

**MIND
MOON
CIRCLE**

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Spring 2016



Rebirth

The next issue of Mind Moon Circle (Summer 2016) will be edited by Philip Long.

The theme will be

"Zen and
The Way of
the Heart"

In Zen we hear talk of Compassion and in Vipassana of Loving Kindness but what of Love as we understand it in the West. Is there a place in Zen for this Love?

All contributions are welcome. Please send your contribution by 31st January, 2017 to Philip Long at: philiplong@bigpond.com"

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ANCESTORS

Gillian Coote Roshi

*And there you are,
drawing kangaroo
at the source of the creek,
working quartz
up there on the ridge.*

*Singing the country,
singing the march flies,
singing the southerly,
dancing angophora
through the river of stars.*

ON THE MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Yamada Kōun Roshi

Koko An Zendo, January 8, 1984

The solution to the so-called life and death question, that is to say, where does life come from, or what happens after death, is the very core of Buddhism. If Buddhism cannot thoroughly resolve this problem, I do not hesitate to assert that Buddhism will completely lose its reason for existing as a religion.

Dōgen Zenji said, “The clarification of life and death is the most important matter for all of Buddhism.” Clarification is seeing clearly into true nature. It is not simply a matter of understanding and believing. It is taught in Buddhism that we should divide the depth of religious fervor into five levels, mainly: faith, understanding, practice, realisation, and actualisation.

Faith means to firmly believe. Understanding means to comprehend. Practice means to engage personally into actual practice; in Buddhism this is *zazen*, or sitting. Realisation means enlightenment. Actualisation means one entering into Buddha and Buddha entering into oneself. That is, the enlightenment melts uniquely

point of view of the purist in Zen Buddhism, it is by no means an exaggeration to say that when *satori* is lost, there is no Zen. When Zen is lost there’s no Buddhism. *Satori*, indeed, is the point of origin of Buddhism.

When life and death are clarified, in what way do they appear? What is the essential nature of life and death? Which has been clarified? This is the problem. If one comes directly to the point, the nature of life and death is completely empty. The content of both life and death is empty. When one says “life and death” it has a conceptual ring. Yet actually both one’s own body and one’s own heart-mind are completely empty.

To grasp this fact by natural scientific methods or philosophical thought is impossible. There’s no way except by direct experience, through the practice of *zazen*, to experience one’s own essential-nature, which can also be called self nature or our true nature. This direct experience is *satori*, sometimes called self-realisation, or enlightenment.

“The clarification of life and death is the most important matter for all of Buddhism.”

into unification with oneself. In other words, the enlightenment becomes our own flesh and blood. It is personalised and actualized in every day life.

For the followers of most religions, faith is the central point, as in believing what is written in a certain sutra, believing sacred books for their own sake, or believing the words of the Bible. Believing the Bible for its own sake. Sometimes they choose to believe in the teacher of a certain religious group. This faith deepens their devotion. If they go on a step further, they come to the point where they say, “Since religion is something which must be penetrated by faith alone we should not try to understand it.”

Many intellectuals cannot go along with this view. On the contrary, in Zen *satori* is the essence. From the

As I said earlier, when one grasps true nature by enlightenment, it is completely empty. When one perceives this fact based on experience, the division up until now between self and the objective world that confronts the self, completely disappears.

[Roshi taps lectern with *kotsu*.] This is zero. There’s no partition between myself and the object involved. One clearly realizes that oneself and others are completely one. At the same time, one sees that the objective world, which up until now we have considered as the outside world, is completely empty. In other words, the oneness of oneself and others, which we have thought about up until now in our minds, is no longer merely a concept, a thought. One realizes that it is a solemn fact, not a concept, not a thought: Solemn fact.

In the Shōdōka or Song of Enlightenment of Yōka Daishi there is the verse: “I have clearly perceived that the true dharmas are empty and have no form.” The true Dharma expresses the existence of both persons and objective things, or the law by which they function. Person is the subject and the law is the object. If one asks why the law is objective, it is because all the things in the objective world are repeatedly appearing and disappearing, coming and going, with change and mobility, according to the law of causality. So, the law, which originally meant the law of causality, refers to and means all things in the objective world.

This is the permanent world, or Dharma world, as we say in Buddhism: *hokkai*. The joy a person experiences when, suddenly, he or she realises that both subject and objective things are all completely empty... this joy is difficult to express. At that time, all discrimination and delusive thoughts, all ideas and feelings which we have cherished up to the present, are at once completely blown away. One realizes clearly that everything is zero, nothing at all. Life and death are overcome by this experience. The verse of the Shōdōka previously cited continues: “In no-form there is neither emptiness or non-emptiness. This is no other than the real form of the Tathagata.”

Emptiness and non-emptiness are only our concepts or ideas. When one becomes aware of the essential fact, both emptiness and non-emptiness do not exist. When thoughts about them are eradicated, the real form of the Tathagata appears before our eyes. Real form is no-form. Then it is not strange to say that we found that Buddha nature is empty nature.

As you know, the Heart Sutra begins in the following way: “When Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, (Kanzeon Bosatsu), engaged in the practice of deep Prajna Paramita, he perceived that the five skandhas are all empty,” and liberated himself from all suffering. The five skandhas mean the aggregation of colour, form, perception, practice, and thought and consciousness, which may be looked upon as objective, material and spiritual worlds.

When one realises that the whole of the objective, material and spiritual world is completely empty, one

is liberated from all suffering. This is not limited or confined to Kannon, the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. Anyone, when he or she definitely experiences this fact, is freed from all suffering in the world. Life and death, of course are no exception. This is called liberation, in Japanese: *gedatsu*.

This is the fundamental principle of salvation in Buddhism. This cannot be obtained except by realising through the practice of *zazen* that the five skandhas area all empty. It is not easy, however. I am very sorry to say that this realisation, the core of Zen and Buddhism, is disappearing in Japan. Not only is it disappearing from Japan but from the face of the earth. I am very sorry, but this is the fact.

Well then, this is the great matter. I said that it is a solemn fact that the subjective world and the objective world are both empty. This means that the emptiness is not in the least caught in the net of our five senses.

In other words, it is zero correlative to our senses. This is not the world of nothingness or the world of nihilistic emptiness. It is emptiness which includes infinite capabilities. Very strange, you know, very strange. Nobody knows, nobody can know where this world comes from. No one knows.

For example, let's consider the heart-mind, in Japanese: *kokoro*.

Among the various koans which are given to first Zen practitioners there are Joshu's Dog, or Joshu's Mu, and Your Primal Face Before Your Parents Were Born... this is very strange, you know. Among these koans there is one koan, “What is the heart-mind?” “What is *kokoro*?” Or “Who is hearing?” or “What is hearing?” This question was often used by Bassui Tokushō Zenji. This heart-mind points to our ordinary heart-mind which sees, hears, grasps and walks.

The koan is meant to help ordinary heart-mind as it tries to make us grasp experientially the fact that the entire universe is empty. This is the aim of koans. Well, there is the heart-mind, but in the heart-mind there is neither shadow nor shape. There is neither colour nor weight. Even its whereabouts cannot be grasped because it's empty you know. Some of you tend to think along the lines of natural science, and may suppose that the heart-mind is in the brain or a brain cell.



However, the brain cells are tools which we use when we think or make judgements. The brain cells are not the subject which thinks or makes judgements. They are more like a precise computer. When we listen to a sound, the ear is not the thing that hears. The ear is an instrument or tool for hearing. It is just a more accurate telephone receiver. The brain cells are exactly the same as the receiver – they are an instrument, a tool.

The heart-mind can do everything, you know. It can see, it can hear, it can think, it can feel, it can imagine, it can resolve or determine. But the heart-mind itself cannot be grasped by our five senses. While the heart-mind has infinite capabilities, it is completely empty. This is the substance of the heart-mind.

I express this fact by the symbol for “infinite” within the circle and I call this “zero-infinite.” The circle means “zero”, and the symbol for infinity (resembling the numeral eight lying on the side) is borrowed from mathematics to show the immensity of infinite capability, infinite capacity.

Our heart-mind, or true nature is zero-infinite, you know. Zero-infinite: that is your essential nature. It is part of each and every person. If you have listened to this talk up until now, you can without doubt grasp what I am saying to some extent. But by thought alone you cannot experience the fact of zero-infinite. Furthermore, the fact that the reality of the zero-infinite is not only the true sense of each individual, but also the true reality of the entire universe cannot possibly be understood by mere explanation...no, not by mere explanation. At the same time that zero-infinite is essentially one’s true self, it is the true fact of the universe. In order to truly grasp this there is no way except the satori experience through zazen. Therefore you must do zazen.

To repeat my conclusion once more: in order to obtain deep peace of mind and transcend life and death completely there is no other way except by clearly realising that all five realms of reality are empty. In this regard, I would like to look briefly at the verse of an ancient one, the head monk Shenxiu.

I think some of you are familiar with this story:

Shenxiu, a disciple of Hongren, the Fifth Patriarch composed a verse and wrote it on a wall inside the monastery. His verse read:

The body is the great Bodhi tree.

*The mind is the bright mirror stand.
Endeavor to continuously polish it.
Do not let dust cling to it.*

In reply to this the Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, wrote:

*In a sense, there is no Bodhi tree.
The bright mirror is not a stand.
From the beginning there is not one thing.
Where is there a place for dust to cling?*

The end of this verse, especially, became very famous. Master Huineng hung this on the wall and, as many of you already know, he subsequently received inka shōmei, proof of dharma succession from the Fifth Patriarch, Master Hongren. There could be no better proof of his realisation of the world of emptiness than the latter part of his verse.

“From the beginning
there is not one thing.
Where is there a place
for dust to cling?”

Before coming to Japan the founder of Kenchōji Temple, the National Teacher Bukō Master Mugaku Sōgen Zenji, fled to a certain temple in order to avoid difficulty with the military of the Yuan Dynasty. While he was there troops invaded the temple, and the captain stood behind the place where the master was sitting in zazen and raised his sword. At that time, the master tranquilly recited the following famous poem:

*There is no ground for
putting down a single staff.
Subject is empty;
object is empty, too.
I welcome the precious three-foot
sword of the great Yuan dynasty --
In a flash of lighting,
it cuts the spring wind.*

In the first two lines his deep perception of the world of emptiness is strikingly evident. “There is no ground for putting down a single staff. Subject is empty, object is empty, too.” The five realms of reality

are completely empty. There is not an inch of ground on the great earth. The last two lines exhibit a playful spirit in the face of death. “I welcome the precious three-foot sword of the great Yuan dynasty. In a flash of lightning, it cuts the spring wind.” That means, if you cut off my head, it’s just like cutting the spring wind with the flash of lightning. A little bit playful, you know.

I’d like you to recall once more the line I quoted from Shōdōka: “In no-form there is neither emptiness nor non-emptiness. This is precisely the true form of the Tathagatha. “Master Dōgen broke through the realisation when practising under Master Tiantong Rujin in China. The account of that episode is transmitted in the Denkōroku in the following way:

One day early morning after night-zazen, Tiantong Rujin Zenji said to the assembly, “The practice of Zen is the falling away of the body and mind.” Dōgen heard this and suddenly came to great enlightenment. At once he went to his master’s room and lit incense.

Tiantong: “Why are you lighting incense?”

Dogen: “I come having had body and mind fallen away.”

*Tiantong: Both body and mind fallen away.
The fallen-away body and mind.”*

*Dogen: This is just fortunate, temporary incident.
Master you must not approve me recklessly?”*

Tiantong: “I do not approve you recklessly.”

Dogen: “What do you not approve recklessly?”

Tiantong: “The fallen away body and mind.”

Dogen made a deep bow of respect.

Tiantong “Fallen away, fallen away.”

I do not have time to give a detailed explanation of this karmic relationship now. In short, when Master Dōgen heard Master Rujin’s voice saying, “Body and mind fallen away,” he suddenly experienced the actual fact of the body and mind slips off and drops away. It is a direct expression and clear proof that one has realized that both person (subject) and phenomena (object) are empty. When Master Dōgen obtained this enlightenment –

satori – he gave his own testimony in saying, “The lifetime study on the Great Matter has ended here.” Master Dōgen at the beginning of the Eihei-kōroku says the following: “By chance I saw Master Tiantong and I realised that my eyes are horizontal and my nose vertical. I am not deceived by anyone.” “By anyone” means even Shakyamuni or Bodhidharma. I have realised the true fact. No one can deny it, you know. “So I returned home with empty hands. Therefore I have not even a strand of hair of Buddhism.” This line is very interesting to me.

Dōgen also said, “Every morning the sun rises in the East; every evening the moon sets in the west. The clouds cease to move and mountain range appeared. The rain is over. The four mountains droop low.” Is there any religion here? Only fact, direct fact.

I’d like to compare this state of consciousness with “body and mind fallen away”. There is no need to mention that body and mind fallen away is the direct proof of enlightenment. The expression of the heart-mind of his daily life after enlightenment is found in the Eihei-kōroku. However, in the two lines, “I return home with empty hands. There is not even strand of hair of Buddhism,” the world of emptiness is vividly expressed.

In Master Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō there is a chapter on life and death. The following few words especially merit our intention:

“When Buddha is in life and death, there is no life and death.” Okay? “When Buddha is not in life and death there is no going astray.” Once more: “When Buddha is in life and death, there is no life and death. When Buddha is not in life and death there is no going astray.” This may be rather difficult to understand. If we think that one moves from life to death, we are mistaken. Life is just one moment already having a past and future.

In the third section we find: “This life and death is Buddha’s life. If one dislikes this and tries to throw it away, one loses the life of Buddha. If one becomes attached to life and death and tries to stay in it, one also loses the life of Buddha.” The first sentence is quoted from the saying of Master Jiashan Shanhui. The second is from the Chinese Master Dingshan Shenyīng. “When Buddha is in life and death, there is no life and death.” What does this Buddha imply? It is what I cited from the Shōdōka: “No-form is neither emptiness nor non-emptiness. This precisely is the real form of Tathagata.” The substance of life and

death is completely empty. Then it becomes clear that there is no life and death.

