

mind moon circle



(Image obtained from Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) "The Miracle of Mindfulness")

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This issue explores the many dimensions of sesshin.

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The Spring issue will focus on teaching and being taught.

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* *wombat graphic (right) from
home.iprimus.com.au/michellejbailey/storybook.htm*



BLUE CLIFF RECORD
CASE 25
The Hermit of Lotus Peak

Robert Aitken

The Story

The Hermit of Lotus Peak held up his staff before his assembly and asked, "Why didn't the ancients remain here after they reached it?"

The assembly was silent, so he himself responded, "Because it lends no strength on the road."

Again he asked, "After all, how is it?"

Answering for his assembly again, he said, "Carrying my staff across the back of my neck, not looking back at others, I enter the myriad peaks straightaway."

Persona

Today we hear from a nameless hermit, whose nickname, Lien-hua Feng-hsiang (Renge Hosho), was taken from Lotus Peak, where he had his hut. We only know that he was Yun-men's grandson in the Dharma, and that he probably lived around the turn of the Sung period, in the late tenth or early eleventh century.

Comment

In his comment on the case, Yuan-wu gives us the background.

After they had attained the Path, the ancients would live in thatched huts or stone grottos, boiling the roots of wild greens in broken legged pots, passing their days. Unconcerned with fame or fortune, they acted according to conditions. They would impart a turning word, wanting to repay the benevolence of the Buddhas and ancestors and transmit the Buddha-Mind Seal.

As soon as he saw a monk coming, the Hermit would hold up his staff and say, "Why didn't the ancients remain here after they reached it?" Twenty years passed, and not a single person could respond clearly and unequivocally. Yuan-wu remarks that the Hermit's question was both provisional and correct, that is to say, it was intended to prompt realisation, and it also presents the fact. All the turning words of masters worthy of the name have this dual function.

During those twenty years, many well-trained clerics, and probably lay people too, presented responses from their stock of clever devices. But as the story goes, even those who could say something in general about the subject could not strike the hermit's central point. Actually, as the hermit shows by placing his staff on his shoulders and announcing his itinerary, the ultimate fact does not lie in

explanation, though without words it can't be made clear. Yuan-wu quotes from the literature, "The Path is fundamentally without words. We use words to reveal the Path."

The Hermit's revelatory words are the question, "Why didn't the ancients remain here when they reached it?" In terms of grammar, "here" is a demonstrative pronoun. All pronouns have antecedents – the people, things, or matters which they present or represent. "*She* is my sister." The other pronoun in the Hermit's question is "it". In his question, both "here" and "it" have the same antecedent. "Why didn't the ancients remain *here* when they reached *it*?"

Maybe you will say that the antecedent of "here" and "it" is "*just this*". But "just this" too is, in effect, a demonstrative pronoun. What is "just this"? You could say that it is the staff. After all, that's what the Hermit was thrusting forth when he asked his question. Is the staff a kind of pronoun?

Once Yun-men held forth his staff and said, "This staff has become a dragon. It has swallowed up heaven and earth. Mountains, rivers, the great Earth – where can they be found?" (BCR 60). The antecedent of this staff is a dragon, but clearly the dragon has an antecedent too. Does the Hermit's staff and Yun-men's staff have the same antecedent? I think so, and the dragon just identifies the staff's function. The Hermit takes his along to the myriad peaks. Yun-men takes his along when his *teisho* is finished. In another context, Hsueh-tou raised his staff and asked, "Are there any of you who live and die with this?" (BCR-61). I have to say that the antecedent of "this" is not the staff.

When the World-Honoured-One was at Mt. Grdhrakuta, he twirled a flower before his assembled monks, and looked around. You know the rest of that story. Whenever he was asked a question, Chu-chih always raised one finger. You know the rest of that story too.

The old hermit had a question about a single point, that single matter, that swallows up heaven and earth. "Why didn't the old teachers remain here when they had it?"

Can you not ask the same question about Shakyamuni Buddha? Why didn't he remain under the Bodhi Tree when he had it? He saw clearly that all beings are the Tathagata. But he could also understand that beings are unable to bear witness to their Buddhahood because of their delusions and preoccupations. So he thought of his five disciples, and arose from his seat, and sought them out in Varanasi, and preached to them about Four Noble Truths. Everyone is caught in *dukkha*, in anguish over the imperfection of reality as they see it. I would like other people to think as I do. I would like them to conduct themselves in this way, but they act like that. I would like to live forever in good health. I would like my stuff to endure. Delusions and preoccupations.

As an exercise in the Dharma, translate your feelings of anguish into personal terms, for the Buddha was and is speaking directly to you. The Dharma is not a philosophy or a system of ethics or metaphysics. It is a personal passage. The Hermit of Lotus Peak speaks to us personally.

In response to his challenge, nobody could say a word so the Hermit said, "Because it lends no strength on the road." It is important not to hurry past this point. The staff metaphor in Ch'an literature has many layers. I wonder who might have uncovered them all.

Pa-chiao Hui-ching, a master in the Kue-yang lineage, said to his monks, "If you have a staff, I will give you a staff; if you have no staff, I will take it from you." A workout in ambiguity, without which there would be no Zen. Wu-men comments, "It helps you to cross the stream when the bridge is broken down. It guides you back to the village on a moonless night." That would seem to indicate that the Hermit is mistaken. Certainly Wu-men seems to suggest that it does indeed lend strength on the road. But then Wu-men goes on to say, "If you call it a staff, you enter hell like an arrow." (GB-44)

I translate Wu-men's comment with "it" as the subject, "It helps you..." and so on. There is no "it" in the original, in keeping with the Chinese practice of omitting pronouns wherever possible. But explicit or implied, the antecedent must be clear, just as the metaphor of Pa-chiao's staff must be clear. Here again, the antecedent of "it" is not the staff. "Call it a staff and you enter hell like an arrow".

The great worthies of the past knew very well the antecedent of "just this". The Hermit raised it with his staff for those who stopped by his hut. How was it raised for him? We don't know. We do know, or at least the Mahayana fathers tell us, that it was raised for the Buddha by the morning star. He was ready for the star, and we can be sure that the Hermit was ready for whatever happened to him there in Yun-men's family.

When his listeners were again silent in the face of the Hermit's second presentation, he again challenged them, "After all, how is it?" How does it work? The monks still were silent, so he said, "Carrying my staff across the back of my neck, not looking back at others, I enter the myriad peaks straightaway."

The Buddha would be lost to history if he had simply remained under the Bodhi tree. He recapped his realization with teaching designed to lift the iron cover of ignorance from humanity. The intimate and thrilling phantasmagoria qualities of the world would have remained hidden if the Buddha had remained in the shade and shelter of the Bodhi tree after his realisation, and of others who had similar attainments had kept quiet.

When the green cover that fixed nitrogen in the soil is mowed, the ground is double-dug, the seeds are planted, the rain falls, the earth-worms do their job, then the garden grows and the vegetables mature and at last are harvested. But the end of harvest is not storage. The harvest is to be distributed and eaten. That's how it is. The realization is to be used. The pilgrimage of the Buddha on the dusty roads of the Ganges valley is itself the distribution of the harvest. Entering the myriad peaks is itself the Hermit's way of passing it on.

Preaching along the Ganges valley, organising sanghas setting guidelines, dealing with importunate groupies, even bandits—thus the Buddha entered the myriad

peaks straightaway. The Hermit just sat in his hut, but his task was to all extent and purposes the same. As the Buddha makes clear in the *Diamond Sutra*, he is not the Buddha with the god-like endowments that we attribute to him. He doesn't have a magic wand, or even a staff to be called such. Whatever he has, or rather whatever he is, he carries it casually, just as the Hermit carried his.

"Carrying my staff across the back of my neck, I enter the myriad peaks straightaway." Across the back of his neck the staff was of no help on the road. *It* helped him to cross the stream, *it* guided him back to the village, but call it an *it* and you enter hell like an arrow.

