

THOMAS ISSAN DORSEY ROSHI
1933-1990
DIED
JUST AFTER MIDNIGHT
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1990

GAIAKIND

A Talk by Baker-roshi.

The practice of Zen Buddhism is to face and to realize one's own being, the being of others and . . . Being. This is the most basic attitude in Mahayana Buddhism, on which the maturing of all practice, understanding, and wisdom depend. It is usually expressed in English as the vow 'to save all sentient beings.' The use of the English word 'save' is salvational and related to complex ideas in the development of Christian and Western civilization. As a result, this translation turns the Buddhist sense of 'awakening for and with all (and each) life--including grass and trees' into something close to an idea of a 'humankind.' (Perhaps Buddhists should vow in English something more like: "I vow to realize Buddhahood with each and every sentient being--in the midst of all Being." Or: "I vow to realize Whole Being with each sentient being." Or: "I vow to realize Whole Being with Whole Being.")

My life is to practice Zen, that is, to practice my lived life--my living and lived life. But how do I practice Gaia, this planet as a living being? First, we have to think pretty clearly about what we're doing before the practice can find the right way of functioning.

'All sentient beings' is an idea much like the idea of 'humankind'. 'Humankind' is not a fact, it's an artifact. It's something we human beings in the West have constructed. It is not a given. To make such an idea really work you give it a purpose and the dynamic given to humankind is progress. 'Progress' in this coupling with humankind has become a pervasive addictive goal that absorbs, expresses or subordinates all other realities and values--happiness, stability, compassion, enlightenment. The result of this addiction to some of the economic and religious dimensions of 'humankind' is that our biological and physical environment has been marginalized, ignored, often

destroyed. Everything is seen as secondary to 'progress' or dependent on progress. However, progress is a powerful and useful idea, one of the most beneficial ideas of all times, but the idea of progress needs to be more responsive to other realities and constituencies than 'humankind.' Or humankind needs to be a larger and more subtle idea.

Ideas, like mountains, are often best seen from a distance. That is when we can most clearly feel their power and beauty. When you are up close on a mountain, all you see is rocks, trees, streams--you lose the overall shape and drama of it. However, up close, in the details--ideas, generalizations, delusions and truths weave and float with more subtlety than ideas seen from a distance. We need to look in more detail at our social and physical environment and at our definitions of personal and moral life. Only in this way will we begin to really acknowledge the biological and physical environment in our institutions and personal views.

The idea of humankind has had great power in shaping our culture. It is the pivotal reference for the central ideals of contemporary democracy: to serve 'people' by making our institutions and ways of life less cruel and more just--in short, to find every way possible to lessen suffering in the world. These ideals have penetrated much of the modern world and have recently undone the Warsaw Pact (along with the Pact's economic collapse, which in itself is partly due to the absence of these ideals). Still, up close, the idea of humankind is often limiting and coercive in its modulations of identity, personal freedom and service to others. In its narrower definitions, totalitarian governments decide who is humankind. Without going into more detail, despite the power and value of the idea of humankind, it does not describe the function and practice of 'the vow to save all sentient beings'--either up close or as a large cultural ideal.

Let us look at another notion. Our existence, the fullness and extent of our existence, is larger than the idea of self. The individual self, as identified in the West, is much too small a boat to carry afloat the complexity of our existence. If you sail through life with only this single self in which to put all the stuff of your life, you're going to have trouble, you might sink. In fact, much falls overboard and sinks to the bottom. All that doesn't fit into your narrow self, all the things that fall overboard, become your unconscious. It sticks to the bottom of the boat, gums it up, you can hardly sail. The particular way the Western self is constructed produces unconscious material at a daunting rate.

In a similar way, the complexity of this planet and of our life on this planet does not fit comfortably or sail well in the narrow boat of governments or of any of the societal forms available to us today. Our institutions have not been so constructed that they incorporate or produce a biological or environmental understanding or history of society or person (medical records are a significant, but on the whole, marginal, exception).

The ever-present biological reality is not part of our society's history. It is not noticed. It is marginalized or excluded. Greenpeace, the Greens Party, the environmental movement are trying to do something about this. The scientific idea of gaia, of the earth as 'living being', a self-correcting interrelated being, this idea in itself is not sufficient for its implementation or realization by individuals or by society. What can we do to make it real and realized in our personal lives?

Since historically we have been able to make the jump from the sense of the individual to the larger identity of humankind, then we should be able to make the next jump, to Gaiakind. But as I have said, first the idea of humankind needs to be wider and calmer. In order for Buddhist understanding and practices to be extended to the Western sense of 'humankind', the idea of progress needs to be separated from its unexamined identity with the needs of humankind--at least the relationship needs to become more subtle. Then the sense of the enlightenment of each and every sentient being, can find a resonant home in the idea of humankind. As that happens, I think the jump from 'humankind' to the larger identity of 'gaiakind' will be more possible for all of us.

