

Caring

The Tenth Applied Precept: I bear witness to my own lack of faith in the power of living in accordance with the reality of life as it is, and aspire to live each moment with mindfulness and caring.

Traditionally: The Tenth Grave Precept: Not Defaming the Three Treasures

Bodhidharma said, "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the One, not holding dualistic concepts of ordinary beings and sages is called the Precept of Not Defaming the Three Treasures."

Dogen Zenji said, 'The teisho of the actual body is the harbour and the weir. This is the most important thing in the world. Its virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude.'

The Three Treasures, also called the 'Three Jewels', are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. While often in Buddhism you find an emphasis on how different, how exceptional the Buddha is, Bodhidharma here says we actually defame — insult, misrepresent, betray — the Three Treasures exactly by thinking they are in any way something *different* from all of us ordinary beings and the ordinary lives we lead. 'Not-Separate': there's a modern Zen koan (actually it's Barry again who says 'I only meant it as a joke'...*but...*) that asks 'what's the difference between a Zen student and a realised Zen Master?' The answer: 'The student thinks there's a difference!'. It's a question of coming to realise that we are 'not-separate' from each other or from some outside 'world'. But also of realising this in such a way that it *doesn't* betray or elide our very real differences one from another and also *within* ourselves. Not simple, but this is what *all* the commentaries on the different Precepts have been pointing to in their different ways. So the place to begin, the place to enter, is always right here, right now, with my experiencing in this moment.

I live *in* and *as* my own lack of faith and my own aspiration just as they are, in *this* moment. This wider awareness, more than our simple moment to moment awareness of the passing world, is the kind of mindfulness to which this Precept points. The temptation is always to put even our non-judgemental awareness to the purpose of a future, a getting better, a fixing me up. So instead of doing this, I hold my lack of faith and my aspiration *together*, not separate. The 'defaming' in this Precept is the same as the 'killing' in the First Precept, the basic act of separation. This is a subtle thought. I live within killing, I Bear Witness to it each and every day: this is my practice. So by becoming aware of *separation* at one level, I recognise my *wholeness* at another. I live *within* my lack of faith in 'the power of living in accordance with the reality of life as it is', I Bear Witness to this in each moment. By being aware, and being honest about this, I hold together at one level what is separate at another level. In their different ways, and perhaps seemingly paradoxically, the Precepts

all point to the *absence* of a beyond, a goal, an *elsewhere* or an *elsewhen*. We enter *here*, and we enter *now*.

Dogen Zenji, in his commentary on this Precept, said, 'The *teisho* of the actual body is the harbour and the weir. This is the most important thing in the world. Its virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude.' The *teisho* of the body, is hearing the body, my body, this body, hearing it teaching. A *teisho* is a demonstration rather than a lecture: more like a chemistry demo — where you actually get to see the liquid change colour, the powder catch fire, the precipitate coming out of solution — than it is a history lecture. In this *teisho* Dogen points to the way you experience the response *within* yourself. So the *teisho* of the body is *this* body showing the way, through my awareness of my experience of this very moment, right here, right now. It is the pain in my shoulder, the queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach, the electricity of my skin in the presence of my beloved. 'It is beyond explanation. We accept it with respect and gratitude'. This is exactly Dogen's 'identity of practice and realisation.' The *teisho* of the body is always *right here, right now*.

Wisdom and Compassion, or, Care and Understanding?

When the Practice Principles say 'Being just this moment, compassion's way', what is meant here by 'compassion'? Within Buddhism as a whole, *Karunā* and *Prajñā*, normally translated as compassion and wisdom, have been seen as the two complementary sides of awakening. We have already questioned whether 'compassion' actually a good translation of *Karunā*. We might ask whether 'compassion' is too much about 'me', about 'my' *feelings*, and about my treating someone else as compassion's *object*. Just too...*separate*, even patronising. So why choose this term in the first place? 'Compassion' is traditionally seen as a noble virtue in our Judaeo-Christian tradition, and to be distinguished from the vulgar feeling of *attachment* to other people, of being *bound* to them, *involved*, even *desiring* or *needing* them. Objective, detached, autonomous, and hence *not* showing our own — shared — vulnerability. Similarly *Mettā* was translated as 'loving kindness' and not simply as 'love': too vulgar, too embodied, too corporeal, and with echoes of the controversy over the meaning of the 'love' practiced by the early Christians as *agape*. That the word derives from Latin is itself important, as Latin is *the* language of culture, of civilisation, of education, of Western spirituality itself. 'Compassion' is readily understood in all the languages that take Latin as one of their roots, including of course, English.

