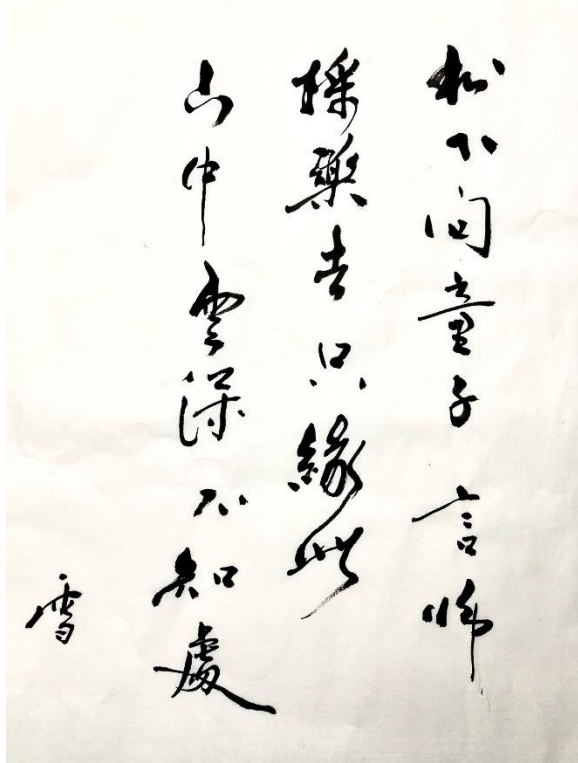


News from Cold Mountain



Cold Mountain Zen
Fall, 2020



Calligraphy by Chia-ju Chang (Kansetsu)

“Seeking but Not Finding the
Recluse”

尋隱者不遇

Under pines
I ask the boy;
he says: “My Master’s gone
to gather herbs.
I only know
he’s on this mountain,
but the clouds are too deep
to know where.”

--Jia Dao
賈島

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MEDITATIONS ON MEDITATION

A PERSONAL STORY NOV.
28, 2012

Glenn Webb (Kangan)

Kangan Glenn Webb founded the Seattle Zen Center in 1977, when Kurt met him and became his student. For more, see <http://coldmountainzen.org/about-cold-mountain-zen/about-the-lineage/>.

Part I

Meditation in the religions of Asia puts emphasis on reflection and transformation. The goal is insight, not obedience. Those emphases and goals are expressed in various ways within [Indian tradition] and the Buddhism that emerged from it. My time spent studying both [Buddhism and Hinduism] is about equal, but my experiential knowledge is anchored in Buddhism, mostly in Kyoto's Zen Buddhist temples where I have trained for nearly fifty years. My reflection on Asian meditation here, then, is focused on Zen meditation. In doing so, I will give special homage to Daisetsu Teitaro (D. T.) Suzuki, and I will consider

the criticism of Zen by a popular proponent of another Buddhist denomination, [Alan Wallace, who trained in the Tibetan Gelukpa tradition.]

Nowadays, lots of people practice Asian meditation of some sort. In the hippie days of the 1960's, of course, it was commonplace, and now meditation is at least known if not practiced in all areas of society. Meditation and yoga classes are taught everywhere. But when I was a little boy growing up in Oklahoma, only [Native Americans] engaged in meditation. My parents, both with advanced university degrees, were paid by the U.S. government to teach in the Ft. Sill Indian School and keep records detailing the welfare of Indian families living in Comanche County. The seasonal gatherings of local Indians involved meditation and prayer, usually accompanied by communal dancing. Our family Bible has an inscription dated one week after my birth in 1935, documenting my presentation to tribal elders and "The Great Father."

Ironically, my parents' official job was to discourage such traditional ways and bring the Indians into civilized American society by teaching classes in English, history, math, mechanics and the Bible. My father R. O. Webb also was a Church of Christ minister and U. S. Army chaplain. But he secretly tried to keep Indian customs and languages alive. He made sure the children sent to the school shared with him all the folk tales and family ways they knew about before being brought to Ft. Sill from reservations elsewhere in the country. For his efforts, local Indian leaders honored my father

shortly before he died, in 1970, with a big powwow celebration, attended by Kiowa, Comanche, Pawnee, Cheyenne, Black Foot, Caddo and other Plains Indian tribes.

It was in this setting, oddly enough, that I first heard of Zen meditation. I've told the story many times of how I grew up during World War II fearing and hating the Japanese. They were the bad guys that my playmates and I pretended to capture and torture to death. We did that for years in the schoolyard. And then the war was over. I was ten in 1945. America had won the war with Japan! I listened to the radio reports and saw movie newsreels of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But something bothered me. I needed answers. Every week I borrowed books from the public library. That week, I asked for a book on Japan.

The librarian gave me a book called *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, by D. T. Suzuki. According to the preface, the author was working on the book about the time I was born, and it was published in 1938, well before the U.S. joined the war against Japan. Somehow that book was on the shelf in a library near my home. Ironically, some twenty years after the war, in 1964, Dr. Suzuki was one of my doctoral dissertation advisors when a Fulbright scholarship took me to Kyoto University for graduate studies. Looking back, I can see that what he wrote about Zen in his book so long ago, and that I read when I was so young, has stayed with me and is the foundation for everything I subsequently have learned about meditation.

So what did Daisetsu Sensei say about Zen meditation? I now know that what he wrote was highly personal, and much of it must have sounded heretical to Buddhist scholars and priests of various traditions. But I appreciate that he cut to the chase, sailing across two thousand years of Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, and Judeo-Christian history, in order to tell his readers in a convincing voice exactly how Zen came to be and how it works in the modern world. Even as a child I was enthralled.

