

般若心經 觀自在菩薩行深般若
 波羅蜜多時照見五蘊皆空度一切苦厄
 舍利子色不異空空不異色色即是空
 空即是色受想行識亦復如是舍利子
 是諸法空相不生不滅不垢不淨不增
 不減是故空中無色無聲無香無味無眼
 耳鼻舌身意無色無聲香味觸法無眼界
 乃至無意識界無無明亦無無明盡無
 智亦無得以無所得故菩提薩埵依般若
 波羅蜜多故心無罣礙無罣礙故無
 有恐怖遠離顛倒夢想究竟涅槃三世
 諸佛依般若波羅蜜多故得阿耨多羅
 三藐三菩提故知般若波羅蜜多是
 大神咒是大明咒是無上咒是無等等咒
 能除一切苦真實不虛故說般若波羅蜜
 多咒即說咒曰
 揭諦揭諦 波羅揭諦 菩薩揭諦
 大唐三藏法師玄奘奉 詔譯

mind • moon • circle
 spring • summer • 2009

延命十句觀音經
 觀世音 南無佛
 與佛有因 與佛有緣
 佛法僧緣 常樂我淨
 朝念觀世音 暮念
 觀世音 念之從心起
 念之不離心

Front Cover:

Heart Sutra: Calligraphy by the late Ron Chan, Sydney Zen Centre

Kanzeon: Calligraphy by Marlow Brooks, Boulder, Colorado

Editors: Tony Miller & Maggie Gluek

The next issue of *Mind Moon Circle* (Summer 2010) will have as its theme **Dana: relinquishment & generosity** (the first of the Prajna Paramitas, and the focus of the Rohatsu Sesshin, 2009)

Deadline: 21 February 2010

Editor: Gillian Coote

Mind Moon Circle is published quarterly by
Sydney Zen Centre, 251 Young Street, Annandale, NSW 2038, Australia
www.szc.org.au

Annual subscription \$A 28

Printed on recycled paper

Contents

Editors' note	5
Singing and dancing are the voice of the law: Wednesday night in the dojo <i>Gillian Coote</i>	7
Three Bodies of Buddha <i>Jenny Gentle</i>	10
Coming Forth in Perfect Harmony <i>Maggie Gluek</i>	13
Chanting the Heart Sutra on Pilgrimage in Japan <i>Allan Marett</i>	15
my sutras <i>carl hooper</i>	20
Chanting with Innocence and Intimacy <i>Kim Bagot</i>	21
The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra <i>Philip Long</i>	27
Sutras are Practice <i>Will Moon</i>	30
The Metta Sutta: Buddhist teachings on Love <i>Subhana Barzaghi</i>	31
Everything is music <i>Sally Hopkins</i>	39
Slowly slowly Sally Hopkins	40
In which reference is made to the Avatamsaka, or Flower Garland Sutra <i>Maggie Gluek</i>	41
'Getting here' – a journey of 'off and on' Zen <i>Doug Hume</i>	45
Lost in Space, or, does Homo sapiens really mean 'wise' man or woman? <i>Peter Thompson</i>	46

Editors' Note

This issue

This issue contains a generous and varied collection of articles on the topic of sutras; many thanks to our contributors. There are various ways in which the contributions could have been organised, but this is the way we have settled on:

Gillian Coote gives an overview of a typical Diamond Sangha sutra service, with both historical information about the texts and personal responses to chanting or saying them. Jenny Gentle describes her long-standing and committed study of the sutras in more than one tradition. These two articles are followed by the first of our briefer personal pieces, by Maggie Gluek.

Next come three articles relating to the Heart Sutra. Allan Marett narrates his experience on a recent pilgrimage in Japan, in which chanting the Heart Sutra has a central place. Kim Bagot writes about his attempts to personalise the Heart Sutra, and to present it in a language free of technical terms; this article ends with Kim's provisional translation. Philip Long reflects on the Heart Sutra as a statement of the fundamentals of Zen. Interspersed among these articles are two more short pieces, in verse by Carl Hooper and in prose by Will Moon.

Subhana Barzaghi gives the text of another sutra, the Metta Sutta, and follows it with a full commentary, including both scholarly and practice perspectives. This is followed by Sally Hopkins's short piece.

The issue concludes with four contributions less directly related to the topic of the sutras, though Maggie Gluek's teisho on dust does sweep up some specks from the Flower Garland Sutra as well as Torei Zenji's Bodhisattva's Vow. There is a selection of the poems written by Sally Hopkins about the last days of Marjorie Hopkins, mother of Sally's husband Colin. The articles by Doug Hume and Peter Thompson are holdovers from the two most recent issues of *Mind Moon Circle*, when they accidentally went astray during the editing process. Doug contributes the experience of one of our newest members on the topic of how we have come to be members of the Sydney Zen Centre. Peter concludes the issue with a meditation on 'belonging', especially on how we all belong on our planet. Peter points out that this article was written several months ago, at an earlier stage of debate about climate change, and was unsure about whether it still belongs in *Mind Moon Circle*. We have decided that

it does, especially since the outcome of the UN Climate Change Conference at Copenhagen and the change in stance by the Federal Opposition in Australia show that the urgency of the problem, identified by an overwhelming consensus of scientific study, is still far from producing the urgent measures that are required.

What next?

We think readers will be impressed and delighted with the quantity and quality of articles in this issue of *Mind Moon Circle*. The same has been true of several recent numbers. But it seems to be proving increasingly difficult to find editors for future issues. The immediate crisis has been overcome – see the topic for the next issue on the inside front cover, and thanks to all who responded to our recent call on the SZC group email list. But we still need to widen the pool of editors, and for that matter contributors.

To repeat and expand a little what we said on the email list: as a Sangha we should think twice before we allow this aspect of our existence to fade away. *Mind Moon Circle* is an expression of Sangha spirit at a time in our history when we rarely come together as a large group. It gives tangible evidence of the commitment and thoughtfulness of our members, and of our democratic character. It shows that, respect and love our teachers though we do, we also value the contributions to the dharma that can be made by every student. We do not sit back and wait to be taught and led. Few Zen groups can point to such a publication and the tradition it embodies.

Editing *Mind Moon Circle* is a substantial task, but not an overwhelming one. It does not require desktop publishing skills, though these would certainly be an asset. Help is available from previous editors. If enough people come forward, they need do the job only once every few years. There are long-time members who have never edited, or who have not recently edited, an issue. Please ask yourself whether now is not the time. Equally, newer members need not feel inadequate to the task of editing or contributing: it is one way of throwing yourself into the roaring stream.

Singing and dancing are the voice of the law: Wednesday night in the dojo

Gillian Coote

Way back when, because there was more chanting on Wednesday nights, this was the night for me. Why? Maybe because chanting bridged the noisiness and bustle of the outside world and the quietness of the dojo – there we were, sitting facing in, and singing from the same page, after a fashion, with big sonorous bells and clippety-clacketty bonks on a fish-drum. Rhythm, pitch, tone, and of course content. After a little while, I learnt the Ino role – dojo leadership responsibilities are a sure-fire recipe for regular attendance. I still sit on Wednesday nights.

Our chanting service begins with a *gatha*, ‘a verse that sums up a particular aspect of the Dharma, often expressing a vow ... probably the earliest form in the Buddhist liturgy.’¹ This is Purification, solemnly ushered in by the *keisu* (the big bell) and a personal acknowledgement of our gross and subtle acts of meanness and selfishness. Even now, ‘All the evil karma ...’ continues to be a brave call. If ‘karma’ literally means ‘action’, then what is this ‘evil karma created by me since of old’? And how old is ‘of old’? And ‘beginningless’? Well, we are joining countless generations chanting this traditional repentance verse from the Practice and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (Chapter 40 of the Hua-yen or Avatamsaka Sutra). Beginningless indeed.

In our next *gatha*, we venerate and pay homage to the Buddha with Vandana, chanted in Pali across the Buddhist world, its long vowels and the gravity of the veneration bringing the sangha gathered on any particular night into harmony, and moving us seamlessly into Ti-Sarana, the Threefold Vow of Refuge, also chanted in Pali. Yes, we have all come together to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Chanting the Heart Sutra is like entering that river which is never the same, each time different aspects of words or ideas emerging, each time our chanting stabilising and integrating the poetic expressions of realisation written by unknown monks of the

¹ Robert Aitken, *Encouraging Words: Zen Buddhist Teachings for Western Students* (New York and San Francisco: Pantheon, 1993), p. 170.

distant past, moving to the heartbeat thump-thump-thump of the *mokugyo* (fish drum).

Here is the story of how the Heart Sutra survived the turmoil in China between the collapse of the Sui (581-618) and the rise of the T'ang dynasty (618-907):

many people fled the country's twin capitals of Loyang and Ch'ang-an (present-day Xian) and sought refuge in the southwest province of Szechuan. Among the refugees was a Buddhist novice still in his teens. One day this novice befriended a man who was impoverished and ill, and the man, in turn, taught him the words of the Heart Sutra (probably translated by Kumerajiva around 400 AD.)

Not long afterward, the novice was ordained a monk, and several years later, in 629, he embarked on one of the great journeys of Chinese history. The young monk's name was Hsuan-tsang, and he set out on the Silk Road for India in search of answers to questions concerning the Buddha's teaching that this world is nothing but mind. In the course of this journey, Hsuan-tsang is said to have travelled 10,000 miles – west across the Taklamakan Desert to Samarkand, south over the Hindu Kush to the Buddhist centre of Taxila, and down the Ganges into India and back again. And time and again, he turned to the Heart Sutra to ward off demons, dust storms, and bandits. When he finally returned to China in 645, he was welcomed back by the emperor, and stories about the power of the Heart Sutra began making the rounds.

