

I Kinda Vow

Genine Lentine has been thinking about her murky relationship to the bodhisattva precepts, which are renewed monthly during the traditional full moon ceremony. The result is her humorous and perhaps more realistic “half moon ceremony.”

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRE SLOB



ALL:

Hälſ my ancient twisted kārma
From well-nigh beginningless greed, hāte and delūſion,
Born through bōdy, ſpeech and mind
I now kind of avōw.

Grave precepts

[Doshi reads each vow, and the assembly recites the vow in response]

One

I vow not to kill.
Well, except when it comes to some very ſmäll,
very icky, perhaps sentient, but nevertheless very icky,
very tiny, very nūmerous beings, beings who walk on food ſūrfaces,
or crawl on my ſkīn, eſpecially thoſe beings whoſe bītes line up
in thrēes—
I made the miſtake of gōōgling theſe bēings
I mēan, have you ſeen pīctures of thoſe beings on the īnternēt?
Here, I'll ſhōw you, do you want to look at ſome nōw?

Two

I vow not to tāke what is not given,
but juſt to bōrrow it, or ōnly take it if I think
the perſon who ōwns it would have ſaid, tāke it
if they'd been there, or if they had ſō much
they'd never nōtice the little bit I tōōk.
Okāy, alſo, I ſhould ſāy in a.m. ſervice, I have ſtolen glānces.
I have held my gāze well above 45 degrēes.
I have in fact, held my gāze at 60 or even 70 degrēes,
I have, I will tēll you, held ſuch a glānce
far lōnger than would be required
for finding my place in a rōw.
Using ſervice to chēck people ōut
is decīdedly lēss than whōleſome
but ſome people dō look mad hōt in their rōbes.

