

**mind
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This issue explores the theme of *insight*.

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Cover Bird Flying over Abyss, *Liang Kai* (fl. late 12th-early 13th c.)

Editor Doug Mason

Next issue The theme of the next issue will be 'Zen and Other Traditions'. We welcome contributions on the experience of practicing Zen with other forms of spirituality or other branches of Buddhism. Contact Maggie Gluek (magpiewarble@yahoo.com) or Tony Miller (tonyphilmill@yahoo.com.au).
Deadline: 21 November.

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THE BLUE CLIFF RECORD

Case 29 Ta-sui's Kalpa Fire

The Story

A monk asked Ta-sui, "When the great thousands of universes are altogether and utterly destroyed in the kalpa fire, I wonder whether this is destroyed or not."

Ta-sui said, "Destroyed."

The monk asked, "If so, does it follow the other?"

Ta-sui said, "It follows the other."

Persona

Ta-sui Fa-chen (878-963) was a successor of Kuei-shan Ta-an and a grandson in the Dharma of Pai-chang Huai-hai. He was a contemporary of many of the great masters in the golden age of Ch'an, including Lin-chi, Yang-shan, Tung-shan, and Te-shan.

Comment

Ta-sui's teacher, Kuei-shan Ta-an, known by his nickname, "Lazy-An," was a Dharma brother of Kuei-shan Ling-yu, founder of the Kuei-yang school. With two masters named Kuei-shan, there is some confusion as to Ta-sui's exact lineage, particularly as both trained at Ling-yu's monastery and Lazy An succeeded Ling-yu as master when he died. In an early teishō after he became abbot, Lazy An said to his assembly:

"I've spent the last thirty years here on Mt. Kuei, eating Kuei-shan's food, shitting Kuei-shan's shit, but not practicing Kuei-shan's Ch'an. I just mind an old water buffalo. If he wanders off the path into the grass, I pull him back by the nose. If he eats someone else's rice shoots, I use the whip to move him away. After such long training, he's become very lovable, and he obeys my words. Now he draws the Great Vehicle and always stays where I can see him. He can't be driven away."¹

Thus he earned the sobriquet "Lazy An." He just worked out with his ox and didn't bother with Ch'an.

Sometime after his training with Lazy-An, Ta-sui met Ling-yu and this is the record of the first of their encounters:

"You've been practicing here for some time. Don't you have any questions?"

Ta-sui said, "What question would you have me ask?"

Ling-yu said, "Since you don't understand, why don't you ask, 'What is Buddha?'"

Ta-sui covered the master's mouth with his hand.

Ling-yu said, "Later you will not find a single person to sweep your grounds."

(BCR-29)

A master as sharp as you won't find a single disciple, in other words. I am reminded of T'ou-tzu I-ch'ing's encounter with Fu-shan Yüan-chien:

Fu-shan asked T'ou-tzu to examine the case of the non-Buddhist saying to the Buddha, "I do not ask for words. I do not ask for no words," and the Buddha's response of no response. Three years past. On day he said, "Do you remember that case of the non-Buddhist and the Buddha? Try and make a presentation." T'ou-tzu was about to reply, when Fu-shan covered his mouth with his hand. With this T'ou-tzu had great realisation.
(TL-44)

Anyway, part of Ta-sui's self-imposed practice was to wander the length and breadth of China, meeting with 60 masters in an effort to polish his realisation. In this way he was like Chao-chou wandering for twenty years all over the country to meet with prominent teachers after the death of his master Nan-ch'üan. Yamada Rōshi comments in his teishō at Koko An on Ta-hui's pilgrimage:

If you finish your kōan study here, it will be good for you to go to various places and study under other Zen masters. You will be invigorated and stimulated by encountering masters of different styles.ⁱⁱ

Good advice, but I fear that if you set your goal at 60 you might be disappointed. A substitute will be a visit around to the masters of old.

Once a monk asked Ta-sui, "Almost all beings have flesh on their bones, but the tortoise has bone on its flesh. Why is that?"

Ta-sui took off his sandal and put it on the tortoise.
The monk was silent.ⁱⁱⁱ

That reminds me a little of Yün-men taking the great triple gate of the monastery and putting it on a lantern. How do you see Ta-sui here?

A monk asked, "What happens when the great matter of life and death comes forth?"

Ta-sui said, "If there is tea, drink tea. If there is rice, eat rice."

The monk asked, "Who receives this sustenance?"

Ta-sui said, "Pick up your bowl."^{iv}

Yes, I offer nine bows. First, it's a good reminder that there is no overt line of distinction to mark realisation before from after. Second, as I caution certain students again and again, asking about the self is a vain exercise. "Who is eating?" "Who is thinking?" "Who is asking about asking?" Fooie, there is no end to it. When Bassui asked, "Who is the master of hearing that sound?" he was directing his students to the great way of the Mahāyāna that the thrush preaches. Who hears that timeless doctrine? A very different matter. Finally:

Ta-sui asked a monk, "Where are you going?"

The monk said, "I am going to live alone on West Mountain."

Ta-sui said, "If I call out to the top of East Mountain, will you respond?"

The monk said, "Of course not."

Ta-sui said, "Then you don't know about living alone at all."^v

The head monk at a Japanese Zen monastery will commonly caution the assembly, "You are born alone, you die alone, you find realisation alone." This is by way of reminding everyone about individual responsibility. He is not suggesting that everybody disperse to remote caves. Ta-sui is calling out to you across time as well as space. Can you respond as you recline there in your chaise longue?

Today we find Ta-sui responding to a question about the great conflagration that will come at the end of the present eon. "Will this be destroyed or not? If you see into the meaning of "this," you see into the monk's meaning in asking the question.

Buddhadāsa draws a distinction between people language and Dharma language. For example, when the Buddha says in the Lankāvatāra Sūtra that you must kill your mother and father, he is not advising you literally to murder your parents. He is saying that your mother is your greed and your father is your ignorance, and you must extirpate both completely if you are to enjoy the evanescence of your things and the impermanence of

your life.^{vi} Lin-chi makes much the same point.^{vii}

So we must get at the Dharmic meaning of the kalpa fire. When the monk asked whether “this” would perish or not, Ta-sui understood him completely, and when he asked if “it” would follow the other, his master was right there with his response. Even though the monk might not have understood Ta-sui’s meaning, he knew what he was asking. He took his question to T’ou-tzu Ta-tung:

T’ou-tzu asked, “Where have you come from?”

The monk said, “From Ta-sui.”

T’ou-tzu said, “What does Ta-sui have to say?”

The monk told him about their dialogue. T’ou-tzu lit incense, made bows and said, “In western Szechuan there is an ancient Buddha who has appeared in the world. You should hurry back to him. The monk returned to Ta-sui but found that he had passed away. (BCR-29)

As Yüan-wu remarks when recounting this story, “What an embarrassment for him!” and he goes on to comment, “You shouldn’t conclude that it is destroyed, or that it is not destroyed. After all, how do you understand? Quick, lay your eyes on this matter and look!”

It was a long way from the monastery of Ta-sui to T’ou-tzu’s place, 10,000 miles according to Hsüeh-tou and Yüan-wu in their comments on this case, and it might just seem that far when traversing the distance on foot, wearing straw sandals. We don’t know the name of this ardent monk, but in our sutras we include him in our dedication and we bow to his presence at the beginning and end of our ceremony.

Life and death is a great matter;
All things pass quickly away.
Each of you must be completely alert,
Never neglectful, never indulgent.

This is the verse that the jisha chants during the ceremony that closes each day of sesshin.^{viii} Nameless monks, nuns, and lay disciples in countless numbers traveled miles on their straw sandals and sat hard days and nights maintaining alert focus on the single point of the great matter. What is this point? Yüan-wu quotes from Buddhist doctrine about the passage of a kalpa:

“Formation, abiding, destruction, emptiness,” and then he remarks,

“ ‘When the triple cataclysm occurs, the annihilation reaches the Third Dhyāna Heaven.’

The monk had no understanding of this statement.”(BCR-29)

I am always saying that the stories and dialogues of the old masters are folklore. Well, folklore too has its language. “Jack and the Beanstalk” has its language, and its meaning empowers the child. Poetry is language that empowers. Fiction is language that empowers. We dismiss folklore as kid stuff, and fiction as something false. I remember a young mother telling me how angry her four-year old son became when she told him there was no Santa Claus. “Of course there is a Santa Claus. He comes down the chimney every Christmas eve and brings me presents.” Listen to the child. A natural opening to the language of people from the language of folklore will evolve, and folklore will continue to enrich and inform the other in an enlarged psyche. Folklore, poetry, fiction and the Dharma can underlie people’s language, as Latin underlies Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French. Then Father Zosima comes forth in *Brothers Karamazov* as confessor to the world, and we bow to Feodor Dostoevsky as our master teacher.

