

SHAMBHALA DRAGON EDITIONS

RETURNING TO SILENCE

Zen Practice in Daily Life



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Commentary on “The Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance”

IN the chapter “The Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance” from the Shōbōgenzō, Dōgen Zenji teaches that the four methods for guiding people to live in peace and harmony with other human beings are giving, kind speech, beneficial action and identity action.

Giving

In Buddhism there are three kinds of giving: giving materials, giving teachings (Dharma), and giving fearlessness.

The Buddhist monks in eastern Asia do not participate in productive labor, so they cannot give material things. Instead they concentrate on Buddhist practice and particularly on giving fearlessness and giving teachings.

Most people want to teach only after mastering something completely. Of course it is right, but sometimes we may be face to face with an opportunity that compels us to give Buddha’s teachings regardless of whether or not we are ready. In such a case, no matter how we feel, we must just teach with our utmost effort. It does not mean, however, that in our daily life we just open our mouth to talk impetuously about Buddha’s teachings; we have to keep our eyes open to see when and how there is an opportunity to give.

To give a talk is particularly beneficial for the teacher, because when preparing for the talk we have to study, but we cannot use all the information that we have learned in preparation, and many aspects of the teaching are still left in our body and mind. So there is much benefit for the teacher as well as the listener. That is giving the Dharma.

Along with giving the Dharma, giving fearlessness is very important, particularly if we are practicing a spiritual life. According to the Buddha, there are four kinds of fearlessness: first is fearlessness arising from the awareness of something omnipresent in the world; second is fearlessness arising from perfection of character; third is fearlessness arising from overcoming opposition, that is, being free from the dualistic world while in the midst of it; fourth is fearlessness arising from the ending of suffering.

Buddha teaches that life is characterized by suffering. Suffering is the real picture of human existence, regardless of whether we like it or not. To live is suffering for us. To be is already suffering. Because we do not participate straightforwardly in what we do, there is human suffering.

We dichotomize all the world holds, but we must be free from dualism while we are right in the middle of it. If we were not in the dualistic world it would not be necessary to be free from it. But we *are* there and we must awaken to what we do and to how the world is misused. We have to awaken thoroughly to what suffering is and from where it comes. To awaken to this we have to practice. Thoroughgoing awakening is to realize the Truth.

Century after century, buddhas and ancestors have done zazen—shikan taza—without reward and have become free from suffering by understanding human beings very deeply and by helping all sentient beings. Even though intellectually we may be skeptical about the idea that “zazen is realization,” still we can do it because of the practice of the buddhas and ancestors in the past. This really gives us fearlessness.

Through understanding the structure of human existence philosophically and psychologically, and through directly experiencing human life, we can build up perfection of character. A person's character must be perfectly beautiful, allowing us to be generous, tolerant, compassionate, kind and strong. Perfection of character is something that makes us free from human suffering, even though we are in the midst of it. Our presence is very important for all sentient beings, whoever we are. If our life wobbles and is shaky, it is very difficult to be present from moment to moment. So we must be stable when we are around people. Even if we have been thrown into despair, we should constantly be mindful of the many people who have stood up straight in the midst of their despair and whose examples can give us strength. Their attitude, their way of life, gives fearlessness to others. Our present life is supported by the past and future. Even though we fall into hell in the present life, there are still great possibilities for the future. Even though we may believe that we don't have any future, that idea comes from our limited understanding. If we really don't have any future we cannot exist. That we exist now shows that we already have a future. The possibility of that future gives us fearlessness and enables us to exist from moment to moment. We cry, we struggle, we despair and we have many difficult experiences, but those experiences are good signs that we exist. They inspire us and encourage us to live in peace and harmony. This is why we can practice the giving of Dharma and fearlessness. We have to stand up straight continuously, in whatever realm of existence, suffering, pain we find ourselves, and then, very naturally, we can see something omnipresent.

That omnipresence is not absolute. In Buddhism the absolute is absolute, but, at the same time, absolute is not absolute, because the absolute is something changing constantly, interconnected, dynamically working. Absolute is usually understood as something that exists eternally,

without change, but in Buddhism everything is interconnected, changing constantly, and interpenetrating; it exists forever in this way from generation to generation regardless of whether we live or die. When we stand up straight continuously, no matter what circumstances we are in, we can really feel, we can really understand something omnipresent. This is the practice of giving fearlessness.

We must give without expecting a reward. In many aspects of human life, greediness appears. Whatever we do, studying science, philosophy or religion, or even when we are trying to understand human life deeply, greediness comes up. If we see the truth, we want to hold on to it without being interrupted by anything. This is, in a sense, pretty good, because greediness gives us energy and vitality to live, but we have to awaken thoroughly to this situation. If we don't, greediness interrupts and hurts others, because the primary characteristic of greediness is exclusiveness. We want to be a big shot and we kick everyone else out.

With greed comes covetousness. Coveting is very sticky, very deeprooted. Buddha calls this thirsting desire. That is a very sticky string at the bottom of human life; it is always there. When we covet something we are likely to curry favor. This means to seek favors by fawning or flattering, like expressing your emotions or affections in the manner of a dog wagging its tail. Consciously or unconsciously, if we are covetous, we try to gain favor in this way. That makes our life complicated. For instance, when we try to gain favor by doing gassho, we are always saying something to the gassho: "I like gassho," "I don't like gassho," "I hate gassho." Lots of feelings come up. When you do gassho, just do gassho. Even though we understand the meaning of gassho intellectually, practically our body must be there, and then simultaneously our mind is there too. Our mind must be clear about what it means to do

gassho; that is, gassho is just gassho, not a way of currying favor.

Giving is just to give, but just to give does not mean to give blindly. Our mind must be clear; otherwise we cannot give. For example, when we jump into the ocean our body must stand up straight, and simultaneously we must be clear; psychologically, we have to prepare for jumping. We must first understand our feelings, affections, circumstances and people, and then our body can “just jump into.” “Just jump into” doesn’t mean to jump carelessly, ignoring the function of consciousness. The function of consciousness is very important and is a unique characteristic of human beings. We must concentrate on how to deal with giving, practically, in our daily life. Whatever kind of giving we are dealing with, material, mental, psychological or spiritual, the question is not within the things we are about to give, but within us, who are trying to give something to others. Just actualize giving without currying favor. This is the most important practice for us, just simple practice, day by day.

Even if we become great spiritual leaders, we have to practice nongreed in order to lead people to live a spiritual life. For this we have to convey the right teachings, but when we give the teachings, they must be given without greed, in order to improve the life of all beings. To practice giving without currying favor is just like giving away unnecessary things to somebody you don’t know, or offering ungrudgingly to the Buddha tiny flowers blooming in the heart of distant mountains. This is a very simple offering, a very simple way to give. Wherever we may be, or whatever position we have, the practice of giving is very important for us in order to convey, in order to transmit to future generations how sublime, how valuable human life is, how valuable daily living is.

