

The Cultivation of Trust

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Trust is an issue that many of us struggle with. One of the most helpful teachings I have heard on this topic is one given by Rev. Master Koten Benson of the Vancouver Priory when he was addressing the monastic community at Shasta Abbey: **Trust is an activity.** Trust is not a given that some people have and others don't. Like meditation, compassion, patience, or mindfulness, it is an activity, a process, an active virtue (for lack of a better word) which we can develop and cultivate through training. And it is something we can work on in each moment of our lives, growing what is an essential attitude of mind and heart for deepening our training.

Sometimes it is easy to become preoccupied with how much progress we are making in training, which can lead to discouragement and doubt. I find it helpful to remember that in Soto Zen the emphasis is on process rather than goal. In fact, as Great Master Dogen taught, the Path is the Goal, training is enlightenment. So rather than set up in our minds the opposites of delusion (“where I am”) and enlightenment (“where I'm not”), simply get on with walking the path of training, which is itself enlightenment. Think of enlightenment not as a static state to be achieved— an end and thereby a lifeless ending—but rather as the process of enlightening. **Training = Enlightening**—oneself and, by natural extension, others. Rev. Master Jiyu's frequent reminder from *The Scripture of Great Wisdom* is relevant here: always going on, always becoming Buddha.

Also, be careful not to judge oneself for having doubt. Another teaching from Rev. Master Jiyu I find helpful is, “That which understands error is not itself in error” (*Zen is Eternal Life*, chapter 6). Seeing and acknowledging that we are not trusting is the first step in converting that energy. Try to look at such occasions as the opportunities for cultivating trust. Doubt is simply a mental energy/condition arising within ourselves which, because of past experience of hurt and distrust, needs our help and love. Yes, we may need to look and understand how this doubt arose and forgive ourselves and others for creating or giving in to a situation which caused mistrust, but now is a new moment when we have the opportunity to be different and change ourselves. Yes, it takes time, but just as water gradually wears holes in rocks one drop at a time, don't underestimate the effort of trusting now.

These opportunities arise endlessly throughout each day of our lives of training. We may not consciously recognize the following situations as times for trust or consider them to be significant, but give the process a chance. Remember the water and the rocks. And we each have the choice—there's freedom in every moment—as to whether we move ahead or remain stuck. As the Buddha taught, there is no fixed, unchanging self. Each of us is this constant flow of energies which we influence through our volition or will—the willingness to look up—in each moment.

So, to start with, can we trust that meditation just might truly be useful, at least enough to get us to our meditation sitting place each day? Can we begin to trust the instruction that all we need do is to allow our thoughts and feelings—the contents of our mind—to just arise and pass away, to “let go” of our hold on our own mind? Can we trust that it is OK for anything, even terrible memories or fears, to arise, and that they cannot fundamentally hurt us? Can we trust the deep, however dimly perceived, sensed intuition that there is Something other than this small, insignificant self called “me,” and that we can get in touch with It through meditation and training? Can we trust enough to try and keep trying, again and again? Can we trust enough to

ask for help from those with more experience when we feel we're getting nowhere? Can we trust enough to try to follow their advice? Can we trust enough not to give up, no matter what?

Can we begin to make those small efforts of mindfulness or every-minute meditation in our seemingly mundane activities throughout the day? Can we begin to find ways to pause for just a moment to be still, to recite the Three Refuges, to follow the breath, or to ask for guidance from "the still, small voice"? Can we begin to trust that the Precepts are worth attempting to keep, to consider that they are more than moral, and perhaps outdated, regulations for behavior, that they might just possibly indeed be descriptions of enlightened actions? Can we begin to trust that the Dharma of the Buddha and the great Ancestors of our tradition (Dogen, Keizan, Bodhidharma, to name a few) is worth the time spent both studying and applying it to our lives? Can we trust that the teachings of the contemporary Masters of our tradition, such as Rev. Master Jiyu, can provide real and reliable guidance, even in this complex modern world? Can we begin to hold fast to the possibility that the teachings of our Serene Reflection lineage can actually take us all the way to enlightenment, that they are enough, and that we can stop searching elsewhere for something more?

Can we begin to commit ourselves to training with others, such as at the Priory, enough to be counted on for helping not only with needed tasks and community work days, but also simply by our presence at meditations and services—a gift of example and faith? Can we begin to share the wealth of our time and other resources so that the temple and our Order may continue their work? Can we begin to discern the value of being reliable at temple activities, even when we don't feel like going? Can we begin to open our personal lives to those of others and share their joys, successes, disappointments, and sorrows? Can we extend a helping hand to those in need?

Can we begin to relinquish the greed for more and learn to be content? Can we learn to release anger's hold on our minds and practice all-acceptance, patience, and understanding? Can we trust enough to let go of our own ideas, opinions and ideals and our fears, worries and past hurts—all that we cling to and define as "our self"—and work with others to live from the place of the Greater Self, which is the source all peace and joy and love? Can we be patient with others as they try to do this too? Can we trust the Teachings enough to stop judging ourselves and begin to relinquish the fear that we might just not be a bad person if we stopped hitting ourselves over the head with the two-by-four of guilt and self-judgment? That the teachings on the inherent purity of our Buddha Nature just might be true? And not only for us, but with regard to all those around us? Can we begin to trust that "all things are perfectly resolved in the Unborn," as Zen Master Bankei in the 17th century expressed it, that it is enough to do our meditation and practice and entrust the rest to the Eternal Buddha?

Each moment of thought and experience such as these provides the opportunity to cultivate trust. These are only some of the "dull, foolish, and unpretentious" acts mentioned in *The Most Excellent Mirror-Samadhi* which lead to our becoming one with the Eternal. Each of us can most likely find others in our own experience of training that provide "grist for the mill." Such small acts repeated over and over again grow the deep trust that stands us in good stead when we come face to face with impermanence on a grand scale: death, disaster, disappointment, sorrow, suffering. Remember, taking refuge in the practice, which is what we've been describing here, is enlightenment itself. Training, walking the Path, is the true solace and peace, Nirvana, the ever-compassionate, ever-loving, ever-enfolding Unborn, Undying, Uncreated, and Unchanging.