



# Water Wheel

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

—Gate of Sweet Nectar

## Abbot Transition: A Reflection

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



The ritual of changing the Zen temple Abbot is called “Ascending the Mountain.” Rituals contain the energetic imprints of our intimate relationship to both the spiritual and material realms. They occur in liminal time when the lenses through which we see, hear, and feel are opened wide. During Ascending the Mountain, we experience continuity in the midst of impermanence; the enfolding of past, present,

and future; and gratitude and service embodied in all that has been created together. This ritual marks an important passage in the life of a Zen temple/training center.

Mountains have long held a unique place in the Zen umvelt. There are the actual mountains—remote, imposing, and powerful—on which a temple is built in a secluded spot away from the machinations of the world. Be that as it may, Great Dragon Mountain is a small hill in the midst of Koreatown, Los Angeles, one of the densest neighborhoods in the United States and the densest in Los Angeles County. During my years as abbot, I took as my koan (and my inspiration) the old Chinese proverb “...the great hermit lives in the city.”<sup>1</sup>

Integral to the Zen tradition are mountain hermits who master “the matter of extraordinary wonder” through “sitting alone on Mount Daiyu.”<sup>2</sup> There is the mythical Mount Sumeru situated at the heart of Buddhist cosmology. Remember when a monk asked Master Unmon, “Not a single thought arises: is there any fault or not?” Unmon said, “Mt. Sumeru!”<sup>3</sup> In *Fukanzazengi*, Dogen Zenji himself instructs us to sit immovable “like a big, rocky mountain (*gotsugotsuchi*).” Such mountain-like stability enables us to be



*Roshi Egyoku at the top of Heart Mountain in Cody, WY.*

fluid in the midst of ever changing circumstances, being able to respond in beneficial mutuality amidst the relational dynamics of any situation. Our mountain-dwelling ancestors left us these pearls. How do you too emanate steadiness in the midst of life’s vicissitudes as hermits living in the city?

The very presence of mountains evokes spiritual forces with which we spiritual seekers engage. As a child I lived with the primal forces of Mauna Loa on the Big Island, Hawaii, the home of the fire Goddess Pele sacred to indigenous Hawaiians. From my home on the Puget Sound, Mount Tahoma (Rainier) towers to the southeast, the ancestral homeland of seven Pacific Northwest tribes. On a pilgrimage, I climbed Heart Mountain—rising over 8,000 feet from the Big Horn Basin in Cody, Wyoming—

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<sup>1</sup>Full proverb: “The mediocre hermit lives in the mountains, the great hermit lives in the city.”

<sup>2</sup>Blue Cliff Record, case 26

<sup>3</sup>Book of Equanimity, case 19

## ABBOT TRANSITION *(Continued from page 1)*

a silent witness to the Heart Mountain concentration camp where Japanese-Americans were imprisoned during World War II. The most compelling spiritual-mountain forces that I have encountered, however, were those on Great Dragon Mountain during the nearly forty years that I lived there.

Mountains symbolize the challenges of a spiritual path—the steep, rocky ascents, the turbulent stream crossings, the deep valleys and seemingly endless plateaus, the fog-shrouded peaks. The heat and cold, the winds, the brambles and lack of clear paths through the thickets of the self. We are focussed on reaching the mountaintop. Once there, the boundless vista of awakening reveals the widest and deepest possible views. There is exhilaration after a long struggle, but alas, we cannot remain at the peak. The descent beckons. On the way down, we may find ourselves speeding up, relaxing our attention as a sense of knowing arises. It is documented that most car accidents happen near one's home, so watch out! The ego is sticky; habitual conditioning reasserts itself over and over again.

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*"...the great hermit lives in the city."*

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Mountains are both a symbol of the spiritual journey and of ultimate reality itself—of Thusness, the Here-and-Now reality. In Zen training, we learn to weave the threads of non-dual wisdom and compassion throughout our daily lives to liberate and benefit all beings. These are not idle words. How do you create life-giving relationships with your partner, children, co-workers, friends, strangers, and acquaintances? You ascend the mountain of the self; inhale the open vista of no-self; and descend back into the turbulence of everyday life. How do you embody the spirit of service from the vista of "no one who serves; no one to be served, no service?" Having been on the mountaintop, new questions arise: How do I need to be present in my life? Who will I be present as? These life-affirming questions are seeds which we water every day. We are no longer absorbed in the workings of the small self; rather we are dynamically engaged in mutually beneficial inter-relating moment by moment.