If we can't identify *it* or its antecedent, at least we can identify its virtues. Clarity purpose runs through this case, as it runs through the life of the Buddha, and the lives of all his worthy successors. I think of the Dalai Lama, his clarity of purpose, and his equanimity. He is not looking back at others, but hand in hand with his community he is walking the tortuous paths of reconciliation through the myriad peaks of hegemony.

Patience is another virtue of *it*. Again our model can be the Dalai Lama, or any of the great sages of the past. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was the Diamond Sangha, or any worthy sangha.

When Yamamoto Gempo Osho had completed his formal practice at Empukuji near Kyoto, he heard that the monastery Ryutakuji to the north had fallen into ruin. Founded by Hakuin Ekaku Zenji and first headed by Torei Enji Zenji, it served as the practice centre for hundreds of monks, but after two centuries, the spirit had run its course, the roof had fallen in, the walls had collapsed here and there, and only rats and spiders were in residence. Gempo received consent from his master to go there and try to revive the spirit and restore the buildings. Almost blind after a bout with eye disease as an infant, he made his way to the ruined monastery and moved in.

He lived there alone, doing zazen alone, reciting sutras alone, and sleeping in corners where the rain could not reach him. He walked to the nearby village of Sawaji to accept donations of rice and money, and to the town of Mishima an hour away by foot, on the same errand. Finally, after a full year, a monk joined him, and gradually a sangha gathered. With the help of lay friends he cultivated in the course of his visits to Sawaji and Mishima, the monastery was gradually restored. His lay friends were so pleased they gave him a trip around the world by passenger ship. He even met President Harding.

Well, of course it was the restoration of the monastery and the building of a sangha with a view of finding at least one good successor that was Gempo Roshi's clear purpose as he made his way from Empukuji to Ryutakuji, not any kind of luxurious and worldly payoff. Without looking back at others he made his way north to his new home, and set about making it livable for the Tao. Yung-chia said,

Haven't you met someone seasoned in the Way of Ease.
a person with nothing to do and nothing to master,

who neither rejects thought nor seeks truth?

At ease, one is not impatient. The truly patient person is not even patient. No thought of achievement or payoff. No anxiety that others live up to conceptual standards. At ease with the self as well. When Thoreau was dying of tuberculosis, he was completely at ease. His friend Theo Brown visited him in the last weeks of his life, and wrote:

He seemed to be in an exalted state of mind for a long time before his death. He said it is just as good to be sick as to be well - just as good to have a poor time as a good time.

This during a snowstorm that raged outside his window. A snowstorm is as good as a fine day. Illness is as good as health. The lovely call of the Melodious Laughing Thrush is as good as the whine of a beggar. That doesn't mean they are the same. Thoreau knew he was sick and dying. "As good as" doesn't mean blanc mange. It means that you call the cops in an emergency. It means that you speak out in the face of injustice. It means that you know who you are and what you have to do, like Gempo Roshi.

"Why didn't the ancients remain here after they reached it?" asked the Hermit, patiently, patiently, not looking back at others, at ease with himself and the world. Who says that koans have no application?

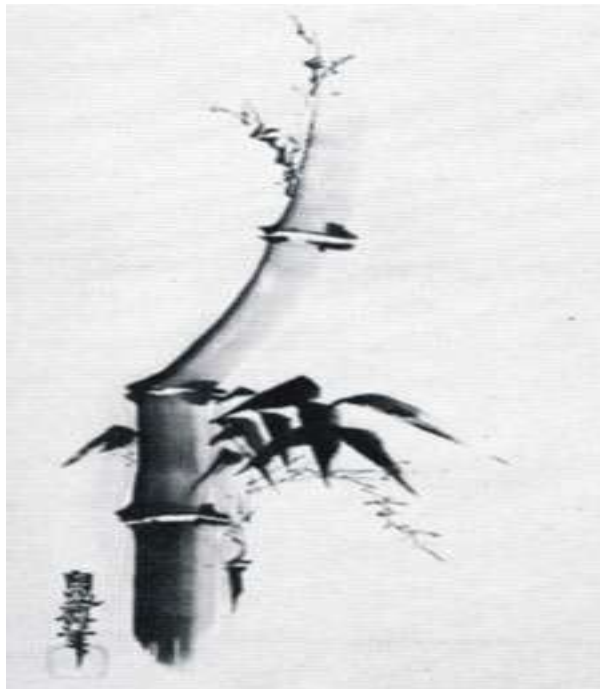


Image obtained from <http://www.zenkan.com/esp/fechassesshin.htm>

Early mornings at Sesshin

In the friendly darkness
mopoke calls, "Mopoke" "Mopoke"
as Jiki hits the iron ring
that calls us from our beds.

4.a.m

Two magpies singing,
from hill to hill,
kookaburra peels of raucous laughter ,
say "Ours! Ours!"
then silence,
darkness.

We sit on our cushions
in the candlelight,
our tiny cups filled
with the offering of tea,
then a clap of sticks, a bell,
and silence....darkness.

Silence.

Darkness

that slowly thins and fades
then Daylight! Daylight!
the world springing into flight
with a thousand, thousand songs,
alive, alive in the ten directions.

Sally Hopkins

Least Action

The path of least action
Not the least difficult
Leads to Gorrick's Run
Where all things speak
Like the ant
With his impossible load
Finding a way home
Not the easiest path no
For the effort is
At times
Immeasurable
Yet still he keeps going
Not adding complaint.

Or like a leaf that falls
Never straight to the ground
But falls with the grace of
Least action
Not adding restraint.

Or like new raindrops
On the window sliding down
Moving around
Invisible barriers
And never a line that is straight.

So I travelled naturally
To Gorrick's Run
Where roads were laid
And buildings made
Long before me
And waiting for me.

Those who did these things
Let me rest my heavy load
And invite me to dance
The law of least action
Oh! How wonderful to cast away
What doesn't matter.

Not the least difficult
No less no more
And lovely
So lovely
Like that ant
The leaf
And the raindrop.

Larry Agriesti



photo: Gorrick's Run. source: www.archizine.com/cootezendo/index.htm

Assisting the breakfast cook, hazy moon sesshin

open the doorway of this dawn,
go out through it.
make subtle adjustments to the silence
as your clothes slip floorwards
in generous folds,
feel each stitch someone else sewed
tightening against the cold.
down the dark stairs, into the kitchen
that is a flaw of warmth
in the black morning.
hand him the saucepan
he can't reach, without thinking.
watch him at the gas stove
light a burner
with a box of matches
someone else has put there
year after year
in the top left-hand drawer.
scattered around the cluttered shelves
so many kindnesses push forwards
their tiny offerings-
cutlery, cloth, soap and sponge.
stir the porridge
look out over the field

with leaves you imagine
crack underfoot
like vows you have broken,
or are yet to break,
in your mind, you gather
as many as you can
in your hands too small
to hold them.
lift each up towards
the trees that lost them.
move the wooden spoon through
the thick body of oats.
the floor still holds sure
as you lean inwards and down
with your feet that are
clasped in the leather
a stranger gently glued
together.
upstairs, someone you love
no less and no more than
anyone else
someone you can not know
cups their hands around
an open bowl.

Tash Sudan

Three Bodies of the Buddha -- Meal Sutra

Caroline Josephs

The clappers sound, wood against wood. Our voices erupt out of silence into chanting. At each change, at each threshold, I am cleft, I am the 'brokenness of enlightenment', liminal, transforming. As the meal-serving ritual (*orioki*) begins, the Zen community of practitioners chants:

Vairochana, pure and clear Dharmakaya Buddha
Lochana, full and complete, Sambhogakaya Buddha
Shakyamuni, infinitely varied, Nirmanakaya Buddha.....

The words of the meal sutra are for me, mysterious incantations when I hear them. The mystery sounds in me and thrills, trills in me, resonates with a strange sense of something beyond, touching something in my body, quivering it, strangely intriguing, a question beyond my understanding, evoking age-old yearnings.

