

Monterey Bay Zen Center News

Spring 2018

WHERE ALL LADDERS START, ACEDIA, AND ZEAL

In December I caught a cold. The cold turned into bronchitis and a spell of illness that lasted more than two months. In addition to the common symptoms associated with upper respiratory illness, the ailment, during its course, was tangled with an imprecise spiritual malaise that made me nearly insensible to the world. At its core was a kind of lingering apathy that resisted all persuading, indulging or willing-away with forced optimism or good cheer. During that stretch, I appeared, on the face of it, a competent enough member of the community—a payer of bills, a person who met deadlines and someone who generally showed up on time. But the overall effect was a dull apprehension of what it would be like to not care.

The Greek word *acedia* means “absence of care” or a mental disposition related to spiritual torpor, ennui, distraction, boredom or apathy. And while the terms are often bundled with what we now label depression, the reality is much more intricate and complex. What we call the boredom, apathy or torpor that plagues us today may be the ancient specter of *acedia* in contemporary garb.

In Buddhist terms, *acedia*, in its most toxic expression, is a derivative of *Moha papanca*, or proliferation of thoughts based upon unpleasant experiences. Sloth, then, is a form of repetitive clinging, grounded upon certain karmic inclinations that spin and self-perpetuate.

Kathleen Norris, a Christian writer who has been plagued by both depression and *acedia*, writes: “The boundaries between depression and *acedia* are notoriously fluid: at the risk of oversimplifying, I would suggest that while depression is an illness treatable by counseling and medication, *acedia* is a vice that is best countered by spiritual practice and the discipline of prayer.”

Someone afflicted with *acedia* is incapable of caring and may be unable to muster even the intention to care. The suffering person remains in a kind of dungeon of spinning, negative thoughts. The impossibility of sharing or articulating the malaise is itself a component of the pain and a contributing factor to the essential condition. The Christian desert monastics called *acedia* the “noonday demon” because the malaise usually struck during the heat of the day when the monks were vulnerable to hunger and fatigue and began to doubt their commitment to religious life.

The demon of acedia . . . is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the sound soul until the eighth hour. First of all he makes it seem the sun barely moves, if at

all, and that the day is fifty hours long. He then constrains the monk to look constantly out the window, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour (or lunchtime).

Evagrius Ponticus (345-399), *The Praktikos*

Today, it can be argued *acedia* is no longer a noonday affliction; rather, its duration can stretch on for 24 hours, prompting one contemporary Benedictine to remark: “We are speaking in cosmic time and it is always noontime somewhere.”

Acidia is one of the five hindrances—along with sensual desire, ill will, restlessness and doubt—which, once possessed, the Buddha said, “lead away from nirvana” causing the mind to become stiff, dull and indistinct. The Buddha christened such hindrances as “encircles of the mind,” likening them to giant vines that fix themselves to trees, making their hosts “bent, twisted and split.”

Traditional antidotes to *acedia* include a whole-hearted engagement with the quotidian, or the details of everyday life. Immersing ourselves in our tasks is what Dogen Zenji sometimes termed “throwing yourself into the house of the Buddha,” expressing our connection to life. Taking care of the everyday details—opening the mail, washing the dishes, answering the phone—with unstinting attention, is an opportunity to realize our individuality and universality.

The first pure precept is often presented as “do no evil,” or the restraint of evil. One model of understanding the restraint of evil is to refrain from our inclination toward distraction (which is a type of unwholesomeness, or type of *acedia*)—or whatever distracts us from where we are, what we are doing and whom we are with.

Similarly, the intention to help others can be a corrective to *acedia*. In giving the gifts of fearlessness, dharma and material things, we are enacting the first *paramita* (perfection or completeness) and benefiting our community as well as ourselves. In the same way, the *tenzo* (cook) enacts individual practice and community practice. By cooking, the *tenzo* is doing an individual practice, which only she can do through her mind and body, as well as community practice, which extends out infinitely. Her life is tethered to all being and is enacted for all being by working in the kitchen.

