

Requiting Gratitude
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Good evening, bodhisattvas.

We've spoken often about how awakening is an unfolding process, something that lasts our whole lifetime, and maybe lifetimes before and after this one as well. In that unfolding process, for each of us and for the world as a whole, it is a process that is made of this world. It's not the intrusion of some other realm or place; it is the waking up of this world. It is made of the stuff and qualities of this world. It changes; it grows; it shrinks. Sometimes it swoops like a kestrel or glides like a dolphin. Sometimes awakening is like a waterfall in the mountains, joyously tumbling over the rocks. And sometimes it feels as though the stream goes underground, and we can walk the desert for a long time, longing for a taste of that sweet water again. This is as it should be. This is this world, waking up. This is what it's like.

For each of us, awakening will naturally be idiosyncratic; it will be particular to us because it will come *through* and *of* each of us, in our own idiosyncratic ways. There is only your awakening, for you. That is the only template. There also is the tremendous joy of seeing the awakening of others unfold, and to see the gradual lightening of the world unfold, made up of all of those individual awakenings.

If each awakening is particular to each one of us, it's also true that there are some common elements we can talk about to help us understand where we are, what part of the landscape of awakening we might be walking at any particular time. We've been speaking these nights of the seasons of awakening — that there is an autumn, winter, spring, and summer of awakening. Those would be common elements that seem to be part of it for everyone, however it is expressed. There are also a few qualities that seem to be common to every process of awakening, and I want to speak about a couple of those tonight.

As we awaken, it appears to be universal that there comes a dawning sense of the awesome generosity of the world, that it should be possible that we can awaken. The strange thing is that we're not quite sure where to address our thanks, because awakening is so much a process of the world that happens through us. Who do you thank? If you're going to thank

anybody or anything, you have to thank everybody and everything, because that is the source of this miraculous thing that unfolds in us over a lifetime. There is the sense of the great generosity of awakening, and as I look at it, the most fundamental taste of awakening is gratitude.

The gratitude is an objectless gratitude, which sounds so cold, but it isn't directed anywhere because it's directed everywhere. It isn't a mood. It isn't something that comes and goes, depending on circumstances; this is what we call 'conditioned' in the Dharma. It is not conditioned; it is not dependent on how things are going or how we're feeling. This gratitude is an existential state, and it becomes a constant state of being for us as our awakening deepens.

Because the generosity is a gift, such a grace that bonks us on the head and falls into our laps all unawares and unexpected, it wants to keep on circulating. That's the nature of gifts : if they stop moving they're not gifts anymore; they've become something else, like monuments, or money. When we have that taste of gratitude in our mouths all the time, when that becomes as much a part of us as skin and bone, we want to help that gift circulate. It's not even that we *want* to help; we *must* help circulate that gift. We have no choice. That also becomes our existential state, that we must help circulate the gift.

That takes lots of forms in terms of how we live our lives, what we choose to do and not to do, how we try to be of service to others. Tonight I want to focus on the particular ways that we can requite that gratitude by keeping the gift circulating in our own heart-minds. I want to take advantage of the rare intimacy that we come into with our heart-minds in a retreat like this, to explore ways in which we can begin to requite that gratitude in the inner world, which of course will have tremendous consequences on how we do it in the rest of the world.

The first way we can requite the gratitude appeared last night in our conversation about dreams. A lot of you remarked that there was a fair amount of death, dismemberment, violence, and things that we think of as shadowed in the dreams. This is great, and let me say why. In a retreat like this, we are working so hard to move into our largest spaces, our most capacious and generous spaces. We're working at the very edges of our capacities of heart and mind. As we do that it's important that the difficult stuff, the gooey stuff, the yucky stuff, gets

included, too. That we not leave that behind; that we not stretch so far toward what we might think of as the light that we leave behind that which is shadowed.

Our willingness to include *everything* in our inner lives is one way of requiting that gratitude. We turn our back on nothing. We explore how spacious and generous our heart-minds are. How willing are they? Can we include everything? Can we, in this little microcosm of a single heart-mind, replicate the tremendous capaciousness of the universe, which includes everything, which turns nothing away? As Great Ancestor Ma said, “For countless eons no one has ever fallen out of the deep samadhi of dharma nature.” No one has ever fallen out of the universe. Can we do our small version of that, and let nothing fall out of the samadhi of dharma nature within ourselves? Can we include what is difficult?

Toward the end of our talking about dreams last night, someone asked a great question : “How do you know when you need to tend to something, or when you’re going over and over the same old territory? How do you know when it’s time to include something and time to let it go? What’s the difference between letting something go and avoiding it?”

