

MOUNTAINS TALKING

WINTER 2019



In this issue...

Waking Up to This Moment	<i>Ken Tetsuzan Morgareidge</i>	3
Getting the Wrinkles Out	<i>Clark Dollard</i>	4
Everything to Learn	<i>Ken Tetsuzan Morgareidge</i>	
	<i>& George Mathews</i>	5
Lotus	<i>John Steele</i>	7
Diamond Sangha Teachers Circle		10
Zen Center Notes		11

Front Cover: *Joel Tagert*

Back Cover: *Geoff Keeton*

Mountains Talking is the quarterly newsletter of the Zen Center of Denver, a Buddhist sangha offering authentic Zen practice and training. For more information, contact:

Zen Center of Denver
P.O. Box 101013
Denver, CO 80250
303-455-1500
office@zencenterofdenver.org

Find us on the web at www.zencenterofdenver.org
And on Facebook at www.facebook.com/zencenterofdenver

Editor: Joel Tagert

WAKING UP TO THIS MOMENT

KEN TETSUZAN MORGAREIDGE



From a teisho delivered in Mark Minor's zendo in Howard, Colorado.

If you had been asked early this morning while you were getting ready to leave, "Where are you going?" how would you answer? "I'm going to Howard to sit a zazenkaï."

Well, that's a perfectly honest answer to a mundane question. But let's face it, Zen masters rarely ask mundane questions. Where are you going? What will you do? And if you are asked, "What have you realized?" how will you answer?

Today we'll look at Case 200 in *Entangling Vines* [TY Krchner transl., Wisdom, 2013, p. 167-8]:

Xuefeng Yicun [822-908] asked a monk who was leaving, "Where are you going?"

"To pay my respects to Jingshan Hongyin," answered the monk.

Xuefeng asked, "If Jingshan asks you what Xuefeng's Dharma is, how will you answer?"

"I'll answer him when he asks me," said the monk. Xuefeng immediately struck him.

Xuefeng later turned to Jingqing and asked, "How did the monk err, that he deserved my stick?"

Jingqing answered, "The monk has already spoken with Jingshan and is on close terms with him."

Xuefeng said, "Jingshan is in Zhezong (a far away province). How could the monk have met him?"

Jingqing replied, "Is it not said, 'Question afar, answer nearby?'" Xuefeng agreed.

(A couple of centuries later) Xutang [1185-1269] commented in his place, "[Jingqing's response is] like a chalk line by the master craftsman Bo of Lu."

This little drama starts off typically enough. The master asks, the monk answers. "Where have you come from?" "Where are you going?" The questions are challenges. Where is the coming and going, where are you in this world of time, space and karma?

The monk replies, "To pay my respects to Jingshan Hongyin." In ancient China it was the usual thing for monks to travel at certain times of the year, visiting other monasteries and other masters. So this monk's answer is quite straightforward. But Xuefeng is not about to be satisfied with such a mundane answer, any more than Yunmen was satisfied with Dongshan's answer to his question in Case 15 of the *Wumenguan*. Some of you will recall:

"Where have you come from?"

"From Chia-tu."

"Where were you during the summer training period?"

"I was at Pos-tzu monastery."

"When did you leave there?"

"On the 25th of August."

"I spare you sixty blows!"

To spare a monk sixty blows is worse than a beating.

But Xuefeng gives his monk another chance, "If Jingshan asks you what Xuefeng's Dharma is, how will you answer?" Yes, when you go to sesshin in California, what will you say to Nelson Foster about the teaching here? What have you gained from all your years of study and practice? Or, maybe, what have you lost?

The monk says, "I'll answer him when he asks me." And Xuefeng hits him.

Why did Xuefeng hit the monk? "I'll answer him when he asks me." Hmm. Is that too much of a wise guy answer? Is that why Xuefeng hit him, to teach him some respect? Or maybe a chastisement for trying to dance around the question rather than giving a direct answer?

Continued p. 8



Rohatsu sesshin, Rigden Lodge, Shambhala Mountain Center.

