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I bear witness to the reality of inequality and of greed in myself and in the world, and aspire towards equality and sharing freely of all that I can.

How far do I show *respect* to myself, offer myself *recognition*? Do I try to *take care* of myself in meaningful ways? These questions might seem to have little to do with 'inequality and greed', especially if what I'm expecting from this second of the Zenkai is, essentially, a lecture on my selfishness. What's meant here by 'respect' and 'recognition' is nothing to do with politeness or manners, and equally nothing to do with advertising lines like 'because I'm worth it!', and likewise 'care' isn't a self-help manual telling me how to boost my self-confidence or 'take control' of my life. I don't even mean 'living my best life', but rather — do I actually *experience* my life? Do I have *time* for myself, or, is my time only there to be *used* for some purpose, or even simply *filled*? I might ask us, as Zen students, do we find time for our *zazen*, whatever form it takes?

With the first of the Zenkai on violence and non-violence, I stressed the awareness of *othering* and of *ignore-ance* as central to our bearing witness. With this second of the Zenkai, I'm asking us to begin our bearing witness by continuing to become better aware of othering and ignore-ance in relation to *ourselves* — what parts of me do I choose to ignore or not to see, what actively reject or deny? So: am I *kind* to myself, do I actually experience and make room for my feelings and emotions? Can I look at myself (literally and metaphorically) without judgement? Do I listen deeply to myself, or recirculate the same old stories about myself and other people? Do I recognise myself as the vulnerable, mortal, complex and mutually dependent being I am? To the degree that I *don't*, I am liable to mirror this *lack* of self-recognition outward onto *others*... Equally, how I treat myself will have a lot to do with my past and ongoing experience of how others treat me...

Although 'inequality' sounds abstract and remote, all of us both experience and act out 'inequality' in our lives every day, as those lives are shaped by forces we have little or no control over. Central to this is this experience we all *do* know of being *recognised*, and of how we feel when other *fail* to recognise us. That might be as total (unconditional?) acceptance or rejection, or it might be a momentary misalignment of how you and I see things, perhaps reflective of some wider, *structural* difference in how we experience and think about the world. This recognition or its lack can and often will have important *material* consequences, that may empower or dramatically limit our own and other people's lives. Inequality *matters*. Inequality takes myriad different forms, but all rely on our individual and collective *othering* and *ignore-ance*, and as with our consideration of violence, a crucial part of our bearing witness is holding together our own experiencing with the wider, literally global, patterning.

We can begin with the active experiencing of our own *feelings*, and our empathic experiencing of other people's — what do I want for *my* life, and what would I want for *you*? What would I want for all *others* in their ability to care for themselves, in their relationships, what they want for their lives? On what possible grounds could I deny my

recognition of them? On what grounds say that their needs, their desires, hopes and fears were not my concern? Yet this denial *is* what we all practise, what we are all *obliged* to practice every day of our lives, by the patterns of inequality which shape all our lives.

What are the factors enabling, determining or limiting *my* life, in relation to those enabling, determining or limiting both the lives of those I directly care about and those billions of people unknown to me (and keeping in mind also all the other, non-human beings with whom I share this planet)? How far and in what ways will the needs of each be met or be denied? How far will they be able to realise their possibility, and by what may this be frustrated? This is about not only the availability of resources, whether that's food and shelter, healthcare, childcare, education, or meaningful work, but *also* how my society allows or rations access to them, the *who* and the *why*. Will it simply be down to 'economics', or will my gender identity, my race, my faith, my sexuality or other factors allow, entitle or bar me? Is this enshrined in *law*, or instead in what my community and perhaps even I myself simply see as 'normal', as being 'natural' or part of 'our way of life'? Will my society support or hinder me in living out my possibility?

Perhaps it seems bizarre, but the single most accurate *predictor* of the possibilities for my life is *geography*: the accident of *where* I happen to be born and grow up, the country of my birth and citizenship. But it's also true more locally, even down to 'which side of the tracks' I grow up. And of course the reasons why this should be true are far from accidental. Countries grown rich on conquest and colonial exploitation, and so also able to industrialise and trade on unequal terms with the rest of the world have created large affluent and relatively leisured middle classes while still being able to offer their 'average' citizens greater access to resources such as healthcare and education, while *within* these nations there is also a very unequal distribution of wealth and resources, concentrated in affluent districts of the major commercial cities and industrial zones.

