THE WOBBLY POT

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

Christmas 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. – 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. To contribute to the next edition please contact Phillip McNamara at 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 Zazenkai'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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GOING FASTER - BUT WHERE?
Or
A RAMBLE TO AFRICA

by Mari Rhydwen

This is an essay which was written over a decade ago, a couple of years after I sailed out of Freo. Some of you may know already that I am going to Indonesia in February, to take up an Australian Volunteers International position for two years teaching academic science editing and writing at a forestry research centre. When I was asked if I would like to submit something to Wobbly Pot, I immediately thought of this essay, because it offers the best explanation I can offer as to why I am going. Ever since making the voyage described here, I have yearned to travel again but even more slowly, staying in one place long enough to become really involved, to work, to learn more of the language, to be connected, instead of just passing through.

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I had just stopped for a coffee in the Kenyan village where I had walked to do my shopping when I read: 'Write an essay on how fast we're all travelling these days. No rambling please.' Having spent the last two years sailing around the Indian Ocean at a walking pace I was itching to respond: to challenge the assumption that we are all travelling fast, and the implication that rambling, literally or literarily, is undesirable. But I needed to find out more about the competition and this was problematic. 'I suppose,' I say to my husband as we stroll the couple of miles back to our yacht, 'it simply didn't occur to them that we wouldn't be able to access the web.' We meander back past the markets where I stop at a stall to try on a cotton frock, past the mud huts and the shambas, past the bunch of cheery children who like to practise their English and shake hands and past the men cutting the roadside grass by hand to feed the cattle. We talk about how we can get to an internet cafe. It will take a day.

Sailing to Africa from Western Australia has taken two years but we have met many other cruising people who had spent ten years travelling this far. They did nothing to disguise that they thought we were rushing, impatient, still infected by the hyperactivity we had deliberately tried to leave ashore. This has little to do with speed at sea, but with the amount of time spent puddling along coastlines, lingering at anchor, pondering the sky as well as days engaged in hauling well-water or walking to market. For many people cruising has become a permanent lifestyle, financed by portable or casual work, or by retirement pensions. A rare minority have taken time off work, rented out the house, and intend to resume their former lives within an allotted time span. Some of us have loosened our grip on the illusion of security and given up homes and jobs to travel the oceans for a while and just see what happens. It is not a way of getting anywhere. It is a way of being wherever you are. Indeed it is a form of rambling and seems to belong

to a whole genre of contemporary sins including loitering, idling and wandering vaguely, that conspicuously fail to get the point or get things done. Practitioners of such unambitious, goal-disoriented lives are prone to being labelled losers. Curiously though, if done blatantly and wholeheartedly in a little yacht, people express interest, even envy, rather than scorn.

Increasingly, sailing takes you only to places that can also be reached faster and more comfortably by people who are in more of a hurry to find tranquillity. Since anchoring in commercial ports or near big towns can be unsafe, sheltered bays on remote islands are particularly attractive but it is here that one most often stumbles upon exclusive resorts where guests are delivered from the nearest airport by private planes or motor yachts. At one, famously expensive, we dressed up and went ashore for a reconnoitering coffee, curious to know what you got for two thousand dollars a day. We found: bamboo-shingled roofs; open-sided buildings furnished with timber, cane and cream linen; coral-rubble paths; tasteful touches of local art; good looking young staff in sarong-meets-Paris uniforms and iconic views of white sand and palm trees. It was the ubiquitous low-key casual tropical paradise elegance we observed in posh hotels throughout the Indian Ocean. But would you know if you were staying on Moyo Island or Ari Atoll? Would it matter?

Chagos is the ultimate exclusive retreat, to which no one can buy a ticket. Part of British Indian Ocean Territory, it lies mid-ocean, out of the path of cyclones, and is thus strategically significant to the cruising sailor as well as militarily. Private vessels are permitted to stop for a limited time at some of the atolls and we stayed six weeks waiting for the change of monsoon. Here are picture book coral atolls where people live out shipwrecked-on-a-tropical-island fantasies, or reality in the case of the couple aboard the sailing yacht Vespara which ran aground there a few years ago. It is probably unique in being a group of habitable but uninhabited islands, a consequence of the relocation of the population at the time of British annexation. I was there reluctantly, already jaded with eden-like beaches, but swimming daily with baby manta rays, snorkelling through reef undamaged by bleaching or dynamite, and being a thousand kilometres from a shop, restaurant, hairdresser or bank, has some charm. Nonetheless these idyllic uninhabited islands are chimerical, created and maintained through territorial haggling and dispute.

The nearest destination to Chagos to which one may purchase a ticket, is the Maldives. Although tourist-processing is a major industry, visitors are kept as separate from local people as possible. There are about two hundred inhabited islands and over eighty resort islands. Private yachts, like backpackers, are not made welcome and are permitted to stop only at Male or at some resort islands. Anchoring off what are termed ‘inhabited islands’, those with a local population, is forbidden. Ironically we spent thousands of dollars there on essential repairs. Indeed yachts people visiting remote places often spend far more than the average package tourist, doing long-term provisioning at local shops and markets, buying hardware and fuel. Like backpackers,

they spend their money at local businesses and not at multinational hotel chains. The Maldives accepts tourists' dollars, but wants their bodies kept at a safe distance. That tropical island paradise was this traveller's dystopia. Is the point of travel to be cocooned in a fantasy theme park version of a native village well away from the real thing? The segregation is the result both of the local people's fear of being swamped by an alien culture and the tourists' desire to be able to enjoy the pleasures of an idyllic tropical island, unconstrained by any concerns about offending others' sensibilities. It is an efficient way of managing tourism but I do not travel to be sequestered in a tourist ghetto. If I wanted an uninhabited island, I would sail back to Chagos.

