



MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 27 ; Autumn 2015

Face to face with teachers

Events

Brighton Day Sit
14th November 2015:
00:11 - 00:11

A day of Zazen in Brighton

Cost: Donation
chrisjh25@gmail.com

Brighton Day Sit
12th December 2015:
00:12 - 00:12

A day of Zazen in Brighton

Cost: Donation
chrisjh25@gmail.com

Hebden Bridge Practice Period
with Ingen Breen
15th February 2016 to
13th May 2016

A 3 month practice period located in Hebden Bridge

Cost: Please enquire
rebeccahabs@googlemail.com

2 Day Sesshin
with Ingen Breen
20th February 2016 to
21st February 2016

A formal Zen practice weekend

Cost: Please enquire
rebeccahabs@googlemail.com

Weekend sesshin in Glastonbury

with Ingen Breen
27th February 2016 to
28th February 2016



Sitting face to face

Editorial

By Karen Reddy

My personal understanding of our Soto Zen in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki is Zazen, Kinhin and face to face with teachers. For me having face to face teacher contact is something I haven't been able to make available regularly, but soto zen feels available. How? The committed local Sangha facilitators, who offer a weekly, Bi weekly, monthly or occasional sits to all. Their and your practice is alive and most welcome.

I feel this edition offers us access to different expressions of practice. Our friend Myoyu accepted an invitation to write and has an offering of beautiful and amusing rambling of Zen and life at San Francisco Zen Centre. An invitation to Ingen, in a year of an anniversary, treats us to memories of Jukai, bringing us right up to date. Paddy offers a warm and honest insight, on finding a teacher. Gill shares an acknowledgement "I couldn't have done it on my own" and sharing from Steve of what came to the open door on a first retreat.

2015 brought us the joys of Grandmother Energy. We were able to welcome Catherine Gammon who travelled around our UK Sangha

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By Angyu Devin and Ji Den Frances

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By Kath Bennett

Jukai
By Ingen Breen

Ingen's report from the Group Facilitators weekend
By Ingen Breen

Paths and Gates
By Ingen Breen

Local Sangha News
By Bev Eatwell

Update from Glastonbury
By Angyu Devin

An emerging centre project in Somerset
By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Letter from Bloomin Zen
By Myoyu

28th February 2016

A two day, non-residential sesshin with Ingen Bree

Cost: £75

07875155464
devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

All Day Zen

with Ingen Breen

12th March 2016: 00:03 - 00:03

One day sesshin

Cost: Please enquire

rebeccahabs@googlemail.com

All Day Zen

with Ingen Breen

19th March 2016: 00:03 - 00:03

One day sesshin

Cost: Please enquire

ingenstheme@gmail.com

All Day Zen

with Ingen Breen

20th March 2016: 00:03 - 00:03

One day sesshin

Cost: Please enquire

j.uhlemann@btinternet.com

Weekend sesshin in Devon with Ingen Breen

with Ingen Breen

16th April 2016 to 17th April 2016

A two day sesshin with Ingen Breen in Devon

Cost: £TBA

melsmere@hotmail.com

All Day Zen

with Ingen Breen

23rd April 2016: 00:04 - 00:04

One day sesshin

Cost: Please enquire

ingenstheme@gmail.com

All Day Zen

with Ingen Breen

24th April 2016: 00:04 - 00:04

One day sesshin

Cost: Please enquire

j.uhlemann@btinternet.com

Group Facilitators Support and Study

and I feel swept sweetness through with her. Thank you to Catherine and to all involved who made this visit possible.

August 2015 brought the opportunity for sangha to attend a retreat with beloved Reb Anderson in Sweden. We would love to hear from those who were able to attend, please send in your retreat experiences! Also with great appreciation, we offer our thanks to the European Sangha for their efforts in making this event possible.

This issue is a summer and autumn offering, despatched to you later than anticipated, the saying "best laid plans..." comes to mind. The delay was due to new challenges, but reaching out to a few brought an abundance of help and compassion. I offer if anyone is in need, let others know, they truly want to be in the now with you. Take a peek at committee news, information from the 2015 AGM, news of registering for fundraising (So lovely to be searching for our own property, who knows what could come our way).

A date to note for your diary is May 6th-8th 2016. This will be a group facilitators training, and chance to have your input on the direction of Dancing Mountains CIC. Theme and Venue to be confirmed, remember we welcome your ideas. It will be a weekend of practice training, finishing with a short Dancing Mountains Annual General Meeting.

As you receive this edition, I drop the seed of sharing, I'd love to hear from you, until then, carry on reading, and connect a little more.

Previous issues are available [here](#)

Sewing my rakasu (or should that be Rakasu?) I Can't Do It

By Gill Jackman

Summers Calling

By Karen Reddy

Haiku

By Guido Montgomery

First experience

By Steve Muir

Finding my teacher

By Paddy

It is what

By Philip Harris

National Future Fund Raising

By Chris Brown

Future date for diary

By Dancing Mountains Committee



Get involved

[Facebook group](#)

For general discussion and socialising about Dancing Mountains and related events on Facebook, please click the link above.

Business matters and decisions are made separately via an email list - please contact us if you want to be part of this.

Local Contacts

Visit the [Local Groups webpage](#) for details of Dancing Mountains groups

Retreat (& AGM)

with Ingen Breen
**6th May 2016 to 8th May
2016**

Developing practice for
event & group
facilitators

Cost: £TBC

07875155464

devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

Two Day Sesshin

with Ingen Breen
**7th May 2016: 00:05 -
00:05**

Non-residential Two Day
Sesshin

Cost: Please enquire

rebeccahabs@googlemail.com

2 Day Sesshin

with Ingen Breen
**18th June 2016 to 19th
June 2016**

A weekend residential
sesshin

Cost: £TBC

melsmere@hotmail.com

in your area, and the [Diary](#)
for their regular meeting
dates and times.

Next Issue

The **winter** edition will have
a theme around **`your life,
your life and Zen and
Sangha`**. We welcome your
articles, poetry, pictures,
letters, retreat reflections
and book reviews!

Publication date: 21st
January 2016, deadline for
submission of material **10th
January**.

Submissions to the
Newsletter/Website:
Karen Reddy, 07590
641733 - 07590 641733
Address: 11 Finchett Drive,
CHESTER, CH1 4DP

pinkkarenreddy@gmail.com

Membership

You already belong, so why
not become a member? -
Download a printable
[membership form](#) and
support Dancing Mountains.

