The Wobbly Pot

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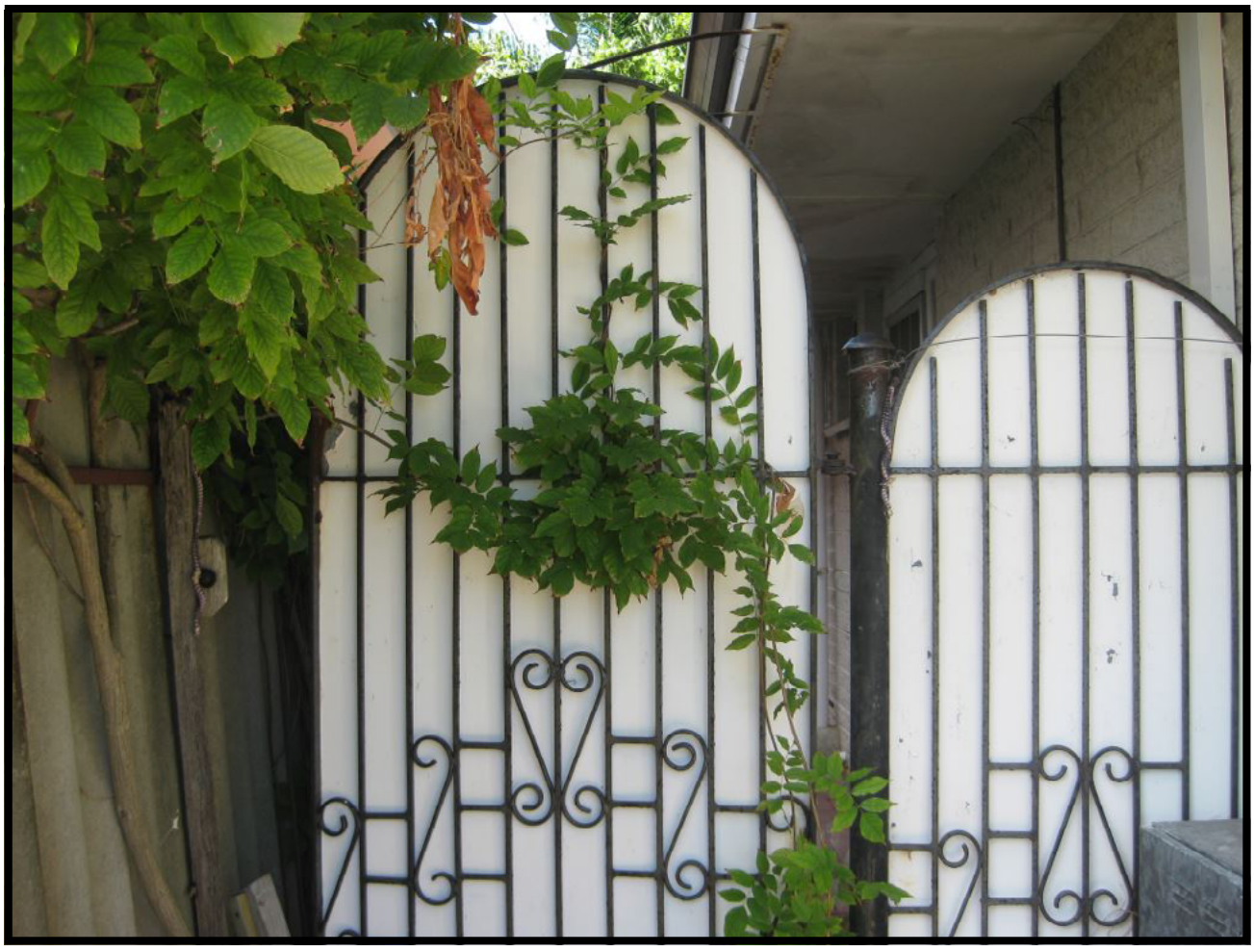
Practice in the Midst of Activity



Contents

DHARMA TALKS

ARTICLES

POETRY

PHOTOGRAPHS

The Wobbly Pot is produced by the Zen Group of Western Australia.

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Front cover photograph: The side gate of the house in Rossmoyne where the 2016 Practice Period was held. Photograph by Kathy Shiels.

The Wobbly Pot is a forum in which ZGWA Sangha members can share Dharma and creativity.

All Sangha members are invited to contribute essays, articles, poetry, fiction, photography or visual art.

Email submissions to wobblypot@zgwa.org.au.

The next edition will be released in January 2017. Submissions are due by the 31st of December, 2016. The theme for the issue will be ‘Coming Home’. Submissions can (but do not have to) relate to the theme in some way.

Thank you to all of those who have contributed to this current issue.

Wandering in your mind

Ross Bolleter Roshi - September 2016

The following talk was given at the ZGWA's zazenkai on Saturday August 13, 2016. *Wandering in your mind* is a koan from my collection of Western koans entitled *Crows Fly Backwards*.

Wandering in your mind

"Still wandering in your mind?" I asked a student.

"You bet," he responded.

"What's there?"

"Oh, grey sky, the sun on the salmon gums."

The student can now be identified as Chris Barker. Chris and his partner Jane Taylor sat with the Zen Group of Western Australia in the later nineties and into the 2000s. Chris and Jane were house managers in the Claremont Zendo, and their relative youth, the fact they were in love and in the early stages of a happy relationship that endures to this day, warmed the Way for the group in those times. There was plenty of joie de vivre and a lot of good music happening between sesshins, zazenkais, and weekly sits. Chris and Jane sat all the Sesshins, did leadership, and supported the Sangha and myself as teacher

I have given dokusan to several people who were dying, but Jane Taylor is the only person to whom I have given dokusan when they were breast-feeding. On this occasion, Jane was breast-feeding her first son, Tom. Was that dokusan for two? Or for one? Or for not even one?

"Still wandering in your mind?" I asked Chris, who could be vague at times, in the way of so many creative people. I had expected to get a fragment of his rather lateral thinking about art and reality, but I got the matter itself: *"Oh, grey sky, the sun on the salmon gums"* – pointing to the profound nature of Mind – not the limited thinking, conceptualizing mind, but "Mind" as unnameable, fathomless, timeless, weightless (though you still need to watch out when crossing the road!) – as well as being without boundaries, or dimension.

We might say that, on one hand, we have the mind which thinks, reasons, fulminates, wonders, complains … that we think of as provisionally being "inside our head": mind if you like with a small "m". Contrariwise, we have Mind with a capital "M," memorably expressed by Dogen as: "Mind is mountains and rivers, the great earth itself, the sun, the moon, and the stars." Although these two "minds" may seem very different, they are at bottom indistinguishable, with not a breath between them.

Thoughts and thinking

Small mind – mind with a small "m" – is characterized perhaps primarily by thinking, by what students often think of as the bugbear of thinking. Yet, when we penetrate far enough into thinking we realize that even a single thought (sometimes so hard to locate in the thought-swarm) – "Oh, I forgot to pay the gas bill" – is itself the timeless place of no coming and going: in fact, Mind itself. Each thought, even the meanest, is no other than Mind. So, on the one hand, although thoughts manifestly come and go, in their deepest nature they are no other than the place where coming or going is not even thought of.

Realizing the nature of mind

I asked Jane Taylor, "'Zen is the complete realization of mind' – what do you understand by that?" And she replied: "I can have silly thoughts." Her very words are the complete realization of mind, the complete cutting off of delusion. In the same breath, a silly thought is the Way, no less than a profound one. I asked my three-year-old grand daughter Charlotte, when she was fretting before her ballet class "Do dinosaurs eat blue custard?" She came back scornfully emphatic: "Dinosaurs don't eat blue custard!" I found the following poem scrawled on a piece of cardboard tied to a lamppost in Northbridge, the entertainment district of Perth, not far from my home.

To placate irises
stretch for that which is unseen
unless large shiny Ding sits on the bag
in the shower shed bus to take you elsewhere.

Then there's the sublime nonsense of children's verse, such as Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat* that I'm teaching my grandchildren:

The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note. …

They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

To realize Mind, we don't seek truth, we don't avoid fantasy; sheerest nonsense conveys it perfectly, puff-ball light. Even derangement of the senses—if not of the mind—can do that. As the late-nineteenth-century French poet, Arthur Rimbaud wrote in his *Une Saison En Enfer (A Season in Hell)*: "I ended by considering my mind's disorder sacred." Even disordered consciousness is Mind itself.

Finally, nothing is left out, and the least regarded thing, or word—or even a thought—is lit by the moon of enlightenment. What might have been formerly seen as a hindrance, or something to be ignored, shines. This is the compendiousness; this is the generosity of the Zen Way, in which each of us – even with our lacks and limitations, even in our brokenness – includes the timeless expanse of the Way, while being accordingly included in it.

"Oh, grey sky, the sun on the salmon gums" is Mind in its vastness and purity: full of potential from which, *as which*, we all emerge. Mind is not something made-up, remotely drifting at the edge of our consciousness. It is our birthright, timelessly established. We don't have to vainly try to jerry-build it; we are already it. And one hazy lazy thought is enough to reveal that.

Ross Bolleter Roshi and Mari Rhydwen Roshi, after the 2016 Spring Sesshin at the Origins Centre, Balingup. Photograph by Paul Wilson.

Ella's Training Period

Kathy Shiels

It's always the same just days out from the beginning of a Sesshin or as in this case a Zen Training Period. The energy builds, precise planning and nervous excitement bubble over into more and more phone calls, text messages and emails. The community of teacher and students gathers in each other's hearts and across technology. It was no different in April this year, as preparations were underway for the ZGWA's Practice in the Midst of Activity Zen Training period lead by Mari Rhydwen Roshi.

