

# Mind Moon Circle

*Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre*



Zen and Ageing

WINTER 2019

# Winter 2019

## Zen and Ageing

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**Cover:** Moreton Bay Fig, pencil drawing by Glenys Jackson

The next issue of Mind Moon Circle will be announced in due course.  
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## Winter 2019

### Zen and Aging

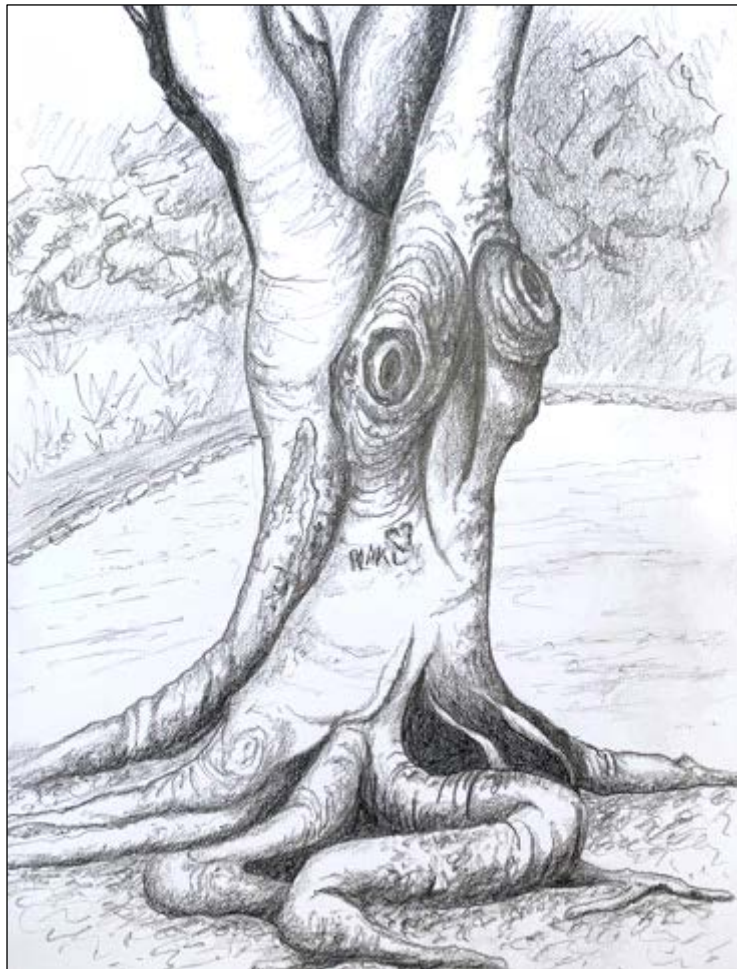
Here is the Winter edition of our MMC journal for 2019. A big thank you to all contributors who have generously offered their reflections on the theme *Zen and Ageing*.

Throughout this edition, we have included photos from the first sesshin in Australia with Roshi Robert Aitken in 1979 through to the present, illuminating Kodoji and our sangha through the ages.

We hope you enjoy this collection of Zen stories and images reflecting on what it is to suffer and to end suffering, to age and to come home.

With love and gratitude,

*Jillian Ball and Janet Selby*



*Moreton Bay Fig, pencil drawing*  
Glenys Jackson

## Teachings from the Field

Maggie Gluek

You might have heard once upon a time the fable of the ant and the grasshopper. When the story begins it is high summer and there is food a-plenty. Still, the ant thinks ahead, wisely gathering provisions to store away for the wintertime when food will be scarce. The grasshopper, on the other hand, lives day to day, singing and playing its fiddle as if there were no tomorrow. Come winter, the ant community is well able to sustain itself. The grasshopper, desperate and starving, must beg them for a meal.

I've always felt rather like the grasshopper, with an aversion to "thinking ahead." Somehow wanting life to surprise me rather than knowing the story ahead of time, wanting to let things happen organically (whatever that means!). Though my procrastinating tendencies and reluctance to forward plan have no doubt irritated family and friends, though lack of foresight may have limited achievement, perhaps there has been some virtue in an attitude that can trust and celebrate joy in the moment.

In this same mode of not taking a long-term view, I haven't thought much about ageing as a phenomenon and still don't really identify as a specific age. The number "70" came as a shock last year because inside, if I had to say, I'd be more likely to nominate "45" or sometimes "12." Who am I anyway? Am I this body? My mother spoke more than once of looking into a shop window, seeing a reflection there and wondering "Who is that old lady?"

Of course, there's undoubtedly virtue in preparation. How quickly the days and years turn! And now it's autumn, with winter suddenly visible on the horizon. Not to mention on my face—those confronting wrinkles. This grasshopper is fortunate, having the security of shelter and food, the support of loved ones, thus far good health. But with ageing the inexorability of impermanence is an increasingly insistent reality. The Buddha's Five Reminders<sup>i</sup> eloquently articulate how it is for each one of us:

I am of the nature to grow old.  
There is no way to escape growing old.

I am of the nature to have ill-health.  
There is no way to escape having ill-health.

I am of the nature to die.  
There is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love  
are of the nature to change.  
There is no way to escape being separated from them.

My actions are my only true belongings.  
I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.  
My actions are the ground on which I stand.

How to prepare in light of these facts? Students of Zen are well-oriented with zazen, a nonstop practice in letting go. Finally with death, after all, everything must be let go of. Tibetan Buddhist scholar and educator Andrew Holoccek<sup>1</sup> points out that the process of ageing itself is a training ground in loss. As the body begins to fail, gradually or suddenly faculties and abilities are lost, activities must be relinquished, friends and loved ones mourned. Thus one is helped in accepting the inevitable complete loss of body and mind, what has been regarded as the self.

At the same time, most significantly, zazen familiarizes us with the dimension of our being that does not die, does not change, that is not young or old for that matter. Isn't this liberation? Who dies? When that reality is perceived, old age and sickness and death lose their sting and we lose our fear. A regular commitment to meditation and study in the Buddhadharma is the best preparation possible for fully appreciating and gracefully walking the path of a human life. That is, right now.

As to our actions, no less right now we can be oriented by the Ten Grave Precepts in what we say and do and think, cultivating wisdom and compassion as the ground on which we stand. A wonderfully positive and creative vocation it is, to hopefully find and share the freedom of no fear, to bring joy. In whatever place or "age" we find ourselves.

A few final musings on ageing. I recently saw an interview with Manuela Carmena, aged 75, lawyer and judge by profession, who was mayor of Madrid and oversaw progressive reforms in that city. She's inspiring. Delightfully frowsy, unpretentious, engaging, talkative, passionate and passionately committed to making the world a better place, she has plenty of new projects on the boil in retirement. She puts a positive spin on ageing, humorously recalling a friend's term "super-adultos" to refer to older people. And she nominates learning as one of life's greatest pleasures and responsibilities. "No matter what age, one must be convinced that there is always more to be learned."

Finally, several recent studies which have followed people across the course of their lives found that as people became older, not surprisingly they became less healthy. But they also had an increasing sense of fulfillment and happiness. Cue the grasshopper! And the ant! Each fulfilled in being just themselves. Who said anything about ageing?

<sup>1</sup> In the *Upajjhata Sutra*.

