eternity. There is impermanence *and* there is Eternity: All is Different *and* All is One.; “I am not God *and* there is nothing in me that is not *of* God.”

If we would know ecstasy, we must be willing to let go completely of all clinging to happiness. When we train truly, we beckon to our karma to come due so that all the spiritual need within us can find its way to the Help of the Eternal. This guarantees that the trainee will not live a happy life as the world understands happiness. *This does not matter*. The Eternal always knows the true and deepest wish of our heart. There is something immeasurably better than happiness, something immeasurably more real than self, something immeasurably more enduring than the life of body and mind.

Chapter 23

Master and Disciple

Since Shakyamuni Buddha's time, every Buddha and every Ancestor has continued to Transmit the TRUTH constantly, this fact is very clear.

Great Master Keizen, *Denkoroku*
("Transmission of the Light")

Two Important Facts about People

These Reflections in a Disciple's Life are about my training, my spiritual life and experience, as it has reflected my master's teaching. I have not said much about other people (except my master, of course) in this narrative, though other people have been, and continue to be, very important in my life.

There are two facts about other people that are so important that all other facts—and these “other facts” are innumerable—are relatively insignificant. These most important of all facts about other people can be expressed quite simply. The first of these facts is that all people have the Buddha Nature. The second fact is that all people make and carry their own karma.

For the purposes of my own training, the first of these facts means that whatever another person may think, say, or do, *my* job is to try to recognise the Buddha Nature within the person, within the actions, within the situation. That does not mean that I have to join in what others do if I believe that it is not *good* for me to join in. It does not mean that I have to idealize what others do. It just means that I need to take whatever is happening as being for my good, and use the situation—whatever it is—to train in meditation, the Precepts, and faith. The question of whether I will recognize Buddha in any person, any situation, is ultimately dependent on my own spiritual choices, not on other people and external conditions.

For my training, the second fact means that I need always to keep my focus on my own actions and their consequences. I cannot do this if I

allow myself to get pulled out of my own spiritual center through worry about the actions of others.

I can both make and accept offerings. If it is *good*, I can offer assistance; if it is *good*, I can accept assistance from another person. *And*, as Rev. Master taught me, “You cannot be Kanzeon (Cosmic Compassion) [for another person].” Nor can another person be Kanzeon for me. No one takes the place of the Eternal for anyone else. We all have the Buddha Nature, and we all make and carry our own karma, *and we are stuck with all the implications of these facts, whether we like it or not.*

This way of training in relation to other people is religious in nature, not psychological. Other peoples' motives are not my business. When I have indulged in speculating about, or doubting, others' motives, I have soiled my own spiritual nest.

My job in training is to follow the Eternal. If I need to say “No!” to something that someone else is doing, it is important *for my own spiritual welfare* that I be following the Eternal, not a personal opinion, theory or emotional reaction. Sometimes I have managed to hit the bullseye: that is when I have paused to turn toward the Eternal and ask for help. Sometimes I have scored a big miss: that is when I have acted impulsively. *Sometimes* everything has moved so fast, and there has been so much confusion, that it is not clear for a long time just what happened. In all cases, I have got the consequences of my actions, and *every aspect of those consequences has provided (and continues to provide) invaluable teaching.*

The Job of the Zen Master

As disciples mature in training, they develop the wisdom of sympathy, and one way in which this sympathy manifests is in a sympathetic recognition of the price that the master pays for doing his job. Even so, disciples can only know the master-disciple relationship from the side of the disciple until they are themselves masters who are training their own disciples. As a master, I look back at my own master's training with awe, for I see now in a way that I could not see when I was younger what a wonderful tool of the Eternal my master was.

There are three good reasons for being a Zen master: first, to express gratitude to one's own master, to all the Buddhas and Ancestors, to

the Eternal; second, to fulfill the vow to row all beings to the “other shore” of enlightenment; and third, to walk the path in which one has been led in one's following of the Eternal. These are all really three ways of saying the same thing, though the third reason, while least comprehensible to the brain, most accurately expresses the deepest spiritual reality.

There are two ways in which the job of the Zen master is very difficult. The first way is the one that is most obvious: sometimes the master has to attempt to jolt the disciple out of a delusive state in which he has become stuck. This can be painful and risky. At times it is heartbreakingly difficult for the master.

The second way is one that is not obvious most of the time: the Eternal is always using the master to represent Itself to the disciple. This is something that the master must be willing for if he is to have any peace of mind and heart, but it is not something that the master controls in any way. When a disciple is looking up spiritually, he has a natural respect, love and gratitude for the master; when the disciple is looking down spiritually, he may fear, resent and even hate the master. When the disciple is looking up, he has compassion for himself, and he sees his own Buddha Nature reflected in the mirror that is the master. When the disciple is looking down, he is judging himself, and he sees his own self-judgment reflected in the mirror that is the master. The master can only do his own training; he has to sit still and continue to recognize the spiritual potential of the disciple regardless of the disciple's attitude and behaviour.

Zen masters are ordinary human beings, not magicians. No master can do anything with a disciple who is bound and determined to look down except sit still and wait for the disciple's heart to soften. In some cases, this is a long wait. On the other hand, no master can be such an utter incompetent that he can prevent a disciple who is bound and determined to look up from realizing the Truth.

The Master's Trust

It took me a long time to see that my master was *trusting* me deeply when she gave me hard teaching. She could see how stuck I was at times, and she trusted her own spiritual instinct in giving me teaching.—*And* she trusted my capacity to receive that teaching, take it in, meditate with it, and get unstuck. Once the teaching was

delivered to me, it was entirely up to me whether I would accept it positively and allow it to help me, or whether I would fight it.

As a master, I have to trust my disciples as my master trusted me. There is no other way forward.

Chapter 24

The Eyes of the Spirit

If you cannot see Him all through your life, you must be an undutiful being—already you were, are and will be the children of Buddha but, if you are undutiful, a thousand Buddhas cannot help you.

—Great Master Keizen, *Denkoroku*
 (“The Transmission of the Light”)

Faith

When I first began meditating, and later when I became a monk, I was following a deep intuition and conviction that this is what I needed to do. I did not have a clear idea why I was beginning to walk the Path of the Buddhas and Ancestors. Now I know much more clearly why I began meditating and why I became a monk. Yet that knowledge does me no good unless I continue to exercise the same faith with which I began training.

That faith has nothing to do with opinions, theories, “isms,” worldly wisdom and knowledge, dogmatic belief, sceptical doubt, competence, privilege, adequacy or inadequacy. I did not acquire faith: I was born with it, as is every other human being. I can turn my back on it or treasure it, but I cannot create it. And I cannot destroy the seed of faith that is within me, for its origin lies in the Buddha Nature Itself, and this True Nature is not subject to my personal will.

For me, Buddhist training is, above all else, the exercise of my own innate capacity to manifest faith.

For me, to insist on depending only on the physical senses and the brain, while refusing to actualize my innate potential for faith, would be to willfully blind myself to what is Real. Faith is my spiritual eyes.

I treasure the forms of training that have been Transmitted to me because they help me exercise faith. Yet always it is important to remember that looking up in faith does not depend upon any particular external forms. It is a volitional act of the mind.

Trip-wires

If I blind myself spiritually by willfully ignoring spiritual intuition I stumble immediately over the trip-wires of good and evil.

Rev. Master so often cautioned, “Do not see evil where evil does not exist.” Human life is the perfect arena in which to *practice* recognising Buddha in all beings and all situations. To be born as a human being is the perfect form of rebirth for *practicing* not seeing evil where evil does not exist.

If I would avoid the trip-wires of good and evil, I must take everything that happens as being for my good. This means bowing; and it means being willing to look for the Teaching in all beings and all situations.

The Precepts have been Transmitted down through the ages in order to help those who wish to take everything that happens as being for their good. The real evil is evil-mindedness—creating clouds in a clear sky. The real good is to recognize Buddha: “Wherever I go, I am able to meet Him: I am not Him; He is *all* of me.” (Great Master Tozan)

The Eternal

Can an ordinary human being do this?

An ordinary human being can do it when that ordinary human being *remembers* to pause and turn within; when he *remembers* to look up rather than down; above all, when he *remembers* to ask the Eternal for help with the naive mind of a child.

