



MIND  
MOON  
CIRCLE



AUTUMN  
2011

This edition of Mind Moon Circle is devoted to our country retreat centre, Gorricks Run, and the Ancient Ground Temple (Kodoji) that we have built there.

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The next issue is devoted to jukai and the precepts. Anything related to these two topics is welcome: stories, ruminations, personal experiences, memories, thought pieces, poems – all welcome.

Due date: mid-May. Contact Lee Nutter: [leenutter@gmail.com](mailto:leenutter@gmail.com)

Photographs:

Jonathon Case

Glenys Jackson

Caroline Josephs

Rob Scott-Mitchell

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# Discovering Ancient Ground

## Past Present and Future

Geoff Dawson

The story of how Gorrick's Run happened to become associated with the Sydney Zen Centre began in the early 1980's. A couple of years after I returned from studying Zen in Hawaii with Robert Aitken Roshi, I became interested in buying a rural property for the purpose of creating a retreat centre.

At that time the Sydney Zen Centre resided in Provincial Road Lindfield. A few resident Zen students lived there and the place became a centre for weekly sitting, zazenkais and sesshin. We also became incorporated as a non-profit organization around about the same time.

I remember searching the pages of the Sydney Morning Herald on weekends looking for rural properties within about a two to three hour drive from Sydney. I was particularly interested in the Colo River area to begin with as I did a lot of bushwalking in the area and loved the meandering river that wound its way through the wilderness and pastoral landscape.

I kept looking in the Colo River area for about a year but it was not meant to be. The prices were usually beyond my reach and often the less expensive land was cheaper because it flooded and there were restrictions on what you could build and where.

One weekend I saw an advertisement for a couple of properties in the McDonald Valley area and became curious. No wonder the McDonald River area is known as *The Forgotten Valley*, I didn't even know about it. I had lived in Sydney all my life and did a lot of exploring in the rural areas but it was off my radar screen.

Driving up from Sydney I was struck by the beauty of the natural scenery and the traces of bygone colonial history in the old St. Alban's pub.



The Real Estate agent first introduced me to a smaller block of about 5 acres closer to town that was hilly and not suitable for building. I suspected he was setting me up for the *piece de resistance*. He told me about this 40 acre property that was at the very end of a small valley called Gorrick's Run that ran off the main McDonald

River valley. He said in a cautionary way that it was very isolated and had no power or any other facilities, perhaps testing whether it was a waste of time taking me there. I remember being intrigued and excited rather than put off.

We drove up and crossed over the ford (which was far more primitive than it is today) and wound our way along the bumpy four wheel drive track until the valley opened out into a vast amphitheatre enclosed with high sandstone cliffs. How ancient and lonely and quiet it was - again with remnants of transient human existence embodied in the dilapidated ruins of twisted iron and sheet metal where a homestead once stood. We drove up onto the main paddock where the zendo and the house are today and my decision was immediate. This is it! - my whole being seemed to be saying.

I told the agent that I was definitely interested in buying it either for myself or that a meditation group that I belonged to may be interested in buying it for a retreat centre. Things moved quickly from there. Other Sydney Zen Centre members came and had a look with me and we decided that the newly incorporated Sydney Zen Centre would buy it. A number of people put up the money of \$40,000 - mainly myself, Tony and Gilly Coote, Cathy and Kim Lukeman and a few others.

Then we hit a legal snag. The contracts were exchanged and all was going according to plan until the vendors tried to rescind the contract on the grounds that we misled them to believe that the property was for private use and not for a retreat centre – even though the contract had the name Sydney Zen Centre on it! We suspected that either they were offered a better deal or they started to catastrophize about their quiet valley being overtaken by religious fanatics.

One year and \$5,000 in lawyer's fees later the legal issues were resolved out of court and the land became the property of the Sydney Zen Centre. I mention these legal conflicts because it is important that those who visit Ancient Ground are aware of the karma behind acquiring it. I can give my personal assurance that the above facts are correct and the land was acquired without deception.

I remember researching the history of Gorrick's Run shortly after we purchased it. Originally the Darkinjang tribe were the custodians of this ancient land for tens of thousands of years. The hills and valleys surrounding the Gorrick's Run/McDonald Valley are rich in Aboriginal sacred sites and there is one particular site we visited with an Aboriginal guide many years ago that was about a two hours walk further up the valley from the zendo. It was deeply moving to be there in that surprisingly well-preserved grotto.

It was a large overhung sandstone cave where just about every available space was filled with drawings of kangaroos, stencilled hand images, and human figures. They were painted in fading red and yellow ochres that evoked a story of a rich and vibrant culture that had also faded out with the encroachment of white settlement over just a few generations. The guide believed that it was probably a sacred site for male initiations. It was sobering to sit there on that warm summer afternoon deep in the Australian bush and reflect that there were no longer any local Aboriginal males to initiate into their ancient way. There was also a sense of joy and reverence to be in the living presence of their ceremonial life.

In the early eighteen hundreds the whole McDonald River valley was taken over by white settlement and became a prosperous and bustling community of wheat farmers. The area was known as the breadbasket for early colonial Sydney and sailing ships were able to navigate right up the McDonald River to where the St Alban's pub now stands and transport grain back to Sydney Harbor via the Hawkesbury River. Even the creek that runs through Gorrick's Run was once a free flowing stream before it silted up due to European farming practices. We were told that you could once fish for perch there!

The historical records cited in the book *The Forgotten Valley - A History of the MacDonald Valley and St. Albans, NSW*<sup>1</sup> appear to show that the Sydney Zen Centre property was originally owned by a John Bailey. Isaac Gorrick owned most of the valley and hence is where the valley gets its name. The farms were used for growing crops and if you look closely you can still see the remnants of furrows in the big paddock where the zendo is. It is even clearer if you look down on the paddock from the cliff tops and get a topographical view. When the Sydney Zen Centre bought the property it was being used to graze cattle and horses and there was more cleared land than there is today. The other side of the creek was a broad grassy paddock that has gradually grown back, mainly with wattles.

Over the months and years following the property settlement, we spent many weekends building the first house - a motley crew of novice builders ably led by Tony Coote. Within a few years we were running sesshin there. The zendo was built later after I left the Sydney Zen Centre.

I can remember during many building weekends, sesshins and time spent there alone reflecting on the timelessness of the place – this seems to be one of the enduring characteristics that the valley and the crumbling sandstone cliffs evoke. I often recalled lines from the Shodoka (Song of Realization):

*In a profound valley beneath high cliffs, I sit under the old (pine) trees.  
Zazen in my rustic cottage is peaceful, lonely and truly comfortable.*

When you reflect on it, Ancient Ground at Gorrick's Run is the coming together of many disparate influences - folks of mainly European background, practicing an Asian religion in an indigenous Australian landscape. We consider our European roots and where our ancestors came from on the far side of the world. Empires have come and gone; the glittering reigns of English Kings and Queens have come and gone; a flotilla of sailing ships voyages half way round the world and lands the first boat people in Sydney Harbor; electricity, motor cars, radios, television and computers are invented, and a man is landed on the moon.

In another part of the globe the Buddha attained full awakening 2,500 years ago in India and returned to his own original nature. Twenty-eight generations later Bodhidharma took the same realization to China and had his now famous interview with the Emperor and declared that he didn't know who he was. Dogen went to China seeking the same realization and brought his wonderfully horizontal eyes and vertical nose back to Japan. Robert Aitken decided to learn Zen from the same people that were his gaolers during the Pacific War and generously passed it on to these shores.

And all the while wombats have trundled along the same hillside tracks foraging for food at Gorrick's Run; the mopoke owls have hooted tirelessly through all the phases of the moon, season after season. The wind has blown through the same quiet landscape, oblivious to the achievements and sufferings of the human species. Perhaps the Darkinjang people corroborated on the same big paddock, drawn to the wide and level valley floor and the natural amphitheatre of the high cliffs.

Now this same Ancient Ground, in its own unassuming way, invites all who go there to return to their original nature. May it continue to be a rite of passage for generations to come.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Forgotten Valley - History of the MacDonald Valley and St. Albans NSW. McHutton Neve. Library of Australian History 1987.*

# Building Kodoji<sup>2</sup>

Tony Coote  
Honorary Architect, Sydney Zen Centre

## HISTORY

The building project at Gorricks Run started in 1984 following a long hiatus period when SZC's proposed purchase of the property was the subject of legal challenge.

