



MIND MOON CIRCLE

SUMMER 2020 / 2021

Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre

FLOWERING

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Cover photograph: *Poppy* Glenys Jackson

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In the next issue of *Mind Moon Circle* (Autumn 2021) we will explore and offer creative morsels on the theme of *Movement and Stillness*.

One more florescent feast before days become short and cicadas retreat into the stillness for the season.

Please share your offerings for the next edition of MMC by the beginning of our Autumn Sesshin

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Mind Moon Circle is published quarterly by
Sydney Zen Centre, 251 Young Street Annandale, NSW 2038, Australia.

www.szc.org.au

From the editors

The size and shape of Now is dynamic; it's not actually a moment or an instance of time such as; *right here, right now*, rather Now is a shape over time.

Gardens and forests come to us Now with all our expectations and strategies, the joy of reverie and the memory of those plans and moments; and indeed flowers and flowering are the most prevailing image metaphor in Buddhist art.

The mythical histories of gardens seem to be one long ramble over and through meadow, orchard and hidden trails. At this time around greater Sydney eucalyptus trees are in flower. One species, *Eucalyptus regnans* native to the great forests of Tasmania is the world's tallest flowering plant.

I love the anticipation of our gum trees coming to flower; often it's the chattering of the Eastern Rosella weeks before any hint of a bloom that lets the secret out and then great clusters of the delicate ancient flower stamen festoon braches and rooftops and garden paths. Waiting, watching and feeling these trees flower simply forces, or less stridently encourages you to acknowledge transience.

Thank you to everyone who has sent in their poems, stories and pictures. We have enjoyed reading and arranging your work.



REMEMBERING THE GARDEN

Maggie Gluek

There's a treasure in my desk drawer, a tattered old bookmark from the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. At the top is stamped the center's erstwhile logo, one of Mayumi Oda's gracious bodhisattvas with hands in gassho, riding on a loon. That deep-diving bird of the northern lakes ferries her babies, as well as bodhisattvas, on her back. Hand-lettered underneath the image are Soen Roshi's words:

*All are nothing but flowers
In a flowering universe.*

My heart lifts every time I read this verse. It's so light and so natural. Empty even, in the "nothing but." All things simply arise, come into fullness and pass away. And flowering implies essential beauty, inherent in any being, in any given moment. *At the peak of each thought a lotus flower opens and on each flower is revealed a Buddha*, sings the Shodoka. When the baby Buddha first walked, it is said that with each step a lotus flower sprouted. And in the instant of twirling a flower, Sakyamuni transmitted his entire Dharma to Mahakasyapa. The Buddha mind flowers endlessly.

We are *all* flowers?? That feels like a redemption. What in the world is more exquisite, more perfect in form? Or more literally attractive, as bees and birds and anyone with open eyes can testify. Colour!! Smell!! Design!! Eloquence!! A feast for the senses and a salient fact, not just an abstraction called "flower." After all, it was *peach* blossoms in particular, in their glorious spring pink, which famously opened Lingyun's eyes, removing all his doubts.¹ Particular flowers in the plural make a garden, that realm of peace and delight, a representation of paradise in diverse cultures throughout history. Nirvana—I'll hazard—lies in awakening to the fact we have never left the garden; asleep in our dreams, we have only forgotten that it is there.

Learn the flowers counsels Gary Snyder in his poem "For the Children," looking ahead to how we can *climb the coming crests*.² I had lived in Australia for ten years but only really came home when I learned the native plants that grew in my area. From the generic "bush" emerged Sydney peppermint gums, wax flowers, hairpin banksias, bearded heath. And many more. The Hawkesbury Sandstone region is uniquely diverse in its flora, species which have evolved different strategies and forms in adapting to shallow, nutrient-poor soils. All carry Greco-Latin names that describe their morphology and/or commemorate 18th or 19th century botanists.³ I recently smiled through a performance of Australian composer Ross Edwards' *Flower Songs* which are structured around the names of a handful of Australian plants. The songs are reminiscent of plainchant, in musically decorating syllables, which are repeated and played with. But instead of Latin words from the divine liturgy, we hear *Dillwynia retorta*, *Boronia virgata*, *Micromyrtus ciliata*. Flowers *are* the divine liturgy. Now I want to urge not just *learn the flowers* but *save them*. Many unique species are endangered by greed and development. The coming crests are steep indeed.

The metaphor of flowering can also be understood as a ripening of goodness. And it is not a given. Karma begins with intention. Each of us has the opportunity to choose the harmful or the wholesome way—in our thinking, in our speech, in our actions. Will I mindlessly perpetuate the loop of habitual (and thereby tedious) negative thoughts that arise in my consciousness and harden divisions? Or will I water the seeds of kindness and compassion? (Thank you, Thich Nhat Han). Will my practice intention be to ferry whomever needs a lift to the other shore? (Thank you, loon.) Will I encourage the best in myself and others? Robert

Aitken Roshi once said memorably “I vow to be my own best Bob.” One of the joys of sangha is being able to know people over time and see them bloom, see them find their gifts and confidently manifest who they are. That blooming is then mysteriously carried forward and the gifts are shared. And so the opening continues.

¹ Lingyun (Reiun), 9th cent., known for being enlightened when he encountered the peach trees in bloom

² “For the Children”:

The rising hills, the slopes, of statistics lie before us.
the steep climb of everything, going up, up, as we all go down.
In the next century or the one beyond that, they say, are valleys, pastures,
we can meet there in peace if we make it.
To climb these coming crests one word to you, to you and your children:
stay together
learn the flowers
go light (From *Turtle Island*, New Directions, 1974)

³ Without question Aboriginal people have for millennia known and named and made use of indigenous plants. *Their* botanical learning has only too recently been acknowledged and appreciated.



Dillwynia Retorta, aka Bacon and Eggs or Heathy Parrot Pea (friendsoflanecovenationalpark.org.au)

MONDO WITH GOANNA ROSHI

Ameli Tanchitsa



I can't remember whether it was during the morning or the afternoon periods, when we had a visit from Goanna Roshi. Roshi is known to occasionally drop in without any plans and last year during Spring Sesshin, on the fifth day she made a true effort of no effort to check on us. Here is an excerpt from my empty diary.

She came across the south paddock, walking with her head up, smelling the air as if she was making sure we would see her. As she walked in plain sight towards the cottage there was excitement among the bodhisattvas on the Tanto's side of the dojo. When the period ended, a few keen to see her were ducking their heads under the chopping room floor and confirming that's where Roshi decided to sit. How wonderful. After a while we were all back in the dojo settled in zazen.

It was a beautiful day like any other at Forgotten Valley. Kodoji was bathing in bird song. Spring sun and the mountain wind were flirting endlessly with the golden cliffs.

It must have been during the rest period, as I walked towards the shower area, when I was stopped by a rustling in the grass. I quickly turned my head only to catch the end of her receding tail. I stopped and decided to just stand there with the hope that she would come back. To my delight, she turned around, poking her head out as if checking I was still there. She must have approved of my standing meditation posture because in the next moment she was standing in front of me with her entire body including the long tail completely exposed on the slashed grass. I was so excited. I felt butterflies in my body.

There we were, two of us gazing at each other. There was only one thing in the entire Cosmos separating us: the nearby compost bin.

And then the craziest thought popped up in my mind as if gently nudging me towards Roshi so not to waist such a rare opportunity. *I should test this fellow.* Without any hesitation I threw the arrow.

Tanchitsa: *Where did you come from?*

I thought it was pretty good opening, but before I finished congratulating myself, she fired back.

Goanna: *Hah! What a stupid question! I never left anywhere. This is my true home. I live here. Full time. Unlike you city slick, face moisturising, deodorant wearing, coffee sipping cats from the big smoke.*

Ouch!?! Sharp claws tearing through young flesh.

Note: *At this point I should mention that this is my own translation and the reader should proceed with caution as my translation expertise is more enthusiastic than accurate. So please, if you would indulge me.*

While I was wrapping bandages around my innocent wounds she continued.

Goanna: *I am here for the eggs!*

I dusted myself off. Partly collected, trusting my practice, I engaged.