When I make room in my mind and heart for faith, I *know* that there is the Eternal. When I do not make this room in my mind and heart, I blind myself. When I blind myself, I suffer. Suffering eventually reminds me to *remember* to turn toward the Eternal, to *rely upon the Eternal*. And thus, the compassionate working of karma, which is in no way separate from the Compassion of the Eternal, helps me at all times.

What the Buddha is to me, what Rev. Master is to me, is embodied in this living reality of the *Goodness beyond good and evil* that lies at the very heart of existence. The Great Immaculacy flows on and on. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett pointed the way for me to find It and know It as she found It and knew It. Only by my own training can I show my gratitude.

Chapter 25

The Ears of the Spirit

*He is a most exquisite Voice,
A Voice that all the world encompasses,
The Voice of Brahma, Voice of oceans,
One that all the voices of the world does much
excel.*

—“The Scripture of Avalokiteswara Bodhisattva”
from *The Lotus Sutra*
translated by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

Paying Attention

The Eternal does not compete for our attention. Its patience is infinite. Our lifetime, however, is very brief, and it is up to each of us whether we will spend our life in preoccupation with transitory external things—or perhaps learn to turn toward, and listen to, That which does not arise and pass, come and go.

As faith is the eyes of the spirit, so meditation is the ears of the spirit. The Source of Wisdom is within ourselves, not in external things. It can be heard *if* we listen for It.

The methods and techniques that are called “meditation” and “mindfulness” are not what meditation and mindfulness really are. These methods and techniques *can* be gateways into genuine meditation and mindfulness provided there is a true spiritual motive underlying the practice.

It is *natural* to us to withdraw within in meditation; it *natural* to us to continually ground ourselves in our spiritual Center in the midst of daily life and pay attention to the effects of our actions on ourselves and others, which is what mindfulness really is. It is *natural* to us to listen to the Voice of our own True Nature.

Rev. Master often explained that we are educated to rely too much on our brains, while ignoring and even despising genuine intuition. Thus,

Buddhist training is as much a process of “unlearning” as it is a process of learning. Spiritual intuition is neither obscure nor imprecise. As karma is cleansed and converted, the role of intuition in the life of the trainee broadens and deepens. We *can* “hear” the guidance of our wonderful True Nature: as karma converts, we find it easier to pay attention to the “still, small Voice” within ourselves.

Confidence

Just as a skilled bicycle rider does not have to think about how to balance on a bicycle, so when we are in harmony with the Eternal we do not need to think about how to have confidence in spiritual intuition. Why would one *not* trust it and have confidence in it?

Just as it is always possible for even the best bike rider to lose balance and take a nasty fall, especially in very difficult riding situations, so it is always possible for even the most advanced trainee to ignore or misinterpret a message apprehended in spiritual intuition. The fact that one *might* make a mistake has to be accepted if one is going to trust one's spiritual intuition.

Generally, it is helpful to remember that “I could be wrong.” Yet this consideration must not be given so much emphasis that it becomes the excuse for not trusting spiritual intuition. That would be like the bike rider ceasing to ever get on a bike again because he *might* crash. If we would follow where the Eternal leads, we must be willing again and again to step into the unknown *with confidence* even while being aware that we *could* be wrong. There is no way to learn to do this other than by doing it. It is possible to do this spiritual hearing and following because there *is* That which leads, and it is our very nature to *be capable of hearing Its Voice and following where It leads*.

Chapter 26

Alone and With

*I sit quietly, listening to the falling leaves—
A lonely hut, a life of renunciation.
The past has faded, things are no longer
remembered.
My sleeve is wet with tears.*

—Zen Master Ryokan
translated by John Stevens

A Solitary Path

Everyone who would follow the Eternal must be *willing* to walk a solitary path.

This walking of a solitary path happens when one is alone and when one is with others. The Reference Point in both cases is neither seeming aloneness nor seeming togetherness, neither self nor other: It is the Eternal.

This is *aloneness WITH the Eternal*. Sometimes it feels very alone indeed. The trainee must be willing to experience the hard, dark edge of that aloneness. When all conditions ripen, this dark edge dissolves into the soft brightness of the “with.”

The Precious *With*

So many times during her great kensho in 1976-'77 and throughout the next year or two, Rev. Master said, “It is *enough* for me to know the Lord of the House.” The meaning of the word “know” here goes far beyond intellectual understanding. It is a *knowing* that dwells within, and radiates from, the hara. It wells up into the heart that knows the pang of loneliness and suffuses it with joy.

These words of my Master—“It is *enough* for me to know the Lord of the House.”—are true for me. Sometimes karmic clouds roll in and at least partially obscure this teaching. That is when I need to reach out beyond the clouds with faith—the “knowing within unknowing.” This

is all part of the process of conversion. I do not wish it to be other than it is.

When I least expect it, there, once again, is the quiet certainty of the “cleanness of the Water.” There, once again, is the certainty that everything that happens is for my good. And there, once again, is the warm glow of the precious “with” in the hara.

It was always there. It will always be there. At times, I may not clearly apprehend it, but it *was, is and will be* there.

The Precepts, meditation and faith: the practice of these three fundamental aspects of the Path of the Buddhas and Ancestors creates the optimal conditions within mind and body for the “blood and bones” knowing of the “with.”

Entrusting

In the greatest crisis of my life, my master told me, “Just don't worry about external things.” I grasped my will and put this teaching into practice wholeheartedly and this led directly to my first awakening to the Eternal. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett showed me the way, and I have found again and again that the way she showed me works for me.

The key to this “not worrying” lies in entrusting all that we love into the hands of the Eternal. Only when we do this can we relax into the oceanic stillness of our wonderful True Nature. In my experience, that entrusting, and then relaxing into stillness, often only comes after working through a good deal of worry. Again, this is where I have to exercise faith: keep meditating, keep looking up, keep going on *through* the fog of worry until I come out the other side.

And always, eventually, I do come out the other side. Worry and care fall away, and once again, I experience the soft, bright *fullness* within the hara: this world of impermanence and suffering *is* the Body of Buddha; there *is* nothing from the first, that is, the true reality of all existence *is* the Great Immaculacy; it *is* enough to know the Lord of the House.

There is one word above all others that expresses all of this for me—Love. Love with a capital “L”—always with a capital “L.”—As Rev. Master so truly put it, “Love beyond your wildest dreams.” It is

because this Love is the heart of existence that we can entrust all that we love to It.

I chose a poem of Great Master Ryokan to head this chapter of these Reflections in a Disciple's Life. Here is another:

*Spring—slowly the peaceful sound
Of a priest's staff drifts from the village.
In the garden, green willows;
Water plants float serenely in the pond.
My bowl is fragrant from the rice of a thousand
homes;
My heart has renounced the sovereignty of riches
and worldly fame.
Quietly cherishing the memory of the ancient
Buddhas,
I walk to the village for another day of begging.*

Chapter 27

The Begging Bowl

*There is nothing to give or to be given;
This is called the Right Law.*

—Great Master Keizan, *Denkoroku*
("The Transmission of the Light")

Giving and Receiving

Precisely because there is, in the deepest and truest sense, nothing to give and nothing to receive, no giver and no receiver, we can give and receive for the joy of the giving and receiving.

Forget self; forget other. There is a Flow *through* self, *through* other, *through* all existence, *through* all beings. When we do not hold back because of greed or fear, we are one with that Flow. Then if it is *good* to receive, we receive with bows; and if it is *good* to give, we give with bows.

"Giving" and "receiving" are names we give to positions in the Flow. We fall out of harmony with the Flow when we get stuck with being "giver" or "receiver." It is *enough* to do that which needs to be done.

A Monk's Privilege

To be a monk in one's innermost heart is to *know* that one has nothing *and* that that "nothing" embraces the whole of life, the whole of reality, a world of infinite possibilities. The Goodness of the Eternal flows forever through all worlds, all realms of rebirth, all states of existence. When we see this, our heart fills with a longing to offer everything we have, everything we are, in gratitude.

A monk is privileged to have a begging bowl—not just the physical begging bowl, but THE Begging Bowl of the heart. It is the bowl of all-acceptance; and it is also the bowl which, when filled to overflowing, gives freely for the benefit of all living beings.

