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with even in a hundred thousand myriad kalpas.
Now we can see and hear it. We can remember and accept it.
I vow to make the Buddha's Truth one with myself.*

Talk 1: Recited Scriptures and Our Practice

The Scripture on the Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata, one of the core scriptures of our Tradition, begins like this

*The World-Honored One (**the Buddha**), then desiring to reiterate
the Teaching's meaning, spoke thus in verse:
Since I have realized Buddhahood, the aeons through which I have passed
are immeasurable hundreds of thousands of millions of billions.
Continuously have I voice the Dharma, teaching untold billions of beings
how to turn their hearts around that they might enter the Buddha's path.*

The Buddha himself says it—he **continuously voices the Dharma**! So what is “voicing the Dharma”? For our purposes here it is speaking the Dharma, or chanting (which is often defined as “sung speech”) the Dharma, or acting in accord with the Dharma in our daily lives. Rev. Master Jiyu built on the Buddha's example, leaving us a legacy that helps us take our meditation practice right from our sitting place into all aspects of daily life. Reverend Master Jiyu's liturgical legacy—of **Scriptures, Sutras, Verses** - all of this supports our practice and encourages our fuller participate in what she called “the Ceremony of Daily Life”. In this and the next two talks I hope to address how this liturgical legacy supports us in our practice.

Recitation of scriptures and verses is not limited to being a monk at Shasta Abbey or on retreat. This is a practice that fits the monastery, the home, the office, school, hospital and recreation area. Whether a lay person or a monk we all have the opportunity to bring greater commitment, mindfulness, gratitude and kindness to our daily practice. As a lay person I found that one of the most helpful moments in a busy day in Silicon Valley traffic day was the opportunity to recite the *Invocation of Achalanatha* at the 3-minute long stoplights along the San Tomas Express.

This is a practice for all people, in all places.

Reciting scriptures in our tradition—speaking them aloud—is an essential part of our practice. The scriptures and verses we recite throughout our day become our meditation cushion away from our seats. We act as a Buddha when we keep the Precepts. And we act as a Buddha when we give voice to the Dharma.

Recitation throughout our day continuously brings us back to our meditation cushion, even the recitation of a single word. We stop. We return to the “temple of our own heart”, just as we might go to the Meditation Hall. To stop to recite a verse, a mantra, even a short phrase, is to come back to our sitting place.

Recitations of a longer scriptures are an acts of mindfulness. Recitations of the short verses can help us strengthen awareness in our daily activities. They can open and deepen our experience of simple acts which we often take for granted. When we focus our mind on the verse, we return to ourselves and become more aware of each action.

What do I do when the phone rings? Is it a bell - inviting me to deeper meditation and awareness? What needs to be done right now? What is happening right now? What is the verse that might be helpful in this very situation? At this very moment?

Recitation is a means of bringing together body and mind. It is a means of putting thoughts into our body - embodying them - using breath, vocal chords, tongue, lips, and ears. Recitation is the means we have of expressing charity, tenderness, benevolence sympathy, Dharma through our lungs, throat and mouth.

Recitation is an act of commitment to our practice, actually saying something out loud, and hearing ourselves say it, perhaps listening to others. We act as witnesses for ourselves and for others when we do this. This is one expression of making a vow - “...I vow to make the Buddha’s Truth one with myself...” in this very real embodied way.

Recitation strengthens our connection with our own Buddha Nature as we give voice to the descriptions and reflections of - Buddha Nature. That’s what the scriptures give us.

Recitation is an act of faith. As it says in *The Scripture on the Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata* ‘...for the Buddha’s Words are true, not something that is empty and vain...’

The same Scripture continues “...I know at all times whether a sentient being is treading the

Path or walks in other ways, and according to what needs to be done to aid that one, voice teachings of various kinds, making for each this my intention: 'how may I help this being enter the Unsurpassed Way and quickly realize Buddhahood...'” This is the fundamental expression of the Bodhisattva Vow.

Recitation is a means we have to give vocal energy to Truth, bringing our uninterrupted meditation to life in both senses of that phrase. Recitation is a means we have to express gratitude. How can we not offer merit for all beings? Recitation is a means we have of strengthening our own practice, wherever we are, in whatever situations we find ourselves.