The first structures completed were the tank stand and a single pit toilet. Designed to be portable, the toilet has since been moved a couple of times. Then followed the cottage and kitchen (which was installed on just one weekend), a bush shower enclosure, an additional double pit toilet and a hut for the teacher (the Hojo). Until the completion of the new Dojo, retreats were held in the cottage using upstairs and downstairs as the dojo for up to forty people.

From the beginning, the idea of a separate dojo was part of the long term plan for Gorricks Run. At a Sangha gathering on July 18, 1993 called Visioning our Spiritual Home, this idea was discussed in more detail and at an Extraordinary General Meeting on the 17th of July 1994 it was unanimously decided "that the Sydney Zen Centre build a Dojo on its Gorricks Run property sufficient to accommodate future sesshin."

Various plans for the new Dojo designed by honorary architect Tony Coote were discussed, amended, approved and finally, submitted to Hawkesbury Council in July 1995. Then there was a long period of negotiation with the Council following a concerted campaign against the project by a couple of neighbours. Development Approval was finally granted but with a number of quite onerous conditions. We objected to the conditions and after many more months of negotiation, our objections were upheld and on June 5 1996, Building Approval was granted.

In September '96, after further meetings with the board to address some last minute concerns about the proposed location of the Dojo and the length of the connecting bridge to the cottage, building started and continued on the fourth weekend of each month. Work periods were also included in a number of sesshin, The polishing of the Dojo floor marked the practical completion of the project on July 6 2001.

## INSPIRATION

In the Northern Summer of 1982 at San Juan Ridge in Northern California, volunteer building workers came from all over the United States and various overseas countries (including Gilly and Tony Coote from Australia) to construct a new Dojo and Kitchen for the Ring of Bone Zendo. The buildings were constructed in three weeks. They were built by enthusiastic amateurs with the help of a small number of building professionals. Everyone had a really great time and lifelong friendships were formed.

The opening ceremony was performed by Yamada Roshi with Aitken Roshi only two months later. The project was the inspiration for the Gorricks Run Zendo giving us the confidence to launch into our own Zendo building.

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<sup>2</sup> Originally published in *Mind Moon Circle*, Spring 2001

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The principal idea for the new buildings was that they should appear entirely appropriate to their setting in the old paddock at Gorricks Run and that they should fit into the landscape as comfortably as possible. The forms and materials used in the farm buildings and sheds of the MacDonald Valley built since white settlement in the 1820s were the inspiration for the design of all the buildings.

Our tradition of Zen has a dear architectural aesthetic that can still be seen today in the temples of Kyoto, Kamakura and other parts of Japan. As well as reflecting the local farm buildings, the simple roof forms and surrounding verandahs of the cottage, Hojo and new Dojo also reflect the forms of traditional Japanese Buddhist meditation halls.



The simplicity of the design for the buildings has also been a response to the difficulty of access to the site, the inexperience of the voluntary workers, the absence of lifting equipment, a limited range of tools (for most of the project no power tools), as well as the sporadic nature of the work periods.

### **Low energy consumption and sustainability**

#### *Choice of materials and construction techniques*

All the buildings are timber framed structures, mostly out of plantation pine. The earlier buildings have hardwood floors and verandah framing with hardwood verandah decking, but the new Dojo is framed entirely out of plantation pine. CCA treated stumps support the



floor and CCA treated pine is used for bearers, joists, decking and for the roof timbers where they are exposed to the atmosphere. CCA pine fence palings have been used as wall lining for the pit toilets and shower enclosure.

The choice of timber framing for the structures was governed by a number of criteria including the fact that timber is one of the very few renewable resources. It is also easy to

transport (often on car roof racks), easy to lift into place, relatively easy to work with and there is no need for site excavation. The Australian Conservation Foundation recommends that plantation pine should be used instead of hardwood because, at present, there is no proper forest stewardship in place and 70% of all hardwood logged goes to woodchips. Other materials used in the project, such as the zincalume roof, hardiflex wall cladding, were also chosen for their ease of use and ease of transportation. Mud brick, that cheap and environmentally friendly material, was not an option because the local soil was far too sandy and we did not wish to import soil. As well, until the roofs were built and tanks put in place, there was no water on site to make the bricks with.

Cost has been a major factor in the selection of materials as the whole project has been built on a shoestring budget. Second hand timber, windows and doors have been used. The glass doors in the cottage were hand made and glazed with second hand shop window glass which was also used in the cottage louvres.

### *Natural light and ventilation*

The temperature in the valley varies from minus 6 in mid winter to plus 45 in summer and frosts are quite common in Winter. However, the main Dojo has been designed mainly for summer conditions as it was considered easier to rug up against the cold. The long wall of the Dojo faces north and there are verandahs on all four sides to give shade and shelter. A ventilated clerestorey gives air movement on hot days as well as an even natural light. The verandahs have been lined and insulated to prevent condensation dripping after frost and heat radiation from the roof on hot days and a gap has been left at the junction of the verandah and main roofs to allow ventilation of warm air. All the buildings have been located at the base of a steep hill which runs north south and which shades the buildings from the western sun in summer after about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

### SERVICES

At Gorricks Run there is no mains electricity, gas, water supply or sewerage system. There is no garbage collection or mail delivery. There is a telephone, which, thanks to a rural subsidy, was installed for a standard fee of \$185 even though this involved running underground cable for three kilometres. The various services are as follows:

Sewerage: Pit toilets which are moveable when pits are full.

Grey water: Grey water: Waste water from the kitchen sink flows via a grease trap into an absorption trench. Water from the camp showers flows through the timber decking into the sandy soil underneath the shower enclosure.

Lighting: Solar panels have been installed on the Dojo roof with collection and storage sufficient to go about 10 days without any sun. During retreats, the use of lighting is carefully regulated to preserve power.

LP gas: Two 50 kg bottles supply cooking and refrigeration gas.

Water: Water 30,000 litre capacity tanks are filled with rain water collected from the roofs of the cottage and the Dojo. Water is used for washing and cooking but not toilet flushing which is a great saving. Water is gravity fed to outlets.

Hot water: A purpose-made stainless steel chip heater is used for showers.

Heating: The cottage has a potbelly stove. The Dojo is unheated, and retreat participants dress for the cold in winter and the heat in summer. This follows

the traditional Japanese practice for Zen Buddhist retreats and keeps the meditators alert and mindful of the changes in season.

Fuel supply: All firewood comes from on site and only fallen acacia wood is used.

## WASTE CONSIDERATIONS



Because of the very limited budget and the difficult access to the site, very careful ordering of materials during construction limited the creation of waste to a minimum. To ensure accurate ordering of materials, framing drawings were made for all walls, floors and roofs and layout drawings were made for sheet materials such as plywood, gyprock and metal roofing.



The use of water and the limitation of waste are factors which are given close attention during Zen Buddhist retreats. For example, each person is given a single bucket of warm water each day for the camp showers and careful attention is paid to ordering the

correct quantities of food, most of which is kept without refrigeration (even in summer) and all waste is sorted for recycling.

The traditional Japanese Zen Buddhist oryoki system is used for serving food. Meals are served where people sit in the Dojo (ie there is no need for a separate dining hall) People keep their own bowls with them throughout the retreat, washing them after each meal by hand using only hot water poured into the bowl (no soap is used and only half a cup of hot water). The washing up water (in fact a tasty broth) is drunk off, before the bowls are dried and wrapped in a towel for the next meal.

After a seven day retreat for 40 people (ie 840 meals) the waste, including what is recyclable, is only enough to fill two garbage bags.

## KODOJI BUILDERS

With some exceptions, such as the Dojo roof plumbing, flooring and internal plaster board work together with solar lighting system, all the work of Kodoji was completed by volunteer labour, mostly with hand tools. A generator was bought during the construction of the Dojo.

Many of the volunteers were totally unskilled, some not knowing which end of a nail to put into the wood. However for some, the experience of working on this project gave them the confidence to become owner-builders for their own homes. The work was done over the years on one weekend a month beginning in 1995. From time to time there were slightly longer working periods.