Empowerment is the upshot of making personal, making intimate, taking to heart. “Intimacy” and “realisation” are synonyms in Zen literature. What is personal about the kalpa fire? It comes at the end of the kalpa, and the kalpa is defined as the time involved in the act of wearing away a cube of iron, one mile square, by a heavenly maiden who descends every one hundred years to brush the top of the cube with her ethereal garment. A very long time indeed; immeasurable by ordinary reckoning, like the age of the universe or the life of the sun.

In what way is a kalpa personal? And what is this “this?” and how is it intimate? Ta-sui and his monk are not talking Buddhist astrophysics. They are not using people language. Chao-chou was not using people language when he said “Mu.” Hakuin was not using people language when he asked about the sound of a single hand.

When you were six years old, you had no idea what your older sisters and brothers were laughing about. But when you were sixteen, you knew very well, or at least you thought you knew. Te-shan, a master scholar of the *Diamond Sūtra*, couldn’t answer a simple question about the sūtra from an old woman in a wayside tea stand (BCR-4). Her question made no sense in the realm of “counting black beans,” of examining the black ideographs themselves rather than exploring their meaning. The true masters of the *Diamond Sūtra* stood on the ground of ultimate sense. Ch’ang-sha Ching-ts’en said,

“The entire cosmos is your eye; the entire cosmos is your whole body; the entire cosmos is your own light; the entire cosmos lies within your light; in the whole cosmos, there is no one who is not yourself.”^{ix}

Now that’s intimacy!

NOTES

ⁱ Cf. Andy Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage: The Masters and their Teachings* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 124.

ⁱⁱ Kōun Yamada, “*Hekiganroku*: Case 29,” unpublished MS, Pālolo Zen Center, Honolulu, HI.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Ferguson, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, p. 163.

^{iv} Cf. *Ibid.*

^v Cf. *Ibid.*

^{vi} Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *No Religion*, trans. by Puñño Bhikku, revised by Santikaro Bhikkhu (Chaya, Surat Thani: Buddhādāsa Foundation, 1993), p. 10.

^{vii} Burton Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), p. 74. It is Watson who notes that the metaphor originates in the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. See Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, trans., *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1932), p. 120.

^{viii} Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 3.

^{ix} Thomas and J.C. Cleary. *The Blue Cliff Record* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), p. 604.

Songs of Insight from the Buddha's Time

Citta was born into a well-to-do family in Rajagaha. She heard Gautama's teaching and sought ordination by Pajapati, yet it wasn't until her old age that she gained the insight she sought.

Though I am thin, sick,
and lean on a stick,
I have climbed up Vulture Peak.

Robe thrown down,
bowl turned over,
leaned on a rock,
then great darkness opened.

Nanduttara was of a brahman family and lived in the kingdom of the Kurus.

I used to worship fire,
the moon, the sun,
and the gods.
I bathed at fjords,
took many vows,
I shaved half my head,
slept on the ground,
and did not eat after dark.

Other times
I loved make-up and jewellery,
baths and perfumes,
just serving my body
obsessed with sensuality.

Then faith came.
I took up the homeless life.
Seeing the body as it really is,
desires have been rooted out
Coming to birth is ended
and my cravings as well.
Untied from all that binds
my heart is at peace.

Both these poems are conversations between Mara and Buddhist nuns.

Mara: Who put this living being together?
Where is the maker?
Where does this being come from?
Where will it end?

Vijara: What's this 'being' you go on about?
That's your delusion.
We are nothing but the skandhas.
There's no being to be found here.

It's like this:
A certain combination of parts
is called by the name 'chariot',
so with the skandhas -
the elements of mind and body,
it's common usage to say 'a being'.

It is suffering that exists,
suffering that endures,
suffering that disappears.

Nothing but suffering exists.
Nothing but suffering comes to an end.

Soma was the daughter of the minister of King Bimbisara, and a contemporary of the Buddha. She first heard the Buddha preach on a visit he made to Rajagaha early in his teaching career, became a lay disciple and subsequently ordained as a nun. Soma uttered her poem when, one day, she went out to sit beneath a tree to meditate. In India, the earliest form of temple or place of worship was a tree. Originally there was no temple built to gods. As Soma was sitting under this tree, Mara appeared and spoke the poem's first stanza. Soma contradicted him, with a response of great force.

Mara: That place
the sages gain
is hard to reach.
A mere woman can't get there.

Soma: What harm is it
to be a woman
when the mind is concentrated
and the insight is clear?

(If I asked myself:
"Am I a woman
or a man in this?"
then I would be speaking
Mara's language.)
Everywhere the love of pleasure is destroyed,
the great dark is torn apart,
and Death,
you too,
are destroyed.

*from The First Buddhist Women: translations and commentary on the Therigatha,
by Susan Murcott, pub. Parallax Press, 1991*

Submitted by Gillian Coote.



image: <http://www.acay.com.au/~silkroad/buddha/images>

the old pond
a frog jumps in
the sound of water

Basho (1644-1694)



image: <http://www.acay.com.au/~silkroad/buddha/images>

INSIGHT TO INTIMACY

Larry Agriesti

The ability 'to see' has been singled out as the most important verb in any language and refers not just to eyesight, but to insight as well: the ability to see what is happening outside and inside ourselves clearly, deeply, and with discernment.

The development of eyesight and insight parallel each other over time; each following a painstaking process that allows the emergence and formation of mind, and all that mind allows or disallows. From the moment of our conception the long process of how we learn to see the external world begins. The infant brain slowly develops, organising its structures that enable the ignition of light at birth. But even with this glorious event we do not really 'see' the world; much less can we make sense of it. It takes some years of hard trial and error for the young brain to establish patterns of figure and ground, distance, meaningful forms and distinct objects.

In this infant state, there are no barriers or limits; no separation between child and mother and world. It is, in reality, 'one thing' from the beginning. But we could not survive if we remained in this state, nor would we want to. Distinction and disclosure must evolve.

For the most part, we forget this long process of learning how to see, and our earliest recollections of childhood present a memory of the world with everything already arranged and in order. This is not true. We never really see the world as such; we construct and disclose the universe; a creative process that, ultimately, has no end point; a continual emergence of discovery and becoming. But the process, both for eyesight and insight, can go terribly wrong at times.

There have been actual cases of persons born blind who were able, through surgery, to have their condition successfully corrected. However, when the bandages were removed and the brain was flooded with light and colour and movement, they were deeply distressed by what they perceived as chaos. Nothing made sense. Nothing but disturbing images of senseless kaleidoscopic data with the power to overwhelm. Trying at this stage to learn how to make sense of this input proved futile; the complex neural pathways essential to organising data were unable to form. Interestingly, some patients requested the surgical procedure to be reversed in order to restore calm.

We see this same thing occurring with persons troubled with their internal life. Those who suffer from failed attempts to connect with life and others present with symptoms not unlike those who have been unable to learn to see with their eyes. They describe their fear and pain in relation to a world that appears as frightening, confusing, filled with stark images of alienation, threats, harshness, and bewildering complexity. To escape this, they often turn to alcohol and other drugs, sex, money, power, magical thinking; just about anything to avoid the maddening images of what they think things are, who they think they might be, and what they suffer.

Apart from purely biochemical disorders or trauma to the brain, the primary cause of poor or distorted insight is an attachment to a collection of irrational beliefs many of us inherit as children from our parents and teachers. Another is the rather toxic idea that one's personal history is worth preserving and holding on to no matter what; that it represents the reality of who and what we are. These distortions of insight present a daunting challenge to any of us wanting to step outside the gunk of neurosis; to dismantle years of flawed learning, to sift through the rubble and save what works while learning entirely new ways of thinking and acting.

The formation of insight is accelerated when we learn how to un-attach ourselves from prefabricated modes of interpreting the world, and the practice of sitting meditation is perhaps the easiest, most direct way of allowing this process to occur.

