

## RAINBOW LIVING: ENACTING AWAKENING

Prajnatara Paula      Sophia Zen Sangha July 20, '24      Friends' Meeting House, Madison

**INTRODUCTION** Dear sangha, here we are, practicing within a circle of wonder. Somehow we have each wandered our way into Sophia Zen Sangha. This circle of wonder is the cosmos and the whole Earth. That's why we bow to our cushion honoring all the beings who support our sitting. And we bow to each other. We know we are held in complete acceptance. This morning we took refuge. May we remember to do so again and again...and again. The precepts we vowed this Full Moon morning help us stay alert and patient. And we chanted "wrapping ourselves in the Buddha's teachings" (whether you wear a rakasu or not) "we free all living beings." There is a saying to remember- "hold your practice so close no air can escape." How does holding practice close within expand to free the world of suffering?

I have chosen the rainbow as a symbol of the circle of wonder to help us investigate this question. We see only the top half of the circle where the light shines and refracts through water droplets into the colors of the spectrum. The bottom half of the rainbow is dark, hidden in the ground. To me it signifies the invisible rainbow of emptiness. Our dark womb, the creative source. Chan ancestor Hongzhi (1091-1157) calls the creative source an empty field; Zen practice is "*cultivating*" this "*empty field*." Here is a passage from his beautiful text, *Cultivating the Empty Field*: "*In this field ...the deep source can... respond to the world unencumbered – enacting and fulfilling the way...with thoughts clear, wander into the circle of wonder...this is how home leaving must be enacted.*"

**II. What is "home leaving?"** In the Theravadan period it meant leaving the world behind to enter a monastery. For the Mahayana Bodhisattva, it means leaving the home the ego has built. Surrendering a fixed identity opens us to realize buddha nature. Then we are free to "respond to the world unencumbered." I found our Zen practice simplified by Mary Oliver (*see the poem "Sometimes"*). Her advice : **"Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell someone!"** Let's take each of her instructions and connect them with Bodhisattva life.

**\*Pay attention.** To what? To the causes and conditions of existing on this Earth. There are some unavoidable facts: We grow old. We will get ill. We will lose all we hold dear. We will die. The Four Remembrances. There is no way to avoid the fact of suffering. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> Noble Truth. It is what motivated the sheltered Prince Gautama to become a home leaver. The other Noble Truths came to him as he wandered the forest. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Noble Truth requires paying attention to discover the cause of suffering. (Ask) What is the 3<sup>rd</sup>? The, 4<sup>th</sup>, the 8 fold path, requires ongoing commitment to paying attention. (*Refer to previous Sangha study text, The Eightfold Path; show chart p.18*) Three Bases or aspects: 1<sup>st</sup> WISDOM which

develops the paths of Right or Complete View and Intention. 2<sup>nd</sup> MEDITATION with develops practice of Right skillful mindfulness and the practice of mediation. 3<sup>rd</sup>, the base of ETHICS – Right/skillful speech, action and livelihood. These three are supported by Right Effort. Harada’s commentary on The Platform Sutra, our current text, does not specifically discuss ETHICS. He focuses on the other 2 aspects of the path, the first base, Wisdom and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Meditation. They enable an ethical life. Joan Sutherland wrote: “Its not enough to know what buddha nature is, we need to discover what buddha nature does!” Recall Hongzhi’s words: buddha nature is “*responding to the world unencumbered.*” We are liberated to respond to the world whole heartedly and authentically.

**III. THE EGO and THE VOWS** Diane recently asked (*Zoom talk, June 2024*), is the ego “fit for office?” Should the ego assume the office of being in charge of your bodhisattva life? Here’s what she pointed out: (#1) Everyone’s ego is disastrously outdated. Since it was formed in childhood, it feels secure relying on your earliest beliefs about being ‘you.’ Thus (#2) the ego has a very limited perception of the world. “Me and mine” are its predominant reference point toward any “others.” It cannot see 360 degrees. (#3) It does not recognize its “use by date.” To me this means my ego is caught in rules and goals it formed in the past. For example, being on time was taken for granted in my family, also in the convent. Punctuality still has a tight grip on me. (#4 ) The ego has little knowledge of the full body’s experience. For example, the body may be tired, but the ego pushes on. Today I add #5, the ego assumes it is in charge of your bodhisattva’s ethical life in the world. An unwarranted assumption for sure.