A delightful aspect of travelling slowly is having time to hang around in places and meet people, travelling by foot or on local public transport and going to hotels and cafes that local people can afford to patronise. Making connections, sharing breakfast at the top of a volcano with a shockingly impoverished university professor and his family on the island of Flores, collecting eggs and a chicken-filled snake on a Malaysian engineer's hobby farm and attending a time-warped meeting of the East African Women's League in Kenya – these are the highlights but they cannot be bought and they cannot be rushed and they cannot be organised. Travel must be slow enough to allow such accidents to happen.

But slow travel is trivialised when reduced to a collection of amusing anecdotes and feel good experiences. It has mainly been about learning again and again and again that most people are poor, a very few people are exceedingly rich and doing nicely, corruption is normal, clean water is precious and good people everywhere are doing what they can. Tourists are generally shielded from the grosser evidence of this: airport officials do not hassle for baksheesh and even cheap hotels have running water where few of the population do. Entering a country by boat, it is first necessary to deal with customs, immigration, port and health authorities, a host of bureaucracies. These first delicate encounters with officialdom have proved a remarkably accurate barometer when compared with the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.

Fast travel enables increasing numbers of people to visit more exotic and remote places but as tourism becomes a significant factor in struggling economies, more and more incredibly fancy resorts are being built in places with the poorest populations and most intractable socio political problems. Instead of bringing people closer and facilitating mutual understanding and awareness of global issues, it is dividing the world more sharply in two, the rich and the poor. Naturally most tourists on their two-week holiday do not want to be confronted by poverty and disease or reminded that the soup they just ordered costs twice the waiter's daily wage. The waiter, here in Kenya's shriveling economy, may count himself lucky to earn a daily wage. Everywhere I find myself looking for ways to counteract the burgeoning polarisation of wealth and the devastation so evidently caused by rampaging greed. I yearn to ask the rapacious, 'What is it you really want so badly? Respect? Happiness? Immortality? Don't you know they are not for sale?'

Each night at sea I do the midnight to six o'clock watch. Since having a light on kills night vision I do little except monitor our position regularly, trim the sails and perhaps learn to recognise another constellation or rehearse some little phrases of Bahasa Indonesia, Kiswahili or whatever, ready for landfall. Otherwise it's like being a cat: eyes half-closed but ears twitching. Each morning the miracle of sunrise, the colour comes back into the world, blueness to the sky first, then a little yellow in the east and the vivid redness of the safety-harness strap that ties me to the earth. After that it will be half an hour till the sun gets over the horizon and there is time for a cup of tea while I watch any hitch hiking boobies or terns take off, always flying away after the colours arrive but before the sunshine. Sometimes I am so glad of the company of other living beings through the long night, I even thank them for coming. Travelling fast, but where are you going? Travelling slowly, always at home.

SUMMARY of A RAMBLE TO AFRICA

Written in a Kenyan village after sailing around the Indian Ocean from Australia at a walking pace, the author must travel all day to reach an internet café from which to enter the essay competition and challenge the assumption that everyone is going faster. Many people are rambling globally in small boats, perhaps the only socially-acceptable way to go slowly these days, and a way to truly be wherever you are. Yet tourism is spreading everywhere. Increasingly anchorages at apparently remote locations throughout the region turn out to be close to the most exclusive of tourist resorts which, upon inspection, are characterised by their homogenised tropical elegance. Only in Chagos were there truly uninhabited coral atolls, reminiscent of paradise, but these are a fantasy, unintentionally engendered through territorial wrangling. The Maldives artificially creates such tropical edens on a large scale, but these are simultaneously tourist ghettoes, designed to earn foreign exchange while preventing any real cross-cultural contact. Slow travel allows time for serendipitous and fruitful connections between people and also for the consequences of poverty, particularly corruption, to become manifest to the traveller. While tourism, fast travel, brings some economic benefits, it also contributes to global economic polarisation. Going slowly forces one to confront the human condition. The conclusion is a meditative paean to slow travel.

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One Moment - Paula Inayat-Hussain

I have been
To the sunny climes of your smile
Seen the yellow lime of your eye,
Sat serene and unfurled
In the roundness of your breath.
As it was in the beginning, so I am.

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Black clad koan

A cross of bones upon a cushion -

Swaying to every breath.

- Paula Inayat-Hussain

Poor flesh dreaming - Paula Inayat-Hussain

Poor flesh dreaming,
Opaque and dull,
Fold upon fold
Of nestled-into-itself
Sorrow of being.
What growth do you still aspire to,
Of beauty, wisdom and meaningfulness,
When the ultimate game-end of all
Is death itself?
What good is it to say,
You are no concern of mine?
Light is for the enlightened ones,
As weightlessness is for those who walk upon water.
What of the lump in the breast,
The morphine shot in the dark?
What of the misery of goodbyes
Where some must go
And some must go on?
What goes? What stays?