Contemporary brain studies have examined the physical properties and effects of sustained meditation on the brain, and conclude that the practice allows for the disconnection of ingrained patterns of thought and feeling. Further, it allows the formation of new connections to be established; a reworking of the hardware that allows new and more satisfying software to be played; software like loving self and others, seeing the images of mind as benevolent, the elimination of fear, and so on and on in a lifetime of new learning.

However, insight alone does not always lead to significant changes in feeling and behaviour or, for those who seek it, to enlightenment. On the contrary, many people can articulate a comprehensive understanding of their neurosis but remain stuck for years. This is not good, and something has to give; perhaps insight itself is the problem. This 'insight' is, after all, a mental construct; a combination of rational thought, intuition, memory, an accumulation of countless bits of data, and the results of endless trials and errors. It is still in the domain of mental activity.

Insight can often bring a clarity and comfort to how we function and inter-relate with ourselves and the world, but it has its limits and there is, I believe, a final and more glorious stage of its development, and that is this: to see what lies beyond insight itself.

The most important truths we discover are those we had not been capable of seeing by just thinking alone; things held in the dark we could only reach by stepping out into an abyss fearlessly; an act of faith that by stepping into the unknown something new and wonderful might be disclosed and thus known. This can require great courage since there will never be a guarantee of what might happen. And to see beyond ourselves, we need to suspend (at least temporarily) the last traces of thought that obscure vision, much like removing a minor flaw in a telescope that can blur ever so slightly the splendid clarity of what is before us.

How is this done? How do we make this crucial adjustment to the lens of insight? With much less effort than I suspect most imagine. There are many travel guides available, and you can get to there from here at the speed light; it's that close. Why then do so many of us struggle for so long? I certainly did, but after a recent and particularly significant event in my life, I was frankly amused and shocked by the simplicity of the task.

Let me trace my path to this event using just one facet of life as a point of focus, but one that I have paid more attention to than any other: intimacy; what it really means, what I have really wanted, where it was finally found, and what I saw

Now I am hardly a gifted person, and I can unashamedly admit that I have had to learn most of life's lessons the hard way; and more than just once. And yet despite having learned, despite spending considerable years developing insight into how things worked or didn't work, I remained stuck. I remained disconnected. I remained lonely no matter how hard I tried or where looked.

I studied the great scriptures, went on pilgrimages, followed the Ten Precepts (well, almost), practiced sitting meditation, prayed, lit candles, was kind to dogs and children, but I wasn't getting 'it', I wasn't getting the intimacy I craved so deeply and so strongly. What was wrong with me? I could see the world, I had insight, I had more lovers than I could count (well, almost), but a glass wall remained, separating me, it seemed, forever from what I desired most: solid, complete, true intimacy.

Then one early autumn day not long ago, at precisely 3:20 pm, as I was walking by the water at Blackwattle Bay, the glass wall shattered. It was as though I had taken one step forward, placed my foot on the ground, and stepped into another universe.

I had been that afternoon, as usual, irritated with myself and my efforts to 'get it right'. I honestly believed I had been doing all the right things and all the hard work, but where was pay dirt? Frankly I was pissed off at the world, with thinking and trying and meditating and thinking and doing and working and linking and looking for patterns and formulas to finally reach this mysterious 'enlightenment' everyone was raving about and put an end to a constant aching in my heart.

As best as I can remember, I thought; "this is it, I'm tired of trying. I don't want to try any more, I'm fed up. I don't give a fuck what happens next or if I get what I want or not or what it is or isn't, I'm just going to stare this existence thing in the face and deal with it the way it is, no questioning, no expectations, no ifs or buts. I'm tired of waiting and I'm not waiting any more for things to be different than they are at this exact moment, and if the ache in my heart is there, so be it! No more trying to understand how it all works, no more nothing! I GIVE UP!"

At this point I think I kicked the space in front of me in some act of defiance, and then it happened. No insight. I just walked into it.

Everything 'looked' the same but it was not the same. There was no longer any separation between myself and what I saw. I saw distance with my eyes and distinction, yes, but all things were seamlessly connected; myself and each and every thing or person or leaf or light or bird or wind. This was not an illusion or a 'feeling' it was simply true, real, tangible. I was shocked but at the same time felt complete peace. I didn't question it nor was I perplexed. I felt as though I was 'seeing' for the first time. It was beyond fear or questioning or thinking or understanding; it was completely, totally perfect. Nothing was missing.

I had a clear sense, perhaps more; a clear knowing or awareness that what was inside me and outside me was exactly the same. Literally. All that I cast my awareness upon belonged to me; was me. Yes, things still had distinct forms. People chatted with each other, children ran and laughed, dogs chased balls and sticks, but I really saw that I was somehow with them and in them as they went about their business. I could see and smell and touch without having to touch; no effort, no reaching, no having to try.

Someone smiled and I felt giddy, as though we shared a secret. I felt amused, almost laughing at the playfulness of it all. There was, after all, nothing to be afraid of and I wasn't going mad; I was sane and safe and home. The universe was vast but I was content with where I was, and the rest was there to explore when I was ready; I had all eternity before me. There was absolutely nothing more I could have wanted; it was all mine, every single bit of it.

It was as though I had awakened from a long and troubled *Midsummer Night's Dream* to find myself safe and well. The spell of separation was broken.

It was as though I had returned to my beginning as an infant held in the arms of creation; before I learned how to 'see', before I became captured by the illusion of separation, before I became lost in mental constructs and insight, before I became addicted to the importance of my own personal story.

To my surprise, I was able to ‘think’ about what was happening without it interfering. In fact, I was able to examine what was happening in some detail. I thought: This is all so wonderful but what will happen when it goes away, and what about all the terrible and painful stuff going on with others in the world; how do I reconcile this heaven with existing hell? What shall I do with this? How could I possibly tell others?

I remained in this state for some hours into the next morning when, slowly, it lessened in intensity. But I did not regret this passing. Nor do I believe we were meant to remain in such a state. It was clear to me that much work still to be done; still much pain and suffering in the world to attend to. But an indelible memory has remained. I saw something with total certitude, something that could never be taken away or lost: I now knew I had never been alone or lost or isolated, and the intimacy I sought was not outside me, in some other person or thing. I had it within me all the time.

I have thought frequently about this event and what might have triggered it; allowed it. But what was the cause? Perhaps it was a result of an accumulation of all things and was a natural event like the falling of a snowflake on water, quietly merging with what it always had been. Perhaps it was something I had eaten earlier in the day. Maybe someone slipped an Ecstasy tablet in my orange juice. I really don’t know for sure. But this is what I think. I believe that meditation practice laid the foundations for what happened that day. I think I just stopped thinking, I stopped waiting for things to be different from the way they were. I stopped trying to become somehow better and thus more deserving. And most of all, I think I put insight to one side, and made a split second choice to jump into mystery and let it have its way with me. I had surrendered everything I had and to everything that might be.

Perhaps the mechanism I’m trying to articulate is similar to a bit of advice given to me in the great Australian outback. I wanted to explore this ancient landscape that once, hundreds of millions of years ago, had been engulfed by a massive sea. I wanted to find, on my own, some fossils that remained embedded in the earth. But where to look? I came across a shop in a small town outside the Alice that sold fossils and asked for guidance. The man gave me some directions on where to drive, and from there where to climb up a ridge that had bands of ancient sea bed exposed. He told me this: “When you find a darker band, you probably won’t see much at first. But get down on your knees, close to the earth, and just let your eyes do the work for you; just look for a while; patiently, and with attention.” Well, I did as instructed and found the spot, knelt and looked around; but nothing! Hah, I thought, pure bunk. But I persisted, and just ‘looked’ without thinking or expecting. Then bang! Right before my eyes, spirals and cones and odd organic shapes began to emerge among the rocks and soil. I was so excited and happy with this discovery I burst out laughing!

I had learned an important skill from that man: just look deeply, carefully, and with patience; let my eyes and my brain do the work without interfering with expectations, or doubts.

As for now, I still get confused and lost and troubled at times, but this no longer concerns me so much. Somehow I am not afraid any more; I know with certitude I cannot lose and will never be lost no matter what happens. And yes, the ache in my heart returns at times, but I treasure this as a gift; it has revealed itself as a bittersweet beacon that helps me keep my course, alerting me to look deeply inside when I think something is missing, and not in some other person, place, or thing.

It’s amazing how intimate I can feel with someone without having expectations. How could they possibly be responsible for giving me something I already have; something that

is not theirs to give?

