▸ **BUILDING COMMUNITY:** Sensei Donna Kowal on the deep meaning of Sangha

ROSHI PHILIP KAPLEAU reflects on art and Zen

IN GRATITUDE: Dukkha and dharma in the emergency department

ZEN BOW

WINTER 2023 | VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER THREE

Z E N B O W

THE MIND OF THE ZEN ADEPT IS TAUT—READY, LIKE A DRAWN BOW

Winter 2023 | VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER THREE

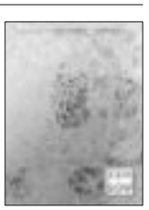
IF YOU'VE NEVER had a chance to work in a Zen training environment, there is much to recommend it. Volunteering at the Center can mean anything from chopping carrots to shoveling snow to finishing drywall, and you will be working alongside others who are notably quiet except for the talk necessary to complete the task at hand. It's a sea change from the work environments most of us are familiar with, and a refreshing one. And the same goes for formal lunches, which are taken in silence except for the meal chants. Where else can you get a great vegetarian lunch and enjoy it in peace?

On the other hand, volunteer opportunities don't exist solely at Arnold Park and Chapin Mill. Technology has opened the floodgates to a steady stream of members helping the Center from afar. From Texas, Tennessee, Indiana, and more volunteers have provided webmaster services, web hosting consulting, insurance advice, legal services, and more. And a host of others outside the Rochester area keep our virtual sittings and sesshins going, conduct online classes, and provide essential tech support to our members and staff. If only we could feed them all lunch….

The big news is this: now, for the first time, we have a staff member—Lila Redding—who is responsible for recruiting and organizing volunteers. You can reach her at lilar@rzc.org if you'd like to volunteer in any capacity. Thank you for your consideration, and a big shout-out to our current volunteers, including those who help put together Zen Bow. The Zen Center literally could not do what it does without you. —CHRIS PULLEYN

ON THE COVER

PHOTOGRAPH *7:30 am, February 4, 2023* | In a process similar to that which causes snowflakes to freeze around dust particles, frost feathers form around invisibly small flaws in window glass.



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If you're thinking about financial planning, estate planning, or both, please remember that there are myriad ways you can help the RZC through planned giving. The right kind of plan can help you reduce your taxes significantly while providing for a larger, longer-lasting gift to the Zen Center. Because there is a wide array of bequests, annuities, trusts, and other financial vehicles to consider, you'll want to work with your financial advisor to decide what's best for you. Long-time Zen Center member David Kernan, an attorney who concentrates his practice in tax law, has generously offered to help point you in the right direction at no charge. For more information about planned giving and David's offer, please contact the Center's receptionist.

Soundings

POST-SESSHIN LETTER TO ROSHI KJOLHEDE

SESSHIN WAS INTERESTING. No major breakthrough to report; however, things did happen. For the first time ever, I sat the majority of the sesshin on just my Rochester standard-issue zafu cushion and didn't retreat to ever more lofty layers of elevation and support. There were still plenty of painful rounds, but less disruptively painful than I can ever recall for sesshin. I'm 100% certain this comes down to my absorption in Mu; it's like I finally got out of my own way enough that the body just… took care of itself. Things aligned better, I could feel that much, but my intention had nothing to do with it; legs weren't falling asleep every round, and while joints still felt strained, they were no longer to the point of agony. All the painful things I've struggled with consistently over a dozen-ish sesshins just didn't happen.

I wish somebody would have told me! ☺

That's a joke; I can't even type it to you with a straight face.

Some other new experiences too. Just hours before sesshin started, a member of my fraternal organization—in which I hold a leadership role this year—sent me some antagonizing messages. It was just a fresh sting of abuse from a previously existing issue concerning his annual dues (because of course, what else besides money?) What followed for me was seven days of intensive education on what it means to be caught in the Buddha's "Eight Winds." I had thought myself fairly mature and, while not immune, at least somewhat inured to the effects of praise, censure, etc. What a laugh. Feeling unjustly criticized, whenever my concentration slipped, my thoughts would be helplessly sucked into this utterly inane,

VARGUVDEVIANT ART

honestly very silly issue. It was like some sort of fascinating, horrifying laboratory experiment, to be feeling the effects of being stuck on those thoughts one round, then catching myself and getting back to Mu during the next round or even the next moment. The state of my whole body/mind could change so starkly and so quickly in response, back and forth, back and forth. By the end I actually came to sincerely appreciate what those insults were teaching me about the power of practice. Bodhisattvas reveal themselves in some strange ways.

I also experienced a prolonged period of blissful-feeling samadhi. I think I made a mistake of being too content to dwell in it though, because when it ended, boy did I come crashing down hard and had an equally prolonged period of unpleasant recovery. The good (and then bad) feelings did come directly on the heels of something significant with regard to practice though. The best word I can come up with to describe what changed is "dis-identification," which is pretty clumsy. Deep down in concentration on Mu, I realized I could let go of my feeling of identification with all the sensations coming from my physical body and the thoughts from my thinking mind. They didn't cease, I just stopped identifying with them, stopped conceiving of them as me or mine, or having anything to do with me at all. I could set them off to one side like they were happening to someone else, or like they were a pre-recorded drama playing on a TV in another room. All that remained then was an intense questioning of Mu, and a sort of wonder about what could possibly be left that could even be called "me"? It's Mu questioning Mu, but what is Mu?

When I first tried this dis-identification—or rather when I intuited to do it, since it just seemed to happen all of a sudden and wasn't really something I tried to do—it was like something came unstuck and released a flood that washed over me and there was this wonderful, blissful, almost total absorption in Mu, newly unobscured. At one point a thought did slip in, warning about the blissful feelings: "This is just a conditioned state, don't get attached to it." And then a counter-thought: "But maybe it isn't?" Of course that first warning was the correct one. I wasn't actively trying to prolong the good feelings, but on some level I knew I was probably enjoying them a bit too much, maybe nudging them onward to new heights rather than leaving them alone to deflate gradually; and when the bubble burst it all came crashing down onto the floor with a sickening, gooey splat that had to be scraped back up onto the mat and reassembled into someone doing zazen. Oof.

Can't wait for the next sesshin. ☺

With gassho.—ANONYMOUS ■

> *"People take different roads seeking happiness and fulfillment. Just because they're not on your road doesn't mean they're lost."*—THE DALAI LAMA

DEPRESSION IS NOT A MOOD

PEOPLE WHO'VE NEVER been through depression might assume it's just an extreme form of feeling low. Don't we all find that our daily activities can sometimes lose their sparkle? Yet accounts of people with depression point in a different direction. As someone said to the psychologist Dorothy Rowe, recorded in her book *The Experience of Depression* (1978): "I awoke into a different world. It was as though all had changed while I slept: that I awoke not into normal consciousness but into a nightmare."

Such reports support the idea that depression stands apart from other forms of everyday experience, as the philosopher Matthew Ratcliffe has emphasised in his book *Experiences of Depression* (2015). Depressed people often say it involves a fundamental shift, like entering a different "world"—a world detached from ordinary reality and other people. Depression seems to be a more totalising kind of experience than some others. Perhaps it is even a distinct state of consciousness, and can, in turn, reveal something about the nature of consciousness itself.

The self-reports of people with depression point to a deep and interesting connection with consciousness. To make sense of this idea, think about the effect of sleeping and dreaming on your mental life, or the experience of emerging from dreamless sleep into wakeful consciousness. In these transitions, our consciousness undergoes a profound structural shift. Consider, for example, how your experience of the passage of time when dreaming diverges from your experience of time when awake: we frequently experience days and weeks passing in a dream in the space of a few waking hours. Similarly, our sense of self and identity is highly malleable in the dream: we sometimes perceive ourselves from the "outside" looking down at our bodies, dream of being someone other than ourselves, or dream of being detached from a body altogether.

While depressed people are not literally in a different world, they are in a different state of consciousness.—**CECILY WHITELEY AND JONATHAN BIRCH, PSYCHE.CO** ■

Q&A

Why do we leave our eyes open when we do zazen? I find it very distracting.

THERE ARE THREE good reasons to keep the eyes open in zazen. The first is that light hitting the retina of the eye keeps us more alert and less likely to sink into drowsiness. The second is that, with eyes open, we're less likely to run into visual hallucinations even when we're really still and absorbed in our sitting. And the third is that learning to do zazen with eyes open makes it much easier to bring the mind of concentrated awareness into our normal, daily activities. When we do zazen with closed eyes, we're shutting the world out and walling ourselves off from the rest of our life.

