

# MIND MOON CIRCLE

Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre

Very Late  
Autumn 2018



oh  
dear  
beginner ...

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## Mind Moon Circle: Winter / Spring edition

The next edition of Mind Moon Circle, will be exploring the theme Resonance.

The great Japanese poem, The Tale of the Heike, begins,

*The tolling of the great bell of the Gion temple  
resonates with the insubstantiality of all things.*

Bells point us in the direction of Awakening and Resonance illuminates the bodhisattva path. At his recent transmission, Allan Marett was given the name, Resonant Cloud (Kyô-un) But bells are important in many other contexts: in various parts of the world, bells mark the location of animals; bells are central to music; there are the school bells of our childhood; the bells that mark the passage of time. And things resonate not just in the world of sound, but also within the mind.

Allan's transmission teisho on Yunmen's Golden Wind, which will be published in this edition, explores resonances between Aboriginal Law and the Dharma.

Let your creative bells ring forth and let us know what Resonance means for you. Please send your poems, stories and artwork to co-editors:

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by October 7<sup>th</sup> 2018.

*Temple bells die out.  
The fragrant blossoms remain.  
A perfect evening.*

Matsuo Basho

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Here is the Autumn edition of our MMC journal. You may have noticed, I am referring to it as Very Late Autumn 2018. I apologise for blending Autumn into Winter. Things just got in The Way. Never - the - less it is here. And it's wonderful, wonderful. Small collection of Zen morsels to savour.

The theme for this edition was something like *Writing a letter to a beginner including yourself*. Somewhat experimental as we welcome numberless newcomers into our Sangha.

Warm Thank You to all contributors. Thank you Ross Bolleter for submitting haiku by John Turner. There is a small selection on the following pages. It comes from John's recent collection titled *Observe the Changes* which gathers up the best of John's work over many years, as well as many new poems.

On the cover is Tilly, Coote's new puppy. Maggie took this wonderfull photo. The pedigree of the other two dogs is unknown to us. All we can say is they look very accomplished compared to Tilly who is just starting out. An absolute begginer. What a beauty!

Also included in this edition are *Ten Ox Herding Pictures*\* and verses and commentary by Kuòān Shīyuǎn (12<sup>th</sup> century); translated by Senzaki Nyogen (1876–1958) and Paul Reps (1895-1990). \*Pictures are contemporary version, series of woodblock prints by Tokuriki Tomikichirō (1902-2000).

I hope you enjoy it.  
With love and gratitude, Ameli.

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John F.  
Turner

*sober~  
I bow with gratitude  
to the moon*



### The Search for the Bull

In the pasture of this world,  
I endlessly push aside the tall grasses in search of the bull.

Following unnamed rivers,  
upon the inter-penetrating paths of distant mountains.

My strength failing and my vitality exhausted, I cannot find the bull.

I only hear the locusts chirping through the forest at night.

Comment:

The bull never has been lost. What need is there to search? Only because of separation from my true nature, I fail to find him. In the confusion of the senses I lose even his tracks. Far from home, I see many cross-roads, but which way is the right one I know not. Greed and fear, good and bad, entangle me.

# LETTER TO A BEGINNER

Sally  
Hopkins

**S**o - a toe in or everything wholeheartedly thrown in?

It makes a difference. You can do an occasional paddle about in the shallows and nothing much happens, maybe some nice feelings. Thrown in - it's a lifetime's practice. It won't increase your self-esteem, make you a better You; there will be times of difficulty, confusion and despair. Slowly, oh so slowly, if you trust the process, the heavy veil of your misconceptions will thin, get holes in it. The dark shadow of "me" as so far understood will sometimes be absent and the whole world will light up.

Even good teachers can't save you from your mistakes. On my first sesshin I did as directed. I did not look around (I saw about 6 of 40 fellow students). I earnestly counted my breaths. I was 'good'. ("I") At the same time I kept up a steady stream of thoughts. It was years before I started to get a grasp of the meaning of 'non-dual' in zazen. I was expecting something complicated, not simple. A slow process, an endless process.

The stream of thoughts can become a roaring river, and so much is truly embarrassing when noticed. "I'm doing pretty well" "Did they notice me?" "I'm bored" "Does that person know more than me?" Self-referential, comparing, "me me me". After a while this becomes comical, so laughter is the only possible response.

You might quarrel with the language, the ritual - though in time they open out, words becoming fingers pointing, ritual very helpful. Don't read too much at first, especially Pop type books. The temptation is to try to make happen what you have read. Acting from an idea in your head is useless. Sit every day. Sit.

Practice can be boring. Painful. Don't give up. Let things be as they are. Keep going. Keep going. You are in the process of dismantling a house, not building a new one. It is painful relinquishing certainties to which you have clung in an unstable world - though our certainties are usually precisely the bars of the prison.

Sit with others - you can lead yourself astray, and when things seem chaotic, the stability of old timers is supportive. Go to dokusan. Don't chatter about it, or theorize. Laughter helps. Everyone has their own path, and it is usually in the opposite direction from what you had imagined. Trust the mystery. Keep looking. Keep sitting.

'The things of the world are just as they are: the gates of liberation are open.'



### Discovering the Footprints

Along the riverbank under the trees, I discover footprints!

Even under the fragrant grass I see his prints.

Deep in remote mountains they are found.

There traces no more can be hidden than one's nose, looking heavenward.

Comment:

Understanding the teaching, I see the footprints of the bull. Then I learn that, just as many utensils are made from one metal, so too are myriad entities made of the fabric of self. Unless I discriminate, how will I perceive the true from the untrue? Not yet having entered the gate, nevertheless I have discerned the path.

# ZEN PRACTICE – WHAT'S THAT?

What's Zen about? Why do it?" ask friends occasionally.

To say that it helps me live my life, and helps me face death is true, but sounds a bit like a trite instruction manual on 'How to get through the years between being born and dying'. What's more, it doesn't touch the breadth and depth and intimacy of my zen practice, both on the cushion and in daily life. And I have no real answer for why I began this journey in the first place, other than to say that a spark was lit when I read Peter Matthiessen's book 'The Snow Leopard'.

'What on EARTH am I doing here?' Initially, while sitting zazen at Annandale, this question would pop up out of the blue and I'd wonder why I was sitting there on a cushion with aching knees instead of being at the movies. Sometimes I'd tediously review the day's activities, plan the next day, do a draft email or two...on and on...Or I'd contemplate what everyone else was doing. 'What's happening in there, in that space between their ears? How can they sit so calmly?' Then, over time, the curiosity and willingness to look inwards rather than outwards became stronger. And when I let go of the chatter, there was space and a sense of calm and an awareness that being there was 'right'. So I kept returning... and the 'rightness' keeps getting stronger.

In the beginning, the ritual side of zen provided another challenge, as it seemed unwarranted, unnecessary. Mostly I'd be content with 'just doing it', but then there'd be occasional antsy times when I'd tell myself 'I don't have to do this! I can just go somewhere else where there's no ritual'. Liking...not liking. Wanting this...not wanting that. Picking and choosing clearly in evidence! Instructively, without any conscious effort, those thoughts just faded completely away. Now the rituals are an integral part of my practice.



Koans bewildered me to begin with, the language making no sense, despite all my efforts at making sense of them - and I did try hard! But with great patience the teachers have helped in pulling the rug of rational thinking out from beneath my feet. And koans now open me up, transform me in a deep and intimate and inexplicable way.

So, gradually but steadily, there is greater freedom and lightness and ease in every aspect of my life. In Wu-men's words "At the very cliff edge of birth-and-death, you find the Great Freedom. In the Six Worlds and the Four Modes of Birth, you enjoy a samadhi of frolic and play"<sup>1</sup>.

So... some advice for myself back then, as a zen newbie... and still.

Stick with it.  
Befriend a regular sitting practice.  
Look forward to just sitting.  
If awareness comes, that's alright – but don't hang onto it.  
Weightiness comes from the thoughts themselves.  
Set the weight down.  
Let go...over and over.  
Be present - totally present.  
Feel gratitude.  
Give!  
Laugh!  
Walk on!

The journey is richer than I could ever have imagined.

