

# A VOID DANCE



M51: companion galaxies in Canes Venatici

## Mind Moon Circle

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## Summer 2005 Contents

This issue explores the theme of avoidance.

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The autumn issue will look at the possibility that engaged Buddhism is a tautology.

Essays, reflections and poems are welcome.

Deadline February 24

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## avoidance

**avoid, v.t.** 1. to keep away from; keep clear of; shun; evade: *to avoid a person or a danger*. 2. *Law*. to make void or of no effect; invalidate. 3. *Obs.* to empty, eject or expel. [ME *avoid(e)(n)*, from AF *avoider*, var. of OF *evuidier* empty out; from es- EX-1 + *uidier* (from L. *viduare*) empty. See VOID, adj]

**void, adj.** 1. *Law*. without legal force or effect; not legally binding or enforceable. 2. useless, ineffectual, vain. 3. completely empty, devoid, destitute (fol. by of) 4. without contents. 5. without incumbents, as an office. *n-* 6. an empty space, the void of heaven. 7. a place without the usual or desired occupant: *his death left a void among us*. 8. a gap or an opening, as in a wall. 9. emptiness, vacancy. [ME, from OF *voide*, from LL *vocitus*, from *vocuus*, replacing L *vacuus* empty]

**a void dance, -v + ing** 1. being 2. burning 3. sunning 4. scorching 5. lighting 6. warming 7. cliffs cliffing 2. rivers rivering. 3. sky falling rain 4. moons 5. suns



# BLUE CLIFF RECORD

## CASE 24

### Iron Grindstone Liu

Robert Aitken, Roshi

#### *The Story*

Iron Grindstone Liu came to see Kuei-shan. Kuei-shan said: “Well, you old cow, so you’ve come.”

The Grindstone said: “Tomorrow there’s a great communal feast at Mount T’ai. Will Your Reverence be going?”

Kuei-shan relaxed his body and lay down sprawling. The Grindstone immediately left.

#### *Personae*

Iron Grindstone Liu was Liu T’ie-mo (Ryo Tetsuma), and early ninth century nun, and an heir of her protagonist in this case, Kuei-shan Ling-yu (Isan Reiyu), 771-853, co-founder of the Kuei-yang (Igyo) scholl in the Nan-yueh line. These masters flourished contemporaneously with Yun-yen and his heir Tung-shan, and Huang-Po and his heir Lin-chi.

#### *Comment*

With this case we should stand up and cheer. This is the only case in our koan study in which a woman appears by name. A number of women do appear, of course, but they are anonymous and tend to serve as foils, triumphant foils to be sure in a couple of cases, like the nameless tea lady who gave Te-shan his comeuppance when she asked him which mind he wished to refresh (GB-28)<sup>1</sup>. Foils nonetheless, no matter how enlightened, and only the Grindstone broke through the glass ceiling of the old hierarchies for a chair in Ch’an mastery.

Liu was the family surname of Liu T’ie-mo. She may have had a second Dharma name, but it is not recorded. T’ie-mo is “Iron Brush”, or “Iron Grindstone”. We get a sense of her quality by her name. A gritty lady, it seems. Yuan-wu comments, “The Iron Grindstone Liu was like a spark struck from stone, like a lightning flash. Hesitate and you loose your body and your life”.

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<sup>1</sup> See end note



She had practised with Kuei-shan for many years, and after receiving transmission from him, she built a little hut near his monastery and came to visit him from time to time, as on this occasion. Kuei-shan's monastery evolved from the hut which he himself had built after kicking over a water bottle before his master, the great Pai-chang, as recorded in Case 40 of *The Gateless Barrier*.

"Well, you old cow, so you have come!" Bovines were honoured in Chinese society, and Kuei-shan's greeting was affectionate and jocular. He himself found accord with the water buffalo as related in a story repeated by Yuan-wu, and it seems that he was deeply in accord with his long-time student as well. "After I die," he said,

"I'll go down the mountain, and become a buffalo at the house of one of our monastery supporters. On my left flank will be inscribed the graphs, Kuei-shan Monk Ling-yu. At that time you could call me the monk of Kuei-shan, but I'll also be a water buffalo. When you call me a water buffalo, I'll also be the monk of Kuei-Shan. What would be my correct name?"

How do you meet Kuei-shan's challenge? The water buffalo is a gelded bull, and has had an esteemed place in Chinese households, and not only Chinese. In many East, South, and Southeast Asian farming communities to this day, the buffalo actually lives with the family on the ground floor while the family lives upstairs, up on stilts. It is famous for its placid disposition, its fondness for children, and its hard work in the rice paddies drawing the plough. Its manure enriches the rice crops. Its gentleness, power, fecundity made it a Bodhisattva symbol, earning it a place on the altar of many Zen temples, including our own here in Kaimu, and the altar of the Sanun Zendo in Kamakura. The cow too is honoured for her patience and her fertility, loved in Asia and as she is in our own culture as well. Stevenson reminds us:

The friendly cow all red and white,  
I love with all my heart,  
She gives me milk with all her might,  
To eat with apple tart.

She wanders lowing here and here,  
And yet she cannot stray,

All in the pleasant open air,  
The pleasant light of day.

And blown by all the winds that pass  
And wet with all the showers,  
She walks among the meadow grass  
And eats the meadow flowers.

“Dear old cow,” Kuei-shan exclaims, “So you have come!” This might sound like an opening in an ordinary conversation, and indeed it is ordinary for these old pals in the Dharma.

Kuei-shan and his Dharma heir Yang-shan (Kyozan) are revered as co-founders of the Kuei-yang, or Igyo school, the first of the five streams of the T’ang period Ch’an to be separately identified. It is a school renowned particularly for the equality among people in dialogue. The giving and taking is very harmonious and commonly will end with one of them saying, “Oh, that’s good!” – a marked contrast with the style of Lin-chi dialogues, with their strong language and occasional beatings. Here is an example from the *Dentoroku*:

When Kuei-shan was in bed, Yang-shan came into his room to speak with him, but Kuei-shan turned his face to the wall.

Yang-shan said, “How can you do this?”

Kuei-shan said, “I just had a dream. Will you interpret it for me?” Yang-shan brought him a basin of water for Kuei-shan to wash his face.

A little later, Hsiang-yen appeared. Kuei-shan said, “I just had a dream, and Yang-shan interpreted it for me. Now it’s your turn”. Hsiang-yen brought him a cup of tea.

Kuei-shan said, “The insight of both of you excels that of Shariputra.

Shariputra is revered as an enlightened disciple of the Buddha himself, the interlocutor in the Heart Sutra. Of course, harmonious dialogues arise from years of patient practice, and endless trials. Kuei-shan himself sat virtually alone on Mt. Kuei for eight years after the water bottle episode, before people at the foot of the mountain assembled and agreed to build him a monastery. Monkeys were his only companions, and chestnuts his only food. Once, he said, he gave up, and began his way down the mountain, only to be met by a tiger. “Hmm,” he reflected, “This tiger is telling me something.” So he turned to his hut and resumed his patient practice.

Patience, the Kashanti Paramita, is itself a way of all Buddhas. Kuei-shan’s mellow dialogues voiced a profoundly good-natured spirit and its ground of clear understanding. In his *Admonitions*, he advised Zen students to shave their heads, find a good teacher, strive inwardly to cultivate realisation, and outwardly to spread the virtue of non-contention.

