

THE WOBBLY POT

Quarterly Journal of the Zen Group of Western Australia.

WINTER Edition 2014



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. – Ikkyu

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.

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 Zen Buddhism.

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Next Issue

The next edition will be the Spring edition. For the Spring issue we will take a themed approach – **the Bodhisattva Precepts**. Please consider writing an essay, a creative piece or submitting a reflection on one, any, or all of the 16 Precepts. Some responses may: describe how one or more of the precepts has been or become a central inspiration for your practice; your experience of considering each Precept as you undertook preparation for Jukai; how the Precepts have deepened your understanding of the Bodhisattva path and your interconnectedness with Sangha and all sentient beings. Submissions can be sent to mcnamara9@optusnet.com.au

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* Issa Haiku on peach blossoms, sprinkled throughout, translated/from <http://haikuguy.com>
- **David G. Lanoue**; whose books about Zen poetry are also available from that site.

The following is an extract from Ross Bolleter's book *The Five Ranks of Dongshan; Keys to Enlightenment*, published this month by Wisdom Publications (Boston).

Ross's book will be launched in the dojo on May 22.

Returning to Life

We need to move on from an experience of emptiness, for it can be so compellingly marvelous that we end up clinging to it. We must emerge from the featureless dark. There's no way that we can live there, although I've met earnest seekers who are still regaling anyone who will listen with stories about their experience, twenty years on—hopelessly circling the inexplicable. Even if they are genuine, such experiences coagulate immediately into our ideas about them, so that we can remain unknowingly entrapped in our rehashing of them—unavailable to others, unavailable for life. If we hoard our experience of emptiness, like a miser his gold, what is insubstantial as a dream ossifies into our ideas about it, and we end by living our life at a deep remove.

The following exchange between two old masters is concerned with just this moving on from an experience of emptiness, conveyed as coming out of darkness into daylight:

Zhaozhou asked Touzi Datong (819–914), “If a person experiences the great death, how will you treat them?”

Touzi said, “I don't permit wandering about in darkness. Come back in the daylight!”⁵²

After we have died to our limited self and its concerns, we must return to life. We must, as Touzi puts it, come back in the daylight. “Daylight” indicates the realm of differentiation and discrimination: the wall is vertical, the floor horizontal; rainwater is fresh, the ocean salty; the sun goes down, the stars come out. After an experience of emptiness, these particulars surface movingly from what feels like a dream.

Although you have realized that you are none other than those you meet (and those you'll never meet), you continue to address your friends by their names and are named in return. What is your name? Where were you born? Who were your parents? These questions elicit your singularity, anybody's singularity. And none of this is at odds with your most intimate experience of the other as you; rather it is a perfect expression of it. Although we are stressing the importance of the daylight realm of particularity, it is important to note that our experience of emptiness continues to inform our activity. We can't turn back to look into the timeless source—it doesn't permit that—yet it animates our standing up, and our lying down, even as it is none other than them.

Beyond our faintest ideas of emptiness, we are sky, bird's wing, rain, and each of them is us too. We are immediately and challengingly those who despise us, and no doubt to their dismay, they are us.

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vegetables! plum blossoms!
butterfly dances
from one to another

-Issa

*

BOW DOWN IN GRATITUDE TO THE MESSY AND THE DIFFICULT by Brigid Lowry

Bridget Kalo, a lovely friend who died recently, had an unusual way of reacting when a bill arrived in her letterbox. Rather than responding with a curse, she'd say to herself, "I'm so glad I have the money to pay this."

This inspiring attitude can apply to practice in daily life. Life will always be messy, challenging and difficult, as well as joyous and lovely some of the time. This is what the Buddha was telling us in the noble truths: nothing is satisfactory and everything slips away. Even the Me that wants it all to be a certain way is only a passing show of thoughts, sensations and bodily sensations. We will never have all our ducks in a row. Things will never be entirely right or perfect, or when they are, it won't last long. Get used to it ☺

So how do we respond? Do we medicate our underlying unease and numb our feelings with drugs, alcohol, television, shopping, over-eating, relentlessly keeping busy? Or do we use the messy and the difficult as our practice, as Pema Chodron suggests, working the edges of our anxiety, our neediness and our longing with honesty, patience and courage.

When my son doesn't return my txt about an arrangement, will I allow my day (and our relationship) to be poisoned by old tapes of neediness and negativity? Or can I soften, allowing my feelings, then letting them go, remembering the dharma wisdom I quote so often: *When I put myself at odds with circumstance I am certain to suffer.*

When I feel the sorrow and loss associated with ageing, do I compound my burden with worry and fear? Or do I remember that all things arising will pass away, including me. It's not personal: it's just part of the vital natural flow. Why not make the most of my precious life, simply doing the next right thing: going for a swim, savouring tea and raisin toast, or some other gentle self-care.

Can I bravely face the black dog of depression and yet arise each morning recollecting my sacred vow: Yay, I have twenty four hours in which I can choose to be happy.

Can I practice Tara Brash's wisdom of radical acceptance in the very darkest and creakiest corners of my psyche, saying a Holy Yes to everything that arises, including and especially the most challenging parts?

