

Conserve, Preserve, Respect & Revere:

Rev. Master Jiyu's Teachings on Care for the Environment as an Expression of Buddhist Practice

This writing arose from a meeting of monks at Shasta Abbey to consider how the monastic community might respond to the human contribution connected with the growing threat of climate change —our typical behavior and harmful habits which detrimentally affect all living things and the earth itself. We determined our response to be twofold, one being to conserve and take care with resources in our own temple and community, and two, to serve as a model for our lay congregation and to show how Buddhists might view and respond to these concerns. I offered to compile teachings on this topic by Rev. Master Jiyu from everyone who wished to contribute. My thanks to those who did. —Rev. Oswin

As people who meditate, our instinct is that environmental principles are part and parcel of the life of Buddhist practice. They are simply an aspect of how we live as Buddhists and express what we aspire to as an awakened way of life in harmony with all things. Great Master Keizan emphasizes this principle in the opening verse and chapter of the *Denkoroku*: “Upon seeing the morning star, Gautama became *Shakyamuni Buddha* when He was, is and will be awakened to His true self and said, says and will say, “I was, am and will be enlightened, together with the whole of the great earth and all its sentient beings, simultaneously.” There is no fundamental separation between ourselves and others, and this vibrant recognition is a vital aspect of training and enlightenment, bringing joy, contentment, peace, and gratitude.

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When I went searching for talks or lectures on these topics, I did not find many. I had expected to find some awesome talk on the environment by Rev. Master Jiyu. Consultation with other monks clarified that what she gave us essentially was the constant example, instruction, and direction for the ‘how’ that arose naturally out of or led to the ‘why’. Our current practices arise out of the intimate, intense, ‘hot-house’ community life with her as our teacher. Just living with a flesh-and-blood Zen Master with more experience and greater insight places one into the dynamic and sometimes difficult practice of awakening. She can point out places where we’re not seeing completely and not making the connection between our meditation and the Precepts, our actions of daily life, and the karmic consequences that flow therefrom. These pointings are how Rev. Master Jiyu instilled in those around her the Buddha way. While these particulars arose in the context of monastic practice, there is little that is specifically monastic about them.

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Our Soto Zen/Serene Reflection tradition that Koho Zenji Transmitted to Rev. Master Jiyu in Japan serves as the integral foundation for what we do today. While we can trace some of the specific practices back to the Buddha himself and subsequent teachers down the generations, especially Great Master Dogen, what is most important is the spirit with which we look at and examine our own minds and hearts, that place of insight and intention that then is reflected in our interactions with the world. Our

guiding lights are regular serene reflection meditation, the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, mindfulness in daily life, compassion, gratitude, and all-acceptance.

I will refer to Shasta Abbey, as it is the first monastery founded by Rev. Master Jiyu (in 1970) and a temple of our Order with which I am familiar. I spent 15 years of training with Rev. Master Jiyu as abbess from the mid-1980s until her death in 1996. I know that a similar process unfolded at other temples of our Order—I lived at one for 14 years—as her disciples and grand-disciples likewise established those places following their founders’ teaching carefully. So when I write ‘we’, I’m referring to the Shasta Abbey monastic community, and that community as it evolved over time, past and present.

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Rev. Master Jiyu showed us how to relate to the whole spectrum of life: plants, animals, the rest of the natural world, the physical fabric of our monastery and its land, each other, and other people. She taught us to conserve resources, preserve our natural environment, to take nothing for granted, and to respect all life—and inanimate life, too. She grounded her approach in the spirit of Soto Zen’s ‘attention to detail’ developed by Dogen in his teachings on every-minute meditation and strict attention to the ‘pure rules’ in his sequestered mountainous monastic setting. This keen mindfulness and respect morph into reverence, expressed by Keizan as ‘make a ceremony of everyday life.’ In titling one of her series of public lectures Rev. Master Jiyu expressed this teaching as ‘Sanctifying the Mundane’.

I’ve broken down these anecdotal examples into five categories: water, power, animals, plants, and inanimate objects, and then include a few of her writings that I hope tie them all together.