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1 Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)*. North Point Press, New York, 1991 p. 16



### Perceiving the Bull

I hear the song of the nightingale.

The sun is warm, the wind is mild, willows are green along the shore.

Here no bull can hide!

What artist can draw that massive head, those majestic horns?

Comment:

When one hears the voice, one can sense its source. As soon as the six senses merge, the gate is entered. Wherever one enters one sees the head of the bull! This unity is like salt in water, like colour in dyestuff. The slightest thing is not apart from self.

# WHAT IS ZEN?

Sean  
Loughman

Some years ago, I was delighted by the opening question posed by a newcomer at a Dharma Cafe<sup>1</sup> gathering. He asked, “What is Zen?” It dispensed with niceties and cut straight to the marrow. Truly a question in the spirit of Zen. This disarmingly innocent and direct question can be answered in many ways. But it is also an eternal question asked many times and in many ways, demanding and deserving of a timeless response.

This is how I like to imagine it might have played out, in some long-forgotten hut on some unforgiving mountain slope. The final line is for you to complete!

*A monk asked, “What is Zen?”*

*“Excellent question!”, replied the teacher. “Sit with it for a thousand kalpas, let it grow and grow until it can no longer fit inside your head and you will attain the Way!”*

*The monk returned, after what seemed an eternity.*

*“Well, what is Zen?”, asked the teacher. The monk smiled slightly and answered rhetorically, “What is not Zen?”*

*“You have made progress. But then what is not Zen?”, demanded the teacher. The monk opened his mouth, but nothing came out.*

*“Study this question day and night; the answer is close.”*

*The monk eventually came back.*

*“‘Zen’ is not Zen”, declared the monk.*

*“Ah! But I am not interested in what Zen isn’t.” “I want to know what Zen is!”, demanded the teacher.*



Section of Pure and Remote View of Streams and Mountains, 13th century, by Xia Gui.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A wide-ranging discussion evening held by SZC

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia. Copyright expired. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xia\\_Gui](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xia_Gui)

*A monk, meeting with some existential crisis, faces a wall for several years, wrestling with a question until one day –KABOOM– his mind breaks open and he is freed of suffering and delusion.*

Begun by the Buddha and cemented in the legends of Tang dynasty China, though just one of the many paths to awakening, this formula has become a Zen trope because of the dramatic and monumental struggle it describes. Yet, other meditation practices and religions lay claim to freedom from suffering and delusion. So, how is Zen different? The fact is, Zen is just one of many paths to the top of the spiritual summit. What is different is that Zen offers a solution that does not rely on belief in the unprovable like traditional religions, or knowledge like science and our current faith in technology, but on the “dropping away” of impediments to the insight into the fundamental emptiness of our world. This insight manifests as a transformation of the mind and subsequently of your entire being.

The mind can change in many ways, but Zen strives for perhaps the most radical transformation of all: the extinction of what we perceive as self. This transformation is the crux of Zen, but is also what it shares with other branches of Buddhism and some religions. All the other qualities associated with Zen derive from this primary principle. The Zen tradition has a number of techniques that it believes are the most effective, but how you get there is not important. Some religions arrive at the same place, but through different means. Conversely, some meditation practices share techniques with Zen, but do not aspire to the same ends.

One such meditation practice is

mindfulness. It is easy to equate mindfulness with Zen because mindfulness is simultaneously a characteristic of the awakened state, a technique that can settle (and even awaken) the mind and the name of a teaching with its own set of techniques and objectives. The technique of mindfulness is like shining a torch on an object in a darkened room. The torch can be used to illuminate just the object or even the whole room. But the awakened mind does not need a torch because the blinds have been opened and sunlight naturally illuminates the whole room. Even after the room has been illuminated, there are further cascading transformations of the mind. Where many other teachings stop at an illuminated object or room, Zen expects you to know what to do with this well-lit room.

The answer to this is neatly summarised in the first line of the Great Vows:

*The many beings are numberless, I vow to save them;*

Put another way, being mindful does not necessarily mean you have seen through the illusion of self, but being freed of self removes all impediments to mindfulness. One is a conscious exercise, the other is without effort. Mindfulness is one example of practising the outward manifestations of Zen in order to reach (again and again) the source from which buddhas are born. Don't throw away that torch just yet.

The Zen path is often perceived as minimalist in its ritual, teaching and aesthetic. And in many ways it is, though the awakened state is, by all accounts, anything but. And yet, the Zen path to awakening has quite an elaborate framework of rules, scriptures and ritual.

However, they are - at one level - just a framework, the outward forms of practice; often broken, burnt and bent by enlightened beings.<sup>2</sup>

Seung Sahn recounts the story of Sul<sup>3</sup>, a young lay woman who attains realisation. Sul was a devout Buddhist, who would bow and chant everyday. One day, to her father's surprise, she stops observing all ritual and is even found sitting irreverently on her copy of the Lotus Sutra (an aptly symbolic act)! Her father seeks the advice of the great teacher, Mazu, who realises what has happened. Sul has discovered the buddha within all things, not just in sutras and statues. Upon instruction from Mazu, when she is ready, she resumes her bowing and chanting.

This story illustrates the role of Zen liturgy as a vessel that contains something far greater than can fit within it. When we smash the vessel, whether it be bowing or a kōan, inside and outside disappear, leaving not-inside-or-outside, which "pervades the whole universe". In much the same manner, Red Pine describes:  
A mantra is like a magic lamp... bringing forth a genie...<sup>4</sup>

What was once a religion for Sul has become something much greater. Likewise, bowing and chanting contain the whole universe and are filled with a profound meaning that is not reliant on intellectual understanding. Am I suggesting that Zen is a religion? Not really. Is Zen a religion? Not really. Does it matter? Not really. But that does not stop people from wondering. Zen can be a religion, if you want it to be. And Zen is not a religion, if you don't want it to be. But I hope that you can see that both views are just that: merely views.

At first, the practice of Zen may seem like going to the gym. Unfamiliar with the rules and procedures, they seem bizarre and meaningless. Taking a good hard look at your self in the mirror is difficult. Your body rebels at the effort, but you know it is good for you. You know there won't be any gains without sustained, personal effort. "No pain, no gain", you hear. This is true at the zendo too, except read more simply, yet with more subtlety: "(there is) no pain, (there is) no gain".

With practice, the delusion that we are masters of our own destiny (or oh! at the very least our own body and mind!) fades, to be replaced by the realisation that we can be masters of this moment and all that it entails. The waves of the mind that we beat up as we flail and struggle to control our situation subside, and the current of life carries us along.

So, what is Zen?

You can chase this question like you chase your shadow, and with enough persistence grasp the ungraspable and kill all the buddhas. Or you could just stop and let go of the question and all that it represents. Either way, you reach the same conclusion and feel the warm sun on your back.

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2 The clear-eyed reader will notice I have created concepts, dichotomies and contradictions where none exist. What remains when we take these away?

3 Dropping Ashes on the Buddha, edited by Stephen Mitchell, © 1976, Grove Press. Excerpt available online: <http://www.zenwomen.com/2008/10/the-story-of-sul.html>. (I am currently seeking more information about this enigmatic character, so if you know something about her, please let me know.)

4 The Heart Sutra: the womb of Buddhas, translated by Red Pine, © 2004, Counterpoint, p. 16.



### Catching the Bull

I seize him with a terrific struggle.

His great will and power are inexhaustible.

He charges to the high plateau far above the cloud mists,

Or in an impenetrable ravine he stands.

Comment:

He dwelt in the forest a long time, but I caught him today! Infatuation for scenery interferes with his direction. Longing for sweeter grass, he wanders away. His mind still is stubborn and unbridled. If I wish him to submit, I must raise my whip.

# DEAR CURIOUS,

Brendon  
Stewart

What can I possibly tell you about my Zen practice? I know this is an easy start off line, it suggests that, with modesty I might tell you something meaningful, something profound or at least offer some guiding insight. I am sometimes asked when people begin to sit how long have I been involved with Zen. It's a question that I reply too with certain vagueness, not because I can't say with any precision but because the time involved hasn't been linear. Now this also isn't a Zen trick; how often one hears the earnest comment that we compromised westerners have been fooled into understanding time and experience as a teleological journey; beginning here and moving towards completion somewhere down the track. But in truth I have lived my life as a journey towards; birthdays, exams finishing, getting married, children being born, saving enough money, taking a holiday, getting older and still today my planning mind thinks up tomorrow's tasks.

