

# Mind Moon Circle

Winter & Spring 2012 / Zen in Daily Life



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Mind Moon Circle, published quarterly by Sydney Zen Centre. 251 Young Street, Annandale NSW 2038, Australia. On the web at [szc.org.au](http://szc.org.au). Printed on recycled paper. Annual subscriptions: \$28 AUD.

This edition was edited by Lee Nutter.  
Front cover design and photograph by Lee Nutter.

# Growing pains

By Adrian Clement

This essay began, at least a month ago, as something much weightier. I called it "Intermediacies," and the description I'll give for it is bound to cause fatigue and boredom, so prepare yourself for it: A personal journey dealing with the interconnectedness between the outer and inner—the physical and spiritual—within the context of art and design, as informed (transformed?) by my experience with Zen Buddhism. Don't even begin to ask me why I thought this would be a good idea.

But since you do ask, I'll respond with several paragraphs, a little history and plenty of self-doubt; I really hope I won't make you sick in the process. It all began sitting on my cushion (I might add, a place of genesis of some of my most ridiculous ideas), after hearing about the theme for this issue of Mind Moon Circle. After studying and subsequently doing a little bit of writing, I have always looked for opportunities to further hone this craft, which always manifests itself as torturous activity. "Intermediacies" was seven (yes, seven) complete re-writes, with many stages of major editing, meetings with friends to discuss some of my themes, and endless recitations to my poor girlfriend, Hayley. Before too long, I envisioned it as my Ulysses, and declared that a) I did not yet have the capacity to talk about the topic at length, and b) in order to be spoken about, the topic deserved to be spoken about at length. I figured I was way out of my league, and yet an impending deadline and terribly

unfounded aspirations turned it into a bit of a... what do you call it? Oh, yeah: a nightmare.

But some marvellous things happened along the way. (Side note: don't you just love the word "marvellous"? It's marvellous!) See, this was a marvellous nightmare. And in case you got the wrong idea in the first paragraph: This experience was riddled with marvellous self-doubt. (Okay, okay, you've had it with the word "marvellous". Fair is fair.)

The first thing that happened, and I'm flushing in my admittance, was beautiful. Regarding the process of writing that beast, I came to this conclusion:

*This [dealing with the paradox that material have the potential to be either superficial or spiritual, or both] has been my journey for many years, as a student of fine arts, a practicing artist today (I collaborate with another artist on a project called Pineapple Park), and as someone who loves design and fashion. I am definitely still on this journey, and the issues and dilemmas I have encountered in my thinking are far from resolved. Having said this, beginning a meditation practice and researching Zen Buddhism has helped me gain considerable insight, and offered me new perspectives that I didn't think were possible. Indeed, even the process of writing this essay has flipped my original opinions on their head. For whilst my practice has helped me formulate a different way of looking and thinking about things, the way I write is still tied to old habits, both stylistic and intellectual. This is, I think, the seventh or*

*eight time, that I have re-written this from the ground up; collectively the revisions are an argument amongst a crowd with radically different opinions. Furthermore, writing this essay from a Zen perspective has been incredibly challenging, and it has made me look deeply at how I use this medium as an intermediate.*

*I think that last sentence says it all: writing this from a Zen perspective has been incredibly challenging. I'll say it once more: writing this from a Zen perspective has been incredibly challenging. Got it? Okay, good. Just checking.*

*And not too long after writing that paragraph, finalising what I suspiciously titled "Intermediacies Draft 3.pages" (perhaps as a conscious exercise in deception to deter me from the reality of my obsessive re-writing?) I experienced something—dare I call it—groundbreaking. This experience, I recounted in full detail in a second piece of writing, separate from the first, and titled it, "Not Doing". Let me just quote the entire thing here:*

*This afternoon, after everyone (except my brother who sits quietly in his bedroom eating hash-browns and eggs on toast) leaves the house, I light some incense, bow to my mat and sit for a short period of time, not doing anything particularly special. Nonetheless, as I venture back into the great nothingness—what the Buddha called *samādhi*—I feel a tremendous sense of relief. Just sitting, I realise that the enormous stresses that I have been governed by these past few days, a result of convincing myself of the things I must do, just completely wash away. Sitting in this space, I crack a smile and a small laugh when these things come back, knowing full well how untrue they really are.*

*Instead of painting my study, I take the day off. I walk my labrador around my neighbourhood.*

*It is a gorgeous day and I bask in the glory of a limitless blue sky until a pain in my arm starts to actualise—the result of being tugged from tree to tree—and I'm brought back to the physicality of my body. At this point, Amy decides to excuse herself and politely do her business on a patch of grass. I reach into my jacket pocket, but the two plastic bags I bring with me are missing. I brought two because I was once caught out only bringing one, but this time, despite being careful, I am at the whim of the law of unexpectedness. I am too far away from my house to do anything, and although I feel guilty walking away, I take it upon myself to use this experience to strengthen my will to give people the benefit of the doubt.*

*I continue on my walk and start up a talk by Mark Lancaster on the San Francisco Zen Centre podcast called 'Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha', which is aptly about how he applies his practice as a Zen priest to his job as Human Resources manager. I owe a lot to this podcast, but not having the time to listen to all the talks, I am forced to make the difficult decision to decide between the several new talks available each week. Confusing Mark Lancaster with Marc Lesser (a speaker I have enjoyed quite a lot in the past), I begin to think, 'Oh, Mark's just got a cold or something. He sure doesn't normally sound like this.' When it sinks in that it's not the same person, I am little bummed out, but I decide to continue listening to the talk anyway, and this case of unexpectedness takes me on a unforeseen journey that I find ultimately deeply rewarding.*

*Amy and I are both entertained from our adventure, and thoroughly puffed out. My new black sneakers are officially broken in. When I return home, I water my penjing and succulents, bringing the latter into my house. One of them sits next to Janet Selby's clay sculpture of Kuan Yin on my bedside table, which is a transparent*

*yellow rectangular prism causing my otherwise white room to glow with spectacular colour. I spend the rest of my afternoon no longer attached to the idea that I have things to do that need to be done today, and yet I find myself leisurely productive: I order a hard-to-find bulb for my Anglepoise lamp, draw up plans for a sculpture I'm working on for a Pineapple Park project based on Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, clean my study while I listen to Kerry Stewart's fabulous new program on religion and disability, organise my timetable for next term's piano lessons, do my budget, and many other little errands. It comes to the point where I feel like I really don't have too much to do, so I curl up in bed and read a fantastic article by Tana Wojczuk in *The Believer*. Her combination of two seemingly paradoxical adjectives—"obvious" and "surprising"—jump out at me as being eloquent words to describe what kind of work I aspire to create as an artist, and the discoveries I make in my Zen practice.*

*Around this time, my girlfriend calls and we arrange for me to pick her up from the train station. I finish the final paragraph in the essay I'm reading, find my car keys and put on a jacket. I drop by the supermarket before we meet, buying some chives and sunflower seeds for a salad I am making for dinner and, after meeting her, we drive home and I tell her of the wonderful day I've been having.*

*I talk to her about my stress, and the subsequent realisation that it was merely formulated by thinking that I had so many things to do, whereas in actual fact, I had very few. I spoke to her about feeling empowered by knowing that I really do have a choice not to do certain things, and the experience of my day has been fantastic evidence. I tell her that I don't even have to finish writing the essay I've been preparing for this issue of *Mind Moon Circle*. That it's not necessary for*

*me to pressure myself into completing something I don't feel completely ready to speak about, at least in a public forum. The feelings of obligation ultimately stem from things I've just made up. Stories I've told myself that are completely hollow. How about that?*

*I think of what Kerry Stewart joked about at a recent *Samu*: My submission to *Mind Moon Circle* should, instead of my essay, be a photograph of my hand I scrawled with pen with references to everything from Carl Wilson's brilliant little 33 1/3 book *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* to design theory by Naoto Fukasawa and Kenya Hara, and quotes by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi.*

*Unfortunately, I never took a photo of my hand in such a state, probably feeling too busy even to indulge myself in humour. But while we're driving, something comes to mind while I speak with my girlfriend: I should just write about the experience of my day instead of completing my essay that I've been working so hard on. I laugh about it, but after dinner and around the time we normally get ready for bed, the joke turns into, I think, a great concept. Naturally, I fetch my computer and type it all out in one go, before falling asleep with a cheeky smirk on my face.*

*Because really, what is more honest? To submit that mammoth of a beast that I've called "Intermediacies": An expedition of epic proportions through my personal experience with the relationship between the physical and spiritual within the context of art and design (I can't believe how fatigued I'm becoming just typing this sentence!), or to recount a small experience of insight that was instigated through the process of writing, editing and thinking about the writing, and ultimately not doing the writing (at least not that writing)?*

