► A LOTUS BLOSSOMS: Koan commentary by Sensei Dhara Kowal **A LIGHTER BURDEN:** Jonathan Hager and the sword of Damocles **ORDINARY MIND:** Koan commentary by Sensei John Pulleyn

SPRING/SUMMER 2023 | VOLUME XLV, NUMBER ONE













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

Spring/Summer 2023 | VOLUME XLV, NUMBER ONE

"GOVERNANCE" IS SUCH a dull, institutional word, smacking of legalese and top-down authority. You'll find it under the "About" tab on rzc.org. And yet, governance in a healthy organization is rarely boring. It's how things get done and how they get paid for. It's honoring the past and planning for the future. It deals with money, sex, and other hot topics! Taking a look at the three aspects of governance covered on the website is a fair way to assess how we're doing as an organization.

TRUSTEES AND OFFICERS Just a few years ago, four of the six Zen Center trustees were over 60 years old. Today none of them are. While one could say that age confers wisdom, the need for fresh thinking on the board has never been greater. Notably, the Center's two newest trustees were chosen by a new self-nomination process. This surfaced a number of excellent candidates who may have been overlooked in the past.

BYLAWS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES The bylaws can make for some tedious reading but contain instructions for, for example, removing a teacher for misconduct. In addition, more recent documents in this section address the sexual harassment policy and a clear pathway for reporting harassment or abuse.

MEETINGS AND FINANCES The Center's financial statements and board meeting minutes have always been accessible to anyone. That's important because the money coming in is a reflection of deep attachments to the Dharma. Good governance means eternal gratitude and an equally strong commitment to transparency. —CHRIS PULLEYN

3 SOUNDINGS

In praise of two-day sesshins | *The* taste of seawater | Blessed exhaustion | Q&A: Modern distractions

SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN

Ordinary Mind is the Way

We're always looking to get somewhere, to leave the humdrum for the miraculous. But the miraculous is right here. ▶8

DESIREE JAEGER-FINE

Mission to the edge of knowing

He plunged from the stratosphere above New Mexico and lived. All he had to do was let go completely. ▶ 14

SENSEI DHARA KOWAL

Chimon and the lotus

How do we get out of the mud? We have to go straight through it, just like the lotus. ▶ 20

JONATHAN HAGER

A lighter burden

He had no choice but to practice. The motivation was forced upon him. ▶ 24

30 ■ SIGHTINGS

Further remarks | Book review | Sensei Dhara Kowal's ordination | The 2023 work retreat

ON THE COVER

IMAGE BY *Amanda Almira Newton* (c. 1860–1943) | The U.S. Department of Agriculture Pomological Watercolor collection documents new fruit and nut varieties, and specimens introduced by USDA plant explorers.



EDITOR

Chris Pulleyn | zenbow@rzc.org

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Sensei Dhara Kowal | donnak@rzc.org Sensei John Pulleyn | johnp@rzc.org

ART DIRECTOR

Daryl Wakeley | darylwakeley@icloud.com

PROOFREADER

Chris Pulleyn

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

SUBSCRIBING TO ZEN BOW

The subscription rate below reflects current postage

	4 issues	8 issues
U.S.:	\$20.00	\$40.00
FOREIGN:	\$40.00	\$80.00

Please send checks and your current address to: Zen Bow Subscriptions Desk Rochester Zen Center 7 Arnold Park Rochester, NY 14607

PLEASE NOTE: If you are moving, the Postal Service charges us for each piece of mail sent to your old address, whether you have left a forwarding address or not. If you change your address, please let us know as soon as possible. Send your address corrections to the Zen Bow Subscriptions Desk at the above address or email receptionist@rzc.org.

COUNTLESS GOOD DEEDS

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.

COPYRIGHT @2023 ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN ZEN BOW ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS ALONE AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER, ITS DIRECTORS, ITS TRUSTEES, ITS MEMBERS, OR ITS STAFF.



A publication of the Rochester Zen Center





IN PRAISE OF TWO-DAY SESSHINS

THE "WORD ON THE street" among veteran sesshin participants is "Why waste your time on a two-day sesshin? You get all the pain and none of the reward." But in May, I decided to buck the common wisdom and attend the two-day sesshin. There were several motivating factors. Two or three people from our Cleveland group wanted to dip their toe into a short retreat and needed support and reassurance to take that step. I was happy to provide it... along with a ride to Chapin Mill where none of them had been before. The weekend also worked comfortably into my work and grandparenting responsibilities. And probably, most significantly, I wanted to support my dharma sister, Jissai, as she led her first sesshin.

The end result? It was spectacular!! I went with no expectations for my own practice. As soon as we arrived, there were many newcomers who seemed lost or confused or at loose ends and I got the chance to be instantly helpful. The head cook expressed immediate relief and gratitude that an "old hand" would be in the kitchen, confident that I could do my job unsupervised. I made my way back to my room in the northeast corner of the retreat center near the teacher's quarters. When I visited Jissai in her room to say hello, I learned that no one had been assigned as her attendant and I asked what

that involved. My offer to take on those tasks was accepted and cleared with the second monitor, who, in addition to assisting all of the first-timers, would have had those jobs added to his already overloaded list. Grateful to be of use.

The drum sounded. The sesshin began. I felt the energy of beginner's mind emanating from all the new people as my practice settled comfortably and joyfully into my belly, into my hara, into my seat.

Before coming, I'd pretty much decided that without Roshi, I wasn't going to go to private instruction. But when my group was called and I heard the handbell, suddenly I was up and on my way, inwardly chuckling. I bowed, stopped myself from making the habitual prostration in the dokusan room. This was fresh, a different experience. Jissai's smile and bright eyes, our shared laughter at this new dimension in our relationship, energized and illuminated the moment of honest direct connection. No expectations! So freeing! Just the practice, giving, doing, present.

The two days flew by and I drove home filled with joy, gratitude, and without the exhaustion or need for a stream of chatter so typical of post-sesshin. What a gift. So if you're someone who feels a short sesshin just isn't worth it, perhaps you could give yourself a chance and open to the fresh possibilities a two-day can offer.

—SUSAN RAKOW

THE TASTE OF SEAWATER

THOSE WHO HAVE not yet attained kensho should be grappling with one of those meaningless koans. You might concentrate on Lin-chi's "person who is standing right here listening to me preach." Bore into him at all times, whether you are in a quiet place doing zazen or actively engaged in the activities of everyday life. Grasp the person who is engaged in this nonstop thinking. Where is he? What is the mind that at this very moment seeks him? Entering ever deeper into these matters, and when mind ceases to function, when words and phrases are exhausted, attack it from the sides, attack it from the front and from the rear, keep gnawing away at it, gnawing, gnawing, until there is no place left to gnaw.

You may feel as though you are clinging perilously to a steel barrier towering before you, as though you are gagging while trying to down a soup of wood shavings, as though you are grasping about at clouds of green smoke or probing thorough a sea of red mist. When all your skills have been used up, all your verbal resources and reason utterly exhausted, if you do not falter or attempt to understand and just keep boring steadily inward, you will experience the profound joy of knowing for yourself whether the water is cold or warm. The practice of Zen requires you to just press forward with continuous, unwavering effort. If you only exert yourself every other day, like a person experiencing a periodic fit of malarial fever, you will never reach enlightenment, not even with the passage of endless kalpas.

There is a sea beach only several hundred paces from my native village of Hara. Suppose someone is troubled because he doesn't know the taste of seawater and decides to sample some. He sets out down to the ocean beach, but stops and comes back before he has gone even a hundred steps. He starts out again, this time returning after taking only ten steps. He will never get to know the taste of seawater that way, will he? Yet if he keeps going straight

ahead and he doesn't turn back, even if he lives far inland in a landlocked province... he will eventually reach the ocean. By dipping his finger in the ocean and licking it, he will know instantly the taste of seawater the world over because it has the same taste everywhere, in India, in China, or in the southern or northern seas.

It is the same for Dharma patricians who explore the secret depths. Proceeding straight ahead, pushing steadily forward, they bore into their minds with unbroken effort, never slackening or regressing. When the breakthrough suddenly arrives, they penetrate their own nature, the nature of others, the nature of sentient beings, the nature of evil passions and enlightenment, the nature of the Buddha-nature, the nature of the gods, the Bodhisattva-nature, the nature of sentient and non-sentient beings, the craving ghost nature, the contentious spirit nature, the beast nature—they are all of them grasped in a single instant of thought. The great matter of their religious quest is completely and utterly resolved, and there is nothing left for them to do. They are freed from birth and death. What a thrilling moment it is!— FROM POISON BLOSSOMS FROM A THICKET OF THORN BY HAKUIN ZENJI,

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL ■

BLESSED EXHAUSTION

ONE OF THE greatest scholar practitioners ever to live in Tibet vividly describes the clearest glimpse he ever had of awakening. It happened when he was just fourteen years old. At that time, he was living in a monastery in Kham (eastern Tibet) where he had been sent at a young age to pursue his spiritual studies.

At the monastery he was assigned a personal tutor, a learned old meditation master whose duty it was to oversee the young man's education. One morning, before dawn, the young monk was awakened to a banging on his door. It was his tutor.

"We're going on a hike," the master announced.

The two of them set off walking over the valleys and mountain passes of eastern Tibet. When the sun rose, they reached yet another mountain pass.

The master stopped and turned to his student asking, "Are you tired yet?"

The young monk replied that he was fine to keep going.

The two continued on their way. At midmorning, the master stopped again and asked, "Are you tired yet?"

Once again, the young monk replied that he was okay to continue.

As the sun reached its peak, they reached the top of yet another mountain

pass and the master asked, "Are you tired yet?"

The young monk could not hide his fatigue.

"Yes," he replied, "I'm exhausted."
"Aha," replied the master. "Then you are

The master then invited the young disciple to sit by his side in meditation overlooking the valley below. As he sat by his master, utterly spent in body and mind, the young monk had a clear, undeniable glimpse of the awakening so cherished by his tradition.

In some meditation texts, such a glimpse is called "the exhaustion of all concepts." It refers to a pivotal moment when all our schemes, our attempts to manage things, in fact the entire scaffolding of the conceptual mind, just falls apart.

When we are completely spent, such a falling apart happens easily. We may not ever have thought of exhaustion as a blessing, but to be tired—to be completely at the end of our rope—is an opportunity to encounter the nonconceptual. In the gap that is left when our thoughts collapse, there is clarity—an open, free, unencumbered space that is both fresh and as old as time.