It may be easier at first to sit with eyes shut, but everyone seems to adapt quickly. Sit in front of a wall or divider with the eyes cast downward so that they are slightly closed. Don't focus on a point, which will tend to introduce tension into your sitting, but allow your gaze to extend past the wall in front of you as though your focal point is a foot or two beyond the surface you're facing. This is something we do naturally when we're considering something deeply. Though our eyes are open, we barely notice what's in front of us. When our absorption in practice deepens, the same thing happens in zazen.—**SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN** ■

jiriki \'ji·ri·ki\ *n* [Japanese, lit. "one's own power"] **:** an expression referring to the endeavor to attain enlightenment through one's own efforts (for example, zazen)

Jiriki is usually used in counterdistinction to tariki, which roughly means "the power of the other." This refers to the fact that the adherents of some Buddhist schools place their trust in the notion that the mere belief in Buddha (generally, his manifestation as Amitabha) and calling upon his name will bring about rebirth in a buddha paradise (Pure Land) and thus the liberation of the believer....

On a deeper level, as is stressed in Zen, every sentient being and thing from the very beginning is endowed with buddha-nature. From this point of view, the opposition of jiriki and tariki must be regarded as an artificial one, which, though indicating a differing emphasis in religious practice, is ultimately not valid.—*THE SHAMBHALA DICTIONARY OF BUDDHISM AND ZEN*

THE PROBLEM WITH GENESIS

THE VERY BEGINNING of Genesis tells us that God created man in order to give him dominion over fish and fowl and all creatures. Of course, Genesis was written by a man, not a horse. There is no certainty that God actually did grant man dominion over other creatures. What seems more likely, in fact, is that man invented God to sanctify the dominion that he had usurped for himself over the cow and the horse. Yes, the right to kill a deer or a cow is the only thing all of mankind can agree upon, even during the bloodiest of wars.

The reason we take that right for granted is that we stand at the top of the hierarchy. But let a third party enter the game—a visitor from another planet, for example, someone to whom God says, "Thou shalt have dominion over creatures of all other stars"—and all at once taking Genesis for granted becomes problematical. Perhaps a man hitched to the cart of a Martian or roasted on the spit by inhabitants of the Milky Way will recall the veal cutlet he used to slice on his dinner plate and apologize. (belatedly!) to the cow.—**MILAN KUNDERA, *THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING*** ■

FEELINGS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

NEUROSCIENTIST ANTONIO Damasio believes that the link between brain and body is the key to understanding consciousness. In his latest book, *Feeling & Knowing: Making Minds Conscious*, he explains why.

Consciousness is what gives an individual a sense of self; it helps one stay in the present, remember the past and plan for the future. Many scientists have argued that consciousness is created by vast networks of nerve cells, or neurons, in the brain. While it's clear that the brain plays a major role in conscious experiences, it doesn't act alone, argues Damasio, direc-

▲ Bare branches reach for sky / A tree stands alone in winter / Silent, still, and strong / Embrace the emptiness / Find peace in the void
PHOTOGRAPH BY DANNE ERIKSSON

BRAIN CHEMISTRY: 90 SECONDS TO PEACE

WHEN A PERSON has a reaction to something in their environment, there's a 90-second chemical process that happens in the body; after that, any remaining emotional response is just the person choosing to stay in that emotional loop. Something happens in the external world and chemicals are flushed through your body which puts it on full alert. For those chemicals to totally flush out of the body it takes less than 90 seconds.

This means that for 90 seconds you can watch the process happening, you can feel it happening, and then you can watch it go away. After that, if you continue to feel fear, anger, and so on, you need to look at the thoughts that you're thinking that are re-stimulating the circuitry that is resulting in you having this physiological response over and over again.—**DR. JILL BOLTE TAYLOR,** ***MY STROKE OF INSIGHT: A BRAIN SCIENTIST'S PERSONAL JOURNEY*** ■

tor of the University of Southern California's Brain and Creativity Institute.

Instead, he argues, consciousness is generated by a variety of structures within an organism, some neural, some not. What's more, feelings—mental experiences of body states—help connect the brain to the rest of the body. "The feelings that we have of, say, hunger or thirst, or pain, or well-being, or desire, etc.—these are the foundation of our mind," Damasio says. In his view, feelings have played a central role in the life-regulating processes of animals throughout the history of life.

In *Feeling & Knowing*, Damasio suggests that consciousness evolved as a way to keep essential bodily systems steady. This concept is also known as homeostasis, a self-regulating process that maintains stability amid ever-changing conditions. Consciousness emerged as an extension of homeostasis, Damasio argues, allowing for flexibility and planning in complex and unpredictable environments.—***SCIENCE NEWS*** ■

WORKING WITH A TEACHER

IN ZEN, POINTS of teaching are communicated to practitioners in a variety of ways. Perhaps one of the most obvious, as well as the most culturally comfortable for Westerners, is the tradition of teisho, in which the teacher delivers a talk while the students listen. Of course, there are some important differences between a teisho and a lecture that you might hear at school or at work. From the point of view of the student, there are several things to keep in mind when listening to teisho. First of all, we are asked, while listening, to maintain a zazen posture and also, as much as possible, to continue with our practice. If we are doing a breath practice this doesn't mean that we need to count breaths while the teacher speaks, but we should try to maintain an awareness of the body and the breath and to stay as physically and mentally present as we can. If we are working on a koan, we should try to maintain awareness of that koan during the talk. If we find that it proves to be too complicated to keep our formal practice going while listening to the talk, then the instruction is to maintain the zazen posture and just listen; in other words, to bring the attention as fully as possible to the act of listening to the teacher. Actively practicing in any of these ways during a talk can make our minds more receptive to what the teacher is presenting than might otherwise be the case. (Note that while the instruction is to maintain a zazen posture, teisho can be long and it is fine to change position if needed during the course of a talk.)

Another difference between listening to a teisho and listening to an academic or informational lecture is that with teisho we are encouraged to "take what we need and leave the rest." What the teacher hopes to communicate is not es-

▼ Snow drifts and cliffs form a winter landscape in a Buffalo member's backyard. PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL ORT

sentially informational, and even though a teisho may contain a fair amount of information, there is no requirement that we retain it. As we listen in a state of receptivity, certain words or phrases may have a deep impact on us, may open our minds in some way or spark an insight. At the same time, listening in a state of openness means not only letting things come but letting them go. We don't need to attach to anything that is said. Just as some words may spark an understanding or insight, other words may annoy or aggravate us, or we may feel strong disagreement. For the most part, it is best if we can just observe these feelings as they arise and let them pass, releasing them and letting them go while releasing and letting go of the teacher's words. This does not mean that we should never ask a question or bring up a problem that has arisen for us in listening to teisho. But for the most part it is best to follow the instructions to stay open, stay in the moment, and, when the teisho is over, to just forget about it, knowing that any important insights will bear fruit without the need for us to hold on to them....

Perhaps the most distinctive teaching method that has been handed down to us from our Zen ancestors is that of dokusan. The Japanese word *dokusan* means to "go alone," and in Zen training it refers to a one-to-one meeting between a teacher and student. These meetings take place during formal rounds of zazen, and follow their own pattern of bells and bows. Once you make your way through these formalities and enter the dokusan room, you will find the teacher sitting in zazen. You take your place on the student's mat directly opposite, and just a few inches from the teacher... and then what?

There is no way to specify exactly what will follow. The teacher is in fact sitting in zazen and most times will not have any specific question or comment for you (though sometimes she may). When students first begin going to dokusan, they will usually want to come in with a question or comment of their own. This might be a question about the practice, or a question about something that has come up in daily life, and either one is fine. If you are able to describe what is going on in your zazen and any obstacles you might be facing, then you'll have the opportunity to get individual feedback and help. Likewise if there is a persistent problem or issue in your daily life, you'll have the chance in dokusan to get a Zen perspective on it. Whatever transpires in dokusan is confidential; the teacher will not discuss it with others and neither should you, as this may cause confusion for other students, since the teaching you receive is just for you.

