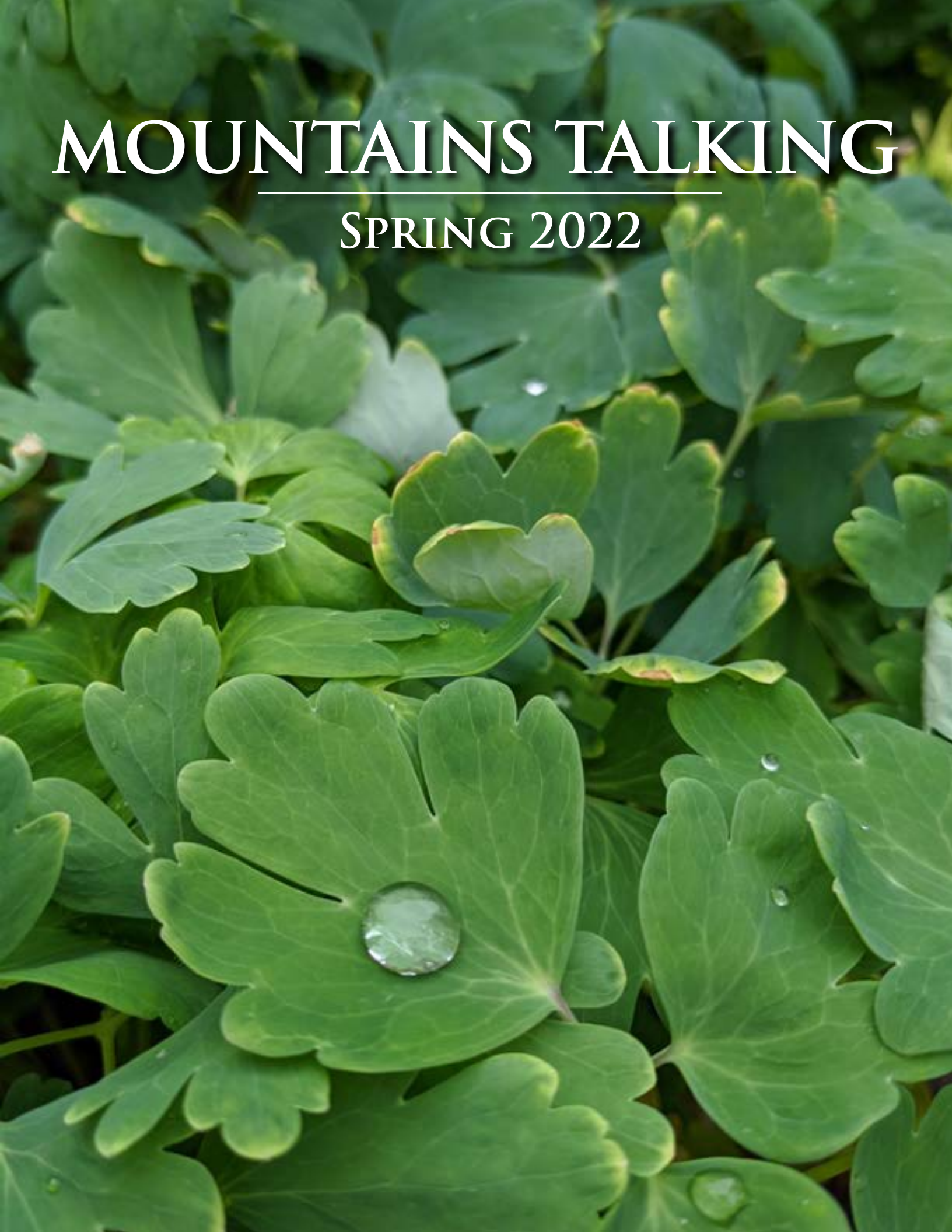


MOUNTAINS TALKING

SPRING 2022



In this issue...

Truing the Wheel	<i>Peggy Metta Sheehan</i>	3
The Pebbles and Bamboo of the Present	<i>Geoff Keeton</i>	4
Guan Yin	<i>John Whitney Steele</i>	9
Bright Ocean Vows	<i>Paige Noon</i>	10
Upcoming Events		14
Notes on the Mat		15

Front Cover: *Joel Tagert*

Back Cover: *Geoff Keeton*

TRUING THE WHEEL

PEGGY METTA SHEEHAN



Last week I was reading a magazine dedicated to *The Vision of the Dalai Lama: Wisdom For a Compassionate World*. It was deeply encouraging, and especially encouraging as regards our time together this weekend, and our ongoing daily practice.

