

Mind Moon Circle



Autumn 2007

Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre

\$6

Autumn 2007

This issue explores the rituals of Zen.

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Editors: Kim McShane, Sue Bidwell and Yvonne Hales
with assistance from Janet Selby.

Next issue: Edited by Britta Biedermann. The theme is Letting Go.
How does your practice help you to let go? What is easy or difficult
about letting go? What did you experience when you let go? Please
email contributions to britta@maccs.mq.edu.au by Friday 18 May 2007

Mind Moon Circle is published quarterly by the Sydney Zen Centre, 251 Young Street,
Annandale, NSW, 2038, Australia. www.szc.org.au
Annual Subscription AUD\$28. Printed on recycled paper.

THE BLUE CLIFF RECORD

Case 28

Nan-ch'üan's Truth That Has Never Been Expounded

The Story

Nan-ch'üan came to Pai-chang Nieh-p'an. Pai-chang asked, "Have all the sages since the remote past known a Dharma truth that they never expounded for people?"

Nan-ch'üan said, ""They have."

Pai-chang asked, "What is the Dharma that they didn't expound for people?"

Nan-ch'üan said, "This is not mind; this is not Buddha; this is not beings."

Pai-chang said, "You have expounded like that!"

Nan-ch'üan said, "Just that is my exposition." How about you, Your Reverence?

Pai-chang said, "I am not a great Zen master. How can I know whether something was expounded or not expounded?"

Nan-ch'üan said, "I don't understand."

Pai-chang said. "I have already expounded too much for you."

Personae

Nan-ch'üan Pu-yüan (Nansen Fugan, 747 to 834) was one of the last Dharma heirs of Ma-tsu. He went on to become one of the great personages of early Ch'an, and the master of Chao-chou. Pai-chang Nieh-p'an (Hyakujo Nehan. n.d.), was technically his nephew in the Dharma, the heir of Pai-chang Hui-hai, but Nan-ch'üan was almost a generation younger.

Comment

This story also appears as Case 27 in the *Wu-men kuan (The Gateless Barrier)*, but in an abbreviated form.

A monk asked Nan-ch'üan, "Is there a Dharma that has not been expounded for people?"

Nan-ch'üan said, "There is."

The monk asked, "What is the Dharma that has not been expounded for people?"

Nan-ch'üan said. "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not beings."

The case ends there. Pai-chang Nieh-pan becomes an unidentified monk, and Nan-ch'üan's response becomes the point of the case. *Neti neti*. Wu-men occasionally took liberties in this way, simplifying and truncating cases. Case 18 of the *Book of Serenity* is another example:

A monk asked Chao-chou, "Has the dog Buddha-nature or not?"

Chao-chou said "*Mu*" ("No, does not have").

The monk said, “All beings have Buddha-nature. How is it that the dog has none?”

Chao-chou said, “Because of its inherent karma.”

Of course you will recognize the first two lines of the dialogue as the first case of *The Gateless Barrier*. In our course of study, the full story does not appear until after the student has completed 165 cases after the koan Mu appears. First things first. Only when you have resolved Part One are you ready for Part Two. Chao-chou’s final repost in his dialogue about the Buddha-nature of the dog hinges on karma, but first you had better understand what Mu is. Without understanding Mu, you won’t get Chao-chou’s point about karma. In the same way, it is important to get at Nan-ch’üan’s initial response, “It is not mind; it is not Buddha; it is not beings,” before you go on to the wisdom of Pai-chang Nieh-p’an. Nan-ch’üan is quoting a Zen proverb, “Mind, Buddha, beings, these are not different,” which can be traced to the *Lotus Sūtra*, and to *Hua-yen* literature:

As in the mind, so is the Buddha,
As the Buddha, so living beings
Know that the Buddha and mind
Are in essence inexhaustibleⁱ

Incidentally, the graph translated as “beings” is commonly translated as “things.” I followed this translation earlier before I saw the original verses. All things are beings, but “beings” is far more the inclusive term, and is thus in keeping with original point.

Pai-chang was completely in control and speaking from a mellow, fully realized position when he posed his question, “Have all the sages since the remote past known a Dharma truth that they never expounded for people?”

Nan-ch’üan was nervy, “brash” in Yüan-wu’s expression, when he replied, “They have.” He is clearly implying that the old worthies did know the unspoken Dharma, and moreover, he knew that Dharma for himself. This is the confidence of the newly enlightened.

Pai-chang presses him. “What is it then, this unspoken Dharma?” Nan-ch’üan responds by declaring the truth that the Dharma is not mind, Buddha or beings, negating the sūtras.

Nan-ch’üan is echoing his teacher, Ma-tsu Tao-i, our Great Ancestor Ma. In Case 30 of *The Gateless Barrier* we read:

Ta-mei Fa-ch’ang asked Ma-tsu, “What is Buddha?”
Ma-tsu said, “This very mind is Buddha.”

But then three cases later we find Ma-tsu reversing himself.

A monk asked Ma-tsu, “What is Buddha?”
Ma-tsu said, “Not mind, not Buddha.”

Was he really reversing himself? When Ta-mei heard that this very mind is Buddha, he took himself off to a hut in the forest to polish his understanding. After a while

Ma-tsu sent a monk to see how he was getting along. The story of their encounter goes like this:

Ta-mei (whose name means “Great Plum”) asked, “Where have you come from?”

The monk said, “From Ma-tsu.”

Ta-mei asked, “What is Ma-tsu saying these days?”

The monk said, “Not mind, not Buddha.”

Ta-mei said, “Great Master Ma has confused many Zen people. I don’t care if he is saying ‘Not mind, not Buddha.’ I still say, ‘This very mind is Buddha.’”

The monk returned to Ma-tsu and reported this exchange. Ma-tsu said, “The Great Plum has ripened.”ⁱⁱ

Not an expression of disapproval at all. But which is it? “This very mind is Buddha” or “Not mind, not Buddha?” Perhaps the young Nan-ch’üan might have learned better from his master’s ambiguity. Ambiguity implies confusion in the world of “short square fingers stuffing pipes,” but every poet worthy of the name plays in ambiguity like a child in the bath playing with duckies.

Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself;
(I am large—I contain multitudes.)

Every master of Zen laughs in the moonlight with Walt Whitman. Pai-chang wanted Nan-ch’üan to join him for a walk in that primordial light, and challenged him, in effect asking, “Is that so? You don’t say!”

Nan-ch’üan stepped back a little. He begins his response by saying, “Just that is my exposition,” but then he says, “How about you, Your Reverence?” Maybe he was just being polite, maybe he was temporizing, waiting to see what the older man would say, and maybe there is a trace of doubt in his words. “Perhaps in wiping away concepts, I was in fact being conceptual,” he might have been thinking. We can’t be sure. In any case, he tossed the ball back to Pai-chang.

“I am not a great Zen master. How can I know whether something was expounded or not expounded?” “Whoops! That wasn’t the answer Nan-ch’üan expected. Yet it is the response of a truly great Zen master. Yamada Roshi used to say that nothing distinguishes a Zen master. He lived his own dictum, commuting to work from Kamakura to Tokyo each day in his dark business suit, his conservative tie and his gray fedora, with no indication that he was any different from the hundreds of others on the train who were dressed just as was. In the *Cheng-tao ke* we read,

Though they always travel alone, always walk alone,
the enlightened all tread the same path of nirvana.
Their air is ancient, their spirit pure, and bearing noble.
Lean-faced and bony, they pass unnoticed in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are a number of cases in our study that make this point. The “Golden Scales” comes readily to mind:

San-sheng asked Hsüeh-feng, “When the Golden Scales has passed through the net, I wonder, what should he eat?
Hsüeh-feng said, “When you come forth from the net, then I’ll tell you.”
San-sheng said, “You’re the master of 1,500 disciples and you can’t keep a dialogue going!”
Hsüeh-feng said, “I’m very busy with many complicated temple affairs.” (BCR-49)

San-sheng was Lin-chi’s “Blind Donkey,” fresh from transmission from a great master, confident in middle life of his realization and status. Hsüeh-feng was the seasoned teacher of Yün-men and others in one of the liveliest and enlightened sanghas in our tradition. Here he was probably in the last years of his life. Like Pai-chang Nieh-p’an he had nothing to prove. He was a walking, talking Buddha, without even thinking about it.

Anyway, Nan-ch’üan was knocked back on his heels, and could only say, “I don’t understand.” It came blurting out, like words from an honest second grader. “I don’t get it.” How can you say that you aren’t a great Zen master without understanding, when that’s obviously not so? Then Pai-chang lowers the gate. “I have already expounded too much for you.” I have exhausted my treasury for you. I have entered the tiger’s cave for you. I have cast myself from the cliff for you. The case ends there, as it should.

