

The Lankavatara Sutra III
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We dive into the pool of the *Lankavatara Sutra*. We enter that world in the same way the *Lanka* came to China, which was with an Indian monk who traveled along the Silk Road from India to China, bringing the Sanskrit version with him. As I'm sure you know, the Silk Road was a trading route through Central Asia from India to China.

At that time, the fifth century, it was a rich and vibrant place, a place of mixing of cultures through the towns that dotted this trading route. *So* much of what we think of as Buddhism developed in these towns and cities along the silk route, where people from all different cultures met, mixed, corrupted each other, translated, etc. This monk translated the *Lankavatara Sutra* from Sanskrit into Chinese in one of the cities on the Silk Road and then went on into China.

In addition to being a scholar and a literary person, he was famous as a magician. That was a time, in northern China in particular, where the country had devolved into little warring states, and magicians who were effective were in great demand in the imperial courts to lob magical things at their enemies. He got a job easily when he got to China.

The warring-magician thing didn't work out too well. The kingdom that hired him ended up being absorbed by another kingdom, but the *Lankavatara Sutra*, having hitched a successful ride on him, made it into China and became an important thing. The law of unintended consequences : the magical state craft, not so good; but *Lankavatara Sutra* transmission, really good.

Last night I introduced basic ideas of the sutra, and we'll go into more depth today. This can be chewy territory because as I mentioned it's a very dense and subtle philosophical text. If there are things that just aren't making sense to you as I go along, don't be afraid to ask immediately.

There are two main themes of the sutra. The first is the description that it wants us to understand about the nature of human life and reality. Then there's the idea that there's a way to do it, which was a powerful message at the time. The way to do it is an inner realization, a deep coming to know the truth of one's own self and to *experience* that—not just in your meditation, but very much in your life—as the way to relate to what would otherwise be only philosophical material.

In this sutra the Buddha says that the world we think of as real is nothing but the perceptions of our own mind. That's not exactly a startling idea, and our version of it today, here and in a lot of western cultures, is that you create your own reality. But that's not what this means *at all*. The basic problem from a Buddhist perspective of the you-create-your-own-reality idea is that you're still setting up a duality, *you're* creating a *reality*. There's still a subject and an object—a perceiver and a perceived—and anything that's founded on a duality like that can't be right.

So it's not that; it's not that each of us as an individual creates a reality. Instead there's a *much* more beautiful possibility that the sutra presents : what we don't realize is that reality is continuous from our minds into the so-called external world. *It's all one thing*. Where we get into trouble is exactly when we make the duality between subject and object. We do that by creating projections with our heart-minds, throwing them into the world, making the mistake of thinking that the projections are real, and then developing relationships with the projections.

The sorrow is what we give up in the process : the experience of the continuousness of heart-mind and world, the one field, the *unity* of everything of which we are a particular instance. Not the creators and not the receivers but a *part*, a participant. If you think about that—the separating out of ourselves as the subject, as the perceiver, as the projector, as the *self*—it's like the original fall from grace, the moment at which everything shifts. And the moment at which the possibility of the kinds of suffering that we're so familiar with comes into play, because we have alienated ourselves from this essential and *natural* unity of all things.

When I speak like this I'm not shaking my finger at us. There's got to be a reason that it's absolutely essential that we do this. I hope that's one of the things we take a look at : there is a reason that we as human beings—as human consciousnesses

—must separate ourselves out so that we can return. The process of return seems essential to the making of a human being.

The Buddha says that because the various projections of people's heart-minds appear before them as objects, people become attached to the *existence* of their projections. Then the question becomes, of course, how do we get free of such attachments? The Buddha said, by becoming aware that projections are nothing but mind.

We separate ourselves out from this natural unity of all things, and then we throw out our projections into the world. We make the mistake of thinking they're real. We come into relationship with them, and we have a life lived in relationship to our own projections, rather than with the *natural* state of our minds, which is to experience that which is continuous between inside and outside, the so-called self and other.

Q1 : As I sit here I look at the floor, and there's a sheen on the floor, and it reflects some of the light, but it's a very irregular pattern. I can see nondescript patterns of light. There are strips of darkness in between the blobs of light. So there *truly is* a pattern there, and I know, even without realizing, that in my peripheral vision there's that bank of clerestory windows. I remember those windows, and I can recognize that the dark strips in between the light are caused by the strips in between the windows.

