

► **BEAUTIFUL SNOWFLAKES:** Roshi Kjolhede hits us with a snowball

**WHO AM I?:** Peeling away the layers of time, privilege, and gender identity

**EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY:** A Western Zen student explores Nanjing



Winter 2021 | VOLUME XLII, NUMBER FOUR

**PSYCHIATRIST JOHN ROLLAND**, in his seminal book *Families, Illness, and Disability*, makes a distinction between dealing with a medical crisis and coping with a chronic condition. The skills needed for each are very different, and it's easy to see why. In a medical emergency—an accident, an unplanned surgery, an unexpected and dire diagnosis—most partners and families go on red alert. The adrenaline pumps, plans are made and put in place, friends and family are galvanized, casseroles and desserts suddenly make their appearances on our doorsteps.

Contrast that with the situation several months down the road...the long haul. Assuming the medical situation can be addressed, the initial shock and pain has been transmuted into a dull roar, accompanied by countless appointments for med checks, physical therapy, additional procedures, etc. Friends and family will occasionally check in, but there's nothing much to say other than, "We're hanging in there." The doorstep is devoid of carbohydrates.

This is precisely the situation we're in right now with the pandemic. The initial jolt of adrenaline is long gone, and it's easy to become bored or even lax with our precautions. Rather than the initial "fix it" mentality of the crisis phase, which can be so instantly rewarding, we need to adopt a posture of patience, of radical acceptance of the things we cannot change. We will probably never have a greater need for Zen practice in our lives than right now. And we can probably never offer so much unexpected comfort to those in need than we can right now.—CHRIS PULLEYN

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IMAGE BY *Giotto di Bondone* | Ceiling fresco of the Capella degli Scrovegni, Padua, circa 1305 (detail). The luminous blue is ultramarine, finely ground lapis lazuli, applied *secco*, after the plaster had dried; the stars are gold leaf.



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EDITOR

Chris Pulley | zenbow@rzc.org

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT

Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede | bodhin@rzc.org

COPY EDITOR

Cecily Fuhr | cecilyfuhr@gmail.com

AUDIO TRANSCRIPTIONIST

Jennifer Kyker

ART DIRECTOR

Daryl Wakeley | darylwakeley@icloud.com

PROOFREADER

John Pulley

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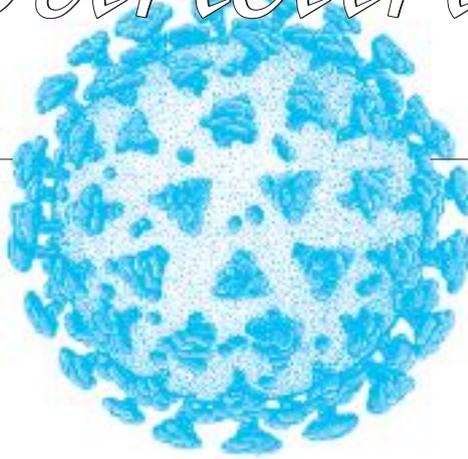
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# Soundings



## A PANDEMIC PRAYER

DURING THE PANDEMIC, Roshi Kjolhede has been issuing frequent “Coronacasts” to members. Following is an excerpt from his last Coronacast of 2020.

This is December 17, 2020. And that means we’re settled into the very longest, darkest nights of the year. And maybe that’s why I’m thinking of all of the victims of COVID-19. Last week we surpassed 300,000 COVID deaths just here in the United States. I thought it would be appropriate to stop and memorialize these 300,000-plus dead in our country, and then the altogether one and a half million dead worldwide.

These numbers are staggering. It’s difficult to assimilate them, isn’t it? I keep up with the news, and so I notice that the numbers are so abstract, especially when it’s day after day, month after month: this drip drip drip of statistics that come at us. How can anyone feel each of these deaths, these terrible deaths? Maybe we’re not meant to feel them, but at least we can remember these people. We don’t want to become callous to it. And yet, it’s very easy to become numb when we don’t have faces, but only numbers.

Someone once said that one death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic. So I’m struggling to not become numb to all these deaths, and to try to find a way to acknowledge the magnitude of what we’re going through. Sometimes writers use analogies, such as the number of deaths is equal to the number of people in a certain city, or the number of people who could fit in Yankee Stadium. That helps a bit; it makes it a little more concrete, but still. How can we fully embrace these numbers? Maybe we just can’t.

We’ve seen so many health care workers testifying in tears to the anguish that they go through day after day, talking about how they have to serve as surrogates for the family members of critically ill patients. What kind of hell are we in when even the closest family member cannot sometimes be with the dying per-

son: their parent, their sibling, or even their child that is dying. So here you are, drawing your last breaths alone, alone in a way that probably none of us has ever been, and we’re dying. The nurses and doctors do the best they can but they’re shrouded in masks and shields and gowns and gloves. So imagine that the last thing you see in this life is this figure whose face you can barely see.

Then consider the grief of the survivors. Anyone who has lost a family member knows that kind of grief. And it’s all the more difficult when it’s sudden, when you haven’t had the time to adjust to the person fading away because the fading away happens so fast. President-elect Joe Biden has talked about how you’re left with this black hole in your heart and that empty chair at the table. It’s terrible. Even since I began this talk ten minutes ago, there are people who have died alone, of COVID. For the survivors there is that terror of finality, the inescapable knowledge that the person is gone. Gone.

Those of us who believe in rebirth don’t see death as final. It sure feels final when it’s someone close to you. But I thought it may be helpful to recite the memorial prayer, which is the heart of a Buddhist memorial service or funeral. I will recite the memorial prayer for the 320,000 people who have died in this country alone. What else do we do? So that’s what I’m going to do.

In Zen and some other forms of Buddhism, the memorial prayer is done as a way of speaking to the deceased. According to the Tibetan Book of the Dead and ancient texts about death and dying, it is said that the sense of hearing is the last

thing to go after death. For that reason, in the memorial prayer we’re addressing the deceased directly.

But if that’s too much for anyone to believe in, maybe it’s a little easier to believe in the fact that we are calling on Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, which really means enlightened ones, to help the deceased. Maybe the best way is to think of what we’re doing is calling on our own Bodhisattva- and Buddha-nature as a way of honoring and fortifying the deceased as she or he finds their way through the intermediate state that we call the bardo. So this memorial prayer will be directed to the hundreds of thousands of people who have died. I will recite the prayer three times.—**ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE** ■

*O Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,  
abiding in all directions,  
endowed with great compassion, endowed  
with love,  
affording protection to sentient beings,  
consent through the power of your great  
compassion to come forth.*

*O Compassionate Ones,  
you who possess the wisdom of  
understanding, the love of compassion,  
the power of protecting in incomprehensible  
measure,  
COVID victims are passing from this world to  
the next.  
They are taking a great leap.  
The light of this world has faded for them.  
They have entered solitude with their karmic  
forces.  
They have gone into a vast Silence.  
They are borne away by the Great Ocean of  
birth and death.*

*O Compassionate Ones,  
protect these victims, who are defenseless.  
Be to them like a father and a mother.*

*O Compassionate Ones,  
let not the force of your compassion be weak,  
but aid them.  
Forget not your ancient vows!*

**SITTING FOR DANIEL PRUDE**

Three bodies,  
 silent meditative postures.  
 We walk through snow and join them.  
 Now we are five.  
 Each week remembering Daniel Prude.  
 Each week justice has not come.  
 Each week whoever is at our sitting  
 remembers this life cut short.  
 Remembers all Black lives cut short.  
 Sounds within our silence  
 revving of cars pulling away  
 coughing in the distance  
 laughter as young girls walk across  
 the field we sit on.  
 Today a man with his phone  
 videotaping us and our signs.  
 Verbalizing his thoughts about what  
 he is seeing.  
 Back and forth he walks  
 along the fence with our signs.  
 Speaking as he walks.  
 Speaking for himself?  
 Speaking for us?  
 What he says is kind.  
 Kind is so needed in this time.  
 One of our signs:  
 We Meditate to  
 Cut Through the Darkness  
 That Caused Daniel Prude's  
 Death.