*Gillian Coote shared this excerpt in a recent Samu:*

*D.T Suzuki quotes Meister Eckhart:*

*'What a person takes in by contemplation, he pours out in love,' and goes on, 'Zen would say, pours out in work, meaning that work is the concrete actualisation of love.'*

*In this case, the work I'm actualising here is the work of not doing. And for me it's the most compassionate thing I can offer myself at this present moment. And yet at the same time it's perhaps a difficult thing for me to practice because of my karmic consciousness and deeply rooted habits to work relentlessly, and not to think about what it is that I'm doing or deeply assert the question of who is it that is so busy?*

*And as for that ugly, colossal undertaking I gave myself and promised Lee Nutter (the editor of this issue) a month ago? I'll do you a favour too and share the experience of not doing by way of freeing yourself from the possibility of having to actually read it.*

Hey, thanks for reading that! In case you were wondering, the voice of the original narrator—yours truly—is still here (please don't tell me you lost me?) But, you want to know something funny? As soon as I finished writing that, and feeling content for a few days, I rushed to Hayley. I told her: Oh my goodness, I need to re-write it! Because it's not my usual problem with writing, where there are grammatical or structural problems that I inevitably discover (unfortunately, sometimes after something is published), but that I realised something even deeper about the entire process. I realised that I grow very quickly. And I repeatedly

experience out-growing things I say or create. Observing the rapid ephemerality of what it is that I know, I often (who I am kidding: all the time) feel vulnerable when I express my opinion. Hence the aforementioned description of the process of writing for me as "torturous", as it manifests itself as a form that often lingers longer than the thought. (Although, as a friend once told me—and I laugh at this today, don't get me wrong—you can burn a piece of writing you once wrote, but you can never take words back.)

This is the kind of marvellous self-doubt I mentioned earlier. For me it was marvellous, because I became awake to the fact that self-doubt even existed. And when I did, I saw what stood behind it: vulnerability and insecurity. I took these friends out to dinner, and we had a good time. We got used to each other's company, and decided that really, it would be unwise to omit this final little discovery from my submission, (Ha! George Carlin, "Every destination is a final destination.") or that I should even omit submitting anything at all, because of the fear of saying something I will, no doubt, grow out of, and can't take back.

Okay, I think I've said it. As I'm typing this, I'll make you one last conviction: This is my contribution. No more editing or re-writes on the page. I promise! But you can be sure as hell that there will be to play out in the course of my life. But then again, as Michael Houellebecq would say, "Anything can happen in life, especially nothing."

# From Zen to Mindfulness, Palliative & Cancer Care

By Barry Farrin

When I reflect on my early adventure with Zen I remember that some part of myself, felt great suffering. Maybe I did not verbalize it, or clearly see it, but now from a distance of many years I see it clearly. This article evolved from my awareness of suffering in my life and in the world and the freedom from suffering that Zen Buddhism gave me. The use of mindfulness meditation in helping people with cancer, and other life threatening illness and their carer's and friends will be explored. The first section looks at my motivation when introducing two mindfulness meditation groups on the Sunshine Coast, particularly as these groups had been designed to work more or less exclusively with life threatening illness, and why the Forest Way Zen also became involved. The second larger section, discusses the rationale and process of mindfulness meditation in controlling and mediating emotional issues for people with cancer and other life threatening. The review of the literature reveals that mindfulness meditation produces credible results in relaxing and creating peace and restoring a sense of hope, calm and feelings of safety in this group of people. Mindfulness meditation is also effective in controlling dread and fear. This paper also reflects my own experiences when working in cancer care and palliative care. The members of the Forest Way Zen are financially supporting all the costs of conducting two workshops a week and the private counselling of those people who are too sick to attend group

participation. They are also attending these groups to help the groups get momentum. This project has become a "Sangha Devotion" for some.

## **Motivation and Involvement of the Forest way Zen.**

About four months ago I noticed that four people out of nine who were attending the Tuesday mindfulness meditation group had cancer or were caring for someone with cancer. Some of these people had followed me from my last position at Bloomhill Cancer Help on the Sunshine Coast where I ran a weekly mindfulness meditation group for cancer patients and their carers. Over the years since the Forest Way Zen has been formed, five students have died from cancer and some have gone into remission and no longer attend Zen meditation sittings.

I had decided long ago to run mindfulness meditation and Zen sitting evenings on different days. Some people who came to Zen introductory days felt much more comfortable in the mindfulness meditation. This splitting into two separate groups seems to be working well. I often invite some people to come to Zen if their interest continues and they are deeply interested in the Dharma. It also felt less disturbing for the Zen group to have fewer people coming and going as can happen with many new Zen prospects.

Many people were getting their needs met in the mindfulness group and did not

want to come to Zen sitting groups. These people were, never the less, looking for relief from suffering. Many of these people however could not see the need for a Buddhist practice. There was a question about responding to their needs directly.

### **Psychotherapy and the Use of Mindfulness Meditation**

Over the years of my work in the psychotherapy field I had become less directive in my therapy and gradually introduced mindfulness meditation into my work with people with cancer and other life threatening illness. Zen meditation and practice has also helped shape and direct my style of psychotherapy. Often people came for therapy after being diagnosed with cancer and some other life threatening illness to find answers to their life situation. I found I needed to respond to their existential suffering and their sense of hopelessness and loss of meaning. What Place Suffering and Compassion? Like many students of Zen who found they needed to find a way out of suffering, I too experienced much suffering during my divorce and Zen gave me many answers. So as many other Zen students have felt, “returning the gift of the Dharma” to other people always felt to me naturally correct and appropriate. This passing it on has two aspects that I see that are appropriate. One is to offer the Dharma and the other is, it seems, is to respond directly to the suffering, if possible without any strings attached. The students in the Forest Way Zen Sangha sensed this aspect of Zen training and when I announced if anyone was interested in helping; eight people

responded and offered to help. The students have shown great compassion and are actively supporting the formation of the two cancer care workshops that the Forest Way Zen is running weekly.

### **What is Mindfulness Meditation?**

Robert Aitkens describes a type of mindfulness meditation in his book “Taking the Path of Zen”. He describes a series of breathing exercises that become more difficult in the first four or five chapters. More specifically mindfulness meditation can be described as a way of paying attention. Mindfulness involves bringing your attention to the internal and external experiences in the present moment in a non-judgemental way. Some mindfulness meditation techniques focus on breathing, walking, sensations, and sounds, and others focus mainly on being aware of thoughts, and emotions that arise during the meditation. The mindfulness meditation practitioner learns to observe these thoughts and emotions in a non-judgemental way. Baer, R. (2003) suggests that the wandering of the mind into thoughts, memories and fantasies are noted briefly and then attention is returned to the present moment. One is encouraged to have an attitude of pure observation. The intention is to bring the mind under control. Malcolm Huxter (2009) states that the goal is to pay attention in an objective fashion to the arising and passing away of all conditions of mind and body. Harris, R. (2006) defines mindfulness as “consciously bringing awareness to your “here/ now” experience with openness, interest and receptiveness.

Mindfulness has become popular since the release of Jon Kabat-Zinn's book in 1990; "Full Catastrophe Living". This brought mindfulness meditation to the general population and it is now used widely in the United States of America and around the world. This book describes the use of mindfulness meditation in stress and pain control.

### **The Role of the Autonomic Nervous System in Stress, Anxiety and Depression.**

The Autonomic Nervous System is responsible for the maintenance of the optimal internal environment for the body. The autonomic nervous system consists of two divisions, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The sympathetic division acts as the arousal mechanism for the entire body and prepares it for vigorous action. For example the heart rate increases faster than normal when there is increased activation in the sympathetic division. This is the classical fight or flight response out of perceived danger. You can stand a certain amount of continued stress but eventually everyone reaches a level and they can no longer go on coping as they normally do. This is what often happens to soldiers during war. They cope for a long time but the effects of stress may come out when they have come home many months later. In this situation the stressor is re-occurring over and over again and there is no escape. This is the effect of post traumatic stress disorder which occurs in returning soldiers and it can occur in patients with cancer in three to twelve percent of cases.

Activation of the parasympathetic nervous system tends to produce the

opposite effects and lowers the heart rate, though it is not as clear cut as that. Most of the body organs have both sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves. The autonomic nervous system is under the direct control of various nuclei in the brain stem. This system is the peripheral motor system that mediates the actions of the brain structures directly involved in the emotional and motivational aspects of behaviour. The "diagnosis of cancer" is often interpreted as losing control. This news is a "stressor" for most people and thus their response is almost always interpreted as stress and/or other emotional responses. People feel they have lost control of their life, and consequently they feel stress and other strong emotions such as depression, anxiety, panic, fear, and loss of hope. The more knowledge you have the more you will feel in control and thus you have less stress. When you are working within the treatment phase, you are very much focused and you learn all about the cancer and the treatment. During this early phase people are stressed but their focus on their treatment mediates the amount of stress they feel. This could be a time of getting control back as people learn about their treatment and they appear more calm and relaxed. The focus is on the treatment and getting control back. When you move through into the survival phase, stress, depression and other strong emotions are likely to re-occur. This is the phase when post traumatic stress disorder might appear as mentioned earlier. Mindfulness meditation allows you to get some control back in your life.

