

ZMC

Gil Fronsdal

February 15, 1988

Keywords: *Dharma, sīla, brahma-vihāras, Middle Way, Four Noble Truths, zazen, bodhicitta, Dōgen, Diamond Sūtra, dhamma-chanda*

Perhaps a little bit. I'd like this talk this morning to be a continuation of last week's talk, the last time I talked, in that a little bit. What I want to do is to express, or to share, a little bit of the passion I have for Buddhism with you all. And I have a very deep appreciation, and almost a passion, for Buddha's way, more than anything else. And I think many, some of you, have heard me talk and kind of get all excited about talking about Buddhism. Witness a little bit at times, and sometimes it'll be embarrassing for me, but I tend to get quite impassioned by it.

Now, in the beginning, we chanted this opening chant, and we paid respect or homage to the *Dharma*. And I think, most superficially, the *Dharma* in a chant is a teaching, talking about the teaching, unsurpassed, perfect teaching. And I think more deeply, it isn't a teaching that the Buddha taught, but it's a teaching that we all have already, that comes from our own awareness, our own kind of jewel-mirror awareness, luminous awareness of how things are each moment. And the *Dharma* reveals itself. The teaching reveals itself to ourselves as we're aware. And so, as I've practiced Buddhism over the years, slowly there is some dawning, or glimpses, of this *Dharma*, of this kind of awareness. It's possible, and I have a deep appreciation and love for it.

And a few years ago, I started to learn to appreciate the historical Buddha, or the Buddha, as a person who kind of founded or started these teachings, set them in motion. And he started something twenty-five hundred years ago, which we're a continuation of right now. In fact, that we're together in this room is a continuation of his intention and effort, and what he started so many years ago. And so, as I started getting some glimpses of the *Dharma* in my practice, I also saw, or got some sense of, some idea, some hint, intuition of what a Buddha's mind might be like. And it's kind of awesome. It's one of the awesome things in life, tremendously beautiful, awesomely beautiful, the idea of what a Buddha mind is like.

I think all of us have had some kind of glimpse of a beauty in our practice, in our life. And if you imagine that beauty extended in an unlimited way, then you kind of have a Buddha's mind. So traditionally, at the beginning of a talk, Buddhists would pay respect to the Buddha. And they have a very ancient language in which they do it with, and the oldest living ways of paying refuge to the Buddha is like a chant: *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa*. So paying refuge to the *arahant*, the Awakened One, a perfectly self-enlightened Buddha.

And one of the things the Buddha talked about a lot, he repeated often, was a very simple phrase, which was, "I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering." And then, starting from there, he taught the Middle Way, the middle path. And you've all heard before, you know, that people mistake Buddhism as being pessimistic or life-negating, emphasizing a lot of suffering. And to a certain extent that's true. And it's very important to come to a very deep understanding of our suffering in our lives. And it's very difficult, actually, to understand suffering. It's easy, in some ways, because it's right in front of us, but the deepest wells of suffering are what make up our life.

And the teachings of the Buddha aren't really understood until the end of the path, when you are fully enlightened. And on the other hand, Buddha also talked a lot about our joy and happiness. And the Buddha way, the practice of Buddhism, is packed full of joy and happiness: compassion, friendliness, love, joy, kindness, faith, buoyancy of the mind, lightness, and lightening of the mind. And he talks a lot about all these wonderful emotions and qualities that get revealed as you start practicing. And he said, in another quote he is known for saying, that the way to enlightenment is through happiness.

So he talks about the Middle Way. And my understanding of the Middle Way, one of the ways of understanding it, is that it's the middle way between wanting and not wanting, between holding on and pushing away, between desire and hating. And what that means is that we're completely open, very open-hearted, and with a very spacious mind. And there's no choice, this kind of choiceless awareness. There's no choice but whatever our experience is. And in Buddhism, what we're experiencing doesn't matter at all.

And people are often confused about that. They think that it's important to have some particular kind of experience when they sit, or when they're alive. And in Buddhism, it's not necessary to have any kind of particular experience. It's not necessary to have experiences of joy. It's not necessary to have experiences of suffering or sorrow. What's necessary, I think, the point of Buddhism, is not what you experience, but how you experience it. So the Middle Way is talking about how to experience what's going on. It's talking about experiencing it

with an open heart and a spacious mind, so whatever comes up, you allow it to come through. You let everything be.

