

Monterey Bay Zen Center News

Spring 2016

KYOTO IN THE DARK

"Zen is feeling your way along in the dark. You might think it would be better to have more light, to know where you are going, and to get there in a hurry, but Zen is feeling your way along in the dark." *Shunryu Suzuki Roshi*

I often leave the house before sunrise. Beyond the front door is an extended porch with three steps to the driveway at the end. If I forget my flashlight and there's no moon to illuminate the porch, I must feel my way very slowly, cautiously guiding my hands along a cold stone ledge. On such mornings, I often remember Suzuki's Roshi's recommendation.

We need to rethink our meanings for "light" and "dark." When was the last time you heard anyone using "dark" to describe something good? Darkness gets traction as a metaphor because it is commonly associated with the shadowy, demonic or generally bad. Want something to mar your otherwise bright and joyous life? Done -- bring on the black hats. What are people afraid of? The dark. "Light," on the other hand, is often associated with rational discrimination, optimism, clarity, "enlightenment."

Suzuki Roshi's words raise perhaps one of the basic tactile questions of how we negotiate the complex terrain of darkness and everyday life. In addition to managing steps in the dark, the activities we engage in are sometimes transformative, and we don't know what's on the other side of that transformation. Opening a door, doing the dishes, getting into a car, meeting the check-out clerk at Target, functioning in a relationship, working in a job, walking in the dark -- are all potentially transformative.

In some sense, Zen practice is leaving the door open to the unfamiliar, the door into the dark. Zen meditation is to rely on uncertainty and unsure footing. It is to be in the dark. That's where the most vital things come from, where we all came from and where we will all go. Darkness supports our vital unsteadiness, the way we are not actually standing on anything.

For artists, the dark -- or the unknown -- is what must be traveled and discovered. It is the job of artists to open doors, step into the dark and invite in deities, the unacquainted and the unaccustomed.

In Zen, darkness is associated with *ri*, the absolute aspect, emptiness, or background of our lives. Light, *ji*, is the foreground, the distinct, individual, form characteristics. In darkness, forms and colors become muted and vague. In the light, people, places and things are revealed in their particularity. In brightness, we distinguish

ourselves from others. Zen practice is to *see* both sides -- light and dark, differentiation and unity. Darkness, then, is not so much the absence of light, but the source of everything. Darkness is alive, fertile, and full of potential.

In southeastern Kyoto is Myoshin-ji, a massive 80-acre, Rinzai temple complex (nearly a Zen city) established in 1337 by Hana-zono, the 95th Emperor of Japan. Myoshin-ji's grounds are serene, immaculate and organized by garden rooms. If visitors talk at all, they speak in hushed, reverent tones. A frequent visitor to Myoshin-ji, D.T. Suzuki studied, wrote and planted azaleas on the grounds. The lecture hall (Hatto) includes a painting by Tanyu Kano: *Unryuzu, (Dragon Glaring in Eight Directions)*. It is one of the few temples where westerners can practice Zen in Kyoto. The Hatto is dark and massive with peaked roofs flanked by pine trees. Like most Zen temples, Myoshin-ji's Hatto is imposing and dark inside. However, it does not feel dark in a severe or ominous way--rather it feels intimate and close, with a darkened dais and Kano's Dragon glaring down from the ceiling. Despite its size, there is an intimacy to the main hall, a kind of warmth that is not apparent at first -- as if one were stepping into the embracing darkness of a warm, summer evening. The silence in Myoshin-ji's Hatto is so deep as to induce an aura of anticipation. In the shadows, boundaries are softened and gradually erased.

Once outside, however, the grounds are as neat and precise and legible as a blue mountain lake against new snow in winter. There is a kind of clarity to Kyoto's slanting October light. Everything on the grounds is wide open -- in a light so sharp that things stand apart from each other as if their edges were cut out with scissors. After the muted light of the Myoshin-ji's dharma hall, everything outside feels sharp and sudden, like the ringing of a telephone. It is, of course, difficult to speculate whether the 14th century temple architects meant to evoke the relative and the absolute in their temple design plans or were simply adhering to design precedent.

Soto Zen is sometimes called the "careful and considerate way." Feeling our way slowly, as if in the dark, is the principal connection between meditation and activities of daily life. Reverend Myo Lahey of the Hartford Street in San Francisco writes of the term *memmitsu-no-kafu*:

In this expression, the character *mitsu* means "cotton"; *mem* means "close, intimate, dense, secret"; *ka* is "family"; and *fu* is "wind" or "manner." Taken as a whole, the expression means a close,

*"Zen is feeling your
way along in the
dark."*

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

(continued from page one)

intimate, family style, as intimate as the threads in finely-woven fabric. A household animated by this principle is characterized by attention unstintingly paid to the connections among people and things. It is this that largely animates Soto Zen training, both inside and outside of the training halls.

The “family wind” of the Soto house is to feel our way carefully in the dark for what is both intimate and absolute.