There were two exchanges mentioned that I very much appreciated.

First, Danielle Laporte had the chance to meet the Dalai Lama, and asked this question: “My generation is at a crossroads, and I wonder what message you have for Gen Xers?”

The Dalai Lama replied, “In the West, you have education. This is good. You have technology. This is good. But you do not educate your people in values of the heart, of compassion. This you must do.”

Well, I certainly have found sesshin to be one of the most important, effective, and radical trainings for the heart, the heart-mind. You cannot sit here, breath after breath, moment after moment, hour after hour, day after day, without opening, softening, growing your heart of compassion. You of course can try to shore yourself up, muscle through, steel yourself (and we do that sometimes), but alas, if you truly do the practice that will give way, and at some point you will come to experience your own heart of compassion, the original “soft spot” as Pema Chödrön calls it—this soft spot that we indeed share with all sentient beings and is the original ground that is indescribable and unfathomable.

The second exchange was written by Pico Iyer, who has known the Dalai Lama for 45 years. He wrote:

Often, when I see him give large public talks, someone will stand up afterward and ask, with great sincerity, what to do if you really hope for world peace or environmental reform, and it doesn't seem to work out. And the Dalai Lama responds: Wrong dream! And he warmly goes on to point out

that we have to be rigorously realistic in our aspirations. If we aim to change our habits, and maybe those of people close to us, we might meet with some success. If we hope to transform the world overnight, we will surely be disappointed.

Now, of course, the Dalai Lama also understands that if one transforms themselves, one transforms the world. The Buddha, upon his awakening, said, “I and all beings have in this moment attained the Way.” The Way is not something the Buddha created. He woke up to it, and it was totally obvious that we *are* the Way. Each of us is the Way from the very beginning.

The Way, however, is also quite pragmatic and direct. Wrong dream! Wrong dream! Let us be rigorously realistic and jump in here.

Wrong! Wrong!

Ahh, well we certainly hear a lot of this these days, wrong, wrong. But no doubt, if the Dalai Lama says this to you, it's a completely different experience. You will receive no barb at all and it might stop you in your tracks just long enough.

Here is case 98 in *The Blue Cliff Record*, “T'ien-ping's Two Mistakes”:

When T'ien-ping was on a pilgrimage visiting teachers, he called on Hsi-yuan. He [T'ien-ping] always would say, “Do not say you understand Buddhism. I cannot find a single man who can speak of it.”

One day Hsi-yuan heard him and called him by name—“Ju-i.” T'ien-ping raised his head. Hsi-yuan said, “Wrong!” T'ien-ping walked a few steps away and Hsi-yuan once again said, “Wrong!” T'ien-ping turned and approached Hsi-yuan, who said, “These two wrongs just now—were they my wrongs or your wrongs?”

T'ien-ping said, “My wrongs.”

Hsi-yuan said, “Wrong!” T'ien-ping said nothing. Hsi-yuan said, “Stay here this summer and let us discuss the two wrongs.” But T'ien-ping went away.

Continued p. 12

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THE PEBBLES AND BAMBOO OF THE PRESENT

GEOFF KEETON

The ancient buddhas' words and actions are the pebbles and bamboo of the present. They are also the tiles, brick and mirrors that we manifest and realize through practice.

An all-day sitting is a chance. As Dogen described it in the verse dedicated to the koan we are going to examine, "All day waiting with empty mind for the phoenix to arrive." Every round of sitting is a chance for us to lighten the mind, to drop the veil of the self that we carry with us. Every second we have an opportunity to realize this phoenix that we already are. Just don't go looking for it.

In the case we will examine, there are some telling words that convey the virtues of both patience and surrender. Not just at the level of realization, but from where each of us starts out. This case tells the story of a monk that is asked a question by his teacher, Guishan. The student, Xiangyan, had no answer. He did what a lot of us do: He went looking for an answer.

In this, the teacher lit a fire under the student. Xiangyan had no answer and kept going back to his notes and his books to find one, but every time he was told, "No."

With heart broken and in desperation, he kept returning to the teacher. In this cycle of repeated nos, he started to realize something that really tears at my heart, something I want to focus on more than the koan. When we are broken, how do we react? Do we practice into our brokenness? Or do we hide and run off, finding some new thing to bury our head in?

