

MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 3

Autumn

Generosity

Release of this third edition of Mountain Silence, the newsletter of The Dancing Mountains Zen Sangha, comes hot on the heels of the UK and international community's annual opportunity to engage in a seven day sesshin in the tradition of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Gaia House Retreat Centre in Newton Abbot, Devon, again facilitated this event led by Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi. The focus this year was the practice and realisation of the Buddha's teaching of totality.

"The authentic practice of Buddhadharma is only provisionally concerned with personal attainment of liberation. The ultimate point is benefitting all beings and positively transforming the entire universe."

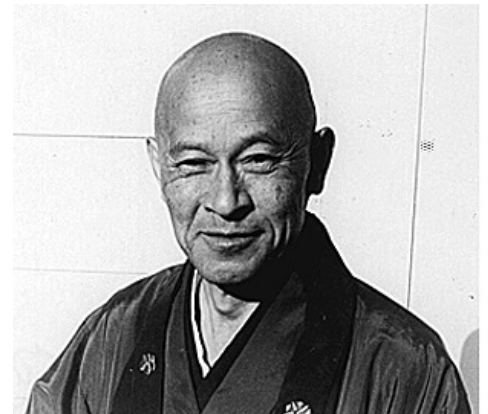
Reb Anderson

Such direct and passionate language above, used in the advertising of this retreat, captured the interest of many more than the 67 people in attendance. This episode of Mountain Silence carries feedback on this event. The theme we have chosen for this newsletter is 'generosity' and the dharma talk transcribed carries many facets including, simplicity, gentle humour, joy and profound wisdom that is so characteristic of this teacher's style. Reb demonstrates his unique ability to deliver the teachings in a way that is accessible to each individual in today's audience.

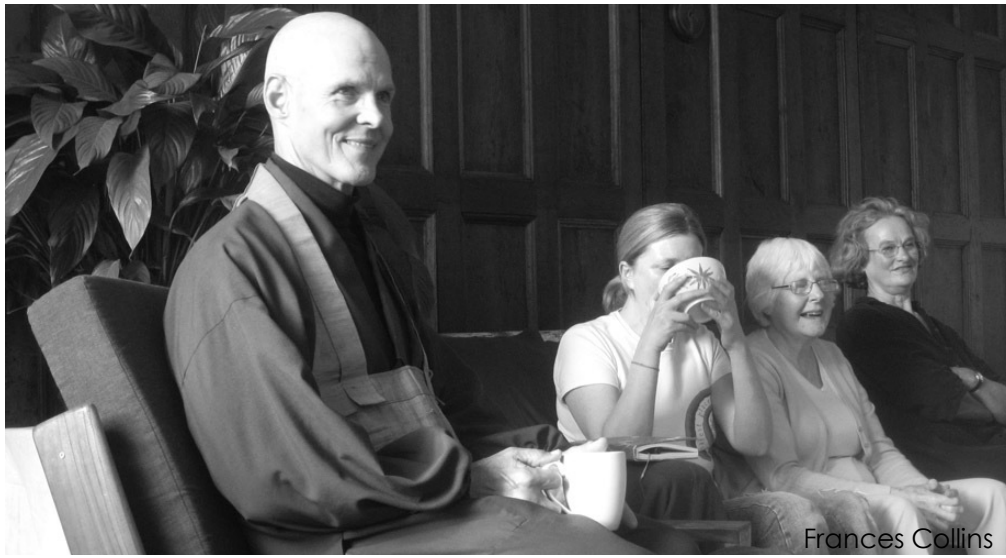
Dancing Mountains, as a sangha and also as an organization, remains in its infancy and can hopefully be forgiven for falling short of wider advertising of the meeting with Reb Anderson on the 29th August at closure of the sesshin. Since the ultimate point of the Buddha's authentic teaching of totality, as taught and embodied by Reb, is to benefit all beings, it is in this vein that I would like to discuss the outcome of that meeting especially for all who were unable to attend. In a way, this may offer the opportunity to begin to weave the teaching of generosity throughout these words.

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"To give is non-attachment, that is, just not to attach to anything is to give"



Approximately 18 members of the Sangha from various parts of the UK were in attendance with Reb, to review the genesis and growing pains of Dancing Mountains over the last year. The enthusiasm for practice in the tradition of Shunryu Suzuki, which was expressed in our last newsletter's editorial, took shape in the form of a yearning for a centre in the UK which could be affiliated to San Francisco Zen Centre. This meeting held this particular aspiration up as more long-term than the immediate, accessible and pragmatic vision suggested by Reb. A combination of the recognition of Dancing Mountains' infancy plus reflections on lessons learned in the US opened a space for the germination of new seeds. In order to generously serve the wider Sangha both in terms of experience and geography, emphasis was placed on flexibility and invitational attitude to all beings regardless of experience of practice in this way.

To carry forth our heartfelt intention we need to recognize our growing edge as we do within our individual practice, supporting attitudes of beginners' mind and patience. The simplicity of a system of 'cells' across the UK which could make it possible for individuals to come together to practice reminded me of the metaphor of Indra's net with multifaceted jewels at each vertex, and each jewel reflected in all of the other jewels. Each cell, mutually supporting each other cell, beginning to contribute to the whole through our practice. Communication between cells is invited through Mountain Silence Newsletter, our website as well as the new Yahoo group:

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/DancingMountains/>

Keeping things simple, sitting with the bell and the breath can be form enough, in the service of this open invitation to anyone who is interested in this way. In the spirit of this edition, it is hoped that this generosity may give rise to the confidence for new dharma friends to come together even in small numbers, in our homes to just sit, supported by all other cells. All life arises out of chaos and as this sangha springs to life, patterns may present which inform us of different levels of need. A flexible Dancing Mountains may schedule sesshin according to the wider sangha members experience and need for formal prac-

tice as expressed through a spokesperson for each cell. Invitation is therefore extended to all sangha members interested in attending our next planned meeting at Gaia House following sesshin with Reb to feed back on growth. A tiered structure may introduce new creative twists, for all of us, threads of this same cloth. Tenshin Anderson reminds us that when the Buddha first began to introduce the teachings and his monks requested more formality in the form of precepts, Siddhartha encouraged them to be patient.