Over the years the opening phrases of the meal sutras have never failed to awaken the same sense in my body. An awakening changes one state to another. It is thresholding.

And as I remind you of it in this telling, it is re-evoked again in this place, bringing into being our Zen ancestors, the ones in whose feet we tread.

We are thus brought into a timeless present where past-present-future re-enactment is brought together. Our ancestors in the dharma did it, we do it, and, we will continue to do it, because there is something in this ritual which is important, on many many layers. When the servers do this age-old dance, we who chant have the age-old dance evoked in us. It enters us. We enter it. For the servers manifest and embody the words in a particular, a unique way, each time. Server and Zen student, dancer and seated bodhisattva, each brings forth the other in the dance of the meal sutras and serving, in the ritual of *orioki*. With each repetition, evoking time past, crystallising time present, and heralding time future, each time the dance comes forth.

The repetition is important because it is ceremony, it is ritual, it is a kind of magic -- happening right there, right here. Now. In the everywhen, the every-where time-space, the no-time, no-place, this place -- the particularity of the *dojo* at Kodoji.

I have always loved the peculiar choreography of two (sometimes three) servers entering the *dojo* and doing the dance of the meal offering together, in unison.

The sutra sings of the Zen story, an offering of words. Each listener receives what they can ingest, what they need -- as server offers food, and as bodhisattva seated on the cushion receives, into an empty bowl, a mind

uncluttered with thoughts and distractions. Food for the hungry. Liquid for the thirsty.

At the first line,

Vairochana, pure and clear, Dharmakaya Buddha,

two servers appear in the open doorway, on the threshold, between the inside and the outside, holding steaming pots of hot food, trays held high as the *Tathagatha*, quite still, no movement..... Everything is latent, not yet manifest. The steam rises from the large serving bowls of food, yet to be eaten. Form is empty, still. Just chanting. The birds are twittering, the grass is blowing in the wind, with the red cliffs and the high ridges caressing the clouds and the sky, and the chanting coming out of silence.

We sit in long lines up each side of the *dojo*, each on their own square mat (*zabuton*) and round cushion (*zafu*). On the altar two candles flicker. The double doors have been thrown open, a slight breeze moves through the open doors around the sides of the *dojo*. All the bodhisattvas wait, sitting motionless.

In this still, silent place, *Vairochana* is manifest -- an aspect of the Buddha Body which is pure and clear. A glimpse of a clear mirror. No dust on the mirror. If I remain here too long, I become mute -- just a hungry ghost, ravaged by being in exile from another, a potential Self. Absent from the feast. If we stay here -- we don't eat. Here on the cushion we may rest in infertility, understanding, potentiality, but mute, unable to speak, unable to move, to act. This is the Buddha body or aspect of no substance, no form, *sunyata*, emptiness. This moment is stillness, is silence -- holding all possibility of fertility in the threshold that is about to be crossed. In this state, like silence, out of which the chant arises -- is clarity, fresh spring water, the sound of the bell. No meaning (or another level of meaning), just things as they are.

The first body of the Buddha, the ***Dharmakaya***, is known as the "Pure and Clear Law Body". It is associated with *Vairochana*, the Buddha of Emptiness. 'Law' the etymological meaning of '*Dharma*' in Sanskrit, refers to the nature of things, animate and inanimate. In this context, the term refers to the infinite, fathomless void, charged with possibilities, that produces, infuses and indeed *is* -- the 'material' of all bodies. According to the Zen view, this body has no substance, even for a moment. It is unbounded, unspeakable, the core of realisation, the gateless barrier.

In a legendary story of Emperor Wu of southeastern China, Emperor Wu asks, "What is the foremost sacred truth?"
Bodhidharma said, "Vast emptiness, nothing holy."

In this realm of emptiness, of clarity, of place without form, a place from which all form springs -- all is equal, and sacred. No judging, no choosing, no face, no taste, no word, -- no meaning, or narrative (in one sense although it is a 'meta-story'). Things and events in their suchness.

Next we chant;

Lochana, full and complete, Samboghakaya Buddha.

In contrast with *Vairochana*, the ***Samboghakaya*** reminds us of the conditions of being in the world -- in a land of uncertainty, in the between worlds of travel, a liminal space-time, the conditions of life in all their paradoxical states and messiness. To eat, to be fertile, to live, is to inhabit the realm of *Lochana*, the liminal, the 'dream' realm, a place of fuzziness, the comings and goings of the world..

Each Body of Buddha, part of a mystery map, enfolding and infused with the others, like overlapping circles of differently tinted transparencies, each completely different and yet including and overlaying the others. These Three Bodies -- conceptual, poetic dimensions, or aspects.

In the *Samboghakaya* Body, I am in the country of the transitional, the liminal, the threshold, the between space. All is unstable. This is where self meets Self, where reality meets Reality.

This is the landscape of dream, where apparent mutual inconsistencies co-exist in apparent paradoxical collision. This is the land of *Samboghakaya* Buddha, the Buddha said to be the 'dream body'.

The servers bow together on the threshold, their trays heavy with the steaming serving bowls full of food. Stepping from the threshold into the room they proceed towards the leaders at the altar end of the *dojo*. There is movement, process. An age-old ritual is being re-enacted. It has been happening over hundreds of years. Each time there is a retreat it is re-enacted three times a day, re-evoking the ancients in this place, right now.

The second body of Buddha, the *Samboghakaya* Buddha body is the body of fullness, exemplified by the Net of Indra in *Hua-yen* philosophy. It is associated with the Buddha aspect of completeness.

This is the liminal zone -- a place where each and every particularity can be present in contrasting and paradoxical existence. This is the confusing *melée* of conditions of our lives. Mutual inconsistencies exist side by side. Suffering exists. Longing and desire, sorrow, anger and fear manifest. This can be the place where we long for food to arrive, desire to have the hunger satisfied.

When the whole universe is reflected in a multi-dimensional net with each point of the net a jewel that perfectly reflects and contains all other points or jewels -- as in Indra's Net -- my body is not my body, but is a constituent of all bodies. This is known as the body of bliss, a name that expresses the delight of freedom in the self and an intimacy in the sense of being with all things, and all things being within each being. Robert Aitken Roshi calls this intimacy "inter-penetration". Dogen (p.183 *Enlightenment Unfolds*) says 'Intimate means close and inseparable'.

This is the territory of apparent opposites -- the liminal zone of transitional states. It has a 'both-and' quality. The between of initiation. For Tibetan Buddhists, it is the Bardo realm, the realm between death and re-birth.

John Tarrant, Roshi, points out (in an essay on "Zen Poetry, and the Great Dream Buddha" unpublished undated paper from the author) that this is the domain of myth, story, dream, meditation, vision, and the archetypes, the locus of meaning and of experience, of what humans undergo. It is a highly charged realm, one of process, where the Bodhisattva works with the suffering of beings. It works with the personal, and simultaneously beyond it. It includes poetry and *koan*, the work of gathering and transforming this thick material -- what I have turned away from through suffering, through error and foolishness, through ignorance, says Tarrant Roshi.

In the landscape of *Samboghakaya* I inhabit the transitional, the liminal, the threshold, the between space, the dream. All is unstable here, fluid, haunting. It is the subtle body, the dream body. Rupture and cleft are certain to reside here. The story of this state continues until the moment of re-union (rupture may turn to rapture) or a 'cleaving' in the sense of being joined. Cleaving has both meanings -- of being torn asunder, *and* being re-united.

Next we chant:

Shakyamuni infinitely varied Nirmanakaya Buddha.

The third body, the *Nirmanakaya* Buddha, is the body of uniqueness, exemplified by Shakyamuni Buddha. "Shakyamuni is the prime example of uniqueness," says Robert Aitken Roshi, but so am I, so are you, each blade of grass, each leaf, each pebble, each form, each particularity, each dust particle, each grain of sand, arising and passing away, appearing and dissolving in an endless stream of change.