Case 17 in *The True Dharma Eye*, "Xiangyan's Great Enlightenment":

Zen master Zhixian of Mount Xiangyan was one day asked by Guishan, "Everything you say is what you've memorized from commentaries. Now I am going to ask you a question. When you were an infant—before you could even distinguish east from west—at that time, how was it?" Xiangyan spoke and presented his understanding, explaining

the principle, but could not get approval.

He went through the texts he had collected and studied, but he could not find an answer that would satisfy the master.

Deeply grieved and in tears, he burned all his books and commentaries. Then he said to himself, "I will never understand Zen in this lifetime. I will become a hermit monastic and enter a mountain and practice."

Thus he entered Mount Wudang and built a hut near the grave site of National Teacher Nanyang. One day while he was sweeping the path, a pebble struck a stalk of bamboo and made a cracking sound. At that moment he suddenly had a great enlightenment experience. He wrote a poem expressing his understanding:

One crack and all knowledge has dissolved.

The struggle is over.

I follow the ancient Way, not lapsing into doubt.

Dignified bearing and conduct that is beyond sound and form;

no trace remains of my passing.

*Those who have mastered the Way
call this the unsurpassable activity.*

He presented this poem to Guishan, who said, "This fellow has penetrated it completely."

This koan starts similarly to the koans we usually examine. The teacher asks a question of the student. Guishan asked, "When you were an infant—before you could even distinguish east from west—at that time, how was it?" and Xiangyan had nothing to say. He did what most of us do. We go looking for an answer. We can infer from the koan that he was busy trying to find an answer in his texts and books and notes.

I can imagine him going back to Guishan, time and time again, over and over, presenting what he thought would be the winning answer. You can see him, scouring the notes and pages, and furiously questioning himself.



All to no avail.

Years ago, I remember being stuck on a particular koan. I went through two sesshin that were six months apart working on the same koan. I worked with Danan (Henry) on it for awhile, then I worked on it with Ron Green, and again was working on it with Danan. I remember being in sesshin, and I presented my answer, and he again said no, and then he started to talk about Tangen Roshi, the teacher that he studied with in Japan.

He told me something to the effect that Tangen Roshi had once been stuck on the same koan. He had sixty-nine or seventy-nine attempts before he got it. Danan told me, "Now go outside the dokusan room and look at Tangen's picture on the wall, and look at his smile!"

The teaching is always this way. Keep going. Keep working on it. One day the light will shine, and you will see it for yourself. The answer will come, but the key is to keep practicing.

Back to Xiangyan—crying, full of frustration, probably angry at himself. He decides he will burn all of his books and notes. He will get rid of everything.

His words are so important. "I will never understand Zen in this lifetime. I will become a hermit monastic and enter a mountain and practice."

This statement, "I will never understand Zen in this lifetime," shows a great resignation to the fact that he does not know what the answer is to the question, and in a manner, he has failed. He knows it through and through, and he has accepted his own failure.

"I don't get it." This statement is total surrender. Totally giving up. Resigning oneself to the fact. This is a statement showing total forbearance. *Not in this lifetime. Maybe never.*

In his next sentence, he says he will enter a mountain and practice the Way. He doesn't quit. He doesn't blame his teacher or anyone else. He blames himself. *I have failed.* This is such a relief!

As many of you know, I am a nurse. I used to work in a nursing home, and may work there again at some point. I was and continue to be what's called the RN supervisor, the person who is responsible for staffing, who tries to run the show when things are not going well. If a nurse has a question, I'm the person that they go to for any



Gregg Keaton

kind of help. And even before Covid we were struggling with staffing. This is a consistent problem throughout our nation.

Covid broke me as a nurse. When it first came into our building, we were doing fine. We had just two patients who were sick. They were not that sick, and it didn't appear that they were going to die. But then Covid started to walk down one of the wings of the building.

The nurses were very effective, but there was just no way that we could stop the virus. I remember calling one family member in particular to let them know that their father was dying from Covid, and they could come in to see him before he died. Then I had to make another phone call saying the exact same thing. I've never felt so helpless in my life, so utterly wrecked. And then I had to call another family member and let them know the same thing: "Your mom is going to pass away. Do you want to come in and see her before that happens?"

My heart broke. We worked harder than I've ever seen nurses work. The patients were too weak to even eat by themselves. Staffing was a mess.

On my days off, I started to pour through my books on Zen and Taoism and anything else I could possibly find to help myself. I couldn't sleep and had to take medicine for it. All of the nurses were just so stressed, and it continues to be the same story over and over for many

nurses. One of the nurses that I worked with passed away from the virus. He was about ten to fifteen years younger than myself.