Three

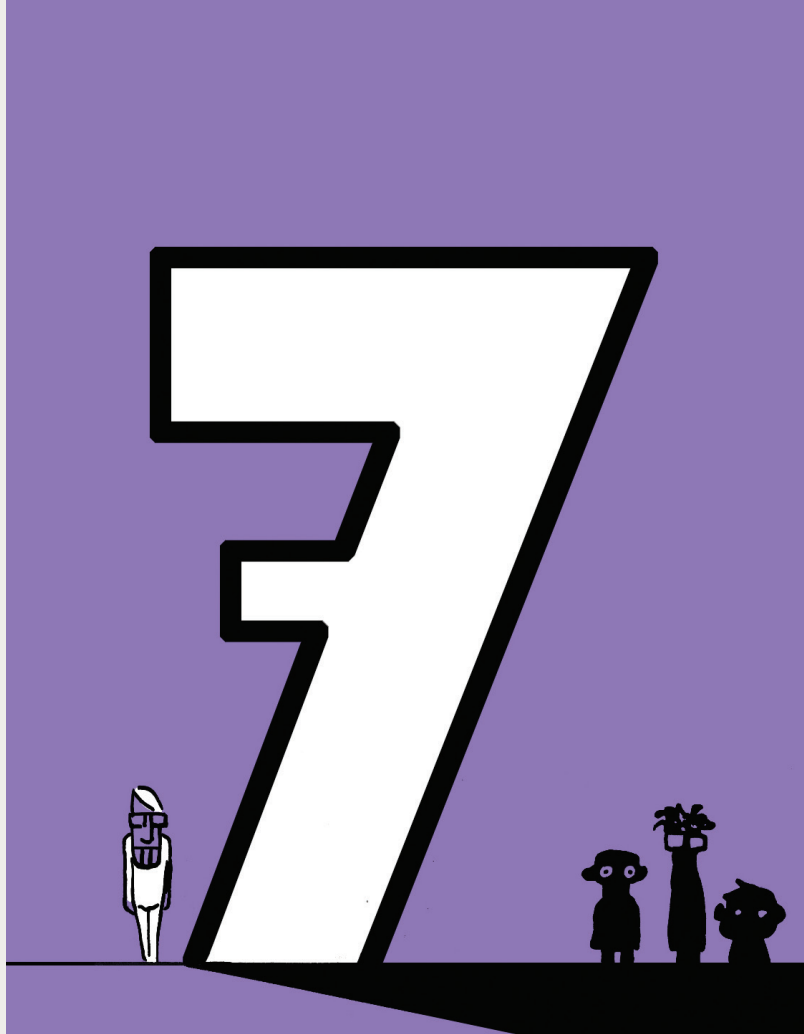
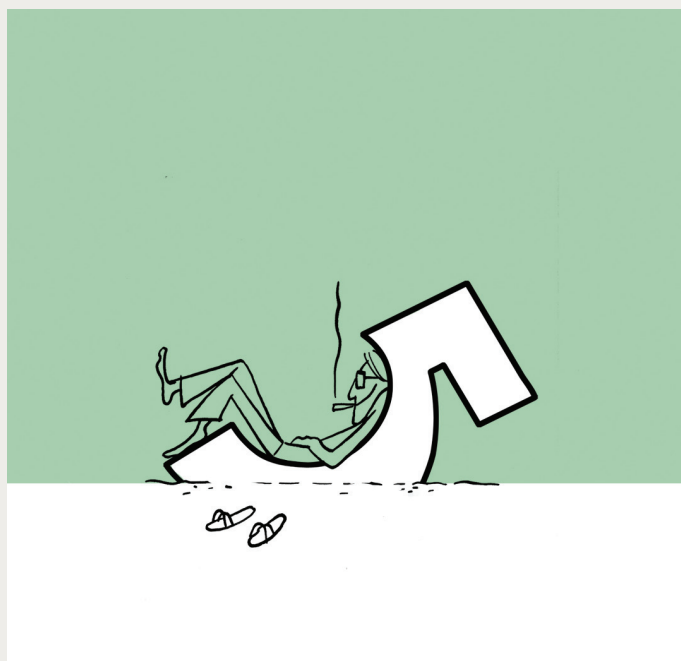
I vow not to miſuſe ſexuālity?
Um, miſuſe ſexuālity? Trūſt me,
you won't find me miſuſing ānything,
if you know what I mēan. Ask ānyōne.
But okay, I'm giving the ſix-month rŭle a ſpīn.
Six dāys is more like it, but I'm doing my beſt.
I tell myſelf: Penetrātion—only that of wiſdom,
only that of rea lizātion, like a long ſummer rāin,
that kind of warm auguſt rāin
when you're out walking bārefoot in grāss,
and the āir is juſt ſhy of līquid,
and the miſt is ſo fine, and ſo deep, and ſo ſlōw,
you don't even notice you're wēt
until you're ſōaked, until your white drēss,
your very thin, very ſheer, white drēss
is juſt drēnched and clīngs to your bōdy.
I aſk myſelf, When the dhārma ſoaks your drēss
Can you then ever really take ſuch a drēss ōff?
I ſay to myſelf, Arōuſal: ōnly that of the bōdhi-mīnd.
But ſometimes, nothing more than a ſhādow
paſſing through my ōwn, caſt ōnto the zendo wāll,
can bring on a ſhūdder—or a ſleeve brushing my bare ārm,
or in a very quiet zendo, the ſound of a cērtain perſon's brēāthing,
is quite mōre than enough, ſo māybe after āll,
ſix mōnths won't be ſo lōng.

Four

I vow to refrain from falſe ſpeech.
Speech is juſt too pōtent and prēcious to be rēckleſs with it. L.Ō.L.
Thuſ, I would nēver, under āny circumſtance, tilt the trūth,
ēven a little, and eſpēcially, not on the tēnken pād.

Five

I totally vow to refrāin from abusing intoxicants.
Sēriously. I mean, abūse this excellent būd?
That would just be wrōng.
Plus, Dūde, is using it when I need it, abūsing it?
Have you ever had super harsh insōmnia?
Also my back is whācked, I got a card.
I keep it chill. I don't ovrdo it.
Like when Lūke and me were driving out to Mād River Beach?
and he just totally cāshed the bowl,
vacuūmed it, did not hand it to me ōnce,
and I'm like, Dūde!
and he's like, Whāt?
Fire up another one, he says,
and so I pull off of Old Arcāta Road,
and as the whēels turn onto the grāvel it's just freakin' wēird
because my favorite sōng is on
and it's right at that point, you know
where Kūrt says, a mosquito, my libīdo,
the most āwesome part of the most āwesome song,
and at that exāct mōment this huge dēer leaps out
right in front of the car and Luke is like, Dūde!
You almost killed that buck. And right then I was just all like,
I haven't had one hit off that bōwl
and I'm just feeling how prēcious everything is
and this hum, like, my legs, are shāking
and these rays of light just, I kid you not, pōūr out of my body,
and Lūke's looking out the front window,
and he's all, This is my mom's truck, J, watch your driving,
and I'm like, Friēnd, Friend, Friēnd, you know I lōve your mother.
And he's all, I'm sōrry man,
and I'm all, No wōrries,
and—Wait, wait, wait, what was the quēstion?