—FROM THE WAKEFUL BODY BY WILLA BLYTHE BAKER

ARE KOANS ARTIFICIAL AND IRRELEVANT?

UNDOUBTEDLY THE BEST koan is one that naturally grows out of one's life situation. For example, a Buddhist might be gripped by the following problem: "If all beings without exception are intrinsically perfect, as the Buddha proclaimed, why is there so much imperfection, so much pain and suffering in the world?" Or a believer may question intensely: "If I am fundamentally a Buddha, why do I act like anything but one?" Those driven by the need to dispel a fundamental contradiction between their faith in the Buddha's pronouncement and the evidence of their senses have a natural koan. Similarly, if the question "Where did I come from when I was born and where will I go after I die?" gripped one constantly, it could be another natural koan. I emphasize "could" because not everyone would be motivated to resolve the matter of birth and death. A natural koan is a personal perplexity that gives one no rest.

Strictly speaking, the inquiry "Who am I?" is not a koan, for it lacks a contradictory element, the "bite" that wheedles the intellect into attempting a solution impossible for it. Yet it too can be effective as a spiritual dilemma. At the base of all seeking, whether couched in terms of the "I" or a koan-type paradox, is the desire for self-understanding. If students tell me that the Who? inquiry has been with them since childhood, and that they feel strongly drawn to it, I assign it to them and then give pointers on how to work with it.

In my book Zen: Dawn in the West I mention the case of a man who fought in World War II and saw extensive action in the Pacific theatre. When he returned to the United States he was utterly beat. In his own words, "I could not work, sleep, or make love." One question obsessed him: "What is reality?" Walking along a street he would bump into telephone poles, so absorbed was he in the question. After some six months in this state an ex-

plosion took place in him, followed by a tremendous joy. This was his enlightenment. His exhausting war experiences had provided him with a natural koan.

The traditional Zen koans, however foreign they may appear initially, can have just as much impact as a natural koan. The main purpose of an assigned koan is to awaken an aspiration to self-realization that is normally submerged. People are usually propelled into Zen training by profound dissatisfaction with life, a fear of living and a dread of dying. A koan provides a much-needed focus for their spiritual striving and eventually evokes a strong aspiration to awakening. It is emphatically untrue that koans have no relevance to one's daily life. On the contrary, they embody our deepest spiritual concerns; through the struggle to penetrate them they become very real and very intimate.—PHILIP KAPLEAU, ZEN: TRADITION & TRANSMISSION, EDITED BY KENNETH KRAFT ■

⊳ SOUNDINGS



▲ Embroidery design by Maira Kalman. Available in gift packaging at https://mairakalman.com/shop/p/dontthinktoomuch

SUBJECT AND OBJECT

THE WESTERN consciousness is object-oriented. The Eastern consciousness... does not shrink from the possibility of a pure subjectivity that needs no object. For the West, consciousness is always "consciousness of." In the East, this is not necessarily so: it can be simply "consciousness." Zen summons one to a realization which will at first confuse and mislead the Western mind.... Western man sees himself as subject with various possibilities of fulfillment: a package of desires for things, or states, which can be "attained." What matters is to find and use effective means to get what one wants. Attainment of one's object brings happiness. One rests in the possession of what one has sought....

Such is the project which the Western mind instinctively sets itself in life. A man sets his mind on something, he uses his will and energy to get it, and when he has it he keeps it, in the full conscious certitude that he has in fact attained what he

▼ Fairhaven State Park, summer 2016 PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSANNA ROSE

sought, that it is and remains his possession. But the basic tenet of Buddhism is that an identity built on this kind of consciousness is false. Such a "self" has no metaphysical status. If it exists at all, as a valid possibility, it can only be realized and enjoyed momentarily, and when it passes, it leaves behind it suffering, death, and the whole train of evils which are rooted in "craving" (The Fire Sermon). The consciousness which lies at the heart of Zen is quite different from this dialectic of cravings, striving, and rest. It rests not in attainment but in non-attainment, and, really, the whole question of rest and attainment becomes irrelevant to it. So also do other questions like the conflict between the individual and society, and the causistical problems of behavior which result from it. In such a context the question of ends and means becomes totally different—it cannot be formulated in our Western terms, which still approach it in terms of cause and effect. Therefore, the koan (a paradigm of life itself) cannot be treated as a problem having a solution (end to be attained) which can be arrived at by setting

certain causes into operation.

Koan study does not enhance the individual self with a new and special efficiency in attaining its particular ends, in causing its desires to be fulfilled. It seeks rather to liberate the individual consciousness from desires by dissolving its very individuality. Indeed, "individuality" and "desire" are the same thing, in this view of man. It is not as if the "individual" were a hard, substantial, ontological core from which desires proceed, but rather that desires themselves form a kind of knot of psychic energies which seeks to remain firmly tied as an autonomous "self."... Hence [Buddhism] denies any special value to the limited and transitory experience of "self" which is constituted by the little knot of desires tied for us by our heredity and our moral history (karma). It urges us to dissolve this limited subjectivity—this "consciousness of our self, our desires, our happiness or unhappiness"—into a pure consciousness which is limited by no desire, no project, and no finite aim.—FROM MYSTICS AND ZEN MASTERS BY THOMAS MERTON



I have some bad habits, like scrolling through Facebook, that I know are wasting my time and probably not good for my Zen practice. But sometimes I really feel like being "off-duty."

WE'RE NOT MAchines, and so it's helpful to have some downtime in our lives. But we

all know that some kinds of downtime restore us and others actually make us feel worse.

Facebook and other social media are designed to be addictive—that's the business model. We end up chasing after little moments of pleasure or engagement that pop up randomly in the midst of what's mostly trivial and often tedious. The fact that it's not so satisfying doesn't make it less addictive—random reinforcement is more effective in driving behavior than rewards that are regular and predictable.

In any case, the research studies are unambiguous. More time spent scrolling through our various devices is strongly associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety. Though we may see this, it's not so easy to change. Nevertheless,

we're not helpless. There's no habit we can't work with.

Change takes time, and we need to be clear about what we want and what we need. Just by becoming more aware of how you spend your time and what you're giving your attention to you can begin to get started. What do you value? What effects are you seeing in your own well-being and your relations with others? What else can you do that's enjoyable and restorative? It's like changing a poor diet. We all do better when we're eating good food.

It's all too easy to castigate ourselves and try to force a change we're not ready to make. Just as a brow-beaten child will resist and resent his parents, we're likely to sabotage ourselves when we try to change using only force of will. Reflection, patience, willingness, and self-compassion are called for. As in all things related to spiritual practice, trust the process. If we keep at it, real change will unfold.—SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN ■



There is a foundation for our lives, a place in which our life rests. That place is nothing but the present moment, as we see, hear, experience what is. If we do not return to that place, we live our lives out of our heads. We blame others: we complain; we feel sorry for ourselves. All of these symptoms show that we're stuck in our thoughts. We're out of touch with the open space that is always right here.—CHARLOTTE JOKO BECK ■

If the universe is meaningless, so is the statement that it is so. If this world is a vicious trap, so is its accuser, and the pot is calling the kettle black.

In the strictest sense, we cannot actually think about life and reality at all, because this would have to include thinking about thinking, thinking about thinking about thinking, and so ad infinitum. One can only attempt a rational, descriptive philosophy of the universe on the assumption that one is totally separate from it. But if you and your thoughts are part of this universe, you cannot stand outside them to describe them. This is why all philosophical and theological systems must ultimately fall apart. To "know" reality you cannot stand outside it and define it; you must enter into it, be it, and feel it.—ALAN WATTS ■

One day some people came to [Ajahn Chah] and asked, "How can you be happy in a world of such impermanence, where you cannot protect your loved ones from harm, illness, and death?" The master held up a glass and said, "Someone gave me this glass, and I really like this glass. It holds my water admirably and it glistens in the sunlight. I touch it and it rings! One day the wind may blow it off the shelf, or my elbow may knock it from the table. I know this glass is already broken, so I enjoy it incredibly."—FROM THOUGHTS WITHOUT A THINKER BY MARK EPSTEIN ■



MUMONKAN, CASE 19

THESE TWO,







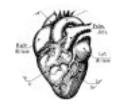




THE CASE

Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the Way?" Nansen answered, "Ordinary mind is the Way." Joshu asked, "Shall I try to seek after it?" "If you try to seek after it, you go away from it," answered Nansen.

Joshu: "If I do not try for it, how can I know the Way?"
Nansen: "The Way is not a matter of knowing or not-knowing. Knowing is illusion, not-knowing is blankness. If



you attain to this Way of nodoubt, it is as boundless as vast space, so how can there be right or wrong in the Way?" At these words Joshu was suddenly enlightened.



THE COMMENTARY

Questioned by Joshu, Nansen, like melting ice and disintegrating tile, dissolved and could not offer a plausible explanation. Even though Joshu has come to a realization, he must delve into it for another thirty years before he can understand it fully.



THE VERSE

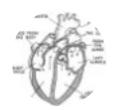
Hundreds of flowers in spring, the moon in autumn, a cool breeze in summer and snow in winter.

If your mind is not clouded with unnecessary things, no season is too much for you.









Joshu and Nansen, figure in an inordinate

number of koans, especially Joshu, so here's a little about him. Joshu is said to have lived to be 120 years old, older than any of the ancient Chinese masters (more recently, the eminent Chinese master Hsu Yun also lived to that age, dying in 1959). Joshu began his Zen career under Nansen when he was just 18 and continued until Nansen's death 40 years later. After this, Joshu set out on pilgrimage, testing and sharpening his understanding with the many deeply realized teachers of his time. Upon his departure he is said to have vowed, "If I meet a hundred-year-old person who seeks my guidance, I will offer the best teaching I can to that venerable

person. If I meet a seven-year-old child who can teach me, I will become an ardent disciple of that child." This vow, running counter to traditional Confucian attitudes toward age and youth, underscores Joshu's earnestness.

So Joshu set off on this pilgrimage and maintained his vow for the next 20 years, deepening and clarifying his understanding. Finally, at 80, he settled down in a small temple, and taught for another 40 years. He died, as we said earlier, in his 120th year.