Certain words of our teacher stay with me from the privilege of attending this sesshin such as,

***“The Buddha
lives in crisis at
the turning point
of our lives!”***

Leaning back and trusting wholeheartedly in all of the brightest jewels in this net as well as in this process, it will become clear when to introduce more formality and organizational structure. May I offer these words of welcome that whispered on my mind at closure of this retreat to you all, Anam Cara, which is Irish for Soul Friend....

**The openness of the sky
to you.**

**The flow of the ocean
to you.**

**The gentleness of the Earth
to you,
and the silence of the mountains
to you.**

Frances Collins



Mariluz Rognetta

The Cloud Tells Nothing Till It Rains

to Reb

My body is fighting something.
 Another white moth is barely not a moth, flicker but no reply.
 Fog through fog...,
 admit again I'm still married.
 Fog
 horn, fog through fog and arugula. A shoulder tap. Not
 everyone
 is getting this.
 In Cloud Hall his jisha instructs
 me on how to approach his door.
 Two brass dings
 signify, Prepare. Prepare,
 bow to his door, make the fascicled
 turns, susurrus into his dark.
 This is the blackest possible pillow of our kind.
 Love as I
 mean it, need it. Green Dragon
 lantern jawed as ever.

Vernon Small

Rich Waters

Confusion's gushing cascade
 In the struggle for certainty
 Emerge only questions.

Calming the torrent
 By blocking the flow
 We stagnate in the familiar.

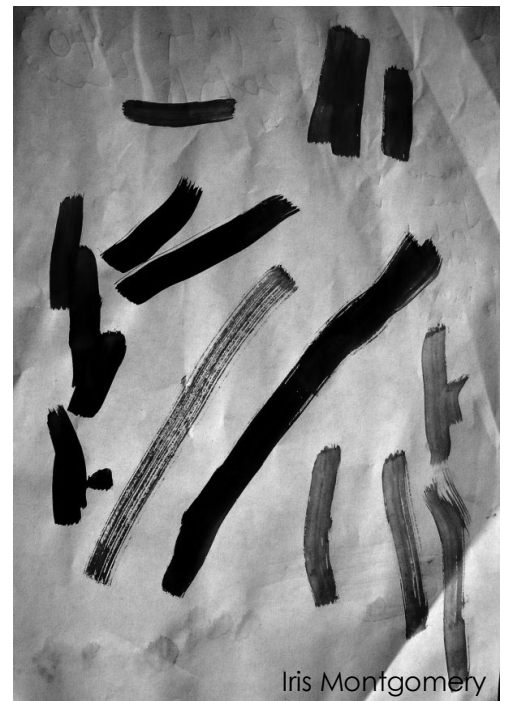
Rough are the ripples of originality,
 But the shallow mud of assurance
 Stirs hazardous undercurrents.

Into murky attachments we stumble,
 A fish ignorant of its Rich Waters
 Barely knows the Light.

Unwanted change is loss
 Wanted change is elusive
 Such desires don't last.

What is worthwhile?
 A vocation of harmony
 With the mysterious.

Chris Brown



Iris Montgomery

Haiku Corner

outside my window
 resonant thud on the path.
 an eager apple.

Guido

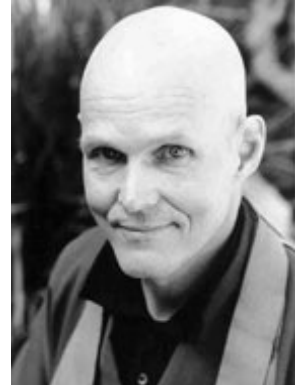
Zazen as Offering

A Talk By Reb Anderson Roshi

This article was transcribed by Rachel Diefenbacher and edited by Catherine Gammon and Frances Collins from a talk given at Green Gulch Farm in the United States on November 15, 2007, Fall Practice Period.

I've heard that Torei Zenji was a disciple of Hakuin Zenji, and Torei's bodhisattva vow was that when he, a student of dharma, looks at the real form of the universe, all is a never failing manifestation of the mysterious truth of the Tathagatha. And these days of this practice period at Green Gulch, one could say, have been beautiful days. Even though tragedies like big ships running into the Bay Bridge cause oils spills, and the oil comes onto our little beach, the days still seem beautiful to me. How about you? There's a beautiful opportunity for you to go down to the beach and clean up, and people far and wide are talking about the brave Green Gulch monks who went down and cleaned up the beach.

It does look, these beautiful days, like everything, the earth, the hillsides, and the human beings in this valley are appreciating each other, are seeing that every event, every being, is the marvelous revelation of the glorious light.



***“...all is a never
failing
manifestation
of the
mysterious
truth of the
Tathagatha”***

I see friends shaking hands
Saying, 'how do you do?'
They're really saying, 'I love you.'
Their arms are around their shoulders,
It looks like they've just finished a fight,
But now the cuddling each other,
Through all the daylight.
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world!

I'm not saying that my vision of the glorious light is uninterrupted. But it's wonderful to see the glorious light in your faces and in the unfailing way you're relating to each other. I can remember to say that wholehearted sitting is the buddha way, just to wholeheartedly sit and just to wholeheartedly walk, just to wholeheartedly look, taste, and speak. This is the self-fulfilling samadhi of the buddhas, practicing all our daily actions of body, speech and mind together with the great bodhisattva vows.

