

# Honolulu Diamond Sangha



January– March, 2016

## *Four Infinite Vows*

*Notes on our new translation*

*by Michael Kieran*

### FOUR INFINITE VOWS

All beings without limit I vow to carry over;  
Kleshas without end I vow to cut off;  
Dharma gates without measure I vow to master;  
Buddha's way without peer I vow to fulfill.

Several years ago Nelson Foster, Don Stoddard, and I began work on a new translation of our Great Vows. Our aim was a translation at once more faithful to the original and less prone to misunderstanding. This project has afforded us the chance to transform various misunderstandings of our vows into fertile questions and hopefully a clearer understanding and appreciation of these vows as foundational to our practice and realization of the Buddha Way.

As a further step in this process, this article takes up key terms and phrases in the new translation and their rationale.

The Title:

四	弘	誓	願	文
SHI	GU	SEI	GAN	MON
four	to enlarge, expand; liberal, great, magnanimous	to take an oath, to swear; an oath or vow in Buddhism: to vow, pledge	to be willing, to vow, to wish	writing, text, composition

Gu, 弘, in the title is not so much great or large as it is dynamically expansive, thus "infinite." Our vows are not static rules or obligations that we must try to conform to. Rather, they are expressions of an ever present and creative Way of living in accord with our own wise and compassionate nature each astonishing moment of this life.

Sei Gan, 誓願, means the activity of vowing. Our vows are Gu 弘, that is, expansive and infinite in and through the way our life opens up in the activity of living the vows. In the Mahayana teachings the activity of *living by vow* is often contrasted with *living by karma*. To live by karma is to act based on habitual modes of thought, feeling, and past action. Living by karma can be impulsive or more careful and calculating but either way it is bound and defined by past action and experience.

To live by vow is to recognize the four infinite vows as clear expressions of who we really are and what our life is about. In this way rather than acting on emotional impulse or by calculation and speculation of results, we simply attend to the

The First Vow:

*All beings without limit I vow to carry over.*

衆 SHU all, the whole of, a multitude	生 JŌ birth, be- ings, that which is born	無 MU without, no, non	邊 HEN boundary, edge, side, margin	誓 願 SEI GAN to vow, pledge	度 DO to cross over, carry across, ferry over
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Shu jō mu hen, 衆生無邊 is not so much a numberless *quantity* of beings as it is the whole inclusive family of beings altogether, without boundary or limit, no being excluded.

Mu hen 無邊, "without limit" could well be translated with a single word like "limitless" or "boundless." However, in our sangha discussions on

matter at hand and live our vows in accord with circumstances *as they come forth*.

In living by vow we do not escape our karma or somehow sidestep cause and effect, nor do we ignore what we have learned through past experience and study. Living by vow is a matter of our orientation to our life. Our actions and our experience of life are grounded in the vows rather than on a calculation of outcomes—outcome we desire or seek to avoid. With our sense of ourselves and our actions grounded in the vows, the actual changing karmic conditions of our lives become the ever changing context for freely and creatively actualizing the vows. In this way, living by vow is not just our intention, it is also what actually happens — the car screeching to a stop in front of us, the joy and sadness that wells up in us out of nowhere, the homeless woman and her child sitting in the park. It is not that we live by vow now so as to produce some beneficial result in the future. *This living by vow is its own result*; it is the whole thing. As Hakuin says, "The oneness of cause and effect is clear, not two, not three, the path is put right." This Sei Gan 誓願, this living by vow, appears in each of the four infinite vows.

the new translation, most of us preferred the sound and cadence of the two-word Chinese form: "mu hen" in the first vow, and "mu jin," "mu ryō," and "mu jō" in the other vows, so we've retained that two-word form throughout the new translation. . Translating do 度 literally as "carry over" invokes the Buddhist metaphor of reaching "the other shore"

of *nirvana*. Our previous translation, "I vow to save them" is an example of a more familiar word which we think we understand, but which usually engenders misunderstandings. For many of us "saving" connotes preserving in some way and for some with a Christian background, this may include the implication of eternal life. There may also be a messianic element in our idea of saving others—a sense that it is *me* saving *them*. None of this is implied in our first vow.

