



# Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

## Musings on the Entangled Life

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



*The Avatamsaka Sutra says, "Now I see all living beings everywhere, and I see that each of them possesses the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata. But because of their delusions and attachments, they cannot realize it."*

—Book of Equanimity, Case 67

*The first line—all living beings everywhere...possesses the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata—asserts*

the foundation of awakening. The koan itself is excerpted from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the "Flower Garland Sutra," which is a compilation—a stringing together into a garland—of Buddhist Sutras from around the 5th Century BCE in China. It is the primary sutra of the HuaYan (Flower Garland) School of Buddhism, developed by scholar-practitioners in China. The English language version of the Sutra by the prolific translator Thomas Cleary numbers 1,656 pages. I have read that Cleary, who recently passed away, read the entire Sutra in Chinese all the way through four times before he began to translate it. Reading this Sutra even once is a daunting undertaking.

The word "sutra" means "thread," that which stitches together the relationships of life forms. These days we have all been living the "Pandemic Sutra," which, with its imposed restraints, has opened us to the complex relationships of interbeing. We are experiencing many losses: of people dying from covid or from non-covid illnesses, of workplaces in upheaval, of social isolation, of housing disruption, and of communal disarray. We are discovering new insights about ourselves and those we thought we knew; sometimes the revelations have been uplifting; other times shocking and dismaying. And we are having a deeper understanding and direct experience of the complex and entangled nature of life itself. It is this "entangled nature" that is highlighted by both the "Pandemic Sutra" and the *Avatamsaka Sutra*—the complex and intricate web of relationships from which we cannot separate. Indeed, all is one undivided whole.



*Los Angeles was not always Los Angeles. This was Tongva Land.*

One of the key teachings in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* is that of Indra's Net. The Vedic god Indra had a net with a jewel in each node that reflects every other jewel: the jewels, net strands, and the micro and macro reflections extend into infinity. This metaphor has come to symbolize the core wisdoms of Shakyamuni Buddha's awakening, particularly that of emptiness, interconnection, and dependent co-arising. Roshi Bernie was fond of saying, "in Bud-

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*(Photo above by caruromerophotography.)*

## MUSINGS (Continued from page 1)

dhism we have Indras's Net; today we have the Internet." Biologists, particularly those studying mycorrhizal relationships, now say we also have variations of a "wood wide web." It seems that, little by little, we humans are waking up to what the Buddha realized, namely that "*I, the great earth, and all beings are the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata*"—a declaration of the vast web of entangling connections among all living beings. The Buddha's awakening exclamation does not prioritize a human-centered focus on life. Rather, the focus is all-centered; all-living-beings centered.

Awakening is a radical reorienting to the Oneness of life: to the web, the net, to the fact that *all living beings everywhere* are one living body. The vastness is dizzying for the limited minds in which we are trapped. Awakening blows open the limited thinking mind. What is so striking about this is that awakening thrusts us beyond the human-centered story to which we are conditioned. Awakening is not a "me, myself, mine" story. This is not a story of nouns living with other nouns or one noun being more important than another. It is not the story of subjects and objects.

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### "...awakening thrusts us beyond the human-centered story..."

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Siddhartha further exclaimed: "All Beings are Awake!" Or, we could interpolate that "All beings are alive!"—everything is living, verbing and vibing in an infinitely entangling web. Interestingly, the Latin root of the word "individual" means "indivisible." Life is dynamically connecting in all directions; never static, *but because of [your] delusions and attachments, [you] cannot realize it*. Humans see themselves as separate in a world of subjects and objects. "Awakening" occurs when the Buddha eye opens to the web. "Living awake" is about constantly creating new ways to live within and alongside all beings in the web. We become porous and malleable and can consider a seagull-centered perspective, a tree-centered perspective, an earth-centered perspective, a homeless person-centered perspective, a Japanese-American perspective, a One-body perspective, and so forth. We start attuning to the needs of different living beings from their own perspectives within the perspectives of the One Body.

The Pali word "Tathagata" means "Thus come one," or "Thus gone one," or "One who is beyond coming and going." Shakyamuni Buddha often used the word to refer to himself and to other Buddhas. In this instance upon awakening, the Buddha declared that all living beings everywhere—every person and every living "thing"—already has the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata Buddha. By definition (according to sciencea-z.com), to be considered a "living being," a being "must grow and develop, use

energy, reproduce, be made of cells, respond to its environment, and adapt." Don't let your thinking mind get in the way of seeing that not just human beings are living beings, but the trees, starfish, fungi, birds, mycelium, mountains, bugs, soil, dust motes, and so forth! Each living being is a unique net node in which everything else is reflected. We are co-arising together always, a net of active forces that cannot be seen in isolation from even the smallest particle or the largest space. Among living beings, there is no "it," there is no "thing"—there is no "object." We, who are nouns as well as verbs, need to create new words that capture the dynamic life force with which all living beings are endowed.

