



Water Wheel

Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

Reflections on Falling

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



Lingzhao's Helping

One day, Layman Pang and his daughter Lingzhao were out selling bamboo baskets. Coming down off a bridge, the Layman stumbled and fell. When Lingzhao saw this, she ran to her father's side and threw herself on the ground.

"What are you doing?" cried the Layman.

"I saw you fall so I'm helping,"

replied Lingzhao.

"Luckily no one was looking," remarked the Layman.¹

This delightful koan comes to mind as we are rolling out *The Sangha Sutra* at Zen Center. The enlightened Pang family of 8th century China helps us to imagine a collective awakening—what would it be like if the Sangha functioned like an enlightened family? How about the Sangha truly falling together by taking refuge in the *Three Treasures* with each other? How about remembering to be at one with another?

This koan is quite funny and deep at the same time. It looks like this father and daughter had a lot of enlightened fun together. The father falls, the daughter throws herself down, too. "Okay, you've fallen, so I will throw myself down right beside you." In fact, you may have done that at times: a family member is ill and you lie next to them and comfort them. A child is on the ground crying and you sit down next to him and see what the matter is. A stranger asks you for money for a meal and you ask her name and inquire as to how she is. Maybe you take her to Denny's across the street and buy her a nice meal. There are countless ways in which we are falling with each other, day after day. Or are you?

How is falling helping? What kind of falling is this?



Beautiful clouds, blue skies, and palm trees over ZCLA.

We fall together because it is just how things are living this life in which separation is not possible. Our connection with everyone and everything is a fact. For instance, when someone does something hurtful to someone else, you are affected just hearing about it. We feel the pain of migrant children at our country's borders; we cringe at yet another #MeToo account. Or there is falling by association as when someone in your family wins an award and the family name is enhanced. Or the opposite, when someone is accused of a crime and that accusation casts a pall over that person's family.

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¹Florence Caplow and Susan Moon, editors, *The Hidden Lamp*. Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA, 2013, p. 293.

REFLECTIONS ON FALLING (*Continued from page 1*)

Being affected by another person's suffering is falling. You and I are falling all the time because fundamentally, there is no distance between you-and-me or self-and-other, is there? When we spontaneously go to where a person is suffering without any calculation at all—this is the falling of an awake person. And yet, how many times throughout the day do you and I find ourselves ignoring the person on the ground?

So show me, how does an awake person fall?

Throughout the course of a day, you yourself are endlessly falling through the six realms of animal mind, fighting spirit mind, human being mind, hungry ghost mind, and heavenly being mind. You and I come face-to-face with how we are careless and allow this undivided Buddha essence to become greedy, angry, jealous, lustful, and so forth. The person who falls with us is a true bodhisattva because they are saying, "Stop. See what you are allowing yourself to become." Years ago there was a funny skit by the comedian Bob Newhart, who was playing the part of a psychologist. He only charged \$5.00 because he had just one two-word solution regardless of the problem—"Stop it!"

"...how does an awake person fall?"

Why is it so hard to stop yourself?

I love stop signs and red lights for this reason: I have to stop, pause, take stock, breathe, and reset myself before I can go on again. Here in Los Angeles, we have expensive fines when we are caught not stopping at a red light even if there are no other cars around (except for the police). In the realm of cause and effect, we experience "fines," too—even if no one else appears to be watching. There are consequences for spewing anger at our spouse, for becoming jealous of our co-workers, or for greedily consuming resources without consideration for future generations. Nevertheless, despite experiencing how much harm our conduct causes even to ourselves, we find it hard to stop the very behavior that causes suffering. We find it hard to remember the Buddha essence—the one undivided heart-mind. In other words, we forget who we truly are.

