

► **NEW LATITUDE, NEW ATTITUDE:**
Roshi Kjolhede in Sarasota

FATPHOBIA: The last bastion of
“otherism” to tackle?

WHO AM I? A new member reflects
on her identity and practice





Summer 2022 | VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER ONE

WARMER WEATHER AND more time outdoors can help lift us from our struggle to be free of the shells, pods, chrysalises, and blinders of stagnation. This blossoming was evident in the Spring trustees' meeting, at which several hot button topics were explored openly and freely, from sexual harassment to conflicts of interest, to staff salaries, to pronouns. With the addition of a younger cohort to the board (three new trustees and an officer), progress has been made on freeing our bylaws from gendered language, implementing a more rigorous program for preventing/reporting sexual harassment, and beginning to ask specific questions about the way the RZC is governed.

Betsy Friedman, a former trustee and lifelong market research professional, conducted a study of religious organizations in New York State as well as comparable Zen Centers around the country, looking at issues of governance. How many trustees do they have? Who nominates them? Who elects them? Does the board have a strategic planning process? Does the board go through any kind of training? The preliminary results of this survey will be presented at the Annual Meeting, and, after some additional research has been completed, they will be available as a PDF to all members.

This type of meeting, stretching over more than one and a half days can be exhausting, but also exhilarating. We hope it will bring us closer to being a regenerative organization that is capable of change. Blessings to those who kick the tires.—CHRIS PULLEYN

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IMAGE BY *John James Audobon* | J. J. Audubon (born Jean-Jacques Rabin; 1785–1851) was an artist and ornithologist. His *Birds of America* comprises 435 hand-colored, life-size prints of birds in their natural habitat.



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Soundings

RECALLING DEATH EXPERIENCES: MORE THAN HALLUCINATIONS?

SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES IN the 20th and 21st centuries have led to a major evolution in the understanding of death. At the same time, for decades, people who have survived an encounter with death have recalled unexplained lucid episodes involving heightened consciousness and awareness. These have been reported using the popular—yet scientifically ill-defined—term “near-death experience.”

A multidisciplinary team of national and international leaders, led by Sam Parnia, M.D., Ph.D., director of Critical Care and Resuscitation Research at NYU Grossman School of Medicine, have published “Guidelines and Standards for the Study of Death and Recalled Experiences of Death,” a multi-disciplinary consensus statement and proposed future directions in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

This study, which examined the accumulated scientific evidence to date, represents the first-ever, peer-reviewed consensus statement for the scientific study of recalled experiences surrounding death.

Among the conclusions:

1. Due to advances in resuscitation and critical care medicine, many people have survived encounters with death or being near-death. These people—who are estimated to comprise hundreds of millions of people around the world based on previous population studies—have consistently described recalled experiences surrounding death, which involve a unique set of mental recollections with universal themes.

2. The recalled experiences surrounding death are not consistent with hallucinations, illusions, or psychedelic drug induced experiences, according to several previously published studies. Instead, they follow a specific narrative arc involving a perception of: (a) separation from the body with a heightened, vast sense of



consciousness and recognition of death; (b) travel to a destination; (c) a meaningful and purposeful review of life, involving a critical analysis of all actions, intentions and thoughts towards others; a perception of (d) being in a place that feels like “home,” and (e) a return back to life.

3. The experience of death culminates into previously unidentified, separate subthemes and is associated with positive long-term psychological transformation and growth.

4. Studies showing the emergence of gamma activity and electrical spikes—ordinarily a sign of heightened states of consciousness on electroencephalography (EEG)—in relation to death, further support the claims of millions of people who have reported experiencing lucidity and heightened consciousness in relation to death.

5. Frightening or distressing experiences in relation to death often neither share the same themes, nor the same nar-

rative, transcendent qualities, ineffability, and positive transformative effects.

CARDIAC ARREST IS NOT a heart attack, but represents the final stage of a disease or event that causes a person to die,” lead author Parnia explains. “The advent of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) showed us that death is not an absolute state, rather, it’s a process that could potentially be reversed in some people even after it has started.

So far, the researchers say, evidence suggests that neither physiological nor cognitive processes end with death and that although systematic studies have not been able to absolutely prove the reality or meaning of patients’ experiences and claims of awareness in relation to death, it has been impossible to disclaim them either.

“What has enabled the scientific study of death,” he continues, “is that brain cells do not become irreversibly damaged within minutes of oxygen deprivation when the heart stops. Instead, they ‘die’ over hours of time. This is allowing scientists to objectively study the physiological and mental events that occur in relation to death.”

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“Few studies have explored what happens when we die in an objective and scientific way, but these findings offer intriguing insights into how consciousness exists in humans and may pave the way for further research,” Parnia adds.—[NEUROSCIENCENEWS.COM/PERCEPTION-NEAR-DEATH-20335/](https://www.neurosciencenews.com/perception-near-death-20335/) ■

▷ **SOUNDINGS**

DHARANI (Sanskrit, lit. “holder” [feminine]): short sutras that contain magical formulas of knowledge comprised of syllables with symbolic content. They can convey the essence of a teaching or a particular state of mind that is created by repetition of the dharani. They are in general longer than mantras. —*The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*

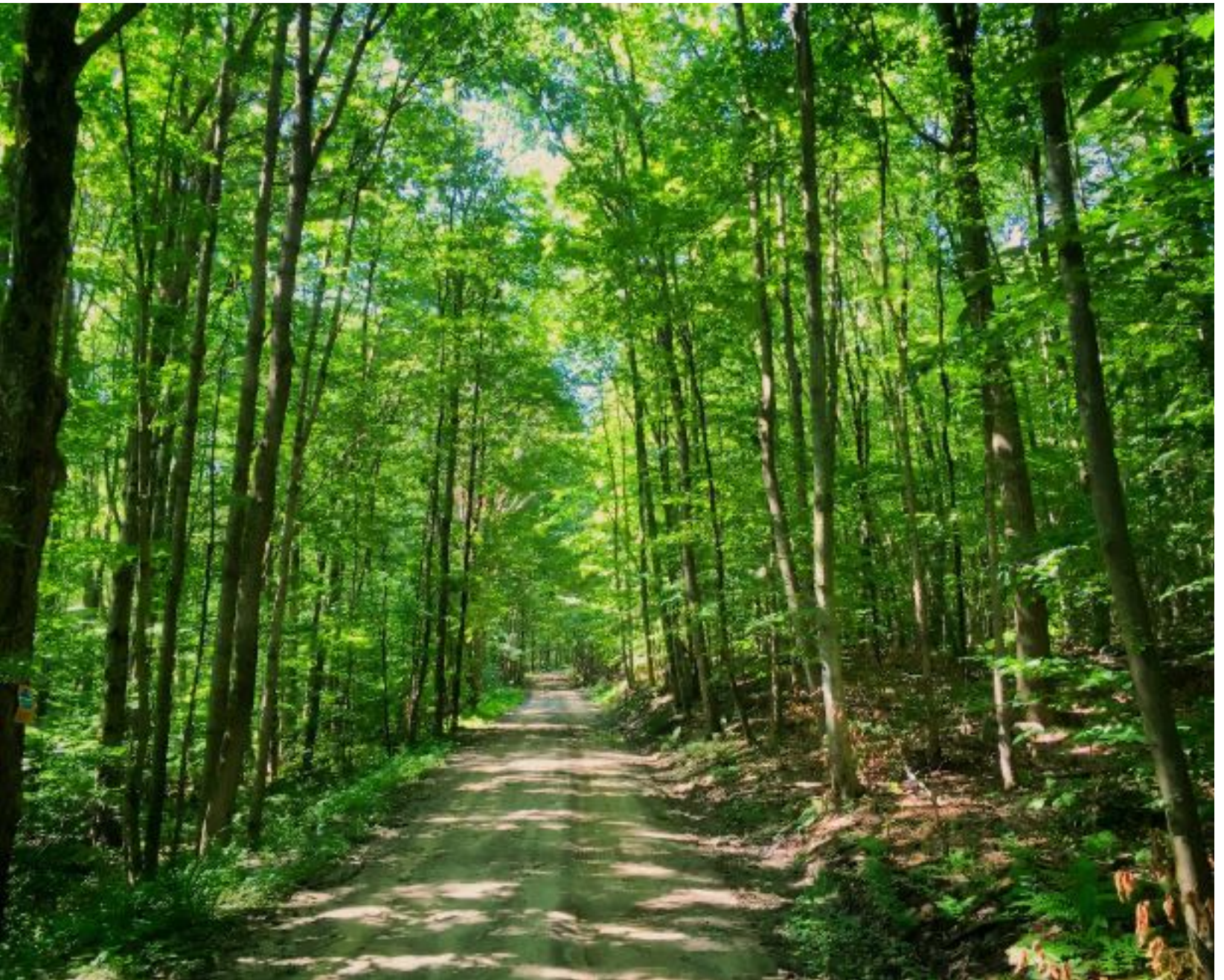
MOST OF THE ELEMENTS of our chanting services are actually concise sutras, or scriptures—teachings generally attributed to