### **How Effective Is Mindfulness Meditation?**

Mindfulness meditation is effective in reducing pain in cancer patients. The Ven. Pende Hawter from the Karuna Hospice Brisbane describes methods of mindfulness meditation that are effective in reducing pain (1993 Unpublished Paper). Carlson, Linda, et al (2001) produced a very well researched paper on pain in cancer patients. They contend that “This program was effective in decreasing mood disturbance and stress symptoms for up to six months in both male and female patients with a wide variety of cancer diagnoses, stages of illness and educational background, and with disparate ages.” They go on to say that, “It also enhanced feelings of vigour in this population and decreased a wide variety of symptoms of stress particularly depression and anger”. My own personal experience as a psychotherapist in practice over ten years working with many hundreds of patient contacts has demonstrated to my satisfaction that mindfulness meditation produces excellent results in controlling psychosocial and emotional conditions in many cancer sufferers . Baer, R.A. (2003) in a review of mindfulness meditation found significant improvements in chronic pain and in anxiety disorders. Williams, M. (2002) and Baer, R (2003) both found during their research into mindfulness meditation that people with recurrences of depression do well when meditating. They suggest that patients begin to see during their mindfulness meditations, that the patterns of thoughts in their mind can be controlled. These two researchers found that patients are also able to recognize when their moods

begin to take on a “downward pattern” and they suggest these people began to take some actions to head off their declining mood and depression. Mindfulness meditation is best used in chronic recurring depression and not in the acute phase. People suffering from major psychological illness should not be introduced to mindfulness meditation unless they are being closely supervised “one on one” by a health care professional. People with panic attacks often find it hard to meditate and need special attention. Some particularly highly panicked people may be unable to meditate.

### **Mindfulness Meditation Working with Fear, Grief and Loss.**

Existential suffering or fear of death can be reduced by practicing mindfulness meditation. Existential suffering may manifest as “loss of hope” and the appearance of “non relenting fear”. This state produces considerable anxiety, anger, depression and a state of flux and uncontrollable fear that seems to go on and on. People find that they can deal with the physical pain but not the thoughts of disaster. In these cases people give up hope and feel that nothing can help them. In my own psychotherapy with cancer patients I found mindfulness meditation very valuable in working with cancer patients. Mindfulness meditation can help patients find relief from overwhelming feelings of grief and catastrophic thoughts.

## Conclusion

The outreach program by The Forest Way Zen is working well in the north of the Sunshine Coast. One of the groups is averaging eight people per week and the other is averaging five people per week. There are also three people who are receiving meditation training at their home or coming for private sessions because they are too sick to attend a full session. Only time will tell if these programs continue to be successful but in many ways all of the members of the Forest Way Zen are benefiting by grappling with issues of life and death and their own suffering and their understanding of suffering and compassion. The unifying effect of this outreach program has brought many Sangha members together and the sense of Sangha has been highlighted to all at the Forest Way Zen. Our practice of Zen is now “in the market place” and is not just only meditation or Kensho. Hopefully our practice has embraced compassion. Maybe this is becoming a way of actualizing our Buddha nature. It would seem that the mindfulness program is benefiting our Sangha and the people in the north of the Sunshine Coast equally. The literature on mindfulness meditation suggests that mindfulness is an effective process for controlling emotional stress caused by cancer, and other life threatening illnesses. Mindfulness meditation is a gentle, easy, non-invasive process that has been used with good results in cancer care. There are very few side effects and

contraindications. Mindfulness is effective in reducing anxiety, stress and depression. Patients also report a reduction in fear and a return to hope, peace and calm. Mindfulness meditation allows people experiencing a life threatening illness to find a safe place in the “here and now” allowing each moment to become bearable.

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# Zen in Everyday Life or Life is as it is

By Ellen Davison

An example of an expression of Zen in daily life is found in Case 7 of the Wumenkuan where a monk said to Chao-Chou, "I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me" Chao Chou said, "Have you eaten your rice gruel?" The monk said, "Yes I have". Chao-Chou said, "Wash your bowl." The monk understood. (1) The dialogue leaves the reader with the question, also asked in the koan, "What did the monk understand?"

As Shibayama Roshi said, "his spiritual eye was opened to the fact that it is as it is. That he, as he is, is it, that it cannot be outside himself. That once having awakened, he has always been in it, the truth. I feel like crying out, how dull and late you are to know it only now. Yet how many will there be who will have the happiness of knowing it at all." (2)

He's saying, realisation is that this is it!  
This very life is it, this very moment is it!  
There is nothing outside of it! Some practitioners have an idea that when an awakening experience happens, that this will be a certain state. It will be a fairyland of only happiness, nothing else. And as Shibayama Roshi said, it cannot be outside oneself. So however you are at the moment is it.

So for all of us whether one has practiced for a few years or less or many more it is not about waiting for some great awakening experience to live completely and fully. As we continue in our practice there may

be insights and each will inform our everyday life in some way. Now if you say you haven't had any insights to date you can still rejig your life to act from a more mindful, aware and awakened perspective. No matter what life offers you are still able to reflect and contemplate on the situations, on yourself, on interactions and work with these with greater clarity.

There is a poem by Master Bunan which goes, "Do not let the word Tao delude you. Realise it is nothing else than what you do morning and night". (3)

This is what each one of us needs to see into. It is nothing other than our daily lives. I wake up, go to the bathroom, put on the kettle, make breakfast, drink tea, get dressed, brush my teeth, I wash my bowl! leave for work/clean the house and so on. Each activity, each moment is it!

I recall Shunryu Suzuki Roshi's comment that there are no enlightened people, only enlightened actions. When you are truly just sitting, just walking, just drinking tea where are you? The just is the complete intimacy with the action so that there is only the action. Self has dropped away. There is no-one to get in the way.

It's like when the young monk asked the old teacher, "How can I enter the way?" He's sincerely asking for instruction and guidance. How can I awaken? The teacher replies, Listen, do you hear the sound of the raindrops?' The young

monk says “yes, I do”. The old teacher then says, “Enter there”. Do you hear the sound of the Magpies? Enter there. Do you hear the sound of the crickets, the currawong, the rain drops? Enter there. It’s very simple. Can you walk down the street, just walking, just seeing, just hearing? Just that.

The main obstacles to experiencing and living with life as it is, being intimate with the moment, really experiencing life as it is, are states of mind such as attraction, aversion and delusion. These three pretty much cover most of the obstacles we encounter in this journey. And we find their expression in our thoughts, speech, and of course actions. In the Dhammapada there’s a verse that goes: All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind, and happiness follows, like a never departing shadow. (4) And if one speaks with an angry mind, what follows will be unhappiness, suffering, bitterness and resentment.

And you can test this out. In other words we reap the effects of our actions, which include speech and thought. So it pays to be very mindful of thoughts. To notice how thoughts lead to other thoughts and the way a story develops. This is where we begin to see what fuels thoughts and the thinking process, and how the stories develop which can eventually find expression in speech and action.

Thoughts are not in themselves good or bad. However, it’s when the thoughts become stories, stories which are fuelled by judgements, likes and dislikes, and opposing views which then in turn fuel

passions, desires, anger and strong emotions, all made up, created in the mind, as real as a wispy floating cloud on a summers day that we have lost contact with life as it is.

Sometimes though, old stories and memories arise, or a thought pattern repeats itself a lot. This is a time to examine and become intimate with the feelings which are holding the thoughts and memories in place and this can lead to a breakthrough, to a letting go of a hurtful memory, something carried for a lifetime. It’s when you drop into the feeling level that it begins to change, to dissolve or to be let go of.

Our daily life practice is to be with whatever arises. And it is incredibly rich. What does your daily life consist of? Is there really time for getting lost in stories when each moment, each experience is so rich? I think it’s that we don’t appreciate the present moment, or the richness of present experience, whatever it is. There is a tendency to get bored as if it’s all the same routine and we want excitement and interesting changes and we want life to entertain us.

Jack Engler, an Insight/Vipassana teacher who interviewed Dipa Ma, a Bengali woman considered to be an awakened being, wrote:

“Early in my interviews with Dipa Ma, I once said, “When I try to imagine the enlightened state, it seems kind of grey and dull to me. Once you’ve extinguished all the desire, anger and passion, where’s the juice? Where’s the pizzaz? As soon as my question was translated Dipa Ma

broke out laughing, “Oh you don’t understand. Life was dull and boring before, always the same routine, nothing new. Once you get rid of all that stale stuff you’ve been carrying around every moment is fresh and new, interesting and alive. Now everything has zest and taste. No two moments are ever the same”. (5)

Dipa Ma’s words are mirrored in one of the Miscellaneous koans we take up: “The storehouse of treasures opens of itself. You may take them and use them anyway you wish”. (6)

How will you use them? Can you be present for each one?