[Unsubscribe from this list](#)

For enquiries related to this newsletter please email: devin@dancingmountains.org.uk

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Sangha Update

Chairs report from Annual General Meeting: The Annual General Meeting Report

By Angyu Devin and Ji Den Frances

REPORT BY CO-CHAIR PERSONS DANCING MOUNTAINS AGM 19th April 2015
Devin Ashwood & Frances Collins

Between October 2013 and April 2015, Dancing Mountains has developed considerably. We have completed the formation of the Dancing Mountains Community Interest Company with a constitution and articles of association. Meetings have been honoured regularly by board directors who agreed the intentions for 2014 -2015 as:-

- 1.) Promote information sharing with sangha
- 2.) Communicate with teachers from SFZC to explore interest/ availability and to support all teachings of Suzuki Roshi lineage in UK.
- 3.) Support local sangha activity
- 4.) Support and build membership
- 5.) Build documentation that enables clarity on handover of board directors
- 6.) Begin to explore ways to fundraise toward future purchase of properties for place of practice in UK
- 7.) Encourage generosity through volunteering support and skills
- 8.) Support development and training

1. Promoting information sharing with sangha

Mountain Silence Newsletter and Dancing Mountains website have continued to be a way of enabling sharing of information with a wide community internationally. Devin has been the lead on this activity since its beginning. This responsibility has now been generously accepted by Karen Reddy who has offered her first newsletter with great enthusiasm. This has enabled us to announce the development of an international 'virtual' daily sitting group. As a board we have actioned a virtual survey as a means of listening to our sangha's views and understanding of our reasons for creating a CIC. This has provided useful feedback for further discussion that we may continue to serve the sangha through the CIC.

2. Communicate with teachers from SFZC to explore interest/ availability and to support the teachings of Suzuki Roshi in UK

We are delighted to welcome back Rev Catherine Gammon to UK to support our national & local sangha activities. Following discussion with Reb Anderson last year in Sweden, Frances has been able to act on Reb's recommendation of SFZC priests and teachers interested in visiting UK. Her attendance at January Intensive practice period at SFZC 2015 enabled direct contact with said teachers to explore availability for 2016 and beyond. We were delighted that proceeds from membership fees & generosity shown have allowed that we could respond positively to request for financial support from Ingen Breen to develop his plan for an Irish temple albeit that Ingen did not proceed with this plan. Planning and advertising a rohatsu retreat to be led by Ingen was initiated by Devin albeit this did not take place.

3. Support local and international sangha activity

Suggestions for sangha facilitator weekend from Carol Hunter have been warmly received as a meeting of local groups in Norfolk in June 2015. We were particularly grateful to work of the newly formed international organising group dedicated to our founding teacher Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi teaching in Europe. Their hard work made a wonderful retreat in Sweden available in 2014 that was enjoyed by a significant number of our UK sangha. We want to take this opportunity to thank all the sanghas for practice activity and particularly to the continued commitment of local sangha facilitators.

4. Support and build membership

Our membership secretary has been able to provide updates on membership growth. Our current total membership is 16 which show an increase of 8 (8 as last AGM) over a year. New members have responded to newsletter and attending sangha groups. The newer membership has expanded from areas of Somerset, Dorset and Cheshire.

5. Build documentation that enables clarity on handover of board directors

We have developed an inventory and procedures to make assets such as equipment for zen ceremonies available to sangha around the country with identification of a role of custodians trusted with responsibility as a practice.

6. Begin to explore ways to fundraise toward future purchase of properties for place of practice in UK
Frances has initiated the search for information about fundraising for social enterprise organisations and templates for business plan that enables application for charitable funding. In its earliest stages this activity needs dedication of energy to take forward as a continuous activity of the CIC.

7. Encourage generosity through volunteering support and skills

It is with gratitude that we thank the generosity of volunteers in the form of our hard working directors that have nurtured our organisation to where it is today. We continue to encourage people to step forward and accept this opportunity to support this service for the whole sangha in any small way they can through volunteering any skills, time or energy that enable this work to continue. Without this generosity we cannot continue this work.

8. Support development and training

Kath & Frances attended The January Intensive at Green Dragon Temple and gave a gift from our UK sangha of an envelope to hold the okesa being sewn by our good friend Myoyu. This is offered with great appreciation and respect for his intense 5 years of practice and preparation toward priest ordination with Tenshin Roshi (so far!). In addition we are delighted to support our friend Devin Ashwood as he begins priest training here in UK with Ingen Breen.

Action: Frances - to forward NCVO details

Treasurer's report - Chris See attached profit/loss report. Currently income from membership - approx £110/m. No major events organised but some involvement with local sanghas. Major effort has been in formulating accounts in line with Companies House format for CIC. Need to pay 20% on any annual surplus for this year (approx tax bill £500) but this offset against any future expenditures.

Secretary's report - Kath See attached notes.

Catherine recognised that the greatest effort had already occurred to establish CIC - now for others to carry the momentum forward.

Membership Sec's report - Karen Membership had grown from 8 at last AGM to 16. New membership came from newsletter enquiries or local sanghas. New members now received a 'welcome letter' & DM stitched napkin. Contact list also audited & updated. There was discussion around ensuring sangha contacts/members were practicing in the tradition of Suzuki Roshi lineage, had attended facilitator's event and/or endorsed by Directors. It was agreed that local contact listings on the website would need to be approved at a Director's meeting.

Action: all - to agree all new local contacts

Election of Board In line with CIC docs all current Directors (5) resigned. According to the DMZ Mem & Arts there is a minimum requirement for 3 Directors on the Board. Frances has resigned as co - chair. Kath resigned as secretary. Devin expressed willingness to stay-on for 6 months to ensure CIC continues until volunteers step forward. One suggestion for inviting potential Directors was proposed for/during facilitator's w/end.

Nominations:Chair: Devin - proposed Kath, seconded Frances - elected

Treasurer: Chris - proposed Devin, seconded Karen - elected

Secretary: Nil nominations - Chair/Devin to assume role in short term

Membership Sec: Karen - proposed Chris, seconded Frances - elected

Nominations for other positions - nil

Motions None

AOB

1. Catherine – Spoke about ‘Branching Streams Group’ for all affiliated sanghas. DMZ & other sanghas need to register as affiliated groups. Felt there was benefit in registering as BS beginning to fund priests to visit. Their intention is to support practice worldwide in tradition of Suzuki Roshi

2. Catherine – shared her vision that is shared with a few other priests from SFZC to establish a retreat centre and arts/craft base – envisions an active engaged community/ residential training place. The location has not been decided. DMZ, when able may consider support. Discussion re potential funding streams followed.

3. Kath – Incense purchased at GG to be distributed to local sanghas with members.

4. Frances – has a number of Reb’s books & suggested these distributed to local groups as a donation to fund raise or held as a resource.

5. Asset threshold – Chris outlined that we need to state our ‘threshold on tax return to HMRC.

6. Chris – still exploring purchasing new zendo items. Action: Devin – To Talk to Steve at GG about affiliation.

Action: Devin – to circulate link for ‘Social Enterprise’ training & internship.