Now we have nine newly initiated bodhisattvas, offspring of buddha in our sangha. Six others have gone to other parts of the world. One person came from Poland, flew from Poland to San Francisco, came to Green Gulch, received the bodhisattva precepts, and went back to Poland. He practiced at Zen Center a long time ago, more than twenty years ago, and has been away pretty much that long, but he kept his dharma roots and came back here to be initiated.

These nine people have been initiated into the great bodhisattva precepts, these sixteen bodhisattva vows. There are other bodhisattva vows, but these are the sixteen that they committed to on Sunday. Now they have a chance to practice those sixteen bodhisattva vows every moment. When they're sitting, they can practice those sixteen bodhisattva vows. They have committed to taking refuge in buddha, every moment of sitting; every moment of sitting going for refuge in the dharma; every moment of sitting returning to the sangha; every moment of sitting, embracing and sustaining the forms and ceremonies of sitting. Every moment of sitting, every moment of walking, every moment of life, embracing and sustaining all good, embracing and sustaining all beings. They have promised to practice continuously, throughout all their actions, observing the precept of not killing while sitting, while walking; while talking continuously observing the precept of not taking what's not given. All these great bodhisattva precepts, isn't that a wonderful promise that they've made?

There are many other great bodhisattva vows, and all these bodhisattva vows can be practiced equally together with all beings. When we sit, we sit together with all beings. When we answer the telephone, we answer the telephone together with all beings. This is wholehearted telephone answering service. When we pick up the phone, we say, "Hello, this is Green Gulch, may I help you?" When bodhisattvas pick up the telephone in the Green Gulch office, they ask a question, a question which will help all beings, like "May I help you? May I assist you in entering the Buddha Way?"

***“When we sit,
we sit together
with all beings.
When we
answer the
telephone, we
answer the
telephone
together with all
beings”***



Linda Griffiths

When bodhisattvas ask questions, they ask questions together with everybody. They ask questions together with their great vows.

One time we were meditating on bodhisattvas asking good questions. There was a bodhisattva in the Surangama Samadhi Sutra who, at the beginning of the sutra, wanted to ask a question that would be extremely helpful to all beings. Once a person telephoned to offer the opportunity of a really good credit card. Bert, my assistant at that time, took the call. This person began explaining to him the virtues of this credit card, and as she was going on, Bert thought, oh, maybe I should ask her a question. Bert thought maybe he should ask her a question that would benefit all beings, which would quell the malevolent spirits in all beings' hearts, and so on. So he said "Do you have to make a certain amount of money to get this credit card?" And the woman said, "Well, yes. How much money do you make?" So Bert told her, and she said "Where do you live?" He said, "Well, I live in this valley by the ocean, and it's called Green Gulch, and we have a beautiful meditation hall, and we grow organic fruits and vegetables and herbs." And she said, "Oh, can I come there?" So he said "Yes." And she said, "Oh, great. Can you smoke?" He said, "Well, you have to go to a special smoking area." And she said, "Oh. Well, thank you."

So we sit together with all beings, we answer the telephone together with all beings when we're wholehearted, and when

we're wholehearted, this is the buddha way. This is the way of the self-fulfilling samadhi. When we sit, we don't sit to get something. We sit to give something. We sit to give our sitting to all beings. We practice sitting as giving, or giving our sitting, not sitting as getting.

Of course, many Zen students have actually thought that sitting was to get something, that sitting was to get enlightened, or to get free of suffering, or to get to India, or to get taller, or to get older, or to get thinner, or whatever. They thought they were going to get something, and when they were told that that wasn't the point, they had a hard time adjusting. Gradually, they have adjusted, so now they're all practicing not to get anything. They're practicing to give. Now all the Zen students practice as a gift to the whole universe. That's been a wonderful change in the history of the world.

Dogen said, or I should say, I can remember that Dogen said, "I can remember when my late teacher, Tientong was dwelling at Tientong, he instructed the assembly in the dharma hall by saying, 'Right at the very time of sitting, monks can make offerings to all buddhas in the whole universe, in ten directions.'" I can remember Dogen's teacher said that back in the Song dynasty. Today, it's pretty much the same. The people sitting in the halls here, while sitting, or as sitting, make offerings to all buddhas in ten directions, and practice together with all beings. All, without exception, pay homage and make offerings ceaselessly. Tientong says "Do you know and see this? Do you know this way of sitting as offering and paying homage to all buddhas? If you know this, do not say you are wasting time.

If you do not yet know this, do not avoid what you are facing."

Samantabhadra says, "If you wish to realize the inconceivably vast and wonderful qualities of the Tatagathas, then in all your actions of body, speech and mind, you can think, 'This action is paying homage to all buddhas, as innumerable as dust particles in innumerable universes.'" Every action can be paying homage to all buddhas, so Samantabhadra says to think and to understand that, to practice that way if you wish to realize the qualities of the buddhas, to think about making every action—or with every action, for every action, as every action—make offerings to all buddhas.

This is what was said in the Indian Buddhist world. Many hundreds of years later in China, Dogen's teacher said the same thing. Now here in America, the same suggestion is being made, that you consider, and contemplate, and be mindful that every action of body, speech, and mind is paying homage to buddhas, is making offerings to buddhas, is done together with all buddhas, with every single living being, and with the mountains, the rivers, and the poisoned beaches, and the frustrated swimmers who can't go in swimming.

This sitting zazen is a gift to all buddhas. It is sitting zazen which is paying homage to all buddhas. It is sitting zazen where every pore in your body is reaching out to all the buddhas, and all the buddhas are saying thank you to every pore in your body, because you're completely giving yourself, you're giving your dear

***“every action of
body, speech,
and mind is
paying homage
to buddhas”***



little zazen as a gift to all the buddhas. That's it. If you've seen this, don't say you're wasting your time, because you're not. You might think so, because, you know, I'm not making any money, I'm not getting any younger, my spine's compressing, at this rate I'm going to be another inch shorter pretty soon. Things are running downhill, and I'm not going uphill, but I don't say I waste time because I'm offering this poor wreck, I'm offering this beautiful wreck, to all the buddhas, and I'm going to continue offering this and this and this and this and this, moment after moment.

