

## Presence Playing Vows Unfolding

Unshin Sangaku Dan Joslyn, May 15, 2021

Gassho and welcome everyone to our spring zoom extravaganza. Let me also thank the members of the STO Retreat and Communications Committees and our presenters: Zenku, Kuwasan, Kosetsu, Fusatsu, Seigetsu Keisei and Hojo-san, plus all of the Practice Leaders Ungan, Kushin, Shinjin, Katsuryu, and Mokuo who talked to us about the wondrous Silent Thunder Order Affiliate Sangha Network.

To put these efforts in context, I offer the volunteer hours index VHI. When I was director of development at what is now Clark Atlanta University, we created a way to value the impact of alums and others volunteers to the institution. The retreat and communications committee began work on this retreat in January, 2021, let's estimate 20 people and then estimate the average number of hours worked by each person at 25 over five months at an hourly cost of \$15. The VHI for the retreat, that is if we outsourced it would be \$7500. This is a low VHI, as I estimate the co-chairs of the communication committee from Thursday night through Sunday noon will each spend about 25 (50) hours managing the retreat. What dana is loving-kindness, What a way to begin our discussion, so let's begin tonight by bowing to our STO volunteers...

The theme of the retreat is ***Vows in Bloom***. Much that has been said about the retreat addresses the first word in the theme... ***Vows***. In my talk and our discussion, let's spend time on the second and third words in the theme "IN" and "BLOOM." I then point to spring, birthday, and rededication

The title of the talk is Presence Playing...Vows Unfolding.

It is not a difficult stretch to see birth and vows similarly, nor would this be only a Buddhist pattern recognition. Birth as coming into being and precepts as declaration of intent with directional effort sometimes viewed as a path to transformation.

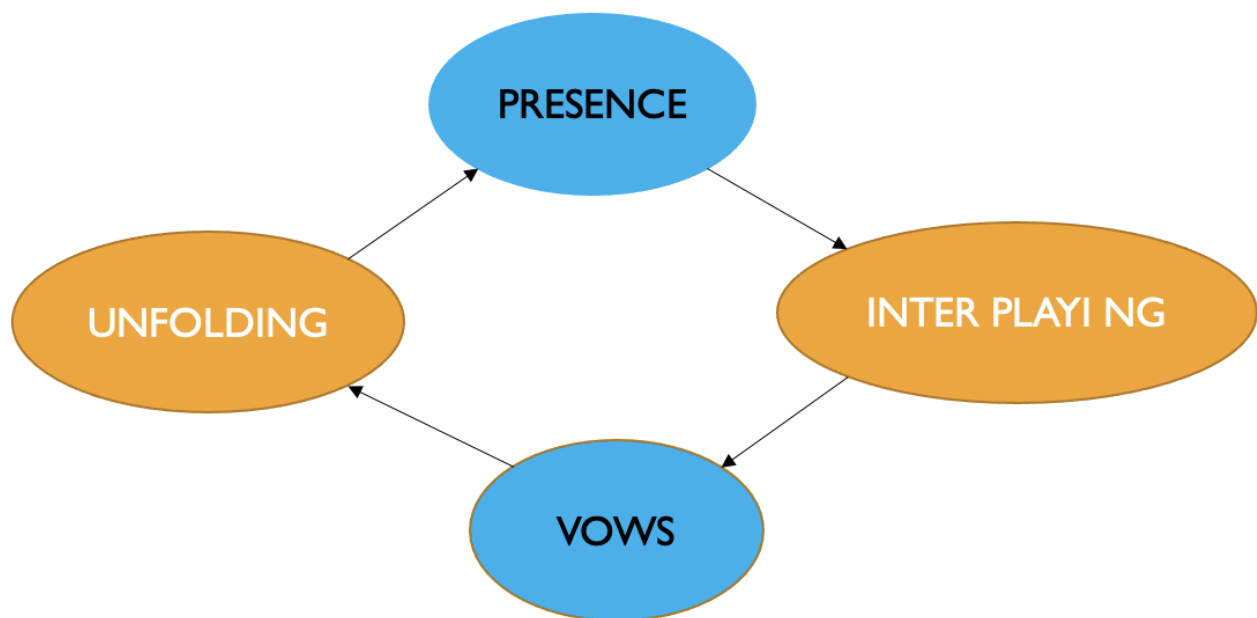
In Buddhism for example, the precursor to becoming awake is leaving home. Then, entering a new sphere or dimension of experience, belief and behavior. I would like to talk about the great meaning of this in the smallest of ways. I will use four points to connect the themes of our Spring Retreat, **Hanamatsuri and Vows in Bloom**. The Upaya for the evening is:

