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Week 1, Recognizing the Self
To Study the Self
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All right. Hello, there. I'm Roshi Enkyo O'Hara taping this from the Village Zendo in Manhattan. And I'd like to offer this teaching, this four week retreat around the subject matter of recognizing ourselves and how we can grow into bodhisattvas, how we can open our hearts and still maintain the integrity of our own being.

You know, we live in this world that's so hyper mediated and so full of images of celebrities and micro celebrities and reality show people. And last week I was in a waiting room, at a doctor's office. I picked up a magazine, *People* magazine. It was the most amazing thing. It had pictures and pictures and pictures of all of these special people, all of these beautiful people, rich people. And I wondered, "why is there no one there that's a really good manual laborer? Why isn't there a really great father who just lives an ordinary life?" There's so much in our societies where there's no value for the individual and I worry about that in terms of what is happening in this country, where people have become so introverted and frightened and unable to accept criticism that somehow the sense of taking care of the whole is falling away. So it's a kind of ironic thing because taking care of the whole requires that are comfortable in ourselves, that we know who we are individually.

I was struck because just this week I saw the film *Searching for Sugar Man*. It's a really interesting film about a very talented musician and songwriter in the seventies who wrote this beautiful music that was very much appreciated by the critics and by producers of albums. They were very optimistic and they produced two albums—both of which bombed. And so this man, Jesus Rodriguez, was completely abandoned by the music world. And he spent his life in manual labor doing construction work and deconstruction work, helping tear down buildings. He lived in a small house and just lived his life. Actually, he got involved in local politics—although he was never elected for anything—

but he would petition for the rights of the poor. He was the son of an immigrant himself. And then it turns out that in Australia and in South Africa he was a great popular figure, and all of his albums had been selling throughout all of these years. But there was a rumor that he had committed suicide when he was very young and so no one thought that he was still alive. And then in this documentary they find him. And the interview with him is so powerful because this man who had such wonderful talent was not in the least bit bitter. Instead he was a stable, resilient, kind, generous guy who was fine with his manual labor. He said, "Well, it kept me very fit." And he was a man of the people, wonderful, authentic, such integrity. But I think that's really rare in this society. I think that most people I know unless they are "successful," they feel that they're failures. And they don't really recognize the power and the importance of being just who you are.

So, how do we do that? I would say, of course, being a Zen teacher, that we need to follow the practice of really appreciating the self. There is a teaching by Dogen Zenji, a thirteenth century Japanese master. He said, "To study the way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by the myriad things." And then I would add as a fourth, "To be enlightened by the myriad things is to serve the world, is to become a bodhisattva."

So, the first part: to study the way, or to study the Buddha way; to be enlightened is to study oneself. What do you think he means by that? To really study yourself is not to listen to the constant input that you're getting from society or from your conditioning but to drop down to a deeper level, to really know yourself, to be intimate with yourself. This is just me. Regardless of whether I'm recognized or criticized, this is me. And although I'm part of everything in the world I am unique and only now will exist in this lifetime. It's a very unique and special consideration: Who are you? I am me.

How did Dogen say that we can study the self? He said, "Turn the light inward." And as you read that you say, what does he mean, turn the light inward? And then he says, "Well, sit down on a cushion, place your hands together, put your tongue up against the roof of your mouth and breathe. Breathe." And as you breathe in, you're breathing in,

your body is accepting air. And as you're breathing out, you're breathing out. And then it's you that is breathing in and breathing out. It is a whole and complete thing. It doesn't require anything else in that moment. You can be intimate with the sounds that you hear, be intimate with the light that comes into your eyes; then you will recognize yourself just as you are, just as you are.

So maybe we could try that for a few moments and then I'll come back. So try and find a position that's comfortable for you to sit in. Dogen was always very articulate about the physical process of sitting. Whether you're sitting in a chair, on a cushion, on the floor, or kneeling on a bench, simply sit so that you can sit up right in a dignified posture.

Actually, the posture can in your own mind resemble that of the many statues of the awakened Buddha. Just sit straight so that you can breathe easily, so that your belly is able to move in and out softly and gently. I'm going to ring a bell now and let's just sit for a few minutes.

[Meditation.]

I wonder how many of you fast-forwarded through the sitting meditation. I think it can be a temptation for us to fast-forward through our life. To not take the time for ourselves to find out who we are. You know, it's not so mysterious. I'm not talking about a philosophical or a psychological technique (which are very valid and important inquiries to have). I'm talking about presence, your breath, just sitting. And it's not in a linear way that you're going to study the self and then forget the self and then be enlightened by all of the things and then serve. The world is a bodhisattva. It's not linear at all. In that one period of time, when you are truly intimate with your own being and you are strong, resilient, and full of your own integrity, you can't help but serve others, be of service to others. It happens in an instant. And it's very mysterious. It's very hard to talk about. And yet, it is true. I've seen it in my own life and I've seen it in the lives of so many people.

Sit down, and take the time to be yourself. Now, what I recommend you do over the next week is to take 20 minutes every day and sit. You don't have to do anything fancy; just

maintain your posture and allow that time to be for you and for you alone. And then next week we'll talk about forgetting the self.