

Kosho: Good morning everybody. It's a pleasure to welcome Linda and Greg to Austin for the first time. They are long-time Zen practitioners and have been for quite a while at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in California. Linda is the Director of Tassajara and Greg is the Tanto, head of practice. Welcome!

Greg: Good morning. We are really happy to be here. I want to thank Kosho Roshi and Graham and Mako and all of you for your hospitality, your Texas hospitality. We feel very welcome and are really happy to be here.

Linda: That goes double for me. We have practiced with Kosho and Mako and Graham over many years at Zen Center so it's a really sweet reunion for us and we're deeply honored, so thank you for inviting us. You are all perfect hosts by being here.

Greg: I'd like to also thank and acknowledge our teacher, Sojun Mel Weitsman Roshi, the abbot of Berkeley Zen Center, the old Buddha of the East Bay. That's our home temple -- that's where we started out. Both of us were ordained at Berkeley Zen Center, we were married there, but we did dharma transmission with Sojun at Tassajara. Anyway. Many thanks to Sojun Roshi. My intention here is just to encourage you in your practice.

Linda: So this morning we thought we'd like to talk about continuous practice, specifically a fascicle, or starting with a fascicle by Dogen called 'Continuous Practice' (one of the translations). Dogen begins:

On the great road of Buddha ancestors, there is always unsurpassable practice, continuous and sustained. It forms the circle of the Way and is never cut off. Between aspiration, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana, there is not a moment's gap. Continuous practice is the circle of the Way.

Greg: Gyoji is the the longest fascicle in the Shobogenzo but we just want to talk about these opening sentences.

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Linda: So, first of all, what is practice? That's one of those words that if you've been doing a Buddhist practice you get very used to using, like Dharma or something. It's untranslatable in a way -- what do you mean by practice? So I thought we'd say a little bit about our understanding of practice. First of all to say that Zen, and Buddhism more broadly, is a religion, if you will, some people have a hard time calling it that -- but it is a spiritual practice that is action-oriented. We chanted the loving kindness meditation sutra this morning and it says 'this is what should be accomplished by one who is wise' --

and it goes on through all of the practices of a Bodhisattva to describe the actions of one who wishes to be of benefit to others. It's not really about belief very much -- what are we doing? What is our mental activity? What is our physical activity? How do we understand this, and how can this be enlightened activity?

So another translation of Gyoji is: pure conduct and observance of precepts. And the body of the fascicle itself, the reason it's so long, is that it's one story after another of various ancestors in different lineages going all the way back to the Buddha and their exemplary practice. The stories are deeply meant by Dogen to be inspiring and to bring us to a level of aspiration that we also can do this ourselves. Some of the stories are about pounding rice, or other ancestors who never slept on their side. So there were different practices -- it wasn't like there was just one practice -- but in each case they took it up thoroughly and maintained it throughout their life. Of course the key practice for Dogen was of course zazen. His understanding of zazen is very broad and deep and encompasses all practices. Sojun Roshi, our teacher, once asked Suzuki Roshi, "What is Nirvana?" and Suzuki Roshi replied: seeing one thing through to the end.

Greg: So doing one practice is practicing completely. Between aspiration, practice, enlightenment and nirvana there is not a moment's gap. Continuous practice forms the circle of the Way. Sojun Roshi sometimes says: practice *begins* with enlightenment -- the thought of enlightenment is what brings us to practice. In our tradition, we have these Way-seeking mind talks: people tell their story, about what brought them to practice. Another translation for Way-seeking mind is bodhicitta: the mind or thought of enlightenment. Hey, you know, there's gotta be something else -- hey, this can't be it! What's really going on here? All of us, every human being, has this capacity -- maybe a state or unstated intention. Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. So this is what brings us to practice, and that in itself is enlightenment. That questioning. That which you seek is causing you to seek. That which you seek is *causing* you to seek. It begins with enlightenment. Hmm, there's actually not actually a moment's gap. The circle of the Way -- entering into that circle, being that circle of the Way, is how we manifest this. So for Master Dogen, you know, this was very important concept. Practice and enlightenment -- they are are not two separate things -- you have probably heard this before unless you're brand new. Practice and enlightenment are not two separate things. It's one thing. It's the circle of the Way. You practice for its own sake -- for the pure joy of it. To live an actualized life; to live an examined life; to have a life worth living. So continuous practice, at Tassajara, is pretty obvious. It's pretty obvious. When I first was getting ready to Tassajara I was pretty excited about it -- I made all these arrangements in my life, I had already been practicing at Berkeley Zen Center for years, and it seemed like other aspects of my life were becoming less and less important, Zen practice was sort of becoming the main thing -- sort of a calling, in my case, you could say. I said once to Sojun Roshi maybe i should