•**Presence** is everything displaying as Dharma

•**Playing or interplaying** is the constant cause and effect of everything on everything...celebration of Dharma

•**Vows or precepts** are commitments to follow an ethical and moral path

•**Unfolding** is the actualization of commitments



In 2018 my two daughters and I took a road trip to the old family farm in Monticello Maine. I had not been there for 30 years nor had my older daughter, while the younger daughter had never been to the homestead. It was the kind of trip that showed my age.

The desire to see, show and tell to the younger generations! A fatherly urge to be sure, but I would argue that of a teacher as well.

### **The Story of Two Photos**



**Daughters in Sunflowers Not Potatoes**



**Daughters in the Forest not on the Farm**

In Buddhist teaching, presence oozes Dharma. We say everything is Buddhadharma: dogs, trees, stones and tiles. Presence is just so. Eihi Dogen writes about the fascicle “Inmo.” in Shobogenzo:

The oozing of right here, right now is the moment which he called “being-time”.

And here from the Original Frontier Hojo points out the following in reference to the Platform Sutra:

*The fundamental reality of our consciousness is not constructed—as are our ideas, our native tongue, and our perception. Nonetheless, it can be pointed to with words. The emotive term here is “precious.” What is so precious about this mirror? This conjures an image, not exactly a thought. Intuiting the presence of this mirror is not simply an intellectual exercise. It is a direct, and precious, insight—into the nondual reality of the apparent duality of self and other. Of form—appearance—and its reflection in our awareness.*

*Michael Elliston. The Original Frontier (p. 77). Cornell Maritime Press. Kindle Edition.*

In each moment all (or One) is sharing the Dharma. Further, everything or ONE is teaching the Dharma. For this practitioner, I don't always sense learning, but my marrow seems to. So being-time is a presence sharing its configuration of emptiness.

I was back in a place of different memories from a different time with my daughter who would have their own experience to carry forward in a shared set of memories now referred to as, **The Road Trip with Dad.**

So, in the present moment everything is being-time as we all present and share the Dharma, hence living interconnectedly through independent co-arising. Yet connected doesn't quite convey this experience let alone our actualization.

## INTER-PLAY/ING



Some years ago I took a year off to study acting with a small theater group in Atlanta. I enjoyed the experience with an interesting twist: I liked rehearsing better than performing.

The rehearsing allowed the forming of relationships, and the performance was following the script.

Here we can look at the two interesting meanings of the term PLAY. The first is to be willy-nellie spontaneous as it were, and the second is to execute a set of behaviors, a role.

For example, it is the difference between improvisation and following the script, between jamming and being conducted.

Life is the interplay of Dharma presence. Rehearsal bloopers made performances better.

To make a point about my point,

Daniel Day-Lewis, an Oscar winning actor, begins rehearsal by relinquishing his current life-style before he begins his transformation.

Interesting as well, it seems he needs weeks or months to die to his current behavior, and be reborn again into the character, a now changed Daniel Day-Lewis.

Everything and one is interplaying, that is how it is ONE and EVERYTHING



In the garden at Lumpini two mothers, Maya and Maha, birthed a son. As the legend has it, the retinue of women and the GARDEN ITSELF attended the birth of the World Honored One. By the way, notice the painting is a time travel exposure of Hindu gods, and Sona (the lute player). I also see Maya encouraging Siddhartha and Maha making an offering, the offering I suggest has been worked out between the two women and shows Mahapajapati welcoming the vow of taking care of him after Maya dies.

Recall as Maya went into labor, a tree lowered its branch so she could brace herself. Just as a tree later would be present at her son's awakening.