I just took a new job working in a hospice at the beginning of January, thinking I would be free from the vestiges of Covid. But in the last two weeks, I've been exposed to Covid four times, if not more. On Friday, I had to tell a patient's daughter that her mom might have Covid, and that her pregnant daughter cannot see her grandma, even though her grandma just might die in the next couple of weeks.

Eventually, through all this searching for rest, I realized that none of those other things could help, and in a sense I came to the same realization as Xiangyan: great resignation to the fact that in front of me are my two friends, hopelessness and helplessness. Why do I call them my friends? Because they led me back to practice. They led me to the realization that the only thing you can do to stop this heartache is to practice. And practice more. And practice more.

When I think about this in terms of practice, it is turning to face the wall. It is squaring one's shoulders and bringing oneself to face oneself. The ego has to know that it doesn't function here. There is nothing you can do to stop your suffering but practice.

This is where my other two friends help—patience

and surrender. We surrender to the fact of samsara, and that it's not going to get better. One has to realize that there is just one path, and the path always goes through practice. You can't find the answers anywhere else but in yourself, through your own practice.

(We hear about Xiangyan, but we didn't hear about the other ten thousand monks that decided to just live in the monastery and eat Guishan's food, to just go on with whatever they were doing and come back again and again.

It is all up to us. Who do we want to be. Do you want to be Xiangyan, or do you want to be those ten thousand other monks who will never perceive their own face?)

In one of my favorite books by Swami Chetananda, he says:

The linear way we usually approach the issues in our lives—the things we worry about, the events that entangle us, our desires, fears, and aspirations—has limited real value. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink our actions, their outcomes, and the appropriate stance to take in relationship to both.

I would suggest that the stance be one of surrender. Surrender has nothing to do with giving up and everything to do with opening ourselves to a situation just as it is, allowing the creative energy inherent in the situation to unfold, and

letting go of the attempt to control the outcome. Instead, we choose to do everything to support the creative unfolding. This is real surrender.

In Zen, this is our practice.

After leaving Guishan, Xiangyan went to Mount Wudang to take care of the National Teacher's monument. The National Teacher was Nanyang Huairang, a student of Huineng. (You may be familiar with Nanyang; he called his attendant three times and was answered three times by the attendant in a famous koan. He also helped Nanquan to realization.)

Entering the temple of Nanyang, Xiangyan's day would have gone like this: He would have gotten up early in the morning and would have sat in zazen. Then he would have begged for breakfast from the local village, quietly, without a word. The body would have moved without any effort from the mind. It simply would go from one house to another. Knock on the door. Stand still. Wait patiently. Bow after receiving an offering, go to the next house and stop. Knock on the door. Stand still. Receive the offering. Bow. And repeat.

Then he would have gone back to his hut, made offerings, eaten his food, and started to clean up the national teacher's monument. He would have swept, picked things off the monument/altar, offered flowers and other items. At the end of the day he would have gone back to

beg. Eat. Zazen. Retire for the night. What a simple life. He didn't need to even speak.

All through the day was like being in sesshin. He would have slowly gotten quieter and quieter. He would have been able to walk no-mindedly. The villagers would have noticed him, and I am sure he would have told them what he was doing. Eventually, over time, the villagers would see him as part of the village, and he would see himself as part of the village. Open. Non-exclusive. Maybe they might ask him to help them with something like a funeral or a marriage. One village. One monk. Not two.

If you can imagine him as he swept, he may have heard the villagers talking in the background. Maybe he could hear a stream nearby, or maybe he was paying attention to the sound of the broom as it swept across the ground.

His experience is no-mind sweeping. If you have ever been to sesshin, it is the mind you use as you perform samu tasks. Usually in sesshin or samu, people get easier tasks where there is no abstract thinking. Sweep. Mop the floor. We do a lot of cleaning. The reason for that is so that we can learn to do things one-mindedly. Mind and body become one. We can slow down our mind as we perform the task. We can feel our body as it performs the task instead of thinking about feeling our body to perform the task. We are our own experience.

This takes patience and surrender, the patience to allow ourselves to be just this, this experience. And not thinking about it, not looking for it, just being. (When I first start to sit, there is always the thinking, planning mind, the comparative mind: "I am not very quiet. Why do I keep thinking about this patient? What did my dad do now? Why am I not quiet?")

Patience and surrender allow this thought. It is not a wrong or right thought. It just is. It is okay. No matter what thought it is, it is okay. Just keep allowing it. Face it. Be open to your experience.