the Buddha (though sometimes to another enlightened master). The sutras we chant are among those most widely chanted throughout the Buddhist world. In China, sutras are chanted in Chinese, in Tibet they are chanted in Tibetan, in Korea in Korean, in Japan in Japanese, and so forth. So it followed that we wanted to translate at least some of our sutras into English.

We have left two of the sutras we chant, however, in phonetic renderings of Japanese. These are dharanis, each of which is a string of mantras, and as such their power re-

sides in their sounds. In Zen, the state of mind in chanting—that of no-mind—is more important than the linguistic meaning of the words. Thus, the sounds are more important than the words, even in the sutras chanted in one's native language. All the more so, though, with dharanis. So it is that we have left the Dai Hi Shin Dharani and the Sho Sai Myo Kichijo Dharani untranslated into English, and likewise the gatha, or verse, at the end of the Prajna Paramita Hridaya, or Heart Sutra: “Ga-te, ga-te, para-gate, parasam-gate, bodhi svaha!”—

ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE ■



Q It seems like many people at the Zen Center are or have been battling depression. Is there any practice-related reason for this? And what should I do when I know I need to sit but I can't even imagine getting off my easy chair? Years ago, I was told that the cure for depression was "Do more zazen," but all that does is speed up my descent into a shame spiral.

ETA THOSE OF US who've taken up this practice are still people, with all the flaws and problems that afflict everyone else. Everything I read and hear points to a dramatic increase in the prevalence of depression and anxiety throughout our country, so it's not surprising if there's an increase in the Sangha as well.

Back in the early days of the Center, many of us thought that zazen alone would take care of just about any mental affliction, including even alcoholism or drug addiction. Today, that's not my understanding or Roshi's. Zazen can be a tremendous aid to recovery, but deeply ingrained ways of thinking and feeling can sabotage our sitting so that it becomes one more arena for

self-criticism and discouragement.

Whether you're struggling with depression or just finding it difficult to get yourself to the mat, understand and accept that changing any long-established pattern takes time and patience. Progress is going alternate with setbacks. That's how it has to be. Nevertheless, in each moment, we have the opportunity to notice that we're "lost in the dream"—caught up in catastrophizing and self-criticism, identifying ourselves with our symptoms.

When I first stopped drinking and asked for help, I got some good advice: "Don't try harder, try different." Paradoxically, it wasn't until I admitted that I was in over my head and that will-power alone wasn't going to do the job that things began to open up and I was able to accept help. Help

can be finding someone to open up to and it can be finding and taking the right antidepressant. Take it a day at a time. Accept the things you cannot change, which includes the way things are right now. If your depression is deep and prolonged, you will need time and patience.

Marsha Linehan, the therapist who developed Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) and the concept of radical acceptance, said this: "The bottom line is that if you are in hell, the only way out is to go through a period of sustained misery. Misery is, of course, much better than hell, but it is painful nonetheless. By refusing to accept the misery that it takes to climb out of hell, you end up falling back into hell repeatedly, only to have to start over and over again."—SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN ■

PLEASE IDENTIFY YOURSELF

HAKUIN SAYS THAT "it is with great respect and deep reverence that I urge all of you superior seekers who investigate the secret depths to be as earnest in penetrating and clarifying the self as you would be in putting out a fire on top of your head." I'm sure we've all been in that situation and have probably not spent a lot of time weighing our options. Hakuin's urgent message about the self might really be phrased: "Liar, liar, brain's on fire!" It's hard for us to face self-non-knowledge.

Should we look for the true self, the real self, the authentic self? Good luck! If you do it you're in for a big (or more precisely, an infinitely small) surprise. Hakuin says that "if we turn directly, and prove our True Nature,/That true Self is no-self, Our own Self is no-self,/We stand beyond ego and past clever words."

But if there is no self, why then does Buddhism, and even Zen itself, sometimes talk of a self? According to Hui-neng, it's not because though there is no "little self," there is a "Big Self." It's not because though there is no "lower self,"

there is still a "Higher Self." He sticks with the basic Buddhist view, "No-Self" (*anatta*), but points out that "in order to liberate people the self is provisionally defined." We can give the self some slack for a while. In the end, though, we have to shoot it down. Dogen puts it as follows: "To study the Buddha is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things." This is from the "Genjo Koan," a brief text that is Dogen's most famous one. We find our self by forgetting the self.

Our enlightenment comes from everything we experience, the Ten Thousand Things. Hit the road!—FROM *ZEN ANARCHY* BY MAX CAFARD ■

You can download a free PDF of *Zen Anarchy* from holybooks.com/zen-anarchy/

MIND AND WORLD

ONCE THERE WAS a monk who specialized in the Buddhist precepts, and had kept to them all his life. Once when he was walking at night, he stepped on something. It made a squishing sound, and he imagined he had stepped on an egg-bearing frog. This caused him no end of alarm and regret, in view of the Buddhist precept against taking life, and when he finally went to sleep that night he dreamed that hundreds of frogs came to him demanding his life.

The monk was terribly upset, but when morning came he looked and found that what he had stepped on was an overripe eggplant. At that moment his feeling of uncertainty suddenly stopped, and for the first time he realized the meaning of the saying that there is no objective world. Then he finally knew how to practice Zen.—ZEN MASTER FOYAN ■

DEAD AHEAD

I'VE OFTEN SAID to people that the way to really live is to die. The passport to living is to imagine yourself in your grave. Imagine that you're lying in your coffin. Any posture you like. In India we put them in cross-legged. Sometimes they're carried that way to the burning ground. Sometimes, though, they're lying flat. So imagine you're lying flat and you're dead. Now

look at your problems from that viewpoint. Changes everything, doesn't it?

But many of you don't want to think of death. People don't live, most of you, you don't live, you're just keeping the body alive. That's not life. You're not living until it doesn't matter a tinker's damn to you whether you live or die. At that point you live. When you're ready to lose your life, you live it.—ANTHONY DE MELLO

◀ Springtime in the Finger Lakes. PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSANNA ROSE

TROUBLE WITH SELF

I RECENTLY COMPLETED my first in-person sesshin, and it left me buoyed by a sense of freedom. I felt wise beyond words and comforted by newfound ease. My practice had progressed, and I was truly on the path. “I got it,” I thought to myself. “Step aside, Shakyamuni, there is a new kid in town.”

Or so I thought.

I AM A GIRL

Upon returning from sesshin, I went out for dinner with my wife. While I was glowing with delusion, the waiter approached me from behind and asked, “Sir, would

you like something to drink?” The sound of “sir” was all it took for me to come crashing back into the land of this and that. Rather than freedom and ease, I was shock-frozen in a bruised and trampled self. “Did he just call me ‘Sir’?” Do I look like a man? What is wrong with him?”