Think rather of the royal ease of Guanyin—realizing and living the incomparable fact of our own awakened nature which is no other than the awakened nature of all beings. Rather than *me* saving *them*, "carry over" makes clear that we all go together. When Shakyamuni awakened upon seeing the morning star,



he exclaimed: "I and all sentient beings of the great earth have, *in the same moment*, attained the Way."

With this first vow we align our life with the power of our most fundamental aspiration, the aspiration to awaken. We make this vow not simply to liberate ourselves, but for the benefit of all beings—to see incisively that all beings truly possess the wisdom and virtue of the Buddha and to live with and serve them accordingly with reverence and respect.

With this awakening it becomes clear that the other shore is right under our feet, yet before we've realized it there seems to be a gap. It is a gap created by our self-centered ways of thinking and feeling and it is a gap we vow to cross over for the sake of all.

The Second Vow:

### *Kleshas without end I vow to cut off.*

煩惱 BON NŌ Skt. klesha — mental/ emotional states which incite unwholesome be- havior; afflictions, vexa- tions, delusions, defile- ments	無 MU without, no, non	盡 JIN exhaust, complete, deplete	誓 願 SEI GAN to vow, pledge	斷 DAN to cut off, in- terrupt, sever; Skt. <i>uccheda</i> : to uproot, put an end to
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Bōnnō 煩惱 is the Chinese translation of the Buddhist term "klesha." There is no really close equivalent English term so, like other more familiar Buddhist and Chinese terms, e.g., Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, karma, and Dao, this term is left untranslated. Though somewhat awkward initially, the untranslated term invites investigation and discovery

and maybe eventually the same familiarity Zen students have with terms like Dharma and Dao. Kleshas are mental and emotional states which dull the mind and incite unwholesome and harmful behavior. We used to translate bōnnō 煩惱 as greed, hatred and ignorance and indeed these are known as the three root kleshas. But kleshas go beyond

these three and include conditions like fear, heedlessness, sloth, arrogance, skeptical doubt, envy, trickery or guile, and so on. The list is long.

We vow to dan 斷 — to cut kleshas off. The sense here is to nip them in the bud as soon as we become aware of them — to interrupt and sever involvement with them midstream. We practice this in our zazen every time we don't chase after a distracting thought or sensation, and every time we bring our attention back to our practice when we notice that we have strayed. Cutting off doesn't mean we don't sometimes feel powerful emotions like fear, anger, and sadness or for that matter bliss, pride, gratitude, or awe. We just don't indulge those feelings and feed them with stories of victimhood or justification. Dan 斷 is the character used by the early Chinese Buddhist scholar monks to translate the Sanskrit term *uccheda* which means to uproot, put an end to. However, the vow also states that kleshas arise "mu jin" 無盡, without end. What does it mean to cut off and put an end to something that arises endlessly?

Fundamentally, cutting off means seeing clearly that there's nothing substantial to cut off and nowhere for klesha to abide, now or ever. That is how we put an end to them. It is the razor sharp



active edge of Manjushri's sword of wisdom which cuts through delusions, the edge so sharp it has no thickness at all.

But life is not static. The conditions of our life are never the same moment to moment. Kleshas arise as part of these changing conditions. We vow to pay attention and engage with the actual matter at hand. But this attention is not some extra, added-on activity—our attention IS our life—coming forth along with the 10,000 things—all at once. As the master Yantou said, "A moment's inattention, a dead person." This is not hypothetical. Our vow comes into play at the moment when kleshas have already arisen in our life, as indeed they do. At such a time it won't do to just look the other way or try to pretend that the resentment, envy, or whatever the klesha, doesn't exist. We vow to wield the sword of wisdom and cut them off on the spot. This doesn't just happen by itself.

