Mind Moon Circle

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Dreams and Visions

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Contents

The next issue of Mind Moon Circle – Summer 2023 – will be edited by Jill Ball & Janet Selby. Please email your submissions to: *jillianball@bigpond.com*

“Is It Enough To Meditate?”

Sarah Walls

When I was asked to give a talk at zazenkai, the first topic that popped into my head was: “Is it enough to meditate?” Of course, that immediately seemed a heretical question. But I was thinking partly of the many people who dip into the practice of meditation, find it difficult, don’t see tangible results, become discouraged, and drop out—and how easily I could have ended up being one of them. I was also thinking of the many people meditating as a way of coming to grips with life-threatening illness or life-shattering disability, or any of the existential crises that can make it hard to be patient with the process of meditation.

Many times, especially during the long, uncomfortable hours of sesshin, I wondered why I was persisting, when the ostensible goal of experiencing enlightenment, or at least some experience of inner transformation, seemed utterly beyond my grasp. Far from soaring into any state of bliss, I sometimes felt like a flightless bird, relentlessly grounded, not going anywhere, just watching while magpies, hawks, cockatoos and all manner of birds with functioning wings dipped and soared in the sky. It was frustrating, as I was hopeful not only of an inner transformation, but also of a physical transformation that might heal my injury and free from me from being trapped forever by physical agony.

Meditation helped soften that physical agony and make it bearable. But I don’t know that I would have had the tenacity to stick with the practice had it not been for the doorway to the inner world that opened through my dreams. In the fifteen years I have been meditating, nothing startling has ever really happened on the cushion. The surprises have mainly happened in bed, in that twilight land between waking and sleep. What I discovered as I tracked and explored my dreams completely overturned my old notions of reality and of the human mind. One surprise was to discover a dialogue, a conversation between the process of meditation and the dreaming process. Meditation seemed to open wide the door to the dreaming mind, and the dreams seemed to produce little snapshots, little situation reports, which gave me hope that perhaps I was making some progress in meditation after all, despite the disappointing lack of supernovas on the cushion.

As for whether dreams are a suitable topic for zazenkai, well, I take reassurance from the fact that Robert Aitken Roshi considers that the three things most likely to influence the transmission of Zen to the West are democracy, feminism and psychotherapy—and I figure that psychotherapy covers dreams. Dogen Zenji says that “The teisho of the actual body is the harbour and the weir”[1], and dreams are surely part of the miracle of the actual body.

In my pre-history, the days before I was injured, I was a journalist—and few occupations are more focused on the outer world than journalism. Then fifteen years ago, I suffered severe toxic damage to my central nervous system from a myelogram—a spinal injection of contrast medium—and large doses of corticosteroid drugs. My entire nervous system became violently electrified. I had huge electric shocks, accompanied by loud noise and bright flashes of light, erupting through my brain, my spinal cord and the most intimate parts of my body 24 hours a day. I couldn’t sit or lie still and I couldn’t sleep. My heart raced, I bruised severely, and my teeth cracked. Even my finger and toenails ceased to adhere properly to the nailbed. I felt as if every nerve was exposed and my body was no longer solid flesh, just a web of taut, electrified barbed wire.

[1] Precept No 10. Not defaming the three treasures […] Dogen Zenji: 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.

This went on not just for a few days, a few weeks or even a few months. For three years, the activity was so violent that other people could feel the electricity coming out through my skin. Fifteen years later, I still have enough high-voltage activity in my head to show up in a permanently abnormal EEG.

As you can imagine, this was a shock of unparalleled proportions. But the shocks this event held for me were not only physical. The night before the myelogram I had a dream so vivid that I wrote it down, something I never did at the time. I dreamt that someone had taken my Jaguar car without my permission, and that I was then completely contaminated in a nuclear explosion. In my dream this explosion took the form of a wheel with a shattered outer edge, something paradoxically so bright that it turned the whole sky dark. I later discovered that the wheel is a symbol of the chakra, a subtle energy centre according to the tenets of yoga. Like the outer boundary of the wheel, my outer being was shattered.

A year later, when my immune function was finally tested, a single abnormality showed up: an elevated level of anti-nuclear antibody, antibody to DNA. That I should have a high level of anti-nuclear antibody was perhaps not surprising as I had been treated with a foreign biological product. But this vivid dream came before the investigation and treatment. Something inside me, it seemed, had known that I was in danger, at a time when consciously I had no idea.

So this initial dream opened the door to the inner world in an utterly dramatic way. The medical treatment proved so traumatic that I had no desire to seek further conventional treatment. I had to find another way to manage. I turned to yoga and Zen meditation, read countless self-help books, tried to improve my diet and de-stress. And I began to pay very close attention to my dreams. Eventually, I had the good fortune to find a highly gifted dream analyst who taught me the symbolic language of my own psyche.

As the months and years went by, my dreams proved a totally unexpected source of inspiration, wonder and information about my bodymind. Eight months after my treatment, I dreamed of an elephant foetus with its cervical spinal cord exposed, which was having great difficulty moving and keeping its head and body together. Months later, an MRI scan confirmed alterations in my cervical spinal cord.

As my dreaming mind dealt with what had happened to me, certain themes turned up repeatedly: losing jewellery and luxury cars; dreams about toxins, poisoning, radiation, fire and destruction; dreams about dilapidated houses and repair; dreams about descent and ascent; and dreams focusing on the neck, the bridge linking the head to the body from which I had previously been so disconnected. Sometimes, the development in the dreaming images was so obvious it needed little interpretation: after early dreams about losing precious jewellery and various luxury cars, I dreamed, eighteen months after the injury, of "finding my stolen bag, […] full of dirt, dust and stones", then of "finding the little grey Morris Minor I had when I was 18", looking "decrepit", and of "coming back to my house after a long time away and finding it in desperate need of repair". The signs of healing in my psyche appeared before any external sign of healing became apparent and gave me courage to continue working for recovery.

There were also times when my dreams threw up utterly inexplicable images which seemed totally outside my experience. In one dream, I was on the side of a steep green hill when suddenly I saw an absolutely magical animal with an equally magical keeper. The animal had huge wings and an extraordinary fluorescent, long, hairy, green plumage, and its keeper, a tall, dark-skinned man, had a costume from the same brilliant green plumage. I had never seen such an animal before. As I watched, it started to perform a figured dance, lifting up and

down from the ground into the air. When the performance was finished, my companion and I set off down the hill, but the animal came bounding up to us as if we had something to feed it with, and it and its keeper did not seem to want to let us go. I asked where it came from, and the keeper's answer seemed to be somewhere in northern Africa called Tedda or Chedda, I couldn't quite hear which.

Flower, photo by Glenys Jackson

Then, in the sudden change of scene that often occurs in dreams, I found myself in a completely crazed and terrifying but oddly funny hospital ward. It was full of very technical-looking machinery that was hilariously inappropriate—like an intensive care unit with someone in what looked like an oxygen tent, but which turned out to be full of water. The nurses were all incredibly busy, but it seemed a matter of total chance whether you ended up alive or dead. There was no way out of the ward.

To my astonishment, I later discovered that in Islam, there is a figure called the Green Sufi. "He was always dressed in green and was called Khizr"–or Chidher—"(Arabic for green) because wherever he knelt and prayed the soil instantly became covered with thick vegetation."[2] He is a wanderer and the patron of travellers, a figure met on the road, a teacher and counsellor who promises longevity and wisdom.

A couple of years after I had this dream, I met a Christian Arab from the Sudan who told me that El Khidr, the Green One, was known among Sufis in the Sudan as a prophet who works miracles and is considered the same figure as the Christian St George and the Dragon. His association with the dragon confirmed for me that this was indeed the figure in my dream.

[2] William Dalrymple, *City of Djinns*, p. 298 ff, 1993.

The dream seemed to contrast two styles of healing, one based on technology and the external world, the other grounded in the ancient realms of myth and nature—a realm that Western society has largely lost touch with, but which still calls to us in our dreams.

That a mythological figure from another culture should appear in my dreams astonished me, but it also made me feel deeply and tangibly connected to the entire web of human existence. As I followed my dreams, I came increasingly to feel that my conscious self was just a thin layer of icing, and that the deeper one went into the mystery of the psyche, the thinner the veil separating us from the rest of humanity, until eventually one falls out into the Great Body of the universe where there is no separation, no boundary at all.

Prior to the injury, I didn't have much trust in the body or the universe. I had lost my mother, my father and one of my sisters, I had been present at both accidental death and violent death, and human existence seemed overwhelmingly precarious, unreliable and painful. But if something within me was capable of realising that I was in danger—even if I was then too ignorant to know how to listen to that inner voice—if that same mysterious something was capable of guiding and counselling me in dealing with the consequences of the injury, and of showing me how to grow, then the universe was a fundamentally friendly place, after all. For this deep dreaming psyche is an inherent part of all humans, indeed all animal life. We are born with what we need to live already built into us. It's just that we don't always know how to listen to the world within, which, paradoxically, can open the door to the interconnectedness of the entire universe.