The servers together at opposite sides of the *dojo*, kneel down to begin to serve each of the bodhisattvas in turn, beginning with the leaders or the teachers if they are present in the *dojo*. Each person signals how much and which of the foods they are needing to the server. Food to feed the hungry. Longing satisfied in the communing.

With meal sutras, we are, as Mircea Eliade reminds us, 'always eating the divinity (p. 107 *Myth and Reality*) always re-evoking sacred, spiritual food.

The two servers enter the *dojo* and do the dance, the formalised ritual and movements of the meal offering together, in harmony. Duality is dissolved in an act of serving food. Hakuin Zenji said: "Singing and Dancing are the voice of the Law." The chanting and the movements of the ritual are the Dharma, the Law, the teachings, the very core of Zen practice itself, intriguing, beyond conceptual understanding.

Dogen says, "At the very moment when you do not understand buddha-dharma, that is a moment of intimate language...That is when the World-

honored One has intimate language. That is when the World-honored One is present." (p.181 *Enlightenment Unfolds*). Dogen used language in particular ways; he would call it 'intimate language' and it was designed to break out of the limitations of the intellect. By this means he could touch directly on the matter of duality and non-duality. Each time the opening phrases of the meal sutras awaken a sense of wonder in my body.

The *orioki* or meal ceremony is an ancient ritual. The ritual re-stores (or re-stories) the Three Bodies, each time the *sangha* (the community of Zen practitioners) presents it at *sesshin*. The ritual manifests the three bodies of the Buddha, there, in that particular place, each time, in each particular person. Each person present re-enacts, re-embodies the Ancestors through ritual, through storytelling.

Dogen says: *The place where the dream is expressed within a dream is the land and the assembly of buddha ancestors.* (p.165, Tanahashi, K., (ed.) *Enlightenment Unfolds*). The place can be the *dojo* among the towering red ridges of the MacDonald Valley, or it can be anywhere that the ritual is enacted. Telling the story, singing the sutras, this dream within the dream of reality -- that is, the Buddhas, the Ancestors. Dogen says, *Simply expressing the dream within a dream is itself the buddhas and ancestors, the assembly of unsurpassable enlightenment.* [p.167, 'Within a Dream Expressing the Dream' (1242 Fukakusa) *Enlightenment Unfolds*, Kasuaki Tanahashi]

I am thus brought into a timeless present where past, present, and future re-enactments are brought together. Ancestral Guides in the *dharma* did it, I do it as they did, and we who are Zen practitioners will continue to do it.

When the servers do the age-old dance, we who chant have the age-old dance evoked in us. It enters us. We enter it. For the servers, they manifest and embody the words in their own particular unique ways, each time. The repetition is important because it is ceremony, it is ritual, it is dream, it is magic happening right there, right here. In the everywhen, in the everywhere.

Listen!

Vairochana, pure and clear Dharmakaya Buddha
Lochana, full and complete, Sambhogakaya Buddha
Shakyamuni, infinitely varied, Nirmanakaya Buddha.....

And all of these 'three bodies of the Buddha' are just "one-taste Zen" as Dogen calls it -- each body, just a concept, enfolding and inter-linking with the others, matrices of overlapping, interpenetrating reality. Each not separate from the other. Mystery is derived from a Greek word which means 'to seal the lips'. There also, in silence, in emptiness, we come to the heart of our experience, to the touching of the heart-mind -- which is, of course, what the word, *sesshin* means. The three Bodies are archetypal notions -- aspects of Buddha. Overlapping and interpenetrating, they serve

to alert Zen practitioners to the form that is emptiness, constructs of the mind that are mere ephemeral aids in the journey towards insight into Reality.

In my notebook I inscribe names:

*Vairochana,
Lochana,
Shakyamuni,
Avalokiteshvara,
Manjusri,
Salivating with the juices of names --
Buddha in the mouth.*

*[This is an edited excerpt from Caroline Josephs' doctoral thesis,
'Sacred Oral Storytelling and Transformation' 2005.]*

Main Work Cited

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Image taken from: <http://www.funkeyforest.com/sesshin2.html>

PRAJNA PARAMITA

Maggie Gluek

We come today to the sixth paramita, that of *prajna*, transcendent wisdom. This is *the* defining quality of the Bodhisattva ("the bodhisattva lives by prajna paramita") and the insight that lies at the heart of Mahayana Buddhism. Santideva, the 8th c. Indian monk who wrote *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, indicates that all other teaching is in preparation for this, the most important paramita. It is also the most difficult to define. Impossible really.¹ The heart of the matter is, of course, classically expressed in the Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra, delivered as medicine by the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara who looks down on the suffering of the world and hears its cries. The sutra reveals the truth of *sunyata*, the true nature of things as they are, which is empty of self-existence.²

It is not that nothing exists at all—that is the heresy of nihilism—but that no thing has a separate and abiding existence. Not the Five Skandhas, whatever we think of as constituting you and me; not the sacred tenets of Buddhism—the Four Noble Truths, the Chain of Dependent Origination, the Path, Realisation. By the way, form, appearance, is only the first of the Five Skandhas, the others being sensation, perception, formulation, consciousness. Thus, "form is emptiness" is a template, a shorthand for "everything is empty." The Heart Sutra deconstructs all manner of phenomena for us so that we may not be misled by provisional distinctions.

What is Prajna Paramita? Personified, she is the Mother of All Buddhas, the understanding that gives birth to Buddhas, to awakened nature.

Red Pine translates the word pra-jna as pre-knowing. *Pra*, meaning before; *jna*, as in *jnana*, meaning knowledge. This is the same combination from which the Greeks got pro-gnosis. But the meanings are inverse: prognosis is knowledge *before* of what is ahead, prajna understands what is *before* knowledge itself.³ Knowledge implies a position, a view; prajna is no positions, the emptiness of positions. In the words of the Diamond Sutra—that other most important Prajnaparamita text—it is abiding nowhere.

Manjusri, who is abiding on the altar, on that vigorous lion, is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. In one hand he holds a scroll, no doubt the Prajna Paramita sutra. In the other, he wields the two-edged sword of prajna that cuts through dualisms. Each side of the sword cuts: through inside and outside, self and other, birth and death, form and emptiness. His sword slashes concepts and cuts off doubt.

Prajna has that sharp, penetrating quality. Insight is incisive, it happens in a flash, a nanosecond. In the old Chan texts one of the metaphors for realisation is being bitten by a snake ... sharp and swift and lethal.⁴

¹ Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, eds., Santideva, *The Bodhicaryavatara* (Oxford, 1995), p. 105.

² Red Pine, translation and commentary, *The Heart Sutra—The Womb of the Buddha* (Washington DC, 2004), p. 68.

³ Red Pine, *Heart Sutra*, p. 29.

⁴ Robert Aitken, *The Practice of Perfection* (New York, 1994), p. 107

The kind of wisdom we're talking about here is not conceptual, though inevitably it is reviewed that way. It is not wisdom *about*, not wisdom with an object. Nor is it an object of mind that can be attained. Historically, in the Indian Madyamika tradition, they went at it by saying what it was not. (Madyamika means Middle Way and was the school of the Nagarjuna. He is said to have discovered the Prajnaparamita texts which had been delivered to the Nagas, mythical serpent protectors, by the Buddha for safekeeping. Hence his name.) The procedure is to undercut, again and again, until there's nothing left and then that has to be relinquished too. Undercut, undercut, undercut, undercut undercutting, empty emptiness itself before it too becomes a thing—that's the metaphysical sword of double negatives. But ultimately "it" cannot be explained, only experienced right here. Realised! We must apply that sword for ourselves!

The real brilliance of our Chan tradition is its resolute reluctance, if not refusal, to use stale words, which are unlikely to transform anguish and distress. Rather it seeks to bring about experience that will. That experience might be live words! Its commitment is to keeping it fresh, to presenting the embodied fact rather than a signifier. Even then the expression may be imperfect, the reality ineffable.

In Case 46 of the Blue Cliff Record, Ching Ch'ing articulates this dilemma:

Ching Ch'ing asked a monk, "What is that sound outside?"

