

The Fourth Zenkai:

**I bear witness to the lack of honesty in myself and in the world,
and aspire to speak truthfully and caringly.**

What is it to speak truthfully and caringly? To speak (and of course to write — what I'm doing here...) is always to tell a story aimed at making us feel a certain way and think a certain way. Speaking is always a *doing*, an action, an 'intervention' in the world that aims at making us *do* (or *not do*) something in response, and this is so whether I'm simply telling myself the story, telling it to you, or to the world in general. We might think that if we simply 'stick to the facts' we are being both truthful and honest, but these facts are always *situated*, always within a *context*, and the context frames and orients the story we tell, making some ways of understanding and responding to it possible, and closing off others. Different presentations of the facts are always possible, so why do I choose to tell the story in *this* way? And why do I choose to tell it to *you*, and *now*? What do I want you to *feel* in response? And what do I want you to *do*?

This all sounds very *instrumental*, and one of the important aspects of working with this Fourth Zenkai is to begin to disentangle (or at least better to recognise) how far and in what ways we are speaking from a place of *separation* either as an isolated 'self', or acting as a relay for ideas and emotions that are not in any very meaningful way our 'own'. This is important, because speaking is always firstly and in principle a *meeting*, entering into a *relationship*. The philosopher Jacques Rancière argues that regardless of whatever differences of status, wealth or background may separate us, that in our speaking and being heard by each other, our dialogue, we presuppose a fundamental *equality* between us. How far do our words honour this equality, *express* it even, and how far do they instead betray it, and hence become, in a primary sense, *dishonest*? How far do our words recognise our mutual vulnerability, our ability to be both understood and misunderstood? Do my words recognise you as a true *other*, an other in whom I recognise the otherness in myself, or do I, intentionally or not, attempt to reduce you to being a *means* to my own ends? As with all aspects of relationship, this isn't ever a case of doing it 'right' or finding the moral high ground — our mutual recognition is always partial and flickering, as we lose and re-find each other over the course of a conversation or a lifetime. We are not looking for for purity of motives or aspiring to absolute objectivity, but to becoming better aware of the forces at play both in the bigger picture of our lives in society, and how these play out in *this* conversation right here and right now. Important too to realise that our 'speaking' takes many forms — our posture and expression, the rhythm of our speech, its tone and nuance, and even our silences will all 'speak volumes'. So our *listening* — the care and awareness we bring to the words, and the beyond-the-words of the other who is speaking — is a central, indeed essential part of our own speaking and so of how far we truly recognise each other. Our mutual recognition is obviously the condition of possibility of *caring* speech — speech that is appropriate to our relationship at *this* moment, whether that is as challenge, reassurance, empathy or affection.

Bearing Witness, Telling Tales

In practicing with this Fourth Zenkai we bring our awareness to both our speaking and our listening. We Bear Witness to the stories we ourselves tell, and to the stories we tell ourselves. We bear witness too to how we hear the stories we tell, and to how we hear and receive those told *to us* by others. ‘Hearing’ in this sense includes the attention we pay (or don’t pay) to what is being said, and to how we ‘feel’ in response, both as the shifts in tension or relaxation within our body and the emotions we experience or try to suppress, as too the thoughts that arise, whether they seem random or deeply meaningful. This may be harder than it appears, because we have to try to step back — effectively put “speech marks” around — what we are saying and hearing to begin to see more clearly both the context and our aims in speaking. As with the previous Zenkai, we have to suspend our *judgement* here, perhaps especially when we think we ourselves or the person with whom we are speaking are being ‘judgemental’.

Take, for example, the stories that appear unbidden during my zazen, those trains of thoughts that I ‘find myself’ thinking. How does *this* story make me *feel*, and what does it make me *think* about myself and about the world? Is this a feel-good memory about times past? Or a way of coping with the anxiety around an upcoming event? Is this self-justification when I feel hard done by or injured? Whatever its subject, we note how we *feel* in response — our bodily and emotional affect. Is this *pleasure* I am feeling, is it happiness, joy? Or anxiety, fear, anger, shame... confusion? As always with our practice, we begin with detailed body awareness: what’s the physical sensation, where is it located, is it constant, fluctuating, evanescent? Does it hit me with the force of a belly punch, or is it simply an atmosphere, a tension within me, a sense of vague dis-ease? Or perhaps instead a sense of calm, of relaxation, a general well-being?