There was (perhaps there still is) a company in the San Francisco Bay Area that sells concrete. The motto on its trucks reads, "Find a hole

and fill it.” Rev. Master changed that to “Find a need and fill it.”
Human life offers a continual stream of opportunities to fill a need.
We do not need to discriminate between “big” and “little” needs. It is
enough to fill a need and go on. It is *enough* to fill a need and let go. It
all happens within that wondrous Flow of the Life of Buddha.

Chapter 28

The Everyday Mystical

*If from your experience of the senses Basic Truth
you do not know,
How can you ever find the Path that certain is no
matter how far distant you may walk?*

—Great Master Sekito Kisen, *Sandokai*
 (“Harmonizing the Real and the Apparent”)

The Meaning of “Mystical”

My Webster's Dictionary gives some good definitions of the word “mystical,” especially the following: “Having a spiritual meaning, reality, or the like, neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence;” and “. . . manifesting an individual's direct communion with God through contemplation, vision, an inner light, or the like, as [in] *mystical* rapture.”

In modern popular English usage, the word “mystical” seldom has the above meanings. Mostly, it is used in a derogatory way to signify some form of imaginative self-delusion. This degraded usage reflects the prevalent materialistic dogma in which skepticism of all things spiritual plays such a prominent role. Thus, activities such as spiritualism (the effort to contact and make use of the knowledge and powers of spirits) are called “mystical,” when in fact such activities have nothing to do with the spiritual training and experience that constitute genuine mysticism.

Genuine mystical experience does exist, and it is not as rare as one might think. Certainly it is not reserved for a special class of human being. Many people who have had such experience do not talk about it. Sometimes this is because they doubt their own experience; sometimes it is because they know that they risk exposing themselves to others' doubt and criticism—possibly even persecution.

The mystic seeks union with God. Mystical experience is the experience of this longed-for union. Mystical experience does not stand in opposition to the normal experience of the senses. Rather,

mystical experience *includes* that normal experience and reveals its full depth of spiritual meaning.

The Buddha of Everyday Life

When we do not recognize Buddha in the world around us, the root problem is not in the world: we need to clean our spiritual spectacles in order to recognize the Great Immaculacy. And whether we do that cleaning or not (which is entirely up to us and is *not* the problem of the Great Immaculacy), the Great Immaculacy *is*. Whether we recognize It or not, It is always right here, right now, and Its Great Compassion is always supporting us.

Why do we not recognize Buddha in the world around us?—Because we do not treat various aspects of that world as Buddha.—And why do we not treat these aspects as Buddha?—Because we do not treat ourselves as Buddha. In other words, the root of non-recognition of Buddha lies in our own opinion of ourself.

To truly meditate is to treat every aspect of body and mind, every aspect of our experience, as Buddha. For when we meditate truly, we do not judge and we do not cling or push away: that which is present in consciousness at this very moment is treated as Buddha simply by accepting it with an open heart, allowing it to arise in consciousness and pass away naturally.

Meditation shows us that we have the capacity to do the essential mental and spiritual act that makes recognition of the Great Immaculacy possible. This mental and spiritual act can be brought into the activity of daily life through the practice of mindfulness and through Preceptual practice. What is needed is a *whole* religious practice in which mystical training can open the door of mystical experience. In truth, that door swings open by itself *when we stop doing that which forces it shut*.

One more essential element is needed—a *teaching* that explains how to do the training, and that also reveals important features and obstacles within the spiritual landscape that the trainee will be traversing. Some of that teaching can be got from books, but the fullest and best way—and the way in which trainees down the ages have been led by their own Buddha Nature—is to be found within the master-disciple relationship. A master does far more than “teach” in

the usual sense in which we use the term: the master is used by the Eternal to *represent* Itself for the disciple. It is as if the Eternal is saying to the disciple, “You long to recognize Me. There are those who give their lives to me without counting the cost. Here is one of these people who I give to you. This person is not Me, *and* I will use this person to *represent* Myself for you. And since I am your own True Self, this person will always *represent* your own True Self for you.” Thus, while discipleship is always, at the deepest level, discipleship to the Eternal, the Eternal makes use of the human master to help the disciple all through the disciple's life.

The Urgent Need to Awaken

Imagine a man who is asleep in his own house. He is having a beautiful dream. The house has caught on fire. Is the man better off if he remains asleep and continues to dream the beautiful dream? Or is he better off if he wakes up and gets out of the house before he, too, catches fire?

Few people prefer to extend a beautiful dream if it means incurring destruction. But few indeed are those who realize that worldly life is a dream and that, however difficult the process of awakening might prove to be, it is necessary to awaken from the dream in order to save their true spiritual life.

No one can give another person the deep sense of urgent need that motivates the true mystic. Our own suffering, our own spiritual longing, and the ripening of the seed of faith within our own heart bring us to this sense of urgency. The person who knows that the house is on fire, and that he needs to get moving in order to avoid being burned up, is already half-enlightened.

The sense of urgent need expresses itself in seriousness of purpose, commitment to one spiritual Path that constitutes a *whole* way of training, and reverence for the teaching and for those who have Transmitted it, especially one's master. Genuine mysticism can *never* be divorced from this seriousness of intention, commitment and respect. There is much confusion on this point in the modern world, but such confusion has always existed. As Great Master Dogen emphasized eight centuries ago, much of this confusion comes from the fact that few people have as yet had the opportunity to meet and train with a true master.

Oneness

In human history, some people have come to some degree of awareness of the Oneness of all existence through reason, or through a combination of reason and intuition. Those who have sought union with the Eternal have gone the route of contemplation rather than reason. This is not to say that reason has not served some mystics well, but only that one cannot think one's way to enlightenment.

The Oneness found in genuine mystical experience is Oneness *within* the Eternal. Within the Great Immaculacy, where is self? Where is other? As Rev. Master so often said, "It is *enough* to know the Lord of the House."

If we think this Oneness is far from us, It seems far from us. If we think we are not worthy of It, It seems remote indeed. If we offer these very thoughts, these very opinions and judgments, to the Eternal in pure meditation and *just BE with an open heart* the Immaculate Oneness is there breathing in and breathing out. It was always there; It will always be there. If I go hunting for It, I cannot find It. If I forget about searching for anything whatsoever and just take refuge in stillness, when I least expect to find It, there It is.

"When I least expect . . ."—How much is expressed in those few words! How are we to recognize Buddha if we allow our view of the world to be shaped by our own expectations? As Great Master Kanchi Sosan (Chinese: Seng-tsan) wrote, "The Way is only difficult for those who pick and choose." We cannot be demanding that the world suit itself to our desires and be recognizing Buddha at the same time. So we have to give up our insistence, or give up our search for union with the Eternal. If we prefer to give up insistence, then lots of bowing will stand us in good stead.

Chapter 29

Reality

When you have practiced sitting meditation for a long time and have come to know the Place of Compassion, suddenly you will perceive the moon of the Buddha Nature in the earth of body and mind. The Heavenly Wind will sweep through your body, dispersing all worldly care, and you will look down upon the deep Ocean of the Great Immaculacy, which is pure and clear and without shadow or dust. On Its surface, innumerable fine ripples flow very quietly—the karmic streams of beings, separate from one another and yet all contained within the one Ocean.

Depth and Concentration

“Life is full of suffering”: this is the classic way of expressing the Buddha's First Noble Truth. Here is another way: “Worldly life can never satisfy the deepest longing of the heart.”

What is “worldly life?”—It is life lived at a superficial level; it is life lived in preoccupation with external things, external relations; it is life stuck in the opposites—joy and sadness, love and hate, gain and loss, honor and dishonor, pleasure and pain.

Life itself is not at fault if we choose to ignore its depths and continue to wander in confusion on its surface. There is That within us that knows that the deeper waters are there. It will lead us into those depths if we will but trust It and follow It.

If we would venture into those depths, we must concentrate our mind in meditation. This is easier said than done. In order to do it successfully, we must train in accordance with a basic principle of the Middle Path: Make a gentle and steady effort, avoiding the two extremes of sloth and excessive zeal.

A scattered mind leaps from ripple to ripple on the surface of the Ocean of life—always on the surface. Right concentration in

meditation allows us to stop leaping around. It is as if we put our hands and feet together and drop straight down vertically—down into stillness, down into the Place of Compassion.

Choosing Reality

Rev. Master sometimes pointed out that the Eternal has already chosen us; it is up to us whether we will choose the Eternal. In other words, we are offered the opportunity to venture into Life's depths, but it is not forced upon us: we have to choose to go—or not to go.

