



Mountains Talking

Winter 2016

East Mountain Walks

By Karin Ryuku Kempe
From a *teisho* on Dec. 10, 2015

All week long we have practiced mountain sitting, mountain walking, mountain sleeping and eating, moment to moment, breath by breath. Quiet and noisy, active and still, encouraged, worn down or worn out, all conditions become irrelevant. Our practice here together is not dependent upon conditions; like mountains, we sit in a deep quiet, unmoving in body and mind, meeting every kind of weather, inside, outside, every phase of the moon and cycle of the sun.

Today I'll offer another mountain koan, this one from a Rinzai book called *Entangling Vines*, and read a bit from Master Dogen's *Mountains and Rivers Sutra*. Here is the koan:

A monk questioned Master Yunmen, "What is the place where all buddhas attain complete liberation?"

Yunmen replied, "East Mountain walks on the water."

The place where all buddhas attain liberation: this is the place where each of us, being no other than Buddha ourselves, sitting alone and complete, experiences our great freedom.

"East Mountain walks on the water." While this phrase may initially appear opaque, his answer refers to our own life in this moment. Yunmen gives us real advice and he is speaking for himself as well as for you and me.

Eihei Dogen, the great master of Soto Zen, brought this image into his *Mountains and Rivers Sutra*. He wrote about the mountains and rivers, the wind and clouds, as direct expressions of the great body of the Buddha, the whole earth body as well as your body, my body. He is pointing to the immediate, non-dual



Photo by Geoff Keeton

experience of your own life using the language of our natural world. So let your mind relax around these images and let Dogen's vivid and transcendent words point beyond language and understanding.

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Rohatsu Sesshin at Shambhala Mountain Center

This year our Rohatsu sesshin was held at Shambhala Mountain Center, a remarkable 600-acre property by Red Feather Lakes brimming with pines, aspens, snow, trails, deer, rabbits, magpies, and wind. Participants took advantage of the rest periods and the days of silence to hike to the awe-inspiring stupa nestled in the back of the valley, circumambulating on one of the tiered walkways or doing zazen inside, beneath the gaze of an eighteen-foot-tall Buddha figure.

Our zazen together was truly profound, marked most of all by the hiss and howl of the mountain wind, which seemed unceasing until the last day, when we woke to a blanket of snow and a deep silence all across the landscape. In reverence we closed our sesshin by sharing briefly our reflections and feelings of gratitude, before making our vows and final prostrations.

Afterward, most of us went to the stupa for a short tour, pictured here. Our guide regaled us with facts about the stupa's construction, symbolism, and history, while we gazed around in wonder. We are truly grateful for the long labors and practice of these fellow Buddhists, who made this place and this sesshin possible. Gassho!

- Joel Tagert



Photo by Geoff Keeton



Photo by Geoff Keeton

You Are Like the Ancestors

By Dennis Sienko

Too many of us have the problem of thinking, “Is my doubt, my spirit of inquiry, strong enough? Am I deserving enough? No way could I be like those ancient Zen ancestors, so strong and devoted. The Buddha stood on one leg for six days or six weeks or something like that. I can hardly stand on one leg for thirty seconds.”

But nothing could be further from the truth. The Buddha and all the ancestors were the same as you, and you are the same as them. After all, the Buddha left his wife and family. What would we think today of someone who left their wife and family to pursue some strange spiritual quest? Certainly, not someone deserving enlightenment.

We all have our warts. The universe loves you despite your warts. Maybe you are divorced. Maybe you are too old, and if only you would have started on this path twenty years ago. Maybe you are too young to get enlightened. Maybe your family life is not what it should be. Maybe you are too thin, too fat, too tall. Maybe you should not have kicked your grandmother’s cat when you were eight years old.

It doesn’t matter! You need to step forward and take Manjusri’s sword from the altar, and once and for all cut off the mind road.

Do you deserve enlightenment? This is not a yes or no answer, for this is not an ego-driven process. You must become totally helpless, totally alone and totally open.

Do you deserve enlightenment? Let the wind be your witness.



Preparing for our Buddha’s Enlightenment ceremony, with guests from Shambhala Mountain Center.

