

# 山門寺

## Mountain Gate Journal

Fall 2021

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Mountain Gate is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established to provide the environment and training in the specific mindfulness practices of Rinzai Zen, focusing on meditation and work with koans [traditional paradoxical anecdotes or questions]. Regaining Balance, a nonsectarian outreach program, was established by Mountain Gate some years ago- to offer free, nonsectarian retreats for women veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress, and for women who are wives or partners of veterans with PTSD.

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*The following is a teisho that Roshi Philip Kap-leau gave in Poland many years ago.*

The subject of today's teisho will be correct practice in daily life. Since I will be beginning with some fundamental teachings here, please listen very carefully. I will be using the book, **How To Raise An Ox** by Francis Cook. This book deals essentially with the teachings of Zen Master Dogen. Dogen is one of the great Zen masters and so called founder of the Soto Zen School. Great Masters do not set out to found a teaching but rather the teachings are the foundation that grow up around the master. Now the Zen of Dogen was fundamentally in the Soto sect but my teacher Harada Roshi—a Soto monk—had extensive training in the Rinzai sect and he combined them both to create what might be called an integral Zen. My other teacher Yasutani Roshi, who was also a disciple of Harada Roshi, continued this integral Zen and this person has done the same. This person is myself.

The Zen of Dogen is the Zen of practice—the necessity for daily, serious, continuous practice of Zen at all times. Now this sounds very simple but actually it is complex and it is very often misunderstood. We have heard it said that the goal of Buddhism is enlightenment or satori. This is true but it must be clarified. Cook makes a very important and accurate statement when he says that in Mahayana Buddhism, enlightenment is the doorway through which one must pass in order to reach the true goal. Or another way to put

it, enlightenment is the foundation on which the structure of a noble life is built. Also many people assume that enlightenment is something that happens at one time. It's a kind of prize, a gold ring that you get on the merry go round of life of training and practice and then once you get the scoreboard ring, that's the end of practice. You have become a great and enlightened person without any shortcomings. Life is just like one big halo.

It would be wonderful if this were true but it isn't.

If our practice exists only for the sake of enlightenment, then after we obtain enlightenment there is nothing else for us to do. *What the Zen Masters have emphasized is that after enlightenment, practice is even more important than practice before enlightenment.*

We must also understand that in enlightenment there is shallow enlightenment and there is deep enlightenment and there is a tremendous difference between them. Especially if one has a shallow awakening (enlightenment) and then doesn't practice afterwards, one is better off to not even have the shallow awakening. Why is this so? Because with a shallow awakening, one has not cut off all of the roots of the ego. With a shallow awakening, the ego can become even larger than before the kensho or enlightenment.

Enlightenment, deep enlightenment, means being aware. We falsely believe that there has to be this feeling, "This is it." But awakening is

not a feeling, it is not a blissful condition, it's not a mystical event, it's not a lot of things people think it is. Now Zen master Dogen has said that Buddhism is mainly a practice, it is a path and the path must be walked not talked about. You can say that Buddhism is an experiential religion in that it involves the realization of the teachings of the historical Buddha. Realization means to make real and this making real can only happen when there is constant effort. Before even a shallow awakening, the effort is very hard because we are, so to speak, working in the dark. One has to constantly keep one's mind in a conscious direction of will for this realization. On the other hand, if we constantly think, "I've got to get enlightenment."—"I've got to get enlightenment."—"I've got to get enlightenment", then this becomes another thought that hangs in the mind and becomes an obstruction to enlightenment. Now, in Japanese, there is an expression in Japanese language that translates to: "Wonderful practice based on intrinsic enlightenment." This refers to the idea that all living beings are Buddhas. When the Buddha Shakyamuni came to supreme enlightenment, he said, "Wonder of wonders, all beings without exception are whole and complete." In this sense, we are all basically Buddhas, whole and complete. We lack nothing to make us happy. In **The Three Pillars of Zen** Yasutani Roshi says that when Dogen says that all living beings are Buddhas, he means we are intrinsically Buddhas, he means that what is common to all existence is Buddha. Remember, the word Buddha means ultimate truth, absolute truth. It's not that we can attain absolute truth, is that we ARE absolute truth. We are not containers in which the seed of Buddhahood is to be found. That would be two things. But rather, we are Buddha. When we say the Buddha Shakyamuni, we were talking about this remarkable Indian who lived some 2500 years ago.

