



MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 6

Summer

Art and Creativity

Summer 2009 offers this sixth edition of Mountain Silence, the Newsletter of Dancing Mountains Zen Sangha. As everything in the garden approaches full bloom, the theme of Creativity feels very appropriate. Patience is rewarded, once seeds are sewn in Spring, and nurtured out of sight to bloom in another season. The wisdom and complete co-operation of nature still amazes me as much now as it did in childhood. How can anything bloom without the assistance of everything?

Dancing Mountains seeds were nurtured for 5 days in March by the presence of Tanto Meiya Wender, head of practice at Green Gulch Farm Zen Centre, one of the three temples comprising San Francisco Zen Centre. We are most grateful and impacted by her wisdom in this early stage of our growth as an organisation. The term 'Tanto' translates as practice leader or mentor. To have Meiya's expert mentoring as the head of the

traditional practice of sewing of Buddha's robes, was much appreciated by 5 members of the community who are sewing raku-sus in preparation for the

bodhisattva ceremony in between 28th August and 4th September with Tenshin Reb Anderson at Gaia House, Devon. Reflecting on this commitment, I am reminded of how beautifully Rumi's poem 'Being Woven' expresses this human need for community and service:-

*This road demands courage and stamina,
yet it's full of footprints. Who are
these companions? They are rungs
in your ladder. Use them!
With company you quicken your ascent.*

Meiya stated that she has been asked three times in the past to visit UK but has only this year acted on these requests. Her gentle and compassionate female presence was the perfect compliment to the masculine and playful

This issue

- 1-2 Editorial
- 2-3 Poetry
- 4-10 Creativity**
- by Reb Anderson Roshi
- 11-12 Asking difficult questions
- 12-14 Art and creativity in a Buddhist context
- 15 Suzuki on Creativity
- 16-17 Zen Art
- 18-22 Retreat Reflections
- 23 Local contacts and subscription information
- 24 News and events



Markus Kvist

embodiment in our teacher, Reb, and was received by the sangha as perfect timing. It strikes me that this visit may demonstrate our readiness to advance as an organisation.

Discussion with Meiya after sesshin facilitated a sangha voice that I hope to express here on behalf of all Dancing Mountains. We, as a group, recognise our need to be woven as threads in the larger cloth of this rich tradition, offered to us by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. In doing so, we hope to link up with our more established sangha across Europe and N. Ireland for advice and assistance toward our development here in the UK.



Markus Kvist

***“We recognise
our need to be
woven as
threads in the
larger cloth of
this rich
tradition”***

Rumi goes on to say:-

*A wall standing alone is useless,
but put three or four walls together
and they'll support a roof and keep
the grain dry and safe*.*

We are open to all assistance for our growing community here in UK. Aspiring to create a charitable organisation requires many skills and knowledge we have yet to identify. We welcome contact from anyone with relevant experience in the third sector. We also seek benefactors who may enable us through their generosity to facilitate further growth.

A meeting has been scheduled for **4th September at Gaia House Devon** at the close of sesshin with Tenshin Anderson. All those interested are most welcome to attend. This will in part, allow the community to review the year that has passed. Last year Reb encouraged Dancing Mountains to be patient and to work with what is possible. In the absence of a UK Zen Centre, he encouraged us to come together less formally to sit together. He suggested that small sitting groups could become a system of 'cells' across the UK as a way of building sangha. Entering the time of nature's harvest will be an opportunity for us to reap what has been sown and to plan next seasons creations.

Frances Collins

*from Rumi – *Selected Poems*, translated by Coleman Barks.

Haiku Corner

the breeze has been kind
windfall apples for reynolds
peaches for the goats

Guido Montgomery

driving past bluebells
will another year go by
without me stopping?

Devin Ashwood

Spring Storm

Lilac litters the soaked ground.
Choking on perfume
I gather the white blooms to my breast.
Wide open starbuds, stillborn.
Crushed while smiling at the moon.

No second flush will grace this tattered lawn.
One uprising a year.
A life already curling in –
Last bruised gasp of scent slipping through my fingers.

I arrange this wreath of battered beauty
In a round, flat bowl.

Gill Jackman



Getting Ready for Church

Respectability kisses me rigid
As I struggle to pour
The exuberant flesh
Into the spandex mould.
Like a too stiff blancmange

Wendy Ruthroff

To Fisher, Almost Blind at Eight

Fisher with pebble lenses, big eyed
You peer at books two inches from your nose.
Words like little fish dart and dash
In formations wild before you enclose
Them in the aquarium of the mind.
One day you lose your specs, so now
Can only sit, tiny eyed, as you swim
And surf the breakers of your mind.

Wendy Ruthroff

Snow Impressions

Lie no more on me.
Your impression is
Like bird tracks on the snow,
Clean and clear,
Showing you were here.
In the falling of the snow
I have to go
I have to make the journey,
Back in the melting snow.

Wendy Ruthroff



Markus Kvist



Creativity

A Talk By Reb Anderson Roshi given at Gaia House, Devon, at the August 2002 Sesshin. Transcribed by Frances Collins and edited by Chris Brown.

(Prior to this talk, the group recited verses by Eihei Dogen)

The person who supposedly wrote the verses that we just recited is reputed to have said, “to study the Buddha way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self, to forget the self is to be awakened by all things.” To be awakened by all things is the body-mind of self and other dropping away. In terms of the language of this retreat we might say that to learn the Buddha Way is to study the self and to study the self is to renounce the self. To renounce the self is to be enlightened by all things. The self that some of you brought into this room might still be here with you. Studying, learning and being aware of that is studying and learning the Buddha Way.

Did you notice if you brought a self into the room?

Studying the Buddha Way is noticing if you brought a self into this room. If you can know whether or not you brought a self into the room then that is what is recommended to study. Whatever you thought you brought into the room or seems to be brought into the room, study that. The way of studying that is to forget that, to let go of it. In the studying of it and when you forget it, or renounce it, everything enlightens. Everything tells you in this state of renounced self who you are. Everything tells you what total living is. But if we bring the self into the room or out of the room and hold it and don't study it, don't forget it, don't renounce it, somehow not everything enlightens us and we don't live totally.

