



# Ordinary Mind Zen

## Giving & Receiving

Transcript of <https://soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/191215-giving-and-receiving>

I'll talk for a little while and if you have a question or a comment or something you'd like to add, please do so.

I'd like to talk today on -- it seems like a, seeing that we're approaching Christmas, what does giving and receiving mean in the context of Zen practice? Shunryu Suzuki, a Japanese Zen teacher who came to the west in the '70s, used to always begin his Dharma talks by saying, "Good evening bodhisattvas." So, I will say, "Good morning bodhisattvas and welcome to the promised land."

You were all sitting very beautifully in the first sit this morning, just like little bodhisattvas. In the Zen tradition, of course, a bodhisattva is someone who commits their life to relieving the suffering of all beings, as well as themselves hopefully, on the understanding that in Zen practice the main principle is that one is all and all is one.



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In Zen practice with the Rinzai and Soto schools, the Rinzai school puts a lot of emphasis on what's called having an initial realisation of oneness, what's referred to often in Japanese as kensho or satori and often a Koan like Mu is used as an introductory Koan and it's used as a focus in meditation to eventually come to this direct experiential realisation of the oneness and that's seen as the beginning of Zen practice and how we then personify that realisation in our daily life is our practice for the rest of our life.

In our school, in the Ordinary Mind School, there's less emphasis placed on having a kensho experience or an initial opening – although that can sometimes happen, and it's different for every person. Just having that sense of when we're breathing that there's a sense in which I'm not doing the breathing, the breathing is breathing me. Just little insights like that are little openings or gateways into the absolute fact or the essential fact that we're not separate from the universe, that each one of us is a manifestation of the universe, in the same way that the mountain is not separate from the earth and the earth is not separate from the universe.





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A person can experience these oneness experiences just naturally. Some people can have them spontaneously. Some people can have them through intensive hours of meditation practice. Some people may have experienced those kinds of things through various psychotropic plants. But, like most things in life, those experiences - like everything in life, those experiences are transient and they wear off and we come back to our usual sense of how we are in the world with others. So, in our practice we put a lot of emphasis on that, with the understanding, of course, that we are not separate and we are one.

But the universe we usually find ourselves inhabiting is the “them and us” universe, what we might call the relative universe as opposed to the absolute universe of oneness. So, giving and receiving, from an Absolute perspective, from the perspective of the oneness of everything, then it’s all about giving and receiving. When we give from an Absolute perspective, we receive at the same time because there is in fact no giver and no receiver in one sense; in the sense that the giver is the receiver and the receiver is the giver.



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So that kind of sense of as we give we receive, though, is something that we can , I think, get a sense of in the relative universe, in the universe that we inhabit. We often have a sense of a mutual reciprocity in relationships and a sort of cycle of giving and receiving.

A relationship, whether it's a relationship with a partner, a marriage relationship, relationships with work colleagues, the dynamics of giving and receiving are often very much at the heart of either a harmonious relationship or a conflictual relationship, and every relationship is going to have moments of conflict and misunderstanding and judgements of fairness or unfairness and often those judgements of unfairness and fairness often can come down to a sense of, "hey, I think I'm giving more here and you're taking more."

And this is something, I just want to express my appreciation for my wife, Annie, who as you know is not a Zen practitioner and has sometimes struggled with the amount of time I devote to Zen practice and she often puts in quite a lot of time in terms of her giving, in terms of I say, "Okay, we're having Zen Sunday mornings" and she'll do a lot of cleaning and I say, "Oh I was going to do that, love", you know,





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cleaning the laundry but she's already done it and so I express my sense of appreciation to Annie for that.

But in our relationship at times you know, we can get caught up in who's been giving more and who's been taking more. I think that would be quite in my practice as a counsellor, something which is quite universal. think in our Zen practice, what we can take the opportunity to do when sitting in meditation on our cushions or our chairs, we start off by, what does it mean to give ourselves fully and completely to Zazen? In the same way as we might experience resistance coming up to actually giving ourselves one hundred percent completely away to Zazen, in the same way we can experience that sense of resistance to giving in every aspect of our lives.