Then it occurred to me: “Wait, no, what is wrong with me? How can I be bothered by perceived slights like this when I just spent a week in ‘no self, no other?’”

I was embarrassed, and so was he, apologizing profusely. With my shaved head and my usual boyish clothes, it was an easy mistake to make. Still, I was hurt.

But why was I hurt?

I am a girl, and I love being female. My sense of self is very closely attached to my girlness. When my girlness is questioned, my self is questioned, and I get angry. Here I was, swimming in my self-righteous post-sesshin “no self, no other” while at the same time insisting on being a girl and being recognized as such, even by a stranger. This moment sent me down the much too familiar rabbit hole. Not only was I hurt by being called “Sir,” I was frustrated by being frustrated by it. Sesshin could not have felt further away.

THEY ARE A GIRL

A few days later, I had dinner with a group of acquaintances, one of which identifies as nonbinary. That person immediately told me that “I go by the pronouns ‘they, them.’” Yet, not one minute later, I referred to them as “she.” And it wasn’t the last time I did so. I seem to be utterly incapable of using “they, them.”

Whenever this happens, and it does way too often, I get mad, angry, and sad. I came to recognize that I feel this way because my sense of self includes the “idea” that I treat everyone with the utmost respect and loving-kindness. When I then fail them by misidentifying them, not only do I hurt them, but I injure my carefully crafted sense of self.

I am trapped not only in gender—my own and that of others—but also in self. And when I recognize that I am trapped, I get angry at being so far from truth. And then I get angry for being angry. It makes, of course, no sense to dwell in anger, so I get angry for making no sense.

That’s a lot of anger. And all because of a little word called “self.”

I AM A ZEN PRACTITIONER

I am grateful for these occasions because they remind me how unfinished my Zen practice is and will remain. Looking at my failure in properly addressing non-binary people and my reaction towards having my gender misidentified is a wonderful opportunity to become aware of my attachment to my gender, my conditioning in responding to appearances and my adoration of self.

What Zen has helped me to recognize is just how much I operate under a sense of self, and how my reactions and moods

HOW ZEN IS THAT!

▼ Presented without comment. PHOTOGRAPH BY ELAINE HEVERON



▷ SOUNDINGS

are conditions arising from the delusion of self. The problem is always “self.” Rather than dwelling in anger, I now recognize these moments as an opportunity to awaken to my fixed notion of “I” and my conditioning to a beard or long hair. My failures give me the motivation to keep working on my practice. Don’t let up! Not yet, not yet! It is a frightening process that takes the kind of courage that I am not yet certain I have. After all, if all goes well, one day, “I” will be thoroughly dead.—**DESIREE JAEGER-FINE** ■

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Through endless ages, the mind has never changed.

It has not lived or died, come or gone, gained or lost.

It isn’t pure or tainted, good or bad, past or future, true or false, male or female.

It isn’t reserved for monks or lay people, elders or youth, masters or idiots, the enlightened or the unenlightened.

It isn’t bound by cause and effect, and doesn’t struggle for liberation.

Like space, it has no form.

You can’t own it and you can’t lose it.

Mountains, rivers, and walls can’t impede it.

But this mind is ineffable and difficult to experience.

It is not the mind of the senses.

So many are looking for this mind, yet it already animates their bodies.

It is theirs, yet they don’t realize it.

—**BODHIDHARMA, QUOTED IN THE WISDOM OF THE ZEN MASTERS BY TIMOTHY FREKE** ■

Submitted by Kirk Lary, who writes, “For myself, I know of no other saying that is so crystal clear.”

THOMAS EDISON: AUTODIDACT, INVENTOR, PARTICLE PHYSICIST?

[EDISON] DESCRIBES IN his *Diary and Sundry Observations* being engaged in the design of an apparatus that would enable “personalities which have left this earth to communicate with us.” Edison imagined living beings as temporary conglomerations—“swarms” was the word he used—of infinitesimally small “life units” that persisted after death in a kind of loitering, dispersed form, and eventually regrouped as someone or something else. He described his ma-



▲ PHOTOGRAPH BY SAM SCORSONE

chine as a sort of megaphone. He reasoned that the “physical power possessed by those in the next life must be extremely slight,” and that, like the speck-sized Whos in *Horton Hears a Who*,

they require a certain level of amplification to make themselves heard. Sadly, Edison himself departed for Whoville before completing the contraption.—

—**FROM SPOOK BY MARY ROACH** ■

WINTER OF CONTENTMENT AND LOSS

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL months, whenever I've gone on the Center's website and seen the photo of our buildings on Arnold Park, my heart has skipped a beat.

The hardest part of having relocated for the winter, then, is clear: not being embedded in the Rochester Sangha—home for 50 years. (More on that later.)

Also harder than we'd expected was the labor of disengaging from our physical household. Homeowners who dwell long enough in ample space learn how easy it is over the years to manage the stream of things that come through the doors—you stash them in closets and attics and basements and garages... for now. But the reckoning must come, and if it's not faced by oneself, it must be by others.

So the spring and summer leading up to the move was all about breaking down and chewing up the old—six months of clearing, sorting, hauling (600 books to the library, vanloads of goods to Goodwill), boxing, and tagging. It was a grinding campaign in confrontation with the past—with photos, clothes, and all the other constituents of self-identity. We fought our way through three real estate closings: for two homes and one private office building. Lawyers, banks, agents. Deadlines. We agreed that had we been just a few years older, we might not have had the stamina—or executive functions—left to pull all this off.

Our 30th anniversary, an occasion we'd made plans months earlier to celebrate in style, but postponed due to Covid, was a week behind us before we remembered it. By the time we hit the road, we were so spent that it didn't occur to us once during our three-day drive to turn on the car radio or listen to any music or other programs. A season of upheaval was over, our to-do list exhausted.

The first priority in our new home was to set up an area for daily sitting. After all, to the extent that over the years in Rochester I'd internalized Sangha, and Buddha, and Dharma, they now had to be nourished from afar. I claimed an alcove, with its own window, in our new guest room and gradually worked out a setup for Zoom sitting and dokusan. That meant getting the house wired for internet service. Then the hanging of art. Equipping the kitchen and stocking the bedrooms left us practically BFF's with the gang at Bed, Bath, and Beyond. Then multiple trips to government offices to establish residency root structures—legal, financial, medical, motor vehicle. And all the while learning the layout of streets, parks, and retail. Lastly, we agreed that we needed to come up with nicknames for each other that were better



TEXT BY *Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede*

attuned to Southern culture. For her I came up with “Daisy Mae,” and for me she settled on “The Colonel.” (To be sure, we’ve yet to use them.)

The many months of the pandemic’s first wave, in 2020, had been a test for those of us who were on staff but not in residence at the Center. With Arnold Park and Chapin Mill both locked down then, we had faced the challenge of preserving the spirit of residential Zen training in our homes. Like other Sangha members, we now had no built-in schedule to lean on. Little did I know that that early experiment would turn out to be a dry run for me in maintaining a solid home practice while living out-of-state this winter.

Daily sittings are the backbone of traditional Zen training, and for me that has proven to be the easy part of home practice; they have long since become non-negotiable. As a lifelong morning lark, making it to our 7:00 AM Zoom sittings now, as in 2020, is—well, like falling out of bed.

AS FAR AS THE ESSENTIALS of staff life to be preserved in Florida, then—daily sitting: check. A prepared lunch: not so much. We knew that relocating would cost me my lifelong staff privilege of Zen Center communal meals, and that we’d both have to de-board the gravy train of Center leftovers. Until now, neither of us ever really had to cook. Even in Rochester, Angela would admit to friends, “The only reason we have a kitchen is because it came with the house.” Now, by necessity, it was a skill I had to learn and she had to refurbish.

Another loss, now that my office has switched to home: in-house, hands-on tech support, usually within minutes, from staff. Ditto with clerical management of health insurance. These are tasks that most adults need to have learned, but that throughout my life I’d been able to rely on the Center to handle. No more now. In this new Florida field of opportunity, to paraphrase Neil Young, it was plowing time.

