



Water Wheel

Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.
— Gate of Sweet Nectar

Dragon Girl's Lessons on Transformation

by Katherine Senshin Griffith



Why do so many myths involve tales of transformation? If we look at the truth underneath the surface of our lives and dive deep (the task of myth), we may find a longing for transformation and significant change. This deep yearning might be why we are here, practicing Zen.

I know I'm always wanting to be transformed. I love being deeply affected, altered, coming out different than I went in. Before - After. Old - New. Cloudy - Clear. There's something universal to it. Longing for transformation is not necessarily a bad thing. The irony is we are always changing. We are never the same person—even moment to moment. And we're also not only one thing.

In Zen, we often use symbols to awaken this ability to transform as needed. Like when the Head Trainee holds up the shippei and says:

This is a three-foot long black snake. A long time ago it had become a konpura flower on Mount Gudakutra, and at Mount Shorin it had become a plum blossom. Sometimes it transforms into a dragon and swallows heaven and earth. Sometimes it transforms into a diamond sword with freedom to kill and give life.

Sometimes wisdom transforms into the “seven-year old daughter of the Dragon King Sagara” we remember in our Women's Lineage. This Dragon Girl, or Naga Kanya, enlightens an assembly of well meaning, but limited viewing so-called male Bodhisattvas.

The Dragon King was a naga, a mythical serpent-like being, prominent in various Asian and Buddhist traditions. Nagas are a divine, or semi-divine, race of half-human, half-serpent water spirits that reside in the netherworld. They can be depicted as entirely human with snakes on their heads and necks, as common serpents, or as half-hu-

man, half-snake beings. Naga Kanya is usually depicted as a beautiful young girl sitting on her bottom half of snake coils, holding precious jewels in offering. She has a five-headed snake on top of her head as a crown and wings representing her ability to fly. Her encounter with the Buddha's assembly appears in Chapter 12 of the *Lotus Sutra* and Chapter 67 in *The Hidden Lamp*.

After visiting the nagas under the ocean, Manjusri praised the wisdom of the young naga princess to the Buddha's assembly. They couldn't believe a little girl could realize enlightenment when it took Shakyamuni lifetimes. Before they could object further, Dragon Girl appears in a flash. Not concerned at all with their limited views, she makes a jeweled offering to the Buddha. “Hi, World-Honored One. I'm Dragon Girl.” The Buddha swiftly accepts her gift.

Her revolutionary story butts up against limiting concepts of who can attain enlightenment. She reveals one can be a Buddha even if non-ordained, a very young female, a foreigner from a different realm under the sea, or (oddly not emphasized) someone of a different species. They were freaked out that she was a little girl—not that she was half-dragon.

Myths, like history, reveal a lot about who is telling the story by how they tell the story. This story uncovers what the aspiring followers of Buddha at the time thought about what it took to awaken. It also brings to light how easy it is to judge someone who is not like yourself.

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DRAGON GIRL *(Continued from page 1)*

When Shariputra bodhi-mansplains that it's impossible for women because of their inherent defilement to be a Buddha, Naga Kanya instantly becomes a male bodhisattva, walks to the foot of the bodhi tree, is completely enlightened, and begins teaching the Dharma to all. It may be upsetting to think she had to change genders to be a Buddha. We bristle at this derogatory view of women—in no small part because those views are still present today. Besides the ongoing harm to women and their full potential, the denigration of women also contributes to homophobia and the squelching of much needed nurturing and other balancing qualities in everyone.

This story can shine a light on our own meager viewpoints. Do you really believe you can realize your Buddha nature? And if so, how are you living your life? What insidious derogatory views do you have of yourself or others? How easily do you think of others with stifling prejudice? Can you clearly see the ever-present awakening potential, even while acknowledging the harmful behaviors that need to be transformed?

Before she morphs into a male bodhisattva, Dragon Girl tells the assembly, "With your supernatural power you shall see me achieve Buddhahood quicker than the Buddha just accepted my jewel!" Like the two-spirited tricksters in many cultures, Dragon Girl is doing her own rug-pulling. "Supernatural powers" sounds like magic. But what if what was super was the male assembly dropping their narrow, preconceived ideas and they are the ones who really transformed. From a literal view, it may seem like she changed genders. But what if it simply meant she did the things only men had been thought to be able to do, and therefore seen to do. And by doing so, she didn't change, their views changed.

We can apply this point to our narrow ideas of ourselves. Especially if we think things like: "Oh, I'm not that. I can't take that on. He can't do that. A Buddha doesn't look like her. A serious Zen practitioner doesn't behave like that." But by your Super (as in Wondrous) Natural (as in the natural way, your true nature), i.e. by your fabulously

inherent powers, you too can discover you are so much more than what you or anyone else thinks!

Regarding mythical creatures, our science mind can say half serpent-humans, like mermaids, don't exist. But humans originally emerged from the sea eons ago and might have shed a serpent skin. So, even thinking scientifically, something akin to these mythic creatures might have existed and that's why they express ancient wisdom across cultures. It's hard to believe dinosaurs existed, though we can recognize traces of them in lizards and birds. Looking

at the imagery of mythical creatures, not as fact but as truth, can help us experience reality more deeply. They reflect both our higher aspirations and abilities and our baser or clunkier ones—vivid reminders that change is not only possible but inevitable.