The birth brought forth full presence interplaying in a symphony of well-being. Flowers bloomed, water spouted, birds sang, and women laughed and wept. This momentous event was captivating, a full immersion in wondrous Dharma, Yet:

"A flower falls,  
even though we love it;  
and a weed grows, even though we do not love it....In this way our life should be  
understood. Then there is no problem."

This statement appears near the start of Dogen's *Genjo Koan*, part of the *Shōbōgenzō*.

The legend of the birth of Shiddhartha also includes the prophecy that the mother of a Buddha will die seven days after giving birth. This statement is the first reality check of Dukkha.

And, it is saying that all women face this possibility in giving birth and it says that they do it anyway. Here we begin playing out the human condition and the start of the teachings of Tathagata. In Japanese a word comes to mind, *Horoniga: Bittersweet*.

This child raised by his Mother's sister may or may not have been told the story of Maya's death. However he was loved and cared for by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, Later he left home leaving a wife and child. It was a call to understand the interplay of pain and suffering to find the meaning of Dukkha so it may be experienced in a manner that will not be all consuming diminishing life at the expense of death.

We celebrate birth as in "Great is the Meaning of Birth" and in doing so there is no death...

### **Vows**

*For comprehensive research on "The Evolution of the Precepts "Study Material for The 2008 National Conference of The Soto Zen Buddhist Association, see:*

[https://terebeess.hu/zen/szoto/Precepts\\_Study.pdf](https://terebeess.hu/zen/szoto/Precepts_Study.pdf)

Vow is a combination of thoughtfulness, mindfulness and logic. It is a process where no distinction is made between the mundane and supramundane. I wonder if Maha made a vow to Maya. If this occurred it is the same way as those which you and I make on various occasions.

I can imagine Maya and Maha knew the condition and variables in play after the birth of Siddhartha.

Compassion and love had to occur to belay concerns of one and establish a life-time commitment for the other.

But we don't have to speculate. In Wendy Garling's book, ***The Woman Who Raised the Buddha***, she writes of the translation of Cambodian living oral tradition chants by Trent Walker (p.49 and 50) where Maya speaks to her sister :

*Look little sister Gotami  
Hold to these words of guidance  
I ask you now to receive  
Little sister forgive me.*

*Since giving birth to my son  
Only seven days have passed  
My life withers to nothing  
I pass on to the next world.*

*What can I do when we are  
Born only to be destroyed?  
All humans and animals  
Die and decay by nature.*

Never lasting never sure  
Life is as the Pali phrase  
a n i c c a m d u k k a h a m a n a t t a (Impermanence, suffering, and non-self)  
Little darling, you must know.

Now as for me dear sister  
Don't worry, for death is sure;

No more can I hold my son  
The refuge of gods and men.

You who pity your sister,  
You lovely girl, that is why  
I ask you to hug and hold  
This motherless child of mine.

Nurse him and bathe his body  
Attend to him day and night  
Care for him like no other  
Oh my golden girl, do not stop.

What a step it is to vow,.. It is saying we take a stand... We must make a concerted effort.

We BOW and lean into this dedication...

Our life as practitioners exist in three simultaneous fields: Dharma, Sila, and Prajna.  
The interplay of these fields are actualizing each moment.

The life and teachings of Buddha, Dharma, Sila, are actions taken to awaken Prajna, wisdom to know how to intuit actions that reduce suffering in a given moment. When we act others see and wonder how?

As Hanamatsuri is a celebration, precepts/vows are a dedication. In the seven days between Shiddharta's birth and his mothers death, Maya and Maha in all likelihood had conversations about the beauty and wonder of the new son, and the pending death of his mother as noted in the Cambodian chant.

It is the kind of sister-to-sister heart-to-heart transmission of a vow asked and one given that eases the suffering of one and directs the steps that the other sister will faithfully carry out until her death. Mahaprajapati became the only mother the new child would know. She set the example of the importance and the meaning of vow. And Shakyamuni Buddha attended her death as Maha attended the death of Maya.

In *The Filial Sutra*, Shakyamuni Buddha is supposed to have spoken of the importance of a child to honor their parents. This reciprocity for the pain and suffering of raising children in that time was cyclical support. The importance of this interrelatedness, I suggest this later became the refuge of Sangha.