At the end of the summer training period, Ts’ui-yen said to his community, “All summer I have been preaching to you brothers. Tell me, do I still have my eyebrows?” (BCR-8)

This case, as you will recall, goes on, with Pao-fu, Ch’ang-ch’ing, and Yün-men all getting in their licks. But this is enough for our purposes. It is said that those who preach false Dharma will lose their eyebrows. But like Pai-chang Nieh-p’an, Ts’ui-yen was not being modest. He was letting down a hook, as Yüan-wu makes clear in his comment. When the ancients did this, as Yüan-wu remarks, it was never an empty manoeuver. And hook it was, if you bite and say he was just protecting himself by uttering the criticism that others might be making, you will be snatched to dry land to expire gasping on the turf. Next time around you might do better. You might see the point that in his 40 years of turning the wheel of the Dharma, our great founder Shakyamuni Buddha never preached a single word.

Many years ago, Anne Aitken and I visited Ryutakuji, where I had practiced earlier. We got acquainted with Tai Shimano, at that time a young monk, who went on to become Eido Roshi. We traveled to Kyoto together, together with Manuel Chenaile, a lay student from France. Tai-san wanted to visit Nanzenji, where his father was employed as an accountant, and pay his respects to the abbot in charge of administration. He was co-abbot, really; the teaching abbot was Shibayama Roshi in those days. I regret to say that I don’t remember the name of that administrative abbot. He was then more than eighty years old. When we were shown in, Tai-san, who was meeting the abbot for the first time, bowed very low, and said,

“We are privileged, Your Reverence, that you should find time to see us and serve us tea. It is indeed a great honor to meet such a distinguished Zen master.”

The abbot said, “Oh, ha ha, come on in, I am not a master at all, ha ha.”

He laughed and laughed, and waved us to our seats. It was very refreshing I thought. Yet he was obviously a most distinguished Zen person. You could read it in his face.

The root of the abbot’s meaning was the root of Ts’ui-yen’s meaning, the root of Hsüeh-feng’s meaning, the root of Pai-chang’s meaning, the root of Bodhidharma’s meaning when he said he didn’t know who he was. It is the root of Ti-tsang meaning when he said that not knowing is most intimate. What is there to know, after all? What is there to be a master, after all? But be careful, remember Te-shan’s injunction, “If you say yes, you get thirty blows. If you say no, you get thirty blows.” Do you say you don’t know? WHACK!

NOTES

¹ Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*

(Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1984), p. 452.

¹ Koun Yamada, *Gateless Gate* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), pp. 162-163.

¹ Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, eds., *The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader* (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1996), p. 25.

TOC! TOC! TOC!

says the Han

CLACK! the clapsticks

ONCE - - TWICE - - THRICE - -
the bell:

good teachers
being themselves.

TOC! CLACK! RING!

Sally Hopkins

Haiku on Zen Ritual

Prostrating
Throwing self over
My head – puff!

Bowing, my body
Re-members --
This place!

Lighting candle -
In the flaming centre
A black space.

Gassho - two palms
Join, in a unity
Of gratitude

Zazen mudra --
Holding the Uni-verse -
Enso brushwork!

Kin hin kin kin
This step this step
Just here just now.

Sound erupting
Out of silence, chanting --
No form, no emptiness.

Entering the *hojo*
With laughter --
'Which bow where?'

Caroline Josephs



soft incense
momentary fragrance
briefly caught
I turn -
at Anne Aitken's smile

Yvonne Hales

Our Dharma Treasures

Gillian Cooté

When we enter our dojo, we gassho towards the Buddha and bodhisattvas on our altars, showing gratitude and respect to the historical Buddha, the whole lineage of teachers and also to the Buddha-nature in all beings, including ourselves. We are already Buddha. We are not bowing to something other than ourselves. In this spirit, we bow to each other, and we bow to our cushions, our Bodhimanda or place of realisation. We are so fortunate to have the Dharma treasure of place and time to practice; we show our appreciation by arriving on time and walking quietly in the zendo; we remain in the zendo until the period of zazen is over. If we arrive late, we support each other's practice by sitting quietly in the front room until after kinhin.

In kinhin we move alongside our altars, where there are several embodiments of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. On the main altar, the sweet-faced wooden Burmese Buddha with one hand in the bhumisparsha mudra, calling the earth to witness, was an early gift from Aitken Roshi, rescued from a Trash & Treasure store in Honolulu. Other bodhisattvas on the main altar are the exquisite small stone Kwanyin - embodying compassion - a gift from Ron Chan, and Janet's marquette for the Kodoji Manjusri - embodying wisdom. There are two candles, both lit for sutra services, the right hand candle burning during our zazen; an incense container gathering *toku*, a small water dish, and vases holding flowers and leaves. And, sitting along the front of the altar, our kyosaku or waking stick, another gift from Roshi, which travels to Kodoji for sesshin. The main altar itself is a homely piece of furniture which may have once held cutlery and crockery, and now holds sutra books and the community incense bowl.



For many years, the striking bare-breasted Green Tara - embodying graceful and compassionate action - left with us for safekeeping by Joe Scotland, an itinerant sangha member, stood on the mantelpiece upstairs, emerging annually to grace our women's retreats. Until somebody asked, why not include her on the altar at Annandale? But she towered over the Buddha figure, so Tony made the side altar which has since become the resting place for a portion of Anne Aitken's ashes, housed in a ceramic and silver box behind her photo. Aitken Roshi installed Anne's ashes here in a memorable ceremony. Roshi also gave us the fine stone Jizo from the island of Sado in Japan - guardian of travellers and little children - Anne's favourite bodhisattva; he sits serenely on the little shelf above.

Speaking of little children, during the Buddha's Birthday ceremony in early April, sangha children delight in honouring our home-grown baby Buddha who, seated in a bowl on a low altar, is blessed by cool water and beautiful flowers. And, as the children step up to the altar, we're reminded that we too are baby Buddhas, coming into being each moment, tender and open.

In the early days of the Sydney Zen Centre, our Dharma treasures were brought to us from far away; as our sangha matures, they are increasingly home-grown - the altar at Kodoji designed and built by Tony, its surface timber found and brought back to life by Patrick, the brocade altar cloth designed and made by Glenys, Janet's large ceramic Manjusri, seated on his lion, who presides during sesshin, and Brendon's stone Buddha - we hold them all in trust for future generations of home-grown Australian bodhisattvas and we do this with our wise and compassionate words and actions. This is how we vitalise the bodhisattvas, this is how we embody the Buddha, this is how we build the sangha. These are the Dharma treasures. I bow in gratitude.

Do I believe in candles?

No.

Incense, bells, statues?

No.

Chanting before meals?

Acting with everyone

at the same time

in the same way?

Or bowing, for goodness sake?

No. None of it matters.

Yet “disregard nothing.”

In my youth

reciting the Creed with everyone

led out the church door.

“I believe in...”

How could I say it ?

I believed, didn't believe,

didn't know, don't know.

Now, no believing.

No standing aside looking on.

Nothing to believe. Nothing separate.

Just confidence to let everything enter.

Just endurance through thick and thin.

Just patience to let everything be.

Just over and over and over again

this step, this breath,

this light, this bell.

Just sitting. Just standing.

Just chanting. Just bowing.

Over and over and over again.

Over and over and over again.

Yet nothing repeated.

The doing the teaching.

Eyes hear, ears see,

Everything HERE.

Sally Hopkins

Rituals

Did you ever as a child

avoid the pavement cracks

for fear of what might happen if you didn't?

Do you ever as an adult

perform a ritual, like crossing fingers

or touching wood, as a hex against harm?

Sometimes rituals are based on superstition;

Sometimes just a habit;

the next thing that comes along;

a movement assigned to auto-pilot

while the mind is busy elsewhere.

Superstition, forgetfulness, laziness...

How easy it is to ignore the true value of ritual,

the movement that connects body, mind, heart;

that, just of itself, re-minds the mind,

with no analysis needed,

no meanings worked out.

Attentive action

Nothing else.

Sue Bidwell

Preparation for Jukai

Yvonne Hales

It was in August 2004 that I started to prepare for jukai. I made my rakusu and, like now, reflected on how my practice would facilitate me living my life by the precepts. At that time, though, I was unable to complete the work and attend the jukai ceremony due to work pressures. Now, as I return to the precepts, preparation assumes a deeper, slower aspect.

The (Ten Grave) precepts are couched in the negative, prohibiting something – not doing, not saying etc. There seems to be a focus on self. Self located at the centre. As I reflect more, I sense a turning away. A turning towards the positive where self is relocated to the margin. When I work with the negative I dwell under the shade of, say, a stand of majestic *Angophora costata* (Sydney Red Gum) - like the buds on a nearby heath plant *Kunzea ambigua* (tick bush) that have not found the right conditions to blossom. The beauty of those buds is within. Constricted maybe. Protected, contained.

When I meet the positive, however, I stretch out and up towards the light. The buds slowly turn away from the shadows towards an opening in the canopy. They breathe in the warmth and light from the filtered sun. Feeling energised I open and present myself to everyone and everything just as I am. The *Kunzea* shows itself off as a mass of scented white flowers. When I turn away from the shade I allow myself to be nurtured by the other.

I feel a tap on my shoulder as preparation takes me further and deeper. Time to wake up.