When his daughter threw herself beside him on the ground, Layman Pang said: "Luckily no one was looking." Who is this "no one?" From one perspective, you may think that this refers to another person who is watching you. If this is the case, it might be useful to ask, "What do I do when no one is watching me?" In this way, you can reflect on your behavior and take the backward step, looking clearly and carefully at your own conditioning, and

your tendency to turn the essential nature into an angry demon or a selfish human. This is part of the inner work of meditators: to know the one who is looking at what is going on with yourself.

From another perspective, when you truly fall into your own life, is there anyone to be found? In this way, there is no gap between you and your self, between you and your life. There is just living as only you can live. Although you may not know it or think it is so, this is the starting point—this one indivisible buddha life. However, human beings think that there is someone who is watching, or there is someone who needs to become whole, someone who needs to become complete. Because we often think in this way, there is the practice of atonement.

The practice of atonement is returning to the essence—being at one with Buddha, with the life force before anything is born. Lingzhao throwing herself onto the ground with her father—this is the practice of throwing oneself into the house of the Buddha. Layman Pang playfully saying, "Luckily, no one was looking!"—this is the practice of knowing that it is not possible to not be Buddha essence because fundamentally speaking, there is no one to look, no one to fall. And yet, a sense of separation arises, so we need to throw ourselves into the one body. Why? Because we forget who we are. Returning to who we are before we become someone is the practice of atonement. It is the practice of zazen itself.

There are many different kinds of atonement that grow out of this fundamental nature of being at-one as the one body. There is the obvious notion that I have done something harmful, and I recognize it, apologize for it, and set it right. This is important, and we do it in front of the Sangha, face-to-face with the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. I stand before you and say, "My name is Egyoku. This week I walked past someone on the street who asked me for help. I ignored him and went on my way, fully knowing what I was doing. I atone. My intention is to respond in a helpful way the next time I see an unhoused person."

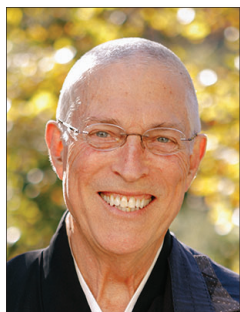
To atone is to pause—STOP— and remember that you-and-I-and-all-beings are one body: we are all together one life. We are all Buddha essence. In this way, we are all falling down together. To atone is to refresh, or as Maezumi Roshi said, "Refresh our realization that the fact of our life is no other than the very nature of all beings," which is Buddha essence.

Let's all fall together, moment by moment, day by day, forever.

Roshi Egyoku is ZCLA's Abbot & Head Teacher.

I Have No Complaints

by Rev. Mark Shogen Bloodgood



Once upon a time, there was a young man who was deeply unhappy. He had many good things in his life but they didn't help. When he was at the end of his tether, he heard about a teacher who was supposed to be good with hopeless cases and he made the journey to see her.

"I am very unhappy," he said, "I'm too restless to sit still and do a spiritual practice and I'm too selfish to practice compassion and service. I reach for what I want, but when I get it, I'm not happy, and I'm always looking out for the next thing. I don't have a clue where to turn. I'm told that you deal with hopeless cases, so perhaps you can help me. You are my last resort."

"I'm glad you came," she said. "I might be able to help but you will have to agree to do what I ask." "Why don't you tell me?" he said, "and I'll decide if it will work for me." "Oh no," she said, "The deal is that you agree to do what I say and then I tell you what you must do. There is no other way."

He hemmed and hawed and went back and forth and finally surrendered and said, "Okay, I'll do it, but I won't do it forever." So she said, "Try it for a year and let me know." "A year?!" She said nothing.

"Okay," he said, "Give it to me." "I'll give you the practice I do myself. Whenever anything appears in my mind or appears in the world, I say, 'Thank you very much, I have no complaints whatsoever.'" "That's all? That's it? That'll never work for me!" "You agreed. For a year. Off you go now. Thank you very much, I have no complaints whatsoever."

So he left and she more or less forgot about him. Then a year passed and he asked for an interview and arrived at her room. "It's as I suspected, I knew it would never work for me, I'm still just as unhappy and selfish as I ever was."

