

Mind Moon Circle





Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre



Gardening the Way
Winter 2022

Zen Meditation Landscape Garden - Analogy of Meditative Practices

Meditation practices generally fall into four categories. It is important to know which one you are practicing and why.

ACTIVE /DIRECTIVE Specific Focus and Purpose			PASSIVE Surrendering
Observing 	Pulling the Weeds 	Planting, Cultivating 	Abiding 
Mindfulness practices: 4 Foundations of Mindfulness: (Body, Feelings, Mind states, Dharma) Breath counting Breath awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posture • Body sensation • Sound • Walking • Standing • Bowing • Samu /work • Everyday mindfulness practices 	Working with defilements, purification of mind & ethics Inquiry into any reactive states - greed, hatred and ignorance. Transforming deep-seated patterns of mind that cause suffering, distress, unease, anxiety, depression. Healing and detaching from one's story and life drama. Contemplation of precepts/ ethics	Cultivating positive states 4 Immeasurables Love, Compassion, Joy & Equanimity 8-fold Noble Path <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generosity • Happiness • Non-clinging • Acts of service & charity • Engaged Social/ Environmental Action • Studying the dharma • Chanting practice 	Being states Concentration & Wisdom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Introspection of Koans * Silent Illumination * Just Sitting * Bearing Witness Non-clinging Concentration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Absorption States (Jhanas) - less volition, awareness, presence dominant. • Serenity, peace Unbounded Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equanimity Abiding Wisdom Empty/ oneness selflessness
Insight into 3 characteristics of existence is available in all four categories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anicca everything arises and passes away - Dukkha unease, dissatisfaction, suffering and its causes - Anatta no permanent, separate abiding self, 'this is not me, not I, not myself' These ' cannot be known by reason alone ' but through direct experience			

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*The next issue of Mind Moon Circle – Spring – will be edited by Helen Sanderson
& Janet Selby. Please email your submissions to: helen.sanderson@icloud.com*

Gardening the Way

Winter 2022

The true face of nature is not that of a garden. We sometimes see in wild places impressions that seem garden-like, but gardens are of our making. They are the consequence of human imagination. In the same way, our Zen practice comes about and can mature in a person's life with the decision to seek the path. Understanding the great vows, hearing the heart sutra clearly, recognising the truth in the precepts and trying to cultivate in our lives the Four Immeasurables of loving-kindness (friendliness), compassion (willing to cease suffering), appreciative joy (feeling happy for others), and equanimity (calm based on wisdom). All require cultivation and attention.

Right in the middle of this edition of Mind Moon Circle is a tribute to our dear sangha friend Tony Coote. Over a countless number of years, he drew many MMC cover pages and cartoons, wrote articles and poetry and helped edit the journal with Gilly. He was at the centre of our Sangha dance and he will remain there in our hearts.

Brendon Stewart

Kerry Stewart

Editors

Winter

Cat Tanaka

...deep in the sacred ground,
High in the empty sky,
Broadly shading living things
The tree of wisdom thrives
By rain and soil and sunshine
And by your loving care that we maintain.

What is Sangha?

Jane Andino

In all the koan stories, there are many that depend on the question ‘What is Buddha?’ I explored this question on Monday evening, as those of you at the Winter sesshin heard, and which we discussed together. Then there is the question ‘What is Dharma?’ as in Case 1 of the Book of Serenity “The Dharma of the King of Dharma is thus.” I won’t deal with that question here, as my teisho would be necessarily very short.

But in all the anthologies of koans, I haven’t yet heard the question ‘What is Sangha?’ This is a curious thing, and a little sad, that the third aspect of the Three Treasures should be absent from the koans and yet, without the Sangha our practice would without doubt come to a dead end. So, I want to explore what Sangha means for us in this epoch and in this place and cultural landscape, and why sangha is so little discussed.

Let’s look at the origins of the sangha. At the time of Shakyamuni, around the period 500-400 BCE, the sangha was a governing assembly in a republic or kingdom. The Shakya clan had a tribal assembly, the gana-sangha, for decision-making. Probably it operated more as an oligarchy but some consider it to be humanity’s oldest surviving democratic institution which in turn influenced the structure of decision-making in the earliest Buddhist communities. And, although in some forms of Buddhism, sangha refers only to assemblies of monks and nuns, in Buddhist communities of the Western world, as in the SZC, the democratic principle in our lay organisation has been restored. It was inevitable in the context of our society and place in history. We have come back to the original meaning of the word sangha where the group functions for the good of the whole, and everyone has rights and responsibilities.

The emperor asked Bodhidharma, 'I have endowed temples and authorised ordinations - what is my merit? Bodhidharma said: 'No merit at all'. In the functioning of sangha, there is no merit for good deeds done; hierarchies have no place. Only what is authentic is *it*.

There is one koan case which in part looks at the perceived limits of sangha. It's Case 32 of the Wu-men Kuan, The Buddha Responds to an Outsider.

An outsider asked the World-Honoured One, "I do not ask for the spoken; I do not ask for the unspoken." The World-Honoured One sat still.

The outsider praised him saying, "The World-Honoured One with his great compassion and mercy has opened the clouds of my delusion and enabled me to enter the Way." He then made bows and took his leave.

Ananda asked, "What did the outsider realize to make him praise you?"

The World-Honoured one said, "He is like the fine horse who runs even at the shadow of a whip."

He is called the Outsider to highlight that there are no distinctions of outsider and insider, of Buddhist and non-Buddhist; the koan presents our true open-hearted nature. We are the sangha of everyone on the Way, everyone who is on the Path of awakening.

One of my favourite stories about Thich Nhat Hanh concerns a conference that he attended of theologians and professors of religion. The opening speaker said 'We are going to hear about the beauties of several traditions, but that does not mean we are going to make fruit salad.' When it was Thich Nhat Hanh's turn to speak he said 'Fruit salad can be very delicious!' We can learn from the many traditions and also enrich other traditions by not getting stuck or attached to a particular view. This is Right View, which enables us to be open to dialogue and change of attitudes. Indeed, in our SZC, there are many who have enriched their Zen practice and their understanding of Australian identity by learning from Elders about indigenous values and beliefs.

I have talked about the democratic history of sangha which is so suited to our modern world. I've talked about the inclusiveness which is a hallmark of sangha. We recite the Ti Sarana in Pali, the language of southern Buddhism, and saying this gatha in Pali demonstrates that Buddhism is a single stream, and we join with all the other Buddhist groups who recite this. In the gatha we vow to take refuge in the Buddha, dharma and sangha. What does this mean, 'taking refuge in the sangha'? It means finding my true home.

So, taking refuge in the Buddha is finding my true home in this moment now; taking refuge in the dharma is finding encouragement and support from this path of practice; and taking refuge in the sangha is sharing and reflecting this true home with others and with all beings.

Aitken Roshi writes (P74 Taking the Path of Zen): “The sangha is our realisation of this harmony, this oneness, the undifferentiated vigour of the unknown and the unknowable and its expression as the song of the Chinese thrush”. Or, we would say, the song of the wattle bird and the currawong.

As Buddhists we embrace the song of the Evening Dedication that “birds and trees and stars and we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony”, so it’s very gratifying in this age of Science when Science offers proof of that underlying harmony.

Recently I came across an article by Alex Dixon and Jeremy Adam Smith entitled “Birds do it, Bats do it, Cells do it”. This article debunks the view that the Darwinian “survival of the fittest”, one of competition, is the only criterion in natural processes.

