

6. In postmeditation be a child of illusion.

Zen practice does not much preserve the distinction most of us would make between meditation and nonmeditation. Zen's emphasis is entirely on presence, on what it really feels like, in this exact moment, to be alive, irrespective of whether we happen to be sitting on our meditation cushion or not. There are many Zen stories whose burden is "Don't be so fixated on meditation as a means of calming the mind and getting insight. Just pay attention to your life right now." These stories are not meant to dissuade us from meditation practice. The word zen, after all, does mean meditation. No, the point of these stories is to remind us that spirituality is always about life, not about some particular technique or state of mind. So in Zen there isn't much talk of "meditation and postmeditation."

But this slogan is about "postmeditation." It is in contrast to the previous slogan, Rest in the openness of mind, which is an instruction for formal meditation. This is what we do on our cushions, as we focus on our body and breathing: we let go of our normal concerns, we relax, we Rest in the openness of mind. (Though, as I've said, we can also take a moment to do this at any time.) The present slogan is simply reminding us that the previous slogans, which all point to a sense of life quite different from the ordinary, should be practiced not only on our meditation cushion or moments of repose but also in our ordinary, engaged daily living.

So these are the five slogans of absolute bodhicitta. Practicing them expands and smoothes the space we are living in, breaking down the walls we've been putting up for so long, maybe without realizing it, walls that have been causing us so much pain and sorrow and loneliness. These walls have also been causing pain to others. Each one of us could be a source of joy for ourselves and for everyone who knows us. Maybe you know someone who is like this, and whenever you are with this person you feel happy. A person like this is a blessing for the world. And there is no reason why you couldn't be that person. Why aren't you that person now? Because of these walls of self-protection you've built, these attitudes of limit and lack. Practicing these slogans and reflecting on the meaning of absolute bodhicitta, you can allow those walls and those attitudes to fall down. Resting childlike in openness of mind in this dream-like life, you will feel protected and at peace. You will feel not only that you are loved but that love is built into the nature of what you are and of what the world is, so that you are never apart from it. Knowing this, you can risk caring and loving. You don't have to be afraid of it anymore. You will not be hurt. Your love will be received, and it will always be healing. Knowing this is so through the practice of these slogans, you can begin to practice relative bodhicitta.