**The first vow, to save all beings**, is flat out impossible since the ego believes its vision of itself and others is correct. It does not realize it exists permeated by all beings! It does not realize the emptiness of the forms of “me, myself and I.” Since it lives in the delusion of being permanent and separate, the **2<sup>nd</sup> Vow: to end all delusions**, is also impossible. Fundamentally, as earnest and hard working as my ego tries to be, it is basically ignorant of who I am. It takes Great Faith and Courage to wake up out of the ego’s amnesia. We must learn not to believe everything we think – to pay attention to the ego’s messaging. “Paying attention” is Dogen’s compassionate “study the self.”

\*The more subtly and compassionately we pay attention the more often we will **BE ASTONISHED** – Mary Oliver’s next instruction. Even a subtle shift or the briefest “oh my”... or a sigh that softens the heart, or “wow, I never saw it this way” can be astonishing to the small self. In an instant we see how our clinging- to a need for praise, or to an aversion to someone – for example – is the cause of our suffering. Example – That person approaching always bugs me. I feel my muscles tighten up. Ah! Wisdom recognizes the mind state forming. Compassion dissolves it. We – the person who was about to encounter my

negative energy and I - are free. A brief enlightenment experience, or “kensho,” is a glimpse of the awakened state. There are many words and metaphors for awakening in all spiritual traditions. The lotus growing in the mud opens. The gritty sand of the oyster reveals the pearl. Hongzhi says even “One beam of light’s gleam permeates the vastness. Such a moment of **“Being Astonished!”** is cosmic intimacy. “I, and all beings are awake!” Shakyamuni said at the dawning of his awakening. The more we pay attention the more often this life is astonishing. Many of you have shared these openings in sangha or in dokusan. The experience may be shocking or sweet, a gentle breeze, or a strong wind, a profound relief or a bold command. In a kensho moment your mind is silent. Your body is fully present. You are Radically Alive. Your unique beam of light gleams of shines within the whole rainbow.

In the Book of Wisdom, Luminous Sophia says: “I am *here*, playing at all times. My delight is to be with the children of humanity.” Her delight in our species is reassuring. Wisdom has not given up on us but is delighted! “Blessed are you who hear me (who pay attention!) and watch daily at my gates (sounds like zazen and mindfulness?) waiting at the posts of my doors. See me and you shall find life.” Sophia’s words echo **our 3<sup>rd</sup> Vow: To enter all dharma doors**. We are on the threshold of change each moment. Wisdom is waiting at the door post of each dharma gate. Waiting for us to enter -awake, radically alive and whole.

\*Mary Oliver tells us, **Pay Attention. Be Astonished** and finally she says, “**Tell someone!**” Think of Pentecost -the moment when the apostles were transformed in the Holy Spirit. Out they went into the world to tell others, each in their own way. There is no one way to live as bodhisattva. We are each different and uniquely qualified to embody buddha nature. **This is the 4<sup>th</sup> vow: “Buddha’s Way is Unsurpassable. I vow to embody it.”**

Embodying buddha nature completely is called the Rainbow Body in Tibetan teachings. Here is my understanding of buddha nature’s rainbow. When sunlight refracts through individual water droplets different colors of the spectrum result. Just so the radiance of buddha nature manifests uniquely in each one of us. This is the Buddhist teaching of “Two Truths.” There is One energy stream flowing from the source of the cosmos. Therefore, we are “Not two- we are one. And we are also “not one” because the one energy appears in different forms. Buddhas are embodying the awakened state in myriad ways in the world. All forms, like the droplets of the rainbow, are different displays of awakening.

#### **IV. AWAKENING THE RAINBOW BODY**

In the text, **Hakuin on Kensho: The Four Ways of Awakening**, we read that all 4 ways of awakening are “originally inherent and complete in every person.” A momentary

