

Appamada's Daily Chants Annotated

December 24, 2017

CHANT	NOTES (PEG SYVERSON)
Verse of the Robe	The Verse of the Robe is traditionally chanted as the monks begin their day, placing their folded robes on their heads as they chant, to venerate them. But there is a larger sense in which we all take up the robe of our practice, of this Buddhist tradition, folded before us like a great mystery.
Vast is the robe of liberation, a formless field of benefaction; wearing the universal teaching, I realize the one true nature, thus harmonizing all being.	True spiritual freedom is boundless, uncountable, immeasurable, and profound. It is also a force field for the benefit of all that lives: it is pure, uncontaminated good. We wrap ourselves in the teaching of the Buddha, a luminous expression of who we truly are, and in this way, realize our intimate connection with all existence, an unbroken field of life, or what the Tibetan teacher Longchenpa called <i>the creative intelligence of the universe</i> .
Four Practice Principles	This translation and distillation of the Buddha's four noble truths was developed by poet and translator Alan Kaprow, a student of Joko Beck, as she was putting the traditional chants into contemporary language. See if you can identify each noble truth in this poetic verse.
Caught in the self-centered dream, only suffering; holding to self-centered thoughts, exactly the dream. Each moment, life as it is, the only teacher; being just this moment, compassion's way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All existence is characterized by <i>dukkha</i> (literally, "a wheel out of kilter," often translated as dissatisfaction, dis-ease, stress, struggle, or suffering);• Together with <i>dukkha</i> arises thirst, craving, desire, wanting (including aversion), <i>Samudhaya</i>;• That thirst which is arising can be contained. The containment of that energy leads to transformation, <i>Nirodha</i>;• That transformation manifests as a life unfolding according to the eightfold path, <i>Marga</i>, the path of wisdom and compassion.

CHANT	NOTES (PEG SYVERSON)
<p>Repentance</p>	<p>The word <i>repentance</i> carries a lot of associations for those in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Here it is not intended to invoke shame, blame, guilt, or recrimination. A better word would probably be <i>acknowledgment</i> or <i>acceptance</i>. The sequence of repentance, refuge, and vow here take on new meaning. Traditionally, each verse is simply repeated three times. An evolution of the morning chants appeared to me in a deep period of zazen. In this new form each chant begins with the personal, then opens out to the collective “we,” and then beyond that to all being and to the power of vow itself. It connects our intention and aspiration to our larger place in the world beyond our self-centered concerns, and it transforms our vows from something overwhelming and impossible—a solitary hero’s journey—to something enacted together through the power of vow itself.</p>
<p>All my ancient twisted karma from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, born through body, speech, and mind I now fully avow.</p>	<p>Karma is not “good” or “bad” as in the popular view. Karma is simply the consequences and residue of any thought, word, or action, exactly as if you dropped a pebble into a pond and watched its ripples spread in the still water. We cannot control where the ripples will spread, or ultimately their effects; we can only control our intention. However, the Buddha taught that we can discern those intentions and actions which are wholesome, healthy, leading to happiness and to liberation for ourselves and others. With this verse, we acknowledge: In this life, there are thoughts, words, and actions—and their absence—I am responsible for. Habits, mistakes, and ignorance, as well as grasping, aversion, and confusion have caused upset, struggle, and harm for myself, others, and the world. I am responsible also for whatever beneficial, compassionate, and wise intentions and actions I have offered myself and others. All of this is who I am. I stand up and openly avow it, here and now.</p>
<p>All our ancient twisted karma from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, born through body, speech, and mind We now fully avow.</p>	<p>This karma I bear is also collective. In our culture, in this present era, we can witness the karmic consequences and residue of our historical thoughts, words, and actions in groups and in the larger society: racism, wars, slavery, misogyny, environmental destruction, and so on, are the product of collective action and have effects that are felt by everyone. We have also collectively created beneficial, wise, and compassionate institutions, systems, actions, and policies. As we stand here together, we avow the karma that has been created through our collective intentions and actions.</p>

CHANT	NOTES (PEG SYVERSON)
<p>All the ancient twisted karma from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, born through body, speech, and mind, All being now fully avows.</p>	<p>Our karma comes from <i>beginningless</i> greed, hate, and delusion. Single-celled Protozoa have organelles that are poison spears, with which they kill and eat their prey. Single-celled creatures evolved also to collaborate in creating multi-celled beings which over time evolved into myriad species, in a dazzling variety. We acknowledge here the participation of all being in the creation of karma, the consequences of which all beings inhabit.</p>
<p>Refuges</p>	<p>It's rather daunting to feel the weight of all that karma, extending back to the beginnings of life on earth, and across all existence. Naturally, then, we seek refuge in that which can nourish and sustain us, that which has endured for millennia, and which warmly connects us with each other, and with the good.</p>
<p>I take refuge in Buddha I take refuge in Dharma I take refuge in Sangha.</p>	<p>There are three reliable places we can find enduring support, care, and guidance on our path of waking up and growing up together.</p> <p>The first is the Buddha, which means not only the historical figure who inspires and illuminates our path, but the Buddha-nature within us, the eternal light that is our very life.</p> <p>The second is the Dharma, which means not only the brilliant teachings of the historical Buddha, but also the wisdom teachings of the awakened teachers—men and women—who followed in his path, and the teachings we are offered in every moment of experience in our daily lives.</p> <p>The Third is the Sangha, which means not only the community of practice here at Appamada, but all sincere followers of the Buddhist path, and ultimately that means all living beings.</p> <p>I can find refuge here.</p>