Not living totally is more or less miserable. I believe the word miserable is related to the word misery, and misery is related to the word miser. When we don't forget the self we are more or less miserly about our life. Charles Dickens told a story about Mr. Scrooge who was a miser and was unhappy. But in the end of the story he forgot about Mr. Scrooge and became happy. Everything enlightened him. The word miser literally means to be tight and stingy with yourself and then of course that is extended to others. It's really being cheap and ungenerous with your self. Mr. Scrooge had tons of money but he didn't use any of it for himself or for anybody else. He just got more and more stuff plugged up, blocking his life.

***“Studying the
Buddha Way is
noticing if you
brought a self
into this room.”***

One of the first times, in this lifetime, that I came to this island I saw a video tape of one of the local artists here. He said something like, "Many people think that when you understand you can create or be creative. I think it is when you understand creativity that you understand." I found that interesting and what I am suggesting is that when you understand creativity, it is then that you understand. When you understand the creation of yourself, then you understand yourself. It isn't that the Buddha's understanding is that when you look at the self you understand yourself, as if the meditator looks at the self sees that there is a self there and then says, "Oh yeah I get it!" It's not quite like that. It's more like the meditator is looking at all things, looking at whatever is happening, and then sees the creation of the self and then understands. The self that has been already produced that you bring in the room is not as enlightening as witnessing the self which arises in the moment of creation.

So to study Buddhism is first of all to study this prefabricated self, the self that has already been made... the old stale self. To study that, to look at it, and to then relax with it, renounce it, and for a while, be without it. Forget it! Then, keep paying attention and as you keep paying attention, notice that in the coming of things there is a self born. See that self - not the self-product but the self-creation. Seeing the process of creation rather than the product of creation is Enlightenment. There again we are entering into the intimacy of all beings because the self is born in the intimacy of the coming forth of all beings. So we need, I believe, to witness creation in general and specifically the creation of the self.

“Bowing is a gesture that says I want to trust Buddha with this body and mind. I'll give it over.”

“The self is born in the intimacy of the coming forth of all beings.”

The bodhisattva initiation ceremony is a formal enactment of this process. It's a ritual version of the process of Enlightenment and it is called the attaining enlightenment ceremony. Tokaido Shiki: "the ceremony of attaining enlightenment". What does it involve? The first step seems to be, as I said before, paying homage to the Buddha, the Buddha's teaching and those who are working on studying the Buddha and the Buddha's teachings. In other words it starts with trust, trusting the Buddha and taking it that the Buddha is where you are safe. The safety side of refuge is that Buddha is your home and you trust this home as the beginning by offering incense and bowing. Bowing can be seen as an act of renunciation. But also first of all I want to mention that bowing is a gesture of trust, of formal ritual homage. A simple definition of homage is things that are said as an expression of respect or a formal expression of loyalty to a ruler. The Buddha is a kind of ruler... the dharma ruler, ruler of the truth, but a selfless ruler who is constantly forgetting her self and awakening to the birth of the self. That's the kind of ruler the Buddha is. Do you want to be Buddha's child? Do you trust Buddha? That bowing is a gesture that says I want to trust Buddha with this body and mind. I'll give it over.

The next stage of the ceremony is invocation. We could have invoked Buddha before but now we invite Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to come to the ceremony and join us in the ceremony. The next phase of the ceremony is renunciation. Then, after renunciation we confess that we have not been practicing renunciation and we vow to continue to confess it when we are not practicing it. Then we receive the precepts. If we have practiced renunciation, when we receive the precepts we can play with them. We can play with them and play with them and play with them until we forget the self. If there is a self brought to the precepts and if there is a self brought to the meditation practice, we notice that as we are playing with the precepts. Actually we are not yet playing with the precepts as long as we bring a self to the precepts. But still we play with them and play with them and play with them until we forget the self. Then we understand that the precepts are the self. The precepts are not the self that we bring already made to the practice of the precepts. The self which is the same as the precepts is the self that is born in the coming of all things and the relationship in the coming of all things is the precepts. We see the self created in the play of the precepts and we understand the self. In this way we attain enlightenment. The ceremony formerly and ritually provides that story, that sequence, which is the process of Enlightenment. This is a formal presentation of it but it doesn't have to be formal in daily life.

***“If we have
practiced
renunciation,
when we receive
the precepts we
can play with
them.”***

Considering this I remembered something of my own story. Sometimes I wonder if I should be telling stories about me. I remember the Don Juan books from the 60's. Don Juan told his apprentice not to tell everybody about his personal history. Shamans sometimes give that instruction not to tell clients about personal history. So as a Shaman, I shouldn't tell you anything about my background. It may interfere with the Shamanic process. But if I look at the example of the Buddha, the Buddha disclosed her past lives. So in the tradition of Buddhism I disclose something about my past life for our mutual edification.



The story I want to share with you today is a story of when I was about eight or nine. Excuse my self-centeredness, but I was living somewhere in the middle of the North American continent, a place called Minnesota. I lived in a house and had a bedroom on the second floor that I shared with my brother. I spent a lot of time sitting in that room by myself, enjoying myself. My parents noticed that I was spending a lot of time in my room by myself without



Markus Kvist

a TV and they thought that maybe there was something wrong with me. Maybe that wasn't the only reason that they thought there was something wrong with me or that I was sick. So they had my ears checked and found that I was not deaf. Then they sent me to a psychiatrist called Dr Hanson. The first time I went with my mother to see Dr Hanson. Then she left me alone with Dr Hanson. I think that every session Dr Hanson started by saying, "Is there anything you would like to talk about?" I think I always said, "No." Then we would play. The way we played was, generally speaking, we created things. We made model airplanes, small ships, small cities, small forts, and small paintings. I don't think we played board games. Mostly we created things together and I happily created these things with him. Since I was only eight or nine and he was an adult doctor I could make them better with his assistance than I could by myself. So I didn't mind that he was helping me. He was really patient and we made some really nice things. Then I got to take them home.

