



Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

Through the Eyes of Prajnaparamita

by Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith



Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom, Prajnaparamita, the Mother of the Buddhas. The lovely and the holy Perfection of Wisdom gives light. Unstained the entire world cannot stain her. She is a source of light and from everyone in the triple world, she removes darkness. Most excellent are her works. She brings light so that all fear and distress may be forsaken and disperses the gloom and darkness of delusion. She herself is an organ of vision. She has a clear knowledge of

her own being of all Dharmas, for she does not stray away from it. The Perfection of Wisdom of the Buddhas – the Buddhas set in motion the wheel of Dharma.

This is the introduction to our Women's Ancestors that is one of our Fall Practice Period texts. What would it be like to start each day with this Hymn? Even before getting out of bed? How might your day unfold if you have a clear knowledge of your own being?

Prajnaparamita means the "Perfection of Wisdom," and its practices lead to seeing the non-dual nature of reality and accessing our deepest wisdom, beyond subject and object. Tuning into this aspect is a return to our most natural, ever-present, awakened state, that underlies all life. Prajnaparamita can refer to both the Perfection of Wisdom sutras (like The Diamond and Heart Sutras) and the Mother of Wisdom, the understanding that all phenomena are empty of self-nature and inter-exists. The Wisdom of Emptiness is the metaphorical birthplace of the awakened mind, or Bodhicitta. We remember that when we chant after each service: "Mahaprajnaparamita." We come back to this Wisdom Beyond Wisdom.

Unstained the entire world cannot stain her.

We are perfect, complete, right now, just as we are, not-separate from anything – including the Great Wisdom of Prajnaparamita. Everything we do or aspire to should

align with this source. If we're out of sync, we need to recalibrate. We can start by seeing where we are suffering and what is non-beneficial. Seeing non-dualistically, we might even thank our suffering for the great clue it is, for helping us drop and return to our True Self. When our suffering completely stops, nothing remains but pure awareness.

Dualistic thinking can get sticky: productive/unproductive, sick/well, mine/yours, red state/blue state, loud/quiet, just/unjust, war/peace, good day/bad day, my way/not my way, worthy/not worthy... Of course, seeing dualistically can be helpful too. It's only when we think it's the whole story and it causes suffering that it becomes a problem. What happens when we drop the subject/object? Or drop all ideas of perfection and just see as is?

There's a key distinction between fixed value judgments and beneficial discernment. Things are what they are. Somethings are clearly harmful. We can discern that, and take a healing action. But we don't have to judge; that's extra. Even troublesome things are not separate from the Whole. Life is just giving us feedback about what we need to look at.

**She brings light so that all fear and distress
may be forsaken and disperses the gloom
and darkness of delusion.**

Clearly we are witnessing distressing horrors everywhere. The bombardment of disastrous news worldwide may overwhelm us and lead to fear, anxiety, depression, cyni-

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cism and despair. But as Bodhisattvas, we don't succumb to it. We feel it, acknowledge it, and drop into deeper wisdom on how to work with it.

Long-time environmental scientist and activist David Suzuki says, "Despair is a luxury we can't afford right now." We can't access new visions or sustain the energy it takes to contribute to great change, without expanding beyond our limited viewpoints and tapping into this Primordial Wisdom.

Thich Nhat Hanh's translation of the *Heart Sutra* says:

Because there is no attainment, the bodhisattvas, supported by the Perfection of Understanding, find no obstacles for their minds. Having no obstacles, they overcome fear, liberating themselves forever from illusion and realizing perfect Nirvana.

When we catch ourselves freaking out, take the backwards step. As seen with the light of Prajna Wisdom, our fear and gloom may have a point we need to pay attention to, but it's not the only view. In the boundless light of Prajna, our limited viewpoint expands and orients to the Whole. So much of the atrocities we are witnessing stem from greed and fear. With no hindrance in the mind, we can offer No Fear.

Thanissara in her book *Time to Stand Up* puts it like this:

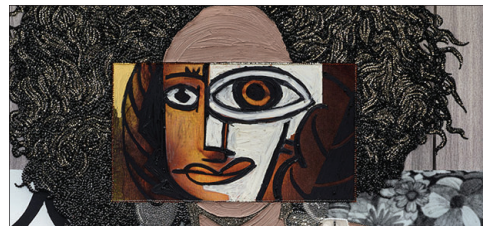
When we recognize and align with our deepest refuge, which is our essential, indestructible, diamond-like heart that can cut through ignorance, yet not be cut, we connect with a different kind of power. If we do this together, as a global community, we could generate a tremendous alignment and support that is effective and enduring.

She herself is an organ of vision.

Can we see everything with Prajna's eyes? The more we pay attention, the closer we get to this deeper wisdom. Her never-dimming gaze conveys the undivided essence of pure consciousness, that is none other than all phenomena. Since it's in everything, this Wisdom is revealing itself to us all the time. We just have to see.

