

► **"THINK NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL"**
Roshi Kjolhede on Huineng, the misfit
monk-turned-teacher

TRUST, FAITH, AND DOUBT:
Reflections on the practice

**WHAT I DID DURING THE
PANDEMIC:** The makings of our
Sangha during the past year





Winter 2022 | VOLUME XLIII

“WELL,” COMMENTED PHIL, the news reporter who is the protagonist of the movie *Groundhog Day*, “What if there is no tomorrow? There wasn’t one today.”

He didn’t mean the same thing that Zen Master Hakuin did in his Chant in Praise of Zazen: “Here there is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today.” Phil was expressing the feeling of a myriad anxieties and experiences becoming repetitive, banal, unstoppable. Very much like so many people are feeling today as the roller coaster of COVID continues its ups and downs, and previously unthinkable challenges (the failure of democracy, the end of civilized debate, the world on fire) become daily provocations.

To be anxious about these things, to worry about how frightful the future might be, is human. To perseverate on them is pathological. We all know that, and yet our addicted fingers keep refreshing the news sites and reading the informed analyses that will be outdated tomorrow. What are we hoping to accomplish? I am always amazed when I attend sesshin, and seven days later the news is essentially the same. Albeit with the tarnish of endless reactions, contractions, and riffs from late-night comics.

Of course we want to help in any way we can. Which really means paying attention to what’s right in front of us. Which also means placing our attention where it will do the most good. Here. Where there is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today.—CHRIS PULLEYN

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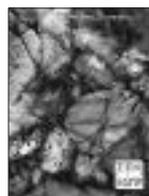
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ON THE COVER

PHOTOGRAPH BY Tom Phillips | Cross-section of a micrometeorite, back-lit with polarized light. Defined as meteorites less than 1 mm in diameter and sometimes called cosmic dust, some 40,000 metric tons fall to Earth yearly.



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Soundings

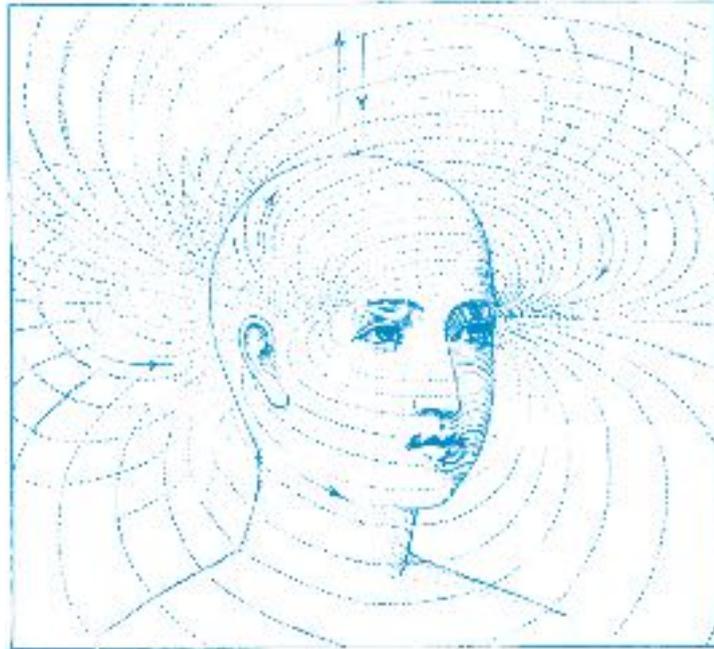
A WANDERING MIND IS AN UNHAPPY MIND

UNLIKE OTHER ANIMALS, human beings spend a lot of time thinking about what is not going on around them, contemplating events that happened in the past, might happen in the future, or will never happen at all. Indeed, “stimulus-independent thought” or “mind wandering” appears to be the brain’s default mode of operation. Although this ability is a remarkable evolutionary achievement that allows people to learn, reason, and plan, it may have an emotional cost.

Many philosophical and religious traditions teach that happiness is to be found by living in the moment, and practitioners are trained to resist mind wandering and “to be here now.” These traditions suggest that a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. Are they right? Laboratory experiments have revealed a great deal about the cognitive and neural bases of mind wandering, but little about its emotional consequences in everyday life.

The most reliable method for investigating real-world emotion is experience sampling, which involves contacting people as they engage in their everyday activities and asking them to report their thoughts, feelings, and actions at that moment. Unfortunately, collecting real-time reports from large numbers of people as they go about their daily lives is so cumbersome and expensive that experience sampling has rarely been used to investigate the relationship between mind wandering and happiness and has always been limited to very small samples.

We solved this problem by developing a Web application for the iPhone, which we used to create an unusually large database of real-time reports of thoughts, feelings, and actions of a broad range of people as they went about their daily activities. The application contacts participants through their iPhones at random moments during their waking hours, presents them with questions, and records their answers to a database at



www.trackyourhappiness.org. The database currently contains nearly a quarter of a million samples from about 5000 people from 83 different countries who range in age from 18 to 88 and who collectively represent every one of 86 major occupational categories.

To find out how often people’s minds wander, what topics they wander to, and how those wanderings affect their happiness, we analyzed samples from 2250 adults (58.8% male, 73.9% residing in the United States, mean age of 34 years) who were randomly assigned to answer a happiness question (“How are you feeling right now?”), an activity question (“What are you doing right now?”) and a mind-wandering question (“Are you thinking about something other than what you’re currently doing?”) answered with one of four options: no; yes, something pleasant; yes, something neutral; or yes, something unpleasant.

Our analyses revealed three facts. First, people’s minds wandered frequently, regardless of what they were doing. Mind wandering occurred in 46.9% of the samples and in at least 30% of the samples taken during every activity except making love. The frequency of mind

wandering in our real-world sample was considerably higher than is typically seen in laboratory experiments....

Second, multilevel regression revealed that people were less happy when their minds were wandering than when they were not, and this was true during all activities, including the least enjoyable. Although people’s minds were more likely to wander to pleasant topics (42.5% of samples) than to

unpleasant topics (26.5% of samples) or neutral topics (31% of samples), people were no happier when thinking about pleasant topics than about their current activity and were considerably unhappier when thinking about neutral topics or unpleasant topics than about their current activity.

Although negative moods are known to cause mind wandering, time-lag analyses strongly suggested that mind wandering in our sample was generally the cause, and not merely the consequence, of unhappiness.

Third, what people were thinking was a better predictor of their happiness than was what they were doing.... The variance explained by mind wandering was largely independent of the variance explained by the nature of activities, suggesting that the two were independent influences on happiness. In conclusion, a human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost.—MATTHEW A. KILLINGSWORTH AND DANIEL T. GILBERT ■ ScienceMag.org, November 12, 2010



MAKING A SPLASH

I HAVE WORKED with wood for most of my life. After I dropped out of college (like any good, self-respecting hippie did in those days), I worked full time for two years as a carpenter's helper, then as a carpenter, building houses. (I worked six months as a helper before the foreman allowed me to buy myself a hammer!) At some point I began making furniture, first reproduction antiques, then, more recently, my own designs.

For the last 15 years I have moved toward sculpture in wood, at first fairly realistic, but, over time, increasingly abstract. For the last year, I have been working on

Splash, a representation in wood of water splashing. Some might say that spending a year making a wooden splash is... just not right. Actually, during the year I paused many times for other projects: toys for the grandchildren and furniture for the Zen Center that is now in the dining room at Chapin Mill, including two new tables for tea service and an altar for the standing Bodhisattva. But I did keep track of the hours I spent on *Splash*—exactly one zillion!

Before I decided to make *Splash*, I made a meticulous study of images of splashes (thank you, Google). I zeroed in on those made by a large stone thrown into still water. While each splash is unique, there are commonalities in the forms. After the stone hits the water, there is first an encircling eruption, a ring of walls of water, like curved sheets, that spew and fling foam into the air. As that initial splash begins to quiet, as the hollow the falling stone created is collapsed by a central rush of water, there is then a solid, cylindrical, and explosive upward burst. More and more, I felt strongly drawn to the forms. They seemed quite beautiful and a little mysterious.

I chose basswood for the piece. Basswood is the preferred wood for many carvers because it is soft and has nearly no grain, so it is easy to work. I glued boards together to make a starting block, measuring carefully so that it would fit through the shop doorway when completed. I began the sculpture itself by making the initial cylinder of upward-thrusting water, which was fairly straightforward—at least conceptually. But then I got to the representation of the fractured foam spewing upwards, and quickly realized there was just no way to realistically carve it. I needed to develop something stylistic that expressed the feel of the spray. As I began to experiment, I was struck by a similarity between what I was making and Scholar's Rocks.

In the first half of the ninth century CE, during the Tang dynasty in China (also considered the golden age of Zen), an enthusiasm for rocks developed in Chinese culture, which gradually spread to Japan and Korea and has continued to the modern age. Known as Scholar's Rocks, they became well-known, valuable, and prestigious objects of contemplation. Such rocks are considered to be forms of art,





▲ A Scholar's Rock, shaped by the forces of nature but sculpted by the power of nature rather than human hands. The more eroded and irregularly contorted the rock, the better. The holes, perforations, and indentations signal presence of the patient, mighty forces of the universe, worthy of respect and serving as guides to finding harmony. Today, some Scholar's Rocks sell for tens of thousands of dollars. So I studied many pictures of Scholar's Rocks.

The challenge for the work became how to become a "force of nature" and somehow allow that to participate in the work. The famous painter Jackson Pollock is known for his technique of flinging and pouring paint onto large canvases. Pollock's friend Hans Hoffman is said to have once remarked that Pollock needed to work more from nature, to which Pollock famously replied, "I don't paint nature, I am nature." But what is the woodworking equivalent of flicking paint onto canvas?

Using woodworking tools of various kinds to carve the forms, I searched for ways to lose control of the process just a little, and hopefully allow "the universe" to become a co-sculptor. I glued on oddly shaped pieces of wood, and pieces with knots which I would normally discard, not knowing how they might be incorporated

later. The techniques I used continued to evolve and so the wooden foam-forms also evolved. I often returned to already carved places to apply new techniques I had learned. I had no picture in my mind of what the final form might be, and for a year I never considered any spot to be finished. I had the luxury of no deadlines, so I also had no idea when it might be done.

One rule in my shop that I try to follow is that there are no such things as setbacks or mistakes. When I would inadvertently crack off a fragile carved section of "foam"—which happened quite a few times—I imagined that maybe some force of nature had joined me in the creating, so I never tried to glue it back together.

I came to think of the process as sort of photographic; that is, capturing a still moment in the midst of change. How does one infuse dynamism into a frozen piece of wood? I imagined that the piece would be complete when it expressed, in the fixed and literally wooden form, maximal dynamism, a form in tumultuous flux. I also began to think of a splash as a metaphor for a thought arising in a still mind, then receding, leaving in its wake undisturbed awareness.

For me, the shop is a sacred space. In one corner of the room where I carve, I have a chair I use to practice zazen daily. My process also involves a great deal of time putting the tools down and just looking.

One curious aspect of working in the shop is that, in a real sense, I am not there. Unlike in the rest of my life, I nearly never have thoughts of me, or anything else. It is as though my hands and eyes take on an intelligence that I don't really feel is mine. Without thoughts of me, there doesn't seem to be a framework for a sense of ownership of what is happening, and there is rarely any sense of time passing. What a blessing to have such an all-consuming pastime right in my basement during the Covid pandemic!

