The Sixth Applied Precept:

I bear witness to the reality of blame and the avoidance of responsibility in myself and in the world, and aspire to speak of others with openness and possibility.

Traditionally: Not Discussing the Faults of Others

The Problem With Harry

As always, Dianne Rizzetto sends us firmly back to ourselves to examine this Precept. 'I catch myself dropping a comment to my husband about someone we both think is *not very reliable*.' A comment that is in itself a judgement, though one that's been made previously. The practice here, as she outlines it, is to suspend or bracket out our judgement and ask instead about the *judging* itself: how do I think I 'know' this, and why am I saying this to *him*, and *here*, and *now*? So this is clearly beginning as a continuation of our work with the Fourth precept: what's the 'truth' of what is going on here? This is a very useful strategy, but as with all strategies it has its limitations. What happens when I bring this back to the complexity of my 'life as it is' in the infinitely complex world we all share? Is this precept simply telling me not to judge (lest I be judged?), or only ever to say nice things about people? And am *I* the real problem here, with my curious selfishly judgemental ways? We can certainly see that we all share a tendency to label, to pigeonhole, to categorise people and things. Are we judging their *actions*, or are we judging them as *people*? (This is actually a vital distinction to which we'll return below.)

We looked last time at our *need to know* as an expression both of our unacknowledged vulnerability and our compensatory attempts to control our world. As I said in the introduction, we all want to be right, and this in both the strong senses of this word: I want to be *factually* right, and I want to be *morally* right, because being morally *right* gives me *rights* that guarantee my own safety and position. 'We too easily become barristers in our own impromptu courtrooms, and are happy to move from there to being both judge and jury. Abstracting and decontextualising, assigning individual responsibility. Making our universalising judgements. *Separating*.' I've already pointed to the supposed *naturalness* of this kind of reaction, and suggested that we might more usefully see it as the personal expression of a culturally specific approach: if we *assume* that society is just the coming together of entirely separate individuals in permanent competition with each other, then we can equally *assume* we all act permanently selfishly, and buttress our assumptions with examples from sociobiology and animal behaviour. We will ask many times as we go along '*cui bono*?': who benefits? The immediate answer here is, of course, my sense of self, of self-*worth* and *worthiness*, of being 'someone', if only on my own personal stage. I learn this in my own family, at school, at work, through sports and in endless cop and gameshows on TV. But the imaginary game of all against all is played at a level and for stakes beyond my

wildest dreams: it is not *my* game, however much I insist on or deny my taking part. It's important to say this, because Zen/Buddhist thought brings with it a reflexive self-judgement: it's *my* fault, my *ego's* fault I act this way. This is the judgement the game requires of each of us: the fantasy of *self*-reliance, *self*-responsibility in a world of utter interdependence, Interbeing.

So we can take this precept at the most immediate and pragmatic level: 'look how I keep making these endless dumb judgements about other people!' and try to avoid drawing the required conclusion (I must be *so* bad, *so* selfish!). *Or* we can allow it to provide an entry point to the way in which we each show up *as* this world, neither guilty nor blameless… So let's begin. Diane Rizzetto:

> 'A good way to explore this precept and how to use it for everyday decision making is to try out the following exercise for a week or two. …
>
> '*Stop*. Take inventory. Take one week to begin noticing the obvious and subtle ways in which you talk about others overtly, surreptitiously, covertly. Keep a journal.
>
> '*Look*. Focus in. Choose one or two specific ways in which you talk about others and where and under what conditions you do it.
>
> '*Listen*. Hear your words as you speak … Pay close attention to the tone of your voice, noticing what happens to your voice and your word choice when you stop simply sharing information and begin discussing faults…
>
> '*Experience*. Notice if there seems to be any emotional charge present. You might notice it makes you feel good to talk about someone else. Maybe it relieves some bodily tension … Sometimes people say they feel physically bigger, stronger …Your body sensations are a good indicator here. If you're feeling some tightness… there's a good chance that your comments are fuelled by some negative feelings. Continue looking, listening and experiencing in this way until you clarify the emotion. For example, you might notice there is some jealousy feeding your comment.' (WUTWYD, 74-5)

We'll pause there for a moment. Rizzetto particularises this: she was making her judgement on *Harry*: 'Harry can't be depended upon…' She asks us to rephrase this global statement *about* Harry to something more true: 'it's been my experience that…' Now it's about *relationship*, and about my *perception* and *interpretation* of what I see as his unreliability. If I freeze that complex and ever-changing living being into 'undependable Harry' I've *separated* him out, reified him as some 'thing' permanently limited and other. I've created a fixed identity for him, and a negative identity at that. And this identity will now be subject to 'confirmation bias': in my dealings with Harry (or yours too if you accept my judgement on him) I'll be expecting, looking for the signs, holding my breath to be able to say 'look, I told you he was like that! It's always the same way…'. This is why

Rizzetto asks us to stay close to our *experiencing*, and to be *honest* about it. It's actually really hard to step back from our judgement once we've made it: my *sankharas* around Harry cause me genuinely to see him and to hear his words in a particular way. But if I am able to become aware of the difference in my *body* and in my *emotional response* between 'Harry *is…*' and 'in *my* experience Harry is…', then I may be able to respond differently in my assumptions and actions. This actually takes us on towards the Seventh Precept and 'meeting others on equal ground': if I *don't* bring my preconceptions to *this* meeting between us, or those about 'people like you'… *then* what?