I had a few thoughts about that over the last day. The first is that we have to make those differentiations, because if we leave anything out we’re not doing the whole work. We have spoken about *dukkha*, which usually gets translated as ‘suffering,’ not a very good translation. We’ve talked about dukkha as incompleteness, and about the nature of this world that is impermanent, transient, and in which things are changing all the time, as incompleteness. It’s never going to be complete; it’s always going to be in process. Then the question becomes : what is our relationship to that? Do we join in and look for ways we can help it tend toward wholeness — which is as much as we’ll ever get, a tendency towards wholeness? That is the wholeness possible in this world — that tendency towards.

What helps us here is the wisdom of equality we’ve been speaking about. Because with that wisdom we’re no longer dividing things into piles based on ‘I like,’ or ‘I don’t like’; good, bad; comfortable, not comfortable; makes me feel good about myself, makes me feel yucky about myself; want to be this, don’t want to be that; want to include this, don’t want to include that. We can’t do that with the wisdom of equality, because with that wisdom, everything has equal value. That also means it is not possible to make anything especially bad. We can’t have a category of aspects of ourselves that we treat in special ways because they are especially bad. In the wisdom of equality, there is only this, and this, and this.

There are still skillful means about how to deal with *this, and this, and this* without making them especially bad. Some questions we might think about asking in these cases are : If I'm feeling like moving away from something, am I avoiding it or am I done with it? If I feel magnetized to something, if there's something that feels quite compelling, is that because I am compelled to heal it, or is it because I am indulging it? Am I digging the habit grooves deeper by whatever way I choose — by moving toward, by moving away, by focusing on, by ignoring? Or am I freeing something up by what I'm doing? Not only freeing myself, but maybe this thing that is held prisoner in my heart-mind, as much as I am held prisoner by it? It's a mutual hostage-taking. As we begin to negotiate our way out of this hostage-taking, is something being freed up? If so, that's probably a good indication that we're moving in a good direction.

Am I including what has been exiled into the mix? Am I including something I've orphaned or pushed away? But am I just including it into the mix, or am I putting it up on Persephone's throne? When Psyche goes into the underworld, she is given some advice : You have to make this underworld journey, but while you're there, don't sit on Persephone's throne. Don't become Queen of the Underworld. Make the journey, do what you have to do, make the exchanges and the hostage negotiations, but don't sit on Persephone's throne, and don't place anything on it, either; don't make anything especially bad.

I'm glad about what came in last night, because how can we make these differentiations, do this inquiry, find our way through, and learn how to be skillful about deciding whether something needs to be brought in or let go of, attended to or ignored, if we're not familiar with the material? If we're not familiar with the stuff we've pushed into the shadows, how can we possibly know what to do with, about, toward them? We have to have a comfort with them in order to know what best to do about them.

If the first requital of our gratitude for the generosity of awakening is this willingness to include everything, and to then do the hard work of figuring out what to do with what it is we've included, our second requital of that gratitude is something quite deep, strange, and essential.

I want to go back to the words of the women developing the practices of domestic zen in Japan. In dealing with what is difficult in their lives — illness, trauma, relationship, the whole

range of problems we're used to — they use two words when speaking about coming into relationship with what is painful. There isn't an exact English equivalent for the first word, but it's what's used when you're speaking about something that has become so familiar that your relationship is no longer formal. It's 'comfortable.' You have a relationship with someone, and you've developed a level of familiarity where you don't use the formal tenses when you speak; you can play with and kid each other. That's the first attitude they turn toward that which is difficult. The second word is usually translated into English as 'forgiveness.' They forgive that which is difficult and painful, that which is dukkha — be it an illness, a traumatic memory, a difficult person, a hard situation. They turn their forgiveness toward it. In Japanese, that word 'forgiveness' includes a constellation of meanings like allowing and including.

This feels like something important to consider as a winter practice of requiting our gratitude. If something is difficult or painful, if something erupts and shows us where there is shadow, where there is fear, worry, anxiety, concern, can we forgive it? Are we willing to stay with the relationship long enough for some kind of forgiveness to occur? Here are some extensions of that question : In those confrontations with what is so painful and difficult, what has shaped and sometimes deformed us, what has caused us to cause suffering for others, can we forgive ourselves? Can we forgive ourselves for having been wounded, for suffering? For having acted from those places, for having abandoned parts of ourselves and exiled them? For having treated ourselves unkindly, for having criticized ourselves and judged ourselves for our inabilities, for our lack of capacity, for the ways we suffer? Can we forgive ourselves? Because that equally is requiting that gratitude.

