



what the sutra says

WITH A COMMENTARY BY CHRIS PREIST

Shi gu sei gan

The Four Bodhisattva Vows

Shu jo muhen seigan do

**Beings innumerable,
I vow to save them all**

Bonno mujin seigandan

**Delusions inexhaustable,
I vow to overcome them all**

Homon muryo seigangaku

**Dharma gates countless,
I vow to pass through them all**

Butsu do mujo seiganjo

**Buddha way supreme,
I vow to follow it**

The four great vows of the Bodhisattva are a commitment to practise with compassion, awareness and determination.

Firstly, we vow to practice to save all beings; to see with an eye of compassion the suffering that we all create. Zen Master Hui Neng speaks of how we each have fundamental awakening already present in us. Through compassion, we can manifest this and give others the space to do the same, naturally unconsciously and automatically.

Secondly, we vow to go beyond our delusions and desires. We do this not by supressing them, but by becoming conscious of them and so reducing their power over us. Zen teacher Guy Mercier has used the image of a darkened room full of furniture. We stumble around, bumping into things and hurting ourselves. But with the light of insight, we see the illusions. They don't vanish, but we no longer stub our toe on them so often!

Thirdly, we vow to pass through the countless dharma gates. At one level, this means to follow the teachings of the Buddha. But it is not about simply following a set of rules. Each instant of our life is a 'dharma gate' - a moment where action is inescapable. Can we pass through the gate with awareness and appropriateness, in harmony with the Buddha's teaching, or will we fall into illusion? Finally, we vow to follow the Buddha-way. This comes naturally from making the effort to practise, and being open to the awareness it brings. So the four vows are a call to practise and to be aware - to be aware of the suffering of others, to be aware of the play of illusions within us, and to be aware of our actions in each and every moment.

FuEko

Ne ga waku wa
Kono kudo kowo motte
Amani ku issai ni
Oyeboshi wareru to
Shujo tomina tomini
Butsudo wo chozen koto wo

Ji ho san shi i shi fu
Shi son bu sa mo ko sa
Mo ko ho jya ho ro mi

One of the key attitudes of Zen practice is Mushotoku: to practise letting go of personal gain. As an expression of this, we finish our practice and chanting with an Eko, a chant of dedication. This chant offers the benefits of our practice to something beyond ourselves.

Different Ekos can be used, offering the benefits to specific people - someone who is sick or suffering, someone who has recently died, or the lineage of teachers who have brought the practice to us. Most commonly, though, we chant the FuEko - the universal Eko - which asks to share the benefits of our practice with all

Universal Dedication

May the merit of this
penetrate into all things
in all places
So that we and every
sentient being together can
realise the Buddha Way.

Ten directions, three worlds,
all Buddhas; All venerable ones,
Boddhisattvas, Mahasattvas;
The great Prajna Paramita

beings, so that they may awaken to reality alongside us and become free of suffering. The FuEko is an expression of the mind of compassion, and an aspiration that we may allow the mind of compassion to manifest through us. This is not an act of charity, seeing others as somehow less than us and in need of our help in a way that we know best; rather, it is to experience, at a fundamental level, that we are not different from others. To resolve the question of our own suffering requires a deep awareness of and connection with the suffering of others. Awakening is not personal, it is universal, and can only be manifest when we abandon ourselves to the practice for the good of all.