The biologist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*<sup>1</sup>, speaks of this dynamic life force as captured by the indigenous Potawatomi language of her tribe. The English language is inherently noun oriented and dualistic. The Potawatomi language is abundant in verbs that extend living energies beyond human life. For example, the word for "hill" is a verb: to be a hill. For "bay:" to be a bay. For "Saturday:" to be a Saturday. So a hill is always "hilling;" a bay is "baying;" a Saturday is "Saturdaying". When we use a grammar of animacy, we no longer reduce the so-called inanimate or non-human to an "it" or a "thing" or an "object." Reflect on this!

So what is *the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata*? Let's consider that this *wisdom and virtue* is the connective tissue of the One Body—it's what makes our relationships come alive! It's what enables Thus to become "Thus-ing." In Zen practice, we learn that practice is a living question, not a question which seeks an answer. You don't need to seek an answer because you are told the answer from the beginning of practice: *all living beings everywhere ... possess the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata*. That is the answer; the question is: How am I living such a life?

What is the living question for you personally? Perhaps it is this: *What if this person [name anyone], this being [name any being], this moment [whatever is happening] is the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata Buddha*? How is this re-orienting me? Or perhaps it is this: *How am I myself living this moment as the connective tissue of the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata*? Raise these not as abstract questions, but as the living moment.

Whether you are reading these words—*the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata Buddha*—for the first time or have read it many times or have heard it for many decades, as I have, I encourage you to sit down in it anew. See it new with the eyes, hear it new with the ears, taste it new with the tongue, wear it new with the body, and absorb it new with the

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<sup>1</sup>Robin Wall Kimmerer. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions, 2015.

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# Radical Zazen

by Darla Baiko Myoho Fjeld



*Attention! Razan asked Ganto, "How about when arising and vanishing are ceaseless?" Ganto scolded and said, "Who is this arising and vanishing?"*

*— Case 43 Razan's Arising and Vanishing from the Book of Equanimity.*

Over the last year and a half this question of "Who is this arising and vanishing?" keeps arising in me and not vanishing. This question has been helpful to me as I have been dealing with the confluence of my Zen practice with wanting to be part of changing things in the world I live in, that is filled with racism and all the other "isms" and divisions and phobias and violence and anger.

Zazen is a radical practice that has caused a shift in me as to how I approach intentional change, including social change—it has shifted me into a new kind of paradigm for change that is different from the one I lived in during my many years of activism.

I use the word "radical" as an adjective for Zazen. The word "radical" was first used as an adjective in the 14th century—its meaning from the Latin is "root." When I say that Zazen is a radical practice—I mean that it quite literally takes us to the root of Reality—the energetic Source of everything that is. There are lots of words for this root. I often use Oneness. The more we practice Zazen the more we experience this lively undercurrent of Reality—this Oneness. When we come from a place of radical Oneness, it changes the way we view the world—for this is a Oneness that does not diminish our unique differences.

The Samadhi that we enter into with Zazen takes us into a non-dual awareness that contrasts with our self-centered awareness in our ordinary lives. Compare how much time you spend being self-centered with how much time you spend in Oneness. Stop and remember that suffering, war, violence, prejudice, bigotry all emerge out of the self-centered side of living life. And self-centered people become us-centered people who construct us/them scenarios all over the place. When we forget that the realm of Oneness is at the heart of the realm of unique differences, we set up the dualistic hierarchies that yield hatred and bigotry.

The question "Who is this arising and vanishing?" takes us right into these two sides of living our lives: the



*Photo by Geri Meiho Bryan.*

Radiant Source where no dualisms exist, and on the other side, the world of arising and vanishing where we live our ordinary lives and try not to be deluded by our imaginary egos.

So why don't we just practice Zazen on our cushions all the time sitting in the comfort of Oneness—especially when it makes us feel such blissful peace. Why do we have families and jobs and friends? Why do we take to the streets chanting "Black Lives Matter!"? Why do we vote? Why do we interact with other people? Why are those of us who are white facing our whiteness? Why are those of us who are oppressed for not being white working so hard to get out from under those who oppress us?

Well, here's the thing—life is for living—there's both a box and its lid—one without the other doesn't make sense. A fetus doesn't spend its whole life in the womb. At the right time, it emerges as a baby, then grows into a person and then vanishes. This is the rhythm of everything in the whole universe.

If we were to use Zazen as a means to get out of life, we would be like drug addicts just trying to chase some momentary bliss. It would be a way to numb ourselves from painful aspects of life and would still be based in Ego. Zen is not the opium of the people, as Karl Marx would have said. It is not about hiding from the world of samsara. It's about the seamless interconnection between the world of Oneness and the World of Suffering.

Paradigm is another word that I use that I want to define. It points to a pattern of thinking or the worldview out of which we think about something. I am suggesting that engaging in radical Zazen opens up a paradigm for social change newer than the ones that have been used before.

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**RADICAL ZAZEN** *(Continued from page 3)*

In a lot of the work I have done over the years in politics and social change around poverty, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, economic justice, and racial justice—we used battle language and said things like “We’re fighting for better conditions” and “We lost the battle for the ERA.” I remember writing grant proposals for a poor people’s organization that I directed and struggling to come up with language that wasn’t saturated with war and battle metaphors that come from a dualistic way of thinking, where one side is the victim and the other the enemy. I’ve also been part of strategy discussions where I’ve been witness to people mostly on the same side shouting at each other and sometimes literally coming to blows over disagreements.