Todd McGrain, my brother-in-law and sculptor of the new lotus flowers in the Chapin Mill courtyard, commented once that when a work of his is done, he has no sense that it was actually made by him. I get that. When I look at pieces I have made, I invariably think I could never have done that. The koan-like question comes to mind then: who made it?—ANDY STERN ■

OVERHEARD IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

MY LORDS, I DECLARE my interest as a chair of the Royal Veterinary College and as a person owned by two sentient horses. I know that they have feelings; I would define them in the following way. They experience comfort and joy when I wait on them hand and foot and bring them haylage, and frustration when I get things wrong in a dressage competition. I welcome the legislation that has now arrived, and there is much to welcome in it. It covers all government policy areas, as the Minister said, and means that all government departments will have to consider animal welfare and sentience issues when forming policy. The Bill also applies to wildlife....

The ASC [Animal Sentience Committee] must work transparently, publishing all its advice to government and having a direct role with the strong public interest in this issue. It should also demonstrate accountability by having a statutory duty to report direct to Parliament annually....

Importantly, the Bill must include a duty on government to create and maintain an animal sentience strategy. If it does not, all the responsibility is offshored to the ASC and guidance needs to be given, by means of that strategy, on the policy issues that the ASC would primarily concentrate on, though not to the exclusion of others at the ASC's discretion.

Lastly, the definition of "animal" should be expanded in the Bill. It currently applies to all vertebrates other than man. Ministers have indicated that the definition could be widened to include invertebrates if new evidence of sentience came forward. It appears that there is already sufficient evidence of sentience among cephalopods and decapod crustaceans, as is the case in the Scottish arrangements. When will the independent review of the subject be published, and can it be expedited so that we can include these animal groups in the Bill as it goes through both Houses? If the Minister is in any doubt about this latter point of inclusion of wider groups, I urge him to view the award-winning documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, which explores the rather bizarre and strange but nevertheless emotional relationship between a man and an octopus. I hope that he enjoys it but has a box of tissues to hand.—

BARONESS YOUNG OF OLD SCONE ■



How do I know when I'm ready for sesshin? I feel like I'm not a serious Zen student if I don't go to sesshin. Almost like a second-class citizen of the RZC. On the other hand, I have heard so many horror stories about how hard it is — the pain, the emotional stress, the beating-your-head-against-the-wall feeling of going to dokusan every day. How can I know I can handle this?

I'M ALWAYS SAD to hear people worrying about how they compare with others. The Zen Center is here to help everyone who wants to work on themselves, and that may include sesshin or not. It really depends (like everything) on circumstances, and each of us needs to make our own decisions. I've spoken to a number of members who've never gone to sesshin but who've benefited immensely from their Zen practice.

That being said, sesshin can be an amazing boost to practice when we're ready for it, and while it can be challenging, it can also be extremely fulfilling and rewarding. Many of the difficulties people run into (in sesshin and in life itself) are largely self-inflicted. Our self-judgment and worry amplify the unavoidable discomfort of some ten hours a day of formal sitting. It's what we call pain on top of pain.

Thankfully, for most of us who keep at it, those difficulties ease over time.

So how can we know when we're ready? When people ask this question, we ask if they've been able to sit three 35-minute rounds as we do on most Monday, Thursday, and Friday evenings. Obviously, sesshin is a big step up from one block of sitting, but experience has shown that for most people who are willing to take that step, it will work out.

It can also be helpful to move more gradually into longer sitting by starting out with one of the extended sittings we hold every month or two. You can find upcoming dates in the website calendar and check the schedule out beforehand. People are free to come to any or all of the blocks of sitting, and in that way you can work up to sesshin gradually.—SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN ■

HOW ZEN IS THAT!

▼ Presented without comment. PHOTOGRAPH BY GRETCHEN TARGEE



BUFFY THE GOOSE

WHETHER WE'RE WORKING on a koan or breath practice, we can take some lessons from Buffy, the resident goose at Chapin Mill.

On a gusty day last winter, a goose crash-landed in the field behind the barn. As a domestic American Buff, they [ed. note: we are not sure of their pronouns] likely originated from a nearby farm. Since they don't appear to be able to fly very high nor for any great distance, it's likely that a blast of wind helped it to get aloft and fly further than it ever had before.

Much of the ground was covered in about one foot of snow that day, so you could tell from the imprint that it was a rough landing. The goose caught our attention when we heard an unusual honking sound—louder and higher pitched than that of the Canada Geese that frequent the pond. As the goose proceeded to check out its new surroundings, it explored the pond, the orchard, and the

meadow by the Mill House, where it found some patches of exposed grass to munch on.

After landing in this totally unfamiliar place, the goose didn't appear to be the slightest bit fazed. It didn't lament "why me?" and it didn't think about what the future may or may not bring. After righting itself, it just shook off its feathers and carried on with the business of being a goose. When hungry, eat. When tired, sleep. When it rains, get wet. When fellow waterfowl stop by for a visit, honk. It's all very simple, as everything this goose could ever need is already within.

The same goes for us. Everything we could possibly need is within us. We don't need to change or control our conditions. If we get carried off in thoughts, we just need to shake them off and return to our practice. We do this simply by being the koan or the breath, being who we already are. In going and returning we never leave home.—DONNA KOWAL ■

THINGS ARE THINGS BECAUSE OF MIND: A TALE OF TWO TABLES

IN THE PROCESS of decluttering our home during the pandemic, my wife Christine and I set up a table in our front yard where we placed items that we wanted to pass along to someone else who might want or need them more. We also have a Little Free Library and a Little Free Pantry in our front yard, so we get a lot of foot and car traffic. The amount of food insecurity and economic inequity in our community is simultaneously heart-breaking and enraging, and we do what we can to be of service.

These items were initially on an old wooden table that we had kept in our basement. It had a big crack down the middle, it wobbled, and if you ran your hand over the top you were liable to get a splinter or two. However, we knew we'd need the table to remain out there so that we could continue placing items on it instead of on the ground; as such, we had a sign on the table that said, "Free Stuff! Please Leave the Table."

One day a few weeks ago, we returned home from running errands only to discover that the table was missing.

I'll admit: I was irked. We had set so many items in our yard that were freely available to anyone who needed them. The only thing in our yard that was explicitly labeled as not being a donation was the table, and someone took it! WTF?!

I ended up bringing up another table from our basement to use for putting our donations on, but I remained a bit miffed that the first table had been taken.

Fast forward to a recent Sunday. Christine was out working with a student in the gym, and I was inside enjoying a video chat with one of my longtime friends. There was a loud knock on the door, and I went to see who it was.

Outside, there was a very kind looking man who was a little older than I am. He sheepishly said that he was a furniture re-

stor, and he was so touched to see our generosity that he had taken our table a few weeks ago to restore it. He said he wanted to maintain its integrity as a worn antique, but that he repaired the crack down the center of the table, leveled everything, and refinished it. He went to his truck, and returned with the table!

It was undeniably the one I had set out, with some of the same marks and all of the character, but without the risk of splinters! And it didn't wobble anymore! And it was beautiful!

I felt gratitude and joy wash over me. I thanked him profusely, and he thanked us profusely in return for doing all that we do to take care of the community. I was nearly brought to tears of happiness. I had rushed to judgment when I saw that the table was missing, but now I couldn't deny that the whole experience was a testament to the kindness that can imbue our lives in the most unexpected of ways.

We have decided to give this table a place of honor in our home: it has become a simple altar space in our living room, where it can remind us every day to not rush to judgment of others, to believe in the goodness within the world, and to continue taking part in the wonderful flow of giving, receiving, and sharing that is available when we build community and connection.

So, all of that happened on a Sunday.

The next day, Monday, I had a very different experience of the table.

As mentioned, after our first table had been taken by the generous restorer of furniture, we replaced it with another cheap table from our basement, and we continued to keep it loaded up with the items we had collected to donate.

In that Monday's mail, I received a notification from the Code Enforcement division of the town we live in. Someone had apparently reported us for keeping "refuse" that had "create[d] an unsightly appearance or unreasonably disturb[ed] the comfort and repose of the neighbor-

hood," and that we needed to comply by removing the donation table. Included with the notice of violation was a picture that had been taken of our donation table.

Now, keep in mind that the donation table was (1) clearly labeled as items that were available to anyone in need, and (2) only set up for the handful of weeks in which we were most active in the decluttering process. I had continued to post the most essential items in our community's mutual aid groups on Facebook, and was only supplementing that process with the table in front due to how much stuff we have to donate.

And in regard to things that unreasonably disturb the comfort and repose of neighborhoods? I gotta tell ya: economic injustice, hunger, poverty, and the absence of generosity do a lot more to disturb me than a yard with an "unsightly appearance."

And mutual aid and generosity do more to restore a sense of comfort and repose than a manicured lawn ever could.

The fact that these two profoundly disparate responses to our donation table happened in such a short period of time brought some insights into my mind.

One person responded by being inspired, and put their inspiration into action by performing an act of deep thoughtfulness and generosity.

Another person responded by seeing an eyesore that needed to be eradicated.

In response to the first person, I had to examine my own initial reaction to seeing that the table was taken: what I thought had been a theft had in actuality been a gift.

In response to the second person, I felt the twinge of sadness at removing my second donation table from the curb. I will simply be posting more things to our community's mutual aid groups; my generosity will not end.

And I will use this experience as a reminder to always do my best to respond to situations with generosity of action and spirit, rather than with judgment and punitiveness.—LORE MCSPADDEN ■

HE IS RICH WHO OWNS THE DAY, and no one owns the day who allows it to be invaded with fret and anxiety. Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could.

Some blunders and absurdities, no doubt crept in. Forget them as soon as you can, tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely, with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This new day is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays.—RALPH WALDO EMERSON



◀ A scroll painting, "The Sixth Patriarch Tearing a Sutra," by LIANG KAI (c. 1140–c. 1210 CE). Liang Kai was a Chinese painter of the Southern Song Dynasty, also known as Madman Liang because of his very informal pictures.

Gateless Barrier, Case 23: “Think Neither Good Nor Evil”

THE CASE

THE SIXTH PATRIARCH was pursued by monk Myo up to Daiyurei. The Patriarch, seeing Myo coming, laid the robe and the bowl on a rock and said, “This robe symbolizes the faith; is it to be fought for? You may take it away.” Myo tried to lift it, but it was as immovable as a mountain. Faltering and trembling, Myo said, “I have come for the Dharma, not for the robe. I beg you, lay brother, to open the Way for me!” The Sixth Patriarch said, “Thinking neither good nor evil, at this very moment, what is the Original-self of monk Myo?” At this, Myo was all at once enlightened. His whole body was dripping with sweat. With tears flowing he bowed down and asked, “Besides these secret words and meanings, is there anything else deeper still?” The Patriarch said, “What has been revealed to you is not secret. If you look into your own True-self, what is secret is right there.” Myo said, “Though I trained under Obai with the other monks, I could not awaken to my True-self. Now, thanks to your instruction, I am like one who

has drunk water and actually knows for himself whether it is cold or warm. Lay brother, you are my teacher!” The Patriarch said, “We both have Obai for our teacher; live up to your attainment with care.”

THE COMMENTARY

It must be said that in an emergency the Sixth Patriarch did something extraordinary. He is like a kindly grandmother who peels a fresh lychee, removes the seed, and puts it into your mouth so that you need only swallow it.

THE VERSE

You cannot describe it, you cannot picture it.
You can never praise it fully; stop all your groping and maneuvering.
There is nowhere to hide your True-self.
When the world is annihilated, “it” remains, indestructible.

THE ORIGINAL CHINESE NAME OF THE SIXTH Patriarch—and let’s refer to him now as the Sixth Ancestor—is Dajian Huineng, known in Japan as Eno. Scholars say that

Zen as we know it originated with Huineng (pronounced way-nung). Yes, Bodhidharma, from India, is considered the founder, and he transmitted the essence of it while in China. And then with Huineng it acquired its distinctly Chinese character as “Chan.” And then Chan became “Son” in Korea and then Zen in Japan and now in the West.