When we are faced with a bad situation, the tendency is to run away. That is an ingrained reflex that we have. If your work situation is bad, just quit. But as part of a village, when one is sick, all are sick. Everyone knows. We lost a couple of older nurses when Covid started, and everyone else hunkered down for battle. How do we do this in our practice (not that we are in a battle)? How do we show courage in this moment, this moment,

this moment?

These were Dogen's words in praise of the case of Xiangyan:

*All day waiting with empty mind for the phoenix to arrive,
A village monk and the single way become neighbors.
Hear the dragon howl and phoenix song without clapping.
Tiles and pebbles transmit the word to a dead tree person.*

Just like us in this all-day sitting, we are waiting for the phoenix to arrive. The village monk waits. He finds and moves into the place. He makes it a part of his own practice. He is intimate with the valley stream, the mountain clouds, the talk of the neighbors. That talk becomes his own wordless speech. The broom is not held with the hands; just empty space holds the broom. His mind is one with all of his experience. There is nothing added. Nothing left over. There is just the *swoop, swoop* of the broom.

Xiangyan waits. This is the practice. We wait, beyond time beyond the next sitting period, beyond coming and going, until we see into the present moment as intimacy, and then the phoenix arrives. The dragon howling is the monk meditating, gaining intimacy of the moment. He no longer hears the broom, just the *swoop, swoop*. The broom is no longer something that can be touched or felt, and it is not outside his own body!

The phoenix song without clapping is the experience of oneness, is your own body-mind experience, right now, whether you realize it or not. *Crack!*

Finally, tiles and pebbles transmit the word to a dead tree person. What did the *crack!* tell him? What is this word that Dogen said was transmitted? A dead tree person is similar to Dongshan's words: "Flowers bloom on a withered tree in a spring beyond kalpas."

What is this word? There is nothing left of Xiangyan; thus, he is the dead tree person. When there is nothing left of you, you too will see Xiangyan, Guishan, the *crack!* and Dogen bloom on the withered tree, in a spring that never starts, and never ends.

And Guishan will say, "This person has penetrated it completely." ❁



Guan Yin

In my left hand
a bowl of rain

a lotus bobbing
on the surface

in my right hand
a willow branch.

Thousand-armed
thousand-eyed

I hear a hundred
thousand cries.

One weeping branch
held in one hand

I dip and sprinkle
what I can.

—John Whitney Steele

BRIGHT OCEAN VOWS

PAIGE NOON

On January 23, I and two Dharma brothers took personal vows to follow the Buddha's way. For more than two years I had studied for the Lay Order of the Lotus in the Flame. It has been a long journey due to the particular turns my life took during these two years. However, my life is my practice and time is no more than being. There was no urgency in my mind, only the desire to bite into the next vow or truth or precept and slowly digest it. I enjoyed reading the great teachers, coming to an understanding and creating my own expression. Each step was a new opportunity to come closer to the Buddha's way and to the foundation of Zen practice.

Once I had completed all sections of study I began the process of sewing my rakusu. I never imagined how much concentration this would take and how challenging it would be for my eyes and hands. Merilee Schultheiss graciously took on the task of guiding me through the process. I drove to her house from my home in Fort Collins every other Saturday to pin, mark, stitch and tear out. Merilee's sunny garden was where I did most of the stitching. Brett and Fred were there too on Saturday mornings. It was during these hours, with our heads down, deep in concentration, that we first came to know one another. We shared our life stories, our political opinions, our worries and our joys. Merilee was a gentle presence always busy preparing us for the next step or fixing our mistakes. We began sewing on May 8 and finished in mid-December: more than seven months of sewing! It sounds overwhelming, but in truth it was probably no more than ten Saturday mornings at Merilee's house and in her garden.

On Saturday, the day before the ceremony, we rehearsed at the temple. I hadn't seen my teacher or the temple for more than two years. I walked into the zendo with its rich wood interior and black zabutons organized in offset rows, peeked out the window at the Zen garden with its trees and shrubs frosted in snowy crystals. I saw my teacher's eyes, alive, peeking up from her mask. My mind was silenced by it all; I stood as if in a dream. We listened, we watched, we practiced. During the course of the run-through I discovered that I had only written vows for ten precepts rather than all sixteen!

