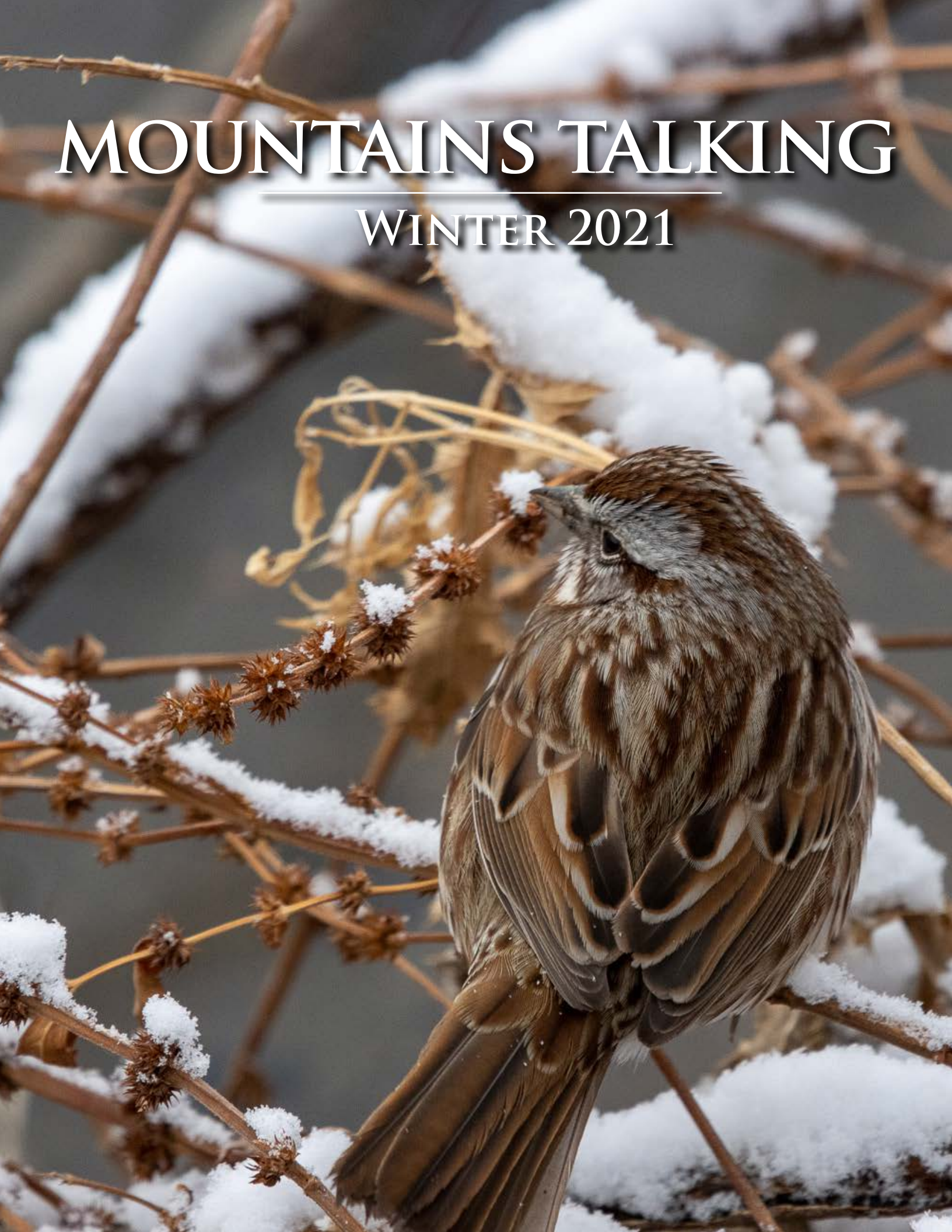


MOUNTAINS TALKING

WINTER 2021



In this issue...

