

► **TO CHERISH ALL LIFE** With the emphasis on “all,” can we exist on earth without killing?

OOPS! What the *Blue Cliff Record* and Roshi Kjolhede have to say about mistakes

FIDGETS, HALTER TOPS, AND SNARK: how a dharma superiority complex develops





Autumn 2018 | VOLUME XL, NUMBER THREE

TO THEME OR NOT to theme? For more than a decade, each issue of *Zen Bow* has had a specific theme, and submissions have accordingly been solicited for specific topics. The first two issues of the redesigned *Zen Bow* were also themed: “Starting Over” and “Memorializing Tangen Harada Roshi.”

Meanwhile, creativity in the Sangha continues to bubble up and ideas keep coming our way. The über-theme of *Zen Bow* is to inspire Zen practice, on and off the mat—but that is wide-open territory! So this issue of *Zen Bow* reflects an array of ideas and experiences. A potpourri? A smörgåsbord? Perhaps a cornucopia, given the season.

The upshot is this: keep the ideas coming. Your letters, articles, recommendations, even random thoughts are most welcome here. Think of these themeless issues not as lacking something, but rather as providing more: more opportunity for diverse perspectives, offbeat ideas, and increased engagement with the Zen Center.

With gratitude,
CHRIS PULLEYN, *Editor*

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All readers are encouraged to submit essays and images at any time and on any topic related to Zen practice. Articles may be of any length. Suggestions for articles and artwork are also welcome, as are “found objects” such as quotations, haiku, and/or excerpts from articles in other publications. Submission guidelines may be found on the *Zen Bow* page of the Center’s website: www.rzc.org/library/zen-bow. For any and all questions and suggestions, please email Chris Pulleyn at zenbow@rzc.org.

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ON THE COVER

PHOTO BY Daryl Wakeley | October 5, 2015: Commonwealth Avenue CSX railroad pedestrian underpass; Alexandria, Virginia; latitude: 38° 48' 28.23" N, longitude: 77° 3' 38.33" W.



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Soundings

MEMORIES OF CYNTHIA

CYNTHIA SEEFELD SERVED for 17 years as a Center staff member. When I began to practice and first came to the Center, Cynthia was already a fixture on staff and the Head of Housekeeping. At a Zen Center, it is often obvious how much we have to learn from a teacher or from the Head of Zendo. But the moment-to-moment practice that is so much a part of Zen training can only be absorbed from the seasoned practitioners who surround and supervise our work.

As a newbie, I was regularly assigned to housekeeping whenever I came around to volunteer. Cynthia, then, was in many ways my introduction to the Center—at least to the work-practice side of it—and has been, from that time to this, a continual source of inspiration for my life and my practice. It was not only her dedication and devotion, but the contagious joy she seemed to find in everything around her, her warm heart, and her wonderful sense of humor, that made me know that Zen training was something I wished to pursue.

As Head Housekeeper, Cynthia had a special way of training us beginners to do the many cleaning and caretaking jobs required at the Center, most of which might seem humdrum or routine at first glance. It is a Zen truism that if you are bored, it means you are not paying attention, and Cynthia, not only through her creative instructions, but through her wholly engaged body-language, had a way of making each small job seem the most important and interesting thing in the world. The zendo mats were not only to be brushed and straightened, but to be gently smoothed by hand until the surface shone like ice. The round cushions were to be plumped until they stood up straight like mushrooms, taller than they were wide, each placed just so and matching all the others in the room. (Occasionally there would be an old one, with the kapok crushed to all but dust, that simply couldn't be coaxed to the requisite height, and then we could only do our best and offer it our sympathies.)



▲ One of the many colorful rakusus that Cynthia made for Buddha's Birthday celebrations.

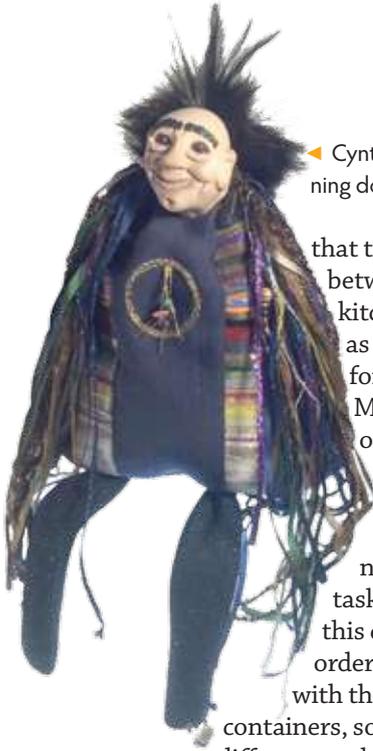
▼ Cynthia Seefeld, in the photo that she requested for her memorial service.



Cynthia had a special gift for altar and flower arrangements, and each altar prepared for each occasion was an artistic adventure of form, texture, and especially color. In my first summer at Chapin Mill, one of my assignments was to do the altar flower arrangements—something about which I hadn't a clue. Cynthia had already trained me to clean the incense pots—a somewhat tricky job which she had introduced with many a tale of students whom the task had reduced to tears of frustration. The ash was to be tamped down to the firmness of room-temperature butter. If you stuck in the stick of incense and the ash felt like refrigerated butter, that was too hard, but if it fell apart like flour, that was too soft. As I struggled with the recalcitrant ashes, she repeatedly assured me that I was a “natural” (not true), and insisted that if I were not crying yet, I was doing brilliantly. Now that I had been assigned to do the flowers as well, she produced for me a little hand-drawn booklet that I could take out to Chapin Mill for reference. It showed the flowers and their moods at different times of the day; I remember their reaction to the fixative being added to the water—standing up quite straight and a bit surprised!

By the time I came onto staff full-time, Cynthia had moved from the housekeeping department to the kitchen, and so had I. There she would regularly hone our mindfulness, calling our attention to the beauty of the food we were working with: “Look at that orange!” “Oh, just look at the way that red and green go together!” She could arrange the most striking salads. Just as important were the sudden flashes of humor that could buoy us through the toughest kitchen mornings. If you have ever struggled with organizing a Tupperware cupboard at home you might begin to understand the challenge of managing a Tupperware collection for 20 people ▶

“WHILE I THOUGHT *that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die.*” —LEONARDO DA VINCI



◀ Cynthia's award-winning doll of Roshi.

that travels between two kitchens as well as back and forth to Chapin Mill for various occasions. Cynthia took on as her own the never-ending task of keeping this collection in order, stacking lids with their matching containers, sorting subtly different yoghurt pots, isolating unmatched tops until their bottoms re-appeared. ("But where do they go?" I asked her, to which she replied, "Don't think that way or you'll go mad.") One day, on her knees as she sorted through the cupboard in the main kitchen, she looked up at me somewhat wistfully and remarked, "When I die, just bury me in Tupperware."

Though she hadn't much money, Cynthia loved to make or buy small gifts for people at the Center and give them anonymously (though we came to recognize her style in time). As for the many secret favors and random acts of kindness that Cynthia performed through the years, I can't tell you about them, as they have never been discovered! When she heard that my husband was having some pain in his knees and ankles when he sat, she personally made for him a special sitting mat with a foam core. It is wonderful, as is the special hand support she made for me. Cynthia devised and created the colorful elephant rakus that are given each year to selected Center volunteers to wear on Buddha's birthday. It is a wonderful way to express appreciation, and is just one more example of the way that Cynthia always made each of us feel appreciated and cared for. Cynthia, I hope we have been able to do the same for you. Thank you for all the gifts you gave us, and may the elephants all bow down to you! —KATHRYN ARGETSINGER

NOTE: This memoir was written on the occasion of Cynthia Seefeld's retirement from staff in 2014. She died on August 4, 2018.

ALL THINGS ARE PROCESS

THE ENTIRE EVOLUTION of science would suggest that the best grammar for thinking about the world is that of change, not of permanence. Not of being, but of becoming.

We can think of the world as made up of *things*. Of *substances*. Of *entities*, of something that *is*. Or we can think of it as made up of *events*. Of *happenings*, of *processes*. Of something that occurs. Something that does not last, and that undergoes continual transformation, that is not permanent in time....

Thinking of the world as a collection of events, of processes, is the way that allows us to better grasp, comprehend, and describe it. It is the only way that is compatible with relativity. The world is not a collection of things, it is a collection of events.

The difference between *things* and

ONLY BREATH

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu Buddhist, Sufi, or Zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not from the East or the West, not out of the ocean or up

from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not composed of elements at all. I do not exist,

am not an entity in this world or in the next, did not descend from Adam and Eve or any

THE VALUE OF THE STORM

TO GET THE VALUE of a storm we must be out a long time and travel far in it, so that it may fairly penetrate our skin and we be as it were turned inside out to it, and there be no part in us but is wet or weatherbeaten.

Thoreau

IN ONE HEAVY thunder-shower the lightning struck a large pitch pine across the pond, making a very conspicuous and perfectly regular spiral groove from top to bottom, an inch or more deep, and four or five inches wide, as you would groove a walking-stick. I passed it again the other day, and was struck with awe on looking up and beholding that mark, now more distinct than ever, where a terrific and resistless bolt came down out of the harmless sky eight years ago.