(For Janet Herbert)

Amaranth and Quinoa (keen-wah) Porridge/Pudding - Serves 4 – 6.

- Wendy Jacobsen

Both amaranth and quinoa are ancient grains/seeds with protein and yet gluten free.

It is still cool enough in the morning for this recipe to be used to make A & Q porridge for breakfast. Alternatively it can be enjoyed at any time cold.

Ingredients

- 1 cup amaranth (cream hard little balls, not puffed)
- 1 cup dark quinoa (black or red hard little balls, not rolled)
- 7 cups of water
- Cinnamon
- Chopped strawberries and banana, or fruit of choice
- Rice or coconut milk, or milk of choice

Method

- Place grains in a saucepan and rinse x 2
- Add water
- Bring to the boil
- Leave the lid on and turn the heat down to simmer for 30 mins
- Turn the heat off and stir with a wooden spoon, replace lid
- Leave to rest for 5 mins while you prepare the fruit

Plating

- Spoon required amount into a bowl
- Poor over milk
- Add chopped fruit
- Sprinkle with cinnamon

Enjoy!

Any remainder can be stored in a covered container in the fridge to be warmed or eaten cold.

Has a dog Buddha-nature?
This is the most serious question of all.
If you say yes or no,
You lose your own Buddha-nature.

"Fly" 2012 etching by Herman Isaac.

Ranier Maria Rilke (Stephen Mitchell translation):
Ah, not to be cut off,
not through the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner – what is it?
if not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.

William Blake:
To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

Keizan Jokin:
One branch from the old plum tree extends splendidly forth.
Thorns become attached to it in time.

Shakyamuni (or Siddhartha), looked up to the morning star and noticed something fundamental about the universe and who and what we are:
"*At this moment I see that I, all beings, and indeed the great earth itself, awaken together."*

Ah, not to be cut off – Phil McNamara
This moment
See.
At this very moment we awaken together.

We are constantly called back to this moment.

This moment
See.
Each thing distinct, yet
At this very moment we awaken together.

Take your zazen seriously. Each zazen moment is your true home. It is very precious.

How then can *we not* awaken together? …We are made of the same eternity.

(the above poems were brought along and shared at our monthly discussion evening)

What follows is an extract from Ross Bolleter's book *Dongshan's Five Ranks: Keys to Enlightenment* to be published by Wisdom Publications, Boston, in April 2014. Service is the second of Dongshan's stages of the enlightened Way.

Service

For whom have you washed off your splendid makeup?
The cuckoo's call urges you to return.
The hundred flowers have fallen, yet the call is unending,
moving deeper and still deeper into jumbled peaks.

I asked an old friend of mine who doesn't practice Zen formally, "What should I do when I feel depressed?"

"Do something for someone else," was his reply.

We find relief from self-preoccupation when we make efforts on behalf of others. With luck, the other person will have been helped and given a lift too. When a student asked Soen Nakagawa, "What can I do when I feel discouraged?" he famously responded, "Encourage others!" His words are a timeless spring of service and commitment, and are an inspiration for this chapter.

In Latin, *attendare*, from which the English word "attention" is derived, means "to lean towards," or "to serve." We serve others when we open an attentive silence in which they can express their joy and suffering. In order to accomplish this we need to let go of rehearsing our eager story as they tell theirs. Whatever else enlightened activity is, it surely includes this. One of the finest acknowledgments one human can give another is to say of them, "He was there for me," or "She was there for me." Idealistic and self-congratulatory notions of service disappear in such moments—we simply help the child with their homework, or push the neighbor's car when its battery is dead. Enlightenment is as enlightenment does.

For a ninth century Chan monk or nun, service was unquestioningly vested in fulfilling one's obligations to the Buddha and to one's teacher. In order to be undivided in his commitment to the Buddha Way, and to secure a favorable rebirth, Dongshan would have taken up some two hundred and fifty precepts, and committed himself to a life of unremitting meditation. Such a lifestyle was much more rigorous than anything we could, or probably would, undertake as lay people.

In the light of the towering past, modern lay Zen practice can look like a long shot. If we do commit to practice as laypeople, chances are that for most of us it will be within the context of family, relationships, and work, where it takes ingenuity to carve out time to meditate. However it's often more possible than we allow ourselves to imagine. If we can be open to opportunities as they present themselves, we will find that gaps appear in even the busiest schedule.

A story circulates within Hasidic Jewish communities of a man who, caught up in the pressure of the day's business, suddenly realized that he would be unable to make it to the synagogue for his daily worship. During a brief moment of quiet between tasks, he prayed a hurried prayer of contrition, and then hastened to his next appointment. It is said

that God blessed him threefold. I don't know about the triple blessing, but momentarily returning to my breath refreshes a torrid hour in the recording studio.

It is difficult to sustain zazen in a life that is too ramified, with too many counter pulls. I wrote "ramified," but when I read it back it looked like "rarefied"—and truly, a life that is too simplified and pure can also be problematic. The practice of zazen thrives in busy lives, where it creates its own joy, and feeds commitment. Regarding these two poles, the solitary and the bustling life: sitting alone makes us strong; sitting with others opens us up. It's good to do a lot of both.