The belt buckle eases another hole or two. Loosening its hold on the shirt inside. Long, slow breaths. Another layer, falls away. Seeds from the *Kunzea* fall to the ground to settle in and germinate in among the leaf litter.

I make a huge commitment. To myself, my friends and my sangha companions. To others I know and those I don't know. Equally, it is my commitment to the world of animals, oceans, clouds, leaves, moss, shells, raindrops, sandstone rocks and fossils. A world that I feel privileged to share and dwell in. A world of endless knowledge for me to acquire. Wake up!



Ritual and Robes

Justine Mayer

This writing was inspired by Lesley Hanks's comments on ritual and the rakusu and a similar version was previously published in Melbourne Zen Group's Vast and Ordinary News.

I have been intrigued by the origin of the rakusu and the ritual of placing it on our heads, to recite the verse of the rakusu. Lesley's research found myths from 7th Century China that tell of a tree deity giving Sakyamuni a robe to protect him from Mara. He was told to carry it on his head and was only able to wear the robe when enlightened.

Apparently the rakusu is a smaller version of the kesa a robe fastened over the shoulder by a wooden ring. The rakusu was developed to be worn in secrecy in times of persecution.

In case 3 of the Denkoroku the Third Patriarch Shonawashu Sonja (Sanankavasa) asks Ananda (the second Patriarch), "What is the essential nature of things which are intrinsically not born?"

Ananda pointed to the corner of Washu's kesa.

Washu asked again, "What is the essential nature of the supreme way of all Buddhas?"

Ananda tugged at the corner of Washu's kesa.

Washu at once had great enlightenment.

This koan reminded me of being with my young children. They often have to point or tug at me when I'm on the phone or computer or in conversation with other adults. The tugging is always aimed at bringing me away from my own preoccupations back to their far more immediate concerns. They want my attention! It is usually to help them with the toilet, to get them a drink or to see something spectacular: an insect, a cartwheel, a drawing. Like Washu, we are often so preoccupied with trying to work things out. Children are very good at tugging us back to what is really happening in the moment, to just being.

Facilitating the Darwin Zen Group is sometimes hectic. There is often a lot to think about at our weekly sits with orientating new comers and helping people take on leaders' roles. I am often so grateful to sit down and place the rakusu on my head and come back to my senses. I find it is a wonderful ritual.

The Verse of the Rakusu is one of my favorites. It seems to sum up so much of our Zen practice in such a short verse.

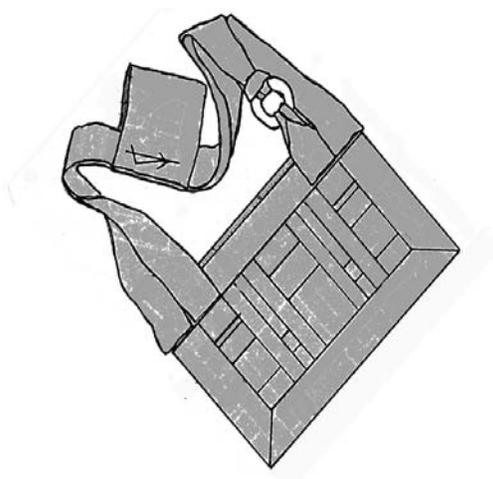
*I wear the robe of liberation,
the formless field of benefaction,
the teachings of the Tathagata,
saving all the many beings.*

The verse suggests that we wear the teachings like a robe. The Dharma as something that is useful and that protects us. Something that is part of us, that we care for and uphold, but it is also something that despite our best intentions, we may get dirty and torn. Bernie Glassman writes in *Infinite Circle*, that the precepts are like a glass. Every moment we are dirtying and muddying and leaving traces on the glass, simply because we are constantly using it.

Through our practice we get a glimpse of ourselves as this robe. This robe that is impossible to define or to find the edges. The robe that becomes the formless field. We are this field that is nothing and yet so vast it contains everything. We may glimpse this formless field in the huge storm clouds and roaring ocean and the din of the tree frogs after the tropical rain.

Our practice is like a continuous tugging to bring ourselves back to just this moment. Over and over. The rituals of Zen help us to come back to this very moment. Just ringing the bell, just the bow, just walking in kinhin, just the rakasu on our head, just this breath.

When our usual preoccupations with our self drop away, we start to find we are more open to what is. With the tug back to the moment, we may find that sometimes we are able to respond to the situation and to others with more openness and spontaneity. With awareness to what is, the usual notions of kindness, generosity and benefaction disappear. Without ideas of doing and receiving, there is no one to give and no one to receive. To just respond to the moment, without being caught in concepts is freedom. Over and over our practice invites us to find this freedom and to wear the robe of liberation, the formless field of benefaction, for the benefit of all beings. I'm very grateful for our practice and the ritual of the rakusu.



On the zafu
rocking slowly,
minutely...

... stopping.

At rest.
At last.

Sue Bidwell

Jet Zen (1)

*Annandale, one Monday evening in 2006,
8.06pm.*

Judy's delicate jiki bells
Call me back to my cushion
And to the breath
Just this, one
Just this, two
Just...

A distant whiiiiistle...?
When does it start?
It locks itself in line.
Snowballing rummmble
It's coming toward me!
(It's coming toward us).
Shearing through the empty sky
Grinding clatter
Windows rattle
Screaming jetscream
Moment-to-moment ROOOOAAAAR
Like a wave overhead
In my head
Parts whirring
In unison
Oiled and tuned gears
Catching and spinning
Happy engineers!
Propelled to land
With a screaming jetstream
And kamikaze intent!
Toward a line of lights
A strip of bitumen.
It gathers its bits
Focusses and steadies
Away over St. Peters.
When does it end?

Energy and silence
Movement and stillness
All things pass quickly awaaay...

Kim McShane



The Greater Vehicle Hojo

Stepping out of the auto -
Mobile hojo, I recollect
My breath.

Caroline Josephs

scent of incense in my hair
moon and clouds slide
above rooftops
I turn
the ignition on

Yvonne Hales

Kodoji Old Dirt Temple

Our Zendo stands on land
That can speak for itself.
No real need for the borrowing
Of name or song or other stuff
That adds layers of distraction
To ground
Already quite grand
And ancient enough.

If you look carefully beneath
This well crafted temple
You will find bits and pieces
Of leftover wood and rusted nails
Wombat shit and spider eggs
Flakes of paint, an oiled rag
A lost coin or two and other surprises.

(Old dirt that when mixed with rain
Turns into ordinary mud
From which no name rises.)

Old Dirt or Ancient Ground
Either will do as well as the other
For though names have their purpose
(As do the songs and the stories)
To pass through the gate
And stand in the now,
Forgetting them all
Is the only how.

Larry Agriesti



The trees conferring
amongst themselves
around the spring

Mullyang*
drawing sky circles
above the farmlands

Diana Levy - on Gulaga, South Coast

*mullyang =eagle (gundungurra)

The Buddha on a Bedford

Brendon Stewart

In early 1946 I moved from my mother's belly into a brick home on a hill from which my mum and dad could look out and see all the way down to the Harbour Bridge. Over the decades since I moved in many of the gardens between our hill top home and the harbour have grown up, now all I can see, on occasion are the sky spluttering fireworks of New Years eve. I like this annual ritual of standing on tippy toes craning up to see more and more of each years best ever display.

This place where I live has a kind of fluidity. It has passed through space and time. Once it was grassland and dry sclerophyll forest and near by my home there are ancient rock carvings, images of the animals that once roamed those forests and grassy slopes and others that swam in the river. Later it was ploughed and farmed and granny Smith's grave, of green apple fame, is nearby in the churchyard of Saint Anne's. Now it is paved and built up with suburban houses and shopping malls. It has also been reafforested, a variegated forest no doubt, very different in botanical make up to the dry sclerophyll, yet beautiful and dense nonetheless. There are homes in amongst the trees and human communities, and cockatoos and eastern rosellas and foxes and wild duck. This is the land that my forebears and I have lived on for nearly 150 years.

I discovered this territory little by little, in the very same way we each do; wandering further from mother's skirt until a whole new universe took shape and mum faded behind my night life. A sense of the scale of the place expanded as I learnt about the region, as I inhabited the world beyond the home. My home grew and spread into an immense cosmic house. My father was an important guide in this. He knew the city tracks, not just the steps, streets and pathways around Central Station or up near the Cross, but the short cuts all the way from the coast to Parramatta. Remembering times with him in the car lets me see Sydney as like a multi-layered city, only readily knowable by people with that "special" knowledge. I practice the ritual of being myself in this place that I identify with as home.