The body-mind you have is a treasure, retribution for the virtuous quality you planted in your former life. You cannot

understand this, but it is really true. Our body-mind is very important for us, for others, and for all sentient beings. Without this body-mind how can we practice the Buddha Way, how can we study, how can we live? So it is very important for us, first of all, to keep our body-mind healthy, mentally and physically, for all sentient beings. We should appreciate our body-mind. Appreciation is not something to think about or to believe; it is to do something practical with our body-mind, helping all beings. This appreciation is seeing and handling all sentient beings from a universal perspective. Very naturally we can be grateful for our life, for our presence and for the presence of all sentient beings. That is the practice of giving. Whether the gift is of teaching or of material things, the value worth giving is inherent in each gift. People have their own virtuous quality worthy of receiving something from others, and the teaching itself has its own virtuous quality worth giving away.

There is a story about a famous Zen master in China in the eighth century, Tennō Dōgo. A shopkeeper who sold rice cakes made it a rule to offer the first ten rice cakes to Zen Master Tennō Dōgo every morning. Every day the master ate nine and gave one back to the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper felt funny about this because the ten rice cakes were his gift, his contribution. One day he asked, "Why do you give me back one rice cake?" Tennō Dōgo said, "You brought ten to me, that is why you have the virtuous quality to receive one." The shopkeeper, whose name was Ryūtan Sōshin, was so impressed by this that he became a monk and a disciple of Tennō Dōgo.

If we were not already buddha, we could not bow to the Buddha. When the Buddha receives our bow, we become one with him. At that very moment the practice of bow is actualized. The Buddha does not force the practice of bow upon us, but that which has been offered is brought back to us. That is all, nothing else.

In Buddhism we should think carefully about the law of causation. We cannot be stuck in the law of causation, thinking if we do something good the result will be good, because even though we have good motivations the result is not always good. Sometimes something unknown to us comes in and creates a certain result that we could not foresee. Between the motivation and the result many things change, because everything is impermanent. Everything is ours, but simultaneously, not ours. We cannot hold even to the teachings. Buddha's teaching is ours, it is open to everybody, but if we believe Buddha's teaching is best and hold onto it, Buddha's teaching is not good for us. Buddha's teaching is not something to be monopolized by individuals or forced upon others; it is that which is always given without greed or currying favor. You can give very naturally. There is no reason to interrupt the practice of giving.

Even though we give a wonderful gift, sometimes it is good, but sometimes it is not good, because such a gift might be used for amusement. For instance, sometimes in rich families parents give children lots of money. When that gift is not used for helping others, but only for amusement, sometimes it can cause trouble. That gift is not good for us. It is not important whether the gift is valuable, the important point is whether the merit is actual. If we give something to others, we may be opening their eyes to a chance to live, or they may have a chance to find a job, or a chance to live a more stable life, or a chance to find spiritual security. If we give something it is very important to be aware of whether or not we are actually helping someone.

The practice of zazen is connected with the mainstream of life and death where we have to practice continually without greediness and without currying favor. When we are sitting zazen, there is nothing at all between life and us or death and us. We are always right in the middle of life

and death. Whether life and death have value or not, whether things have value or not, is not the point. The point is how we deal with life and death when we are right in the middle of life and death.

The universal path is fair, clean, quiet, serene and, at the same time, dynamic. All sentient beings without exception are already passing along and functioning on the universal path. So all we have to do is leave ourselves to that Way, and then, very naturally, we can settle ourselves in the self. Our existence is very fair, the presence of zazen is fair, there is nothing to say. Even though we don't like it, if we sit like this, whoever we are, very naturally we return to our own spiritual home. Zazen itself is home. When the zazen we do is real, very naturally we attain the Way and we improve, raise, deepen and enrich our lives.

We don't usually handle zazen in this way, however. When we try to mold zazen into our own preconceptions, feelings and understanding, zazen becomes a kind of plastic home and not our real home; it is not real zazen. If we always handle our life and others' lives—flowers, spring, rain and snow—according to our own feelings and emotions, at that time how can we understand the human world, which is perfectly beautiful? Our feelings and our emotions are important for us because we have them, and we have to deal with them day by day. But first of all, we must be fair to ourselves and to our feelings and emotions, and then we can handle each situation as it is. We know we cannot stay at a certain stage called sadness or happiness; we may believe that happiness is something that exists, something we can reach and hold on to permanently, so we say it is real. Of course it is real, but it is also not real, because it's temporary and constantly changing, so we cannot stay with it for long; every day, life is manifested in many situations, therefore we cannot see our life from only one angle such as sadness. For instance, if we attend sesshin immediately we feel uncomfortable and say, "Why is it we have to do

such a ridiculous practice with constant pain?" We handle zazen and the sesshin with discomfort and stay with that, and finally the whole world becomes painful and ridiculous. All we have to do is handle zazen as it really is, nothing to complain or comment about. It is really something to support our life, to help and to develop our life. This is the practice of giving.

The body-mind is not something we can think of in terms of our own telescope. Our telescope is just our own limited viewpoint. We have to use a universal telescope, because our body-mind comes from the universe, past, present and future. It's really a treasure for us. We must be fair to the treasure, the body and mind; that is, whatever we think with our body-mind, like hatred or anger, is just our feelings. We complain, we grumble, we always hang on to an image of body and mind, but before we create an image of body and mind, the real body-mind is already there. We should accept it; from beginning to end we should be fair to this body-mind as it is. At that time, treasure becomes giving. Our body-mind gives away something to us to help support our life and the lives of others.

We have to think about ourselves, because we are already beings that exist from moment to moment. When we have to think about ourselves, we must think carefully, not egoistically; we have to think what is most important in life and death. In order to grasp what is most important in life and death we need zazen.

Because Zen always emphasizes "just do it, just be present," sometimes Zen students misunderstand this, thinking it means not having to take care of body and mind. But if we don't take care of our life, our life becomes desolate, because without thinking, we cannot do anything at all. We cannot always do what we consider to be valuable, important things or favorable things; however, if we deal with unfavorable conditions carelessly, we create problems. Many beings exist, favorable and unfavorable.

Even though we don't like them, they are really a fair existence completely beyond our speculation about how to handle them. So when we have to think, just think. To think is really to dig out our wisdom. This is great, this is really giving yourself to yourself. It is real wisdom. In the universal perspective, we have to think of ourselves, we have to think of others, and then we can give others treasure.

If we give zazen to zazen, the merit of this zazen permeates and influences all beings visible or invisible. The image of the Buddha carved in wood is not merely a work of a sculptor, nor the fruits of his scriptural technique, but his universal heart, which is inherent in everyone. Sanctity and majesty are manifested in it beyond its being just a kind of work. The same applies to our practice. Gassho and zazen are venerated by all beings in the universe.

If we can practice giving in the true way mentioned above, the merit of giving reaches at once to all beings, and all beings are in a position to receive it. Thus the relationships of practitioners and all beings create an endless, agile interconnection and interpenetration. When we do zazen, we have to cast the pebble into the ocean first. The ripples caused by this action are forms, the doing of zazen. "Do zazen" spreads endlessly everywhere just like ripples. From this aspect zazen as the practice of giving is a great universal activity disclosed in personal practice. If we practice like this, people notice very naturally.