I realised that mythology is not just something found in books, but a living force within us, the wisdom body that is part of our biological birthright. To realise that there was something within us which is capable of dealing with anything that life can throw up—for everything that we live through is but a variation of things that have happened to others before—was a revelation. I felt for the first time in my life that I had solid ground to stand on.

When we face life-threatening injury or disease, chronic illness, disability or any major crisis that seems beyond our capacity to deal with, we are often at a loss to know how to proceed. Meditation then is extremely useful. It gives us a refuge, steadies us in our daily lives, allows quiet space in which insights and intuitions arise. Attending to our dreams can bring an additional, immensely useful dimension at times when we are frightened and in need of help. This is especially true if we are facing a situation where there may not be much that can be done externally.

In serious illness, our cultural bias towards the outer world persists, and the patient's attention is usually taken up with the various things being done to treat the disease. In the midst of all this activity, there is not always much focus on what is going on inside the person. When there is <u>no</u> treatment available—or no acceptable treatment—what is going on <u>inside</u> the patient takes centre stage. The patient has to confront the challenge of how to live with a life-threatening disease or chronic illness. Illness can be lived as a diminishing transition or as an opportunity to grow and transform. In the words of American surgeon Bernie Siegel, "Disease can teach us to live by confronting us with our own mortality, with the uncertainty embedded in every life. If we have the courage to follow where our fate leads us, a great rebirth can occur.[3]

[3] Bernie Siegel, Foreword to *The Healing Path: A Soul Approach To Illness*, Marc Ian Barasch, p. 11, Penguin books, U.S., 1995.

From the solar left-brain point of view, illness and misfortune strike randomly. Our minds, however, are structured to create meaning. Everything means something, for the psyche's universal language is symbol and image. So our dreaming mind will reflect what the particular illness or misfortune means for us, how it fits into our story, our individual myth. To learn the meaning of misfortune in one's own life should not be confused with some New Age notion of being responsible for one's own disease. That's simplistic and rarely helpful. We do not control everything that happens in life; indeed, that's often one of the key lessons illness and misfortune teach us. But we do have choices about how we respond to what happens. Having a sense of where an event fits in the pattern of our lives, what it means to us, can help us see different ways to respond. By listening to what comes up in dreams and meditation, we can step outside our habitual grooves and engage more fruitfully with life.

In her book *My Grandfather's Blessings*, Rachel Remen tells a beautiful story of a young man having trouble coming to terms with juvenile diabetes, who was shown the way forward through a dream. In his dream, he found himself sitting facing a small stone statue of the Buddha. He was surprised to feel a kinship with it, and to experience an unfamiliar sense of peace. Suddenly, a dagger was thrown and buried itself deep in the Buddha's heart. The young man was shocked. Then the statue began to grow, its face as peaceful as before. The knife didn't change either. Gradually, it became a tiny black speck on the breast of an enormous, smiling Buddha. The young man woke up in tears.

Rachel Remen says that when the young man had been told that his disease was incurable, "his response had been rage and despair. He had felt that the life in him had been stopped and that there was no way to move forward. But in the most exquisite way possible, life had shown him something different. His dream offered him the hope of wholeness, and suggested that, over time, he might grow in such a way that the wound of his illness might become a smaller and smaller part of the sum total of his life. That he might have a good life, even though it would not be an easy life. "[4]

So, is it enough to meditate? In one way, of course it is. But exploring our inner life by attending to our dreams can also be immensely valuable, especially when we are suffering and need help. And that is true whether we are physically ill or well.

This is an abridged version of a zazenkai talk given on 20 November 2005. Sarah Walls was correspondent for The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age in New Caledonia from 1988-1990. She retired from part-time work as a translator in 2018 and is now campaigning for national no-fault compensation for injured patients (change.org/FairGoForInjuredPatients).

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[4] Rachel Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging*, p. 142, Riverhead Books, U.S., 2000.

Clouds, photo by Glenys Jackson

Am I dreaming or not?

Kim Bagot

I have to confess that I enjoy daydreaming - it feels like home to me. But I also feel the need to employ various little tactics to keep me on task and focussed on daily priorities. When I was nine my dad bought me a book about developing memory skills; many years later it dawned on me why he bought that book for me. Now that I am well and truly a grandpa, I seem to have a bit less choice about "dreaminess", and I relish being with the young ones, sharing in their play, their invisible friends and fast evolving dreams.

Nevertheless, I do believe that what a lot of people seem to think of as reality is actually a dream, and in fact, reality often is what happens in dreams.

We regularly make vows to express our Zen aspirations and dreams. Robert Aitken Roshi, (who lead sesshin here between 1979 and 1989), encouraged us to deepen and personalise Zen practice, among other things, by studying and reworking our Jukai vows and precepts. From the outset he told us that Zen was about making the practice intimately our own and, without being self-centred and grandiose, to actualise the Buddha Way.

Later on it made a big impression on me when I read John Daido Loori Roshi, the founder of Zen Mountain Monastery, New York, saying that in his private practice he sometimes reworded his Great Vows thus:
"Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to realise them,
"Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to realise them…" and so on.
I thought it might be instructive to study the varying translations of the Great Vows (below), used in other Zen centres. There is a caution about translations said by the poet W. S. Merwin, Aitken Roshi's friend and student, when he was accepting a major national prize for his many translations, (including Gilgamesh, the ancient Sumerian epic). He said, "translation is impossible". Merwin should have a good feel for using words appropriately and truthfully since he twice received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and was made US poet laureate.

Honolulu Diamond Sangha:
diamondsangha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Sutra-Book-12-25-18.pdf

Four Infinite Vows
All beings without limit I vow to carry over.
Kleshas without cease I vow to cut off.
Dharma-gates without measure I vow to master.
Buddha ways without end I vow to fulfill.

Zen Mountain Monastery, Catskill Mountains, New York:
zmm.org/teachings-and-training/four-bodhisattva-vows/

Four Bodhisattva Vows
Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.
Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to put an end to them.
The Dharmas are boundless; I vow to master them.
The Buddha Way is unattainable; I vow to attain it."

Thich Nhat Hanh:
plumvillage.org/

Bodhisattva vows
However innumerable beings are, I vow to meet them with kindness and interest.
However inexhaustible the states of suffering are, I vow to touch them with patience and love.
However immeasurable the Dharmas are, I vow to explore them deeply.
However incomparable the mystery of interbeing,
I vow to surrender to it freely.

Pacific Zen Institute:
pacificzen.org/library/sutra-book-the-four-boundless-vows-four-bodhisattva-vows/

The Four Boundless Vows
I vow to wake all the beings of the world,
I vow to set endless heartache to rest,
I vow to walk through every wisdom gate,
I vow to live the great Buddha way.

San Francisco Zen Centre:
sfzc.org/offerings/establishing-practice/services-sutras-texts-songs

Beings are numberless; I vow to save them.
Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them.
Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.
Buddha's way is unsurpassable; I vow to become it.

I appreciate all these versions, pointing to very sincere aspects of practice. After my daily sittings I chant the Great Vows starting with the current version used in SZC, then as an exercise, as a dreaming space, I experiment with alternative wordings, as they might feel right at the time.

Some notes and queries: "Interbeing", as used by Thich Nhat Hahn, seems to be graciously inclusive, and invites us to embrace the many beings with us as part of them; not as an outsider coming into an unknown, nobody's territory? Thich Nhat Hahn is the grand master of humility and poetry, and a wonderful guide in living Buddhism in daily life.

A student asked Robert Aitken Roshi how do I save a being? He replied, by including it.
The student asked, what is a being? Roshi replied, a quadratic equation.
Perhaps that algebraic function is one of the "least of the brethren" which can also be welcomed and included.
So I am not yet convinced that to exclude non-sentient beings from our embracing is "welcoming and inclusive".

It seems less binary and can absorb the dualising mind of yes or no, the mind of numbered or numberless, when we reflect deeply on what is beyond our understanding, measuring and numbering, and not just on what is lacking. So I'm liking saying the interbeing is many-fold beyond numbering.

Our work is to realise and actualise the serene person who, when all alone with no trace of the measuring, comparing mind - as we might be in our last breaths - welcomes the completely mysterious beyond our understanding.

In this serene place who or what is there to carry over, or to save? So I sometimes vow, to keep all safe, as it is already before we say that. Already saved and safe, as when people say, God save the King, or we save our money in the bank.

The roots of my greed run deep within my grasping and thirsting for, and attachment to, being alive, breathing and growing. I am beginning to think that putting an end to desires might be coterminous with the end of life. I was heartened to read recently about the Dalai Lama, happily tucking into his lunch, and explaining to his guests how much he enjoyed it. Aitken Roshi used to say, joy is the touchstone of the Way.

Hatred is one of my lesser vices, and its roots seem to be in turning away, averting the inner gaze from our common humanity and from interbeing.
Thinking of our aversions and the judgemental mind Oscar Wilde, a great wordsmith and wit, said that all criticism is self-criticism.