So is that what I'm seeing? No. Because there's this interplay of the sensory perception with memory, that allows me to see patterns. Pattern recognition is an early stage of cognition—beyond sensory intake—that integrates concept with that sensation, and it doesn't seem to me to be heavily predicated upon the fabrication of a self. It's not *really* a projection...it's something lower than that. I feel like I know through practice to feed low on the *skandhas*, to not immediately jump to consciousness, to not interpret everything through some absolutist value system. But the mind is designed to put together experiences and find patterns and grow those patterns into a broader understanding. So it's helpful to me—in making sense—to know when I see those lines on the floor, not to just say, 'Hmmm, I wonder what the hell those things are?' but to be able to say, 'Those are caused because the light is

coming through the windows and there are strips in between the windows.’ So it helps me *know*.

I guess what I’m saying is I’m not sure that this business of living in the projection and imagining the projection is real, and thereby being deluded, in contradistinction to the seamless unity of mind and world—I’m not sure that those are two discreetly separate experiences. There’s some middle ground. There’s something about being human that needs making sense, and making sense involves memory and concept formation, and that bleeds off into projection, but how much of it can we actually let go of? If we live in nothing but *the moment*, the sensory intake, everything is complete chaos.

JIS : That’s not the recommendation. It’s not an utter absence of cognition, which would be an abandonment of our human condition. That would be throwing up our hands and saying, ‘Never mind.’ That’s not at all what’s being suggested—and I hope this will become clearer as we go along—but what is being suggested is to look at how much interpretation and meaning-making goes on. That’s where the projection comes in.

The perception or the pattern-making that *is* the natural interface between the mind and the world—nothing wrong there. My only suggestion would be *even* when you’re saying, ‘Oh, that’s happening because the light’s coming through the clerestory window,’ as a general attitude we would hold, ‘as best as I know at the moment’.

Q1 : Ah, so it’s about provisionality ... how close that is to the forefront of one’s consciousness at every moment. So it’s *all* provisional.

JIS : Exactly. It’s really about holding everything provisionally, even the things we’re pretty darn sure are true. *My best guess is...* It might be my best guess for my whole lifetime; I may never give that up.

Q2 : I think that’s it’s snowing outside. I perceive that it’s snowing outside.

JIS : I *think* it really is snowing outside. But it's just a different attitude. Much less 'Okay, what can I line up that I'm certain about?' Absolutely nothing, but I have all these working hypotheses at the moment that seem to be doing well ... but are subject to revision.

Q3 : If I hear this often enough I may begin to get an idea of what it is. Ten years ago at a Zen retreat I went to see the teacher, and said I had this awesome insight ... Wow! And he said, 'Great insight. Now let it go, just drop it.' I assume that's similar to what you just said.

JIS : Not so much. I'm assuming that the message there was 'Don't attach to it', but that wouldn't mean 'Don't come into relationship with it'. I think the whole koan way is about coming into relationship with something like that in a rich and deep way—and a *provisional* way. What you're describing is cutting off the mind road. It arises, cut it off at the knees. It arises, cut it off at the knees. That's not what we're doing.

Q3 : Okay. So when you go into a relationship with it, how do you know that you're in a relationship with it as opposed to being attached to it? How do you cultivate that fluidity?

JIS : Well, the nature of the relationship is that's it's always changing, and as soon as you're sure you know what it means or what its significance is in your life, it's become an attachment. Everything we're talking about is what Stephen Batchelor says, that the mystery of life is best expressed as a question. We're saying that part of moving from projection to projectionlessness is to see everything as a question : 'As far as I know that's what's causing the lights.'

Q4 : Does keeping that provisional mind keep you more aligned with the truth of impermanence, and also keep your mind soft?

Joan: Yes. It does.

Q1 : What do you mean by *truth* of impermanence? What is the *truth* of impermanence?

Q4 : Well, forget about the word truth ... the *fact* that things are impermanent ...

JIS : The *apparent* fact that things are ... Right?

Q1 : But it's front and center. We chant that all the time as prajna paramita. 'This is *truth*, not mere formality.' What is truth? What is inductive reasoning? How does inductive reasoning fit into this provisionality ... this whole consciousness of provisionality? Inductive reasoning is inherent to our species as an adaptive mechanism, and we do it in Buddhism.

Q4 : We're not arguing with that. Well, *I'm* not. It's probably more skillful to keep that kind of mind, what I call soft mind. Yes, provisional mind. Maybe I *am* going to live forever, but I have to treat myself as though I'm not.