Thoreau

events is that things persist in time; events have a limited duration. A stone is a prototypical "thing": we can ask ourselves where it will be tomorrow. Conversely, a kiss is an "event." It makes no sense to ask where the kiss will be tomorrow. The world is made up of networks of kisses, not of stones....

We therefore describe the world as it happens, not as it is. Newton's mechanics, Maxwell's equations, quantum mechanics, and so on, tell us how *events happen*, not how *things are*. We understand biology by studying how living beings *evolve* and *live*. We understand psychology (a little, not much) by studying how we interact with each other, how we think.... We understand the world in its becoming, not in its being.

"Things" in themselves are only events that for a while are monotonous. —CARLO ROVELLI, *The Order of Time*

origin story. My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless. Neither body or soul.

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two worlds as one and that one call to and know,

first, last, outer, inner, only that breath breathing human being.

—RUMI

NO UMBRELLA, getting soaked, I'll just use the rain as my raincoat.

Daitō

LIGHTNING FLIES, thunder rolls, mountains crumble, rocks split.

A Zen Grove

NOTE: Passages and responses are arranged in this order:

1	2
3	4

—from *Zen Traces: Exploring American Zen with Twain and Thoreau*, by Kenneth Kraft

THE EIGHT WINDS

THE ROOT OF SUFFERING is desire, yet there isn't a one of us who doesn't prefer some outcomes over others. The Eight Winds is a list of experiences that are most likely to destabilize the mind. But who among us wouldn't prefer, deep down, gain over loss, fame over disrepute, praise over censure, and pleasure over displeasure (the eight winds)? And in the chant "Affirming Faith and Mind," we are admonished to have no preferences. Yeah, right!

The key here is the nature of our relationship to outcomes. Of course we all have our desired outcomes, and that itself does not cause problems, but do we cling to them? Do we need those outcomes to be realized for us so that we, ourselves, can feel whole? If so, we are vulnerable to experiences over which generally we have little control. When things are good, we feel good; when things are bad, we feel bad. We live riding a roller coaster within us controlled by the external, making for one bumpy ride! The wise proverb, "Beware the man coming to do you good," means that most of those well-meaning people are helping primarily so *they* can feel good.

I suppose one way to think of the goal of Zen practice is to realize a sense of inner wholeness that is not dependent on what happens to us. In practice, we learn that to cling to an outcome is actually a roadblock. For me, this wisdom has limitless implications and has had a profound

impact on how I choose to live.

For years, I have been deeply engaged with environmental work, primarily to help initiate meaningful climate mitigation. Etched in my brain are images of the unprecedented and unimaginable human suffering that climate change wreaks—not just in the future, but now. I have worked extensively with environmental activists nationally on dozens of projects. Over and over I ask myself the question, "Why is it that nothing has changed?" Or, said in another way, "Why is it that so many highly motivated and capable people have together utterly failed?"

The standard answer to this is that the immense power of what we are up against—politicians, oil companies, and the huge segment of the population that is ignorant and disengaged—is just too big. Or that humans are just hard-wired to value the present and near-term over the long term. Yes, perhaps. But to think of ourselves as victims of immensely powerful forces is disempowering. Simply, I feel I am up against too much and I am too small, so there is nothing meaningful for me to do. This attitude comes, at a deep level, from our need to have the world change for the better so that we can feel better. It seems to me that the vast majority of environmentalists fall into this all-too-human trap, and just as in practice, it is the most important, perhaps the only, roadblock to effecting change. Not

samadhi \sə-'mä-dē\ n [Sanskrit *saṃ* 'together' + *a* 'toward' + *dhā* 'get, hold'] 1: a state of meditative absorption, a collection and unification of the mind

BUDDHIST AND HINDU literature includes descriptions of various samadhis, some deeper and more profound than others, but all are characterized by one-pointed concentration and the fading or complete disappearance of the sense of self and other. The Japanese Zen master Dogen famously said, "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things." In other words, it is when the mind has completely settled that insight into our True Nature may arise.

This cultivation of focused concentration is arguably neglected in the current secular craze for mindfulness. Ideally, mindfulness (awareness of what the mind is doing) works in tandem with deepening concentration, so that when the mind strays into the stream of thoughts, we notice at once and are able to renew our focus. The two aspects work together, like the wings of a bird, and correspond to the seventh and eighth steps on the Buddha's Eightfold Path: Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.— JOHN PULLEYN

▼ Wood and stone sculpture by Andy Stern.



to mention the reason for our collective failure. As a disempowered victim, how can one be effective? If I need the CEO of Exxon to agree with me so that God can once again be in his heaven and so I will feel whole, not only won't I get very far, but I will feel defeated and hopeless.

It's the same with practicing medicine. There isn't a doctor in the world who doesn't want their sick patient to get better. But the results of clinging to that preference, of needing the patient to feel better so the doctor can feel competent, that he is doing good, and that he can feel an inner wholeness, are likely to have important negative impacts on the healing.

What happens if the patient does not get better or it takes a very long time for any improvement to occur? The doctor and patient are both likely to feel discouraged or even hopeless. That will lead to some degree of disengagement at the precise time when a closer, more supportive relationship to the patient is called for. And even for the patient who does get better, there are negatives. The doctor, now feeling fulfilled and complete, may pay less careful attention to what is happening, and become intolerant of any suggestion of setbacks. The patient may feel unconsciously that he or she *must* report progress to the doctor, even if that is not quite the truth.

I have been a woodworker for many years, spending hours every day in my workshop (more time than I sit!). Initially I made reproduction fine furniture, then original design contemporary furniture, and, in recent years, wood sculpture, no longer limited by any concern about practical function. I hesitate to call myself an artist, as I hold artists in the highest regard, but bit by bit I am evolving into one. For art, the outcome—the final version of the sculpture or painting or musical composition—is unknown when the work begins. If there is too much focus on the final work, the art generally is less alive and vibrant. The final version is intimately informed by the process as the work unfolds: the evolution of the artist at work, her level of courage in unleashing forces that can't otherwise be really understood, and the nature and limitations of the material. This is exactly why art, at the highest level, has the potential to touch us deeply and change our relationship to the world *forever*.



MY LEGS KEEP falling asleep when I sit. Is there anything that can I do to help with that?

THE TECHNICAL reason why legs—or a leg, or a foot—fall asleep is pressure on the sciatic nerve. This is a very common problem, especially in the beginning of practice when you are still experimenting with the best way to sit.

If a leg falls asleep during a round, the best thing to do is stay seated when the round is over; that is, don't try to get up for kinhin and risk a fall. Remain facing the wall until your leg tingles and comes back to life and your foot can move up and down. Normal feeling should come back within a few minutes, and then you can join the kinhin line.

Here are a few tips for keeping your legs awake:

–If your hips are tight when you sit cross-legged, you may need a cushion with more height. Experiment with support cushions of different thicknesses until you find a height that works for you.

–Sit on the front third of the cushion instead of the middle. By doing this, you avoid sinking into a dip in the middle of the cushion. It tilts your pelvis forward just the right amount and relieves the pressure on your sciatic nerve.

–Make sure that you're not slouching or rounding your lower back. These postures expose the sciatic nerve and put pressure directly on it.

–Check to be sure there is no pressure against the outside of your knees against the mat. A soft support under that area

should relieve any pressure.

Occasionally one foot alone will fall asleep in a half- or full-lotus posture. For Westerners, these positions are not always easy to get into and sometimes your limbs are being forced beyond their flexibility. That being said, with time your body will adjust to these sitting postures and your legs may stop falling asleep, but it is worth spending the time to get the position right initially to avoid injury and discouragement.

You may find some cushions too hard and others too soft. Either density can increase nerve pressure. Like Goldilocks, you will have to try different cushions until you find the one that's just right. If you're at RZC, ask someone to show you the wide array of custom cushions that members use. Often an inflatable round cushion will work best, and you can experiment until you find the right amount of air to use.

If you're experiencing persistent numbness, discomfort, and even weakness in spite of trying the above suggestions, then a chair may help, with a gel, or better yet, an air cushion on the seat. (The best brand is the Roho cushion: Mosaic Roho MOSAIC1818C 18×18 Seating and Positioning Cushion w/Standard Cover, available from Amazon.)

Finally, there is a lot you can do on your own to ameliorate this problem, but if numbness and lack of motion persist for round after round, seek medical attention. Undue pressure on your sciatic nerve could lead to permanent nerve changes.—
ERYL KUBICKA

In furniture making, the outcome is set at the beginning, and the measure of success is simply how close to that outcome is the final work. But in the sculpture I make now, I do not have any picture in my mind of a final outcome. This requires huge trust in the process, in my intuition, courage around the unknowns, and faith in the value of the work. I can now generally view “mistakes” as forward progress. Making sculpture calls on far deeper currents in me, from which I learn daily.

