

Accomplished Hearts
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Good evening, bodhisattvas.

The last couple of weeks, around springtime, I was talking about how, often, the people in this community who have taken up this Way, are working so hard and so sincerely at their practices. Maybe just for spring we could remember that the legacy, the heritage, of this tradition is awakening, and that's quite beautiful. Maybe we could turn our attention to the promise of that awakening, as well as to the hard work of practice that tends in that direction. Tonight I wanted to talk about a specific case of that, that came out of events this week.

As most of you know, I'm moving. Many of the people in this room came over on Tuesday and helped pack my stuff in preparation for the move. I was so grateful for that, and for me it was such a lovely day, such a happy day, so full of good feeling on everyone's part. That started me thinking about the beauties of being in community together like this — and the beauties in particular of this community, which is a particularly beautiful community, and why that might be so. Why is it that we've come together in this constellation that seems so good and right?

And then I'm going to Colorado next week to do a retreat, which will culminate in a refuge ceremony. Some people in the Colorado community, who are our cousins, will take refuge in this Way, and in the promise of awakening, and in each other. Every time we do that, I'm struck by the wonder of people coming together and agreeing to be committed together to doing this work of becoming more full human beings in the world. Not just as individuals, but together. What a precious thing it is to be in a community in which people have shared that commitment with each other. That's an extraordinary thing.

Then this morning I was having breakfast with a group of friends. There were fresh croissants and great coffee, some good music, and lovely conversation. Then the phone rang, and the news came that a friend had died suddenly that morning. Afterwards, when I was thinking back about why that moment felt so extraordinary, it seemed to me that there was good coffee, good conversation, and good friendship, and then something happened, and there was Ben's death. I watched everybody go *whoosh* — just like that, without a hitch, without a moment's, "Oh gee, I was really enjoying that breakfast," or "How could we have been doing this frivolous thing when all the while Ben was lying cold in his bed?"

No hitch like that — just this, and then this, each with everybody’s whole heart. That seemed, in its simple way, quite extraordinary.

It reminded me about an old Daoist saying, “If you have an accomplished heart, you’ve found a true teacher.” What I saw at that breakfast was a group of people with accomplished hearts, who were able to do one thing, and then turn immediately and wholeheartedly do another thing when circumstances changed. Without commenting on either; without having one compared to the other. What is it that has that flexibility and complete commitment to reality, to what is actually happening?

It’s a cliché to say it, but the Chinese have one word for both heart and mind, and so it’s heart-mind. It’s thought of as one system within the self. When you’re reading Zen stuff, every time you read mind it’s actually heart-mind if it’s Chinese. That makes a difference if you think about mind as spacious as the sky, and then you think about heart as spacious as the sky. There’s a different quality to the two of those — mind as big as the world, heart as big as the world. They need each other. I’m not suggesting that we replace one with the other, but that we remember that in the origins of our tradition they weren’t separate. They were one thing, they were one whole important part of our being.

An accomplished heart feels to me like a heart refined by insight, by the gifts of the mind. And a mind that’s connected with the heart feels like a warm mind, a mind that is warmed by the gifts of the heart. How important it is for all of that to be active in us! How important it is for us not to do the western thing : *Well, my mind says one thing but my heart says another*. What’s it like to think of them as informing and infusing each other completely? What’s it like to think about acting from a place that is rooted deeply in both of those things, without making those kinds of distinctions?

So if that feels like a good place to be heading towards, where one responds with an accomplished and wise heart to whatever happens, how do we do that?

One of the things that seems obvious is that relationship is important in that. If you can have perfect equanimity sitting on your cushion in your room by yourself, so what?! Really, what does that matter? It makes not the slightest bit of difference to anyone else, and the surprising thing is that it doesn’t make much difference to you, either. If you get up off the cushion and are knocked over by the first thing that happens, it’s not doing you any good at all. And yet that’s the image we have of practice, that it’s about what happens solitarily on the cushion. That view of it leaves out relationship, which happens at a number of different levels. It happens when you’re sitting on the cushion before you even stand up, because the most intimate, lifelong relationship we will have is with ourselves, and we forget that. I know that it’s a little weird in a buddhist context to talk about a relationship with yourself, but if you want to know what I’m referring to, just ask yourself, *Who am I talking to all the time? (Laughter)* Who’s talking to you? I’m talking about that relationship.