Another way of considering the dynamics of mountain climbing as spiritual awakening is through the lens of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of life. Ascending is the vertical: the inherent emptiness of all things. Descending is the horizontal: living life unreservedly, flowing freely in the thick of the everyday, creating buddha fields by flexing the muscles of relational virtuosity.<sup>4</sup> In a teisho on the Blue Cliff Record, Case 32, Yamada Koun Roshi,

our Dharma uncle, holds his teaching stick and says that as you engage Mu, "...you go deeper and deeper just like this stick rising gradually from a horizontal position and becoming vertical. That is the point of the 'great death.' Senior monk Jô (the monk in the koan) is now precisely at this point – his mind being empty, his intellectual functions have come to an acute halt. 'Ten thousand activities are thoroughly scraped out.' At this particular point one more movement is needed, like this (moving his stick slightly from the vertical position), in order to come over here. To be fixed in this vertical position is a fatal error; you need another leap forward. Then all things open up – it's the 'great resurrection.'"<sup>5</sup> Descent is a leap back into life, into the marketplace, into the city.

Zen practice now begins anew: we are living in the nexus of the so-called vertical and horizontal. We steer clear of the old ruts, moving nimbly as we engage the practice of creating Buddha lands right where we are. Having seen the view from the peak, the everyday world is no longer seen as the world of difficulty or suffering, but rather as the world in which we now create an enlightened everyday life. Manjusri, the Non-dual Wisdom Bodhisattva residing on Mount Wu'tai, whispers to us now: your task is to become Manjusri in the midst of your everyday life; to create Mount Wu'tai in the very spot where your feet touch the ground. When you reached the mountain peak, you realized that the thread you followed is no-thread at all; now having descended the mountain, you weave the no-thread for the benefit of everyone. The Sangha Sutra says, "the thread of emptiness leaves nothing unstrung." The poet William Stafford illuminates the thread in his poem "The Way It Is:"

*There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

Zen mountain climbing—ascending and descending the mountain—is not the exclusive realm of abbots. Rather, it is an activity for all of us as we engage the Zen journey. The question bears repeating: Who do I need to show up as to create an enlightening environment right where I stand? This is a question for each of us, every day, in every situation. Whatever you have realized until now, how do you roll that into your conduct so that it is not an

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<sup>4</sup>"Relational virtuosity" is a phrase coined by Buddhist scholar practitioner Peter Herschok. <sup>5</sup>In SanboZen website [www.sanbo-zen.org](http://www.sanbo-zen.org).

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# Ascending the Mountain - Some Ponderings

by Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert



When I was first asked to write this article on ascending the mountain, I happily accepted. But it is now over a month late because – how do I talk about ascending the mountain? Having just received the Temple Seal several weeks ago, what do I really have to say? Much to the consternation of the Water Wheel staff, I have really pondered and pondered.

Here are a few thoughts.

**1. Being Grateful.** Always begin with gratitude. As practice develops, hopefully our gratitude and appreciation for others deepens. We realize the fact of interconnection, and that we are all, always, standing on the shoulders of all those who have come before us and who stand alongside us, no matter where we are, no matter what we are doing. Ascending the mountain is very much the same. I am very grateful to my predecessor, Sensei Faith-Mind Thoresen. She has been an inspiration to me. For many years while she was working as a flight attendant, she would arrange her schedule so that she could attend every sesshin at ZCLA. Eventually, after she retired, she took on more and more responsibility at the Zen Center. When Roshi Egyoku asked her to become abbot, she said yes – not because she hankered for the position – far from it! – but because her teacher asked her to and because it was a way she could be of service to her teacher and to the Sangha.

It was the same with Roshi Egyoku – when Roshi Bernie asked her to come back to ZCLA, it was not exactly an appealing request. Zen Center was in total chaos, its founding abbot had died just 2 years earlier and things were falling apart. Nevertheless, when Roshi Bernie asked her, she said yes, to support her teacher and out of love for this practice place. I am grateful to both of them for saying “yes” when asked, and for building the strong training temple that we have become.

As I was preparing to step into this position, I spent a lot of time with Sensei Faith-Mind, learning various aspects of this position. I began to understand that much of the function of the Abbot Seat is largely invisible to most of the Sangha; it involves a lot of the quotidian tasks that



*Sensei Faith-Mind offers the Temple Seal to Sensei Dharma-Joy.  
(Photos on this page by Myokan Schwartz-Hughes.)*

keep the Zen Center functioning on a daily basis, as well as handling various sensitive interpersonal issues and addressing conflicts that crop up in any place with more than one human being. Much of what the abbot does is thankless – and necessary.

It is notable that she handled this position through a pandemic. Sensei Faith-Mind ascended the mountain in June 2019, and ZCLA closed to the outside world nine months later, with great uncertainty about the future, our finances, and how we would continue to offer the Dharma and training in a world where isolation was suddenly not only the norm but imposed and enforced! And, of course, shortly thereafter, Sensei Faith-Mind was diagnosed with cancer and had to endure a grueling regimen of treatment. With the Board and Roshi Egyoku supporting her, she carried forward with great skill and brought both herself and all of us through to the other side. So I am deeply grateful to Sensei Faith-Mind, who took on this role and steadfastly attended to it through very difficult circumstances.