There is a koan where a student asks a master. "What is Buddha?"

And the master says "A shit stick." This monk thought that only noble and lofty and beautiful

things are Buddha, in other words ultimate truth. And the master is saying, "everything, even a shit stick has ultimate truth."

Getting back to enlightenment, if we believe that we do zazen now in order to acquire enlightenment at a later time, then we are setting up a duality between ourselves and enlightenment and between now and later, and that is false. This assumes that there is difference between beings and Buddha and between means and ends and between now and then. If we sit in zazen egolessly, if we perform all our daily activities in the same kind of way that is without judgment, without evaluation, we take things as they are, then we are actualizing this Buddha nature. That is why it is said that cause and effect are one. In that case, we can say that doing zazen is the cause and this realization of every moment is the effect but they are not separate, cause and effect are simultaneous. And because they are simultaneous, we are not aware of it. This awareness, this sudden saying, "Ah, this is it!" This is another kind of effect. So it is important to not think of enlightenment as a future event.

This next point is very important. We have to carry on our practice in the knowledge that we already are what we hope to become. Our practice is the external appearance of this inherent enlightenment. So we have to say there is no sequence of before and after, ordinary beings now, Buddhas later. We said before that cause and effect are one. Another way to put it is that practice and enlightenment are the same. To practice seriously and egolessly is to actualize our inherent Buddhahood. And so we can say that true practice is the enlightened activity of the Buddha that we already are.

Now let me say something about Zen Master Dogen's views on the matter of ethics or morality. Dogen believed that to impose the Precepts from the outside as something that has to be obeyed as a set of rules or actions that have to be followed is very unrealistic. Rather he felt the observance of the Precepts to be a natural unfold-

ing of conduct which was in itself an expression of our enlightened nature. So Dogen said that ethics or proper conduct and meditation are the same thing. Now before going further on this let me say what the Precepts are for the benefit of some people who may not be familiar with them. The ethical basis of Buddhism are the Precepts:

- First, not to take life but to cherish all life.
- Second, not to take what does not belong to one but to respect the things of others.
- Third, not to engage in improper sexuality, which means not to engage in adultery, not to use or abuse your partner in sexuality.
- Fourth one is not to lie but to tell the truth.
- Fifth, is not to take liquors or drugs that confuse the mind but to keep the mind clear.
- Sixth, not to speak of the shortcomings of others.
- Seventh, not to praise oneself and put down others.
- Eighth, is not to withhold material or spiritual aid to others.
- Ninth, is not to give way to anger but to practice restraint.
- Tenth, not to denigrate, not to disparage Buddha, Dharma, or Sangha.

When Dogen speaks about our conduct and meditation, or rather, the Precepts and meditation being the same thing, we see the great importance of zazen.

For the moment let us talk about sitting zazen. This is very important because in sitting zazen, we develop this samadhi power that is called in Japanese *yoriki* and which enables us to live what we call a decent and ethical life. These days we hear of certain Zen teachers who engage in certain anti-social activities and people are very confused as to how this can happen. And we get a clue to this: There is a statement of Dogen's about morality and zazen being one. These teachers, in other words, have a kensho experience and then they become so busy with many activities that they don't have time for zazen anymore. They become so involved in worldly things that thoughts of the Dharma go. As one

Chinese Zen master put it, "When thoughts of the Dharma are strong, thoughts of the world are weak." And then he continues, "When thoughts of the world are strong, thoughts of the Dharma are weak."

In **Zen Dawn in West** there is a statement, "Zen is above morality but morality is not below Zen." What this means is that morality is really grounded in Zen. Zen is the basis from which morality or proper conduct emerges. The second part of the statement is very important "but morality is not below Zen." When you hear of Zen people, so called Zen people, acting in all kinds of not only strange kinds of ways but actually in immoral sorts of ways, you can be sure that they are not Zen Masters. A true Zen master does not act in ways which go contrary to the prevailing morality.