Through Zen sitting practice and through mindfulness practice, I think each of us can locate and realize these larger identities, these larger presences, of friend, teacher, family, nation, tribe, humankind and gaiakind as identities inseparable from and permeable with one's practical and spiritual identities. Gaiakind can be as much a real identity for us as the widest sense of humankind, just as real and satisfying. Each moment, each perception, each person you are standing before, looking at, feeling--each tree, everything you happen to see or be in contact with--can become gaiakind for you. In Zen when we say 'all sentient being', we mean that everything is part of sentient life. The physical world--animal, mineral and vegetable--all the planets, stars, the farthest reaches of the galaxies--and the imagination, all is the sentient world.

Tung Shan asked, "It is said that insentient being, inanimate objects expound the Dharma. Why do I not hear it?" Kuei Shan answered, "Although, you do not hear it, do not hinder that which hears it."

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A good way to practice with this is to create a vision of an Earth Body Mandala of Fertility. This mandala is a combination of what one is thinking and what one is visualizing (seeing), together with a feeling, even an ache in your body, and all accompanying thoughts and images.

A mandala is a fragrance, an atmosphere, a presence, a self-organizing system. A simple example would be the way a gardener sees a flower. He is aware of all the fertile elements that make the territory of the flower and the flower itself possible. Someone who is not a gardener is

likely to see only the flower or many details, but will not see the fertility mandala of the flower or the overlapping mandalas of each plant. In the path of Zen practice we should ask: "How do I see the fertile mandala of my own life?" and "How do I hold that perception, that knowledge?"

In Buddhism we practice 'simultaneous perception' so that we are able to see the world as impermanent and at the same time be able to maintain the conventional perception of the world as permanent. The development of this practice allows us to see the world as 'form' and 'emptiness' and also to see each individual as an ordinary person and as a Buddha. One of the fruits of this practice would be to see each person in their own particularity and, simultaneously, be able to see each person in their dimensions of, in their mandala of, Buddhakind, Humankind and Gaiakind. I do not mean just to see the larger identities that we all are submerged in, contextualized in, but to see these larger identities manifested, in various degrees in each person--in their life, activity and presence.

(I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha." These are the three vows or refuges of every Buddhist. One way of understanding these three refuges is that 'Buddha' means that you have to practice completely alone. 'Sangha' means you have to practice completely with others. And 'Dharma' means you have to practice within the sense, knowledge and truth of all being, sentient and insentient--the Earthbody Mandala.)

Buddhism is based on the idea that everything constantly changes, yet the word 'Dharma' stems from a root meaning to hold. How do you hold your world together in the midst of everything changing and you changing as well? A key notion for Buddhism--as reality and as an identity of the Buddha--is the Dharmakaya. 'Kaya' is the body, the vehicle. Dharmakaya has come to mean space and everything all-at-once--the held body of space and beingspace (as presence). The experience of meditation can open this space as the real territory of existence. To hold the Earthbody Mandala would also mean to hold the Dharmakaya as the mandala in which everything happens. Gaiakind and humankind would be a play of identities within Dharmakaya.

A simple, but transformative practice that I often suggest is to find that state of mind where space connects us rather than separates us--to find that feeling. If you manage to find that space, you are into Buddhist practice and not just thinking about it. You can begin to do it by simply walking around having that idea, the sense that 'space connects' in your mind. Try to sense that. It may be useful to feel the world as an aquarium, an ocean that you are physically swimming in. The people and things around you are a bit like seaweed, moving and responding to you and to every movement.

One reason we suffer so much is that we are usually stuck in the world of reasons and causes, in progress, in cognitive thought and its justifications and explanations. True joy has no reason. It is spontaneous. But when joy comes up you say, what is the reason for this? There must be a cause. Then you are back in suffering. Most people rarely have a chance for joy except perhaps when they are sunbathing. For a few minutes you can let the world go by, because the beach and the sun are more powerful than progress.

Right now Gaia's beach is all around us. We are on permanent vacation right on the other side of every stressful moment. It doesn't mean that you aren't also caught up in the world of suffering and things to do. But don't let it coerce you out of simultaneous joy. Here we find a little bit of the territory of joy and presence, where we can practice the Earthbody Mandala of Gaiakind, where we can see humankind and gaiakind as always with us. With that feeling and knowledge you will know what to do, know what to do for all of your family-your planet and planetary family.

I would like to end with a brief Zen story.

A famous teacher, Mazu was walking along with his disciple, Baizhang, when some wild geese flew overhead. You know how beautiful migrating wild geese are--in those great flying patterns of awareness and mutuality.