"Avidyā"/ignorance' is a Theravadan technical term, emphasising intellectual misconceptions about the metaphysical nature of reality. My general ignorance seems to grow as I grow older, but I hope I get just a little wiser about my limits, as well as the big, final limitation. To use the term "unwiseness" points to the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path of cultivating personal character and wisdom, which are not identical with pursuing knowledge.

I like to think that lovingness and kindness "precede" knowingness and even wiseness - for one thing, they seem intrinsically of dreaming space. According to the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra, Avalokiteśvara, (the embodiment of lovingness and kindness), takes up deep practice to realise her clear insight and wisdom.

What is there to surpass? Why cut off or abandon part of our being? How about being serene and beyond comparing? Often, "unsurpassed" means, "excelling", or "extraordinary" in comparisons, with connotations of being the best or supreme. Dwelling in idle dreams of superiority or greatness can bring on grandiosity or an "I-disease". Nevertheless, Nelson Mandela, whose great achievements will be long remembered, said our greatest fear is not of our own smallness and meanness but of our own greatness. So is the Buddha's Way, the way of all beings, or just that of one great, historical person? If we embody something fully, does one, as an ordinary person in "this very body", personalise it in our actions? Then our friends and family members will notice if we really "walk our talk".

So, today's translation travesty is:

Four Bodhisattva Vows
Interbeing is many-fold beyond numbering,
I vow to keep it all safe;
My grasping, aversion and unwiseness arise beyond ending, I vow to realise them all,
Dharma gates are beyond counting,
I vow to realise them all,
The Buddha Way is beyond comparing, I vow to personalise and actualise it.

Am I dreaming, or not?

Eclipse of the Moon, photo by Helen Sanderson

Jukai Vows

Jill Steverson

30 September 2022 Spring Sesshin at Kodoji

Dreams, hopes, visions, determination, will, all intermingled perhaps? I came to Australia in my early twenties and lived in Perth. Somehow in my mid-twenties I ended up going back to England, mostly out of guilt for living so far from my parents. I always wanted to come back but various things got in the way. By my late twenties I was in a mess and found a group, weirdly all dressed in black which was slightly off putting, practicing Zen meditation. I had found my European/ American sangha 'Kanzeon', part of the White Plum Lineage. My rakasu with Genpo Roshi reflected the northern climes with a poem,

Deep in the cloudy valley,
still the lonely pine tree lives through
the cold of many years

My Genjo (life) koan 'I want to go back to live in Australia' never had a chance to manifest until I was 42 years old. There was a natural break, laced with depression that helped in facing the fear of the big move. I was not in a relationship plus I was dragging my feet each day going to job in an oncology hospital. I made the great leap back in 1999, this time to the gorgeous little town of Bellingen on the mid north coast where I knew people and met and sat with Sexton Bourke….

I have now been with my beloved Australian sangha longer than my original sangha.

My new Australian Rakasu is sewn using pieces of fabric from SZC sangha dharma sisters and brothers, and centrally including a piece from my old sangha. This is the poem on my new Australian Rakasu.

Lyrebirds, koalas, grasses and stones
Still the sacred bushland
Lives through the changes of the years

It was wonderful opportunity to reflect deeply on the vows and a deep bow of gratitude to Gilly Coote Roshi for my Jukai ceremony at Spring Sesshin

The Three Vows of Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha
Not separate from Buddha, I am Buddha, knowing the awakened Mind I honour it, moment by moment, the wonder of Buddha in everything

I take refuge in the Dharma
The Dharma is the path, the middle way, the practice
Kookaburra and magpie show me the way of joy

I take refuge in the Sangha
Embedded in Sangha, we share, we love, we turn the Dharma Wheel together with the wider sangha of birds, clouds, lightening, stars, and all things

The Three Pure Precepts

I vow to maintain the Precepts

Seeing all things are Buddha, the precepts flow naturally from this. I vow to follow and value the precepts as the path in my everyday life

I vow to practice all good Dharma
The rain, stones and trees show me the way. Good Dharma arises moment by moment, I vow to leave behind my clinging and stories of self and open to sharing the joy of this moment without loss or gain.

I vow to save the many Beings
I vow to fully realise all beings are not separate from myself, and although all beings are already saved, I vow to live with an open heart to respond wherever I can

The Ten Grave Precepts

I take up the way of not killing
I vow to not kill this precious life of a buddha, to look after myself and others, to be present, not kill the moment, especially when others speak, being open and appreciate what comes rather than shutting down others with *my* ideas, experiences, and views

I take up the way of not stealing
I acknowledge I knowingly came to live on stolen land. I acknowledge power differences and work to be open and live with humility for my good fortune, acting with care and compassion with others and with things.
I acknowledge I have everything right here, there is nothing to steal.

I take up the way of not misusing sex
Sex is a gift that has the power to bring joy and pleasure. I vow to use it to enhance that joy and not cause any unhappiness to myself or others

I take up the way of not speaking falsely
Seeing the self is a concept, the effort to protect myself with gossip and criticism is wasting time and causes harm and disharmony. When at peace I understand that the heart mind can speak more clearly, knowing there is no self or other, I vow to love.

I take up the way of not giving or taking drugs
Everything is true and complete just as it is, I vow to be conscious of my escape to obsessive busyness, actions and achievements rather than being simply present with what is: weeding, cooking, drawing water, chopping wood.

I take up the way of not discussing the faults of others
Me / you, self /other separation causes suffering, seeing there are no faults and no 'other' allows kindness to neutralise the negative and supports love and harmony.
I vow to practice not to separating 'self' from 'other'

I take up the way of not praising myself while abusing others
The self-satisfied feelings from making myself good, others bad is delusion. There is no other to abuse, no faults that are not also my faults.
I vow to see my comparing mind and embrace Avalokiteshvara's unfathomable compassion for the world as it is. Practicing the way of Right View of the Buddha

I take up the way of not sparing the Dharma Assets
The vast Dharma is ready for all, arising in every moment, withholding I am trapped by the small self, letting go I will give and take wholeheartedly.

I acknowledge diabetes and moth vine are dharma assets

I take up the way of not indulging in anger
Anger is an emotion that brings forth power, I vow to find that energy rather than shrink into poor me, despair and cowering. I will use that power to speak with truth and kindness to save all beings

I take up the way of not defaming the Three Treasures
My life is nothing but the three treasures, it is nothing but the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. I take up the way of cherishing, moment by moment

Jill *Myoko* Steverson (*subtle/gentle illumination*)

Enso, calligraphy by Glenys Jackson

From Little Things Big Things Grow

(With thanks to Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly)

Helen Sanderson

It's sometime in the early 1980's, when exactly I can't remember, but I'm travelling down a red dusty road, bumping along 80 kms from Alice Springs, on the way to Santa Theresa Mission. We pull to a stop, waved down by a bunch of Aborigines whose ute has broken down, a common occurrence. The road is littered with abandoned wrecks. These people pile into the Land Council Toyota my friend is driving, a dozen or so adults and kids all sitting on top of each other, three deep in some cases. My friend Neil is going to that mission to work on some Central Land Council business, something to do with Land Rights, I guess.

The man sitting next to me points to one side of the car where the MacDonnell ranges stretch out. "Thats my mother's country." he says, "That's very big dreaming. " Then pointing to the other side of the car he says "and that's my father's country. That's very big dreaming. too." I am silent. I don't really know what this word dreaming means. It's something to do with law and lore and land, I think. Is it like a koan? Both the landscape and the word dreaming are immense. After telling me this he goes back to talking in language to the others, Eastern Arrernte.

There is one other detail I remember from that visit. Santa Theresa was a dry Catholic community but white people including those from the church who worked and lived there could bring in and drink grog. It was illegal for the black community, back then, anyway. I wondered about that, if it was a source of tension? White privilege and choices harming the black community?

Land Rights and Aboriginal rights have been an ongoing issue, a running sore, you could say, since Australia was first colonised by British in 1788. Recently I heard it referred to as Australia's Original Sin. The Frontier Wars point to the fact that Australia was never given freely to the British occupiers There has been no national treaty to recognise prior ownership though there is one now in the state of Victoria. But there has been ongoing action by black activists and their white supporters for land rights and other political rights for many years.

In 1966 Vincent Lingiari led his people the Gurindji in a walk off from the Vestey Brothers station at Wave Hill WA as the company was refusing to pay the Aboriginal workers. In 1967 The Gurindgi mob moved closer to sacred sites at Daguragu. Their dispute was over more that pay. They wanted their land. In 1975 Gough Whitlam came to Daguragu in WA and formally handed over land to the Gurindgi. This led to the Aboriginal Land Rights act in 1976, (Northern Territory). The Gurindji had been on strike for nearly a decade. Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody wrote the song about this struggle, 'From Little things big things grow'. You probably know it.

It is good to dream, to dream of a better world, to dream of peace. And to take action to secure it. It might be necessary to protest against injustice. Robert Aitken Roshi was a social activist. There is a famous photo of him in a wheelchair protesting against the Iraq war with a sign, "The System Stinks." When my own husband was quite unwell in the last year of his life, he attended a climate change protest and another about the treatment

of refugees. Recently I heard Adam Goodes talking about the power of marching with others to effect change.