Within any individual country the key predictor of our own 'life chances' is simply the *wealth* of our parents. Those with wealth can buy a 'top' education to get a 'top job' and salary, 'invest' their wealth to make more money, or even *borrow* money to 'invest' to make still more money; those without wealth struggle to buy food, rent somewhere to live and pay the bills for essentials, running up debt (whether to the bank or the loan shark) that they'll find hard to repay and which obliges them to take whatever poorly paid employment is on offer. Inherited wealth *guarantees* unequal outcomes, and, as time goes on *increasingly* unequal outcomes. The situation between nations is not entirely dissimilar: 'rich' nations largely acquired their wealth through the conquest and colonialism that still allows them to trade on unequal terms, while 'poor' decolonised nations have become increasingly indebted, even when rich in natural resources.

Inequality, Meritocracy

Why, at the moment of my birth, *should* either the wealth of my nation or of my parents so dramatically constrain my life chances and all that will be possible for me? Much lip-service is given to ideas of 'social mobility' and 'equal opportunity', and to the idea of *meritocracy*: that I do, or at least ideally *should* receive 'reward' in direct proportion to my talent and hard work. In reality these ideas *alibi* the status quo of our society in a sense that will reoccur time and again through these commentaries, inviting us to practise *ignore-ance* by turning away from reality towards a fantasy version of how things are, a fantasy that

makes the existing state of things seem simply 'normal', even 'natural'. There are many good books that establish in detail why meritocracy as we generally think about it is neither possible nor desirable, and I might mention *The Tyranny of Merit* by the philosopher Michael Sandel as a useful 'Buddhism-compatible' starting point.

To briefly rehearse some of the problems: I don't think anyone has ever claimed that Bill Gates is the greatest coder who ever lived. He was in the right place at the right time, made some business decisions that turned out supremely well, and established a ruthless business model that crippled the competition. As he was fully 'entitled' to do. But in what sense is his wealth and consequent influence a *proportionate* reward for this? Why, for example should this give him a voice in the future of healthcare across Africa? It has been well established that 'achievement' of all kinds in adult life (whether educational, professional or in other forms) is highly dependent on age relevant resources being available, particularly in the early years of childhood. But what *determines* availability is largely *parental* wealth. The 'self made man' (or woman) exists, but purely as an exception, and is in no way the norm. 'My' talent and even ability to work hard are something I largely *inherit* — not in the traditional sense of my aristocratic 'good breeding', but simply as early and ongoing access to financial, cultural, and personal resources.

Even accepting that a 'level playing field' *could* ever be found, why *should*, say, a CEO be better 'rewarded' than their office cleaner? Or even, why should a brain surgeon be better 'rewarded' than theatre staff or porters? At the base level all are equally important, and mutually necessary. 'My' achievements in whatever field rely absolutely both on those who have gone before and those who make my life here and now *possible* — that there is food to be put on the table, clothes for me to wear, roads to travel on... and so outwards to the entire web of animate and inanimate beings without which there could simply be no *me*, no *here*, no *now*, no field of *Interbeing* itself. Is there any *ethical* argument for a differential of 'reward', and hence of the life chances, the possibilities not only for those directly involved, but of their families, their children and grand-children? Why should the life-chances of *everyone* be determined by 'the market': the mixture of *demand* and *custom* as to the relative value 'we' collectively assign to different social roles, and which largely preserve or accentuate the status quo? We may offer ethical window-dressing — that higher 'rewards' are the right of those who 'work the hardest' or whose unique 'talents' (perhaps 'God-given?') set them apart from the herd. I doubt, though, that any CEO works as hard as a single mother holding down three part time jobs in addition to raising her children. But then so much of the valuable, vital work of *caring* receives no material 'reward' at all, whether we label it as 'child-care', 'elder-care' or 'house-work'. 'Supply and demand' clearly don't figure here: this is inequity of a different, *customary* kind. So, do we *not* value most caring work *because* it has traditionally been seen as 'women's work', or has it been *assigned* to women because we don't value it?

