



Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

Musing on Living in Gassho

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



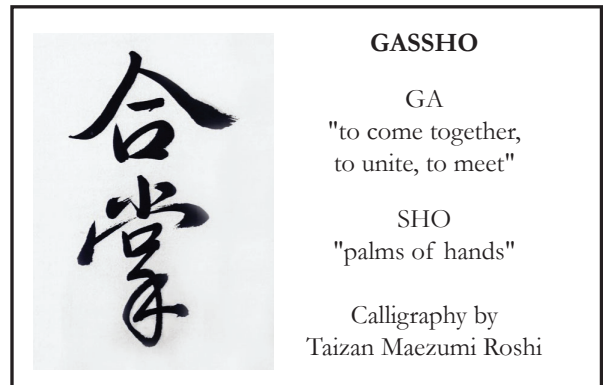
The circumstances of these days are relentlessly calling each of us to an awakening. How are you meeting this moment?

There is a koan that states: “One hand before the fifteenth day, one hand after the fifteenth day. One hand on just the fifteenth day.” This koan is the perfect expression of gassho, the theme of the Fall Practice Period. Gassho embodies inter-being.

During these Pandemic days, the realization that we inter-are, to use the word coined by the Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, is not difficult to see. Our challenge is to act in a way that is in alignment with this realization.

When you bring your two hands together in front of your body, right here is the “15th day.” The fifteenth day is the day of the full moon, which is the Buddhist metaphor for complete, unsurpassable enlightenment. Right here is the bringing together of mind-created opposites (which is the only kind of opposites there is). This includes the so-called opposites of Buddhas and Beings, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), and White people, worthy and unworthy, deserving and undeserving, and so on. When you make gassho, you personify the state of no gap between you and everything else, without exception.

Although some of you may live alone, the present circumstances have made it clear that we, in fact, don’t live our lives alone—we live together, intricately and intimately bound, in a vast and varied human community. Western society places far too much emphasis on being a separate individual. The Pandemic, Black Lives Matter, and the climate crisis each, through its own particular lens, points to the fact to which Shakyamuni Buddha awakened: that you have never been an individual separate from all that is. You have never been separate from, better than or less than, anything or anyone that is different from you. This



realization cuts through the invisible and not so invisible constructs and systems of privilege and race, skin color and class designations, wealth and poverty and so on.

“Ga” means “to unite or come together” and “sho” means “the palm of your hands.” Although there are variations of how the hands are placed together, gassho expresses the unified heart-mind, specifically the fundamental unity of Buddhas and Beings. To bring yourself into gassho signifies that you recognize that every person and every thing, without exception, is intrinsically buddha nature. The mind can easily find itself in the distorted view that since everything is buddha nature, then everything is the same and differences are somehow diminished. This lopsided sentiment is a variation of people saying, “We emphasize our differences too much. Let’s focus on what

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MUSING ON LIVING IN GASSHO *(Continued from page 1)*

we have in common.” Buddhism provides an alternative for this is distorted thinking.

What gassho is actually expressing is that everything is both uniquely *and* equally different and unified as one undivided life. Can you keep the equality of differences—the uniqueness of each person or thing—and realize it all together as unified life itself, without distorting it by valuing some differences more than others? Conventional wisdom, if we can call it wisdom, says that differences are a problem and the way to deal with them is to erase differences and emphasize the sameness. It is like the pernicious assumption that “all lives matter” and fail to see that Black Lives Matter. Each finger of the gassho is a unique dharma—do not ignore the dignity of differences.

“... personify the state of no gap...”

These days the old paradigms are shifting. Awakening is the biggest paradigm shift of all. As Zen practitioners, we learn that an awake life honors equality of differences as the life of the Buddhas. The intersections of the Pandemic and the exposure of white privilege and racial injustices has torn away the veils of a caste system that values white bodies over BIPOC bodies. As a BIPOC person, I gassho to white people who are doing the deep forensic inner work of dissecting the unearned privileges that come with having white skin. I gassho to those who translate their realizations from this work into actions that dismantle systems of racism, white privilege, and all inequalities that keep a life of justice and respect out of reach. Let’s shift the paradigms of our personal and societal karma to erase white supremacy forever.

The one-hand koan quoted above points to three important aspects of the process of transformation. “One hand before the fifteenth day” calls you to look at the past and learn what you can from it. Many people today are learning about the actual events and experiences of Black lives. This is not about wallowing in shame and guilt, but a deep learning of what caused harm and suffering. “One hand after the fifteenth day” calls you to envision a world that is beneficial and life-affirming for everyone. And “one hand on just the fifteenth day” is you, right now, waking up to and carrying out the actions that affirm a life of renewal and purposeful revisioning of equal justice for all.

Transformation may seem like a very big leap, but when you gassho, you recognize your place in the world. Embodying the fact of life’s interdependence and the true nature of differences, you will feel compelled to use your uniqueness, your wisdom and compassion, to leave behind a life of isolation and dismantle systems of separation and

oppression. Martin Luther King, Jr., powerfully expressed this in his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail.” He wrote:

... I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea.

This is the meaning of placing your palms together.