JIS : I think it also opens up for us the possibility of looking for the places that we want to make things *certain*, and looking at why we need them to be certain. What is that trying to *solve*? What fear or anxiety is that trying to solve in me and what would it be like to not need to solve it with certainty, but to solve it with expanding the territory in which I rely on the groundlessness of everything?

Q6 : I want to touch on that very basic place where we begin to determine as a baby the other and self—that object relation of mother, that object relation of other, and our reliance on that other for survival and how big that is ... that sense of object relations that we have and how we can deconstruct that or hold it as true but also hold the provisional mind that mother will bring us food or she won't bring us food. For a baby that's a very powerful understanding.

JIS : Yes. This is Red Pine's comment : 'In the light of the Buddha's wisdom, the world doesn't exist. In the light of the Buddha's compassion the world doesn't *not* exist.' How do we hold those two things?

So what's the alternative? The Buddha says in the sutra, 'Tranquility means oneness, and oneness means the *tathagata-garbha*.' Again, he's saying that tranquility, that place of natural rest and peace, is when we understand the oneness of things. And then he links that with 'and oneness means the *tathagata-garbha*'.

So now we get to talk about *that*.

In the Buddhist understanding of how the mind is, it's suggested that there are eight or nine levels of consciousness, and the first five are the sense consciousnesses that come up in these quotes from the *Lanka*. Sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch. The sixth consciousness is the mind, which is seen in the same way as the sensory consciousnesses are, with thoughts as its object. If hearing has sounds as its object, the mind has thoughts as its object. This is a pretty interesting way to think about mind : not as a sort of all-encompassing, overarching, Machiavellian generator of everything that makes life difficult, but actually just a sensory organ that's dealing with thoughts, dealing with *inner* sensory awareness in the same way that the first five are dealing with outer sensory awareness.

That's one through six. The seventh we'll touch on lightly but come back to. Seven is what's called the poor 'tainted consciousness', or the deluded consciousness, which I prefer to call the *mistaken* consciousness. This is the layer of consciousness that makes the mistake of thinking there's a self. Here's how it does that. In the eighth layer of consciousness, which is called the *alaya vijnana*, the storehouse consciousness, we have the repository of all of our experiences. So into the storehouse consciousness fall —like leaves in the autumn— all of our sensory, emotional, cognitive experiences. They just fall and pile up inside this repository. It's quite beautiful to think that there is a part of consciousness that is completely able to receive everything. It doesn't refuse anything. It doesn't sort things into piles. It accepts and receives and can contain *everything* we experience.

The ninth consciousness is the place where the bottom opens up under the eighth of each of us and joins them together into one. Each of us has a particular repository, which makes you, you, and me, me. That's the *alaya vijnana*, the eighth consciousness. It gives us a shape, but it's also joined and shared.

The seventh level makes the mistake of thinking there's a self as it looks into that repository, that storehouse consciousness. It sees all the stuff and makes a story about it, organizes it, lines it up, makes a narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end. In this view of the human mind, that's where we get into trouble, when we start thinking that that *story* the seventh is making up about the contents of the eighth is true, is the only way that you can experience the *alaya vijnana*—as a story, a narrative. Everything has to have meaning. Everything has to line up somewhere. It has to have a place in the narrative, rather than just *being* there.

When things fall into the storehouse consciousness, they do what's called perfuming the storehouse. Each thing comes in, and it has its effect. It leaves a trace in the storehouse consciousness. If the trace is strong enough, or the same thing happens over and over again—if it reaches a certain sort of critical mass—it turns into a seed, and eventually the seed sprouts as future karma. That's how karma works.

The leaves of experience fall in, they perfume the storehouse, they leave a trace. Sometimes those traces are strong enough to turn into seeds, and then the seeds sprout, and the results are future events, which is karma.

What is beautiful and mysterious is that in Mahayana philosophy the *alaya vijnana*, this storehouse consciousness, is also mysteriously the location of the *tathagata-garbha*. It's not as if one contains the other, it's more as if you had two translucent sheets of paper, and you lay them one on top of the other, and can see them simultaneously occupying, apparently, the same space at the same time. It's a beautiful mystery.

The *tathagata-garbha* is the inherent buddha nature that each of us contains. *Tathagata* is a title for the Buddha, and it refers to enlightenment, to awakening. *Garbha* means a womb in Sanskrit. It also means the embryo that grows inside the womb. By extension, therefore, it means the innermost thing, the thing closest in, or as we might say, the most intimate thing.