In a garden of violets near my back fence I have a reclining Buddha. This Buddha takes the form of Avalokiteshvara, or maybe it's a reclining Quan Shi Yin. Around his neck a string of small sea shells, bright white against the musty red of her body. I'm never quite certain whether this delightful piece is a man or a woman. I bought her from Garden Artistry on Parramatta road. Whenever I notice her, just in passing or as I leave for a trip somewhere or whenever I am feeling like being religious I offer him a prayer. It's always a selfish prayer. I want something like safety or understanding, sometimes I do offer thanks for the good fortune that has been my lot for all of my life. It's a funny business this way of worship. The Buddha has assumed the character of a nature god, and I recognise how simple, yet ancient are my spiritual needs, how simple are my rituals. Isn't this how rituals happen and take shape? We give to things, both grand and humble talismans, significance; the Buddha on the altar in the Annandale zendo, that piece of wood holds so many of the stories of our sangha. It satisfies simple needs, confirms ancient feelings, and enables the stirring of piety.

Nearby in the garden there are other rocks, all hewn from the sand stone outcrops and cliffs that form up the foundation architecture of the Sydney basin. These blocks I salvaged from the crumbling stonewall that was a part of the old Gladesville mental asylum. I use the word salvage with some presumption; I might also say that I wantonly

took them without permission. A couple of these stones hold our reclining Buddha off the violet bed; others have been sculptured into garden artistry.

A few years back I had the privilege to help with making some of the beautiful art work that we share at Kodoji. It was also at this time that I meet Cotton.

Once upon a time on the shores of Black Wattle Bay, there at the end of Johnson Street Annandale was a business called Thunderbird Marine Salvaging Company. From the foreshores of Sydney harbour Cotton would gather up huge wooden wharf pylons and great blocks of stone that once formed sea walls, the hulks of old yachts and fishing boats, sea washed treasures that fall off the back of trawlers and any other strange wonder from the world of the water ways. Cotton was the only name I knew him by. He rode a black Triumph 1000 motorbike, a great ungainly machine, together they fitted with ease.

The goodwill that extended between us was largely due to the comfort and confidence with which he handled things in the worlds, and this included people, people like me who wandered into his yard with a mix of surprise and unabashed delight. Every time I'd visit I would move around and in between these things of my boyish heaven; heavy machines, great stone wheels, ships propellers, and Cotton himself, I wanted to be near too. He is the type of person that easily lifted away the veil of my wariness. It was here in the Thunderbird yard that I found the stones from which the Buddha at Gorricks is made. Stones marked with crusted on seashells and the fretting of convict pick work; layers that bind us into a special knowledge about this place.

Cotton showed me how to use his mobile crane, angle grinders, masonry drills, he suggested techniques to join and secure the stones and he gave me space to compose and experiment with different assemblages. And eventually we had our Booodhaa, as he would drawl. At the end of these days working hard he'd call me to join him and some other mates in his top office, this involved climbing a ladder through a hole cut in the top of one shipping container and then into the container perched atop. There was always a joint on the round, beer, southern comfort and talk. Cotton, I guess would be about my age, but he seemed less frozen into being an adult, and the talk while flavoured with strong language was never asinine. We spoke of the sea, of recycling, of a working marine harbour, of Buddha and Christ and eventually to the great matter of 'ow ta'll are ya gonna get the Booodha up country.

Up country, to Gorricks, to the Zen land as our kids call it, to Kodoji; to the foothills of those great sand stone bluffs we call the Blue Mountains. To carry these stones home, but how? The money available from the Australia Council grant that SZC had received for our community arts project wasn't that much and hiring a truck with a crane and a driver willing to make the trip was a long way outside my particular budget. So Cotton and I hatched a plan. In the yard he had an old unregistered work truck, a Bedford. It was a model from the 1960s, a J2 general-purpose light lorry with a flat top tray. A piece of shit Bren, but she'll get us there and back. So, on Friday April 2, (1999) I turned up at Thunderbirds about 7 in the morning ready for the great Buddha lift off. But firstly we had to construct some mechanism, a crane I suppose that would be able to lift up and then down again, these very heavy stone blocks. This wasn't to be a straightforward civil engineering exercise. An electric engine with a wire cable wheel had to be found, then bolted to the flat top tray, near to the truck cabin, then wooden shafts were cut to form up a crane derrick which also had to be able to swing on a pivot and carry the wire cable over the fulcrum point. Why were we doing all this on the same morning that I had thought we would be driving to Gorricks?

It looked flimsy!

About noon we set off with a scavenged set of NSW rego plates temporarily attached back and front. Now Cotton smokes and drinks and does things with machines in a way that makes them go fast. Bedfords, even as new, were never meant to go fast. Three huge unsecured blocks of sand stone sat on the tray, the truck groaned away, Cotton smoked a joint, then from his Southern Comfort took a few gulps, I sat with my fear. We slowly worked our way out through the suburbs and onto the Wiseman's Ferry road, I have never been so transfixed by a drive to Gorricks, and never so there, as on that particular drive down hill and around those bends to the river and ferries.

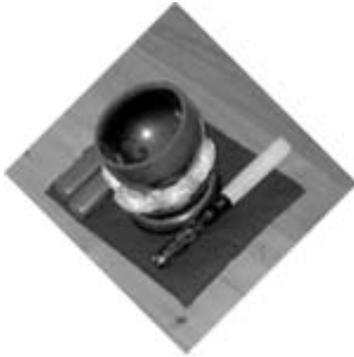
There is a ritual in getting to Gorricks. It begins with the leaving of the city and our homes, of the drive through farmlands and then those dry sclerophyll forests close in and somehow this very ancient place is alive through the windscreen. All this is normal and wondrous at once. Then there are the rivers and ferries, and further on the bridges and creek crossings, each boundary crossing taking you further into country. The few odd cows on the small flat just before Red Rock gate were there, they witnessed the dismantled Buddha pass along and off down the old road that has carried us all so often to sesshin and samu and long before that Gorricks himself and his family, other early farmer settlers and before that again family groups of Dharuk people would have walked and played along that path.

I decided on the place that marks one corner of our temple's inner grounds and we positioned the truck.

Flat straps had been put around the base block and these were fixed to the wire cable. The electric engine, probably as old as the Bedford screamed out its mechanical reluctance at heavy work, and with barely any height gained in the lift we pulled on a swing rope to turn the whole dubious contraption around to position the stone over the site; and then it all flew apart. I think there is a poem that has the line: "and when she blows she bloody blows". At least the first block was on the ground and Cotton and I were both still in our singular bodies. The truck really bounced as the stone crashed onto the side of the flat tray.

We managed to manhandle the three stones into place. Together we lifted and pulled and levered and joked and swore and danced the man's dance with heavy work. As we finished off the night closed in, a cold April night as I remember. The Southern Comfort then was warm and wonderful.

The drive home was fast and without caution. It might appear to others as irresponsible, I dare say it was. I have lost track of Cotton, Thunderbird Marine Salvaging Company is no longer part of our city, the foreshores of Black Wattle Bay are about to be redefined as a leisure marina and pedestrian walk way. The three stones that have taken up the shape of Buddha seem happy enough; the seashells remain bright white against the musty fawn of her body, bird shit and dry grass seeds are sprinkled about her skirt and kids, on tippy toes reach up and climb into his lap.



warm playful breezes
creep through the dojo window
uninvited yet
welcome -
to caress our cheeks

Yvonne Hales

the bell is invited
to sound
twice ...
we swivel around
among reverberating
tones

Yvonne Hales

The beauty of the form
is its endless repetition.
No surprises.
Though faintly bizarre
when first encountered
it becomes an old friend,
promising no novelty,
but demanding attention.
Repeating and repeating
and repeating and repeating
we see
how fleeting they are
we are all is
how marvellously Alive.

Sally Hopkins



The Ancient Camping Ground

Diana Levy

This is another walk in Gundungurra country, part of my book "Walking the Blue: a haiku journey". I performed this piece at Sydney Zen Centre in 2004 with shakuhachi player Bronwyn Kirkpatrick. It relates to Billy Lynch, the great-grandfather of Aunty Dawn Colless who was a force in Blue Mountains aboriginal politics and pushed, and succeeded, in having the Gully declared an Aboriginal Place. Cox's River flows into Warragamba dam - the lifeblood for Sydney town.

The place I wanted to get to is on the Cox's river and the Gundungurra used to camp there in their travels. It is beside the Six Foot Track.

My family and my old zen friend Rob camped beside the Megalong Creek overnight. In the morning we watched a water rat frolicking in the creek, just below azure kingfishers who were diving into it like bombers. We began our walk at the Megalong cemetery, where many Gundungurra are buried. I showed Fanny Lych's grave to my companions, then we set off.

*Downstream
of their graves
the she-oaks sighing*

The track goes through rather denuded paddocks and rampant patches of blackberry at first. Then it winds gently through the bush down towards the river.

*Cox's river
you're curled sleepily
around that hot hill*

A goanna lazily escapes into a fallen tree, tasting the air with his tongue - a line of hairy caterpillars - and lots of earlybird walkers coming back the other way, and mountain bikers who grunt their way uphill. One of them treads on a caterpillar and the line writhes in chaos and confusion.

Rob likes the gradient of the track. "I'm no particular fan of steep hills," he says.

