

Taking Realization Into Everyday Life

Jan Chozen Soule Sensei is a pediatrician, acupuncturist and mother of three teenagers, as well as a Zen teacher. She began sitting in 1973 with Maezumi Roshi at Zen Center of Los Angeles. In 1975, she took lay Buddhist precepts, and in 1979, was ordained as a nun. Last summer she officially became a teacher and was recognized as one of Maezumi Roshi's Dharma heirs. This summer she moved to Portland, Oregon, to do a sabbatical from teaching and a personal retreat for two years. She will work as a pediatrician part-time.

practice, then our days are more than full. We wake up in the morning and first thing we go over lists. The day goes by too fast. As we go to bed at night, we wish we had at least six more hours.

We pick-up lint as we cross the room. As we turn out the light, our last vision is of the kitchen floor that needs washing. "Oh well, tomorrow I'll sit." Just no time to do it all. Our days are so full, we wash the diapers in the toilet bowl, thinking, "I know this is practice, too, but I really want to be in the zendo."

Meditation is such a relief, to have a

the monastery at 83. I don't want to waste my time by night or day. I want to be like the Buddha. I want to clear the way and leave behind all the obstacles and restrictions. I want to practice full time. Before I die, I **have** to see it through to the bottom. If my spouse doesn't follow me, then he has his own work."

That's the monastic voice speaking, purely and strongly. We have other voices. Another might say, "Are you kidding? Practice is real life. You can't go and sit in the zendo all day long. You have kids at home, and housework to do. What good is it to meditate for the weekend? Two hours later when you get home, you're yelling at the kids? That's practice? That's escape. Your practice is your everyday life. You sit in the zendo and you're thinking about cooking and cleaning. When you're cooking and

because there were parts of it she agreed with and parts that she didn't agree with. She went through it line by line with him saying, "Yes, maybe that one. No on that one, but maybe I'll think about it." That's who we are, parts that come and go. Today it's "no, not that part; maybe tomorrow." But the very part that we don't allow in ourselves is what causes trouble eventually, both inside and outside.

The part that we have not recognized or not experienced "inside" is easy to recognize "outside", because we have that extra negative energy about it. As Christ said, it's easier to see the mote in someone else's eye than the log in our own eye. "I really don't like that person." That person is our teacher, a good koan.

What is there in that person that we're not allowing in ourselves? For example, there are the terrible realities of child abuse and wife beating. The problem is not the wife-beater out there. It's the wife-beater in here, the part of us that says, "You stupid wife! The house isn't clean, it's 6 o'clock, he's going to come home tired in 10 minutes. You don't have dinner organized, and the kid's room is a mess." You see? That's the wifebeater in us.

There's a spiritual beater in us too. We all know the part that says, "I'm not doing it well enough." C.S. Lewis, the British author, wrote "Surprised by Joy", a story about his leaving Christianity as a child and coming back to it as an adult.

He remembered a time in his childhood when he was told to say prayers and be attentive to **every** word. He would kneel on the cold hard floor by his bed at night and say his prayers. When he got to the end he would wonder if he had been attentive to every word. Then he would start again at the beginning and go all the way through them again, and again. He said he spent hours as a ten-year old child on the floor at night, trying to pay attention to every word of his prayers. The energy he put in was the energy that drove him away from spiritual practice.

We have that energy too, that say, "You must do it right. You're not doing it well enough." It's a ferocious energy, the same wonderful energy that keeps us trying. It's the part that gets up at 4:45 in the morning to do 108 bows. Halfway through the bows another part comes up and says, "Are we up to 50 yet? I sure hope somebody is counting!"

The very part that we don't recognize in ourselves is the part that will give us trouble. Our practice is to become wider and bigger, to encompass more energies, more ways of living, more images. Whenever we see ourselves resisting, angry, unhappy, there's the place to go. There's the bowing mat.

Then the other part of our problem appears. We don't recognize the

"No one thing is more Buddha than any other thing."



Photo by Ellen Sidor

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Photo by Ellen Sidor

I want to express my gratitude for all the teachers, students, and Dharma friends over all the generations whose practice brought us here today. We all have areas of clarity and unclarity. If we can meet together like this, we can share those areas and help each other. We are all together in the same search, to find out who we are, what our life is about, to find some measure of contentment no matter what life brings us.

The form of that search may be very different. We may be Sufis or Rajneesh followers or Buddhists. We may dress in red or purple, black or brown. I think one of the chief dangers is to feel, "My way is right." We always want confirmation by having people join our way or our group. For this generation I feel we must be beyond that. We must be able to talk to each other and share our areas of clarity and unclarity.

It's very easy to say that spiritual people are better than non-spiritual people, or Zen Buddhism is better than Mahayana or Hinayana or Tibetan Buddhism. That comparison and

few moments to ourselves. The place I use to have for these moments to myself was, and still is, the bathroom. I can sit in the bathroom for ten whole minutes of solitude. But usually there is a child lying against the door sobbing, "Mommy, when are you to come out here? Are you going #1 or #2?"