It's interesting how in yoga, so many poses are named for animals: pigeon, crane, locust, cat, cow, cobra, sphinx, horse, downward and upward dogs. It's like we're trying to remember our mythic animal roots, our other half, our inter-connection, our potential to be something greater. Reflect on this as you sit Zazen here on Great Dragon Mountain, which was at one time underwater! We all may be children of the Naga King and, like his precocious daughter, capable of great transformation and inconceivable Bodhisattva service.

In the end, the little Dragon Girl taught the Dharma to beings throughout the universe and her example lives on. She helped open the gate for all beings to be considered eligible, innately endowed, capable of realizing themselves. When the Diamond Sword of Wisdom cuts through our delusions, we swallow heaven and earth. Then we can emerge freely functioning, available to serve whatever is needed. After all, what solid identity is there to begin with? Just who do you think you are?



Sensei Senshin is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

Leaving Speech and Silence Behind

by Darla Myoho Fjeld



Let's take a moment to acknowledge all the suffering that's going on all around the world and right here in Los Angeles with the ICE raids. Let's acknowledge the wars and the political conflicts and the atrocious behaviors of many of our nation's leaders. Let's hear the cries of the children and the sick and dying people. Let's just

breathe in and breathe out with the whole universe as we turn to the question of how we can transcend speech and silence.

Let's listen to Case 24 of the *Gateless Gate*:
A monk asked Fuketsu in all earnestness, "Both speech and silence are concerned with ri and mi. How can we transcend them?" Fuketsu said, "I constantly think of Konan in March, where partridges are chirping among hundreds of fragrant blossoms."

Koun Yamada Roshi tells us that the word ri-mi is found in the *Treatise on the Jewel Treasury* ascribed to a 4th century monk named Jo. Jo says, "To enter is ri, to come out is mi." Yamada Roshi says that these terms could be understood to mean that if we separate from the phenomenal world and enter into the inner world, that is called ri. When we come out of the inner world, that is called mi. He then reminds us of the fraction metaphor that he often uses to explain the way of reality. The numerator is anything that we observe in the phenomenal world—this is mi. The denominator is represented as a zero with the sign of infinity inside of it—this is ri. The problem presented in Case 24 is that speech and silence are connected to the dualistic world. This should help us understand the monk's question of Master Fuketsu: How can we transcend the dualistic world—the world of ri-mi?

This case is pointing directly to what Zen is all about. Our practice is to close the gap between subject and object. The sixth Chinese ancestor Huineng in the *Platform Sutra* tells us that closing this gap is the only practice of Zen. When we close this gap, we realize that there is no Here and Over There. We realize Oneness.

There really is no subject and object in the seamless Oneness that is Reality. The problem is that we are very attached to this dualism of subject and object. It's the way we think.

When we sit in Zazen and drop out of our brains, we enact the radiant wisdom and compassion that has nothing to do with our dualistic brains. If we practice with great faith, great doubt and great courageous determination, like Shakyamuni Buddha, we too will be able to say, "I alone am the World-Honored One" and "I, and the great earth and beings, simultaneously achieve the Way." The whole point of what each of us is doing at the Zen Center is to realize this. When we realize even a small opening, the whole universe and all the beings, including ourselves, smile.

Koun Yamada Roshi writes: "Superficially, we all know that speech is speaking with our lips and tongue. If we think about it a bit more deeply, however, speech is the expression of thoughts and not only involves the mouth but also the eyes and gestures and actions as well... To put it even more comprehensively, when we have concepts or ideas, or images or pictures in our consciousness, that is speech. To have none of these is silence."



Zen Master Fuketsu was liberated from ri-mi, speech and silence, subject and object and he demonstrates this in his final response to the monk by talking about the way he, Master Fuketsu, lives his life. He says, "I constantly think of Konan in March, where partridges are chirping among hundreds of fragrant blossoms." What an amazing teaching! How do you describe your life? Can you relate to the way Zen Master Fuketsu describes his? His response made me smile radiantly, as I do when I look at the Zen Center's beautiful grounds or when I go out the back door of our house in Palm Springs and experience the mountains and the wind blowing through the trees and the songs of the many birds. The mountains and the wind and the birds and the trees and the rivers and the oceans are our teachers, and we bring all of these teachings to all the beings that we encounter in our daily lives.

Mumon's Commentary also points to Fuketsu's liberated life:

Fuketsu's activity of mind is like lightning. He gains the road and immediately walks along. But why does he rest upon the tip of the ancient one's tongue and not cut it off? If you realize this deeply, a way will be found naturally. Just leave all words behind and say one phrase.

Mumon is urging all of us to open up to our true nature, which we share with the entire infinite universe.

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SPEECH AND SILENCE *(Continued from page 3)*

Koun Yamada Roshi tells us: “If you clearly realize this koan, you will be able to realize perfect freedom and true peace of mind in your daily life.” Try it—see if you can say something without using your brain and your mouth. See what happens if you, like Avalokiteshvara, do deep prajna. That is lived out of a deep experience of your own inner wisdom. You might find yourself putting out your hand to help an old man step up on a curb or handing a couple of bucks or a bottle of water to an unhoused, middle-aged woman.

