



The Oak Tree in the Garden

Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

The Bodhisattva Vows

This is Day 1 of this 7-day sesshin here in July 2015 at Hidden Valley Zen Center—our only 7-day sesshin at HVZC this year, so take good advantage of it! To go to another 7-day sesshin you will have to wait a whole year or travel to Mountain Gate—our sister Sangha in northern New Mexico—where there is a full schedule of 7-day sesshin.

As was said in the opening talk of this sesshin, a single sesshin can be sufficient to have a kensho experience. Kensho means “seeing into”—seeing into the true nature of reality. Of course that’s just a beginning and it’s important to recognize that. We are incredibly fortunate to have the interest in practice and the urge to practice—sufficient interest that we come to a 7-day sesshin and that we can connect with a place like Hidden Valley Zen Center and this wonderful zendo we have here with such clear, deep, compassionate energy; it’s been sat in for decades, thanks to its founder, Lola Lee, Osho, as well as the many people who have done zazen here—including some who still sit with us today. We have the benefit of that deep energy and are adding to it with our own depth of practice.

This is vital! There is so much violence in the world nowadays that whatever we can do to counteract it is of tremendous importance. Doing zazen can counteract violence. The Transcendental Meditation people many years ago did a great deal of research into the benefits of meditation. One of the studies they did involved having a certain number of people meditating over a certain period of time in a certain part of the country. When they gathered the statistics

on crime before and during that period of time they discovered a correlation between the meditation and reduced levels of crime.

As we go deeper in our practice we begin to get a more accurate sense of reality. As Dogen said centuries ago,

*To study the Way is to study the self;
To study the self is to forget the self;
To forget the self is to be enlightened by
the 10,000 things;
And to be enlightened by the 10,000
things is to remove the barrier between
self and other.*

“*To study the Way is to study the self.*” As our zazen becomes more focused and our awareness deepens we become more aware of the subtleties of our mind; our habit patterns become more obvious, our motivations and thoughts are more accurately experienced. This is an important aspect of our practice.

“*To study the self is to forget the self.*” As that continues, we become less and less involved with a self-image. This needs to continue until “I” disappears completely.

“*To forget the self is to be enlightened by the 10,000 things.*” Continuing yet, when we forget ourselves completely, then “*everything is clear and undisguised,*” to quote Affirming Faith in Mind.

“*To be enlightened by the 10,000 things is to remove the barrier between self and other.*” When “I” disappear there is no separation, no “inside” and no “outside,” no “me” and “you,” no “me” vs. the chairs and the carpet and the

clouds and the planets and the rain and the sunshine and all beings. There really is no separation between self and other; any idea of it is an illusion. As we are more and more able to experience the truth of that we find ourselves growing in compassion. Human beings are endowed with what are called “mirror neurons” in our brain and body. These “mirror neurons” do just that: mirror mind states; it is through this mirroring that we are able to actually feel the mind state of people around us. That we can actually experience the mind states those around us are feeling, not from knowing what they are thinking about or engaged in but actually **feeling** the same feelings, underscores the fact that indeed we are not separated individuals except in seeming appearance. And it is through this as well that our compassion grows, for we know ourselves what it is to feel like that person “over there” who is in pain.

Today I’d like to take up a very important topic for Buddhists, and that is the Bodhisattva Vows. We recite them daily and will be doing so as usual at the end of this teisho. The Shikuseigan is the Japanese reading of these vows.

“Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to liberate them.” It sounds like we’re going to march out into the street and yank people in here, sit them down and tell them they need to do practice; that would never work. The yearning to practice necessarily must come from within each of us: “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink.” So what does that vow really mean?