—MARTHA HOWDEN



**IN MEMORIAM**

JOE METZINGER died of COVID-19 in early April, 2020. He was an active member of the Cleveland Zazen group for decades and the Vice-President of our Board.

Joe was generous with his time, always ready to lend a hand for house and yard cleanups. Joe managed our group's Facebook page and drew inspiration for his posts from his wide reading in Zen and other Buddhist books. He played the mokugyo for our chanting services and attended our meditation intensives and sesshin at Chapin Mill. At the time he died, he had recently applied for the RZC's March 2020 seven-day sesshin, the first to be cancelled due to the coronavirus.

Joe was a very private person with a gentle spirit. He enjoyed our brunches and he is sorely missed by all in our Sangha. His body was cremated and returned to his family for burial in Indiana. —SUSAN RAKOW ■

**A NOTE FROM SWEDEN:  
 THE IMPROVISED SESSHIN**

I NOW HAVE two online sesshins behind me. The first thing that comes to my mind is: fantastic! The second: thank you, COVID-19. The third: thank you, Zoom, Internet, my computer and so on. The fourth: thanks to all who have grasped this opportunity, made this change, organized all of it, and provided daily service during sesshins too!

Like most of us, I had to take my experience of sesshins at a few Zen centers and Chapin Mill and transplant it, accommodate it, detail by detail, to my little two-room flat. I live alone in Uppsala, Sweden, in a time zone six hours ahead of Rochester, so I did sesshins part-time: the three first blocks.

I still have vivid memories of the Swedish Sangha's first sesshins in a vari-



**WISE WORDS FROM 1948**

In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. "How are we to live in an atomic age?" I am tempted to reply: "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents."

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation.

Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anaesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

This is the first point to be made: and

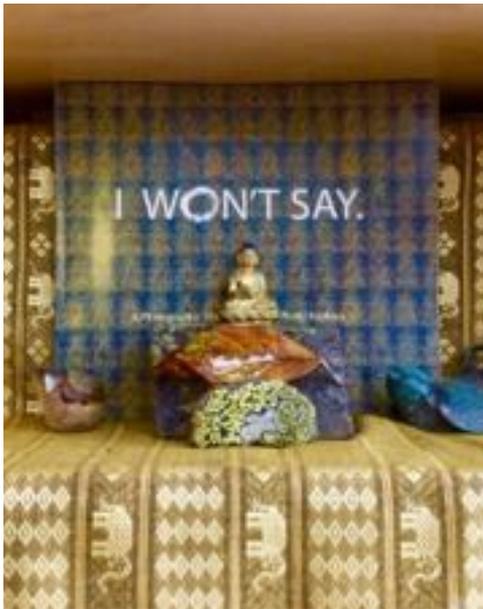
the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds. —C.S. LEWIS, "On Living in an Atomic Age" (1948) in *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays* ■

ety of rented, most inexpensive venues in the Swedish countryside. These took place at kindergartens, elementary schools, etc. which were abandoned during the summer time, and we had to improvise like crazy to prepare for sesshin. But it was, of course, very inspiring too! All this before we had acquired, besides our little Zen Center in Stockholm, our own “residence” in Finnaker—a former country school too.

Improvisation was great then, 30+ years ago, and it still is.

Back to my flat.

1) The zendo—It’s a combined living room–guest-room–office–library–yoga-room with a little altar on one of the bookshelves above the mat and cushions. For sesshin, it wasn’t a monitor with a kyosaku who had to have access to my shoulders but the computer’s camera instead.



◀ Majka’s sitting environment (OPPOSITE) and altar (ABOVE) in Uppsala, Sweden.

2) The kyosaku—How do you give kyosaku to yourself? Simple, with an electric Chinese massage/acupressure device with a great “sting” to it thanks to the elastic and steel handle. Quite unorthodox timing, though, in between rounds or after.

3) The kinhin—Around the living room, through the kitchen to the tiny hall and back. The reflexive habit of holding my eyes down was still strong and there was nobody I might encounter on this path, so kinhin went smoothly and easily.

4) The meals—Very simple, vegetarian

## Q & A HOW DO I KNOW if I’m making progress with my Zen practice?

FOR SO MANY of us, especially in the beginning, we can be plagued by this nagging question. In fact, it may even persist several years into our Zen practice. Another way of putting it is “How do I know if this is working?” Well, there will be periods of time when it does not feel like it’s working. One day, our zazen is running smoothly: “I’m getting pretty concentrated”; “My thoughts are not a problem.” Then suddenly, tomorrow’s round becomes stale and flat. Worse, the day after that and my practice is still flat! “My mind is filled with thoughts”; “I’m bored”; “Why the hell am I doing this?!” Ironically, you are now noticing these thoughts due to the fact that you *are* making progress. Because you have been practicing intently, they are more obvious than ever before.

Beyond this reassurance however, there is no better substitute to progress than committing oneself to daily Zen practice. Zen meditation must be a long-term, serious affair if we are going to see progress and experience its true rewards. It’s a marriage really. One of the tricky things about zazen is that the visible results of our practice do not happen on our own schedule. For most of our lives, we’ve had this extremely blurry filter called “self-and-other” in our mind and its influence is all-encompassing; we truly cannot see what is in front of us. It’s only through dedicated, long-term practice that we can start to wipe away and polish the lens; all that self-and-other smudge and dirt be-

gins to loosen. Once it loosens, that is when the benefits start to pop up unexpectedly. You can call it serendipity, but these benefits and insights do not happen by chance; they happen because of the daily (*DAILY!*) zazen. “Just do it” and “whatever it takes” are two slogans that will take us a long way in Zen practice. That question “How do I know if I’m making progress?” will lose its grip on us. It’s just a thought after all.

Finally, there is the teacher and the support of the Sangha. In our post-workshop orientations, I’m fond of telling newcomers that there is nothing a teacher can give you that you don’t already have. It’s just a question of putting in the work of serious Zen practice and discovering it for yourself. And yet, Zen has always been a mentor-based practice. The teacher is both cheerleader and thief. He or she encourages you when you feel down about practice, your mind filled with self-doubt. At other times, they pull the rug from under you, taking away your false notions about practice and your perceived limitations. This is always coming from a place of compassion, no matter how painful these false realizations or personal insights may be.

And the Sangha? It’s just such a relief to be in the company of like-minded practitioners. Because we are change itself, it’s very difficult to see it in ourselves (remember that nagging hindrance, “How do I know if I’m making progress?”). But if we stick around long enough, we can see the change in others who are sticking with it, and that can be encouraging.—

TRUEMAN TAYLOR ■

as usual. Preceded by a short “thanksgiving,” and assisted by a willing dishwasher.

5) Yoga—I did this in the morning (the middle of the night in Rochester) after the first hour of sitting on my own, without a Zoom connection.

6) The soaking bath—In the evening I took a warm bath with Epsom salts to soothe the pain in my legs. In the morning a slow deep soak in the previous day’s water. This time, it was cold and refreshing. The same water was used later, throughout the day, to flush the toilet.—MAJKA DUCZKO ■

### UNSUI (*Japanese; literally, “cloud water.”*)

Novices in a Zen monastery are called unsui, and ornaments in a Zen monastery and temples are often in the form of stylized clouds and water motifs. Aimlessly coming and going, moving freely, forming and changing in accordance with external circumstances, disappearing without reluctance like clouds; like water soft and flowing around every obstruction without hesitation; like water in relation to a container, fully adapting to any situation—these are the characteristics of living in the mind of Zen.—*The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*



SNOWFLAKE GENERATOR BY VIVIAN WU, VIVARIUMS.COM/PROJECTSSNOWFLAKE/INTERACTIVE/

## BLUE CLIFF RECORD CASE 42: LAYMAN PANG'S BEAUTIFUL SNOWFLAKES

### ► THE CASE

When Layman Pang took leave of Yaku-san, the latter asked ten Zen students to escort him to the temple gate to bid him farewell. The Layman, pointing to the falling snowflakes, said, "Beautiful snowflakes; they fall nowhere."