Somehow magically occupying the same space as the *alaya vijnana* — the storehouse consciousness, which is the repository of *all* of our experiences — is our inherent buddha nature, which is not yet manifest. It's in the form of an embryo in a womb; it's both the embryo and the womb.

The implication is that we already have it. It's always been there, and it's not something separate or outside our humanness. It resides in that *very* place where we hold all of our experience. The attempt is to transform storehouse consciousness into the womb of bodhi, womb of enlightenment — and all of that happens within us as human persons the way we are, not by dint of some special thunderbolt from heaven.

Q1 : So what's underneath those two pieces of translucent paper is the same thing, and you just view it through the *tathagata-garbha* or through storehouse consciousness. We don't have to transform anything. It's the same object underneath, or the same event in our lives, or the same *anything*.

JIS: Yes, beautifully said. The same *many* things.

Q2 : But aren't we observing the storehouse which is below? We're observing through these two things to the storehouse below, and depending on the view we see — which one we choose, which one gets preference — we can hold the storehouse below. Is that right?

JIS : The storehouse is one of the two things.

Q3 : Doesn't that create a duality? If you're viewing from this or that angle? Isn't there someplace where you're holding both?

JIS : Well yes, and so in Mahayana philosophy there is a bit of an idea of transformation. You are transforming projections into buddhas, basically. You go from throwing the projections, into the *tathagata-garbha*, giving birth to buddhas instead of projections. But the *koan* move, the thing that is so radical about the koan tradition, is

to exactly remove that duality and to do what you just did; you made the natural koan move. Which is to say, 'Oh, they're just ways of describing the same thing. It just depends what *lens* you're looking through.' That eliminates any idea of inherent or latent, or 'It's like this now and it's going to be like that then'. No, they're both true now.

Q1 : So the *event* happened. It's just the projections about the event that we can drop away. But the event itself doesn't need to change or be held differently, it's just the adornment, the added extra, the projection that can be cleared.

JIS : Exactly. And we return to that *natural* state of unity between interior and exterior, which is what's revealed when the *projections* are dropped away.

Q1 : Can you say a little bit more about that inside and outside piece?

JIS : Exactly what we drop away *is* the duality of subject and object, which is what's implied in the idea that we're throwing projections. When the projections drop away, we see that there never was a subject and object, there was only a continuous field, and that we are provisionally, temporarily standing at *this* place in the field. We're seeing from this viewpoint, but we're part of the field. Were not outside it *looking* at it. We're the field looking at itself from this viewpoint.

Q1 : When I was thirty I did Transcendental Meditation, and me and my friend used to laugh when we'd see videos of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi talking about 'the *is*-ness, the *is*-ness'. That's what I think you're talking about when you said it's the whole field. We just thought that was the *funniest* thing. But I'm finally beginning to glimpse what he may have been talking about, really. It's not based on any conditionality.

JIS : Yes. Although we would probably say, 'It's the *maybe*-ness, it's the *maybe*-ness.' You know that great story about Suzuki Shunryu when some asked him, 'Can you sum

up Zen philosophy in a sentence while standing on one leg, drinking water?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I can sum up all of Zen in two words : not always so.’ [Laughter]

Q2 : Would that be the same as absolute and relative truth? Or is that not the same?

JIS : Yes. Absolute and relative truth are ways to talk about it and to help us actualize it in our lives. But they’re stand-ins. I don’t know that they’re exactly synonyms. They’re kind of skillful means.

Q2 : Well, they’re a way to ground it and not get too lost in trying to figure it out in a moment.

JIS : Yes. Shall I project out a bit more? I’ll go to the koans.

To illustrate this idea that already within us is this inherent buddha nature, there’s a story about a medieval Chinese nun, Qiyuan Xinggang, who became a teacher. She had a profound opening as a student, and her teacher asked her, ‘What was it like when you were gestating the spiritual embryo?’ She replied, ‘It solidified, deep and solitary.’

This is the sense of the profound inward turn, dropping down through the layers of consciousness into the *alaya vijnana* and resting in the *alaya vijnana*, resting in that place where we receive, without comment, all of our experiences. Resting in that place it suddenly became the womb of the *tathagata*. That very place, she realized, *was already* the womb of the *tathagata*.

