



Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

“The New Year à la Diamond Sutra”

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



We turn the proverbial calendar page and voila, here we are in 2021. When, in fact, there is no old or new year. There is just now! What we call our life—what we call time—is beginningless and endless. It is as the Diamond Sutra sets forth: “What I call ‘the new year’ is not ‘the new year.’ Such is merely a name. That is why I call it ‘the new year.’”

Maezumi Roshi was fond of saying that it is helpful to place a punctuation mark in this life of no beginnings and no endings. What mark will you place as we measure our days by the Gregorian calendar? Will you place a period, a comma, a hyphen, a semi-colon, an exclamation point or perhaps a question mark? I am partial to the long dash. After a tough ten months, we are all likely breathing a sigh of relief at the custom of ringing out the old and ringing in the new, even if nothing has really changed and the Pandemic rages on in Los Angeles.

The Diamond Sutra expounds a useful formula for living awake. It expounds the sound Buddhist logic of “p is not p, that is why I call it p.” Or, “What I call (such and such), is not (such and such). Such is merely a name. That is why it is called (such and such).” I recommend using this formula, which can cut through the knots of the mind like a diamond sword and align you with the dynamic life force itself. Even if you don’t fully understand this formula, using it will loosen up your grip on whatever you are clinging to, even just a little bit.

In the Diamond Sutra, the Buddha teaches Subhuti as follows, “...what the Tathagata has called a conception of dharma is not a conception of dharma. Such is merely a name. That is why it is called a conception of dharma.” There is nothing that is exempt from this formula. Maezumi Roshi often used the adjective “so-called,” as in so-called new year, so-called Dharma, or so-called pizza. This is a fine way to remember that the designation of a name is not



the thing itself. It merely points to the pulsing reality that is obscured by the name we have agreed to call it.

This formula reveals the three legs of the path of a Bodhisattva. I envision an offering bowl with three legs. What are these three? Wisdom, compassion, and skillful means. The first leg—“What is called ‘the new year’ is not ‘the new year,’ ” reveals the supreme wisdom of shunyata, the essential nature of being empty of any fixity. Reality is energy in motion; nothing is solid, nothing is fixed. All is constantly moving; this great rhythm of the life force moves unceasingly. We, too, are of this nature—never apart, never separate, but a direct expression of the very web of life itself. We are always in creation; we are always co-creators.

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THE NEW YEAR *(Continued from page 1)*

This ever-moving energy gathers itself into various forms. Owing to karmic and natural laws, each formation has its own unique characteristics, including how long its form will hold. A bubble in a stream holds its form for a few seconds, a butterfly for about thirty days, Rohatsu sesshin for seven days, a human being for anywhere from a few hours to over one-hundred years, a ginkgo tree for three thousand years, and a mountain for centuries. However long the form is held, the form itself is not solid even if it appears to be so. It is, in fact, empty of any fixity, of any fixed point.

Compassion, the second leg, is embodied in the phrase, "Such is merely a name." Whenever I hear or say this phrase, my heart opens and softens a little. Compassion arises with seeing that what we perceive as our lives is solidified by language. Hence, what we live "is merely a name," not the actual taste, sound, smell, or touch of direct experiences. What is this softening that I experience at these words?

*"So you should view all of the fleeting worlds:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud;
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream."*

First, I feel compassion for myself—for the fact that I have unnecessarily created a solid and separate sense of myself, people, and situations and attached to these self-generated ideas. I see how I have obscured the very nature of life with my thoughts, labels, and ideas that I then call "my life." I experience the suffering this causes.

Secondly, compassion arises within me for all those who do not see this diamond wisdom. When Siddhartha saw the morning star and awakened to the insubstantiality and connection of all forms, he refused to budge from his seat under the bodhi tree. He had resolved his urgent question about life for himself. For seven days he sat satisfied. During those days, compassion arose in him for all those who did not see what he saw; for all those who did not have the experience of being free from concepts, from ideas of a solid, fixed self-identity. He felt compassion for all those who were not free from the tyranny of their own thoughts and the thoughts of others; for all those who live with the ego-self as the sole reference point of their lives. Perhaps he especially felt compassion for those who sensed that there was something more—some way to be liberated from their suffering and had no idea how to be free.

The third leg, skillful means, is embodied in the final phrase of the formula, "And that is why we call it 'the new year.'" Skillful means are the ways that you and I co-create to help each other see the diamond wisdom that Shakyamuni realized. What are the skillful means that will help us see through to shunyata? To see through to the arising of the myriad forms, which are, as the Sutra says, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River. Each form has its own unique name, but it is only a so-called name. "And that is why I call it 'the new year'" because I know the true nature of that which is called by a name.