I might make a mental note of this story and *label* it, something along the lines of ‘telling myself a story about how unfair my boss was yesterday’, and return to the investigation later. Or I can allow this story to run further while holding it in awareness within zazen, letting the feelings and their accompanying emotions and thoughts unfold. Does the story find an ‘ending’, or does it simply fade out? Do I become distracted by something else, perhaps a different story? How do my feelings and accompanying thoughts shape themselves as this happens? Do I find myself left in a place of calm, or have I become unsettled, even newly preoccupied?

The same applies *off* the cushion, talking with my family or friends, or at work. Can I at least become aware ‘in the moment’ that the story I’m telling *is* a story: ‘telling my partner a story about how unfair my boss was yesterday’? Can I notice my physical and emotional response to what I’m saying, and notice too the whole-body response of the person I’m speaking to — their posture, moving towards or away from me, making or breaking eye-contact, and so on. How aware am I of the response I was *hoping* for from them (the *affect* I wanted of them)? And how does the way they *actually* respond make me feel?

Again, I’ll stress the non-judgemental aspect of this kind of investigation: it is absolutely not about trying to catch myself out (or anyone else), or about trying to ‘prove’ anything to myself or anyone else. I’m investigating at a ‘technical’ level how telling a story connects the speaker’s *affect* — how they *feel* about something — with the affect experienced by the *hearers* (which will always include the speaker themselves).

Following The Script

So it is always useful to ask why I am framing this story in *this* way, as *this* narrative, and how I might tell it differently. How might someone else tell it? How would that change things? There is always a *choice* of narratives. Suppose I tell you that story about my boss giving me a hard time. Were they ‘acting like a little Hitler drunk on his own power’, or ‘under a lot of pressure herself at the moment’? Is it the case that they were ‘being so sexist’, or that ‘this is what you get when you put foreigners/women in charge!’? Perhaps I feel ‘my *old* boss would never have treated me like that’, or that they are, like all bosses, epitomising ‘the evils of capitalism’? Each of these narratives places my interaction with my boss in a different light, and presupposes a different way of understanding the nature of my relationship with them, and so make different kinds of appeal to your sympathies as the hearer. Each different way of telling the story, each way of framing the narrative *invites* different varieties of response, both in terms of how I want you to *feel*, and so what we should consequently *do*. Is it that ‘that’s just how it always is...’, inviting us to fatalistic resignation? Am I looking for encouragement to ‘get my own back’ on this individual, or call them out publicly? Am I telling you this within the ‘echo-chamber’, of the online manosphere? Or at a trades union meeting, or a gathering of political activists? And of course, whatever the way I tell the story, *you* do agree with me, *don’t you?*

Underlying each of these narrative variations is a part-conscious, part unconscious *scripting* of it that emerges from my intention about the emotional response (affect) I want from you, a scripting that itself embodies a whole ‘world-view’, a *way of seeing* our life in the world. While different scripts may diverge in important ways from each other, the worlds they presuppose will still share many features, and it is these features they *share* that form the basis on which they can meaningfully *differ*. We might say that these common underlying features form deeper ‘*meta-scripts*’ embodying core shared assumptions, expectations and requirements about the way the world is, assumptions we probably don’t even notice *as* assumptions, unless we are led to challenge them. Some may be consciously articulable as ‘beliefs’, but many are normally experienced as so ‘natural’ that they are rarely even consciously registered. This framing orients *how* we experience the world, and hence *what* we experience in it. Hence too what we *feel* in response.

John Locke’s account of what it is to be a *person*, based as it is in ideas of property and exclusive possession, works in this sense as a meta-script underlying how we tell stories about ourselves as being *separate* and *self-consistent individuals*. A central proposition of this meta-scripting is of the assumption of the natural inevitability — even desirability — of the division between the relative few who possess the means of self-realisation, and those many obliged to struggle for subsistence while, through the sale of their labour power, supporting those already in possession of the means to a realised life. We have pointed to the parallel here with other dualisms that divide and establish hierarchies of one side over another: patriarch and dependent, boss and worker, man and woman, White and Black, sane and mad, good citizen and criminal. For Locke this separate self is *self-consistent* and also *self-transparent*: I always ‘know my own mind’, and my thoughts and actions are always freely chosen and intentional (and hence I may equally always be ‘held responsible’ for them as an individual). We might contrast this with Zen’s very different assertion that our selfhood exists always *mutually* and *relationally*.