When my best friend starts drinking again, or a beloved is diagnosed with a terminal illness, does it throw me into old patterns in which I hopelessly try to solve, sort and fix everything? Or do I recall and use my equanimity practice, in which I care about the suffering of all beings but know that what happens to others is not the result of my wishes for them. Can I hold my grief with tender regard? Can I surrender? Let go and let be? Can I lighten up and take my hands off the steering wheel, as Anne Lamott suggests.

When I come home frazzled and overwhelmed by the 10001 things, do I eat mindlessly over the sink, turn on the telly, do one more weary task? Or do I take the time to light a candle and incense, sit down on my meditation stool and give each breath the attention it deserves, allowing ease, softness and relaxation to refresh and nourish me.

Joseph Goldstein suggests that instead of making our sitting practice The Main Event of our spiritual path and our lives The Lesser Event, we experiment by swapping the two and seeing what results.

As Ross Bolleter Roshi writes in his forthcoming book: *Every moment is up for it*. There is no other Now. There is just this, whatever it happens to be. Yes, here we are, in the middle of our wonderful, vexed, tricky lives. Aren't you glad you have the skills to play with it?

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little straw mat-
coins, a little butterfly
and fallen cherry blossoms
- Issa

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Capitalism, Consumerism and Commercialism.

by Taylor Weaver

Taylor Weaver is currently a Year 12 High School student. This essay thus presents to readers of Wobbly Pot comment and insight on issues of interest to young adults.

How does one measure a person's worth? Through their contribution to society? Or the lustre of their car? Does the basis to such a judgement revolve around rectitude and merit, or a hunk of metal with wheels? Many will argue the former, however, despite this they will judge on behalf of the latter. But what is the reason for this? Why do people value a human's material belongings over their behaviour and morals? The answer is twofold, one being advertising, and the most predominant being us. Advertising is effective, but it just doesn't move product, it is its further impact on society which is more so.

The statement that our sense of identity is formed through society's increasing focus on consumerism is undeniably true. As Jimmy Carter once said in 1979, "Too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption, human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns". We as humans feel the need to distinguish our individuality, to say "this is me, I'm real" through our belongings.

When People create who they want to be through their possessions, they are fitting themselves into a desired category. People are made aware of such categories due to advertisements; their images and narratives. Advertising thereby becomes an incredibly influential medium when it comes to consumerism.

Advertising taps into emotions that are central to our lives, fitting into beliefs and attitudes about love, fitness and sexual appeal. For example, Lynx, a popular hygiene brand for men, appeals to the male demographic. One of Lynx's ads claims "the cleaner you are, the dirtier you get", this claim is accompanied by a half-naked woman wrapped in a towel. Regardless of the fact that the implied claim that Lynx will get you women is erroneous, men will go out and buy this product due to the image the advertisement has created for it.

A reference to our societies increasing focus on consumerism can be found on the opening page of the book Affluenza, an expository text written by Clive Hamilton and Richard Deniss, where the statement “A society going nowhere” is written. This quote, holding many implications, refers to society’s endless pursuit of attempting to find happiness through material belongings. Another analysis of “a society going nowhere” is found later in the book where the author says “the only way to win is to stop playing the game”. This quote again implies that the endless pursuit (increasing focus on possessions) is a race; a competition to see who can attain the most expensive belongings. The consumer is unhappy, but believes that if they can upgrade, they will be met with their desired happiness. Such a goal may be achieved, but it is short-lived and only to be scrapped for the next biggest thing. If a consumer was to step back and observe the fruitlessness of such a pursuit, they would possibly find that consumption is not the key to happiness, thus actually ‘winning’ the game and removing themselves from the endless cycle.

“The only way to win is to stop playing the game”

In contemporary society and its advertising campaigns our focus has been shifted from the product in our hands, to the identity of the company that puts it there. Are you an Apple or a Microsoft person? A McDonalds or a KFC customer? The narrative of identity and lifestyle shrouding the brand has become more important than what product (as opposed to image) the brand actually produces. But why is this so? Are people that desperate to cling to an identity, that they will spend an extra \$50 on a t-shirt, or a couple of hundred on the latest iPhone? Are people that self-conscious of who they are that they feel the need to assure themselves by buying a brand deemed “cool” by society? Sadly, for the majority of us yes... the reason why company profits continue to rise.

To properly analyse the way we view the wealthy and the most materialistic of our kind, we must look at how we treat people who are the exact opposite; Robinson Crusoe-like figures who, unlike the rest of society, are able to live without the ego-comforting super-sized house and top of the range car. Surprisingly, there are some alternatives suggested in the media. For example, David Glasheen, an Australian man who has lived self-sufficiently on an island for the past twenty years and has featured many times on television, is portrayed to be almost a hero for escaping civilisation. This portrayal can lead one to think, if a person who has escaped society and consumerism is received with such admiration, then what does that say about those we feel compelled to continue to compete in societies consumerist rat-race? Does it mean we should aspire to be like Glasheen, and lead lives such as his? Has he actually become a hero because, deep down, we all wish to escape the ‘endless pursuit’ of consumerism and the stresses it brings?

Questions like these lead us to a further analysis of our values, what shapes them and to wonder if we really have (through the various periods of our cultural history) actually become more ‘advanced’. To illustrate, the history of racial discrimination - the value of feeling superior and the attitude of judging another on the colour of their skin - serves as an example that a person’s appearance has not just recently emerged as a basis for judgement. That is society may claim to be more accepting and less prejudiced or judgmental of others, but it seems we may have merely evolved from judging each other because of the colour of one’s skin, to judging the car we and others drive. What’s next? More importantly, how do we resist chasing false values and discover a more authentic and accepting self?