The movement in practice is to rest there, to rest in that place of experience-without-comment, to rest in that place of the willingness to receive everything, to turn away nothing, to not make piles of good and bad. When she could do that, suddenly it was revealed that *that* was the womb of awakening, and that the spiritual embryo, as they called it, was gestating there, was growing there.

Then her teacher asked, ‘When you gave birth, what was that like?’

‘Being stripped completely bare.’

We have the first movement, down and in, resting in the *alaya vijnana*, recognizing it as the *tathagata-garbha*. Then this embryo grows, and we have to do something with it. We have to give birth to it. It’s not enough to just sit down there enjoying it. We have to give birth. In that process of giving birth there is a way in which we do have to strip ourselves completely bare of projections, of habits of mind, of our certainties. And it’s in *that* process of deconstruction that we’re able to give birth to something in the world that fulfills the bodhisattva vow.

Then her teacher asked her, ‘What about when you meet with the Ancestor?’ And she said, ‘I met the Ancestor face to face.’

There are a lot of ways to understand what that Ancestor is, but I’m thinking in terms of the *Lanka*. It’s called an Ancestor because it’s what was already true about us. What she’s meeting is herself. She’s meeting that natural state of mind where the field is continuous between inside and outside. She’s meeting that awakening already existing, that thing that the koan reveals. Not something new, but something that was already there, inherent in you that you just didn’t know yet. That’s what it means to meet the Ancestor. You’re your own Ancestor. You’re meeting yourself before that got covered up, before that got obscured.

Q1 : Sounds like the koan Original Face?

JIS : Yes.

I’d like to step back into that realm of the Ancestor and make it a little bit bigger, and this, I hope, addresses the question of karma. One of the things that people, quite rightly, ask about Buddhism in general is, If there is no self, what is it that reincarnates? The Mahayana answer to that question is this : what is continuous from life to life and throughout the length of one life is this *tathagata-garbha*, this potential buddha nature in each of us. So what reincarnates—if you believe in

reincarnation—is that inherent buddha nature. Not a self—not the way each of us comes into existence that we experience in life—but the desire for this momentum towards awakening that is the *tathagata-garbha*. *That* is what keeps coming back.

The way the *Lanka* describes it I think is particularly beautiful. It uses the language of classical Indian music, and it says that this continuous thing, this continuous *tathagata-garbha*, is like *prabandha*, which means music in the way we think of music. That's the continuity, that's the thing that keeps emerging over and over again. In each lifetime it appears as *lakshana*, which is a particular melody. You've got this *continuous* stream of music *appearing* again and again and again as individual melodies.

Q1 : So 'Natalie' doesn't necessarily continue, but the desire for embodied life and for awakening does—and they have to be together, sort of like the thing that fertilizes the egg. It's not just the little seed going by itself; it needs that fertilization.

JIS : Right. So the 'Natalie' piece is the *lakshana*, the individual melody that's getting sung or played this time out of the music of the *tathagata-garbha*.

Q2 : Does the storehouse consciousness drop down so then those two things, your own storehouse consciousness with the individual lifetime of it, fall into the whole thing? How do you bring *that* with you?

JIS : Yes, it does fall. The ninth consciousness is a little different. I'm sorry about the complications of this topography, but it also has its beauty. Nine is more like what Jung would've called the collective unconscious. It's the place that we all share. We're talking about something underneath even that, which is this momentum towards awakening. And yes, how karma works in this system is that those seeds that have been created in the storehouse consciousness fall back into the stream of the music and reemerge as part of the next melody. Is that responding to what you're asking?

Q2 : Your own?

JIS : Well, I don't know if it's our own, but it's the ones that we end up intersecting with in a lifetime. I don't know if they're even that personal, really.

Q3 : So karma is continuous, but our interpretation of it is where the separation and the projection occur. The karma itself does not contain it? When you talked about how we create our own reality, having that separation, that was what moved me into pondering karma because cause and effect could be seen as having a subject-object aspect. The way you're describing it, the trace developing into a seed and becoming the melody is a very continuous thing that does *not* have a separation, but our relation to trying to understand what's happening and therefore creating the 'piles' is where the separation occurs around karma.

JIS : Yes, and in fact one of the radical things about the philosophy of the *Lanka* is that it explicitly rejects cause and effect. It actually says that that's just made up as a way of understanding karma.

