



Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

I Am Always Here!

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



*Since I attained Buddhahood
the number of kalpas that have passed
is an immeasurable hundreds, thou-
sands, ten thousands, millions, trillions,
asamkhyas.*

*Constantly I have preached the Lam,
teaching, converting
countless millions of living beings.
Causing them to enter the Buddha way,
all this for immeasurable kalpas.
In order to save living beings,
as an expedient means I appear to*

*enter nirvana but in truth I do not pass into extinction.
I am always here, preaching the Lam.*

These are the opening lines of the Lotus Sutra's Chapter 16, "The Life Span of the Thus Come One." Who is speaking these words?

The Lifespan chapter, the mid-point of the Lotus Sutra, marks a pivot in the voice of the Sutra. Up until this point, the Lotus Sutra is spoken through the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Mahayana sutras, which were created hundreds of years after the Buddha's Parinirvana, were not spoken by the historical Buddha. Although the Pali Canon is attributed to the historical Buddha, scholars say that, if indeed there are actual words of the Buddha, there are likely very few that survive in the Canon itself. The Canon is spoken through the collective memories of Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples, most notably through Upali, a foremost disciple responsible for the monastic discipline, and Ananda, the Buddha's attendant with an extraordinary memory.

The Lotus Sutra itself appears about 700 years after the Buddha's Parinirvana. So who is speaking about the Life Span of the Tathagata, if it is not the historical Buddha? The Buddha who speaks the Lotus Sutra is none other than Sambogakaya Buddha. The Trikaya—*Tri* means "three" or "triple" and *kaya* means "body"—are part of the evolution of Buddhism when the person of Shakyamuni



Space.

Buddha is no longer accessible. The Trikaya constitute the Buddhist trinity: the Dharmakaya or Ultimate Reality dimension, the Nirmanakaya or Human dimension, and the Sambogakaya or Primordial/Eternal dimension. These triple bodies of Buddha are articulated as the Mahayana Sutras take root. Hence, in the Lotus Sutra, the mainstream traditional story of Gautama's quest for enlightenment is upended.

The Lotus Sutra proclaims that the account of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha's life was merely a skillful means to help people wake up. The Sutra says that if people think that the Buddha lives for innumerable eons, they will become even more lazy and indulgent and neglect

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practice all together. However, if the Buddha says that he will enter Parinirvana and be gone forever, people will make an extra effort to awaken. In Chapter 16 we learn that Samboghakaya Buddha, who preaches this Sutra, was enlightened eons ago and that this Buddha manifestation is not limited to a human lifespan but has an immeasurable lifespan. Therefore, although Shakyamuni Buddha appears to preach the Lotus Sutra at the end of his forty-five years of teaching, his Samboghakaya body will, in fact, continue on for billions of eons to come.

I am always here, preaching the Law.

The Trikaya is interpreted differently in the Mahayana Buddhist schools. In terms of the Lotus Sutra, the key interpreters of the Sutra also had different views of the Trikaya which lead to various interpretations of the Lotus Sutra itself. The key interpreters go back to the Chinese Ancestor Zhiyi, the founder of the Tendai School in China, to the most influential of the modern-day interpreters Nichiren, the Founder of the Lotus School (now called Nichiren Buddhism) in Japan, and several others since then. Nichiren himself preached that all three Buddha bodies of the Trikaya find their expression in Shakyamuni Buddha and, furthermore, the time-space dimensions all find their manifestation as “the single thought-moment comprising three thousand realms in actuality.” This means, primarily, that rather than a notion of linear practice, cause-and-effect are present all together in the very act of practice right here, right now.

Shakyamuni Buddha’s lifestory as a skillful means for waking people up is an intriguing idea. Imagine the time when no one alive knew the historical person of Shakyamuni Buddha—there was no longer anyone alive who had ever seen him, heard him, or had been in his presence. Can we ourselves imagine a time when no one is any longer alive who knew the persons of Maezumi Roshi or Roshi Bernie, a time when no one will be able to reference direct memories and experiences of either one of them? Indeed, what will live on to inspire and awaken people?

I read an article on the death of the King Goodwill Zwelithini, the 72-year-old king of the Zulu nation, who died in March of this year. It was reported that “For his subjects King Zwelithini has not been buried. They use the Zulu term “ukutshalwa,” a loose translation of which means “planting”—to imply this is not the end of his influence on the people he ruled for more than five decades. His leaving is understood simply as a transition to becoming an ancestor, joining generations of other Zulu kings.”¹

I found this a provocative perspective in light of the homage we pay to the Zen Ancestors. Are we the recipients of the universal vows taken up for the benefit of all beings that are planted in the lifetimes of the Ancestors? How do we see these Ancestors in light of the Trikaya? If beings awaken and live out their lifespans teaching the Buddhadharma and then become ancestors upon passing from this realm, what remains? Maezumi Roshi often said that what remains is our vows. The vows continue to grow and expand and carry our lives forward as we ourselves commit to them. From this perspective, one cannot but live a life steeped in gratitude.