The following dialogue shows a great spirit of embodying Zen in everyday life:

Dizang asked Xiushan, “Where have you come from?” Xiushan said, “From the South”. Dizang said, “How is Buddhism in the South these days?” Xiushan said, “There’s extensive discussion”. Dizang said, “How can that compare to me here planting the fields and making rice to eat?” Xiushan said, “What can you do about the world?” Dizang said, “What do you call the world?” (7)

In the translation (Yamada and Aitken) we use in the Diamond Sangha, Xiushan last question is translated as, “How can you save the beings of the three worlds in that way?” A question about what one can do to alleviate suffering in this world, showing his confusion on how normal everyday life and action, such as planting and growing rice could have a place in the Bodhisattva’s vow of saving all beings.

Having lived on a farm for over 30 years, I see Dizang’s comment as a wonderful expression of farmer’s mind. Every day farmers tend and nurture their crops, beginning with preparing the ground, then planting the seeds, caring for and feeding the seedlings, being attentive to the seedlings as they grow, for insect damage and fungus, picking the bugs off the plants, watering the plants, paying attention to the weather, to harvesting the crops, cooking the vegies and then eating the fruits of the harvest. Each phase requires attention, focus, patience, intimacy, commitment, trust and appropriate action. Over the years a rhythm develops of attention to the many tasks, a mindful attention and intimacy with the task.

As Suzuki Roshi is often quoted as having said, there are no enlightened beings, only enlightened actions. Xiushan was still caught up in concepts including the injunction to save all beings, the first of the four Bodhisattva vows. But how does one save all beings? Does preaching save all beings? This is a question students of Zen often grapple with, a koan itself. When speech and action come forth from a selfless place, and selfless being a place that is empty yet potent with all possibilities such as generosity, caring, loving kindness, compassion, all the attributes that nourish this universe and our lives, then any action including planting rice, peeling potatoes, washing the dishes, being with an ill or dying friend, is no other than an enlightened action, the true spirit of Zen in everyday life.

Practice in everyday life is then just the natural flow of events. The more you get out of the way and respond from selflessness, the more there will be ease, peace and intimacy in your life.

Using Shibayama Roshi's words, it is as it is. That's it. Just this! Nothing outside it.

Our world is filled with wanting things to be different than they are, which happens when we don't get what we want, or can't hold onto what we have or when we can't get rid of what we don't want. And most people are so caught up in these aspects of desire and wanting that it becomes difficult to see that this is it!, to accept that this is it!

It's in the seeing and accepting that this is as it is where we can find intimacy, appropriate action and liberation, our practice of Zen in everyday life.

### Notes

1. Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, p. 54, North Point Press, 1990.
2. Zenkai Shibayama, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*, p. 71, New American Library, New York, 1974
3. *Ibid*, p. 71.
4. Gil Fronsdal, *The Dhammapada*, p. 1, Shambala, 2006.
5. Jack Engler, *Enlightenment in this Lifetime; Meetings with a Remarkable Woman, an Interview with Dipa Ma*. *Tricycle Magazine*, Spring 2004.
6. *Miscellaneous Koans*, trans. Yamada Koun and Robert Aitken, for reference within the Diamond Sangha.
7. Thomas Cleary, *Book of Serenity*, Case 12, p. 51. Lindisfarne Press, NY, 1990.



## Dizang's "Nearness"

By Kim DeBacco

### *Case 20, Book of Serenity (Thomas Cleary, Trans.)*

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"*

*Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."*

*Dizang said, "What is the purpose of pilgrimage?"*

*Fayan said, "I don't know."*

*Dizang said, "Not knowing is nearest."*

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"*

Where are you going?

It's an innocent enough question, isn't it?

Fayan (or Hogen, 885-958) was the founder of the Fayan school of Buddhism in China which flourished for a time but later died out. Some commentators say it was snow, others say it was rain and floods, that forced Fayan to stop at the temple of Dizang (known in Japanese as Jizo Keijin, 867-928) where he had this exchange with him. It was on the basis of this exchange that Fayan decided to stay at the temple and Dizang became his teacher.

I started asking myself where I was going back in 2007 in Sydney, Australia immediately after I had submitted my PhD. It was truly an uplifting feeling when all that knowledge came bursting forth and hit the page. I enjoyed the work and process of discovering ideas, and discovering my own ideas in the process. And yet with that final submission, I had hit an obstacle on my life journey. With my PhD submitted, I

felt I had climbed Mt Everest, and was now asking myself, "What next?"

In my case, it was Bala who really tapped on my heart-mind and asked me, "Where are you going?"

Bala and I met first in writing, in letters that started crossing the Pacific in 2004. In July that year, I invited LA-based Vietnamese Zen Priest Kshanti (SuCo Tich Tu Hanh) to speak one Tuesday evening at the Sydney Zen Center. Kshanti's sangha comprised inmate groups in prisons around LA. A large crowd filled the Annandale hall and Kshanti ran us through a typical service that she would conduct in one of the prisons she visited. She sold artwork and beadwork, donating the proceeds to SZC. At the end of the evening, people started filing out and suddenly she remembered and said, "Oh. Does anyone want a zen pal? Some of these men want support for their practice." Kshanti gave me two names, Ben and Tad, then, almost as an afterthought, she added Bala DeBacco to the list, saying something oblique like, "Someone needs to write to Bala. You might be the right person."

I assiduously wrote 3 letters to Ben, Tad and Bala. The letters from Ben and Tad were pleasant and straightforward. The letters I received from Bala were of a different order. The following is from the second letter he wrote to me:

Wed 15th September 2004, 3:30pm:

Hello Kim,

*I received your letter today .... I had just come back from my 10 min. shower escorted in handcuffs, and the officer placed the letter in my hands while cuffed in the back. I was like a child the morning of Xmas day! I nearly created a confrontation with the officers because they were taking their time in removing the cuffs.*

Bala and I started a correspondence and a relationship that continues to this day. At first I kept my distance; I would occasionally check with Kshanti: "Who is this guy?" I was very wary of sharing too much about myself. After all, he was inside for 2nd degree murder, I reminded myself.

We met face-to-face for the first time in 2007 while I was on sabbatical in California, and that was it! We married in February 2009, and we are exceptionally happy, unconditionally loving, devoted to each other, and committed to Right Effort.

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?" Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."*

In January 2008 I returned to Sydney, left my tenured position at the University, and in March I returned to California to find a job. Reluctantly, I stepped out of Annandale zendo, quietly removing myself from the Sydney sangha, and I returned to California in March 2008. I was very aware that Subhana and some of the SZC sangha members in Sydney had been hurt by terrible experiences with two manipulative inmates 15 or 20 years earlier. I heard that when these men

were released, one of them cause havoc, unnerving people at sesshin, and breaking up long-standing, committed relationships.

I was not ready to reveal my relationship with Bala to my dharma friends. At the time, I did not have the energy and courage to deal with the anxieties and concerns which inevitably arise in others when I mention Bala for the first time. These days, while I still don't announce our circumstances and marriage first up to everyone, everywhere, I am no longer ashamed; I understand the stigma, but I am on a path to "normalizing" our relationship. I am so blessed to know, love and be loved by this man. We are a team with responsibilities now and great plans for the future.

In July 2008, after a day-long interview and a long wait, I accepted a challenging appointment at the University of California in Santa Barbara, and to this day I am fortunate to continue in that position and so grateful to come to know the many academics, colleagues and friends at the university and in the Santa Barbara region!

When I first started to write this piece, I found myself describing what I thought was my "spiritual" pilgrimage, visiting legendary zen centers and temples all over California, and sitting with the many well-known zen teachers who live here! But then Dizang asked me his second question.

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"  
Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."  
Dizang said, "What is the purpose of  
pilgrimage?"*

One pilgrimage that come to mind immediately was written up in Mind Moon Circle 6 or 7 years ago and describes the walking trip undertaken by Jean, Maggie and Tony from the Sydney Zen Centre along the Camino Santiago de Compostela through southern France and Spain.

Closer to home, here in California, it's still possible to undertake a sad and beautiful pilgrimage by following the 650 mile long El Camino Real (The King's Highway). This road runs from San Diego in the south to the heart of San Francisco in northern California, following a trail that was originally blazed by Spanish Franciscan missionaries between 1769 and 1823. Tradition has it that the first missionaries scattered mustard seeds along the way so that their bright yellow flowers would act as a marker to guide others following in the missionaries' steps. The Camino Real is punctuated by a chain of 21 Spanish Missions, and the original plan was for the missions to be one day's travel apart, though this is not exactly what eventuated. These religious outposts were designed to attract local Indian populations to food, refuge, and God. The missions of course fell into decline due to disease, starvation, mistreatment and misunderstanding.