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When we were all reading and talking about the Lotus Sutra, we heard a lot about Skillful Means (Upaya), which is a Buddhist’s ability to tailor our message to a specific audience. The Buddha spoke differently to his kind and wise stepmother Mahapajapati than he did to Angulimala, a serial killer. This skill is something that we all can develop in ourselves as we continue to practice Zazen. To develop this in ourselves, we must come to an experience of Oneness, and we must also be able to live in the world of Samsara where each living being is unique according to their own conditioning.

Each and every one of us is newly unique in each moment of our lives according to the influences, we have received which come from every direction—environment, other people, input from art, media, television shows, movies, reading material. Think for a moment about everything that has gone into making you, you. Well, that same thing is going on with everyone else. Everyone is doing the best they can according to the conditioning, the input they have received. Everyone, whether they are part of BLM or KKK, came to be who they are through their own unique conglomeration of conditioning.

And what changes conditioning? The answer is quite simple and obvious—more conditioning, and we’re all part of that. You never know, you might just be part of the antidote needed to cure the poisons of Greed, Anger and Ignorance. We can’t figure it all out because it’s too big, but we can see small Karmic Frames, such as how the murders of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor were the straws that ignited a call to a changed consciousness across this nation, and millions of people took peaceful protest to the streets.

And we can’t just forget about the people whose conditioning has led them to greed, hatred and ignorance. These poisons have filled the hearts of people throughout human history. Just as each of us is working on the precepts and finding more and more love in our hearts, this is possible for even the meanest, gun-toting racist you can think of. That person has come to be who they are in the same way you have come to be who you are, and in the next moment each of us will be a new person. Each of us is continuously arising and vanishing.

All of this, to me, suggests a different way of approaching social change, one that is not based on the very divisions of injustice, hatred, and violence that we are longing to end. It’s an approach based on the Precepts, such as Precept #7.

*I will speak what I perceive to be the truth without guilt or blame. This is the practice of Not Elevating Myself and Blaming Others. I will refrain from elevating myself and blaming others and from encouraging others to do so. I will give my best effort and accept the results.*

What if we apply Precept #7 to overcoming oppression? For instance, what if we apply this precept to our work to end racism? What would this look like if we centered ourselves in refraining from elevating ourselves and blaming others? What if I as a white person practiced not elevating myself as a white person and not blaming BIPOC people or immigrants for not getting a job I want or living in a better house? What if I practice Not Knowing and Bearing Witness when I am with a BIPOC person and allow what I hear to become part of my conditioning? What if I encourage other white people to do the same? What if I do my best to examine how I benefit from racism and give my best effort to not participate in the systemic racism that is part of the world I live in? And what if I do this and accept the results?

We often talk about “issues” or “subjects” or “concepts”—and this has its place and can be helpful sometimes. It’s important though, to remember that at the heart of every issue, there are living beings conditioned to be who or what they are moment by moment. There are real people who have endured the horrors of racism and other forms of oppression and real people who have inflicted these horrors. In the midst of all of this we vow: Numberless beings whatever their condition, I vow to serve them.

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*Sensei Myoho is a priest, the ZCLA Temple Development Steward, and is on the Teachers Circle and Board of Directors.*

# We Eat This Meal With Everyone

by George Mukei Horner



## *The Meal Chant*

*Let us reflect on the efforts that  
brought us this food, and  
consider how it comes to us.  
Reflect on our virtue and practice,  
and whether we are worthy  
of this offering.  
Regard greed as the obstacle to  
freedom of mind.*

*Regard this meal as medicine to sustain our life.  
For the sake of enlightenment, we now receive this food.*

*First, this food is for the Three Treasures.  
Second, it is for our teachers, parents, community and all beings  
everywhere.  
Third, it is for all beings in the six realms.  
Thus, we eat this food with everyone.  
We eat to stop all evil,  
To practice good,  
To liberate all beings,  
And to accomplish the Buddha way.*

We begin our meals together with these words. They serve to settle us, to orient us in what we are about to do, to set our intention for why we eat, and to remind us that, no matter where we are or whatever the circumstances happen to be, we never eat alone.

We recite these words before serving ourselves Sunday lunch in the Sangha House. And in oryoki meals during sesshin and zazenkaï, we recite them after being served the meal, just before we begin to eat. But even though the very first line calls us to reflect and consider, reflecting upon and considering the larger context in which we eat is not easily done while chanting. And, of course, once the meal begins, we are eating, and attending to what is before us.

So let's begin by noticing that the meal chant is composed of two verses. The first five lines are known as *The Verse of the Five Contemplations*. Its current wording expresses the character of our practice today at a city Zen center, but for many years at ZCLA we used a version that recalls the monastic origins of this text. Let's imagine ourselves in the dining hall of a Zen monastery chanting, in the phrasing we once used,

*First seventy-two labors brought us this food; we should know  
how it comes to us.*

These seventy-two labors are the seventy-two named service positions in a Zen monastery, where they grew



their own food and were largely self-sustaining. Everyone in the dining hall would have known where their food came from, all the effort that went into preparing it, and everything that went into maintaining the monastery as a functioning place in which to practice. These words call them to

remember that it is through the efforts of the whole community that they are sharing this meal.