***"I suppose
through a
one-way
mirror we
were being
watched!"***

Then once a month all the crazy kids were gathered together and had a party where we ate ice cream and cake and played games. I suppose through a one-way mirror we were being watched! I don't know. The doctor was in the party with us watching us play. All I remember is the ice cream and cake and various card games and board games we would play. I travelled at the age of eight or nine by bus all the way across the city in various kinds of weather all by myself to go and see Dr Hanson because I actually liked to go and see Dr Hanson, because we played. I could play with Dr Hanson because I trusted him and when he asked if I wanted to talk about anything and I said no he accepted that. By the way, at the end of play he would also ask if there was anything I want to talk about and I would say, "No." I happily did that week after week going to see Dr Hanson and bringing home my creations which my little brother then destroyed, thus completing the cycle.

I stopped going to see Dr Hanson on my own because of soccer season. I didn't want to miss a soccer game. So I stopped going to see Dr Hanson and everybody was okay with that and I never got to find out if I was crazy or cured! But I did hear that my parents started seeing him after I stopped.

I don't know if there was healing and enlightenment in that meeting. I don't know if I was half alive when I entered the process and came out fully alive. I really don't know. But I do remember that I trusted him, that I wanted to go, and I played and that this was supposed to be medicine. Right? This was supposed to be helping to heal this boy of what ever illnesses he might have had. I don't know if he was healed. He probably was sick. Most little boys are, more or less. But I don't know if he was healed. Until the last few days, looking back, my version of the story was that he wasn't sick. I just went because my parents told me to and I had a good time. But maybe I was sick.



Markus Kvist

***“The realisation of
creativity happens
when two people
play together.”***

Sick people can play if they are in a state of renunciation. If they can play, and when they are playing, the creative can appear. When the creative appears, and in the appearance of the creation of the self, there is enlightenment. There is understanding that the self is a dependent co-arising, and not something already made that you can bring into a room. When you enter a room in a state of renunciation and play with the door, and play with the threshold, and play with the appearance of the room, in that state of play suddenly you see who you are. The main disciple of this teacher Dogen, who said “To study the Buddha way is to study the self...”, was called Ejo. Zen Master Ejo became Dogen's main successor and wrote a poem that goes something like,

*Most bestial of humans am I
A festering lump of flesh
For 40 years I have walked in Chinese fashion
Today I touch my nose anew*

I don't know what history that really indicates but one story I could tell to elaborate on that is that for 40 years he practiced renunciation. For 40 years he relaxed. He surrendered in the midst of practicing the forms of Zen. For some part of that 40 years, perhaps for only one moment or perhaps millions of moments, in that state of renunciation playing with

these Zen toys, he touched his nose anew and a self was born in that touch. He touched his nose and... Oh what a coincidence! It's me right here! For 40 years I'd been practicing Zen and today I touch me anew. It's a new me!

“This is enlightenment: New me!”

This is enlightenment: New me! But in between each new me, there is forgetting me, and then there is who? Me! And where is this me? It's here! Always being surprised at this new me right here. But if there is no new me then there is no surprise. There is just,

“Of course it's me here. Who else would I be? Don't be silly!”

“It's okay. It's all right. Is there anything you want to talk about?”

“No!”

“Do you want to build a model airplane?”

“Okay...”

Maybe Dr Hanson was my Zen teacher before Suzuki Roshi. I don't know. He didn't tell me that he was. If he was my first Zen teacher then he must also have been my first Zen student and he will also have been healed if I was healed. I think it is mutual. The Zen teacher doesn't get stuffy either. The realisation of creativity happens when two people play together. If the teacher doesn't know how to play then the teacher should go on retreat and learn how. If the student doesn't know how to play, then the teacher should find a way so that the student can learn how to play.

I would like to expand on what Zen master Dogen said: To learn the Buddha way is to learn the self. Now that self could be the real self, that is, the independently co-arisen self with all beings. Or it could be to learn about the self that we think is already made that we carry into the room with us. Actually we need to learn about both. We have to learn to understand the old stuffy prefab self that we carry with us everywhere. Studying that we will also will learn about the fresh, spontaneously created self.

Thoughts of safety come to mind, trusting a situation to be safe in some way. What about some of those Zen stories of the harsh training of the monks where it looks as if the monks are scared to death? They look seriously scared in the training situation with the big master swinging big sticks at them. But it's about giving such training situations the benefit of the doubt... in other words, the doubt is: Can people really learn when they are afraid? Or do we learn best when we are relaxed and at ease at least for a moment? So let's consider the possibility that we are already afraid. It isn't that we have just become afraid when we go to a Zen Centre where there is a big teacher who can see how evil we are.

“Can people really learn when they are afraid?”

“If the pain comes up as it does in life, can we find a way to relax with it?”

Consider that we are already afraid that anybody in the street just might not like us and that these random people might see how faulty we are. Let's go to a place that will bring our fears out of the closet, where they are allowed to come out of the closet. That seems like a good environment to get support to face these fears and to relax with them and play with them. It's about having enough trust in the situation that you can open to your fear and relax with it.