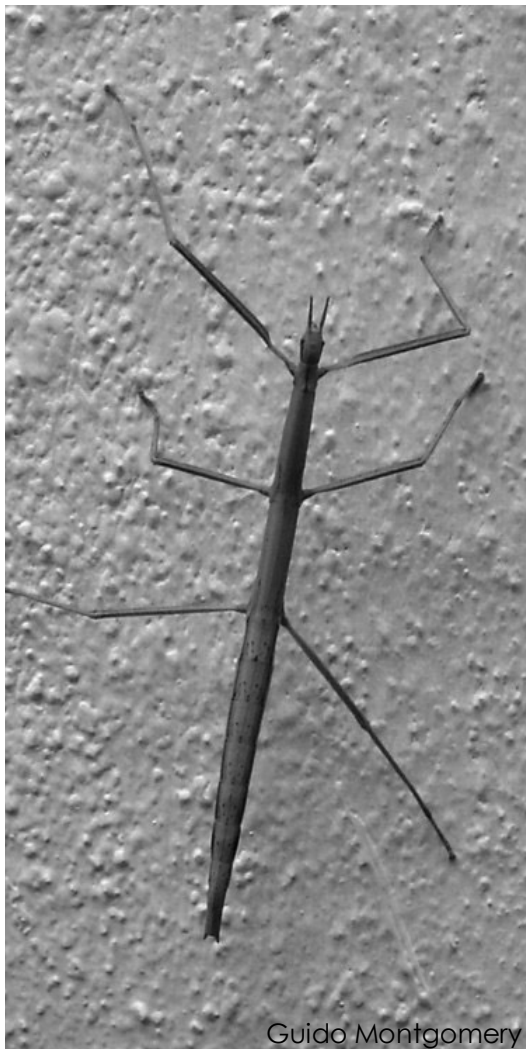
So Rujing, or Tientong, told his monks, don't say you are wasting time. And if you don't see this, okay, then at least face the situation, say, "Hey, I'm just resisting this whole thing here."

When Samantabhadra is explaining how, in some sense, to practice giving, he says that you practice making an offering of whatever you're doing to all buddhas as though you were face to face with these inconceivable buddhas. It's as though you could see the faces of all the buddhas. But most of us cannot see the faces of all the buddhas. Some advanced practitioners in the traditions in various countries like Tibet, China, Japan and so on, Korea, some of them say, "Well, I actually can't see the faces of all the buddhas, but there is one guy in our tradition that can do that." So sometimes they say some people can do that. I think it's fine to try, but it's also fine just to remember the instruction, and just say the instruction: "I want this, or I give this instruction to all buddhas as innumerable as all dust particles in all universes." If you don't want to

do that, you can also say, "I want to offer my practice to Shakyamuni Buddha, or to one buddha." You can do that, too. The point is, you're opening up to the possibility of being generous without limits, and entering the realm of unhindered generosity and wholeheartedness. You can try to visualize innumerable buddhas, starting with one, then go to two, then three or four, and you can start squaring the numbers. You might feel it's too hard, you can't do it, you can only do three buddhas. But you might not even do one buddha, you might just say I offer my practice to innumerable buddhas. Now try to visualize them, and still have the feeling that you would like to do this as though you were face to face with them.

***“The point is,
you’re opening
up to the
possibility of
being generous
without limits”***





Guido Montgomery

Write a Haiku !

In this issue of Mountain Silence we are asking readers to write and send us their haiku. The haiku is one of the great classic poetry forms of Japanese literature. Governed by strict rules and composed of three lines using only five vowels in the first line, seven in the second and then five again in the third they were intended to represent an emotion, a sensation, a philosophical point, or aesthetic view or to describe the essence of a season, landscape or animal. Ideally they would be written in a split second of spontaneous insight but sometimes after a period of intensive concentration or meditation. The following advice from poet Patricia Spork makes a fine introduction to writing a haiku.

We look forward to receiving your poems.

Writing the 'Not-So-Simple' Haiku by Patricia Spork

*"the simple writing
of seventeen syllables
doth not haiku make"*

Haiku is revered for its simplicity. But how simple is it to write haiku? Reading English-translated haiku of the seventeenth-century Japanese poet, Matsuo Basho (considered a haiku master), can lead one to believe haiku is easy to write. Not so if you follow the Japanese use of their phonetic script "onji" (sound symbol).

The traditional form of Japanese haiku has seventeen **onji**. Onji, most of them considered as one **syllable** in English, led modern haiku to having three lines containing seventeen syllables (5-7-5). But **onji** has shorter sounds than our English language. Sometimes two or three onji characters can be translated to one syllable in English. Many haiku translators believe ten to twelve English syllables would best be used to mimic the original Japanese sound-length form.

Then there is the "**kireji**" (**cutting word**). The Japanese kireji's purpose is to separate one phrase from another in the stanza of a haiku. A kireji pauses the reader. The break is generally in the first or second line. In English, punctuation, like ellipsis, **exclamation point**, **colon** and **semicolon** are generally used as the kireji.

And we can't forget the "**kigo**" (**season word**). Standard season words describe the time of year a particular event occurs in a haiku. Words like bright, robin, and cherry blossom denote spring; heat, fawn, and mimosa denote summer; typhoon, scarecrow, and pear denote autumn; and snow, chestnut, and bear denote winter. How the season word evolved as a standard for haiku is how haiku was eventually created.