Buddha's Life Is Your Own	<i>Dennis Sienko</i>	3
An Immovable Tree in a Heavy Wind	<i>Peggy Metta Sheehan</i>	4
Diving Into the Great Matter	<i>Karin Ryuku Kempe</i>	8
Water	<i>John Steele</i>	9
Accept Yourself As You Are	<i>David Marvin</i>	10
Upcoming Events and Guest Speakers		14
Notes on the Mat		15

Front and Back Covers: *Geoff Keeton*

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BUDDHA'S LIFE IS YOUR OWN

DENNIS SIENKO



At this sesshin we have been looking at the life of Siddhartha Gautama. Who exactly was this historical figure who went on to become the Buddha? We have no way to know for certain whether the traditional story of the Buddha's life we have been examining is factually accurate. However, historians tend to agree there was a historical Buddha, and he lived sometime in the 4th through 6th centuries BCE. When we read or listen to the story of the Buddha's life, we might be inspired, but we might also be discouraged. After all, the Buddha started on his spiritual quest at age 29 and really went to some extreme measures before finding the Middle Way. But the Middle Way he did uncover, and in a lot of ways the story of Siddhartha Gautama is our life story.

As we have heard, Siddhartha Gautama was the son of a king and was raised in sheltered opulence. He supposedly married and had a son. His life was laid out before him. In many ways this is not too different than us. By the world's standards, where some people subsist on a dollar a day, we too are born and live in opulence. If you are attending a retreat like this, you likely have plenty of food to eat, sleep in a warm, comfortable bed and for the most part are in good health. Certain diseases, such as malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, are pretty much unheard of in our country, yet account for many deaths elsewhere. Our country does have poverty, sickness, inequality, food insecurity and homelessness, yet our society and culture tend to hide and shelter us from many of life's miseries. We have homeless shelters, unemployment checks, school lunches for kids, and while not the world's best, a fairly decent social welfare system. So, why do we come and practice Zen? Why do we sit and meditate and feel our backs and knees ache? Why do we wrestle with our thoughts and emotions? Why do we devote such time to this endeavor?

What was it that drove Siddhartha to leave his life

of luxury and seek out some spiritual path? The only reasonable explanation is that Siddhartha, like us, had something inside of him that unsettled him, something troubling, possibly the thought that there must be more to life than getting a good education, pursuing a career, getting married, raising a family, and eventually dying. Unfortunately, for many people, concerns about the existence of God or the meaning of life do not formulate into heart-felt spiritual questions until they are at death's door.

Someone once asked me, what was the point of meditation? After all, are you not just going to die like everyone else? Why go through all that trouble? How would you respond to that question?

In our story of the Buddha's enlightenment, Siddhartha recalled the memory of a certain festival day during his youth:

*He had been seated quietly under a rose-apple tree watching his father, all the nobles, and the poor men plowing the earth together. He saw the the earth breaking open in even, wavelike furrows, the heat shimmering up off the freshly opened soil and shining on the sweat-slick brows and straining bodies of men and oxen alike. He saw the sun continuously flashing off the gilded traces and horns of the oxen and he heard that senseless, plodding rhythm of hooves and cowbells rolling in a solemn, sealike way. He heard the shrill shouts of the men and the whirring cries of the birds as they dove to devour the billowing hordes of insects, glistening grubs, cut worms, and broken bodies of mice which men, oxen, and plows left in their wake. [This and following quotes are adapted from *The Hungry Tigress: Buddhist Myths, Legends and Jataka Tales* by Rafe Martin.]*

What was going on here? What did Siddhartha recall? Why did this memory spur him on? Can you feel what Siddhartha felt?

Think back to your childhood. Was there something you recall that like the Buddha helped propel you on your spiritual journey? Were there questions that you felt needed answers? Were there experiences of restfulness or peace from sitting in a church service or hearing a song

Continued p. 12

AN IMMOVABLE TREE IN A HEAVY WIND

PEGGY METTA SHEEHAN

Given the current state of our world, the one that we are all inhabiting together right now, I was drawn to this koan in the introductory collection: “Show me an immovable tree in a heavy wind.”

It seems somewhat straightforward. How about it? Show me an immovable tree in a heavy wind.

Now, maybe you would just demonstrate sitting in *zazen*. That’s your immovable tree. Not bad. And I do hope that your *zazen* has this quality, a steadiness, balance and resolve no matter what the winds of your mind are doing. Good. But alas, not it. Koans are direct, not metaphors. Settle more thoroughly and jump into your practice completely, wholeheartedly, holding nothing back, and the freedom of this *immovable in a heavy wind* is all yours.