Gradually, as you get more used to the process of going to dokusan, you'll find that you don't need to come in with a specific problem or question each time. It is often said that you don't need a reason to go to dokusan, because dokusan is beyond reasons. Dokusan is above all an opportunity for teacher and student to work together on the Great Matter, to turn together to reality just as it reveals itself at a particular moment. So the best advice about going to dokusan is just to stay as involved as you can with your practice, and to be as open as you can to the present moment. Enter the room without any agenda. Sit and do zazen with the teacher. Perhaps some words will emerge, or perhaps a physical action. Or perhaps you will just sit and experience the moment together. This is a process which can be confusing and even frightening, but also immensely liberating; dokusan tends to crystallize everything that we believe about self and other—but it also has the hidden potential to help move us beyond that false dichotomy.

Sometimes at our Center, daisan (private instruction) will be offered instead of dokusan. Procedurally the two are similar, though not identical, but daisan is offered by a senior practitioner, not a teacher. The main technical difference between the two is that koans are not investigated in daisan; koans may be assigned and assessed only by a teacher who has been sanctioned to do so. In addition to this technicality, however, you may find that dokusan and daisan have quite a different spirit and may function in rather different, though complementary, ways in your practice. Dokusan interviews tend to be briefer and more sharply focused on the formal practice. In daisan there may be time to talk more expansively about issues that are coming up in the course of your practice, to hear about and learn from the experiences of the person offering daisan, and just to receive encouragement. In other words, daisan can be more of a peer-to-peer experience than is generally the case with dokusan....

The relationship between a Zen teacher and student is an intimate one. It is not easily compared to other relationships with which Western students are familiar. It cannot really be defined as a friendship, nor as a teacher–student relationship in the academic sense, nor as a therapeutic relationship, though it does contain some elements of each of these. Because the relationship is intimate, powerful, and yet culturally unfamiliar, it has the potential to cause a fair amount of confusion and even pain. From the point of view of Western psychology, there is no doubt that projection and transference have their part to play in what transpires between teacher and student. Old patterns from family or other relationships may assert themselves and, even if we are able to recognize what is going on, we may feel quite helpless to control it. (At times, if personal patterns seem to be causing too much pain and obstruction, the teacher may recommend that the student work with a therapist. Many students have found that such work has not only had benefits for their personal lives, but has also freed them to focus in a new way on the work of Zen.) And yet, from the Zen perspective, all this is simply grist for the mill. The teacher–student relationship is not a therapeutic one in the Western psychological sense, and the teacher's job is not to help us analyze the patterns of our individual psyche, but rather to help us see through and beyond them. In the best of all worlds, we will stick with the teacher, and the teacher will stick with us, through the times of confusion, doubt, and pain, and this very fact will set the stage for times of joy, confidence, and certainty to emerge.—**FROM FINDING YOUR SEAT, A ZEN HANDBOOK BY ROSHI AMALA WRIGHTSON AND KATHRYN ARGETSINGER** ■

Although there are slight differences between practice at the Rochester Zen Center and its sister center, the Auckland Zen Centre, this comprehensive book can serve as a useful reference for members of the Rochester Zen Center.

BEING SANGHA

ONE OF THE THREE TREASURES, ALONG with Buddha and Dharma, Sangha is a Sanskrit word that is often translated to mean assembly, association, congregation, or community. But there is another synonym I came across that is especially rich in meaning: aggregate. An aggregate is a whole body formed out of disparate elements, or, in physics, a fluid mass of fragments and particles. We can understand this aggregate in a literal sense in that our bodies are a mass of pure energy. But we can also appreciate how it reflects the diversity of beings that comprise Sangha, whether we see it in the narrower sense of a community of Zen practitioners or the larger sense of the interdependence of all beings and things.

Within the context of a community of practitioners, what the body of Sangha looked like in the early history of Buddhism, of course, is nothing like how it appears to us today. For starters, there wasn't an online or virtual dimension. When online sittings, workshops, and sesshins were established at the Center in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it transformed my experience of Sangha. Technology has become a lifeline in terms of our ability to do zazen together and stay connected across the miles.

However, for much of the history of Buddhism Sangha strictly referred to the monastic community. In her biography of the life of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, Karen Armstrong describes how the Sangha consisted of an order of monks who meditated every day, traveling from one place to another and preaching the Dharma. It was their visible presence that helped attract novice monks as well as lay followers. Because it was largely an oral culture, the primary way for people to access the teachings of the Buddha was to hear it firsthand, either from the Buddha himself or from one of the monks.

As a community of monastics, the monks had to learn to live, practice, and work together, which involved letting go of self-centered tendencies and cultivating harmony. On this point, Karen Armstrong writes, "Unskillful states such as anger, guilt, unkindness, envy and greed, were avoided not because they had been forbidden by a god or were sinful, but because the indulgence of such emotions was found to be damaging to human nature." In other words, it would be damaging to the life of the Sangha. She continues, "The compassion, courtesy, consideration, friendliness and kindness required by the monastic life constituted the new asceticism." Prior to his awakening, the Buddha had experimented with asceticism—that is, extreme measures of self and bodily denial, such as going without food and water and sleep deprivation. But

TEXT BY *Sensei Donna Kowal*

ultimately, the Buddha came to realize that the path to enlightenment is the Middle Way: not denying oneself, not rejecting nor pursuing anything, just being one with what is.

IN THE MONASTIC setting, then, interacting and engaging with one another was a part of daily practice for the monks, and later it was also so for the nuns. On the introduction of nuns to the Sangha, there are two relevant stories involving the Buddha's personal attendant, Ananda. The first story is about how he convinced the Buddha to allow women to join the monastic order. One day Ananda came upon Pajapati Gotami, the Buddha's aunt, who was in a state of despair after the Buddha had repeatedly rejected her request to become ordained. Moved by her desperation and her genuine desire to devote her life to Buddhadharma, Ananda took up the cause. It's important to recognize that the society Siddhartha Gautama was born and raised in was patriarchal, which was typical of the Axial Age, the age during which most of the world's religions emerged. The notion that women were inferior to men was a part of his social conditioning, so it's not surprising that he was at first resistant to the idea of ordaining women, and, after he agreed to it, that the nuns were segregated and not treated equally. And, yet, to further put this in perspective, it was a pretty radical act to ordain women at that moment in history. Armstrong says that it was the first time that women were presented with an alternative to domestic life, an alternative to being a mother and raising children.

A second story about Ananda involves another conversation he had with the Buddha. Having served by the Buddha's side as his attendant for many years, Ananda often shared his insights with him. The story goes that one day Ananda turned to him and said, "Lord, I've been thinking, spiritual friendship is at least half of the spiritual life." The Buddha replied, "Say not so, Ananda, say not so. Spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life." In this exchange, the Buddha dispelled the idea that Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are separate. The Sangha does not exist as a separate entity to support the Way; it is the Way.

As part of the Three Treasures, we recite, "I take refuge in Sangha, and its wisdom, example and never-failing help, and resolve to live in harmony with all sentient beings." One could interpret taking refuge as simply relying on Sangha for support, but that's not the whole of it. In a Zen Bow article published in 2017, Roshi Kjolhede wrote, "[It] isn't enough to just have a Sangha. To enter the Way, we have to take refuge in Sangha as one of the Three Jewels that are our inheritance. What we translate as 'refuge' originally meant 'protection,' so taking refuge in Sangha implies going to the Sangha for protection from suffering. This can sound a little like running for cover from the wider world. But instead it means placing our faith in the community of Dharma practitioners. It's not a running from, but a throwing oneself into. Refuge in Sangha, then, is ultimately realized in the pure practice of sitting and active Zen."

There are so many ways we can throw ourselves into Sangha. First and foremost, by doing zazen together, whether in the zendo at Arnold Park, Chapin Mill, or on Zoom. What better way is there to sustain a mutually supportive community?

One can also contribute to Sangha through offerings of material and monetary aid. Annual membership donations help keep the Center and its programs up and running, as do supplies in the form of food, furnishings, computer equipment, tree saplings—you name it.

There's also volunteering, serving the Sangha by giving one's time and energy, whether on-site or remotely. There are so many skills and abilities that directly support the day-to-day functioning of the Center, such as cleaning, cooking, sewing, gardening, and woodworking. Moreover, volunteering offers the opportunity to experience practice within a training environment and to get to know people better, including teachers, residential staff, and fellow volunteers.