Present day arguments connecting talent, hard work and material reward can be traced to the sixteenth century Calvinist doctrine of 'the Elect' as it came to be embodied in what Max Weber — whom we have already met in relation to his definition of 'the State' — called the *Protestant Work Ethic*: a meritocratic reformulation of aristocracies' traditional justification of their wealth and power as being their natural *right* as the *result* of their 'superior breeding.' The Calvinist spin on the idea of a separate, superior class of human beings is that of God's *predestination* of the 'Elect', the minority of souls who will one day

enter heaven while the majority of mankind burn (rightfully) in hell. While who is or is not among the Elect is strictly unknowable for mere mortals, material success as the result of leading an industrious and virtuous life (making the most of one's talents, working hard...) is seen as a mark of superiority and a sign of hoped-for things to come. Weber argued persuasively that it was the wholesale adoption of this worldview by the merchants, entrepreneurs and emerging middle class of Early Modern Europe that provided a self-understanding and validation as being a class separate and apart, a class *morally* superior both to the aristocracy and to the mass of those without property who hence had to *work for others*.

We see this meritocratic myth active too at the international level, again used to justify inequality of all kinds both within and between nations. *Our* country (whichever that happens to be) offers its happy citizens an unparalleled opportunity to make the most of themselves by their own hard work and unique talents, and it is this that has given our country its (assumed) pre-eminence in whatever combination of wealth, power and virtue we claim for it. To challenge this belief is to be at best unpatriotic, and at worst a traitor, a dangerous internal enemy. Such is the 'Manifest Destiny' of American exceptionalism, or of a 'Great' Britain. In the case of the United States — a secular society — the continuing influence of the version of this myth that sees in it the working of Divine predestination is particularly telling. So this 'explanation' effaces the entire reality of our history: 'we' are rich simply because we are more talented and work harder than foreigners, and we have been duly rewarded. Exactly who is included in, or excluded from this 'we' can be made to shift as is most useful to our particular version of the story: the 'great and the good', 'hard working families', 'all who have made their home here' or 'The White Race'.

Possession = Exclusion

Writing in seventeenth century England, the philosopher John Locke effectively defined our modern view of what it is to be a *person*, and in doing so also how we still think of ourselves as being a *self*. He did this in terms of *possession*, in the widest possible sense. For Locke, 'my' most fundamental and inalienable 'possessions' are my body and the thoughts, feelings memories and intentions that together make up what he was the first to think of as 'my' individual 'consciousness'. This was a *radically* new idea: what makes me a unique and separate *person* is the *coherence* of my sense of self dependent on the memories of 'my' past, my experiencing in the present, and intentions about 'my' future. *Possessing* these thoughts, memories and intentions that are *exclusively* 'mine' demonstrates that I am *not* you, you are *not* me, and hence that I 'am' or 'have' an entirely separate *individual* consciousness, one directing my physical body as its 'possession'.

By defining the *person* in terms of what I exclusively possess, Locke was making a connection with *legal* principle. There is a central aspect of the law that normally goes unnoticed when we think about our possessions — our 'stuff' — cars, shoes, Mars bars. To possess something legally is to have the *exclusive* right to it. I can choose to eat the Mars bar or stick it in a drawer, but what is crucial is that *only* I can choose what to do with it. *All* property is like this: *the legally enforceable right to exclude others from using or disposing of it*. And so, just as I am defined as a person by the exclusive possession of my thoughts, memories and intentions, this extends to my *material* possessions, and so *to what I can exclude you from*. To be 'me' is to *have* these things *exclusively*. I am a truly unique person,

separate from all others, and I am 'free' insofar, and *only* insofar as I can exclude you from interfering with my possessions, including my *will and intention*, what I *want*.

This is a key moment in the birth of the modern idea of 'man' (and it is largely 'man' in the gendered sense who possesses): separate from all others, living as one fragment within a fragmented society; responsible *to* no-one, and responsible *for* no-one. It cannot be over-emphasised what a fundamental departure from mediaeval societies this was, where each individual from King to commoner was defined by a tissue of reciprocal rights and responsibilities expressed as 'custom' and 'tradition'. Not that these were always honoured, or that such societies were for most of the population a great place to live, but simply that this is an entirely different way of understanding what it is to be a person in relation to others, and hence what it is to be 'me'.