Our ancestors speak of three essentials for practice and awakening: great faith, great doubt and great determination, three legs of a stool or a tripod. Koun Yamada said, “It is uncertain if we can accomplish the Dharma if one of these three legs is missing. If all three are present, however, we would be more likely to miss the ground with a hammer than we would be to miss enlightenment.”

I hope you find that reassuring, for I can assure you that if you are sitting here, the legs are present. He then likens great faith to the root of a huge tree and says, “The great root of faith naturally activates great doubt. If the root of faith appears, the great ball of doubt will arise without fail.”

Let’s look there. What do you have faith in? Just sit here for a moment, quietly. Let your breath come in and out and your mind settle. Not thinking, just sitting. Might there be faith in this quiet, in this stillness, in this just sitting? How about in the birdsong, the gentle falling of snowflakes, or the hum of the furnace? Is there something unknown and unknowable in this? In this sitting? This breath?

I think faith is different than beliefs or hopes. Remember, the Buddha did not ask us to believe in anything. In fact we can see how problematic beliefs are, how concretizing and polarizing they can be. So please don’t believe, but do discover faith.

Discover the faith that if you plant an oak tree seed, an oak tree will grow (given the proper conditions, of course); faith that you are what you seek; faith that you are whole and complete exactly as you are, as everything else is, exactly as it is.

And there is more to explore in the great root of faith, from which sprouts the trunk and branches and leaves of great doubt and determination. Determination, by the way, is that simple yet very powerful urge to grow upright and to lean toward the sun. That, too, is a natural occurrence or quality arising from these roots.

But now let us follow the root down into the earth for a bit. This can be a part of the journey that we neglect because it lives in the dark.

We are drawn to light and seem to yearn for the light. In fact, Dogen and many teachings say, “Turn the light around to shine within.” It is a profound teaching, and I want the light to shine within me, I do. Yet in order for that to happen, I must deeply, intimately and profoundly know the dark. For, as Shitou wrote, “the tributary streams flow through the darkness.”

Wendell Berry wrote, “To go into the dark with a light is to know the light. To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight, and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings, and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.”

Send your roots down, down, down into the dark earth. Don’t be afraid. Invite the rich nourishment of the dark soil and the boundless interconnection to all living things. You’ve heard of the network beneath the ground through which trees communicate to one another and to the forest. The one mind: Open to that. As you sit



here rooted and breathing, connect the breath to these dark roots and be nourished. Follow the breath, the roots down. And don’t take a light with you; go dark. Don’t take any thoughts or beliefs, don’t take any history or sense of time, don’t take any hopes, yearnings or visions. Go dark.

Don’t be afraid. Nothing ever fell out of the universe. You can trust the dark, the inconceivable, the unknowable.

There is a story of the wonderful Zen Master Muso Soseki (1275-1351), who spent many years in remote temples and hermitages. He was practicing *zazen* as the sun set and as the night deepened. He grew tired, stood up to go inside, and in the pitch black he stepped on a tile and then reached for the wall to steady himself, and the wall wasn’t there, and down he fell, stumbling right into awakening:

*For many years I dug the earth in search of the blue sky
Piling useless obstructions layer upon layer*

*One night in the darkness I kicked a tile
And no-mindedly smashed the bones of the void.*

Yes, we are often reaching for some kind of wall to steady us, to lean against, to build upon. For today, just sit in the dark, and each time you reach out for a wall, find that it isn't really there and let go.

Show me an immovable tree in a heavy wind. As a tree bends in a heavy wind there is no resistance. Let the wind move through you, sway and bend as you need without any resistance. Let the wall that you thought was there vanish.

I recently read a book titled *Waking Up to the Dark: Ancient Wisdom for a Sleepless Age*, written by Clark Strand, a former Zen Buddhist monk and first senior editor of *Tricycle* magazine. He is in the habit of waking in the night and walking in the dark for miles, and he has done so since he was a child. His wife attributes people feeling utterly comfortable in his presence to the fact that he is thoroughly at home in the dark. His book was quite thought-provoking and inviting as regards the night and the untold consequences of electricity to our sleep and natural rhythms as well as to population growth, climate change and loss of our connection to the natural world.