Photo by Ken Morgareidge

Cultivating a Relationship with the Precepts

By Cathy Wright

The Ten Grave Precepts are a practice and a lifestyle. Becoming aware of them, exploring them, and upholding them puts into practice what we experience for ourselves in meditation. As we stay consistent with our practice, we answer these precepts from a different layer of silence. How we settle our minds, or don't settle our minds, on the zafu gets reflected in how we engage with our friends, our family, and those that we conflict with. The Ten Grave Precepts are a lens to look through when dealing with the world.

Thus to have a meditation practice in tandem with studying the Ten Grave Precepts is a very special interaction. It is a special look at how one has a relationship with one's self and how this self gets replaced by the world and its ten thousand things, its bushes and grasses and clouds and stones and people and cars and flowers and garbage and life and death.

Without the precepts, we would lose a valuable Zen compass on what to do when we get up from meditation and walk out the door. Zen places a strong emphasis on seated, silent meditation. No music or candles, or paintings of the Buddha to look at. We look at a wall. We sit with eyes open. hands resting on our lap. And we don't move.

Each breath confirms our place in the moment as an eternal being with a mortal body. We learn more about our life, our mind, and our way of being judgmental than we ever could imagine at the start of this path.

And then, we step outside and are asked to love, not to lie, not to gossip, not to kill. These are big qualities. How are we doing with these?

Let's go back onto the meditation cushion for a moment. What else is going on besides looking at the wall and following the breath? Is there something else at work here, round after round?

I think so. I think to know how active and obsessed the mind is, is the first step in hearing from another place. For then, it is possible for something to dawn on us, something that we can be clear about, something fundamental to zazen: to know we are turning away

from our restless mind. This is a huge thing to become aware of and to turn toward something other than this. For herein lies the place from which we learn our own answers to the precepts. From the deep places we touch in silence we rub up against our limited ways of being.

With the practice of zazen, the Ten Grave Precepts spring us into existence with all things. The Dharma wheel turns ceaselessly. No one puts it in motion, no one is here to stop it. No one but you and I and the birds and the mountains to keep it rolling. It is from this place, this continuous turn of the Dharma wheel, that a particular precept in your blood and bones churns you up and shakes you awake from sleep-land. One precept jumps from the ground like the first flower in spring and taps you on the shoulder. One precept falls from the sky like the first snowflake of winter, and this precept grabs you like nothing has grabbed you in years. It gets your attention, your eyelids pop wide open, your mouth wants to speak but you know you are caught and quietly close your lips.

And then it begins. The zazen practice, the Buddha-Dharma-Sangha triple treasure, takes over, and you find your way out of the fog of forgetfulness and neglect, and you come forth with the arms of the universe.

When you know this place for yourself, you share the joy that overcomes you. You embrace the precept of the day, the precept of your life, and jump in with both feet. You shake the bejesus out of your sloth and arrogance. You know exactly how to answer, how to respond, and you do it.

I know for me, since sitting zazen, what the greatest pain is. I thought it was the stabbing knife pain between my shoulder blades during the long days of sesshin. Then later on, I knew it was the knee pain. The burning, aching, screaming pain of the knee not being able to sit one more second.

But now I believe differently. The greatest pain of all is the pain of separation, the pain of separation between me and you. The separation between me and you is so great, it stabs the heart with a sharp blade and it is nothing I want to hold onto anymore. To work with the precepts from separation does not liberate their unifying potential. To work with them from the silence that is touched in zazen liberates the precept right up to the level of replacement.

We can work with that. This silence is something other than our restless mind. This quiet, active

commitment that occurs each time we take our zafu seat. This stopping and sitting zazen takes the wind out of the emotional energy of separation.

And when this process of losing our separation from each other is underway, the Ten Grave Precepts meet us on new ground. We are more able to sift through our life and see where the precepts are guiding us or tripping us. Which ones have been in the dark? Which ones need some attention? Which ones have changed in the last year, the last ten years?