Perhaps I feel less threatened myself, knowing I am not responsible for giving them what they already have, but (and maybe this is what love does) I can help to allow this discovery to occur. At the very least, I can try to avoid casting shadows or illusions that might interfere.

Lary has been a member of SZC for eight years. He is employed as a psychologist at Parklea Prison where he provides inmates with a range of therapeutic interventions including meditation practice.

Grace's Alien Encounter



Janet Selby

Walking the path alone: an introduction to Flora Courtois

Gillian Cooté

These days, Zen groups abound, but it was not ever thus, and certainly not when Flora Courtois was a young woman growing up in Detroit. In her 'Experience of Enlightenment', published in 1986, she writes: 'My quest for reality began a little over fifty years ago with a vision of a great whirling spiral of light. Only recently have I realised how deeply that vision affected the course of my life right up to this moment. I began to understand that vision twenty-five years after it happened, when I met the Zen master Hakuun Yasutani Roshi.'

That crucial meeting, which confirmed Flora's insight, took place in 1968 in California, where Yasutani was visiting Tassajara. Here is Yasutani Roshi's introduction to Flora's account of her solitary journey to realisation:

'She began with a description of her growing sense of doubt concerning all things as a young girl. She went on to tell how she began to confront the question, 'What is the ultimate reality?', while attending college, of her search for a solution through reading the works of many philosophers, of personal visits in quest of help to several priests and professors.'

Flora: 'One day, in a class on psychology, the instructor made a casual remark to the effect that the world as we saw it was simply a projection of neural activity in the visual centres of the brain. I walked out of the class and along the street, thunderstruck, saying over and over to myself, 'All I know, the whole world, even the universe, is myself!' I was filled with an extraordinary sense of exhilaration with this realisation. Shortly after this, another incident occurred which made a deep impression on me. Standing at the kitchen window one day, and looking out at where a path wound under some maple trees, I suddenly saw the scene with a freshness and clarity that I'd never seen before. Simultaneously, as though for the first time, I fully realised I was not only on the earth but of it, an intimate part and product of it. It was as if a door had briefly opened. I stood there transfixed. I remember thinking, 'Distant places on the map such as Tibet and North Africa are extensions of right here, all interrelated!' It was as if for a long time I had been reading books on how to swim; now, for a moment, I had plunged into real water.'

Flora now concentrated on everyday experiences, on sensation, in pursuit of 'the elusive ground of all being'. She continued going to university, always seeking answers, and was referred to the college psychiatrist. Her search did not stop. 'Sometime in April, Easter vacation arrived and I went home to Detroit to spend a week with my parents. There, about three days later, alone in my room sitting quietly on the edge of my bed and gazing at a small desk, not thinking of anything at all, in a moment too short to measure, the universe changed on its axis and my search was over. The small, pale green desk at which I'd been so thoughtlessly gazing had totally and radically changed. It appeared now with a clarity, a depth of three-dimensionality, a freshness I had never imagined possible. At the same time, in a way that is utterly indescribable, all my questions and doubts were gone as effortlessly as chaff in the wind. I knew everything and all at once, yet not in the sense that I had ever known anything before. All things were the same in my little bedroom yet totally changed. Still sitting in wonder on the edge of my narrow bed, one of the first things I realised was that the focus of my sight seemed to have changed; it had sharpened to an infinitely small point which moved ceaselessly in paths totally free of the old accustomed ones, as if flowing from a new source.'

What on earth had happened? So released from all tension, so ecstatically light did I feel, I seemed to float down the hall to the bathroom to look at my face in the mottled mirror over the sink. The pupils of my eyes were dark, dilated and brimming with mirth. With a wondrous relief, I began to laugh as I'd never laughed before, from the soles of my feet upward.

Within a few days, I had returned to Ann Arbor, and there over a period of many months there took place a ripening, a deepening and unfolding of this experience which filled me with wonder and gratitude at every moment. The foundations had fallen from my world. I had plunged into a numinous openness which had obliterated all fixed distinctions including that of within and without. A Presence had absorbed the universe including myself, and to this I surrendered in absolute confidence. Often, without any particular direction in mind, I found myself outside running along the street in joyous abandon. Sometimes when alone I simply danced as freely as I did as a child. The whole world seemed to have reversed itself, to have turned outside in. Activity flowed simply and effortlessly, and to my amazement, seemingly without thought. Instead of following my old sequence of learning, thinking, planning, then acting, action had taken precedence and whatever was learned was surprisingly incidental. Yet nothing ever seemed to go out of bounds; there was no alteration between self-control and letting go but rather a perfect rightness and spontaneity to all this flowing activity.

This new kind of knowing was so pure and unadorned, so delicate, that nothing in the language of my past could express it. Neither sense nor feeling nor imagination contained it yet all were contained in it. In some indefinable way I knew with absolute certainty the changeless unity and harmony in change of the universe and the inseparability of all seeming opposites. It was as if, before all this occurred, "I" had been a fixed point inside my head looking out at a world out there, a separate and comparatively flat world. The periphery of awareness had now come to light, yet neither fixed periphery nor centre existed as such. A paradoxical quality seemed to permeate all existence. Feeling myself centred as never before, at the same time I knew the whole universe to be centred at every point. Having plunged to the centre of emptiness, having lost all purposefulness in the old sense, I had never felt so one-pointed, so clear and decisive. Freed from separateness, feeling one with the universe, everything including myself had become at once unique and equal.

Writes Yasutani: 'This was the turning point. As her awareness deepened over the succeeding months, effortlessly all her problems and uncertainties were resolved and her entire attitude toward life underwent a radical change. Even her physical condition improved. However, when she tried to relate what she described as her experience of Open Vision to her professors at college or to the college psychiatrist she met with such a blank lack of interest and understanding that she finally concluded there was no one to whom she could try to describe this experience with any hope of recognition or appreciation. She then resolved never to speak of it again until she was confident such a person had been found. Since that time, over twenty-five years ago until this morning of July 16, she had not spoken of it again. I learned that she had continued her life, first as a student, later as a psychologist and writer as well as a useful person in her community and all along at the same time as a busy housewife and mother. Although more than twenty-five years had intervened, it was obvious she vividly recalled every moment. Throughout her talk, I carefully watched and observed her; her facial expression was very calm, with tenderness but without harshness; my total impression was of an individual quite natural and serene. Listening to her talk, I instinctively felt that to test her experience was unnecessary. That experience she had over twenty-five years ago was still vitally alive today. Immediately I verified that the experience was a clear kensho! (Literally, seeing into one's own nature: realisation) At the same time, I recommended to her that she

practice shikantaza with more diligence.’

Flora writes: ‘Yasutani went on to say that shikantaza is like sitting in the centre of a clearing in the forest, knowing that ultimate danger is about to strike but not knowing what form it will take or from what direction it will come.Grandiose descriptions of enlightenment tend to obscure the fact that once this Way of Seeing becomes the natural matrix of everyday experience, its practice is a rather homely affair, requiring a continuous, intimate attention and discipline.’

Back to Yasutani: ‘I repeatedly emphasised to her the importance of renewing her determination to practise further because our Buddha nature has the great function by which illumination is deepened endlessly through practice.....Kensho is only the first discovery of the original Self, that is, only a beginning. To deepen and clarify it, to establish its full function in everyday life, requires never-ending practice.’

I’ll let Flora have the last word: ‘With the ego absorbed in this immediate and intimate attention moment to moment, there is no separate experience of enlightenment, no path, no chasm to be bridged. No longer living in the old way, we are lived. Nothing has been lost. All our skills, strategies, relationships and memories are available for service to a more harmonious mode of being. Far from becoming special, we become more down-to-earth, direct, natural. We become as little children with everything we have learned since in our pocket. All the energy we previously expended in support of our separate selves is now free to flow in the Tao of working, dancing, laughing, sleeping, just living.’

*In youthful days
you had doubt about this life*

*no teacher found
and went alone*

*at the moment of glancing at the desk
the doubt disappeared, the mind in peace*

*you lost your way and now
the way has opened in all directions.*



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1. An Experience of Enlightenment, Flora Curtois, introduction by Hakuun Yasutani, published Quest Books, Wheaton, Ill, 1986.

thoughts on insight

Doug Mason

Insight.

1. a clear or deep perception (often sudden) of a situation
2. a feeling of understanding
3. grasping the inner nature of things intuitively

Meditation has two aspects – calming the mind and insight into the processes of the mind. Without the calm, insight does not arise.