In the preface to [a book on] Zen by another author, R. H. Blyth, Suzuki would write: "The aim of Zen is to open the eye to the 'supreme wisdom' (*aryajnana*), that is, to awaken the inmost sense which has remained altogether dormant since the beginning of the human consciousness. When this is accomplished, one sees directly into the truth of Reality and confronts a world which is new and yet not at all new."

In 1945 I knew by heart every answer offered to life-and-death questions by the particular Protestant Christianity that shaped my childish view of the world. That was my Reality. But I had no clue about the things Daisetsu Sensei wrote about. I hung on every word in the ideas he presented, captivated by their breadth, logic and compassion. And I vowed I would go to Japan someday.

At the beginning of the book that inspired me so, Suzuki asks, "What is Zen?" And he answers with a nod to Buddhist history (and the Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese languages that informed it) and with the doctrine that lists meditation as the last of six spiritual exercises -- known

as *paramitas* -- which the historical Buddha taught his followers to practice in order for them to reach the goal of self-fulfillment, i.e., enlightenment. Buddhist texts dealing with the sixth *paramita* describe it and give names to the various levels of its achievement, which some Buddhist denominations (including all of those in the Tibetan lineage) claim to be able to validate in each practitioner.

But Suzuki's approach is to explain Zen not as a difficult, multi-level form of meditation, but more broadly *as a way of life in which meditation plays a part*. In so doing he removes almost all orthodox narratives of all the religions on earth. He boldly argues that you could be Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim or anything else and still practice Zen. (That alone probably gave me the courage some 67 years ago to keep reading his book.)

When recounting how Buddhism came into China as a foreign religion which was contrary in many ways to the teachings of centuries-old Taoism and Confucianism, Suzuki suggests that the "Taoist mind" of China's antiquity was probably attracted to the practical side of Zen Buddhism, or what he calls "its complete democracy." Its "penetrating analyses and speculations" may also have seemed compatible with Taoist ones, and better than Confucianism's society of the educated and land-owning class over peasants.

Instead of striving, Suzuki suggests, for oneness with nature and immortality after death, as Taoists did, or being reborn countless times in hopes of bringing enlightenment closer and closer, as both Hindus and Buddhists in India

believed they would, a Zen master often is skeptical about either possibility. Suzuki cites a case in which a believer in reincarnation asked a Chinese Zen master what he expected to be reborn as in his next life. The master said he hoped to "work for the villagers" as an animal. He in effect believed in doing what needed to be done instead of speculating over the unknown.

When I read this story for the first time, I found nothing enigmatic about it, perhaps because this seemed to corroborate Christian teachings about the first being last and the meek inheriting the earth. Indeed, the abbot of a Zen temple in Kyoto where I first did some training criticized Christians (and indirectly, me) for having a martyr-complex, because they seemed to make self-sacrifice the main goal in life. He warned me that that was not the goal of Zen, even if Suzuki claimed it was.

In his book on Zen and Japan (and in many other books and articles), Suzuki cited many of these conversations between Chinese Zen masters and their disciples. These cases are called *koans*, which Suzuki refers to as "barriers" to full realization (*satori*, the Japanese word for enlightenment.) *Koan* "practice" began in China as formal exercises in which a teacher and student "looked at the words" in temple records of conversations between the first Zen teachers and their students. The word *koan* literally means "princely plan" – implying that in ancient China, the plans of a land-owning scholar contained wisdom that was beyond the grasp of an ordinary peasant. The word might be translated less literally as

“spiritually advanced views.” The point of the training is for the students to grasp the true meaning of the master’s words for themselves.

Only the Rinzai and Obaku branches of Zen in Japan use *koans* in formal training of novice priests. Now, after experiencing *koan* training myself (and providing it in the Zen centers I established), I am convinced that *koans* all have practical moral lessons. But the majority view of them seems to be that they are puzzles without answers, to be used as nonsense mantras that help us break through linear thought. They do that, too. But they are loaded with practical advice about how to live a useful life.

Let me give one example of what I mean. Zen masters in Japan assign *koans* to their students one at a time, taking them from well-known *koan* anthologies. They often begin with the “Joshu’s Mu” *koan* from the *Mumonkan* anthology, which involves a famous master, his disciple and a dog. A 9th-century Chinese master, Zhaozhou, the “Admonisher from the State of Zhao” (Joshu in Japanese), was asked by one of his disciples if a dog had Buddha Nature or not, to which the master Joshu answered, “No!” This account does not tell us what the disciple thought, but he probably was puzzled, as any student of Buddhism would be, knowing that a basic premise of Buddhism is that all beings are born with Buddha Nature (S. *buddhatva*, J. *busshou*), the potential for Buddhahood.

In another account of the conversation, [*Recorded Sayings of Master Zhaozhou*], the disciple questioned Joshu’s “No” on scriptural grounds, which got him in trouble with Joshu for being too attached

to ideas. So, when the disciple asked the question again, Joshu replied “Yes!” The disciple then asked, “But how can Buddha Nature get into a lowly creature like a dog?” Joshu’s response seemed a non-answer: “The dog was ignorant.” Such admonitions from the famous Admonisher from Zhao seem to relate somehow to Zen teachings about false opposites.

Suzuki Sensei explained it this way in a later article, where he wrote: “to speak logically of things that cannot be put into logic” or “to bring into the ‘arena of logic’ things that go beyond logic is a necessary teaching ploy, a method of instructing students of Zen. It is one way of understanding ‘holy truth’ and is usually described as ‘the non-duality of the highest truth and everyday truth.’” After all, the 6th-century Indian patriarch of Zen himself, Bodhidharma, also responded to such discussions of yes-no duality by equating emptiness with fullness and the holy with the profane. But for those of us raised to believe in dualities, the idea of the non-dual is a hard teaching. We seem to get caught up in logic. God’s ways and man’s ways are different and can never be the same, we think.