Let's go a step further. Because where that path leads, if we really follow it with sincerity and openness, is to the question : Can I forgive the world for being the world? Can I forgive the world for being incomplete, imperfect, painful, devastating, terrifying, as well as heart-stoppingly beautiful, full of generosity and gratitude? But we struggle so much with those parts of the world that are difficult for us to accept, so I'm saying, let's push it. Let us not just accept that the world is as it is. Let us forgive the world for being the world.

That doesn't mean we don't work to change what needs changing, or care about what is painful and what we can do to help. But imagine for a moment the difference between moving toward what we feel compelled to do to help in the world with an attitude of unforgiveness,

and with an attitude of forgiveness. If we can forgive the world, we are not in a fight with it all the time for being the way it is, and that energy is freed up to actually do something to help. If we can forgive the world, our hearts don't have to be armored in the way they are if we don't. All of that energy that gets put into building, maintenance, and repair of those battlements, towers, drawbridges, and walls gets freed up to actually be helpful in the world, to directly requite the gratitude we feel for awakening. It becomes the hands, eyes, feet, good hearts, and good minds of the generosity of the world, which appears as awakening in us, through us, and around us.

These are quintessential winter practices : turning inward, looking to see what we can do in that inner world, standing on the bare ground, seeing awakening, generosity, and our gratitude extending in all directions. Perhaps we can begin by including, by not leaving anything out, by not exiling any part of ourselves, by bringing ourselves whole across the threshold. We can begin by forgiving that which has hurt and continues to hurt us, forgiving ourselves for being hurt and for doing all the things that come out of being hurt, and forgiving the world for being itself.

We have been given this awesome gift. Can we respond by taking the risk of laying down the armor and the complaint, laying down everything that separates us, taking the risk of being simple, open, and available for the gift to move through us and on into the rest of the world?

Q1 : I think it's Torei who says that if someone maligns you, you should bow down, because that's the Buddha? Can you relate that to what you're saying?

JIS : It's exactly the same thing. That's an immediate act of forgiveness, a moment of nothing to assert, nothing to defend. It's taking what's being offered (in whatever strange form it's being offered) and seeing what it has to do with us — trying to take it in, understand it, and looking to see if it relates to anything we have exiled inside ourselves. Is it pointing to something we need to do? Asserting or defending in the face of what happens just isn't that important anymore. If we think about what we're doing as an attempt over a lifetime to refine the requital of gratitude, then in any moment we can ask, does this bring me closer to requiting that gratitude, or does it bring me further away? That's a completely different criterion for judging action than, how do I feel or think about this?

We've spoken about *The Vimalakirti Sutra* and about what happens when we place the bodhisattva vow at the center of our lives. This is another way of saying the same thing. If we place the requital of our gratitude at the center, how does that change what our reaction is going to be in any situation? Probably it's going to change it a lot, because some things are going to suddenly be a lot less important, and other things are going to become crucial. There is a great liberation in that, in not having to fight every fight.

Q2 : It seems like it moves us from being victim to being empowered.

JIS : Say more how you see that.

Q2 : Well, through forgiveness, victimization can dissipate and go away, actually, to liberation.

Q3 : Because when you forgive, that's a powerful act.

JIS : Yeah. But it has to be a private, silent forgiveness. This is something between you and you. This isn't necessarily explicit.

Q4 : It releases you from the power over you that it has had.

Q5 : I wrote three or four pages about this today. I keep thinking about trees and how, without speaking or moving, they're helpful in so many ways. I used to get annoyed when I would hold the door open for someone and they would just sail through. And I would be like, What am I, a doorstep? *Grrr*. Today I wrote, "It's fine to be a doorstep, really." I'm being helpful and, from a tree point of view, that's fine.

Also, yesterday you were talking about letting elements of yourself be big so that they're huge and you're not yourself anymore. Can we also, instead of saying, "I am creative" say that there is creativity, and I get to express treeness, mountainness, creativity, and I can share it with friends? We're all expressing something that the universe has given us to express. Then I began to wonder, can we use whether it's helping or not as criteria? If it's helping others to awaken and myself to awaken, is that a keeper then?

JIS : That's a keeper, for sure.

When we're talking about the power dynamics involved in forgiveness, it's important that we simultaneously forgive ourselves, that we look at ourselves for how we've been affected by what's happened, and we turn the forgiveness inward so that there's an equal-opportunity forgiveness going on; it's not something we're bestowing on someone else.

