



Encouraging Words

Paul Maloney

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

While we may feel that we know WHY we are here, the answer as to what are we actually DOING, now that we are here, may not be so clear.

A couple of years ago, I woke up with the word “here” clearly in my mind. And I asked myself, “What is it that I can gain by being elsewhere, that I cannot gain by being here?” Upon reflection, I concluded, nothing much at all. It felt right, just being “here.”

Of course, one is always here, where else could we be, and yet our minds are often elsewhere in space and time, and this is often accompanied with a sense of seeking something.

David Loy tells us that the inability to find satisfaction in our lives has its root in a basic “awareness of non-self --- the intuition that ‘I am not real’ which we become conscious of as a sense of lack infecting our empty core.”

Most of us, I believe, can identify with this deep sense that; “something is wrong with me, that something is missing in my life.” So, we set out to fill this felt void, each in our own way. But somehow, nothing seems to work. No matter how successful we may appear to be on the surface, no matter how much we accumulate, we continue to feel empty.

According to the Buddhist account, the sense of unsatisfactoriness about our lives arises from a mistaken notion about the nature of what, or who, we are. Furthermore, should we realize our true nature, we will also understand that there was never anything missing.

In the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Sogyal Rinpoche defines (self) as,

“the absence of true knowledge of who we really are,

together with its result; a doomed clutching on, at all costs, to a cobbled together and makeshift image of ourselves” that has to keep changing in order to “keep alive the fiction of its existence.”

Notice the cause: *“the absence of true knowledge of who we really are,”*

Note also that self is not something that grasps, it is the grasping. (p. 116) So our practice is not a matter of struggling with a substantial self that we have to overcome. Rather the goal is to see through it. To see that it is a fabrication, a set of ideas and attitudes that have frozen into a rigid form.

We use self-centred thinking to maintain and perfect our strategy of self-construction until it eventually becomes, literally, embodied – it is our self. All of our experiences come to be filtered through the self-image (this is me) where they are evaluated, manipulated and used to confirm our self-centred dream. It is the concepts we have developed about who we are, and what the world is, that hinder us, “the one thing that stands between us and our true nature.” Life is unsatisfactory because the self employs its dualistic consciousness to fabricate a private world for itself that it then embellishes with concepts and beliefs. But this world is, to use a modern parlance, only a virtual reality, one that cannot satisfy the need for reality.

So, how can we turn this around, such as to find Reality? Well, the Buddha-Dharma points the way. What then, is entailed by the belief that one is a student of the Buddha-Dharma, and a member of the Zen school in particular? And what is the purpose of this rather intense and demanding practice, if there is nothing to attain? Those who engage in the joy of koan practice get a hint. For example, in our Miscellaneous Koans, we are asked to investigate Tosotsu’s Three Barriers. These are:

a) The purpose of going to abandoned, grassy places and doing zazen is to search for our self-nature. Now, at this moment, where is your self-nature?

Here we are given a very precise purpose as to why to do zazen, now that we have come to this grassy place: to search for our self-nature. Why should we want to do that? Well, the second of Tosotsu's three barriers give us a reason.

b) When you have attained your self-nature, you can free yourself from birth and death. How would you free yourself when your eyes are going to the ground (you are about to die)?

While we are given a reason for coming here, we are also given a challenge; how well will you die, when the time comes?

c) When you have freed yourself from birth and death, you will know where to go. After your body has separated into the four elements, where do you go?

I leave this third question for you to contemplate.

To gain some idea as to how these questions could be answered, we have the lives, and words, of our Ancestral Teachers to guide us, and they all revolve around the practice of zazen. Here is an account given by Dōgen in Chapter 9 of the Shobogenzo, "The Voices of the River-Valley and the Form of the Mountains." (Nishijima and Cross Tl.)

Kyogen Chikan was a member of the assembly of Zen Master Dai-I Dai-en. On one occasion, Dai-I said to Kyogen, "you are sharp and bright, and you have understanding. Without quoting from any text or commentary, speak a phrase for me in the state you had before your parents were born."