Then one of the Zen students named Zenkaku [i.e., a practitioner of Zen] asked, "Then where do they fall?"

The Layman slapped him. Zenkaku said, "Even a layman shouldn't be so rude."

The Layman said, "Though you call yourself a Zen student, Old Yama [i.e., Lord of the Dead] won't let go of you."

Zenkaku said, "What about you?"

Again the Layman slapped him and said, "You look but you are blind; you speak but you are mute."

### ► THE COMMENTARY

When Pang first spoke I would have made a snowball and hit him with it.

### ► THE VERSE

Hit him with a snowball, hit him with a ball! Even the best will fail to reply. Neither heaven nor earth knows what to do. Eyes and ears are blocked with snow. Even the blue-eyed monk can't explain.

## TODAY WE'LL TAKE UP THE KOAN "LAYMAN Pang's Beautiful Snowflakes" from the *Blue Cliff Record*, number 42. Layman Pang lived

in China in the eighth century, which places him in the Tang dynasty, often called the "Golden Age of Zen." He is the most famous lay Zen (Chan) Buddhist in Chinese history, and he trained under both of the most heralded Zen teachers of his era, Shitou and Mazu. One reason Layman Pang is so famous is that his wife and daughter were also enlightened Zen practitioners.

Legend has it that when Layman Pang reached middle age and his family had attained the Way, he gave his house away to be used for a temple and sank his possessions and money in a nearby river in order to be rid of them forever. He regarded the acquisition of wealth as an impediment to enlightenment, and for that reason didn't want to give it away to others, either. (So

much that could be said about this stance!) There are many other stories about these remarkable householders, and what follows comes from *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, by Andy Ferguson.

Layman Pang began training under Shitou in 785, and here is an account of his initial breakthrough:

Shitou asked the Layman Pang, "Who is the one who is not a companion to the ten thousand Dharmas?" Shitou quickly covered Layman Pang's mouth with his hand. At that, the Layman had a realization.

The ten thousand Dharmas refers to the infinite things, all the phenomena of the universe. So this is another way of asking, "Who is it that has transcended all phenomena imaginable?" How might you respond to that question? How



KOAN COMMENTARY  
BY Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede  
January 2009 Rohatsu sesshin

could anyone do so in words—which themselves are phenomena?

One day Shitou asked, “What have you been doing each day since we last saw each other?” Layman Pang said, “If you ask about daily affairs, then nothing can be said.” And then he recited a verse, the last two lines of which are widely known in Zen: “How miraculous and wondrous—hauling water and carrying firewood!”

This is the world seen through the eyes of enlightenment: even the most ordinary, routine tasks become wondrous. Brushing our teeth, stirring soup, using the toilet, walking up the stairs. When we’ve seen into the “True Self that is no-self,” there’s no one brushing the teeth, no teeth to be brushed, and no brushing. And yet, teeth brushing is somehow happening! There it is! Just the pure action itself—the pure no-action.

When the mind is truly empty, everything becomes miraculous. There’s no subject, no object, and no action. And yet all of us go about performing these little miracles every hour, every day. How wondrous! Shoveling snow, tapping at our keyboard, driving to work, taking out the trash, stepping forward with one foot in front of the other....

**BACK TO LAYMAN PANG’S** response to his teacher Shitou: “If you ask about daily affairs, then nothing can be said.” Why not? When we’re absolutely one with what we’re doing, it’s not easy later to remember what we were doing. When I finish with a teisho, I can hardly remember anything I said (mercifully), and that was true even many years ago when my memory was stronger. When I was training in Japan, at Sogen-ji, the abbot, Harada Shodo Roshi, said, “As you advance on the Path, your memory goes.” Then again, as we advance on the Path we are also getting older, and aging has never been known to improve memory. But notice this yourself in simple activities - when you’re completely absorbed in them, you’ll find that there’s less likely to be any etching in the mind, any tracks left afterward. Because “you” weren’t “there,” nothing happened.

According to legend, when Layman Pang was about to die, he said to his daughter, Ling Zhao, “Go watch the sun to follow what time it is. When it’s just noon, come and tell me.” She went to the door, looked out, and called back to her father, “The sun has just reached noon. But look—

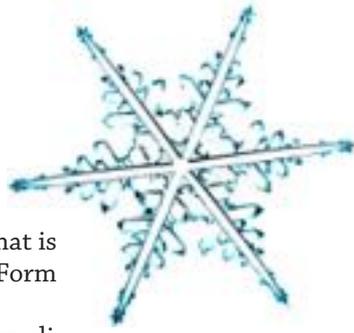
there’s an eclipse.” When Layman Pang went to the door to see, Ling Zhao walked straight to her father’s seat, placed her hands together, and passed away. Layman Pang smiled and said, “My daughter’s deftness.” He then postponed his departure from the world by seven days, presumably to follow the conventional schedule of memorial services.

The Governor Xiangzhou came to visit Layman Pang, and asked about his illness. Layman Pang said to him, “I ask that you regard everything that is as empty. Nor give substance to that which has none. Farewell. The world is like reflections and echoes.” Then, placing his head on the governor’s knee, Layman Pang passed away. His cremated remains were cast upon local rivers and lakes. Three hundred of Layman Pang’s poems were left to spread through the world, and there’s a whole book in English just of the sayings of Layman Pang.

**NOW BACK TO THE CASE** before us. When it opens, Layman Pang had been with master Yaoshan for seventeen years before now taking leave of him. So it would not have been unusual for Yaoshan to enlist a select group of students to escort this long-term resident to the temple gate to bid him farewell. Layman Pang spotted an opportunity here for some Dharma dialogue, so he stood there in the snow—maybe for a few minutes, to take it all in—and then, gesturing with his hand, said, “Beautiful snowflakes—they fall nowhere.” This is the nub of the koan.

So what about this statement, “They fall nowhere”? It flies in the face—literally, since it’s snow!—of what our senses tell us. How can they fall nowhere? With my own eyes I can see them falling! But our conventional view of things—that is, what our senses tell us—is not the whole picture. It’s half, at most.

Buddhist psychology speaks of six senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and, as the sixth, thinking. But then there’s the realm of reality that is beyond all these functions—beyond falling and rising, coming and going, before and after. This is a world altogether beyond “name and form,” to use a phrase from the old texts. It is the Unconditioned, the Absolute, the complement to all things, to every single thing: it is no-thing. No time, no space, no differentiation. Yet ultimately it’s not other than the world of phenomena, of differentiation. In our Affirming Faith in Mind, the fourth ancestor, Seng Tsan, is expressing this nondual nature



of reality when he says, “What is, is not; what is not, is.” In the Prajna Paramita we chant, “Form is only emptiness, emptiness only form.”

Another aspect of the form-emptiness dichotomy is that of color. In classical Chinese and Japanese writing, I’m told, the character for “form” is the same as that for “color.” It makes sense, somehow; “color” doesn’t apply to that which has no form. And what’s the complement to the realm of color-form? No-color-form, which in Asia is sometimes represented as the color white. Like snow.

“They fall nowhere.” People sometimes think that Zen masters say nonsensical things just to mess with their students’ minds—“Oh, those zany Zen masters....” We can’t always rule out such a motive, but more often they’re being dead serious. In this case, the Layman, in his “nonsensical” musing, is pointing to the reality that exists out of reach of our senses. Just as the contingent of students had escorted him out of the monastery, he with a sweep of his hand ushered them into the pure, white world of nothingness.

**FOR MOST OF HUMAN** history there was no empirical evidence to support this teaching of emptiness that Buddhist masters realized through direct experience. But in the 20th century Einstein and other quantum physicists came up with theories suggesting that this confounding principle wasn’t so implausible after all. Meanwhile, the Buddha had expounded it in his sutras 2,500 years earlier, and other women and men continue to confirm it today through their own awakening. This teaching of the non-substantiality of the world of appearances is the very essence of the Dharma. One of the most famous of Zen sayings proclaims: “From the very beginning there has never been a single thing.” This became a well-known subject of calligraphy, and it is painted on a scroll hanging in my Zen Center quarters in Rochester in the same place Roshi Kapleau displayed it while living there.

