



# MOUNTAINS TALKING

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SUMMER 2022

NO PLACE IT DOES NOT REACH

KARIN RYUKU KEMPE

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# NO PLACE IT DOES NOT REACH

KARIN RYUKU KEMPE



Our ancestral teacher Dogen wrote that practice is enlightenment and enlightenment practice. It's the kind of statement that sounds great, even simple, but is it really that easy to understand? Because it doesn't always feel that way, does it? Practice can seem hard, against the grain, like walking uphill. Instead of

floating in harmony with everything as it arises, carried in the river of our mental preoccupations, we instead are remembering to hold Mu, to repeat Mu, or to return to our breath, to our count of *one, two*, or to stay with the actual experience of this moment—the wisps of thought that swiftly pass, the aching in our body or in our heart, maybe our feeling of fatigue or dullness, whatever we find actually present right now.

So much of our effort goes into escaping what we experience, that to be consciously present seems at times to require a heroic resolve, a kind of grit that can feel at odds with what we imagine spiritual experience to be. We undermine our dream state with this remembering to come back, and it often does not feel smooth or even natural. This is particularly true on the second or third day of sesshin, when our initial enthusiasm and the push of our adrenaline wears off and we may find ourselves sore and tired, with the immersion we anticipated so very distant. It can feel like trying to run through a thick and opaque fog; we face our own resistance and meet our self-doubting thoughts. How can this be enlightenment, liberation, spaciousness? How on earth did we end up here, now? And yet... and yet we are here; it is now.

At the end of the *Genjo Koan*, the koan of everyday life, there is this exchange recounted by Dogen:

*Priest Pao-che of Ma-ku Shan was fanning himself. A*

*monk approached and asked, "Sir, the nature of the wind is permanent, and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, must you still fan yourself?"*

*"Although you understand that the nature of wind is permanent," the master replied, "you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere."*

*"What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" asked the monk. The master just fanned himself. The monk bowed with deep respect.*

The nature of wind is permanent and there is no place it does not reach. We are told that the nature of mind, my nature and yours, the nature of all things, is nothing but Buddha, already perfect and complete, both present now and in each moment. Permanent. How to experience that? And what about the reaching everywhere, how does it touch you and me? Why do we find ourselves fanning, raising that wind energy, making the effort to sit still, remembering and returning to our counting, to our breath or our Mu? Why do we need to do anything if it's already here? Why do we have to practice to experience it? What we must bring to the table so that our spiritual meal, which is already ready for us, can be tasted, eaten and digested—so that what is already innate is realized as our own eyes and hands?

When we very first come to Zen, we may not know much about the tradition or the forms, how to chant or when to bow. We may not even be able to sit still well, much less work skillfully and patiently with our habits of body and mind. But perhaps we already have two important latent capacities which we can recognize in ourselves and protect. And if we aren't already aware of them, maybe they can be uncovered and cultivated.

One is our capacity for openness, for wonder, our ability to be struck dumb in awe, to experience joy. This

*Continued p. 11*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Sesshin at Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center

**Sept. 20-25**

Once again we will be returning to the beautiful environs of Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center for our late-summer sesshin. This intensive retreat will include zazen, chanting, dokusan and teisho in a magnificent mountain valley near Ward, Colorado.

The cost is \$375 for ZCD members or \$475 for non-members. Please plan to arrive for check-in between 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 20; the sesshin will end before noon on Sunday, Sept. 25.

Main dishes for meals are vegan and gluten-free (or a gluten-free option will be provided).

Lodging options at RMERC include: rooms in the lodge (16), glamping sites below the lodge deck (2), camping sites (approximately 12), and RV parking sites (3).

The registration deadline is July 28. To register, please go to the website or contact the office.

## Cha Dao

**July 23, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.**

Experience the simplicity and elegance of a traditional Chinese tea ceremony led by Zen Center of Denver member and tea expert Greg Fellman. We sit in silence as we brew and drink a number of bowls of tea, letting the Way of tea speak to us.

Each ceremony lasts about an hour. The suggested donation is \$20, made to the host at the time of the event. Registration closes 24 hours before each ceremony.