For us, when we say, *Let us reflect on the efforts that brought us this food*, what does that call to mind? In our world today, truly, it could be almost anything. Our economy is unprecedentedly global. Not just the devices we use and the clothes we wear, but the food in our bowls may come from hundreds of miles away, or halfway around the world. How many unknown tasks on the part of how many people who will never know each other, had to come together to make that possible?

Consider how it is that we, this particular group of people sharing a meal, have come together in this time and place to do this. All the myriad paths our lives followed—and didn't follow—that led to us being here with each other, in this moment. Likewise, consider all the paths our ancestors' lives took, all the choices they made or did not make, that led to us being here at all. And what of the choices we and our ancestors have made collectively, as a community, as a nation, as a people, however we define those terms? How do they manifest at this meal?

Every one of these strands of personal, communal, national, and global karma, come together and are present in and with us as we sit down with this meal. We should know how it comes to us, even while we know that we can never know.

*Second, as we receive this offering, we should consider whether  
our virtue and practice deserve it.*

We live and practice in community with others, and have vowed to continually realign our conduct to accord with the precepts. Without indulging in the unhelpfulness of guilt, just notice where we need to realign and set our intention to do so.

*(Continued on page 6)*



## WE EAT THIS MEAL *(Continued from page 5)*

*Third, as we desire the natural order of mind to be free from clinging, we must be free from greed.*

Be balanced in what we want, and mindful in what we take. Where the amount is limited, as it is in the dining hall, the more we take for ourselves, the less there is for those yet to be served.

*Fourth, to support our life, we take this food.*

*Fifth, to attain our way, we take this food.*

We eat to support our own life. We eat to support the life of others.

The second section of the meal chant is known as *The Verse of Raising the Bowl*. During oryoki, it is at this point that we place our spoon in the Buddha bowl, and our chopsticks across the middle bowl, then raise the Buddha bowl and say,

*First, this food is for the Three Treasures.*

How do we understand the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha? They are, of course, Shakyamuni Buddha, the understanding of life to which he awakened and that guided his teaching, and the community of practitioners who joined him in seeking to live the Way.

But they are also the ongoing stream of the Way from the Buddha's time right down to us, all the teachers, all the practitioners and their communities, all the insight and understanding they shared with each other, and which we share with each other as we grow and mature in the Way, as well as the precepts with which we guide our lives.

More deeply, the Buddha Treasure is the seamless oneness of life, in which none of us is separate from anything else, in which your being and my being are vast, including everything, even each other. The Dharma Treasure is the diversity of life, the distinctness and particularity of each aspect as it reveals itself just as it is, so that this aspect and that aspect, this being and that being, are not the same, even while part of a seamless whole. The Sangha Treasure is the harmony with which this diversity-in-oneness, this oneness-in-diversity simply is the nature of life. The Three Treasures are what our life truly is.

*Second, it is for our teachers, parents, community, and all beings everywhere.*

Having reflected on how this food comes to us, we eat in gratitude for all the efforts of our dharma ancestors, and our family ancestors, and everyone in every community of which we are a part, together with all beings, past, future, and present. It is due to their efforts that we are here

and able to give our own efforts, in turn, in the service of others.

*Third, it is for all beings in the six realms.*

The six realms are those of heavenly beings, fighting spirits, human beings, hungry ghosts, animals, and beings in hell. Traditionally, these are regarded as the realms into which one can be born, live, die, and transmigrate after death to be reborn as a new life. In Zen, they are especially understood as the many places we go in our minds, over and over, in endless permutation, countless times in each and every day. In recognizing that, we recognize the possibility of being freed from that.

*Thus, we eat this food with everyone.*

This is what the preceding three lines have just said. First this way, then that way, then another. And just in case we missed it, it says it one more time in words that can't possibly be misunderstood: We eat this food with everyone.

*We eat to stop all evil,  
To practice good,  
To liberate all beings,  
And to accomplish the Buddha way.*

In these words, we recognize together, the Three Treasures, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Three Tenets of the Zen Peacemakers, reminding us that we do not eat just to sustain our own individual life.

We eat to refrain from evil by practicing the Not-knowing that allows us to see clearly and live out of the Oneness that is the awakened nature of all beings.

We eat to practice good by Bearing Witness, recognizing in Diversity the ocean of wisdom and compassion, treating all beings with respect and dignity, and allowing ourselves to be touched by the joys and pain of the world.

And we eat to do good for others by practicing Healing, embodying the Harmony that is the seamless interdependence of the Oneness and Diversity of our life in this world, and acting to heal ourselves, the earth, humanity, and all creations.

With this we begin our meal, knowing that wherever we are and whatever the circumstances, we do not eat alone. We eat this meal with everyone, and to accomplish the Buddha way together.