Becoming snowbirds has also meant doing without my own library of Zen and Buddhist books. In October it was hard to visualize how things would fit into our decidedly smaller home space, or even how I’d be using my time while no longer embedded in the staff routine. So only books left unopened for years made it south.

Another relinquishment in moving here: use of a Zen Center car. But sharing Angela’s has been fine, especially with our household income sharply reduced. Simplify, simplify, simplify.

I’ve also missed... snow. Really! Other than four winters spent in Mexico assisting Roshi Kapleau in the late 70s, this was my first one without ever

looking out at the snow. Granted, it’s not been painful going without Rochester’s months of unyielding, often dirty urban snow cover. But in Florida even Layman Pang himself might have missed those “beautiful snowflakes... falling nowhere,” as it reads in the koan. Missed, too, in a very different way, was shoveling it—one of the best strenuous cardiovascular activities around, and truly exhilarating when tackling the Zen Center parking lot in teamwork with the rest of the staff.

As a snowbird, I’ve also missed Rochester’s tall trees, and Chapin Pond; more swamps here than ponds. And another form of joyful, coordinated Sangha effort now suspended: playing tennis weekly (weakly?) with the Kubickas, Sensei, and Axel.

But when is a loss ever purely a loss? There’s that other side, the tradeoff: no snow here, but lovely climate. No woods, but instead the sea. No second car, but then there’s the savings on gas and maintenance. And even the less tangible losses, which can’t be squared with discrete gains, have opened the door to discovery. Without in-house Zen Center tech support, I’ve had to rely on myself more, as in learning to work with health insurance and meal prep. These are the intangible gains. And being catapulted out of a place of buck-stopping responsibility at the hub of Zen Center life to relative anonymity 1400 miles away has been a relief. It has also provided a different form of practice—that of famous masters such as the Sixth Ancestor and Daito Kokushi who left their monasteries to go underground, living for years among hunters and beggars and other common folk to “walk the walk” of Zen practice outside the rarefied environment of the temple.

THERE WAS ANOTHER point of self-discovery this past winter, which came in exchange for the loss of Zen Center staff life. I realized how much I’d thrived my whole life—first in school and then on staff—in a highly structured environment. Once that structure was gone, in Florida, I found myself in unknown territory—not bound to the Center’s sitting and meal schedule. (When Linji was asked about the gist of Zen and answered, “Eating when hungry, sleeping when tired,” are we to think that he wasn’t following the monastic routine?) This new freedom has also meant exercising and running errands, not at circumscribed times but whenever there was an opening in my schedule. Likewise, dokusan.

This unstructured life has been marvelous—but also revealing. With no rails to stay between in daily life, I’ve come to recognize in myself (as my

psychologist wife did long ago) features of ADHD. Before Zen, the evidence was there all along: acting out in school, scrapes with the law, distractibility (ten car accidents—though most of them minor—between ages 16 and 18), forgetfulness, restlessness, poor time management, impulsivity, delighting in risky behavior....

In the past, when people new at the Center would sometimes ask whether they could manage to do meditation with ADHD, I did wonder myself. Wouldn't above-normal distractibility be a handicap? But context can make all the difference. Those with the condition may have plenty of ability to focus within structured conditions, such as while sitting. Or while serving in the military. Staff training provides even more structure. And most of all: sesshin. Each of these contexts in its own way reflects what in Japanese Zen has been called "putting a snake in a tube" ("No moving!"). I've seen people diagnosed with ADHD concentrate fiercely in the zendo, and go far in Zen.

Zen practitioners doing breath or koan work are tasked with focusing on those to the point of self-forgetfulness. But in forgetting the self, we can also forget about time—which even in Zen would invite problems. In Zen training, residents have bells and blocks to prompt them to show up for sittings, meals, and work meetings while otherwise they would be carried along uninterrupted through the day like a leaf on a river. Without those signals, in their absorption in their work they could forget what's not present and right before them. At home, coping devices such as alarms, notes, and lists can help one stay on schedule, but they're not foolproof, especially when each day's schedule is different. Even an experienced meditator can, in his absorption in the task at hand, lose track of time (as occurs when a certain teacher loses track of emails, or of dokusans he's scheduled at times scattered through the day).

PEOPLE HAVE ASKED me about the "r" word. But for a Zen teacher in good health, what would retirement even mean as long as he has online dokusan customers and emails from his students to answer and the technology to give recorded talks occasionally? Why would he want to give up those activities, the best part of the job?

It would mean being unyoked from the Director's responsibilities that are centered in Rochester. In that respect, this past winter was a preview of retirement. It was a season, not of idleness but of ease, free of any set schedule. And pleasure, really, because I've had the luxury of spending more time



This winter,
then, has been
one of
contentment,
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in each dokusan than the brief slots (typically under three minutes) available for in-person dokusans at morning or evening sittings. This winter, then, has been one of contentment, and a contentment bolstered by many reports from Rochester confirming that the Center has been in good hands.

In traditional Buddhist teaching, the circumstances we find ourselves in reflect our past deeds. Yet cause and effect are forever in flux. To be able to enjoy life, even in retirement, is not a stable state. Our reservoir of favorable karma will drain away unless we replenish it with ongoing Dharma practice. That starts with daily sitting as a way of "nourishing the sacred Embryo" of our Original Enlightenment, and working to embody the Six Paramitas, chief among them dana, or giving. Dana itself starts with giving up thoughts, opinions, and other mental attachments. And there's no better way of doing that than in concert with the Sangha.

HAIL THE TREASURE of Sangha! We do want to be able to sit alone, as necessary, and not become dependent on local Sangha. But what a force magnifier it is to sit in a zendo with others. For those of us excluded from the zendos at Arnold Park and Chapin Mill by distance, online sittings have been a gift, as they were during the Center's Covid lockdown. But what can compare to sitting with others in one room to return the mind to the Fundamental Ground? Who of us after being excluded from our local zendo for so many moons will forget the visceral thrill, in 2021, of finally gathering again, or sitting "knee-to-knee, eyeball-to-eyeball" in dokusan that is three-dimensional?

The greatest challenge to us as human beings, ultimately, is in adapting to change. Despite our untiring efforts to get what we want and to arrange things as we wish, the sands beneath us keep shifting. In sitting and working and communing with others in the Sangha, whether online or in person, we develop the power to adapt to two of Buddhism's "eight winds" (basic challenging changes): "gain" and "loss." That means adapting to even as formidable a change as losing the local, flesh-and-blood Sangha we've become entwined with over fifty years. Imagine—a practice that enables us to transcend loss itself! If we're sitting every day, no matter how far from our root Sangha, why would we cling to feelings of longing to be there? Why would we want to? Such pangs might arise, but without dwelling in thoughts of those people "out there," what exists other than This, Here, Now? When we're centered, we're at the Center. Even better, we're right here. **///**



THE DHARMA OF FATNESS

IN 2018, ELLEN MAUD BENNET died as a result of inoperable cancer. She had been seeking diagnosis for several years, but doctor after doctor had dismissed her symptoms, simply

because she was fat; the only diagnosis that she received was obesity, and the only treatment plan she was given was to try to lose weight. Meanwhile, her tumor grew. By the time she was actually given access to diagnostic testing, it was too late.

The choice made by her and her family to use her obituary to call out the fat shaming she had received from doctors made international headlines, but her experiences were so common that every fat person* with whom I've talked about it has nodded in recognition. Being denied care and compassion is, quite literally, a daily occurrence for fat folks.