"The sound of rain dripping," replied the monk.

Ch'ing said, "Ordinary people are upside down, falling into delusion about themselves, and pursuing outside objects."

"What about yourself, Your Reverence?" asked the monk.

Ch'ing said, "I am on the brink of falling into delusion about myself."

The monk asked, "What do you mean 'on the brink of falling into delusion about yourself?'"

Ch'ing said, "To attain the world of emptiness may not be so difficult, but to express the bare substance is hard."⁵

How readily indeed we fall into delusion about ourselves. Is there any avoiding it? The ongoing challenge is to find out who we really are and not lose sight of that.

The legendary founder of the tradition expresses the bare substance in and as his person, taking the position of no position.

Emperor Wu of Liang asked the great master Bodhidharma, "What is the first principle of the holy teaching?"

Bodhidharma said, "Emptiness, nothing holy."

The Emperor asked, "Who is facing me?"

Bodhidharma said, "I don't know." The Emperor did not understand.

Bodhidharma then crossed the Yangtze River and went on to the kingdom of Wei.

Later, the Emperor took up this matter with Master Chih and asked him about it.

Master Chih said, "Your Majesty, do you know who that was?"

The Emperor said, "I don't know."⁶

The koan tradition is one long riff around prajnaparamita. There is no koan that is not a vehicle for this understanding and yet, as Aitken Roshi points out, the word *prajna* is mentioned only once in our koan curriculum. I did find, outside of the

⁵ Cf. Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, transl., *The Blue Cliff Record* (Boston, 1977), p. 275.

⁶ Cf. Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, p. 1.

curriculum, Chao Chou and Yun Men happily eschewing metaphysical discussion of the matter:

*A monk asked "What is the Great Perfection of Wisdom?"
Chao Chou said, "Great Perfection of Wisdom."*

*Someone asked, "I heard a teaching that speaks of the purity of all-encompassing wisdom. What is that purity like?"
Yun Men spat at him.⁸*

The aforementioned koan is Case 90 in the Blue Cliff Record, Chih Men's Prajna:
*A monk asked Chih Men, "What is the essence of prajna?"
Chih Men said, "The clam encloses the bright moon."
The monk asked, "What is the function of prajna?"
Chih Men said, "The rabbit conceives her young."⁹*

These strange statements refer to magical and beautiful legends: that the clam (or oyster more accurately) rises to the surface of the sea, opens to the moon and forms a pearl out of moonlight; that the rabbit, who was thought to be female only in gender, conceives her young by opening her mouth and swallowing moonlight. How mysterious. Thus, both embody light. And give expression to it, you might say. How is this true for us? How is the light of wisdom embodied? How mysterious.

"The sky of samadhi and the moonlight of wisdom form the temple of our practice," we chant, echoing Hakuin's *Song of Zazen*. Once I did a sesshin in California at a retreat center where the sleeping accommodation was a long way from the dojo. Negotiating the path back to our room on a pitch black night—we could barely see the ground beneath us—the woman with me quipped, "I'm sure glad we've got the moonlight of wisdom."

Probably because I knew I had to give a talk on prajna—what do you say?!—I had a dream recently about my old teacher John Tarrant. We were talking about a koan. It had to do with young boys. Then I said "The light has to come on." On later reflection, I was interested in the image. The young boys, I think, point to the innocent and joyful natural mind. Beginner's mind, not cluttered with misleading ideas or expectations, wide-eyed like a child and not closed off. In this poem a man becomes a young boy again:

An August afternoon. Even here is heard
the rush of the glittering Raba.
We look at the mountains,
my mother and I. How clear the air is:
every dark spruce on Mount Lubon
is seen distinctly as if it grew in our garden.
An astonishing phenomenon—it astonishes my mother
and me. I am four and do not know

⁷ Chao-chou Chan-Shih YuLu, *The Recorded sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green (Boston, 2001), p. 89.

⁸ Master Yun Men, *From the Record of the Chan Master "Gate of the Clouds,"* trans. Urs App (New York, 1994), pp. 105-6.

⁹ Cf. Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, p. 496.

what it means *to be four*. I am
happy: I do not know what *to be* means
or *happiness*. I know my mother
sees and feels what I do. And I know
that as always in the evening
we will take a walk
far up to the woods, already before
long.¹⁰

The light comes on, maybe gradually in glimpses, maybe suddenly in a great burst, when we realise—make real—the innocent, clear, empty mind. When we realise the light of awareness as not separate from the light of who we are, of what is. Not separate from the darkness. Clear seeing where the seer is not separate from the seen. In the words of Meister Eckhart, the 13th c. Christian mystic: "The eye with which I see God, is the eye with which God sees me."

Yun Men puts it this way: *"Everyone has his own light. If you want to see it, you can't. The darkness is dark, dark. Now, what is your light?"* He answered himself, *"The storeroom. The gate."* Again, he said, *"It would be better to have nothing than to have something good."*¹¹

The Catch 22. "If you want to see it, you can't." We must proceed with faith, in it for the long haul. Brother David Steindl-Rast in conversation with Aitken Roshi notes that the word confidence means *with faith*. Roshi says "Confidence in nothing whatsoever. Confidence that the abyss really is all right."¹² In dark times I've used that as a lullaby: confidence in nothing whatsoever.

In our practice, we proceed by relinquishing, that seminal dana paramita. Giving up what we want or do not want, giving up depending on anything, just letting things be.

The bodhisattva lives by prajna paramita. What's integrity here? What are the implications of clearly seeing? That we contain one another, across time and space. That nirvana is not separate from samsara. That prajna necessarily implies compassion or compassionate means. How can I ignore your suffering if you are none other than me? I am reminded of Jesus' injunction: Love thy neighbor *as* thy self. In other words, love thy neighbor truly in seeing through the duality of self and other.

Action naturally arises out of prajna, skillful means present themselves. The Tibetan Buddhist yab yum figure (to call on an icon from esoteric Buddhism) is a beautiful image for the conjunction of wisdom and compassion. A male and a female figure joined together in blissful (and erotic) embrace; either would be incomplete without the other. Wisdom is well and good but if it does not turn the Dharma wheel it is useless.

It's significant that the Prajna Paramita Sutra is presented by the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who undertakes to liberate beings from anguish and distress.

¹⁰ Bronislaw Maj, "An August Afternoon," in *A Book of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry*, ed. C. Milosz (New York, 1996).

¹¹ Cf. Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, p. 472.

¹² Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast, *The Ground We Share* (Boston, 1996).

Though a realised being (as they say), he or she participates in samsara, the world of delusion, of suffering. The world we live in! There is no choice but to be down and dirty—thank heaven. Compassion is a slightly tricky word. True compassion is not in anyway self-conscious. It does not enhance the ego, that consummate construction of delusive thinking which takes so much feeding. It's just doing. Deliberate actions taken to "help" or "save" may be misguided, blind, not necessarily helpful at all. And yet, here again, from this side of the equation, we proceed in faith. It may be lifetimes until we're fully enlightened, but we do our best. That we are sincere may be enough. We can practice forgetting the self. We can make it our intention to protect life and to enlarge the view.

And it's a tricky line that we ordinary bodhisattvas walk. To be with anguish—in our selves, in our families, in the community, on the planet—and not have it take up the whole screen, not drown in despair. To live as a human being in the busy troubling convincing swirl and not forget that right here is nirvana. The lotus lives in the midst of the fire. To keep our eyes open and not lose our way. We need to make sure we rest and take care of this very Buddha body. Roshi said "The bodhisattva lives by prajna paramita but she also lives by toast in the morning." We need to meditate, to stay connected to our source in the heartmind: practice is like an umbilical cord. It helps us to remember who we are, essentially, and to live out of that understanding, that empty ground, moment by perfect moment. Sitting at the computer, walking up the street, stirring the pot, having a shower—refuge is never separate from where you are, from your very form.