Action: Frances – to count & pass books to Karen

Meeting closed: 3.30pm

Next Meeting: 6 May 2016

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Sangha Update

Annual General Meeting Minutes

By Kath Bennett

Annual General Meeting of Dancing Mountains Zen Community Interest Company
Held at Sandymount, Crosby, Merseyside
Sunday 19 April October, 2015

The board thanked Frances for organising the venue and advertising the weekend retreat with Rev Catherine that ended with Dancing Mountains AGM. The venue was extremely supportive to our needs and practice. Frances as Co-Chair welcomed participants and thanked them for being present for this the first AGM of Dancing Mountains (CIC) following incorporation.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of previous AGM
3. Chair(s)'s report
4. Treasurers report & financial statement
5. Secretary's report
6. Membership Secretary's report
7. Election of committee
8. Motions
9. AOB

Present: Devin Ashwood Co-Chair, Frances Collins Co-Chair, Chris Brown Treasurer, Kath Bennett Sec. Karen Reddy, Mem sec. Steve Muir, Catherine Gammon

Item (Lead) Summary Action

1. Apologies for absence Received from Michael Elsmere, Josh Zatz, Wendy Klein. Action: Karen to distribute AGM minutes

2. Minutes of AGM 2013 Agreed by those present.

In review of last year's recommendations, Frances re-stated that a sangha meeting around practice & ritual may help engaging & unifying DM members.

3. Chair's report

Frances & Devin See attached report.

Frances spoke about Point's 1-4, Devin points 5-8

1. 1. About 10% returns to the end-of-year survey & the tone was generally positive.
2. 2. Supporting teachers from SFZC - Frances reported on discussions with Fu & Shokuji whilst at January Intensive Practice period at Green Dragon Temple (2015). Since then Kathy Early has contacted Frances to inform her that Reb also passed on Reiren's interest in visiting UK and to offer a reminder of the benefits of Diana Gerrard's UK residence.
3. 3. Support for local events & growth- Carol Hunter is keen to host weekend for existing or potential sangha facilitators June 20th at Norfolk. The board are keen to support this event.
3. 4. Support for international events - Frances and Kath as part of The European group organising Reb in Sweden reported 16 UK participants to date. Catherine enquired as to the number of UK sanghas/groups? Difficult to identify - about 6 groups/localities but only 4 currently with DMZ members. Some discussion was held about integrating AGM into other events e.g. Devin suggested dovetailing future AGM with teaching/facilitator's event. Frances reminded Board after discussion at January Intensive practice period with Rita Cummings that it would be appropriate to welcome Rita home to Edinburgh on behalf of DMZ.
4. 4. Membership - Increased from 8 at last AGM to 16
5. 5. Assets & Inventory - DMZ have established procedure for events & responsibility.
6. 6. Fund raising - Frances highlighted the need for energy to be directed to fund-raising and building a business plan as a regular and ongoing activity in order to grow as CIC & establish a permanent venue. Devin suggested that identifying specific projects to raise money for should make

fundraising easier. Frances agreed to forward details of NCVO government central funding by The Cabinet Office so that DMZ can enter a profile for funding alerts and become accustomed to the process and procedures of seeing funding streams.

7. 7. Generosity - All were thanked for their time & efforts with the CIC & recognised the efforts of individuals throughout the country to help organise events. The board continue to encourage people to step forward & volunteer any energy or skills in the service of the sangha.

8. 8. Myuyo & Devin were acknowledged for their devotion towards priest training. Action: A number expressed interest to receive summary of DM meeting minutes.

Action: Catherine to speak with Diana & clarify her interest and availability in teaching in UK.

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Article

Paths and Gates

By Ingen Breen

"To have some deep feeling about Buddhism is not the point, we just do what we should do, like eating supper and going to bed. This is Buddhism." Shunryu Suzuki



Although the Way is infinitely long and, ultimately, without direction, we have mile-markers, landmarks, turning points, significance and meaning. It is this dual aspect of practice that can be confusing, enriching, intimate, true. In Zen we immerse ourselves in the Relative as well as the Absolute, each flows into the other and are really not distinct.

The essential part of our practice is Being Present, or simply Being, and the most fundamental way in which we express that is in zazen, or just sitting. From this kernel the whole tree of practice grows. We have, so to speak, the roots ever deepening into the Eternal Present and the branches ever reaching into Space and Time. Or we could invert the metaphor, the branches growing deeper and deeper into the Sky of Emptiness and the roots growing further and further into the relative, discriminating between the various nutriment.

So, hopefully, our practice leads us deeper into the present, frees us from entanglement in the relative, so that our relative life is an expression of the absolute. When we bring Big Mind to ritual and ceremony then that is the case. If we bring small mind to ritual and ceremony, well, we might get a glimpse of Big Mind.

At San Francisco Zen Center there are various mile-markers along the Way. The first one is, perhaps, just crossing the threshold into the Zen Center or into the Zendo, finding your seat, finding your Zen. After a while it may seem appropriate to receive Jukai, sometimes called Lay Ordination or Lay Initiation. At Jukai you receive a rakusu, that is Buddha's Robe, a new name, your Dharma Name, or as it is called, your Serene Name, and you receive the lineage paper of your preceptor. The 'life-blood' of that lineage is the precepts, so you receive the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts. It is a beautiful ceremony, and for the initiate it can be transformative and confirming of what is already the case, that you are a practicing Zen Buddhist. In some ways it means that you have found your path, that it is this kind of practice you want to engage with, that speaks most clearly or most truly to your heart. So it is a significant event. You have entered a Sangha of Zen Practice. To some extent, you have found your place.

Other initiation ceremonies may follow Jukai, but not necessarily. It depends upon the individual and upon circumstances. I like to think in terms of things happening at the right time, and since we're engaged in Zen practice, if the time is never right then it's no big deal, we just continue with our practice. Still, the tree of practice tends to grow, it will grow wherever the conditions are right. If you received Jukai the chances are that others have or will too. So, the Jukai ceremonies are not only a mile-marker in the individual's practice, but also in the Sangha's.

Over time, a Sangha's practice will grow and broaden and deepen. This may take various forms, but one of the landmarks in it is being able to have sesshin, and later being able to have periods of more intense practice lasting say a month or more. These practice periods act as a way of strengthening the container we call 'practice', allowing us to go deeper into the Present, allowing us to sustain an effort over a longer-than-usual span of time. Eventually these practice periods maybe developed enough to support a Shuso, or 'Head Monk'. Such a person would take that role for the entire practice period and at the end of the practice period there would be a Shuso Ceremony, after which the Shuso

is allowed to teach – teach in the form of giving classes, giving Dharma talks, giving practice discussion. Being Shuso is a recognition that your practice has reached a point of maturity where it seems appropriate to do these things, but also that there is a context in which do to them, so it represents a certain maturity in the Sangha too.

