

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Rebecca Otte

On December 5, 2020, Rebecca Otte received inka in a virtual online ceremony.

DHARMA COMBAT

Paul Majchrzyk JDPSN: A lot of people here who don't know you don't realize that you're a midwife and you've brought into this world over fifteen hundred human beings. But Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say that human beings were "number one bad animal." So by bringing all these human beings into the world does that make you a saint or a demon?

Rebecca Otte JDPSN: *[Mimicking a baby crying.]*

Majchrzyk PSN: *[Laughing and bowing.]*



Jason Quinn JDPSN: This question is not, I would say, important, but it is a curious question I have been wondering. You've been in the school for a long time, right? You must have been asked a lot of questions over the years. What I'm curious about is what is the stupidest question someone has asked you?

Rebecca Otte JDPSN: The stupidest question anyone has ever asked me is what is the stupidest question anyone has ever asked me.

Otte PSN and Quinn PSN: *[Laughing.]*

Otte PSN: Thank you!

Quinn PSN: Thank you! I'm stupid.

Otte PSN: Not so much!



Question: When she was introducing you, Zen Master Soeng Hyang said we need to have this authentic listening. I don't understand, because our ears are always open. Even when our eyes are closed, our ears are open. Our heart is closed, but our ears are open. Our mind is closed, but our ears are open. Even when we sleep . . .

Otte PSN: I'm sorry. I can't hear you, Marshall.

Q: Shall I start again? Oh! *[Bows.]*

DHARMA SPEECH

The Compass of Zen tells us that great faith is an essential element in Zen.

Great faith is no faith. No faith is great faith.

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

No great faith. No "no faith."

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Great faith is great faith. No faith is no faith.

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

What can you have faith in?

KATZ!

The sun is shining. The sky is blue.

I'm so grateful for each and every one of you. I also want to express my gratitude to Zen Master Ji Haeng and to all the members of my committee as well as all the teachers who have patiently taught me and supported me through the years of practice. This wonderful Zen practice, handed down to us through the millennia, really does change the world. So I want to encourage you to keep trying. No matter what, just do it. Even if you fail wholeheartedly, just keep trying.



Photo: Ken Otte

We have a Taoist kong-an in the *Whole World Is a Single Flower*:

*See the world as your self.
Have faith in the way things are.
Love the world as your self;
Then you can care for all things.*

Why is having faith in the way things are important to me?

Great faith means having faith in the way things are. It is easy to have faith when everything is going well, you are happy, you just passed your kong-an, or perhaps after a retreat when we all feel bonded to our fellow meditators and are showing our gratitude. But what about having faith in the way things are when you're doing the dishes? What about having faith in the way things are when your best friend dies or when you have a flat tire? What about having faith in the way things are when you've turned sixty-five and your knees don't work anymore?

The Buddha was right—everything has this quality of suffering, dukkha, this dissatisfaction with the way things are. How can we have faith in the midst of our suffering, the suffering of others, and the suffering of the planet?

There is a story about Dipa Ma and one of her attendants. They were on a plane that had hit some bad turbulence and the plane was jolting the passengers. During one particularly bad lurch, her attendant screamed. Dipa Ma reached across the aisle, took her hand, and very quietly said, "The daughters of the Buddha are fearless." I love that. The Heart Sutra says "the mind is no hindrance. Without any hindrance no fears exist." The daughters of Buddha are fearless. This is having faith in the way things are. Zen Master Seung Sahn said the most important thing you can do is to find the one pure and clear thing—that even if the world were to explode tomorrow, it couldn't touch the one pure and clear thing in the least bit. Dipa Ma knew in that moment that even if the plane were to crash, everything would be OK. Such equanimity, you know? Having faith in the way things are allows you to accept whatever comes before you without judgment and with tranquility.

One of our wonderful Zen stories is about a farmer whose horse has run away. The neighbors come and bemoan the fact that his only horse has run away. "What terrible misfortune!" The farmer says, "We'll see." The next day, the horse comes home with several wild horses in tow. The neighbors come to celebrate. "How wonderful! What good fortune!" The farmer says, "We'll see." The next day the farmer's son is trying to break one of the wild horses, the horse bucks him off, and his son breaks his leg. The neighbors say, "How unfortunate!" The farmer again says, "We'll see." The next day, the army general comes through town looking for conscripts. And the son can't go because his leg is broken. "The neighbors say, "How fortunate."

But again the farmer says, "We'll see."

The farmer's openness and calmness in the face of what could have been distressing events is having faith in the way things are. Having faith in the way things are is the ultimate expression of this wide don't-know mind.

And there is another aspect to this as well. Have faith in the way you are! Zen Master Lin Chi says, "Don't create troubles by manipulating your way of life. Just be as you are. Stay with yourself when life circumstance is upon you. Be confident in your own standpoint, and there will not be a single problem with you."

Be confident in your own standpoint! How many of us lose sight of our own standpoint? It is, after all, the everyday mind. So simple and yet so marvelous, and it is always there. Zen Master Seung Sahn says our true nature is like the full moon in the sky. Sometimes clouds cover it over, but the moon doesn't disappear. When the clouds move away, the moon is still shining brightly.

The Buddha said, "How wonderful! Each thing has it! Each thing is complete! It and dust interpenetrate." The Buddha wasn't talking about some abstract person or some great bodhisattva—he was talking about you. He was talking about all things. Even your woundedness is part of the wholeness that is you and the part of you that allows you to have empathy, so that you can help this world. How wonderful! You have it! You are complete!

The Buddha said all things are complete. You can have faith in that.

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

The Sixth Patriarch said all things are emptiness. You can have faith in that.

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Are you complete, or are you empty?
Complete is not complete. Empty is not empty.

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

KATZ!

Today is December 5. The sun is shining. Many Zooming faces. ♦

Rebecca Otte JDPSN began studying Zen at the Kansas Zen Center in 1995. She cofounded Prairyerth Zen Center in 1997 and is currently the abbot. She began studying with Zen Master Ji Haeng in 2013, and took bodhisattva precepts in 2015. She received inka in December of 2020. She worked as a nurse-midwife and retired in 2017. She has two sons, a daughter-in-law, and a grandson. She lives with her husband and two cats in Topeka, Kansas.