Mumon’s Verse makes a similar point:

*Fuketsu does not speak in his usual style;
Before he says anything, it is already manifested.
If you go on chattering glibly,
You should be ashamed of yourself.*

The generous words Master Fuketsu offers the monk were not necessarily for himself, but drew a picture of his own attitude and life for a monk that needed his help. Every one of us is buddha already—all beings are this way. No words are necessary, but they are sometimes helpful when we speak from a place of inter-being.

After spending many years in school earning one degree after another, I realized that Zazen was the best practice for bridging the gap between subject and object. In Zen, the gap between the subject, which is the “I” or the observer, and the object, which is the world or the observed, is one of our worst delusions. It’s a product of our ego-conscious, dualistic brain. When we practice Zazen, our aim is to close this gap by moving out of our brains into a direct experience of no separation—of Oneness. All we have to do is drop every barrier that hinders us from experiencing this.

None of us is an island. What we have is an illusory definition of “I” that is cut off from the rest of the world. The gap between subject and object is the gap between me and the world.

You might ask, “Why does it feel like I’m separate from everything? Why do I think this way? Well, it’s not really our fault. We’re designed in our bodies and brains to survive and function, and we can’t do that without our dualistic brains. We have to function in the Relative world while touching in with the Absolute world. In the Absolute world there is no me over here and you over there. The truth is that you and I inter-be. We would not be who we are without each other.

When we really practice on the cushion with all of our effort, we begin to see a crack in our armor that lets the light in and we realize Not-Knowing, the first of the Three Tenets. And we can flash Not-Knowing throughout our

days as we bear witness to one circumstance after another. That’s the Second Tenet. And we discern over and over again what we will do or say based on the first two Tenets. Practicing in this way continuously reinforces our movement in the world as interdependent beings and encourages direct action, such as washing dishes or driving a car, without the chit-chat in our brains that causes separation from our tasks.

Dogen Zenji saw that words and silence should not be pitted against each other, but seen as unified to transmit the world beyond words. This is why he can be so difficult to understand—he bends and plays with language to express the non-dual reality of the Dharma. He refers to silence as the falling away of body and mind, which is the expression he heard from his teacher Great Ancestor Rujing that brought him to realization.

So what does “dropping off body and mind mean?” Roshi Judith Riger tells us that at first she had a narrow understanding of dropping off body and mind—she thought it was only while practicing Zazen that this could happen. This is just one aspect of the phrase. She now understands how a fuller understanding of dropping off body and mind brings her practice back to each moment as it arises. She writes: “Each moment is an opportunity to drop off our personal desire system.”

When we talk about practice, we’re not just talking about Zazen, although this is very important and helps us to develop the ability to practice in our everyday lives. We practice coming back to every moment as now and getting out of our fantastical brains.

Everything we do at the Zen Center encourages no separation between subject and object and being in the now. Zazen, service positions in our ceremonies and services, and helping out in the kitchen. We also clean bathrooms and work on the grounds. Many of us did serve or are presently serving on the Board, the Tenzo Circle, or one of the other circles. There are people who clean the altars. This is how we practice shared stewardship and all of this service gives us opportunities to practice Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness and Appropriate Action.

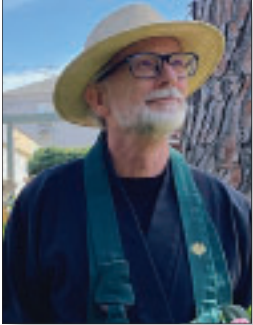
In the same way, the *Sangha Sutra* provides guidelines based on the Three Tenets and the 16 Bodhisattva Precepts for living and practicing with each other as a Sangha, with suggestions for dealing with conflicts that arise from time to time.

So, let’s all live freely with no hindrances and greet each moment as a friend.

Sensei Myobo is a priest and is on the Teachers Circle.

The One Who is Not Ill

by Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran



Attention! Tozan was ill. A monk asked, "Osho, you're sick. Is there someone not sick?" Tozan answered, "Yes, there is." The monk asked, "Does the one who is not sick look after you?" Tozan replied, "This old monk is able to look after others!" The monk asked, "Osho, how about when you look after others?" Tozan said, "Then the having of sickness is not seen." -Book of Equanimity, Case 94: "Tozan's Illness"

Recently the Los Angeles Times reported that a condor pair in Redwood National Park may be tending to the first condor egg in northern California in a century.

Redwood National Park is part of the historic land of the Yurok people. The Yurok have worked for decades to recover access and ownership of the land stolen from them and to heal its waters, forests, plants, and wildlife.

The female California condor is called Ney-gem' Ne-chweenkah, Yurok for "She carries our prayers," and she has been flying to a spot deep inside Redwood National Park. She and her mate Hlow Hoo-let, or "At last I (or we) fly," have alternated flying to the spot. Their behavior indicates they are tending to an egg.

Tina Williams-Clausen, the Yurok tribe's wildlife specialist, told the Times that the Yurok people "consider ourselves to be world renewal people, or fix-the-Earth people, whose primary purpose is to keep the world in balance. Post-American contact ... our world became very out of balance, ecologically and culturally."

