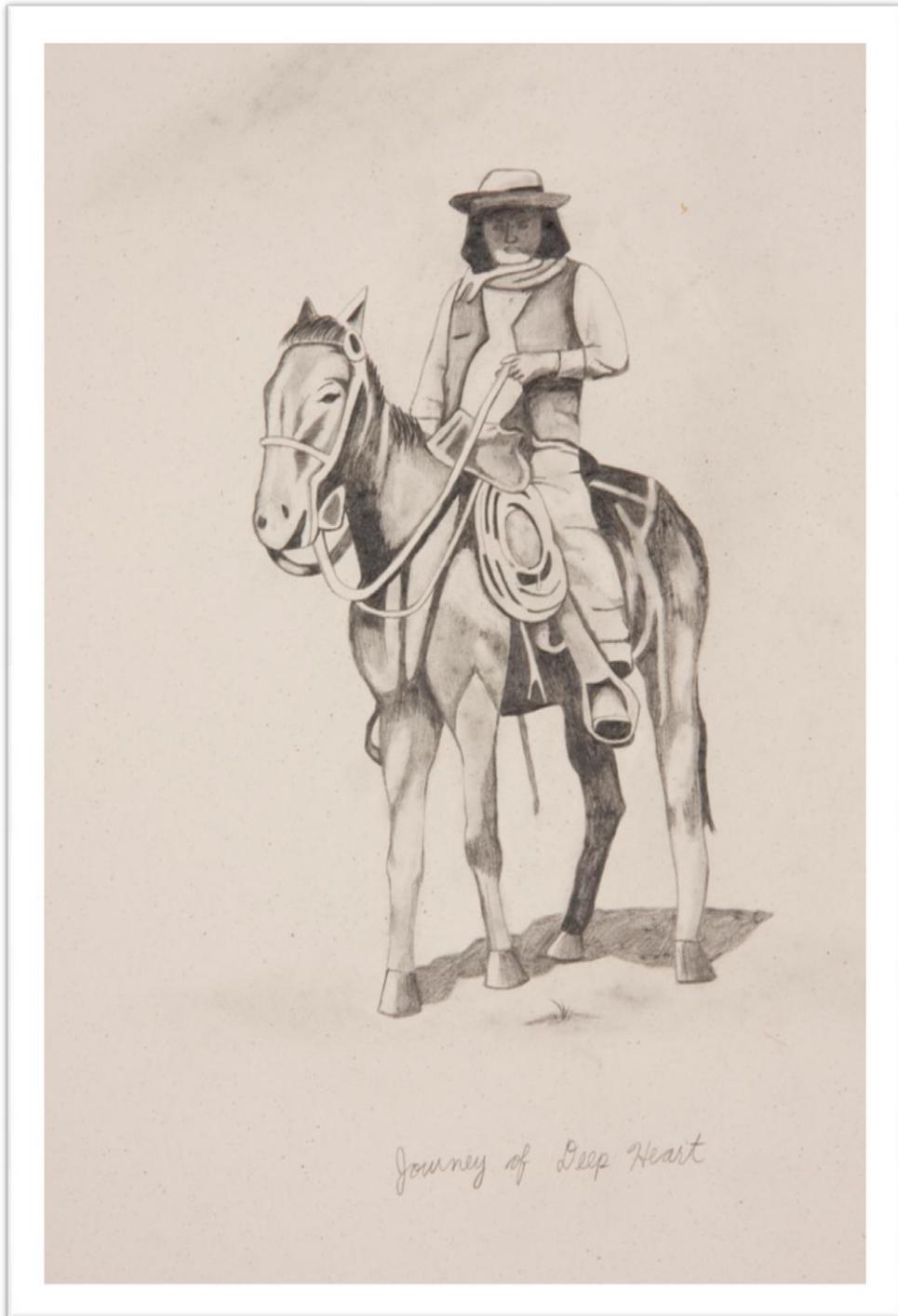


Mind Moon Circle

A Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre



What does Zen mean to you?
Winter 2014

About the Issue: What does Zen Mean to You?

By Stuart Solzberg

When I think about what Zen means to me, memories of riding my bicycle as a young teenager to the local hippie, new age, incense shop come to mind; where I bought my first pair of Birkenstocks, incense and my first book on meditation. It was a small, three-dollar, generic book on meditation; and I loved it. It was around this same time, at age fourteen, that my wonderful creative writing teacher, an old time hippie in his own right, suggested I read 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind' and it had a profound and lasting impact on my life. To this day it remains a treasured book and is like an old friend to me. For years, I read this book many times over. It wasn't until many moons later that I actually went to my first zendo, the Dai Bosatsu City Zendo in New York City. I remember walking into this mysterious place with the lingering smell of incense, and I was directed to a small room upstairs for orientation. Basically I was instructed to sit and don't move, that was about it. I sat there facing the wall feeling like I was going to explode! I thought I might jump off the bench and run out the door screaming at the top of lungs, "What the F*** is going on here!" You can imagine my relief when the bell sounded to end the sitting period. For the second period we were given the option to stand, I thought this sounded easier. By the time the second period ended I was in utter agony! Turning to face centre, the teacher in full robe attire proceeded to march up and down the centre of the zendo followed by several bows. By this point I thought I was going to burst out laughing with a huge smile on my face. I had no idea what I was witnessing, nor did I have any idea of its impact. I did not return to organized practice for some time.

After many years and having sat with several sanghas, combined with life's ebbs and flows, and many thousands of miles away from New York City, I walked through the doors at the Sydney Zen Centre for zazen before Christmas 2010; a month before my son Leo was born. I immediately felt at home. The following September I went to Kodoji for sesshin, and as soon as I stepped into the valley I knew I was someplace special, home amongst the mist, the rocks, the birdsong. As Gillian has said to me at sesshin since, "Clarifying the mystery, not making the mystery clear."

What does Zen mean to me? Coming home again and again and again...continually, over and over and over, moment after moment after moment, day after day, year after year. In the end, over several months of thinking about what Zen means to me, it became a koan. What does Zen mean to me, I would ask myself. Does anyone really know what THIS all means, would usually be the question to follow. In the end, I must admit, I haven't a clue! And frankly, I don't think anyone else really knows what it means either. As Robert Aitken urges in *Taking the Path of Zen* (1982), it is essential that the path is deeply personal and intimate, and we must make it our own.

Black Bear asked, "Am I on the right path?"

Raven said, "Of course. Wolverine is on the right path."

Black Bear said, "Wolverine? He seems pretty far afield."

Raven said, "His path."

(Aitken, 2002, p.186)

I hope you enjoy thinking about this, or not thinking about this as much as I have.

Gassho grasshoppers! Cheers, Stuart

Mind Moon Circle

What does Zen mean to you? - Winter 2014

Contents

Living Practice by Sally Hopkins.....	3
Sounds of Silence by Jillian Ball.....	4
The Tune of the World Opens My Heart by Maggie Gluek.....	6
Jukai Ceremony by Michael Tierney.....	7
Fathoming the “Z” Word by Gillian Coote.....	12
And my shadow follows me by Philip Long.....	17
Annandale Sitting by Jane Andino.....	17
Black Cockatoos by Suneeta Peres da Costa.....	18
Zen Practice: A True Refuge by Subhana Barazaghi.....	19
Who is Hearing Now?	25
<i>Musical Offerings by some of the Sydney Zen Centre musicians</i>	
Zen to me, the great never ending path by Stuart Solzberg.....	26
Soft-shelled by Suneeta Peres da Costa.....	27
Somewhere In Time With A Dog Named Shelby by Jack B. McNeil Jr.....	28
Dr Leigh Davison – “Frugal is the New Sexy!” by Diana Levy.....	29
Faith and Reason: The Heart of the God Debate (Part 2) by Philip Long.....	31