But there is in existence an English word that covers all the ground we need to, all the way from *feeling* and *thinking about* to direct and sustained *action in relationship*. That word is 'care'. Less cultivated certainly. Caring has by and large been women's work, and very often the work of poorer and less educated women at that. These carers care because they have to, because nobody else is willing to, because they are emotionally attached, because they need the money. This is not the noble and disinterested compassion of the saint or philosopher. We might of course ask who it was who cared for our saints and philosophers: who brought him (because overwhelmingly *him*) his food, did his washing or cleaned his room while he was occupied experiencing such deep compassion for others.

So for Wisdom's companion it is perhaps no surprise that the early translators chose *compassion* over *care*. But it is also a huge shame. 'Care' reaches wide to embrace the full scope of our real lives in its resonances and infinite shades of meaning. Care may be a burden one feels or carries, a responsibility, it may be suffering. It may be an attraction: a love that is familial, or that of friendship, romance or desire. It may be the material or emotional help one offers or accepts, that one gives or receives, and often is some admixture of all of these. Care may well be one's work: my profession, vocation, career or simply paying the rent. 'Care' relieves us of the delusion of the higher plane on which *Karunā* may be imagined to operate. Caring is relationship: it is *involved*, concrete, whether that is a matter of deep emotion or forced economic necessity. Caring places us in the real world of the relative, the contingent, of our 'life as it is'. Caring is relationship.

Thich Nhat Hanh stressed that compassion is *understanding* what is appropriate action in the situation in front of me, so *not* just a kind of warm feeling about things, but rather about how we *act* in the world: which brings us back directly to *care*. To avoid the danger that it might lead us to think that all this is about some utilitarian mental calculus of possible outcomes, Nhat Hanh himself uses a very direct embodied image of what he actually means: the relationship between my two hands. They naturally act 'as one' while also remaining distinct from each other... the right hand must act as *right* hand, the left as *left*, in order to work together. This is actually a pretty perfect image of *caring*, rather than 'compassion'. Each responds to the other in what is needed in that moment. We just do what needs doing, there's no big deal, no helper and nobody helped, just 'empty' action. Our hands don't wonder what to do, don't think well or badly of themselves, don't fall out with each other, or want some kind of a reward. Nhat Hanh tells the story of hammering in a nail...(I paraphrase...) 'When the hammer I am holding in my right hand slips and hits my thumb holding the nail to the wall...does my right hand say "it wasn't *my* fault...*you* are so clumsy to get in the way like that!"? Does my left hand say..."give me that hammer! I want...*revenge!*"? No, my right hand just moves swiftly to hold and help my aching left...' Hence when we find ourselves in a situation that needs an immediate response, we don't see ourselves as *separate*, as *outside* the situation, and so we act accordingly *as part of* the situation. Understanding caring has to begin in the non-separation of myself and all things — I don't imagine I can stand outside, but see that I'm already together with the suffering, a part of the situation as it is.

We might also ask whether a shift from 'compassion' to 'care' changes how we might think the relationship between *karunā* and *prajñā*? 'Wisdom' (*prajñā*) is embodied by Manjushri's sword as it cuts through ignorance and delusion. So what is the relation of *karuṇā* to all this, do we see it as if simply there to somehow soften or humanise the blow? Or that by becoming 'wise' we find ourselves naturally compassionate also? If we think that perhaps 'wisdom' sounds a little *interior*, about 'my' state of mind or even to suggest my *possessing* some kind of spiritual 'power' (mind-reading, levitation, parting the waters?), then we might remember that Thich Nhat Hanh actually suggests that *prajñā* is better translated as 'understanding' rather than 'wisdom', more immediately and more practically oriented. So if *prajñā* is the *understanding* of how to *care* appropriately in each moment, we might even reverse the implied priority here: not *wisdom* somehow leading to *compassion*, but *care* that requires our *understanding* of appropriate action in each moment. *Care and*

Understanding certainly sound less glamorous and exalted than *Wisdom* and *Compassion*, but perhaps also more realistic, more useable, and perhaps that's the point. Care and Understanding: the understanding of how to care effectively in any particular situation, given the non-separation, the boundlessness, the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all things.

So the question becomes, how does my wholeness manifest as caring in this moment? How does my care for 'All Beings' (remembering the Four Great Vows) show up as care for *these* beings in *this* moment? With real insight Thich Nhat Hanh's story of hands working together provides us with an image of care that *includes* the potential for *mis*-understanding, the getting it wrong, the rupture and repair that are an essential part of the deepening and growth of relationship in our real lives and our real caring (maybe read it again?) This is a vital point. Vital too to recognise that just as some relationships are very damaging in the suffering that is a part of them and that all have their stresses and their failures, so *much* caring can be exploitative or unfair, and *all* will have its elements of suffering. To think in terms of 'Care' is not to propose some panacea, but to invite us to examine the reality of our own lives and those of other people, of our own society and of the world as a whole. It is to ask us about the limits of our own and collective understanding, and how our priorities live out as the joys and suffering of which we are all a part.