We *all* experience actual or virtual exclusion as a constant in our everyday lives, although the *suffering* this exclusion causes us will vary dramatically depending on where we find ourselves placed in the matrix of different inequalities. I walk down the road, and on all sides there are 'private' houses, flats, gardens; even 'public' buildings are not open to me much or all of the time, and so there remain to me the few parks and perhaps a church or library I find open, or the road itself. Even here, if I look 'wrong' or am doing the 'wrong' thing, I may well be asked or forced to leave, to go... where? Do I have somewhere of my *own* that I'm *not* excluded from? And if, for whatever reason, I don't?

I have a bed, and somewhere to live, quite a nice somewhere to live, actually. I would be very unhappy if I came home and found someone had taken it over, slept in my bed. I am not a hermit or a renunciant, and unlike Hakuin, were I to disturb a burglar taking away my stuff, I would not simply ask them if there was anything else they would like. I 'need' *my* stuff precisely because I am excluded from everyone else's...

But what, for Locke, determines what counts as 'mine', what allows me to claim exclusive possession of it? His answer to this question is what has made him one of the key figures of the tradition in politics and economics that we call 'Liberalism' (in present day terms this also includes most mainstream conservative and social democratic thought). For Locke, as the 'proprietor' of my own body the way to make something 'mine', is to *labour* on it. If I work a piece of 'uncultivated' land, then it becomes *exclusively* mine. But if I have no land, and no access to any? As proprietors of our body we each have *exclusive* right over our power to work — our labour-power — and *because* this is exclusively ours we are also free to *sell* it. If I buy your labour-power for money, then whatever you labour on during the time paid for becomes... *mine*, becomes my *exclusive* possession. Who buys the labour power of others? Whoever *already* has wealth in the form of *exclusive* rights to land, to materials, to money. Who sells their labour power? Whoever is *excluded* from land, materials and money, and so cannot otherwise meet their needs. Writing at the dawn of the capitalist era, Locke was quite clear about this: those with the money to employ others are those who already possess wealth in some form, and it is only those without wealth who are obliged to work to meet their day-to-day needs, and in doing so increase the wealth of their employer. In this way two very separate social classes are born: those who by employing others *realise their own individuality through the increase of their possessions*, and the mass of those who support their employers through being forced to sell their labour. It is this that ties our modern idea of the person as a *separate* individual 'consciousness' to the *employment relation* and so to ever increasing inequality.

It is the reality of *property-as-exclusion*, and our actual and constant *experiencing* of this exclusion as both fact and potential that ‘squares the circle’ between Thomas Hobbes, who as we have already seen understood society as the permanent struggle of all against all to *dominate* each other, and John Locke’s view of modern society as having two separate classes in permanent *competition* with each other. In a way, both were right. The major boundary within our society remains that of the employment relation, between those who make money from the labour of others, and those who labour to make others money. And yet we all *do* experience society as a permanent struggle of all against all, a permanent competition to secure the means to bare life, and insofar as we can, the means to live a full life through *individuation-as-possession*, where possession is both material and immaterial: my physical ‘stuff’ existing in intimate relationship with my memories of the past, my experiences in the present, and my dreams and intentions for the future.

Adam Smith, writing in what is generally considered to be the founding text of modern economics, *The Wealth of Nations*, (wrongly) assumed that employers would naturally discover that acquiring ‘a modest sufficiency’ would stop them feeling the need to pursue endless accumulation. This has clearly not been the case. There are always new ‘needs’ to be created, and advertising of all kinds is explicitly designed to make me *feel* that I want any number of the attractive things from which I am excluded *unless* I have the money. But Locke’s concept of the ‘person’ suggests a deeper, *existential* reason why possession as accumulation *must* become endless, in his equation of personhood with *exclusive* possession, whereby *being* = *having* = *excluding all others*. Being me *is* to have it all, and to be me *is* to *exclude* you from everything. Hence a Musk, a Besos, a Zuckerberg, a Trump cannot rest until they possess *themselves* by possessing the world, even the universe itself.