Diane's development of the practice — 'Deepening the Inquiry' — goes on to ask us to ask the kind of questions we are already becoming familiar with: what am I adding, how does talking in this way affect my own self image? She asks us to make an important imaginative exchange:

> 'Now try seeing yourself in the other person, and honestly try to find examples in yourself where you have been like the person you are discussing…"how am *I* undependendable?" Watch for situations where you may not follow through. In other words look at your own behaviour. The idea is to keep an open awareness about your behaviour without judgement or even trying to change it, although that may happen quite naturally once you become aware of your actions. What is your experience now? How do you feel about this other person? About yourself?' (p.77)

She asks us to consider if we feel less judgemental now, or perhaps even some guilt or other similar feelings? Bringing this back to ourselves, and to experiencing our own resistance to our feelings: our desire *not* to feel bad, and especially not to feel bad about *ourselves*. 'If I do not find fault, *what's the worst thing that could happen*?' (My italics) (p.78) She points to the way our responses to others always show us something about ourselves: our deeper assumptions, fears, *demands* that the world should be a certain way, and instead to allow ourselves to sit with these as koans about *ourselves*. She gives the example of a student whose anger at his sister's repeated requests for money showed him his own hidden determination that everyone, including him, should always be able to 'take care of themselves', which had led to him often being unable to ask for the help he needed… 'Such beliefs are what we hold on to dearly because they make us feel safe and in control.' (p.70)

I think this statement is profound and vitally important. I think it also is the key to extending the practice around this precept further and deeper. We might respond to Diane's student's realisation in Buddhist terms: in a world of impermanence, of interdependence and Interbeing, such an attitude of universal 'self-reliance' simply makes no sense. It can only lead us away from recognising and bearing witness to our all-too-human vulnerability and mutual dependency, which are at the very heart of our practice. But we can take this further. Is this simply '*his*' belief? Is this 'universal human nature'? Or is this some quirk uniquely his, or maybe something he got passed on from his family growing up? In terms of *relationship*, how does his sister's inability to 'look after herself'

figure? Is he the one who 'can' and she the one who 'can't'? What about their parents attitudes, and how they feel towards him, towards her, how does his sister think about herself? And what about the wider picture? We might bring gender in here: in a world of very real inequality of opportunity and with the contradictory expectations placed on women (have a career, or at least hold down a job while being a homemaker and a perfect mother!), so how does all that figure in her aspiration, her sense of success or failure? And where does the idea of self-reliance really come from? Isn't it an essential part, a cornerstone of the American Dream: the frontiersman reliant only on his wits and his trusty rifle, the businessman building up a corporation from nothing? Both fantasies that mask both actual exploitation and the greater reality of infinite interdependence. *I am sick because the world is sick…*

Practice Questions: *What judgements on others do I find myself making?*
What ideas or assumptions lie behind my own reflexive responses to others?
Where does my own deepening awareness lead?

The Three Of Us

But to return to Diane and her judgement on Harry: there's a third party here too, who only gets a passing mention in the vignette, but whose role is in some ways the most important of all: Diane's husband. Note that this Precept isn't initially flagging up criticising someone *to their face*, but to *others*. This isn't about not going behind someone's back — even if that's rarely a good idea — but about the nature of judgement itself. There is a *demand* in making a judgement, a demand bordering on an assumption that we all *will*, that we all *must* agree with it. Diane demands her husband agree about Harry: as this isn't the first time she's talked with him about this, all's well. But if her husband were a big fan of Harry's an argument might have ensued, harmony and their shared identity as a couple shaken. But as this is something they can agree on, their *own* bond is re-affirmed by *othering* Harry in this way. Now let's scale this up: this is actually how our whole society works, by making collective judgements to which it is demanded we all tacitly or actively agree. We can see this happening all the way from the law courts to stand-up comedy. Comedy actually provides an interesting barometer of the edges of the acceptable, of what can successfully demand our agreement: the observational comedian sets up an 'isn't it funny that life's like *this*!' scenario, and riffs on it. If that *is* the way we in the audience see the world then we fall about laughing…if not, she bombs. *She* may see the world that way, but that's only *her* opinion, not ours! It is not so long since it was the actual basis of much comedy to parade the most familiar and limiting derogatory stereotypes to make us laugh at the otherness of people we were taught to perceive as different: all mothers-in-law were fat and stupid; all blonde women were vain and stupid; all BIPOC/BAME (non-white) men were deferential and stupid, or else sex-crazed, drug-addicted and stupid; non-white women were barely seen at all as they performed their poorly paid, low status jobs.