kensho is your Big True life living through you. This is to live radically, from the Root, as your true being. The Root is the dark Mother, the enigma of the empty field. Living radically is Dogen's "Jijuyu Zanmai" -translated as "Life Living Itself Through Us." It is in the Appendix of *Turning and Being Turned*. If you worry that your awakening practice has no impact, dive into Dogen's "Jijuyu Zanmai." "Jijuyu" is the 'Zanmai' or samadhi of your small self present as big Life lives you. "You are completely present with everyone; you don't feel self-conscious." Shunryu Suzuki Roshi says. Then he adds, "That is self- respect." Just sipping this morning's coffee or tea aware of being aware... body present, mind silent. Letting the present moment be the present moment as it is – not only in zazen but everywhere. In "Jijuyu Zanmai" you "*become imperceptibly one with each of all the myriad beings and permeate all time... and are performing they are performing the eternal and ceaseless work of guiding beings to enlightenment...*" Hongzhi says when the empty field is cultivated and its abundance is shared "such a person is can fulfill the family business (51)." He is writing of the Soto 'family business.' The Tibetan teachings describe 5 families' ways of enacting awakening or 'doing business' in the world. Each is a color of the rainbow.

*Show flags of families and give chart from Pema Chodron's How You Live is How You Die. The 5<sup>th</sup> white flag, boundless space, is not included in Hakuin's text.*

All four orientations are naturally within each of us yet usually have developed one and use it more easily. EXERCISE: VISUALIZE YOUR CLOTHES CLOSET ... focus on clothing for your upper body -the shirts and blouses and Tees and Jackets. Close eyes. How do you perceive what you see? What colors are dominant? Where does you gaze first fall? Why? What clothing do you ignore or even dislike. How do you feel when seeing your closet. We can learn about each family's way of knowing by imagining we are looking inside our closet. (open eyes)

The **Blue flag** represents the kensho of mirror-like wisdom. It is the Vajra family. This way of kensho is called seeing into the cosmic mirror, opening to everything everywhere all at once. This way of wisdom is clear awareness, intellectually precise as a mirror's image. A Vajra could contemplate the whole Universe mirrored in her closet. She can stand in awe, enjoying how perfectly her closet is organized. She may visualize the people who made and sold the clothing working in various countries. She may buy organically made clothing. She might have researched working conditions in Bangladesh or chemical damage done to the environment. The element of clear water represents this family's mirror like wisdom. Its display feels like gazing into deep clear water. Awakening this way usually prompts contemplative study and silence, perhaps writing or the arts or teaching or science might be the preferred way a Vajra expresses her wisdom. Is this you or someone you know? PAUSE

The **Yellow or gold flag** represents the wisdom of inner equanimity expressed in outer work for equality. A Ratna woman sees the abundance in her closet. It might be overflowing or even a mess.

Everything is there to be used. Each is a gift of the golden richness of the Earth element. A Ratna embodies this earthy generosity. She wants all children of the Earth to live as equals - safe, well fed and clothed and housed. All species included. No privileged group. The Ratna family member is steady, welcoming everyone with respect and equanimity. When she looks at her closet she has no preferences - all the clothing is gift to be shared. She may give a lot of her clothing to St. Vinney's. She is the mom who gives each child an equal piece of pie. She makes extra pie to away to visitors. Perhaps a Ratna woman volunteers for Habitat for Humanity or is on the equity committee of an organization. Is this familiar to you or someone you know? **Pause.**

The **Red flag** represents the Padma family. Instead of focusing on the whole closet the Padma woman excels in discerning wisdom. She sees diversity instead of the equality. While a Ratna woman sees the whole forest; a Padma falls in love with a special tree. In her closet she might focus on a blouse that holds dear memories. Or she gently touches the jacket her mom gave her. She is sensuous in her way of knowing. Red is the color of passion and compassion. The Padma element is fire. She is warm for Padma woman knows through emotional connection. The Padma environmentalist's heart opens to save a specific animal rather than work for general cause like climate change. She might volunteer to assist refugees at the border. This mom might give an extra piece of pie to the child who just failed a test. Perhaps Padmas are nurses or vets or special ed teachers. She'd be on the diversity community instead of the equity committee. You? **PAUSE**

The **Green flag** represents all accomplishing wisdom. This family is dedicated to action for a better world. Thus, they are called the Karma family. The Karma woman's closet probably has a lot of well used Tee shirts and practical comfortable tops. She wants quick access to items that help her move freely - that's what's most important in a Karma's closet. She grabs what will serve her and goes. The Karma element, the wind, moves outward. Her efficiency is breathtaking. Like a green light, this green woman is all about 'Go! Go! Go! Getting things organized -- all the lunch boxes ready, her schedule planned. Her 'to do' list will be completed at day's end. A green Karma woman who chairs the school board will stick to the agenda. She efficiently organizes a family reunion. She is dedicated to success and will not leave things unfinished. She is often in charge of many projects because people trust she will get things done. You? Someone you know? **PAUSE.**