If you were to consider everything you do as a skillful means, how would your life align with such a vision? The entire Zen Center is set up as a skillful means—sesshin, samu, giving talks, face-to-face, preparing and sharing meals, zooming, according with the precepts, and so forth. All are skillful means to align us with this reality of wisdom and of all-encompassing compassion. When we do this—no matter how small our understanding and effort, the very act of doing puts us in alignment with the universal life force. In this way, we can serve each other skillfully without any attachment to outcome because you and I align with the great benevolent movement of the life force that is itself a buddha being.

The Buddha asks, "In what spirit would [you] illuminate [the Sutra] for others?" The Buddha himself responds, "Without being caught up in the appearance of things in themselves but understanding the nature of things just as they are. Why?" In response, the Sutra ends with this memorable verse:

So you should view all of the fleeting worlds:

A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;

A flash of lightning in a summer cloud;

A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

This verse sums up the deep feeling that I have for this life, that the flavor of this mysterious life is bittersweet—beauty tinged with sadness.

Indeed, isn't this the flavor of these pandemic days? In the midst of sorrow, suffering, and pain, we experience the incredible sweetness of people reaching out across balconies, saving lives in overwhelmed hospitals, and extending help to those suffering from the loss of lives and livelihood.

Roshi Egyoku is ZCLA's Head Teacher. Quotes from Mu Seong's translation of the Diamond Sutra. Article is excerpted from a teisho at Rohatsu sesshin, 2020.

All About Love

by Rev. Darla Myoho Fjeld



Case

The first ancestor was Mahakasyapa. Once, the World-Honored One held up a flower and blinked. Kasyapa smiled. The World-Honored One said, "I have the Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma and Wondrous Mind of Nirvana, and I transmit it to Mahakasyapa."—Case 2 of Zen Master Keizan's *Denkoroku*

Love has been in my heart-mind since Love Bernie Day when someone shared something Roshi Bernie said at a council at Auschwitz—he was distilling what our practice is all about—Roshi Bernie said: “It’s all about love, man.” That expression of what it’s all about said by that good man Bernie—hat Mensch—in that place, Auschwitz, where the opposite of love had once reigned—is so powerful that it’s been living in me as a koan since I heard it.

Even before that, the seed of love was planted in me at my Shuso Hossen a few years ago when someone asked me: “How do you define love?” Without thinking, I replied: “Love is when we acknowledge the interconnection between us.”

Love has lost its meaning in our world today because we use it so casually for everything that we need, desire and admire. We say things like “I love pizza”—“I love that color on you”—“I love the way she talks”—“I love that song”—“I love you and can’t live without you” and so forth. Or we think of love in a Romantic way or we say “I love you” to various people in our lives like our children, parents or friends.

We seem to use the word “love” to refer to a feeling that we might have toward other people, animals and things. My suspicion is that buried in that feeling is a need of some kind that would not be met if that person or thing were not in our lives. We fear the loss of people that we love because it will cause us to suffer.

The practice of zazen brings us to an awareness of a deeper love that is available to and flows through all of us as we realize more and more the truths of no-self, interdependence, impermanence and karma.

How might we Buddhists think about our use of the word “love”? Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Master refers to the “Four Qualities of Love” in a book he wrote by that title.

The first quality of love in Buddhism is *maitri* which refers to loving kindness. It refers to the intention and ability to offer joy and happiness. We can’t offer joy and happiness, however, unless we practice the three tenets of Not Knowing, Bearing Witness and Appropriate Action. Here we must emphasize Bearing Witness, because unless we really bear witness to another person and learn what that person really needs, we might stumble into bringing that person unhappiness. We must really understand another person to offer appropriate loving kindness.



The second quality or aspect of love in Buddhism is captured by the word *karuna*, which is usually translated as compassion. Buddhist compassion refers to our intention and ability to relieve suffering. Again, this points to bearing witness—fully observing and listening—being with another person who is in pain—offering relief to that person. It often only takes one word to reduce another person’s suffering—one pat on the back—one understanding email or text. Paying attention is key to knowing what would be the best action to take to alleviate suffering.

The third quality of love in Buddhism is *mudita*, which is translated as joy. In our positive emotions class that Rosh Egyoku led, we defined *mudita* as “sympathetic joy”—the happiness we feel when other people are happy. Thich Nhat Hanh believes that *mudita* is about our own joy and the joy of others. It is a joy filled with peace and contentment. We are overjoyed when we see happiness in others, but we are also overjoyed by our own happiness.

Lastly, we have the quality of *upeksha* which means equanimity—this is a quality of no-clinging—letting go—like when we unclench our fist. We take the widest view and look at all sides with no discrimination. To love in this way is to come from a place of no me and no you, no self and other. We love equally because ultimately all are equal in the Dharma—all beings are Buddha. This quality of equanimity keeps us from being possessive in our love.