So then what is all this? Talking, listening, moving, coughing, the myriad activities? Who’s doing these things? Who, or what? What is it? What is *Mu*?

We are deceived by our senses. They are amazing in how they gather and process the data of our environment, and we couldn’t function without them. But as useful as they are in so many ways, they cannot reveal the fundamental emptiness of things.

People sometimes  
think that  
Zen masters  
say nonsensical  
things just  
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those zany  
Zen masters....”  
We can’t always  
rule out such  
a motive, but  
more often  
they’re being  
dead serious.

Fundamentally, there are no snowflakes, there’s nowhere they fall, and there’s no falling. And when the Layman commented on the scene before him, he might have added that because they fall nowhere, they’re beautiful—breathtakingly beautiful.

**RESUMING WITH THE KOAN**, one of these ten Zen practitioners, a monk named Zenkaku, asked, “Then where do they fall?” This is not an unreasonable question. But this encounter takes us beyond the realm of reason. The Layman is trying to engage the monks in something that transcends the box of reason.

The Layman slapped him. Don’t think this just means, “Oh, shut up.” There’s quite a bit of hitting and slapping in Zen koans and Zen stories. As Westerners, it’s hard for us to appreciate such rough physical treatment in the way the monks and masters did. It’s seldom just punitive; more often it’s a demonstration of the master’s determination to open the students’ eyes. Experienced students would have taken it to mean that the master cares enough to want to help them. So, Layman Pang slapped him.

Zenkaku said, “Even a layman shouldn’t be so crude.” This Zenkaku, then, was a monk. And one of the distinctive features of this koan is that the tables are turned. By tradition, any monk would outrank any layperson—period. But here instead the Layman is daring to strike the monk. And the monk doesn’t go for this! In his mind, it’s not within the rights of any layman to hit a monk.

With Layman Pang now having provoked a reaction by the monk that exposes his attachment to status—to form—he now rebukes the monk: “Though you call yourself a Zen student, old Yama won’t let go of you.” Yama is short for Yamaraja, the Lord of the Dead. According to Buddhist mythology, when we die we go before Yamaraja for our reckoning. In one version he simply holds up a mirror to show us all of our karma stretching from our most recent life back through previous lives. In another version he holds open a large book with the records of everything we’ve ever done, said, and thought. And with that we are consigned—we’ve consigned ourselves—to our next lives.

In popular Buddhism the figure of Yamaraja is a personification of the teaching of karma, the Law of Cause and Effect on the moral plane. In karma there’s no God who sends us to heaven or hell. Rather, it is our actions, words, and

thoughts that create the momentum propelling us into our next existence. The doctrine of karma is immensely complex. And so to give uneducated Buddhist followers, especially, some grasp of it, the myth of Yamaraja was created. It's more concrete.

How might Zenkaku have responded to this slap if he had been more developed as a Zen student? In Roshi Kapleau's early years after returning from Japan and founding the Center, he would say that one of the best ways of gauging the depth of someone's insight was to see how he responded to being slapped. Now, I myself never knew of him to have slapped anyone. He would often rebuke us, though, which would sting plenty, and is itself a good test of ego-attachment.

Zenkaku, in his whining about privilege, fails the slap test, and after getting rebuked by the Layman again responds, "What about you?" But just how did he say this? What was his state of mind? This is a key factor in koans, and one the student has to demonstrate in dokusan. The Layman doesn't give up on him, though, and so slaps him again and says, "You look, but you are blind. You speak, but you are mute."

**NEXT COMES THE COMMENT** by Setcho (Ch., Xuedou), who compiled the Blue Cliff Record and whose comments are peppered throughout the collection. He says: "When Pang first spoke, I would've made a snowball and hit him with it."

This irreverence is very much in the Zen style—overturning what the master presented, lest we make something precious out of it. And maybe Setcho, after seeing how Pang had roughed up the monk, figured, "Pang turned the tables on the monk, so I think I'll just turn the tables back on him." But that aside, what might you have done when Layman Pang first spoke?

And then there's Setcho's verse: *Hit him with a snowball, hit him with a ball! Even the best will fail to reply. Neither heaven nor earth knows what to do. Eyes and ears are blocked with snow. Even the blue-eyed monk can't explain.*

The blue-eyed monk refers to Bodhidharma. What does Setcho mean, even the great Bodhidharma can't explain? If "eyes and ears are blocked with snow," so too with the faculty of discriminating thought. Under a coating of snow, names and forms—trees, cars, houses, fences—start to blend together in a landscape of no-color, no-form. Or one-form; uni-formity.

There's something so wonderful about a

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heavy snowstorm. It may create practical problems, but there is something magical that spreads over people in their interactions. We're more likely to want to help one another—checking on our neighbor, maybe shoveling their walk, even stopping on the street to push a stuck car out of the snow. We more readily talk with one another, with strangers. Why is that? What is it about the deep silence of snow that makes people reach out? It's as though the mind of self-and-other is blocked with snow. We don't so easily see strangers as "other." Notions of separate identity—racial, ethnic, sexual, religious—become muted, at least for a while. We're all in the same boat. We're all leveled somehow by the majesty of the weather system that has loosed this cornucopia of pure whiteness from the heavens and brought a hush to our world.

**THERE IS A WONDERFUL** poem Roshi Kapleau shared with me after he passed me on this koan. It's by Wallace Stevens, an American poet who died in 1955. It's called "The Snowman."

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the  
nothing that is.

We're all snowmen, aren't we? With height and mass, with eyes and hair of color, we do give the appearance of personhood. But our form is evanescent. Like snowmen, it's only a matter of time before we melt away. And unlike snowmen, we know it. But look again, closely—we're already melting. There's nothing to us that's fixed. We're change itself. We're... nothing. And so we're everything. ///

▷ FROM THE ARCHIVES



**WHERE ARE THE SNOWS OF**

**YESTERYEAR?** It's a good thing they're not evident in the current year, as the thought of excavating the sidewalks with the skeleton crew currently living at Arnold Park is daunting.

We are fortunate that this has been a relatively mild winter. According to the *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 27.2 inches have fallen so far this season, roughly half the amount of snow Rochester typically sees at this point. These

undated archive photos illustrate what many of us think of as a "typical Rochester winter." That may be a bit of an exaggerated statement; of the past ten winters, just five have given us more than 100" of beautiful snowflakes.

Of course, the season isn't even close to being over. Snow can fall in Rochester as late as May, though winter typically serves its last large wallop in March or April, with April, of course, being the cruelest month. When I first moved to Rochester in 1969, I remember a late-season

storm that completely buried our Volkswagon beetle. My then-husband Fred and I proceeded to dig it out by hand and I managed to get to work, feeling very proud of myself, by 10:00. Shockingly, everyone else had been there on time, at 8:30. That's when I realized they all owned snowblowers.—CHRIS PULLEYN



*Great is the matter of birth and death  
Life slips quickly by  
Time waits for no one  
Wake up      Wake up  
Don't waste a moment!*

I have walked by those words countless times through the years,

rakusu in hand, as I made my way into the zendo at Arnold Park for sittings.

For many years, I read the words outside the zendo solely through the lens of my own work and personal experiences. You see, shortly after I first moved to Rochester in 2003, I was working as a home health aide, and the majority of my clients were receiving palliative hospice care. My work and zazen were a powerful combination, as they were so deeply resonant with each other.

The moments of my life were well steeped in reminders of the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the time of death, but were still limited: after all, they were grounded in a perspective that viewed death primarily through the context of sickness and old age.

What they didn't account for was the impact of systemic oppression and marginalization on mortality, health, and longevity. As my direct involvement in anti-oppression activism has increased through the decades, this has changed. It is clear that any deep practice of contemplation regarding the uncertainty of the time of death must plumb the depths of racism's role in society.

It is heartbreaking that this lesson has been so strongly present here in Rochester, particularly in the aftermath of the murder of Daniel Prude by several officers of the Rochester Police Department on March 23, 2020. It wasn't until September 2, 2020 that the video footage of the murder was released to the public.