Tanchitsa: *You are late. We have eggs on day four.*

Goanna: *Hmmm...*

I sensed she might walk off so I quickly produced the next line.

Tanchitsa: *We have tofu.*

Goanna: *(like a flash of lightning) I don't like tofu!*

Tanchitsa: *When walking truly on the way one doesn't have preferences!*

Aha – I felt my wings spreading a little.

Goanna: *Isn't it a cliché these days when people say 'The great way is not difficult just stop picking and choosing!'*

I could swear she was grinning at me. In a split second I felt like hundreds of arrows on fire were shot and flying my way. What to do? Should I just hide inside the compost bin? Or maybe I should go and double check the fridge, maybe there are some eggs left from yesterday?

And then another thought came to my mind. *Breathe. Just breathe.*

So I did. As I was breathing in a very long breath I felt oxygen flowing into my limbs. The air I was breathing in was so new and so old at the same time. My body was tingling. The breath was both cooling me down and warming me up. It was both filling and inexhaustible. It was nourishing and grounding. I felt my feet firmly on the ground.

I glanced at goanna. She was waiting for me. She was waiting for me to show up. I turned fifty that year. She must have waited for me for fifty years. I felt incredibly grateful to her for that. Fifty years is a very long time. And yet it felt like it happened in just a brief moment next to the compost bin.

I bowed to Roshi and offered the following modest gift:

*At Kodoji in spring
I sit with all beings
and watch the ancient song.*

Roshi looked at me and offered a perfect response in return. She stuck her long tongue out for a second and walked off towards the hill.

DIGGING, DIGGING

Aeveen Kirby

If I tried to write a poem about a flower that grew angelically out of the ground, describing how you would imagine a time-lapse video to capture its growth, I would have described how elegantly it emerged from the soil and reached and stretched towards the light. The dainty pale petals awakening and surrendering themselves to the elements, like a little baby's arms being released from its swaddle first thing in the morning.

That's what I would have written about.

It would have been beautiful, the words dancing across the page like a ballerina across a stage capturing the audience and bringing them down the gently beaten track, through the grass, into the field, to sit down by the single flower and observe in awe *and* it would have rhymed!

I thought to myself many times over December, January and now February, 'Oh perhaps this is the moment I can embody and write about the emergence of a lovely delicate flower and how it relates to wonderful realisations, growth, birth, newness'.

Every time, as I would explore the imagery a big tractor would come digging up the blasted soil nearby, persistently, destructively, effortfully! Funnily enough the flower was still there despite the obstinate upheaval around it. It sat there unaffected; dainty, composed, and rooted in perceived confidence in its significant, fine but finite presence.

Lovely, lovely, lovely. But sorry flower, I can't stay. I've very pressing digging matters to attend to. Why?? I have no bloody idea. But I'll be back to ogle your beauty, to sit with your tranquillity, to learn from your grace.

Right now, I have some digging to do.

My Breath the Wind

Caroline Josephs

It's this –
A wafting of rhyme
on a cold stone –

The willy-wagtail swaying
verse on the wooden gate,
Whiff-crust of moss fringes...

Breezes seething and
rolling cadences up
From the dam --

And into the high stanzas
of eucalypts, forest rhythms –
writings vertical --

Near the house
roses - florid poesy
and nursery beds of lettuce tankas

Seasoned lyrics of berries,
aroma blossoms
come in gusts –

Whole phrases lost
in murmurings, villanelles,
whisperings of winds...

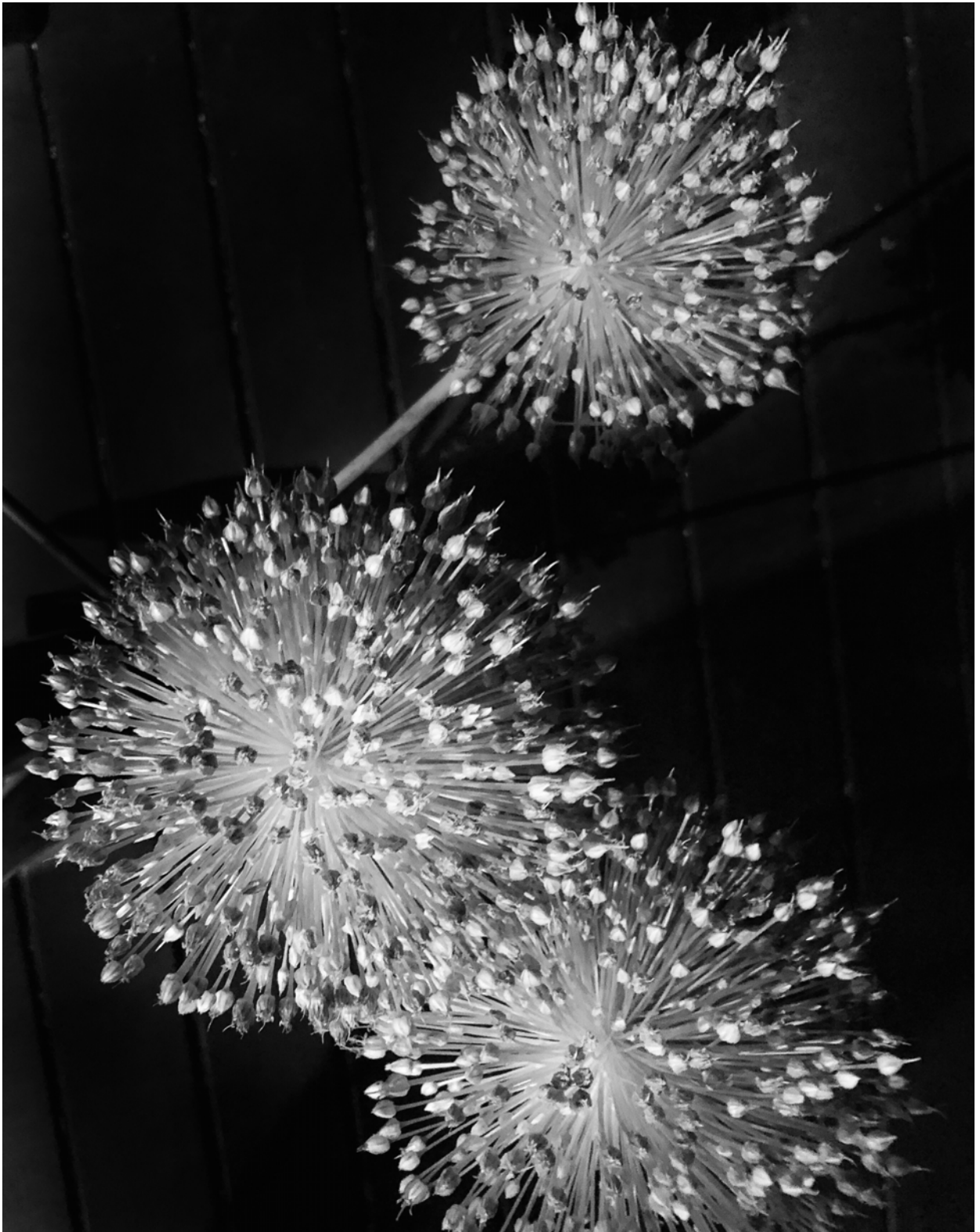
A sonnet trembles a refrain --
the sighing of top branches –
flickers into being, slips away....

Clouds scud by, nebulous
shape-shifters of the ballad –
evanesce into....no thing

A blue wren, free verse –
flits among the grevilleas....
fades into sky

Bees suck nectar syrup, and
unknown birds, call and respond
mating couplets

Blue rosemary blossoms
cry, sing, crinkle, die --
re-bud – burst forth again.



THE WHOLE WORLD IS MEDICINE

Subhana Barzaghi

The Earth as Medicine

A gnawing ache in my heart tugs at me, ‘go wandering’ it says, ‘go walk about’. I could have so easily been dragged down into that gapping hole of absences left behind by the domino effect of personal losses; my mother’s death, the death of good friends who have crossed over that inevitable threshold, the loss of a lover, each one could have so easily swallowed me up. Then there is the enormous loss of species from our natural environment that sits heavily on my heart and has left me like a beached carcass washed up on the shoreline.