They argue that “Cooperation is part of nature, down to the cellular level. Why? Because cooperation is one of the most important and beneficial behaviours on earth. We literally would not be here without it. For example, you will never see an ant stuck in traffic, or with road rage. They have evolved ultra-cooperative systems for leaving and returning to their nest.”

To follow on Aitken Roshi’s quote: “We are, you and I, the Tathagata, showing that harmony in each of our actions, standing up, putting on clothes, sitting down for a meal.” And yes, gathering here for this age-old tradition of transmission which we have adapted into our lay ceremony...that’s the spirit of sangha.

Aitken Roshi writes (P72, Taking the Path of Zen) that sangha is “the kinship of all things, every entity of this universe and of all universes, past, present and future in endless dimensions. It is to the enlightenment of this total sangha that we are dedicated in our vows.”

Here is our first Sangha koan:

Green Thumb and Take-a-cutting were turning over the compost heap at Kodoji. Take-a-cutting asked Green Thumb, “Elder Sister, what is sangha?” “Compost bin!” said Green Thumb. “Isn’t that like something Chao-chou said?” remarked Take-a-cutting, rather pointedly. “I still say Compost bin!” said Green Thumb. “How about you, Achariya? What is sangha?” He replied, “Green Thumb, Take-a-cutting, Kerry, Brendon, Stephen, Lizard, Sunshine, Rain.” Both bowed in appreciation.

We all know that there is just that presenting of the fact ‘Compost bin!’ Sangha isn’t a concept. There it is in the exchanges of student and teacher, in the hum of the crickets’ constant singing, in the sound of pots and chopping boards from the kitchen. Sangha is not merely a means to get things done, an organisational unit, but also presents the essential.

And we can also see the recycling and renewing actions of Buddha, dharma and sangha, finding the jewel of true nature that is always here and making it apparent; taking mouldy old ideas and

turning them into a rich and fertile garden for meditation. At the same time, the sangha is each member, shining forth, full and complete.

Here is another modern koan:

The teacher asked the online student, “Where have you come from?”

The student answered, “Nowhere. I’m at home.”

The teacher said, “Good! Good! Always at home nowhere is most intimate.”

In some ways Covid has forced us to embrace the wider world, the wider extensions of sangha. I’m still amazed that I regularly meet online with Zen teachers from other parts of Australia and other countries. The recent international Diamond Sangha Teachers meeting was conducted completely online with possibly greater participation rates, and certainly a lot less air travel.

And then, there is the greater mahasangha to which we and all beings belong. I love this gatha of Robert Aitken (p227 The Morning Star):

Hearing the crickets at night
I vow with all beings
to find my place in the harmony
crickets enjoy with the stars.

I was reading the comments of Robyn Williams, long-time broadcaster of the ABC’s Science show. He expressed the same awe and wonder, with more down-to-earth cautions. He said “I relish the natural relationship of a zillion things and I wonder where did all this come from? How does the balance get maintained? If you farm the Amazon, you change the weather. Science connects everything and, if we don’t understand the interrelationships and look after them, we’re stuffed.” A very Aussie assessment of the Net of Indra, a Buddhist image of a net of jewels, where each jewel, each precious being, reflects all the others.

In the sutras Shakyamuni Buddha proclaimed that the next Buddha will be named Maitreya, the Buddha of Love. It’s interesting that Thich Nhat Hanh has interpreted the Maitreya Buddha to be the process of a loving sangha. He wrote, “In the Buddha’s teaching we learn that love is born from understanding. The willingness to love is not enough. If you do not understand, you cannot love. The capacity to understand the other person will bring about acceptance and loving kindness”.

He went on to say, “It is possible the next Buddha will not take the form of an individual. The next Buddha may take the form of a community, a community practising understanding and loving kindness, a community practising mindful living. And the practice can be carried out as a group, as a city, as a nation.” (Inquiring Mind, 1994)

Those inspiring and millennial words were written way back in 1994. Still the world lurches from one war to another. Still the number of refugees and hungry people grows. And yet, there are many ordinary sages willing to find solutions to bring us closer to the reality of the sangha of Maitreya Buddha. The vows which I will make at this ceremony are the Vows of the Bodhisattva which express the realisation that it is impossible for me to be enlightened unless all others are enlightened too.

In the Tenth precept we vow to not defame the three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Aitken Roshi describes Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as enlightenment, the truth and harmony. To me, Sangha is more than just a harmony of Buddha and Dharma. It is the embodying of being awake; the embodying of vast emptiness, nothing holy; it's the enactment of wisdom and compassion together. In the commentary on this Tenth precept, Bodhidharma wrote: "Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the One, not holding dualistic concepts of ordinary beings and sages is called the Precept of Not defaming the three Treasures." In the realm of the One, there is no distinction of ordinary and holy, of pure or impure. Everything is just as it is in its mysterious way, and yet we bow to the Buddha together, we recite the Heart Sutra together, we share tea together, we revere the Three Treasures.

Dogen wrote, "The teisho of the actual body is the harbour and the weir. This is the most important thing in the world. Its virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude."

I appreciate Dogen's words as meaning the sutra of the body and of actual life which I chant in my every action is my refuge, the harbour that nourishes and supports me. This is the supreme Way. Its virtue finds refuge in the essential, the deep mystery. Not defaming the Three Treasures means to give them respect and have gratitude for them.

Regularly at the end of sesshin, we reflect on the container of sangha which has held us lightly as we have faced the search for our own nature. It's like the realisation of a koan, that recognition of the importance of holding each other to the task at hand. Is it because sangha is everyday mind, is the harmony of the universe, that it is so rarely noticed or talked about?

It was the strength of the sangha's practice here without any teacher which convinced a doubtful Robert Aitken to travel here to hold the first sesshin in Australia. You will have noticed that I have used many quotations from Aitken Roshi in this talk, as on this occasion I feel great gratitude that he decided to visit and teach in this faraway land.

When I first started meditating, I read a line from Aitken Roshi that when we are doing zazen, we are sitting with all the world. It struck me as an important point, and yet it took a while to understand this essential point about our practice, that we are never in this world on our own. Sitting in zazen isn't about me. It's about realising that there are no boundaries in this sitting.

Here is the last modern koan story:

The teacher and student were in the hojo at Kodoji. “What are the Three Treasures?” asked the student. Just at that moment the lunch bell rang. “That’s it!” said the teacher. Student and teacher left together to go to the dojo. They stopped on the way to gaze at the stone Buddha. A Willy Wagtail danced on the Buddha’s head. At his feet, weeds and flowers lovingly gathered around. Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Then they hurried on.

A model example for us of Zen lay life is the P’ang family of T’ang dynasty China. Layman P’ang is mentioned in some of the well-known koan collections, but his wife and his daughter were a match for him in the dharma. Their interactions are a wonderful expression of sangha.

This translation is from The Hidden Lamp:

Layman P’ang was sitting in his thatched cottage one day, studying the sutras. “Difficult, difficult, difficult,” he suddenly exclaimed, “like trying to store ten bushels of sesame seed in the top of a tree.”

“Easy, easy, easy,” his wife Laywoman P’ang answered. “It’s like touching your feet to the floor when you get out of bed.”

“Neither difficult nor easy,” said their daughter Lingzhao. “It’s like the teachings of the ancestors shining on the hundred grass tips.”