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*Preceptor Mukey is our Zendo Steward.*

# Appreciate Another's Life

by Frank Genku Martinez



I recently reread *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the 1961 science fiction classic by Robert Heinlein. The book describes the life of a human child that is the only survivor of an ill-fated mission to Mars. Unbeknownst to the people on Earth, Mars is inhabited, and the child is raised from infancy to adulthood fully immersed in Martian society. Twenty-five years later, a subsequent

mission discovers the young man, and he returns to Earth. On Earth, the young man brings an outsider's perspective and his Martian skills and sensibilities to his discovery of human society.

An important Martian practice that the young man brings to his experience of understanding humans is expressed by the Martian word "Grok." On one level to Grok a situation (or person, custom, etc.) is to fully understand the situation. But in the Martian sense, to Grok is a much deeper experience. To Grok is to understand something so thoroughly that you merge with it, and it merges with you such that there is no separation. To Grok is also expressed as "identically equal." Whenever the young man is confronted with a new situation, he doesn't Grok, he engages in a deep form of meditation and patiently awaits "full Grok-ness" to emerge. I suspect that Zen students can relate to this Martian practice.

As I read, I began to reflect on the challenge of fully understanding, honoring, and appreciating the lived experience of another's life. Especially when someone's current manifestation is different from our own in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, education, economic status, and sexuality. Not only does the other person bring their own perspective to a situation, but society responds to them differently.

I thought of times when I did not Grok or fully appreciate another person's lived experience. One such incident occurred some 40 years ago when my wife Maria and I stopped for lunch in a small rural town. She went ahead to get a table while I attended to the car. When I arrived inside, it was clear Maria was upset—she said she was being ignored and was picking up unwelcoming vibes. At first, I dismissed her concerns but eventually it became clear that we were not welcome, and we left.

Why was I initially dismissive of her concerns? Although we were in the same objective circumstances, we had a different experience. Maria's lived experience—a female Mexican immigrant, darker skinned with more indigenous features, initially placed in a special needs class because she didn't speak English, and navigating racist and gender biased institutions—informed her experience. Just as my lived experience and relative privilege—male, lighter skinned, born and raised in the United States—informed mine.

Through modern news media and ubiquitous cell phone videos, we have all gotten a glimpse into the lived experience of those in very different circumstances than ours. From the horrific murder of George Floyd; the heartbreaking caging of immigrant children; the annoying (but still potentially dangerous) incident of a person of color being challenged when entering their own apartment; to the revelations of the "me too" movement.

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**"To Grok is to understand something  
so thoroughly that you merge with it,  
and it merges with you  
such that there is no separation."**

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I believe that the Three Tenets of Not-Knowing (by giving up fixed ideas about ourselves and the universe); Bearing Witness (to the joy and suffering of the world); and Taking Action (that arises from Not-Knowing and Bearing Witness) provide us a framework for truly appreciating another person's life. Consistent with our Bodhisattva Vows to seek the liberation of all beings, we have the power to deeply see, hear, understand, honor, and appreciate (Grok if you will) another person's lived experience. Further, in fully appreciating another person's life are we not also appreciating our own life—as manifestations of the one body? Closing the gap between ourselves and another is a worthy and perhaps even a foundational first step in fulfilling our vows.

*Note to reader: Although the concept of Grok was useful to frame this article, rereading the book from a current perspective shows that it contains problematic language relating to hetero-normative and gender stereotypes, and expression of patriarchy.*

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*Genku is a member of the ZCLA Board, BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) Group and a dedicated musician.*

# The Fresh Richness of Radical Inclusion

by Christina Tchoren Carvalho



*Tchoren with her Portuguese translation of "The Householder Koans."*

"How do we survive the f...ery with undefended hearts?" started the facilitator after the first welcome words. "Let me repeat, How do we survive the F...ERY with undefended hearts?" The jolt was intentional, deliberate. This is how our 5-day online retreat called Block Build Be Earth started. "Yes, we do curse, but not a whole lot. We like to ask questions and live into the answers. And we use swearing as a love language too."

I heard her completely. My knee-jerk alarm was instantly laundered by a flood of joy. In one quick swoop, she had removed lots of Styrofoam layers and landed on the core of the bodhisattva path: the f...ery (the pain we feel and witness), and the undefended heart (the love and compassion we muster). This was the main theme of the retreat, and facilitators opened windows to vast new landscapes for us to deepen our "living into" the myriad answers.

My application, a couple of months earlier, can't have been strong: straight and white (= privileged), and old to boot. I suspect "country of origin" must have played a strong part in my being accepted—it happens often.

BBB Earth is offered by Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) for two groups of applicants, "mixed" and "strictly BIPOC," and it's clear from the application that the "mixed" will be very diverse. Not false advertising. It was refreshing to see that roughly 80% of attendees were BIPOC, lots of them openly LGBTQ+ too. Together we explored "how to harmonize approaches of Blocking harm, Building the worlds of love and support that we want, and Being full, free, and embodied in our life while we're at it." BPF, as so many organizations, started as a white-male-energy initiative back in 1978—arguably the first socially engaged Buddhist organization in the West. Its history, as described on the site, is fascinating, but nothing is said about the huge turnabout to a BIPOC-female-energy leadership that seems so vital now.