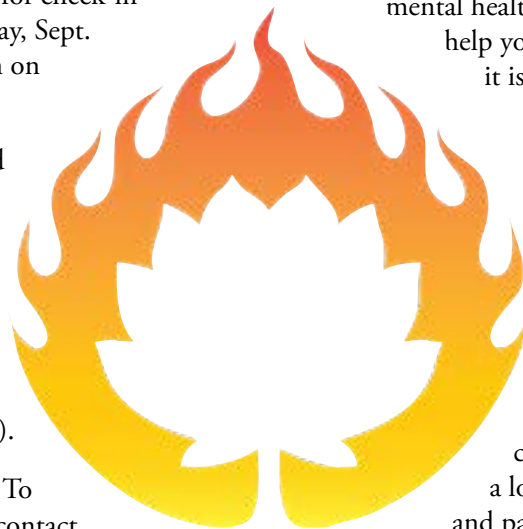
For this date, we will be performing side-handle pot, an extension of the leaves in a bowl ceremony, in which we

brew in an elegant sidehandle pot and decant into bowls. While retaining the beauty of leaves in a bowl, we are able to brew more varied teas with the sidehandle pot.

## Awakening With Compassion

**Mondays 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., Sept. 12 - Oct. 3**

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 4-week course will focus on mindfulness techniques for cultivating compassion in our daily lives. It will integrate short didactic talks, guided meditations, and community sharing and discussion so that, when we're done, you will have acquired tools to deepen your mindfulness and compassion practices. 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](mailto:billywynne77@gmail.com) for alternative accommodations.

The class will meet each Monday from 7:00-8:30 p.m., September 12 through October 3. Registration is limited to 15 participants. 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 Foodbank of the Rockies.

# NOTES ON THE MAT

As we look toward our 2023 calendar, we are planning to return to a quarterly *ango* (training period) system of three months. Our hope is that such a structure will help focus our energies for practice throughout the year and create a clearer sense of intention in our schedule of events.

Along these lines, we have set some dates for our upcoming sesshin. This year, our Rohatsu sesshin will be held Saturday - Saturday, Dec. 3-10. The dates for our sesshin in 2023 are:

- March 24-26

- June 16-21
- Sept. 15-20
- Dec. 2-9.

The June and September sesshin will be held Friday - Wednesday, by way of helping working people minimize the number of days they need to request off. Our Rohatsu sesshin will be Saturday - Saturday, as usual.

All sesshin listed above will be held at the Columbine Street temple. Registration deadlines, in general, will be three weeks before the start of sesshin.

## CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

**July 16:** Landscaping workday

**July 17:** Half-day zazenkai and Dharma talk by Geoff Keeton

**July 24:** Sangha workday and anja (altar attendant) training

**July 31:** Senior student talk by Josh Mather

**Aug. 7:** Mountain Staff meeting

**Aug. 13:** Samu

**Aug. 14:** Sangha picnic

**Aug. 21:** Half-day zazenkai and Dharma talk by Bill Hamaker

**Aug. 28:** Dharma talk by Geoff Keeton

**Sept. 10:** Intro to Zen Seminar

**Sept. 11:** Dharma talk by Dennis Sienko

**Sept. 18:** Senior student talk by Joel Tagert

**Sept. 20-25:** Sesshin at Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center

# AROUND THE TEMPLE

Summer is a busy time around the temple, with many dedicated members working hard to maintain our grounds, garden and temple. Our deep thanks to all those who lent a helping hand, especially the members of the landscaping committee.

Along these lines, we will be adding more workdays to our calendar, allowing us the opportunity to contribute concretely, practice mindfulness in action, and maybe even have some fun while we're about it. Dates for upcoming workdays and samu include:

- Landscaping workday, Sat., July 16, 9 a.m. - noon
- Sangha workday, Sun., July 24, 8 - 11 a.m.
- Samu and picnic setup, Sat., Aug. 13, 9 a.m. - noon
- Landscaping workday, Sat., Aug. 20, 8 - 11 a.m.
- Landscaping workday, Sat., Sept. 17, 8 - 11 a.m.