Our nation now has a chance to heal the injustice that runs through it by enacting a Voice to the Parliament. Treaty and Truthtelling or Makaratta will follow. The hope is that we will listen to and respect the Statement from the Heart from Uluru, the result of the meeting of indigenous leaders there in 2017 which was rejected out of hand by the then Government. Now with this different Government change is in the air.
From little things big things grow.

Without a dream or a vision, the Sydney Zen Centre wouldn't exist. In 1979 Robert Aitken Roshi visited Sydney at the invitation of a group of meditators. Every year for a decade he came to run sesshins. Sydney Zen Centre evolved from that. Without the vision of those who dared to dream, we wouldn't have Kodoji, our bush zendo, or our city zendo at Annandale for that matter. Thank goodness for dreamers and visionaries. And for those who work to make dreams come true. From little things big things grow. A seed can grow to a seedling and a seedling to a tree that can spread its branches and protect and nourish us all.

Uluru, photo by Helen Sanderson

A dream within a dream, Absurd!
Zen koans and dream work

Subhana Barzaghi

For the past twenty-five years, I have had the privilege of working as a therapist. I hear gut wrenching stories of trauma and angst where people struggle to make sense of their life and heart-warming stories of recovery and resilience despite all odds. Therapy is a sacred space a meeting space of heart and mind, a dialogical space where stories, dreams and conversations emerge for deeper reflection and healing. What keeps me going is to see people grow, mature and blossom out of that crucible of compassionate in-depth work. One aspect of my therapeutic background includes training in a Jungian approach to sand tray therapy, art therapy and dream work. I became interested in exploring the relationship between a Jungian approach to dream work and Zen koans and what they both reveal about the personal and universal aspects of our nature. It is probably a curious relationship, but both dreams and koans are like windows that open out into the greater architecture of our lives.

There are many threads to my spiritual journey; introspection of koans, silence inquiry, zazen, studying the dharma, psychotherapy, dream work and journaling. I treasure the journals I have from my very first Tibetan Buddhist retreat in Kopan Monastery at the age of 20. Teachings, poems, insights, experiences and dreams make their way into my dozens of notebooks. Dreams and my reflections of them are like a silvery snail's trail of my inner life, sometimes sticky and painful and sometimes illuminating.

In the old Maui Zendo in Hawaii, Robert Aitken Roshi had a piece of calligraphy by Gempo Roshi inscribed with the character 'Dream' yume in Japanese. Gempo Roshi, artfully created this piece at the age of ninety-three not long before he died. Why did he choose the character dream? An odd piece for someone who was considered awake. Gempo's dream character has a clear resonance with the verse from the Diamond Sutra:

> "All composite things are like a dream, a fantasy, a bubble, and a shadow, are like a dewdrop and a flash of lightening. They are thus to be contemplated".

This verse speaks to the fact that all things, life and the cosmos are transient. Life is like a dream, a dynamic play of experience that cannot be grasped. Directly seeing into our temporary nature leads to the awakened state of shunyata…the great luminous void which is empty of a permanent, separate entity we refer to as self. To wake up from this dream - the illusion of separateness, is to see clearly into the nature of things, to realise 'that' which does not change, our unborn, unconditioned eseential nature. Thus "dream" is the condensed expression of the great mystery, shunyata and impermanence, the quintessence of the Buddha dharma.

Koans are poignant deep questions of inquiry designed to unlock the great mysteries of the heart, the timeless, formless ground of being. At the very best Koans are wonderful tools that help to open the mind, initiate a breakthrough experience from the dream like

trance of duality. They are skillful means for transformation and expansion of consciousness. You cannot resolve a koan through an intellectual understanding, they are an invitation to transcend the old familiar habitual dualistic ways of thinking and knowing.

Some dreams have a wonderful intelligence embedded in them. They can be prophetic and predict future events. I certainly value those dreams. I have asked my dreams to give me practical clues about where I lost some precious earrings and a jade necklace and found them exactly at the place that was revealed through a dream. The dark and shadow parts of our character are also revealed. Others are a catalyst for change and offer profound insights that have a guiding power through the years. One way I have interpreted my dreams is that each aspect or figure in the dream is an aspect of myself. Are we also not made of stardust and dandelions?

Greg Bogart, a transpersonal psychologist said, "Dreams are like icebergs rising out of the deep waters of the unconscious. Some are icebergs of the past, helping us understand past traumas and undigested memories, and thus are retrospective. Dreams can be integrative as they enable us to perceive and reconcile our many conflicting sub-personalities. They are also prospective or anticipatory, icebergs of the future, depicting what is emerging, images of what the individual potentially can become. Looking backward and forward simultaneously, the dream's essential function is always to expand the aperture of consciousness, the circumference of perception, the sphere of identity."

One of the common grounds between dream work and Zen koans is that both speak to us in a symbolic language, rich with metaphors. Dream work is an intuitive or imaginative way of unraveling and understanding the deeper patterns of our psyche. Both Zen koans and dream work are like pointing fingers to the moon, they point to the deeper fuller truths of life and who we are. Koans unravel the knots in the mind to reveal our great nature the formless dimension of life. Feel the resonance in these lines from Zen Master Dogen Zenji, in Mountains and Rivers Sutra, leading us into a greater dream of ourselves.

> The green mountains are forever walking.
> A stone woman gives birth to a child by night.

In the Miscellaneous Koans we contemplate what it means to awaken within the dream itself. “Someone comes to you in a dream and asks you, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West? If you do not answer you evade your responsibility. How will you respond?”

The dream world like a koan is only beneficial if we have a dialogue with it, if we contemplate it. In cultivating a wise relationship with our dreams, we need to sort out what is irrelevant blah, blah a mishmash of the day and that which holds meaningful morsels, or shadowy material of our character that necessitates reflection.

Children can have dreams that are sweet, innocent and profound. My son Akira remembers his dreams from when he was five years old and took delight at reporting

them over breakfast. When he was eight years old, he recalled this dream, 'Searching for Buddha'. The dream refers to a reclining concrete Buddha figure on the back verandah of Kuan Yin Meditation Centre.

Akira's dream: The Buddha got up a walked into the garden. Akira went after the Buddha and tried to catch him to bring him back to the verandah. First, he tried to tie a rope around the waist of the Buddha, but every time he did that, the rope ended up around his waist. Next, he tried to push the Buddha back up the path, but when he did that, he fell through him and landed flat on his face. Then he tried to put a cage around the Buddha, but the Buddha could not be imprisoned and got away. He then tried to run after the Buddha but the Buddha would just walk through the walls and disappear. Finally, Akira gave up trying to catch the Buddha and decided to just sit quietly on the verandah where the Buddha had been and just wait for the Buddha to come back home… and he did.

My son's dream offers wise instructions for our practice. We want to discover the truth of who we are and yet we usually tie ourselves up in knots in that search. But, if we simply sit still, wait patiently, be aware, be mindful, centre ourselves, give our full attention to the moment, listen deeply, the awakened one returns home all by itself. Our search for Buddha leads us back to our true home right where we are.

To be opened by a koan or a dream is to become gradually more conversant with the 1,000 mirrors and images of our psyche. The dream is one place where the sense of 'I' is a variable, it is fluid. Fraser Boa, a Jungian analyst said, "When we go to sleep, the self as we know it no longer exists and we suddenly undergo an inner experience that we do not initiate that is often not logical, rational or even possible. We may find ourselves flying, running from a monster, making love to someone we have never met and yet these experiences seem as real as those in waking life".

Robert Bosnack, a well-known Jungian analyst doesn't call the "I" figure the dreamer, because at the moment of dreaming, the dreamer and the dream are identical. The "I" consciousness becomes only an aspect of the dream world and the dreamer. In the dream the shackles of the self-loosen, we become unhinged from our fixed daily identities. What a relief.

Like koans, there is an open, fluid, sense of self in the dream experience. Koans and dreams both intimately reflect a greater truth, that who we are is interconnected with each and every thing. The dharma invites us to wake up to our great body of; stones, flowers, clouds, mountains, rivers and all beings as none other than our true nature. We are invited to realise our interconnectedness with the koan: Each branch of coral holds up the light of the moon. (Miscellaneous Koans)

Jung said, "the dream is a conversation between the self and God". At the source of the dream there is a creative mystery the numinous dimension of the mind which we cannot rationally explain. Jung calls this the 'Self', not the small ego identity self. The Self can be represented in our dreams by images of a centre or mandala, a circle, an ancient

garden with a fountain in the middle, a divine savior, the Christ child as the saving factor, an image of a Goddess, a wise guide. It is the unknowable mysterious centre. It is an adventurous encounter with the inner depths of our being. This indefinable, vast mysterious awakened presence is one's intrinsic true nature within the dreamer, as the dreamer and the dream. When the small ego self is forgotten or becomes unhinged the authentic nature emerges. We are not divine but we are the dark stable in which something is born, we are giving birth to ourselves, moment by moment.