Insight is not as similar to understanding as the dictionary definition implies. Understanding involves reason, at least to some extent. Insight is holistic, direct, immediate. It is not gradual, progressive. In insight meditation the mind has been variously described as absorbing, penetrating or confronting the object (or process). Equally, the moment of insight may be described in the opposite terms, that is, the mind is absorbed, penetrated or occupied by the object.

And creativity. Without insight there is no creativity. But there is much more to creativity than just insight. A study performed by Colin Martindale (University of Maine, in 1978) showed creativity has two stages: inspiration and elaboration. In the inspiration stage the conscious mind is quiet and the unconscious is active, making connections behind the scene, and giving rise to insight. In the second stage the conscious mind is active as the person elaborates on the insights, developing and organising them. The conclusion was that creativity is primarily about mental flexibility: not simply using the two-step process, but readily switching between the two states. It was found that the more creative people move between the two states easily and intuitively.

Humour relies on insight. In order to “get” a joke we must have an appropriate insight. Humour generally involves two concepts of the one object. The moment of seeing the joke requires first that one sees beyond the expected concept or interpretation of an object or situation, to an alternative concept. The alternative concept arises from insight, and as we encompass the new idea, the humour *dawns* on us. A moment of opening, of enlightening.

A monk is walking back from a lecture at a distant temple and gets lost on the wrong side of the river. He needs to cross the river to get home but cannot find the bridge. Finally, he sees the teacher who gave the lecture on the other side and yells out to him:

“Master, how do I get to the other side of the river?”

The teacher replies: “Novice, you are on the other side of the river.”

Meaning requires relationship. Something has meaning *in relationship* to something else. Things have relationship. Things have context. Memory works by association. When we remember an event, we recall various details associated with the event in various ways – the people present, the sounds, the weather etc. When we learn something new it is stored in our memory in such a way that we can retrieve it again. It is integrated into the larger whole of our total memory.

It is said that the mind is always trying to find or create meaning. The mind is meaning-making entity. We feel that all our experience and our view of the world to be one, to be a single structure. Each new memory has been added and integrated into the whole.

Insight, as the perception of new relationships or connections between things, is therefore a source of new meaning. Insight, considered from this viewpoint, is an *essential* part of the mind's activity.

Insight, and the desire for insight, is not a luxury, not a mere by-product of the mind's potential. It is necessary for growth from infancy to maturity. It is, perhaps, a critical factor in the evolution of primate consciousness.

Haiku, the traditional Japanese verse form, consists of three lines totalling 17 syllables. Generally, a haiku presents a pair of contrasting images, one suggestive of time and place, the other a vivid but

fleeting observation. The poet does not comment on the connection, leaving the synthesis of the two images for the reader to perceive.

A haiku poem does not communicate an experience of insight by depicting the result of the insight. The haiku acts as a catalyst for the reader to experience their own moment of insight.

The most famous haiku, which was written by Basho (1644-1694), is:

the old pond
a frog jumps in
the sound of water

I think one reason for its enduring appeal is that it captures the process of insight itself. The old pond is still, the calm mind. An idea (the frog) suddenly appears, and then gives rise to something completely new – a splash, an insight. Even after it has finished the poem continues to reverberate, for we see ripples spreading across the surface of the pond as the insight propagates through our consciousness, reorganising our connections. (Your mileage may vary).

Haiku writers are individuals, and their insights are personal. It seems to me that their poems often reveal something of their particular, human characteristics. For example, Taigi (1709-1772), who wrote:

not a single stone
to throw at the dog;
the winter moon

The vigour and humour of Taigi is evident in his theatrical expression of annoyance as his contemplation of the moon is being disturbed by the howling dog.

Basho, ever the master, displays an intense and complex (perhaps synaesthetic) sensibility:

winter desolation:
in a world of one colour
the sound of the wind

This also conveys a profound sense of integration of all things – of season, sight and sound.

In another example from Basho:

the sea darkens;
the voices of the wild ducks
are faintly white

the shift in modality is the opposite direction, from sound to sight, from dark to light. In my view, this is characteristic of the sheer depth and flexibility of Basho's imaginative and intuitive powers. Moreover, this poem seems to suggest that the instinctual, non-conscious, natural world is at least partly accessible (faintly white) to human consciousness.

A tender, yet arresting work from the (female) poet, Chiyo-ni (1703-1775):

the autumn moon
leaning against the verandah post,
and moving around it

It is hard not to imagine the writer having these same characteristics.

In Western poetry we sometimes find insights expressed in a form resembling haiku. For example, in the poem *Sea-weed*, by D H Lawrence, there is a section that reads:

sea-weed sways and sways and swirls
as if swaying
were its form of stillness

Lawrence certainly had a capacity to appreciate, even identify with, the instinctual realm. This example shows a considerable depth – seeing motion as a form of stillness.

For me, haiku has redefined the meaning of insight, vastly enlarging my understanding of what it is and what it is capable of. I have a particular admiration for a poem by Yamei (C17) :

in one shrill cry
the pheasant has swallowed
the broad field

This haiku is exhilarating, but, at the same time, it leaves my imagination utterly floundering as I try to catch up ...

Finally, koans. Koans are another story. One hesitates to say *anything* about koans. Nevertheless, the fool ventures forth.

A koan is typically presented as a paradox. Paradoxes, by definition, cannot be solved (or resolved) by reason. They yield only to insight. Perhaps the best-known koan is:

What is the sound of one hand clapping?

There is no “answer” to this. It is at once deliciously humorous, yet impregnable. A fine koan indeed.

True to form, Basho has given us a haiku that includes a koan, with a possible resolution. It begins with a paradox:

I hear the unblown flute
in the deep summer shadows
of the Temple of Suma

It proceeds via a synaesthetic association, from a (in this case, nonexistent) sound to sight, indicating the quality or flexibility of insight required in working with koans.

Another way to view this poem as a koan resolution is to see it as a question and response.

What is the sound of an unblown flute?

For Basho, at that moment, the response was:

It is in the deep summer shadows
of the Temple of Suma



Note: the English translations of the Japanese poems are mostly by R H Blyth.

Zazenkai Talk
The Sydney Zen Centre
Sunday 22 July, 2007
Sarah Walls

This is my second talk for the Zen Centre, and like the first one – on dreams – the topic came instantly to mind, but working out what to say took considerably longer! The topic of this talk is failure. You might wonder why failure came instantly to mind as a topic. After all, it's one of those things we don't usually talk about much, unless we're feeling particularly maudlin or engaging in a heart-to-heart with a close friend. People generally prefer to keep their experiences of failure to themselves. Indeed, when I told someone I thought I'd give a talk on failure, she said, "Isn't that a bit of a downer? Couldn't you link it to success?"

And of course, it is linked to success. It is the flip-side of that particular dualistic coin. I guess I'm interested in it partly because it's an issue that preoccupied me a lot, especially when I was younger. I'm not alone in that, I'm sure. At one point or another in our lives, whether personally or professionally or both, most of us encounter failure in some form and have to work out how to live with it. I was also interested in how our perceptions of failure shift with the passing years, and how failure might be seen in a Buddhist context. What can our practice teach us about dealing with failure? Indeed, how do we see our practice in terms of success and failure?

So I started, as you do when you want information now, by googling "failure + Zen". I was astonished to discover, on one of the first sites I looked at, an advertisement for T-shirts, calendars, shoulder-bags and so on, all emblazoned with a "Zen failure" logo! Did this have anything to do with Zen, or was it just another example of someone borrowing the term "Zen" because it was seen to be cool? Still, "failure" didn't sound too cool, so what could it be about? Well, it turns out there is a wonderful book written by an American, David Chadwick, called *Thank You and OK*, about life inside and outside a Zen monastery in Japan, and its subtitle is "An American Zen Failure in Japan". Baker Roshi apparently said of the author: "Years of expensive Zen training gone to waste"! I'll come to this book a little later in this talk.

There are, of course, infinite varieties of failure and infinite variety in the way we respond when we think we have failed. There is also our fear of failure, which can often be just as bad if not worse than the objective reality itself. Sometimes we think we have failed when we haven't; sometimes we have indeed failed and are mortified to realise it; and, less often but potentially most devastating of all, sometimes we interpret as success something that ends up looking far less shiny and much closer to failure than we had initially realised.

Our perception of ourselves and our place in the private and public domain is critical to our sense of failure. It is not only about how we see ourselves but also about how we feel that others see us, our place in the pecking order.