Every third weekend I undertake a pilgrimage of a different kind, driving 5 hours each way through the middle of

Los Angeles and on to Calipatria State Prison to visit my husband. The faded, dusty town of Calipatria lies in the Imperial Valley about 30 miles from the border with Mexico. A wintertime food bowl for the United States, in summer the temperature regularly reaches 120 degrees Fahrenheit (or 49 degrees Celsius). Incidentally one of my regular rest stops on the drive to Calipatria is in a town called Mecca! Clearly, visiting my husband in prison is a pilgrimage!

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"  
Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."  
Dizang said, "What is the purpose of  
pilgrimage?"  
Fayan said, "I don't know."*

While Bala is walking the tier and walking the yard, he is walking his own pilgrimage too. His circumstances challenge our fundamental beliefs about humans and human nature: Do people change? What is it to forgive someone who took a life? What does he have to do to redeem himself?

I am proud and humbled by the great work he is doing to support himself and the inmates around him on his Special Needs Yard at Calipatria State prison where he is actively "programming", or undertaking rehabilitation programs.

He is close to completing his Associates' Degree, he is a Distance Education coordinator and literacy tutor; he has held leadership roles at the institutional level leading NA and Marines' Veterans groups (organizing fund-raising for children of vets, and making local TV news appearances handing over checks!).

He has designed, and continues to facilitate, two self-help support groups on his yard: Bridges to Freedom (parole planning) and Positive Interventions (psychological, emotional and social rehabilitation). He has written books (which can also be self-help manuals for individuals) to accompany these workshops comprising chapters of advice, workshop handouts, sample materials, cell study handouts (homework). Every other Wednesday at around 5pm Bala and 25 inmates meet to discuss their parole planning which entails developing insight into their crimes and the circumstances that led to them. He models the work they have to do by sharing details of his wretched childhood in the LA Foster Care system, his subsequent body image issues and addiction to steroids.

In recent weeks, five inmates have approached him inquiring about Zen Buddhism and asking for instruction in how to sit zazen. He shakes his head (in disbelief) and laughs. As a former five precept monk, who fell from grace 10 years ago, he lost his way and his rakusu, but he is now back on his spiritual path, sitting every morning in his cell and drawing inspiration every day from Mel Ashe's book *The Zen of Recovery*.

Unfortunately, prison wives get a bad press. Yet I don't see myself as a lonely or psychologically suspect prison wife! I get on with my own life and professional work - outings with friends, travel, research writing and conferences. In this marriage, separated by several walls and razor wire, Bala supports and sustains me. He makes me laugh (so much!) and

he challenges my thinking and intellect in ways no other person has ever done. He connects ideas in lateral and obvious ways that I would never see. He is much wiser than me about the motives of people. We respect each other, and we help each other through difficult times at both ends. In 2006 in Sydney, when I was writing up my PhD about online text-based teaching, Bala was virtually at my side, encouraging and urging me on in text, with his letters. We celebrate each other's achievements.

Where are we going? We don't really know. We are going wherever we are right now! We are not postponing our happiness until some unknown parole date in the future. As we sometimes remind each other:

No anticipation, no regrets;  
this moment now is as good as it gets!

*Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"*

*Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."*

*Dizang said, "What is the purpose of pilgrimage?"*

*Fayan said, "I don't know."*

*Dizang said, "Not knowing is nearest."*

Dizang's final comment in this case is also sometimes translated as "Not knowing is most intimate". When we talk on the phone, when we read our letters, when we touch and speak during a visit, Bala and I don't know what will happen in the next instant. I sometimes hear men and guards yelling in the background when he calls. He listens to the music playing, or the waves crashing at my end, and he chats with my friends on speakerphone. Our mail to each

other is inspected going in and out of the prison, and oftentimes an envelope is returned to me because, as I've found out, writing on the back of photographs, sending lipstick kisses and small cards with glued layers or sparkly bits are banned!

Our visits take place in the D-yard visiting room with dozens of other couples, families and children around us. Whereas most couples on a Saturday or Sunday might be distracted by household chores, gardening and shopping trips to hardware stores and Target, we sit hand-in-hand for up to 6 hours a day, talking about our lives, activities and our plans, sharing our feelings, playing chess or scrabble, discussing people and their motives, making sketches and notes on scraps of paper. Intense or light, joking or serious, we talk, talk, talk, sweet talk, heavy talk, sex talk. Hmm - sex.

Whenever I explain my husband's circumstances to someone for the first time, invariably they find a way to ask me about sex! "Do you have, you know, ahm, conjugal visits"? (Why are you thinking about sex, I wonder?) I try to explain how, in those years when there was lots and lots of sex in my life, the intensity of sex was equally matched by the lack of it when it wasn't happening. To experience sex, there has to be no sex. When there is no sex there is sex. Form and emptiness. Emptiness and form.

If that doesn't make sense then I remind the curious that intimacy and sex can be two different experiences, each expressed in different ways. Bala and I know each other's heart beats, finger tips, breath,

warmth, movements, and contours. We can all learn a lot about each other just by being with, being mindful, being attentive. And as we all know from sesshin, the vow of silence does not stop us from coming to know some of the habits and peculiarities of the person on the mat next to us!

As others before me have observed, being in prison is like being in sesshin. Things happen very slowly in prison, and I've learned that prison is all about waiting... waiting... waiting for something to happen. Prison is not knowing what will happen next.

For Bala and me, being on this pilgrimage together, step after step, moment to moment, not knowing is nearest and most intimate.

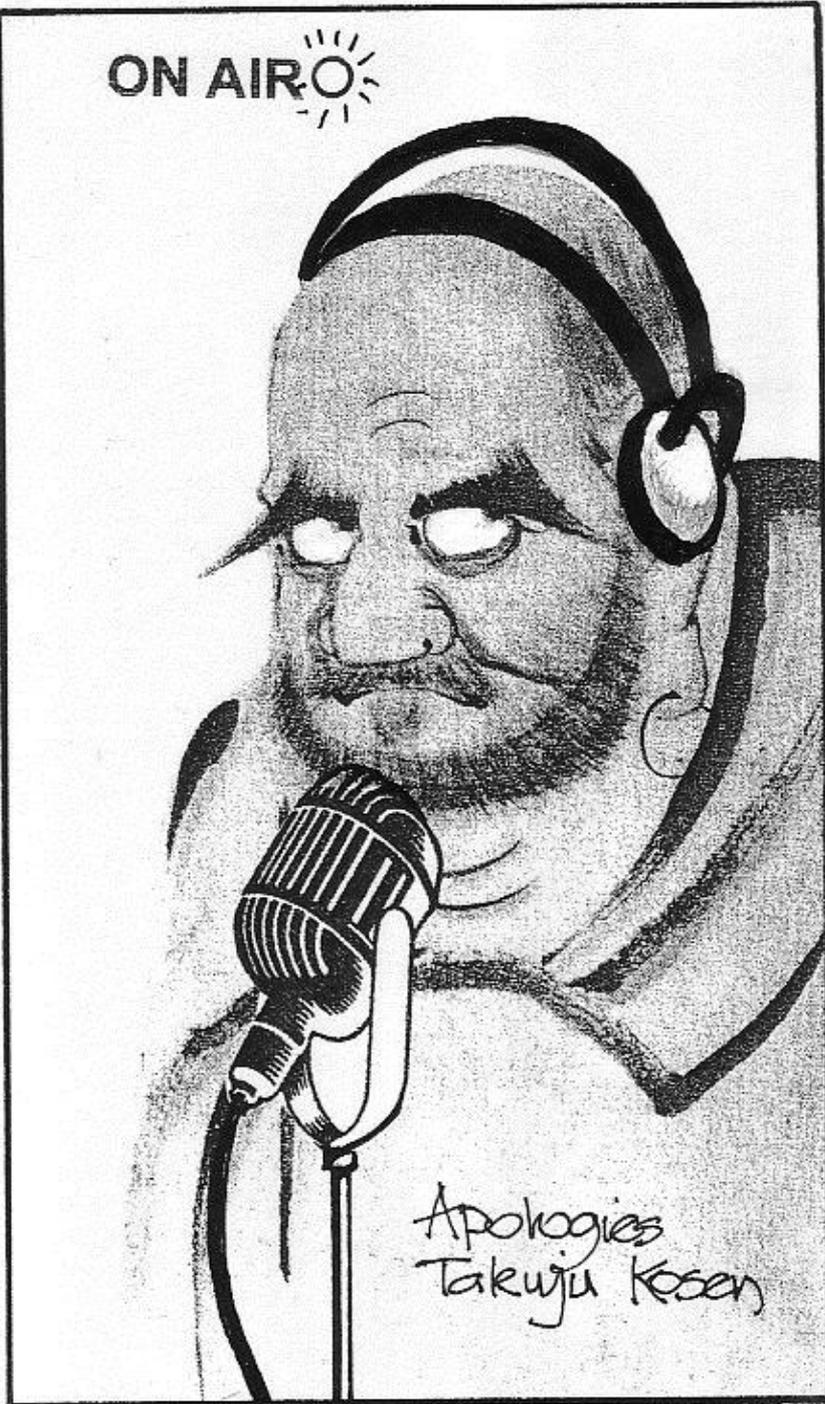
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Kim remembers and misses the many kind and amazing bodhisattvas at SZC! She looks forward to hearing your responses and sharing news. You can email Kim at: [kimdebacco99@gmail.com](mailto:kimdebacco99@gmail.com). Bala's books, *Bridges to Freedom* and *Positive Interventions* are available at [bridgestofreedom.wordpress.com](http://bridgestofreedom.wordpress.com)



ON AIR



## Dream Diary – Death and rebirth

By Tony Coote

I've recently started therapy with a Jungian psychologist. She has me writing down my dreams as part of a program designed to make me a more thoroughly integrated human being. During my last Sesshin at Kodoji I had a very strange dream, which I shared with my fellows at the end of the retreat.