What I have learned in these years of sitting, going to dokusan, attending sesshin, and engaging in the forms of the temple, is it is following the precepts that have been my best mirror to how it has all – not just Zen, but my entire life – been going.

Because, in the end, no precept has been easy to follow. No precept has a right and wrong line so I know where to stand. Yet there is a precept buzzer, and it goes off each time the line is crossed.

Who pushes this buzzer? We do. I do. You do. I know instantly I have acted from separation due to the intensity of the judgment passed on myself or passed on another. When the precepts are actively looked at, reviewed, felt deeply, daily, monthly, yearly, there is a transformative force that grows and reworks us from the inside out. Then I am you, and you are me.

This is a special, extraordinary, and at the same time ordinary relationship indeed. A fresh relationship reflects the natural state of no yesterday, no tomorrow and no today, a relationship that is worth cultivating for the love of it all.

Zazenkaí Comín' at Ya'!

Zazenkaí, an all-day sitting, presents a terrific occasion to devote several hours to your zazen and your practice. You sit at home, right? For thirty minutes, maybe sixty minutes a day. Then you already know that longer sittings with the sangha allow you to get quieter than you do at home. So expand the zazen to six to eight hours in a day and what do you have? A zazenkaí, an extended sitting that gives you the chance to really practice into those “Big Questions.”

John Daido Looi wrote in *The Eight Gates of Zen*:

When we sit zazen, we build joriki, the power of zazen. But the power of that joriki is directly related to

the intensity of our sitting. When we stop sitting and stop creating joriki, our mind drifts back to the scattered state. When we resume sitting and again collect our energies, we again begin to build joriki, the power that effects the breakthrough necessary to experience for ourselves the nature of reality. But even before that breakthrough is realized, zazen is the manifestation of that reality, the manifestation of the enlightenment of the Buddha.

We have several zazenkaí planned for the first months of 2016. Take advantage of them. One of our teachers will lead each zazenkaí, so you will have the opportunity to go to dokusan, whether that teacher is your regular one or not. Actually, it can be delightful to exchange the dharma in a different perspective. You might try it. Or just come to sink into your zazen. Here's the planned schedule:

Sunday, Jan. 17, 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. at Mayu Sanctuary with Peggy Metta Sensei. Maximum capacity: 18. Fee: \$15.

Saturday, Feb. 6, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Franciscan Retreat Center, Colorado Springs, with Karin Ryuku Sensei. Maximum capacity: 40. Full day participation required. Fee: \$30. Hot lunch available for \$11.50 or bring your own lunch.