Through Prajna's eyes we can see the constructed nature and causal conditions behind everything. Reflecting on Prajnaparamita, I encountered the work of visual artist Mickalene Thomas who unapologetically features Black women in states of leisure, power and joy. Raised as a Buddhist, Thomas reclaims the gaze of these overlooked women and often pastes an extra pair of eyes on her subjects, vividly calling attention to how things are viewed. Who is looking, who is seen? I found those eyes-on-eyes to be an inspiring reminder to myself to reclaim Prajna's Organ of Vision.

Try spending a day, seeing through the eyes of Supreme Wisdom. What do the parched soil, aching legs, crouching cat, vibrant flower, wagging tail, littered street, laughing workers, election results, fresh seasoning reveal? Witnessing social injustices, what blindnesses are uncovered? Fully feeling the sun on your face, can you connect with the endless source? Through Prajna's eyes all is unveiled, truly seen.



Painting by Mickalene Thomas.

She has a clear knowledge of her own being of all Dharmas, for she does not stray away from it.

Have you ever experienced this Clear Knowledge? Perhaps you've said things like "it wasn't me" or "it was some greater wisdom coming through me." If you are just concerned with your small sense of self: Go deeper. Drop further. Expand into the Great Silence where Not Knowing is found. When we let go of all pre-conceptions, we tap into this Greater Wisdom, which is unthinkable, indivisible, transparent. Truly realizing this is liberation from suffering.

This Wisdom frees us from all boxed views. We think we are one thing, but circumstances may ask us to rise above our limited beliefs. Aligning with something greater, we can freely dance within the context of any challenging times and situations. Who we are and what can be done is so much more than we can imagine.

We must keep remembering and directly experience that which is beyond all these "this and thats." We need this perfect clarity and fierce compassion to save our planet, stop hate, end wars, heal, and serve each other, especially those in need. Measureless Mother Wisdom is the living ground which culminates in the inconceivable knowing that is without subject, object, structure, or process. It is said Prajnaparamita radiates joyful sympathy toward all beings, generating a similar response.

We can bring to our heart/mind the protection of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas by repeating the Prajnaparamita mantra, which ends the Heart Sutra, the sounds of which contain the entirety of Perfect Wisdom: *Gaté gaté paragaté parasamgaté bodhi svaha* (Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone beyond even the beyond into full enlightenment, so be it.)

So be it, indeed.

Sensei Senshin is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

Getting Real

by Darla Myoho Fjeld



My core vow is to live Reality – to “see as is,” which is written on my shuso fan. In my experience, the more my vow is realized, the more compassion arises in my heart and the more I am compelled to serve others. I like the words “realize” and “realization.” To realize something is to experience the real. To be in a state of realization is to live in the real world as a real human being.

This is why I practice Zazen.

Let’s consider what keeps us from living in reality. Most of us spend far too much time believing what our brains think. Brains are very useful and are responsible for our survival, so it’s understandable that we cling so tightly to them. The problem is that brains operate by “othering” everything. Our brains operate with dualisms, such as male/female, right/wrong, black/white and me/you. Our senses – eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind – also distort reality, as do our biases that are often based on distorted or misinformed views. If this were not enough to distract us from reality, we also engage in wishful thinking, where we counter the reality right before our eyes and try to make it into something more preferable to ourselves.

Reality is defined as the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them. Reality is under threat from both within each of us and outside of us. Coming at us from the Ten Directions are the myriad spins on reality from folks like “the flat earthers” and all the other conspiracy sellers, politicians, and advertisers. Perhaps you too have been spinning during this time of transformation in the United States and need a reality check. I have found myself thinking and saying, “I can’t believe this” many times and have had to stop, breathe, and remind myself that this is really happening. Our Zen practice involves reality checks over and over again throughout each of our days.

I am so grateful at this momentous time in American history for the theme of Prajnaparamita for our Fall Practice Period. Prajnaparamita, Non-Dual Wisdom, is a great Upaya, skillful means, for living in Reality. Prajnaparamita points us to the Non-Dual Wisdom that resides in all beings. It is our Buddha Nature – our essential nature – the life force that has always been and always will be.

When we practice zazen, we do our best to stop clinging to our brains and the concepts, stories, memories,

ideas and other thoughts that our brains produce. All of this constitutes the dualistic, delusional mind. The point of Zazen is to develop the facility to think with Reality – to come from a place of Prajnaparamita or Non-Dual Wisdom like Avalokitesvara doing deep Prajnaparamita. Have you been doing deep Prajnaparamita?

When we practice Zazen, we do our best to mellow out our grasping and clinging that keeps us in our little prisons of delusion. It’s important to know that no one is trapping you other than yourself. If you’ve been feeling trapped in your little prison of opinions and stories, just open the cage door – it’s not even locked – and walk outside into the bright world of Prajnaparamita. The entire world cannot stain her Source of Light, including your opinions, spinning, and stories.

We should always be asking ourselves: What mind is doing the thinking? Is it the karmically-conditioned brain or is it Prajna-Mind. This is to ask: Where am I coming from? Am I thinking with delusional mind? Or am I coming from my intuitive, Non-Dual Wisdom mind? Am I being real?

