

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.

Delusion is real. It has real causes and real effects. Delusion, in the Buddhist/Zen sense, is the *mis*-perception of a real state of the world that leads us to *mis*-recognise, *mis*-identify and so *misunderstand* what's actually happening. An often-used example is that of seeing a mirage in the desert: we see distant 'water' in the parched waste of sand and so we head towards it, only to find...yet more sand. The patches of rippling blue against the desert sand we really do *see as* 'water': we mis-perceive, and so mis-identify the real atmospheric condition of the rising heat haze. If we are perhaps a traveller who is lost and thirsty, then as our steps turn towards the 'water' the happiness and release of tension are real too. We have misperceived, misidentified, and so our thoughts and actions have become deluded. And this misperception will persist: I can *show* you, prove to you that there isn't water *there*, but the next time atmospheric conditions are right you'll still *see* water, regardless.

Our most general and seemingly near-unavoidable delusion is in *seeing* (everything) *as* separate 'things' (*misperceiving*), in a chicken-and-egg situation with our imagining that they have some independent self-identity (*mis-identifying*), and then *acting* on the basis of this belief. This process is circular: we misperceive the world (and ourselves) *as* 'separate' 'things' *because* we have the habit of *looking for* separate things, and our misperception reinforces us in our misidentification and misunderstanding, in our delusion.

Life is complicated, and making sense of it is difficult. And so our perception and thinking find shortcuts that reduce the infinitely complex flows of our experience to something that is mentally more manageable, containable, manipulable: we not only perceive *separate* and *independent* 'things', but we always 'perceive *as*' — I see a 'man', hear a 'robin', smell a 'rose': every 'thing' *represents* an *identity*. I both perceive and imagine each 'thing' as actually *being* its identity — he *is* a man, it *is* a robin, a rose — and while this is a useful (essential?) strategy in our daily lives it is also delusional. In perceiving and thinking about reality as separate 'things' in this way we bracket out and obscure the real complexity and interdependence within the unique situation of each moment. More than this, because all identity is part of our language, we imagine that each individual 'thing' *shares* all that being this identity's representative brings with it by way of *association* and *connotation*. In naming what I perceive I frame it, but also limit and, to a degree, falsify it.

If our desire to *disconnect*, to *dissociate* from the fullness of our actual experiencing and so to 'evade the painful truths of life' begins here with the shorthand of our deluded perception and deluded understandings, then these delusions come back to bite us as the world's (and our) failure to live up to our assumptions, expectations and requirements. We live not in a world of inanimate 'things', but one of 'sentient beings' as our tradition calls all those other *relative* sources of feeling and intention with whom we share our lives — people, dogs, trees, grass, insects and the rest. Our *identifications* are hence also *mis-recognitions* that place us in a determinate, limited relationship with other beings, and so rob us of the possibility of deeper and more productive connection and relationship.

Sharing Delusions

Because both the intellectual and material culture of our contemporary world take the ultimate separation of everything from everything else as being *axiomatic* — as the key and unprovable *assumption* on which everything else is based — we are required by our society to act ‘as if’ this were actually so in reality. This is also how we normally understand what it is for each of us to *be* a self: a sovereign and autonomous centre of feeling and intention that is essentially ‘the same’ person from birth to death, a delusion made more real for us by the tangible evidence of our birth-certificate, our exam grades, bank records and the rest, and by the actions we take of which these are a part.

It is not only Zen that regards this attitude as fundamentally deluded. Psychoanalyst Philip Bromberg gives a convincing account of exactly how this process of ‘selfing’ works, by showing how it is our ability to dissociate moment by moment that gives us the ability to construct the experience of a continuous and unified ‘self’ — my ‘me’ — out of the reality of discontinuous and constantly shifting self-states 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 way I can ever stand back from these to get a ‘true’, ‘objective’ view: each self-state feels like ‘me’, and each is experienced as ‘whole’, as consistent with itself, despite each being the product of dissociation. Hence I not only misidentify and misrecognise others, but in this most fundamental way misidentify and hence fail to recognise *myself*.