There was a young couple staying at the Sonoma zendo who were Canadian citizens and were having passport problems. Though they didn't know what to do about this problem, I clearly noticed that their lives were very stable, going on. It's true, people notice such a practice even though we don't notice it by ourselves. Even though someone says, "I am a Zen master," that isn't the important point. The title of roshi or Zen master is given by all sentient beings, that's enough. A teacher can give us a

certificate and a title, but sometimes it doesn't work in our daily life. When all sentient beings give the title, at that time there is a real teacher. The communication of such a person is completely beyond human speculation. When we see a person like that, immediately there is communication on a deep level. That is real communication, human communication, subtle and completely indescribable. That is the practice of giving.

If we go rushing into giving the truth to people blindly, carelessly, we create problems. We should think about when, how and what kind of teaching to give people; with great careful consideration give a phrase or verse of the Truth. We can give a phrase of truth not only through words, but also through body and mind. When we are at home with our parents, and they don't understand what we practice, what we have learned, and we cannot explain what Buddhism is, we can still practice giving, being present there, taking care of our lives day by day. That is also a great verse, a great phrase of the Truth. All we have to do is to plant a good seed, day by day, year after year, even though our parents do not notice at the time.

Zen Master Rinzai was asked by his master Ōbaku why he was planting young pine trees. Rinzai gave two reasons for his action: one was to make the scenery of the temple beautiful, and the other was to benefit future generations. This is an example of planting a wholesome seed for us and for the temple. Intellectually or consciously we can see this. Why do we want to do zazen? We may have a conscious reason why and depend on this reason for doing zazen, and hang on to it, but finally all we have to do is just put it aside and sit without expecting anything; all we have to do is handle zazen as it is, planting good seeds, day by day, year after year.

After planting, then we can see the result, Usually, we pay a lot of attention to the result, stop to grumble about it, and finally, we cannot move an inch at all toward the

future. I don't mean we should ignore the result, or ignore what we have done. Of course, we must take responsibility for what we have done, no matter how we feel, but Buddhism doesn't care so much about the result. The result is something we have to carry on our backs, completely beyond criticism. This is very good for us. We can't ignore it, we can't hang on to it, we can't be stuck there; we just carry it on our back and reflect upon it, and then all we have to do is to walk ahead day by day. That is the Buddhist way.

Everything we have is valuable. Teaching coming from our lives is valuable, words of wisdom from our lives are valuable, one word, one phrase is valuable. Even a penny is important for us. I saw a person on the news a while ago who had collected pennies for many, many years. He had several bags of pennies, and with those pennies, he bought a Cadillac. So a penny can be very valuable. Even a blade of grass is important. Without grass the soil cannot exist. Constantly from beginning to end, when we are exactly fair to our life, our life turns into valuables and we feel life is worth living. For instance, if climbing mountains is just a sport or an amusement, it's not really climbing mountains. To climb the mountain must be the practice of giving. This means handling the mountain as it is. At that time, the mountain teaches us something we have never seen or known. The mountain turns into the vastness of existence. Zazen, mountains, everything turns into buddha. Buddha means supporting life, enriching life, deepening life. Teaching the life of the mountain, teaching the life of the trees, the birds, clouds and the whole universe, that is climbing the mountain, that is Buddhist practice. We don't know what makes us climb the mountain; something inspires and encourages us. It is aspiration coming from the depth of our life. Whatever happens, whatever disturbances occur while climbing the mountain, we can

overcome them; we just continue to do it. At that time aspiration turns into joy.

There was a prime minister in the Tang dynasty who became sick; the king felt sorry for him and asked a doctor how to cure his sickness. The doctor said that the power of a person's roasted beard would be good for this sickness. So the king shaved his beard, which he considered of great value, roasted it, and gave it to the prime minister, who recovered completely from his sickness. The prime minister really appreciated the king's spirit. It doesn't matter what the king gave, it was his spirit that was important. That attitude, that spirit made him take his beard and roast it and give it to the prime minister. Because the prime minister was very impressed by this act, he vowed to serve the king for his whole life.

The story of King Ashoka, which we can read in Buddhist scriptures, tells about a former life of this king who helped develop Buddhism in India. In King Ashoka's former life he was a child who offered sand to the Buddha. As a child he didn't have any money to give to the Buddha so he took a handful of sand and offered it to him. By the merit of this giving he had a chance to be born in this world again as a human, and he became King Ashoka.

Zen Master Ōbaku bowed to the Buddha without expecting a reward from Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. He just bowed. That is planting a wholesome seed constantly, day by day, for us, for all sentient beings, for generation after generation. This means we should do our best to do something with the capability that we have now. That is, with our best, we share our life with people. Ōbaku really shared his life with all sentient beings by just bowing. That's why Ōbaku's practice of just bowing has been handed down from generation to generation, up to now.

There is a great reality that causes the gift of material things to stabilize people's minds. After the Second World War in Japan we didn't have enough food and clothes. The

United States helped in many ways, but still there was a lack of food, housing and clothing. When I returned home from the air force, I built a small hut and started working in a company. I was very hungry every day. I understood what a hungry ghost was from experience. One day some strangers gave us some food. It was not much, just a little bit. Even though it was very difficult to share that amount of food with everyone in our family, we were still very happy. It's really true. That gift of material things caused my family members' minds and lives to stabilize spiritually. It is not a matter of discussing the quantity of the gift; the important thing was that there was really spirit in the giving. All my family felt stable even though we didn't have enough food. We appreciated that small gift. It was really proof of the greatness of giving.

Making something in the kitchen, sewing, working in a company, whatever we do is really the practice of giving. Dōgen Zenji's understanding of giving is very deep and profound, completely different from our understanding. If we say *giving* we immediately think of giving away our time or material things and then we say that we practice giving. It is giving, but it's just the surface. All beings that exist in this world manifest themselves as the practice of giving just by being whoever they are. That is a very deep understanding of the practice of giving. Real zazen is exactly zazen as it is. Birds flying in the sky, flowers blooming when spring comes, everything exists as it is with no contamination. However, when we think about flowers in the spring, immediately we speculate about them. They are late or early, spring is too cold or too short. This is just human speculation. Even though it may make us happy, it is not fair to all sentient beings. So, whatever we do, we have to be fair. If we use zazen as a means to attain enlightenment, at that time we can't be fair in our dealings with Zen Buddhism, because we are already handling zazen as something other than zazen. We are already seeing

zazen in terms of our preconception, our understanding, our view, our telescope. At that time, how can zazen manifest itself? All we have to do is let the life force of zazen bloom when the time for zazen comes. That is fair to zazen and to us too.

When we do zazen we have to completely give away our body-mind to zazen. This doesn't mean to destroy our body-mind or to be confused about it. With our best effort we have to deal with how to give away our body and mind. If the practice of giving penetrates our life, we can understand this. We cannot curry favor from zazen; when we deal with zazen we must be completely fair. At that time we accept our body and mind and can give them to zazen.

Our present life comes from the practice of giving, the act of giving, what we have done so far, day by day. When we do gassho, when we bow, this is nothing but the act of giving. Get up, go to work, go to school, this is a very simple practice of giving for us. Because we took care of our life in that way in the past, our present life right now, right here, is great.