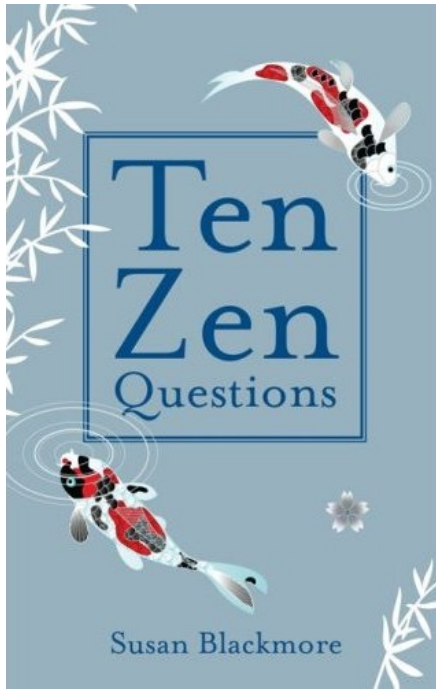
Someone asked me for advice about pain that sometimes occurs in this type of retreat where you sit a lot and that sometimes it seems like an endurance test. Attention to posture and not interfering with the pain sounds pretty good. In a sense we don't have these long sittings so that you will have pain. Rather it's more that if the pain comes up as it does in life, can we find a way to relax with it? It's fine to relax when the pain is virtually insignificant. But can learn to relax in the pain? I think we can. Also, sometimes you can use the pain as a guide to finding a posture that won't be painful. I myself in doing this Indian style walking and sitting over the years have experienced some discomfort.

A lot of the time this discomfort has been a guide for me to look for a posture that is more efficient. Certain postural habits that I have had are not efficient. They are not the most elegant, simple and natural way to hold my body. If I hold them that way a long time, discomfort accumulates. This discomfort is feedback on my posture and my posture has evolved over the years so that it is more and more comfortable because I have found a way that is really efficient and that is not holding anything extra. One of the things that feedback on your pain does is that it simplifies and streamlines your way of holding the body upright. The opportunity also arises in finding ways to be relaxed with more or less discomfort. When you are relaxed with discomfort then you are in a good position, for example, to change posture and be more comfortable. If you are tense then every way you change your posture sometimes doesn't help unless the way you change your posture is by taking painkillers. When you relax with your posture and relax with your pain sometimes you are able to see the most intelligent thing to do. The most intelligent thing to do is often to uncross your legs, take a break. Rest is part of the Buddha way. As a matter of fact Dogen says that our way is the comfortable way. Then, why is practice so painful if this is the comfortable way? If you are uncomfortable and you think that continuing to sit in the posture you are in is not appropriate to your welfare and the welfare of all beings, please adopt another posture. Be spontaneous!

“Rest is part of the Buddha way.”

Asking difficult questions

by Susan Blackmore



Am I conscious now? Yes, of course I am, how could I not be? But hang on a minute, when I asked myself that question and answered “yes” it almost seemed as though I was waking up, as though I had not been fully conscious a moment ago, but asking made me so. Could that be true? If it is, then what is the darkness and could I see into it?

These are the sort of questions I have been obsessed with most of my life, and they have taken me in two radically different directions. One is my science. I have researched all sorts of weird experiences, studied the neuroscience of consciousness, and become frustrated with theories that assume they know what consciousness is like without ever really looking. In a consciousness course I ran for more than ten years, I got my students to look. We all had to ask ourselves questions like “Am I conscious now?” as many times as we could every day. The effects were startling and often led the students, as well as me, into even deeper questioning.

The other is my Zen practice. I began tentatively about 30 years ago, went on my first retreat with John Crook at the Maenllwyd in Wales in 1982, and began regular practice a few years after that. It took me a long time to realise that both these paths were really tackling the same mysteries but from different directions, and it was time to bring them together.

This is what I try to do in my new book *Ten Zen Questions*. Some of the questions are my old favourites, starting with “Am I conscious now?” and – inspired by the peculiar results of asking that one – “What was I conscious of a moment ago?”. Others are traditional Zen koans, studied for a week at a time on koan retreats, and yet others are ones I simply made up because they interested me.

When I conceived the idea of the book I revisited the questions, took myself off on a series of solitary retreats, and sat down to work on them again. Typically I would spend a few hours calming the mind and then set about exploring whatever the question threw up. I am not a Buddhist and make no claims that anything I discovered fits with traditional Buddhist teachings. But I’m grateful for my Zen training which made it possible to sit calmly and look, and so approach steadily such questions as “Where is this?”, “What am I doing?” and “Who is asking the question?”

“We all had to ask ourselves questions like ‘Am I conscious now?’ as many times as we could every day.”

The book has no answers – of course – and in a way I only wrote it to give myself an excuse to keep on struggling, but I hope it may contribute something to the troubled science of consciousness. I also hope that others may enjoy the tangles I got into, the discoveries I made, and may be inspired to keep asking too.

Sue Blackmore

[Ten Zen Questions](#), was published in March 2009 by One-World, Oxford. £ 12.99 hardback

You can learn more about the book, read some chapters, or join in the TenZenBlog at <http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Books/Tenzen/index.htm>



“Who is asking the question?”

Is art intoxicating the mind?

I was recently at a national meeting of Buddhist Chaplains to the prison service and during one of our discussions, the issue of Right Livelihood was raised. One practicing Buddhist and experienced Chaplain spoke of how one of the prisoners he was working with asked him if his career in the music industry was 'right livelihood', he assured him that working this way was not at odds with the teachings of the Buddha. After some discussion, one of the most senior teachers among us suggested that performance work such as music and acting was warned against by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni citing the Talaputa Sutta and relating the story of Talaputa, an actor of those times, who is said to have had to address the Buddha three times before he would answer:

"Lord, I have heard that it has been passed down by the ancient teaching lineage of actors that 'When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.' What does the Blessed One have to say about that?"

“Performance work such as music and acting was warned against by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni”

On his third request, the Buddha is said to have responded:

"Apparently, headman, I haven't been able to get past you by saying, 'Enough, headman, put that aside. Don't ask me that.' So I will simply answer you. Any beings who are not devoid of passion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of passion, focus with even more passion on things inspiring passion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of aversion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of aversion, focus with even more aversion on things inspiring aversion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of delusion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of delusion, focus with even more delusion on things inspiring delusion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Thus the actor — himself intoxicated & heedless, having made others intoxicated & heedless — with the break-up of the body, after death, is reborn in what is called the hell of laughter. But if he holds such a view as this: 'When an actor on the stage, in the midst of a festival, makes people laugh & gives them delight with his imitation of reality, then with the break-up of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas,' that is his wrong view. Now, there are two destinations for a person with wrong view, I tell you: either hell or the animal womb."