GETTING THE WRINKLES OUT

CLARK DOLLARD

I was recently at the Rohatsu sesshin at Shambhala Mountain Center. In the bathroom down the hall from my dorm room, there was an ironing board with an iron on it. I will admit that when I first saw it, I would pass by with a bit of sarcastic amusement, “Like what, I’m supposed to iron my robe?”

Then, late in sesshin, maybe Thursday or Friday, during one of the breaks, I walked into the bathroom and there was my dharma brother Dennis, whom I have been practicing with for years, ironing his robe and rakusu. But he was not just ironing them; he was ironing them with a focused, loving, meticulous attention to the process. In this loving, meticulous attention, he was, in that moment, the embodiment of Zen practice. He was Dennis embodying Buddha, he was Buddha embodying Dennis. And at the same time, he was just Dennis being Dennis.

But all of this is from my perspective. From his perspective, there was just the robe, the iron, the wrinkled

fabric becoming smooth as the iron passed over it.

Seeing him there, allowing himself to be himself with no holding back, no self-consciousness, filled me once again with a sense of love and appreciation for him as my dharma brother whom I have shared so many sesshin with. I walked on past, around the corner to the sinks, brushed my teeth, and went back to my room.

I am still not inclined to iron my robe at sesshin, but back at home after sesshin, while reflecting on some situations in my life, I found myself asking if I could allow myself to be me as fully as Dennis was allowing himself to be Dennis when he was ironing his robe. Thus, for me, this simple act became a teaching.

So, as you sit here tonight, just iron your robe. Just be with your breath as it comes in and goes out. Just one, just two... Just mu... In this way, we become Buddha.

EVERYTHING TO LEARN

On Dec. 6 at our Rohatsu sesshin, a flower ceremony was held in which George Mathews was named an assistant teacher by Ken Tetsuzan Sensei. Over the next few years, George will be taking on increased leadership and teaching responsibilities in the sangha.

Ken Tetsuzan’s Remarks

Case 6 in the *Wumenguan*:

Once, in ancient times, when the World-Honored One was at Mount Grdhrakuta, he held up a flower before his assembled disciples. At this all were silent. Only Mahakyashapa broke into a smile.

The World-Honored One said, “I have the All-pervading Eye of the True Dharma, the Subtle Mind of Incomparable Nirvana, the True Form of Formless Form and the Flawless Gate of the Supreme Teaching. It is not established upon words and phrases and is transmitted outside all teachings. I now entrust this to Mahakyashapa.”

This flower ceremony is an acknowledgement of something that has already occurred – or better to say, something that is occurring and continues to occur: a mind-to-mind transmission of that which has never been transmitted.

I sometimes wonder what is it that brings someone to the place in their practice where they are able to express the Dharma, to come forth from that place of nothing at all. The answer is, of course, a whole lifetime and more. This one life is the tiniest imaginable fraction of the vast river of karma that converges upon this one moment in time and space. Nevertheless it is the life that we know, and it encapsulates the progress (if you can call it that) of eons, even as the Buddha, in his last rebirth, began in delusion as a young prince and progressed through all the stages from ignorance through suffering and study, practice and ultimately to full enlightenment.

George, your life in the practice at our center began in 1993, but prior to that, and continuing to your retirement, you’ve been a soldier, a teacher, an environmental and health consultant, and a nurse. Who knows how all these have contributed to the qualities of silence, meticulous effort, zendo and Zen Center leadership, and an ever-deepening understanding and realization of the

Dharma over the last 25 years?

In what we then called Lay Ordination and now Jukai, you received the Dharma name Mountainstaff. And a staff you have been. You have given so much in service to the sangha in every possible role – anja, tenzo, sesshin tanto, zazen instructor, and head of zendo, – all with compassion and integrity and even some humor.

It was a few years ago now that you received inka, the certificate of completion of your formal koan training. Since then we have continued to work together in the dokusan room on other matters including other koan collections. During that time I have seen your dharma understanding grow in ways that I never could have predicted. We are at the point where sometimes I teach you and sometimes you teach me. And this is the important part: You have not stopped. You have continued, not only here but in sesshin with Danan Roshi, Nelson Foster, Michael Kieran and others. The journey never ends.