Fraser Boa's dream is a beautiful encounter with the Self. "I was walking on the ancient rocks of Georgian Bay, the unevenness of the rock face made walking difficult. When I looked down to steady myself. I realised that I was walking on the face of Christ".

Zen Buddhism would call this same mysterious centre, non-abiding empty awareness, which centre is nowhere and everywhere. It has other names such as Buddha nature, the luminous ground of mind, one's essential nature, also referred to as the great void.

Marie-Louise von Franz said, "Dreams always point to the inner centre. They are like hundreds of forms all pointing to the inner centre. Every dream is an attempt of nature to centre us to relate us again back to our innermost centre, to stabilize our personality. When we are not in harmony with that mysterious centre, then we develop neurosis, stress, restlessness anxiety, fear, dread, despair, irritability and depression, our life feels meaningless and not worth living". (The Way of the Dream)

I had an insightful dream while teaching an Insight retreat at Sangsurya. I had been reading Ramana Maharishi's awaken experience before I fell asleep. Rama's words, "I am not the body", leapt off the page and kept reverberating through me as I slipped into sleep. I dreamt that I let go of my body like a silk gown falling off my shoulder. I mindfully turned around and looked behind me. It was as if the back of my head fell open and I fell into the vast space of the cosmos with pulsating stars, like pin-points of light. The awesome vision replaced the feeling of 'me'. I felt a pervasive sense of peace and homecoming. I then turned around again to see all my friends and loved one in front of me. Their bodily forms and characters were simply part of this vast empty, illuminated cosmos. I woke up at the ting, ting sound of the early morning wake up bell. The feeling of peace continued for days.

Ch'uang T'se the renowned Taoist philosopher once dreamt that he was a butterfly. That dream left him puzzling ever after whether he was a man who dreamt that he was a butterfly or whether he was a butterfly who dreamt that he was a man. It is delightfully ambiguous; we cannot figure it out. A butterfly can be a symbol of the Self. Are we the dream of the Self (big mind) or is the Self (big mind) our dream of liberation from the burdensome ego self?

Dreams and koans are like a fountain flowing from our inner depths that can be of inestimable value to our inner process. With careful reflection you can unwrap these curious parcels of wonder that keep opening out to the cosmos. You can dance with koans and dreams so they keep unfolding the mystery of the awakened heart-mind.

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Zhuangzi dreaming of a butterfly (or a butterfly dreaming of Zhuangzi), Ike no Taiga

To Dream etc. etc.

Brendon Stewart

Sigmund Freud said somewhere in one of his books that dreams and their interpretation is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind. In comparison some Buddhist traditions and scriptures tell us that the Buddha never dreamed and, apparently, he was never anxious. No road, no knowledge of the unconscious!

What do you think about that Sigmund and Carl?

A google search for quirky but pertinent dream quotes threw up for me the following:

In *Good Reads* (what are or is *Good Reads*?) there are 8062 quotes that evoke Dreams and 15 of the Best Quotes Ever about "Dreaming Big" are to be found in the *New Idea Magazine (which ones?)*

In truth we don't know much about dreams, the biology of dreams particularly; for example, how come we can dream in colour, when there is no white light deep in our cellular being, nonetheless of all our peculiar behaviour and capacity it is these weird night-time drama/comedies that cast a spell. – but as in many a midsummer dream Lysander's words reminds us that the night-time spell can be
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream, Brief as the lightning in the collied night; That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and Earth, And ere a man hath power to say "Behold!"

Usually a dream, Carl Jung says is a strange and disconcerting 'biological' product distinguished by many "bad" qualities, such as lack of logic, questionable morality, uncouth form, and apparent absurdity or nonsense. People are therefore only too glad to dismiss them as stupid, meaningless, and worthless. ("On the Nature of Dreams" (1945), in CW 8: *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. pg. 532). He talks further of how dream analysis and interpretation work only when one is prepared to enter into an imaginative - unknowing - relationship with the dream. It is, indeed, a good thing (Jung again) that no valid method exists (for interpretation) otherwise the meaning of the dream would be limited in advance and would lose precisely that virtue which makes dreams so valuable for therapeutic purposes - their ability to offer new points of view. ("The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man" (1933). In CW 10: *Civilization in Transition*. pg. 319)

John Tarrant Roshi used to ask about our dreams during dokusan at sesshin: sesshin dreams always seem apposite for me. Once upon'o'time Sleep Temples were 'common' in ancient Europe, (and elsewhere I suspect) they were often located in caves or other dramatic natural settings where seekers after 'truth', clarity or maybe simply emotional relief would come. In these temples the person would undergo an elaborate preparatory ritual of cleansing and fasting and then enter into a kind of trance on the borderland between wakefulness and sleep. There may be a similar intensity during sesshin that provides for a comparable dramatic clarity.

At the Pacifica Graduate institute, in the University of California Santa Barbara there is a research programme which has recreated a dream temple and works with seriously sick (cancer) patients. And here too importantly in our land of the dreamtime the Northern Territory Health Department, when carrying out its remote psychological health programme involves both a psychologist/psychiatrist and a Songman.

Dreaming and darkness have an affinity. While the Buddha may not have dreamed the Hindu heritage from which his insights emerge took dreaming and seeing deeply into darkened places as essential to one's awakening.

Are we using this dream word carelessly when we say *Oh that's a dream job*, or *my dream came true* or *what a dream boat* or *I won a dream holiday* or *I dream of a better world?* Each dream story here comes forth from our unconscious life, these are the fantasies we feel and imagine while daydreaming and at the same time these are the fantasies of haphazard night-time dreams – work, fulfilment, desire, relief, ambition.

Those of us who arrived here on this great South Pacific Island over the last two and a half centuries can and must participate in the dreamtime of this place. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People this land and this place is a living and vital dream narrative. But a dreamtime permeates the entire world. We live in the Antipodes, (sole to sole and now more aptly soul to soul) and for a very long time the lands "below" were inhabited by monsters and covered in by a darkness. The southern world crept into the ancient minds of the people from the north slowly but always with story of discovery and creation.

Our private and socially collective dreams are always in the making; each night-time brings us the wonderful chance to follow on with our own delightful and frightening children's story – where our *Wild Things Are!* As a people we can dream our way into a collective loving kindness, and work on what should be done

By one who is skilled in goodness,
And who knows the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied.

Evening at Hardy's Bay, photo by Helen Sanderson

My Breath the Wind

Caroline Josephs
Nov, 2022

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

The willy-wagtail swaying
verse on the wooden gate,
whiff-crust of moss fringes…

Breezes seethe and
roll cadenzas up
From the dam --

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

Near the house
roses - florid poesy blows
nursery beds, lettuce tankas

Seasoned lyrics of berries,
aroma blossoms
wafting air currents –

Whole phrases lost
in murmurings, villanelles,
whisperings of wind…

A sonnet trembles a refrain --
Zephr sighs in top branches –
flickers into being, slips away….

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

A blue wren, free verse –
flits among the grevilleas….
fades in a flurry of sky

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

Blue rosemary blossoms
cry, sing, crinkle, die --
re-bud, burst forth. Puff!

One day my breath…
Will cease…and, in a wisp…
I will be…

Ruach—breath, spirit….

Gone….
with…
the Wind.
(wiiiiinnnnd..)

'Ruach' Hebrew: meaning breath-spirit-wind

Xuanzang's Dream of Mt. Sumeru

Gillian Coote

When Tony and I were in China, we were reading Ten Thousand Miles without a Cloud, an account of two pilgrimages, 41 year old Chinese-born (l963) documentary filmmaker Sun Shuyun's - and Xuanzang's (born in 600 AD in China.) Xuangzang is an extraordinary man of any age. He was born in 600 AD, into a scholarly Confucian family; both parents died when he was an infant. By the time Xuangzang was born, Buddhism had already been in China for over six hundred years. We visited the first Buddhist temple built on Chinese soil in Luoyang in 64AD - the White Horse Temple. In these first six hundred years of Buddhism in China, Indian monks came to China, and Chinese monks went to India. Different schools flourished side by - Theravada and Mahayana monks and nuns lived and practised together. Many sutras had already been translated, such as the Vimalakirti Sutra by Kumerajiva c. 350.

Xuanzang was a serious little boy, who followed his brother into monastic life at thirteen; after hearing a sutra only twice, he'd remember every word. By his late teens, he and his brother had mastered all the Buddhist scriptures of the different schools and were impressive teachers. But the more he studied, the more dissatisfied he felt. Ch'an masters told him all beings by nature are Buddha - and there must have been enough Ch'an around for masters of the Pure Land School to tell the curious monk that practising Ch'an was difficult and laborious, and instead he should simply recite the name of Amitabha Buddha, and pray to Guanyin, Amitabha's chief minister, ever ready to lead the faithful to the land of purity and bliss. Followers of the Tiantai School claimed *they* had found the true way with their emphasis on the Lotus Sutra. Xuanzang saw that each school claimed to know the true way but were at odds with each other. Perhaps it was because the sutras they read were in different translations? He decided to study the Yogacara school, and set out for the capital, Chang'an - now present-day Si'an - leaving his brother behind.