Immediately, she said, "Thank you very much, I have no complaints whatsoever." With her words, he felt an eruption in his chest. He began to laugh and immediately understood what she meant and laughed and laughed and laughed, and his happiness didn't subside, though it did become quieter after some months. "Thank you very much," he told people, "I have no complaints whatsoever."

Our friend in the koan – can you relate? Deeply unhappy with his life. All the good things he'd accumulated didn't help. Looking for a teacher who is good with hopeless cases. Are you a hopeless case? Is this practice your last resort? Too restless to sit still and do a spiritual practice? Too selfish to practice compassion and service? Too self-centered? Never satisfied? Always wanting more? How about you? Have you any complaints? I've got plenty.

It's interesting, too, the fact that he submits to practice without knowing what the practice was going to be ahead of time. So he repeats the same words for a year. And during that year, he feels it makes no difference: "It's as I suspected, I knew it would never work for me, I'm still just as unhappy and selfish as I ever was."

Has your practice felt like this? Mine certainly has. I worked with the koan MU not just for one year, but for seven or eight years! Then after a year, he hears the same words from the teacher and suddenly understands. What did he understand? What awakening did he have? He laughs, he's giddy. Thank you very much, I have no complaints whatsoever.

Closer to home is my own story. Karla and I were caught up in the 2008 Recession, sometimes referred to as the Great Recession. It's generally considered to be the longest period of economic decline since the Great Depression of the 1930's. Well, we lost a lot: our business, my livelihood, our home, our life savings. At some point during this economic debacle, I began saying, "I love my life. I love my life."

What can seem unfortunate at first may turn out to be an unforeseen blessing. What happened in the aftermath was that other doors opened for me. I was able to give myself more fully to the practice here at ZCLA and our sitting group in San Luis Obispo. I was able to spend more time at the prison where I volunteer, and then my job as a hospice chaplain opened up. My personal vow, to serve others, really expanded. I've always resonated with Roshi Bernie's statement: "When I see someone suffering, I want to help." Suddenly, I became able to help so many more people. I love my life!

Well, Karla got sick of hearing "I love my life. I love my life." "Shit, we've lost everything. How can you say 'I love my life, I love my life?' Screw you!" But then, an amazing thing happened. After some time went by, she

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH (*Continued from page 4*)

came in from the garden of our tiny rented cottage in Los Osos one day and said, “I love my life. I love my life, I really DO love my life.” I asked what the heck happened?

She said she’d made up a mantra while out in her garden which she had repeated over and over for many months. At one point, she said there had been a shift. So I asked her about the mantra. Karla had visited our grandchildren in Austin where she was subjected to repeated viewings of the movie, *The Lion King*. Do you remember the song, “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”?

*In the jungle, the mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
In the jungle, the quiet jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
A-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh.*

She used the melody from that song and used these words:

*In my life, my lovely life
my heart sings tonight
in my life, my lovely life,
my hearts sings tonight.
I love my life, I love my life, I love my life, I love my life.*

Now Karla is buddies with Sensei Koan’s wife, Jill (Genji). They talk almost every day. Karla shared her story. On one of my stays at Koan’s in Santa Barbara, I walked into the bathroom and there was a note scotch taped to the mirror: *I love my life*. So what awakening did Karla have? What was the shift? (Of course, when she first heard me say it years ago, she thought I was saying “I love my WIFE!”)

What is the Buddhist approach to being grateful? I turned to the Pali Canon to see what the Buddha said:

“Now what is the level of a person of no integrity? A person of no integrity is ungrateful and unthankful. This ingratitude, this lack of thankfulness, is advocated by rude people. It is entirely on the level of people of no integrity. A person of integrity is grateful and thankful. This gratitude, this thankfulness, is advocated by civil people. It is entirely on the level of people of integrity.” *Katannu Sutta*. Are you a person of integrity?