So, when we're doing our sitting practice, it's not like something separate to everyday life, actually it's a great training for saying well I'm going to sit for 20 minutes or I'm going to sit for 30 minutes or longer and I'm going to give myself totally to that, to the Zazen, and then see the resistance that comes up to that in whatever form that might take, such as getting distracted and thinking about something or the urge to move or the urge to actually not complete the sitting, whatever it might be.



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And then when we get off our cushion, the sense of how we're always in relationship, how we give ourselves to that relationship that we're in, whether that relationship is a relationship to cooking, cleaning, driving the car, whatever kind of work we do, how we give ourselves one hundred percent to each task in the day as it comes along.

I think, if we can connect, connect our everyday giving to our Zazen practice, it is actually a good way of looking after ourselves or taking care of ourselves and preventing burnout. The sense in which each moment of our day is the opportunity for giving and then seeing how the reverse, the flipside or the giving is the receiving, so how we can also open to receiving. In the same way as there is a resistance to giving there can be a resistance to receiving.

So, everything that comes we can see from one moment to the next in our lives as a gift that we receive and we can receive this gift one hundred percent with an open heart or we can push the gifts away. Maybe it's easier to receive the gift of a lovely bird singing in the morning when we wake up, the sunlight shining through the window, a lovely warm bowl of porridge. These are beautiful gifts that I think are reasonably easy to receive.





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Sometimes the gifts that we receive can come in, of course, other forms. They can come in the form of disappointment, for example, and how do we receive the gift of disappointment and how do we one hundred percent accept that gift is also important as we take our practice into our everyday lives.

The universe is changing moment by moment, both subjectively, objectively, the in and the outer becoming one, and we have no control over that constant process of change and as that constant process of change is happening we're giving and receiving, giving and receiving. It's responding to the call of the universe all the time, moment by moment.

So, each moment is the opportunity to see where our resistance is coming to either giving or receiving. Sometimes in my therapy practice I introduce clients to various forms of what in Buddhism is called metta practice, it's a kind of loving kindness which is directed towards the self. You've probably come across that in your travels where you might say may I be well, may I be happy, may I accept myself completely. We're trying to cultivate a sense of compassion towards ourselves.



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It's not unusual for people to have a great deal of difficulty, a barrier or a resistance to actually receiving that sense of compassion from ourselves and, of course, the origins of this are often quite deep in terms of human relationships and if people have received unkind treatment from people who are meant to be loving and caring, then often that sense of receiving love or receiving compassion is not always something that's easy to open up to. It's not easy to open the heart to receiving compassion and love because there is always some underlying fear or anxiety around are we going to get abused, exploited or used in some way. So, giving and receiving.

The traditional four vows that are recited in Zen Buddhist practice are the four great vows are the bodhisattva's vows and the first one being the many beings are numberless, I vow to save them, and so there's a sense in which it's an impossible task to save all beings, but when you come from the Absolute perspective where the one is all and all is one, then each moment is that opportunity to fully give ourselves, to fully save all beings moment by moment.

The second vow is greed, hatred, ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to abandon them. So, the sense in which all the barriers of separation that we experience, all the resistance to giving of ourselves completely, we can experience those in an average





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day. If we bring our awareness to the subtle ways in which the barriers to giving come up, we can see -- it might not be hate but certainly sometimes it will manifest as irritability or anger even, and we can just practice with that on a day to day basis and that's practicing with the second vow.

The third vow is Dharma gates are countless, I vow to wake to them. And then opening up to the Dharma gates. A Dharma gate is any moment of reality. It could be a sound, it could be the visual, it could be a phrase, a word, a connection with someone. All these Dharma gates are constantly opening moment by moment in our life. Again, it's a chance to give ourselves totally to that moment.

The fourth one, Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to embody it completely. And then the question is well, who is the Buddha? Often the question is asked and in most Zen Koans, the question is really what is Buddha? And the answer is you are Buddha, and so it's about as we let go all these barriers to giving and receiving, we experience ourselves as just this, just this, just this. We don't have to change ourselves in any way, we just... we already are perfect as that morning star that shines in the morning when the Shakyamuni Buddha had his realisation, and he was no different to that



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morning star. Fundamentally we are all one, we're all complete, not lacking in anything.

So, who is Buddha? We're all little Buddhas sitting here and reflecting each other's Buddhahood. So, may your Christmas be full of lots of giving and receiving. Thank you.