

The Fifth Applied Precept

I bear witness to the reality of delusion and the desire to evade the painful truths of life in myself and in the world, and aspire to experience Reality directly with clarity and kindness to self and others.

Traditionally: Refrain from using intoxicants that cloud the mind.

We turn away from our life, and we turn towards it. If *shame* and *shaming* are our turning away from experiencing 'this moment' and from 'life as it is', and *desire* is turning towards experiencing both our reality and our fantasy, where does this leave *delusion*? 'Delusion' suggests that what I *appear* to see, that what I *think* I see, isn't really that way, and hence that I *mis*-understand, *mis*-recognise and *mis*-identify my reality. We've explored over previous precepts the central delusion by which we live: that we experience the things of the world—me, you, sentient beings, doors, happiness, time and space—as fully *separate from* and *independent of* each other, and so as their being other than *relational*. We've explored too the mirror image of this delusion: the idea that because things lack any such separate *essence*, therefore nothing 'really' exists, that hence *all* being is 'only delusion'. But to see 'truly' (or as truly as we can) is to see things as *both* 'real', *and* 'empty', and so finally as 'not-separate'; that this is simply what existence *is*. Hence delusion too is *real*: we really see this way, and seeing this way has very real effects in the world.

In Buddhism the cure for our delusion is often talked about in terms of the *purification* of our mind and perceptions, in Zen we often speak of 'seeing things as they really are'. Such ideas can be dangerously dualistic though, and we may imagine this as some lifting of the veil to reveal a 'really real' world behind appearances, or get hung up on ideas of inner calm, or some 'mental state' of unruffled equanimity. This precept originally referred to the 'heedlessness' brought on by drinking alcohol, and if I do get drunk my mind definitely *does* get clouded, and I can't even begin to think rationally. So we contrast this with our ideal mental 'state' of calm or 'mindfulness' and think *that's* the point of this precept. Of course in reality our consciousness is changing rapidly all the time as we respond to our environment: hormones instantly change our whole body's working as heart rate and breathing shift and oxygen levels rise and fall, and so our focus of awareness changes in both object and breadth. Our passing emotions *are* our engagement with the world, and neither in the way we perceive or understand the world is it ever possible to be 'free' of delusion. Yet, 'we are not defiled by our the contents of our thought', to quote Barry Magid himself quoting Dogen. So rather the purification of our mind in search of 'inner peace' or perfect mindful awareness, this precept actually asks us a rather different set of questions. To turn once again to Diane Rizzetto:

Our approach to this precept is not to determine how, or to what extent a substance or an activity may cloud or alter our experience, but rather to point to how we may use and abuse them by obscuring the wisdom and intelligence present in life as it is in any moment, any event, and in any place... This precept is about the ways we use whatever substance to alter or escape our experience... (WUTWYD 95)

So: 'life as it is' offers us 'wisdom and intelligence' *as* our experiencing, and in trying to change, evade or escape this experiencing we actually turn away from life itself (which is *my* life, of course). *Why* would we do this, why don't we want to be *present* for our own lives? Well, we turn away from *dukkha*, from suffering that is both *our* suffering and the suffering we *share* with all beings, the suffering we experience as pain, fear, shame and the rest. The routes we choose are many and various, but never ours alone, and for the most part are only too familiar to us all. The experience of one of Diane's students can take us to the heart of this. S/he's not an addict or an alcoholic, just a regular guy or gal coming home from work to their family:

Student: As I work with this precept I realise that I have expectations that I *should* experience certain feelings around certain situations. For example, I *should* feel happy when I get home from work at night and see my partner and kids. When I don't, I often reach for a beer or glass of wine so that I can relax and loosen up in order to enjoy them more. I know my intention is to relax, but would that be such a bad thing if it allows me to be there and enjoy my family more? Would you call this addiction?

Diane: But are you really there? Would there be another way to *be there* and *honour* the tenseness, rather than ignoring it? This is what your practice can offer you. There's a...way of talking about addiction much like what you might be describing here...a requirement that causes us to act in body, speech, and mind in a certain way in order to alter our experience. What is your requirement here?

Student: That I will always be relaxed and enjoy coming home and being with my family.

Diane: Where is it written that you must always be relaxed and enjoy your family? This question is your point of entry... Grab this question with your life—before you reach for the bottle of beer. You'll learn something. I don't know what that will be. This is your discovery. Own it. Your addiction is your *requirement*—not the beer or the wine. (WUTWYD 95)

Recognising our *requirement* is a vital step: we talk too of recognising our *resistance* to our life as it is, and our requirements are one major aspect of this resistance. But calling it a requirement makes it sound just too voluntary, too intentional on my part, like I just *decided* to feel this way. That is absolutely not how our requirements *feel*. My experience is of *dukkha*, this physical, bodily experience of emotional pain that shows up as the nervous tension or jumpy insecurity that makes me reach for a beer or pour the wine. This is a nagging *need*, an intimate and personal distress (even if often so subtle it only hovers on the edge of consciousness) that *also* brings me into 'self-consciousness' (rather than awareness) as *lacking, inadequate*...back to all our usual stuff. *That's* where I enter the round of *identification* and *shaming*, as I identify myself as the inadequate partner or parent who can't really cope. Calling this my 'requirement' invites me to stay at this judgemental, moralising level of the *individualised self*: It's all about *me*, and *my* foolish, wrongheaded 'requirement'! Why don't I just *drop* it and act like a grown-up? Well, maybe.