When you give something, there is no need to discuss the thing you are about to give; you are not doing it to curry favor. The important thing is your psychological and spiritual attitude, how you give it. Wherever you may go, whatever you do, you can practice giving. You can make an effort to give and can also be mindful of every opportunity to give, day by day.

Of course, we should also practice giving to ourselves. To give to ourselves means to think of ourselves. To think of ourselves is not bad. Most people believe that thinking of ourselves is very egoistic. Of course, there is always a certain egoistic sense there, but it doesn't mean we should ignore thinking of ourselves. We have to think carefully of ourselves in order to be aware of what wisdom we have. To think of ourselves in this way is not to create an egoistic sense, or our own individual life. It includes all sentient

beings for generations. That is really a great practice of giving for us. If we practice like this, very naturally people around us learn who we are.

We must use ourselves, our bodies, our words, our minds, carefully; that is also a part of giving. Through this practice people allow us to understand what we do. When we were teenagers with rebellious feelings toward our parents and we said, "Good morning," that "Good morning" was completely different from the "Good morning" we say now. Very different. The words are the same, but how we use them is different. We have to use this good morning without currying favor. This is a great practice of giving. Then our parents gradually begin to understand us. We have to be present, to just say good morning when it is time to say good morning, taking care of our parents with compassion and with patience. Very naturally, people will understand us. This is a great practice of giving to people around us.

This practice, actualized from moment to moment, is temporarily called buddha, but that buddha is not an idea. Our life is really alive when it leaves no trace of an idea of buddha. This practice is not something we have to observe, obey or try to keep, because it's always there. For instance, if we climb a mountain, we cannot constantly obey, or maintain, or try to keep the discipline of a mountaineer. It's not necessary to maintain an idea called mountaineer. The mountain is there already, we cannot ignore it; that's really why we climb the mountain. The same applies to Buddhist practice. It is not something we try to obey, it's not a discipline. It's already there. Just actualize it.

The purpose of human life is not a matter of discussion. Whatever we say, it doesn't hit the mark. First we must be alive. All we have to do is just live day by day. How we live is the important thing. Practice is nothing but giving, day by day. At that time that practice of giving really penetrates and extends to the past, to the future. The purpose of human life is just to plant good seeds day by day. That's

enough. If we do this, we create human culture; we can leave a wonderful culture, not only for us and for the people around us but for people from generation to generation. Simultaneously we can transmit Buddha's teaching to future generations. We should rejoice, we should be happy, we should accept ourselves and our zazen with joy. We are really bodhisattvas.

We know pretty well that the mind of all sentient beings is very stubborn and difficult to change. We know, as a member of human society, how egoistic and stubborn we and the people around us are. Even though we practice zazen for many years, still, the harder we practice the more we realize how stubborn we are. To change the stubbornness of all sentient beings is great practice for us. The mind is really difficult to change, but you should keep on trying to change the minds of all sentient beings. It is not necessary to try to change human society quickly by having strikes, carrying placards, fighting with each other, or participating in radical activities. We cannot change things quickly, so how do we change the minds of all sentient beings? It must begin with giving, just being there and greeting each other with compassion. It's pretty hard for us because we can't see how much we change people's minds. It's a very quiet practice; we must be stable, first. There is no way to change people's minds except to practice like this. You have to act in the enormous scope of Buddha's world. When you say good morning, just say good morning without being swayed by feelings and emotions, such as hatred or malice. If we just plant good seeds for ourselves, simultaneously we can plant good seeds for others.

When we give something to others we say our mind is big mind or universal mind. But what is big mind? There is no particular form called big mind. Big mind is nothing but just to give something, such as good morning, to others. That's all we have to do. When that one thing is alive for us

and for others, helping us and others, at that time, we temporarily call this big mind. However, in the next moment, maybe big mind is gone and small mind appears. We say, "Oh, I should say good morning with a little bit of a smile because my mother seems to be angry." At that time small mind is present. Temporarily, we say "big mind," "big self," or "small self," but they are provisional beings, appearing and disappearing. They are just flashing lights, nothing but visitors to us. We cannot keep visitors for long, nor can visitors stay with us for long. Even though we say, "Would you please stay a little longer?" sometimes they have to leave. This is big mind, small mind, delusion, enlightenment. They are just visitors, coming and going, but because we have to know how to take care of them, these visitors are very important for us. We have to take care of ourselves and visitors as best we can. As soon as possible, we have to do something, we have to be hospitable to them.

Let's look at our zazen for a moment. Many visitors visit us, and so we become completely confused. We are sitting, not doing anything, and many visitors come and say many things. How should we treat these visitors? In zazen we should take care of them as simply as we can. "Hello, good morning. I am busy now, I don't have time." That's enough. However, if we seem to have lots of spare time, then the visitors want to stay and talk. At that time zazen is no longer a full-time job, it's really a part-time job. With a part-time job we have lots of spare time and can do many things. But it's not zazen. When we sit in zazen without creating spare time, we are really alive. There is no space for visitors. Big enlightenment or small enlightenment are nothing but visitors, flashing lights. Just see it. It's a good signal for us. Should we go now, or should we stay for a while, should we go straight or should we turn?

If we practice giving through using the words "good morning" with our whole body-mind, this giving really

transforms the mind. Mind means we completely penetrate one dharma, we are proficient in it, we complete it with wholeheartedness. It doesn't mean empathy, because with empathy there is still some gap between us and "good morning." However, penetrating one dharma means that there is no space between us and "good morning." That "good morning" really pierces people's hearts, even though they don't understand. They don't realize it at the time, but eventually they will understand. It communicates beyond words. Already the vastness of existence is alive between us and others. Here, very naturally, we can feel human warmth. This is the great Buddhist practice of planting good seeds day by day.

The practice of giving is not to exploit something or someone for a certain purpose. We are not just material beings; we are human beings who have consciousness or mind. So, from this standpoint, we have to help each other with our mind, with our body and with our words. In other words, we need human warmth, which simultaneously means Buddha's warmth, not egoistic or individual warmth. Buddha's warmth is huge. At that time we can really communicate. We can help somebody and simultaneously somebody can help us. We may complain, saying, "How can I find such a way? Wherever I may go I cannot find anybody who practices in that way, so how can I live in that way?" It doesn't matter. All we have to do is be a bodhisattva and try to live in that way. That is our vow. We should take our vow in that way. If we do this, we can light candles one by one. It's not necessary to imagine a huge, beautiful, ideal image of human life, where all sentient beings live in peace and harmony. Of course it is important, and Buddha constantly mentions that we should move toward that ideal. But actually, we should do small things, just small things in order to move toward a life of peace and harmony. This is really the practice of giving. It is a simple practice. Buddhism is not asking us to do something big, to be a big

shot. If we can be big shots that's fine, but everybody cannot be one. We should know ourselves, who we are, and then if we want to be big shots in the future, fine. However, right now, let's do small things as we move toward the idea of being a big shot. That is Buddha's teaching. Buddha's teaching is always patting our heads and saying, "Fine. Your idea is beautiful. Why don't you have some more big ideas; but take it easy. Do something small." When you say good morning, just say good morning. At that time, we can understand the meaning of helping all sentient beings, and of changing human society. We can really understand what we have to do.