Asked about this turnabout, Katie Loncke, BPF's Director since 2012, is pithy: "Yes, our culture is shifting, and that is very intentional. It doesn't happen overnight.

It doesn't happen through shallow tokenism. It doesn't happen solely from meditation retreats, or a slew of feminist anti-racist workshops (though both can be wonderful). It doesn't happen by a random stroke of luck! In a way, it requires adhitthāna, strong determination. As BIPOC, femme of center and gender-expansive leaders, facilitators, and co-creators of BPF today, we still have to insist that our views and ways of being are just as valid as: white convert norms; patriarchal traditions; ableist, misogynist, self-sacrificing habits; or depoliticized sanghas strategically allergic to offending anyone."



*From left to right: Katie Loncke, Chika Okoye, and Sophia Grady.*

After that opening to the BBB Earth retreat, the pearls kept rolling. "Release self-improvement projects. Retreats (and catharses) can be addictive. Make sure to have your personal 'emotional emergency kit' at hand (in case you step from your Stretch Zone into a Panic Zone). Appreciate the many acts of bravery and vulnerability."

It would take pages to point out every skillful means that made this plunge OUTSTANDING. And, taken out of the context of the tangible loving-kindness that exuded from the facilitators, such a list might sound like a recipe. It was not. To give a few of examples, Rev. Lien, with modesty and unpretentiousness, opened an amazing new vista of Indra's Net (often a tired image for long-time Buddhists); B. Anderson, with supernova energy, unveiled an Earth timeline masterfully named Black Earth Wisdom; Mary Rose, with a huge smile, introduced us to martial aspects of Rinzaï Kado (Flower Path); and Katie Loncke, Chika Okoye, and LiZhen, with "joy, juice, and jazz", shared their experience in Co-Leadership, Conflict; and so much more. But content was only half the magic.

Through BBB Earth, I had a taste of a world where white supremacy is not the Operating System. This world tastes like freedom. Imagine that!

*Tchoren is a ZCLA priest living in Brazil.*

<sup>1</sup>"The convert who approaches the people [of color – my addition here] but feels alarm at each step they take, each doubt they express, and each suggestion they offer, and attempts to impose his 'status', remains nostalgic towards his origins." (Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the oppressed* "The convert who approaches the people [of color – my addition here] but feels alarm at each step they take, each doubt they express, and each suggestion they offer, and attempts to impose his 'status', remains nostalgic towards his origins." (Paulo Freire in *"Pedagogy of the oppressed"*)



## Showing Up and Being Present

by Nem Etsugen Bajra



When Roshi Egyoku informed me about my head-trainee program, I felt grateful for the opportunity. My intellectual mind immediately started making plans. I came up with a long list of things to prepare for. This included a residency at the Zen Center that would allow me to sit more in the Zendo and experience Zen-community life. I also

signed up for on-line workshops like ones on the Lankavatara Sutra and Yogacara.

As the year progressed, however, my plans didn't go as expected. Nor did I end up feeling more prepared for the head-trainee position. Due to the pandemic lockdown, I was confined to my studio apartment with almost no participation at the Zendo and no communication with fellow residents. My on-line workshops just made me feel busy.

At this point, I asked myself the question: "What do I do, when nothing works out as planned?" The answer that came to me was this: Keep showing up and being present. My koan studies with teachers have been wonderful, as I just showed up every week. There was nothing to plan for and nothing to expect. It was about being present with teachers and my own awareness.

As the lockdown eased, I started showing up in the Zendo. I felt very present when we did both zazen and service at the Zendo. It was moving to see some dedicated members running the daily program in this pandemic period. With each person filling the positions of Head Monitor, Jikido, Chanter, Doan and Sogeï, everyone was fully engaged.

I showed up in one sesshin meeting and was told that I would officiate evening services. As Dharma-Joy trained me, I listened to the Doan, Mokugyo, and chanting while Roshi Ryodo engineered the Zoom audio. Everybody listened to everybody. Everybody watched everybody. No one was left out. Nothing was hidden. I was being watched with every step I took and then instructed to correct every mistake I made. No preparation, no thinking, and nothing to memorize. By just being present and doing what I was told to do, my body remembered the steps. What else could I ask for?

*Etsugen is the ZCLA 2020-21 Head Trainee and the CEO at Calsoft Systems.*

## The Fault Lies Not In the Stars

by James Sie



I have an app on my phone. If I use it ten days in a row, I earn a yellow star. If I get five yellow stars, I earn a red star. If I get five red stars, I get a green. What is this app for:

1. Playing a video game?
2. Ordering coffee from Starbucks?
3. Behavioral Modification Therapy?
4. Meditating?

If you guessed #4, you get a yellow star!

For years, I've been using the meditation app Insight Timer, which allows you to set a time and customize your interval and ending bell sounds (very realistic!). It also has a motivational tool to get you on your cushion daily by bestowing milestones—one for every ten consecutive meditation sessions or every fifty non-consecutive ones. It's like a pat on the head, a tiny ping of dopamine to send you out on your day, a gold foil star for your classroom spelling quiz. What could be wrong with that?