Seeing the geese, Mazu asked, "What is it?"

'What is it?' is a very basic question in Zen practice. It is a kind of mantra and an essential attitude. It can be reversed. 'It is What! Whatness!

So Mazu said, "What is it?" Baizhang answered, "It's wild geese." Mazu then said, "Where have they gone?" Zhang answered, "They have flown away." Mazu gave Zhang's nose a hard twist. Zhang let out a cry of pain. Mazu said, "When have they ever flown away?"

When has Gaia ever flown away!!!

(Editor's Note: These are excerpts from a talk given by Baker-roshi at a conference in the Black Forest in West Germany, May 17, this year.)

NEWS

SESSHINS AND SEMINARS

UPCOMING SESSHINS: The October Sesshin will begin Sunday, September 30, and end Saturday night, October 6. Rohatsu Sesshin, the main sesshin of the year, will be the first through the eighth of December. There will be dinner served and an orientation meeting the evening before sesshin, and breakfast the day following the end of sesshin. You can come a day or two early to acclimate yourself to the altitude and the practice, or stay a day or two later after the sesshin, for \$15 a day. Sesshins are \$300 (deposit \$100) for non-members, \$150 (deposit \$50) for members. You will need a deposit to reserve your place. For more information, please call Randy at Crestone.

SEMINARS IN SANTA FE: There will be a seminar, 'The Teaching and Practice of the Heart Sutra', with Baker-roshi on the 18th and 25th of September, and the 9th and 16th of October, Tuesday evenings at 7:30. The text will be the Heart Sutra and one or more koans from the newly published Book of Serenity. Please call Miriam in Santa Fe at 982-1332 or Robert at 982-8340 for information or to reserve your place.

CRESTONE NEWS

ABOUT CRESTONE: Crestone Mountain Zen Center is in Southern Colorado. It is 200 miles north of Santa Fe, and 200 miles south of Denver. You can join our regular schedule of zazen, study, meals, and work. There are also regular seminars, discussion, individual instruction, and sesshins four times a year. You can come to practice Zen and to participate in the schedule, or you can come as a retreatant for the peace, space, and quiet.

Crestone is isolated, set on a plateau of pines and aspen at 8400 feet; looking out over the largest alpine valley in the world a thousand feet below. From the monastery the valley stretches out like an inland sea of earth and grass, and at night, a line of flickering lights compressed on the horizon. Directly behind us the dramatic range of the Sangre de Christo and Crestone Peak rise to 14,300 feet.

The main building is partly buried in hill and is made of stone and very large logs. It contains a zendo, kitchen, dining area, bedrooms, atrium, and greenhouse. The building is solar heated, but for the coldest winter nights, each room has a stove. There are solar panels for lights and electricity. There is a large lawn, organic flower and vegetable gardens, a woodshop and pottery studio, and a domed chapel.

If you would like to come to Crestone, please call to make reservations. Our fees vary according to the kind and length of your stay.

SESSHINS: We've had three sesshins this past winter; Rohatsu in December, and "study sesshins" in October and February. During the February sesshin, for example, we added periods for a seminar, a group discussion, and individual study of the text, the Third Patriarch Sengtsan's poem Faith In Mind.

VISITORS: A group of students from the University of Minnesota came to participate in the monastic life. Taiun Matsunami-roshi from Ryosenan temple at Daitokuji visited for a few days, and spoke informally with us about practice life in Japan. Another guest, Vitold Ryollo, from Moscow, videotaped everything, including 50 minutes of zazen, service, and formal breakfast. He also filmed the solar panels, which are of great interest in the Soviet Union. The Gay and Lesbian Spiritual Conference in July was a big success, with 50 participants and much good feeling. The staff and students at Crestone enjoyed and were deeply moved by the conference.

RESIDENTS: Gerald and Gisela Weischede, the founding directors, went to Germany during June and July to join Roshi in two sesshins and two seminars, to visit their families after three years at Crestone, and to see the !wall!. Regina Krautwig, Gisela's sister, and her three-year-old son Max have come to live at Crestone. Randy Fox, after his annual Spring earning trip to Aspen, where he practices as a taxi driver, has returned to be the new director.

Mark and Lynn Bluestein have been living and practicing here since last August, after sitting with our weekly group in Albuquerque during 1988. Gisela and Lynn have been producing black, sawdust-fired pottery and are in the process of making a kiln with materials donated by K.C. Wyman. Mark has joined the local volunteer fire department. Bertha Gottrup, who was potter-in-residence at Lindisfarne, has moved from Crestone to her own house in the Baca, where Gisela has been studying with her. Don Henderson, who lived at the Center when it was Lindisfarne, has returned to live and practice here. Several people are also here for long stays: Sarah Grayson from San Francisco, Christiane Robrecht, Dr. Horst Wehowsky and Vally Trefz from Germany, and Ania Kamienska from Poland. At the moment of writing this, there are sixteen residents at the Crestone Center. This is the maximum the buildings will sleep.