Zen hasn't changed the ordinariness of trying to make meaning out of my everyday tooting'n'froing; has 'it' become more acute? I don't think so. I am no more 'there' in the moment of 'itness' than I may ever have been. Yet this said I do notice the experience and I can be aware of the moment. Seems simple enough, but its taken a good while for this ordinariness to break through. Each time I sit on my meditation stool I have the chance to notice the momentary nature of my living.

When my children were very young my Zen practice had no continuity

whatsoever. It was haphazard at best and non-existent for many of the years while learning to be a father. Our Sydney Zen community continued without me, others put in the hard yards building much of our Kodoji retreat, teachers came and went, disputes boiled over and through these times I was busy with my planning mind. A career was imagined and worked on, children turned into teenagers, my marriage matured and within this roundabout of living I would catch a glimpse of my sangha friends toiling away. Our city temple was established and zazen took shape here in Sydney.

What I am trying to tell you about is how a Zen community began to blossom. Zen Buddhism here in Sydney grew out of the 60's and 70's, out of the energy and experimentation that looked like rock'n'roll and psychedelic colour schemes and communes, autonomous houses and friendly engaging Americans. Sangha friends worked in and on a dream, which gradually woke us up and here we are a Zen community. As I write this down I am aware that it reads very much as if there was a beginning and now sometime later we are somewhere 'down the track'. So yes there was a beginning to my Zen practice. And yet in a contrary play with words, Zen practice is all about beginning; beginners mind; starting afresh every time; always coming back to just sitting there.

Sitting where? What I know and what I think about a lot is the sitting practice; the zazen. Sometimes I long for it, stopping my busy scheduling and just come back to the sitting. At these times something



very gladdening takes over, my body relaxes and plans drift in and out, disappear, shape shift and leave off all together. There are other times too when I fidget and struggle with the sitting, I shape shift my body and my mind fixates, this then that – picking and choosing.

And then there is the study. I say this conscious that Zen practice has been described as outside the scriptures and free of prescribed words. Get off the mind road we are told, you can't read your way to awakening. When I heard my first teisho at sesshin some years ago, it was a beautifully composed treatise, evocative and poetically poignant, touching on the beauty of our literature, referencing, what seemed at the time sphinx-like tales from old China and Japan, it drew me in to a special beauty – to the beauty of Zen.

Once upon a time I swept paths fully intending to clear the ground of all litter, no trace of the swirl of dust and fallen leaves. Later I heard a tale about an Abbott who kept sending his young novice student back many time to sweep the Zendo path properly. At length and in despair the young person came to the Abbott; I have swept this path so many times, there isn't a leaf or twig or dead bug to be seen, I have even push back the edge of the falling garden, why is this not proper? A path, (the path) the Abbott explained can never be free of life's litter. There is a beauty, in Japan this is referred to as Wabi-Sabi; a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, incomplete and the Zen student's samu, the physical work is to offer a sweeping that in its beauty leaves behind a trace. This is different to sweeping everything away.

When I started with my Zen practice I had only a hippies account of what Buddhism might be. Now I think of myself as a Buddhist first and then possibly a Zen student. At the end of each formal zazen block we recite the four great vows. For me I make a promise. Together with my sangha friends I say we are going to act in the world. It was Kerry my wife and Zen companion who explained this to me; This acting in the world isn't a presentation of a Koan insight, nor a reflections and interpretations of some complex philosophical treaties like the heart sutra; no, the vows put it bluntly I will Save all beings I will Abandon greed hatred and ignorance, I will Wake Up to the dharma and I will Embody the way (the littered path) of Buddhism.

Teachers are very important; part of our journey together. Finding a teacher is bit like sweeping the path. For a novice it's possible to push at perfection a little too hard. Our practice by tradition is as a lay sangha. We teach each other, returning always to the world, to our friends and 'enemies;' alike. In the book Zen mind, Beginners Mind Shunryu Suzuki says we need some teaching ... but the teaching is (only) some explanation of ourselves. If you are not attached to the teacher, the teacher will show you the way to yourself. And then a good teacher can 'help' you forget yourself. Over the years teachers have come and gone and now we have six very different teachers. Very different characters! Finding your way in amongst them will not be completely harmonious. That's a good thing.

Enjoy your zazen  
Brendon





### Taming the Bull

The whip and rope are necessary,

Else he might stray off down some dusty road.

Being well trained he becomes naturally gentle.

Then, unfettered, he obeys his master.

Comment:

When one thought arises, another thought follows. When the first thought springs from enlightenment, all subsequent thoughts are true. Through delusion, one makes everything untrue. Delusion is not caused by objectivity; it is the result of subjectivity. Hold the nose-ring tight and do not allow even a doubt.

John F.  
Turner

*just on light*  
*a kookaburra ruptures*  
*absurd dreams*



### Riding the Bull Home

Mounting the bull, slowly I return homeward.

The voice of my flute intones through the evening.

Measuring with hand-beats the pulsating harmony, I direct the endless rhythm.

Whoever hears this melody will join me.

Comment:

This struggle is over; gain and loss are assimilated. I sing the song of the village woodsman, and play the tunes of the children. Astride the bull, I observe the clouds above. Onward I go, no matter who may wish to call me back.

# BEGINNER'S MIND

**B**eginner's mind is the mind of Zen. It's right there whether you've been sitting for a just a couple of weeks - undiluted, fresh, curious, open - or if you've been sitting for a thousand years - or at least seven. What is beginner's mind?

*"If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything, it is open to everything",* Shunryu Suzuki wrote in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Suzuki (1904-1971) was a Sōtō Zen monk and teacher who helped popularise Zen Buddhism in the United States, establishing Green Gulch and Tassajara Zen practice centres. *"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,"* he wrote, *"but in the expert's mind there are few".*

Nyogen Senzaki, another pioneering Zen priest, is one of our founding teachers, Choro Nyogen in our second sutra service dedication. It's instructive that the first story in Senzaki and Paul Rep's collaborative book, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, innocently titled *A Cup of Tea*, speaks of beginner's mind.

*One day Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912) received a university professor who'd come to inquire about Zen.*

*Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full and then kept on pouring.*

*The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself.*

*"It is overfull," he said. "No more will go in!" "Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"*

As Suzuki Roshi said, *"If your mind is empty it is open to everything, it's always ready for anything."* The birds, the breeze, our friend's sigh. So, how do we empty our cup, how do we practice readiness?

*A student said to Master Ichu, "Please write for me something of great wisdom." Master Ichu picked up his brush and wrote one word: 'Attention.'*

*The student said, "Is that all?"*

*The master wrote, 'Attention. Attention.'*

*The student became irritable. "That doesn't seem profound or subtle to me."*

*In response, Master Ichu wrote simply, 'Attention. Attention. Attention.'*

*In frustration, the student demanded, "What does this word attention mean?"*

*Master Ichu replied, "Attention means attention."*

Joko Beck, writing of this story, says: *"Attention or awareness is the secret of life, and the heart of practice. Like the student in this story, such a teaching may appear to be disappointing - dry, uninteresting. Where is the juice, the fruit, the glory? But every moment in life is absolute - in itself. That's all there is. There is nothing other than this present moment - and when we don't pay attention to each little this! we miss the whole thing. And this! can be anything - is everything."*

Yes, nothing is left out, no picking and choosing. Turning the key in your ignition. Biting into an apple. Here is beginner's mind - attention, awareness, generosity, bringing everything to bear on this moment, open to everything.

When we begin our Zen training, our practice is bringing our attention to the breath - with the count of one, on the exhalation...with the count of two, with the count of three - bringing everything to this breath in, this breath out.... the entire universe breathes one, breathes two, and we are intimate at last.