Mostly we get by on this basis, and yet so much of the suffering we experience and cause to others turns out to be intimately connected with the real contradictions that arise from this basic structure of delusion in thinking and acting towards ourselves and others as if we were each a unique individual person, separate from all others and self-consistent through time. Hence the contradictions of our contemporary society, built as it is on the ‘possessive individualism’ (to use C.B. Macpherson’s term) exemplified in John Locke’s concept of the ‘person’, create near-infinite unreconcilable aspirations, desires and requirements for us both collectively and as individuals. Our desire always seeks *connection* of all kinds, but becomes canalised, formalised along specific socially constructed (though not necessarily socially *sanctioned*) pathways tied to narratives of identity that cause us to misrecognise both each other and ourselves, and so separate us even as, in another sense, they bring us together.

In this way the life of connection we intuitively feel possible for us becomes scripted by our narratives of aspiration towards what we are told we ‘deserve’ and just have to ‘work hard for’ or ‘want enough’. It may well be that our aspiration is simply to a life lived with a home we feel secure in, a job, and being in relationship... perhaps there will be children? There are also the more immediate and intimate forms of connection that are the grain and texture of our ‘life as it is’: the beauty or ugliness offered by our visual environment and the soundscapes that surround us, and the tactile quality of the surfaces we touch; the care we receive and are able to offer others, and the happiness, frustration or pain of those with whom we share our personal space and the wider world.

But it’s hard to disentangle this from those narratives that present us with a fantasised world of celebrity and the trappings of wealth and status, where our meaning and purpose become defined instead as what we can *do* or ‘*achieve*’, even simply what we *purchase* and *possess*. We may come to experience relationship primarily through our

sharing of such aspirations, or reject anyone we feel is standing in the way of our realising them. The *pain* of frustration is real, but we may not ever understand that the deeper pain of what is lost in the search for fulfilling such narratives of identity is the very possibility of more genuine connection, of relationships that are less transactionally based. In any event, these narratives are all too often contradicted by our life-experience, and while this affects *all* of us, clearly for some the balance of pleasure and pain is stark. Lack of material resources and lack of practical and emotional support whether through poverty, inequality, family instability or for whatever other reasons may make our aspirations seem impossibly remote, and the very experiencing of them painful. It may be that we intuit or are even explicitly told that in *our* specific case, our poverty or family or gender or education or citizenship or race or disability or criminal record renders our self-aspiration both arrogant and illegitimate. All of this is *painful*, and pain of all kinds... *hurts*. Our failure to 'achieve success' as we have been led to believe we should; our experiencing *this* place as a space of emptiness, monotony, hopelessness, pointlessness or even impossibility; whether we believe we have made the wrong choices, or that we had no choice to begin with... all of this is suffering, all of it hurts. As we have explored in relation to inequality, our individualising social myths — of 'talent', of 'hard work', of 'social mobility' guaranteeing that 'you will get what you deserve' — mean that the responsibility/blame for our inevitable frustration is always reflected back onto ourselves, or rather, onto that imagined-coherent self-construct we co-create with the other members of our society. We are *sold* delusive answers to the complex contradictions of life, answers that merely evade or seek to hide the real contradictions, and in reality *are themselves a central part of those contradictions*.

No wonder we *want* to turn away, to disconnect from the actual experiencing of our 'life as it is', to dissociate from the full richness of 'this present moment' in its connection to the entirety of our shared lives. But in this we are *also* turning away from relationship and possibility, and turning back towards the very shortcuts that have served us so poorly. What we are experiencing is our resistance to 'life as it is' not as our personal deluded perception of an independently functioning world of 'reality', *but as a deluded perception of the workings of a world that is itself shaped by the deluded actions of deluded beings* (including, of course, ourselves). Hence our desire to 'evade the painful truths of life' leads us to the deluded attempt to evade delusion by deluded means...