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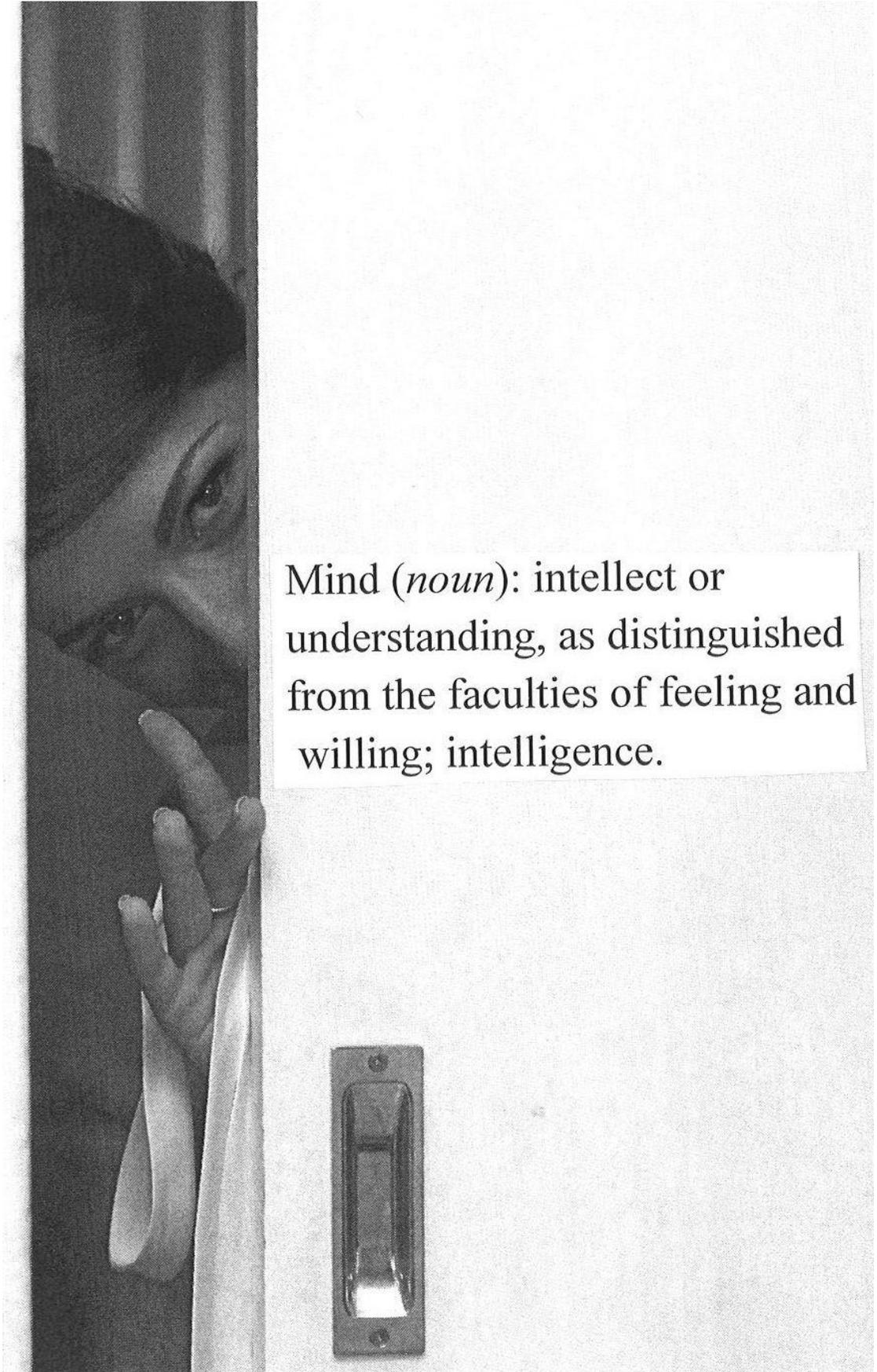
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Next Issue: Zen and the Story

The topic on our next issue will be ‘Zen and the Story’ All submissions are welcome. Please send submissions by 31st October, 2014 to Sarah Sherringham:

sariemae@gmail.com



Mind (*noun*): intellect or understanding, as distinguished from the faculties of feeling and willing; intelligence.

Even if you consume as many books

As the sands of the Ganges

It is not as good as really catching

One verse of Zen.

If you want the secret of Buddhism,

Here it is: Everything is in the Heart!

Stevens, J 2004, Dewdrops on a lotus leaf: zen poems of Ryokan, Boston

Do not imagine that the journey is short; and one must have the heart of a lion to follow this unusual road, for it is very long...One plods along in a state of amazement, sometimes smiling, sometimes weeping.

Matthiessen, P 1978, The snow leopard, Penguin Group, New York, (p.46)

Living Practice

By Sally Hopkins

Living Practice.
Sitting in silence together
is sitting with friends everywhere.
Into the silence of 'not knowing'
flows the world.
Birds sing . Insects buzz.
Wind whispers and wails . What 's the meaning?
Fingers play Schubert . Schubert sings,
right now. The poem speaks.
My ideas about you are my thoughts,
not you , not YOU. Who are you?
Who are we? The sunrise
colours everything,
but there's nothing to grasp.

A strange whirling scroll
at the top of the stairs.

***Year after year I would wonder,
"What is it? What 's it mean?"***

When the words were translated?
"What is it ?" came the answer.

Nine years at home with Kuan Yin
Avolokiteshvara,
the calm , silent presence,
on the Annandale wall.
"The one who hears the cries,
who IS the cries , who responds to them."
First thing in the morning.
Last thing at night.
Going to the toilet in the dark.
Creeping up the stairs, unwell.
Who? Which one? Which One?

***This one. Each one. Everyone.
Each step I take.***



Photo by Glenys Jackson

Sounds of Silence

By Jillian Ball

Awakening to
the dawn cloud
the birds' song
the rhythm of
the ancient ground
the sharing of the path
deep compassion
lots of moments arising

and falling away
spaces between the moments
rising curiosity
doubt
not knowing
knowing
letting go
of the need to know.

Winter Sesshin
Kodoji
June 2014



Photo by Glenys Jackson

The Tune of the World Opens My Heart

By Maggie Gluek

When we begin

the sesshin
It brings back the depth
of practice so tender
We sit in a night
of Kodoji splendor
It brings back the
presence of green

We're all here once more under the stars

And out in the field
an orchestra's playing
And even the gum trees
seem to be swaying
When they begin
the sesshin
To live it anew
is past all endeavor

The tune of the world opens my heart

And here we are, learning to love forever and seeing we're never, never apart

A moment divine What silence serene

It brings back the depth
of practice so tender
We sit in a night
of Kodoji splendor
When we begin...the sesshin
When we begin
the sesshin

Jukai Ceremony

By Michael Tierney

In Autumn Sesshin 2014 I took the Jukai ceremony with Subhana Barzaghi Roshi. Jukai is a wonderful ceremony in which a student makes a kind of public declaration of their aspirations for their practice. It is also an act of support for the practitioner by the Sangha a kind of nurturing from all. This is embodied viscerally in the ceremony as you are placed at the centre while the Sangha surrounds you on all sides. The teacher sits with you and throws down the traditional challenges which include your responses to the three vows, the three pure precepts and the ten grave precepts. In a way you are asked the very question ‘what does zen mean to you?’

It was a very wonderful event which was attended by some of my friends at the centre who travelled out especially for the occasion (Ameli, Lee and Mel my thanks), my parents John and Pam who tussled with strange terrains and lovingly offered their support, and the sitters of the Sesshin which was described by Subhana as a Maha-sangha event as people travelled from the south and the north to join us at Kodoji. These included a strong showing of Sydney sitters and some of my closest friends and three teachers with Paul and Maggie also. The photos shown here are by Lee Nutter.

A special part of the ceremony is the receiving of a Dharma name. Subhana gave me the name Ko Zan which means ‘Illumination Mountain’. Ko Zan was a Zen master in our lineage, it is very inspiring to have the name of an old master and is a name I hope to grow into one day. Thank you Subhana for the beautiful name. On the back of the Rakasu Subhana wrote the words:

Mountain & No mountain

Illuminates the Way

I was asked by some to print my vows and responses and though my understanding of the vows and precepts is something to work on and deepen with, I am happy to share my responses from Jukai. I aspire to one day give the ‘Strictly Ballroom’ responses ala Kim Bagot, but for now here is what I said on the day:



Photo by Lee Nutter

I take refuge in the Buddha

Misty Valley, motionless trees
The stone Buddha, silent and faceless
Yet watching
'The bell has not yet rung and the drum has not yet sounded'
What better home
Than this place.

Also,
the car parks.

Also,
The dental chair

Also sorrow!
Also loss!

As once was said to me in a dream:
'Everywhere, the father waits for you'

I take refuge in the Dharma

My teachers are many.
A four year old boy, down at the river
Here at Kodoji
Playing in the water with his mother
Once watched me approach
And held up a fistful of sand
Thrusting it towards me he yelled

'SAND!' 'SAND!'
Fierce as a tiger

My teachers are many.

'Each branch of coral
Holds forth the moon'

I take refuge in the Sangha

My Dharma companions.

My Sangha is the clouds,
the sky,
the mist,
the trees -
 Clad all in black
They sit with me through the dawn.

The Three Pure Precepts

1. Renounce All Evil

I vow to abandon all activities and avoid speaking words that are harmful to myself or others. I will actively cultivate my wisdom so that I might act with clarity.

2. Practice All Good

I take up the principles of right action, right speech and wise effort. I adopt Buddhas teaching of the middle way as a guiding principle for all of life's activities.

3. Save the Many Beings

I take up Zen training to open the Way to enlightened being so that I and all beings may find our true home:

*Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate
Bodhi Svaha*

The Ten Grave Precepts

1. I take up the way of Not Killing

I respect and value the right of all beings to a fulfilling life. I value a strong community that supports and nourishes each of its members.

2. I take up the way of Not Stealing

I value the appreciation of what I have right now and the knowledge that this is a great treasure.

3. I take up the way of Not Misusing Sex

I value self-restraint and respect for sex. Stripping away our clothes is a spiritual act.

4. I take up the way of Not Speaking Falsely

I value speaking from the heart that is at peace. I value the cultivation of wisdom to enable compassionate truth-speaking.