### Credits:

Hon. Architect/Builder/co-ordinator:	Tony Coote
Hon. Structural Engineer:	Kym Lukeman
Solar lighting:	Phil Hunt
Roof and gas plumber:	Bradley Sendt
Floor layer:	Peter Hughes

Many members of the Sydney Zen Centre and other friends have contributed over the years to the construction of the buildings and to the new Dojo, both at work weekends and during samu at sesshin. Gilly Coote, Patrick Forman, Mathew Arkinstall, Greg Carty, Mike Fuller-Lewis, Larry Agriesti, Jean Brick, Jenny Gentle and Caroline Josephs have been regulars at the samu weekends for the new Dojo building. Art works were made possible with a grant from the Australia Council.

Stone Buddha:	Brendon Stewart
Altar:	Tony Coote, Patrick Forman
Altar cloth, banners:	Glenys Jackson
Entry calligraphy:	Glenys Jackson
Offering bowls:	Patrick Forman
Hans and click sticks:	Patrick Forman
Entry painting:	Phaptawan Suwarinakudt

What next? We're out of funds for any more building at Gorricks Run. However, when SZC's finances are looking more robust, we hope to fix up the 'temporary' kitchen, and provide a storage space for mattresses and tools.



### UPDATE

As this edition of MMC is prepared in the last week of March 2011, a building samu with around twenty people is enclosing both ends of the cottage verandah, creating a covered choppers' space and a second hojo, weeding, painting and carrying out general maintenance.

# The Ballad of Gorrick's Run

(with apologies to A B Paterson)

Tony Coote

There was movement in the Dojo when the word was passed around,  
that two blokes from Gorricks Run had land for sale.  
They had once flown planes for Qantas, but now lived on the ground –  
growing cattle and consuming pints of ale.

Robinson, the agent, said he'd sell the land for Zen,  
so contracts with those pilots were exchanged.  
Then an architect named Snodgrass took his students with their pens  
to Gorricks for a workshop, as arranged.

To design a great Zen complex was the students' mighty plan,  
and they boasted to a stranger of their scheme.  
But that stranger had a yen to buy the next-door block of land  
And he was not impressed by their Zen dreams.

So he went and told the pilots, "It's either them or us!"  
To the pilots he was worth a lot of dough.  
And so they asked their lawyer, with a minimum of fuss,  
To tell those pesky Buddhists where to go.

The pilots, in their greedy haste, had forgotten just one fact  
which was of course, the contracts they'd exchanged.  
And the law don't make it easy - to give and then take back –  
and they had to wait till bearings were arranged.

Now Zen students love hard sitting when there's nothing else to do,  
and to them a blink could be a million years.  
But that stranger was impatient and in a month or two  
gave up and left the pilots to their beers.

So up by Womerah Creek today, where Gorrick had his run,  
a motley mob of Buddhists dance and play.  
They sit in meditation before the rising of the sun,  
and the cliffs resound with chanting every day.

Reprinted from *Mind Moon Circle* Spring 2001

# Opening the Eyes of Kodoji

Robert Aitken Roshi

This teisho was given on October 28 2001 on the occasion of the opening ceremony for our Temple of the Ancient Ground (Kodoji). It is re-printed from *Mind Moon Circle*, Spring 2001.

With our ceremony of opening the eyes of Kodoji, Temple of the Ancient Ground, it is appropriate that we recall our heritage and our own early beginnings.

When the Buddha was walking with friends and disciples, he pointed to the ground, and said, "Here is a good place to erect a sanctuary."  
Indra, King of the Gods, took a blade of grass and inserted it into the ground, saying, "The sanctuary is erected."  
The Buddha smiled.<sup>3</sup>



Indra's words are a bit like those of Dogen Zenji, when he said, "Zazen is itself enlightenment!"<sup>4</sup> They can evoke a kind of magic thinking, and students may be inclined just to sit there complacently, or to feel that any old shack will do for a temple. Such a fundamental misunderstanding!

Dogen certainly did not mean that the Buddha had the same kind of busy mind that troubles so many of us. Likewise the blade of grass inserted into the ground was the sanctuary of the Buddha, for Indra. Something to be lived up to, and 'living up to' is hard work.

When Pao Fu and Ch'ang Ch'ing were wandering in the mountains, Pao Fu pointed to the ground and said, "Right here is the top of Wondrous Mountain!"  
Ch'ang Ch'ing said, "That's true, but a pity!"<sup>5</sup>

Wondrous Mountain is Mt. Sumeru, the centre of paradise in Hua Yen legend. How do you paraphrase Ch'ang Ch'ing's words, "That's true, but a pity"? The Buddha might have said, after he smiled at Indra, "Yes, but where is the women's bathroom in that sanctuary?"

What does 'sanctuary' mean for us in these troubled, perilous times? As an American, I think of Rosa Parks, whose sanctuary was the front of the bus at the outset of the civil rights movement in the American south. She did nothing at all, but just sat there. And I think of the young men

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Cleary, *Book of Serenity* (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne, 1990)

<sup>4</sup> Dogen Kigen, *Shobogenzo: Gyakudo Yojinshu*, cited by Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1987), p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas and J.C. Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), p. 154.

who just sat there on stools of segregated lunch counters. As Australians, I'm sure you can think of your own heroes and heroines who held fast in the context of iniquity. They are our inspiration, and we can say with all of them, "This is our place, this is our seat of fundamental human integrity." We too can bring the sanctuary of decency and Right Views into reality in our homes, work places, and practice centres, Any old shack really will do, after all, if it's squarely in the way.



Traditional people understood that a place can be sacred to begin with, and mainstream religions have, down through ages, been in touch with this innate human sense of feng shui. Look around Sydney, or any western city. Catholic churches are located on splendid sites. Down through the ages, spiritual

centres have been carefully placed, from the temples of Babylon to the sacred initiation rings the Darkinjung people formed, we are told, at Burrbung grounds by the Hawkesbury River near here.<sup>6</sup> We locate our new temple on land we inherit from the Darkinjung, at the head of a deep valley, with a stream running nearby, in keeping with primordial protocol.<sup>7</sup>

Then there is the foundation of the actual structure itself. Tradition and its archetypes again guide us:

Nan Ch'uan and two brother monks set out see the National Teacher Hui-chung. Halfway there, Nan Ch'uan drew a circle on the ground and said, "If you can say something, then let's go on." Kuei Tsung seated himself inside the circle and Ma Ku made a woman's bow before him. Nan Ch'uan said, "Then let's not go on". Kuei Tsung said, "What's going on?"<sup>8</sup>

Like Indra, Nan Ch'uan and his brothers are disclosing the significance of the true temple, though their impro is richer. Hsueh Tou, compiler of the *Blue Cliff Record*, titles this case, "Nan Ch'uan's Circle," and that is the first koan point. But there is an architectonic point as well.

Adrian Snodgrass, in his cogent study, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, explains that the circle, radiated and expanded from a central point, is the primary figure in the plan of a stupa or a pagoda.<sup>9</sup>

It follows that Kuei Tsung seating himself in the middle of the circle is identifying the central point. "Right here", as the Buddha said. What is Kuei Tsung's living metaphor? This matter too

<sup>6</sup> E-mail communication from Gillian Coote, August 24, 2001, citing a survey by R.H. Matthews, Royal Society of Victoria, 1897.

<sup>7</sup> Henry H. Lim, *The Art & Science of Feng Shui: The Ancient Chinese Tradition of Shaping Fate*, (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), pp. 107-126.

<sup>8</sup> Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, p. 386.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University, 1985), pp. 12-157.

is not to be taken lightly. The point is, as Mircea Eliade declares, the axis mundi, the meeting of heaven, earth and hell.<sup>10</sup> Kuei Tsung is like Pai Chang, alone in the universe:

A monk asked Pai Chang, "What is a matter of special wonder? Pai Chang said, "Sitting alone at Ta Hsiung Peak." The monk bowed.<sup>11</sup>

Ta Hsiung Peak was where Pai Chang was sitting, there in his monastery. The monk bowed, not a woman's bow, but very much in keeping with the response of Ma Ku to Kuei Tsung's presentation. But the story goes on to relate how Pai Chang hit the monk as he bowed. What might he be saying as he struck? You'll find a paraphrase in the story of Pao Fu pointing to Wondrous Peak. Such a pity.

Art history enriches Kuei Tsung's presentation, there in the centre of the circle. Originally, Buddhists had no notion of a Buddha-image. The idea of carving them was inspired by Greek effigies brought by Alexander when he conquered Western India. Before his time, the fourth century BCE, it was the pagoda that presented the transcendent nature of the Buddha, and the lotus, the wheel, and other symbols that presented his teaching.<sup>12</sup>

Ma Ku makes a woman's bow before Kuei Tsung. This is another koan point, and Nan Chuan final riposte forms still another. But revelations in the room aside, the circle is the footprint of the Buddha, and the temple is the Buddha body itself. Kodoji is in direct line with this primordial tradition. It is our pagoda, our Buddha body, our Mt. Sumeru, navel of the world.