There was only one day to go and some folk were arriving in town, while others were making lists and preparing soups in advance. For some days, I'd been rummaging through all of the group's gear, which is stored in my shed, and sorting items into boxes for collection. It was a treat for the training period to have rented a house and I found that the group still had a lot of household treasures packed away.

During those days, Ella, my Golden Retriever, waited patiently outside the shed, trusting that a walk would eventually be on offer. And indeed it would be. We'd head off down the drive and up the street to one of the many parks in our locality. In the middle of each walk we had a ritual; we'd both sit for some time taking in the world before making our way back home. Often it would be the curious ways of Corellas, Crows, Magpies or water birds of all kinds. Ella had enjoyed many such walks with friends from within the Sangha; she'd been to lots of ZGWA council meetings and even joined a Sangha weekend in the country.

Wednesday; the day before the training period opened, was typical of 'the day before' big events with its constellation of demands on all fronts. An all staff planning day that went till early evening at work, urgent contact with a travelling family member and the last minute communications within the Zen group all jostled for attention. I felt stretched and when I got home late, Ella voiced her right to a brisk walk. With her company always being a great leveller, I sat next to her and we played and laughed while I put on my walking shoes. Her feathered tail swung happily back and forth as she sauntered down the driveway.

Photograph by Nicole Read.

It was dusk. When it was late evening we'd usually go around the block to the nearest park and home again. The streets were quiet and empty, so as was the custom of our 'risky runs', Ella's lead was draped around my neck rather than hers. However, my phone was in my pocket ready for more calls. Ella trotted on just ahead of me taking in all her favourite shrubs and likely places to find 'cat truffles.' The evening closed in really quickly and in the midst of a phone call about logistics for the next day, I lost sight of Ella.

Presuming she'd gone on, I quickly made my way forward to the park which was cheerily floodlit. She wasn't there. Ella, after almost 15 years with me, would sometimes check whether I had caught up to her and that night she went back; heading to where she'd last seen me. We were looking for each other on either sides of our block. A neighbour heard her trotting past and looked out to see the fateful moment when a stationary white utility eased away from the kerb slowly, but fast enough to catch Ella's hock joint. She fell badly and a tyre caught one of her haunches. They didn't notice her even then.

When I saw her, she was sitting with neighbours under a street

lamp smiling enthusiastically at my arrival. I've learnt since that in the first moments after accidents, pumping adrenalin masks pain. I spent most of the night with her at the emergency veterinary hospital, but by 10am the next morning, it had taken four vets to gradually convince me that, with a severe hock injury and a badly fractured pelvis, euthanasia was the most compassionate course for an old arthritic dog.

As someone who carries cockroaches out of the house in a dustpan and carefully rescues Daddy long leg spiders from the shower recess, I'd never considered euthanasia till the moment I acknowledged the brittle chill of Ella's ears whose circulation wasn't reaching them while she 'slept' under heavy sedation. At 10:30am I was home and dazed, but soon gathered into warm hugs from Mari and Herman Isaac before the three of us began to load the ZGWA's gear from my shed into cars and transport it to the training period house.

That night, in her talk, Mari found words for my unspeakable grief and announced that we'd lost a cherished canine Sangha member in the morning. As the training period got underway, Mari told me that Ella's death was my training period and to hold it tenderly and spaciously. I was hugged by the other participants while given beautiful flowers and cards. But mostly I was held strongly and compassionately in the sitting. In a blur of tears, images, recollections and longing I sat feeling how I'd suddenly joined the community of bereaved people across the globe. Yet what sustained me was the incredibly vivid experience of sitting as Ella in the refuge of the Dharma bathed in the warmth, integrity and love of the Sangha. I bow deeply in gratitude to Mari and all of the training period participants.

During some rounds of Zazen, I lamented that I had been so preoccupied and that I'd lost Ella to busy preparations and not being able to contain them. Most often though, I sat in the pure blessing of her long happy life and I opened to the curious timing her death. I still find it instructive that she suddenly and graciously left me to the training period; doing more Zazen than usual in the midst of everyday activities with Sangha members prepared to candidly discuss their practice. We offered the following dedication:

Ella – great teacher, gracious old lady of golden fur and kind brown eyes; brimming with patience, playful curiosity and joy - every moment.

May you have tasty treats and soft beds along the Way as you continue to guide our hearts on the art of risky runs - purely for love.

I've taken some leave from work and I'm honouring Ella's teaching by continuing to sit a little more these days. Sometimes I take my Zafu out onto one of her daybeds in the pale autumnal sunshine. It's good to taste the quiet life she led in the little garden while I came and went. Ella's not so far away and yet Butcher birds, Wattle birds and Honeyeaters seem to know something's up and come in closer than usual as I sit.

Training Period Rossmoyne 2016

Brigid Lowry

There were roses. There was cake, and soup. We met and sat in silence but it was never truly silent. There was the sound of the rain, the street, the bells. We were tired. We were bewildered. We were keen to go home. We met and talked together. We shared our thoughts about what fed our practice and what did not. We forgot what our homework was, but then we remembered. We went to dokusan with Mari, who told us things we wanted to hear and things we did not want to hear. We sat on behalf of Kathy's dog and our dying niece, on behalf of our broken hearts and each new moment. The sun came out and it rained, and we were glad of all of it. We were already home. There were roses. There was cake. There was soup.

Photograph by Kathy Shiels.

Training Period - Rossmoyne 2016

Phil McNamara

Do not say that speech or silence

is the way to manifest the wondrousness of the

HEART

For how can your sense organs and their objects

Ever possibly defile your own

SELF NATURE?"

- **Keizan Zenji** (pointing to the teaching of Fudamitta)

What was that homework? To watch my thoughts? How they attach around objects in front of my eye?

How do I watch thoughts? They are like ripples that become waves in an ocean; nudging along until they rise.

They seem to always be moving through, coming and going.

Was it judging thoughts I was too watch? Are my thoughts an iceberg rather than a moving wave? What portions of my thoughts am I not seeing, denying, not inviting? What thoughts am I loitering around? Incessantly pursuing?

What was the homework? The pulse of my heart and life as radiations of thought lingering, hiding, comprising, those compromising comparisons and contrasts. Associations. Squelchy mind mud.

Was it watching thoughts or simply noticing. Noticing. Was that it? Simply noticing? Without name. Noticing. Yeah.

Or was it just noticing what I name? And just that. Without verbs. Form without symbol, without associations. Without eddies, drift, vapour.

I don't know. I think I'm making that up.

I'll probably be the only one who has forgotten precisely what their homework was. Zen in the midst, in the activity, in the busy eye of the maelstrom, of the early mornings late evenings, of daily routines and weekend commitments of the bulls eye… What time is it? Shit I've been distracted. I've got to be going. It's an hour drive to Rossmoyne.

Six poems

Richard Begley

zendo haiku 1

the water tumble
down the gutter resonates
on the ground of mind

zendo haiku 2

the water tumble
down the gutter sings its tune
the roshi pauses

zendo haiku 3

the water tumble
down the gutter subsides to
just a tinkled drip.

sesshin song 1

koan
koan koan
caw an - crow
arking the morning
unconcerned with self nature
but there nonetheless
no one the less
en

sesshin song 2

attention!
thunderclap!
reverberating still

sesshin song 3

what's in there?
no-one!
come on - I'll count

Not Sparing the Dharma Assets and the Great Practice of Samu

Ross Bolleter and Lizzie Finn - February 4, 2016

Not Sparing the Dharma Assets: Ross Bolleter

Lizzie and I are going to give a joint talk on the Eighth Great Precept: I take up the Way of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets, exploring in a variety of ways the richness that this Precept offers.

Over the past two years I have given a series of talks on the precepts and have looked at each of them – including tonight's precept of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets – as expressions of what it is to live the Way in our lives, of how we put the Way into action in the spirit of not harming others and ourselves. The precepts are also expressions of how we take refuge: which is to say, how we find our home in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Each of the precepts has two verses, the first by Bodhidharma and the second by Dogen, which we chant in the ceremony of Jukai, when the student formally takes up the precepts

I want to acknowledge Robert Aitken Roshi who translated these verses, and indeed our Ceremony of Jukai. It is a matter of joy to me that we practise in a tradition where language is employed so exquisitely to convey the Way. Aitken Roshi is rightly acknowledged for his many inspiring books, but I want to acknowledge him in the more private realm of his translations of the koan literature. If you memorize a koan that he has translated, his rhythms and imagery will have you already well embarked on the koan, opening your heart, and engaging you at the deepest level. I am grateful to both of teachers, Aitken Roshi and John Tarrant for the poetry of their Dharma.

Here is the first of the two verses that accompany the precept of not sparing the Dharma assets in the Jukai Ceremony. It is attributed to Bodhidharma:

Self-Nature is subtle and mysterious,

In the genuine all-pervading dharma

Not being stingy about a single thing

Is called the precept of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets

Dharmas are the things of the world, the events of the world. Each day offers itself unconcerned as to whether we are there for it or not. The sun rises, the moon fades, a little breeze starts up… even in the midst of our unhappiness and alienation the planets align. You can even see Mercury, the faintest of them in that curve, if you get up around 4 o'clock in the morning. Our breath rises and falls regardless of what we think about it, our heart beats regardless, our blood circulates regardless of our opinions about it. Even the unnoticed moment offers itself. The lamp doesn't decide on whom she will shine, the rose offers herself, her reds, her pinks…her scent to us all, regardless. We live in a universe which doesn't spare the dharma assets, not even for an instant.

I was thinking about Bodhidharma's line *'Not being stingy about a single thing is called the precept of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets'* this morning when I was writing this talk, and the phone rang and it was a call on behalf of a charity. The voice started up…'We thank you for your contribution last year', and it's like 'Ahh um, maybe it's someone else's turn if I contributed last year.' That feeling rises unbidden, but I am writing 'Don't be stingy about a single thing' – so I bought the raffle tickets.