move to Tassajara, and he said maybe you SHOULD. I was pretty keyed up before I left, and during my last dokusan I said I'm moving to Tassajara how shall I practice there!? He says just follow the schedule! So it's pretty obvious. It's true! Just follow the schedule and pay attention to the guidelines and that's your life. Sojun says practice at Tassajara is easy! It is! It's also really hard too because it's physically and psychologically pretty relentless, but on the other hand, it's really easy, you just follow the schedule. That was my practice when I was first at Tassajara and we left and then we came back and now I feel like my continuous practice there is maintaining that and having that to offer it to other people. That Linda and I, that Kosho Roshi, Mako, Graham, could go to that place and train in that place and then come and take what we have embodied there and offer it to other people. AZC is one example but there are many others throughout the world. This lineage, this branch Soto Zen is pretty vibrant. Pretty amazing. Here we are, late July, and this is more people than I expected -- this is very lively Sangha!. On the verge of Kosho becoming abbot of AZC, you might be faced with the problem of outgrowing this space! That might be an interesting problem to have. I come to offer this to other people -- the not-so-straightforward, not-so-simple continuous practice is, I think, pretty interesting. Pretty juicy, actually. Dogen was very clear about: this practice is for everybody; it's a universal. When he wrote Fukanzazengi, the 'fu' is universal. It's for everybody. How do we do that? That's a big question.

Linda: First I want to say that although Greg pointed to those of us sitting here as having a continuous practice, or taking that up and offering it to others, you may already know that all of you are also already engaged in that. Because every so often someone might say: oh, that thing you said really helped me, or someone at your work might comment that your calm was really inspiring to them. I bet that that's already happening. Your practice is already of benefit to other beings and helps them. Because. We can't help it -- your practice permeates everywhere, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Oh, no, actually, that's right where I am. How can I be elsewhere? Anywhere else? So Dogen goes on to say, 'This being so, continuous practice is undivided -- not forced by you or others. The power of this continuous practice confirms you as well as others. It means your practice affects the entire world and the entire sky in the ten directions, although not noticed by others or by yourself, it is so.' Just read that again. 'This being so, continuous practice is undivided -- not forced by you or others. The power of this continuous practice confirms you as well as others. It means your practice affects the entire earth and the entire sky in the ten directions; although not noticed by others or by yourself, it is so.' That's usually not necessarily the experience that we have. Yeah? I mean if you're having that experience you're probably in the middle of an enlightenment experiences, so congrats, but otherwise you may be in trouble. But we're generally we are so aware of how we wish we could be different or what we're doing wrong, you know, all these feelings, but this is actually in a certain way -- turned correctly -- it is part of our way-seeking mind. More of being on the path away from where we are not aligned with our true nature. It can get

overblown, it can be very difficult to live with that voice but if we can find the part of it that is trying to help us -- and that we really are doing the best we can -- to hear what is true and live accordingly to that even before we have much of a clear idea about what it really is. To listen to that still, small voice and what it is asking of you. What does your practice ask of you? What is that Way-seeking mind, that bodhicitta, that is calling all of us to be here and find some way of being that feels deeply true that we can abide in, that we can return to, and that is the fount of joy and connection in our lives. And on the way to that we make *endless* mistakes -- Dogen said "one continuous mistake" -- practice is one continuous mistake. What a relief! I've been very grateful to practice at SFZC where there are so many teachers and they manifest the teaching in so many different ways and because we live so closely together is that we really that we ALL make mistakes. I've gotten really good at saying -- I'm sorry, I've made a mistake -- and being really okay with that. Mostly, you know. So Dogen Zenji said, When you hit the mark that is the same effort you have been doing that you have been doing all along. Suppose after trying 99 times of failure, you hit the mark at the 100th time -- that effort, that meaning of hit the mark, and the meaning of losing the mark -- should be the same. We think they are different, you know? But he is saying that effort, that meaning of hitting the mark and losing the mark should be the same. The difference is that now you've hit the mark! Okay!?! From a materialistic viewpoint to lose the mark is not good at all. You should hit the mark. But from the meaning of practice, actual practice, even though you lose it, the meaning of the practice is the same. To hit the mark or lose the mark is not different -- that is, you know our enlightenment. So it is not only enlightenment that is valuable; the failure by true spirit is also valuable. The failure by true spirit is also valuable. So your best effort -- you sincerely aimed to hit the mark, and you failed. Okay, beautiful. It has the same meaning. This is why even if your zazen is not perfect it is still Way-seeking mind. This is bodhicitta mind.