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ALL ABOUT LOVE *(continued from page 3)*

When we are possessive with another person, we destroy his or her freedom to be themselves. With true love neither person is in a prison.

When we practice, these aspects of love naturally arise in us. Perhaps you have experienced this. But we often find ourselves being selfish and jealous—I do anyway—and I find it helpful to gently come back to the place of love that I am developing in my Zazen. That place of openness and open heartedness.

The reason we get so caught up in the dramas of selfishness, jealousy, greed, anger, ignorance and lust is that we get caught up in need-love, rather than seeing Love as the magnetic force that binds us all together. We get it wrong because we deny that we are interdependent every time we assert that we are separate—every time we break a precept—every time we speak ill of the Three Treasures. We do this even though there are so many hints and signs that we are interconnected—like the way a virus spreads—or how yawning or smiling is contagious—or how one person in a bad mood can bum out everyone around him or her. Just think how much effect we could have practicing loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

Love moves through us and always comes from the foundation of “I and everything are in this life together.” There is no “I” per se—there is only “We”—and that “We” contains all that is, was and will ever be. This shifts us away from self-preoccupation. It takes us out of thinking that there’s a little “me” inside my body somewhere that is at the center of everything and replaces it with Love.

Of course, we hate this. We like living in our dramas. We all have our little stories about how hard our lives have been and why we act the way we do. But when we let those stories become beliefs about who we are, we are setting ourselves up for drama. Really stubborn people may live their whole lives caught up in the self-centered drama of their own stories and never really get to experience life as it is. I know I don’t want that for my life. How about you?

So as long as we stay stuck in the prison of our own personal stories, we will continue to create dramas wherever we go. To live life in this way is to deny the love connection that runs through us all. Love lives beneath the stories that we tell ourselves.

Think about all the stories we tell ourselves about love and the loss of love. With Romantic Love, we really put trips on each other that are based on our attachment to permanence. We act like this one person will make everything in our lives perfect. That’s quite a trip to put on a person.



Photo by Peter Cunningham.

So, this is what I meant when I said that Love is when we acknowledge the interconnection between us. Love is not about another person per se—love is everywhere—we just have to see it. Everything really boils down to realizing experientially the fact of interconnection—that everything depends on everything. This is what the Buddha realized when he sat down under the Bodhi Tree. Love is when we truly experience the interdependence of everyone and everything and when we act in hurtful ways, we are denying that reality—we are living in the delusion of being separate.

When Roshi Bernie said “It’s all about love, man,” I believe he had interdependence in mind. This deep statement will be a guiding koan for me for the rest of my life. I have often repeated Roshi Bernie’s definition of enlightenment as a greater and greater awareness of interconnection. I see now that another way to put this is to say, “Enlightenment is Love.” Love is the connectivity that lies at the heart of the universe.

The transmission story of the World-Honored One holding up a flower and Mahakasyapa responding with a smile is a perfect illustration of Love—of what is meant by interconnection.

Master Keizan tells us in his Teisho on this case: “Shakyamuni and Mahakasyapa became acquainted and their life pulses intermingled.”

The Buddha held up a flower and Mahakasyapa smiled.

The Buddha offers each of us a flower: How do you respond?

Rev. Myoho is a Dharma Holder, priest and Temple Development Steward.

The Recommendation of Zazen for Everyone

by George Mukei Horner



Dogen Zenji brought the Soto lineage of Zen from China to Japan. Born in the year 1200, his father died when he was only two or three years old, and his mother when he was seven. As the smoke of offered incense rose over his mother's body, he keenly felt the evanescence of life and awakened his desire to study the Dharma.

In his early teens, he ordained as a monk at a Tendai monastery on Mt. Hiei, receiving the name Buppo Dogen, Buddha-Dharma Way-Source. At this time, Japanese Buddhism was dominated by the Shingon and Tendai schools. Tendai was especially powerful politically. Some of its larger temples had armies of warrior monks, which they used both in violent conflict with rival temples, and to pressure the government. It was a common belief among Japanese Buddhists that they had entered the long-predicted Age of the Degenerate Dharma, whose conditions were so un conducive to enlightenment that seeking it was pointless. The best one could try for was rebirth in the Pure Land, where awakening would be easy.

It may be while training as a new monk that Dogen first heard the teaching that everyone is endowed with Buddha-nature from birth, and it raised in him a consuming question: If so, then why is practice effort necessary?

In time, feeling his understanding was not deepening, he visited other temples and eventually came to Kennin-ji, a monastery in Kyoto founded by Master Eisai, who had received dharma transmission in China in the Linji (Rinzai) lineage of Zen. Around age seventeen, he became a student of Myozen, the abbot of Kennin-ji. Myozen recognized that Dogen was an extraordinary student, and when he travelled to China in 1223, Dogen accompanied him.