This year has been like no other, a year few of us could have ever imagined, a year of upheaval and change, a year of uncertainty and the necessity of adapting due to the pandemic. Yet we have fared pretty well here in Australia our death rate from Covid is low in comparison to many other countries. The blessings of being a large island in the southern hemisphere. Many of my friends and myself included have had a sigh of relief with a negative Covid test result, yet others are not so fortunate.

With all the worries of the year, I head to one of my favourite Sydney Harbour trails that fringes around the nature reserve of Middle Head and Georges Head and along to Bradley’s Head, the traditional lands of the Borogega-Yuruey Clan of the Eora Nation. I am drawn to the healing magic of trees, wild grasses and the flowering natives. I long to lose myself and yet to find myself again, wholly and unbroken. Or perhaps is it more broken open and whole? I have learnt to hold the broken parts tenderly and compassionately. Pain, grief and vulnerability are naturally stitched into being human. I respect these scars as they mark places where I have loved. My footfalls carry my loss carefully on strewn leaves feeling the earthly cushion underfoot. The arching canopy of twisted salmon-coloured Angophora gums comforts me. The groves of Angophoras the Sydney red gums with their twisted branching habit, their shedding bark revealing pink new skin underneath, their laced shaped leaves and their cream white inflorescence are simply my favourite trees. I let my tired eyes wander over their curved branches like a pencil drawing in the sky.

Georges Head faces the entrance to Sydney Harbour that magnificent whooshing birth canal between the North and South headlands. It is a turbulent rough water channel between the inner harbour and vast ocean that lies beyond. I feel the earthy pull from the natural world like an umbilical cord reminding me of my ancient belonging. I move more quickly now along the path with the need for solace and the blessings of this light filled day. The shimmering blue waters curve around the headland. Wafts of fragrance from the coastal gums, the heath and the flowering flora offer a perfumed antipodean bouquet. I am on the look out for native flowers. I spot a bunch of flannel flowers those soft wooly white lovelies and around the bend I spy a shy purple blue native violet. Then there is a rare short-lived native iris. This three petal transient beauty lives for about a day before disappearing. She is such a reminder of the transience of life, here one moment gone the next.

Along the trail, lies a large flat rock offering up a harbour view of a watery expanse. I hear it calling me back to my own depths of an inner expanse, a vast web of aliveness. I turn towards the rock where I scattered the remains of my mother’s ashes in the Spring. Something solid to stand upon as the familial rug of 93 years of tenderness disappeared behind the pale vale. I remember gently holding the blue urn with the white dove against my chest for the last time and emptied out mum’s ashes hanging onto only a small portion. It was a still sultry warm

October day. My cousin and some dear friends gathered around to commemorate the occasion. Rose petals and mum's ashes floated over the edge of the rock down the steep slopes back to the earthen floor below. The great earth like a generous mother takes us back into her arms, indiscriminately. No matter who you are, no matter where you have come from, she offers an unending welcome.

The seasons of a challenged yet gracefully lived life are now slithers of memories. Laughter, love and tears and my mum's love of flowers and particularly roses are embroidered into a quilt of gratitude. I have come here for healing to be stitched back into the larger fabric of nature a re-generative re-wilding jolt. Nature intimately connects us back to the earth, the natural cycles of our great body. As Zen master Eihei Dogen said, *"I realised my mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth"*.

"You might awake one morning and find that nature is a part of you, literally internal to your being. You would then treat nature as you would your lungs or kidneys. A spontaneous environmental ethics surges forth from your heart, and you will never again look at a river, a leaf, a deer, a robin, in the same way." (Ken Wilbur)

Curled dried leaves give way to vibrant new shoots and life keeps bursting forth, flowering beyond kalpas. Decay and rebirth lie along side one another, entwined everywhere coded into our DNA. Contemplation on death is also a celebration of life, how could it be otherwise? As Shunryu Suzuki, reminds us, *"Treat every moment as your last. It is not preparation for something else. If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything, it is open to everything"*.

I often visit this rock shelf, which has become my sacred rock. I sit here so that nature can re-attune me, take me back to her wild roots. The rocks solid, cold, hardness against my buttock and its immovability steadies me. I gaze at the light dancing across the shimmering blue waters that sparkle with phosphorescence. The wind sweeps across the curves of my cheek, my hair flies out into a tangled mess. As each element pours through my senses it revitalizes me. We are made of the earth, water, fire and air, these elements are the raw data of a life. Intimacy with nature sings us back into aliveness. Time stretches into timelessness. I hear indigenous elders whisper through the bush, 'nature needs to be treated as a sacred living thing not an object to be possessed'. There is a far more ancient knowing alive within us. It awakens in me a deep knowing...a knowing intelligence that started a dialogue that has never stopped.

Reflections on the Flower Garland Sutra

There is also another deep conversation within me that seeks to understand and embody the wisdom from the ancient spiritual teachings. The philosophical teachings and Buddhist sutras offer guidance give meaning and inspiration to the journey. The Avatamsaka Sutra known in English as, 'The Flower Garland Sutra' describes a cosmos of infinite realms upon realms mutually containing one another. The multi-dimensional vision and philosophy of interpenetration formed the foundation of the Yogacara, Madhyamaka and the Huayan School of Chinese Buddhism. This doctrine states that, *"all things are empty of inherent existence and also of a pure untainted awareness of consciousness (amalacitta) as the ground of all phenomena"*.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi expressed the wisdom of inter-dependence poetically, *"If you can appreciate each thing, one by one, then you will have pure gratitude. Even though you observe just one flower, that one flower includes everything"*.

What does it mean to realise and embody this vision and philosophy of interpenetration and emptiness of any inherent existence? The old Zen masters from the Tang Dynasty in China left us koans, provocations that call us to attention. In case 87 in the Blue Cliff Record, Yun Men announces to his assembly,

*“Medicine and sickness mutually correspond.
The whole earth is medicine what is the self?”*

The croak, croak of the frogs and the black satin bowerbird nibbling on the mass of red berries hanging from the Bangalow palm outside my window, answer as medicine. If we are present to each thing, each moment reveals and confirms the self. When we shake off the limiting shackles of worry and anxiety of the self and dive straight into the world, the world becomes our lover, the world is our very Self. If we bring our sorrows to the land and listen deeply, the earth can be our medicine, it will bring us back into accord with the natural systems.

With a world pandemic and the angel of death - Covid 19 flying around the globe we could equally ponder, **‘The whole world is sick what is the Self?’** Perhaps this is a more apt koan right now. Can we embrace this too and not turn away in fear? Surprisingly Covid even found its way to the Chilean research camp at Antarctica. The virus is clearly not bothered by below zero temperatures, it is indiscriminate of race, place, age, gender or culture. What is the real medicine here? A vaccine will surely help, but it is a reminder that we are all in this together. The virus has changed us. We have experienced that it’s possible to achieve so much more by working together than anyone of us can achieve alone. Perhaps this is the silver lining of Covid, we are pulling together to protect one another to stop the spread.

But there is more than one crisis and sickness circulating the globe right now. We are also in the midst of an ecological crisis and the true tragedy of our time: the spiraling decline of our planet’s loss of biodiversity. Australians have witnessed this first hand with the worst wildlife disaster in modern history from last year’s devastating bushfires. An estimated 3 billion animals died, the awful breakdown is approximately; 143 million mammals, 2.46 billion reptiles, 180 million birds and 51 million frogs. This unimaginable loss is overwhelming.

Contemplating what is happening to our world can give rise to more grief than healing medicine. I cannot look at the beauty of nature without equally looking and knowing about; the destruction of habitats, the clear felling of virgin rainforests, the micro plastics found in turtles, the melting of the ice caps, over-fishing in our oceans, polar bears going hungry, the dwindling of the great migration of birds, koalas on the endangered list and so much more. Acknowledging our intimacy with the earth’s sickness is our spiritual and moral responsibility. As Thich Nhat Hanh said, ‘we must hear the earth crying’ then we will know how to act.