Taking up the Bodhisattva Precepts, which comprise: the Three Vows of Refuge (taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), the Three Pure Precepts (renouncing evil, practicing good, and liberating manifold beings), and the Ten Grave Precepts (not to kill, not to steal, not to misuse sex, not to speak falsely, not to give or take drugs, not to discuss the faults of others, not to praise oneself while abusing others, not to spare the dharma assets, not to indulge in anger, and not to defame the Three Treasures) is an expression of our commitment to the Way, and should help us to reduce the harm we do to others and ourselves.

We come to know ourselves through the challenge of trying to keep the precepts, because they make us more conscious of our motives, and help us to know our own hearts. Regardless of our commitment to keep the precepts, we can still hurt others and cause harm. We aren't proof against that. To live is to hurt and to be hurt, and making apology, forgiving, and being forgiven remain at the core of our relationships with others.

As regards that core, it is important that we know our own hearts. Our loves and our fears are also our true nature in its unfolding. We serve the essential when we allow the presence of those feelings. Otherwise we run the risk of divorcing what we mistakenly take to be the purity of the essential from the messiness of our lives.

In Dongshan's verse the voice of the cuckoo calls us into greater depth, and we enter the jumbled peaks of passion and suffering to find that they too are expressions of awakened mind and heart.

For whom have you washed off your splendid makeup?

The reference to removing makeup conjures the image of a woman, well versed in the ways of the world, who decides to wash off her makeup and commit to the one she loves. This is Dongshan's image for renouncing worldliness to commit to the Buddha Way. Most of us are not in a position to renounce our worldliness, so to bring the verse into closer accord with contemporary lay experience, I will reframe Dongshan's question as Robert Aitken does: "For whom do you bathe and make yourself presentable?" [1]

This is a koan of daily custom. In it, the "for whom"—or more aptly the "who"—disappears into the fact of our showering, of our drying our hair, and of our dabbing on deodorant. There is nothing ulterior here, nothing hidden. Our being born is like this. Our dying too. This long day here—the sun that rises, the cat that glides through the long grass, the figure that stands at the sink making coffee, the dark purple, almost indigo, morning glories twined on the fence opposite—is clearly that, and clean as a whistle. All ages and limitless space disappear into the least of these.

The cuckoo's call urges you to return.

Here in Australia it is the crow's "caaaark!" that calls me home, and which surely is home. "To return" is the integrity of practice, and we do this undeterred by any awakening experience we may have had. In this spirit, Yamada Koun, after his great awakening, practiced every day for the rest of his life with what some might regard as a beginner's koan: "Who is hearing that sound?"

The wind on our faces—our ever-faithful breath—calls to us, *as* us. As we move into accord with this, our half-lives become a life. With repeated returning, over time, the genuine person emerges. We emerge in our true colors.

> *The hundred flowers have fallen, yet the call is unending,*
> *moving deeper and still deeper into jumbled peaks.*

Even though our delusions fall away, still the call continues to draw us in to greater depth. Our heart yearns for its release, and that too is the call. The heart's yearning *is* its release. With the confidence that comes from our surrender to the softest of invitations—a long ringing bell, a flickering star—we embark on a journey into the jumbled peaks of our suffering, and of the suffering world.

Regarding our suffering, and our journey with it, it is important to get to know our propensities and our demons, and to learn to work with them. This process usually entails fear: of the journey itself, and of what we might discover. When I touch on the topic of fear when giving a Dharma talk, I feel the atmosphere in the zendo change, and I have the sense that everyone's on board for this bit. Fear seems so fundamental to how many of us feel much of the time.

We are often more afraid of life than death. This isn't reasoned or even reasonable. We fear shame, in particular. And shame surely can feel like a death. My mother used to say, "I could have died!" or "I felt as big as sixpence!"[2] Contrariwise, we often need signs of respect from others in order to behave tolerably towards ourselves, even to feel that we are alive in a way that's worth the living.

When we learn to acknowledge our fear, we also learn a lot about the sources of our aggression, manifested both as lashing out, and as being uncooperative. We see how painful it is when we allow fear to shape our lives, as when we constantly contort ourselves trying to avoid others. If we could see the tracks of our avoidance from above, what a confusing maze of scuffmarks that would be!

By attending to our fear, and anger, over time we are changed. This is not least because with attention to our fear and anger we are more in touch with our sorrow and vulnerability. We can then connect with the world from a much more settled, open place. When we speak, our words have much more heart and body in them, and our compassion feels less entangled with our co-dependent need to please others.

Even a moment free from attachment to our isolated self can release helpful energies and abundant love that many can share in, without quite knowing what draws and holds them. Groups form and benefit from this. Over time, as we settle into such communities, our less appealing traits get unerringly reflected back to us (our more appealing traits having mostly shown up earlier). For this reason, being in community can be rough. As Subhana Barzaghi, a fellow teacher, says, "It's in the communal vegetable garden that words are said, and tears are shed."

When we begin to cultivate the Way we're often naïve, and blind sighted to our heart's darkness, which is perhaps just as well. Later, when we encounter our own ill-will and cruelty, and that of others, we may feel daunted. But in a maturing community such experiences are part and parcel of our journey together. The old master Wumen Huikai wrote:

> If you want to support the gate and sustain the house,
> you must climb a mountain of swords with bare feet.[3]

Huikai is saying that if we wish to teach and to cultivate a practice community, we must bear the difficulties involved. Dealing with the trickiness of Sangha relations, as well as with our own deviousness and self-deception can be confronting. The first four letters of Sangha are *sang*, the French word for blood. The ties that connect us in Sangha are blood ties: the shared pain and joy of a second, third, or fourth go at family.