If you wish to study the Way by intensive zazen, and suddenly leap beyond expedient teachings, let your mind merge with the hidden harbour, and investigate thoroughly its subtleties, determine its most profound depths, and realise its real source. Ask everywhere of those who already know; associate with good companions. It is difficult to attain the wonder of this fundamental source; it is necessary to exercise scrupulous attention.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the teacher that brought the Iron Grinder Liu to her high polish and rugged power. Without returning Kuei-shan's greeting in kind, she launches into a challenge. "Tomorrow there's a great communal feast at Mt. T'ai. Will your Reverence be going?" Mt. Kuei is more than 600 miles from Mt. T'ai. What does the old lady have in mind? Yuan-Wu comments:

The old lady understands Kuei-shan's kind of discourse: fibre coming, thread going, one letting go, the other gathering in; they answer back to each other like two mirrors reflecting each other, without any reflected image to be seen. Action to action, they compliment each other, phrase to phrase they accord.

"Phrase to phrase they accord." In uninformed realms, Zen dialogues have a reputation of being wild and random, but actually their language is exact and precisely to the point. For this reason it is essential that translations be faithful, and that students memorize them with scrupulous precision, word by word. Realization of the intent of these old worthies simply cannot be done by paraphrase. I confess I feel impatient when a student comes to me with a summary of a koan. For example, the student might say, summarizing Kuei-shan's words, sort of "Oh, hello, you old cow." This is totally and fatally different from Kuei-shan's words and intent. It's vitally important to slow down and stop and look at the words. In the same way, it's important to slow down and look at the words. In the same way it's important to slow down and stop and practice on your cushions. Stop there with "one", stop there with "two", stop there with Mu. Synopsis is miasma, swamp gas. Trees merge with clouds and people wander, irrevocably lost. There is a dragon hidden in Kuei-shan's greeting, and a garuda bird lurking in her response. This is not danger cloaked in style or manner, but in words, fastidiously precise words. Zero in there.

If Mt. T'ai is 600 miles away, then we dismiss the Iron Grinder's question as merely rhetorical? "Tomorrow there's a great communal feast at Mt. T'ai. Will your Reverence be going?" Isn't there usually something behind rhetorical questions anyway? This is an ordinary conversation, but it's between two highly accomplished Zen friends, so for sure there's sand in the rice. What's her point?

Kuei-shan saw through the old ladies intention, and quickened the impro. He relaxed his body and lay down sprawling. How do you see Kuei-shan here? It would be simple to imitate his action, but what do you say as you relax your body and lay down? Your words would show your intimacy with Kuei-shan.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Cleary, Admonitions of Kuei-shan (n.p.: Nanyang Books, n.d.) n.p



The Grindstone immediately left. I am reminded of Zhao-Zhou in dialogue with Lin-chi:

When Zhao-Zhou was travelling around, he came to interview Lin-chi. Lin-chi at the time was washing his feet, Zhao-Zhou asked, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West?”

Lin-chi said, “As it happens, I’m just now washing my feet.”

Zhao-Zhou came close and made as if he were listening.

Lin-chi said, “All right then. I’ll throw out another dipperful of dirty water.” With that, Zhao-Zhou turned and left.<sup>3</sup>

Same point, there at the end. How do you see Zhao-Zhou turning and leaving? How do you see the Grindstone leaving Kuei-shan? Easy enough to turn on your heel, but what do you say?

<sup>3</sup> Burton Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* (Boston: Shambala, 1993), p.69.

### End Notes

As I mentioned last time, I am abbreviating references and placing them in the text, rather than placing them out as endnotes. For example, GB-33 is the *Gateless Barrier*, Case 33; BCR is *The Blue Cliff Record*; BS *The Book of Serenity*; and TL *Transmission of Light*, using Francis Cook’s case enumeration.

# Coming home and how to avoid it

Gillian Coote



There are times in sesshin of fatigue, dejection, doubt, avoidance and distraction, all drawing one's attention away from the subject at hand. Everybody goes through these confusing and difficult times - it's just that in sesshin they're magnified and we can't avoid *what is* as easily as we can at home, when we just get up and turn on the TV or go to the fridge for something to eat or ring a friend for a chat.

Anything can set us off. Anything will. We find ourselves caught in micro-dramas about the person sitting next to us, or the Jisha, or the food - all ways to avoid *this!* - mind and body clamouring to be anywhere but here and a persistent voice deep inside, insistently asking, 'Why on earth did I come here? What is this insane practice? Who are all these weird people?'

It's a wonderful thing when we see this great drama that's going on, as we settle into being *with what is*. How we play all the roles, one after the other. How in one period of zazen, we may feel unusually fatigued, flat, and negative. Our legs or back or knees complain incessantly. And how, in the very next sit, there is peace, and the birds sing in our hearts.



Sesshin is also a time of hope and expectation, mingled with the discomfort of knees and feet. That is all right. That is how it is. That's our condition. Whether we've just begun a meditation practice, or are seasoned sitters, we all face our individual condition as we sit. Moment by moment, we see our minds clouded by sadness, accelerated by desire, slowed down by fatigue. These conditions are not barriers to our practice. In fact, one of the great learnings from zazen is that we're always sitting, always breathing, in one condition or another, and that the practice of coming back to our breath or our koan is not separate from our condition. So through our lives, we will have sad zazen, anticipatory zazen, tired zazen. Our lives cannot be separate from conditions. But what is it that pleads, that hears, that grieves? That avoids?



In an encounter from the olden days in China, the monk Hui'ko pleads with Bodhidharma, 'Please help me, I have come to pacify my mind.' What mind is that monk searching for? The angry mind, the fretful mind, the fearful mind? The peaceful mind? Remember, this monk's been beseeching Bodhidharma for instruction for some days, sitting outside in the snow. Finally he cuts off his hand to show his sincerity and the red-bearded one responds. 'Where is your mind?'



The monk sits for some time, inhabiting this question. Then he says, 'Though I have looked everywhere for it, I cannot find it.' 'There, it is pacified - it is at rest,' says Bodhidharma.

*It is at rest. It has always been at rest. Our practice in sesshin is to stay with this! moment by moment. This one point that is completely empty.*

Dogen Zenji said, 'The seed of buddhas arises from conditions, Buddhadharma arises from the outset. When you encounter good conditions, do not stumble but just practice. Staying here at Kodoji, do not stumble but just wholeheartedly engage the way. Within wholehearted engaging of the way there is both practice and effort. With one morning of thoroughness, ten thousand dharmas become complete'.