These Bodhisattva Vows are an aspect—a vital aspect—of Mahayana [Great Vehicle] Buddhist practice. Buddhism includes Mahayana Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism—which in some writings is listed as a subset of Mahayana Buddhism, and Theravada [Way of the Elders] Buddhism. The Theravada form of Buddhism is considered to be the earlier teachings of the Buddha, and focuses on a person’s personal practice with the goal of not taking rebirth in this (suffering) world again. A person who does this is termed a “Non-returner.” (It is taught, but you don’t have to believe this, that a person goes

through lifetime after lifetime, up and down the ladder of beings depending on the person’s karma.) This form of Buddhism spread through Southeast Asia except for Vietnam. Mahayana Buddhism is practiced in Vietnam, China, Korea, Japan, and nowadays, most of the western world. Mahayana Buddhism is called the “Great Vehicle” because the focus of its practitioners is to come to awakening for the benefit of all beings—and to delay arriving at full Buddhahood until all other beings are completely liberated. A Bodhisattva is a person who takes this vow and practices with this purpose and so the Bodhisattva Vows imply a commitment to keep practicing until there is no longer suffering in the world. It’s a tall order! And yet, if we can even get a toehold on it, if we can relieve even a tiny bit of suffering, that’s tremendous!

The bodhisattva vows embody what is known as *bodhicitta*—the yearning to come to awakenings for the benefit of all beings. The Dalai Lama daily repeats the vow that he continue to take rebirth until there is no more suffering in the world; this is *bodhicitta*.

A vow is an intention. It may not be one we can fulfill immediately—we may have to work on developing that intention, nurturing it, bringing it deeper—but if we continue to repeat that vow with sincerity and commitment, that intention does indeed go deeper and ultimately we will be able to fulfill it.

“Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to liberate them.” This doesn’t mean, as was said earlier, that we’re going to go out and get people, bring them in and sit them down and say, “This is the only way to do it, folks! You’ve got to sit zazen!” Given the number of people in the world, the number of people who actually have a connection with Buddhism deep enough to be motivated to actually practice zazen much less do sesshin, is extremely small. To be able to have the karmic connection to find a place of practice at all, especially one as deep as we have here, to be able to have the karmic connection to connect with a genuine teacher—these are extremely rare occurrences. It is said that to encounter Buddhism alone, much less

a way to practice and a teacher to guide us in that practice, is as rare as it would be for a sea turtle that comes randomly up to the surface of the vast ocean only once in 500 years to put its head through the hole in a small piece of wood floating there. When we look at our own lives we see that there was a necessary karmic fruition that had to take place before we discovered Buddhism, became interested in it, encountered the practice and actually decided to start doing it, connected with a teacher and started working at a deeper level in practice, and eventually came to sesshin.

Moreover, it takes a great deal of courage to do zazen; we will, if we continue and don’t look away, become increasingly aware of our less than meritorious behavior, where we are caught in greed, anger and delusion and are ourselves the source of suffering. In zazen we are called upon to look nakedly at each mind state that arises—not to get involved in them, but not to shut them down or deny them either. We do not hide behind our issues; we are not trying to deny our dysfunction. We’re willing to become aware of “the whole catastrophe” because it is through this and through our increasingly deepening zazen that we will ultimately be able to let it go and live the pure life we are endowed with from the origin.

It was the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng, who really brought the bodhisattva vows to the forefront in Zen. There does not seem to be—at least not yet in any translated materials I’ve come across—any mention of these vows before the Sixth Patriarch spoke of them. The Sixth Patriarch was illiterate, having been born to a former government official who was expelled to the borderlands for some political misstep, married an illiterate local woman and died when their only child was a toddler. Had Hui Neng’s father lived longer, Hui Neng would have been taught how to read and write and would have studied at least the Confucian classics; this is the way it went in China for centuries. But because his father died before that could take place and his mother was illiterate he never did learn to read and write, thus unwittingly eliminating some potential distractions to practice. Hui Neng

had a spontaneous awakening experience as a late teenager as a result of hearing an itinerant pilgrim reciting a portion of the Diamond Sutra: “Arouse the mind that abides nowhere!”

