

# Joya 1998: Resolutions

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"I've got to try to stop being such a mean-spirited son of a bitch." *[said in a growl]*

"This year, everything is going to be different." *[said in a wistful, prim voice]*

"I've really gotta shtop drinking." *[slurred]*

"I've got to be more confident and stand up to people. I can't let them continue to take advantage of me like this." *[said in a delicate tone]*

On New Year's Eve, people make all kinds of resolutions. But on New Year's day, or at best the next day, the story of what they would like to change about themselves vanishes into all of their other stories about themselves and the world. It is not a bad tradition to make such resolutions, but regardless of what we might say, what matters is what we do. All of our actions arise from how we understand or misunderstand ourselves and our world. Who we are is beyond understanding. What this world is, is beyond understanding. The things that we would like to change about ourselves have themselves arisen because we have misunderstood that who and what we are is beyond understanding.

Lost in our stories, lost in our strategies, we have lost ourselves and we have lost the vivid richness which is present right now and in each and every moment and throughout each and every day and night and year. This moment is beyond understanding. When you understand this, then the moment opens before you and all around you and you realize that you are arising within this opening, this exertion, this vividness. But if you only understand this, you have still misunderstood because this body and mind, all beings, all worlds arise within who you and all beings and all worlds truly are.

There are many traditions about the New Year. In fact, the New Year takes place at various times for various cultures. And of course, this moment of midnight is occurring at different times around the globe. Does anyone know why we decided that January 1st will fall on the day that it does? I certainly don't. We just decided to start measuring things this way. Really, the old year and the new year begin and end at the point that we begin to measure. But this moment cannot be measured. It arises everywhere, as everything, right

now.

Mountains are tall, valleys are low, but the moment has no height that can be measured. It has no breadth, no thickness, because as soon as it is here as this moment, it is gone as that moment.

Perhaps we might greet the new year with resolutions or with trepidation. Perhaps we might look back on the old year as something that we are quite glad is over. We have - oh, let's say, 108 delusions about ourselves and the world, about this coming and going, this rising and falling which exerts itself as this moment, exerts itself as December 31st, exerts itself as January 1st. We say 108 because, well, that is a lot, isn't it? You can try to picture, say, three things, five things. At ten things it starts to get a little fuzzy. Try to picture 18 things, 37 things, 108 things. Can't do it. So 108 means measureless, numberless.

Here, we say "New Years". In Japan they say "Joya." Well, actually, they don't. We say "Joy-a" because it sounds nicer that way. But it should actually be something like "jo-ya no ka-ne." [*this last is said in a deep Toshiro Mifune imitation*]

On Joya, the tradition is to strike a bell 108 times. It could go on all night, but - you know - we have better things to do than sit around banging at a bell all night. So these 108 strikes represent the measureless richness that is present as each and every moment. Our 108 delusions are resolved into 108 Dharma Gates or possibilities of opening to reality, not simply through banging away at a bell, of course, but through hearing the sound, through allowing ourselves to be intimate with the hearing.

In the Zen Community, our tradition is to accompany these 108 strikes on the kesu, or the rin gong, with 108 recitations of a mantra. The Japanese word for "mantra," or one of the Japanese words, is "shin-gon", which means "true word".

Now, there really is no such thing as a true word. Nothing that we can say is true. The truth cannot be spoken. We can try. I try. But all that I can do is mutter bits and pieces and fragments of what is true about who you are and what the world is. So the shin gon or true word that we chant is something that tries to say something that is true. We chant this in Sanskrit. We chant the mantra, or the Prajnaparamita Hridaya sutra, the Heart of Perfect Knowing Discourse mantra. This mantra summarizes what the Prajnaparamita Discourses say over and over and over again in various ways.

Gate, gate, paragate, parasam gate, Bhodi svaha. Gate means "gone". The next gate also means "gone". This moment is gone. Because it is gone, there is room for this moment. There is a moment of confusion followed by a moment of recognition of confusion. This can be followed by a moment of being confused further and feeling bad about your confusion. Or it can be followed by not following it, by just letting go of it, by just opening up to the reality of seeing and hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking and feeling as a whole. And that is para gate. Para means "to transcend", to "move past". It means "over". Parasam gate means, well, more of the same, really. Sam means "truly" or "very".

So let's see, where are we? "Gone, gone, big gone," or "really gone." Parasam gate - really very gone. Bodhi means "intelligence". It means to Wake Up. "Gone, gone, really gone - or big gone - really very gone, Wake Up".

Svaha. Svaha is an ancient word. In the Vedas, it is used as a kind of exclamation to be made when casting something into a fire offering. It kind of means "there" or "yup" or "okay".

So, what do we have? “Gone, gone, really gone (or big gone), really very gone, Wake Up! Okay”?

But you see, although this is called a Shin-gon or true word, what it is saying is not really true. Because who and what you are is always already Awake. Who and what you are is beyond confusion, clarity, delusion and enlightenment. Who you are presents itself in such a way that it is never merely something which is present. It is utterly ungraspable. Because it is ungraspable, to realize it all that you have to do is to release everything that you believe to be true, to release all of your understandings as well as your misunderstandings.

This releasing is what the process of Zen practice is. And so, our tradition in the Zen Community is to get off to a good start as the New Year begins by sitting, before we bang the bell, before we shout “Gone, gone, really gone, really very gone, Wake Up! Okay?”

I am so glad that we have the opportunity to do this together this evening. However, in order for this to be really worth doing, I think that we should understand that the only resolutions that really matter are resolving the mind into the body, resolving the bodymind into the Field of Present Experience, resolving the Field of Present Experience into That in which it arises: experiencing or Awareness in Itself.

Zen practice is taking responsibility for whatever we have understood about how and who we truly are. Even if that understanding is only a glimpse, still if it has ever happened the question is, what are you going to do about it? Zen practice is taking responsibility for the truth. And so, there is a little resolution I would like to make with you this evening. This is a gatha, or a verse, that I composed many, many years ago with your grandfather in Dharma, Joshu Dainen roshi. This gatha is used as part of the conclusion of our ceremony of Fusatsu, or Renewal of the Precepts:

*We now resolve to enter into this Way  
again and again without limit.  
We now resolve to penetrate all delusion  
and clarify all that is into wisdom beyond wisdom.  
We now resolve to practice and teach without fail.*

*[the teisho ends with three strikes of the Hansaku]*