It's Not About Me

I think instead it's more interesting to ask: where did this requirement come from? Not in the sense of trying always to chase back to my personal trauma or core beliefs, but instead letting the circle move gently outwards from my self in isolation to ever broader circles of relationship... I'm not looking to pin blame, or find the 'answer', but instead just map the territory by becoming aware of our *dukkha*, our dis-ease, and simply allowing ourselves to open to the social fields that shape our experiencing.

I don't know the 'truth' of this student of Diane's, any more than I did with those in her other case studies, but we *can* easily map some possible points of reference. I assume s/he's coming home in the evening from 'work': a major gearshift of identity and of role, of different kinds of relationship. For most of us our work lives are times of intense activity focused on specified tasks. Work relationships are hierarchical, so maybe s/he's put upon by their boss, who's being leaned on by their boss in turn. It's stressful, but at least the *rules of behaviour* at work are clearly defined. S/he is used to deferring to superiors, and back home they likely need some validation, some recognition by their partner of the valuable contribution they're making to the family under difficult circumstances, and perhaps too hoping for the the deference or admiration of the children. Or...maybe s/he *is* the boss, used to giving orders, receiving the deference of others, their very own PA there to anticipate every need... S/he arrives home to the chaos and differing priorities of family... their partner too may have been at work all day, or at home juggling the infinite varied tasks of family life, while the children will probably be, according to their ages, dispositions and own social experience ('*how was your day at school?*') a mixture of need/raw energy/stonewalling insecurity and probably also...*love*. All of them will have different 'requirements': requirements which are actually perhaps better seen as their assumptions and expectations of family life. Where do these come from, for any of us? Our own childhood home figures large. The images we pick up from films and TV... conversations with friends and coworkers. How *should* it be, how is it *supposed* to feel? A 'sanctuary' from the outside world? That my family are the 'meaning of life' for me? That they 'expect' me to work all day and then come home to work *another* shift without a 'thank you'? So we need to ask about the major distinction our society makes between *public* (the world of work and social life) and *private* (my family, my home). This division isn't in any way 'natural' but has evolved to suit the specific and shifting needs of our capitalist economy, and frames how we think about work/life balance, employment conditions, domestic arrangements, and how we establish and maintain both traditional and non-traditional gender roles. Our current understanding of public and private treats them as seemingly hermetically sealed spheres each making their own demands and often being in competition. This split isn't something of our own devising, but the result of the choices that have been made *for* us about how our society is organised, choices over which we have little significant 'choice' of our own.

So how do we see Diane's student? As *failing* to engage with their 'life as it is', and failing *because* of their 'requirement'? Or can we see their experiencing emerging out of a whole field of different relationships that place stresses and demands on them that are sometimes explicit and sometimes tacit but 'understood'? Why does s/he open the fridge to get a beer? Because coming home, experiencing this sudden shift of their way-of-being between one set of relationships and another is painful, it hurts in its difference and in its

demands and in the uncertainty of what will be asked of them by their partner and the children. I think Diane is exactly right in her question: 'would there be another way to *be there* and *honour* the tenseness, rather than ignoring it?' Which is to ask them to take their life *whole*, to see that *both their desire to turn away and the discomfort that provokes it are still part of 'life as it is'*, part of this complex of relationships. How does this *actually* feel, and what are the feelings *beneath* which s/he (and we) are working so hard *not* to feel by blunting our experiencing with beer or wine or any other evasion?

To remind ourselves of another of Diane's excellent practice questions: 'what's the worst that could happen?' If I *allow* myself this feeling, and meet my family without the 'support' of beer or wine, what's the worst that could happen? My guess is we're not far from exactly the kind of feelings we explored in relation to the Sixth Precept: those connected with our identity, our relation to gender, and our experience of shame. How do we begin to work with all of this? By allowing ourselves to experience our own fears and fantasies, our own shame. But equally importantly by exploring our *relationships* with those others with whom we feel the need to hide from our own wholeness: in Diane's student's case, their family. Let's ask about the feelings of *both* partners! *And* the children. *All* this is life as it is, and it is as relationship that it needs to be worked through. The sixth precept is clear what the process needs to be: can each come to meet the others with 'openness and possibility'? Our practice is towards making this happen.

Individually and Collectively

What goes for Diane's student goes for all of us, for me too. To see all my thoughts, feelings and actions in response to the complex forces acting in different areas of my life as in some way only being 'my' business, and so as uniquely 'my responsibility' is to come perilously close to falling into exactly that pit of shame that both produces and is produced by the illusion of our isolation as an individual separate from all others. This is an illusion the more destructive and perverse in that it is always *socially* constructed: as we have explored, I can only be my shamed and separated self *in relation to* a world of others. It's also to offer me a fantasy of control I can never make real: the whole point about our practice with 'life as it is' is to recognise not simply the limits to my ability to control the relationships (*both external and internal*) that make up my life, but to problematise the notion of *control* itself, we do not need to compound our existing delusions in this area. Instead we need to learn to take ourselves whole. *Taking myself whole* is to expand my limited notion of 'self' to include all aspects of my self (selves) and my relationships as they show up as my *experiencing*. I have to include, to make space for, to *allow*, the 'painful truths of the world' to be recognised *as* and *in* my self (selves). Joko's basic image of practice as fostering our growth in becoming 'A Bigger Container' in our ability to *be with* what is painful to us is central here. For all of us this is hard, and for most of us this will *sometimes* be impossible, but even to recognise this impossibility is something. What is painful to us is not easily managed, for the very reason that it isolates us within ourselves, and automates and makes reflexive our reactions to what are always in reality complex and nuanced situations.