And in the process of doing that, your whole humanity will pass through your eyes, pass in front of your eyes. And if there's a lot of joy, a lot of happiness, that'll come. And also there's a lot of pain. And in some ways, the more I practice, the more sensitive I've gotten, and the stronger my emotional life has become. So rather than my emotional life becoming smaller as I practice, it's actually gotten a lot stronger, and I feel things much more than I ever did before. And my heart sometimes feels like it's going to break. It feels such great pain sometimes when I see suffering around me. At other times, I'm just filled with light and happiness, and I think, somehow, I love this, all of it.

It's kind of like my relationship to the Buddha's way has become like a love affair. I feel it's a tremendous vitality that comes from this kind of contact, this kind of openness, and it happens on many levels. When I was at Tassajara before, in the early eighties, I remember there was the Israeli bombing of Beirut. And, you know, I'd grown up in the Vietnam era, and, you know, we read the newspapers, and we all know what's in the newspapers. But it wasn't until I saw the *Newsweek* photographs of the bombing of Beirut that I think I really felt for the first time the tremendous pain and suffering of war. I think one of the reasons was I was just open. Being at Tassajara, I'd become so open.

And also because Beirut was very close. I had even been to Beirut when I was small, so I knew it. And also it's a very European city, very Mediterranean, where you saw some photographs of how it looks, and it's right on the Mediterranean. And I also grew up for many years on the edge of the Mediterranean in Italy. So I was just very close. I felt so, it's like next door what was happening. It wasn't so far away anymore, whereas now it's very far away. And Israel also, I also grew up in Los Angeles. And growing up in Los Angeles, I often felt that Israel was just a suburb of Los Angeles. There were so many, to me, Jewish friends there.

So I felt some closeness to both places, and to have both places killing each other was painful. I really wanted to go there. When I read those *Newsweek* magazines and saw the photographs, I really wanted to go there because I felt that's where my humanity lay. I was awakening to my humanity. So really vital, this pain I felt in my heart was so precious, and I wanted to go very much just to be there in the middle of it. But, you know, we don't have to look so far away to find suffering. And I think all of us here are here at the shore because of suffering in our life, either conscious or unconscious. But I think all of us know it very well.

And here, just suffering in small ways. The smallest of wanting and not wanting is suffering, you know. And we sit here, and, you know, we don't want the period to end. We don't want

to have a *kinhin*, and we have so much joy. That's a form of suffering, not wanting. Or we're sitting here and we want the period to end quicker and sooner. It's too long. That wanting is also a kind of suffering, as we make our suffering in our lives.

On the other hand, there is lots of joy. And for me to come to Tassajara and see the effort and intention of all these people here, and see that actually these people are opening up to this vast beauty in, I don't usually use the word, you know, purity or purification of the mind as in Zen, but this sense, this purification process going on, and see it in other people, and see the happiness that it seems to bring many of you, brings me much happiness, a kind of joyful feeling, and a feeling of friendliness that I never had before. A feeling of extending warmth and love that I never had before I started practicing.

So this vitality, which I use, this love affair, it's this vitality that I've gotten from having this rich, somehow emotional life. One, for me, one of the joys of practice has been living in a monastery. I know it often isn't easy to live in a monastery like Tassajara or other monasteries. But the joy for me comes from giving myself completely to the monastery as much as I can, and especially to Tassajara. That means giving yourself to a schedule, and the schedule's pretty tight. There's very little time for personal concerns. So you give yourself as much as you can, until you can.

And in that giving there is lightness. That happiness is freeing up the mind of a lot of the petty concerns, or gross concerns, we have, self-centered in some way. And the more I did it, the more you do it, the more the lightness of the mind happens, the buoyancy and freedom of the mind happens. And the more the mind becomes buoyant and free, the more open it is, the more open the heart is, and the more sensitive you get to many things. And one of the things you become sensitive to is very small sensual pleasures. This morning, eating yogurt after my food had been served, and all the food was in the bowls, they were just exquisitely beautiful. It's kind of silly to talk about how beautiful it is because it looked irrational. But it's just really like that.