I am equally grateful to Roshi Egyoku, our third abbot, who served in that role for 20 years. I have learned a tremendous amount from her over the years – not because she was formally “training” me, but because I was observing her. Zen training is an apprentice system, which is why a monastic setting is so ideally suited, as people work side by side for many years. Roshi Egyoku was Maezumi Roshi’s jisha for many years, and learned a tremendous amount from this proximity; many of his successors had the same experience over time. In current times, we are not a monastery, which doesn’t mean we don’t have an apprentice system, it just means it takes a lot longer. (Fortunately, I was relatively young when I first arrived!) We learn by observing, and then doing. After hanging around a bit we

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## ASCENDING THE MOUNTAIN *(Continued from page 3)*

soak it into our bones. Then we are assigned a position, we learn the basics of what needs to “get done,” we learn these mechanical elements and, once we have them down, we relax into the position, make it our own, and invest it with heart. Then, we can dance! Whether the position is being jikido for sesshin, or being doan, or officiating at service – or being abbot – the process is the same. But it requires being present (both in body and mind) as the first step!

**2. Serving.** Each of us who has taken on the Bodhisattva vows is engaged in a life of service, and each position that we take on provides a different avenue through which to serve. In the Zendo, the jikido is essential in serving the community by enabling us to sit with ease, knowing that someone will watch the clock and take care of the Zendo, and will tell us when to start and when to get up. The guest steward is essential in taking care of our guests, the tenzo in feeding people, and so on. Everything we do at Zen Center is infused with service, and every activity is part of our practice of collective awakening. This is an essential point that we have to come back to again and again. We are not a business, and efficiency is not a goal or even a particularly important yardstick of accomplishment. How we serve each other, how we take care of each other, how we practice together – and make a place conducive for the practice of others – these are the important values in the function of a Zen Center. This is heretical from a “business” perspective – our society thinks in transactional terms, zero-sum games, of gaining and losing, meeting and exceeding, but this acquisitive mindset is wholly antithetical to the core training of our school.

Recently, I had the chance to visit our sister temple, Yokoji Zen Mountain Center, and talk with its Abbot, Roshi Charles Tenshin Fletcher. I was talking with him about taking on this role and was seeking input and advice from him. He was the head administrator at ZCLA for many years, and has been abbot of Yokoji for decades, so I wanted his input. His response was very simple: “Serve the people.” It was wonderful to hear him say this. What “serving the people” will look like is still to be written, but his comment confirmed my own orientation towards the function of the Abbot Seat.

**3. Unfolding.** A few days ago, when contemplating what to write, the image that popped into my mind was of one of the Mars landers, or the James Webb telescope. I’m a big fan of space exploration – the first specific memory I have is from when my parents allowed me to stay up late in order to watch the Apollo 13 moon landing and Neil

Armstrong’s lunar walk – so I shouldn’t be surprised this is where my mind went in looking for analogies.

With the Mars landers as with the deployment of the James Webb Space Telescope, the actualization of its function happens very slowly and deliberately. With the lander, I recall that after it landed, it took something like a week before a single panel was opened up. Then, it was thoroughly tested. Time passed. Then, another panel was opened up. It was tested. Time passed. Eventually, it moved – maybe 3 feet. Well, you get the idea. So far, this “ascending the mountain” has been a lot like that for me. Since “landing” (or maybe “ascending,” depending on which metaphor you want to adopt), each day has involved a small additional extension of my perspective over the day before. Each day, the concentric circles expand. The panel opens, it is tested, time passes, then it opens a little bit wider. Each day, my perspective expands.

A key component of this slow expansion has been practicing with the Three Tenets of Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and taking action that naturally arises from this place of not knowing and bearing witness. Having been at Zen Center in some capacity for 23 years, there is a lot of “baggage” that needs to be shed when stepping into this position. The Abbot’s Seat is fundamentally different than the other roles I have held at Zen Center. I’ve been here for over 23 years, and for something like 22 of them I have held various positions of “responsibility.” But the abbot seat sits in the center of our mandala, in the Buddha Sphere. The function of the Abbot is to have the largest possible view. In this way, its charge is different. The other spheres – Resources, Relationships, Service and Study – are each connected to a particular view or function. The Buddha Sphere sits in the center. Its slogan is “Include everything!” It embodies the Wisdom of All-Inclusiveness. Taking the Abbot Seat requires me to shift my perspective, to widen my view, to let go of any sense of thematic agenda and to think bigger, to see bigger. If there are guiding questions, they might be: “What am I not including? What am I leaving out? What is not being said?” Only by practicing moment after moment with the Three Tenets can I develop enough openness and clarity to be able to take this widest possible view, to be able to investigate what is not being said, and to invite all of you to this same investigation.

Let’s keep going!