Q4 : It feels like when your life ends, you recede, the melody fades away, but then everything mixes up. It's not all you, right? In terms of controlling your karma—it can't be true because your life is not your own. You think it is but it's not. It's everybody's.

JIS : Yes. Absolutely.

Q4 : That's why we all affect each other's karma, which seems more of the Mahayana view. Why compassion matters. It's not all about you.

JIS : I think some of us have had a model of karma as being this thing that we drag around lifetime after lifetime, trying to get rid of it. With each new life we're showing up at the schoolhouse door again with our heavy sack of karma on our back and

hoping that this time we're going to get it right. A radical extension of what the *Lanka* is suggesting—and please understand, this is not in the text but it's kind of where you have to go, given what you're saying—is that there is a momentum in the universe toward awakening, and that's not personal. It's not even about *your* awakening or *my* awakening or anybody's awakening. It's about Awakening, and that we are the melodies that get sung in this much larger entropy toward awakening that's happening in the universe.

Q4 : Can the melodies be harmonizing with each other, creating a greater awakening? I'm thinking about how the melody expresses itself—not in isolation. It's not just the elevator song.

JIS : Yes. Absolutely.

Q5 : The universe doesn't hold us. It's not dual. It's not good or bad. It doesn't hold us as special or not special. It has no discerning good and bad power. So to say that there is a natural flow in the universe toward awakening is a very interesting human spiritual layer on top of that indifferent universe.

JIS : Maybe. We may again be looking at two ways of looking at the same thing from different viewpoints. From one viewpoint, it is absolutely indifferent and impersonal, and from another viewpoint, there seems to be this entropy toward awakening.

Q6 : This whole typology is laid out in the *Lanka*?

JIS : I'm giving it my special spin. [Laughs] But yes.

Q6 : Is there also discussion of reincarnation and rebirth, how that fits into all this in the *Lanka*?

JIS : No there's discussion about cause and effect and about karma. Rebirth might be touched on, but it's not heavily addressed.

Q7: Are you sayin, *entropy* toward awakening?

JIS : Yes.

Q7 : That's interesting. A disorganization.

Q8 : What does entropy mean?

JIS : It's the momentum of the universe, which is toward disorganization.

Q9 : Is that un-selfing?

JIS : Yes. The universe is in this great project of un-selfing itself.

Q9 : But not indifferent. There's something in what you're saying that's slippery. It feels like there's a shift in orientation that we're talking about ... of where we are in it. When you first said the universe is indifferent, I heard it or experienced that in a way that I could recognize in myself, as having myself very strongly here in the universe. Even as indifferent. And somehow we're *closing* that gap. I don't understand how exactly. But it feels like it's a sideways move. That we're shifting where we are in that.

Q10 : It seems like 'in the light of the wisdom, the world doesn't exist and in the light of the compassion, it doesn't not exist.' I think you're right on that.

Q : It's both things.

Q : But where do we stand in it?

Q11 : I'm recalling a conversation I had a long time ago when I was first encountering karma. I asked a lama, 'When we do *tonglen* practice (a practice of sending out compassion), how does that affect someone's karma?' And he looked at me as if I was Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, and he said, 'There's no way we can affect someone else's karma. It's just something we do out of compassion.' As I'm hearing now, I'm putting it together with what you said about this collective sense; that maybe the point is that we're developing our own compassion, but the object of someone else is conjuring a very palpable entropy towards going there. It is like a stew that we're all developing, a kind of compassion desire. It's somehow clicking in for me that the compassion is a kind of vehicle that can travel us towards the other place.

Q : Or our own self-compassion. Every drop of our own self-compassion clearly has got to be doing something. But maybe not in someone else's karma.

Q12 : Is that true that we're not impacting other people's karma by offering compassion? Because I feel like you can't *not* impact their karma. I feel that, especially in this community, we are impacting each other's karma all the time. It's such a relief.

Q13 : I would imagine it's a little bit like being a parent where you hand your child values and love but they still might go and be a murderer. It's their life so ...

JIS : I think that's the bridge. You can't tweak someone else's karma but you can make something available that if they pick up, *they* change their karma by picking it up.

Q : But kindness changes me. I mean I feel it immediately.

JIS : Because you picked it up, right?

Q : Fetchability?

JIS : Fetchability, yes.

Q12 : Fetchability is a term that Joan devised. It's the whole idea of being fetchable. You can go through your life and people can offer you kindness and you cannot even observe it because you're so caught up in your stuff. You can't not be affected by compassion or cruelty, for that matter. That's part of fetchability, too.