<sup>2</sup> Tricycle Online Course, *Navigating the Bardos*.

## First Zen Sesshin in Australia, 1979, Burradoo, NSW



*Photo: Tony Coote*

*Standing left to right*

?, Tony Giggins, John Coper, ?, Bob Joyner, ?, ?, Diane Epstein, John Keating, ?, Paul Maloney, George Pugh, ?, ?, ?.

*Seated from left to right*

Marion Bagot (partially obscured), Kim Bagot, ?, Sandy Dresden, Maxine Keogh, Robert Aitken Roshi, Diana Levy, ?, Michael Keiren (came with Roshi), Michael Hallal, Patrick Kearny, ?.



## Myth

Sue Bidwell

Deep inside,  
never seen,  
filtering, filtering;  
their final output audible.  
I marvel at the sound.  
I marvel too that  
kidney cells  
are entirely  
kidney cells;  
not one  
stomach cell or  
toe cell there.

Yet each body cell,  
each singular one,  
is part of the  
aliveness that  
collectively  
is me.

But moment by moment  
the tenor of this  
aliveness  
is changing;  
cells breaking down,  
rebuilding,  
aging, dying;  
constantly in flux.

This immutable me  
is a myth  
of my own making.  
How mysterious!  
How marvellous!



Gorricks Run, 1981. Some familiar faces..... Photo SZC archive

## Beauty in the Landscape of Ageing

Jillian Ball

‘Thank goodness for impermanence. Impermanence is what gets us old. If we just stayed the same, like a plastic flower that gathered dust and never wilted, how attractive would that be? How much fun? I’m here now, petals curling, alive.’

Susan Moon<sup>1</sup>

I first realised I was ageing when a bus driver in Hobart asked if I had a seniors’ card. When I finally got my seniors’ card, I was given another reminder when no one questioned it! Ageing for me has been both liberating and humbling, a teaching in relinquishing and letting go, loss and gratitude.

Ageing is to know impermanence with clearer eyes. The realisation of fewer days ahead, actions that prioritize connections with what really counts and embodying each extraordinary ordinary moment. Through this comes the surrendering of expectations and notions about time and age.

‘How happy to see lightning  
And not think,  
Time is fleeting’.

*Matsu Batsu*

My mother has recently turned 91. Despite her dementia, she offers daily teachings to us on patience, humour and the fleeting nature of despair. She has suffered many losses, first her hearing, then her memory, mobility, life partner and many friends...the illusion of certainty and control. Yet my mum exudes grace and a boundless love for life and those around her. She remembers details for mere seconds but the felt sense of her experience is deeply imprinted on her mind. Everything exists only through what she can see and feel right before her: a smile, the warmth of the midday sun, the burnt orange leaves on the path, the billowing charcoal clouds.

My father was fading in the Melbourne heatwave of 2014. Already frail, his 86 year old frame was starting to wilt by the fourth day of 44°C. Yet he still tended his orchids each day and watered his camellias named after each member of our family. He shuffled by the owls sleeping in the jacaranda making sure that the bird bath was full. Finally, he got us together to impart a few wisdoms. ‘If you get old’, he said, ‘make sure you keep your sense of humour’. ‘Listen deeply to nature, the plants and the birds’, he went on ‘because they can teach you a heck of a lot’. ‘Love well and long’, he declared ‘because that’s what it’s about’. He paused for a moment ‘And we need rain’. The following week he died from a massive heart attack.

<sup>1</sup> Moon, Susan. *This is Getting Old: Zen Thoughts on Aging with Humor and Dignity*. Shambhala, 2010.



Love  
omnipresent  
weaves through  
life, old age  
and death.  
A pine box,  
red dahlias.  
A discarded body,  
black limousine.  
The sky opens  
rain falls.  
The drought  
has broken.

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*Mount Penang, dead water lilies*  
Glenys Jackson

## **Looking into the Mirror of Old Age**

Subhana Barzaghi

Frequently on Sunday for a number of years now I drive down to Sutherland to visit my father who is 91 living in an aged care facility. Dad refers to it as the 'lock down ward' as it is not so easy for him to get out and about these days. He still has all his cognitive facilities although a bit slower now and he occasionally complains that when he walks across his room to the bathroom, by the time he has entered the bathroom he has forgotten what he wanted to do. I empathise with him, I have moments like that myself. Still he is the only person in higher care with a computer, a mobile phone, landline, printer and office set-up in his room. His daily routine consists of reading his emails, the financial review and sections of the Sydney Morning Herald, checking out the stock market and monitoring his share portfolio, all before lunch – impressive at his age. Yet his body is deteriorating, he suffers from rheumatoid arthritis in his feet, deafness, painful neuralgia and emphysema.

I sometimes wonder if I will have my cognitive faculties in order like Dad or will I end up with severe short-term memory loss like my dear mother? A kind, generous, sweet-heart of a woman yet sadly, conversations were forgotten and on a repeat cycle every five minutes. At least with Dad I can enjoy good conversations about politics, mindfulness, Zen practice and the latest research on climate change.

The decision to move into Higher Care was not a drama for my father, he is a very pragmatic, rational man. It was resolved in one conversation, he had all the paper work sorted and put his name down on the waiting list the next day. I was very grateful for this approach. For my mother it was the opposite, she dreaded going into care, she hung onto stubbornly to her independence, a quality that she fiercely valued living alone for over 40 years. As an avid square dancer, Mum had wanted to die on the dance floor or quietly in her own home. We tried to support her wishes as much as possible with nursing care at home until it became an issue about her personal safety and hygiene. It was a heart-breaking, teary decision for everyone. It took the Aged Care team supervisor and a family meeting to convince her it was time.

Moving Dad out of his apartment into a room into Higher Care was a different ordeal. We sorted out and loaded up three truckloads of stuff. He had already reduced his belongings down from a house to an apartment, yet still there was a mountain of things stuffed into every draw. Each item needed to be sorted either into the yellow recycled bin, thrown into the red rubbish bin or be gathered into piles to be sent off to Vinnies. The sentimental things that we hang onto over a lifetime are then dispersed and scattered to the winds. Life gets downsized to a bedroom with a bathroom and a communal dining room if you are lucky.

Do we really need half the stuff we think we need? I scrutinise my own house full of belongings, lying inert gathering dust. The walk in wardrobe is full of clothes; half of them black, Buddhist statues don the rooms, beautiful Mayumi Oda prints line the walls. Stacks of old photo albums record my hippie roots, my children's birthdays, their escapades and milestones and my travels abroad. Then there are the bludging bookcases of art, poetry and dharma books in my office along with painting easel and boxes of art materials that I always promise myself that I'll make time for. Being repulsed by the accumulation of stuff, it ushered in a more ruthless 'throw it out' and

‘pass it on’ spring mood. The first decade of life seems to be one of building a life, accumulating the necessary degrees, experiences and things of the world; the second half of life is about letting go and giving it all away.

In Higher Care a walking frame is mandatory; you are not allowed to walk down the corridor without it. It’s an hour’s drive to Thomas Holt facility from my house and I usually arrive just before lunchtime. Most of the other residents are either heading for or are in the dining room. Their walking frames are all lined up just inside the dining room like good little wheelie carts waiting patiently for their owners. Dad tells me he is bored living in a place full of old people who are frail, sick, partly deaf or demented, he is all of the above except demented. He complains that he is starved of an intelligent conversation in the communal dining room. It’s ground hog day in the Higher Care facility except for the menu.