When we start to practice, we discover how wonderful those moments are, to stand back, reflect on our lives, order our priorities, have the chaos settle down, and become calm enough to go back into the fray. When we get a little taste of that, we want more.

The spiritual hunger is tremendous. The spiritual thirst is tremendous. We are almost afraid to open the door because when it opens, it opens wide. We have a tremendous yearning to take the search all the way to the bottom, to put aside all the things that restrict and bind us and keep us from pursuing that search full time.

To do that, we have to do zazen. We have to do retreats, set aside hours, days, weeks to pursue that search.

"We picture our child wandering through the neighborhood dirty in an unironed shirt, thumb in his mouth. Someone says, 'Where's your mommy?' 'My mommy is getting enlightened.'"

judging goes on endlessly. To drop that is one of the fundamental teachings of our practice.

Once the search begins it never seems to stop. Wherever we are, we're looking for clues. We read books, listen to Toni, Maurine, Gesshin, and Jacqueline. Some part of us is always looking for answers. When we start to practice, the differences disappear. We sit together in uniforms, in uniform rows, with uniform hair, schedule and chanting. This is a very important step in trying to put down the separation, the small-self-ego that causes our distress and conflicts. We are trying to realize oneness. But as we practice, differences arise.

I've heard women talking about the problems they have in practice, problems I do not often hear from men, ever though men and women are sharing jobs more now. If we are working women with households, children, a spouse or partner, and on top of that we have

Meanwhile, what are we leaving at home? Jobs, housework, children. As we sit, visions of spiritual orphans float through our heads. We picture our child wandering through the neighborhood, dirty in an unironed shirt, thumb in his mouth. Someone says, "Where's your mommy?" "My mommy is getting enlightened."

A real conflict arises. We cannot ignore it or push it down. Even when we have the best kids in the world, the most supportive spouse, the best child care, still these problems arise. We feel divided. The more our spiritual thirst grows, the more we feel divided.

We might imagine giving voice to these various elements in us (Toni calls them images). There is a powerful monastic element in each of us, and if we could give that full voice, it might say, "I don't want to wait until I've raised children and grandchildren — like that lady I heard about in Japan who entered

cleaning you're thinking about sitting in the zendo. That's crazy."

Then there are other voices. There's one that says, "I love being married. I love waking up in the middle of the night and feeling that warm body next to mine. If I have a nightmare, someone takes me in his arms. I love being pregnant, the magic of having new life inside. I love nursing a baby at the breast. I love seeing my kid off to school on the first day all dressed up and carrying a lunch box, going off to a new world, or a teenage learning to drive the car, I even love soapy dish water and my dirty kitchen floor. I love it all."

All these parts are the Buddha nature. We try to say, "No, I want to be in the zendo, not diapers now. I will be spiritual, not worldly." Conflicts and suffering come from trying to cut a part out, or attaching to it. In spiritual practice you often see people saying or feeling that there's a spiritual way to be. You might think that you're supposed to be even-tempered. You could even practice it in front of the mirror. "What, me angry? No, I don't get angry, I love everyone." It's a mask over what's really there. What's there is there. No one thing is more Buddha than any other thing. Everything is the Buddha, the enlightened way.

You can't throw part of the Buddha out. You can't cut off his hand and throw it out. We try to do it because we have ideas of how things should and shouldn't be. But all these things are parts of our Buddha self.

We also have a no-self, because the parts are constantly changing. The mother part, the part that likes housework and the part that doesn't, the part that likes to sit, all these parts come and go. They are constantly changing, EMPTY. All of these parts are us, and all are not us. Call them the relative and the absolute. What does that really mean in my life?

Relative means that I am all of these parts. None can be denied. The absolute means that none of the parts are me. Constantly shifting, we can't hold on to them or exclude any of them.

Recently a student who is a Christian and a Zen student came to me. She had just joined an Episcopal church. There was a confirmation class with the pastor who presented the Apostle's Creed. She demanded that he go over it with her

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emptiness. We don't recognize what is constantly changing. We try to fix it or hold it in some way. "Oh! I am a vegetarian meditator. This will always be my life." Right away we're headed for trouble. The fundamental teaching of the Buddha is impermanence, constant change. We have to recognize that we are all of it, and it is constantly changing. Emptiness is not like some big black void waiting for us to fall into it and yell for help. Emptiness is constant change, nothing fixed, nothing permanent.

We are a celibate nun, and also we're very sensual people who love being married and having relationships. We are very vulnerable and frightened and childlike, and also very clear-minded and steady, with diamond-like wisdom to cut aside any impediment. We are also fluffy-brained and confused and forget things. We're health food nuts who love to eat burned oatmeal in the morning because "It's good for our practice." We also love those Pepperidge Farm cookies with the sugar icing for tea break.

We are vegetarians and meat eaters. If we don't recognize the meat-eater in us we cannot relate to them "outside". A whole world is off-limits to us. Right away there are conflicts. "You guys are not on the right path, I am." It doesn't mean we have to eat meat, but, being both carnivores and vegetarians, we can choose freely each moment which to be.