We either work with these symptoms of resistance and avoidance by including them or we lose our opportunity to deepen. Most of us have thought about leaving sesshin at some time, have visualised packing up our bags and heading out to our lives again, escaping and avoiding. Then the fatigue and doubt lift of their own accord, and we find ourselves flowing along as the creek, standing still, as the cliffs. Completely formless, shape-shifting, as the clouds. As Basho wrote:



*Sitting silently, doing nothing, spring comes  
and the grass grows by itself,*

Effortless being. Anxiety-free being. The grass grows by itself. Body and mind at home in this moment, perfectly at ease, completely present. Breath by breath coming home to our true self, to our place of realisation - in sesshin at Kodoji surrounded by the wilderness of Yango National Park. After sesshin, in George Street outside Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Many students, coming to the dojo for the first time, say 'I felt I had come home at last'. Essentially, where else is there to be, anyway? Nyogen Sensei often quoted his teacher, Shaku Soen Zenji: 'Zazen is not a difficult task. It is a way to lead you to your long-lost home'. When we lower our eyes and breathe quietly in and out, our distractions disappear and our long-lost home is right there. Suzuki Roshi used to say, 'When you follow your breaths, you are like a swinging door. Nothing comes in, nothing goes out. This is our original dwelling place'.



This very place is the lotus land, this very body the Buddha. This very body, its moans and groans amplified by the absence of the usual distractions. We just sit here, we just walk, and body and mind take centre stage. Right now, is your body and mind at ease? Are you truly at home? Or are you distracting yourself and constantly buffeted by the turmoil of your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations? Avoiding what seems boring and repetitive? Avoiding coming back to *this*.

Bassui said, ‘All of you! If you want to return to your homes, simply wake up to your true nature. This mind-nature is the original source of all Buddhas. It is the names of all the sutras. Sometimes it is referred to as the Unique and Wonderful Dharma, (etc) yet all these names simply point to the One Mind. Though there are 10,000 different names, there are not even two dharma realities. For that reason it is written in a sutra, the teachings in the sutras are fingers pointing to the moon. When you see the moon yourself, you realise there is no moon to point to after all’.



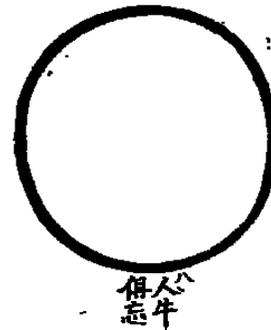
Do we trust the Way will open up for us? That we *will* come home? That *is* the matter at hand. Are we clear about it? Do we know why we are sitting here, walking here? There's a conversation from The Book of Serenity that plays with the notion of home. Yangshan asked a monk, ‘Where are you from? What is your native place?’

The monk said, ‘I am a man from Yushu province’.

Yangshan said, ‘Do you consider the inside of it?’

The monk said, ‘I always do’.

Yangshan said, ‘That which thinks is consciousness. That which is thought about is environment. Within that are mountains, rivers and the great earth, towers, palaces and people, animals and other things; but reflect upon the consciousness that thinks. Are there a lot of things there?’



The monk said, ‘I don't see anything at all there’.

Yangshan said, ‘That is correct so far as degree of belief is concerned, but as for the degree of man, it is not enough’.

The monk said, ‘Your Reverence, do you have some special advice?’

Yangshan said, ‘To say that I have anything particular or not would not be accurate. From now on, introspect on sitting down and wearing clothes.’

In this dialogue, we see how Yangshan probes the monk's understanding. His opening question, ‘Where are you from?’ and the monk's literal response – ‘From Yushu province’ gives Yangshan the opportunity to probe the monk’s sense of subject and object, inside and outside, mind and environment. ‘Do you consider the inside of it?’ he asks, and the monk says, ‘I always do’. In doing so, the monk has accepted a split between inside and outside. Yangshan carefully lays out the territories of the mind and the environment, then asks him to reflect on the consciousness that thinks. ‘Are there a lot of things there?’ When the monk says, ‘I don't see anything at all there’, Yangshan tells him that’s OK as far as the degree of belief is concerned, but implies that the monk has to take another step. The monk then asks for some special advice, and Yangshan invites him to step off that 100 foot pole, to come forth and embody his realisation. ‘From now on, introspect on sitting down and wearing clothes.’



How do *we* embody our realisation? Our Zen practice, as we know, is not confined to

the cushion. Bankei is one of our many dharma ancestors who says one's everyday life should be thought of as meditation, as Zen, not just sitting in front of a stick of incense. Zen is a way of life and a state of mind and being. We take up a lifelong 24/7 practice as lay Buddhists that determines our everyday thoughts and actions - or it's another esoteric hobby.

And zazen is itself enlightenment, as Dogen Kigen Zenji never tired of saying. This means that body and mind have dropped away and they continue to drop away endlessly. The self is forgotten and it continues to be forgotten more and more completely through all time. Residues of self-centred conduct, speech or thought are wiped away. And any residue of that wiping away is then wiped away and so on endlessly - each day more liberated, each day more joyous.



There are difficult days too, painful days when everything goes dark. There are always going to be challenging situations, challenging behaviours. And when we're agonising over how to respond when faced with decisions - what is wrong? What is right? remember that zazen is the foundation of living the precepts. Remind yourself, as the Diamond Sutra says, 'To dwell nowhere and bring forth that mind.' The more we sense the vast backdrop of awareness behind our limited and ever-changing psychological life, the softer, more open and more trusting we become.

In these good conditions at Kodoji, we touch the heart-mind. We receive the heart-mind. We convey the heart-mind. We create unity and enrich other by embodying harmony in our manner and words. As we sit, we reach a place of true quiet. Even with war and great human tragedy, there is something in our heart of hearts that does not move and is always at rest. Even with distractions and doubts, we come home. Li Po, the Tang dynasty poet, says it like this:

*The birds have vanished into the sky, and now the last cloud drains away.  
We sit together, the mountain and me, until only the mountain remains.*

## At Kippen

Hunter's Moon  
commanding  
over the snow  
and the roaring stream  
and the mountainside  
at this inhuman hour  
and over  
the swollen foot  
radiating round  
its shining pain,  
a modest enough  
animal trial  
but large tonight,  
in its fullness of sensation  
unavoidable.

Maggie Gluek

To avoid: to empty, make void,  
evade...

Penny Keable

How might any more emptying be effected if 'tis truth not mere formality: all five skandas are empty, form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form and all things are essentially empty.

Elephant noticing Mouse sitting under a banana frond said, "I hate mice so I'll not eat those bananas". Mouse, sitting under a banana frond said, "I hate elephants so I'll stay here for keeps". Monkey, enjoying a meal of banana garnished with protein says, "How generous are Ele and Mo to prepare for me this tasty delicacy".

# THE BUDDHA'S MEMORY



Larry Agriesti

*Through the unknown, unremembered gate, when the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning  
Not known, because not looked for, but heard, half-heard in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.*

The scientific basis for genetic memory is fairly well established. It is widely accepted, for example, that 'instinctual' behaviour in all living creatures is genetically based and can later be modified by various types of learning. Since instinct is just a form of memory stored in DNA, other forms of memory are thought to exist there as well although these ideas are recent and controversial. Nevertheless, many speak about body memory, primal memory, memory of past lives, or the fuzzy memory that something has happened before.

According to the Genome Project that has mapped the entire genetic structure of the human body, only about 3% of our DNA has been identified as having a direct link to body structure. The remaining 97% of DNA is classified as 'junk'; another way of scientists saying that they don't much understand what this DNA does or why, ignoring the fact that nature simply does not carry this much junk around. Some, however, suggest that Carl Jung's 'collective unconscious' stems from this DNA and helps to explain why there are so many universal 'archetypes' manifested throughout human experience in dreams and in awakening. These are not memories of specifics, but rather a background resonance from all humanity, from all of evolution; a pooled or averaged experience of all that has been.