When I recounted the dream to my therapist she advised me that it would be most beneficial if I shared it with the wider sangha in the hope that it may be beneficial to others.

In the dream I had died and been reborn as a 1960s radio disc jockey by the name of Bodhidharma.

*Bodhidharma:* Yeh! All you groovers and shakers you dig it and you dig it deep! Anuttara-samyak-sambodh, a Rickapoody and a Fandangly! Yeh, you far-out Yogis and Yoginis – this is your Master of the Blaster speaking, the one, the only, the big, the bad and the burly – the man with the bulgy eyes and no eye lashes, the Bandit of the Beats - Bo-hodi D-Harmanaaa!!!

Yeh Bodhisattvas it's me the King of the Dudes and the Dude of the Kings.

Cats and kittens out there in radio-land I hope you and your granny have got your trannies locked right onto the home of the wise and the heart of the good - RADIO PRAJNAPARAMITA.

For every mindful minute of the day we've got more stacks of wax than the Bodhisattvas in Vimalakirti's sick room. Get a tight grip on your zafus as we lay more tracks than the number of sands in 60,000 Ganges Rivers!

But hey! Before we make Makyos with the music, for all those golden-hued waxheads and their 32 marks who are tuned in, let's check the way of the surf with our very own guru of waves, reporting direct from the Prajna-copter up there in Tusita heaven. Amped- up and pumpin' through the clouds of unknowing let's hear it from that great little booger - Layaaa man Pang!

*Pang:* Aloha and Ayatana old Bodhi man! Yes indeedy today's the day to get out there with all the Bonzes, Brahmans and Buddhas of the surf 'cos it's really going off like Avalokita's nighty.

My pick of the morning for the part-time paddler is the Bombi off The Pure Land, which is giving a nice easy left- hander all the way to Nirvana. For the more intrepid who can withstand the Dukkha of the wipe-out and the Bodhichitta of the Green Room, slip on your Okanuis, clip the big Kyosaku to the board racks of the Combi and head straight down the Eightfold Path to Samsara where you'll be scoring endless waves of birth and death.

*Bodhidharma:* Pangman thank you for those words of Prajna. That's pure

Dharani from the Deva of the drop-in.  
The untold Dharmakaya of the sea of  
uncertainty.

And don't forget all you grommets out  
there make sure you're fully prepared for  
the sick hours of the Samadhi of the  
Après-surf. Yes cool cats and Arhats  
when you're through dicing with the  
waves of birth and death and your Iddis  
are focussed on the Jiriki of the carnal -  
make sure you're practicing Right Sex.

And when we say Right Sex you need the  
security of Big Bodhi's preferred choice  
for maximum Karuna and guaranteed  
Kensho - the Mahalingham Kundalini  
condom – one size fits all and all sizes fit  
one.

OK! OK! If you've been hanging out for  
the latest noble truth from the stock  
exchange keep your ears pricked and  
your chakras relaxed for our financial  
reporter Chou Chou's daily dose of  
wisdom.

By the way Old Man Chou Chou lost his  
dog this morning, which was not for the  
first time. But, hey! What's the old  
codger expect if his backyard is secured  
with a so-called gateless gate.

Keep an eye out for the little pooch will  
you? She answers to the name of Katz.

Chou-man reports that there's bad news  
from the exchange this morning because

the Dao has risen six points, which  
means, to quote the old dude verbatim:  
“is not eternal Dao”.

That sure put me right up the Bodhi Tree  
– Do I buy, sell or commit Harry Curry?  
I just don't know. “That's good Bhodi  
buddy”, Chou-chou said, “Not knowing  
is most intimate.”

What the Moha????

But Hey my little Bodhisattvas let's cut  
the Avidya and move with the Karma.  
Here's something to juice up your Kinhin  
and counter the Five Poisons. Let's put  
the needle in the groove and get the joint  
jumpin' with the number one album from  
this week's Shakyamuni's Top 40 - THE  
PRESENT MOMENT .....

At this point the 4am bell at Kodoji  
interrupted my dream so I never got to  
experience The Present Moment. Both  
my Zen Teacher and my therapist  
considered this particular point in the  
truncation of the dream to be significant.  
They have encouraged me to continue  
the work using a number of simple  
techniques that may help me to really  
experience the Present Moment.

#### **Hand and footnotes**

Buddhist terms can be seen at -  
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/glossary.html>  
Surfing terms see - <http://cougartown.com/surf-slang.html>

# How I Sketch a Place

By Janet Selby

When I am out and about and I see a landscape that catches my attention, I don't take a photo with a camera. Neither do I make an illustration. I try to capture its story.

When I am in a place I get a feel for its character and essence. I highlight this feeling by drawing its shape, colour, texture etc, trying to evoke the atmosphere. The first lines on the page begin the story. It is this composition from which the story emerges on the page.

I never think twice about how such a vast vision before me could fit onto a tiny piece of blank paper. The inbuilt viewfinder can edit the scene immediately. I find it easier in a drawing than a camera to edit and exaggerate as you go. The essential elements of the story emerge instantly. For example, the placement of a figure evokes a lonely path. The small size of a cloud evokes the vast proportions of a grand scale, giving a sense of history and perspective both temporal and physical.

As I am drawing I am fully engaged in the place and the process. I consciously choose the limits of the composition to fit the page. This is the opening paragraph of my chapter. Then I choose the method which would relate to the character of the place, which make the details of the story. Small fine lines indicate lots of delicate detail, perhaps showing fragility, or broad sweeps of

watercolour might show the loose freedom of the wind. Rugged pastels are for rocks and bark that might tell me of the solid core of the place.

I am interpreting and relating to the spirit of the place. This is my role, to point out aspects that might be superficially passed over by other observers. So when I am walking with a group, I am not engaged in idle chit chat. I am seeking out the feeling through my eyes, ears, feet - all my senses, including my instinct. This requires a sharp sense of awareness and a quick eye-hand response, enlivened by the heart.

The first quick sketch is with a watercolour pencil, which may be left uncoloured, or washed lightly with water. If I want to continue, I may use watercolours. I have a tiny travelling kit. But I might need to use oil pastels before the watercolours, if the scene offers me a more rugged response. Then, the wax of the pastels will resist the water, giving a sense of depth and texture. There are endless combinations I am still discovering with these simple methods.

I keep a small jar of water with me. I don't throw it out or replace it with fresh clear water once it has been used for my watercolours until the stain is too dominating, when I will replace most of the water, but keep a part of the original in the fresh batch. As I dip the brush into this water it leaves traces of paint and colour from each painting which charges

the water with the colour and character of each place that has been painted. The water becomes charged with its essential energy like a homeopathic remedy. Each site I have painted is remembered into this subtly deposited mix, and when the brush is dipped into it again at a new site, it is linked to all other sites ever painted.

So the story that I find in a place is the story that has been observed and interpreted by my deep inner self, in the hope that the images I evoke on paper will be a new story to inspire others to pick up a finer sense of awareness.