When I arrive, his greeting ritual is to tell me about his latest ailments in graphic detail. I tell him, ‘It’s way too much information before lunch, Dad’. But he continues to rattle off the list of medications and whether he has had a good night’s sleep or not. Only then can we move out into the brighter light of day. Life gets reduced to managing the minutiae. I rail against this shrinkage and seriously hope that I don’t succumb to such a binocular view of life. I vow to foster a compassionate attitude to my ageing body even with all its frailties and idiosyncrasies, not an endless complaints list. I want to be a bride married to amazement to the end of my days.

As I walk down the corridor, I glance into each room where elderly people are either like zombies, asleep, sick or bed ridden. Is this where I am heading? It’s a sobering reality. Sickness, old age and death are not for the faint hearted. The Buddha called them the 3 great messengers; the three great wake up calls. I notice my father’s pale paper thin skin stretched over aged spotted hands grasping his walker, I see the bruised knock-on-effect from taking blood thinners. As the ageing process sets in, bodily changes bring us into a direct relationship with impermanence and the transient nature of all life. The message is take heed, don’t waste this precious life, practice as if your hair is on fire.

I often recall Great Master Matsu’s comments in Case 3 of the Blue Cliff Records. The accountant monk asked him, “How is your reverence feeling these days?” The Master Matsu said, “Sun-faced Buddha: Moon-faced Buddha”. What adds potency to Matsu’s response is that he was unwell and dying. Sun-faced Buddha is a metaphor for the world of living form and Moon-faced Buddha is the world of emptiness. In Matsu’s mind it did not matter whether he was sick or well, he was undisturbed, he abided in a deep peace and equanimity. I am deeply inspired and grateful for Matsu’s response.

Indeed some days are bright and wondrous and life flows without regret or measurement under the vast sky other days I wake up with a headache, my hip hurts and I need a good stiff cup of coffee to get going. The task is always to find an accord right where we are, right in the very conditions of this ailing body and mind. To discover our Sun-faced, Moon-faced Buddha is to find peace whether in favourable or unfavourable circumstances, right in the very midst of this transient world of dewdrops. Zen practice asks us to wake up and embody that mind.

Anne Aitken, the grandmother of the Diamond Sangha, aged gracefully into her twilight years. She recommended morning zazen, an afternoon rest followed by an ice-cream.

One of my fondest memories is eating ice-cream with her. Steeped in Zen practice, having gone through the koan curriculum three times in her final moments she faced death with acceptance and a clear mind. She knew when the bus stopped outside her door, that it was time to get on and go. Anne had made it very clear that she never wanted to be put on life support. Aitken Roshi and the family had gathered around her hospital bed to discuss whether life support was an option. Anne overhearing the conversation pursed her lips in a determined way as if to say no thank you and in blink of an eye she was gone.

There are deeper questions that we need to grapple with to wake up to Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha. ‘Who ages? Who dies? I remember my dear dharma friend Sexton Bourke saying, “We only fear death, because we think there is someone to die”.

Over the last seven years since Dad moved back to Sydney we gradually stitched back together a relationship. Prior to that we had not really spoken for over 30 years. I’m the only family member living in Sydney. My sister rings him occasionally and my brother still doesn’t speak to him, it’s an irreparable breakdown. There are good reasons for that fall out; there are painful emotional wounds from our childhood years culminating in our parents’ divorce when I was 13 years old.

I spent many years in therapy, trying to make sense of Dad’s abandonment and neglect of his children, his lack of affection and support, his serious lack of communication, his avoidant attachment style and his narcissistic tendencies. I could not comprehend how a parent could simply walk out on his family especially when mum was only just recovering from the debilitating effects of encephalitis. It left me in the desert for years. Through psychodynamic therapy, I learnt how to heal the attachment wound and make sense of my father’s behaviour and mend the whole in my heart. I was no longer in the position of the little girl still wanting Daddy’s love and approval that I never got. With loving-kindness practice I realised that freedom came from the act of forgiveness. Harboring resentment was like drinking poison and expecting the other person to suffer. Forgiveness has the capacity to open and soften the heart.

I actively took up the practice that Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh recommended in communicating with ones parents. Those three messages are: “I see that you are suffering, I am here for you and I love you”. Saying, I love you was the hardest of all. To inhabit this authentically, love became a multi-faceted koan. Is the responsibility to care for my father a re-enactment of the dutiful, eldest daughter role? Is this obligatory love or a genuine compassion for the suffering of an old man who is nearing the end of his days? I tear up at witnessing my father’s vulnerability and frailness, the loss of independence, the high need for care, fumbling to figure out how to operate the remote for the TV. Dad’s lack of mobility, leaning over a walking frame moving down the green carpeted corridor of vanishing time. That slow shuffle and forgetfulness points the way. These practices transformed our relationship to one of endearment.

Proponents of community health advocate that ageing is not a disease. Generally our current generation because of health care technologies advances in modern medicine is living much longer than their predecessors. The focus is on preventative health, well-being, replacing worn out body parts and maintaining a quality of life into old age.

Age is a curious question, how old am I really? There is the linear time-centered biological age, which becomes deterministic if one over identifies with such measurements. There is the emotional-centered age; how old I feel, which is a variable that doesn't always marry up to my image in the mirror or seems to depend on how well I slept last night. How I feel about my age sometimes depends on the social shadow that is cast in the kitchen theatre of life. Culturally older women become more invisible and undesirable. Unlike indigenous cultures we are not a society that esteems its elders. There is the social face of age, the hegemony of cultural beliefs of what a society portrays and tells us about how one should behave, the dress code at 20, 40, 60 or 90. Fairy dresses, spotted tights and wings are only reserved for 4 year old's. So I am told. What would happen if Grandma wore a fairy gown, she has her reasons for those wings too! A rebellious voice in me says you are not going to clip my wings.

As I look in the mirror in the soft light of morning since turning 65, I frequently wonder who looks in the mirror? I see wrinkles and sags that were not there before. I wince. How do I meet my reflection?

I notice an urge that wants to peel away the image from the mirror. I practice seeing with the eyes of a scientist, just the bare facts, color, shape and angles, my nose is vertical and my eyes are horizontal. Then I look at my image as a lover or poet would. That gaze softens the edges of my heart. But freedom comes from casting the gaze of cultivating the mindful observer. Seer and seen fall away into just seeing, then only utter amazement remains.

Sitting on my zafu, my heart-mind meets the jeweled net of Indra and opens: I am the age of the black pottery mug on the edge of my altar, the age of the angophora gum's seed pod bursting forth, the age of the coolness of the limestone tiles underfoot, the age of the soft morning light streaming inside. Indra's net also casts me out into a meadow of unspeakable grief for the burning of the Amazon, the 63 million refugees fleeing violence and the horrors of war. And yet, each node on the web, reflects the dark and light, the timeless in its treasured dewdrop moment. All of this, the universe of falling flowers and new foals on wobble legs sit in the cradle of my original face, the ageless, timeless dimension of no age at all. I give a sigh of relief and a deep bow for the ancient mirror of practice that recognises the timeless truth of 'no age' at all. I bow to the liberating force of the Dharma.