In contrast to *acedia*, the *paramita* of energy as defined by Shantideva in the *Bodhicaryavatara* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*) is a kind of ethical act and curative to the default setting of self-referencing and self-concern. In that sense, the *paramitas* can also be under-

...Now that my ladder's gone,

I must lie down where all the ladders start

In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.

W.B. Yeats



stood as priorities, or something of foremost importance. *Parami* is related to *paramam*, which means something of importance. If we worship and make a priority out of things that are largely beyond our control—material wealth, power, youth or status—then we are essentially serving something of which we can never have enough, never feel we have enough. Worship power and you will feel weak and afraid. Worship wealth and you will never have enough. Worship beauty and you will always feel plain. Worship mutable things and realize the gnawing sense of having possessed and having lost some infinite thing. On one level, we already know this, because for centuries it's been collected in myths and proverbs and parables and is the basis of all the classic stories. On the other hand, we can consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn't. We can decide what to attend to. We can decide what to worship.

The paramita of energy or zeal in the *Bodhicaryavatara* is a formidable corrective to acedia and, when used in a skillful manner, supports the other paramitas. The Sanskrit word for energy is *virya*, which in Buddhism has come to signify the energy of accomplishment, the effort and courage to realize spiritual exertion to its end. Shantideva's chapter on energy reads, in part, as a kind of guide to the cultivation of positive dispositions of the unconscious mind. By cultivating the wholesome qualities of zeal, patience, morality, tolerance and wisdom, we influence the unconscious mind and train as bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas, then, are devoted to this training without residing in the results. Simultaneously, this training without results is occurring within the stillness of zazen, which seeks nothing other than itself.

The six paramitas constitute practices that go beyond themselves (transcendent practices) for the development of a bodhisattva and for all being.

The activity of cultivating energy can be understood in terms of what Kodo Sawaki Roshi called "thief nature" and "Buddha nature." From the view of thief nature, I might cultivate energy for personal benefit, as a means of personal improvement or to get something in the bargain. From the perspective of Buddha nature, my actions are for the benefit of all being. There is nowhere to go and nothing to get.

The priority of the bodhisattva vow comes from the Mahayana tradition, long before Zen. We may not really know what it means. We may not know how to do it. It is a wish, an aspiration. But it is our vow, the effort of our lifetime, to be carried out with energy, gratefulness, clemency, non-condemnation, understanding, and sorrow.

*Spring comes with its flowers, autumn with the moon,
summer with breezes, winter with snow;
when useless things don't stick in the mind,
this is your best season.*

Wumen Huikai
-- Rev. Robert Reese

THE CRACKED SHUSO

I came to our sangha with big cracks and small. It is said that cracks are where the light shines through and, I think, where the zombie stuff leaks out. Some cracks show clear to the outside, some are well hidden or forgotten, some have healed strong, and still others hurt

others too. A few months after receiving the Zen name Chōan (Morning Hermitage) Tetsugen (Penetrate Source), I was invited to be *shuso* (head student) for our practice period.

I thought all my cracks, memories, concepts, opinions, frailty, and the rest would make for a decidedly unskillful head student. While that has shown true and not, moment-time slows and movement flows as never before. In your eyes and on your lips are light and truth. You offer transparency, an offer to meld. I'm lifted and healed by the trust and courage you so generously deliver.

This tender heart of ours became fearful somehow. And now, our awaking heart-mind is becoming more pure in its intention and manifestation. Who can know where a respectful, loving bow reaches? I often forget my heart's true nature and desire, but you, dear sangha, are there with arrows that pierce my armor and reveal bodhichitta residing within and without.

The wise guidance given was to bring only Guy, with his tangled karma, divided mind, and broken body to this moment as shuso. Part of me does not want to do that—what would people think? And you let me do so anyway. Some of us have met. Some of us will meet. Please take good care of yourself, for the good of all beings, all things, and all circumstances.

Guy Riina



THE HIDDEN DHARMA

Three Films Explore Buddhism in Ways Known and Hidden

A three-part film series, *The Hidden Dharma: Buddhism and Film*, begins Thursday, May 3 at the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts. The series continues on May 10 and 17, all at 7 pm.