We must take up the sword and use it. We have to practice. At the same time the incisive activity of this vow isn't a long-suffering battle. Manjushri's sword is not a blunt cudgel — it cuts through in a flash. As the master Dahui Zonggao said, "You must make yourself turn freely, like a gourd floating on the water, independent and free, not subject to restraints, entering purity and impurity without being obstructed or sinking down."

The Third Vow:

*Dharma gates without measure I vow to master.*

法	門	無	量	誓	願	學
HO	MON	MU	RYŌ	SEI	GAN	GAKU
dharma, law	gate	without, no, non	to measure, to deliberate	to vow, pledge		study, learn, master, realize

The term dharma has many meanings within Buddhism and beyond. In the context of this third of our Infinite Vows, dharma means the recorded teachings of the Buddhas and ancestors as well as all the particular phenomena of our lives: stones and clouds, plants and animals, thoughts and sensations, just as they are—arising and passing away at the very same time. Each of these so-called phenomena—no less than the recorded teachings of the Buddhas and ancestors—is a gate, a potential point of awakening. What makes a gate a gate is that it opens and closes. An open field is not a gate; a solid wall is not a gate. Our life is not static. The vow is not about a permanent state of openness. It is dynamic practice and realization—at once opening to and being opened by the vastness of our own nature upon seeing a grain of rice on the floor.

*Mu ryō* 無量, too is dynamic—meaning, not so much a great countless quantity, but rather: without measuring, without calculating, without keeping score, and without self-consciousness. After all, what measure could be applied to the song of the thrush?

*Gaku* 學, the character we're translating as mastery means to study, learn, and master or realize. In the activity of *gaku*, study, learning, and mastery are not so much discrete steps in a linear progres-

The Fourth Vow:

sion, but rather different aspects of a single way, a single continuous practice. They form a circle rather than a straight line. In this sense, study without learning and mastery isn't really study.

Mastery without study and learning isn't really mastery. There's nothing particularly liberating about the concept of mastery, or for that matter, concepts of enlightenment, emptiness, and no-self.

Awakening is a lived experience — it is only real to the degree it functions, and this functioning, living way, this way of attending, opening, and being opened by is what is meant by mastery. It certainly

has nothing to do with dominion or dominance over the creatures and things of the world.



### *Buddha's way without peer I vow to fulfill.*

佛	道	無	上	誓	願	成
BUTSU	DŌ	MU	JŌ	SEI	GAN	JŌ
Buddha	dao, way	without, no, non	above, summit, top	to vow, pledge		to accomplish, to complete, succeed
		Skt. <i>anuttara</i> — su- preme, peerless, un- surpassed				

The Buddha Way is the Noble Eightfold Path—the lifetime practice of right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right attention, and right samādhi. In Chinese, the "right" of the eightfold path is *zheng* 正, which means upright and true. Upright thoughts, words, and actions can bear weight and be relied upon, unlike that which is slanted or crooked. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the Buddha Way is not simply having good intentions—it is about what we actually do and includes what actually happens as a consequence of our thoughts and actions. Our fourth vow is to follow through, to complete and fulfill the Buddha Way in every dimension of our lives.

At the same time the Buddha Way is radically immediate. As great ancestor Ma [Mazu] put it: "This very mind is Buddha!" The Chinese says literally: "Immediately mind is Buddha." Shakyamuni meticulously mapped out the path for us and Mazu kicks some dust from the path in our face so we don't mistake the map for the territory. As Aitken Rōshi says early on in *Taking the Path of Zen*, "... the path is personal and intimate. It is no good to examine it from a distance as if it were someone else's. You must walk it for yourself."