Classical Haiku

Basso (1644-1694)

*By the old temple,
peach blossoms;
a man treading rice.*

*Winter downpour -
even the monkey
needs a raincoat.*

*Year's end, all
corners of this
floating world, swept.*

Issa (1763 - 1827)

*The spring rain;
a little girl teaches
the cat to dance.*

*It doesn't seem
very anxious to bloom,
this plum-tree at the gate.*

Originally **haiku** was the **hokku**, or starting verse of a **renga** (a collaborative poem containing several stanzas, each stanza written by different or alternating poets). The hokku was about nature and gave a season word so that the collaborators knew what time of year the renga encompassed. Eventually the hokku became independent of the renga and became known as haiku.

But as modern haiku evolved, the use of season words dissipated, as did the traditional format of haiku. Haiku can be written as 3-3- 4, 4-4-3, and 5-10-5, to name but a few variations. **No matter the length, an important thing to remember when writing haiku is to allow your reader to experience the same special moment you experienced, to see or feel what you thought or felt at a particular instant in time.** If you can do that, your haiku is a success, and as you intended the moment to be shared.

To have a successful haiku, you should try to eliminate unnecessary words, especially articles (a, the) and prepositions (of, but). That doesn't necessarily mean not use them at all, just use them sparingly. **Vivid images and vivid actions are what haiku are about; the sharper image you convey, the easier a reader is impacted by the same image and moment in time. By taking two objects, adding an action to combine the objects, eliminating all unnecessary words, rearranging the words time and again, you can write haiku.** As an example, let's look at one of Basho's famous haiku:

*old pond . . .
a frog leaps in
water's sound*

The first line, **there is a pond (first object)**. Also notice the **kinji**, the **ellipsis in the first line**. The second line, there is a **frog (second object) and an action ("leaps in")**. The action and the last line tie the two objects together for one breathtaking and thought-provoking instant in time. We not only see this moment in time, but also hear it.

When writing haiku you don't really have to stick to any tradition unless you're following market guidelines or you're a traditionalist by heart. You can experiment with free-verse-haiku (my term for "anything goes as long as it's short, sharp, and captures a special moment"). I have found that staying in present tense helps capture the same moment for other people that read my haiku, but that hasn't stopped me from writing haiku in past tense at times. I guess what I'm trying to tell you is write what you see as you see it, or write what you saw as you saw it. Or even make up a special moment -- something you haven't seen, but something you'd like to see or to let other people see (through your imagination).

You can experiment with the use of similes and metaphors (a no- no for traditional haiku). You can add sensory perceptions like touch, sound, smell, sight, and taste. Make a man drink water like a thirsty dog, or a woman scratch her head like a dog that has fleas. Have a kite fly like a swallow or a crane dip its head in water like a hammer driving nails in a wall. Let rain sound like the clicking of tap shoes on a floor, or a child's cry for a bottle like the shriek from a jaguar at losing its next meal.

The most important thing to remember before writing haiku is that you are the writer of the haiku. **Make a special moment come to life using your words.** Use your freedom of expression to convey images in words as sharply as you can. Follow traditional haiku form or stretch the boundaries of tradition and try new things. By doing so, you can write the 'not-so-simple' haiku.

2001 Patricia Spork.

Modern Haiku

*The summer chair
rocking by itself*

In the blizzard

(Jack Kerouac 1971)

*After winter rains
where tramps gathered
last summer
watermelon sprouts*

(Anon.)

*Whitecaps on the bay:
A broken signboard banging
In the April wind.*

Richard Wright

*Just friends:
he watches my gauze dress
blowing on the line.*

Alexis Rotella, After an Affair

Rules??????

5-7-5 syllables in three lines? A season word? The only rule is there are no rules!!!! Just Write!!!!!!! Michael

Practice Period at Tassajara

By Bev Eatwell

Some people have asked me what it is like to do a practice period at Tassajara these days. As many of you know, SFZC has three main sites in California: City Center which is a large Victorian building in downtown San Francisco; Green Gulch, which is a large organic farm and temple on the coast near Muir Beach and; Tassajara, which is located in the mountains near a hot spring. All three sites are beautiful in their own way (if slightly singed of late!) and have many resident priests and teachers living at them.



Whilst all the sites become increasingly monastic during the winter, only Tassajara closes to guests and adopts a schedule as rigorous as that found in a Japanese monastery. Anyone with an interest in Zen practice and a desire to do some deep contemplation should seriously consider spending 3 months here.

***“moving in
harmony with
each other and
there is really
a sense of food
being grate-
fully offered
and received”***

My first practice period at Tassajara began in September 2003. The place looked fabulous with the heat of the summer sun beginning to be tempered by cool autumn breezes and the trees lining the paths turning into fabulous reds and oranges. These early days are to be treasured as they will soon become colder and colder at this altitude, with temperatures often below freezing and no real heating in many of the cabins.

Practice period begins with Tungaryo for the new students. This is 5 days of near constant sitting in the Zendo from 4.30am to 9pm, and is meant to replicate sitting outside the monastery gates before admittance, thus proving dedication to the practice. After the end of Tungaryo there is the opening ceremony and the schedule begins in earnest. For me, the schedule was one of the best teachers. It's pretty harsh: most memorable was the 3.25am start when a wake up bell is rung by the head student (Shuso). The trick is not to have any resistance. The moment the bell is heard everyone reaches out of bed and lights their oil lamp. There is just time to get into full robes (with plenty of underclothing to help with the cold) and for a rapid, but hugely essential, cup of tea at the outside samovar before being in the zendo in time for the jundo lead by the practice period leader. Everyone puts their hand in gassho as the priest walks around the zendo, having previously offered incense at every shrine in the temple. In this way the new day and all the students are greeted. Then there is two periods of zazen and then service followed by oryoki breakfast. Service marks the beginning of the bowing. It's good to get comfortable with this as you do a lot at Tassajara. In a moment of distraction I worked