Dharmakaya Buddha is the dimension of Ultimate Reality. We call it Buddha Nature, which is unconditioned, without characteristics, formless. The Dharmakaya body is not subject to birth and death and to cause and effect. It is the groundless ground—MU—beyond all concepts and processes. The Dharmakaya body has two aspects: the Nirmanakaya and the Samboghakaya.

Nirmanakaya Buddha is the dimension of the phenomenal body, the human form that appears in the world. Specifically, this refers to the human body that has undergone the transformation of Awakening, sometimes called the Transformation Body. The historical person Siddhartha became the Nirmanakaya Buddha we know as Shakyamuni Buddha. In a sense, you and I are Nirmanakaya Buddhas. You and I have human form; however we are not yet fully awakened, although we are fully endowed with the potential to awaken and to live a life of vows, rather than with a passive attitude towards cause and effect. This is not to say that cause and effect are not operative, but rather that it is lived out as vow. This is expressed so powerfully at the end of Chapter 16:

*At all times I think to myself:
How can I cause living beings
to gain entry into the unsurpassed way
and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?*

Samboghakaya Buddha is the dimension of the Bliss or Reward Body endowed with transcendent powers. I like to call it the Fulfilled Body, the form that emerges from eons of practice and complete awakening and emanates and continues as vow. In this Chapter, it is expressed thus:

*In order to save living beings,
as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana
but in truth I do not pass into extinction.
I am always here, preaching the Law.
I am always here.*

¹Pumza Fihlani, “Death of a Zulu King,” in BBC News, March 18, 2021.

Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva

Lotus Sutra Chapter 24

by Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith

In the land Adorned with Pure Light, there was a bodhisattva named Wondrous Sound, who from long ago had planted many roots of virtue, made offerings to, and been associated with, innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions of buddhas. He'd gained every kind of profound wisdom ... including attaining the concentration that enables one to understand the words of all beings.

My word for the year was “Listen” and I am very inspired by Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound, who has the power to appear in any form for the sake of sentient beings. Chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra enumerates his 34 transformations through the mastery of the samadhi of manifesting all physical forms. Shakyamuni, and the bodhisattvas Never Disparaging and Avalokitesvara, are children of the earth. But the activity sphere of Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva is not just our Saha world of earthly suffering but the entire universe.

The description of his super-size, special powers, and mythic family tree calls to mind Greek and other mythologies, as well as comic book superheroes. Throughout history and cultures, humans have created mythic archetypes with powers beyond our known capabilities. Deep down we have a sense we can be greater than how we see ourselves. And when we truly awaken, we realize the workings of the Universe Writ Large is none other than ourselves—our “Above the Heavens, Below the Earth, I Alone Self.”

We find similarities in Quaoar, the all-singing, all-dancing Creator God of the Tongva, who came out of chaos, with a spring in his step and a song in his heart. He danced and whirled and sang the Song of Creation, and thus the Universe began. He created and danced with God the Sky, then Goddess of the Earth. Then with complicated three-part harmonies, the song grew and created the Sun and Moon. For a grand finale, the quintet sang into being everything else that exists.

Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva in Sanskrit is Gad-gad-va which means “Stammering Utterance,” although it is rendered as “Fine or Wonderful Sound” in Chinese. Perhaps the stammering connotes a reverberation felt upon hearing it. For when Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva set out with 84,000 bodhisattvas, the lands they passed through shook in six different ways, lotus flowers of precious materials rained down, and hundreds of thousands of heavenly instruments sounded spontaneously, shaking the whole cosmos.



The ZCLA orchestra silently performs John Cage's 4:33.

Today, many leading physicists are working hard to solve what Einstein called the “unified field theory,” that would allow him to “read the mind of God.” A strong candidate is “string theory,” which posits the universe is made up of tiny vibrational strings, with each note corresponding to a subatomic particle. As theoretical physicist Michio Kaku puts it (in his bestseller *The God Equation*):

“If we had a microscope powerful enough, we could see that electrons, quarks, neutrinos, etc. are nothing but vibrations on minuscule loops resembling rubber bands. If we pluck the rubber band enough times and in different ways, we eventually create all the known subatomic particles in the universe. This means that all the laws of physics can be reduced to the harmonies of these strings. Chemistry is the melodies one can play on them. The universe is a symphony. And the mind of God, which Einstein eloquently wrote about, is cosmic music resonating throughout space-time.”

For 12,000 years, Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva made offerings with a hundred thousand kinds of music to the King of the Sound of Thunder whose land was named Displaying All Worlds and whose eon was called Seen with Joy. Did this King have a microscope powerful enough? What could be more inclusive than “Displaying All Worlds” or more desirable than an eon named “Seen with Joy”? If you are frustrated with your practice, let’s talk in 12,000 years.

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WONDROUS SOUND *(Continued from page 3)*

In his former lives, Wondrous Sound was a musician and composer who served the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha with his music. We don't have to be musicians to follow this path of making music to create harmony within ourselves and others. When we chant in the zendo or in service, we are practicing a kind of music that helps us concentrate and nourish our wisdom, devotion, and joy.