Nansen, Joshu's teacher, was a disciple of the great Matsu, who was famously the teacher of 139 enlightened disciples. Before meeting Matsu,







KOAN COMMENTARY BY Sensei John Pulleyn



Nansen was already widely versed in the various schools and scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, and at their first meeting is said to have instantly forgotten the net of delusions and delighted in Samadhi.

There's a short talk that Nansen once gave that's recounted in Andy Ferguson's book, Zen's Chinese Heritage, that reflects a bit on this koan. Nansen addressed the monks, saying, "Dipankara Buddha said, the arising in mind of a single thought gives birth to the myriad things." Then he went on, "Why is it that phenomenal existence is empty if there is nothing within mind? And how does one explain how the myriad things arise? Isn't it as if shadowy forms differentiate emptiness? This question is like someone grasping sound and placing it in a box, or blowing into a net to fill it with air." Therefore some old worthy said, "It's not mind. It's not Buddha. It's not a thing." Incidentally, that old worthy was his own teacher, Matsu.

SO COMING BACK to our koan, let's look at this word "Way" in the phrase, "Ordinary mind is the Way." "Way" here is the Chinese word "Tao." When Buddhism came to China, the Chinese changed it, adding their own flavor. The word "Tao" was used to translate two Indian Buddhist terms, "Dharma" (the Buddha's teaching, the way things are) and "Bodhi" (enlightened mind). Both those words were rendered as "Tao" in Chinese when the sutras were translated. Zen is really in a sense an amalgam of Indian Budd- hism and Taoism, in the context of Confucianism, which accounts for the tremendous respect in China, Japan, and Korea, for one's elders. That's one aspect of Confucianism. Another is an emphasis on having an upright mind, of moral behavior, do-ing the right thing, seeking harmony and getting along with others.

So Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the Way?" and Nansen replied, "Ordinary mind is the Way." Ordinary mind is what's right here without going anywhere, without any effort, without anything added. This is so hard to wrap our minds around, that it's not something special. Our life seems so humdrum and filled with dissension and anxiety and bad vibes—our ordinary mind seems like a disaster. Many people come to practice wanting to escape that disaster and that seems pretty reasonable. But that motivation can lead us to reject what's right in front of us, to fasten on to some picture that we've created or that's been created for us. We

seek something out there, something far removed from where we are right now. Nansen says ordinary mind, right here, is the Way.

This goes against our natural understanding. We're always looking to get from here to there. We want to leave the humdrum and the tedious and get to something miraculous. But what Nansen is pointing out is that right here is miraculous. This ordinary life is Nirvana, to put it in Indian Buddhist terms. In Zen Master Hakuin's Chant in Praise of Zazen, we recite, "It's like one in water crying I thirst."

Over time, with practice, this begins to sink in. The more we do, the more we sit, the more we let go of our thoughts while we rest in our natural awareness, the more we begin to realize that what we're looking for is right here. And when we do realize it, it can galvanize us. We see that we're living in truth, that the way of the Tao is intimate and immediate. It's ordinary, it's nothing special, yet it's what we long for, our long lost home. Why can't we see it? This really gets in deep, and we feel a deepening interest in practice. We want to put our attention on what's here, and not go flying off into our speculation and ideas, worries and

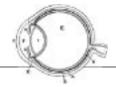
Anthony de Mello, the Jesuit priest I'm fond of quoting, brings up the example of a scientist studying the behavior of ants. He points out unlike someone who's training a dog, the scientist isn't trying to make the ants do anything. He just wants to know all about them. He's interested in them for their own sake; he doesn't have an agenda. Really, our practice is our own personal experiment, our own science project. We're totally in charge of this investigation, of how we look into our own

"ORDINARY MIND IS the Way." Well, Joshu lets that sink in, and then he says, "Shall I try to seek it?" And Nansen replies, "If you try to seek after it, you go away from it." So Joshu wants to know, how do I begin? How do I practice? How am I okay with ordinary mind being the Way? What do I do? And Nansen doesn't tell him what to do. He says, "If you seek after it, you go away from it."

Robert Aitkin, in his commentary on this koan, has a relevant story. When he and his wife lived near Tokyo in the early 60s, they practiced with Yasutani Roshi, Roshi Kapleau's primary teacher.



SENSEI JOHN PULLEYN is a teacher and co-director of the Rochester Zen Center. He has been a member since





He says, "We communicated with him surprisingly well, though he spoke no English and I spoke only broken Japanese. Still, some of our subtle questions went unanswered. When Nakagawa Soen Roshi wrote us that he would be coming to Tokyo from his temple, both of us looked forward to the chance to ask about our practice in detail. But I was sick when the day came, so my wife went by herself and asked my question, "Should I use effort or not?" She came back late in the day exhilarated as one always was after being with Soen Roshi, full of stories of her encounter. Finally I was able to ask about my question. She laughed and replied, "He said that is a very difficult question."

I love that.

THE LATE CHAN master, Sheng Yen, has perhaps the most grandmotherly take on this question. He says, "Stilling the mind is like catching a feather on a fan," talking here about the kind of pleated fan that one opens up on a hot day to wave at one's face. "Every time you move the fan, the feather is likely to be blown away. It's a delicate business to catch the feather. You have to hold the fan quite still just under the space through which the feather is sinking on its own. The feather then comes to rest on the top of the fan. You can imagine how difficult or how easy this may be—any use of force and the feather is lost. Yet once you grasp the principle it is something very easy to do. It needs patience and persistence. When practicing, do not be afraid of a distracting thought. If the body has a problem, do not be concerned with it. If the mind is worrying, put the worry down. Keep the mind on the method, waiting for the feather to sink onto the fan."

That's about as good a job as you can do to describe it, but even that is just a pointer. What are you going to do with that? Are you going to sit on the mat, thinking about the fan and the feather? So many times in my own practice I've felt I've hit on how to practice. It's very exciting. And it feels like things will go so much more smoothly from now on. This typically lasts a round or two, maybe a block of sesshin.

THERE'S ANOTHER INSTRUCTION, much more to the point and much more spare from the phenomenal Indian master and teacher Ramana Maharshi, who lived from 1879 to 1950. He said this: "Your duty is to be. And not to be this or that.

The more we sit, the more we let go of our thoughts while we rest in our natural awareness, the more we begin to realize that what we're looking for is right here.

'I am that I am' sums up the whole truth. The method is summed up in the words, be still. What does stillness mean? It means destroy yourself, because any form or shape is the cause for trouble. Give up the notion that I am so and so. All that is required to realize the Self is to be still. What can be easier than that?" Notice here, Ramana Maharshi is telling us it's easy. And other masters emphasize how difficult it is.

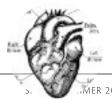
They're all right. It's not a matter of knowing or not knowing. As Nansen says, "Knowing is illusion. Not knowing is blankness."

We have a deep habit of mind to want to move from uncertainty to clarity. We want resolution. It's more than a habit. It's probably genetically programmed into us. We're built to take shortcuts, to overlook what isn't a threat or a reward. And so we look for a symbol or some sort of shorthand, instead of the thing itself.

Understand that whatever we're looking for is an illusion; it's not the thing itself. And if we just go "duh," that's not it either. This reminds me of my first dog, Nora. She loved people food. She wanted it pretty bad. And since this was our first dog and we hadn't learned our lesson yet, we would from time to time share a scrap under the table. And what happened then was surprising. If you handed a piece of food down, she'd be so excited: "Here comes the food, here comes the food!" But when you dropped it on the floor, she couldn't find it. She was so keyed up that she couldn't see what was right in front of her.

WE DON'T NEED someone to give us the answer. We need a little bit of instruction. And we need to open our mind, to see what's there. I once found something written about teaching in a blog by a teaching assistant in physics, a newly minted PhD. He said, "Every part of teaching is challenging, and that extends beyond the lecture component. For example, my philosophy about Office Hours has always been, ironically enough, to be as useless as possible. If a student comes and asks me how do you do problem number one, I ask them, 'How do you think we should do problem number one.' And it's absolutely infuriating. But by the end of office hours, they are so thankful that they struggled through it.

He continues, "My favorite physics author David Morin wrote in his recent book, Green-eyed Dragons



and Other Mathematical Monsters, that the one piece of advice he can offer about solving problems is not to look at the solutions too early. Once you see the answer you can't undo that and come up with it yourself. So don't be afraid to just sit and get stuck, and ponder, because that's when you're really figuring out what to do." We could say that's when something deeper in the mind is figuring out what to do. That is the learning process. It takes so much patience and so much faith to be stuck and not to spin off into an easy answer, not to play with images, just to sit in that deep state of not-knowing. Not the not-knowing that's blindness that Nansen points out. It's the not-knowing of Bodhidharma, who uttered arguably the three most important words in Zen: "I don't know."

THE GERMAN POET Rainer Maria Rilke said, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms, and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers which cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them. The point is to live everything; to live the questions now."

This is the heart of Zen, the original teaching. The teaching beyond words and letters, pointing directly at the mind.

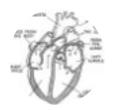
Nansen says, "If you attain to this way of no-doubt, it is as boundless as vast space. So how can there be right or wrong in the Way?" At these words Joshu was suddenly enlightened. It's a whole different dimension. This is not the tediousness of what we think of as ordinary mind, good and bad, I like it and I don't like it. I know and I don't know, two sides of one coin, possessing and not possessing. And so Nansen says, "How can there be right and wrong in the way?"

I like Sheng Yen's term for awakening: "seeing the nature." We see, but we can't really tell it to anyone else what we have seen. Elsewhere, Mumon says, "You're like a mute person who has had a dream—you know it for yourself alone."

MOVING TO THE commentary, Mumon says, "Questioned by Joshu, Nansen, like melting ice or disintegrating tile, dissolved, and could not offer a plausible explanation. Even though Joshu has come to realization, he must delve into it for another 30 years before he can understand it fully."

So, just taking that first sentence, how could Nansen offer a plausible explanation?

This is really praise by slander—Mumon's specialty. And then Mumon takes a crack at Joshu: When practicing, do not be afraid of a distracting thought. If the body has a problem, do not be concerned with it. If the mind is worrying, put the worry down.



"Though Joshu has come to realization, he must delve into it for another 30 years before he can understand it fully." Such an important point in Zen practice—there is no finish line. You can't have some sort of insight (and for most people, the insight we're talking about can be faint)—you can't take that and bottle it. And if you do, you're doing damage to yourself and anyone you try to help. Ordinary mind is the way, not your special experience. So simple. Throw out everything. See it, meet it, be it fully. Let it go.