If you happened to be identified by others as any of these things, then you were expected to laugh along, to *share* the joke, and hence to *accept* the judgement made on you, or at the very least, to accept it *being made*, accept the right of others to hold you in contempt. In the

last week we have had the latest allegations about Russell Brand reminding us that even putting to one side those accusations of actual sexual assault, the basis of his (alleged) comedy lies in expressing an unbridled misogyny, and that in this he has been in no way an exception, but merely one of its most skilful and successful exponents. Comedy is and remains one of the many arenas in which we can see negotiation happening in real time between differing views of what judgements we can demand agreement on at a societal level, but there are very many other places to observe this happening, all the way up to formal government policy and professional philosophers…

So Diane's judgement brings, if only implicitly, the whole of society to bear down on poor Harry, or at least to claim that it *should*: this judgement is just what anyone would think in this situation! As Diane has pointed out already, it's important for us to understand how we generalise a specific experience into a global judgment that freezes Harry into a separate fixed thing, and by doing so shapes how we *think* about him, *talk* about him, and how we and others *act* towards him. It really does matter significantly whether we understand and act on each of these judgements as *particular* or *global*, as *accidental* or *existential*. Although the *consequences* will be dramatically different, it's the *same* question whether it's a question of my own offhand remark, or a stand-up comedian's live set, or the framing of primary legislation in Parliament or Congress. Often it can be unclear (or even made deliberately unclear) how far the judgement is about people's *actions* or their actual *being*? If you judge me for my actions I can try to justify them to you, or challenge your evidence or interpretation. But if you judge me for my simply *being* who I am, or for just being *other* in your eyes, then what can I do? Often we hide global judgements behind alleged actions or inclinations: there has, for example, been much concern in the UK recently about the numbers of Albanian men claiming asylum here. Nobody will admit that this is simply because these men are 'Albanian' and we associate Albania with all kinds of badness, but will point instead to the prevalence of mafia style organised crime within this small and poor Balkan state, arguing that men who happen to be Albanian will therefore inevitably *act* in criminal ways in UK. Or the famous characterisation by Donald Trump of all Mexicans as drug dealers and rapists. It's not *because* they are Mexican, they just *all* really are that way, in and of themselves… We are only fooled if we *want* to be, if we want to maintain the appearance of fairness (perhaps even to ourselves) while denying it's actual substance. *Where* we set the boundary between 'us' and 'them' is also important. The English traditionally told derogatory jokes about 'the Irish', while in Ireland itself similar jokes were told about 'Kerrymen': those from the far west of the island. Do 'we' feel the same about Albanian *women* as Albanian *men?* Was Trump only talking about *male* Mexicans? And so on, ad nauseam…

Practice Questions: *Hearing or reading the News or in conversations, who is being 'othered'?*
How much do I really 'know' and what is the source of this knowledge?
What assumptions are being made in how these stories are told?
How do I experience *my agreement or disagreement with these assumptions?*
What broader patterns are they a part of?
How does this relate to my personal *experience?*

Us and Them

These kind of global judgements establish overlapping in-groups and out-groups of *us* and *them*, of *people like us*, and *people like them*. I talked last time about 'binary inequalities' in relation to truth and to justice. Within any 'inequality' — what makes it definitionally unequal — one side is favoured over the other. 'Our' side is always the superior, the *right* (in both senses) side. Sometimes these different inequalities align well, sometimes cross or contradict. In Western societies the wealthy *tend* to be White, better educated, healthier, and male. But being a British citizen (which is in itself to enjoy real privilege in global terms) — is split roughly 50/50 between men and women. In reality I will always find myself on different sides of an inequality at different times: I might be 'rich' in one context and 'poor' in another, now ignored because I'm 'only' a woman, then seen as embodying privilege because I'm 'acting White'. I might be a respected professional in one moment, then arrested, or worse, for the crime of 'running while Black'. Deferred to as 'a man of means', and then dismissed as 'posh', 'stuck up', or 'out of touch'. But all this is in no way an *equality* of inequality: which side I find myself on, and where and when, can make all the difference in the world to my life chances, or even my chance of remaining alive itself.

