

## THE GIFT OF ZAZEN IS ILLIMITABLE

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Talk given by Paravrtti Doralee Grindler Katonah one week after the murder of George Lloyd, May 25, 2020  
Valley Streams Zen Sangha

We hear the teachings - the life of the bodhisattva is to sit upright in stillness in the middle of the fierce flames of suffering. We vow to refrain from all evil and We vow to live and be lived for the benefit of all beings. Well, here we are! I am asking myself, how do I do this now!

**Our nation is ablaze**; First there is the CV and all the ways in which are lives are already changing in challenging ways with this highly contagious invisible virus with no vaccine which...it turns out is not the great equalizer – no one should die of this virus – yet 60% of people dying of the CV are African American; since the stay in place orders resulting in many businesses closing and many service jobs halting, 25% of the American population are unemployed and I'm not one of them. When I sit Zazen I hear a voice – the Earth is crying. Biologist say that the extinction rate of plants and animals is between one thousand and ten thousand times the natural rate. The cause is human greed.

And now, **the reality of the murder**, some will say lynching, of George Lloyd, a handcuffed Black man screaming that he can't breathe while a white Policeman continues to choke him to his death and 3 other cops just standing there! The piercing pain of hearing George Lloyd's last cry out to his mother, just before he died. And George Lloyd is not the only Black man killed by police when there is no justifiable reason as if there is a justifiable reason to kill- just several months ago it was Ahamud Arbery and the list is too long. Maybe some part of you is saying, I don't want to hear this again! When I see the video again and again I am overcome with nausea – I want to run away from the TV not to see this again. I can't stand it; this is horrible; unthinkable.

And yet we have to continue on – but how?

The flames are all around us; major cities all over the country.

How do I sit in this 400- year old fire of racism? and face the mirror that reflects back to us revealing how we participate!

**But we need to back up:** Our vow is to **sit upright in stillness** in middle of the flames of suffering. This is about bringing something to the suffering, a quality of presence, an expression of compassion and kindness, a wisdom of response that relieves suffering.

Tenshin Reb Anderson (Senior Dharma Teacher at the San Francisco Zen Center) ...

says: **The problem is that we are afraid to suffer.**

There are so many ways in which automatically we turn away – we don't even know we are doing it. Everyday my white privilege protects me and offers me a life of relative safety in which I don't even have to think 'is this neighborhood is safe', or I better be careful when I go birding because someone may call the police on me (like Christian Cooper), or maybe it isn't safe to go jogging because I may be killed ( like it was for Amaud Arbery) or even I may someday be arrested it would never occur to me that I could be murdered (like George Floyd). We may try to minimize the problem or we may choose to remain silent, not speak out when we see suffering that is the result of racism.

**We are afraid to suffer!** What does this mean? Just this is something to sit with and wonder about.

But the irony is that turning away or our clinging to fear **is our suffering** because we become lost...we've lost our connection to the world, to humanity

Because –as Dogen says: “our true self is living out a life connected to all things.”

David R. Loy (scholar and author of *Ecodharma – Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*, 2018) says:

“ Buddhism is not about avoiding suffering but about being transformed by it.”

**Through our Practice of Not Turning Away:**

Greed is transformed into generosity;

Clinging to a false sense of separate self is transformed into compassion;

Our hatred and aggression is transformed into loving kindness;

Our delusion is transformed to the freedom that arises in our capacity to be wholeheartedly engaged, moment to moment, in the liberation of all beings.

**This is the awakening of our Buddha nature –**

**So this is the call - for us to be engaged in the training for transformation – to cultivate our capacity for compassion and wholehearted engagement in this crisis of the world.**

Joanna Macy says: **COMPASSION MEANS TO “SUFFER WITH.”**

the capacity to live from compassion awakens a larger self, our hearts open and our capacity to care, to love opens us **even more to the rich illimitable world.**

**What’s happening now all over the world and right now in our nation, we cannot turn away. We cannot remain silent; we cannot split and make the issues be over there.**

**LET’S BEGIN OUR TRAINING TOGETHER AGAIN:**

1. **When we sit zazen – we begin with our breath, with the invitation to open our awareness with alert attention to whatever comes.**
2. **Right now this means beginning with self-compassion – to allow our own suffering to arise and be felt – maybe it is anxiety about paying the rent, or the separateness some of us may feel because we**

can't hug our grandchildren, to our rage about our society that kills black people for no reason. The rage, the despair, the overwhelm, the need to blame, or our need to turn away. A friend said to me today: I'm so stunned and overwhelmed I can't find my voice. **We must begin with self-compassion to bring a tenderness and self-love to how we each are suffering now.**

3. **Now we are able to settle deeper into our Zazen.** Beginning with self-compassion –begins to open our hearts allowing us to settle deeper into our zazen.
4. **Now Remember our practice invites us to sit at the pivot.** At this open pivotal edge There is all that is arising in our conditioned lives right now and there is the stillness always present, where the Buddha activity lives. This stillness that is always present is always present – even when it hasn't registered in our consciousness.
5. **Living at this pivot is a matter of faith.** We sit open in the wellspring of life and 'do nothing' not trying to get anywhere. Here begins our faith a kind of promise we are given in the sutras. We practice sitting in full awareness, full alertness at this pivotal edge. And then something happens. **Zazen does itself. Everything we need is already available. Stillness is the always present offering.**
6. **I often go back to the Prajna Paramita Sutra of 8,000 lines.** Mythology tells is that this Sutra was discovered by Nagarjuna somewhere between 200BC and 200AD (a teaching of the Buddha held at the bottom of the ocean until the people were ready to receive it). This sutra is considered the beginning of Mahayana Buddhism.