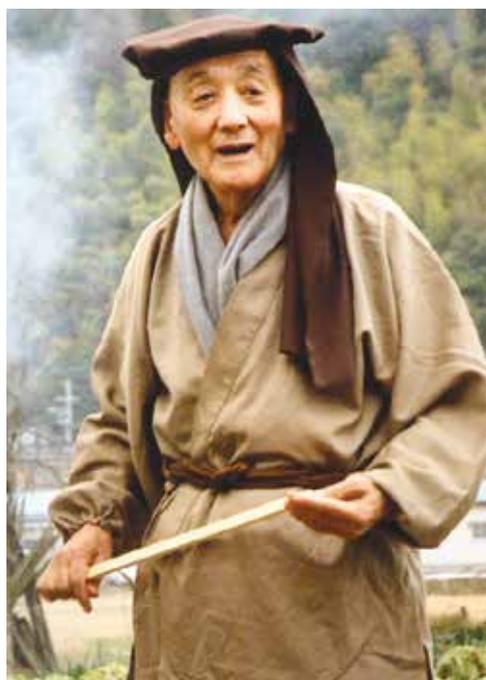
The devilish question is how do we know to what extent what we do and how

we live is driven by our personal need to feel better, our “endless blind passions”? Few of us would pass the test of the Eight Winds, which applies to a very advanced level of development. To know this about ourselves is so important for realizing true inner wholeness and fulfillment in the midst of the inevitable ups and downs and complexities of life. It is an elusive aspect of self-knowledge since, nearly always, awareness of our attachment to the Eight Winds is unconscious. And perhaps the ultimate challenge is that feeling good...feels good!—ANDY STERN

THE OLD TEA ROOM

IT IS COMMON for Zen practitioners to place their teacher on a pedestal so high as to make it impossible to have an eye-to-eye meeting. This apotheosis of the teacher presents the same barrier to realization as setting up enlightenment as a grandiose ideal. It is useful at a certain stage but needs to be seen through.

For me, the tea room was as important a learning situation as the dokusan room. It



is where I got to know Tange Harada Rōshi as a simple, playful human being.

I spent much of the period 1981–1982 at Bukkokuji, having returned two years after my first sesshin with Rōshi-sama in 1979. At the time there were only seven or eight of us living together with Rōshi-sama, who, at the time, we all called Hojo-san (temple head). In fact it was my friend Karin and I, the only two foreigners at Bukkokuji, who began to call him Rōshi-sama (an honorific).

In those days we had tea twice a day with Rōshi-sama, after samu (work period), in the eight-tatami tea room just off the genkan (entrance hall), approximately where the upper kitchen is today. He would sit at the head of the table with the genkan to his left and peel and slice apples and pears which he would distribute along with cakes and cookies and all manner of Japanese treats. The atmosphere was always light and social around the table.

Rōshi-sama told stories ranging from tales of his past as a student of Daiun Harada Rōshi, to jokes, to stories of World War II and his time as a kamikaze pilot. Occasionally tea would last for an hour or more. If it looked like tea-time was about to end, we might stretch it out by asking a leading question.

One day Rōshi-sama tossed a piece of anpan (a sweet bean-filled cake) into the genkan for Koro, the black-and-white temple dog who was standing at the foot of the step. The anpan caromed off the door frame and landed in the back of the genkan by the line of shoes and sandals where Koro lost track of it. We could see it but he couldn't. We were all encouraging him to look behind for the anpan. "Over there Koro." "Turn around." He just got more and more excited without understanding. Finally, Rōshi-sama balled up a cake wrapper and threw it at the anpan. Koro went for the wrapper and found the cake.

Sometimes when he was feeling particularly voluble and had more stories to tell, he would jump up and run into the hondo (Buddha hall) with his almost girlish, sliding gait and fetch a new supply of fruit and cakes from the altar, which, upon his return, he would produce, one by one, like a magician, from the sleeves of his kesa. He would pull a pear from his sleeve and hold it up before the group with an expression of wonder, and exclaim excitedly, "Nashi!" (which means both "pear" and "nothing" in Japanese).

If by chance there were an odd bean cake or cookie left over, we would do Jan-ken-pon (rock, paper, scissors) to determine who would get it. The competition across the table was fierce. No one wanted to be eliminated. In the end the winner would make a great show of dividing the morsel into tiny portions to distribute round the table.

And the talk was very free. We were like a family hanging out with a wise old uncle, though at the time Rōshi-sama was only 57 years old.

One day Owaki-san farted loudly on entering the tea room and, blushing, meekly apologized. Rōshi-sama, without hesitation, responded from the other end of the table, "Ii, oto, ii oto!" ("Good sound!")

Someone complained that the level of water in the toilet was so high that the splash-back would hit them in the back-

side. Rōshi-sama said the solution was to move like a dive bomber across the hole so you would be out of the way when the splash came. He jumped up from his seat, squatted, and demonstrated the move.

More tea room stories: One winter day, the monks, having returned from takuhatsu, were grouching in the tea room about the cold. Rōshi-sama got up quietly and stepped out of the tea room and crossed the genkan. He returned, sat down at the head of the table and placed a large snowball on top of his head. He sat there quietly for a few moments, the snowball beginning to melt, and then said, in English, "Most warm."

And it was in the tea room that winter that Rōshi-sama told us of the plane that had crashed the day before into the Potomac, and of the Bodhisattva who had passed the rescue harness to one after another of the passengers struggling in the icy water, until finally he went under.

And it was in the tea room, alone together by the kerosene heater after evening zazen, that I learned that Rōshi-sama didn't like Picasso's painting, and that we shared a love for Tolstoy. And that our favorite scene in Anna Karenina was of Levin mowing with the peasants.

One last memory of the old tea room. Toya is a day of celebration that falls on the winter solstice, when everyone in the monastery cooks up something special to be eaten by the group in the evening, and during which the monks can do whatever they want. We had a great party in the bedroom beneath the zendo, eating and joking, drinking sake and whiskey, smoking cigarettes until late at night. I played a tune on the fiddle, Rōshi-sama sang a drinking song. Neither Rōshi-sama nor I drank any alcohol and we both left a little early.

A few days later I asked Rōshi-sama why fish and meat were sometimes served at meals at Bukkokuji despite the fact that he agreed that Buddhists should be vegetarian. He said that we just receive whatever is given without question, and use it gratefully. I pressed him, asking, "Then why didn't you drink the whiskey at Toya which was also given to the temple?"

He put his hand in front of his face like a geisha coyly hiding behind her fan and replied, "Natural desire." This was an important moment for me.—JOHN HERRMANN, Asheville, NC

I RESOLVE NOT TO KILL

A CALL TO ARMS



CONTINUED MASS SHOOTINGS and other ghastly events in recent history inspire reflection upon the First Grave Precept (*I resolve not to kill, but to cherish all life*). While this may

sound like the easiest of all precepts to follow, it may actually be the most difficult, and it tests whether we practice Buddhism as a hobby or a religion.

Roshi Kapleau explains in *To Cherish All Life* that *ahimsa* (harmlessness) has a religious rather than a moral or metaphysical basis because it is grounded in our Buddha-nature. “It is in this

Buddha-nature that all existences, animate *and inanimate*, are unified and harmonized” (emphasis added). Thus, to willfully take life “means to disrupt and destroy this inherent wholeness and to blunt feelings of reverence and compassion arising from our Buddha-mind.”

It is clear that, in Roshi’s view, the First Precept covers not only human and non-human animals,

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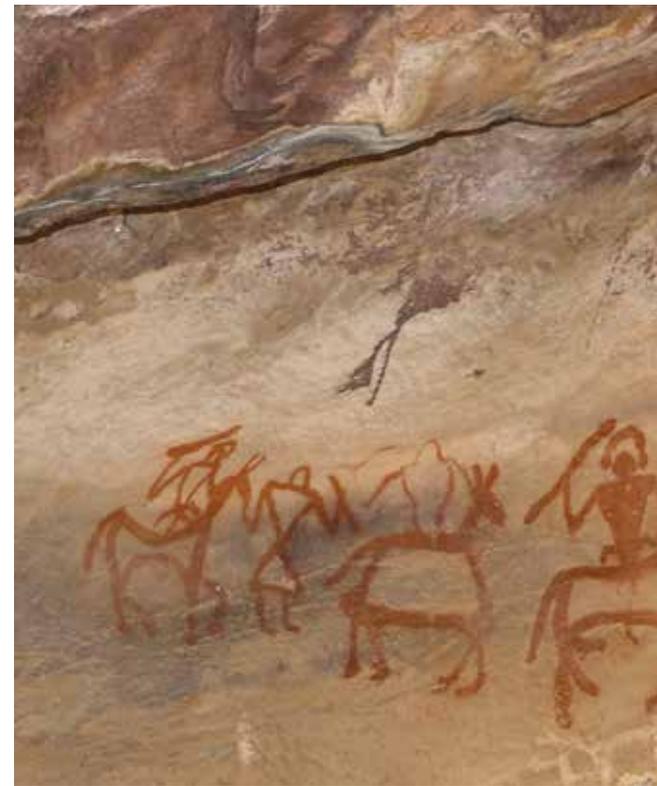
WIKICOMMONS

plants, and viruses, but also “the Earth where we stand” and the universe as a whole. Existence is the focus, not a particular arrangement of molecules. This view exceeds even the custom of some Buddhists to avoid stepping on small insects and the Jains’ refusal to kill microorganisms, which leads to the practice of filtering water to save the tiniest beings. To what extent are we willing to engage in ahimsa in our modern, harried lives? How can we fully respect the inherent wholeness of all existence? I see strict adherence to the First Precept as a figurative call to arms that requires understanding, commitment, dedication, and courage.