So your journey will continue, as you move into the role of assistant teacher, and none of us has a clue as to how it will turn out. I now ask you to take a seat on the tan and share with us some of your own understanding.

George Mathews’ Talk

A few weeks ago I offered a talk on the topic of confusion, saying that confusion is essentially not a good or bad emotion or feeling but is an opportunity to explore and grow in the Dharma. Confusion is not typically a comfortable feeling. And that’s how I feel at this time, rather confused and decidedly uncomfortable.

But I also spoke of Great Faith as well as this Great Doubt. I do have that faith. I can’t even define it or put my finger on it. But I do have the belief that something has brought me to this point in my Dharma practice. You may call it karma if you wish. I really don’t know. With this trust in the universe I have accepted this request and am trying to muster Great Determination to move into this new experience. Thank you, Ken Tetsuzan Sensei, for your confidence, and I pray that I will live up to that. Thank you also to our other two teachers, Karin Ryuku Sensei and Peggy Metta Sensei, for your support now and in the future. I will strive to earn your confidence as well.

In the Diamond Sutra it is written that the World-Honored One said:

“Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata conceives the idea ‘I must set forth a teaching.’ For if anyone says that the Tathagata sets forth a teaching he really slanders Buddha and is unable to explain what I teach. As to any truth-declaring system, truth is undeclarable; so ‘an enunciation of truth’ is just the name given to it.”

In Truth there is nothing to teach. The Truth cannot be taught because it is beyond teaching. There is nothing to teach.

At the urging of his head monk to teach, Yakusan ascended the seat. After a while, he descended and returned to his room. The head monk confronted him. Yakusan replied, “For scriptures there are scripture teachers. For treatises there are treatise teachers. How can you question this old monk?”

Emperor Wu asked the Great Bodhisattva Fu to expound the Diamond Sutra. Fu mounted the platform, struck the lectern with his baton and descended from the platform. The Emperor was dumfounded. Master Chih said to him, “Does your Majesty understand?” The Emperor replied, “No.” Master Chih said, “The great bodhisattva has expounded the sutra thoroughly.”

So, what is the purpose of a teacher? We say it all the time: “Have you selected a teacher yet? You need a teacher?” If there is nothing to teach, what does a teacher do? Why a teacher? Because a teacher guides the student to the Mani Jewel within that person, a precious treasure that is hidden by greed, hatred and ignorance. The teacher helps the student peel away the layers of delusion that prevent the student from realizing and living her own True Nature. A teacher cannot teach the student that she is inherently perfect. That can't be taught. The teacher is here to help the student truly see. There is nothing to teach. There is everything to learn.

There is everything to learn. In zazen we have the opportunity to release the grip of our delusive self. Slowly, with time and diligent practice, we learn that we are captives of a self that we ourselves have constructed and that we perpetuate endlessly. We learn that within this ego-maintaining shell is a living radiance that is beyond words, can't be described. Buddha nature is just the name given to it. “We go beyond ego and past clever words ... our true self is no-self, our own self is no-self.” There is

nothing to teach. There is everything to learn.

We live a great mystery. Life is a great mystery. Let's focus on a small aspect of the mystery of the human existence. We absolutely need a healthy concept of self. Surviving in a real world of space and time requires a self-image of integrity and with boundaries. We assemble this self-concept from infancy, through childhood and adolescence and we remodel its plasticity as we mature and age. We need a self to traverse the arc of life. With our endowed body-mind we construct this self-concept. To be sure, many factors influence this construction, but we cannot deny that it is the body-mind that processes, accepts and rejects the stimuli and experiences we encounter.

Understanding that development is one of the lessons we can learn in zazen. If indeed we have fabricated our structure of self, we can deconstruct it as well. Remove the nouns and verbs, the adjectives, the phrases, the conditionals and the subjunctives. See through, into. We can learn to see that the messiness of being human is empty. The experience of emptiness, the insight into radiant nothingness cannot be taught. It can only be learned. None of this experience into clarity denies the joys and grit of life. Nothing enlivens everything. All beings are by nature Buddha, and all events, processes, celestial explosions, tadpoles and waterfalls are by nature Buddha. Dharma gates are countless; I vow to wake to them. We are given a mind, to see beyond the mind, to return to the mind.