A lot of material has come down to us about the life of Huineng. In fact, in autobiographical form it occupies about a tenth of the sutra that bears his name, The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. That’s too much material to read in this talk, and besides, much of it may be legend, including today’s case. But koans don’t need to be

factually true in order for us to mine their rich teachings. We take them on their own terms.

In brief, Huineng was born in the seventh century, a son of a civil servant who died young and left his family penniless. The story is that Huineng had no schooling as a youth, and had to peddle firewood to support his mother and himself. And then one day while he was delivering wood to a customer he heard a monk reciting the Diamond Sutra. At that he had an awakening. This turning point in his life came when he was only 23 years old. Then he found his way to the mountain of the leading teacher of the time, the Fifth Ancestor. The master challenged the newcomer, whose re-



KOAN COMMENTARY
BY *Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede*
March 7, 2021

sponse, according to the story, would have impressed him. But the Ancestor assigned him to rice-pounding duty, well away from the heart of the monastery. On one of my pilgrimages to China I saw the very stone they said Huineng used for the task. It was part of a primitive machine—it looked a bit like an elliptical trainer—that he would have operated with his feet. Well, after some months the Fifth Ancestor announced that he needed to name a successor. He came up with a contest for this, and told all the monks that anyone who believed himself worthy of transmission should write a verse expressing his understanding on a prominent wall at the center of the monastery. The monks all demurred. They turned to the Head Monk, Shen Hsiu, and said, “Come on, you’re gonna have to step up to the plate here and do this for all of us.”

Apparently Shen Hsiu didn’t feel on such solid ground himself. He agonized over the challenge and finally wrote on the wall the following verse:

*The body is the Tree of Wisdom,
The mind a bright mirror,
Moment by moment wipe the mirror
diligently,
Allowing no dust to cling.*

When the Fifth Ancestor saw the poem, he made a point of praising it. As in, “Good. Follow these instructions and you’ll do all right.” But nothing more than that. Later Huineng, out there on the fringe of the monastery compound, heard the other monks talking about this poem by the Head Monk, and how the Master had seemed to endorse it. But Huineng thought to himself (well, I’m filling in here), “Come on. That’s not really it.”

So then he found that big wall and wrote his own verse:

*Fundamentally the Tree of Wisdom does
not exist,
Nor is there a stand for the mirror,
Originally, there’s nothing at all,
So where would dust alight?*

That reveals a whole different order of understanding than that of the Head Monk. The Head Monk’s verse was all about daily practice—plugging away at it, laboring to keep the mind clear of the dust of thoughts, working and working just to keep up. It sounds like quite a chore. But then Huineng just obliterates that whole idea. He leaps free of it, and says, basically, “There’s never been a single thing—nowhere to go, nothing to be done.”

When the Fifth Ancestor read Huineng’s verse, he knew that this young layman had truly seen into the Great Matter. But as the abbot, he had

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political currents to consider, and knew that approving Huineng’s understanding over that of the Head Monk would not go down well with the other monks. A Chan monastery in the seventh century, like today, was ordered largely on the basis of seniority. So to avoid creating a stir, he concealed his approval of Huineng’s verse and sent him back to the outskirts of the monastery. Later, though, he summoned Huineng to his quarters and, in the middle of the night, presented him with teachings from the Diamond Sutra. When he read him the sentence, “Arouse the mind without its abiding anywhere,” Huineng came to a deeper realization than before. This passage is a great summation of the Zen way: “Rouse the mind, be alert and aware, without abiding in thoughts, in feelings, in fantasies—without getting stuck anywhere.”

At this the Fifth Ancestor secretly transmitted the Dharma to Huineng. He presented him with the symbols of Dharma transmission, the robe and the bowl, making him the Sixth Ancestor. But the Fifth Ancestor recognized that many of the monks in this huge monastery would be unable to accept Huineng as his successor, and might even do harm to him. He was afraid that even with his authority as the abbot, by singling out Huineng he would provoke jealousy in the other monks.

THIS IS NOT HOW we want to think about monks, is it? But there are plenty of accounts in Zen that suggest that the monasteries had their share of misfits. There seems to have been no screening process for admission. Poverty-stricken parents would relinquish their children to the monastery to be fed and schooled. Scholars say that some monks ordained simply to escape the military draft or to avoid paying taxes. And even monks of sincere spiritual aspiration weren’t saints. Monasteries, churches, and religious organizations of every kind—they’re like halfway houses. Their members wouldn’t be there if they were perfect.

So he told Huineng, “You better go into hiding. And while you’re at it, polish your realization.” There it is again—the polishing. It needs to go on and on, even after enlightenment. He urges Huineng to refine his understanding in secret before emerging as a teacher. He knew that Huineng’s work was unfinished, just as he knew that his own work was unfinished! After all, on this path to full enlightenment, who is ever finished? In the 46th koan in the Blue Cliff Record, “The Sound of the Raindrops,” Kyosei puts it this way: “Although it is relatively easy to express what one realizes through awakening, to transcend is

difficult.” Emotional knots and other issues in the personality still need to be ironed out even after genuine enlightenment. Blind spots remain, even if they are subtle. And so the Fifth Ancestor said, okay, you’re awfully young. Get out there and do some mopping-up of the work that you’ve accomplished. And then later you can step forward publicly as my successor.

In the eyes of the other monks, Huineng had three strikes against him: he was young, he was a newcomer, and he was a layman. No wonder the Fifth Ancestor told him to get out of town. He was placing him in a kind of Successor Protection Program. It was a truly radical move on the part of the Fifth Ancestor—cutting against the Confucian grain of age and seniority as well as the assumed superior status of monks. His choice was a great tribute to Huineng, a confirmation of his enlightenment and a vote of confidence in his natural abilities as a teacher.

The Fifth Ancestor then rowed Huineng across the river to safety, and returned to the monastery and announced to the other monks that it was indeed Huineng whom he had made his successor. And here again comes the very common reality of monastery life. The other monks, if they weren’t just plain jealous, thought the Fifth Ancestor must have made a mistake. He must have made a mistake. Maybe they thought that in his old age his judgment had slipped. Apparently he didn’t explain to them why he had passed over the Head Monk after having endorsed his verse. So the others told themselves that the Head Monk’s rival, this whippersnapper Huineng, had somehow pulled a fast one, a grand heist of the robe and the bowl.

The monks thought, we have to somehow bring justice to all this. A certain monk Myo (not the Head Monk) was especially indignant. Myo had been a general before he became a monk. The old texts say that he was powerfully built and had tremendous willpower. I picture him stalking around the monastery like Toshiru Mifuni in *The Seven Samurai*, with the younger monks, especially, looking at him with awe. So they band together and say to him, “Listen, if we’re gonna catch this guy and bring back the robe and the bowl, we need you to lead us.” So off he charged, leading this posse of monks to catch Huineng. By and by, he had outdistanced the others and was left alone, still tearing after Huineng. And that’s where the case picks up the story.

“Huineng was pursued by monk Myo up to Daiyurei”—a nearby mountain. Huineng might have known that he would be pursued, and when

he did catch sight of Myo closing the gap behind him—maybe roaring in anger, shaking his fists, nostrils flaring—he realized that he himself couldn’t outrun him. And so finally he stops. He waits until Myo—mosquito-bitten, sunburned, his clothes probably ripped in places—is standing before him. Then he lays the robe and the bowl on a rock, stands upright, shoulders relaxed, and says, “This robe symbolizes the faith. It’s just a symbol of the Dharma. Really, do you think we need to fight over it? Go ahead—take it.” Myo now realizes that his goal is right at hand, but wait—he finds that he can’t lift it—“it was as immovable as a mountain.”

LET ME SHARE a story from Aitken-roshi’s book of commentaries on the Mumonkan. Ever since I read it, many years ago, it’s stuck with me. He talks about Frederick Frank—a painter, sculptor, and author of more than 30 books, including *Zen of Seeing*. Frank became a vegetarian as a small child during World War I. He was living with his family in Holland, just a mile from the Belgian border. He had witnessed what he called “the incomprehensible horror of seeing living human flesh in the tatters of German, Belgian, and French uniforms, coming across the border on pushcarts and other improvised ambulances.” It had sensitized him, he said, against all forms of physical violence.

During those years when he was a child, Frank was forced against his will to eat fish and meat, and he became preoccupied with his own kind of koan: “Is it more evil to eat whole sardines or a slice of cod?” When we were in Tibet, in Lhasa, I got my head shaved on the roof of the Jokhang, a 7th-century temple venerated throughout the country. And then coming down from the roof, on these narrow, dark, stone steps, I had to squeeze by a Tibetan monk who was struggling up the steps with a huge side of beef slung over his shoulders. And I later heard that in Tibetan Buddhism there’s the belief that it’s the number of beings that die that determines the karmic consequences of eating them. By this line of reasoning, eating ten sardines carries more consequences than eating a hamburger because the latter involves the slaughter of only a single being, the cow. Hmm. Granted, holding to a plant-based diet at the altitude of Tibet would be challenging. But why construct an ethical rationale that prioritizes number of beings over their developmental level of consciousness?

Back to Frederick Frank. One day, as an adult, his childhood aversion to eating fish or meat came to a head. These are his words: “It happened in a

restaurant, where a fragrant fillet of sole amandine was put in front of me. I took my fork, but it refused to touch the fish. I ate the potatoes and never knowingly ate animal flesh again.” The fork would not touch the fish. And monk Myo could not lift the robe. Why not? The koan is asking us, “Why was this simple robe of greater weight than the burly Myo could handle?”

AND NOW COMES the climax of the koan: With monk Myo faltering and trembling before him, Huineng demands, “Thinking neither good nor evil, at this very moment, what is the Original-face of Myo?”

The Original-face—our Original-self. Over the past year I think we’ve all come to appreciate the face as never before, since most faces have been behind masks. It’s through our face that we present ourselves. It’s the single most expressive part of the body. Through people’s body language we can pick up a lot about them, but nothing can match the face for giving us a sense of the person before us. There’s this old saying that the eyes are the windows to the soul, but we’ve discovered over this past year that when the rest of the face is covered, we miss a lot.

We really invite trouble when we become attached to the appearance of our face. After all, our faces keep changing. As they age, so many people dread getting wrinkles—sometimes, it seems, as much as they dread serious illness. Think about crow’s feet, those wrinkles at the corner of the eyes acquired through years of smiling. Studies have linked them to good heart health, but people still hate them.

We can learn to affect a smile, and in a Buddhist lineage I’ve heard of, they actually make a practice out of that, oddly enough. But the true smile, people say, is with the eyes. When the Buddha silently held up a flower before the assembly of monks on Vulture Peak, surely his eyes were twinkling. And when Mahakashyapa alone smiled back, proving his understanding, I’m guessing that Mahakashyapa’s eyes were also twinkling. And that Mahakashyapa had crow’s feet around those twinkling eyes.

In Japan, there’s a high value placed on not revealing too much of your feelings, especially when you’re in emotional or physical pain. This stoicism is seen as sparing others the burden of knowing how to respond. There also seems to be a kind of expectation in Japanese Zen that when you’re in dokusan facing the teacher, “knee-to-knee, eyeball-to-eyeball,” you keep your eyes down.



In Japan it’s a signal of respectful humility. It seemed to be the same here, in the early days of the Zen Center. I don’t remember Roshi Kapleau ever instructing us to keep our eyes down, but it somehow became a thing. And besides, since many of us felt intimidated by him anyway, it was an easy thing to keep our eyes down while sitting just inches in front of him in dokusan. But after some years of giving dokusan myself, I began encouraging people not to feel obliged to keep their eyes down, because in doing so they could be missing visual features of the teaching. They would miss my facial expressions and other gestures. So now I say that what’s most natural is to look up now and then, and not be attached to either looking up or looking down. I myself find it easier to compose my words when my eyes are down.

