

# FINDING YOUR INNER GYROSCOPE

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First, congratulations to all of you who took precepts today. And second, congratulations to all the rest of us who reaffirmed our commitment to these precepts once again during this ceremony.

These precepts provide us with something of a roadmap, leading to an ethical, moral life. In our world today, following that kind of life—while declining to resort to some rigid fundamentalism or to hedonism—can be tricky. One bit of advice on how to meet that challenge was offered by the Sixth Patriarch when giving instruction to a monk. He said, simply, “Don’t make *good* and *bad*.”

“Don’t *make* good and bad,” of course, does not mean there *is* no good and bad. Don’t *make* good and bad means don’t construct some idea of good and bad in your mind, then paste it on the nose of the situation in front of you—and then fabricate some story to substantiate how you are going to react to your construction. That becomes a big problem. If you don’t make good and bad, if you don’t make anything, and if you return to [*hits floor with Zen stick*] this original empty mind, then this empty mind will perceive what is correct in that situation, based on what appears in front of you in the moment, and based on time and place and the nature of your relationship to that event and person and situation.

And that means finding your inner gyroscope, so you can hold your balance moment by moment by moment and act correctly. If, fundamentally, you are coming from a place of cherishing all existence, while feeling your connection with each and every existence you encounter, then that gyroscope will appear. As we practice it appears more and more frequently.

However, what also appears is our sticky areas. While some karma immediately [*hits floor with Zen stick*] goes, there is also sticky karma, which reappears and reappears and reappears. It behooves us all to be patient with ourselves and to look into that sticky karma and see what we are holding.

Some time ago I attended a talk by the Dalai Lama. He, too, suggested the need to practice and progress, while recognizing that occasional backsliding is part of the process. The talk was given at a Mongolian monastery in New Jersey. This monastery, sitting up on a hill, has been there for a long time. There were probably a couple of thousand people there, mostly Tibetan Buddhist students, all sitting on the grass and listening to the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama’s subject, Vajra sattva purification, was one of special meaning to that audience.

I’m going to report on just a bit of his talk, so you get an idea of how it went, because the part that relates directly to my subject actually appears in his comment after the talk. The process, he said, begins by visualizing this particular Buddhist deity. You could visualize the deity in front of you, up in the air above your head, sitting on your head, or on your head then moving down into your body and heart. It doesn’t matter. Next you were to do a particular kind of breathing exercise, visualizing yourself taking in truth and light, then breathing out black smoke representing all your impurities. However, he added, if you were practicing the kind of yoga where you were conserving energy, you were not to breathe out, but to imagine a fire lit inside your very being, a fire that consumed all your impurities. After his talk, we all chanted this mantra together; it was very long.

Finally, the Dalai Lama thanked everyone for coming. Then he said—this was something that surprised and delighted that whole audience, and it is what brings me to my point—“Now that you have all purified yourself with the Vajra sattva mantra, please go out and do some more mischief.” My recollection of his exact words may not be altogether correct, but you get the idea. He, too, was recognizing that even though his audience had just chanted a lengthy mantra—even as you have just taken precepts—the process is not complete. We do not always live up to our own highest intentions.

Bodhidharma said, “Fall down seven, get up eight.” So, just as you must know when the precepts are open and when they are closed, and when to keep them and when to break them, also know when to forgive yourself. Taking the precepts is an important step. Thank you for being here.