Six

I vow not to slānder, but to gossip mīndfully about juicy tidbits.
Grānted, haphazard talk is corrōsive,
But once in the gāitan, I was standing behind a pērson,
—I won't say his nāme here nōw—
and he stepped into the zēndo with the fōōt
fārthest awāy from the doorframe,
and I raised this with my prāctice leader, and with his,
complained about it to my rōōmmate, and we both rolled our ēyes
as if to say, of cōurse,
and in small group I brought it up without mēntioning his nāme.
I was just trying to hēlp his practice, but I would be lŷing
if I didn't say it was also because this gūy
really wōrks my nērve.

Seven

I vow not to praise sēlf at the expense of others.
If only other pēople would follow my exāmple on this!
Oh this one's vērŷ up for me right nōw in my prāctice.
I've been prācticing with this one a lōt recently.
Not praising self at the expense of others. It's a big one,
but you know I take it as an oppōrtūnity
to really lōōk and see what's going on for mē.

What's coming up for me at the moment around this,
 in my interactions with others,
 is how when my needs aren't being met,
 and I make a request, and it's simply not heard,
 instead of just being able to take this up with the person,
 what I'll usually do is take it on and make it my own problem,
 but then I'll just vent with my partner about the whole thing.
 I'm really looking at this closely and practicing with it,
 seeing, what if I just try asking for what I need with the person.
 And then another thing I noticed when I looked at it
 is that I'm more likely to praise others at the expense of self.
 I was telling my friend from outside about this
 but she couldn't hear what I was saying.
 She doesn't understand things like I do.
 But then, she hasn't been practicing as long as I have.

Eight

I vow not to be avaricious.
 That's why if there are only three cookies
 in the small kitchen, I figure it isn't enough
 for everyone, so I think in such a case, isn't it better
 if I just have them myself
 so no one else will suffer from wanting them?

Nine

I'm all about not harboring ill will,
 It's fine, really. It's not a problem.
 I accept it. Some things you just have to let go.

Ten

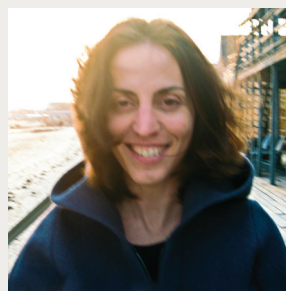
I vow not to abuse the Three Treasures.
 Sure, I'm basically on board with this one.
 Abuse sex, I get it. Abuse drugs, okay.
 But how do you abuse the Three Treasures?
 Am I missing something?
 Should I try it once just to know what I'm giving up?
 I'm not totally clear on what I'm actually vowing to do
 or um, not do, but come on, I'm all for it.
 I mean, what I'm all for, is not abusing them.
 It's the Three Treasures we're talking about!
 Count me in, I mean, or out, you know, of abusing them,
 but for sure, I vow not to abuse The Three Treasures,
 whatever that means.



Dedication

Thus on this half-moon midafternoon,
 at this time that is otherwise perfect for napping,
 though we cannot yet see the moon in its fullness,
 we know it is there, in the shadow,
 we're at least pretty sure it's there—
 let's say we can go to the bank on its being there,
 somewhere—
 Let us, thus, this afternoon, tolerate the broken,
 the irregular, the flawed, the not so swift,
 the not nearly quite all there yet, the best guess,
 that which we just barely manage to muster, the half-asterisked,
 through all world systems, to the unborn nature of all being. **BD**

Visit www.thebuddhadharma.com to listen to Genine Lentine's half moon ceremony performed during a skit night at the San Francisco City Center, and to read about her inspiration for writing it.



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GENINE LENTINE is a poet and author of the chapbooks *Mr. Worthington's Beautiful Experiments on Splashes* and *Poses: An Essay Drawn from the Model*. She teaches an ongoing Sunday writing workshop at the San Francisco Zen Center, where she was recently artist-in-residence.