The gassho that you make with your palms pressed together with no gap between the palms is called the “mother gassho.” It is said that all the buddhas arise from the mother gassho. This means that when you place your palms together, this act of at-one-ment embodies the quality of renewal. In each moment, you can renew yourself. The heart-mind (nen) of this moment is renewed. You can shift your mindset, adopt a new habit, adopt a new way of thinking or a new way of seeing. You can rewrite your own life narrative so that it is life-affirming, no matter how dire your circumstances.

When you make gassho, you are affirming that your default position is to align yourself with the wholeness of life—not your idea of oneness, but actually seeing in detail how all life supports your existence. For example, when you eat a meal, you viscerally connect with how the meal came to you—the sun and rain, the earth and its nutrients, the seeds and the farmers, all that supports the life of a farmer, all that supports the life of those in the supply chain, the grocery store, the delivery persons, and how it arrives in your hands and into your mouth. This is not an intellectual exercise!

Give thanks, express gratitude, place your hands in gassho and affirm this web of life that is activated for a simple meal. For everything you wear—sit on, clean your house with, water, electricity—lean into the specificity of how it comes to you. Your life is completely dependent (not just interdependent) on everyone and everything else. Gassho is a simple yet profound gesture of alignment to this reality.

What causes the gap? How can you close the gaps? Arouse curiosity! Recognize the reference points of self-righteousness. Shift your personal paradigms just as the paradigms of the world is shifting under your feet. Be open. Try new ways of being as you explore gassho. As Maezumi Roshi often said to us, “Have good guts!”

Roshi Egyoku is the Head Teacher and Abbot Emeritus of ZCLA.

Two Arrows Striking

by Sensei Deb Kyobai Faith-Mind Thoresen



*Pain and bliss, love and hate, are like a
body and its shadow;
Cold and warm, joy and anger, you and
your condition,
Delight in singing verse is a road to Hell,
But at Hell's gate – peach blossoms,
plum blossoms.*

–Ikkyu 1394-1481

Yikes! The times of the world that we are living in! I do not need to point out the earth-shaking issues. When the current world-wide pandemic of Covid-19 came into my awareness, my naïve self wanted to contain it; this was what we needed to address, this is it! And yet, life did not stop, Covid-19 only became a part of this very life and complicated everything.

One of my favorite sayings by my Dharma brother, Dharma-Joy, was “What is next? Locust infestation, frogs dropping from the sky?” I whispered to myself, “Well, I have just been diagnosed with stage three cancer.” This diagnosis certainly threw me into the unknown, forcing me to bear witness to the changing aspects of my life, what I believed, my conditioning, my love ones, and deeply, my practice. All plans for the future just seemed lost in the moment.

As I accepted this diagnosis, “Not Knowing” revealed the ingredients of this very life that I could muster-up, realizing the shifts that would lessen suffering as I have journeyed through this diagnosis, treatments, and pain.

I have been meeting many people who have loved ones in serious life/death circumstances and are not allowed to see them in the hospital, not allowed to participate in the meetings with the doctors about serious diagnosis, and as a patient, it has been a lonely experience. As a spouse or caregiver, it is very difficult, feeling dismissed from major life decisions. Although phone connections exist, it is not the same as being present for these crucial conversations. The personal connections have been lost.

There is a sutra in the *Samyutta Nikaya* called “The Arrow.” It says that in life, two arrows strike us. The first arrow is the unavoidable pain of life. No one escapes being struck by this arrow. Not one of us escapes the pain of life. It comes with having a physical, impermanent body of a human living among other physical, impermanent bodies. This first arrow also includes feeling pain such as the grief of loss, the death of someone we love, our own deaths,

and sadness with all of the social injustices we are witnessing in our country, past and present.

Then the second arrow comes – the arrow of suffering! The arrow of suffering penetrates the mind and leads the pain to our ongoing need of “storyland.” Why me? Life isn’t fair! What did I do to deserve this? I just can’t handle the pain anymore, I’m feeling grumpy. So, as our practice points to—find an *upaya* that creates shifts. I was able to create a beautiful morning Gratitude Practice. I set up an altar with many gifts offered to me throughout the years. I felt love and gratitude with the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha flooding throughout me – no separation. It was a rich and healing time each morning as I maneuvered through these difficult treatments.



The second arrow is the source of wanting to escape the pain of the first arrow, allowing us to get really engrossed in the stories we create to save us from our own pain, to want to escape it. This is the suffering we can free ourselves from. This is the First Noble Truth—*dukkha*—stress, discomfort, unease, dissatisfaction, illness.

As I understand the Buddha’s intent, he began the first turning of the wheel of his teachings in Deer Park with unpleasant and often painful experiences. He did this because humans spend so much time trying to deny them or make them go away. It is this relentless effort to escape what we cannot escape, and to change what we cannot change that leads us to be dissatisfied with our lives. Trying to make *dukkha* go away is trying to make life go away. Receiving it, accepting it, is in a way, no longer *dukkha*.

“It just is this!” Our Life as it is!

Impermanence could be most devastating. Could it not also be beautiful, if received with equanimity? When we’re dying, (which I have thought a lot about recently), this mind-habit of pushing it (death) away will cease. It’s inescapable. One way or the other, we’re going to have to deal with it. So don’t you think it’s good to get a head start?