Tradition starts the day with a meditation period. And that first meditation period concludes with the *Kesa Verse*:

*How great and wondrous are the Clothes of Enlightenment,
Formless and embracing every treasure.
I wish to unfold the Buddha's Teaching,
That I may help all living things.*

This verse expresses our wish, not only to practice through the next 24 hours, but in that practice to fulfill the Bodhisattva Vow “...*That I may help all living things*”. Whether we put on a kesa or a wagesa or simply articulate the words, we set the tone for how we practice this one day - today.

We recite the *Three Refuges* at the end of the day, as *The Scripture of Brahma's Net* urges: “at night as you concentrate your mind, keep the Three Treasures in your thoughts...”. We take refuge in the Buddha. We take refuge in the Dharma. We take refuge in the Sangha, choosing to focus on the One True Thing as we go to sleep, letting go of the distractions of the day.

In between these bookends to our day there are so many opportunities for recitation in daily life, both the formal and informal.

We can organize our lives to have time to do formal recitations of Short Morning Service or the Surangama Litany, or say some part of the Mealtime Ceremonial before a meal. And we can bring our awareness to the times in our day when we have the opportunity to recite the less formal “long stoplight” kinds verses.

The formal Soto Zen scriptures and verses are rich resources for us, both to recite and to study. We are very lucky to have the traditional verses in English. This, too, is part of Rev. Master Jiyu's legacy. Her translations - and those of Rev. Master Hubert Nearman - make these texts much more accessible to us.

At Shasta Abbey we express gratitude when we recite the *Mealttime Ceremonial* in one form or another at each meal, and I know lay friends who start a meal at a restaurant with them, too. Whether in the more extended and formal *Mealttime Ceremonial* or in the shorter *Donors' Verse* and the *Five Thoughts* we have the opportunity to express our gratitude and our purpose for accepting this food.

The *Donors' Verse* says

*The two kinds of alms, material and spiritual,
have the endowment of boundless merit.
Now that they have been fulfilled in this act of charity,
both self and others gain pleasure there from.*

The *Five Thoughts* go on

*We must think deeply of the ways and means by which this food has come.
We must consider our merit when accepting it.
We must protect ourselves from error by excluding greed from our minds.
We will eat lest we become lean and die.
We accept this food so that we may become enlightened.*

We can also say the Donor's Verse when we receive anything, not just food. It's an acknowledgement of our gratitude and our connection to all beings: *...both self and other gains pleasure there from*. Similarly we can say the Five Thoughts when we receive a teaching, or a gift, or a hard and uncomfortable truth:

*...the ways and means this difficulty has come...
...can I consider my merit when accepting it...?
...can I protect myself from error by excluding greed from my mind?
...can I accept it lest I become lean and die (metaphorically or otherwise)?
...and can I accept this teaching so that I may become enlightened?*

When we sit to study the Dharma we recite the *Lecture Verse* as I did at the start of this talk.

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Even in a hundred thousand myriad kalpas.
Now we can see and hear it. We can remember and accept it.
I vow to make the Buddha's Truth one with myself.*

Here again, we have the opportunity to commit ourselves to deepen our practice as we *vow to make the Buddha's Truth one with myself.*

When we step into challenging situations the *Metta Sutra* or the *Loving Kindness Sutra* comes to hand. *May all beings be happy, peaceful, and free from suffering.* This goes a long way toward diffusing situations of difficulty, tension, and anger - whether outside me or in my own heart.

When we go shopping, or turn on the TV set or connect to the internet, or are in a situation where we've just "gotta have it" we have Venerable Heng Sure's VegSource Mantra:

I have enough. I am grateful. Share the blessing, BodhiSvaha

I have enough. I am grateful. Share the blessing, BodhiSvaha.

When we recite the *Surangama Sutra* we ask for help from the Buddhas and Ancestors. It is possible to organize our lives so that we can recite regularly the whole of the Scripture and we can also read small segments of it as is possible. I have come to value the following verses from ***The Surangama*** in my own practice:

Make known what needs to be known.