One study he quotes by a psychiatrist, Dr. Thomas Wehr, was quite interesting: What would human beings' night rhythms be if they were removed from the stimulating effects of all kinds of artificial light? Here's what he found:

For one month, beginning at dusk and ending at dawn, Wehr's subjects were removed from every possible form of artificial lighting – even the gentle glow of a luminescent clock. During the first three weeks, they slept as usual, only for about an hour longer. (After all, he reasoned, like most Americans, they were probably sleep deprived.) But at week four a dramatic change occurred. The participants slept the same number of hours as before, but now their sleep was divided in two. They began each night with approximately four hours of deep sleep, woke for two hours of what Wehr termed "quiet rest," and then slept for another four.

During the gap between their first and second sleep, Wehr's subjects were neither awake nor fully asleep. Rather, they experienced a condition they had never known before – a state of consciousness all its own. Later Wehr would compare it to what advanced practitioners experience at the deepest levels of meditation. But there weren't any such prac-

tioners in his study. They were simply ordinary people who, removed for one month from artificial lighting, found their nights broken in half--or maybe broken open. Because there was something hidden inside.

The subjects reported a profound sense of peace, quiet and safety, and apparently this was a quite normal and natural pattern for humans before the onset of electricity. The description of this state is reminiscent, for me, of newborn babies – their quiet alert state. If you are familiar with this, you understand why we can sit and stare at babies for hours. They are connecting us, reminding us, drawing us into their state of consciousness. It's very similar to what happens in nature – or perhaps, hanging out with a tree.

Babies, nature, trees, the dark speak to us without thought or words. Listen and not with your ears. At any moment you can experience or invite this quiet, restful aspect of your own nature. Just listen to the breath, to the birds, the wind or the dark. Count *one, two*, breathe *Mu*, or simply sit.

Now, this state that Wehr describes, the meditator's experience, which is reflected to us in familiar ways if we are open, is a doorway (albeit not necessary) to see into your nature. I point to it to remind us what is natural and what is our birthright: to be touched by the untouched, the unborn, the unseen. It's already who and what we are, and we can step through this doorway at any moment.

And here is how: Take the great root of faith, with the heart of determination to grow up, to grow upright and toward the sun infused with dark nourishment, and right there, if we are genuine and sincere, we meet great doubt. The whole body and mind are absorbed in inquiry, in just this. Letting the breath breathe itself, letting *Mu* breathe *Mu*. When there is no one outside or inside doing this practice, we have met great doubt, and at any moment the wind blows through, or the sight of red or golden leaves meet our eyes, the scent of moisture or crunch of leaves on our feet, a car honks or a dog barks, and the hammer hits the ground.

This is the path, the journey to encounter that immovable tree in a heavy wind: To be what you are, to recognize what is all always surrounding you, and to join the great mystery of your life in the howling winds or the dead stillness and everything in between.

Together with all beings we realize the Way. ☸



DIVING INTO THE GREAT MATTER

KARIN RYUKU KEMPE

This week [of sesshin] we are devoting ourselves to the fundamental practice of our tradition, silent meditation, being attentive in whatever we are doing, sitting, walking, working, resting.

Preparing for this week I remembered a program some of you may have seen (*My Octopus Teacher*), about a wildlife photographer who came home to the tip of South Africa, burned out from overwork and estranged in his relationships. He started to go into the ocean at the tip of the cape, into the rough seas, to swim every day. He wanted to reconnect with the kelp forest and made some commitments to himself: He would not miss a day, no matter what the weather, and he would not wear a wetsuit or use scuba. Instead, he decided to free dive so that his body would be as open as the sea and its creatures. He says it took over a year before he could tolerate the cold without shivering. He learned to hold his breath to stay down longer.

In his daily visits, he came to know a relatively small area of the underwater forest very, very well, to meet it with fresh eyes each day, with interest and longing. He noticed a female octopus who had her lair there and hunted in that small neighborhood. He observed her minutely, carefully, trying to understand a creature so very different from himself.

Over time, she came to trust him and would come out of hiding to explore his hands and to rest on his chest. He was no longer a visitor but a participant in the underwater neighborhood, every second awake, watching the octopus hunt and be hunted. Diving every day was his practice, and it took patience, courage, persistence and a kind of dogged faith to enter the ocean despite the danger and physical challenges.