The architect and chief builder of Kodoji, Tony Coote, is in direct line with this primal tradition, with the experience he and Gillian Coote and their son Gulliver had while helping to build the Ring of Bone Zendo on San Juan Ridge in northern California in 1982, and then at the dedication ceremony, led by Yamada Koun Roshi, which followed.

As the Palolo Zen Center in Honolulu is a transmutation of the Ring of Bone Zendo into Hawaiian forms, so Kodoji is an transmutation into Australian forms. The Ring of Bone Zendo followed the fundamental intentions of Japanese monasteries, which in turn rework the forms of older sacred centres back to earliest Buddhism, and to those of even earlier times and religions in the misty untraceable past.

Kodoji is also, of course, a child of the Sydney Zen Centre, which in turn evolved from an informal gathering of Zen students in the 1970's who sat together and even held sesshins together without a teacher. The Centre moved around for a while before settling in Annandale, where in time it developed critical mass, ready for a country zendo that could readily serve as a venue for sesshin. Here, after the purchase of the property and the permissions process got under way, the beginnings were a pit toilet excavated in 1984.

When I was blocking out this teisho, I asked for suggestions. An old time student wrote:

To build a temple takes many things, a communal spirit, hard steady, mindful work, sustained perseverance through the seasons, organization, acts of generosity, but above all it is an act of faith. There have been many acts of faith of stepping forth into the unknown over the last 20 years to bring this temple into being. Just as your first flight to Australia in 1979 to teach a small, innocent yet willing and enthusiastic group was an act of faith, so too the people taking up the Zen way with you was another act of faith.

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<sup>10</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 12-17.

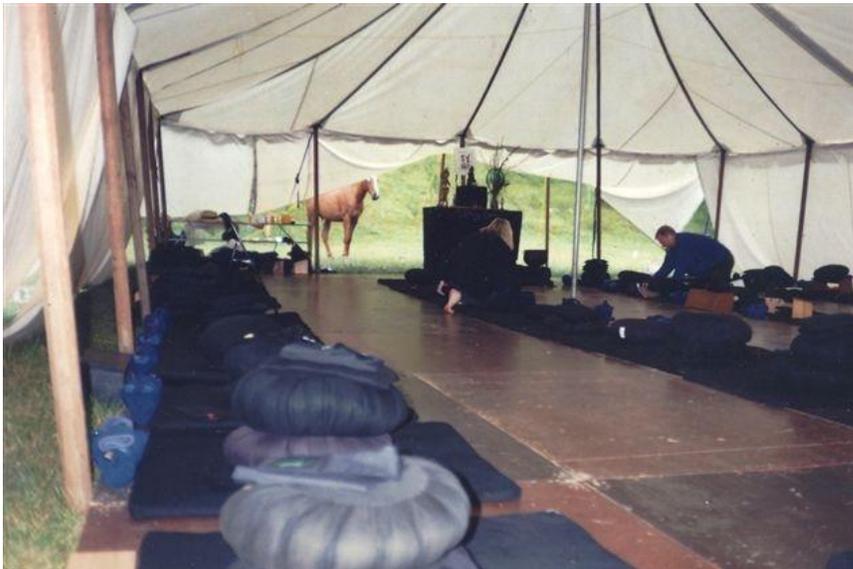
<sup>11</sup> Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, p.172.

<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Fisher, *Buddhist Art and Architecture*, (London:Thames and Hudson, 1993). pp. 20, 44.

Building a temple is another great act of faith, a stepping into the unknown, for we have no idea what the future will hold and what will come forth from this simple step. I am reminded of Lin Chi's great gift, who planted a pine forest for future generations, but he himself would never see the fully manifested fruits of his labour. However, he had the foresight and vision that those trees would provide shelter or shade for generations to come.<sup>13</sup> Hopefully this temple will be like a great tree shading the many beings.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, I could not express it better. Seventeen years a-building, this is certainly sustained perseverance through the seasons as an act of faith. I made my last visit to this ancient ground to help confirm Subhana Barzagli as master of the Sydney Zen Centre. We held the transmission ceremony and a sesshin in a great marquee. Now, just a few years later, we have a splendid zendo, a worthy heir of all those sacred centres, from the monastery of Lin Chi and his ancestors, down the centuries through the Three Cloud halls of the masters Harada, Yasutani and Yamada in our own heritage. Kodoji is a worthy heir to those early meetings in Sydney that were fuelled with ardent faith in the ancient way.

New temples and newly installed images are traditionally dedicated by having their eyes opened, as the eyes of our temple are now unveiled. Even Bodhidharma dolls, which have escaped their religious bounds to serve as icons in businesses, have their eyes opened at propitious moments in the development of an enterprise. Sometimes just one eye is painted in, to show some kind of partial success. I have seen newly acquired Buddhist images ceremoniously installed in this way, and just the once, in the woods of the Sierra Nevada foothills of northern California, I watched with the sangha as Yamada Roshi inscribed the eyes of the Ring of Bone Zendo and declared them open.



Open to what? What are the particulars of the faith that we act upon today? I think probably there would be many responses to that question. Let me offer my view.

Our faith is a path, It is zazen, the seated practice of focused inquiry and attunement in relation to a single matter. It is also a certain way of life and attitude. These two definitions, seated practice and a way of life and

attitude go together, and are integrated. Both positive and negative definitions are useful. Let's begin with zazen and what it is not.

Though it is often called 'meditation', I've come to question that usage. Certainly zazen is not introspection. It is not a close examination of what is happening in body or mind. It is not the samatha and ,Vipassana practice of Theravada, or psychoanalysis, or interpersonal problem-

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<sup>13</sup> Burton Watson. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi: A Translation of the Lin-chi Lu*, by Burton Watson (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), pp. 107-108.

<sup>14</sup> Email message from Gillian Coote, April 27, 2001.

solving. It is not itself any of the arts it might have influenced. It is not available by explanatory devices intended to make it accessible. Lin Chi sets forth the main focus of Zen practice very clearly:

All the buddhas and patriarchs of the past, present, and future and in all the ten directions make their appearance in this world just so that they can seek the Dharma. And you followers of the Way who have come to study, you are here now just so you can seek the Dharma. ...

My preaching of the Dharma is different from that of other people in the world. Even if Manjushri and Samantabhadra were to appear before my eyes, each manifesting his bodily form and asking about the Dharma, they would no sooner have said, "We wish to question the Master," than I'd have seen right through them.

I sit calmly in my seat, and when followers of the Way come for an interview, I see through them all. How do I do this? Because my way of looking at them is different. I don't worry whether on the outside they are common mortals or sages, or get bogged down in the kind of basic nature they have inside. I just see all the way through them and never make an error.<sup>15</sup>

"I don't get bogged down in the qualities of students", Lin Chi says. "I just see them as earnest seekers of the Dharma". They are impelled by their Dominant Idea, to appropriate Voltairine de Cleyre's expression. For de Cleyre, the Dominant Idea in nature and humanity is to grow, mature, flower, and bear fruit. She also used the term to identify the imperatives of people in particular cultures - for example, the compulsion to accumulate property and things and to gain personal power and control in our contemporary western world.<sup>16</sup> For Lin Chi the Dominant Idea of the Zen student is to mature and season in the Buddha Dharma. He sees this clearly in each of his students, no matter how confused they are, and it is solely this Idea that he seeks to encourage.

Nonetheless, not every student is ready to grapple with such a Dominant Idea. In our time and place, it probably would be most encouraging to certain Zen students to take up what Zen is not. Just as psychology does not readily address existential questions about birth and death, so Zen does not take up old personal traumas or marital difficulties. Dukkha, the profound human dissatisfaction with the way things are, is a fundamental concern in Classical Buddhism, and is directly addressed in Vipassana practice. However, you will only occasionally hear the word mentioned in Zen circles. While the peace and confidence and intimate understanding which arise with zazen do indeed set the stage for self-correction and contentment, I am sure that many Zen students fell away in the past because they were too taken up by what seemed to them to be barriers. Thus as a Zen teacher I don't hesitate to suggest a double track for some students for a while, to include consultations with a wise psychologist, or an occasional retreat with a Vipassana master. A Zen teacher who is seasoned in Vipassana training can, I am learning, offer certain Vipassana methods to students who are not interested in koan study, as they pursue shikantaza, or pure sitting.