At San Francisco Zen Center the term 'Shuso' is usually reserved for someone who has received Shukke Tokudo, or priest ordination, and the term 'Head Monk' is used for someone who has not received Shukke Tokudo but has received Jukai. Either way, to be Shuso / Head Monk for a practice period you need to have received Jukai or Shukke Tokudo. Also, at SFZC, in the case of a priest who has been Shuso, they are then allowed to be doshi at morning and noon service and not just at evening service, which is the case before being Shuso.

Last year at Hebden Bridge we had a three month non-residential practice period. As the days, weeks, and months went by I could really feel the strengthening of the container, a kind of momentum towards the present built up and it really did feel like a practice period. I feel that if we keep this up it will only be a matter of time before we have a practice period that can support a Shuso / Head Monk, even if the practice periods remain non-residential.

There is precedence for non-residential practice periods. First of all, in San Francisco, although many of the people may be participating in a residential way, that is by being in residence in the Zen Center for the duration of the practice period, a good number participate in a non-residential way. Usually the Shuso / Head Monk would need to participate residentially. In Norman Fischer's *Everyday Zen*, practice periods are normally non-residential, and in these cases the Shuso / Head Monk would not be in residence either. So, in my mind, this makes it very possible that we could soon have practice periods in the U.K. that support the role of Shuso / Head Monk. (By the way, the term 'monk' is often used at SFZC to describe someone of either gender, and Head Monk in no way implies the person must be male!)

After being Shuso what else can follow? Well, all of this should be understood in the context of practice, in the context of the opening quote by Suzuki Roshi. It is not so much that these are hoops to jump through in order to get somewhere, more like 'oh, it would be good if someone were Shuso for this practice period, do we have someone who could do that?' In much the same way as we might ask 'Do we have someone who could be Tenzo for this sesshin (or practice period)?'. Like fitting pieces of a jigsaw together, somehow we realise our potential. And yes, there are more things to follow the role of Shuso / Head Monk. In the case of a priest there would be Dharma Transmission, after which the person is allowed to ordain others and pass on the lineage, enabled to 'transmit the dharma'. In the case of someone who has received Jukai but not Shukke Tokudo, there would or could be Dharma Entrustment. This is recognition that the person is mature enough in their practice to be considered 'entrusted' with the dharma. As far as I know it does not give any additional abilities to those received upon being Head Monk. In a sense what it means is that the person has become independent of their teacher in their understanding and practice of the Dharma, which is not implied upon being Shuso / Head Monk. (The same is true with Dharma Transmission.)

And then? Yes, it seems like 'when thou has done thou hast not done for I have more', to quote John Donne. But we'll leave that for another day. Incidentally, there is no other day.

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Retreat Report

Ingen's report from the Group Facilitators weekend - Summer 2015

By Ingen Breen



So the weekend that had been in the pipeline since early last year eventually came to pass. Last year I could see the importance of the event and was a little disappointed to see it fall through. However, quite possibly last year the time was not ripe.

Although the numbers were few for the event that took place over the Solstice weekend, I feel a lot of ground was covered, notably the consensus that the company Dancing Mountains is essentially a service instrument to the emerging and existing Sanghas that want to have a connection with San Francisco Zen Center. Ways of being able to support these groups were discussed, an action plan was arrived at, and some clarification as to 'progress' in the Zen path was reached.

It was a joy to practice with Devin, Chris, Carol and John, and the tapestry and orchestra of their environs. Our schedule, hatched on our arrival on Friday was fairly simple, zazen and chanting, discussion and tea, and food and sleep. The setting was really beautiful, an acre or so of wooded land with a food garden, chickens, a lovely straw-baled house and camping. Waking up in a tent with the early brightness of mid-summer and the frenzy of the dawn chorus was a little bewildering and also deeply connective with the web of life.

One of the highlights for me was discovering what a wonderful collection of dharma songs John and Carol have made. I look forward to being able to put links to them on my website. Another was watching Bubbles the cat clearing a meter high fence with perfect confidence and nonchalance. Nobody ever asks if cats have Buddha nature, I guess it just goes without saying.

In gassho and quiet optimism,

Ingen.

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Teacher Interview

Jukai

By Ingen Breen

Jukai

Tassajara was cold, sometimes 20 below, F, and the river full. The water sounded like a waterfall, thunderous, roaring, and wherever you went there was no getting away from the sound. It was wonderful. The days were dark, a sliver of sunlight after breakfast as the sun rose in a trough of the mountain ridge, then soon disappeared until near sunset for another brief visit. As the practice period ran its course gradually more daylight, rising temperatures, and more wildlife appeared. It was my first practice period at Tassajara and I loved it. Especially I'll be forever grateful for the opportunity to sit Tangaryo. For five days the new arrivals sat from 4:20 a.m. to 9 p.m. We were joined by the community for morning zazen and service, and for evening zazen, and for the three Oryoki meals in the zendo, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Apart from that, the ten Tangaryo students sat facing the same wall in the otherwise empty Zendo. And in the afternoon at some point tea was brought in, which we were served with a cookie.



It was a precious time. We had a half hour break after each meal. There were no periods of zazen, we just sat. If you needed to go to the restroom you did, if you needed to do kinhin you did. Time became eternity.

The practice period (Ango) was led by Zenkei Blanche Hartman, then co-Abbott of SFZC, sharing the Abbotship with my teacher Zoketsu Norman Fischer. Norman lived at Green Gulch and Blanche at City Center in San Francisco. Actually, I could say the Ango was led by Shakyamuni Buddha, but that might sound a little too esoteric.

The practice period was the spring of '97 and I had spent the previous year living at Green Gulch. Actually, I arrived at Green Gulch in October of '95 and did two practice periods there - the winter and the spring, or the fall and the winter, depending on how you reckon things. During my second practice period there I asked Norman for Jukai. He agreed. It had been a difficult enough decision to make, to ask Norman or to ask Reb. Much as I loved Reb's teaching and am still so grateful for his teaching, I gravitated more towards Norman's style and way of being. What I appreciated most about Norman at the time was I could easily sit zen, zazen, through his talks and even in his class. Because of how Reb delivered his talks that was not so easy and I got the impression he didn't really like it during class. But I may have been wrong, it was an impression. I feel as though I learned a lot from both these teachers, and from the whole community and way of life at Green Gulch. It's a gem of a place.