No life and death. That is Buddha's life.

Subsequently, when Buddha is not in life and death, there is no going astray. This may be rather difficult. "Buddha is a concept." When we completely wipe away all concepts, then life is just life, totally covering heaven and earth. There is not a speck of death, only life; death is just death, totally covering heaven and earth. There is not a speck of life at that time. Life is just one moment, *this* is just one moment: is there any room in which to go astray? To think that life changes into death is fundamental mistake.

In the third section, this life and death is the life of Buddha. Looking at it from the phenomenal point of view, life and death are undeniable. However, seen from the essential world the substance of life and death is completely empty. Yet these two aspects are perfectly one. This one actual fact is called the life of Buddha.

Master Bassui Tokushō wrote the following as a preface to a Dharma talk: "If you want to free yourself of the suffering of the six realms, you must learn the direct way to become a Buddha. This way is no other than the realization of your own heart-mind. Now, what is this heart-mind? It is the true nature of all sentient beings – that which existed before your parents were born and hence, before your own birth, and which presently exists unchangeable and eternal. So it is called one's face before one's parents were born. This heart-mind is intrinsically pure. When we are born, it is not newly created and when we die it does not perish. It does not distinguish between male and female. Nor has it any coloration of good or bad. It cannot be compared with anything, so it is called Buddha-nature." The empty nature of our own heart-mind is called Buddha nature. Understand?

Master Bankei Yōtaku Zenji was famous for his "no-birth Zen." He lived during the Genroku period at Ryūmonji Temple in Banshū Hamada, now called Himeji City. When he was young, he suffered from a lung ailment and fell critically ill. He was literally gasping for breath, awaiting death, when suddenly he realised that all things are okay as they are. He realised that all things are not born, all things are okay as they

are. Likewise, when we realise that all things are not born, then all things are okay as they are.

It is said that he was 26 years old at the time. After that he gradually regained his health and conquered his consumption, and lived to be 50 years old. His teaching that "all things are not born" is no other than the deep realisation of the empty nature of his own self. "From the beginning there is no birth" can mean nothing else but emptiness. Master Bankei grasped this experientially.

Where do you go after death? Don't you understand yet? Doushuai Congyue's Three Barriers are famous Zen Koans:

The first is: "The purpose of going to abandoned, grassy places and doing Zazen is to search for your self-nature. Now, at this moment, where is your self-nature?" Can you show me your self-nature, your heart-mind?

The second is: "When you have attained your self-nature, you can free yourself from birth and death. How would you free yourself from birth and death when your eyes are darkening for the last time?" How would you free yourself when you are about to die? That is a problem, you know.

Then third: "When you have freed yourself from birth and death you will know where to go. After your body has separated into the four elements, where do you go?" Can you show me? Can you answer me?

When you realize deeply that your self nature is intrinsically empty, the problem of life and death vanishes like clouds and dew.

Where you go after you die is no longer a problem.

Go straight ahead and don't look back. "Buddhas and Patriarchs do not deceive me." Without fail there will be a time for stamping one's feet and shouting with great joy. Have you understood what I've said? Will I be told "I still don't understand?" Then let me say with Master Yongjia Xuanjue, "If you still don't understand, I will make it evident for you. Please come to me."

That's all. Thank you for listening.

TRAVELLING THE UNDERWORLD INTO SPRING

Helen Sanderson

I was born four years after the end of WW2. My father had returned from flying in bombing raids over Germany trailing internal trauma like a wounded Lancaster shedding its fuselage. He could never bear to speak of death having experienced so much of it. If we drove past a cemetery my mother shushed us from singing out. Then at the age of one I contracted polio so illness and death followed me from the beginning.

Children can be fascinated by death, thrilled and scared at the same time. When I was teaching young children occasionally an ambulance or even better a hearse would pass by and the kids would rush to the window to view it, screaming with excitement and horror.

As a child death was alluded to but not spoken about. It was the big taboo. After my grandfather died, adults walked around with red eyes, but we children were not included in funeral mysteries. Despite or maybe because of this death bothered me. Why do we suffer and die I agonised. My mother's explained about the cycle of life and death. Plants grew, flowered, seeded and fell into the ground then germinated and sprang back into life. I nodded my head, satisfied.

In March 2015 my husband was in the hospice when one of his best friends came with new baby granddaughter Persephone. Persephone Goddess of Spring was daughter of Demeter the Goddess of the harvest in Greek mythology. The God of the underworld, Hades according to the legend sees Persephone walking in a field of flowers. He falls in love with her and takes her down into the underworld, the kingdom of the dead. Demeter, beside herself with grief refuses to allow all growth and winter reigns. Finally she descends to the Hades' realm, and bargains with him to allow Persephone to rise up. Spring and new life return as Persephone once more walks on the earth.

When my husband lay dying in that hospice, after many years of cancer then a sudden final illness I thought I heard the angels of death whispering. Though it was a very good place for Leo and me, the energy of death was overwhelming at times. I remember clutching at my heart and saying to a

friend that I thought death would grab me by the ankles drag me down into the underworld too. Before he died a few friends asked how I thought I would cope. They said they couldn't imagine what it would be like to lose their partner. I dismissed the question. I couldn't think about that then I said. I knew there would be plenty of time to find out afterwards. Leo had worried it would be hard for me afterwards, several friends told me. And he was right. After he died just staying alive seemed to involve a daily effort of will, a conscious stepping into the now, though the pull of yesterday and death and grief seemed immeasurably more powerful. For the first time I understood the practise in India where widows throw themselves onto the pyre. I had experienced death before, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, pets, favourite plants but nothing prepared me for this level of grief, the loss of my life partner. Someone asked me had I thought of going with Leo, of suicide. I hadn't. Philosophically I resisted those thoughts because of a belief that life is a gift and a hope that the sadness would pass. In the midst of the grief I had no idea if it would indeed pass. It kept on for over a year with an intensity that waxed and waned like the tides. I didn't consider suicide but I didn't always want to keep living and I didn't really care about my life. I felt like a piece of flotsam tossed on a flooded river. I was told that grief is not an illness and isn't the same as depression. But when people asked me how I was I would sometimes say, I'm not exactly sick but I don't feel well either.

Now it is spring and sadness is and has been retreating. Retreating, with the flowering of the wonga wonga vine and the pink grevillea, with the new green leaves on the persimmon tree in my garden, and the scent of the wattle. Retreating as parrots flash across the sky in the lengthening days, retreating, not entirely gone, but replaced from time to time even often with gladness. My Leo is not forgotten. I talk of him often, but the weather fronts of tears come less frequently. I don't need handkerchiefs and sunglasses all the time as I did for at least a year every time I left my house. I have noticed that I am reconnecting with



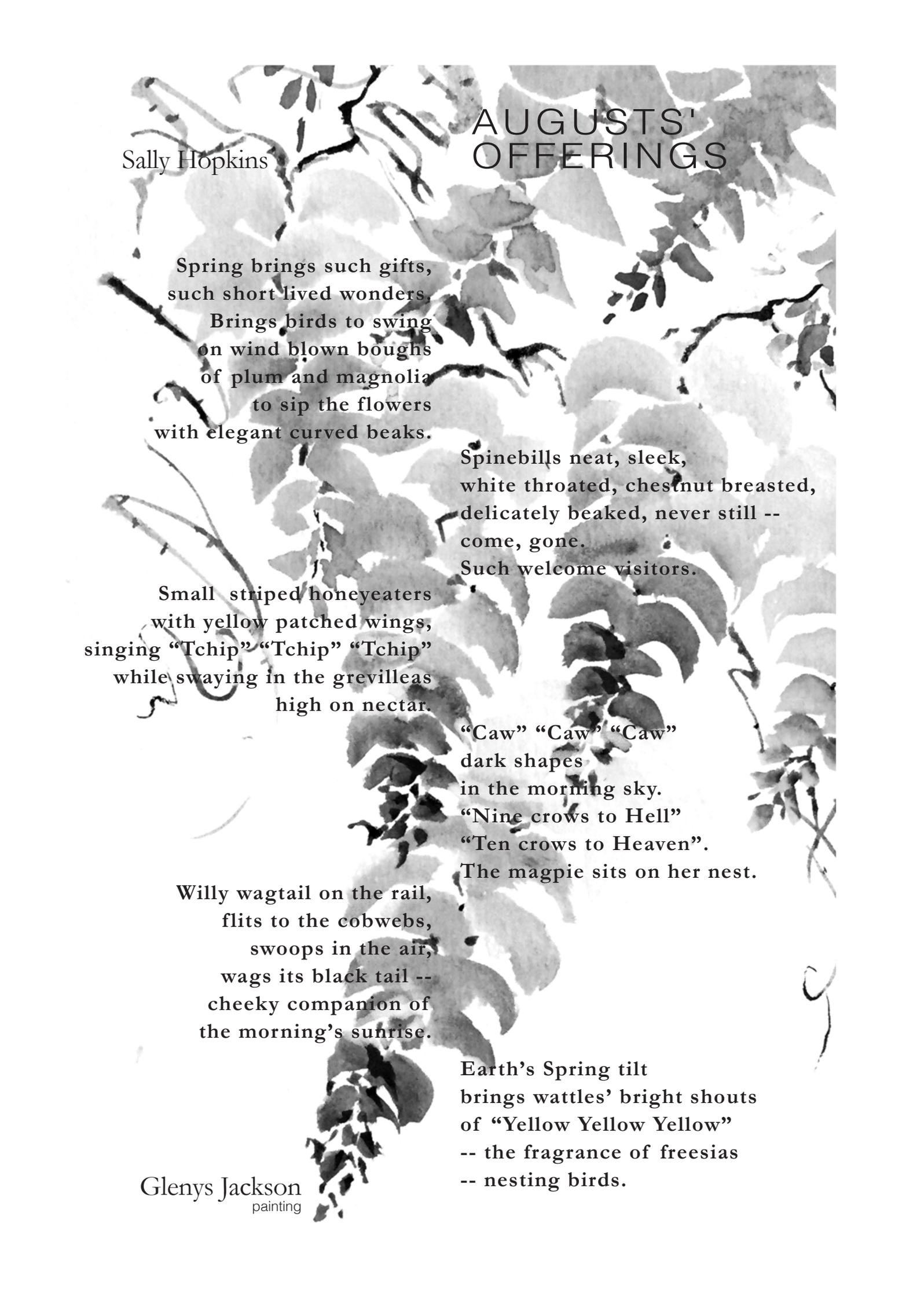
Glenys Jackson
photo

people more and resuming things I did before Leo got sick. When people ask me how I am I can often truthfully say I'm fine. Previously my answer was "I'm just going along." This meant things are just as they are, (which meant pretty tough).

When I decided to write about this period of my life I asked myself what was helping me to be happy and healing the grief. Demeter hasn't brought me up from the underworld, but the presence of love in my life has had a similar role and relieved much of the bitterness and loneliness of Leo's death though loneliness can still be my companion: Those phone calls asking how I was, the kindness of dear friends who asked me for a meal, my grief counsellor's non-judgemental listening and knowledge of the area, the intimacy of the sangha, and wise words of the teachers and the church community, and the wisdom of having a routine that includes a practice of meditation, the couple who asked me to join them for a holiday, the cousins who shared their caravan with me on the big family reunion, even the kindness of the real estate agent who helped me sell my husband's house, good neighbours, my garden, the necessity of looking after my little dog and taking her for walks. Writing this I remember gratefully the numerous kindnesses and wisdoms which have been reconnecting me with life. They have been protective. I have come to realise that the source of kindness can be a stranger and there can be an intimacy in that. Recently I had surgery and was weeping before going into theatre because Leo wasn't there. The anaesthetist, well named Dr. Heavener comforted me. I may never see him again but the memory warms me.

Some people say time heals. Maybe it does, and then again maybe it doesn't always. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 says "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose, under heaven: A time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, a time to pluck up that which was planted, A time to kill a time to heal; a time to break down, a time to build up, a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." (Remember the Pete Seeger song?)

It might be true as the cliché goes that time heals all sorrow. However in my experience it is love and kindness that transforms. This is Demeter descending to the underworld of grief and bringing forth spring.



Sally Hopkins

AUGUSTS' OFFERINGS

Spring brings such gifts,
such short lived wonders.
Brings birds to swing
on wind blown boughs
of plum and magnolia
to sip the flowers
with elegant curved beaks.

Spinebills neat, sleek,
white throated, chestnut breasted,
delicately beaked, never still --
come, gone.
Such welcome visitors.

Small striped honeyeaters
with yellow patched wings,
singing "Tchip" "Tchip" "Tchip"
while swaying in the grevilleas
high on nectar.

"Caw" "Caw" "Caw"
dark shapes
in the morning sky.
"Nine crows to Hell"
"Ten crows to Heaven".
The magpie sits on her nest.

Willy wagtail on the rail,
flits to the cobwebs,
swoops in the air,
wags its black tail --
cheeky companion of
the morning's sunrise.

Earth's Spring tilt
brings wattles' bright shouts
of "Yellow Yellow Yellow"
-- the fragrance of freesias
-- nesting birds.

Glenys Jackson
painting

QUESTIONS OF RESURRECTION AND REBIRTH

Subhana Barzaghi Roshi
The Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence



In 1951, Henri Matisse sits in the Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence France - a building he designed and decorated, and that he considered his life's masterpiece,

by Dmitri Kessel - Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

theredlist.com/wiki-2-24-525-970-1073-view-1930s-5-profile-henri-matisse.html

One of my primary reasons for coming to the old historic village of Vence which is located on the slopes of the Côte d'Azur France was to see and to sit in the Chapelle du Rosaire, also known as Matisse's Chapel. It was everything and more than I had dreamed of or expected. While I had heard that everything in the Chapel from the grand design down to the particular, even the priests vestments were designed by Matisse, this did not however prepare me for the overwhelming beauty and presence of the place. As soon as I walked into the light filled Chapel its serenity and artistic beauty held me in silent awe. Every angle, window, color, object, design and symbol had been thoughtfully executed to create a sacred effect. The large stone slabs for the altar were chosen to represent the color of the earth... teachings that ground us. Walls of floor to ceiling blue, green and yellow stained glass windows with their bold nature motifs cast a purple-aqua light across the floor and turned the white walled tiles a soft opalescence. As the sun's arc reached across the sky the white Chapel walls became a theatre for light to animate itself playfully. Three elegant slender brass candleholders stood either side of the carved, minimalist statue of Christ on the cross. All this combined conveyed such humbleness and simplicity. The elegant simplicity of the place left a far greater impression on me than some rather ornate Barocco style Cathedral, it stripped me back to a quiet presence.