Selling the Story

So far we have thought about our 'speaking' and storytelling largely in terms of *direct* speech: dialogue or conversation where you and I are present to each other, where relationship can be assumed to be based (at least in principle) on our *equality*. But how does any of this apply in the mediated forms of recorded or broadcast speech, of TikTok and Instagram, of the Google search, or of writing itself? How is it when I'm simply the listener, the follower, spectator, the addressee of this particular story that might be information, confession, gossip, exhortation or command... all of which may well, in our current society, be in pursuit of selling me something? *Selling* has become the *necessary* (and often the *sufficient*) condition of all media, and whether explicit or implicit (and the increasing elision of the difference is important), advertising has become the absolute condition of our access to most of the media. YouTube, for example, is the main platform through which my own Dharma talks can reach an audience beyond our sangha itself, and you can watch for free, *provided* you accept to watch whatever adverts are shown you. Similar rules apply to much of news, broadcast and streaming media.

Advertising, both explicit and implicit, uses narrative to induce us to share, and *feel good* about sharing, a very specific set of assumptions about how we should want to live our lives, key to which is that we can *buy happiness* through purchasing particular products. Drawing on the proverb that 'a picture paints a thousand words' our mediated image culture condenses complex narratives to show how *this* product (a cream, a political party, an exercise regime, an app...it matters not...) will meet an essential need, and/or buy status, and/or reinforce family connectedness, and/or forge and sustain friendships. Drink this and you'll share good times! Use this and you'll get the guy/girl! People will envy your new car! Your laundry will be whiter...(and your family will love you more)! In this world-view where our happiness is fundamentally dependent on what we *buy*, the best answer to every personal unhappiness or social ill is to change brand, or identify a new 'need' to be filled by buying a new product or service. This is the *scripting* that individual narratives follow in their differently nuanced ways; underlying all, there remains the meta-script of personhood and property: I possess therefore I am.

The stories advertising tells to us only work to the degree that in some combination of fantasy and 'my life as I lead it' we *identify* with the narratives and characters offered to us. How far is my self-understanding then based in seeing my life *as* a narrative related to the narratives offered me, so *becoming* a story myself? While I may think I'm always in control of the way I tell the story (whether or not I'm consciously trying to persuade or manipulate you), there is always a sense in which in my choice between pre-existing narratives I am in effect being used by the story to tell itself; I become a character in the narrative, told according to a script that has chosen me as much as I have chosen it. As we follow the track of well-worn assumptions and expectations, we find ourselves fitting the current set of facts to an available narrative. To stick with some tried and tested stories we tell about our relationships: there is the 'Ungrateful Child', the 'Parent Who Doesn't Understand Me', the 'Nagging Wife', the 'Neglectful Husband'. That these are narratives built around well-established tropes *does not* mean they don't correspond to a certain truth in each case, but each scripting frames a particular understanding of the situation, which frames in turn our possible responses. Telling the story in *this* particular way will also likely generate a corresponding *affect*: as I describe the situation from the point of view of

the character I come to identify with, so the corresponding *feelings* are aroused: we riff on our righteousness or recoil from (in our eyes) unjust accusation. It's obvious that here, whether we consciously intend to or not, we are foreclosing on openness and possibility, attempting to tilt the ground on which we meet decidedly away from being 'equal'. When we realise this (or it's brought to our attention) we might imagine this is a sign of our inner badness (another story: 'telling myself I am a bad person'...), but perhaps it is rather just our desire to tell a tale that will tie our experiencing to stories we already know and so give us a 'place' in the world that allows us to *feel good* about ourselves. This narrative may well then come to frame the way I actually experience my future, as I live out the role the chosen narrative has assigned me.

"I Love You!"