To hear the earth crying we need to have a deep time perspective. The Holocene epoch beginning about 11,700 years ago after the last ice age and continuing up until 21st Century was our Garden of Eden on Earth. The Holocene had a strikingly stable climate and corresponds to the rapid growth in humankind brought about largely by the agricultural revolution. Geologists argue that we have now entered the geological age of the Anthropocene, which is defined by the impact of human activity being the dominant influence on climate, the environment and its planetary systems. The Anthropocene has ushered in an unstable climate due to rising green house gas emissions and global warming. The destruction of wildlife habitats, the pollution of rivers and the acidification of the oceans causing us to head towards

a graveyard of the 6th mass extinction event upon this earth. The magnitude of the loss of biodiversity has not been seen since the extinction of the dinosaurs.

We don't know what we have lost because it has disappeared out of sight. Each stage of decline for each generation becomes the new normal. Feeling the underbelly of grief for what we have lost is the bitter medicine that we now need to swallow.

Honouring our pain for the World

We need courage to seriously ask what have we done to the garden that was entrusted to us? We have violated the sustainable laws of nature. An ecological crisis of our own making is hard to swallow. David Attenborough the renowned natural history film-maker who stands at the forefront of issues concerning the planets declining species which he documents in his latest book, 'A life on Our Planet - My witness statement and vision for the future' openly states, "*The devastating scale of the catastrophe now forecast by mainstream science is a direct result of the way we are currently treating this planet*". The grief cracks my heart open...being broken open this too is the Self.

Joanna Macy, Buddhist teacher, writer and activist said, "*An important and central principle of the Work that Reconnects is honouring **our pain for the world** which is a phrase that covers a range of feelings including; outrage, alarm, grief, guilt, dread and despair. These feelings and reactions are a normal healthy response to a world in trauma*".

Bearing Witness

Terry Tempest Williams a naturalist, writer and environmental activist writes passionately about finding refuge in the wild places while honouring the loss of her grandmother and mother to cancer. "I am not married to sorrow", she said. "*I just choose not to look away. And I think there is deep beauty in not averting our gaze. No matter how hard it is, no matter how heartbreaking it can be. It is about presence. It is about bearing witness. I used to think bearing witness was a passive act. I don't believe that anymore. I think that when we are present, when we bear witness, when we do not divert our gaze, something is revealed—the very marrow of life. We change. A transformation occurs. Our consciousness shifts.*"

Each tip of each branch of coral holds up the light of the moon:- this Miscellaneous koan opened my mind to the interconnected wonder of life. This poetic metaphor helps to re-orientate and remind us who we really are. Curiously I had just watched on ABC live TV, the greatest spawning event of the natural world that recently occurred on the Great Barrier Reef. Every year approximately 6 days after the full moon in late spring (early December) the corals of the barrier reef release trillions of eggs and sperm into the water over about 3 to 4 days. The luna cycle and water temperature trigger entire colonies of coral reefs simultaneously to release their tiny eggs and sperm called gametes into the ocean. Underwater divers and scientists were filming this extraordinary event as it was happening. It is the greatest sex event on this planet, occurring right at our front door. Yet alongside the beauty of this extraordinary underwater world was the grief that 50% of the Great Barrier Reef is dead due to back-to-back bleaching. This is caused by global warming and run off of pesticides and fertilisers into the river systems and out into the sea. Inspiring and disheartening all at the same moment.

The planet's biodiversity encapsulates not only millions of species and billions of individuals, but the trillions of different kinds of animals, insects, plants, fungi, micro-organisms and the like. David Attenborough insists, "*The greater the biodiversity the more the biosphere is able to deal with change and maintain a balance and support life*". For life to truly thrive on this

planet there must be immense biodiversity. In conclusion he urges us, *“We share the Earth with the living world - the most remarkable life-support system imaginable, constructed over billions of years. The planet’s stability has wavered just as its biodiversity has declined - the two things are bound together. To restore stability to our planet, therefore, we must restore its biodiversity, the very thing we have removed. It is the only way out of this crisis that we ourselves have created. We must re-wild the world”*.

To re-wild the world we must also re-wild ourselves. The transformation requires both an inner and outer revolution. The Earth and our own survival are intimately laced together. The earth is indeed medicine for the sore heart, but it needs our protection, care and love. We know what to do. There is a path to sustainability. We can choose to be part of the great turning and engage in the practices that reconnect to live a more sustainable life.

When we move in a direction that touches the heart, we add to our life the momentum of a deeper purpose that makes us feel more alive. The great Turning is following the thread of active hope. It is listening to the ancient wisdom traditions of interdependence and compassionate action. Joanna Macy in her inspiring book ‘Active Hope’ found that what inspires people to support campaigns that are not of immediate personal benefit is to deepen ones sense of belonging. An aspect of the Great Turning is a shift in consciousness, “When we pay attention to the inner frontier of change, to the personal and spiritual development it will enhance our capacity and desire to act for the world. By strengthening our compassion we give fuel to our courage and determination.”

In the coming year, may we have the courage and wisdom to bear witness, to draw strength from each other, to serve, to act with fierce compassion in the midst of what we are facing today in order to foster active hope. Let us seek refuge and discover the earth as medicine, let us lean into the light for renewal when we are worn out and tired. Let us re-wild our hearts and the earth together to form a sustainable brocade to care for the many beings.

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AUTUMN CAROL

Sally Hopkins

Autumn days have come again,
Summer days are over;
the rams are running with the ewes
the paddocks spring with clover.

Onions hang in bags from rafters,
pumpkins ripen, jams are made;
pears and quinces, plums and cherries
in their bottles neatly laid.

Box woods cut and stacked all neatly,
cows their summer coats have lost;
nights grow longer and much colder
gentle blue days turn to frost.

From the road-side home rejoicing,
bear we scarlet hips of briars;
deck the house against the Winter
with their shining autumn fires.

I came across some poems that Sally had sent me a while ago which had been languishing in a big pile of papers. I read them again and rang Sally to congratulate her on fine work. She told me about the context of her writings. She and Colin lived at Nullo Mountain for some years, before she became a zen student. They lived on a steep farm surrounded by Wollemi National Park. Their life was close to the land, akin to the life of the locals (as opposed to the blow-ins) who had grown up there and continued in the farming traditions of their forbears. It was a self-sufficient life with limited contact with others. The postman would bring butter, tea, sugar and huge bags of whole wheat which Colin would grind for flour. Sally and Colin had a huge orchard, ran a flock of sheep including merinos (at the end stage), cows, and ate from their large vegetable garden. The sheep paid for the rates with their fleeces. There was endless work, and they were rubes, with little spare cash. And yet, said Sally, "We both agree that this was the happiest time of our lives". (Diana Levy)

THE SAYINGS AND DOINGS OF LITTLE HEART

Case 4

Sean Loughman

The Case

Day after day, Little Heart gets in the bath and bursts into laughter.

The Verse

*See through everything and you'll see a bath.
See the bath and you'll see Great Joy.*

WHAT IS FLOWERING?

Kerry Stewart

It's late summer and our garden has an abundance of bright red flowers – dahlias, ginger lily and geraniums - boldly singing the heat of the season. But yesterday I noticed a carpet of tiny white petals under the cumquat tree and the scent of citrus blossom in the air –whispering the promise of winter fruit.

The most diverse group of land plants are Angiospermae or flowering plants. The earliest record of angiosperm pollen appears around 134 million years ago. Over this period flowering plants diversified significantly and became widespread by 120 million years ago. I love the word 'Inflorescence' which describes both the structure and process of flowering - the complete flower head of a plant including stems, stalks, bracts, and flowers, the arrangement of the flowers on a plant as well as the process of flowering.

Whether I'm sitting quietly by the pond, wandering to the compost bin or rain gauge, or weeding some small section of the garden, thoughts arise of the similarity between the garden's growth and my own development through this 'one wild and precious life' (*Mary Oliver*). Plants have been on this planet long before any of my ancestors, so I reckon they probably have something to 'tell' us about living here.

Our garden planting is very diverse. Natives and exotics are planted side by side and I'm sure communicate with one another through soil, air and water. The subtle differences in each plant's nature is always surprising and a key part of my learning. Difference and co-existence are never debated. Lilly pilly sits next to frangipani shading bromeliads, rock orchids and salvia.