They went to Jingde Monastery on Mt. Tiantong, at which Myozen's late teacher, Eisai, had trained. Dogen trained there for a year and a half, then spent several months visiting other monasteries in search of a teacher. What he saw left him disappointed. With some teachers, their methods seemed unhelpful, and they did not allow students to ask clarifying questions. There were also instances of corruption, of monks attempting to acquire documents of dharma transmission illegitimately, or bribing government officials to be appointed abbot of a temple.

Dogen returned to Jingde when Master Rujing was appointed abbot. An authentic, highly regarded teacher of the Caodong (Soto) school, he emphasized the practice of zazen and required seriousness and dedication in his students. Dogen wrote to Rujing, asking to be accepted as a student who could meet with him privately. Rujing accepted him, and in their meetings Dogen asked deep, probing questions, correcting and clarifying his understanding.

One night, during zazen, Rujing encouraged the monks saying, "Zazen is dropping off body and mind!" On hearing this, Dogen was suddenly awakened, inside and outside fell away, and he experienced the true meaning of the teachings. When Master Rujing had verified his realization, he gave Dogen Zenji dharma transmission and his seal of approval.

In 1227, after four years in China, Dogen Zenji returned to Japan. It was then, as he began to work with students of his own, that he wrote Fukanzazengi, the Universal Recommendation of Zazen. This was his declaration that zazen is the essential, authentic practice of all Buddha-ancestors; that it is—as he put it in his next essay for his students, Bendowa (On the Endeavor of the Way)—the front gate for directly entering the buddha-dharma.

Dogen Zenji opens with the seeming paradox that had confronted him for so long in his own practice.

The Way is basically perfect and all-pervading. How could it be contingent upon practice and realization? The Dharma-vehicle is free and untrammelled. What need is there for concentrated effort? Indeed, the Whole Body is far beyond the world's dust. Who could believe in a means to brush it clean? It is never apart from one right where one is. What is the use of going off here and there to practice? And yet, if there is the slightest discrepancy, the Way is as distant as heaven from earth. If the least like and dislike arises, the Mind is lost in confusion.

The Way is identical with the very life of each of us. It's impossible to be apart from it. But even the slightest failure to understand this sets us heaven and earth apart from the Way from which we can never be apart. So what to do?

Need I mention the Buddha, who was possessed of inborn knowledge? — the influence of his six years of upright sitting is noticeable still. Or Bodhidharma's transmission of the mind-seal? — the fame of his nine years of wall-sitting is celebrated to this day. Since this was the case with the saints of old, how can people of today dispense with negotiation of the Way?

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RECOMMENDATION FOR ZAZEN (Continued from page 5)

Dogen's answer is to do as they did, to negotiate the Way by sitting, being present, and feeling out a path through the confusion to an ever deeper understanding.

You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self ... Cast aside all involvements and cease all affairs. Do not think good or bad. Do not administer pros and cons. Cease all movements of the conscious mind, the gauging of all thoughts and views. Have no designs on becoming a buddha ... Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Non-thinking. This in itself is the essential art of zazen.

How many ways does he need to say it? Stop thinking about your thoughts when you sit! Of course thoughts will come up spontaneously. This is natural. But when they do, if you discipline yourself to not engage with them, they will not linger. Then, deeply settled in body and mind, body and mind of themselves will drop away, and you will recognize the meaning of the teachings and know that you are whole.

In general, this world and other worlds as well, both in India and China, equally hold the Buddha-seal, and over all prevails the character of this school, which is simply devotion to sitting, total engagement in immobile sitting. Although it is said that there are as many minds as there are people, still they (all) negotiate the Way solely in zazen ... Please, honored followers of Zen. Long accustomed to groping for the elephant, do not be suspicious of the true dragon.

In the story of the blind men and the elephant, each one touches a different place and gains a different impression of the animal—its leg makes it seem like a pillar; its side, like a wall; its tail, a rope; its trunk, a snake. They're not wrong, but they mistake its true nature by experiencing only part of it. In the tale of Yeh Kungtsu, he so revered dragons that he filled his house with images of them. But when a true dragon delightedly came to visit, Yeh was terrified and drove it away.

And the Buddha-seal likens the way that a teacher's awakened mind enables the same awakening in the student's, to the way a carved seal reproduces its image when stamped on paper. The entire lineage, every Buddha-ancestor, bears the mark of authentic awakening through zazen.