I’ve read that there are forty-three muscles in the face, and that way more of them are used in smiling than in frowning—though also that it depends on the kind of the smile and the kind of frown. You could say that if our face presents our self-identity—that’s small-s self—then going beyond the face presents our True Self, the capital-S Self. Self-identity is not something we want to deny, but the danger from a Zen perspective is becoming attached to small-s self—at the expense of our True Self. In Zen Master Hakuin’s Chant in Praise of Zazen, Hakuin says, “And when we turn inward and prove our True-nature, that True-self is no-self, our own Self is no-self...” And now here is Huineng, demanding of monk Myo, “At this very moment, what is beyond good or evil? What is the Original-face of monk Myo? Show me your True-self!”

SINCE THE SIXTH Ancestor’s opening words are, “Thinking neither good nor evil,” we know that monk Myo was preoccupied with the idea of right and wrong. In his mind he was on a mission to make things right. Imagine how much blood has been spilled throughout human history in the name of right and wrong. But we don’t really need to frame things in terms of right and wrong if we fully buy into the law of causation. If we can appreciate that some of our words cause harm and others don’t, some of our actions cause harm and others don’t, then that’s enough. Why superimpose this Abrahamic religious idea of right and wrong on top of causation?

There’s a wonderful poem by the magnificent Rumi, the Sufi master:

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and
rightdoing
there is a field.*

*I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
The world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other,"
don't make any sense.*

Rumi's words are especially fitting in the context of Huineng and monk Myo meeting face-to-face. I picture them facing off in a clearing, and for Huineng the grass there—and everywhere else—is already a field that's beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing. Can Myo meet him there? So again, what is the Original-face? That's the nub, the very crux, of the koan. And in dokusan the student has to demonstrate their understanding of that.

Can you appreciate that this monk Myo was not just some misguided oaf? The Dharma, as he understood it, meant everything to him. Maybe his war experiences had driven him to the monastery. He was misguided in mistaking the robe and the bowl for the real transmission, but the lengths he went to to retrieve those emblems marked him as someone of great sincerity and determination. These are qualities that would serve anyone well on the path of Zen. And at a glance Huineng would have seen through Myo's raw personality to his true potential—his Original-face.

ONE OF THE MANY paradoxes in Zen is around aspiration. Bodhicitta, the aspiration to enlightenment, is a tremendous resource. It can turbocharge our practice. But as long as it's fixed on enlightenment as a thought, it leaves us shackled. The problem is grasping, and grasping grows out of ego delusion, the root source of suffering. What's amazing—almost magical—is that the mind, when sufficiently focused, enables us to transcend grasping. In zazen samadhi it's incinerated, "purifying karma, dissolving obstruction." Myo's obsession with the robe and bowl brought him to a state of no-thought—a robe-and-bowl samadhi.

For this monk Myo, his real aspiration for the truth gripped him as a quest for justice. He felt compelled to restore order based on rank. The Head Monk Shen Hsiu had outranked the young Huineng in all kinds of ways. So then how could the young Huineng been given the precious robe and bowl? Besides, Myo, as a former general, would have gotten used to looking down on those who ranked beneath him, and would have been very much invested in—and protective of—rank.

There's a koan in the Book of Serenity, the Shoyoroku, where the great Linji (Jap., Rinzai) said to the assembly, "There's a true person of no rank who is always coming out and in through the gates

When the
Buddha silently
held up a flower
before the
assembly
of monks
on Vulture Peak,
surely his eyes
were twinkling.
And when
Mahakashyapa
alone smiled
back, proving
his understanding,
I'm guessing that
Mahakashyapa's
eyes were
also twinkling.

of your face. You beginners who have not yet witnessed that one, look! Look!" A monk stepped forward and asked, "What is the true person of no rank?" Linji got down from his seat and grabbed him. The monk hesitated. Linji pushed him away and said, "The true person of no rank—what a useless piece of shit!" In today's koan, Huineng could just as easily have demanded of Myo, "Show me the man of no rank!" But don't think for a minute that Linji saw this monk as any less endowed with our Original-nature than he himself.

"At this, monk Myo was all at once enlightened. His whole body was running with sweat." Tears were flowing down his face. This was no grazing experience of kensho.

Huineng says, "What has been revealed to you is not secret." Zen has been called an open secret. It's right here. And when we see into our True-self, what is secret is... this! But it wasn't until Myo had reached his imagined goal and stopped seeking, running, grasping—had stopped—that he found himself. He had nothing more to grasp at. The Taoist sage Chuangtzu said, "To the mind that is still, the universe surrenders." So long as we are clinging to the idea of enlightenment, we will not be able to experience it. And that's the whole point of the particular practice we're working on. Whether it's a koan, or the breath, whatever it is, it's all to help us get unshackled from this idea of enlightenment as something out there. Because, indeed, from the very beginning, we've all been enlightened.

At our online workshop yesterday, someone asked, as usual, about the contradiction between the basic Buddhist teaching of Original Enlightenment, on the one hand, and our striving for enlightenment, on the other. The puzzle of how to talk about enlightenment is built into Zen discourse. When the great Japanese Zen master Dogen was a young monk, this had become his natural koan: "If our Essential-nature is enlightened wisdom, why did all the masters have to strive for it?" Many in Zen contend that to talk about awakening is to imply that we're not originally enlightened. Well, yes, kind of. But until we awaken to it, it's effectively just a belief. Both sides are true, and neither by itself is true.

In 9th-century China, a master asked Yangshan, another master: "Do people these days need enlightenment or not?" Yangshan replied, "It's not that there is no enlightenment, but how can one not fall into the secondary?" If we just sit back, basking in the idea of our original enlightenment, we foreclose having the most profound experience any human being can have. We have to actualize

▷ ROUNDTABLE

What I made during the pandemic

our innate wisdom, awakening to it for our own sake and for the sake of all beings.

THE REST OF THE CASE is something of an epilogue. Myo, still reeling from his awakening, says, “While I trained under the Fifth Ancestor with the other monks, I could not awaken to my true self. Now, thanks to your instruction, I am like one who has drunk water and actually knows for himself whether it’s cold or warm.” In other words, the direct experience of awakening is what matters, not reading about it, not wishing for it, not thinking about it or grasping at it, but experiencing it. Clearly, Myo is overwhelmed with gratitude. And he’s also suggesting, in an indirect way, that his previous teacher, the Fifth Ancestor, hadn’t really come through in helping him close the deal. But Huineng won’t have that. He can’t let that pass. He says, “We both have Obai (the Fifth Ancestor) for our teacher.” Huineng knows that awakening is a mystery, and a matter of timing. It’s not just the ability or lack of ability of the teacher. It’s not just the ability or lack of ability of the student. It’s the particular teacher and the particular student coming together at that particular time that determines the outcome. This is a core doctrine of the Dharma: the law of dependent co-arising. The Buddha used the analogy of two sheaves of wheat leaning upright against each other: is the one on the left supporting the one on the right, or is it the other way around? You can be sure that plenty of other monks at the Fifth Ancestor’s monastery had come to enlightenment under him. But there was something in Myo that hadn’t yet ripened while he was there, and then finally did under Huineng.

The Commentary: Mumon says that the Sixth Patriarch did something extraordinary. “He is like a kindly grandmother who peels a fresh lychee”—let’s make it an orange, which is nativized in the Americas—“...peels a fresh orange, removes all the seeds, and puts it into your mouth so that you need only swallow it.” He just laid it out there. He laid out the robe and the bowl, literally—and with it the Dharma.

The Verse: “You cannot describe it. You cannot picture it. You can never praise it fully. Stop all your groping and maneuvering; there’s nowhere to hide your True Self.” You can describe an actual robe and an actual bowl, but our True Self? Go ahead—try. Or, as Myo did, give up groping and maneuvering, and experience it for yourself.

“When the world is annihilated, it remains, indestructible.” So, in what sense would it remain, indestructible? In dokusan, the student must present her understanding of this. ///

A FRIEND

TERI GREW UP on the streets of Miami, got pregnant, lived for a few weeks in a shelter until her two kittens were born and adopted before we met her one Saturday afternoon and brought her home to live with us in our little paradise. After an initial shy period, during which she mostly hid in the laundry room, she began to show us how smart, funny, athletic, and affectionate she could be, as well as how very appreciative she was of her new circumstances.

She is keenly observant of our every move. When I ring a chime in the late afternoon before yoga practice, she comes running to join me, doing her little stretches, though she prefers to crowd the mat I am using rather than use her own. On the days I don’t feel like practicing, she still shows up at 4:30 and says, “Hi!”

She understands English very well, but she uses it very little. She gets by with only these few words: hi, yeah, yes, out, and treat. She spends the majority of her time on the lanai, watching out for unusual birds, turtles, or rabbits, and resting.

Recently, she ran into the house to get our attention, through the special door we made for her, and ran back out. Lou and I followed her. Right outside the screen was a three-foot long black snake. We praised her to high heaven for saving us from that harmless snake and she seemed very proud of having done so. We are both in love with Teri and can’t imagine our life without this special cat.—ELAINE HEVERON



SOME BUDDHAS

I WAS INSPIRED to carve these figures after discovering the poems and carvings of the late 17th century mountain monk Enku. One is more of a Japanese-style temple monk and the other is a Mahayana-style painted Buddha with another Buddha seated on top.—ERIC CADY



AN APPLIANCE REPAIR

CAN TAKING APART and fixing your dishwasher count? I had to take the front off, the top off, and get the old latch disconnected and unplugged (not for sissies), put in the new latch, and reassemble. And yes, I used a YouTube video.

When I finished, I was like Rocky on the steps of the Art Museum.
—LOUANNE JAEGER



A SERIES OF WATERCOLORS

THIS IS A full-sheet watercolor painting I did, which is on exhibit at Pittsford Fine Art. The title is "Sunset at Patriot House." It's one of a series of winter paintings I did during the shutdown.—LARRY KEEFE

EARTH-FRIENDLY INSTRUMENT CASES

I SPENT MUCH of the time before and during the pandemic educating myself on how to make instrument cases for the custom Appalachian dulcimers I build. After my former case-maker was run out of business by Chinese competition, I was determined to build my own—which I had always vowed I would never do. So I hired a local fine cabinet-maker to build the basic wooden boxes, which were too large for my tiny lutherie studio. Then my task was to find suitable materials, fixtures (hinges, latches, corner protectors), the right kind of heavy-duty vinyl cladding, upholstery, and, most importantly, adhesives that do not pollute the air and water with petrochemicals, do not require spray application, and do not require disposable



brushes and paint rollers. The first case took two years!

It was quite a journey, and took me quite a while to find out all about these arts of applying vinyl to wood, details of upholstery, with the help of friends and friends of friends—and good old YouTube. And I designed a couple of "gig boxes" to hold picks, strings, business cards, etc. Here's a client's photos of her case, the third one I made, with her Bear Meadow (my brand) Concert Grand dulcimer inside.—DWAIN WILDER

AN ONLINE GAME

SO HERE I WAS, stuck in Costa Rica for most of 2020, with no one around with whom to play cribbage. But—technology to the rescue!

Fortunately, for our game table we had a glass-topped coffee table in our condo. My iPhone with FaceTime turned on was positioned to point upward through the glass to the face-down cards, displaying the six cards in my opponent's hand—but these were visible only to him. Our laptops showed the playing table to both of us (as well as our unshaven faces, unbelievably welcome).

His downward-facing cards were designated A thru F. He instructed me to place two of them—again, face-down—in the "crib" or holding pen for later play, then, as play progressed, he would tell me, by letter, which card to play.