When I look closely at the botanical world it teaches me much about the ecology of my own life. Not just my relationship to other beings and physical surroundings, but also to my own internal vines, weather and flowers.

Where we grow, the soil itself has rich minerals that fertilise and a solid yet friable base that stabilises our sense of place. If the soil is too sandy all the minerals will be washed away. If there is too much clay, the water will be held tight rotting the roots. Both retaining and letting go are necessary to nourish body and spirit and support flowering.

The cold and heat, wet and dry, wind and stillness come and go, so I'm learning from the branches to dance in the cold rain with my hair blowing wildly. Now in the early Autumn of my life, manifesting in my stiff joints, I sit for longer periods on the wooden bench by the pond entranced by the water lily's translucent blooms. I watch my mother in her Winter cloak, words shrivelling on her tongue, developing a different sort of growth - flowering of the heart.

If seeds in the black earth can turn into such beautiful roses, what might not the heart of man become in its long journey toward the stars? (G.K. Chesterton)

This particular garden, where I am rooted has been tended by our family for more than 100 years. Before that, unnamed generations of people, possums, lizards, flying foxes, trees, birds, spiders, soil bacteria, grasses and bees (to name a few) have lived on this same piece of land on top of a hill, between two rivers.

*I originally came to this land
To transmit the Dharma and save deluded beings.
And when the Single Blossom opens its five petals,
the fruit will ripen naturally of itself.*
(Bodhidharma - on plum blossoms - Baika)

Do not be unkind to weeds, they are strong plants just growing where the conditions are right. Each type of weed has its favourite place to grow - in shade or sun, damp or dry. They are opportunists that thrive, when not being noticed, so pluck them regularly and the mind will be thankful. And I've realised over these many years in this garden, that they never go away, so I might as well enjoy their flowers too.

Beauty can't be described easily, yet it's deeply known as soon as the senses engage fully with some other being or thing. I think the early experiences of beholding beauty must have been how ritual and culture emerged - the flower on the altar, the green glazed cup filled with lemon verbena tea from the garden, your smile sitting under the carob tree. And that sweet joining of me with you is an act of creation, or flowering.

The principle purpose of a flower, apart from the pleasure of its very being, is for the reproduction of the individual plant and the species. Flowers hold the reproductive parts of plants and they mediate the joining of the pollen to the ovules.

Brendon has lived here almost all of his life. Family stories abound - like his mother's camellia, which still graces the land with her dark pink open face; and his planting of an angophora and a grey gum when he was a young man, much to the concern of his father about their potential for growth.

Well, his dad was right. These trees are now giant guardians. I sometimes think of them as his first-born twin children – a girl and boy. At the front of the house the angophora's languorous limbs embrace all passers-by. The gum, at the back, is solid and reflective, reaching for the clouds. They both support a multitude of creatures that crawl and fly from every direction to feast on their abundant cream blossoms – a commune of joyful giving and taking.

Flowering is one of the major transitions that a plant makes during its life cycle. The plant is able to interpret important cues such as changes in levels of hormones, the seasonal temperature shifts and changes in the light for it to come into flower. Once this process begins it cannot be reversed.

I have been here, in this garden, for only 40 years. Over that time our children have emerged and have been planted into the soil. This may seem a strange thing to say, but being rooted in place is not just a metaphor. Our children were born in the house and their placentas were buried under specific trees. This act links the trees with our children, with our ancestors and to future bodhisattvas.

*In the cherry blossom's shade
there's no such thing
as a stranger.* (Issa)

Mock Orange Blossom (*Philadelphus*)

Mainly from East Asia and North America, it flowers in late spring and early summer bearing 4-petalled white or cream flowers in loose clusters. The flower's scent strongly resembles that of orange blossom, hence the common name.

I got a cutting of this plant from my mother's garden so I could plant it for our first-born son. It has been grown in every house my mother and grandmother have lived, with cuttings being taken before their move and planted at the new house. It's easy to think this shrub is dead over winter, with multiple sticks emerging from the soil, but when it starts to form leaves I know the season is about to change. It's my marker of the endless life cycle. This flowering shrub seems fragile and delicate but it hides a toughness of spirit, being incredibly hardy and reliable. The petals of this flower are almost translucent and the yellow stamens rain gold dust over nearby plants. And every time I smell its delicate heavenly scent I remember my resilient ancestors, both here in this great south land as well as those from the northern hemisphere.

Flowers leave some of their fragrance in the hand that bestows them. (Chinese proverb)

Night Jasmine (*Cestrum nocturnum*)

Native to Central & South America and the West Indies, it has clusters of slender pale green to cream flowers appearing in late summer and autumn. It has a strong and sweet perfume at night but is scentless during the day. The flowers are pollinated by night visitors, including bats and moths, who are likely to be attracted to the scent.

This plant comes from a dear friend, a keen gardener, who used to live with us. It was planted for our second son. I love the way this shrub grows so strongly. It always reacts in a positive way to being moved or being pruned very hard. Its graceful long branches have the greenest of leaves and it's often hard to see the cream flowers. But that's part of its beauty. One summer night while sitting outside in the evening glow, a heady scent mingles with the smell of woodfire from the BBQ, and the sweet surprise of this plant comes forth. And these small, almost unnoticed flowers produce the most viable of fruit, which means plenty of seeds, or bodhisattvas, for the future!

All kindness begins with a sown seed. (Mary Oliver)

Magnolia

This large and varied genus from East Asia requires deep, fertile, well-drained soil. The roots are fragile and the tree doesn't transplant well. They thrive in sun or part shade and need to be protected from strong winds.

Now 30 years old, this tree was planted for our youngest son. It has light green soft leaves and large white scented flowers. It is a sensitive tree that seems to attract wildlife, like possums who munch the leaves like they are lettuce. But it's generous and patient, allowing some branches to be eaten while the rest of the tree thrives. Planted on the western side of the garden, in springtime when the sun sets, the white flowers on bare branches turn pink and gold, encouraging the mind and heart to work together.

Flowers are expressions of life moving forward. Nothing is static. They are a brief delicate scented reminder to savour this moment while it lasts. On this hot summer's day, beside the magnolia, an apple cucumber grows up the trellis and over a bay tree.

There is a sweet conversation between the cucumber's simple bright yellow flowers and its vine like form with the surrounding plants and the insects that pollinate it. Today I'll pick the round white crisp fruit to add to a salad for lunch, bringing the transformed flowers, with deep gratitude, inside.

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THE KOAN: “WHO AM I?”

Will Moon

To quote from Jack Kornfield: “*The mystery of identity, ‘who am I?’ is one of humankind’s central spiritual questions*¹.” In the forest monasteries where Kornfield practiced in southeast Asia, this was one of the first questions that a novice was asked to meditate upon. Ramana Maharshi used this as an almost exclusive practice for his followers². For such a central question it is interesting that throughout our whole koan curriculum this question does not appear. It seems that the ancient koans indirectly carried this question, the existential question, embodied in the dialogues that occurred between the ancients. The nearest that we come to the direct question in our tradition is, ‘Who is hearing?’

I started to sit with this question after having completed working with the koans we sit with in our tradition. But I will qualify that to say, truly we have never completed working with these koans. They forever deepen our practice. I’m not sure how I came to sit with it, perhaps just out of fascination and with an exploring and inquiring mind. So, it was almost by accident, there was nothing that specifically pointed me to it. I have come to realise that this is one of the most significant koans I’ve sat with. The reason is that this koan is so deeply personal a question and it takes us to the true essence of who, and what we are.

I’ve heard it said in Zen circles that to directly ask this question can be problematic because students can get caught up in ideas about what the self is. But I think that truly deep inquiry, the type that fundamentally questions our existence, and what we are, takes us beneath the chatter of concepts, requiring nothing less than our whole being committed to this question. We are looking for the substance of our existence.