Hsuan-tsang produced his own translation of the Heart Sutra in 649, and it wasn't long afterward that the first commentaries began appearing, as his fellow monks realised that not only was this a scripture of great power, but its summary of Buddhist teaching provided the perfect platform from which to offer their own interpretations of the Dharma. Since then, the Heart Sutra has become the most popular of all Buddhist scriptures, and yet no one knows where it came from or who was responsible for its composition.² *Gate gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha!*

² *The Heart Sutra*, translation and commentary by Red Pine (Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), p. 17.

Sho Sai Myo Kichijo Darani, or the Darani of Good Fortune that Averts Calamities, is a mysterious gathering of words which have become a little scrambled in their journey through time and space, from China via India, to Japan. Our sutra book has a translation from two professors of Indian Buddhism in Tokyo. ‘O Emptiness, O Emptiness, drink up all misfortunes, drink them dry. O Flame, O Flame, burn away all misfortunes, incinerate them utterly. Let there be happiness’.

Our first Sutra Service Dedication begins with the Ancient Seven Buddhas – mythical beings – followed by our founder, Shakyamuni; then comes Bodhidharma. Tozan Ryokai (Tung-shan in Chinese), co-founder of Ts’ao-tung or Soto Zen in China, then Dogen Kigen, the Japanese founder of the Soto school, and a writer of great inspiration. Keizan Jokin is a pupil of Dogen’s two Dharma heirs, who helped to consolidate Soto Zen, back in the thirteenth century. Now we move nearer to our own times with Dai’un Sogaku – Great Cloud – who is none other than Harada Roshi, founder of the Sanbo Kyodan line in the 1930s; Haku’un Ryoko – White Cloud – is Yasutani Roshi, Harada’s Dharma heir whose teachings can be found in *The Three Pillars of Zen*.³ Ko’un Zenshin – Cultivator of Clouds – is Yamada Roshi, and Anne Tanshin Aitken is Robert Aitken Roshi’s wife, whom many of us knew and loved.

On Wednesdays we recite two Dharma poems, Hakuin Zenji’s Song of Zazen and Torei Zenji’s Bodhisattva’s Vow, and again, familiar phrases and images, mysterious, moving, or puzzling, are often revealed in a new light as the words fall from the lips. Or not. I recall one sangha member who resolutely kept his mouth firmly shut during Torei Zenji’s poem. Certainly, Torei Zenji’s ‘I find [the many dharmas] all to be sacred forms of the Tathagata’s never-failing essence’ and his encouragement to see sworn enemies as ‘compassionate devices to liberate us entirely’ are extremely challenging. With the conclusion of Hakuin’s powerful Dharma poem, ‘Nirvana is here, before your eyes; this very place is the lotus land, this very body, the Buddha’, the heart melts, hair stands on end. This very body!

Now our sutra service draws to a close as we begin seven rounds of the Enmei Jikku Kannon Gyo, or Ten Verse Kannon Sutra of Timeless Life, an affirmation of our affinity with the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The Ino chants, ‘Infinite realms of light and dark convey the Buddha mind’ and soon we are up on our feet, throwing

³ Philip Kapleau Roshi, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980).

everything away. Now we settle into kinhin and zazen. Now the keisu rings out and we turn facing in once more, and recite our Bodhisattva's Vows. Now the words, 'I vow to embody it fully', ring out through the dark Annandale streets and flow through our veins as we move back into the noisy, busy world.

'May we retain this mind and extend it throughout the world, so that we and all beings become mature in Buddha's wisdom.'

Three Bodies of Buddha

Jenny Gentle

It is hard for me to describe the emotion I felt when I sat for the very first time in the zendo at Annandale in 1986 and chanted the Heart Sutra: not joy, but a deep sense of relief that comes when rediscovering something that had been lost for a long time. And so my love affair with the sutras begins ...

One of my favourite times during sesshin is chanting the meal sutras, not because I know that breakfast will be coming soon, but because I am being shown a way into a world that is much bigger and more beautiful than I could ever imagine: Vairocana, pure and clear Dharmakaya Buddha; Lochana, full and complete Sambhogakaya Buddha; Shakyamuni, infinitely varied Nirmanakaya Buddha; Maitreya, Buddha still to be born; All Buddhas everywhere, past, present, future; Mahayana, Lotus of the Subtle Law Sutra. This passage of the meal sutra became my koan.

How do you squeeze the exquisite complexity, detail, and magnitude of the Dharmakaya Body of Vairocana Buddha into this moment? What role does Lochana and the feminine play in reaching the Bliss Body, full of every imaginable delight, complete, right here now? Who is the teacher Shakyamuni, the Body of Transformation, and who is being transformed? Why is Maitreya so kind and friendly? All Buddhas everywhere, past, present, future: where are they to be found? What is the message of the Lotus Sutra that makes it so revered?

Historically, the great Mahayana Sutras are considered to have been written around the first century BCE - second century CE. It is not known who wrote them

down, but it is believed they were transmitted by advanced spiritual practitioners, Bodhisattvas. Entering into the world of the sutras is not about going back in time, it is being able to step into a realm that exists now, very real and alive, the vivid manifestation of Dharma. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to life to teach those who want to see and hear.

I am not an intellectual or scholar, and I don't enjoy reading literature that much either, so my passion for the sutras surprises no-one more than me. I originally starting reading sutras because I had become disillusioned with how Zen Buddhism was being taught both in the West and in the East. I wanted to know the original Mahayana teachings that were beyond cultural conditionings and deviations. What I found was that reading the sutras made me feel very peaceful, so I read every sutra I could get my hands on. Eventually when I had exhausted all the sutras available I headed to the Fisher Library at Sydney University. On the top shelf was a collection of Buddhist texts I had not seen or heard of before. I desperately wanted to know what lay hidden within those books. They were easily within my reach but completely inaccessible because they were written in Sanskrit.

It is thought that Sanskrit originated in ancient India through the Brahmas, who entered deep yogic states and received the language from the Devas. Hence it is called 'the language of the Gods', a sacred language. Later it was conveyed orally between initiates in the Brahmic tradition, eventually to be written down in the Vedas (*circa* 1500 BCE). In the fourth century BCE a mathematician called Panini systematised the grammar in Sanskrit. This is what is commonly taught in Classical Sanskrit schools today. The early Buddhist Mahayana sutras don't follow the rules of Panini's grammar so generally Sanskrit scholars consider them inferior texts of bad grammar. I'm not one for rules or grammar and would rather follow the way of the yogis than a mathematician so for me this is not an issue. I did a short two-week summer course at Macquarie University to get the basics, then I was off. So eight years on, I'm fairly competent at reading Buddhist Sanskrit sutras, and yes, I did manage to read those top-shelf texts.

What part do sutras play in my Zen practice? In a way I use sutras like others use koans. I don't question or try to understand them; it is enough just to read them, embody them, watch them come to life, and let them teach you. It's very simple.

My practice has taken some very interesting turns over the last ten years. I have been exploring other Mahayana traditions, mainly Pure Land and Vajrayana. The Pure

Land School uses primarily three sutras for their basis – the smaller Sukhavativyuha Sutra, the larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra, and the Contemplation Sutra. It was my love of sutras that drew me to this tradition. The smaller and larger sutras describe the Pure Land of Sukhavati and how it was formed. The Contemplation Sutra gives a very detailed account of a meditation, actually sixteen meditations, that lead one to enter into the Pure Land of Amitayus Buddha. Through this sutra I learnt another way to meditate, completely different from the Zen style, actively using imagination and visualization. A vast new realm of possibilities emerged, full of unlimited potential that I wanted to explore more deeply. I have had moments of extraordinary beauty during sesshin but this is very different to the euphoria I experience performing these Pure Land meditations. My inner landscape has been greatly enhanced by adding this devotional dimension to my practice.

My reaction to the Vajrayana tradition was very different. From my point of view Vajrayana was clearly a degenerate teaching and I was very reluctant to have anything to do with it. That all changed in 2001 when a group of monks from the Gyuto Tantric Monastic University in Dharamsala, India, turned up at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and created a sand mandala. It was the Guhyasamaja Mandala (Secret Assembly). At the same time I had just commenced studying the Guhyasamaja Tantra, a fourth-century CE top-shelf text from Sydney University. The timing was too obvious to be called coincidence and I realised, against all my prejudices and apprehensions, that I had to embrace these teachings. What makes Vajrayana unique is that it deconstructs the sutras then reconstructs them as tantras. The starting point is reversed: you are no longer part of the audience revering the teachings of Buddha, you become the enlightened central figure in the scene. Tantra is like the substrate on which the sutras sit. A huge leap of faith is required in Vajrayana because these teachings don't use rationality or follow logical sequence, and some of the methods are very strange and contrary to what the Buddha taught. Vajrayana works by manipulating subtle and extreme states of mind. What I have learnt through practising Vajrayana is not to take myself too seriously, and it is the one form of Buddhism where having a big ego is a really good thing.

It's been over twelve years since I last chanted the meal sutra at sesshin. I didn't know then the journey I would take to find answers to my questions, my koan, the three Bodies of Buddha. A magnificent description of the Dharmakaya body of Vairocana is found in the Avatamsaka Sutra. It needs to be read and re-read; no words

can do it justice. Lochana is all- seeing wisdom, the feminine aspect of Vairocana in tantric traditions, and is fundamental to obtaining the Bliss-body of Buddha. Shakyamuni is the teacher constantly changing, arising to meet needs. Maitreya is dwelling in perfect satisfaction waiting for all to be revealed. All Buddhas are our heritage and our inheritance, it is who we are. This is the message of the subtle law.