By practicing mindful breathing—which is its own subtle form of music—we contribute to peace, finding a harmonious mindfulness within ourselves that we then share with others.

Music is often considered the purest and most abstract of the arts, that can affect one in a direct, unmediated fashion, without description, narrative or morals. For this reason, the critic Walter Pater said, “All art constantly aspires to the condition of music.” This is what we mean in Zen when we say, “Go beyond the words and experience reality directly.”

In this Spring's workshop on the Dharma of Dr. King, a comparison was made between protest songs and hymns, chanting our four vows, and chanting slogans like “Si Se Puede” (Yes we can). All are skillful means to maintain a high level of spirit and morale during a nonviolent campaign.

Since the sphere of activity of this Bodhisattva is not just the Saha world but the entire universe, this Wondrous Sound is everywhere. Can you hear it? Can you hear all the world's sounds as the Sound of the Dharma? In the Great Silence of our zazen, every sound is cosmic music. When we intentionally take a moment of silence to commemorate those who have died or walk in silent peace marches, we feel our connection not only to each other but to the whole universe.

At one Sangha Event, we performed John Cage's “4:33” with full orchestra. A dozen sangha members did not play their various instruments for four minutes and 33 seconds. In that silent 4:33, Cage intended every sound heard to be the score.

Even from Zoom, the ambient sounds of Koreatown have connected us: the marching band, car radios, alarms, boom boxes, helicopters, planes, sirens, megaphoned police instructions, distant church bells, dogs, kids' calls and

responses, bird songs galore, and, of course, the ice cream truck. One sesshin morning, the sound of shoveled debris outside gave us an extended percussion solo.

Can we hear all sounds as Displaying All Worlds, where all is Seen with Joy?



Senshin conducts all sounds in the 4:33 minute silence.

Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva has two powers that can be particularly inspiring. The first is the ability to understand the words of all beings. The second is the ability to transform herself.

If we listen deeply, from a Not Knowing Mind free from preconceptions and agendas, we too will be better able to understand our universe. Then we can listen deeply to ourselves and transform into what is truly needed. Which might even mean more listening and more silence!

A contemporary of Shakyamuni, the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, said “Each celestial body, in fact each and every atom, produces a particular sound on account of its movement, its rhythm or vibration. All these sounds and vibrations form a universal harmony in which each element, while having its own function and character, contributes to the whole.”

What is your particular sound, your particular gift to offer to the world? How are you in harmony with all the other musical notes? Are you able to shift keys when needed? Or are you stuck and out of tune? What do you sing when blasted with notes of discord? How are you contributing to the whole symphony?

As bodhisattvas, we vow to stop the harm we're doing to each other and the planet. Not from our small sense of self but from that Great Spirit expressed by Wondrous Sound and felt in every particle vibration of cosmic music resonating throughout space-time. Tune into this Cosmic Song, hear what's needed, listen to your own gift, and offer it. Be like the Tongva god, singing in harmony with earth, sky, sun, and moon.

Sensei Daiki Senshin is the ZCLA Program Steward and is on the Teachers Circle.

Tending to Conflict in the Sangha

by Lorraine Gessho Kumpf



For many years, ZCLA has embarked on a deep study and practice of ethics in the Sangha. This effort, led by Roshi Egyoku, has led to the development of the Sangha Sutra: ZCLA's Ethics Policies and Practices. The document presents the ethics history and culture of ZCLA, describes our practices, structures and policies, and lays out steps to resolving situations of conflict and

misconduct. It also introduces the HEAR (Healing, Ethics, and Reconciliation) Circle, whose function is to ensure that people's issues are heard and complainants are guided through resolution processes.

The Sutra makes a distinction between "normal conflict," such as gossip, blaming, avoidance, anger—which is an inevitable part of human behavior, and "harmful conduct, such as sexual abuse/harassment, substance abuse, bullying—all of which are egregious violations of ethics. For this article, let's consider normal conflict. In most cases, normal conflict can be resolved when the parties involved come to a mutual understanding through some form of communication.

What is the first step in the resolution of a normal conflict? Our Sutra says to "Go directly to the person(s) involved," unless it is unsafe or otherwise impossible to do so. People are advised to set up a meeting time when both parties can listen deeply and speak directly to one another. As uncomfortable as it may be, it is an important step in reaching an understanding of where each person is coming from and where the disagreement needs tending. What I have seen in the Sangha is that this is the hardest step: people tend to avoid it and that allows a situation to fester.

Resistance to meeting face-to-face to resolve normal conflicts surely involves factors that vary with the situation and one's experience. A conflict can bring up a mix of emotions, memories, fears, past traumas, and other factors that make avoidance easier. A person may anticipate an inability to control anger, hurt or shame, or may fear a consequence, and so on. In my experience, when I have avoided conflict, leaving issues unresolved, I have seen how memories and images can solidify into fixed ideas of who the other person is. I understand that these fixed ideas are fabricated and unfair, and know that this affects my life and the life around me.