We are now in a better position to understand why this precept isn't *per se* about drinking alcohol or using any particular 'substance'. This precept applies to all and every

means we use to 'evade the painful truths of life in myself and in the world', thereby 'obscuring the wisdom and intelligence present in life as it is in any moment'.

Originally this precept focused on the use of alcohol, but later it was expanded to include the use of other substances like marijuana, tranquillisers, hallucinogens, and so forth. Today we can think of more subtle ways we turn from being present by using and abusing not only mind-altering drugs, but also caffeine, cigarettes, food, and activities like exercise, TV watching, internet surfing, work, sensory highs, or anything that can turn us from the immediate experience of our minds and bodies.

...in exploring this precept, we focus not so much on what particular drugs or activities are acceptable to use, but rather what our intention is and how we can use any substance or engage in any activity that drives us further into our habitual ways of meeting the events and circumstances of everyday life. My point is that alcohol, drugs, TV, whatever, are not escapes in and of themselves. What makes them escapes is how we use them. (WUTWYD 94)

I want to both agree and disagree here. Diane's fundamental point is absolutely correct: it's how we *use* things. But her approach, as with so much of 'Western' Zen, seems very *asocial*: it's always all about *me*, never about *us*. This is more strange, given that Zen teachers so often speak of us all being 'one body', an idea that is very relevant to how we think about and practice with the precepts, though it's easy to get mystical with it. Thich Nhat Hanh talked of the 'collective body' as one aspect of our interdependence and Interbeing, and applying this insight practically is a good way to counter both asocial and mystical tendencies: we need to examine how the collective body shows up as 'us' in our everyday lives and in the broader patterns of our society. Here's the Plum Village formulation of this precept:

Aware that true happiness is rooted in peace, solidity, freedom, and compassion, we are determined not to accumulate wealth while millions are hungry and dying nor to take as the aim of our life fame, power, wealth, or sensual pleasure, which can bring much suffering and despair. We will practice looking deeply into how we nourish our body and mind with edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. We are committed not to gamble or to use alcohol, drugs or any other products which bring toxins into our own and the collective body and consciousness such as certain websites, electronic games, music, TV programs, films, magazines, books and conversations. We will consume in a way that preserves compassion, wellbeing, and joy in our bodies and consciousness and in the collective body and consciousness of our families, our society, and the earth.

An insightful list, but it might seem to be saying the exact opposite of Diane, so should we really be thinking in terms of 'toxins' here? From the point of view of 'me' and 'my choices' it could be argued that '...it's not *guns* that kill people, it's *people* that use guns to kill people!'...or at least that's what the National Rifle Association always says. Actually, it's the combination of the two which is dangerous, and rather than locking up or executing all of the potential killers (which means *all* of us, and me and you too), sanity

suggests it might be more humane and effective to tackle the availability of the guns. What both liberal and conservative arguments always seem to ignore is that there is a vast industry creating not only the products themselves, but the social conditions under which there is a demand for their products. 'Nobody *made* you go out and buy a gun and kill with it!'. True, but many, many people contributed to the conditions where this seemed like the 'right' or 'only' choice possible. Blaming the individual weapon for the harm it causes is stupid, but to claim the individual who used it was entirely 'free' in their choices is equally so: which is why we fall back so often on the ultimate non-explanation of calling things 'evil' as an alternative to any real understanding or acceptance of our collective responsibility for the collective body. Thus it is with our use of substances and all of life's other evasions...

The nature of *toxins* also provides us with a further insight: the all-important point with any toxin is *dosage*. Substances vital to the human body at one level can become toxic or fatal at a higher level, and many substances we think of as poisonous are well-tolerated at low levels. Almost any substance or activity is *potentially* toxic, but some are clearly much more dangerous than others (guns, for instance...). So that rethinking Diane's insight at the social, *collective* level allows us to frame it more usefully. So for example it's important to talk of the psychological factors that lead to our obsessive scrolling of social media or news 'feeds' rather than engaging with 'life as it is', but frankly stupid to do so if we ignore the algorithms governing these feeds, algorithms whose only purpose is generating 'clicks' to produce the advertising revenue that is the sole reason for the hosting platforms' existence. How we as *individuals* use potentially toxic substances and media is led by our *collective* usage of them, because it is at this level that the industries responsible for developing and marketing them as products operate, always with profit as their primary purpose. We make our individual choices within a collective frame. How do we draw our individual and collective lines?