*Fred Becker sets the concrete for our new temple bell.*



*Martin Johnson takes a breather from the hot work of applying an oil treatment to the garden fence.*



*Our June 2022 sesshin.*



*Congratulations to new assistant teacher Geoff Keeton, shown here following the Flower Ceremony, in which his teacher, Ken Tetsuzan Morgareidge, formally recognized Geoff's Dharma understanding with the traditional presentation of a flower.*



**Light**

Watch your breath, gaze at a candle,  
pray to a god or ávatar,  
visualize a buddha or bodhisáttva,  
dance or whirl, or practice ásana.

Finger beads, voice names of God, chant mantras,  
sing kírtaṅ, recite the Torah, Qurán, or sutras.  
Prostrate yourself, pilgrimage to Mecca.  
Contemplate a koan, or just sit.

When your mind is clear,  
forms rise and pass unhindered,  
when roiled, dams burst, cities flood.

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.  
Coming and going, nothing comes or goes.  
Those who know pass calmly through the storm.

—*John Whitney Steele*

*Previously published in Buddhist Poetry Review  
and in John's book, Shiva's Dance, available at  
<https://johnwhitneysteelepoet.com/books/>.*

### The ten thousand things still practice

Boys chatting on bicycles pass    The sun blinds me  
Two vehicles whirl past on the crossroad ahead  
Jack's voice in the basement hojo    Let the sound of the dog  
barking go through you    And you through it    Whirs

to my right now    Row of naked trees soon to don their spring  
green dresses    Sun nears setting    caresses    Geese  
crying ahead    Air crisp    Limbs braced by walking  
Thud    thud    thud    thud

Now there's a fire extinguisher in the basement  
There's no excuse    not to resume practice  
The Buddhas ancestors    the ten-thousand things    have never stopped practicing  
Not chasing us per se    yet presenting themselves fully    everywhere    in every moment

Like water    neither pulling toward    nor pushing away  
Flowing generously in all directions    Open radically  
Woman jogs by    to my left  
Half mast flag at library    And Ukraine    Still

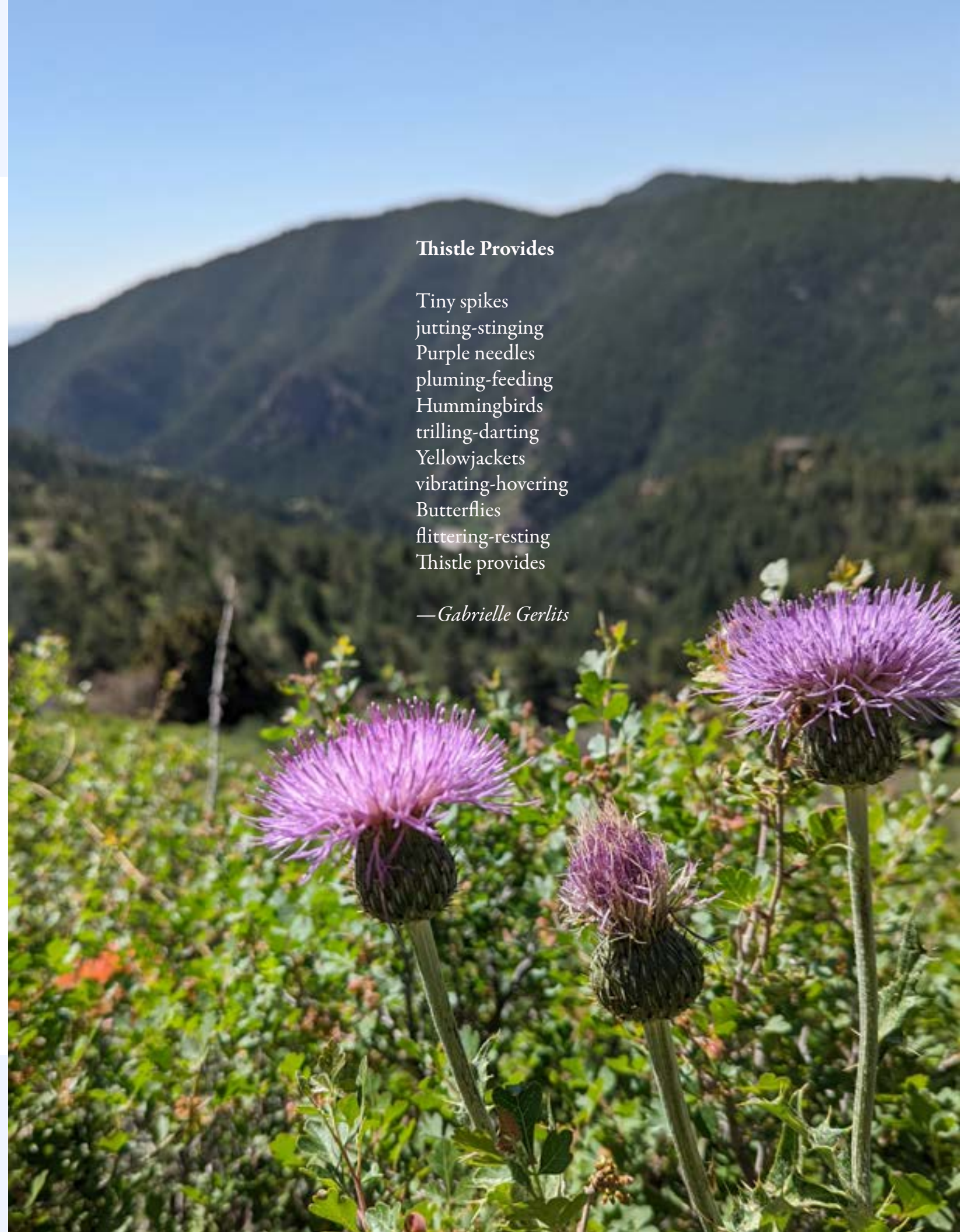
the sculpted woman on the bench    will keep reading to her children