My first Zen friend, R.H. Blyth, used to say that there is a person for every religion and a religion for every person. Sometimes I meet people who are stuck in their Zen practice for some deeply rooted reason. They really should be meditating in a Theravada setting, or studying psychology in graduate school, or following a teacher of Centering Prayer. Sometimes a Soto Zen student wants to clarify the points of old Zen stories, or a Rinzai student is happy with shikantaza. "Chacun a son gout". Each to his or her own taste. Each to his or her own character

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<sup>15</sup> Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Dominant Idea," in Peter Glassgold, ed., *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), pp. 185-195.

and imperatives. Maybe a good psychologist can help the misplaced student to get at those deeply felt motivations and to acknowledge them.

So then, what is zazen? “The seated practice of focused inquiry and attunement, in relation to a single matter” is a definition that needs taking apart, for virtually every word is loaded. Understanding the freight, one understands the container. Without such understanding, it might seem that zazen is like reading or listening to music. Well, it is indeed like reading or listening to music, but the simile is not the metaphor. The words must be examined one by one, then experienced in their interrelated sequence, and finally put into practice.

The first definition of ‘seated’ in the Oxford English Dictionary is ‘fixed in position’. The Buddha Shakyamuni was fixed in position under the Bodhi tree, in his bodhimanda, his dojo, his ‘place of enlightenment’. Successive teachers for some ninety generations and the students of all those teachers across the world have made his position and his dojo their own. You make them yours, as you seat yourself in the fixed posture of the Buddha in your home or in your Zen centre at Annandale or Gorricks Run.

Yet ‘fixed’ could sound restrictive. ‘Settled’ might be a better word. From outside you look fixed. On the inside you are not wiggling.

You are seated in practice. There are two kinds of practice. One is ongoing action as a way of life, as a doctor practices medicine, or an attorney practices law. The other is action intended as a means for improvement, like practicing the piano. The two meanings elide. The doctor becomes a better doctor; the piano student is Mozart with each arpeggio.

The engine of practice is bodhichitta, literally ‘enlightenment thought’, better translated as ‘aspiration for enlightenment’. ‘Enlightenment’ is a grand word which I prefer not to use. The Sino-Japanese expression kensho, literally ‘seeing into (true) nature’, is instructive, implying a peep into the empty, interdependent and infinitely varied makeup of things. I like the simple English word ‘Realisation’. Bodhichitta is the aspiration for realisation, the aspiration to understand the wisdom of the world and to take it upon one's own shoulders.

Practice is ongoing. The most enlightened sages of the past sat daily in their dojo. "Not yet, not enough, not enough yet". Inspired by your bodhichitta, you muster body and mind to focus your practice, not just with attention, but also with a receptive spirit - and this is important. You are not trying to bore a hole into something.

The post-modern critic of Zen, Dale S. Wright, clarifies this point:

The creativity and inventiveness of the Zen master is not his or her own ingenuity. It is rather an openness of the self beyond the self in listening and attunement. To be enlightened, then, is to be a willing and open respondent, to have achieved an open reciprocity with the world through certain dimensions of self-negation.<sup>17</sup>

My own teacher, Yamada Roshi used to say, “The practice of Zen is forgetting the self in the act of uniting with something”. As a loyal successor, I turn his dictum on its head: “The practice of Zen is forgetting the self in the act of receiving the other”. Wordsworth clarifies the same point:

Enough of Science and of Art;  
Close up those barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart

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<sup>17</sup> Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 200.

That watches and receives.<sup>18</sup>

Watching and receiving don't require muscular effort. It is the practice of the Buddha's fundamental teaching of *pratitya samutpada*, mutually dependent arising.<sup>19</sup> You are focused and attuned. You face your koan and let it face you. You clarify it; it clarifies you. Then something comes up, a task to be done, or the way to settle a long-standing argument. At that juncture, you can take a turn and tick off items in the agenda of tomorrow's meeting, or rehearse an apology that might set things right. Or you can take that thought of the meeting or the argument as a flavourless prompt, a helpful reminder to maintain the way. Calmly, easily, return to your focused attunement.

Thoughts are what make us human. Your brain secretes thoughts as your stomach secretes bile. In the *Enmei Jikku Kannon Gyo* (The Ten Verse Sutra of Timeless Life), we read:

Rapidly thoughts arise in the mind;  
thought after thought is not separate from mind.<sup>20</sup>

And what is the mind but the great mind! What is realisation but a great thought! Zen is noetic, as D.T. Suzuki was always saying. It is knowledge, in the gnostic sense. Understanding. It takes inquiry. You are not tediously repeating, "Mu, mu". Your teacher demands, "What is Mu? Show me Mu!" Relinquishing all the small stuff, you seek and find harmony with what matters. Relinquishing the notions of great mind and great thought is imperative as well. Which is, of course, not to say that the meeting is not important, or that the argument doesn't await a resolution. Just as there is a time for breakfast and a time for commuting, so there is a time for problem-solving and a time for zazen.

Thoughts can be very seductive. Small stuff can seem like big stuff. I have told about a man who came regularly to meetings and used his time to think about his business problems. Ultimately he stopped coming. Perhaps he solved all his problems.

Random thoughts can also be seductive. Witty notions come out of nowhere and sometimes a student will chuckle aloud in the silent dojo. But such thoughts, too, are just noise. Back to the beam!

The Buddha Shakyamuni asked, "Why should there be suffering in the world?" All his teaching and all the texts of Classical Buddhism grow from his focus on this single question, and from its resolution.

For Zen students, the Buddha's inquiry is further encapsulated as 'Why?' - a solitary interrogative on the Buddha Way. Other traditions offer analogies. The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth century Christian manual of contemplation, recommends that you take up a single word of a single syllable 'and clasp this word to your heart', whatever

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Van Doren, Ed., *William Wordsworth: Selected Poetry* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> When this is, that is;  
this arises, that arises;  
when this is not, that is not;  
this ceasing, that ceases.

Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, (New York: Grove, 1959), p. 53. See also the early chapters of Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place: Zen Buddhist Essays*, (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996), p. 54.

happens.<sup>21</sup> Centering Prayer derives its method directly from this injunction. Ira Progoff draws parallels to this old European method with those found in Yoga, Zen, Hasidism, and Sufism.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, comparative religion is not my purpose here. Least of all do I want to imply that all paths lead to the top of the same mountain. That's a risky assumption. I don't go there! My purpose is rather to mark zazen as a practice that emerges from the nature of the human mind, and from human discoveries in 'the world as lover, world as self', to use Joanna Macy's expression.<sup>23</sup> The single point that is our focus in zazen is a door to the world and the self so tiny that it has no dimension. You learn in geometry that the point has no dimension, no magnitude. 'No dimension' is truly expansive. There is the vast and fathomless mystery itself, and there it is again, and again. We learn how attunement is the twin and co-worker of focus.

Be careful. You are not practising emptiness. You are facing the point. "The solitary light shines brightly; it never darkens," wrote Keizan Jokin.<sup>24</sup> It is like the morning star above the Bodhi tree. What happened when the Buddha glimpsed that point? That is the matter. Like the word 'practice', 'matter' has two important implications. First, it is the stuff confronting us, the object of our focus, the subject of our attunement. The old masters took their beginning students in hand and showed them breath-counting. This is the way of facing the mystery of the single point of no dimension: just 'one', just 'two', "just 'three'; patiently returning to 'one' with each distraction, centering upon each number as a task. Breath-counting is not just for beginners, but old-timers too revert there when Right Recollection weakens.



The second implication of 'matter' is, of course, the 'Great Matter'. This is what brought tears and laughter around the charcoal fire in the old days. When the object of focus, which is the subject of our attunement, is clear, imprinted, and part of one's moment-to-moment consciousness, then the question remains, what is that solitary light? Zen practice is not an intellectual process, but is experiential, and the solitary light

opens the way to a galaxy.