I have given multiple presentations about the harmful impact of fatphobia and sizeism over the

*Following in the footsteps of fat liberation activists of the last fifty-plus years, I intentionally use the term fat in favor of other terms. Terms such as "obese" and "overweight" pathologize natural body-size diversity; these words are further problematized by the ways they are used in contrast with a supposedly "normal" weight, thereby deeming diversity of body sizes and shapes as abnormal. Euphemisms such as "curvy" and "larger bodied" imply that fatness is somehow shameful or not-to-be-named, an idea that fat activists are strongly opposed to, while terms such as "thicc" would be culturally appropriate for me, as a white person, to use.

last five years, in different states and to different audiences. I have borne witness to the resistance of so many people to this simple truth: fat people deserve loving kindness and respect, exactly as we are.

However, it is all too rare that we are treated in such a way.

It is worth mentioning here that people of all sizes are susceptible to receiving negative messages about their bodies, and all body shaming is harmful: however, fat people face widespread *systemic* discrimination that is not faced by smaller-bodied folks. Research by R. M. Puhl has revealed the widespread presence of weight-based discrimination from employers, medical providers, and educational settings. In one cited survey of medical professionals, 31% stated that they would prefer to not treat fat people at all. Meanwhile, longitudinal studies have revealed that there is an inverse relationship between weight and salaries, and a direct relationship between weight and unemployment levels and social isolation.

It is from a growing body of research, then, that a deeper level of understanding about the correlation between weight and health outcomes is

TEXT BY Lore McSpadden

coming to light. The illnesses and deaths that have for so long been assumed to be caused by someone's higher weight are more accurately understood to be caused by medical neglect; failure to correctly diagnose and treat fat people; the resultant avoidance of medical setting by fat folks; the higher rates of fat folks who are unemployed, underemployed, uninsured, and underinsured; and the social isolation that all too often accompanies being fat.

So what does this have to do with the dharma? Everything.

THE FOUR VOWS

Let's start with the very foundation of our practice: the Bodhisattva Vows.

Anyone who has attended a formal sitting or sesshin through a center that is affiliated with the RZC's lineage is familiar with the translation of The Four Vows that we use, but I offer first a translation that is used by Thich Nhat Hanh and students of the Plum Village tradition:

"However innumerable beings are, I vow to meet them with kindness and interest.

"However inexhaustible the states of suffering are, I vow to touch them with patience and love.

"However immeasurable the Dharmas are, I vow to explore them deeply.

"However incomparable the mystery of interbeing, I vow to surrender to it freely."

In this moment, I invite you to take a deep breath and consider your beliefs about fatness: not just a little bit of belly fat or thigh fat, but Big, Round Fatness. If you are a visual person, I invite you to visit Substantia Jones's Adipositivity website, Instagram feed, and/or Facebook page (be aware that many of Substantia's images do feature

nudity) and find an image that strikes you as particularly impactful. Settle into your breath and the depth of your hara. From this centered space, look with humility into your mind and ask yourself:

Are my thoughts about fatness and fat people ones that manifest kindness and interest?

Can I acknowledge the truth of the suffering that is caused by my anti-fat beliefs and discrimination? Can I vow to transform my anti-fat bias with patience and love?

Does my understanding of reality include a compassionate, curious exploration of fatness?

Does my understanding of interbeing include a free and expansive surrender to my own connection to fatness?

There are so many aspects of life that are not inclusive or welcoming for fat folks: financial support of clothing companies that do not make options for folks of all sizes (i.e., up to at least a 6X, and preferably a 10X), choices of chairs and other furniture with weight limits under at least 500 pounds, the acceptance of the default sizes of zafus and zabutons, and decisions to engage in or positively talk about the inherently fatphobic practice of intentional weight loss (IWL) are all ways that our day-to-day lives can increase the states of suffering for fat folks.

One way that we can all deepen our practice of living in accordance with the Bodhisattvic Vows is to slough off the layers of fatphobia and sizeism that prevent us from embodying compassion for all beings.

THE THREE POISONS

Ah, yes: the three poisons of attachment, aversion, and delusion and the nefarious ways that they keep us trapped in the samsara of death and re-



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

FAT FACTS

FOR ME, AS FOR MANY other people, fatphobia is one of the last bastions of "otherism" that pollutes the mind. And there may be more people blinded by this prejudice than any other. We turn it on ourselves, as well as others, so that the self becomes "other" and just another object of contempt. In the interest of setting the record straight, here are some scientifically validated facts to refute the myths of obesity.—*Editor*

MYTH: Fat people are unhealthy and unfit.

FACT: There is no specific weight that an individual should reach to be "fit and healthy." Everybody's body is different due to differences in muscle mass (and remember, muscle weighs more than fat), fat distribution, bone structure, water, sex, culture, and race. Second fact: Lizzo.

birth, are absolutely at play in the ways that fat-phobia interferes with our ability to manifest our commitment to the Bodhisattvic path.

We are, almost without exception, ensnared by our thoughts about our bodies. The belief that we would somehow be more worthy, more attractive, more loveable, more productive, or more valid if we were to lose weight (or avoid gaining weight) is so insidious, pervasive, and challenging to uproot that it could easily be considered addictive in nature—and, as a result, a manifestation of the poison of attachment.

Similarly, the systemic and ubiquitous nature of sizeism results in the truth that most people are caught in the web of aversive beliefs about fatness. Buddha nature has no size limit, and yet all too often people correlate thinness with morality and fatness with slovenly gluttony.

So many people begrudge the soft expansiveness of their bellies and thighs by holding them in, keeping them in a contracted state, or otherwise denying their right to grow and take up space, and as a result change their breathing patterns and their posture. We know from the information shared in Introductory Workshops (as well as from multiple scientific studies) that our ability to breathe fully and to maintain a posture that is appropriate for our body's needs is integral to our ability to be present and to deepen our meditation practice: however, our sizeist aversions preemptively interfere with our access to deep breath and optimized posture. In the most pragmatic and concrete of ways, our aversion to fatness interferes with our ability to deepen our Zen practice.

Delusive beliefs about fatness abound, particularly as they relate to the supposed correlation between health and size and the supposed benefits

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of weight loss. It is beyond the scope of this article (and of *Zen Bow* as a publication) to unpack the growing body of research debunking long-held beliefs regarding these supposed correlations, but I do encourage interested folks to start by reading the books *Body Respect* (by Drs. Lindo Bacon and Lucy Aphramor), *Fat-Talk Nation* (by Susan Greenhalgh), and *The Fat Studies Reader* (edited by Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay). These books are accessibly written, but also very well researched: the references of each of these books will provide a wonderful roadmap for unlearning long held delusions regarding fatness.

What I do want to emphasize here are a few delusive beliefs that are profoundly detrimental to our practice and to our ability to live in accordance with the Bodhisattvic vows.

The delusive belief that people either are healthy or are not healthy is binary, reductionist, and harmful. The etymology of the word health is connected to the Old English word *hælp* (“wholeness”), the Old Norse *helge* (“holy, sacred”), and in some of its earliest uses in Middle English as *health*, where the connotation was happiness and safety as much as any physical condition.

Our very bodies are whole and sacred exactly as they are (“this very body, the body of Buddha”), and are infinitely worthy of safety. From this understanding, a prerequisite for health is the acknowledgement of one's inherent wholeness and sacredness; simultaneously, this understanding of health creates space for people who live with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities to define themselves as healthy when they are provided with the conditions of safety and acknowledgement of their wholeness and holiness.

A connected delusive belief is that IWL (inten-

MYTH: BMI is the gold standard for assessing a person's weight.

FACT: The BMI is inadequate, stigmatizing, and racist. It was created by a Belgian mathematician (not a health professional) in 1832 using white men (French and Scottish).

The BMI thus represents M. Adolphe Quetelet's perception of “the perfect weight of the average man.” The original BMI

threshold for obesity was 27.8, but in 1988 it was lowered to 25 (easier to remember). The next day 29 million Americans woke up “unhealthy.” The BMI appears to be a measure of social acceptability rather than of health.

MYTH: The best way to diet is to eliminate certain food groups/eat one meal a day/fast every other day/join friends on Facebook and do the Whole 30.