As I sat on the Quaker like wooden bench and felt graced by the golden tinged light from the magnificent stained glass windows, I wondered why Matisse had orchestrated all this, why had he made such efforts over four years to design this Chapel? I was touched when I learned, he had designed it late in his life at the ripe age of 77 when his eyes were failing him and his hands were crippled with arthritis. I suddenly realised it was for love, pure love, everything here was a testament, it had the signature and imprint of a whole-hearted expression of love. My eyes welled up and tears streamed down my cheeks unashamedly. There were many facets to his love. Love for Monique Bourgeois his nurse who cared for him with a great tenderness

while he was recovering from cancer. She also modeled for Matisse and appears in a number of his paintings. Their friendship continued and some years later she chose to enter the Dominican convent and became Sister Jacques Marie. It was sister Jacques Marie that requested Matisse to design the Chapel. He accepted this request as an artistic challenge. It is a love story of collaboration and friendship. Love that is expressed in the holy Mother and child, the Ave Maria, a love that is perennial and circles back again and again and is intimately present if you listen and see with your heart.

On the back wall was a striking if not shocking depiction of the 14 stations of the cross - the crucifixion, the agony, the revelations and resurrection of Christ that Matisse drew in simple but strong black lines on white tiles. This harsh, almost aggressive line drawing conveyed; the pain, grief, the violence, suffering and ugliness which is the back drop and sometimes the foreground of a life and this was in direct contrast to the subtlety and lightness of spirit that beamed in from the stained glass windows opposite. I was reminded that Matisse designed the Chapel after the Second World War and was deeply affected by the violence, suffering and destruction of war. I was grateful for the inclusion of the shadow, pathos and suffering and the compassionate response to suffering, this added a realistic sense of wholeness to the Chapel of life.

I then noticed to the side and below the 14 Stations of the Cross a small white Arabic motif doorway to the confessional. Matisse had lived in Morocco for several years and one can recognise these Arabic motifs in his paintings of that period. The doorway design had meaning too, like the veil or hajhib. The person behind the screen can see out, but if you are standing on the outside of the screen you cannot see in. The screen protects our private inner sanctum, a contemplative space where we can find solace, forgiveness, draw nourishment and then are carried forward out into the day, each with our sovereign piece of light.

I came here to experience one of the world's great impressionist artists, Matisse's passion and dedication to his art and how he utilised his artistic ability to express; love, serenity, peace and simplicity...a divine presence. Matisse considered this his masterpiece. The whole Chapel was a living, sculptured sacred book, it was a spiritually, uplifting experience of the heart. It brought together two of my great loves, a reverence for art



Henry Matisse and Sister Jacques Marie

© Getty Images

and the sacred and how one can intimately inform and celebrate the other.

While the Christian path offers salvation and transcendence through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the Buddhist path of immanence offers liberation from suffering through the cultivation of Shila, Samadhi and Prajna. While vastly different philosophical and theologically a common ground for both religions is the compassionate heart that mediates suffering.

You might wonder how all of this is related to rebirth, the theme of this issue. The romantic in me chose France and Italy for a sabbatical, a writing holiday, a time for some space and renewal, reflection outside my familiar roles and responsibilities. The Chapelle experience reinvigorated my spirit, it was soulful and nourishing. I could say a form of rebirthing of consciousness the kind of renewal that I am inspired by. The resurrection of Christ and tapping into the Cosmic Christ consciousness is a sense of rebirth and awakening of the spirit which can rise above the quagmire, the chaos, stress and noise of the world. Clarified by the statement, "I am in the world but not of the world". The Chapelle hit the refresh button again and I found a sense of serenity here.

What these cumbersome notions of resurrection, re-incarnation and rebirth all have in common is the belief of transcendence, a belief of continuity of life after death, as oppose to a belief of discontinuity, that life ends at death. Perhaps it's a stretch to think of rebirth in Christian terms or existential terms and non traditional ways, but I struggle with the traditional Buddhist terms of a

soul passing from one life to another due to their past karma. Being a Buddhist teacher, I am often met with stunned shocked gazes as I declare my doubts and honest disbelief in rebirth. When I rub up against conservative Buddhists and their uncritical ideas of rebirth I want to throw open the louvers and widen the conversation. This traditional interpretation raises too many unresolved questions for me, about what is a soul and how does consciousness pass from the death of one body to a new life form? Tibetan Buddhists would have us believe that after we die there is some ethereal Bardo land a temporary waiting lounge out there where souls are lined up to pop into some newly formed embryo.

Sometimes I wonder if rebirth is similar to a process of refraction? The physics definition of refraction is the change of direction of a ray of light, sound, heat, or the like, in passing obliquely from one medium into another.

Perhaps I am too much of an agnostic pragmatist but there is no clear articulation in the Pali Cannon how this happens, particularly as this argument comes up against the core part of the teachings of 'anatta' - which states that there is no permanent, separate, abiding entity called self. The 'self' is a living, changing dynamic process of mind/body states, it is fluid and impermanent. So then what is reborn?

Another related potent question is, what is consciousness? Scientists have about 5 working theories of consciousness and not even Buddhist scholars and teachers can agree with each other. Is it all pervading? Does it migrate from one being to another? If so then how does it stay bound in this hairy bag and bone shop of a body? We could say that all things turn to dust and disintegrate to an ash, that is a kind of rebirth too, but not one that is terribly palatable for those invested in beliefs of 'continuity' - life after death. My perspective is that we are embodied beings our experience is layered down, uniquely and unrepeatable, cell by cell hair follicle by hair follicle. Consciousness is an embodied phenomena and process of the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, thought/mind) engagement with its environment, moment by moment. Is there consciousness separate from the 6 senses? Who is dragging this body around?

I prefer to think of rebirth as being alive to this moment-to-moment flow of experience. The morning light filters through the French shutters, there are small birds here with sweet songs unlike

the bold and brash squawks of the big birds back home. Everything and everyone is embedded in the law of flux and is danced by the impermanence of song and light. We are made of stardust; we live in a world of dewdrops. This is one of the great truths of our existence. If I look into my experience... there is the birth, death and rebirth of each moment; each sound, feeling, thought, image, smell, taste and sensation will step up and step down on the grand stage of experience.

As my gaze shifts, I am reborn this moment as an opalescence tile on the Chappelle wall, then the violet light reflected on the floor, then the one black line joining mother and child. I die with this moment to the silence in the Chapelle, and then comes the sound of footsteps down the isle, now a tear welling in my eye. An old Vedanta Sage Nisargadatta Maharaj said, "Wisdom teaches me I am nothing, love teaches me I am everything", with this understanding every person is me, is not separate from me, each thing confirms the self. It is also not me in the transcendence offered by the widest heart-mind embrace.

Change sits in the crucible of that time honored question, "Given that all things are under the law of change, is there anything that does not change?" What if there are multiple interpretations of rebirth and all of them have a slither of validity? Just like light refracting through a stained glass window, multiple reflections of the personal and universal within the great elephant of time and space. What then?

Do these questions of rebirth, whether they are true or false - or perhaps we simply don't know - help you live more fully Now? Does the belief of rebirth serve you to awaken and free yourself from suffering? If the answer is yes, it is helpful then hold it dear. It is my view that the questions of rebirth are speculative. I choose to live more fully in the gritty vulnerable presence of life as it is. Grow a compassionate heart to heal my own wounds and the courage to face the pain and sorrow in the world and hopefully help to alleviate that suffering where I can. I want to live with wisdom and see through the delusions and false anxious hungry preoccupations of the 'I, me, my' world, to live from this bigger space of selflessness that offers such relief and freedom. I am willing to fall in love with this transitory river of shadow and form, life and death that is braided through with this mysterious, unfathomable, unnameable presence. I'm heading back to the Chapelle du Rosaire for another dose of serenity.

ERROR: THE ENGINE OF CHANGE AND REBIRTH

Philip Long

Case 98 of the Hekiganroku. Tempyo's Two Wrongs

The Master Tempyo Osho visited Sai-in, while on pilgrimage. He was always saying,

“Don't say you have understood Buddhism. There is no-one who can make a mondo with me, and examine me.”

One day Sai-in saw him at a distance, and called to him, “Come here Jui.” Hyo raised his head.

In said, “Wrong!” Hyo went on for two or three steps.

In said again, “Wrong!” Hyo turned and came closer.

In said, “I have just said, “Wrong,” twice. Is it I who am wrong, or is it you?”

Hyo said, “It is I.”

In said, “Wrong.” Hyo was silent.

In said, “Stay here for the summer retreat, and I'll examine this matter of two wrongs with you.”

Tempyo, however, departed.

Years later, when Tempyo became an abbot, he addressed his assembly and said,

“Once in my days of pilgrimage, I visited Sai-in by chance, and he twice said, “Wrong.” He advised me to stay with him for the summer retreat to examine this matter of two wrongs with him. I don't say I was wrong then, but when I left for the South, I realised for the first time that I had completed saying, ‘wrong.’”

Wu-men's Verse to Case 2 of the Mumonkan – Pai-chang's Fox.

Not falling, not evading –

two faces of the same die.

Not evading, not falling –

A thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.

Each of us struggles with habits of mind. The Buddha said: “Ah, now I see all beings are the Tathagata. Only their preoccupations and delusions prevent them from seeing this.” How does one rid oneself of a preoccupation or a delusion? If you attempt to get rid of it by accepting that it is an object and trying to eliminate it from your consciousness, that is, by repressing it, you will be creating just another preoccupation/delusion – the idea that you can eliminate the original. If you do nothing, the old habit continues unabated. How do you respond when you see yourself or someone else exercised by such an error? If you leap in and correct the error you may very well cause yourself or your interlocutor to become defensive and dig his or her heels in. If you let it go by without comment, again you compound error.

Psychotherapists and counselors come face to face with this problem everyday. We can also encounter it in our practice either on the cushion or in our interactions with the teacher or with others. As followers of the Buddha's Way we will hear warning bells ringing when we hear a question framed in an “either... or...” fashion. “Ah”, you say, “the Middle Path”. But what is the Middle Path here? Is it to both to say nothing and to correct the error? Is it to do something in between, that is to do neither? Again as Buddhists we recognise here the *catuskoti*. We hear Nagarjuna warning us not to get trapped by concepts.

Case 5 of the Mumonkan. Hsiang-yen: Up a Tree.

The priest Hsiang-yen said:

“It is as though you were up in a tree, hanging from a branch with your teeth. Your hands and feet cannot touch any branch. Someone appears beneath the tree and asks:

‘What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West?’

If you do not answer, you evade your responsibility. If you do answer, you lose your life.

What do you do?’”

Let us unpick the problem here. The notion of error can create in our mind something which is substantial and ongoing. How can such a thing come to an end? Chuck it out and replace with truth? Won’t that be just another error requiring another correction? This sounds like a game of tennis – ping! ... pong! ... ping! ... pong! ... right! ... wrong! We need liberation from such a strategy; it is merely a more subtle form of error. How do we get the door to swing open and reveal its other face? For us, as Buddhists, the Buddha has offered the only effective solution – stop your tanhā or clinging to concepts, such as error. How would you deal with Sai-in? Wrong! Is that a correction or an endorsement? What if Sai-in had said: “Right!” Would it have made any difference?

Case 14 of the Mumonkan. Nan-chuan Kills the Cat.

The priest Nan-chuan found monks of the eastern and western halls arguing about a cat. He held up the cat and said:

“Everyone! If you can say something, I will spare the cat. If you cannot say anything, I will cut off its head.”

No one could say a word, so Nan-chuan cut the cat in two.

That evening Chao-chou returned from outside and Nan-chuan told him what happened (sic). Chao-chou removed a sandal from his foot, put it on his head and walked out.

Nan-chuan said:

“If you had been there, the cat would have been spared.”

As we examine our mind on the cushion and mindfully during the day we gradually, gradually become aware of the signs of attachment and resistance. What seemed at first part of the landscape of our mind now begins to look like an encrustation of the Way. However, when we take a closer look we see that there is nothing fixed or permanent to encrust and no fixed or permanent encrustation. Everything is changing; everything is impermanent.

“All very well”, you say, “but how does that fix the problem of correcting errors?” If there is no such thing as error then why is there so much anguish and pain in our life around notions like right and wrong? It is important to realise here that merely seeing intellectually that everything is impermanent and insubstantial does not solve the problem. After all, Dogen Zenji has said: “Impermanence is Buddha Nature.” We must live in the “impermanence”; we must become the “impermanence”. We must see that if there were no error there

would be no change. We would permanently encased in the truth. We would be dead to life-and-death. That would be the momma of all errors. Being imperfect and impermanent error is thus infinitely open and can itself die and therefore give way to a broader and more pervasive insight.

Then we can truly hear others and ourselves and we can be open and wait with patience for the way forward to appear of its own accord. No forcing, no passive letting be. Right! Wrong! Ping! Pong! The door swings open and we step up to the plate and are counted. Our words, our actions are like a hot knife through butter, like the Prajna Sword, and everything moves on. Our words, our actions are the moving on of everything moving on. And we move on from our actions or our words. Let them go. Don't become defensive, even if the rejection hurts. Let the flow of the Dharma sweep up all traces of your presentation.

Case 3 of the Mumonkan. Chu-chih Raises One Finger.