Mu jō, 無上 is the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term "*anuttara*" which means supreme, unsurpassed, and without peer or equal. The term is inclusive and experiential, not dualistic or comparative. It does not mean "better than" or "superior to" other paths or ways. Far from any arrogance of superiority, "without peer" expresses the sober recognition that I am born alone and will die alone, and that the Buddha Way must be walked with my own footsteps and actions. A vital sangha and good teacher are indispensable for most of us, but ultimately we must trust ourselves, trust the practice, and step forth uprightly, again and again. In this sense mu jō 無上 means quite literally "without summit." Like walking in the mountains—each time you crest a ridge or peak, you can see further peaks and ridges. As Xuedou says in one of his verses in the

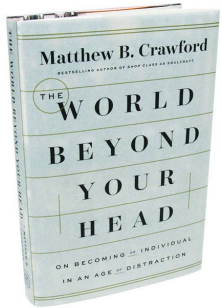
Blue Cliff Record, "Distant mountains without end, layer upon layer of blue. "Our fourth vow is to jō 成, to fulfill, this peerless, endless path. Jō 成 means literally to accomplish, to complete, to succeed. Our practice is this way of completion—not a practice to become complete but the enactment of completion, the realization of completion. Complete one breath; complete one footstep. Complete your sentence when you speak; complete each word of the sentence. When we practice this way, there is no next thing to get to, and yet we are not complacent. We do not consider our practice completed or sufficient. The Buddha Way is not all laid out for us ahead of time. It appears as we walk it—"mountains without end, layer upon layer of blue"—the work of many lifetimes, practiced and fulfilled in each step.



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Buddha's way without peer  
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# *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, by Matthew B. Crawford

Reviewed by Susan Brandon



Let me state my bias now: read this book. If the subtitle *on becoming an individual in an age of distraction* sounds like a self-help book, promising ways to “de-stress in this digital age” or offering “mindful living in the midst of plugged-in culture,” be not dis-

turbed. *The World Beyond Your Head* by Matthew Crawford is not of that genre. Instead, this book offers for consumption and digestion a banquet of complex, sticky, profound and difficult questions about the nature of personal freedom in our modern culture. Crawford draws the reader into serious political philosophy by examining and tracing many of our deeply held and uniquely American ideas and beliefs about freedom and individuality to some of the greatest thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This is a deeply political work, not in any partisan way, but because it deals with power: who has it and why, and what to do about it. Crawford keeps his head up by focusing on the individual person (you or me, himself or the reader), not on the corporations or others seeking to harvest our attention like a resource or edge the consumer into a more passive agent than one could be. If you believe that to be truly free is to actually see what is taking place in your life and the world around you, and that such freedom is developed by engaging with other people and things, there is much in this book to appreciate. If you are a Zen student, it may even be delightful.

There’s been some buzz about this book around our sangha over the past year, ever since our teacher, Michael Kieran, read it and began telling us about

it. Many of us had already heard of Matthew Crawford from reading his first book, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: an Inquiry into the Value of Work*, published in 2009. Crawford, who earned a PhD in political philosophy (after majoring in physics as an undergraduate), discovered for himself the important dimension of all inquiry: wholehearted engagement with the physical world of people and the objects we use and make.

In particular Crawford, with a craft of hand-making custom motorcycle parts, discovered that individual richness emerges with and through working among others and experiencing the deep satisfaction of study and mastery of a craft in real life. For him, this came about amidst engines, motors, valves, angles, traction, tread, resistance, the physics behind spin and speed, and the myriad details which become familiar to one who comes to know and experience the motorcycle from the inside out. In this latest book, Crawford recognizes many equally rich environments for this joyous immersion, from the short-order diner kitchen to the hockey rink to the quiet shop of a master with perfect pitch. Any of us who may know or be working for any length of time in the arts and crafts of the wood lathe, the dye pot, the pastry oven, the camera, the spindle and heddle, or the musical instrument may immediately recognize a fellow traveler. Likewise, anyone with clients, co-workers or students upon whose needs and quirks the success of our livelihood depends, will understand that the ingredient of personal interchange is absolutely necessary to make a product or endeavor of depth. The measure of quality or value of our product or activity is never what we think of it. To paraphrase Crawford, the customer’s willingness to pay for the product or service is a useful measure of its value,

but for the craftsman, the best sign is the approving nod of the master.