There Must Be Something More To Life (Than This...)

If so many of us feel that there 'must be something more to life than this', it is not only as 'evasion' or escape but also as the motor for our 'spiritual' searching. Although our desire becomes canalised along pathways tied to narratives of identity, nevertheless force of circumstance, a chance encounter or our own inclination can offer the possibility to *deviate from* and *exceed* these habitual pathways, so allowing desire to forge new productive connections that challenge our delusions of separation and permanence. Philip Bromberg talk about the function of psychoanalysis being 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. 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. By so doing we allow ourselves to — we feel safe to —

experience ourselves more inclusively, as more *whole*, and so less subject to the specific dissociations that have formed not only our own coping strategies, but at a collective level maintain our world in a state of violence and inequality. Our approach through Zen practice is in many ways analogous to this, in 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, and so experience more fully our wholeness. This inevitably involves turning *outward* to the world, and so to the *causes* of my turning away from my experiencing, and the *consequences* of my actions.

We may perhaps come to glimpse *alongside* our delusions of the separateness, substantiality and permanence of all things, the reality of their ungrounded nature, their 'conventionality', their 'emptiness'. Perhaps there is always at least this potential in depression and grief, in chronic illness and also in the recovery from trauma, any of which can motivate us towards 'spiritual' practice, *even if* that takes the initial form of wanting to escape a life that is too painful, or feels all too empty. Relationships of all kinds carry the potential to take us beyond our lived experience of the (painful) contradictions of the enforced separation and constriction of identity that is generally called 'reality'. Perhaps for us it might be in the experience specific to church or art gallery, the 'dance scene', activism, engagement with the natural world. It might be the encounter with that inspirational teacher at school, in the 'gay icon' that showed me that it was not simply 'ok' but *good* to be this way, or the insight that that my being identified as 'Black' or 'woman' or 'working class' was *also* a potential pathway to all kinds of *becoming* other... In their pleasure, in their 'joyous affect', such new connections challenge old identities and form new ones. Are these more open, flexible and turned towards *relationship*? Does our desire hence become *productive* and *connective*, or instead do these new identities become self-limiting and bound to a destructive circularity? Any of our connections to what is 'more than this' can *either* bring us closer to the immediacy of our actual experiencing, *or* lead us into more permanent disconnection, dissociation and dis-ease — *or both*. Regardless, our 'turnings away' are not simple failings or inadequacies, but *invitations to practice with delusion in ways that are always potentially transformational*.

Contradictions And 'Requirements'

Most readers will already know that this Fifth Zenkai traditionally took the form of requiring us not to use alcohol or other 'intoxicants which cause heedlessness' and 'cloud the mind'. Over recent decades teachers in the 'West' have extended this to cover, potentially at least, pretty much anything we do. Diane Rizzetto talks of the...

...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... Our approach... is... 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. (WUTWYD 94-95)

The key phrase here is 'obscuring the wisdom and intelligence present in life as it is in any moment, any event, and in any place.' As Barry Magid tells us, there is no delusion so deep as that delusion that I can be free of all delusion, and there is no 'natural' or 'ideal'

state to maintain, just the ebb and flow of our awareness as our moods and self-states shift in response to whatever 'internal' and 'external' stimuli arise. We mood-adjust both intentionally and unintentionally as our chosen combination of music/caffeine/alcohol/tv/exercise/chocolate/meditation/pornography/scrolling and the rest interacts with our hormones, organ systems and other stimuli from our environment. This coming and going, coming in and out of being present and the shifting nature of our awareness *is* who we are, our task is to learn to *manage* this honestly and with kindness. If we abandon the fantasy image of ourselves in lotus posture sat on a mountain top being perfectly 'zen', then there is no 'zero state' (other than physical death) to use as reference point against which to judge our current state of consciousness.