I remember arriving there, after spending the first week of my trip with friends in San Francisco, they were renting an apartment there, coming over the hill in a taxi I got from Manzanita parking lot where the Golden Gate Transit bus had brought me, and looking down onto the 'campus' of Green Gulch as the taxi turned down into the drive and thinking 'Yes!'. The complex of buildings set in trees and farmland suggested both activity and serenity, and promised to be what I was looking for, a place to practice.

So, after Norman said yes, I set about sewing a Rakusu! That meant going to the sewing room on Sunday afternoon and learning how to do the Namu Kye Butsu stitch. Although I lived at Green Gulch it took me forever to sew the Rakusu. There was / is much of Zen practice I didn't like, perhaps still don't, but see its value. At the time I saw the value of having to come to terms with doing an activity that I didn't like, and that I didn't really connect with, and that offered me much practice of making room for my negative responses or reactions, impatience and frustration. I had a wonderful

environment to sew in, and teachers who helped me along every step of the way, and eventually it was sewn.

Then there was the waiting. Norman suggested that the practice period at Tassajara would be a good time and I readily agreed. He would be visiting for a week or so while Blanche left. I never really knew why Blanche left, was it to maintain connection with the City Center or was it just to make room for Norman to teach. They got along so well together and their styles so compatible that I can't really see it being the latter. So Norman arrived and it was great to see him, great to hear his teaching again, and great to meet him in dokusan. He wondered if I had a preference for when to do the ceremony, and I suggested, at first, St Patrick's Day, then I had a second thought and suggested the 16th, the eve of St Patrick's Day.

I was led in to the Zendo by Daigan, whom you may know recently died. He was the Tanto at Tassajara at the time and quite an impressive practitioner, with his US Army life showing through. The Zendo was full of the community, sitting facing into the room, on the Tan, with the kersone wall-lamps burning. I was the only initiate and so it was quite intimate, facing my teacher across the ordination table.

I received my new name, Buddha's Robe (the Rakusu) and the lineage papers of this branch of the family tree. I had decided earlier that if my dharma name was reasonably pronounceable I would change over to that. I think I picked up this idea from the Western Buddhist Order, where I had practiced for over 4 years before deciding I really had to do 'Zen'. Perhaps I had also picked it up from the knowledge that Christian monastics change their name when they join, it's a form of rebirth, a sense of change or commitment, a sense of direction. It took some persistent effort to get people to go along with it, not so much because they didn't want to, but because of habit and culture. At SFZC very few people changed their name to their dharma name, and so there wasn't a culture to 'go along with', whereas in the WBO there was and is. At, SFZC that has changed, with many people now choosing to be called by their dharma name.

So, I received Jukai just over 18 years ago. Later I received Shukke Tokudo (priest ordination) from Norman, and was Shuso (head monk) at Tassajara, again for an Ango that Blanche was leading, and then I received Dharma Transmission from Norman in 2009. As Arlene (Daigan's wife) said once, that's a lot of sewing!

Recently I gave Jukai to Liam and Kathy in Belfast. The ceremony was beautiful, it was so good to see how well the BZ Sangha could manifest this beautiful ceremony, quite a lot of 'practice' goes into it. And it was really wonderful to have Rebecca from Hebden Bridge and Devin from Glastonbury at the ceremony, their effort and support was wonderful to see. I said in my talk that morning that the ideal setting is a practice period, next best is a 7 day sesshin or a retreat, next a weekend, and next a 1 day. We had a 1 day sit and the ceremony was well contained.

Liam reported to me since how much he appreciated everything and how powerful the ceremony was, and that was unexpected. Yes, these rituals are very transformative, deepening the process that has already been going on for some time before. They have an impact and make our practice life more real.

Ingen
Dublin
June 16, 2015.

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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[Local Sangha News](#)

By Bev Eatwell

Brighton

Saturday 13th June saw another one day sit for the Dancing Mountains Brighton sangha. The day was hosted as usual at Chris and Clare Hannah's beautiful house in Brighton and much of the delicious food eaten throughout the day came from their garden and allotment, including a spinach and feta spinakopita which contained spinach picked less than an hour before serving!



The day followed the usual structure, with the Heart Sutra chanted during noon service and an extended break period in the afternoon to allow for some exercise and enjoyment of the beautiful sunshine. Diana Gerard agreed to act as Doshi for the ceremony and came over from Eastbourne in order to support our practice here in Brighton.

A wonderful day was had by all, and was capped off by tea and cake and a rare badger sighting. The next scheduled sit is planned for 11th July and please do get in contact if you are interested in attending. We sit together most Thursday evenings and there is one day sit approx. every 6 weeks on a Saturday.

Bev

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Sangha Update

Update from Glastonbury

By Angyu Devin

Hello from the Glastonbury sangha. Our weekly meeting is going from strength to strength, despite two other similar Zen style groups now running on the same night locally!

We have had an intense spring which has included a deeply moving memorial service to our dear friend Fee, wife of Roy, one of our longest standing members. This was lovingly led by Ned who has sadly been leading more funerals and memorials than weddings of late. The visit by Catherine was wonderful. Francoise, Gill, Chris and Nicky all made substantial progress on their Rakasus under her guidance and I had the chance to help as well as do some sewing myself with a rather splendid 1940's sewing machine from my mother-in-law. Catherine's evening talk attracted a full house, I have no doubt her insight and experience benefited all, I am only sad she can't be persuaded to come and live here! I was privileged to read Catherine's latest novel 'Sorrow' after her visit, which is truly a force of nature and I highly recommend it to anyone who has the stomach for investigating Dukkha to its depths.

We had a wonderful three day sesshin with Ingen in July which was a somewhat intense practice with the incorporation of Oryoki style meals to keep the focus on mindfulness throughout the day. We recently finished sewing some utensil holders, so are getting closer to having the equipment for the full form as we have 12 full oryoki sets now...

We are hoping to start a regular schedule of events in the south west soon in collaboration with the Totness sangha, so we are looking forward to welcoming you here in the near future.

Bows to all,

Angyu Devin

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Article

An emerging centre project in Somerset

By Angyu Devin Ashwood

Inspired by a wish to create practice opportunities and live in a way more congruent with our values, a Bev, her partner Gez, Nicky and I have started to explore possible venues in Somerset to establish a centre that could host study, retreats, and related training. Depending on where we find the funding, this might look more secular/mindfulness oriented, or might look more Zen, however whatever form it takes, it is likely to be a place for practitioners to live and work which will host practice periods.

We have found the most magnificent building. A beautiful old priory that has been derelict for the past 20 years which local residents would like nothing more than to see put to good use. We have contacted the owner and they are keen to sell, but we must now explore funding avenues to pay for it along with the necessary repairs to make it a usable building, which may be up to or over a million pounds. The property we are looking at has a modern extension (for a swimming pool) which has a space big enough to rival the group room at Gaia House. Considering how overbooked Gaia House gets these days, we are convinced that it would be financially sustainable by making it available as a venue for retreats.