Cox's river is dammed twice above this place, so it's low - a wide bed of smooth pink, bone, grey and white granite and a series of pools. My daughters and Rob want to rest at the swing bridge. They want to walk the bridge, and swim, and lie on the granite rocks sunbaking. I trudge on towards the old campground, and my spirits soar when I find it.

*Peaceful and lonely
a deeply hidden valley -
voices drift across*

Traditional life then white settlement. The Gundungurra survived remarkably well in the Burratorang valley and the Megalong. In the 1880's an important Gundungurra man called Billy Lynch, Fanny's husband, selected forty acres right here and the family lived for a time beside the track. I wonder how they survived?

But now it's 2004: there are families in 4WD's, campers, walkers, mountain bikers and motorbikers on the site. Everything is a mix of the old and the new.

I steam back to my companions for the walk back to the beginning. My feet are sore. But the most charming part of the walk takes away the pain. It's right beside the river, there are boulders everywhere, and grassy dells, and pools. On the way back I see only one flow.

*A green stem of water
falling down rock:
white water flower*

The river life – how can it reproduce if neighbours are isolated off into separate pools? When we're stopped to rest Rob and I hear a strange call from across the river. It sounds..... sounds like...

The drought-stricken paddocks look romantic swathed in the dark of nightfall. In the violet distance, water is spraying far into the air and falling on some kind of bright green crop. I wonder whether it is Cox's water being utilized, for the good, practical, obvious purpose of feeding human beings, rather than the uselessness of shimmer when the sun shines on it, the plash as it falls over smooth granite, and the sound like 'plop!' as a kingfisher dives into it like a bright missile, throwing itself into Megalong Creek in the early morning before we are really up and about and talking in our loud human way about breakfast and the fire and who wants tea, and what'll we have for breakfast. ...

Billy would have walked this track many times to Katoomba to trade wild honey, rabbit or possum skins. Tourists going to the Jenolan caves would have been driven past in a buggy. A sickle moon rises as the orange glow on Narrowneck fades. By the time its dark we're beside the creek again, and we stop to listen to an animal splashing about, perhaps another water rat.

*Faintly and rippled
the moon in the water –
ducks honk overhead.*

Koans and Reflections **prompted by the World as Self Retreat December 2006.**

Justine Mayer

Based on the work of Joanna Macy, the World as Self retreat brought together a diverse sangha, including students from Darwin and Perth. With so much suffering due to wars, poverty, disease and environmental disaster it is often easy to shut out the wider suffering of our planet and to concentrate on our selves and our loved ones. Joanna Macy's experiential work aims to "awaken our will and uncover our deepest motivations ...to reveal these yearnings and help us find in them the courage, commitment and community we need to change our lives and move into action for the healing of our world".

The retreat was held by a schedule of daily zazen, dokusan, and silent meals at the SZC dojo. Every afternoon there was a different activity out in the world around the city and returning to zazen and teishos in the evening followed by deep reflection and sharing.

Lifework.

In this workshop on work and social activism/engaged Buddhism led by Mari Rhydwen we discussed our actual activities in our paid and unpaid work. We went on to explore the things about our work which cause us difficulty, despair and ambivalence.

From The Shoyoroku: Case 15

Guishan asked Yangshan, "Where have you been?"

Yangshan said, "In the rice field."

Guishan said, "How many people are there in the rice field?"

Yangshan thrust his hoe into the ground and stood with his hands clasped on his chest.

Guishan said, "Today many people are cutting reeds on the South Mountain."

This koan provides us with the inspiration to know that all our activity is The Buddha Way. Thrusting his hoe into the ground Yangshan shows us Just This! On the telephone, on the computer, writing, designing, teaching, healing, washing, caring for children. However, Guishan's teaching is deeper. Just this One contains the Many. On reflection we discover *that all social interaction is in fact social action and so can be seen as social activism*. We made lists of our intentions to bring our paid and unpaid work in line with our desires to act in the world for social change and to create a culture of awareness. For many this was a commitment to make lifestyle changes to minimize our impact on the environment. For most it was also raising awareness on a huge range of issues from intolerance to Islam to sustainable housing.

Bearing Witness: The Truth Mandala.

Retreat participants attended Al Gore's movie, 'An Inconvenient Truth.' The movie was about the impact of global warming on the environment. It also showed how Gore's commitment to raise awareness on global warming had been influenced by family tragedy and committed teachers.

During the retreat we chanted Peacemaker Vows inspired by Bernie Glassman Roshi. These vows were dedicated to oneness, healing, diversity, peace and harmony and

included the Vow to Bear Witness. To keep our heart and mind open to the joy and suffering in our lives, family, community and the world. Bernie Glassman writes that *bearing witness is being one with what is*. No why, no right or wrong. Nothing to separate us from others.

During the evening sharing everyone took part in a Truth Mandala led by Gilly. Participants spoke from the heart of their feelings about the state of the world, prompted by holding symbolic objects placed in the centre of the circle. The Truth Mandala was an extraordinarily moving and inspiring way to bear witness to the truth of the suffering that we all share. To be able to embrace this suffering together, without fear or denial was genuinely transforming. Jenny Devlin contributed a poem by David Whyte,

*Enough.
These few words are enough.
If not these words, this breath.
If not this breath, this sitting here.
This opening
to the life
we have refused again and again.
Until now.
Until now.*

Bush Regeneration.

From The Shoyoroku Case 89:

Dongshan addressed his assembly, saying, "At the beginning of autumn and the end of summer, you all are departing east and west, but you should go directly to the place of ten thousand leagues of no grass." And again he said, "How will you go to the place of ten thousand leagues of no grass?"

Shishuang said, "When you emerge from the gate, there is the grass!"

Dayang said, "I would rather say at once, "Even if you don't emerge from the gate, everywhere is covered with grass."

Gilly Coote led us out into the amazing bush land in the heart of Sydney to weed out non-native vines and grasses (which were everywhere) to allow the native plants to regenerate and facilitate the natural biodiversity of the area. Hearing about the history and philosophy of bush regeneration was fascinating and meeting such enthusiastic bush regenerators was inspiring. To be at sesshin and working outside in such beautiful bush was a wonderful way to practice. With infinite care we learnt to recognize the weeds and carefully remove them. It was amazing to observe that the same issues that arise on the cushion: over-enthusiasm, boredom, perplexity, impatience also arise during the grass weeding! And as with practice anywhere, Dongshan's advice to find the place of the 10,000 leagues of no grass was most appropriate. When we let go of all expectations of how our lives should be and we find this place, no matter whether we are weeding, typing, wiping etc, we are able to take up all the tasks of our life with joy.

A Day with Aboriginal Elder Uncle Max Harrison.

Uncle Max Harrison took us out to Lane Cove bushland to teach us about country. He said to *let the language of the land speak to us*. He showed us how to begin to listen and understand the language of the land by sharing his culture with us. It had many resonances with Zen teachings.

From The Mumonkan: Case 37

A monk asked Chao-chou, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West? Chao-chou said, "The oak tree in the courtyard."

Wu-men's comment:

If you can see intimately into the essence of Chao-chou's response, there is no Shakyamuni in the past and no Maitreya in the future.

Wu-men's verse:

Words do not convey the fact

Language is not expedient.

Attached to words, your life is lost;

Blocked by phrases, you are bewildered.

Just as Chao-chou called out, "Oak tree in the courtyard", Uncle Max called out to his relations: the trees and birds and sun and moon, showing us another way to see intimately into the essence of our True Selves. As Wu-men points out, this is a way of being which is beyond time, space, and language and Aboriginal people understand this. Wu-men calls it bewilderment and it is True Bewilderment. A *Not Knowing* from where we are able to truly listen to country. We gain a deep sense of place and connection, and a recognition of our True Home. And with this recognition comes responsibility. Uncle Max points this out, how in his culture there is a sense of respect and responsibility to the land as to all things. We learnt over and over how to only take what was freely given and only with permission and consideration of all others. It was a wonderful day with a deeply inspiring and respectful teacher.

Shopping: Aversion and Desire as Practice.

Subhana took us to a Sydney shopping mall. This provoked mostly strong feelings of aversion. We practiced awareness and worked with the Peacemakers commitment to Be Diversity. We walked around the shops mindfully observing our thoughts and feelings, however it was only in the bookshop that strong feelings of desire emerged! Subhana led us through a range of really intriguing exercises on desire and aversion during which we made notes and then continued with the reflections during the evening's sharing. This was a surprisingly deep and thought-provoking way to practice with the familiar, leading to profound insights into our deepest desires.

From Dongshan's Five Ranks: The Fourth Rank (Hensho Goi)

Two crossed swords, neither permitting retreat:

Dexterously wielded, like the lotus in the midst of fire –

The natural spirit of the supreme encounter.

Our insights in the dojo give us glimpses into the relationship between the Relative and the Absolute, but the challenge is to take these insights into our daily life. The two crossed swords of Dongshan's verse suggest an equal tension and some dexterity is required, to live like the lotus amidst the fire in the turmoil of aversions and desires in our everyday lives.