As we age and walk the labyrinthine path between birth and death, we face many physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual challenges. Buddhist teachings focus on practices that liberate and heal the suffering and dissatisfaction woven into the fabric of our lives. These teachings are profound in the sense that they offer us a way to meet the challenges of sickness, old age and eventually death with calmness and serenity. Zen practice fosters deep acceptance and peace with life itself and promotes a wise compassionate response to our own departure.

## **The Baby's Practice : Goo goo gar gar**

Sally Hopkins

The wonder of newborns is how swiftly they change almost by the day , the hour. They manage to smile, to make noises. They discover their hand. There is the triumph of sitting up . Walking. Talking. Discovering dogs, and butterflies. The world is an astonishing place for newborns; full of wonders.

So from the start we are familiar with change. We grew taller, older, "big girl". We became adolescent (a bobby soxer). Change seemed just how it was. When my mother was dying I was working as a gardener /cleaner. My Father said, "You'll learn a lot about life really looking at the garden, Sal".

And yes - the Bible said we were as grass. So I thought a great deal about death. Life and death.

My mother said , "I'm lucky I won't have to cope with old age." I didn't understand her message at all. Somehow it didn't seem possible to imagine being physically or mentally less capable. Dead- yes. But not reduced. I never imagined I would no longer be able to climb, run, or sing, walk even, would be deaf, would ever be frail or incapable.

It is always interesting discovering new things, even unwelcome new things. There are blessings in age, in every age, as well as difficulties. Less energy, more incapable, and less is expected of you. There seems more time. Life slows and much that was missed in the earlier rush is suddenly visible. Like grass, indeed, changing, withering, decaying. But rain drops on dry grass shine like small suns.

Practice has shown how to let things go, accept what is the case. I was the second oldest sangha member at 59. No permanent teacher, just sesshin twice a year. At Gorricks- no Kodoji temple, no phone, no electricity, everyone in tents. At Annandale we sat zazen and chanted. No teacher. Yet at least 14 Zen and Vipassana teachers have flowered from SZC in succeeding years.

What comes next? Who knows? We sit. Come back to this breath.  
What is it that is changing? What is aging?

This body is certainly aging. This old body seems to be returning to the dependencies of childhood, even babyhood at times. The brain that once remembered reams of poetry and plays, now remembers very little, and finds it hard to figure out anything new, even many things once known. Walking slows. Action slows. Thinking slows. Nostalgia is no help at all. What is, is. I wasted years of my life wishing to be where I was not. Where we are, is where we are. Tomorrow ?- who knows ? Zazen makes this clearer and clearer.

But beyond the physical body- this one sitting here- who is that?  
The one enlarged by the whole world?  
Where do you find 'me'? This process labelled "me"?  
Like flowing water, beyond labelling, beyond solidification- HERE and HERE.



Not a soul to be saved, a tiny solid me somewhere. Just a wondrous flowing from moment to moment. Breath to breath. Mysterious. Always mysterious.

The one who hears the cries of the world.

The one who is the cries of the world.

The one who responds to the cries of the world.

The one RIGHT HERE- each moment fresh. Like a newborn.

Old lady /Newborn. Both true. A matter of great wonder.

---



Hojo at Gorricks Run, 1992. *Photo Caroline Josephs*

**Haiku**  
Diana Levy

alive or dead?  
this or that?  
just itself!

*Uncle Max walk, Ku-ring-gai*

the tomato  
unloved for a week  
oozing brown rot

cicada sings  
a three-minute  
life story

warming winter sun:  
the old dears and their walkers  
crackle from the bus

clear afternoon -  
the smoke of old growth burning  
has blown away  
*NW Tas.*



a *Hardenbergia*  
at the edge of the death leap  
flowering

*The Bluff, Glenbrook\**

\* *The Bluff at Glenbrook is a place above the railway line where some people have taken their own lives.*

Old battered, sweat-stained leather hat  
I've become  
your scarecrow.

*Dexter Dunphy*



Gorricks Run, 1992, before Kodoji Temple was built. *Photos Caroline Josephs*





Gorricks Run, 1995, before Kodoji Temple was built, camping in the paddock with equine guests.  
*Photos Caroline Josephs*

## A Diary of Ageing...in 2019

Caroline Josephs

Yamada Roshi (quoted by Robert Aitken Roshi):

*The common denominator of all things is  
empty infinity  
infinite emptiness.*

### ***Zen, ART, Ageing...***

I have lived 76 years in this world.

Earlier this year I am offered space in a 13<sup>th</sup> century Church in Italy -- to have a solo exhibition.

I say, 'Yes'. The Church is La Chiesa di Santa Maria Nuova'. In Gubbio, Umbria, near Perugia.

I begin by contemplating *Santa Maria*. Santa Maria evolves to become for me, the 'Nurturer', an everywoman. I paint quickly -- a semi figurative, verging-on-abstract expressive painting to depict the spirit of the Nurturer.

I research, I read, I search the depictions of Mary, of Santa Maria. I find I have a sense of 'spirit' infusing my body and being. Later I write of this inner spirit as a transient human form while emphasising inner essence, an evanescence of form, a union of energy and spirit. (I have had many connections with nuns, with the Catholic Church, over a long career in Education).

Next I am painting a '*contemplative*' inner spirit -- the one who reads, muses, sits, meditates. Tones of grey, white and black, dreaming, reflecting an inner life, prayer, of solitude. Perhaps in everyday life we may be suffused by this spirit when in a state of peace, musing, perhaps in Nature, or contemplating words that move us, or in song, music, or just focussing on breath.

Then, I am painting the *dancer* -- in orange, yellows—a spirit moving with grace through Life, body changing like the Wind, energy shifting, body orienting to forms, sounds, space, emotional states, to inner and outer stimuli, to the rhythms of Nature.

Spontaneously, '*rebel*' occurs to me. In colour red, action-oriented, she pushes at the boundaries, in spite of restrictions and circumstances. The spirit of the rebel challenges norms of behaviour, of art. Rebel does not accept the *status quo*, pushes back at authority. As artist, the rebel challenges forms of art or content...creating something else, exploring new paths.

It isn't till I have researched, written, researched again, thought a lot, writing their stories, and considered the depictions available of the 'Illustrious Italian Women' whose stories have touched my heart, who have chosen me, (emerging out of months of process) that I complete the 'inner spirit' series that will intersperse the series.

It is the inner *Creative Spirit*. This may derive energy from Nature -- Wind, Sea, Sun, Moon, Sky, Fire, Air, Earth. ('Spirit' comes from the Latin *spiritus* meaning breath). We may be in-spired by nature, other beings, or human-made objects...My depiction is

pure abstract. The creative spirit is innovative, experimental, imaginative, sparking new ideas and ways of doing....

I look at photographs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century educator and social reformer, Maria Montessori (1870-1952). I warm to this strong and feisty woman, the first woman university graduate in Italy (in Medicine) in 1896. I admire her work with those children neglected by the education system. Her work with the intellectually handicapped, and the poor, revealed that *all* children are curious, want to learn, and will learn -- with practical hands-on, guided loving engagement in the process.