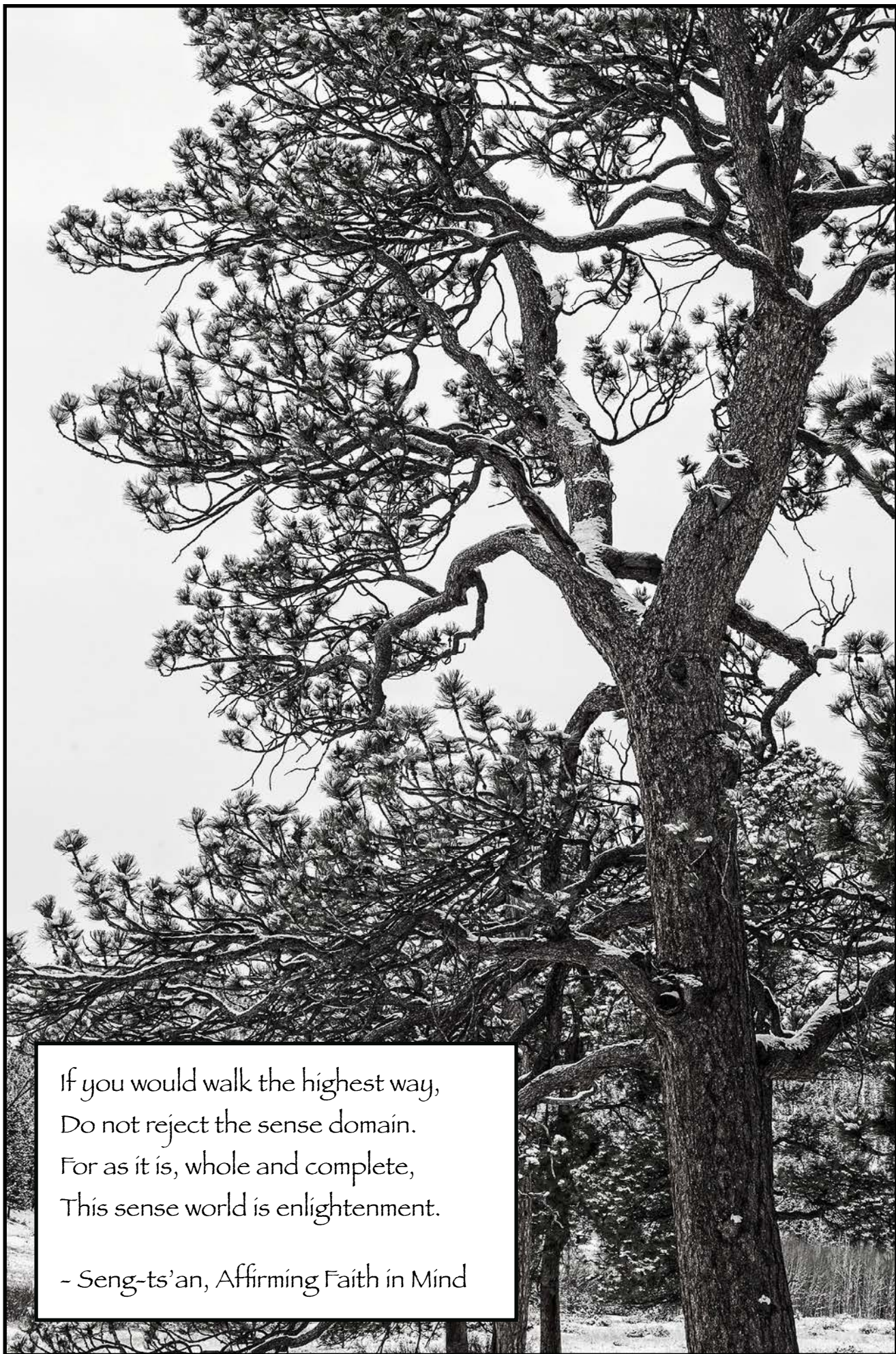
Saturday, March 5, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Franciscan Retreat Center, Colorado Springs, with Ken Tetsuzan Sensei. Maximum capacity: 40. Full day participation required. Fee: \$30. Hot lunch available for \$11.50 or bring your own.

Sunday, April 3, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at Cathy Wright's yoga studio, Ft. Collins with Peggy Metta Sensei. Maximum capacity: we don't know yet. Full day participation required. Fee: \$30. Bring your own lunch.

Because there can be space limitations and/or rental deadlines for these places, the office will announce signups in advance with cutoff dates. Fees will be required when you sign up, but be warned that if you cancel, your payment may not be refunded. Reduced fees are possible for financial difficulty and for students. Sorry, no senior discounts.

See you there, doing quiet, still zazen.

- George Mathews



If you would walk the highest way,
Do not reject the sense domain.
For as it is, whole and complete,
This sense world is enlightenment.

- Seng-ts'an, Affirming Faith in Mind

This is the start of his sutra:

These mountains and rivers of the present are the manifestation of the Way of the ancient sages. Each abides in its own dharma state, exhaustively fulfilling its virtues. Because they exist before the eon of emptiness, they are living in the present. Because they are the self before the appearance of any difference, they are free and unhindered in their actualization. Because the virtues of the mountain are high and broad, the spiritual power to ride the clouds is always entered through the mountains, and the capacity to follow the wind is ultimately liberated from the mountains.... [An ancient master said,] "The blue mountains are constantly walking; the stone woman gives birth to a child in the night" ...[Further,] it is because the blue mountains are walking that they are constant. This walk is swifter than the wind. However, those in the mountains do not sense this, do not know it.