***“The actor ...
with the break-
up of the body,
after death, is
reborn in what
is called the
hell of
laughter.”***



Markus Kvist

The senior teacher at our meeting spoke of how he himself had worked in this industry prior to ordination and had experienced first hand the powerful mind altering and intoxicating influence of even the classical arts. A most interesting and passionate debate ensued between those who upheld this senior teachers warning to the assembly and those who challenged it. The content of the argument seemed to be between an appreciation of the powerful potential for deepening and reinforcing fantasy and delusion through passionate engagement with the arts and an appreciation of how creativity and the arts may be put to use in the service of liberating beings. The lively debate highlighted the passion with which many Buddhists feel towards many forms of art.

Is there enlightened art? Where do you stand?

Where do I stand? At the time I said little, but now as I reflect upon it, it seems to me that creativity is the essence of life, it is not something to be used to achieve an end. To try to use creativity to achieve a goal is to try and pour a glass of water at the bottom of the ocean. Creativity is, you cannot fail to express it but this may be obscured! Packaging creativity for consumption cannot fail to invite opportunities for delusion. But can we see this and not get caught?

Angyu Devin Ashwood

***“To try to use
creativity to
achieve a goal
is to try and
pour a glass of
water at the
bottom of the
ocean.”***



Markus Kvist

Suzuki on Creativity

According to Suzuki Roshi, we are creating something moment after moment, and this he says "is the joy of life". However, it is not the "small I" which is creating, it is the "big I".

For Christianity, everything in nature is created or given to us by God. But, if you think God created us and that you are separate from God, you may begin to believe that you have the power to create something not given by Gaia. For example, we create airplanes, highways, etc. so we continually repeat "I create, I create, I create", so that we soon forget who is actually the "I" which creates these many and varied things. We soon forget about God. Because of this, we can easily become attached to the material or exchange value of something, but "not to be attached" to something is to be aware of its ABSOLUTE value.

***“To sit in
Zazen means
to resume our
fundamental
activity of
Creation”***

To sit in Zazen means to resume our fundamental activity of Creation and here Suzuki Roshi suggests that there are maybe three kinds of creation: Firstly, to be aware of ourselves after finishing Zazen. When we just sit we are nothing; that is, we don't even realise what we are. But after standing up we realise we are there!!! That is then, the first step in creation because when you are there, everything is created all at once. Creation is fresh, new and miraculous. This, he says, "is non-attachment". Secondly, when you then act, produce or prepare something, this is the second kind of creation. And when you create something within yourself like education, art or some kind of system for society, this is the third kind. But if we forget the first, the most important one, the other two will be similar to children losing their parents; and there, creation will mean nothing. So by forgetting about Zazen, everyone forgets about God. We may work very hard at the second and third kind of creation, but God does not help the activity. When we forget or are out of touch with the fundamental source of our creating, we become like children orphaned from our parents, confused and not knowing what to do.

Francis Checkley



Markus Kvist

Zen Art

I've just had another look at one of my favourite books – 'The Unknown Craftsman' by Sōetsu Yanagi, adapted by Bernard Leach. I have a first edition which was published in 1972 and is bound with handmade mulberry bark paper (momigami) from Toyama Prefecture. My copy has that lovely old bookie smell now and is wonderful to just sit and hold.

What follows is a snippet from a chapter on the Buddhist idea of beauty. "Beauty from the Zen point of view is the state of non-preoccupation, it is that which in every respect is free. In pursuit of the pre-differentiated world, Zen monks asked such questions as "How about an old mirror before it is polished?" or "How about a lotus blossom before it emerges from the water?" Translated to the realm of aesthetics, such questions become: "How about the time before the beautiful and the ugly were differentiated?" Art is usually, so to speak, a struggle between the beautiful and the ugly, a struggle in which the artist seeks to subjugate the ugly and bring victory to the beautiful. But this is a process that can take place only after the separation of the two. The Zen point of view warns that this struggle is not a final solution to the problem, that the artist must dwell in the world before there is beauty or ugliness, that only there is salvation to be found. The fundamental "undifferentiated" or "unborn" state is expressed in Buddhist terms as inherent or innate or inborn nature. The distinction between beauty and ugliness is post-natal and artificial, and therefore one is constantly advised to "return to one's original state", since this means liberation from dualism.

The object of Buddhist aesthetics is the clarification of the following truths:

1. That the inherent nature of man is not dualistic; that non-dual entirety is the primordial home of us all; that the place is purity itself.
2. That the division of things into two is merely a later event and is unnatural; that the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly is based on human delusion and is wholly artificial.
3. That we must accordingly forsake the dualistic fallacy and return to our old home of non-duality, where our salvation is promised.

"The artist must dwell in the world before there is beauty or ugliness"



Kizaemon Ido teabowl, Korea, Yi dynasty, 16th century.

Zen looks forward then, to the state where there is no dualistic strife, a state it describes by the words buji ("no event") or bunan ("no trouble"). What is implied by the two terms is the absence of storm, of conflict, of disease, of living with one's self nature without illusion and in complete tranquillity. Worshipping the beautiful and hating the ugly are immature; Zen admonishes us to seek the world "where no antagonism exists". This Kizaemon Ido teabowl from Korea (Yi dynasty 16th century) renders all critical comment meaningless and sums up the content of the item above.

I suggest a look at the following Wikipedia link on the subject of 'Wabi Sabi' - sometimes described as beauty that is "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete"

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabi-sabi>

Finally a line from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book, 'The Little Prince':

"What is essential is invisible to the eye".

John Pollex



John Pollex, Chawan, Paperclay.
Height approx 9.5cm



John Pollex, Chawan, coloured slips.
Height approx 9.5cm

Retreat Reflections

Joint day retreat: Dancing Mountains Sangha and South West Sangha of The Order of Interbeing at The Barefoot Barn Chagford Devon.