A SCRUPULOUS ADHERENCE to non-violence is not the exclusive province of Jains and some Buddhists. Before the U.S. had a standing army, Quakers opposed the use of arms not just for militia service, but for any violent purpose whatsoever. Quaker frontiersmen were forbidden to use arms to defend their families, even though “[i]n such circumstances the temptation to seize a hunting rifle or knife in self-defense... must sometimes have been almost overwhelming.”^[1] This spirit of self-sacrifice is taken to an extreme in the famous story where the Buddha offers his life to a tigress so that her cubs may survive. Parallel to Roshi Kapleau’s exposition, the Torah teaches that only when there is a true state of “wholeness,” meaning that everything is “complete,” does true peace reign. The directly-related Arabic greeting *Salaam* encapsulates the same idea.

The self-immolation of Buddhist monks in Vietnam in 1963 is another example of this extreme dedication, expressing a willingness to accept rather than inflict suffering. It appears that, at least in Mahayana Buddhism, the objective is to *minimize* suffering in a world where much suffering is inevitable. The Vietnamese Buddhist monks taught us, however, that violence may befall us whenever we oppose violence. The killing of students at Kent State University demonstrating against the war in 1970 reflected that reality. Are we willing to face white supremacists and neo-Nazis in our streets? Can we muster the courage to express dissenting points of view under threat of losing a job?

I never saw Roshi Kapleau watching for small insects when we walked together during his time in Hollywood, or filter his water to avoid killing microorganisms. I do remember that he reluctantly accepted the need to fumigate the house where he had retired, which contained a zendo. (Tropical



cockroaches can be quite disturbing when one is perched on a zabuton.) But his middle way accorded with the mainstream Buddhist principle that we are responsible for Mother Earth and must protect the environment as part of our ahimsa practice, as far as is practicable.

Leaving aside the complex matter of what life is exactly, when it begins, and the agonizing issue of abortion, we can still recognize a point made by Lewis Thomas in his acclaimed work *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (1974): the best way to describe our planet is in terms of a living organism. From this viewpoint, it is easy to see that caring for “this earth where we stand[,] the pure lotus land,” is practicing ahimsa too. Are we disposed to catch flying cockroaches inside our living rooms instead of crushing them? Are we willing to demonstrate on the streets against depredations of our environment? How about putting some time into organizing opposition to members of Congress who voted for the Keystone XL pipeline or drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

NOT KILLING IN GENERAL, and protecting the environment in particular, are clearly worthy goals. How can we achieve them? Roshi Kapleau writes that deliberately taking life by shooting, strangling, knifing, drowning, crushing, poisoning, burning, or electrocuting another human or non-human animal, or by purposefully inflicting pain on them, are not the only ways to violate the First Precept. To *cause* another to commit these acts is also a violation. Therefore, Roshi writes, to eat an animal makes one an accessory after the fact to its slaughter, although different considerations determine the degree of culpability for taking life, according to Mahayana Buddhist

[1] E.g., P. Brock, *Pacifism in the United States*, 359 (1968).



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WIKICOMMONS

teaching. Do we practice ahimsa when we abide the acts of others who commit the unskillful acts?

If we didn't eat animals, they wouldn't be killed or tortured. If we didn't consume eggs and dairy products, chickens and cows wouldn't suffer from overcrowding, imprisonment, and other abuses. To avoid that is relatively easy, although indoctrination by the meat, poultry and dairy industries may make it seem like we can't live or enjoy good health without their products. It may be that some people require them, but probably not too many.

It is a fact that organic life in our planet evolved in such a way that all living things must eat other living things. We cannot perform photosynthesis. We could subsist on plants and those life forms which are neither plant nor animal: fungi and cyanobacteria such as blue-green algae that can be considered a complete food. Even plants, however, have been found lately to behave in some ways as sentient beings. How many would be willing to subsist on manufactured Soylent-type foods made from Protista and Monera? Still, these would be living organisms, and consuming them would offend the Jains as well as violating the strict version of ahimsa. Besides changing our eating and consumption habits in order to protect animals and the environment, are we willing to stop wearing leather shoes and belts?

BUT EVEN WHERE IT'S CLEAR that killing is taking or has taken place and we have not cherished even human life, all so-called religions of peace (the Abrahamic religions) and yes, Buddhism, have descended to hellish levels. "You don't normally associate Buddhism with violence, but time and again we hear that it is Buddhist monks who are leading the attacks against the churches [in Sri Lanka]. And our partners have found the monks

[2] "Christians Facing Violent Persecution in Buddhist Sri Lanka," CBN News, 18 April 2016, www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2016/april/christians-facing-violent-persecution-in-buddhist-sri-lanka

[3] "'It only takes one terrorist': the Buddhist monk who reviles Myanmar's Muslims," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2017, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/12/only-takes-one-terrorist-buddhist-monk-reviles-myanmar-muslims-rohingya-refugees-ashin-wirathu

[4] "Myanmar government says case against Reuters journalists can proceed," Reuters, 18 December 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-journalists/myanmar-government-says-case-against-reuters-journalists-can-proceed-idUSKBN1EC04

[5] "Why Aung San Suu Kyi isn't protecting the Rohingya in Burma," *The Washington Post*, 15 September 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/why-aung-san-suu-kyi-isnt-protecting-the-rohingya-in-burma/2017/09/15/c88b10fa-9900-11e7-87fc-c3f7ee4035c9_story.html?utm_term=.16a451e195b4

are being aided by pro-Buddhist authorities," said Paul Robinson, chief executive at Release International, "a ministry that exposes persecution of Christians," in a 2016 interview. [2]

Consider also Ashin Wirathu, one of the most powerful monks in Myanmar, who was branded the "Face of Buddhist Terror" by *Time* magazine. The *Guardian* reported that his visitors are received in Wirathu's own compound within the Masoeyein monastery in Mandalay by a wall of bloody and gruesome photographs showing machete-inflicted head wounds and severed limbs, disfigured faces and slashed bodies, which Wirathu claims, "without the slightest evidence," are the images of Buddhists who were attacked by Muslims. [3] The evidence actually shows that Wirathu, the Myanmar military, and lay "Buddhist" extremists have engaged for years now in a genocide against the Rohingya Muslims, comparable to Pol Pot's, Hitler's and Stalin's atrocities. Ironically, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel peace prize winner and the darling of Buddhists and peaceniks worldwide while she was under house arrest in the days of military rule, has refused to take action to stop horrendous spasms of violence against the Muslim minority, and even approved the prosecution of journalists who reported on the Buddhist abuses. [4] Suu Kyi apparently forgot she may owe her life to a worldwide campaign in the press during the years when the ruling junta oppressed her. "Suu Kyi—the country's de facto leader, though not its official president—has stood by and watched the slaughter and flight of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Rohingya." [5]

Isn't it complicity to remain silent in the face of these atrocities committed in the name of Buddhism? Doesn't our silence or inaction contribute to the impunity of the military leaders of Myanmar? Shouldn't we somehow join those who are protesting? Does the wholeness recede with the cultural and geographical distances?

LESS THAN A CENTURY AGO, Zen priests and other religious Japanese officials enabled and justified the brutality of the empire's conduct during World War II. In his 1997 book *Zen at War*, Brian Daizen Victoria offers a "compelling history of the contradictory, often militaristic, role of Zen Buddhism..., meticulously document[ing] the close and previously unknown support of a supposedly peaceful religion for Japanese militarism throughout World War II. Drawing on the writings and speeches of leading Zen masters and scholars, Brian Victoria shows that Zen served

as a powerful foundation for the fanatical and suicidal spirit displayed by the imperial Japanese military.”^[6] The author also shows how Zen was used to justify racism, fascism, and genocide. Zen masters contributing to the justifications include some in our own lineage. This shows how tempting it is, even for otherwise enlightened leaders, to be sucked in by prevailing notions of racial or national superiority. Doesn’t that ring a bell with respect to MAGA, the myth of American exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, and their many ramifications in foreign policy, which were and are justified by religious leaders quoting scripture?