First, water, precious that it is and essential to all life. Three examples come to mind. The practice for taking showers consisted of wetting oneself, turning off the water, soaping up and washing, turning the water back on for rinsing—we’ve been doing that for years and continue to. Second, in the kitchen, after washing vegetables we carefully took the water outside to pour on trees or plants. In this we can see an early version of what is now called ‘greywater’. Third was an instance one summer when I was staying at the Berkeley Priory while Rev. Master Jiyu was also there. There were public drought concerns, and she asked all of us to take simple sponge baths rather than showering. There are many other examples that continue in present use at the monastery, such as low-flush toilets, and these were installed even though the temple is supplied by ample, pure water from a large aquifer at the base of Mount Shasta, which has the largest land mass of any mountain in North America! The scarcity of snowfall this past winter has called that abundance into question.

We conserved other resources as stringently—and still do. For heat we used whatever scrap wood we could find for woodstoves. Every summer when I was a novice, a small crew of monks would go up on Mount Shasta every day to harvest dead trees for cutting up later into firewood. One year we had off-cuts from a pencil factory and had less tree felling of our own to do—and the larger pieces we used to construct outdoor benches and picnic tables. In addition to gathering branches on the monastery grounds, we sought kindling in a similar manner. Nowadays we still cut some dead trees on the mountain and many local friends donate dead trees for felling and use. Over time we gradually upgraded our woodstoves in the smaller houses and installed high efficiency gasification boilers (they burn the gas produced from burning wood) for our largest buildings, the residence halls for monks and lay guests. Even with solar

panels for hot water and heating for these buildings and the kitchen, and a diversification of fuels—propane, kerosene, oil, and electric—we still use approximately 35 cords of wood each winter!

We were and are conservative with electric power as well. I can remember a senior monk reminding me to turn off the lights in the bathhouse which was used in common by meditation hall residents. A central focus of the training of novice monks living there is to learn *what as a human being do we actually need?* My senior went on to explain that Rev. Master Jiyu had taught the monks that we should not waste resources—for example, how much light do we need? Dogen gives a similar teaching in Rules for the Trainees Hall, quoting a Chinese master about ‘our being together in the same boat’ because of good deeds done in the past. Whatever resources we have in our ‘alms bowl’ today depends on past karma, and our individual and collective choices of today influence our circumstances in the future. The fruit of training, eventually full Buddhahood, depends on gathering the ‘two collections of merit and virtue,’ so instinctively we do not want to squander the merit of today. Merit is precious to come by, and we have no guarantee as to its future provision. And, equally important, the bountiful merit we enjoy today is not only not ‘ours’ to ‘possess’ and use selfishly, it provides the means which enable us to help others—the compassionate essence of the Bodhisattva vow. I would add that this teaching is perhaps obviously applicable for lay practice, too: do not all Buddhists want to take only what we need and give as much as we can?

This conservation at Shasta was taught down to the smallest level. Two monks related anecdotes about Rev. Master Jiyu commenting on the amount of toilet paper monks were using when using the bathroom toilet and on the small amount of scotch tape actually necessary for food labels in the kitchen. And she often had a used *Kleenex* tissue tucked in her sleeve for further use—she made them go as far as possible.

The list could go on almost endlessly. Sacristy helpers learn to cut up the stubs of incense sticks into smaller pieces to make granular incense. In recent years we’ve installed smaller water heaters in the private bathrooms and continue to make a practice of vigilantly turning off lights when not in use. One of our hermitages is powered completely off-the-grid. We use the reverse side of used office paper for photocopying and making notepads. In the laundry we minimize laundry soap, hot water, and dryers, and over time provided drying racks and solar dryers and installed high-efficiency washers. Like most people of few and modest means, we pass on hand-me-down clothing—vestments, robes, and other monastic clothing. In sewing our kesas (meditation robes) we assemble them from many small pieces of fabric in a patchwork pattern copying the kesas made from ‘waste-cloth’ of the first Buddhist monks. And we keep the spirit of the explanation offered by Ananda, the Buddha’s chief attendant, on how the monks would re-use a gift of 500 robes in successively smaller pieces. With us, worn-out robes become quilts and hand-woven rugs and mats (see photos), used towels become washcloths and bathmats, sheets and T-shirts become cleaning cloths, and finally whatever’s left is shredded for use as a filling in cat and dog beds. Other used clothing is given to thrift shops for sale or to homeless people in the area.

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Rev. Master Jiyu put much effort into teaching respect for animals and the Buddhist view that they have feelings and rights the same as humans. They are not inferior beings. We share this planet with them

as fellow travelers in the pilgrimage of life. In her early years as a teacher in the US she worked with the San Francisco Humane Society and appeared on television programs featuring pets and care for them. One program was ‘Mac & Mutley’, which featured Rev. Master Jiyu and her beautiful white rat Cedric.