I am drawn to writers, like Moderata Fonte (1555-1592) and Lucrezia Marinella (1571-1653), who wrote books defying male writers who wrote of women's deficiencies and men's superiority. These were courageous women, especially in those times. Their work is eminently readable, relevant, and contemporary. (If you are interested email me).

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652) was a famous artist who overcame extreme difficulties to become recognized for her strong artwork, doing commissions for the rich and powerful. I write her story in my detailed catalogue with illustrations of the paintings of each.

I tell the stories of each of the women and the process of art-making of the 8.5 metres installation (an unfolding Japanese-style book along the floor of the church) -- in a television film I do at the opening in the Gubbio church in June. (Available by link -- if you are interested email me).

Lucrezia Borgia (1480-1519) appealed to me. She has often been alleged to have done awful deeds, but some historians say that her beauty, her charm, meant she was used as a pawn by her father Cardinal Rodrigo de Borgia (later to become Pope Alexander VI) ...to lure men and help his political ambitions. Her third marriage was happy and devoted. She also did a lot of social benefits, founding hospitals and convents, proclaimed an edict to protect Jews from persecution, and pawned her jewels to aid famine victims. Died after birth of her tenth child.

As I am painting and musing on how to present the works on canvas, my curator emails. "I love the work so far. If you can include Elsa Morante, the 20<sup>th</sup> century writer, I can get you into the Elsa Morante Cultural Centre, in Rome". I will consider this offer. I read Morante's main large novel, 'History' (La Storia) in English, as well as her biography. I am blown away by her writing, and her life. I do two portraits of her, each with cats (she adored them). She has a mind of her own it seems, and presents herself in my portraits of her, as delicate and compassionate in one, as defiant and strong in another.

### ***How does Zen practice relate to Art?***

Research and spiritual practice both involve seeking -- learning, delving, listening, meditating, sensing, feeling.

Art-making is process. Art-making and Zen are learning, touching into the mystery of the unknown. Zen is process.



## **ZEN, Ageing, Hospital experiences, and Humour**

Twelve days after the two exhibitions in Gubbio, in Rome, I am home in Sydney.

Taking ill, I am in Emergency Department at the Prince of Wales Hospital. I am there for 7 hours of tests after a torrid night experiencing some scary symptoms I have never had before....which bring me to some short stories that stay with me from Emergency.

How do these relate to Zen?

I am lying on a bed in Emergency. Donald is sitting quietly in the corner waiting. Dr. Emma is putting a cannula in my arm (or some such --I forget what).

She looks at me and smiles, indicates with a turn of her head, "Do you know that man over there?" she asks. "I know we have long waiting queues. Did you pick him up out there?" All three of us laugh loudly.

Doc Emma adds, "We don't get out much here!" More laughter.

I leave Emergency Department of hospital. The first doctor I have encountered there – 7 hours ago and many tests later – is sitting behind the window at front desk. He is Dr. W. young and fresh-faced. I wave 'Bye! Thank you so much'. He leans forward to say to me conspiratorially, "I thought you were pregnant!" (I did throw up when I first saw him, some hours before).

"Oh yes," I say, "Miracle woman! 23 years post-menopausal!" We both burst out laughing!

What is so illuminating about such moments of laughter, at any age?

The incongruity of two apparently different ways of seeing the world – coming together. This is humour. In that instant, there is no 'self' no 'I'...We meet in a guffaw, a moment of openness, of true human sharing and connection. Beyond rationality, beyond all aspects of each of us as unique individuals. We are joined in a space of emptiness!

### ***Zen, Ageing, Meeting Mortality...***

The next day I still have severe symptoms again, and am admitted as patient to the hospital, am being given treatments and tests of all kinds over one week.

During this time, I am waiting with other patients for a CT scan, each of us in our wheelchairs, having been pushed some distance through meandering corridors by hospital assistants.

Later I write of the old lady who is sitting opposite me in the waiting room:

*Bent withered woman  
Waits for CT scan,  
"It's not funny, getting old!"*

A different perspective on 'getting old' -- another paradox, the humorous, *as well as* the *inevitability of the mortality* of each living being.

Home after a week in hospital. Now not in pain. and a promise by surgeon -- of an operation to take out gall bladder in a month or so when I am fit and stronger...

*Zen, Ageing, ART....the creative process....*  
*August -- the Paintbrush...*

I am now in a time of Unknowing it seems, while I wait, to have the operation.  
I am musing on ageing as I pick up the paintbrush for the first time in more than two months (a long time for me).

The new work is different, paint reflecting a space of fuzziness, not lucidity....I don't know what I am depicting.

This is blurred reality, where finding the edges of things seems unavailable.

Probably under water -- fluidity, water-likeness, dreaminess....

Being intimate with this state of blurredness, as inner reality...bringing it to the canvas....

This is a sense of being in 'winter' season, which may unexpectedly, burst into 'springtime', a feeling of exuberance, clarity even....

I feel inspired...breath re-awakening an inner presence. Good friends come to visit, a gardening show with broad beans and pea frames reach between Earth and Sky...I can do that! Inspired by other painters' work -- the splash of polymer paint on polyester, or photograph resonating -- of two splash-spattered feet in currents of ocean....

William Blake's:

*To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour.*

I am content. Life goes on...

I begin a second painting, with joy...

## Nothing distinguishes the enlightened person

Brendon Stewart

*"You are old, Father William," the young man said,  
"And your hair has become very white;  
And yet you incessantly stand on your head—  
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"*

*"In my youth," Father William replied to his son,  
"I feared it might injure the brain;  
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,  
Why, I do it again and again."*

Time passes so quickly. There seems hardly enough of it to make sense of those old chestnuts meaning and purpose.

When little Alice fell down a well she became aware of herself falling for such a long time straight down. Curiously and delightfully she wasn't certain whether it was very deep or whether she was just falling very slowly.

She had plenty of time it seemed to look about. First she tried to look down and make out what was coming next, but it was too dark. Then she looked to the sides and noticed they were crowded with cupboards and bookshelves. Here and there she saws maps and paintings. She even had time to take down a jam jar from one of the shelves as she passed by. It was labelled **Cumquat Marmalade**. To her great disappointment it was empty.

Down, down, down. Would this fall never come to an end?

From time to time, as Alice will eventually discover the end may never come as you expect. You can lay in wait all your life and then it all turns out to be different. Different from childish expectation and even sometimes grand mature fantasies. I think good advice is to keep studying the maps and the paintings too. There are magic moments in these that come with no prophecy, they rub against you with surprise like when a painting becomes real and fleshy and can remind you of people and places you remember and know. Pages in little books and maps hidden in clear view reveal visions of lands unimagined and books as yet unwritten.

Maitreya, Buddha still to be born: a mystery in the making.

Young Father William brimming with youthful confidence took care and pride in his intelligence, "I must not injure my brain". Gradually clarity emerges and old Father William becomes sure he is no brainy boots at all, certainly not one to be overly proud of, so he is released to play and be foolish.

Living the mystery as it's made.

There is a tale in The Gateless Barrier, Case 31 about two old people. Chao-chou investigates an Old Woman. Written long before *Me Too* pointed out some disparities in how men and women relate. You don't get a sense here of two people in conversation. Wouldn't that have been interesting as Chao-chou was also very old? Instead some

weird *boys own* conspiracy takes shape and the investigation is surreptitiously carried out. Chau-chou shares with his brother monks that he has investigated the old woman. What did he see or learn? He doesn't say and this is where the story ends.