In Case 48 of the *Gateless Gate*:

A monk asked Master Kempo in all earnestness, “In a sutra it says, ‘Ten-direction Bhagavats, one Way to the gate of Nirvana.’ I wonder where the Way is.” Kempo lifted up his stick, drew a line and said, “Here it is.”

Later a monk asked Unmon to give instruction about this. Unmon held up his fan and said, “This fan jumps up to the heaven of thirty-three devas and adheres to the nose of the deva Taishaku. When a carp in the eastern sea is struck with a stick, it rains torrents as though a tray of water is overturned.”

The monk’s question is prompted by the *Surangama Sutra*: “In a sutra it says, ‘Ten-direction Bhagavats, one Way to the gate of nirvana.’ I wonder where the Way is.” Bhagavat has many different meanings. In this koan, we can take it as another name for Buddha. Bhagavats in the Ten Directions means that everything is Buddha and there is only One Way to Nirvana, the enlightened state of a Buddha. There is not a thing you can do where the Way is not part of it. You can search and search for it and will never find it. Just like the Gateless Gate it is the way-less Way. You are not it; it is actually you. The Way is not just the line but is everywhere in the Ten Directions. You cannot find the Way, no matter how much you look for it, you

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GETTING REAL (Continued from page 3)

will not find it, because it is not an objective Way. It would be like trying to see your own eye directly without reflection.

The monk then asks Unmon to explain what Master Kempo said. Unmon held up his fan and said, “This fan jumps up to the heaven of thirty-three devas and adheres to the nose of the deva Taishaku. When a carp in the eastern sea is struck with a stick, it rains torrents as though a tray of water is overturned.”

Katsuko Sekida lets us know that the carp of the eastern sea is a mysterious being.¹ When the time comes, it becomes a dragon and ascends to heaven accompanied by a stormy wind and black clouds of torrential rain. This is a metaphorical description of the monk attaining enlightenment. This means the monk can now live a real human life – alive to the reality of life. This is represented by Taishaku, also known as Indra, whose eternal net represents the reality of inter-being.

Inspired by Mumon’s commentary, Robert Aitken Roshi says Kempo and Unmon, are like two children who run toward each other and collide and collapse laughing!² I agree when Reality Recognizes Reality there is nothing to do but laugh.

Mumon in his commentary sees Kempo as holding fast and Unmon as letting go. Zen teachers often interpret this through the lenses of Emptiness and Form – where Kempo is presenting Emptiness to the monk and Unmon with his causal words is presenting Form. This is something all Zen teachers do depending on the circumstance of the individual student. If you are experiencing a bit of Zen sickness, the teacher will give you the medicine of giving life; and when the student is blind to the world of emptiness, the teacher will kill your concepts, stories, and ideas.

We can also see that both great Zen Masters Kempo and Unmon present the whole truth that form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form. In fact, they are each presenting the whole of Reality: form is

exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form. Both sides simultaneously together constitute the Way of Reality. What a lucky monk to have this presented before him by such generous teachers!

Kosho Uchiyama Roshi, in *Opening the Hand of Thought*, expresses what Reality is quite nicely:

We are always living out the reality of life. However, as soon as we start thinking and calculating about things, we become, in a sense, suspended from reality. That is, human beings are capable of thinking about things that are not real... However much we become enlightened, it just is not very much... It is with our flesh and bones that we actualize the reality of the self.



When we are in the Zendo we are presenting Reality with our flesh and bones. We enter the Zendo, put our hands in Gassho and bow in gratitude, then we walk respectfully to our seat and bow to it, turn around and bow the other way. We sit down, adjust our clothing and take the Zazen position, the bell rings and we sit in deep Samadhi – the portal for Non-Dual Wisdom – until the bell rings again. Then we stand up, bow to our seat, turn around with our hands

in Gassho and when the Jikido hits the clappers we begin kinhin. This is it! Form and emptiness. We’re doing it. The Zazen is the emptiness part – the Prajna part – everything else is the form part. Of course, breaking it down in this way is conceptual. In Reality, both form and emptiness are always simultaneously operating in us and all around us even though we don’t always notice it.

There is no need to ask: Where is the way of Reality? We are on it right now. Look!

Sensei Myoho is a priest, the Temple Development Steward, and is on the Teachers’ Circle.

¹*Two Zen Classics: Mumonkan Hekiganroqu*, Katsuki Sekida (Translator)

²*The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan* by Robert Aitken.

This Wonderful (Shuso) Life

by John Kyogen Rosania



What a wondrous ride, this role of shuso! Waking up for weekday morning sitting and service, walking outside into the cool morning dark, the soft lights of the Zendo illuminated by the care of the jikido, welcoming us to settle down into and through Prajnaparamita.

Waiting in the front gaitan for the shuso entrance, the thick carpet touching my feet, our abbot makes his morning offerings, and then whoosh! the jikido closes the back gaitan door, signing me to enter the zendo's cool wooden floors, and then swooping past the head monitor where I bow and look directly into the eyes of Manjushri Bodhisattva offering non-dual wisdom to us all (whose eyes are seeing whom?).