So it is legitimate to ask, why do religions always find ways to justify violence despite preaching love and peace? Alan Strathern of Oxford University put it this way:

[H]owever any religion starts out, sooner or later it enters into a Faustian pact with state power... The result can seem ironic. If you have a strong sense of the overriding moral superiority of your worldview, then the need to protect and advance it can seem the most important duty of all... Christian crusaders, Islamist militants, or the leaders of “freedom-loving nations,” all justify what they see as necessary violence in the name of a higher good. Buddhist rulers and monks have been no exception.^[7]

No wonder that “Buddhist monks have looked to kings, the ultimate wielders of violence, for the support, patronage and order that only they could provide. Kings looked to monks to provide the popular legitimacy that only such a high moral vision can confer.”^[8]

WHEN WE TOLERATE the existence of laws that allow the purchase and possession of weapons of war, designed for mass killings, are we not engaged in an implicit Faustian pact with state power? When we stay silent regarding the genocide perpetrated by other so-called Buddhists, aren’t we disrupting and destroying the inherent wholeness and blunting feelings of reverence and compassion arising from our Buddha-mind? When we tacitly accept that American lives are worth more than others, and justify as “collateral damage” the murder of innocents by remotely-controlled drones, where is our commitment to ahimsa?

Viewed in historical context, the ethnic cleansing of Native American tribes, the more recent,

[6] *Zen at War* book review, Good Reads, www.goodreads.com/book/show/238872.Zen_at_War

[7] “Why are Buddhist monks attacking Muslims?” BBC News, 02 May 2013, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22356306.

[8] Op. cit.

recurring massacres in our country, the Buddhist-on-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka, the ongoing genocide in Myanmar, and innumerable insults on the environment inflicted by the current administration, among other things, make it incumbent upon us to look into the deep meaning of the First Precept and its relation to the Three Treasures. To “resolve, with all beings, to understand the Great Way whereby the Buddha seed may forever thrive” implies that we should see how our actions or inaction tend to reduce or increase suffering on “this Earth where we stand” and to defend the Earth itself. To “resolve, with all beings, to enter deeply into the sutra treasure whereby our wisdom may grow as vast as the ocean” demands that we try to better understand the infinite network of connections that make up this world and affect the lives of all sentient beings. To “resolve to live in harmony” with all these sentient beings by taking refuge in Sangha suggests that collective measures are necessary. These notions conjure one word that may be repellent to some: politics.

I understand that the mission of the Rochester Zen Center and other Buddhist organizations does not include advocating for political causes, nor do I suggest that it should. Each Sangha member can look for ways of participating in the political process if so inclined. To those who say “I’m not interested in politics,” I say politics is interested in you, and you are involved in it whether you want to be or not. If you have a child in school, or just care for children, as you surely do, then you may want to do something to help prevent another tragedy like the ones at Columbine, Sandy Hook and Parkland. And you may want to do something to help stop the genocide in Myanmar, which is giving Buddhism a bad name, although that should be the least of our concerns. As Robert Aiken Roshi concluded as far back as 1984 in his book *The Mind of Clover, Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics*, “We have reached the place in international affairs, and in local affairs too, where it is altogether absurd to insist, as some of my Buddhist friends still do, that the religious person does not get involved in politics.” Remember the famous dictum, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good [people] do nothing,” often attributed to the conservative philosopher Edmund Burke, who wrote much about the importance of religion in moral life.

How to engage in this challenging task is up to each of us. I personally don’t know if I can “not kill.” But I hear a figurative call to take up pacifist arms: do good, avoid evil, liberate all sentient beings. ///



WIKICOMMONS



PLEIN-AIR YOGA, sometime in the Sixties, with the late Ruth Sandberg. Ruth was highly influential on the Center in its early days, not just with her yoga instruction, from which Roshni Kapleau benefited greatly, but also for

her aesthetic advice when 7 Arnold Park was being rebuilt after the fire. Accompanying her on the grass (at Chapin Mill? the Gratwick Place?) are, from left: Alan (Dharman) Stortz,

Cindy Walker, the late Delancey (Maitrayi) Kapleau, Chuck Wright, Ted Shoemaker, Ruth Sandberg, (in rear) Julia McCorkle, Jeff Volk, and unknown. And the ears? Perhaps a demonstration of a yoga pressure point.



ZEN

& THE ART of

SNOOB
BEERY



I ENTERED THE ZENDO FOR

the first time, clad in my well-made brown sitting robe with my rakusu hanging proudly around my neck, and my first thought was, “Oh my God!” I had recently moved to a new



town and, making use of Google, I had discovered the existence of a Zen group there. This was my first sitting with this group, and I was appalled by what I saw.

Not a sitting robe in sight, but lots of shorts, skirts, brightly patterned T-shirts, halter tops, and even a Hawaiian shirt. Paraphrasing the Wizard of Oz, I said to myself, “Dorothy, you are not in Rochester anymore.”

THERE WERE MORE SURPRISES to come. When zazen was about to begin, I realized that I was the only person in the zendo sitting in half-lotus. Everyone else was sitting in Burmese posture, or in seiza on a large pile of cushions (a pile of the size that I used when I first began doing zazen), or in a chair. In fact, there were lots of people much younger than I sitting on chairs, and one of them was the jikijitsu, the person timing the rounds.

S/he had obviously not been instructed in how to strike the inkin bell properly, because it did not give off the lovely, reverberating sound that can be obtained by striking the bell on the side of its lip, rather than on top of it. The person playing the han had also obviously received little or no training, because s/he was not hitting the wooden board in the hole in its middle, and the accelerandos were uneven and temporally separated from the sequences of slower strikes.

While the han was being played, the jikijitsu got up to do three prostrations, but there were no actual prostrations, just three standing bows. Since the jikijitsu was apparently physically fit, I was very surprised that the traditional three prostrations were replaced by three standing bows.

The first round of zazen began, and I had another shock—people moved during the round. They changed postures, they stretched their legs out in front of them; one person actually left the

zendo to go to the bathroom and then returned before the round ended. No one said, “No moving!”

I thought, “Don’t these people know that moving disturbs other people? Most of these people are apparently beginners, so moving must be particularly disruptive to their concentration.”

Then, a little shadow of doubt began to appear in my thoughts. An inner voice asked, “Whose zazen is actually being disrupted by the moving, your zazen or that of the people whom you are calling ‘beginners?’” I heard this snarky question, knew the answer, stopped thinking about the sitters who moved during the round, and returned to trying to count my breaths.

Kinhin was at about the same pace as at Rochester, but there was a difference: people were told to keep in step with the person in front of them. I started thinking about whether this was a good or a bad way to do kinhin, until I noticed that I was completely out of step with the person in front of me. Trying to keep in step required that I pay attention and not drift away into thoughts (as I am usually wont to do when I do kinhin in Rochester). As I tried to stay in step with the person in front of me I found myself counting my breaths with almost the same degree of concentration as when I do seated zazen. Between breaths I thought, “Trying to keep in step is actually a pretty good way to do kinhin.”

WHEN I RETURNED HOME that evening, I told my wife about the shorts, skirts, brightly-patterned t-shirts, and halter tops; about the number of people sitting in chairs; about the upright prostrations; and about the apparent lack of training people had been given about how to strike the inkin bell and how to play the han. As I listened to myself demeaning the sitting and the sitters, I realized, “I sound like a Zen snob. These people are

ILLUSTRATION BY
Inuyasu

kind enough to let me come practice with them, and I am returning their kindness by disparaging them. What does that say about the fruits of my own Zen practice? Isn't there a precept about not praising oneself and disparaging others?" I was ashamed of myself!

But only temporarily. Some of the time I am still stuck in judging negatively the attire, the moving, and the lack of what I would call "Zen professionalism." I try just to observe, without judging, but I find that I easily slip from the former into the latter. However, when I do slip into judging yet again, I hear an accusatory inner voice in the background of my thoughts, calling to me and saying, "You are a Zen snob!"

I SHOULD BE ABLE to do better than that, because I have seen this tendency in others and it is not pretty. I have noticed the bemused looks of Zen priests who have trained in Japan and who ask about Rohatsu sesshin in Rochester when I tell them that we get up half an hour earlier than usual each morning. If I take the bait and then inquire, "And what did you do at Rohatsu when you were training in Japan?" they answer breezily, "Oh, we were not allowed to lie down for the entire week."

On my first trip to Japan, I had expected to hear some deprecatory remarks about Kapleau Roshi, since he did not complete his formal training when he trained under Yasutani Roshi. Therefore, I was surprised to hear no such comments. Instead, the first Rinzaï monk whom I met told me dismissively that Yasutani Roshi is regarded by the Rinzaï establishment as having been something of a madman in his strident denunciations of traditional Soto Zen practice, and that the entire Sanbo Kyodan lineage that Yasutani Roshi founded is perceived as "just a bunch of lay practitioners."

Having admitted the bitter truth, that I have a strong tendency toward being a snob myself, I wish I could say that my judgments about the Zen group with which I am currently sitting have completely gone away. They have not, as I am reminded one night each week. On that night, after a single round of zazen, we take turns reading, one paragraph each, a chapter from a book on Zen. At the end of each chapter, the moderator says, "Well, that was interesting! What are people thinking about it?"