STILL ANOTHER WAY to immerse oneself in Sangha is by participating in Center events and programs. Just showing up can be a real support, whether it's a Term Intensive, a Sunday Sangha brunch, an Uprooting Racism event, or the Zen Kids program, to name just a few possibilities. Likewise, there's an ongoing need for volunteers to take the initiative in developing and leading activities that nurture community connectedness.

In the end, we each need to figure out for ourselves, based on our abilities, time, and resources, how we can contribute to sustaining the life of our Sangha. And it's important to remember that practice itself is the foundation of community. Love for and devotion to Sangha arises out of awareness.

In The Way of Love, Anthony de Mello writes, "What is love? Take a look at a rose. Is it possible for the rose to say, 'I shall offer my fragrance to good people and withhold it from bad people?' Or can you imagine a lamp that withholds its rays from a wicked person who seeks to walk in its light?

SENSEI DONNA KOWAL has been practicing at the Center for more than 20 years. She serves as Head of Zendo at Chapin Mill and was sanctioned as a teacher by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede on October 16, 2022.

It could only do that by ceasing to be a lamp. Observe how helplessly and indiscriminately a tree gives its shade to everyone, good and bad, young and old, high and low; to animals and humans and every living creature—even to the one who seeks to cut it down."

When we throw ourselves into Sangha, we're giving ourselves over to love, to seeing everyone we come upon as not-other. De Mello continues, "How does one attain this quality of love? Anything you do will only make it forced, cultivated, and therefore phony, for love cannot be forced. There is nothing you can do. But there is something you can drop. Observe the marvelous change that comes over you, the moment you stop seeing people as good and bad." And, likewise, when we stop judging ourselves as good or bad.

Years ago, when I was new to practice and rather naive, I remember having all these ideas about those in the Center's residential training program. I thought they must all be enlightened, whereas I didn't stand a chance because I was just a lay practitioner. Depending on the circumstance, my feelings ranged from total admiration to jealousy. I wanted what I thought they had. Fortunately, as my practice matured, I saw that I was mired in thoughts about enlightenment—making it into a thing, as if it is other than who we already are—and judgments about myself and others.

Some other ways we might be inclined to make distinctions about others within the Sangha include on-staff versus off-staff, locals versus out-of-towners, in-person versus online, and Arnold Park versus Chapin Mill. Speaking in such dualities isn't inherently bad, as it is sometimes necessary for the sake of clear communication. But it does become a problem if we become attached to those mental constructs. We run the risk of not seeing the person that is standing right in front of us, or of making sweeping generalizations about "us versus them."

Just like the monastics of the Buddha's lifetime, our practice off-the-mat involves letting go of delusive thoughts, seeing beyond differences, and opening up to the whole of Sangha.

IN CLOSING, THERE are two Buddha figures that can offer us some inspiration for taking refuge in Sangha. One is the figure of Kannon, also known as Guan Yin and Kanzeon. In Faces of Compassion, Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and their Modern Expression, Taigen Dan Leighton describes "the multiplicity of Avalokitesvara," which is Sanskrit for the Bodhisattva of Compassion. He notes that the Sanskrit name is translated in a multitude of ways, as "Gazing Lord," "Lord of What is Seen," "Regarder of the Cries of the World," and "Perceiver of Sounds." Kannon assumes so many different forms, he says, that we might understand this bodhisattva as an assemblage of archetypes of spiritual life—or the aggregate that forms Sangha. In terms of iconography, the book shows how Kannon figures may appear as female or male or androgynous. Also, some have faces that are serene and calm, like the figures we have at Arnold Park and Chapin Mill, while others are dynamic and ferocious. Others have as many as eleven faces and thousands of outstretched arms, and there's even one that is horse-headed. Yet, no matter the form, Kannon's responsiveness and compassion shine through. Appearing in so many different forms and personages, we can interpret this in meaningful ways to represent the diversity and inclusivity of the body of Sangha.

> In the end, we each need to figure out for ourselves, based on our abilities, time, and resources, how we can contribute to sustaining the life of our Sangha.

Another figure that reveals our aspirations for Sangha is the Universal Buddha situated in the back garden at Arnold Park. In the mid-1980s, Roshi Kapleau invited a Canadian sculptor and practicing Buddhist named John Fillion to create a Buddha figure without a face. Designed from Roshi Kapleau's own drawings, it's a six-foot-tall figure that appears to be sitting in a lotus position, based on the rough triangular shape at the figure's base. It is faceless; there are no eyes, ears, nose, nor mouth. It has no race, no gender, no distinguishing qualities or features. It's not even necessarily human; it could be a boulder or a mountain.

This Buddha figure is so unique that it is the subject of an academic article, titled, "Aesthetics of American Zen: Tradition, Adaptation, and Innovation in the Rochester Zen Center Garden" by Jeff Wilson (2005). Wilson writes, "To all appearances, it is a rough jumble of individual stones, artfully arranged to evoke the idea of a Buddha in seated meditation. But in fact, this Universal Buddha is a single piece molded by the sculptor to look like discrete stones." He also describes how the sculptor "decided to mold the Buddha out of a curiously-named industrial construction material called cement fondue. Cement fondue is actually a powder, which is mixed with water and massaged into whatever shape is necessary. … [T]he rough-hewn look of the Universal Buddha is a deception—rather than a gathering of venerable, weathered stones, it is actually a block of construction-grade cement fondue, deliberately crafted to disguise its true nature."

What a beautiful representation of Sangha, and of Buddha and Dharma, and how fortunate we are to have it in our midst. ///

REFLECTIONS ON ART AND ZEN

IN THE 15 YEARS THAT I CALLED JAPAN HOME, THIS QUESTION MUST HAVE BEEN PUT

REFLECTIONS ON ART AND ZEN

TO ME AT LEAST A HUNDRED TIMES:

"Whatever made you abandon a flourishing business in the United States to come to Japan to discipline yourself in Zen?"

Sometimes the question seemed motivated by nothing more than simply curiosity, with no undertones of disbelief or astonishment. Occasionally it had a sly French-Foreign-Legion connotation of "Come now, fellow, nobody does what you did unless he is drowning in the despair of an unrequited love or escaping from a shrewish wife." Often the question revealed the interrogator's unabashed admiration for a foreigner who could—up to a point, that is—understand and cope with such a thoroughly Japanese-saturated discipline as Zen.

But most often the question had an air of sheer incredulity: "Why would any Westerner, and especially an American, want to exchange the American standard of living for the austere rigours of a Japanese Zen temple?"

Why indeed? I wasn't sure whether it was because I wanted to escape from my physical pains and mental frustrations, or to find some light in the black jungle of meaninglessness oppressing me, or because I just had to know the origin of the appalling human suffering I had witnessed as a member of the American Occupation forces in Europe and in Japan. Each of these reasons seemed valid and true enough, but eventually I came to realize that in fact I couldn't know why, that the whole concatenation of causes and effects constituting one's karma was responsible. But this awareness came only years later, after I had probed deeply into myself through Zen.

Still, there were certain crucial events which more directly shaped the karmic pattern that was to propel me into Zen. One such circumstance was an art review in the *New York Times* which unexpectedly precipitated me into the most searching reflections. "In comparison with the universe," it read, "works of art are small and incomplete. It is obvious that none of them

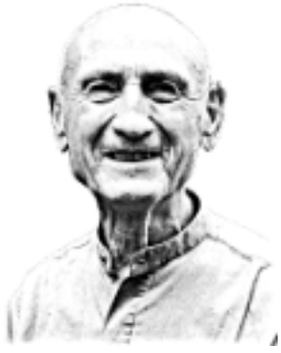
TEXT BY *Roshi Philip Kapleau, from the 1967 annual* This is Japan, Tokyo

represents ultimate wisdom.... Presumably there is a final order in the universe that can be discovered, understood, and obeyed. A great work of art merely proposes answers to the eternal questions, who are we, where are we, and why?"

Having prided myself on an art collection comprised largely of the lithographs of Picasso, Chagall, and Rouault, which had required much effort to amass, and having always looked upon these treasures as incontrovertible proof of my elevated tastes, superior intelligence, and undoubted wisdom, I found myself puzzled and then deeply disturbed by the ideas contained in this reviewer's article. And without quite knowing how or why it happened, I began earnestly to ask myself, "Which is more intelligent: passionately and greedily—and your true collector is nothing if not greedy—to pursue beauty, or to strive for self-understanding so as to be able to live with inner peace and dignity in a frustrating world?"