Descending into the darkness suggests a direction toward realizing the background of our life, an acknowledgement of *ri*. It is not to look for the light switch, but to engage the dark in its own terms, to reach deeply into our life in slow, tactile steps. When we unlock the door to darkness we work our way slowly and carefully without a map. Shohaku Okumura discusses the term, *fue* or “not knowing,” to describe the dropping of conceptualizations. Being in the dark and *fue* are cut from the same bolt of cloth.

Being in the dark can sometimes be called the condition of mind that is *without*: without assumptions, without prejudices, without prized views, without the story we happen to have about how life should be at the moment in which we find ourselves – even our stories about being in the dark. At that intersection, possibility occurs. Being in the dark can be profoundly subversive to our usual habits of mind. It is to examine the assumptions that say “you are like this” or “I am like that.” Not knowing, or “fue,” is to move in the absence of such thoughts. It is to reach into the dark. The Zen teacher Koun Yamada said that by sweeping the mind, meditation takes away false blindness and gives us true blindness.

If you arrive at a meeting and assume you know in exacting terms who you are meeting, you may have sabotaged the encounter before you’ve even begun. Creating assumptions about who you are meeting (and who you are that moment) limits the possibility for intimacy. True intimacy is not based upon knowing – rather, upon discovery. It is being in the dark, not knowing who you are, or who someone else is, that allows you to meet an event without imagining it is something else – something that happened before.

To say, for example, that someone is “interesting” or a “jerk” is to assign the selfhood of “interesting” or “jerk” and the obligation of those associations. To imbue something or someone with a specific characterization is to levy the selfhood of those depictions on a vastly open, fluid and complex formation. The emptiness, or lack of inherent self-existence, does not refute or diminish that individual or event—rather, it opens and enlarges significantly. The person, place or thing is empty of self-existence, but full of *all* being.

A story illuminates this point. Each afternoon, a Zen teacher would have tea and rice cakes with two of his students. The teacher pointed to his fan and asked the monks what it was. One monk picked it up and fanned the teacher, who admired the answer for its directness and lack of conceptualization. Then, the other monk took the fan and placed a rice cake on it and offered it to the teacher. The fan was now a serving tray. Because the fan lacked inherent self-existence, it was free to become a serving tray or serve as sun shade. “Knowing” limits it to being a fan.

Having the willingness to be in the dark keeps us exposed, off-balance and alive to the world – to each other, to streets at dusk, to the bending sky, to teenagers on cell phones, to green tendrils uncurling in April and a thrush in the afternoon breeze.

-- Robert Reese

RIDING THE OX HOME: FIND THE WAY OF EVERY- DAY LIFE

A workshop with Rachel Boughton

Rachel Boughton will be leading a workshop entitled *Riding the Ox Home: Find the Way of Everyday Life*, on Saturday, April 23rd from 10:30am to 12:30pm at the Carl Cherry Center on Guadalupe & 4th St, Carmel. Ms. Boughton will also give a talk on Friday, April 22nd at Brown Bag Zen at St. James Church in Monterey.



The workshop is based in part upon the *Ten Ox Herding Pictures* and will include zazen and discussion. *The Ox Herding Pictures* are a series of short poems and accompanying pictures used in the Zen tradition to illustrate the stages of practice as well as the subsequent return into the world while acting with wisdom and compassion.

“In a meditation practice, we sometimes stumble on the experiences of the seamlessness and beauty of all things--the vast generous ground of things as they are. But how to find that experience in a tight spot, when we need it, rather than having to hold it tight? That’s the actual path we’d like to be on, one where we can feel that spaciousness and kindness wherever we are.” says Ms. Boughton.

Rachel Boughton is the director of Santa Rosa Creek Zen Center. She has been teaching meditation almost since she learned it when she was 15 years old. “At that time I was looking for an adventure story to model a possible life on, and I stumbled on a book that suggested that meditation and a spiritual quest might be the adventure I was looking for. I sent away for instructions. Now, thirty years later I’m still following them.”

Suggested donation: \$25. For your information, please call (831) 920-8303.

UNDER ONE ROOF

Zen students from the various practice venues on the Monterey Peninsula will be gathering together *Under One Roof* in the Fiesta Room at Carmel Hacienda, Carmel on Saturday, June 4 from 12:30 pm to 2:30 pm. This is a wonderful opportunity for meeting *Students of the Way* that we otherwise might not encounter. And to have fun! The event is a potluck lunch with book and plant sales. Rumors have it that last year’s band is back for entertainment.

Volunteer participation is vital to the success of the event. Please contact June Poe at juneipoe@gmail.com to register and volunteer. Volunteer areas are: set-up, coordination of the potluck, clean-up, entertainment and the plant sale/book sale donation tables. To reach Hacienda Carmel, turn right on Via Mallorca from Carmel Valley Road (about 1.5 miles from Highway One) and over the bridge into Hacienda Carmel; turn left to the dining hall/community center on the right.