Dharmas are also teaching; Dharma is the teaching itself and where do you start? Well, Dogen's verse on this precept is a good place:

One phrase, one verse - that is the ten thousand things and one hundred grasses; one dharma, one realization - that is all Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers. Therefore from the beginning there has been no stinginess at all.

I've told the following story many times, but it feels inexhaustible. A young woman was standing at the head of the line, waiting to go to dokusan. And the student behind her had an opening. When she was asked about what she had realized, she just kept saying, 'But she was just standing there….but she was just standing there…', in amazement….'but she was just standing there.' This is the boundless

generosity of the universe coming forth in all its fullness. Truly, from the beginning there has been no stinginess at all. We are not simply our body. We are not bounded by our skin and our skull. We are the boundless generosity of the Way, which includes us all, and which we embody right here, now. Just this! (slap!), 'just this'…nowhere else to be looking.

The Dharma of money is a subtle and tricky business. There is this great story from Robert Aitken's *Mind of Clover* from his chapter on this precept. He writes: 'The assets of the dharma include money, the test of pure spirit. … The important thing is attitude, to be pure in giving or receiving something, as pure as the act of standing up.' He goes on to illustrate this with a fine story:

> *'When Seisetsu Shuryu Kokushi was Roshi at Engaku Monastery at Kamakura, the dojo needed to be rebuilt to accommodate a large number of monks who had gathered to practice. A wealthy merchant brought 500 pieces of gold….this is an immense amount of money for this purpose, for the purpose of the rebuilding of the dojo. According to the version that Roshi heard from Nakagawa Soen Roshi, Seisetsu Zenji, when the merchant presented the money, just said, 'OK, I'll take it.' The merchant was miffed and said, 'In that sack there are five hundred pieces of gold.' And Sesetsu said, 'You already told me that and went back to the game of Go that he was playing.'*

Master Eckhardt said, 'To give a thousand Marks of gold to build a church or a cloister would be a great thing, but to give a thousand Marks for nothing at all would be a far greater gift.' That is the true spirit of not sparing the Dharma Assets. It is very interesting because gratitude is implicit in such free giving: gratitude for the opportunity to give, to contribute; gratitude for being one among the many who truly give. Even sitting itself feels like an act of undirected gratitude. Just to sit feels like gratitude without an object, gratitude without a direction, gratitude without any expectation of reward. The teacher Amy Hollowell has this beautiful koan: She asks: 'Who benefits from your generosity?'…. Who benefits from your generosity?

There are limits though; if you can't set limits you finally can't be generous. If we exhaust ourselves, we become useless to others. The archetype of the one-thousand-armed Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kuanyin, comes to mind here. All her arms are used to help suffering beings. But, in the middle of each of Kuanyin's hand is an eye and that eye is the eye of discriminating wisdom: the wisdom to work out what is possible for us given our energy and what we can't possibly do given that we are exhausted. Discriminating wisdom is concerned with formulating priorities, and working out the triage of everyday life. 'Triage' in military terms means that the soldier dying of gangrene has a higher priority than the colonel with a headache. If you can't prioritize, if you can't set limits, you can't finally be generous. The precepts are instrumental in helping us to create boundaries for ourselves, and, yes, at times for others in their behaviour towards us. The fact that the precepts are framed in the negative clarifies this…. *I take up the Way of NOT killing, I take up the Way of not stealing*. Sometimes we have to say 'No' to protect the integrity of the student-teacher relationship. I remember many years ago getting a phone call from a woman who wanted to learn accordion from me. We talked on the phone, and agreed on a fee for the lessons. She turned up for her first lesson, and when it was over, she said, 'Look I am sorry, I don't have any money but here are some chocolate chip cookies.' Her chocolate chip cookies were very good. However, after her second lesson, and then after her third lesson, she continued to insist on paying with chocolate chip cookies. I finally had to say to her: 'I'm sorry but my bank manager doesn't accept chocolate chip cookies!' And the lessons stopped abruptly. I guess both parties were setting limits.

The experience of realizing one's self-nature can be the fount of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets. Hakuin, after many awakening experiences could give teisho all day. He was alive for whoever came before him and he had creativity to burn. Here is the little story that shows the skill and generosity of his teaching:

> A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin, and asked: 'Is there really a paradise and a hell?' 'Who are you?', inquired Hakuin. That's a good question indeed. 'I am a Samurai', the warrior replied. 'You a Samurai', exclaimed Hakuin, 'What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar.' The soldier became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued, 'So you have a sword. Your weapon is probably as dull as your mind.' As the soldier drew his sword Hakuin remarked, 'Here open the gates of hell!' At those words the Samurai, perceiving the discipline of the Master, sheathed his sword and bowed. 'Here open the gates of para-

dise', said Hakuin.

Dogen in his verse on the precept of not sparing the Dharma assets writes:

> *One phrase, one verse - that is the ten thousand things and one hundred grasses; one dharma, one realization - that is all Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers. Therefore from the beginning there has been no stinginess at all.*

Dogen's words 'From the very beginning there is no stinginess at all' complement Bodhidharma's 'not being stingy about a single thing.' 'The ten thousand things' is a Chinese metaphor for 'everything.' 'One phrase, one verse': that's everything. 'One hundred grasses' – well the grasses stand for thinking and conceptualizing, as well as delusions and attachments. It is quite witty actually because he is saying: 'One phrase, one verse'…everything gathers as that, including our delusions and attachments, which are accordingly lit by the moon of enlightenment.

On the matter of that "One Phrase, One Verse," even one word is enough. Mari Rhydwen is teaching in our Sangha and coming to do a training period here in April. Well, Mari and Glenn Wallis and Arthur Wells and I were giving an evening of short talks in Glenn Wallis's dojo in Dunedin after sesshin. I gave a little talk on gratitude that arose from the fact that I had mislaid my wallet several times that day, and found it again. Each time I had it back in my hand, I would mumble: 'Thankyou universe.' I continued: 'I am sure there must be a better way to express that.' Mari chimed in – 'Thankyou.' Just that – 'Thankyou.' 'Thankyou' gathers up everything. Thankyou. And now I will hand over to Lizzie for her words on the great practice of Samu.

The Great Practice of Samu: Lizzie Finn

Ross has spoken about generosity of spirit in his talk on the precept of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets. This precept is very much related to this talk now on Samu, which describes ideas that the voluntary Council now running our ZGWA group activities and Ross have started to look at. This is with a view to ensuring the future longevity of our group as an active and thriving community for Zen practice and learning, and also in that way to benefit every member of our Sangha and members to come. The Sangha itself is one of the greatest Dharma assets. It's a place where we have the opportunity to deepen our understanding of interdependence and to learn compassion and wisdom. And Samu is an ideal avenue for this learning – and sometimes I can tell you it's not easy – it can truly be a case of stones rubbing together to become smooth! At other times it feels really good and can be full of humour and fun.

Some of you here tonight will have experienced a rich taste of Samu at the recent Australia Day sesshin – that sense of working in community with care and mindfulness to benefit all sesshin participants. Whether it was cooking, serving, chopping, arranging flowers, washing up, cleaning the toilets or being a leader, all of these roles were directed towards the goal of benefitting the sesshin community - a jigsaw of roles really, which was designed to enable participants to be free to settle comfortably and focus on their practice. I had a sense at the sesshin, both personally, and communally, of people joining in with a great spirit of generosity, and helpfulness and care – and many seemed to truly get a buzz out of working in and for community.

Samu is also a great learning ground whether it is sesshin or the every day running of the sangha. I'd like to tell you a story which I personally experienced with Samu at a sesshin early on in my practice – it was a story which offered me a mirror of learning and great humour in the solution of a dilemma. At that time I was rather a rebellious Zen student. I was given the task of porridge cook at sesshin, or breakfast cook making porridge, and I thoroughly enjoyed the task. I was experimenting successfully with cinnamon and other spices to give the porridge a real tang! And one morning as I was stirring the pot of porridge and 'at one' with the porridge, the Tenzo for the sesshin called Graeme came up to me with a small saucepan containing old porridge from the day before and asked me to combine this porridge into my beautiful fresh cinnamon aromad porridge. I continued to stir silently while thinking 'No way are you going to put that old porridge into my lovely fresh porridge!' but responded in a whisper, 'It's not appropriate'. The Tenzo disappeared and I continued stirring for a few minutes when I looked down and a hand appeared out of nowhere in front of me on another gas burner with that small saucepan of old porridge. Silence prevailed for a few seconds as I considered this dilemma and then suddenly I saw the humour and absurdity of my territorial approach to porridge and thought 'Awwhhh what the hell, I'll let him put it in!' and so I did, and all was well and I narrowly escaped the hell realms.

Anyway, the word Samu derives

from two words in Japanese, 'Sa' for work and 'mu' meaning to devote your attention to something. And in traditional Zen monasteries samu is work that encourages mindfulness, and great importance is placed on working for the community. Zen Masters were known to value and practise Samu diligently. Hakuin Zenji, who we venerate in our sutras, was one of the most important Japanese Zen Masters in the Rinzai School in the 17th and 18th century. He said that meditation in the midst of activity was a thousand times superior to meditation in stillness. And he believed that Great Action is doing what needs to be done, and losing yourself in the act of uniting with the task at hand. The action of doing what needs to be done was seen as voluntary and as a form of generosity. Our Diamond Sangha founder Robert Aitken Roshi wrote that 'Without Samu, Zen Buddhism would be a cult isolated from daily life. Samu is Bodhisattva work in the world'. The great challenge of the Zen Way is taking what we learn in our practice on the cushion and with the teacher out into the world of activity – and Samu offers this opportunity along with our daily lives, our jobs, and our relationships.