Q : Every time I think, 'Oh, I'm compassionate', it's not about me. That right there shifts my orientation.

Q : So, if it's not about me and if there's no self, who is it that is being compassionate?

Q : It's not that *I* don't matter. I think that's the other part of it that's so odd. It does matter what I hold and what I contribute.

JIS : Read that quote again about wisdom and compassion.

Q : "In the light of the Buddha's wisdom, the world doesn't exist. In the light of the Buddha's compassion it doesn't not exist."

JIS : That's how it matters.

Q : It does matter. I matter but not in the way that the self may define, which is an orientation that's *about* me. There's a very different experience of those two things for me.

JIS : What's happening is you're dropping from the seventh layer of consciousness, the *mano vijnana*, which is where the story of the self gets told. You're dropping from the narrative of the self into the eighth layer of consciousness, which we are talking about as being simultaneously storehouse consciousness and womb of the *tathagata*. And *you* are becoming a product of the eighth consciousness rather than the seventh consciousness.

What we're talking about doing in our practice is dropping down into the eighth and looking at that place where we can see the *alaya vijnana* and the *tatbhagata-garbha* overlapping. What are the implications of being a something that arises from *there* rather than arising from the *self*-creating function of the seventh consciousness?

Q: Can I go back a little bit? You said something about how reincarnation might happen, about a way that buddha nature *wants* to manifest? Is that what you said?

JIS: I'm anthropomorphizing, but I have this sense of shifting from the image of arriving at the schoolhouse door with my sack of karma on my back to this ongoing stream of music that says, 'Hmmm, let's try *this* melody. Okay, now let's try *this* melody.' To me that's a view of what life is for, or what life is about, or what life is, that's so much more compelling than the schoolhouse and sack of karma model. It's constantly *trying*. We're each of us—in this lifetime—a melody that the music is trying out to see what *piece* of awakening it holds.

Q: Isn't that what Suzuki is saying from the quote that you read last night, that we arrive here?

JIS: Yes. To use the same kind of imagery, you could just as easily say that we arrive here with a song that we're trying to understand the melody of.

Q: I think I'm looking into how striving might resonate with that. We're all striving, and it seems natural. Yet in a way that is harder than it needs to be maybe? And it gets tangled up in the seeds.

Q: Well, could it be that the striving is in a sense striving to get pregnant when one's already conceived?

JIS : That's great. This, then, is when the *Lanka* says, 'The mind is a hero in a play. The will is the hero's confidant.' 'I will make this happen by getting pregnant', when, as you say, I've already conceived.

Q : That goes back to the exhaustion. I've been noticing ways that I seem to *try* really hard. It's kind of an m.o. of discovering an illusion of control that I think I have by trying really hard.

JIS : Absolutely.

Q : Will is such a big part of my trying really hard. It's a very separating thing though, isn't it, will?

JIS : Yes ... Take a moment, take a couple of breaths, and see if there's anything that we really need to say or confuse further before we have our break.

Q : I want to say something about will because ever since last night I've been thinking about seeing this as a play. It's been really helpful. The mind says, 'I want to do this,' and the will says, 'Yeah, yeah. We can do this! Yeah, yeah.' Like a cheerleader. Whatever the mind wants, the will says, 'Yeah, yeah we can do this.' It's really kind of amusing and interesting to see it in that role as opposed to how it was before that.

Q : 'Understanding the melody' has confused me a little. I'm thinking of the word understanding in a way that's confusing me. I'm thinking of it as studying it, dissecting it. Analyzing it. I don't think that's what we mean.

JIS : You're an artist, right? Is that how you understand when you're painting?

Q : No. I think I let it just come to me.

JIS : So more like that?

Q : I get an understanding, but without picking it apart.

JIS : Exactly. And without that understanding then we're just kind of passive agents of the universe's desire for enlightenment. It's singing the melodies through us, but we're just the agents, the channels, of that. But we have the capacity to *join with* that exploration of what the melody is, so that our lives become a co-creation between this impulse towards awakening from the universe and the individual, particular melody or circumstances—the karma—through which it's being expressed in our lives, and *that's* what I mean by 'understanding'.

Q : So it's more of an arising than a delving into?

JIS: Yes. How do we hear the melody being sung through us, and then how do we join that and maybe enhance it?

Q : Like harmonizing?

JIS : Like harmonizing. Yes.