One of my Japanese Zen teachers came to my rescue by dramatizing the Joshu story in a way I’ll never forget. He said maybe a real dog was right outside Joshu’s room that day, a starving dog that gave birth to several puppies and then died right in front of Joshu and his disciple. Then, what if only one puppy survived, blind and on the verge of death. What if that dog was the one that the disciple was asking about? And instead of worrying

about what Buddhism taught about Buddha Nature, maybe Joshu was trying to admonish his disciple to wake up. Just feed the dog!

At that moment I think everything fell into place for me. Joshu's words became like the "Argh-h-h!" in a Peanuts cartoon. He was telling his student in the best way he could that all of his concerns were worthy enough, but that time was wasting! Those concerns were not enough. Somebody had to do something! It was then that I saw why none of my Zen teachers, the abbots of the Japanese temples I trained in, wanted to discuss anything about the Buddhist teachings behind this *koan* with me. They were tired of answering my questions and knew I had given everything enough thought.

At this point I quit being critical of how this *koan* is always used in Japanese Zen temples. The training is very formal. At certain times during the day, usually during a group meditation, the novice priests get up and line up in front of the teacher's room. Upon entering, they prostrate themselves in front of his seated form. He asks them what their *koan* is and what it means to them. In this case specifically, "What is the meaning of Joshu's MU?" They have been told to "place his answer on your breath" and they do so – with moans like cows mooing. I always found it funny and it felt even funnier the first time I tried to do it.

But here's the thing: each of us has breath that animates our bodies while we are alive. We breathe in and we breathe out. In seated Zen meditation we gradually get used to turning down the

volume in our heads of the noises our brains make. We listen. We feel. And we become more aware of everything. *Koans* provide answers that only each of us can discover for ourselves. However, with this *koan* of Joshu's MU, there is a special teaser that may leave us trapped in our thoughts.

The Japanese word "*mu*" (pronounced "*wu*" in Mandarin Chinese) means "No". At the same time, it is used in Buddhist texts to refer to the totality of reality, the Not-One-Thing, the "I Am That" of the so-called Void, a gateway to enlightenment (S. *nirvana*, J. *satori*). You have it at the end of every out-breath, which may be your last! Mu can indeed stand for enlightenment itself. But it also means No. Words can get in the way. Here, you think maybe No is a trick. And that can lead you nowhere. (Oh, no! Nowhere? Everywhere?) You'd better just shut up and listen to the universe, your home, and allow it to show you its rewards and its needs.

[Part II will appear in our Spring 2021 *News from Cold Mountain*]



Teisho on 'Seijo's Soul Separated'

Sandy Spina (Kangetsu)

Today's teisho will be on Case 35 in the *Mumonkan*. Case 35 is entitled "Seijo's Soul Separated."

Goso said to his monks, "Seijo's soul separated from her being. Which was the real Seijo?"

Mumon's Comment:

When you realize what the real is, you will see that we pass from one husk to another like travelers stopping for a night's lodging. But if you do not realize it as yet, I earnestly advise you not to rush about wildly. When earth, water, fire and air suddenly separate, you will be like a crab struggling in boiling water with its seven or eight arms and legs. When this happens, don't say I didn't warn you.

Mumon's Verse:

**The moon above the clouds is ever the same;
Valleys and mountains are separate from each other.
All are blessed. All are blessed.
Are they one or are they two?**

[Three Bells]

I thought when I was driving here this morning that I would probably be "sitting with the ancestors"—that's the euphemism for sitting by myself. But it is really nice to see so many people here in spite of the weather.

So, this is a koan, for anyone here who is relatively new to the practice. A koan is basically a little story. It usually takes place between two people, a teacher and a student or two teachers. Often they're doing what is called "Dharma battle," which is a topic that I won't get into too deeply today. But I do have a memory that I would like to relate. It was years ago, very early on when I hadn't been practicing for a long time, and I went to sit with another group. The teacher in that group with a great flourish announced that in a short time--the next day--a member of the group and the teacher would be doing Dharma battle together. At that time, I assumed it was a rite of passage of some sort, and, because it was very intimidating for me, I thought that I would probably stick with Kurt for a while. But this "battle" used to happen in past centuries between teachers and students and even teachers together. That was the way they had fun.

Anyway, this story is a koan, and it's a little bit different from the other koans because most of them tell you the whole story to give you some background, but not here. We only get a summary, and it's assumed that we're familiar with the rest. But as you know, even though koans don't make much sense or, in some cases any

sense, they're really not supposed to, because they're speaking to you on a deeper level. There's something in each little story that is meant to resonate below the surface of the conscious mind. I'm sure that is also true of this koan, but for me, in some ways, this one is different. I've always liked this koan very much. It actually speaks to me of why I'm practicing.

There is a story that goes with it, and I think it's a beautiful story. It's about two children who are growing up together. They're cousins, Seijo and Ochu. They play together every day, and they love each other very much. There are different versions of this story. I've read several. In one they were engaged at birth, which was the custom in many cultures. It was decided at that time that they would marry. In another version, this wasn't the case. They just grew up to become very close, and Seijo's father—and everyone else--could see how close they were, how intimate they were, and everyone just expected that this union would happen at the right time. But then something changed. Maybe the status of the girl's future husband meant a great deal. Seijo's father decided at some point that there was another man who was better suited to be the husband of his daughter. So he decided that she would marry this other person. Seijo and Ochu were devastated, and Ochu just decided to leave because he could not stand to live in the town knowing that the person he loved most in the world was the wife of another person. So he got into a boat and started going downstream, and he noticed that someone was running alongside on