My favorite line in the Heart Sutra, my refuge—no doubt others have them—is "No hindrance in the mind, no hindrance and therefore no fear." It's such a salve, just to hear that. Like being released from prison. Prajna is not being hindered by conventional notions of self; not being hindered is being able to see through, see into (insight!). Then there's nothing to lose and nothing to defend. Those chimeras of the mind are innocent after all. Santideva puts it logically: "Fear comes if there is someone called 'I', if there is not 'I'—who can be afraid?"¹³ And as Subhana reminded us last night, there's nothing to be afraid of.

All Buddhas, past, present, and future, live by prajna paramita. This is now. The three times converge—there's no need to think ahead or behind or around. Buddhas are not separate from the multiplicity of things as they are. The mind lurching from this to that, the waning moon, the vivid color of the iris.

"Each moment is no other than the Tatagatha's inexpressible radiance."¹⁴ And this moment is not one in a series of possible moments—this is it, the vast empty sky. The moonlight of wisdom is always shining right here, already you.

How does it end? Or not end? The mantra that concludes the Heart Sutra is interesting as a bit of esoteric, secret and magical, Buddhism that has crept into our tradition. It is teaching as pure sound, its syllables sacred, its harmonics powerful. It is the song sung by Prajnaparamita, says Red Pine, as other mothers sing lullabies.¹⁵ We are held in wisdom's vast embrace. It is beyond the beyond

¹³ Santideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*, p. 120.

¹⁴ Torei Zenji, *Bodhisattva's Vow* in Diamond Sangha Sutra Service.

¹⁵ Red Pine, *Heart Sutra*, p. 154.

the beyond of meaning. It just is. Lose yourself in it. GATE GATE PARAGATE
PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA.

(Maggie gave this dharma talk at this year's Easter Sesshin)



Gratitude Ceremony for Paul and Maggie. with Subhana in the centre.

Congratulations again!

Photo by Glenys Jackson

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Robert Aitken

I should like to avoid the impression that I misinterpret Darwin's expression, "Survival of the Fittest" in "The Groundless Ground of Social Action." Accordingly I have rewritten the pertinent passage as follows:

"This was the theme of the anarchist Peter Kropotkin in his book, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, who rejected the notion that competition was central to the development of species.[1]"

[1] This notion was enhanced by a misunderstanding of Darwin's "Survival of the Fittest," which did not mean "strongest" but rather "most fitting."

Teisho

The Teacher says
"Regeneration! Regeneration!"
That is what we are doing on our cushions,
when walking mindfully,
regenerating our natural bountiful selves:
skillfully seeing
those things from elsewhere
that spring up
to strangle, to darken, to lay waste-
weeds to be plucked out
carefully- no heroic destruction
that encourages rebound-
gentle seeing from where our best nature flourishes,
gentle digging, gentle plucking
around the grasses and rocks
of Gorricks
a bent over black figure
carefully weeds
encouraging what was here from the beginning.

We who have eyes
can see the flourishing,
can see the love.
She shows us the way.
"Regeneration".

Sally Hopkins

Precepts as Rules to Comply With and as Guiding Values: Preparing for and Doing Jukai

Jeff Ward

After a long period of wondering whether it would be a good thing for me to do or not, I did jukai at sesshin this autumn. While preparing for jukai, I was led to reflect on what this period of wondering had been about, because it had gone on for years. I used to tell myself that it was because I didn't have the time or inclination to sew the rakusu, which is one part of the preparation. However, in going through the process I discovered that, while this was a factor, it was the other part of preparing for jukai that had held me up for deeper reasons. This involves studying and reflecting upon the sixteen bodhisattva precepts.

I first came upon Buddhism and started to practice meditation in 1975. Since then, I have continued to sit and study, sometimes more intensively than others. However, like many young rebellious people who find their way to Buddhism, I never really took seriously the ethical or moral aspect of the dharma. When I first discovered Buddhism, my heart was troubled and I was looking for a path or a way that would help ease my suffering. The wisdom of the teachings and the peace I found in my experiences of meditation told me that the Buddha's medicine was the prescription I needed and I was happy to take it. But I paid only lip service to the precepts, thinking that I do a pretty good job anyway and why bother to think about them.

My practice deepened considerably ten years ago when I joined the Sydney Zen Centre and started to attend sesshin regularly. I witnessed many jukai ceremonies at sesshin and each time I would think, I will do that next time, but there was always some inner resistance working. I just didn't seem to like something about the whole question of considering the precepts. An experience I had last year at work opened up things in an expected way for me and I think, looking back now, that I now have a bit of a handle on what was going on.

As well as zen Buddhism, the other great influence on my thinking and the way I live my life is my training and experience over the years as a psychotherapist. My main influences have been psychoanalytic and as part of my training as a psychoanalytic therapist I have spent quite a bit of time in therapy, both for personal reasons and as part of my training. A central issue for me here and for many of the clients I work with is the issue of what is called the false self or an accommodating style of relating. In my early life I learned to be accommodating to the needs of others and was, until my teenage years, a "good boy". I tried to be good, as this kept others happy, but this left me empty inside and, as the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott observed, came, as it usually does, with resentment as its underside. I resented having to accommodate to others all the time. As a teenager in the late sixties and early seventies, I rebelled against this and was swept up on the broader tide of social change that was taking place. It was in this heady mix of rebellion and alternative lifestyles that I came across Buddhism. But one thing that I didn't want to have to do was go back to being a

“good boy” again, which was how I interpreted the ethical aspect of the practice. However, looking back, I did go through phases where I replaced the demands of my childhood environment with the demands of Buddhism and tried to be the “good Buddhist boy”. This is perhaps not an unfamiliar position to all of us, where we try to act as if we are good in a Buddhist sense, but it can be a trap and just another false self that we try to strap on.

Over the years, through my own therapy experiences, I have come to understand and to some extent been freed of my accommodating style. In my zen practice I have also shed, without thinking about it, various incarnations of what I think a good zen Buddhist person might be like, and found a more authentic place to inhabit. These changes have been going on for some time but were given a significant shift when I was asked to teach some ethics classes to trainee clinical psychologists. In preparing for this, I read a book by the American psychoanalyst Sandra Buechler entitled *Clinical Values: Emotions that Guide Psychoanalytic Treatment* (published by Analytic Press). I was intrigued by the title, because it put emotions as being central to values and ethics, and I was happy to find that there were chapters on kindness, respect, compassion, equanimity and other ways of relating to clients that read very much like the divine abidings found in Buddhism (compassion, kindness, joy at others happiness, equanimity). It was a revelation to find that this was what ethics could be about: not about what I *should* do, but about how I would like to relate to my clients. This put things in the domain of choice and positive action, rather than in the domain of complying with strictures and precepts.

It was then that I found I wanted to do jukai. And I can see now after preparing for and doing jukai that it is not a question of trying to comply with or accommodate to a set of strictures and precepts that come from outside. It is a question of having guiding values for how I want to live my life. These guiding values are the same values that I have found naturally arise from zen practice. Our true nature is one that is gentle, kind, compassionate, joyful, and has the capacity to hold all kinds of experiences in equanimity. My current understanding of the bodhisattva precepts as I expressed them recently at sesshin are set out below.

The Three Vows of Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha.... I take refuge in that within all of us that is at rest with the way things are.

I take refuge in the Dharma.... I take refuge in the teachings and practices that open the heart to the way things are. I take refuge in the way things are.

I take refuge in the Sangha.... I take refuge in the many beings who cultivate the way. I take refuge among the many beings of the universe who cultivate the way by coming forth just as they are.

The Three Pure Precepts

I vow to maintain the Precepts.... The precepts alert me to times when I separate myself from others and bid me to return to the Way where I see others as myself. The practice of zazen, of focused concentration and mindfulness and looking deeply into the matter at hand, aid me in navigating a path through life that gravitates towards harmony with the great Way.