I think anyone who practices Zen meditation has paid some attention to resistance. How do we deal with it? We know that inner work is important. Our Zen practice teaches returning to the breath, cultivating awareness and grounding the body-mind. Zen practices bring deeper insight into our intentions and conditioning, and can support us to approach difficult conversations by helping us to open up, bear witness, and listen more deeply.

Psychologists say that what is not dealt with moves into habit and becomes the foundation for calcified thought and memory. These formations become baggage and can take us out of the present, thus affecting our interactions and relationships. Our Zen Buddhist practice emphasizes total interconnection: when we orient ethical behavior to the whole sangha, we benefit everyone. The efforts of all of us to work out "little" conflicts in an ethical way support the life of the whole Sangha.

Supposing you have resolved to speak with a Sangha member regarding a conflict. You have invited that person to meet with you, and he/she has accepted. You have worked out a convenient time. How best to proceed? Here is one script which has worked successfully in my experience. First, find a neutral location free of possible intrusions. When you meet, sit facing each other at whatever distance is comfortable, preferably with nothing such as a table between you. Lay out any ground rules necessary. Two that must be included are to listen without interrupting to each turn until the person has finished speaking, and to maintain confidentiality. The Council Guidelines may be helpful, and further rules might be equal time, any necessary constraints on speech, or whatever is germane to the situation. You have invited the talk, so you begin.

I have found that this kind of interaction is very rich. I may come into the situation with an issue, but new questions, insights and ideas arise spontaneously. In my opinion, this is an exercise in building understanding and trust, and this kind of experience is fundamental community-building.

But what if the person in conflict with you will not meet? Or what if a meeting doesn't feel safe to you? If one-on-one meeting isn't possible, another route to take is a facilitated meeting, where an agreed-upon facilitator works together with the parties. Facilitation can take different forms and depends crucially on shared intention.

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Our Strange Journey

by Burt Wetanson



The person I consider to have been my first spiritual teacher was Isabel, the middle-aged woman who took care of me while my parents were at work and I was home alone. She was an antidote to my mother, who tended to be cold and anxious, and my father who was a punisher ("Don't make me get the belt, Burton."). Isabel was calm, warm, and sane.

When my parents decided to get divorced, there came the moment when I had to say goodbye to Isabel. I vividly remember standing with my parents at one end of the long hallway and Isabel standing at the other end at the apartment door. My rising tension exploded, I ran down the hall, threw my arms around her, and cried out, "Isabel, please don't go!"

I never saw Isabel again, but she always remembered my birthday. Then the birthday cards stopped coming. But in my memory, I have never forgotten the calm and healing qualities that drew me to Isabel and perhaps, ultimately, to Buddhism.

When I reached age 13, it became time to prepare me for my Bar Mitzva. That's a happy occasion when a young person celebrates becoming an adult. (The Bat Mitzva is the same thing for girls.) My parents put me in a school manned by young friendly rabbis who gave me Hebrew lessons to help me get through the ceremony. When my parents got divorced, however, I had to switch to more limited and formal classes with an old-fashioned European teacher and students much younger than me. I never did get Bar Mitzva'd.

What I think of as my first spiritual experience occurred when I was 17 years old working as a summer camp counselor. I was lying in bed in the darkened bunk. All around me, the kids were sleeping. Suddenly my consciousness ended. I disappeared, then returned to everyday consciousness with a strange, vivid, visual impression of—in the words from a service—a vast ocean of dazzling light marked by waves of life and death.

What followed has been a pretty ordinary life of high school and college, friendships and relationships, jobs as a writer and editor, helpful therapists, and my years at the Zen Center where my practice is to keep noticing and coming back to my breath.

In downtown New York, there used to be a spiritual bookstore where I found a book published by ZCLA commemorating the passing of Yasutani Roshi. A photograph shows Yasutani standing alongside Maezumi Roshi, the founder of ZCLA. That photograph pointed me to the Zen Center of Los Angeles,

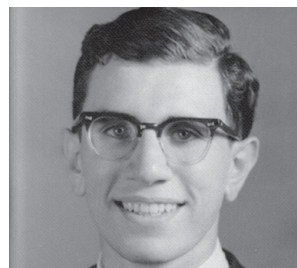
I had always lived and worked in New York. Then an incident that was part of the general crime wave of the Seventies drove me out of New York to California where I eventually came to a welcoming and healing ZCLA and where my practice has always been to follow my breath, holding my attention in my lower abdomen.

At this point, I've decided to conclude with a fairly recent and brief experience. I was in the local CVS pharmacy not far from the Zen Center. I had a question about where to find a certain item and noticed a young woman with her back to me working on a display. I walked over and said, "Excuse me."