*Delight in singing verse is a road to Hell,
But at Hell's gate – peach blossoms, plum blossoms.*

Sensei Faith-Mind is on partial medical leave but continues to serve ZCLA as the Abbot.

Many Branches Rooted Deep in Practice



Sensei Gary Koan Janka, Roshi Egyoku's sixth successor, recently zoomed in from Santa Barbara to talk about his 47-plus years of practice. Here are some highlights from that conversation with Roshi Ryodo and the Sangha.

Desire & Aversion

When I started practice, the issue of desire and aversion kept nagging at me. It was what I wanted to accomplish as a Zen student. Desire is the wanting of something and aversion is having something you don't want and can't get rid of. It's a fascinating thing to spend your life working on. Even now I find a desire for something arises to the surface and stops me in my tracks. How many years have I been doing this and I'm still experiencing desire? And why not? That's what we're programmed to do. The important thing is to see what's happening and to choose a different path. We don't need to cave in to every desire.

The most critical thing is awareness. If you're not aware of what you're doing and how you're doing it, then the chances that you're going to change anything are pretty slim. You've got to be able to see it and to recognize it for what it is. And then after seeing it, you have to own it. I realize that's kind of a hackneyed phrase these days but you really need to know that "I'm the cause of that." The Buddha taught us in the form of the Noble Truths. So I would encourage anyone who is so inclined to devote him or herself to this issue of desire and aversion. Otherwise they will just continue to run your life like a hamster in a cage and you'll never know any peace.

Planting Trees

I'm a big fan of trees. It started several years ago when someone gave me a little Christmas tree that had outgrown its pot, hoping that I would plant it. I did, and I planted several more after that. Unfortunately, I didn't know the developer was coming and all the trees I had planted were plowed under. But that didn't stop me. I simply found better places to plant trees. I was looking for a way that I could impact global warming directly, and, what came up for me was planting trees. If you plant a tree, you sequester about one ton of carbon. If you want to heal the earth,

plant some trees. I've planted fifty trees around ZCLA – and I'm closing in on about 365 in Santa Barbara. Some of those are street trees and the rest were planted in an open space named Honda Valley Park. The city recently opened up a couple of new open spaces where, hopefully, I can plant some more trees.

Prison Work

I've really enjoyed my prison chaplaincy work. I first went to the Men's Central Jail with Sensei Nagacitta Buckley and after one bite, I was kind of smitten by the practice. I honestly don't know what the final outcome has been. I don't know how many hundreds of men and women I've talked with, counseled, given reading materials. I don't know where they are or what's happened to them. There are two or three who are now out of prison that I talk to, but the rest of them, I have no idea where they are. People say "Oh what a shame that you can't see a better

picture of the results you've gotten." That would be nice, but I liken my prison work to crossing Iowa in a car, and every once in a while, you stick your hand out the window and scatter seeds along the way.

I have no idea where my seeds have wound up. I just do it with the faith that somebody somewhere at some point in their life, something is going to click and they'll say, "Oh, I remember that. Sensei Koan

told me." Hopefully, I would have served that person in a beneficial way. In addition to the county jail system, I've spent some years going back and forth from the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo, the Avenal State Prison in Kings County, and the Pleasant Valley State Prison in Fresno County. It was just a long haul out there on a Friday night. It would take me about four hours to get home, so after a while I kind of set that aside.

What happens when we die?

The honest answer is I don't really know. But, I can share what I've experienced and learned from others. Not long after beginning my practice, I asked Maezumi Roshi, "What happens to us after we die?" He replied, "Nothing happens. You're dead." If you're looking for something a little more scientific, then you'll be interested in learning about the Laws of Thermal Dynamics. It tells us that everything we are and everything we have is moving toward

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Sensei Koan's Tokudo in 1998.

MANY BRANCHES (Continued from page 4)

entropy. In other words, it's becoming useless energy. So when something has completely fulfilled its destiny, there's nothing left. It's all been used and absorbed by the entity that was working with it, or, the system of which it is part. At some point even the sun is going to burn out. As the energy works itself out and away – in whatever process that is – eventually this gets to the point where there is no useful energy left.

Two Branches of Meditation

In the Eightfold Path, the Buddha talked about two kinds of meditation: mindfulness and samadhi. In Zen, we tend to focus on samadhi and not spend a whole lot of time on mindfulness. And yet, try tying your shoes with one hand. It works a lot better when you use both hands. Mindfulness practices deal mostly with here and now experience. When someone is in pain, it helps to locate where they're feeling something. Emotions always have a locus in the body. For example, we get headaches in our head, a runny nose in the nose, heartbreak in the chest, and so forth. By focusing our attention over and over again, we learn to spend more and more time in the present. It also helps us explore desire and aversion with a clear mind.

Samadhi, on the other hand, leads to the development of intense concentration. It is the last, or eighth, of the Eightfold Path. There are a number of nuances in the various definitions so I suggest you read several of them to develop a deeper and wider understanding. This one is a good place to begin: a state of intense concentration achieved through meditation. In Hindu yoga this is regarded as the final stage, at which union with the divine is reached (before or at death).

What do you do when anxiety arises?