Do you already have a sense of which buddha family or families the natural way you habitually see and think about the world? My examples are obvious generalizations. Can you guess the blind spots in each way of knowing? Our egos can be entrenched in our preferred way of seeing. Hakuin tells us trouble can come after experiencing any of these ways of kensho. *"As a newborn child of the buddha, the clouds of her former actions will not have yet been cleared away (47)."* How can we clear away habits clouding the Wisdom we experience? For example, I may have a clear vision of this perfect dharma talk in my Vajra mirror. Look at Pema's chart- it says the neurotic side of Vajra Wisdom is aggression. That threw me as first- kind me, aggressive? But then I recognized I do get angry when things aren't perfect but the anger is at myself. Now a lifelong habit of aggression against

myself for not living the perfection I idealized is finally dissolving. Now I know a so-called 'perfect' talk is a fantasy. Sharing heart to heart with you is what's important.

One of the fundamental teachings of nirvana is that it requires intimately seeing our suffering. We study the self not to transcend it but to directly feel this muddy samsaric stuff. As the Gospel parable says, the treasure is waiting for us in the dark field; suffering is the precise place the lotus of awakening can bloom. The chart from Pema Chodron's book notes the neurosis of each family. This shadow side of each family's ego. Its cloudy vision obstructs our wisdom eye. Our rainbow body is not fully actualized.

**V. 4 Types of the shadow side.** Here's an example of an ethical dilemma I'll apply to illustrate this teaching. "BABIES IN THE RIVER" is a story used in teaching ethics and the social sciences years ago. I've adapted it to our 4 vows. Follow along in your imagination. See four bodhisattvas- in-training walking nearby a river. They suddenly hear screaming, shouts of "help! Help! They rush over to the river's edge where they are shocked to see babies- dozens, maybe even more than a hundred babies being carried downstream by a fast current. It's the 1<sup>st</sup> vow but each bodhisattva sees how to act in her preferred way. The **Ratna** woman sees all the babies as one horrible mass of human suffering. What does she do? She immediately begins rescuing as many as she can. Gets one to shore, turns around and gets another. There is no time to look for which baby is actually drowning. She has to do her best to save them all. Back and forth with one baby... back and forth... But.... (what neurotic shadow side could overtake her?...pause to reflect)

The **Padma** bodhisattva's heart is breaking. She stands on the shore weeping but then looks closely - one little one meets her gaze, is reaching out, crying out to her. Whoosh! Padma dives in and swims frantically to grab this child before it is too late. She's forgotten other babies. Holding this baby close, she climbs out of the water. She cuddles and warms this precious one .... the special one she saved. But then she looks up and realizes her chance to awake...what changes? (comments)

The Karma bodhisattva scans the scene. She sees shocked people just standing around - this will not do!! Of course, she quickly organizes a "baby brigade!" She gets everyone in lines so each person takes a turn pulling a baby out. Then they give it to the next person to care for. Rotating again. Faster! Faster! Karma bodhisattva cheers them on. "We must not fail!" But then, she looks at the other side of the river where others are doing a better job and she.... (comments)

Where is the Vajra woman. She is nowhere to be found. Why isn't she helping? How could she leave? She hates herself for leaving but her anger builds and ....(Comments)

This is an example of 4 limited ways of seeing reality for bodhisattvas still caught in ego's habitual view. Each way has an ethical priority, but each has its shadow side. It is of course, my shorthand version of a bodhisattva's trying to save all beings, recognizing her delusion, waking us to enter this dharma door wisely and skillfully to embody buddha nature.

TIME FOR COMMENTS /DISCUSSION

*(Handout of questions – SEE BELOW. These questions can help you reflect the 4 families and ways of kensho in terms of your own life and practice. Please work with them over your lunch break. If you need more paper, there is some on the side table)*

**VI. CONCLUSION** How can we know what is appropriate ethical action to take on the spot? The practice “Wait, wait.... listen, listen....remove the ‘I’ – you will know what to do” is excellent. But if there is little time to wait and listen try the mantra I based on grade school fire drills. **\*STOP!** Don't let the thinking mind keep running on. Be silent. “*Silence calms the fear through which the ego exists (Robert Sardello).*” **\*DROP** the reactive energy. Recognize if the body is tightening up. Exhale and let go... Let energy flow so you can **\*ROLL** free. Just as rolling over on the floor can extinguish flames, we turn a suffering situation into liberation. When we STOP, we are no longer preoccupied with the small self and its clinging energy. We DROP it and open into empty space. Emptiness is not a void. Emptiness is vibrant presence to what is. Emptiness offers space for loving kindness and compassion so buddha nature lives itself through us. The rainbow buddha body shines.