She elaborated to National Public Radio (NPR) that "we consider our foundational reason for being here on this earth, to help maintain and caretake balance in the world, whether that's spiritual, physical, ecological. All of it ties together. And so condors, in particular, as scavengers, are ecologically a very important part of that cycle of life, of taking what's died and bringing it back into the living cycle again."

Her comments prompted me to reflect on questions that indigenous people all over the world have been exploring: How do we heal a world that is sick? How do we manifest right relationship across differences? What must change?

Williams-Claussen says that in Yurok creation stories, "it was Condor who provided a song that we sing" in what are known as world renewal ceremonies. Condor carries prayers for world renewal across the globe during the ceremonies.

Prayers for world renewal. How wonderful! What is your world renewal vow during this Earth Week? Beyond it? It is your Bodhisattva vow to wake up! To manifest wisdom and compassion right here in the nitty-gritty details of your life.

Today's koan from the *Book of Equanimity* investigates sick and not-sick and points toward healing by letting go of what we think we know. It features Tozan (Chinese: Dongshan), who lived in Tang dynasty China from 807 to 869 CE. He co-founded the Caodong school, which became known as the Soto school following its transmission to Japan by Eihei Dogen in the thirteenth century.

In the koan, the monk says, "Osho (an honorific), you're sick," and then asks, "Is there someone not sick?"

The monk presents two things: sick and not sick. Pay attention to the duality. We create categories all the time. They're a handy fiction that too often clouds our ability to simply see as is.

When we get lost in our categories, we see the world through the lens of "I don't want this, this is unsatisfactory, this hurts." And it may be true that at one level it really does hurt.

Tozan is ill. We can say that he's very ill. He's in bed. That's a real condition in his life. Yet here's a monk coming to his sickbed to test him. Tozan could have said, "Can't you see I'm sick? Get out of here!" That would have been one truth!

The monk is testing Tozan, but he also earnestly wants to know, is there something, someone that is not ill? If there isn't that burning, earnest need to know then it's just shadow boxing, it's not a koan. We want to know about this, right? Is there something that is free of suffering and that can free me of my suffering?

Our fundamental delusion is that there is a self, a me, that abides and persists. A category. Suffering arises because our experience of the world is one of impermanence and contingency, but we think, we hope we are permanent. We're not so much attending to sickness in this koan as we are to suffering. And that's rooted in a funda

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THE ONE WHO IS NOT ILL *(Continued from page 5)*

mental perception of separation. Feeling a fundamental dissatisfaction with our life is the deepest suffering. We spend time and energy pushing away all that we feel is dissatisfying.

Tozan meets the monk directly, saying, “Yes, there is” someone who is not ill. Who or what is this someone? How does it function in this world?

The monk responds, “Does the one who is not sick look after you?” In our everyday logic it’s a sensible question. Tozan confounds that logic when he replies: “This old monk is able to look after others!” The one who is sick looks after the one who is not sick. Again, I ask you, how does the one who is not sick function in this world, right here and now?

Who is this old monk? It’s Tozan, of course, but who is Tozan? Who are you? Who are others? Tozan isn’t falling into a story about self and others. He’s flowing in all directions, the one who is ill looks after the one who is not ill and vice versa. There’s no fixed line to draw.

The monk pushes on, trying to see all the way through: “Osho, how about when you look after others?” Tozan replies, “Then the having of sickness is not seen.”

He’s not attached to something called sickness or something called Tozan or something called the “essential” Tozan. Tozan isn’t stuck; he’s free to take care. He may be sick, but he isn’t sick with delusion about the self. He’s looking after this inquisitive monk!

When we cease to live as a fundamentally divided self and other, then who has sickness and who is not sick? Tozan is free and available to respond as needed. He’s simply functioning in the world. And being present as just this old monk, as yourself, is healing, it heals separation. Then we simply take our medicine, someone cleans us up, we are brought tissues and lip balm.

Think about the root sickness that perhaps brought you to practice. Consider what you are doing to heal. Consider how your taking responsibility for healing affects the so-called others in your life. They are not apart. Don’t separate or get grandiose and abstract.

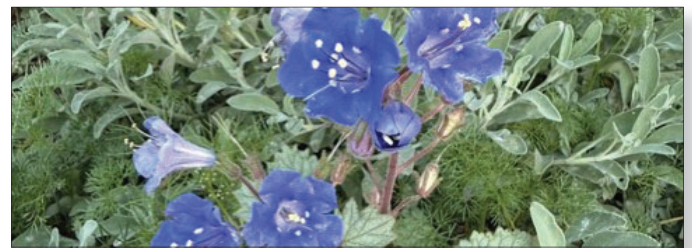
In this spirit, the appreciatory verse for this case says, “Stop and eradicate; don’t deceive and cheat.” Tozan cuts off idle speculation and immediately thrusts forward reality beyond sick and not sick. But we can’t get stuck to Tozan’s expression either. We don’t create new stories to deceive ourselves. We should not cheat ourselves with shallow understanding.