In fact, we have to choose again and again. Genuine meditation is *always* a venturing into the unknown. However far one may have ventured yesterday, the venturing of today is a *new* venturing. Continuing venturing leaves no room for spiritual complacency.

The surface of life is always there, and it provides plenty of reminders why it is so important to venture into the depths. But reminders also come from the deeper waters—the beckoning of the Eternal to draw closer to Itself.

We do not have to settle for second best spiritually. The deepest longing of the heart is within each of us. When we experience this longing in its full purity, we know it as a flame of longing love of indescribable power and majesty. Then we know why worldly life can never satisfy the deepest longing of the heart: it is because this longing love is *of and for* the Eternal.

Letting Go

The Eternal has chosen us, yet, due to the dark karma of self-judgment, we may be blind to this wonderful fact. More surprising perhaps is the fact that we can choose the Eternal and yet still be mostly unaware that this is what we are doing. Many, many times Rev. Master told disciples who were struggling with self-doubt, “You are still here [in the monastery].” By this she meant that the trainees were choosing to continue on in training regardless of the clouds of confusion that sometimes swirled through their heads, and that this is what really mattered.

We tend to think that the hard things to let go of are material comforts and human consolation. Actually, the really hard thing to let go of is our own judgment of ourself. How can we do this?—By going again

and again to the Place of Compassion within ourselves in pure meditation, and in that Place offering all we are and have into the hands of the Eternal. Buddhism is a religion, and this is the quintessential religious act.

Chapter 30

Innate Wisdom

Living in the world yet not forming attachments to the dust of the world is the way of a true Zen student. . . .

Live with cause and leave results to the great law of the universe. Pass each day in peaceful contemplation.

Zen Master Zengetsu
—quoted in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, by
Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps

Wisdom and Knowledge

Wisdom is innate within our wonderful True Nature. This wisdom manifests *in our experience* whenever greed, hate and delusion are sufficiently out of the way.

This way of understanding the essential nature of wisdom illuminates the deep meaning of the Precepts and meditation. When we train in the Precepts, we refrain from indulging the attitudes that blind us to innate wisdom. When we meditate, we relax into our True Nature in perfect faith, and innate wisdom has a chance to get a word in edgeways. When Preceptual training and contemplative training are harmoniously wed to one another, so that they function as two aspects of *one* movement of the heart, innate wisdom can manifest unimpeded within the life of the trainee.

Knowledge is acquired; innate wisdom is not. When we get out of the way of innate wisdom, there it is in all its simplicity and profundity. We did not bring it into existence: all we did was stop making clouds in a clear sky.

Knowledge about external things is not wisdom. Wisdom, however, can make use of knowledge about external things. Much of what passes for knowledge is really half-baked opinion or ideology, and wisdom bypasses such unsound ideas.—How? Very simply, they do not “sit right” in spiritual intuition.

The head that does not allow itself to be guided by spiritual intuition can have every appearance of brilliant intelligence and yet in reality be utterly lost with regard to all that truly matters in life. Conversely, the life of a person who knows that he or she knows nothing can be an excellent vehicle for the expression of wisdom.

Unquenchable Optimism

Within innate wisdom there is an unquenchable optimism, an optimism based in the true character of reality rather than in a belief that external circumstances are going to end up in some configuration that accords with our desires. What is this “true character of reality?”—To put it very simply, all conditions, all circumstances, all mental, physical and emotional states are good grist for the mill of meditation. Or, to put it another way, there is such a thing as genuine spiritual conversion. Here is yet another way of saying the same thing: The Eternal always has the last word.

Thus even when we find ourselves in a state that seems remote from the spiritual harmony of which I have written above, the very spiritual disharmony that we are experiencing constitutes the potential for the re-establishment of harmony—perhaps on a deeper level than ever before.

For me, the example of my own master's training, especially during the great kensho described in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, always comes to mind as the embodiment of the unquenchable optimism that exists within innate wisdom. However great, however painful, the darkness might be, Rev. Master always chose to turn within in meditation and *allow the Eternal to help her in her spiritual need*. This I saw her do again and again. And this she taught her disciples how to do.

Innate wisdom always homes in on that Good that at one and the same time lies at the heart of all existence and transcends all worldly care. We are born, live and die within that Good, and It constitutes the very core of our being. We can turn to It in pure meditation even in the midst of the greatest spiritual darkness. The capacity to do this is innate, not acquired. The results of doing it speak for themselves.

Chapter 31

The Cleanness of the Water

To look back upon one's training with enlightened eyes is to see no speck of dust.

—Great Master Dogen, *Gyakudo-yojinshu*
("Aspects of Meditation")

The Path of Suffering's Cessation

I would like to describe as simply as I can my actual experience of the way in which the teaching of the Five Columns in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* is applied in practice.

My description is couched in personal terms, and I am thinking of particular events in my spiritual life. I am thinking of times when I have been in a cloud of spiritual pain and have gone for refuge to the Eternal in pure meditation. In some instances, the details of these events stand out clearly in memory. I can see the stages in the process—the stages in the Path of Suffering's Cessation. And I can see each stage in the light of one of the Five Columns.

The Inextinguishable Light

Even in the midst of the greatest fear, grief, self-doubt, anger, confusion there is the inextinguishable Light that pierces these spiritual clouds *and that I can see with the spiritual eyes of faith*. I just have to pause to be still. Within a moment of stillness there is That which looks up toward the Light which is entirely *of Itself*. I just have to trust It completely and *do nothing to get in Its way*.

One moment of stillness; then another. Intervening pain and turmoil. Hold fast! Hold fast! Then another moment of stillness. Allow attention to be drawn to the breath or the beat of the heart. Another moment of stillness. Surrender into stillness. Join the Meditation that is eternal.

Washing

Open the body and mind, open the heart, fully to the Eternal. Allow inhalation and exhalation to quieten. Allow the heart to soften.

Be willing to see where I am wrong. Refrain from accusing self or others. “All, all is defilement, defilement, earth, earth. Do, do the work within my heart.”

Is the dirt real? Is the uncleanness real?—It *seems* real, and while it seems real there is pain. Please help me to look up within the pain. Do not cling to regret. Do not cling to thoughts of injury and accusation. Do not cling to self-justification. Do not cling to self-judgment. Let go of worry about external things: “Nothing matters. Mindfulness is all.”

Suddenly, there It is for a moment: the Cleanness of the Water. Then It seems to vanish. But I glimpsed It. A single glimpse of It and I know that the dirt is not real. There are actions and there are consequences: “No doer is there who does the deed, nor is there one who feels the fruit.”

As I see actions and consequences—not those of others; only mine!—I see also how I have created clouds in a clear sky *for myself*. Others make their karma; I make mine. I can only do my own training. Whenever I have forgotten this, I have made suffering for myself *regardless of what others have done or not done*.

Where I have contributed to the confusion of others, I have contributed to my own confusion. Where I have done harm to others, I have hurt myself. Sincere repentance is beyond praise and blame, self and other: it is the pure sorrow of having willfully added to confusion and pain for oneself, for anyone, for any being; it leads to the resolve to better understand and practice Preceptual Truth.

Where did I go wrong?—I did not remember to turn to the Eternal for help. I did not remember to be still instead of reacting impulsively. I did not remember to listen for, and follow, the Voice of the Eternal, which is the Voice of my own True Heart. The Precepts are reminders to follow this Path. How heavily I pay when I wander from this Path!—And still always, always there is the Cleanness of the Water.

A single glimpse of the Cleanness of the Water gives rise to quiet confidence and strengthened faith: “I am *willing!*” “Move, move my Defilement-free One.”

Here again is the Cleanness of the Water, and then the heaviness of spirit flows in in a dark wave. Hold fast to the Lord of the House! Hold fast within the hara! The dark wave subsides. There is the Cleanness

of the Water again. How exquisite It is. Do not try to hold on to It. Trust that It is doing Its work and that *in reality It is always there*.

With each cycle of washing, the spirit is lighter. With each cycle, I am more aware of the Compassion of this process, however painful it may be.

Heaven Penetrates Earth

Now the Cleanness of the Water is *known*. It was always the True Reality. It always will be the True Reality. “Since there is nothing from the first, where can the dust alight?”