That wisdom of the Buddha shines forth in the sangha of interbeing. I will do my utmost to keep vivid and clear the teachings of the ancestors in this dear Sangha of the Sydney Zen Centre.

The Sayings and Doings of Little Heart

Sean Loughman

Case

“I’m six-and-a-half”, volunteers Little Heart, apropos nothing. “How old are you?”

Verse

As old as the stars,

As young as the moon.

(Would forty-six-and-a-half mean anything to you?)

When I look in to your eyes,

I’m six-and-a-half too.



Melancholy of the Lotus
Glenys Jackson

冬の禅

ふゆ の ぜん

Fuyu no Zen

白い吐息の音のなく

しろい といき の おと の なく

Shiroi toiki no oto no naku

凍る静けさ

こおる しずけさ

kooru shizukesa

黄昏の坐禅僧

たそがれ の ざぜんそう

tasogare no zazen sou

White soundless breath

Monks in Zazen half light

Frozen in stillness

Cat Tanaka

Jukai Ceremony

Max Baker

In what follows I provide a personal response to the Three Vows of Refuge, then the Three Pure Precepts and then the Ten Grave Precepts. These are statements of intention I will no doubt develop and better understand through my ongoing practice. The final part of this document contains two short commentaries: one on my connection to the natural element of the moon and the other on my aspirations in the Dharma.

The Three Vows of Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha...

With the perfection of being and mastery of character; the Buddha was the embodiment of the way. More than just imitate, I will try to embody this wisdom right now!

I take refuge in the Dharma...

The dharma lives through me, in my thoughts and actions.

I take refuge in the Sangha...

The spiritual life is found in the relations we nurture. All of you are my teachers. I take refuge in the many hands of Avalokiteshvara.

The Three Pure Precepts

I vow to maintain the precepts...

For me, the precepts are the basis of good moral standing. Observing these principles is no easy task; it takes perseverance so that one day they will be completely natural and part of my character.

I vow to practice all good dharmas...

The Dharma is the many ways of truth. It is multi-faceted, crystalline, deep and nourishing. I vow to practice all good dharma which means being open to the world and changing my conduct, speech and thought accordingly.

I vow to save all beings...

Life is indeed unfathomably precious and always worth saving. Life is the very reason I am able to practice in the first place.

The Ten Grave Precepts

I take up the way of not killing

Not killing means not taking life and it is the very opposite of our great vow to save all beings. To snuff out a life for pleasure or consumption is evil - simple. I vow to nourish and support life and to have the lightest footprint I can on the earth.

I take up the way of not stealing

Extracting time and resources from others is hard-baked into our economic system. Therefore, not stealing for me means not engaging in direct forms of thievery as well as not engaging in the subtle extraction of my fellow man's time and resources – however celebrated culturally. To not steal is to practice generosity, the very nature of the Buddha, his Dharma and our dear Sangha.

I take up the way of not misusing sex

Sex is more than just pleasure it is a meaningful connection between people and not to be taken lightly. I commit to staying loyal to my wife, both physically and emotionally.

I take up the way of not speaking falsely

Speaking falsely can be subtle and often I do it without even being aware of it. Not speaking falsely involves developing mindful, right speech. Truth is speaking from the heart-mind - that is speaking with a direct connection to “what is” (my personal experience) with care and compassion. I will endeavour to speak honest phrases and strengthen my character and integrity.

I take up the way of not giving or taking drugs

Drugs are any substances that are unnecessary for my health, which are addictive in nature and cause me to be mindless in my actions. Drugs are not medicine. Not giving or taking drugs means not contributing to and enabling other people’s habits. It means not trying to avoid the gift of the present no matter how painful it may be. When I abstain from giving or taking drugs, I am respecting myself and others.

I take up the way of not discussing the faults of others

Indeed, a favourite pastime of mine has been to gossip which often verges on discussing faults. Taking up this precept requires me to not indulge in judgement or idol speech. Speech is important, as we can never take back what has been said. Speech sets up patterns of relating to others. I take up the way of not discussing others’ faults - this involves practising radical acceptance of people which creates more opportunities for positive interactions in the future.

I take up the way of not praising myself while abusing others

I am not better or worse than any other person - and yet I am not equal to any other. Comparison is the issue. I will endeavour not to fall into the trap of reducing people down to simple comparable attributes. Not praising myself while abusing others is not just about speech but also about avoiding a state of mind that confirms the small self and degrades others and with them the entire universe. Abuse is unacceptable whether subtle or direct; it is demeaning and hurtful and has no place in the world of the Lotus Flower.

I take up the way of not sparing The Dharma Assets

How can one spare what is vast and unending? I've always loved this line “from the beginning there was no stinginess at all”. Not being stingy about a single thing reflects positive aspects of character. In taking up the way of not sparing the Dharma Assets I will practise generosity with The Dharma Assets as they are the greatest knowledge I have ever received and therefore shall do my best to pass them onwards.

I take up the way of not indulging in anger

With anger, *the appetite* grows with *the eating*. Anger destroys me physically and spiritually. Not indulging in anger means not picking up storylines about others and their intentions. For me, not indulging in anger means pausing for a beat after feeling threatened or slighted. In not indulging in anger, I am able to turn the Dharma Wheel.

I take up the way of not defaming the Three Treasures

Not defaming the Three Treasures means to have intimacy with all things: to aspire to be like the Buddha, to listen to the truth; and to engage with and contribute to the community.

Element of Nature: Reflected Moon

My sons and I would go out on a winter night and talk to the moon. None of our eyes are very good but we could still make out her cheeky face. Finding the moon, day or night, became a game for us. I am still amazed by the moon. It breaks into our daily lives and reminds us we are part of a universe of meaning and mystery. The moon constantly changes as do we and even when completely covered in shadow, she is still there.

I asked my wife whether I am a *mysterious moon* and she said I'm the least mysterious person she knows. So, I thought maybe I am a bright moon? In his most famous poem, Bai Li wrote:

“before my bed a pool of light -

I wonder if it's frost on the ground

looking up I find the moon bright

then bowing my head I drown -

in homesickness”

Moonlight shines through an arch window in our house adding its frost to the carpet and while such an ingress feels local it contains the universal. And while I am at home, I return home, drowning as I do.

Later I realised that the moon may be *mysterious* because despite being seen on earth it exists in another realm – its image screams across a void and is reflected everywhere: the surface of a pond, in a dewdrop or our minds. As Dogen says, the key to practice is recognising what we see as a reflected empty world:

“Enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water
the moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken
although its light is wide and great
the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide
the whole moon and the entire sky are reflected in one dew drop on the grass”
(Dogen’s “Moon in a Dewdrop”, page 71)

Recognising the world as reflected makes it truly mysterious... like looking through a crystal. The moon's reflection is different in a puddle of water or a dewdrop. As Dogen says, in such cases, it has both water and moon forms. And yet both the moon and the water are empty. There is not one moon, nor thousands of moons reflected across the world. As Baoji says, there is just mind moon - alone and full. When you make the moon your mind; there is no mind which is not moon and no moon which is not mind. The moon reminds me that with a single mind all things are simple. Mine disappears.... moon remains. The whole kit and caboodle arises in that porcelain face – birth, death, the ten directions and ten thousand peaks.