But even the Yogacara teachers seemed to be at odds, and when an Indian monk in Si'an told him about Nalanda University in India with its ten thousand students, he knew his questions would be resolved there. But the Emperor had banned all travel.

One night he had a dream in which he saw Mount Sumeru, the sacred mountain at the centre of the universe in Indian and Buddhist mythology. It was surrounded by sea but there was neither ship nor raft. Lotus flowers of stone supported him as he crossed the waters but so slippery and steep was the way up the mountain that each time he tried to climb he slid back. Then suddenly a powerful whirlwind raised him to the summit where he saw an unending horizon. In an ecstasy of joy he woke up; he believed he'd been shown a vision of what he must do - he must go to India and learn the teaching of the Buddha at its source. It was a time of great turmoil in China, and nobody was allowed to travel, but he was determined and snuck out of the capital.

Xuanzang set out in 627AD and returned in 645 - eighteen years on the road. He came back fluent in seven languages, with 657 sutras, relics of the Buddha, and seven gold, silver and sandalwood images. His brushes with death were astounding. When he returned, there was a huge welcoming procession - such as Sydney puts on for sporting heroes - musicians, masses of people - in Chang'an. But the person he was most keen to see, Emperor Taizong, was away in Luoyang, the eastern capital, preparing to go to war with Korea - so Xuanzang

had a brief rest and set off to see him, another 700-mile journey on top of his epic journey. He was determined to persuade the Emperor to fund a translation institute for all the 657 sutras he had brought back with him. But the Emperor didn't mention Buddhism at all during their interview, instead requesting that Xuanzang write him a full account of his journey. The information could be a very useful guide for his dynastic ambitions to extend his empire to the Eurasian steppes. Xuanzang persuaded the Emperor that in return, he would fund an institute for translating the sutras. Xuanzang selected twenty-four monks from all over China and installed them in the Monastery of Great Happiness to begin the epic task of translation. Xuangzang worked day and night, up at 2 am meditating, then reading through the Sanskrit text to be translated that day, thinking over each word and phrase. When the team was ready, he'd dictate his translations to them. And while they worked on them, he'd be either giving talks twice a day on new scriptures or treatises or answering questions from monks from all over the country and from afar. At this time, Chang'an was a buzzing metropolis, a 7th century New York. This was the T'ang dynasty flowering. And, after Xuanzang had done all that, he'd sit down with one of the monks and dictate information about the countries he'd travelled through for the promised book of the journey. This became his Buddhist Records of the Western World, an extraordinary work of cultural anthropology and geography; in 1884 it was translated into English by Samuel Beal. I bought my copy in the Piccadilly Book Stall, New Delhi, surely the most marvellous bookshop in the universe, at the end of our pilgrimage with Thich Nhat Hanh, to compare and contrast the Buddhist sites we had just visited, journeys over 1400 years apart.

Xuanzang's scholarly account of the Buddha's life came just in time for the Englishman Cunningham to research the Buddha's life. He had begun his research without this book in the l830's when, curious about the stupa at Sarnath, he'd dug down into it, finding lots of statues which ended up being thrown into the Ganges to stabilise the edges. The locals had told him it was the tomb of a Rajah's mistress, or some such gobbledegook. The Buddha seemed unknown to Indians at that time, except as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Tragically, this English translation of Xuanzang's work also came out just in time to become the perfect guidebook for European thieves and looters of the Silk Road Buddhist treasures - Sir Aurel Stein and all the others.

Of the 657 sutras he had brought back with him, 75 sutras and commentaries were translated under his direction. The most important for Chinese Buddhism was the Prajnaparamita Sutra which he started working on in 660, when his health was failing. Together with commentaries, the translation occupied 600 volumes, nearly half his work. He completed it at the beginning of 664 and then he sent for all his disciples. 'I am weary of the body now. My work is finished and there is no point in my staying longer. May the good works I have done benefit all living beings. May they and I be reborn in the Tushita Heaven of Maitreya and serve him there. When Maitreya at last becomes a Buddha, may I go down with him into the world, promote the faith in all lands and attain the highest enlightenment.

Before he died, Xuanzang had persuaded the Emperor to write a preface (p.426) praising Buddhism, and at last Buddhism eclipsed Taoism as the official religion. This is known as the flowering of the T'ang dynasty. With royal patronage, thousands were ordained, and monumental monasteries and temples built. Xuanzang's translations were stored in the specially built Big Wild Goose Pagoda. He died on March 8, 664. He was 65. The Emperor was heartbroken and said, 'Xuanzang was the boat ferrying the faithful over the sea of suffering. The sea is so vast, and now the boat is sunk.'

The Big Wild Goose Pagoda is in present-day Xi'an and we visited there on our second day in China. Out in front, there's a huge bronze statue of him, setting out on his epic journey. A vast new hall inside the temple grounds has recently been opened, showing in exquisite bronze bas relief murals, the hair-raising adventures he had on his journey. The Chinese are so proud of this monk and they have never stopped loving him. His journeys formed the basis for Monkey, which some of you may remember from television in the 70's. Luckily Hui Li, one of his translating monks, wrote down Xuangzang's stories of his journey, which was also translated by Samuel Beal. One can climb up inside the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, and at every one of the nine levels is a little shop selling memorabilia. Here I bought a rubbing of Xuanzang setting out on his journey.

Although I had dedicated our journey to China as a pilgrimage, to walk the way in equanimity and to pay respects to the Dharma ancestors, it was difficult to be equanimous here knowing that during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards stormed the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, ripped down the silk banners, toppled the Buddha figures, and took all the sutras and Xuangzang's translations out of the pagoda. "Smash the old world, build a brand-new one!' they shouted. Then they set fire to the precious priceless archive of Xuangzang's original translations. The fire burnt all through the night. All the monks were forced to leave the temple - the abbot was reduced to selling coal in a little cart - but one monk named Pu Ci refused to leave. At 'struggle meetings' he refused to say a word. Though he was beaten by the Red Guards, he stayed put. This is k'shanti - endurance, Xuanzang's endurance. The spirit of these Dharma ancestors is alive here.

These days, the temple is supported by the government; the temple fields have shrunk to almost nothing, even since Sun Shuyun visited there in the late 90's. The pagoda and the many halls are hemmed in by high-rise apartments. But Xuanzang is striding out on his mission. On his pilgrimage. I bow in gratitude.

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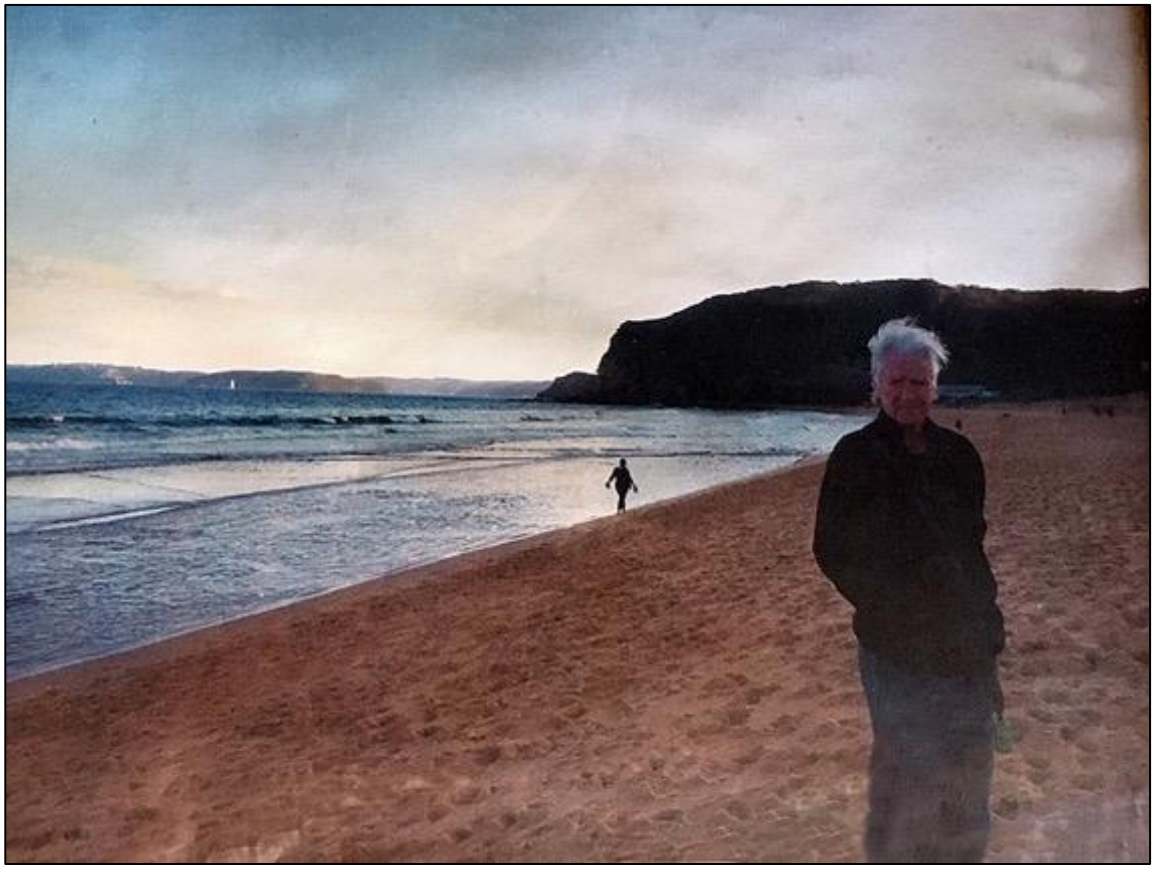
We also travelled to Wu Tai Shan, one of the sacred Buddhist mountains of China and the reputed home of Manjusri. The place is described by the Chinese as 'The Buddhism Holy Land', and is full of Chinese visitors and shops selling enormous Kwan-yins, Buddhas and all manner of other accoutrements. Very little English is spoken or understood up here. There is a Manjusri Temple, and we climbed one of the mountains to find it; on the way, wondering how much further we had to go, and always optimistic about finding someone who'd understand simple English, I asked a man, 'Where is Manjusri's Temple?'