From the beginning, always, everything that has happened, everything that happens, everything that will happen is for my good. Everyone, everything is a Bodhisattva for me personally. The pain, the confusion, the anguished striking out in spiritual darkness, suffering, disease, death—all, all is Buddha. The Buddhas and Ancestors, my dear master, my beloved fellow disciples, all beings: all, all are Buddha. The Life of Buddha is infinite and eternal. All, all is within the Great Immaculacy.

All Buddhas teach. Some Buddhas teach by example mostly what is good to do. The Buddhas and Ancestors are such Buddhas. Buddhas can also teach by example what is *not* good to do. In either case, it can be difficult at times to comprehend the teaching that is being given. For me, coming to an understanding of the teaching usually is like fumbling around in a dark room for a light switch. I have to trust that if it is good that I understand, that the understanding will eventually come. Keep an open mind and heart and do not try to force the issue.

The consequences of my own actions are Buddhas that give me teaching. The consequences of others' actions are also Buddhas that give me teaching. Always I need to wait patiently in order to absorb the teaching.

Bathing

The Healing Love of the Eternal flows to and through all pain, to and through the sources of all pain. My love for the Eternal is the Eternal's love for me; the Eternal's love for me is my love for the Eternal. The Cleanness of the Water *is*.

The Love of the Eternal flows through the shadows of self-doubt, regret, self-judgment, grief, sadness, confusion. It despises none of them; It heals them all. The Cleanness of the Water *is*.

I will forget. I will stumble. The Cleanness of the Water *is*.

I will remember. I will be carried aloft and soar. The Cleanness of the Water *is*.

The Eternal Life of the Tathagata

Lord of my heart, I hide myself in Thee. I am blind, and I will follow where You lead. Please help me follow where You lead.

Eternal Meditation is the Light in the First Column. Eternal Meditation is the scouring Love in the Second Column. Eternal Meditation is the flow of Wisdom in the Third Column. Eternal Meditation is the Healing Love in the Fourth Column. This transitory, insubstantial body and mind is the vessel of Eternal Meditation, and this Reality of Oneness is the Fifth Column.

When I do not see this True Reality, I need to look up and ask for help in the First Column. I need to open my heart to the Eternal and offer everything in the Second Column. I need to sit still in patient acceptance and wait upon the Lord for the Teaching that illuminates the darkness of delusion in the Third Column. I need to entrust all of me to the Compassion of the Eternal and listen for Its guidance in the Fourth Column. I need to sit still and upright in the Fifth Column—and follow wherever the Eternal leads.

Chapter 32

Conclusion

*When I am gone,
And the house seems empty,
Do not thou,
O plum tree by the eaves,
The spring forget.*

—Variation by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett
of a poem by Helen Waddell

A Great River

I think of my master's teaching as a great river, such as the Nile, flowing through a desert. The waters of the river create a fertile, green valley right in the heart of a vast aridity. My life is like a little corner of that valley that has been nourished by the waters of the great river. Without those waters, this corner of the valley would be part of the desert.

By “teaching” I really mean the whole merit of my master's training. What we usually think of as “teaching” is one important aspect of that merit, but there is far more to the merit than I, at least, will ever comprehend.

In these pages, I have attempted to show the way in which my life has been blessed by this great flood of merit. And my life is just one little corner of a long, wide valley. Many beings have been blessed by one woman's indefatigable resolve to find and live the Perfection of Zen!

I write these lines in the twentieth year following the Parinirvana of my master, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. The flood of merit has just begun! It will roll on and on down the centuries. I wish all who read these words the full benefit of this river of merit.

*Sitting alone in the middle of the night,
My heart rises in longing love to its Immaculate
Source.
The kind eyes of my master*

*Shine through this world of suffering.
Oh wonderful Unborn True Nature, I take refuge
in Thee!*

Appendix I: Related Writings

Chapter 1: Unconditional Love

Chapter 2: Neither Being nor Non-Being

Chapter 3: “The Gordian Knot of the Spirit”

Chapter 4: “Flitting Shadows”

Chapter 5: “The Mystic City”

Chapter 6: “Life with a Capital “L”

Chapter 7: “The Five Laws of the Universe”

Note: I am continuing to write an essay now and then. These essays will be published in the “Related Writings” section on the website, <http://www.howtogrowalotusblossom.org> “

Chapter 1

Unconditional Love

The Light of the Lord of the House, the Heart-Mind, irradiates the infinity of space—within Its center I may not say that It is empty; I may not say that It is not empty. It is unstained, immaculate; I am not It, It is all of me; thus form is void and void is form.

—Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett
How to Grow a Lotus Blossom,
Plate LXIV (first edition: Plate XLIII)

Two Oceans

A single human being can contain an ocean of grief. Feeling is the ultimate reaper of karma, and when very heavy karma is reaped in feeling at the deepest level, the ocean of grief is revealed.

Fortunately, each human being (and all the grief within each human being) exists within the Great Ocean of Immaculacy.

When the ocean of our grief is at last able to flow and disperse into the infinitely vaster, and all-accepting Ocean of Immaculacy, the spiritual wound that underlies our grief begins to heal.

The Blindness of Cosmic Love

Fortunately for us, the Love of the Eternal is incapable of loving one aspect of Itself more than another. We live in the shadow of our own judgment of ourselves, but the Love of the Eternal does not see that shadow—which is, after all, an unreality.

Cosmic Love does not distinguish perpetrator from victim, the just from the unjust, the good from the bad: It just envelops all in Its limitless Compassion.

It is that Compassion that we open our mind, body and spirit to in pure meditation. In the beginning, we may think of it as our embracing of all that arises; one day we know it as our offering to the

Eternal of all that arises. What is the difference?—One day we hit the limit of what we can do on our own and we cry out for help with our whole being. Then we find that the limit of what we can do on our own is not the limit of what the Love of the Eternal can do. This is the meaning of “grace.”

A Human Expression

When we need the human expression of unconditional acceptance and love, it is provided, and we can trust this fact implicitly: we do not have to grasp after human love.

Sometimes this acceptance and love—and, when it is needed, forgiveness—comes from the most unlikely quarter. It is important to understand that the Eternal quietly and tirelessly works for the good of all beings, and that it is the Eternal that brings us together with precisely the right form of help at the right time. There are plenty of surprises in this process.

I have spoken here of the human expression of unconditional love. But the expression of such love is not limited to humans. Animals and other beings are capable of being the vehicles of unconditional love: all beings possess the Buddha Nature.

Two Points of Teaching

In the fall of 1974, Rev. Master gave a series of lectures during a week-long monastic sesshin (meditation retreat). She used visual aids—one of which was a version of the Buddhist “Wheel of Life”—to explain Buddhist teachings. I was twenty-five years old. I sat through those lectures in amazement: here was the explanation of life for which I had always been looking. Two points of teaching have always stood out when I have looked back at that wonderful week.

The first point is that when we die we are shown our actions as in a mirror. And we have a choice whether to judge ourselves and sentence ourselves to continued wandering in sangsara—or instead to forgive ourselves for being human and entrust ourselves to the Compassion of the Eternal.

The second point is that in whatever realm rebirth takes place, whether it be a blissful realm or a hellish realm or any other realm, Cosmic Compassion—the Unconditional Love of the Eternal—is to be

found. In our ignorance and desperation, we may believe ourselves to be far from It, yet It is always with us. And at any point we can turn toward It and sincerely ask for help.

If we put these two teachings together, we see that whatever we may do to ourselves, the Eternal was, is and always will be right with us and within us. For me, the process that we call “Buddhist training” is the process of awakening to this Unconditional Love, learning to trust It in all situations, and doing that which allows It to help and guide me.

The Shared Adventure

I am one little speck of humanity. Together with other human beings, I live in this world and this universe for a tiny duration of time. And we humans share this universe with a vast number of other beings and forms of existence. We have no idea of the vastness of the scale of it all.

All these beings and forms of existence, in all our realms and worlds, are going together on the same great adventure. And we are all accompanied every inch of the way by the Unconditional Love of the Eternal. To It, all are part of Itself. To It, all are precious.

Living beings can live and die within the Great Ocean of Immaculacy and not recognize It for what It really is. Yet living beings—and especially we human beings—can also awaken to find ourselves, together with all our pain and confusion, in the midst of the Great Immaculacy. Then we can turn toward the Unconditional Love of the Eternal with confidence and allow It to wash and heal our self-inflicted spiritual wounds.