What is that most intimate relationship to you? Is it troubled or painful, does it feel like something you need to fix? Is it simple, is it rising and falling and not much of a big deal? It seems important to understand how we are in that most intimate of relationships and not take that for granted. My sense, from talking to a lot of people over a number of years, is that that relationship can be quite a struggle; there's a kind of conflict going on all the time. So that's the first relationship to look at, and to wonder about what it would mean to bring a wise heart to it.

I had an experience today, about that most intimate relationship, which made me laugh really hard. In this process of moving, the moving can't quite happen because there's all this repair going on at my new house. It's endless. It goes on week after week after week. I went up there today and all I could think of was, "I want these people to leave (*Laughter*), I want them to go home so I can come home." I just thought, "I don't care if the furnace doesn't work. Just go home." And then I started noticing stuff like their cigarette butts all over the place, and they were using the kitchen and not cleaning up afterwards.

What I saw was that the irritation arose first, and then the self constituted around the irritation. It was so clear, this non-self that had been loping through the day, in this and in this and then this — and then suddenly irritation arose. And like iron filings to a magnet the self had to rush in — as if there were irritation and then I had to instantly create a self to explain the irritation, to give the irritation an agent. It just cracked me up! Immediately I started getting interested in the way the self constituted around the irritation, and that became more interesting than the irritation at the builders. So, there's a way in which we can put light and air in that relationship with ourselves. Even when I was feeling snarky, it was possible to just say, *Oh, look at that, that's really interesting. Huh!* Which is my new mantra : Huh! We can develop a relationship that can be quite quicksilver; it can change quickly, and then of course the irritation just vanished, and I was loping through the day again.

So that's the first thing : the relationship with your most intimate lover—or torturer, or some combination of the two, whatever it is.

Then there are the relationships we have with each other. I'll speak particularly about our relationships as community but, obviously, similar things apply to family and friends. When I was coming up through practice, the way that sangha relationships were described was always with a story like the guy who goes to the monastery in Japan, and he's given potato-washing duties. Being an American, he takes each potato one at a time and scrubs it under the water. Then someone comes along and says, "No!" and puts all the potatoes in a bucket together, and puts some water in the bucket, and shakes the bucket, saying, "Potatoes wash each other." There's something true about that. One of the things I'm seeing in this community that gives me a great deal of happiness is that there is

something also not true about that anymore; that's not the whole story. It's not just about people forced to bump into each other until the rough edges wear off, which is one model, but it feels more like everybody in the bath together scrubbing each other's backs. And that's quite nice.

There's a sense of all of us doing this together; we're all being lifted on the same tide, and we're all somehow making that tide together. If I'm completely deluded about this don't tell me, because I want to believe it's true (*Laughter*). It seems so powerful to me, and it seems like such an immediate expression of wise hearts meeting each other. One of the things that is clear, because we're a relatively young community, is that you don't have to do the work on the cushion for twenty years first before you can have a decent relationship with anybody. Or you don't have to forsake any kind of individual work and go out into the world. They just move together naturally; what we do as individuals and what we do together walk hand-in-hand. They meet each other. Each one is less without the other as accompaniment.

And then there's relationship with the world, or relationship with life, however you want to put that. That's one we talk about a lot : how we can feel like being a human being is a problem; meditation and other spiritual practices are about fixing that problem; life is suffering, the world is hard, and we do the best we can. All of that assumes a problematic stance with life and the world. So when we come into a new situation, oftentimes the questions that arise in us are things like, *Okay, what's the situation? ... What's wrong? ... What needs to be fixed? ... What do I have to do? ... What do I need to be aware of or afraid of or concerned about?* There's a stance of *Okay, another task*.

I want to suggest that we change our relationship with that relationship to think about asking questions like, *What is here to be enjoyed? What is here that needs attending to?* That's different. What's the first difference? The *I* drops out of it. It's not *What do I need to do? What do I need to be aware of?* Instead, what needs to be enjoyed here? What needs to be attended to? That pretty much covers everything : enjoyed, attended to, that's about it. What happens when we make that simple shift? What happens when we come into relationship again and again, with situation after situation, encounter after encounter and person after person, with that kind of relationship?

And then, even a little further out, there is our relationship with the vastness. In the last week or two we've been talking about how there's a stillness that's underneath both noise and quiet, that doesn't have to do with whether it's noisy or quiet. There's a stillness underneath both of those things, out of which all noise and all quiet arise. It's possible to be in any situation along the spectrum from quiet to noisy, and to feel that stillness and to be seated in it. Seated in the stillness no matter what, and to be quite noisy seated in the stillness, sometimes.