He didn't hesitate. 'Now!' he said. It was perhaps his only English word and one I am more than happy to share with you. 'Now!' That is the true pilgrimage, not to exotic or remote countries, but to this very moment, where everything is just as it is, and nothing is missing. Now!



Chop Wood, Carry Water

Patrick Forman

Many years ago, perhaps thirty or more, I ran a one-week camp for teenagers at Olly's and my bush home. I was part of a community group, Backtracks, which ran outdoor activities for challenged youths. My initiative was not part of the regular program but offered a different holiday experience, including mud-brick making and laying, plant propagation, bread-making, bush walking and abseiling, with the finale being a canoe trip down the Lachlan river.

Mostly, things went well - until we hit town in the vehicle towing the canoes. I stopped for fuel, the chance for the kids to race into the servo shop and feed their deprivation of sugar and other antidotes after over-consumption of an organic fibre rich diet. My mind tumbled into gloom and anger. How could they! A week of clean healthy living, junked in a heartbeat.

On arrival at the canoe launching place, the scene in the water soon replicated my inner turmoil - floundering kids and upturned canoes in the rush of water. Eventually, all were rescued and the remaining trip was uneventful and a happy conclusion for the kids

But, not for me. I knew instinctively that my reaction was wrong; the kids were not the problem. I decided to start doing some yoga and try meditation. I knew a bit about yoga but nothing about meditation and that led me eventually to Zen and a meeting with Tony Coote.

My first toe in the water, literally, was an Easter retreat, sans teacher, at Gorrick's Run. (Note: although present at the birth of Kodoji, curmudgeonly, I will stick with Gorrick's). My chauffeur for the trip from Springwood was Diana Levy in her trusty and rusty VW. We arrived at the MacDonald River crossing in flood, balanced our backpacks on our heads and carefully waded through chest-high water and crossed the river.

As far as my introduction to Zen went, by day two I was bitterly hostile to chanting, feeding hungry ghosts and zazen in particular. I had tried, but no, Zen was not for me. But I did like the buildings and the surrounding cliffs and bush. On the walk out, I fell into conversation with Tony and found we had some connections through architecture and rugby. Somewhat to my surprise, neither Tony, nor Diana, nor Kerry Stewart took umbrage at my avowed antipathy to Zen, which was some balm to my aggrieved heart.

Just as many women bear more than one child after suffering wrenching pain, my piddling discomfort with zazen gained perspective. My reading had led me to think that a teacher was a desirable guide to meditation, so I signed up for a seven-day retreat with a teacher present.

Same result, same pain, never again. Same consequence, signed up again. And again. But relationships began and work retreats (samu) were enjoined and enjoyed.

I'm writing this particularly about Tony, but there have been any others who have held my hand through my journey. My affinity with Tony was particularly because he was an architect and a builder. His work appeared to me stripped of ego and yet replete with great skill.

One early 5 am at Gorrick's involved the moving of the long drop dunnies. Tony was our supervisor, and this task a long way from architecture, but it showed me other dimensions to his character. Management, humour and compassion. As years rolled by, the gestation of a new dojo inspired the architect's imagination and conversations progressed between Tony and the Board. Whispers about this were my clarion call for an opportunity to work alongside him.

Materials started arriving. They had to be moved, stacked, yet accessible and protected from the weather and insects. In its turn, construction began. Saws, hammers, tape measures and levels. All body-work, no powered tools at this early stage. Weekend by weekend, longer shifts in holiday periods. Gradually the building rose from stumps, bearers and wall studs, with large trusses spanning the width and ultimately supporting the clerestory glass structure at the apex and the roof rafters and purlins. One memorable Saturday night, Tony suggested we pay a visit to the St Albans pub. The Wallabies were playing the All Blacks and a few of us rugby diehards followed our leader.

From memory, the flooring was completed by professionals, as was the roof sheeting. Our work continued patiently, completing the complicated joinery of the surrounding verandah.

By the time the bridge construction began joining old and new dojos, an epoch-making decision had been made and a powered engine was purchased, a petrol generator, capable of carrying electricity to numerous powered tools, saws, drills, routers and nail guns. This was a decision not easily made. Many members expressed concern. The valley now echoed with sounds never heard before and perhaps there are lyrebirds in the valley whose repertoire now mimics these songs. Likewise, later when Tony opted for solar lighting in the new dojo, some lamented losing the softer luminescence and evocative odour of a previous generation, courtesy of the kerosene lamps. During the long building process, a common call from Tony to the tribe of helpers was, "We'll just have a hiatus for a moment." Time to think, measure twice, cut once, a respite enjoyed by all. Of course, once the new dojo was completed, many smaller tasks were taken on, including commissioning a new teachers 'room on the verandah and a small job which became special for me, the design and installation of a new chip heater. Tony, as was his nature, looked deeply into the issue. The original chip heaters, made of mild steel,

had a habit of self-destruction after two or three years of service. I happened to be there when he arrived with CHI mark 1 (Chip Heater Indestructible), manufactured from bright shiny stainless steel. Tony connected the device to the appropriate water ins and outs, plus the smoke flue to the chimney. As a frequent hot water wallah at sesshin, Tony honoured me with the job of igniting the first sticks and feeding the fire. After a little while, the characteristic of this device is the "whoof whoof" sound of the flue, which brought smiles to our faces, increasing to full-on face-cracking grins as the hot water gushed steadily into its waiting bucket.

Two other special memories come from one of my last attendances at sesshin. The first appeared in the first morning break. A young teenage boy stood at the fringe of things, disconsolately bouncing a rugby ball. The lad's parents were attendees, but Tony immediately sensed the discomfort the boy might have been feeling. He approached him and engaged him in conversation. In a short while, they were exchanging long kicks with each other; during future breaks, other volunteers offered to step in and make his time at Gorrick's pleasurable.

Later in that same sesshin, during the afternoon sitting, Tony came up behind me and whispered in my ear, "Come with me." We went straight to the tool shed and took two shovels. As we walked away from the dojo I saw smoke coming from somewhere up a steep hill. As we ascended higher, the smoke became more obvious and the threat more ominous. On reaching the spot, a hollow log glowing red with embers was being fanned by the prevailing wind. We set to work with our shovels, piling dirt into the log and eventually completely submerging it in a blanket of soil.

As I said, a 'chop wood, carry water' kind of bloke.

Opening up by the Creek

Janet Selby

On a lunchtime break during Spring sesshin, I revisited the creek bank that we had walked during outside kinhin. The showers from that morning created a fresh healthy smell of bush released by brushing against the shrubs.

Recent flooding had laid down a bed of sand on the gently sloping banks. The flood height was apparent by tufts of dried debris about waste height, clinging to the tips of branches, like weird, dried flowers that had been carefully added to each thin branch.

I walked along mindfully until I reached a bend in the creek where a stand of large white Sydney Blue gums (*Eucalyptus saligna)* stood as a proud family group, refreshed by the morning shower, basking in the brief sunshine, sparkling. The blue rain clouds receding behind their strong white trunks.

Here I stopped and found a patch of meadow grass, beckoning me to lie down, sloping to the running stream. I lay there without getting wet as the sand had filtered the rain from the patch of soft *Microalena* grass. Above me, the canopy reached overhead like a cathedral's embrace.

With no thought of time, or no-thought at all, I breathed the air, connected to the earth, opened my palms upwards and vowed to accept whatever lesson I needed. I was open to whatever it was that I needed to learn at that moment.

One big wet drop from high above smacked me on my face — a precursor to my lesson.

Wake up, be alert.

I lay there for about twenty minutes with bent knees so I wouldn't slip down the bank.

Then I heard the close-by sound of birds. In stereo, one friar bird way up there, then repeated over here behind me.

The "ch-ch-ch" of the satin bower bird up high, then repeated over here behind the same bushes.

A lyrebird!