That little bowl with those bananas coated with yogurt, they were just glistening. I didn't want to touch it sometimes because it just, you know, it's so precious, like jewels there. These three white bowls, three black bowls with white things inside this morning. Or sometimes the way the light comes into this *zendō*, you know, it's exquisite. These are all kinds of sensual pleasures that we can have and enjoy. And monastic life, I think, is full of them because we are open and ever-present, or we try to be, or we tend to be. The more we give ourselves to the monastery, give ourselves to the practice, give ourselves to Zen, the more we become open to these little joys, little jewels.

And the Buddha, he talked about a joy which was even greater than this kind of sensual joy, and another form of giving, that is. He talked about generosity. He talked a lot, a lot, and a lot about giving and generosity. And it's not something you need to take up as a practice. But you can notice the times in your life when you give freely to something, give some material thing, or give an act of kindness, or give a smile. Or if you pay attention to your mind at that time, you'll see that the mind is, in the moment of giving, very light and very free. It's a moment of non-greed and non-attachment, and it's a moment of non-clinging. And you will feel a very special kind of joy and pleasure and happiness with that kind of mind.

And that kind of pleasure, the Buddha said, is far superior to the world of sensual pleasures. So he encouraged people to incline the mind toward these higher levels of happiness, incline the mind toward generosity. He said that if people knew the fruits of generosity, the joys that are possible from acts of giving, if you knew in the way that I know, you would not let a single meal go by without offering to someone else.

And then there's another form of giving, which is the giving of harmlessness, non-harming, harmlessness. And this is also one of the very precious things in life, I feel, very special things. It isn't just unique to Buddhism, but Buddhism emphasizes it a fair amount. Other religions emphasize it a lot too. But it is creating an atmosphere and a feeling of trust where people can trust that you're harmless and aren't going to harm them. They can trust you. The Buddha talked a lot about that.

And now, traditionally, Buddhist robes were kind of brown, kind of brownish-red, maybe like blankets or *kāṣāya*, I don't know. And it was like, must be the kind of color of the earth. And the idea of this color was that it was the color which had a harmless feeling to it. The animals, when they walked by a monk, wouldn't feel threatened. So this giving of harmlessness is a really special thing. And the giving of harmlessness is the foundation, or in some ways one of the main motivating factors, for following the precepts.

And for me, I always was very little interested in precepts most of my time in Zen. I didn't really have any concern in my life. But now, in the last few years, I've begun to appreciate the precepts a lot more, and beginning to understand them as a guideline or an extension of this feeling of desiring to be harmless. And the precepts are, the literal word, or the word in the ancient language, the *Pāli* language, for precept, is *sīla*. And *sīla* literally means foundation. So *sīla* becomes the foundation for our meditation practice.

And there's a kind of happiness that comes from having pure conduct, pure conduct. Conduct that comes out of the precepts, or naturally comes out of the precepts, comes out of our direct openness to the world. And if it's kind, we call that happiness the happiness of

non-remorse. And I think we are who we are regardless of who we think we are. And often-times we try to run away from ourselves, I think, or avoid ourselves, or just don't know our whole side. And one of the things that happens if you do a lot of sitting is that you realize that everything will come back to you, that whatever you do is going to come back.

And if you've done something which you're not so happy about, or feel shameful about in the past, you'll find out about it again. And sometimes it takes years and years for it to come surface again. But the more you sit, the more you get into intensive sitting, the quicker these things will come back. Sometimes they come with a great surprise. And it seems, I don't know so much about these things, but my impression is that it isn't just one lifetime that'll come back. Things from former lifetimes will come in, these things from the past, *kamma*, and so on. So if you base your life on precepts, then this remorse won't surface in your sitting, and that's kind of nice, actually nice feeling.

There's a feeling of non-remorse, a feeling that now your conduct has been good, and that's another form of happiness. I think often in the West, we have a taboo against appreciating ourselves. And it's possible to appreciate ourselves if we think back on our conduct and, in the full moon ceremony, all ancient twisted *kamma*, and the kind of beauty of our conduct. I think all of us, in the long-distant past or the short-distant past, we've all done everything and all kinds of terrible things, and it doesn't really matter too much. But what matters is the dedication and intention to start living an open, pure life, a life based on the precepts, right now. If you do that, you don't have to do this, but if you do that, then you have another sign of a kind of subtle joy, and it's called the joy of non-remorse anyway.