Jonquil hair

Kerry Stewart

The cycle starts again
with the first Jonquil
bulbs in flower.
Their name
conjuring a young girl -
unruly rushing hair
petal skin of clotted cream
sweet animal scent.

What makes her flourish?
Knowing and trusting
what's not seen -
paying attention to
smell taste touch,
organic senses
of the soil's riches,
body of water
and companions -
worms fungi beetles,
friends family strangers,
dwelling in the earth
united.

In all gardens
tending is the first lesson -
noticing and responding
to the small
with a boundless body of being,
tenderness in action.

Long green plant strands
catch and store the sun,
sending nutrient nurture
to fleshy underground stores.

Above ground
hands plait without thought,
intuitive thirds weaving
plant ribbons
over and under,
braiding the future.

Two green topknots
pretend to be samurai,
guardians of the bonsai.
Cheeky nibbling possums beware!

What is it about hair
that connects us?
Uncurling fern frond pigtails of youth,
tying a yellow ribbon,
a side hedge parting,
eyebrows of bush,
pruning silver perm curls,
understorey of mossiness.
Mother son grandchild,
Azalea Banksia Jonquil,
touching the sky
united.

Her Jonquil hair losing colour now,
past Spring glory –
plant strands of gold
lighting the bulb
for next season.

Unseen
below,

resting and waiting,
in fullness.
In darkness,
renewed bulb girl
knows the perfect
balance of illumination
and warmth
to burst forth again.



The Sources of Joy

Tony Coote

The wattle birds' call coming right out of my mouth.

The blood of the Angophora drying and cracking on my arm.

The sound of the creek coming forth from my whole body.

The grey sandstone, the wattle blossom, eucalypts,

little lizards and ants, all in walking meditation long the path.

Look! See how the crazy white cockatoos fall through the sky

without leaving a seam.

Hey old Dharma buddy, what a friendly face you have.

Why, there's Nga. She hasn't changed a bit since Thay's retreat

at Burradoo eight years ago.

I wonder if she still sees the privet blossom so completely

as she did then?

Cherry and Lam's baby makes an earth-shattering toothless smile.

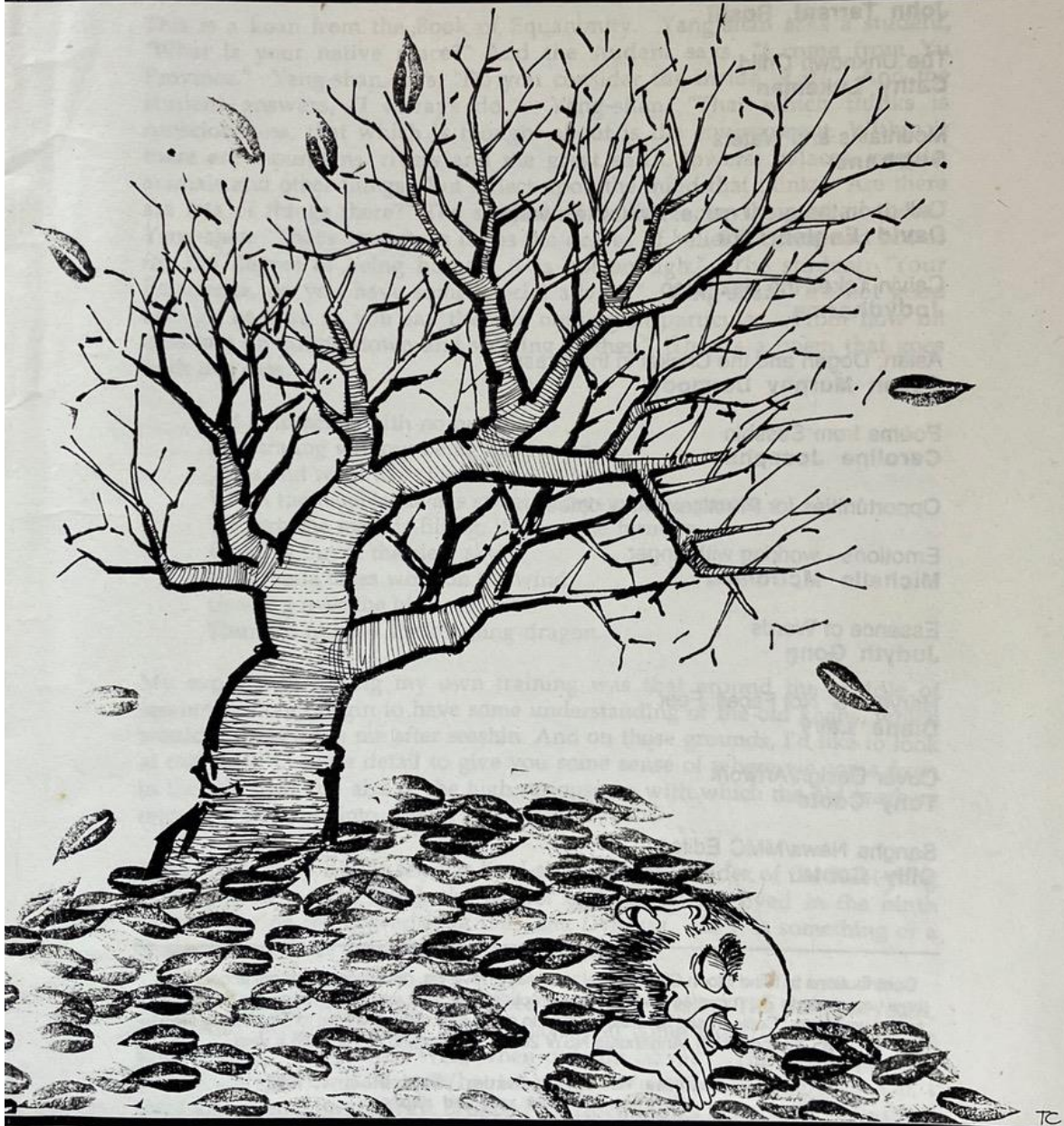
The perfect presentation for the koan:

With empty mouth I express my joy.

Whatever is the source of such things?

I wonder, I wonder, what is the source of my joy?

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MIND MOON CIRCLE

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Foundations

(In memory of Tony Coote)

Diana Levy

An architect makes a truss
with his body
calls it *trikonasana*
and the Currambena* kids follow along
they make a triangle
maths and yoga braced together outdoors.

He kneels, thrusts one leg out and
leans over, a gate – *parighasana*
gate opens, gate closes,
minds open to the Sydney sky,
frames his bones into another pose
no nails needed
only strength of purpose, gingery youth,
respect for a thousand Indians.

Now the architect
assembles himself into a stack of planks
rests on the earth in *savasana*
pose of the corpse,
children love this pose,
a long rest between heaven and earth,
his loving work of building foundations
with all the shapes of the world
is done.

*Currambena is the primary school that Tony's son, Gully, attended

The Practice

Helen Sanderson

I was asked to consider how I nurture my practice, how I tend my garden and plant stillness, meditation and steadiness. If my garden currently is a metaphor for my spiritual life, it is a mess. Mud everywhere after months of incessant rain and little sun. What happened to the summer? Last spring before the rains my garden was glorious. Jacaranda's purple flowers covering it like a carpet, sweet peas up the fence sweetly scented, aquilegia, pinks, snapdragons, grevilleas, roses, wisteria, a little version of Monet's garden. But the jacaranda came down in the rains with a mighty crash, and is no more, the plants requiring sun refused to shine as did the sun, and indeed with the weather my practice came to standstill.