With koan practice we must take our experience to heart, it must seep through us and transform our life, otherwise it becomes just an interesting experience, and sometimes the ego can take this experience on board as another achievement. There is a danger of this for some students. With koan practice there needs to be the ongoing intention to live our experience and to be aware when we are drifting and to be honest with ourselves and correct things. It reminds me of the anger that I can sometimes feel when I see the agenda of some right-wing media outlets to undermine the best efforts of people, to sow the seeds of division through misinformation, exaggeration and defamation. “I take up the way of not indulging in anger.” After all, in our minds we have created an image of what we are angry with, a creation of the mind. Nations go to war over these creations of the mind, never really knowing the people and the lives that the hatred is directed towards.

The question of ‘Who am I?’ is significant I think because it is such a personal question that I think that there is less opportunity for the ego to take a hold of it, because we see directly through what the ego is. It is less easy to later hold our experience at arms length and think of it at some sort of achievement when it is truly about who and what we are. When we understand the fathomless and infinite expanse of our existence, of which we are, the question is settled, and we can delight in the peace we experience.

¹ J. Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy the Laundry. How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*. Rider, London 2000, p. 54.

² Kornfield, p. 54-55.

So, how to practice with this question? I usually sit with my breathing for a short while to settle the mind. I then look directly into what I sense as ‘me,’ the ‘I,’ and ask the question, ‘who am I?’ The question is asked with the deepest sincerity. Ever deeper the question goes, probing in all corners for the substance of the self. ‘What and I?’ ‘Who wants to know?’ ‘Who is asking this question?’ Sitting with the question with the utmost commitment, not straining, but not slack, you want to know right? When we are really committed to this question, returning to it with daily practice, over and over coming back the question, no different to other koans, then there is a resolution to this question.

And it doesn’t end there. We need to realise the same thing over and over. In no time at all, when we are off the cushions, the idea of the self as a separate entity, separate from the world and vulnerable returns. We forget. We must bring the experience of encountering the true self back to life again and again. Over and over, it works through our lives, transforming us.

The truly great thing is that we can continue to touch the ground of who we are over and over, to learn and grow from our practice for the rest of our lives, and to truly blossom (just sticking to the flowering theme here). So, perhaps you may wish to ponder, ‘Who am I?’



BUCKINGHAMIA CELSISSIMA (Ivory Curl tree)

Helen Sanderson

It is early summer 2019 and we are in drought. The days are full of foreboding as part of the country is already burning. And more, much more is to come.

Here in the inner west of Sydney, here in Marrickville the street tree I planted years ago is in flower. Actually it is the descendant of the first tree I planted, *Buckinghamia celsissima*, which actually replaced a large messy tree called *Melaleuca linarifolia*, also known as Snow in Summer. Council gave it the chop at my request, I feel a bit ashamed to say, because I just didn't like it and gave plausible reasons for its removal, like it was digging up the footpath. It also only flowered on one side, the side that faced away from me, another black mark.

Buckinghamia by contrast had attractive glossy bright green leaves and long beautiful white grevillea type flowers so she was lovely. Sadly *Buckinghamia celsissima* number 1 came to a murderous end when a terrible driver in the middle of one night ran her down. I heard the commotion and ran out in the street to see a woman trying to replant the tree, now rootless, a futile effort. She denied having knocked it down, which I could see was rubbish and being as much outraged by her lie as her dreadful driving, I called the cops. When they arrived the next morning, they knocked on my door and asked, "Where's the victim?"

I walked the few steps from my front door to the street garden and pointed. The victim lay sadly on the ground and as I had taken the perpetrator's car number plate number, the cops paid her a visit. Later they phoned to report her apologies and that was that.

Shortly after a small *Buckinghamia celsissima* number 2 was inserted into the ground in the street where she still is to this day, now, a tall, rather wide spreading lady. She actually, in my opinion needs a bit of a haircut. She's like me in that respect as my hair is long and bushy and Covidy. My arborist however tells me that she probably doesn't want a haircut, she'd rather be left alone. But enough of anthropomorphising.

Back to 2019.

Just as the summer was becoming fiercely hot and dry, and bushfires were crackling all over the eastern side of the country, but before they morphed into that appalling conflagration *Buckinghamia celsissima* burst into flower. Not one or two flowers but myriads of them. She was covered in flowers. White lacy flowers made up of curling tendrils and dripping nectar. I breathed in the scent of honey, sighing with wonder and satisfaction. With the scent came the sound, the bee buzzing sound that surrounded the tree. I stood before the tree, the bee loud tree, enjoying the sound, the scent and the sight of it.

I grabbed passers by. "Come and look at this," I said, "Look at my bee tree." Most people humoured me. They looked up noncommittally, and murmured something like, 'oh yes' or 'very nice' then got away.

But I was in amazement.

I stood looking up. Honeybees, black stingless bees, bright blue cuckoo bees, blue banded bees, iridescent Christmas beetles, butterflies and other flying things, hoverflies, wasps, garden bugs, buzzed, flew, landed on and drank the flowers. The tree was alive with multitudes of insects flying, legs pollen laden, into the curling strands of the nectar filled flowers.

Buckinghamia celsissima was a reminder of paradise, in that terrible fiery time, a reminder of abundant life.

In many religions trees are worshipped, considered sacred. The longer I live the more I revere them. Their names roll off the tongue like a chant. *Eucalyptus maculata* (spotted gum), *Eucalyptus citriadora* (lemon scented gum), *Eucalyptus robusta* (swamp mahogany) *Angophora floribundas*, *Angophora costata*, and *Buckinghamia celsissima*.

Numberless trees of life grow in and around the places where I live, delivering flowers, bees and other blessings.



A SIGNPOST IN AN ENDLESS ROAD

Pablo Scodellaro

How to describe something that is completely beyond description?

The spring sesshin 2020 was held at Kodoji in early October. As with every sesshin before, I looked forward to it for weeks. I anticipated the glorious mornings in silence, the peaceful walks in the bush, the wonderful singing of birds, watching the imposing cliffs that surround the valley, and the long periods of just being.

And as with every sesshin before, two or three days before the start, I was stressed out. I was the Jiki. But I had been Jiki for some previous sesshins so I knew what to do. Nevertheless, for some reason that I cannot explain I was anxious and nervous. As I was pitching my tent at Kodoji I was asking myself what I was doing there. Finally, when I got ready to strike the han for the first sitting block the anxiety vanished and everything was smooth.

Gillian Coote and Will Moon were the teachers leading the sesshin. On day two, during the afternoon, Will gave his first teisho, where he quoted the following words from the Shodoka: *“Not avoiding fantasy, not seeking truth”*

I had come across those words many times before, and somehow I had managed to come up with my own understanding of their meaning, right or wrong. However this time they appeared to be absolutely puzzling. I started questioning the wisdom of not avoiding fantasy and not seeking truth. Why wouldn't you seek truth? Why wouldn't you avoid fantasy? After all, are we supposed to remain in delusion?

Somehow those words found their way into the depths of my mind, and showed up several times during the rest of the sittings on day two. I went to bed that night with the words still doing the rounds within my head. On day three, they came back on and off during the first sitting. The second sitting occurred normally and at the end of it, I led the kinhin line out of the dojo. As usual I stopped, facing the cliffs for contemplation.

The view from the verandah was simply breathtaking. Gorriks was displaying its usually incredible colours. The birds produced their magic sounds everywhere. The cliffs, the birds and the trees assembled to form this beautiful and peaceful morning scene.

Suddenly, the truth and the fantasy flashed in the field of my consciousness with astonishing intensity. They were both present there, forcefully, in a way that I cannot possibly explain. They were just there. *“Not avoiding fantasy, not seeking truth”*. The substance of this assertion revealed itself with full force. The truth and the fantasy were entirely empty.

The view from the verandah changed completely. A huge and all-encompassing mass of emptiness originating inside the earth was giving rise to everything there was. The boundaries between cliffs, trees, birds, heaven and earth vanished. I started weeping intermittently, something that would be commonplace for the rest of the sesshin. I couldn't believe what I was watching.

I spent some moments in contemplation of that magnificent and dazzling view where the birds, the trees, the cliffs, the truth, and the fantasy were there, and at the same time were completely empty. Of course I didn't want this striking experience to end, but at some point we all had to return to the dojo, so I started walking. After a few steps, and still under the spell of this vision, a second flash came together with a voice within my head. In a provoking tone this voice asked me: "... *and do you think that this picture could be complete without you?*"

At that point I realized that this mass of emptiness that was giving rise to everything, actually included me.