In the above stories, both Yakusan and the Great Bodhisattva Fu ascended the platform and after expounding the Dharma came down from the platform. From the mind, beyond the mind, returning to the mind. Knowing that there is nothing to teach, there is everything to learn and live and do and give and love and laugh. At the end of sesshin, no person here will be the same as the person who arrived. Each one will be changed. Each one will have had a privileged glimpse into nothing – perhaps not a celestial explosion of realization, but an insight nonetheless, whether we consciously recognize it or maybe not. On Saturday go forth from the mat carefully, with tenderness for the self that was stripped down raw and is re-engaging the rough-and-tumble world of space and time. Be alert. There is everything to learn. ☸

Lotus

Floating on the surface of the pond,
roots descending deep into the mud,
you sit cross-legged, feet on thighs, gaze down,
a thousand-petalled flower on your crown.
Immersed in zazen, hour after hour,
spiders weave silk trails through your fine hair.
Each night your petals fade, disappear.
The morning light brings forth a fresh white flower.

Do you think you sit there all alone
for the sake of no-one but yourself?
Don't you know your seat becomes a throne
for the likes of Lakshmi, Saraswati?
When you rise up from your lotus seat
such goddesses grace everyone you meet.

– John Steele



Photo by Geoff Keeton

Continued from p. 3

Suppose the monk had answered, “Xuefeng is an eighteen-carat SOB.” Would that have been a better response? A Zen teacher doesn’t whack a student as punishment. The blow from the stick is saying, “Wake up!” Wake up to this moment. Don’t get lost in ruminations about past or future.

In Robert Aitken’s *Zen Master Raven*, Raven is about to leave his teacher, Brown Bear, and Brown Bear asks him, “What will you say about your study here?”

And Raven replies, “Brown Bear is quite thorough-going.” Was Raven’s answer about the future, or was he responding in the present moment?

Xuefeng later turned to [his disciple and heir] Jingqing (868-937), and asked, “How did the monk err, that he deserved my stick?” Where did the monk mess up?

When you come up with “I will...” – I will say, I will

do, I will etc. – you are off in the ozone. You can’t dance around; you can’t temporize and push things off into an imaginary future. You have to face the questions of your life and death head on without fear or favor. You must answer in this moment, as this moment. Don’t get led astray by notions of past and future.

Jingqing answered, “The monk has already spoken with Jingshan and is on close terms with him.”

Now how would Jingqing know that? Jingshan is a long way away. Zhejiang province is about 800 kilometers from Xuefeng’s place.

Xuefeng said, “Jingshan is in Zhejiang [province]. How could the monk have met him?”

In the moment of the monk’s reply, in the moment of Jingqing’s reply, where was Jingshan? Where is Jingshan at this moment? Where is Buddha at this moment?

The only Jingshan there can be is the one who is right here, right now. You might say that one is just the thought of Jingshan. If so, even if you were instantly transported to the physical presence of someone you call Jingshan, is that concept “Jingshan” any more real than the thought you had 800 kilometers and 1000 years away? The person sitting next to you – are your thoughts about them now any more “real” than they were last night?

When we make our Bodhisattva vows, to whom are we making them? To a monk who lived in India 2500 years ago? To our own Buddha nature? Is that somehow different from Shakyamuni or the Buddha on the altar?

If you are intimate with yourself, if you are intimate with the great matter, you are intimate with all beings. Location and time have nothing to do with it. Xuefeng is Buddha, Jingshan is Buddha, the monk is Buddha. There is no separation. The monk was indeed intimate with Jingshan, and with the whole universe.

You have to face the questions of life and death head on without fear or favor. You must answer in this moment, as this moment.

In Case 24 of the *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyuanlu*):

The nun Lutie, the “Iron Grindstone,” came to Guishan, who said, “Old Cow, so you have come!”