At roughly the same period of human history as the Buddha, Plato suggested that learning is really a form of remembering eternal ideas. In his Symposium, he recounts a 'myth' of creation when we were as one, but the gods separated us so they could have more control, and our yearning to be whole again is a memory of that wholeness. The process by which we activate this primal or genetic memory of things occurs for Plato through dialogue; a field of conditions; a set of questions can lead a student to 'remember' an axiom of geometry.

In our time, the biologist Rupert Sheldrake extends the idea of Jung's collective unconscious and hypothesizes that it operates not just in the individual person, but also

throughout the entire universe. He calls this type of memory a ‘morphogenetic field’; a structured memory field (similar to a magnetic field) that acts to enable emerging forms and ideas. The more a particular form has been constructed and practiced, the more easily the following forms occur because the universe holds a memory. For example, experiments have been conducted to test this hypothesis by growing new types of chemical crystals. At first, the process of crystallization is slow and difficult, but afterwards and in any laboratory in the world, formation becomes easier and faster.

If all these hypotheses are correct, then we should be able to experience this ancient memory of things. And we could begin by asking the question, “What did the Buddha see and what did he remember when he looked at the morning star?” Certainly he did not awaken to something new but, as he himself said, to something that had always been, something that each of us could awaken to. Put another way, remembering who and what we truly are, have always been and are now in this moment. As for how to remember, he taught the way of sitting meditation. And as for how he acted in the world, he left us the trace of his actions in the world; perhaps a morphic field that he and all the Buddhas have left to guide and support us along our way.

In my own practice, I have not experienced an explicit memory of life’s journey from the stars to now; but I know it occurred and all of this very body of mine is a temporary configuration of matter each particle of which has been singing and dancing since creation began. And in quiet awareness, sometimes, just sometimes, I can hear the sound of silence between two waves of the sea and I am astonished. There is something I recognize, something I remember – or know for the first time, I cannot tell. But it changes me and all that I do. And as I do, this very body, the Buddha, acts in creation.

*“We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”*

T. S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*



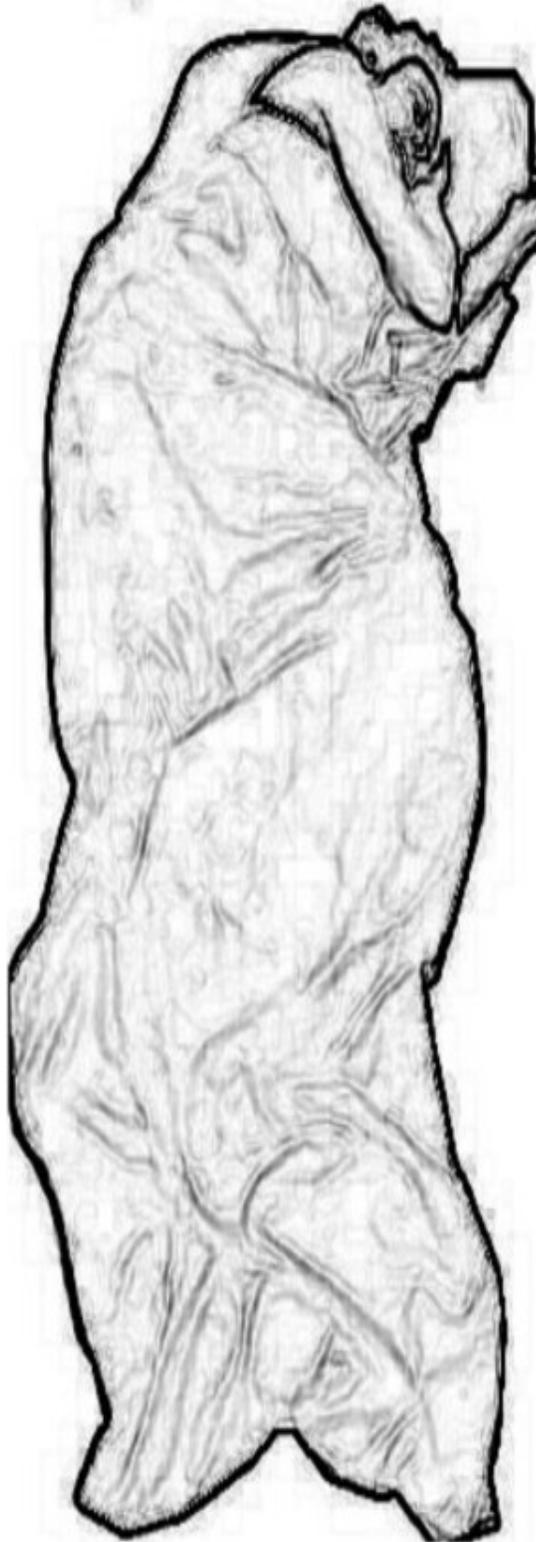
a kangaroo  
bounds silently across the far end of the field  
a penny in motion

Doug Mason

## Ode to a Sleeping Bag

its coziness is entirely  
temporary  
its ancient, space-age  
touch  
the stuffing of  
paradox.  
roll yourself inside it  
like tobacco.  
nestle deep within  
its smell of canvas in  
the rain.

sometimes it is a cloud  
that has swallowed  
you whole  
sometimes a python;  
the natural habitat of  
children,  
a last refuge for those  
at higher altitudes  
than you or i can  
possibly imagine.



somewhere, below  
your feet,  
it still cocoons  
that one night at the  
drive-in,  
a meteor shower in a  
backyard,  
or, after heartbreak,  
your brother's couch.

it never quite keeps  
out  
all the brittle fingers  
of the night  
but still, it softens  
the cold,  
like torchlight.

its synthetic dreams  
of feathers,  
its slinky skin;  
when you wake up  
in the morning  
your boney parts are  
still held close  
your cold pieces  
made whole;  
as long as one finger  
keeps  
the zipper  
closed.

**Tash Sudan**

# Being Upright

*Kim McShane*

This is a reflection on “being upright”, and how ‘being upright’ helps us find our true nature and our interconnectedness with all beings.

Alaniz and Codie are a Texan couple, whom I have come to know tentatively and carefully via email in the past couple of months. Al is the half-brother of one of the prison inmates I write to and have been getting to know, in California. Al and Codie, who are in their early 30s, have a 12 year old son, Rico, and they live in the small community of Little Cypress near Orange, Texas, not far inland from the oil refinery city of Port Arthur, and near the border of Texas and Louisiana. During the night of Friday 23rd and Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September, Hurricane Rita passed directly over their house. Al maintains a website (photos, discussion boards) for family and friends, and I thought I would read you some excerpts from his last posts as Rita approached. (Al says it’s OK to share these messages with you).

Thursday 22.09.05

6:39 am. we are going to take a direct hit. I have no idea where I will be living tomorrow. I am looking around my house wondering what I should take with me as I don't expect this house to be here when I get back. My truck is low on gas and all the stations are empty. We have a full tank in the car but I keep thinking that anything I try to save in the truck may end up on the side of the highway. they just called mandatory evacuation here. I will be packing up the computer next so don't expect a reply to this right away. this is it folks. beats the hell out of an earthquake. at least I had some warning. I love all of you. wish us luck.

alaniz, codie, 'rico, and judy.  
and but the dog, cinco the cat, and the fish, (I don't know the fishes name).