This self-inquiry marked the beginning of the end of my days as a collector, for in thinking long and hard on this there flashed into my mind one day these insights which all but severed the bonds of my attachment to art:

Every work of art represents the artist's own search for self-knowledge, for self-completion. If his painting or sculpture or composition has an element of greatness, that is to say is deeply inspired and vividly rendered, it can momentarily lift the responsive spectator beyond his mundane self into a wider and more rarified dimension of consciousness; but effect in him a genuine transformation of character and personality it cannot. Not even the artist himself, for whom the disciplined struggle to give viable form to his ideas and feelings was a fundamental and concrete experience, is so transformed. "How many artists do you know, " I asked myself, "who could be called modest and humble?"



ROSHI KAPLEAU was the founder and first spiritual leader of the Rochester Zen Center. He authored several books, including *The Three Pillars of Zen*.

THE TIME OF these reflections, 1950, coincided with the arrival in the United States of Professor Daisetz Suzuki whom I had met in Japan right after the war. Liberated from his long isolation of the war years, Suzuki had come to America to ignite the fuse that was later to explode into the Zen "boom," and his chief incendiary was satori—that mystical experience of mind-awakening by which the ego-self is banished and a wholly fresh vision of the world attained. At Columbia University, where he had gone to give a series of lectures on Zen philosophy, Suzuki attracted scores of avant-garde painters, composers, psychiatrists, professors of philosophy, and lesser fry. I was among them. Another avid listener was the composer John Cage.

Cage, it will be recalled, came to Japan in the autumn of 1962. An interview which he gave a reporter of one of the English-language dailies at the time is as revealing as it is amusing. Cage was asked about one of his avant-garde compositions "played" at a concert in Woodstock, New York, in which the pianist sat down to the piano without striking a key. The audience waited in expectation of the first chords, but none came. Two, three, four minutes passed without a sound from the piano. The pianist then stood up quietly, bowed to the audience, and left the stage.

When asked if this was music, Cage replied "Yes. Some in the audience were naturally displeased, but I might say it took me two years to compose this piece. It consists of three movements. The first requires the pianist to sit down at the piano and open and shut the instrument. The second and third movements demand the same."

"But," queried the reporter, "can it be called music where there is no sound?"

"There were sounds," replied Cage. "In the first movement the rustling of the leaves outside could be heard. Rain began to fall in the second movement. The sound of the falling ran was beautiful. During the third movement the audience began to laugh and talk and move about."

"What is the meaning of that piece?" asked the reporter.

"Please listen carefully," began Cage in all seriousness. "Everyone is impressed with the beauty of Mozart's music. To those who appreciate the music of Mozart, the sounds of a motor-car are only noise and not pretty. This limits the world of music. My desire is to educate people's ears so that the noise of automobiles and the noise of machines in factories will be heard as beautiful music."

"Is it not correct to say that your avant-garde pieces are without harmony, rhythm, or melody?"

"That is not true," replied Cage. "They are all there. The only difference is that I think of all kinds of noises as being harmony. I recognize a melody in unconnected sounds, and there is rhythm in irregular sounds. It is the same as the Zen teaching that every day is a good day. To my way of thinking, every kind of noise is music. Rhythm must be given a broader meaning than just regular sounds. If one wants to hear regular sounds, one need only place his hand over his heart."

BUT HOW DOES this all fit into Zen? When Cage had the pianist sit down at the piano without laying a hand on the keys, very likely he had in mind the familiar incident of the Zen master who came before his assembly of monks, thrust out his short stick before them, and then wordlessly stepped

down, signaling the end of his "lecture." Or he may have been thinking of the even more famous occasion of the Buddha Shakyamuni's holding up a flower before his disciples and silently twirling it in his hand, smiling all the while. Maha Kashyapa alone among the monks understood the significance of this and smiled back.

It is important that the soundlessness of Cage's compositions and the silence of the Buddha and the Zen master be distinguished one from the other. Cage's silence, if he has been quoted correctly, has as its aim rousing his audience to an awareness of sounds which normally escape their notice and teaching them how to experience them as beautiful. The Buddha and the Zen master, for their part, sought not to entrance their audience with sound but to completely free them from the snare of language so that they might perceive Truth directly. By their pregnant silence both dramatized the fact that Ultimate Truth is more than anything which can be said about it. But more than this, each was trying to awaken his disciples to the understanding that the entire cosmos is no less than this stick or this flower.

As one method among many of bringing their students to the realization of silence as the womb of all things, Zen masters have always employed "the sounds of the world." The most ordinary sounds such as the falling of rain or the chirping of the cicada have traditionally been utilized by Zen masters as a fruitful means of concentration in zazen—the basic intuitive meditation in Zen. In his letters to his disciple-correspondents Bassui, a great Japanese Zen master of the fourteenth century, urged them, whenever they hears a sound, to inquire of themselves, "What is it that is hearing this sound?"

The *Surangama Sutra*, one of the profoundest of the Mahayana sutras, contains an account by the Bodhisattva Kanzeon (later corrupted to Kannon) of how he attained perfect enlightenment through concentration on the "true-nature of sound." In fact, the name Kanzeon means a "hearer of the sounds of the world."

It is obvious, then, that in Zen the goal is never sound for its own sake, which is to say the discovery of its infinitely varied rhythms and beauty, as appears to be the case with Cage's compositions, but rather as an expedient device for bringing the disciple's mind to a state where he hears without his ears the source of all sound—in other words, the "silence which was ere the word was spoken."

Cage says that he feels every noise is music and this, he believes, is similar to Zen's "Every day is a good day." But were he to present his understanding of this statement to a Zen master, he would discover a new sound—the clang of the master's dismissal bell informing him that his interpretation is unacceptable. On the basis of Cage's statement about sound we can only assume that his understanding of "Every day is a good day" is a simple opening of one's awareness to every circumstance and event in the same way that one must be open to new sounds.

The most ordinary sounds such as the falling of rain or the chirping of the cicada have traditionally been utilized by Zen masters as a fruitful means of concentration in zazen—the basic intuitive meditation in Zen.

But Zen goes much deeper than this. Every day is a good day only when we so single-mindedly absorb ourselves in the task of the moment that scarcely a random thought rears its head; when we are free of the mental static that hinders our being in tune with our daily tasks; when, in other words, we live without for one moment regretting the past, despising the present, or hoping in the future. Each day is then more than a good day—each day is a Day is a DAY.

Cage, of course, is only one of a number of avant-garde artists who have sought to give fresh impetus and direction to contemporary art by evoking, wittingly or unwittingly, principles common to Zen. Among painters there may be mentioned the Frenchman Georges Mathieu, surely one of the more articulate expositors of the significance of contemporary art. Writing in the magazine *Paris Review* in 1958, he observed:

"Our whole culture has allowed itself to be permeated, since the end of the Middle Ages, by Hellenic thought patterns which aimed at bringing the cosmos down to human proportions and limited the means of access to the understanding of the universe to those provided by reason and the senses. Our Western pictorial art was thus founded on notions of perfection deriving from handicrafts insofar as they were premeditated and came into being according to patterns… The latest liberation to date…is a liberation from the canons of beauty, from notions of harmony and composition, from the Golden Rule, and so on… In a series of lectures given in 1954–1955, Sir Herbert Read… showed that ideas are nothing more than meditation on intuitions revealed first of all by the artists, who expresses them visually… We do not even know if man and the cosmos constitute a contradictory duality.... Beyond pantheism, God and gods, man—after turning towards himself—today finds himself no longer faced even with his own development but with nothingness. And works of art are no longer anything but marks, traces of these changes of direction in the itinerary of world thought...."

LET US NOW examine the parallels between Zen and the spirit of contemporary art as revealed in these excerpts. Mathieu's contention that, since the Middle Ages, Western man's "means of access to an understanding of the universe has been limited to those provided by reason and the senses" can be

counterpointed against Zen's basic teaching that, for realization of the truth of the indivisibility of man and the universe, a deeper stratum of consciousness than the rational mind must be called forth. Zen koan, for example, are simply unique devices for cornering the discursive mind and checking the flow of random, irrelevant thoughts, Every koan compels us to face and accept the inherent limitations of the reasoning mind as an instrument for self-awakening. Koan, in short, are a slap in the face of logic and conceptual thought. "It is useless to try to reach Zen enlightenment," notes contemporary Zen master Hakuun Yasutani, "through philosophy or theories of one kind or another. One can never come to satori-enlightenment riding on the back of a concept."