—David Q. Hutcheson-Tipton

### Thistle Provides

Tiny spikes  
jutting-stinging  
Purple needles  
pluming-feeding  
Hummingbirds  
trilling-darting  
Yellowjackets  
vibrating-hovering  
Butterflies  
flittering-resting  
Thistle provides

—Gabrielle Gerlits



## Night Watch

Moonlight reflecting on the water. Gentle waves and light wind moving us along on our journey towards the strait of Juan de Fuca.

Small waves breaking along the side of the boat that sound like the breath of a whale or dolphin. Monitoring the sailboat. No stress during the night watch while the other crew rest down below. Check the instruments: wind speed and direction; look for ships on the chart plotter; check the sails; sip some coffee to stay awake...

Trust that there is only water out in front of us, that the wind will continue to move us along, that the boat will remain seaworthy for the journey. A practice of letting go. Acceptance. Focus on this very moment. Then the stars begin to fade, the horizon revealed.

—Greg Van

*Continued from p. 3*

is our own Beginner's Mind, the child's mind each of us already has, the untarnished mind of not already knowing but of living in this moment for the first time, playful and receptive. It may get covered up or ignored, but each of us has this mind innately.

Our other capacity is that of inquiry, our very own *why*, our *what...* our willingness to ask a deep question we might not even have words for, to look, to listen and to probe our experience with the open eyes and ears of a child. What is this? Who or what am I really? Who hears, sees, walks or talks? It is said that at an early age, Dogen lost his mother, and at her funeral he watched the smoke from a stick of incense curl up into the air and disappear. She was gone. Where did she go? The great matter of life and death, right in that pungent thread of smoke, fading away in a few seconds but working its way into his heart and even his bones.

The longer we practice, the more we appreciate that it really does not matter if we take the koan path or the path of shikantaza. In the end, these are the same path and both are grounded in these two capacities. Dogen started his instruction in *Fukanzazengi*, his instruction on how to practice, with these words:

*The Way is essentially perfect and exists everywhere.*

Already here, already complete.

*How could it be contingent upon practice and realization?*

How could it depend on causes or conditions?