Now the meal sutra is being revealed. It has nothing to do with cultures Asian or Western, it traverses many Buddhist traditions and is beyond the limitations of reason or time. It speaks of a world that lies within the wonder of this moment waiting to be uncovered. The beauty of Zen is being capable of holding it all.

Coming Forth in Perfect Harmony

Maggie Gluek

Birds and trees and stars and we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony proclaims the Ino in the Diamond Sangha's evening service dedication. In sutra chanting this fact is evident. Community is implicit. It is the practice, individual and collective, of uniting with one syllable, one sound. Coming forth as KAN, BO, DEEP, EAR, SHIN. Finding (or losing) my voice in the one voice. Fortunately, attention is crucial. It's like hitting a target, being just there on the mark. Stop to ponder meaning or wobble on the Sino-Japanese, and you're lost. In chanting we are united in turn as we open and listen to one another, *tuning in*. It's always notable in sesshin that the sound of the sutras becomes increasingly refined (and the practice increasingly effortless) as the week goes on, as we discover that birds, trees, and stars are singing right along with us.

Arguably the enterprise of resonating together is vital to the health of a community. There's a story doing the rounds about a Benedictine monastery in France which, in response to Vatican II, stopped its practice of Gregorian chant. The many hours a day spent chanting were replaced by other activities. Meanwhile, the monks became lethargic. No-one understood why. More sleep and changes in diet were prescribed but nothing made any difference. Finally a neurolinguist advised the

monastery to reinstate chanting. Immediately the monks revived and were able to return to their former monastic practices. It's all in the vibe! Certainly chanting raises energy: lifting up the voice from the depths of the belly, giving subtle expression to the self of no boundaries. When you sing, said St Augustine famously, you pray twice.

Perfect harmony may present as perfect unison. Or ... Something unusual happened during a sesshin at Gorricks Run in the early nineties. In those days everyone sat in the old cottage, some of us upstairs, some downstairs, packed in. The layered, collective energy was intense, like a pressure cooker. Anyway, on this occasion a woman upstairs deviated from the unison chant and sang the sutra at a major third above everyone else. Possibly the Ino had pitched the chanting very low and she was looking for a more comfortable range. It's interesting that it was a woman and a woman upstairs who initiated this descant. But in any case the change 'took'. Other women joined in. And then harmonies began to emerge during other sutras. And melodies. The Great Vows evolved as a loosely arpeggiated theme, Kanzeon even more wildly and divergently so. Sutra chanting presented a field for play. This improvisational and sometimes choral tradition continues in the Sydney Zen Centre. It happens of its own subtle (and literal) accord, without rules or structure. If there is any rule it is that the Ino's pitch is the fundamental, the core. Embroideries must happen around that line. If you're uncertain of your pitch, if it seems discordant, return to the ground bass. Another new mode of chant was the 25-minute Kanzeon, with the Ino gradually accelerating speed, *faster and faster*, until it all exploded into silence. A kind of Big Bang. Sometimes the Kanzeon danced inside the dojo, all of us moving in a tight refrigerator coil formation, singing until we got lost in Kanzeon, as a friend put it.

More recently we have been given the privilege of including in our sutras *wangga*, sacred songs of Aboriginal people in northern Australia, songs which convey our intimate relationship with and responsibility for the ancient ground we inhabit. Accompanied by clapsticks and sometimes didgeridoo, we chant in communion with untold generations who realised this body of birds and trees and stars.

Chanting the Heart Sutra on Pilgrimage in Japan

Allan Marett

On my sixtieth birthday on 30 April this year I set out to walk the pilgrimage route known as the *Shikoku henro* (or *henro-michi*). It is a 1200-kilometre walk around Shikoku, the smallest of the four main Japanese islands, during which the pilgrim visits eighty-eight temples. I'm going to focus here on one of the key practices associated with the pilgrimage, namely the chanting of the Heart Sutra (*Hannya Shingyô*).

The rituals carried out at each temple by pilgrims are not fixed: to a large degree the pilgrim is free to choose from a number of practices. Ian Reader describes the chanting rituals as follows:

The main focus of pilgrim activity, in terms of prayers and rituals, centres on the temples themselves. There are no set routines or practices that pilgrims are obliged to follow at them, although there are some normative patterns such as praying and making offerings at the main hall of worship [*hondo*] and the *daishido* [the hall dedicated to Kôbô Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism who is also believed to have established the pilgrimage]. ... Pilgrims may chant a variety of prayers and mantras, such as the invocation in praise of Kôbô Daishi, “*Namu daishi henjô kongô*” (*hail to Daishi, the universally resplendent diamond*)—“*henjô kongô*” (the universally resplendent diamond) being the consecration name given to Kûkai [another name for Kôbô Daishi] by his Chinese Buddhist master, Hui-kuo (740-803) before Kûkai returned to spread the word of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. Another common chant is the *Hannya Shingyô* (shorter Heart Sutra), one of the most popular Buddhist sutras in Japan. (20-21).

Like most pilgrims, I developed a form of ritual that suited me, which once established I held to more or less strictly at each temple. Because I was not doing the pilgrimage as a Shingon Buddhist, I didn't chant the invocation in praise of Kôbô Daishi. I did however chant the Heart Sutra at both the main hall and the *daishidô*.

Some months before I left for Japan I had decided to memorize the Sino-

Japanese version of the Heart Sutra, even though it is perfectly acceptable, and indeed the most common practice, for people to chant from a little folded book. This allowed me to also recite the Heart Sutra as I walked. My normal practice upon setting out from my lodgings in the morning, or from a temple after the rituals, would be to do *kinhin* at normal walking pace for an hour to an hour and a half—usually three times around my 27-bead rosary, with ten breaths to each bead: round about 800 breaths in all. I would then silently recite the Heart Sutra three times. After this I would allow myself to just walk, reflect, day dream, compose poetry or songs, or converse with companions. In this way I covered large distances while remaining pretty much centred in the place that I was at any moment. I also often chanted the Heart Sutra when things got difficult, particularly at the end of a long hot day when my final resting place or the next temple still seemed impossibly far away: it kept me from thinking ahead and fretting. And somehow you seem to get there quicker when you're chanting. Now six months later I often chant the Heart Sutra on long runs – particularly during the last few kilometres when the going is getting difficult. My partner Linda asked me before I left what pilgrims do when they are walking. I said I didn't know though I thought it varies. What I have described above is, like the rituals at the temple, what I worked out for myself. It was immensely centring and rich as a practice. I'm still not sure what other pilgrims do when walking.

Before you commence the pilgrimage it is traditional to visit the head temple of the Shingon sect at Mount Kôya. On the morning before leaving for Shikoku, Linda and I visited the Mausoleum of Kôbô Daishi with our guide, Mrs. Yasukawa Teruko, herself a Shingon practitioner. She suggested that the three of us chant the Heart Sutra together. There was already an old blind monk sitting in front of the Mausoleum chanting in a loud and vibrant voice. Linda, Teruko, and I quietly chanted the sutra, feeling very self-conscious. As soon as we had finished, the monk accosted us and told us in no uncertain terms that we should chant louder and with more confidence. He then gave us a booming demonstration. We bowed and, as quickly as politeness allowed, took our leave.

This was the beginning of a series of stages in my relationship with the chanting. For the first few days of the pilgrimage Linda and I continued to feel self-conscious but as the ritual became familiar we became able to chant more confidently. At last I began to have get the 'I alone in the universe am chanting' vibe, and at this stage I was very focused on syllable by syllable chanting – just this *kan*, just this *zai* –

but gradually this too changed as I found myself matching the Sino-Japanese version to the English version that we chant at Annandale—running the English in my head as I chanted in Sino-Japanese. This in turn produced a change in how I chanted: instead of syllable by syllable it became phrase by phrase and then gradually I found myself being able to directly understand what I was chanting, even though it was in Sino-Japanese.

Linda decided that she too wanted to memorize the Heart Sutra, even though she is neither a Buddhist nor a Japanese speaker. As we travelled we worked our way through the Japanese text. There were so many things to explain: that *shiki* written with one character means ‘form’ and with another means ‘consciousness’. That *ku* can mean ‘emptiness’ but also ‘suffering’. I was incredibly impressed at how quickly Linda learnt the text. For the first three days of the pilgrimage she chanted it beside me at every temple, and then after returning to Australia, recited every day until I returned. I was deeply touched at the way that she entered into the spirit of the pilgrimage with me, even though she couldn’t be physically beside me all the way. Everyday she wore a scarf with the Heart Sutra written on it I wore a matching one, mostly on my head to stop my sedge hat from cutting in and to keep the sweat at bay. Mine had to be replaced the day after I used it to staunch a wound that I inflicted on myself at a temple: but that is another story.



When you recite the Heart Sutra many times each day, it really begins to influence the way you see the world. I remember walking into Imabari City towards the end of the pilgrimage and coming across a wooden tablet attached to a power pole. On it was written *shiki zoku ze ku* (form is no other than emptiness).



Encountering this my attention suddenly engaged with the world as emptiness.

Walking down the mountain from Kakurinji (Temple 20), I suddenly remarked to my companion, ‘you know the Heart Sutra is just throwing everything away —*mu* this, *mu* that, *mu* everything.’ *Mu shiki mu ju so gyô shiki; mu genni bi zesshin i; mu shiki shô ko mi soku hô; mu gen kai nai shi mu i shiki kai.* (no form, no sensation, mental reaction, consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no colour, sound, smell, taste, touch, object of thought; no seeing and so on to no thinking). ‘Look!’ I said, ‘No trees, no rocks, no mist, no world, no me, no you, absolutely nothing. Just this, this, this.’