The corollary of this is the resulting *fear of our own potential exclusion*, and so of a *loss of (my)self*. Whether that is only from fully taking part in the life of my peer group, or more radically as the losses that unemployment or prolonged illness might bring to me, it is a loss not simply of lifestyle, but potentially of home, relationships and community; the spectre of destitution lurks. Being defined by what (in the widest sense) I *possess*, to lose my possessions is to lose myself. Both the unassuageable *desire* fully to *be* by *possessing* myself, and the *fear* of exclusion, of dispossession from ‘myself’, make me competitive and anxious in equal measure, and as a consequence *ugly*. Both the carrot and the stick urge me to compete — to *dominate* insofar as I am able to, by acting only in my own interests as a *separate* person — and so to bring about Hobbes’ ‘war’ of all against all *within* our own stratified society. The result is increasing inequality between those who directly or indirectly benefit from the concentration of wealth into fewer hands, and those who come under ever increasing financial strain. Either way we are tied to the employment relation. Either way, we are all obliged to think as act as modern, Lockean, *persons*.

Separation = Suffering

Apologists for inequality will demand that we harden ourselves *against* empathy, arguing that inequality is inevitable and even ‘good’ in encouraging innovation and hard work while penalising idleness, perhaps adding that ‘welfare promotes dependency’. The most thorough answer available contradicting such prejudices is probably that provided by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett’s books *The Spirit Level* (2009) and *The Inner Level* (2019). These demonstrate beyond any doubt that across a vast range of metrics, ‘more

equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve everyone's well-being', and in short, 'why equality is better for everyone'. To take one small but telling example: the rate of playground bullying in school can be shown to vary by as much as a factor of 10 in proportion to the general level of inequality within a society, this factor varying as the level of inequality within that society changes. Rising inequality generates more 'competition', the *dominance* behaviour of which 'bullying' is one form, hence the more we are encouraged, the more we are in practice *obliged* to think and act as entirely separate persons concerned only with our own self-interest, the more we all suffer, and the more suffering we create. If we want to bear witness to *greed*, 'in myself and in the world', then we need to understand the way in which our greed comes about, that its origin is not in some way 'in' me, but in the way *we collectively think and act*, and of course in our history, in 'how we got here'. The more unequal our society, the more ugly we collectively become.

For Locke there could be no question as to who *should*, or was even *capable* of governing a society such as ours: it was self-evidently only those 'men of property' who had the time and the intellectual and material means to develop themselves as fully rational individuals. One of the State's most important roles was to develop the mechanisms of the police, courts, workhouses and prisons to *enforce* those without the independence of owning 'property' to sell their labour-power; government would and should act to maintain the interests of property. Of course our societies have developed in a way that is much more nuanced than Locke imagined — we each live by some complex and shifting combination of our own labour and benefitting from the labour of others — but this social *apartheid* (as being *separate* and *legally* but in no way practically 'equal') still largely applies both within and between nations. What can 'equality' really mean under such conditions? How *should* we as communities decide our own laws and regulation? For both John Locke and Karl Marx the practical outcome of all men being 'free', (meaning 'equal' before the law as separate persons) was the *obligation* to either work or own, leading to a stratified society where power was in practice exercised by those individuals or groups with significant wealth; the difference was that while Locke saw this as being both desirable and inevitable, for Marx it was iniquitous and ultimately self-contradictory. So what might 'freedom' and 'liberty' mean in our lives as we lead them today, or in a future society?

We live collectively with the legacy, the history, the karma of a world where inequality is a major, perhaps *the* major form of violence, one that, in the actual and potentially irreversible damage to all eco-systems we are witnessing in real time extends beyond the human to include all beings on this planet. While to talk of 'inequality' as if it were a single thing is misleading, yet the major axes of inequality within our world — gender, race, class and environmental — *do* all interconnect, and feminism, anti-racism and the fight for economic and climate justice *are* aspects of the same struggle. In writing a commentary like this I'm inevitably too selective: if I emphasise the the lesser but still real miseries of the daily life of each of us, then I risk missing the catastrophic experience of those millions at the extremes of inequality; to pay due respect to our individual 'lived experience' risks trivialising what are population-wide structures and effects. In finding myself, both as an individual and as a citizen of my country, inevitably and unavoidably made complicit in so much of the world's inequity, facing up to my place, my position in the global order — living *this* life, in *this* place, at *this* this time, and in relation to *all* others — is a vital aspect of bearing witness to inequality of all kinds.