Dogen Zenji references these things for students who may well have come to Zen after years of believing that the best they could hope for from Buddhist practice was rebirth in a better place. He's saying, do not distrust this practice. It's been handed down from Shakyamuni Buddha, through every Buddha-ancestor, to us. This is how they verified the Way. It still works, even in this age. I verified it for myself, and so can you. He concludes,

Devote your energies to a way that directly indicates the absolute. Revere the person of complete attainment who is beyond all human agency. Gain accord with the enlightenment of the buddhas; succeed to the legitimate lineage of the ancestors' samadhi. Constantly perform in such a manner and you are assured of being a person such as they. Your treasure-store will open of itself, and you will use it at will.

Through the practice of zazen, we verify that even though each of us is distinctly, uniquely ourselves, we and our life are a single whole. That person of complete attainment who is beyond all human agency is you, as you truly are. The treasure-store is your life itself. To use it at will is to live in accord with the enlightenment of the buddhas.

What does that look like? Recognize that you are not separate from all that is, and refrain from leading a harmful life or encouraging others to do so. Seek to live in harmony with all life and the environment that sustains it.

Encounter the diversity of life with respect and dignity. Refrain from thinking or speaking in terms of errors and faults; from harboring resentment, rage, or revenge; from employing guilt and blame to elevate yourself at others' expense, as if you and they are separate. Dehumanize no one. Give and accept love and friendship without clinging.

Listen and speak from the heart, and deceive neither yourself nor others. As best you can, see and act in accord with what is, cultivate a mind that sees clearly, embrace all experience directly, and accept what each moment has to offer. Knowing that your life is in your care, acknowledge responsibility for all of it, give your best effort, and accept the results.

Freely give, ask for, and accept what is needed, and refrain from fostering a mind of poverty in yourself or others. Be satisfied with what you have, in the sense that everything you need for living this moment, is already present in this moment.

These words, of course, are very general. It's the particular ingredients of our life here, now, that give them content and meaning. As Roshi Bernie would say of these ingredients, use them all, make the best meal you can, and serve the wholeness of life.

This is what it means to honor our life as a peacemaker, to not speak ill of the Three Treasures, and to recognize ourselves and others as manifestations of the Oneness of Buddha, the Diversity of Dharma, and the Harmony of Sangha.

Your treasure-store will open of itself, and you will use it at will.

Resident member Mukei is the ZCLA Zendo Steward and an empowered Preceptor.

Bearing Witness for a Child's Future

by Pam Myogetsu Smith



The two-year-old sits on his foster mother's lap clapping and squealing in delight at the sight of my Australian Shepherd that has hoisted up to be seen on the computer monitor. "Doggie!" he shouts. We are in the middle of a Zoom call. I am the child's advocate, a volunteer court appointed special advocate (CASA.)

Clayton* is a bright, beautiful and charismatic little boy. His foster parents tell me that when he was brought to them in February it was "love at first sight." After nine months in his foster home, Clayton is clearly thriving. When he was placed just a month before his second birthday he was experiencing minor developmental delays and had night terrors. In the succeeding months, he has met or exceeded all developmental milestones and sleeps through the night.

As an advocate, it is my responsibility to represent Clayton's best interests to the court and provide recommendations for his current and future wellbeing, this includes a permanent placement recommendation. The responsibility of this mandate weighs heavily on me and there are no clear answers. Clayton's mother is Eurasian and his father is Black. Both parents are incarcerated, have serious drug dependences and have been unable to provide a safe and stable home. Mom has seven other children; all are either in state custody or in the care of their various fathers. Mom has expressed little interest in caring for her children. Dad has agreeably been participating in Family/Team meetings and court hearings. He loves his son and wants to be part of his life. Endorsing a placement that will profoundly affect this little boy's future gives me great pause and apprehension.

In his explanation of the tenet Not Knowing, Roshi Bernie Glassman underlines the importance of entering areas that are unfamiliar, even fear enhancing with an open mind. Roshi Egyoku encourages us to set aside fixed ideas about ourselves, others and the universe. Entering Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Loving Action become an interwoven cycle. Sitting on the cushion I reflected on the necessity of bearing witness to my own preconceived attitudes and prejudices especially related to race, identity and privilege. This led to the requisite action of engaging the individuals whose lives are intertwined with this little boy

and his ultimate welfare. I resolved to enter into a dialogue with each of them, doing my best to bear witness with an open mind to their own joys and sufferings.

I went to the jail to meet with Clayton's 50-year-old father, Franklin*. He expressed his love and desire for Clayton's happiness and his appreciation for Clayton's foster parents and the loving care they have given him. "But I want him to know his daddy" was his fervent wish. Regrettably, his plans for the future were vague and unrealistic. He explained he wanted permanent placement to be made with Clayton's Aunt Alishia*, Franklin's younger sister.