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/filial-sutra.htm>

*To explain more clearly, there are ten types of kindnesses bestowed by the mother on the child:*

*The first is the kindness of providing protection and care while the child is in the womb.*

*The second is the kindness of bearing suffering during the birth.*

*The third is the kindness of forgetting all the pain once the child has been born.*

*The fourth is the kindness of eating the bitter herself and saving the sweet for the child.*

*The fifth is the kindness of moving the child to a dry place and lying in the wet herself.*

The sixth is the kindness of suckling the child at her breast, nourishing and bringing up the child.

The seventh is the kindness of washing away the unclean.



The eight is the kindness of always thinking of the child when it has traveled far.

The ninth is the kindness of deep care and devotion.

The tenth is the kindness of ultimate pity and sympathy.

To be a member of Sangha, invitees are asked to consider if they are willing to accept responsibility for their karma. They are asked to look into the teachings and come to their own awareness about whether taking on this new middle way of life is what they are willing to do. There is a saying in twelve steps programs, "if you want what we have, you must do what we do." This is living by vow.

Sila then is the actualization of three of the steps in the Noble Eight Fold Path, namely, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. And, you ooze or radiate presence.

Some fifty years ago I was a graduate student in organizational sociology. The emphasis was finding patterns across various organization structures. Back then sociology was defined as norms, interrelationship, social structure, and institutions. Anthropology looked at the cultural side of humans related to values, icons, beliefs, language and historical patterns of these conditions and variables. Now sociology and anthropology are more intertwined in social psychology, cultural anthropology and the idea of social-culturalism. The term "more," was used in both schools of study in the middle 1960:

*Mores (Mos.singular) are the strongest of the social norms, which relate to the basic moral judgments of a society. They tell us to do certain things, such as pay proper respect to our parents and teachers. They can also tell us not to do certain things, such as not to kill other human beings or not indulge in adultery... They are considered more important than folkways or customs, and reactions to their violations are more serious. They are more closely associated with values of a society to be important.*

<https://www.1.com/sociology/mores-strongest-social-norms-meaning-and-characteristics/35066>

I should add that the development of norms is seen as organic or need-based. a norm is a factor of many interrelated things, it is experiential and pragmatic with the goal of reducing suffering within the group. Sound familiar? Precepts anyone?

I recommend two books as one lives and looks into the importance of Precepts in Soto Zen Buddhism. The first is **The Mind of Clover** by Robert Aitken, and the second is **Living By Vow**, by Shohaku Okumura. Both are excellent and I suggest Aitken's as a first read then Okumura-roshi.

Buddhism is subtle in many ways. After becoming awake Shakyamuni Buddha sat with what to do next, This period of time leading up to the first turning of the Dharma Wheel unfolded through his experience with five ascetics with whom he had lived for several years and who followed vows of asceticism:

*According to hagiographies of the life of the Buddha, Gautama hooked up with such a group and practiced and mastered the radical ascetic regiment they advocated, to such an extent that he ate virtually nothing and shriveled to nothing more than skin and bones. Finding that he had not achieved his goal through such austerities, Gautama rejected the ascetic path and pursued what he called the "middle way" between the poles of sensuality and asceticism: "There are two extremes, O monks, which he who has given up the world ought to avoid. What are these two extremes? A life given to pleasure, devoted to pleasures and lust; this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, ignoble and profitless. And a life given to mortifications; this is painful, ignoble and profitless" (Mahavagga, quoted in Bhagat, p. 161).*

What the Buddha had found was a "middle-way" between the extremes of living. Remember ascetics renounced attachment, but to a degree that would eventually lead

to their death if continued, thereby an addiction. This means extreme suffering does not produce enlightenment but death. On the sensuality end, we must eat, drink and be merry, hence the image of eating and drinking oneself to death.

## Unfolding

What did Shakyamuni see in the ascetics that made him seek them out to give his first teaching and then their awakening and living the life of sangha (recall the legend suggests before he found the ascetics, he had sought out two of his teachers from the last six years but both had died)?

If sociology as a body of knowledge suggest "organic rules of engagement of two or more people interacting," then Shakyamuni saw clearly these individuals were the closest in experience to him and possibly, that if anyone could awaken as he had it was they. He saw the importance of a teacher as noted below a kind of catalyst.

