

## Core Practices Part Three

"The bodhisattva's way puts relationship at the heart of spiritual practice." (from "Mixing Minds: The Power of Relationship in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism" by "Pilar Jennings, Jeremy D. Safran").

"is all too easy for that kind of inner conflict to get co-opted by the language of practice and in the name of spirituality we try to kill our needs, kill our attachments, kill our vulnerability, kill our anger, kill our sexuality, kill our desire for love, kill off anything that will make us need other people and be vulnerable to them. It's a great problem when practice is co-opted by those kinds of inner conflict, and yet, it's also the skillful means of the language of Zen that it draws out that language of conflict and puts it into koans where we can really see it and can make it explicit. Then we can see what we've been up to." (from "Nothing Is Hidden: The Psychology of Zen Koans" by "Barry Magid").

Non-killing. How we try to kill parts of ourselves. Two aspects - our relationship with our selves and others - are both interconnected

*1. Experiencing*

*2. The Three Treasures: Co-Creating a Safe Relational Home*

*3. The Student-Teacher Relationship*

*4. Trauma Centred Zen Practice: The Practice of Bearing Witness and Mutual Recognition: The Ten Applied Precepts*

*5. Peace and Aliveness (Appreciation of this life, this moment)*

## **Experiencing**

Experiencing was a core practice taught by Joko Beck. Experiencing was her expression of how we become one with absolute – in other words, being just this moment.

See the chapter titled experience and experiencing.

However, this is a description of subjectivity being one with our senses – we need now

## **The Three Treasures: Co-Creating a Safe Relational Home**

One of my sangha friends recently told me a story about Ananda, the attendant to the Buddha. Apparently, one day he got sick of sangha politics and went off to practice on his own. After a while, he realised that he needed sangha, and when he returned to the sangha, he said to the Buddha - I've realised that sangha is half of the practice. To which the Buddha replied - no Ananda, no Ananda, it is the whole of the practice. Barry Magid has significantly expanded my appreciation of the importance of sangha, emotional interdependence and mutual recognition based upon a understanding of a healthy sense of a relational

self. In our model of practice, we do not seek to disengage from all our emotional and social needs for belonging, recognition, sexual intimacy and love – rather we embrace them. We do not seek refuge in being an island unto ourselves we seek refuge in human connection – even though human connection is not always a reliable source of refuge.

In Ordinary Mind Zen we aspire to living in accordance with life as it is. Our last line of the practice principles states – “Being just this moment – Compassions way.” *This* moment is the absolute. Our Zazen practice is being just this moment. We are not seeking another more special moment in the future. This moment is it. This moment is always it. However, this moment is not always going to be easy. This moment could be, maybe I am going to die. Or this moment could be, my wife wants a divorce. If you like, practicing being just this moment is the foundation for building a capacity for the self-regulation of affect. But we also embrace the co-regulation of affect – the need for attunement and recognition in human relationships is also living in accord with life as it is – to live in accord with being human is to live (and love) in accordance with our interpersonal needs. Therefore, we would also say that happiness is a function of our emotional and social needs being met. This is self-compassion. This leads to our inevitable dependency on other human beings for our happiness. Therefore, we must tolerate the reality that happiness is both interdependent and impermanent, like everything else. We must tolerate that relationships will sometimes disappoint us and let us down. As Barry Magid teaches, we must therefore practice dependency intelligently, which is alluding to Joko Becks’s invitation for us to suffer intelligently. Barry feels there is a blind spot in Joko’s teaching on relationships. He detects a tendency towards autonomy in her teachings and a lack of acknowledgement of the importance of accepting the need for dependency. He finds a hint of spiritual by-passing in her teaching. Therefore, Barry wants us to acknowledge we are

“dependent mammals that need love and nurturance and connection and groups”. And he tells us there is a danger in religious practice, including Zen, to seek to transcend our dependence through taking refuge in God, or Being, or Buddha, or simply by reifying happiness or peace. The purpose of our practice is not to seek happiness per se, but to develop the willingness to live in accordance with the reality of life as it is and to love and be loved in return, and to express our creativity through our work in our own unique ways. Again, we meet up with Freud, who also argued that love and work are the foundations for our humanity and for our psychological health and happiness.