The gross levels of unfairness within our societies may seem a very long way from Diane's simple judgemental remark to her husband about Harry, and of course that is so. But it's a small-scale version of the same mechanism, the same reflex of judgement. So… should she hang her head in shame for having made it? Does it make her 'the same' as any misogynist or racist bigot (and how useful even are those terms)? Of course not. That would move towards the same kind of global judgement of *her*, even if as a judgement by her on herself. And what we are talking about here is exactly that tendency in we all share to slide towards freezing, immobilising, reifying, and then globalising our judgements and those of others we offer our assent to. As soon as we judge the person and not the action, not only do we separate from them in the most radical sense, we also enter the world of shame and shaming. To be shamed is to be judged naked before the world, if only in our own imagination. To shame and be shamed is to judge existentially, that I or you or they have been, are and will ever be *bad*, *failing*, *lacking* in some essential quality. That I, or you or they are *wrong*, not *right*. As we've already noted, there is no definitive dividing line here between action and person, made more problematic in that we are dealing with what is most difficult and most embarrassing for us. So many ways to attempt to evade actually seeing the nets in which we are already caught. If I have already judged you before the whole world (if only as represented by my husband), then your every word and action will confirm it to me.

But what if it is *me* being judged as failing, as lacking, as bad? We have already touched on this too: as a woman I have been expected to laugh with the sexists or 'lack a sense of humour'; as a Black woman how much of the casual racism I additionally encounter can I evade or ignore, and when to play along, when and where to challenge? And how will I be seen then? Within all this, whoever I am, how to be simply myself, whoever and whatever that might be in this moment?

Practice Questions: Practice noticing the experience of finding myself situated on either *side of these inequalities. (We began this with the previous precept practice.)*
How do I think they are experienced by the person on the other *side?*
How is the experience of crossing from privileged side to less privileged, and vice versa?

Impotent Bigness

But say, instead, I'm an able-bodied, assigned male at birth, heterosexual, White male, born into the entitlement that patriarchy and racist colonialism have conferred on me. Entitlement so instinctive, so unconsciously held, that I am shocked to see it named as such. Entitlement made to seem merely 'natural', merely 'the way things are' by both the structures of society itself and the attitudes of those I encounter. Surely I am, or *should be able to feel myself to be*, the master of the universe? Surely, if I truly am what I am told I am, if I am what I am told I *should* be to be what I am, then truly I *should* have women falling at my feet, I *should* struggle and compete and emerge victorious, I *should* stand alone as the noble warrior whose stoic restraint is tempered by acts of extreme but necessary violence in the pursuit or defence of what I hold dear. And my success *should* be visible to all. If we doubt the collective hold this vision of masculinity has within our culture, doubt how dominant and relentlessly promoted it is both within the mainstream and on the fringes, then the billions of views of Andrew Tate's videos, predominantly by teenage boys, are a good starting point. Our teenagers are the most sensitive barometer of our cultural attitudes, they have everything to play for and everything to lose in the games of life, and relatively little cultural or financial capital to work with. That the image of masculinity promoted by Tate is far from the most extreme can be confirmed by reading Laura Bates soul-crushing *Men Who Hate Women*, the researching and writing of which was in itself an act of heroic bravery.

This version of masculinity is a fantasy that I am in reality condemned to *fail* to live out, the fantasy that will lead me to harm others in direct ratio to both my belief in it and my despair at my failure to embody it in my real life. To the extent that I choose or feel obligated or forced to participate, I *cannot hope but fail*. The examples of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are paradigmatic here: even to be President, to be Prime Minister is not *enough*, can never be *enough*, can never *satisfy*. I can never prove to myself that I have succeeded, won, finally *achieved* in other than the most fleeting sense. Never proved, beyond my own unreasonable doubt, that I *exist*. Hannah Arendt's wonderfully resonant description of the perpetual struggle to fill the void that powers our restless society is 'impotent bigness'. It is the expression of the fallacious ideal of of a society based in the permanent competition of entirely self-sufficient individuals, and not even a question of whether I 'want' to be a part of this or not: the organisation of our society channels and limits the possibilities of my existence, depending on the cultural and economic capital I have been given. This inevitability of failure is in *itself* what sustains the system, keeps the wheels turning. Dominance and accumulation are dangerously addictive.

How will each of us respond to this? So, in playing the role of 'man' *of course* 'I' don't think like that, or don't think I think like that: I have come to realise, suddenly or over time, that

this is not what I want, or what I ever really wanted, or even something I was ever in any way 'cut out for'. But what then? How can I make a more honest and realistic life from the resources — emotional, intellectual, cultural, economic — that are at my disposal? And how to escape the seemingly inevitable weight of judgement and self-judgement? If I've a glimmer of self-awareness I will be all too frequently aware of the many ways, small and large, in which I act out aspects of exactly that masculinity whose grosser aspects I so vehemently repudiate. My self-judgements too often stem from unconsciously taking that masculinity as the 'gold standard' of what I am, *should* be, as a man, and hence also as being *human*. (In what way are these really '*self*' judgments? *Who* is making them? 'I' make them *on behalf of* others: my *image* of society, my parents, peers… What they would, *must*, think of me…)

Practice Questions: Reading this, how do I respond in my body? In my emotions? What thoughts arise, how do these connect with my sense of being a woman, non-binary, a man?