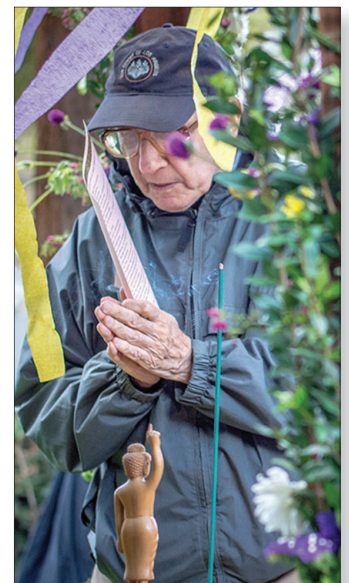
When she turned and faced me, I found myself gazing not into the young woman's ordinary eyes but into blazingly brilliant white lights, as if all the galaxies of the universe had exploded in the same instant. Strangely enough, I matter of factly asked her my mundane question, and she just as strangely replied with a mundane answer, her eyes still ablaze. Then I simply walked away and she went back to her job. Inevitably, the question comes up—how can we so easily forget that we are all companions and teachers on the strange and beautiful road of our lives?



Working in the bookstore.



A young Burt.



Buddha's Birthday.

More Reflections from Burt Wetanson

Burt is a designated Sangha Treasure and the longest continuous resident at ZCLA, first arriving in 1978. Sensei Senshin asked him these additional questions.

What was Yasutani Roshi like?

Though he had a lightness and humor about him, he encouraged a very rigorous practice. That was his persona. I liked him and I had a sense that he liked me. His Jisha (Tai-san Shimano, later Eido Roshi) translated for him. For me, the practice was rigorous, and others were very gung-ho about all the forms. I felt Yasutani Roshi was kind and very perceptive. His instructions to me were to watch and follow my breath.

What was ZCLA like when you first came here?

It was a lovely culture shock. I guess it was the perfume of the Sixties in the air. Some of the Sangha seemed a little more flakey than our current residents. But then, I was very shaken up by my huge move from New York. Maezumi Roshi was always generous and never tough with me. He told me, "Get whatever you can from this." Then added, "But you won't be here forever." I've never known if he meant I wouldn't be living at the Zen Center forever, or like all of us humans, I will eventually die, which is the fundamental truth. He was a man of few words. I took it to mean, "Don't waste your time, because someday you won't be able to do it."

What effect has living in residency and practicing Zen all these years had on you?

I'd say my personality was changed by living and breathing in the midst of Zen practice. Like soaking up a constant rain. It happens. You may not even know it, but you realize you've deeply absorbed it. Things still come up that would have upset me, sent me into a tailspin of fantasies and worries. Now they just don't bother me as much or at all. I can always return to my breath, and the wind blows through, and it's okay. It's almost as though my genes have changed.

So zazen is still the bottom line, which is why I find The Book of Householder Koans so helpful. I open it up in the morning, read the koan I land on, and it affects me, sometimes deeply.

What advice would you give to those new to Zen?

Basically, you can trust this practice. Believe me when I say—there's something in it that is real. Something that can help you meet the needs of your life. But you've got to do it and maintain it. I have a big green Diefenbachia at home, and if I take care of it, it grows and pays me back with its beauty. You can trust it. It can meet the needs of your life because it's there and it's true.

TENDING TO CONFLICT *(Continued from page 5)*

Many years ago, I participated in facilitation. I had said something that I thought was merely factual, but that was considered by a friend in the Sangha to be insulting. We both sought understanding and agreed to meet with a trained facilitator, who was also a Sangha member. We talked for many hours and came from the experience with renewed friendship and deepened respect. So facilitation is one path; other creative approaches are possible, and there are great opportunities for healing. The HEAR Circle is a resource for finding appropriate ways to resolve specific situations that arise.

Every ZCLA Sangha member makes a commitment to abide by the Sutra. If you find yourself in a difficult situation and would like to talk to someone about it, feel free to contact any HEAR member (see box). If you need to hold a challenging conversation, the Sutra Appendix A—"Guidelines for Speaking with Others"—is meant to prepare us to talk and listen. The first thing to ask is, "What is the purpose of the conversation?" Exploring this question honestly may reveal unconscious intentions, such as to blame, to be right, to fix, etc. The appendix probes

our expectations and checks our mindset when taking a course of action. This and other appendices in the Sutra document offer practical support which has proven helpful to many. The document is not perfect and is in continuing revision, but it stands as a source of information and perspective on ZCLA's unique culture, and more importantly, as a resource to be used when approaching ethical situations in the Sangha.

If you have an issue and are not sure how to proceed, or just want to air it, you can direct your initial contact to HEAR through any of the following:

Sensei Shogen: markbloodgood9@gmail.com

Sensei Myoho: dr.fjeld@gmail.com

Sensei Senshin: programsteward@zcla.org

Preceptor Gessho: lekumpf@gmail.com

If you haven't received a copy of the Sutra, email Gessho and she will send it to you.

Gessho is a Preceptor and a long time resident of ZCLA.

When is the story beneficial in dealing with racism?

by Conrad Butsugen Romo



As a person of color, I am not insensitive to racism, having personally experienced various acts from being called derogatory names, to being followed by security in stores, to being pulled over while driving numerous times because I didn't look like I belonged in a particular neighborhood or I fit a description. The most recent time this happened, cops

approached my car with guns drawn and this just a few blocks after I had left ZCLA from a dharma talk.