Kind Speech

The second of the four methods of guidance is kind speech. Kind speech is not merely to speak with an ingratiating voice, like a cat purring. If we speak of something with an ingratiating voice, very naturally, consciously or unconsciously, we are trying to get a favor by fawning or flattering. This is not kind speech. Kind speech is not the usual sense of kindness. It can appear in various ways, but whatever kindness appears in our speech, we should remember that it must constantly be based on compassion or deep love. Under all circumstances that compassion is always giving somebody support or help or a chance to grow.

Compassion is a little difficult to understand. Kindness is part of compassion, friendliness is also part of compassion, but as a whole, compassion is rooted more deeply in the human mind. Everyone has this compassion. Buddhism always focuses on the ultimate nature of existence, which is manifested as compassion.

The ultimate nature of existence is open to all sentient beings, whoever or whatever they are; without this we cannot exist. Whatever happens, all is going on in this vast

expanse of the ultimate nature of existence. If you cast a pebble into the quiet ocean, the ripples extend in all directions and finally melt into the ocean. This is really human life. So from this vantage point, whatever kind of ripples you can see—suffering, up and down waves—whatever kinds of things come up, remember they are happening in the vastness of the ocean, and sooner or later they melt back into the immense ocean. This is characteristic of the ultimate nature of existence, in which all sentient beings are present from moment to moment.

The original, ultimate nature of existence functions just like a filter; we don't know what it is, but it is sort of like our lungs. Our blood comes into our heart and is pumped to our lungs, so our lungs are sort of a filter to clean the blood and send the pure, oxygenated blood to our body, to make our whole body and mind work well. When a person goes through the filter of the ultimate nature of existence and then comes out, he or she is of course the same person, but a little bit different—sort of a transparent person—what we call an enlightened being or buddha. Then this transparent person is exactly like a mirror, reflecting and accepting all beings in equality—trees, birds, tulips, spring, winter, all of life. For instance, this person sees a dog and simultaneously the person and the dog go through the filter and then come out, and then the dog and the person are the same—transparent. Then, the dog is not a dog, the dog is buddha, or an enlightened being, bodhisattva. That is why when this person hears the precept, “Do not kill,” he does not moralize, thinking “Don't do it;” he cannot do it, because he and the dog go through the filter and come up, and are the same thing. What it is? A person? A dog? Some particular soul? No, they are buddha, universal life. Just universal life comes up. This universal life is exactly our life and the dog's life, so it's really the same, simultaneously. We cannot hurt the dog even though we may not know about the precept “Do not kill.” We cannot do it. So the

person goes through the filter and comes out and this person is not the same. Still this person must be alive as a human being, that is, this enlightened being must, at the same time, be in the human world. Everything is always simultaneously going in circles like this.

It is characteristic of human beings to have a mind seeking for the truth. Whether we know it or don't know it, it doesn't matter. We have this mind already. It goes through the filter: that is practice; it goes through the filter and then comes out: that is enlightenment. "This enlightened person cannot stay in enlightenment and comes back to the form of the human being again; that is called nirvana. So arousing mind, practice, enlightenment and nirvana are going on like this constantly, just like the circulation of our blood. This is our practice.

If we do zazen, simultaneously we become a filter. A filter is exactly zazen. When we do zazen with our body and mind, immediately we go through and come out and are an enlightened person. So all we have to do is just sit down. There is nothing to trick us. All we have to do is just be a filter.

If you become a priest, you must be a filter. You must function as a filter, not only in zazen, but in everyday life. That's pretty hard for priests because everyday life appears in many ways, its patterns never stay the same. That is why enlightened beings practice continuously, forever.

Sometimes we get tired of practicing, because we always have in mind to practice for a certain length of time, maybe seven days or a year. We focus on our practice for seven days, wanting to attain enlightenment. That is fine, if we can do it, but it is very hard, because our effort is just focusing for seven days. After seven days, then what? But if we focus on countless lives in an immensely long span of time, all we have to do is focus on right now, right here, without looking around. This is to practice in the eternal

world. At that time we become calm step by step, just like a turtle, step by step.

This turtle must pass through the filter and come out again, and then come back to daily life. This is very good for us, but usually we don't do it. Instead of passing through the filter, we use a sort of prismatic device, analyzing and synthesizing how many colors there are in it. Consciously, we don't want to pass through this filter; we really want to pass through the prism. It's much more fun to see the wonderful, different colors—philosophy, psychology, suffering—it's wonderful! And then we just go on and never come back, because it's a lot of fun just going on, constantly keeping away from human life. This is modern civilization.

Sometimes we miss what we're aiming at and fail to pass through the prism. Consciously we want to go toward the prism, but nature is also constantly going on, so very naturally we pass through the filter and come up—pop! At that time loneliness, despair and depression come up, but it's not real loneliness or emptiness. This is what we have to know; we have to awaken to this filter. This filter is really a fantastic device for us. We can accept our life not only in a passive way, we also have to send our life to the universe in a positive way. This is why we are living. For this we have to go through the filter.

If you are not a priest it is more difficult to constantly be a filter, so instead you are likely to be a filter some of the time. You come to sesshin and become a filter; then as you leave, you say, "Oh, it's ridiculous, I can't do this in everyday life." So you forget and just go to work every day. That's okay, but if you become a priest you have to function constantly as a filter, and help other people function as a filter. You cannot have any particular pattern such as being stuck in a concept of "I am stupid" or "I am not stupid"; you cannot be like this; just be a filter, constantly. That's very hard. But there is no excuse. Priests are completely

committed to functioning as a filter. This is the best way to help human beings; this is compassion. You can see the enormous scope of life, open to all sentient beings. We are not in a portion of the whole world, we are completely the world ourselves. At this very moment kind speech comes out. This whole body and mind are nothing but the whole world, because we have gone through this filter and become transparent. There is no partition, no border between trees and us or birds and us. This is called, temporarily, an enlightened person. Usually we like this state of becoming transparent, but this is not a final goal. We have to come back to the form of a human being.

In Gotō Egen, a Zen scripture, a story is told of an Indian saint who went to visit the famous Zen teacher in China, Zen Master Gyōzan. One morning Zen Master Gyōzan was standing on the porch in front of his temple, when the saint came down from the sky. Gyōzan said, "Who are you?" The saint said, "I am a saint from India." Gyōzan said, "When did you leave?" The saint said, "I left this morning." Gyōzan said, "You are so late arriving! What did you do on the way?" Although the saint left India in the morning and arrived in China almost immediately the same morning, Gyōzan still asked what he did on the way that made him arrive so late. The saint said "Oh, I played a little bit." If, while going to a certain destination, you see something you are interested in and poke your head into it, forgetting to go towards your destination, that is playing with something on the way. That is why Zen Master Gyōzan finally said, "That's wonderful, but being a saint is not my business, so I leave that to you; but give Buddhism back to me."

Usually if we come through the filter we act like this saint, because there are lots of fantastic spiritual things to play with. You can talk with dead people, you can fly in the air, but it's not Buddhism. Buddhism just comes back to the form of a human being. This is very important. Returning to

the form of a human being is compassion coming from a deep level.

