

Good morning, it's very good to be here. It was wonderful to see some of you at our Cedarwood building yesterday. If you weren't there I'll just describe the scene for a minute [seeing the main spaces opened up, being together, working on the weed-infested backyard, saving a tree, joyful togetherness, excitement about the possibilities, improbably the sun came out].

This morning I enjoyed re-reading Shokahu-san's wonderful chapter about the 3 Treasures. I want to share a few thoughts and then I have a virtual guest teacher I'd like to give the floor to.

The book he reminds us that Buddhism is a religion and to take refuge in the 3 treasures is the traditional way to enter into it to become a Buddhist. There's a wonderful kind of playful tension there I think: we receive and try to practice a body of teachings that's oriented around selflessness/a freedom-from-ego kind of way of being in this body/mind/heart/life that we can never fully understand and at the same time we might say "I am a Buddhist" - who is it that's a Buddhist exactly? And you can go further in Mahayana Buddhism we realize that all teachings are provisional - that all concepts are just concepts - that surely the ultimate reality is beyond any particular categories or ideas or concepts - so what is a "Buddhist" anyway?

So the non-self takes refuge in being part of a non-existent religion. Wonderful!

Or a more practical way of looking at that is that Buddhism is both specific teachings and practices with a history and terminology. Very specific and precise (if incredibly varied, I usually say to people that it's much more accurate to say Buddhisms than the singular Buddhism) and at the same time our practice is a deep and powerful invitation into something that's beyond all of that. So say "universal" isn't quite right either: that's puts in a kind of mushy "all-is-one" box. Beyond the specific and beyond the universal. It's a vast vision you could say. Or it's simply opening to the reality beyond our limited conceptions of reality. A beautiful thing to ponder.

I have the privilege from time to time to conduct weddings. And sometimes the couple getting married don't identify as Buddhist and aren't so familiar with words like Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. And yet they know they want a wedding with a deep ritual feeling. Probably if I quizzed them about "their religion" they'd fit into what the U.S. Census says is the fastest growing answer to their question about religion which is "spiritual but not religious" - which is you study the definitions of religion actually the characteristics of "spiritual but not religious" match up pretty well with a religion.

So I want to offer these couples a feeling of practice and in our Zen tradition the precepts are always central to all of our rituals of connection and commitment. So I've worked up a Zen wedding for our "spiritual but not religious" friends. Here are the 16 bodhisattva precepts in that frame. The 16 bodhisattva precepts of course starting with...taking refuge in the 3 treasures. I'll share the whole bit with you including the explanatory comments I make about each vow.

Priest "Will you now receive the **threefold refuge**?"

Couple: YES

(couple rises to knees if sitting on the floor and puts hands together in gassho if that is comfortable)

Please repeat after me:

I take refuge in Awakening. * [indicates sound of clappers if there is an attendant]

(couple repeats after each line in italics)

To take refuge is to always return. Returning to awakening is returning to the stillness, the clarity, the kindness that is the real nature of all life.

I take refuge in the Truth. * (repeat)

To take refuge is to always return. Returning to the truth is to live the way of life, day by day, that accords with Awakening.

I take refuge in the Community. * (repeat)

To take refuge is to always return. Returning to the community is embracing the community of all being that is our refuge and support.

Now will you receive the **three boundless precepts?** (YES)

I vow to refrain from all action that increases suffering. *(repeat)
This is the intention to always practice a wise restraint

I vow to perform all action that increases awareness. *(repeat)
This is the intention to do wholesome actions that make ourselves and others truly happy

I vow to live for and with all being. *(repeat)
This is the intention to always try to see everything with an unselfish eye

Now will you receive the **ten clear mind precepts?** (YES)

I will cultivate and encourage life, I will not take life needlessly. *(repeat)
A follower of the way of awakening is someone who lives with awareness. Such a person can never knowingly harm a single thing.

I will honor the gift not yet given, I will not steal *(repeat)
Everything belongs to us and nothing belongs to us; but we don't take anything unless it is given to us as a gift.

I will remain faithful in relationships, I will not misuse sexuality *(repeat)
There is no way to remain deeply in relationship without complete honesty and openness.

I will communicate truth, I will not lie *(repeat)

Our speech must be true and accurate and kind. We make and destroy worlds with our words.

I will polish clarity and dispell delusion, I will not intoxicate myself or others.*(repeat)

To share spirits moderately with friends may be all right; but intoxication as a way to relax or cope, whether it be with substances or with doctrines, creates confusion and unhappiness.