To be able to acknowledge and be open to the suffering of the craving and avoiding in the fire of our lives, is to live knowing that desire is always accompanied by aversion and aversion always accompanied by desire. We can live thrown around by these feelings or we can find the tension between the two and see beyond these extremes to a place where they meet, right here and now in the nitty gritty of just this moment. To be present to our actual experience, to be present to the experience of our desire and aversion in this very moment, is the natural spirit of the supreme encounter. To accept all that is offered with equanimity, beyond like and dislike is to find the lotus in the midst of the fire and the tension between the Relative and the Absolute.

World as Self.

From the Hekiganroku: Case 87:

Yunmen said, "Medicine and sickness mutually correspond. If the whole world is medicine, what is the self?"

In her last teisho of the World as Self Retreat, Subhana asked us to consider what it is that we really desire? To live and love well? To contribute? How do we want to achieve this? This retreat was a wonderful way to reflect on these issues. It provided thought provoking experiences to give us insight into the way in which we live in the world and the world as practice. It was a marvelous opportunity to take sesshin mind into everyday life, with morning and evening Zazen, dokusan, teishos and silent meals, but also mixed with activities and conversation and a chance for profound sharing and reflection. Throughout the retreat many comments were made on the importance of being in nature, practicing with the precepts and joining Sangha discussions for connecting with our deeper aspirations to live and love well.

The retreat brought up many issues that we face in our lives. We shared concerns about our difficulties at work, our social justice activities, our fear for the environment, fear for our children's future and our despair at so much suffering due to greed, hatred and ignorance in our world. However, as Yunmen points out in his koan: medicine and sickness mutually correspond. When confronted by all the disasters and sickness on our planet, it is from our practice of awareness and openness that our feelings of compassion arise and we are moved to act, to find a medicine or remedy. Without our ability to bear witness and see the world as self, we would not be moved from despair to act with compassion for the benefit of all beings.

On this retreat we came to understand that all work is social action and that all suffering is the suffering of self. We felt appreciation for the teachings, and support of Sangha and felt deeply responsible and motivated to create a culture of awareness for change. We felt the joy of working in the dirt and green of this land, the joy of feeling connected to place and all beings. We experienced being Oneness and being Diversity. We learnt what it would be to live equanimously, like the lotus within the fire. This retreat was an inspiring affirmation of Zen practice as a way to live and love well and to contribute, by providing a deep understanding that the world is none other than my Self.

Deep bows of gratitude to Subhana and Gilly for their generous teaching, to Jean Brick and Kim Bagot for their leadership and to all participants for their inspirational sharing.

Penjing and Bonsai

Janet Selby

What message do I want to convey? That art is a way of seeing, brought out by keen awareness, and study of the essence of nature. This keen awareness, I practice with zazen. Others cultivate awareness through other means. Art of bonsai brings together for me my love of nature, living in a small unit with no personal garden space, and my zen practice of cultivating awareness. I want to outline the background to Bonsai coming from Chinese Art of Penjing, and show the roots of aesthetic principles inherent in all art and philosophy.

When we sit here in Annandale with zafutons and altar with Tibetan sculpture, chanting Sino-Japanese and Sanskrit, do you ever wonder about its journey to our scattered trees, aeroplanes, crunching gears and garbage trucks? As in any historic journey, each culture takes on aspects of the new environment and cultural nuances that make it more relevant to our daily lives. So with Zen Buddhism as with Bonsai.

In Australia it was considered an oddity, and described as miniature trees, until 1968 Ryde Horticultural School (I have the original notes from Aunty Doris) began lessons. Australia has a wide range of horticultural environments, whose seasons differ more than in predictable Japanese climate, where the cherry blossoms bloom at a specific date. Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne Bonsai Clubs all specialise in different trees depending on the local environment. There is an undercurrent of acceptability for Australian Native Bonsais. Banksia, melaleuca, callistemon, figs, and even eucalypts have been used as stock, with a unique rugged Australian flavour, which differs from the Junipers' and pines' ruggedness in Japanese and Chinese lands.

Being a ceramic artist, I noticed that the trend has not taken such a curve in the containers. Pat Kennedy and Roger Hnatiuk make pots relating to Australian conditions. Japanese pots look odd, not natural. I know of a lovely contorted Casuarina placed in a shiny blue pot, which refers to more feminine qualities. I began to research ceramic bonsai containers. This is what I do: I make a pot with a shape or texture based on my experience of the landscape and environment that the natives survive in, and take it to my club for feedback. They let me know its suitability and technical adjustments, and I have been refining the surfaces and shapes, up until the present. I have a long way to go.

I showed my little windswept juniper to the bonsai workshop one Sunday morning, and they commented that it looked like a PENJING rather than a bonsai. I had never heard of PENJING. They said it had a natural, unrefined quality, rather than strictly adhering to the traditional Japanese rules of bonsai. (They meant it as a compliment.) That's Beginner's Mind at work!

Research brought me to Penjing expert, Karin Albert, whose words of spirituality and beauty gave me heart and inspiration, and some reassurance as to why I had chosen such a hobby nearly two years ago. She spent 5 years living in China learning the language, customs and art of Penjing from masters, and is helping to bring forth the beauty existing there, to the west.

Penjing definition and history

盆栽

Bonsai.

盆景

Penjing.

Penjing and Bonsai are closely related art forms. Penjing is the older form from which Bonsai is derived. They are similar, but as can be seen in the characters: Bonsai means *tree in a pot*, which makes it more narrow a concept than Penjing which translates as *landscape in a pot*. Many of the elaborate tray sceneries created by Chinese artists clearly defy the parameters of bonsai. They use water, rocks, even little clay figurines to express their sentiment.

Penjing as an art form spans over a thousand years. There are records from Tang Dynasty (618-907), and paintings from Song Dynasty (960-1279) depicting scenes with miniature landscapes that would be prized among collectors today. It was during this artistic time that Penjing artists drew inspiration not only

from nature but also from other art forms – poetry and painting. More of that later.

By the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) the art had become very popular and the first manuals appeared. This influx of popularity created more commercial, gimmicky styles imitating dragons or certain lucky characters. The aesthetically sophisticated art was still there, though, until wars and revolutions of the 20th century meant large old collections, along with the masters, were all but lost. Only in the last twenty years or so have conditions in China allowed a renaissance to begin, and extend throughout the world through publications, books and demonstrations by current masters.

Penjing as wordless poems

In poetry, words are carefully selected for meaning sound and associations. In Penjing, the artist carefully perceives a landscape's original features, but he does not reproduce them in every detail. Instead, he chooses those elements which best convey the essence of the scenery.

Also, in Chinese tradition, the artist adds lines of classical poetry to the garden. So when a Penjing is displayed, they choose words as a title, which will enhance the work by its name. Naming a work of art is equivalent of "*bringing the painted dragon to life by putting in the pupils of its eyes*". Traditionally in China, names or poems were bestowed on the display to evoke a certain sentiment expressed.

Penjing Poem by Ding Henian, in Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1368)

The small container fills with water is placed in front of the winding balustrade.

The old Zen master, placid, relishes the creation of forests and springs.

The energy held by two cupped hands swallows the Bohai Sea.

The momentum of a fist-sized rock quells the Himalayan Mountains.

Apparently mist and clouds are generated by this tiny space.

Certainly Sun and Moon are in the sky framed by this pot.

Do not utter amazement at this absence of aspiration.

A single hair can represent the universe.

Aesthetic Principals

I'll outline some principles that are inherent in Penjing and Bonsai. I find that in studying these points, it makes sense in all aspects of our lives, not only to the art that we perceive and create, but also to each breath and encounter. See what you can relate to, with these points, adapted from Karin Albert (translator), *Penjing: Worlds of Wonderment* book and web site: www.venuscomm.com/Penjingdef.html

1. Learning from nature increases open-mindedness, produces relaxed accepting attitude, not to imitate nature, but capture its essence. Implicitness and suggestiveness evokes associations which cannot be seen in reproductions of nature.

2. Opposites:

Distinguish major and minor. Highlight the prominent feature but harmonically include minor components.

Dense and sparse. A balance between the two, as in music, a rhythmic change. It is in the placement of some trees closer together – dense, and others further apart – sparse, which shows the experience of an entire forest.

Refinement and roughness. Blending, Needs both. If rough only, it would not be interesting. If it consisted of minute detail – refinement – it lacks strength and spirit. A balance is needed.

Firm and soft co-exist. Strong masculine or soft feminine trunks straight and square or curved and feminine.

3. Mutual arising of solid and void - emptiness and presence. It is said that 30% emptiness creates liveliness. Qi is created in the void, and complemented in the solid.

4. Interconnectedness - Eying and echoing. What really matters is the way everything blends together into one harmonious, united landscape. No one part exists in isolation, by itself. A sense of inter-relatedness is known as “*gupan*” or looking at one another. Each design element appears to eye all the other parts and perceive its relationship to them. How to do this? Direction of trunks contour texture, colour, slope, are all echoed in each other.

5. Balance and Harmony - light and heavy. A balance through asymmetry, gives visual weight. A stone is heavier than a tree, a near object is heavier than a far object. This produces equilibrium in profound harmony.