He visited his octopus teacher every day for over a year, through times of joy and wonder and play, but also danger – even disaster – up to the completion of her life cycle, when he watched her body torn and drifting away, some in the current, some in the mouth of a pajama

shark. While no doubt he entered his adventure out of frustration and desperation, he continued, despite its challenges, out of love.

To clarify the great matter of life and death, to come to know who and what we really are, is a commitment not for the faint of heart. We too plunge in, no matter what the weather, even if the seas look rough and cold. We too go without a second skin, naked as we came into this world and without artificial supports. We too rely on our own breath, each new breath over and over, and we are faithful. We do not back out, not a minute. We can't afford to. And we also look, look with our whole body, listen with our whole body, we pay attention, minute attention, to our practice, whether it's our count, our MU or the openness of our awareness.

Sesshin means to touch the mind, and it's a total immersion experience; no matter what we are doing, we are completely wet.

We are both alone and not alone, because this total giving of ourselves to our practice together can really only come from love, out of letting go of what we hold and letting our practice come first. Although when the Buddha first left home to undertake his spiritual search he may have started out of his own pain and confusion, over time he came to realize that his practice was not just about himself, but extends beyond time and space and includes all beings. Seeing that our practice is an offering takes it out of the sphere of performance or accomplishment. It helps us to meet the rough seas and cold along with the clear blue waters, and to receive the beauty of the unexpected visitors there as a gift. ❀

Water

Immersed in water, I'm transparent.
When a water strider skates
across my dimpled skin, it makes
me ticklish, almost incoherent.

When Jesus walks across me like the wind,
I barely notice until he says, *Be still*.
Then I know he's God, and so strong willed
that when he says, *Be wine*—my head just spins.

When I turn to ice, my thoughts congeal,
and I can see that they amount to nothing,
compared to what I come to know
when I dissolve in water's flow.
Evaporated, I am next to nothing,
as close to who I am as I can be.

– John W. Steele

Previously published in Orchards Poetry Journal



ACCEPT YOURSELF AS YOU ARE

DAVID MARVIN

On a Tuesday evening last November following a wonderful discussion about the Eighth Precept, I learned something very important about metta practice. A brief experience in my kitchen made clear to me how important it is to extend loving kindness and forgiveness to myself if I have any hope of being able to do that for other people.

After our sit and discussion, I went to the kitchen to make tea and prepare something to eat. I felt calm, quiet and relaxed, appreciative of such a thought-provoking session with the sangha. I was due to deliver a talk on the Ninth Precept the following Tuesday, and I was thinking about how I wanted to organize the evening. While I was preparing some food, I didn't notice a large metal travel coffee cup perched close to the edge of the countertop. As I turned to reach for something, I swept my arm to my left and knocked the cup over, first on its side and then to the floor. It made quite a ruckus, which was disturbing after such a lovely Zen session. The noise broke the spell of my pleasant mood and I reacted instantaneously with anger.

In Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames*, he describes the cycle of anger: "When we get angry, we suffer and then we may retaliate, by trying to make the other suffer." The other in this case was my wife, who likely put the cup near the edge of the countertop. It was fortunate that she was in her office attending her own meditation group, because my immediate reaction was to blame her for putting the cup near the edge. I could feel the surge of anger in my body. If she had been there, I could very easily have lashed out at her.

Thich Nhat Hanh goes on to say that lashing out at others when we are angry complicates and threatens our relationships: "The fact is that when you make the other suffer, he will try to find relief by making you suffer more. The result is escalation of suffering on both sides." I have unfortunately seen this play out with my wife in other instances when she was present for one of my eruptions, leading to an unnecessary conflict between us.

Because of the practice we had just done in our evening meeting, I was able to notice pretty soon what had

just happened. The contrast between the contentment I felt after our practice together and my explosion of anger only moments later was shocking and unsettling. What became clear to me, without having anyone nearby to blame and escalate the situation with, is that my anger was actually directed at myself. I had made a "stupid" mistake, and in that instant, I saw my father acting in a very similar way that I witnessed many times over his lifetime. James Baldwin wrote:

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

My personal history was driving my reaction and the reaction I had about myself; I was acting out something that has been with me since I was a child and that I learned from watching my father and how he dealt with his emotions. Wanting to do something different, I have spent a lot of time trying to learn more effective ways of managing my anger. Clearly, I have more work to do!