Certainly, stopping and taking deep breaths calms us down, and that's a very happy thing that it does. And this is where mindfulness meditation takes the lead. When you start paying attention to feelings, you'll find first of all that

they arise for what we consider to be a good reason, but that isn't necessarily the case. The feeling of anxiety arises, stays for a while, and then fades away, and then something else (like anger) comes along. But the skill, the upaya, comes along, allowing you to feel it at the level of bones

and marrow and fingernails – to get down to the level of that experience. And the quicker we can recognize what's going on, the quicker we can take helpful action. (Hint: most have to do with reproduction.) For starters, it's important to appreciate that emotions all have a function. Seeing that function is the best starting place. Once you are clear about that, you can deepen your ability to successfully work with feelings.



Sensei Koan with Sensei Nagacitta.

Current “go to” Upayas

There are several things that we keep coming back to. One, of course, is how to deal in a confident, competent way with feelings. I realize that that's not strictly a Zen process. In fact, I think a lot that's going on in our society is kind of an amalgamation of not only various forms of practice but also the Western approach to psychology. You're seeing more of that comingling, and each has upayas to offer. I see them as complementary: My recommendation to someone wanting to become a teacher is to do both.

After 50 years, do you ever find it difficult to stay present?

When my brain wanders, it snaps back fairly quickly. I don't have many complaints in that direction. In fact, I'm trying to think of what distracted me in the zendo. If someone stepped on my foot, I might respond. Just the ability to be present is a gift which has helped me be much more patient than I used to be. It's a lot more effort to deal with a distraction than it is to keep sitting. I've learned to appreciate not just my practice, but the people I've lived with. I appreciate when I get to go out on a nice foggy morning and take a walk and somebody makes pancakes for breakfast. I find, in fact, that I appreciate the smaller things in life, the things that really matter.



This is It!

Reflections of the Outgoing Head Trainee

by Rosa Ando Martinez



As head trainee, I made a commitment to one year of focused study; I began my term in December 2019. At the entering ceremony, the head trainee fan that Roshi Egyoku gave me is inscribed with the words: "This is it!" In so many unexpected ways, the wisdom of these words has helped me catch my breath throughout the unfolding of the Pandemic.

Being apart and in quarantine is just one of the ways our practice has radically changed during this challenging time.

I came to the Zen Center 27 years ago through an article in the *L.A. Weekly* about "new age" alternative practices in Los Angeles. Out of curiosity, I decided to run through the listings, visiting a site a week. I'd already explored Catholic and Episcopal theology, Yoga Sivananda, est seminars, Self-Realization Fellowship, and many others.

Years ago, when Maezumi Roshi asked a group of us what brought us to the Zen Center, I said that when I had reached Z on the list of the magazine article, there was no place else to go. I got laughs, but the truth is, it stuck, and I committed to the practice of Zen.

Walking onto the Zen Center grounds for the first time is an especially preserved memory. It was so peaceful, and at the introduction to meditation class, I learned to sit still a bit longer than I ever had. The memory of the sangha treasures that opened the dharma gate for me at the Zen Center is also enduring. I look around in my memory and see Reiju in the bookstore, straightforward, never mincing words; Charles Duran in truculent political conversations; and Sensei Ensho, whose steadfast sitting in the Zendo was a teaching unto itself.

I've seen the Zen Center grow and flourish throughout my years of practice, consistently rising above the financial and membership challenges. The focus on student and teacher training and a growing pledge to social transformation through service continue to meet the needs of practice during the sequestering and distancing mandates.

I admire how many in our community have readily moved forward to transition our traditions and services quickly to online and distanced platforms. Though the Center's gates are temporarily closed to outside foot traffic in response to sequestering in place, I've been able to sit zazen, attend sesshins, services, and other programs.

As head trainee, I had envisioned my term would follow the format of those that went before me. But that was not to be. Home practice now means upgrading my technology skills, learning the iPad, and remembering to mute and unmute. Transitioning has happened alongside doubt and insecurity. Shifting from in-person to online

practice has meant sitting with impatience and being more flexible. Everything changes.

My home altar is the center of my home zendo. Though I miss rubbing shoulders with sangha, I am surprised to learn that connecting by way of enhanced encryption feels strangely intimate. I miss the garden, the coffee room chats, and Burt at the bookstore. On the other hand, I'm just a click away from home without battling traffic.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity of being head trainee, especially during these challenging times. I have to settle deep into my practice again and to feel the anxiety and uncertainty in the air. Mindfulness of body, breath, and mind rise with the practice of just getting up in the morning, just sitting, just breathing behind my mask, just six-foot distancing, just hand washing.

Deep bows to Roshi Egyoku for allowing me the opportunity to fill the head-trainee position and for her guiding words which framed my tenure. Deep bows to the staff, priests, teachers, and residents effectively supporting the center in maintaining our interconnectivity. I appreciate and am grateful for the support I've received from everyone, sangha and family alike.

This is it!



Ando was the Head Trainee for 2020. Her Hossen ceremony (Dharma Combat with the Sangha) will be on Sunday, October 18.

Who Is Civilized?

by Christina TChoren Carvalho



TChoren and Bingo during quarantine.