Please honor your unique awakening. Hongzhi has this advice: **“How many arrive here, but hesitate to proceed.”** *Continuous practice realization is not easy. The pull of ego habits is strong. We need support to go deeper. So, we study the self with tenderness and humor. Perhaps you know the saying “Life is like an onion; we peel off layer after layer and sometimes we weep.* Hongzhi advises: **Before your awakening is complete, do not create problems. Just now, step by step, realize enduring peace...** (Religious Verses, 59)

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CHANT TO END STUDY and METTA SUTRA for noon service. Most of us are familiar with the short form of offering loving kindness, to ourselves, to those we especially care for, to those we find difficult and to all beings. I'm so glad I joined Toku Cynthia Scott's month of Metta. Cynthia integrated lines from the Sutra into each day of Metta practice with sensitive insights and questions to ask ourselves. It was a powerful practice. NOTE: Now Toku will offer this zoom Metta practice each Monday from 8-8:15. There is no fee; you can drop in any Monday. Do consider the invitation. Especially since our morning zazen will not start up again till Sept. 3. **METTA FLIER //ZOOM LINK** by contacting [www.winterskydharma.org](http://www.winterskydharma.org). /Click on classes and practice for information.

*After the sutra, Hokyo Ellen will lead us in a blessing before our meal. During your lunch break please work with the questions on the reverse of the Metta Sutra. They can guide you through personal study of your own ways of knowing, waking up and then showing up.*

*Do the 3 bows before sitting..... pause. Doan intones the chant. After, we stand, face the altar and DOAN intones MEAL BLESSING. Informal exit.*

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION DURING LUNCH**

1. Which Buddha Family or Families were evident in your early life? How about now?
2. How does this dominant family's way of knowing get obstructed by the limits and habits of your ego? Example? Another family's obstruction in you?
3. Can you recall a kensho – a brief or longer experience of awakening - when you awoke to your freer, bigger self? Were you able to live it then? Now?
4. Do you trust that your true whole self (i.e. buddha nature) can arise out of a suffering situation? Example?
5. Other reflections....

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### **2:30 PREPARATION FOR PERSONAL PRACTICE CREATING YOUR RAINBOW BODY**

The rainbow is an ancient symbol of connecting heavenly realm with the Earth. The story of Noah seeing a rainbow as a sign of a covenant from a Father God is different from most of the symbolism in earlier cultures. In Australia the Rainbow Serpent Goddess made the world and gives birth to all the people. A similar Rainbow Goddess, Oya of the Yoruba African people, created all the elements of the Universe. Devotion to Oya is also in Haiti and Cuba. Iris is the earliest Greek Rainbow Goddess. She was more important than the later Olympians. And in China the rainbow is the Great "Tai Ch'i" uniting yang and yin energies (*Barbara Walker. The Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects, 349.*) Buddhist monks crossed the Himalayas into Tibet and China absorbing Asian views and symbols uniting heaven and Earth. This is my guess about how the rainbow came to symbolize buddha nature both visible and invisible.

During this time of personal practice review your lunchtime reflections to find a way to express the colors and wisdoms of your rainbow body to express the 4<sup>th</sup> vow: "Buddha's Way is Unsurpassable – and I am called to embody it." Find a way to honor your rainbow way of knowing – what do you see or say or do to help the world awake? You can also express gratitude for those you know whose life expresses one or more of the buddha families. Where do you see Padma, Vajra, Karma or Ratna energy in the world? Use the 4 colors of yarn however you'd like to blend the colors and weave your rainbow. Wear it if you'd like. Downstairs there are markers and colored paper and scissors for you to use. You can write- a poem or story or of the different rainbow families you display. Or a story of the astonishing adventures of your unique droplet. If it feels best to remain silent, ring a bell and we will sit with you in silence.