And worse happened at my little family cottage at Hardys Bay. With the rains, which were terrifyingly torrential, mud slid down the bank just behind the house and landed in a great mess with plants still growing in it up to a metre high right at my back door which I could only just open. For months I tried to get help first to move the mud down the hill into a skip below then to repair the land behind with a retaining wall. When builders came to look they asked, "Are you going to sell?" that is, give up on the place. Two pieces of land in a dreadful mess.

But here, a note of encouragement. Last week I phoned a gardener friend and said I need some help for my Sydney garden. I felt desperate. I need to plant my garden for spring. And he came, and built new garden beds from the old. Reconstruction. Next week I will weed then plant. Two new trees have already been planted, a flowering gum and a lemon scented tea tree. If the sun agrees to shine, maybe they will grow and flower spreading nectar for the bees and delight.

And miracles of miracles, at Hardys Bay, just in the past few weeks a local builder, a kindly man came to my aid and together with an offsider and his little black dog, Max is building a retaining wall. His motive? Kindness! He could tell I was worried. It is a hell of a job, hard yakka and done with graciousness and good humour. Today they put in the last posts for the retaining walls. I threatened to sing the last post and make them Anzac biscuits. They really are diggers. Now, I will be able to retain my special places and plant new gardens for now anyway.

When I was a child piano practice was a daily activity, up and down the scales, learning a new piece, playing the old pieces, learning a bit of theory. 30 minutes a day. A weekly lesson. And the question by the teacher, "How is your practice going?" Because I loved the piano and music I could answer with a degree of satisfaction, "Good, Mrs Matheson." Children are sometimes creatures of few words. And today, 60 years later I can still remember some of those pieces, though the playing is rusty, a bit like the body.

What of my meditation practice? I am tempted to say, what practice? In the beginning of the pandemic, the zoom meditations were a generous encouragement to maintain a practice. But after several years of it, I did tire of looking on a screen. And once meditations started in person, there was often an excuse, I was too tired, too stiff to sit without pain, or I had a cough, or a sniffle, all true. I think I had pandemic fatigue. So, the question, how have I nurtured my practice

was confronting. Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa, my fault, I'm to blame, I said to myself and I'm not even a Catholic. And I don't want to think about it.

So, what kept me connected to the Sydney Zen Centre? I have to say as I write and reflect, I think it is love. I have a little samu practice of answering emails and booking people in to sit at Annandale or answering questions people might have. It is my contribution and keeps me connected. I love the idea of making it easy for people to meditate and become part of the community. And I love the community at Sydney Zen Centre, so many wise good people. Some of them dear friends. And I love the teaching which rings true in my heart, when I can hear it, I'm going a little deaf.

Recently I went to my doctor, for a referral, and as a doorstep, you know how people leave the most important thing till last, I said, "I think I am depressed," and I listed the reasons the pandemic, loneliness, deaths of various people. "I know what I need to do..." I said, and I listed the various remedies, which surprise surprise included meditation.

Since then, I have started to sit again in the mornings, instead of reading the news. I am less anxious about the state of the nation since the change of government so can let that go. And I have been to Annandale to sit. We are still at the tail end of winter, but spring is stirring. My gardens are being reconstructed and will shortly be planted. The wattle and clematis and Wonga Wonga are already flowering. Seeds of renewal of practice are starting to shoot. With more nurture, and practice, flowers and fruits will follow. That's how it works. Cause and effect.



Cherry blossom festival, Auburn Botanic Gardens

Cultivating the Garden of the Heart-Mind

Subhana Barzaghi

What should we do with the garden that is entrusted to us?

The spiritual purpose of this precious human life is encapsulated in the dedication of our full Moon precept ceremony:

“Like the aged turtle swimming in the vast ocean who finds the only board in the sea, we find ourselves in human form in the Buddha’s sacred hall.

May we use our precious fortune of body, place and time to take the Buddha Way undeviatingly.”

The bones and skulls of those who did not turn back from this continuous practice have left footprints along the path for us to follow. The stone drenched with rain and the broken pine needles show us the way. Following the Buddha way is embedded in our Four Great aspirational Vows, inspiring us to awaken in this humble ordinary transient life. While the dharma gateless are endlessly and open to embody the Way it is good to have a map and tools for the garden.

‘The Garden Analogy of Meditative Practice’ (see diagram on Page 2) is a practical and wonderful metaphor, it lays out a broad-brush stroke of the Zen landscape for cultivating the heart and mind. The four main gates of practice are grouped under: Mindfulness Practices, Working with defilements, Cultivating positive states of Mind, and the fourth, Concentration, Being states and Wisdom. These areas of practice

represent an integrated wholistic view of the path of liberation and awakening. They are not completely definitive nor are they rigid categories but the garden analogy indicates their interwoven benefits and purposes.

A well-maintained, beautifully tendered, abundant garden feels irresistible, it cannot help but enliven the spirit. It is our daily nourishment but also food for the soul. For 25 years, I worked in the communal, organic quarter acre garden on Bodhi Farm. Neat rows of; zucchinis, silver beets, Asian greens, corn and cherry tomatoes were in abundance. We were never short of a fresh garden salad. Bees pollinated the 5 staved yellow pumpkin flowers, their entangling vines taking over the back corner of the garden. Children wandered freely plucking fresh ripe guavas, fruit and mulberries from the orchard. My small suburban garden in Sydney has been reduced to a tiny plot downstairs that never gets enough sun and was completely wash out this summer. The worm farm has replaced the compost heap. A colony of hungry worms devours the kitchen scraps turning it into rich worm casting nutrients for the garden beds. I worry that if I don’t feed them each week they will starve. On the sunny veranda upstairs, fragrant potted herbs of; mint, oregano, garlic chives, lemon thyme, rosemary and tendrils of naturisms trail over the edge; all great ingredients for a summer salad.

A flourishing garden does not simply manifest all by itself or by someone sitting on a bench simply observing the beauty of the garden, it takes hard work. Both active and receptive qualities are at play. A wise gardener works with the natural seasonal cycles and understands companion planting how carrots are good neighbours to beans, cucumbers, tomatoes and herbs but they are ill tempered with dill, fennel and parsnips. One learns to trust in the organicity of nature that plants and we ourselves naturally lean towards the light. Plants are embodied sunlight, they have learned to photosynthesise sunlight into life giving juices and energy to leaf out, bulge and fruit.

Similarly, our meditation practice of tending the garden of the heart takes wise balanced effort in the correct manner. It takes trusting your longing to return home to the source of all longing. We come out of the dark watery womb of our mother and naturally have the seed potential of awakening within us. While we have a natural in-built homing instinct yet it requires wise effort and care to wake up to and reap the fruits of practice otherwise it will simply remain only seed potential.

Mindfulness – the ground of our practice

The Satipatthana Sutta is a much loved and treasured teaching of the Buddha. The discourse outlines the four foundations of Mindfulness which is considered a direct path to overcome suffering, distress, grief and despair. The four ways of establishing mindfulness are: Mindfulness of body, feeling, thought and mind states and the dharma, the body of knowledge that leads to

liberation. The first task is learning to be mindful, to bring a kind non-judgemental attention to our present moment experience. We learn to observe and engage with the senses in the sensorium of our experience from a place of mindfulness, serenity and kindness. The body, posture, movement, breath grounds us in the present moment experience. The body with all its flaws, aches and pleasure centres is such a wonderful anchor as it is always in the present moment. Our body does not exist in the past or future, it is simply always here.