5. I take up the way of Not Giving or Taking Drugs

I value clarity of mind, clear speech and right action. I value a mind for the effect I have on others.

6. I take up the way of Not Discussing Faults of Others

I value the principle of 'turning the light in' when considering faults of others. I value constructive discussions.

7. I take up the way of Not Praising Myself While Abusing Others

I value a mind that is open to the Way. I value humility and respect for others.

8. I take up the way of Not sparing the Dharma Assets

Love for others enriches all. I take up the way of a generous spirit.

9. I take up the way of Not Indulging in Anger

I value a spirit of grace and ease, particularly a mind for grace under fire. Buddha said ‘Holding on to anger is like holding a hot coal to throw at your enemy. It is you who are burned’

10. I take up the way of Not Defaming the three treasures

I value a mind free from the ideas of rank and file, respectful of others’ true place in the grand scheme of things.



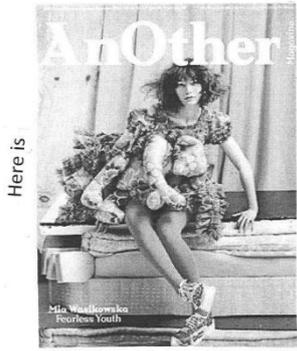
Photo by Lee Nutter

Reflecting on these responses now, well I would like to change some of them (a lot of them) but this is zen! Our understanding grows and grows or at the very least it changes.

Yesterdays great ideas look like soggy toast.

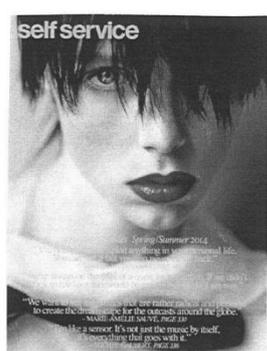
“You cannot step in the same river twice” –

Paul Maloney took up this saying in a talk one day and pointed out –It is not just the river that changes, it is a new person stepping into each new river as quick and flowing as the river itself.



Here is

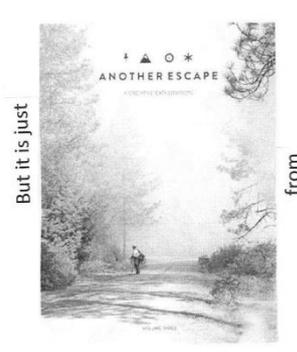
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pretending to be your



of desire.

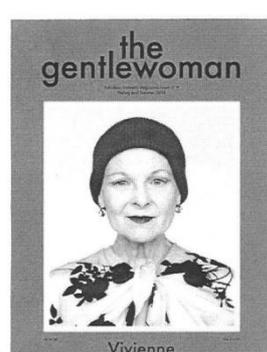


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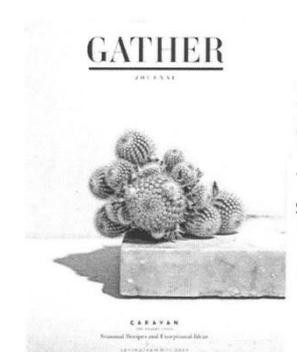


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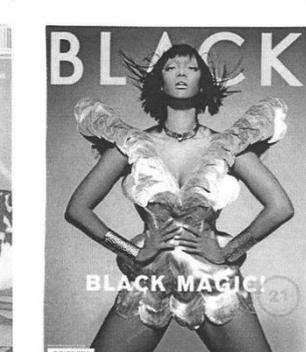
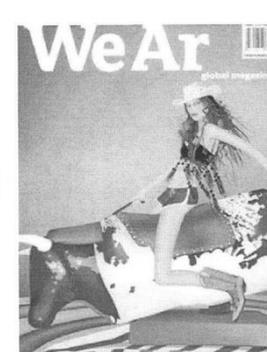


you are

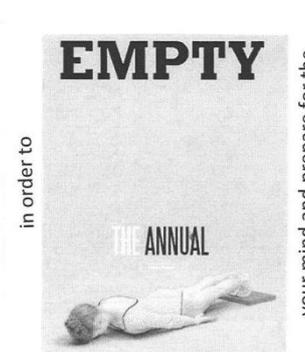


yourself, adopt 'right'

and

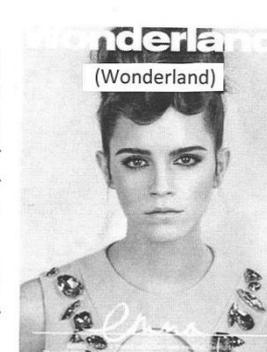


Pay attention to the

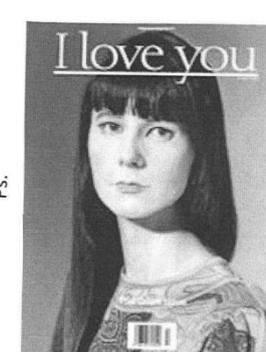


in order to

your mind and prepare for the



Ps.



ax Baker, The Dharma of All Magazine Covers, 2014

Fathoming the 'Z' word

By Gillian Coote

Even if you knew nothing whatsoever about Zen, you couldn't fail to notice honourable mentions of the 'Z' word popping up all over the place. It's become ultra-cool for business names - just check the Business & Government White Pages phone directory. (1) There's Zen Again Pilates, Zen Bodies, Zen Bridal, Zen Clothing, Zen Day Spa, Zen Global Electronics Pty. Ltd., Zen Stunts Action Consultancy, Zen Living Massage Clinic, etc, etc. A sharpish eye might even notice the listing, Zen Centre Sydney, buried in this Zen thicket.



Journalists and copywriters like using the 'Z' word too. **'Zen and the art of sneaking a peak at Zampatti'**, fronts a story about fashion week where the journalist tells us that 'Zampatti's style referencing moved from the Zen simplicity of modern Japanese masters onto the modern American sportswear deluxe of Calvin Klein's' (2)

In an upmarket interior design magazine, the photo of a bare bathroom is paired with the heading, **'now and zen'** (cool lower case), with the sub-heading, 'Pale stone, natural light and understated lines create a bathroom of monumental simplicity'. (3)

In **'Look East, now and zen'**, collectors are advised about a forthcoming auction of Asian art, illustrated with a gilt-bronze version of our wooden Burmese Buddha on the Annandale altar, which is "expected to fetch at least \$3000 at Sotheby's on Thursday." (4)

It even pops up in the sporting pages. This headline, **'Zen and art (sic) of captaining the Roosters'** appears beside a photo of (then) Roosters skipper Craig Fitzgibbon, and in the middle of the story: "For his part, Fitzgibbon takes the rough times in his stride. Sure, he takes it personally that the Roosters have struggled on his watch over the past two seasons when he has been captain. But a discussion with (caretaker coach) Fittler about leaving self-importance at the door during the twilight years of his career has given him some Zen-like perspective." (5) Hey, the football writer's getting warm.

Sometimes you can find the 'Z' word used as a verb, as in, 'I have to Zen my bedroom', again using the word to communicate a minimalist aesthetic. This has enormous appeal, precisely because so many of us are drowning in the very 'stuff' copywriters urge us to buy.

So, one might presume that Zen is about fashion, about simplicity and about letting go of self. How does this work? Do you let go of self-importance *and* buy Zampatti's Zen-inspired

clothing? Do you strip out all the extras in the bathroom to achieve a 'calm and almost Zen-like space, complimented by accessories in natural textures', while letting go of self-importance?

Though popular culture's embrace of the 'Z' word is superficial and confusing, to further confound matters, the Japanese/Zen concept of wabi-sabi is gaining currency in the West. In contrast to the stark minimalism usually associated with Zen aesthetics, wabi-sabi is about the integrity of ageing - the much-mended pot, the worn rug, the weathered face. A home decoration piece headed, '**A dash of wabi sabi**', tells us that 'Wabi sabi carries a spiritual component through its close links to Zen Buddhism, with its reminder that the home should be a sanctuary.' (6)

But it's not just the *aesthetics* around the 'Z' word that might confuse. What people imagine Zen behaviour, let alone Zen practice to be, is unsurprisingly, rarely related to a daily practice of zazen, sitting with a sangha and being of service. More often it's all about 'living in the moment'; sometimes it's about mindfulness.

Perhaps not wishing to add to the confusion, Robert Pirsig, author of the hugely popular **Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance**, first published in 1974, said that despite its title, his book should 'in no way be associated with that great body of factual information relating to orthodox Zen Buddhist practice. It's not very factual on motorcycles, either.' (7)

Hang on! Let's add to the confusion! R. H. Blyth was Aitken Roshi's first teacher, encountered as an intern during WW11 in the Rinkangaku Reform School, above Kobe. One of the guards reading Blyth's seminal book, Zen in English Literature, lent Aitken a copy, which he then read from cover to cover over a dozen times, always moved to tears. Here's a fragment from one of Blyth's letters to an old friend, written a few years before his death in 1964.