At the altar, lavender buds are raised to our zen eye, a light fragrance is released, and then they are let go of into the stillness of the water bowl. We finish by making three full bows to the Buddha, to our teachers, to the sangha, and to the whole world! (Could a bow be anything other than to the whole world?)

Finally, sitting down on the shuso seat, to the right of the abbot, with all the previous shusos from the founding of ZCLA up until now, I'm invited again to settle down.

The (shuso) seat holds this abiding calm, roots deep into the earth below the zendo and above the clouds, and calls me to bring forth the energy to sustain practice over the course of a year (and a lifetime).

This energetic sustenance at least partly comes from a commitment to spiritual discipline, part of the shuso's charge, what James Ford in a recent talk at ZCLA (September, 2024) said was one of the inspiring elements we can take from our Zen monastic communities. Spiritual discipline includes cutting through the questioning mind to show up, and then when we've taken the step to show up, wherever we are, whomever were with, to be right there.

Another part of this spiritual discipline is to work with the perceived obstacles and experiences of the various

roles of the Zen Center (with which mind is one perceiving these so-called obstacles?). Each role is a world of training, from the delicate ching! of the sogei aligning with the bow of the officiant, to the care for the shuso's fan that continually calls out "See as is!", to the breathwork of the chanter maintaining a continuous line of sound, to the washing and sanitizing of our bowls by the after-lunch wash crew. Each role is embedded in the functioning of all the other roles.

And then! A quick word from a teacher reminds me to "stop doing" after I went habitually to take up a vacant service position. "Your role is shuso, maintain it!" (We aspire to maintain the precepts, maintain the three treasures, what is it to maintain?)

And as the year continued and my particular brand of defensive thoughts danced along—the-I'm-not-doing-enough-am-not-good-enough two step, the what-am-I-doing-here-I'm-useless-I'm-better-than comparison twist, or the I'm-stuck-here-I'm-stuck-there-still-searching-still-seeking-someone-to-save-me-give-me-an-answer shuffle—and then they came and went (where did they come from? Where did they go?), the shuso seat remained, settled, open, free.

The shuso seat had its own path for me, but I can't help but think that these are the dancing dynamics of a life of practice whatever role we are inhabiting (parent, daughter, employee, spouse, caretaker).

And with that dance, the shuso year also carried the rhythm of the (great) ordinary. Sesshins and ordinations came and went, councils and funerals began and ended. The squirrels fought and played right up the redwood trees in the garden. Ru the cat settled deeply into the nooks and crannies of the grounds. Wars began, conflicts developed, and the bizarre American political landscape further polarized. Through it all we sat together, aligned with life, and did what we could.

Deep bows to the ZCLA Sangha, the teachers, and the great gift of the practice forms of our Zen lineage.



Kyogen is a ZCLA resident and was our Shuso in 2023-2024.

Reflections on Bhikkhuni Clear Grace's Manifestation of the Sacred Feminine

by Rev. Jitsujō Gauthier



The spark for organizing the “Exploring the Sacred Feminine” program happened during the June 2023 Engaged Compassion intensive at ZCLA. The moment that stands out for me is when five of us women were working together in the kitchen, repeatedly saying “Sorry!...I’m sorry...oops, sorry...sorry-sorry-sorry” and I thought “why are we so sorry? At the time, I was reading the book

Time to Stand Up by Thanissara, and taken by the section about internalized oppression, conditioning within a woman’s body, feeling unworthy or devalued, and the tendency to live out a diminished aspect of oneself.

During the June intensive we reviewed the Five Wisdom Energies, using the book *Wisdom Rising: Journey into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine* by Lama Tsultrim Allione as a guide to understanding more about Dakini wisdom and power. On an intuitive level, I had a deep wonderment about the Five Wisdom Dakinis¹, and desire to know them better. What if I could meet them? What would be like to see these fierce feminine energies embodied in front of me, or as a group? When I saw that the Fredrick P. Lenz Foundation was offering grants to support Women’s Leadership in Buddhism, I was compelled to apply and then we received the grant.

The wisdom energies became a framework for the program. The Teaching Team consists of 1) Pamela Ayo Yetunde in the Padma sphere, 2) Roshi Ilia Shiko Perez in the Buddha sphere, 3) Hsiao-Lan Hu in the Vajra sphere, 4) Bhikkhuni Clear Grace Dayananda in the Karma sphere, and 5) Thanissara in the Ratna sphere. A group of 50+ practitioners and 7 facilitators from a variety of Buddhist traditions and cultural backgrounds are involved in a 5-month exploration together. We are learning about the roles, ecosystems, values, leadership, and our many views/ways of feminine embodiment. Learning can be muddy, murky, and confusing as we navigate this uncharted territory.

The program questions are: 1) What is the sacred feminine? How can we manifest what we cannot see? 2) What internalized oppression do women in leadership experi-

ence? What Buddhist philosophies, psychologies, practices, etc. support or undermine leadership development? 3) What is denied feminine and twisted masculine? How do we embody patriarchy? 4) What is feminine power? What female leadership structures and pedagogies are within Buddhist teachings?