the shore calling to him. He looked and he saw that it was Seijo. She was calling to him and begging him to take her with him, and so he did. He pulled the boat in to the shore, and they got into the boat together. They traveled somewhere far from their hometown and lived for several years. The versions that I've read all say the same thing. They had two children and they lived together as husband and wife, but there was a deep longing in Seijo. It didn't surface right away, but it did eventually come to the surface. She missed her family. She missed her father. She was sorry that she had hurt him so deeply. Same for Ochu. He agreed and said, "Let's go back. Let's make amends." So they did. They went back to the place where they grew up and when they arrived, Ochu left Seijo in the boat. He went up to Seijo's old house and knocked on the door and greeted her father. Ochu explained why they had come back and told him that Seijo was waiting in the boat and they had come back to make peace. Her father was amazed. He said, "How can that be? That can't be. Seijo has been upstairs in bed for all that time. She is very ill and depressed." In one version of the story he actually said that she was in a coma. He said, "It's impossible!" Ocho objected, "I've been living with her as my wife for all these years. We have two children." So they went up and roused "sad Seijo," I'll call her. Now I have to tell you that this has been called a ghost story in more than one place, so please think of it that way. They brought her down to the riverside where the other Seijo, I'll call her the "happy Seijo," was waiting in the boat. The two advanced toward each

other and came together as one Seijo. They came together as unified Seijo. I imagine them walking toward each other and I can visualize the response from happy Seijo. “How sad to look at myself and see this misery. Where did this come from?” Then, sad Seijo responds, “How wonderful! This happy person is me!” So that’s the end of the little story. They did come together and become one Seijo. So that’s where we begin.

This koan is one of many koans, but the story behind it is more detailed than most that I’m familiar with. It makes me wonder about what had been going on inside Seijo all that time. And it reminds me of something that happened in my own life. I used to volunteer on a helpline. This was many, many years ago, but I actually did it for about twenty years. That experience was for me very rewarding, and looking back now, it prepared me for what was to come afterward. At that time, I liked to talk to people in the middle of the night, so that’s when I usually volunteered to do a shift. The location was in a big old church, and I was the only person in the whole building. I would sit there and answer the phone. All I really had to connect with was a voice. When someone called, they would usually give a name, but sometimes, commonly, the name they gave was not their true name. And the only way to be able to make a connection was with the voice I was hearing and with their breath. Often the person would stop talking and then I would just wait, just stay on the line listening, and I would come to be aware of their breathing. Many times, I could tell by the way they

were breathing how they were feeling, struggling in that silence.

As part of our training we were taught that any person we would be speaking with would tell us their story or multiple stories. Although we would be listening and responding, hopefully in a helpful and supportive way, in many cases we would be unable to relate to their stories at all. Their emotional pain and suffering were coming from a vastly different experience of life. So, the only way to create a sense of empathy with the voice on the other end of the line was to focus on whatever they were feeling at the time of the call. People have countless stories, but there aren’t that many feelings, and the human experience of them is universal. The situations, the causes that bring about the emotions are infinite, but the actual feeling is the same for everyone. That is the way we were taught to create empathy with the “voice” on the other end--by focusing on what they were feeling in the course of whatever story they were relating. The idea was to determine the feeling the caller was experiencing, and then to picture or remember some situation in your own life when you experienced a similar feeling. It really worked!! That was the empathy. That was the way that we established a trusting relationship with callers who we couldn’t relate to in any other way. When I responded to the caller, it was usually by doing what we called “mirroring back” to the caller what they just said. That shows the caller that you are really listening. I have often found that the technique of a little mirroring back has a positive effect on anyone. On the helpline phone, I could

often tell just by a change in the sound of the caller's voice that he or she really knew I was listening and that I had heard what was said. For many people desperate enough to reach out to a helpline, that was their first experience of someone truly listening to them. It really was an effective helping tool in that situation, and I used it every shift for about twenty years.

And some of that experience came back to me with this koan. To work with it, you have to connect through feeling first. Of course, it's a ghost story and not literally true. But we can connect emotionally. On the one hand, there was the happy Seijo who knew what she needed to do, was living life with the person who loved her, who had children. Yet she still felt a deep longing that for a long time she wasn't conscious of. On the other hand, we have a woman who lived the very opposite life, who was home, hiding in bed, miserable, and that unhappy Seijo also had a deep longing which had trapped and crippled her.

One thing the Seijo story shows is that even though feelings are universal, the way each person responds to those feelings is not universal, and, in fact, even the same person can react or respond to life in opposite ways at different times. But no matter how we respond, there is a part of us that we are unaware of. The happy Seijo was unaware of the sad Seijo aspect of herself, and the sad Seijo was unaware of the happy Seijo aspect.

Part of what creates suffering in life is a lack of self-awareness, that is, not really

knowing ourselves. We all like to think that we know ourselves, but on some level, we really don't, and I think that's often what brings us to the cushion. We sit down on that cushion. We watch our breath, watch it go out. We learn to focus on that little pause, that little space between breaths, that little moment in between breaths when there's nothing . . . the place we call emptiness, *mushin*, and we can then learn to stay in that deeper place for a while. Then, we can begin to become aware of things we haven't been conscious of. It takes time and practice even to begin to realize what they are. But as I said, most of us come to Zen practice realizing that there's more to learn. And if you do Zen for a couple of years, and then you do Zen for a few years more, you will be able to look back and think, "How much I have learned about myself! I know myself much better now."

When the two aspects of Seijo--happy Seijo and sad Seijo--approached each other, my thought for sad Seijo was, "How wonderful!" In one of the versions of the story, when she recognized in herself the happy aspect, when she realized for the first time that it was part of her, Seijo smiled. I think that moment of recognition is what we are reaching for when we practice. We begin with breath perception, and then we move on to Mu and to other koans. As we move along in our practice, we begin to understand where it's taking us. It's taking us towards that moment of recognition, like the moment in the koan. Probably the experience is different for everyone, but I think that for all of us, this is what has to

happen and what will happen if we stay with our zazen.