A little tedious? Indeed. Doable? For sure. Many thanks to Barry, Eric, and Jerry for cribbage games across the miles, safe in our respective COVID bunkers, yet still able to enjoy a simple game together.—JAY THOMPSON

DECK FURNITURE

HERE'S A PHOTO of a Trex deck, table and benches made from old tables, and, in the background, several planters I made with reclaimed old dock wood. The deck was a labor of love in Zen, taking my time, enjoying the planning and construction. I'd like to say I enjoyed each one of the several thousand screws I put in it... but I am not an Enlightened One!
—MARK DONADIO





A BEAUTIFUL OOPS

I FINALLY TOOK some of the new-found downtime to take a few painting classes. The goal was to create a “beautiful oops” with watercolors, meaning to learn to experiment with the medium and then to turn whatever I made into something. I had a few private classes during the pandemic, and had a ball playing again with paint. The “homework” unexpectedly led to some sweet afternoons painting with my son Zachary too.

My teacher invited us to exhibit our artwork in the Creative Workshop’s student show, where the theme was “In Honor Of.” I turned my “work” (it feels truly reaching to type that) into a balloon, and dedicated it in honor of Roshi and the Zen Center.—RACHEL CLAR

THE OFFICIAL RZC-BROWN™ MASK

THERE’S NOTHING LIKE a pandemic to make even a physician feel helpless. So I pulled out an unused sewing machine (a wedding gift) that had been sitting in our house for 20 years and sat down and learned how

to use it. Owner’s manuals and YouTube videos and four or five hours of plugging away at it, and I was able to start making masks. It wasn’t long before our sewing machine broke and we started borrowing unused ones from neighbors and friends. At one point we had three different machines sitting on our countertop. We looked like an old-fashioned factory!

In the first weeks of the pandemic, my wife and I made a couple hundred masks. We sent about 75 of them in envelopes to Sangha members all over the country, and in the process learned just how many masks you can squeeze into a regular letter-size envelope before the Postal Service will reject it. And when the Zen Center reopened for sittings, we put a basket of RZC-brown masks in the link at Arnold Park.

Eventually, I transitioned to volunteering with the Monroe County Health Department as a contact tracer. This proved to be a very rewarding endeavor. Every single person I interacted with was gracious and cooperative. I had only one person refuse to give me one name of one person in all of the contact tracing. We certainly heard plenty of stories in other parts of the country where contact tracers were routinely hung up on and ignored. But not in Monroe County. Everyone wanted to get this pandemic under control and was happy to cooperate.

When the pandemic began to rage last winter and it was clear that contact tracing was no longer working, I volunteered to administer the vaccine. Here too, I encountered nothing but extremely grateful people. Of course, I was seeing people who wanted to be vaccinated.

Unfortunately, in my work as an addiction-medicine physician, the vast majority of my current patients do not want to be vaccinated. They are overwhelmingly good people who are afraid and have been convinced by various conspiracy theories and fears stoked on the Internet about the vaccine’s safety. It’s an uphill battle trying to convince them to get vaccinated, as they already have tons of misinformation from the Internet before coming to me.

The pandemic has been especially hard on people with addictions. Drug-overdose deaths increased 30% last year, totaling more than 90,000. I’ve had more patients relapse in the past year than in the previous five years. In addition, the COVID-19 infection itself is especially troublesome in patients who suffer with active addictions, for whom mortality is even greater than the general public. I fear the vaccine hes-



itancy in this group will add to the already high burden of morbidity and mortality in this population.

In many ways, it reminds me of my Zen practice. On a day-to-day basis, I put in the time on the mat and don't necessarily see any immediate results. I trust that change is happening slowly, and I hope that the same is true with the pandemic.—JONATHAN HAGER

A CORN GODDESS

I DID THIS as a study in squares initially, but it ended up a tribute to Illinois, my birthplace, also known as corn country. Granite City, where I'm from, was a booming steel mill town in my youth. As we would walk past the mill in the dead of winter, the open forge with flames and molten steel would warm the air. Today the mill is gone, but the corn remains.

—GRETCHEN TARGEE



A COMMITMENT

PLANNING MY WEDDING to Jay Saxe during a pandemic presented a particular set of challenges. First and foremost, winnowing down the most important people in your lives to 25. You agonize over the list. You apologize to those who couldn't be invited. Then, on the day of the wedding, a bunch of people cancel because of, you guessed it, COVID. So it was an even smaller affair than we had planned.

Convincing John Pulleyn that, yes, he could legally marry us was also somewhat of a challenge. I signed him up online to be a Universal Life Minister—ask him to show you the totally generic "clergy" tag that was bestowed upon him. It was his first stint as an officiant and we were honored. We opted to do it during COVID, because, like Buddhism, it



emphasizes the impermanence of life. Those most important to us were healthy and able to be present, so why wait?—JEN BYRNES

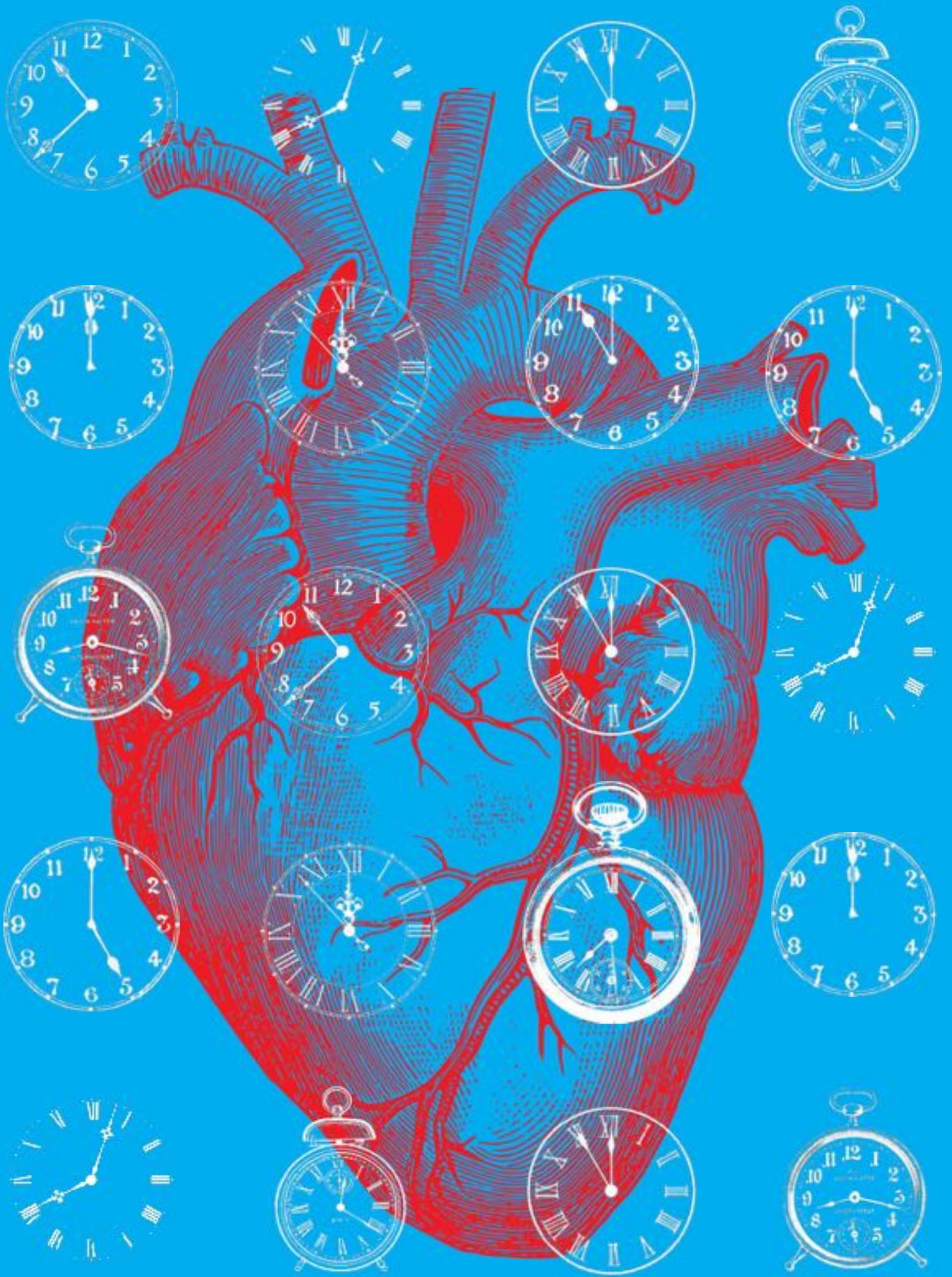
A FULL PANTRY

THE PANDEMIC INSPIRED me to reconnect with some of the practices of my agrarian ancestors, including growing and preserving food. Our yard has now been largely converted to garden beds for growing herbs, vegetables, and grains, and our pantry is replete with jars of home-canned, home-grown foods. It has been a source of deep joy and peace to bring these simple, nourishing practices into my life!—LORE MCSPADDEN



I MADE IT OUT THE OTHER SIDE

—SASHA PULLEYN



“One wild. precious life”

ZEN BOW: Tell me about your last name, Kutiyifa. Is that Hungarian?

VALENTINA KUTYIFA: It is actually a Slovakian name; my dad’s grandparents came from Slovakia. My dad’s parents were farmers and they had vineyards. The region I come from in Hungary is focused on agriculture. My dad ended up becoming a welder; he now works for a company assembling agricultural machines.

On my mother’s side, her father was a car mechanic with a small car repair shop. He was also a self-taught artist who carved wooden sculptures and had a few exhibitions during his later years. My family was well respected in our small village, which had fewer than 4000 inhabitants. That was the first place my dad started working when he was young, and that’s how my parents met.

No one in my family finished university. I have four siblings, five of us altogether. I always excelled in school and that was my trajectory. I remember my mom telling me, you’re brilliant with your

brain but you really don’t like working in the vineyards, so just focus on your studies. She told me, you can do whatever you set your mind to, you can be anything. You want to be become a doctor? Yeah, you can do that.

ZB: Oh, that’s great. Because when I was growing up, it was always, girls can’t be doctors. Girls have to be nurses.

VK: Yeah, I know. I got lucky. If you know a little bit about Hungarian history, you might recall that Hungary was a socialist country. And in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down, I was only eight years old. That opened up a lot of possibilities and allowed students to learn multiple languages, including German and English.

ZB: You found it easy to learn additional languages?

VK: Yes, I picked up the German language very quickly. I learned English very fast as well, it felt like I had always known this language. I remem-

INTERVIEW WITH *Valentina Kutiyifa*

ber when I was in kindergarten I was very small, they almost didn't let me go to school. I was underweight for the school limit. They said, Oh, she's so smart. She's ready to go now. So for the first year, my mom was bringing my backpack because I couldn't carry it.

ZB: So how did you get to the United States?

VK: I finished medical school in Hungary in 2005. And then I finished my Ph.D. a few years later. I am actually a cardiac electrophysiologist, which means that I focus on treating the electrical disturbances of the heart, currently doing 100% clinical research. And that's how I came to Rochester. A group at the University of Rochester designed and conducted one of their clinical trials on the cardiac resynchronization therapy that was the topic of my Ph.D. studies, and our Hungarian hospital enrolled participants in that clinical trial, called MADIT-CRT. The study was led by my mentor-to-be in later years, Dr. Arthur J. Moss. After about seven years practicing in Hungary, I came to Rochester to visit the University and do research with the group here, write some research papers. Then I just fell in love with the group, and fell in love with Rochester. Following a two-week visit in 2010 came a one-month visit in April, 2011, and I subsequently got an invitation to join as a Postdoctoral Research Associate for a year, which was extended for a second year, and the rest is history... ☺.