This sutra reveals the truth of emptiness and the interconnectedness of all beings and the path of the Bodhisattva became the realization of this truth – that there is no individual liberation; until all beings are enlightened, no being is enlightened and we vow to live for the enlightenment of all beings through transmitting this wisdom through our living compassion.

7. I love this sutra because the teachings reveal characteristics of this Stillness. **ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS STILLNESS WHERE THE ACTIVITY OF THE BUDDHA MIND AWAKENS IS: ILLIMITABLE**

**ILLIMITABLE** – cannot be limited, boundless, infinite. Timeless..space! like a diamond – cannot be limited, cannot be destroyed, cannot be reduced to something less. No matter what! No matter how many times we try to stop ourselves from growing. No matter how many crises in the world arise. Wisdom is like space, endless, infinite. This truth of the Tatagathas is **illimitable**.

**And most important is that in this Illimitable Stillness where the Buddha activity happens - nothing is left out!!!! Everything we need is always available to us for Wisdom to express through us.**

8. **SELF-INQUIRY-** Now that we are resting in this Illimitable Stillness we can open to the wisdom of the **ROUND MIRROR** reflecting back to us truths about ourselves. **We need to be asking the question – how am I participating in this crisis of 400 years of racism? In Zazen we can turn to this question from a place of openness and tenderness.**

What I've learned is that there is a round mirror that reflects back something I need to see about myself or the situation I'm in. This reflection is compassionate because it arises from the ground of stillness where the reflection is gentle but it is the truth – we recognize it is true (not just in our minds but we feel the truth) and the truth sets us free... (like when I thought of saying something to my daughter that I believed was kind and sincere and then in my zazen I felt the aggression that was in my voice tone and I recognized this as true).....and now I can respond more skillfully.

These reflections we can invite in our practice - like how is my white privilege blinding me to the suffering in the AA community? What is this fear in me about losing my comfort zone?

9. **Bodily discomfort as training of Compassion:** Compassion for the world begins with our bodily discomfort and leads to an empathic imagination that cultivates compassion for the world.

Trevor Noah – a commentator who gave an amazing talk yesterday –He commented on how so much emphasis, after the murder of George Floyd which led to protests all over the country, became focused on the looting and reactions such as anger, visceral distain and unease towards the looters who were trashing Target and other businesses. He invites us to stay with this unease in our bodies – not our judgment or analysis projected outwards towards the looters but rather to stay with the bodily sensations of visceral distain or unease or anger and then imagine what it must be like for African Americans who watch themselves being looted everyday. Police in America are looting Black Bodies every day because of the color of their skin – and then wonder why this looting got to you so much. Imagine you were them experiencing the societal contract of the right for protection from harm broken every single day.

**He's offering a way to train in compassion.**

Today in my Zazen I was given a snapshot flash from the TV yesterday - Seeing one of the leaders of the protest in Minnesota – I think it was Saturday night and the group was marching to the next Police Station. A reporter was attempting to interview this leader as they were walking fast. At first the leader graciously paused to respond to the questions but soon it became clear that the questions were in a way a distraction related to the looting. He proclaimed this is a peaceful walk and then he pulled up his mask and turned with fierce determination and marched. He gave himself totally to this walk this march for justice – Like a Lion's Roar – I felt that nothing will pull him off this deep intention – as this arose in my Zazen I felt the gift of his determination and a deep desire to cultivate this courage in my walk. The Lion's Roar.

THE LION'S ROAR OF MARCHING FOR JUSTICE

So this talk is an invitation to all of us to RETURN TO THE STILLNESS  
OVER AND OVER AGAIN –

**ENDING:** We can't waste time – our world is in crisis, this is our call to quicken our practice to sit in the wellspring of life, in the illimitable stillness where wisdom lives.

**With self-compassion we need to turn to our self- inquiry –** and a cultivation of a compacity for a commitment to stand up for justice, to an increased capacity to look at our white privilege, to cultivate compassion for situations that challenge us to come out of our comfort zones and our limited views.

Our practice to rest in this illimitable stillness and space is training us to wholeheartedly respond with compassion, with ethical integrity, with the gifts of generosity, with the hard work of demanding justice for everyone in these moments of our lives now. In this stillness is everything that is needed to become available to bring liberation to the flames of suffering.

*The Prajna Paramita Sutra in 8,000 lines.*

Chapter 1

*Preliminary Admonition*

“Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith!  
Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints!  
Listen to the Perfect wisdom of the gentle Buddhas,  
Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended.” p.9