I'm not insensitive to addictions, be they of the mind or habits with drugs/alcohol. I was an ardent cult member for 14 years. I've also been sober from drugs and alcohol for 31 years, so the lived experience of struggling to stop something that is unhealthy but seemingly impossible to drop is in me.

I'm not insensitive to the pain and sadness of loss. I have had many close family members and friends die. Recently I had to euthanize my dog, my good pal for nearly 14 years. The sorrow has diminished but it flares up all on its own at moments.

I also know how it can feel to be overlooked, left out, not included, not recognized, not seen and heard. I am not insensitive to the healing power of having one's story told.

And as relates to stories, I hold a love and fascination for them whether they be in books, movies, television, the theater or various spoken word events. I also am not a fan of story; the type that can be inhibiting further growth, the type that feeds and attaches for further story.

In *The Identity of Relative and Absolute*, we chant:

"To be attached to things is primordial illusion."

And from The Heart of the Perfection of Great Wisdom Sutra:

"Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form."

Can I embody these teachings? When I chant them, I feel a recognition and appreciation of their beautiful expression.

Ego is a construct to help develop an identity in this world. I used to think that ego must be eliminated until I came to understand that it was a part of me, and out of compassion, I could offer it a small amount of food, not a big plate to fatten it.

So here is the sticky part. I feel that racism is just a manifestation of suffering in this world. Everyone in one way or another has been the giver or receiver of this poison. It can't be wished away or hated away, but change can start with acceptance. As long as there is ego, there will be the distinction of the perception of self and other. It just is.

In the rooms of recovery, I heard time and time again stories of the addiction and I and others identified and understood and remembered and admitted to ourselves and each other what we were. But at a certain point, I wasn't struggling with my addiction. I wasn't in denial that I had the bug. I had decided to live a sober and awake life, yet the same pattern of storytelling persisted meeting after meeting because that's just how it worked in the rooms of recovery.

And as relates to racism, is it possible that by reiterating stories of trauma and discrimination that I am to some degree just propagating the story of difference and fueling the fire of otherness?

I understand that many things in life can't be leapt over and that time takes time. In this practice we speak of non-attachment and point towards clinging as a source of great suffering.

While not minimizing this shadow of humanity, how can the narrative be changed by dropping attachment to the story?

When is the story beneficial? When does it become stagnant, harmful? How do I navigate and accept the myriad manifestations that need to be heard and also cut through the non-beneficial entanglements of story?

Butsugen is a member of ZCLA and 2nd generation Los Angelean and was an occasional participant in the ZCLA BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) Group.



Inhabiting Whiteness

by Sacha Joshin Greenfield



I recently attended a talk where the Black speaker said: “The key question that white people need to reflect on, that will determine how things shift in the coming years, is: ‘What does it mean to be white?’” Since then, I have practiced with these questions: What is my white karma? What actions of my white ancestors are manifesting in the present? What karma of

whiteness am I manifesting? And how will I respond to the karma of whiteness through vow?

As a child, I was taught to empathize with others by “walking a mile in their shoes.” Imagining what it’s like to be that person and how they are feeling was the gateway to compassionate and appropriate action. Now, I am questioning this “conventional wisdom.” I can never really know another person’s experience. Can I actually walk in another person’s shoes? My imagination of their experience is actually based on my concepts: I can only directly experience my own life.

Instead of pretending to walk in someone else’s shoes, I am practicing standing fully in my own shoes. Fully accepting and taking responsibility for my self, I can meet someone just as they are. Grounding myself completely in my own experience creates the spaciousness to meet others without trying to change their experience.

My white skin is the shoes I walk in. As a white person, I will never know what it is to be a person of color and to be marginalized, discriminated against, and killed on the basis of my skin. So instead, I am deeply investigating: How do I stand completely in my white karma? How do I fully inhabit whiteness in a way that heals myself and others?

Since embracing this question, the actions arising for me are microactions, and they are very personal. Basically, I notice my own racist thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. Rather than suppressing them, I feel them and see them clearly. Sometimes I voice them to supportive friends. And I let them pass on.

The other day, I observed to a friend that I have more racist thoughts and feelings now than I ever did before. “I’m not just noticing them more,” I told him. “I’m actually having more of them.” I liken it to sesshin, where deeply sitting with my own mind, I have more distressing

thoughts and feelings than I do in ordinary life. This is actually my mind’s healthy functioning. My conditioning has been there all along—sesshin simply brings it to the surface so I can see it clearly and release it. Likewise, the deep investigation into racial conditioning that I am doing with white and BIPOC dharma friends is drudging it up for me to see.

My white karma is the karma of my colonizing ancestors, who subjugated indigenous peoples for their own benefit. My white karma is to cut in front of the black man at the grocery store without realizing it, and to assume the black students at the physics conference aren’t physicists. My white karma is to be implicitly or explicitly preferred on applications because of my white-sounding name. My white karma is to have the privilege to ignore the racism that pervades society. The violence of my white ancestors lives on in my body, heart, and mind.