But it can be frustrating for a while because it doesn't feel like anything is happening. We're so used to living on the surface level, on an everyday, ordinary-mind conscious level. As time passes, however, we open up more and more. We leave the safety of our bed and go out and extend ourselves to our other aspect, to the other part of our being that we know intuitively is there but has remained hidden from us.

Of course, we spend so much of our lives learning to wear different "masks" for different situations. We can even begin to believe that those masks are really who we are. Just the idea of giving up any of our defenses is unthinkable. But as we slowly move out of our "hiding place," I'll say, towards the boat where everything is open and we can see clearly who we are, it's usually not a frightening experience because our steady practice has prepared us. Instead of feeling fear and pulling back into our hiding place, it can be like watching a silly movie: you notice one of your obstacles rising up, coming into awareness and looking at you in the eye. You might even feel like laughing at it after a while, whereas at the beginning, just the thought of facing it was terrible. You wanted to turn away and run in the other direction. But when we don't, you end up with a smile.

So, that to me is really the beauty of this particular koan and why it has resonated with me even though I haven't formally worked with it. Every time I read that

story, it resonates with me because it speaks to me of myself and it speaks to me of all of us. We're all not whole in some ways, not the way our Buddhist teachings assure us we could be. But this practice gives us ways of working with ourselves, ways of being able to tolerate in ourselves, little by little, what we could never even think of looking at before. For me, no therapy or counseling that I've experienced in my life has resulted in such a positive change or even come close. By the time you've been practicing for a number of years and maybe answered a few koans, you will look back and realize that something in you has subtly changed and that's wonderful. I didn't feel anything happening as I was moving along in practice. I wasn't aware of anything changing, but I look back now and I see that the way I respond in everyday life, although not perfect, is considerably different. It's not that all my obstacles have disappeared or even that I now know what they all are. But there is a definite difference in the way I respond to life, and I think that can be true for all of us.

Maybe trusting ourselves is the most difficult challenge. It just depends on the person. If you practice for a time, you will begin to realize that the koans really do help. You are sitting there on the cushion and maybe working with this koan for a long time, for, who knows, weeks or months. Suddenly something inside you smiles at you. That's the only way I can explain it. Something deep inside speaks to you but not with words. It smiles at you, like Seijo looking at her other aspect,

and both aspects came together, and she smiled.

That's what happens, and it happens over and over again with each koan. It's all very subtle. It can happen in just a blink and you might wonder if anything really happened. But it's definitely there, and I feel that's the way toward wholeness. Every time your whole being smiles at you, you become a little bit more whole, and you experience the world just a tiny bit differently than you did before you sat down on the cushion that day.

Goso said to his monks, "Seijo's soul separated from her being. Which was the real Seijo?"

Mumon's Comment

When you realize what the real is, you will see that we pass from one husk to another like travelers stopping for a night's lodging.

When I read this passage for the first time, all I could think of was the Buddhist teaching of rebirth. That's what I thought that meant. I thought that was the beginning and the end of it. Since my first reading, though, I've learned another way to understand that comment if you think of the husks that Mumon is speaking of as being our thoughts. Now I see this comment as talking about the way we live our life. We layer and layer on ourselves defenses that we create because we think they will protect us, keep us safe. But what they actually do is just make us feel separate and closed up. That's what this comment now means to me.

So, when you realize what the real is, when your whole being smiles at you maybe for just an instant, you've embraced some hidden aspect of yourself that has been sad and hiding to stay safe. Something opens up just a little bit and smiles, but not permanently because something else still remains unrecognized. Then you need to work with another koan, again and again over time. This is our method, and it works.

But if you do not realize it as yet, I earnestly advise you not to rush about wildly. When earth, water, fire and air suddenly separate, you will be like a crab struggling in boiling water with its seven or eight arms and legs.

Now I don't know about the earth, fire, water and air part, but I know that there is an aspect of this practice that can be a struggle, that can take real work. In order to reach the point where we can experience that "smile," we have to struggle sometimes with whatever it is that we don't want to face, that is keeping us sad and hiding in bed, miserable, with a divided mind. That is something else that both aspects of Seijo shared. As happy as the happy Seijo was, or thought she was, and as miserable as the sad Seijo was, both wanted to be somewhere else. Neither could just live in the moment and be who they were, where they were. They both had this tremendous longing that pulled them, but at the same time trapped them and kept them from being whole until they came together--and smiled.

“So, you will be like a crab struggling in boiling water with its seven or eight arms and legs. When this happens, don’t say I didn’t warn you”.

Well, that’s Mumon saying it plainly.

Mumon’s Verse:

**The moon above the clouds is ever the same;
Valleys and mountains are separate from each other.
All are blessed. All are blessed.
Are they one or are they two?**

I guess the answer depends on whether they find a way to smile together and reach each other to become whole.

[Three Bells]



Interview with Heather Fenyk

Pat Andres

CMZ Will you tell us about your Zen practice? When did you begin sitting zazen? How is your practice going?

Heather: As you know, in between meditation periods, Kurt will announce a five-minute break that we don’t have to

take. In the past, whenever he has offered that break, I’ve always said to myself, “Ok, I’ll take it.” But in the last few months, I’ve realized the advantages to sitting through that break--a little bit of extra challenge but also an opportunity for focus, and that’s a new experience for me. I still really feel like a novice.

CMZ: You say you’re a ‘novice,’ yet you’re sitting like a rock!