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Cherry Blossom Tree, by Kathy Shiels

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his peach sapling
has blossomed...
though he never prays

- Issa

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Some favourite quotes and insights - from Dan James. Brisbane. March 2014.

All the darkness of the world
is not enough to put out
the light of one candle.

Spanish proverb.

A mother's son
Dishevelled in the rain
Irises trembling.

Sho-ka.

Siftings on siftings in oblivion
Till change hath broken down
All things save beauty alone.

Ezra Pound.

This bitter wind.
A thin line of blood
Stains the wiping hand.

Sho-ka.

Only after severe cold and snowfall
Everything meets the Spring.
Now your time has come, plum tree
Open all your blossoms.

Zen saying.

In every town you will find a drunk
a cripple a fool and a thief.

The Universe does not make noble gestures.
It's a diamond life and the Moon a harsh mistress.

We all walk our own path, but in the end
have we become better human beings.

As for me there was no greater joy
than to hold a sleeping child in my arms,
Or to brush my love's long dark hair.

+

I first met him years ago when out cycling and always remember him saying, how much he loved his Wandering Days and of being in the bush. He said he was a student of the old master Ma, but he didn't seem that old to me at the time.

We used to ride and train together and over the years I slowly came to know and respect him for his great endurance. A bit of a loner with an odd sense of humour, he sometimes played the fool, but occasionally came out with some small insight that stuck with me.

I can only remember the good times we had and that we laughed a lot, even through the hard bits.

When I last saw him he said he was going back home to the West and later heard that he was somewhere out back of Burke, beyond the black stump, heading towards Arkaroola.

Some wag suggested he was even further out, back of Bumcrack, a place considered by many to be the arsehole of the world, but that was just another bit of Aussie country humour.

Emma Chissit.

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The Button Tin

- by Wendy Jacobsen

Do you mend your clothes? Do you replace the buttons when one or more is lost? Spare buttons were always kept and saved in the button tin. You never knew when you might need one to extend the life of a garment, or more simply to wear it without attracting unwanted attention. Especially if it revealed what lay beneath.

When garments did eventually expire and were only good enough for the 'rag bag' the buttons would be set free and assigned to the 'button tin'. This made searching the button tin even more entertaining because, not only were you seeking to replace a button to continue to wear a garment, but with the range of buttons that were accumulated over the years, they were the catalyst for memories and interfamily discussions as the buttons were the only remaining evidence of the source garment.

They reminded the owner of events that the garment was worn to, feelings and emotions of attachment at wearing such a favourite garment, or not, and most engagingly the recollections of what occurred at said events. For example, the buttons from the green dress mum had had made for her brother Bill's wedding. There were even buttons bought in anticipation of use. Ah the button tin, a source of memories and family as we laughed together.

*

not giving a damn
that plum blossoms fall...
his stern face

- Issa

*

Poems – by Paula Inayat-Hussain

One good throw-away word
And down comes, between us,
The usual veil of sorrows.
27/12/13

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Built into every hello,
There is a goodbye.
But in this sea of sorrows,
I shall build my Noah's Ark,
Stick by stick.
2/4/14

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My brother bird,
My sister wind,
Loving is always a doing,
For all that I give,
Belongs to me.
10/4/14



Hiking by Kathy Shiels

Zen and Creativity by Brigid Lowry

Welcome to my talk on Zen and Creativity. It's a huge topic, and I hope I can do it some kind of justice. When I began planning the talk I wondered how I could possibly fill an hour, then I realised that an hour was not long enough. Never mind, here goes!

I'd like to begin by sharing a story involving two Buddhist teachers, Kalu Rinpoche and Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn, which took place years ago at a Harvard Professor's house. Students of both masters had arranged for them to meet and debate, as both the Zen and Tibetan traditions employ "dharma combat" to test one's understanding. Seung Sahn opened the debate by reaching into his gray robe and removing an orange. With classic Zen theatrics he held it towards his opponent's face and yelled "What is it?" The elderly monk didn't respond, just continued quietly fingering his prayer beads. Seung Sahn tried again, holding out his orange and demanding to know "What is this?" Everyone waited for the lama to manifest Unfettered Mind but he remained impassive. It was getting uncomfortable but finally he whispered to his translator, "What's the matter with this guy? Hasn't he seen an orange before?"

I tell you this story for three reasons. Firstly, because it's always good to begin a talk with a joke. Secondly, I love it so much I just wanted to share it with you. Thirdly, I wanted to tell you where and how it came to me. I read it in an old Tricycle magazine in the garden of the Zen Center of Sydney. Tricycle magazine itself is abundant with creativity: photographs, paintings, cartoons and articles, all expressions of dharma practice put out into the world to inspire and illuminate fellow travellers on a spiritual path. And during my stay in the hojo - the garden shed in which dokusan takes place - I was awestruck by the creative energy that the Sydney sangha manifests. There were wonderful paintings by the students decorating the walls; there were hand-made cards, statues of Jizo the protector and copies of Subhana's poetry book for sale as fundraisers. *Mind Moon Circle*, the group's magazine, contained beautiful calligraphy, drawings, and photographs of a mosaic made from kitchen supplies as part of a peace project. On the shrine, a deceptively simple display of tall grasses. It's a vibrant community of creative people, each in their own way contributing to the life of the group, an inspiring example of practice and creativity meeting and flourishing. Here, in our own group, my heart lifts each week when I see Kathy's elegant flower arrangements on the shrines of the dojo and the dokusan room. We have a CD of home-grown music for sale; Wobbly Pot is a venue for sharing articles, poetry, cartoons and drawings. If you haven't already, go and see Herman's exhibition *The Many Beings* at Mutima Gallery, just down from the Round House in Fremantle. It's stunningly good. Opportunities to come forth, not just in our silent practice on the cushion but in our lives and in our sangha, are many and various. Our soiree is coming up, a night of play and fun, so please dig out your dusty flute or your shy poetry.