In his *Divine Comedy* Dante places the illicit lovers Paulo and Francesca among those who will be eternally damned and consigned to Hell. They will be together forever, but caught up in Hell's great spiralling wind that blows them where it will... Given that the idea of love, and of 'true' love has such a central place in Dante's project, this damnation of the lovers might seem surprising, surely 'true love conquers all'? Rather than the illicit nature of their love, the key point for Dante's reading of the (true) story is that Paulo and Francesca fall in love while *reading* together the great love story of the also-illicit love of Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot. They have not so much fallen in love with each other as with 'love' itself, or rather, 'love' as it is represented to us in narrative, in story. They have 'become' Lancelot and Guinevere, and their punishment is not simply to endure the winds of Hell, but as a consequence of having made themselves into narrative, to have all eternity to experience the *reality* of being together with another. How can they come to live this out as *relationship*?

So — "I love you!" Sometimes, the most simple words are the most complicated. Three words, universally known, a 'trope' if there ever was one, a cliché beyond clichés, and yet still potentially the most powerful affirmation we can ever make, and one that may (should?) touch us at our core. No possible way to escape the baggage these words bring with them, and indeed the baggage is itself part of their importance, part of their power as an affirmation of the significance of *this* relationship, that places it besides all those others times and places and stories of 'I love you'. I say these words because I *feel*, and because in saying them to *you*, I want you to feel, too. Is this *new*, in that I recognise the significance of *this* feeling in *this* moment (or have been waiting for the 'right' moment to express it), and so I risk all in telling you this, because to *say* it changes our relationship, as I *perform* the recognition of 'love' according to the correct and unique formula, as a celebrant performs a marriage, or the police an arrest. Having *risked*, I await your answer... will this confirm our relationship, our shared meeting each of other in a 'new' way, and perhaps meeting *ourselves* in a new way also? Or is it *you* that first said "I love you!"? How do I respond, and what feelings are actually aroused in me by your words? Openness and possibility beckon! But words being words, and feelings being feelings, it may be more complicated. Perhaps, I *want* to feel 'love', and think that saying it will truly perform the magic? Perhaps I think I *should* 'love' you, or simply that I should *say* this (because I think you want me to)? Is there honesty or dishonesty here? Or perhaps things are going less than well and I feel I 'need to make a statement'? Or is my declaration desperate, fearing

rejection: reminding, beseeching you that whatever we may actually be feeling in *this* moment, it is our 'love' that defines our relationship? Or even accusatory... how *dare* you do/say *that*, when you know how much I love you? And words being words, I may even actually be *lying*, in order to manipulate, deflect, or at best to placate you. So much in these three little words, we could continue forever. This space that includes both my deepest feelings and my following a well-worn script, that comprehends the layer upon layer of intention and motivation, from the cynical treatment of you as an object that is merely the means to my ends, to an opening out onto the infinite possibility of the mutual unknown...

Meeting Each Other

I suggested above that a central aspect of what makes our meeting each other 'honest' or 'dishonest' is how far our speech acknowledges each other's full *otherness*, how far what we say *recognises* the other. This is a matter not just of our 'intentions' towards each other, but also, and more importantly about our *actions*. As we began to investigate above, how far do my words create the possibility of a genuine two-way *dialogue*, and how far are they aimed *instrumentally*, simply at gaining a particular response, whether that's getting your assent or consent, arousing a particular feeling in you, or actually getting you to act — to *do* or *not do* something. In the 'real world' there will usually (always?) be aspects of both dialogic and instrumental speech about what we say to each other, but it's important to realise the difference. At one pole we might place the 'difficult' but important conversation that, say, a pair of lovers or parent and child finally find the mutual space to begin; at the other the 'consultation exercise' that a firm or government department stages to gather the public's 'views' about a proposal whose outcome has in reality already been decided.

Do we meet, as the Zenkai put it, 'on equal ground', and with a sense of 'openness and possibility'? Offering our recognition extends beyond those present here and now: speaking truthfully and caringly demands that we offer recognition not only to the one *to* whom we speak, but also the one *of* whom we speak. This is harder than it might appear, 'telling tales' on someone is often the form our stories take, particularly when we are just retelling a story that someone else has told to us. 'Gossip' is a traditional target for Buddhism: the relaying of stories for which we have no direct evidence as truth or possibility, so as to gain an audience and bond over the sharing of affect, whether outrage or complacent disapproval. Better to say nothing at all? Or only ever say 'nice' things? Good advice in one sense, but criticism, complaint and calling out are all important aspects of both our individual and wider social relationships, and of the Bearing Witness that is part of our aspiration to practice the Zenkai. Our *ignore-ance* thrives in silence, in what may even seem 'good' manners, what we *don't* mention, 'should not' mention. This extends to when we speak *about* ourselves or the other: 'then you said that ...' or 'I felt unhappy when you did x...'. What story does the way I shape my words tell, and how does that in turn shape your possible responses? Do I create space for you to respond with openness and possibility? I will obviously choose my words to express my *intention* towards you, but of course they may betray a different motive from the one I *consciously* intend. If I'm honest — *self-honest* — I may see that, yes, this way of framing the story as self-justification or as assigning you responsibility is 'unconsciously' part of my intention in speaking! Sometimes we do this in using stock rhetorical devices: exaggerating, minimising, 'what-aboutery', deflecting blame. Of course that in itself might suggest a