FACT: 95% of all diets fail, and, ironically, diets are the #1 cause of weight gain. This is due to regaining weight after dieting. The Minnesota Starvation Experiment studied the physical and psychological effects of dieting, which included significant slowing down of basic metabolism, failure of certain organs, teeth and hair

weakness and loss, dizziness, energy and strength loss, water retention, decrease in libido, depression, anxiety, anhedonia, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. And if you're forcing a child to diet, you may be encouraging a lifelong unhealthy relationship with food. More children die each year from anorexia than “childhood obesity.”

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE ►

tional weight loss) is both desirable and safe. It is only desirable if we fall prey to the aforementioned beliefs connected to attachment and aversion, and it can only be seen as safe if we deny reality. All of the harms that have been inaccurately attributed to having a higher weight have been shown to be the result of weight cycling—in other words, they are caused by repeated attempts to lose weight. Because repeated studies have shown that the vast majority of people who attempt to lose weight regain all or more than what they initially lose, weight cycling is the most likely result for any attempts toward intentional weight loss: Basically, attempting to lose weight can be significantly more harmful for your body than not attempting to.

Those who do experience long-term weight loss often do so by falling prey to behaviors that would classify as an eating disorder, and anorexia has a higher mortality rate than any other mental illness.

And what about surgical methods of weight loss? Literature reviews and research compiled by Lisa DuBreuil, LICSW, a leading expert in the field of postoperative effects of bariatric surgery, reveal that “patients are at a significantly increased risk of death by suicide following bariatric surgery compared to these same patients’ own presurgical histories, to BMI-matched reference groups, and to the general population. Research suggests that bariatric patients have an increased risk of self-harm behaviors and a four times greater risk of suicide following bariatric surgery.”

It therefore becomes clear that one cannot be safe, let alone whole and holy, while engaging in the behaviors that result in intentional weight loss, nor can we claim to be in support of the wholeness, holiness, and safety of others by speaking positively



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about the weight loss of ourselves or others. In order to free ourselves from the grip of the three poisons in relation to our beliefs about our bodies and to more fully embody the Four Vows, it is imperative that we uproot our fatphobia and sizeism.

LOVINGKINDNESS

Unlearning our tendencies towards upholding fatphobia and sizeism can be easier said than done. I have found that the practice of Metta meditation can be very helpful with this process.

Those who have explored Metta meditation in their own practice know that it always begins with a focus on oneself: “May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be safe, may I be free, may I liberate all sentient beings.”

I encourage you to incorporate a loving, radical acceptance of your body’s shape and size into your practice of Metta. As you expand the focus of your Metta towards ever-larger circles of beings, make space in your practice to encompass all of the shapes and sizes of embodied beings, without judgment, hierarchy, or exception.

In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Roshi Kapleau recounts Harada Roshi’s statement that “The center of the universe is the pit of your belly!” and his entreaty to “Put your mind in the bottom of your belly, there’s a blind Buddha there, make him see!”

The yoga teacher Charlie Shipley has stated, “When you begrudge the belly, you begrudge the breath.”

There is an alternative to the harms of fatphobia, and this alternative is profoundly healing, compassionate, and beautiful.

As beautiful as your belly, your thighs, your softest parts.

Breathe into it. ///

MYTH: Fatphobia is a natural consequence of worrying about someone else’s health.

FACT: Fatphobia is one of the last systems of societally-approved oppression in the Western Hemisphere. Our “culture of thinness” is one reason for this—a culture that is strengthened daily by the movies, the fashion industry, popular media, catty girls in high school, and articles about

“how to take off those pandemic pounds.” Weight loss is seen as an achievement, while weight gain is viewed as a symptom of lax discipline and laziness. Not all weight losses are good things, just as not all weight gains are bad things. The “obesity epidemic” can better be characterized as an epidemic of fault-finding and unscientific thinking.

—Cottais, C. Pavard, J. Sanchez, M. (2021) *Fatphobia, a pervasive and socially accepted discrimination*. Growththinktank.org [online] July 2021. Translated by Camille Cottais.

▷ FROM THE ARCHIVE

BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES

Because children love predictability, the format for the Buddha's Birthday celebration over Memorial Day weekend every year has remained essentially the same: first, to the Buddha Hall for the story of the Buddha's birth (in some years the story was told as a pageant, as a play performed by the children, and by shadow puppets). Then, a great deal of noise must be made outside to awaken the Sleeping Sage, who emerges every century or so to tell Jataka tales, other folk tales, and jokes. Suddenly, the unmistakable sound of Phil Swanson's trombone...er, a trumpeting elephant heralds the arrival of the Great White Elephant, who leads a parade up and down Arnold Park. Finally, a potluck picnic crowned with a Tower of Cupcakes.

This year, with the time for reflection that the pandemic afforded plus increasing awareness of the structural racism issues that the Uprooting Racism group is addressing, the issue of cultural appropriation has come up. The generally

agreed-on definition of cultural appropriation is what happens when "another culture 'borrows' any cultural elements, typically without asking permission or crediting the source culture. Appropriation also tends to involve some misuse of cultural elements." [O'Neill Institute of Georgetown Law]

So when we apply the *bindi* to the space between the eyebrows of our costumed Queen Maya, are we aware that this "ornamentation" is intended to enhance the purpose of the *anja* chakra, or third eye? That this "dot" is meant to signify piety as well as to serve as a reminder to keep God at the center of one's thoughts? Few of us would interpret an Ash Wednesday thumbprint as pure decoration, part of a costume. Is our use of the *bindi* misuse of a cultural element? Or an attempt to pay homage to the Indian roots of Buddhism? As in making most difficult decisions, we will need to find a middle way.

NOTE: sadly, dates were not available for most of these photographs.



Milk-rice Dharma: Becoming our own Sujatas

Last September,

I visited a surgeon's office for a consultation on my left knee, which I badly injured in late July during a virtual High Intensity Training class. As someone with a history of disordered eating, and aware that the Body Mass Index is far from a scientifically-sound tool for determining health, I regularly ask not to see the reading on the scale.

Being aware of the number cycles up thoughts about what weights I have been at various times in my life, what I used to weigh x number of time units ago, what I "should" weigh now, and quickly, how much less I "should be" eating. While this surprises some medical workers who have not previously seen a patient opt out of seeing their

TEXT BY *Luka Häkkilä*



► Wall painting of Sujata offering rice, Wat Kasattrathirat, Ayutthaya, Thailand. PHOTOGRAPH BY Photo Dharma (Sadao, Thailand)

weight on the scale, this morning was different.

I was attended by a new employee in the process of being trained, younger and with nervous eyes, and a more experienced staff member guiding them. “Let’s get your weight,” the supervisor said, gesturing toward the beige scale in the corner of the triage room. “I’d rather not know the number, so I’ll just face away from the scale,” I replied. Not one but both of these two medical professionals actually laughed aloud—severely undermining the trust I was putting in them by sharing that weighing myself is something I actively refrain from doing.

“No, really,” I pressed. “I have a history of disordered eating.” They (seemingly begrudgingly) allowed me to not know the weight measured on the scale, but discussed it in conspicuously loud tones, underlining their feelings about my request, repeatedly misgendering me in the process. Being met with laughter when advocating for my reasonable needs was just another drop in the ocean of anti-fat bias we all swim in, knowingly or unknowingly.

“GLUTTONY STEMS FROM greed: let us be moderate.” This line of the formal meal chant, which I most often encounter during sesshin, consistently awakens painful, intrusive thoughts about my body and its size. It suggests a dangerous equivalence between eating for nourishment and enjoyment on one hand, and moral failure on the other. I cringe a bit, every time I hear it. I think of how many people may have been turned away from practice, particularly those whose bodies are especially policed, by lines such as these.

“It can be helpful to eat less.” Another common sesshin sound bite. I think back to my mid-twenties, when I was very actively restricting food, counting calories, and overexercising, milking the appetite-suppressing qualities of my prescription amphetamines as much as I possibly could. I was very thin following a relatively short period of fatness, and was congratulated heartily on the results of my punitive self-treatment in every arena of life.