In Zen monasteries Samu also has a history as an essential means of maintaining the monastery while practising mindfulness. And work as a critical element of Zen practice began in monasteries with the 8th century Chinese Master Hyakujo. He used to labor with his students even at the age of 80 trimming the gardens, cleaning the grounds, and pruning the trees. One day the pupils felt sorry to see their old teacher working so hard, but they knew he wouldn't listen to their advice to stop, so they hid away his tools. And that day he stopped eating and wouldn't eat the next day or the next. His students believed he was angry because they had hidden his tools and put them back. And on the day they returned the tools, Hyakujo worked and ate the same as before. That evening during teisho he instructed them … 'No work, no food.'

Our Zen group is a lay community and here it's more a case of 'No work - no regular practice, no teaching and no training opportunities….no sesshin'. The Samu tasks in the everyday running of our group inevitably differ from those at a Zen monastery, but they are just as essential. Currently most of these tasks are carried out by the voluntary ZGWA group Council with Ross's participation and guidance. And I'm on the Council this year and we're a group of usually around 6 volunteers who meet monthly for a meeting taking up a weekend morning. If you've been here a while, you'll know that the group and our teachers are currently putting on a rich program of activities including, for this year: two extended sesshins, an extended new training event this April, five 1-day zazenkais, talks, teishos, weekly practice, frequent dokusan, and fundraising and social events. In my fairly long-term experience on Council over many years, on and off since 2000, the ability to offer such a rich and beneficial program depends very much on how the Zen Council is faring – sometimes it has been hard to find more than 4 members to sit on Council, and sometimes some members have been unable to offer much time. Then the group energy can tend to dwindle and things fall off. At other times, like now, we've got a really committed and enthusiastic team who are putting in many hours of work. Council has tended to undertake just about all the many tasks needed to be done to keep the ZGWA wheels rolling, apart from our long-serving member Paul Wilson who turns up, rain or shine, early every week to set up the dojo. The trouble with this tendency to do most of the tasks is threefold: Council members can burn out, and when Council members who give many hours of work step down after two years, it can leave a huge gap which may not be filled. And most important is the fact that when Council does just about everything it really disempowers the Sangha – how can Sangha members learn about doing what needs to be done if they don't get the opportunity to do it? And how can they benefit from this very real opportunity to engage and to deepen wisdom and compassion?

I'd like here to include a Samu story with humour from a sort of Zen agony aunty discussion website that I came across. A Zen student asked about Samu in a piece which he entitled, 'Confessions of a wayward Zen Buddhist'. The student wrote, 'I have read that in Zen any activity performed in a mindful way can lead to enlightenment. That means mowing the lawn or scrubbing bathroom tiles can be a path to enlightenment, just as sitting meditation is. But I find that my mind wanders, to say the least, when doing tasks called Samu. I would much rather meditate or read sutras or light incense sticks…anything but peel potatoes or doing the cleaning! Do you have any advice for a somewhat wayward Zen practitioner with this kind of aversion? Is Zen the wrong path for me?' Here came the response to his plea 'It may well be the wrong path, but you might consider that any path you take is going to involve doing things that you would prefer

not to do. If what you do agrees with your preferences 100 per cent of the time, how would it be possible to learn anything?' And here I will add that at times making time to perform Samu tasks is quite a commitment and can seem hard and time-consuming.

Unlike this student, I've had quite a few Sangha members here coming up to me to say they would like to help more in the running of the Sangha and to let them know what they can do. Well here goes……. there are many useful tasks the Sangha can help with – some of them require little time, like putting out the literature, and incense and CDs before the regular weekly sit at the back of the hall , others need more time like rostering for one month to come early on Thursdays around 6pm to help set up the dojo, and staying at the end to finalize closing it. There's a Zendo care and repair task looking after tea supplies and mending zafus and zabutons when needed, as well as every now and again washing or black drapes andaltar cloths, here and in the dokusan room, and the teacher's dokusan water serviette. There is also the task of helping Council members if there is a large mail out or other large admin task. And fundraising is another very important task. Also, if you are interested in sitting on Council every year at our AGM you can put your name forward.

I must emphasize, we are really aware that just about everyone here leads very busy lives, some with full-time jobs and for some of you it may not be possible to volunteer – and that's just as it is and completely OK. However, if you would like to, and are able to engage more in the running of our Zen group so it becomes a community that we share a part in running, that would be really welcome.

I'll close this Samu talk by saying that at the back of the dojo at St Paul's Church where we sit, on green paper is a list of Samu tasks that can be undertaken by the Sangha. If you would like to put your name down against any or many of the several tasks listed that you would be willing to do, that gives us the chance to sort it all out so that each volunteer gets just one task. We intend to rotate tasks over time and to draw up relevant rosters as soon as we can. Our Sangha is already thriving as a community and your contribution to everyday Samu tasks would be enormously helpful towards ensuring this continues for years to come. We have a vision of this kind of lay Samu becoming a living and ongoing part of our community …. it will boost our sense of travelling the Way together and learning together, and create an ongoing space for future Bodhisattvas to benefit from Zen practice.

Flower arrangement by Judith Peppard for the 2016 Spring Sesshin. Photograph by Paul Wilson.

Memoirs on Gili Meno

Jula Mallaby

1st April, 2015 Gili Meno Lombok

Sparkling glittering gentle waves
Cloud covered mountains making shapes to delight and amuse
Only a quiet watchful eye with day dreaming time will notice
Moments merge into moments

Time seems to stop
Days unfold into more days
Nothing to report

Heads bobbing around joining the movement of ocean
Sounds filling the air are wave hitting shore soft guitar soft singing

Ferries both public and private enter the harbour clip clopping of horse and cart

Returning snorkellers sun ripened bodies some like lobsters others richly tanned all skin tones

An island that once had few inhabitants but some fishermen now families and a couple of generations call this place home

Oh to take in this peaceful existence Where basic respect over rides the need for rules and laws

Our days are spent in the hammock under a beach shelter 8 metres from the water shell mobiles dangling from sprawling coastal trees that shade us

Me and my son, Che', his Happy 25th Birthday tomorrow 8 days together on this island

Our time together again in South East Asia after 11 whole years

A fortunate Mum am I A proud one At times he is truly my teacher Always respectful and a deep knowing and understanding naturally emerges from his being No cultural awareness course necessary for this young man He gets it!

Treading softly on white sand Jalan jalan No rushing here Off to the day's resting spot where we savour every bit of this peaceful life.

Meeting Dōgen's Words on the Way

Kathy Shiels - A talk at St Paul's Dojo

Introduction

During our Zazenkais and Sesshins when chant our First Sutra Service Dedication we pay tribute to *Dōgen Kigen Dai Osho*. *Dai Osho* means great priest[1], and I'm sure any of you could take this seat tonight to share your meetings with the words of Dōgen Kigen, also known as Dōgen Zenji, Eihei Dōgen or simply Dōgen. As Aitken Roshi states in his book 'Taking the Path of Zen':

> *Dōgen is a teacher of towering importance in Buddhism generally as well as within his own tradition of Zen.*[2]

I thank our teacher, Ross Bolleter, for decades of his teaching and for asking me to contribute to our Dharma sharing; our exchange of words and phrases; tonight on Dōgen who in his style, which is poetic and paradoxically intriguing, wrote:

> *"Discriminating is words and phrases, and words and phrases liberate discriminating thought."*[3]

As I prepared these words and phrases for tonight's talk, I did so trusting one of Dōgen's favourite words *Shōshin* translated as *Beginner's Mind*. The term was brought to us vividly, by Shunryo Suzuki with his book title: 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind.' As a beginner in the study of Dōgen's texts, I offer this talk in appreciation for his words which encourage me along the Way.

First encounter

The encouragement I speak of began in 1974. Under London's grey skies I was far from home and lost in the sudden demise of my young marriage. I headed to Kos, a Greek Island (as you do) with my tiny book 'Springs of Oriental Wisdom' in my backpack. A Californian traveller introduced me to Suzuki's 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind'; published just four years before and it soon became 'my bible' with its quotes from and references to Dōgen. I still re read it these days because of Suzuki's clarity in transmitting the essence of Dōgen's instructions on Zen meditation and practice.

Uji The Time-being

On page 33 Suzuki introduced me to and expanded on Dōgen's unique understanding of time. He only quoted one phrase:

> *Time goes from present to past.*[4]

Yet, I felt strangely met by that little phrase. In Greece, I would take Suzuki's slim book with me on long walks and find an outcrop, often just down from a whitewashed chapel on top of a hill. There I tried zazen for the first time; counting breaths freshly fragrant with wild herbs. At times, distant tinklings of goat bells would make their way through the turmoil of pain in the legs, thoughts and feelings. Fleetingly, I would settle into a straight back and warm sunshine, but for the most part the loss of my marriage was turning time upside down, roundabout, forward and back each moment.