One day I and another pilgrim had got ourselves a bit lost. Suddenly a monk appeared from a house and offered to guide us back to the correct route. He told me that he had trained at Mt Kôya and that he would eventually inherit Shôryûji (Temple 36) the temple we had last visited, from his grandfather. In the meantime, however, he was having to work in a factory. Then he produced his mobile phone and showed us a video he had taken. It was of him sitting under the long waterfall at Shôryûji chanting the Heart Sutra. The pilgrimage incorporates many ascetic practices, some of them probably local specialities that predated even Buddhism. Suddenly this ancient world and the modern world of mobile phone videos were united around his performance of the Heart Sutra. A glorious and surprising jewel in the net of Indra!

One final anecdote. Early in my pilgrimage, just after Kirihataji (Temple 10), I

fell in with an elderly pilgrim called Mr Moroshima Tadu. He was attempting to walk the pilgrimage carrying a tent and was very weighted down. Even though he was struggling, we had some interesting exchanges, including one (some of you might have seen my email posting of this) where he pointed to a rice paddy as the mind of Kôbô Daishi. Mr Moroshima refusing my offer to carry some of his gear and eventually told me to go on ahead. I was worried about him, but there was little I could do. Some weeks later, I met him at Dainichiji (Temple 28) near Kôchi city. Even though he was no longer carrying his heavy load he seemed exhausted. I felt an urgent need to chant the Heart Sutra with him, and asked him if he would do this. He was diffident, saying that he chanted very badly. Indeed, whether from exhaustion or whatever, he kept stumbling as we chanted and I began to regret putting him on the spot and worried that I was embarrassing him. But afterwards he turned to me and we both bowed, beaming at one another. There is a photo of us just after this moment. Mr Moroshima was going to stay with friends in Kôchi. I hope they had the sense to send him back to his home in Okinawa. If they did, there is a chance I might see him again when I resume the pilgrimage in a few months time.



Reference:

Ian Reader, *Making Pilgrimages: Meaning and Practice in Shikoku*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2006.

my sutras

carl hooper



my sutras –
I burnt them all
aeons ago
when first I heard
under a fugitive moon
from bushy banks
of the creek that wanders
through the stillness of my sitting
the croaking of ten thousand frogs

sutra of the shadow self

dogs or dingoes –
and so we argued
back and forth on and on

for who among us
in our bush retreat
had not heard it
long before dawn
somewhere in the wooded hills
a howling loud
long and plaintive

dogs or dingoes –
and so we argued
back and forth on and on

I alone held my tongue
long burdened with knowledge
of the shadow self
cursed to wander hills remote
and howl out loud
and long and plaintive
for a vanished vixen ghost
so sleek so supple so elusive
glimpsed but once
in an autumn mist
figment of the fabled fox

dogs or dingoes –
and so we argued
back and forth on and on

(Kodoji, Spring Sesshin, 2009)

Chanting with Innocence and Intimacy

Kim Bagot

Chanting the Prajna Paramita Sutra never fails to intrigue and move me. I have been exploring the text in order to personalise it more and refresh my practice. Aitken Roshi at the time of Jukai encouraged us to put the various vows into our own words. He said once that the word ‘fear’ in the Sutra would be better translated as ‘terror’; this intrigued me. The more so because of Roshi’s story about a very old teacher he knew who pointed to a line in the Sutra one day and said, ‘Ah! I now understand that line for the first time!’ It’s good to call to mind, before any quibbles, the old saying that real truth cannot be discussed, and real discussion is not about truth. Roshi writes that our task as Zen students is to ‘demythologise the lofty words of the old teachers’ (*The Morning Star*, p. 203).

I must say that chanting the Sutra moves me at times to joyous, quiet laughter, and tears of happy release, especially at sesshin. For an exercise, I wanted to try something that spoke to my non-Buddhist intimates about things I hold dear, with some of Buddhist ‘buzz-words’ explicated, but still in faithful terms. Does ‘the peace which passes understanding’ convey *nirvana* to a non-Buddhist? The term ‘heart-mind’ for one doesn’t really resonate for me; it just seems an intellectual construct without roots. On the other hand Roshi cautions us that it is not always possible to translate some words and we should be faithful to the ancient, powerful words, and not ‘dumb them down’ (*The Morning Star*, p. 21).

One big opening of the Dharma of chanting for me happened when I was sitting next to Anne Aitken at an early sesshin and experienced her chanting in my heart. This opened my eyes (and ears) to chanting: a big, strong voice of utter conviction came hurling out of what was a slight and aged frame. My first, naïve thought was that this was about ‘my boy the Roshi’, such was the feeling of her presence and commitment – something reminiscent of the mother of Jack Benny the comedian, who helped launch his career by sitting at the front of his early shows and laughing uproariously at everything! The next perception was that Anne was showing the Way of releasing body and mind in her chanting; or as Keizan Jokin says, chanting sutras means dwelling carefully in the house of the Buddha ancestors ... arousing prajna-

insight everywhere (*Denkoroku*, Case 10).

I do relish reflecting on the old, Dharma words; musing, consulting dictionaries and etymologies, has been fruitful for me. I like contemplating a word, as this can prompt the experience of encountering the word anew. I was first encouraged in this by my dad, who had an annoying practice of saying, ‘Look it up’ – and then checking back. A few of us in John Cooper’s yoga classes studied Sanskrit for two years with Brian Parker at Sydney University; Brian could read and cross reference twenty-four languages, and helped feed my obsession with words. I have used C. R. Lanman’s *Sanskrit Reader* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the meanings and derivations presented. I have found consulting Dharma friends helpful and grounding; I have acknowledged them elsewhere but must accept responsibility for all errors; I have to say at this stage the more I revise the less I like it. My wife says I'm a perfectionist – I hate that!

Prajna Paramita (often rendered ‘perfection of wisdom’), we are told, completely removes all anguish; I wanted to see if the absolutism of ‘complete’ and ‘perfection’ could be channelled into faithful words which guide everyday practice. I wouldn’t want to encourage laziness but perfectionism can be a besetting vice, especially with characters inclined towards practices of improvement and purification. I have met a lot of people whose lives are burdened by perfectionism; a wise friend counselled me with the saying that no work is ever finished, it is just abandoned. I haven’t yet met any perfect parents, teachers, or musicians, but I have encountered many very ‘accomplished’ ones, who are nowhere near supreme, or masterful. An ‘accomplished’ parent or musician is nevertheless always on a journey faithful to completeness and perfection.

Perfectionism brings us to anxiety and worry abounding in our world; Roshi renders the First Noble Truth as ‘an anguished sense of lack is everywhere’ (*The Morning Star*, p. 3). He used to say (quoting Henry David Thoreau, his ancestor in the American philosophical tradition) that most people lead lives of quiet desperation. Perhaps that is why Buddhism can get an undeserved name for pessimism. Roshi also said to us that the word ‘fear’ (in the Sutra) was an inadequate translation since the original had the sense of ‘terror’. The Sutra distils the prescription of the king of doctors for the release of anguish; it would be good if more people could take the course to get more relief from despair, dreading, and alienation, the common refuges of the anxious. Perhaps the script is a bit obscure, like many doctors’.

Pra-jna combines ‘know’ (*jna*) and ‘full’ (*pra*), which comes to us via Latin, *plenus*, full, into ‘com-ple-te’ and ‘ple-nary’. ‘Great Wisdom’ seems faithful to this as well to the Zen essentials of Great Faith and Great Doubt, and to what is perhaps their intimate, Great Spirit; it is truer to emphasise accomplishment than completion. Within real greatness, supremacy, and mastery surely there must be a truly humble heart. Clearly that is so in ‘the simple monk’ who is the current Dalai Lama, beneath the welter of his lengthy honorific titles, as well as a crisp and very well-honed intellect. And in Nelson Mandela, who survived an outrageous sea of injustice and inhumanity, with his own humanity and graciousness intact with a humble demeanour; two of the ‘supreme’ characters of our time if not of all times.

Skanda has meanings of branches (of a tree top) and ramification. Our word ‘scale’ appears to be descended from it through the Latin, *scala*, a ladder; a scale is an integrated set of elements. As we are said to be in the ‘Mind-only school’, and chant that there is no distinction between mind and thing (in *Shodoka*), we might not be surprised that the word ‘thing’ (before our sense of it was born) meant ‘a meeting’ (presumably, where issues, ‘things’, were discussed). This sense is preserved in the All-meeting that is the Icelandic Parliament, the *Althing*; suggesting, perhaps, that existence without the meeting of a net of relationships is not conceivable.

I do wonder what a mantra is doing in a nice Mahayana Sutra like this. It might avoid suggestions of spells and magic incantations, and connect more with our times, to talk of a great sacred song, a great living dance, a prayer of complete giving which releases anguish. In part the Sutra feels like a logical argument: this premise and this one, and therefore that conclusion There are accounts that the Sutra emerged within the Indo-Greek kingdoms, from the school established by the patriarch Upagupta at Mathura in northern India, around the beginning of the Common Era. So perhaps pre-Vedic mantra practice was clothed in a Greek philosophical approach in areas linked with Ghandara (now in Afghanistan), where Buddha statues (*rupas*) were made first, and were clothed in Greek-style robes. There are other accounts that the Sutra was composed later in China from the extremely long version and then translated back into Sanskrit.

To balance abstract intellectualising it might help to ‘marry up’ what could be called ‘heart practice’ with ‘head practice’; or see that compassion and wisdom are basically not even one. After all, Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of compassion, is the one the Sutra says sees clearly. I think here of the old (pre-PC) adage, ‘no wife, no

life!’, because often the one who actually knows what our true nature is really like is our life partner – a type of domestic dokusan? At the end of the *Odyssey*, after the mud, the blood, the brilliance, and the deceptions, the question that Penelope poses to Odysseus is: show me that you are truly the one who you claim to be? After all the fancy stories, who truly is the Bodhisattva?