I am still reflecting on how the program is unfolding. The way I make meaning here is most likely very different from the way others do. I see the sacred feminine as mystical and embodied, philosophical and practical, action-oriented and spacious, fierce and fluid, collaborative and chaotic. This feminine power, the power of life, Prajnaparamita, flows through all of us. Sometimes feminine power is rejected and/or reacted to negatively. This results in various types of oppression, (e.g., sexual, social, political, ideological, emotional, spiritual, etc.) which manifest externally in society, and internally within us. Regardless of gender identity, we each need to recognize this power as indigenous to ourselves and find ways to use it skillfully for the benefit and betterment of our world, and our earth beyond our human-centricity.

Below are four reflections on the Dharma offered by Bhikkhuni Clear Grace Dayananda², her embodiment of dharma, and the way she brought the Karma sphere alive. The teaching session she offered was on “The Bhikkhunis’ Quarter” sutra in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, and the “Eight Gurudhammas” in the *Cullavagga Sutra*. The “Eight Heavy Rules” were imposed by the historical Buddha as a condition of ordaining women. The first of these eight heavies, i.e., 1) a nun must always show deference to monks, for example by bowing even to the most junior monk³, generated much discussion, and in true Karma energy fashion, the group got fairly stirred up.

¹ Kaitlyn Hatch “Representation Matters” (2022) is a series of Thangkas of the Five Wisdom Energies: <https://www.kaitlynschatch.com/representation-matters-series.html>. A Thangka is placed by the name of each of the contributors of this article.

² Bhikkhuni Clear Grace Dayananda is also known as the <https://travellingnunk.org/> For more about her and Sangha House Nola also see: <https://www.sanghahousenola.org/>

³ “Oxford Reference” (2024) accessed November 5, 2024, Oxford University Press: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095843896>

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SACRED FEMININE (Continued from page 6)

Xinying Li



As a Buddhist, from the day I took refuge, I was taught to “follow all the teachings transmitted by the Buddha.” However, during my practice, I’ve sometimes faced doubts and confusion. Yet, the resistance I felt after reading the Eight Gurudhammas was unlike anything I had experienced before. My heart strongly resisted, saying, “I can’t do this! I can’t even accept it!”

When I recited the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Purvaprāṇidhāna Sūtra for the first time to cleanse my karma, there was a passage that troubled me: “If there is a woman weary of being a woman, she should make offerings to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. By the power of her offerings, she will never again be reborn in a female body for hundreds of thousands of eons, except through a compassionate vow to deliver sentient beings.” This perplexed me. Didn’t the Buddha say, “All beings are equal?” If equality exists, why would there be the notion of “a woman weary of being a woman?” And why would the sūtra promote “transforming a woman’s body into a man’s?”

I discussed this with a Bhikkhuni several years ago. She explained that “women are more attached to many things, and these attachments create obstacles to spiritual practice. Therefore, being a woman is called the ‘karmic retribution body.’” Venerable Master Hsuan Hua also mentioned, “Women have heavier habitual tendencies such as jealousy and vanity, which create more obstacles for spiritual progress.” While these explanations seemed reasonable, they triggered a strong emotional reaction in me. Why are these problems framed as exclusive to women? Don’t men also have attachments and faults?

This confusion remained with me for years, obstructing my recitation of the Ksitigarbha Sūtra. Though it didn’t affect my core practice, I considered it a thing of the past. But when I read the Eight Gurudhammas, anger flooded back. Countless “whys” filled my mind. Part of me reasoned, “The Buddha must have had a reason for this; I just don’t understand it yet.” But another part of me argued, “This is gender discrimination!” My heart and mind were in chaos, completely losing touch with mindfulness and right thinking. The resistance I felt affected me so deeply that even meditation became ineffective.

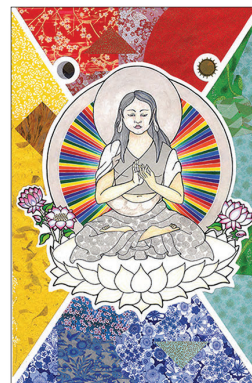
I expressed my disagreement and negative reactions in a peer discussion, the group’s support had a healing effect.

I realized I wasn’t the only one struggling with feelings of gender inequality. When a participant shared how menstruation impacted her life and practice, others responded with empathy. I, too, recalled my struggles with monthly menstrual pain, and how my male teacher suggested I take a year off school because of it. How could men ever understand the suffering many women endure? These reflections led me to reconsider the Bhikkhuni’s words, “a woman’s body is the karmic retribution body,” and why the sūtra emphasizes, “If a woman is weary of being a woman.”

Suddenly, I began to see the Eight Gurudhammas differently. Instead of viewing them purely through the lens of fairness, I started acknowledging the social environment of ancient India, where women’s status was low, and the challenges they faced were immense. Perhaps these rules were the Buddha’s way of offering protection to female monastics, shielding them from potential harm. Regardless of our understanding of “equality,” as long as we live in this Saha world, we are bound by karma and the social environment it shapes. As we cannot transcend it, we must abide by certain worldly rules, even if they seem unfair.