If you feel inspired to help this project along, there is much to be done. In the short term, we will need a surveyor and building estimates for repairs, but most of all funds to pay for all this. If you have resources or enthusiasm to help us, please do get in touch.



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Article

Letter from Bloomin Zen

By Myoyu

Hello good folk of the Albion,

I guess I should come straight out and tell you that this is hoped to be an ongoing look into the journey this one is taking over at the Green Dragon Temple situated on Green Gulch Farm, one of the three Treasure's of the San Francisco Zen Centre.

Of course for the ease of writing and reading it won't be chronological. Zen Right! Beyond words and all that.

I have been on this path, hoho straight into zen speak, for a few years now and feel well and truly able to wear the title of Novice Student, a title I hope to remain true to for the rest of me days n nights.

The regime here is roughly divided into the Spiritual and the Mundane, my words, i.e. the study of Zen Buddhism and the practicality of eating, sleeping, sitting, working and of course, sh****ng.

Those of you who have been blessed by visiting GGF will know some things of how the community manages to survive, which is on the whole due to the wider sangha who live in and around Marin County as well as those who come to visit, be it for a conference and or workshop or as a Guest Worker (this may be called by another name, but is essentially people who come to stay and work in the morning to cut down the costs. Tis very expensive), Guest Student (the prerequisite for most in order to stay long term), or one of the Apprentice schemes, i.e. Farm and Garden Apprentices who come for 6 months and learn about Organic Farming / Gardening, the Guest House Apprenticeship which we have just begun this year and runs for three months at present, or the general Work Practice Apprentice, who can stay for up to 2 years and then move onto staff.

Anyway I best put a disclaimer in here to point out that the above is only my limited understanding of how GGF operates! And also to point out that whatever you gather from my rambling from any of my communiques is no more than my delusional thoughts (Probably) as interpreted by your good selves.

Onward ever going nowhere,

What's your job I imagine you crying out....

That actually was your Cue...

No I still can't hear you

Ready or not... I am held by the role of Fukaten, actually Joint Fukaten.

It's a long story and maybe on another occasion I will tell you more!

The role of Fukaten is that of enabling the Kitchen Crew to prep. and cook the meals the Tenzo has picked out from Her (His) extensive knowledge of the wellbeing and cravings of the community.

This is the second time I've almost held this position Mmmm well I guess I will have to check here about how to go forward with this expose of Me! Myself! and I. which I presume you all can see as

being interpretations of the word OTHER.

bye bye for now.

Myoyu

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Writing

Sewing my rakasu (or should that be Rakasu?) I Can't Do It

By Gill Jackman

Sewing my rakasu (or should that be Rakasu?)
I Can't Do It



I have deep psychological scars. That's why I trained to be a psychotherapist. Through Zen I've come across parallel concepts to certain psycho-babblish nouns. In Buddhist terminology, I think my complex-driven beliefs are called saṅkhāra. You might say that they manifest as my schtick(s) (Yiddish slang meaning "gimmick" that has come to mean "someone's signature behaviour.")

If I were to reduce one of these patterns of thinking/feeling/behaving down to a phrase, that phrase would be - I can't do it. It's a feeling state of panic I avoid these days by not doing anything difficult.

My first recollection of this experience taking over was aged seven, sitting behind a very old-fashioned Victorian school desk (with an inkwell), trying to work out a long-division sum. The more I panicked, the more the numbers jumped around until I didn't know what should be removed from what, where or how. I had been kept back from going to lunch. The upshot of this hysteria was that that I had the back of my hands battered with a ruler and was forced to eat cold rice pudding. Earlier that day, I had stood on a low chair, with a gingham cloth on it, while the school sang 'happy birthday' to me. Unsurprisingly, I do not have as much as a maths CSE.

Years later, doing my first degree, I whipped myself into a frenzy of hysteria trying to understand G.E. Moore's philosophical essay: Is existence a predicate? I also walked out of a logic seminar which was too close to algebra for comfort.

And then, half a lifetime passed and there came... The Rakasu. Oh dear. Very kindly, a friend gave me a few hours help and I took the pieces away. I started the front and was happily sewing along, when hubris, that great levelling God, led me to an experience much like the one I had recently at the Glastonbury festival. (I'm a veteran.) One minute, in sure and certain belief, I was thinking, I know exactly where I am, and in the next, I knew no north, south, east or west. (I knew only that I'd sewn one seam back to front before the view from my raft held no horizon whatsoever.)

What to do? (as the old lags in India say.) I can't do it had become a phrase guaranteed to tip me head over heels as whatever I tried to do became more and more fragmented with the panic. But this is Zen, I thought. Stuff the Rakasu. I mean, I wanted to take the vows but to do so at the expense of my mental health seemed pointless. I felt that the choice was either to leave it or to embrace the other half of my personality (the authoritarian part), go deeply into my suffering as I relived it, however long that took, until I let go of the trauma. I'm 55, I thought. Life is far too short.

And then - Catherine Gammon appeared, manifesting the compassion I had delivered to myself by telling me exactly what to do, step-by-step, unpicking the mess, saying 'sew that bit to that bit' and presiding over an oasis of supportive calm round at Devin and Nicky's. I am incredibly grateful. Unknowingly, she circumnavigated my utterly helpless child with a quiet practicality.

It's not finished, of course, but I am a quantum leap ahead in confidence and the devoted Devin and Nicky couldn't be more willing to help, bringing a whole new, largely down-to-earth entirely non-metaphysical meaning to the phrase, I couldn't have done it on my own.

Maybe I'll be a fully vowed-up Zen woman one day, after all.
With very deep bows of gratitude.

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By Guido Montgomery

In the cool dusk breeze
we walked backwards on the beach
Venus our witness

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Poetry

Summers Calling

By Karen Reddy

the sky is showing blue, the sun is shining high and there`s a warmth
to the air. Nature breaths aloud. How I love having senses

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Article

Finding my teacher

By Paddy

Finding my teacher

To paraphrase the Oracle in The Matrix talking to Neo about being the one - "(finding the one) is like being in love - no one can tell you you've (found the one) - you just know- balls to bone" I'm being ironic, and actually prefer the approach of Brad Warner who wrote about the concept of Zen teachers on his blog. He wrote about a Zen teacher in the USA who was unfortunate enough to be discovered having an extra marital affair and was denounced on the website of his centre by his students and had to retire as a Zen teacher. Brad didn't think he should resign because when you have a guitar teacher you don't care who they sleep with or what their personal morals are. You just want them to show you how to play the guitar, and then he makes some reference to a riff by Led Zeppelin or something. His point is; 'can your Zen teacher teach you about Zen?' That's the important bit.