Roshi says the heart of the Buddha’s teaching and practice was intimacy (*The Morning Star*, p. 221). Intimacy is a many splendoured thing; many movies and epics trace the hard learning journey through the forests, deserts, and seas of false starts and fake arrivals at true intimacy. Many plots are driven by the confusion of more carnal intimacy with spiritual intimacy. I was casting around for terms which express that innermost intimacy, but which point to the unity of Prajna-insight with living within the precepts. Our materialistic cultures often place less value on the non-material.

To live in Buddha’s house we need good foundations; the role of keeping the precepts in the arising of genuine insight needs to be made explicit, as we do with the regular Precept ceremony. That could be to marry real innocence with truly intimate experience. To be truly one with Great Wisdom is to have great integrity – to integrate this wisdom into your real life at home, at work, on the street, at the restaurant. Over the years, sadly, I have seen more than a few people go off the rails with fake or shallow esoteric insights; even some august and brilliant teachers have harmed their lives and those of their intimates. We all need guides and auditing: Keizan says in the *Denkoroku*, Case 14, ‘if body and mind are still not regulated you should not dwell alone away from a spiritual teacher’. He argues vehemently against solitary practice. A teacher and a sangha keep us grounded – sometimes too grounded.

The first precept, ‘*Ahimsa*’ (also the first ‘limb’ of Patanjali’s Yoga practice) is often rendered ‘non-killing’ or ‘non-harming’, which defines virtue in a reactive and negative fashion, rather than holding forth a positive ethic and life-path. ‘Innocence’ affirms this as a positive virtue, as well as by derivation, saying ‘non-noxious, non-deadly’; the ‘noc-’ part is a form of ‘nek-’, and links to ‘necro-’ words. Nobody likes to be seen as a necrophiliac, but when we exert selfishness and supremacy over the world we take a lot of life out; we strangle our vitality and slay our potential when we grind out our lives unmindfully with no real care for and connection with family, friends, colleagues, and our home, the great Earth. William Blake sang of the movement from Innocence to Experience and to a higher Innocence releasing the ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ to reconcile contraries in selfless love. Genuine work with the

precepts applies the mind of innocence or ahimsa in practice.

I wanted to use variants of ‘emptiness’ to see more into it; also ‘emptiness’ can give Buddhism a reputation for nihilism. Seeing into emptiness sets the scene for innocence, intimacy and integrity or perhaps, Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna.

Gate (which occurs also in *Tatha-gata*) is a form of *gam*, which means ‘to go’ and, confusingly, ‘to come’; it is the ancestor of our word, ‘to come’. ‘To arrive’ accommodates both senses and is true to the old teacher’s admonition that to take a step is to go the long way round. The word ‘arrive’ itself is from the Latin for ‘to come to shore’, ‘*a-ripa-re*’; ‘riparian’ refers to banks or shores. The words ‘hall’, ‘cell’ – and ‘hell’! – are descended from the word *car-anam* to which we ‘gacchami’ via the Greek *khalia*, a hut or shelter. I prefer the sense of homecoming of ‘hall’ (or ‘homeplace’) over something more fugitive or escapist. In Spanish, though, a *refugio* denotes a dedicated shelter house for pilgrims.

I was working with the sutra as a personal exercise; maybe someone with a real grasp of practice and translation could complete it properly. I have tried to be as brief as possible, since my previous *magna opera* all fell largely stillborn from the press. I would be happy to share this with any kindred.

Song of Innocence and Intimacy

*The heart of true intimacy accomplishes the Great Wisdom;
in the moonlight of Wisdom sees that all branches of being are vacant,
releasing anguish and heart ache.
Student of the Way, all forms pass quickly away,
Void and sacred are all forms;
all phenomena are completely evanescent, all appearances are empty;
your sensings, your perceptions, your concepts,
your self-consciousness are all vacant.
Student of the Way, all things are without essence –
nothing is created, nothing is annihilated;
nothing is unclean, nothing is pure; nothing is lost, nothing is gained.
Thus in the heart of intimacy there are no phenomena,
no touch, no object, and no subject;
no seeing and so on to no thinking;
no delusion of self and no enlightenment,
and so on to no ageing and no dying
and no ending of ageing and dying;
no anguish, no reason for anguish, no liberation, and no Buddhist path;
no wisdom and nothing to be realised.
Thus free from attaining, you abide in innocence,
no obstacles to your spirit;*

*not alienated and thus not dreading and despairing;
abandoning fully the mind of meanness,
the peace which passes understanding is right here.*

*All Buddhas of past, present and future dwell right here in Great Wisdom,
embodying the Great Dreaming of eternity.
Understand thus that Prajna Paramita
is a great sacred song, a great living dance,
a prayer of complete integrity, the humble heart of true greatness,
which releases all anguish completely.*

*This is lived as truth, not empty, repeated words.
Now step forth in the dance of Great Wisdom,
let your life proclaim this song, saving all beings thus:
'Arrived! Arrived! Arrived right here! Wholly arrived, already in Buddha's
Hall!
Bodhi, Svaha!'*



The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

Philip Long

Before Life and After

A time there was as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell
Before the birth of consciousness,
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart burnings.
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung.
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong.
E're nescience shall be reaffirmed
How long, how long?

Thomas Hardy

Zen practice is an act of will

Recently I have been listening to a number of Mass settings by Renaissance composers. In doing so, I have been drawn to go deeper into the Credo or Creed which is sung in these masses and forms the central pillar of the Catholic belief system. Of course, 'credo' means 'I believe' and the Creed sets out a number of beliefs which each Catholic is expected to hold. The contrast with the Buddhist approach and its emphasis on practice and intimate experience of the spiritual life rather than mere belief can be exaggerated to be sure, but there is a real difference, in emphasis at least.

While contemplating how much of the Creed I could give unrestrained adherence to, I remembered often commenting to non-Buddhists that Buddhism had no central 'Creed' as such but rather a vast number of complex, often prolix, sutras, which explored the nature of the spiritual life from many, often contradictory, viewpoints. When the idea for an article on the Sutras came up, however, I immediately thought of the Heart Sutra.

Study of the Sutras can easily turn into a very intellectual exercise focused on a complex web of interlocking ideas and doctrines. Zen cuts through all this with its own doctrine of direct seeing without mediation of words or letters. Recently in dokusan, unable to answer a koan question I dutifully undertook to think about it. The teacher immediately leapt on me: 'Don't think about it!' and then added: 'Just sink into the koan'. You can't argue with that.

It could be said that the Heart Sutra is somewhere in between the bare bones of koan study and the prolixity of the sutras. It is in Christian terms a superb example of the *via negativa*. *Neti, neti*. Not this, not this. Why should such a negative document appeal to someone on the path? Do we not have a goal? Is there not in our practice of zazen and the Way, as one teacher put it to me, 'a certain intention'? But what is that intention? In a dream I had about a year ago I was in a circle of fellow zendoids, including Subhana, who addressed a koan (I think it was) to me thus: 'What is plan B?' Whatever Plan B is, Plan A seemed to be what I had been doing so far. The Heart Sutra might tell me: 'Not Plan A, not Plan B!'

Zen practice is an act of love

The Heart Sutra focuses on the Buddhist doctrine of Sunyata or Emptiness:

Shariputra, form is no other than emptiness,

Emptiness no other the form;

Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form.

It is often the case that we harbour a secret desire in our hearts which says: 'If only you had ..., you would at last find peace.' We do not reach it even when we seem to be getting so close we could touch it. The Heart Sutra admonishes us, saying: 'Whatever you think will bring you peace is entirely empty and without substance. How will you grasp that?'

All the doctrines we hear often repeated in Buddhist circles are said by the Heart Sutra to be about things which do not exist. No form, sensation, perception, mental reaction, or consciousness? Nothing then! Since the five skandhas cover all that is. No dhatus (realms of elements), no nidanas (links), no truth to the Four Noble Truths, no wisdom to attain. What the bloody hell are we doing here? May as well go home and make a cup of tea. Come to think of it.

Despite all this apparent esotericism the Heart Sutra has many times eased my heart's pain and given me release from what appeared at the time to be intractable

suffering. I find it, somewhat strangely perhaps, to be a very moving document. Whatever you have been struggling for, or struggling to get rid of, let go of it and taste ultimate freedom, absolute and unchallengeable freedom, it says. No hindrance and therefore no fear. Or is that no fear and therefore no hindrance? If it is true, who would not go for it? As a teacher once said to me: 'Don't hold back now!' Our hearts as well as our minds can be deeply moved by this.

Zen practice is an act of grace

But wait a minute now. What about Prajna Paramita? That's the key. Go for that. At least the sutra doesn't say there is no such thing as Prajna Paramita. The Perfection of Wisdom. Hold on. That's the goal; how can it be the method (*mantra*)? The American peace activist A. J. Muste said: 'There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.' Dogen summed up the Zen practitioner's dilemma with his notion of practice-enlightenment thus:

Because it is practice in enlightenment,
There is no beginning to practice.
Because it is enlightenment in practice,
There is no end to enlightenment.

The Buddhist life can be seen as one long letting-go and letting-be. Often when I am doing zazen and even at other times, I am reminded of the words of the Beatles' song Let It Be:

When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom
Let it be.
And in my hour of darkness,
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom
Let it be.
Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be.
Whisper words of wisdom
Let it be.