Westerners have traditionally believed that the mind lives in the brain. But modern brain research has yet to prove that this is so, and in fact there is increasing evidence that at least brain cells are scattered throughout the human body. “Arouse the mind that abides nowhere!” Normally we are abiding in lots of places, and often simultaneously—or near simultaneously—our mind distracted by this and that, semi-focused here, jumping to there, pulled away from the present moment by our thoughts and feelings about something that happened in the past or we expect to take place in the future. And our tech toys seem to be exacerbating the situation. There are a number of videos online of people accidentally doing stupid things like walking off docks because they’re distracted by their cell phones, for example.

Where—and for that matter, what?!—is that mind that abides nowhere? That mind that is not caught on anything, and free to respond instantly to circumstances, not caught on past, present or future! This is our inborn, natural state of mind...

After Hui Neng had that profound insight, because of the generosity of a kind customer—he and his mother sold firewood to eke out a living—his mother was taken care of financially and Hui Neng was free to go train at the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch. We don’t need to go into more of the story at this point except to say that ultimately the Fifth Patriarch conferred the patriarchate to him and asked him to stay out of the public eye for an extended period of time to deepen and broaden his realization before beginning to teach. This he did, which testifies to his humility—and to the depth of his awakening; he was not caught in a search for power or prestige.

It was when Hui Neng felt the time was right and went to a temple where the incumbent priest was scheduled to give teaching lectures

that he was discovered and asked to teach. The famous encounter with the monks arguing about a flag flapping about in the wind at the temple gates is what gave him away. Hearing the monks discussing whether it was the flag that was moving or the wind that was moving Hui Neng responded, “It is your venerable minds that are moving!”

Asked to teach, he first brought up the subject of doing repentance. It is most helpful if we are not dragging feelings of guilt or remorse around as we try to focus our mind on our practice. To this end it is helpful to do regularly what is called in Japanese, *zange*—the investigation of our behavior, owning of it, repenting of it and vowing to not indulge in that negative behavior again. There are also public ceremonies dating back from the time of the Buddha, specifically at the full moon and the new moon, where monks and nuns would gather and examine their behavior. Nowadays we always engage in such a process as part of the ceremony of Jukai—Receiving the Precepts.

After the Sixth Patriarch led the people gathered for the talk in what he called “the formless repentance” he spoke of the four vows. These and subsequent quotes attributed to Hui Neng are all taken from **The Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch on the Pristine Orthodox Dharma**, translated by the Buddhist Universal Church in San Francisco, by Paul Fung and George Fung

“Now that we have made the act of repentance we should all make the four great vows. Each one of you should devote his mind to complete attention: We vow to deliver all beings within our own minds. We vow to cut off the limitless passions within our own minds. We vow to learn the limitless Dharma within our self-nature. We vow to attain the highest degree of Buddhahood within self-nature.”

In our version of this we recite:

“Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to liberate them. Desires are

inexhaustible, I vow to put an end to them. The Dharmas are boundless, I vow to master them. The Way of Liberation is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.”

The Sixth Patriarch continues:

“Virtuous and learned counselors, if you have the great compassion how can you not vow to deliver all beings without limit? But in so doing it is not I, Hui Neng, who is delivering them.”

And this is very important!

“The beings within the mind are those which are called the erroneous and deluded mind, the vicious mind, the deceitful and false mind, the attached and jealous mind, the evil and poisonous mind. All such types of minds are beings. Everyone must deliver them from his self-nature. This is called genuine deliverance.”

As we do our practice we become more and more clearly aware of where we’re caught—on our conditioning, our ideas about things, our reactions to people and things, our assumptions about things including our relationships with other people and ourselves—and we begin to see more clearly the truth of our interactions. Assuming we don’t try to deny these insights, they act as a kind of self-limiting “governor” on our behavior because we are essentially compassionate, wise people. It’s as if, once we’ve seen where we’ve been less than kind, less than compassionate, more selfish, more greedy or acting out of anger, the next time that circumstance arises and the reactivity begins to be triggered, a red light comes on and we both realize we don’t want to indulge in that behavior anymore and we have the space and the chance to choose to not do so—and it’s easier not to indulge. Each time that circumstance arises again and we again choose not to re-up that unskillful behavior, the synaptic brain connections that would keep that habit going are weakened, and eventually—assuming we don’t

turn around and indulge in it again—the habit will die on the vine. This is one of the great benefits of Zen practice if we’re willing to really do it as it’s meant to be done.