Buddha also said, “There are two persons who are rare in the world. Which two? First, the person who volunteers to help others selflessly (pubbakari), and second, the one

who is grateful (kattunu) and helps in return (katavedi).” *Anguttara-Nikaya Sutta*. Are you that rare person?

Often we’re told to remember to be grateful for our blessings or good fortune, as in our Thanksgiving tradition. But Buddhism teaches us to be grateful, period. Gratitude is to be cultivated as a habit or attitude of mind not dependent on our circumstances. So fundamentally, we should feel grateful for everything that happens to us.

“The greatest thing is to give thanks for everything. He who has learned this knows what it means to live. He has penetrated the whole mystery of life: giving thanks for everything.” Albert Schweitzer

The Thai meditation teacher Ajahn Chah asks, “Which has had more value in your life, where have you grown more and learned more, where have you become more wise, where have you learned patience, understanding, equanimity, and forgiveness – in your hard times or the good ones?” How has it been for you?

“I love my life. I love my wife!”

On a trip to Yokoji last year for a Beginner’s Mind Sesshin, Roshi Tenshin said that one of the major parts of Buddhism is the transformation of greed, anger, and ignorance; they become the three hidden treasures. During one of our recent Sangha Sutra roll-out meetings, Roshi Egyoku commented that this Sutra was born out of our own experiences at ZCLA with addiction, sexual misconduct, and power abuse. I shared that, in a way; these have been our own hidden treasures. Roshi called them “Our shadow treasures.”

Thich Nhat Hahn said: “Your suffering and my suffering are the basic condition for us to enter the Buddha’s heart, and for the Buddha to enter our hearts.” So how do you express your gratitude?

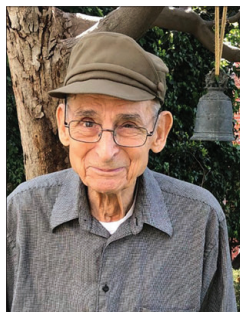
Dogen Zenji said, “Continuous practice, day after day, is the most appropriate way of expressing gratitude. This means that you practice continuously without wasting a single day of your life, without using it for your own sake. Why is it so? Your life is a fortunate outcome of the continuous practice of the past. You should express your gratitude immediately.”

Thank you very much, I have no complaints whatsoever.

Rev. Shogen is a ZCLA priest and the teacher at San Luis Obispo Zen Circle.

Charles Duran: Memories and Reflections

by Burt Wetanson



WW: Charles, you just turned 90. You've been at the Zen Center for about 40 years. What motivated you to come here?

CHARLES: I was very dissatisfied and thought that perhaps there was a better way to experience life. After I became interested in hatha yoga, I found Buddhism, which was very appealing.

WW: How did you find your way to the Zen Center?

CHARLES: A book I read intrigued me – “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.” So I decided to quit my job and try Zen Buddhism, but I wasn't sure where. I thought about San Francisco and Los Angeles. When I called down here, I spoke with one of the monks. He was a wonderful guy with a great sense of humor. I said to him, “Look, I'd like to practice but I'm not into ritual and ceremony.” And he said, “Oh, we don't do any of that. No, no. Come on down, you'll like it.” So I came here and there was nothing but ritual and ceremony.

WW: How was your relationship with Maezumi Roshi?

CHARLES: Excellent. We liked each other and had some very interesting conversations. Somehow, he got the idea that I had some insight into the practice. Though I don't think I did. I think sometimes, I was rather blunt with him. When I look back, I can hardly believe he was so gracious about things I said.

WW: What was your practice?

CHARLES: Following my breath, which never really changed. But I'll tell you one thing that's surprising. One day, Roshi and I were having a conversation, and he said to me: “Charles, you don't believe in enlightenment, do you?” I was startled, and rather than admit that I did, I went along with him. I said, “No, of course not.”

WW: Do you feel that you've grown over the years, living and practicing here?