*Sensei Dharma-Joy is the 5th Abbot of ZCLA.*



# Reflections on Descending the Mountain

by Deb Kyobai Faith-Mind Thoresen



*Once there was a Zen master who was called Bird's Nest Roshi, because he meditated in an eagle's nest at the top of a tree. He became renowned for this precarious practice. The Song Dynasty poet Su Shih (who was also a government official) once came to visit him and, standing on the ground far below the meditating master, asked what possessed him to live in such a dangerous manner.*

*Bird's Nest Roshi, answered, "You call this dangerous? What you are doing is far more dangerous! Living normally in the world, ignoring death, impermanence, loss and suffering, as we all routinely do, as if this were a normal and a safe way to live, is actually much more dangerous than going out on a limb to meditate."*

I stepped down as Abbot of the Zen Center of Los Angeles on Sunday, May 21, 2023, and passed the Great Dragon Temple Seal to Sensei Dharma-Joy Reichert. I am not retiring from the Dharma or practice – one does not retire from the Dharma, I am creating space for a leadership transition. I offer deep bows of appreciation to Sensei Dharma-Joy for accepting my invitation to be the fifth Abbot of ZCLA.

In 2018, Roshi Egyoku requested that I consider succeeding her as ZCLA's fourth Abbot. With much ado (trust me on this), I accepted her request for a four-year term, ascending the mountain, together with you, the Sangha.

I have seen myself as a bridge, a conduit to the next generation, a protector of the mission of ZCLA, to provide and nurture, in precarious times, a secure and stable pathway for the preservation of the Three Treasures at Great Dragon Mountain. A bridge traverses the water, providing safe passage to the other shore. In a parable, it says the raft provides a way of escaping from the dangerous shore, over the water to the safe shore of liberation. Where is the shore of liberation?

I've been deeply drawn into the practice of gratitude, not so much the emotion, but as an understanding of who we really are and what life really is. One July sesshin many years ago, I was Tenzo, the sesshin cook, and Los Angeles was having a heat wave. Oh, did I suffer and create a lot of suffering for others. Some days it was over 110 degrees in the kitchen. It was a fairly large sesshin, so there was a lot of work: planning, shopping, directing, preparing, serving, cleaning up. One day, as we were preparing to eat

the ritual-style meal we call *oryoki*, it was so hot, the heat penetrated through us. As we began to chant the meal gatha, the heat lifted!

*Let us reflect on the efforts that brought us this food  
And consider how it comes to us.*

During these lines, I saw in the bottom of my bowl all the people in the fields, experiencing this same heat as they harvested the food that was now prepared before me. I felt their sweat, worn hands, earth-stained clothes, and hats shading them from the relentless sun.

This was a wake-up call, an atonement for my complaining and whining about the kitchen heat. I gave thanks to the people in the fields, to ALL beings, along with Mother Earth, for sustenance, medicine, shelter – for this very life.

Our interdependence has the deepest of roots. It is unimaginable to think of any of us without others. There's no such thing as a separate person, a detached independent being. We exist through the kindness of each other, Mother Earth and the whole universe. We're all of that. All of that is us!

*An "organization" of integrity practices gratitude and thankfulness. This gratitude, this thankfulness, is advocated by civil people. It is entirely on the level of people of integrity.*

That is a powerful passage from the Katannu Suttas on "Gratitude" in the *Anguttara Nikaya* (I substituted the word "person" with "organization.") And this passage is from *Winnie the Pooh*, where Winnie is strolling with Piglet hand-in-hand:

*Don't walk behind me; I may not lead.  
Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow.  
Just walk beside me and be my friend.*

My wish is for us all to cultivate spiritual friends and for ZCLA to continue to strive to be an organization of Integrity. We must all dig deeper!

To the residents, the Sangha, our staff, all the awesome folks that keep this Center functioning and mostly to Annette for the past 37 years of support in ways beyond beyond: Gratitude, Gratitude . . . endless gratitude.

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*Sensei Faith-Mind was the fourth Abbot of ZCLA.*

## Faith in the Practice

*Sensei Senshin interviewed Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen, our descending fourth abbot, for the Water Wheel.*

**WW:** When did you first hear about meditation or zazen?

**Sensei Faith-Mind (FM):** My brother Howard, who was five years older than me, began a spiritual practice of meditation and Yoga when I was seven and it intrigued me. When I was sixteen, Howard found a Yoga guru guy and I took some Yoga classes with him. Once I was in a pose for five minutes and I had an experience of my body falling away. It was quite shocking, and there really was no one to talk to about it. I forgot about it through the years, and yet I sometimes would be reminded of a feeling that there was something more. I had no explanation of what more was, just a sense of—something. I eventually believed that “more” could be discovered through meditation.

**WW:** How did you first come to ZCLA?

**FM:** I asked a friend if she knew of any places to learn meditation and so she put together a list. I attended several places and styles of meditation and eventually came to ZCLA. I took the beginning Zen Practice classes, ZP 1, 2, and 3, interviewing with Joko Beck. I was impressed with the clear statement: “We can’t tell you, you will have to experience for yourself.” I guess this was around 1983, because after my ZP3 day, when I returned a few weeks later to become a member, everyone was gone and those left were very traumatized. Maezumi Roshi was in re-hab and all the teachers were gone. I became a member, received a Dharma Buddy, but for me it was too negative at ZCLA.