In *social* terms, why ban heroin and crack cocaine, and *not* ban or more severely restrict the use of alcohol, which in terms of its collective harming is our society's most dangerous drug by far? How do we find the line between substances and activities I can 'reasonably' make choices about, and those which should be matters of public health, public safety? What do 'we' require 'protecting' from, and where do we feel that 'misuse' by 'others' should not be allowed to interfere with our own use? We stress the *nonjudgemental attitude*, but this doesn't mean shutting our eyes to what's going on: to what it is that *I'm* doing, but also to what is going on around me and within my society and the wider world. What are the toxic effects at each level, and what are the causes? As an individual, to allow myself to find my way forward in my own time as I develop a greater degree of self-honesty may well be my best approach. But what if it is two bottles of vodka a day, or my stealing to get the money for my dealer so I can carry on shooting up? What if it's spending my days on Incel websites, or gambling away my family's home without them knowing, or downloading child porn every night? What then? What if it's actually *me* I'm talking about here with the big stuff?

Selling To the Addicts

For most of us, most of the time, it's not that, but instead any or all of those plethora of activities that clearly are neither good nor bad in themselves: playing and watching sports,

exercise, even the food we eat... In fact most of us lift our mood or counteract stress by eating. Chocolate, cookies, foods that remind us of childhood or happier times, or just the buzz of sugars and the satiety of fats. The pleasures of looking, smelling, tasting, and chewing, of contrasting textures in the mouth. Is this in any way wrong or worrying? And yet we know that in the West obesity is a massive and growing problem. We know that if we 'comfort eat' too much, we may well end up comfort eating because we are 'so fat', or simply that it becomes our go-to response in any difficult situation. Clearly this too is 'evading the painful truths of our life'. Yet ridiculous *not* to take into account that this finding refuge in overeating is a response to exactly that *cycle of shaming* we looked at in relation to the Seventh Precept. I experience myself as individualised and in permanent competition with others, so creating a sense of personal inadequacy and with it the fantasy of personal fulfilment through buying and consuming. What I get is the momentary forgetfulness of experiencing the (real) pleasures of the mouth: smell, taste, texture. The global food industry has developed in the way it has to supply this 'need', a 'need' that the global economic system itself has created. Extended supply lines expropriate from local populations to provide cheap raw materials processed by multinational corporations into attractively packaged commodities the actual properties of which are engineered to be maximally addictive, while intense corporate lobbying pushes back against whatever minimal public health measures individual governments may try to put in place. All reliant on the insecurity induced in us through our individualisation as 'free' workers and consumers... Ditto of course the huge alcohol industry and its intensive marketing, to which we shall return.

Perhaps the most severe and widespread social and chemical *addiction* of recent times has actually been nicotine, traditionally in the form of tobacco, but now increasingly as vaping. What goes for food goes for tobacco also. There's the action of holding between the fingers, the ritual, often social, of lighting the cigarette, and then the inhaling, the feel of the filter between the lips, the warmth of smoke, its trailing off into the air. The fall of ash, the hand positions of our 'smoking *mudras*'...All this quite apart from the actual hit of nicotine... Why was it so cool to smoke? Ask Hollywood! Long gone are the days when advertising depicted every smoker as a handsome cowboy or with the gold braid of an airline pilot, but the principles have not changed. In what ways do these stories become our own? What do they reveal about ourselves and about our world, and what do they hide? This product will make me look good and feel good, and give relief from the truths that worry me, and in some small way I'll become a different me, if only for a moment or two. There's no simple escape from these stories, of course. This is the culture, the society, which I inhale with every breath. *Who* is it who reaches for the cigarette? If I am happily a smoker this might seem an easy one to answer. Okay, but when it's my fifth go at quitting, and all my previous attempts have collapsed after a week or a month, then just *who* reaches for the cigarette? The nicotine? My body? My weakness? My badness? My...*will*, my *intention*? How do I judge? And what's *really* going on? Likewise, when I'm pouring a beer, or opening the biscuit tin/cookie jar? *Who*? Any of these will show me, if I pause to notice, that I'm never simply 'one thing', a whole, undivided, unitary 'person'. Different 'parts' of me want different things, often in the same moment. Our relationships with our habits show us this very clearly and intimately. 'Habit' is of course itself a long-standing slang for addiction... and I need to 'feed' my habit. How many of our habits are connected

with evasion, momentary or sustained? But of course our habits are not ‘ours’ in the sense of being biologically programmed or engraved on our souls: they exist only in context of our being *this* person, in *this* family, doing *that* job, surrounded by others consuming in the way they do, immersed in a sea of advertising for the products and services (cookies, gambling websites, loss-leader alcohol, porn) that can be profitably marketed to us and provided for us. And now, as internet users we are all under permanent training by the algorithms that use us to scroll on and click through to generate the all-important advertising revenue. But this is just the most sophisticated (and also the clearest, most explicit) iteration of the process basic to consumer capitalism: use the alternation of fantasy and shaming to induce a ‘need’ one can profitably fill.