Recognition or Entitlement?

Strange question, but how far do I think I *deserve* to have the things I have, to act in the ways I do? We often encourage each other with 'go on, you *deserve* it!' Then there are the 'deserving' poor — those who despite their best efforts and 'upright moral character' still find it hard to make ends meet — these days we are most likely to meet them as 'hard-working families', which may well include ourselves. Their virtue separates them from the 'undeserving' whom we are told *should* be excluded from our empathy and support — the shirkers, the benefit fraudsters, the criminals, or simply those who haven't already 'contributed'. Just who is *entitled* to what, and why? In one sense, *entitlement* is simply 'standing up for our rights', especially when we feel they have been unfairly challenged. That might be the right to vote, or receive a particular benefit, or simply to *be* in a particular space. Perhaps I might even get *preferential* treatment in *this* context because I have been disadvantaged in other ways. In a different sense 'entitlement' is to claim special treatment by reason of the assumed superiority of my gender, my race, or my class over others, or simply because of my income or wealth. In the first case I want to be recognised as a moral equal by virtue of what we together *have in common*. In the second, I want to be recognised for what *sets me apart* from you: I assert or even assume my superiority by *excluding* you from 'my' space, by failing to recognise what we all *share* in our being mortal, vulnerable, suffering beings. Thinking in terms of recognition and entitlement can help us see and empathise better with the inequity of different forms of inequality, whether experienced face to face or impersonally in the wider world.

So...we are travelling on the Tube or on the Subway. The man opposite us sits knees wide apart to give us an excellent view of his crotch, one elbow virtually in the lap of the woman next to him. Is he aware that he's literally taking up twice as much space as needed? Is he aware there's a *gendered*, and implicitly but inescapably *sexual* gesture here? How does he imagine both the other men and, more particularly the women he's sharing the carriage with *feel* by his 'manspreading'? There's a lack of recognition here — he's asserting that his gender *entitles* him to exclude others from this space. Would he be horrified to have this pointed out to him, or respond with 'yeah, and your point is...?'

Or... we are walking in a 'nice' neighbourhood — let's say it's mainly 'White' — and we see a young man across the road who happens to be Black. Is he waiting for someone, or 'loitering', 'acting suspiciously'...is he *entitled* to be there? It's *public* space open to all, and yet his right simply to be there is far more likely to be questioned than that of, say, a White woman. In the UK this will likely result in a 'stop and search', in the US there's a much higher chance that the consequences could be fatal. And the same is true if he's driving an expensive-looking car — Black people are 'supposed' (in *both* senses of the word) to be poor — or simply if he's 'Driving While Black'. All of which is part of the much wider spatial issue of *who* gets to live *where* in terms of legally or informally enforced zoning, whether that's racially, culturally or economically determined, or more probably a mixture of the three. In all these cases where we restrict or exclude others, or find ourselves restricted or excluded, there is a *failure* of recognition that's *structural* before its personal, and that in a world where we are now legally 'all equal', points to the ways in which this is far from true in our actual lives. The way we occupy, or are allowed or not allowed to occupy physical space — whether that's my 'personal space', my 'home' or the public highway — is central to our fully *recognising* and our *being recognised*.

Recognition and entitlement both relate also to *time*. As embodied beings we are mortal, which is to say that we are born time-limited; we all need the sleep which occupies perhaps a third of our lives, and our employment may well take the most potentially productive of our remaining hours. In fact the fundamental point about the employment relation is that it takes control of our *time* and puts it at the service of another. Sometimes this isn't *felt* as a problem — I may see my work as meaningful, even that 'I love my job'. But much work is routinely repetitive, and may turn us into the organic component of a profit-making machine: the delivery driver who will be penalised for looking in the 'wrong' direction as their eye-movements are logged on their algorithm-generated round, the office worker whose keystrokes are monitored by their supervisor. Either way, we are to be excluded from 'taking' any of this time for 'ourselves'. But *caring*, taking care of ourselves, caring *for* each other, caring *about* each other, it all takes time.