out that it would be well over a thousand bows by the end of the practice period. Almost all meals are eaten oryoki style at Tassajara. This is when people stay at their seats and are served food into 3 bowls which they then clean out themselves and leave at their seats for the next meal. The serving and forms are performed effortlessly and beautifully, everyone moving in harmony with each other and there is really a sense of food being gratefully offered and received. Whilst the unfolding of cloths and bowls is highly ritualized, the actual time dedicated to eating is short and I must confess a sadistic delight in watching out of the corner of my eye the 6-foot men trying to elegantly eat a large overflowing bowl of rice with chopsticks in 2 minutes! After breakfast there is a quick break and then everyone meets down in the dining room for the class, which usually lasts until lunchtime. Rozy (Reb's jack russell) was at this practice period and she seems to only like English people. As a result I am one of her special friends and so she sat on my lap throughout the class and followed me everywhere I went. The class is one of the most social times of the day with questions being asked and tea drunk in the relative warmth of the dining room. After class there is another service in the zendo and then oryoki lunch. The afternoon consists of a few hours of work and then a break before a scramble back into robes for afternoon service and then dinner, followed by 2 more periods of zazen and then bed just after nine. Almost all the day is spent in robes and almost all your time is structured. Before surrendering to the schedule this is agony, and afterward it is luxury. Because of this love-hate relationship with the schedule, free time can be a double-edged sword. Friday is



the weekly day off and begins a luxurious hour later (4.35am). Two periods of zazen are followed by a social oryoki pancake breakfast in the dining room as only the Americans know how, and then nothing to do until afternoon service at 5. Most people pack a lunch and go for a hike in the stunning scenery whilst others take naps to catch up on sleep deprivation and recover from the unusual sugar rush of breakfast.

The Japanese style bathhouse is a great way to spend any free time. The hot springs bubble up through it and the luxury of lying in the hot tub after 5 days of Tungaryo (when you are not meant to even take a shower) is mind blowing. The baths border the creek so if you have boiled yourself too much you can wander down and take a quick dip in the crystal clear waters while the fishes nibble at your feet.

Every few weeks there is a sesshin, and the practice period itself ends on a one week sesshin. This is basically Tungaryo all over again but the periods of zazen are structured in to 40 min blocks and there is a lecture every morning. Although sesshin involves 14 hours of sitting a day, by this time legs, backs and minds are used to this. Cushion mountains have been perfected and most mental resistances have been overcome. Sesshin is a time to luxuriate in the structure of Tassajara at this time of year, which makes days on end of doing nothing but sitting zazen the expected norm.

Living at Tassajara is challenging, but immensely rewarding. The site itself is stunningly beautiful and the people are the most kind-hearted you could find anywhere. Ironically, despite the punishing schedule and sleep deprivation, I have never felt so relaxed. You soon get sick of the stories and the resistance and living becomes effortless. Although at first your mind balks and strains against early starts and sitting motionless for hours a day, my time at Tassajara taught me many things, not least to be very good at long haul flights!

The Teaching of Totality

Report on the retreat held by
Reb Anderson at Gaia House,
August 22-29th 2008

By Sue Blackmore

Welcoming all beings without preference - this is just sitting. I am the sum total of everything that is not me. Er ??? Um ??

Such extraordinary ideas might have seemed too difficult for me, yet after a week of Reb Anderson's gently powerful teaching, and long hours of meditation in the peace of Gaia House, these are some of what I brought home with me.

I arrived ill-prepared and a little scared. In the past few years both my parents have died with dementia, I fell off a horse and broke my hip, and I've just moved house. I still meditated every day but have not been on retreat for several years. Arriving at Gaia House chased the fear away. I was late, so I had no choice of jobs. It's washing up at breakfast time for you! I would have liked gardening, and laughed to hear that some people arrive 3 hours earlier to get their favourite job!

Then to my room, where mindfulness seemed to come easily. Don't think about the week ahead, all those hours of sitting, just make your bed, put away your things nicely, walk slowly down to the hall, and now it's the first lecture.

The Buddha is unobstructed totality. To see this is to welcome all beings: meditate on emptiness.

All sixty-eight of us file out of the hall. I don't look at anyone. Many years ago Master Sheng Yen suggested that on retreat we should look at feet, make eye contact with no one but just bow to acknowledge their presence and support, and I've done this ever since. I find it steadying. I know some people like the warmth of a friendly smile or an encouraging laugh but I prefer the depth of silence that not looking brings. I walk up to bed wondering what "all beings" means and how to welcome them.

Gradually we learn that "all beings" are not just people,

animals, rocks and trees but every thought and action – indeed everything we tell stories about. It's natural, says Reb next morning, to frame things with stories. Then we hang onto the frames and suffer. This second day he suggests that we practice framing things deliberately and then giving up the frames – letting go – giving away.

A hand goes up. "No use putting up your hand" says Reb, "Come and sit here". Now I notice there is another mat and cushion right next to him. Those with questions or comments have to walk up and sit there, looking out at the crowd. Some are terrified. In every case Reb is right there with them; his clear, kind eyes, accepting what they say and skilfully making suggestions. Someone talks about her difficult mother and how to know when to leave a horrible situation. I sympathise. His answer was to get into a calm and gentle place, the place from which the Bodhisattvas act, from where you will find yourself leaving, or not leaving, as appropriate.



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I too went up to the cushion and asked whether Bodhisattvas really “do” anything. They have activities, he said, like puppets (he mimics) doing kind and loving things. “Does that mean you have to give up doing?” “You have to give up everything” he replies.

The next day Reb explains that welcoming all beings means loving them. We are to practice loving all limited things – all those things we frame. Only through loving the limited can we love the unlimited, unobstructed totality which is Buddha. I can’t love all beings. It’s too difficult. But welcoming them seems possible; it’s a start.



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He talks with skill about parasites, RNA, and retroviruses. His version of Buddhism is not at odds with science, or in conflict with a rational understanding of the universe. I find it helpful that I don’t have to choose between my science and my practice.