It is 'out there', but 'out there' is not objective or even subjective. It is the realisation of the teaching, which happens as the student. It is the Buddha's understanding of the Dharma, as the Sangha. Sangha links Buddha and Dharma and encloses them, like a bubble, with inside and outside the same. It is the student who realises intimately how things are, as the self. It is the power of realised students in synergy that erects and maintains the true temple, to be venerated by Ma Ku and by the world. It is Indra's own sanctuary, Kuei Tsung's own pagoda, "like a great tree shading the many beings". That's something to live up to with our hard work. It's something to celebrate.

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<sup>21</sup> Ira Progoff, trans., *The Cloud of Unknowing* (N Y: Julian Press, 1957), p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Joanna Macy, *World as Lover. World as Self* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991).

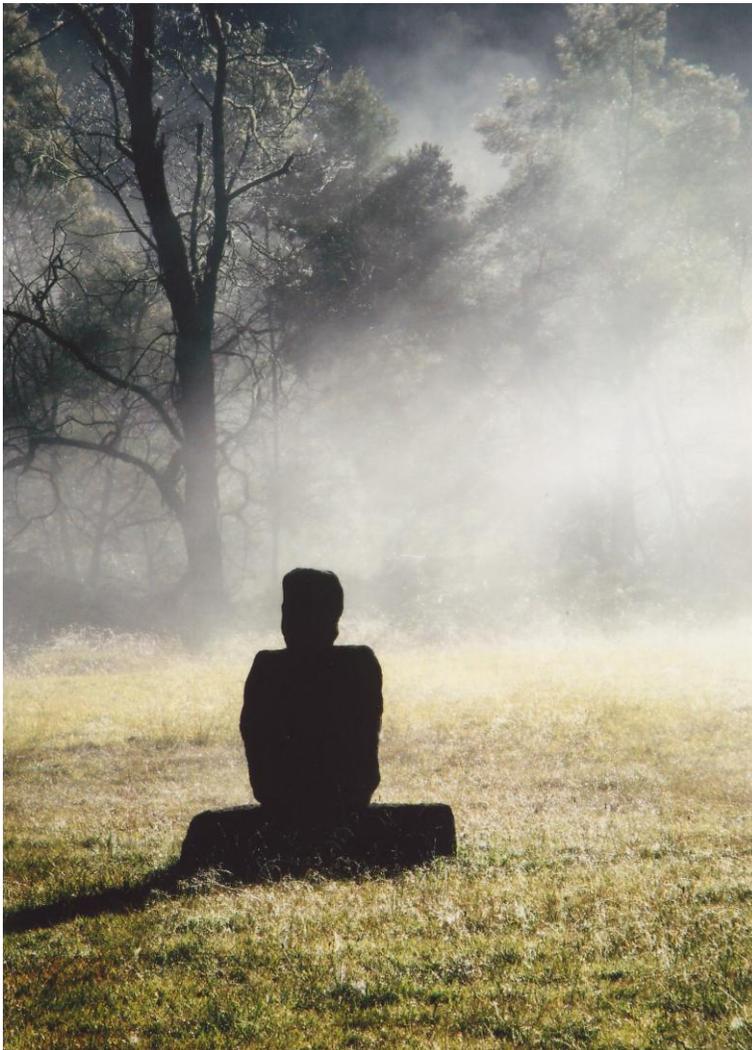
<sup>24</sup> Thomas Cleary, *Transmission of Light (Denkoroku)\* Zen in the Art of Enlightenment. by Zen Master Keizan* (San Francisco: North Point, 1990), p. 66.

# The Three Stone Buddha

Brendon Stewart

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 *Booddhaa*, 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'ell are ya gonna get the Booddha 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 1960's, 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 Wisemans 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.



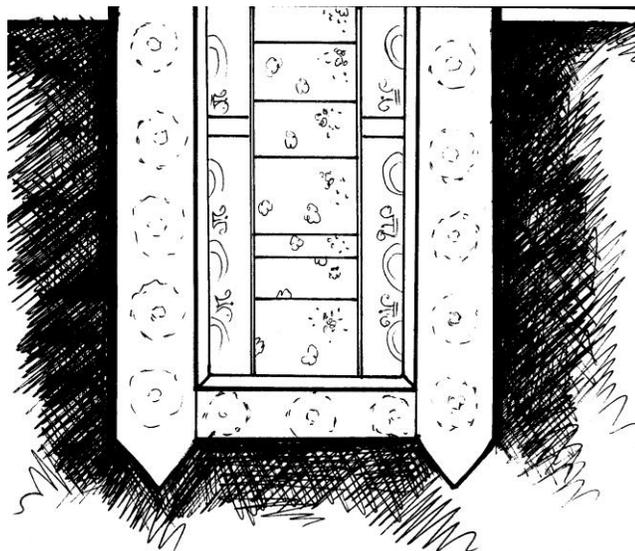
## On the Way to Becoming a Rainbow

Glenys Jackson

In 2000, the SZC received an Arts Council grant for art works to be created for our new Zendo at Gorricks Run - Kodoji. I was asked to conceive and make an altar cloth and banners for the outside verandah.

For the altar cloth, I wanted a reflection of the beauty, magic and colour of our special place in the McDonald Valley. Many ideas came to mind. Maybe a many-toned black zen altar cloth - or the lush shades of green of the countryside - the luminous beauty of the golden wattle - the delicate shades of eucalyptus blossom - the dynamic patterning of tree bark ... What most reflected for me, the magic of Gorricks?

Maybe it is something about the last hours of the day, the slowing of activities - stopping to feel the last trace of warmth from the sun, and noticing the wondrous changing light. In the late afternoon, before the shadows start to fall on the west facing barefaced hills, the sandstone starts to glow a firey orange/red, the stone is "on fire" reflecting the last rays of the sun. As the shadows slowly start to appear, the hot orange tones slowly fade, and the stone turns mysterious shades of deep purple. It's quite hypnotic... pure magic!



The surrounding hills, my main inspiration. Colours; orange and deep purple with a deep sky blue and a little green. The fabric, a bow to tradition, a rich Chinese silk brocade.

After much searching, no purple brocade was to be found, so at last I spent many hours dying strips of hot pink brocade. My small backyard looked like a Chinese laundry, filled with varying shades of pinky-purple fabric. Finally, the right shade of purple was achieved, a perfect compliment to the sandstone orange.

Assembling the altar cloth pieces was a challenge. The brocade was cut, folded and stitched in varying odd shapes, patchwork fashion, in the style of our rakasu, so rich in tradition and meaning. The finished altar cloth has graced many wonderful and inspiring sesshin at Kodoji, and is used frequently at Annandale for Rohatsu, and special occasions. During the day, the satin finish on the silk brocade reflects the light, and in the evening, deeply solemn tones.

Over the years the ephemeral nature of the fabric has become evident in fraying, the sewn seams coming apart, and in tiny burnt holes. The seams are now carefully mended, and the candle holders have been changed to protect against splashing hot wax. The cloth has acquired a certain patina with age ... but the beauty and grace of the fabric remains.



## Zen Babies

Hugh Miller & Clare Atkins tell it like it was ....

### **From Hugh:**

Many of my most vivid memories of Gorricks Run are of the journeys there and back and around it - the plunge from mundane suburbia into wildness, natural beauty and a frontier spirit. Leaving our family car at the first creek crossing, in the days before the ford, for the sturdiness of the Cootes' beige Subaru 4WD station wagon; another time, after the ford was installed, when our disappointingly gutless Toyota was bogged at a smaller, deceptively sandy-bottomed creek, and Clare Atkins, Phoebe and I waited on the edges of concerned adult activity for what seemed like an age, while some shifty characters on trailbikes, of the kind one frequently encounters in the backwoods of the Hawkesbury region, offered somewhat unwelcome assistance; freewheeling around and off the tracks with Kym Lukeman and Tony Coote collecting rocks in a trailer (for what, I have no idea); walking the long way in after wading across some creek or other that had again defeated our car; walking to the waterhole and skinny dipping with the women and children, then later bathing in shorts, embarrassed (but of course curious) at others' continued nudity; and certainly the walk to the cave to see the Aboriginal paintings and carvings, and inscriptions by early settlers--a deeply impressive and significant experience of my early adolescence.

Of being at the place itself, I remember a profound sense of community and togetherness, and of feeling a different pace and texture of life. Times spent at Gorricks Run educated me in the essentials of living, stripping away the trappings of modern life to a more rustic, basic core: heating water on a wood fire to bathe; drinking water fallen from the sky and held in a



**Zen babies ...**

Lucy Marett, Kathy Bagot,  
Bee Marett, Phoebe Miller,  
Rose Bagot & Hugh Miller.

coming years, so that they may enjoy some formative experiences of their own in its special surrounds.