*The Truth which carries us along is sovereign and does not require our efforts. Indeed, the Whole Body is far beyond the world's dust. Who could believe in a way to brush it clean? The Way is completely present where you are; is it then necessary to run around in search of it?*

This is the monk's question: Why do you fan yourself?

*And yet, if there is the slightest difference in the beginning between you and the Way, the result will be a greater separation than between heaven and earth. If the slightest dualistic thinking arises, the Mind is lost in confusion.*

The very moment we judge or evaluate our experience, or even look at it as if witnessing it from the

outside, we separate from our life.

*You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn to withdraw and reflect upon yourself.*

This is our practice of *sesshin*, becoming quiet and holding still, letting the practice anchor our heart-mind.

*When you do so, body and mind will naturally fall away, and your original face will be revealed.*

He goes on:

*Cast aside all involvements, cease all affairs and let the myriad things rest. Setting everything aside, do not think of good or evil, right or wrong. Halt the flow of the mind, cease conceptualizing, thinking and observing and give up even the idea of becoming a Buddha. This holds true not only for seated zazen, but for all your daily activities.*

Dogen is telling us how to practice, why we practice. Because it is in your practice that you clarify who you are, what you are. The word *sesshin* means to touch the mind, the mind already here, already at rest. To cease all affairs and cast aside your involvements just means not to feed the casual random thoughts that arise continuously from your own individual karmic conditioning, those grooves of thought that we go to again and again—to unhook from that wheel of *samsara*, not to feed it.

Some of our thought patterns can be very, very addictive, as if our minds were stuck in a section of a recording which plays over and over. We can't repress those thoughts; if we do try to wipe them out, that effort just generates more noise. But we can turn the volume down, let them play in the background like the rumble of distant traffic. It's not that hard to do if the content is random, not sticky for us. But if the voice we hear repeats negative self-talk, like a sore place that we keep rubbing, it can take some firm resolve to not get hooked. Even just to say to ourselves, "Thoughts, thoughts," can help us see that these mind-clouds too are essentially vacant, phantom-like. Or you can say, "Let it be, let it be," because we do have a choice to stay open even as we let all these visitors have their place.

Those difficult thoughts or memories we wish we could let go—our place of rest and peace includes them too. It's just that they don't need to be seated in the front row. We learn we cannot block off parts of ourselves or make ourselves blank to realize our Way. If your practice

is Mu, it is your koan itself which is held close right here, here: in your hands, in your chest, in each step. Just let your Mu be first in your awareness, let it come all the way in, in, even more genuine, more present, and hold onto it, sometimes as if grasping a lifeline in a turbulent ocean, sometimes as if holding something fragile with great care. And you can hold it in the most modest of moments, holding your toothbrush, the doorknob, the mudra as your thumbs gently touch. Let yourself be still, quiet and at rest as you hold it.

Right in this moment, what is here? Let your body open, your mind open. Feel your seat. How are your hands positioned? The raw feeling of touch—who feels that? Who is hearing? Who is seeing? Before even an image or any explanation arises, what is this awareness? And when you look into your own mind, the place where awareness arises, what is there? Can we look into the space between our thoughts, our sensations? To let that space expand, and just look, listen there, rest in the silence between any sounds?

Under words or thoughts, what is it that hears? That sees? Even if we are turbulent, lost, confused or cloudy, just to look, as a child looks, as the child you already are looks, wide open. There is no state that we encounter which is a problem—we have the capacity to just look. Sometimes this is called turning the light around, to look with simplicity at that place of spaciousness, where even the shadow of a thought arises and falls away, where Mu comes up. Just watching, open, and still.

While it is not easy for many of us to trust, just to be here, stay here, is an expression of trust. To sit still is already trusting this moment. It's enough.

Let yourself trust your own path, your own unfolding. You don't even have to trust your teacher, although it helps for sure. Most important is to trust yourself, what you see and what you experience for yourself.