When men 'explore' women what is it that the woman is expected to divulge or make known? In this story we never learn the Old Woman's name and throughout she is referred to in the third person, except when she offers her simple response;

Go straight ahead.

I can hear her answering like that, like a mother guiding a child. *How will I go mum? What way is the right path?* Go straight ahead. Why was she to be checked, was it necessary for the old master to check on her wisdom, on her grasp of the Great Matter? While he may have explored her surreptitiously I think it was also ill mannered.

The old woman sits quietly selling her tea and guiding passes by. She is familiar and comfortable; Chau-chou on the other hand is a bit of a sneak. Surely this unnamed old woman and old Chao-chou could have found something to say to each other, not just some simple direction giving. In the end, the Case is about the venerable old bloke investigating so why doesn't he share more? Why not take a cup'o'tea and a cake, after all she had a little tea stall? That's the simplicity of two old people talking: in conversation.

I'd prefer a conversation, a place of shared originality and insight. Open and creative conversations always produce intelligence. Two old brains are better than one. The old master missed an opportunity here. Maybe he should have stood on his head a little longer.

Mount T'ai is still a sacred mountain; the abode of the Bodhisattva, Manjusri. A mountain full of wisdom you could say and the Old Woman generously pointed out the way to anyone who asked. Sacred places are timeless, dream places that can alert us in the present to past and future. I have experienced it that *old women* are often the ones more willing to quietly guide. The Great Matter doesn't have to be flagged or investigated. The Great Matter isn't the mountain.

But I admit it is sometimes difficult to get into a good conversation. I can appreciate that Chao-chou may have been a tongue-tied old monk especially when 'investigating' a women, young or old. Good conversations mostly start with a great question. We are lucky with our Zen that there is a vast compendium of great questions. Finding something to say to one another, speaking to the face and soul of another human is precious.

Case 31 tells us something about an opportunity missed. At the bottom of the well, Alice keeps up a line of questioning; the Red King and Queen, all the strange animals including a Dodo and a pack of cards and from them all she learns matters of importance. She learns in effect how to go straight ahead.



Gorricks Run, 1996, preparing the post holes.

*Photos Caroline Josephs*





Gorricks Run, 1996, preparing the framework.

*Photos Caroline Josephs*



## **Sitting on a Park Bench**

Larry Agriesti

Many, many years ago when I was young, I remember well listening to Simon and Garfunkel's song 'Old Friends': "Can you imagine us years from today, sharing a park bench quietly? How terribly strange to be seventy." And now, half a century later, I find it to be more terribly strange than I could possibly have imagined then.

Zen is good for any age, and any age can be terribly strange, but possibly old age presents many of us with the luxury of having lots and lots of time to practice the skills we've learn from our meditation practice. Lots of time to be fully present in the moment. Lots of time to, among many other things, sit on a park bench and just 'be'.

Often sitting with me on a park bench, my old friend Zen is there reminding me how to let memories of the past and fears of the future rest in the background of things, and just focus my attention on what is, as it is, now; a good friend, always encouraging, always available, forever new and comforting, knowing I can return to it again, and again, and again.

Memories of the friends I've made at the SZC over the years sit there with me as well; countless times they have offered encouragement, support, and teachings that now ease the struggles of growing old. Good friends, old friends, "silently sharing the same fears", quietly assuring me that all is well, that although all things change, that although we grow old and the body dies and returns to stardust, paradoxically the truth of who and what we are will never change.

My old aged days are filled with good stuff, bad stuff, and all the in-between stuff, and I have come to treasure the gifts of a daily meditation and the mystery of what emptiness allows. At times I experience a deep awareness and quiet certainty that all is as it should be. Other times I'm not so sure; existence remains a total mystery to me, but a mystery that allows me to imagine possibilities, to consider what has been learned from life, and make some choices on how to live, and what I choose to believe without the certainty of proof. No one knows what happens after the body dies: either there is nothing and the story ends, or there is everything. My heart tells me it's everything, and the story renews and continues forever.

Still, old age and Zen caution me to avoid too much speculation about the future, about what might happen at death, or even about what might happen tomorrow. Trying to understand what cannot be fully understood is exhausting and leaves me feeling anxious, but when I stop trying to understand, stop imagining the future and what might happen, when I stop asking 'why' and stop looking for answers, I find that I have all that I need just now, more than enough.

A few days ago, I was sitting on a park bench looking out over the ocean from the cliffs at Coogee. I was lost in thoughts of mindless junk when a young couple walking by asked me if I had seen the whales. Startled, I replied I hadn't been paying attention, and thanking them for letting me know, I quickly scanned the horizon; after just a few moments a whale breached the water, twisted his body high into the air, waved his fin, reminded me to live in the present, and splashed back into the sea.

*First breath of life draws in  
Last breath out at death  
And in between enough time  
To see what emptiness allows*

*I die before I die and wonder  
Where was I before and will be after*

*Doesn't matter*

*Countless creations have come and gone  
Before this birth and those to follow  
Yet it can only always be just now  
And all that emptiness allows*

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Gorricks Run, 1984, dedication of the first structure to be built, the tank stand. Rolling the tank into place. *Photos Tony Coote*

## **The Fox goes muuuu and the Mu growls like a fox**

Stuart Solzberg

Pai-chang's Fox

(The Gateless Barrier, Case 2)

Student:

Clean the house top to bottom...

Mu!

Gust of wind blows all the dust back...

Fox.

Teacher:

Yes.

Student:

Blow the roof off...

Mu!

Put the last nail in...

Fox.

Teacher:

Sounds like Huizhong's Seamless Tomb to me. (Blue Cliff Record, Case 18)

Student:

Had a look at the seamless tomb.

Very interesting, I would agree.

The Dharma is fundamentally all inclusive, nothing left out, nothing accidental.

Flaws, scars, and warts.

I don't understand it,

I don't like it sometimes,

I don't always agree,

It will not make me a better person.

It is fundamentally beyond such concerns.  
No seams, no gaps.  
All inclusive, like it or not.

There is no escape from this life,  
No here or there, this or that...  
Just this.  
Slap!

Our original place...

Nothing is different,  
Nothing is the same...

Teacher:  
(Holding up their staff with an out stretched arm)

Let us leave it at that.

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*Left: Gillian and Maggie  
1992 Photo Caroline Josephs*

*Below: Subhana and  
Maggie Photo Maggie Gluek*



## The Five Remembrances

Greg Try

A few years ago I came across the five remembrances in a Buddhist blog<sup>1</sup>. I hadn't read them before but they summed up in a succinct fashion for me an underlying anxiety, you might even say neurosis about getting older and all that accompanies it.

When I read the 5 remembrances it's a reminder that getting older and all that goes along with it is simply the natural way of things.

The first two are as follows:

*I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.*

*I am of the nature to have ill-health. There is no way to escape having ill-health.*

It isn't a crime or a failing to age or even get sick, it's just the way things are. We're made of parts, things made of parts eventually fall apart.<sup>1</sup> Of course we may do all we can to stay in good health though even so, over the years we will experience a change in our bodies and our physical capabilities.

