

## *How to refrain from disparaging the three treasures*

**All our ethical principles** point to the meaning of awakening mind. The “three treasures” are three inseparable parts of awakening mind: the *soil* of awakening, the *seeds* of awakening, and the *gardeners* of awakening.

What is the *soil* of awakening? We could call it the nature of mind. It is the ability of our mind or mental activity to learn how to live in harmony with all others, for the benefit of all others. This ability is not something that “I” alone create; it is an inheritance from our ancestors and our teachers. Our ancestors are all those who have given us this body. Our teachers are those who teach us our ethical principles — those who teach us the way of awakening.

What are the *seeds* of awakening? We could call them learnings, or the causes and conditions for learning. When we practice the way of awakening, whatever happens and everything that comes to us are learnings, or the causes and conditions for learning. In other words, when we practice our ethical principles, all of reality becomes the causes and conditions for learning how to live for the benefit of all others.

Who are the *gardeners* of awakening? We could call them our community. They are everybody who is practicing the way of awakening with us, and everybody who gives us support as we practice our ethical principles. Even those who are intentionally cruel to us are supporting us if their activity provides the causes and conditions for learning, thereby deepening our practice of the way of awakening. When we find that we are completely practicing the way of awakening, we will find that all beings are completely supporting our practice, and our practice is completely supporting all beings.

The three treasures are inseparable from each other and inseparable from us. They are our deepest commitment and our fullest potential as living beings. How can we refrain from speaking or acting in any way that would disparage or diminish the awesome power of these three inseparable treasures?

### **1. NOTICE HOW YOU DIMINISH THE THREE TREASURES**

First, we see and acknowledge how we have disparaged or diminished the three treasures in our way of feeling, thinking, speaking, or acting. We disparage and diminish the three treasures whenever we imply that the three treasures do not matter, or whenever we imply that that the three treasures can be separated into “this” and “that” — these that matter and those that do not matter.

We disparage the *soil* of awakening when we imply that our teachers do not matter, or that our teachers matter but students do not matter; or when we imply that no living beings have the ability to realize awakening, and thus they do not matter, or that some living beings have the ability to realize awakening but other living beings do not have this ability, and thus they do not matter; or when we imply that there is something outside the nature of mind that matters but the nature of mind does not matter; or when we imply that the nature of mind matters but there is something outside it that does not matter; and so on.

We disparage the *seeds* of awakening when we imply that learnings do not matter, or that some learnings matter but other learnings do not matter; or when we imply that what happens in this moment does not matter, or when we imply that what happens in some moments matters but what happens in other moments does not matter; or when we imply that what happens in this place does not matter, or when we imply that what happens in some places matters but what happens

in other places does not matter; or when we imply that causes and consequences do not matter, or that some causes and consequences matter but others do not; or when we imply that causes are separate from consequences, and thus causes matter but consequences do not, or vice versa; and so on.

We disparage the *gardeners* of awakening when we imply that our community does not matter, or that some members of the community matter but others do not; or when we imply that there is a fixed boundary separating our community, which matters, from something outside our community, which does not matter; or when we imply that not all members of the community are practicing the way of awakening together; and so on.

## **2. ATTUNE TO THE SUBTLETY AND INTIMACY OF THINGS**

Second, having noticed how we have disparaged or diminished the three treasures, we practice changing our mental activity so that we can appreciate more of the subtlety and intimacy of all things. All the ways of disparaging and diminishing the three treasures are consequences of our unskillful and ignorant mental activity.

The reality of life is very subtle and intimate, more subtle and intimate than we can comprehend. Our opportunity to attune to the reality of life is “closer than we can imagine, more profound than we can imagine, easier than we can imagine, more wondrous than we can imagine.” At the same time, attuning to this subtlety and intimacy can be a slow process because reality is always changing and our mental activity is often out of tune — sometimes very out of tune.