CHARLES: Absolutely. And the question comes to mind – did it have anything to do with my practice? Or does it just happen as you grow older? I'm inclined to think that if you're a reflective person, you change with or without a practice. Through a natural process.

WW: Has your practice affected the way you have lived your life?

CHARLES: Now I'm contradicting myself – the practice does change your attitude. The more you can get away from your thoughts – the more relaxed you become and tolerant and reasonable.

WW: Why do you think you've stayed for such a long time?

CHARLES: I've enjoyed being here. The place was always dynamic. Sometimes there was friction among people, but on the other hand, there was so much creativity. Carpentry and papermaking and stained glass windows – all sorts of things. And there were friendships and romances.

WW: Roshi Egyoku suggested a question: What have you learned about living in community?

CHARLES: I learned how important it is to have a harmonious community. I can't always say I contributed to that harmony, but I certainly understand it now. We really need to support one another. That's difficult for me and I think it's difficult for a lot of people. There are people you develop a kind of antipathy towards. You don't really feel like spending time and energy supporting them. But I think it's necessary to try.

WW: Because it benefits them?

CHARLES: Because it benefits the whole. Them and you. I think what we're talking about is a sympathetic attitude towards people in general. We can't have enough of it.

WW: Did you have any startling or unusual experiences as a result of your Zen practice?

CHARLES: I have, but they're not lasting. I don't pay any attention to them anymore. Though at the time, they were tremendous. And not just with Zen, but with hatha yoga too.

WW: These days, there are quite a few younger people at the Center. Are there things you wish you could tell them about life?

CHARLES: There was a time when I felt that way, but not anymore. I think we can't escape going through trials and tribulations. It really doesn't seem to do any good to tell people, “I have some important advice for you.”

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DANA BOOKLET

January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2018

Dear Sangha and Friends of ZCLA,

The first of the six perfections is generosity – giving with open-heartedness. The people whose names appear in this Dana Booklet have given of their time, energy, material goods and money to ensure that the Zen Center can continue to provide the space, teachers and community that encourage the awakening of hundreds of people a year.

We achieve nothing alone – we are all thoroughly interdependent. As one is generous, another one is grateful, as we remember the teaching of no giver, receiver and gift. Each year, the Zen Center relies on donations to the Dharma Training Fund and to the Annual Appeal to ensure that we can continue to offer zazen, trainings, programs, sesshins and zazenkais and maintain our buildings and grounds.

In addition, fifty-seven donors have joined the Zen Center's Legacy Fund – these are donors who have remembered the Zen Center in the form of future bequests. Each year, in February, we hold a service for our donors who have died. The pictures on the altar remind us that generosity lives on forever.

As the Zen Center lives on for decades to come, we take into account and appreciate each one of you that have been so generous.

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**“We offer our blessings to
all those who have come and
gone through this temple
gate and nurtured us.”**

– From ZCLA's Third Service Dedication

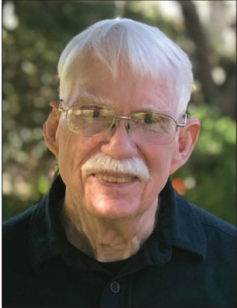
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On Cleaning the Streets

by John Heart-Mirror Trotter



Discourse

Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was on Normandie Mountain surrounded by those immersed in the affairs of the world. I rose from my seat and addressed the Buddha, “World-Honored One, our concerns are many, but wisdom is hard to find. I face a situation difficult to resolve. What shall I do?”

The Buddha said, “Tell me your predicament.”

I said, “The streets are littered with trash. Their beauty has been defiled.”

The Buddha replied by reciting a Hymn to the Perfection of Beauty.

Hymn to the Perfection of Beauty

Homage to those who clean and set right, who preserve and maintain the Dharma body. Aware of the hunger of things for their right places, they know what belongs and what does not, and do not confuse the two. They know how much is too much and where there is lack. They are one with discrimination.