I'm sure we have all experienced sudden loss in one way or another; when clock-time stands still, winds back, rushes on and loops into the rhythm of heart-time. It rips the veil of our contrived notions of time as something separate with sequence and order, to reveal time expressing itself as everything in existence here and now. Dōgen, reputedly Japan's first philosopher, is perhaps the only religious leader in history who has written on the nature of Time. And in more recent years, I've become aware of his full text 'Uji' 'The Time-Being' from which Suzuki quoted the short mysterious phrase that I resonated with all those years ago. In his text 'The Time-being' Dōgen wrote:

> *. . .time itself is all being, and all being is time.(Fascicle 1)*[5]

> *Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away. (Fascicle 5)*[6]

> *Because all moments are the time-being, they are your time-being. (Fascicle 7)*[7]

> *So-called today flows into tomorrow, today flows into yesterday, yesterday flows into today. And today flows into today, tomorrow flows into tomorrow. (Fascicle 8)*[8]

I take note of 'so-called' and other phrases such as 'moments that appear to be' or 'seems to be' throughout his text because with them Dōgen cautions us from our habitual and myopic ideas on the nature of time. Time isn't out there, early or late; it's completely in the face of now as moments arise from each other and within each other. Our teacher, Ross Bolleter Rōshi frequently reminds us with his refrains:

> *There is no such thing as waiting*

He wrote in his book Dongshan's

Five Ranks: Keys to Enlightenment:

Every moment is up for this….

and

…between breaths, lifetimes pass, all of them gathered into this puckering of time we call now. [10]

Nevertheless, Dōgen compassionately acknowledged our limited understanding of time when he wrote:

People only see time's coming and going, and do not thoroughly understand that the time-being abides in each moment. (Fascicle 12) [11]

I have experienced several sudden or accidental losses in my life and as some of you know, eight weeks ago I faced the impossible challenge of conceding that Ella, my cherished canine companion of fifteen years, needed to be euthanised. In the weeks since the sudden shock, I have grappled with Buddhist ethics and the precepts and I could say more about that, but here I can say that the situation presented its poignant taste of truth; the truth of impermanence of form but inclusiveness of all time in each moment. Ella's form dissolved like the form of a cloud dissolves. Gone forever and not gone at all. *(Woof!)* Dōgen's words deeply encourage me to stay present to the being of time. Loss of a loved one as described by Dōgen was the pivotal event in the course of his life.

Dōgen's life

Dōgen was born in 1200 in Kyoto, Japan, and much of his family details are the subject of scholarly conjecture, but it is agreed that he was born to aristocratic parents in a period of great upheaval and imperial power conflicts in Japan. His reputed father died when he was three years old and his foster father was a distinguished poet and editor of a celebrated imperial anthology of waka (a traditional Japanese poem form), so as a boy; Dōgen received a high tutorial education in Chinese literature and Japanese poetry. He was destined for an imperial position. However, his mother's death, when he was only eight years old, changed the course of his life. Dōgen stood at his mother's funeral watching the smoke from the incense waft away and much later in his life wrote:

Realising the impermanence of life, I began to arouse the way-seeking mind. [12]

At the age of thirteen, he went to Mt Hiei to become a Buddhist monk at the headquarters of the dominant Tendai Sect. However, disenchanted the teaching and the politically affiliated warrior monks[13] he found no answer on Mt Hiei to his compelling question:

If all beings have Buddha nature, why did Buddhas and ancestors have to arouse Bodhi mind and practice? Why does anyone have to practice? [14]

Dōgen carried his question deeply and followed his restless heart travelling to a number of monasteries in the early 1200s. In the early 1980s, during four nomadic years of travelling between Perth and Hawaii; sitting Sesshins with John Tarrant when he visited the Zen Group of WA and Aitken Rōshi with the Honolulu Diamond Sangha, I discovered Dōgen's elegant poem, 'On Nondependence of Mind.'[15] I wrote it on the inside cover of journals and on bookmarks as I crossed continents then moved to the vast Inlet of Denmark in the 1990s and returned here to the wide reaches of the Swan River ten years ago. This favourite verse, as translated by R.H. Blyth, is:

The waterbird wanders here and there

Leaving no trace

Yet her path she never forgets. [16]

In that verse I find, as Ross Bolleter often quotes from Eduardo Galeano, a 'true contemporary.'

Back to the 1200s…when Dōgen continued visiting monasteries until it was suggested he study with the abbot, Eisai, who had twice visited China and brought back teachings from the Chinese Linji School to his Tendai affiliated monastery, Kennin-ji, in Kyoto. Myōzen became abbot after Eisai's death and Dōgen formed a firm bond with the new abbot. They travelled to China together in 1223, in search of *authentic teachings.*

Dōgen finally met and stayed with Rujing, a Caodong abbot of Tiantong Mountain where just sixty or so years before, Hongzhi Zhengjue had been abbot and written his wonderful verse entitled 'Silent Illumination' which is one of the readings in our sutra books. Some of its lines are:

Silence is the final teaching

Illumination is the universal response…

The response is devoid of effort.

The teaching is not heard with the ears. [17]

At Tiantong Mountain, Dōgen would have met elderly monks who had sat with Hongzhi and his poem 'The Point of Zazen, after Zen Master Hongzhi'[18] pays tribute with its echo of the old Master's teachings. As the second of Hongzhi's descendants, Rujing taught Dōgen who stayed five years until in his own words he had completed his:

Life's study of the great matter. [19]

In his poem 'Snow' Dōgen wrote of his struggle and earnest quest for authentic teachings:

All my life false and real, right and wrong tangled.

Playing with the moon, ridicul ing wind, listening to birds…

Many years wasted seeing the mountain covered with snow.

This winter I suddenly realise snow is the mountain. [20]

Dōgen returned to Japan in 1227, adopting Rujing's understanding that there was only one Dharma, dismissing distinctions between different schools and sects, so it is ironic that Dōgen is most famous as the founder of the Sōto school. When he first arrived home in Japan, he stayed in Kyoto and taught with the support of lay people connected to his former aristocratic circle.

However, 'The Roaring Stream' edited by Nelson Foster in 1996, refers to one Tendai document which told of how the powerful Tendai sect, with its links to the imperial court, was critical of Dōgen and that tired of defending himself, Dōgen and most of his monks left Kyoto and relocated to the mountainous, rural area of Echizen, now Fukui Prefecture. His monastery, Daibutsu, he renamed Eihei-ji in 1246 and it was there he wrote prolifically until when unwell in September 1253, he journeyed to Kyoto and died in the home of a lay student.

His prolific writings, especially his great life work 'The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye' or 'Shōbō Genzō,' are the cornerstone of practice for Sōto teachers and students worldwide today. 'Nonseparation' Kazuaki Tanahashi states, as editor of the most recent (2010) edition, may be the one word he would use if he attempted to sum up Dōgen's teaching.[21] Dōgen's teaching of practice-enlightenment; that Zazen itself is enlightenment was profound and ground-breaking. He wrote:

When even for a moment you sit upright in Samadhi expressing the buddha mudra in the three activities, the whole world of phenomena becomes the buddha's mudra and the entire sky turns into enlightenment. [22]

Yet for over 600 years after his death, his writings were not well known beyond his own community and only in 1965 did Aitken Rōshi and Kazuaki Tanahashi collaborate to publish the first English translation of his most revered text (which we read in our sutra books): 'Genjō Kōan' or 'Actualising the Fundamental Point.' Seventeen years later in 1982, Aitken Rōshi wrote his classic 'Taking the Path of Zen.' It is imbued with Dōgen's teachings and on page 66 he wrote of his Sanbō Kyōdan lineage that:

It is an independent sect of Zen Buddhism intended as a revitalisation of the line of Dōgen.[23]

I recall hearing Aitken Rōshi quoting lines from 'Genjō Kōan' during my time in Honolulu and their mysterious poetic style intrigued me. In his Teishos, classes and many of his books Aitken Rōshi repeated some of the most commonly cited lines. Among them, from the seminal book, 'Moon in a Dewdrop' edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi and published in 1985 were:

To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion.

That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening. [24]

Eihei-ji

While not understanding those lines I always felt encouraged and uplifted on hearing them in the dojo in Honolulu, so in 1990, when it was time to finally return to Perth, I spent a month in Japan on the way home and briefly visited Dōgen's monastery, Eihei-ji.

It was autumn and chilly in the mountains. I stayed in the large guest accommodation building near giant Redwoods and ancient Gingko trees; quietly dropping golden leaves. Through the monastery grounds a loudly rushing stream flowed. I stood in awe next to the ancient boulders and stream where Dōgen would have stood and since I've enjoyed reading his line:

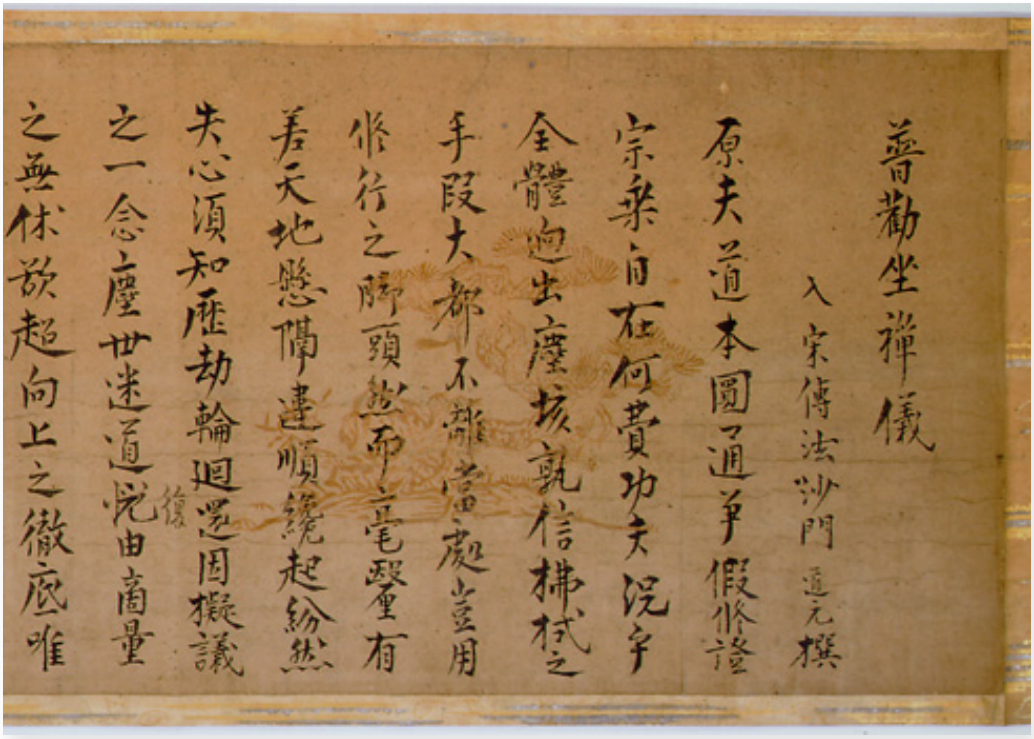
The sound of running water is Buddha's great speech. [25]

In the early morning, I sat in the Dharma hall where more than 200 monks chanted the Heart Sutra in Sino-Japanese. When my name was chanted as part of the dedication to the monastery's visitors, tears filled my eyes. Before I left I gathered some fallen Gingko leaves to press into souvenir bookmarks and shared them with folk in the Sangha in Perth. Eihei-ji, Dōgen's place greatly encouraged me along the Way.