Unfortunately, the homeleaver approach to practice offers, as a goal, a picture of pure autonomy and imperturbability in response to the vicissitudes of life. It says that, because impermanence is inescapable, we should try not to hold on to anything. In contrast, Barry says our practice is about recognizing the inescapability of vulnerability, attachment, and dependence. The willingness to enter into relationships, to depend on others, and be vulnerable reflects the understanding that the wholeness of ourselves and our lives is inseparable from our Buddha nature. In our practice we learn to experience and accept the uncontrollability of life. We are not seeking to take refuge in Buddha or zazen if that is seen as a kind of quest for autonomy and imperturbably from the inevitable emotional consequences of living with intimate relationships. In fact, it is probably the case that many people seek out zen as a means of coping with the turbulence and responsibility of relational life.

I therefore reinterpret taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha from a *relational* perspective, drawing upon Heinz Kohut’s Self Psychology. When we are taking refuge, we are taking refuge in our self and in our relationships. We are taking refuge in what Kohut called *selfobject experiences* or what I call these days, *affirming self-experiences*. In Heinz Kohut's Self psychology, the three core relational needs are mirroring, idealizing, and twinship (or alter-

ego). When these needs are met my empathic caregivers self it builds self-structure and cohesion.

1. Mirroring: This involves the need to have one's talents and abilities recognized and affirmed by others, particularly caregivers. It's the experience of feeling seen, valued, and appreciated for who one is. A healthy mirroring experience helps build a sense of self-worth and confidence.

2. Idealizing: This refers to the need to idealize or look up to someone, often a parent or authority figure, who possesses strength, calmness, and wisdom. This allows the child to feel a sense of awe and merging with a powerful, idealized selfobject. Over time, these idealized qualities are internalized, contributing to the development of a stable system of values and goals.

3. Twinship (or *Alter-Ego*): The twinship aspect involves the need to feel a sense of belonging, similarity, and connection with others, to feel "just like" someone else. This can be a need to be seen and understood, to have one's feelings validated by others. It contributes to a sense of being part of a larger group and developing a sense of belonging. The Alter-Ego aspect refers to an recognition of difference in the other, which we also share in common.

These experiences are crucial for the development of a healthy, cohesive self. If these needs are not adequately met in childhood, it can lead to difficulties in regulating self-esteem, forming healthy relationships, and developing a stable sense of self.

Like the self, the three refuges are a metaphor. They have etymological roots in shelter and protection – but these refuges are not a place to hide – they are not defenses to keep the world outside at bay. Rather, they are affirming of the self – allowing the self to open and take care of self and others. Experientially, they have the quality of expansiveness. They are not something we take refuge in;

rather, the refuge is our experience, when we are in intimate relationship with them – as Thich Nhat Hanh might say, they inter-be with our selves.

The historical figure of the Buddha can be interpreted as an *idealising self-experience* and when we sit in Zazen with our sangha we feel a sense of belonging or being at home in the world – what Kohut called a *twinsip self-experience*. We can also interpret taking refuge in Buddha as taking refuge in Zazen. Taking refuge in Zazen helps us to create the context for self-recognition through just-sitting being an enactment of self-acceptance. Zazen is an activity. It includes the activity of stillness, silence and feeling the breath or contemplating a koan. All these activities are regulating and facilitating of affirming self-experiences: as our body relaxes, we let go of thoughts and surrender to the completeness of this moment. The self-experience of zazen is self-affirming and self-actualizing. We may feel a greater sense of stability (sitting like a mountain). Feelings of gratitude may arise for being alive. Our heart opens. We can also feel a sense of being “held” nonjudgmentally, in the loving arms of Zazen, so to speak - a kind of maternal holding – by something bigger and wiser – a kind idealising self-experience. Self-intimacy. Self-merger with something bigger. The feeling of arriving home in the activity of Zazen.

Similarly, the dharma or teachings can also provide a sense of finding a home or sense of belonging in a tradition. When I was younger, in my formative years as a Zen student, I once thought of becoming an Anglican Priest and teaching a form of Christian Zen meditation. I actually enrolled in the seminary at Morpeth College in Newcastle. However, I couldn’t find my home in the Biblical scriptures – I had already found my spiritual home in the Zen Buddhist scriptures. We can also think of dharma as reality and hence taking refuge in Dharma is being able to accept life as it is.