As we learn to open and allow more of the world in, we hear the sorrow that lies beneath the anger in the voice that criticizes us. We feel our own shame, nearly to the point of incapacitation, in that moment. We begin to open to truths embedded in our interactions with others, and slowly come to see our own part in the conflict.

We lean in, we serve, by giving our awareness to each painful situation. We allow whatever is there to be there. Every subtle movement of feeling is just what it is. This is the voice that calls us home. This is home. No one asks us to do this work, and for the most part we didn't come to the Way for it. But we do it nonetheless, cultivating a path of opening to, and seeing into our karmic inheritance, as we struggle to come to terms with what is most obdurate in us.

When we take this on, we undertake to practice with devotion to the end of our lives. This means accepting disappointment without giving up, and enduring in the face of discouragement. All of this requires courage, understood here as that quality that carries us beyond petty resistance and self-pity. Having made the commitment, it's good to keep going. There's still so much (who knows how much?) to be discovered. It's as though we've found our way into a dark cave. We grope our way forward. We glimpse a stalactite, and see what looks like water glimmering in the dark. Is it a lake? How far back does it go?

By undertaking service to the essential, we learn to distinguish stream from lake, stalactite from stalagmite, and we begin to emerge from the shadows. Even with our ordinary activity—bathing, cleaning our teeth, squinting in the steamy mirror to comb our hair—we make the subterranean caverns eloquent, no less than the night of turning stars.

Ross Bolleter

1. Aitken, Robert, *The Morning Star: New and Selected Zen Writings,* (Shoemaker & Hoard, Washington, D.C., 2003), 139.
2. In nineteenth century England a "sixpence" was the smallest coin minted. The saying "I felt as small as sixpence" indicates a diminution, even unto death—as when we say "I could have died of shame."
3. Aitken, Robert, *The Gateless Barrier: Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)*. Translated with commentary by Robert Aitken. (New York: North Point Press, 1991), 114.

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And They Never Knew - Kathy Shiels

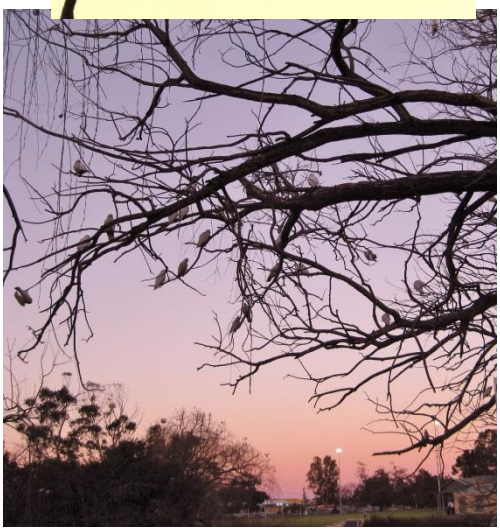
Remember how beach bound footpaths
and gentle salty waves' beckoning fingers
enticed us from home as nine year olds.
Stealing away on sea breezes and sand
we'd sink a day in the pools of Point Peron
or wade the wide sandbar to Penguin island.
Without a word to our mothers.

Without a plan, without a watch, off we'd go
into the sea straight down and along the shore.
Shady rock pools beneath high limestone cliffs
became a lazy summer's paradise where
we'd sit on ledges with water withered fingers
and plastered hair, while temperatures soared.
Until into satin water we'd slide - again.

How did we know it was the sandbar's low tide?
And how did we get to Shoalwater Bay in time?
Those few houses sleepily ignored our little feet.
Penguins heard us and hid or maybe just weren't there.
The far side was best and the track over was hot
enough to walk on towels or step on sparse tufts.
And the sandbar always waited.

Afternoon sun and hungry bellies sent us home.
We'd begin walking in jade, knee deep and cool.
As the gentle breeze became a wind at our back
vanishing edges of the sandbar turned deep green.
We'd step off and tread water with towels held high
Sometimes it was a scary long way back to shore.
And they never knew.

Corellas' Christmas



They take off in loud overture
To the beat of the rising sun
Wheeling and screeching above rooves
Wings skywriting the day's begun.

Now summer they swoop the traffic
And give sprinkler sprays quite a fright
Then hop, peck and running for shade
Pruning all dry grasses in sight

They plunder our late afternoons
For high branches with peak hour views
Commuters and Christmas shoppers
Silhouetted in sunset hues

All rushing towards family
Bearing the fruits of the season
Bemused by the sudden frenzy
Corellas question our reason

Corellas don't wait for Christmas
They open and wrap up each day
Celebrate their family flock
Calling each other on the way

Carols, hymns, choruses and chants
Sing up this season of sharing
Corellas sing like it's Christmas
Whenever they can get the chance

Kathy Shiels

Putting the Z in Zen: Ta-I Tao-hsin's Way - Kathy Shiels

The following talk was given by Kathy Shiels at ZGWA's dojo in Beaconsfield, WA on the 7th of November 2013.