Kannon Bosatsu

The Precepts we study and vow to 'hold' (in our awareness, in our minds and hearts) are called the *Bodhisattoa* Precepts ('*bodhisattoa*' is '*bosatsu*' in Sino-Japanese). I think it's a shame that there is perhaps something of terror in the response of most of us feel when presented with talk of the 'Bodhisattva Ideal'. A terror that I think is fostered by both the language of the sutras, and the attitude of some teachers. The Bodhisattva Path can sound more like a Navy Seal or SAS operation: 'Suffering reported three kalpas ahead Sir!' 'I'm going in Sergeant... cover me... I may not make it out of there this side of rebirth!' 'On your six, Sir!' But the reality of most Bodhisattva action is utterly mundane. And is thereby exactly also the Great Matter of Life and Death.

The text we know as the Four Noble Truths is by tradition the Buddha's first Dharma talk, the one that began his teaching and the whole 'turning of the wheel of Dharma', of which these commentaries and our study and practice are one infinitesimal part. It sets out the purpose of our study and practice: to address the reality and universality of the experience of *Dukkha*, which while it is usually translated as *suffering* is actually much wider than this: discomfort, unsatisfactoriness, dis-ease. Its root comes from the frictional rubbing of a badly fitting wooden axle into its bearing — it's all in life that is not smooth running, easy, as we would wish it to be. This is precisely the gap between 'life as it is' and life as I imagine I'd want it to be that Joko calls us back to recognise as the heart of Ordinary Mind practice. The Buddha puts it both baldly and bluntly: 'birth is *dukkha*, ageing is *dukkha*, sickness is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, encountering what is not dear is *dukkha*, separation from what is dear is *dukkha*, not getting what one wants is *dukkha*.' He continues in the same way with the other three 'Noble Truths': 'this is the arising...this is the ceasing... this is the path...' It is only recently that it struck me that in this text the Buddha does not say 'I suffer', or 'you suffer' or even 'we all suffer'.

It is only when we begin to both understand *and* experience ourselves as ‘not-separate’ that the *relative* difference between self and other loses much of its problematic, as we come to understand this difference less dualistically. In terms of our Bodhisattva Vow to ‘save All Beings’ it is not up to ‘me’ to save everyone or anyone. It is not that anyone else is ‘more’ or ‘less’ important than I am. Our path is simply to address this suffering, whether it is experienced as ‘me’ or ‘you’ or ‘them’... As we are ‘not-separate’ we can only ever really address our suffering collectively, and in fact we can only do that through *caring relationship*. In different ways, *caring* is the activity of all the Bodhisattvas, but pre-eminently of Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Great Caring. There is a traditional image of Avalokiteśvara as having a thousand arms, the better to care for the world. We might point out, in our Zen tradition, that the classic statement of our everyday practice as ‘chop wood, carry water’ can also be stated as ‘clean up diarrhoea, change bedsheets...’ To see *all* caring as Bodhisattva action is to inject a concrete and very necessary dose of reality into whatever fantasies we have about both Bodhisattvas and the purpose of our own practice. We might too be more inclined to offer a little more respect to the myriad carers on whom we rely, and respect more our *own* caring activity, activity which our society regards as *secondary at best*. We might want to ask some searching questions of this society. To return to the thousand arms of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara: we need a thousand, a million, a billion arms to care: to care for ourselves, for each other and for this world. We have around 16.4 billion arms, give or take, between the human beings currently alive on this planet, and the question of how we together organise ourselves in our caring is *politics*.

An Ethics of Care

In the introduction to our study of the precepts I pointed to the urgent question that we all — implicitly at least — begin our study by asking: ‘just tell me what to do and what not to do!’ Even at this purely personal level ethics already seems quite complex enough, but the result of our exploration of non-separation is better to allow ourselves to experience our existence as and in relation to each other and to the whole. So how *do* we, how *might* we, relate to each other not simply face to face, but also collectively, globally? We have seen how living in a world organised as if we are all only separate individuals in permanent competition with each other gives rise to extraordinary inequality and violence, and gives rise also to the dissociation, denial and shaming we all experience in the effort to make sense of the deep contradictions that this way of seeing and acting in the world brings about. We have seen some of the different ways in which the threat and reality of coercion and violence are at the heart of this world order, and the sense in which to be a citizen, to be a ‘subject’ in such a society is to already have internalised this as *self-coercion* and fear of the *other*. This point cannot be overstated: for us, power is underpinned, is *guaranteed* by violence as its final arbiter. The very *image* of power is the ability to call forth violence on those who oppose you. As sociologist Max Weber famously defined it, the State is ‘a human community that has a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a specific territory’. I might rephrase that as ‘a community whose dominant interests are able to enforce within a specific territory the exclusive right to what they are able to define as legitimate force’. So we come to respect and admire this power of violence, and if we think of a counter-power, a resistance to this threat of violence, it will reflexively take the

form of a counter-*violence*, whether that is, say, as *Star Wars*, as the glamourising of gangsters or the lone 'hero' with a gun.