Another 30 years before he can understand it fully. What do we mean by understand? Joshu remained, as we said, with Nansen until the latter's death, then traveled on pilgrimage for another 20 years. And only began teaching at the age of 80.

FINALLY, THE VERSE: "Hundreds of flowers in spring, the moon in autumn, a cool breeze in summer, and snow in winter. If your mind is not clouded with unnecessary things, no season is too much for you." Life just keeps bubbling up. It's wonderful when we're there with it.

Hundreds of flowers. Moon in autumn. Cool breeze in summer, snow in winter. Zen master Ummon said, "Every day is a good day."

Wet and rainy in spring, cloudy sky in autumn, baking hot in summer, freezing in winter.

WHAT PRACTICE SHOWS us—what we learn through repeated practice—is how to move freely with conditions, as they arise, without separation. Not keeping score. It's wonderful. Everything lights up. People light up. We can just move with it. I'll finish with a little account from Matthieu Riccard, a Frenchman. He's the son of a famous philosopher and is now a Tibetan Buddhist monk. Riccard recounts a conference where a Japanese scientist (who was studying the benefits of laughter on diabetes, of all things) made a presentation. The Dalai Lama was present at this conference, and the scientist ended with a question to the Dalai Lama, "Your Holiness, can you tell us what was the happiest moment of your life?"

"A silence full of expectation fell in the room, which was composed of a dozen scientists, some Buddhist scholars and meditators, and 100 guests. The Dalai Lama paused for a while, looked up in space, as if seeking an answer deep within himself, and then suddenly he leaned forward and said in a resounding voice, 'I think, Now!' Everyone broke into a joyful laughter, and the meeting was adjourned. The Japanese scientist was himself laughing heartily." ///

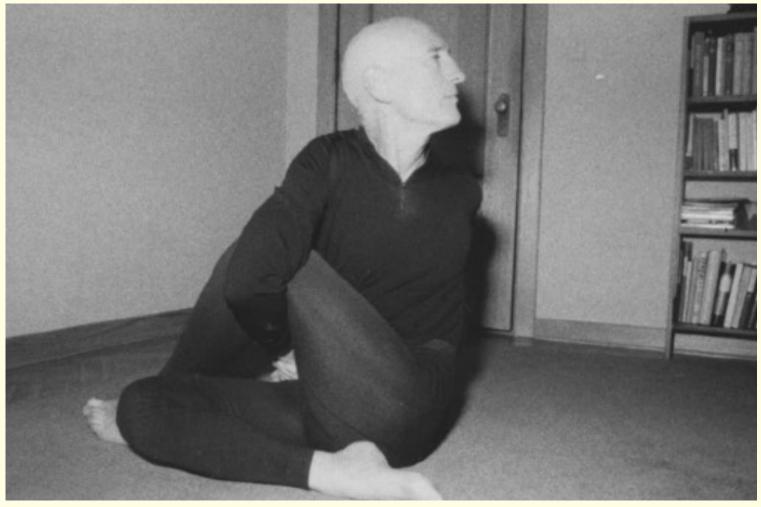
> FROM THE ARCHIVE

WHEN HE FIRST BEGAN teaching in the US, Philip Kapleau was not an advocate of yoga. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who single-handedly founded the mindfulness movement, remembers a memorable encounter with Roshi Kapleau when he gave a lecture at MIT. Kabat-Zinn sought him out after the talk and expressed his interest in coming to Rochester. Roshi replied by asking him if he had a meditation practice. Kabat-Zinn replied, "No, but I do yoga." "Well," snapped Roshi Kapleau, "You'll have to give that up."

It wasn't too long after that that Roshi Kapleau began to practice yoga under the tutelage of Ruth Sandberg, an influential early member of the Center who also taught yoga to the staff. For those who are bothered by pain in the limbs and back while sitting, yoga can be an invaluable adjunct to Zen practice. As you can see from these 1978 snapshots, Roshi Kapleau became quite proficient.









to the

edge

of

knowing

ON OCTOBER 14, 2012, FELIX BAUMGARTNER FELL FROM SPACE.

HE PLUNGED FROM THE STRATOSPHERE AT A SPEED of 843.6 mph from 127,851 feet above New Mexico. As a renowned parachutist, falling toward earth was a familiar sensation for him but this adventure represented unique challenges—challenges that this article will explore as a metaphor for our practice.

In 2005, Baumgartner started working with a team of experts in the field of skydiving and space exploration and sponsor Red Bull on what was, at the time, the highest skydive ever made. How do you get a man safely into the stratosphere and then make him fall faster than the speed of sound toward earth?

After exploring various options, the team decided to bring Baumgartner into the stratosphere in a capsule suspended under a helium balloon. The balloon was the largest balloon ever flown, with a length of 33 football pitches and a height twice as tall as the Saturn V rocket that was used for the Apollo mission to the Moon. It was also 10 times thinner than a sandwich bag.

Attached to the balloon was a pressurized capsule designed and built by an aerospace firm in California. The capsule, six feet in diameter, was crammed with displays, instrument panels, cameras, and a seat for the pilot. At the sides of the door, there were two handrails that allowed Baumgartner to stand on the edge of the capsule 23 miles above earth (airliners cruise at only 6.8 miles above ground) before falling from it. The stratosphere's air pressure is a measly 0.5 psi at that allitude. That

deadly absence of gas could boil the fluid in Baumgartner's body. To avoid that, the capsule's pressure sphere was made of fiberglass and epoxy strong enough to maintain a pressure of 8 psi—about what you would find atop Alaska's highest mountains. Before Baumgartner would jump out, the air pressure inside the capsule would drop to about 3.5 psi, which is lower than the pressure at the top of Mount Everest. At that point, Baumgartner would depend solely on his pressurized space suit.

Falling seems straightforward, but the falling Baumgartner attempted required lots of practice, patience, commitment, and—hardest of all for Baumgartner—giving up control and trusting thoroughly the process.

During practice and testing, Baumgartner was forced to stay in his spacesuit, seated on a lazy chair, completely isolated from his surroundings, sometimes for up to seven hours. The spacesuit's purpose was to isolate him from extreme stratospheric temperatures. Without the pressure suit, Baumgartner's tissues would swell up and his blood would start to boil.

Being in the spacesuit represented one of Baumgartner's most unexpected challenges. His relationship with his suit declined with every minute he spent in it. "The mental side was definitely the most difficult," said Baumgartner. "I wasn't claustro-

TEXT BY Desiree Jaeger-Fine PHOTOGRAPHS BY Benoit Duchatelet



phobic but once the visor is closed, you're completely separated from the outside world and alone with your thoughts. After just a few hours, sitting starts to hurt and no matter how you adjust, it keeps hurting. Everyone is outside talking and having a good time and you're stuck in the suit. All you can do is breathe. You're totally by yourself. And the only thing that you can hear is your mind."

Baumgartner's aversion towards the pressure suit became so strong that he could not even be in the same room as the suit. He eventually left the project for several months, during which the team hired a test pilot to continue testing. No one believed Baumgartner would return. In the meantime, though, he started working with a sports psychologist who helped him change his perspective. After five months, Baumgartner was able to return to testing.

Joseph Kittinger, who fell from space in 1960, was Baumgartner's Sensei during the entire mission. Baumgartner said: "You want somebody who knows what you are going through because he has been there himself." Facing many weak moments, Baumgartner credited his mentor with achieving the right balance between guiding him and giving him space. "He knew when the fire was on and when all I needed was a push."

Multiple attempts at mission launch failed due to unfavorable conditions. To launch a thin balloon with human cargo, weather and atmospheric pressure play a crucial role, something no scientist in the world could control. After years of preparation and practice, all the team could do was sit and wait for the conditions to be just right. Two missions were aborted after Baumgartner had already spent six hours in his suit because of unfavorable weather conditions.

After seven years of ups and downs, the team was finally ready to attempt the ultimate fall. The capsule was launched from Roswell International Air Center at 9:30 MDT on October 14, 2012, after years of practice, test jumps, failures, and setbacks. The balloon ascent went smoothly, and the entire team felt that after years of research and practice, the conditions were finally coming together to produce the greatest fall of all time. Baumgartner spent three hours in his six-foot wide capsule, patiently waiting to ascend to the target altitude. His mentor communicated with him frequently to make sure Baumgartner was on track. "If it gets out of control, just go back to basics," Kittinger reminded him. After reaching his target height, Baumgartner had to run through a 40-step checklist before leaving the capsule. After the final four steps—depressurize the capsule, inflate the suit, open the door, and

disconnect from the oxygen supply—Baumgartner stood face to face with the unknown. No human ever broke the speed of sound without the safety of a fuselage. Once he stood at the edge, there was no turning back. Once Baumgartner left the capsule, engulfed by blackness, he could not reenter it even if he wanted to. His only way home was to jump.

Did Baumgartner think of going back into the capsule? The size of the capsule may have been small and limiting but it provided a familiar comfort up there in the dark void. Outside the capsule, there lay the unknown—the vast expanse of space in which Baumgartner was not in control. Surely the capsule, in which he had some sense of control, seemed more appealing to him. But then, again, the only way home was to get out of the capsule.

Baumgartner decided and after uttering the words, "I'm going home now," he let go.

One of the most dangerous aspects of the mission was the risk of Baumgartner spinning out of control during his descent, a common phenomenon for objects falling from extreme altitudes. The slightest movement of his body when plummeting from the stratosphere into denser layers of air could have thrown Baumgartner into an uncontrollable death spin. Because Baumgartner was in a vacuum, there was no atmospheric pressure to stop him from spinning, so any input he would have made into the fall would have backfired. The slightest lean left or right or movement one way or another would lead to a continuous spin. "You are at the mercy of how you step off the platform," said Baumgartner. If his body had rotated around the legs, it could have led to a redout. If his body had rotated around the upper body, it could have led to a blackout.

Because of that, he had to practice the art of non-doing. Baumgartner did not jump into space; he leaned into it, a move that had to be practiced repeatedly. When you look at images right after his "fall," his arms are loose, knees slightly bent. His suit was not fluttering since there was no air friction. It looked like Baumgartner was unmoving in a giant ocean. There was nothing for him to do. He could only be. One of the most important aspects of the entire mission required Baumgartner to let go and do nothing.