Whatever the particular form or the individual circumstances, underlying it all is this *turning away from my life*, often without being aware that that’s what I’m really doing. Despite what I consciously believe or want, and despite all the teachings about of mindfulness and awareness, I find myself being led into ‘ignore-ance’, into dissociation. There is a turning away from what hurts, or from what this part of me assumes is going to hurt... In this turning away from aspects of my experiencing I *displace* and *limit* the fullness of my awareness and attention by *dissociating* from what I experience as painful. I may wish instead to soothe myself, to numb out or excite. Or I may wish simply for myself to vanish, be it for an hour, or *forever*. In reality all of these ‘solutions’ to life’s harder experiences separate us from both the wholeness of ourselves and of our relationships with others, a wholeness which of course always *includes* our pain, our resistance, our disease. Whatever self-states I enter (I become?) are inevitably configured in relation to what I have dissociated from as ‘not me’. This ‘not me’ may come to function like the blind spot on my retina: something of which I am completely unaware in what appears to *me* as a consistent and coherent vision of the world. To return to Diane Rizzetto: we obscure ‘the wisdom and intelligence present in life as it is in any moment, any event, and in any place.’ Many of our turnings away are harmless, or at least not actively damaging to ourselves or others. We are often simply ‘too much’ for ourselves, both in ourselves and in our relationships to others. There is no simple line dividing harmless and harmful evasions, hence the need for thorough and sustained investigation in the direction of becoming more open and self-honest. The difficulty is that it is of the nature of the very process of dissociation that it excludes aspects of our own experiencing, and so leads us in the direction of self-states that seem to make sense of and appear to justify the unjustifiable. We become blind to the harming that we suffer, and the harming that we do.

I’m Not an Addict, I’m Just...

As we have already noted, the original subject of this precept is the use of alcohol in its effect of causing ‘heedlessness’: leading us to causing harm by actions or speech. I’ve found much insight in listening to the responses of new students and the world at large to thinking about their use of alcohol. For many—and I think even for most people—suggesting that our ‘drinking’ might be problematic *both* for ourselves as an individual *and* part of a much wider social problem, brings out our *resistance* (always a red flag in our practice) in a way that points to our feeling *shamed* by the suggestion itself. The thought that we might want to think about, reduce or eliminate our ‘drinking’, whether as part of our Buddhist practice or not, often evokes reactions that swing between a suppressed

panic and incredulity or outright hostility. The traditional interpretation of this precept definitely *is* that we *stop* using alcohol altogether. Our Ordinary Mind approach doesn't ask us to do that, but instead to get more interested in why *even the idea of stopping 'drinking' seems difficult for us*, and so to become curious about our *resistance* and what that might tell us about the ways in which we actually *do* use alcohol. We see *at once* that lying, stealing, killing and so on are wrong, and even though we inevitably find it hard to entirely match our behaviour to them, we don't challenge these standards themselves. We're not immediately looking for get-outs: 'do I have to give alcohol up *entirely* to be a Buddhist? How *much* is ok? Is it ok to have a beer with a meal? Is it ok as long as I don't get really drunk?' People never ask: 'do I *have* to stop stealing? How *much* am I allowed to steal a day if I'm a Buddhist?' 'How many lies *can* I tell, and how *big*?' 'Can I kill someone if everyone agrees they're a bad person, or if I feel I '*have*' to, or if I only do on Tuesdays? Is that OK?'

(NB: Of course alcohol really might *not* be your thing, and if 'take it or leave it' really *is* how you feel, then this is the moment to shift your attention to whatever *does* bring up feelings of irritation or anger when you think of giving it up, stopping, doing without. What 'pleasures' or 'comforts' do I treat as 'requirements'? Which do I feel I have some kind of *right* to? These might even include those that make us feel 'virtuous', like my exercise regime, my regular zazen...)

So, this precept is as much about awareness of the feelings of discomfort, of *dis-ease* (=dukkha), that make us willing to argue that black is white if it means we don't have to challenge our behaviour, as it is about what we actually *do*. Anyone who *does* give up drinking will be familiar with the reactions this provokes: people will probably assume you are an alcoholic or on serious medication. If you do try to explain about Buddhism, then they will think that you have joined some kind of cult intent on *forcing* you to stop. 'But *why* can't you drink?'

So I need to put my 'liking a drink' or feeling I 'need a drink' in context. Why did Diane's student feel that they 'needed' a drink, or that one would 'help'? Alcohol is a socially sanctioned mood adjusting drug, produced and promoted by a massive industry that spends billions on advertising and marketing. We have learnt to associate using alcohol with 'good times', with 'sharing with our friends and family', with 'being ourselves' and 'letting our hair down'. This industrial product is marketed as an essential part of our personal expression, of our exercising our ability to discriminate and judge in our choosing one brand over another, and even as a subversive and transgressive blow against a straight-laced and moralising society. It promises freedom: freedom from our cares and responsibilities, freedom just to be our true selves (however we imagine them...) *Whereas..* the Friday night drunk, the solo drinker, the driver who lost control, the night that ended in a fight or in sex they didn't really want or weren't even able to consent to... let alone the true alcoholic... these are all someone else, an *other* who whether we pity or damn them 'can't cope', can't 'take their drink', perhaps has an 'addictive personality' related to personal trauma or 'poor genes'. Either way, *they* are nothing to do with *us*, and their existence is no reason to spoil *our* fun.