They clean and arrange, yet do not protest impermanence. They know the rhythm of beauty and its alliance with nature. They keep track of beauty’s ebb and flow and geography. They know the language of beauty, all its parts of speech, and use it to teach.

I asked, “What can beauty teach about trash in the street?”

The Buddha said, “Trash is that which is abandoned without an attentive mind. Trash emerges naturally as discrimination is applied to living.”

I said, “Given that it emerges as a natural part of life, what can be done about trash?”

The Buddha said, “Trash may be transformed, relocated, endured, or not generated. When trash is transformed, that is called recycling. When trash is relocated, that is called the zero-sum game. When trash is endured, that is called ugliness and poison. When trash is not generated, that is called cleaning the street.”

I asked, “Other than being that which is abandoned without an attentive mind, how do we identify trash?”

The Buddha said, “Through discrimination.”

I said, “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure. Discrimination is too personal to be useful.”

The Buddha said, “Quit whining. Like beauty, trash has its rhythm and geography, its shape and color. Trash will show you where it is by its straight edges, by colors that don’t belong, by reflecting, by its location and response to the wind.

“Know that the street cannot be cleaned. If this seems a problem, ego is alive and well. If this seems a challenge, ego is alive and well. Because of this, when reluctance to cleaning the street arises, know that it is just a thought, and thus temporary.

“When cleaning, clean with parental mind, as a mother cat cleans her blind babies. Clean with joyful mind and know that pride need not accompany joy. Clean with magnanimous mind – to raise thoughts of the trasher is to suffer anger and cast blame.”

The Buddha continued, “Greet everyone who passes. This acknowledges both them and the work being done. If asked why you do this, say it feels good to have the street clean.

“Some will not notice that the street is clean, yet they will be heartened; do not judge their distraction. Some will not notice the greeting, yet they will feel seen; do not judge their unease. Some may notice that the street is clean, may return the greeting, and may even say ‘Thank you.’ Do not be swayed.

“Have a place in mind for everything picked up. Pick up everything sharp or pointed, all plastics, all advertising, everything that does not belong, and anything that does not decompose easily and beneficially.

“Know that picking up larger things reveals smaller things. If you find a pile with many pieces, pick them all up, lest no one see it as clean.

“Allow nooks and crannies their true nature and their partnership with the wind. Know that it is delusion to glance from a distance and think that what looks clean is clean.

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ON CLEANING THE STREET (*Continued from page 8*)

“To pick up trash with anger or aversion is to defile it.

“To worry about getting your hands dirty is to have a worry bigger than dirty hands.

“Should pride arise, return back to your path and gather all that you now can see.

“Be aware of your face. It is valuable to know when it frowns or wrinkles with distaste or frustration.

“Be aware of your thoughts. It is valuable to know what and why you pick up or do not pick up.

“Trust your sense of triage and separate the trash. Recycle that which can be recycled. Take what must be relocated

to the dumpster. Vow to endure what must, for now, be endured. And teach non-littering.

“When done, bow and thank the street for holding still.”

I asked, “How will I know when the work is done?”

The Buddha remained silent. Everyone present was filled with peace and gratitude, and they bowed to the Buddha’s wisdom.

Heart-Mirror is a practicing resident member.

MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS (*Continued from page 5*)

WW: Well, sometimes we might help them experience less suffering.

CHARLES: You’d have to be very close, and they’d have to be very comfortable with you before they would take your advice. Also, I’m a great believer in skepticism. We need to question everything.

WW: What do you end up with when you question everything?

CHARLES: Two things. You may shed light on something. The other is, you may shed some light on yourself, learn about yourself. We’re naturally inclined to be prejudiced. It’s a given we should accept. All we can do is be aware of it.

I’m a reflective person. I’m not exceptional about that. Many people are like that. Maybe even most. And being reflective, you continuously discover things about yourself and your interactions with the world around you. You can’t help it.

WW: But many people don’t seem to be self-reflective at all.