Chapter 2

Neither Being nor Non-Being

*Great Kanzeon views all the world in truth,
Free from defilement, loving, knowing all,
Full of Compassion.*

—“The Scripture of Avalokiteswara Bodhisattva”
from *The Lotus Sutra*
translated by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

Two Mistaken Views

Here are two mistaken ways of viewing our life and the world in which we live: In one view, the world as it presents itself to us through the vehicle of our senses, together with our mental and emotional life and our somewhat vague sense of our body and its workings, is all there is to reality. In the other view, all of this is seen as transitory, but also as painful, sordid, futile, dirty, base—and ultimately meaningless.

The former view is the normal, unreflecting worldly view. The latter view is what happens to that normal, unreflecting view when it bumps up against the harsh realities of life and, instead of deepening into faith and true understanding, sinks into despair. The former view is “falling into being.” The latter view is “falling into non-being.”

Do Not Forget

When I ponder these two views, I think, “If we *wish* to ignore the Eternal, there is nothing to stop us doing so. On the other hand, even if everyone else in the world were to choose to ignore the Eternal, that would not force me to do so.”

The truth is that there *is* more to life than external things; and because there is this True Reality, which I usually call “the Eternal” or “our wonderful True Nature” (at some point, I started putting the “wonderful” at the front, and I have not been able to stop: It *is* wonderful), existence, though transitory and often painful, is not in reality sordid, futile, dirty, and base. And above all, it is not meaningless.

What *is* futile is to wait around for the world to change to suit our expectations. What is *not* futile is to surrender our expectations into the hands of the Eternal and allow the Eternal to correct our view of things. When our eyes are clouded by ignorance and expectation (the first mistaken view), or the grief and despair that inevitably result when expectation is disappointed (the second mistaken view), the world looks one way; when our view has been transformed so that we see through eyes of faith, compassion and sympathy, the same world looks another way altogether.

Above all, what I think when I ponder the mistaken views that I have described here is, “Do not forget the Unconditional Love that lies at the heart of all existence.” It is not just that there is more to life than meets the eye: there is *True Life* that is magnificent, immaculate and compassionate beyond our wildest dreams.

Self-Forgiveness

Why would we ever settle for either of the above views when there is the Refuge of the Eternal?—Ignorance certainly is a major player here. But if we scratch the surface of ignorance a bit we find something peculiar.

This peculiar something is a deep wound of self-judgment. It is not just that we are blind to the Eternal, for all beings have an intuitive knowledge of the Eternal. It is that in the midst of great confusion and grief beings have judged themselves as being *unworthy* of that Unconditional Love. And these hard and anguished knots of self-judgment—the very core of what I have called our “spiritual need”—become the most difficult aspects of the karmic inheritance of beings “downstream” in the stream of karma.

These hard knots have to soften in order to be helped. They are softened through forgiveness and acceptance of ourselves; and they are softened whenever we are forgiving and accepting toward others. For we will find most difficult to forgive and accept in another person that which we find most difficult to forgive and accept in ourselves. This is an immutable principle of spiritual training.

Thus every meeting with another human being—even just the memory or thought of another person—has the potential to help soften any hard karmic knots within ourselves *if we refrain from complaining*

and blaming, and instead look with eyes of kindness and sympathy.
What a wonderful world we live in when every seeming chance
encounter—even a passing thought—offers us such a precious
spiritual opportunity!

“Great Kanzeon views all the world in truth.”—And Great Kanzeon—
Cosmic Compassion—can help each of us view all the world in truth.

Chapter 3

The Gordian Knot of the Spirit

The roots of the lotus are nurtured in the mud just as Right Understanding is nurtured in this world of delusion if only we use everything, including adversity, as an opportunity rather than an impediment to our training.

—Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett
How to Grow a Lotus Blossom,
Plate LXI (first edition: Plate XXXIX)

Four Strands of Rope

Four strands of spiritual rope form the Gordian knot of causality that perpetuates suffering. These strands are externalized longing, self-hatred, self-judgment and self-doubt.

Externalized longing is greed; all hatred is based in self-hatred; judgmentalism and doubt are the main forms of delusion, and all judgmentalism is based in self-judgment, while all doubt is based in self-doubt.—So here we have greed, hate and delusion—the “three fires,” or “three poisons.”

Greed, hate and delusion do not make a pretty picture. However, they constitute the mud within which the lotus plant of training/enlightenment has its roots. In fact, the greed, hate and delusion from which we suffer, and which so need conversion, constitute our *potential* for enlightenment.

The Knot

These four strands of rope are tied in the hard knot of self, which is the hard knot that lies at the heart of our karmic inheritance.

We can pick at this knot for years. Then one day the Sword of Buddha's Wisdom gives it a good whack and it falls apart.

Here's the amazing thing: there is *nothing* within that knot. What does that mean for greed, hate and delusion?—There is nothing to

gain, nothing and no one to blame, no one to judge, nothing for doubt to stick to.

Rev. Master called this the “fullest Nothingness you could ever imagine.” Thus, when Cosmic Compassion looks at our body and mind (the “five skandhas”) and, indeed, the whole world, It sees that all the many aspects of existence that It surveys are “in their self-nature void, unstained and pure.” So if one day we see with the eyes of Cosmic Compassion, then we see what It sees: we see an ocean of Immaculacy.

For this “fullest Nothingness” is the Great Immaculacy. It is not negative, futile emptiness, nor is It something that can be grasped and held onto. It simply *is*, *and* It is Love, It is Goodness, beyond our wildest dreams.

Adversity

Who swings the Sword of Buddha's Wisdom?—It certainly is not me. A sword of that magnitude has to be swung by the Eternal.

Since that Sword can cut through all delusion, Its benefits are great indeed. How can I live and train so as not to impede Its work?

The best way I know to keep from impeding the work of Cosmic Wisdom is to bow within adversity—and to bow *to* adversity.

We would like to be able to shake off adversity as a dog shakes off water when it comes out of a lake after a swim. But some adversity sticks to us like glue—sometimes for years. The sheer difficulty can stretch us to the breaking point. Under such strain, it can be very difficult not to look down and sink into a hell of chronic complaining. And here is where Buddhist training can enable us to turn the seeming impediment into an opportunity (see the quote that heads this chapter).

How to do this?—Sit down in meditation, face the adversity, open the heart to the Eternal, ask for help, offer *everything*: “Please help. I am willing!” Just sit with the pain and difficulty, giving the Eternal a chance to help. Work throughout the day on looking up rather than down; catch the complaining when it starts up; refrain from feeding negativity through non-Preceptual actions of thought, speech and body.—And *keep going* in this training, immersing oneself in it to

such an extent that one forgets ideas of ability and inability, inadequacy and attainment. When we are just doing what needs to be done without insistence or expectation, the Eternal can get a word in edgeways.

Most of the time this does not necessarily feel like any kind of transcendence of suffering. Yet every time we bow to adversity as to our Teacher, we take a transcendent step, regardless of how we are feeling at the time we take it.

We *can* refrain from doing that which impedes the Sword of Buddha's Wisdom in Its work. Then, when all conditions have ripened, the Sword cleaves the knot of impacted greed, hate and delusion. And suddenly sangsara—the world of suffering—has become Nirvana!

Chapter 4

Flitting Shadows

When I allow external things to influence me, endless space takes on endless colours and forms that titillate or terrify my senses; when I am still, these shapes, which are the shapes of fear and the negative side of desire, have no means of manifesting themselves. . . . We shape our fears from emptiness and unto emptiness they must return.

—Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett
How to Grow a Lotus Blossom, Plate LXIV (first edition, Plate XLIII)

Spiritual Weather

The temple in which I live is located in a part of the country where the weather changes frequently. Most days, we can look southwest and see in the sky what is coming at us.

Similarly, I am accustomed to “spiritual weather” in which “clouds” arise and pass in consciousness. Sometimes the clouds are darker, sometimes lighter. They can be clouds of fear or desire, hope or regret, grief or joy, and so on.

It is my choice whether I will get caught up in the passing feelings. It is my choice whether I will build a train of thought on the basis of a passing cloud. It is my choice whether I will speak or act based on a train of thought that started with a state of feeling.

It is my choice whether I will get lost in the passing clouds.