There is much ambivalence around public health campaigns to encourage us to reduce or stop ‘drinking’ (the euphemism itself tells us so much). One journalist describes joining an anonymous WhatsApp group where would-be non-drinkers could share the guilty secret of their desire to stop, and the shaming they faced by doing so: if you stop or simply attempt to reduce your drinking you have violated our societal norm around alcohol, and you will be shamed as a result. We *demand* the assent of others to our world-view, best understood not so much as a set of explicit ideas, but as patterns of dissociation: *for others to fail to dissociate along similar pathways challenges the coherence of our own self-states, resulting as they do from exactly those patterns of dissociation*. Those of us of a certain age will remember the first government campaigns linking the newly recognised AIDS virus (HIV) to drug use. They featured a stereotypically derelict junkie (pale and sunken-eyed) huddled in the corner of a bare room saying: ‘I’m not an addict—I’ve just got a touch of flu today!’ I think the copywriter nailed the key delusion of addiction, and one that fits perfectly our society’s use of alcohol. Not of ‘alcoholics’, but of *the culture of which we are all a part*.

Alcohol, due largely to the scale of its use, is the world’s most dangerous drug. It is a disinhibitor, allowing violence of all kinds an active expression it would otherwise lack. The links between alcohol use and domestic violence of all kinds are particularly well established, as are alcohol’s effects on our collective violence. Many of the health consequences of both its acute and long-term use are well known, from depression to liver failure, but others are only becoming apparent. My seemingly unique and personal wish *to avoid the more potentially painful moments of my own life* is part and parcel of all this: a world of human beings engaged in billions of moment by moment *turnings away*. We are not ‘*separate*’ from any of this. To reprise our major theme: it’s not so much about ‘right and wrong’, about ‘do or don’t’ as about the *causes* of our turning away and the *consequences* of our doing so. Our delusive self-states will tend to blind us to both.

The ‘War on Drugs’

‘Demonising’ substances can be as harmful as actively promoting them. The US sponsored ‘War on Drugs’ has been in full swing internationally for more than a century, and in its own stated terms has been a catastrophic and chronic failure. It has however proved a suitable vehicle for political manipulation and to pursue racist agendas, undermining democracy not only in the US itself, but massively so across South America and to a lesser extent in Asia too. It has been used as an argument for increasing social control, particularly of minority populations, and the arming of police forces with military-grade weapons. Illegality makes quality control, scientific research and providing reliable information impossible, and combined with the near-total lack of treatment centres and possibilities for effective management leads to far higher levels of longer and more dangerous addiction. So that alongside the resulting social and health consequences of addiction itself, the continuing illegal trade in drugs produces horrendous levels of violence and exploitation that are a direct consequence of the criminalisation itself.

The ‘Great Powers’ have a long and dismal history in their involvement with addictive drugs, the ‘War on Drugs’ being merely the latest chapter of their ‘War *with* Drugs’. For example: the nineteenth century British invasions of China—the Opium Wars—succeeded in forcing China to allow the importation and sale of British opium grown in India, a

'trade' that created millions of Chinese addicts, and destabilised Chinese society sufficiently not only to break the longstanding Chinese hegemony across Asia and the Pacific but to make China effectively ungovernable, a situation that ended only with the Communist victory following the Second World War. The resulting racial stereotype of all Chinese men as being 'drug-crazed' opium addicts who posed an existential danger to civilised society (and specifically to White women) was then used by the United States as the rationale for making a wide range of recreational and medical drugs illegal throughout the world, inventing a 'racial panic' as a political control on the rapidly growing population of Chinese-Americans. This same strategy criminalising specific drugs—but in this case those favoured by Black communities—was an important component of the racism of the Jim Crow era, as one part of the response by White elites following on from post Civil War reconstruction. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010) showed conclusively that the revival and intensification of this 'War on Drugs' from the 1980s onwards was organised, promoted and funded with the covert—and often not so covert—intention of undermining the advances won by the Civil Rights movement. The creation and disciplining of a huge Black underclass of 'law breakers'—fabricating the symbolic equation of Blackness with criminality—meaning that the majority of Black Americans could more easily be denied the very political, economic and social equality they were now legally guaranteed, a process continuing today.

It seems incontrovertible that the 'War on Drugs' has created far more harm than it has ever prevented, and that this has been so from its beginning. But as a strategy of Mastery—of racial and class control—the War on Drugs has been and remains effective, and our images of the 'dangerous other' have been shaped by this. In terms of our Ordinary Mind way of looking at the Precepts it's clear that in defining a section of our society as dangerously and differently other, our governments have created a *collective* delusion far more dangerous for the world than any clouding of my *individual* consciousness. This plays to racial stereotyping of the worst sort: non-Whites are irrational and devious, and 'we' (Whites) need to resist at all costs being polluted by them. This is the argument for slavery, colonialism and exploitation of every kind, even for genocide. *By separating off our own collective 'badness' in the figure of the other, we obscure the real issues of our society.* This is a misdirection of our collective attention, and while we are all to some degree complicit in this, for some it has been and remains their cynical and direct intention to deflect our attention, to misdirect us in our perception and understanding of our world.

We don't even have to have the *intention* to misdirect, or even consciously to *believe* these ideas in order to deepen our delusion. We are in the grip of dangerous *ideology* not when we actively debate or discuss, but when we take it for granted that a particular state of affairs is 'natural' or 'just the ways things have always been'. So: 'Work hard and you will succeed!', 'Life is dog eat dog!', 'Men are men and women are women...period!' are straightforwardly ideological views, but what is most important is *how these show up* as the limits we place on our own and each others' actions: in the laws we frame and how we police them, and in the institutions and communities we build, as much as in our daily encounters. To study our ideologies is simply to study the more internally coherent of our collective delusions: our unreflective *mis*-recognition of our relationships with others and with the things of the world.