Those, of course, are 'just stories', but the effects of our valorisation of power as violence are very 'real world'. If we want to understand, for instance, male violence against women, we have to begin with the fact that to *be* a man is to compete for power, a power finally guaranteed by violence. Both the frustration and gratification of the feeling of power equally require the attempt to display that power through action on those *defined* as 'weaker'. If I come to experience myself as omnipotent (as a politician, a 'celebrity', a 'success'), sexual or other violence may simply be an expression of this. If I experience the shame of feeling myself a 'failure' as a man, then violence may well seem my only resort.

Even if we are thinking of the righting of wrongs, our first thought is to justice as punishment, retribution, compensation, a justice enforced, if necessary, by the threat or reality of violence. So when we think of 'justice' it is almost always in relation to the *law* and to *punishment*: a system of permissions and exclusions sanctioned by judgement and dependent on coercion and violence. Justice in this sense always aspires to *universality*, and to definitive and explicit *rules* that are 'justified' by appeals to God, to human nature, or simply to the rules being consistent with each other. On the basis of these (supposedly) well-established principles, justice tries to determine between the antagonistic interests of different (separate) individuals and groups, underpinned by the threat or reality of sanction and (violent) punishment. With the institution of *law*, the State *creates* its own absolute right to inflict whatever violence it chooses on us, and we each of us live 'within' this law. So thorough-going is our acceptance of this, that it even extends to *how we think of ethics itself* — 'just tell me what to do!' — what is allowed and what isn't, and what sanctions will follow if I transgress? Buddhism is often no exception here in how this is presented: will I be subject to endless rebirth, or even descent into the hell realms? As citizens our collective and individual moral 'maturity' has even come to be seen as measured by our ability to reason from abstract and general principles in exactly this way: what should we be allowed and what forbidden? What price must we pay?

In 1982 Carol Gilligan published *In a Different Voice*, a book that has come to be seen as beginning the contemporary discussion of the *Ethics of Care*. Over the last forty years this has become an interdisciplinary field of research, reaching out into philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, ecology and economics, and has been explored within diverse strands of political and perhaps above all feminist thought. The 'different voice' is that of an ethics built out of the lived experience of *relationship* rather than from abstract *principles*, from *caring* rather than *judging*, from the *particular* rather than the *universal*, from *engagement* rather than *objectivity*, from an *open response* rather than a *dualistic decision* as to 'right and wrong'. Beginning from her own psychological research into the nature of the supposed differences between girls and boys in the level of their 'moral development', Gilligan established that the very criteria by which girls were judged to be 'less morally developed' than boys of a similar age, in reality presented an *alternative* sense of the ethical, one founded in the values of relationship and interdependence, rather than on rule-bound individualism.

Joan Tronto is one philosopher we have already met in this context, and her work (*Moral Boundaries* - 1993, *Caring Democracy* - 2013, *Who Cares?* - 2015) provides a clear articulation that the ethics of care are neither simply about 'the difference between men and women' or 'looking after our loved ones', and has helped bring much needed clarity to arguments which can easily become woolly and superficial, if well-meaning. Why *in practice* is care so little regarded in our societies? In terms of our image of *power*, caring cannot but appear as *weakness*, because we see and imagine 'power' as the polar opposite of *vulnerability*. To exercise power in politics or business is held to require 'ruthlessness', and any trace of 'sentiment' may betray us... For women, their caring 'responsibilities', their perceived 'emotionality' and lesser physical strength were long held to preclude their gaining or wielding 'power' in the sense we imagine, and if this attitude is very slowly changing, our image of power itself seems firmly stuck. Further, for a culture in which the economic competition of all against all is seen to be self-evidently both desirable and inevitable as the basis of any modern society, it is unsurprising that values of care and relationship should seem of secondary importance. This only the more so when it is the very *lack* of recognition of the absolutely central place of care of all forms in our society — as reflected in so much of care-work being low or unpaid — that enables 'the economy' to function: the largely unaccounted-for 'reproduction' of the workforce allowing the 'productive' work ('making money') of the economy to take place at all. So many circles within circles: as 'women' have been and in many respects still are assigned a lower place in social hierarchies, the work they do is that which is less valued, and they are less valued because this is the work they do... Care ethics requires us to take all this into account: exactly who cares for whom and how, why, and with what consequences? Detailed and empirical work: we are all both carers and cared-for, but differently so, depending on our precise relationships within the play of assumptions and inequalities both within and beyond our own society.