certain nervousness born of either lack of confidence or a need to be 'right', but in any case it's evidence enough of the complexity of our feelings, of our motivation in talking. *Owning up* to that might be one way of getting the conversation back towards a more genuine dialogue...

Identity and Relationship

Who do I think *I* am, and who do I think *you* are? Who do *you* think I am, and who do you think *you* are? And how does that show in the way we *act* towards each other and expect the other to act towards us? However we define them, the different aspects of our *identity* that we assign to ourselves and to others, and which are assigned by others to us, are always also *misidentifications*. As we'll explore more fully in relation to the Sixth Zenkai, *any* identification of me both limits and misrepresents me. Any label we can apply brings with it a whole raft of implicit and explicit assumptions and habitual ways of thinking and feeling about the person concerned, and of acting towards them. Linguists study some of this in terms of a word's *connotations*. Connotation is a key aspect of the way narrative and scripting work. No word is simply neutral, and in effect all words are already narratives in terms of how they orient us: 'gratification', for example sounds rather indulgent, very different from 'fulfillment'.

The connotations of a word (and with them the way it is used in the world, and the *effects* it has) will also all depend on the relationship to them of whom I identify as, or am identified as: *identity is always relationship*. The 'Terrorist' and 'freedom fighter' may well be the same person carrying out the same actions, depending on my relationship to them. *This* 'soldier' may be, *for me*, the 'saviour of our nation' / a 'cold-hearted trained killer' / 'our' eternal enemy. They may also be a 'mother', a 'rapist', an 'environmental activist', my own 'son', any or none of which may correspond to my image of, and actions towards a 'soldier'. These different descriptions place me in very different relationships to them, yet what any or all of these identities describe is the *same* flesh and blood human being — complex, vulnerable, self-inconsistent, intimately in Interbeing with the universe.

Identity is not primarily a matter of what I consciously know or understand, but of how I *act* and am acted towards. Importantly, it also extends down to the level of *perception*. As I have tried to emphasise in the previous commentaries, our seeing and not seeing follow the fault lines of violence and inequality within our society, 'naturalising' them as self-evident, as common-sense, as being the nature of reality. What we describe and study as connotation is one of the different processes by which the way we come to see and act in the world are framed and guided by language, ways in which we are actively constituted in relationship by a language that is never neutral, but is an expression of our social world.

The inter-relation of language and perception is complex. We know that our sight does not operate like looking at a pointillist picture — just seeing a mass of coloured dots which we make 'sense' of as a coherent whole — but rather looking for dynamic figure-ground relationships that abstract 'things' that are perceived as separate, and according to the available repertoire of thing-possibilities recognised from our previous experience and processing of the world, processing of which language is itself a part. Likewise speech itself separates out into 'parts': nouns, verbs, adjectives and so on, whereby we construct a world of things and processes. As is well known, the Indo-European languages (of which Sanskrit and English are both members) all use the basic subject/verb/object structure

that offers a very simple model of causality: 'I hit the ball': 'I' (unique active subject) 'hit' (act on) 'the' (this specific) 'ball' (passive object). For both better and for worse 'Western' logic and science have both tended to universalise this form in analysing the world into a series of unique causal agents having specific effects on determined objects. The paradigmatic example of this is the laboratory experiment that isolates a single variable to be tested under completely controlled conditions, the results of which will then be applied to the outside (and inevitably far more complex) world.