The message I was giving myself was, how could I be so stupid and not see the cup? This emotion was so strong and so unpleasant that I wanted to avoid it at all costs and lash out at someone else instead. As I sat with this raw expression of anger, I noticed too that I felt shame; I had let myself down, let my wife down, and knew that I knew better after all that I have learned about conflict, meditation and communication. I reacted with anger, blamed my wife, felt shame at what I did and was stunned with the rawness of this experience. I had been unkind to my wife and unkind to myself. And all this happened in the space of a minute!

I was introduced to metta practice by two wonderful Buddhist teachers, Sharon Salzberg and Eric Kolvig. Sharon Salzberg co-founded the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, with Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein in the '70s; they were instrumental in bringing Vipassana Buddhism to the United States. Sharon wrote an immensely helpful book about the four abodes or



brahma-viharas called *Loving Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*, in which she described practices designed to cultivate metta, or loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Eric Kolvig was another exemplary teacher in the Vipassana tradition, since retired. I was fortunate enough to sit a retreat with him in Southwest Colorado ten years ago, and he shared a version of metta practice phrases that I have used ever since:

May I be filled with loving kindness; may I be held in loving kindness.

May I accept myself just as I am.

May I be happy.

May I touch great and natural peace.

May I know the natural joy of being alive.

May my heart and mind awaken; may I be free.

Skeptical at first, but willing to experiment with using the phrases, I have been profoundly moved by how

much practicing with these phrases has helped to open my heart for myself and for others. What became clear after my experience in the kitchen that evening was that I need to *accept myself just as I am* more fully. I didn't want to feel anger and was ashamed at my reaction to look for someone to blame, but I didn't want to own those parts of me. I was more interested in the glow I had felt after our evening practice together; that felt much better. Sharon Salzberg refers to moments like I experienced as having a visitor, one we may not necessarily want to let into our house. Maya Angelou said, "I am human so nothing about being human is foreign to me"; to accept this is challenging work.

My new focus in metta practice is to be able to slow down and notice my imperfections with a smile and a gulp of humility. It is to realize that I don't have everything figured out, and take responsibility for my actions. I can be kind to myself even when I stumble – especially when I stumble – because that is what I would do for someone else that I love. ☸

Continued from p. 3

of praise? Do not discount your childhood memories, for they are seeds which have fallen on fertile soil.

For Siddhartha, his spiritual questions were once again aroused. He knew there was more to life than working hard, accumulating possessions, and then dying. As the story states:

He was energized once again, filled with the excitement of his rediscovery, sure now that he had finally come upon the way he had been so arduously seeking those past six years, the way to Supreme Enlightenment. He decided to take proper nourishment once again.

Siddhartha also realized the body itself is holy. Sitting up straight in zazen is enlightenment itself. All beings are holy, and we owe it to the world to uncover the Truth that underlies all existence. Our bodies, our human shape, is a gift. Of all the millions of billions of life forms that inhabit this earth, very few are human, with the capacity to go beyond and extend understanding to all beings. Siddhartha understood that instead of punishing the body through extreme ascetic practices, he needed to discipline his mind and its myriad of thoughts.

That is what we do when we sit quietly on our mats or in our chairs, when we walk quietly between rounds, prepare meals, or eat. We work to quiet the mind, to let thoughts come and go, to go deep into our practice, to become more intimate with everything that surrounds us. Whether a beginning student or a person who has been practicing for many years, we continue to quiet the mind and allow all that is be. Do not add or subtract from that which surrounds you.

Siddhartha reopened the path, a path that from time immemorial has never been closed. Siddhartha accepted a small meal of milk rice from a young woman. He regained a portion his strength. He did not quit. How many of us get frustrated with sitting still, counting our breaths, working on Mu or other koans? This path is not about reaching the number 10 in breath counting or passing X-number of koans. This path is not about crossing the finish line and calling it quits. This path is eternal. It is about sitting still, quieting the mind, and experiencing the emptiness that underlies all existence. You are One with the world and the world is One with you. This is something that can only be pointed to. It doesn't matter your age, how long you have been practicing, your sexual

orientation, your past, or whatever barrier you believe prevents you from experiencing the Truth – for the Truth is freely available to all who step forward. Seek and it will be given to you.