The underling in the article below is that of the author

*In the first sermon, the Buddha warns these monks over extreme devotion to the indulgence of sense-pleasures as well as self-mortification:*

*“Bhikkhus (monks), these two extremes ought not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the household life. What are the two? There is devotion to the indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, common, the way of ordinary people, unworthy and unprofitable; and there is devotion to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and unprofitable.*

*“Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata (referring to the Buddha himself) has realized the Middle Path: It gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.*

*“And what is that Middle Path? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right*

*mindfulness, right concentration. This is the Middle Path realized by the Tathagata, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.*

<https://tricycle.org/magazine/the-first-sermon-of-the-buddha/#:~:text=In%20the%20Buddha%E2%80%99s%20first%20sermon%20at%20Deer%20Park%2C,suffering%2C%E2%80%9D%20which%20is%20the%20ultimate%20goal%20of%20Buddhism.>

The question is how to live together as we follow--"The Truths and The Path?" Or, as we live our middle way. What are the domain assumptions (a 1960 sociological term meaning fundamental interactional guidelines)? In essence, what rules can we use to unfold the path of the middle way?

People interacting create a kind of "Indra's Net." Behavior of each person generates a body or sense of connectedness. This oneness of group even has a spiritual name in the West:

***esprit de corps:*** *the common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group.*

[https://us.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?hspart=ima&hsimp=yhs-st\\_mig&p=%22Espirit+de+corps%22&type=q3000\\_A2FAU\\_set\\_bcrq](https://us.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?hspart=ima&hsimp=yhs-st_mig&p=%22Espirit+de+corps%22&type=q3000_A2FAU_set_bcrq)

Sila, is one of the teachings of Buddhism and encompasses ethics and moral behavior as defined by practitioners. This is the arena of domain assumptions or "Precepts." This is a statement of truth in advertising: "this is what you do to find what we found."

It is what we do when we are not on the cushion.

Precepts and vows unfold. That is, we come to inculcate them into our marrow.. Not a hair's width of difference we say. We live precepts by probing their importance and as Taiun-roshi says often, "we don't realize the meaning until we break the vow." Everyone has a way of life, as people of the Middle Way, precepts are our safety measures. They

point direction, identifying possible suffering hazards on the path ahead. Kind of like a Tesla automobile, buzzing, binging, and vibrating if the car swerves off the path.

Before identifying the precepts taken by us, think of all the teachings as variations of a meaningful life of engaging each moment awake and seeing it through the lens/teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Then we become the teachings, become awake, and realize Buddhahood With this caveat...YOU must come to your own awareness, and even limited understanding which YOU experience MUST be brought forth as a Bodhisattva. How can we save ourselves and not others as our very being would be threatened by not helping others.

Below is a list of the precepts taken in the STO precepts ceremony Sunday along with the Hanamatsuri recognition and chanting the Kannon sutra.

The past three days have seen wonderful discussions around all of the precepts. (Zenku, Seigetsu, Kuwasan, and Kosetsu). In reading these again I add only to comments.

First affirming and negating something is less than two and second vows without actions are lies.

Shakyamuni Buddha encouraged all who wish to become awake to follow precepts/vows of action to maintain Sangha harmony:

## **THEREFORE**

### **REFUGE**

I take refuge in Buddha

the fully Awakened One: **By seeing what he did**

I take refuge in Dharma

the compassionate Teaching: **By looking into the teaching and My experiences**

I take refuge in Sangha....

the harmonious Community: **By compassionate interacting**

## THEREFORE

### THREE PURE PRECEPTS

The First Pure Precept is not creating evil

Do no harm: **By not interjecting suffering**

The Second Pure Precept is practicing good

Do only good: **By actualizing compassion, loving-kindness, joy and equanimity**

The Third Pure Precept is purifying intentions

## THEREFORE

### TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS

- Affirm life – I will not kill
- Be giving – I will not steal
- Honor the body – I will not misuse sexuality \*
- Manifest Truth – I will not lie \*
- Proceed clearly – I will not cloud the mind \*
- See the perfection – I will not speak of others' errors and faults \*
- Realize self and other as one – I will not elevate the self and blame others \*
- Give Generously – I will not be withholding \*
- Actualize harmony – I will not be angry \*
- Experience the intimacy of all things – I will not defile the Three Treasures \*