LISTENING TO THE RAIN

Breakfast with Poetry Benefit

Because the mind is free--
Listening to the rain
Dripping from the eaves,
The drops become
One with me

Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts, Patrice Vecchione and Susan McDonald will read poetry based upon the theme of "Listening to the Rain" at Earthbound Farm stand on Saturday, July 16, 2016. The reading will be preceded by a sumptuous, organic breakfast provided by the Earthbound Farm kitchen staff and cook. The breakfast will start at 9:00 am and the event will run until 11:00 am. Donations support the Monterey Bay Zen Center and its activities.

Listening to the Rain is a five stanza poem by Eihei Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism. The poem points to realization of sitting practice wherein self-clinging drops away and the world comes forward in that moment.

Earthbound Farm, 7250 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel, CA (3.5 miles east of Highway One). Donation: \$30.00 for each adult and \$10.00 for each child, children under 6 are free. Please RSVP to Mark Orrisch at 831-659-7138 for advance tickets or email: mbzc.pres@prodigy.net. Participation is limited to 50 individuals.



THE WILLOW TREE CANNOT BE BROKEN

The Family Style of Soto Zen

A series of classes, *The Willow Tree Cannot Be Broken*, will explore the spirit, practice and teachings of Soto Zen. The classes will be held June 4th, 11th and 18th from 10:30 am to 12 noon at the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts. The classes will be taught by Robert Reese, a priest in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi.

Through meditation, dharma talks and discussion, the classes will investigate the core teachings, themes and practice of Dogen Zenji.

The series is intended to make Dogen's writings and practice accessible to all, including those not familiar with Zen or Buddhism in general.

Suggested donation: \$10 per class. For more information, please call (831) 624-7491 or (831) 920-8303.

THE FORM OF PRACTICE

A Workshop with Shogen Danielson

A workshop exploring Soto Zen deportment, movement and ritual, *The Form of Practice* will be held Saturday, June 25th at the Cherry Center. Shogen Danielson, a Soto Zen priest, will facilitate the workshop from 10:30 to noon.

Soto Zen is a profoundly physical and embodied practice. Much of the instruction focuses on posture, movement, comportment and whatever understanding that arises through the physical movement. Ritual movement trains the body to move, sense and feel in certain ways. Zen forms and rituals are a way Soto Zen culture and tradition communicates to us.

Shōgen Danielson began practicing with the San Francisco Zen Center community in 2001. He was ordained as a priest in 2008 and was head monk at Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery in 2013.

Suggested donation: \$20.00. For more information, call (831) 920-8303.

1]
A long time ago
once upon a time
one at a time
you only live once
there once was....
a whale of a good time.

2]
A stone thrown in the pond
symmetry of following wave,
moonlight night, frosty morning,
in this fathomless life
change itself abides.

3]
A towhee and a chickadee
converse in the dense brush.
A soaring red-tail high
cries across the blue sky.

4]
meditation,
sitting in early light,
an owl calls.

-- Susan McDonald



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Facebook pages for current information on what's happening there, photos of events, and more.

MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTER

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE

We meet at the Cherry Center, 4th and Guadalupe in Carmel, unless otherwise indicated.

Tuesday Evening Service:

Zazen 6:30

Service 7:20

Lecture/discussion 7:30-8:30

Monday, Thursday mornings:

Zazen 7am

(followed by service and soji)

Zazen instruction

First Tuesdays, 5:30pm

Ordinary Recovery

Saturdays 9-10am

Brown Bag Zen

Fridays 12:15-1:15

St. James Church,

High and Hellam Sts, Mntry

Mountains and Rivers Meditation

2nd and 4th Wednesdays 6:30pm

Carmel Valley. Call Patricia 659-3042

Chicken Coop Zendo

Jamesburg, Thursday evenings

5:30 -- 7 p.m. Call 659-2365

Fearless Fathers
with Shogen Danielson

Saturdays
April 9th & 23rd
May 7th & 21st
June 4th & 18th

10:30 to noon, Cherry Ctr
(415) 531-2090

Returning to Zazen class

Sun, April 3, 10

10-noon, Santa Catalina
School, Monterey

Half Day Sitting

Sat, April 9

8:30-noon, St. James Church,
Monterey

Shuso Closing Ceremony

Tues, April 12

6:30pm-8:30pm, Cherry Ctr

Rachel Boughton Wkshop

Sat, April 23

10:30am-12:30pm, Cherry
Center

Tassajara Weekend

Fri-Sun May 6-8

Tassajara

Introduction to Zen

Sat, May 14

10:30-noon, Cherry Center

Under One Roof

Sat, June 4

12:30-2:30pm, Hacienda
Carmel

Willow Tree Class

Sat, June 4, 11, 18

1030-noon, Cherry Center

The Form of Practice

Sat. June 25

10:30-noon, Cherry Center

Poetry and Breakfast

Sat. July 16

9-11 Earthbound Farm
Stand, Carmel Valley Road