In the same way, I think there is a happiness that's underneath either joy or sorrow; a happiness that isn't dependent on the conditions of our lives or how we're feeling about a particular thing. What I mean by that is this : at the breakfast the happiness in the first case was pretty obvious. It was people enjoying each other, enjoying the situation. The happiness in the second circumstance, after the phone call came, might be harder to see, but it's there and just as strong. The happiness arises not from things being lined up the way we think they oughta be, or from conditions being easy or perfect or pleasurable; the happiness comes out of an intimate relationship with what's actually happening. The intimacy of that relationship is so powerful that it doesn't matter what the content of the circumstance is. At that deeper level, what matters is being real with it, being intimate with it. That happiness is available anywhere, in any situation, even if it is expressed as tears because someone just died, even if it's throwing your arms around someone who's feeling the pain of it. That's not unhappy in the way I'm talking about it. It's the deepest happiness because there's no alienation, there's no separation from what's actually happening. To feel that, to feel right in what's happening, is a great and abiding and sustaining happiness.

We can create the circumstances in which that happiness becomes apparent together as a community. It's one of the most powerful and important things we do. Which doesn't mean that everything's groovy all the time, but it means that we're real together as much as we can possibly be. When we're real together, whatever the content, whatever's going on, that is an occasion for us to touch the happiness of being right there without separation, fully committed. Fully committed to each other, fully committed to life, fully committed to finding out how to be the best human beings we can be. Not to fix our heart-minds, but to refine these extraordinary heart-minds we've been given. We're living our heart-mind more fully. We're allowing it as close to its full expression as we can — not paring it down, not fixing it, not making it go away — but actually, what is to be enjoyed? What needs to be attended to in our own heart-minds and in the heart-minds of each other?

All of this is by way of saying thank you to the community, and expressing an appreciation for who we are together and what we're doing.

That's probably the end of the Spring series. (*Laughter*) I'll see you in two weeks. By then something else will have happened, and we'll be talking about that instead. In the meantime, for tonight, if anybody has any comments or questions I'd be glad to hear.

Q1 : I've got two comments. The first one is that I was thinking that in a sense we're ambassadors for the practice, and you and the sangha when we go out into the world. That thought kinda ratcheted things up in a good way. I thought, *Wow, what a wonderful burden to have*. I don't mean burden in the

sense of the negative connotation. And then we were talking about heart-mind. For a while, I've wondered about beginner's mind, so I just switched it, and made it beginner's heart. That opened up, at least in my head; that little switch is opening up beginner's mind.

JIS : Great. Yeah, anytime there's a phrase that has mind in it, try heart-mind or heart, and see what happens to it.

Q2 : I've had the feeling lately that there's the sangha, but it's like when I go out into the world that's all sangha to me. There's no distinction at all. I had a really nice experience the other day. I was in my yard and a very young woman came up with a basket; she had broken English, and she said, "Would you like to buy some?" She opened her basket and had these turnovers in there. She said, "Strawberry and pineapple." I thought how cool is that, to be having this happen right now in 2009, right? We had the best time, just that connection, it was everything to me. Exchanging names, there was nothing between us, and it was just so beautiful. The turnovers were wonderful, and she's coming back with tamales. (*Laughter*) So that opened up to another good, you see, and I just really loved that, loved my day.

JIS : That's great, that's great. Yeah.

Q3 : I think this sangha is wonderful; I think it's pretty unique. I bumped into it about a year ago. I was living in Colorado, and I pretty much moved down here for this. It was not very rational but that's fine; it's what I did. I ran into Nic in the bathroom a few minutes ago where we were both coughing and blowing our nose, and sharing the sangha cold (*Laughter*) ...

JIS : Yeah, there is that part of it too, right?

Q3 : But it's okay, there's something kind of dear about it, because it's like something you share among family. I never experienced anything quite as, um...what's the word, it's not as... it just seems like it's a very um... everybody holds each other in a way, and it feels very strong. It feels more like a family.

JIS : Mmmm. Thanks for that.

Q4 : I'm having the opposite thought, in some ways. I've had plans to move to Montana, and all this is being completely re-thought, because of this sangha ...

Q7 : So, is this Spring break, now? (*Laughter*)

JIS : Yes, that was Spring break (*Laughter*)

Q7 : No, coming up is Spring break, yeah.

JIS : Anything else? Thanks.