In the Anapanasati Sutta - mindfulness of breathing, the whole teachings can unravel and be found even in a single breath. In-breath is a fresh new moment like birth, out-breath is release, letting go like death and there is awareness present, that which observes both birth and death. Yet awareness is not changed by what it observes. When we turn the light of attention around a deeper question, arises, “What is the nature of this awareness, what does the mirror of the mind reveal?”

Jack Kornfield a senior western Dharma teacher said, “Mindful attention to any experience is liberating”. Mindfulness gives us a pause moment between stimulus and response, that sacred pause means that we don’t have to have a knee-jerk, automatic reactive response to an unpleasant situation. We can move into response mode rather than reaction mode. Mindfulness is the gentlest and sharpest sword. This moment slices through our delusions and confabulations of mind.

Present moment awareness becomes the best season of our life.

Joyce Kornblatt, wrote on Caring Bridge recently as she navigates her way through radiation treatment that she drew inspiration from Dharma teacher Sylvia Boorstein. Throughout the day, Sylvia has many brief mini-meditations in which she says, like a mantra: '*May I meet this moment fully. May I meet it as a friend.*' Joyce has been adding this message into her meditations when her mind wanders to a hypothetical scary future. "I've been noticing that within a few minutes of repeating those words, the fear changes to tenderness. A 'bigger space' becomes available where thoughts and images about suffering come and go. In that bigger space, Joyce reflects, "There is the same great truth: there is the boat of mortal suffering, which I share with everyone else. And: there is the boundless ocean and sky, with all its mysterious depths, buoyancy and beauty: that's also where I live".

Drawing inspiration from his teacher's two-acre garden on Long Island, NY, Sensei Koshin, "Wonders what it means to tend to the gardens of our own lives, especially the garden of our practice. While discussing the importance of consistency, perseverance and grit, he emphasizes the place of gratitude in everything we do". I have found that braiding mindfulness and compassion together towards the felt sense of one's bodily experience to be powerfully healing. My motto for working with painful feelings and old complicated knots of memory has been to **attend and befriend**. This gives me the capacity to hold and soothe those painful feelings rather than react out from them or suppress them. There is a softening and healing through this process.

Pulling out the Weeds

As I pull out the obnoxious turkey rhubarb weed in my overgrown back garden, prolific after the drenching rain, I reflect that there is a strong resonance with pulling out the weeds of the mind. Paying attention to the moments of greed, unhealthy attachment, aversion or strong feelings of ill-will is the hard work miracle of character work. I remember Yamada Roshi saying that, 'Zen is the perfection of character'. It took me many years to really understand that. In the land of the long white clouds in the verdant valley of Te Moata Retreat Centre in New Zealand, I had the wonderful privilege of studying with the Burmese master Sayadaw U Tejaniya. He is a round faced jolly Abbot and focuses almost solely on working with the defilements of mind by up-rooting these deep-seated conditioned tendencies of greed, hatred and ignorance. The emphasis in his teachings was born out of his struggle with two major episodes of clinical depression which provided the motivation to develop his skills at mental self-investigation (Dhamma vicaya) to an extraordinary level.

The focus on working with the hindrances underscores the philosophical position that all beings by their nature are Buddha. It is only our greed, hatred and ignorance that obscures our inherent awakened nature of mind. The practice is to be mindful of the 5 traditional hindrances - desire/ craving, anxiety/restlessness, hatred/anger, doubt/confusion and sloth and torpor or laziness. These hindrances obscure clarity of mind, block creativity and destabilise loving relationships. As the veils of aversion, clinging, ill-will, restlessness and

doubt fall away the mind becomes clear. Gradually we realise that this very body is the lotus land, this very body is the Buddha.

Even when we have joyful openings of the consciousness and insight into the nature of our existence still a clearly enlightened person can fall into a well. The question is, how do we free ourselves? Even with years of practice on the cushion, we can succumb to old rusted on habits and deep-seated patterns of mind that have their roots in our cultural, family systems and early childhood experiences. The 'ego story' is a self-perpetuating pattern of 'selfing'. Selfing is a process of over-identifying with negative beliefs and feelings about ourselves that we keep reinforcing. It takes a considerable steady inquiry to shine a light into the shadows. For example, you may believe you are not good enough or some version of this. With the power of mindfulness these old negative beliefs can be understood, seen through and released. The Vedanta teacher Nisagadatta Maharaj said, "All you need is already within you, only you must approach yourself with reverence and love. Self-condemnation and self-distrust are grievous errors". Shunryu Suzuki Roshi said, "If you have some experience of how the weeds in your mind change into mental nourishment, your practice will make remarkable progress". Finally, we dis-identify and unhook from the 'I', 'me', 'my' drama. When the barriers fall away the storehouse of treasures opens of itself, you may take them and use them freely as you wish.

Another dimension to 'pulling out the weeds' is contemplating ethics and the precepts which is an important and integral

part of our spiritual practice. Morality and upright conduct form the basis of our meditation practice for training the mind and wise conduct forms the temple of our daily life. The 16 Bodhisattva precepts offer a deeply personal reflection of how to walk in an upright manner with integrity, authenticity and compassion through the trials and tribulations of our daily lives. The 10 grave precepts are not rigid rules but reminders and pointers along the path in how to live a life of non-harming. Teachers of old studied and lived by the light of the precepts. Everyday life is a great multi-faceted Koan to be realised. It is the embodiment of the absolute and relative that is always intimately intersecting one another moment by moment. Ethics are like a rudder that help us navigate through this mysterious wondrous life with wisdom, compassion and integrity.

Cultivating the Garden of the heart

"A peaceful heart gives birth to love
When love meets suffering, it turns to compassion
When love meets happiness, it turns to joy."
(Dhammapada)

Once the garden beds are tilled and ready, the weeds pulled out, there is such pleasure in planting the seedlings of nourishment. The boundless heart teachings of the 4 Immeasurables as they are known in the Mahayana Zen tradition are; loving-kindness compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. They are immeasurable because there is no end to their cultivation and expansiveness. Because there is no permanent separate self-identity, therefore

we must peel away the crusted layers around the heart to awaken it to its immeasurable nature. Persistent meditative practice will have two crowning effects: first, it will make these four qualities sink deeper into the heart; second, it will bring out and secure their boundless extension, the unfolding of their all-embracing range.

Thich Nhat Hanh so beautifully said, “Metta practice begins with an aspiration, we then transcend the level of aspiration and look deeply at all the positive and negative characteristics of the object of our meditation, in this case ourselves.” This is our deep work to see into what blocks the heart from opening and keep inclining the mind towards its universal unbounded nature. In Thay’s book ‘Teachings on Love’, he invites us to cultivate loving-kindness towards ourselves. “Go back and take care of yourself. Your body needs you; your feelings need you, your perceptions need you. The wounded child in you, needs you. Your suffering, your blocks of pain need you. Your deepest desire needs you to acknowledge it. Go home and be there for all these things.”