Zen and creativity have a long and ancient history. Haiku, ikebana or flower arranging, calligraphy, sumi-e or Japanese brush painting, the Zen garden aesthetic, architecture, all are manifestations of the Great Way. When Chinese Zen first travelled to Japan in the 13th century, the arts followed and soon became integrated into the culture of Zen. They included *chado* (tea ceremony), bamboo flute, landscape gardening, *Noh* (drama), ceramics, *kyudo* (archery) and most important, *shodo*, painting and poetry. Do means "way" and these areas are referred to as "ways" because they are all-encompassing disciplines of polishing the artist's understanding of him or herself and the nature of reality. Together, these disciplines

became known as the artless arts of Zen. A lovely quote from the introduction to a book about Enzo : “Zen art, as sacred art, is a direct expression of the ineffable. It helps to transform the way we understand ourselves and the universe. It makes visible the invisible.”¹ Many of these art forms have interconnections, for example, painting was regarded as ‘silent poetry’ and poetry was regarded as ‘painting with sound.’

Clarissa Pinkola Estes says “The creative life is a spiritual practice.” One might consider one’s creative life and one’s spiritual life to be separate but they are not. There is only one life, and in it everything resides. There’s a lovely story about Natalie Goldberg going to her teacher, Katagiri Roshi, asking him endless questions about her Zen practice and never seeming to understand his answers. In the end he would explain things to her by saying “Natalie, like in your writing” and told her that, actually, her writing *was* her practice. In *The Zen of Creativity*, John Daido Looi says that the Zen arts were created “to communicate the essential wordlessness of Zen,” which is a paradox perhaps, but Zen and life are full of paradoxes and this one is worth exploring. Words, Hakuin said, are just an overflow of delusion, and yet at times they are all we have to express our deepest loves and deepest sorrows.

Zen and creativity are intimately linked, not just in ancient times but right here, right now, in our messy busy lives. In the words of Ross Bolleter - “I feel that Zen is a peerless path for artists, and is a fathomless creative source. The Bodhisattva Way includes, along with suffering and its release, delight in the richness of things and its expression. The Way is fertile and breeds fertility.”

John Tarrant puts it like this - “The Way is creative. You rest in the place that the next line of the poem comes from, or the next note of the musical composition, or the next brush stroke.”

In an article titled “The Dust Beyond the Cushion” Gary Thorp suggests that “Through art, a painter can make the ordinary come alive. As Zen students, we try to bring this kind of relevance into each moment of our lives, into this one moment that contains all moments. In this way, we allow the ordinary to enliven us. Sometimes this is successful, sometimes not, but the work itself goes on.” He continues by noting that persistence is part of the gig 😊

So, don’t spare the dharma assets, we are told in the precepts, and modern psychology concurs. Abraham Maslow proposes that “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What one can be, one must be.”

Zen can’t be bought or sold, despite capitalism’s attempts to do so. I’m talking about Zen candles, Zen spas, Zen this that and tacky tacky everything. This is not true creativity. One must go deep into practice, I think, before one dares to speak in the name of Zen. I’d like to read something Rilke wrote, relating to this:

For the sake of a few lines one must see many cities, men and things. One must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the small flowers open in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected meetings and to partings which one had long seen coming; to days of childhood that are still unexplained... to days in rooms withdrawn and quiet and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to nights of travel that rushed along on high and flew with all the stars – and

¹¹ Enzo: Zen Circles of Enlightenment. Audrey Yoshiko Seo. Weatherhill: Boston and London, 2007. P xiv Forword

it is not yet enough if one may think of all of this. One must have memories of many nights of love, none of which was like the others, of the screams of women in labour and of light...one must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open window and the fitful noises. And still it is not enough to have memories. Not until they have turned to blood within us, to glance, to gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – not until then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them.
Nothing shallow here.

My own Zen practice and my creative life are intimately and mysteriously linked, and after sesshin my creativity flourishes. Somehow the hard work of long sitting takes me deeper into original mind, and my writing is more alive and playful and creative.

I've always loved haiku, the ancient and deceptively simple poetic form in which the use of so few words conveys so much. I'd like to share a few haiku tonight. A haiku can be about ageing, like this one, written by Zen nun, Seifu, in the 16th century:

The faces of dolls
In unimaginable ways
I must have grown old

This one by Basho, about death:

Dying cricket -
how full of
life, his song.

Some haiku bring a smile, like these three from contemporary poets:

At the ticket window
Our child becomes
One year younger.