Whenever Chu-chih was asked a question, he simply raised one finger. One day a visitor asked Chu-chih's attendant what his master preached. The boy raised a finger. Hearing of this, Chu-chih cut off the boy's finger with a knife. As he ran from the room, screaming with pain, Chu-chih called to him. When he turned his head, Chu-chih raised a finger. The boy was immediately enlightened.

When Chu-chih was about to die, he said to his assembled monks:

“I received this one-finger Zen from T'ien-lung. I used it all my life but never used it up.” With this he entered into his eternal rest.

When you speak or act wholeheartedly and do not cling to the correctness of those words or that action, something magic happens. Either then or some time later when your speech or act has matured in the mind of the interlocutor the door swings open and the other side is revealed. You find your words or actions emerging from the mind of the other. “That's what I said” you are tempted to riposte. Better not to try to own the truth; let the other realise it for himself or herself. “Isn't that the truth”, you say and you can both share that truth. Both get a glimpse of what it is to die to this world, to enter emptiness and be born renewed in this world.

There is no need to worry about the finger, the cat or the error. It has slipped by in the stream - in the slipstream - and a fresh start is starting, starting, starting. When the whole self steps into the void, that is, its own self-nature, into its own “impermanence”, where then is the self? Where is the error? I meet the solution, the correction, in the Other. I meet myself in the Other. Is this New Self, born out of the void, reborn or did it never die?

Listen, listen. What do you hear? The Call of the Other. Answer that!



image source: <http://terebess.hu/zen/gutei.html>

STUDYING ZEN

Brendon Stewart

A young physician in Tokyo named Kusuda met up with a college friend who was studying Zen. Kusada asked:

What is Zen?

“I cannot tell you what it is,” the friend replied,
“but one thing is certain, if you understand Zen, you will
not be afraid to die.”

“That’s amazing, I will try it. Where can I find a teacher?”

“Go to master Nan-in,” the friend told him.

Kusuda went, he was curious to know whether or not the teacher himself was afraid to die.

When Nan-in saw Kusuda he exclaimed:

“Hello, friend. How are you? We haven't seen each other
for a long time!”

This perplexed Kusuda, who replied:

“We have never met before.”

“That’s right,” answered Nan-in. “I mistook you for
another physician who is receiving instruction here.”

With such a beginning, Kusuda asked if he might receive Zen instruction.

Nan-in said:

“Zen is not a difficult task. If you are a physician, treat
your patients with kindness. That is Zen.”

Kusuda visited Nan-in many times. Each time Nan-in told him the same thing:

“A physician should not waste time around here. Go
home and take care of your patients.”

It was not yet clear to Kusuda how such teaching could remove the fear of death. So on his next visit he complained:

“My friend told me when one learns Zen one loses his
fear of death. Each time I come here all you tell
me is to take care of my patients. I know that much.
If that is your so-called Zen, I am not going to visit you
any more.”

Nan-in smiled,

“I have been too strict with you. Let me give you a koan.”

He presented Kusuda with Joshu’s Mu to work over, the first mind-enlightening problem in the book we call *The Gateless Barrier*.

Kusuda pondered this problem of Mu (No-thing) for two years. At length he thought he had reached certainty of mind. But his teacher commented: “You are not in yet.” Kusuda continued in concentration for another year and a half. His mind became placid. Problems dissolved. No-thing became the truth. He served his patients well and, without even knowing it, he was free from concern over life and death.

I have lost count of the number of times my teachers of Zen have remarked to me that I am not yet in when it comes to my take on the mind-enlightening problem of Mu. Sometimes out of curiosity I go to the inter-net looking for Koan cheat sheets. And by inter-net chance I came upon this delightful short story and ... a moment; every time I take care with my work – Mu.

No work, no Zen. Day-by-day work is a presentation, going on with our chores, with our obligations. The before and afterwards story about enlightenment.

Near to the back end of *The Gateless Barrier* is another simple Zen story about work. In Case 46 Ch’ang-sha notices that an old student friend has lost himself to a world where nothing happens. Just sitting there in the luxury of zazen on a hundred-foot pole; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; saving others is out of the question.

Two bells every twenty-five minutes brings me back to change: stand up and walk, a simple practice: I step off the hundred-foot pole.

INSIDE THE BRUSHWOOD GATE

Gillian Coote Roshi

Yunmen said:

“Medicine and sickness mutually correspond. The whole world is medicine. What is the self?”¹

And at the end of the day in sesshin, we are reminded:

“Life and death is a grave matter, all things pass quickly away.”

Though we all know intellectually that we’re mortal, there are thousands of ways of distracting ourselves from this knowledge. Though not so many when we’re lying in a hospital bed, in the dark.

Earlier in the year, I came down with a mysterious and painful condition. Thinking I’d torn my hammy at work (translation: torn a hamstring), I went to the physio who concurred and massaged vigorously. I eventually saw the GP, who noticed my temperature and ordered blood tests. By then I could scarcely get up our stairs so when Tony decided it was time for me to go to Emergency, I had to be carted out by the Ambos and Firies, delirious.

In ICU, coming round after the operation, there were just skerricks of consciousness in the vast darkness darting about like bright little fish. I didn’t know where I was or why. I knew nothing. I expected nothing. There was nothing to be done but respond to the doctors and nurses as they asked questions, took blood, or rolled me over to check the wounds. It was timeless.

The medicos asked if I had been bitten by a spider. No. Perhaps it was an E. coli infection from one of my work sites? No. After some weeks cultivating material drained from my leg, the detective infections doctor told me it was an anaerobic bacterial infection, in other words, my own gut’s bacteria; having escaped from their usual home, they somehow burrowed through the gut wall and made inroads into my thigh and down my leg.

Once out of ICU I had no watch and the clock in my ward had long ago stopped at three minutes to seven. No time. All time. And there was the Buddha’s medicine right there. Awakening from yet another sleep breathing in, out, deep, slow, breathing mu - noticing whenever I began to think about what might be happening next, and letting it go. Projecting a future was beside the point. Breakfast would come, or not, without my having anything to do with it.

*I don’t regard my life as
insufficient.*

Inside the brushwood gate

There is a moon.

There are flowers.

-- Ryokan

1 Case 87, Blue Cliff Record, transl. Thomas Cleary, pub. Shambhala, 1977

*Two hundred years ago
Issa heard
the morning birds,*

*singing sutras to the
suffering world.*

*I heard them too,
this morning,*

Which must mean

*Since we will
always have
a suffering world*

*We must always
have a song.*

-- David Budbill

*Enough. These few words
are enough.*

*If not these words,
this breath.*

*If not this breath,
this sitting here.*

*This opening to the life
we have refused*

again and again

until now.

Until now.

-- David Whyte

I was hooked up to a catheter, and antibiotics dripped into my veins. The strange tilting bed and the small room were my whole world. I was grateful to be alive for every quiet moment of it. Tony came each day, with news of Grace or rain. Cards and flowers arrived and I saw and felt my dharma friends' love. My son and his family visited with strings of colourful origami cranes they'd made, which they strung above the door.

The hospital bed is a dojo, a place of practice, and sickness a Dharma gate. There was nothing I could control. A card that Julie and the kids brought me in hospital was extraordinarily healing. On the front, a photo of a family of pied butcherbirds. When the card's opened, their song rang out. It was astonishingly moving. From that day on, I'd feel around on the shelf beside the bed in the dark, open the card and there it was, the pied butcherbird's glorious, fluting call, my morning sutras. I played it three times each morning. I still open that card every day.

The physios pressed me to practise walking. One day I paused in the corridor to read a sign on the nurses' whiteboard for Anzac Day - it said: 'Think not how unlucky I am that this thing has happened to me - but rather - how fortunate I am that it has happened to me and I have prevailed'. Yes, but who am I? What is the self?

People ask me how they can control their anxious thoughts - their doctor has suggested meditation to help them feel better. How about letting the thoughts go? How about choosing to be with the breath count, the songbirds, the traffic noise, the sad mood, the aching knees?

How about letting go, too, of any thoughts about what is medicine - because help and healing can be, are, unexpected. Though when we are right here - present - it can be hard to find something that isn't sickness, that isn't medicine. As our practice deepens we become more willing to be open to help, to healing and medicine - coming from anywhere. Chao-chou said. 'I will learn from a seven-year old child.' Perhaps we realise that we don't make it happen, that it's not something that can be controlled, that we can control. It's just that we are open. Inside the hospital, there is a nurse. There is a needle. There are flowers. The whole world is medicine.

Like our own evanescent nirmanakaya bodies, the illness of the earth - our infinitely large body - is a constant dharma gate. How do the Buddhas embody their realisation and respond to its suffering - to climate change, to the endless violence between humans, to the suffering of refugees and of all beings?

Thich Nhat Hanh said, "If we maintain awareness of our breathing and continue to practise smiling, even in difficult situations, people, animals and plants will benefit from our way of doing things." And when he talked about the Vietnamese people fleeing their country and taking to the sea in leaky boats, he said, 'When just one person stayed calm and present, the whole boat would be saved.'

That one person who stays calm when the pirates attack is not projecting a future, or entertaining a doom-laden outcome or imagining they are in control. That one person is breathing in, breathing out, smiling, present, even in the most dire circumstances.

JUKAI VOWS

Jane Andino

The Three Vows Of Refuge

I Take Refuge In The Buddha.

I find my true home in the one
who hears just this sound,
and who sees just this flower.

I Take Refuge In The Dharma.

I find true joy in the call of the currawong,
the golden moonrise,
the flow of each activity just as it is,
the path of practice.

I Take Refuge In The Sangha.

I find my true expression in the fellowship of all beings,
giving and receiving naturally
like the ebb and flow of the ocean tides.
Just as the Buddha turned back to find his friends,
I will turn back to listen deeply and respond.

The Three Pure Precepts

I Vow To Maintain The Precepts.

I vow to maintain the truth of the Precepts,
that all beings by nature are Buddha.
From this flows the right action.

I Vow To Practise All Good Dharmas.

I vow to see the joyous side of each encounter;
to see the wondrous side of this vast universe;
to see the funny side of our human situations.

I Vow To Save The Many Beings.

I vow to fully realise no self/no other.
Although all beings are saved,
I need to make persistent effort to fulfil
the Four Great Vows with a loving heart.

The Ten Grave Precepts

I Take Up The Way Of Not Killing.

I do not intentionally harm other beings
in body or spirit,
and I act in harmony with the Earth.
I will nurture the creative spirit of others and myself.

I Take Up The Way Of Not Stealing.

No one owns it, yet I live on stolen ground.
There is no yesterday, no today and no tomorrow,
yet I use goods made on stolen time.
I will share my work and my gifts
in harmony with other beings.

*I Take Up The Way Of Not
Misusing Sex.*

I value the joy and beauty of sex
and gender relations
which have trust, respect, and no gain.

I take up the Way of Not Speaking Falsely.

Words are creative and powerful.
I will speak, not to flatter or harm,
but to touch others with love.

*I take up the Way of Not Giving
or Taking Drugs.*

I live in a reward-mentality society.
In my work breaks I don't really need
to check my emails several times a day, have multiple cups of tea,
the habitual drink just because it is Friday night.
I take up the way of true enjoyment of each moment:
"Marvellous activity! Drawing water, chopping wood".

Concepts can also cloud the mind.
I take up the way of helping my students
with positive and inspiring methods.

*I take up the Way of Not Discussing
the Faults of Others.*

Is it my business?
Will talking about this lead to harmonious action?
These are the questions I will ask myself
to avoid the painful delusion of "us" and "not us".

*I take up the Way of Not Praising Myself
While Abusing Others.*

Thoughts of comparison create
the painful delusion of choice,
of better and worse,
of separation of self and other.
Who is there to praise or criticise?
I take up the Way of Right View.

*I take up the Way of Not
Sparing the Dharma Assets.*

I vow to give wholeheartedly,
to do wholeheartedly, to go for it!!
and let drop away the self.

*I Take Up The Way Of Not
Indulging In Anger.*

Anger can be a useful tool,
a warning that tells me there is a lack of balance.
I vow to not be a boiling kettle of self-righteousness,
or be overwhelmed by the clammy grip of despair.
I will take a step back, and act from equanimity.

*I Take Up The Way Of Not
Defaming The Three Treasures.*

Right Here, Right Now could be
just another New Age mantra chalked on a wall where I buy take-away;
except...for this brush of cold air on my cheek, this seeing of the curve of the rainbow.
I take up the Way of being attentive and, flowing from this,
I cherish the Three Treasures.



Glenys Jackson
photo

JINGQING'S PICKING IN AND PECKING OUT

Allan Marett

Death and rebirth in The Blue Cliff Record

The association of eggs with rebirth is an ancient one that resonates to this day. We see it in our custom of giving Easter eggs, which symbolise the death and resurrection of Christ, but also (in the northern hemisphere) the end of winter and the beginning of spring. For Christians, the egg represents the empty tomb of the risen Christ: death (the tomb) and rebirth (resurrection) neatly dovetail into a single image.

In my work on *wangga* songs from Northwest Australia I have encountered numerous images that similarly dovetailed death and rebirth: for example the *wudi-pumininy*, a freshwater spring (a symbol of life) that comes out under the sea in the salt water (a symbol of death) mixing the two and bringing about renewal. Maurice Ngulkur sings of ghosts encountering rebirth like this, “the Ma-yawa ghost is sitting at the *wudi-pumininy*.” For the Marritjevin people, it is instead the tide that represents this flux of death and rebirth: the outgoing tide culminates, at the turn, in the moment of death; the incoming tide represents a turning back towards rebirth. Very recently I learned, at a talk by Jonathan Jones as part of his *barrangal dyara* installation in the Botanical Gardens, that in South East Australia eggs also express the mysterious relationship of death and rebirth.

This brings to mind:

Case 16 of The Blue Cliff Record. Jingqing's Picking In And Pecking Out.

A monk asked Jingqing,

“I, your student, am pecking from inside. I beg you, Master, please peck from outside.”

Jingqing said,

“But will you be alive or not?”