Welcome

The noble limestone walls and cottage gardens of St Paul's community greet us as we make our way from the exquisite maelstrom of our lives on Thursday evenings and welcome ourselves to our Zen community. We enter this hall from our busy days and begin to put the Z in Zen. How do we do that? Well, we sit together and we work together. We set up the altar, set out the mats and zafus, and hoist the long black drapes to create a dojo as authentic as the ancient Chinese temple of Ta-I Tao-hsin who is at the heart of tonight's talk.

When asked the question:

"The moment we are going to begin practice, how should we contemplate?"

Ta-I Tao-hsin replied:

"We must identify with the natural rhythms of things."

The Natural Rhythm of things

The natural rhythms of things; the tyres of the car sweep by, the wind comes up and the frogs steadfastly chorus on. The natural rhythms of things; the sun rises; we wake to birds or alarms and make our way to the bathroom. We work, drive in impatient traffic, field endless emails, calls and texts and soften at the concern in a loved one's voice. The natural rhythms of things; we enter this freshly built dojo with hands at gasshō to the Buddha, we gasshō to our seat, the Dharma, and gasshō a third time across the room to each other, as Sangha, our community in the Dharma. We take our place in the dimmed lights with the frogs, crickets and lurching buses centre stage, in the natural rhythms of things.

Discovering Tao-hsin

Tao-hsin also said:

"Just let your mind be. Don't contemplate or purify your mind. Don't become angry or greedy and don't harbour cares. Float along unobstructed. Let your mind go where it will..."

When I first read this I felt a resonance, especially with the phrase "don't harbour cares". I had a felt sense of how I was nursing, sheltering and protecting *my* cares. Tao-hsin's words prompted the elegant simplicity of letting them go. Encouraged, I read more of Tao-hsin, following a thin but most compelling thread that lead me to discover his place in the very origins of some of our familiar practices here at St Paul's and wherever a Zen community gathers.

It was, as Bill Porter states in his book *Zen Baggage*, Tao-hsin who put the Z in Zen. I thank Ross for how he tirelessly brings ancient teachers into our lives and for guiding me towards great Zen literature. Ross noted my enthusiasm for Tao-hsin and suggested I share it with you in this talk. I have found that so much of what we identify as Zen today is attributed to Tao-hsin.

In fact David W Chappell, who was a contemporary of Robert Aitken Roshi, and Professor of Buddhist Studies at Hawaii University for three decades from the 1970s, went as far as to posit that "there is some weight to the argument that it is actually Tao-hsin is the first patriarch of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism not Bodhidharma."
That seemed to be such a radical statement. I somewhat sceptically tracked through quite a number of texts only to find there he is, Tao-hsin, consistently referenced as the fourth patriarch, yet founder of some fundamental aspects of how we practice Zen together.

Tao-hsin's contribution to Zen

Besides the claims that Tao-hsin is the earliest Ch'an master whose teachings survived (in two ancient manuscripts discovered in London and Paris in 1926) and that all Zen schools unanimously trace their roots to him, it is since Tao-hsin that Zen monasteries and lay communities, with their sesshins and zazenkais, have been self-sufficient communities with participants attending to whatever work needs to be done as part of their practice - as immortalised in the words of Pai-chang: *"A day of no work is a day of no food."*

Sesshin and Jukai in Balingup

Some of us were fortunate enough to be at sesshin recently when Joe Harding took Jukai and during the wonderful ceremony we recited the precepts and chanted the Heart Sutra. Both of these communal practices are also first attributed to Tao-hsin, so perhaps it's now time to venture to ancient China to learn just who he was and hear more of what he taught.

Tao-hsin's life story

Tao-hsin whose name can be translated as *one who trusts the way* was born into the Ssu-ma family, in Wusueh, 25 miles south west of Huangmei, a renowned tea growing area in the Yangtse region of Southern China. It was the year 580, around the time the first Buddhist ordinations were taking place in Japan and they were women, but that's another story. Tonight is about our patriarchs. So when Tao-hsin was born it was over 300 years since the first Buddhist monks had arrived in China and just 85 years after Bodhidharma's arrival. There were, at that time, wandering monks, cave dwellers and hermits as well as those in large temples who were all alms mendicants practising different streams of Taoist and Buddhist teachings; often on solitary paths amidst mountains.
From *The Book of Songs* in David Hinton's anthology of classical Chinese poetry we have the earliest surviving Chinese recluse poem *He built his hut:*

He built his hut on the stream
that stately man so far-seeing
sleeps alone, wakes and speaks:
a timeless bond not forgotten.

He built his hut on the mountain,
that stately man so lean-eyed,
sleeps alone, wakes and chants:
a timeless bond not surpassed.

He built his hut on the heights,
that stately man so self-possessed,
sleeps alone, wakes and abides:
a timeless bond beyond telling

T'ao Chi'ien, well before Tao-hsin, was born wrote:

At this distant, bramble – weave gate, my
wandering come to rest, the world and I
set each other free. Not a soul in sight.
At dusk, who knows my gate sat closed
all day? This year-end wind bitter cold,
falling snow one thick, daylong flurry…

Young Tao-hsin

Tao-hsin became interested in Buddhist teachings at the age of seven. In his early years he studied at various temples, the most influential teachings of which were the Perfection of Wisdom (The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra) and Ti'en T'ai school on Mt Tai where the founder Chih-yi had not only emphasised calming the mind but had given detailed explanations of processes including the Pure Land practice of *nien fo – fo* is the Chinese word for Buddha and *nien* means impulse or thought so *Nien-fo* means bringing the Buddha to mind, thinking on the Buddha. Tao-hsin was later to foreshadow Lin-chi in his teaching that *nien-fo* is thinking *as* not *on* the Buddha – but we're getting ahead of ourselves so to return to his life story...