Boy, did I rack up stars. The more I earned, the more I needed to keep my streak. I began to obsessively check my star status, anticipating the day when my yellow stars would tip into a red one, and the big moment when a green star announced itself on my profile. I logged three hundred and sixty consecutive days. How was my meditating? Look at all those green stars! I must be meditating good!

And then I got a new phone.

For some reason, when I migrated my data, my stars didn't come with me. I was back to ... zero. I spent a few frantic days calling tech support, trying to figure out a way to get back those hard-earned stars. Could I cheat and manually add them in? But wait—what was I doing? What happened to ebb and flow, to non-striving and simply sitting? Wasn't this a perfect example of impermanence? For someone trying to practice non-attachment, I was awfully attached to those little pointy icons. I had to laugh.

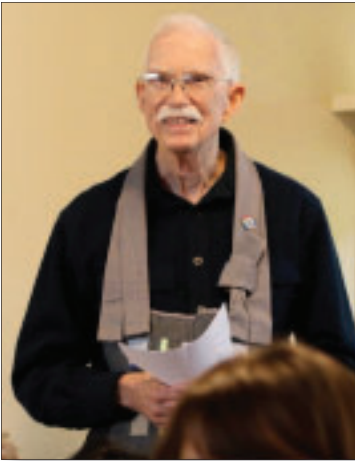
Every moment, a new moment. Every day, a new day. Some of those days earn a star, but I'm no longer checking. If I need stars, I'll just have to look up at the sky.

*James is a ZCLA member, a voice actor, and author. His latest book, the Young Adult novel All Kinds of Other, is now available from HarperCollins.*

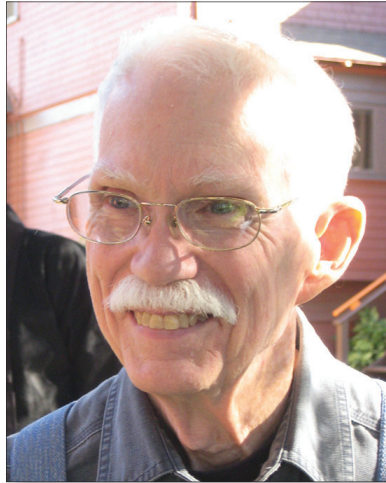


# John Heart-Mirror Trotter

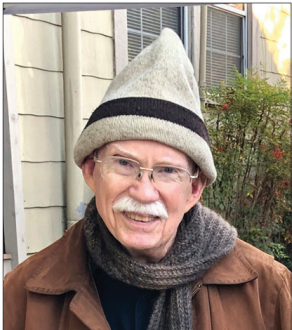
August 8, 1940 - July 23, 2021



A question for the Shuso.



Learning flower arranging.



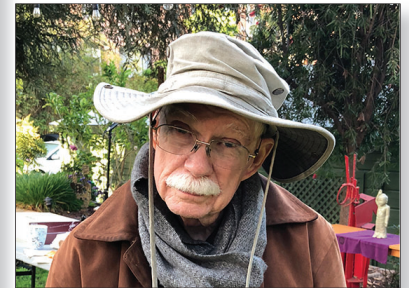
Street cleaning.



Buddha's Birthday.



Jukai renewal.



Day of Dana.



Day of Dead.



Densho.



## Three Short Verses of the Heart-Mirror

### Counter Thanksgiving Verse

From the very beginning I knew  
it wasn't right, it wasn't fair.  
Out of balance, but out of my control,  
it was wrong to be favored.

Now, near 80, I wonder  
did that little boy see too well?  
Did he refuse to be loved until  
his sister was loved as well.

Back and forth her eyes would go,  
my little sister,  
not understanding Grandma's lie  
about having only one lap.  
11-23-20

### Awakening Poem for Today

My head shakes left to right  
my eyes fill  
and my cheeks are wet  
3-1-18

### An excerpt from A Brief, Incomplete Sutra on Cleaning the Street

The Buddha said: "Tell me your predicament."  
I said: "The streets are littered with trash, their beauty has  
been defiled."

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

Homage to those who clean and set right, who preserve  
and maintain the Dharma body. Aware of the hunger of  
things for their right places, they know what belongs and  
what does not, and do not confuse the two. They know  
how much is too much and where there is lack. They are  
one with discrimination. They clean and arrange, yet do  
not protest impermanence. They know the rhythm of  
beauty and its alliance with nature. They keep track of  
beauty's ebb and flow and geography. They know the  
language of beauty, all its parts of speech, and use it to  
teach."

I asked: "What can beauty teach about trash in the street?"

The Buddha said: "Trash is that which is abandoned with-  
out an attentive mind. Trash emerges naturally as discrimi-  
nation is applied to living."