The Umbrella

If I get lost in the passing clouds, I am sure to get soaked to the skin with suffering. But I can choose to duck under the umbrella of meditation—the umbrella that is the Place of stillness within the hara. This is down underneath the passing clouds of feeling and thought.

Sometimes the spiritual weather can blow in strong and stormy. Yet there is always safety under that umbrella. In fact, it is the only truly safe place in a world of impermanence.

During a big storm, I have to hold on to that umbrella for dear life. But help is available. I only have to turn to the Eternal with childlike trust and *ask* for help. Then I have to be willing to sit still.

Shadows and Reality

Rev. Master often referred to these spiritual “clouds” as “shadows,” or “unrealities.” Yet they can *seem* real enough. Emotions can be very intense; thoughts can carry great conviction.

Again, it is my choice whether I will run with a *seeming* reality, or take refuge in the Eternal, which is True Reality.

True Reality does not despise *seeming* reality. The Eternal does not despise the flitting shadows of feeling and thought. Nor is the Eternal swayed by them. The shadows arise and pass *within* True Reality: they are not It, yet neither are they apart from It.

In the physical world, when I look in the direction from which the clouds are coming, I get a pretty good sense of what the weather will be doing within the next half-hour or so. I have avoided many soakings by heeding the warning signaled by a dark cloud on the horizon. Similarly, passing feelings and thoughts arise out of a spiritual horizon of complex karma. A familiar feeling or thought can signal “Time to get under that umbrella of meditative stillness. A storm may be approaching.” There is no *meaningless* form of existence.

Chapter 5

The Mystic City

The original Lord sits in true lotus position in the mystic city.

His threefold, all-embracing sacred womb embraces the eight corners of the universe And transforms them into the purely bright harmony of Heaven and Earth.

Eternal Life is indeed a wonderful work!

The Mystic City

There is within every being That which sits in Eternal Meditation. There is within every being the “Absolute Upright” which knows no confusion.

Our body and mind are the “mystic city,” the rightful and utterly benevolent Ruler of which is the Eternal.

The “sacred womb” is the hara—the place in the body within which meditation is centered. Yet, while the hara is this physical place, it is simultaneously the spiritual “sacred womb” within which our potential for enlightenment is nourished, protected and actualized.

Anatman

The Buddha taught that existence has three characteristics: impermanence; suffering; and *anatman*, which means “no atman”, and which is often translated as “no-soul” or “no-self.”

The fact that existence is characterized by impermanence and suffering is more obvious than the fact that there is no “atman.” What was the Buddha trying to point out by saying that anatman is a fundamental feature of our life?

There is a context. Before His enlightenment, the Buddha believed a particular religious teaching and followed a practice based on that teaching. The teaching held that there is a “World-Soul” (Brahma) and that each sentient being possesses an individual soul (the *atman*) that is separated from the World-Soul by being imprisoned in the

realm of material things—by being stuck in a material body. The atman is imprisoned in this realm through life after life until all desire is extinguished. Then it is liberated from the body and can reunite with the World-Soul.

The purpose of ascetic practice was to conquer desire, even if it meant destroying the body in the process. And the body, being merely material, was inherently expendable. The Buddha nearly starved Himself to death pursuing the goal of freeing the atman from its prison in the body. But one day He realized that He was about to kill Himself and that He still had not realized His goal. Therefore He took nourishment and made a new beginning on the basis of a new premise.

Here is that new premise:—Body and mind are worthy of, and should be treated with, respect. He called this new premise “The Middle Way.”—The Middle Way does not deny that the body is impermanent and subject to pain, but neither does It despise the body and view it as unclean.

In propounding the teaching of anatman, the Buddha was not philosophizing about the existence or non-existence of a soul. He was saying, “There is nothing that is apart from, or outside, the Great Immaculacy.” The Buddha learned this—as others who have followed in His footsteps have learned it—by *experiencing* the Great Immaculacy. Inherent in this experience is the experience of body and mind as being entirely *of* the Great Immaculacy: the five skandhas (the “aggregates” of body and mind) are “void, unstained and pure.”

Taken together, the three characteristic features of existence say the following: “Body and mind are transitory and subject to suffering; therefore do not cling to them. There is nothing within body and mind that is separate from the Eternal, therefore do not despise and abuse body and mind.”

The Lord Enthroned

To whom does this body and mind belong?—Where within this body and mind is there a “me” that owns body and mind?

Certainly I am responsible for my actions. And the consequences of my actions will be experienced in body and mind. Yet this responsibility does not constitute ownership.

That which is *of* the Eternal belongs to the Eternal. The Eternal is its rightful Lord. “My” volition can be used in service of the rightful Lord of body and mind, or it can be used to attempt to steal that which is *of* the Eternal. The latter use of volition is utterly self-defeating.

When the rightful Lord sits enthroned within the hara, the little realm of body and mind experiences the many benefits of a rule that is utterly beneficent and compassionate.

Chapter 6

Life with a Capital “L”

Science studies life with a small “l”; we study Life with a large “L”.

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

The Inner Mystery

It is a well-known fact that people who love baseball are often obsessed with the history of the game and the statistics that provide a general view of the performance of teams and players.

Imagine that you are someone who knows nothing at all about baseball. You have never played it or seen a game. (Maybe you haven't! If so, please bear with me—whether you know the game or not does not matter here.)

Now imagine that one day you are introduced to the game of baseball—but only through reading the rules of the game and the statistics that have been kept so scrupulously for decades. You still have not seen a game.

Suppose now that you see a game. All of a sudden the rules and statistics begin to come to life. Even so, how much are you understanding? To someone who has played baseball, your understanding of the game will still be woefully lacking.

Now imagine that you have a friend who is an expert baseball pitcher. He agrees to give you lessons in pitching. Your very first lesson is a revelation. You think, “It looked so simple! I can't believe that *all that* was going into pitching a baseball.”

All of a sudden, a fundamental part of the game of baseball has come alive for you, and given you a respect for the game that can only be acquired through experience.

When we study the world just with the physical senses and brain, we are like the person who learns the rules of baseball and the statistics, and who has seen the game being played, but who has not played the game. We can know a very great deal about baseball, but something

will always be missing until we play the game. Similarly, we can know a great deal about the mechanical functioning of nature, yet still fail to have any insight into the *meaning* of existence until we let go of external things and turn within in pure meditation.

A certain amount of the “how” of existence can be known with the brain; the “why” of existence must be found within the True Heart. We look outwards for the “how;” we must look within to find the “why.”

When we look within, we look with the eyes of faith. Faith sees meaning where the intellect sees only a void. Faith hears the Song of Immaculacy where the intellect hears nothing at all.

The Niyamas

In its long history, Buddhism has produced its share of philosophical writings. One of the philosophical teachings is that of the *niyamas*—the “five types of natural process,” or “five laws of the universe” (Rev. Master used the latter way of expressing the meaning of *niyamas* in English).

If I had read an explanation of the *niyamas* before hearing Rev. Master's explanation, I would have thought, “This is an interesting teaching, and obviously superior to the dominant Western scientific/materialistic dogma, because the *niyamas* acknowledge the law of karma and recognize the validity of certain mental and spiritual phenomena that Western science rigorously ignores. *But does this teaching have practical value for daily spiritual training?*”

Rev. Master brought to her examination of the *niyamas* a potent combination of careful study under good teachers, spiritual intuition and extensive personal experience of training/enlightenment. Her explanation illuminates the spiritual implications of each of the five laws of the universe. She is like the skilled baseball player who can show the willing neophyte that there is a whole world of meaning wrapped up in the abstractions.

The next Chapter in these Related Writings will be devoted to the five laws of the universe.

Chapter 7

The Five Laws of the Universe

There is no need to change the present body and mind; all one has to do is follow in the enlightened Way of a fine Zen master for this is the receiving of the teaching directly: to follow a Zen master is not to follow in old ways nor to create new ones, it is simply just to receive the teaching.

–Great Master Dogen, *Gakudo-yojinshu*
 (“Aspects of Meditation”)

The Traditional Formulation

The *niyamas*, or “five types of natural processes,” are traditionally expressed as follows: the laws of the physical inorganic world; the laws of the organic world; the law of karma; the laws of Dharma; laws of the mind.

I am a living being, and my existence as a living being has a context. The *niyamas* are a way of looking at my existence within its total context. In other words, the *niyamas* identify five aspects of the world, and of my life as part of the world in which I live.