Let me explain this a little more. You will find that real Zen Masters will act in ways that seem very strange but when you examine their behavior very carefully, you will find that there is no ego in it, no desire for self gain, no selfishness involved. In false teachers there is a very strong ego, a very strong desire to gratify their senses or whatever. Also when you find teachers who claim to be Zen masters, who live in a very luxurious style, have very expensive motor cars and are going to parties and doing all that kind of thing, drinking very heavily; you can be sure that they are not real Zen masters. In China, in Japan, wherever there has been true Zen, teachers lived a very simple life. Life in its truest is very simple. It is down to earth. It is practical.

To continue with the subject of enlightenment, To see evil as evil, to accept rain as rain, snow as snow: This is the most difficult thing under the sun. Take pain as pain and pleasure as pleasure. This is living the life of Buddha. It means living life 100%. Chinese Zen master, Hui Neng, says, "What is it in this teaching that we call sitting in meditation"? In this teaching, sitting means without any obstruction anywhere. Under all circumstances not to activate these unnecessary

thoughts. Meditation is internally to see the original nature and not become confused. There is an interesting quotation here: when the great Chinese Zen Master, Daimeiji was dying, his students asked him to give them a final word. He said, "When it comes, don't try to avoid it. When it goes, don't go running after it." And just then a squirrel made a noise on the roof, and the master said, "There is only this; nothing else," and he died.

The Buddha is just someone who is totally at one with his experience at every moment. Real meditation is this alert, clear-minded attention to the details of our daily life without activating any thoughts about these activities. So practice is much more than when we are in the zendo, when we bow, when we chant or offer incense, and when we do zazen. There are people who very often will say to the Roshi, "I would like to practice zazen more seriously but my work interferes". Anybody who says that either has the wrong idea of zazen or the wrong idea of work. Practice includes all activities. It begins when we open our eyes in the morning and ends when we close our eyes at night and anything in between. This is our practice. It's not what we do but how we do it, the mind state.

To repeat, if we color our activities with these unnecessary evaluations, judgments, conclusions, opinions, and so on, then we are dirtying activities and dirtying our minds. Also to practice the way of the Buddha means to show the proper consideration to the Buddha nature of all of our coworkers, co-practitioners, our friends, everybody that we come in contact with. We may disagree with people. We may find certain attitudes of people to be unpleasant but we must never forget that the other person has the same Buddha nature as I have. And to respect that Buddha nature means to respect one's own Buddha nature. When one has reached this point where as Dogen said, "Dropping off body and mind" and dropping off all self concerns, our minds become empty, then one feels grateful, grateful to the Buddha, grateful to one's teacher, grateful to all

of one's dharma friends. Without this gratitude there can't be any true practice.

There is one other subject that I want to go into which it is very important for daily practice and that is the subject of faith. One has to have faith first and foremost. When the Buddha said as a result of his great enlightenment that all beings are whole and complete, we believe that he was not mistaken, he was not lying. It is also important to believe that the teachings that we receive from our teacher and so on are true. We must believe in our practice as I said earlier and we must have the faith that our practice will not ultimately result in enlightenment but enlightenment will come. Of course, one also has to have faith in one's own intrinsic Buddha nature. If we don't have faith in the truth of the Buddha's teachings, then we cannot truly practice the Buddha's way. The Buddha himself said, "The great ocean of Buddhist teaching is entered through the door of faith." Therefore unless one practices with the faith that one's self is Buddha, that everything else, even a speck of dust is Buddha, and that everything sings out with the truth of the Dharma, then the realization of these facts will be impossible. Let me give you a short quotation of what Zen Master Dogen says here, "Practicing in the way of the Buddha means you must have faith in the Buddha way." Having faith in the Buddha way means that you must first have faith that you originally abide in the way, that you are not in error. If you arouse this kind of faith, if you illuminate the way in this manner, and rely on it and practice it, it is the basis for enlightenment.

Now just one final thing which is to make clear that this kind of faith is not a blind belief. We tentatively or provisionally accept these things as true and as our practice deepens, we confirm it in our own bodies and minds the truth of what we believe. And then faith drops away because faith has been replaced with knowledge. In other religions, for example in Christianity, faith is the most important thing because it continues all the time. In other words there isn't a time for the Christian when faith is no longer important. As

our practice develops, one can verify the truth of the Buddhist teachings in one's own body and mind through practice. And therefore for a Buddhist faith drops away. It is different for other religions. There is a great deal more that could be said about this subject but this is difficult material to grasp at one time. So we will stop here and recite the four vows.