Rev. Master Jiyu always had companion animals in her own house, and they were not always easy to care for, which became the training of the chaplains, her assistants. The monastery was also home to many other animal friends: rats, mice, cats, dogs, hamsters, chickens, geese, ducks, birds, fish—and goats! For many years we had a goat herd which provided most of our milk, and all of us regularly helped with milking. We gave homes to stray cats and dogs (and still do), and rescued animals—many of us as novices had pet rats of which the females lived together in a rat ‘condo’, a giant cage with enough cubbies and snuggeries that each rat could have her own apartment. Each Thanksgiving we would sponsor turkeys at an animal refuge in order to keep them from being slaughtered. For a time we also wrote letters to manufacturers to ask that they stop using animals in product testing. Many wild animals visited frequently in safety: raccoons (now seemingly replaced by possums), deer, birds, squirrels, occasional coyotes, bears (twice) and a mountain lion (once).

In 1980 the *Journal* published a special issue on Buddhism and Respect for Animals. Rev. Master Jiyu wrote a lengthy article called *The Buddhist’s Responsibility to Animals*, which we reprinted many times down the years. She writes,

The teaching of the Buddhist church is explicit on the subject of killing animals. All creatures love life and all life is sacred....All things possess the Buddha Nature and there is no thing to be called a Buddha Nature....All things must be treated with utter respect as manifestations of the life force of Buddha, whether animal or human. (pp. 2-3).

She goes on to describe the ever-increasing population of animals, the necessity of animal shelters, and the killing at shelters, animal pounds which are deemed necessary, and her solution:

The only really sure answer to the problem seems in educating the public in responsibilities to animals as well as humans. She challenges us, For it is the duty of every Buddhist and, I would imagine, every Christian also, to offer a home to at least one animal; this is surely the law of the Cosmic Buddha (page 7).

Accompanying this article was the animal ordination and funeral ceremony excerpted from the priest’s ‘secret papers’ given at Transmission. Rev. Master Jiyu wrote with great sincerity and strong feeling that she was making this short ceremony available to everyone, so that anyone could ordain their animal companion into the Buddha’s family by giving it the Three Refuges. Commenting on the ceremony, Rev. Master Jiyu goes on to elaborate on the issue of killing, acknowledging that we cannot but help to kill in order to live. She draws her main points from the Five Thoughts that is part of the mealtime ceremony. Although we kill—vegetables are living things, too—we endeavor through Buddhist practice to make our lives worthy of the life that was sacrificed for our benefit. And we sincerely reflect in gratitude on the many ways and means by which the food appears on the table before us.

On the monastery grounds we have planted numerous fruit trees and for many years had a large organic vegetable garden. We used manure from the goats or local friends' animals as fertilizer and mulched heavily to retain moisture in our dry climate's air. Care for all food is the hallmark of the kitchen, endeavoring to waste nothing. What is not edible or eaten goes back into the compost. Regarding food preparation, Rev. Master Jiyu eschewed food fads and emphasized the use of simple, whole ingredients. At the same time we make complete use of donated food, regardless of its 'quality', and many a meal relies on donations of unsaleable produce or 'seconds' from a local wholesale produce distributor. In Appendix 2 one of the present day chief cooks details our current practice, based on Dogen's Instructions to the Chief Cook (*Tenzo-kyokun*).'

We continue to give great care to flowers, trees, and other plants, both native and introduced. As we constructed the large buildings on the property, we transplanted trees when they were on a building site, and when they needed to be felled, the wood was turned into lumber or firewood. We constructed the cloister in such a way that we left as many trees as possible: the notches out of the roofs for trees too close to go around are still evident, and many of the trees are still living. We continue to use grass and woodchips as ground covers to minimize the dusty semi-desert environment at Shasta. We are also consulting local professionals about xeriscaping (landscape design incorporating water conservation), and greywater and water catchment systems. At our two hermitages, we manage the forests to optimize use and preservation. (see photos)

Rev. Master Jiyu's great empathy with living things extended as well to the sacristory altars. Basing her instructions on the teachings of Bodhidharma, the First Ancestor in China, she asked that we use artificial flowers or living plants on our altars in order to prevent the pain felt by plants when their 'feet' were cut off. And we always make use of cut flowers if they were given unknowingly; otherwise their sacrifice would have been in vain.