Science And Story

So many aspects of the contemporary world would not exist without the rigorous application of this way of thinking, including all but the simplest of our technologies. Yet it does have its more and less obvious limitations, both theoretical and practical. Ecology, as the scientific study of whole systems, is premised on the high degree of complexity of actual causality, and the processes of biology itself show that even many/most of the explanations we offer as to how (for instance) medicines work dramatically underestimate the complexity of actual bodies and correspondingly overestimate what is known about their functioning. Two hundred and fifty years ago the philosopher David Hume showed that logically there can never be *proof* that (a) *causes* (b), only a higher or lower *correlation* that when (a) happens, (b) follows. We then look for plausible causal mechanisms (that are themselves finally only other correlations) to justify the connection, or in their absence dismiss the correlation as down to 'chance'. So it's not even that there is simply a good correlation between (a) and (b), but that the correlation itself fits into a broader pattern of correlations, and these in turn to still broader ones, so that there is a high degree of *coherence* between and within different fields (for example physics, chemistry and biology), and internally down to the level of specific experimental results. Hence climate scientists can never *prove* that a particular event definitively would not have occurred absent the climate crisis, or even prove that the crisis itself is human-made, but only show that it is overwhelmingly *probable*, given the extremely high degree of coherence between putative causal mechanisms and experimental observations. That's how science works. We abstract the simplest explanations we can find that *work* in the given context, whether that's explaining why an apple falls to the ground or developing new and improved medicines and microchips.

So, with science have we finally left the realm of story, of narrative and scripting? Obviously far from it. The presentation of science as 'objective', and hence its production of 'objective truth' is itself a carefully scripted narrative, one which both scientists and public alike are inclined to take over-literally. Clearly *how* science is done, and hence the nature and context of the truths it produces, is (in scientific terms) *multi-causal*. Here we might point to the need to ask, for example: what economic and political interests fund research, and to what purpose? How is it assessed? How far is this related to actual or possible economic gain or social utility? What are the effects of divisions between and within different disciplines, at the level of theory, education and actual practice? How far is science itself shaped by the great inequalities within our society? How far is it also shaped by our culture's grounding philosophical assumptions, by the form and history of our languages? And what are the effects on the way we do science of being ourselves embodied organic beings that perceive and experience in very specific ways?

We need also to ask how far science is driven by its *own* narrative and scripting, and the *affect*, the *feelings* these produce in legislators, funders, researchers and 'the public'. Why is the 'technological fix' for any perceived problem always so attractive to so many, and its self-created problems minimised or ignored? Why the glamour that surrounds the idea of 'Space Exploration' and the vast sums enthusiastically spent on it? Or the relation to the parallel narratives of patriotism and 'National Security' and the billions uncritically spent on military research? None of which questions *invalidate* the truths offered by science, but should make us ask still further about the context of these truths, and the specific fields of their applicability.

The Truth of Zen

And Zen? Zen itself argues both against any over-simple understanding of causality, and equally against mystifying or dismissing it. So, *all* the names we give things and the descriptions we offer are *useful* but also *misleading* abstractions, philosophically unsustainable because there are and logically *can* be no independently acting separate objects, and therefore no direct uni-causal action of one object on another. This does not mean that such ways of thinking and speaking aren't useful, either practically or in terms of our thinking itself ('I hit the ball' does seem to cover the basics pretty well in both cases). The problem, as always, arises when I take these descriptions too seriously, pretending that both 'I' and the 'ball' have separate self-existences outside our complete relationality with the universe, and so imagining too that the 'force' 'causing' the ball to move ('hitting') has real independent existence also. Not normally a problem, of course, until it's *your* throw that hits *me* in the face, and I assign unique and total intentional responsibility to you — "how dare you!"

Just as science's claim to a value neutral and ahistorical 'objectivity', is part of a scripted narrative that intersects with other narratives core to our society, so Zen claims its own kind of objectivity and yet tells this truth *as and through narrative*, in the forms (among others) of the lineage stories and koan collections that talk of 'seeing the world as it truly is', and 'becoming one with the Buddhas and Patriarchs'. It is only too obvious that no aspect of our tradition is independent of our shared histories and their collective karma — in a world of emptiness and Interbeing, really, how could they be? Zen's journey to 'the West' is part of this history and this karma, and so too of this narrative. But the impossibility any actual *escape* from narrative and from its scripting — that we are always telling stories of some kind (as I am telling a story now about telling stories) — only makes it still more urgent to investigate the motivations and forces that lead us to tell a story in *this* rather than in *that* way, and the real effects in the world of our so doing.