While I may be accepting of 'the way things are' i.e. getting older and at some point frailer. I still have resistance to the process. For example, when I consider going to sesshin, I look forward to the natural and beautiful bush setting, the deep quiet and slower pace and I also consider discomfort, pain from prolonged sitting in the zazen posture, going out of my comfort zone etc.

The third remembrance is:

*I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.*

It's probably preferable to face it directly and process it in our own way then be continually on the run from this truth. As existentially frightening as it is, we know it's the truth for us and all other beings. I know I will die. Happily, I don't have any end date to when this will happen, though it's becoming clearer than it was say at the beginning of the new millennium. I have aches and pains the same as everyone else and I imagine they're saying to me....don't forget, you're finite. It's both frightening and liberating to face our own mortality. Perhaps it can sharpen our focus and ask the question, how best should I spend this time I have left.

If this all sounds too grim and confronting, here's something from Robert Aitken entitled 'Old Age':

Mae West said, "old age ain't no place for sissies". Yes, that's true. One must cope with a range of afflictions, from incontinence to macular degeneration, not to mention peripheral neuropathy, strokes and cancer – and memory loss! Yet I don't mourn my lost youth. What a confused mess I was! What time I wasted! All in all, I am really quite comfortable in these last years. Pass the marmalade! <sup>2</sup>

The fourth and fifth Remembrances are:

*All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.*

*My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground on which I stand.*

We cannot stop things from changing, we cannot stop time. We get lulled into a sense of permanence by imagining things will be this way for ever. Like a warm peaceful Sunday afternoon, things are pleasant and if only things could just stay like this....

<sup>1</sup> James Ishmael Ford, *Monkey mind blog*

<sup>2</sup> Robert Aitken, *Miniatures of A Zen Master*

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### Gorricks Run 1996, Subhana's Transmission Ceremony



*Top:* John Tarrant, Subhana Barzaghi, Robert Aitken, all Roshis together.

*Above:* The large tent used for Subhana's transmission ceremony in 1996, before Kodoji was built.

*Photos Caroline Josephs*



## **Jukai Vows June 2019**

Rachel Whiting

*Kuan Yin Meditation Centre, Lismore, NSW*

### **The Three Vows of Refuge**

I take refuge in the Buddha

Inspired by the Awakened One of long ago  
I call on the Awakened Mind within myself.  
Relinquishing attachments, aversion, and delusion,  
honouring Buddha nature in every living being.

I take refuge in the Dharma

I dedicate myself to the study of the Buddha's wisdom,  
to the clarity, fullness and suchness of each moment,  
to embody the Dharma in all I think, say and do.

I take refuge in the Sangha

Taking time to be with spiritual companions,  
with the sky, earth, birds and trees.  
Giving and receiving in natural harmony,  
turning the Wheel of the Dharma together.

### **The Three Pure Precepts**

I vow to maintain the Precepts

To guide this precious life with its wisdom and kindness,  
to not waste a single moment in selfishness.  
Acting from 'Right View', no view,  
the Precepts fulfil themselves.

I vow to practice all good Dharma

Listening carefully, I hear the Dharma speak.  
Responding selflessly, I practice all good Dharma  
With no concept of 'good' or 'evil',  
no concern of 'loss' or 'gain'.

I vow to save the many Beings

Stepping forward with open awareness  
Allowing the Dharma to guide me  
Giving up self-centredness and embodying compassion  
I dedicate this life to the benefit of all beings.

## The Ten Grave Precepts

I take up the Way of Not Killing

Not giving rise to the idea of killing  
I vow to nurture life in all its forms.  
Practicing the Way of the Heart in all directions  
I vow to do no harm.

I take up the Way of Not Stealing

What can be held onto? Who is this that takes?  
Remembering our interconnectedness  
I share the gifts of the world without clinging or grasping.

I take up the Way of Not Misusing Sex

Valuing unconditional love over personal pleasure,  
I practice holding another as I would life itself.

I take up the Way of Not Speaking Falsely

Whether speaking or in silence,  
I vow for my intention to be that of expressing  
the deepest root of the heart at peace.

I take up the Way of Not Giving or Taking Drugs

There is suffering.  
There is a wise path that leads to the cessation of suffering.  
I vow to walk this path of clarity, courage and freedom.

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

Not separating 'self' from 'other'  
Knowing there is no fault to be found  
I vow to unify all beings through understanding, kindness and warmth.

I take up the Way of Not Praising Myself while Abusing Others

I vow to dissolve the comparing mind,  
to drop it into the field of emptiness,  
and to bring forth the mind of love.

I take up the Way of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets

Mi casa du casa!  
What's mine is yours.  
Sharing fearlessly with the heart of the Buddha  
Letting the abundance of the universe ebb and flow.

I take up the Way of Not Indulging in Anger

I vow to embrace anger like a scared child  
Releasing my hold on how I think things should be  
Freeing all beings of expectations, of rights and wrongs.

I take up the Way of Not Defaming the Three Treasures

Sacred axes from which limitless freedom arises  
I honour them beyond these words into the core of my being.

## Spring moon, autumn waters

Sean Loughman

*This is the third and final instalment on the capping verse to case six of Keizan Jokin's Denkōroku.*

*Though clear waters range to the vast blue autumn sky,  
How can they compare with the hazy moon on a spring night!  
Most people want to have pure clarity,  
But sweep as you will, you cannot empty the mind.*

Translation by Maezumi & Glassman<sup>1</sup>

*If we suppose that it has a connection with heaven, autumn water is pure,  
but what about the haziness of the moon on a night in spring?  
Most other people desire what is clear and white;  
they sweep and sweep, but their minds are not yet empty.*

Official Sōtō school translation<sup>2</sup>

The last line led me to wonder if Keizan was suggesting that we cannot ever entirely sweep away our character flaws. As Sally once said to me, “The problem with the light is that you see the dust.” Insight exposes exquisite and hopelessly entangled paradoxes, and at times, shadowy corners of the soul. This is exactly why the Purification *gatha* is the first thing we chant. By purifying ourselves we return to the perfection of original mind. Do this wholeheartedly, and there is nothing else to be done. We sweep away that which was never really there, without effacing the quirks we call personality.

However, when a Zen student thinks of sweeping the mind clean, one thinks of eliminating *everything* in the mind, naming them all “delusion”, in order to perceive the emptiness of phenomena. This can take a lot of sweeping! And although abiding in the samadhi of nirvana is pure and “clean”, it is a cold and static purity like the clear waters of autumn, the one place that classical Buddhism teaches is independent of *pratītyasamutpāda*, or cause and effect<sup>3</sup>.

Zen abbot Nakahara Nantenbō (中原 南天棒, 1839-1925)<sup>4</sup> wrote something similar, “I brushed everything away, but the dust won’t move”<sup>5</sup>. Dust usually refers to the mundane world and its cares. Nantenbō uses the metaphor of broom and dust to say that you can find emptiness, but it is not a means of eliminating the mundane world and its problems. Instead of viewing the world as dust, the metaphor of jewels offers a more positive perspective because in Buddhist mythology what remains after cremation are jewels (*sarira*). In moments of clarity, dust become jewels; in moments of turmoil, jewels become dog shit. What remains though, is actually not dust nor jewels nor dog shit.