**From Clare ...**

As I read Hugh's piece of writing the memories came flooding back, along with a real affection for Gorricks Run as a place of childhood adventure, enjoyment and community. As I'm now a mum of two with only moments snatched while children sleep I'll have to write this in shorthand, but some of the many joyous memories I have of that place include: poetry workshops run for the kids while the adults meditated; finding multicoloured clays in the riverbeds nearby to use as paint; using a pizza cutter to put flyscreen in frames for the windows; helping to dig the pits for the toilets (I know, it doesn't sound that great but it was somehow fun – and I'm sure I was limited 'help' being a young child!); building bark tents near the river with Subhana and her kids; walking to the waterhole and having to navigate by finding piles of stones indicating the way; jumping out of the car to open all the gates on the drive out to Gorricks; the river crossing in flood; sheer cliffs emerging from bush, reflected in moonlight; trying to meditate with the adults and getting bored after five minutes; helping cook – and eat! - communal meals; exploring the hillsides alone and with other kids; showers from buckets hoisted high; that beautiful old chestnut tree in the field; stories of fairies, elves and pixies coming to life in the magic natural surroundings. I'm sure my time at Gorricks Run has contributed to my love of nature. Like Hugh, I hope that's something I can impart to my children.

steel tank; shitting in hole dug deep in the ground; reading by the light of a lamp burning pungent kerosene; sleeping in a bag on a thin foam mat on wooden boards, soundly. I recall Gorricks as a group of tents and a wooden frame, on my first visit in 1985; the single building that frame became, where as a child I ate, played, slept, talked, briefly attempted to meditate, and, which is still what I picture when someone mentions Gorricks Run; the construction and completion of the hojo, and its temporary function as a creche on various family friendly sesshins; and the eventual development of the new dojo and Gorricks' current incarnation as Kodoji, by which time I was grown and a rare visitor. But it is a place that looms large in my memory, and in the collective memories of my family, and I look forward to returning there with my own children in the

# Wild Diamond Sangha in Australia

Maggie Gluek



The wild Diamond Sangha is significantly evident and supportive during sesshin, at Kodoji, Ancient Ground Temple, which stands in disused grazing land surrounded by bush, some three hours northwest of Sydney. The dawn bird chorus, richly layered, sometimes deafening, sings the day into being. The superb lyrebird, a superb mimic, offers a solo concert that encompasses the calls of many other birds, rendered loud and baroque. Over the years some lyrebirds seem to have picked up the sounds of dojo instruments. "But I'm sure I heard the bell ringing..." Aboriginal people call them liar birds.

In the evening darkness the frogs have the music. A vividly diverse chorus, especially apparent if you're down by the creek. At night small marsupials make fierce noises. Male koalas, growling and grunting piglike, tarzan their way through the tree canopy.

In the early to mid-nineties non-human sesshin companions included three horses who belonged to a woman on a neighboring property. Some way into sesshin they'd arrive, magically, mysteriously, thundering their way into the paddock, often between 3 and 4 a.m. In a tent you could feel a little nervous at the proximity of those hooves. And delighted at the nearby chomp, chomp, chomp, grass being nibbled, and at the strong WHOOSH of horse piss. After breakfast they'd be gathered around the verandah -- a pony, a white horse and the star turn, a chestnut who seemed to be fully aware of his good looks. People stroked them and talked to them. The horses knew a good thing was in the offing, ie breakfast leftovers, and proceeded to dedicate themselves to the compost pile. Satisfied they'd depart, but often not before having done a breathtaking show-off gallop around the paddock, leaving us feeling graced indeed.



## The Chestnut Tree

Paul Maloney

The old Chestnut tree had been patiently standing there, long before Geoff Dawson decided Gorricks Run would make an ideal zendo for us. I recall Gillian Coote telling me that it may have been the oldest Chestnut in Australia! So it was a privilege to enjoy its shade as we sat listening to John Tarrant Roshi's teisho, on hot sesshin afternoons. The tree also played host to

the Jukai ceremonies of many of us over the years: a silent witness of our commitment to the Way. And as the years passed we realised, with some sadness, that the tree was dying. But even in death it continued to dominate the field.



Aboriginal elder Uncle Max teaching at the old chestnut tree during a walking the country retreat.

Then, I don't remember when, I decided to take a few days out and do a self-retreat at Gorricks. On my last day there a huge storm raged up the valley. The storm was so intense that I could hear and see nothing but wind and rain. All was wind and rain. Then it passed, leaving the field washed clean and the air clear. Looking across the paddock from the new dojo, I saw something that I did not recognise. It took some time to realise that what I was looking at was the roots of the old tree. The wind had ripped the tree out of the ground, and it lay in a very undignified manner down the slope and across the road.

While feeling sad at the tree's falling, I was mortified by the realization that in falling it had blocked the road out of Gorricks. I was locked in. Fortunately, I was able to find the old cross-cut saw, and spent quite a few hours cutting the branches of the old tree, disfiguring it in the process. These days, as I drive in and out of Gorricks, I remember the old tree in all its glory, and its sad passing. But the roots are still there to remind me of what was. And so, to paraphrase a few lines from the Shodoka,

I have entered the deep mountains to silence and  
beauty  
In a profound valley beneath high cliffs  
I sit under the old chestnut tree  
Zazen in our rustic cottage  
Is peaceful, lonely, and truly comfortable.



**Editor's Note:** Because it was apparent for a long time that the old chestnut tree was dying, three tiny Medlow variety chestnut trees were brought from Bathurst by a chain of people that started with Patrick and Ollie Forman, who delivered them to Sally and Colin (then living in Kandos). From there to Kim and Cathy Lukeman's place in the Blue Mountains and finally to Gorricks. Named Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they were planted near the old chestnut in July 1993 and surrounded by heavy guard rails to keep off the cows (there were a lot of cows around, back then). The guard rails were removed when the trees became big enough to look after themselves (by which time there were also fewer cows), but none are yet big enough for teisho or jukai to resume in their shade. But they will be so when the children named in our baby-naming ceremony this year are old enough to sit.

# Remembering ...

## David Englebrecht

If you walk passed the showers, keep on going down into the gully, cross the creek and climb up the other side, you will come to a small open glade in the midst of which stands a two metre wooden pole. This pole is a memorial to David Englebrecht, our outrageous, luminous, courageous, generous friend and dharma brother. David lived for twelve years with HIV/Aids, he practised with that and he died with that. To the end he worked for himself and for others living with the disease, editing a news letter on alternative therapies, teaching meditation, leading Qi Gong groups, daring to embrace the disease with love rather than retreating into fear and self-pity.

Engraved on his memorial pole is his dharma name, Ko Sei, Harbour Star, and the verse from written on his rakasu:

The star shines in the harbour  
In each corner of the water love appears

David's ashes were scattered at Gorricks on a Thursday deep in sesshin. You will hear his voice in the wild exuberance of a scarlet sunset, the swooping flight of the king parrot and the roar of the creek in spate.

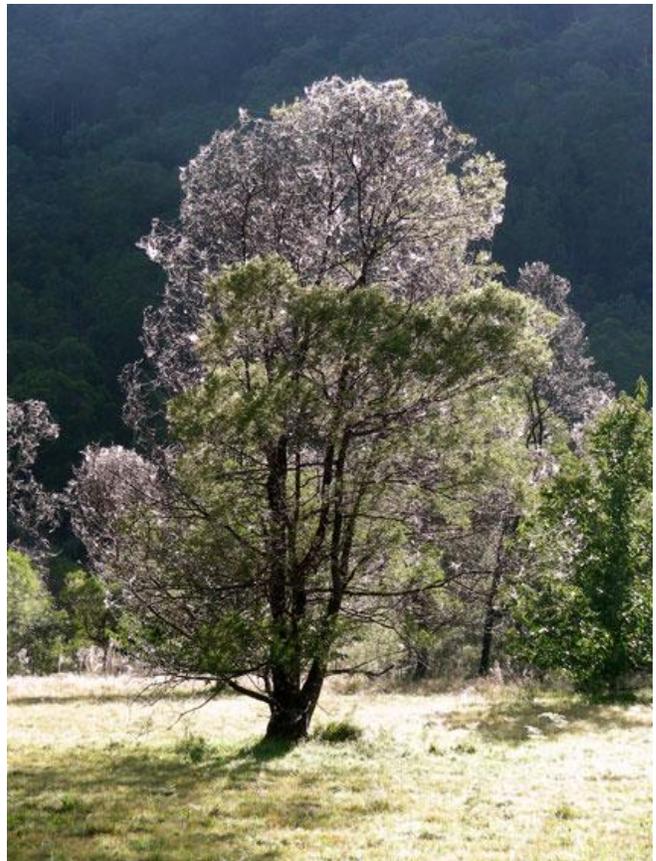
## Charles Saxton

Those who have been to Gorrick's will have noticed, perhaps even admired, the large black table that patiently performs many functions to serve our needs. This table is very special, as it was made for the sangha by the late Charles Saxton.