The relationship between teacher and student is one of the pillars of the Zen tradition, along with the creation and maintenance of a Sangha. Without a Sangha there is no Zen. The teacher can work with the student in helping them to recognise their *curative fantasies* but also part of this work requires the teacher to be aware of the possibility that the curative fantasy is working on an unconscious level and for the student to experience some insight into this. It is very difficult for this to be the case, if the teacher is only meeting with the student in order for the student to pass through a traditional koan curriculum. The relationship needs nurturing, in the same way a psychotherapy relationship needs nurturing, through meeting on a regular basis to discuss the emotional and relational issues that are arising in the student's everyday life. One of the ways I like to do this, is to offer a one-hour dokusan meeting every four weeks. The meetings could also be more frequent, depending upon need and availability. The sangha can also be just as important if not more important than the teacher – student relationship. Spiritual friendship can provide many opportunities for mutual recognition and creating a sense of belonging. In our OzZen Sangha we intentionally create opportunities for Sangha members to express themselves creatively in Sangha settings through performing music, or poems or re-telling their own spiritual autobiographies, which are designed to create a sense of mutual affinity and belonging.

## **Mutual Recognition and Bearing Witness: The Ten Applied Precepts as Relational Guides**

Steps to witnessing:

1. Co-creating a safe relational home
2. Being prepared to witness mean being prepared to receive transmission of traumatic experiences with empathy and compassion. The empathy and compassion prevents burnout. (Kathe Weingarten).

Firstly the precepts are about getting to know ourselves intimately.

When do I get angry?

How do I get angry?

What patterns?

Does it happen in my relationship?

In this discussion I am going to link the precepts to the self-centred dream and the path of mutual recognition and bearing witness as actions that lead to liberation from being trapped in the self-centred dream. Self-centredness is how our intrapsychic life is organised around core beliefs that are expressive of complementarity, subject and object ways of relating and protective strategies. The self-centred dream is configured that way as a result of relational trauma and most relational trauma involves some kind of nonrecognition. Breakdowns in relationships often result in finding ourselves back in this self-centred position. Healing relational trauma therefore involves some kind of recognition. The precepts can be read as aspirations to embrace a relational intersubjective self, ready to recognise the other as both similar and different, as



sharing common needs and intentions and unique gifts and abilities. In this discussion on the ten applied precepts, I am going to introduce two core practices: *recognition* and *bearing witness*; bearing witness is in fact one very important facets of recognition – it is an intentional form of recognition. Recognition and bearing witness are actions that cultivate relationships that are mutual beneficial and supportive pf human flourishing. Acting in accordance with the precepts guides us

After years of studying relational psychoanalysis and infant research, Jessica Benjamin in her book *Beyond Doer and Done To*, concluded that the action of recognition can be understood as the basic element or building block of relationships. As the primary form of connection between two persons, recognition is consciously or unconsciously, going on all the time. The only way out is through dissociation!

Relationships, even between people with similar minds are continuously challenged and often destabilised by each other's difference and disjunction. She therefore also concluded that how we come to appreciate the other's separate existence, how we evolve through a relationship where each is the other's other, is crucial. We evolve as selves in a relational system that is unique to the parties in the relationship. When this relational system is characterised by reciprocity and mutual recognition, Benjamin calls it the position of *the Third*. The dance is a good metaphor for describing the Third. There are two separate dancers both participating in the dance, which can only be experienced in this special form of togetherness. Recognition can be thought of in two ways: as a psychic position of recognising the other's mind as an equal source of intention and agency, affecting and being affected (what Fonagy describes as mentalisation); and second, as a process or action, the essence of responsiveness in action. These *acts* of recognition confirm that "I am seen,

known, my intentions have been understood, I have had an impact on you, and this must mean that I matter to you; and reciprocally, that I see and know you, I understand your intentions, your actions affect me and matter to me. Further, we share feelings, reflect each other's knowing, so we also have shared awareness. This is recognition."

Recognition theory recognises two basic ways in which relationships unfold – the first is mutual recognition – two subjects recognising each other's sameness and difference, leading to a sense of connection, intimacy and understanding; and secondly, non-recognition, leading to disconnection and objectification, where the other is treated as a means to an end, as an object that can gratify my needs only, or to be pushed away and dismissed. These two psychic positions can best be conceived not as exclusive but as interrelated ways of being in relationship. The oscillations between them correspond to our shifts in relational states between feelings of self *being with* an other self and self being in complementary relation *to* an object. However, breakdown of this basic recognition is a common and pervasive phenomena. It spells collapse into twoness, "a relational formation in which the other appears as object or objectifying, unresponsive or injuring, threatening to erase one's own subjectivity or be oneself erased. This relational formation, based on splitting, takes shape as the complementarity of doer and done to, but there are many other permutations: accuser and accused, helpless and coercive, even victim and perpetrator." (Benjamin 2018).