In *Swampland Flowers*, Master Da Hui wrote:

*If you want to cut through, don't entertain doubts about Buddhas and Patriarchs, or doubts about life and death—just always let go and make your heart empty and open. When things come up, deal with them according to the occasion. Be like the stillness of water, like the clarity of a mirror (so that) whether good or bad, beautiful or ugly approach, you don't make the slightest move to avoid them. Then you will truly know that the mindless world of spontaneity is*

*inconceivable.*

Da Hui wrote in such a different time and place; he lived in 12th-century China, and yet his words speak with the authenticity of a genuine practice, from this present moment. Just let go and let your heart be empty and open. Empty means that your heart already has plenty of room, plenty of space, and is able to accept whatever comes. The mindless world of spontaneity is inconceivable.

*A king of Eastern India invited the twenty-seventh patriarch, Prajna Tara, for Buddhist food. The king asked, "Why don't you recite sutras?"*

*Prajna Tara said, "My inhalation does not stay in the world of subject, or in the world of consciousness, my exhalation does not tangle with the world of objects. Still, I am always reciting millions of millions of scrolls of sutras."*

This koan is in a way very straightforward and simple, and yet, like the wind, it enters into every corner of our lives. Breathing in, breathing out. Not tangled up with thinking or with things. We lift our bowls as we chant and our meal is an offering. We are offering ourselves and the energy we bring into this life. When we reach the entrance to the zendo, a pause for just a moment, then our foot is lifting to step in. I always try to enter with my left foot—I have for years. That way, I know I am here, I have shown up in this moment. Then I walk to my seat and make my bows. Our bows are already part of our zazen practice and create our temple. Taking a shower, we are enclosed by waters that have already passed through clouds, rain, streams, processing plants, metal pipes. The residue of our bodies is carried away, and we are baptized yet again. Then we dry off and our towels dry too. Not tangled with subject or object.

To enlighten is to make light, to experience light, and we have a taste of this when we experience even small joys, when we notice and are entered by the red of a flower, the toasty smell of tea, the damp touch of the breeze or the lifting of a foot to enter the zendo. None of us could ever truly describe what this is like to another, we can know it for ourselves alone; it is specific and unique. It is yours. It is mine. Tasting our own practice is like that too. Prajnatara could only taste his own meal and the king could only taste his. Each of us can only lift our own spoon. The gateway to delight in our world is attention, our own attention, our mindfulness of this exact moment of living. Our sense doors receive colors,



Judith Hirt

sounds, sensations, a tapestry of beauty whether or not we notice. For sure, sorrow is real, loss, pain but in those very same moments we receive the rain glistening on a wooden walkway, brightening deep colors, the unexpected scent of toasted rice in our tea, the smooth cool of wood under our feet.

The poet Wordsworth wrote, "With an eye made quiet, by the power of harmony and the deep power of joy, we see into the life of things."

We so often focus on what is hard, what is challenging, that we neglect the beautiful which is already here. I find it helps to notice something of beauty several times a day, whenever I remember. Let yourself stop for just a moment; let that beauty enter you, replace you. This as an important practice, a balancing practice; so many of us tend to the negative. What you make yourself available to can be anything—something from the world of nature, something of the made world. There is no thing that does not have its own innate quality, its balance. Stop, stop, then look. Come to inner quiet and listen, our mind empty of floating ideas. Shut your eyes, and simply feel, let your fingers explore a blanket, or a railing. Just a

minute to be present in the miraculous world we inhabit. This wonder bleeds into our life fabric, unexpected, taking away what we thought we knew as the sound of that bell washes us again.

"The nature of wind is permanent; what is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" Sometimes the force of that wind is so slight, so gentle that there is nothing to notice beyond a soft freshness; sometimes it is steady and resolute; sometimes it is fierce enough to crack branches and sculpt hills, turn over our lives completely. It reaches everywhere; how could we escape it? It animates our smallest actions as well as our moments of courage and commitment. When we realize this wind here, as my own self, of course it permeates everywhere! Priest Pao-Che found himself holding a fan, so he used it. You open your computer and answer an email, your daughter hands you a book and you read to her, and you answer the barista, "I'd like a latte." And thank you. Thank you. When our life, our entire life, is all practice, the wind is blowing through you and through me and there is no thing that is not a sutra.

Together with all beings we realize the Way. ☸





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