The monk said,

“I am living vigorously like this. If I were not alive, I would be laughed at.”

Jingqing said,

“You fool in the weeds!”¹

Here the monk is asking the master to assist in his birth, in his release from the confines of his delusions. Yamada Roshi sees the monk as having a rather high opinion of himself and his practice, paraphrasing his words like this: “I am just about to be born [ie about to attain realisation]. I'll strike the shell from inside, and will you, Master, knock from outside. Then I'll be able to break through the shell and all.” Yamada goes on, “If you are really absorbed in your practice, you will never know that you are on the brink of kensho ... If you say, ‘I'm close to a breakthrough, please knock from the outside,’ that's a self-judgement that you've fabricated in your head.”

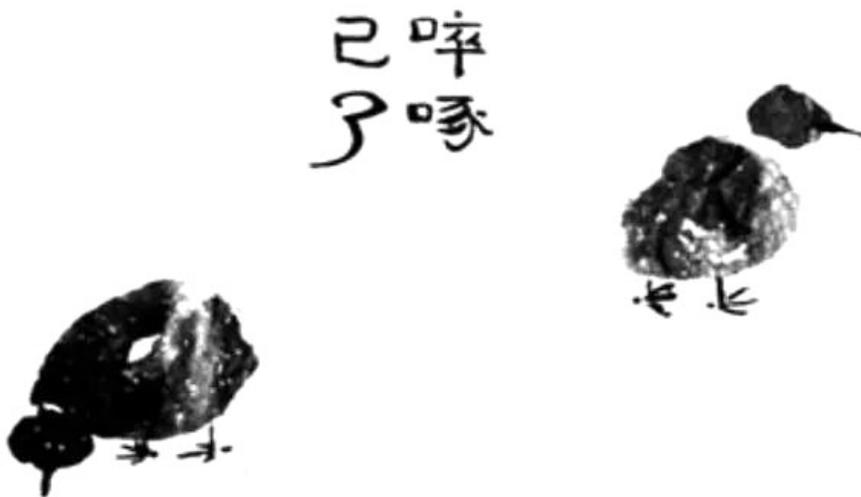
¹ Note that this conflates the translation made by Yamada and Aitken (which we use in our sangha) with a later translation by Yamada Roshi, from his teisho on this case, accessed at <http://www.sanbo-zen.org/hek016.pdf>.

Jingqing (Jingqing Daofu ca.863-937)—one of several brilliant students (including Yunmen) of the great late-Tang teacher, Xuefeng Yicun—immediately challenges the monk’s understanding: “but will you be alive or not?”

This is what I like to call “a baited hook,” which students can bite on and immediately lose their life, or miss entirely to swim off into the weeds. Realisation is sometimes called “the Great Death” because at the moment of awakening everything falls away. Dôgen called it, “the falling away of body and mind.” Suddenly the world as we habitually know it ceases to exist and we finally realise the words of Huineng: “from the very beginning there is not a single thing.” At the same time we also see through ourselves. That identity that we have so carefully fashioned and relentlessly defended with our endless stories about ourselves is seen to be nothing more than an illusion. Paradoxically, at the moment of the Great Death we also become alive to our true nature and the true nature of the world bursts forth, vividly apparent. Life and death come forth as a single fact, eliminating all distinctions.

But the monk goes right past Jingqing’s probing jab—his baited hook—and gives a response that reveals the extent of the limitations of his understanding: “I am living vigorously like this! If I were not alive, I would be laughed at.” — “Look at me. Am I not a vigorous and dedicated monk? Am I not respected by the community?” The monk’s attitude is in some ways laudable. Vigorous, dedicated practice is terrific. Working every moment to wipe the dust from the mind-mirror is a worthy activity. Presenting a good example to the community is something that to be encouraged. It was Shenxiu, Huineng’s rival in the famous poetry contest who focused on endlessly wiping clean the mind-mirror through dedicated practice. But it was Huineng who swept it all away: No mirror, no mirror-stand, from the very beginning, not a single thing. So what is missing from both Shenxiu and our monk’s response? What was it about the monk’s response that brought forth Jingqing’s swift and cutting response, “You fool in the weeds?”

The monk asked for a peck from the teacher, and he got it! “You fool in the weeds!” Jingqing offers a perfect presentation of the dharma— “you fool in the weeds!”—while simultaneously offering a vigorous and compassionate corrective to the monks practice: “You are still entangled in the weeds of delusion. Please continue your practice.”



Each of the 100 cases in the Blue Cliff Record selected in the Sung period (around 1125), by Xuedo Zhongxian (980–1052) is followed by a verse in which Xuedo points to what he himself saw as the main points of the case, just as Wumen’s verses do in the Gateless Gate, and Hongzhi’s verses do in the Book of Serenity.

The ancient buddha has his own family style;
The response led to a detraction.
Chick and hen never know each other;
Who picks and pecks at the same time?
Tap! Rap! Yet he is still inside the shell.
Once again he meets a blow.
All monks under heaven grope around in vain.

The first line of the verse praises Jingqing’s “picking and pecking” teaching style, referring him as “the ancient buddha.” The second is a comment on the monk’s response, “I am living vigorously like this. If I were not alive, I would be laughed at.” The monk’s response diminishes him, and for this reason we can see it as detracting from the very thing he seeks to enhance: his reputation and his sense of self worth.

The next couplet and a half focuses on the matter of the transmission of that which cannot be transmitted. “Chick and hen never know each other/Who picks and pecks at the same time? /Tap! Rap.” The teacher cannot see into the student’s mind any more than the student can see into the teacher’s mind. But nonetheless, Jingqing is skilled enough to be able to intuit the mind of the monk from his unskilful response and in particular his words, “if I were not alive, I would be laughed at.” Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135), who reconstructed and expanded the Blue Cliff Record into its present form, says in his pointer to this case:

If you pass the jungle of thorns, untie the bonds of the buddhas and patriarchs and attain the region of secrecy, then heavenly deities [devas] find no way to offer flowers, nor will non-Buddhists see a gate to spy through.²

That is, if you can cut through your delusions, if you can break free from everything that constrains you and see for yourself with your own eyes, the gods themselves will not be able to enter, however much they wish to praise you with offerings of flowers. “Who picks and who pecks at the same time? Tap! Rap!” Don’t get caught up in the duality of picking in and pecking out, in the duality of life and death! Go straight to the Great Matter itself. Here it is: “Tap! Rap!”

But then, Xuedo compassionately points back once again to the messy world in which students and teachers in fact meet and interact. “Yet he is still inside the shell/Once again he meets a blow/All monks under heaven grope around in vain.” “Rap! Tap!” is a perfect presentation of the great matter, but the fact is, the poor monk is still trapped in his delusion. A (verbal) blow from the teacher, “you fool in the weeds” is not the kindly peck the monk expected. But did it work? What do you think? Personally I certainly hope that Jingqing’s sharp words spurred the monk on to greater efforts. But my guess is that he still had some time before he could stop groping around—groping around when in fact everything is already clear under the empty sky.

30 EONS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Drew Bourgeois

Posted on March 20, 2015 on That's Zen Bro blog

<https://thatszenbro.wordpress.com/2015/03/20/thats-zen-bro-30-eons-in-the-mountains/>

I wish I was joking – about the whole 30 eons thing. I know it's only been 4 weeks since we last spoke, Dearest Reader, but since then I have lived for many millions of years. I'm serious, bro. There is an infinity in every second, a universe between each click of the metronome. And if you sink far enough, there is even a Single Point at which you become completely Empty, and One with everything that is, ever has been and ever will be for all of time. Woah.

Anyway, I've spent some time in the mountains of Lantau Island off Hong Kong. The island is famous for its massive (like, multi-story) Buddha statue and monasteries. I went camping on my own in my cheapo tent, practiced drums and shakuhachi, was offered dinner by some beautiful Chinese people, went on hikes and mountain runs. Everything became sacred though; I was only eating one meal and carrots a day, had to boil

*No money
No food
No water
No bed
Nothing.*

*In these Mountains
I recline with the comfort
of 10,000 kings*



drinking water on the fire, didn't have electricity to charge my devices, put my clothes on the ground to make a mattress.

One night it started to rain pretty heavy, and my tent started to leak pretty bad. I felt completely hopeless as everything I owned was slowly getting soaked in mountain rain, but in that moment I found a beautiful calm with the thought 'everything is melting'. So I played shakuhachi over the sound of the rain for a bit. I ended up trekking to the nearest hostel and they had a bed for the night and a hot shower. Everything is melting, but everything is also fine in the end.

So I camped for nearly two weeks, and then, walking down a mountain track, I noticed a sign that said 'Po Lam Zen Monastery', and I thought 'How interesting, I love Zen bro'. So I asked an old monk about joining them for a bit. Turns out he was the head of the temple (the abbot), they were about to start a 3 week intensive meditation retreat, and I was welcome to stay for as long as I wanted. So I did.

I feel like I have so much to say about the monastery, yet there are no words to say it in. 23 days of waking up at 3:30am, and meditating most the day. Sitting periods 30-80 minutes. Sleep at 10pm. When I wasn't meditating

I was working hard or practicing drums/shak. The temple has been running for 2000 years (!!!) and so they still live in a really traditional Chinese way; they still use fire-stoves, farm organic food, recycle pee and used traditional tools. I moved mountains (literally boulders) using an old-school chain winch, built walls, cut trees.

I was pushing myself pretty consistently there; I was really tired, the long sits were hard, hardly anyone spoke English, I pushed a bit hard on the whole pain thing a few times. But the thing that inspired me was that these old monks and nuns sleep for 5 hours a night, get up and work incredibly hard all day with only two meals. Super-human mental strength. The last grandmaster of the temple lived till he was 120, walked around China on foot, lived in a mountain cave for years eating only leaves and drinking only mountain water. That's Zen bro.

I got pretty deep into meditation mind as well. Lost track of time completely and can't really remember a period of about 6 days. I got no words now, so here are some small moments I caught in poem in the Mountains to give you a vibe:

*The morning birds
Eat their breakfast rice
Tweet tweet.*

*In the garden
Sifu* teaches
without words.*

I hum as I weed Hallelujah.

*Old Chinese nun (master).



So I had all these crazy experiences, but what did I learn? Two take-away containers full of freshly deep-fried pseudo-wisdom coming right at you:

First, you will always be exactly where you need to be, which is always right here, in front of this computer, reading these words, feeling this weird feeling. See how time feels like it slows down when these words are seen clearly, written in this very instant by none other than your own Mind. It's as if you want to hold your breath, and relax the entirety of your body into the space surrounding it. What is that feeling?! Enquire into it deep enough, and time will come to a complete Empty stand-still – right now! – and in the words of Dogen Zenji, 'Body and Mind of Self and Other will fade away'. Find the space before thought!

“If it halts, it is enlightenment (Bodhi)” – Buddha, via Master Hsu Yun

Secondly, the Truth is equally as close to – and as far from – everyone. Everyone is equally as enlightened and equally as confused. How liberating – it's like seeing everyone in their underwear! No professor or priest, poet or postman, policeman or politician can really say anything at all about the way things are. The Truth ain't something you can know. It's like taking a sip of water; you alone know if it is cold or hot. How do you taste water with words? I don't know. But not knowing is the first step to knowing, ya know.

And so we're all just confused little atoms, floating in this atomless void. But we're confused together, and so we love each other, and that keeps us here, together. So, it's all gravy. When you let go of everything, you spend an eon in the Empty Mountain; when you let go of Emptiness, you come back and write a blog post to the people you love.

COUNTRY, PLACE HOME, LOVE AND CHARACTER

Kim Bagot

an exploration

This is a personal presentation based on my limited understanding of Zen, the original language and, indeed, life. I have been working through Tung - shan's Five Modes (Aitken, p. 138) and it was suggested that I publish it. All the errors are mine, especially, probably, overworking imagery of country and the Rainbow Serpent to replace riding a jade elephant and chasing a winged dragon - deer, which I couldn't keep up with. Part of my intention is to honour the First Australians as the traditional custodians and carers of this country, whose cultures are among the oldest living cultures, and pay respect to the Elders of the community past, present and future. As regards country and home I resonate with Aitken Roshi saying, "The ground of our ancestors is under your feet but it takes great effort to realise it".¹

Contemplating the place of love in the practice, I am deeply impressed by Ross Bolleter's comment, "A student comes to hear her teacher teach but more importantly to see how he or she loves".² Yamada Roshi used to say that the business of Zen is the perfecting of character. Zen practice can set up many test cases; I like to say that life is a test of character - not a test of IQ, physical strength, wealth, good taste or outward success, although all these things have their place. A dear friend reminded me of other, deeper dimensions of place, ancestors and elders- as the English painter and actor Anthony Murphy said, 'We are the meeting point of our ancestors and descendants'

Finally, rather than ranking experiences (and people) into rigid hierarchies, to say 'mood' points to a deep insight being a 'frame of mind' as in a 'Spring mood'; to say 'mode' indicates the need to actualise insights in practice as characteristic ways of acting and being.

Mood One *The phenomenon within the universal music*

When you are lost in unknown country, and have no idea where you are,
Don't boggle about not knowing anyone or any place.
Listen! Hear the music of your dreaming.

Mode One *Orienting by the law*

As a true child of country, walk in the way of the Ancestors;
Look after country carefully, and bend your noble ear to the sufferings of all beings,
When you pass through a rough place, listen carefully - find the music of the dreaming,
And the law of the Ancestors honoured in every place.

Mood Two *The universal ground within the phenomenon*

A little child, lost in a dream, glimpses her true place,
and beholds her own true home.
Step out carefully, through the gate and walk on your original country.

1 Robert Aitken, The Five Modes of Tung-Shan, in The Morning Star, 2003.

2 Ross Bolleter, Dongshan's Five Ranks, 2014.

Mode Two
Actualising service

Wash away the dust and let your innate nobility guide you.
The song in the restless heart calls you to your peaceful dwelling;
even after hundreds of angry scenes, the music still calls you;
even when you are lost in the roughest country, the quiet voices of the Ancestors sing to you.