As bonsai artists we study a tree's essence, habitat, whole environment, then study the aesthetics of beauty that would suit. There comes a time when intuition tells us when a tree looks 'right'. The rules are written and followed for generations. Yet, if a tree looks odd or has not followed the guidelines, yet it can be acceptable if it has its own character. Australian 'style' of Bonsai is yet to be written about effectively, although there is a website of Native Bonsai enthusiasts: www.farrer.riv.csu.edu.au/ASGAP/bonsai.html.

There is a difference between Australian Natives and other cultivated species. The art of cultivation and horticulture has been going on for a very long time outside Australia. Our natives have had a long time existing on this continent without interference. This is its character, and is sometimes difficult to work with. They can be unreliable, and being untamed, don't take to being wired or pruned. But, not all species respond in this fickle way. If we study the wind-blown coasts with their dwarf melaleucas, we may learn from this environment that the coastal ti-tree is very tough, or that the Port Jackson Fig can be a very fast grower with the right moisture and humidity. (Certain Australian figs are given to beginners, as they are apparently hard to kill!) This is a peculiarly Australian direction and I would like to see a book and exhibition on Australian Style trees, landscapes and containers, shown to the world.

Also unique is its place in time – each season, each drought, each northerly dry wind, each cold snap affects the tree and condition of growth (or not). So even down to each day or morning, each moment is unique in the life of a tree. And us. This tree wouldn't be here without me. I wouldn't be here now without this tree.

That's why a bonsai is never really finished. It can be ready for display at one exhibition, but next time, it will be different. It will have grown and evolved. You don't buy stock then train it and leave it. Join a club to maintain and develop the trees. Like bring up a child, it is a 'work in progress'.

Literati (Bunjin) Style

It is a tree with a tall and sinuous trunk. The foliage only grows near the summit of the tree. This styling is somewhat an exception to the rigorous rules of bonsai because it does not have specific rules. The elusive quality becomes the external form, and is actually the embodiment of a specific state of mind. Some elements which are depicted are:

- aloofness – tall, slender trunk reveals a lonely, elite, withdrawn feeling, towering above the mundane.
- sparseness – less is more, a few simple, clean lines.
- “ya” refined elegance – poise, loftiness of spirit, distinguished gracefulness.
- plainness – unassuming, unpretentious kind of beauty, plain, subtle, austere quality which shines from within showing inner strength.

The Japanese term "bunjin" is derived from the Chinese "wenren." which is a term that came into widespread usage during the Song dynasty (960-1278) to refer to scholars (often government officials) who engaged in literary and painterly arts. These men saw themselves as embodying a particular lofty attitude toward the arts, particularly a dedication to the "amateur ideal" and a naturalistic approach. They disdained and denounced the widespread commercialization of art (i.e., they didn't like professional painters and took exception to their overly contrived or artificial scenes). Thus, the term

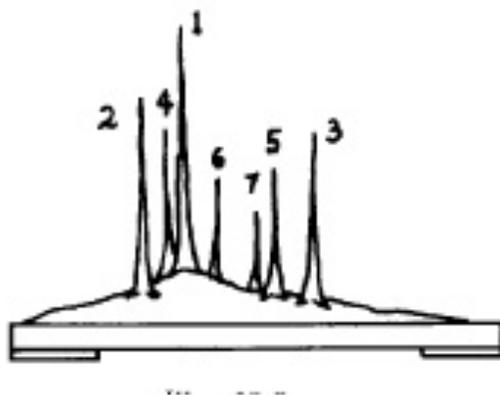
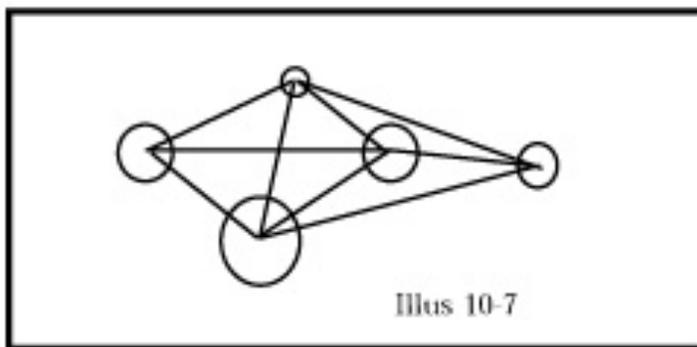
"wenren" came to embody an extremely cultivated (but non-commercial!) artistic sensibility that purported to "get back to nature." In a sense, the "wenren" ideal was a rejection of the profound forces of commercialization sweeping through Chinese society at that time.

The slender trees of these "wenren" painters had an abstract, calligraphic quality that was the inspiration behind cultivating bonsai in this style. It is not meant to represent the natural world but expressionist statements, revealing the artist's temperament and sentiment in a lyrical and succinct quality.

Forest Style

The **forest**, or grove style is one of the classical bonsai styles. The forest is made up of multiple trunks planted together in a single bonsai container. The combined planting creates the image of a forest of trees.

- The forest should have trees of varying heights and thicknesses.
- Each trunk's thickness should be proportional to its height.
- The trunks are carefully arranged so that they appear to be naturally spaced, some near to one another and some far away.
 - Avoid lining up the trunks in rows and aligning in a straight line when viewed from the front and from the side.
- Planting an odd number of trees makes this effect easier to achieve.
- Branches should be arranged so that they do not congest between adjacent trees.

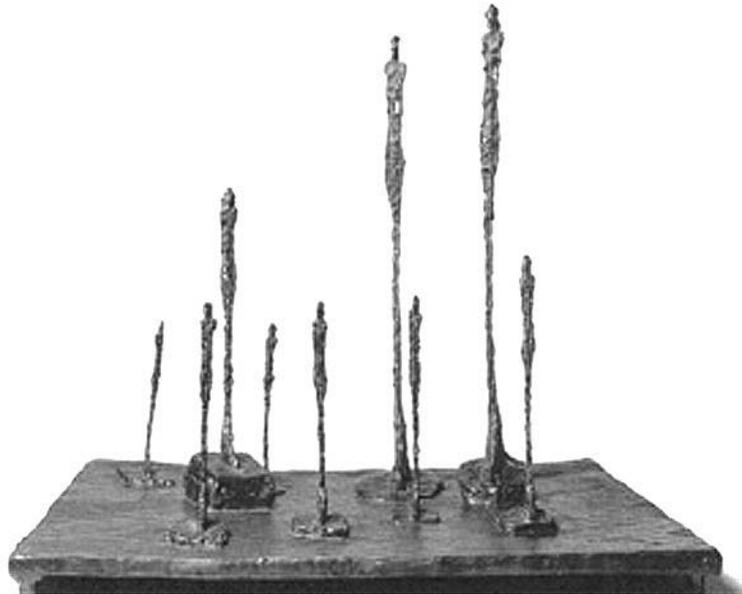


- Each branch needs to be positioned so as to receive light and ventilation.
- The tallest tree should have the thickest trunk; every other tree in the group should be shorter and have a proportionately smaller girth.
- Ideally, the taller tree is three times taller and has a girth three times greater than that of the smaller tree.
- The tallest tree should be about one-third the way in from the side of the container.

Trees grouped in a single group design should, when viewed from the front, present a single outline in the form of a scalene triangle.

An individual standing close to the edge of a forest has a "near view" of that forest. In bonsai, the near view is created by planting the tallest and heaviest trees near the foreground for emphasis, the medium in the central area, and the smallest in the

background to complete the perspective of depth and distance.
An individual far away from the edge of a forest has a distant view,
with the taller, heavier trees in the central area,
the smallest in the foreground and
background, and the medium
trees in between
the others.



Giacometti

Whilst attending the Tom Bass Sculpture Studio School, I studied in detail the works of Giacometti, currently on view in AGNSW until 26 October. I am drawn to his work because of the spiritual search he expressed, *“I seek gropingly to grasp in the void the invisible white thread of the marvellous.”*

There is a piece by him called the Glade, or the Clearing. It is a group of figures – there are a few with groups of figures, some with five or seven figures, and my favourite with nine figures, set out on a flat rectangle. It relates directly to a forest setting in bonsai, outlined above, where the ‘rules’ are followed with each tree clearly seen from the front, etc. Yet Giacometti didn’t need to study any rules, *“I don’t create to make beautiful paintings or beautiful sculptures. Art is just a means of seeing.”*

This wonderful discovery of correlation between Sculpture and Bonsai reminded me that all art is a way of seeing, an intuition of what feels right. The masters and teachers write the books and manuals to help people how to see, as an artist.

There is a sign on wall of Tom Bass Sculpture Studio School, Erskineville. It is a quote from Constantin Brancusi: *“It is not the outward form which is real. It is the essence of a thing. On this basis it is impossible for anyone to express anything real by imitating surface appearance.”*

Also a small quote from Vincent Van Gogh: *“If one truly loves Nature he will find beauty everywhere.”*

I have asked myself how to bring relevance of this Asian art to my own practice and quote Karin Albert from a magazine article, where she has been asked for advice from enthusiasts.