And then, your question about helpfulness : if we don't make that radical step of forgiving the world for being the world, sometimes when we think we're being helpful, the anxiety we're really allaying is our own. We don't want the world to be this way because it makes us feel bad. That's helpfulness with a spin on it, right? Whereas if we're doing the endless work of forgiving the world, we don't need it to be any certain way in order to feel comfortable. That becomes less our unconscious motivation; we're genuinely looking for what needs doing and doing that, rather than trying to arrange things to make us more comfortable.

Q6 : I'm having a hard time with one thing. Can you actually forgive something you don't see in yourself? I see acts of forgiveness as being *This is myself reflected in this*, not *I forgive this thing for being like this*.

JIS : Why?

Q6 : I guess I have a hard time saying, *I'm sorry that's like that, that's wrong*. I feel like it's a separation. It doesn't mean that I have those qualities right now, but I don't like separating myself from the potentiality of those qualities. If I can't see that potentiality in me then I don't understand it, then I can't relate to it.

JIS : What about that sense of an existential complaint about the world for not meeting our needs? For not being the way we want it to be?

Q6 : Okay. I can forgive that! I think I was just stuck in those situations where I don't really go up and say, 'I'm sorry you're an asshole.'

JIS : No, no. That's an interesting form of forgiveness! No, you are not required to go up to someone and say, 'I'm sorry you're an asshole.'

Q7 : So it's personal to yourself. I was thinking that it's okay to say that maybe there's something that I just can't fix, like that asshole. That's his or her job. I can show how one might behave. Was it Yogi Berra who said, "I can explain it you but I can't comprehend it for you?" I struggle a lot with wanting people to understand, and it's gotten me into so much trouble because I'll go on and on explaining, and people will say, *She's so argumentative*, or *She always has to be right*. I think now, to the point, it really doesn't matter. I just have to do the best I can and move on.

JIS : It's a very strong practice, nothing to assert, nothing to defend. If you find that explaining tendency in yourself, which many of us have, play with that : nothing to assert, nothing to defend.

Q8 : What does that mean, Do not call the bad things bad? To some extent I understand, but then there is a point where, if I have reacted this way a hundred times and I don't want to react this way anymore, what happens? Where is the transformation? I get this feeling as if something else fills up and then suddenly the one hundred and oneth time it doesn't happen anymore because something else has grown larger. Is it gratefulness?

JIS : That's good. There are two parts to it, and you need both. One part is the inquiry into why I'm doing this, how this is serving me to do this, why I'm making this bad — all of that inquiry that's specific to each situation.

Q8 : How is this serving me to be doing this?

JIS : Yeah, to make this bad, because that's a rejection or an exclusion. So half of it is that deconstruction. What are the pieces of this and why am I doing this? What's the need? What's the compulsion behind this? The other half is what you just touched on, which is to allow our allegiance to shift toward something else, something bigger, like gratitude. And to allow that shift of our allegiance toward gratitude to tow us out of the tangled relationship we think of as bad. Because once you begin to feel that larger space of awakening, it's painful to go back in the box, right? It's painful to build the three-by-four-foot cell of pain, and then climb back into that and 'make bad' again. So we need that experience of the larger space to tell us what we could be doing instead, and then it doesn't become difficult to choose.

Q8 : Because suddenly we are aware of a choice.

JIS : I can live like this or I can live like that. Hmmmm. Which shall I choose?

Q9 : I'm still a bit confused about discriminating wisdom. Acceptance versus nuclear holocaust. There's a million things we can think of that do not seem to be helpful. How do you deal with that?

JIS : Okay, so blind acceptance isn't anywhere in there. What we're talking about is holding simultaneously the wisdom of equality and the wisdom of discrimination. Right now we're focusing on the wisdom of equality because that's the winter wisdom. So the wisdom of

equality is that everything has equal value. We can't make particular meanings out of some things and other meanings out of other things. The wisdom of discrimination is : kale, really good; nuclear holocaust, not so good. The wisdom of discrimination is the ability to see that things vibrate at different frequencies, and some of them are helpful, and some of them are really unhelpful. It's a matter of having both wisdoms. If you have the wisdom of discrimination without the wisdom of equality, it's nothing but judging from here 'til eternity, and that's *painful*. If you have the wisdom of equality without the wisdom of discrimination, it's nothing but 'Eh' [Shrugs] from here to eternity, and that's painful. So how do you bring those two together? How do you simultaneously see everything as *tathagatha*, absolutely 'such' in and of itself, and, how do we differentiate how to relate to it? That's our job. I'm going to work against nuclear holocaust; I'm going to work for kale. Those two wisdoms are absolutely essential to each other, and they exist in a creative tension. Our lives are about living the creative tension between those two things, and always trying to find how they relate in any circumstance.