Baumgartner's experience has many lessons for our practice.

When we sit on our mat, we are by ourselves, just as Baumgartner was every time he donned his spacesuit. Like him, "the only thing that [we] can hear is [our] mind." For Baumgartner, the spacesuit



DESIREE JAEGER-FINE, a novice priest at the Rochester Zen Center, studied law in Germany before coming to the U.S., where she received her Master of Laws degree and was admitted as a lawyer in New York State. She is the author of several books and numerous articles. In 2021, she moved from New York City to Rochester to be on staff at RZC.

meant giving up control, something he was never comfortable doing. Sitting requires of us the same kind of surrender.

Just as Baumgartner stood at the edge, yearning to return to the relative safety of his capsule, we often stand at the "edge of knowing" only to retreat into our capsule—the capsule with memories long past and hopes of futures that will never come; the capsule with our carefully labeled buttons and checklists that give us the appearance of control but in fact are limiting; the capsule we desperately continue to furnish even as we desperately try to

The capsule in which Baumgartner ascended to his jumping-off point is like the mind that helps us to seek out Zen practice. Like Baumgartner's capsule, the mind is not our enemy—it has its use. But just like Baumgartner had to leave his capsule behind, there comes a time at which we must leave the mind behind. Home—for Baumgartner, the earth; for Zen practitioners, our true nature—is beyond the capsule, beyond thoughts.

To return home, the capsule was of no use to Baumgartner; to return home, he had to leave it behind. In the same way, to "return" to our true nature, we must learn to leave our thoughts alone. The idea of "cutting off the oxygen supply," of starving the "I" of the only thing it really is—thoughts —is scary.

Just as Baumgartner was steered and gently pushed by his psychologist and his mentor, we must follow the guidance of our teachers and their patient reminders to return to basics. Those reminders must shape our practice even when we are tucked into our spacesuits—alone on the mat. Do we notice when thoughts emerge and return to the practice, or do we double down on a stream of thoughts—the ones in which the "I" berates itself for failing in our practice? That stream of thoughts is the very retreating into the capsule. Only when we return to the practice will we find ourselves at the edge of the capsule, alongside Baumgartner.

Any mission requires the right conditions, and there comes the point where the entire team has done its part, and only the universe can do the rest. Baumgartner's team was waiting for the right weather and air pressure; nothing in their power could speed up this natural process. And so is it with our practice. Insights require the right conditions. "Our" job is to notice and return to the practice; the universe will do the rest. No amount of willing it to happen will help. We surrender to the process. That's all we are asked to do.

When Baumgartner left the capsule, he did not retreat; he could not retreat. Instead, he let go of the handrails and fell, loose and free, engaging his oft-practiced art of non-doing. So, too, must we as Zen practitioners work on the art of non-doing and have faith that only by completely letting go will we "return" home.

When Baumgartner fell, he was falling toward earth—a familiar place, in fact, the only place he knew. When Zen practitioners let go, we may feel like we are falling toward someplace unfamiliar and unknown.

Many of us come to Zen practice out of a sense of dissatisfaction or suffering. But that is not the only reason. We all retain a memory of our eternity within ourselves, and it is for this reason that we come to practice. Just like the Big Bang left an echo in the universe in the form of cosmic background radiation, so does the echo of our true nature reverberate in our everyday mind. Our homecoming is a return, not a discovery. No, it is an unveiling. In truth, it is not even that.

While hurling toward space faster than the speed of sound, Baumgartner was very much falling. But in our case, can it be called falling if there is nothing in relation to which we are falling? Are we truly falling if that very fall has no end to it? When we "fall," the entire universe falls with us. We are not falling in relation to something, nor are we headed toward something. Baumgartner was falling in time and space. His fall had a distance between two points and a duration between two events. Neither is true for our "falling." Our falling has neither duration nor distance. We remain suspended in eternity. We are eternity, meeting itself by itself and through itself. When everything happens, nothing does. In fact, the mind does not return to its original condition, it never left. We never left home, so we can never return. We just need to stop veiling ourselves with our own manifestations.

But in order to help us remember what we know to be true all along but have simply forgotten, we speak of letting go, of returning, of falling.

Baumgartner landed safely in New Mexico after breaking three world records on his way down: the highest free fall, the highest manned balloon flight, and the first man to break the speed of sound in free fall.

Next time when we stand at the edge of our capsule, on the edge of knowing, we can remember Baumgartner and his moment at the edge of space. Maybe next time, just like him, we can appreciate that there is no turning back, let go of the handrails, suspend input, and.... ///



The Columbarium Project becomes the Memorial Path

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, a task force has been working on a plan for a columbarium (receptacle for ashes of the deceased) at Chapin Mill. As the plans began to take shape, it became obvious that it would be important to survey the Sangha regarding if and how members have been planning for their own deaths: to measure interest in the project, to understand where members are at in the planning process, and to explore options for the use of the columbarium and its surroundings.

A link to the survey was sent to all active members of the Sangha (460) in March of 2023, and 141 responded—an excellent response rate considering the topic. Of the respondents, only 11 didn't finish the survey, which is an indication of high interest among those members to provide input for the planning process.

Some of the highlights of the survey results

- Good participation from members both inside and outside the Rochester area
- Older members were more interested than
- 69% of members in the Rochester area had thought about having their remains at Chapin Mill versus 39% of out-of-town members

The concept evoked an array of positive emotional responses. A sampling:

- "The Zen Center and Chapin Mill is my spiritual home."
- "It inspires practice."
- "It could be a contemplative place very supportive of Zen practice, much the way Roshi Kapleau's grave is today."
- "Laying this body in final rest among my longtime Sangha friends."
- "I think that it is a beautiful idea! It gives me a peaceful feeling thinking about it."
- "Sesshin forever!"

Concerns included questions about the design and its impact on Chapin Mill. Members were concerned about the visual impact of "machine-made substances" (like metal urns made to last) on the property, about wheelchair accessibility, about the logistics of making sure one's remains would be placed there, and about "practical concerns like cost, upkeep, restrictions regarding flowers, flags, ornaments" and how the project would scale up over the years.

Despite the concerns, 44% of respondents said they are extremely or very interested, and 28% said they are not very or not at all



interested. Not surprisingly, high interest is slightly lower (34%) among younger members and those living out of the area (36%).

A theme that became evident in the research findings was that many members are interested in other methods of disposing of their remains, including scattering their ashes (versus being stored in a niche in a wall), composting, and green burials [note that full-body burials are not legal at Chapin Mill]. Given this diversity of interests, it became obvious that the original concept which includes only a columbarium needed to be expanded to include scattering of ashes and composting, which has recently become legal in New York State.

Accordingly, the Columbarium Project became the Memorial Path, highlighting the pathway that will wind through the property following the curve of the columbarium wall. Consideration is being given to planting a meadow with native flowers to provide space for scattering of ashes and composting, and the concept drawings will be revised to incorporate the feedback received in the research.

From the beginning of the task force, Eric Higbee, a Zen Center member who is a landscape architect in Seattle, has been key to the project, providing research into columbarium design, landscaping considerations, and concept sketches that evolved into the ones shown here. Eric graciously agreed that from this point forward it makes sense to engage a landscape architect who is geographically closer to Chapin Mill and who can oversee construction when it happens. At their recent meeting, the trustees approved an initial contract with Peter Fernandez, a landscape architect who is President of Carter Van Dyke Associates (cvda.com) with offices in Doylestown, Pennsylvania and Naples, New York. Peter has deep roots with the Zen Center as his late mother, Audrey Fernandez, was a

founding member of the Center, and he has many fond memories of Roshi Kapleau and other early participants in the life of the Center. In contemplating the Memorial Path project, Peter wrote:

"First, it is an honor to be asked to assist the Zen Center in the design and construction of the proposed columbarium at Chapin Mill. I have been connected to the Zen Center most of my life. An early memory is touring the Buckingham Street Center after it was purchased. Over the years I knew many Zen Center members through my mother from

afternoon teas, evening meals, holiday gatherings and picnics at our property in the Bristol Hills.

"After high school I obtained degrees in ornamental horticulture, environmental science, and landscape architecture. The profession ties my love of art with stewardship of the environment. After working at an engineering firm in Rochester, I obtained my Master of Landscape Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and studied under Ian McHarg. I'm currently based in Doylestown, PA.

"For over the past 30 years I have designed expansions and provided construction administration for eighteen National Cemeteries for

the Department of Veterans Affairs. I felt that even though I did not serve, it was my way of respecting those that did serve (including my father) and their families. The Chapin Mill columbarium project is also my way of giving back to the Zen Center as the Zen Center was a large part of defining who I am. And I understand those who say from dust I came to dust I go leaving no marks. That's why a goal is to make the columbarium project discrete and tied into the landscape along the line of the concept sketches."



HEKIGANRUKU (BLUE CLIFF RECORD) CASE #21

A monk asked Chimon, "How is it when the lotus flower has not yet emerged from the water?"

Chimon said, "A lotus flower." Then the monk asked again, "What about after it has emerged from the water?"

Chimon answered, "Lotus leaves."

FOR THE BENEFIT of those who are unfamiliar with

koan practice, "koan" is a Japanese word that means public case or precedent. Koans typically take the form of a short story, a verbal exchange between one or more monks, or with a master, or an interaction between masters. As a method of Zen practice, they date back to 10th-century China. So, although they have been translated into many different languages, they can reflect a distinctly Chinese cultural context, especially the ones that involve elaborate stories.

Koans are designed to bewilder us, to get us to go beyond our ordinary way of perceiving the world. They require us to let go of our habits of intellectualizing and rationalizing. Consider, for example, the koan attributed to Zen master Hakuin, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" If we resort to employing logic or dualistic thinking, we're bound to get stuck.

When working on a koan, we simply need to get intimate with the question for its own sake, without any expectations. And, in the process, we inevitably confront the muck of the mind, especially when working on a first koan such as "What is Mu?" or "What is this?" When I was working on Mu, at times, I encountered feelings of frustration, confusion,

self-pity, desperation, and anger. These and other kinds of passing mental or emotional states are part of the process of dredging the muck of the mind. It involves a process of continuously letting go of thoughts and judgments, including our tendency to grasp for answers outside of ourselves. Although we might be inclined to turn this process into a deficiency, thinking that we're failing at our koan practice, the truth is, even when our deluded mind is operating, we're a Buddha, just as we are in any number of conditions we experience.