The last two lines of the Sutra emphasise the essential nature of the Way:

Gone, gone, gone over to the other shore,
Completely gone over to the other shore,
Bodhi Swaha!

Sutras are Practice

Will Moon

At the beginning Sutras seemed foreign and probably as a result of a Christian upbringing there was some resistance felt towards spending time reciting them and performing the ritual. However, things change.

There were times at sesshin where we would spend a whole period reciting just one sutra which was very musical, absorbing, enlivening and quite uniting.

Sometimes we recited them walking under the stars and by the soft lamplight in the paddock.

Other times they have seemed very routine and I've not quite understood what it is that we are doing; however it never mattered.

Sometimes they have seemed strange, like meal ceremonies, 'Vairochana, pure and clear Dharmakaya Buddha....' What is this about?

At times during sesshin in utter exhaustion it has felt such an effort to open my mouth to utter a sound. 'When I, a student of the Dharma, look at....' Oh my god how am I going to do this?

However the sutras somehow bring richness to the practice, even if at times they can seem a bit awkward. They remind me of that Buddhist connection back through time, through all our old teachers that have walked the way, bringing their wisdom back to life. They add some colour and life to our practice.

Recently reciting the Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra, I was the words, the meaning, the sutra, no separation, each line seeming to make perfect sense, a good reminder that the Sutras are the practice, they are the way.

The Metta Sutta: Buddhist teachings on Love

Subhana Barzaghi

The Buddha's words on Loving-kindness

*This is what should be done,
by those who are skilled in goodness,
and who know the path to peace:
let them be able and upright,
straightforward and gentle in speech.
Humble and not conceited,
contented and easily satisfied,
unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm, wise and skilful,
not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
that the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: in gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
the great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
the seen and the unseen,
those living near and far away,
those born and to-be born –
May all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another,
or despise any being in any state.
Let none, through anger or ill-will,
wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
her child, her only child,
so with a boundless heart
should one cherish all living beings.
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
spreading upward to the skies,
and downward to the depth,
outward and unbounded,
freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
free from drowsiness,
one should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
the pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
being freed from all sense desires,
is not born again in this world.*

The word *metta* is an ancient Pali word for loving-kindness. Metta is grouped under the teachings on the four Brahma Viharas, also known as the four immeasurables. The four immeasurables are *Metta*, love; *Karuna*, compassion; *Mudita*, joy; and *Upekkha*, equanimity. The Buddhist path of loving-kindness can help us discover the radiant and joyful heart within each of us. These qualities of heart and mind are called immeasurable because there is no end to cultivating them. These four states of consciousness are said to be the most beautiful, powerful and sublime states of consciousness we can experience. With consistent dedicated practice they can become our natural abiding place our true home. These qualities are also expressions of an awakened heart/mind, a heart that is as wide as the world.

If we examine the structure of the Metta Sutta, the first section of the Sutta lays out the conditions that give rise to metta, the second section informs us how and to whom we should direct loving-kindness, and the last section discusses the highest ideal of metta, which is combined with wisdom.

*This is what should be done,
by those who are skilled in goodness,
and who know the path to peace:
let them be able and upright,
straightforward and gentle in speech.*

Holding ourselves in an upright manner is an ability to walk with integrity and awareness through the trials and tribulations of our daily life. One of the conditions that give rise to loving-kindness and cultivating the loving heart is *shila*, which is having an ethical foundation that embraces conduct, speech, and behaviour. The traditional five precepts are to take up the way of refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants. The path to peace relates to the classic three-tier structure in training the heart-mind. One's ethical conduct, speech, and behaviour (*shila*) influence the capacity to develop and train the mind (*samadhi*), which gives rise to the cultivation of wisdom (*prajna*). Those skilled in goodness establish this ethical container for their lives and live by the light of the precepts. Gentle and compassionate speech is an expression of the open loving heart.

*Humble and not conceited,
contented and easily satisfied,*

unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.

The Buddha lived a renunciate lifestyle, which was unburdened with duties and frugal in his ways, a life of voluntary simplicity. While many of us are not living a renunciate lifestyle, we can have a taste of this experience by attending a retreat. Participants step out of their busy lives and temporarily let go of their family obligations and work commitments and live in a simplified manner. We enter a retreat with just a humble bag of clothes or camping equipment; we leave behind many of our creature comforts – cars, computers, household things – and live a life of voluntary simplicity. Being unburdened with duties facilitates the feelings of contentment, and we discover and touch deep states of mind, the appreciation of beauty, joy, and love that naturally arises out of the ground of our being. Unburdening ourselves in fact gives us greater access to the capacity of love. We do start to fall in love with everything from the tiniest flower to the Great Ocean and the golden moon rising over the sandstone cliffs.

*Peaceful and calm, wise and skilful,
not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
that the wise would later reprove.*

‘Peaceful and calm, wise and skillful’: this line suggests that the basis of loving-kindness emerges out of the practice of calming the body and mind. The practice of cultivating metta is intimately tied to developing concentration; it is an aspect of focused attention.

Metta is not a love that is proud and demanding in nature. Sometimes, due to a wounding in one’s childhood from the lack of loving attunement from one’s family, one can develop a anxious neediness for love that is never quite satisfied. If you bring that needy hunger into relationship, if you bring your empty bucket expecting the other person to meet all your love needs, then it is bound to create problems. Many of us have experienced the pain of that, either being on the receiving end of a partner who is so needy or being the one who never feels satisfied. This pattern and dynamic often does not work, and the other person is repelled or overwhelmed by that neediness. The healing remedy for this condition is to learn to love and appreciate oneself. Metta practice starts with directing loving-kindness towards to this body, heart, and mind.

Wishing: in gladness and in safety,

May all beings be at ease.

I love this line ‘May all beings be at ease’. The word ‘ease’ has a deep sense of safety, peace, freedom from pain. I also enjoy the fact that not once in the Metta Sutta does it actually mention the word love. It is unfortunate that it is so difficult in our culture to talk about love. Love has become so commercialised, romanticised, eroticised. It has been blurred with desire and appetite. We say, I love strawberries and ice cream, I love my house, car, country, without some discernment about the quality of love. The Buddha spoke of the near enemy to *metta*, or we could say its shadow, as something that masquerades as love, feels similar but isn’t true love. Sensual desire is the near enemy to loving-kindness and can so easily be enmeshed with erotic and passionate energy. We can think we are feeling love for someone when we are really feeling attachment and desire. Metta is a love that is free from sensual desire, it is a love and veneration for all of life that knows no bounds, it is an unconditional love. The first task in breaking open the loving heart is to bring clarity to the whole process and experience of love and differentiate *metta* from sensual desire.

The second part of the Sutta informs us who we should direct metta towards.

Whatever living beings there may be;

whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,

the great or the mighty, medium, short or small,

the seen and the unseen,

those living near and far away,

those born and to-be born –

May all beings be at ease!

It is easy to love those dear and near to us: this is a preferential type of love, and there is nothing wrong with that, but the true art of *metta* is to be able to generate a loving-kindness to all beings, which means to cross the divide of one’s preferences, to cultivate a loving heart to others, whether you like them or not. It is an altruistic, unconditional love, a loving-kindness that does not discriminate, that omits no one. This inclusive spirit is dramatically evoked in a poem called ‘Kindness’, by Naomi Shihab Nye:

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness

you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho

lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Naomi's juxtaposition of the words 'the tender gravity of kindness' holds lightly so much depth and *gravitas*. Our spiritual journey does take us to regions where we begin to see how each person, the bus conductor, the old woman, the innocence of youth, the dead Indian, the soldier in Iraq, the poor illiterate children in Bihar India, could be you, if you were simply born in a different time and place. How every human being journeys with the simple breath of life. If we look deeper still, we can see how each and every person is in fact your original face, a manifestation of your big heart-mind. This insight and deep connection with another naturally evokes kindness that has no degrees of division or separation.

*Let none deceive another,
or despise any beings in any state.
Let none, through anger or ill-will,
wish harm upon another.*

In the teachings on love, the Buddha referred to the near and the far enemy to love. The far enemy is the opposite of love, which is anger and ill-will. There is a beautiful reminder, in Chapter 1 Verse 5 of the Dharmapada, that anger and hatred only beget more hatred and consequently create greater divisions in the community:

Hatred never ceases by hatred
But by love alone is healed,
This is an ancient and eternal law.

The Buddha's constant advice to his followers was not to retaliate but to practise patience at all times, in all places, even when under provocation.

*Even as a mother protects with her life
her child, her only child,
so with a boundless heart,
should one cherish all living beings.*

'Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child' is for some a challenging metaphor for unconditional love. Some people haven't had the blessings

of a loving, wonderful, protective, supportive mother, so, rather than generate love, the metaphor can easily trigger painful memories. However, my own experience was to the contrary. After giving birth to my children, I remember just holding this tender, vulnerable, pink little being and looking into their eyes, and falling totally in love with them. That love evoked the protective tigress within me, a fierce determination that I would do anything for my child. At the time of birth, a potent dose of oxytocin, the affiliative love hormone, is released, which is probably nature's insurance and survival mechanism, ensuring that a parent will protect and nurture their infant. And it is probably just as well that there is some powerful mechanism to sustain our parental love over the years, given the long and tumultuous phase of adolescence which lies ahead. So in the same spirit as a mother who loves her child, we hold the intention to cherish all living beings.

The last part of the Sutta informs us how we should sustain this recollection, and how it is linked to the practice of insight, and the awakened heart-mind.