If my sense of self — fragile and defended in denial of its own vulnerability — is based firmly in those 'conventional' and 'durable' *binary inequalities* (such as 'man'/'woman') that need constant reinforcement, then the blaming of others — judging them — is an effective way of policing my own boundaries, of establishing the difference between 'me' and 'not me', and of ensuring that 'me' always sits on the side of virtue, goodness and entitlement. Those durable binary inequalities that *appear* fixed, perhaps most obviously 'man'/'woman' and 'white'/'black' are central to this policing, hence the violence of the feelings and too often the actions provoked by any apparent *trans*-gression of them (from 'miscegenation' to 'gender ideology'). In a world in which we are in constant competition, where in reality we find ourselves implicitly or explicitly in a state of perpetual challenge to our dominance, there is a sense of safety and grounding in our off-loading, our out-sourcing of the ambivalence of our sense of self-worth onto others. There is an important truth here: *we judge because we have been judged in the past and we fear judgment in the future.* We judge because we have spent a lifetime plastering over the cracks in our life, cracks through which the void can be glimpsed. I attempt to fix, to freeze the other in order to to give stability to myself. By making you, in and as yourself, *bad*, I attempt to make myself *good*. By making you *failing*, *lacking*, I attempt to make my self a *success*, a *fullness*, and so attempt to fill the emptiness which I feel is at my core. And so at a still deeper level, my separation, my distinction, my pushing away from you is the very condition of my own existence. Because if I can't be *good* then I'll be *bad*, because at least to be bad is to *exist*, and much of the time we don't even really believe we do. So here we have our two basic strategies of separation. While one may predominate, both co-exist (un)happily in each of us. I am good and exist *because* you are bad. Or: I exist *only* in my badness, I am defined by it. *This latter is shame.*

Shamed and Shaming

Shame is our dirty secret, the hidden force which drives us, and which we are (quite literally) ashamed to mention. We would rather do pretty much anything than experience shame, the more so because shame itself is shaming. The fear of the experience of shame

casts a long shadow: we will instinctively turn away from it, dissociate, zone out or respond with anger and challenge. Prison psychologist James Gilligan has chronicled how shame, or the fear of it, makes men attack or actually kill others, because to live as shamed is really not to live at all. Shame may make us mute, may make us hide and wish to disappear, or actually make the attempt to disappear for ever…

But what, experientially, do we mean by shame? Full-blown shame (and we've all felt it) is that deep sinking in the pit of your stomach, as aware of every creepy inch of your skin you feel super-exposed to *everyone's* view, and simply want to crawl away and hide…or worse… You can barely see, barely hear, the world disappears and all that remains is your own awfulness, your hopeless, ridiculous, awfulness. Maybe you run (if only in your mind), and maybe you fight, with fist or words or weapons. Anything to change how you feel, to erase this unbearable feeling with anger, or to stop feeling anything at all. But paradoxically while this is an emotion we may feel with overpowering and intimate intensity — and one that we will go to almost any lengths to avoid — it's also the most *social* of our emotions. Shame is the psychophysical experience of what we instinctively feel to be a *social* judgement that, although about something specific, appears to show up my general and permanent failure to be what I want/should/aspire/appear to be, or can never be. I can be shamed as a man for not being a 'real' man (and hence being symbolically a kind of woman); I can be shamed as a woman for not being a 'real' woman (for not behaving as a man wants me to); I can be shamed for being 'Black' (and hence not sharing the innate virtues you consider part of Whiteness); I can be shamed simply because you are dominant in our relationship and you choose to ignore me (for example if we are parent and child). However it arises, this is a judgement on myself that I am powerless to resist, a judgement that 'I' myself (who?) can and do make on myself (on whom?) *on behalf of others*. So we can talk of shame as being the negative experience of awareness of self in relation to others in our family, community and society.

We learn shame in childhood, at the hands of our parents and peers. Psychoanalyst Philip Bromberg argues that if our thoughts and emotions as emergent *independent selves* are consistently not affirmed and validated by our caregivers, the result is developmental trauma that produces deep shame:

> 'A failure of responsiveness by the mother or father to some genuine aspect of the child's self, not necessarily open disapproval or abusiveness…but a masked withdrawal from authentic contact that leaves the child experiencing part of herself as having no pleasurable value to a loved other, and, thus, no relational experience as part of "me"….The child's own need for loving recognition becomes despised and shame-ridden. The need becomes a dissociated 'not me' aspect of self that, when triggered, releases not only unmet hunger for authentic responsiveness, but a flood of shame.' *Awakening the Dreamer*, 139-40

Shame is the overwhelming experience of not *mattering*, not *counting*, of being nobody, of being already dead. I am witness, if only in my imagination, to my own casting out from

family or society. I am not 'relatable to', I cannot have 'relationship', I cannot ever truly meet an other, and hence (or because) I do not really exist myself.