(Note 23. "In other words, on the basis of the reality which transcends the past, present, and future." Vol. 1 p.88)

After some years of striving, Kyogen went to Dai-i and pleaded,

"Chikan is dull in body-and-mind and cannot express the truth. Would the master say something for me?"

Dai-I replied,

"I would not mind saying something for you, [but if I did so,] perhaps you would bear a grudge against me later."

Note here the "tough love" of Dai-I. While recognising Kyogen's despair, refrained from interfering with the growth process that Kyogen was going through.

After more years of fruitless searching, Kyogen went to live by himself. While he seemed to have given up the search, the question was still doing its transforming work deep within his heart/mind. He made a thatched hut on the remains of the late National master Daisho's hermitage and dwelt alone for some years. There he planted a bamboo and made it his friend. One day, while sweeping the path, a piece of tile flew up and struck the bamboo with a Crack!! Hearing this sound, Kyogen's Dharma eye suddenly opened.

He bathed and purified himself, and, facing Mount Dai-I, he burnt incense and did prostrations. Then, directing himself to [Master] Dai-I he says,

"Great Master Dai-I! If you had explained it to me before, how would this thing here have been possible? The depth of your kindness surpasses that of a parent."

Finally, he made the following verse:

*At a single stroke I lost recognition.
No longer need I practice self-discipline.
[I am] manifesting behaviour in the way of the ancients,
Never falling into despondency.
There is no trace anywhere:
[The state] is dignified action beyond sound and form.
People everywhere who have realized the truth,
All will praise [these] supreme makings"*

Wu-Men, the compiler of this set of koans, known as the Wu Men Kwan, tells us, emphatically,

For the practice of Zen, it is imperative that you pass through the barrier set up by the Ancestral Teachers. For subtle realisation it is of the utmost importance that you cut off the mind road. If you do not pass the barrier of the ancestors, if you do not cut off the mind road, then you are a ghost clinging to bushes and grasses.

Hakuin Zenji, author of the Song of Zazen, insists on the absolute need for kenshō, seeing our Buddha-nature. He tells us:

Everyone who belongs to the school of Zen should understand, there exists in our school an essential matter that can only be penetrated in great awakening.

I want all of you to be aware that the study of Zen can effect a miraculous transformation that will change you to the very marrow of your bones.

In Section 11 of the Rinzai Roku, we find the master telling his students,

Today's students of the Buddha-Dharma need to look for genuine insight. If you have genuine insight, birth and

death will not affect you, and you will be free to come and to go. If you want to make use of genuine insight, then use it right now without delay or doubt.

In the koan collection, The Iron Flute, we find Case 28. Lung-yu's Ultimate Stage.

A monk asked Lung-yu, "What did old masters attain when they entered the ultimate stage?" "They were like burglars sneaking into a vacant house," came the reply.

To each of these koans Genrō added a verse. Here is his poem for this case.

*He walked the blade of a sword;
He stepped on the ice of a frozen river;
He entered a vacant house;
His desire to steal ceased forever.
He returned to his own home,
Saw the beautiful rays of the morning sun,
And watched the moon and stars intimately.
He walked the streets with ease,
Enjoying the gentle breeze.
At last he opened his treasure house.
Until that moment he never dreamed
He had owned those treasures from the very beginning.*

In dark times, the Way may seem difficult, even impossible, to travel. No matter what, keep going.

Paul Maloney

Upcoming Events

Winter Sesshin Saturday June 6 - Wednesday June 10 at Annandale

The winter sesshin will be led by Paul Maloney Roshi and teacher, Jane Andino at the Sydney Zen Centre in Annandale. It is non residential and will be held over the long weekend in June.

Each day will consist of three blocks: Morning: 9:30-12, Afternoon 2:00-5:00pm and Evening: 6:30-9:00pm. Participants can sign up for the whole sesshin or individual blocks and an introduction evening will be held on Friday June 5th which all participants are strongly advised to attend.

A non residential sesshin is an excellent opportunity to bring the practice into daily life and by signing-up for whole days you will support your fellow meditators while strengthening your own practice.