Charles was very special: painter by inclination, and a great human spirit by nature. This spirit was demonstrated when some utilities servicemen accidentally set the bushland below Charles' house alight. He had a bare ten minutes to flee with his wife and the cat. Everything he owned was gone in a moment, yet Charles maintained his equanimity and cheer – a great lesson to all of us who knew him.

In his will, Charles requested that his ashes be scattered at Gorrick's Run, and one wet day a few of us, together with his daughter, did just that. And now this table stands as a monument to this humble Bodhisatva. You may think of him sometime when chopping vegetables.

Vale Charles Sexton.



*Paul Maloney*

# The Sound of the Bell ...

Hearing that we were looking for a temple bell, Sexton Bourke, teacher of the Tallowood Sangha in Bellingen and long time member of the Zen Centre, made us one. Here is what he wrote to go with his gift:

I heard you were looking for a bell, so I offer myself. As you can see I am, or was, a wheel rim. However, before you reject me out of hand, hang me up and listen to my voice. Hit me hard or soft where the red ring runs 'round. I sound more mellow if you use a softer striker. I represent the aesthetic of re-used things. If you don't like me, please re-cycle me. I am happy to do service until you find a real bell. My name is 'Silence'.

Gassho.

The sound of the bell  
Calls to the ten thousand things  
Wake to my silence!

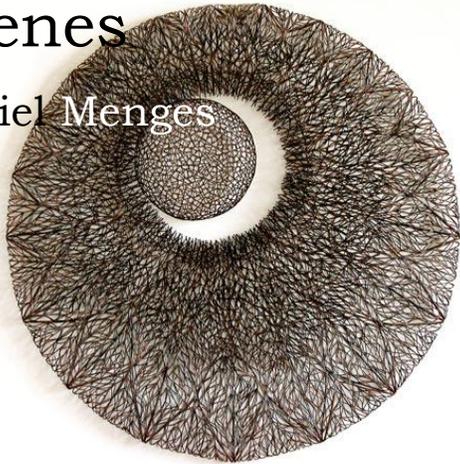


## Rainbow Buddha

You will find our Rainbow Buddha - pink, lime green, sky blue, yellow – doing zazen in a small kuti under a tree in the gully to the south of the paddock. He was presented to us by Graham Lyle, President of the Buddhist Council of NSW, when Kodoji was dedicated and now watches over us as seasons wheel around him.

# Scenes

Daniel Menges



## Morning

The mist crowns the gums.  
One hand planting seeds, the other  
— palm up – catches rain.

## After Zazen

Inside the sun bright  
Moon, the teacher's challenge  
mirrors  
The student's question

Body empty, mind  
Opening beyond dojo  
Window – When do you wake?

Words like weapons, words  
That plow; sow seeds / empty  
moon-  
Light on sorrowful eyes

\*

Man on a bridge, ready  
To jump – like fish scales,  
diamonds  
Shining in the wake

\*

Dead cherry blossoms  
Bursting forth in wind – who sees  
Beyond this warm breath?

Holding her gaze / empty:  
Containing everything, / now  
One sun-touched dew drop

Opening through you  
Opening you / into the  
Star dust universe

\*

Behind brown eyes weeps  
The city / shadowing crowds /  
On the path we walk

\*

Dukkha falls away  
In Bronte's sea swell – moments  
Of swimming with sharks

\*

Autumn sun crisp, I  
Disappear into the night's  
Soft, star-dust dream

\*

When mind open like sky  
Birds come to play

\*

The unfolding word  
The kiss  
Tea cup and rain  
The gasp you wish to unfold

On a bus, a blind woman who can  
see shapes and sense turns yet  
Is afraid to trust in the driver's word

Chai / talk of cellos, sharing  
Lovers / today  
The mind passes through  
The eye of the needle / threads  
The whole world together

# Vale Robert Aitken

Peter Thompson

Peter Thompson submitted this article for inclusion in the memorial issue of MMC. Unfortunately it disappeared into the ether, or possibly into the editor's Spam box. It is therefore being included here.

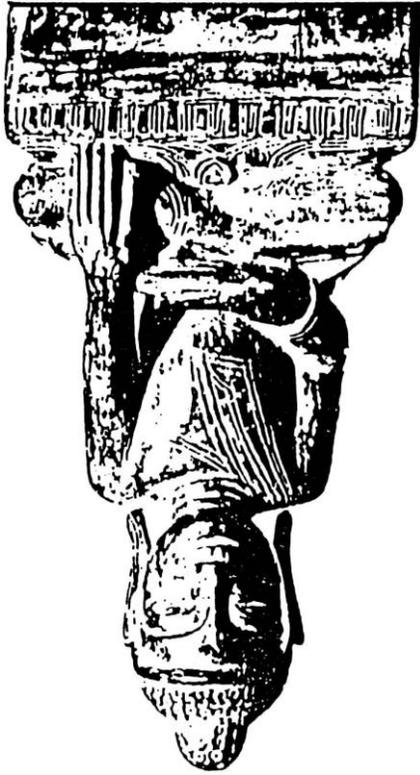
I shall try to express in summary what I said at our Memorial Service for Robert Aitken Roshi. I was lucky to meet him on his first trip to Australia and was impressed by the patient way he listened to and answered my questions. As a young student at A.N.U. I had begun reading Alan Watts, J.Krishnamurti and D.T. Suzuki for a number of years and my main question was something like " If we already are Buddha nature and thus enlightened why do we need to practice ? " He replied that this had been the deep personal koan and question of Dogen Zenji which had driven him relentlessly to China and it's resolution that "Practice is enlightenment- practice reveals what is already the case. There is no becoming enlightened in the deepest sense ". He also spoke about how Alan Watts had failed to see the full implications of Master Pai Chang's encounter with the young Ma-tsu while he was assiduously practising in the Meditation hall. Pai chang had endeavoured to demonstrate to Ma-tsu the futility of practicing with the goal of attaining Buddha nature by trying to rub/polish a tile with the goal of making a mirror... Robert Aitken said this example did not mean to stop practising as Watts had wrongly concluded - even though it is pointless to try and become what we already are, practice is needed to realise, reveal and express that Buddha nature that we already are...

After many subsequent encounters and meetings with Robert Aitken over a number years, I realised that although a man of few words- his words seemed to stick in the memory and the psyche. I was reminded of the story which was related to George Ivanovich Gurdjieff upon his visit to a secluded esoteric monastery in Asia Minor about masters X. and Y. Master X , on his visit, always spoke a lot in beautiful language but upon his departure his words were quickly forgotten . However master Y spoke dryly in a few words and yet his words were always remembered long after he had departed. In Robert Aitken's case I put this fact down to his strong and deep character - as he said himself, his whole path/passage was very slow and very difficult and he needed to have and to develop deep character to continue...'Great Difficulty promises Great Opportunity' (Yi Jing) Because of this, he was able to be of more usefulness to others than those who had experienced a relatively easy passage - he spoke to us in an encouraging way of struggling with the first zen koan/barrier 'Mu' for over 20 years whilst others around him were passing it on their first weekend zazenkai...

Although ( for a whole set of reasons ) an awkward, painfully shy person in human interactions, the depth of his realisation and character more than compensated for this. He showed amazing dedication, loyalty and perseverance on the pathless path of zen and he will be greatly missed in this embodied life by all beings.



There is the leisurely one,  
 Walking the Tao, beyond philosophy,  
 Not avoiding fantasy, not seeking truth.  
 The real nature of ignorance is the Buddha-nature itself;  
 The empty delusory body is the very body of the Dharma.



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journal of the sydney zen centre  
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