"The other day I went to see Dr. Suzuki, who is now, as you know, 93 years old. I asked him a question, holding a cat in my arms, "Which is more important, to be fond of cats (that is, to write haiku) or to understand Zen?" He answered, "They are one and the same thing", and I said to him, "You have passed your examination." But I did not really think so. To be fond of cats and to understand Zen are equally important because they are the same thing. Yes, this is so, but at the same time, what is more important is to be fond of cats. Now, you see, I have contradicted what I wrote on the previous page, but who cares? who shares?' - RHB (8)

"I'll give Yung-chia the last word on the 'Z' word: 'Walking is Zen, sitting is Zen, speaking or silent, active or quiet, the essence is at peace.' (9) In a word, fathomless.

Hey, do you know that person, quietly reading Mind Moon Circle?

Notes:

(1) White Pages Business & Government, 2012, Sydney, p.989.

(2) Jane de Teliga, SMH circa 1999.

(3) Helen Redmond, Vogue Living, Sept-Oct 2006, p.218.

(4) James Cockington, SMH Money, May 17, 2006.

(5) Andrew Webster, SMH, July 27, 2007, p.27.

(6) Caroline Baum, SMH Domain Home, May 11, 2006, p.7.

(7) Robert Pirsig, Wikiquote

(8) <http://www.hacketthaiku.com/RHBlythsHome.html>

(9) Shodoka, Yung-chia



Student says to teacher,

“ Does anyone really know what THIS all means?”

Teacher replies,

“ No.”, or “ Nothing!”, or “ Not yet.”, or

“ Mooooooooooooooooooooo!” *

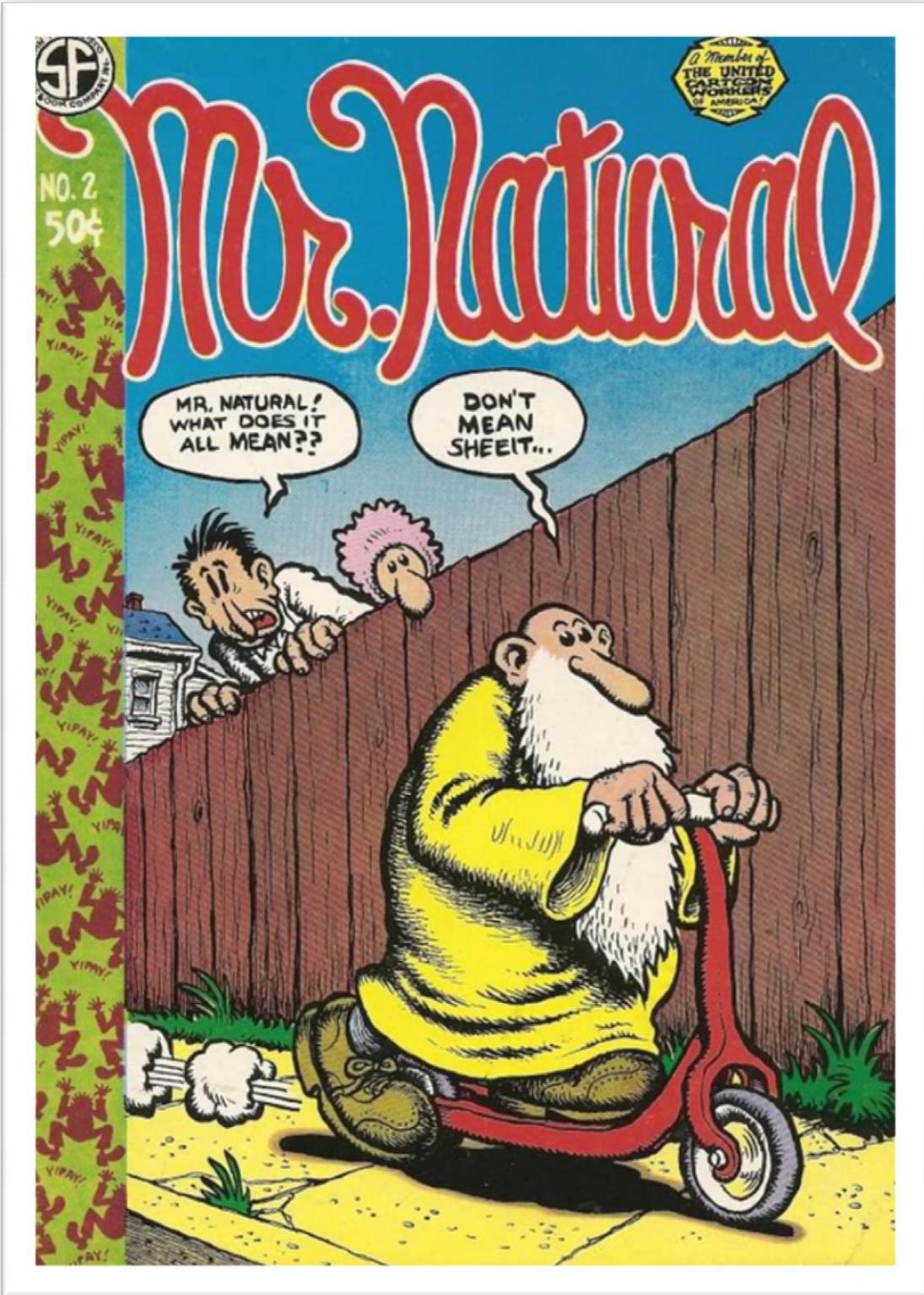
* No, Nothing, Not yet, or Moooo depending on the translation

We do not see that our life right here, right now, is nirvana. Maybe we think nirvana is a place where there are no problems, no more delusions. Maybe we think nirvana is something very beautiful, something unattainable. We always think that nirvana is something very different from our own life. But what we must really understand that nirvana is right here, right now.

Maezumi Roshi, *The Essence of Zen Practice*, Boston 2002, p.4



Photo by Glenys Jackson



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And my shadow follows me

By Philip Long.

You can't escape it,
You can't leave it behind.
It follows you wherever you go,
Craving acceptance, ordinariness,
Like all the others,
Like your favourites.
When you acknowledge it,
It is just like you.



Photo by Glenys Jackson

Annandale Sitting

By Jane Andino

High, low,
birds, planes,
short grasses,
long grasses
sing

Kan-ze-on!

Black Cockatoos

By Suneeta Peres da Costa

There were the tails of
the black cockatoos I
Saw on my last walk
from Tallow's. I looked
Up and saw them though
the camera later lied.
While fiddling with the
zoom, they sailed away
And I had only traces of
memory to call upon - a
shriek of bright yellow
against cloud and sky.
Intimating loss, I had
collected shells,
collected
pieces of pumice and the
soft green cones of
banksia that had fallen in
the night. My footsteps,
light, still made strong
impressions in the sand.
Strange pilgrim, I was
not visited by the image
Of a great poet; I had
neither prayer nor sutra
As a guide. Sunlight
nevertheless filtered
through
the canopy of gums, my
breath sufficient proof
Of some kind of *kenshō*¹,
and then I saw the end
Of the path and that I
had suddenly arrived.



David Cook Wildlife Photography
<http://commons.wikimedia.org> Creative Commons, 2006

¹ Kenshō is in Zen *initial* insight or awakening; a term often used interchangeably with *satori*, it is derived from the verb *satoru* and means "comprehension; understanding".

Zen Practice: A True Refuge

By Subhana Barzaghi

I wake up in the early morning dawn light an ingrained habit now after decades of sesshin that has probably permanently tuned my internal clock to the Jikki's bell. Alas, there is no chance of sleeping in. After making my ritual cup of tea, I sit down on my beloved cushion, which is a warm and welcoming place to greet my 'self', this moment under the sky of a broad day. The cacophony of bird song is an early morning, 'Wake up' call. Just listening, the bird song invites me to presence and attention with their lyrical tweets, loud caws, and soft calls. I soften and open, their song penetrates inside, the birds now sing and call out from my very own breast...ahhh! the joy and intimacy of the way.

At the end of my morning sit I reflect on my intention and life purpose, which is to live as much as possible a wakeful, compassionate life and to actualize my fullest potential. This wholesome intention has parallels to chanting the Great Vows at the end of Zazen. Right intention is an aspect of the Noble eight-fold path. This intention is my compass; I take refuge and rest in the felt knowing of this. I hold this intention dear, like resting in the warm cradling current of a great river.

I always find sitting a curious encounter with ones mind. I never know what is going to happen next, where it is going to wander to, what intricate thought or mundane boring state I'll be in. There are practical thoughts about what I need to do today or a bizarre unexpected image will emerge. One minute a memory of when I was 7 years old, sick in bed pops up or the next moment there is a nostalgic memory of being a hippie with long locks of hair and equally long flowing skirts, living in a hand-crafted house on an alternative community in the Northern Rivers. The fragments of a life like an intricate mosaic, re-configuring itself playfully like a child's kaleidoscope. That perennial koan, "Who am I", arises in the midst of this colorful mosaic. I have my favorite koans that tend to circulate through the seasons. What is my original face is one that I return to over and over.