Neuropsychologist and Buddhist teacher, Dr. Rick Hanson’s found in his research in re-wiring for happiness that the more we incline the mind towards the positive states, it strengthens the neural pathways in the brain and they become more stable natural traits. As the American Palestinian poet Naomi Shehab Nye in her much-loved poem, “Kindness”, concludes, “Then it is only kindness that makes sense any more, only kindness that ties your shoes and sends

you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread”.

The universal nature of love has no boundaries, edges, surface, gender, barriers or preferences, it welcomes all forms and bodies of darkness and light. Love is a guest house of belonging, the nectar of homecoming. Compassion is the healing medicine that responds and alleviates suffering. Joy balances the heart from over-focusing on compassion for the suffering of the world. As one of the seven factors of awakening joy is an outcome of living a wholesome mindful life. Being married to amazement, we unleash the joyous reciprocity of the gardener and the garden. Zen master Dogen poetically affirms, “the world of blossoming flowers arises”. I love an old Chinese proverb for joy, ‘If we keep a green branch alive in our hearts, the singing bird will come’.

Being states and the non-dual wisdom mind

Koans are windows that open us to realise the empty one world of our essential nature. They are embodied parcels that we keep unwrapping to discover the mystery of who we. They have been passed down lovingly and thoroughly for generations by sincere men and women who have grappled with those existential questions. Who am I really? What is my original face? Who hears? What is Mu? Koans are phrases of confounding grit to focus the mind, to evoke the spirit of inquiry into the great matter of life and death. Here the koan becomes a great thief to clear you out of your misconceptions. You cannot figure it out

with my logical mind. Dogen Zenji recommended in Guidelines for Studying the Way, “to stop the practice based on intellectual understanding, on following words and argument and learn the backward step that turns the light inward and makes clear the original self”. When I sink the koan into my belly it is always a process of entering through the cloud of unknowing.

Buddhist monk, Shosan Jack Haubner said that, “turning inward on a meditation cushion was some of the hardest work he had ever done. “One day it was as though I got to the bottom of my heart, and there was a door, and behind it was my essence, the true me. I turned the handle, but instead of opening inward to some final place, it swung out into a brilliant vast sky. I was staring out the window, completely blown away by the view. There was no ‘me’ at the bottom of it all. There was a passage to that boundlessness, and the *very notion of me* was the closed door blocking it.”

Silent Illumination another primary practice is the art of just sitting. There is less and less volition in our meditation in the ‘being states’ of just sitting. The mind is settled, focused, grounded and there is a greater capacity to abide in presence, curiosity, wonder and awareness. We cultivate the clear mirror of the mind that reflects things as they are. The consciousness opens to being with what is, the raw suchness of things without the embroidery of judgements and opinions. When we trust in mind the great Way is not difficult it simply avoids picking and choosing. Master Hongzhi’s instructions for zazen are to withdraw from focusing on any mental object or sensory

object, settle into awareness itself. This is a re-fined non-dual awareness. Enter the field of vast bright awareness. This bright aware field is immanent in all of us.

As awareness stabilises, we deepen into the mind-body-environment-unity consciousness, and inside and outside fall away. Ideas and identification with body and mind fall away, we let go, the small self is forgotten. We realise there is no one sitting on the bench in the garden observing the garden, there is only the garden. To forget oneself is to be enlightened by buzzing flies, cherry tomatoes and lemon thyme. The heart-mind falls open and we recognise that every green shoot, the endless pounding rain, the croaking frogs, the dark starry night, each and every thing is you, it has your name on it, it is your inherent nature. We need to keep in mind that the self is a song in the network of interdependent origination with the myriad things. Without a relationship with the myriad things, there is no self. Actually, the relationship itself is the self. Each moment, fills us, each moment empties us out, moment by moment it never stops flowing. How wonderous that is!

Yamada Roshi commented that awakening means that we must go beyond all duality, he said, “There is, is the world of phenomena, there is not, is the world of emptiness; you must go beyond this”. Zen master Kyozan in Case 32 of the Book of Serenity added, “It does not penetrate so long as you say there is nothing in particular. From now on introspect on sitting down and wearing clothes.” It is here in our humble rags of love, in our ordinary household life,

the ups and downs in our connected circles of friendship and care we embody the way.

Our relationship to the earth and its household has never been more pressing. We should be asking, **“What have we done with the garden that was entrusted to us?”** This world, this great garden of mountains, rivers, stones and clouds, birds, wombats, frogs and snakes, what have we done to this wild, intricate beautiful earth garden? We are already experiencing extreme weather events with devastating consequences. Ecological systems are breaking down, tipping points are being crossed. The latest Government environmental report for Australia stated that our much-loved scorched sunburnt country and place of drenching flooding rains is in poor condition and rapidly deteriorating. Numerous unique species are critically endangered or staring into the abyss of extinction. We are at a threshold of urgency.

Joanna Macy said, this crisis is an opportunity for a great turning. To see with new eyes requires an ecological awakening which is to realise our inter-connected oneness with our wild natural sanctuaries. Dharma buddy and long-term activist John Seed said, “I try to remember that it is not me John Seed trying to protect the rainforest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into human thinking”. Our task is to fully know ourselves as one with our world. As Zen master Dogen recommends, “Just wholeheartedly accept and trust that to study the way with mind is this mountains-rivers-

an-earth-mind itself which is thoroughly engaged in studying the way” We awake to, “the entire world of the 10 directions is our true human body.” (1985, pp 89,91)

What I long to do is to sit in council with you and cry, sit in the circle of mourning and celebration. To sit with the creative longing to make of the world a better place. It can be a sustainable garden of ecological systems of green clean energy sources that will support generations to come. While the environment is in poor condition, there is cause for celebration. In this month’s latest Habitat magazine there are amazing stories of restoration and regeneration. The Ngupitji Ngupitji people at the heart of Queensland’s Galilee Basin are restoring the soil and channel country using nature-based solutions. This reduces emissions through storage of carbon in a renewed landscape. The platy-project engages citizen scientists to monitor the elusive and shy iconic platypus, to prevent future declines and local extinctions. In Victoria a group of researchers from Blue Carbon Lab, along with traditional owners are restoring coastal wetlands and saltmarshes. Saltmarshes are called nature’s kidney’s as they capture 5 times more carbon pollution than a tropical forest and 66 times faster. There is underwater gardening and seahorse hotels. Divers are planting out seagrass in underwater beds to restore sea grass meadows which are one of the most productive eco-systems on earth and shelter for hundreds of species like endangered seahorses to blue swimmer crabs and snapper. (Habitat Journal, July 2022)

How will we take care of the garden that is entrusted to us? Part of the puzzle is that when we cultivate the inner garden of the heart-mind; our fierce compassion, generosity, kindness, wisdom and our love, it can then flow outwards to our families, friends, colleagues, our brother and sisters of all nations and all species. We realise our inter-being like the dew on the tip of each branch of coral reflecting the light of the

moon. We hear the cries of the world and respond where we can. We stand up to injustices. We become architects of peace. We cultivate the garden and restore ourselves; enhance personal resilience and build resilient communities that value life sustaining eco-systems. When we mend our hearts and minds, we mend the world. With our efforts to mend the world we embody our vows to save the many beings.

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Poems, a Desert, Shoes and Other Mysteries

or

Two Little Masters On My Feet

Anne Buescher

(in memory)

I love poetry! Therefore I never wanted to write a poem myself. Not one! Poems, I thought, should be written by poets, but not by someone like me. There are people destined to express themselves artistically. But I didn't belong to this category. So it seemed better not to embarrass myself and others with home made dilettante art.