Our habit patterns of self-image protection, reinforcement and defense are strong, and it can feel quite threatening to allow ourselves to become honest, naked and vulnerable. But the liberation that can result is incredible, as we return more and more to whom we truly are.

Early on in our practice as we begin to open to more clear and true mind states and these dismaying realizations come forth, we can mistakenly assume that we are becoming worse people. But that is the opposite of what is happening, and it’s accordingly a time to take heart; our practice is working! Shunryu Suzuki Roshi called these instances “mind weeds” and spoke of how they can become manure—good, old-fashioned fertilizer—for our practice. It is only when we become aware of these challenging aspects of our practice that we can do something to diminish or eliminate the conditioning and habit patterns that cause that reactivity. To be able to see where we are being dysfunctional is a tremendous asset, as painful as it can be, as it allows us little by little to become free of whatever that dysfunctional behavior is. So take heart! Own it! Feel it! And resolve not to indulge in it again.

Each time we see such a negative habit pattern and choose not to indulge in it, we are working to liberate “the erroneous and deluded mind, the vicious mind, the deceitful and false mind, the attached and jealous mind, the evil and poisonous mind.” This is engaging the vow to liberate all beings! The Sixth Patriarch continues,

“Everyone must deliver them from his self-nature. This is called genuine deliverance. What is the meaning of self-deliverance within one’s self-nature? It is to deliver warped views, passions, ignorance, grasping, and all such beings within one’s mind by means of perfect view.”

In other words, clarity of insight! When we are able to see clearly that what we just did or recall we did is not the nicest thing in the universe, and remorse comes up, that is the beginning of the self-deliverance. And then of course there are the instructions of Longchenpa, the 14th-century Tibetan master, who said,

“Though attachment, aversion, dullness, pride, and envy¹ may arise, fully understand their inner energy; recognize them in the very first moment, before karma has been accumulated. In the second moment look nakedly at this state and relax in its presence. Then whichever of the five passions [lust, anger, stupidity, arrogance, and jealousy] arise becomes a pure presence, freed in its own place, without being eliminated. It emerges as the pristine awareness that is pure, pleasurable, and not conditioned by thought.”

Basically, tune into the energy, the “felt sense” of that emotion, stay present with it as completely as possible, recognizing when you’re trying to slide out of it and pulling yourself back into 100% awareness and out of the story. When we do that it is amazing the release that subsequently comes forth as a direct result of this 100% presence. Suddenly there is space around us and we no longer feel compelled to react to whatever the feeling is; instead, we can respond out of a place of clarity, having let go our investment in it. This is called “radical acceptance.” When we allow ourselves to truly become one with such a circumstance then it is freed—and we are freed as well. It simply dissolves if we have become sufficiently one with it. This is also what the Sixth Patriarch is talking about.

“As soon as you have perfect view then the wisdom of bodhi [enlightenment] will demolish these ignorant, grasping, deluded and ignorant beings. One delivers each by the appropriate means: error is delivered by truth,

1 Or any other obstructive emotion

delusion is delivered by realization, ignorance is delivered by knowledge, by understanding, evil is delivered by virtue. Being delivered in this way is called genuine deliverance."

The Sixth Patriarch then goes into the remaining three bodhisattva vows:

"As to the vow to cut off limitless passions it is to use the prajna wisdom of self-nature to eradicate empty and false thinking from the mind."

