



Ryokan
Steve Weintraub

It's a great gift to be here and what a great gift our practice is, our zazen practice and our Buddhist practice. We are so lucky to have found it in our confused and confusing life.

Two stories to start with. One is from the Wizard of Oz—this Buddhist film about resuming true nature. There's one moment where Dorothy is caught in the castle with the Wicked Witch of the West and the three others have climbed onto the rocks outside the castle and they see that they need to go in there. The Cowardly Lion is in the middle and the Straw Man and Tin Man have a plan: "We'll go into the castle and get her and save her, etc." And then the Cowardly Lion, who hasn't spoken up to that point, says, "There's only one thing I have to say," and they ask, "What is that?" and he says, "Le-e-e-et me out of here!" He tries to run away, and they both grab him and hold him down. That's the way our practice may feel also, from inside. "Let me out of here!" "This responsibility is too great for me," we may say. There's something about this Cowardly Lion—of course, this is the way our courage manifests itself. It's funny, we think courage is some attainment beyond fear, but that's not the way it actually is. Actually it may feel inside like "Let me out of here!" But because we love Dorothy, we go and try

to help her get out of the castle. Because of our love of our true nature, because we have an instinct or innate movement toward this true nature, toward who we really are, we practice. There are various things around practice—barricades and demons and innumerable things. But the power of our intention comes from something we can't do anything about. We can only allow it. And when we allow it, we think: how great it is. Well, actually, we may think it's terrible, but that doesn't matter. We think it matters whether we feel terrible or not, inside. Of course it does matter. But also it doesn't matter at all.

I came to San Francisco in the Fall of 1968. I was living around the corner from Zen Center, which at that time inhabited an old Jewish Synagogue on Bush Street. And there were American Zen students around Suzuki Roshi, and then there were Japanese people. Suzuki Roshi had actually been sent from Japan to take care of this Zen mission. He was a missionary to the Japanese Buddhists in America, and to the barbaric Americans. That was his job. We sat zazen there, and on the weekends the Japanese congregation, to raise money, showed samurai movies in the auditorium. One time there was a one day sitting, and Katagiri Roshi (we called him Sensei then) was leading it because Suzuki Roshi was sick. So he was doing *dokusan* (private meeting with the student) behind the movie screen. And Katagiri Roshi's way sometimes was—they have a phrase in China, "A mouth like a bent carrying pole." You know the carrying pole with two big buckets at either end. He was like that sometimes, a very forbidding figure. So I sat down and after awhile he asked, "How is your zazen?" I said "Pretty terrible." And then he said "'Pretty terrible' is pretty good." That was about 23 years ago and still, I am working on it. That was a pretty good thing for me to hear at the time: "Pretty terrible is pretty good." I didn't understand what he meant for a long time. But now I have some feeling for what he meant: he was talking about the spirit of practice.

So Steve and Paul and I have been involved with this Dharma Transmission ceremony with Sojun Roshi and Zenkei Sensei and Shosan Vicki all helping us very much for the last few days and weeks and months and years and decades and lifetimes. And I want to make a distinction—just for tonight, okay? A tentative distinction—between the outer meaning of Dharma Transmission and its inner meaning. The metaphor that is used in Dharma Transmission is lineage, birth, 'your dharma son,' or 'your dharma daughter'. It's a lineage. So there's blood involved. There's blood that runs through the transmission. The meaning of that blood is not something just for Dharma Transmission. The meaning of that blood is for anyone who takes up practice. For anyone who takes up practice, this blood is transmitted. So I ask you: What is this blood?

We can say that the outer meaning of Dharma Transmission is like graduation. The outer meaning is that you have accomplished something. It looks like you

know something or have something. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "Oh, he has Dharma Transmission; he must know the answer to that question." But Avalokitesvara is "coursing deeply in the prajna paramita"—she hears all suffering. She is coursing deeply in the prajna paramita, coursing *deeply* in practice. This coursing deeply is the feeling of Dharma Transmission. This blood courses deeply in us. We recognize it and allow it to course deeply in us, and we course deeply in it. It is not some knowledge or ability; it doesn't have anything to do with that. That's just the way it looks. Inside, in fact, it may be 'pretty terrible.' This is what's given from generation to generation, and what's given to each of us—not just in this fancy ceremony. What's given is this opportunity to course deeply.

In the *Fukanzazengi*, Dogen says, "Have no designs on becoming a Buddha." Katagiri Roshi's "pretty terrible is pretty good" is 'have no designs on becoming a Buddha.' That was his instruction. Becoming a Buddha is our strategy. Our strategy of accomplishment, our strategy of improvement. This is what you get a Ph.D. for, this strategy, this figuring things out, accomplishing things. I don't have anything against a Ph.D., in fact I may get a Ph.D. myself. But the great gift of practice is that we *don't have to strategize*. We don't have to do it anymore. We don't have to figure out how to get better. We don't have to figure out how to have deeper concentration or better samadhi or more insight or any of that stuff. What's left when you take that stuff away and take up "coursing deeply" is: throwing yourself completely at your life, okay?

By the way, not having any designs on becoming a Buddha completely includes having designs on becoming a Buddha. Don't worry, you can't escape not having any designs on becoming a Buddha. And what allows this coursing to occur? The great kindness and great compassion and great sympathy of our teachers. So even if you are afraid, your teacher can say to you, "You are afraid, but you are just an afraid Buddha." And you will say "No, no, no, it can't be. Being afraid and being a Buddha don't go together." This kindness is what encourages us, and creates the ground for the fruit of our practice to grow, and allows each thing, each moment, each next event to be the opportunity for us to enter with sincerity. So maybe you could say this commitment to entering with sincerity is what is transmitted. That's the inner meaning of what is transmitted. Ironically this is both a great gift and also, you can't escape any longer. Even if you are afraid, you have to be a Buddha anyway. Even if you are angry, you have to be a Buddha anyway. There is no way to get out; the channel of the coursing blood gets deeper and deeper and deeper, the more you stick around. And I really believe this is, finally, what we most want. This is the response to our "inmost request." Thank you very much.