Heather: I am certainly a novice in terms of language and understanding the constructs of practice. I’ve defaulted to the experiential rather than the conceptual. I’m moving forward slowly regarding an intellectual understanding of the lineage and how it’s practiced. But I honestly don’t know the difference between sensei and roshi.

CMZ: Can you say some more about how sitting through the bells is an extra challenge, but also presents opportunities. That’s a very clear way to put it.

Heather: Well, it’s a newer part of my practice and very rewarding. I attended the whole virtual sesshin in May, which was my first extended stretch of sitting beyond the half-day Saturday sits. But the benefit in the end was a much more expansive clarity, and that no doubt had to do with the perseverance and the sitting with—exploring--the discomfort and everything else that arose. I don’t want to call them intrusions or distractions necessarily, but for much of my time during the sesshin, I was outside. My family shares an “open-concept”

apartment, and I didn't want to impose on my husband and sixteen-year-old daughter by having them tiptoe around me for the full extent of the session. So, I sat in the patio garden that we've cultivated behind our building. I had to deal with everything from squirrels scampering on top of the chair that I sat on to a stray cat jumping into my lap while I was meditating. So anyway, as I said, I don't know if they were intrusions or opportunities--extra challenges, I guess.

CMZ: How did you cope with all that?

Heather: I saw them as unexpected engagements. The challenge was to refocus on silence and remain unattached. Anyway, my point is that I'm still very, very much learning the benefits of focused sitting. Yah!

CMZ: So, you were able to keep going, there on the patio?

Heather: It's really wonderful to sit with others virtually, and I try not to miss the opportunities to do so throughout the week as well. I'm increasingly realizing that it's not my practice, either. Interestingly, at the very beginning, or maybe a few months into practicing, it seemed apparent to me that it wasn't just my practice. It's truly a group practice. Then, for a couple of years, it became an intensely self-focused practice. Now it seems to have reemerged as truly collective. Certainly, in times of isolation like now, so powerful an opportunity for that collective practice, even virtually, is

wonderful. It's just really nice to have that.

CMZ: So, let's talk a little bit now about your work and how that connects with all of this.

Heather: Well, I am a mom. I have a sixteen-year-old daughter. I'm a wife, and I'm a member of a small family here in New Brunswick. I also have a Masters and doctorate in Environmental and Regional Planning. And I use that background in a number of different ways. For one, I teach and do research in the Department of Landscape Architecture and in the School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers. I'm a Part-time Lecturer for both, and I also do contract-based research on planning. So, that's one area of my life, the academic realm.

Also, my husband and I have a couple of businesses. We manage property in Central New Jersey. We live in an apartment building that we manage, and then we manage a number of other properties in the area.

We also have a planning consultancy. Much of the work we do in that consultancy involves a GIS or Geographic Information System. The GIS tool that we have developed will, we hope, help people examine and understand borders and boundaries in space. And we're especially interested in places where there is conflict. How do people negotiate border disputes, for example? We've created a tool that can help with those negotiations. And we're very interested in the

interpersonal connections that might emerge by using these types of tools.

But most near and dear to me is a non-profit that I started. I serve as the President of the Board of this nonprofit. It's entirely volunteer run, and it's called The Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership (LRWP), dedicated to addressing a lot of the historic inequities in land use that have affected our urban population in Central New Jersey, particularly poor brown and black folks, in terms of environmental hazards. But it's not just about environmental hazards such as all the superfund fights and the legacy of industrial dumping. It's also about the outdoor experiences available to our communities. Can people access our blue and green spaces? In the view of the LRWP, it is every individual's right to be connected to the earth. How can we create opportunities for deep connections with our landscape and with the environment?

CMZ: Do you find yourself collaborating with other nonprofits in the area--such as soup kitchens and homeless shelters for that population you spoke about earlier, living under the bridge?

Heather: We engage most directly with social workers who help us develop our outreach protocols. When we go out to do stream clean-ups or river clean-ups, we sometimes find homeless encampments along the waterways, tucked into hidden areas, since our waterways are often safer for the homeless than under bridges. And when we go to do the clean-ups, we have

those outreach protocols. For example, we provide a contact sheet listing resources for them, and, also, we extend an invitation to join us in the cleanup. Any metal we collect they can redeem for cash. Our approach is direct contact rather than direct provision.

CMZ: Awesome! "Help us clean this up, and here, you take the cans and get reimbursed."

Heather: Yes, that's right. So, it's not that we always go out to provide food, although we always have snacks and water and what not on offer. Instead, our goal is to connect with folks in that setting and really understand how they're engaging with it. Sometimes that extends to where they're using the outdoors for the bathroom. We might recommend that they dig a trough somewhere away from the water source.

CMZ: So you began this yourself, one person?

Heather: I did. I started talking about it about six years ago, and doing just some very basic water quality monitoring and training. And after I learned how to do the training, I trained a handful of folks about six years ago, and then, about five years ago, we established ourselves as a nonprofit. We're all volunteer. We don't have staff. Eventually, we hope we will have staff so that we can be more effective in the work we do. However, given COVID and the difficult funding climate, I think it's probably better that we don't have staff right now because I

wouldn't want to be in the position of laying people off. As it is, we have a lot of flexibility. But eventually, if we want to do all that we have said that we want to do, then we will absolutely need to have a staff. We could just be much more effective that way.

CMZ: So, let's go back to that mapping tool you were talking about. Do you actually get involved in negotiations with people?