So this conduct, a life based on precepts, is a foundation for our meditation practice. And it's much easier to see reality directly if our conduct is good, if we don't have an agitated mind that remembers and reflects and feels all kinds of strange things about what we've been doing. And you can see that. I think all of you have always seen it. Just our small things we do at Tassajara, basically. We live a pretty good life here. You don't do too many bad things. But in just the way we talk to people, in the kind of conversations we have, sometimes, you know, you go sit down in Zen and you feel as if you've carried with you the feeling, or that there's a taste of it, on into it.

The more your daily life can be in line with Buddha's way, the more you can have a direct experience of reality in your sitting. And as your sitting develops, there are whole worlds of joy that open up, whole worlds of suffering. And it's very important not to judge your sit, because again, it isn't experience that counts. And if you think you're having joy, don't judge it as being good. If you think you are having suffering, a lot of pain, don't judge it as being

bad. There's just no way of knowing what you can experience. And it's out of our control.

And this has been one of the great joys, I don't know if that's the right word now, but one of the great sources of vitality for me in practice, or in life, is that things are so tenuous. Everything we know is really tenuous, and it's just always slipping away, and it comes completely out of our control. And the more, or deeper, our insight gets in sitting, the more we realize that things are basically out of control. Our experience, things come and go without our wish. And in our experiences of our mind, the experiences of our body, we can't really control them. How many of you invited your thoughts you had this morning during *zazen*, or how many of you invited the pains you have? They come and go out of our control.

And then there's the other part of that tenuousness of what's known, this tension. I feel this great quivering in the heart of facing the unknown. There's just so much unknown. You're always on the edge of it. And monastic life, I think, is very much always being on the edge of the unknown. And monastic life has very much an unknown quality. You can't really know what it's about.

So as we sit on, sometimes we get concentrated, and some of the greatest joys, thrills, raptures that are possible for people are possible in states of concentration. And I don't say this with the idea that we should all sit down and try to attain these kinds of happiness. In some ways they're a sidetrack. But some of you experience it sometimes, and it comes from being one-pointed. If our concentration is one-pointed on one object, we develop a happiness of seclusion, of solitude, because we're no longer in touch with all the things that distract our mind, all the delusions and heaviness of the mind, distortions of the mind which weigh us down, which make us unhappy. All those things are kind of put to rest for the time being because we're just focused on one point.

And most Buddhist teachers, and a lot of Zen teachers, make a strong emphasis to stay away from one-pointed concentration. Not always, but there is some value to it. And the value of one-pointed concentration is that from one-pointed concentration you can develop what's called the four *brahma-vihāras*, the four boundless abodes. And these are some of the most powerful emotions a Buddhist can feel. And if you feel, I think, that Buddhism is unemotional, just try to develop some of these emotions. And these four are loving-kindness and compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

And when you get really strong, fixed one-pointed concentration, you can take one of these four emotions and cultivate it and develop it. It becomes the one point you focus on, and they become boundless. And now, just if you extend them all around the universe, these feelings are extended, and they're inconceivable, and you cultivate the ability to develop it. I think,

you know, you can imagine feelings at times when you felt a lot of love, the moments you felt a lot of love or friendliness to other people. You imagine those moments, having access to them and being able to call them up at will, just because you feel a desire for them. You call them up in powerful states. These things are possible from a concentrated mind.

But then we come to the most wonderful happiness of them all, and maybe the most subtle. And that's the happiness in practice. And maybe some of you have been wondering where the happiness of Zen practice is. I think that the happiness in practice comes from simply being in touch with what's real. Or Reb said in the *Abhidhamma* class, that's all illusion, genuine, in touch with what's real. And again, having, in a very radical way, unconditionally accepting what's happening at the present moment. Now again, it's open mind and open heart. And it's a kind of coming home.