It's the practice of just sitting or 'silent illumination' as Hongshi Zenji called it, which is a true refuge for me, a safe harbor of stillness, a place where I find my true home and deep sense of belonging to this universe of stones and flowers. 'Silent illumination' practice or serenity and insight practice as it is referred to in the Insight tradition, allows me to come back to 'myself' in its deeper, wider sense, ones expansive sense of 'self'. I come home to the ancient groundlessness of being the selfless dimension to ones being.

The Buddha dharma and its meditation practices have been like a treasured old friend throughout my adult life, a consistent thread since first meeting Buddhism at 20 years of age in Bodh Gaya India. I see myself as a midwife on a pilgrim's journey, giving birth to heart and mind. The way of silence and practice has forged a vessel, a deep commitment and willingness to bear witness, wake up and compassionately respond to life.

I have a deep faith in the everything and nothingness of my own nature, it is here that I find a true refuge and unshakable peace.

Of course ones journey is also an encounter with life's fierce beauty, joy and painful travails, the ups and downs, the profound and profane. I have often asked myself, given our vulnerability as human beings to the forces around us and the worldly winds of change, where can I take refuge in this fleeting world of dewdrops? What can I have faith in when I experience hard times of blame, pain, failure, faltering relationships, inevitable loss and sorrow or when things fall apart? This has resonance with the Buddha's quest too, what is true freedom and liberation in the face of sickness, old age and death?

Practice helps me recognize that restless urge that searches for some security, control and certainty of some kind when actually we have very little control over life events. The recognition that there is no security and certainty is indeed quite scary, but it seems I need to taste this again and again with life's thrusts, pulls and somersaults. I notice how easy it is to be lulled back to sleep in those cotton wool delusions about; permanency, the sources of happiness and who I think I am. Meditation for me is an opportunity to mature and wake up to the bare impermanent reality of life as it is. It may not be the way I want things to turn out, of the way I dreamed it should be, or what is actually right and fair, but zazen is an encounter with what is here and now and true.

When I am mindful, I notice that there is nothing that is stable, or permanent in my experience, inside or outside, nothing that is not touched by the forces of change. Everything that I experience through the six senses; eyes, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, is in constant flux. The truth that each and every one of us face over and over, is that there is no ground to stand on at all. I see zazen as an opportunity to face this truth, to see life with new eyes and wake up from that ancient sleep of preconceptions and delusion. Even though there are layers of dust and conditioning that I need to see through, with clarity, I know the groundlessness of being and the wise teachings of liberation help me to abide with this without panic or denial.

Pema Chodron, poignantly said, "The next time there is no ground to stand upon, don't consider it an obstacle. Consider it a remarkable stroke of luck. We have no ground to stand on, and at the same time it could soften us and inspire us." (p.117, 2000).

Last year was a very painful year; there was considerable loss and grief in my personal and family life. In the midst of this rupture, I noticed a deep longing to find a refuge, a place of peace and freedom. A place of refuge where I can embrace and radically accept life as it is, and love life fully no matter what happens. When I let go into this moment, beneath the turbulence of my thoughts and emotions, there exists a profound stillness, a silent vast spacious awareness capable of limitless love, it does not exclude anything, it also includes the pain and loss.

In those painful difficult times I have relied on the dharma teachings and my practice has been a powerful resource, it offers solace, comfort, guidance, strength and is uplifting for the spirit. To be honest I don't know how people manage without a spiritual practice and path to point the way. The teachings are a compass for the heart.

I often recall Aitken Roshi's wise words when I was in the pits and feeling miserable. "It's only a quarter turn from where you are right now Subhana in this dark place to, I alone and sacred in the whole universe". 'It's only a quarter turn', was so reassuring and comforting. That quarter turn is being able to let go, shift gears, drop into a sacred perception, which reverberates as, It's alright mama.

I had an interesting dream recently, while I was teaching a retreat at ‘Sangsurya’ in Byron Bay. Because I was awake in the middle of the night, I decided to read and reached for the nearest dharma book on the bedside table. I read of Rama Maharishi’s first awakening experience when he was 16 years of age. The lines that stayed with me as I fell back to sleep were, “I am not the body” (p,21, 1985)

I dreamt that I was gazing in front of me seeing all the many names and forms, bodies, shapes, contours and relationships to people in my life. I had been rather over focused on their personality, identity, the numerous manifestations of bodily forms. I then slowly turned around and looked behind me and the vast empty universe opened up. I felt I had been facing in the wrong direction. This about face, turning the mind around brought a deep sense of freedom and peace. I thought, I am still in relationship with the world of form but with its fathomless nature. I woke up feeling happy and at peace.

This dream reminds me of Honzghi’s meditation instructions. “Take a backward step, turn the light of the mind around and face where the light issues forth and then just return. Observe closely ones awareness. Lean the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate yourself. Body and mind will drop away and your original face will be manifest” (p.20, 2000).

Abiding in this formless awareness that has no center, no name, no age, no surface and no seams, I feel at peace. I am not pushing away things, nor leaning into the future and the next moment expecting it to be fulfilling and satisfying, but just being open with what is, a radical acceptance. All the stories and thoughts about myself and others drop away and there is a freedom in that non-grasping mind.



However, while I taste these moments and even when that window of ‘silent illumination’ is extended for long periods of time, it is hard for me to stay with this wisdom, I get pulled by the emotional waves and turbulence in the mind. For this reason, I value the practice of silence and stillness and resting in awareness. I sit with a strong backbone, soft open heart to find a place of equanimity again in the midst of those emotional currents. I pay attention to the restless movements of mind that get caught up,

**I ask myself where am ‘I’
clinging now?**

Jack Kornfield said in his delightful book, “The Wise Heart”, “The middle way teachings invite us to find peace wherever we are, here and now, by neither grasping nor rejecting life, we can find wakefulness and freedom in the midst of the joys and sorrows of our life”. (p243, 2008).

This longing for a true refuge or something that is greater than oneself, longing for freedom or peace or love of the divine, Christ consciousness, longing with union with the 'Beloved' whatever you would like to call it, appears to be so universal. What I love about Zen practice is its embodiment of a contemplative practice that points out the way to peace, is that peace is the way. The binding of a philosophical understanding and practice was central to Zen master Dogen's teachings which was further articulated in Fukuan Zazen Gi. Zazen is the unity of 'practice-realisation'. Realization is our inherent nature and practice is the dropping off of those hindrances of body and mind, that obscure our natural boundless empty field. This bright abundant empty field is not outside of us, this true refuge is here within.

I asked Zen teacher and dear friend, Sexton Bourke what his practice was now? He was in his last days before he died of cancer 3 years ago. At that point, he was only able to sit in his armchair and look out through the back door across the paddock. Sexton said,

I am perfectly happy to be here, each moment is so full and complete, overflowing and abundant, I am deeply at peace.

He found equanimity in the moment-to-moment experience, the empty field, as he was, just sitting there. He was a free man embracing the full catastrophe of life and the immanence of death without aversion or clinging.

It's Sunday, I ring my dear old mum who is 90 years of age, now living in a nursing home. She has relatively good health and a wonderful spirit, despite her dementia and blindness. She announced to me today, "You know dear, Buddhism is not a religion, it is a way of life. I am so grateful for that". Mum is a long-term lover of Buddhism, since I first introduced meditation to her forty years ago, on my return from India. She said, "I forget everything else, (she has short-term memory loss) but I can remember to come back to my breath, just be here now". How sweet that the habits of a life of practice can bring us home.

Like my mum, for me having faith in the dharma is remembering to come home to the breath-mind, this wonderful moment. It means giving myself over completely to those great questions that move through the human heart that sincere men and women down the generations have taken up and wrestled with and how they can open the mind and liberate one. What is your original face? Who's Hearing? Who is experiencing this right now? What is Mu?

I sit in the middle of this life and realise that I am an expression of a sacred mandala, the bright day, the dark night! Everywhere I look there I am - the angophora leaves waving in the wind, the flower and great ocean. I am a constantly moving shifting changing form and also formless and groundless. We are all part of this stream. There is no permanent, I, you or me in here or out there. This sacred perception is profoundly healing, it heals the ancient wound of separation and alienation. My heart is at ease when I feel connected to this seamless universe. Returning again and again to realizing this is knowing ones empty, full boundless over-flowing nature.

I have been particularly grateful for dear friends, their warm friendship their kindness and wise words and a shoulder to lean on through the painful upheaval last year. The heart of friendship, is at the heart of the teachings. It is where we can take refuge and drink deeply from the well of nourishment from the support of a practice community of like-minded souls who are mindfully walking a spiritual path. I wrote this letter of thanks to my dear friends about what was carrying me through those hard times.