So often we as a Sangha practice in isolation largely unaware of the forms, practice and ceremonies of other traditions. It was with a view of acquainting ourselves with our brother and sister practitioners in the tradition led by Thich Nhat Hanh that this retreat was arranged.

The Barefoot Barn is a wooden custom-built meditation and yoga practice centre situated amidst the rolling hills of Devon on the edge of Dartmoor. The day of our retreat was perfect early summer weather; the old ash and oak trees surrounding the centre were clothed in the freshest shades of green whilst further off in rolling parkland horses and sheep grazed or sought the shadows of hedges.

As the bell rang out for our first sitting a blackbird sang us into silence. We were a little surprised to find that, like us, The Order of Interbeing sit facing the wall! After the first sessions of zazen we were led through the lush woodland gardens in a long period of kinhin, these meditations apparently being a very important part of the Order's practice. Later both groups chanted their different forms of the Heart Sutra, the differences here being superficial. Over lunch we were able to sit outside on the terrace and hear from others their experiences of practice over the years, stories from Plum Village (their centre in France) and how they first came to Buddhist practice. These discussions and questions were continued later in the afternoon over exquisite green tea and biscuits served by Leon and Bernadette. The day concluded with both groups chanting their versions of the refuges.

It was evident from feedback that this had been a much appreciated day together and it was resolved to repeat it next year.

Michael Elsmere

“We were a little surprised to find that, like us, The Order of Interbeing sit facing the wall!”



Markus Kvist

Soto Zen Forms and Ceremonies
The Practice of Deep Intimacy
Tanto Meiya Wender, 25 to 29
March 2009

As I drove into Gaia House it seemed subtly changed, not quite what I expected. The great trees usually shadowing the lawn were bare, late daffodils trumpeted their tones of bright yellow from beds and pots whilst a blaze of forsythia draped their lovely flowers round supporting trellis. The noisy calls of the crows were the same though,

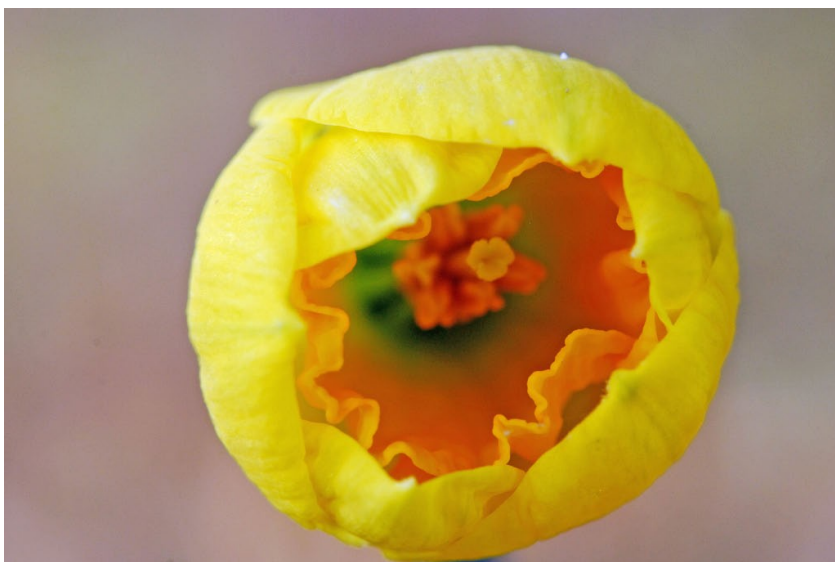
giving their harsh calls of welcome as they flew busily to and fro constructing their ramshackle nests. As I pulled my rucksack from the car I realised... of course! Usually I was here for Reb's retreat in high Summer. Now we were just tilting past Spring, the earth stirring, the wind losing its Winter edge and the skies clearing to reveal patches of hard Summer blue. This was the first time that Dancing Mountains Sangha had been privileged to be led on two longer retreats in a year under the guidance of senior teachers from Green Gulch Farm Zen Centre, our 'mother house' in California.



Markus Kvist

During our sangha meeting at the end of Reb's retreat in September 2008 we had discussed the possibility of having two retreats in 2009 with one focusing directly on the practice and understanding of our Soto Zen forms and ceremonies. Reb promised to consider this and subsequently with the cooperation of Gaia House, Tanto Meiya Wender, Head of Practice at Green Gulch, was asked to lead a five day retreat in March 2009. Meiya was ordained as a priest in 1986 and received dharma transmission from Tenshin Reb Anderson in 2002.

Dogen, our illustrious ancestor, had enjoined his followers to 'just sit' as had the founder of our lineage Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. So why had Dancing Mountains Sangha gone to such lengths to invite a senior teacher to travel many thousands of air miles to train us and deepen our understanding of the forms and ceremonies that are, paradoxically, also at the heart of our practice?



Markus Kvist

Over the years we had done our best to carry out the rituals to the best of our very limited ability. It became clear that if we were to invest this vital part of our practice with the grace, dignity and reverence that it required we were going to need the help of an energetic, wise and very patient teacher! In Tanto Meiya we were indeed fortunate to have such a person. Not only did she lead services and zazen as Doan and give dharma talks and dokusan (interviews). In the evenings at the end of a long day she gave a group of eager but nervous volunteers detailed and precise instructions on when bells should be sounded, when they should be

silenced, which bell should be struck big or small, how meticulous prostrations should be performed, how the names of the women ancestors should be chanted, the timing of the beating of the mokugyo and so on; the list is endless! This group went to bed with these details churning through their brains waking up the next day to be thrust centre stage in enacting them... perhaps with a little gentle nod or smile from our benign repetiteur! Further to all this, during the afternoons those intent on taking precepts this summer were led into the deep mysteries and challenges of sewing Rakasu by Meiya in another of her roles as an expert needlewoman!