Thursday 22.09.05

8:06 am. we are expecting 150 mph winds at our house. trashing our house to save what we can. 17-25 [ft] storm surges in Orange and Beaumont.  
i'm telling our neighbors "so long it's been good to know you."  
what am I doing on the computer?

al

Saturday 24.09.05; 9.07am

i don't know what y'all have seen about people dying while trying to get out of south east Texas but we are not among them. almost all of us have made it out alive. some people in our caravan ha[d] a daughter refuse to leave and her fate as of now is unknown. [...] the storm path is looking like the eye will pass directly over our house. if this happens even a category 1 could put us on the street. not good to think about. we will survive this storm and that is more important than anything else. [...]

we made it out with our computer hard drives and family pictures and personal documents and the rocking chair i bought for codie just before 'rico was born so she could have something to rock him to sleep on. most importantly we made it out together and alive.

love to all,  
alaniz and family.

An event like a hurricane, a bushfire, an earthquake, a tsunami sends our fragile lives topsy-turvy. In the storm we find ourselves being tossed around, everything shakes and surges and the objects we know and love drop and break. When the tangible “things” are swept away – the house and its furniture, the cars, the clothes, books and CDs - the self that finds meaning, and finds *itself* in those objects, starts to wobble.

Being upright (and being wobbly) is the theme of my talk, and I came to this topic at the Rohatsu sesshin last December. No doubt thoughts of having to give a dharma talk kept rising ...and no doubt my knees and back were hurting. Or perhaps I was aware that after several years of practice they might be getting just a little more flexible and stronger... Some of you know that I have struggled through sitting with numbness, cramps, flat feet and unbending legs that will not even take up the Burmese position. For a long time this was an issue for me. I felt ashamed when I couldn't even get into position to do the floor stretches in Aitken Roshi's book, *Taking the Path of Zen*. I still can't. But I've now realised that I am “normal”, well I am just as I am, and the whole business has been a lesson in how easy it is for me to think myself into dualist positions around inclusion/exclusion. (I can't do it – they can; I am different – they're normal; I'm not doing this properly – they are, etc, etc, etc. – and I, I, I.. ego I ). I'm over it. Or perhaps I'm over 'me'.

Apart from numb legs, the other body awareness that has come from my practice these past few years is sense of 'uprightness'. Until I started sitting, I was not at all aware of my posture – my back was just there, and my spine – well I had never really thought about my spine, except for a painful couple of months when I was writing up a thesis in 1996. In fact, until I started my practice, I think I was pretty much an invertebrate! I had an outer shell that held me together: très cool Melbourne style, with chic Japanese clothes, always well-groomed hair 'just so' to show off my unusual earrings, subtle make-up. Oh vanity....These were my masks and coverings. Suddenly, there I was, in Annandale one Wednesday evening a few years ago, dressed in my work clothes, immobile on a soft blue mat, looking dimly at a white wall. I remember a brief orientation with Tony Coote, who introduced me to the idea of

an imaginary thread running through my spine and out the top of my head – 'Feel it gently pull and lift you to find a good alignment', he said. In those early days the

### Stone Dance



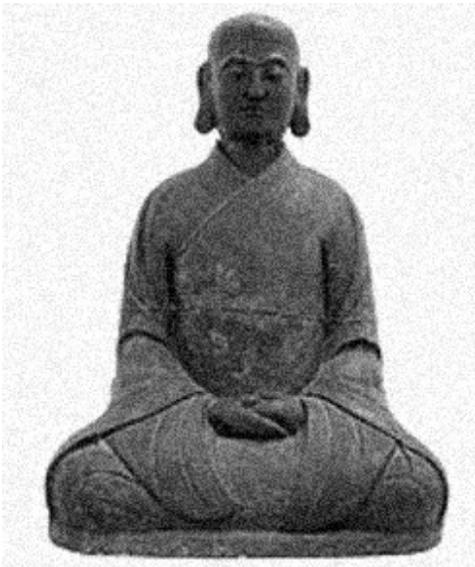
practice of ‘just sitting’ and ‘just breathing’ started to make me aware of my legs, my back, neck, shoulders! My shoulders were rounded from computer work. My bones wouldn’t twist and bend. My knees hurt! My back hurt!

Actually I had this strange “posture” experience in Paris last year when I went along to the “Dojo Zen de Paris” to sit. I found out later that they are a Soto Zen group and good posture is all! I remember starting a 40 minute period of zazen, sitting directly on the tatami with one thin cushion. Alarmingly, one of the practice leaders came by me and, reaching around from behind, he grabbed my chin just so, and pulled my head and neck back to align my ears with my shoulders. He touched my chin! My gosh! - it shocked me! But I remember that touch every time I sit, and my back pain has diminished, possibly as a result of this.

And so through events like this, and by just sitting, I started to discover I had bones! I was a vertebrate – with a spine. Not spineless. My bones and posture became a focus of my attention. In his book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, John Kabat-Zinn writes:

*When we describe the sitting posture, the word that feels the most appropriate is ‘dignity’.*

*When you sit with strong intentionality, the body itself makes a statement of deep conviction and commitment in its carriage. [...] If you can muster the patience to sustain your sitting for even a brief time, it can bring you in touch with*



*bring you in touch with the very core of your being, that domain which is beyond up or down, free or burdened, clear-sighted or confused. This core is akin to awareness itself; it doesn’t fluctuate with mental state or life circumstances.*

*(Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 109)*

The core doesn’t fluctuate. No rigidity (being uptight?) - for rigidity can lead to cracking under pressure. No wobbling and topsy-turviness. Just being upright. A “being upright” – with dignity - that might just help us cope with the tsunamis and hurricanes of life...

I want to take this opportunity to examine the core of our practice: ‘Being upright’. Perhaps it’s time to ‘go inside’.

For more than 12 months I have been writing to 3 inmates in Californian prisons. Tad Rollins – prisoner E13742 – is ‘doing time’ (22 years of ‘time’) for 1<sup>st</sup> degree residential burglary. He is 44 years old, and his release is scheduled for 2011. He writes to me and tells me he is now using his time in prison – at Pleasant Valley State Prison no less! - to look within. Go inside. Tad is a bodhisattva in Rev. Kshanti’s *Temple in the Heart* prison

sangha. He sits with a prison group roughly once a week, and he likes the writings of Pema Chödrön and Lama Surya Das. His dharma name is Passaddhi – Tranquillity – and it truly fits the Tad I know in the letters we have exchanged. He writes rhythmic poems that read like song lyrics and I think should be set to music. He beats himself up about ‘procrastination’, so maybe I should see if I can get him to send something for our next *Mind Moon Circle!*

When I realised almost 12 months ago that I would have to do a dharma talk, I wondered whether I could involve one of the guys ‘on the inside’. Let me read something he wrote for you all in one of his recent letters:

*During meditation watching my breath, thoughts come and go. This is neither good nor bad I've determined. Occasionally, I lose track of my breathing so I return focus to the air entering my nostrils swirling through my lungs and exiting similarly. At times, by moving the location of my focus, different sensations of my breath become apparent. I endeavour to smooth the flow, yet remain conscious of not trying too hard. Thoughts come. Thoughts go. Impermanence? Sometimes I find myself wondering what sort of conditioning is responsible for my constantly arising thought processes. Do I need to know, or just sit? Air-entering. Air-exiting. A familiar sensation occurs. I note the feeling of pleasure. Do I embrace the pleasure or ignore it? "This isn't why I meditate", a thought declares. Am I that thought? Back to the breath. Air comes in. Air goes out. Abdomen gently rises and falls. Rising, falling. Thoughts come and go. I am not my thoughts, I think. Who thinks? Do I need to know or just sit? Not knowing is just fine. Just this. But then thoughts thoughts thoughts. Sometimes it seems as if my mind has a mind of its own. Focus returns to the breath, gratefully. Suddenly a glimpse of the gap occurs. The space between the thoughts is revealed. Truth? Self? No-self? Non-duality? Do I need to know or just sit, just this? Not knowing is just fine, or is it? I don't know. Breathe*

*This is some of what occurs in meditation. Maybe you could relate some of your impressions. I'd appreciate it greatly. I'm not sure if it is exactly applicable, but I thought I'd share. (Extract from Tad's letter, 05.09.05)*

From out of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Master Dogen in the *Shobogenzo* replies to Tad:

*If a human being, even for a single moment, manifests the Buddha's posture in the three forms of conduct (behaviour, speech and mind), while that person sits up straight in samadhi, the entire world of Dharma assumes the Buddha's posture and the whole of space becomes the state of realisation. (Master Dogen, 1231/1998: 4-5)*

*Zazen, even if it is only one human being sitting for one moment, ... enters into mystical co-operation with all dharmas, and completely penetrates all times; and it therefore performs, within the limitless Universe, the eternal work of the Buddha's guiding influence in the past, future and present. For everyone it is*

*completely the same practice and the same experience. (Master Dogen, 1231/1998: 6)*

One human being sitting alone and upright. Alone and all one. So how do we embrace our aloneness – this all-oneness - with the myriad things? Tad is doing it. Alone and upright. All one and upright. Shakyamuni Buddha achieved it one night in December in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. He sat upright all night, meditating upon the suffering of all beings and came to understand that everything is born, lives and dies through the complete support of all other things. Reb Anderson reminds us:

*If you wish to join all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in their great work and play, you may do so simply by being upright in all circumstances and being very kind with yourself and others until we understand who we are. (Anderson, 2001: 79)*

Anderson continues:

*As Franz Kafka writes [in The Blue Octavo Notebooks], 'There is no need for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't even wait, be completely quiet and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it can't do otherwise, in raptures it will writhe before you. (Kafka 1991: 54), in Anderson, 2001: 81)*

I will come back to this notion of the world writhing in a moment. I just want to reflect first of all on how Al and Codie are currently seeing their world unmask itself and writhe before them. They are back at home in East Texas and they are OK, but they face new challenges.

Monday, 26.09.05; 1.19pm

no. . . no one has tried to go home. the entire area has been closed off. the EYE of the storm went over our HOUSE!! there are thousands of trees down. thousands of electric poles snapped off. we hear the smell of natural gas is too strong for people to stand still for very long. 80% of businesses in some parts are DESTROYED. there is no power, gas, water, and all the food that was left in peoples refrigerators started to rot yesterday.

we contacted a friend who stayed and he says ALL streets a impassable due to the downed trees. the front of our house is intact, we are still waiting on news of the back where all the big trees were. even if we could get to our house and the back wall has not been smashed in, there is no power or gas or. . .

I am going back as soon as I know I can get in. it may be months until there is power. friends all around us have lost EVERYTHING. we need to do all we can to help and maybe try to get our lives back.

if you want to send \$\$, send it to the local churches. [...]

al

Verse # 15 of the Tao Te Ching speaks to Al and Codie in Little Cypress, Texas. It speaks to Tad in his cell in Pleasant Valley State Prison in California. It speaks to all of us.

*Who can wait quietly while the mud settles?  
Who can remain still until the moment of action?  
Observers of the Tao do not seek fulfilment.  
Not seeking fulfilment they are not swayed by the desire for change.*

I've done a bit of Kafkaesque writhing myself since coming to zazen in 2001. Not always rapturous. I say jokingly that 2004 was my 'Year of the Spine', for it was last year that I really became aware of the postural demands of my academic work, and my PhD writing. I started to see a chiropractor, and I started yoga! Most mornings I click and pop and stretch my tight bones and limbs and mind into peace and action, remembering their advice and words, and now I enjoy my limits. There is a pleasure in just...h.o.l.d.i.n.g and breathing into the stretch and pull. I might just loosen up a little and become more flexible.

By practising "being upright" in zazen, we practice "being upright" in our interconnectedness with others. As Tad observes, in between the in-breath and the out-breath there is nothing. Just a motionless intimacy with all things. By practising being upright in my spiritual life, I am finding that I am less likely to wobble and sway in my personal and working life. (Well it's all one and the same really, all those lives I construct). By sitting upright on this cushion, on these stiff bones and joints, I am starting to see that now. Being upright with dignity, we can achieve intimacy with all things.

So, let's be upright.

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# Avoidance

Sally Hopkins

I find it difficult to write about Avoidance because for me it involves so much that is unconscious. I do knowingly avoid some things but, like blindness, if you cannot see, you don't know what you are not seeing. "Not seeing" is allied to ignorance, but rather than wilful, it is often an unconsciously willed ignorance. Consciousness is narrowed to the familiar limits, seeing what I expect to see, hearing what I expect to hear. Some part of the brain neatly cuts out all the rest without benefit of a conscious say so. No rude shocks. Asleep perhaps?

But there are a few clues. Sometimes when sitting there's a fleeting something, hard to catch, in the corner of the eye. Sometimes the eyes themselves signal. Generations of observation went into expressions like "not being able to look someone in the eye- in the face". When I find my eyes lowering, when it seems impossible to lift them and look straight out, it is a good signal that something is being skirted around. What don't I want to see? What don't I want to communicate?

Sometimes I do know. I do try to avoid conflict, for it always seems as if cats let out of bags are not easily returned. Sometimes it can be the cowardice of a small self protecting itself, having forgotten its true nature.

Then there is a positive avoidance. Being open to all that is here can be overwhelming and then I have to be aware of my own distress and avoid looking too hard and long at what is distressful when I have no way of doing anything about it. So I consciously avoid visual images of disasters, don't watch TV, read few papers and rely on the radio for news. Hearing is somehow more easily assimilated, despite the fact that sounds can unhinge me. I consciously do what I can and then drop it. I've noticed that dwelling on distressful situations can become a whole drama of the self. Imagining how it is for someone else is just that, imagining. How does one know how it is for someone else? There can be open looking, listening, including. But knowing?

I am endeavouring to practice openness to all around on the bus, the street, everywhere. I've noticed that if someone gets on the bus who is very disabled, disfigured, mentally unstable everyone tends to act as if they are not there. Politeness perhaps? Shock? We see "disabled", "disfigured", not Person.