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Inanimate objects were not left out of our care for the world, both natural and fabricated. Rev. Master Jiyu continually taught us to repair things when we could and to use things no one else wanted. Rev. Master loved dolls, and an example of one she transformed was a rather sleazy mermaid who was in fact a radio—her nipples were the knobs. Rev. Master fixed her hair, designed a new gown sewn from a donated fancy evening velvet outfit, and essentially gave her a complete makeover. The doll became a lovely being who she kept for company next to her sickbed one summer in the last years of her life.

Rev. Master Jiyu once said in a public lecture that recycling was the greatest sign of a spiritual revival in the U.S. she had ever seen, because it taught to waste nothing and to make use of everything: everything is Buddha Nature; It permeates all. She also used recycling to teach the Buddhist principle of rebirth—whatever remains is not lost but returns in a new form, whether material, plant, animal, or human. Whatever cannot be reused is recycled, and with the help of our lay friends we regularly recycle paper, plastic, metal, glass, cardboard, *Tetra Pak*—anything that nearby cities' recycling centers will accept.

The spirit of recycling teaches as well compassion and the unity of all things. In contrast to our

predominant Western culture where evil is condemned and sinners “cast out into utter darkness,” Buddhism teaches that no matter who we are or what we’ve done, nothing is wasted. ‘Mistakes’ and poor choices are simply experiences to be learned from— ‘composted’ or ‘recycled’ —for the next opportunity, in this life or a further one. For Westerners, this attitude can sometimes be startling, in a good way. Buddhism’s emphasis on compassion is what brings many people to the Dharma—I know that was the case for myself. Yet it is not always easy to convert our old karma quickly. It can take a long time to train our guilt and judgmentalism into compassion and empathy—with all things and all circumstances—and learn to ask, what good can I make of this? And regardless of the time involved, no effort is ever in vain.

The monastery itself was fashioned by purchasing a motel at a reduced price. Part of it had been condemned to make room for Interstate 5, then under construction. (Sometimes we complain about the traffic noise, but I try to remind myself that the freeway’s existence made the monastery possible.) By linking the small cabins with a cloister and constructing the larger buildings we needed, a monastery was formed—not all at once, of course, but over the course of forty years. And it’s not finished: repair and maintenance are now the extern sacristy’s daily fare. We constructed the cloister from used lumber that the community was offered in exchange for tearing down dilapidated houses in the local area. Some of that lumber is still visible in the oldest stretches of cloister. Many people, lay and monastic may remember straightening nails from that lumber for further use. In building our recent Guest Office we incorporated lumber from trees cut down to make room for it, old bricks for the steps, varied leftover tiles donated by many people, and refurbished solar panels on the roof. (See photo)

Rev. Master Jiyu delighted in making things from something else, especially the unwanted. One example was the conversion of the Four Kings Lights in the Buddha Hall. At a point in the monastery history when we were recognized by the State of California Board of Education as a seminary, we were able to purchase the lights at a state property warehouse. They were standard institutional lights until creative monks removed crosses (so I was told) and added the strings of bells which are traditional in these sorts of hanging lights in Japanese Zen ceremony halls. (See photo) Other examples include constructing the kitchen’s bakery table from the wooden lane of a bowling alley and buying costume jewelry in thrift shops to decorate the Buddha Hall’s main statues of Bodhisattvas, traditionally ornamented with all the finery and jewelry of Indian royalty. Rev. Master Jiyu taught the monks to look at everything with the eye of Buddha—can we see its Buddha nature? What use can be made of this so that it does not go to waste unappreciated? She gave high praise to monks who would bring back items from the local dump across the freeway and make things from them. One monk in particular became so skilled at this that she used to give him a ‘shopping list’ when he was going over.

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In this excerpt on benevolence from the introductory collection of her lectures *The Roar of the Tigris*, Volume 1, Rev. Master Jiyu expresses in her own words many of the principles outlined here:

If you think about it, very few people realize that benevolence is a law of the universe. We never think about air—be grateful for it—until somebody has stuck too much pollution in it; then we complain about the pollution. We don’t give thanks for the fact that the air is there anyway. These are the reasons that you bow to your seat and you bow to the wall before and after meditation. If it wasn’t for the carpet and the floor, you would have no

place to sit; if it wasn't for the wall, you would have no place where to rest your eyes quietly while you meditate. It is not a benevolent act to look at the carpet and say it's dirty, or to look at the wall and say it's spotty.... Benevolence is the opposite of this: creating wise ways to help beings. In some respects, cleaning the carpet is a wise way to help beings. But at a later date, one must realize that it doesn't matter whether the carpet is cleaned at all. It's just a place to sit; it is, of itself, benevolent.