I went to Yokoji, the Mountain Center, which was connected to ZCLA. They were only open in the summer so I spent as much time as I could there. There was a sesshin every month that Maezumi Roshi led, along with other teachers.

Daido Looi led one and that was the first time I understood how working with a teacher could be of benefit. But there was not a teacher there for the full summer. Zazen was the teacher. The place was the teacher.

Then, I drifted away. I bought a house, got into a new relationship, and just got busy. I have always wondered if there had been more offered for beginners and teachers to be there for us to have conversations with and available to ask about practice, perhaps I might have continued at that time. This was sometime in late 1986/87. But there were no conversations, and no one called when I just disappeared.

When Maezumi Roshi died in 1995, I was devastated and

shocked since I had not seen him in years. I didn’t connect deeply with him, though I always respected him. I went to his memorial service in Little Tokyo, but something kept me from re-joining ZCLA. In 1998/99 I read the *Los Angeles Times* article about a woman taking over ZCLA. I soon showed up and the rest is known.

**WW:** What are some of the jobs you have held in the secular world?

**FM:** I became a flight attendant in 1972. I left college as I was unclear what I wanted to study. It was a way to travel and support myself until I discovered what I wanted to do when I grew up. This never became clear enough to further my education.

Being a flight attendant became a lifestyle offering as much time off as I could afford and freedom to travel and develop other skills and opportunities. When I did settle into ZCLA in 1999, this lifestyle allowed me to dive deeply into practice.

I lived in a horse stable for many years and developed some skills in carpentry, buying a house, fixing it up and then selling it—before this was a thing.



*Faith-Mind becomes a priest, 2007.*



*Day of Dead, 2012.*



*Faith-Mind becomes a teacher, 2018.*

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FAITH IN PRACTICE *(Continued from page 6)*

**WW:** What are some of the positions you have held at ZCLA?

**FM:** I began doing some gardening at ZCLA, accidentally, because there was no one mowing the lawn. This developed into my first "staff" assignment. Mary Rios, our Business Manager, asked me to consider a staff position as grounds steward. After some arguments with her, I gave in. She said she was uncomfortable asking a volunteer to make certain decisions and if I would accept being in charge of the grounds, she could then feel freer to tell me what to do.

I participated in Shared Stewardship when it was forming and as a result the many hats began to grow. I had many positions in the Buddha Hall and Zendo. Roshi Egyoku often told me, "we use who is here," and I was around a lot. I was often the Head Monitor for sesshins, which is a great training seat. I was the Head Trainee in 2005-2006. I was Tenzo several times, on the Executive Circle, and a Board member. In addition to Grounds, I became the Co-Grounds and Buildings Steward, working with Mary. I received Tokudo and became a priest and then became a Co-Ceremonial with Dharma-Joy the year Roshi left on sabbatical and continued until I became the Vice-Abbot.

**WW:** You've often talked about your reluctance and resistance in taking on positions and yet you've always stepped up. How have you worked with that? What helped you through it?

**FM:** This truly has been my practice. It is often stated that this is a form of ego, but even so, it was a very deep core belief of mine that I was never good enough and I did not want to ruin things for others. I ran into this often, and still work with this core belief, which is often debilitating. The most important point is to become aware of this as a core belief. I've done many different kinds of practices with this, working closely with Roshi



*At ease in the kitchen.*

Egyoku, learning to see the bigger picture and that I am not always the center of the universe. Mostly there just wasn't anyone else around to do anything, so I stepped up rather than let the whole down. It has been difficult to keep bumping into this belief, and yet, what I appreciate is that Practice has been the healing.

**WW:** Do you have any advice for others who may be resistant or feel inadequate to doing things or stepping up at ZCLA?

**FM:** Being a Co-Ceremonial and Head Monitor was great training for me in regard to resistance. And when I trained others, I could spot their resistance and learned to work with each person according to their individual situation.

**WW:** Any advice to dealing with conflicts in the Sangha?

**FM:** It's so important for people to address the one they have a problem with directly, and not to wait too long. If there's been harm said or done, don't hesitate to come forward. If you cannot meet the person face-to-face, talk to someone on the Hear Circle. Get to know our Sangha Sutra. It is an amazing ethics document into which a lot of experience and effort has been put.



*Planting the Peace pole with Doetsu Ross.*

**WW:** Anything else you would like to say?

**FM:** Just showing up is so important. You can't learn anything if you don't show up. I learned from showing up and dealing with what arose. Have faith in the practice, that it works, and has value. See for yourself.

**WW:** Faith in the practice seems like appropriate advice from one named Faith-Mind. Sensei, the Zen Center is deeply grateful for all your years of service.



*Head Trainee Faith-Mind, 2005-06*



# Connecting to the Natural Order and to Others Through Samu

by Tim Taikan Zamora



Samu (work practice) is an important part of our Zen practice here at ZCLA and is in need of a revival. In a recent resident council, we talked about approaches we could take with our Samu assignments. Some residents said they loved the connection they felt with Samu. Others said they didn't know how to do their jobs.