My research focuses on implanted cardioverter defibrillators. Most people know about pacemakers, right? The implantable cardioverter defibrillators are similar, but their primary aim is to terminate serious, life-threatening heart rhythm disturbances and deliver a shock or fast pacing to help the heart to return to its normal rhythm. I'm also researching newer devices that help patients with heart failure to breathe better, walk longer; this is called cardiac resynchronization therapy. These devices have only been around for the past 25 years. So we are still gathering data from large cohorts of patients and trying to understand how these devices work and how can we help patients benefit from them to a greater degree.

ZB: So the newer devices address a broader category of patients than defibrillators do?

VK: Yes, defibrillators help patients who have life-threatening heart disturbances. And the cardiac resynchronization therapy helps patients who have heart failure. It's a much larger population.

ZB: What a great field to be in right now. So do you work a lot with the manufacturers of these devices?

VK: Yes. We help industry partners to conduct clinical trials to show the benefit of these devices in new populations, and sometimes assess new devices as well.

ZB: So can you explain in kindergarten words how these new devices help people with certain types of heart problems, and how—what they would be not doing normally without that device?

VK: The easiest to explain is the defibrillator, which is monitoring every heartbeat and how fast these heartbeats are. Sometimes patients develop life-threatening heart rhythm disturbances, which means that their heart rate becomes very fast, and they could pass out, and they could potentially die. When the rapid heartbeat is detected by the device, it provides therapy, which is frequently a shock delivered to the heart that revives the heart and restores the normal heart rhythm. It's really fascinating to see that in real life and help patients survive these conditions. Cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT) has its meaning in its name. Patients with heart failure frequently have an issue of their heart not pumping synchronously, that is, some aspects of the heart's action are delayed, or "dyssynchronous." Cardiac resynchronization therapy restores the normal "synchrony" of the heart, thus the name, "resynchronization therapy." CRT helps the heart to pump more efficiently. The patients then actually have more blood going into their organs. They have less swelling of their ankles, have less fluid in their lungs. Once the patients are implanted with this kind of device, they immediately feel better, they are able to walk longer, they breathe easier. They report improvements in their quality of life.

ZB: That must be incredible to see.

VK: Yes, it's a truly fascinating field to be working in. You know, there's been a lot of serendipity involved in my life, since I never planned to come to the US or to stay here. I came for a short visit. And then I literally fell in love with the people and the research environment and ended up joining as a faculty member at the University of Rochester. I still have an adjunct position in Hungary and I've continued to serve in various European organizations in the past 10 years to keep the connection. I am also actively involved with mentoring young physicians and medical students from Hungary.



DR. VALENTINA KUTYIFA holds a Ph.D. in cardiac electrophysiology, a Masters degree in health care management, and a certificate in clinical research from Harvard Medical School. Her major research focus is on cardiac arrhythmias and sudden cardiac death. She has been a member of the Rochester Zen Center since 0000.

ZB: Now I understand why you do so much travel.

VK: Indeed. A couple of years ago, for the European Heart Rhythm Association, I helped develop a group for young physicians, called the Young EP, young electrophysiologists, and led the committee for a number of years. I feel this was important work to support the younger generation of physicians, and this mission continues to be close to my heart. At the moment, I am co-teaching two courses at the University of Rochester focusing on research for early-career individuals.

ZB: In your field, in the type of research you do, do the young people sometimes have exciting new ideas that the old people haven't thought about?

VK: Yes, actually some research suggests that early-career physicians innovate a lot and have groundbreaking ideas, but without proper support they often don't realize that until their forties or fifties. This is the barrier that we felt needs to be eliminated with a mentoring and career development platform for early-stage researchers. We've had lots of positive feedback from the community.

ZB: I've heard that sometimes the academic environment can be really hurtful and toxic and ego-driven. Have you been able to either ignore that or get beyond it somehow?

VK: I think I got lucky in a way, because if my intentions were to come here and fight for a position, it probably would have been very difficult. Instead, I just had a curious mind to explore this path, I worked really hard, I did my best every day, and simply allowed things to unfold.... I feel that opportunities just came to me and I always took the next step on the path that was right in front of me....

ZB: Did you miss your family?

VK: Yes, of course. My mother visited once a few years ago and she really enjoyed it. But honestly, almost no one in my family speaks English, and my mom never flew in a plane, so she really needed me to fly with her. I come from a tiny village in Hungary, as I mentioned earlier, just about 4000 people, everyone knows everyone. Actually both my grandfather and grandmother became artists. My grandfather was carving wooden sculptures, and my grandmother was doing some hand-made arts with exhibitions.

A couple years ago, I ended up getting an award in Hungary for research. In addition, Rethelyi-Prikkel Miklos, a local writer, wrote a book about

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the history of Akasztó—my village—and included descriptions of some of the villagers, including a nice write-up of my grandfather's life and also mine. I feel closely connected to the place I come from and deeply grateful for my special upbringing.

ZB: In Hungary, were you raised in a faith tradition?

VK: I had some Christian background and upbringing—mostly Catholic. I was a very inquisitive child, questioning everything. So around the time we had first communion, we were told to see the priest and confess our sins. I spent a lot of time thinking about my life and where I might have failed—I was nine at the time and took this very seriously. I ended up telling the priest, "I spent a significant time thinking about this, and I just have to tell you, since I might not remember every sin I ever committed, I probably committed all the sins listed here. So please, forgive me for all of that...." Now I have different words to express the same truth: "All evil actions committed by me since time immemorial, stemming from greed, anger, and delusion, I now repent having committed."

Anyways, as you can imagine, the priest got very angry with me. He thought that I was making a dishonest confession, when in fact I was trying to be thorough and comprehensive, making sure that nothing was missed.... So this was certainly a point where I felt unseen and unappreciated in religious life. I continued religious education until age 14, as long as it was required, and then I quit. I really felt the importance of questioning and understanding the way things are, and if God is or isn't, you know, rather than accepting a dogma. I always had that sense of inquiry from the time I was little. My mom actually tells me that I kept asking everyone, from a very young age, "What's the meaning of life?"

My family had a small business growing chrysanthemums for the Day of the Dead on November 1, a special holiday we celebrate in Hungary by bringing flowers to the cemeteries, lighting candles, and remembering our lost loved ones, a solemn but serious way of paying respect. As a child, I spent a fair amount of time helping my parents with the greenhouses and selling the flowers at the farmers' market. It's been interesting to be exposed to death at a young age. Dying was a subject that always interested me. How do we die? What happens exactly? And since we die, what is then the real meaning of life...? I kept asking this question.

ZB: And did you get many answers?

VK: I got some great answers. I loved talking to grownups. I remember there was a wonderful man who developed multiple sclerosis at a young age. He was in a wheelchair. They would come to buy flowers every year. And every year, while my family was loading the flowers in their van, I had a nice conversation with him. I remember him telling me that you get up every morning and even if you cannot walk or do other things, you just look outside the window and you see the sun is shining. You just have to appreciate the little things in life. “Every day is a good day,” said Ummon.

ZB: So once you were here in Rochester, how did you find out about the Zen Center? Had you been reading about Buddhism, or was there an interest before?

VK: When I was in Hungary, a friend of mine introduced me to a Hungarian version of “Reiki”—healing with hands. I had been involved with that group for about two years before coming to Rochester. The practice involved energy work and also guided meditations, mainly similar to the Tibetan tradition. I really enjoyed this practice. I remember when I first started with the group for a weekend retreat, I was so tired as a physician with very long hours, once we started a meditation, I would simply fall asleep. So at the end of the day, I apologized to the teacher, who just said, “Don’t ever apologize for that. That’s just what you needed right now, the sleep.”

I moved to the US in November, exactly ten years ago. Later in January, I had my birthday, which I had to spend alone for the first time. So I decided to treat myself to something special. I googled “Buddhism Rochester, NY,” and I found the Rochester Zen Center workshop, and just signed up for it. I remember the morning of the workshop, my car was all snowy and icy and the car barely started. I almost missed the start (auspicious sign). Then later that day, Roshi saying, “Zen is when you are shoveling snow, you are just shoveling. Nothing else. It is that simple. But not easy.” That really stuck with me. The rest is... quite a wonderful journey, or faith, trust, joy and struggle, and the ever-returning quest of continued discovery of what this one wild, precious life really is and who we really are....

ZB: I know you travel a lot. Do you sit when you travel?

VK: Yes, I sit every day even when I travel and often have mindful moments, mindful walking, mindful interactions with people. “Every day Zen

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is the way.” I feel that traveling also augments experiences/mental formations/struggles from everyday life and it is a great time for practice. It is a great time to be outside of your comfort zone and having to surrender to flight schedules/cancellations and other challenges that might come along. As Joan Halifax says, “The schedule is subject to reality.”

ZB: Is there anything else in your life experience that you might recommend to other members?

VK: I feel what really touched me when I first visited the United States was the genuine kindness and compassion of the people, the caring, the volunteering, and the continuous striving to be better. It deeply resonated with me. I also feel very deeply grateful for “finding my tribe” here at the University of Rochester, and the Rochester Zen Center, and Roshi’s insightful, masterful guidance of our Sangha. I hope others recognize this deep inner goodness in fellow practitioners, all sentient beings, and themselves, and identify with it as our true “Buddha nature.”

It rings true for me that from meditation arises this deep quest of serving others... with love and compassion. My deep aspiration to serve others in a meaningful way led me to start in a Buddhist chaplaincy program at the Upaya Zen Center, Santa Fe (now online), with the support of Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede, about two years ago. My main interests at this point are end-of-life care, serving veterans, and developing an abbreviated mindfulness program for healthcare providers to relieve burnout in this especially difficult time with COVID.

So my advice to you: practice, practice, practice, and if serving others arises from your practice, please do not hesitate to respond to it and find a way to be the light to make this world a better place....

ZB: So when you’re finished, will there be some kind of title? More initials to be added after your name?

VK: I believe at the end of the completion of the Buddhist chaplaincy program, we will all be ordained as Buddhist chaplains. The initials added to my name are not that important; they are certainly useful labels in academia, but they are only labels. What’s been important for me starting the chaplaincy training is the deepening of my practice through commitment to serving others, and learning “Upaya,” skillful ways to interact with the compassion that serves and benefits others to the fullest extent possible. ///

▷ WORK IN PROGRESS



WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF, the Zen Center is happy to announce the renewal of the bathrooms in the basement of 7 Arnold Park. Anyone who has been a member for a while has probably experienced the cramped quarters, the 1970s aesthetic, and the rattling wooden folding doors that characterized the old bathrooms for more than 50 years. Now the bathroom space has been enlarged and reconfigured, with the addition of a shower and renovation of the Japanese bath.

Scott Redding, Head of Maintenance at Arnold Park, commented: "We made almost everything ourselves. The wood for the doors, trim, and cabinets came from Chapin Mill, cherry trees that were culled and milled several years ago. We wanted to keep it simple and at the same time modernize, and the shutdown during the pandemic provided the perfect opportunity." Scott was assisted by a team of volunteers including Bill Lindenfelser, who made the cabinets; Bill Miller and Dick Rosin, who

worked on construction; Harvey Rayner, who helped with the concrete countertops; and Sensei John Pulley, who worked on drywall.

Upgrade projects for both Chapin Mill and Arnold Park are defined and prioritized by FASOC (pronounced *fass-ock*), the Center's Facilities and Sustainable Operations Committee, which is chaired by Bill Lindenfelser and includes both Scott Redding and Tom Kowal, the Heads of Maintenance at Arnold Park and Chapin Mill respectively. The committee includes a dedicated team of people with experience in the construction, design, and engineering fields. The next Arnold Park project, which is already underway, is renovation of the men's dorm, which houses both trainees and out-of-town guests. Scott Redding commented, "It's cruel to put people out there. It's the first place some people see when they come to the Center." The new dorm will include a fitness area in addition to private bedroom areas.