Benevolence is perhaps one of the most difficult of these four wisdoms—charity, tenderness, benevolence and sympathy-- to understand, for everything in nature is at all times helping beings, yet, man is usually unaware of the fact. The trees are helping us, the flowers help us, not just by their beauty and their shade, but by what they do to the air. Our children and our animals are helping us. What are we doing in return? The trees have given us wood upon which to sit. We've just taken them; we haven't thought that the tree lost its life to give it.

.....Benevolence is obvious in every single thing, even in things that humans have made—like the road out there, for example. The sun bakes it, the cars go up and down on it, the drunks and the dogs do various things on it, we walk on it, and it does the very best it can of being a road. Sometimes the strain is so great that it cracks, and then we have to be benevolent to it and mend it. Everything is doing the very best it can at all times to help us find the Unborn, and that is what makes it a law of the universe. So keep that well in mind. The road that you travel is one of the finest Bodhisattvas you've got: it is just being itself, the very finest road. Don't swear about its potholes; get out and mend them. If all you see of the road is its potholes, you will never see its Bodhisattvahood, and you will not understand this law of the universe.

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In her description of the benevolence of the road mentioned in the excerpt above, one monk pointed to another quality that can be cultivated in response to climate change: all-acceptance. In all-acceptance—'all' is a pretty encompassing word—we can view everything with the still, yet kaleidoscopic mind of meditation. This perspective leads directly to contentment and gratitude (and vice versa). It is in the calming of the passions of greed and hatred that we can find true peace. Rev. Master Jiyu taught us that 'all-acceptance is key to the gateless gate' of Zen—nirvana, Buddha nature, or That Which Is. She spoke of the necessity of curbing inordinate desire and its mate, violence, in *The Wild White Goose*, her diary of training in Japan:

Our present civilisation is founded on greed, on killing and plundering. I believe that we need to establish a different type of civilization run along the lines that the Buddha laid down based on his doctrine: a doctrine which teaches that greed, killing and plundering are wrong. One day there will be a civilisation under the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. My duty is to train myself and, when the opportunity arises to establish that civilisation, to do everything I can.

While Rev. Master Jiyu was constantly showing us where we could see more clearly and do better, she never lost sight—or let us lose sight—of 'the Important Thing, or 'the Great Matter'. All activities in our practice support that effort. In pointing in this last teaching to the root cause of many of our civilization's present day problems, she continues by highlighting the personal responsibility for

transformation that needs to underlie and accompany social change:

Just train myself and, in being ready, exhibit the world of the Buddhas in my own lifestyle that others may want to copy. The kingdom of the Buddhas can only be established by people like us. So we're the ones that have to do the training in order to bring about the civilisation of the Buddhas. We must change ourselves if we would change the world for we are the world."

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The offering of these teachings of Rev. Master Jiyu arose out of our community's concern regarding the human contribution to climate change. Without minimizing the value of other approaches or measures, I have tried to show how the monks' community at Shasta Abbey learned from Rev. Master Jiyu many of the environmental practices that continue to naturally flow from our meditation practice. They are not add-ons or peripheral to our training, and they are not based in idealism or on fear. One of the monastery's lay congregation who recently moved back to the area mentioned how much he appreciated the community being at ease in responding to contemporary issues without an emotional attachment to 'saving the world.' This comment underscores the importance of responding to any of the 'eight worldly winds' or 'distractions' — gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, elation and sorrow — from a place of strength, stability and stillness, all of which arise naturally as a result of regular meditation practice.

These sorts of details arise where meditation turns into the mindfulness of daily life, and they're inexorably linked to the Precepts, compassion, gratitude, and all-acceptance. Most, if not all, of the practices described here are activities that we as Buddhists, and especially as meditators, would want to be doing anyway, to the extent that we can. Recognizing our connection with others also brings joy — we do these things out of gratitude for the opportunity to train. Beyond right and wrong they are simply 'good' to do. The current possibility of climate change only makes the stakes higher and the human contribution more critical. Not paying attention and not responding in wise and compassionate ways multiply the karmic consequences for all concerned. And our fundamental compass, for small acts or grand ones, is our practice of Serene Reflection Meditation. Thank you, Rev. Master Jiyu.

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