When Sensei Daiki talked to me about writing for the *Water Wheel*, I nodded thinking how much there was to say about my practice, my groups, etc. Then she added, almost in passing, “Anything you think that can be helpful to people here.” Swoosh... That sounded like a much more difficult proposition. It became like a koan to me. What in this whole plethora of new things in my life could be of use to ZCLA members at large?

I don’t know. So I start with the basics. My son, having his Law school classes online, is living with me for the time being. We adopted a sweet dog that had been abandoned. Since mid-March I’m offering my sangha two periods of *zazen* daily during the week, plus a Council and study group on Saturdays. Everything online. Many practitioners just disappeared, unable or unwilling to adjust – some hoping this would be a short phase. But new people started to contact me. Most come and go and who knows whether they will come back again.

Yet my feeling – strengthened by direct feedback – is that both the daily *zazen* and the weekly Council are much appreciated. In these challenging times when we had our way of life turned inside out (or should we say outside in?) our practice connections are even more precious.

On a more intimate level, there is a profound change happening – like my very tectonic plates are shifting and I do not know what the new configuration will look like. I’m not sure how it happened, but all of a sudden my heart broke open to the pain and urgency of the increased destruction of the Amazon and the Pantanal and the real threat of indigenous genocide in Brazil. With my heart broken, a number of shifts continue to happen. I will mention only three in the hopes that this will be of value to some.

When educating myself regarding racism, I came across an article by Kritee Kanko called: “White

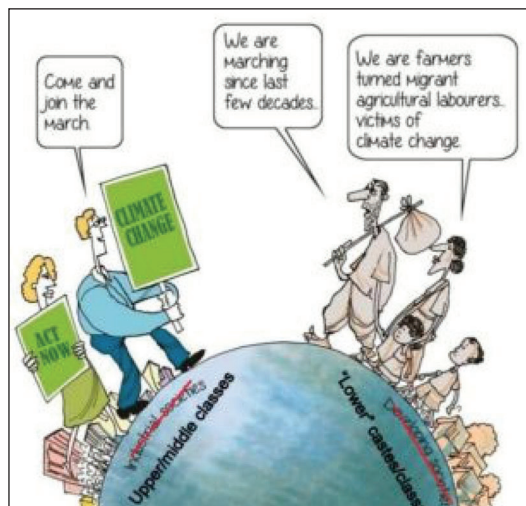
Supremacy: Mother of Climate Crisis.” To say this title hit me like a brick is an understatement. The whole sham of the History learned in school came crumbling down, as my eyes went wide open to the perverse reversal of “civilized vs savage.” Traditional peoples around the world were the ones who had a balanced, civilized way of life, keeping a wealth of wisdom on how to care for our beautiful “blue marble.” Duhh.

Another shift happened during an online workshop on measures to reverse global warming. One of the cherished ideas was about investing so many trillions of dollars on technology that would eventually save so many more trillions of dollars ... my head started spinning. How can this mode of thinking truly benefit the poor and vulnerable, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of environmental refugees? This was NOT what I was looking for.

Then I watched an interview with one of our great indigenous leaders and thinkers, Ailton Krenak. He recounted that, in fact, the government had offered his tribe to move to another territory, since it was in their land that the largest environmental disaster in Brazilian history happened in 2015 – Mariana’s dam failure that released 43.7 million cubic meter of toxic mud into the Rio Doce (Sweet River). Ailton Krenak declared with the patience

and resilience of an old Tibetan Lama, “The river is like our grandfather who is in a coma now. He will probably never come back to life, but we will not abandon him. We will stay and bear witness.”

Now, with Roshi Egyoku’s blessings, I’m going deeper into this Not-Knowing. Even my personal vows, that seemed so adequate for a number of years, feel somehow not spacious enough – and not incisive enough. For now I’m just educating myself regarding the ecological crisis, the rich and profound indigenous cultures, and more. How will I integrate all of this with my Zen priest path? I do not know.



TChoren is a ZCLA priest living in Brazil. Her Shuso (head trainee) year began in September 2020 and will end when it is safe for her to return to the U.S.

Anti-Racist Practice in Motion with the Three Tenets

by Kristie Ryōnen Valdez-Guillen



Zen practice requires mindful presence: an earnest presence with what is right here, right now. I will be the first to admit that I struggle with this on the cushion! My mind loves zipping around a laundry list of things it could or should be doing, my body finds any minor discomfort an inconvenience worthy of shifting around endlessly to avoid, and my spirit

struggles to settle into the here and now, especially as a trauma survivor. And yet, all my wonderful teachers here remind me, lovingly and in good humor, that the only way out is through. Especially when I do not want to be mindfully present, that is exactly what I must practice. “Just sit,” Roshi Egyoku, Sensei Faith-Mind, Sensei Senshin, and Rev. Myoho repeat with saintly patience. “Just sit.” And so I try. And still, I fuss. And still, I struggle.

I find that the more sangha members I talk openly with about my struggles on the cushion, the more I find that I am not alone. We are all comfort queens, eternally seeking the coziest posture. We are all pain averse, continuously hoping that practice will bring peace and enlightenment that allow us to float above life’s troubles. These do not make us bad practitioners, they make us humble bodhisattvas in our own little samsaras, on and off the cushion.