Once I got home I worked on the vows I hadn't yet written. Many of my Dharma brothers and sisters had asked me if I was excited or nervous. I had always considered the Jukai ceremony to be one step in the path of practice, nothing special really. After all there is nothing to be learned, nothing to be accomplished. I thought Jukai was a ceremony of little consequence. I knew I would continue practicing, studying and learning afterwards, just like I had been doing all these twelve years. I wondered if I was missing something. Did I not understand the true import of Jukai? Was I worthy? Was I ready? I just didn't get it. That night I lay awake for hours thinking that my teacher knew I wasn't ready and asking myself how she could have allowed me to continue on to the ceremony. But what is the big deal anyway?

At 5:30 a.m. I was on my way down to Denver with two friends in the car. Conversation was easy and my view again turned to this event being rather unimportant, just a formality. Shortly after we arrived at the temple friends began arriving. They too asked how I felt: "Nervous? Don't worry, it will be fine." Brett, Fred and I milled around the entrance to the zendo in anticipation. Once the densho rang out for the final time, we three entered the zendo together in step, bowed to our cushions and to the room in sync and sat zazen for one round. After a short break the densho rang again, we took our seats, chanted the Heart Sutra, the teachers entered, and the ceremony began. As the teachers read about the meaning of Jukai, I connected to an "I" deep inside that knew exactly why I was here. "I," living a householder's life, had been drawn to being a Zen practitioner, a follower of the Buddha's way. This practice, my teacher, these Dharma brothers sitting beside me, were my home. As the teachers continued reading the moment became alive and timeless. When I bowed in gratitude to my many teachers in the room, online, or in the direction of those who have passed from this world, I paid complete attention to each pair of eyes. The eyes drew me close, so close I could feel their energy. Past and present connected in this room and beyond. Boundlessness!

I could hardly wait to repeat my teacher's words and to look into her eyes, straight on as if she was my truth, as



From left: Karin Kempe, Fred Becker, Paige Noon, Peggy Sheehan, and Brett James. Fred and Brett took Jukai alongside Paige on Jan. 23, with Fred receiving the Dharma name One Sound and Brett the name Deep River. Congratulations to all!

if she was the Buddha. I could hardly wait to say my vows out loud, to hear myself say them. I cherished them. They are all I wish for. If only I could be true to them. But that didn't actually matter; they are there for me as a guide. It felt as if the words I had written were speaking "me." I listened as my Dharma brothers said their vows; I could hear the sincerity in their voices and in the words they had written. The power and energy of connection as we sat next to each other was palpable. Together in unison, separately and uniquely, we praised our precious lives. Joyous gratitude!

I was given the name "Bright Ocean," Mei Kai. I loved my name from the moment I heard it. I am Bright Ocean, Bright Ocean is me! Open and wide, expansive and adventurous. I had never imagined "name giving" would have much of an effect on me. I figured it would be like someone reading my horoscope, a one-dimensional experience, words only. But by giving me a name, my teacher had "seen" me, really seen me. The moment I heard her say "Mei Kai" I became Bright Ocean. I cannot explain in words the sense of it. As if Bright Ocean is everything, and it is me. Upon hearing my name I van-

ished to Bright Ocean. I listened intently to my Dharma brothers receiving their names. How wonderful for them to be seen uniquely, for their gifts to be brought out into the light, and for me to be next to them.

At the end of the ceremony I felt new life had filled the three of us, the three of us together as one, each of us different in subtle ways but not different at all. Students of the Dharma living this precious life together, we left to go our separate ways but we will never be separate.

Jukai surprised me. Now I have a sense of what my Dharma brothers and sisters were saying to me. It reminds me of giving birth to my children. No one could truly have prepared me and I could not have imagined it. Today Bright Ocean is here living in me and all around me. I see her in the blue sky above and in winter's leafless branches. The scent of Bright Ocean fills my first breath of morning air. I taste Bright Ocean in my morning coffee and hear Bright Ocean in the first chickadee song of the day. Limitless, boundless, the vows and Bright Ocean are one. How can this be? But it is. 🌀

Continued from p. 3

Later, when T'ien-ping was abbot of his own temple, he said to his disciples, "When I was on a pilgrimage I was blown by the wind of events to abbot Shimyo [Hsi-yuan's other name], who told me twice that I was wrong and tried to keep me there over the summer to wait for him to deal with me. It was not then that I was wrong, however; but when I first started south on my pilgrimage I already knew that I was wrong."

Often we come to practice because we feel something is fundamentally wrong, wrong with the world, wrong with us. And yes, this is *dukkha*, suffering, the sense that the wheel is off true. This is real, something is wrong, something is off, but it's not us or the world.