“I’ve been approached by quite a few western bonsai and penjing enthusiasts who ask for advice on how to go beyond mere copying of Asian artists to something more deeply satisfying. They want their work to capture their own personality, their unique perception of the world around them, their own sensibilities, spirituality and understanding of nature. These are great questions with no easy answers though I think the ancient practitioners pondered these very same questions. Revisiting their world with honest curiosity and open-mindedness may reveal important guidelines and establish some signposts that can help lead us onto our own paths.”

A Bonsai artist looks for the character that lies in a tree that comes from the hardships of its environment, and shapes that response into beauty. She employs careful sight exploring the potential in its growth, the buds, the branches, the bark, seeing where the growth will be, imagining what the tree will look like in ten years time, or more, after the artist has died.

It’s like this in life – careful and thoughtful selecting, adjusting and arranging of small things now, that will have lasting effects over time.

Just make sure the buds will form, and wait patiently for the seasons to change.

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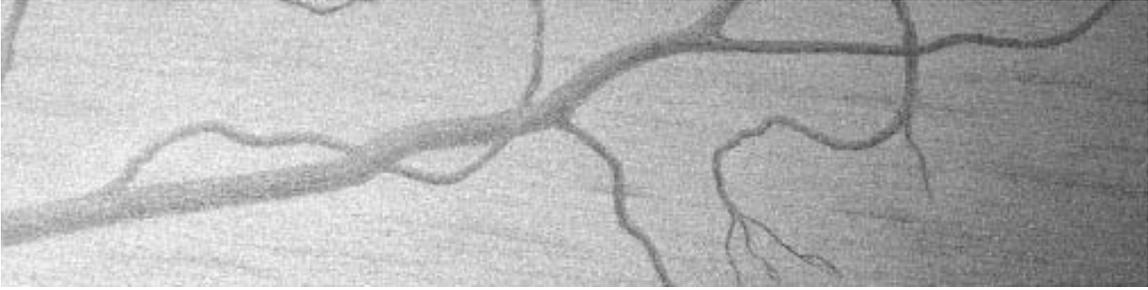
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acacia leaves
silhouette on shoji
candle flames
beckon ...
I silently walk by

Yvonne Hales

low voices among community garden
drift across bushland
I watch ...
careful hands work warm earth
during outside kinhin

Yvonne Hales



The Ritual Between...

Caroline Josephs

I am holding his hand. He is dying, no longer able to sit up, in the hospital. His face is serenity. The body is departing, without struggle. Only his voice, softly telling me of what he is giving – money, art works, bequests, to our Sangha -- a gentle necessity for clarity around these practical details. I am but a friend, a fellow, a Sangha member, a messenger. The hospital has advised that they can do no more and he can return home to be with his family for these last, perhaps days, or weeks... I lean forward to listen, to make sure I remember.

Into the room, shaded to keep out the bright light, comes a woman. She holds a few objects in her hand...two containers, a Bible. She addresses the prone figure in the white shrouded bed. “Would you like to take Communion?” she asks him. “Yes,” he answers without hesitation. She unwraps the communion wafers, offers one to him, as he raises his head slightly to ingest the mystical body of the Other. She offers the wine. He drinks. I watch. She turns to me, “Would you like communion?” she asks, no hint of anything else. “Why not,” I say, smiling, and without thought, I find myself a participant in a Catholic communion. A sip of ‘blood’ is on my tongue. Somehow I feel a little dazed -- or is it dazzled?

The image came to me at that moment when, some twenty years previously, as an employee in the office of the Catholic Church, I was obliged to attend Mass each week -- but never invited to participate in communion. How strangely excluding it seemed, how outside the group of colleagues and schools I was there to serve. Each time, I wondered why I was there.

The woman is gone, as though a breeze has just passed through the room. I am struck like a bell, a strange new sound. We two are hand in hand again in this bare hospital room -- a Chinese-Catholic-Zen Buddhist who has lived in Australia for many years, and a Jewish-European-Zen Buddhist woman born in Australia -- participating together in these final days of life -- in a ritual, usually outside the province of non-Catholics. We have shared a liminal moment...through the Body of Christ – Jewish/Christian/Buddhist aspects of our various selves – all interconnected by an embodiment of ingesting, inhabiting, and being inhabited by....all bodies, all beings, all aspects.....
no body, no being....

The moment remains with me, a shimmer of memory, held in wonder.

Atonement

Larry Agriesti

What an abundant store of treasures
I wake to each morning:
The joy of Mozart and the rising sun
Soft memories of last night's pleasures.
Quick shower, shave
The M4 Motorway paves the way to prison
Where I work mending men
And spend the endless dharma assets.

The path past cells is deserted at this early hour;
I hear inmates making waking noises
Not yet fully here or there, the sheets sour
With last night's fears and sweaty dreams.

In the empty cellblock multicoloured birds announce their perfection
Taking neglected crumbs back to razor wired rose bushes.

Soon prisoners arrive at my door
To talk of issues
They hand me tear soaked tissues
I place them in
The recycle bin.

There are dreams enough and sunlight
Between the dark and empty spaces
And forgiveness enough and love enough
Throughout this prison stage
And what transpires between me and them
Is the honest exchange of what has been
Earned through countless other trials
An accumulation of knowing how and not knowing how
And knowing how not to know.
All that is needed, all that is required is to bear witness and lay
Before the broken and deeply wounded the treasures of healing
Stored in the dharma assets: here, now, free,
At one ment; the open gates are countless.

silently I breathe in
long deep slow
breathing out
I pause -
to settle into nothing

Yvonne Hales

‘Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Centre’
Michael Downing, Counterpoint 2001. Reviewed by *Andrew Judge*

In 1983, amongst allegations of excess and abuse of power, Richard Baker was removed as Abbott of SFZC in an upheaval that shook the most influential Zen Center outside Asia to its core.

This précis was delivered by [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) in its auto-generated recommendation for *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Centre*. The title alone had me, but I felt unsure; what if reading a scandal sheet provided short term entertainment, but severely undermined some edifice I'd constructed of respect for Western Zen practice that kept me sitting? Reviews indicated that at least some SFZC members saw the book as a valuable, considered piece. I ordered. On arrival of the amazon box, I delved into other purchases and gingerly put *Shoes Outside* aside, as if it were invested with some malevolent power. Once I picked it up, I finished the book's 385 page within a day.

Richard Baker, Abbott for life of the first Zen Monastery outside Asia, was forced to resign by the San Francisco Zen Centre (SFZC) board amid allegations of abuse of power and sexual misconduct. In presenting the origins and impact of the 1983 "apocalypse", Michael Downing surveys the period from Shunryu Suzuki's arrival in San Francisco in 1959 to Linda Cutts' transmission in 2000. Downing interviewed extensively, and the book is driven by the stories of people involved with SFZC. The structure of the book and the vignettes about individuals convey the author's perspective.

Downing is not a practitioner, although he did sit at SFZC in the course of his research. The book is structured around an outsider's impressions and does not directly focus on practice, but focuses on the context in which practice occurred. Downing looks from the present, his analysis is sociological and economic. Maybe that's how the story can currently best be told - an outsider telling a traumatic and still tender history. However, this means that the book only obliquely comments on how so many people were drawn to SFZC and then engaged so deeply that they strove to devote themselves to a new mode of living. *Shoes Outside* came as a history of a community that I felt an affinity for, and I brought to it feelings of the impact of practice.

Shoes Outside does raise and give some consideration to range of significant issues emerging in the adoption of an Asian religious tradition in the west, including; the appropriate level of formality in ritual, the blending and distinction of lay and monastic practice, the primacy of the teacher and the role of democratic processes, the place of social engagement and how to fund a large Western Buddhist organisation. *Shoes Outside* acted as a dramatic introduction to many of these concerns.

The book is centred on Richard Baker's period as Abbott. Much of the material on the relationships between Baker and students came as a grim surprise. I realised that I had assumed that the nature of the organisation guaranteed some certainties. The centrality and dynamism of the relationship between teacher and student and the need for continual respect and awareness came through. Downing focuses on sexual, financial, political and institutional aspects. From the numbers and the dedication of students there must have been strengths in the teaching throughout the '70's, though this is not communicated clearly in *Shoes Outside*. I was left with fewer certainties.

The people involved are intriguing and inspirational; Suzuki's original students and their journey, poets Phil Whalen and Gary Snyder, drag performer Tommy Dorsey who became a Roshi and AIDS hospice founder, the Grateful Dead performing a 'Zenefit' fundraiser. The intensity and sense of possibility turns the pages for you. I also found that the proximity of the experience portrayed vividly the faults, failings and moments of connection and transcendence. This is recent history of people that I could meet, on streets that I've walked. I find myself with a few less distancing conceptions of what practice may be.

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←Close Open→

winter evening
door opens closes
we enter the warm dojo
slowly settling
with the han

**Journal of the
Sydney Zen Centre**

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