

Trust and the Heart

Rev. Vivian Gruenenfelder

We are grateful to both the Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives and to Rev. Vivian for permission to reprint the following portion of her article, "Trust and the Heart." We encourage interested readers to see the entire article in the Winter 2003/04 Journal. © 2003 The Order of Buddhist Contemplatives]

It must certainly be true that sitting still is the ultimate act of trust. And it is easy to forget that the meritorious fruits of our meditation practice include joy and wonder....

....When we consider the issue of trust we usually think in terms of whether or not some person or situation or thing can be trusted....I had considered it a God-given right for myself, when in fact it was something I expected others to work hard to earn.

As human beings living everyday lives in the world it is important to reflect in this way: "Can I trust this person? Will harm come to me? Am I living in a way that makes me worthy of trust?" But what begins as a practical and reasonable form of self-protection can lead to more pernicious, spiritually life-destroying, mind states which may take the form of despair on the one hand and storming heaven on the other. To distrust another human being, a situation or set of conditions is one thing, but both despair and storming heaven are deep-seated but elusive, insidious, barely perceptible manifestations of distrust in the Eternal. The former is the belief that the Eternal has abandoned us with insufficient means to come to know It. The latter is propelled by a certainty that we know better than the Eternal, that our training is not going quickly enough, and we can and must and will force our way into Enlightenment. It reflects an unwillingness to allow the training to ripen naturally and in its more subtle forms manifests as everyday impatience with our progress in training. In either case we doubt that conditions are just fine as they are. As a result we fail to see all that they offer us.

I would like to suggest that all I've said about trust so far, while valid, limits trust, and I would like to call this type of trust "worldly trust." It limits trust because it is based on three delusions. The first is that of duality, the mind which takes refuge in discriminatory thinking, the mind which is bound by the opposites. It sees a self which can be harmed and an other which causes harm. It divides and separates. The second is the delusion that we can in fact be harmed. Yes, we can be killed. Yes, we can be maimed. Yes, we can be severely psychologically damaged. Yes, child sexual abuse happens and it is a terrible thing. But the only thing within us that matters, our complete unity with the love of the Unborn, can never be harmed, is not affected by any condition, and is not subject to birth and death. The third, of course, is the delusion that the self exists, that there is a self that can be harmed or protected.

Worldly trust is suffused with victim/perpetrator thinking, someone who is harmed and someone who causes harm. From this point of view, which directs our attention outside ourselves, away from the truth of our own hearts, there is no one and no thing which can be trusted. Ultimately all conditioned phenomena will fail us. There is nothing external to ourselves which can be trusted, and this implies, automatically, that we ourselves cannot be trusted either. If we had to stop here we'd find ourselves in a perpetual hell constructed of the suffering we create when we perceive ourselves as wronged, justify our perceptions, hold grudges, seek revenge, attempt to vindicate ourselves, on and on and on....

We must go further. We cannot stay here. Just as Rev. Master Jiyu taught us to grow Perfect Faith, faith that takes the Third Position of the mind of meditation, to supplant the blind faith of our childhood religious beliefs, I would like to suggest that there is something I will call "Pure Trust" Which brings to an end the suffering which is inevitable if we stop with worldly trust. Pure Trust is the act of sitting still, the mind of meditation itself, which does not move no matter what, which turns away from nothing, sees nothing as separate, and which is fundamentally grounded in the Unborn which is our own Original Nature. Original Nature knows no duality, knows no harm, knows no self. It was because she had Pure Trust that Rev. Master Jiyu could write in *The Wild, White Goose* that she must take everything for her own good (even though terrible things were happening to her) and then add in a footnote that this was the most important sentence in the whole book.¹ When we trust purely all things teach. *All* things. Pure Trust is like a new born baby trusting that it will be taken care of. A new born baby doesn't even ask such a question. It simply lives.

The school of Pure Trust teaches three Rs: Refuge, Renunciation and Rejoicing. By practicing the 3Rs we cultivate Pure Trust, but we must have Pure Trust, and act from Pure Trust, in order to practice the 3Rs. What a pickle! Fortunately Pure Trust IS our Original Nature, so we do have it. Practicing the 3Rs helps us to uncover it, and uncovering it helps us practice the 3Rs.

I had better confess at this point that I have borrowed the term "Pure Trust" from Dogen. He writes, "Once we have manifested pure trust, both ourselves and others alike turn around."² So in fact we have a fourth R, Repentance, the turning around of the heart. This turning, which *is* Pure Trust, is the fundamental religious act, the turning from the worldly mind to the mind which resides habitually within the Unborn. There is *no* act on earth which is more revolutionary than this. It is none other than the dropping off of suffering and entering into Nirvana, the fulfillment of the promise of the Four Noble Truths. Once we have evoked this willingness to turn we can embark on the practice of the 3Rs....

1. Jiyu-Kennett, Rev. Roshi P.T.N.H. *The Wild, White Goose*. Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 2002, pp. 44 and 477.

2. Great Master Dogen. *The Shobogenzo or The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teachings. Vol. 1.* Rev. Hubert Nearman, translator. Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, editor and consultant. Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1996, p. 152.