IN THE LIGHT of these strictures against the all-powerfulness of the rational mind, it would be easy to fall into the serious error of supposing that Zen condemns the intellect. To say, however, that the analytic powers of man's brain are not equal to the task of abolishing for him the oppressive sense of self-and-other which his discriminating mind creates for him is not to deny that, for all other purposes of dealing with his environment, man's power of reason is not only a standing marvel but unquestionably indispensable.

Mathieu's assertion that "the latest liberation…is a liberation from the canons of beauty, from notions of harmony and composition, from the Golden Rule, and so on," could easily be equated with the Zen doctrine that to reach the highest state of consciousness (i.e. Buddhahood) one must liberate one's mind from attachment to every moral or philosophical preconception, however lofty, and renounce adherence to every religious belief or dogma, including even ideas of Zen itself.

The quotation from Sir Herbert Read, i.e.. that the ideas which follow the plastic image are "nothing more than meditations on intuitions," is, I would say, peculiarly congenial to Zen. For Zen, all philosophizing is empty unless it grows out of genuine spiritual experience and the intuitions which flow from such experience. Buddhist scripture, Buddhist doctrine, and Buddhist philosophy are in fact no more than intellectual formulations which emerge from zazen meditation and satori. Contrariwise, zazen is the dynamic expression of the truth of Buddhist doctrine and philosophy.

Where Zen and Mathieu part company is in these two statements (if my understanding of them is correct): "We do not even know if man and the cosmos constitute a contradictory duality," and "Beyond pantheism, God and gods, man—after turning towards himself—today finds himself no longer faced even with his own development but nothingness."

Every day is a good day only when we so single-mindedly absorb ourselves in the task of the moment that scarcely a random thought rears its head; when we are free of the mental static that hinders our being in tune with our daily tasks.

Zen would deny that man and the cosmos are a contradictory duality. The Mind which is the essence of man is not other than universal self-consciousness, and man's heart-beat is the universe's heart-beat. Man does not stand in opposition to the universe—he is a silhouette of it. This, the innermost teaching of Buddhism, is the very substance of Zen. Shakyamuni Buddha's deathless pronouncement, "Throughout heaven and earth I am the most honoured One" is the supreme statement of the ultimate truth that each separate one of us is the whole.

Zen would likewise repudiate the notion that man is faced with nothingness if by "nothingness" is meant merely a negativity of disintegrating structures. It is a fundamental doctrine of Buddhism that everything is constantly arising, disappearing, and newly reappearing according to causes and conditions. Thus no object has an enduring, independent existence, being subject to infinite transformation grounded in Emptiness. This Emptiness, however, is not a powerless cipher which could give rise to pessimism or despair. On the contrary, the Buddhist Void is alive, dynamic, creative—the very matrix of all phenomena. Is Mathieu's "nothingness" the same as Buddhism's Void? It would seem not.

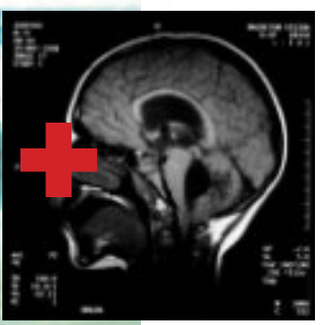
This ambiguity of language is startlingly illustrated by the following two quotations, both of which seem to be saying the same thing but which in fact are diametrically opposite in meaning. In his *The Fox in the Attic* (quoted by Eric Fromm in *The Heart of Man*), Richard Hughes, speaking of Hitler, writes: "He considered himself the universe's unique sentient center, the sole authentic incarnate will it contained or had ever contained… Hitler existed alone, 'I am, none else beside me….'" How chillingly like the Buddha's words, "Throughout heaven and earth I am the most honoured One!" Yet the first is the statement of a megalomaniac with delusions of grandeur, while the second is an affirmation of the deepest spiritual truth of Oneness.

Before concluding these reflections I should like to observe that after some 15 years of trying to live by the Buddha's formula of the middle way—and occasionally succeeding—I now find beauty where formerly I least expected it: in a gnarled tree, a broken dish, a scowling face, or even an angry word. I find beauty in a drawing by my young daughter as in a painting by Wols. Cage is surely right: no sound is without its beauty. Yet silence is the inexpressible wonder of all… and a slow movement of Mozart—could anything be more enchanting than that? ///

ROSHI PHILIP KAPLEAU giving dokusan at Arnold Park. Based on what the prostrating student is wearing, this must have been in the early days when members wore *yukata*—readymade blue and white patterned bathrobes—rather than solid-color brown robes. Why brown? Because that's what was on sale at the fabric store when the first robes were commissioned.

When prostrating now, practitioners bring their hands up next to their ears, not in front of their heads.

Note that Roshi Kapleau is sitting in full lotus. When he first went to Japan, he was tormented by leg pain during his sittings, but later he began practicing yoga and became very flexible.



DUKKHA, DHARMA, AND *gratitude*

In September 2021,

I traveled out of upstate New York for the first time since the pandemic. Between visiting family and a little vacationing, I was able to visit a few places. Very grateful for the ability to travel, I attempted to make the most of it.

Early on in the trip, I felt a familiar pain in my body. Having a condition called hydrocephalus, my body has needed outside assistance to regulate the pressure around my brain. For most of my life, to do this, I have had tubes running from my head to my abdomen. At unpredictable times, these tubes would malfunction and the give-away symptom would be abdominal pain and tightness. Living in a body sprinkled with hospital procedures, I can often catastrophize any passing physical pain. It has been a slow process learning to relax when I have a stomach ache from eating too much! So, when I began to feel pain on the trip, I initially tried

TEXT BY *Jack O'Shaughnessy*

to let go of my fears and be with my breath. As time progressed, though, the pain increased and became more present. Even with a couple of red flags, I attempted not to panic during this out-of-state exploration.

Once the pain began affecting my sleep, though, you could say I became a bit worried. In a city I had never visited before, Boulder, Colorado, far from friends and family, I was swept into rumination and stress. I had the practice, but my thoughts still darted to worst-case scenarios. Eventually I decided to go to the Boulder Hospital emergency department.

Reflecting on those moments, I was frustrated, to say the least. I am learning that life does not always follow my plans. Oh yeah, and then there is always the fear of the unknown. With a little distance, it amazes me how one hiccup in health can wipe away so many minor concerns: "Do I want to move to Boulder for graduate school?" "I sure hope they have better coffee shops than this one!" "Why does the walk to the bus have to be so long?" Of course some of these concerns are necessary in daily life planning. I am noticing, though, that I seem to make these concerns larger than they are, packing in more anxiety around them than necessary. Why do I do this? Why do we do this?

After a test at the hospital, it was confirmed that one of these tubes was malfunctioning. Abruptly ending the trip, I returned overnight to Rochester. Reflecting over that time period, Shantideva's text *The Way of the Bodhisattva* comes to mind: "We cannot trust the wanton Lord of Death. The task complete or still to do, he will not wait. In health or sickness, therefore, none of us can trust our fleeting, momentary lives."

Maybe I could take advice from the ancient and contemporary teachers. While I do not want to fall into paranoia and unnecessary anxiety, I also want to acknowledge the normalcy of illness and death. Why do I treat these phenomena as abnormal, or as if they will not happen to me? Thankfully there are Buddhist messengers repeating this teaching to us over and over again.

The rooms and halls of the Strong Memorial emergency department were loud teachers about the indiscriminate nature of dukkha. Irrespective of age, socio-economic status, or any other personal demographic, the dukkha of an unpredictable body seems to touch all people. So much pain, suffering, and trauma. In a sesshin about five years ago, Bodhin-roshi reminded us that no matter how frustrated we were about our lack of choices during sesshin, in everyday life we have far less control over far more painful aspects of life. While I concerned myself with various opinions, issues, and plans, the hospital had a knack for quickly pointing out the reality of living in a human body.