At home with 2,000
people, his Holiness
Scratches his armpit

He's out of hospital
It's such a pleasure
To swear at him

Anything we encounter can be the basis for poetry. Sometimes finding the right words can be a painstaking task, or it can happen quickly, almost all by itself. It can't be forced. Poetry tends to arrive when it feels like it. Carl Sandburg said that ordering a man to write a poem is like commanding a woman to give birth to a red-headed child. You can, however, create the optimum conditions for your creativity: eat well, get enough sleep, sit zazen, take the time to read, nourish yourself by spending time in art galleries, in the bush or by the ocean. Learn for yourself what feeds you the best. And then, whatever art form you are practicing, immerse yourself fully, savouring it. This is a key instruction, I think, for any of the creative arts. As Alan Watts suggests "No one imagines the whole object of playing is to reach the finale. The point of music is discovered in every moment of playing and listening to it."

Seido Ray Ronci is an American Rinzai Zen monk and also a poet. He writes: "For me, poetry has always been a practice in and of itself. It's not only the practice of using

language—it's also the practice of being aware: of using all the senses and being absorbed by each moment. Zen practice is always about returning to that place where there are no words. Early on, I realized that to use words, you have to live life beyond words, before words, without words. Only then do you have the right to speak. As I see it, the main issue is getting out of the way. When I paint, and even when I play piano, I try to remove myself completely and let the painting paint itself, the song play itself, the poem write itself. With language, it then becomes what the words want to say, not what I want to say. As I indicated before, I believe that comes from silence.”

Ram Dass suggests that “Every religion is the product of the conceptual mind attempting to describe the Mystery,” and I think perhaps all art is the product of the conceptual mind responding to the Mystery. It is a unique and extraordinarily personal response to this world of a thousand joys and a thousand sorrows and sometimes those thousand emails that you don't feel like answering. Creativity is a path you forge in ways uniquely your own, whether it's writing poems in your journal tucked up in bed, or decorating a cake for a special occasion. Use your own recipes and don't falter, as Perle Besserman suggests. It's not about perfection, as illustrated by the tale of a young man learning the art of gardening from an old monk. The apprentice worked hard for many hours, weeding, clearing leaves and raking sand, but when the old master came to inspect it, he frowned. Then he shook the tree so that the cherry blossoms fell on the path.

Like that!

Creativity can be a form of social justice, an activity born as a personal, response to the greed, hatred and ignorance arising endlessly in this big old world. Ross's recent concert involved ruined pianos, tales of city life, and stories gathered from his own world and from history. It was, amongst other things, a response to what white Australians have done to the indigenous people of this land.

There are many ways we can speak out. Pedro Reyes is a Mexican artist who got hold of 6,700 decommissioned guns and, with the help of other artists and sculptors, turned them into musical instruments on which they played John Lennon's "Imagine. This is Art as political statement. Our practice isn't always only something we do alone on a black cushion.

Photographer Michael Light² scanned NASA's digital images of moonscapes at film grain resolution, then reprinted them using a state-of-the-art digital process, creating a dizzying sense of spaciousness. There is literally nothing there; nothing but ground, light and space. Nothing to cling to; no obstructions. The scenes are disorienting and inspiring, an unmitigated view of emptiness. The super sharp images are reminiscent of *Karesansui*: the dry landscapes of the Japanese rock garden. Light (great name for a photographer ☺) says, “I've always felt a real affinity to the fundamentals of Zen art, the sparseness of it. One image shows a footprint and a discarded plastic sample bag. It's not the Zen garden of classical Japan – but it *is* the Zen garden of contemporary America. A response to the environment, a responsible way to represent the landscape is with the beauty and the trash, everything interacting. We don't need to go to Yosemite to talk about landscape; we can go to industrial LA. My work is an ethical political response to the devastation we are doing, not only to our planet, but to every other bit of the universe that we can explore and exploit. An overall description of my work would have to include seduction and beauty, and the sheer power of observation. Tempered by a sometimes sad, but hopefully clear-eyed, evaluation of what

² *Moonscapes and Mushroom Clouds*. Tricycle magazine, Winter, 2005.

humans do to their environment, their surroundings, and by extension, each other. But it all comes back, perceptually, to what I consider a Buddhist approach. The light of the universe is out there, 24/7, in all its horror and magnificence. To pay attention, to remain focused, to be awake – those are the challenges.”

We often think of Zen as a practice of stillness but the other half of mature spiritual practice is intimacy and expression.³ There is no limit to the way imagination might give rise to creativity and its expression. Photography, composing, song writing, drawing, painting, cooking, sewing, craft, gardening, arranging flowers on the shrine, the Great Way invites you to frolic and play. “We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and bones,” wrote Thoreau.

Everything that happens to you is useful. Virginia Woolf said “use the bits you have.” In this spirit, old scraps of fabric from your children’s clothing make a quilt, the limp veggies in your fridge make a soup, the thought or image that haunts you becomes a haiku. In Zen, nothing is left out. Avoid the phoney or the fancy. Better to aim for what Gary Snyder calls “the weave that produces an elegant plainness, which we name the Zen aesthetic.”⁴

Zen, like art, calls us to attention: to slow down, taste, hear. It asks us to observe, to listen, to attend fully to our lives and offer that to others in a unique way. Who knows when we will be back this way again? Meanwhile, let’s give it all we’ve got, as Leonard Cohen said at a recent concert. Ecologist Paul Hawken writes, “My advice for people is to love the world they are in, in whatever way makes sense to them. It may be a devotional practice, it may be song or poetry, it may be by gardening, it may be as an activist, scientist, or community leader. The path to restoration extends from our heart to the heart of sentient beings, and that path will be different for every person.”