Do I have time for you, do you have time for me? How we *spend* (an interesting idiom?) our time is a good way of looking at our actual priorities in life — what's really important to us? It may well be that our 'work' dominates our schedule. It may be that we are too 'tired' or 'distracted' by our obligations to do much beyond watch TV or scroll through what is supposed to be our 'own' time, the time we still *own*. As I suggested at the beginning on this piece, it may be hard to offer *ourselves* recognition, and we may find it hard to offer the recognition we would like to others — to offer them our *time*.

Listening and speaking take time — whom do I recognise by really listening to them, who listens to me? Whom do I ignore? In *Men Explain Things To Me* the American writer Rebecca Solnit popularised the term 'mansplaining' — men's habitual talking over women who know the subject in question *better*, and have better grounds for speaking. Classicist Mary Beard has forcefully drawn attention to the ways in which both she personally and women throughout history have been effectively silenced by cultural assumptions that whatever they have to say is less important, and hence less worthy of being listened to. How far is this part of *our* everyday experience, as both speakers and listeners? What really determines *who* we listen to and the attention we pay? Alongside gender, their race, class and wealth may all play a part, as will the way our collective experience is structured by both new and old media, for example the overwhelming bias of news coverage in favour of Israeli over Palestinian sources in the early days of the Gaza genocide. Why are 'White' bodies apparently more deserving of our recognition, our empathy and our *time* than 'Black' or 'Brown' ones? Vital then, in terms of both our *bearing witness* and our *aspiration*, to investigate who is given a platform from which to speak, to whom I choose to listen, and the value I place on what they say. Who do I have *time* for?

The Time To Care?

All *caring* takes time. In caring for ourselves, and in the caring responsibilities we take on for others — whether voluntarily, professionally, or simply because we feel we are given no alternative — we mix our 'own' time with the labour time of others. Our children may require paid-for childcare to allow us to work, and will almost certainly be educated by professionals outside the home. We may choose to care for some or many of the needs of our parents or a sick relative, or rely instead on a variety of professionals. None of these are simple choices 'freely made', but depend heavily on availability, cost, wage differentials, kinds of personal competence, personal relationships. I may be a professional

carer myself in some form — teacher, medic or whoever — how far does my employment allow me to care in the way I would wish to, both professionally and in my ‘private’ life?

Philosopher Joan Tronto has developed the concept of the ‘care pass’ to describe how the relatively well-off (which may also include us) may ‘outsource’ any and all aspects of personal or family caring to those whose time is — in strictly financial terms — ‘less valuable’ than their own. *Whose* time is less valuable takes us back to the lines of inequality both within our own society and the wider global context: the time of women, ethnic minorities (especially those who are non-citizens), the less-educated. The vast quantity of open-ended and unpaid ‘domestic’ labour *expected* of women to support ‘their’ men’s paid work is still evident today, even given that women themselves are expected to be employed full-time. This is the traditional ambiguity of women’s labour within the home: ‘priceless’ = worthless. So what about *our* caring ‘within the home’? Whose time do I choose or ‘need’ to buy, or do I have my every want met by housekeepers, cooks, cleaners, gardeners and the rest? The *care-pass* allows me to *exclude* others from *their* time, to avoid *taking the time* to care for myself and my family. It also lets those who can afford to use it avoid the physical and emotional stress, the actual *work* of caring, which can never simply be quantified as time or money. How does *entitlement* play here: do I assert or assume my ‘right’ not to do any of this work I may think of as demeaning, and which may well be physically demanding or emotionally distressing to perform? A right based, ultimately, on my wealth, my ability to *exclude* others from *their* time...