In an article from the fall of 1987 precursor to *The Water Wheel*, *The Ten Directions*, entitled "Dharma Words,"

Maezumi Roshi wrote about the meaning of the word Samu and its derivative practices. Samu comes from the characters *Sa*, meaning "to do" and *Mu*, which means "obligation." The final meaning being "to do one's obligation." Not as an obligation from the outside, but as our duty to the natural order of things and as a means to connect our spirits.

He also describes the meaning of two equally important words related to Samu. Fushinzamu and Intoku. Fushinzamu adds the characters *Fu*, meaning "everyone" and *shin* which translates into "doing as much as you can" to the root word Samu. The second word is Intoku, which translates as "hidden virtue." Taken together these two words describe two very important aspects of Samu: working together with everyone and seeing the virtue of Samu in itself without any expectation of an outcome.

Much of Maezumi Roshi's teaching in the article stresses the importance of working for unity and harmony. It is important that Samu practice harmoniously meets our obligations to the sangha, to ourselves and to the natural order of the world we live in. In our dining room at the Zen Center are posted the words of Master Hyakujō Ekai: "a day without work is a day without eating." For the monks of Hyakujō's time there was no sense of work being a transactional activity as we define it in the modern sense. Work was simply done

because it needed to be done. In those more difficult times it could certainly be said that a day without work certainly could mean a day, or perhaps days of not eating.

Most of us can't imagine the sense of immediacy that was created from those circumstances. However, Maezumi Roshi stressed that monks did their work with a non-transactional attitude. There was no expectation that something might be gained. Samu was an act of "straight forward doing" in Maezumi Roshi's words. It was through this doing that monks would not only accomplish their work, but be subject to the joining of their spirits naturally. How can we use this example in our Samu practice today at ZCLA?

In our times the nature of work is different, with the most common definition of work being activity that is done for money, recognition, reward or an outcome. We also work in non-physical jobs that the monastics of Hyakujō's times couldn't have imagined. These jobs put us in isolation, where the only connection we may have for

hours on end is with that of a computer screen. In situations like this, the connection to one another through a natural order and to the physical nature of work barely exists. This was something that came up at our resident's council where some of the younger residents had less connection with physical work experiences than the older residents.



As our information society advances and even more physical work is taken over by computers, robots and AI technologies, the reality that we live in a society that values work as a commodity that we can buy, such as when we pay to have our house cleaned, and with the idea that work continues to be something done for reward and career advancement. Our relation to work as a means to connect with one another and

the natural order of things is less likely in these circumstances.

The modern transactional nature of work along with its social isolation and disconnection from its former physical aspects create divides that make it harder for us to understand why Samu is part of our Zen practice. I offer

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CONNECTING THROUGH SAMU *(Continued from page 8)*

as an alternative to this a return to words that Maezumi gave in his 1987 article and the prompts discussed at the Samu resident council. The prompts move us to understand Samu as an obligation to both our personal practice, and practice together as a community. By obligating ourselves to these virtues of Samu we open ourselves to



connect with our work and to the sangha in the most natural way and free ourselves from our preconceived notions and expectations that we should be achieving some kind of outcome. Instead Samu gives us the opportunity to see the natural aliveness that exists in everyday life and connect with one another. These four prompts are: 1) Samu as the practice of Zazen in action, 2) Samu as a practice of engaging seamless

continuity, 3) Samu as a practice of non-attachment, and 4) Samu as a practice of service and compassion.

Samu as the practice of Zazen in action is the practice of understanding that our practice is not limited to just sitting in the Zendo or a service position in the Buddha Hall, but extends to all parts of our daily lives, including Samu. It moves us to bring a spirit of mindful awareness to everything we do. The practice of Samu is an opportunity to cultivate presence, non-distractedness and whole-heartedness while engaging in practice. The outcome being a natural harmonious connection to one another through Samu.

Samu as practice of engaging in seamless continuity emphasizes the nonseparation between zazen and engaged practices such as Samu. It also describes our connection to our work and to each other. There is indeed no separation or distinction between sitting in the zendo and ordinary tasks such as washing dishes. Each moment, whether in zazen or engaged in other daily tasks affords us the opportunity to wake up and connect with one another by yielding to the natural order.

Samu as a practice of non-attachment encourages us to let go of attachment to outcome of our actions, and instead focus on the work that needs to be done. This is related to Intoku, or the hidden virtue found in our Samu practice alone. We can see Samu as the opportunity to engage our work with complete presence and attention.

By the cultivation of an attitude of non-attachment to an outcome, we can experience what it feels like to be fully alive in the task at hand.

Samu as a practice of service and compassion means engaging the inherent selfless service and compassionate nature of this practice.

Engaging in work with the intention of benefiting others and the community cultivates generosity, humility, and interconnectedness. Samu becomes an expression of Zen practice that is beyond ourselves and is directed instead towards the community. A recent example of this was at Reverend Jitsujo's Intensive Retreat Samu Day which involved picking up trash around ZCLA's neighborhood.