THIS PARTICULAR CASE involves a short exchange between a monk and a master. The master's name is Chimon, which is a Japanese translation of his Chinese name, Zhimen, so I'll switch to the original. A monk asked Zhimen, "How is it when the lotus flower has not yet emerged from the water?" Zhimen said, "A lotus flower." Then the monk asked again, "What about after it has emerged from the water?" Zhimen answered, "Lotus leaves."

According to Zen's Chinese Heritage by Andy Ferguson, Zhimen lived during the 10th century and died in the year 1031, which places him in the Song Dynasty. He lived near the modern-day city of Chengdu, China, and his name, "Zhimen," is derived from a mountain, which was a common

KOAN COMMENTARY BY Sensei Dhara Kowal



naming convention at the time. The temple he taught at was called Zhimen Temple and it was located on a mountain named Zhimen. In Ferguson's book, there are a few short dialogues involving Zhimen, and here's one of them:

"Zen master Zhimen entered the hall and addressed the monks, saying, 'All of you put your staffs over your shoulder and go traveling, leaving one monastery and traveling to the next. How many different types of monasteries do you say there are? It's either a sandalwood monastery surrounded by sandalwood, or it's a thistle monastery surrounded by thistles. Or it could be a thistle monastery surrounded by sandalwood, or a sandalwood monastery surrounded by thistles. Of these four types of monasteries, in which type is each of you willing to spend your life? If you don't find a place to pass your life securely then you're just wearing out your sandals for no reason, and eventually the day will come when the King of Hell will take away all of your sandal money!" In Chinese mythology, the King of Hell judges the fate of the dead.

In the above exchange, Zhimen is referring to a habit that some monks had of going from one temple to another, touring the country, meeting people, and comparing and contrasting various teachers. That said, of course, there's nothing inherently wrong about going on a pilgrimage; they can be deeply enriching to one's practice. But if you're just traveling around to see the sights, which is the phenomenon that Zhimen is describing, it's not genuine practice. It's looking outward rather than inward.

There are probably some current-day Zen practitioners who do the same, hopping around from one Zen center or monastery to another. They participate in the training environment long enough to get a sense of the place and the people, but not long enough to settle into serious practice and commit to working with a teacher.

FOR HOUSEHOLDERS, a variation of this scenario might be habitually finding ways to distract oneself and keep busy. We can fill our lives with so much stuff, places to go, things to do, boxes to check off, Netflix episodes to watch, and so on. We might even lament that we just don't have time to sit, no time to devote ourselves to daily zazen. This kind of patterned behavior can be seen as an avoidance or escape mechanism.

If we take a closer look, though, we might discover that our perceived lack of time is actually a matter of the choices that we're making, rather than solely a product of our conditions. One of the great virtues

of practicing with others, as we do for formal sittings and in sesshin, whether in-person or online, is that there's a structure in place that helps us to avoid that trap of negotiating whether or not to sit or for how long. It's a support system that comes with being part of a Sangha. There's so much support and inspiration that can be found by practicing with our Dharma siblings.

WE CAN ALL FEEL grateful to not only have taken up Zen practice, but to have taken advantage of the opportunity to get deeply rooted in it. Just like the process by which a lotus flower comes to be, practice involves getting rooted, working our way through mucky water, and opening up. It's no coincidence that Buddha figures are often portrayed seated upon an open lotus flower. In Buddhism, the lotus flower is a symbol of our True Nature. When a lotus emerges from the mucky water and unfurls its magnificent pink or white petals, the petals are bright and pristine, unstained by the mud that they emerged from. Spotless.

In the plant world, the lotus is recognized for its ability to adapt and thrive in challenging conditions. Lotus seeds germinate at the bottom of ponds and other bodies of water as deep as eight feet. They're resilient plants in terms of being able to adapt to changing temperatures and rise to up through the muck. Just like a lotus, we need to work through the muck and the mire. It's part of the process. If we feel like we're just sludging through never-ending thoughts and judgments, then we're right where we need to be. We're on the Path.

IN THIS KOAN, we can also see that it has a before and after dimension: before and after the lotus emerges from the mud and opens its exquisite flower. The monk asks, "How is it when the lotus flower has not yet emerged from the water?" And Zhimen responds, "A lotus flower." Even before the flower bud rises up through the muddy water and the petals unfold, it's already a lotus. It doesn't matter that it hasn't yet come to the surface and bloomed. It's still a perfect lotus.

We recite in Master Hakuin's Chant in Praise for Zazen, "From the very beginning, all beings are Buddha." But until we experience it directly for ourselves through the process of practice, we think and act in ways that deny it. Zen master Dogen once wrote, "Although the Dharma is abundantly present in each person, it isn't manifested without practice." It's not real until we actualize it. And yet, it's a lotus flower all the same, whether we perceive it or not.



SENSEI DHARA 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.



We can all feel grateful to not only have taken up Zen practice, but to have taken advantage of the opportunity to get deeply rooted in it.

Then the monk asks another question: "What about after it has emerged from the water?" What about that? When we do emerge from the muck, we realize that each and every one of us is equally Buddha; already a lotus flower with no exceptions. The monk's question is like asking what happens when a Buddha becomes a Buddha? Or what happens when a human becomes a human?

Zhimen responds to the monk's question by saying, "Lotus leaves." So, before we were a lotus flower, and after, we're just the leaves. No magnificent blossom? There's a famous saying in Zen from the Soto teacher Roshi Kodo Sawaki: "Zazen is good for nothing." We don't gain a thing through practice.

There's also old Zen saying that goes like this: "In the beginning mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. Later on, mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers. And still later. mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers.' What we lose is the notion that there's me over here and you over there. But even when we do see through the delusion of self and other, there's still more work to do. Practice is unending. We need to drop our notions of before and after, enlightened and not enlightened. These are just thoughts, mental obstructions that keep us stuck in the mud.

How do we get out of the mud? We need to go straight through it, just like the lotus.

IN SUFI FOLKLORE, there's a story about a flower garden created by Mullah Nasruddin, a character that appears in thousands of tales. Nasruddin wanted to create a beautiful garden. He prepared the soil, planted the flower seeds, and devotedly tended to the garden. However, when the flowers bloomed, he discovered that his garden was overbrimming not just with the beautiful flowers he had carefully chosen and nurtured, but dandelions -weeds! He sought the advice of gardeners from all over and tried every suggestion offered to eliminate the weeds. None of them worked; the dandelions kept coming back. Out of desperation, he then trekked all the way to the capital to seek guidance from the royal gardener at the sheik's palace, who would surely know what to do.

The royal gardener was a very wise old man, and he recommended various methods to rid the garden of dandelions. But Nasruddin had already tried them all. The two men sat together in silence for some time, and finally the gardener turned to him and said, "Well then, I suggest you learn to love them."

Learn to love the practice. Love the question. Love this present moment just as it is. ///

WHAT



CAN

YOU ASK FOR

TEXT BY Jonathan Hager

TRUEMAN

FIRST ASKED ME TO GIVE

THIS

the year before the pandemic, the before times. And as I was in the midst of a suicidal depression at that point, I didn't think it was a good time. So I said no. And then I was approached again this past fall. And I said, Yes.

ND THEN I GOT COVID, so it got canceled again. But Trueman persisted. Despite all the signs of the universe telling him I shouldn't give this talk, here I am.

I'm going to talk not just about how I how I got here, because that's a relatively short story, but a little bit about my time here. My struggles with the practice, my wanting to leave the practice, not leaving the practice. I know that the in thing on college campuses these days is trigger warnings, so here are my trigger warnings: there's going to be a lot of talk about anxiety, depression, cancer, suicidal thoughts, and the death of a young baby. I'll probably cry. I might need a hug at the end. But it's also going to be a talk about resilience and hope, courage and healing, a lot of healing.

We'll start at the beginning. My birth was a little traumatic. I was I was an emergency C-section because the cord was wrapped around my neck. As I've spent the last 10 years staring at a wall investigating myself and wondering why do I have so much anxiety,it came to me: well, maybe because I almost died when I was a baby. So I called up my parents and asked what I was like as a kid. My mother told me that, in addition to the emergency C-section, she thought I was a near-death from SIDS. She walked over to my crib one time and I was limp, placid, and not responsive. She's convinced if she hadn't been there at that moment I might not be here giving this talk. I also asked my mom and dad to give me a one-word description of me as a young child. And they said, "Easygoing." I think they felt that I was easygoing because I was obedient. I was always a good kid. I wasn't in trouble. I wasn't rebellious. My big moment of rebellion in high school was when my parents were out of town for the weekend and I commandeered our classic deadhead Volkswagen camper. This was back in the early 8os. I got as many friends as I could packed into that camper with a keg of beer, driving around the suburbs of Cincinnati

from party to party. But that was that was the extent of my rebellion. I was very anxious. I had a lot of social phobia. Still do. This talk is not easy for me.

We moved around a lot. I lived in Baltimore until I was about seven or eight and we moved to Florida. And I was there until through freshman year of high school. So I had to move again in the middle of high school, which is also not fun. You know, losing friends and trying to make new friends especially if you're anxious and socially phobic. And then I was in Cincinnati for three years for high school and I went off to college in Philadelphia. I was a high achiever. I got good grades. I never got in trouble. Part of that was the fact that my father was the assistant principal at our school. I always avoided him like the plague.

THE REST

of my upbringing was pretty unremarkable. It was a middle-class upbringing. My dad was a teacher, my mom a nurse. Other than that cord being wrapped around my neck as a baby there were no major traumas that I was ever aware of. And yet there was always this anxiety and social phobia.

OW SELF-ESTEEM WAS a huge part of all this, and I'm sure it was a driver for the $m{4}$ studying and the good grades and being a people-pleaser. Off to medical school, and again I was a high achiever, but it didn't help my low self-esteem.

My religious upbringing was Episcopalian; my father was Episcopalian and my mother was a lapsed Catholic. I would go sometimes with my mother to the Unitarian Church and sometimes with my father to the Episcopal Church. I had mixed feelings about church growing up; I didn't really want to be in church but I did like the ambiance. My father still to this day gets into some old man rants about modern churches because he loves the old classic cathedrals and I do, too. Now having been to Europe and been to some amazing cathedrals, I walk into those places and I have a feeling of awe and safety and comfort. But I was bored in church a lot.