The murder of Black people by police officers in the United States is heartbreakingly frequent. Breonna Taylor. Rayshard Brooks. George Floyd. Atatiana Jefferson. Aura Rosser. Stephon Clark. Botham Jean. Philando Castille. Alton Sterling. Michelle Cusseaux. Freddie Gray. Janisha Fonville. Eric Garner. Akai Gurley. Gabriella

Nevarez. So, so many more.

And now, locally, Daniel Prude.

The tenets of Buddhism teach us of the preciousness of all life, and of the deep and abiding potential of being reborn as a human: the potential for enlightenment, the potential to awakening to the bodhisattvic path, the potential to liberate all sentient beings. Every Jukai, we are invited to contemplate the six realms of unenlightened existence, and through doing so are reminded of the vital importance of not taking this potential lightly, for ourselves or for others.

Every one of those murders was a violent destruction of this potential.

And so it was that, on September 5, I joined well over a thousand other protesters on the streets of Rochester. Our goals were and are to protest Daniel Prude's murder and to elevate the demands being made by the Black organizers of Free the People Roc. Our end goal is to make the changes that are necessary to prevent future violence by the police against members of the Black community.

In other words: the protests arose from a place of deep compassion and from a profound commitment to cherish all life.

Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, one of the the first protests against police brutality was met with an overwhelming show of police brutality. Through the night, police deployed pepper balls, tear gas, military vehicles, sound cannons, and flash bangs at me and the other protesters. We were "armed" with nothing more than umbrellas and handmade shields to help protect ourselves from the tear gas and pepper balls and bottles of water to help each other wash the tear gas and pepper spray from our eyes.

Over the course of over two hours, the barrage

TEXT BY Lore McSpadden



PRESS PHOTO COURTESY OF PRUDE FAMILY

of tear gas and pepper balls pushed the protesters back from the Blue Cross Arena to Spiritus Christi Church, locations that are approximately a half mile from each other. The police officers would announce loudly through their PA system that the gathering was unlawful, and that anyone who did not disperse would be arrested—and then, instead of moving forward to arrest anyone, they would once again shoot chemical weapons upon us and deploy the sound cannons. People who were not wearing respirator masks, goggles, or earplugs ended up dispersing, but not because they wanted to leave the protest; rather, they were going to find the many street medics who were out on the streets or to make their way to Spiritus Christi, where medics were set up to help provide medical treatment to protesters.

I had already talked with my friends who had been out the night before. One had his nose broken by a police officer, and was then arrested. One had been hit in the head with a pepper ball with so much force it had left an open wound. One had been knocked out of his wheelchair by the charging police officers; another one of my friends who was next to him put her body over his to protect him from the still-charging officers, and when she refused to get up and leave him, she was hit in the face with an officer's club. If she hadn't been wearing the protective gear of her profession (she's a union ironworker), I shudder to think what injury would have happened. And these are just the most dramatic of the list: countless of my friends are nursing bruises, sprained ankles, skin wounds, and aching lungs.

And so it was that I had come prepared. I was also covered from head-to-toe in black clothing. I had on a black bike helmet, a respirator mask, goggles, knee pads, and was holding a black umbrella in front of me to block the toxic waves of tear gas that we were being engulfed in. Very little, if any, of my skin was visible.

As a result, I ended up experiencing in real time the change in how the cops treated me from the moment when they thought I was a young Black man until they saw my ID and realized that it said I am a 40-year-old white woman.

You see, for those who don't know me personally, I am a non-binary transmasculine person who has been on gender-affirming hormone therapy (testosterone) for almost 18 months, and who had gender-affirming top surgery last November. I am also a strength athlete, and my silhouette is easily interpreted as that of a man.

Sometime around 12:30 am, the protesters who had been able to weather all of the chemical and sonic weapons that had been deployed at us were at the intersection of Church and Fitzhugh. We had been on Church, but when the cops charged us for yet another time, the protestors split between continuing a bit further down on Church and going onto Fitzhugh; I was one of the ones who went onto Fitzhugh. The cops formed a line again, this time no more than 20 feet from us.

They charged towards us again, and I had to make a calculated decision about whether to run yet again, or stand my ground. I did not want to turn my back on them charging us from such close proximity, and I was and continue to be willing to be arrested, so I chose to stand my ground. Those who ran ended up at Spiritus Christi Church, which was still open to protesters who needed medical care and/or sanctuary.

A cop slowed down in front of me, spun me around, and threw me to the ground. I could feel the sharp impact of my knee pads against the ground: I have no doubt that if I hadn't been wearing high-impact knee pads, I would have experienced a serious injury to my kneecaps. The cop grabbed me by my shoulders and pushed me face down onto the ground. I was told gruffly I was going to be arrested.

The officer then told me to put my hands behind my back so that I could be handcuffed. I did, and this was the first time that he would have been able to clearly and undeniably see that my skin was white. He instantly became gentler in his handling of me, and used less force to put the handcuffs around my wrists. Instead of the violence he used when pushing me to the ground, he talked me through how he was going to help me stand up.

As he and I were walking to the police car where he was going to start processing me, he referred to me multiple times as "dude" and "man." I became panicked when I started to think through how he would respond when he saw my driver's license, which still lists me as female. I figured I should let him know what to expect.

"My driver's license says I'm female," I said through the mask.

He didn't quite hear me, so I repeated it louder. He laughed. "Well, what are you?"

I decided that, given the context, I don't want to get into a Gender Studies 101 conversation through my respirator mask, so I simply answered, "Female." The sadness I felt at telling



**LORE MCSPADDEN** (they/them) is grateful to have a fellow RZC Sangha member, Larry McSpadden, as their father, and for the early introduction to the Dharma that he provided. They began sitting with the Madison Zen Center in 2002, and attended their first sesshin in Rochester in 2004; early experiences at the RZC also included nearly a year and a half on staff. Lore lives in Rochester with their wife and son, and they are regularly joined by their six cats and one dog for at-home zazen.

this lie about who I am stabbed at me. The saddest part of it was that there was no room for the truth to be safely shared in that situation.

He asked me where my ID was, and I told him which of my zippered pockets it was in. He took it out, and started writing down my information. He got to my birthday.

“Wait: how old are you?”

I told him that I’m turning 40 in a few weeks.

At this point, I could see in his eyes that he was doing some complicated mental gymnastics. In the last three minutes, he had had to adjust his interpretation of me from young Black man, to young white man, to young white woman, to 40-year-old white woman. He had put it together that I’m not in the category of people he was taught to treat as violently as he did when he first interacted with me.

(Side note: no one should be in that category. No one should be treated that brutally at the hands of a police officer.)

Sometime during those mental gymnastics, another cop asked him if he should bring the wagon around to take me to jail. The officer who had pushed me to the ground, grabbed and shoved my shoulders, and told me in no uncertain terms that I was being arrested changed his tune, and said that I’m not being arrested, that instead he’s just going to take down the information on my ID.

While my ID information was being taken down, he was regularly calling me “he... I mean, she.” He made fun of me for being at the protests, and said that I should be at home relaxing instead. He asked me at one point why I stayed at the protests after they “stopped being peaceful,” and I replied something along the lines of, “My definition of peace and yours are clearly different.” I was told that I need to leave the area and go home, and that if he interacts with me again at a protest, I’ll be instantly arrested.

I guarantee that if I wasn’t who my driver’s license says I am, and if he hadn’t been so shocked at the discrepancy between who I am and who he had assumed I was, I would have been booked that night. I also guarantee that I’ll be back on the front lines whenever possible; in fact, on the day that I am writing these words, I am preparing to go out to another protest tonight. I may or may not be arrested: who knows? This fight continues, and I’m in it for the long haul.

In the book *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening through Race, Sexuality, and Gender*, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel writes, “How could a path to spiritual

Who is  
Daniel  
Prude?  
What is  
the truth  
of his body?  
What is the  
truth of  
his body  
in this world?

liberation possibly unfold if we turn away from the realities that particular embodiments bring? To confront hatred with spirituality is to confront the way we view race, sexuality, gender, or whatever form of embodiment we are as living beings. To provide a meaningful path to spiritual liberation, spirituality must acknowledge the body and the denigration of certain types of bodies in the world.” As with all things related to the practice of Zen, this acknowledgement is not a theoretical one, nor one that is solely intellectual.