Rizzetto's examples we met in our work on the previous precept may touch into shame: the nurse silenced by the unarticulated threat of shaming (what's the Worst Thing That Could Happen? — to be shamed…) The brother feeling unnamed shame at his sister's neediness, which when examined resolved itself into sadness. How would Harry feel if told of Diane's judgement of his unreliability and her husband's assent to it? Well, that probably depends on how he's grown up with shame: does he feel vulnerable to any slight? Does he see Diane's opinion as *mattering* to the world at large, or not? Would he respond with (false?) laughter, with a wry smile, a counter-judgement, silence, or anger?

Rizzetto's treatment of this precept moves us towards exactly how judgement, shame and identity relate to each other. My specific experience of Harry tends towards a global judgement which creates an identity for him —'unreliable' — by which he is then implicitly or explicitly shamed as inadequate. It's been argued that we actually *only* learn to become the social beings we are — that we so diligently learn the rules of how behave'in the broadest possible sense — in response to the *fear* of being shamed, of repeating our past experience of this. So our extreme *shame-avoidance* motivates us to learn what is approved, what is permitted, and what is not. This is obviously partly a question of prevailing morality — of what our society thinks of as 'right and wrong' — but extends much more widely. as for example with our gender expression, where shame avoidance motivates us to walk, talk, sit, 'like a man' *or* 'like a woman', *or else* to face the censure of *being shamed*. Shame has a *normative* function here: it is the 'stick' that enforces a standard to which to conform within our community. I may be shamed — made to feel 'shame' — by the judgement of any member of that community, including of course *myself* acting as judge on myself in accordance with our shared values. The 'carrot' is the active recognition of my belonging that I hope to experience when I do behave 'properly', when I keep to the words and actions of the socially sanctioned script. This is the reason that it's often said within Buddhism that shame is actually a *positive* emotion when we feel it in relation to having done something wrong, in that it calls us to reflect on what we have done and change our ways accordingly.

Clearly, these are different senses of shame we are taking about, but they do all connect up. The shame I might feel at not being able to throw a basketball well, or having been found out about a lie clearly isn't by nature the same as that Bromberg discusses: one is a self-judgement on my action, the other a self-judgement on myself. But a major point of this precept is precisely the way that one slides into the other, becomes general, global, existential. Let's say I'm a boy, and I get told 'you throw like a girl!'. This is at base merely an observation of the throwing of a ball, but it's clearly *not* only that: it challenges the fixed stereotypical and symbolic identity I hold (I am a man!) and offers an equally fixed, stereotypical and symbolic alternative identity: 'but really (in this respect at least) you are a girl!' (…and hence lesser, and a fraud to boot, by failing to demonstrate the reality of my claim to be a boy…). It's true gender-shaming: I am moved from dominant to subordinate. I am shamed, in the full sense. I *need*, I *must* learn to appear to 'throw like a boy', or know

myself to be, at root and in my heart, to be a failed boy — a non-boy — and hence, a girl. And so to live in shame. (Gilligan points to the central role of gender in shaming, this first and pre-eminent binary inequality, which we'll return to later.) Whether this single event changes my life — I become England men's (or women's) next star fast bowler, or never leave my bedroom again — or instead just cheerfully return the insult and hence 'play the game' in that way, will depend on how the infinite complexity of my interactions with family and peers have, and will, connect up as the person I become. If we are set the task of playing (as we all are) an un-winnable game in 'the competition of life', then we are all exposed to this deep form of *shaming* which takes us to the dark side of judgement, and to the use of shaming as a way of establishing and maintaining dominance and control. If we grew up in a family where shaming was in any way routine, then the consequences will be severe and long lasting.

Practice Question: Can I allow myself gentle *entry into my experience of the 'shame emotions'?*
Even if I am not aware of experiencing deep shame: what makes me embarrassed?
What makes me blush? How is the experience *of this, and what thoughts/stories arise?*

I'll reiterate how important it is to understand how shame connects to the *durable binary oppositions* we've discussed: it is normally being on the disempowered side of any binary that will open us to shame, as being lesser, less powerful, less virtuous, less *in control*. Attempting to reverse the terms of the binary and the language used is one coping strategy: 'All Men Are Rapists'; the re-appropriation of 'Queer' and 'Dyke'; the use of 'bad' and 'sick' as approbation. As we all in our actual lives cross and re-cross the boundaries of these binaries, our shame may follow us. 'I'm a hugely successful professional…*and yet I feel…worthless…*' Childhood trauma? Failure to conform to some ideal code of appearance? The possibilities are endless. As we have touched on, *to feel shame is itself shaming,* intensely so. The more 'power' I appear to others to have, the more keenly I may feel the shame of… whatever… Related to this, if I instead *lack* what I feel should be the *due*, the *entitlement* of being on the dominant side of a major inequality, for instance being white, or British, or male, or… then the shame may be amplified still further by this shamefulness of feeling shame: no man/Briton/white should have to feel this way! The unbearable nature of this shame may well displace onto anger, and onto violence. Of course, *shaming itself is the outcome of the experience of shame*: as with so many forms of violence, my injury leads directly to further harm to myself and to others.