I was an altar boy until middle school and in the choir, but then in high school kind of dropped off and that's when the doubts about God started, noticing things that just didn't make sense to me. Suffering just didn't make sense. I couldn't accept the explanations that I was given in church. So I faded away from it. In college I took some philosophy classes, again looking for answers that a lot of us come here for. Philosophy classes, as you know, raise more questions than they do answers. And you just spend a lot of time thinking, thinking, thinking. My first exposure to Buddhism was in a Buddhist philosophy class in college. I don't remember now why I picked it and I don't remember a lot about the class. The professor was this gorgeous

right mix of protons and electrons and neutrons. So that's why I wrote that paper on biology and Buddhism that was trying to try to synthesize these two things to get to some kind of understanding. But of course, I didn't get that understanding. As we know, there are many theoretical physicists who are still searching. And that's what we're here doing, just in a very different way than I used to do.

THROUGHOUT COLLEGE, I went from doubting God to being agnostic to saying for the first time, I'm an atheist. I was hedging my bets and, wanting to be on both sides of the fence in case I was wrong.



Indian man with flowing hair and very expensive suits. He just kind of floated around the room. And there was a cute girl in there that I liked a lot, too. So that was part of the reason I liked the class. But my final exam paper for that class was on biology and Buddhism. I would love to be able to find that paper now, because I don't have any recollection of what I wrote it about. But I was looking in both realms, essentially, for understanding.

Academically, I was always a math and science kid. I'm a very linear thinker, A goes to B goes to C. And I hated poetry, oh boy, I just could not do poetry. So I was looking for answers in science. And at first it made sense: geometry, you know, just made so much sense. And then as I got to higher level math, things got confusing again. That hit the limits of my innate intelligence. Same thing with physics. Biology seemed to make more sense. And part of what's been fantastic about this journey is I've circled back to realizing it's an illusion of knowledge that science was going to answer all of this for me. You could explain it all with just the But then you go to medical school, and you just don't have time for any of this stuff, right? Even though we spend our whole day dealing with life and death, you don't think about it in those terms. So you're incredibly busy. You put these things to the side. The first day of medical school, I met my future wife. So you're in love and you're trying to study... good luck with that. So all these existential questions got put on the back burner except the wanting to understand.

I finished medical school. My wife and I decided to settle down in Rochester and do our residency here. We started having kids about a year after our residencies ended. Religion popped into my head again when we had kids. I'm thinking, well, I have to do something here; I'm responsible now for the development of two beautiful daughters. So I started going back, taking them a little bit to a couple of different churches around town, seeing if I could reenter even if even if I still didn't really believe in the God thing. There were a lot of benefits to churches, even if you don't believe in the God thing;



JONATHAN HAGER is surviving cancer as a husband, father of two daughters, and retired physician who currently serves as Chair of the Board of RZC.

it's a lot of great messaging, a great community. Just the atmosphere, that feeling of being in a sacred space never left me. But my wife is totally non-religious. So there wasn't a lot of interest on her part in pursuing this with our kids and it faded out a bit.

SO WE WERE LIVING our lives, working and taking care of the kids, and in 2009 I woke up in the middle of the night with the worst pain I've ever had. It was like somebody was stabbing me with a knife in my ribcage, in the right side of my ribs by my liver. And I couldn't do any anything. No position was comfortable. I had to sit absolutely still or it would be like somebody stabbed me with a knife. I couldn't even breathe. I just took these teeny tiny breaths because it hurt so much. And I ended up in the emergency room. They scanned me and gave me blood tests. There was no real explanation and the pain went away. A few months later, it came back. Again, no real explanation, and I just pushed on, didn't really pay much attention, because I seemed to be pretty okay. I was tired in between the episodes; that would last a few days. I didn't get good explanations from the doctors I went to. And you know, I started lying down when I would come home from work. And I just said, that's normal, you're working hard, you have two kids. Only in retrospect do I know that wasn't normal.

This goes on for almost two years. I go back and forth for a variety of tests. And yeah, no answers. But I'm getting worse. And I think back at that powerful level of denial that goes on in the human psyche. Because I was a very competitive squash player, I was playing in national tournaments. And the last tournament I played in before the big day was in New York City. I remember I was lying down on a couch trying to get some rest in between my matches because I was so tired. And yet, I kept playing. (That stubbornness might have helped me along the way with my Zen practice.) My doctors concluded I was probably having some kind of spasms in my gallbladder that were irritating my diaphragm and causing these pains. So I went in for routine gallbladder surgery. I woke up in the recovery room and found my wife, with tears pouring out of her, telling me that I had a liver full of cancer. Being a doctor, I knew of no disease, no cancer, in which you have a dozen tumors in your liver, that is not uniformly fatal.

SO THAT'S THE SHORT answer of how I got to Zen right there. Fortunately, there was stuff I didn't know. And stuff that most oncologists don't know. The first week or 10 days, of course were pure hell,

The part of this story that I think is really relevant for me and Zen practice is not just the existential trauma, which is obvious. But for me, this was about self- discovery, self-agency, listening to experts, but also knowing when to listen, knowing when to ignore.

because, we didn't know what kind of cancer it was. They thought about gallbladder cancer, liver cancer, pancreatic cancer, and none of those are good. And fortunately, there was a very smart pathologist who determined I had an exceptionally rare type of sarcoma. Sarcomas are cancers of the connective tissues. So even though the tumors are in my liver, it's not the liver cells that are cancerous. It's the blood vessel in my liver that has the cancer.

We got this diagnosis and went on the internet. Okay, average life expectancy is five years. Well, that's better than what I thought, and so now I started a search because no one at University of Rochester had ever seen this cancer before. Nobody in Buffalo Roswell had ever seen it before. I'm fortunate that I had the resources and the ability to get all the top-notch medical opinions. Went to Boston, went to Pittsburgh. And the part of this story that I think is really relevant for me and Zen practice is not just, of course, the existential trauma, which is obvious. But for me, this was about self-discovery, self-agency, listening to experts, but also knowing when to listen, knowing when to ignore. At Harvard, they wanted to put me on hardcore chemo. I was nervous about this, I'd seen some things online about some softer stuff that might really work. And I found an oncologist at MD Anderson in Houston, Texas, one of his research papers. You have to do all this research yourself. You know, it's given me a whole new appreciation of being a doctor and how hard it is to be a patient. Because you really have to advocate for yourself. The doctors are so busy that they do what they know. And the guys at Harvard know chemotherapy, and that's where the conversation ended. But I didn't want to just go with that because those are toxic drugs. So I emailed Dr. Ravi in Houston.

I'm getting choked up just thinking about how fortunate I am that this man had compassion. Think about this. You get a random email from a patient in New York State saying I have this cancer. I can remember exactly where I was when I heard from him. I was driving my daughter to Hochstein for a cello lesson. I'm in the in the car, the phone rings, and it's Dr. Ravi at eight o'clock at night on a Tuesday calling me and saying I want to talk to you about your cancer.

I'm fully convinced if he had not called me I would not be here right now. Because I would have done the chemo at Boston and I'm sure there's no way I would be still alive here 11 years later. Because it doesn't cure this disease; it just keeps it at bay a little bit, but then it weakens your immune system. And Dr. Ravi had the wisdom to say let's just do some gentle stuff and watch and wait and be patient. You don't have to do anything. Just sit there. He didn't say that; that's my little Zen tweak. So I hadn't come to Zen yet. I was still desperately trying not to die.

Obviously I was very depressed, and couldn't work. And even Dr. Ravi said I have no cure for you. I was always quite open to alternative medicine. So, I sought out acupuncture. An emergency room doctor I knew had left traditional medicine completely and set up an acupuncture and Chinese herbal practice. So I started going to him and getting acupuncture three times a week, and then taking the herbs, and he had me doing the kind of Qi Gong exercises myself, and that's starting to get into the meditation realm. And he was having me visualize things, and I said, I guess I really need to learn more about meditation. I had been to Open Sky Yoga before my diagnosis. And I remembered, oh yeah, there's that Zen Center next to the yoga place. I'll call up the Zen Center.

YOU KNOW, I HAD no choice but to practice. There are a lot of people that are coming to Zen out of the pandemic and trying it out and it's hard, it's difficult. As we say on the Zen Center website, it's simple but not easy. But for me, I had no choice. I have, as Deborah Zaretsky likes to say, the sword of Damocles hanging over me. The motivation was forced upon me. I suppose I could have turned to drugs or alcohol, but fortunately I didn't. I have tried to escape, of course. But from this disease that I have there is no escape. So I'm here. Not to say I didn't fight it a lot. I remember my early times coming here. I would wait almost until the third bell was struck to run to my seat so I could avoid sitting on that mat as long as possible. But when you've been given this diagnosis, and then you're staring at a wall with nothing to distract you, it's pretty tough. It's pretty tough not to think. But I had no choice. So I persevered. And slowly, slowly, it got easier. The tumors kept growing, obviously a source of anxiety. They grew for the first couple of years. Three years after I was diagnosed they were still growing, I was still declining, I was working part-time. And I got some radiation treatment, which seemed to stop them from growing. So that gave me some breathing room and made it a little bit easier to sit, thinking that that maybe the end was not so near.

Staying on the path. I plugged along for that first bunch of years, and had some great experiences in sesshin which reaffirmed my faith in the practice. Again, I was lucky that I had such a powerful motivating force to get me into the room. Because once I did, then I started having some experiences that

Ihad no choice but to practice. I have, as Deborah Zaretsky likes to say, the sword of Damocles hanging over me. The motivation was forced upon me.

reaffirmed for me that this really does work. I have yet to find something that I have been taught here that is not true.

THEN THE NEXT catastrophe happened in my life, actually more to the life of this other family than to me. About four years ago, we had some new neighbors over for a dinner party to welcome them to the neighborhood. They were there with their two daughters, one of them a young baby. And the next day, she was dead. And it turned out she had ingested a pill that my mother had dropped on the floor in our house. It was an unspeakable tragedy. I can only imagine the suffering that family went through.

When this was discovered there was a big police investigation. Our house was searched. It was in the newspaper and we had to get a lawyer. I was always so afraid of getting into trouble. Now this anxiety was unbearable. I didn't sleep for weeks at a time. Despite the cancer diagnosis, I had never taken any anxiety medicine or antidepressant. Zen was my medicine. And now I had to take something, and after the first dose of one of the SSRIs that I took I was acutely suicidal. I stopped that medicine, obviously. But with two months of sleep deprivation and anxiety and the existential angst of acknowledging the loss and the suffering of our neighbors, I spiraled down into a horrible, horrible depression.