It's settling down, coming to rest at what's happening each moment, directly in the experience of each moment, coming to rest, feeling this is our home. And it doesn't have anything to do with whether it's pleasurable or unpleasurable. Some of you maybe have felt, or I felt it very strongly during my time here at Tassajara eight years ago, that I had a lot of pain. I was wracked with pain. My knees were on fire, and so it was very unpleasant. But it was very real, and I was very happy. There was this intimacy. I was very intimate with my life. And I was very sad when *tango* ended because I was going to lose this intimacy, lose this contact with what I felt was most real.

In monastic life, in a monastery, Tassajara, we give ourselves to the schedule. And it doesn't matter if we're tired or have a headache or we're starting to get sick. Maybe we go anyway to this *zendō*. And we sit. That's our basic dedication, our basic purpose for being here. And it's outside of our judgment, our concerns about what is good or bad, or good or bad for us, or whether it can be pleasant or not, whether it can be difficult or not. We don't even fill our minds with the kind of questions, even to allow the question to rise up in our minds: should I, shouldn't I go to the *zendō*? It's a source of suffering. It's a suffering mind that has us full of questions.

And it's a joy that comes from just going anyway. Just going. It doesn't matter if you don't want to go. Just go. And the thing is very important also, if we're really going to confront our lives face to face and have this direct contact with reality that comes from practice, we have to have some way of stepping outside of our self-centered ideas of what we want and don't want. And if we have a headache, come to the *zendō* anyway, and you're in touch with what's real. In some ways, you know, oftentimes I think we trick ourselves. And I say often it's pretty healing. And if you have a headache, I find it's often just better to come to the *zendō*. I might

not want to come, but it's just better to come.

And often I feel better afterwards. Often when I start feeling sick, you know, I go to this *zendō* anyway, and sometimes I get sicker, but sometimes it's healing to be here. It's healing to be choiceless. The healing power of Buddhism comes from being choiceless.

So as we sit and are confronting what's real, one of the first things in practice we confront is all our psychological patterns. And it's very important to admit them all, and let them all surface, and let them all come, and not to get concerned in the content of them, but to be involved in the process, and see directly for what they are. And the more we can have this very kind of deep acceptance and love and forgiveness for ourselves, for our personality and everything, who we are, the more we can kind of let all that settle down. And we start seeing the mental side of our life and the physical side of our life. We start seeing how we have expectations and assumptions and projections and ideas and judgments about what's going on. And it's all our mental life. And then there's the physical experience of the body, which we are so much in touch with when we sit.

And as we can be involved in the process of seeing these things for themselves, one of the things we become very quickly aware of is impermanence. It's the fleeting, changing, changeableness of what we're experiencing. And the teaching of the Buddha, I think, as I understand it, he was talking, the whole teaching of Buddha is based on what we're experiencing, from the point of view of what we're experiencing. And when he is talking about change and impermanence, he is talking from the point of view of our direct experience. And it's not abstract. It's not conceptual. To see impermanence conceptually and abstractly is pretty obvious. The Buddha didn't have to say that. But to see it in a very concrete, non-conceptual way is when Buddhism really starts opening up for us.

And *Dōgen* said that too. *Dōgen* said that in the thought of enlightenment, *bodhicitta* is the mind which sees impermanence directly, non-conceptually. You don't really, in some ways, have the possibility of practicing Buddhism in a very strict, formal way until you're very, very intimate with impermanence, and you see that everything is fleeting. And at first, when many people first start seeing impermanence, it fills them with rapture because the first thing you start seeing, the tendency is that everything is just arising all the time. You see it's arising, primarily when your mind is very concentrated and very focused and just lighting on the arising of phenomena moment after moment, sounds and tastes and sights and smells and touches and thoughts. There's one after the other arising.

Everything seems so perfect, so wonderful. Everything just opens up. There's no more any concept of inside and outside, of body and environment. Just all this stuff happening, this

flow of sensations, things just arising and passing, arising. And it can seem so wonderful, so perfect, and your mind can be so bright, so filled with rapture anyway. And again, it's a very wonderful time of practice. For Zen students, the danger is of getting stuck in it, getting caught in it, either holding on to what's happening or thinking, "Oh, this is what my practice should be like." And then when it's not happening, trying to make it happen. And sometimes I've gotten headaches holding on to certain states or trying to make them happen.