Dogen Zenji said: *"Intimate means close and inseparable. There is no gap. Intimacy embraces Buddha ancestors. It embraces you. It embraces the self. It embraces action. It embraces generations. It embraces merit. It embraces intimacy."*

And Debra Seido writes: *"Even though we can label one moment intimate and another not, intimacy in Zen is a facet of the fundamental state in which we actually live; waking up to that truth is the goal of our practice from which compassion and wisdom flow. Zen intimacy rests on the clarification of delusion, the conceptual ideas concerned with 'I am' and 'I am not'. When these dominate the landscape, the 'you' who is a mystery unfolding before me disappears, and we miss the opportunity to experience the vitality and creative fullness of the moment. We stop listening and our patterned responses to life take hold. If we want to understand this intimacy, we need to take a step outside our comfort zone. We learn how to do this in zazen. Exactly because we don't "know" how to "do" zazen, we are already intimate in that very act. No gap, no self."*

*"Treat every moment as your last. It is not preparation for something else," Suzuki Roshi said. "In Japan we have the phrase 'shoshin', which means 'beginner's mind.'" The goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind. Suppose you recite the Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra only once. It might be a very good recitation. But what would happen to you if you recited it twice, three times, four times, or more? You might easily lose your original attitude towards it. The same thing will happen in your other Zen practices. For a while you will keep your beginner's mind, but if you continue to practice one, two, three years or more, although you may improve some, you are liable to lose the limitless meaning of original mind."*

How do we regenerate our beginner's mind when our practice is stale? We may remind ourselves to *"make zazen the spine of our life,"* as Aitken Roshi said, rather than *"will I or will I not sit today? Sit this week? Attend sesshin this year?"* Instead, just like brushing our teeth, we just do it. And in the dojo, we renew our commitment to intimacy - with each period of zazen, bowing to the sangha, and committing to being present as the sangha; bowing to the cushion, and committing to paying attention, moment by moment, to letting go feelings of failure, or thoughts of tomorrow's meeting. Bowing for kinhin, committing to key the steps to the breath, to bringing the foot down with full attention, step by step.

Suzuki Roshi again: *"While you are continuing this practice, week after week, year after year, your experience will become deeper and deeper, and your experience will cover everything you do in your everyday life."*

*The most important thing is to forget all gaining ideas, all dualistic ideas. In other words, just practice zazen in a certain posture. Do not think about anything. Just remain on your cushion without expecting anything. Then eventually you will resume your own true nature. That is to say, your own true nature resumes itself. Because what we call 'I' is just a swinging door, which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. The world is its own magic."*

But - notice his "*without expecting anything*". Even with beginner's mind, open, trusting, curious and ready, there can be subtle, almost imperceptible expectations and disappointments. I'll never get this thing called realisation, I'm not cut out for this, I'm not good enough, wise enough, intuitive enough, I can't do this', thoughts which burble on and on until, at last, you pay attention and notice - again - that they are all about yourself.

*Enough. Enough.*

*These few words are enough.*

*If not these words,*

*this breath.*

*If not this breath*

*this opening up*

*to the life we have refused*

*until now*

*again and again.*

*Until now.*

*Until now.*

David Whyte

The essence of Buddha's mind is open-mindedness, a willingness to let go of old habits and assumptions, and to approach every experience, even if it's one we've had many times before, for the first time - our own Groundhog Day. It is to be open to possibilities, to re-experience the freshness we felt when we were true beginners, the sense of wonder and delight, beautifully captured in this prayer from Michael Leunig:

*God give us rain*

*when we expected sun.*

*Give us music*

*when we expect trouble.*

*Give us tears*

*when we expect breakfast.*

*Give us dreams*

*when we expect a storm.*

*Give us a stray dog*

*when we expect congratulations.*

*God, play with us,*

*turn us sideways and around.*



### The Bull Transcended

Astride the bull, I reach home.

I am serene. The bull too can rest.

The dawn has come. In blissful repose,

Within my thatched dwelling I have abandoned the whip and rope.

Comment:

All is one law, not two. We only make the bull a temporary subject. It is as the relation of rabbit and trap, of fish and net. It is as gold and dross, or the moon emerging from a cloud. One path of clear light travels on throughout endless time.

# THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

Maggie  
Gluek

Denkoroku Case 31

The Thirty-First Patriarch, Dai I Zenji

*The Thirty-First Patriarch, Dai I Zenji, made his bows before Kanchi Daishi, and said, "I beg the compassion of Your Reverence. Please teach me the Dharma way of emancipation."*

*The Patriarch said, "Who is binding you?"*

*The Master said, "No-one is binding me."*

*The Patriarch said, "Then why should you search for emancipation?"*

*Hearing this, the master had great realization.*

In his Instructions for the Zen cook Dogen talks about *Kishin*, Joyful Mind. A joyful spirit, he says, is grateful and buoyant. He reminds us of how incredibly fortunate we are to have found the Dharma and to be able to nurture the Three Treasures.<sup>1</sup>

We proceed along this path, pulling weeds as we go, grateful to be able to serve and share as this very particular body. This body which, once you subtract self-centered preoccupations, is not weighed down. Why search for emancipation? Why practice, why attend a zazenkai or go to sesshin? I recently came across these words of Sally's which I had written down: *Going to sesshin is to find within all the seeming difficulties the joy that is always there.* The joy that is always there, suffusing the search itself. Not an emotion, not contingent, but the deepest appreciation of what is. The Buddha's joy when he saw the morning star and he exclaimed:

*Oh, wonderful! wonderful! Now I see that all beings of the universe are the Tatagatha!*

The core joy is the core realisation that there is no binding, that you were never in prison--you were never who you thought anyway!--and intimacy is everywhere.

Hakuin in his commentary on the Heart Sutra has this to say regarding Kanjizai (aka Kanzeon, Avalokitesvara) the Bodhisattva of Free and Unrestricted Seeing:

*Why, it's the Bodhisattva of Butuoyan! The Great Fellow supplied to each and every person. Nowhere on earth can you find a single unfree soul. You cough. You spit. You move your arms. You don't get others to help you. Who clapped chains on you? Who's holding you back? Lift up your left hand--you may just scratch a Buddha's neck. Raise your right hand--when will you be able to avoid touching a dog snout?<sup>2</sup>*

Ikkyū is said to have written:

*With just one glance at the figure of Miss Original Face*

*Standing there, you will fall in love with her*

*That's it, it's irrevocable. You're in the relationship for good.*

---

1 Zen Master Dogen and Koshō Uchiyama, Thomas Wright, trans. *Refining Your Life* (New York: Weatherhill, 1987), pp.88-89

2 Norman Waddell, trans. *Zen Words for the Heart: Hakuin's Commentary on the Heart Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), p.16



Whatever obscurations you may have uncovered thus far, the process never ends. Those pesky delusions and attachments are rather hard-wired. They keep popping up so you can keep putting them to rest, keep acknowledging that it's okay--from the beginning actually. Keep learning. Anxiety is samsara, I heard a Tibetan Buddhist teacher say. Fear is useful if you're talking about running into a grizzly bear when you're camping, but when arising as the desperate clinging to, the defense of that chimaera - *I, me, mine* - it's a straightjacket. What will happen to *me* ....if I am exposed? (Today this worry is called "impostor syndrome!") If she doesn't love me? If I don't understand? If I let go? I imagine each of us has some kind of anxious litany, perhaps buried beyond recognition but manifesting in strong, physical tension and dis-ease. Too much mental energy wasted here on behalf of noone! But then again, perhaps fear is just an old friend that needs to be understood. After all, samsara *is* nirvana.

Joanne Kyger writes:

*I will not be intimidated*

*by myself*

*Outflanked by, upstaged by*

*this former self of yesterday*

*which left a pretentious array*

*of books to read, sources to pull*

*the western mind into shape.* <sup>3</sup>

The power and virtue of the Chan literature and teaching is precisely to pull the western mind out of shape. Self-declared as a tradition "beyond words and letters", it expands and even overturns the function of language, using words to open rather than circumscribe reality, challenging you to step outside stale conventional meaning, the binding. Surprise! It can be freeing as well as confounding. This is the domain of koans and, of course, of poetry, and of play.