So how *do* we come to 'obscure' life's 'wisdom and intelligence'? If 'evading' emphasises our *turning away* from experiencing life, then 'obscuring' suggests our intentional or unintentional *hiding* of life's difficulties, of our active *ignore-ance* of the contradictions generated by our individual and collective mis-perception, mis-recognition, mis-identification and mis-understanding. We obscure what we may or may not be consciously aware of in the deluded attempt to evade delusion by deluded means. The pain, the *dukkha* of the consequences of these contradictions is real, as are the contradictions themselves. Our mistake is in failing to recognise the contradictions for what they are and so 'obscuring' them by turning away from our direct experiencing by mood-adjusting or displacement, either of which allow me to dissociate at least in part from my present, painful, self-state. Experiencing emotional pain in this moment, — including the pain of anticipation and of memory of pain — I may look for pleasure elsewhere to obscure it. Or I may attempt to shift my self-state, to change my mood to one where I feel better able to 'cope' with the situation. Diane Rizzetto records a conversation with one of her students who regularly found themselves in just this situation:

Student: '...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.'

Rizzetto: 'Where is it written that you must always be relaxed and enjoy your family? This question is your point of entry...You'll learn something. I don't know what that will be. This is your discovery. Own it.'

The student's 'need' here, one that has hardened into a *requirement*, is to ease the anxiety of anticipated and remembered stress when getting back from work; their requirement is a coping strategy that obscures the real contradictions with which life confronts us in our relationships. The central point here is the difficulty of moving between what our culture has constructed as the opposing social worlds of 'work' and 'home', of 'public' and 'private' life. Our work-life is governed by hierarchy, by the giving and receiving of instructions about specified tasks within a world seen as fundamentally competitive, where all relationships are assumed to be transactional. Home, by contrast, is imagined as a place of refuge, with the ease born of enduring emotional connection. Such a view of family life may be as much fantasy as reality; 'home' is also a site of work, a place of multi-tasking and of the need for moment by moment improvisation that the commitment to raising children brings, and where women still often find their labour gets minimal recognition. Work and home exist in complex relationship: do my boss's or my child's

criticisms hurt more? I can always change my boss, but a child is 'for life'. Except that my boss can fire me, and so I potentially stand to lose the income and even the home on which my family rely. The boss has bought my 'work' time...but in what sense is my 'family' time 'mine' or not? No wonder the student reaches for a beer! And rather than expecting them to look to their 'core beliefs' or personal trauma, any 'discovery' will need to explore the feelings of both partners, *and* the children. To recognise and allow their full experience of the contradictions that make coming 'home' a potentially difficult social situation in which they feel the need to obscure their experience of anxiety behind a 'drink'. The Sixth and Seventh Zenkai are clear what the process needs to be: can each find 'equal ground' on which to meet the others with 'openness and possibility'? Zazen might well allow them to experience directly the further problematic assumptions, expectations, coping strategies and habits that slow or block this process. But... why would it be a beer or a glass of wine that seem to offer refuge from our difficult feelings?

Go On, You Know You Want To!