At the age of only 12 Tao-hsin met Sêng-ts'an, traditionally known as the third Zen patriarch.

Tao –hsin precociously asked: *"What is the mind of a Buddha like?"* Sêng-ts'an asked back: *"What is your mind like?"*

Tao-hsin replied: "*Right now there is nothing in my mind*. " Sêng-ts'an said: *"If there is nothing in your mind how could there be anything in a Buddha's mind?"*

Tao-hsin's enlightenment

On another occasion the young Tao-hsin asked the master to compassionately liberate him from bondage. And Sêng-ts'an asked: *"Who is holding you in bondage?* Tao-hsin answered: *"No one is holding me in bondage".*

Sêng-ts'an said: *"Since no one is holding you in bondage, why do you want me to liberate you from bondage?"*

At these words Tao-hsin was greatly enlightened and remained with Sêng-ts'an for the next nine years until he was 21 when he received the robe and bowl of transmission, but not permission to travel further with his master. He was urged by Sêng-ts'an to go alone; to protect and spread the Dharma.

He did for the next fifty years with words pointing to his experience such as:

"The world has no hold on you. Whatever has a hold on you comes from your mind. Don't let your mind force names on you….Just let your mind be… Don't try to control it anymore."

Tao-hsin's compassionate eclecticism

And yet in a compassionately eclectic way Tao-hsin went on to explain a number of explicit practices in his teachings. *For him no practices were final – all were possible and he boldly promoted a wide range of practices in 'the royal freedom' that is another characteristic of Zen.* (David W Chappell)

The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

For example, he advocated his followers chant together, in particular the Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra (on page 2b of our sutra books). In the Denkoroku there is the following story of when he was in his thirties:

A large gang of bandits had been holding the city of Chi-an under siege for seventy days and terrorized the people. Tao-hsin felt pity for them and so he taught them to chant the "Heart Sutra". When the bandits were scouting over the wall of the city, the people appeared to them to be like war-gods. They said to each other that there was something very strange about the people of this city and that perhaps they would be better off to just leave them alone. They gradually withdrew.

Tao-hsin was obviously a rather charismatic figure and the people offered to repair an old temple on the outskirts of the city for him. Over the next ten years lay people offered to build a number of temples for him but it was in 624 when he was forty four and travelled to Huangmei, near his hometown, that he saw the setting of Shuangfeng Mountain and knew it was the right place for the kind of temple he had in mind. There he saw the possibility to establish the first self-sufficient temple. By the time he died he had more than five hundred followers of lay people and monks involved in the manual labour of producing and preparing food and in performing all of the monastery's administrative duties.

Practices in Shuangfeng Mountain Temple

"Tao-hsin was well educated in the sutras and he united popular schools of Buddhism by asserting that Buddha nature, Nien-fo, Pure Land and the Tathagatagarbha are identical while acknowledging that the methods of achieving this are endless." (David W Chappell) Practices in his temple on Shuangfeng Mountain included many hours of dedicated sitting, chanting, the study of sutras and focusing on images of the Buddha. His teachings became widely popular and for the first time Buddhism entered the main stream of Chinese society.

As captured in the verse of Wang Wei:

Dharma-companions filling mountains,
a sangha forms of itself: chanting, sitting
ch'an stillness. Looking out from distant
city walls, people see only white clouds.

The Emperor's request
The emperor of the day invited Tao-hsin to attend his court three times but each time he ignored the request. Exasperated, the emperor sent a messenger with the instruction to return with his head if Tao-hsin again refused the invitation. In response Tao-hsin leant forward, stretched out his neck and said: "Take it!"
The messenger scurried away to tell the emperor who finally accepted Tao-hsin's refusal and declared him a national master.

Tao-hsin's writing
However, it's in his writings that Tao-hsin is most remarkable because he gives vivid prescriptions for practice. He set forth the precepts in a way that for the first time made tilling the fields to grow rice and vegetables acceptable for monks. In his second text, commonly referred to with the acronym JTFM which is translated from the Chinese as *The Fundamental Expedient Teaching for Calming the Mind which Attains Enlightenment* he gives specific and well organised instructions for meditation.
"First make your body erect and sit correctly. Make your clothes roomy and loosen your belt. Relax your body and loosen your limbs. Expel completely the air in your belly. Through the natural flow you will obtain your true nature, clear and empty of desire, quiet and pure."
While he gives these rather grandmotherly instructions, Tao-hsin, also writes:
Tso-fa is our method of cultivation. The basis of our method is no-method (Wu-fa). The method of no-method was from the beginning called the method. This method is therefore not to be cultivated. Thus the method of non-cultivation is the method of true reality.

Shen Yen echoes Tao-hsin
Tao-hsin wrote those words over 1400 years ago and five years ago, in 2008, the Taiwanese Master Sheng Yen published his popular book entitled *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination.* Shen Yen echoes Tao-hsin's teachings the essence of which are – softening the body and mind in *a steadfast but harmonious attentiveness which lucidly and serenely identifies with the natural rhythms of things* (David W Chappell); just sitting or as in Japanese, Shikantaza.