Such analysis invites us to ask deep questions, and ones directly relevant to our practice of Zen. What would a society look like that actually prioritised 'care' as being the foundation of everything else we do? Can we begin even to imagine this? Not simply that all forms of care-work (including housework of course) are 'properly remunerated', but that we collectively change our values to come to see caring in its infinitely diverse forms as our *primary* activity, towards which end we realign other economic, social and political structures. Of course as individual 'private' citizens this is in some ways already how we *think* we think — what matters most in the world to you? — "my family does!" — but the way in which our society draws the distinction between *private* and *public* realms makes our caring as individuals and families both impossible to generalise and hugely vulnerable to the pressures of the 'outside' world. Hence, for generations of men (and still?) 'caring for my family' has meant being both the 'breadwinner' and a dutiful citizen supporting the status quo (and if needs be, dying in foreign wars) while for a woman it has meant performing complex caring roles in a position of dependency within the family, and all 'for love' (unpaid) while quite possibly also doing 'real' (ie paid) work outside the home as well. More recently, ideas of gender equity and the increasing demands made on families have led to a somewhat more equal sharing of roles, but within the context of an ever increasing burden of 'productive' work that now requires both parents in most families to

hold full time jobs and hence subcontract much of the caring for their children to outside (paid) agencies, or to other (unpaid) family members. (NB: professional childcare is an essential service, the problems come when its use is held to be *obligatory*, because only the work that parents do *outside* the family is remunerated, and/or such professional childcare is unaffordable in practice.) A society that placed caring at its *heart*, rather than othering care to the fringes of the economy or beyond, would not regard its own people as primarily a 'workforce' to be *trained* and *disciplined* — cared for only according to their economic value to the 'powerful'. Such a society would re-negotiate the public/private divide (meaning that between what counts as 'work' and what does not, what is our *collective* concern and what is not). Presumably the provision of human-centred housing rather than 'construction', of food grown for human well-being rather than agri-industrial profit, of public rather than private transport, public healthcare and public health itself would be significantly higher priorities.

'Utopian'? Perhaps, but *why*? Such a society would be *more* rational than our current system, and hugely increase the actual well-being of all. Even simply as a 'thought experiment' to point up the madness of our current world there is real value in imagining that things might be otherwise. That some human beings choose to put profit over people does not mean that we cannot collectively choose to do otherwise, and do *better*. And — as I have already insisted — right *here* and right *now*, we *do* do better: we *care*, we care *about*, we care *for*, we care *with*, and we are *cared* for. Every day. As individuals, as families, as communities, and for many of us in our 'jobs' too, we can and do care. With the move towards Care Ethics we are not attempting to devise a 'perfect society' from scratch, but working from who we already are and what we already have: our connections, our attachments, our loves, our needs... and our *vulnerability*.

An Ethics 'Beyond' Violence

By placing the *process of relationship* at its heart, Care Ethics challenges the image of power to which we have collectively fallen victim, and with it the place of domination and violence in our societies. It challenges too the *internalised fear of judgement and punishment that enables it*. Living within this fear we bring it to bear in our individual and collective reactions to both the everyday problems of life and the genuine injustice we see around us. Care Ethics questions whether our first thought of 'justice' must always be of judgement and punishment, rather than of caring and process. We might remember the furore around the Black Lives Matter movement's calls to 'defund the police!', as if the aim had been to release a tide of violence across our towns and cities. The true purpose was very different from this, although you could be forgiven for entirely missing it in the cacophony of outraged hostility or bland 'yes...but...' reactions. Is our 'go to' response to any social problem to think in terms of violent restraint (the law and judicial systems), or of addressing the underlying problem itself? What are the consequences of either approach, and, implicitly, what should we collectively be resourcing and spending money on? Perhaps the example of public health might be useful: we have already noted that the huge reduction in mortality rates over the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not so much due to medical advances, but the result of basic collective public health measures. So, in the face of a cholera epidemic do we ration — by our ability

to pay — all the clean water that actually is available, and imprison those who become ill or object to our doing this? Or do we provide clean water for all as a public benefit to all (*including* the wealthy), and so prevent further epidemics and minimise *all* cases of waterborne diseases? *Coercion* or *care*?