Then, on the shore once again, his energies roused, his mind and heart gripped by a fresh intensity of concentration, in deep sureness, he cast the empty offering bowl onto the rapidly flowing waters, calling out: "If this is the day of my Supreme Enlightenment, may this bowl float upstream!"

As soon as the bowl touched the swirling surface of the river, it forged upstream with the swiftness of a stallion, until it came to the whirlpool of Kala Naga Raja, the Black Snake King, where it whirled down into the jeweled chambers of his underwater palace, settling at last against a long row of identically formed bowls. The Black Naga King slowly raised his ancient, hooded head and cried, "Lo! Yesterday a Buddha arose, and today there shall be another Buddha!"

Today, there shall be another Buddha. Take your offering bowl and cast it into the rapidly flowing waters. Take your cares, worries and frustrations and cast them aside. You are no different than Siddhartha. He had his doubts, frustrations, and feeling of being unworthy. Don't give up. Svaha! Awake! Rejoice!

Thousands of hands are waiting to help you. You must put forth the initial effort. You must take the step. No one can walk this path for you. You must be determined.

And the Bodhisattva, Siddhartha Gautama, striding gracefully and energetically now, moved like a roused lion towards the Bo tree.

Can you move like a roused lion toward your breath, toward your koan? Just breathe *one* – exhale. Breathe *two* – exhale. Breathe *three* – exhale. Can you be the monk who could have saved Nanquan from cutting the cat in two? Can you hold your body completely still and allow the mind to settle? Can you walk gracefully and energetically while doing kinhin? Can you eat your meal, and understand that you eating the meal is enlightenment itself? Don't look outside yourself. Don't be caught up in your thoughts, your ongoing internal dialog.

For we are like the person who has had a stranger enter their clean house. The stranger tells us their life story. He or she relates to us everything that has gone wrong in their life, all the injustices they have suffered, all

the people who have wronged them. We like this person. We begin to warm and accept this stranger into our home, offering them food, just to hear their story.

However, after a while we notice that the stranger just sits around in our house. They don't clean, and something about this person doesn't seem right. We begin to wish the stranger would leave. We have an ancient memory of a house that was once clean. At first, we try to force the stranger out. We might even argue with them, telling them they don't belong. However, the more we try to force the stranger out the more they resist. The stranger may even sing, play loud music and try their best to keep our attention.

At some point, we decide that enough is enough. Life is short. There are questions we need to find answers to. We have a breath to concentrate on. We have a step to take, a carrot that needs to be cut, a spoon that needs to be bought up to our mouth. Let the stranger tell their story, do their antics. Allow the stranger to be, quiet your body, concentrate on your practice, and by him or herself the stranger will leave. Then what is left?

People view Zen practice as training to gain enlightenment. This is not Zen. Whether you practice zazen or not, you have Buddha nature. Because you have it, there is enlightenment every time you practice. However, we need to have strong confidence in our original nature and – maybe most importantly – true sincerity. For it was this confidence and sincerity that allowed Siddhartha Gautama to see with his ears and hear with his eyes.

The future Buddha touched the humble, ever-trodden earth lightly with his right hand and asked the earth to witness for him. And the earth replied with a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand voices – the voices of furrows and graves, the voices of youth and age, of man, woman, and child, the unheeded cries of beasts, the quick, unknown, silvery language of fish, the sweet twinings of plants and the warm, grey crumbling of stone. For all were one voice now, thundering, "He is worthy!"



Photo by Merrilee Schultheiss

Do not believe for a second that you are unworthy. The earth abounds with thousands and thousands of hands reaching out to you. You must make the effort. You must take the leap of faith. Allow everything, but cling to nothing. No one can walk the Path for you. You must desire to know the answers to your spiritual questions. You must be like Siddhartha, willing to undergo certain hardships while practicing with a sincere heart.

Time is short. Press endlessly on, arouse deeper and deeper concentration. Practice without ceasing. Practice as you walk, as you shower, as you prepare a meal, as you eat a meal, as you drink your tea. Practice without faltering, without stopping anywhere, for the morning star awaits.