I want to respond, "Zen is not about thinking!" But I don't. I have had lots of practice in keeping my mouth shut during these weekly discussions. Nevertheless, although these discussions often

have a "blind leading the blind" quality about them, I must admit that they do serve a valuable function. Sharing a conversation does bring the members of this Sangha, including me, closer to each other.

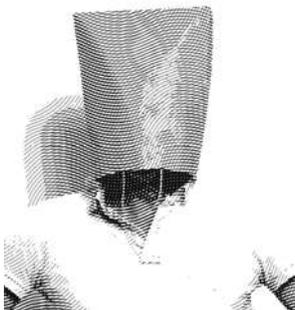
There are some really admirable qualities about this Sangha. For example, since there is no staff, everyone has to pitch in to help set up for all-day sittings and for sesshin, and people have to volunteer to prepare meals for these events. Also, some people are quite ardent about their own practice. On the evening of December 7, some members of the Sangha begin sitting at 10 PM and continue until 9 AM on December 8. Then, instead of going home to bed, they stay for the morning service at 10 AM: two more rounds of zazen and a lecture that ends at noon.

I am also impressed by the purity of the motivation for practicing zazen in this Sangha. When I began my practice, I wanted to get something out of it. I wanted to "get enlightened" (although now I would say that what I really wanted was to come to some sort of awakening). The members of this sangha do not talk about kensho or awakening. Rather, they seem to practice just for the sake of practicing.

My judgmental self would say that the desire for awakening is crucial for serious practice because it fuels and intensifies one's zazen. True as this may be, there is something inspiring about people who do zazen with no self-conscious motive. I find myself admiring the members of the Sangha who practice zazen not to get something for themselves, but just for the sake of the practice.

BEGINNING TO PRACTICE with a new Sangha has taught me many things. First, I have a regrettable tendency toward being a snob. Second is that, although I may have practiced zazen for many more years than most of the people with whom I am currently sitting, I keep realizing that, fundamentally, I am not superior to any of them. Practicing with this new Sangha reminds me that from the beginning, all beings—even those who do zazen in shorts, halter tops, and brightly patterned t-shirts and who move in the middle of rounds—are Buddhas.

I am grateful to my new Dharma sisters and brothers for helping me to relearn this fundamental lesson every time that I do zazen with them. I am also grateful to them for providing me with the opportunity to see, over and over again, how hard it is for me to break the habit of Zen snobbery and for inspiring me to keep trying. **///**



THE AUTHOR is a longtime member of the Rochester Zen Center. Although he is unable to hide his true face, he would like to hide his name.

▷ WORK IN PROCESS



KLAVA HOUSE HAS BEGUN to look like a house instead of a basement! Earlier this summer, first floor framing was completed along with a temporary bridge for construction purposes.



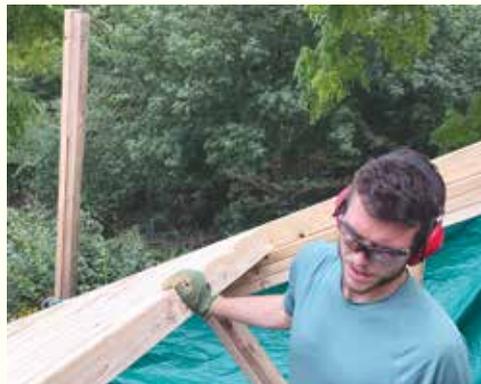
Shiplap siding was then applied to the first floor walls, providing a rustic look to the interior and eliminating the need for drywall.



Tarps protected the house from the weather, while the siding was gradually covered with green exterior sheathing—a vapor and air barrier that is tight and energy efficient.



The roof beams were sanded and oiled before being installed.



Staff member Joey Wustner installing the finished ceiling, which is known in the trade as NLT (nail laminated timber). It's constructed of solid 2×4s nailed together.



A view of the ceiling and roof with the roof beams and NLT ceiling in place, along with metal tension rods that provide stability to the walls.



A view of Joey from above, wrangling the NLT ceiling sections.



Klava House's design is rooted in simplicity, openness, and economy: a Zen esthetic.



The ceiling will remain unpainted, while the shiplap walls and studs will be painted white.

▷ When Minister Wang went to Shokei temple they were making tea. Ro Joza, lifting the kettle to bring it to Myosho [the head monk], happened to overturn it. Seeing this, the minister asked, “What’s under the tea stove?”

Ro said, “The God of the Hearth.”

The minister said, “If it is the god of the hearth, why has it upset the kettle?”

Ro said, “A thousand days of government service and only one accident.” The minister shook out his sleeves and left the room.

Myosho said, “Ro Joza, you have long eaten the food of Shokei temple, but still you wander about the countryside gathering charred wood.”

Ro said, “What about you?”

Myosho said, “That is where the devil gets the better of you.”

[Setcho comments, “At the time I would just have kicked over the tea stove.”]

Blue Cliff Record, No. 48: “Turning Over the Teakettle”



IN THIS KOAN THERE ARE THREE FIGURES, and we know little about any of them. Minister Wang was the Governor of the district, Ro Joza was a senior monk, and Myosho was the Vice Abbot of the temple.

All three were descendants in the Rinzai lineage of Tokusan (Chi: Deshan). Ro Joza must have been a senior monk because he was assigned the very important role of serving tea to the Governor. And Myosho, as the Vice Abbot of the temple, was of course even more senior.

The context of the tea ceremony is meaningful in this koan. According to Sekida-roshi in his book of commentaries, *Two Zen Classics: Mumonkan and Hekiganroku*, having the Governor come to the monastery for a tea ceremony would have been a momentous occasion. As was the Chinese custom, the participants would have been sitting on chairs or stools, and perhaps the kettle had to be fetched from the hearth in the corner of the room and placed on the table. At a tea ceremony, whether in China or Japan, the host's first consideration is the comfort of the guest. The guest, in turn, is expected to be attentive to his host so that together they create a harmonious atmosphere. Sekida-roshi writes, "Their concentration is such that even the slightest mishap is rare. If by any chance a minor accident happens, it is dealt with quietly, and may even enhance the composed spirit in which the ceremony is conducted. Everything is done with seeming nonchalance, but in reality with collected serenity."

And then Ro Joza spilled the tea kettle, right in front of the Governor.

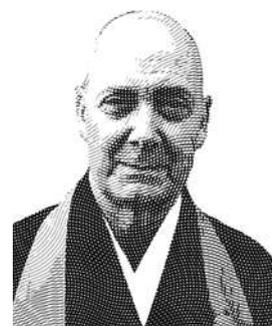
THIS CASE COUNTERS the notion of koans as just arcane stories of ancient masters dueling in confounding utterances. It addresses one of the most ordinary of worldly challenges: how to deal with our mistakes. Every day we all make mistakes of some kind, so we get a lot of practice in managing them. More than that, this koan asks us to consider how we handle ourselves when our carelessness, our misjudgments, or just our forgetfulness are exposed to another.

In today's story the Governor, upon seeing Ro Joza's mishap, asked him, "What's under the tea stove?" Now, what is he really asking here? This

is the first point of the koan. Sekida-roshi writes, "According to ancient folklore there were gods or spirits in many parts of the house: in the kitchen, the hearth, the fireplace, the bathroom, the lavatory, the central pillar of the house, the well, and even the corners of the garden," and these gods were very much revered. The housekeeper would present offerings to them. The effect of this was that the people in the house would feel compelled to carry themselves mindfully. They would have been raised to "watch out under your feet," a Zen saying meaning to maintain your aplomb, your balance, your center.

In reply to the Governor's question, Ro Joza said, "The god of the hearth." Of all the responses we might come up with after committing an error and having it pointed out to us, probably the commonest is to blame it on someone or something else—what in psychology is called externalizing. This is the go-to response of many children. (One of our members tells of a toddler he knew, Andrea, who always blamed her mistakes on her younger brother, Gregory. And once when Andrea pooped in her pants, she tearfully cried, "Gregory did it!") In adults we might expect a higher level of moral development, but often don't find it. Blaming others is especially on display among politicians and others working in the public sector, whose mistakes more easily become public. If they don't blame their colleagues or political opponents, they cite circumstances or bad timing. Rarely do we hear someone take full ownership of the mistake, and even then it has strategy behind it. Compare these reactions to the words of Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch himself: "In abandoning errors, wisdom will inevitably arise. But defending one's defects reveals an ignoble mind."

BUT WHO AMONG US has never done this? It's painful to accept blame! It's bruising to our pride—our self-image. Our reflex is to dodge the blame, avoid the pain, as Ro Joza did. To do so, though, is to bind ourselves to the mistake. To



KOAN COMMENTARY
BY *Roshi Bodhin*
Kjohede

move beyond it, we need only acknowledge our responsibility in it.

Best of all is to apologize. That's the silver bullet—the way to put the mistake behind us in an instant. For instance, I believe that if President Clinton could only have acknowledged, early on, his sexual misconduct with Monica Lewinsky and then apologized for it, millions of us would have been ready to move on. He could have spared himself—and the whole country—months of misery. (Presumably his lawyers advised against it to lessen his legal liability.)