Rather, this acknowledgment of the body and the denigration of certain types of bodies is the direct, lived experience of all people. It is the this-ness of *Just This*. It is the heart and substance of what we must navigate along our commitment to the liberation of all beings.

Who am I? Who is this body? Who is this body in this world?

Joe Prude called the Rochester Police Department because his brother Daniel was having a mental health crisis that had been worsened through ingestion of drugs. Daniel was naked and bleeding, and the night was cold and wet. The police officers placed a spit hood over Daniel’s head, but failed to provide him with a blanket. Officer Mark Vaughn pressed him to the ground, using both of his hands and all of his body weight. Daniel became unresponsive; after the ambulance did finally arrive at 3:27 AM, he was declared brain dead. He was kept on life support for a week, but died upon being removed from life support. His death was ruled a homicide by the Monroe County Medical Examiner.

Who is Daniel Prude? What is the truth of his body? What is the truth of his body in this world?

In Red Pine’s translation of *The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*, Bodhidharma is recorded as having said, “Life and death are important. Don’t suffer them in vain. There’s no advantage in deceiving yourself.” This is the call that brought me to the front lines last Saturday and that will continue bringing me back.

Life and death are important. There’s no advantage in deceiving ourselves: racial injustice and systemic racism are the root cause of so much suffering, of so many deaths. The Dharma teaches me this, in no uncertain terms: Black lives matter. **///**

EDITOR’S NOTE: On February 23, a grand jury refused to indict any of the officers involved in Daniel Prude’s murder. The protesters, who never stopped demonstrating, have now redoubled their efforts.



## A WESTERN ZEN STUDENT VISITS CHINA

# Stranger in a strange land

**FOR MANY IN THE WEST, CHINA IS AN IMMENSE** paradox; a koan writ large in which our collective mind sees reflected its own fears, anxieties, and fantastical delusions. Like working on a koan, too, trying to understand China without direct experience of it can be like “wandering in darkness” from one dark path of misunderstanding to another. What I found when I went there for myself upended my expectations, despite my best attempts to learn about it in advance. The truth was more subtle and complex than anything I had anticipated, and also more beautiful and inspiring, especially as a Western student of Buddhism. I went to China in part seeking connections between my Zen practice and the ancient heritage of our tradition, and I did end up finding such connections, though not in the places I had initially set out to see.



**IN EARLY 2019**, my wife was asked by a colleague if she would consider traveling to Nanjing, China to teach a week-long class to a group of Chinese professionals. Visas and accommodations were part of the package, including arrangements for a tag-along husband. We jumped at the opportunity, and only later realized the com-

plexity of traveling to a place as culturally distant from the United States as China. Contradictory advice was everywhere; one Chinese friend was aghast that we were planning to go it alone rather than pay a full-service tour company to arrange every detail for us; on the other hand, another Chinese friend was so certain that we would have an effortless, easy trip that he discouraged my attempts to learn Mandarin as unnecessary. Guidebooks, travel blogs, and even the U.S. State Department all offered assurances that China is a very safe place for Americans to visit; however, news sites, history books, and other sources sometimes left me feeling anxious. Consider this advice I received from a trusted and very well-traveled family member:

“Do not expect to be incognito. You will be tracked, followed, listened to, photographed and interactions with ‘locals’ will be reported. You will be questioned: what are you doing here? Where are you going? Where have you been? Who did you talk to? Expect to have your passport and visa “held” at your hotel. I don’t mean to sound paranoid but... you should stay on the beaten path.”

This went on for pages, and far from being completely over the top, everything he wrote fit a pattern of harassment reported by foreign

TEXT AND  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Dharma  
Cloud* (Doug Carr)

► Memorial to Baozhi, one of the monks with the imperial patronage of Emperor Wu

journalists in China who, it turns out, have a tendency to write and publish their personal stories. When my wife read this email, for a brief moment she was almost ready to back out of the whole trip. We were just a few days away from departure and were vacillating between feelings of excitement and anxiety. For all our attempts to know, we really had no idea what was in store.



**AS A READER** of *Zen Bow*, chances are higher than average that you've at least heard of Chan, the Chinese older sibling to Japanese Zen, and that you know some of its history.

Maybe you have a few Chinese friends or colleagues, or you have a favorite Chinese restaurant that serves a pretty good General Tso's chicken or Buddha's Delight vegetable medley (neither of which are actually common dishes in China). If you're a news hound or history buff, maybe thinking about China stirs up images of student protests at Tiananmen Square, unsettling stories of the Cultural Revolution, or reports about how the quintessential "Third World" country, a term coined by Chairman Mao, is today industrializing so fast that it will soon eclipse the United States as the world's largest economy. The Chinese government's provocative behavior abroad, oppression at home, and appalling treatment of ethnic minorities all provide endless fodder for the 24-hour news cycle, and American politicians seem to love nothing more than to blame the Chinese bogeyman for every possible ill.

This basically sums up my perception of China prior to stepping off the plane in Nanjing in November 2019. China was a mystery, and my wife and I stood at its gates, bleary eyed, jet-lagged, excited, and uncertain. Nor could we have had any idea that just a few short weeks after we had seen our sights and gone home that COVID-19 would erupt into the world in Wuhan, just a few hours' drive from where we stood. In retrospect, almost every one of our concerns were misguided in some way, but we had yet to learn any of those lessons.

Residents of Rochester might be amused to know that my first impression on the ground in mainland China was that the Nanjing airport reminded me faintly of the Rochester International Airport. We shuffled our bags down a long, fluorescent lit, grey-tiled terminal, echoing and empty except for a handful of employees and other stragglers from our flight. The walls were decorated with lonely ads touting local businesses and tourism, and the occasional out-of-



context attempt at art. At customs, an enormous screen played an endless loop of a flashy recruitment ad for the border patrol, featuring high tech battle gear, action packed adventures, and helping hands and warm smiles for senior citizens in need. "Serve your country, protect your family and your way of life, join the Border Patrol!" By contrast, the customs officials in their glass booths looked bored out of their minds. They showed less interest in us than the guards at most Canadian crossings. We were waved through curtly after presenting our passports.

That first afternoon what stood out most were the differences. Security cameras were ubiquitous, mounted prominently at every store-front and street corner as deterrents. The chaotic roads made my most stressful rush-hour commutes seem like polite queues at the bank. Even upstate New York's most creative drivers would be humbled and awed by the style and bravado of the Shanghai taxi-man. Later, I recall just sitting in the window of our hotel room overlooking a busy commercial plaza, feeling lost in a sea of neon Hanzi characters, until jetlag finally overcame me.



**OUR THREE-WEEK** itinerary would take us all over the country, and I incorporated famous Buddhist sites like the Tibetan Lama temple in Beijing, and Dàfó, a 233-ft Buddha carved into a cliff during the Tang dynasty. The first week,

► Vulture Peak Chan Temple, Nanjing



**DHARMA CLOUD** (Doug Carr) is a Zen practitioner and engineer in Carnation, Washington. He has been a member of the RZC since 2002, and is eagerly awaiting the "all clear" for a return to sesshin at Chapin Mill.

though, was dedicated to business; as my wife lectured in Nanjing, I was left to wander on my own. Guidebooks aimed at the general traveler don't list many Buddhist attractions in Nanjing. The city boasts spectacular museums, parks, and monuments, but in some cases these modern attractions are papered right over the sites of ancient monasteries and temples, reflecting the norms of contemporary Chinese society. One such spot, in the midst of a beautifully forested park, was a building with a tall arching roof made entirely from stone. Today it houses some neglected, dimly lit, and eerily creepy mannequin displays of "Heroes of the People" posed eternally in acts of valor, something clearly left over from a previous generation's political zeal. A placard outside explained in broken English that the vaulted stone ceilings had given the building its ancient name, the "Beamless Hall," and it had originally been built to house an enormous golden statue of Amitabha, the Celestial Buddha.