Through this simple act, the participants were able to connect with something outside of themselves and the temple gates.



We must detach ourselves from the concept that we do our Samu to gain something. We must even detach ourselves from ideas of clean and dirty. Instead, we engage in Samu with an attitude of selflessness and just doing. By taking this attitude, not only does the doer benefit, but by natural extension our practice extends out to others. It is my hope that this article will prompt all of you to consider your Samu as something beyond just work in the modern sense or a task to be endured.



*Taikan is the 2022-23 Head Trainee and the Resident Samu Leader.*

# The Practice of Saying "I"

by George Mukei Horner



Meeting together in council is a core Sangha practice. It provides a way for insights and understanding to arise and be shared, deepens our exploration of the Dharma in community with each other, and connects us and reminds us of our shared humanness and our inborn capacity for wisdom.

When we arrive for council, we find chairs arranged in a circle, with a cloth in the center on which are a candle and some objects called talking pieces. We each take a seat. A bell is rung. We sit zazen for several minutes. The council facilitators introduce themselves. There may be a check-in where we are invited to each say our name and briefly whatever cares or feelings we brought in with us from outside. The facilitators present the prompt—the topic for our reflection—and the council guidelines. Talking pieces are introduced and how to use them. Finally, someone is invited to light the candle, and we recite the blessing, “May we open our hearts and awaken our Bodhi Mind together.” Anyone moved to do so may then take a talking piece and begin.

This sequence is very important. We don’t jump right into council. We enter it, step by step, in a way that opens a space for deep sharing. The zazen settles us. It clears our minds to start from the place where everything is simply just-as-is. We call that place *not-knowing*. It prepares us to see clearly what may be evoked in us by the council prompt and by the sharing of others, and to receive the sharing of others without attachment or judgement, just as if it were our own. We call that seeing, receiving, and sharing bearing witness. From these twin practices of not-knowing and bearing witness, we may be moved to take up a talking piece to offer our own reflection or even to set an intention, an action to take forward into our life.

Then, having sat and settled, the facilitators offer guidelines for the council process. We are reminded that this practice makes use of the Three Tenets of the Zen Peacemakers: Not-knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action, where the action is one that will arise from not-knowing and bearing witness. And we are given specific guidelines for how we should conduct ourselves, how we should listen, how we should share. They’re all important, but the essence of council is found in just three: *Speak from the heart – Listen from the heart – Avoid cross-talk*. These are what make council not a conversation or a discussion. They make it a practice of bearing witness.

But be careful; there are subtleties here. Like, the first time you hear, “Speak from the heart; use I statements, not we statements or you statements,” or “Avoid cross-talk; don’t speak directly to someone in the circle, or refer directly to something they said,” you maybe don’t know what that’s about. So you pause a moment, wonder about it, but the facilitator is still talking so you stop wondering, and then the sharing starts, and you’re listening, and things are coming up for you, you’re thinking about that, and observing the way others share, and so on. That’s the first time. What about the twentieth time? By then those words are so familiar you have a hard time hearing them at all, much less wondering whether you know what they mean.

Did you notice what I did there? Do you recognize it? And do you notice that the you in those two questions is you in particular, the one who is reading these words? The you in the preceding paragraph is no one in particular. It is the vague, generalized, unfocused you of our common speech. It’s a you that pretends to include everyone, even though we know it doesn’t. This is a style of speaking that is absolutely pervasive in our culture. It is so pervasive, that we—you, the one reading this, or I—may not even notice when we’re doing it unless we have become sensitive to it. It pretends to say, “everyone thinks like...,” or “everyone does...,” even though, if asked, we’d say, “Well, yeah, I know, not *everyone*. And not every one of ‘you,’ whoever ‘you’ is. That’s not what I mean.” In fact, what we often use it to mean—and what we collectively understand it to mean—is: “I’m saying something about myself. I’m just not saying it directly.”

For me, after so many years practicing council and Face-to-Face, I notice when I say something about myself using vague-generalized-you speech, I find it’s often because it feels safer that way. I’m rhetorically directing the hearer’s attention, and my own, off of me, toward that vague-nebulous-you who is actually no one. To say “I” feels much more intimate, much more exposed, than saying “you,” but a you who should never be mistaken for the listener. To say “I” means, “Look right here. At me. I am revealing myself.” It might not be like that for you, the one reading this, but I suspect for many of us, it is.

I’ll say it like this. In council, I am asked to bring my awareness right down into the heart of my being, to speak directly from that place, from my own experience, of what I find there, and to share it equally with everyone present. It is not a conversation. It is a practice of bearing witness that requires me to be willing to say “I.”