Rather than pulling beings into deeper and more vicious cycles of racism, how can I transform this white karma into vow?

Just as we sit together in sesshin, I now feel that this work of bringing my racial conditioning to light is best done together. When I notice my own racist thoughts and feelings, I try to expose them in the Facing Whiteness group—a vulnerable experience that is supported by the fact that all the members are white. When I hear microaggressions, I practice making microefforts to raise my own and others’ awareness. I practice asking BIPOC friends how I can support them—letting them walk in their own shoes, and if they want to, tell me what it is like.

I atone for racism past, present, and future. My white skin is the portal of my atonement.

Joshin is a ZCLA Resident, a member of the Facing Whiteness Group, and a PhD student in Physics at USC.

The Corner of DisOrder

by Sunshine*

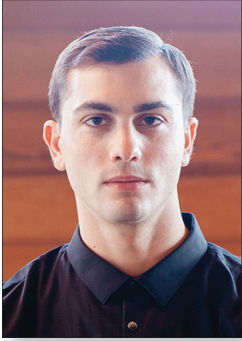
Do not leave any stone
unturned
where people may trip.

**autocorrect Senshin*



Stop, Rewind, Play Cassette Tapes as Zen Practice

by Daniel Lessler-Newman



Since January 2021, composing music using cassette tapes and cassette players has become a significant focus of my musical practice. I have spent hours at the workbench splicing tape loops; removing and adding components to allow for more creative freedom and control; and exploring various ways to marry the music recorded on the cassettes with music produced

by acoustic instruments. Unlike working with a computer, the layering process with cassette tapes is done blindly. We cannot see visual representations of previously recorded audio nor hear what was recorded on the previous takes, which means that we can only work from a memory of what the previous layers sounded like and when musical events from previous takes occurred. But despite our memory's best efforts, we have to accept that the results will largely be unpredictable and unknown. And permanent. There is no undo function. And yet, tape is an impermanent and degenerative material. With each time a tape is played or handled, it degrades, thereby affecting the sound, especially if it is old tape.

Building the tape loops themselves is a practice of patience. The material has a mind of its own and rarely wishes to conform to unfamiliar shapes after it has spent its life comfortably and tightly spooled around tape wheels. Inevitably, just as soon as we think we have finished splicing ends, or reintroducing the newly spliced tape loop to the new geometry of an altered cassette case, the tape springs into action—jumping away, tearing apart, or creasing in on itself. And so the process begins again. But the result is worth the time and effort, and there is satisfaction in the tedium. The music recorded on cassettes takes on an ineffable nostalgic charm and simplicity and is made more beautiful by the inherent faint hiss and warble textures that arise from the imperfections in the splicing and the tape material itself. Permanence, impermanence, repetition, patience, imperfection, and acceptance of the unknown. Sounds familiar...



Daniel is a ZCLA member; a composer, conductor, multi-instrumentalist, and educator; and is studying and teaching at CalArts.

Buddha Recognizes Buddha On Becoming a Sensei

by Darla Baiko Myoho Fjeld



What I now know to call “the inquiring impulse” came to my consciousness when I was almost five years old—I was filled with love, wonder and curiosity about being alive in the universe and was aware that I was a small speck in a vast world. My favorite words were “why”, “what” and “how”.

Why does anything exist? What am I doing here? What do I do with all this love? How should I live my life? I believe that I was born to be a seeker, a priest and a Zen teacher. And seek I did—in church and in 31 years of school studying religion and philosophy, which led me to 25 years of Zen practice, 20 of which were spent in training with Roshi Egyoku at ZCLA. With Zazen, the shackles that had been clouding reality began to fall from my eyes and I knew that finally karma had led me to the practice, the Sangha and the teacher that would best nurture my inquiring impulse.

I spent years practicing Zazen trying to break down the wall that stood between me and reality and little pieces of the wall began to fall onto my zabutan and my heart began to fill with love. This love connected me to everyone and everything—I could just feel it and a calling welled up and I found myself talking to Roshi about becoming a priest so that serving others could be my life's sole focus. I was ordained in 2013 and put my best effort into my practice of being a priest. I am filled with gratitude for Roshi Egyoku's patient guidance and for our Sangha for teaching me in so many ways.

The next thing I knew Roshi told me that she was going to give me Denkai in August of 2020 which empowered me as a Preceptor and made me a full priest and then she told me she was going to give me Denbo in April 2021—the ceremony of full dharma transmission which fully empowers me to teach the Dharma. During this ceremony, with my face wet with tears, I vowed again and again not to ever let the seed of the Buddha be discontinued. I continue to live this vow every day.

Sensei Myoho is a priest, the ZCLA Temple Development Steward and a professor of philosophy at El Camino College.

I AM ALWAYS HERE (Continued from page 2)

It is this Buddha that preaches the Lotus Sutra. Other examples of a Samboghakaya Buddha are Amida Buddha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise; Lochana Buddha, the Buddha of Mirror-Like Wisdom; and Medicine Buddha. The Great Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara, Buddha of Compassion; and Great Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, Buddha of Awakened Activity, can also be regarded as Samboghakaya Buddhas, beings of great vows.