*What is the Dao?* someone asked Yunmen

The Master replied, *To break through the word.*

*What is it like when one has broken through?*

Yun Men: *A thousand miles, the same mood.*

Those who are not trying to maintain an identity, not fixed to a particular role or story about self, are freed to move outside convention generally, not just linguistic. What others might think of *me* is no longer a concern. The fool is a strong archetype here. Not the fool that is easily deceived--though that may just be a form of innocence - but more commonly the fool of no mind. Are you in or out of your right mind?

Anyone who has ever acted as Jikijitsu will know the Verse of the Han, that hangs above the wooden Board that is struck to signal "time to go into the dojo":

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3 Joanne Kyger, *Again, Poems 1989-2000* (Albuquerque: La Alameda Press, 2001), p. 65

*Completely freed from yes and no;  
great emptiness charged within;  
no questions, no answers;  
like a fish, like a fool.*  
Just CRACK!

I remember John Tarrant insisting that you not be afraid to make a fool of yourself, to fall flat on your face, to *not* know. Conventionally people are afraid of being judged by others, afraid that they might not be able to maintain a positive sense of self. In many of the stories there are assemblies of monks and the teacher asks someone to say something and no-one says anything for fear of being seen to be stupid. Some of us recall an occasion a few years back when the Diamond Sangha teachers' meeting was in Sydney. There was a panel discussion hosted by Zen Open Circle for which four or five teachers sat up the front to receive questions, a kind of open dokusan. People were slow, reluctant perhaps to come forward. Finally someone asked Sexton Bourke something to the effect of "Why are people afraid to come up and ask a question?" and he responded, "They think there's a self that's going to die."

We have plenty of role models in our Chan ancestors and teachers, individuals who became complete fools, strolling or leaping through the landscape, joyful, utterly at ease, with no fixed address to adhere to. And legendary worthies who lived unconventionally. Remember Bird's Nest Roshi, a Tang dynasty character who did zazen in a tree? There's a story about him that bears retelling. The poet and politician Po Chu-i found him sitting up there one day and called *Oh, Bird's Nest, you look very insecure to me up there*, Bird's Nest looked down and replied, *Oh Governor, you look very insecure to me down there. Tell me*, said the poet, *What is it that all the Buddhas taught?* Bird's Nest Roshi replied by quoting from the Dhammapada: *Always do good; never do evil; keep your mind pure--thus all the Buddhas taught.* So Po Chu-i said, *Always do good; never do evil; keep your mind pure* - I knew that when I was three years old. Yes, said Bird's Nest Roshi, *A three-year old child may know it, but even an eighty year old man cannot put it into practice.*

Some had unconventional mealtime rituals. Before each meal Master Chin Niu himself would bring the rice bucket to the zendo, dance and laugh loudly, saying "*Little Bodhisattvas, come and eat your rice!*" What was his meaning? (He was not being cordial, says the commentator.)

Some lived outside society altogether. Famous in ink paintings are the mountain recluse and poet, Han Shan, along with his friend Shih-tou, broom in hand—"ragged, wild-haired characters, cackling over the cosmic joke."<sup>4</sup>

If there is truly nothing to lose (as well as nothing to gain), well then, you can relax. Really relax. In the midst of activity, there is non-doing, no-doer. One of the classic images for this is from the 10 Oxherding Pictures, a series of images and poems which present different steps along the way of practice in searching for, finding, taming and

incorporating the Ox that is your very own true nature. Having made him your own, you ride him home, trilling on your bamboo flute.

*Shields and spears are gone; winning and losing are nothing again.  
You sing woodsmen's village songs and play children's country tunes.  
Stretched out on back of your ox, you gaze at the sky.  
We call you but you won't turn around, catch at you but you won't be tied down.*

And of course these stories function as metaphor. To live with no fixed address, with ease and joy, is to be entirely at home wherever you are and whatever you're doing. Which may be within an entirely conventional context, wherein there is nothing eccentric, no self-declared "Zen person." No person at all.

The Taiwanese Chan Master Sheng Yen tells the story of a someone who goes to meet a reknowned teacher who lives on a mountain. At the foot of the mountain he encounters an old monk laying manure and inquires officiously after the important master he is seeking. The monk says, in effect, "Why would you bother about him? It's not worth the trip. He's nothing." The visitor angrily reprimands him for insulting such an eminent Zen teacher. "Suit yourself, then" replies the old monk. "The path is over that way." When the man gets to the top of the mountain and asks the whereabouts of the master, he is told that the master is at the foot of the mountain laying manure. <sup>5</sup>

This is equally you on your computer, making a sandwich, taking out the trash, cleaning the toilet, isn't it? No special time or place. No ordinary or not-ordinary. Just fresh! To appreciate the unique particularity and often condensed joy of this moment is everyone's privilege. This is, I think, where haiku originates.

From a plane:

*Fully being with what is  
fully being with not wanting to  
fully be with what is*

From a haiku poet: <sup>6</sup>

*let the sunshine  
of that wattle  
bloom in me*

*the sky speaking  
through a muffler of clouds  
something about rain*

---

5 Chan Master Sheng Yen, *The Method of No Method* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), pp. 77-78

6 [dianajumpsintoaiku.blogspot.com](http://dianajumpsintoaiku.blogspot.com)

And as a tale of the moment of condensed joy, this beloved chestnut always bears re-telling:

*A man travelling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.*

*Two mice, one white and one black little by little, started to gnaw away the vine The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted! <sup>7</sup>*

That would be your life at any given second, hanging over the precipice, mortality certain, limitations inevitable, perhaps the circumstances desperate, and still the essence remains unbound. That's the cliff edge of birth and death, where we practice. (In this story, literally!)

Philip Whalen—a SF poet, a Beat, teacher at SFZC, friend of Joanne Kyger, himself a playful iconoclast, now gone, now here with us, wrote this poem of gratitude. In his lovely calligraphy with ink drawing.

#### *HYMNUS AD PATREM SINENSIS*

*I praise those ancient Chinamen  
Who left me a few words,  
Usually a pointless joke or a silly question  
A line of poetry drunkenly scrawled on the margin  
                    of a quick splashed picture--bug, leaf,  
                    caricature of a Teacher--  
On paper held together now by little more than ink  
& their own strength brushed momentarily over it.*

*Their world and several others since  
Gone to hell in a handbasket, they knew it--  
Cheered as it whizzed by--  
& conked out among the busted spring rain cherry blossom winejars  
Happy to have saved us all. <sup>8</sup>*

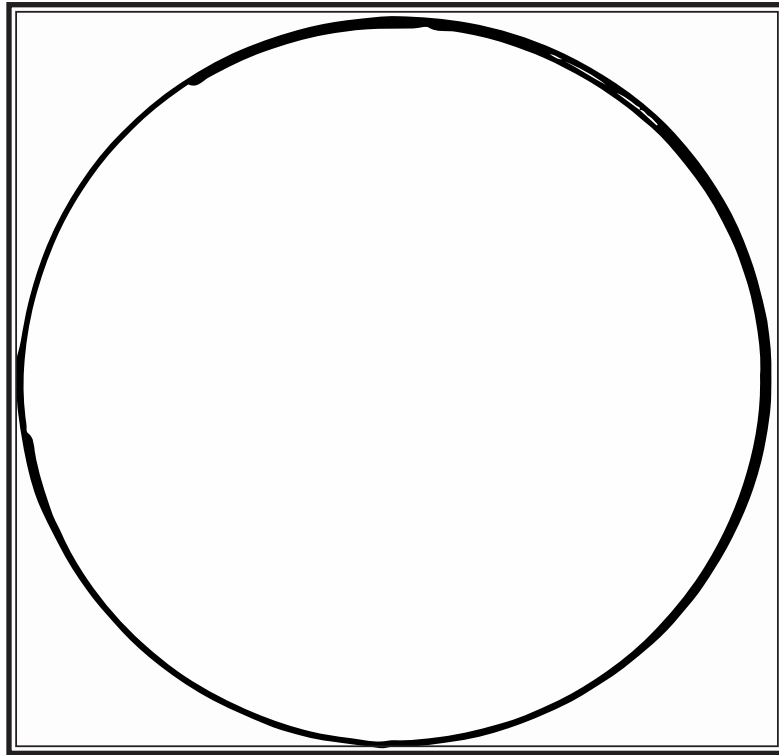
Over and over you yourself realise that it is play. That it is in play, as Aitken Roshi puts it, that Zen students celebrate as one the substantial teaching of all the buddhas and its empty content. Happy to have saved us all!