This social approval only encouraged me to restrict further, since this was apparently what people liked me to look like, what people expected me to be. It felt like my worth as a human being was contingent upon looking like eye candy. Physically, my body was shrinking, but also weakening. I got sicker than I have ever been, hospitalized for 3 days with a severe infection. Mentally, I was deeply unwell, brittle-tempered and tightly wound. I exercised compulsively, afraid of the alternative.

Would my family love me more if I were thinner? Would I stop hating myself if I were thinner? It took a long time to stop going down that path. Even now, I have to exert effort to avoid taking steps in that direction.

Although my relationship with my body is arguably improved since those bleak days, as I move through sesshin, it’s still very much a work in progress. Many of the cycling, self-conscious thoughts about myself still have to do with unfavorably comparing my body — once again larger than it used to be due to a life-saving antidepressant and various other factors — to the overwhelmingly slim, white, often straight and cisgender folks around me. I assume they eat sparingly, like Deva-esque birds. I’m very careful to not appear sloppy when I eat, but dull fork tines sometimes release the crisp lettuce leaves in midair. Salad dressing smudges my robe. I feel shame. What will people think of me? Nothing good.

In sesshin, I studiously avoid looking at what others eat, how they eat, how much they eat. I’ve learned to stay in my lane. At sesshin mealtimes, sometimes I allow myself to eat to satiety, but I often don’t, and I have to question myself whether this is in a spirit of self-imposed, punitive austerity. When you have a history of food restriction, being told that it’s better to “eat less” can tip a person down a slippery slope. To eat less is to be a “better” practitioner, right? So thin people who eat less or at least are presumed to eat less are “superior,” right? I guess I “should” be austere in my eating so that I can reach awakening. (Never mind the fact that dieting overwhelmingly increases both body weight and disordered eating long-term.) Would my teacher care more about how I’m doing as a student and a person if I were thin again? What about stereotypically feminine-presenting again? Thinness is more “feminine,” right?

I’m still wearing the robe I had made for me when I got really serious about outfitting myself for practice several years ago, when I still lived in Madison, WI. The long, complicated tie doesn’t loop around my waist the same number of times as it used to, forcing me to fasten the robe differently. I have to loop the tie starting at the front of my body rather than the back. The lapel edges of my now-too-small robe pull away from each other on the front of my torso, revealing more of my T-shirt than I’m used to. A certain amount of upper leg peeks out and I feel I must look slovenly, amateurish. I go into the dokusan room and feel ashamed, or at least very self-conscious.

So much mental chatter I experience hooks



LUKA HÄKKILÄ (they/ them) began sitting with the Madison Zen Center and is now a member, volunteer, and trustee at RZC. To learn more about cultural anti-fat bias and nutrition, they recommend *What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About Fat* (2020) by Aubrey Gordon, as well as the podcast Maintenance Phase.

onto this strong, active, injured, fat body of mine, through which I experience the world. Which carries me through the world.

IT'S NO SURPRISE, really, that I get caught up in these habitual patterns of thought. Very few among us in the United States are able to evade the widespread belief that thinness is inherently desirable, as well as its close cousin, the belief that thinness is morally superior to fatness. Thinness is perceived, I believe, as consciously “doing something right,” or being “hardworking,” while fatness is often equated with “laziness.”

But where do these beliefs really come from? Are they grounded in science or in popular interpretations of “health?” Although anti-fat bias is by no means unique to the United States, I suspect that in this country, the roots of such beliefs lay deep in the Puritanical austerity which underpins much of American culture.

If “the flesh”—the physical body—is inherently suspect and even “sinful,” a rejection of perceived excess could be worn as a badge of self-restraint or even self-mortification. It is noteworthy that many of the ancestors of the modern-day “natural foods” movement, such as Kellogg of breakfast cereal fame, formulated and promulgated their proprietary products in order to combat such perceived “social ills” as masturbation.

I believe there is a tendency among Zen practitioners to indulge in some degree of golden-age thinking: the assertion that our standards for morality, rigor, kindness, attentiveness, or any number of ideals have been irrevocably and entropically deteriorating over time. Golden-age thinking would have us all believe that everyone in the past was a better practitioner, worked harder, endured more, “achieved” more. Things certainly change over time, but does that mean that people are inherently “superior” or “inferior”—or that humanity as a whole is, based on when individual people happen to be born?

What would happen if we questioned these deep cultural assumptions: that “before” was “more worthy,” that larger bodies were “less-than,” on a social and moral level? What would happen if we saw them as habit forces that cause harm when left unchecked? What would happen if we questioned the assumption that fasting was healthful?

IT WAS AFTERNOON in A Room of One's Own bookstore, in its old location on Gorham, in Madison, Wisconsin. My dear friend Yasmin and I had walked over from campus to browse and to bask

But where
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in the unapologetically queer vibes of the many attractive booksellers. We made our way to the Buddhism section. Intrigued by the expansive title, I noticed a whitebound paperback copy of *Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach and picked it up. As I read the introduction, my eyes welled up with the hot tears of being seen. Brach's vulnerable words had struck a nerve, cleanly delineating the painful experience of constant self-conscious inner turmoil, of I'm-not-enough-ness, which I knew all too intimately.

Now that my body is larger again, I'm sad to admit that I still feel ashamed of it. I try my damndest to love it, or at least accept it, and I can love and appreciate others' fat bodies, but it's harder to appreciate my own physical form in the here and now, just as it is.

Siddhartha Gautama, like so many other ascetics in ancient South Asia, tried extreme austerity. He did not somehow “transcend” the physical realm; rather, his self-administered experiment nearly killed him. Only by allowing, to repurpose the great lesbian poet Mary Oliver's words, “the soft animal of [his] body” the nourishment of Sujata's generously offered milk-rice did he survive to even experience his great awakening. To some degree, our Center, our very practice would not exist as it does today without the nourishment of Sujata's milk-rice.

What must it have felt like for Śākyamuni to release that tight, controlling grip on self-mortification? How ambrosial must those mouthfuls of sweet kheer have been?

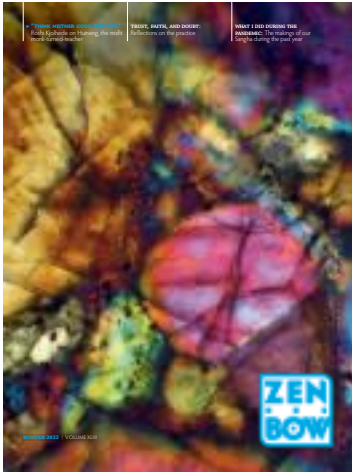
WHEN AUSTERITY IS lauded and positioned as morally superior, perceived “excess” is inherently disparaged. For those many of us who feel pressured to be in a body smaller than the one we are already in now, and those who have defined their worth by their body size, it can be all too easy to get caught up in “avoiding excess” in our food consumption and movement habits.

What would happen if we allowed ourselves to eat not little enough but *simply* enough, to relinquish a sense of heavy-handed control? What if we put down the mendicant's bowl and staff and gathered together with others to share meals in company in a spirit of abundance and gratitude? What if we learned to fill our own cups first, in terms of sleep and rest and nourishment?

I want you to be adequately nourished. I want your body to be strong. Your body, my body, our bodies are the locations, the loci of our liberation. I want us to be ready. We have work to do. **///**



Sightings



FURTHER REMARKS

DEAR ZEN BOW, ¶ I finally got the chance to read the Winter 2022 *Zen Bow*. What a treat!

The articles and shorts are all wonderful, but “One Wild Precious Life” [interview with Dr. Valentina Kutylia] especially resonated with me, not only because I too have an implantable cardio-defibrillator, suffer from some of the described ailments (and cardiac synchronization therapy could perhaps help me), but also because of the author’s fascinating life and eloquence.