“There are good days and terribly painful days, alternating between plunges into grief and loss and days that are lighter in nature. "There is an ocean of solemn clouds an ocean of bright clouds". What is carrying me right now is my practice of opening into the broadest sense of the inter-weaving of the nature of a lived-loved-life. **I am prepared to show up, meet and be present to THIS.**

What carries me in this painful time; is the compassion, good intentions, warmth and kindness from dear friends, their care & connection, integrity, receptivity, the actual nature of the woven fabric of a life, with it's many facets and faces. It's not a fairy-tale, it's not always pretty, it is sometimes down right painful, it does not exclude the fabric of suffering, the challenges, the broken trust, the grief and loss. Pain has been a somewhat unwelcome but curious portal, which keeps expanding into the ocean of essential nature. This lived-loved-life is simple and yet extraordinary in its unadorned way. **In this moment I know I am Ok.**

This moment to moment unfolding carries me along, the materiality... body of breath, the caring and goodwill that others have for me, and I of them, the momentum of my own good-hearted nature. I let go into this lived-loved-life and practice a receptive yielding into all that lives me, you. When my mind is clear, I am carried by the ocean of fullness, the bird song, the water dragons diving into the pool, the bats feasting on insects above the gums, the familiar voices downstairs, the bright sunny day, all held in this vast spaciousness that finds it's home in this humble, trembling, vulnerable being. I sit with Zen masters Yun-Men's koan, “Every day is a good day”, no matter how it unfolds I try to embody THIS, sometimes it sighs and sobs, sometimes abides in deep peace. Either way all are blessed, all are blessed. I bow down and thank my dear friends for carrying me”.

Buddha, Dharma Sangha are not separate they are just facets of the same jewel, they are inherently wise. I vow to embody them. If I had to summarise what Zen practice means for me, it is encapsulated in one of my favourite verses, which embodies the whole teachings for me, by Sri Nisagadatta Maharaj (1973).

***“Wisdom teaches me I am nothing,
Love teaches me I am everything,
Between these two poles my life flows”.***

I have a deep faith in the everything and nothingness of my own nature, it is here that I find a true refuge and unshakable peace.



Photo by Glenys Jackson

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Who is hearing now?

In thinking about what Zen means and/or doesn't mean, I was inspired to follow suit of the many insightful practitioners whom have come before me and pushed and pulled, caressed and beat the meaning of what Zen is. With rebelliousness and pushing of the envelope in mind I wanted to offer individuals the opportunity to submit offerings to the Mind Moon Circle in an aural context, perhaps a first for the MMC? That said, I am pleased to say we succeeded with several aural offerings for your listening pleasure. Please follow the links to the Sydney Zen Centre to hear the offerings and enjoy! (Ed.)

Follow the link or type the text into a browser:

<http://goo.gl/0TeX4t>

Song of the Birds

Cello by Thomas Rann and Piano by Wu Qian
Live at Wigmore Hall London. 'Song of the Birds' is a traditional Catalan folk song by the great cellist Pablo Casals.

Kanzeon

Piano by Jane Andino

Musical Offering

Improvised percussion by Drew Bourgeois

(2013 Spring Sesshin Musical Offering)

Right now your eye is moving left-to-right across this page and a voice in your mind is reading aloud this word, *this italicized statement*. 'Hear me?' asks the voice. As you read this word you feel your breath slow down as this voice asks you to listen closer, to 'wake up' to this voice this word - rice cake! Dearest reader, these words are for you. From you, with unending Love. (Drew).

Little Contemplation

By Ricardo Andino

Kodoji Birds (Spring Sesshin 2013)

Recording by Michael Tierney during early morning Dokusan, Spring Sesshin 2013

What does zen mean to you?

Sitting alone in Dokusan,
Kookaburas chant the great kanzeon.
One bell rings, one bell answers,
the mist fades as the morning rushes off.



Photo by Heidrun Lohr

Zen to me, the great never ending path, the laughing kookaburra showing me the way home and the Buddha has rabbit ears...

By Stuart Solzberg

The great never ending path
The kookaburra laughing showing me the
way home
The journey of coming home
Endlessly coming home, again and again
Embracing the unknown, embracing the path
in a deeply personal way
Trying not to look away from the life in front
of me

The smile on my son's face
His laughter, cheekiness, and simply his
existence
Looking into my wife's eyes, her sensual kiss
Glimpsing her naked body when she's getting
out of the shower

Looking into the mirror at the man I have
become
My balding head and graying beard
Recognizing my faults, making mistakes
Falling down and getting back up
Trying to look the worlds' sorrows and
atrocities in the eye
Accepting my own defeat in doing so
Understanding I am human

The perfect song to suit the mood
Driving in my van, windows down, music
blaring
A quiet walk in the forest
Walking anywhere hand in hand with my son
The rare night away with my wife
The cheerful purr of my dear cats
Cleaning their litter box
Trying to be of service to others
The reality, challenges, frustration of the
above
Digesting that there is no ideal

Putting on my favorite pair of jeans
Really good pizza
A fresh New York bagel with mom
My wife's pilaf and dhal

My brother in laws pasta, my sister in laws
pesto,
My mother in laws strawberry shortcake
A really good piece of grilled salmon
A summertime family barbeque

Remembering to be grateful to have food to
eat, a warm safe place to sleep, a family who
loves me, grateful for my education, money in
my pocket and in the bank
Remembering to be grateful to be alive at all!

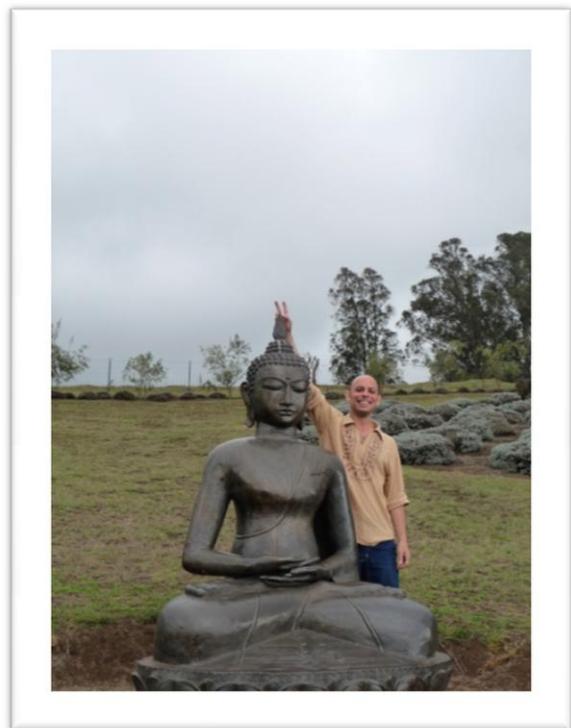


Photo by Tara Cuthbert

Attempting to be ever aware of the union with
the trees, rocks, and birds
In union with the trash, compost, and faeces
In union with the great never ending path
The kookaburra laughing showing me the
way home

Soft-shelled

By Suneeta Peres da Costa

For J. C.

The crabs we eat on Norton St at your favourite Japanese are blue swimmer I believe, and there's no question about their status, so tasty. I speculate how they do the tempura and you say we must try it one day; you've seen plenty sold frozen at Pymont Fish Market. Otherwise, it's the same: talk of love, of work, of what the other people at the other tables are eating, the familiar archipelago of friendship, its regular humour, even the topics of conversation islands of sanctuary. Lately admittedly some dÈjÀvu, and return of the monster of the deep. Dark and gleaming, fascinating and horrifying...I describe wrestling with it to you and watch while my words become one with it, frighteningly tentacular. Letting it go, letting it return to its own element is somehow harder than anything, the will to do battle seemingly stronger than the strain of rowing out alone, the waves and wind high, the prospect of the small trawler upturning, of drowning... I'm still wrestling with a maw of crisply battered arms and legs, a mere chopstick for a harpoon - the sting of wasabi no real deterrent - when you raise your eyebrow, sympathetically, I know, and pour us both another cup of green tea before asking should we order another, your wit tonight drier than mine and for that a lot safer.

Somewhere In Time With A Dog Named Shelby

By Jack B. McNeill Jr.

The artificial construct of “TIME” is a trap for the mind; or perhaps an excuse we use to cope with not knowing how to accept the present moment of ours and others’ beings.

Life is going to happen, no matter what preconceived notions we have.

Still, we pursue desires to placate our egos. We struggle to satisfy our human vices; such as “getting” tasty food; “getting” sex; “getting” money; “getting” clothes; “getting” recognition; “getting” things. All of this “getting” is part of the trap of time, because we end up in the labyrinth (conundrum) of time. We’ve become “consumers” of time and things, instead of “beings” of here and now. **Why can’t we just “be”?**

Of course there are stages of life when the psyche hasn’t developed enough to balance or navigate the constructs of “time” around us. I think this is what people have referred to as being in “the rat race”. Everyone is trying to get in. Why?

When we simply “live” we aren’t part of competitions or comparisons. We don’t need to “outdo” or “outshine” others, or be an idea of ourselves.

This line of thinking is in my thoughts because I was asked during an interview about my perceptions of the subject of time and to compare some periods in my life. Today I am alive. I have an ideal construct of “wealth” and the equity/value are my relationships. I am the richest man in the world, because I have friends. I love them and appreciate them. They give me a sense of wholeness and connectedness to the world around me. We share ideas, emotions, hopes, disappointments, or sometimes just silly faces and laughter. This is an endless source of wealth! This “unit”/“share” of trade is the fuel for living and “being” in time. When I say trade, you only have to “trade” in humanity. You are trading in shares; pun intended.