Ro Joza's response wasn't enough for the Governor, who then pressed him: "If it's the god of the hearth, why has it upset the kettle?" He wasn't going to let Ro Joza get away with that.

Then Ro Joza protested, "A thousand days of government service and only one accident." (This is an allusion to another, famous governor, who in his years of service allegedly made only one mistake in his official functions.) It's not hard to grasp the spirit of that remark: "Hey, accidents happen. No one's perfect, after all." But how did he say it? This is for the student in dokusan to show.

In response to this comment by Ro Joza, the governor shook out his sleeves and left the room. If a picture is worth a thousand words, an action can be worth a thousand pictures.

At that point, Myosho, the Vice Abbot, stepped forward and said, "Ro Joza, you have long eaten the food of Shokei temple, but still you wander about the countryside gathering charred wood." Much of koan work, especially with this kind with extended dialogue, is just trusting your intuition. Don't look too closely at the wording, but try to get a sense of what's being conveyed.

And then Ro Joza: "What about you?" Those were his words, but again, what is he really saying? And Myosho's rejoinder: "That's where the devil gets the better of you."

THIS KOAN ALWAYS reminds me of a painful experience of my own, when I had been on staff at the Center for a couple years. It happened at a sesshin where I was assigned as a server in the opening tea ceremony—and with the added honor of being in the pair of servers who went up the center aisle and served Roshi Kapleau himself. After first pouring his tea (without a mishap—whew!), we served each person in turn, down the aisle and then back up. The last person whose cup I was to pour was the one seated right next to Roshi. I had calculated how much tea to pour, but upon reaching the last guy (Pat Simons, I remember;



Naturally
we can't avoid
making any
mistakes
at all, but
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minimize
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mindfulness.

these things get burned into your memory), I saw that he might end up with less than everyone else. So I tipped the kettle all the way over. The lid clattered out onto the floor—right in front of Roshi. The last of the tea splashed onto the floor as well, accompanied by a strained outbreath of disgust from Roshi. I was mortified, and *hara-kiri* was not hard to imagine at the time.

Naturally we can't avoid making any mistakes at all, but we can minimize them through mindfulness. That's what we're really brewing in a tea ceremony: mindfulness. It's a way of refining our attention, and that's why so few mistakes, apparently, are made, at least in these big ceremonies. But then, should we make a mistake, that's where our real mettle is tested. Our kettle mettle. How to wisely manage our mistakes is a critical part of Zen practice.

THERE ARE TWO OBVIOUS extremes in responding to mistakes. The first is to be cavalier, as in, "Oh, whatever. Everyone makes mistakes. It's not the end of the world." This can be a defensive stance, a compensation for the feeling of shame. But trying to sweep the mistake under the rug by dismissing it as unimportant is a missed opportunity for working on oneself.

The more common response among people in Zen training here, it seems, is to get into a tizzy over it and keep working it in one's mind. In the West we don't face the elaborate, high-stakes code of etiquette that people in Asia have to navigate day in and day out, but what we do have is a tendency to be self-judgmental. We tend to beat up on ourselves. I think of the comic actor Chris Farley, whose character on SNL would blurt out something foolish and then slap his forehead—hard. Among Zen students this reaction, internally, is more common than just skating past a mistake.

Even when there are extenuating circumstances to consider in the case of a mistake, do we really need to defend ourselves? In this koan, a mouse may have suddenly darted across the floor, naturally diverting the monk's attention. But still, the fact that this monk was so quick to point his finger at the supposed "god of the hearth" does not reflect well on him. It would be a rare situation in which one has no share of responsibility at all. And even when there are secondary causes and conditions in addition to one's own actions (or inactions), someone who has seen into the interdependence of phenomena would not jump to place the blame elsewhere. Thus the famous words of Hui Neng: "When others are wrong, I too

am responsible. When I am wrong, I alone am to blame.” Such a statement could only come from someone with the profound understanding that ultimately it is all one’s Self.

IN TRADITIONAL JAPANESE Zen monastic training the student is tested on this, and sometimes in a severe way. To see how you would respond, you might be scolded even for things that clearly were not your responsibility. While I was in Japan I heard a story about a young monk who was given instructions to “go get a bucket of hot water.” He scurried off, did as he was told, but then was confronted by his supervisor: “Why did you bring hot water?” When he answered, “Because you told me to,” his supervisor slugged him. It was a test, to see how the monk would respond to a harsh rebuke for something that they both knew was not his fault. Now, this is not the kind of treatment you’d ever see here, but it does have the potential, with a resilient enough monk at the right time, to checkmate the mind of right and wrong. Then you’re liberated from the net of fault-finding. The game is up.

Having to contend with these scoldings is a great way to scour away one’s attachment to self and one’s attachment to right and wrong. We can find a space, a realm that is beyond right and wrong even when we’re at the receiving end of these common mistakes. And that realm is simply to let go of it in the mind. Not to go on chewing over the memory of what just happened. And then we’re free! We’ve learned not to do it that way or not to forget, and then go on. No teacher wants you to go on chewing over your mistakes. A teacher or supervisor wants you to get the point that that was a mistake and you have to be more mindful in the future, but then drop it right away. *Drop it.*

A famous passage by a master speaking of this realm that is beyond right and wrong goes as follows: “Don’t be overjoyed at the right. Don’t be distressed over the wrong. For the ancient masters, things are like flowers and blossoms. Peach blossoms are red, plum blossoms are white, and roses are pink. Though I asked the spring breeze why they are so, it knows nothing.” This realm of no-mind is where the legendary 20th-century Chan master Hsu Yun must have been dwelling during the tea ceremony at which he experienced enlightenment. As his tea was being poured, the cup was dropped, and when it broke, his mind awakened.

IN DEALING WITH their mistakes, those in residential training here face a test known to everyone who

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has spent much time in communal living. From time to time one of the residents will leave just a trace amount of food in a container of leftovers so as not to have to wash the container. Or neglect to clean the lint filter in the clothes dryer. Or leave one of the vehicles with the gas tank almost empty. Then, at one of the daily staff meetings, comes the test: “Who left the...?” Will the culprit admit it? If so, he or she passes the test. What’s more, their admission reveals more about their character—their integrity and honesty—than whatever the infraction did. It eclipses the mistake.

Nowhere do we learn to let go of our failures better than in our zazen, because they’re happening every few seconds. We keep dropping the practice. That’s where we really develop this ability to let go, and we learn the price we pay for clinging to thoughts of our own or others’ failures. So when we make a mistake, right there is the chance to avoid the two extremes of beating up on oneself, which is pointless, and dodging the responsibility for it. In sesshin, especially, when our mishaps or inattentiveness—in the kitchen, in the dining room, in the zendo—loom large, right there is the opportunity to transcend the trap of self and other.

AT THE END OF THE CASE Zen master Setcho gets the last say: “At the time I would have just have kicked over the tea stove.” Now that would really have made a mess! So what does he mean? Just leaping free of the net of right and wrong, good and bad, my fault, his fault, her fault, their fault.

Miles Davis once said. “Don’t worry about mistakes. There are none.” We need to see so-called mistakes as even themselves not somehow outside of the Way. It’s not like there’s the Dharma, our Buddha nature, and then there are these mistakes that somehow creep in, that we have to expel. Everything is it, even the mistakes. In the Mumonkan we read, “The failure is wonderful indeed.” It is perfect in its own way. It is exactly what needs to happen. We can never exclude anything from the truth.

We have this this most exalted method of freeing ourselves from the bondage of “right and wrong,” “good and bad,” “failure and success”: zazen. T.S. Eliot wrote, “From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit proceeds unless restored by that refining fire wherein you must move and measure like a dancer.” The forge. The blast furnace of zazen. It removes these impurities from the mind. It enables us to move through our daily life with grace and buoyancy. ///



Sightings



FURTHER REMARKS

TANGEN ROSHI TRIBUTE ¶

Thank you for all of the work that you did for the Tangen Roshi issue of *Zen Bow*. I have just two comments on Bodhin's very well written section. One is that a few readers could erroneously get the impression that there is often only one samu (work) period at Bukkokuji, when in reality there are usually three, interspersed with break periods during which one can either continue with one's job(s) or go to the zendo. His article also suggested that there seemed to be a more laissez-faire approach at Bukkokuji than at the RZC, and superficially that is true. To flesh that out, new practitioners inevitably receive quite a bit of instruction soon after arrival while ordained people with experience, such as Bodhin, are assumed to know the essentials about practice, including temple decorum, and are therefore usually not given a lot of 1:1 guidance outside of dokusan. And they will be watched by the teacher in order to see how they behave under such circumstances. It's

a common approach at Japanese temples.

DHARMAN STORTZ
Obama, Japan

Ever since the latest issue of *Zen Bow* arrived [Summer 2018], I have been meaning to write to congratulate you on it. If I were to comment on its content, I would have to be modest and write that, with the exception of the article by the person who was rejected for membership in the RZC 49 years ago, it was a wonderful issue. But what really impressed me about the issue were the visual aesthetics. To me, the issue looks very lovely and very professional.