When Tozan was approaching death, he declared his intention to die and sat in zazen. But the monks carried on so much in their grief that he decided to stick around for a week to have what he called a Stupidity Meal—he wasn’t even stuck on dying! He was always responding and teaching. As Bansho (Chinese: Wansang) says in his commentary on the koan, “When the ancients were about to go, they frolicked in the realm of old age, sickness, and death.”

This frolicking is how we can simply bear witness to what is and respond. We just need to take our medicine, to be medicine. What is the medicine? Restoring salmon fisheries and forests, gratitude for the food in your bowl, your zazen, your life, mine. You and me. Let’s be serious about that.

Fully present to what is: ill, healthy, living, dying. That simple moment of aware presence, that is the renewal of this precious life, the refreshing of the world. So simple!

We heal when we deeply recognize that all beings (yes, including you) are medicine and when we meet the one who is not ill, how tender, how beautiful. Let us reveal our own medicine in the world and live our lives as endless prayers and actions for healing, for attending to the world that is ill. Then it is Earth Day and Earth Day is you and the day itself disappears into just this.



Dharma-Holder Earth-Mirror is the ZCLA Board President and is on the Teachers Circle. He gave a Dharma talk on this koan for the Earth Week Zazenkai.

Zen and The Art of Zenility

by Eberhard Konin Fetz

When learning about Zen many years ago, I read that people typically experienced satori only after a lifetime of diligent practice. The final breakthrough came after dedicated lifelong effort. Now that I'm at the other end of my life, I realize that nature actually provides some help toward liberation. It's the natural process of aging that we could call zenility.



Eberhard long ago.

In youthful times powerful energies and raging hormones fueled relentless desires and aversions. My active mind was busy elaborating complex scenarios and generating endless thought forms. No wonder it was difficult to break free.

As these energies wane, so do the mental distractions. The desires and conditioned reactions that used to hijack consciousness become less compelling. As the mind's associations and fantasies drop away, awareness more easily remains with the present reality. It helps that memory seems to naturally lose its grip. Names and facts don't get recalled as readily anymore. And as memory becomes less dominating, its accumulated baggage lightens. The tyranny of time and thought recedes. It's easier to let go. In fact, it's harder to hang on.

After a lifetime of chasing wild geese, barking up countless trees and burrowing down many rabbit holes, these seductive attractions become recognizable in advance. The mind has an innate tendency to imagine the gratifications to come when goals are reached. This is probably traceable to evolution selecting for brains that explore the environment in search of satisfaction. But such expectations become less compelling with the repeated experiences that reached goals are not as glorious as anticipated and that any satisfaction is transient.

As the brain ages, the depth of cortical processing diminishes. This is noticeable, for example, in driving a car: previously the mind's subconscious processing handled the details of navigating through a changing environment, leaving the conscious mind to chat with passengers or ruminate. With age, safe driving requires more continuous attention dedicated to what's happening up ahead and anticipating potential hazards. Glancing away from the road is risky and looking back at the road again involves palpable time to reconstruct the situation.



Konin now.

Similarly, keeping up with complicated discussions also requires sufficient computational depth to process multiple associations. With the onset of zenility it seems more difficult to follow all the ideas bouncing around between people during dinner conversation. It's easier to give up and take refuge in non-dual awareness of the scene.

The present moment presents a complex scenario that keeps changing every instant. The conscious mind is aware of only an infinitesimal part of this unlimited reality—and is typically preoccupied with its internal thought stream. The mind's conditioned reactions to events also involve their computational processing. As that capacity diminishes, so does the tendency to elaborate reactive thought. Staying with the present moment becomes easier as mental processing becomes more tenuous.

So ironically, living more in the present moment develops naturally as one ages, perhaps even without dedicated lifelong Zen practice. This suggests that getting older may be sufficient to fall into the present, and all that effort to sit and struggle to awaken earlier in life may have been unnecessary. However, there's more to it: enlightenment is not guaranteed. Without a spiritual clue, it's easy to remain stuck in conditioned mental patterns and to squander precious consciousness on reactivating and reinforcing stale scenarios. So, the optimal preparation for a liberated Zenility is spiritual practice, after all. Plus, it helps to have some spiritual perspective to deal with the looming reality of impermanence.



ZCLA member Konin is Professor Emeritus in the Departments of Physiology & Biophysics and DXARTS at the University of Washington, Seattle WA. Pictured with Roshi Ekyoku Nakao.

Encountering the Sutras

by Diane True-Joy Fazio and Diane Enju Katz

The Encountering the Sutras Circle is a bi-weekly Zoom gathering. We open each meeting with this statement of our intention:

We study various Buddhist sutras, exploring and discussing them together with beginner's mind. In this way, we deepen our sangha connection with each other and as well deepen into our understanding of the Dharma.

Our current format has evolved over time. There is no teacher or leader. Members take on the role of facilitator. Diane Enju Katz and Diane True-Joy Fazio are the current co-stewards. Participants do not need to have any particular qualifications or length of time practicing, just an interest in exploring these texts. They come and go as works for them; there isn't a time commitment and there is no homework. We recite the words of the current chapter/verse/section in round-robin fashion. Then we return to the lines we are studying, and conversation begins as participants engage with the words. When available, alternate translations are referenced. We do not move on to the next section until the group agrees.