Here we recite, *"Desires are inexhaustible, I vow to put an end to them."* We are not putting an end to the desires; desires may still rise and in fact they will do so so long as there is habit energy for them to arise. We are vowing to put an end to attachment to them through becoming truly one with the felt sense of them, which makes it possible not indulge in them.

"As to the vow to study the limitless Dharma, this is the necessity to practice constantly the truth of seeing into one's self-nature. This is the meaning of genuine learning."

As we recite it here, this vow is worded, *"Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to master them."* There are a gazillion ways you can use an experience, a moment, a mind state, to come to awakening; that's a dharma gate! When you feel the rising of anger, for example, and you tune into your body and feel the electric energy 100% until it dissolves, you are mastering that dharma gate. The word "Dharma" has two meanings. With a capital "D" it means the teachings; with a small "d" it refers to phenomena. Here, either Dharma or dharma can become a gate to awakening. Reading a sutra, for example, we can gain insight into a teaching; this is mastering a Dharma gate with a capital "D."

And the final vow:

"As to the vow to attain the highest Buddhahood, this means that when you

can always have your mind under the discipline of the real truth, letting go of both delusions and awakening, and when you have prajna always arising, casting off both the real and the unreal, then you will see the Buddha nature. You will attain Buddhahood at the mere mention of the word. The way to practice these vows is to do it constantly from moment to moment."

And this is why we recite these vows again and again. As a fellow Zen teacher—Taitaku in North Carolina—writes,

"When we take these vows an intention is created, the seed of an effort to follow through."

Each time we recite them we are deepening our commitment to them. Taitaku continues:

"If you have a well-defined task with a beginning, middle, and end, you can estimate or measure the effort needed. But the bodhisattva vows are immeasurable. The intent we arouse, the effort we cultivate, call forth these vows and extends us beyond the limits of our personal identities."

And it is these personal identities that keep us trapped. It is seeing through these personal identities that is called awakening to the truth. It is the work of zazen. As Harada Shodo-roshi says, *"To forget ourselves is to be enlightened by all things, and this is how we liberate all beings, not with our narrow, personal view."*



Paradoxically, the more we try to change ourselves, the more we prevent change from occurring. On the other hand, the more we allow ourselves to fully experience who we are, the greater the possibility of change.

—Healing Developmental Trauma:
How Early Trauma Affects Our Lives,
p. 31

Personal Term Intensives

Two out-of-town people chose to commit to Personal Term Intensives for the duration of the November 7-day sesshin and December's Rohatsu 8-day sesshin. To do a TI while Mountain Gate or Hidden Valley Zen Center are in sesshin can bring about a "tuning into" and certainly support from the concurrent sesshin, as a number of members have discovered. Here is an email from one of those who did exactly that during these last two Mountain Gate sesshin:

Mitra Roshi,

I'm writing to check in and express my gratitude to you and to the Mountain Gate Sangha for your great efforts and for a very worth while back-to-back set of term intensives / sesshin. On my last day of Rohatsu I felt - I knew - that This stillness and clarity could be carried through the day despite being in the midst of a busy office and family life. Though staying up through the night and making it to work in a functioning state the following day didn't feel like it would work for me, I added a day 8 early sit yesterday in lieu of the rohatsu all night sit, for a final push.

Today was the first day without the added sitting time which I missed!

A deep bow of thanks to you and to all who sat during these meaningful past few weeks.

It's easy to set up a Personal Term Intensive. Just go to the Mountain Gate website: www.sanmonjzen.org, or the Hidden Valley Zen Center website: www.hvzc.org, and download the Term Intensive application form. Choose how you will intensify your practice, whether it be with extra periods of zazen, with chanting, prostrations, metta practice, etc., and commit to a period of doing so—the "term" of Term Intensive. Send it to Roshi filled out, either by snail mail or email. Then for the duration of the TI, email her daily with updates. She will respond.