Mood Three
Uncoiling within the universal sky

The great, blue sky mind knows no obstacles.
When you humbly walk in the way of not knowing,
then the noble Ancestors will sing their songs of the law with your mouth.

Mode Three
The great earth and the empty sky witness your achievement

In no time, and as if from nowhere, the desert is brocaded with blooms;
the great rainbow serpent, with her body of stars, arches back & forth across the empty sky;
her body of earth lifting up innumerable mountains endlessly rising and falling -
she is swallowed up the hazy moon, the brisk winds of change
and the dawning of the day of the descendants.

Mood Four
Crossing over within phenomena

Like an aged married couple, held in the embrace of love - until death do them part
as one hand tending the embers and fires of love -
a natural desire to cross over and penetrate the sanctuary.

Mode Four
Arriving within together

Your ordinary mind and a loving, realised mind are not separate.
Now - you are greatly elated by people and events,
and now - wiped out by people and events;
what does all this turning and changing mean?
The heartfelt call of the beloved brings you back to the manifold field of practice.

Mood Five
Homecoming

Not clinging to luminous nothingness or grasping after glistening things,
who can live authentically right here?
We all ache to cease from the endless odyssey,
not just to achieve peace, but to come home and bask in the loving warmth of home fires.

Mode Five
The character of truth

The moment you set out to preach to others, then you have nothing to say;
If you seek Buddha nature outside yourself you won't find it;
in the mind of the faithful pilgrim there is no need to seek out teachers in other dusty lands -
our exploring ends by arriving in peace at the place we started,
and knowing it for the first time.

SEVEN DAYS OF SESSHIN

Diana Levy

a sequence

As a teacher of haiku, I emphasize that the proper subject matter of a proper haiku is nature. But I present here, a sequence in the spirit of the 'hokku' – the first verse in a renga sequence, written for amusement in early Edo-era Japan.

Not proper! (or maybe human nature?)

Day One

*I cannot believe
that I have to get up now -
someone has goofed up!*

Day Two

*day two of sesshin
I am suffering so much!
the first noble truth*

Day Three

*yet again
eyes-bigger-than-my-stomach
is my greed showing?*

Day Four

*a morning visit
to the bowels of the earth
success! ring the bells!*

Day Five

*pain pain pain pain pain
rare moments of samadhi
pain pain mossie pain*

Day Six

*teacher's teisho
I think I get it!
I get the joke anyway*

Day Seven

*O the wonderment!
these people, this routine -
hang on - we're leaving.*

DAWN

Caroline Josephs

November, 2016

Einstein said, 'Imagination is more important than knowledge'.....

Imagine this



*In the grey of pre-dawn,
Standing on
sandy shore...
A small cove,
rocky arms
reach out,
embracing ocean.
Whitefellas,
devotees of this Land -
Yuin Country...
With Yuin Elder,
Dulumunmun,
Uncle Max,
We face a
Universal sea,
rippling to
a line of
horizon,
Two lines
waiting...
ten of us,
chanting, chiming,
an ancient evocation --
'Grandfather Sun...
Grandmother Moon...
Father Sky...
Mother Earth'....*

*Piercing arcs of
light sliding,
slipping
shimmering
slowly rising,
above
horizon --
Becoming
dazzling globe.
Uncle Max intones:
'Through the Mother'...
Kindled --
fire, struck
in awe, jaws
drop
open to
fiery heat,
infusing
bodies,
gold
suffusing
rocks,
glistening
sand,
sparkling
water...
We offer
gratitude
For this --*

*everyday
miracle --
growing of plants,
trees flourishing,
for animals
being
nourished,
for human
beings
fed --
to grow, develop...
We re-create
the Ancestors,
Our ancestors,
our kin
Our Grandfather,
our
Grandmother,
our Father,
our Mother.
These fellas,
our relatives,
our kin,
Here in Yuin country
Once...upon
a long
circular
time.....
Now!
ALIVE!*

KING PARROT MY MOTHER

Janet Selby

The setting is this:

Three generations of Selby women living in a suburban block of units with a bush garden buffering the main road and the front verandah which is used as my art studio. In this location we get the usual visits from lorikeets, cockatoos, noisy miners, wattle birds and magpies.

Last year my mother passed away after few weeks, mercifully quickly from bowel cancer. A couple of weeks later, I was inside and heard a long, enticing “CHEEEEEEP!” Quite different to any bird call I had heard in the 15 years living there.

Where is it coming from? Investigating further, I went to the door waiting for the next sound to get bearings on its direction. “CHEEEEEEP!” So close, where is it in the garden. . . . “CHEEEEEEP!”

There, under the balcony cover, right in close to the house, a bright red and green, male King Parrot, perched on the easel I was using to dry my towel. Looking directly at me, he again went, “CHEEEEEEP!”

I ran around telling Lily, my daughter, to have a look! Get the camera! Come and see!

He stayed there for long enough for me to get my phone and take a photo, and for the neighbours to witness the visit, perhaps five minutes.

He seemed young despite his fully bright colours. The female was camouflaged in a nearby tree and after a while gently called him home. They flew off together.

The significance and apparent link to my mother was that the easel was in front of a portrait of her— a portrait that my father had painted in oils when they were courting in the 1950’s.

This bird visit seemed to be a farewell gesture, a symbolic message of goodwill. Although it was a rare and lovely encounter – just a visit from a bird, the ancient human search for meaning cannot be ignored.

On delving a little deeper I discovered an interesting article, *On the Relationship between Birds and Spirits of*

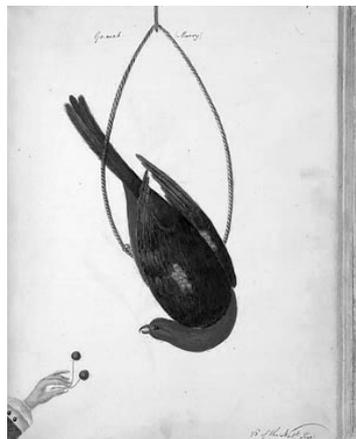
the Dead (Christopher Moreman, 2014).¹ This paper discusses the significance of birds across cultures throughout human history and begins by posing the question: Why would anyone recognise the spirit of a deceased human in a creature seemingly so different as a bird?

I tried to find out if there was any particular significance or story in Aboriginal lore for the King Parrot. I have not been successful except to discover a clan called Gadubannud in western Victoria, known as King Parrot people. However, I suspect if I asked Uncle Max (a Yuin Law Man, holder of ancient knowledge) the significance of this encounter, he would not hesitate to suggest it was my mother saying farewell.

My very first book was a bird book, *Some Common Australian Birds*, (by Alan Bell with drawings by Shirley Bell, Oxford University Press, 1956). Apparently I gave this book “To Mummy from Janet Xmas 1960” (suspiciously in my father’s handwriting). I would have been 6 months old. I still cherish this book. The delightful descriptions for each species are quaint and somewhat poetical. The section for King Parrots on page 148 reads, “The flight is less agile and dashing than that of most parrots: the King strikes one as a somewhat phlegmatic bird. As well as the usual harsh and boisterous chatter, softer, more musical notes are mingled in flock conversations. The call note is shrill. Growers take toll of this bright raider when it gives trouble in cultivated areas and its numbers may be decreasing.”

This quote about Australian King Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*) describes it as “phlegmatic”; something like my mother watching reruns of *Midsomer Murders*, not quite remembering whodunnit, although having seen the episode a few times before.

1 http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/33110702/off-print.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ56TQJRTWSMTNPEA&Expires=1475834303&Signature=WApCchht8VxiBjrZrvjGiJZEFec%3D&response-content-disposition=attachment%3B%20filename%3DOn_The_Relationship_between_Birds_and_Sp.pdf



John Hunter
(1737–1821)
King Parrot

Birds & Flowers of New South
Wales Drawn on the Spot in
1788, '89 & '90
bound volume of watercolours
on paper; 23.8 x 20.0cm



Colourful Visitor, and Easel in Situ,
snapped on my phone, 2015



Keith Selby (1919–1991)
Portrait of Phyllis Wilson,
Canterbury, Oil on canvas; 1950

A friend recently lost a loved one, and told me she was disappointed because he hadn't given her a sign. She was waiting for an encounter of confirmation. Confirming what?

For me, after this life ends the energy simply returns to the great ocean of energy; not born, not destroyed. There are innumerable amazing facets and lingering embodiments colouring this ocean of energy.

Sometimes they coagulate and if we are in tune with it, we can experience fleeting wonders, like bubbles, magically popping up, momentarily touching our hearts. The trick is to be awake to these moments and not dismiss them with thinking mind. Pragmatic as it is, the mind can block perception to many nuanced details and colours.

The delightful visit of the King Parrot confirmed for me not that my mother had a message from the beyond, not that her spirit kindly sent me a message, but that a natural part of our human condition is its search for meaning.

From that article:

Essentially, we must not impose meaning on the animal, but instead realize what the animal speaks—not with words, but with the unconscious instincts common across animal-kind. We must “unlearn [original italics] one of the basic lessons of human subjectivization: to be a person, one must not be an animal” (Robman, 2005, p. 125) and instead recognize the one-ness of animal and human. As such, the world of human experience can be seen as a matrix of interconnected subjects, each seeing reflections of one’s self in one another.²

The parrot is my mother. My mother is the parrot. This is not fact, it is not conjecture. It is its colour, its sound, its nuanced meaning to me.

2 Referenced from the above article: Rohman, C. (2005). Burning out the animal: The failure of enlightenment purification in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. In M. Pollock & C. Rainwater (Eds.), *Figuring animals: Essays on animal images in art, literature, philosophy, and popular culture*. New York, NY: Palgrave. 121-134.

REDUNDANCY TO REBIRTH

Jill Steverson

Sometimes it seems to me that the turning wheel of life spins very fast and yet, simultaneously at another level, it can seem to turn so slowly it is interminable.

I experienced a period like this with my recent job. Nine years of intensity, speed, rush, worry – and yet so slow, grinding, plodding, enduring, responsibility and a pantheon of people, tasks, constant worries at all hours and weekends. Of course, there was some joy and interest, but was it mainly billowing clouds of muddy particles in my mind? Rarely giving the particles a chance to precipitate to let the sun shine through?

‘Right livelihood’ is such a challenging koan, especially in these busy times in which any senior career role seems to require ‘over and above’ more than ever.

Earlier this year, the mental health organisation I worked for underwent a restructure into a regional model to prepare for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This meant fewer jobs in Sydney. Suddenly I was wondering what would happen to me. It was a small ‘shark pool’. We all had to reapply for new roles. I started fantasising about the possibility of a redundancy, a rest, a payout, a new life, sunshine, everyone happy, skipping over the hills with flowers, laughter... you can see how I felt. Escape! That is, sometimes it felt like that; other times I wasn’t so sure I wanted to let go. Fear, loss of income, interest, position, security, engagement, dear colleagues.

Perhaps births require energy, lots of it, plus acceptance? Reflecting on some of my births or turning points, they have usually required some action or determination and have been hard won after much effort, even if the effort has been moving through, or accepting, emotional turmoil or depression. I love what Leonard Cohen said about depression as ‘the background of your entire life, a background of anguish and anxiety, a sense that nothing goes well that pleasure is unavailable and that your strategies collapse.’ How true of our suffering.

I had the sense that this birth needed energy and equanimity as I anticipated it would be a rather torturous route. In the turbulent waters of the shark pool, staff were pitted against each for the positions. I had to apply for jobs and be interviewed – to get to the end and a redundancy wasn’t going to be easy.

As soon as the new General Manager was appointed, effectively my job had gone. I no longer had any role or authority. I went from being a senior staff member to someone without position or influence, and a whole new set people seemed to be jostling for the ear of the new Queen. I wasn’t asked for my knowledge, views or opinions and I was well and truly relegated to the sidelines. As I write about this, I am thinking what it must be like for Barack Obama right now to see all his work bypassed and ignored by the new president elect Trump. OK, I wasn’t the most powerful person on earth, but how difficult it was to see all my hard work cast aside, staff I had recruited and valued cast aside. Were the last nine years worth anything?

But why did I care? I hadn't wanted the new GM's job anyway. I was too tired, she had to do it her way. I did respect her, and I saw clearly that my shock was pride. When I was interviewed and not offered the job I had not quite wanted, my being affronted reached a marvellous crescendo of self-righteousness! Meanwhile, another part of me was wondering whether I was reacting like that because I thought I should do. Because at a deeper level, I was absolutely calm and joyful... the crack through which the light was getting in was getting bigger and bigger – rays of sunshine through that crack.

But a couple of weeks later there was another twist, another cycle in the washer dryer, when the person who had been successful for that position declined it. Oh my! Would that mean the escape door would shut? Would I have to take the job? Hadn't I wanted it? Oh well, who knows?... Relax. Sit. Enjoy the ride. Breathe.

I was reminded of the koan in which people from the village brought a baby to a monk, shouting at him at the gates of the monastery that it was his baby with a girl in the village and he needed to look after the baby. He took the baby and replied, 'Ah, is that so.' The monk loved and cared for the child. Ten years later, the villagers came to the monk and again shouted at him saying, 'that baby was never yours, hand it back to it's rightful parents!' The monk handed the young child back and replied, 'Ah is that so.'

We never know what is next. I reminded myself this was no different, I was just getting myself caught up again, ego here, ego there, preferences and dramas. Perhaps I was now back in a job. It's OK. Relax.

In the end, the washing machine slowed its cycles. I was more accepting by then somehow. I was told the job was withdrawn... wonderful. I wouldn't be forced to do it! A whole stream of sunlight came flooding through that crack. I knew I would prefer to step into the sunshine. The machine turfed me out into a big meeting where I was asked my wishes and then, miraculously, I was offered the redundancy.