More information and application forms will be on the website closer to the application date. If you have any queries, please email Zoe Thurner at zoethurner2015@gmail.com



Reports

Samu at Kodoji

It was with some trepidation that a score (including Alex and Pip's little Freya) of Samu-ers and one dog turned out for the first Samu since fires encircled Kodoji, followed by similarly devastating rains. What would Kodoji be like after a dose of death-dealing and life-giving fire and rain?

The first signs of difference were the efforts made to repair and protect property. The local council had freshly laid some gravel over a washed out Gorricks Run, so fresh and deep that it temporarily

bogged a car, before it could be rescued by the same council workers. The bulldozed fire break around Kodoji too, was still fresh and visible.

Most remarkable was the green! So fresh and vibrant that from a distance, you would not know that fire had passed through so recently. The rain also made itself known by the trees along the creek, knocked over like matchsticks by the sudden wall of water. Some along the road were also removed by council. Paddocks remain wet and the water runs deep over the ford. One brown snake and one other snake, a variety of birds and insects were sighted, but the impact of the fires on animals was hard to gauge.

The close shave with these wild, threatening and uncontrollable events made our tasks seem comfortingly simple and



mundane: mowing, chopping, sweeping, wiping, more mowing, whipper-snipping, fixing, stock-taking, weeding, grading, cleaning, oiling, dusting and more mowing. Of course, there was also the not-so-small issue of feeding and showing this small army of workers. Did I mention we did some mowing?

Maintenance may have been the primary purpose, but the deeper result was cultivation of Sangha. It was wonderful to see familiar faces and meet new ones. Outside the immediate Sangha,

Betsy and Jumpa of the Insight Meditation tradition joined in the fun. Barry returned with putty and Robert expertly demolished fallen timbers. Michael helped Jason and Jumpa realign the drive way. Chiyo and Sachi occupied Joey delightfully. Joey said hello to everyone at the morning sit reminding us that the gateless barrier has a dog companion. Kudos to everyone, but I give special mention to Kerry and Brendon for the invisible work of organising and being one of the first to arrive and last to leave.

With so many hands, more was accomplished more easily than anticipated.



Photos: Barry Stewart

Women's Retreat at Kodoji - New dates

Due to high waters over the ford at Kodoji, the Women's Retreat was postponed until 27 - 29 June.

Contact jillsteverson@gmail.com

News from the Board

DIAMOND SANGHA TEACHERS MEETING

We hosted a very successful meeting of teachers from all over Australia and NZ in March. Although, our plans to hold the meeting at Kodoji had to be cancelled because of the flooding creek and state of the road, and the Forum on Monday night was cancelled to mitigate the spread of Covid 19. We look forward to experiencing how the cross pollination of ideas from the teachers may enrich our practice at SZC in the future. One exciting possibility, in these times of isolation, is an Online Zoom Dojo – where Subhana, and other teachers, connect with the sangha virtually from their homes. Watch this space for more information!

COVID 19

The Board and teachers have decided to cancel activities over April and May to minimise the risk of Covid 19 to ourselves and spreading through the sangha.

The cancelled events are:

*Autumn sesshin – fees will be refunded in full
Samu at Kodoji on 28th and 29th March
Baby Naming Ceremony on 5th April*

Also, the Annandale zendo will be closed till further notice.

But you can still connect with the teachers and the sangha:

If you wish to sit with Subhana on Monday nights from your own home, please join the Zoom meeting using the link circulated in each Sunday's weekly calendar update.

If you wish to participate in an on-line group with Gilly on Wednesday nights, please express your interest via info@szc.org.au

BABE IN THE HOUSE

Congratulations to Lily and Adrian on the birth of their beautiful new daughter. The Board has sent flowers to them as a small gift.

WEEDS AND REGENERATION

After the fires and floods the road to our bush zendo was in very bad repair so the local Council graded it and put some rocks on the road to make it more stable for our cars. Unfortunately, some of the areas near the creek were adversely affected by the workers pushing over dead wattles. This makes the bush regeneration efforts of our sangha members and the bush regen company we have employed, much more difficult. So, the Council has offered to supply endemic tube stock plants and the labour costs to plant them, to restore the site. We look forward to seeing new life in this area soon.