I came to prison as a teenager. I didn’t realize how I was interconnected to others. I didn’t understand the essence of being alive. I think I was trying to “get” things to satisfy my ego so I could fit into the artificial construct of time. This pursuit resulted in unwise (immature) decisions that offset the balance of life for others and myself. I was not living. I was dying.

I write this from a prison cell where I’ve been for over 26 years now. The difference in today than in bygone days, decades even, is that I’ve been afforded the privilege to care for a dog which will go on to be adopted and add joy to someone else’s life. This is a fulfilling human experience, being . Ahh, and I have the experience of being with a dog; a lovely dog named Shelby. **Life is wonderful!**

Today I am living.

The entire world is breathing at the same time.

Breathe.... Live....Love.

Jack B. McNeill Jr.

6:09am June 19 2014

Dr. Leigh Davison - “Frugal is the New Sexy!”

By Diana Levy

What does zen mean to me? It means the great people I have met. When I first began my zen practise as a raw young woman at Koko An zendo in Honolulu, Hawaii, I heard that some Australians were going to be visiting the centre. Since I am a Kiwi, these were obviously (to Americans) my compatriots! I met John Tarrant, his partner Susan Murcott, Geoff Dawson, and Leigh Davison.

Of these four, I connected best with Leigh, perhaps because I had already met his future wife, Ellen, who is Canadian. Leigh was a small nuggety brown man, and from memory, had spent a bit of childhood time in NZ. He can correct me if I’m wrong. But mostly, he had this wonderful sardonic sense of humour. Before I left Hawaii, I visited the island of Maui, where Leigh had been training with the other Australians. A group of us, including Leigh and Ellen, went to the beach in someone’s ute, I was riding in the back like everyone does on islands like Samoa, where I’d travelled. Ah, the good old days before ‘risk assessment’! We had a great time.

Recently Leigh was the guest speaker at the Dharma Gaia forum* in Camperdown, at the buddhist library. He was reflecting on his 35 years in the great experiment of trying to live sustainably. It’s one thing to recognise that our carbon-fuelled lifestyle, is, akin to an alcoholic’s, headed for global warming disaster. And another to know how to move away from our addiction to all that marvelous energy that we can simply dig out of the ground. Leigh had read the Club of Rome’s report “The Limits to Growth” in 1972 and was utterly persuaded by its argument. He was a maths Ph.D. student at UNSW at the time and the mathematics of the study was incontrovertible. He realised that he wanted to act on its findings, and live a life that was simple and sustainable.

Leigh had met Ellen at the zen centre, and in September 1979, back in Australia, they bought shares in a 102 hectare community in the northern rivers region, on Terania creek near Lismore. One of the delights of the evening was the Power Point pictures that he used to illustrate his talk. We saw a youthful and gorgeous couple, on their land, beaming into the camera. It was a time when intentional communities were being set up all around the area, as an expression of the ‘back to the land’ , alternative lifestyle movement. The pioneers of Dharmananda, as their community is called, had specific Buddhist values. It is one of the very few that has survived and thrived, and has been examined and studied often. The values it began with were:

- respect for the land
- respect for each other
- food self-sufficiency
- no dope and no dole

Leigh emphasised that they have a strong work ethic on Dharmananda. But part of their schtick is creative leisure - to have fun while meeting basic needs. So for example, every Friday is a community work-day and Saturday morning is garden morning. This builds community cohesion. I’ve been a member of working bees here in the more conventional outer suburban fringe and it’s been fun and satisfying to work, and then eat, together.

Leigh and Ellen had very little money. “*We had a freedom from choice.*” Their first task was to build a home. With his engineering background, Leigh designed a small post and beam house which could be built by 2 people. Costing \$7,000, their house initially was 46m. square, but as time went on they realised that there is a trade-off between environmental sustainability and social sustainability. You need space to have a party! The average Australian house is 250 m. square, Leigh and Ellen’s house is now 75m. sq., walled in, with a 55 m. sq. verandah. Their water

supply comes from a spring in the steep hill behind them, which is like a sponge and has never dried up, even in dry times. This water also runs their power supply, which is a 12 V micro-hydro system.

On the Power Point slide, Leigh displayed a facetious sign:

YOU ARE NOW ENTERING LISMORE

COMPOSTING TOILET

CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

They learnt much about sanitation and waste management on Dharmananda. They wanted to not only manage the human health and environmental health part of the waste cycle, but also recover and use the resource. *“We are a faeco-phobic society,”* said Leigh. The NSW Department of Health was antagonistic to the idea of a composting toilet, but when a report in 1991 showed that the Minimus continuous flow toilet was no threat to health and did not smell, they changed their attitude and came up with guidelines for owner-built composting toilets. What goes into the top of Leigh and Ellen’s toilet comes out down the bottom as compost, usable on the gardens. Their grey water grows fabulous bananas - it runs straight out into the banana patch below the house. Recently Leigh retired as a lecturer in Water Systems Management at Southern Cross University, Lismore. Ellen is a zen and insight teacher, and recently retired as a counselor at TAFE.

Leigh talked about the history of the land, which had been used for dairying and bananas but was run-down when the group bought it. To keep the growth down in the early days, they bought a couple of cows. This has developed into a key part of their protein intake. Leigh and Ray get up early every morning to hand-milk the cows (jerseys). The community makes two or three cheeses every week. The cows (and the bull) are part of the nutrient pathways, when they eat the remains of a lab-lab bean and pumpkin harvest. The gardens at Dharmananda are located down by the creek where the soil is richer. There are eight sections of 500 m. sq each. Everyone can harvest any mature crop, but each person looks after only one crop. Carol Perry, one of the pioneers, is a whiz at growing carrots.

Dharmananda has grown like topsy, with new younger families building their houses on other ridges. It now has a tractor and nine implements. Leigh said that 1 litre of diesel could accomplish the work of one strong man over three weeks!! This means that it is a fantastic resource that we should be using frugally - instead of with gay abandon. “The Limits to Growth” predicted that food production would peak in the 2000’s. But in fact it peaked in the late 90’s. We will reach peak phosphorus (conventional agriculture is heavily dependent on phosphate) around 2030. Leigh emphasised that frugality does not mean austerity, but it has a time horizon of hundreds of years.

There are three criteria by which to judge the success of a transition community:

re-localisation (not global)

de-carbonisation (renewables)

resilience (social cohesion)

Leigh was asking the question, how does Dharmananda score? He ran through his analysis and I was interested to see that he gives it an 8 out of 10 for resilience. That is something to be very proud of. I think people tend to focus on the tangible aspects of intentional communities such as food production and housing, perhaps because they are easier to see. When one sees the power of the local movement against CSG at the Bentley blockade, this is how social cohesion manifests. A number of highly effective movers and shakers have been nurtured at Dharmananda. The Multiple Occupancy movement itself has bred some very positive qualities like independence, the ability to

act in accord with the values expressed above, the renaissance man or woman has many skills and is committed to their locality.

There were many questions after his talk, some quite technical. I asked Leigh, “*What have you learned about conflict by living there?*” His answer was succinct.

“*You learn that your point of view is only one among many*”.

Bill McKibben of 350.org says it is important to build a movement that is creative and hopeful. Yes - “*You’ve got to dream it first,*” said Leigh.

If Leigh doesn’t like all this attention, may I just add some zen insults? 35 blows with a stick, combined with some great fat gobs of fox slobber....

If you’d like to see a video of Leigh’s talk it is on the web, you can find it on:

> <http://1drv.ms/1kjSff9>

The best way to view it is to download it first, and then view it.

* The DG Forum was created this year as a means to look at the buddhist response to the climate crises we are headed for.

(

Please note: The following article is Part 2 of an article published in MMC Autumn 2014)

Faith and Reason – The Heart of the God Debate, Part 2 (14)

By Philip Long

Doctrines and propositions

Doctrines as propositions are part of the religious life: witness our own doctrine of Buddha Nature (Buddha Nature pervades the whole universe, existing right here, now). However, most religionists understand that religious doctrine is not to be treated in the same way as common sense truths (The cat is on the mat) or scientific truths (The atomic mass of mercury is 200.59 ± 0.02 u).

They understand that doctrines are meant to act metaphorically as guides on our inward/outward spiritual journey to find and fulfil ourselves as integrated, mature and compassionate persons.

There is no a priori principle that will ground all knowledge and totally eliminate the need for faith. Any intellectual proposition or set of propositions that serves as the basis for a system of knowledge must be taken on faith. The final justification for such propositions and the systems built on them is the Absolute, the ground of infinite unknowing which itself requires commitment and trust, that is, faith, that the truth will out. Faith is thus the way to truth. It is the infinite openness of this realm which constantly calls into question all that we “know” in our finite systems of knowing, which demands eternal revision and reformulation of our propositional stances. This endless process of revising the truth based on the infinite openness of the Absolute is itself the truth.

