

## THE WOBBLY POT

Quarterly Journal of the **Zen Group of Western Australia.**

Summer Edition 2013



*Monks these days study hard in order to turn a fine phrase and win fame as talented poets. At Crazy Clouds hut there is no such talent, but he serves up the taste of truth as he boils rice in a wobbly old pot. – Ikkyū*

### **The Wobbly Pot**

This journal provides a medium for members and friends of the Zen Group of Western Australia to express their views. The opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect Council's views, or those of other Sangha members. To contribute to the next edition please contact Phillip McNamara at [mcnamara9@optusnet.com.au](mailto:mcnamara9@optusnet.com.au)

Membership to the Zen Group of Western Australia is encouraged. Membership supports the activities of the group; including publicity, this journal and hall rental. Members get discount to our Sesshin and Zazenkaï's as well as access to books in our library.

### **Zen Group of Western Australia (ZGWA)**

ZGWA started in 1983 with a small group of people sitting in a private home in Mt. Claremont, Perth. It is affiliated with the Diamond Sangha tradition of Zen Buddhism, which was founded in Hawaii in 1959 by Robert Aitken Rōshi.

The Diamond Sangha tradition follows the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, practiced and passed on from Shakyamuni Buddha in India, through China and Japan, from Japan to Hawaii, and now to Australia. Diamond Sangha communities integrate this ancient tradition into their lives in contemporary cultures throughout the world. Drawing on the great Japanese schools, our sangha offers a rich and authentic environment for the study of ZenBuddhism.

### **CONTENTS**

<i>Page 3</i>	Hakuin's Calligraphy and Juan Yin's Secret – John F. Turner
<i>Page 4</i>	13/2/13 Persistence and vision: page from a journal - <a href="#">Paula Inayat-Hussain</a>
<i>Page 5</i>	<i>Poems</i> - <i>Phillip McNamara</i>
<i>Page 6</i>	Corellas' Play - <i>Kathy Shiels</i>
<i>Pages 7-10</i>	Narrating Self's Story - Glenn Wallis

## **Hakuin's Calligraphy**

how to imprint  
this mind  
of wind and plum?

Great Japan Exhibition  
London, 1980

- John F. Turner

## **Juan Yin's Secret**

'Listen to Nature' - Seisensui

1. if you want to be happy  
then practice deep hearing  
listen as silent prayer
  
2. this open attention to Nature  
the tree outside my window  
in its glittering susurrus
  
3. for what occurs is peace  
'Nothing obscures the Mind'  
you have returned home
  
4. an though it isn't funny  
a smile lights Buddha's face  
the heart is gently eased.

- John F. Turner

### 13/2/13 Persistence and vision: page from a journal

- Paula Inayat-Hussain

Anisah's dietetics' mentor is dying of cancer at Royal Perth right now. I've just lit a stick of incense for her. Anisah was in tears last night, stirring her brownie batter. She's going to visit her today for the last time. Anisah met with her over coffee for nearly 2 years now. She saw her just before her trip to Hawaii in December and her mentor was feeling really well, with her cancer in remission. Now, less than 2 months' later, she is very close to death. She was in her late 50's and still working one day a week. For me it's hard to comprehend such a turn of events.

Hard not to turn death into an idol.

May she dwell in the heart/ May she be free from suffering/ May she be healed/  
May she be at peace.

-----

How not to waste time:

Doing my eye exercises early this morning, just before watering the vegies, the usual thought occurred to me, 'Am I wasting my time?' followed this time by the consoling thought that maybe not. Maybe – just maybe – even if my vision does not improve, such moments of my life spent looking at treetops, rooftops and clouds are not such a waste of time. And yet they so go against the grain. I'd much rather get on with my day, load up the washing machine, water the vegies, renew my toothbrush attack on the aphids on the okra. And then I went and deliberately squatted down by the pond and waited for the tadpoles to come to the surface.

Last night I had to go out to turn off the pool pump at 10.30; it'd been left on by the pool technician. I went out with my torch, grumbling away. And the world revealed itself in all its beauty. As the circle of light touched each thing a magic of leaves appeared, perfectly formed, perfectly still, totally alive. And I was grateful. Now I am blind; but then I can see.

Poems by Phillip McNamara-

countless times  
on the wind screen  
that one black spot

hand greets digestive wind;  
impulse of energy  
into behaviour

whilst apologizing for  
forgetting my glasses  
the words come into focus

digging the garden  
for roots held fast,  
extending out of sight and touch

if we do not ask anything at all  
the moon still rises;  
*circulatio*

a hoist above the slime  
of the submerged log  
is difficult to grasp

along the corridor of train  
glances of eye,  
postures of spine

a toad can both  
breathe and drink  
through its skin

moist stone  
intertwined with sound  
becomes a one-piece robe

dead tree congregation  
sitting down or standing up  
offering cold ash

ninety-seven circles;  
close your eyes and the remaining three  
will come and stand quietly beside you.

under the arch of life  
the sky and sea  
bend the locks of wheat

the whorl and wheel  
of the tree stump  
graffitied with names

**Corellas' play** - Kathy Shiels, 2012

Been regulars here for years now  
excusing a few brief absconds,  
so now we hear jubilant screeching  
as melody of eloquent songs.