Crawford's insight and thesis that we are made more human by our devotion to and interaction with our physical world may be happily familiar to the Zen student, particularly since he's not quoting Dogen's famous ten thousand things confirming the self or suggesting anything 'zen-ny' or offering any other religious perspective. This kind of interaction with the world beyond our heads, in addition to being practice, is also philosophy in the best sense: inquiry in the spirit of summoning one's courage to look directly, without excuses or excessive psychological or cultural explanations. Calling us forth to such inquiry is a call responding to a universal human desire to live from and by both the gut and the head and to stand up, uniting with all fellow travelers: birds, trees, you, me and the elements. Crawford's urge, as a philosopher and social observer, to engage and write about this fundamental desire to really know life for oneself, encourages me as a student of Zen.

In the early chapters of *The World Beyond Your Head*, in which Crawford offers some grim examples of how the vitality of our culture and our very individuality has been compromised and explains how this may have come about, and in the later sections pointing to where answers may be found (*people* being the operative word of that section), Crawford's strong medicine is sweetened with good stories well-told. He uses real-life examples of what he is getting at to keep his narrative concrete and readable. The book is populated by gamblers in the casino, jazz musicians, glass blowers, the Muppets, and Simone Weil (quoted in a chapter titled "the erotics of attention").

One of Crawford's stories recounts how, years ago, he frequented a gritty neighborhood gym where the regulars would by turns bring the mix tape for the boom box with the day's workout music. The vigorous interesting music was the result of each person in effect taking a stand for their own taste in a very competitive environment. By contrast, the

insipid prepackaged music piped into the gym today, Crawford learned, is chosen by a corporate office and not subject to discussion. I know I'm not doing the story justice here. By condensing out the rich details it seems that I've removed the character and authenticity of the tale. Crawford refers to this as "flattening." Isn't this what happened of late to the music in his gym? At the risk of diluting another good story, here's another example; a favorite part of the book to many is a lengthy chapter including a study of the recent history of pipe organ design, and describing Crawford's visits to a modern maker of historically inspired pipe organs, the Taylor and Boody shop in Virginia. Even a fascinated reader might wonder why he takes so many pages exploring this topic, but the answer to that question can itself be found between the lines (it's the opposite of "flattening").

Crawford writes like a man with a mission, in a voice whose urgency is contagious and stimulating. In an epilogue that summarizes his ideas and provides an excellent overview of his thinking, he explains, "Philosophy is, among other things, an attempt to understand one's own experience. It therefore has some kinship with the idea of 'common sense.' But common sense sometimes has to be defended by elaborate arguments directed against other arguments that *cover over* lived experience. . . . One must deploy sharp implements to clear away and recover a more immediate intelligibility to life."

*The World Beyond Your Head* has important and difficult ideas that are worth thinking about, grappling with, and discussing with others. Opportunities to consider and apply them will arise like Dharma gates. In complement to the sharp implement of thoughtful inquiry, as Zen students we have another sharp implement: *zazen*. With diligent practice we can recognize the Dharma gates as well as the ideas and insight of others. This book encourages our faithful cultivation of the desire to be and continue to become a person who is free and wide open, through and through.



# Highlights from the Calendar

We gather for Zazen most Sundays from 9 to 11 am, and most Wednesdays from 7 to 9 pm, followed by tea. Variations on that schedule, and special events, are highlighted below. Please see or download our full calendar from our website, [diamondsangha.org](http://diamondsangha.org), call us at (808) 735-1347, or find us on Facebook.