The long hours pass slowly. The sun very occasionally comes out and its warmth creeps across my knee and onto the next person. The rooks shriek. The cows moo. We do kinhin. We sit again. I notice, with surprise, that welcoming everything that comes is getting easier, and in some odd way I’m not judging things so much. Nice things are easier because I’m not fighting them off or feeling guilty about enjoying them, horrid things are easier because I’m welcoming everything, but above all there is usually no need to decide which is which. Reb says you don’t have to like everything, only to love everything – even love the fact that the kinhin is so hopeless with too many people, and one woman who steadfastly walks slower than everybody else. Welcome all beings.



Devin Ashwood

Reb listens to Dharma talks on his MP3 sunglasses! He told us that when he got this free gift with his new computer he didn’t even know what MP3 meant. His last computer expertise was as a programmer during his masters degree. But now he wouldn’t be without them.

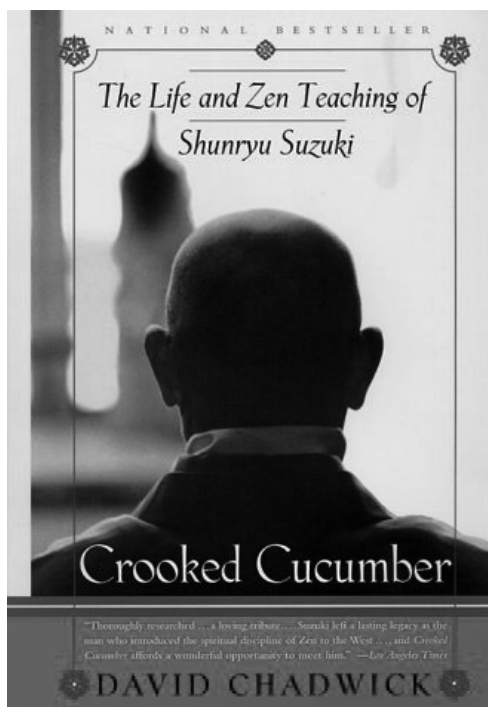
The question sessions are wonderful. People cry, tell inspiring or terrible stories, and Reb is open to each one. I admit that I cross my fingers in the morning service; I’m not a Buddhist and I won’t take any vows. Reb says that’s very childish – but adds that practice needs some child-like qualities and a lot of playfulness. And he is joyfully playful. One man comes up, clearly nervous and working out what to say, but instead bursts out laughing and shouts “I just want to lie at your feet and be your dog!”. I guess we all know what he means.

I am the sum total of everything that is not me, says Reb. As more hours of meditation, and washing up, and walking in the garden pass, this becomes less baffling. I have often looked for myself and found only the rest of the world, now trying to welcome all beings I can glimpse that all beings are me. Why then should I want to hurt those beings? Why would I be afraid of them – and welcome the fear too, says Reb, and the perplexity, and the anger. “Beings are numberless, I vow to save them”. I keep my fingers crossed as we chant, but if all those beings that I frame, and think about, and worry about are me, how can I save myself without saving all of them?

Welcoming all beings without preference is much harder at home, on the train, doing my email, but Reb has taught me how to begin practicing.

Book Review: Crooked Cucumber

The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki by David Chadwick



“The forms change, but not just to new forms that people are comfortable with.

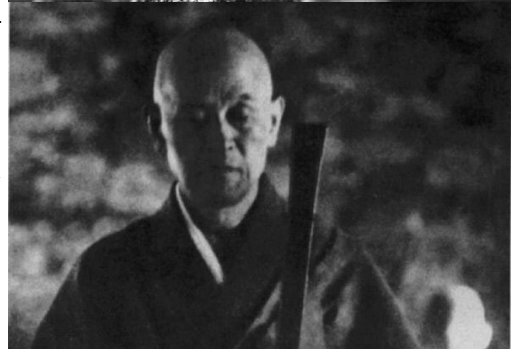
Dogen said that the best teaching makes people feel like something is being forced upon them.”

Shunryu Suzuki came to my attention in the early nineties through his book ‘Zen Mind, Beginners Mind,’ given to me by a friend. She said she hadn’t understood a word and wondered what I would think of it. I too understood very little but dimly perceived that these transcribed talks represented a profound wisdom and insight into the paradoxes and challenges of life and Zen practice. Many students of Zen will know how at the age of 55 this priest of a minor temple in Japan came to San Francisco in 1959. Within twelve years he transformed the practice of Zen in the west and established three major centres of practice. Since his untimely death in 1971 his teachings carried on by his students have transformed the lives of countless people. What is probably less well known is Suzuki’s life before he came to the U.S.A. In his biography ‘Crooked Cucumber,’ David Chadwick who was ordained by the master in 1971 unearths the early life of this remarkable man. The book also describes some of the major influences and incidents that helped shape Suzuki. As well as exploring other successes it outlines the development of the three main centres in California.

“Instead of criticising, find out how to help.”

The title of the book, ‘Crooked Cucumber,’ refers to the nickname that was given to Suzuki by his first teacher. A name that encompassed the master’s view of this small, quirky monk. Crooked cucumbers were useless: farmers composted them ‘You will never have any good disciples,’ the thirteen year old was informed. Paradoxically it was this very quiriness, this ability to see possibilities beyond the conventional and the traditional that was to be Suzuki’s greatest strength when he arrived in San Francisco. He saw that in the midst of the beat culture and the wildness of the hippy movement there were individuals seeking new views on life with an energy and determination that he had rarely met in his native Japan. It was this original insight accompanied by an intuitive humour and iron determination that enabled him to channel the raw energy expressed by his new students.