It could be said that all poetry and art are offerings to the Buddha.

I’d like to finish with a Leunig cartoon and a poem by Mary Oliver.

The Deficit: Mr Curly owes much to his teapot. It has given him a lot. He is in debt to the moon and the stars. His debt to the birds is huge. For the joy they have given them, he owes much to the trees and flowers. To the table, the chair, the cat, the dog, the vase, the mandolin, the duck, he owes a large debt. Can he ever repay? Well, of course he can. That’s the whole point of his life.

WILD GEESE

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

³ Michael Stone : Author of *Awake in the World*: in a recommendation for [Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life’s Challenges](#) by Roshi Pat Enkyo O’Hara

⁴ Gary Snyder, in the *Introduction* to [Beneath a Single Moon: Legacies of Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry](#). Boston: Shambala: 2001. Eds Kent Johnson & Craig Paulenich.

Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting,-
over and over announcing your place / in the family of things.

*

Zen as a Mystical Path

by Mark Edwards

Let's start this foray with an exploration of the etymology of the word mystic. It comes from the Greek "mousai". Originally Greek mousai (muses) were the goddesses of music, poetry and inspiration, the arts and libraries. The Greek mouseion meant a "place of study, library or museum, school of art or poetry," originally "a seat or shrine of the muses". The muses were the goddesses who inspired creativity and artistic insight. To be initiated into a school was to be a *mustes* and the word *muein* meant to be initiated into sacred rites. Eventually this *mustes* or *mystikos* came to mean "to conceal", "to close the eyes or mouth". So the terms muse, music, mystery, museum, mystique, and mysticism all have their origin in the meeting of two aspects of life. One is the secret, unspeakable, non-verbal, artistic and profoundly subjective dimensions of human experience and the other is the idea of a special shared knowledge or practice that is inter-subjective, communal and passed on to others through rites of passage and collective ritual.

So we have these two elements to the semantics of "mystic" – one is about a secret personal insight and the other about a communal practice or educative tradition. So the mystical path connects and scrambles together both of these ingredients. The mystical path is a path of liberation, emancipation and insight that involves transformative practices and cultural traditions providing a context for those practices. All re-lig-ions, at least in their guise as arts and sciences of human reconnection, include mystical traditions and mystics.

There are not only many aspects to mysticism but they are mostly contradictory. The most

concealed and the deepest secret is the thing that is most obvious and most ordinary, that what is directly before us and what we live is the most unknown and unknowable.

Our “Great Vows” embody the mystery of these contradictions, “beings are numberless”, “save them all”, “ignorance rises endlessly but I will leave it totally behind”, “Buddha’s way is unattainable – yet embody it fully”. The Heart sutra also seems like a bundle of contrarian ideas, “Of no old age and death and also no ending of old age and death”, “no path, no wisdom, and no attainment.” “no Zen as a mystical path” but in the end we have this great mantra of “GATE GATE PARA GATE PARASAM GATE BODHI SVAHA!” - “Gone, gone, completely gone over to the other shore, enlightened, so be it.”

In sitting with the mystery, the musing, the music and mysticism of Zen practice, in chanting the Heart Sutra and in sitting Zen, in talking about Zen with others we have deep paradox and contradiction in every direction.

And so we have Zen as a mystical path of deep and abiding mystery about that which is thoroughly ordinary and obvious. And this total ambiguity attracts us like moths to a flame, and it also powers our seeking, our faith and commitment to our practice. The red hot iron ball of doubt stuck in our throats motivates our effort and our courage. Paradox, opposition, the tussle between knowing and not knowing sets up the space in which we sit.

The mystic keeps her mouth closed about mystery, the moment, the unknowable. So it might be better to keep quiet about it all. But then silence can also be an escape and sometimes a bit of a fraud or at least a ruse. It might be better to remain silent and appear to be ignorant of all this than to open my mouth and remove all doubt. Sometimes it is good to make an honest attempt to say something about it all.

There is an aspect of this in dokusan. The cutting edge of dokusan lies right there in the meeting of the unutterable nature of each moment and the public giving voice to what is in our heart, in our practice. Zen is deeply mystical in that it directly engages with the dynamic of silence and story, knowing and not knowing, we sit in silence facing the wall even as the parade of our lives sounds out before us. Here are some lyrics from one of my songs that connect with this.

*When together we don't need to say what's clear
In sitting silently there's more than can ever be said
Holding on to what's being held so near
And in that sharing of a song the dreaming passes on*

Zen as a mystical path is, before anything else, is something to walk along but after that it is also something to talk about. It's like taking your zazen up and walking about with it and not just sitting still with it. Mysticism has this contrarian nature, what has been called “*coincidentia oppositorum*” – the coincidence of opposites in many mystical traditions. Diogenes says (4th century BCE): “All things come into being through the conflict of opposites and the sum of things (τὰ ὅλα ta hola, "the whole") flows like a stream”. In Jewish and Christian mysticism we have this - *coincidentia oppositorum*.