Some six hundred years later, haiku poet, Masaoka Shiki (正岡 子規, 1867-1902) in describing the red-light district in Dōgo which once pressed against the hills that still

stand today, makes a similar observation about the human condition using strikingly familiar imagery.

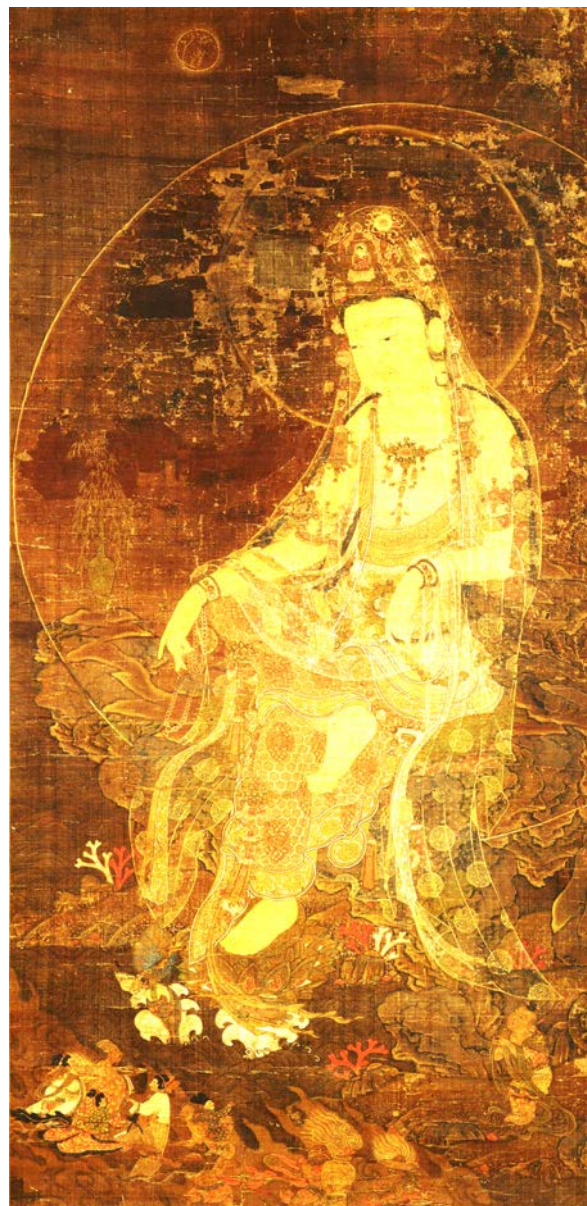
色里や  
十歩はなれて  
秋の風

*Coloured lights.  
Ten steps away,  
The autumn breeze.*

What lies in that space between coloured lights and autumn's touch and how do we close the divide? If not the emptiness of nirvana or "the dead beauty of perfection"<sup>6</sup>, then what is this vista of "the hazy moon on a spring night" that Keizan speaks of, and how can we know that it is the "best"?

In the Zen pantheon, Avalokiteshvara is held in the highest regard<sup>2†</sup>. This is because he/she is the bodhisattva par excellence manifesting you and me in perfect form. In perfect form, we are the sacred and profane. This is why she is a deity in human form. When we lose sight of our innate buddha-nature, we can look to her for guidance. She may seem like just another Indic god, part of a distant and irrelevant Indian cosmology. However, all the indivisible qualities that she possesses, that she expresses, from her physical bearing, to the way she turns herself to the world, spring from a very human heart-mind. We can express each and every one of her qualities. If anyone can appreciate the spring moon, it is Avalokiteshvara.

The story goes that Avalokiteshvara became a buddha, but then chose to return to the world of human suffering to save all beings<sup>8</sup> (echoes of the Christian mythos). She renounced the clear autumn waters in favour of the hazy spring moon. However, she also understands that the spring moon is reflected in the autumn waters. When Avalokiteshvara returns to the



*Water-moon Avalokiteshvara*  
(수월관음도 고려), first half of 14<sup>th</sup> C,  
114.5 x 55.6 cm, artist unknown<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>†</sup> I suspect that in Keizan's time, it was Manjushri, not Avalokiteshvara, who would have sprung to mind. Sōtō meditation halls have a statue of Manjushri in pride of place. Cotterell writes, "Manjushri was always regarded as the fount of compassion. One legend says that the Buddha miraculously created the bodhisattva as a means of enlightening China, where he was called Wenshu."<sup>7</sup> However, over time it seems that Avalokiteshvara has come to personify compassion, with Manjushri taking the mantle of wisdom.

“world of dust”, she does more than just return to the place that she never left. She returns in a different state of mind, variously known as *surangama samadhi*, *vajra samadhi*, *prajna paramita* or simply buddha-nature<sup>9</sup>. This is the heart-mind, source of her outward form that I described above. As Lamotte says:

*...this samādhi is the essence of the nature of the Buddha and is indeed the “mother of all Buddhas”.*<sup>10</sup>

Red Pine elaborates:

*...the Heart Sutra is their [the early Buddhists'] womb. With this incantation ringing in our minds, we thus enter the goddess, Prajñāpāramitā, and await our rebirth as buddhas.*<sup>11</sup>

It took me years to understand why Red Pine would describe *prajñā pāramitā* as a womb. However, it is no coincidence that the Arabic/Hebrew word for womb, *raḥam/reḥem*, shares the same root, meaning mercy as their word for compassion, *raḥ'mah/raḥamim*<sup>12</sup>. It should then come as no surprise that we return to our original home of compassion to be reborn as Avalokiteshvara.

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This poem raises many questions. How do we live in this delusive world? What is the correct understanding of perfection? What can zazen do for us in our daily lives? What is the proper practice? The “answers” to these questions are not to be found in the poem, but rather at the sandy bottom of clear autumn waters, where pearls and jewels lie. We can't empty our heart-minds of thoughts, desires or “imperfections”, but we can sweep it clear of discrimination. As Manjushri said, “dragons and snakes intermingle”. When there is no difference between dragons and snakes, the dust remains but leaves no trace.

Have we answered the question of how to live our lives in this hazy, crazy world? If we can maintain Avalokiteshvara's heart-mind moment by moment, that question ceases to be asked.

*No longer captive to the drifting dust particles;  
Here comes another one.  
Tears in my eyes,  
The spring moon swims in the clear autumn waters.*

## Postscript

Soon after part two was published, I came across Hongzhi Zhengjue's (宏智正覺, 1091-1157)<sup>13</sup> death poem. Of course, it immediately brought to mind Keizan's poem. Look closely and you will see that Keizan uses all the characters of the last line in the first line of his poem. Though he makes reference to various poems and imagery, Keizan's perspective is quite different. Where others effortlessly merge heaven and earth, Keizan acknowledges the difficulties and false summits encountered in the practice.

夢幻空花  
六十七年  
白鳥煙沒  
秋水天連

*Empty flowers of an illusory dream,  
Sixty seven years,  
A white bird disappears in the mist,  
Autumn waters touch the sky.*

Translation by Andy Ferguson<sup>14</sup>

## References

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<sup>i</sup> In the *Upajjhātana Sūtra*.