I worked a seven-week notice period. That was an odd birth canal, the door crack widening, the sunlight flooding in, the pantheon of work worries subsiding, creeping off to another Inbox. I started to become a wonderful no-body. I came in late, I went for coffee, I was nicer to people, I talked to colleagues, I listened, I liked myself, I helped, I left early. Oddly, I found myself potting new plants outside my office. I'd be gone before they flowered – was it I wanted to be remembered? Who would look after the flowers in the courtyard now? Then there was sadness, recognition, gladness, true pride and happiness.

Finally how wonderful to wave goodbye

*A breath, a ray of sunshine, falling rain
Resting in the garden, the muddy particles precipitating
Lettuces growing, ready to be shared*

Moments, years, turmoil – one magnificent dewdrop.

GRANDAD'S KOANS

Lee Nutter

Mel and I were midway through one of the largest transitions in our adult lives, an exhausting and tumultuous and trying time, and at the pinnacle of it all, when it was already way too much, when we'd long since had enough, my Grandad passed away.

On top of the obvious upset, the expensive and unpleasant process of wrapping up our affairs in Australia meant that we weren't in a position to fly around the world, and I was the only one of my Grandad's grandchildren that wasn't at his funeral. This being so, my Dad asked if I'd like to write an eulogy.

I started planning immediately and dove into my notoriously bad memory looking for the stories and details that made my Grandad the man we knew and loved. Despite my memory I found plenty, but there were a couple of stories that stood out.

These stories were previously just humorous tidbits, recounted whenever my Grandad came up in conversation, but now that he was gone they became koans, life lessons he'd left behind.

The first was an occasion when my Grandad had purchased a new book to read. He had spent an hour or so sitting down with it when he sat bolt upright and cried, "I've read this!" Everyone present laughed and commented on his terrible memory, but he wasn't to be made fun of. He turned back to his book with his nose up, "It doesn't matter," he explained, "I don't read to remember, I read for enjoyment."

This story, previously just a vague memory mixed up with a host of others from the same holiday, became something so much more. Grandad wasn't just defending his terrible memory, he was living by example, reminding us that life isn't just about remembering the past, but living in the present.

I know I know, how profound to contemplate life when you're faced with death, but bear with me for just one more short story, or koan if you will.

In the second story my Grandad was at work when he opened his lunchbox and sighed. A workmate asked what was wrong. "I've got cheese sandwiches again!" gasped Grandad. His colleague suggested he ask his wife to make him something else. "That's the thing," cried Grandad, "I make my own lunch!"

Grandad delighted in telling this story, each time as if it was the first. This koan is much more straightforward. You've made your bed, now lie in it. We all know the cliché, but still find a way to blame others for our circumstances.

To my mind this koan reinforces the first, Grandad was reminding us that we are not above cause and effect. For the most part, if we're not doing all we had hoped with our lives, we've only got ourselves to blame. We've got to make our own lunch, and live with it when we do.

My Grandad's passing was not the reason we moved to Cambodia, but now more than ever I'm aware of his influence in my being able to do so. I know that Grandad was a little confused about why we chose Cambodia as our new home, but I also know that he wanted what was best for us, even if he didn't completely understand it himself.

Grandad passed at a turbulent time in our lives, but in some ways it was a gift that I was forced to reflect on his life in the way that I have. I've been reminded of why we've done what we did, and why we're doing what we're doing. We're making our own lunch.

This article was originally written for our web site CambodiaMe.com, which is a diary of sorts, documenting our experience moving to and living in Cambodia.

REBIRTH IN A NEW WORLD

Peter Thompson

Zen Facing The Shock And Challenge Of The New

Given the crises and the challenges humanity is now facing, the Zen Practice Tradition is being forced to undergo a process of evolutionary adaptation or risk becoming almost irrelevant in our “Brave New World”.

The Australian native bushland and the eucalypt species in particular needs the crisis of a bushfire to release and help germinate new seedlings - which in turn produce new and luxuriant bright green growth. This is a dramatic example of what evolution is about generally - a dead end, a blockage, a challenge or a crisis to promote the discarding of outmoded and unnecessary accretions and the drive towards creative adaptation to new circumstances in order to survive. Survival seems to be the primary drive for every monad or individual entity. In this context, it is of course no accident that the Chinese character for ‘crisis’ is identical to the character for ‘opportunity’.

Even in our Zen Tradition there is a good example of the innate drive towards evolution in the notion that in order to be a good teacher - a student must surpass the depth of wisdom and understanding of his/her teacher.

In the notion of rebirth is also the reality of a necessary death of the old forms - no rebirth without a death of the old. In our own case, at the Sydney Zen Centre, we have inherited a wonderful Zen Tradition with multiple layers of lovely, historical accretions - with the layers of this spiritual archeological dig beginning with Prince Gotama, Mahakashyapa, Bodhidharma extending through the Sixth Patriarch, The Tang Dynasty Golden Age of Zen - Huangpo, Rinzai, Mumon, Paichang to Dogen and Hakuin in the Japanese branches. The Zen Tradition also picked up various cultural accretions as it passed through different civilisations - Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. Some of the most distinct forms we have inherited have their roots in Paichang’s monastic forms and rules, Mumon’s ordering of certain koans (The Mumonkan), Dogen’s zazen instructions and monastic guidelines, and Hakuin’s reordering and creation of the modern koan “curriculum”. In receiving all of this we remember the words of our founder Prince Gotama of Lumbini - that everything heard or received must be questioned and not accepted on face value or on automatic conditioned pilot - it must be thoroughly masticated and digested afresh to be truly personalised and made fully our own understanding. The forms we have inherited are of pre - medieval and medieval Asian origin - they are now being practiced in completely different times, places and cultures.

This process of questioning, investigation and inquiry has already been vigorously happening in regard to Zen since its arrival in the West for the last 60 years - the confrontation with Western Culture has already been generating automatic changes and adaptations. This process will and must continue - this is a process of death and rebirth. Shakyamuni’s teaching to think for oneself and question authority has always been an important part of Buddhism and Zen despite the resistance and protestations of clinging, conservative minds and hearts ... Already we have seen a shift away from the Zen we inherited in some of the following ways:

1. The Japanese cultural overlay of the samurai warrior in Zen has been questioned and is beginning to dissolve
2. The use of the waking or encouragement stick ‘kyosaku’ has been fading and waning
3. There has been a looking back to the original teachings of The Buddha on awareness and

mindfulness and these have been injected into our Zen Practice (eg via Thich Nhat Hahn, Joko Beck, Subhana Bazarghi and Patrick Kearney)

4. The old prejudices against both women practitioners and teachers has all but dissolved
5. There has been a serious questioning of a Zen overladen with Japanese conditioning in regard to both alcohol and sex use and misuse
6. There has been investigation of the Japanese conditioning that sees the questioning of authority and hierarchy as taboo. This obsession with politeness and respect has led to some grave abuses eg the longtime, shameful habitual sexual abuse of female students perpetrated by Edo Roshi (Hawaii, New York) with the most polite, respectful reluctance and pathological acquiescence of his master / mentor Soen Roshi. Also, we note the great failure to call out Baker Roshi on his abuse of power, money and sex for fear of breaking the Japanese taboo of questioning hierarchy.

The Buddha's approach to examining and questioning has been reiterated in recent times by Buddhist figures Toni Packer, Bernard Glassman, Christopher Titmus and to some extent Hogen Daido Yamahata.

Just as in the earlier analogy of the bushfire which does not destroy the seeds of the eucalypt - right questioning serves to burn away burdensome and unnecessary dross but does not destroy core teachings and practices. They are released from the dross and the pure gold of the Teachings is once again released with new clarity and vigour. The core of our teaching, the uncreated 'Unborn' cannot be destroyed by anything - especially creative questioning. The creative, sacred spirit of enquiry cannot be destroyed by such investigation - only enhanced! Toni Packer, Manfred Steger, Perle Besserman and Hogen Daido have each critically investigated our tradition and found that when unnecessary accretions have been let go - the following necessary practices remain:

1. Sitting/Walking Meditation
2. Teacher - Student Interviews
3. Silent Intensive Retreats
4. Dharma Talks
5. The recorded historical talks, dialogues, exchanges and koans (public cases) of our tradition

Steger and Besserman say in their insightful book "Grassroots Zen" (Tuttle, Boston 2001) that they drew great inspiration from an earlier evolutionary development in The Tang Dynasty - the lay Zen group called "Tsao-Pen Ch'an". This Zen community of both men and women practised without official sanction from Buddhist priests and beyond the monastery walls. They have used the model of this group as the inspiration for their own practice sangha - The Greater Princeton Area Zen Group.

Sometimes it seems that we need to regress back to earlier ways as a form of advancement. An earlier rejected dead end form can be used in a new and revitalised way. In the wonderful words of Jesus "The stone that was rejected has now become the cornerstone". Three great, eccentric Zen masters seem to be in this category - Bassui, Bankei and Ikkyu . Though very bright stars in their own lifetimes, they produced no continuing and identifiable lineages. However, each in his own way has been a great inspiration to later generations of practitioners. D.T. Susuki resurrected the legacy of Bankei calling him the most original and creative force in the history of Japanese Zen (one is truly reminded of the young Beethoven and older Mozart resurrecting the legacy of a forgotten J.S. Bach). So, the earlier dead ends of evolution can often prove to be future cornerstones of innovation and adaptation. In a

similar way, we may need to return to earlier views of money and spirituality. The connecting of money with spirituality has been condemned from the Golden Calf days of The Old Testament, through the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament and this abuse partly helped bring about the Protestant Reformation in Europe... In every major spiritual teaching there has been a strong need expressed to disassociate money from spiritual practice. However, in our current strongly consumer Capitalist system everything seems to have a price - everything can be bought and sold in the market place - even spiritual teachings. In our rampant, out of control Capitalist Society “Greed is Good” has become the prevailing motto. There has already been talk about putting a price on solar energy, the free energy from the sun and even the air that we breathe. Business PHD. students have been already discussing business models for making money from Zen and other teachings - how to properly market and sell them! It has been often said since the TM Maharishi of the 1960’s fame, that people will not fully appreciate spiritual teachings unless they pay good money for them. This trite and cynical rationalisation has found its way into many so- called 'New Age' Teachings. Even as we are chanting “Greed, Hatred and Ignorance rise endlessly”, ignorant capitalist conditioning is undermining and betraying our sacred spiritual practice traditions. We all need the freedom to be able to ask spiritual hierarchy what is it that they are charging money for especially when they say that they are ‘selling water by the river’, Buddha nature is our common human birth right and cannot be bought and sold like some market commodity! Teaching Dharma does not call for a Fee for Service like the driving of a taxi! To come to a right view on this it seems that we must move away from our greedy, acquisitive capitalist conditioning and return to an earlier, purer and more pristine view of sacred teachings and practices - this is truly regression for the sake of creative evolution!

The present-day rebirth of Zen will really begin happening when it has started to come to terms with some of the following challenges:

1. The immediate Climate, Environmental and Resources Crisis
2. Fully sustainable transition from a greedy and rapacious Capitalism
3. Investigation/adoption of the deepest love and social action teachings of Christianity
4. Bearing witness to sufferings caused by the glaring inequalities of current societies (Bernard Glassman Roshi and The Peacemaker Fellowship)
5. Embracing relevant scientific theory and truth eg Darwinian Evolutionary Theory put into a modern spiritual context, ie The Omega Point of Teilhard De Chardin and The Atman Project of Ken Wilber - both of which give our practice a much bigger, non- sectarian , meaningful and contextual long view of the human existential mystery. So even though our practice may seem local, narrow and sectarian we may be uplifted in Faith, Hope, Compassion and Meaning as we glimpse the vast path of a universal human evolution of consciousness unfolding
6. Exploring/healing the human shadow by incorporating some of the many theories and practices of modern psychology
7. Zen embracing the best and highest forms of art/ culture of the various places where it is being practised

In conclusion, we should fully celebrate without any fear, a Renaissance or Rebirth of Zen, realising that MIND itself is never in danger of being altered or destroyed.

DEATH AND THE LANDSCAPE

Originally published on www.theplanthunter.com.au

Georgina Reid

Images by Daniel Shipp

When we were children we used to hold our breaths when we drove past a cemetery in the car, in case we accidentally inhaled some of the inevitable bad spirits hovering about. Whilst struggling to contain ourselves in the back seat dad would say ‘Ahh, the dead centre of town’. Ka boom.

My thoughts on cemeteries have since evolved from fear to fascination. I’m not sure I’m able to adequately illustrate what it is exactly that draws me in but I have a few inklings.

Truth draws me to nature, and also to cemeteries. Plants and trees, in fact all non-human living things, however affected by our whims and notions, just exist. They are what they are – there is great truth in this. Cemeteries, whilst vastly different, are in many ways the most truthful and human of all landscapes, illustrating clearly the nature of life in a way we living beings can only grasp at.

We all die. Whilst we spend most of our lives pretending otherwise, in cemeteries we come face to face with this truth. Acknowledging it evokes in me a relief of sorts. Not because the idea of death is comforting (its not) but because there’s a freedom in recognising the truth of it.

As I wander amongst the headstones on my almost-daily lunchtime cemetery stroll, I ponder the lives beneath me. Lives that were once full, expansive and messy are now contained within a few square meters of earth. Names, ages, dates carved into stone. I imagine the lives they lived, and think about the people I’ve known whose lives are now based in the airy realms of memory rather than fixed in physicality.

After my grandmother passed away a few years ago my cemetery visits became a time to breathe, to remember, and to mourn with perspective. Then one day a month or so after her death someone was practicing on the





organ in the church. They were rehearsing the song that was played when my grandmother was carried out of the church for the last time. I sat down on a grave and cried for a long time. I cry now as I write, even though the melody escapes me. The truth hurts.

People often comment that it's a bit morbid of me to spend my lunchtimes in a cemetery. I find this to be a rather strange notion. I guess it's an illustration of how disconnected we have become from death. It's an idea we run from, rather than a truth we accept.

It hasn't always been this way though - until relatively recently dead bodies were prepared and laid out by their loved ones, and funerals happened in the 'good' room at the front of the house. The one used for celebrating the real stuff: births, deaths, and impressing the neighbours.