Our mental activity is often out of tune because it continuously fabricates a simulated reality, an internally coherent imaginary world that is like a musical tapestry woven from our expectations, desires, and memories. Whenever we are paying attention, our mental

activity monitors patterns of light and sound and heat and pressure; it rapidly compares those patterns to our expectations, desires, and memories; it weaves selected patterns into our own simulated reality; and it attempts to choose the best way of feeling, thinking, speaking, and acting. But when our expectations, desires, and memories are too crude, our simulated reality will be out of tune, and consequently our way of feeling, thinking, speaking, or acting will be unskillful. We may feel unnecessarily distressing feelings, such as chronic fear, anger or shame. We may think or speak unhelpfully distorted thoughts, such as disparaging the three treasures. We may act in ways that cause harm, such as killing, stealing, lying, abusing sexuality, or intoxicating mind and body of self or others. These are symptoms that our mental activity is out of tune with the subtlety and intimacy of all things.

The three treasures are the resources that our mental activity can use to tune itself. Our mental activity has the innate ability to learn to attune itself to the reality of life; within distorted and ignorant mental activity is the potential for self correction *the soil of awakening* . When we trust and cultivate this innate ability to learn, all causes and conditions are transformed into new learnings *the seeds of awakening* . When we share our learnings among others who are trusting and cultivating their innate ability to learn, we build a community of learning across generations of living beings *the gardeners of awakening* .

### **3. HONOR TEACHERS, REALITY, AND COMMUNITY**

Third, having noticed how we have disparaged or diminished the three treasures, and having acknowledged that we need to attune to the subtlety and intimacy of things, we honor the three treasures by continuously practicing **all our ethical principles** in our way of feeling, thinking, speaking, and acting.

We honor teachers by taking refuge in the *soil* of awakening. In other words, when we trust and cultivate the nature of mind, our teachers are present. This does not mean that our teachers are absent before we take refuge; it means that we can truly meet and honor our teachers only when we take refuge in the nature of mind, which is our ability to live in harmony with all others, for the benefit of all others. Cultivating the nature of mind by continuously practicing all our ethical principles is like seeing our teachers and bowing to them in deep respect and gratitude.

We honor reality by taking refuge in the *seeds* of awakening. In other words, continuously investigating causes and conditions and consequences is respecting the reality of life. We have learned that all our feeling, thinking, speaking, and acting occurs due to causes, conditions, and consequences; therefore, we continue deepening our understanding of causes, conditions, and consequences for the benefit of all others. Exhaustively studying reality is the ultimate meaning of honoring reality.

We honor community by taking refuge in the *gardeners* of awakening. In other words, when we acknowledge that we are inseparable from all others who are practicing the way of awakening, our community is present. This means that only when we acknowledge and participate in our community will the way of awakening be fully realized. “We are completely independent while at the same time we are fully part of the community. So, how can we actualize both sides of our lives within one action? This is really the basic point of our lives.” Going beyond any separation between individual and community is completely honoring community.

Once we take refuge in the three treasures and vow to realize the way of awakening, we become alert to those moments when we violate our ethical principles. When a violation occurs, we acknowledge our violation, we study the causes and conditions, and we decide how to

change our feeling, thinking, speaking, and acting so that as much as possible we may prevent any violations in the future. We prescribe ourselves a regimen of practice that will gradually change our feeling, thinking, speaking, and acting. In this way, our ethical principles become evolving patterns that help us to harmonize with the subtlety and intimacy of things and to support and protect all beings. We endlessly refine our mental activity; in response, our ethical principles endlessly deepen and expand.

### SOURCES

This guide to how to refrain from disparaging the three treasures was rendered by Nathan Strait [nathanstrait.com](http://nathanstrait.com) on the 6th of March of 2015. It is a meditation on the tenth grave precept of **the ethical principles of bodhisattvas**. The writing was inspired by Reb Anderson's book *Being Upright: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts*, Berkeley: Rodmell Press, 2001; and by Norman Fischer's book *Taking Our Places: The Buddhist Path to Truly Growing Up*, San Francisco: Harper, 2003. The words "closer than we can imagine..." are a traditional Tibetan saying recounted in Tara Brach's book *True Refuge*, New York: Bantam, 2012. The words "We are completely independent..." are from Shohaku Okumura's book *Realizing Genjōkōan: The Key to Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010.