I will now discuss the receipt using this framework of mutual recognition and the inevitable breakdown of recognition, followed by repair.

I will then discuss how the ten applied precepts can be understood as relational guides to understanding the common ways in which person to person relationships and mutual recognition break down into relationships of domination, coercion and control, or mutual destruction and the importance of recognising breakdowns when they occur to that they can be mended and repaired. We will explore the precepts from a person to person perspective and from a social perspective (war; poverty; domestic violence)

Precepts practice also supports our ability to recognize when this equality of relating breaks down and hence providing us with an opportunity to restore the relationship to one of mutual respect and mutual recognition.

"The I-Thou relationship is a stance of genuinely being interested in the person we're interacting with as a person. It means that we value her "otherness." By otherness is meant the recognition of the uniqueness and distinct separateness from us of the other person without obscuring our relatedness and underlying common humanity. The person is an end in herself, not a means to an end, and we recognize that we are a-part-of this person." (from "Between Person and Person: Toward a Dialogical Psychotherapy" by "Richard Hycner, Maurice Friedman").

I will now finish my discussing the precepts as relational guides.

Is about aspiring to subject to subject relationality. When they break down into subject-object relations (twoness, duality, I-It) we break the precepts. Without continuous practice we will break down, things will fall apart without continuous practice.

*Bearing Witness and Mutual Recognition: A Relational Understanding of The Ten Applied Precepts*

**The First Applied Precept:**

*I bear witness to the reality of killing and aspire to practice non-killing.*

*Traditionally: Do not kill*

To aspire to practice non-killing is to be able to witness the ways in which I kill myself and others and to become nonseparate from this killing. How do I become nonseparate?

My practicing what Joko Beck called *experiencing*.

To practice non-violence is to relate on an equal footing recognizing the each other as both separate centres of selfhood and at the same time recognising our ability to experience a sense of at-oneness with each other – a sense of intimacy.

When this breaks down this sense of feeling of at-oneness breaks down and it contracts into a defensive subject either protect itself or attacking the other as an object.

We commit acts of violence and abuse when we are caught in the self centred dream of relating to the other as an object of fear or hatred.

### **The Second Applied Precept:**

*I bear witness to the reality of stealing and aspire to practice non-stealing..*

Traditionally: Do not take what is not freely given

We are caught in greed or envy or desire what we think we lack when we are caught in the self-centred dream of greed and envy.

### **The Third Applied Precept.**

*I bear witness to the misuse of sexuality and aspire to practice non-misusing sex.*

Traditionally: Do not engage in sexual misconduct.

We commit harmful acts when we are caught in the self-centred dream of domination and subordination.

### **The Fourth Applied Precept**

I bear witness to lying and aspire to practice non-lying.

Traditionally: Don't lie, or, I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech

### **The Fifth Applied Precept**

I bear witness to the misuse of intoxicants and aspire to practice non-misusing intoxicants.

Traditionally: Do not take intoxicants which cloud the mind

### **The Sixth Applied Precept**

I bear witness to talking about others' errors and faults and aspire to practice non-talking about others' errors and faults.

Traditionally: Do not speak of the faults of others

### **The Seventh Applied Precept**

I bear witness to the elevation of oneself and blaming others and aspire to practice non-elevating oneself and blaming others.

Traditionally: Do not praise myself and disparage others.

“As long as we approach people from a feeling of deficiency and longing, we cannot approach them as equals” BM, ETPH.

### **The Eighth Applied Precept**

I bear witness to stinginess and aspire to practice non-being stingy.

Traditionally: Do Not spare the Dharma Assets

### **The Ninth Applied Precept**

I bear witness to anger and aspire to practice non-being angry.

Traditionally: Do not be angry, or, Do not hold on to anger.

### **The Tenth Applied Precept**

I bear witness to the abuse of the three treasures and aspire to practice non-abusing the three treasures.

Traditionally: Do not defame the Three Treasures

### **Conclusion: Peace and Aliveness (Appreciation of this life, this moment)**

*Unceasing change turns the wheel of life,  
and so reality is shown in all its many  
forms. Peaceful dwelling as change itself,  
Liberates all suffering sentient beings and brings them to great joy.*

As our curative fantasies get worn away and our resistance to life as it as dissolves, and we embody the three refuges and the ten applied precepts, we find ourselves experiencing a sense of peace, aliveness and joy at being alive in this moment.



Benjamin, J. (2018). Beyond doer and done to: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third. London and New York, Routledge.