The sitting and ceremonies in the zendo were only part of our intense days. Our teacher had borne, across the Atlantic, meal bowls and a determination that we should carry out a modified form of the Oriyoki meals in the dining room at Gaia House, a new experience I am sure for the old walls of the former convent. At this point I wish once again to thank the managers, staff and retreatants of Gaia House for their extraordinary kindness and efficiency that enabled us to practice in this way. We have become used to the fine service we receive here but the kitchen and other staff went to extraordinary lengths to ensure meals (breakfast and lunch) went as smoothly as possible. This eating together was to prove a very significant part of the retreat and a number of people have spoken and written to me since saying what a powerful experience it had proved, extending the intimacy and communality of the zendo into the dining hall and beyond.

“Ritual and ceremony are essential, at the very heart of our practice”

“What a powerful experience it had proved, extending the intimacy and communality of the zendo into the dining hall and beyond.”

Ritual and its use have always proved to a contentious issue within the modern Zen community. The questions that came after Meiya's talks showed that this was still so. Doubts were expressed as to just how important forms are to practice. How much, it was asked, is just pointless cultural accretion? Some retreatants practicing for many years had witnessed newcomers drifting away when they met these 'esoteric' forms. For me, Meiya, in her wise talks, demonstrated that ritual and ceremony are essential, at the very heart of our practice, developed by the communal wisdom of our ancestors over centuries to sustain us, a container for our energy and commitment, a means of ensuring that we take the ethos of our practice into every cell of our bodies to awaken the bodhisattva within.

For me this retreat revived again the sense that we are blessed and privileged to be able to receive such teachings. The presence of Meiya and the sangha gave me new inspiration to ensure that the future for Dancing Mountains is secured so that our children and grandchildren are able to receive its beneficent wisdom in a much troubled world.

N.B. The proposed dates for our retreat with Tanto Meiya Wender in 2010 at Gaia House are 13 to 20 March. Numbers

are likely to be limited as it is expected that once again we shall eat Oriyoki meals! Book early! The Gaia House brochure will be published October/November and you should receive it in the mail. By this time we should have compiled a number of Oriyoki sets for purchase so you can come at least fully equipped materially!

Michael Elsmere

“What I liked about it was mainly the communal aspects.”

My view on ‘Zen Forms and Ceremonies,’ a Retreat held at Gaia House, Devon, in March 2009

Back home after the retreat I have been very uncertain about Zen and zazen. After talking to some of you at Gaia House I found a group in London (<http://www.zeninlondon.org/>). The guy who organises it is very friendly and welcoming. But the couple of times I've been, I've found it quite intimidating and stressful, I think mainly because it's just this random group of people who all walk in off the street, sit, and then go their separate ways. Rather than finding sitting in the group supportive, I've found it quite a lonely experience. This has made me wonder if I'm just not ready for sitting yet. When I think back to the week at Gaia house in March, what I liked about it was mainly the communal aspects. I liked that over Oriyoki we were all grinning at each other, and it felt like we all knew we were going through something special together. I liked helping Malvern out in the kitchen. I liked listening to Meiya's talks. I liked wandering about and being in the middle of beautiful countryside with no work or commuting or worries. But I found the actual sitting a nightmare. I think what I'm trying to say is, I suspect I enjoyed the retreat at Gaia House for the wrong reasons, and am just not ready to handle sitting yet. Like, the part of sitting that's about being able to just be with your self. I'm just not sure I'm able to do that yet.

by a newcomer.

Back To The Future

I was first given the book, “Zen Mind, Beginners Mind”, in 1985 in Vancouver by a close friend of mine and have in one form or another been sitting and working on my own spiritual development ever since. Many things have happened to me since the first time I read that book but nothing prepared me for the sudden vanishing of duality and all conceptual thought on the 15th of August 2005 while hanging up the phone from a business call. The experience was so profound it left me unable to function in the world for almost three years and as a result could not work or provide for my family.

During this process I had to stop all spiritual practices as they would trigger the state and I would find myself unable to function again. This went on for some time until one day while surfing the net I once again came across the book, “Zen Mind, Beginners Mind”; it had been many years since I had last owned a copy. After all those years Zen was back in my life

again so with out delay I ordered the book and waited for its arrival in the post. It took a week for it to show up and as I ripped through the wrapping the first thing my eyes were drawn to was the photo of Suzuki Roshi on the back. Twenty-four years had passed since I had last looked at his photo, and although I could not remember much about what it was like, something profound now stood out. I looked deeper into his eyes and features and began to see someone who had achieved and grounded their practice and state of consciousness to a level where it could serve others. There was a sense of integration and peace that emanated from this man and it was exactly what had been missing in my life and the thing I had been searching for since my experience in 2005.

After reading the book I realised that what I now had to do was reconnect with the Zen practice I had begun in 1985 and the people that were involved in it. I googled 'Zen' in the UK and began looking for the Susuki Roshi lineage but could not find anything in the London area. However, I did eventually connect with the Black Mountain Zen Centre in Northern Ireland and so began communications with them. This led to a last minute decision to fly to Belfast and participate in the retreat that was being led by Paul Haller. The experience was again just like coming home and it reconnected me with the power of sitting with a group and practicing such a profound lineage of Zazen.

Just knowing a Zen Master was in the room was a powerful and motivating experience for me as his presence pushed us on with greater determination and commitment during our practice. On the last evening the rain came and began pounding on the roof as we all sat and practiced into the night with Paul leading the way, pushing us on with his intention and many years of practice and experience. This was, for me, the moment when it all came together. It was uplifting and profound just to sit and breathe into life knowing everything was just as it was supposed to be: free of conceptual thought and of any meaning. That night I slept like a baby.

On the flight home the next day I reflected on my short journey and just how looking at an old photo on the back of a Zen book had triggered a set of events that had led me back to the daily grounded practice of Zazen. When all is said and done there really is nothing else to do but sit and breathe and to let all things come and go just the way they were designed to. For this insight and for the gift of being able to reconnect with the Suzuki Roshi lineage, I am blessed.

Thank you.