CHARLES: I know what you mean, but there may be a benefit to that. What’s that line in Shakespeare? (“The native hue of resolution is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.”) There can be a positive side to not reflecting.

WW: You were in the Korean War. So many people are terribly traumatized by experiences of war. Did it have that effect on you?

CHARLES: I’m sorry to say it didn’t leave much of an impression on me. When I was young, I was very active, aggressive, competitive. War was just an extension of that. I actually had to be warned by an officer not to fire on the enemy. (laughs) I was firing in their direction and an officer came over and said, “Soldier, is that necessary? Things are quiet now. They’re not firing on us, and there’s no point in you shooting at them.”

WW: That’s very funny.

CHARLES: It is funny. But that’s what I was about. So I wasn’t left with any kind of remorse – although I will say this. I had the bleep scared out of me one time.

I was in a foxhole and I came under mortar fire. They realized I was an observer and were trying to get me. But they were missing me because I was between two ravines and the mortar rounds were going down into the ravines. But it was a real shock. I remember thinking, “They’re trying to kill me! And they don’t even know me! If I ever get out of here, I’m not coming back!”

WW: Speaking of death, you’re elderly like me. What are your feelings about death?

CHARLES: I’m not afraid of dying. I’m pragmatic about death. But I’ve always been interested in politics, so before I go, I would really like to know how the next presidential election turns out.

WW: Thank you, Charles, for this interview and for your many years of devoted practice and service to the Zen Center.

Charles is a practicing resident member.

Film Life as Zen Life

by Gemma Cubero del Barrio



Zazen entered my life before film did. It all began when I was nine, training in karate back in Spain. I had a lot of energy, so my parents decided that martial arts would be a good outlet to release my intensity. Every day at the dojo, we started and ended with a period of “zazen.” After 12 years of training, competition, and wearing my black belt, I felt burnt out and ended this chapter. The seed of Zen was planted.

My desire to tell stories began at 16. I started a journal as a vehicle to express my emotions during a very messy family time. Writing has never left me since then. It was also then when I learned English by watching the films of Jessica Lange and reading the plays of Sam Shepard. I dreamt of meeting them in New Mexico where they lived. At 19, I traveled to “the land of enchantment” and fell completely in love with the landscape. In northern New Mexico, I first encountered Zen meditation.

The summer of 1991, I volunteered to work at the Lama Foundation, a spiritual center near Taos Pueblo. I discovered the writings of Natalie Goldberg and while reading “Wild Mind,” she appeared on the mountain to attend a meditation retreat with Jack Kornfield. I still remember that first day we sat under the same dome. My mind spinning and me feeling “Oh my, what is inside?!” At the end of that retreat, Jack came to the kitchen where I worked and gave me a clay Buddha. “Take it with you,” he said softly. A gift I carried inside my grandfather’s old cigar case along with my pens and lost in one of the many hitchhikes I took up and down the mountain.

Ever since then, zazen has always shown up wherever I would travel. Even when I moved from Madrid to North Carolina to finish my BA in journalism, I found a teacher who invited me to drive for a couple of hours to sit in a tiny zendo in the hills of the Carolinas.

Living in San Francisco in 1998, I began to work for Lourdes Portillo on her groundbreaking film *Señorita Extraviada* about the killings of young women in Mexico. While working in the desert of Juárez, I knew I had found my life’s vocation in documentary filmmaking.

During those years, I started sitting at the Berkeley Zen Center with Sojun Roshi, a man who transmitted an open heart and unconditional love with his mere presence.

At this time, I was already working on my next film *Ella Es El Matador* (She Is The Matador) and travelling a lot between Spain and California. I expressed my interest in sewing a rakusu and my concern about not knowing if I was going to be able to stay in the same geographical place to do this. Sojun just said: “Start.” In June of 2006, I took Jukai. “Seisui Shishin” became my dharma name. “Calm Water, Aspiration Truth” was Sojun’s translation.