We typically ask a teacher to join us when a text is finished to give their perspective and/or lead a discussion of the text as a whole. Those meetings have been especially thought-provoking. In addition to some of our current teachers, Roshi Egyoku Nakao and Roshi Ryodo Hawley have joined as guests, as has Maezumi Roshi via a recorded talk on the completed text.

The group formed in 2020 in response to a Sangha Forum discussion and the current format took a while to gel. Chris Daian Fields and True-Joy were the original co-stewards. The first meeting was in February of 2020 and by the second, we moved to Zoom where the group became an unexpected anchor for participants through the pandemic. The first reading was *Fukanzasengi*, which we naively assumed could be read in a few meetings. It took nine months! The next few were also by Master Dogen: *Bendowa*, *Genjokoan*, and *Gakudo Yojinshu*. We followed with

two texts used in service, *Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness* and *The Identity of Relative and Absolute*. We also read *Guidepost for Silent Illumination* and *Verses of the Faith Mind*. We are currently near the end of *The Mountains and Waters Sutra* by Dogen Zenji. The group will decide together on the next reading.

We read very slowly, line by line and discuss whatever arises. The texts are frankly pretty difficult so there is little opportunity to say, "this is clearly what it means." Ambiguity leads to fruitful discussion. It feels like a form of council in that understanding opens as each person weighs in and interactions lead to further discussions and an intimacy grows among the participants. Each contribution leads to the whole.

Sometimes someone will ask a provocative, "How is this relevant for us now?" Those questions, often born of frustration, have led to deeper discussions. The functioning of the group feels like the manifestation of collective wisdom/awakening and Not-Knowing.

We meet every other Monday, 7:00-8:15 p.m. Pacific Time. Participants can join anytime though many do so when we begin a new text. If interested, contact us at encounteringthesutrascircle@gmail.com.

Here are some reflections from our participants:

Diane Enju Katz

The Sutras Circle has given me the opportunity to sit in a flow of thoughts about the text. Hearing personal connections and reflections, I open to the text and to the group participants.

Carrie Helgeson

The Encountering the Sutras Circle is a uniquely open and encouraging space to explore texts. We respect each other's thoughts and questions, and I feel a real sense of freedom to wonder out loud. During one of the meetings when we were discussing Dogen Zenji's *Mountains and Waters*, someone from the group asked what studying Dogen had

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ENCOUNTERING THE SUTRAS *(Continued from page 8)*

to do with the sorrow they felt as they were caring for a friend with Alzheimer's disease. Silence fell for a moment as we sat with the pivot. Now we were all wondering the same thing. It was a deeply real and tender moment - and we met it together. Sangha in action.

Hique Montanari
(joining from Brazil)

Since this is only my second time here, I'm still discovering this place and learning, but I can already see its incredible potential for advancing Dharma studies and cultivating the factors of awakening.

Penelope Luminous-Heart Thompson

The Sutras Circle has been for me an experience of sangha together studying Dogen Zenji, listening deeply to each other, allowing various insights, perspectives, Not-Knowings and wisdoms to arise. Laughter, silences, appreciations have seasoned our shared time.

Kathy Myoan Solomon

I feel like such a newbie. At first I was tortured by Dogen Zenji, but stuck with it, and now only now, learning to let it wash over me. I appreciate so much the non-judgmental acceptance of the group. I couldn't speak for months. I like the community and the trust and exploring something that makes no sense whatsoever!

Julia Seirin Norstrand

I'm very grateful for my experience in the Sutras Circle. It provided a warm and friendly way to connect with and deepen my understanding of Zen practice. The horizontal structure, in which everyone's thoughts and feelings are taken seriously, allowed our individual insights to really land in the room, without judgment. It doesn't always work perfectly, but the journey within each of us to those precious moments of connection is most likely the whole point. Thank you, True Joy and Enju, for your dedication in making the Sutras Circle thrive for so long!

Diane True Joy Fazio

I am so grateful for the chance to get to know the texts and fellow practitioners better. It feels rare and special to work together in this way.



Dogen Zenji

Sutra Study in the Spirit of Dogen Zenji

by Katherine Senshin Griffith

Monday night Sutras Study, Thursday night Hidden Lamp Study, the monthly Zen Teachings in Challenging Times Study, and many other offerings here at ZCLA, all embody one of our core principles: Collective Wisdom and Awakening.

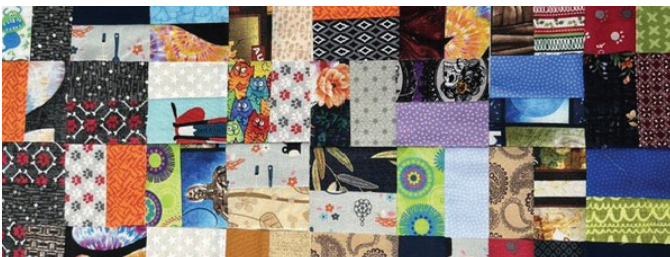
This reflects the teachings of Dogen Zenji himself, as revealed in these passages from his *Mountains and Waters Sutra*¹, that we just studied:

Simply because you yourself do not comprehend the sutras is no reason for you not to study the path comprehended by the buddhas and ancestors. Even granted that Zen teachings were in the end incomprehensible, this comprehension of yours would also be wrong.