Presented by the Monterey Bay Zen Center, the series examines the teaching and practice of Buddhism through film—and film through Buddhism. The series uses the medium of film to explore various themes and issues in the study of Buddhism, and employs ideas culled from Buddhism to reflect back on the nature and power of film. Films will be screened from a rear projector on a 10 x 12-foot screen. For more information: (831) 920-8303. Suggested donation \$10 for each evening.

MONTEREY BAY AND SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTERS' ANNUAL TASSAJARA RETREAT

Our annual Tassajara Retreat with Santa Cruz Zen Center will be held May 11 to 13, Friday to Sunday. This is a rare opportunity. The Saturday sitting, with oryoki meals, ends at 4pm. Sunday's half work day with the Tassajara community ends at noon. Meals are with the community. It is necessary to attend the entire

schedule beginning Friday afternoon and ending Sunday afternoon. We have time to enjoy the baths and take a walk. Please contact Sara (sarahun@comcast.net) with questions and reservation requests. Suggested donation of \$150 is requested. We are limited to 10 reservations and will need two or three people to volunteer to carpool for the drive to Tassajara. You may attend as a day visitor but need to make those arrangements directly with Tassajara.

JUST SITTING AT CARMEL VALLEY ZENDO

You are invited to join us on May 27, Sunday, 9 am to 3:30 pm for all or half (AM or PM) of this Zazenkaï. Please call to reserve a space as the zendo is small. A donation of \$20 (includes lunch) is requested (for full or ½-day). Sara Hunsaker, a priest in the Suzuki Rōshi lineage will lead the day. Please call Sara to register at 659-1522 or email sarahun@comcast.net.

SESSHIN AT JIKOJI ZEN CENTER

MBZC is welcome to participate in the Genzo-e sesshin led by Kokyo Henkel of Santa Cruz Zen Center. This four-day Study Sesshin, June 21 to 24 (Thursday evening through lunch Sunday) will be held at Jikoji, in the Santa Cruz mountains. Jikoji was founded by Kobun Chno-Roshi. During this sesshin, Dogen's fascicle "Jippo," Ten Directions (the entire universe) will be studied. There will be a memorial service for Katherine Thanas on Sunday, June 24. For more information, please contact Sara Hunsaker at 915-4736 or sarahun@comcast.net. You may come for all or part of the sesshin. Please arrange your own reservation with Jikoji directly: <https://www.jikoji.org>

REFLECTIONS OF THE SELF

Just Looking and Drawing Mindfully

Using mirrors to see the faces of our self, the light and dark sides, we enter a holistic realm — slipping by the thinking, judging mind. We will use simple drawing exercises to respond to what we see. This process of drawing is a concentration practice and when we are drawn into the process, concepts drop away. This mindful looking and drawing is not about the outcome, not about drawing to 'look good.' It is about simply seeing and making marks. And in reflection we meet our selves much as Narcissus did. We will get to talk about it. There will be a short period of zazen before and after.

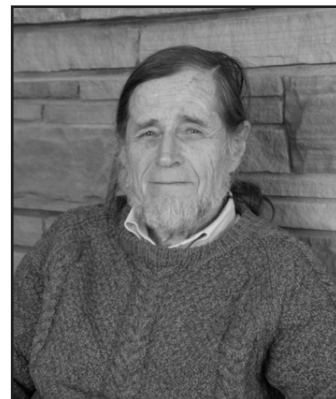
This workshop, led by Sara Hunsaker (priest in the Suzuki Rōshi lineage), will be held at Carmel Valley Zendo/Studio on Sunday, June 10 from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm. About noon we will serve a vegetarian lunch. Please call or email Sara with questions or to hold a place: 659-1552 or sarahun@comcast.net. Please do not show up without calling in advance. A donation of \$25 to \$40 is suggested. No one will be turned away for lack of ability to pay. All supplies provided, you're welcome to bring your own.