But there was no "Me".

I *was* that emptiness. Everything was this emptiness. Everything was emanating from this oneness. How can you describe something that is completely beyond description...? There was no separation with anything else. Everything was only one thing. Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form. Nothing has a separate self...

All of a sudden the deep meaning of these otherwise cryptic statements was absolutely plain and self-evident. The feeling of confirming all these propositions was magnificent and at the same time overwhelming. It was like finding the key to a hidden treasure. A key that I wasn't sure that I deserve to find.

As we were about to enter the dojo the same voice came back, this time saying: "*Welcome to the world!*" Literally this is what I felt. I sensed that I was being welcomed into the same old world, the true reality of which I had just perceived for the first time. We entered the dojo and I think I nearly collapsed onto the cushion. The vision slowly subsided over the following minutes and left me with a powerful sense of the importance of Zen practice at all times, and a strong wish to do so. This burst of consciousness came back, although with less intensity, one afternoon when the Tanto, Stephen walked the kyosaku, and offered the following words: "*There is nowhere to go. There is nothing to attain. There is no one that can attain it.*"

Besides sending shivers down my spine, those words left a mark in my consciousness as they appeared perfectly clear in substance and meaning like never before. I am happy to say that they remain this way to the present day.

It was during those magic moments at Kodoji that the fruit of Gillian's guidance through the Zen path revealed itself, when her teachings, help, patience, and encouragement triggered this inconceivable event. Nothing that I may say can properly express my gratitude to her for all the work she has done with me, and the way that she continues to support me. My gratitude goes to Will as well for choosing those baffling words from the Shodoka, certainly not the only ones, which ignited my curiosity and interest at that particular time.

Since then I carry the truth and the fantasy somewhere in my heart. They show up at surprising times, like that morning at Kodoji.

How to describe something that is completely beyond description?

I just don't know. At this point I call it: "*A signpost in an endless road*".

ARE YOU FREE

Brian Gutkin

Are you free when you soar like an eagle,
Free when you live like a king?
Freedom's the source, it's not gained by force,
It's not breaking out of anything.
The spring buds dance on the branches,
The wild wind whistles the trees,
The soft glow of morning, the first hint of spring,
Oh where are those shackles you flee.

Are you free when you know where you're going,
Free when you reach the high peak,
In a cave or a castle together, alone,
With the time upon time that you seek?
This cup I drink is refreshing,
The cool solid ground hugs my feet,
The first song of spring sounds deep in my heart
As here and eternity meet.

Rise up in the morning early,
Dress to the dream of the day,
Sup for the body, work for the soul,
And nothing will lock you away.
Dance with the buds and the branches
Though walls within walls there may be,
For you are the ocean, the field and the sky,
Wherever you're bound, you are free.

If you'd like to listen to Brian singing this poem go to:

<https://soundcloud.com/brian-gutkin/are-you-free?ref=clipboard&p=i&c=1>

HAIKU

summer's legacy
over on their sides
dead banksias

let that sunshine
of the wattle
bloom in me

on the steep creek-bed
yellow petals have fallen -
hauling ourselves up

Grose River **Diana Levy**

ROOT AND FLOWER

Diana Levy

In between Christmas and New Year, I had a problem. The rain fell, the veggies grew, the weeds ran rampant and my whippersnipper was playing up. Everyone was on holiday including the local motor-mower repair business, so this meant I had to fix it myself. If I could do that, then the garden universe around the tomatoes and zucchinis and cucumbers and all the non-flowering vegetables would support their growth, rather than overwhelm it.

I began with the lessons that my Makita has taught me so far: when it won't start, walk away for a while and do something else, put my attention elsewhere. Let the petrol evaporate - a flooded engine will not start. Having allowed my frustration to evaporate, I returned to the two-stroke machine and methodically ran through the four steps, put my body in the optimal position, yanked the starter cord and still nothing. This routine repeated itself several times until I noticed that my frustration, my ignition point, had been reached.

In "*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*" by Robert Pirsig, he calls this, "*running out of gumption*". This seminal book posited two types of motorcycle freaks: the Classic, who loves tuning this type of engine, and the Romantic, who loves the wind in his/her hair as they purr along the back roads of, lets say, NSW. I've often needed to call upon the classic side of myself to fix, or build, or plan, or coordinate something. It requires a methodical, cool state of mind. Step by step rather than big picture. The Makita went back in the shed for the day.

The following day was not much different. The whippersnipper was teaching me calmness and patience. I had to be calm to tame the machine and delve deeper into its workings. I now fished out the specific whippersnipper tools and removed and checked the sparkplug, cleaned it as best I could, reinserted it. It reminded me of being a young student in Auckland, riding a two-stroke Honda, pulled off the motorway and pulling out a sparkplug in the rain. Tried starting it again: walked away. I looked at the rampant weeds and the growth of my tomatoes which now had tiny yellow flowers all ready for pollinating. Pull yet again, run out of gumption, put the thing back in the shed.

Try again the next day. Notice what you're doing. Follow all the steps. Stay cool. Clearly I had to understand the machine, so the next stage was to bring in a consultant: a friend. His view, over a number of conversations, ran counter to mine in some respects, but I learned that a carburettor mixes air with fuel. The petrol needs the air to catch alight. He thought that the air-fuel mixture was what I had to play with.

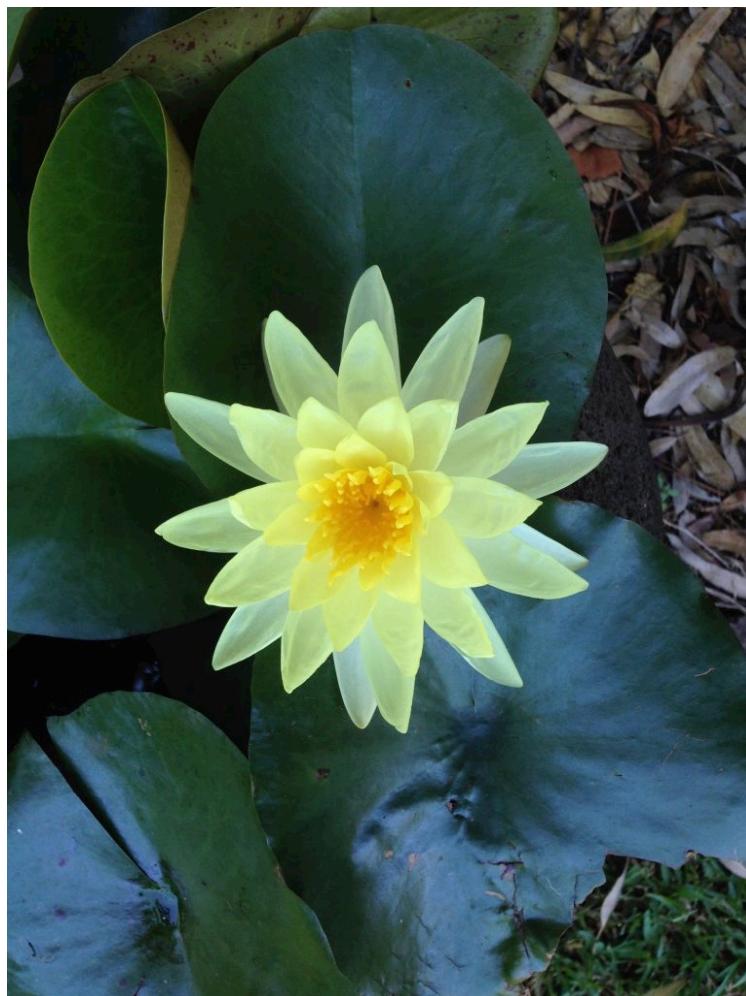
The next day it started - hurray! - some weeds and edges had their ambitions thwarted, but after a while the Makita gave up. It was clearly time to read the manual, in hard copy. They are becoming a relic. Back in the day there were even witty manuals, like the "*Compleat Idiots' Guide to VW Maintenance*", with fun cartoons that cheered you along your knuckle-scraped, grease-smeared task. It's easier to use a hard-copy manual than to clean hands, go inside, open the computer, find a site....etc. I read beyond '*Trouble-shooting*' to '*Maintenance*'. I had done some of these jobs on my other garden machines, but none of it on the whippersnipper! I felt like a dolt.