The name stunned me. I had not spent much time near water, having grown up in the Castilian plains. But by then, I was already in love with Hawaii. For the following 12 years, I took this time to study the nature of calm water, and I kept investigating through my documentary film life the truth that I was facing in the stories I chose to tell.

I had always had the desire to live in a Zen community, but because of romantic relationships or work, I couldn’t. I once asked Sojun Roshi if I could move into the Zen Center. His answer surprised me: “I think you need more freedom than that.”

In 2011, after working in documentary films for 12 years, I got an Annenberg Fellowship to obtain my MA degree at USC. It was then that I applied for residency at the Zen Center of Los Angeles. I checked with Sojun if he knew the teacher there. He said she was “a life force.” This time he gave me his blessing to move here and to pursue this dream of mine.

On October 1, 2011, I moved to ZCLA. Living here, I first heard about the Three Tenets. I wrote the words and kept them on the fridge to let them permeate my life. “Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, Taking Action.”

Today I can say that to me, there is no separation between my documentary film life, my personal life, and my Zen practice. I have learned that reality is certainly greater than fiction. When I enter the path of making a documentary film, I always need to be in Not-Knowing, open to finding the story path, Bearing Witness to accessing people’s lives, witnessing how the very moment unfolds in front of my eyes while capturing reality with my camera, and Taking Action all the way through editing and post-production.

At the end of this filmmaking process, I find that reality is again shown in its many forms. And as in zazen, not only does the story change over time, but everyone changes, is transformed, always with the intention that once the film is out in the world, it could benefit others.

Gemma is a resident practicing member. For more information about her film work, visit: www.talcualfilms.com

Your Gifts are Received with a Heartfelt “Thank You!”

The Zen Center is maintained by the hands and eyes of each one of you.

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To Etsugen (left) and Gyokuren for tenzoing the Buddha's Birthday sesshin.



To Jiei (left), Enju, and Anna for arranging flowers for Buddha's Birthday Celebration.



To our Fushinzamu kitchen cleaning Bodhisattvas.

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To **Mukei** for leading the Entering and Leave-Taking Ceremony;

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(We would also like to thank all those names that were forgotten or left unsaid.)

ZCLA Affiliated Groups

The Lincroft Zen Sangha (New Jersey)
led by Roshi Merle Kodo Boyd

The Monday Night Meditation Group (Pasadena, CA)
coordinated by Betty Jiei Cole

The Ocean Moon Sangha (Santa Monica, CA)
contact Michael Seigan Novak

The San Luis Obispo Sitting Group (CA)
coordinated by Mark Shogen Bloodgood

Santa Barbara Zen Center (CA)
led by Sensei Gary Koan Janka

The Valley Sangha (Woodland Hills, CA)
led by Sensei Patricia Shingetsu Guzy

The Westchester Zen Circle (CA)
led by Sensei Kipp Ryodo Hawley

Outreach Groups

CMC Buddhist Fellowship Group
California Men's Colony (CMC)
San Luis Obispo, CA
led by Mark Shogen Bloodgood

Contact info@zcla.org for information.

Sangha Rites of Passage

Welcome New Members

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Mikko Rakushin Ijas
Hugh King
John Dai Shionkon Kuykendall
Bruce Silva

Welcome New Residents

Gemma Cubero del Barrio
Trey Davis
Brian Huff
David Randall

Residents Leave-Taking

Betsy Enduring-Vow Brown

Shared Stewardship Entering

Tenzo Steward
Yoko Gyokuren Bajra
Teachers Circle
Mark Shogen Bloodgood

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Our mission is to provide training and resources for realizing the oneness of life, to maintain the precepts, and to embody the Three Tenets of Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action. **Our vision** is an enlightened world free of suffering, in which all beings live in harmony with each other and the earth, everyone has enough, deep wisdom is realized and compassion flows unhindered.

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Pizza socks! Remembering Bernie Roshi and his love for pizza!



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