True, isn't it? The earth turns and time passes. We and the mountains and trees are moving as the earth turns but we are not aware of this constant flowing, because we are not apart from it. The earth's turning is our turning. Dogen also tells us that the "blue mountains commit themselves to the practice of walking." These mountains are completely walking and at the same time completely still, like human beings.

Dogen then adds that "East Mountain walks over the water" and goes on to say that the "true significance of this expression is that all mountains are the East Mountain, and each of these East Mountains is also moving over the water."

Intimate words. Can your mind relax around these images?

Blue mountains constantly walking, walking over water. Mountains that are massive, solid, rooted. Holding fast, their change is hard to see. They are older than any of us. When a mountain walks, it's the coming forth of all life, a deep, rumbling energy, shaking the earth. Water, unbounded and changing to fit any circumstance, Dogen says, is "neither strong nor weak, neither wet nor dry, neither moving nor still, neither cold nor hot, neither being nor nonbeing, neither delusion nor enlightenment."

So in talking about mountains and waters and their function, Dogen shows us the nature of the real, the true, the nature of Mind, Original Mind. An

ancient Chinese scroll reads, "The water holds up the mountains; the mountains go down in the water." (T'ien Hsieh of Wei-lo.) The underwater landscape is filled with mountains and valleys (those of you who have been deep underwater know this for yourselves).

Waters as clouds play around mountain peaks; then waters fill the valleys as snow. Dogen adds that "All waters are actualized (find their life of this moment) at the foot of the East Mountain; mountains ride the clouds and wander through the heavens." "Riding the clouds and following the wind," that's living with your whole body and mind; it is your unconstrained life. And following the wind around here is a wild ride!

Years ago, I attended a workshop at Naropa with John Daido Looi, which brought together his passion for art and for Zen. He assigned us phrases of the Mountains and Rivers sutra to use as visual koans, inspiration for a photo, a painting or some other art form. Before I left to start my painting of East Mountain walking, I caught Daido Roshi during a break to ask about it. "What is East Mountain walking on the waters?" No doubt, if he had known me for a Zen student he would have just thrown it back at me. But like a kindly grandmother, he just told me that East Mountain meeting the water represents the relative meeting the absolute, or maybe it was the absolute meeting the relative; two arrows meeting in mid-air.

Of course, this comment won't help you a bit and it didn't really help me. But another time he put it like this:

When we step out of the way, our life pours through us; the universe pours through us ... In each one of us lives an enlightened being, and the most important thing each one of us can ever do with our lives is to realize that, to make that enlightened being real, as a free expression of our lives. When we do that, we make ourselves free, and that freedom is then actualized in everything we do: in the way we drive a car, grow a garden, prepare a meal, program a computer, raise a child, live a life and die. (Hearing with the Eye.)

Mountains and waters, two arrows meeting right here. Your life, my life, right now, right here!

The poet Gary Snyder wrote:

Dōgen is not concerned with sacred mountains, or pilgrimages, or spirit allies, or wilderness as some special quality. His mountains and streams are

the processes of this earth, of all existence, process, essence, action, absence; they roll being and non-being together. They are what we are, we are what they are. For those who would see directly into essential nature, the idea of the sacred is a delusion and an obstruction. It diverts us from seeing what is before our eyes, plain thusness. Roots, stems, and branches are all equally scratchy.

So the mountains walk to the kitchen and back to the shop, to the desk, to the stove. The blue mountains march out of the sea, shoulder the sky for a while, and slip back into the waters.

There is a gritty, astringent quality to “thusness.” And yet... this, just this, the thusness of things, also misses it. At least once in your life, you must experience what is not before your eyes: not this, not this. No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind. No waters, no mountains. No arrows, no words, no form and no emptiness. Body and mind dropped completely away; no me, no you. Dark, dark. The hidden face of our practice Mu... the Mu which crushes mountains and dries up rivers. Mu, which makes your own personal story irrelevant.