Religious faith is thus not an absolute, literal and abiding faith in a narrow set of intellectual propositions or “belief without evidence” as the New Atheists define it. Faith is in fact the direct opposite of the New Atheists’ definition.

It is a willingness to call all propositions into question and to call that questioning into question, to take religious doctrine as “metaphorical” and ambiguous, uncertain and ever changing. It is a commitment of one’s whole being, including all that one knows, to the Openness and Mystery of the Absolute. It is a preparedness to listen to and trust the Other, all that I, in the narrowest sense, am not. It is a constant doubt, an unfathomable unknowing which endlessly calls me, and all I know, into question. It is the capacity to hold and embrace contradictions such as “God exists” and “God does not exist”. It is radical openness. It is infinite integrity. As Walt Whitman said:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then ...I contradict myself;
I am large ... I contain multitudes. (15)



Faith is thus a personal and existential commitment rather than a scientific hypothesis about “the objective world.”

What is absolutely true is that we don’t know what is absolutely true. This infinite Unknown supports all we know and yet constantly undermines it in a radical undoing, a perpetual unthreading. This is the nature of reality, of the truth. It is untrue! This is faith. However, faith is not merely mystery, a blank unknowing. It is infinite possibility, infinite realisation. It is the clarity of true knowing, the litmus test of all experience and all rationality. The divine mirror which reflects back all we know and all we are with unsettling accuracy. It is pure science, incontrovertible evidence, ultimate rationality. Not evidence limited by the a priori assumptions of science but evidence garnered from the broadest empirical realm directly perceived with our whole being, not leaving out any of the many ways of knowing but gathering all of them into her heart and giving herself over to herself in the glory of God’s creation. Thus religion is not suggesting an anything-goes nihilism, on the one hand, or a fundamentalist and rigid adherence to doctrine as proposition, on the other, but is suggesting rather a broader and properly based empirical rationality.

A religionist may start off with faith in a doctrinal proposition, as does a scientist, but find very quickly that his or her understanding of how that proposition should be interpreted changes over time with further experience of the directly experienced reality to which it refers. True religious faith refers to an openness to this process of change. One holds the proposition in one’s heart or mind lightly and with a constant search for deeper understanding to the extent that one is willing in the end to entertain the possibility that the logical opposite of the original proposition is just as true and that ultimately truth transcends, transforms, includes and integrates both the assertion and the denial of the proposition. “God exists” and “God does not exist” may both be “true”! In Buddhist terms we might refer to “the emptiness of Emptiness.”

The nature and content of religious faith changes with the age and maturity of the religionist. As a child one is taught religious truth by one’s elders and takes its truth on trust. As one grows older one comes to question the truth of what one has been told and forges one’s own beliefs out of that trust and that doubt. Still later one comes to experience the truth directly and sees doctrine as an interpretation of this experience, as a pointer to that experience and as an expression of it. And this process is never completed.

As to the question of strict adherence to differing religious doctrines being the cause of conflict between religious groups, this involves an aberration of the true nature of religious doctrine. Those who hold to religious doctrine in this way are spiritually immature and misunderstand doctrine and what our true relationship to it should be. To cling to it in order to gain intellectual certainty is to miss completely its existential and practice dimensions. When these are embraced and one reaches spiritual maturity, doctrinal conflict between religions is totally relativised and we can all meet on the open ground of Being and Love.

Absolute faith

Absolute faith in religious terms is the decision not to take the high ground, not to claim ownership of the Absolute. From the religious point of view, the only true certainty is that we are truly uncertain. It is part of all religious traditions to engage in constant renewal, opening up and re-interpretation of religious doctrine and insight. This is an openness and self-questioning far more radical than that of the New Atheists. The New Atheists' openness and self-questioning is not yet complete and is impeded by their adherence to a number of a priori, unprovable assumptions, untestable by science. Some of these are: -

There is an external world which is to a great degree known, or can be known, by us.

In pursuing the truth the subject must be eliminated and we must rely only on so-called objective enquiry.

Reality consists of a number of separate entities and their relations.

A satisfactory and complete explanation of reality can be reached by reducing reality to its basic building blocks and their relations.

The scientific method of truth-finding, or, variously, a method based on the scientific paradigm, is the only acceptable method of pursuing the truth; everything else is mere subjective speculation.

The world is natural and material only; there is no supernatural or immaterial reality.

Everything can in principle be known. (16)

There is no scientific proof of any of these. Scien *Photo by Glenys Jackson* ally
for the New Atheists, scientists have *faith* in such unprovable propositions.

In this way New Atheism can be seen as fundamentalist in a way which mirrors (in reverse) the beliefs of fundamentalist religionists. These two views become polar opposites which both miss the truth which avoids these extremes. I am not the first to claim that the New Atheist position is fundamentalist, imitative of religious fundamentalism, utopian, progressivist and ultimately nihilistic; this is by now commonplace. In a form of scientism, naturalism or rationalism they have made ultimate and unquestionable the above a priori assumptions on which their position is based. They say: "Unlike religious people we are willing to change our minds when the evidence adduced contradicts our current view." But, while this is true of them *within* the scientific field, it is not true of their a priori assumptions which come from *outside* that field. Their fundamentalism consists not in their adherence to scientific truth and its testability but in their rejection of the value or ultimacy of non-scientific viewpoints and in their insistence on the ultimacy of their own general view of truth.

Thus with true religious insight, the tables are turned on the New Atheists; it is *they* who are absolutist and ideological; it is *they* who are unwilling to question their a priori assumptions which they take on faith. Religion, in attending to God as mystery, that is ultimately unknowable, eliminates a priori assumptions and provides a ground for all authentic truth.

In fact, science also relies on this more extended realm of faith for its own creativity, renewal and advancement. Such faith functions as openness to the new, to the as-yet-unthought-of. To the extent that science is open to this realm and not fixated on existing scientific or philosophical orthodoxy it will entail a genuine and creative search for the truth. But science by its very nature will always have to rely, as does any thought system, on certain untestable a priori assumptions which are not themselves amenable to scientific analysis or testing. Thus science will always be limited and only religion can provide a reliable and truly open guide for ultimate truth. Religion in fact provides the only true ground and warrant for scientific truth.

Doubt

When Lawrence Krauss refers, in the above quote, to “telling the truth and full disclosure and also doubting yourself, being sceptical – because the easiest person to fool is yourself”, he is suggesting that in religion all doubt must be eliminated in a rigid adherence to doctrine. We have seen, however, that self-doubt, as the recognition of the ultimate mysteriousness of reality, is an essential aspect of the religious path. God’s mystery is itself a doctrine. Mystery or unknowing is, however, not apart from knowing; the two work together. When the New Atheists hear religionists talking of mystery they see this as an irrational avoidance of debate, a retreat to obscurantism, whereas all it is, in fact, is a radical openness of mind and heart to the truth as *it reveals itself* to us. Here, in absoluteness, faith, doubt and will become one. In Zen we are urged to have Great Faith, Great Doubt and Great Perseverance. *Go straight on a mountain road with ninety-nine curves!*

This doubt or openness is to be distinguished from what is sometimes called sceptical doubt. In this case the practitioner becomes mired in, and attached to, doubt without the balancing effect of true faith. Too much uncertainty is not good for us any more than is too much certainty; it can paralyse the will. In the enlightened mind faith becomes confidence, doubt becomes openness and wilfulness becomes willingness.

Freedom

To have faith in God is to let go of our clinging to our “mind-forged manacles” as William Blake called them. (17) It is to realise that I am God searching for God, that there is no way to God because God is the way. It is to trust diving into (and at once becoming) the unknown, to take a step which from the position of our attachment to our egoistic preoccupations and delusions looks impossible, chaotic and absurd. Releasing our grip on these painful and limiting obsessions, however, leads to the freedom which is our birth right, our original nature, to a life lived with balance, integrity and authenticity.

References

14. Part 1 of this article appeared in the Autumn 2014 issue of Mind Moon Circle. It outlined the New Atheists’ position on faith and reason and dealt with the first part of my response under the headings “Good faith” and “Faith and reason”.
15. Whitman, Walt. “Song of Myself”. See Francis Murphy, ed., *Walt Whitman: The Complete Poems*. Penguin Books, 1986, p.737.
16. For an alternative list see Albert Low. *The Origin of Human Nature: A Zen Buddhist Looks At Evolution*. Sussex Academic Press, 2008, pp. xii, xiv. Low’s list is different and in some ways more extensive than mine. I wanted here to list the most basic assumptions.
17. Blake, William. “London”. See Alicia Ostriker, ed., *William Blake: The Complete Poems*. Penguin Books, 1988, p. 128.

THE GOAL

Gray Wolf made one of her rare visits to the circle,
And after a talk by Raven she remarked,
“The goal of practice seems to be just more practice.”
Raven bobbed his head. “Well?”
Gray Wolf hesitated, and then asked,
“So there’s no end to it?”
Raven hopped down from his perch to a little hummock
beside Gray Wolf, put his beak to her ear, and murmured,
“Thank goodness.”

(Aitken, 2002, p.119)



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