When we discuss concepts like “the divine feminine, gender fluidity, and the masculine,” we are engaging with qualities that exist in ultimate reality. The divine feminine refers to nurturing, compassion, and wisdom, while the divine masculine refers to strength, decisiveness, and perseverance. Gender fluidity represents impermanence and no-self, reflecting the Buddhist understanding that all phenomena are non-fixed. Once we dissolve the duality of gender, qualities of both the divine feminine and masculine can manifest in anyone. Achieving this balance within ourselves leads to realizing our wholeness.

Jenny Lambson



Bhikkhuni Clear Grace Dayananda’s teachings deeply resonate with me. I found her generosity unparalleled. I cried when I realized her mother was present because of the complexity of the memories they share and because of the grace, understanding, and forgiveness with which Clear Grace relates to her upbringing and the trauma she experienced. I can only imagine the depth of release she has practiced to be so honestly free.

I was also touched by Clear Grace’s responses to participant questions and remarks during the reading of the rules for nuns in her tradition. It is funny how I immedi-

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SACRED FEMININE *(Continued from page 7)*

ately see the injustices, how feeling wronged feels sorighteous. How it feels like I am subordinated and made less-than, against my will. How that brings up anger, repulsion, the desire to fight back and dominate. It feels like my only choice is to rebel, to exercise the very power-over I detest.

But, there was much more depth than this reactionary response in Clear Grace's teachings. She showed us how to hold complexity with honesty and within actualized Buddhist practice. Her responses to our fears and aversion consistently demonstrated deep offering, the true power of meeting all others as Buddha, and the humility of embodying reality.

For me, what she modeled for us is divine feminine wisdom. The ability to be in the dark without needing a light - in part because the light shines from within and in part because the darkness is valued for what it is and does not ask for light; to receive without taking personally, without needing to change the other, receive by taking full responsibility for oneself; to intuitively know what is right because we are in touch with the depth of our own being and willing to presence everything that arises as equanimity.

I attended a Zen retreat this summer. The woman who received Shiho along with five other women teachers came through the kitchen on altar rounds chanting and bowing three times a day. It was powerful, female, feminine, sacred. One night at dinner the woman who was receiving Shiho told me about the Shiho room and how the red and white curtains are the womb. She cried as she shared her experience of sitting and bowing in this womb for all those days. I cried too. I felt the sacred feminine in our practice, in our lineage, in that moment. I felt the feminine patriarchy.

The question of "how do we push back against the patriarchy?" from our break-out groups feels masculine to me. I feel like how the feminine works with the patriarchy is to include it, and not be limited by it. To not be ignorant of it, and to not make it the whole truth. And I say that from a position of incredible privilege of equality and education, and health, and wealth.

This class so far has had me thinking about how binary the masculine/feminine energy structure is. I studied with a powerful masculine-energy woman bodied Roshi. The teacher I study with now, Mark Kanchi Esterman Roshi, is male bodied yet very feminine-energied. He is comfortable in the dark. He embodies not knowing. He honors others and is not power-over. He is respectful, power-with, empowering, loving. Just like in my own identification (I don't feel like a woman or a man, and I feel like a woman) I embody the feminine and the masculine and the huge spectrum of non-gendered, non-binary energy in between

the two. I feel the sacredness of the full spectrum only by including the sacredness of the feminine.

Rita Valencia**Why Bow Down to a Kid??****Why must she prostrate?**

A mature, accomplished nun bows to a snotty arrogant 16 year old monk. His parents have put him in the monastery along with substantial monetary offerings, so that he is provided with a personal tutor and cook. Is this an affront to the dignity of the elder nun? Is the fact that the nun has acquiesced to her

being forced to bow-or-else damaging all women who have worked hard, overcome many obstacles, and obtained great wisdom? These questions are infected with the pain and suffering of all women who are constantly under-valued, diminished, disrespected, and ignored by the more privileged-male-dominant mass culture. Why must the "feminine" body be forced to show submission? As a young woman, I flaunted my body as an act of rebellion against all my Catholic conditioning to be modest-like-a-mouse. Only through hard and frightening lessons about dress coding in the "adult world" did I give up on that way of expressing what I took for power, power that I came to see was false and a trap. But what then?

Why may she prostrate? Bhikkhuni Clear Grace responds with grace. She has experienced first hand the worldly situation of women suffering, and holding that in compassion, she fastens her gaze beyond conventional reality. She has arrived at the certainty that all sentient beings carry essential Buddha nature. She has embodied this calm certainty. So firm and strong is her faith that she spreads into the world all the graces of that very same Buddha nature that the audience strives to embody and realize, consciously or unconsciously.

I am struggling to give birth to Buddha Nature from the old body I must carry with my still young Buddha mind. In my own experience I have been close to the position of that nun-that-must-bow...although I'm no nun! But because of the protocols and traditionalism of my sangha, I was faced with having to accept, as an article of faith, that a particular young man, because of his family background, was predestined to be the teacher of my sangha. I could not get beyond my doubt. As the time, approached

(Continued on page 9)

SACRED FEMININE *(Continued from page 8)*

when his transition to this preordained role was to happen, it became clearer and clearer that things were not going to work out as planned. Later I learned about the horrendous suffering, both physically and psychically, this young man endured during his period of monastic training--suffering not uncommon in monasteries in general, which is unspoken of now and historically.