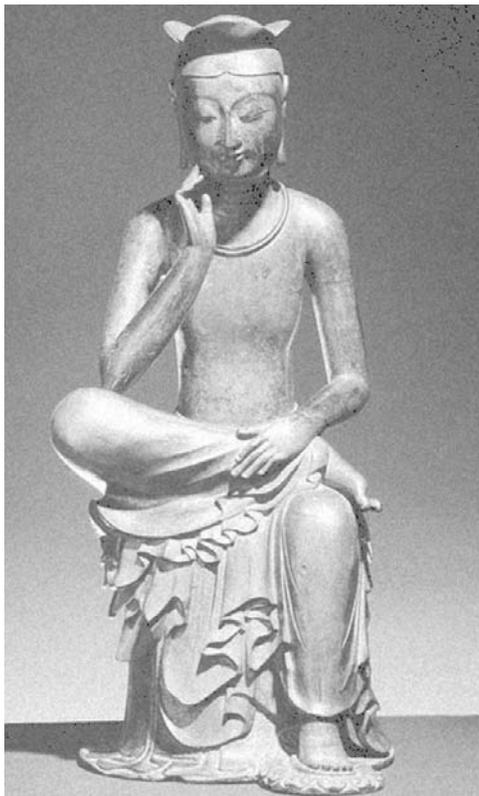
Recently I was in Macquarie Street with all the wigged barristers and self-assured well dressed people passing. A young Indian with tiny pack and thin doona, only slightly grubby, was asleep in the bus shelter. What he gave off was total despair. When I passed several hours later he was still there, and everyone passing without a glance. Sellers of The Big Issue would recognise the phenomenon. Is the problem too big for us to want to know?

My efforts to not avoid knowing what we have been doing to Asylum Seekers have led to a great deal of distress and sadness and not knowing. But they have also led to wonderful

contacts with people very different from myself who have come from horrendous situations, and yet remain positive, thoughtful, generous, alive. Contacts with people in detention and gaol have put the life I have led in a very different context. Very humbling. I am grateful.

The same is true of my long acquaintance with old age and death. I have been forced to be open to such things, and life is immensely enriched by that non-avoidance. It helps in seeing everything just as it is. I always thought of nursing homes as “pre-death morgues” as someone described them. No, no, have nothing to do with them. But I have been forced to become familiar and of course, like anywhere, they are full of everything. My mother-in-law is in a nursing home one-legged and helpless, and she seems more content and grateful than I have ever known her. Of course there is suffering. Where is there not? But there is also kindness and intimacy and pleasure in small things - life itself. The *Shodoka* says, “Don’t belittle the sky by looking through a pipe”.

It also says “Right here it is eternally full and serene. If you search elsewhere, you cannot see it.” So Here, in its uncensored fullness, is IT.



**Dance at the cliff-edge  
of life and death**

## Advice Column

With a good selection of thoughts  
cycled and re-cycled  
round and round  
day night day  
the whole messy business  
can be avoided.  
No shocks. No surprises.  
Everything known.

But beware  
take care  
rogue thoughts  
like "What's the meaning?"  
may break in.  
In extreme cases  
you may find your cheeks wet  
with your own unexplained tears.

Sally Hopkins

## Avoiding self, Finding Self

Justine Mayer

*Yun-men said, "See how vast and wide the world is! Why do you put on your seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?"*

In the commentary to this case (16) in the Gateless Barrier, Robert Aitken quotes Yamada Roshi saying "But why? Ah this why! It is a wonderful talisman that brings the Zen student to enlightenment." He asks 'Why do you go to work at the sound of your alarm clock?' Why do we rise to do Zazen at the sound of the alarm clock?

Facilitating the small Zen group in Darwin, many people tell me that they would like to start a regular meditation practice, but it is just that they feel they have so many things that they must do first. We all recognise this feeling. We have so many things that we have to do, in order to avoid ourselves. To avoid what Ezra Bayda describes as 'the anxious quiver of being'.

When I sat with a Tibetan group it was their practice to begin meditation by contemplating the preciousness of our human existence and our chance to practice meditation, whilst others might not have such an opportunity. Other contemplations to inspire our practice included the inevitability of karma and suffering and as in our Zen sesshin evening ceremony; we would contemplate the one absolutely unavoidable thing in life: our own impermanence and death. Described in the eighth century by Han Shan:

*I stand here and watch the people of this world:  
All against one and one against all,  
Angry, arguing, plotting and scheming.  
Then one day, suddenly, they die.  
And each gets one plot of ground:  
Four feet wide and six feet long.  
If you can scheme your way out of that plot,  
I'll set the stone that immortalizes your name.*

Like many others, I find death a major motivator in life and it was this that aroused my initial interest in meditation. When we first start a meditation practice we may begin to notice all the things that we do in order to avoid being in the present and avoid any discomfort or unease, that "anxious quiver". We may realise that we contact friends, exercise, fantasize, shop, eat, use drugs or sex to avoid being present with our current thoughts and feelings.

As we continue our meditation practice, we may become aware that what we think of as our 'self' is just a complex collection of beliefs and recurrent thoughts which we continually use to explain our understanding of the world and how we should act in it. We may recognise habitual patterns. For example thoughts of being unlovable, never good enough, never being able to get our needs met or that others are untrustworthy or

will exclude or leave us. We may notice how difficult it is to spend any time just being present in the moment, and just being open to these thoughts and feelings.

Maybe I was very naïve, but I was shocked to find that there was actually a lot in my benign lifestyle that I believed that I enjoyed, yet found it might be preferable to avoid. Many movies, books, TV and radio shows made me physically uncomfortable or upset my zazen. I started to be more aware of my body. I found a wonderful sense of well being connecting with nature and watching the spectacular Darwin sunsets. I found I could avoid negativity at my workplace by going out alone for a silent lunch break.

One of the reasons I committed to being part of the Darwin Zen Group was that I began to see that spiritual practice was not only about Zazen and avoiding certain activities. It was also about being inspired by others with similar values in a supportive and nurturing environment. However, I started to wonder more about my avoidance. Was I just avoiding my unease but just in a different way? Should I just practice staying with my discomfort and learn to practice equanimity?



In Zen there are a quite a few koans which take up the theme of avoidance. I counted four koans in the Blue Cliff Record with Zhao-Zhou on picking and choosing with the words based on the lines from the Third Patriarch's Verses of the Faith Mind:

*The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. When love and hate are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised.*

In Case number 59 from the Blue Cliff Record:

*A monk asked Zhao-Zhou, "The Supreme Way is not difficult, it simply dislikes choosing.' If there are words at all, that is choosing. How can your Reverence give instructions to others?"*

*Zhao-Zhou said, "Why don't you complete the quotation?"*

*The monk said, "I wish to know only this."*

*Zhao-Zhou said, "Only this: 'The Supreme Way is not difficult it simply dislikes choosing.'"*

When driven by choosing and avoiding, we fall into the cloudy, murky gap of 'right and wrong' and 'I and you' and we certainly avoid living in the clear and undisguised now of the present moment. Zhao-Zhou sees this murky gap that we and

the monk so readily fall into. His words cut through all our notions of choosing and avoiding. Zhao-Zhou forces us to see beyond our concepts of choosing and avoiding to the vast emptiness that contains all things and avoids nothing.