Please hear the encouragement in these words of an old master (Shido Bunan Zenji):

*Die while alive
Thoroughly die
Then do as you will
And all is right.*

In darkness, you walk on the water. In darkness, you enter the zendo and take your own seat as the Buddha did sitting alone all night. Die into each step you take, each bite you swallow. At least once in your life, die the great death, and then die into each moment and be reborn over and over again. Release everything with each breath, each Mu. Let yourself walk into darkness, the darkness of not knowing. Have no name. Let yourself empty so that the awakened universe can take your place and sit here for you, open and listening... and then allow it to let you go.

A Sung dynasty poet (Su Tung-Po) became enlightened in the mountains as he wandered lost in the sound of the stream:

*The sound of the stream is his long broad tongue,
The form of the mountain, isn't that his pure clear
body?
In the course of the night, eight-four thousand*

gathas,

Tomorrow, how could I explain them to anyone else?

The long broad tongue is one of the distinguishing marks of a Buddha. The poet heard it in the song of rushing waters. Can you hear it speak in the creaking of a door, the sound of the bell, the wailing of the wind. The floor on which you sit is the Buddha's lap. Look at your hand. Your hand is Buddha's hand, your eyes are Buddha's eyes. What do you see? What do you hear? The clank of dishes and the flush of a distant toilet preach the dharma to you.

In our koan, the great Master Yunmen replied, “East Mountain walks on the water.” Another time, he just held up his staff like this and said: “This staff has become a dragon. It has swallowed up the whole universe. The mountains, rivers and great earth, where do they come from?” (BCR Case 60)

This staff, a dragon. A dragon represents the awake mind. Here it is, right in front of you; it swallows everything! You lift a cup of tea to your lips, the cup swallows everything, bitter, hot. Your foot steps on the floor and you find you have been swallowed by Mu. Mu! You breathe in and then feel that breath leaving your body, Mu! Opening the door, the cold air whispers Mu, Mu. Every morning, we see mountains, rivers of snow and the vast sky full of stars. Where do they come from? Where do you come from? That vast space between the stars, that vast space between the thoughts which bubble up spontaneously?

Look, look. It's a question beyond words. Let it pry you open, let it help you stay open. Don't shy away from the discomfort of this great doubt. It is your best friend, No one can exhaust your doubt but you yourself. It is your own work, your own path. It is your own practice fuel, the fuel that allows the lotus to burn. And when at last, in an instant, you see your original face clearly, it is unmistakable; you know it for your own; it has always been there.

Another master said:

Before this old monk studied Zen, twenty years ago, seeing a mountain, the mountain was a mountain; seeing water, water was water. Later, I met my teacher and attained some realization. Then a mountain was no longer a mountain, water was no longer water. Now after further accomplishment, seeing a mountain, mountain is mountain; seeing water, water is water. Now I ask you, are these three views the same of

different? If you can answer, you'll meet me intimately.
(Ch'in-yuan Wei-hsin, *The Way of Everyday Life*, H.T. Maezumi.)

Affirmation, this...this, and negation, not this...not this...are incomplete. In intimacy, they are left behind.

Although it's years now since I first painted East Mountain walking on the water, with each empty canvas, I start fresh and uncertain. Every time, each painting is a new world. Maybe you have been to many sesshin, maybe practiced Zen for twenty or even thirty years. Maybe you are new, with the freshness of a beginner's mind. But any past experience is a corpse now, just a memory. The Way of Reality is alive in *this* moment, now. Can you set those old experiences you carry, satisfying or not, down like a heavy bag of rocks? You can only meet this old monk intimately, you can only meet this *life* intimately with empty hands, without strategy, completely naked, in this moment, now.

How to let go? When to let go? Even the question is another way to hold on. "Seeking it with empty hands, you return with empty hands. You grasp it actually, where there is nothing to grasp from the beginning." (*Denkoroku*, Case 40.) Stepping over the threshold of this room, bowing and walking to your seat, let go. Simply sitting still, not moving away, let go in body. Holding true to your practice, let go in mind. You don't need to reject your grasping mind, just see it arise and die away. Be still. Be at rest. Give up the war with yourself, enter completely, like the small hare jumping in the fire in the Jataka tale.