But then we keep going. And in Zen we have a stubborn steadiness, stubborn commitment, just staying focused on what's happening moment by moment, and not getting caught by any of what we expect, getting caught by what we're experiencing. And then impermanence starts revealing its other faces. And the other phases of impermanence are next. One you might see is the arising and passing away of phenomena. And then, as our concentration gets stronger, we just see the passing away, just see things passing away very fast. Our focus or concentration is so strong that we just see things, just the moment our concentration falls on the object, it's already gone. It's so strong, we don't even see things arising anymore, just passing away, just vanishing so fast.

And then you start feeling, you know, we read today in the *Fukan zazengi* about a flash of a flint stone, a spark of a flint stone, and talk in Buddhism about a flash of lightning, and how reality is a mirage or an echo. I think at this stage, when you start feeling this kind of impermanence, you really start understanding what we're talking about when we talk about a spark of flint stone, a flash of lightning. Things are just so impermanent. What we're experiencing is just experience, fleeting so much. And then you start feeling again how tenuous things are, the mystery and the unknown that's around us.

And you might wonder, sometimes we might wonder, what's happened to our practice, because we're no longer filled with this happiness anymore that we had earlier. I remember many sittings I had in the *zendō*, usually in the evening, like last night, we had this open sitting in the *zendō*, and I used to have the experience of things just going away, just going away, and I felt I couldn't concentrate on anything there, as nothing I could concentrate on because it was just going away. And it was very strange. So I usually stopped sitting because I thought I wasn't able to concentrate. I wasn't able to practice anymore because I couldn't concentrate on anything. So I was kind of tricked by this experience.

And it gets pretty far out, seeing this kind of passing away of phenomena, the passing away of experience. It's really far out when you're seeing the mind passing away, and you realize that the mind isn't there, it's just passing away. And, you know, you might see the body's passing away, sensations are passing away very fast. But then the awareness which sees the

sensations passing away, the awareness not only is passing away, but passes away before even you're aware of it. That is very strange. Kind of paradox, just passing away. And it's very frightening at times. A lot of fear can arise in people because our ideas of self, ideas of the mind, the concepts of who we are, no longer hold up. We see there's no place we can rest anymore. There's no abiding place.

We can start seeing that in the *Diamond Sūtra*, where they talk about past mind, future mind, and present mind can't be had, can't be experienced. And now we really understand that. The present mind we talk a lot about, even about being present here, but actually it can't be present. One can't catch up to the present, even in our experience. And at this stage, you can experience a lot of suffering, a lot of pain. And I think one of the things I've learned about practice that's been very important is not to judge your experience, because we go through cycles, alternating cycles of pleasure and pain. There's no way of knowing what can come up next.

And anyway, at this stage of impermanence, deep penetration of impermanence, the suffering can be tremendous, much more than I think most people in our daily lives can imagine. And at times, some people, not always, but sometimes, think you're going to die. And I think, for Zen students, if you're really serious in Zen practice, you have to be willing to die. And not just kind of figuratively, but you're actually convinced that if you continue sitting you're going to die, but you can't stop. You know, we have to continue. You know, even if you're going to die, you have to continue. And many times we come to this place.

If you really completely accept that, we accept this place, then you can settle down. You fall down into a place of very pervasive equanimity. And this equanimity is a jewel. It's a jewel somehow of the Buddhist emotions. When they talk about the seven factors of enlightenment, equanimity is the king. And then we see things just passing. Things arise and pass away. There's no reaction to them at all anymore. Absolutely no reaction. They're really effortless. There's no more feeling of effort in our practice. Things come and go, come and go, drawing very light and very clear, and a lot of clarity.

And from this point, this kind of equanimity, there is the possibility of getting a glimpse of the Unborn and the Uncreated, of emptiness. And I think emptiness, the Unborn, is the greatest happiness. It's the most beautiful thing. I think it must be that way.

My hut, my hut, lies in the middle of a dense forest. Every year the green ivy grows longer. No news of the affairs of men, only the occasional song of a woodcutter. The sun shines and I mend my robe. When the moon comes out, I read Buddhist poems. I have nothing

to report, my friends.

I was in the wrong poem. It's the next one.