So some years ago there were some Buddhist teachers invited who were all invited to Eselen and doing various demonstrations of their practice/their great powers/whatever and someone was doing archery practice. And I think it was Kobun Chino stepped up and -- Eselen is about 14 miles of west of us from Tassajara actually -- and it's right on the edge of cliffs looking over the ocean. So they had the archery range set up on the cliff face and so Kobun Chino draws the bow, turns around towards the ocean, and lets it go. And he watches it and when it goes into the water he says: bullseye!

Greg: Accordingly, by the continuous practice of all Buddhas and ancestors, your practice is actualized and your great road opens up. By your continuous practice, the practice of all Buddhas is actualized and the great road of all Buddhas opens up. Your continuous practice creates the circle of the Way. When Dogen says all Buddhas he means all of us. All of us. We practice together, we awaken together, this is the universality of our practice and is also Mahayana path. There is no sentient being left behind. Our practice includes everyone

-- when we practice we practice with all beings. When we wake up, we wake up with all beings. So you could just as easily say by our continuous practice, the circle of the Way is created. I'm very much thinking about Sangha, being here with all of you, this vibrant, diverse, growing Sangha. The night before last, Mako took us to see these purple martens at the Jack in the Box on the strip mall. Thousands of them! Wow, what a treat! I'm a bird-watcher myself. I was watching birds. That's a purple marten. That's a purple marten. Oh, and look, a purple marten! There were thousands of them! There's something about that energy that I understand. The energy of all of them together creates something that is more than just one individual purple marten. Why is it so beautiful? That energy is the same as our continuous practice, our practicing together -- so it doesn't matter, you know, where you find yourself, whether it's Tassajara or AZC or in a traffic jam in this growing city that isn't growing its infrastructure as fast as the city is growing -- if you're in a traffic jam, your Sangha is the traffic jam. That's all. Wherever you find yourself, that's where your practice is. The first time we left Tassajara we went and practiced at City Center and then for four and half years I was doing prison ministry work at San Quentin. The San Quentin Buddha-dharma Sangha. San Quentin, you've probably heard of it, it's the oldest prison in CA. The immense California prison system, it's where death row is, and there's a really great Sangha there. And it's Soto Zen. At San Quentin State Prison. So I went there almost every Sunday night for four and a half years and I got to really know those guys. At one point most of the guys -- these older guys -- who did something really heinous in their 20s and are doing term life sentences. They are in this part called north block and they have these cells and that has been their entire life for decades. And the Sangha was a refuge for them -- a little island of sanity on a Sunday night. And at some point the prison system wanted to turn the north block into more high valued real estate and wanted to send all these guys elsewhere. Because these older guys don't need to be in such older housing. We need this space in north block. But that meant that all these guys in our Sangha were going to be scattered in all different directions, and of course they were devastated. It was at that time when our teacher Sato Roshi -- still thinking about it gives me goose-bumps. Because he was so impassioned. He said: your practice is right here! You've got nothing to worry about! If you go to Soledad, your practice is in Soledad, if you go to Folsom, it is there -- the practice is portable; it goes through stone walls, it goes through steel bars, it goes where you go. Whew! And the guys heard it, and I sure heard it. It really meant a lot to me. Your practice goes where you go. What is the true place of practice? Right here, right here, behind the breastbone. No problem there at all. Turns out they didn't send them off to all different directions, so the story has a happy ending. Somehow, in the administration, somebody got the idea that this is going to be really disturbing and they didn't do it -- thank goodness. Hrm.

Linda: So one of the ways that we make our practice portable is through 'Sati' -- which is translated as mindfulness -- a very popular term -- but perhaps a better translation of Sati that might be closer to the original meaning is

'remembering'. Remembering and coming back to the object of meditation or to our intention, or coming back to following the schedule completely. So, where and what do you choose to give your attention to? Where do you put your awareness throughout the day? Because our lives have their (apparent) constraints, but we have a wide, range of choice, very evident choice, about where we give our attention. So in a traffic jam you can choose to give attention to irritation, or worry, or anger, and you can choose to pay attention to the breath and the body, to wholesome thoughts, to encouraging thoughts, you can examine what is arising in the moment. You have that choice. It's a terrible responsibility actually, once you realize it -- what are my habit energies? What am I doing? I catch myself all the time. Gee, that isn't what I meant to be focusing on. Habit energy is very very strong. Yet the more we exercise that, the more we exercise our attention, our awareness, our choice, the stronger those habit energies get in another direction. And that is part of practice. Talk about sudden awakening and gradual practice -- as meaning, we continue to work in our day to day lives -- the relative world -- to determine how we actualize the Buddha Way? How do we manifest it? How? How do we share it with others? How do we do that? Each time that we're able to do that, even if we do this a little bit, we should notice it and appreciate it, that we're going against the stream, that we've managed to shift our focus, shift our gaze towards our intention and our inner uprightness. And then it has sort of a life of its own -- like getting healthy; it's hard to start at first but as soon as it builds momentum it starts to feel so good. The fruits of practice are like this -- they encourage us to keep going. So the last quote from Dogen:

Continuous practice is not necessarily something that people in the world love, but it should be the place of true return for everyone.