In recent years, with my teachers' encouragement, I have been reading more of Dōgen's texts. I joyfully encounter his enigmatic style of word play, paradox, contradiction, metaphor and steady encouragement. He wrote so profusely that as a beginning student I know I'll die not having met all his words or the incredible range of commentaries on them by Zen scholars.

As our teacher Mari Rhydwen said to me last year:

He had lay students and a huge number of monks at Eihei-ji. He wrote text books for them.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原夫道本圓通爭假修證
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手段大都不離當處豈用
修行之辦頭然而毫釐有
差天地懸隔違順纔起紛然
失心須知歷劫輪迴覓因擬議
之一念塵世迷道(復)況由斯量
之無休歇超向上之徹底唯

Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen, by Dōgen, 1233. Public domain.

Eiheiji, Fukui prefecture, Japan. Licensed under Creative Commons.

It's true he wrote instructions for every activity such as cooking, eating, washing and getting dressed. I find he instructs and he cautions, plays and reassures, but most of all his paradoxical style constantly turns everything around leaving nothing to hold on to – except trust in Zazen.

Zazen is the key to practice for Dōgen because while every moment, whether sitting Zazen or in the midst of everyday activities, offers its taste of true reality, doing formal Zazen sharpens the tastebuds. Dōgen provides no short cuts nor escape routes. Sitting and a lot of it is his essential. Our sitting practice grounds us and wakens us to the mischief we can make of our everyday activities. This was most evident to me during our recent training period with Mari Rhydwen when participants reported on how additional sitting illuminated their usual daily activities.

Genjō Kōan

Dōgen goes to the heart of why we practice in the title of his best known text; 'Genjō Kōan'. Norman Fischer Rōshi, a contemporary Zen teacher, who I met very briefly at Green Gulch Farm in California in the 1980s, says that to study Dōgen without Japanese is a sad thing. At best we read translations. Strangely, I have always felt a closer affinity to the Japanese title than to the English translation 'Actualising the Fundamental Point', so as someone who isn't literate in Japanese, I was delighted to recently investigate Shohaku Okumura's comments, in his book 'Realising Genjokoan' published in 2010. Okumura has been studying the Genjō Kōan in Japanese for thirty five years and he writes about the characters or kanji Dōgen used to write that title.

Okumura acknowledges the usual translation of Kōan as a public case; of a turning point that we need to make our own, and reveals that the kanji Dōgen used for 'Kō' refers to equality of all things, absolute, emptiness, while the kanji for 'an' refers to uniqueness, relative, form. Shohaku Okumura says:

> *With these kanji 'Kōan' expresses the reality of our own lives; we are the intersection of equality (universality, unity, oneness of all beings and inequality (difference, uniqueness, particularity, individuality. Reality, or emptiness, includes both unity and difference.*[26]

Norman Fischer comments that this is what we grapple with as the koan of our life and that with Zazen we 'show up' and 'actualise' this truth of our nature.

Perhaps Dōgen's most well-known words on the practice of Zen are:

> *To study the buddha is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self.*
>
> *To forget the self is to be actualised by myriad things. When actualised by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the body and mind of others drop away. No trace of realisation remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.*[27]

I've learnt from Okumura that the word 'study' doesn't have our usual associations. The kanji intends the meaning of 'to become intimate with', so to become intimate with the Buddha way is to become intimate with the self. All is contained here (gesture head to toe) in our sensations, feelings, mental reactions and consciousness.

…To study the self is to forget the self… Here is the rub. Nothing is unchanging, the fiction we construct as the self, clothed in roles; Kathy, sister, employee, neighbour, is simply a constellation of experiences and conditions that we do well to leave at the door of the dojo. As Arthur Wells put it in Balingup in 2014:

> *We can relax the face and let go of all the masks it's worn that day.*

Ross Bolleter constantly reminds us:

> *We are not bounded by our skin. We are not bounded by our skull. We are not bounded by our thoughts of who we are.*

When we sit Zazen we can give these constructs of self a rest. I believe this is the rest that Aitken Rōshi referred to when he wrote:

> *Buddha nature breathes in and out, but is always at rest.*[28]

Yes, in Zazen we soften each sinew and muscle, but moreover we soften and put to rest our fabrication of a fixed self. Dōgen wrote that the self is not a personal possession and I find it helpful to recall the words of Glenn Wallis who said during his transmission Sesshin in 2010:

> *The universe is searingly impartial in its flourish of you.*[29]

In forgetting the self, myriad things come forth in their impartiality. They experience themselves.

That's it! No separation between self and the environment: tummy rumble, traffic, floor boards, candle light.

> *When actualised by myriad things your body and mind and the body and mind of others drop away.*

For many years, beginning with Dōgen's third generation successor, Keizan Jokin, interpretations of this line had it as expressing Dōgen's pivotal realisation experience. Okumura refutes this understanding and asserts that the words describe

the active process of practice-enlightenment as taught by Dōgen and expounded throughout his writing.

I am encouraged by Okumura's interpretation because for decades, I struggled; striving to shed delusion and gain realisation when Dōgen asserts both are here all along. As Mari Rhydwen described last year:

> *It's like that drawing in which we can see a beautiful young woman and an old crone, they are both there, but we can only see one at a time.*

How encouraging! Meeting Dōgen's words on the Way has brought trust and commitment to my practice. Trust! Trust Zazen! But I commend you to meet Dōgen's words for yourself. The wonderful poet Ryōkan met them in the nineteenth century and exquisitely wrote:

> *One evening sitting by the lamp*
> *my tears wouldn't stop,*
>
> *and soaked into the records of*
> *the ancient buddha Eihei*
>
> *In the morning the old man next*
> *door came to my thatched hut.*
>
> *He asked me why the book was*
> *damp,*
>
> *I wanted to speak but didn't as I*
> *was deeply embarrassed;*
>
> *my mind deeply distressed, it was*
> *impossible to give an explanation.*
>
> *I dropped my head for a while,*
> *then found some words.*
>
> *"Last night's rain leaked in and*
> *drenched my bookcase."*[30]

May rain leak in and drench your bookcase.

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29. Glenn Wallis cited in Ross Bolleter *Dongshan's Five Ranks: Keys to enlightenment* Wisdom Publications, USA 2014 pg.67

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Poem for Josepha Petrick Kemarre

Gerard Mazza

I eat my breakfast
Beneath your paintings
Of the wild bush plum.

Your little berries, *anwakety*,
Are poisonous when not ripe
And given by the earth.

I eat yoghurt, oats,
And strawberries,
All taken from plastic packaging.

You remind me that nothing is
small.

Dream Haiku

John Turner

1.
A cool spell –
something is resolved
in dreams

2.
A wave of sleep –
in the magic theatre
players appear

3.
A wet dream –
one I needn't discuss
with my therapist

4.
A forest log hut –
in catch up slumber
erotic dreams

5.
Honey-suckle!
The turn
home

6.
Alone
her name rings with
Bell birds

One With the Footy

A personal journey towards Zen through playing Aussie Rules Football

Phil McNamara - Part Two of Three

There are three main kinds of discipline required during a Football game. The first is of restraint – one has to hold position and not get prematurely pulled into the game. The second is of constructive awareness – one must see what is happening and concurrently deconstruct and creatively reconstruct what is unfolding; so that one's concentration and ability to respond stays at the crest of the rolling surge. The third kind of discipline is this concentration. It allows the insight and energy of your contribution to be keyed to the surge. Right action is the result. A feeling of tireless buoyancy is what it allows. It is also quite joyful as from this state one plays with a precognitive and intuitive sense. For example after my best games I remembered the brackets around the plays rather than the entire set. That is I'd see an opposition player streaming from the centre with the ball, know where it was going to be kicked and where the player it was being kicked to would receive it, then somehow cover the 30 metres to chest mark in front of the bewildered intended receiver. It would also confuse the spectators as I'd seemingly teleported in from nowhere. Perhaps I had, as after such plays I only ever recalled deciding to take the mark and then finding myself with it in my arms or having already marked and kicked it on to one of my team mates. It just seemingly all happened by itself. Afterwards there were always questions about how I had been able to cover the distance in just a few seconds. I just knew, through the intensity of my concentration, that it could be done and so did it. Such weekly feats made me start to wonder about the mind and human limitations. Not that I could always, when such things started happening, play in this state. I knew it had started happening because of my focus, but initially the "think of something intensely and then wake up after it has happened" had an uncanny aspect that spooked me. For a year or two I oscillated between being too self-conscious and being too anxious about what such a state meant to regularly get there.

Through regular training one develops focus, discipline and conditioning. One can't stop and start, go on holiday and return at the same level. One can't try to seriously train and concurrently take up regular partying. Yet as already suggested a great number of players, who say that they take their football seriously, take a haphazard approach. They baulk at the commitment. They baulk at curtailing their socialising. They baulk at the specialised diets and doing the specific training practices a coach and trainer will devise for their improvement. But if one keeps at it constantly, including maintaining some sort of training routine on the off season, there is the moment of assimilation. That is eventually one might develop body-mind harmony where skills come to the fore as required. It is when knowledge about the skill no longer remains planning about some particular action, but when knowledge itself acts. From the outside it looks like you are playing with natural instinct or intuition. You are, but it has taken a lot of training.