Constrained to be up here a cold night, sitting alone in my empty room, filled only with incense smoke. Outside, a bamboo grove of a hundred trees. On the bed, several volumes of poetry. The moon shines through the top of the window. The entire neighborhood is still except for the cry of insects. Looking at this scene, limitless emotion, but not one word.

Limitless emotion, but not one word as well. Buddhism, Buddha's way, for me, is packed full of emotion, limitless emotion. Does anybody have any questions, any comments?

Used to the word heart. Many people use it. To me, it's sort of a black box that contains a lot of stuff, but it obscures. I was wondering what you mean.

So like the word God, right?

Practice, practice now. Well, I'd like to use it together with the word open. It's the open heart. And it's, you know, it has a lot to do with feeling. There is the area here, my body. It's tended to vibrate a lot more since I started practicing than ever before. And so there's something here which I feel is very special. So it's like the word heart refers to this vibration, warmth, tenderness here. But I think open heart, it is a quality of not reacting to our experience, not pushing anything away, not holding on to anything, not making a repertoire of choosing. And when you have that quality, that, for me, is the definition of an open heart, or openness in Buddhism, right?

This seems like I am a big of paradise. And then this is when, if you do react to something, well, what do you do now?

In Buddhism, your actions, but the thing is not to push them away, or react to that reaction and say, stay away from me. If I understand you, preconception, reconstruction, absolutely the last thing you want to be involved in in this instance is preconceptions. I think what you're saying is very right. And yet it's out of our control anyway. We don't know what we experience. We don't know if there can be equanimity, or reaction, or hate, or anger, and those things just happen. And to some point, we don't get involved in a chain thing, as what you're saying. It's not a chain effect that goes down the line forever. And that's what sorrow is, a chain effect that goes down forever. So, you know, at some point or other, we just let things be as they are, as the thought, or how we shouldn't denote our experience as suffering at that.

What do you see of this one-pointed concentration, actuality, experiences that come from an experience of mind saying, “Yes, I'd like to have that. I'd like to attain that, bring it about”? What is this wanting? Is what you put these things out of reach? Is that fitting, belonging to the school? Is not it unnecessarily greed?

It can be taken up from a place of non-greed. For example, one of the things you develop from one-pointed concentration is possible, is these *brahma-vihāras*, tremendous feelings of compassion, loving-kindness. And some people, some Buddhists, will develop concentration, one-pointed concentration, not to try to help other people, to benefit other people by developing these qualities. And it doesn't necessarily have to be greed. Maybe you're doing it from a great Buddhist optic, but it's not to be mine. I don't know. But for the most part, as I said, most Zen students, most teachers, I think, and most Buddhist teachers tend to shy away a little bit from excessive one-pointed concentration, because very little wisdom arises in one-pointed concentration.

You're fixated. Your mind is like a rock, fixated on one thing. The only thing you know is that one thing, and it's permanent. You don't see its changing, or don't see its impermanence. You're only hooked on it. And what we're interested in more is a fluid mind, a mind that is more like water, that can see everything as it is, as it arises, and see its fluidity, see its changes, see its true nature. We can't really see anything's true nature when you're excessively one-pointed. So all the joys I was talking about from that kind of concentration come when the mind is extremely well-pointed, and it happens sometimes, at times, to people. And when it happens, it's nice, doesn't it?

So, I ask, you have a feeling for me that one wants to develop concentration, or loving-kindness still has a wanting.

It depends who you're doing it for. It depends who you are doing it for. There's wholesome wanting. You know, there's some confusion in Buddhism about the word desire. And now, because the problem is that the Buddhist word for desire was translated as desire. In other words, desire is too big of an umbrella. It includes too many things. And when it says, you know, in the Four Noble Truths that the cause of suffering is desire, it isn't likely. Desire is clinging, which is unwholesome. There's also very wholesome wantings, desires, like this *dhmma-chanda*, the desire of zeal, desire for *Dharma* practice, which is considered wholesome, is not necessarily coming from a selfish place.

And now there's a whole range of ways you can be engaged in the world which is not selfish but is still full of desire or intention. And once you step out of the way, and for me, that's not how I practiced for many years. I think I was telling someone recently yesterday, when

I, for years at a Zen center, I thought it was really insincere to take up any kind of practice except just being present. My practice was to unconditionally be present, unconditionally accept the present moment. And to take up any other practice, take up even the attempt to get concentrated or do the precepts or to develop *pāramitās*, to me, was kind of a perversion because I was adding something to our life and it came from a kind of desire. And all I wanted to do was just accept what was happening right now and see.