I can think of examples of all these varieties of failures in my life. For the first decade of my working life, I managed to keep moving up the career ladder, always with the fear that eventually I'd be shown not to measure up. That fear finally materialised when in 1985, with three months' television experience, I landed a job as a Four Corners reporter.

I was a fish out of water and after 18 very stressful months, my contract was not renewed and I found myself looking for work. I was overwhelmed with shame, and dreaded any social gathering with other journalists, for I felt as if I had a large sign hung around my neck saying, "This woman failed on Four Corners!" This clearly mattered far less to anyone else than it did to me, but I didn't have much sense of proportion.

Fifteen years later, I had a different experience of failure. In 1990 I suffered severe damage to my central nervous system from medical treatment. I had been advised to return from New Caledonia to Australia for an MRI scan. Instead doctors did a myelogram, an X-ray where contrast medium is injected directly into the cerebrospinal fluid. When the myelogram proved negative, probable multiple sclerosis was diagnosed, and I was treated with six weeks of high-dose

corticosteroids and ACTH. The quantities of contrast medium and steroids prescribed exceeded the maximum recommended and in combination proved highly toxic. As it subsequently turned out, I didn't have MS.

In the process of trying to work out what had gone wrong in my treatment, I came across scientific findings which indicated that corticosteroids, stress hormones that are used as anti-inflammatory agents, can in fact have the opposite, pro-inflammatory effect when used repeatedly or in large doses. This seemed information of vital clinical importance, especially when steroids were being used to treat potentially disabling diseases such as MS. Yet there was little warning of the specific risks of excess steroid exposure in the clinical literature.

As an ex-journalist, it seemed to me crucial to raise awareness of this issue. Since I did not have the medical and scientific qualifications to publish on it myself, the only way I could see to bring about change was to lobby the scientific, medical and government authorities and to pursue legal action for compensation.

Pursuing a compensation claim proved far more difficult than I had anticipated. Over the ensuing decade, I contacted some 45 potential experts on five continents, only two of whom said no negligence was involved in my case, but none of whom was willing to testify in my favour. With no medical expert willing to speak out, no lawyer was willing to pursue my claim.

I continued with it nonetheless, not just because of the vital clinical issues surrounding steroid use, but also because I was scandalised by the difficulty facing injured patients in obtaining compensation. A 1996 federal government report on professional indemnity had estimated that of 230,000 "preventable" health care injuries that occurred every year in Australia, fewer than 2,000 resulted in negligence claims, and the vast majority were won by health professionals. That meant that less than 1% of those suffering health care injuries received compensation—and the report estimated that 50,000 people a year suffer permanent disability and 18,000 die as a result of adverse events in hospital.

(At the time, these figures were attacked as unreliable and were subsequently revised downwards. But the most recent national data for *actual* adverse events in hospitals show that the estimates weren't too far out: in 2005-2006 there were over 352,000 Australian hospital admissions that involved a recorded adverse event, though not all may have been "preventable" or have caused permanent damage. As for the percentage of injured patients who now receive compensation, that is not easy to find out.)

Anyway, in 2001, with no expert or lawyer, I ended up taking my case to court on my own. Predictably, I lost. While I knew the odds were overwhelmingly against me, I thought the court would at least be obliged to consider my arguments. But my oral submissions did not appear in the transcript—just references to page numbers in my written submission—and the court did not consider my arguments in its judgment. However, it seems they were not entirely ignored: when the 2002 NSW Civil Liability Act, designed to cut personal injury claims, was introduced, I was horrified to see that the door had been firmly closed on three of my key arguments. These arguments would never again be tested in court, as it was no longer legal to argue them.

When you read about injustices in newspapers, they often seem rather distant. As you can imagine, it's a very different matter when you experience them personally. I felt absolutely gutted, especially to realise that there were now even more legal barriers in the way of injured patients obtaining compensation than there had been in 1996. There was some consolation in knowing that significant systemic changes had occurred: both drugs prescribed for me were withdrawn from the Australian market in the 1990s, and in 2001 new international criteria for the diagnosis of MS were introduced which eliminated the "probable" category into which I had been placed. You cannot be treated for MS now until the diagnosis is confirmed. Scientists also now recognise that excess steroids have direct pro-inflammatory effects.

I didn't feel mortified by losing my case, as I had by my professional failure on Four Corners. But I had to accept that there was nothing more that I could do; after twelve years of battling, I had to learn to let go. Part of that involved recognising that life is not always fair, and

that it is not always possible to rectify injustices.

Just as hard, if not harder to deal with than professional failure, are experiences of failure in our personal lives. Relationship breakdowns, estrangement in families, personal conflicts of many types all cause us suffering. Sometimes we find it difficult to step aside from our entrenched positions and make room for understanding. Sometimes even our best efforts do not avail to resolve deep and longstanding personality conflicts. Our resolutions to act more mindfully may fall by the wayside, and we see ourselves failing to measure up to the standard of behaviour we would expect from “good Buddhists”! This is certainly still true for me, even after more than 15 years of Buddhist practice.

Often we see ourselves repeating damaging patterns in relationships which we feel powerless to stop. We may withdraw and cut off contact when we are hurt, prolonging rifts. We get irritated with ourselves when we find our “buttons” being pressed by the same old triggers, despite all our resolutions to stay calm. One thing we can be sure of: whatever the spectrum of our emotions, sooner or later all our emotions, both positive and negative, will be expressed in our close relationships. Some relationships will be strong enough and warm enough to contain conflict. Others will be shattered, perhaps permanently.

Coming to terms with failure, whether personal or professional, involves a grieving process. But as Thomas Moore, the author of *Care of the Soul*ⁱⁱ points out, it is important that one does not indulge in failure, “wallowing in it rather than letting it affect the heart”. Learning our own limitations and those of the world is painful, and we cannot avoid traversing that pain. To block out the pain of failure is to raise defences against its potential contribution to our growth in wisdom and maturity. With time, the pain of failure, like any grief, slowly heals and becomes less central, and the experience finds its place alongside the brighter moments in our lives.

When you pass the half-century mark, as I have, something seems to shift in how you see success and failure. You realise that most of your life is now behind you, and that however your successes and failures tally up, they are part of who you are. In any case there are more important things to worry about—like making the most of what remains of your life, really relishing each moment. I’m not sure to what extent this is solely a function of age, or whether it’s also the result of Zen and zazen gradually softening our tendency both to see things in black-and-white terms and to see ourselves as mattering so much in the larger scheme of things.

What wisdom does Zen have to offer us on dealing with failure? Failure is certainly part of the suffering and distress that Buddhism sees as the basic condition of life. In the *Shodoka*, a sublime state of being is portrayed which is beyond the dualistic coin of success and failure, a tantalising goal to aim for:

*...since I abruptly realised the unborn,
I have had no reason for joy or sorrow
at any honour or disgrace.*

and again:

*...self-centred merit brings the joy of heaven itself,
But it is like shooting an arrow at the sky;
When the force is exhausted, it falls to earth,
And then everything goes wrong.
Why should this be better
Than the true way of the absolute,
Directly penetrating the ground of the Tathagata?*

Many of us, when we come to Zen practice, start out in linear fashion aiming for the bright star of “enlightenment”. We think that if we just meditate long enough and hard enough, we will “break through” and reach this superior spiritual state of being. Then, we think, all the negatives in our lives—failure, grief, even illness—will disappear...or at least shrink into insignificance. Often, as the years go by and this state remains unattained, we may feel we’re Zen failures!

But after a while, as we continue to practice, we find that the benefits of meditation lie not

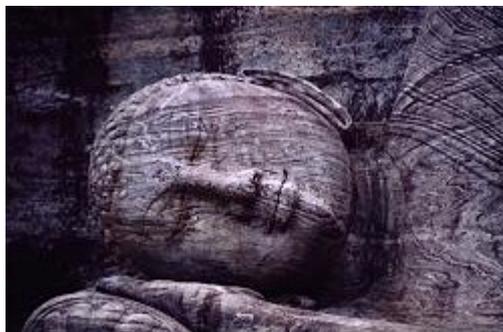
necessarily in the flashes, the supernovas, the spectacular peak experiences that may occur from time to time, but rather in the steadying influence the practice exerts on our day-to-day lives, the way it anchors us in the here-and-now. It opens our hearts, makes us less rigid, allows us to see things with a wider perspective. It is not that our egos disappear, but hopefully as time goes on, they take up less room and don't block the view so much.