Our practice calls us not simply to cultivate physical and spiritual solidity, but to practice this stillness as we move about our lives. For whatever reason, practice seems to make a little more sense to me in motion. Whether this is walking meditation, or the kind of practice that life has so abundantly provided through incredulous amounts of trials and tribulations this year – simply moving allows the dharma to come alive for me.

While moving through my life, I am given many opportunities to learn and practice not knowing, bearing witness, and loving action. Most prominently, I am called to engage these practices when I hear my Black brothers and sisters crying out for racial justice on the streets. When I see Indigenous communities disproportionately and lethally impacted by COVID-19. When I witness headline after headline reporting another transgender woman of color being murdered with no justice. When I read about the enormity of the trauma Latino immigrant children are being subjected to in detention centers.

My vows make embodied and clear sense to me here. Listen. Do not presume you know their pain, even if you have your own as a queer woman of color. Work to liberate all beings from suffering, including racial and gendered injustice. This vow to liberate all beings from suffering isn’t a colonialist quest to save an “other,” but a decolonial calling to liberate all interconnected beings – including ourselves – from the constraints of racist, colonialist, and otherwise intersectionality oppressive structures. We do this not only by cultivating mindful samadhi on the cushion, but also by practicing loving kindness, compassion, and equanimity when we are asked to confront our own roles in perpetuating the suffering of others.

It’s here where many of us begin to shift on our metaphorical cushions – looking for that physical comfort, that spiritual peace, that mental solidity above all earthly troubles. Or maybe our minds zip around through lists of all of the ways we, too, have suffered, or all of the ways we are good people. Or perhaps we negotiate with the magnitude of the grief this reckoning creates – saying that we can turn our mindful attention about anti-racist practice out toward others. Can’t we just donate or call others out, instead of looking within ourselves, our own families, or our own communities? Practice requires that we ask how we, too, enact harm and benefit from oppressing others, if only indirectly. Practice requires that we stay with what hurts, and how we hurt others.

The struggles we face in practicing off the cushion are all so valid. Evasiveness is my propensity on the cushion, and I empathize deeply with it as others struggle through evasiveness off the cushion. Anti-racist practice is an in motion practice that requires all of our courage, vulnerability and strength. It requires all of our willingness to be here and now, especially when we are confronted with our little Self discomforts, and propensities to run from pain. There is no easy answer for how to resolve generations of racial and colonial traumas. But as we practice together and work to imagine a more liberated world, I paraphrase my wise teachers’ advice: the only way out is through. I hope you’ll continue to join me in just sitting, just being here and now. Just bearing witness. Just now knowing. One breath at a time.

Ryōnen is a ZCLA resident and member of the ZCLA BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Group.

White Aspiring Allies

by Jitsujo Gauthier



Soon after the May 25th killing of George Floyd, fellow ZCLA resident Harlan Jindo Pace and I began the Anti-Racism Reading Group (ARRG) at ZCLA via Zoom. This group is still forming and processing its identity. There is discomfort in many of us around creating a white-only group; at the same time we need the space to deconstruct white-

ness, and practice talking about our privilege and part in racial history. I think it is hard for us white folks to see that our reality is in fact segregated by design with some exceptions, so we chose a group name that felt racially neutral.

The ARRG group began by reading the *Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing* by Anneliese Singh. We developed group safety and accountability agreements and share about exercises from the book at weekly meetings. In July, we began using a dialogue practice called the R.A.C.E. Method, which I learned from an “Empathy is Your Superpower” course I took with Dr. David Campt. The R.A.C.E. Method is a way to call us into conversations that explore beliefs and direct experiences of racism and race, as opposed to calling each other out on racist thoughts, statements, and actions. Here is the basic method:

REFLECT: To prepare for a difficult conversation, take a breath, get centered, and relax.

ASK: From a place of not-knowing, without trying to change the person in front of you or their beliefs, be brave and ask questions that help you become clear about what they believe to be true. Once you are clear, ask if they have had any direct experience(s) that led to their beliefs.

CONNECT: Tell a story that shows that you understand where this person is coming from and aligns with at least one aspect of their point of view, e.g., “I see, I also felt like this.”

EXPAND: After telling your connect story, pause, and then add a story that expands how our beliefs and/or direct experience may be problematic, linked to a larger system of racism, bias, stereotypes, or unseen privileges, which divide rather than unite us.

Dr. Campt’s philosophy is about developing empathy and creating environments for allyship. Our group spent weeks on the Ask step, learning to disclose and ask questions about racially problematic beliefs and experiences. The Ask step seems to be the most difficult. It’s easier to go straight to an Expand story and say what you know to be

true, but this breaks the connection. Part of white fragility is an inability to lean into a difficult conversation around race, emotionally tolerate something racially problematic, and stay in the conversation with a humble and compassionate heart. There is humility in seeking to understand, remaining curious, and asking someone to expound on a belief system or direct experience entirely different from one’s own. Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) have been engaging in these types of conversations with humility for many years.

After the 2016 election, Dr. Campt realized that conversations about race in our country needed to happen between white people, rather than between BIPOC and white people. I see that calling ourselves an Anti-racist group may not adequately represent what we are currently doing. Perhaps we are more like a group of white people reading about racism, trying to see and disclose our blindness of racism and supremacy. Although, I think we aspire to be a group that helps shoulder the burden of the racial justice work that BIPOC have been doing for so long. Perhaps we can be a space for white folks to ask basic questions around topics of race, microaggressions, structures of whiteness, and privilege.