The Beamless Hall sits inside the sprawling Zhongshan park, which encompasses a mountain that has hosted important religious sites for millennia. Most of those are invisible now, lucky to be remembered even as a footnote on a placard. A restored Ming dynasty tomb and the mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen draw the biggest crowds to the park, but I preferred walking through the nearly deserted quarter of the Lingyu pagoda, where I found the Beamless Hall. There was a calm serenity in those woods, maybe something left over from the days when a Buddhist monastery had resided there. As I came to the end of one meandering path, I found what looked like a weather-worn stupa, and so I stopped for a while, with a

Everywhere  
I went,  
regular people  
were out  
enjoying  
the mild fall  
weather, and  
they had a  
disarming  
openness and  
warmth that  
reminded me  
of stereotypical  
small town.



vague intention that I should honor it somehow. Another broken-English placard explained that it was the memorial of an important Liang dynasty monk. I felt like this was a special place somehow, but wasn't quite sure why, so I snapped a few pictures and eventually moved on.

If you've heard even one or two of Roshi Kjolhede's teishos, chances are good that you've heard him read from Andy Ferguson's *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, a translation of a huge body of sayings and biographical stories of the ancient Chan masters. A few months after I returned from China, I discovered another of Andy's books, *Tracking Bodhidharma*, in which he lays out a case for reconsidering the traditional story of the legendary First Ancestor of Zen, Bodhidharma, for whom I've long felt an affinity. The book details the history of Emperor Wu of Liang, who features in the first case in the *Blue Cliff Record*, when Bodhidharma infamously told him that his building of Buddhist temples and supporting of monks amounted to "no merit whatsoever."

Emperor Wu's capital was the city that is today called Nanjing, and among the many monks he supported with imperial patronage, one of the most famous was named Baozhi. This eminent Dharma teacher had probably risen to prominence before the Indian sage Bodhidharma appeared in China, but some of the stories about Baozhi have a Zen-like flair, and it's possible that the two masters might have met in the flourishing Buddhist scene surrounding Emperor Wu's court. In the official dynastic histories, another of Emperor Wu's favorite monks was reported to have been a disciple of Bodhidharma. The "blue-eyed barbarian" Bodhidharma famously refused imperial patronage himself, setting the tone for generations of Zen monks that followed in his lineage. In his book, Ferguson described visiting a memorial to Baozhi while on the trail of Bodhidharma, and the place sounded familiar to me. When I pulled up the pictures I had taken, sure enough, that "important Liang dynasty monk" whose memorial I had visited was none other than Baozhi, who had taught the Dharma to Emperor Wu and possibly crossed paths with Bodhidharma. I'd been wandering around seeking signs of Zen's history, completely unaware that I was totally immersed in it.



**AFTER A FEW DAYS** exploring Nanjing, my worries had mostly vanished. Nanjing is a modern city with bustling commerce and good

public transportation. Armed only with some phone apps and my scant Chinese language skills, I was able to navigate around and enjoy the city easily enough. People mostly ignored me; it was rare to see a non-Chinese, but not rare enough to be noteworthy. Everywhere I went, regular people were out enjoying the mild fall weather, and they had a disarming openness and warmth that reminded me of stereotypical small town, mid-western Americans. For reference, Nanjing, as a modestly large Chinese metropolis, has a population about the same as New York City.

One sunny afternoon, late in the week, I was exploring in the city with no set agenda when I had an intuition that I should visit a particular park. Just a blank green square on my map, White Egret Island Park was not mentioned in my guidebooks. The park surrounds a scenic pond, and people were out socializing, playing chess, and making music in the nooks and gazebos of the carefully arranged landscapes. Tucked away in the most remote corner of the park, I stumbled upon the “Vulture Peak Chan Temple.”

The doors were open, but it was nearly deserted except for a handful of older lay women in volunteer vests. There were handwritten signs in Chinese and English about not disturbing the monks, but no monks to be seen. A tiny woman, hunched over with age, approached me and started asking questions in Chinese, but all I could say in return was “Wô méi tīng dòng [I don't understand].” To my surprise she seemed satisfied by this answer, and shuffled off down the veranda saying “Wô méi tīng dòng... Wô méi tīng dòng...” On my way out, I startled two women who were restocking incense offerings at an altar to Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. They both bowed toward me with gassho and reflexively I did the same. That was all that seemed necessary to reach a mutual understanding, and their faces eased from uncertainty into smiles. It was a reassuring glimmer of a shared connection, something beyond our inability to communicate with language.



**IN THE SOUTHWESTERN** city of Chengdu, we stayed in the neighborhood of the Wenshu (Manjushri) Monastery. On our last morning in the city we decided to explore the temple grounds, which were thrumming with all sorts of life and activity. Wenshu is part monastery, part public temple, and part city

It turns out that Bodhidharma, or “Dámó,” was everywhere in China; pop culture has subsumed the Buddhist legend into an amalgamation of wild-eyed, grizzled, and misshapen features.

park, replete with tai-chi and dancing classes in the courtyards. This was a vibrant, living community center on a busy Saturday morning. I stopped to listen to a group of monks chanting sutras in a fast two-tone drone that bounced back and forth between pitches in a syncopated rhythm. The monks read from thick sutra books that lay open in front of them. They looked as though they'd been at it for a while, and probably still had a long way to go, too. Across the courtyard from the chanting room, I discovered what may have been the zendo for the monastery. I immediately recognized a familiar figure on the wall at the head of the room; none other than Bodhidharma.

It turns out that Bodhidharma, or “Dámó,” was everywhere in China; pop culture has subsumed the Buddhist legend into an amalgamation of wild-eyed, grizzled, and misshapen features more reminiscent of the Bridge Keeper from Monty Python and the Holy Grail than a Buddhist monk. You can walk into just about any trinket shop or gallery selling carvings in China and ask for him by name, and they'll have at least one grotesque figurine to show you. The better-quality ones may even have a feature or two retained from his Buddhist legends, like a missing shoe or a reed for crossing the Yangzi





◀ Guanyin in the Vulture Peak Chan Temple

river. But here in Wenshu, like a breath of fresh air, was a simple and unmistakable image of a monk facing a cave wall, doing zazen.

There was little evidence of any recent meditation activity in the room; its main purpose at that moment seemed to be to serve as a foyer for the administrative offices of the monastery. Consistent with stories I've heard from others, the many Buddhists we encountered didn't seem much interested in meditation; then again, I was just a tourist passing through, unable to read the signage or talk to anyone. What would such a person make of the Zen Center at Arnold Park? The most visible practice by far was prostration before the various gilded Buddha and Bodhisattva figures, accompanied by prayer and offerings of incense and money. That aspect of popular Chinese religious practice is especially common, but it felt strikingly foreign to me. The more mainstream Buddhist places we visited all had droves of people making the circuit from altar to altar carrying sticks of lit incense, one by one bowing in obeisance before each figure. In the midst of these public displays of piety, I felt like a gawking tourist more than a fellow Buddhist. Still, I was drawn to these places as though by magnetic attraction, and on closer inspection it was never

hard for me to find evidence of more familiar traditions. In Wenshu, not far from Bodhidharma, I discovered a sequence of 10 paintings arranged around the walls of the room, unmistakably illustrating the famous Zen ox-herding series.



**THE ETYMOLOGY OF** the word “reveal” links it closely to “re-veil,” to replace one veil of misunderstanding with another. China’s chief impression on my memory is of open-hearted and earnest people, and yet paradoxically it is also a country that demonstrates almost daily its capacity for stunning brutality. The book *The Souls of China* by Ian Johnson describes the complex ways in which the Chinese people and their government have lately been interacting in the sphere of religion, which helped me make sense of some of what I had seen. The beautifully restored temples almost certainly owe much to the government’s recent obsession with promoting “traditional values.” The line between political expediency and genuine interest in traditional religious culture is blurry. Going all the way back to Emperor Wu and probably well beyond, the embracing of Buddhism by any political movement has usually carried a subtext of statecraft. Likewise, from Shenxiu’s Northern School to the Zen teachers who encouraged Japan’s Imperialism, returning those embraces too wholeheartedly has often proved perilous.