懺	悔	文
Repentance	Regret + Repent	verse text

我	昔	所	造	諸	惡	業
I my mine	the past former times	that which (particle introducing a relative clause)	to create	everything all various	to harm evil	karma

皆	由	無	始	貪	瞋	癡
all each and every in all cases	from by a cause to allow, to let	—less un—	to begin to start	greed	to glare angrily to open the eyes with anger	fool foolish stupid silly

從	身	口	意	之	所	生
from related to to follow	body deed act action	mouth word speech	mind thought views opinion	(possessive particle)	that which (particle introducing a relative clause)	to be born to give birth to give life to grow

一	切	我	今	皆	懺	悔
all the whole everything		I my mine	now	all each and every in all cases	repentance +	regret repent

# The great silence at my wits end

By Kim Bagot

## The impossibility of translation.

Recently a friend gave me the above word-for-word translation of the Purification gatha and it reawakened ponderings about the meaning of notions such as 'evil', 'confess', 'karma' and 'purify'. So, at the risk of doing porridge for restarting the porridge/grain meal/meals/food fights I will indulge in a few maunderings of a non- mendicant non-monk:

## Verse of Reconciliation

*For all the harmful karma ever created by me  
Caused by beginningless greed, aversions and self-  
delusions  
Arising from thought, word and deed  
I now vow with all my heart to fully atone.*

Some self- justifications: I believe that a lot of Christian churches now name what used to be the sacrament of 'Confession' as 'Reconciliation'. This perhaps points to the need to move beyond just mouthing words of 'Sorry' to actually 'Closing the Gap' with atonement. As well, there is the change of heart evoked by the notion of 'Purification' at its best where we abandon self- preoccupations and perfectionistic concepts of personal purity. I did resile from abandoning 'karma' in favour of 'behaviour' or 'actions'; but I do meet people who seem to have superstitious, voodoo-like beliefs based on immature interpretations.

To 'Repent, repent' presumably is to fully repent and thus experience character change and at-one-ment with those of

the many beings, and those parts of our own self, which we had up to then in our heart of hearts identify as 'evil' and not part of our real self.

As regards translating, W.S. Merwin the noted translator, United States Poet Laureate and twice Pulitzer Poetry Prize winner, comments in his foreword to Aitken Roshi's *A Zen Wave* (1978, p.13) that translation is impossible, and that the translation of poetry and translation of Zen, contribute barriers of their own to this basic impossibility.

Well, I'm glad we are clear about that, because Aitken Roshi points out ('Gateless Barrier', p. 238 ) that we, as Western students, do not live in a culture that is permeated by Zen thought; and even advanced students need to prowl bookstores and libraries, and if possible begin reading texts in the original and trying to translate them...In passing I want to observe that the impossibility of translation is some excuse for revisiting and refreshing terms which can become fuzzy and clichéd into rote-learned, meaningless buzz- words.

## What is the character of Buddha-nature?

In rendering rather freely (hopefully not rending) parts of Shodoka, "realization-way-song", I dont want to pose as an adept or translator. This is a never ending journey of personalizing my practice- a suburbanite's pilgrimage. Every time I sit down with the text I find something new which makes for quite delightful

explorations, and meanderings. I have a custom of going over at least one verse before I sip my coffee (in Buddha's Inner-western Paradise of Dharma Cafes), or skim The Telegraph (never purchased!).

### **Singing The Great Silence (after Yung-chia Ta-shih)**

*Do you truly walk in peace? The silent peace which passes all your understandings?  
The peace of one who neither strains to avoid delusive thinking, nor grasps after ultimate truth,  
Who knows that ordinary mind, in reality has Buddha-character.  
Do you know that this frail body is no other than the timeless body of the Dharma?  
When you awaken to the Dharma-body, reality is not objectified.  
Innocent truth is the origin of all things, the character of the timeless Buddha;  
Mental and physical forms come and go like clouds floating in the blue sky;  
Grasping, aversions and self-delusions appear and disappear like foam on the great ocean...  
Those who cheat people with faked spiritual knowledge merit having the power of speech cut off forever...  
An authentic Zen character embodies a grounded faith...  
If you keep on snatching at outer leaves and branches, it won't help you to get grounded...  
The properly accomplished character, has the character of all beings,  
One being, all comprehensive, embraces in itself all beings,  
One moon reflects wherever there is a sheet of water,  
And all the water-moons are embraced within the one moon;*

*The true treasure of integrity is always the ground of Buddha-character, the true basis of one who is awakened-  
How can the creeping mind of a jackal track the Dharma-Raja?  
Even with all their magical tricks, intellectual wizards just jabber in vain...  
All eagerness since my early years, I chased intellectual attainments  
I pored over the sutras, shastras and commentaries-  
Wholly given over to the analysis of names and forms, never even realizing the meaning of fatigue.  
But diving into the ocean headfirst to tally the grains of sand is a fool's errand, and exhausting work, ...  
What's the use in totalling up somebody else's treasures  
All my achievements and wrong-headed efforts were mistakenly applied in my life- I see that clearly now,  
For many years I had been a wanderer on pilgrimage to nowhere...  
A noble elephant cannot stride in a rabbit's run-  
The boundless mind of Bodhi surpasses all our self-enclosed understandings;  
Stop trying to measure the heavens by squinting through a tiny reed tube;  
If you honestly have no insight yet, just allow the song to present the great silence.*

I have been comparing differing versions and looking where emphasis on realization and intimacy is balanced by attention to character work and integrity. One of my initial and lasting recollections of Aitken Roshi was of his shining integrity and outstanding equanimity, which invited openness, honest enquiry and intimacy. I have reflected on versions by D. T. Suzuki (Manual of Zen Buddhism, 1934, readily available online),

Nyogen Senzaki Sensei (Buddhism and Zen, 1953), and Nelson Foster Roshi (The Roaring Stream, 1996). Senzaki's version seems more interpretive and freer in places. Suzuki's version I take to be more scholarly and closer to the original Chinese. Aitken Roshi met Senzaki, his first Zen teacher, in 1947 and described him as the most down to earth of teachers.

I am interested that Senzaki uses the word 'character' where others might say, 'nature':

“The precious grass of the Himalayas is the only kind in the meadow...”

“Zen students partake of teaching always as pure,

“When human character is purified, it is the character of all beings;

“When the law of humanity is completed, it is the law of the universe.”

In 'The Morning Star' (p.6), Aitken Roshi dwells on the importance of ongoing character development and practice when he traces the evolution of versions of Shakyamuni's realization sitting beneath the Bodhi tree. Writing his summation after fifty years of Zen practice and thirty years of teaching, Roshi points out that the actual turning point (appearance of the morning star) is omitted from the Classical account, but is central to the Zen story. Character formation and practice are emphasised in the Classical legend; they are omitted in the Zen version, but stressed in the rigors of monastic life and training.

In lay practice some of that rigor might be missed, as well as, I am guessing, regular bodywork like Tai Chi and manual labour. I think here too of

numerous 'enlightened' teachers in various traditions whose characters have been found grossly lacking. Yamada Roshi said the business of Zen is the perfection of character; presumably he meant perfecting through never-ending work on maturing leading to deeper and deeper peace of mind and heart.

Senzaki commences Shodoka:

“Do you see that Zen student? He has forgotten what he has learned, yet he practises easily and freely what he has learned and also what he should learn.

“He lives in equanimity calmly and contentedly. He is free of all care, yet he acts naturally and reasonably.

“He neither strives to avoid delusion nor searches after truth.”

D. T. Suzuki renders this passage more concisely:

“Knowest thou that leisurely philosopher who has gone beyond learning and is not exerting himself in anything?

“He neither endeavours to avoid idle thoughts nor seeks after the Truth;”

'Leisure' doesn't quite nail for me the arduous practice of life-long study and development of the self. Rather than simply looking 'out there' to models of others' ease, the point surely is to actually put into practice a sturdy, honourable equanimity; the sort of peace of mind and heart which never slacks off but always seeks to surpass understandings 'achieved'. Thus the Zen attention on what is beyond words and phrases and the spirit of 'never enough yet' might be echoed in ideal expressed by St. Paul of the 'peace which surpasses understanding'. That might be a rough

translation of Ahimsa, the ethic which is said to pre-date Hinduism and Buddhism and is very roughly translated as 'non-violence'. Notions of non-harming are a negative guide and in puritanical hands can lead to obsessive silliness like breathing through a mask to avoid killing microbes; better to say what we are for- the way of peace, to which there is no way but to practice peace.

In any case, the wide variations in wordings of texts are something to contemplate and reconcile with. After all these words I want to say that true words should point to great silence rather than any great matter; ideas of the latter can more easily lead to ego- inflation while

contemplation of the former is a nice stopper for the buzz of buzz-words, at least in my wordy mind. In the last week I was reminded of this vividly when all my 'wisdom' eluded me and left me at wits end. I was walking in a park with a younger-onset dementia sufferer who is in a very paranoid phase. It was to no avail trying to reason with him or empathise at leisure when he angrily started walking onto a busy road after raising his fists. He became very truculent with any interaction. There was nowhere else to go but to practice as much inner silence as I could muster and walk in his meanderings as lovingly as I could. Very gradually the storm abated.



## Frolic and play

By Sally Hopkins

Most Mondays I catch a train, a ferry, a bus, and walk to the home of one of my brothers to play his piano. It is always fun. Sometimes, when playing, something wonderful happens. The player disappears entirely. There are fingers, ears, notes, the music singing and speaking, playfully returning, interweaving, solemnly chanting. It is as if the music is playing itself with the greatest of ease.