I vow to practice all good dharmas.... In the knowledge that we dwell in this great field of interbeing, I take up the way of kindness, compassion, joy at other's happiness and equanimity, so that life may be enhanced at every turn. Again zazen practice is a great aid in opening my mind and heart to the essential radiance that is naturally kind and in harmony with others

I vow to save the many beings.... I vow to continue to make an effort to wake up and to meet everything and everyone that comes forth just as they are, as none other than my very self.

The Ten Grave Precepts

I take up the Way of Not Killing.... I take up the way of not killing by cultivating respect, kindness, compassion and joy at others happiness. When I do not respect others, I kill them by undermining their sense of worthiness. When I am not kind, I kill the other by withholding love when it is needed. When I do not act with compassion, I leave the other alone in their suffering. And when I do not show my joy at others happiness, I dim the light of their joy in that moment. A life lived in the cultivation of these virtues has no room for physical or emotional killing.

I take up the Way of Not Stealing.... I take up the way of giving and only taking what is given. This involves the cultivation of contentment with what comes freely into my life.

I take up the Way of Not Misusing Sex.... The red thread of sexual passion can be used both to separate and to join. I take up the way of using sexual passion to join with and not to separate from others.

I take up the Way of Not Speaking Falsely.... I take up the way of being true to my own heart. This means that I do not remain silent out of fear or shame when I know that it is the time to speak. It also means remaining silent when I know that to speak will cause harm.

I take up the Way of Not Giving or Taking Drugs.... Drugs are those things that can be used to separate myself from life when it is not what I want it to be. I take up the way of allowing myself to experience life as it is, unmodified by any form of drug.

I take up the Way of Not Discussing Faults of Others.... When I discuss the faults of others I treat them as objects rather than as living breathing beings. Every person has their story which shapes them and makes them who they are. By

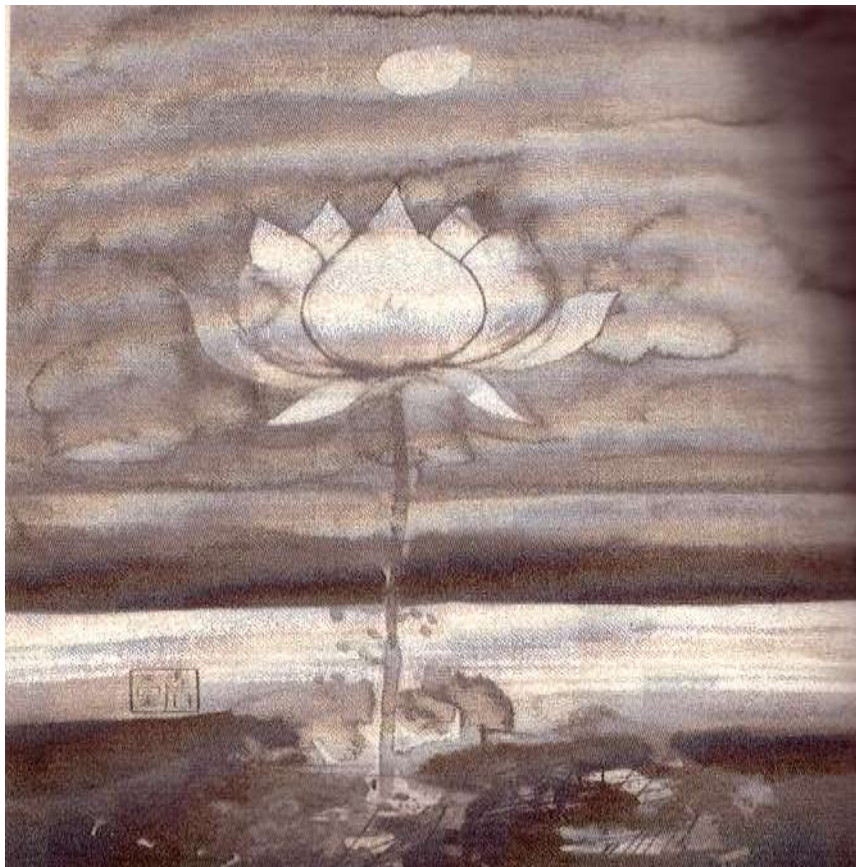
practicing empathy and appreciation as a fundamental way of relating, I will undercut the tendency to see fault in others.

I take up the Way of Not Praising Myself while Abusing Others.... Comparing myself to others to shore up my own self esteem is a poor compromise, compared to acceptance of myself and others. By appreciating all life, including myself, I undercut the need to praise myself and abuse others.

I take up the Way of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets.... This life and everything I meet in it is a treasure beyond price. I take up the way of using each moment as wisely as I can.

I take up the Way of Not Indulging in Anger.... By recognizing anger as anger when it is there and investigating its cause, I undermine the tendency to indulge in anger by acting it out. If anger is born of more primary feelings such as fear or shame, I will endeavour to understand and manage these more fundamental states. If it is born of frustration then I will attend to the causes of frustration. In this way I will endeavour to undercut the mindless acting out of anger.

I take up the Way of Not Defaming the Three Treasures.... I defame the three treasures when I do not allow myself to be guided by them. To live by these precepts, to practice zazen and cultivate the way by other skilful means is to avoid defaming the three treasures.



(Image obtained from Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) "The Miracle of Mindfulness")

BUBBLE (Tanka)

Oh bubble are you
My heart ballooning in me?
A mere droplet tear flowing
Bursting into endless NOW
Summer, cricket thrum, all things?

Caroline Josephs

night of the han

knock.
knock.
knock.

every three seconds – I timed it,
in the middle of the night
loud - a giant woodpecker, perhaps

thinking it is a dream
I wake a little,
testing for the feeling of the sheet on my skin

Yes, it's real
I don't need to pinch myself
It's not a dream

The knock knocking is real
It's keeping me awake
But at least it's real

Next day I break the rules and ask someone
I find out
it *was* a dream

Doug Mason

From the Denkoroku Case 14: The Fourteenth Patriarch, Ryuju Sonja (Nargarjuna Arya.)

When Kabimora Sonja was received by the Dragon King, he was given the cintamani (talisman pearl). Ruyju asked him, "This pearl is the most valuable pearl in the world. Is it form or non-form?"

Sonja said, "You only know about its being form or non-form. You don't know that this pearl is neither form nor non-form. Still more, you don't know that this pearl is not a pearl."

When the Master heard this, he was deeply enlightened.

Poem: The solitary light shines wonderfully; it never darkens;

The talisman pearl, glistening, taking part in it.

Finding the Talisman Pearl through the Paramitas. Easter Sesshin 2006

Justine Mayer justine@tedgp.org.au

Like oysters, we clamp down our shells
To resist fear, loneliness and death.
Struggling to keep everything safe and to understand,
We separate ourselves from the pearl that is not a pearl, from love.

Despite our best efforts, the unwanted grit gets in.
Those we trust fail us.
Our bodies let us down.
We feel powerless in the face of cultural forces larger than we can imagine.
Work, relationships and health spiral out of control.
Pointlessness, sadness, anxiety and rage leak out of our shell
Sending waves of pain rippling around us.

But in turning to our practice
We find Generosity gives us meaning: in giving up, we receive.
Ethical Conduct steers us through fear to a fearless sense of the other as ourselves.
Patience cradles our self-doubt and opens to a spacious acceptance of what is.
Right Effort offers a gentle way to diligently return to each moment.
In Zazen over and over we learn to stay with the grit of our lives.
In staying present to each moment we find Wisdom.

In our tiny shell, a glimpse of emptiness so vast it contains everything.
With the light that never darkens our shell begins to open with kindness to love.
With the practice of the Paramitas we find the grit is not separate from the talisman pearl.

Then opening to each moment:
The autumn breeze blowing through the fire, is none other than our breath,
In the faces lit by the flickering fire, we glimpse our own face.
The Sangha voices chanting Ancient Ground, are none other than our voice,
Just as it is, we find the talisman pearl, glistening, taking part in it.