I wish you joy and stupidity!

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7 Paul Reys, ed. *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1975), p. 32

8 Philip Whalen, *Canoeing Up Cabarga Creek* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996), p. 13



Both Bull and Self Transcended

Whip, rope, person, and bull - all merge in No-thing.

This heaven is so vast no message can stain it.

How may a snowflake exist in a raging fire?

Here are the footprints of the patriarchs.

Comment:

Mediocrity is gone. Mind is clear of limitation. I seek no state of enlightenment. Neither do I remain where no enlightenment exists. Since I linger in neither condition, eyes cannot see me. If hundreds of birds strew my path with flowers, such praise would be meaningless.

# XINGYANG'S NONATTAINED BUDDHA

Peter  
Bursky

Wumenguan Case 9

Xingyang's Nonattained Buddha

*A monk asked the priest Xingyang of Qingrang,  
"The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom did zazen on the  
Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself  
and he could not attain Buddhahood. Why was this?"*

*Xingyang said, "Your question is exactly to the point."*

*The monk said, "But he did zazen on the Bodhi Seat; why couldn't he attain  
Buddhahood?"*

*Xingyang said, "Because he is a nonattained Buddha." <sup>1</sup>*

Wumen's Comment:

*I approve the Old Barbarian's realization,  
but I don't approve his understanding.*

*If an ordinary person understands, he or she is thus a sage.*

*If a sage understands, he or she is thus an ordinary person.*

**T**his case features the little known Master Xingyang of Qingrang mountain, a 10th century Chinese zen master said to be the last known heir in the Guiyang school of zen.

The encounter is the only existing dialogue we have with Xingyang, but it gives a pretty clear indication as to what his teaching style might have been like. In this case he seems cool, settled and quite effortless, maybe someone not too worried about passing on the torch. He was a student of Master Bajiao, who we meet later in case 44 of this collection. It is said the Guiyang line ended with Xingyang, and the house was soon after absorbed into the Linji school. However, this is a later take on the history of the early days of Zen in China, and today's case offers a challenge to such ways of seeing things.

As for the content of this case, it might be wise for me to give a quick summary of the context from which the monk's question is derived and how the original story has been flipped on its head by Master Xingyang, so that he may offer some assistance to the monk, and all of us, in this dialogue.

*"The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom did zazen on the  
Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself  
and he could not attain Buddhahood."*

The monk here is quoting almost directly from chapter seven of the Lotus sutra, sometimes called “The Parable of the Magic City”, which is one of those highly lavish tales full of all the bells and whistles one might expect from a vibrant and colourful Mahayana text.

The story begins with Shakyamuni Buddha giving a long-winded explanation of how the time in which the Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom lived goes so far back that it is almost inconceivable to imagine how long ago that actually is. For those, like myself, without the patience to appreciate the Buddha’s long and detailed description, he also offers it in verse form:

*“When I think of it, in the past, immeasurable, boundless kalpas ago, there was a Buddha, most honored of two-legged beings, named Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom. If a person should use his strength to smash the ground of the thousand-million-fold world, should completely crush its earth particles and reduce them all to powdered ink, and if when he passed through a thousand lands he should drop one speck of ink, and if he continued in this manner until he had exhausted all the specks of ink, and if one then took the soil of the lands he had passed through, both those he dropped a speck in and those he did not, and once more ground their earth into dust, and then took one grain of dust to represent one kalpa—the number of tiny grains of dust would be less than the number of kalpas in the past when that Buddha lived. Since that Buddha passed into extinction, an immeasurable number of kalpas such as this have passed.”<sup>2</sup>*

The Buddha then offers a capping phrase to his description of this inconceivable distance of ancient time, saying, “And yet, I remember it as if it were right now”.

And so with Shakyamuni having set up, or at least hinting at a relationship between the incalculable past and the present moment, he then moves into a description of Buddha Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom’s long and arduous practice and how he did indeed attain nothing at all, even after ten kalpas of practice. That seems to be maybe where the monk in our case stopped reading, and putting his own copy of the sutra down, thought to himself, “Shit, this is going to take a very, very long time”.

It is here the original story and our case part ways. It seems the gods had had enough of waiting around and decided to step in, and they created a lion throne that allowed the Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing wisdom to soon after attain complete and perfect enlightenment. Perhaps, like us most of the time, all he needed was a little help from the sangha.

And so, although flowers rained down from the heavens, and a fragrant wind from time to time swept away the withered flowers as fresh ones rained down, the Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom simply continued to practice for another

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2 Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra* (NY: Columbia Univ. Press 1993), p. 118-119



ten kalpas, unperturbed. Time is not the issue it seems, but to be at ease in the flow of time is to be one with cause and effect.

*“The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom did zazen on the Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas”...*

So far, so good. We might say this guy really went for it! A predominant belief in our culture is that life shouldn't be easy, and we should struggle hard to get what we want. If it wasn't hard, you didn't earn it and you can not appreciate it. That might seem somewhat true if we think we've achieved something great when we have a breakthrough in our practice, but in my experience insights almost never come from grinding your teeth and holding tightly onto something, you open up to them when you let go and realise what you've struggled after is not something to be attained. The practice is one of continually letting go, and each stage along the way is a hint, to let go, let go. Eventually we develop faith in that process because it works.

Most of us can agree that If we define ourselves by our achievements and look for security in conquering a world that continually seems to move further and further out of reach, at some point we will probably end up tired and unhappy.

The Buddha nailed that when he set forth the second noble truth - That you set up the cause for suffering when you hold onto the belief that there's something better than the way things are right now, something better to attain. Once we desire to attain something we set up a future event, and therefore a present, and a past. Set that in motion and ten kalpas is a very long time. Buddhahood is an aeon away.

In fact, everything we do may seem like ten kalpas away if we are never really settled. Although the time may come for renunciation, and as mentioned before letting go is a BIG part of our practice here, nonattainment can not be forced, it is simply becoming intimate with the way things truly are. With faith in times passing, knowing deeply that everything comes and goes, we develop a deeper sense of gratitude for this precious human life.

With that in mind, how does *“The Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not attain Buddhahood”* make us feel? And “Why?” asks the monk, was there no manifestation or attainment of the Buddha Dharma? Even after ten kalpas.

Judging by the monk's response, it seems the 10th century wasn't that much different from the Buddha's time, nor our own, in terms of our fundamental human problem of wanting a better situation.

Caught by old man time, the monk is obviously quite disturbed by the fact that ten kalpas of zazen couldn't get a Buddha anywhere. Hakuin Zenji was similarly stuck when as a young monk he heard the tale of Master Yantou's death at the hand of bandits...

*“It was a very disheartening discovery”* He recalls. *“After all, Yantou was said to be the kind of person who comes along only once in 500 years: he was truly one of the dragons of his age. If it were possible for such a man to be assaulted and killed by common bandits while he was still alive, how could an ordinary garden-variety monk like me hope to avoid falling into the three evil paths after I died? A buddhist monk, I*



*concluded, had to be the most useless creature on earth”*<sup>3</sup>

We will soon find out however that there's nothing at all out of the ordinary with a statement such as *“The Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not attain Buddhahood”* It's just that we've just never really been brought up to think or see in any other way. What if we did just leave it at *“The Dharma of the Buddha does not manifest itself and you can not attain Buddhahood”*?

Who would you be then? What would your practice be like? In light of this statement, what's your own practice got to show for itself?

Once a monk named Huichao (whose name means 'surpassing wisdom') asked Fayen, *“What is Buddha?”* Fayen said, *“You are Huichao.”*

And at another time a monk again asked Fayen, *“What is the style of the ancient Buddhas?”*, Fayen said, *“Where can it not be completely seen?”*<sup>4</sup>

You are you, where can you not find your true self? Take this onto your own Bodhi seat and feel that freedom right there.

Xingyang said, *“Your question is exactly to the point.”*

Let's rephrase the monk's question again, this time as a statement...

*“The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom did zazen on the Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not attain Buddhahood.”*

Yes! Yes! Of course, most definitely!