Again, nothing really helped. I went to psychiatrists and therapists, I was on three different antidepressants at the same time, and was still suicidal. I never acted on it, but I had a hole in the center my chest I had never had in my entire life. I described it like a black hole that sucked all joy into my chest. How do I deal with this? And this is where staying on the path really hit home for me, because I had a crisis of faith. I had been meditating hard for seven years before this happened, and it felt useless. It felt like the practice had completely abandoned me: total panic, and mental health never worse. I started shopping around for other practices. I couldn't just sit and stare at that wall. I needed guided meditations, I wanted something to help me. I did gratitude meditations. I wrote gratitude lists—you know, did all those things. And everything was just an empty intellectual exercise, so I had to search again on my own. I found psychedelic psychotherapy, and did a different number of treatments there.

I KEPT DOING ZEN. I even sat through the virtual sesshins during the pandemic. Talk about bad timing: I was already suicidal, we were in a pandemic, and our last daughter went off to college, so we had an empty nest. It was rough sitting in sesshin by

myself in a walk-out apartment in my parents' house. I'd go there so I could have a whole place to myself with this hole in my chest. And I just I hated Zen at that time; I don't know why I kept doing it. I just did. I guess I had no choice.

I was so angry at Roshi. How can you let me sit here with this hole in my chest? The reason I mentioned my obedience and my non-rebelliousness as a kid was because my next act of rebellion was to stop sitting every day. Whoa, whoa, crazy! I sat every day for seven, eight years. But I have a hole in my chest. I do not want to live. This cannot be good for me to sit here and think about this. Of course Roshi is not

for a year and a half and my mental health has never been better.

I'M SUCH A PLANNER and linear thinker that it's hard for me not to go into sesshin with expectations. But every time something good happens in sesshin, it's out of the blue. And it's unplanned. And at last November's sesshin I was just struggling. Actually, every sesshin, I still hate it at times and say I'm never doing this again. I can't do it. I'm not coming back here. Why am I here? So I was in one of these temper tantrums in last November's sesshin and I asked myself, why am I struggling so much? Just



telling me to think about it. Of course, he's telling me not to think about it, do your practice. So I finally gave him the virtual finger. And I stopped sitting. Well, that lasted about, I don't know, a week, two weeks, but just doing it made a difference, just making the decision that I was going to take charge of my practice. And that's what I've been learning about this combination of listening to experts and listening to yourself. I had to listen to myself when it came to my medical care. But at the same time, you know the old saying a doctor who treats himself has a fool for a patient. Same thing in my Zen practice, listen to the experts. Listen to myself. So I persevered, just keep sitting, keep sitting. Ketamine seemed to be the bomb for me, but it's impossible to know what got me through all this. I will certainly say that sitting through all of that and directly experiencing a hole in my chest, did help me get through it. We say this all the time, the only way out is through. You can't avoid it. All I wanted to do was avoid it, but you can't. So some combination of ketamine and all those sesshins worked. I've been off all antidepressants

relax. I took some relaxation breaths—and how many times have I done that in 10 years of practice? But there was something different about these and I tell people it changed my DNA. It was that profound, and then the next thing that followed was telling myself, stop beating yourself up. I had been so hard on myself my whole life.

I'm not going to say it's been 100%. I still have my moments, but it was transformative. And it may not be a kensho-type experience but for me it was enlightenment. I saw things about myself. That's enlightenment to me. And my burden—my burden is lighter, and what more can you ask for than a lighter burden? With this life that we all live in, I know you all have burdens. Anybody could come up here and give a talk like this.

So I'm going to end with some poetry because now I like questions more than answers, and that's another thing that's changed with 10 years of this practice. So I have to go with Rumi, of course:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.



FURTHER REMARKS

ZOOM IN ON POETRY ¶ Lou and I are part of a Taos-based Zoom writing group, Imaginative Storm, which meets on Saturdays at noon EST. About 30 of us are shown a visual prompt, then for two minutes we jot down any words that come to mind. Then we each give a word to the group, a list is made, a timer is set, and we all write whatever for only ten minutes. It is great fun to speed along writing, grabbing other's words in whatever we write. Here's my poem from Saturday.

Coming Home

For over three years now we've sat in our Florida bedroom alcove, most every day, mourning sky beneath the calm of meditation, zazoom, as they refer to it now. It all began with the Great Lockdown—a foreground in jeopardy found its subtle rainbows. And each day 50, 60 or more of us would silently share our time, mind trekking, our reflective hospitality and there on the screen was the beloved Zendo in Rochester we once took for granted—and now long for—as we envision the giant faceless stone Budand the flowering dogwood branches waving in the garden's breeze, the silent Zendo inside always too

or too hot, but still. On our recent trip back, we nearby, sat right there in

person each day in silence-and

irony of ironies-I realize my vision of where I was present

was fading as I longed to see the place which has become

our new home, the laptop's screen view of the Zendo.

Namaste, **ELAINE HEVERON** Port Saint Lucie, FL

IN PRINT THE BOOK: HOW TO DO **NOTHING:** RESISTING THE **ATTENTION ECONOMY**



BY JENNY ODELL ¶ What it's about: First, the title is wholly misleading. This is not a book about doing less in any sense. It is really an argument or manifesto, for doing more, just guided by principles that are contrary to those mainstream principles that generally guide our living now. Odell does offer a disclaimer:

Doing nothing is hard... it takes commitment, discipline, and will.

To find Zen-aligned here, in an entirely non-spiritual, non-religious context was refreshing. The genre of *How to Do Nothing* is elusive—part self-help, part political diatribe, part nature appreciation, but there is nothing overtly spiritual and for sure there is no "stink" of Zen. Odell's laser focus on the quality of our attention, and the conditions that allow it to serve optimally, resonates with the meticulously choreographed conditions of sesshin, designed to do the same.

Why it's worthy: O'Dell's writing is precise, nuanced, and profound, so I will allow the book to speak for itself:

I want to see what's possible when we ... bring attention back, over and over again to an idea "held steadily before the mind until it fills the mind." I am personally unsatisfied with untrained attention which flickers from one new thing to the next, not only because it is a shallow experience, or because it is an expression of habit rather than will, but because it gives me less access to my own human experience.

 Sensei Donna Kowal was ordained as a Zen Buddhist priest by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede in an August 6th ceremony held in the Arnold Park Buddha Hall. Her new name is Dhara.



cold

\triangleright SIGHTINGS

And then,

The point of doing nothing, as I define it, isn't to return to work refreshed and ready to be more productive, but rather to question what we currently perceive as productive.

She emphatically argues that Doing Nothing is not the same as dropping out and disengaging, just as the job of the enlightened being in Zen is to return to the marketplace and fully engage. Rather, she challenges us to reclaim our attention which, in her view, has been appropriated by the attention economy:

What's especially tragic about a mind that imagines itself as something separate, defensible, and capable of "efficiency" is not just that it results in a probably very boring (and bored) person; it's that it's based on a complete fallacy about the constitution of the self as something separate from others and from the world.

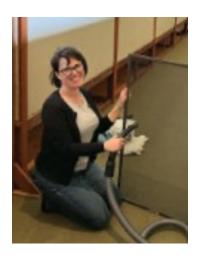
Yikes! Where did she come up with these crazy ideas?

Many books that sometimes brilliantly describe and dissect an important issue often fail to offer remedies. Not so here. The potentially healing relationship she suggests is to "stand apart." She frequently cites Thoreau who she sees as occupying that space. Odell suggests living not in retreat, but living a life of "refusal, boycott and sabotage" (in other words, "subvert the dominant paradigm").

To stand apart is to take the view of the outsider without leaving, always oriented toward what is you would have left.... It also means giving yourself the critical break that media cycles and narratives will not, allowing yourself to believe in another world while living in this one.... It is a perfect image of this world when justice has been realized with and for everyone and everything that is already here. To stand apart is to look at the world (now) from the point of view of the world as it could be (the future), with all of the hope and

sorrowful contemplation that that entails.

The Zen monk in a monastery is in retreat from the world. At the Rochester Zen Center the paradigm is to "stand apart"—the practice of Zen is central to our lives, but we engage with the world. Jenny Odell would be a fan!—ANDY STERN







This summer's Chapin Mill work retreat was very well attended, with several helpers coming from out of town, including two people who were not Center members but who had connected with us by listening to our podcasts on Spotify. The work included the usual gardening, weeding, and interior cleaning. In addition, special attention was paid to the barn floor, which had begun to deteriorate. This was especially worrisome as Andris Chapin stores her car in the barn when she is in town. The entire floor and its supports will be replaced, and beginning the project entailed cleaning out decades of stored tools, wood, paint cans, etc. When the project is finished, the barn will be able to accommodate the outdoor vehicles that have been resting (and rusting) in the field behind it.





NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

PERMIT NO. 1925 ROCHESTER, NY

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.

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.

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 COSTS?

The Zen Center's Training Fund was established specifically to help cover sesshin and training program fees for those in need. Although our sesshin fees are moderate compared to many other meditation centers, we realize that money is tight for many of our members. The Training Fund is an anonymous peer-to-peer fund in which members donate to assist others. So don't hesitate to ask for support if you need it.

To donate to the fund or to request assistance, look for Training Fund under "Practice with us" on the RZC website.

UPCOMING SESSHINS

SEPTEMBER 2-DAY SESSHIN

September 8–10, 2023 Led by Ven. Trueman Taylor

SEPTEMBER 7-DAY SESSHIN

September 23–30, 2023 Led by Sensei Dhara Kowal

OCTOBER 2-DAY SESSHIN

(Madison Zen Center) October 6–8, 2023 Led by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede

OCTOBER 7-DAY SESSHIN

October 28–November 4 Led by Sensei John Pulleyn

DECEMBER 2-DAY SESSHIN

December 8–10 Led by Eryl Kubicka

JANUARY 7-DAY SESSHIN (Rohatsu)

January 6–13 Led by Sensei John Pulleyn

FEBRUARY 2-DAY SESSHIN

February 6–18 Led by Ven. Jissai Prince-Cherry

APRIL 7-DAY SESSHIN

April 13–20 Led by Sensei John Pulleyn