I love that. Continuous practice is not necessarily something that people in the world love. People in the world -- us -- don't necessarily love it all the time. It's hard -- you don't necessarily love it all the time. But when we can find that little thread, it is the place of true return. It is that subtle place; we arrive in zazen and often it's hard to settle, there is a lot going on, but because we have the support of these people around us, we are able to touch that place. It was always there, it never went away, but we get to experience it. It never went away and and it's now available for us through our experience. True return.

Questions?

Student: I have a question. Sometimes I don't know what is the correct action; you know, if you're trying to be kind, I don't know sometimes if it's more important to try -- again, I don't know what the correct action is. I'm going to be kind -- who am I being kind to? Am I trying to be kind to this person? To myself? What's more important, I guess? The question isn't fully formed yet but I have a conflict about what true kindness is.

Greg: I know just the person to ask -- it's her. (points to Linda)

Linda: So Dogen says we can only see as far as our eye of practice can reach at that time. This means you do the best thing you can and pay attention to what happens. Oh, I thought I was being kind -- in giving this four year old the snow cone -- but now I see what happens. Sometimes we really don't know! Or we think something we do is a terrible thing. Sometimes it's the perfect thing for all kinds of reasons. If you look at politics, you can see that we're all trying to do these good things in one way or another -- others are doing evil things but not us -- someone told me that in immigration law, they actually now teach that the unintended consequences far outweigh intended consequences. You can't know! You just can't know -- if your intention is good and you are constantly alert and open to what actually happens as a result of that, you will continue learning and you'll become more skillful over time. It's kind of a shot in the dark, based on all of your past experience, and it's deeply conditioned sometimes -- but you have to make a choice -- no attachment to outcome -- but stay open, no attachment to outcome, and can I actually see what happened as a result of my best intention?

Student: What if we feel like, like I feel, like my best intention falls really really short -- like "I don't think I'm good enough for this". I find, like you said, Greg, I'm more interested in these kinds of things but my practice is a lot of things at work or things that I'm less interested in, but it really doesn't feel very fulfilling so sometimes, so I think I'm just not all anywhere like I want to be. Does that make sense? It's kind of all over the map.

Greg: That's fine, my response will also be all over the map -- I sympathize. I think I understand that dilemma, and it's a common one. We feel separation. we feel separate. I don't want to do this right now, it's boring or stupid or ... or...these people. Right there in the midst of that, Bodhisattvas practice wherever they are. Strides into the midst of hell, amidst these crummy feelings, connecting to that, asking -- what is my intention? This can change your life! You chance the situation with your intention. People crave integrity. You know? It's important! It's very important! Being connected to what you do. So if you're not feeling connected with what you do, little by little, you can find smaller ways or larger ways to change that. Through your intention. So that's my response that's all over the map.

Linda: I'd like to add a little. I still sometimes have the idea that I should be able to learn something different when I decide to. I decided this way, this idea is good, so now I'm going to act on that. But I realize that if I drove home a different way it would make things much easier for parking, so it took me two weeks to remember to do that despite the fact that I went out and returned home twice every day! In my car! At first I would drive past it, and then I gradually backed up until I barely missed the turn, almost missing it, slamming on the brakes, just making it, and then finally remembering it. This is also a way to learn! So every time you remember, every time you notice -- oh, I'm not

quite here. Say thank you, I'm awake now, and go on, and every time you encourage yourself to remember that this is not what you want to be doing, I wanted to be doing this that is waking up. It did say 99 times and then 1.

Student: Sati is to choose where to focus your attention; that sounds easy, but it is extremely difficult because it seems like my attention seems like it goes wherever it chooses to go. That makes life difficult sometimes.

Greg: Please, everybody, trust. Trust zazen, trust your continuous practice, trust that you really are making your best effort, and if you stumble, remember that the ground you trip over is the ground you stand up on, your forgetting is also your remembering, and trust that as you go forward in continuous practice.

Linda: And whatever it is that you have been doing throughout your life, so far, it brought you here -- seems pretty good so far!

Graham: I'd like to thank you for your wonderful talk and thank you very much for coming to Austin and taking care of us in this way, and I'm heartened to -- you know, when I remember you, I remember you at Tassajara, where you are, and taking care of the monks there, so it's been wonderful to see you again and to practice with you and thank you for coming and I hope you come back again.

Linda and Greg: Thank you very much.