In truth we are like babies learning to crawl. Do you know that stage before the baby is able to crawl where they rock back and forth on their hands and knees hoping that the momentum will somehow thrust them forward? A baby may spend day after day trying to thrust one knee forward in hopes the arm will simultaneously follow, repeating this action simply to crawl. Surrounding adults may try to help by modeling the crawl, physically moving a leg or arm, cheering, patiently watching from a distance, and intervening when things seem unsafe. Can we embrace our vulnerability, be more playful about learning, and receive help when it’s offered with a sense of appreciation and grace?

Our group is open to those with white-skinned privilege that would like to learn how to crawl through dialogues around race and racism. If you are a sangha member further along this path of anti-racist allyship and would like to hold space, articulate blind spots, or share your learning along the way—we welcome your help. We don’t know what we don’t know. What keeps us stuck is isolation and not taking responsibility for our own ignorance. The world we are being asked to re-imagine is of course right here. This is a world where we see our differences clearly and play freely in the fields of the pure land with ease and grace. Do you see this?

Rev. Jitsujo is a resident ZCLA priest and a Dharma Holder.

ZCLA's New Website

by John Kyogen Rosania



The previous version of the Zen Center website, our internet residence for many years, with its beautiful gold and purple home-page, was programmed by our very own Roshi Ryodo. The newest version of the website launched in March this year, just as Mayor Garcetti announced the Safer At Home plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many hands and eyes of the Center spent over a year bringing this new site to fruition led by the steady guidance of Dharma-Holder Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld.

With the closing of the physical grounds of the Center and the emergence of our full virtual zen calendar of sitting, talks, and events, the website has become the unofficial entrance gate to ZCLA.

A website is like a mushroom's root system, its rhizomic structure spreading out in all directions. The fruiting mushroom bodies are the surface presentation, the web pages, but underneath, in the dirt of the earth, a network of coordination and communication occurs through our practice of shared stewardship, continually changing and updating.

Currently, a ZCLA web circle has formed to coordinate the ongoing development of the website and Reeb Kaizen Venners has stepped in as temporary webmaster.

In addition, a group of web-savvy Sangha members recently met to explore how to improve the accessibility and clarity of the website, increase the visibility of the various groups at the center (Anti-Racist; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; Sutra Study; Brown and Green; etc.), and thread the message of social justice throughout the site.

As we continue through the end of the year and into 2021, the website is only going to become more important as a representation of the many voices and practices of the Zen Center and a powerful means to spread the Dharma. We want the website to reflect the character, personality, atmosphere, and practice culture of Zen Center as well as become another means of practice itself. What a wonderful opportunity!

If you have suggestions for the website, email Kaizen at: rvenners@gmail.com

Kyogen is a ZCLA resident and Steward of the Website Group.



In August, Roshi Egyoku (center) empowered four new Preceptors. They are (from left): Lorraine Gessho Kumpf, Rev. Jonathan Kaigen Lery, Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld and George Mukei Horner. Rev. Myoho and Rev. Kaigen were also empowered as Zen Priests in the ceremony of Denkai.



On September 26, eight members received the precepts in a Jukai ceremony held outside at ZCLA and witnessed on Zoom by the Sangha. They are from left to right: David Fushin Watson, Sacha Joshin Greenfield, Kristie Ryonen Valdez-Guillen, Dylan Banto Neal, (center Roshi Egyoku, Preceptor), Daniel Ejo Wilner, Fernanda Myokan Schwartz Hughes, and Chris Genzan Hackman. Not pictured is Eberhard Konin Feitz who participated remotely from Seattle.

Revolving Wheel of Change

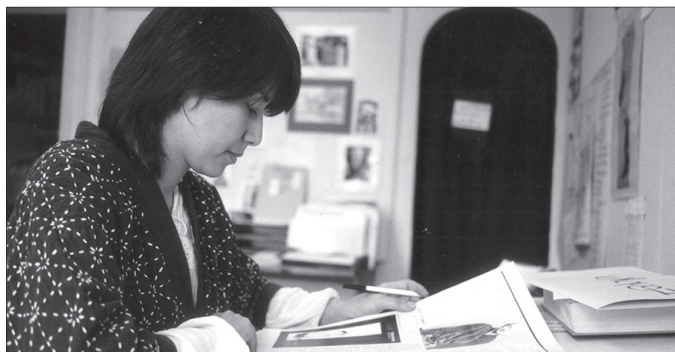
by Sensei Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith

This issue of the *Water Wheel* marks a significant change in stewardship. After 23 years, Roshi Egyoku is transitioning out of her role in the *Water Wheel* as Publisher and Editor. Burt Wetanson will continue as Editor and Tom Yudo Burger will continue as the Design and Production Manager. I have stepped in as the new Editor-in-Chief and Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld has joined the staff as Associate Editor. John Kyogen Rosania and Reeb Kaizen Venners are envisioning how the *Water Wheel* will live on our new website.