DURING MY TWO-WEEK stay at the hospital, there were many difficult conversations with doctors. There was uncertainty as the surgeon contemplated out loud the benefits and risks of different surgical procedures. I felt a lack of control over the two things (or one thing) that I identified as more "mine" than anything else: my body and mind. Yes, self-advocacy in the hospital was a necessity. And this existed also. But, generally, those weeks pointed to how little control I have over such central elements of my own identity. No matter how much fear and desire I have about controlling the various minutiae of my life, how much of it is under my control? Knowing this, why do I keep fretting over such small things in my life story and other persons' life stories?

I generally seek refuge in things outside myself: others' approval, finding the "right" job, mind states, tasty food, YouTube videos, the news, to name a few. None of these are bad, but are they as reliable as I consider them? Shantideva seems to keep coming up: "And when the heralds of the Deadly King have gripped me, what help to me will be my friends and kin? For then life's virtue is my one defense, and this, alas, is what I shrugged away." Attending so often to unreliable things in my life, what is truly reliable? I do not generally live with the acknowledgement that life is tenuous. I thought about this regarding my fellow patients. Did the stroke patient across from me know even 24 hours in advance how much his life was to change so drastically? Or the patient next to me who had a brain injury from a motorcycle accident, did she know? Did any of us know?

Lost and confused, I am grateful that my parents and brother paused their lives to help me emotionally and physically through this process. Aside from my family, the people that helped me the most were Sangha members from the Zen Center. A couple people walked me through my fears in multiple humbling phone calls. I am so used to pretending to be spiritual, but at the time there was not much room for false arrogance. These spiritual friends helped me open up to a larger concept of how situations could be "workable." Even if there were physical or mental damages from the surgery, moment by moment, the situation still could be "workable." Even if post-surgical healing required occupational therapy or speech therapy, there were resources. Again, I was reminded not to catastrophize.

Like many people, **JACK O'SHAUGHNESSY** started meditating after reading *The Three Pillars of Zen*. Originally from San Francisco, he moved to Rochester to join the staff training program at the RZC. He has been a member since 2014.

But what about death? How was that "workable"? Being honest with myself, I did not want to be there. I wanted to unplug myself from all the machines and take a bus to my apartment. That was not possible. Maybe reality was, in fact, inescapable. So often I want to check out, run away, numb out, distract myself. Life was not making that very easy, to say the least. If there was a real possibility of death or brain damage, and if I could not escape the situation, then what? What would happen after I disappeared into anesthesia? Not wanting to leave this life kicking and screaming, I wanted to know what I could rely on. The message continuously being offered was that letting go, acceptance, and doing spiritual practice were the best options. Even if death is a possibility, we still have a reliable refuge. I am infinitely grateful for the practice offered by the Zen Center. Successes and failures, entertainment and distraction, and others' approval could not take away illness. The practice, though, was a refuge that followed me even into the doors of the operating room.

On this topic of gratitude, having a parent by my side every day was invaluable. Even as an adult, I guess I am still my parents' child. As for the hospital staff, they not only offered quality care, but they also offered it with humor and smiles. Beautiful examples of compassion and love.

As I was living in a small studio at the time, my parents and I discussed staying in a hotel or AirBnB while I healed from surgery. The Chapin Mill community had offered up the Mill House for us to use while I recovered. Reflecting over this time, their generosity continues to come up for me. I cannot think of a better way to rest and rejuvenate. The space was very homey, loving and comfortable. Even though I had been off the Zen Center's staff for over a year, the Chapin Mill staffers still welcomed my family in to stay. Whether it was offering us meals, phone calls checking in on us, or conversation and social life, I cannot count all of their acts of generosity and love.

IN ADDITION TO teaching me about generosity, this taught me so much about the meaning of taking refuge in Sangha. The Chapin Mill and Arnold Park communities have been a refuge in multiple ways. Physically, it was clear I was taking refuge in the place and community as I rested and healed. In addition to this, Zen Center people have been such a great example of the Dharma, living it in a loving and compassionate way. They acted as a model of how I would like to live in this world.

The Sangha's generosity did not end when I left Chapin Mill. One Zen Center friend let me recover an additional week with him at his house. After this, I went to the Arnold Park campus for a few hours each day to participate in their schedule. Such a community of love and support!

> Maybe I could take advice from the ancient and contemporary teachers. While I do not want to fall into paranoia and unnecessary anxiety, I also want to acknowledge the normalcy of illness and death

I am very grateful to be part of the Rochester Zen Center Sangha. During times of health and sickness, they offer opportunities to bring awareness to dukkha, practice, and the human condition. One beautiful resource they offer is the Zen of Living and Dying group. In this group, we can discuss the events in our ordinary lives, and how Zen practice can assist in our experience or shift our perspective. The people in the group have taught me that all of us are dealing with these basic human struggles—illness, aging, and death. In addition to these specific topics, Sangha members discuss traumas, mental health, relationships, and everything else. It has been a space to interact with Sangha members who share openly about real struggles and joys in life. Sharing and listening, both experiences have been valuable, and I also believe both actions can be of assistance to others.

As much as I view my experience as unique, what could be more universal than unexpected illness? This is an element of life that touches everyone at some point. All humans, including the members of our community, have had similar experiences. I am grateful that the Zen Center offers spaces to explore these experiences, how they relate to our Zen Buddhist practice, and how we can be compassionate friends to one another. I feel like the Zen Center Sangha offers an abundance of opportunities to discuss important and vulnerable topics.

I WAS INITIALLY inspired to write this *Zen Bow* article out of gratitude for my parents and the Zen Center Sangha. The Sangha teaches me about refuge, love, generosity, and the Dharma in action. Writing this was also an opportunity to reflect over dissatisfaction, non-self, and impermanence in daily life, even this body. This process has not necessarily leaned towards a fatalistic viewpoint so much as it has been a pointer to what might be more reliable and important: Buddhist practice, love, and compassion. Even though I have plans for my life, I have to remember that I have no idea what will definitely happen. Maybe there is a way to hold things a bit more lightly. And maybe this can be a reminder to me that we are all humans that need to work with aging, illness, death, and loss. Hopefully I can be there for the next person in need.

Until then, if the practice is good enough for the time of death, maybe it is good enough for this moment. ///

Sightings

IN PRINT

SILENT ILLUMINATION: A CHAN BUDDHIST PATH TO NATURAL AWAKENING, BY GUO GU

¶ *What it's about:* Silent Illumination is the practice of opening naturally to our own nature without attaching to ideas and concepts. It corresponds to the Japanese practice of shikantaza or "just sitting."

Guo Gu is a Dharma heir of the late Chan master Sheng Yen. In this excellent book, he goes into clear detail about the foundations for taking up this practice and finishes with translations and commentaries from Chan Master Hongzhi's writings on the "method of no method."

Why It's Worthy: Anyone who's taken up this practice has discovered how difficult it is for us with our transactional habits of mind to simply sit—to allow the mind to remain silent yet vividly aware. What Guo Gu has to say about the understandings, attitudes, and feeling tones with which to approach Silent Illumination will resonate with anyone sincerely doing any form of zazen, including those working with the breath or with koans.

It can easily happen in Zen practice that we fall into tense or judgmental or dull and hazy states of mind and body. This book can help you reset your practice with mind and body relaxed yet curious, confident, and determined. —SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN

ON SCREEN

THE SERIES: MISS SCARLET AND THE DUKE (PBS)

¶ *What it's about:* The heroine of Miss Scarlet and the Duke is a young, charming Victorian-era woman of refined manners. She has just been orphaned and left in financial straits by the death, apparently natural, of her father, a brilliant, erratic and usually inebriated private detective. What to do? Get seated behind her father's office desk and carry on the business. Problems? A thousand, including the fact that Eliza Scarlet has put herself on the street as the first female detective in London, which means that every encounter requires a climb up the hill of credibility.

The Duke of the title is the office nickname for Detective Inspector William Wellington of Scotland Yard. He's no aristocrat but a workhouse boy from Glasgow, a former protégé of Eliza's father and a big brother figure to her since adolescence. They partner in solving crime (she's the smart one) and share an irresistible but unacknowledged mutual attraction, reminiscent of Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn—they're always scrapping as though to keep themselves from tangling—which makes for abundant fun.