But it’s *also* to exclude myself from the rewards and joys of *actual* caring. Ask any teacher, nurse, doctor or care assistant how rewarding their work can be when they are allowed to do it well, with proper recognition given to both themselves and those for whom they care — when mutual relationship is placed at its heart. Or ask any parent — ‘domestic’ labour is not *simply* domination, ‘love’ of all kinds is real and present, even if, in our unequal and inequitable societies that love can be and often is exploited. In the face of all that being a ‘person’ is supposed to demand of us as *separate* from each other, the reality is that *care* and *caring* are central to the actual lived experience of all of us, and bear witness that we are *not-separate* from each other. It should surprise no-one that living out this reality is complex and often contradictory — this is the nature of relationship itself, and only the more so in a world where we are led to see relationship as primarily a contract between wholly separate individuals. But within our families and friendships we can and do experience ourselves as *more* than parties to a contract, even if these relationships too are always framed within the employment relation, and misdirected and misunderstood by our fantasies and received ideas of what *this* relationship is or *should* be.

Aspiring ‘To Share Freely’

Nothing about inequality is ‘written in stone’. The employment relation is not some fact of nature. In reality we never entirely act as, or imagine ourselves to be the separate ‘persons’ described in Locke’s philosophy, and neither do we define ourselves entirely through what we exclusively possess. We not limited to the ‘identities’ that others use to dominate or exclude us, and neither are we bound to dominate or exclude others. If I emphasise the actual and catastrophic inequality of our current societies and the greed it produces in each of us, then I must only stress more strongly the reality of both what we each *already* do daily as relationship and as care, and in what we might together *aspire*

towards as 'sharing freely of all I can'. Our openness to the world, our love and caring bear witness to the reality of our mutual necessity and interdependence, our *Interbeing*, which are all aspects of the non-separation that *is* our 'emptiness' in the Buddhist sense. Our aspiration is at once always intimate and common: 'my' actions, thoughts and words *together with* family, friends and colleagues; 'our' collective actions, thoughts and words as *community*, whether as neighbourhood, as nation or globally. Giving genuine recognition to ourselves and to each other demands equitable *outcomes*, not simply the offering of fine sentiments or establishing legal frameworks. Who decides what, and how do I play my role? Who decides who gets to decide, and how do we decide that? How do we 'share freely' towards diminishing inequality, its inequity and iniquities?

It takes time to care, and it takes time to bear witness. Firstly, and as always, our *zazen* is in itself both a bearing witness and the embodiment of our aspiration: we take the time to care for ourselves and for the world in this fundamental way. Beyond this, whether as what arises spontaneously from our *zazen* or what we directly experience within our different relationships, we can bear witness to recognition and its failure, and to the active role of ignore-ance in the exclusions we both practise and are subject to. We can bear witness to our experiencing the forces that make us *feel* and *act* as separate, and to how these forces are structured: as race, class and gender, and as able-ism, age-ism, species-ism and more. We can bear witness that even our most intimate and loving relationships involve such failures and exclusions, whether momentary or long-lasting; we can aspire to address these, whether in-the-moment, in the space offered by reflection, or the openness of *zazen*. *Exclusion*, *ignore-ance* and *othering* are countered in each living and open act of *recognition*, and together pattern both our experiencing and that of the billions of people and countless other beings with whom we share this world. Where in all this do I find myself placed, where do I place myself? How do I *act* on my aspiration?

Recognition puts the *mutuality* of relationship front and centre, and as such is at the heart of our *caring*. We might return to the Māhāyāna 'Wisdom' literature of which the Heart and Diamond Sutras both form a part. This insists that in a world 'empty' of 'separate' beings — which is *not* to say that 'all beings are one' — there is no significance to the distinction between carer and cared-for, no implied hierarchy, no obligation, no gratitude demanded or worthy self-satisfaction felt: there is simply 'caring' in the mutuality of relationship. As we each live it out in our lives this very mutuality also presents in each moment the possibility of misunderstanding, of the failure of recognition and so the rupture of relationship, but a failure that in its overcoming is nevertheless *necessary* for relationship to evolve and to grow. Will each momentary failure we experience harden into ignore-ance, into the othering and exclusion that tend toward domination, or instead resolve within a mutuality that is wider than before? Whatever compromises, misunderstandings or actual inequalities are involved, our vow is to take the time to bear witness honestly to the reality and possibility of relationship in each moment, and allow our *aspiration* to 'equality' and 'sharing freely of all we can' to show us our path.