In the Lotus Sūtra, Buddha gives advice to the bodhisattvas who are about to go out to teach, telling them that they have to sit on the seat of emptiness. This is to go through the filter. If we give Buddha's teaching with our body, with our words, however we teach the teachings it cannot be as a usual person. We must be something else; we must pass through the filter. Then we understand people who are interested in the teachings and those who are not. We accept all sentient beings as exactly one, regardless of whether we like them or dislike them. At that time compassion is always functioning under all circumstances.

My teacher, Yokoi Roshi, always looked down on me, whatever I did, but now I really appreciate his attitude toward me, because his use of rough language and his belittling whatever I did were based on compassion. Sometimes rough language is a great help, but don't use rough language recklessly, be careful. Don't imitate others. Rinzai teachers scream and shout, using the stick very hard, but don't imitate them. Imitation is a weakness of human beings. We always try to depend on somebody who is famous by imitating them. At that time, we completely lose our own subjectivity. Whatever happens, you shouldn't lose your own subjectivity. You must be alive.

Don't misunderstand kind speech, thinking it is working just for this moment. If somebody gives us kind, friendly, sympathetic words in order to help us, sometimes it doesn't work, because we are not ready to accept them. Even though we are not ready to accept kind speech at that moment, in the long run it is working. This is kind speech. For this we need compassion. If we use rough language and scold somebody, it is necessary that it be based on very deep compassion. If we forget, rough language really

becomes rough language, hurting people. Be very cautious to reflect on whether we deserve to do so or not.

If you give quality to greetings and have compassion for all sentient beings as the basis of your life, good morning is a great opportunity to communicate, to give, to share kind speech with somebody. Usually we criticize someone we do not approve of, but it is not the Buddha's way. Instead of criticizing, why don't we help them to improve, to grow. This is most important. Even though the world is not peaceful right now, day by day we can live in a peaceful way. If we practice in this way, that is great, because we are walking on the path of Buddha. It doesn't matter whether we reach the goal or not. Day by day, all we have to do is move toward it; this is our practice.

If we get angry, very naturally there is a feeling of vilification. So the important point is, if we see people who don't have virtuous qualities, instead of criticizing them, we should suffer finding a way to help them, in order to improve, grow, deepen and enrich all of our lives. Even if we don't see any progress after practicing kind speech with people who are not good, we are really helping them. Sometimes through a third person we may hear that someone has spoken kindly of us. At that time we are really touched. We are really moved by it and will never forget it. That's why, wherever we may go, we shouldn't speak ill of others. If we see somebody who is not good, even though he is not in front of us, we should see the good aspects of his life, and speak about it to others. This really helps. If such kind speech reaches the person indirectly from a third person, he is really touched by it. This is Buddha's practice.

Beneficial Action

The third of the methods of guidance, beneficial action, means to help others. There are two kinds of beneficial action: one is giving and the other is kind or loving speech.

Without beneficial action, giving does not work. For instance to think of ourselves is to practice giving to ourselves, but it must be based on beneficial action. Sometimes, when we think of ourself, it is not in a beneficial way. We sometimes become nervous and confused. But even though it is difficult, we can't ignore thinking of ourself. Wherever we may go, whatever we do, we have to think of how to use ourself best, how to behave, how to take care of gassho and zazen, how to walk. We have to think about this but to do so too much is not beneficial. When thinking of ourself confuses us, it is not the real practice of giving. The practice of giving must be backed by beneficial action, which means to help others. We think of ourself in order to help others. Remember this point.

The practice of giving is exactly the same as loving speech. Loving speech is really to give something with your whole body and mind, and if you give something in that way, your whole body and mind really practice loving speech. People can understand and can listen to this sound of your speech. That is why beneficial action is based on two practices, giving and loving speech.

Beneficial action in Buddhism is to give thought constantly to how we can cause everybody, all sentient beings, including inanimate beings, to awaken to themselves, and beneficial action is to lead them to the Buddha Way—a peaceful, harmonious life—day by day. The Way means the practice we do with all sentient beings, not practice just for ourselves. The Way is the universal path. We have to actually pass along this universal path practically, day by day. This means to live our daily life with all sentient beings in peace and harmony. This is our hope, the target we have to aim at, whatever circumstances we are in.

When we see the human world today, it scares us. We feel fear just walking on the street. But even under such

circumstances, there is no reason to stop living in peace and harmony. Under just such circumstances we have to live in peace, because there is still a chance to create our own beautiful world and to teach people too. We should not forget to give thought constantly, day by day, to how we can live in peace and harmony with all sentient beings. We have to do this. This is really beneficial. To awaken to oneself means to do something not only with one's head, but also with one's body, mind and words. In many ways we should do this. "This is called beneficial action, helping others.

Beneficial action is to benefit all sentient beings skillfully, not only human beings but also inanimate beings. When we educate and help human beings, we cannot judge them quickly according to our understanding; we cannot educate people quickly. It is very difficult. So we must practice patience, generosity, compassion and kindness, thinking of others for the long-range and short-range course of their lives. Sometimes we can give words and suggestions, sometimes we cannot—we can just be present with them. Sometimes just doing something together is really important. These are ways of using skillful means to benefit all sentient beings, but this is very difficult for us to do, because skillful means do not come from a technique, but from the measure of our practice.

Buddha-dharma is the unity of Buddha and all sentient beings. This is the real portrait of our life. Thinking of oneself from our own viewpoint is not the real portrait of our existence. We have to see the total portrait of our life—the unity of Buddha and us. At that time majesty or dignity or imperturbability, whatever we call it, is coming from each pore. We don't know what it is, but immediately we can feel this. Majesty is a person's aliveness coming from the totality of a person's character and personality. No matter how long we study or how much we know, no matter how much information we can give to people from all the old Buddhist terms we have piled up like business cards in

our drawer, this does not express the majesty of Buddha-dharma. Buddhist practice, human life is not like this.

Everybody has compassion. We are compassionate because we are alive. The reality of our existence is supported by many beings: air, rain, clouds, winter, spring. Winter and spring do not discriminate. They don't care where we come from or how much we complain about them; they have great compassion. Everybody, more or less, is protected by compassion, but we don't realize this. However, there are different degrees of protection by compassion. For instance, if we were members of a street gang, our situation would be different from those who are practicing here. If we practice here, we have more of a chance to be protected by compassion, because people around us help our life. We may think we grow by ourselves, and of course we should make effort, but this effort is just a speck of dust. By listening to Buddha's teaching we are protected by compassion even though we don't understand. All we have to do is just listen and sit down here and maybe we will understand in the future. This compassion extends into the future. If we were a member of a street gang, there would be less compassion there, because the people around us would not be interested in helping others so much. Still, compassion is open to everybody. We should realize this, awakening to this compassion. If we awaken to this compassion, we really appreciate others and can give something to others too. We can really help others: This is actual practice. The skillful means to educate, to lead people to a peaceful life, to nirvana, come from the majesty of Buddha-dharma. It is not a technique.