Killing Shame

Shaming itself is the outcome of the experience of shame. If the shaming 'takes', or is not explicitly challenged, then dominance has been established or maintained, and this was its purpose. So our resistance to our shaming will itself be challenged: do you call me a 'snowflake' for getting upset in response to a gendered or racist slur, or even ask me 'can't you take a joke then?' It carries with it the same function of shaming: the use of shame as a relation of dominance by the withholding of recognition. The shame emotions do indeed tie me to society, to my group, and place me in relation all its members. In fact their primary *function* is to 'keep me in my place', through offering me or withholding

recognition. Shame in this sense is always about hierarchy, about relationships of power. These may be very obvious or very subtle, and we begin to learn them from the moment of our birth as we *learn* to be shamed, and learn also to shame others (and of course ourselves) in our turn. As we touched on above, we are shamed by our parents, as they were shamed before us. We are shamed by our peers, and will shame them also. We will attempt to deny, displace or repress our own being shamed, or act it out as retaliation, as depression or violence. We may be overwhelmed by our own experience of perceived inadequacy, or even construct for ourselves and others the image of a supreme self-confidence unconcerned and even unaware of the real existence of other people: the shamed personality style we call 'narcissism'.

It is this *social* dimension of shame that means it can and will be used as a weapon against ourselves and against others. We *all* share the experience of being both the victim of shaming and of shaming others. We all live in the fear of being shamed. Shaming is never random (though it may often appear trivial to others), but follows the lines of identities and inequalities: the rules and expectations of 'correct' behaviour differ by specific context but are always framed through distinctions of age, gender, class, race, ability and the other significant inequalities. Shaming always has the intention of establishing or maintaining hierarchy. The practice of shaming is one of the most significant ways that we try to exercise control over others, but behind it lurks the fear which demands that we also police ourselves to avoid being shamed in turn. Avoiding the experience of shame is an important motivation to shape myself, acquire skills, take on social roles. Shaming and its avoidance is a key mechanism by which we place ourselves in and maintain an established social order, one of the key instruments by which I become 'me', and define myself in relation to others. It's an active *separation* that still *binds* me to those others, and does so whether the shame is held to be theirs or mine. So shaming is a form of symbolic violence we inflict on ourselves and others, towards ends which are at once both individual and social. Our attempts to avoid or erase the symbolic violence of shame may themselves lead directly to further and more damaging acts of physical or psychological violence.

We can see this played out on the international stage, with consequences as disastrous as they are tragic. In an address to a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001, in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11 when cool heads were much needed, President George W. Bush, famously said the following : "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." A global judgement indeed, and one entirely without nuance. It's hard to see the prime motivation in the invasions of either Afghanistan or Iraq as other than shame, and gendered shaming at that. The destruction of the Twin Towers, that central phallic embodiment of the United States' global economic dominance and exceptionalism, a 'violation' (symbolic and actual) of the never-challenged territorial integrity so fundamental to the US's self-myth. Hence the only possible response   to this symbolic feminisation being a reassertion of the most violent masculinity on a global scale to shame more massively in return. It is part of this image of masculinity itself that the *oppressed* and *defenceless* women and children of Afghanistan were invoked as an additional alibi for this punitive conquest, male aggression cloaking itself as virtuous *defence* of powerless femininity. Hence too how little thought was given

to the 'beyond' of this conquest, the difficult and ongoing *what happens next*. The most cursory reading of Afghan history, ancient and modern, showing that that no conqueror has succeeded in establishing more than a temporary presence, because every conqueror has been ultimately ejected through simple attrition. A punitive shaming was the point (as later in Iraq), and the point was strongly made. That twenty years later Western forces beat an ignominious retreat from Afghanistan, and that the 'reconstructed' Iraq still suffers endless internal troubles, should perhaps shame the West more deeply than did the initial assault on the United States. It should show us that a response in the same terms as that of 9/11 itself — more than a million actual human lives taken in the cause of a symbolic gendered shaming — was always entirely inappropriate, and that the dissemination of Western values (had that been the point), could never be done down the barrel of a gun. Such is the outcome of a reflexive violence as a response to shaming, exactly as James Gilligan had described in detail in the case of the individual prisoners he worked with in Massachusetts prisons. But here the response was a collective one: there was enormous domestic support for these shaming wars, and of course enormous opposition to them too.