Regular Notices

The Annandale zendo will be closed till further notice. Please note these regular sittings may also be cancelled.

Use of Kodoji

Kodoji is available for use by members of the SZC and guests (if accompanied by a member). It can also be hired by other groups if approved by the Board. Fees are \$20 per night for members and \$25 for non-members. There is a \$100 booking fee for non-member groups. Booking of Kodoji is essential and it is also essential to receive instructions about use of the facility before going there. Please note that the local Fire Brigade has advised restrictions during summer. Try giving the family a wonderful weekend, or yourself a few days of private retreat.

Enquiries to Brendon Stewart 9879 7290
stewarts34@bigpond.com

Blue Mountains Zen

The Blue Mountains Zen Group meets on the second and fourth Sundays of each month, from 2pm - 4.30pm in Lawson. Our teacher is Paul Maloney 9045 3897

Contact Jane janeandino@yahoo.com.au

Canberra Zen Group

Meets on Wednesday evenings.

Contact Gary
gaitcheon@gmail.com 0429 635 412

Sydney North

North Shore Zen Group meets on Thursday nights 7-9pm at the *Quaker Meeting House*, 59 Boundary Road, Wahroonga. Please bring your own zafu/stool and zabuton. Contribution \$5 - \$10 towards hiring the venue. Contact Maggie Gluek magpiewarble@yahoo.com.

Sydney East

The Guan Yin Sangha meets every Thursday morning at Peter Bursky's home in Matraville from 6:30-8:00am.

Allan Marett also leads the occasional zazenkai 3-4 times a year. Zafu & zabuton's are provided.

Contact Peter Bursky mowerman26@hotmail.com

Sydney South

The Wombat Sangha Miranda meets every Monday evening from 7- 9pm at *Our Lady Star of the Sea* meeting rooms, 50 Kiora Road, Miranda.

We practice deep relaxation then zazen and kinhin and a talk/discussion on the dharma. Zafu & zabuton's are provided. Contribution \$10 towards hiring the venue. Bring yoga mat.

Contact Peter Thompson 0408 507 906

joshu_7@hotmail.com

Members of the Board



Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) stewartkerry4@gmail.com; Steven Crump (secretary); Jason Koh (treasurer); Alex Budlevskis; Helen Sanderson; Brendon Stewart, Zoe Thurner, Julie Robinson.

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April 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	2 Orientation CANCELLED	3	4
5 Buddha's Birthday & Baby naming Ceremony CANCELLED	6 VIRTUAL Dharma Cafe 7-9pm	7	8 VIRTUAL Dharma Cafe 7-9pm	9	10 Autumn Sesshin CANCELLED	22 Autumn Sesshin CANCELLED
12 Autumn Sesshin CANCELLED	13 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	14 Autumn Sesshin CANCELLED	15 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	16 Autumn Sesshin CANCELLED	17 Autumn Sesshin CANCELLED	18
19 Zazenkai 8:30-12pm Talk Jane Andino CANCELLED	20 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	21 Board Meeting 6pm for 6.30	22 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	23	24	25
26	27 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	28	29 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	30		



*Group shot, Samu at Gorricks. The back of Sachi's head is just visible! Missing are Robert and Sean.
Photo by Sean Loughman.*

May 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31					1	2
3	4 VIRTUAL Full Moon Ceremony, <i>Not Discussing Faults of Others</i>	5	6 VIRTUAL Full Moon Ceremony, <i>Not Discussing Faults of Others</i>	7 Orientation CANCELLED	8	9
10	11 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhan	12	13 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	14 Beginners' Night with Gillian Coote CANCELLED	15	16
17 Zazenkaï 8:30-12pm talk by Alex Budlevskis with Gillian Coote CANCELLED	18 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	19 Board Meeting 6pm for 6.30	20 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	21	22	23
24	25 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	26	27 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	28	29	30



*Fine folk supporting our sangha samu efforts. Many thanks.
Photos: Barry Stewart*