There are two examples of beneficial action that come from old Chinese stories. As Ching-k'ang was walking in the street he saw a fisherman carrying a basket with a tortoise in it. He knew the tortoise would be sold in the fish market for food, and feeling very sorry for it, he bought it

from the fisherman and let it go into the ocean. As the tortoise was going back into the ocean, it turned its head to the left three times and looked at Ching-k'ang; then the tortoise disappeared. Many years later, Ching-k'ang became the mayor of the small town where he had freed the tortoise. Traditionally in China and Japan, the mayor has his own seal carved in wood or stone. In those days, it was the custom to make the seal with gold and have the design of a tortoise head on the top of the seal. So Ching-k'ang asked a goldsmith to make the seal for him with the tortoise on the top. The seal was made with the tortoise head straight as usual, but when it was finished, the tortoise head was turned to the left. The goldsmith did not understand why the tortoise's head was turned to the left when he had made it straight; however he straightened it once more. Again it turned to the left. Three times he made a new seal; three times the tortoise's head turned to the left. Finally, the goldsmith told the mayor, "I did this design very carefully, but always the tortoise turns its head to the left. I don't know why. It's very strange." The mayor knew, however, that the tortoise he had freed many years ago had now appeared on the top of his seal. It is just a story, but there is truth in it because all sentient beings are connected with each other.

In another story, Yang-pao is said to have helped a sparrow that had been injured by a bird of prey. To express its gratitude, the sparrow later presented him with four silver rings. The sparrow and the tortoise appreciated the beneficial action of the people who helped them, because they did something without expecting any reward. They just did it. We can really communicate even with a tortoise and a bird, but if we expect something as a reward, it's very difficult to communicate with anyone or anything, no matter who or what it is.

Usually in our daily life, we want to benefit ourselves first, and then if we have spare time, we will help others.

This is very common. But Buddha's way is completely the opposite. We practice together to benefit ourselves and others. In the monastery we eat pickles without making noise. According to common sense, it is ridiculous to eat pickles like this, or to use our metal spoon in a china bowl quietly. If our spoon touches the bottom of the bowl, very naturally it makes noise. So according to common sense this is ridiculous advice. The important point is to pay more careful attention to the china bowl and the metal spoon, giving to them with beneficial action. This really helps us and others simultaneously. Very naturally, however many people live and practice here, all can practice one thing. If we don't pay attention to the spoon, using it carelessly, very naturally this is messy practice and it interrupts others' lives. This is why practicing together is very important for us. If we eat a pickle, help the pickle first. If we use chopsticks, help the chopsticks first. This is our practice.

There was a lord in ancient China who was compassionate and helped others. On one occasion this lord stopped right in the middle of taking his bath, combed his hair, put on his clothes and helped visitors, three times. And then, while having dinner, this same lord left his dinner table three times to help people who had come to see him. This is a good example of the compassionate mind constantly helping all sentient beings.

Wherever we may be, whatever race we are, it doesn't matter. Whether in our own country or another country, whether the customs are Chinese, Japanese or American, it doesn't matter. If you are a human being, beneficial action is very natural, universal. This is what we can practice. This is most important. We can benefit a friendly person, but we usually cannot benefit a person we hate. My friend Yokoi Roshi always gave compassion to everybody. Every time he said goodbye to a person whom he did not like, he sent him off with gassho. He went to the railroad station and as the train was leaving, he did gassho. That gassho was an

expression of his compassion. Even though he did not say anything, I was very impressed.

Once I was invited to a Catholic church to talk about Zen in their class on world religions. I talked about taking care of toilet paper, and they liked my talk because they had never heard of such a thing before. When I asked them how they used toilet paper they replied that they did not pay attention to how they used it. They pulled it off the roll and used just a small part of it and then threw it away. The next time you go to a public toilet, pay attention to the basket where paper towels have been thrown away. Almost always just a corner of the paper has been used and then it has been thrown away. This is not beneficial action. We cannot practice giving and we cannot practice loving speech to the paper with this kind of action. We should pay attention to how we use it, although I do not mean we must pay meticulous attention to it. If we are very busy, of course we should use the paper as quickly as possible; but still, there is a chance to pay attention to the existence of the paper. This is a wonderful communication.

When I was at the temple, my life was changing every day, because I had never experienced living in that way. There were just two people in the old, funny temple in the countryside of Japan: my old teacher and myself, a young monk. He taught me many things. One day I cut flowers and put them in a vase as an offering to Buddha. My teacher came to see the flowers and asked me why I had cut a particular flower. I hadn't given it any thought, so I said there was no reason, I just wanted to offer new flowers to Buddha. He pointed out a very young bud and said that if I cut a flower with a bud that was too young, that bud would have no chance to bloom. He suggested I leave it for a while until it grew more and then when I cut it, the bud would have a chance to bloom in the vase. This is an example of beneficial action. It is very important for us. When we cut flowers recklessly, carelessly, we are not

paying attention to them. To pay attention is practicing giving and loving speech to that flower. This is beneficial to the flowers and simultaneously it is beneficial to us.

My teacher also taught me how to clean Japanese *tatami* with a special broom. Every day I used the broom to clean the room, but I used it without thinking, paying no attention to how I cleaned. My teacher taught me to pay attention to the *tatami*, cleaning with the direction of the grooves between the straw rows rather than against them, in order to get all the dust out. After that I practiced giving to the *tatami* and to the broom; I could express loving speech to them, and at the same time this action was beneficial to me also.

I was also taught to clean the temple grounds outside with bamboo brooms we made ourselves. At first when I cleaned the grounds the traces of the broom strokes went zigzag, this way and that way. My teacher taught me to pay attention to the broom's trace marks in order to understand how I had used the broom, and to clean in such a way that left the traces completely straight. Then the grounds looked very nice. It is not a matter of whether we have left beautiful traces or not. The important point is to pay attention to the broom, to the loving speech given by the broom. We should pay attention to the broom, the soil and the temple yard. The temple yard is not just for you, for me or for the teachers; it is for all sentient beings. Practicing giving and loving speech is beneficial to the yard, to the broom and to us.

When you clean your room, pay attention to the corners and under the table. There is lots of space that is easy to clean, but under the table or desk it is more difficult and sometimes we avoid what is difficult to reach or to see. But cleaning with attention to the whole room is an important practice for us. It is to practice giving and loving speech to the corners, to the room and to ourselves. It is beneficial for us. Then we can communicate with all sentient beings.

Identity Action

Identity action, the fourth method of guidance, means to practice something with complete, full devotion. This is a very important practice for us. Without this, we cannot master anything that we do, we cannot exist in this world. Identity action means there is no difference between the object of our devotion and us—we are completely one. If we want to become one with a baby, we have to jump into the baby's world; but it doesn't mean to lose sight of ourself. Mother is mother, but still there is total communication between mother and baby. In front of a baby, people make funny faces in order to please the baby, even though the baby doesn't understand. They completely become one with the baby but they don't lose sight of themselves. This is not so easy actually. It is a very difficult practice for us in everyday life. That is why we create problems in human society. The bodhisattvas practice again and again in order to master this point until it penetrates their skin, muscle and bone. It is very hard. Even though we understand Buddhism intellectually through scriptures, still it is difficult. We can explain it in words, but to actually practice it is very difficult.