Additional precepts as part of our practice path will be taken, also know that within sanghas, other vows may be taken. Dogen for example had members of the sangha take dozens of vows to maintain harmony among members. In some cases as conditions and variables change so will vows. Hence our vows as Bodhisattvas:



*Dōgen emphasizes that whatever the condition or situation or state of our mind, we just whole-heartedly practice. That's it, only the reality of right now right here. But we need to practice, based on our bodhisattva vow to free all beings, to be free from our delusions, to study dharma, and to attain buddha's way.*

*Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.*

*Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to put an end to them.*

*The dharmas are boundless; I vow to master them.*

*The Buddha's Way is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.*

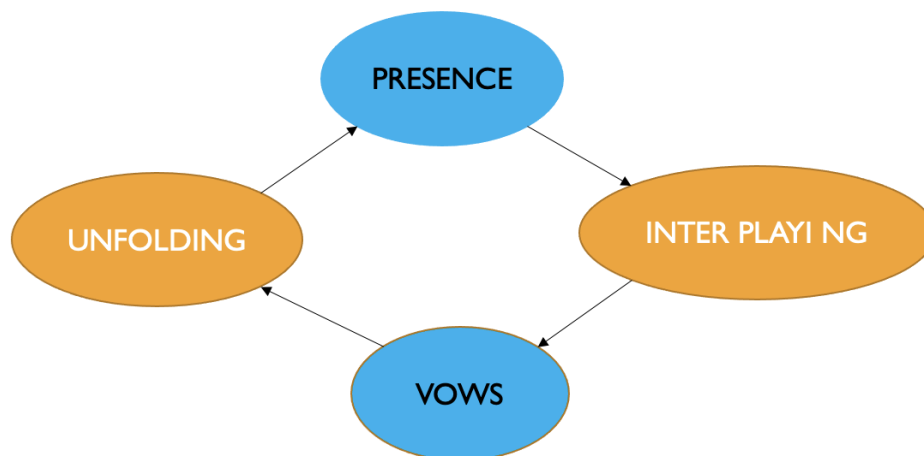
*That is our vow. Usually or almost always our practice is incomplete. We cannot really fulfill those four bodhisattva vows so we need to awaken, we need to be aware of that incompleteness of our practice. Incompleteness is not a bad thing, and to awaken to that incompleteness of our practice is important. That awakening allows us to practice repentance. So as far as we practice based on following our bodhisattva vows, we need to awake to the incompleteness of our practice and practice repentance. Vow and repentance allow us to return to the track we follow to go in that direction, that is, towards buddhahood or nirvana. And when we practice with that attitude, we can find nirvana in each step, each moment. <https://dogeninstitute.wordpress.com/tag/bodhisattva-vows/>*

Robert Aitken then offers on page 5 of **The Mind of Clover**:

*Without the Precepts as guidelines Zen Buddhist tends to become a hobby made to fit the needs of the ego...In my view the true Zen Buddhist centers are not just a resource of sanctuary but a source from which ethically minded people move outward to engage with the larger community.*

So to close the circle:

- Presence** is everything displaying as Dharma
- Playing or interplaying** is the constant cause and effect of everything on everything...celebration of Dharma
- Vows or precepts** are commitments to follow an ethical and moral path
- Unfolding** is the actualization of commitments



Finally, In each moment Dharma is presenting and being affected by other forms, creating an interplay of sensory awareness--a sea of sunflower waves in a former potato field. Our path then unfolds as we live by vows to save ourselves and others--a forest reclaiming an old farm and welcoming the daughters of a young boy who once lived there...

Knowing what we are getting into is not the same as experiencing what happens when we follow or do not follow the precepts. **Vows in Bloom must also be read as Bloom in Vows.**

In practicing what is preached, “Inmo,” facing each moment, affirming vow, this non-duality (less than two) becomes walkable... two women Maya and Maha brought into the world and raised the son who would rediscover the path, the middle-way followed. This was in turn followed by our ancestors who handed it to us. This retreat is

about the celebration of birth and the dedication of vows. It is about you and me, and it is about here now.

Like the front foot and back foot in kinhin...even our missteps share the Dharma.