12-21-18

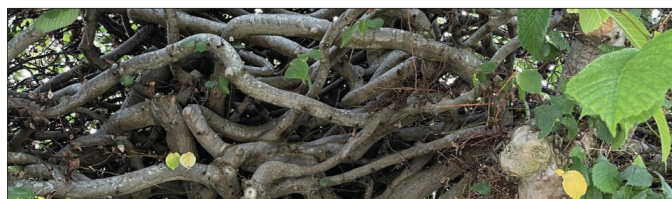
### MUSINGS (Continued from page 2)

mind. When filtered through delusions and attachments, to  
be "new" is nearly impossible, and yet, the sparks that arise  
from this declaration never grow mundane. (Let the spark  
burn a hole in limited mind!) A sheer sense of alive-ing,  
of discovering something out of one's usual conditioned  
perceptions, arises as if for the first time. Each moment is  
a first-time momenting. Is it ever otherwise? The mind is  
adept at creating a before and after, a good and bad, and so  
forth. All of this is useful when it is useful, but underlying  
all is this "new-ing"—*this wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata,*  
the *Thus-ing*.

We are all powered by the *wisdom and virtue of the*  
*Tathagata*. I like the phrase "powered by" because the life  
forms that arise from the "zero" are simply astounding.  
The innumerable amount and diversity of life forms  
means that most are unseen and unknown. Because we are  
using words and concepts to describe experiences, we use  
words such as "oneness," "interdependent," "boundless,"  
and even "wisdom and virtue" or "Thusness," but all such  
words do not ever come close to the dynamic, vivid life-ing  
itself.

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "... *But because of their delu-  
sions and attachments, they cannot realize it.*" We humans are  
thinking and decision-making beings. This is an extraordi-  
nary capacity. And yet, we must see through the thinking  
mind and the ways that we are immersed in it. Most living  
beings lack the thinking and decision-making capacity that  
we are so blessed with, and yet non-human living beings  
are also extraordinary. It is very difficult to talk about  
non-human beings without anthropomorphizing them—it  
requires an intense awareness on our parts to not interpret  
non-human life from our human-centered perspectives.

What we do with what arises—our attachments and  
delusions—is how the conundrums of our life arise. Our  
capacity to arrange and rearrange our biases is endless.  
Even our perceptions are conditioned. So, anchor yourself  
in *the wisdom and virtue of Tathagata* with which you and all  
living beings are endowed. We are entangled in this vast,  
mysterious life all together. You are reflecting the net and  
responding to it endlessly; the nodes of the net are reflect-  
ing and responding to you endlessly, too. The trees, the  
grass, the birds—all living beings around you, are respond-  
ing to you. Do you notice this? Don't get in the way!



Roshi Egyoku is ZCLA's Head Teacher and Head Priest.



## 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](mailto:info@zcla.org) for information.*

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

*Founding Abbot: Taizan Maezumai Roshi  
 Abbot 1995-1999: Roshi Bernard Glassman  
 Abbot Emeritus 1999-2019: Roshi Ekyoku Nakao  
 The Seats: Abbot, Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen;  
 Head/Resident Teacher, Roshi Ekyoku Nakao*

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## Sangha Rites of Passage

### New Members

*Rachel Belish  
 Charles Kosetsu Gallagher  
 Lane Kyojin Igoudin  
 Eva Jiun Neumann*

### In Memorium

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

## Your Gifts are Received with a Heartfelt "Thank You!"

To our 3rd Quarter Exploring Your Zen Practice leaders: Sensei Darla Myoho Fjeld, Rev. Jitsujo Gauthier, Rev. Jonathan Kaigen Levy and Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert;

To Sensei Myoho, Rev. Kaigen, Rev. Dharma-Joy, Rev. Jitsujo, and Preceptor Lorraine Gessho Kumpf for their Dharma talks;

To Jenny Jusen Bright, Dan Ejo Wilner, and Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher for their Personal Practice talks; and Julie Getsuan Suhr for leading our Dharma Chat;

To Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley and Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen for leading the Midsummer Mindfulness Sesshin; and Preceptor Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran for leading the Zazenkaï;

To our Officiants: Sensei Myoho, Sensei Faith-Mind, Rev. Jitsujo; Preceptors Gessho and George Mukey Horner; To our Ceremonial Stewards Rev. Dharma-Joy, Rev. Jitsujo, and Geri Meiho Bryan;

To our 3rd quarter Day of Reflection leaders: Sacha Joshin Greenfield, Eberhard Konin Fetz, and Bill Tetsui Press;

To Rev. Jitsujo for teaching the Three Tenet Mala Bead and Heart Sutra classes; and Rev. Kaigen for leading Dogen's Three Minds of a Tenzo classes;

To our Intro to Meditation Instructors and Zoom Hosts: Peter Ryugen Sample, Reeb Kaizen Venners, Jane Radiant-Joy Chen, Sandy Seiju Goodenough, Jim Dojun Hanson, Rev. Jitsujo, Chris Genzan Hackman, Karina Myoki Beltran-Hernandez & Stewards Rev. Kaigen & Chris Daian Fields.

To our Jikidos: Tim Taikan Zamora, Gemma Soji Cubero, David Randall, Genzan, Brian Sotetsu Huff and Joshin. To our Zoom Hosts: Rev. Dharma-Joy (Steward), Preceptor George Mukey Horner, Kaizen, Soji, and Meiho;

To the MHAE-Race Circle for their many hours of diligent work.