Sitting with 'supremely pervading' or 'surpassing wisdom' in your practice, you may eventually find that nothing else is needed beyond what you already have, or are for that matter, even that much desired Buddhahood may not be needed anymore.

With a masterful casualness characteristic of the Guiyang school of Zen to which Xingyang represents, the master simply replies with *“Your question is exactly to the point”*. By this stage you may have picked up on what Xingyang is getting at here, but the integration of that fundamental truth so it becomes as easy as *“Your question is exactly to the point”* may or may not take a kalpa or two. No rush though! Attaining it is not really the point. The Japanese Zen Master Bankei, whose Unborn teaching resonates quite deeply with today's theme once said, *“You are Buddhas to begin with. There's no way for you to become Buddhas now for the first time”*.<sup>5</sup> Even though when “Mu” breaks open it might seem like the first time, the real shift occurs when you realise “Mu” itself has been active a lot longer than that.

The question was exactly to the point because just doing zazen is the point entirely. Supremely Pervading Buddhas, Surpassing Wisdom Buddhas, a jewel encrusted bodhi seat and the immeasurable past ten kalpas are all just helpful pointers that skillfully make use of language to open you up to a broader more inclusive way of seeing things. Xingyang is saying *“Where you are sitting is Supremely Pervading, you already have The Surpassing Wisdom right where you are”*.

If that's the case then, how do you present it?.

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3 Norman Waddell, *Wild Ivy* (Boston. Shambala Pub. 1999), p. 18

4 Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage* (Massachusetts. Wisdom Pub. 2011), p. 344

5 Norman Waddell, *The Unborn* (New York. North Point Press. 2000), p. 138

The question is exactly to the point.

The monk said, *“But he did zazen on the Bodhi Seat; why couldn’t he attain Buddhahood?”*

Sorry mate, but the zafu won’t scratch your back no matter how much you sit on it. When Dogen was young he often wondered what the point of practice was if everyone was intrinsically already enlightened. Eventually he came to realise that practice and realisation are not separate, and that practice is realisation. All Buddhas are practising Buddhas, and the dharma can never be attained in the sense that it is something outside of yourself. As far as Dogen is concerned, when you sit silently on your cushion, nothing more is needed.

The Korean Master Seung Sahn commented on this case saying, “The Huayan Sutra states, “Each mote particle has Buddha-nature, so everything has already become Buddha.” If someone wants to become Buddha, this is already a big mistake. So, be careful”<sup>6</sup>

Referring to the grand story-line of the Lotus sutra that this case quotes from, Nyogen Senzaki says in his commentary on this case that the monk *“could not enjoy the beauty of the dharma”*.<sup>7</sup>

The state of the monk’s process with this question is very reflective of what we all struggle with in our lives, not just in practice, but in the world as well. Although we endeavor to embody practice and realisation in our everyday lives, we are still not immune to the seemingly maddening culture of attainment and we encounter it constantly in our relationships with others. When we begin to let our zazen penetrate deeper into our lives, moments of anger, sadness and pain may make us question our practice. *“This shouldn’t be happening, I’ve been meditating for 20 years now!”* or *“Learn how to drive ya fuckin idiot!”* - *“Shit what a horrible thing to say, where’s my patience!? Surely I’m better than that”*.

Attainment rears its head everywhere. It can create any number of obstacles for us, especially if we’re not clear on what’s actually being presented by the reality of seeing things as they are. Recognising the life current of gain and loss however is our practice. It is our practice and realisation.

The monk said, *“But he did zazen on the Bodhi Seat; why couldn’t he attain Buddhahood?”* Xingyang said, *“Because he is a nonattained Buddha.”*

The Vietnamese master, Thich Thanh Tu says, *“Once we create something to attain, then that something is not inherent within us”*.<sup>8</sup>

If you truly want to ask yourself whether or not you can attain Buddhahood or not, you really do have to go beyond this idea of Buddha that you’ve created for yourself. The Buddha that Xingyang is talking about is very different from anything we might conjure with our imagination. We practice to realise a whole other way altogether. Yet we need to be able to present it here and now, as absolutely our everyday lives. Denying something to attain something else will not do, the whole storyline must be dropped.

6 Paul Lynch, Wumenguan (Cali. Before Thought Pub. 2010), p. 29

7 Nyogen Senzaki, Eloquent Silence (Massachusetts. Wisdom Pub. 2008), p. 70

8 Thich Thanh Tu, Heart Sutra Lecture (Cali. Thien Vien Dieu Nhan 200?), p. 110

It's quite easy to say that, but to actualise it when we go and sit on our cushions is something else all together. In a way It's quite profound really, just to sit still and be as you are.

There is one part of the Heart Sutra I really like, and it occurs right when you think Guanyin is going to give you something to latch onto, that something being some sort of conception of emptiness, or something else other than. After expounding the nature of emptiness to Shariputra, denying the inherent existence of anything at all, Guanyin ends the foregoing *"In emptiness there is no this, no that" part of the sutra with "no knowledge, no attainment"*. Some versions of the text also have "no non-attainment" so that the stickiness of "non-attainment" doesn't become a problem for us.

The text continues, *"Therefore, Shariputra, without attainment, bodhisattvas take refuge in Prajnaparamita and live without walls of the mind. Without walls of the mind and thus without fears, they see through delusions and finally nirvana"*<sup>9</sup>

Put simply, if there is no origin of suffering, how can there be a way out of it, some sort of special attainment we can acquire. But it's not that suffering just disappears. As it says earlier in the sutra, emptiness is not in any way separate from form. There are suffering Buddhas too, just as there are non attained Buddhas, and when it goes all the way through, suffering is also the Great Way. Guanyin still hears the cries of the world.

So what is a non attained Buddha? Definitely not someone who tries to get rid of everything, there's still the stickiness of "Non-attaining" there.

Someone once asked Xingyang's great great dharma grandfather Yangshan, *"May I hear the principle of attaining mind?"*

Yangshan said, *"If you want to attain mind, then there's no mind that can be attained. It is this unattainable mind that is known as truth"*. That unattainable mind is very much what Xingyang is talking about.

When I am aware of myself sitting here right now, that awareness is 'non-attained buddha'. Also, the non-separation between that awareness and the entire phenomenal world is 'non-attained Buddha'. We need not be concerned with whether the Buddha way has manifested or not because that concern simply doesn't arise as a concern that can bother that truth, it's just something else that comes and goes, another aspect of our essential nature, free to be itself.

Not attaining is just being like this. The Buddha dharma is clearly manifested.

Wu-men's comment:

*"I approve the Old Barbarian's realization,  
but I don't approve his understanding.  
If an ordinary person realizes, he or she is thus a sage.  
If a sage understands, he or she is thus an ordinary person."*

*"I approve the old barbarians realization, but I don't approve his understanding"*

When you take up zen practice, you work your way through a schedule that's mapped out somewhat by the tradition, based on certain experiences all students have shared throughout the centuries.

A good teacher will offer guidance on the path. But whether you get through all those koans, stages of insight, asana or breathing exercises is besides the point - Practice and realisation are not separate.

In case six of this same collection of koans we are told that at one of the Buddha's sermon's he simply picked a flower from the earth and twirled it before the assembled audience. Mahakasyapa, one of the Buddha's disciples, simply smiled. The only one out of the entire assembly. This was apparently enough for the Buddha to name Mahakasyapa as his successor and trustee of the Buddha Way thereafter, and this incident, although said to be a later addition to the tradition, sets in motion the entire zen lineage to come.

But what exactly did Mahakasyapa attain? What is that smile, really?

*"I don't know"*, Bodhidharma a.k.a "The Old Barbarian", might reply with. So how then can it transform our lives?

Aitken roshi called that smile 'Right Dharma', and said when a person comes into the dokusan room with that grin across their face, it's unmistakable.

After Hakuin Zenji heard the story of Yantou, he decided he might as well give up and make a name for himself in the poetry and calligraphy circles of his time. But this was a short lived distraction for him however, and he eventually returned to his rigorous routine of zazen. One night, the last on a solo retreat in which he hid himself in a shrine room for seven days, the boom of a distant temple bell reached his ears. "My body and mind completely dropped away" he recalls, "and I rose clear of even the finest dust. Overwhelmed with joy, I hollered at the top of my lungs, "Old Yantou is alive and well!" <sup>10</sup>

There's nothing esoteric about Hakuin's statement, it's precisely to the point. He finally saw the Old Barbarian intimately, and they both approved each other.