Does that respond to what you're saying?

Q9 : It does, in theory. In practice, that's another thing ...

JIS : That's why we're here.

Q10 : I always come up against a value question. Nothing to assert, nothing to defend. We support Occupy Santa Fe. Occupy Santa Fe is asserting something.

JIS : Okay, so what we're doing is exploring, we're taking place with, we're witnessing, and our relationship with that, as with anything, is always changing based on experience and circumstance. That's neither asserting nor defending. That's something else entirely; that's accompanying. We're not taking a stand. We're standing somewhere and seeing what that's like, and then we're moving dependent on what we discover.

The sense is that everything is provisional; even if provisional lasts 150 years, it's still provisional. So even if we feel, yes, this is where I stand, we hold it knowing that it might be provisional for the rest of our lives, but still provisional. To assert that something is permanent and eternal is to fly in the face of the nature of the world. There is nothing permanent and eternal.

Q11 : So we can't be absolutist about things.

JIS : Yeah.

Q12 : It's interesting to hold it provisional. There are so many examples of organizations formed around wonderful intentions. But they're only wonderful for so long, and then they're no longer appropriate to the circumstances, and suddenly what was wonderful is no longer wonderful or helpful. Keeping in mind that everything is provisional gives us the option to shift when we see a need to.

JIS : And then there's nothing to defend, right? Because there's no fixed position to defend, there is movement, accompanying the thing as it changes, and the willingness to change with it, rather than to stop short and take a stand.

Q13 : I want to notice when I am feeding the flames of my unforgiveness, and yet I'm not quite there ... I love making solid that middle place where I'm not at forgiveness, but I can occupy a different territory than that compulsive misery of the barb.

JIS : A character in a novel I was reading goes to court to see the trial of someone who had attacked her. As she's watching the trial she says, "I realized I can't get to forgiveness yet. But I can certainly get to not cherishing unforgiveness." You can do that immediately, moving into that third place you're talking about.

Q13 : And repeatedly!

JIS : In some ways that's a richer and truer position because it fully takes into account the person who's been attacked. It's not doing a further violence to her by expecting her to feel a certain way about it that it's not time for yet. So it's forgiving of her, as well.

Q15 : That reminds me of a powerful film about Rwanda, where a woman was saying, as part of the forgiveness process, "I am willing to be your neighbor again." It didn't have anything to do with how she felt about what had happened, it wasn't a matter of feelings. It's a little bit like that, not cherishing unforgiveness.

JIS : Does that remind you of anything?

Q16 : Yes, compassion. Vimalakirti.

JIS : Say more.

Q16 : Compassion is doing, not feeling. It's an action.

Q17 : I also love that distinction between *I'm willing to be your neighbor*, which is not quite *I'm willing to be your friend*. Being willing to be your neighbor is a helpful, truthful stance sometimes. Because there can be a too-fast expectation with forgiveness or not cherishing unforgiveness, that it means we're all gushy again, when we're not necessarily. I like the idea that I'm willing to be your neighbor.

Q18 : Which is hard enough!

Q17 : Yeah. That's good for now. We'll see.

JIS : Before we close, I would like to touch lightly back in on generosity and gratitude. Does that have resonance with people? Anything you want to say about it?

Q19 : I was in the middle of Texas and gave birth to my baby five weeks early. I had a C-section. Of course I wanted a natural birth here, where I could do it my way and it would be lovely. And there I was getting every medical procedure possible, and my child was on x, y, z machines, and it was a Christian hospital. I was in the throes of pre-term labor and they asked, "Your religion?" I said, "Zen Buddhist!" My partner said, "Shhhh!"

Finally, after sleepless nights and my baby's condition worsening, I was losing my mind. There was no ground. Then I asked for some rosary beads from the chaplain. They brought me little plastic beads. That's how I prayed for my child, and I quieted the delirium and was finally able to sleep, by repeating familiar words, a prayer, which was so foreign and also was not ... I was so grateful for these little plastic rosary beads. I was able to accept the prayers of the people around me in this situation. She pulled through, and she's home, and she's the light of my life.

JIS : What's her name?

Q19 : Eva.

JIS : Eva. Thank you. I think we should stop right there.

Thank you.