Following the meeting with Franklin, I interviewed Clayton's foster parents. They love Clayton and desperately wish to adopt him. They also have a lot to offer a child for his emotional, educational and physical wellbeing. They are white. When I asked how they'd help Clayton embrace his ethnic and cultural roots, Mom said, "oh, we don't see color." Bearing witness practice helped me to respond rather than react to this bright red flag. I suggested that including all the ingredients of Clayton's rich heritage would allow him to embrace his own identity and would help them comprehend their own privilege.

Finally, I spoke with Clayton's Aunt, Alishia. She made it clear that she and her husband were committed to Clayton's upbringing. Both understood it was unlikely her brother would ever be capable of providing the care and stability the boy needed. Most crucially, they are a black, capable and loving couple who understand not only the importance of racial self-acceptance but the potential damage that can be visited upon a little boy if he is precipitously removed from a home where he has been loved and accepted.

Practicing not knowing and bearing witness allowed me to give the court insight into the complicated elements of privilege and racial identity involved in the decision for a loving, nurturing and culturally relevant permanent placement for Clayton. As a result, all parties have agreed that whatever ultimate placement is determined, Clayton will have access to both his biological and foster families through mutual visitation.

Myogetsu is a ZCLA member living in Tennessee. To learn about the National CASA organization go to <https://nationalcasag.org>.

**Pseudonyms provided to ensure confidentiality.*

The Dharma Quilt

by Geri Meiho Bryan



I received an invite from my mother and sister to take part in a collective project making a Covid quilt. Accepting this invitation felt like an opportunity to collaborate with them, using the dynamics of our relationships, to step into a creative space and just see what happens. Stepping off the hundred-foot pole, I greeted them

with thread and fabric in hand. I knew from the trepidation I felt in my stomach that it would be good to engage with the project.

The quilt pattern we agreed on is a modern take on the traditional granny square afghan, comprised of hundreds of one-inch squares. To start, we set a few intentions to help manage the expectation of our co-creation. We agreed to compile scrap fabric that we already had in our collections and we could receive donations from friends and family. I raided Yudo's scrap bins of whimsical blues and reds. We worked with different hues in complementary colors so that the work of matching was completed. The only fabric purchased for the project is the background, in my quilt this is the navy blue around the squares.

To create the quilt square we pre-cut fabric into strips and blindly drew the cut strips from a bag and used whatever came out as long as it was not two of the same pieces next to each other. This avoided wasting time in picking and choosing. Drawing the fabric in this way, I noticed my patterning of what I would put together versus the randomness of a blind draw. The blind draw was always more dynamic.

Then we agreed all inexperience stays in the quilts. No redo's. This helped us to practice love and kindness for the process of learning. We would do our best and accept the results. The "No-redo" kept the project fresh and fun and not weighed down by perfectionism. We also shared openly what was working and what could be improved upon without criticism.

Mom texted the following prayer by Michael Hollings and Etta Gullick, "I will enjoy each simple task as I do it, without thinking that I must hurry on to the next thing. Do what I am doing with all my ability and all my concentration. Mind no longer divided, life is more peaceful." Mom added her own comment, "Relax and enjoy a quilt." I thought to myself somewhere along The Way mom transformed into the Bodhisattva of No Mind.

Mom's next text was Tyler Perry's video, The Meaning of Quilts. Its essence is as follows: When Perry left home his grandmother gave him a quilt she had made but he did not recognize its value. He dismissed her work and story because it did not look like what he thought it should. Later in his life, he went into an expensive antique store and saw a quilt that looked just like his grandmother's quilt. The shop owner told him it had been made by an African American slave and each square represented different periods in her life, like the dress she was wearing when she learned she was free. Each patch represented a part of life. Reflecting on this, Perry sees we are all sewing our own quilts with our thoughts, behaviors, experiences and memories. Inspired by the intentionality of sewing our own quilts, Perry purchased land that once was a Confederate Army



base. Now on that land, black people, white people, gay, straight, lesbian, transgender, ex-cons, Latinx, Asian, all come together to work and add patches to a quilt that is as diverse as it can be.

My takeaway from this experience is that it has taken me many decades to come to appreciate the life my mother's quilts represent as well as my own. I am inspired by Roshi Issan Dorsey's teaching shared in a recent Day of Reflection, "The space between us does not separate us but connects us." I find myself seeing this space as a primal energy of co-creating. An energy that gives a voice to the ingredients of life made manifest. I see my mom, sister, and myself in this space spreading out our quilts making that connection.

Meiho is a ZCLA resident and priest.

How to Lighten Up in Dark Times

A conversation between YooWho (Moshe Cohen) and Sunshine (Senshin Griffith)

Sunshine: How can one stay light-hearted in these bleak times?

YooWho: It's very Zen really. You don't ignore the undercurrents. Whatever is negative or challenging—the shadow some call it—you acknowledge it, appreciate it. Then you turn it upside down. If you know it's there, you can work with it.