If the Zen Precepts are inevitably a form of ethics, what do we see as the fundamental questions ethics asks of us? If the explicit aim of our Precepts is to practice non-separation, non-violence, how can they be part of an ethics based on coercion? If it's our fear of coercion and othering that is at the root of our experiencing our very selves — our *subjectivity* — as separate, as isolated, as being uniquely 'responsible' for ourselves and our actions, then in this sense isn't the 'justice' of judgement and punishment exactly the problem rather than the solution? At the very least is it not in need of being dethroned from our unreflective acceptance of its sovereignty over us? Only the more so if we allow ourselves to come to see our own caring — our caring *about*, caring *with*, caring *for* and *being cared for* — as the base, the ground of our ethics. It then becomes self-evident that we *all already do practice a very different kind of ethics alongside that of justice*, but one that it has rarely been recognised as such, precisely because in our societies caring has come to be seen as secondary, as 'unproductive', as unpleasant, as to do with physical and emotional labour rather than intellectual, and pre-eminently as the work inflicted on the power-*less* at the behest of the power-*ful*. It is seen as the work of women, of migrants, the poor, of underachievers and feminised or emasculated men. Nevertheless, in reality it is the infinite work of *caring* that continues to sustain our societies, all day, every day. If we ask about what an ethics of care might look like, we come to see that an understanding of ethics very different from that of judgement is not only possible but essential. We can come to hear ethics 'in a different voice', one that however unfamiliar, is somehow also our *own*.

As caring, our own individual ethical awareness develops through our actual lived relationships and actions in the world, and as such is often not 'speakable' or able to be conceptualised in any simple way, and certainly not taking the form of abstract and universal judgements. It 'thinks' in terms of possibilities and potential, of unfolding, and not of limitation, sanction and punishment. It holds the importance of our particular embodied and felt connections — the 'emotional' side of our caring-for and caring-about — together with both the practical aspects of caring *and* the acknowledgement of a shared responsibility of all for all: 'saving all beings', in Zen terms. This ethical awareness comes to be an aspect of what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called our *form of life*: the sense in which how we organize the world, communicate, and share cultural values can be seen as a *whole*, something of the same sense in which the French term *arrière-plan* ('background') is also used in philosophy. Rather than being a series of discrete judgements or beliefs, our form of life frames our moral/ethical 'stance' as a whole, and both is formed by and forms how we live our actual lives, rather than being made up of abstract ideas of how we believe we or others 'should' live them. Hence much of the caring we do is routine : 'discipline' is in one sense just letting our behaviours come to be governed by habits we have chosen to follow, and developing a 'life practice' or 'Zen practice' is just the same. So with making the bed, sharing household tasks, and all the specifics of our individual personal and work lives. All these, with their mixture of predictability and infinite minor variation, run throughout our lives. Then there are the

immediate situations we find ourselves in that need a response: a child's accident, or a parent's health scare... Sometimes *action* is what's needed, sometimes just *stopping* our instinctive reaction to act or say something unwise, and sometimes it is just *being there with them*, and sharing the *impossibility* of doing anything at all. As Zen students, we can recognise that this needs both our insight into the *nature* of non-separation and our growing *practical* understanding of non-separation that experience brings us (and to which our working with the precepts hopefully also contributes), of how to care in just *this* situation. But to return to the question we asked above, *beyond* the routine and the immediate, how can we understand what 'not-separate' means for us as a community, a society, a world?

Violence, or Democracy?

If *violence* — in every form from the 'legitimate' coercion exercised by the State, to the petty cruelties we each are the daily perpetrators and victims of, and also encompassing warfare, genocide, torture, and the rest — is the inverse of *caring relationship*, then the path away from violence is one of mutual reciprocal recognition (I *am*, only because you *are*, and vice versa...), where this recognition carries an obligation actively to listen to the other, and to respond from a position of 'openness and possibility'. We are familiar with this idea from our earlier work with the precepts, and with our experience within our own immediate circle and personal encounters. At a wider level we might simply call this 'democracy'. Democracy has no real formal definition or any single shape, and at its simplest is the aspiration that 'the people' rather than sectional interests should decide on all important matters collectively and as equals. In practice our current forms of 'democracy' limit this through their organisation as *representative*, and so restricting what, how and in what terms issues can be examined. But dialogue based on recognition — genuinely *listening* and *responding* — remains our chief form of resisting violence, and so it is our fostering of more genuinely democratic decision making at every level — business, community, local, national and international — that is perhaps the single most important aspect of bringing about a less violent society. How to make the voices of all be heard and listened to in immediate and responsive ways? It is the denial of an effective *voice*: to women, to 'the poor', to 'other' ethnic or religious groups, to the cognitively different, to those with disabilities, to all those who find themselves *othered* by those who frame and control our public speech, that has maintained violence and domination within our societies, and so too *within ourselves*. Democracy resists domination through the renunciation of the use of violent means to achieve our ends, and a commitment to dialogue in problem-solving and settling disagreement and dispute. Caring relationship rather than coercive violence.