*Radiating kindness over the entire world:
spreading upward to the skies,
and downward to the depths,
outward and unbounded,
freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
Free from drowsiness,
one should sustain this recollection.*

The sublime abiding is poetically expressed by Naomi Shihab Nye, in her poem 'Kindness':

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head from
the crowd of the world to say,
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

So let loving-kindness walk you to the meditation hall, sit you down. Let kindness be the meal you serve up for yourself and your life. Let it flow throughout the day, let it

be your daily bread. It is the power of loving-kindness that can save not only this one sitting here, but is the necessary medicine and nourishment that this sorrowful world needs right now. It has the power to transform your life, if you let it.

*This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
the pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
being freed from all sense desires,
is not born again in this world.*

In the last section of the Sutta, loving-kindness is tied to the ideal of a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being, free from holding fixed views. When you cling to views, ideas, and perceptions about yourself and others, you build up whole stories and projections about the other person. This is like pouring colored dye into a glass of water and seeing the other person through a filter which is distorted. When we hold to fixed views about ourselves or the world, we mistakenly believe them to be true, real, and correct, when they are just views. We can see how much suffering there is in the world that is caused by holding fast to our opinions, views, judgments, and ideologies as the one true way. We have gone to war over religious and political beliefs and fixed views about one another. When you let go and can see that your views and beliefs are just like clouds floating through the empty sky, nothing substantial there at all, then you can see the nature of self and other with clarity of mind and you can rest in the sublime abiding of the pure heart song.

I came across a simple yet delightful poem by a man named Josh, who is a Vipassana student in New Zealand, which expresses a heart that is as wide as the world:

The world inside my heart

I'm walking around
with the whole world
in my heart.

Please don't
ask how it happened.
I don't know.

The world hasn't shrunk, and
my heart hasn't grown.

I'm walking around
with the whole world
in my heart.

Please don't
ask me how it fits.
I don't know.

My heart just
opened out, somehow,
and when I looked inside,
I found
the whole world is living there
all the time.

References:

- Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Lovingkindness, in Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*, Shambhala, Boston, 1995.
- The Dhammapada: Pali Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes*, trans. Narada Thera, 4th edn, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taipei, 1993.
- Naomi Shihab Nye, 'Kindness', in *Risking Everything: 110 Poems of Love and Revelation*, ed. Roger Housden, Harmony Books, New York, 2003.

a

The shortest of the Mahayana 'Perfection of Wisdom' sutras consists of a single letter, the short 'a' vowel. As a prefix it negates a word's meaning, and as a sound on its own it has been called the most basic of speech sounds.

Everything is music

Everyone a song

Thousands of sutras

Chanted

Each step of the Way.

There is for me something odd about the Sutras. I have read quite a few. Studied some of them carefully. Ploughed through the repetitiveness of some of the Buddha's Discourses, the Suttas, trying to remember that I'm privileged and can read, not only hear. In the days when I was far from libraries, I'd copy them into a special book. Yet the words, like a swiftly running stream, flow in and out, and I can remember almost nothing.

Even the sutras we chant together every evening seem to be mostly unavailable to my conscious mind. Like teishos, they are *vivid*, then gone. Chanting them for me is about the chanting, not the words. Listening to everyone, just chanting together, dropping everything else, our interconnectedness seems almost physically presented.

Perhaps in some unconscious way the words, the meaning, are indeed digested? Who knows? Reading some sutras, like listening to some teishos, can expand the mind. Lights flash, but then – gone! Like birdsong.

Perhaps increased years diminish the power of recall? All I know is that they are Great Treasures, that somehow turn into mist; bright mist perhaps, but mist. The sutras of the wind, trees, birds, stones, clouds, and freshly damp earth, speak as loudly.

Sam Hamill, in his poem, 'Ten Thousand Sutras (after Hakuin)' writes:

No words can adequately say it

Yet every word must praise it.

Sally Hopkins

Slowly slowly
she is letting go the
guy ropes
that have held her
all these years.
No more eating.
No more speaking.
Skeletal body just breathing.
We sit
holding her birdbone hand,
and don't know, don't know,
don't know – how to help,
what to say, what to do –
in this mystery of her fading.
Her parents and siblings,
children, and grandchildren,
great grandchildren, all
look out from the photos
now ignored by her bed.
Dear love-ropes all, now loosened,
dropped overboard.
Nothing left. Just breathing. Just breathing.

13 November 2009

'White cloud comes and goes',
said the Master of Zen.
What is there to grasp?
Who is it that's grasping?

Right now you're a worn out
frail pair of bellows
breathing in and out,
breathing in and out. –
All the stories of you just
floating away.
Do thoughts come and go
behind those closed eyelids?
'It's cold it's hot I'm too old what's
wrong?'
Or are you at peace
being breath,
just the breathing,
letting what happens
just happen
as mysteries unfold?

14 November

'I want to stop! I want to stop!
I've stopped – but it goes on.'
O friendly Death,
though the Christmas bush is in flower
and the cicadas loudly trilling,
and carers dress her still for life
and urge her still to eat,
she's had enough, quite enough.
'I want to stop.'
Jacaranda flowers are falling
like tears
beneath the trees.

15 November

For Marjorie Hopkins, who, after long years of learning to relinquish all she held dear,
took to seriously dying after her 98th birthday on 2 November 2009. In gratitude.

Sally Hopkins

In which reference is made to the *Avatamsaka*, or Flower Garland Sutra

Maggie Gluek

*A monk asked Yunmen, 'What is the dust-particle samadhi?' Yunmen replied, 'Rice in the bowl, water in the pail.'*⁴

What is samadhi? In classical Buddhism, it is the eighth step on the Noble Eightfold Path. For our purposes Aitken Roshi defines it as 'absorption; the quality of zazen; one with the universe.'⁵

A few months ago Sydneysiders might have thought they had rather literally entered dust-particle samadhi, one with the dusty universe. Who could forget waking up that morning and finding the world eerily red? In many places visibility was minimal. Where am I? Heavy red dust had blown in from South Australia and western New South Wales to cloud our skies and coat our exteriors, subsuming. Everywhere!

In fact we live constantly in an environment of dust, mostly unseen. Hannah Holmes, who wrote *The Secret Life of Dust*, entitles her first chapter 'The World in a Grain of Dust', and presents the example of a juice glass sitting on a verandah and containing a little bit of everything on earth. Some fragments of camel hair and desert. The wind changes and in come spores from forest funghi. A bus stops and flakes of human skin come into the juice. With each inhalation we take in thousands of motes of dusts of all kinds, both helpful and deadly. The remains of dinosaurs and your dead ancestors roam the planet. The past is beneath your nose. And the future too, she suggests, when the dust of a decayed *you* will be circulating widely. Then there's dust from space. Every day the earth gathers 100 tons of space dust.⁶ Indeed originally much of what makes up our bodies, all the heavier elements on earth, iron and calcium certainly, comes from the inside of stars, the dust produced in supernova explosions. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is nothing if not dusty. So Joni's Mitchells's beautiful refrain from her song 'Woodstock' is not just poetry. We *are* stardust.

The monk's question here refers back to a passage in the Flower Garland or

⁴ Yamada Koun and Robert Aitken, trans., *Hekigan Roku* (For reference within the Diamond Sangha, 1974), Case 50.

⁵ Robert Aitken, *Encouraging Words* (Pantheon, New York, 1991), p. 217.

⁶ Hannah Holmes, *The Secret Life of Dust* (Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, 2001), pp. 5-14.

Avatamsaka Sutra in which the Bodhisattva Chief in Goodness says ‘Entering samadhi in a single dust-particle (atom), one attains samadhi in all dust particles.’⁷ The *Avatamsaka* or Flower Garland Sutra is the lengthy and elaborate sutra embodying the insight of Hua-Yen Buddhism, the seventh-century Chinese school which principally expresses the truth of interpenetration: one thing containing all and all things containing the one, the intimate relationship of vast and particular. The most famous Hua-Yen image is Indra’s net. In Indra’s palace one room is hung with interconnected layers of net, and on each mesh intersection is hung a crystal. The crystals reflect one another and the reflections themselves are again reflected, and so reflecting, accompanying each other, all in one and one in all, endlessly.⁸ Dizzily.

Probably the other most famous image is that of Fa-tsang’s golden lion as an expression of *dharmadhatu*, the true nature of things. The lion is golden. All the parts of the lion down to the tip of each and every hair, as they are all golden, in turn take in the whole lion. In the tip of each hair is the entire lion, indeed are an infinite number of lions.

As a Ch’an metaphor, one particle of dust means one instant of thought in the human mind. And metaphor aside, one instant of thought of one sentient being, says Daibi commenting on Torei Zenji’s *Inexhaustible Lamp*, contains everything enumerated in the great Avatamsaka Sutra – this is the essence of the teaching. ‘*But while indulging in judgments of large and small, of wide and narrow, you cannot have faith in it. Once you have faith in it, it is easy to understand what Master Hakuin means by taking out Mount Fuji from a pill box or walking inside a tea cup.*’⁹

Torei himself in his *Bodhisattva’s Vow*¹⁰ emphasises the inherent comprehensive reality of the particular. *Each particle of matter, each moment, is no other than the Tathagatha’s inexpressible radiance. You can’t get around that! You can’t get outside of that. And then: At the peak of each thought a lotus flower opens and on each flower there is revealed a Buddha.*

This may sound a little cosmic, highblown, and, well, flowery. Golden lion indeed! In fact ‘it’ is nothing *out* of the ordinary. Ask Dogen who says ‘Those who believe there is no Buddha Nature in mundane things fail to realise there are no

⁷ Thomas Cleary, trans., *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record* (Shambala, Boston, 2002), p. 165.

⁸ Master Daibi of Unkan in *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp of the Zen School* by Torei Zenji, trans. Yoko Okuda (Tuttle, Boston, 1996), p. 145.