It has struck me that all those early years of effort and detailed practice, years and years of practice, have led to this present delight. Maybe this is true of Zen practice too.

I see Zen practice as being awake every step of the way. How simple that sounds! Awake? Awake to how things truly ARE, in our triple natured world- clear and ephemeral, interconnected, and unique. All aspects true, all the time. So indeed we do need to be Awake. A lifetime's practice that we hone day by day, breath by breath, will not suffice, always walking in mystery.

Giving a personal response to the precepts for the Jukai ceremony was helpful - like actually practicing the piano, rather than just thinking how great it would be to be able to play. Another truly helpful practice was found in a wonderful little book of Aitken Roshi's "The Dragon that Never Sleeps". In this book Aitken Roshi offers gathas (verses) for each moment of lay life. i.e. in setting

up a serious practice, as with a piano, you need to look at the details - waking up, conflict in a meeting, sickness, children, aging E.g:

*When everything loses its meaning  
I vow with all beings  
To honour this intimate teaching  
That clears my dependence away.*

*In a paranoid cycle of thoughts  
I vow with all beings  
to enjoy a cold glass of water  
Step outside to look at the sky.*

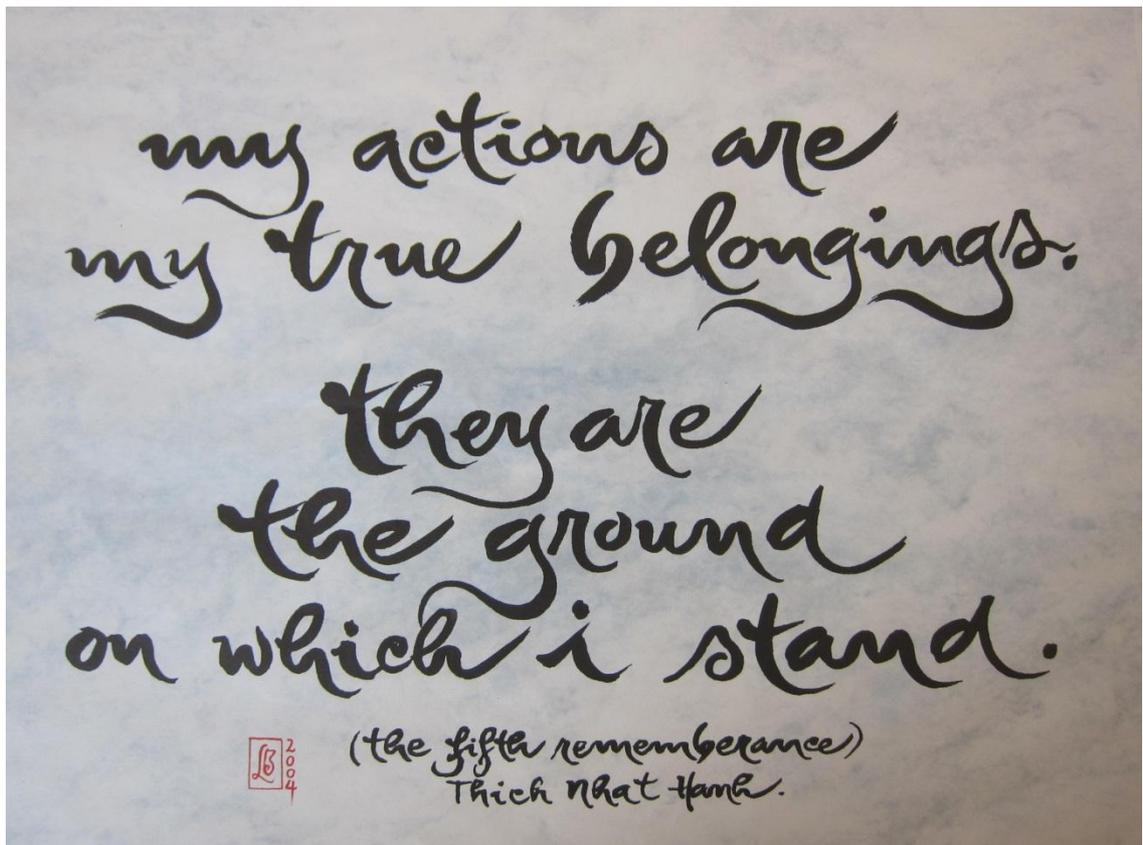
*When thoughts form an endless procession  
I vow with all beings  
To notice the spaces between them  
And give the thrushes a chance.*

When x is the case, then "I vow with all Beings". A great way to be taken beyond helplessness, beyond the sense of a little separate self. Vowing is a serious matter- a wholehearted, wholebody matter, not a tossed off, "Hopefully this is what I'll do". Nothing wishywashy about it. The vow is basically to act in the light of all aspects of our shared triple nature. Roshi's offerings open windows of the heart/mind, point to the next step!

It was helpful for a while to write my own gathas for occasions when it was difficult to remain truly present, hidden in my own fog.. "When I see red" "When I am fed up" "When I mentally criticize others" ..I vow with all beings.... Repeating these as needed. Practicing the scales!

The music , the song, is the point when playing. Life unfolding is the point of Zen practice. Life each moment. Life living Life in a way. Not into perfection, whatever that may be, but into whatever comes, in ease and joy, even in the

saddest, most confused, most despairingly dark times. Life endlessly unfolding, rich , mysterious! “ We are here only briefly. Let us accept reality fully and take care of one another”, as Roshi said.



## To Basho, with gratitude

By Sue Bidwell

Usual humdrum  
day by day;  
greed, hatred and ignorance  
rise endlessly,  
sometimes noticed,  
sometimes not.

I journey on -  
walk, talk,  
watch others,  
watch myself  
see suffering  
feel suffering  
spikes of clarity  
troughs of chatter...

Sit in stillness;  
the mind a limpid lake  
raindrops of thought  
falling  
merging  
disappearing..  
..and I fall  
merge  
disappear..

Up from the cushion  
to and fro,  
to and fro;  
catch myself  
judging,  
comparing,  
seeking  
confirmation  
of me.

See raindrops  
on a branch;  
gaze in awe  
..and smile.  
know in my bones -  
in my very being,  
that all that I am  
all that I do  
is a small field  
that I alone can tend.

## Basho, Journeying through the world

Contributed by Sue Bidwell

Journeying through the world  
to and fro, to and fro  
cultivating a small field.

Basho

## Poems

By Max Baker

### Tanka and Haiku

The Tanka and Haiku poems have the traditional syllable structure. Haikus have the 5-7-5 kami-no-ku and the Tanka have the added 7-7 shimo-no-ku, and are thus 5-7-5-7-7.

#### *Sleep Tanka*

No rest when I'm drunk  
My stomach turns with unease  
Wanting to settle  
I read haiku in the dark  
Counting sheep- five, seven and five

#### *Depression (Haiku)*

Tears flash in light cracks  
As Paradise waits for me  
To open the blinds

#### *Gone Senile (Tanka)*

If thou lives too long  
Just sit thee down in zazen  
Facing thy Quan Yin  
And together ye will go  
Parasamgate- amen.

#### *Fiji (Haiku)*

Hototogisu\*  
Nowhere seen on this island  
Yet everywhere Zen

\*A cuckoo bird native to Japan which frequently features in the poetry of Ryokan.

#### *Pop's wisdom (haiku)*

Pop opens his mouth  
Dad and I lean in to hear  
The rustle of leaves

### Free Verse

#### *Mu*

I find dog shit  
smeared on my pants  
and realize;  
At least one of us  
has Buddha nature

#### *Sesshin*

Tried body  
Old breath  
Silly mind  
All welcome

#### *Shuson Kato*

I hold his poetry like a dagger  
Each line slides straight in  
Seppuku- the old me dies

#### *Bad News*

Bad news travels on low voices  
A friend has weeks to live  
Trying to hold onto permanence  
I spill tears everywhere

#### *Downsizing Zen*

Talk of change management  
and redundancies  
Like clouds floating by  
in a clear sky

## Daily Life

By Sally Hopkins

Words are such coarse nets  
for catching life,  
trailing streams of meaning,  
clouds of mist.  
Music speaks another language,  
but even butterfly nets  
can't catch it precisely.  
Bodies say more.  
"With every action  
we inhale and exhale  
the whole universe,"  
said Yastuni Hakkuun.  
Six trillion miles of a light Year,  
one fertilized egg that is us,  
the sun gold on the plane trees,  
this orange , your hand,  
this old man in the gutter?  
Inhaling/exhaling-  
what glory, what tears-  
breathing in, breathing out,  
nothing separate, right here ,  
this luminous moment  
each step of the way.

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Mind Moon Circle, Journal  
of the Sydney Zen Centre  
251 Young Street  
Annandale NSW 2038  
Australia

PRINT POST  
100004569

POSTAGE PAID  
AUSTRALIA