## January

- 1/2/16 through 1/9: Rohatsu. The temple will be closed from Sunday, 1/3 through Saturday, 1/9 for our Zen sesshin (full-time overnight silent “retreat”). All are welcome to attend the Dharma Assembly with presentation by the teacher at 2 pm on Sunday through Friday. Please arrive a few minutes early and wait to be escorted into the zendo. Maintain quiet, please, and remain on the lanai; you may use the restrooms during kinhin just before the assembly.
- 1/10, Sunday: No program (day off after sesshin).
- 1/15, Friday: Board of Directors meeting, 6:30 to 9:30 pm.
- 1/16, Saturday: Orientation to Practice, 9 am to noon. No preregistration is necessary.
- 1/22 through 1/30: Vipassana Hawaii Retreat. No Honolulu Diamond Sangha programs will be held Sunday 1/24 or Wednesday 1/27. Please contact [vipassanahawaii.org](http://vipassanahawaii.org) for information.
- 1/31, Sunday: Samu (zazen and silent work practice), 9 am to noon followed by lunch

## February

- 2/7, Spring Sesshin signup deadline
- 2/10, Wednesday: Zazen/Dokusan with Question and Response time, 7 to 9 pm followed by tea.
- 2/13, Saturday: Sangha Circle (discussion), 2 to

4 pm.

- 2/14, Sunday: Hiking Zazenkai, 9 am to 5 pm, trail to be announced. We will meet at the trailhead. Bring a brownbag lunch, water, sunscreen, headgear and sturdy shoes.
- 2/20, Saturday: Orientation to Practice, 9 am to noon. No preregistration is necessary.
- 2/21, Sunday: Work Party (dharma assembly and informal work practice), 9 am to noon followed by lunch.
- 2/26 to 3/5: Vipassana Hawaii Retreat. No Honolulu Diamond Sangha programs on Sunday 2/28 or Wednesday 3/2. Please contact [vipassanahawaii.org](http://vipassanahawaii.org) for information.

## March

- 3/1 to 3/5: Vipassana Hawaii Retreat. No Honolulu Diamond Sangha programs on Wednesday 3/2. Please contact [vipassanahawaii.org](http://vipassanahawaii.org) for information.
- 3/4 to 3/7: Maui Zendo sesshin (on Maui) with Nelson Foster.
- 3/12, Saturday: Orientation to Practice, 9 am to noon. No preregistration is necessary.
- 3/13, Sunday: Samu (zazen and silent work practice), 9 am to noon followed by lunch.
- 3/18 – 3/23: Spring Sesshin. The temple will be closed from Saturday, 3/19 through Wednesday, 3/23 for our Zen sesshin (full-time overnight silent “retreat”). All are welcome to attend the Dharma Assembly with presentation by the teacher at 2 pm on Saturday through Tuesday. Please arrive a few minutes early and wait to be escorted into the zendo. Please maintain quiet and remain on the lanai; you may use the restrooms during kinhin just before the assembly.

## Seeking New Temple Keeper

On June 1, our temple keeper Lisa will complete her one-year term. We are looking for a new temple keeper to begin May 1. This is a training position for an experienced Zen student with a well-established practice. Preference will be given to applicants from Diamond Sangha centers or in an active teacher/student relationship with a DS teacher. We request a one-year commitment.

The temple keeper leads our small residential program of people who work or go to school while doing daily and weekly Zazen and Samu together and with the sangha. The temple keeper coordinates sangha work practice and related programs, and keeps the sangha and our Board of

Directors advised of our facility's care and maintenance needs, so that together we can maintain the grounds and keep the aging buildings in good repair.

We provide a room with private bath, waiver of sesshin fees, with modest monthly stipend including two weeks off annually. Depending on the situation, a part-time job in the community may be possible.

To apply, please closely review the description of our residential program in our website, [diamondsangha.org](http://diamondsangha.org), download and complete the residential application form, and submit it to our Administrator along with a cover letter describing your qualifications.

**Note from the Editor:** Thank you to each of you that sent suggestions and articles. We hope to incorporate your ideas and articles in upcoming issues. I am currently looking for writers to help create an Ancestors section in the newsletter. If you are interested please contact me at [editor@diamondsangha.org](mailto:editor@diamondsangha.org), and please continue to send articles and suggestions.

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