In Buddhist terms this places 'right speech' at the very centre of our lives, and the first three precepts we studied together (*Honesty, Openness and Possibility, Meeting on Equal Ground*) explored the complexities of what this might mean in practice within our own immediate relationships (including as always that within *ourselves*). How to become aware of the coercion and violence within our *own* speech and in that of others, in a way that recognises our non-separation, rather than entrenching existing barriers and erecting new ones? How not to 'win' the argument, but achieve some level of mutual understanding

that strengthens caring relationship? This is 'right speech' in Buddhist terms, it is also 'caring speech', caring in action, the action of Avalokiteśvara, of *Kannon Bosatsu*, whose first action is to *listen*, to 'hear the cries of the world'. It is no accident that it is Avalokiteśvara, *Kannon*, who speaks the great speech of non-separation that is the Heart Sutra. *Prajñā*, 'understanding' or 'wisdom', emerges from the practical recognition of non-separation that is *relationship*, that is *care*. It is the embodiment of non-violence, and our active resistance to domination and coercion, whether that of the State, or of others, or that we find within ourselves. Real democracy is nothing other than the practice of this care at a *collective* level. As Zennists we cannot pretend that our practice can ever be an exclusively individual affair, or that decisions that affect the collective body should be left to 'the powers that be', 'our betters', or 'the Divine Emperor'. The experience and practice of Zen offer us insight to address both individual and collective suffering, *as* suffering beings who are impermanent and hence vulnerable, caring and cared for like any others.

Caring for the Three Treasures

Care is part of all aspects of our lives and hence too our Zen practice. Care is there with our experience of daily Zazen and our sitting together in Sangha. Care is in returning to my cushion, and in sitting still without fidgeting or moving, at least insofar as I am able(!) Care is doing that not just *this* time, but *every* time, and every time in my returning to the cushion and my committing to return. Care is brushing the mat clean when I stand up or sit down, care is arranging the cushion to give me good support. Care is lighting the candle, and offering incense with mindfulness and respect but without exaggeration. Care is... so many of the aspects of my practice that turn it into a *discipline* I share with others, into something more than a set of techniques or a hobby, and something else than a belief. This is the beginning of a caring that holds both 'self' and 'others'. And outside the Zendo? It's just the same. I Bear Witness with awareness of the life of the world of which I am a part, and where there is suffering I bring awareness, and respond to what that awareness calls forth from me.

I can (and should!) also offer *appreciation* for the value and multiplicity of the caring work that I *do*, and of that which I *receive*. The tendency of our economically driven society is to act as if there are carers on one side and the cared for on the other. Who, by their status, wealth or custom gets a 'care-pass' out of getting their hands dirty, and whose caring is instead taken for granted? Always remembering that in reality I am always both carer and cared for, in a constantly shifting modality. My *caring-for* includes all the *micro-care* we offer each other every day — a smile shared with a passerby on the street, an exchange of kind words with a work colleague — and might extend to the profession that is my life's work, or be the only job I could find that will pay the rent. It might be the care I offer and receive (in all its complexity of good and ill-will, love and obligation) to and from my children, my parents, friends, community. If I am 'in a relationship' it will most definitely involve exploring the giving and withholding on both sides that I experience, and the thoughts and feelings around this. I offer to myself an appreciation of the value of the care I give and receive. And all this work is an aspect of *self-care*, remembering that caring for all beings has always to include my caring for *this* being that I am.

Moving beyond this I can examine deeply and continuously what brings me to become *un-*caring, to be care-*less*. On the one hand my sense of lack, of insufficiency, of isolation and separation; on the other hand my sense of uniqueness, entitlement, self-sufficiency and individual autonomy. Who provides *my* care? What is the basis of these relationships... familial, financial? Once we begin to examine these connections, the net spreads wider and wider, spanning the assumed divide between my most intimate feelings and the economics and politics of our shared world... just who decides what caring I do and what care I receive, and on what basis? What are the reasons I feel 'it's not my job' to do some *kinds* of caring work? Because I'm male, or well off? Because I'm educated, or smart, because the government should do it, because people should be self-reliant, because they don't *deserve* it...? Again, switch this round: what forms of being *cared for* are restricted or denied to me, and in what ways might *my* needs (physical, emotional, spiritual and other) be better met? What would need to change? And noticing, and questioning again if *any* of this leads back in the direction of self-judgement and the self-justification or self-hatred that swiftly follows. Just noticing, just being aware of why I live this life in the way I do, in *this* society.