The Zohar is the foundational work in the literature of Jewish mystical thought known as Kabbalah. It is a group of books including commentary on the mystical aspects of the Torah. The Zohar contains a discussion of the nature of God, the origin and structure of the universe, Ein Sof (“no end”) as God without any form of manifestation. Becomes manifest through Sefirot, “the principle in which everything hidden and visible meet, and as such it is the common root of *both* faith and unbelief.” Sefirot involves the union of opposites, and that this unity provides the energy for the cosmos. The nature of sefirah is the synthesis of everything and its opposite. For if they did not possess the power of synthesis, there would be no energy in anything.

“Mystics of various persuasions have generally held that such paradoxes are the best means of expressing within language, truths about a whole that is sundered by the very operation of language itself.” Drob, Sanford (2000)

The Doctrine of *Coincidentia Oppositorum* in Jewish Mysticism. Every spoken word rears apart the sacred nature of what is real. But what about the beginning of John's Gospel “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God”.

In Zen we sit silently, we do sesshin in silence, but also are asked to give expression to our True Nature, “To be mature in Zen, is to be mature in expression”. So we have silence and words, but not only that we have, “basically leaping clear of the many and the one”

The Mystical As What Is Obvious, Public, Open and As What is Hidden. Koan study, the study of public cases and of the open recorded expression and communication of the Way. In Chan there is also the practice of Silent Illumination.

It cannot be practiced nor actualized because it is something intrinsically full and replete. No other things can defile it; it is thoroughly pure to its depth. ... Truly arriving at this place where there is no middle or extremes, before or after—it begins to become one pervasive totality. ... Clearly, this is a matter to be found within one's own home. (Silent Illumination Chan by Hongzhi Zhengjue, Excerpts from *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*, - “Extensive Records of Chan Master Hongzhi”)

The mystical as a path of silence has been called the Via Negativa – the way of not naming and of keeping your mouth shut about that of which nothing can be said. Even the realm of art, for all its dependence on depiction and performance, searches for a Mondrian-like simplicity.

As the activity of the mystic must end in a via negativa, a theology of God’s absence, a craving for the cloud of unknowingness beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech, so art must tend toward anti-art, the elimination of the “subject” (the “object,” the “image”), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence. (Susan Sonntag “The Aesthetics of Silence”)

But, like the boiling maelstrom of energy that the quantum physicists tell us fills apparently empty space, a mysticism of silence and absence is boiling over with expression and articulation. The mystical is both silent, hidden and very apparent, full of declamation and publicly obvious. Oscar Wilde, said that “It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible." What is clearly seen by all is perhaps the site of the greatest mystery – In the beauty of the deeply ordinary rests the most profound secret.

The mystical as revealing what is hidden in the visible, revealing the extraordinary in the ordinary or perhaps it’s more just allowing what is there to be what is there. Not missing the reality of what is there by attaching a name, a meaning, a position, an attitude to it. This is

mysticism as not speaking, not knowing, not attaching ourselves to the beauty (or not) of what is before us.

The mystical as “con-templative” – “with time” in the moment. Coming into this moment and into this moment. Eckhardt says of the “Now”.

“The Now in which God created human beings and the Now in which the last member of the human race will pass away, and the Now in which I am presently speaking to you, are all the same in God and are nothing other than a single Now. See, this person exists in a single light with God, which is why there is neither passivity nor temporal succession in them but only an unchanging eternity. For such a person there are truly no more surprises, and all things exist in him or her essentially. Therefore neither future events nor the effects of chance can bring them anything new, since they live in a single now-time, ever new, without ceasing.

Zen is a mystical path in this sense of the new, the now of this moment, this movement. Our senior teacher Ross Bolleter has mentioned in a recent teisho something about what he calls this “puckered” moment of the present moment. Here, from a recent teisho of his:

Truly the sequence of time in the quietest way collapses in those moments. As it often does for us in sesshin. Our imagery of intimacy is so often spatial but it is also temporal and functions across time. We cannot find the track that leads us to such experiences nor do we know where they lead. They are what they are. They feel ancient. All that we regard as before and after are gathered and our relationship to the past and the future is like a single mirror reflecting itself. Any moment is up for this, any moment is thus privileged.

A truly privileged position in being able to enter the mystery of this moment. The mystical is also the spontaneous expression of the Heart in this ever new moment. From the Mahabharata we have the wonderful example of this in the responses of Yudhisthira to the Yaksha (one of the caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth, the lakes, and tree roots). All of Yudhisthira’s brothers have ignored the warning from the Yaksha not to drink from the lake’s waters and they have each one in turn gone into a sleepy death. The Yaksha asks these

questions of Yudhisthira. If he does not answer satisfactorily he and his bothers will die and remain in death. The Yaksha asks: What is quicker than the wind?

Yudhisthira: Thought

Yaksha : What can cover the earth?

Yudhisthira: Darkness

Yaksha: Who are more numerous, the living or the dead?

Yudhisthira: The living because the dead are no longer

Yaksha: Give me an example of space?

Yudhisthira: My two hands as one

Yaksha: An example of grief?

Yudhisthira: Ignorance

Yaksha: Of poison?

Yudhisthira: Desire

Yaksha: Which came first, day or night?

Yudhisthira: Day, but it was only one day ahead

Yaksha: What is the cause of the world?

Yudhisthira: Love

Yaksha: What is your opposite?

