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YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT I DON'T BELIEVE

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Karen Maezen Miller, sensei

From time to time I'm asked this question: What do Buddhists believe? I like to respond that Buddhism requires no beliefs, but that's rather hard to believe. And so I offer this.

I believe in love. Not the love that is the enemy of hate, but the love that has no enemies or rivals, no end and no beginning, no justification and no reason at all. Love and hate are completely unrelated and incomparable. Hate is born of human fear. Love is never born, which is to say, it is eternal and absolutely fearless. This love does not require my belief; it requires my practice.

I believe in truth. Not the truth that is investigated or exposed, interpreted or debated. But the truth that is revealed, inevitably and without a doubt, right in front of my eyes. All truth is self-revealed; it just doesn't always appear as quickly or emphatically as I'd like it to. This truth does not require my belief; it requires my practice.



I believe in freedom. Not the freedom that is confined or decreed by ideology, but the freedom that is free of all confining impositions, definitions, expectations and doctrines. Not the freedom in whose name we tremble and fight, but the freedom that needs no defense. This freedom does not require my belief; it requires my practice.

I believe in justice. Not the justice that is deliberated or prosecuted; not that is weighed or measured or meted by my own corruptible self-interest. I believe in the unflinching precision of cause and effect, the universal and inviolable law of interdependence. It shows itself to me in my own suffering every single time I act with a savage hand, a greedy mind or a selfish thought. It shows itself in the state of the world, and the state of the mind, we each inhabit. This justice does not require my belief; it requires my practice.

I believe in peace. Not the peace that is a prize. Not the peace that can be won. There is no peace in victory; there is only lasting resentment, recrimination and pain. The peace I seek is the peace that surpasses all understanding. It is the peace that is always at hand when I empty my hand. No matter what you believe, this peace does not require belief, it requires practice.

I believe in wisdom. Not the wisdom that is imparted or achieved; not the wisdom sought or the wisdom gained. But the wisdom that we each already own as our birthright. The wisdom that manifests in our own clear minds and selfless hearts, and that we embody as love, truth, freedom, justice and peace. The wisdom that is practice.

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