TRUSTING *the practice*

FOR ANYONE

WHO HAS DONE A SESSHIN OR TWO, I'M GUESSING these words might ring a bell: "Trust the practice." Some of us, myself included, have heard it dozens, seemingly hundreds of times. Why does it bear repeating? To place trust in our practice is, of course, a matter of faith: faith in our Buddha-nature, and faith in the fact that each and every one of us is endowed with it, with no exceptions.

But also, it is faith in Zen itself. Faith in this method of sitting still, working on a breath or koan practice, faith that it's what we need to do, and doing it for its own sake, not just to get out of the conditions that we're in.

From my experience with practice, especially in my earlier years, I remember questioning whether I had such faith. I was dogged by self-doubt. When I recited the Four Vows — "All beings without num-

TEXT BY *Donna Kowal*



▲ Leaf from a Tibetan handbook on the correct proportions for painting Buddha figures.

ber, I vow to liberate...” — there was a little voice inside my head that said it was all beings except for me. I was also afflicted by guilt: it’s my fault that I’m not getting anywhere in practice. I’m not working hard enough, wallowing in feelings of inadequacy, feeling sorry for myself. What a loser.

So sometimes when I would hear Roshi or the monitor, say “Trust the practice,” instead of taking this advice to heart and just pouring myself into questioning my koan, Mu, I questioned my faith. Do I really have faith? How do I know if I have it? What if I don’t, then surely I’m not going to get anywhere? I was mired in this muck of thoughts — thoughts that included making faith into this abstract thing outside myself, treating it like some kind of measuring stick of my effort, rather than just doing the practice, just questioning what is, keeping it simple.

In Buddhism, self-doubt is also referred to as skeptical doubt. It’s one of the five hindrances that we may encounter in practice. (The other hindrances are desire, aversion, sloth, and restlessness.) Each of these hindrances takes the form of thoughts or emotional states and they’re fueled by our social conditioning plus entrenched habit forces. These include our lifetime of experiences of family; of upbringing, education, and relationships.

BUT HABIT FORCES are also passed down from generation to generation. As well, skeptical doubt can also arise at critical junctures in our lives, especially periods of indecision. It’s part of the experience of being human, asking ourselves, “What should I do with my life? Should I do this or that? Should I go back to school? Should I start dating again? Should I stay single, get married, have children? Should I move to a new place, get a new job, pursue a different career?”

And now that we’re more than two years into the pandemic, a lot of people have spent time rethinking and reassessing their lives. Some have been compelled to do so because they lost their jobs, lost a loved one, or experienced the ending of a relationship. What next?

It wasn’t too long ago that I found myself wracked with skepticism about my career as a college professor and administrator. I was in academia for over 20 years; it was a big commitment with big requirements, including a Ph.D., publications, and tenure promotions. But eventually, I came to ask myself, “What am I doing? What is this all for? Is this really how I want to continue to spend my days? Am I really helping anyone?” At that point, I had long been a Zen Center trainee

wanna-be. I yearned to be part of the residential training program. But I was afraid to let go of everything I’d worked so hard for. I was on this trajectory, so walking away from that seemed very risky. But at the same time, remaining in my academic post felt dishonest. Should I take the leap?

Yes.

And I haven’t had a single regret. (That’s my shameless plug for the training program.) Not to say that we don’t all have hindrances, and they can actually be quite subtle at times. We might not even notice that making a radical change with apparent decisiveness and ease can be accompanied by a vague feeling of unworthiness. But sooner or later, in the process of doing zazen, we’re going to notice those feelings, and it can be very sobering and painful to see how often they appear — especially when we notice not just their habitual nature, but also their intensity.

In the case of self-doubt, it can easily turn into a kind of doom loop, where you get bogged down in self-judgments, then you feel guilty for wasting so much time being far removed from your practice, and then back to the judgments. At times, practice can feel like we’re just thrashing about in our reactions to our thoughts and feelings.

But we need to remember the fact that we have such thoughts isn’t the problem. Thoughts are just thoughts. Their content doesn’t matter. The fact is, we cannot not have them. It’s what our brain is hardwired to do. They only become a hindrance when we cling to them, taking them at face value as if they had any substance.

In that regard, when it comes to daily practice, skeptical doubt is probably the most challenging of the five hindrances. We can get to the point where we ask, why am I even doing this? Why even bother sitting? Why bother going to sesshin? It can really undermine our motivation to practice altogether. And, in turn, we lose touch with our faith. But we need to distinguish between small or skeptical doubt, and what is called Big Doubt. While skeptical doubt can be at odds with faith, Big Doubt is something altogether different. Big Doubt co-arises with faith; they go hand in hand. This applies not only to Zen practice but, arguably, to most spiritual traditions, and anyone who is seriously working on themselves at one point or another is going to be confronted with Big Doubt. The poet Kahlil Gibran once said, “To doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.”

IN ORDER FOR US to come to practice in the first place, there’s got to be some degree of both faith



DONNA KOWAL has been practicing at the Center for over 20 years and joined staff in 2019. In addition to serving as Head of Zendo at Chapin Mill, she manages the Center’s new Sangha Programs Office.

and doubt. At the very least, we're becoming aware of some inkling that there's something beyond the suffering, or unsatisfactory nature of our life. Something that drives us to sign up for the workshop and give it a try. And in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, where Roshi Kapleau presents Yasutani-roshi's introductory lectures, doubt—that is, his Big Doubt—is described as one of the three essentials of Zen practice, the other two being faith and determination.

Yasutani-roshi says it's not a simple doubt, mind you, but a doubt-mass. And this inevitably stems from strong faith. It is doubt as to why we and the world should appear so imperfect, so full of anxiety, strife, and suffering, when in fact our deep faith tells us exactly the opposite is true. In other words, if the world is indeed perfect, just as it is, if we're already whole and complete, then why do we experience so much pain and suffering in our lives? Why is there so much greed, anger, and delusion? This kind of doubt clearly isn't skeptical or small doubt.

Big Doubt is a deep questioning that is activated by our faith. It leaves us determined to resolve it. I'm now going to turn to reading and commenting on excerpts from a book titled, *The Faith to Doubt: Glimpses of Buddhist Uncertainty*. It's by Stephen Batchelor, and it was first published in 1990.

Stephen Batchelor is a British author who, back in the 70s and early 80s, was an ordained Buddhist monk. He was one of the speakers at the Zen Center's 30th anniversary symposium in 1996. *The Faith to Doubt* is part memoir and part reflection on Buddhism and Zen practice. He describes his personal struggles with practice, first in the Tibetan tradition, and then, after going through a kind of spiritual crisis that drew him to it, in the Zen tradition.

In chapter four, Batchelor describes two different kinds of questioning: calculative and meditative. About calculative questioning, he writes: "It is that which solves problems which occur in everyday life. If something fails to work in the way we expect it to, we ask ourselves why, and begin to search for the causes and reasons for the failure. We are usually confident that an answer lies within reach. It's just a matter of figuring it out. Such questioning leads along a calculated path; we eliminate certain choices, through trial and error, or by simple deduction. With each step, we calculate our next move, until finally the problem is solved. And our curiosity is replaced with the satisfaction of knowing."

An example of calculative questioning might be paying our taxes, or trying to fix a technical glitch on the computer. The calculative approach to these problems is not just a method but an at-



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titude: one where we try to get from A to B in the most efficient way. Batchelor says the calculative attitude "...treats life as though it were composed of a virtually infinite number of separate parts. This attitude not only operates in the material realm, it affects our vision of other people, and even ourselves. It fragments and divides, it turns living creatures into things, separate units capable of being dissected and accumulated, of being rejected or attained."

SO, WHAT WOULD calculative questioning look like in practice? If we're working on a breath practice in a calculated way, we'd be focused on an outcome: mastering the count, getting from one to ten without missing a beat, fixating on getting it right, rather than becoming one with the counting. Likewise, in working on Mu or Who, perhaps we'd also be looking for results, for kensho—expending energy on evaluating how well we're doing along the way.

With the calculative approach, our practice ends up being directed towards some future goal, something or some place outside of ourselves, outside of this moment. And because this calculated attitude is very much a product of our social conditioning, each one of us grapples with it. It's simply part of the terrain of practice. It's hard not to expect results—let's face it, who wouldn't want kensho? But we need to find a way to not pay attention to those thoughts. Again, the problem isn't that we have them, it's that we give in to them rather than just letting them pass.

The calculative attitude can also filter into our relationships, perhaps when we're trying to get something from a friend or co-worker, jockeying for favor, or trying to control a conversation to our liking because it makes us feel good about ourselves.

When we do this, we're only creating separation, just as we are when we attempt to think our way through our practice. Of course, we do need to use our analytical mind to go about our day-to-day lives, we do need to be able to solve problems and collaborate with others. But do we need to use our calculating mind when we're sitting, or when we're practicing off the mat, engaging in simple activities?

There's a great quote from Audre Lorde: "The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house." Her point was that you can't bring about equality and justice using the tools of "divide and conquer," the very same tools that are used to oppress people. We can say the same thing about going beyond duality, which thrives on thoughts. We can't use thoughts to go beyond thoughts.

WHAT WE NEED is a different way of questioning. And Batchelor calls this meditative questioning. He begins by describing how meditation can easily be misunderstood. He says: "Meditation is widely perceived as a kind of specialized activity. It is regarded as a means of calming the concentrating mind as a panacea for anxiety, agitation, and tension; symptomatic of the prevailing obsession with calculation, it is considered as a technique."

Of course, a technique is aimed at results. This is what we see with the mindfulness movement that has taken off, using meditation as a tool to achieve some specific purpose such as becoming more relaxed, more focused. But although guidelines can be given, ultimately there is no "how" to meditation, and the meditative attitude is not something we can acquire. It is nothing new or alien. It dwells deeply within us all. It is already present in an embryonic and sporadic way. It may come to us unexpectedly in glimmers and hints; it is vaguely recognized as a distant, barely known possibility, which may nag at us like fragments of a dream that refuse to leave us alone. Batchelor says we need to recognize this fragile attitude and then care for it and nurture it as we would a child or a seedling.

In other words, we don't need to worry about whether or not we have faith or doubt. It's there from the very beginning. Practicing zazen earnestly is what will uncover it. And, it's invariably going to ebb and flow. There's no need to analyze it. Faith just takes care of itself when we nurture it and put our trust in Zen. And when Batchelor talks about there being no "how" to meditation, he's also saying that we need to find our own way. A teacher can give us guidance, but ultimately, we need to do the work on our own.

On this point about faith and doubt lying within us, whether we realize it or not, I was reminded of a quote by the novelist Edith Wharton. She once said: "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it." Our faith can be fueled by our own trust in our True Nature that we too can wake into it. But it can also be driven by our actions simply by reflecting faith, being faith, even when we don't feel it in our bones. We do that when we sit even when we don't want to; by doing prostrations and chanting, even if they feels strange at first; or by doing a term intensive during which we make some big commitments. It's through our effort that our faith arises. It's in the doing.

Batchelor then goes on to describe meditative questioning as a matter of working with a mystery. He says: "Calculation can solve our problems, but

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it is helpless in penetrating our mysteries. The mysterious lies at the heart of our lives, not at the periphery. And its presence is only felt to the extent that a meditative attitude still lives within us. Unlike a problem, a mystery can never be solved, a mystery can only be penetrated. A problem, once solved, ceases to be a problem. But the penetration of a mystery does not make it any less mysterious."