The coaching you receive is important for how your skills, insights and persistence grow. There are two types of footy coaches – form coaches and emptiness coaches. Both types tell you to put the team first and foremost, and not to worry about individual achievements, yet both also notice individual strengths and weaknesses and encourage you to become "well-rounded".

Form coaches like you to run endless ball or team drills and tend to yell a lot. Mine also liked to sometimes eye-ball you and physically poke or prod your chest to put emphasis on what their spit was stating. This type also tended to give out physical punishments, belittle you in front of others, call you names and never say anything positive. In contemporary sport coaching the boot camp antics have decreased, however form coaches are still out there yelling and drilling and telling undisciplined players to run another lap of the oval.

In footy emptiness coaches are fewer in number and tend to be the specialist or visiting observer coaches. They teach you by their own presence alongside you at training and their modelling of skills, or by minimal but individual and pointed guidance. Thus they demonstrate the elegance and pres-

ence of an embodied skill, or they silently but dynamically observe you and then make a single suggestion or correct an element of your posture and say why that creates a better dynamic or angle. The names are now probably not know by many, but legends of the game such as Polly Farmer, Mal Brown, Barry Cable and Kevin Sheedy had these qualities, and I always enjoyed having them come down to coach us "juniors". Some unexpectedly turned up every now and then at club training, but usually past players and coaches of this calibre came along to coach at a development camp of promising players at the district or state level.

At the development camps we were told that to play professional football (which was expected to be our goal) we had to learn to effectively pass the ball with either foot or either hand. Nearly all of us had spent our lives passing the ball with a favoured foot or hand. It was requested that we regularly practice disposing of the ball from both sides of the body. There was always an exercise just after we were told this, in which we had to use our "non-preferred" side. In this exercise there was much laughing and clumsy kicking or punching of air. But after that there was no further requirement to train both sides of our body and most of us fell quickly back to old habits. I attended a couple of camps before I took the request seriously. The change to my attitude came about when Kevin Sheedy – a well-known champion player and coach – took us for a few camp sessions.

Sheedy made the yearly request that we learn to effectively dispose of the ball from either side, but showed us why. He told us that we had to be able to naturally use either side of our bodies and that this 'naturalness' would take lots of practice. He said that such a skill would broaden our capabilities and make the way we would turn to dispose of the ball unpredictable to the opposition. He then lined us up in single file about twenty metres in front of him and then, one by one, kicked the ball along the ground to us. We had to gather the ball and pass it around him or over him to a player moving around about 20 metres behind. He then proceeded to demonstrate to every single one of us how easy it was for him to block our passes as how we moved towards the ball made it easy for him to predict which way we would go to dispose of it. He was there for three days and repeated the exercise, including one in front of the goals where the aim was to pick the ball up and score. The ball smothered or a kick out of bounds was the most frequent outcome. By day three he was really frustrating us. Just when you thought you'd fooled him and had free space, he'd pluck you off the ball from behind or there'd be his gnarly hand suddenly materialising to block the line of your kick. He eventually had up to five short piggledy queues attempting to get past him. One of five balls would quickly come back out and we'd gather and kick at goal. He managed to block our efforts until most of us were bent over or sprawled on the ground from exhaustion. After the medley of rapid fire kicks was done he simply stood there in front of us with a twinkle in his eyes. At that moment I wanted to be him. I listened when he calmly said "From the standpoint of the ball there is no left and right. Apply this to your own body."

In case you are wondering after that camp I took the time and learnt to hand ball, tackle or pivot to either side with there being no difference in accuracy or strength. However my kicking became more accurate from my left foot and more penetrating or longer on the right. But the only one I ever played against who seemed to work it out was Brad Hardy who, years later, went on to win the Brownlow medal as the National Australian Football League's fairest and best. I was consoled by the fact that Sheedy had also said "We use a less-than-perfect body", so do the best you can.

Some other exercises Sheedy did with me – and I can't recall him doing these with anyone else – was a series of tackling and spoiling exercises. He knew I had begun to specialise as a back-man and spent a few moments each day coaching me on how to position myself, tackle and get the ball. One of the tasks was Sheedy grasping the ball and telling me to get it off him. His grip was phenomenal but the lesson was the one who grasps the ball is the ball itself. It's hard to put into words but truly, if the one who grasps the ball is himself the one who is grasped … the ball isn't moving. You can't pry the ball from the ball. You can however concentrate so much on the ball that you never see the player and so can become the one who grasps. In other words you replace the other player with yourself. In Zen we might say emptiness itself is form, thus there is no difference between you, the other player or the ball and you replace them with you. With Sheedy I'm sure he let me pry the ball off him at least once, he wanted to encourage me, but the first time it happened I somehow found myself holding the ball and there was Sheedy grinning back at me. I felt wild eyed and was certainly sweaty, but I sobered up when he snatched the ball back. Whoever maintains their concentration wins;

another lesson. Sheedy's kindness was that he didn't just tell me what to do. Indeed ask him something and he was more likely to remain silent and go fetch a ball, or say "I won't say", than tell you anything. He knew that there is a big difference between having understood it in your head and having grasped the reality of it. Sheedy help you grasp the reality.

The transitions between group sessions, as also occurs during the breaks during a game, allowed for questions. There are many kinds of questions asked of a coach or the team leaders. There are two broad categories of questions: holding fast or letting go questions. They include beginner's questions, clarifying questions, demonstrative questions, analytic questions, echoing statement questions, challenging question and so on. The important thing, if you are a leader within the team, is that the questions show where the player is at; they might show one-sided thinking, a holding on to a particular way of doing things, or a willingness to enquire, reflect and change. Their beauty is that they always show the mind state of the player who voices the question. Like dokusan very important if one is to work through the layers of conditioning which hold you back. Like belonging to a Sangha every player in some ways is a coach and every individual player relies on the others for something. Because of this you value your team mates and you encourage each other. Myriad dharmas.

Yet these training sessions also made very conscious what I had already concluded that on a footy field you are alone. You are all one in that you are the ball, the grass, the other players. You are also alone in the sense that there is no other player on the field. There is a you, but that is also a dream. In the Zen sense by playing or training fully you bring about the dropping away of body and mind of both yourself and others. You can therefore get the ball anytime you want to. I have come to see that I had also learnt this from just going down to the park and kicking the ball back and forwards to myself. I got to intimately know the ball and how it bounced and how I should twist and turn on grass. I still enjoy going past an oval and seeing a lone dedicated player kicking their ball back and forth to themselves or running sets of patterns. Kicking high, running and marking it, dribbling a kick towards the goal then running to intervene, or running sets of 20 then 50 then 100 metre sprints, then running the sets down again. I like to think they are discovering what I discovered – they are the sky and grass, the goals and ball, their legs and arms and breath. They don't need anything else.

I would go to sleep at night holding a ball and constantly visualise a ball. I use to walk around with a football tossing it from hand to hand, kicking and chasing it, bouncing it, fixing its shape in my mind. The experience of Familiarization; the state of knowing the shape of the ball being firmly there whenever I reached for it. You can gain complete mastery of space and find the stability of a ball bouncing or flying or rolling if your mind is use to clearly and calmly locating the flow of that shape under various conditions.

Another approach which assisted in embedding the same empty but full focus was my taking up of the statement "Get the ball". Getting the ball is the very basic requirement for winning a game. At nights, when lying in bed, I had started pondering "How do I get the ball?" Soon the question was being repeated day and night, so much so that it became my default thought. It was similar to koan practice. Over about a year of repetition this morphed into "Get the ball", then "The ball", then to just "Ball, ball, ball, ball."

Working towards being able to just focus on "ball" improved my concentration tremendously. At first other thoughts kept distracting me, but then such distractions came and disappeared. That is the distractions were never stable and thus didn't have to be supressed or engaged with. The focused on thought became the foundation or fundamental core of you. Thus throughout, at the centre of my mind, then my heart, then my gut was "ball". It came about that I could expand or descend to just being the ball. With such focus you do not hesitate when going for the actual ball and no one can rival you. You can penetrate the deepest pack, make the most difficult mark, deal with numerous bumps and pushes, twists and turns and keep your balance. For a player in this state time stands still or speeds up as required. For example, that everything seems to be active is a delusion. There is not a single flowing football. When you look with focus there is just a footy shape going on and off within different points of space. The moments between each separate point is the empty space which allows you unlimited access to that ball. Such seeing cuts of the ground, cuts off your position, cuts of continuity, however it allows great freedom of play. Another way of saying the same thing is that the whole field of play is intimately reflected in every player. Thus I didn't have to be anywhere near the ball to be in or influencing the game. Accordingly as a backman my staying on my man

showed I was a vessel for the goal being kicked by my team's forward down the other end. Dogen says we can be "like the dewdrop not obstructing the heavens". This is the spirit of intimacy and our wondrous practice. It is also on the edge of that flow of spaciousness - the becoming-process - we can sit in during zazen. Consequently when I first chanted The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra, I felt I had come home:

> *form is no other than emptiness,*
>
> *emptiness no other than form;*
>
> *form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form;*
>
> *sensation, perception, mental reaction, consciousness are also like this.*

Ready awareness gives a concurrency to consciousness that holds or operates in both a macro and a micro focus all the time. You can make use of the realm of large or small or act fully by realising the abundance and function of what manifests. There is no limit to this field; it is vast and limitless sky just like Buddha nature. Another way of saying it is that when the need is great the function is great; when the need is small the function is small.