Six years ago I wanted to take part in a five-week retreat in the Mohave Desert in Southern California. The retreat was scheduled to end with a poetry workshop. I didn't like this idea of poetry writing, especially not the writing in a foreign language, and I was secretly contemplating skipping the poetry. But I longed for the sesshin and meeting my Roshi.

I left Germany in high spirits. I was determined not to lose track of my practice for one second. I was determined not to fall into all the traps I had fallen into before so very often; traps such as daydreaming, longing for the unattainable, picking and choosing. I just wanted to sit quietly amongst all the strangers, following my breath and having dokusan with my Roshi three times a day, accepting all circumstances happily as they occurred.

Events unfolded in an unexpected way.

The landscape I arrived in, after two days of flying and driving, hit me with an intensity I had never experienced before. My European eyes were trained in colour, shades of green, brown, red and yellow. My inner map of belonging was defined by a set of signs I suddenly couldn't detect anywhere. The colours of the desert were too subtle, I couldn't differentiate them. Everything seemed to be grey, the sand, the rocks, the sky, the clouds, the mountains in the far distance, the spinifex. Only the shed snakeskins added a bit of brown. My sense of orientation didn't work, everything looked the same: grey, harsh, hostile.

I had expected an undefined something in this place called desert I had traveled to so eagerly, but I couldn't find this something. I certainly hadn't expected the barrenness. I hadn't expected the nothingness. I hadn't expected the greyness. I hadn't expected the icy cold wind blowing mercilessly through all layers of jumpers. I hadn't expected the dryness turning the skin into a lizard like surface and the eyes into something resembling an albino rat.

And worst of all, I hadn't expected that my Roshi would be admitted to hospital again and wouldn't be with us. I hadn't expected the loneliness, the feeling of being stranded in the midst of grey nothingness.

I couldn't concentrate. I didn't want to sit. I forgot why I came. I felt utterly lost and cold and lonely and homesick. I was filled with anger about everything, especially with anger about myself; anger about not concentrating, anger about my homesickness, anger about feeling so lost, anger about not loving the desert, anger about my lack of orientation, anger, anger, anger.

I sat on my cushion from 5 in the morning till 10 at night totally lost in daydreaming. I fantasised about the ocean, about water, about green forest, about the warm sun, about mild and misty and humid air. I sat on my cushion and beamed myself to places all over the world. No place resembled the pace I was in. I fantasised about almost everything. The only object I was not interested in was my breath.

I didn't talk to the teacher who had come to replace the irreplaceable Roshi. Because there was nothing to talk about. In Germany I hadn't spoken any English for a while and the foreign language section in my brain seemed as dry and barren and empty as my surroundings. The ability to express a complex thought seemed to have abandoned me forever. After four days of making a fool of myself I stopped going to dokusan. Sitting opposite a man I didn't know and didn't understand desperately searching for words which didn't express what I wanted to say, seemed to be an exercise too grotesque to be performed on a daily basis.

All my efforts to accept things as they were, failed completely. I wanted to escape. I wanted to everywhere, but not in this barren, dry nothingness. The inner world equaled the outer world.

After four weeks of silence, of anger, of growing desperation, of self-pity and loneliness, the poetry workshop started. It didn't really worry me anymore whether I would embarrass myself and others with poetry. Nothing mattered. I was counting the days, only five days to go before I could fly home again.

The first task was to write a poem about our shoes. 'Shoes? A poem? I am never going to do that! Never, ever!! I can't I can't, I can not do this!' said the loud and angry inner voice I had become so familiar with over the past four weeks.

I took my notebook and set off into the icy cold wind, my old black canvass shoes on my feet. I walked and walked through the spinifex bush looking at my shoes. I slowly started to remember how many summers these shoes and I had spent walking on sandy beaches, how they got wet and dry again, how they had lost their colour exposed to salty water and Mediterranean sun. How the hundreds of kilometres we had walked together had slowly removed the profile from the bottle green rubber soles. How they lack of profile had turned into idea working shoes; they left no marks on carefully brushed surfaces. I remembered all the digs we had worked on together.

And how we had sat by log fires in the evening, feeling the warmth of the fire and listening to the stories being told.

Over the years, the shoes had transformed from holiday shoes to working shoes, to session shoes. My beloved old black canvas shoes.

And suddenly the shoes seemed to start walking on their own. They just kept walking, not worried whether they walked along a roaring ocean or over rocks and sand or through spinifex bush. They didn't seem to mind whether it was warm or cold, dry or wet. They didn't seem to mind whether the sand was grey or white, they just walked. They were two little masters on my feet. They were just walking, not judging. They didn't judge anything. They walked. I felt an overwhelming gratitude for these shoes.

And the world opened up, the desert was the desert. But what a desert it was!

I walked back to the zendo and wrote a poem, my first poem ever. About my old faded black canvas shoes that were with me for so many years, taking me everywhere without the slightest protest, showing no joy about the ocean, no rejection of the desert, no joy about holidays, no rejection of work, they walked and were.

I wrote many poems during the following days. They just kept flowing out of my pen. Pen on paper and the hand started writing. I wrote English words I wasn't even aware of knowing. It felt as if I was connected with an ever-flowing stream of words, a pool of words that was always there and will always be there. The words put themselves in order, formed patterns of meaning and melody.

My eyes had adjusted. The landscape was not grey anymore. It was as colourful as a tulip show in Holland. I had fallen in love with the desert. I didn't want to leave, only three days to go, only two days to go ...ohhhh noooo.

Picking and choosing are hard to overcome!

Becoming Mycelium, Becoming Fungi, Becoming Sangha

Caroline Josephs

Underground
dark
soil –
Embracing
Mycelium,
'sangha' of a
Fungi world.

Each of us
One cell,
a *hypha*,
in intricate
wood-wide
web,
Each hypha
cell of
Mycelium a
Part of
a network,
Foraging
for sustenance,
moving,
turning,

As unique
Individuals --
we hyphae,

Seek spiritual
Nourishment.
As one cell of
Our
Zen
community,
we give,
we receive
Inter-cellular
Intersections,
Metabolising,
Changing,
trading,
Affecting.
Hyphae
Together, we
Dance,
our
Shared
Path,

Digesting waste,
Thoughtless
Negativity,
Defilements.
As hyphae do --
Ingesting plastic,

Oil, Nuclear
waste,
Dead logs,
Interdependent,
Our Mycelium
Sangha,
Our family,
The world.
In shared
Symbiosis.
Fungi
spores
Scatter,
Like seeds,
Inside us,
In air,

In the sea --
as our acts,
our words,
our Ways
of relating --
In family,
In sangha.

Dharma --
earth of
Zen,
Unseen,
Rich loam,
Sun, rain –
Teisho,
Dokusan
Fertilising.
Enriching,

Our
Practice.
Mushrooms,
we
Pop up,
From
Silence,
From
gardening
Practice--
Meditation,
Mindfulness,
Each
One,
Illuminated –
we
Mushroom
Fungi.

We are
Nature,
We are
Fungi,
Individual
Hypha,
Mycelium
Community,
Spores too,
Of
Act,
Word,
Expression,

Seeking,
Always,
The Mystery,
The Unknown,
The Infinite.



Forest Fungi, with Underground Mycelium (89cms x 95cms)
Caroline Josephs



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