On a quite mundane level, I am certain that upon bowing to any monk I may be showing a sort of kindness that may be a balm to them. If it were required of me, I would have few compunctions doing so, but only because of what I know. To me as a Western ex-punk/teeny bopper/questioner-of-authority, devotion and respect do not come naturally to me. I need to take a deep breath, to cleanse myself of judginess based on insecurity, before I relent into a more respectful stance. What I have learned over and over again, and what motivated me to pursue a Masters of Divinity degree, is the universality of human suffering and how it can be a crucible of wisdom or a destructive fire of generalized (and often internalized) animosity. Either way, it arouses in me a strong sense of the brahmaviharas/four immeasurables--and the immeasurable importance of contemplating them continually in every pause in the day, no matter how this floods my heart and mind with tears

Why am I prostrating? On a conventional level, I make reverent prostrations before a representation of a deity. On the sublime level, I am prostrating to my very own, innate Buddha Nature.

Kayel Carroll



As a person assigned female at birth, but who identifies as non-binary, it was not until the Sacred Feminine class that I realized some of the ways that my experience has been different. When I first came out as non-binary, it was as if everything started to make sense. For example, I remember vividly someone suggesting to me that I would relate more to a female singer-songwriter than a male one

because we were “both women” and being deeply confused about that. This experience was prior to coming out, but that confusion made sense after I had done the work to realize my identity.

I also hadn't realized before this class just how much I have not internalized the sexism found in some of the Buddhist traditions. While familiar with the idea that women were not likely to experience enlightenment, I have never accepted it for myself or embodied that limitation. I have certainly recognized the discrepancies in male and female experiences in all areas of life, including Buddhism, but even then, it did not occur to me to be limited myself.

Sister Clear Grace's sharing of "The Bhikkhuni's Quarters" was interesting to study in terms of the separations found in early Buddhism. I had known that there were separate rules, but not specifically about the eight garudhammas. I found it reassuring to hear of the Buddha discussing the levels of practice that were open to all despite the “heavy teachings” for the nuns.

Studying the sutta was more enjoyable to me versus engaging in the peer group. While I appreciated every person and the experiences they shared, I felt the highlight of our differences in this initial meeting. My experience of being “female bodied” in Buddhism is one very different than others. Is it being non-binary that changes this experience? I have struggled for a while about how tightly I may cling to that identity and what is the appropriate way to hold it. I had thought up until the peer group that I was holding too tightly to it, but what I discovered is that I am simply holding it and maybe the stories around me cause me to feel like I'm holding too tightly because they are asking me to be something other than what I am. When a person sees me, they believe they know what they see. It is maybe like the nuns in early Buddhism: there were ideas about where they could go with their practice and how they should behave in the world. We hold so tightly to our ideas.

In the same way, I believe that people hold “women/men” and “sacred feminine/masculine” as the same things. But what if we're just holding tightly to the binary? Why do we find the sacred feminine and masculine to be separate things? In our peer group, we talked for a while about yin and yang. In my Traditional Chinese Medicine training, we learned that these two forces are infinitely divisible in each other. If you look at night as yin, it is always moving into yang (day), which is always moving into yin. Perhaps this is true with the sacred feminine and masculine as well: we are always in a dance with these energies regardless of our assigned or embodied gender.

While these classes have been a stretch for me, I feel like they've brought up many questions as well as affirmations. It was sometimes difficult to be with what was in front of me, but I also have a lot of gratitude for those in my group who shared in a way that challenged me.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging at ZCLA

by the DEIB Circle

At the request of the Board and the Many Hands and Eyes – Race Circle (MHAE-R), a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Circle was formed to further clarify training goals and identify an external organization to work with to implement these goals. The DEIB Circle is made up of Jane Radiant-Joy Chen, Jacqueline Kyojaku Drummond, Reverend Jitsujō Gauthier, Sacha Joshin Greenfield, Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith, Frank Genku Martinez, and Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert.

The DEIB Circle researched various potential training programs, narrowing our list down to four different organizations with whom we had Zoom interviews. Each interview was helpful in informing us about the scope and variety of training possibilities and approaches.

We decided to work with Isaac Ruelas, a Los Angeles-based consultant, and their team at VISIONS. VISIONS has a strong history of leading DEIB training for organizations, including non-profits and religious organizations. VISIONS' values, approach, and mission resonate with ZCLA's values and the DEIB circle's identified goals.

Isaac conducted assessment interviews with eight focus groups of ZCLA members. We received and are sharing the results of that assessment and are now planning an all-day DEIB training next spring.

Below are guiding questions that Isaac created from the "Four Levels of Change Strategies" for our Sangha and those who will engage in the training to "chew on:"

1. Personal Level

- How good am I at being uncomfortable?
- Especially when talking about race?
- How open am I to exploring how I've internalized "better than/less than" messages about my self and others?