JC Mac

***“It was
uplifting and
profound just
to sit and
breathe into
life knowing
everything was
just as it was
supposed to
be”***

Local Contacts

Below is a list of people who have offered their details as local contacts for Sangha in our tradition. Please contact them if you wish to meet and practice with others in your area.

Bedfordshire (Broham)

Chris and Clare Hannah
channah1@btinternet.com

Cambridge

Wendy Klein
07756 554374 / 01223 426590
wklein02@hotmail.com

Chester

Frances Collins
01244 683289
fmjcollins@hotmail.com

Devon (Totnes)

Michael Elsmere
01803 732761 / 07817 604156
melsmere@hotmail.com

Dorset (Poole)

Jason Miller
07837 303972
jasonthemiller@hotmail.co.uk

Guilford

John Mackormik
07768 475622
info@gzc.org.uk

London

Bev Eatwell
0208 449211, / (07730) 030233
beatwell69@hotmail.com

Manchester (Swinton)

Chris Brown
07812 602794 / 0161 7934844
chrisb.by.name@gmail.com

Somerset (Glastonbury)

Devin Ashwood
01749 813969 / 07875 155474
devin@zendesigns.org

If you would like your details included here, please write to us (details on back page)

Appeal for funds

Dear Friends,

Those involved in Dancing Mountains have a number of functions and projects. We uphold the forms and ceremonies of Zen by organising visiting teachers and retreats, networking, facilitating discussion, producing a newsletter and are working towards developing a Zen centre in the south of England. So far, these activities have been resourced from ad hoc donations, occasional surplus money from retreats and from the private finances of core group members. To develop our activities to their full potential, more money is needed so we can take the next step. Publishing and more widely distributing the newsletter in hard copy, purchasing items to support forms and ceremonies, financing the development of a centre, all these things can only happen with wider financial support. At present, we ask for no membership fee to be a part of our community but in the tradition of Dana, freely give what we have. If you would like to join us in the spirit of generosity and make a one off contribution, please send a cheque made payable to 'Dancing Mountains' and send it to the address below. However what may help even more is a regular contribution so that we can budget for the future. Please fill in and return the form below and we will supply you with a bespoke standing order form to send to your bank.

With a deep bow,

Angyu Devin Ashwood.

Subscription Form:

I wish to make an offering to Dancing Mountains

Name:	Address:
Phone:	
Email:	

I would like to make a voluntary contribution of: (please tick as appropriate)

£2 ☐ £5 ☐ £10 ☐ £20 ☐ £50 ☐ £other ☐ each month ☐ each year ☐

Please post me ☐ paper copies of Mountain Silence each issue

I prefer ☐ A5 ☐ A4 ☐ format

Signature:

note: It costs about £4 to cover minimum costs to post out a years worth of newsletters for one person in A5 format.

return to: **Devin Ashwood, D.M. Secretary, 18 Westfield, Bruton, Somerset, BA10 0BT**

Diary of Events

2009

Every Monday

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

Every Tuesday

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

Every Sunday

The Guildford Zen Centre group meet the Pepper Pot at 7pm
Phone: JC Mac 07768475622 or email info@gzc.org.uk

Monthly:

Dharma Discussion Group:

Email: Alan, woodap@btinternet.com

July

Sun 5 July: *DM

Zen Retreat in Ermington, Devon.
Phone: Devin 07875 155464
devin@zendesigns.org

Sun 12th July : South Devon Chan day retreat

Leusdon Memorial Hall near Poundsgate in Dartmoor
Pete Lowry
07737 526048

August

Fri 28 Aug - Fri 4 Sept: *DM

7 Day Retreat: Reb Anderson

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

October

Sun 4 Oct: Chan day retreat

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

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

Envisioning Retreat

As part of the ongoing process of manifesting a more sustainable presence for Dancing Mountains Sangha in the U.K. we are considering holding a weekend (Friday evening / Saturday / Sunday till noon) possibly some time after Reb's retreat in August, brainstorming, sitting, and exploring the infinite possibilities available in the future development of the Sangha.

Francis and Bernadette Checkley have kindly offered free accommodation for up to 8 persons for the weekend and food/drink have been donated. If Totnes in glorious Devon is considered too far to travel we are open to the possibility of other venues. If you are interested in attending the retreat please ring/e-mail Michael Elsmere on 01803 732761 or mobile 07817604156 e-mail melsmere@hotmail.com

We intend to begin the process of consultation and discussion of ideas and possibilities before the weekend so we invite anyone who is interested (whether attending or not) to mail or phone any of us in the editorial group with your thoughts and inspiration. We look forward to hearing from you!

Michael Elsmere

New Zen Group in Guildford

On May 31st the first Guildford Zen Centre group met at the Pepper Pot at the top of the high street in Godalming which is a short hop from the Guildford town centre. About 15 people showed up and we will be meeting every Sunday evening at 1900 for Zazen practice, Q&A for new comers and a reading. We then all meet for coffee on the high street. All are welcome. See diary for contact details.

JC Mac

Next issue of Mountain Silence

Autumn issue with a theme around 'Vows'. We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters, retreat reflections and book reviews! Summer issue publication date: 28th September, deadline for submission of material 14th September.

With thanks to: Reb Anderson Roshi and San Francisco Zen Center; the editorial team, Michael, Chris, Gill, Frances, Francis, Devin and everyone who has contributed to the newsletter and supported and encouraged us in our devotion and practice.

THIS ISSUE AND BACKISSUES OF MOUNTAIN SILENCE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE WEB:

www.dancingmountains.org.uk

Submissions to future editions & comments on newsletter design:

Chris Brown (Co-ordinating Editor)
07812 602794 (daytime) or 0161 7934844 (eve. & w/ends)
Address: 16 Wayfarers Way, Swinton, Manchester, M27 5UZ
chrisb.by.name@gmail.com

Web Development: Devin Ashwood (Secretary)
01749 813969 / 07875 155474; devin@zendesigns.org