‘Using’ Buddhism

And what when it is the stories themselves that become the habit, the addiction? I might have got the idea that my ‘real’ problem is the distraction offered by my ‘sense pleasures’ and the world of *kāma*, but the world of ideas can be equally, and in some ways *more* involving. Any and all firmly held ideas that demand our unswerving belief have this potential: political, religious, and of course Buddhist ideas can affect us very powerfully and over long periods of time. Political or ethical views that offer us any degree of certainty about how the world is—or how it *should* be—can in fact narrow and restrict our view of life, while at the same time creating a passionate conviction that we are correct and that only fools or devils could disagree with us. Displaced onto a great leader or an ideal, our desire for belonging and certainty ceases to seem ‘selfish’, and we may even offer ourselves up for metaphorical or even literal martyrdom for the cause.

Our precept practice itself and the sense of purpose and identity created through it can become a turning away from my life rather than towards it. If I’m convinced that this is the ‘right’ path and everyone else is ‘wrong’, then I’m clearly caught up in the world of views... I’ve already referred to the pervasive idea found in many Buddhist schools that what I’m looking for is the ‘right’ state of mind, whether that be ‘pure consciousness’, ‘calm’ or ‘equanimity’, and even mindfulness and awareness can come to be understood in this way. Our quest for *control* and *safety* is not unreasonable, but searching to find *the right* mental state, and one that has the sanction of those I believe are my spiritual superiors is delusion through and through. There is a particular rigidity and inflexibility that may come with the sustained intensity of the effort of striving for spiritual mastery, a striving which may at any point collapse under its own weight, leaving us feeling failure and self-recrimination, a self-judgement from which we will be only too happy to turn away to continue our search for the next demagogue or spiritual leader, and so further compound our real experience of suffering.

Self-States of Delusion

I have talked about the ‘assumptions’ and ‘preconceptions’ that shape our seeing, and linked this to the Buddhist concept of the *samskāras*: the ‘mental formations’ and their affective content. Philip Bromberg’s idea of our continually shifting between relatively autonomous self-states returns us directly to our *immediate experiencing*, and to its *wholeness*. Bromberg talks of our sense of self as the ability to construct the idea of a continuous and unified ‘self’—my ‘me’—out of the reality of discontinuous and constantly shifting self-states, which we move between in relation to the needs of the moment. In this sense *all self-states are versions of delusion, within the delusion of a fully coherent self*. There is no simple way I can ever stand back from these to get a ‘true’, ‘objective’ view, and in fact this idea itself makes no sense. Each self-state feels like ‘me’, and each is experienced as ‘whole’, as consistent with itself, despite each being the product of *dissociation*. But some self-states are more inclusive than others, some can come to include what has previously been experienced as ‘not me’, as bad, dangerous or completely other.

We need to understand delusion neither as *failure* or a kind of *madness*, nor as a departure from imagined initial or final *clarity*. Only then we can claim it and own it as what we all are: embodied, mortal, vulnerable beings experiencing ourselves as the selves

we have fabricated out of this moment by moment experiencing. We *turn towards* and we *turn away*, we see the world in the ways we do, and we tell stories about it. It is in the nature of our delusion for it to be invisible to us. The world really *looks* that way, *feels* that way. It *makes sense* that way. So whether it is the idea that the world is ruled by space-lizards, or that my heroin use harms no-one, I really do *experience* the world this way. I can never be *free* of delusion any more than I can be free of being *this* self-state in *this* moment. As Barry Magid never tires of saying, there is no delusion so deep as that delusion that I can be free of all delusion. But not all delusions are equal. Philip Bromberg argues that the function of psychoanalysis is to help us 'stand in the spaces' between self-states: to experience their shifting nature and the unnoticed inconsistencies and contradictions within and between them. By so doing we allow ourselves to—feel safe to—*experience* ourselves more inclusively, as more *whole*, and so less subject to the specific dissociations that have formed the coping strategies that serve us so poorly.

Our approach through Zen practice is in many ways analogous to this, that by paying attention to the shifting moment by moment play of experience which we each are, we may come to see ourselves as less separate both within ourselves and with each other. We may come to experience more fully our wholeness with the world, and within ourselves. This inevitably involves turning *outward* to the world of which I am a part, and so to the *causes* of my turning away, and the *consequences* of my actions. None of my engagement is, in this sense, 'neutral', or without consequence. Our practice is exploration: not to determine in advance, not to tell us how we *must*, or *should* think or behave, albeit that this absolutely does *not* mean it doesn't matter what choices we make, or that it's all 'relative'. If a popular working definition of 'madness' is to keep repeating the same actions and expecting a different result, then we are all clearly 'mad', but our investigations can lead us to becoming less so. While we can never stand back to get a 'view from nowhere', our changing patterns of dissociation clearly allow us to see our world as less or more whole, and to act in ways that are more and less harming both to ourselves and to others, whether in our intimate relationships, or the 'collective body' of which Thich Nhat Hanh speaks.

Turning Towards Non-Separation

Here's a strategy for practicing with this precept in our day to day lives, whether on or off the cushion. None of this is 'one-shot': it's all about coming back and back and back again. It involves working in reverse along the sequence from *effect* to *cause*:

Recognise the kinds of things I do to displace, evade or avoid my experiencing of 'life as it is', whether that's scrolling, reaching for a 'drink' or a cigarette, turning on the TV...