They take off in loud overture  
to the daily beat of a rising sun,  
wheel and reel o'er our rooftops  
while wing spanning the day begun.

Returning they yell at the traffic  
before sprinkling the green oval white,  
then hop, peck and run the ground  
to forage every bug and blade in sight.

Oval replete and sung out  
the larrikins take up top branch views  
of late afternoon rush hour and  
play city games two by two.

They summersault, twist and flap together  
high in willows above the council lake,  
until it's time to silhouette our urban sky  
with a fly over for the sliding sun's sake.

Now this has been going on for years  
Corellas open and wrap up each day,  
but yesterday evening dog and I saw  
an astounding shift in the Corellas' play.

Swooping down from the willows  
five alighted the playground swings,  
two rocked the seat while three twirled  
with claws on metal links.

Well it was certainly entertaining  
dog and I sat nearby and stared,  
then saw more Corellas were waiting  
It was clear the new game was shared.

Swinging, rocking, twirling and clinging  
on plastic and metal Corellas merged in turns,  
those feathered city slickers played fairly  
I know now it's more than eloquent songs I've learned.



## **Narrating Self's Story** - Glenn Wallis

This is an exploration into our mental self-talk, the narration of ourselves. In many ways we narrate our self, through mental self-talk, giving the impression of our continuity as self. Here the premise is that self arises and falls away as sense of self, and that the self-talk or self-narration is what links these moments together into a cohesive experience we refer to as self. The experience we call being me.

### ***Sense of self***

Through our zazen we can at times get a glimpse into what makes up our sense of self. Self isn't a thing lurking somewhere within, unseen, rather self is really sense of self. This is important. 'Sense of' here being only that, a sense of, an impression of, not a thing itself at all. It is all sense of Self, and only that.

Sense of self is a moment to moment creation brought about by particular causes and conditions. The causes are experiencing things, whether it is through sight, sound, smell, touch, taste or thinking, feeling or memory and all the events that make up our living experience. The conditions are the delineation between 'inside' and 'outside', the accumulated predisposition toward the sole privacy of skin and the contents therein. There is a moment by moment 'referencing' that takes place between the sense of inside or outside that leads to a sense of self experiencing the cup, the idea, the words on the page. But when the causes or conditions cease, sense of self also ceases.

This is natural. Sense of self emerges moment by moment and naturally falls away as conditions and causes that bring about sense of self change and cease. This is usually when we're caught up in other matters and are temporarily oblivious to 'our involvement' in those matters. Whether this is during zazen or mowing the lawns or listening to a friend.

The sense of self that emerges and falls away moment to moment is maintained and strung together, drawn into a cohesive experience, through narration, through the story that I am this or that.

### ***It's my story:***

Typically we narrate our lives, sometimes in small ways, "Argghhh. Where did I leave my keys?" when we're actually alone in the house. Or continually creating thinking as if I'm speaking to myself.

Sometimes it's the of background of story that we hold to, our group of defining features that we identify as what we're like, no matter whether those features are wonderfully desirable or extremely undesirable. Perhaps such background is some particular event that continues as a reference point that we continually trip over when it seems about to play out once more.

We are often in the throes of some self-story or another. It's a curious event, trying to create, something that implies 'me'. To be able to feel substantial, to feel cohesion of experience as me, we have the story of what was, what is, what will be or might be. In a way we live, or try to live, our own fairy tale as we story or cognize our lived, living events. But living a fairy tale is just chasing the restricted imagination we chanced upon at one point in our life. It is an invention without honest and virtuous connection to our here and now.

The self-talk involved in self-narration is useful in thought organisation, to treat thinking with a degree of objective perspective. Or at least to feel that way. We get to experience the thoughts with a clearer objective distance that seems to help in manipulating and working with the thoughts on an on-going basis.

This is the case with speculative thinking. There are many times and circumstances when speculative thought is invaluable, a necessary tool in our survival and integration into the world and the societies we share. It's also a way of 'testing' out the future, to get a feel for if a future prospect seems viable or not, interesting or not, beneficial or not. Speculation is a valuable tool and is a vital part of our shared humanity.

However when we habitually substitute present experience for repetitive speculative thinking (worry, preoccupation, anxiety, obsessions) we are trading away our lives, our capacity to experience deeply and clearly what is. At such time the worry, preoccupation anxiety obsession itself is what is bright and apparent, but clear?

Speculative thinking is part of creating a cognitive framework of what is; the ideas of what we know about the present moment in order to fend off or be prepared for what may be coming up in the future. When we predominantly rely on our cognitive frameworks to tell us about present moment experience we cease to connect with present actuality and are living through a very filtered, negotiated version of what ought to be the clear and direct experience of right now.