DEVELOPMENT OF CRESTONE: We recently built a large storage shed and started work on the first separate staff housing. We have put in more batteries for the solar panels and bought a Honda generator. The generator is necessary to boost the batteries during a series of cloudy days and when we have to use the washing machine several days in a row. The increase in the number of full time residents from six to eight plus retreatants last year, to twelve to sixteen residents plus retreatants now, has also overtaxed the original leaching field, so an additional leaching field is a project for Spring. It is too late to do it this year (even if we had the money), the mountain already has snow on it and we are expecting snow soon at the Center itself.

Although everything is going really well here, Crestone has an urgent need for more residential practice space, staff housing and guest and retreatant rooms. We are slowly reworking the woodshop building to provide more housing, a bathroom, and showers.

If you can donate cash or the skilled labor and supplies we need, we would be very grateful.

CRESTONE FINANCES: We pay no salaries, but it costs us \$3000 a month to cover our operating expenses. If you can help with any size contribution, that would be wonderful.

SANTA FE NEWS

NEWS: The Sangha met in June and discussed the temple and zendo practice. We're planning to paint the Stupa-Chorten in September--if anyone is interested in helping to prepare and paint, please let us know. David Padwa, a founder of the temple and the builder of the Chorten, visited and stayed with us for a while with his son, Gideon. David told us that TigerLily, the temple cat, is now 17 years old. Gideon, who grew up with TigerLily, was amazed to find her still on the planet.

DEVELOPMENT OF SANTA FE: We need to build a new shower room to replace our patched moulding fourteen-year old one. Eventually we want to replace the center Zendo window with a door so that the two side rooms (cells) can each have a little study that is not the entrance to the Zendo. And we want to replace the center of the Zendo room skylight with a clerestory in order to improve ventilation and to cut down on the severe heat of the afternoon sun through the skylight. We would be grateful for any contributions toward these projects.

OTHER NEWS

BAKER-ROSHI: The Dharma Sangha has rented for the next year the Santa Fe temple house where Baker-roshi lived next to the Zendo. Roshi will be staying in the Zendo building when he's teaching here. He is planning to spend more time at Crestone, where he can work steadily on his book. Roshi spent his yearly 2 1/2 months in Europe this Spring, from mid-April through June, giving seven, 3-day seminars and a number of lectures in Austria, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, and leading 7-day sesshins at the beginning and end of June. In July he led a two week retreat, "Desire and Awareness," in Bali, and in August taught a week-long "Full Heart" seminar with Atum O'Kane in Switzerland. He brought his twelve year old daughter, Elizabeth, with him on this five-week trip around the world through Bali, Japan and Europe. This coming November he will be teaching in Berlin and leading a sesshin at the Haus der Stille. This oldest Buddhist center in Germany is between Hamburg and the former East German border.

Baker-roshi will be living at Crestone Mountain Zen Center from September until mid-April of next year, except for the two weeks in November when he will be doing the seminar in Berlin and the sesshin at the Haus de Stille. Every month he spends some time teaching at the Santa Fe Zen Center.

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER: Issan Dorsey-roshi is very ill with AIDS related lymphoma. Issan-roshi is founder of the Hartford Street Zen Center and the Maitri Home and Hospice for people with AIDS. Issan-roshi began his practice with Suzuki-roshi and is a disciple of Baker-roshi. On September 1 in San Francisco, Baker-roshi conducted an Installation Ceremony with Issan-roshi and Steve Allen, Kijun Tenryu-sensei, establishing Steve as the new abbot of the Hartford Street Zen Center. Sunday after the ceremony was spent with Baker-roshi, students and visitors. Although Monday and Tuesday he was quite weak, he seemed pleased, smiling and bowing, to receive a steady stream of visitors.

Just as this was about to go to the printer:

Issan Dainei-roshi died a little after midnight, 12:05, Thursday, September 6, 1990. It was a full moon. He was surrounded by his disciples and friends. He lived well and he died well. He chose his life and his death. He died in his own power, in deep and intentional samadhi, four days after Steve's, Tenryu-sensei's, Installation Ceremony.

ISSAN-ROSHI'S FUNERAL will be September 16 at 4 p.m. in the BuddhaDharma Hall of the San Francisco Zen Center at 300 Page Street.

DHARMA SANGHA EUROPE: There are now sitting groups in Berlin, Heidelberg, Zurich and Vienna. There is a quarterly Dharma Sangha Europe publication called Dharma Forum that has begun. It will be published in English in Holland.

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