Lutie said, “Tomorrow there is a great communal feast at Taisan [several hundred miles away]. Will you be going, teacher?”

Guishan lay down and stretched himself out.

Lutie immediately left.

Guishan is already intimate with the feast at Taisan, and realizes it. The monk in this case is already intimate with Jingshan, but does not yet realize it. He is hung up on the image of Jingshan as something far, far away.

Jingqing replied, “Is it not said, ‘Question afar, answer nearby?’”

Question afar: So many questions are afar, abstract,

theoretical, far from the direct experience of the here and now. What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the west? What is the fundamental reality? Does the dog have Buddha nature or not? And on and on. Each time the master answers with a presentation of direct experience of the moment.

Case 14 in the *Blue Cliff Record* reads:

A monk asked Yunmen, “What is the teaching which Shakyamuni Buddha preached throughout his life?”

Yunmen answered, “Teaching to the particular!” (Robert Aitken’s translation)

Teaching to the particular. The oak tree in the front garden. Shitstick! Have a cup of tea. Mu!

Xuefeng agreed. Not only that, but a couple of centuries later:

Xutang commented in his place, “[Jingqing’s response is] like a chalk line by the master craftsman Bo of Lu.”

A chalk line or snap line is the most precise way of drawing a straight line. High praise indeed. How many times do we say it, think it? I’m going to see my father, teacher, cousin, boss... as if there really was a future beyond our thoughts about the future, or a past beyond our thoughts about the past.

Xuefeng strikes the monk to wake him up from his dream of things separate in time and space. Our whole practice is about waking up to this present moment, and what’s more, trusting it enough to act without fear. Don’t be fooled by abstractions and generalizations. They have nothing to do with the moment. When the Buddha became enlightened, what did he realize? Show me!

Together with all beings, we realize the Way. ☸

Diamond Sangha Teachers Circle

In October Karin, Ken and Peggy senseis joined some other Diamond Sangha teachers at Mountain Lamp, a rural lay-practice center in the North Cascade Mountains of Washington state, led by Jack Duffy Roshi and Eileen Kiera.



Back row, from left: Jana Zeedyk, Jack Duffy, Michael Kieran, Karin Kempe, Nelson Foster, Daniel Terrango and Ken Morgareidge.
Front row: Kristen Olsen, Peggy Sheehan, Antoinette Parekh and Andrew Mason.

Dharma Transmission Ceremony Jan. 6

We are happy to announce that Karin Ryuku Kempe Sensei will be receiving Dharma transmission from her longtime teacher, Shishin Wick Roshi of the White Plum lineage, in a ceremony Sunday, Jan. 6, at the Rocky Mountain Miracle Center. We encourage everyone to attend this wonderful occasion and extend their congratulations to Karin Sensei.

Laying the Foundations

At long last, we've begun construction in earnest! In fact we broke ground (not just ceremonially) some months ago, and construction crews have been busy excavating and laying the foundation for the basement. Barring any further delays, we expect to open our doors sometime in fall 2019. The end (and a new beginning) is in sight!



Jukai

On Sunday, Dec. 16, ZCD member Lois Becker took Jukai with Karin Ryuku Sensei, receiving her rakusu and the Dharma name Seishin, Pure Heart. Congratulations Lois!



Calendar Highlights

- Sunday, Jan. 6 - Dharma transmission ceremony with Karin Ryuku Sensei and Shishin Wick Roshi
- Sunday, Jan. 13 - Teisho by Karin Ryuku Sensei
- Sunday, Jan. 20 - Sangha Circle meeting
- Sunday, Jan. 27 - Zazenkai with Ken Tetsuzan Sensei at Mayu
- Sunday, Feb. 3 - Sangha Circle meeting
- Sunday, Feb. 10 - Senior student talk
- Sunday, Feb. 24 - Zazenkai with Peggy Metta Sensei at Mayu
- Sunday, March 24 - Zazenkai with Karin Ryuku Sensei at Mayu



ZEN CENTER OF DENVER

PO Box 101013

Denver, CO 80250

(303) 455-1500

office@zencenterofdenver.org

www.zencenterofdenver.org