In general, the way of encountering the sutras differs according to the type of student that studies them.

Given that what different types of beings see is different, we should have some doubts about this. Is it that there are various ways of seeing one object? Or is it that we have mistaken various images for one object? At the peak of our concentrated effort on this, we should concentrate still more. Therefore, our practice and verification, our pursuit of the way, must also be not merely of one or two kinds, and the ultimate realm must also have a thousand types and ten thousand kinds.

¹from Karl Bielefeldt's translation.



Introducing "Dear Claude"

by Roberta Myodo Brehm



When I'm not at Zen Center, I am a practicing orthopedic physical therapist. All physical therapists are experts in examination, diagnosis, and treatment of movement. However, we can specialize in different systems that affect movement, such as neurology or oncology. My particular specialty is

orthopedics, which focuses on the musculoskeletal system and how it affects movement. I think this is the specialty that most people think of when they think about physical therapy. It's also the reason that I was recently asked to lead a Dharma chat about sitting posture. This chat has led to a lot of questions and insights about the body and posture in sitting practice.

One of my partners in leading the dharma chat was a skeletal model who was nicknamed "Claude" by my yoga teacher training classmates. I have several skeletal models that I own, and so Claude has many different manifestations. The one I work with a lot when considering the sitting body is the version where he is simply a pelvic girdle and a spine. I do say "he" since the majority of skeletal models in use today are cast from adult males of European ancestry, of approximately 67-72 inches in height. Most large skeletal collections today (and the data gathered from them) are also dominated by male specimens, which has shaped modern anatomical study.

Seeing Claude sitting on a cushion and moving through different Zazen positions seemed to resonate with people instantly at the Dharma chat. It has been a privilege



and a deep learning experience for me to listen to people's insights into their own practice after meeting Claude.

The *Water Wheel* is launching "Dear Claude," a periodic column to help the Sangha with their Zazen postures and other physical practice issues. Please send your questions to robbehreh@yahoo.com.

Here are some initial questions:

Dear Claude,

It was helpful to see you sitting in a perfect Zazen posture. I could see your lower spine's forward curve as your pelvis tilted backward. When I tried that, I noticed that I sat taller and my chest opened. I now go to that posture multiple times in Zazen. It's "multiple times" because I just don't hold it! Thank you, Claude, and hope to see you again soon.

Sincerely,
Palms Together

Dear Palms Together,

Thank you for sharing this! I am glad that my demonstration was illuminating. Also, I agree that placing the spine and pelvis in that way helps with finding stillness in the Zazen posture. When the skeleton is arranged that way, the muscles of the spine and abdominal area are at an optimal length to work over a long period. In fact, when I look at how the various sitting aids are designed to promote this posture, I realize that the ancestors intuitively understood this as well.

Sincerely,
Claude

Dear Claude,

In trying to be more flexible for my Zen sitting and bows, I have been doing various stretches. Yesterday, when doing a standing hamstring stretch, I lifted my legs back too far. Now I have very bad back pain from the bottom of my ribs down. It feels like it is temporary and will heal with time. But for now, when my back really hurts, is it ok for me to do bows? Is it better to keep moving so I don't get stiff? Or is it better to be very still till the pain goes away? Claude, I would really like your help.

Sincerely,
Over Stretched

Dear Over Stretched,

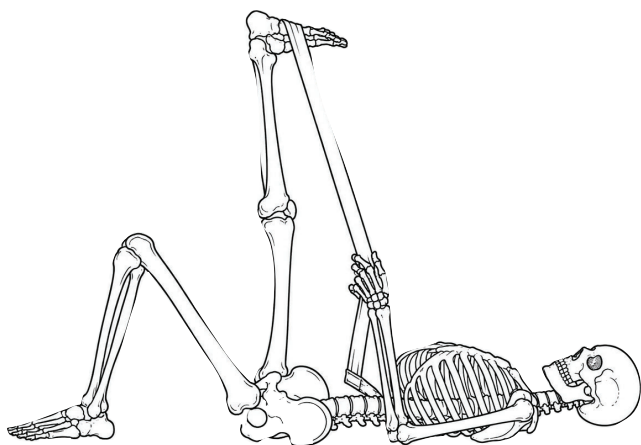
I'm so sorry to hear that this happened to you. This injury is a common one, so you are not alone in experiencing this.

(Continued on page 11)

DEAR CLAUDE *(Continued from page 10)*

When healing from this type of injury, a balance of gentle movement and rest is the best course. Complete rest and overwork will both make healing more difficult.

I would define “gentle movement” as movement that increases your baseline pain level no more than two points, and that the increased pain resolves within a few minutes of completing the movement. For example, if your pain level was at 5/10 intensity without doing anything, and then increased to 7/10 during bows, but then went down again a few minutes after finishing, that would be gentle enough to support your healing. Any pain increase more than this during movement, or any increased pain that lasts longer than a few minutes, is the signal from your pain system that the body is not ready to do that movement while healing. During the initial phase of healing, icing 1-2 times daily for 10 minutes can also be helpful with pain management.