Sunshine: Like Dogen's words on our Sangha House mural: "The Ocean does not refuse any kind of water." With the pandemic and so many deaths, there are good reasons to fear.

YooWho: So, embrace that fear. Can you feel comfortable in your relationship with it? Play with the fact that you don't want to catch the virus. Turn it on its head to lighten the load. Then you can let go of what's holding you up.

Sunshine: In your levity pause classes, you often use the phrase "invite mischief in."

YooWho: Some mischief can be harmful. But with Sacred Mischief, there is an invitation to have fun, to not take yourself so seriously. There is a trickster element in many indigenous clowns, one of whose roles is to give the community a chance to laugh about their problems. Our playful side often gets suppressed as adults, but really wise people still have it. It's about sourcing our joy. There is a strong current of joy flowing in our being, which is an appreciation of our life, which we are privileged to have.

Sunshine: What have you learned from your clown work with kids in dangerous or troubled areas throughout the world?

YooWho: In one exercise, the kids imagine walking across a log atop a huge gorge. I tell them they will get across safely, but they are to have fun playing with the fear of looking over the edge, of slipping but catching themselves in the middle, and with making it safely to the other side. They have such fun!! Another exercise was supposed to be in eight steps, gradually growing in momentum, a jo-ha-kyu walk (Noh theater). But the kids were having so much fun with the game that they didn't stop after eight steps. They just kept running and screaming with delight.

Then they all came back laughing, saying "let's do it again." Facing fear became a fun ride that released the energy they were subconsciously holding inside.

Sunshine: That reminds me of the Syrian refugee kids in the films of Elias Matar. In the midst of the bleakness of their displacement, they were so willing to find an excuse to play and clown around with the camera operator.

YooWho: Play is a way of inviting lightness and joy. When I instruct students to invite lightness into a slow Butoh walk, where with each step you take the entire space with you, I'm amazed at how people transform in that moment.

Sunshine: The world seems extra absurd these days. In a world where there is already so much disorder, what's a Zen clown in the Order of Disorder to do?

YooWho: Whatever it is, turn it upside down. With an inner smile, tune into your contrarian nature.

Sunshine: Oh, so upside down of disorder gets us back to order?

YooWho: We are all fools on some level. Nothing makes sense. Embrace that.

Sunshine: I can't embrace anything else due to social distancing.

YooWho: The Three Tenets are a great tool. Coming from Not

Knowing. A place of No Fear. No attachment. Let go of any outcome. Often, during protest marches, I march in the opposite direction chasing after this huge dollar bill at the end of a stick that is always out of reach. By doing things backwards, it makes people laugh and a question lingers as an afterthought. It's not about preaching but letting people make up their own minds.

Just spending time beyond the thinking mind is so nourishing.

Moshe Cohen (YooWho) is an internationally renowned teacher and performing artist, founder of Clowns Without Borders-USA and Closbi of the Zen Peacemaker Order of Disorder. Sensei Senshin (autocorrect Sunshine) is the ZCLA Program Steward.



2020 Fall Practice Commitments

We acknowledge the following practitioners who made formal practice commitments for the 2020 Fall Practice Period.

Ah Reum Lee
Amanda Mauceri
Andrea Carman
Andreia Henrique
Ann Piu
Austin Lanari
Barbara Santos
Barnett Cohen
Beverly Brown
Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran
Bill Tetsui Press
Brian Sotetsu Huff
Chris Daian Fields
Christina Tchoren Carvalho
Cláudia Fonseca
Claudia Lee
Cle Van Beurden
Corey Ryujin McIntyre
Cynthia Romanowski
Damon Huss
Daniel Newman-Lessler
Darla Myoho Fjeld
Dave Fushin Watson
David Shealy
Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen
Deborah Chiku-in West
Dewayne Gojitsu Snodgrass
Diane Enju Katz
Donna Buell
duVergne Gaines
Dwana Willis
Dylan Banto Neal
Eberhard Konin Fetz
Elana Robyn Auerbach
Eleanor Jōen Heaphy
Frank Genku Martinez
Gary Koshin West
Gemma Soji Cubero del Barrio
Geoff Kanjō O'Quest

George Mukei Horner
Geraldo Fonseca
Geri Meiho Bryan
Giovana Valent
Glenn Gikai Davis
Guy Zimmerman
Hannah Seishin Sowd
Harry Hoetsu Heck
Illana Berger
Jack Kuykendall
Jacqueline Drummond Lewis
Jake Busshin Duarte
James Ryushin Carney
Jane Radiant-Joy Chen
Jean Serge Dube
Jeff Sekiun LaCoss
Jessica Oetsu Page
Jim Dojun Hanson
Jim Jindo Hagar
Jitsujo Gauthier
Joao Pettena
Joe Johnston
John Heart-Mirror Trotter
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Julie Getsuan Suhr
Jenny Jusen Bright
Karina Myoki Beltran
Katherine Daiki Senshin
Katherine Koch
Kipp Ryodo Hawley
Koshin Paley Ellison
Lane Kyojin Igoudin
Leszek Dion-Wesolowski
Lina Keiju Bahn
Lorraine Gessho Kumpf
Marcia Rorty-Greenfield