Tao-hsin's Dharma Heir Hung-jen and East Mountain Zen
Tao-hsin encouraged the practice of silent illumination (or shikantaza) at Shuangfeng Mountain until he died at the age of seventy one in 651. His Dharma heir Hung-jen, who became the fifth patriarch, had been one of his first disciples on Shuangfeng Mountain and he had unusually stayed in residence after receiving transmission. It was only three years after Tao-hsin's death that Hung-jen left and walked just half a day away to where he established a similar monastery to Shuangfeng Mountain; the second of many self-sufficient monasteries later known as East Mountain Zen. Bill Porter notes in his book *Zen Baggage* how such monasteries had in common their great locations for producing food. In fact he claims it was location, location, location! Notably the sixth patriarch, Hui-neng, was an illiterate rice pounder in the kitchen of his monastery when he came to Hung-jen's attention. Such was the work practice legacy of Tao-hsin who was posthumously given the title *Great Healer* by the emperor of the time.

Contemporary Zen Temples - Palolo

But it's now time to leave ancient China and reflect on contemporary experiences of Zen temples. In the late 1980s, five years after Ross, Paul and Ian had established this group, I lived for an extended period of time in a two story suburban house in Honolulu which was Aitken Rōshi's first temple, *Koko an,* translated as *little temple right here.* I was one of eight residents in a training period which brought in funds to help support the temple. We sat together in the early morning, chanted sutras and ate breakfast in silence, outside on the lanai (veranda). We'd then change from our sitting blacks into work gear and squeeze into two old wrecks of cars to weave our way, still in silence, through the traffic, out to the edge of the rainforest at the back of the Palolo valley. We were building the Honolulu Diamond Sangha's new temple. After our work gatha with Roshi and Anne, we found tools for cutting cane grass, measuring, sawing, dressing and hammering timber set out waiting for us at work stations on the property.

After directing us to our places Don, a master ship builder turned temple builder, came to each of us and demonstrated what to do. I remember how he'd watch me as I began to work and would again silently correct me by way of demonstration. His resolute silence was a challenge and I battled with it but it put a chink in my habitual urge to ask for clarification. I soon understood how I needed to pay really close attention when he was showing me how to do something. He didn't stay nearby very long because he'd soon be moving on to help another person with their task. We worked with our doubts and uncertainties as well as our saws and hammers. And we all learnt to pay attention – put the Z in Zen. It was my first experience of one of the sparkles in the gem of Sangha; the heart opening miracle of someone noticing exactly when I needed another nail, a different tool, a lid or a hand at the end of a heavy plank while we worked together in silence..

Mt Claremont Training Period

In the 1990s, Ross had the Dharma strength and heart to offer the first Zen training period in Australia and I was fortunate to be one of the residents in our Mt Claremont Zendo where Mari Rhydwen, Ian Sweetman, Paul Wilson and others brought Ross' vision into reality. The Zendo was a fairly simple suburban house, right next to the railway line. It was given quite a sprucing up as our little community of residents paid our training schedule fees to help the group and worked together; silently attending to maintenance needs of the house within our daily schedule.

Balingup, St Paul's and life's big events

In Balingup on sesshin and here at St Paul's you put the Z in Zen each time you, pay attention and notice when a zafu, chair, cup or helping hand is needed and you come forth not waiting for requests or directions. It's the hallmark of a Zen student and Zen communities to see what needs to be done and do it; to come forth. Paul knows it takes a while to set up so he comes early. Brigid knows fresh vegies are good for us and grows them for our soups and salads. When Brian was relatively new to the group he noticed the state of our web site and offered to update it. Gary heard we were hoping to go to Balingup and offered his van to transport the dojo. Nick brings us eggs from his dear old

hens and Phil brings us journals and library books. I could go on and on naming so many. The point is love grows when we give that quiet attention to the natural rhythm of things and it flows into our greetings, stories, meals, music and dedications for the big events in our lives.

Dedication for John

I'm so grateful for the phone calls, text messages and cards I received when my oldest brother John died three weeks ago. Your support was tangible in far off Brisbane. As you offered the dedication here in the dojo two nights after his death, I was held within the walls of this heart strung temple.

John had had a very difficult life with schizophrenia setting in after a trauma in his youth. For years the physiognomy of his face reflected his sadness. Even in repose he appeared as though he was in tears. Then seven years ago he took up residence in a caring community which also had the sparkle of loving attention. I witnessed an amazing change in his being, especially his face. Although he was bed-ridden with Parkinson's and only able to swallow pureed food, in his later years the deep tracks of his hard life which had furrowed into his face unfolded into a smooth calm repose. He wasn't able to articulate his needs very well but the community paid loving attention and saw when and what he needed.

Packing up tonight in the natural rhythm of things

Tonight as we pack away this temple we'll embody the third gem. We'll notice what's to be done and simply do it. But just what does go in that trunk and in what order? And just how early do you need to get here to help set up? Yes, now the dojo will be packed away but we'll continue to put the Z in Zen in the fertile fields of our work, and with our family and friends as we're urged along by mobile ringtones, sirens, frogs, crickets and lurching buses in the natural rhythms of things - as Tao-hsin reminds us.

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