The bell sounds (ding!)... time to bow. No gap. Washing your face or washing dishes, no splitting of your awareness. Moving with what is needed, with the whole body, whole heart. Do what comes next, like

poured water entering a glass. Let light and darkness, knowing and not-knowing work together like the foot before and the foot behind as you walk. Whatever you encounter, don't turn away. If you don't pull back, picking and choosing, then the Great Way is not difficult; whatever you do is already completely at rest, perfectly still.

Like a dry leaf falling from a tree, Mount Sara pours tea. Like snow whirling in the freezing air, Mount John stretches up then falls to reach his toes.

Master Keizan gave us this verse:

*The sourceless stream from a ten-thousand-foot cliff
Piercing rock, sweeping clouds, it surges forth
Brushing away the snow, making the flowers fly
wildly-
A length of pure white silk beyond the dust.*
(*Denkoroku*, *Transmission 3*)

This is where the barren stone woman gives birth at midnight, where you are reborn at midnight. Already your own true nature is free... free, unrestricted and complete.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche said, "The bad news is that you are falling through the air, nothing to hang onto, no parachute. The good news is that there is no ground." (*Already Free*, B. Tift.)

I would add more good news: you have wings, and you ride the wind as you fall. Nothing needs to be fixed. Mountains dance and wind sings. The great freedom of this sky is your home and there is nothing to fear.



Photo by Geoff Keeton

Trees giving teishos
Wind stealing prayers from the flags
Just so just so
- Francine Campone

Instructions for the Cook

Chile Sin Carne

New Mexican red chile powder, cocoa and peanut butter give this chile a remarkable depth and richness of flavor. You can find the chile powder at many grocery stores in Denver, usually in a plastic bag. Serves 6-8.

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp canola oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic gloves, minced
- 1 medium-small potato, cubed small
- 1 12-oz package soy ground beef substitute
- 1 15-oz can pinto beans
- 1 15-oz can kidney beans
- 1 28-oz can crushed tomatoes
- 1/2 cup frozen corn
- 3 tbsp peanut butter
- 1 tsp cumin
- 2 tbsp cocoa powder
- 2 tbsp New Mexican red chili powder
- 1/4 tsp oregano
- 1 tsp salt, or to taste

In a medium-large soup pot, heat the oil on medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic, and potato and saute, stirring periodically, until the onion is translucent and the potatoes are soft.

Add the cumin and continue to cook for a minute more to release its flavor. Add the beans with their juices, the tomatoes, the soy ground beef, and the corn. Continue cooking on medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the chile starts to bubble. Then reduce heat to low and simmer.

While the chile cooks, stir in all the rest of the seasonings including the peanut butter. It's ready when it's hot through and through. Serve it with tortilla chips or rice, shredded cheese or avocado as desired.

Also, don't be afraid to play around with the recipe! Half the enjoyment of making chile is personalizing it to your tastes. You may wish to add diced jalapenos for added heat and flavor, some veggie bouillon for added savory depth, or a tablespoon of sugar to heighten the chocolate flavor. Try it out, and trust your taste buds!

-Joel Tagert

Gassho Corner

We offer thanks to everyone who helped with sesshin, especially Karin Sensei and Laura Menzer, who did much of the organizing with Shambhala Mountain Center; the sesshin leaders, including tanto Dennis Sienko, jiki Jason Polk, anja Becky Wethington, jishas Mike Griffiths, Geoff Keeton and Melanie Ritter, tea servers Jim Long and Sara Bauer, ino Greg Fellman, audio Darren Christensen, David Lee and Francine Campone.

We also thank the staff at SMC, especially Faith Killough and Tammi Matthews, who folded us in the warm embrace of their attention and practice.

Calendar Highlights

Jan. 9, 9:30 a.m. - Introductory seminar (RMMC)

Jan. 17, 12:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. - Zazenkai (Mayu)

Jan. 31, 8:00 a.m. - Sangha discussion (RMMC)

Feb. 6, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. - Zazenkai (Franciscan Retreat Center in Colorado Springs)

March 5, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Zazenkai (Franciscan Retreat Center)

March 19, 9:30 a.m. - Introductory seminar (RMMC)

March 27, 8 a.m. - Kannon Ceremony (RMMC)

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