



## To save all sentient beings

by John Kling, Dharma Teacher

“Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all...Delusions are endless, I vow to cut through them all...the teachings are infinite, I vow to learn them all...the Buddha way is inconceivable, I vow to attain it.” This is the bodhisattva vow and it is unique to the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. In reciting this we are affirming our intent to become bodhisattvas.

In the tradition of a subjective spiritual path, the details of “how to save them all, learn them all, cut through them all, and to attain Buddhahood” are not concrete commandments. Exactly what behaviors or thoughts that must be followed are not spelled out. Each of us is unique and meditation, chanting, and kong-an practice is part of the process of solving the riddle of “who am I.”

In my period of practice I have studied traditions, listened to other practitioners, and meditated on what I would do to meet these Bodhisattva vows.

Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all. Some Asian practitioners wear face masks to prevent breathing in microbes and thus harming/killing them. At some monasteries following a rain fall monks sweep the walking paths in front of them with brooms to prevent worms or other small creatures from being stepped on and harmed. Some monks do not boil water for tea because that would result in the deaths of millions of microbes in the water. To some practitioners, keeping this vow means vegetarianism.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes about interconnectedness of all living things. The rain is connected to the flower growing in the meadow, which is connected to the bee that depends on the pollen for making honey. The bee in turn spreads pollen to many flowers and crops that nourish other animals including us. Any action breaking this interconnectedness may result in harm to other sentient beings. This interconnectedness has become apparent to more and more people with the advent of global warming. Carbon production from industry and automobiles has been implicated by the American Academy of Sciences to be a significant source in global warming. The melting icebergs have increased sea level, and there is evidence that polar animals, such as the polar bear and seals, may be extinct within the next decade. I have attempted to make changes in lessening my carbon footprint as part of saving all sentient beings. When shopping, I choose paper bags rather than plastic. I no longer drink bottled water; rather, I use filtered water. Plastic is estimated to last in landfills for 100,000 years, and production of plastic releases carbons into the atmosphere. Additionally, I am mindful of the automobiles that Kate and I have chosen to drive. They both have good mpg ratings. When driving, I drive the speed limit and am mindful of how I drive in order to use the least amount of gasoline. In the winter I set the temperature in our house at 67 degrees during the day and lower it to 60 degrees at night. In summer the temperature is set at 75 degrees.

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Although these activities are unlikely to save all sentient beings by themselves, it is a way one individual can contribute to the welfare of all creatures on this planet.

# Abbot's letter

Robert Blender



Two days after the Providence Zen Center Buddha's Birthday weekend, there was a tragic event. Linc Rhodes, JDPSN, our Guiding Teacher, called and told me that JW Harrington, executive director of the Kwan Um School of Zen, had taken his own life. I have known JW for fifteen years; he was a sweet and intelligent man. Although he was not a Zen teacher, he seemed to me to be the core of the Kwan Um School.

Suicide is my everyday work. I am a psychotherapist on an inpatient psychiatric unit in an urban hospital. Everyday I facilitate a group therapy session for people who have just made a suicide attempt or who are thinking about it. I have been doing this same group for seven years and I have seen hundreds of patients.

One thing that I know about suicide is that it is about hopelessness. The person is suffering and feeling that there is no way out of it. Everyone's suffering focuses on something slightly different: one person has a terminal illness, another has chronic physical pain, another person is hopeless that the one they care about will ever take them seriously. I have met people whose past traumas haunt them in dreams and images, and they feel that they will never be free. I have met those whose loved one has died, and they can imagine only suffering from then on. No matter what sort of suffering a person is enduring, it is hopelessness that leads human beings to harm themselves.

The first noble truth of Buddhism is that all life is suffering, and human beings get through all sorts of it. But, depression can greatly distort our thinking about our suffering. Everyone who is depressed begins to have distortions in thought such as: easily seeing the negative and having a difficult time seeing or remembering the positive. Our thinking becomes catastrophic--we interpret limited information and predict that disaster is imminent. When we are depressed, we are no longer looking at our experience through a clear lens; these thinking distortions of depression can lead one to conclude that things are hopeless.

Any of us can become depressed, and we will experience these same distortions in thinking, to some degree. Depression is not simply sadness. It goes on longer. It involves disruptions of sleep and eating. There is diminished energy and concentration. There are bio-chemical changes that cannot be changed by force of will. A person cannot simply "pick themselves up by their boot-straps" and march on.

Zen practice can help us improve our ability to see our own distortions in thinking. Meditation can also induce helpful neuro-chemical changes (one only has to look to an old friend of the Kwan Um School, Jon Kabat-Zinn, to find scientific research in this regard). Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Kabat-Zinn's work, is becoming a major influence in Western psychotherapy. Those of us who have meditated for many years know from experience that there is some mood-stabilization benefit and emotional resilience that results from sticking with the practice.