There are endless ways to divide us up to into little boxes and say "This is the right box." All those parts constantly changing and flowing are us. If we try to exclude a part, it's going to cause us trouble.

As a pediatrician I talk to many parents. I have to know there's a child-abuser in myself, or I can't work at all with child-abusers. If I don't know that part of me, boy, they know it right away: "Here comes that goody-goody." We all have parts that comes home frazzled after a hard day's work and hasn't sat a sesshin in two months because our husband got to do the sesshin this time, and when the kid starts crying and whining, you want to open the window and throw him out. Or you want to say to your teenager, "Look, see you later when you get your act together. Come back in about five years."

Knowing and exploring all those parts is exploring Buddha nature. It's not just human nature, it's everything. I am the grass, the leaves, the Datsun Z. I am Ronald Reagan.

I am a star and a piece of dirt. All of that blending together and constantly changing is who we are. It's not a blend in the sense of gruel, like on the seventh day of sesshin when the cooks keep mixing the leftovers from days before into the pot and it comes out all gray with some little green flecks in it, not tasting like anything. It's a rich and lovely blending like Chinese food, that preserves and recognizes the diverse elements: salty, sweet, spicy, crisp and soft, and so on. That's what our mixture is — delicious. Our Buddha nature is delicious, as Gesshin said.

We mentioned the notion that women don't have Buddha nature or can't become enlightened until they become men. Should we reject that notion? Or can we examine it, ask what it means in a deeper sense...women can't become enlightened until they are born as men? Absolutely right! I can't become enlightened until I have been born as a man, as a woman, as neither and as both.

Men cannot become enlightened until they know their masculine nature, their feminine nature, the nature that is neither and both.

So let us practice together. Every life and every minute of life is communion, coming into union with who we are. □

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WITHOUT IMAGES

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touch with this fundamental anxiety of being nobody. And usually there's an immediate withdrawal from that anxiety. But will one not escape this time? Will one face that anxiety—but just anxiety? Not stopping the questioning, but simply looking, feeling, listening, quietly with no goal in mind. Just being with what is there or isn't there in utter silence...

Maybe there is a flash of insight into the fact that we are nobody, nothing. With this glimpse comes a joy that cannot possibly be put into words. It has nothing to do with words. It is no image, no thought.

Then the next moment, does one try to grab onto it, make it into an image? "I am somebody who has seen." "Now I know." Does one congratulate oneself again? Does one try to recall and relive the experience? Images come so quickly, like mushrooms springing out of the ground on a moist rainy day. There they are — new images. Will one see them immediately and drop them instantly?

Or does one just carry on, "I've done this thing, I've gotten through it. This is it. I'm no one!" What does it mean — "I'm no one?" It's already become a concept, a memory.

So — is it possible to see and be free of images from moment to moment — really being no one and therefore completely open and related to everyone and everything, with a lovingness that cannot be produced through any kind of practice? Love is not practiceable. It's either there or it isn't, and it is not there when the "me" is there who wants to bring it about, who tries to grab it and hold on to it.

One may deceive oneself as being a loving kind of person being very compassionate. Is it just an image? Do you see it when it comes up? Can it be dropped instantly so one really does not know what one is? Just letting action flow out of this not-knowing, just being in touch with what's within and before one — listening, seeing, responding openly? It's up to each one of us. No one can do it for us. Listen!
□

GENTLE AND STRONG

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grabbiness? Or are we sitting instead with this kind of mind that other women teachers have spoken about today, this open-hearted, not-knowing, giving-up-yourself practice? No grabbiness, no gaining idea, just moment after moment open.

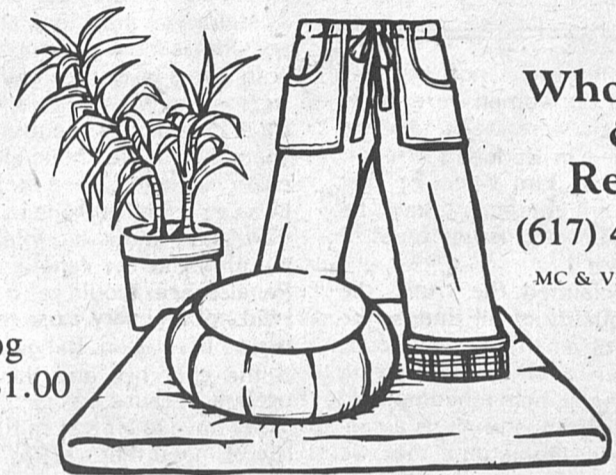
When we had finished the California sesshin, we sat around outside in a circle

and had a very intimate time together, really open-hearted, ready to share experience and feelings of freedom and deep compassion with one another. What came out of it were feelings of real strength with that compassion. There was our compassion and wisdom, gentle and strong: real women warriors cutting off all their delusions about what they could or could not be. There we were!! □



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