Congratulations,
WES BORDEN
Vashon, WA

ON SCREEN

THE MOVIE: THE EAGLE HUNTERS (2016) ¶

What it's about: This moving documentary follows the story of Aisholpan, a 13-year-old Qazaq (Kazakh) girl living in remote, westernmost Mongolia. Aisholpan's dream—to become her community's first female *bürkitshi*, translated as "one who raises and trains golden eagles to hunt"—breaks with centuries of patrilineal precedent. But why not? Why can't



a girl dream of continuing this unique and honorable tradition and proudly wear the title

of "eagle huntress"?

Why it's worthy: Like Shakyamuni faced by Mara, and despite her youth, Aisholpan is the embodiment of perseverance in the face of doubt. Her heart's wish is to pursue the lonely, difficult path of the *bürkitshi*, and she follows it with an inspiring clarity of purpose rarely seen in people of any age—a reminder to us all of the short time we have in which to live meaningfully and authentically.

Breaking with tradition's shortcomings while embracing its merits is a theme in both Aisholpan's story and in current Buddhist practice. Resistance to the ordination of women is a historical and ongoing problem in Asia in both Zen and other schools of Buddhism, and barriers to true inclusiveness still proliferate in American Zen along multiple demographic lines. Nevertheless, we have the agency to choose differently, whether it's the focus of our attention moment to moment, whether to go to sesshin when we can, or whether to try new methods and perspectives to address issues within the greater Sangha. Aisholpan's bravery and willingness to endure hardship help set a new and more inclusive precedent for future female *bürkitshi* and encourage viewers to question problematic cultural inertia and their role in maintaining it.

Finally, the film leaves viewers awestruck by the beauty of the sweeping, majestic setting of the natural world in which humans and their self-pre-

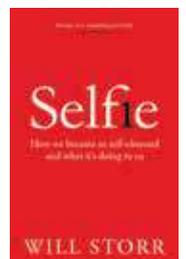
occupation are, effectively, a minority; a reminder of the effortless splendor which surrounds us, should we care to notice it. The pastoral-nomadic community's reverence for and closeness to nature serve as a timely reminder of our own interdependence with all species sharing this fragile world. —ANGELA HAKKILA

IN PRINT

THE BOOK: SELFIE: HOW WE BECAME SO SELF-OBSSESSED AND

WHAT IT'S DOING TO US BY WILL STORR ¶ *What it's about:* *Selfie* is a history of self-identity in Western civilizations and how it has evolved chronologically through six stages, from tribalism to the age of Instagram.

Why it's worthy: The author suspects that however humans have conceived of themselves through time, they have always been wrong. While his arguments often fall short, the data he presents manage to lay bare several common delusions about the self in a way that just might fatally wound one or two of the ego's defenses, clearing your way to direct experience. —JOSHUA GROVES



WORLDWIDE

LETTER FROM GLASGOW ¶

The Cloud Water Zen Centre's new home opened almost exactly a year ago, although work really began a number of years earlier. For around 10 years we had a sitting group here in Glasgow, supported

▷ SIGHTINGS



◀ The original office space—located in a business district of Glasgow—as it was before we moved in. Lots of potential but needing plenty of work



▲ Six months later, after a small group of talented people had learned how to make dividers and build an altar (always useful skills!).

by occasional visits by Kanja Roshi and Sante Roshi. A solid core of people soon appeared and—like many other sitting groups—we hired space locally on a weekly basis and occasionally for longer weekend events.

It was always clear to me, however, that we were pretty



limited in terms of what this arrangement could offer: no space for private instruction or dokusan, no storage space for mats and cushions (which we spent 10 years transporting around, week in week out!), no space for a library, for socializing, and so on.

So while the idea of a permanent home was always in the back of my mind, it really started to coalesce when I was sanctioned to teach three years ago. This gave many of our members a confidence boost and meant that we could—potentially—offer people a more complete and much deeper experience of Zen practice and training. Right here in Glasgow. And, while no one can ever know in advance whether a project like this will really take off, I didn't want to die wondering!

One of the interesting

◀ We now have a zendo which can seat up to 20 people comfortably (and more if need be) with a beautiful, simple *han* (wood block) constructed by a couple of our art school graduates.

things about a big project has been to see the ways in which people step up: it really is a communal effort. And to see people develop new skills that maybe they didn't know they had. Before you try, how could you know that you can build a Buddhist altar or a *han* (wood block)? We were fortunate enough to have skilled woodworkers and artists who could turn their hands to these things. Just as importantly, an accountant, property manager and other members with extensive experience in the field of charity work volunteered. And, of course, working and

SANGHA ENGAGEMENT
CHAPIN MILLS SLEEPOVERS

¶ Twice this year the Sangha youth group has held sleepovers at Chapin Mill, where children and parents alike can enjoy the pond, the retreat center, the wide open spaces, and the joy of unstructured time together.

For sleepovers, the exercise room is converted into a play space: kids zip around on scooters, play games, watch movies, and make the kind of noise that one rarely hears at Chapin Mill. It has become such a treasured destination for the youth group that one



practicing together in this way, a Sangha begins to emerge.

One year in, and the center is well and truly up and running. Lots of the spade work is done and now we can turn our hands to the real matter at hand: Zen training. We have a number of public events planned over the next few weeks to help arouse interest in Zen. It's hard work—probably the hardest thing I've ever done—but we're in the game now. Just put an end to all this coming and going, sit down and get to work.—SENSEI KARL KALISKI

▲ Sangha children ham it up with their s'mores sticks.

four-year-old recently commented, "It's the Children's Zen Center!"—CHRIS PULLEYN





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► OCTOBER

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2: BODHIDHARMA CEREMONY
 11: SH. DEADLINE
 19: TRUSTEES MTG.
 20: TRUSTEES MTG.

► NOVEMBER

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8: AID CEREMONY SH. DEADLINE
 18: CEREMONY OF GRATITUDE
 23: TEMPLE NIGHT
 24: PRECEPTS CEREMONY
 29: BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENMENT

► DECEMBER

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31: NEW YEAR'S EVE CEREMONIES
 28: TEMPLE CLEANING

► SEPTEMBER 29–OCTOBER 6 SEVEN-DAY SESSHIN with Roshi (CM)

► OCTOBER 9 BODHIDHARMA CEREMONY 7–9 PM (AP)

► OCTOBER 11 APPLICATION DEADLINE for November sesshin

► OCTOBER 11 TERM INTENSIVE opening ceremony 7–9 PM (AP)

► OCTOBER 13 INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP (AP)

► OCTOBER 14 ALL-DAY SITTING, 6:15 AM–3 PM & YOUTH SUNDAY (AP)

► OCTOBER 19 & 20 TRUSTEES MEETING

► OCTOBER 28 ALL-DAY SITTING, 6:15 AM–3 PM, SANGHA MEETING, YOUTH SUNDAY 10:30 AM (AP)

► NOVEMBER 3–10 SEVEN-DAY SESSHIN with Roshi (CM)

► NOVEMBER 15 APPLICATION DEADLINE for December sesshin

► NOVEMBER 15 CEREMONY OF AID, 7–9 PM (AP)

► NOVEMBER 18 CEREMONY OF GRATITUDE, 8:30–10:30 AM & YOUTH SUNDAY 10:30 AM (AP)

► NOVEMBER 23 TEMPLE NIGHT, 7–11 PM (AP)

► NOVEMBER 24 PRECEPTS TEISHO, 8:30–10:30 AM (AP)

► NOVEMBER 24 PRECEPTS CEREMONY (Jukai), 5–6 PM (AP)

► NOVEMBER 29 BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENMENT ceremony, 7–9 PM (AP)

► DECEMBER 1 INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP (AP)

► DECEMBER 2 ALL-DAY SITTING, 6:15 AM–3 PM (AP)

► DECEMBER 4–8 FOUR-DAY SESSHIN with John Pulley (CM)

► DECEMBER 13 APPLICATION DEADLINE for January sesshin

► DECEMBER 16 SANGHA MEETING, 10:30 AM (AP)

► DECEMBER 20–26 CENTER CLOSED

► DECEMBER 28 TEMPLE CLEANING 9:45 AM–12:30 PM (AP)

► DECEMBER 31 NEW YEAR'S EVE ceremonies, 8 PM–12:30 AM (AP)

Schedule subject to change. For the latest updates, please see www.rzc.org/calendar/

A.M. EVENT	ALL-DAY SITTING	DHARMA TALK	TEISHO
P.M. EVENT	BEGINNERS NIGHT	GROUP INSTRUCTION	TERM INTENSIVE
ALL-DAY EVENT	CHANTING SERVICE	PRIVATE INSTRUCT.	WORKSHOP
SESSHIN	DOKUSAN	SANGHA MEETING	YOUTH SUNDAY
CENTER CLOSED	SESSHIN	FORMAL SITTING	