David Chadwick, in *Thank You and OK*, portrays with humour both the hopeful naïvety of the Zen beginner and the down-to-earth and wise conclusions drawn from 30 years of practice. Towards the end of his book, he says:

"...am I a failure because I can't remember what Buddhism is—and are all the rest of us failures, as it seems, when contrasted against our early pure and simple expectations and the clear-cut enlightenment of the story books? The Shimboji monks would say so." – Chadwick is referring to monks from a Buddhist temple in Tokyo-- "They'd just say we were all wallowing in delusion and that if we were enlightened, we'd understand everything completely..."

Towards the end of the book, Chadwick's Zen teacher, Katagiri, dies. Like Suzuki Roshi, who first brought Zen to San Francisco in the 1960s, Katagiri had taught in the US as well as Japan, and had faced the difficulty of implanting Zen in a foreign culture. Reflecting on what his teacher had left behind, Chadwick comments that transmission is mysterious. Maybe, he says, Katagiri's *"true dharma heir is the whole sangha, everyone he got to—not like the traditional stories with one or more of us realising the true light, attaining a perfect understanding, and the rest plodding along. I think we're all just plodding along—and that is the true light...Anyway, it seems to me that all our endless failures are adding up to a magnificent success. It's just not what we had in mind. It's real."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Life too, particularly its failures, is rarely what we had in mind. But it's real. And our Zen practice can help us live that reality to the full.



Reclining Buddha of Polonnaruwa (Sri Lanka)
source: www.travelphoto.net

NOTES

ⁱ *Thank you and OK – An American Zen Failure in Japan*, David Chadwick, Penguin/Arkana, 1994, USA.

ⁱⁱ *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, Thomas Moore, HarperCollins Publishers Inc, New York, NY, 1992. See pages 196-197.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quotations from *Thank you and OK – An American Zen Failure in Japan*, David Chadwick, Penguin/Arkana, 1994, USA, page 434.

Dedication: Shirley Cooper

These pages are dedicated to Shirley Cooper, who died on Wednesday August 22 at 1.00 pm, at her beautiful farm outside Bega. Shirley was a potter and weaver, and a sparkling, wise and wry friend. She and John hosted Aitken Roshi's early visits to Sydney in their house by the Lane Cove River, where zazenkaï were held; many old-time sangha members were students in John's extraordinary yoga classes. Roshi remained close friends with the Coopers and when he came to Sydney for the opening of Kodoji, he spent a week with them down on the farm. John died in 1998. These poems of Shirley's were written after his death. – *Gillian Coote*.

The Chinese Geese

They came from the markets in a hessian bag.
I was going to put them on the island in the dam.
 The neighbour said they'd just fly away home.,
 That's the scam,
So they lived with the chooks for eight weeks.

The neighbour taught me how to catch them,
Hold their feet, put the wings under your arm.
 Down the hill we walked with our two parcels
 The cage on the island was waiting
There was longing in their eyes for the water.

On that special day, I let them out
With dignity they paced to the water
 Never did I see them rush
Only sailing on the dam like two Lohengrins
They shared space with wild ducks and the little Grebe.

Always companions, they rowed with the dogs and horses.
Taking off from the top of the hill
Flying, floating, sweeping to swish and settle on the water.
 From the window, I watched them mirroring.
 That's a good sign.
 But never a nest.
 It must be just comfort sex.

These green paddocks and waterways are their home now.
 Before sunrise each morning
 I check for their whiteness
 I love them being there.

Shirley Cooper



John and Shirley's dam at The Diggings, outside Bega. *Photos by Tony Coote*

Showers

A white, still surface reflects the clouds.
Reeds mirror themselves on the edge of the dam.
Are there insects dotting the glass?
More and more disturb the silent peace,
Up and down, up and down.
White becomes a moving grey.
The reeds are just shadows now.
A slight wind changes the pattern.
The surface is dark.

Rain on the roof is a steady beat.
Thunder rolls, frightening the dogs.
Downward, slanting, moving lines fill the air space
Weighing down drooping branches.
The air is soft with water,
The sound is soft with smaller drops.
Brightness is returning.
A drift of fog lifts through the trees,
And a hope-filled rainbow.

Shirley Cooper

Jukai Vows

Tony Shields

I take refuge in the Buddha, the example of the man who lived over 2000 years ago, all the Buddhas of past and present, the Buddha nature that pervades the whole universe.

I take refuge in the Dharma, the teachings that have passed down through the ages and teachings of the stones, the birds and the weeds.

I take refuge in the Sangha, the companionship of the many guides along the ancient way, the teachings and examples of my friends.

I vow to maintain the Precepts. The precepts remind me that all is one and there is not me and them or I and not I. They are skilful means to end suffering. I accept them and vow to use them.

I vow to practise all good dhammas. Practising all good dhammas, particularly right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood helps me not to separate myself from others or place myself above them.

I vow to save the many beings. I vow to acknowledge my companionship with everything else. I vow to remember kindness and loving compassion when I am angered by other beings.

I take up the way of not killing. Buddha nature is the whole universe. I vow not to deny it, not to dismiss it, not even one little bit of it. I vow not to divide the world up into good and bad and therefore kill it by doing so.

I take up the way of not stealing. The universe comes forward without loss and without gain. When I covet what I do not need and when I take what is not given, I forget that desires are only satisfied temporarily and then another desire comes up to be satisfied.

I take up the way of not misusing sex. Sexual desire has been there from the beginning. When followed unwisely it leads to pain, anger and dissatisfaction. When I lust I climb onto the wheel of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. I vow to clearly see sexual desire and leave it to gently rest.

I take up the way of not speaking falsely. Truth is the way it is. Dealing with the world the way I want it to be, rather than the way it is, is delusion. I take up the way of speaking the truth, gently and compassionately.

I take up the way of not giving or taking drugs. The world comes together in harmony, pain and joy, security and insecurity. I vow to accept the good peacefully and to accept the bad peacefully without enhancing them or avoiding them by using drugs.

I take up the way of not discussing the faults of others. A tortoise cannot run very fast, but swims well. Similarly all people have strengths and weaknesses. When I discuss the faults of others, I invoke my small discriminating mind and envy.

I take up the way of not praising myself while abusing others. I stand alone and intimately with everything. Praising myself while abusing others is small mind. I vow to move beyond small mind.

I take up the way of not sparing the dharma assets. I am just passing through. Being

generous recognises this. I vow to be generous.

I take up the way of not indulging in anger. Anger signals that I am contriving reality for myself. I vow to recognise anger quickly and what it signals. I vow not to indulge in anger.

I take up the way of not defaming the three treasures. The Buddha, the dhamma and the sangha are the treasures that end suffering, mine and others. I vow to talk and think about the treasures respectfully and kindly.

Tony Shields took Jukai together with Kim McShane and Yvonne Hales, at the 2007 Easter Sesshin.



Spire Of Htilominlo Pahto, Bagan, Myanmar (Burma)
www.lonelyplanet.com

Seeing / Not Seeing

Each time he got new specs
it changed the world.
“How”, he always wondered,
“How is it really?”

I wondered too;
looked and looked
“through a glass darkly”.

If only.....
If only I had clear specs
I could get things straight.
But then
Who is wanting it clear?
Who asking? Who trying to see?

“I” “you” “My insights”
“Our tears”.....
I stick labels on butterflies,
on passing mist.
How is it really?

The magpie sings. The garbage truck arrives.
A child starves as the bullets fly.
Stars shine. I hold your hand.

When, if,
in the twinkling of an eye,
the universe turns over,
who can cry
“I’ve got it! At last I’ve got it!” ?

Ah no. . Not yet. Not yet.

No clear glimpse suffices
to embody the seen.
No words nail it.
The river flows on
The dance never stops
The next note of the song is now.
What is it? Who is it?
How is it really?

Sally Hopkins

a visual haiku



Photo: Zen Frog by Davie Trood



Source: <http://www.arroyoseco.org>

On Being 90

A Talk by Robert Aitken ©

Thank you, everybody, for this nice party. I feel quite overwhelmed. We are recording these words, so for the record, let me thank the planners and those who brought those plans into reality. Thank you everyone for coming, and thank you everyone who telephoned and sent messages of congratulation. The kindness of your messages almost convinces me that those 90 years did not pass in vain.

Now, I suppose, you hope for words of wisdom. Sorry, I don't have any, beyond stuff you already know. Wotthehell, as Archy would say.