I got up and crept closer to locate the individual. I couldn't see it, but the entertaining sounds were a constant litany of locals. Black cockatoo; currawong; friar bird; crimson rosella; whip bird; even a single frog going, "chirp … chirp … chirp … chirp … chirp …"

I listened enthralled until I knew my lesson was over after the voice stopped and a rustling indicated the master had moved deeper into the bushes.

This was my healing paradise-moment, too big to paint as I had done on other occasions. This one committed not to paper but to my heat-mind.

Waterfall, watercolour by Janet Selby

Practicing in Just Such Times

Cat Tanaka

It was in 2017 that I attended the Seven Sisters Symposium in Canberra. After days of being immersed in indigenous understandings I came back to the Blue Mountains, feeling I was carrying something very disturbing and heavy, deep down inside.

Being back in the mountains where I had space to release that which was in me, I found myself facing profoundly disturbing fears and inner visions that haunted me. I could not make any sort of clear meaning. I knew deep within myself that something was coming and it was big. I needed to move.

I responded as strongly as I could to what was in me. It was a blind, fumbling, stumbling, thrashing kind of response to something huge building in and around me. I came to call this movement that arose, 'the imperative'. From 2017 until now it lives in me and leads me forward.

At that time, it felt like I was being prepared for, and guided toward a much deeper need for spiritual practice in my life, as well as being psychologically and even energetically prepared for something completely new. The journey was as blind as it gets, but 'the imperative' had the reins, and I was tethered to it.

Then the worst bushfire season we've ever seen hit us and we were surrounded by fire on all sides. I struggled to make sense of the deeper meaning because that was the only place I could find peace. I was struggling to find that place of 'let it be'. In my struggle, I remembered what a friend and aboriginal elder told me. He said that when he sees fire, he sees Spirit. And that the coming of fire was the coming of Spirit. So, I took water and gum leaves, and I blessed every corner of my land and I prayed. I prepared it and myself for Spirit and I let it be.

We were evacuated and the fire came within four doors of our house, but thankfully we were safe, our neighbours were safe, and our homes were safe.

We had just drawn breath when Covid hit us and the changes and challenges that it brought with it began. It seemed like another type of fire was racing through everyone and that was the fire of fear. It was as if the human race had collectively decided to face its biggest fears all together and we were struggling deeply. The fear of sickness and death, the fear of extinction and annihilation, the fear of loss of structure and stability and security, the fear of isolation, the fear of disconnection and my own particular big one - the fear of being controlled, all rolled over and though us like waves.

My mediation practice was deeply disturbed, and the usual fifteen minutes it used to take me to let go of the noisy discursive mind turned into fifty. I realised I needed to sit for one-hour blocks now, in order to release all that was rising in me. And I realised that only grounding myself in the Dharma and the practice would answer the insistent, persistent and pervasive demands of 'the imperative'.

So, I sat and sat and sat. And I sat some more. I sat in terrible storms inside and outside myself. And I sat until I could let go of the fears, let go of the narrative in and around me, let go of the tensions in my body - until the waters of my mind calmed in me.

And in the stillness that finally arose I saw that 'the imperative' had the reins. It drew me into deep compassion for myself and others. It called me into deeper learning and work in natural healing that now was to be deeply rooted in sprit. It called me to unconditional trust.

Not long after that, while walking down the road one day, in a naturally arising mindful moment that came to me with the calming quiet of the bush nearby, I could see that I was always practicing in a context, and that Covid was just another context. And that I would always practice in a context, some easy, some hard, but always in a context. And that practice was the core, and practice was the constant.

This insight allowed me to accept the context I was in more deeply and so be more present. I was learning again, but more profoundly, how acceptance is always the core of presence and mindfulness. One hair's breadth of resistance or clinging and I was off the path again. Acceptance and presence were two sides of the same coin.

I was still tethered to 'the imperative', but in acceptance the tether went slack and there was no other place to be, no other way to be.

The 'imperative', perhaps what Dogen would call 'the arousing of the awakening mind', is stalking me, leading me. The words of a wise Catholic Priest come to me, "Cath, you have to stalk your spirit!".

It is not only the Spirit that I am seeking, but the Spirit is stalking me; its shadow behind me, it's hot breath on my neck. Until I go beyond the fear. Until I can fully accept all of it. Until nothing is excluded. Spirit is so fearlessly and relentlessly relational.

Dogen says: "In the great Way of the buddhas and ancestors, there is always unsurpassable continuous practice which is the Way. Like a circle without interruption. Between the arousing of the awakening mind, practice, awakening, and nirvana, there is not the slightest break. Continuous practice is the circle of the Way."

So, I take refuge in the Dharma. The imperative arises, I practice, and sometimes the Dharma opens perfectly. I am in the flow and the circle of the unsurpassable continuous Way. It is emergent, freshly born, unnamed and unknowable. It is always there to be met with full open acceptance, awareness and vibrancy in every moment. And as I long for it, search for it, return to it, I am part of it. When I practice, I am part of it. And when the Dharma opens, I am part of it.

And so the practice continues. Sometimes the work is seismic and the words of Claude Anshin Thomas come to me - be careful, we're not sitting on a cushion, we're sitting on a bomb. It will and can change everything. Absolutely everything.

But it is in this living of it that I come to know the path. And in this way, form is never othered by emptiness, and emptiness is never othered by form.

And this endless relationship that opens to oneness, this turning, returning, this struggling and getting lost and turning again, this taking refuge and this very tethered spirit; all this is the path.

Erasing Pre-History

Diana Levy

Over the last few years when La Nina has been belting down her buckets onto the land, the road beside the Hawkesbury River /Dyarubbin below Portland has been trammelled. Those of us who drove to Kodoji via this shortcut were directed up a detour which goes along a fire trail on Wheelbarrow Ridge. On our way to samu with Will, Sue and Lily, we stopped at a rock platform for lunch. It sits high above a valley and looks to the south. They showed me the engravings on it, and the axe-grinding grooves. After pondering their meaning, we went on our merry way.

This spring sesshin, I was again travelling with Will, sensei, archaeologist. We stopped at the engraving site, demolished our lunches and then wandered the rock again. I refreshed my memory of the axe grooves. They are beside a pool where rushes grow and invisible frogs become silent. Then we looked again at a large two-legged being with something else inside of it. Will pointed out the lines on the body or the arms.

Hair belts? I asked. My understanding is that these represent a stage of learning of traditional sacred knowledge. This being has widespread legs with ...toes on the end? The arms have ... fingers? We were deciphering the faint lines when a four-wheel drive pulled up. An old man with a long white ponytail and a girl hopped out. She was in that budding stage. They approached, we greeted them, and we all stood looking down at the engraving.

One time, a guy tried to concrete over this rock, he said. But it had been saved by powerful jets of water from RFS hoses.

Why did he do that? I asked.

I don't know what was going on in his head, he replied.

Will's been visiting Wheelbarrow Ridge for the last 16 or 17 years, and has found other sites nearby. He told me that he'd read, *in the Bucketty book*, that it's thought that this was the last place where the Darkinjung had had a corroboree. He had found a cave with handprints in it.

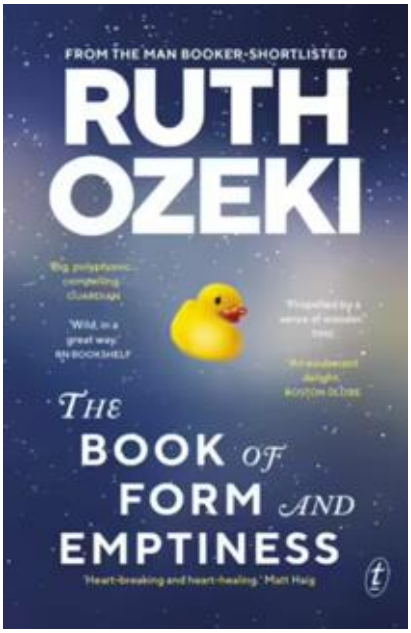
On our way back we visited the being again. This time I noticed that there is a heart-shaped pool of water between the legs. It is vaguely the shape of a map of Australia. *A birthing?* What is clear, is that I don't know. Recently I attended a talk by Darug descendants Jasmine Seymour, Leanne Mulgo Watson and the historian Grace Karskens ("*People of the River*"). They gave instances of these erasures in Darug country. Loss is something they know a lot about. But the grandfather wanted his granddaughter to experience the mystery of what had been saved.

Clouds at Gorricks, watercolour by Janet Selby

Do you want to read this book?

Caroline Josephs

By Ruth Ozeki, *The Book of Form and Emptiness,*
Canongate Books, UK, 2021.



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Ruth Ozeki intrigued me when I heard her being interviewed on radio sometime this year. Ozeki was born 1956. She grew up in Connecticut, and is the daughter of an American linguist, anthropologist, and scholar, and linguist, Masako Yokoyama.

This, her fifth book, won the Women's Prize for Fiction in June 2022, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.
Ozeki is a professor of English these days,and has been a film-maker.

She is also a Zen Roshi.

The last word from Tony…

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