*Sensei Mukei is the Zendo Steward and a member of the Teacher’s Circle.*



## ABBOT TRANSITION *(Continued from page 2)*

untethered, disembodied insight? Right this moment, does your presence—your behavior—reflect that, embody that? Challenge yourself to try on a new behavior; challenge yourself to not succumb to the habitual ruts of numb or dumb. The awakened life is not out there to be found; it is for you and I to create the here-and-now reality, moment by moment.

The one who sits on the Abbot's Seat especially embodies this spiritual journey. As much as the question: "Who do I need to show up as to create an enlightened environment right where I stand?" is a question for each of us, it is even more so for the one on the Abbot's Seat. I call this mysterious activity "mischievous-making." Indeed, there is great opportunity for mischief-making on the Abbot's Seat, so let's make good mischief together. In my years as Abbot, I found that one of the most powerful aspects of ascending the mountain is that the abbot training calls forth acute awareness—there is little room for self-absorption. One must shift and submit to the great Here-and-Now reality; to infusing wisdom and compassion as the response to all situations. How can I respond to the needs of others in a way that decreases suffering and brings about increasingly liberating ways of relating? How responsively creative and fluid can I be? This indeed is great mysterious mischief-making!

When I ascended the mountain in 1999, Roshi Bernie, my beloved teacher and abbot predecessor, told me: "Everything that you have done up until now is the ascending. Now all that you will do as Abbot, that is the descending." In other words, it is time to put your shoulder to the wheel, the time of selfless service to the Three Treasures. One is claimed by the mountain, claimed by the seat, claimed by the energetic mold of abbot.

This Spring at the Great Dragon Mountain/Buddha Essence Temple, the fourth abbot Sensei Kyobai Faith-Mind Thoresen descended the mountain and the incoming fifth abbot Sensei Baiten Dharma-Joy ascended. When Sensei Faith-Mind ascended the mountain in 2019, she said that she would serve as a bridge for four years from my tenure to whoever comes next. I thank her from the heart for her exemplary effort and service. I wish her deeply restful days of self-nurturing and restoration. Four years ago, there was no indication of who would arise to fill the Abbot's seat. I am deeply grateful that Sensei Dharma-Joy matured and emerged as the fifth abbot. I express my deepest gratitude to him.

In contemplating the long years of Zen training of both of these Stewards, we see clearly that Zen is a life of service. The Mountain Seat itself is a seat of selfless service—a seat of abiding gratitude and grace. In particular, on this occasion, we all anticipate how the vision of the

ascending abbot will enhance—complement and build upon or even dramatically alter—the vision of his predecessors. I look forward to seeing how Zen training unfolds, remaining true to essential awakening and the creative and skillful ways that will arise to meet the needs of the moment. This is the golden activity of our lineage. The work, however, is not so much about transmitting legacies of the past masters, but rather for each of us to personally exemplify awakening, to suffuse the very places where we sit, stand, walk, and lay down, with the wisdom and compassion of the buddhas for the benefit of everyone in our daily life and beyond. In this way, the great hermits create buddha lands in the city.

May the Great Dragon Mountain live for 10,000 years.

Thank you for your practice.

*Roshi Ekyoku Nakao served as ZCLA's Abbot from 1999-2019.*

## Corner of Disorder

**Bodhi Vows** by Katherine Senshin Griffith

*(Written for the Mountain Seat Ceremony and sung to the tune of "Tiny Bubbles" by Leon Pober)*

Tiny bubbles in the streams  
Lightning flash, phantom dreams  
Tiny bubbles, that's our lives  
Bodhi vow, that's what thrives

Bodhi Vows, we renew all over  
With a feeling that we're gonna  
Serve you till the end of time

So, here's to the Changing Moon  
At one with the Boundless Sea  
And mostly here's a Vow from you and me

Tiny children, for their sake  
Future Buddhas, we'll awake  
Vows to carry the Dharma Seed  
Hungry Spirits, we will feed

So, here's to the Changing Moon  
At one with the Boundless Sea  
And mostly here's a Vow from you and me

Bodhi Vows We renew all over

With a feeling that we're gonna  
Love you till the end of time (x3)

With a feeling that we're gonna love you till the  
end of time

## A Heartfelt “Thank You!”

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Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert  
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Sensei Darla Myoho Fjeld  
Sensei Jeanne Dokai Dickenson  
Sensei George Mukei Horner  
Ben Ehrlich  
Bob Doetsu Ross  
Brian Sotetsu Huff  
Chris Genzan Hackman  
Conrad Butsugen Romo  
Corey Ryujin McIntyre  
Craig Daigetsu Brandau  
Craig Genji Miller  
David Fushin Watson  
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### Sangha Rites of Passage

#### Jukai

*Jacqueline Kyojaku Drummond Lewis • April 16, 2023*

*Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hanley, Preceptor*

*Toby Keido Rider • June 11, 2023*

*Sensei Jonathan Kaigen Levy, Preceptor*

#### New Residents

*Mats Borges, Jenny Jusen Bright, Blakey LeRue*

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*info@zcla.org • www.zcla.org • 213-387-2351*

*Editor: Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith; Associate Editor:  
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