My impulse is to look to Bodhidharma. Reportedly a prince in India prior to becoming a monk, he would have known all too well about the corrupting influence of worldly power. He taught the Dharma to his disciples far away from imperial courts and prestigious monasteries, and that’s where his lineage thrived after him while other schools of Buddhism rose and fell with imperial favor. What I encountered in Nanjing and Chengdu felt more authentic than a contrived government campaign. If old traditions are actually being revived in these places it’s not because the government has been footing the bill for glossy building restorations, but because people have preserved those traditions in their homes and in quiet backwater temples when the same government was trying to stamp them out not so long ago.

Perhaps it’s a testament to the wisdom of Bodhidharma and his successors, and to the endurance and forbearance of common Chinese people, that signs of the Chan tradition are today springing up, lotus-like from the muck, to inspire another generation of seekers of the Way. **///**

◀ Bodhidharma facing the wall in Wenshu Monastery



# Sightings



## FURTHER REMARKS

### **SOUTH BRISTOL IDYLL** ¶

*Dear Zen Bow*: The cover photo of this issue was so striking I opened the issue right away. The photo of Roshi with friends further in the issue caught my eye. The lyrical description of the Gratwick Place is right on but the identities of the location and the people in the photo might be corrected (perhaps with the digital editions?).

This photo was taken in 1966 or 1967, soon after Roshi arrived in Rochester. The scene is the deck of our family cabin in South Bristol, near Naples, New York. The couple seated next to Roshi are not the Gratwicks but are Mary and Ed Barnitz, who were family friends from the Unitarian Church and who were frequent visitors and outdoor enthusiasts. Roshi was introduced to a number of folks from this group when he first arrived. The young lady is my sister, Ellen, who was 14 or 15 years old. Roshi loved our “golden beagle,” who was a mutt we found by the roadside

as a puppy.

I love *Zen Bow*; thanks for the great work!

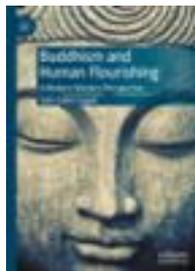
DAVID FERNANDEZ  
*Ithaca, New York*

## IN PRINT

### **THE BOOK: BUDDHISM AND HUMAN FLOURISHING BY SETH ZUIHŌ SEGALL** ¶

*What it's about*: This book is about the tension between Buddhist and Western conceptions of what it means to live the best life according to the Greek concept of *eudaimonia* (human flourishing).

*Why it's worthy*: The author studied Zen and other practices with several teachers, and Rev. Daiken Nelson, Sensei, ordained him. Mr. Segall is an erudite in Buddhist study and practice and several other fields. He is a lay Zen priest and psychologist who taught at four universities and directed the psychology



department of a large urban northeastern hospital. He is the author/editor of *Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings* and writes about Buddhist philosophy, psychology, ethics, art, history, social engagement and practice for his blog, *The Existential Buddhist*. He is also the science writer for the Mindfulness Research Monthly. His latest book is *Living Zen: A Practical Guide to a Balanced Existence*.

Mr. Segall dazzles the reader with his diaphanous writing style. He shines a light on the development of Buddhism in the West and offers his views on the direction it could take to strengthen its roots in new soil. This reminds me of Roshi Kapleau's firm belief that Buddhism had to change because everything changes, and Indian trappings were swapped once for Tibetan trappings, and then Japanese and Korean, etc., so why shouldn't it reflect now the conditions and circumstances of the West?

The author transports the reader over considerable territories of Aristotelian philosophy, comparing and contrasting it with the Buddhist path of living the right life. The great challenge for us as Western practitioners, he says, is “how to make Buddhist practice our own—how to make it something we can fully endorse without inner division or pretense.”

Verdict: highly recommended.—AMAURY CRUZ

## ON SCREEN

### **DICK JOHNSON IS DEAD (NETFLIX, 2020)** ¶

*What it's about*: This one-of-a-kind film was made by a documentarian (Kirsten Johnson) who is grappling with the impending loss of her father, a psychiatrist, to Alzheimer's and eventual death. Kirsten is very close to her father, so, as a sort of ther-



apy for both of them, she films “rehearsals” of his death by various means and in various places. Dick gamely collaborates with her, and the interplay between the two of them as he “dies” multiple times is suffused with humor, tenderness, and a growing awareness of how much they mean to each other.

*Why it's worthy*: As Dick says at one point, “I'm pretty good at living in the here and the now.” It's touching and inspiring to see such openness, honesty, and joy in the context of deeply felt pain and loss. The radical willingness of father and daughter to face and accept death brings light to everyone around them.—JOHN PULLEYN

## VISITORS LOG

**ON WEDNESDAY**, February 24, 2021 a nephew and grand-nephew (Mark Rosenberg and his son Michael) of the late Roshi Philip Kapleau visited both Chapin Mill and Arnold Park. They were hosted by

## ▷ SIGHTINGS

Roshi Kjolhede, who noted, “The visit...went swimmingly. Mark is a warm, openhearted guy who was very much affected by seeing Roshi’s old quarters and the zendo. I explained to them that the Center has been shut down for nearly a year now, and that they were the first non-staff to step into PK’s old quarters in that time.

“Michael, the grandnephew, is very youthful, personable, and enthusiastic.... He had read parts of *Three Pillars* and ...spoke fondly of Uncle Phil bringing him gifts when he was a boy: first an Erector set, then a bow and arrow (‘...and not just a cheap bow and arrow, but a really good one!’)

“When I presented Mark with a copy of Roshi’s memorial publication, *I Won’t Say*, he was surprised and visibly moved, and thanked me several times. He and Michael leafed through it, marveling especially at Roshi in his yoga poses.

“I was a bit surprised at how gratifying it was for me to meet Mark, especially since I could see Roshi in him. It left me feeling filled up.”

### BEYOND SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING A REGENERATIVE ORGANIZATION

The recent Sangha Renewal survey of active local members—the results of which will be ready to share soon—was one of the first activities in a new strategic planning process the Center has undertaken to help us become a more flexible organization that is set up to adapt more quickly to change. The notion of a “regenerative organization” has implications for change that a “sustainable organization” does not.

In a recent teisho, Roshi characterized the Sangha Re-



◀ Michael and Mark in the Arnold Park zendo



◀ Michael and Mark Rosenberg visiting Roshi’s gravesite at Chapin Mill

newal survey as “Sangha sculpting Sangha.” As part of an ongoing process of self-examination, surveys will be implemented at least every other year to provide continuing feedback to members, trustees, and staff—which will, in turn, pinpoint the areas on which we need to focus. The entire Sangha will be invited to participate in this process, and later this year out-of-town members will be sent a slightly different version of the Sangha Renewal survey that was sent to local members.—CHRIS PULLEYN



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## RZC ONLINE

AS THIS *ZEN BOW* GOES to press, our offerings continue to be mostly online. Online sesshins and workshops have attracted a high number of participants, and, as a result, workshops have been scheduled more frequently. The only downside is that a donation is optional for the workshops, and most people have elected to not pay.

A small task force that includes members who are medical professionals has been meeting to determine when and how the Center will reopen. Full vaccination will be required to resume sitting in person at both Arnold Park and Chapin Mill, and the task force is considering using Signup Genius for people to reserve a mat, as the number of seats will be limited. It is unclear when the requirement for social distancing in the zendo will be lifted or when chanting can resume. We're all looking forward to reopening, but the decisions will be made based on evidence-based practices.



## NEXT ISSUE

The coming of Spring brings a lot of evocative words to mind: fresh, blooming, youth, promise, sunlight, awakening. What are you most looking forward to as the pandemic restrictions ease? And, as warmer weather makes more outdoor adventures possible, are you planning a trip? A garden? A visit to Chapin Mill? Will the increased possibilities make it more or less difficult for you to sit? Let us know what you think and hope for as we move from cold and dark to warmth and light.