Darwin Sesshin



Darwin is a unique place in that the International Buddhist Centre is home to a number of different cultural groups. The Thai Buddhists, Chinese, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan, Tibetan and Zen Buddhists all share the same temple and in this town one has to be very accepting of cultural nuances. We have a number of resident monks and the different groups take responsibility for maintaining particular parts of the buildings and/or grounds, providing food to the monks and generally taking care of this special environment.

The temple has been built to accommodate the tropical weather - read hot and humid a good deal of the time, with both indoor and outdoors meeting halls. The outdoor one is my personal favourite, a huge construction with a concrete slab, a roof on the top, open walls and lots of very large fans; just the thing for hot conditions, especially in our current wet season. The indoor temple is built with floor to ceiling louver windows on three sides and makes meditation somewhat easier in an environment where the outdoor critters fly around in reasonably large numbers and can be the perfect distraction to a good sit.

Earlier this month our Zen group held a non-residential weekend retreat and our very inspiring teacher Ellen Davison came to facilitate. The numbers of bookings were surprising high and we knew that conditions would be crowded. The heat becomes an essential consideration in the tropics and adjustments always need to be made for the local conditions. Fortunately, at this time of year, the nights often cool down to 27 or 28 degrees, which means the early mornings can be

beautifully crisp and clear. So whilst it might be quite hot and humid by mid morning and remains that way for the rest of the day, the early mornings often become such a beautiful time. This is what the universe turned on this particular weekend.

In order to create sufficient space for newcomers on the Friday evening, some of us waited till Saturday morning to begin our retreat. The temple was beautifully decorated and many people arrived to begin the day. Not only Zen people wanting to sit either, for we shared the space with a group of Chinese Buddhists who were having a funeral ceremony in the outdoor meeting hall, whilst we began our practice in the indoor temple. Cooperation and tolerance is so important in our centre.

Both groups enjoyed the other, with the resident monk making comments about the number of Westerners coming to meditate and how pleased he was that we were there. Personally I loved knowing that the Chinese Buddhists were celebrating the passing of someone's life and especially as we were included in that celebration, when at lunchtime the ceremonial fruit was shared with us. That was the best apple I've tasted in months!

Our practice schedule was well constructed with my favourite session for the day being the public Inquiry. Having Ellen facilitate people to think through issues of the heart was moving in that I could connect with what was being explored with a loving detachment whilst noticing what they triggered or stimulated within myself. Such a wonderful practice! I suspect that the heat created additional intensity for the sits because our walking meditations around the tropical gardens were so well attended and enjoyed and later I heard that the heat was in fact an issue for some people. That's how it is in Darwin!

Our retreats are made possible through the loving service of so many people in our small sangha and especially from Ellen as she gives us her time, wisdom, practical intelligence and deep connection of the heart. Our next event is scheduled for August, as an end of dry season retreat, so if you're planning a visit to the top end this season, maybe we'll see you there.

Love and blessings
Surya

Turtle by Caroling, 1959

www.wholeo.net/Trips/Art/MN/ink/mnInkTurtle.htm



Sitting around

So utterly, I am sick of this being.
Why do I go on, sitting in this place of still
breathing,
of long and deliberate dawns
coming to the windows quicker and colder
than any season could account for –
why do I keep on walking in the raised up dust of another
thousand yous on a nameless
unpaved road
past half built malls, broken eyed devotees, goats.

The only thing I want is to feel no more like a cinema
like a strange rearrangement of a quartet
no one knew how to play in the first place.
The only thing I want is a warm delicious
wind to clean me out, deliver me fresh as a carwash
to some street preparing for a better
festival.

Again and again, I am sick of becoming
what is this long dive down through muddy
emerald, through spineless fish and
steady weeds, I am sick of finding myself
on the sawdust floor of the butcher shop
or looking through the talcum skirts of a schoolteacher
or fallen to my knees in the sickroom
though there is nothing at all wrong with me,
and it's lunchtime.

I am not this diving bell,
these small piles of silence that are children walking the
distant thin corridors of hospitals.
I am not this space odyssey; this solid orbit that insists
I pass every dead lagoon on every planet in every
suit every orderly has ever worn;
which one of you gave this miserable trajectory to me
to hold for a moment, and never came back to get?

I won't go on being this blind and dumb, this peach pit
I won't die solid as a stone, curled up around my own
blue fever,
a certain doomed asteroid, a hubcap in a gutter.

There are sand dunes here larger than need
there are courtyards scathed with older wars and which were once
stages for corsettes and gold teeth and so many kinds of tobacco
you cannot even imagine there was once a time like that, how broken
down you really could once get, in how many bar room hues.

All this, I all of a sudden for no reason
recollect and
understand why crow calls catch in the throat more than other birds.

I understand why there is no actual place west of this place
we have come to.

That's why when a nameless day emerges with its gold heart on
the horizon of a thousand television test patterns
I will stop and applaud and feel nothing at all.
That's why I will walk along
a coastline promenade holding a clock
locked on a time I have forgotten the significance of, and I will
tie myself to myself with the black tape like a fanatic
and I will note the whiteness of the laundry
hanging from the lines of all the houses in which I imagine
no one ever feels as bleak as this;
and I will go on walking, I will go on sitting,
at a time like this, which is (for now) longer than always.

I know you will not let me be alone in this,
that you carry something of me on your sleeve, in a dark pocket,
like something you put there and forgot; that you are just as sick as me
sometimes, in the leanest evening, chasing shadows round the window frame,
on the path that neither of us asked for, that is even now
laced with the traces of other snails, and is still somehow, a glittering
last gasp of silver.

More precious than we have a word for.

Tash Sudan

(Tash Sudan is a member of our sangha and a gifted poet, currently living at Zen
Mountain Monastery in upstate New York.)

bird call

a single sharp bird call
shadow waves ripple
across the white wall

Doug Mason

Keep Counting – First Sesshin Experience

(Britta Biedermann)

One

Two

Three

Mental cinema, story 1

One

Two

Three

Story 2

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

I feel hungry

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

I will never make it to ten

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Keep counting, there is something to it that I do not quite yet understand, it feels worth trying, something keeps me on my cushion, something which I do not yet understand what it is. There is a vague idea, a vague concept, which I seem to already know, but not consciously, an innate knowledge I owned when I was a child, when I looked at the grass and played with a lady-bug for an hour without noticing that this hour passed, just sitting in the grass, totally in sync with nature, totally non-aware of myself. Sadly, this innate knowledge got lost, somehow. Or is it still there? Somewhere in my store of old memories? Is this knowledge simply disrupted? Disconnected? Knowledge that is waiting to be remembered again?

We welcome the evening with chanting, Aboriginal chanting, 34 people in a circle, in the dark, only candles for light. We sing "ancient ground, ancient ground, you will look after it; ancient ground, ancient ground, it will look after you." This place really feels as if it cares for us. After 2 more hours of sitting, the day finishes with a wonderful interplay between a drum and a bell:

JIKI (on drum): XXXXXXXXxX (which means its 8 or 9 o'clock)

JISHA (bell): O O O or O (which means 3rd quarter or 1st quarter of an hour)

The drum and the bell talk to each other and repeat the same conversation again, again and again.

JIKI: (on HAN): XXxX

JISHA shouts out in the night: "I beg to urge you, everyone –
Life and Death is a grave matter –
All things pass quickly awaayyyyyyyy...
Each of you must be completely alert.
Never neglectful. Never indulgentttttt....."

Finally, the JIKI sends different drum rhythms out into the night. The JISHA strikes the bell once, waiting for an immediate response from the bell of the INO in the Dojo. The JISHA and the JIKI return into the Dojo. The teacher exits the Dojo with leaving us some powerful words to think about before we walk silently to our tents and fall asleep while counting our breaths...one...two...three...

Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?

(by Caroline Josephs)



Carl Hooper leaves Rohatsu

Permission granted from C.H.

(Zen cartoon by Caroline Josephs)



The characters for "beginner's mind" in calligraphy by Shunryu Suzuki

The characters for "beginner's mind" in calligraphy taken from Shunryu Suzuki (2004). "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" (7th printing).

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