FIREFLIES TAKE WING Breakfast with Poetry Benefit

Miscellaneous poem at a grass hermitage

*The moon begins to rise
above the mountain's brow
in the glimmering evening
moonlight
fireflies take wing
glowing dimly*

- Eihei Dogen (Translated
by Shohaku Okamura)



Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts will read poetry based upon the theme of *Miscellaneous poem at a grass hermitage* at Earthbound Farm stand on Saturday, July 14, 2018. His reading will be followed by readings from *The Truth of This Life, Zen Teachings on Loving the World as It Is*, the newly published anthology of teachings by Katherine Thanas that reflect the themes in Dogen's poem.

Miscellaneous poem at a grass hermitage was written by Eihei Dogen, founder of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism. Of this poem, Shohaku Okamura, founder and guiding leader of the Sanshin Zen Center in Bloomington, Ind., has written:

The fireflies are like human beings who have aroused bodhi mind. The light of such ordinary bodhisattvas is tiny and glows only briefly. And yet this light of bodhi mind is the same as the vast moonlight of Buddha's wisdom.

Katherine Thanas was the founding teacher of Monterey Bay Zen Center. *The Truth of This Life, Zen Teachings on Loving the World as It Is*. It is the first compilation of her teachings to be published by a major press, Shambala. The book was edited by Natalie Goldberg and Bill Anelli. Copies will be available for purchase at the event.

The reading will be preceded by a sumptuous, organic breakfast provided by the Earthbound Farm kitchen staff and cook. The breakfast will start at 10:00 am and the event will run until 12:00 noon. Donations support the Monterey Bay Zen Center and its activities.

Earthbound Farm, 7250 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel, CA (3.5 miles east of Highway One). Donation: \$35.00 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@gmail.com. Participation is limited to 50 individuals.





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tos, and more, go to MBZC
FACEBOOK

MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTER

PO Box 3173, Monterey, CA 93942

831-915-4736

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

We meet Tuesday evenings, Monday and
Thursday mornings at the Cherry Center,
4th and Guadalupe in Carmel.

Tuesday evening schedule:

Zazen 6:30
Kinhin (walking) 7:10
Service 7:20
Lecture/discussion 7:30-8:30

Monday, Thursday mornings:

Zazen 7am
(followed by service and soji)

Zazen instruction first Tuesday of
each month at 5:30pm

Ordinary Recovery, Sats, 9-10am
Cherry Center, Carmel

Fearless Fathers, Tuesdays, 5:30
p.m. (415) 531-2090

Brown Bag Zen, Fridays 12:15-1:15
St. James Church, Monterey

Compassionate Communication
2nd Saturdays, 6pm
Patricia 659-3042

Chicken Coop Zendo, Thursdays
5:30-7:00pm - 659-2365

Bodhicaryavatara Class

Shuso Closing Ceremony

Bodhicaryavatara Class

Buddha's Birthday

Bodhicaryavatara Class

Bodhicaryavatara Class

Bodhicaryavatara Class

Hidden Dharma Film

Intro to Soto Zen

Hidden Dharma Film

Tassajara Weekend

Hidden Dharma Film

Zazenkai

Full Moon Ceremony

Drawing Mindfully

Genzo-e sesshin

Sun, April 1, 10-12 noon

Tues, April 3, 6:30-8:30

Sun, April 8, 10-12 noon

Tues, April 10, 6:30-8:30

Sun, April 15, 10-12 noon

Sun, April 22, 10-12 noon

Sun, April 29, 10-12 noon

Thur, May 3, 7-9

Sat, May 5, 10:30-12 noon

Thur, May 10, 7-9

May, 11-13

Thur, May 17, 7-9

Sun, May 27, 9-3:30

Tues, May 29, 6:30-8:30

Sun, June 10, 9:30-3:00

Thurs-Sun, Jun 21-24 w/SCZC

St. James Church

Carl Cherry Center

St. James Church

Carl Cherry Center

St. James Church

St. James Church

St. James Church

Carl Cherry Center

Carl Cherry Center

Carl Cherry Center

Tassajara

Carl Cherry Center

Carmel Valley zendo

Carl Cherry Center

Carmel Valley zendo

Jikoji

Food photography on pages 1 and 3 by Viktor Klinger