My teacher is Ingen and I have asked him to give me the precepts. I have been watching him and I am sure that he can teach me about Zen. He is helping me sew a rakasu, which is a slow process as I can't seem to sew and he seems to be helping me more and more as I do less and less, as it probably wouldn't happen otherwise. It's gonna be a funny looking rakasu and if you laugh at it, well you laugh at it.

That's all I want to say about my teacher except that so far he has been really kind, which is probably what I needed.

So instead I thought I would tell you about the other contenders, the ones who didn't make it. If I was still a Christian I'd call them false prophets but I only mean false for me, not what I needed. The worst thing about them was that when I met them I was thinking that there was something outside of myself that would do it for me. Someone, who would sort me out, so to speak, that reminds me of an old Zen story that I possibly made up, or perhaps read somewhere and forgot where. A young monk was walking on a pilgrimage with his teacher and the monk asked him "What is it like being enlightened?" and the teacher said "On this pilgrimage I can do a lot of things for you but if you need to take a s**t, you have to do that yourself."

The first potential teacher was Father Leonard May - a parish priest from Maltby in South Yorkshire, who was the leader of a Charismatic Catholic group that is still going as far as I know. I was a member from 1983 till about 1993 and lived as full time member, called at the time a religious brother from 1987 till 1989. I used to shake uncontrollably sometimes when Father May gave a sermon and when he laid hands on me and I would fall to the ground, called 'resting in the spirit' and lie on the floor in a state of bliss. He upset me when I told him I was gay and he said - "there is no such thing as 'gay' there is only sin" and I had to pray to be cured. Enough about that.

In 1988 I met a Nichiren monk on a sponsored walk to raise money to help people with AIDS. He was chanting the Lotus Sutra as he walked. I went up to him and said "I am a monk too." And we got talking. He was so attractive, really peaceful, committed and non-discriminatory. He was walking then length of the country chanting the Lotus Sutra and raising money to help people with AIDS. I had got myself into a bit of trouble for doing the walk; I was asked why I didn't raise money for 'innocent victims' of illness rather than people who had 'brought it on themselves.' Anyway I never saw him again but decided that a real monk was like him and not like me - and a real monk would be a Buddhist. That worried my contemporaries.

I didn't become a Buddhist till 2005 - with the Triratna Buddhist Community - then called 'the friends of the Western Buddhist Order' I met Sangharakshita once and felt exactly how I felt when I met Father May. I would feel like I was going to 'rest in the spirit' as he walked past me. The shaking didn't happen though, thankfully. He has dodgy ideas about women being inferior to men and although I know you have to go a long way to find a religious leader who doesn't explicitly or implicitly think

women are inferior to men I still think it is worth trying.

I met Reverend Leandra, a Soto Zen monk from Throssel Hole Monastery in 2011. She doesn't think women are inferior to men. I was unemployed and looking after my partner who was in recovery from heroin addiction and he was trying to forget the phone numbers of drug dealers. Later he was given the label of paranoid schizophrenia by some other drug dealers (my word for psychiatrists). The minute I met Reverend Leandra I felt really calm. She was very kind to me and I was feeling a bit like I did when I was with Father May, but without the shaking. Instead the feeling was grounded and peaceful, not blissful, just ordinary, but nonetheless important. She didn't judge me.

The only reason I didn't take things forward with her (apart from the funny chanting and calling everyone Reverend Master and stuff) was because of my ancestor Issan Tommy Dorsey Roshi. He was a teacher in Suzuki's lineage who died in 1990 and I knew I wanted to be in the same lineage as him. If you don't know who he is read 'Street Zen' and you will see while I consider him my ancestor and why I wanted to be in the same lineage as him. So I told Rev Leandra that I was looking for a teacher in the Suzuki Lineage.

After I met Ingen and asked him to be my teacher I met Reb Anderson. I have told most people this story as it was one of the most amazing meetings of my life. In Dokusan with him I nearly started to hyperventilate and probably would have if he hadn't helped me to calm down (I know I am bit of a drama queen sometimes). I had another amazing experience with him in the zendo and as he spoke to me my heart was pounding and I could literally feel the blood running around my body. My whole body woke up it was incredible. He told me that ninety five percent of me was unconscious and that the ninety five percent was telling the five percent that the teaching was true even though the five percent doesn't understand it and it was causing me to smile. I thought that I should listen to what he said. He said he had given us the teaching and we didn't need to be with him all the time because the teaching is here where we are and doesn't just follow him around. The teaching is everywhere.

I also met Brad Warner who is really great. When I talk to him sometimes I am shocked. I didn't think I would meet someone who would shock me with their honesty and openness but he does. I don't get the creepy 'you're the one' feelings with him though. He is too grounded for that.

I don't get the creepy 'you're the one' vibes with Ingen either, although I do sense that he has a great stillness about him. It makes me feel as if the relationship is a bit more grown up, a bit more self-contained. One of the things Ingen has taught me is that Zen is right here in this body, in this room. It isn't outside of me and it is not the possession of another more advanced or spiritual person - nor is it my possession.

In fact according to the Heart Sutra there is no Ingen and there is no me -so how can he be my teacher and me his student if we don't exist. There is a saying that I learnt at University (doing French post structuralism if you really care) that helps me understand this. 'I don't exist, we do.' So I think I can say that the relationship between Ingen and me exists, with me called student and Ingen called teacher. But only provisionally and possibly or hopefully in the end I will realise in my bones that only relationship exists, relationship with everything, or as Dogen said, 'intimacy with everything'. That's the idea but for now I am waiting to meet him again and do more sewing.

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Retreat Report

First experience

By Steve Muir

Thank you Karen for inviting me to write about my experience at the weekend retreat in Crosby with Dancing Mountains Sangha. I might have had some expectations or notions about what the weekend would be like but I can't remember them now. While I've been reflecting on my recollections of the retreat, parts of it start to fall in to place.

During the first evening zazen, a cat inquisitively padded up to the door, which had been opened slightly to let some fresh air in, and considered entering the zendo. It probably wasn't quite sure what to make of the human statues facing the walls and the scent of incense and decided against it. Although at that point I felt ok with sitting there, I would later have some empathy with the cat and wonder if I was doing the right thing being in there as well! As the light faded, Rev. Catherine Gammon introduced the subject of the weekend's Dharma talk, about "Grandmother mind", with a koan that, to my simple mind, bore no relationship to it whatsoever. It wouldn't be until the Dharma talk on the Saturday that I would understand that the koan was in fact showing exactly what "Grandmother mind" is, which I think I understand as kind wisdom or wise kindness; the amalgamation of knowing the ultimate reality with instinctively knowing the appropriate, compassionate response to suffering. But then, I could easily be wrong!