For years, you know, I had very poor concentration in my sitting because I wasn't interested in concentration. And probably my practice was much purer back then than it is now, because I shouldn't be so concerned about concentration, even if it's for selfish reasons. And at some point, I realized that if the boundaries of self and others start breaking down, and now you start to see that, and you have effects on other people, you want to do something for other people, help other people, support them in their practice. It's like cultivating a garden, and you want to have a garden. So weeds are okay to have. And some gardeners leave all the weeds there, and it's also okay to pull the weeds. And it's also okay to cultivate certain qualities, and the desire for that can come from a wholesome place.

But mostly, teachers will ask you to avoid cultivating any particular qualities, especially in the beginning of your practice, because it's a little bit of a distraction from the main point, which is just to see reality directly for what it is. So it's best just to avoid any kind of desire, even wholesome ones, and just be committed in a real stubborn and steady way to a direct confrontation, direct intimacy with reality.

In about following forms in the monastery, that means loosening up a lot. For example, I find that I have a lot of fixation and observation, and go to a lot of details. As I am in other windows too, I am aware of it. The world is much harder than is. I suppose maybe you say something about that.

Yes. If you're judging too much, the purpose, part of the purpose of these forms and monastic forms, is to do them wholeheartedly, and make an attempt to do them wholeheartedly, with lots of mistakes if possible. You make mistakes all the time. You read the wrong poems, and I. But the point of these things is so we don't judge our life anymore. So one of the greatest mistakes is to do these forms and then judge yourselves for doing them wrong. So if you're judging the forms and getting involved too much in judging them and criticizing people or yourself, you know, a good antidote would be maybe to do what you're doing, look out the window or the ceiling, so you kind of come back to a more non-judgmental way. And that's a good thing.

Which brings out the point. Sometimes you see *dōans*, or *dōans* make a lot of mistakes, and

at Green Gulch also here, *dōans* make mistakes. But sometimes the *dōans* do a terrible thing, the worst thing the *dōan* can do, and it's kind of their death. The death of a *dōan* is when you hit the wrong bell and you go. That's the death of a *dōan*. Getting the wrong bell is fine. That can actually be the moment of birth for the *dōan*. But the moment of going, that's the death of a *dōan*. Some of the *dōans* around here have died a few times. In *parāyaṇa*, it's a mystery, and they get reborn really wonderfully, really a great group of born-again, born-again *dōans*.

These robes, where they came from, something in China. Something happened in China, I think maybe, I don't know. I've heard some various things three times yet, and I remember them so well. Something about now in Japan, I think, I don't know. You know, black is, you know, *vāna*. Anybody else know? I only know, but it's orange, kind of orange or brown or some red one. And monks wore black robes because they are brown. Good.

I think in Japan people get married in black, whereas we get married in white, right? Just different associations with colors. The black, like intuition, and the idea of the precious laser. Oh yes, and black absorbs all our emotions. What's left is happiness. And it's true, you know, and everything else drops away, you know.

At the same time, in my practice, would I try to prevent joy from arising? I thought it was, you know, kind of silly to get kind of happy and joyful, and I wanted to be sober. I really wanted to kind of get going. And it's not possible to avoid joy when it opens up. But if you have this opening happen, you go through a period of joy, and it's inevitable. And so don't avoid it, but don't get caught in it. And the ideal thing would be if you could pass through it quickly, you know, in a couple of minutes. The ideal thing would be just to let it go and move on. Unfortunately, we often get stuck even in good feelings.

How is that different from, say, one-pointed concentration?

Well, if you're distracted, your mind is just jumping all over the place. Usually most of that is distorted reality. And how's that from one-pointed concentration? Oh, there's two kinds of concentration. There's one-pointed concentration, which fixates on one object, and the other one is called momentary concentration, moment concentration, which rather than selecting and staying over time with one object, is just open to whatever is happening moment to moment as it arises. If you're open to the changing nature of our experience, there's this constant stream.