*"If an ordinary person realizes, he or she is thus a sage. If a sage understands, he or she is thus an ordinary person."*

We might say that what the ordinary person realises is the realm of non-attained buddha, the supremely pervading, surpassing wisdom. This is what Xingyang is trying to wake us up to. The flipside of that, understanding in the relative sense only, refers to the monk's state of mind and his inability to break free from the realm of the intellect. But I can't help feel though that Wu-men is offering some sort of caution to us not to get caught up in only this way of seeing things. Even saying that ultimately there's no difference between the two, sage and ordinary person, feels a little sticky if you think you can still give it an extra push. Sometimes you're an ordinary person buddha completely free to realise, and sometimes you're a sage buddha completely free to understand.

Wu-men's verse:

*"Better than knowing the body is knowing the mind in peace;  
When the mind is realized, the body is no longer anxious.  
When body and mind are fully realized,  
The saintly hermit declines to become a noble".*

*"Better than knowing the body is knowing the mind in peace"*

I thought about paraphrasing this with, "better than knowing the world of form, the phenomenal world, is knowing the world of no form, of emptiness". This is the realm of the Supremely Pervading buddha. It is close, but still not quite the Wisdom that surpasses.

Seeing the empty one world can bring about a clarity and peace to our everyday lives. We see everything for what it's worth. Nothing in the way it seems, nothing to worry about. Nothing at all, supremely pervading emptiness. Wumen's inclusion of the word 'better' seems to set this up nicely. Seeing into emptiness is the beginning of bringing your life into balance from the more often than not default position world of form. In the context of the case, the monk only knew the forms - An ancient buddha, an expensive zafu, ten kalpas of practice.

*"When the mind is realized, the body is no longer anxious."*

One thing we don't have to get anxious about is getting on our cushion. Sure we get distracted and maybe even anxious about what's ahead once the zazen is over, we all must attend and attain the day, but there's something about zazen that you don't need to worry about, something extremely deep yet apparent that can't be expressed even in talking about body and mind. You just sit and that's ok, the entire universe is taken care of. You are free just to be yourself.

*"When body and mind are fully realized, The saintly hermit declines to become a noble."*

Bankei says, "If you harbor the least notion to become better than you are or the slightest inclination to seek something, you turn your back on the Unborn buddha mind. There's neither joy nor anger in the mind you were born with - only the Buddha-mind with its marvelous illuminative wisdom that enlightens all things".<sup>11</sup>

Ordinary Mind is the Way we are told. But it is indeed special - the hermit in question here is indeed saintly. Bankei's Unborn Buddha Mind is definitely marvelous.



### Reaching the Source

Too many steps have been taken returning to the root and the source.

Better to have been blind and deaf from the beginning!

Dwelling in one's true abode, unconcerned with that without -

The river flows tranquilly on and the flowers are red.

Comment:

From the beginning, truth is clear. Poised in silence, I observe the forms of integration and disintegration. One who is not attached to "form" need not be "reformed." The water is emerald, the mountain is indigo, and I see that which is creating and that which is destroying.

DEAR AMELI,

Ameli  
Tanchitsa

**R**elax... Try to forget everything you know. If you are worried about losing something precious, try not to be. Nothing is ever lost since there was never anything to gain. You don't know this yet but there is skill-full guidance along the way.

For the moment try to forget it all. All the smart stuff. Theories like Information Paradox or Entropy. "No information is ever lost" states one pointing to a black hole. "Any system will dissipate its energy over time and will come to an end" says the other pointing to the Sun. All of this is written with very elegant strings of abstract symbols which your mind is able to find and hold in form, so don't worry. You can always find it and hold it. But just for the moment, try to forget it. Let it go. Just for the brief moment. Because, I would like to show you the practice of forgetting.

Sit firmly, straighten your back and neck, relax your shoulders, put your hands in your lap and let the body breathe. Let go. Just let the things happen of themselves. Let everything arise and fall without effort. Just sit. Let the breathing breathe.

Try to let go of the theory of personality as well. You know the one I am talking about. The theory you have been trying to prove without success. You have been doing all sorts of experiments to define it and all of them have been short of the fulfilling effect. I know this because I was there with you along The Way.

Do you remember the experiment of choosing what dog to get? Please remind me, was it the Afghan Greyhound that suited your personality best or was it the French Bulldog? I remember how seriously you projected this question and the time you worked on it. You were a working dog. Working working working - never getting it done. Frustrated dog. Sit! - - - - Just sit.

Like the sugar cube becoming empty of form when it dissolves in a glass of water - Form becomes No Thing. Taste the water; taste the sweetness. It arises as you are tasting it. Sugar is there and empty in form. Taste of sweetness in your mouth is also there and empty in form. Such is the mind. Capable of creating the most magnificent forms and then shaping itself to these forms. No Thing becomes the thing. Then the thing wants to stay the thing but finds all sorts of problems in being the thing. Then the thing becomes frustrated thing, always working working working to keep itself in the shape of the thing. Or trying to become a better thing. Or avoiding to become some other thing. *Ad infinitum*. This is suffering.

Don't worry about the thing. The practise of forgetting resolves this incessant quest. So, relax dear man. Just sit. Let the breathing breathe. Arrive to the place where you



always are. Truly realising This is all there is. Everything is Here in the endless space of the Now. Relax. Remember. Member. Ember. Mber. Ber. Er. R. Mu.

Let's get back to the forgetting. There is the dog in the practice of forgetting too.

The practice of forgetting will help you dissolve all the possible questions. Ancient, contemporary and future. All of them collapse and expand just like the breathing. You don't know what koans are but you will learn about them and how transformative they can be. You will also learn about the power of precepts and you will have a chance to put them in practice. They also are transformative. You will see to avoid harmful karma to the point of faith. You will discover how great faith is. This is not the faith as you understand it currently - a belief in something yet to eventuate. You will discover faith in the interdependence of this very moment. You will rejoice in the exactness of numberless things just as they are. You will discover that It can't be any different. You will see how to accept and offer This. *Amor Fati* - just as it is. Complete. The Great Peace along The Way. This is liberation.

It asks for a lifetime of rediscovery. Lifetime of forgetting and remembering.

Remembering this is exactly the practice of forgetting.

Here I offer heartfelt words:

Forgetting and remembering

How wonderful when you remember.  
How wonderful when you forget.

*red bricks flying along the window  
train chugs through the suburbs  
"no stopping"*

There is no liberation without suffering.  
And no suffering without liberation.



*whispering "nothing is forever"*  
*liberation and suffering*  
*not a single hair between*

There is no birth.  
And no death.

*no birth*  
*no death*  
*no thing*

Stand up and walk  
in Enso of Abundance  
in Boundless Zazen

There is no Me without Full Moon of Wisdom.  
And no Full Moon of Wisdom without You.

Opening the treasured gate  
The Heart-Mind flows steadily ~  
Seeing Truth in a blink of an eye  
Tears of liberation and suffering ~  
Crystallizing fullness of Dharma  
Each a mirror of Original Face

Breathe with the river tides ~ effortlessly  
Open your eyes with the sunlight ~ mindfully  
Feel the suffering ~ wisely  
Liberate all beings ~ lovingly  
Celebrate this moment ~ wholeheartedly  
Enjoy the company of Dharma friends ~ openly

Have faith in forgetting and remembering  
With gasho this humble moment extends to eternity.

...

John F.  
Turner

*apricot blossoms~  
mostly beyond the reach  
of my nose*



### In the World

Barefooted and naked of breast, I mingle with the people of the world.

My clothes are ragged and dust-laden, and I am ever blissful.

I use no magic to extend my life;

Now, before me, the dead tress become alive.

Comment:

Inside my gate, a thousand sages do not know me. The beauty of my garden is invisible. Why should one search for the footprints of the patriarchs? I go to the market place with my wine bottle and return home with my staff. I visit the wineshop and the market, and everyone I look upon becomes enlightened.



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