Tame those who would prolong pain. (p. 60 The Monastic Office)

or

To all that is difficult to look upon, Peace! (p. 67 The Monastic Office)

or

To the one who resists, Peace! (p. 68 The Monastic Office)

May you may find your own resonating mantras, verses and phrases as you recite this profound and subtle ***Surangama Litany***.

When we renew our commitment to the Bodhisattva Way of practice we recite the *Bodhisattva Vows*:

However innumerable beings may be, I vow to save them all.

However inexhaustible the passions may be, I vow to transform them all.

However limitless the Dharma may be, I vow to comprehend it completely..

However infinite the Buddha's Truth is, I vow to realize it.

That "all" - all beings, all passions, all Dharmas, all Truths - all of them start in the moment right in front of me in my day-to-day life. And whether monk or a lay person our practice is the practice of the Bodhisattva Vow. We're part of the Mahayana Tradition.

Dogen's *Rules for Meditation* offer a doorway into a much deeper understanding of our meditation practice. And I turn to the *Rules* when I find myself questioning or doubtful. "Why ARE training and Enlightenment differentiated?" "Why study the means of attaining it since the Supreme Teaching is free?" It helps me to realize that even Great Master Dogen had questions.

We strengthen our commitment to the Precepts and practice when we recite the *Shushogi*. It contains rich teaching on the Precepts, contrition and conversion, the Four Wisdoms, and gratitude. Whether the whole scripture or a single chapter or a short verse - this teaching is directly related to our daily life.

We turn the stream of compassion within when we recite the *Invocation of Achalanatha* (who, remember, is a manifestation of Great Compassion!). I will often recite "...*may I within the temple of my own hearts dwell amidst the myriad mountains,,,*" when I am pulled in too many directions by too many distractions.

There are times when a "simple" mantra is enough—sometimes familiar words like *Seek To Get Back On The Path (from the Parinirvana Scripture)*, repeated over and over again, give me encouragement. Other times untranslated words like the Mantra of Kshtigarbha speak to something that is deeper in my heart. *Om Ha Ha Ha Vismaye Svaha!*

Coming out of the drought in Northern California when I turn on the water faucet I very much appreciate "the ways and means" by which this water has come. Before turning on the engine of the car I'm taking on a trip, I prepare for my journey by reciting a verse for starting the car. I like one adapted from Ven Thich Nhat Hanh: *Before starting the car I know where I am going*. Or as I drive out the gate, I'll say the *Invocation for the Removal of Disasters*. There are so many opportunities for this kind of verse - **turning on (or off)** a light or a faucet or a computer, **cleaning** the bathroom or **clearing** the weeds - every single point in our day is our meditation cushion.

Reciting even a single word is a connection to our meditation practice - sometimes a simple *Help* is all I can manage, but it connects me with the Buddhas and the Ancestors. It connects me with my meditation cushion.

And sometimes, the only thing that's possible is *a simple breath*. Etty Hillesum, author of *An Interrupted Life*, observed: "...Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths..." simply making the space to return to the mind of meditation.

When we recite a Scripture, a Sutra, and Invocation, a Verse, that recitation resounds with a fundamental YES! YES! It is our intention to realize (make real!) the words we articulate. YES! We are committed to bring charity, tenderness, benevolence and sympathy, all forms of the Dharma into our “ceaseless practice”. YES, as Dogen says “...*the Great Enlightenment is synonymous with our tea and meals.*”

My teacher wrote on the back of my small kesa something I read each time I put it on. “...To become Buddha is to behave like Buddha...”. So, yes! it is my intention to “...continuously voice the Dharma...” . I invite you to consider strengthening your practice through engaging more fully with this part of Rev. Master Jiyu’s legacy.

In the coming week, perhaps you might pick one scripture or verse in our tradition to recite on a regular basis.

Or you might consider creating your own verse to recite in your day, for example:

- the verse of the problem I have right now*
- the verse of patience*
- the verse of burrs under my saddle*
- the verse of my commitment*
- the verse of my practice*

What impact does it have? How does this recitation support your practice?

*I offer the merit of this Dharma Talk for the benefit of all beings,
known and unknown, in need of merit.
Homage to the Buddha. Homage to the Dharma. Homage to the Sangha.*