Very much of the violence and inequality that surrounds us is directly dependent on the illusion of separation and our individual and collective actions that result from this. Can I come better to see and understand that I am truly One People with all those marginalised, excluded and 'othered', and that it is not enough to simply offer them membership of what I feel to be 'my' society on *my* terms? Understanding that our *othering* underlies I can examine in what ways my *inclusion* of some is always based on the *exclusion* of others. I'll reiterate that this has to be done *without judgement* of myself, because to do so would simply me return to the self-centred dream which benefits nobody. *Without judgement*, but noting one's own responses of defensiveness and any other emotions that arise. *Bearing Witness*, without judgement to myself as I am, not as I fantasise or would wish myself to be. Some might imagine this to be an unhappy task, but I have found this process to be profoundly liberating and to give rise to surprise, a sense of spaciousness and of (relative) freedom, and finally to joy. Not to imagine that I am or ever will be in any sense 'pure', or 'good', or 'wise', but simply that the straightjacket of separation loosens, that I can breathe a little better, and that I can incrementally more freely experience myself *as* this world. I find that the basis of being One People is always the recognition of our shared vulnerability, and also of our perpetual attempts to deny this vulnerability. In this way I can learn to *care with* others.

My *caring-about* manifests as *taking care* of the people and things that *matter* to me. Our 'living in accordance with life as it is', is inevitably a life of care: of caring for and caring about, and of being cared for and cared about. Bringing awareness to my sensations, feelings and thoughts, I can come to see the ways I act *as if* I were an entirely separate, self-consistent and permanent being, and the harm and suffering that flow from this. I can come to see the way this 'self' that I am is produced, conjured out of a 'world' that is always already social and embodied. Can come to see how the way my vision, emotions and understanding are framed gives the illusion that 'I' see clearly a 'world' that is 'out there', when the reality is that there is only continuum and process. I can come to see that

ideas like 'freedom' and 'responsibility' are both more nuanced and more problematic than I had thought them to be, because neither freedom nor responsibility is ever simply to do with 'me', but are co-produced across society, and all too often in ways that consolidate inequality and mutual harming. And so I may come to see and experience 'life as it is' differently, and act in accordance with this different experiencing, and so in turn come to see the precepts as *description* rather than *prescription*, as 'ought' and 'should' fall away. Being 'just this moment' becomes more to experience myself *as* fluid connection with all other beings, rather than as a self that is defended and isolated. In this sense, 'being just this moment' *is* caring, and caring *is* action. Acting in accordance with non-separation, interdependency and impermanence, we come to meet and create less resistance, and experience that resistance differently. This is what Dogen spoke of in relation to zazen as 'The Dharma Gate of Joy and Ease'. We are open to ourselves, to each other, and to the world. To relationship in all its senses. So finally, I can simply be what this moment asks of me, respond with appropriate action, and within the awareness of my own calculation, exhortation, judgement and blame. I can care. I can be cared for. I can be open to the experience of the way in which, in being 'just this moment' there is — as the Wisdom Sutras might say — no 'carer' and no 'cared for', and no 'caring', but simply appropriate action. Action without discrimination.

It is in acting *as if* we are finally separate that we come to 'defame the Three Treasures'. To be a *self* is always-already to be a *self-with-others*, where 'I' have no simple priority or privilege. I am a separate individual only by abstraction, but first I am the dynamic play of forces that is 'life as it is' in this place at this time. I do not exist *against* the world, but *as* the world. I'd suggest that this engagement *is* the expression of 'Ordinary Mind' at its simplest and most radical. We most clearly *honour* Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in our continuing active engagement with these Zen Precepts, in 'upholding' them as living practice. A practice opening to each other and to ourselves, and to our collective life and to the universe, rather than practice as individual constraint or control. Roughly fifteen hundred years ago, Santideva wrote of this 'nothing else to do' in the *Bodhicaryavatara*, the Guide to The Bodhisattva Path:

May I be the medicine and the physician for the sick.

May I be an inexhaustible treasury for the destitute.

May I become food and drink in times of famine.

*May I be a protector for those who have no protection, a guide for travellers, and a boat,
a bridge, and a ship for those who wish to cross over.*

May I be a lamp for those who seek light.

This may sound like the work of saints, but it is exactly what we each and together *do* and *don't do* every day of our lives. The Bodhisattva Precepts are at the core of our practice, they remind us that to be an 'I' is always already to be a 'we'.

How shall we *care with, care for* and *be cared for*?

How?