Gilligan came to the conclusion that both the majority of violence that resulted in imprisonment, and the violence within the prison system itself was *gendered*: violence as the only possible *masculine* response to the symbolic *emasculation* (and hence *feminisation*) of *being shamed*. We'll return to this theme in our look at some of the later precepts, (above all the Third) but for now a couple of obvious questions need at least to be noted. Men (of course) don't *have* to make a physically violent response, and we mostly don't. According to our position in society and family experience growing up, we may displace, deflect or deny our shame and shaming, and for the most part remain functional — if more constrained — human beings. It will still figure, still show up, as in the eagerness of a President and much of his people to go to war to avenge an insult.

We may also take the route of fully internalising our shame, acting it out primarily towards *ourselves*, as self reproach, self-censorship, self-limitation, self harm. This is the primary route offered towards those of us who are women. There has only recently been significant research into the forms of shaming experienced by women, coming from the side of the marked, *other*, term of the gender binary. If we are *all* asked to play an un-winnable game, then undoubtedly the extra rules imposed on women make the game still harder: be (the right kind of) mother, have a career, have the perfect body, always appear happy, and always be *available*. Unsurprisingly the self-policing and policing of others through shame have much to do with the female body, as to how it appears, and how it functions. As, unlike a man, one cannot reassert one's symbolically challenged femininity through physical violence, different strategies emerge, often more internal and hence often too more damaging to self, whether as depression, cutting, or through eating disorders. I'm not in any way suggesting that any of these are necessarily a direct outcome of the experience of shame, but in these and so many other forms of harming, shame lurks, and our attempts to evade its experiencing lead us towards further real harm.

Practice Questions: Can I notice examples of how my experience of embarrassment, guilt or full-blown shame frames my reactions and responses to challenge or criticism?

Turning Towards, Turning Away

We instinctively turn away from shame. We turn from 'life as it is', and head instead deep, deep into our fantasy of self. We could talk about Joko's Core Beliefs in terms of shame, in the physicality of its experiencing and of its global nature. *I* am *unworthy, unlovable, unrecognised*. This is indeed the script that underlies all shaming. It is vitally important to understand that shame is an absolutely *social* script, albeit one that seems most *private* — *my* business, *my* shameful secret — because *shame is itself shaming*. But shame goes to the heart of what it is to be human: social animals, unimaginable without others, meaningless in isolation from our peers, needing the mutuality of recognition to know we exist.

How can we turn *towards* shame, and towards its healing? As we'll begin to look at in our work with the next precept, it is through meaningful connection, the establishing of mutual *recognition*, of *relationship*. This is something I do with my self — my selves — on the cushion, and with others in my daily life. On the cushion we can begin to allow ourselves actually to experience this shame intimately, and resist the stories, the narratives we weave around it. We can learn to hold it and allow it to fade, dissolve, transform, or simply to lose its ability to move us reflexively towards denial and the harming of self and other which follow. Shame is not the end of the world, or the end of us, however much it may feel like it, it is an embodied physical experience like any other. Although she does not name shame, Rizzetto's practice question is highly relevant here: *what's the worst thing that could happen*? But we do need first to be able to see shame for what it is: we are all masters of evasion, displacement, substitution, *anything* rather than directly experience our shame. Are we 'A Big Enough Container' to hold our shame, without in turn shaming ourselves further, or shaming others? This is to begin to recognise *ourselves*, which we do in *taking ourselves whole*. But to recognise ourselves is also to recognise the other, and to recognise the other is to recognise myself. No *me* without *you:* 'you can't be yourself by yourself', as Barry Magid says. On the cushion, in the kitchen, at work: I am never 'alone'.

Shame isolates us, not only as individuals, but also in our identities: the frozen states (always threatening to thaw into something more human) by which we build and maintain in-group and out-group, just as we build and maintain 'me' and 'not me' within each of us. Those to whom we would pass on the shame we have provisionally contained as 'not me' we collectively treat with vindictive contempt or patronising concern: the 'illegal' immigrant, the prisoner, are there to carry our own shame off from us, as the biblical scapegoat carried sin off into the desert. But in our case it is not to the desert, but to the confinement of human lives immobilised and left in a suspension that we, in our shame, instead name as our over-generous indulgence of them. We have travelled far from Rizzetto's off-hand remark about Harry, but our practice always begins with and returns us to the intimacy of our immediate *experiencing*. With our work with this precept we have gone by way of individual and collective shame, the prisoner's cell, and the war in Afghanistan. Not-separate. In the spirit of 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step', coming to awareness of each of our judgements that consign others to the prison of shame is a step towards the possibility of real relationship, and in this sense towards the liberation of All Beings. With our study of the next Precept, we will widen and deepen this inquiry.