With all beings we attain Buddhahood! ☸

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS AND GUEST SPEAKERS



Jan. 16 & 30: 11th Hour

This two-part mindfulness workshop will focus on preparing for your death, including planning and making decisions about advance directives. Offered from 9:30 a.m. – noon each day, the workshop will also focus on being present and prepared for your own death and dying process, and will include time to reflect on your death, what you need to be prepared emotionally and spiritually, and what is important at end of life. There will be a guided death meditation, teachings, activities and time for dialogue during these sessions. Advance directive planning will include medical power of attorney, living wills and do-not-resuscitate orders.

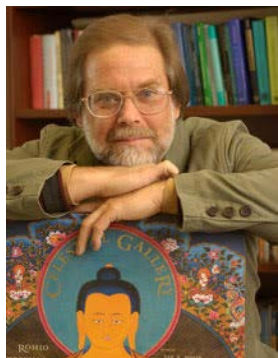
The workshop will be led by Ginny Swenson, a longtime educator and social worker in hospice. She has developed this 11th-hour training for volunteers in hospice centered on how to be present and be with someone who is dying in their final hours. She also teaches at the Community College of Denver on the psychology of death and dying.

Please sign up in advance by emailing office@zencenterofdenver.org. Our recommended donation for the workshop is \$35; however, we welcome your participation at whatever level of support is appropriate to your means. Donate via Paypal at <https://zencenterofdenver.org/donate-2/> or via Zelle to office@zencenterofdenver.org.



Jan. 17: Shinshu Roberts

Shinshu Roberts is co-founder and teacher, with Rev. Daijaku Kinst, of Ocean Gate Zen Center in Capitola, CA, and is a Dharma heir of Sojun Weitsman Roshi, Abbot of the Berkeley Zen Center, in the Soto Zen lineage of Shunryu Suzuki, founder of San Francisco Zen Center. She holds the appointment of International Dharma Teacher in the Japanese Soto Zen School, and is the author of *Being-Time: A Practitioner's Guide to Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō Uji* (Wisdom Publications, 2018), as well as articles appearing in *BuddhaDharma* and *Lion's Roar*. Please join us as we deepen our understanding of the teaching of Master Dogen, the 13th-century founder of Japanese Soto Zen.



March 21: David Loy

David R. Loy is a professor of Buddhist and comparative philosophy, a prolific writer, and a teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Buddhism. His books include *Money Sex War Karma*, *A New Buddhist Path*, and most recently *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. He is especially concerned about social and ecological issues. In addition to offering workshops and meditation retreats, he is one of the founders of the new Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center, near Boulder, Colorado.

NOTES ON THE MAT

While COVID vaccines are beginning to be distributed (several ZCD members working in health care have already received their first shots), cases in Colorado and nationwide remain fairly high, and so we expect the Center will remain closed to most in-person events through March. However, we continue to offer a complete practice schedule through Zoom, and members also have the option of solo in-person practice at the Center from noon - 1 p.m. each day (please sign up via Signupgenius). As the vaccine rollout continues, we look forward to the joyous occasion of seeing each other in the flesh once again.

In the meantime, it has been humbling to see how the sangha has held together and even prospered throughout this period. Of particular note have been our weekly discussions on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, where we've enjoyed the remarkable insights of our teachers and fellow sangha members speaking from their own homes (with many a cat and dog nosing across the screen).

In December we hosted a five-day online sesshin, complete with zazen, teisho, chanting, dokusan, and the Buddha's Enlightenment (Rohatsu) celebrated on Dec. 8. Though we are geographically separated, it is wonderful how the bonds of sangha still move us to practice right where we are.

We also held a New Year's Eve ceremony and memorial service, recognizing the hundreds of thousands who have perished in this difficult year, including friends and relatives of our own members. After listening first to the somber tolling of the large densho 108 times, we again heard the special dedication that we have repeated for the last several months:

We dedicate the merit of our practice to all those suffering from illness, injustice, poverty, hunger and grief. May our practice unite us, give us strength, and guide us in love and kindness.

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

Jan. 16 & 30: 11th Hour: Preparing for Death and Dying

Jan. 17: Guest speaker Shinshu Roberts

Jan. 24: Zazenkai with teisho by Peggy Metta Roshi

Feb. 14: Dharma talk by Dennis Sienko

Feb. 21: Kannon Ceremony

Feb. 26-28: Weekend sesshin

March 6: Intro to Zen seminar

March 14: Dharma talk by Bill Hamaker

March 21: Guest speaker David Loy

March 28: Zazenkai



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