Mark Shefrin
Mark Shogen Bloodgood
Marley Jakuan Dowling
Martin Nakell
Mary Frankos
Matt Bradley
Maureen Briggs
Michael John Giuffre
Mitch Genzo Paskin
Nan Reishin Merritt
Nem Etsugen Bajra
Nico Larsen
Noreen Purcell Dillman
Pam Myogetsu Smith
Patrick Thurmond
Peter Ryugen Sample
Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher
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Richard Taishin Schulhof
Robert Dharma-Gate Evans
Roberta Myodo Brehm
Rosa Ando Martinez
Russell Rinkai Rayburn
Ryan David Schneider
Sacha Joshin Greenfield
Sandra Seiju Goodenough
Sarah Mettasophia
Shawn Nobuo Farley
Stephanie Lee
Steve Larson
Tania Palhares
Tim Taikan Zamora
Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert
Ty Jotai Webb
Wendy Egyoku Nakao



A Poem by Joshin

*How to end suffering?
Just suffering.*

Where do we go from here,
this no place of no where?

The buddhas cannot stop suffering.
In sorrow's stream, they no longer
fight the current
but they
flow,
float
with the thrashing rapids.
Just as water is not hindered by,
does not hinder,
itself,
the Buddhas are like
water
in samsara's stream.

What can hurt such a one
who is one
with suffering itself?

Nirvana is no place apart from here.
It is the water and the rocks and
the struggling beings.
Buddha is what we call
sentient beings
who see they are
the water,
who see they are of
water-nature—

intrinsically pure

incessantly and violently changing

fluid and ever-moving.

This water is our life, this water is us.

What does the stream look like to
a water molecule?
A matrix of motion,
a swarm of activity,
and yet—
stillness

connection
quiet.

Centered on a single H₂O,
I do not move,
and yet my world never is the same.

Sacha Joshin Greenfield is a ZCLA resident member.

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 our Zoom Team: **Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert** (Steward), **Rev. Jitsujo Gauthier**, **George Mukei Horner**, **Gemma Soji Cubero del Barrio**, and **Reeb Kaizen Venners**;

To those helping with Chiden duties: **Rev. Jitsujo**, **Lorraine Gessho Kumpf**, **Geri Meiho Bryan**, and **Mukei**;

A special Thank You to **Gessho** for tending the flowers on our seven main altars throughout the ZCLA closure (now 11 months);

To **Rev. Jitsujo**, **Rev. Jonathan Kaigen Levy**, **Meiho**, **Gessho**, and **Rev. Dharma-Joy** for maintaining our Founders room;

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To the Fourth Quarter 2020 Security detail: **Gessho** (Steward), **Kaizen**, **Mukei**, **Brian Sotetsu Huff**, **Sacha Joshin Greenfield**, **Harlan Jindo Pace**, **Burt Wetanson**, and **Chris Genzan Hackman**;

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To **Kaizen** for his steadfast dedication to the resident community as Resident Steward and expanded duties due to the Abbot's medical leave;

To our jikidos **Sotetsu**, **Meiho**, **David Randall**, **Tim Taikan Zamora**, **Mukei**, **Joshin**, and **Soji**;

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To **Roshi Egyoku**, **Sensei Senshin**, and **Sensei Shogen** for leading the Autumn Wind and Rohatsu Sesshins; and to **Rev. Kaigen** for leading the November Zazenkai;

To **Rev. Dharma-Joy** and **Rev. Jitsujo** for stewarding all the Year-End Ceremonies; and to **Sensei Shogen** for leading the Year-End Council and sharing his San Luis Obispo Sunday sitting with ZCLA since March.

ZCLA Affiliated Groups

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

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

Empty Hands Circle (Campinas, SP, Brazil)
coordinated by Christina Tchoren Carvalho

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.

Sangha Rites of Passage

New Members

Carey Ann Strelecki
James A. Abercromby

Preceptor

Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran
December 4, 2020



The ZCLA Board of Directors hard at work! Screen shot by John Kyogen Rosania.



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

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Residents gathered in the ZCLA garden to honor all those who died while homeless. The vigil was organized by Sanctuary of Hope via Zoom. Thank you to our Zoom Team members Soji and Rev. Jitsujo.

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