In order to prevent these types of injuries, I often like to stretch while laying on my back. Standing stretches can be tricky because you have to control your spinal posture while stretching your muscles. When lying on your back, the floor automatically supports the spine in a neutral posture, which can make stretching more effective and easier. Above is a demonstration of my favorite hamstring stretch. I keep the non-stretching leg bent because that position is also more supportive of a neutral and stable spinal posture.



All beings without exception AWAKE!!

Jukai for Mats
Hensho Borges.



Receiving the Water Wisdom
from Sensei George Mukei
Horner.



(Left) Naoko Shugetsu Yogi, Hideyuki Shodo Yamashita,
Preceptor Sensei Nem Etsugen Bajra, Eriko Eju Imaizumi,
and Dai Tokugen Takano.

Corner of Disorder

Being one with the neighbors



by Mats Hensho Borges

Numberless games, I vow to observe them...
Inexhaustible fireworks, I vow to light them...
Boundless boomboxes, I vow to blast them...
Unsurpassable traffic, I vow to become it...

A Heartfelt Thank You!

Buddha's Birthday Celebration: to **Sensei Lorraine Gessho Kumpf** for officiating; to **Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert**, **Sensei Darla Myoho Fjeld**, **Diane Enju Katz**, **Jenny Jusen Bright**, and **Dylan Lake** for decorating the flower bower; to **Sensei Gessho** and **Tom Yudo Burger** for getting the flowers for the bower from the downtown Flower Market;

To our leaders: **Sensei Dharma-Joy** (Priest Retreat), **Preceptor Elizabeth Jiei Cole** (Zazenkai), **Dharma Holder Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran** (Zazenkai); **Senseis Gessho** and **Jitsujo Gauthier** (May Peace Prevail Sesshin);

To **Karina Myoki Beltran** for leading the Entering and Leave-taking Ceremony;

To **Sensei Gessho**, **Sensei Myoho**, **Ben Connelly**, **Sensei Dharma-Joy**, **Monen Ishikawa**, **Bill Tetsui Press**, **Jiei**, **Earth-Mirror**, and **Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith** for their Dharma talks;

To our Day of Reflection leaders: **Enju**, **Sensei Dharma-Joy**, and **Frank Genku Martinez**;

To **Josh Cretella** (Dharma Chat) and **Sensei Senshin** (Public Face-toFace); **Chris Daian Fields** for reading his book *Leave Yourself Alone: Zen and the Art of Acting*;

To our 2nd Quarter Jikidos: *Tuesday evening*: **Rey Barcelo**, *Wednesday dawn*: **Ben Genkai Ehrlich**, *Wednesday evening*: **Japhy Phoenix-Moon Orlinski**, *Thursday dawn*: **Ryan Rockmore**, *Friday dawn*: **Mike Radice**, *Saturday*: **Phoenix-Moon**, *Sunday*: **Carrie Helgesen**, *Wednesday-Friday mid-day*: **Chris Genzan Hackman**, **Yudo**, **Rey Barcelo**, and **Phoenix-Moon**;

To **Senseis Etsugen**, **Gessho**, **Myoho**, **Senshin**; **Dharma-Holder Earth-Mirror** and **Preceptor Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher** for leading the Exploring Your Zen Practice classes;

To our Intro to Zen Meditation Instructors: **Hokyu J. L. Aronson**, **Jusen**, **Genkai**, **Sandra Seiju Goodenough**, **Joshin**, **Enju**, **Daian**, and their assistants **Sensei George Mukei Horner**, **Tetsui**, and **Jusen**;

To the **Bodhisatva** who sends out birthday e-cards;

To our 2nd Quarter Tenzos and their assistants: **Chris Carrowiano**, **Genkai**, **Jiei**, **Genku**, **Reeb Kaizen Venners**, **Mike Radice**, **Myoki** and **Kathy Myoan Soloman**;

To **Sensei Etsugen** for teaching the Introduction to Japanese Buddhism class series ■

Sangha Rites of Passage

New Members

Jean Renso Bond
Benjamin Ellingson
Josh Heyman
George Lugo
Ryan Sozan Schneider

Jukai

Mats Hensho Borges
From Sensei George Mukei Horner, Preceptor
April 26, 2026

Hideyuki Shodo Yamashita, Eriko Eju Imaizumi,
Naoko Shugetsu Yogi and Dai Tokugen Takano
From Sensei Nem Etsugen Bajra, Preceptor
June 7, 2026



Rev. Monen Ishikawa

On June 20th, we were joined by Rev. Monen Ishikawa who presented on Baika, a somber, heartfelt musical tradition unique to Soto Zen. After offering a demonstration and explaining the deep meaning of the poetic verses, Rev. Ishikawa led us through two of the hymns. Unforgettable!



Los Angeles Koreatown during the World Cup Soccer event. Korea vs. Mexico. Mexico won!!

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Buddha Essence Temple • Great Dragon Mountain

923 S. Normandie Ave., L.A., CA 90006

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



Editor: Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith; Production Artist: Tom Yudo Burger; Proofreaders: Sensei Gessho and DH Earth-Mirror.