Equally, we are called to practice because of what is Right or fundamentally True and always True. And something within is listening, orienting to that.

Each time you take your seat, sit still and quiet, you are orienting. Each breath that you invest in with your whole being, each moment that you let go of a trail of thought and return to your practice, that is truing up the wheel. And I'm sure the Dalai Lama would add, each time you choose kindness over reaction that, too, is truing the wheel.

My teacher, Danan Roshi, used to tell a story to the folks in the Mountain Staff training program. These are the folks who ring the bells, play the han/wooden block, tend the altar, open and close the zendo, manage dokusan etc. It's a training in practice and service. And we get together after sittings to review what needs refining. Believe



me, we have been doing a lot of refining this weekend!

The story was that the teacher, an old Zen master, would listen to the han, for example, or sit during the opening ceremony, and any time something was off, in that moment he would simply call out "Wrong!" No explanation, just Wrong. And over time, whatever it was, seemed to adjust.

Now imagine that. Our culture does not handle that kind of teaching very well. And yet, taking a breath in and out right now, setting down all defenses and no barrier to in and out, no shoulds or oughts, what if all edges have worn away from both giver and receiver of this "Wrong, wrong"? No movement toward right versus wrong, up versus down, he versus she, we versus they. What then? What then?

"Do not say you understand Buddhism. I can not find a single man who can speak of it." Yes, what could there possibly be to speak about? And yet, our friend T'ien Ping is a little lopsided—a bit like the carp getting out of the net from yesterday.

Hsi-yuan in his compassion calls out to him, "Ju-i!" He lifts his head. "Wrong!" How about it? He's not saying Ju-i is wrong; so what's he doing? T'ien takes a few steps away. You and I might do that as well. Wrong! Now what do you do? T'ien Ping turns and approaches Hsi-Yuan. Ah, yes, come forward.

This "Wrong!" Did it stop T'ien Ping in his tracks just long enough? Who was it that took a few steps toward Hsi-yuan?

Can the sound of the crickets, the temple bell, the sirens stop you? Stop you completely?

Hsi-yuan asks, "These two wrongs just now. Were they my wrongs or your wrongs?" T'ien Ping says, "My wrongs." Ah well, treading in the land of mine and yours. That's okay. And he is invited to stay for the summer training.

And though he didn't stay, something of this exchange remained with him. Perhaps it nudged him over many years, as these unusual encounters seem to do, and I think he's still chewing on it.

"These two wrongs just now—were they mine or yours?" How would you respond?

How do you respond these days?

We all undoubtedly have many opportunities to step into the river of "Wrong! Wrong!" I suspect our responses vary, and yet I wonder can we allow it to stop us in our tracks, stop the usual tracks and grooves of our habits so that something fresh, even surprising can arise. Sometimes our response may appear or feel skillful, sometimes not so. Yet there remains a profound invitation, again and again to be wrong to the very bottom.

By the way, can you find "Wrong" in the call of the morning dove, the scent of evening stew, or the yellowing of leaves? Can you locate wrong in ache of knees, fluttering of nerves or the heaviness in heart? Or how about the dentist's drill on your tooth, buzzzz, the crunch of the car fender on the pole or whoa, whoa, slipping on ice? And is a virus with a spike protein wrong?

If you can find the wrong of Hsi-yuan here, then you are as free as the carp out of the net.

In a recent piece by Joan Sutherland entitled "Seasons of Awakening," she wrote:

In our yearning for enlightenment, we might hope that it's a state of unfluctuating perfection that solves the problem of the constant change that roils our lives. But if we see what we're doing as awakening, something that unfolds over a lifetime, we understand that each of us is somewhere in the middle of a long walk through varied terrain. Then our task is to stay alive to the changes in that terrain and to trust the path as it appears before us, rather than try to impose our map on it.

It's a strong and often unconscious habit to impose our map upon the path, upon the moment that is here to be seen and lived. It is this practice that enables us to begin to throw out the maps and to show up with a wide open heart to what is before us—*this* and *this*.

I'd like to end with another favorite story of the Dalai Lama. As you may know, he is very interested and supportive of science and the mind, the science of meditation and kindness. He was lecturing to a room full of meditation teachers and scientists and everyone was listening very intently and nodding their heads, yes, yes. This is the Dalai Lama speaking, yes. Confirming everything I believe. All in agreement. And at the very end, he looked out over the room and said, "But... I could be wrong."