The beer and wine in the fridge aren't there by accident — these are culturally and economically important products that *call us* to engage with them. We learn that alcohol is a reliably purchasable pleasure, and we learn how to find the pleasure in it — the feel of the glass, the liquid catching sun or candle-light, its scent, mouth-feel and after-taste. The warmth, and what according to circumstance we may feel as rush or release as we 'let go'. 'Drinking' (and the euphemism itself tells us we are dealing with our *active ignore-ance* here) is about 'sharing good times', with 'being ourselves' and 'letting our hair down'. We use it to relax, to 'destress', to 'take the edge off' our emotional difficulties. Our choosing exactly *what* we 'drink' — beer/wine/spirits, the brand — is marketed as an enjoyable and socially important part of our 'personal' expression. Perhaps above all 'drinking' promises us freedom from our cares and responsibilities, and from the inhibitions that stop us *connecting*... In these dominant narratives alcohol is a 'personal good', and to be told and to re-tell these stories is *itself* a part of real *pleasure* of alcohol, its *positive affect*. Alcohol producers spend multiple millions on advertising campaigns, but these are also very much stories that we tell ourselves and each other, stories *we insist each other believe* — one journalist describes joining an anonymous WhatsApp group where would-be non-drinkers could share the 'guilty secret' of their desire to stop, and talk about the shaming they received from family, friends and colleagues by violating our societal norm of *wanting* to 'drink'. In order to affirm these positive narratives we have to dissociate from, learn not to recognise the negative, *painful* side of our individual and collective relationship with alcohol. If we are honest, even those of us who drink 'normally' well know that alcohol's pleasures are fragile and fleeting, how easily 'just one' becomes 'one too many', and how quickly ease or exhilaration dull into forced excitement, or torpor and depression. This is a 'pleasure' to which we likely find ourselves returning time and again, and the more we do so the more we will notice the increasing dosage required. Indeed, this is a central part of alcohol's becoming, often imperceptibly, our 'requirement' (a word that with its implication of involving our active 'choice' becomes altogether inappropriate here), and required perhaps even to feel merely 'normal'. For some of us this requirement will become ever more absolute, and the damage caused in the leaps of dissociation required to prioritise this ambivalent 'pleasure' above all else in our lives, ever more extreme.

Alcohol is a socially sanctioned mood-altering drug produced and promoted by a massive global industry whose primary concern (as with any other industry) is always the 'maximisation of shareholder value'. Annual global sales are worth an estimated \$2 trillion, £42 billion in the UK alone. Across society, as a *dis-inhibitor* alcohol allows violence of all kinds an active expression it would otherwise lack, and while many of the health consequences of long-term use are well known, still others are only now becoming apparent. The scale and social acceptability of its use contribute to making alcohol the world's most 'dangerous drug', yet the Friday night drunk, the closet drinker, the driver who lost control of their vehicle, the night out that ended in a fight or in unwelcome or non-consensual sex, the role of alcohol in 'domestic' violence, the increase in accidents of all kinds when 'under the influence', the alcoholism that destroys relationships and families, the slow death from liver failure... these all remain for most of us as *someone else*, an *other* whose existence, whether we might pity, damn or excuse them, provides no reason to change *our* narratives, to spoil *our* 'fun'. Such denial and dissociation always signal our *resistance* to, our *ignore-ance* of what we don't *want* to see.

Rather than making any unreflective rule that we 'must' or even 'should' not 'drink', our Ordinary Mind practice with this Zenkai asks us instead to investigate *why we feel the way we do* about alcohol; to investigate, by *being-with* them, the feelings that may make us argue black is white in order to avoid questioning our behaviour. Can we draw hard lines between 'pleasure', being a 'requirement', and actual addiction? Regardless, our collective attitudes to alcohol are in themselves an evasion of the painful truths of life, our active *ignore-ance* that obscures 'the wisdom and intelligence present in life as it is in any moment, any event, and in any place'.

Diane Rizzetto's student 'reaching for a beer' has causes and consequences that neither begin nor end with them and their family. Experiencing the dukkha of living out the contradictions of their life as *this* particular worker/partner/parent within our culture of possessive individualism, they are caught between our society's twin delusive narratives that they will always enjoy the 'home' life they share with their family, and that the best way of 'connecting' is by using alcohol to 'relax' and to 'open up'. When the student instead becomes open to recognising the bottle of beer or glass of wine as a 'requirement' on which they rely as a coping mechanism — one that 'obscures' living out as *relationship* the truth and wisdom of the real contradictions of their situation, and the openness to change this requires — their (deluded) experiencing of 'needing a beer' becomes itself an invitation to practise, to Bear Witness, and to Aspire...