Usually however, we try so hard to avoid suffering that we actually end up by increasing it. We try to resist what is. We limit ourselves by fear and try to control the ever decreasing circles in order to feel secure. This is illustrated in Case 5 of the Gateless Barrier:

*The priest Xiang-yan said, "It is as though you were up in a tree, hanging from a branch with your teeth. Your hands and feet can't touch any branch. Someone appears beneath the tree and asks, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?' If you do not answer, you evade your responsibility. If you do answer, you lose your life. What do you do?"*

We have all felt like this, hanging from the branch, feeling we are unable to avoid a difficult situation. In my work in health care, I see many patients present with terrible physical symptoms, which through the course of our discussions they recognise as being due to their feelings of being stuck, just like the man up the tree. Most often they are in difficult situations at work or in unhappy relationships. With my patients they often feel they have no choice because they are dependent on staying in their job or relationship for financial security. Some stay in unhappy relationships for fear of being alone. Stay or go they usually have a responsibility to others, often children. Sometimes, I have patients who must face the ultimate situation which they cannot avoid. We discover they have cancer or a condition from which they will not recover.

Like the man up the tree, when we feel stuck we often try to twist ourselves and contort and manipulate the situation trying to avoid our current reality. In doing this we may increase our suffering and make ourselves very unhappy and unwell in the process. We may stay hanging in the tree, our mouth full of wood, trying to avoid change with all its unknown challenges and possible greater losses. At times it seems it is better the devil (or hell realm) that we know.

When we do risk everything and let go and fall, we stop avoiding the reality of our current situation, and we stop increasing our suffering by facing up to it. Part of us does have to die and accept the truth of our situation. The part of us that wants to avoid accepting that our relationship has not worked out, or the part of us that believes that life should be fair or that we should not get sick. We have to let these dearly cherished self-beliefs of who we must be and how we must behave, die. We may then have to grieve for them. I am lucky in my work in that although I see a lot of people suffering from their circumstances, I also see many people successfully work through these situations. Every time we do manage to stay with the pain of our current situation and let go, we practice for the final letting go.

The koan helps us to see that by working through these types of situations, we come closer to accepting ourselves for who we really are. We stop avoiding the concepts of who we think we are or our notions of how we should behave. We see they are just deeply held beliefs that we created a long time ago to help explain a situation. Clinging to

these old concepts of self only increases our suffering. They are empty of any permanent reality and useless to hold us up or cling to in our current difficult situation. The meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West lies in ceasing to live according to our concepts of how life should or should not be. It means to stop avoiding living in the moment and to just practice with what is. We let all our notions of self die so that we may find our True Self.

One way to really get to know our own habitual responses and our core beliefs is to attend a Zen sesshin. In sesshin we have none of our usual avoidance mechanisms. Many hours of Zazen gives us an opportunity to really observe our reactions and attitudes. We notice that how we respond in sesshin may be how we respond to challenges in our life. Our notion of self starts to fray a bit. Our thoughts, beliefs and feelings begin to feel less solid. We glimpse something beyond our ego and our notion of self.

This process is described in the first part of Case 59 of the Book of Equanimity:

*A monk asked Qinglin, "When a student goes a long the path, how about that?"*  
*Qinglin said, "A poisonous snake is on the path, I advise the student not to run into it."*  
*The monk asked, "What about when the student runs into it?"*  
*Qinglin said, "He must mourn his life."*  
*The monk asked, "What about when he doesn't run into it?"*  
*Qinglin said, "But there is nowhere to avoid it."*

The student here is stating that he's had some insight. The teacher Qinglin is referring to himself as the poisonous snake and is saying "Watch out!" With true insight the student must mourn their life. In order to experience true freedom our concepts and notions of a permanent, solid separate self must die completely. When we lose this sense of separation, Qinglin then points us in the direction of finding our True Self or Buddha Nature. This is the True Self that goes beyond concepts of self and avoidance.

When we attend a meditation retreat we find that we gradually enter into the stillness of sesshin. As we enter into the rhythm of the ritual, as body and mind fall away, we can truly begin to experience that which Qinglin says we really cannot avoid. The cool dawn air, the taste of the morning tea, the sunlight through the paperbarks, the scrubbing, chopping and sweeping, the screeching of cockatoos, the hovering dragonflies, the waterlilies and herons on the billabong, the grazing wallabies, the sound of the bell, the clappers, and the Han. And really how can we avoid it? We realize in our attempt to avoid suffering actually what we have been avoiding is this precious life itself.

When we find our True Self we see that we contain all things and also nothing at all. When we have this understanding, it is easier to accept that when we find ourselves in difficult situations, we can just respond from that place beyond choosing and avoiding. We are then able to more easily accept our situation and accept others. We no longer feel that we need to avoid difficult aspects of ourselves. In finding our True Self, we are more able to accept ourselves just as we are, and we are more able to see that we have no need for any avoidance at all. It may then be that:

*The time will come  
When, with elation,  
You will greet yourself arriving  
At your own door, in your own mirror,  
And each will smile at the others welcome.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> 'Love after Love' by Derek Walcott, *From Ten Poems to Change Your Life*, edited by R. Hudson.

## Breath Counting

Doug Mason



- One:** What I would like to do is switch to 3 days a week instead of working full time.
- Two:** It is not that I am any less committed to the work, just that I want more time for other things.
- Three:** I know I couldn't expect to get a good mix of challenging work and that.
- Four:** What I could do is perform all jobs that no-one really wants to do.
- Five:** All the messy or tedious little tasks that turn up - that everyone complains about.
- Six:** What I mean is - I would be quite prepared to do all those, no problem.
- Seven:** It would have a good effect on morale – everyone would be free of the crap stuff.

**Eight:** If three days is not on, what about four days a week. That could still suit me.

**Nine:** I would be happy because I would have what I want, or most of it – more time.

**Ten:** So it's win win all round: right?

## Book Review

Larry Agriesti

**“Psychoanalysis and Buddhism: An Unfolding Dialogue”** Edited by Jeremy Safran, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2003

This is a remarkable collection of essays by prominent psychoanalysts and Zen practitioners. They provide a clear, easy to read exploration of the links between Buddhism and current psychoanalytic thinking. Remarkable in that, although this is a serious and disciplined discussion of complex ideas and their application to therapy, the language is refreshingly free of psychobabble. The terms and images will be familiar to anyone who practices zazen.

One of the very few guides we have to authenticity, to what is real and true and lasting is convergence, the independent arising of stable and reoccurring forms; biological life forms in evolution such as the eye, chemical structures, evolving galaxies, and the formation of planets and life itself. This applies to the convergence of ideas and mental constructs in the evolution of human thought as well. If an idea or concept repeatedly and independently arises again and again throughout human history, this is the strongest possible indicator that the idea is valid, reliable, and true.

Zen Buddhism and the psychoanalytic method developed by Freud and Jung is but one example of the convergence of meditation and personal well-being, of healing and becoming whole. The method, guidelines, and expected outcomes of meditation arise again and again. It works! We are not floating on the great ocean without a compass. We can build a steady raft of ideas, stories, images and dreams that keep us afloat, and this book is filled with useful timber in building that raft.