Samboghakaya Buddhas are often regarded as divine bodies—the eternal, the vast life-span body. This is a very ancient Buddha. His lifespan, which unlike the Dharmakaya body, has a beginning and end, is nevertheless beyond what we can conceive of. This in itself situates us in the boundlessness of reality. The life of the historical Siddhartha, the Sutra tells us, is merely a manifestation of this great cosmic, primordial Buddha. Thus, the historical Siddhartha, according to the Lotus Sutra, appears in this world as a skillful means to guide us to awakening. This very world in which you and I are living right now is Samboghakaya Buddha's realm—his Buddha field, his pure land, which is described as follows:

*When living beings witness the end of a kalpa
and all is consumed in a great fire,
this, my land, remains safe and tranquil,
constantly filled with heavenly and human beings.
The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves
are adorned with various kinds of gems.
Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit
where living beings enjoy themselves at ease.
The gods strike heavenly drums,
constantly making many kinds of music.
Mandarava blossoms rain down,
scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly.
My pure land is not destroyed,
yet the multitude see it as consumed in fire,
with anxiety, fear and other sufferings
filling it everywhere.*

What does this say to you? How does one access this “safe and tranquil” place—this pure land—in the midst of the suffering of our world? We access it through vow—through activating the great bodhisattva vows to liberate each other. Samboghakaya Buddha appears in this world through vow and has one purpose only: to cause living beings—you and I—to wake up! In this way, the Lotus Sutra expands so-called Buddhism beyond the historical Shakyamuni Buddha and thrusts us into a lifespan that does not expire when a physical body dies. Rather, it thrusts us into a lifespan of vows, which are immeasurable and abide for countless eons to come to help living beings:

*At that time I tell the living beings
that I am always here, never entering extinction,*

*but that because of the power of an expedient means
at times I appear to be extinct, at other times not,
and that if there are living beings in other lands
who are reverent and sincere in their wish to believe,
then among them too
I will preach the unsurpassed Law.*

What is this unsurpassed Law? The Buddha of the Lotus Sutra says it is this: I am always here! I Am Really Here! I Am Here! I Am! The timeless realm of the Buddha's awakening is constantly abiding and is always available to you here, now.

Who is this that is always here? What is it? The Buddhist trinity manifests in you yourself—it cannot be otherwise. The Great Master Rinzai said: “Do you wish to be not different from the Buddhas and Ancestors? Then just do not look for anything outside. The pure light of your own heart-mind at this instant is the Dharmakaya Buddha in your own house. The non-differentiating light of your heart-mind at this instant is the Samboghakaya Buddha in your own house. The non-discriminating light of your own heart at this instant is the Nirmanakaya Buddha in your own house. This trinity of the Buddha's body is none other than here before your eyes, listening to my expounding the Dharma.²

And I vividly recall a student once asking Maezumi Roshi, “Roshi, Who is Samboghakaya Buddha?” Maezumi Roshi replied, “It's you, stupid!” All the Buddha Ancestors and Triple Body of the Buddhas comes down to your very hands and eyes—this body reading these words—right here, right now!

You and I are transforming our inner worlds and our outer worlds as well. So tell me, these warm summer days, how are you living your vows?

Roshi Egyoku is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

² Schloegl, Irmgard (1976), *The Zen Teaching of Rinzai* (PDF), Shambhala Publications, Inc., p. 18.



Hawk above.

ZCLA Affiliated Groups

The Monday Night Meditation Group (Pasadena, CA)
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Empty Hands Circle (Campinas, SP, Brazil)
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Outreach Groups

**CMC Buddhist Fellowship Group
 California Men's Colony (CMC)
 (San Luis Obispo, CA)**
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Contact info@zcla.org for information.

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*Founding Abbot: Taizan Maezumai Roshi
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Denbo (Dharma Transmission)

*Sensei Darla Baiko Myoho Fjeld
 April 16, 2021*

In Memoriam

*John Heart-Mirror Trotter
 August 8, 1940 - July 23, 2021*

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 **Roshi Egyoku, Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith,**
 and **Sensei Mark Shogen Bloodgood** for leading our
 spring Sesshins;

To **Rev. Jitsujo Gauthier** and **Conrad Butsugen Romo**
 for the Dharma Discussion on Sitting in Racial Discomfort;

To **Roshi Ilia Shinko Perez** for her class on Goddess Prac-
 tices; **Kazu Haga** for his class on Dharma of Dr. King;

To our Second Quarter Day of Reflection leaders: **Jane
 Radiant-Joy Chen, Karina Myoki Beltran-Hernandez,**
 and **David Fushin Watson;**

To our Exploring Your Zen Practice leaders: **Rev. Jitsu-
 jo, Sensei Darla Myoho Fjeld, Rev. Jonathan Kaigen
 Levy,** and **Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert;**

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To **Sensei Myoho** for leading the Sangha Forum.