2. Interpersonal Level

- Are authentic conversations happening across difference at ZCLA?
- What skills do I need to address microaggressions?
- What does it look like to share the process of Zen with people across differences holding that I have good intentions, and I might have negative impacts?
- How can I support people's practice differently?

3. Institutional Level

- Can we create more opportunities for people to get to know each other?
- What institutional process' can we create to address negative impacts across race and other variables?
- What does it look like to invite children and families back to ZCLA?

4. Cultural Level

- How do we address the culture of whiteness people experience at ZCLA?
- What does it look like to tell our story and share our values within ZCLA and to the greater community?
- How do we create a culture where BIPOC come to stay at ZCLA?

ZCLA is committed to ensuring that DEIB principles are embedded in all our practices now and in the future.



The DEIB Circle shares results from the VISIONS' assessment.



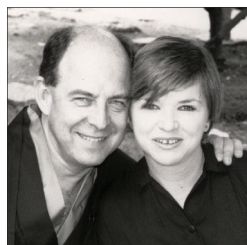
Remembering DeWayne Gojitsu Snodgrass



I have been reflecting on the over 40 years that Gojitsu and I wove in and out of each other's lives. He died just shy of his 80th birthday (September 11) and, if my count is correct, from his 5th heart attack. Since the untimely passing of his wife Myokai in 2016, he became even more aware of the passage of time. He had a challenging life, sought equanimity and wholeness, and spent his later years making amends and reaching out to friends. He received Jukai from Maezumi Roshi in 1980 and served as Head Trainee under my guidance in 2010, offering Shoyoroku Case 45: The Sutra of Complete Awakening for his Hossen. Gojitsu was a master salesperson, developing a training which he titled "The Now Sales Training." Back in the 1980's, he and his then wife lived at ZCLA when it spanned over most of a city block and had their own business. He loved his hometown of Chicago and the pizza there. One of the truly joyful moments we shared was when a half-sister (through his father) "found" Gojitsu when he was in his 60s. For the first time since the death of his mother, Gojitsu had birth family. He had never met his father, had thought about searching for him, only to learn from his half-sister that his father had lived not far from ZCLA for a time. I remember his sister as a kind and lovely person. It was a happy meeting and, at the same time, tinged with sadness over the family he had missed. The Buddhadharma meant a great deal to Gojitsu. He remained a steadfast member of ZCLA for decades, serving in many capacities including as a Board member, Zen instructor, Head Trainee, Prison Circle member and volunteer, and tenzo.

Well done, Gojitsu. May the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas protect you and guide you through the Bardo realms. May your next life be beautiful.

In gassho with gratitude,
Egyoku, ZCLA Senior Teacher



Corner of Disorder

by Caitlan Brady



A Heartfelt “Thank You!”

To Rev. Jitsujo Gauthier for the Exploring the Sacred Feminine Women's Leadership in Buddhism retreat;

For our Dharma talks given by: Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert, Preceptor Bill Earth-Mirror Cocchran, Dharma-Holder Nem Etsugen Bajra, Bhikkuni Clear Grace Dayanada, James Ford, Betty Jiei Cole and Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith;

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To Earth-Mirror and John Kyogen Rosania for their class on Writing The Gathas of Our Lives;

To Etsugen for leading the Journey Through Ox-herding and the Eight Consciousness class;

To our Thursday night Personal Practice talks by, Sacha Joshin Greenfield, and Craig Genji Miller;

To Sensei Senshin for leading the Just Summer Sesshin;

To Sensei Dharma-Joy as the Preceptor for the Ceremony for Receiving the Precepts for Ben Genkai Ehrlich, for leading the Public-Face-to-Face, and Precept Class Series;

To Joe Parker for leading the Indigenous Ally Workshop;

To Elizabeth Jiei Cole for leading the August Zazenkai;

For leading the Day of Reflection: Kyogen, Richard Taishin Schulof, and Roberta Myodo Brehm;

To Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley for leading the 3 Steps to Mindfulness workshop;

To Dharma Holder Lorraine Gessho Kumpf for leading Tangaryo;

To Sensei George Mukei Horner for leading the Entering and Leave-taking ceremony;

To Diane Enju Katz and Diane True-Joy Fazio for leading the Encountering the Sutra Circle;

To Ty Jotai Webb for sending out birthday e-cards to our members;

To our dedicated Parking stewards Dylan Banto Neal and Mike Radice;

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To our Day Managers: Gikai, Joshin, Kaizen, Sensei Mukei, Myoki, Brian Sotetsu Huff, and Tim Taikan Zamora.



Sangha Rites of Passage

Jukai

Ben Genkai Ehrlich

August 18, 2024

Preceptor Sensei Dharma-Joy Reichert

In Memorium

DeWayne Gojitsu Snodgrass

September 11, 1944 - August 8, 2024

New Members

James J. DeSantis

Dylan Lake

Dean McAdams

Sebastian Wadler

Mikey Watts

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