This is an important distinction, solving a problem versus penetrating a mystery. Who am I? Why am I here? What is Mu? What is this? If we try to answer these questions with our thinking mind, we're only going to get dull, unsatisfactory answers. But to penetrate these questions is entirely different. We recite in the Four Vows, "Dharma gates beyond measure, I vow to penetrate." To penetrate is to see into, to experience the mystery, to merge with it. This book has helped me to understand and appreciate even more how doubt in Zen is so very different from how it's often treated in Judeo-Christian religion, where doubts are seen as straying away from one's path.

A patient, unhurried, yet continuous flow of water can wear down even the most resistant rock. Only the patient continuity of meditation with what the Chinese master Hsu Yun called a "long enduring mind" can finally wear down our stubborn doubts. This process is echoed in Lao Tse's words: "What is of all things most yielding can overwhelm that which is of all things most hard."

Patient, unhurried, continuous. That means simply returning our attention to the practice each time we notice that we've wandered into thoughts. This process of wearing away doesn't happen on a timetable, certainly not on our own timetable. To trust the practice is to put our trust solely in the doing of it, without wandering into our expectations.

Batchelor says: "It is fatal in meditation to entertain expectations. As soon as we fix in our mind a picture of what it is we seek to attain, we restrict ourselves to the boundaries of the known. Not the mystery, but the known.... One of the greatest dangers of all lies in the recollection of our own experiences of meditation. It is not so unusual, while meditating, to awaken to something extraordinary and unprecedented. But the more unusual and mystical the experience, the greater will be the danger, for we will be tempted, once the immediate experience has faded, to place an image of it before us, and then strive to recapture it."

If you sit enough, especially during sesshin, there's a good chance you're going to encounter this. You have what you label as a good sitting, or



a strong sesshin. Then you cling to the expectation that it's going to happen again the next time. Of course, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. Why can't I get back there? Why didn't it happen again? What's wrong with me? And you can't get back to it; that moment is long gone.

I used to catch myself making sesshin into a sort of monolith. I would find myself slacking off in daily practice, not taking it seriously enough, on and off the mat. But when sesshin came along, well, now I'm going to get serious. Now I'm going to throw myself into it. When we create this duality between being in and out of sesshin, we're in that calculative mindset. We're telling ourselves that sesshin is a big deal and everyday practice is, you know, kind of boring. We can't fall for that trap. When we treat practice as continuous, as never having an end point or goal, our relationship to it totally changes. Sesshin becomes an extension of daily practice. If we're doing the work every day, our practice in sesshin is all the more fortified from it.

THAT SAID, WE ALL have to find the right balance when it comes to integrating practice into our daily lives. We have family relationships, work responsibilities, and we have to carve out time to sit. But there are also moments off the mat throughout the day when we can be working on our practice, when we're walking up and down the stairs or doing the laundry—so many opportunities to understand that “ordinary mind is the way.”

This reminds me of an incident that happened at Chapin Mill. Over the course of the winter, a lot of snow had accumulated on the middle roof of the Klava House. There had to have been at least eight inches of packed snow up there. And then we had a couple of warm, sunny days in a row; it was in the 60s. And so naturally, that metal roof started to heat up and the snow began to melt. At first, the only thing that was noticeable was some dripping water. Looking at the roof, it was still completely covered in snow. And then a couple of days later, all of a sudden, a single massive sheet of snow came crashing down in an avalanche. I jumped when it happened, because it was so loud and the whole house shook. In a flash, the roof was totally bare.

But in order for that to happen, the snow had to have been continuously melting, turning to water, little by little, little by little, before it all gave way. Again, to penetrate a mystery, we have to be continuous in our efforts, waiting and awake in this not-knowing. ///



Sightings



Keep up the good work.
AMAURY CRUZ
Miami, Florida

IN PRINT

THE BOOK: ILLUMINATING SILENCE: INSIGHTS ON THE PATH OF CHINESE ZEN BY MASTER SHENG-YEN & DR. JOHN H. CROOK ¶ *What it's about:* This book leads the reader day by day through two six-day Chan retreats in Wales, led by Master Sheng-yen. With a foreword by Stephen Batchelor, the book also includes an autobiography of Sheng-yen and an account by Dr. Crook of his own experience of training under Master Shen-yen.

Why it's worthy: Because it's so practical and to the point. As Stephen Batchelor states in



the introduction: "This book thus provides a rare opportunity to listen in to the unfolding of a Chan retreat attended entirely by Western practitioners under the guidance of a contemporary Chan master." The retreats are a bit different from our sesshins, but not so different that it's jarring. The practice includes both koans and silent illumination (shikan-taza). The Chinese tend to teach students to relax into the practice rather than straining; it's important not to be tense, nor to get too excited when things go well or discouraged when they don't. This is an excellent handbook



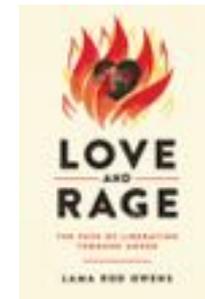
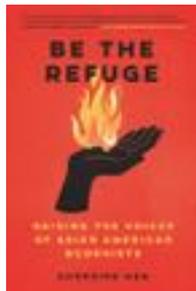
▲ If you haven't ever been on the third floor of 7 Arnold Park, do yourself a favor and check it out. Shown here is just a fraction of the library's collection.

for direct, commonsense practice.—SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN

AT THE CENTER

LIBRARY CORNER ¶ During the current pandemic lull in the United States, the Arnold Park library has reopened to fully vaccinated Sangha members along with the rest of the Center. Its collection currently contains over 2,000 items and is browsable online at Library-Thing (www.librarything.com/profile/rzclibrary).

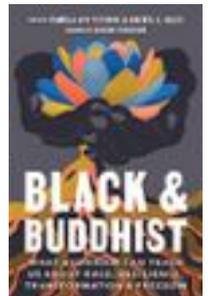
Some of the many sections the Zen Center library holds include books on Zen, koan collections, writings by Zen ancestors including Roshi Kapleau, Therevada and Vajrayana writings, poetry, history, lifestyle, and special topics such as engaged Buddhism,



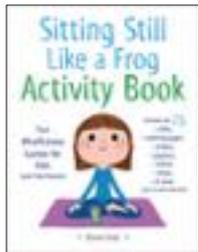
women in Buddhism, death and dying, and other world religions. There's a growing selection of kids' books,

too, with fresh new titles forthcoming. Newest additions to the Zen Center library include new sections related to race and LGBTQ+ topics, and a young adult section is coming soon.

Just a few special highlights of our newest arrivals are: *Be the Refuge: Uplifting the Voices of Asian American Buddhists* by Chenxing Han, *How We Show Up* by Mia Birdsong, and *Love and Rage: The Path of Liberation through Anger* by Lama Rod Owens. We also now have a library copy of *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Teaches Us about Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*, the book



▷ SIGHTINGS



used for Up-rooting Racism's inaugural book discussion group in July and August,

2021. A recently added kids' book currently on the New Arrivals shelf is *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids and Their Parents*.

Visit the third floor library on the 5 Arnold Park side next time you're attending a sitting and browse the New Arrivals shelf above the computer, or the main collection, and enjoy the peaceful ambience while you read. Zen Center members can check out books as well by following the instructions on the windowsill with the turtle figurine.—LUKA HAKKILA

RECENT EVENTS

SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN

On August 20, 2021, Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede sanctioned John Pulleyn as a Zen teacher at a ceremony held at the Chapin Mill Retreat Center. He is the third teacher to be named to lead the Rochester Zen Center since its founding in 1966, after the late Roshi Philip Kapleau



and Roshi Kjolhede. Sensei Pulleyn has been named a Co-Director and, together with Roshi Kjolhede, will continue to provide Zen training and spiritual guidance to the Center's members worldwide.

Born in St. Paul, Sensei Pulleyn was raised in Minnesota and Ohio, and graduated from Oberlin College with a B.A. in history. In 1968 he came to Rochester to join the Zen Center's staff and train under

Roshi Philip Kapleau, at a time when the Arnold Park buildings were under reconstruction. Later, he worked as a painting contractor and a software developer while raising two children with his wife Chris. A DWI arrest in 1990 inspired him to evaluate his life and resulted in an increased commitment to Zen practice. He also returned to school for a B.S. in nursing and worked as a pediatric nurse for ten years.

In 2003, Sensei Pulleyn re-joined the Center's staff as Head of Zendo, a position that he held for 15 subsequent years. During that time he gave numerous Dharma talks, provided private instruction, and regularly led meditation retreats (sesshin).

ELSEWHERE

MAKING A SCENE

In their pre-Zen days, Sensei Amala Wrightson and Richard von Sturmer were members of The Plague, New Zealand's first political/theatrical punk band.

▲ Amala-sensei (far left) and Richard Von Sturmer (foreground, green shirt). PHOTOGRAPH BY CONNER CRAWFORD

The Plague was formed at the beginning of 1978 when Richard returned from England, having immersed himself in the London punk scene while studying movement with Lindsay Kemp, a mentor to David Bowie.

Fast forward to 2020 when a music producer, John Baker, discovered unreleased recordings of The Plague. Putting together an album of their songs, he coaxed the band to re-form for a concert to celebrate the album's release. So, after 43 years, The Plague was back together with the original line-up except for a new, young drummer. It was a one-time-only performance with the old punk energy rekindled to the delight of all.

—RICHARD VON STURMER

A review and additional photos may be found at www.undertheradar.co.nz/news/18470/Live-Photos--Review-The-Plague---Neck-Of-The-Woods-Auckland.utr



◀ Sensei John Pulleyn (far right) during the ceremony.



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RZC ONLINE FOREVER!

Well, that is obviously an over-promise, but for the foreseeable future—even if there is no pandemic—the Center will continue to offer nearly every event online as well as in-person. Sittings, sesshins, Finding Your Seat, dokusan, Dharma talks, special events, and meetings of the entire Sangha as well as groups such as Uprooting Racism, the Zen of Living and Dying, etc., will all be available for members who can't be here in person. Everything we do, inside and outside the zendo, is now being viewed through the lens of reaching members and friends wherever they live. We will continue to update the technology and look forward to the improvements that are sure to come.

Q: Can I send my avatar to sesshin?

A: Not until we finish virtualizing Roshi and Sensei.

INTRODUCING THE SANGHA PROGRAMS OFFICE

Now any member, anywhere in the world, can suggest an idea for a Sangha get-together and the Sangha Programs Office can provide all the support necessary for a successful event. So, for example, a member in Sweden who has a friend who happens to be a documentary filmmaker can suggest a film viewing followed by a panel discussion including some of the people working on the film.

The Sangha Programs Office's assistance would include scheduling the program; publicizing it to our members and, if appropriate, to like-minded community groups and individuals; setting up the ticketing system on EventBrite; and providing the tech support for online participation.

The SPO has come a long way since it was first formed as a result of our member survey last year. At this point, we have a robust team of people and a good number of suggestions for events. The team just participated in a strategic planning process to identify its mission, vision, and values; the next step is reviewing and prioritizing the ideas that members have submitted to date.

Obviously, some ideas are relatively easy to produce (i.e. weekend hikes in the Finger Lakes) whereas others (Buddhist symposium at Chapin Mill) might require much more lead time and work. But, please—don't let that stop you from submitting them!

Barry Keesan is the strategic consultant for the SPO, and Donna Kowal is currently heading up the group. If you have any ideas for Sangha events, please contact Donna (Donna@rzc.org).

NEXT ISSUE

Have you come upon quotes, articles, books, movies, or other materials that have challenged your thinking about Buddhism, racism, climate change, or other pressing public or private concerns? Or maybe something that just provoked your curiosity or amusement? We're always looking for material for *Zen Bow*; submissions don't need to be long, profound, or even original (though please cite a source for items you're passing along from your reading). Send a question for the Q&A! Send in a snapshot of something that made you say "That's so Zen!" All submissions will be most gratefully received: zenbow@rzc.org.