It seems to me that the most obvious observation I can make is the gap between what we know and what we do. We know that we come into being, hang out for a while and then go out of being. Nothing survives. Rupert Murdoch will not survive. Bill Gates will not survive. Their organisations and institutions will not survive. You and I and everything we value are completely ephemeral. Do we act as though we know this?

The bowing-mat before our altar appeared in our mail after we heard that the seamstress had died. Had we treated her as though her days were numbered? When we stop to think about it, we realize that they are numbered for everybody in this room. That is a poignant fact, and it's sad. Guanyin (Kanzeon) holds our tears in her vase. Namu Kanzeon Bosatsu! Harada Daiun Rōshi asked, "How old is Kanzeon?"

Our containment of all beings is the second thing we know and have difficulty putting into practice. True realisation of containment is also conducive to waves of compassion. With Walt Whitman, we are large, for we contain multitudes.

This inclusion is set forth metaphorically as the Net of Indra in commentaries on the *Huayan Sutra*. Each point in the net is a jewel that perfectly reflects all other jewels.^{iv} Its virtue is the network, as well as mutual inclusion. Each one of us contains all others. The Net of Indra is metaphor extraordinaire. It permeates many of the cases of Zen Buddhism and it permeates the haiku of Bashō. Here's an example of Bashō's network with my comment edited from *A Zen Wave*:

*Suzumego to
koe nakikawase
nezumi no su
Baby mice in their nest
squeak in response
to the young sparrows.^v*

Not only baby mice and baby sparrows, but all people, animals, and things are intimately interconnected, symbiotic— dissimilar organisms living together in mutual dependence. That says it all. We are all of us completely and absolutely dissimilar, living in complete and absolute dependence upon one another. We are a symbiotic universe, a symbiotic family of nations, a symbiotic country, state of that country, island, community, family, and even individual (for we have all kinds of creatures living in our insides).

Challenge follows challenge, and we are led to the third thing we know and easily forget: the infinitely precious quality of each individual being and thing. Truly great masters show the way.

When Bashō was on his last pilgrimage and lay dying in the home of one of his students, he dictated the verse:

*Aki fukaki
tonari wa nani wo
suru hito zo*

Autumn deepens,
Our neighbour—
What does he do? ^{vi}

Literally, “What occupation-person is he?” In the deepening mood of autumn, Bashō’s mind turns to the person next door. Is he an artist or a carpenter or what? You might think that at such a time, he would be focused on the seriousness of his condition and situation, or on some unfinished matter. No, he asked about the identity of a person in his network he did not know.

Japanese tend to pigeon-hole people by their occupation or profession, but most people, including Japanese, will be self-centred at the moment of death. That is what makes the verse so unusual. Bashō was a teacher of haiku and of life itself, and he lived this way to the very end.

Well, where does this leave us? Maybe you do not consistently frame your attitudes and conduct with a completely enlightened consciousness, but neither do I. Even at 90, my practice continues. The same goes for anybody with a practice, down through the years. However, the true master of religion and the true master of poetry are seasoned in their practice and realisation—in their understanding, and to their compassion. Remember that the first meaning of “compassion” is “suffer together.”

Reading the literature of the Bodhisattva is an exercise in the irredeemable human facts of consequence. The denial of compassion and the exclusion of others are often quite benign and productive, but ultimately and inevitably they lead to war, mass imprisonment, torture and murder. “National interest” is the false maxim used to cover such abominations. The Bodhisattva is far- and-away unlimited by the bounds of national interest. Her sentiment is a feature of the oldest composition in human history.

Take the Chinese poet Bo Jui, for example. Here is an excerpt of his poem about prisoners of war in the ongoing conflict between the Chinese and the Tartars of Turkistan. It was composed in 809 AD, almost 200 years before the Battle of Hastings in 1066:

They were led from the city of Chang-an under escort of an armed guard.
Their bodies were covered with the wounds of arrows, their bones stood out of their cheeks.
They had grown so weak they could only march a single stage a day.
In the morning they must satisfy hunger and thirst with neither plate nor cup.
At night they must lie in their dirt and rags that stank with filth. ^{vii}

Thus we get a sense of complicated human cruelty from ancient times, and indeed Homer predated Bo Jui by some 1,200 years, and his *Iliad* presents the same subjection of flesh-and-blood human beings to the forceful imperatives we see on our television screens today, of people denying humanity.

the horses
Rattled the empty chariots through the files of battle,
Longing for their noble drivers. But they on the ground
Lay, dearer to the vultures than to their wives. ^{viii}

The imperatives of human beings to deny the humane leads to widespread killing and also to walls and fences thrown up to separate people from people—the Great Wall of China, for example and the walls dividing humanity that have likewise been thrown up in the 20th and 21st centuries. One by one these walls self-destruct—somehow by something, as Robert Frost wrote:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

Frost wrote this poem in reaction to his neighbour's declaration that "Good fences make good neighbours." It is a shameful kind of irony that Frost is remembered as the author of the line about good fences, when actually he hated the sentiment, as even a casual reading of his poem makes clear.

You might suppose by all this that it's important to realise that all things and all beings are ephemeral and empty, that a single being contains all other beings, and that each being is infinitely precious. Well, such truths are indeed very important, but there is more to realise. The human being who realises the transitory nature of the self and all beings— personally, to the very bottom— *under-stands* the humane. The human dies, but the humane lives on. This ultimate kind of complementarity is the very the ground of the Dharma. The *Heart Sutra* boils down this truth to the basic:

Form is no other than emptiness—
emptiness no other than form.”^{ix}

The brief *Kannon Sutra* sets forth this ultimate fact in the realm of thought:

Thought after thought arise in the mind:
Thought after thought are not separate from mind.^x

As everybody with a modicum of conscience knows very well, thought after thought arise in the mind. It may not be so clear that each of these thoughts is that very mind. It is the purpose of true masters to help us to grasp the unity of our every-day mind and the mind of Guanyin herself.

This is the great stone bridge of Zhaozhou, and my best birthday present is its full and complete realisation by each of us at last.

I dedicate this teishō gratefully to my late master, Yamada Kōun Rōshi.. Michael Kieran, Jack Shoemaker and Carolyn Glass helped with its composition.

NOTES

^{iv} Thomas Cleary, *Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1983), pp. 33, 149.

^v Robert Aitken, *A Zen Wave: Bashō's Haiku and Zen* (Washington DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 1978), p. 63.

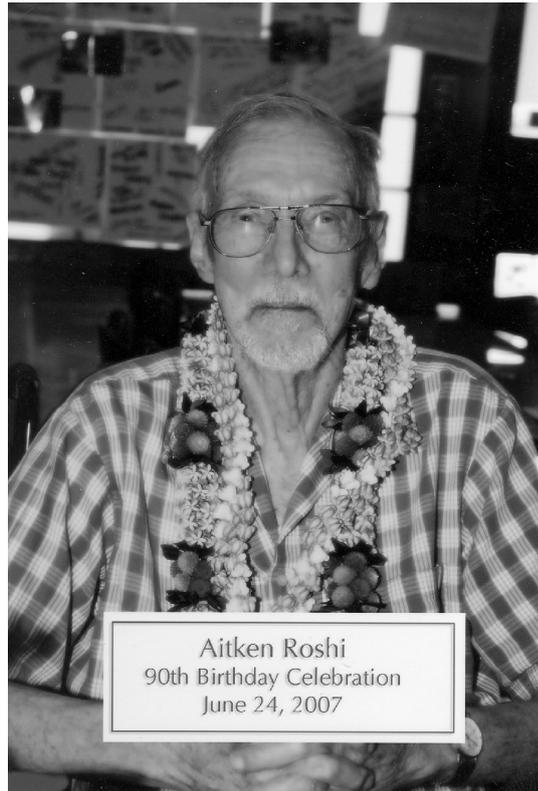
^{vi} *Ibid.*, p. 68.

^{vii} Arthur Waley, *Translations from the Chinese* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 174.

^{viii} Simone Weil, *The Iliad: or the Poem of Force* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, ND), p. 3.

^{ix} Robert Aitken, *Encouraging Words: Zen Buddhist Teachings for Western Students* (New York & San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 173.

^x *Ibid.*, p. 178.



Hourglass
granite, marble, Mediaacrylic and emulsion on board on canvas.
John Edgar

observing poets

eyes see

hands write

on paper, mind signs

Doug Mason

.....

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