Heather: We hope to, but haven't quite yet. We've created an on-line tool that anyone can use, so it can be used in many different ways. You can find it for free on the web at <https://mapourborders.com/>. This is a tool that comes out of a tradition that's called "Public Participatory Geographic Information Systems (GIS)," and the idea is that folks have a right to their own data about a place. They also have a right to improve their understanding of their spaces and use tools that can communicate to decision-makers about the changes that affect them. Our device has a map of the whole world, and the whole world is divided into very small hexagons. You can zoom into one specific place on the map, say Pennington or Lambertville. If there's a problem with flooding at a particular intersection that most people aren't aware of, you could input that information into that hexagon.

The tool would help, too, with border issues in, say, the Middle East. Why is that tract disputed? What is the history in this place? Our hope is to find the commonalities through this process. We

are integrating a component--we call it an emotional analysis--a check analysis of emotional contents, to better understand how folks feel about place and space.

CMZ: Like the Gaza Strip, for example?

Heather: Exactly, which is a place where I spent quite a bit of time myself, in the Palestinian occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

CMZ: So instead of leaving it to the politicians, when there is a dispute, people might use this tool and then voice ways to resolve that?

Heather: Exactly. We try to offer a non-political platform that does not pass judgment. That is important when we're working with equity concerns: we want to be dispassionate, and we want the tool to be the same way. And it's not just about political boundaries that affect taxes. As someone who works in environmental planning, and, in particular, watershed planning, I see these political boundaries as highly problematic. You know they're arbitrary. They are often incredibly arbitrary and based on land-ownership histories, whereas we should be looking at watershed boundaries and geology--the way water flows through a community. My take is that we should be looking at how the environment organizes *itself*. That is something that could be revealed a little bit more clearly through a tool like ours as well.

CMZ: Right now it's online, right? But as you get to interact more with parties that are at odds with each

other, do you see how your Zen practice would inform this work? It could operate within so many situations to the benefit of everyone, enhancing connections and benefitting everyone without anyone--maybe not even you--realizing how that was happening or where that was coming from.

Heather: I agree. We are absolutely interested in creating something that can be dispassionate.

CMZ: Yes, *dispassionate* is the perfect word. And, describing how the environment self-regulates relates to Zen practice, as well, where we connect with whatever is happening.

Heather: I think that's a nice way of realizing it or articulating it, although it may be more difficult in some place like the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, where the political is so personal. Hopefully, we can offer something that allows people to articulate their attachments and then dispassionately step back and look at them and at others' attachments, as communicated through a tool like this. Then you can find the common ground to come together. But it's not something that will happen overnight or even in a few years. It's absolutely something that has to be cultivated and built little by little.

CMZ: Right! Layer by layer

Heather: Right. But honestly, in terms of what it could ultimately look like, I have

no idea. I can't point to an existing model of what this project could look like.

CMZ: Could we return for a moment to the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership—and its place in your life and relationship with your Zen practice?

Heather: Yes, as I said, the Partnership is near and dear to my heart. It is, first of all, a wonderful opportunity to synthesize a number of personal interests of mine, but also to engage directly in the community and the landscape of which I'm a part. But the Zen link? It's another case of taking a big picture, all-encompassing view: how everything is connected ecologically, from soil and micro-organisms to our waters and air and ourselves. How everything is connected is a point that I am experiencing in my Zen practice. What I feel incredibly steeped in is a practice of connection.

CMZ: Well, you're doing it on the cushion and bringing it right into the marketplace!

Heather: Thank you. There are challenges, though. I'm trained as a planner. Planning requires looking far into the future, which is in many ways in conflict with being in the here and now for Zen practice. I'm struggling with how to reconcile that planner's training with Zen practice. And it's not even that difficult, though it seems like it would be, because the practice is always bringing me back to the present and not getting wrapped up in the details of the future.

You can have a big picture idea of the future without obsessing over all the details because they'll always need to be worked out in the here and now.

CMZ: Thank you!



Zen Seeds, Shundo

*Aoyama. Boulder:
Shambhala Publications,*

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(originally published in Japanese, 1990.)

Review by Pat Andres

When I showed a very good Zen friend Shundo Aoyama's slim volume, *Zen Seeds: 60 Essential Buddhist Teachings on Effort, Gratitude, and Happiness*, she joked, "Sounds like Zen self-help to me." I was in no position to argue since I had read only the first few pages. While we laughed at her remark at that time, as I read *Zen Seeds*, I realized that Aoyama Roshi's reflections reach way beyond lessons on how to be motivated, grateful and happy, as the subtitle suggests. And, after reading it herself, my friend remarked, "I still have the impression that it offers a kind of self-help, but from a Zen perspective." It's not a book with the purpose of telling the reader what to do or how to "think" in

order to change what they don't like about life. It doesn't tell them to think through problems. It tells us how to be one with them.

A common thread running through the sections is the suffering we endure when attached to a "self," to "self-cherishing." Aoyama's intimate examinations of her experiences reveal such an awareness: "Reflecting on how I live my own life as a student of the Buddha's teachings.... all I can see is my own self-centeredness. Yet had I not been exposed to the teachings of the Buddha, I probably wouldn't have been able to see even that much." In short, the entire book is composed of Aoyama's reflections on how her Zen life has been a continuous practice of cutting through the self, especially self-centeredness, in order to discover the Buddha within.

Before Shundo Aoyama was born, her mother promised her to the Buddha. So, from the time she was five years old, her aunt, head priest at Muryo-ji Monastery, raised Aoyama there with very strict discipline: she was allowed one hour to play after lunch and only on holidays! She was allowed visits home to see her mother and father for only a few days, and those visits were when they were dying. Aoyama was ordained at age fifteen and always felt surrounded and protected by the Buddha: "As a child I learned the importance of living according to the Buddha's way of measuring things. I also learned that a life interwoven with joy, anger, sadness and pleasure, [with] happiness and unhappiness, is itself in the very palm of the Buddha's hand." These aspects of her life make Aoyama's early training

“experience distant” from most of her readers. Yet, the extraordinarily refined consciousness reflected in these chapters makes the experiences she renders understandable and almost familiar.