Feel the impulse to turn towards these *as it arises in the moment*: feel into how it feels physically and emotionally... anticipation/distraction/guilt/relief? Where in my body do I experience this? What form does it take (tension, breathing, heart rate, gut, and so on...)?

Return to my initial experiencing of the *resistance* that produces the impulse to turn towards this particular kind of displacement. In my moment by moment experiencing of 'life as it is', what are feelings of *dukkha*, of physical or emotional dis-ease, dis-comfort,

tension, or anger that prompt me to turn away? Where in my body am I experiencing this, what are the images / thoughts / feelings that arise?

Connect this experience of *dukkha* back to its immediate cause: what is happening around me, what am I thinking as I begin to experience this resistance?

Allow the question: without reaching for easy answers, just *why* does being in this situation or thinking these thoughts make me feel this way? If I find a *requirement* or an *assumption*, a *view* or a *belief* about myself or about the world, how does this fit in the broader pattern of my life?

Expand the circle of connections: what role do these specific *requirements*, *assumptions*, *views* and *beliefs* play in the organisation of our world? Do they help us become more open to the possibility of meeting ourselves and others, or make us act as more separate?

Review the activities I use as displacements: for each one, what are their actual effects on me, both long- and short-term? What place in the world do they have, what are their economic and political consequences, both for humans and other sentient beings?

We talk, and rightly so, of being non-judgemental in our awareness. ‘Should’ and ‘should not’ are death to self-honesty. I *feel* the way I feel, I *want* what I want... And I feel and want *differently* from day to day, moment to moment. In my exploration of what appears as ‘me’ I feel and I follow my feelings as they unfold, the thoughts arising and fading that accompany them. My investigation itself is not a neutral or distanced activity, and if I sustain my practice it can and will change *how* I feel, *how* I think, and so also how I consequently act. It’s not that ‘right and wrong’—or as modern Buddhism likes to say ‘wholesome and unwholesome’ actions—don’t figure, but that we can’t assume them in advance, or derive them *a priori*. Being what looks like ‘right’ may prove very ‘wrong’ in this particular context, and the attempt to distinguish one from the other may itself lead directly to harming born of deepening our delusion, of our moralising separation into *good* and *bad*, *us* and *them*. Righteousness is rarely appropriate, and our attempts to imagine we can get on the ‘right’ side of any issue are always problematic. We’ve touched on many ways of ‘evading the painful truths of life’, and one of these painful truths is that our need to know—to be right, and so to be safe from shame and from harm—can itself a cause of suffering and harming. And yet. Both as individuals and as a society we need to *act* and hence to judge, and realise that our *inaction* is itself always *also* an action and a judgement. No escape! We are part of this world, down and dirty with it...

We turn away, and we turn away. There is much to turn away from, far more than any of us can bear. We *can* at least Bear Witness to this turning, and investigate it as best we may as for each of us it shows up as and in ‘me’. I cannot step outside my culture or my ‘self’, I am always and forever a part of it: back to Vimalakirti’s ‘I am sick because the world is sick’. Hence this investigation of ourselves and the world needs to be gently, and kindly, and generously done: there is far more to turn away from than any of us can bear. If we persist in our investigations, if we come back, and back, and back we may begin to gain insights about ourselves as we are in the present, and as we have been in the past.

These insights may, hopefully, help us to see and to experience ourselves as ‘not-separate’ from our embodiment as social beings. We may come to see the dependence of our turnings away and turnings towards on our collective delusion and dissociation, manifesting in our collective ‘requirements’, assumptions and ideas. The precept itself won’t tell you the purpose or the consequences of your or my opening the fridge, scrolling on the sofa, turning on the TV. Our *practice* will do this, if we allow it to develop and to deepen. My investigation of my own patterns of reaction and response will definitely bring about changes, though exactly what these will be I’ll have to find out as I go: my behaviours shift and adjust, my thinking and experiencing acknowledge the full complexity of the given situation in which I or we or the world find ourselves.

This is to return to where we began with this precept, in the moment by moment challenging of our fundamental delusion that all existence is that of permanent and separate *things*, and so instead to see the necessity of the identity of non-separation and emptiness in *our* and *all* existence. In each moment, do we *turn towards* non-separation? This is to turn towards connection and relationship, towards openness and possibility, towards meeting and recognising both self and other. In our *turning away* there is also always a different kind of *turning towards*: towards separation *from* both self and other in the distraction of the intensity of momentary experience, in our clinging to a fantasised ‘state of mind’, in cleaving to the security of an idea of truth or righteousness, or simply the non-feeling of numbing out what is just too painful to bear. Turning towards the separation that in seeming to offer us control and safety instead divides us one from the other, and from ourselves also. Sometimes reflection will make this blindingly clear to us, sometimes the pattern of our delusion will still make us swear that black is white, or even *see* day as night. It can be hard to recognise in the moment, and impossible to divine the consequences moving out into the universe of any one action. My complicities, my cowardices and my heroism, or rather... recognising it’s not really about ‘me’ at all, but the way we find ourselves thrown into a world which is not of our making or choosing, and yet is still *our* world, and our *only* world. The world we share, the world we love.