Bearing Witness to Delusion

Sitting with, sitting as our resistance to 'life as it is' is the core of our zazen. Our practising by ourselves on the cushion is never separate from the world of our relationships, but rather an opportunity to experience that world (our world, the only world) differently, in solitude. Our desire to escape, to push back against 'the painful truths of life' is itself the reality of our experiencing all that has brought us to this point, to 'this moment'. And so our practice is **to experience, as fully as we can, this desire not to experience the contradictions of our deluded perception of a deluded world.** We open, as best we are able, to actually and directly experiencing our lived reality of the individual and collective mis-perceptions, mis-recognitions, mis-identifications and misunderstandings that show up as the 'me' of this moment.

We Bear Witness to our own desire to evade and obscure the pain of the contradictions in our lives, and also to our desire for pleasure, and to the effects of the desire of others to evade pain and find pleasure. We Bear Witness to our desire and the desire of others to find and make connection, and to the pleasure of connection; of the joy this can bring, and also to our experiencing of emptiness, of limitation, of frustration, of fear, of anger, of shame. We Bear Witness to the effects on us, and on others of poverty, inequality, the threat of violence and the traumatic consequences of violence, of illness, and of loss. We bear witness too to the ways our own story is told to us and by us, it's narratives and scripting, and the way in which others' stories are told. We Bear Witness to the effects of all these in our body, and the the pain of the experience of 'need' that results from them.

We Bear Witness to all of this as the material for our practice, either as spontaneously arising during zazen or in more focussed reflection, bringing us to the immediate experiencing of the affective consequences of our own delusion and that of the others with whom we share our world.

Features And Bugs

The substances and activities we use to alter our mood or obscure and evade 'the painful truths of life' are myriad, and the causes and consequences of our so doing extend far beyond this place and 'this present moment'. The Order of Interbeing's *Fifth Mindfulness Training* (their version of this Zenkai) makes this clear:

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.

We might hear the word 'toxins' as problematic, and the commitment not to engage with what has been so judged is not part of our Ordinary Mind way. But, although this wording pre-dates the rise of social media, and we'd now have to include Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, chatrooms, our newsfeeds and the rest — everything that keeps us variously clicking or 'doomscrolling' for protracted periods — the *Training's* central point is crucial. If we can potentially use *anything* to evade or obscure the realities of life, and hence can never draw hard lines between what's 'ok' and what's 'not', nevertheless *everything* we so use arises from our society, our culture, where it is assigned a commercial value that can be extracted from us in return for the various kinds of pleasure it offers. I don't *have* to get a beer from the fridge or open the app and click on the link. But if I abandon the disingenuous fantasy of myself as sovereign and separate individual, I can better understand that in many ways that choice has already been made for me. In this we are all 'users' both *ignore-ant* and aware, both willing and resisting. The online bet I choose to place, the videos I watch on PornHub and the advert, image or story I click on while scrolling have all been designed, marketed and sold to make me feel 'good' in ways that

will keep me coming back for more while offering me the appearance of the ‘freedom to choose’. In all such cases the potential for harm is ‘a feature not a bug’: not a potentially eliminable side effect, but arising directly from the design and purpose of the products themselves. The algorithm-governed digital world is undoubtedly the most explicitly intentional example, but all actively encourage us towards reliance or addiction by creating positive feedback loops that may variously be chemical, psychological or mixed in nature. We have previously (for example) looked briefly at the role of internet pornography and wider social media in producing and reproducing damaging attitudes and behaviours around sexuality that are themselves part of the wider problem of inequality and violence within our society. This is far more than ‘distraction’ or a momentary evasion of the ‘painful truths of life’, but rather the creation of society-wide routines of evading and obscuring the inequality and violence to which we need to Bear Witness in our own lives and in the lives of others, inequality and violence that is the product of the contradictions resulting from our collective delusion.