The sixty chapters, though they might best be called reflections, are short, ranging from a half page to nine pages. Rather than feeling like soundbites, though, even the shortest sections reflect the condensation of a prose style that is precise, poetic and powerful. For example, in a two-page section called, “We Are All Related,” Aoyama quotes from Zen Master Dogen’s *Instructions to the Kitchen Supervisor*, “See the pot as your own head; see the water as your life.... Use the property and possessions of the community as carefully as if they were your own eyes,” and sums it up this way, “Everything is alive in the vast ocean of the Dharma world.”

So, we might approach this collection as meditations or ‘koans’ that have the potential to permeate our daily lives, inviting us to become more porous, more receptive. One such chapter, “Magnanimous Mind,” retells the story of when Zen Master Yunmen’ questions Zen Master Joshu: “What is Buddha?” and Joshu replies “shit stick!” With a characteristic combination of humor and self-effacement, Aoyama, herself now an abbot, muses, “When the abbot...is away from a temple for a week or so, the novices think nothing of it. But if there is no toilet paper, they would quickly feel its absence.” She continues, “[I] wonder whether, if I were given a filthy task, would I be able to tackle it with the same

attitude that I would deal with any of the duties of [an] abbess.”

For poetry lovers, *Zen Seeds* is a treasure since nearly every section includes haiku or lines from longer poems, followed by Aoyama’s commentary on how the verses reflect Zen Mind. For example, she pairs this poem:

Though I searched all day for spring,
I could not find it.
Carrying my staff,
I crossed over mountain after mountain.
Coming back home,
I happened to grasp a spray of plum blossoms.
There I saw spring, blooming at its tip.

--Tai-I (Chinese)

With this:

Crossing mountains and rivers,
In a country where loneliness never ends,
I am still traveling.

--Bokusui Wakayama (Japanese)

And she concludes that to search outside the self for happiness is to embark on a futile path to suffering. Money, fame, success--all considered sources of happiness--are, in fact, possessions that will entrap. “To put it simply, do not look beyond yourself. Do not seek happiness somewhere else or at any other time – tomorrow, next year, or in the next life. It is at all times ‘here and now’ that we must straighten our posture and sit upright.”

Aoyama extends her reflections on the futility of seeking outside the self to an examination of the ways honest self-study leads to self-love, which then births love

of all others, which, she writes, “is called compassion in Buddhism.... It means both shared suffering and tender affection. Shared suffering is ultimate self-love. When the final obstacle to self-love falls away as if the bottom has fallen out of one’s pail, one shares in another’s joys and sorrows as if they were one’s own.” And, with her signature affirmation of how a poem represents a quintessential Buddhist truth, Aoyama describes an experience of being outside of time and space. While in communion with a statue of a Chinese monk, she senses the Buddha’s compassion within herself brought on by the haiku engraved in the statue’s base:

With a young leaf,
I’d like to wipe the tears from your eyes.

--Basho (Japanese)

For an encounter with the self-reflective voice in *Zen Seeds*, let’s take an extended look at the longest section, “Zazen That Amounts to Nothing,” a journal entry recounting Aoyama’s sesshin at *Antai-ji*, the Purple Bamboo Grove Monastery in Shaka-taniguchi, Japan. In marked contrast to the monastery where Aoyama trained, every detail of *Antai-ji*, including its hidden location at the end of a thicket on a mountain path, its broken-down sign consisting of carved letters on a board “so worn that it had a large concave area in the center,” and its meditation hall with cracks in the floorboard and “clumsy paper curtains that appeared to be made of sheets of wrapping paper...flapping noisily in the drafts,” reveals a Spartan focus on sesshin activities, rather than on

the surroundings. Words of instruction at the entrance to the Meditation Hall reinforce this focus: “Leave others alone. Individuals must engage in their own spiritual practice. Everything must be done in silence. There must be no audible sutra readings or greetings.” This message echoed the words Zen Master Uchiyama used when welcoming participants to sesshin the evening before: “Chanting the sutras would spoil our concentration, interrupting our zazen practice. Sesshin here means sitting in meditation for five days as though it were a single sitting.”

While on sesshin, Aoyama caught a very bad cold, but was heartened by the care she received from the abbot and staff: “Zen Master Uchiyama worried about me and gave me some medicine, and so did the nun working in the kitchen. At night they put a foot-warmer in my bedding.... I continued in this way and was able to complete the sesshin without missing even a single sitting.” On leaving the Purple Bamboo Monastery, Aoyama realizes that at sesshin, “you must come face to face with yourself” and that she has come to know real zazen, “in which people must be led with true kindness.” Her praise of the kindness offered at *Antai-ji* is consistent with her dedication to kindness and compassion as the essence of Zen practice, even when observed in those masters whose desire for their disciples’ awakening led them to strike undisciplined students with a stick.

In the Fall 2019 issue of *Buddhadharma*, Tenko Ruff, Osho, and Yuko Wakayama, Osho, disciples of Aoyama Roshi write, “A few years ago, she was awarded the title

of *Shike-kai-Kaicho*, or Master of Zen Masters, making her the highest-ranking nun in the history of Soto Zen. For Zen women, this is a very big deal – to have a nun teaching monks is virtually unheard of--and Aoyama Roshi trains Zen masters, not novices. As a Zen master’s master (or a nun’s nun) she has broken through Zen’s glass gate.” Her students refer to her as “an enigma, a rock star, a laughing Buddha, and a fiercely dedicated, humble practitioner of the Way.” One monk described her as “a mountain – a mountain on fire.” *Zen Seeds*, in my view, makes the monk’s metaphor quite apt.