I will create wisdom from ignorance, I will not criticize others mindlessly*(repeat)

This precept is very important in marriage. We make an effort to be realistic and kind in our speech about others. In this way we can love and be loved.

I will maintain modesty, I will praise others, not myself*(repeat)

This precept is also very important in marriage. Please let each other know, frequently, how much you love and respect each other and why. This is important, and easy to forget.

I will share freely, I will not be stingy* (repeat)

Since there is nothing we can possess, especially others, we approach the world and each other with open hands.

I will dwell in equanimity, I will not harbor anger or ill will*(repeat)

When there is anger, see it as anger; respect it but don't keep it close; try as much as you can to let it go. Try not to let a single day end with ill will between you. There is no justification for resentment. Remember this.

I will respect awareness, seek truth and nourish the community.**
(repeat)''

With the taking of these precepts we express our vow to live a life that is in accord with the the holy nature of all that is.

So this is living by vow - vows from Buddhism - for everyone.

I love how our path can be so deep and so broad, so inclusive. No one is outside it.

And at the same time each branching of that path is deeply complex and there is a ton to learn. I was saying the other night at the Unitarians as we've been studying a bit more about Japanese ritual traditions as they're reflected in our Zen rituals that it is kind of shocking how little we know - we're kindergarten Buddhists here. But that's wonderful too.

So I was so moved last night to watch and listen to a kind of bodhisattva in the public sphere express what he's learned. He's in no way a "Buddhist" but the feeling that stems from the practice was right there: humility, kindness and compassion, wisdom around not being caught by limited views, honoring his teachers, inviting his audience into a bigger space of love and connection.

I'm talking about Trevor Noah. Do you know of Trevor Noah who's been host of the Daily Show on TV for the last 7 years - or 7 yearhs as he says it? In case you don't I'll give a little context. Trevor who's in his late 30's now. Grew up in the last years of apartheid in South Africa. And his very birth was illegal. His dad was white and his mom was black and their relationship was illegal. They had strict ways of defining everyone's race so he himself was classified as "coloured". He wrote a memoire called "Born a Crime" - I haven't read that but I've listened to him speak about his childhood. There was a lot of sneaking around to avoid the authorities ever seeing him with his mother and father together.

Of course he was one of millions of people living under this oppression. It's hard to believe that within our lifetimes there was a major modern nation with laws enforcing systematic racial oppression, but it's true. And it did change. Nelson Mandela was released from 27 years in prison and went on to become president of a new South Africa - amazing. And yet this being humans with deep roots of suffering and inequality and injustice it's not like everything got all nice for everyone in South Africa. The freely elected multi-racial governments have had

plenty of corruption and the core issues of greed, hatred, and delusion are there as well as everywhere, and yet it's an amazing thing.

Anyhow Trevor got into comedy and started performing stand up in South Africa and eventually was touring in the UK and started being noticed. He's pretty darn funny - ironic and not afraid to bring up difficult issues, and yet also grounded in a kind of wholesome sweetness is that best I can come up with. So one person who noticed him was the American comic and then host of this TV news and comedy show The Daily Show, Jon Stewart. As you'll hear in this clip it was Jon himself who called Trevor one day to say, "please come to the U.S. to work with me". I think the Daily Show started out as pretty much parody and comedy - poking fun at the affairs of the day. But actually it evolved into a pretty perceptive look at U.S. Politics and goings on. Pretty liberal truth be told, but of course being of that persuasion myself that also looks like "pretty much the right point of view" - and yet as you'll see one of Trevor's learning in the years he ended up hosting the whole show was to not be trapped by a point of view.

One more thing before I put this on. It's not like these folks are hard working social workers tending to street kids of something. I don't want to valorize celebrity too much - they are highly paid elite performers within a system that churns out entertainment and culture for sale. The whole thing is powered by advertising and capitalism. And yet they are figured who have the attention of millions of Americans. They are in the position of teachers and examples. They are actually the thought leaders of modern America as much as anyone else, don't you think? Influencers is a modern term for them.

So here's a longish clip of Trevor Noah sharing what he's learned so far in this position near the top of American society - what an unlikely place for an illegal "coloured" baby from an oppressive African nation to end up. Life is strange no?

[What Did Trevor Learn from The Daily Show? | The Daily Show](#)