Yudhisthira: Myself

Yaksha: What is madness?

Yudhisthira: A forgotten way

Yaksha: And revolt, why do men revolt?

Yudhisthira: To find beauty, either in life or in death

Yaksha: And what for each of us is inevitable?

Yudhisthira: Happiness

Yaksha: And what is the greatest wonder?

Yudhisthira: Each day death strikes and we live as though we were immortal, this is the greatest wonder.

And Yudhisthira asks: Who are you, that is asking these questions? The Yaksha replies: I am Dharma, your father, I am Constancy, Rightness, the form of Love. I am all forms.

Zen as a mystical path is perhaps most of all a path of “practice” and of praxis, that is, the enactment of possibility in the action and weight of our body. Practice is a performative enabling of potential into reality, of thought into breath. This is an act of embodied

transformation and this is why the notion of practice was central for that very practical revolutionary Karl Marx. For all his words of indiscriminate revolution he was perhaps the first to so clearly see transformation through the lens of practice. He says in his “Theses on Feuerbach”:

All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

Zen as a mystical path might be thought of as an embodied revolution, intimating the unnamable beauty of each moment, and might be practiced as this breath, this moment, this body.

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Sun on Boats, by Kathy Shiels

About the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts (considerations for your Spring edition contribution)

The sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts are a collection of 16 koans used in training in the Rinzai and Sanbo Kyodan lines of Zen (Maezumi and Glassman, 1976: 58-59, 61, 65-66, 98-101). These koans are also used in the ceremony of accepting the Precepts (the Jukai ceremony) when they are given a unique and personal commentary (written and oral) (Aitken 1994:92-93) by a student taking a Buddhist name and embarking on the Bodhisattva path. The collection is comprised of the **Three Vows of Refuge**; the **Three Pure Precepts** and the **Ten Grave Precepts**. *

In Soto Zen, the founder Dogen established a somewhat expanded version of the Bodhisattva Precepts for use by both priests and lay followers, based on both Brahma Net Sutra and other sources. Many various translations exist, the following is used by John Daido Looi, Roshi at the Zen Mountain Monastery. **

The Three Treasures : Taking refuge in the Buddha; Taking refuge in the Dharma; Taking refuge in the Sangha.

The Three Treasures are universally known in Buddhism as the Three Refuges or Three Jewels.

The Three Pure Precepts: Do not create Evil; Practice Good; Actualize Good For Others.

These are also known as the *Three Root Precepts*, and are mentioned in the Brahma Net Sutra as well.

The Ten Grave Precepts:

- Affirm life – Do not kill
- Be giving – Do not steal
- Honor the body – Do not misuse sexuality
- Manifest truth – Do not lie
- Proceed clearly – Do not cloud the mind
- See the perfection – Do not speak of others errors and faults
- Realize self and other as one – Do not elevate the self and blame others
- Give generously – Do not be withholding
- Actualize harmony – Do not be angry
- Experience the intimacy of things – Do not defile the Three Treasures

* From <http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/ZenPages/Koans-PCP.html> At this website readers will find access to commentaries on the precepts by Robert Aitken, John Tarrant and others. It is a very useful and interesting website.

** From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva_Precepts, accessed 14-05-2014.

**ZEN GROUP OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
MEMBERSHIP/PLEDGE FORM FOR 2013/2014**

The fee structure for the Zen Group of Western Australia for 2013/2014 is as follows.

Full Member -	\$200	Health Care Card/Pension/Student - \$90	Out of Town - \$160
Family -	\$230	Friend (suggested) -	\$90
Pledge (suggested)- \$500 (\$42 per month, in addition to membership)			

If you would like to join but cannot meet the fees please contact the ZGWA Treasurer, Paul Wilson. The money raised through membership and pledges goes towards maintaining the Zendo and paying the teacher. Members have the opportunity to be nominated for council positions and to vote at general meetings. As a member you also have a right to a reserved place and discount for sesshins, ZGWA magazine subscription, receipt of mail outs, and use of the library.

We have a group of **members** who pledge monthly, over and above membership. These pledges are vital to maintain the zendo and our teacher, and keep the doors open for everyone. If you can afford it please consider. Pledges can be made throughout the year, or in a lump sum. But this is different from a donation. Pledges are a scheduled payment, and the Treasurer is notified in advance of your commitment.

Regular payments can be made by cheque or by arrangement with the ZGWA Treasurer.

The membership fee should have been paid by **1st July 2013**. However you can join at any time. If you wish to continue your membership or to join us as a member please do so now. To become a member or friend of ZGWA, and to register your pledge, please complete the form below and either give it to the Treasurer or a Council member at the Zendo or send it with your payment to:

The Treasurer, Zen Group of WA, PO Box 442, Fremantle 6959

If you have a query regarding membership please contact the Treasurer by:

Email: zgwa_contacts@yahoo.com.au Or call: 0413826119

I wish to be a member of the Zen Group of Western Australia for the **20013/2014** financial year.

Please tick:

Full Member - \$200 Health Care Card/Pension/Student - \$90 Out of Town - \$160
 Family - \$230 Friend (suggested) - \$90

If you also wish to pledge a regular amount to ZGWA please indicate below.

Monthly pledge of \$..... Other (please specify)

Please fill in your up-to-date contact details below.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

THANK YOU