“Trusting the Practice” [Donna Kowal’s article] is very inspiring and hits the nail on the head with its perceptive diagnoses and prescriptions. It has given me new impetus.

And Roshi’s Case 23 exposition? Brilliant, as always.

Keep up the good work.
Gassho,
AMAURY CRUZ
Miami, Florida

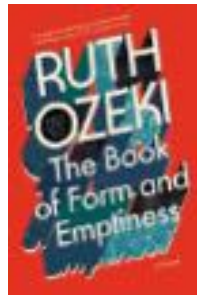
IN PRINT

THE BOOK: THE BOOK OF FORM AND EMPTINESS BY RUTH OZEKI ¶ *What it’s about:* A novel about two peo-

ple with very different relationships to objects: a boy who can hear the voices of inanimate things and his mother, who is a hoarder. Both are suffering from the loss of their family patriarch.

Why it’s worthy: A delightful read that deftly weaves Zen Buddhism into engaging fiction. Author Ozeki is a priest with the Everyday Zen Foundation (Norman Fischer), and her intimacy with Zen fuels a bountiful

constellation of characters and storylines that give literary form to Zen teaching and practice. Humorous, poignant, and clever, the novel is a powerful story exploring our relationship to things in ways both spiritually profound and relevant to today’s materialistic and culturally complex world. — ERIC HIGBEE



DEPT. OF BODY-MIND CONNECTION

NEW EXERCISE SPACE

As part of the remodeling of the dorm space in back of 5 Arnold Park, a new exercise room has been created for use by the staff and guests. The exercise equipment that was formerly housed in the basement of 5 Arnold Park has now seen the light of day in the new space, providing opportunities for strength training, aerobic exercise, and more. “It’s nice,” commented Sensei John Pulleyn, “but

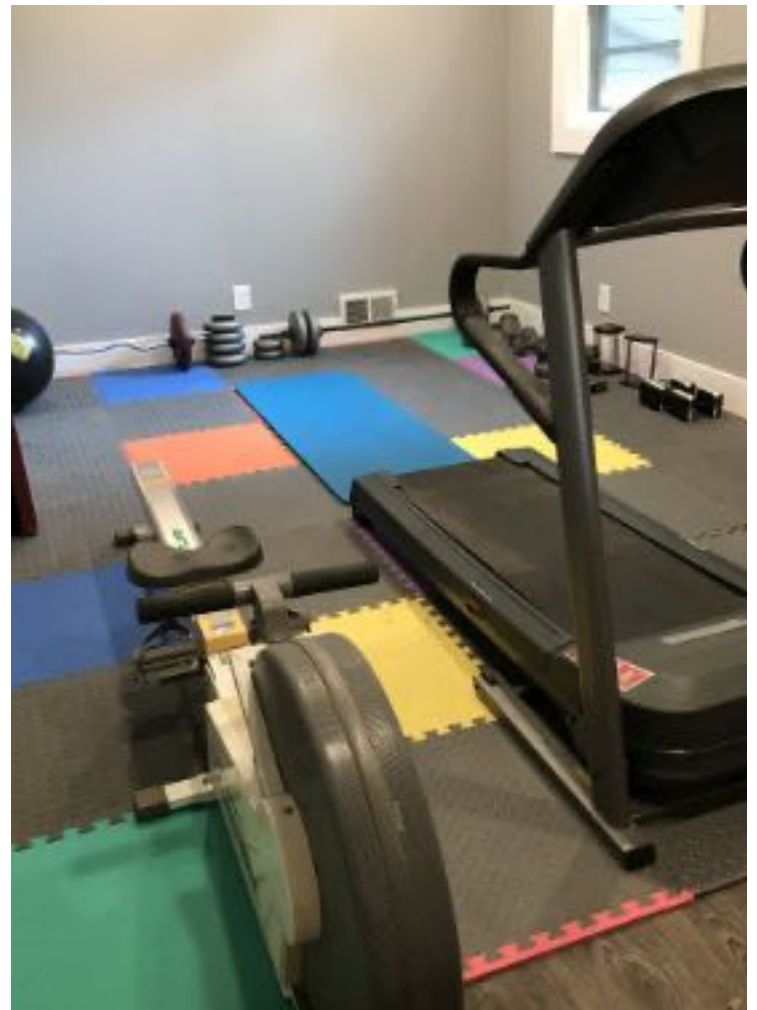
what’s really nice is it’s already getting use.”

ADDRESSING INJUSTICE THE ZEN CENTER’S LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In a time when thoughtful people are examining their and their ancestors’ racist practices, the Center’s Uprooting Racism group has developed a Land Acknowledgement that may be read before the start of a meeting. This is especially pertinent to those of us in Upstate New York, where one of the largest and most organized of Native American civilizations, the Iro-

quois Six Nations, was systematically robbed of the lands they had lived on for centuries.

In *A History of Native American Land Rights in Upstate New York*, historian Cindy Amrhein traces this complex, disturbing history through treaty after treaty rife with bribery, corruption, lies, and deception. On December 29, 1791, President George Washington wrote to Cornplanter, a Seneca chief, that “Only the general [federal] government has the power to treat [sign a treaty with] the Indian nations, and any treaty formed and held



▷ SIGHTINGS



without its authority will not be binding. Here then is the security for the remainder of your lands.... The general government will never consent to your being defrauded; but it will protect you in all your just rights.” Meanwhile, New York State as well as private property owners continued their inexorable march across the state, accessioning millions of acres from the Native Americans and ultimately deporting a number of them to live in Kansas. And the federal government itself was equally culpable in its campaign to stamp out Indigenous culture by forcibly sending young Native American children to boarding schools.

For these reasons, we begin meetings with the following Land Acknowledgement:

The Rochester Zen Center is located on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Seneca people. Together, with the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Tuscarora, the Seneca make up the sovereign

Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We pay respects to their elders past and present, and take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, genocide and migration that have resulted in our being here today. We recognize, honor and respect these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and water on which the RZC now resides.

SUMMER CAMP

2022 RALPH CHAPIN

MEMORIAL WORK RETREAT

Much was accomplished in this year’s work retreat. In addition to the usual cleaning, pruning, weeding, mulching, and cooking, a new trail by the creek was cleared and lined with freshly chipped wood. The courtyard sculptures got a good polishing (thanks to Roshi) and a portion of the Mill House was scraped in preparation for some overdue painting. Thanks to the many volunteers who joined the staff in pitching in for this annual event.



TOP LEFT: The newly created creek-side trail, now lined with wood chips. CENTER LEFT: Group shot of worker bees. BOTTOM LEFT: Numerous flower beds were weeded and mulched. ABOVE: How many windows does our retreat center have? The zendo alone has more than 30! And they all need cleaning periodically. PHOTOS BY DONNA KOWAL



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EXPANDED ONLINE OFFERINGS

ONLINE SITTINGS CONTINUE to be offered from 7:00–8:00 AM and 7:00–8:00 PM Eastern Time, every day except Sunday, when the Sunday sitting is online in full, including teishos, Dharma talks, and all-day sittings (see the RZC calendar for details). In addition, the list of online study groups and other Sangha programs continues to be expanded and now includes the following, all of which are detailed on the RZC calendar:

THE ZEN OF LIVING AND DYING A support group for those who are struggling with illness, old age, and intimations of mortality, the group is facilitated by Eryl and Wayman Kubicka.

NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION A group open periodically to Sangha members, it meets weekly to practice compassionate, collaborative communication techniques. It's led by Alan and Anna Belle Leiserson, longtime NVC practitioners. The group will open again to new members in the fall.

DHARMA REFLECTIONS This study group, led by long-time member Larry McSpadden, meets approximately once a month. Members can join at any time.

DEPRESHZEN A hopefully not-too-depressing support group for those who wish to discuss the experience of depression while practicing Zen. This group currently meets on Saturday afternoons and is led by Irizelma Robles and Tom Kowal.

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.