Together with all beings we realize the Way. ❁

UPCOMING EVENTS

Beginner's Mindfulness: The Foundations of Presence

Mondays 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., April 4 - 25

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment with compassion and curiosity. Numerous studies have documented the benefits of mindfulness meditation practice, including improvements to brain function, autoimmune response, sleep, chronic pain and mental health. As importantly, this practice can help you awaken to the truth of your life as it is unfolding right now.

This four-week course will focus on the foundations of mindfulness meditation. It will integrate short didactic talks, guided meditations, and community sharing and discussion so that, when we're done, you will have the basic tools you need to continue a consistent meditation practice. Billy Wynne, a longtime member of the Zen Center and participant in the Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Certification Program led by Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach, will facilitate the course.

Though offered at the Zen Center of Denver, this is a secular course available to anyone. People of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+, and members of other potentially marginalized communities are warmly invited to participate. If the course fee presents a barrier for you, please contact Billy at billywynne77@gmail.com for alternative accommodations.

The class will meet each Monday from 7:00-8:30 p.m., April 4 – 25. The fee is \$75 for non-members and \$50 for Zen Center members, with the proceeds divided evenly between the Center to cover administrative needs and the Food Bank of the Rockies.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Mondays 7:00 - 9:00 p.m., May 2 - June 27

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is an evidence-based course developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn over 40 years ago at UMass Medical School. It is highly effective

at helping people manage stress, pain and illness, as well as finding more joy, ease and insight into one's life.

This eight-week class will be taught by Peggy Sheehan, M.D., who brings many years of experience of teaching MBSR programs at Kaiser Permanente, along with being a Zen teacher and one of the ZCD's spiritual directors. Peggy offers a wonderful balance of decades of meditation practice, clinical experience and gentle humor.

The class will meet each Monday from 7:00-9:00 p.m., May 2 – June 27, with no class on Memorial Day, May 30. The program will also include one six-hour retreat day, Saturday, June 25, from 9:00-3:00 pm. The cost is \$275 for non-members or \$150 for ZCD members.

Way of Council

Sunday, May 1, 8:00 a.m.

The Way of Council is a core practice of the Zen Peacemakers, along with meditation, the Three Tenets, and social action. It invites individuals to come together in a dedicated and sacred space, to tune into one's personal and collective truth, and to the land and nature taking part in the circle. Council is conducted using a set of guidelines, a center altar, and a talking piece which is passed around to indicate a single speaker. With these forms, council enhances our practices of deep listening, bearing witness and empathy. Council focuses our intention and energy on the common stories, values, fears, and aspirations that make us human; it reminds us that we are more alike than we are different. Most importantly, Council is a powerful container to experience the Three Tenets with others, entering the moment of the circle by Not Knowing, Bearing Witness to oneself and others, and Taking Action, relating from the heart.

NOTES ON THE MAT

In light of rapidly falling Covid case rates and high levels of immunity through the state, in early March our Board directed that **masks are optional** for in-person participation at the ZCD. This heralds a joyful benchmark in the years-long struggle presented by the pandemic, and we hope it will foster a renewed sense of ease and fellowship at the temple.

Beginning April 1, we will be **returning to an 8:00 a.m. start time for our Sunday sittings**. While there was some support for the later start time (of 8:30 a.m.), this conflicted with the desire to allow time on Sunday mornings for meetings following the sittings, while also providing time for two rounds of zazen. In order to align our Sunday schedules, this also means our **zazenkai will**

begin thirty minutes earlier, at 6:00 a.m. Thank you for your patience as we experiment to find the best way forward in developing a consistent practice schedule.

Joel Tagert (RYT 200) is once again offering a **yoga flow class** in our multipurpose studio space every Monday from 5:30-6:30 p.m. This moderately vigorous level 1 class focuses on building strength and stability in fundamental yoga poses while cultivating a continuous awareness of the breath matched to movement. This is a donation-based class with donations made directly to the instructor; you may donate any amount, but please do donate each time you attend.

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

April 3: Mountain Staff meeting

April 10: Samu (mindful work practice)

April 17: Dharma talk by Dennis Sienko

April 24: Zazenkai with Dharma talk by Cathy Wright

May 1: Way of Council

May 8: Teisho by Peggy Metta Sheehan

May 15: Half-day zazenkai with Dharma talk by Dennis Sienko

May 22: Flower Ceremony for Geoff Keeton

June 1-5: Summer sesshin

June 12: Sangha workday

June 19: Dharma talk by Geoff Keeton

June 26: Sangha meeting



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