HVZC News

Our Rinzai Zen practice comes under Mahayana Buddhism, in which the focus of practice is to come to awakening for the benefit of all beings. As part of that bodhisattva vow, we not only work on the cushion with that aim, but also work to integrate the full practice into our daily life. When circumstances arise, that can extend as well to the center or temple. Many years ago when a home in the neighborhood of Sogen-ji burned, taking with it the life of an infant in the family and leaving the survivors homeless, the guest house at Sogen-ji was opened to that family. While the father camped out at the ruin—tradition in Asia is to allow anyone who died such a death time to process and move on before beginning to rebuild—mother, grandmother, and the two surviving children lived at Sogen-ji's guest house until their home could be rebuilt.

Now at HVZC we have been met with a similar situation, and while thankfully only the house and no lives were lost, through the auspices of the Interfaith Council we now have two temporary residents—husband and wife—in the Casita. They will live there for a period of three months, to get back on their feet.

NOTICE

The morning following a weekend sesshin is a "sleep in" morning, i.e., there is no morning sitting that day; there will, however, continue to be an evening sitting the day following a weekend sesshin.

As usual, the day following a longer sesshin—one of four, five, or seven days—will be a "free day," i.e., there will be neither morning nor evening sittings that day. It's a day off.

January 5-12 Sesshin at Mountain Gate.
Deadline for applications is December 28.

January 9 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei

January 26-31 5-Day Sesshin Mitra-roshi expects to be here January 25-February 3.

March 4-11 7-Day Sesshin at Turtleback Zendo For more information and to apply, contact Serita Scott: seritas@comcast.net

March 18-20 2-Day Sesshin led by Sozui-sensei

March 18-23 Elder Sesshin at Mountain Gate Deadline for applications is March 2.

March 25 - April 1 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Application deadline March 17

April 8-10 VESAK - Celebration of the Buddha's Birth This is a most important celebration in Buddhism, and begins with **Temple Night on Friday, April 8**, continuing **Saturday, April 9 with the Ceremony of Bathing the Baby Buddha, the Story of the Buddha's Birth, and a potluck meal with Sangha, families and friends**, and concluding **Sunday morning with a teisho by Mitra-roshi**, and of course, tea and sweets after teisho.

April 19 - 26 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Application deadline April 14.

April 29-May 1 2-Day Sesshin led by Sozui-sensei.

May 4-8 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate. These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats for women veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. These retreats are offered free to the women they serve; if you would like to help support this effort, please send your check to Mountain Gate, HC 65 Box 78, Ojo Sarco NM 87521-9604; donations are

tax-deductible and most gratefully received!

June 3-5 Regaining Balance Weekend Retreat for Wives & Female Partners of Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate. These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats, offered free of charge for partners of veterans suffering from PTSD. For further information see www.RegainingBalance.org

June 10-12 2-Day Work Sesshin Mitra-roshi expects to be here June 8-15.

June 25 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei

July 8-15 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline for applications is June 25.

August 6-13 7-Day Sesshin Although HVZC members are welcome to apply to attend longer sesshin at Mountain Gate in New Mexico, this is our only 7-day sesshin at HVZC. *Because of the sesshin there will be no Half-Day Introduction to Zen Meditation on August 6th.*

September 28-October 5 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline: Sept 16.

October 14-16 2-Day Sesshin; Mitra-roshi expects to be at HVZC October 13-20.

October 26-30 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate. These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats for women veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. These retreats are offered free to the women they serve; if you would like to help support this effort, please send your check to Mountain Gate, HC 65 Box 78, Ojo Sarco NM 87521-9604; donations are tax-deductible and most gratefully received!

November 4-6 2-Day Sesshin; Mitra-roshi expects to be at HVZC November 1-8.

November 15-22 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline: November 7

The Oak Tree in the Garden is published bimonthly by Hidden Valley Zen Center, P. O. Box 1355, San Marcos CA 92079-1355; subscriptions are \$20 per year for hard copy. For information about our Centers, log onto our websites at www.hvzc.org and www.sanmonjizen.org.

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