The early part of the book highlights some of the most important early influences on Suzuki. His father, a very poor temple priest;





his mother Yone, adept but strict. At school although he was studious, his small stature, forgetfulness and background caused him to be at a disadvantage with other boys. Fortunately he had a teacher who with great prescience saw his potential and told him 'you will grow up to be a great man, you should not avoid difficulties but use them to develop yourself.' At thirteen Suzuki left his home to be a student of Gyokujun So on, a fierce authoritarian who had been a student of his father. Life in the temple was strict and the boy rarely had enough to eat or warm clothes to wear but he was clearly determined to stay with this imperious teacher despite the fact that one by one the other students left. He later commented, 'Anyway I was not smart enough to run away, so I was caught.' The young man went on to higher education and was particularly interested in learning English. Under the tutelage of Miss Ransom, an eccentric but accomplished englishwoman, he met many American and European dignitaries and became a relatively fluent English speaker.

“How do you like zazen? How do you like brown rice? I think this is a better question. Zazen is too much. Brown rice, I think, is just right. But actually there is not much difference.”

Chadwick spends some time describing Suzuki as husband and father and it seems clear that he was not the easiest of people to live with in either of these roles. His relationship with his children was difficult and to some extent very formal which seems extraordinary when we consider the teacher we know from 'Zen Mind Beginners Mind,' and in other anecdotes told by his students.

A great tragedy was to overshadow this part of Suzuki's life that to some extent was to soften his heart though it apparently left a deep, painful wound that never left him.

Chadwick studied with Suzuki, was close to him and spent many years researching and speaking to the master's family and second wife as well as many of his early students. What emerges from this is a loving but rigorous portrait of a very special man with all the strengths and weaknesses this implies. Particularly impressive is the way that the author has interwoven through the text, quotations from Suzuki and passages from his talks, thus reading it becomes almost a reflection on practice itself with the spare prose of the biography being suddenly shot through with Suzuki's special wisdom, paradoxical sayings and sense of humour. The spirit of the great teacher infuses this very readable book and it should certainly be on the bookshelf of all students of Soto Zen.



Crooked Cucumber
David Chadwick
Broadway Books
ISBN 0-7679-0104-5

Diary of Events

2008

Every Monday

Glastonbury Chan/Zen Group meet at Shekinashram 7:00pm
Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

Every Wednesday

Totness Zen Group meet at different locations 6:15pm
Phone: Michael 01803 732761 or Francis 01803 866735

Monthly:

Dharma Discussion Group:

Study and discussion of Buddha's teaching and its application in daily life. Email: Alan, woodap@btinternet.com

October

Sat 4 - Sun 5 Oct: *DM

Zen Weekend Retreat in Glastonbury, Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

Fri 31 Oct - Mon 3 Nov:

Haiku as a Spiritual Practice, 3 day workshop with Ken Jones in Chagford, Devon. email: eaglehurst@talktalk.net

November

Sun 9 Nov: *DM

Zen Retreat in Glastonbury, Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

January

Sun 18 Jan: *DM

Zen Retreat in Ermington, Devon. Phone: Michael 01803 732761 or Francis 01803 866735

February

Sun 14 Sep: Chan day retreat

At Shekinashram, Glastonbury
Email: reiter@clara.co.uk
Phone: Ned, 01458 832931

2009

March (2009)

Wed 25 - Sun 29 Mar: *DM

5 Day Seshin: Soto Zen Forms and Ceremonies – the Practice of Deep Intimacy.—Meiya Wender
Gaia House, Devon, England
Phone: 01626 333613

August (2009)

Fri 28 Aug - Fri 4 Sept: *DM

7 Day Retreat: Reb Anderson

(Dates yet to be confirmed) —

Gaia House, Devon, England
generalenquiries@gaiahouse.co.uk
Phone: 01626 333613

October (2009)

Sun 4 Oct: Chan day retreat

At Shekinashram, Glastonbury.
Email: reiter@clara.co.uk
Phone: Ned, 01458 832931

Appeal

Many generous donors have contributed to offset the losses caused by the fire at Tassajara this summer but there is a long way to go before all the costs of the fire have been met. If you would like to send a donation, please contact Devin or, Michael, details on the right.

Also, if you would like to contribute to the costs of producing this newsletter and offering retreats, please do get in touch. Offering a monthly or annual payment to Dancing Mountains will help us to continue our work.

Ads

Incense £6

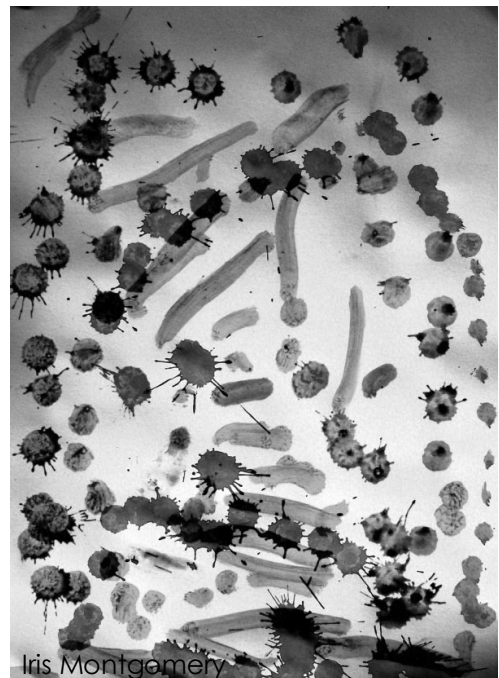
Japanese incense as used and sold at San Francisco Zen Center.

Phone: Devin, 07875 155464

Sutra books

Sutra books are now available for people who would like to learn our chants. £8 for the full liturgy as used at San Francisco Zen Center.

***DM** Indicates that the retreat is either using the Dancing Mountains Liturgy or is led by a priest in the Lineage of Suzuki Roshi.



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With the theme of 'Crisis'

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ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE WEB:

www.dancingmountains.org.uk