Our cognitive framing of present moment is so strong that we can deal with present moment completely through our story of it. "When she looks at me like that, I know to get out of the way..." When we want to connect with the moment we become caught up in re-hashing the moment for something that we may be missing or not quite putting together.

We become like the king or queen's servant who is constantly whispering into the royal ear, poisoning the royal judgment with their particular slanted view of things. But to be 'whispering into our own ear' in depiction of the present moment is not being present in any meaningful sense.

The created self-story can too often dictate our lives, our perception of ourselves and our capacities. After all it's 'ours', the province of the story of who I am. On



one side it creates a sense of individualism and history as well as attributing a certain solidity to our sense of me, but it comes at a cost that can be seen when our cognitive framing of what we perceive dominates our experience of the moment.

Part of the way we become a person, establish our 'personhood' is to story our existence. 'I'm 52, I come from Auckland, have lived in the south most of my adult life...' It gives us a reference point from which we can meet and exchange with other people. It gives us a history, shows that we are indeed individual, continuous, substantial. Not just to the other person, but more importantly shows this impression for ourselves. We get to assure ourselves we are individual, continuous and substantial. This is simply the usual state of events, but it's a slanted and totally partial story.

A function of self-narration is filling in the gaps between when we more fully experience sense of self. The sense of self could be as strong as the righteousness of anger or as quiet as feeling our breathing. Either way in between times of experienced sense of self, self-narration fills the gaps to provide an impression of enduring personhood, where we get to feel ourselves as continual, and substantial.

### ***Letting go the Story***

We have to learn to let go and not need the story, the fairy tale, and instead take up the child's capacity to stare at the moment without the requirement of comprehension that necessitates we 'make something' of it; to let go of trying to make the moment somehow meaningful or important and, above all, to treat it as enough as it is.

To be encouraged in letting go the story it's useful to see the storying, see how it's being used, see the virtue as well as the partiality of the story, then we can, bit by bit, trust to let it go.

Seeing the story can sound sort of easy, but it's not. It's usually so in built it is hard to catch. But sometimes we do see it, or rather we find that we trip up over it. The ones I notice most are in terms of what I do, what I 'can't do' what I'm not comfortable doing, what I can do well. The deeper stories come from a closer examination usually through troubling times in our lives when we really do let the usual concerns drop and stare into our pain or the confusion grimly and determinedly. Whether it's 'I'm always - alone / misunderstood / not taken seriously / unlucky / abandoned / undervalued / get hurt - or more complex weavings of our attempts to rationalize the painful and hurtful flow and events of our lives.

To see how it's being used, to see the virtue in the story is to know that it is there for a purpose, and to find what the investment is in such a view. We are very self-invested and generally (reasonable mental health assumed) work in our best

interests. It's good to see the virtue of it, to be more at ease with ourselves in letting it go, now it's seen as not functionally needed. Virtues such as retaining certain continuity of self-image as a person; as well as a sense of experiencing who we are so as to better see what others see when dealing with us; how we get to relate to ourselves in the abstract sense.

Seeing the partiality of the story is to already be emerging from it, the wider world looms and presents beyond the confines of the story. There is no magic to letting these things go, just enough insight into the story and its force to not want to continue supporting it. Then, noticing when it is present, using the mechanism of zazen to acknowledge, let go and return to what is immediately bright and apparent as this moment. Just like during zazen, when we're 'off task' storying ourselves or our lives into some surety, then when we return to where we are, there are no recriminations, judgments or checking of the story. We simply gently acknowledge, without content about the story, and turn to feel the breath, the actuality of being present just as it is. Like this. Now.

That present can well include the pain of the situation that the story is wrapped up in, but the immediate, the bright and apparent is the pain itself, not the story we generate or uphold as an evasive misdirection from that body of pain. Keeping playing the story helps to avoid the pain, keeps it at bay somewhat. This avoiding prolongs the pain, and usually generates a neurotic response to it wrapped in a substantial and hidden fear of it through the illusion of being able to escape.

In many ways the path of Zen is the giving up of fairy tales, letting go the fantasies and dreams of being me and instead start from where we truly are, right here right now. Meet the moment as enough as it is, then taking matters from there. Staring into the moment without requirement is where we find the brightness and clarity of our true home, where it has always been.

Glenn Wallis © 2013

*2013 September 27<sup>th</sup> to October SESSHIN, register NOW*



*To touch the Mind, to settle the Mind, to convey the Mind*

**ZEN GROUP of WA 7 DAY**  
**RESIDENTIAL SPRING SESSHIN 2013**

**7 Days - Friday evening 27th Sept, to Friday noon 4th Oct, 2013**

**with Ross Bolleter Rōshi and Ian Sweetman Rōshi**

**Cost:** approximately \$75 per day, dependant on the number of participants.  
**Concessions and part-time attendance negotiated.**

**Venue:** Epiphany Centre, 60 Fifth Avenue, ROSSMOYNE WA 6148.

**Registration:** contact ZGWA council member  
Phillip McNamara: Ph: 0416249224  
email: [mcnamara9@optusnet.com.au](mailto:mcnamara9@optusnet.com.au)