CHANT	NOTES (PEG SYVERSON)
<p>We take refuge in Buddha, before all being, immersing body and mind deeply in the way, awakening true mind;</p> <p>We take refuge in Dharma, before all being, entering deeply the merciful ocean of Buddha’s Way;</p> <p>We take refuge in Sangha, before all being, bringing harmony to everyone, free from hindrance.</p>	<p>We, together, also seek refuge. We stand here, without pretense or apology, in front of all existence. Here is where and how we collectively take refuge in these three inexhaustible golden fountains of awakening.</p>
<p>Now all being has completely taken refuge in Buddha, Now all being has completely taken refuge in Dharma Now all being has completely taken refuge in Sangha.</p>	<p>Anyone, anywhere, any life form can find refuge in the three treasures that are the Buddha’s offering for a suffering world. All being is filled with the light of life itself. All being is actually resting in this triple refuge, in every moment. This verse simply expresses that.</p>
<p>Eko</p>	<p>We practice not only for our own benefit but for the benefit of all existence. In the spirit of recognizing that whatever merit we create through our practice belongs to all being, we make this offering.</p>
<p>We offer the merit of our practice for the welfare of all beings everywhere. May all be relieved of suffering, free from fear, longing, aversion, and ignorance, and may we together with all beings realize the Awakened Way.</p>	<p>In the <i>Fukanzazengi</i>, Zen master Dogen wrote about zazen: <i>You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words, and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self.</i> But our practice is not only for ourselves, for self-reflection, self-improvement, or even self-enlightenment. This is an important distinction between this school of Buddhism and other forms of contemplative practice, mindfulness, or meditation. We are in intimate relationship with all being. We practice to prepare ourselves for our work in the world, redressing the forces of greed, hatred, and ignorance, supporting all life and cultivating all that is wholesome, wise, compassionate, and connecting, in ourselves and in others. We do this work with <i>appamada</i>—mindful, energetic care.</p>

CHANT	NOTES (PEG SYVERSON)
Bodhisattva Vow	Once we have acknowledged our karma, and taken refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we are prepared to meet the world with some confidence, courage, and creativity. We are inspired, strengthened, and warmly connected to all being. We are at home in the world, no matter what our circumstances. Our aspiration is to help the suffering beings in the world, and free them all from the pain created by grasping, aversion, and ignorance. This is an enormous undertaking. Here is how we meet the challenge.
<p>Beings are numberless, I vow to free them; Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them; Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them; Buddha’s way is unsurpassable, I vow to embody it.</p>	<p>The Dalai Lama said, we are responsible toward the whole world. At first this alarmed me; I thought, <i>I can’t be responsible for the whole world! I am just one person!</i> Then I realized what he actually said: we are responsible for this one life we have been given, we are responsible <i>toward</i> the whole world. Everything we think, say, and do has effects, so I can be responsible for my aspiration and my intention. This is my vow, a lifetime commitment that is personal and impossible to accomplish. But it creates a functional orientation toward the world. I can do this. I can meet the world from this aspiration and act from it with respect to whatever and whomever I encounter. <i>I can free all beings from my own grasping, aversion, ignorance.</i> And in the process, I free myself. This is my practice, path, and vow.</p>
<p>Beings are numberless, we vow to free them; Delusions are inexhaustible, we vow to end them; Dharma gates are boundless, we vow to enter them; Buddha’s way is unsurpassable, we vow to embody it.</p>	<p>Still, the Buddha never asked his followers to do anything impossible. The work of liberating all beings, ending delusions, entering the dharma gates of each moment, and embodying the way taught by the Buddha is also our collective, collaborative endeavor. We have a powerful impact when we work together for the welfare of all beings and our planet. In a very real sense, the difficulties and challenges we face in the world today are beyond the capacity of any individual; we must make real sacrifices and join forces to meet them. We need to put our minds, our hearts, and our bodies to work together, and this begins with our closest relationships and spiritual friendships.</p>

CHANT	NOTES (PEG SYVERSON)
<p>Beings are numberless, this vow frees them all; Delusions are inexhaustible, this vow ends them all; Dharma gates are boundless, this vow enters them all; Buddha’s way is unsurpassable, this vow embodies it.</p>	<p>Yet we recognize that the work of liberation is actually fueled and directed by this deep Vow. It is not a vow we take, it is a vow that has taken us, turned us into the vehicle for the mysterious transformation of beings. We are not the agents of this transformation, we are the instruments by which this vow frees beings, cuts through delusions, enters this moment’s dharma gate, and realizes the Buddha way, in this world, in this place, and in this time. We can relax. We are not doing anything, striving for anything, attaining anything, accomplishing anything. By the power of the vow flowing through us, like a river, everything is realizing itself. This is what Dogen called the <i>Self-Fulfilling Samadhi</i>—Life unfurling its majestic tapestry through us; playing its magnificent symphony through us, dancing its astonishing choreography through us.</p>
<p>Concluding Thoughts</p>	<p>We do three bows, finally, because this puts our body into the space of acceptance and reverence for life in each moment. It returns us to the earth, reminding us of our home and grounding us right here and now. Prepared in this way, we turn back to the world with, as the Ox-Herding Pictures put it, <i>gift-bestowing hands</i>.</p> <p>Here’s the arc of this morning service, in a nutshell:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I honestly admit the karma I’ve created and the collective karma I carry, which stretches back to the origins of life itself. 2. Given the import of this admission, I take refuge in that which provides nourishment, care, and support: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I take refuge personally, we take refuge collectively, with others, and in fact all beings, all existence, can find refuge there. 3. Stepping out of self-centered concerns, I offer whatever merit my practice has generated for the welfare of all beings. 4. Having taken refuge in what supports life, I am prepared to turn toward the world and realize this aspiration, individually, collectively, and through the mysterious functioning of Vow. <p>It’s a powerful way to start a day of life on earth.</p>