However, demonising substances and their users can be as, or more, harmful than their active promotion. In contrast to public policy towards alcohol, the banning of a wide range of very different psychoactive substances as intrinsically evil and pursuing and incarcerating those who consume them, makes effective management of supply and treatment of users impossible, and so leads inexorably to far higher levels of longer and more dangerous addiction. Globally a vast number of people are involved in the manufacture and distribution of drugs classified as illegal, often working in highly dangerous conditions and/or in virtual slavery, while the extreme violence of cartels, smugglers and dealer networks exists only as a direct consequence of the criminalisation itself. It seems incontrovertible that the US sponsored ‘War on Drugs’, in full swing internationally for more than a century, has created far more harm than it has ever prevented, and that it has been doing so from its beginning. It has however proved a suitable vehicle for political manipulation and to pursue racist agendas, and undermine democracy internationally. We might take as the key example the intensification of the ‘War on Drugs’ in the United States itself from the 1980s onwards that, as Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* (2010) showed conclusively, was organised, promoted and funded with the covert (and often not so covert) intention of undermining the advances then only recently 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*, meant that Black Americans could *in practice* more easily be denied the very political, economic and social equality they were now *legally* guaranteed. This process continues, is even accelerating, today. It’s clear that by identifying sections of our society as dangerously other, our governments have created *collective* delusions far more dangerous for the world than any clouding of my *individual* consciousness as a ‘drug user’.

Even our zazen and practice with the Zenkai *can* become a turning away from life rather than towards it. Along with the sense of purpose and identity, 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’... There is, for example, a real danger in the misguided attempt to practise an absolutism of awareness: *no* defiling my body with caffeine, *no* recreational tv, *no* turning away from being present by taking aspirin for my headache... (I’ve had several students over the years ask me about that). Any and all ideas that demand our unswerving

belief have this potential, be they political, religious or whatever. 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. Cults and conspiracy theories are only the most extreme forms of this kind of formation of new but limiting identity through narrative and its pleasures of story-telling and belonging. This is a question always worth asking of *my* practice: is it one more distraction from, one more displacement of the painful truths of my life? Or does it, in the patience of my *sitting with*, of *being with* those painful truths, allow new desire and connection that opens onto possibility? I may well find there are elements of both.

Insight In Delusion

We need to understand delusion neither as *failure* or *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. *Taking myself whole* is to expand my limited experiencing of 'myself' to include different and potentially painful aspects of my self (selves) and my relationships. I have to make space for, to *allow*, the 'painful truths of the world' to be recognised *as* and *in* my self (selves). This is the real meaning of Jōko's image of practice as becoming 'A Bigger Container' in our ability to *be with* what is painful, *not* as learning to bear what is external to us, but instead as recognising and holding what is *other* as also being *ourselves*. Our experience of delusion is the raw material, the fuel from which this insight is continuously produced: '*no mud, no lotus*' as Thich Nhat Hanh has it. If we can never stand back to get a 'view from nowhere', never stand *outside* delusion, our changing patterns of dissociation *do* allow us to experience our world as less or more whole, and to act in ways that are less or more harming to ourselves and to others in our intimate relationships and as the 'collective body'.

By Bearing Witness to the experiencing of our delusion we reveal something of the contradictions that both create and are sustained by it. We talk, and rightly so, of being non-judgemental in our awareness: this investigation of ourselves and the world needs to be gently, kindly, and generously done; 'should' and 'should not' are death to self-honesty. If we persist in our investigations we may begin to gain insights about the dependence of our turnings away and turnings towards on our collective delusion and dissociation, the collective 'requirements' and assumptions by which we evade and obscure the painful contradictions of our shared world. Such investigations will inevitably bring about changes, though exactly what these will be I'll have to find out as I go: my behaviours shift and adjust as my thinking and experiencing acknowledge the full complexity of *this* situation. No escape! We are part of this world, down and dirty with it...

This is to return to where we began with this Zenkai, in the moment by moment experiencing and challenging of our fundamental delusion that we exist in a world of permanent and separate *things*, and instead to experience the identity of non-separation and emptiness in *our* and *all* existence. In each moment, can we *turn towards* connection and relationship, towards openness and possibility, towards meeting and recognising both self and other as we find ourselves thrown into a world not of our making or choosing, and yet is still *our* world, and our *only* world? The world we share, the world we love.