Nowadays, death is big business. There's a huge industry built around it, ensuring the living have as little to do with the process as possible. 'We send our old people off to homes and hospitals to die; we only go to the cemetery for funerals and then avoid them' Keith Eggener, an associate professor of American art and architecture at the University of Missouri and author of *Cemeteries*¹ suggests.

This disconnect, and therefore avoidance of the truth of death, is reflected in cemetery landscapes. Whilst 19th century cemeteries were park like, with grand headstones and monuments, and angels and flowers carved into stone, modern cemeteries are stark in comparison. Headstones are low and simple, there's minimal ornamentation and arguably less romance and explicit spirituality.

Back in the day, cemeteries were used for recreation. In fact, in America some cemeteries were so popular they had to start making rules about what was allowed and what wasn't. On weekends they would be overflowing with people picnicking, playing sport and having social outings. Can you imagine doing that in a cemetery nowadays?

Of course, references to the natural world remain in our modern cemetery landscapes. But they've become just that – references, not quite reality. For example, cemeteries are now called Memorial Parks. I visited one such park recently, sandwiched between a container terminal on one side and factories on the other. It was neat, orderly, and had a garden chapel with not a shrub in sight. I was surprised at how corporate and cold it felt in comparison to the old cemetery in Newtown.



I guess modern cemeteries feel like this because they're landscapes we're trying to pretend don't exist. As Eggener suggests, we only visit them for funerals, and then maybe once a year to pay respects to loved ones. We don't want to spend too much time in them, and they certainly don't encourage it, otherwise we might start pondering the true nature of existence, and who knows where that would lead...

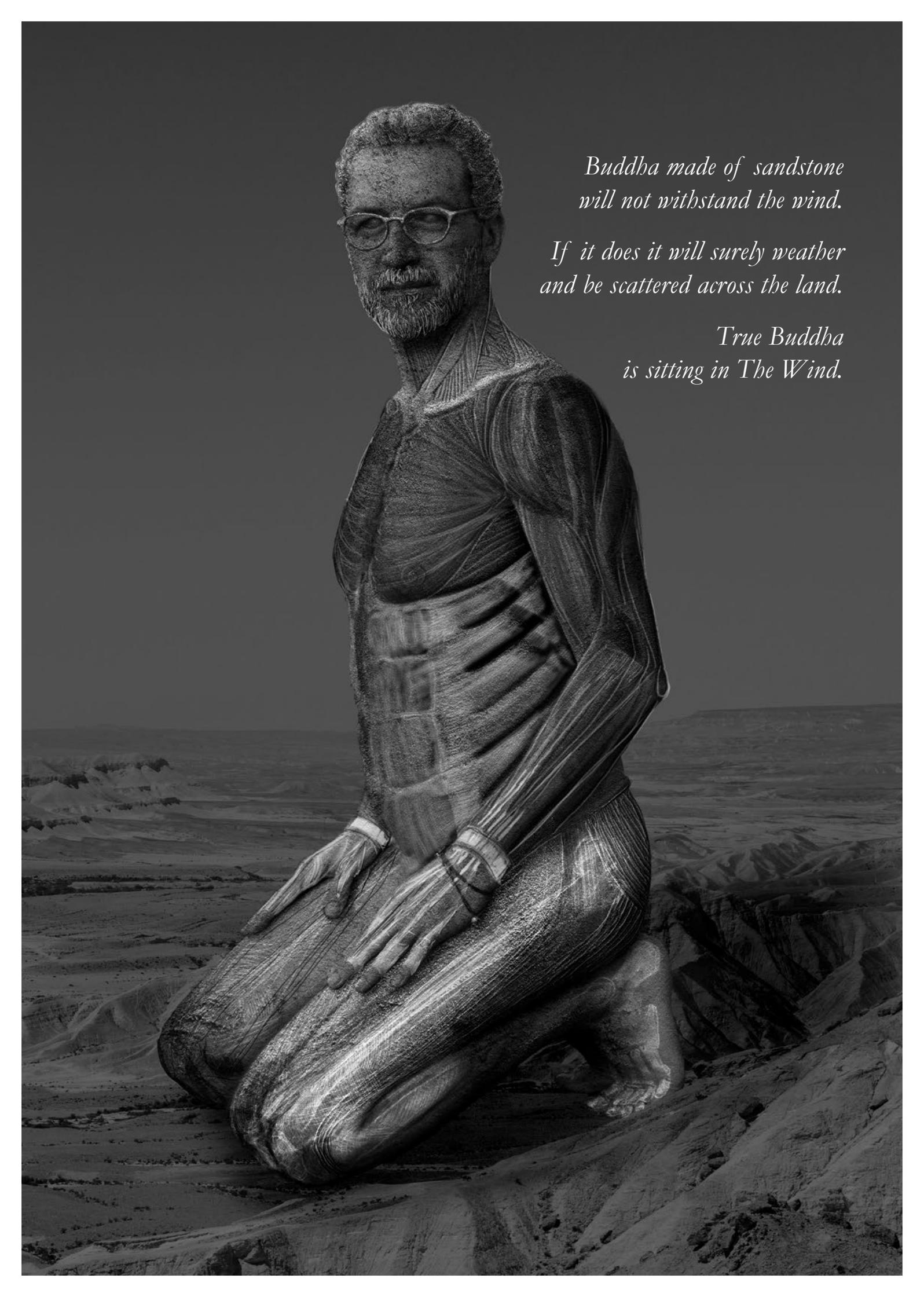
'Cemeteries are not scary, creepy places but moving, rich, provocative places, with really powerful and positive meanings', suggest Keith Eggener. With sprawling old trees, wild roses twining around rusted iron fences, and plants and graves in equal proportions, old cemeteries are where it's at for me. There's poetry on the headstones, grasses growing in the cracks, and truth, beauty and subversion in abundance.

Subversion, you ask? Hear me out.

Cemeteries are, in many ways, mirrors of society. They impose themselves on the landscape like miniature cities, with row upon row of lives fixed in stone. Like cities, there's separation and containment, often based on religion, status, and money. Catholic over here, Protestant over there. Big tomb here, un-named timber cross there. Yet, in death, we're not separate anymore. Not from each other, and certainly not from nature. We return to the earth and no amount of money and ego can do anything about it. On the surface, cemetery architecture supports the notion of separation through the allocation of plots, structure of graves, and division into religions, yet the deeper truth of death subverts it. Death is the great leveller, some famous person once said. It's true. Cemeteries illustrate this in a way no words can. This, I find incredibly fascinating.

And now to the end, my end. Well, I used to think I wanted to be cremated but now I'm erring towards being composted. I've never been keen on the idea of being buried in a cemetery, and I'm still not. However, I'll continue to wander their miniaturised streets reading inscriptions on headstones, wondering about the lives contained within the words, and admiring the tenacity of the plants that find life amongst the cracks in the stonework.

My heart will ache a little as I make my way through the gravestones in recognition of the finality of the space, but it will also soar. There's serious beauty in the humanity and ultimate truth of cemetery landscapes, and anyway, as Keith Eggener suggests, 'You don't have to dwell upon death. You just have to recognize it.' Where better to start than a stroll through a cemetery?



*Buddha made of sandstone
will not withstand the wind.*

*If it does it will surely weather
and be scattered across the land.*

*True Buddha
is sitting in The Wind.*

WHAT IS THIS?

Ameli Tanchitsa

*Editor's note &
miscellaneous musings*

As the editor of this issue of Mind Moon Circle I would like to thank the contributors and readers. I am so grateful to everyone who has responded to the theme of Rebirth. It's a joy and privilege to spin the Dharma wheel together.

Over the last season or two, my practice has become better tuned. I find myself waking up very early and sitting through several incense sticks almost every day.

I use word "tuned" because it has something to do with a sound. What sound? This unwavering sound which has entered my perception! Or did I enter It?

In drawing lessons we talk about the figure and the ground. By looking at the relationship between the two we can deduce proportions of scale and composition.

When you close your eyes you don't see a thing.

At first I thought the sound has something to do with my ears. But it doesn't. When I put my fingers in my ears, regardless of how hard I press, the sound doesn't change in any way. I am sure I did this a lot as a boy but never really questioned it deeply. Didn't need to, I guess.

So what is it? I don't know.

What I do know is that I am open to it through zazen. Figure and the ground are dancing. But it's hard to see sometimes which one is which and who is leading. Especially with my eyes closed.

That is why I practice with my eyes opened.

Now, I am greeted at the gate by my friend the sound every time I start dancing. One, two... three, four... Oh, how great! I have opened up to be more like my host. Giving, loving and kind.

Often I step out of it and sometimes decide I would like to come to the bottom of this sound. To see where it's coming from and put my finger on its beginning and on its end. Sometimes I think there is something in it for me

and how I would really like to find out what it is. What is it? Oh, of-course... it's me! It's been me all along.

Ambitions rise and fall. Like Empires and all other phenomena. Is anything forever?

Practice has truly become my dancing instructor. I can say that I am reborn through my practice. Right now, I am reborn as a more mature man who is somewhat skilled in dancing and loving.

This loving kindness is like the light and an eye.

Somebody's theory found on Internet:

"In the centre of every proton there is a black hole. As the black hole is pulling everything in, what remains on the event horizon is actually what we experience as the world of phenomena."

Facts of the relative world.

Each black hole is connected to every other black hole.

In Emptiness, there is no separation. No event horizons, and no ending of event horizons.

No Ameli, and no ending of Ameli.

This is perplexing. How can it be and not be at the same time?

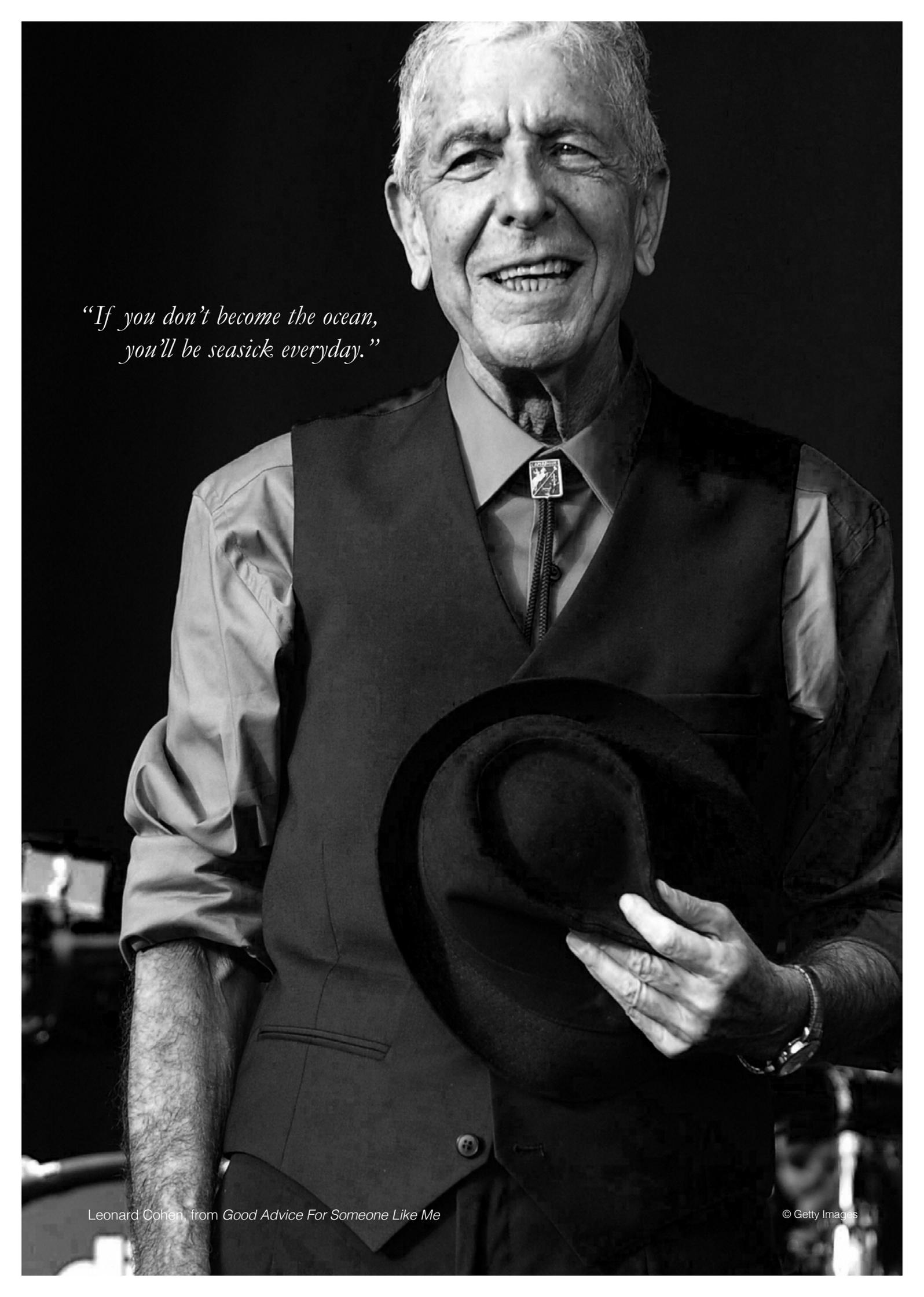
Facts are relative. Truth is absolute

We can't find a location in the human brain where memory is stored and retrieved from. So what is happening? Where does the memory come from? Where does the knowing come from?

Through zazen, I remember how to know the Truth. I tune in. I open up. I dance. Truth takes its veil off and reveals its original face. Our original face before our ancestors were born. Yours, mine, everybody else's, plant, animal, mineral, past, present, future. Wow!

Ok. Now what?

Now... dance me to the end of love.

A black and white photograph of Leonard Cohen. He is wearing a dark vest over a light-colored shirt and a dark tie with a silver tie clip. He is holding a dark hat in his left hand. He has a slight smile and is looking towards the camera. The background is dark and out of focus.

*“If you don’t become the ocean,
you’ll be seasick everyday.”*



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