But, as our Guiding Teacher said on the phone this past Tuesday night, despite peoples' best intentions, these things still happen. Our notions of Zen practice "fixing" our lives or making suffering easier are challenged by an event like JW's death. Our expectations, presuppositions or even scientific knowledge do not apply to the suicide of a friend. This event forces us to turn not to meditation as a panacea, but to the wisdom of encountering this actual moment with the mind of "Don't Know."

The Kwan Um School will not be the same without JW Harrington.

As Zen Master Bobby Rhodes wrote in her announcement to the School,

**"We are devastated."**

# Calendar of Events

May 2, Saturday

Foundations of Zen Class

1 PM to 4 PM

*no charge,  
registration required*

May 16, Saturday

Sangha Ice Cream Social and Movie Night

*Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring*

8:00 PM

June 4, Thursday

Public Dharma

Talk with

Linc Rhodes, JDPSN

7:30 PM

June 5, 6, and 7

3-Day Retreat with

Linc Rhodes, JDPSN

July 11, Saturday

Foundations of Zen Class

1 PM to 4 PM

*no charge,  
registration required*

*Disclaimer: All events are subject to change. Please contact the Zen Center at 317-921-9902 or by email at [director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org) before coming to an event. All events take place at the Indianapolis Zen Center, unless otherwise noted.*

## Foundations of Zen Class

Do you want to know more about meditation and Zen practice? Are you wondering about the history and philosophy of Zen? Do you want to start a daily personal practice or refresh your practice? The Foundations of Zen class addresses all of this and more.

Join us on Saturday May 2nd or Saturday July 11th for the Foundations of Zen class. There is no charge, but pre-registration is required — use the registration form at [www.indyzen.org](http://www.indyzen.org) or email [director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org).

## Are you a Buddhist?

There is something very interesting about saying you are a Buddhist. You don't have to reject anything to be a Buddhist. You simply have to embrace Buddhist practice. You can be a Catholic Buddhist, a Muslim Buddhist, an agnostic Buddhist, or even a *nothing but a Buddhist* Buddhist. Buddhist practice stands alongside our everyday lives.

Still in our culture it is sometimes hard to say you are a Buddhist. For some it is an act of courage to make that declaration. Whether it's easy or hard once we say, even just to ourselves, "I am a Buddhist", the question becomes "now what?"

Our human minds need some direction when we start on a new journey. One way to establish direction in your practice is to work towards taking the five precepts:

*I vow to abstain from taking life.*

*I vow to abstain from taking things not given.*

*I vow to abstain from misconduct done in lust.*

*I vow to abstain from lying.*

*I vow to abstain from intoxicants, taken to induce heedlessness.*

Taking the five precepts means recognizing the importance of practicing, and making it part of your everyday life. It means joining a family of other people who have made the same decision, practicing with them when you can.

The precepts help us to know how to avoid evil and do good, moment to moment to moment. They can lead us to gain the wisdom needed to explore the question "Who Am I?" and to develop our innate compassionate nature.

Are you a Buddhist? Are you ready to make a strong commitment to practice? Are you ready to embark on the path shown to us by the Buddha?

The Indianapolis Zen Center has a Precepts Ceremony every September. Between now and then, you can take the necessary steps to formally take the Five Precepts at that ceremony and to receive your Buddhist name.

*For information on taking precepts, see any Dharma Teacher or email [director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org)*

## Practice Schedule

### Monday

6:30 p.m.

*Special chanting*

7:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

*Evening bell, chanting, sitting*

**Tuesday** Source Yoga, Fishers

8:15 p.m.-9:15 p.m.

*Sitting, walking meditation, chanting*

### Wednesday

6:30 p.m.

*Orientation to practice*

7:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

*Evening bell, chanting, sitting*

### Saturday

9:00 a.m.-10:45 a.m.

*Bows, morning bell, chanting, sitting*

### Sunday

8:30 a.m.

*Orientation to practice*

9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

*Bows, morning bell, chanting, sitting,  
Dharma talk, discussion & socializing*



*Kwan Seum  
Bosal  
at Indianapolis  
Zen Center*

Also known as  
Avalokitesvara in  
Sanskrit,  
the bodhisattva of  
compassion

## About the Zen Center

The Indianapolis Zen Center offers authentic Zen practice in the lineage of Zen Master Seung Sahn and is a member of the Kwan Um School of Zen. Membership is \$25/month for individuals and \$35/month for families. Becoming a member supports both the center and Zen practice in the community. Members receive a monthly calendar, the local and Kwan Um newsletters, discounts on retreat fees, and have the right to vote at the annual meeting.

**For more information**, call 317-921-9902, email [director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org) or access our Web site at [www.indyzen.org](http://www.indyzen.org)