Why it's worthy: It's a good show, but what makes it really interesting to me is Eliza's poise. We see her, for example, faced with a gun in the hands of a murderer or the needling of her should-be-but-will-he? paramour. Nonetheless she remains composed, sometimes opening her eyes wide in surprise for an instant but immediately reverting to an engaging smile and then responding with the best move available.

What's special is the quality of her composure. There's a way of understanding equanimity which I think is important for meditators. It's not only a state of being calm and balanced, but the skill of allowing experience to come and go freely and attentively, without aversion or craving. Meditators can't help but be faced with thoughts, emotions and other sensations, and we learn that it's fruitless and counterproductive to try to fight them off. The skill of equanimity enables us to maintain that calm and balanced state while remaining open to a full experience of our lives. It helps us to see things as they are. Eliza Scarlet seems to embody that equanimity, and in doing so she offers a remarkably clear and admirable model of how to manifest in the world or on the mat. Plus, you should see her smile. —TOM ROBERTS

LAIMONS KLAVA: FARMER, REFUGEE, AND CARETAKER OF CHAPIN MILL

THE NEW KLAVA HOUSE at Chapin Mill was designed and built by Tom Kowal, with assistance from staff and Sangha members. It was named after Laimons Klava, the long-time caretaker of Chapin Mill. Laimons Klava gave one of the largest donations to Klava House, but, more importantly, he made the first donation before the fund drive even began, which provided much-needed energy for the project. With this article, I would like to introduce you to Laimons Klava and share his adventurous journey to Batavia.

Laimons Klava was born in 1935 in what was then free Latvia. His parents farmed cooperatively with two other families, and they grew sugar beets, grains, and animal feed. They also had cows and sold milk; one of Laimons's earliest memories is of pulling a sled loaded with milk cans to the processing plant.

In 1940 the Soviets invaded Latvia, but the three farms were unscathed. But one year later, when the Germans invaded, Laimons's bucolic childhood was over. Initially, Laimons found the "blitzkrieg" coming down his little dirt road fascinating since he was interested in machinery and German tanks. But then shells began falling on the farmhouse and set it on fire. Several months after D-Day, all three families headed west, to Liepaja (a large city in Latvia), joining hundreds of horses and wagons on the road. The trip was memorable for Laimons. The first night, Laimons and his family slept in a barn, the second night, while Russian planes strafed them, they slept in a ditch, and on the third night, when they arrived in Liepaja, they slept under a wagon.

More than 80,000 Latvians were leaving the country at that time. Laimons's family boarded a German supply boat

and traveled to Danzig. They slept on the floor of the boat with their belongings. The Russians attacked twice during their journey, strafing the boat, but luckily not hitting it. "We had two close escapes," recalled Laimons. Once they arrived in Danzig, the Latvians were housed with and fed by German troops. Laimons and his family had to go through de-lousing stations and his clothes went through a steam machine. He remembers his hair being washed with "gooey green stuff," men shouting, and dogs barking.

The same three families were still traveling together and were sent to work on a farm near Stuttgart, Germany. They were paid in food and slept in an unheated attic with no glass in the window. Because of the military draft, the only men in the village were those with missing arms or legs. Laimons remembers hiding with the villagers on the concrete floor of a blacksmith's shop when Allied troops or Germans came. He also remembers heavy bombing, playing in bomb craters, and watching the bombing of a railroad and a small town. One time, he had to line up before the Germans and faced a machine gun. "I was tense all the time, dreading a knock at the door," recalled Laimons.

After the village became an American zone it became peaceful and quiet. Laimons and his family stayed and continued working the farm, but after a while they were sent to a refugee camp in Esslingen, Germany, where they lived for four years. "That's when life really got interesting," said Laimons. Both of his parents received paying jobs—his mother cleaned and his father worked as a woodcutter. Laimons started school, which was an hour's walk away. They lived in a cramped dormitory space with tarps for walls between families. There was a lot of barter for food, and Laimons remembers eating "US food" such as Spam, corned beef, and salmon. The family cooked on a hot plate and was allotted one carton of cigarettes per week. A local woman taught Laimons English and took him to movies.

When the US began taking refugees from the war, Laimons's first thought was "Oh, boy—Hershey bars!" His family was sponsored by the North Darien Baptist Church near Batavia. Their first task was to pass a physical with a dentist and a doctor. The screening was a two-week process and English fluency was a big plus. The family then traveled to Bremerhaven to board a boat with US troops. They were allowed one suitcase, one wooden box, and $3 each. They were not allowed to take German currency on board. Laimons remembers trading his German money for clothing and a watch.

After passing the white cliffs of Dover and stopping in Nova Scotia to allow Canadian soldiers to disembark, Laimons and his family arrived in Boston on June 19, 1950. They then took a train to Batavia which was paid for by the church. After arriving in Batavia, the family's sponsor, the John Cox family, settled them on their farm.

In 1951, Laimons's mother found a job as a housekeeper at the brand new Genesee Memorial Hospital in Rochester. His father worked at the Holley Poultry Farm. When school was out, Laimons worked 60-hour weeks doing yard work. After he graduated from high school, he worked full-time at the hospital until he enlisted in the Army and was sent to Fort Dix and San Antonio for basic training.

After his Army discharge, Laimons didn't want to go back to work at the hospital, and he heard about a warehouse that was hiring. The warehouse was part of Chapin Industries, owned by the Chapin family, who also owned a large property outside of Batavia known as Chapin Mill. At work, Chapin Mill was known as "the farm," and most of the employees didn't want to be sent to work there. Laimons did, and that was the beginning of his long history with Chapin Mill. Beginning in 1962, he lived on-site in the farmhouse, then moved to the guesthouse in 1977.

▼ The interior of Klava House, which was designed to be energy-neutral. The building features a vaulted ceiling and open kitchen; from the outside it sits near the Farm House and looks like a shed or small barn.

Laimons retired as Chapin Mill caretaker in 2001. He currently lives in his own home in Batavia, stopping by the retreat center on a regular basis for lunch and company. "His historical knowledge of the Chapin Mill property has been invaluable," commented Tom Kowal, the current caretaker. "He knows when electrical lines were installed, how Ralph Chapin used to raise and lower the water level in the pond, and what happened during the blizzard of '77 when a 15-foot snow drift blocked the driveway." He also shares numerous anecdotes such as the time "a bunch of drunk college students drove through the ice into the pond and ended up sleeping in the barn."—EDITOR

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EVERY SESSHIN IS AN ONLINE SESSHIN

After two years of experimentation and fine-tuning, the Zen Center's online sesshins have become worthy substitutes for the in-person experience. If you've been thinking about attending sesshin but live far away and/or have limited travel time, an online sesshin is worth a try. It can't replicate the total Chapin Mill experience, but most of the major features of sesshin now work very well online.

The sesshin schedule is organized around four blocks of sitting. Many online participants, especially those who are in different time zones, elect to sign up for two or three blocks, depending on their needs. This is perfectly acceptable.

DAILY SCHEDULE

NOTE: This schedule changes slightly for Rohatsu

Block 1: 4:45–7:00 am
Zazen, chanting, and dokusan

Block 2: 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Zazen with teisho

Block 3: 1:30–3:45 pm
Zazen, dokusan, and chanting
The last afternoon round (4:40–5:15) is optional for those online

Block 4: 7:00–9:25 pm
Zazen and dokusan

CONCERNED ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY?

On the first night, those participating online have a special orientation session with the sesshin monitors, who will walk you through how dokusan works, etc. And during the entire sesshin there is always an online monitor available for any technical glitches that might arise. Recently the online sesshins have been blessedly free of problems, making it easier to participate as fully as possible at a distance.

UPCOMING SESSHINS

MARCH 7-DAY SESSHIN
March 25–April 1
Led by Sensei John Pulleyn

MAY 2-DAY SESSHIN
May 5–7 2023
Led by Ven. Jissai Prince-Cherry

JUNE 7-DAY SESSHIN
June 10–17, 2023
Led by Sensei Donna Kowal

JULY 7-DAY SESSHIN
July 22–29, 2023
Led by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede

SEPTEMBER 2-DAY SESSHIN
September 8–10
Led by Ven. Trueman Taylor

SEPTEMBER 7-DAY SESSHIN
September 23–30
Led by Sensei Donna Kowal

OCTOBER 7-DAY SESSHIN
October 28–November 4
Led by Sensei John Pulleyn