Silence was difficult to begin with; this was all relatively new to me only having attended a fairly relaxed day of practice and the evening sangha meetings. I wanted to talk to someone, I suppose, in order to find some reassurance with my own cat-like thoughts. Thinking about it now, it was like having learned to speak french at school and then going to live in a part of France where nobody speaks english. So how fortunate it was that my need to talk to someone should be met by a one to one meeting with Rev. Catherine Gammon, complete with Grandmother mind. I found talking to Catherine very reassuring even though I didn't actually bring up any of my immediate thoughts of the weekend thus far. Before I left, Catherine asked if there was anything more and it was here that I brought my own koan of sorts in to the mix of things that I should contemplate on the retreat. I call it a koan because it is something that I have been thinking about for some time and more so recently without coming to any real understanding of it. It was something that actually happened some twenty years ago when I worked as a builder. Briefly, the job involved painting a dormer window on the roof of a large old bungalow in West Sussex. The lady owner of the house offered me her roof ladder, which she said had been made for the very purpose of reaching the window in question. My immediate thought was that I didn't particularly like the look of the ladder, but the following thought was that it would be ok and that as I had been offered it I should go ahead and use it. With everything in place and by now having used the ladder several times to prepare and undercoat the window, it was time to apply the emerald green gloss. The brush was dipped in to the paint and as I reached up to within an inch of making the first brushstroke the ladder started to slide down the roof with me and the pot of green paint on it. In what seemed like a minute but what must have been no more than one or two seconds, I had time to realise that I couldn't get off the ladder before it went off the roof and even if I could I would still fall off it anyway because of the momentum and then that when I did hit the ground, which happened to be stone paving slabs, I was going to get hurt, bones would probably be broken, I might actually die if I broke my neck. At this point, an absolute calm came over me, I closed my eyes and thought, "Relax - whatever happens it will be ok".....And then I was hit by the "bus," which is what hitting the ground felt like. I tentatively opened my eyes and realised that I was still alive. I was face down, in a skydiver's star shaped position but facing away from the building that I had just fallen from. The ladder was now about 20 yards away on the lawn. As I gently moved my fingers and toes and slowly got to my feet I realised that nothing was broken, there wasn't a scratch or a bruise, miraculously, I had suffered nothing more than being momentarily winded and I was now standing

covered in green paint being attended to by my aunt and uncle who were also working at the house and the lady owner, who was feeling terribly sorry for having offered the ladder. I was just thankful to be alive but confused by how I had landed in the opposite direction and how the ladder had ended up so far away. This particular point was what had stuck with me, like a koan that I couldn't relate to. Catherine's invaluable wisdom immediately saw that I was stuck with the need for an explanation for my own and the ladders position after the fall, as if I thought there had been some "divine intervention" or something and that there was probably a perfectly reasonable explanation of the physics of how this had happened and therefore was not something to be too concerned about. Then there was the thought that the ladder didn't look safe and the thought that it would be ok and that both of these are necessary thoughts to have neither one or the other are right or wrong. The main focus of this story therefore, was, at the point of realisation of imminent death, to relax, let go, don't be afraid. In order to cultivate this, more zazen!

And so, I happily returned to my zafu and more zazen. There were further thoughts raised by Catherine's Dharma talk on koans that involved teachers hitting students and vice versa and I was reminded of stories of how Suzuki Roshi taught with a playful humour, such as forcing Reb to practice counting to ten in Japanese over and over during a flight to Japan by saying, "Again!" even when Reb thought that it was safe to stop because Suzuki Roshi appeared to be asleep. Or when, during a long drive with a young monk, having stopped for something to eat at a burger bar Suzuki Roshi ordered a cheese burger, whilst the monk diligently ordered just a bun with cheese as a vegetarian alternative. Suzuki Roshi took one bite of his cheese burger and said, "Mine isn't very nice, shall we swap?" - I think this is like the teacher hitting the student in a playful way, Japanese slapstick humour, taking students out of their comfort zone.

As Saturday moved on and the light in the zendo lowered to dusk, although my knees were now aching, I felt comfortable with where I was and grateful for what I was experiencing. A great deal of work and effort had enabled this to be happening and I could appreciate that a beautiful ancient tradition was being authentically practiced. The constant effort to attain perfection on the forms also brought humour as when the pronunciation of "neither" was a cause for concern in the chanting of the Heart Sutra.

Sunday morning zazen, and a feeling that this retreat would soon be ending, just as I was starting to get comfortable! The pain in my knees was fading and the white radiator and stretch of carpet in front of me were like old friends. Everything was starting to make more sense and I was almost sorry when the silence came to an end. As we packed away I felt a renewed enthusiasm to practice and looked forward to the next sangha meeting and to carrying on zazen at home in the morning and in the evening.

As for my koan, it might be very simplistic, but I feel that my experience of the retreat has helped to bring about some understanding of it: I was like the cat at the open door on Friday night that didn't like the look of it when I started the retreat, just as I hadn't liked the look of the roof ladder, but I got on with it as I had told myself it would be ok, just as I had got on the ladder. The ladder was the vehicle and the vehicle is the Dharma and I need not be afraid of where it leads to. Sliding down the roof is life, after all death is inevitable, it is only the fear of death that is the problem and it's also continuing to practice. To relax is to let go, to be in the moment without fear, to realise that death itself is going to be ok and it's zazen, it's no attainment, it's no notions. Hitting the ground and surviving, this should be awakening, this should be the joy to be alive and it's worth remembering the gratitude felt in that moment. The ladder 20 yards away on the lawn is when the vehicle is no longer required - that the vehicle will take you to the point of awakening but it isn't awakening itself, a reminder that it's the finger pointing at the moon not the moon itself. And the green paint everywhere was the playful humour, the Japanese slapstick or maybe just the "luck of the Irish"?

Much love and thanks to everyone that made this such a brilliant first retreat.

Steve

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MOUNTAIN SILENCE

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Poetry

It is what

By Philip Harris

The realisation that we already
have it is effortful.
The realisation that we already
have it is not it.
It is you, whether we realise
it or not.
The beauty of it is in
the realisation but the
object of beauty is not it.
To study dark matter
we must use the light
but the whole is neither
light nor dark.

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[National Future Fund Raising](#)

By Chris Brown

DM is now registered with Government Funding Central. Just to let you know I've registered on Funding Central now, and will forward any interesting funding alerts that come up.

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[Future date for diary - 2016 DM AGM](#)

By Dancing Mountains Committee

Looking a head and hoping to give every opportunity to all to attend, a date for your diary: 6-8th May 2016. A weekend retreat that will be an opportunity for group facilitators to give and receive support, which will finish with DM AGM (on the 8th) and keep our legal obligations and our practice open in the lineage of Suzuki

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