⁹ Daibi, pp. 144-5.

¹⁰ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, pp. 176-77.

mundane things in Buddha Nature.’¹¹ Yunmen gives us or-di-na-ry, specific, vivid. Rice in the bucket, water in the pail. And Torei, again: ‘*Who is not grateful for the protections of life ... food, drink and clothing? Though they are inanimate things they are no other than the warm flesh and blood, the merciful incarnations of Buddha.*’ Offering the reassurance of ordinary things where we can take refuge. Where, what, is *not* the dust-particle samadhi?

The issue is to realise this for ourselves. Functionally samadhi in meditation is recognising what already exists. One ‘enters’ samadhi as a state of mind where thoughts of ‘I, me, mine’ fall away, where the world and I speak with one voice. But the fact has long been accomplished.

We tend to think, ‘*Well, there are thoughts and there are thoughts.*’ Indeed another, pejorative gloss for dust in the tradition is delusion. Dust is what is dirty, what makes for less than pure, what gets in the way of seeing clearly. In the famous poetry contest at Tsao-Chi, the expected successor to the Fifth Patriarch wrote about once and for all wiping clean the dusty mirror of mind. It’s a good metaphor for what we do on the cushion, seeing through thoughts which reinforce the delusion of ‘I, me, mine’, quieting and settling the mind as thoughts are relinquished. Eventually with practice you can see them coming and nip them in the bud. But then the illiterate kitchen hand of a Sixth Patriarch comes along and says there is no mirror at all, let alone dust. Or ‘dust is *it* too!’ Even abusive words, says Torei, convey the Buddha’s boundless loving kindness. Everything is practice, everything is a gate.

Okay (again) but how to *practise* samadhi? Ours is the way of single-pointed and single-minded meditation. It’s simple: as simple as a dust-mote. The goal is not to ‘get rid of thoughts’, which is in any case impossible. Rather over and over and over, again and again we unite with Mu, with the breath, with the *hua-tou*. The one point to be actualised. Where is that? Dogen again: *When you find your place where you are, practice occurs, actualising the fundamental point.*¹² The point of no dimension and time.

Another translation for *samadhi* is concentration. This word may call up the furrowed brow and tensing of muscles. It refers however solely not to my little mental

¹¹ Dogen, *Bendowa*, Question 14.

¹² Robert Aitken and Kazuaki Tanahashi, trans., ‘Actualizing the Fundamental Point’ in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (North Point, San Francisco, 1985), p. 72.

effort but to *everything* brought to focus, nothing left over. Not a subject ‘concentrating’ on an object. Not thinking about how nice it would be to be in a ‘higher state’ on the one hand – and doing zazen on the other. Do you ever catch yourself on the cushion wanting something else? *There’s* an invitation to suffering!

Certainly samadhi is not thinking about samadhi. Hakuin comments on this case, rendered as ‘concentration on every atom’:

Concentration on every atom means entering into the six fields of sense objects without being concerned with the six fields of sense objects, working things out according to the situation, men cultivating themselves as men, women cultivating themselves as women, everyone just as they are attaining the knowledge and vision of Buddha. Just get to know your self clearly, and in the course of your daily activities, unobstructed by anything in the senses or objects, one nature pervades all natures, one truth contains all things, one moon is reflected in all waters, the reflected moons in all waters are contained in one moon. Concentration means correct reception; correct reception means non-grasping. The pillars are vertical, the sills are horizontal: this is concentration on every atom.¹³

In samadhi abandoning discrimination and you find everything vividly uniquely discriminated. And it’s natural, ordinary. Or no big deal, as they say.

A monk asked Chao chou ‘The ten thousand dharmas return to the one. Where does the one return to?’ Chao chou replied, ‘When I was living in the province of Ch’ing Chou, I made a robe of cloth. It weighed seven pounds.’¹⁴

Nothing is insignificant. Not the small and unseen, the dust literally beneath your feet. The tiniest conceivable is as great as the greatest. The most modest thing is to be appreciated. There’s no hierarchy. ‘To see a world in a grain of sand And heaven in a wild flower.’ One nien, one moment of thought, sees eternity. And every atom, every speck of dust, every moment is there to be received. You don’t have to wait to get lucky ... it’s you, now, continuous. The gate’s already open. Dogen once more: *Those who trust in the buddha way should trust that they are in essence within the buddha way, where there is no delusion, no false thinking, no confusion, no increase or decrease, no mistake and no mistake.* Please practise with this trust.¹⁵

¹³ Cleary, p. 165

¹⁴ Yamada, Case 47.

¹⁵ Ed Brown and Kazuaki Tanahashi, trans., ‘Guidelines for Studying the Way’ in *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 42.

‘Getting here’ – a journey of ‘off and on’ Zen

Doug Hume

Leaving Sydney for California in 1958 at age twelve; stopping in Hawaii for one day – not seeing the Aitkens.

Returning to Honolulu in 1967 as a surfer, girl watcher, and, oh yes, a uni student in marine biology – again not seeing the Aitkens.

During Vietnam war days; searching, objecting, reading, finding D. T. Suzuki – starting ‘off and on’ practice.

Living and working in a community amongst many Japanese – mentoring by three American-Japanese chefs in French-style cooking.

Standing transfixed in front of a large enso at the Honolulu Art Museum – feeling ‘something’ at the core.

Experiencing marriage, birth of child, divorce, marriage – being egocentric, making mistakes, suffering, feeling *joy*.

Sitting without seeking a teacher (perhaps avoiding one) for over thirty years – sitting ‘off and on’ – especially at times of crisis.

During the last five years it happened! Working alone except for a faithful border collie/kelpie cross ‘teacher’ in a peaceful vineyard – *bang...* anger – where did that come from? Knowing that if peace can’t be found here ... Where *did ‘that’* come from?

Experiencing a really big personal crisis (eighteen months ago) – interacting with an unstable person with a brain tumour – really scary!

Sitting again – another *bang!* – realising no matter how indefensible another’s actions were, both people played their parts. It was just life.

Doing zazen always ‘on’ – no choice – may be time for a teacher? Finding SZC website (twelve months ago) – Sydney too far away, think about it later.

Travelling to Northern California for niece’s wedding in San Francisco (September 2008); thinking about visiting Shunryu’s San Francisco Centre – too little time! Staying in Palo Alto – not knowing Shunryu’s first centre was nearby. Visiting parents in Nevada City – not knowing about Ring of Bone!

Returning home, deciding to make ‘proper’ effort – contacted SZC and booked flight for July zazenkaï celebrating 50 years of the founding of the Diamond Sangha. Arrived!

**Lost in Space,
or, does *Homo sapiens* really mean ‘wise’ man or woman?**

Peter Thompson

Where do I belong? Where do you belong? Where do we belong? In this emptiness or nothingness there is no fixed address – no abiding place. We seem to belong everywhere. Master Hogen Zenji, now resident of Byron Bay, Australia, used to give out a koan he devised himself. ‘What is my sitting position?’ As one looks at it, it becomes apparent that wherever we are in this moment there is no fixed position, no abiding place. Any particular point we focus on just dissolves into nothing(ness).

Even though this swirling reality in front of us is empty, it is an emptiness or nothingness always in constant movement. This ball of a planet is one whole field of nothingness and this ‘Gaia’ is constantly changing. One of the great changes at the moment in this system is being brought about by human activity – carbon release into the atmosphere. This addictive activity is changing life possibilities on the planet. Humans are by nature and necessity bonded to this planet Earth because it is where we breathe, move, and have our being, and yet our own addictive activities are drastically altering the possibilities for future life here. Surely the time now has come for *Homo sapiens* to begin realising that we belong to this whole planet and be completely responsible for all our actions.

Addicts don’t tend to change addictive behaviour even if it is destroying them, unless they are brought to the critical terminal point, dramatically – their life is immediately put in danger. That is the nature of addiction – no action until death is actually at the door!

So we, led by ignorant governments, continue to destroy our home, this empty but real space.

We can immediately see and understand now that our home is a system (Gaia), where one single action does affect the whole planet, whether butterfly wings flapping or one carbon emission.

We can see this in a real physical way, looking at how we are all connected and interconnected by ocean currents, gulf streams and air currents – how melting ice at one place in the oceans affects sea levels everywhere.

This is Gaia in action. This is interconnectedness in action. This is systems theory in action. This is one whole unitary planet earth. This is present and immediate demonstration of Thich Nhat Hahn's interbeing in action. This is where science and dharma meet and agree.

Even carbon addicts must wake up and eventually see how we are involved in destroying our home – and potentially destroying ourselves, as well as affecting for the worse many living species and many future possibilities for life. Now we are already beginning to suffocate and fry in the heat caused by our thirst for cheap fuel and power. We can't really blame the various 'gods' any more. Science has taken away that escape.

This is systems theory in your face, and Gaia is systems theory in action. We can easily see and realise this with global warming and climate change. The carbon emissions I create with my car here are having far-reaching effects for the whole globe. Through the desperate extremity of global warming, through the actions of each individual, we realise that even a minute action in a minute part of Australia eventually affects the climate balance of the whole planet.

Surely it is only a responsible action to want to protect our home and security against real and cataclysmic danger. The problem with humanity in general at present is we can still not see this danger clearly or accurately enough. More importantly, our politicians are blinded to this.

What role has Buddhism still to play in deep ecology? Can there be an eco-revolution of people via the Internet? This may be one of our only hopes.

There is no particular location to which we belong – only this vast empty reality for which we are all utterly responsible.

journal of the
sydney zen centre
251 Young Street Annandale
NSW 2038

Print Post
2225 293 00002

POSTAGE PAID
AUSTRALIA