I am a living being who is a human being who does Buddhist training. What special meaning does each of the *niyamas* have for me as a human being who trains in Buddhism? Rev. Master's explanation of the *niyamas* provides an answer to this question.

Respect the Limits

The first *niyama* is *uta niyama*—physical inorganic processes. Think of a rock. Its existence expresses physical inorganic processes. Another example: the weather.

What is my relationship to a rock and to the weather? The answer to this question might prove rather lengthy, so let us refine the question: What is my relationship to a rock and to the weather *as a Buddhist trainee*?

I can love a pretty rock, and curse a rock that I stub my toe on. I can rejoice in the sunshine and soft air of a lovely spring day, and resent the cold winter drizzle that soaks me to the skin.—If I am not careful, I will end up setting my will against the real limits that the physical world imposes on me. If I do that, I create a great deal of suffering for myself.

Rev. Master expressed the first *nimaya* as “The physical world is not answerable to my personal will.” In other words, the limits that the physical world imposes are a constant reminder that I am not God. The first law of the universe thus becomes a reminder of the importance of all-acceptance—endless bowing.

Let Go

The second *niyama* is *bija niyama*—organic processes. The seed of a plant is an example of a tiny piece of the world that contains within itself a whole little universe of complex processes that make possible the development of a mature plant from the tiny seed. In other words, *living beings grow—and eventually decay.*

I am a living being. My body and mind grew to maturity and are now growing old. One day I will die. My life has been one of constant change, as is the life of every other living being.

Rev. Master called the second *niyama* “the law of change”—Interestingly, in her explanation of this *niyama*, she strongly emphasized a Buddhist teaching that I have repeatedly stressed in the Reflections: the teaching of no-self. And the basic point of this teaching is that *there is no real separation from the Eternal.*

Rev. Master also expressed this second *niyama* as “All things flow.” This is the “Flow of Immaculacy,” which is the same as “no-self.” The *seeming* opposites of that which changes and That which is eternal are in fact complementary aspects of one Flow of Immaculacy.

Body and mind are a rug that is constantly being pulled out from under our expectations. We can accept this fact, look up, and let go.—The unborn, undying Life of Buddha is unscrolling within and around us at this very moment. The details change; the Life of Buddha *is.*

Pay Attention to Cause and Effect

The third niyama is *kamma niyama*—the law of moral cause and effect. If I lose my temper, I feel lousy later: cause and effect. If someone loses their temper at me and I respond with compassion rather than resentment, I feel peaceful later: cause and effect.

Rev. Master expressed this third niyama as, “The law of karma is inevitable and inexorable.”

The “inevitable and inexorable” fact that every volitional action has consequences that find ultimate expression in pure states of feeling means that we are all enrolled in the School of Moral Cause and Effect from birth. We cannot get out of this school. So the question is whether or not we will be attentive students. There is no better teacher than the consequences of our own actions.

Entrust the Future to the Eternal

The fourth niyama is *Dhamma niyama*—phenomena associated with the Dharma. Traditionally, this seems to refer to events that accompany the coming to fruition of merit. In her expression of this niyama, Rev. Master focuses on the underlying merit of existence that is rooted in the Buddha Nature Itself.

Rev. Master often said, “God writes straight with crooked lines.” In other words, the Eternal makes use of everything: all paths lead to enlightenment, though some paths (those in which greed, hate and delusion are wantonly indulged) are much longer and more full of suffering than others. All of this is contained within Rev. Master's expression of the fourth niyama: “Without fail, evil is vanquished and good prevails.”

It is never too late to look up. Rev. Master puts it very clearly: “No matter what a being has done, either in this life or in a past one, if he truly repents, or so much as even doubts, the wisdom of his evil acts as late in life as the moment of death, he opens the door to freedom.” (*The Book of Life*, p. 7)

Infinite Love does not “vanquish evil” by wreaking vengeance. Evil actions create more spiritual need, and the painful consequences of evil actions reveal the extent of the need. Cosmic Compassion forever holds out its Help to *all* need. One day, someone looks up and reaches

for that Help. Whenever the conversion of karma happens in any degree whatsoever, evil is vanquished and good prevails.

Guard and Nurture Faith

The fifth niyama is *citta niyama*—laws of mind. This niyama includes many kinds of mental phenomena, some of which science tends to disregard.

In her expression of this fifth niyama, Rev. Master focused on the very root of genuine spiritual intuition: “All beings possess intuitive knowledge of the Buddha Nature.”

Every being carries a spiritual beacon within its own body and mind—a beacon provided by the Eternal to guide beings back into full harmony with Itself. As Rev. Master says, this beacon is what prompts us in “the creation of religions and Precepts down the centuries.” This beacon is faith—the intuitive knowledge of the Buddha Nature.

The religions of human beings bear the marks of our humanity. Many modern people despair about religion because they see *only* the marks of our humanity in it. To such despair I say, “Find the spiritual path that works for you, find your true teacher, and do not worry about the paths and teachers of others. Above all, always guard and nurture the beacon of faith within yourself.”

Capital “L”

When I contemplate Rev. Master's way of expressing the five laws of the universe, I think, “What a majestic, sobering and *profoundly positive* view of life this is.” Indeed, it is a view within which Life with a capital “L” can be glimpsed.

POEMS

Cloud of Bright Darkness

From day to day and year to year
Gather the mists of bright darkness,
Obscuring all the wants and goals
That once stood forth in such bold clarity.
Upon the turning wheel of change
This petty self is strained and stretched,
Its knowledge and achievement lost
Within the depth of one great forming cloud.

Into this cloud I venture willingly,
Not unafraid, for fear and doubt and grief
And all the bonds of darkest ignorance arise
And pass as shadows in these mists.
Yet one great certainty I am allowed,
One lamp to light one footstep at a time:
That He is, Lord of Eternity,
Unborn, undying—this alone I know.

This cloud is formed and guided by His hand;
Its darkest reaches shimmer with His light.
Within its awesome void His presence dwells,
The still Lifebreath of luminescent night.
Lord, may I stand unmoved within these gales,
Seeking hope and faith and life itself in Thee.
Then may I recognize within this cloud
A kindness great enough to purge and burn,
Reforming and reshaping what is Thine—
All that which hitherto I dared call “mine.”

That You are, Oh Lord—with this I go.
In lengthening shadow, I await your call.
Come in this cloud, hide and envelop me
Within its mists of all-embracing love.
In darkness blind me to all worldly hope
And steal from me all refuge that is vain.
This fragile self would melt into your night,

To be reborn in union with its Lord.
From ages without name this longing leaps,
To join You in a vast cloud's silent deeps.

Lord of our Hearts

Lord of our hearts, we hide ourselves in Thee;
Lord of our lives, no worldly eye can see
Thy Jewel shining ever brilliantly,
Thy kindness flowing for eternity.

In darkness sitting, waiting for Thy call,
In faith abiding in Thy Shadowed Hall,
Thy Presence blessing every silent form,
Thy Wisdom guiding through each passing storm.

In stillness now Thy solace sweetly dwells,
Thy Love transcending heaven, earth and hells.
Toward Thee we turn, Thy Teaching to embrace,
Toward Thee we turn within this Secret Place.

The Wind Bell

Dark winter night and tall firs sway;
The wind's soft voice from far away
Whispers through a wind bell ringing,
Sets my heart in stillness singing—
Singing silently of Thee.

How is it that it speaks so clearly
Of that secret flame so dearly
Nurtured through so many nights?
Now no shadow shades its light—
Inner light that comes from Thee.

How is it that a distant bell
One lonely night can, chiming, tell
Of others who have walked before,
Who beckon from the other shore—
Shore of Thy eternity?

And how remind of one great heart,
Separate, yet no more apart,
Vessel of Thy Water pure,
Living faith, forever sure—
Sure because at one with Thee?

Dark winter night and tall firs sway;
Drifting in from far away
Comes the voice of restless wind,
Stirs a knowing deep within—
Knowing *our* True Life in Thee.

Following

To Thee my life I fully give;
In Thee alone I truly live.
My life—Thy Love; Thy Life—my love,
On earth, in hell, in heaven above.

Sources

The following published works provided source material for the essays in this book:

Books by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett (all published by Shasta Abbey Press):

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The Book of Life (out of print; still offered by a number of internet sellers)

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