Hence these Zenkai commentaries use concepts such as the Lockean 'Person', 'Patriarchy' and 'Race' as useful descriptions (fictions?) to help us frame our experiencing, feeling, thinking and acting in the world. They are my (current) best effort at creating a practical 'field of coherence' between Zen practice, the Mahayana philosophical traditional that underlies it, and contemporary developments in philosophy, psychology and social thought. They are *not* claimed to be *causal* explanations.

Playing Together

I've used 'narrative' as a thread linking together the different aspects of truthfulness and honesty touched on in this commentary. That we are never *outside* of narrative, and that the specific forms of narrative and scripting always frame our understanding and actions towards ourselves, each other and the world. I've stressed the way narrative always connects to *affect* — to the feelings that prompt the speaker to speak, and so to the feelings aroused by the narrative in those who hear it. This places it at the heart of our practice, as our *desire* shapes and is shaped by narrative. Sometimes this looks like my own fully *intentional* action, sometimes rather to betray 'unconscious' motivation, and then again sometimes that I have become merely a *character* in a narrative that is telling itself. In reality *all* of these always apply — it depends how we are telling the story of this story, what makes the best sense, and the most satisfying experience of *affect* for teller and listener. I've pointed to the *meta-scripts* that script the scripts that script the narrative through which we tell our stories, and the way these reproduce and *naturalise* our assumptions about and requirements of the world, reproducing too our active *ignore-ance* towards the violence and inequality we fail to see in ourselves and others.

Every narrative articulates a set of characters in relation to each other and, implicitly, in relation too to the story-teller and listener, with each character assigned a set of characteristics as the features by which they participate as 'victim' or 'perpetrator', as 'smart' or 'dumb' and so on, and possessing a gender and perhaps a race besides. The characters of narrative are in fact one of the major ways in which we experience *identity*, both those we assign to others and those we find assigned to us. Characters both embody and display identity, and remind us again that identity is *always* relational.

Narrative penetrates down to the level of language itself and our individual perception. Language is always *already* a way of telling stories, of scripting and meta-scripting in its grammar and connotation, and hence *all* our stories directly affect our perception, directly affect the way in which we see and hear, and so too the resulting *affect*, how we *feel* in response to what we see and hear.

So, given all of this, what is it to speak truthfully and caringly? How to orient our aspiration? To allow the *other* person to speak, and to be heard by the other in myself? An other who is not outside, not separate from, but a part of the stories and their telling. I bear witness to my story as relationship, and so as leading from *my* affect (my feelings, my emotions) to *your* affect and back, by way of becoming narrative in accordance with a script that both emerges from and ties us within our world. Our stories always have an ambivalent relation to truth, both revealing and concealing truth that is itself always relational. *Relationship* — of you and me, of us and them — requires us to learn to play *together* with our stories.

Paradoxically, *silence* figures importantly here. Firstly in our own *restraint* within speaking. Our affect, the urgency of often unrecognised feeling, may lead us to speak unwisely, unkindly, even frankly *untruthfully*, and so to close off the openness of actual relationship. I bear witness to my own irritability, self-righteousness, sense of self-identity. Allowing the other *their* silence is also part of this, to speak in their own way and in their

own time, not to try to force the story. Allowing the unsaid to find form in speech, and recognising the truth, welcome or unwelcome, that it offers us. We have already noted the silencing, and the effects of the silencing of 'women', to which we can add that of all those 'others' deemed not to count, or to be lesser. A silencing which is often (usually?) unrecognised, and may well be simply reflexive, but in its demonstrating that these others' words, thoughts and feelings do not matter to us, is no less damaging for being 'unintentional'. These silences require us to listen actively — to what is being said and to what is not being said, to what might be said, to what needs to be said. These are all forms of bearing witness.

Silence, listening, non-judgemental self-honesty. These are the foundations of caring speech. To become better aware, insofar as we can be, of how our stories and the stories of our culture, our society, come to be told in just *this* way; better aware too of the consequences, the real effects of their telling. At the heart of this is how we mutually come to be ourselves *together*, both through and despite our stories, our scripting, our identifications and our ignore-ance. *Playing* together in and through language. 'I love you' — the most trite, the most formulaic, the most affecting, intimate and profound words we can ever say.