At first getting focused involved some prolonged rituals. These started with my father waxing and polishing my boots two days prior to a game and leaving them in full view of the family dining table to dry; they were a constant reminder that I had to play well. Then to improve my performance I was given certain foods to eat as game day approached. Getting to bed early the day before, getting to the game ground on game day at a certain time, getting dressed, warming up and running out onto the field in a particular sequence, also became part of my absorption rituals. On game day a heightened mental focus is as essential as any physical ability, technical mastery, or knowledge of the game. However I also knew such rituals were mostly absurd and eventually weened myself off them so that I could feel relaxed yet also ready. Zen would simply describe this state of relaxed awareness as openness.

It wasn't too difficult, once I knew how, to get into this state of absorption. I found I could take it into ordinary life: absorbed in reading; absorbed in watching dust floating in a shard of light; absorbed in sitting on a jetty looking into the dancing shadows within and reflected upon the water. However such absorption annoyed my parents. They couldn't understand how they could take me to visit Mum's uncle, who lived on the Murray river, and I'd spend hours just sitting still on his jetty staring into the water. Similarly mum would call me out for dinner and I wouldn't hear. I'd finally feel her shaking or poking me and red of face because I'd been "ignoring" her. Friends had to also sometimes prevent me from walking out onto a busy road or stepping into a ditch. It concerned them all, but one pointed focus seemed a good skill to me. Nevertheless there should be the same caution given at the end of footy training as is given at the end of intensive Zazen: "Please be careful, you might not realise it but your perceptions and reactions have been altered…"

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However my parents kept worrying. They considered me anti-social and insisted that I watch television with them every evening. Mum also worried that I might be reverting to autistic type behaviours that had concerned her when I was a toddler. Even though countless trips to Princess Margaret Children's hospital and numerous tests had decided I wasn't on any dysfunctional spectrum, she still worried. Mum said that I'd often looked at a rock or piece of bark or tree leaf for a good half hour or collect such objects, line them up along the driveway or back path, then spend all day pondering their sequence, rearranging them and sitting somewhere along my queue as if I was on a train.

I vividly recall doing such things; my favourite tree, the edge of the path, and the feeling that I was

honouring both the uniqueness and similarities of what was to be discovered in the world around me. It meant that much later, when studying Biology, I was well acquainted with the concept of the web of life. Anyway as a toddler my parents would physically block my way or take things out of my hand and throw it away, or try to distract me, shake me and point out other things I should do, or pull me inside to play with my toys or sit in my high chair. They argued about how to stop me as well as over dad's rougher handling of my arms. I remember that their fear surprised me but I didn't have the vocabulary to explain my joy at all the intricacies and connections I was exploring or sitting amongst. I could get the same contentment from moving my peas from the bowl to the tray and then inspecting them one by one. I got into trouble for not eating fast enough as well. But I enjoyed any ritual of lifting and carrying and placing as it accomplished a sense of serene purity or timelessness. I revisited these feelings when I started training for football as the drills and repetitions had the same effect on me.

My wincing and pulling away from dad's guiding grip also resulted in some ongoing discussions about my masculinity. The next response, when I started school, was for him to stop giving me a goodbye kiss when he left for work each morning. He'd kiss my younger brother and my mother but not me. The daily ritual was to stand at the front door and say goodbye to him, but three weeks of me sobbing and asking why my dad would no longer kiss me or let me kiss him goodbye resulted in my mum refusing to have us stand at the door. About thirty years later my dad apologised to me for how abrupt he'd been in withdrawing his emotions. He teared up at the memory saying that he'd done it because he just wanted to be a good father and thought I should learn to be a man. I forgave him.

I wasn't always a backman. Although I was chosen in the state Under 18 side at centre half back, in my early days - when I eventually got selected to play - I played a number of positions including ruck-rover. From this I learnt that we each have quite diverse capabilities. I think it has enabled me, throughout my life to multi-task and juggle many roles; including one memorable Sesshin when I was both the Tenzo and Jisha.

That is not to say that shifting from role to role - having to relate to different ways of reading and positioning myself to the play - was at first easy. To the contrary, it was quite confusing. I'd regularly get caught in no-man's land with both teams playing kick to kick over my head. I'd hang back at the wrong times or go forward too far or too soon. During the game I'd get switched to the forward line where I had to make space for myself - and lead for the ball again and again without it being kicked to me - or I was shifted to the back line where I had to stay glued to my opposition player and not give them the space to get the ball. I was on occasion shifted 6 or more times during a game; from pockets to flanks, to wings, to on the ball roles. I initially found it frustrating and wondered what the coach saw as the "real Phil", but I quickly learnt that to get caught up in any one role or position can mean that you forget your essential skills and that your actual potential to shift roles or respond as required is what makes you a well-rounded footy player. Over my footy career I won several trophies for "best utility player", meaning that I could be relied upon to successfully step into whatever position was required. Zen points at the same fundamental truth I learnt from this: one is actually always ready to relate to any situation; you just have to enter without a fixed set of thoughts, feelings or pre-planned way of doing things. Sitting Zazen and finding that you can't empty your mind yet whatever arises will also pass is also the first physical embodying of this.

All the training and role changing enabled me to strip everything down to processes of body, breath and mind. I found I could train and discipline each of these and that strength and endurance relied on a balance of pace within centred rhythms and on actions free from passion. I found that when a forward runs he forgets his legs and the backman's job is to make him remember them, that when a forward marks his eyes and hands are the ball and the backman's job is to make the forward doubt this by making his own eyes and hands more fully the ball. In such instances, as in the zen Way, there is no past or present or future. No eyes or hands or touch or object of thought. Just the ball.

Really, all football training exercises are rather simple. Basically: kick to kick; leading at a ball and marking or defending; handballing to a moving player or around an opponent; scooping the ball smoothly off the ground or knocking it onwards and anticipating its bounce; tackle an opponent so that they drop the ball or can't release it. But one should not let the simplicity mislead one into a half-hearted approach. These are all practical skills required on a game. Their repetition embeds what is termed an "ability to read the play";

you can second guess or intuit what an elliptical ball and the players chasing its flight and bounce are going to do. Training also consolidates the fact that football is not an idea or a thought but a series of physical actions. One begins to glimpse that action and outcome, movement and consequence are simultaneous; this understanding is what brings about an intuitive manner.

Eventually this all translates into game play. You chase the ball, you grab it, you pass it on. That is, when the ball comes your way, you stand up to the task of getting it and delivering it on. When you've passed it on the task of that moment has finished. But you remain alert and waiting for the next movement of the ball your way. That is because once you have begun a game, you should never give up. Your team needs your full effort and your best requires the respect of your full effort. So you give it.

Full effort and focus will suddenly shift you into a state of mind quite different from any other. Often you realise this after the event, but the start of it is when you forget all your daily affairs, what is happening in the crowd, what is happening amongst the players and watch the ball. Just the ball. The ball. And suddenly all is quiet and wherever it is the ball is floating in slow motion, very big, totally absorbing. What it is going to do you become quite intuitive about. You are the ball and everything else drops away. It is the same in Zen. In positive Samadhi even the noisiest places and the busiest activities operate in an all-pervading stillness. Still and silent but active.

The active component of each game also includes variables such as the weather. I began to like playing footy across changing weather conditions. Wind, rain, mist, mud, sun, shadows … all bring about distortions in how clearly (or not) one perceives the play and the types of energies one feels ebbing and flowing. In their own right each condition and energy is fun and can be worked with, conversely they are of no consequence if one shifts into single pointed focus. The warning here is that some players start to believe they play better on windy days or start to hold some other superstitious or karmic cause and effect belief. *The En-mei Jik-ku Kan-non Gyo* gives some advice here: "Thought after thought arise in the mind; Thought after thought are not separate from mind".

It is all mind and because of this a lot more can be known than is often presumed. It is ordinary but perhaps sounds magical. Cooper quotes in his book reflections by retired American National Basket baller William Felton "Bill" Russell who played centre for the Boston Celtics, won 11 NBA championships and, during a 13 year career, was a 5 time NBA Most Valuable Player. In his autobiography, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, Russell evokes the "mystical feeling" that would on occasion lift the action on the court to the level of magic:

> *At that special level all sorts of odd things happened.… It was almost as if we were playing in slow motion. During those spells I could almost sense how the next play would develop and where the next shot would be taken. Even before the other team brought the ball in bounds, I could feel it so keenly that I'd want to shout to my team mates,"It's coming there!"-except that I knew everything would change if I did. My premonitions would be consistently correct, and I always felt then that I not only knew all the Celtics by heart but also all the opposing players, and that they all knew me.*

Good players develop a sixth sense. I've not played at the professional level, however during my playing days I had the same experience numerous times. With right focus everything plays in slow motion and you can see the arising game patterns and their waves. Indeed game play often looks like it happens in sweeping waves. At one level this is because teams have their set plays and players learn where to stand or which space to run into. To an outsider looking in when these work they appear to build or get driven by passion. Many coaches, players and spectators believe this as they get swept up in the rising tensions and excitements of expectation. Without doubt learnt patterns and passion concurrently aids the momentum of some waves. Even so players taken over by emotion are very sensitive to the opposing tendency. They may look invincible when in a positive state, but are always vulnerable to their own duality. Here lies their strength but also their weakness. Duality is a relative existence but appears absolute. That is it is only real in one moment of space-time. Accordingly if the perceiver believes it is real as a continuum, this delusion can be used against them. At that point their consciousness and confidence gets tripped up by its own net. As a backman or 'the opposition' I became quite aware of this net of dualism. With determination and a certain creative capacity I learnt to envelop the play in a projected overlay that could turn the energy about. Later when I came across the phrase "Upside down zen", it had resonance with me.

Spring Sesshin - Balingup, 2016

Photos by Paul Wilson