I now sought further expertise, in the form of fellow gardeners at the Springwood Community Garden. The men enthusiastically took up my problem, and gave me advice which conformed to my view. I went home and chucked out the old 2-stroke, ordered a new sparkplug, and read

the manual again. It instructs in about 20 languages but neglected certain steps, such as how to remove the air filter cover: so engage classic brain and figure it out. There was a large clump of dried grass smothering the air filter, which might explain the air-petrol mixture imbroglio. I followed the new advice, and cleaned the air filter in petrol. The manual did not recommend petrol, said the community gardeners, because there might be a DIY idiot with a cigarette in his mouth.

Lo, the Makita started! With enormous pleasure I roamed my domain in boots and orange helmet, turning the machine on and off at will. Had I flowered? Or is the metaphor more accurately, that of the relationship between roots and flowers?

When I'm in the garden my inner Romantic imagines the Chinese zen monks and nuns who raised their own food, and were completely self-sufficient (as a defence against a hostile state). This effort pokes through many of the stories; the abbot who found a snake in his soup, "*Eat the blame!*", Hui Neng in the rice-pounding shed. Westerners who gained access to Chinese Buddhist centres in the twentieth century, such as Red Pine/Bill Porter, found gardening an integral part of daily practise and survival. There is a great deal of boring weeding in gardening (you could say), and a great deal of boring organisation in bringing a sesshin to fruition. That classic attention to detail and methodical work brings about a great flowering on the paddock in the minds and hearts of the householders. Root and flower – not two.



LOST, LOSING AND FINDING THE WAY (Walking the country)

Gillian Coote

Walking the country is an opportunity to explore where we are, with Kodoj as our home-base. Walking in silence, with wide open awareness. The destination is not the point. It's each step. Sometimes a whole day walk, sometimes a half-day walk. Sometimes ceremony at particular places, sometimes writing, sketching. There are a couple of familiar walks and, as this time we've only got Saturday and half of Sunday, we'll head for the cave on Saturday and the waterhole on Sunday morning. To show the way to the cave, last time we tied orange ribbons on trees. Up early for zazen on Saturday. Breakfast, make sandwiches. Soft rain falling on the tin roof, the warm potbelly stove, the two little girls and their mother waving from the verandah, the rest of us walking away from homely comforts in light rain.

Beware certainty. Beware habit. Beware solid ground. You step into the unknown with each breath. Heading for the cave, we walk along the swimming hole track, poised to turn right at the plastic tied to the tree. Only it's gone. So we hazard a guess and start the ascent. There are levels of boulders to negotiate, to squeeze between, to step around, careful not to look down. Now one of last year's orange ribbons presents itself, we're on the right track. Now another ribbon, tied to a big angophora spreading her curling limbs out over the valley. Up and up, through more crevices, heaving our dog Gracie up from below – she weighs about twenty kilos these days – more orange ribbon – on we go, up and up – and now we are at the top of the ridge, now we look down and see the small round brown-ness of 'our paddock', where tree-felling and ploughing and slashing over nearly two hundred years has created a perfect medium for frost, which burns any growing tips over and over again through these harsh winter seasons away from the coastline.

Still panting from the steep climb, sweating under the raincoats, sitting on a rock drinking water, sweet and cool on this cool day of rain – rain, for the first time in months! soft, gentle, and soaking through our trousers from the many leaves and branches on the way. Soft mist – beautiful and delicate, drifting across the valleys below, wreathing the ochre cliffs. The sky dull grey – no sun. A good day to climb, to bush-bash. Yes. On we go then. Through the casuarina grove, through the *Lambertia formosa* patch, the *Xanthorea* grove, the yellow bloodwoods, the *Banksia serratas* – keeping the adjoining ridges visible as we hold to the middle of the ridge. After less than an hour, we come to boulders, signalling another descent – but surely it's too soon for that. Tony and I zig-zag back and forth, left and right, searching for sightlines – the creek dividing those hills, the huge old trees. No signs. Dark green forest depths, misty clouds, soft grey sky. Back and forth, back and forth, we'll see something familiar soon. But the others have their own idea, the sandwiches are out, water, fruit, the soft sky, the rain holding back. Birds calling. Black cockatoos. No cave today – that's fine. Sometimes it is not to be found.

Time to set out for home. Off we go. Back up the slope, back to the banksias. One of the group is sure we are going the wrong way. Shock – how could he think that? No, we must go back this way, he says firmly, indicating where we have recently sat on the rocks for lunch. Then he says, 'Let's determine our direction by the sun.' You just point the hour hand to the sun and the minute hand indicates north – but where is the sun? Today it too is hidden, beneath layers of dense cloud. Some of the group think they see the sun's dull gleam over there, while others think it's in the opposite direction. So, forget the sun. Uncertainty reigns. Today I am determined that the inward flutter of doubt, which always arises when someone is certain and

confident they are right, will not stop me but it takes a huge amount of psychic energy to overwhelm that doubt and remain calm and confident. The familiar flutter is there, the adrenalin of doubt and fear moving in the body. We go forward for a while until he expresses concern and doubt again, and everybody stops. This is an edge for me. To be firm, confident, and take responsibility for my intuition. I point out the various familiar trees and plants as we go, but he remains unconvinced and the others don't know either way and have little to say.

On the way through, before lunch, there was a particular piece of sandstone cracked in a way that reminded me of the peace symbol. I wondered what had stepped on it that was heavy enough to crack it. A great big kangaroo? If it was a person, then who? And when? But now, here it is again. Proof! I point it out and everybody seems happy to believe me but clearly they hadn't noticed it the first time. I push ahead now, feeling we are very near our descent point and in my eagerness to end the uncertainty, I walk fast, ahead of the rest. From my vantage point on the ridge I look down. But there's no brown paddock. Instead, the deep green forest in every direction, plunging down from bony sandstone cliffs to the creek line, no different from the wilderness where we ate our lunch. Wild country, on a topo map, the ridges an endless maze. Now the fluttering of doubt flips into terror – he is right. We will have to go all the way back, the other way. At such a time, the mind throws up one ghastly scenario after another. A night in the bush with no matches for fire, no food, no warm clothing. How I long for that small round brown circle of whitefella paddock. Now what?

Just then he calls, 'You've gone too far, come over here.' Together, we crash through the bush until, up ahead, he calls, 'You were right! here's the orange ribbon.' We gather together and there below is our paddock. How I love the fact that it was cleared and ploughed and has turned brown, the only brown to be seen. Our dusty burnt grassy paddock. Home. The misty clouds are still floating round the valley, playing hide and seek with our view of the paddock. It's sobering. Forces of nature – rain, mist, wilderness – that we must respect.

Back at the cottage, the little girls and their mother have been walking, sketching, playing. It's so good to be back. Hot showers, a change of clothes, a cup of tea, and into the dojo for a sit before our supper. We sit again after our meal and sink into sleep while the potbelly dries our soaking jeans and shirts and socks and boots.

We wake to the sound of heavy rain which persists beyond the time of our scheduled departure for this morning's walk, so we sit instead. Glorious rain. And after lunch, before setting out for the city, we share our experiences.

The sculptor amongst us had her own project of collecting the leaves of various species on the ridge, and this has been accomplished. Her partner had been anxious about his physical ability to climb up the ridge, and having managed it, is happy. The one whose sense of direction had been confused is grateful for my certainty and leadership. I am grateful for trusting my intuition.

Claudine from Switzerland weeps - tears of gratitude. Her ongoing dilemma has been 'where should I be?' she tells us. In Australia for eight years, her initial sense of being welcomed by the country has evaporated, leaving her full of doubt. What should she do? Where should she be? "When we were 'lost' up on the ridge," she said, "not knowing much about where we were – or who was on the right track – I let myself 'not know' and just be present. And I came home. I found my true home right here."



MIND MOON CIRCLE
Journal of Sydney Zen Centre
251 Young Street,
ANNANDALE NSW 2038

PRINT POST
225 293 00002

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