Pai Lo-tien, a famous Chinese poet, asked a Zen master, "What is Buddha's teaching?" The Zen master said, "Buddha's teaching is to do something good, not to do something wrong." So Pai Lo-tien said, "That is pretty easy; even a three-year-old boy knows that." Then the Zen master said, "Even though a three-year-old boy knows this, an eighty-year-old man doesn't do it."

Buddha was born in this world as a human being, putting himself in the position of a human being to save, to teach all sentient beings, becoming one with the people and guiding them to a peaceful life. Since we have been born as human beings, the same applies to us. We are born in this world in the form of human beings—for what? In order to

enjoy ourselves, to make lots of money and become rich, or to become a politician or a famous person? No, I don't think so. The main purpose of being born in this world is to live with people, because we cannot exist alone. However, we cannot just be present with people; we have to live with people in peace, in harmony, day by day. This is not a matter of discussion. We have to live in this way every day under all circumstances. For forty-five years, Shākyamuni Buddha taught in this way. This is why there is this most important practice called identity action. Buddha is a good example of why we have to practice like this.

“Action,” in this case, means behavior that is characterized by courtesy and sharpness, that keeps people naturally in awe and that has a sort of majesty or dignity coming from the bottom of human life or existence. We don't know exactly where it comes from, but we notice when people exhibit it and we have complete respect for them. Action has a very broad meaning. It includes not only human action and attitudes, but also all circumstances, circumstances' actions, and attitudes' actions.

If we want to make a poem about a pine tree or about nature, we have to move, we have to act, we have to do something first, and become one with nature. If we come into nature, nature comes into us. However, if we don't act first, nature is nature and is far from us. If we want to know something about nature, we have to be in identity with nature first and then nature is in identity with us, teaching us something about nature.

The relationship of self and others is a big relationship. Relationship with people and with nature goes on and on, continuously, limitlessly. This relationship between nature and me involves not only the “I” we can see, but the huge “I” that is extending into the present, the past and the future, to heaven and hell, in all directions. So the relationship between nature and us is not only between

nature and us, but is an endless relationship, constant and dynamic.

If we say the ocean consists of water, we are seeing the dualistic world. But water is the aliveness of being, constantly supporting the ocean without creating a gap between the ocean and water. Intellectually we know there are two beings, but the two beings are not always two. Within their activities the two completely become one, just like a spinning top. A top is decorated with stripes of separate colors, and when the top is spun into action, all the colors become one. They are not actually mixed up, because each color is still separate, but when the top is spinning, all the colors become one. The colors become blurred. Each color doesn't have its own egoistic sense; each extends into all the other colors.

When doing gassho, if gassho is seen from gassho, we do not appear. We are hidden in the gassho. If we become one with gassho, we simply cannot perceive who is doing gassho, but it doesn't mean we are excluded. We are there. If gassho is seen by us, we appear on the surface. Gassho does not appear; it is hidden in us. Nevertheless, we cannot say gassho is excluded. Gassho never excludes gassho itself. It is there. At that time, it is called gassho. This is identity action.

Wise leaders never hate people; they respect people. This is why people follow them. We have to be tolerant and make space where people can come to us. If we reject them, then there is no space for others to come in. Americans are not just Americans, Americans are the nation itself. We cannot say we are Americans without the existence of the nation. So Americans and the nation are exactly one, just like water and the ocean. If we say American, the nation is completely hidden behind the American, but it doesn't mean the American excludes the nation. The nation is there. If we say nation, at that time American is hidden behind nation, but it is not excluded; it

is already there. Nation is not a material thing, it is not an imagined thing, it is not a concept; the nation is people, people are nations. This is also identity action. The leader is exactly the same as the people, a human being. He or she has to see all people in equality, but it doesn't mean there is no difference. The leader is the leader and the people are the people. The teacher is the teacher and the student is the student. We have to see equality, but not in the realm of equality; we have to see equality in the realm of differentiation. Differentiation must be formed not in differentiation, but in equality. Then, differentiation and equality are working in identity action.

Identity action does not function in a small area called ego, but in the vastness of existence. When we clean a room, we just clean the room. The room is not something different from us. We are the room, the room is us. Then we and the room communicate with each other in the rhythm of identity action. We have to take the best care of the room we can, because the room is not a material being apart from us. The room is a great being called Buddha-dharma. Buddha-dharma means the unity of buddha and us, buddha and the room. It is nothing but a great being, just a great being completely beyond our speculation. Cleaning the room is not something someone makes us do. This action comes up from us, from the unity of buddha and us and the room. To take the best care of the room means whether it is dirty or clean, take the best care of the room. If we take care of the room like this, the room can live a long time; if we don't, the room does not live long. This is very important for us to understand. If we clean recklessly, not paying attention to the room, its life will be cut short. But the room is a great being deserving to live the life that has been allotted to the room itself. So we should take the best care of the room that we can. It is not necessary to make its life long, but just to take care of it, because it already has its own life. Taking the best care of the life of each being

and circumstance, we can practice giving, and then we can practice loving speech with our mind, words and body. This is beneficial action. In all these practices there is always identity action.

We are more or less ignorant and crazy, but it doesn't matter. We are already ignorant, so we must be right in the middle of ignorance and make the best of ignorance. That is all we have to do. But usually we add something extra to ignorance; we hate it and our life goes away from us. How can we be free from ignorance? How can we take care of ignorance? If we take care of our life according to our emotions, saying, "I hate my life," it is pretty easy for us to make our life short. My teacher always said his health was not strong. He said maybe he would die at sixty. He said he was weak, but he took the best care of his body and he lived to be eighty-six. The same applies to your room. If you rent your room from others you may think because you don't own it you don't have to take care of it. This is not the Buddhist way. Whether your room is rented or not, it doesn't matter. The room is a great being, our clothes are great beings, our boots and shoes are great beings, completely beyond our speculation. Day by day, we have to practice identity action, giving and loving speech, and then there is beneficial action.

If we see life as an object separate from us, it is easy for us to create fear and anxiety and confusion. When we see our life we feel many things. This is called experience. Of course it is okay, but it is not the total picture of the way to live. We must put it aside and be one with our life, that is all we have to do. This is most important. When we dance, we cannot look at the dance, at the stage, as something separate from us. We must be right in the middle of dancing. At that time we are one with the dance and are realizing the significance of the dance. Later, when we reflect on the significance of dance, we are separate from

it, but our understanding is the result of dynamic identity action.

We are human beings, so we are always thinking in terms of others and us, a leader and the people, zazen and us, Buddha and ordinary beings. Even though we know Buddha's teaching pretty well, ignorance comes up very quickly in our daily life. So, day by day we have to do our best to practice identity action. Because they are aware of how ignorant everyone is, bodhisattvas take a vow to practice identity action continually.

With a gentle expression, with a kind, compassionate attitude, we have to take care of our life and other people's lives. If we practice identity action, the other three methods of guidance are included. Very naturally we can practice giving, we can practice loving speech, we can practice beneficial action, we can really help others. Then we can fulfill our duty in life.