Since its beginnings, ZCLA published in three main areas: *The Sangha Letter* (started as a monthly, keeping everyone current on the goings-on), *The Ten Directions* (a quarterly journal named by Burt), and *Center Publications* (ZCLA was one of the first U.S. Zen Centers to form its own publishing company). Roshi Egyoku was involved in all three. For many years, she oversaw *The Sangha Letter*, which provides a historical record of the life of the ZCLA Sangha. It lives now mostly in the UCLA ZCLA archives. She succeeded Andy Taido Cooper as editor and publisher of *The Ten Directions*, which was published for about 10 years and is an amazing record of how forward-thinking ZCLA was way back when. And for *Center Publications*, Roshi and Sensei John Daishin Buksbazen oversaw the republishing of three titles.

Returning to ZCLA in 1997, Roshi felt it was time for a new vision for *The Sangha Letter* and renamed it *The Water Wheel*, a phrase from The Gate of Sweet Nectar. Under her keen guidance each issue has included timeless dharma teachings as well as articles reflecting how ZCLA sees itself now and in the future, and therefore is also a historical record of our evolution.

Going forward, the *Water Wheel* will continue to evolve and refine its purpose. We are deeply grateful to Roshi for all the ways and decades she has served in this realm and are happy she will continue as advisor and writer. Gassho.



Young Egyoku working on a Zen Center publication, circa 1983.

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

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

To **Ty Jotai Webb**, **Victor** at **Advanced Computer Systems**, **Mary Rios**, **Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen**, and **Sensei Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith** for all their work unlocking, removing, reformatting, reinstalling, and restoring systems and files after the ransomware attack while continuing to communicate to the membership;

To all those who helped to make Jukai happen: **Roshi Egyoku**, **George Mukei Horner**, **Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert**, **Geri Meiho Bryan**, **Reeb Kaizen Venners**, **Tom Yudo Burger**, **Jotai**, **Tim Taikan Zamora**, **Bob Doetsu Ross**, **Lorraine Gessho Kumpf**, and **John Kyogen Rosania**;

To **Kyogen**, **Kaizen**, **Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld**, and **Sensei Senshin** for all their work on our new website;

To our ZOOM Zendo Streaming team: **Rev. Dharma-Joy**, **Rev. Jitsujo Gauthier**, and **Kaizen**;



To **Robert Diaz**, our Maintenance Manager, for all his work maintaining our grounds;

To our 3rd Quarter Jikidos: **Mukei**, **Sacha Jōshin Greenfield**, **Taikan**, **David Randall**, **Meiho**, and **Brian Sotetsu Huff**;

To those who have continued service in the Buddha Hall: **Rev. Jitsujo**, **Mukei**, **Meiho**, **Jōshin**, and **Kaizen**;

To **Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley**, **Dharma-Joy**, and **Kaizen** for the ongoing upgrades to the Zoom audio and video;

To **Mukei**, **Jessica Oetsu Page**, **Conrad Butsugen Romo**, **Diane True-Joy Fazio**, and **April True-Flower Ford** for leading our Day of Reflections;

To **Roshi Ryodo** and **Sensei Senshin** for leading the Bringing it Home Sesshin and **Elizabeth Jiei Cole** for leading the August Zazenkai;

To **Roshi Egyoku** for forming and leading the ZCLA BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Group.

ZCLA Affiliated Groups

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

The San Luis Obispo Zen Circle (CA)
led by Sensei Mark Shogen Bloodgood

Wild River Zen Circle (Nevada City, CA)
led by Sensei Jeanne Dokai Dickenson

The Valley Sangha (Woodland Hills, CA)
coordinated by Marc Dogen Fontaine and
Michael Jishin Fritzen

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

Outreach Groups

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

Contact info@zcla.org for information.



The *Water Wheel* is published quarterly by the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Great Dragon Mountain/Buddha Essence Temple, which was founded by the late Taizan Maezumi Roshi in 1967.

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.

Founding Abbot: Taizan Maezumi Roshi

Abbot 1995-1999: Roshi Bernard Glassman

Abbot Emeritus 1999-2019: Roshi Egyoku Nakao

The Seats: Abbot, Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen;

Head/Resident Teacher, Roshi Egyoku Nakao

Water Wheel: *Editor-in-Chief:* Sensei Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith; *Editor:* Burt Wetanson; *Production Artist:* Tom Yudo Burger; *Associate Editor:* Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld; *Proofreaders for this issue:* Jotai Webb; *Photographers for this issue:* Rosa Ando Martinez and Tom Yudo Burger.

Sangha Rites of Passage

New Members

Elana Auerbach
Stephen Carignan
Jerry Grenard
Catherine Daniels Riveros
Patrick Thurmond
Guy Zimmerman

Preceptors

Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld (and Denkaï)
George Mukei Horner
Lorraine Gessho Kumpf
Rev. Jonathan Kaigen Levy (and Denkaï)

Jukai

Eberhard Kōnin Fetz
Sacha Jōshin Greenfield
Chris Genzan Hackman
Dylan Bantō Neal
Fernanda Myōkan Schwartz Hughes
Kristie Ryōnen Valdez-Guillen
Dave Fushin Watson
Dan Ejō Wilner



In Memoriam: The Magnolia and Liquid Amber trees we lost in the Jizo Garden.

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