*The following was written by a long-time Zen student:*

## Being Real

I've been pretending to practice Zen Buddhism for about fifty years – sporadically mostly, sometimes with commitment, as when I did several sesshins a year and was in a group of women aspiring to be Zen nuns. That aspiration was in conjunction with the sudden death of my 18 year-old son. I told myself that if he was in the void I wanted to shed all illusions that I wasn't also in the void and be with him – heady intellectual distraction from pure grief.

There were also other distractions from that grief that took me away from a committed practice, but I always felt that sitting on the cushion was a deeply compelling way to be free of suffering. I just wanted to do it with my ego and maybe find true love with someone equally as awakened.

I clung to an image of myself as a Zen Buddhist meditator. But in order to be cast in the star role of the Zen movie I had to be able to sit for many hours a day, for many days a year, in a posture that broadcast my stoic holiness. Every failure to do this was torture. I derided myself – much more than any Buddhist teacher ever did – as being weak. And aging didn't help, with back pain, varicose veins and insomnia. Good excuses to finally bail.

But I can neither bail nor keep pretending that I'm doing deep practice by enduring pain or indulging in fantasies. This gives me the chance to sit authentically, to go right into the hole of grief and fear and let it expand into the void. Instead of stuffing that hole with ideas of a cool ego that is on the path to Enlightenment – always sometime the future – I have the chance to truly sit with what is, not with what I wish might be or that others will think is.

My effort now is to approach self-discipline with self-compassion. I sit in a cross-legged position on the floor – Burmese style – because it's how I feel the most settled. I sometimes am compelled to sit on a zabuton and zafu in a closet, which I figured out is my very turned-down version of a hermit's cave. It's where it's easy to not consider how someone else may see me, how much like a true Zen practitioner they'll think I am. Most importantly, I'm trying to stop, after years and years of sitting apart from reality, to just be with it – no stories – or at least the stories are regarded as playthings, not the core emptiness. They are the fairytale distractions of a forest of thorns, complete with princesses, handsome princes, dragons and swords. And what they obscure is "just this" – as Ajhan Sumedho would say.

I now try to sit for about 30 minutes a day. And I've made a bargain with myself to trade lengthy zazen with being present with what is no matter what I'm doing, not just when I'm doing zazen. Whether on or off the cushion, this connection with what is includes feeling, in my body, all the grief I've taken such great pains (literally and figuratively) to avoid – without running away, without trying to analyze or fix it, relentless habits. Being open and available to reality also includes the expansion of a myriad of tiny pleasures. I need to remember that when I'm afraid that this deep dive is going to drown me in bleakness. And for the time being, that fear is palpable. It

manifests as rage sometimes, or judgement and self-righteousness – certainties that are armor the lonely self clangs around in. It was a happy mistake that I looked to a superficial and ego-inspired distraction from grief in Zen practice. I got duped by my ego into something very strong. All the romance and ambition in other areas never seemed as compelling or lasting, and eventually the practice insisted on being real instead of being role playing. And when my practice is authentic, it feels like a mother's love. This mother encourages me to be as real and honest with myself and as I can.



*And from another student...*

“...while I was regarding the Grand Canyon, it was almost like looking at the stratigraphy of my own self. There are the many layers where proto-rock interacted with the specific situation at a specific time and caused specific characteristics in each layer. Each layer is distinctive and you can trace why each layer formed the way it did. As you get further down in a section, the rocks become less differentiated and more elemental. Eventually if you go down far enough, everything becomes magma.

This was helpful as a visual image as I thought about what it means to go deeper with a koan. It is not the intellectual understanding at all, which is relatively easier. Much harder to get into the bones and marrow of it, to get down to the magma level, to experience the meaning of it.

***It is something, at least, to really know that thinking is not the way through a koan.*** [emphasis by editor]



*And yet another...*

***What's wonderful about susok'kan is that I could***

***meditatively pierce through my thoughts and physical discomforts no matter where we were or what we were doing while we were traveling. Prior to introducing susok'kan to my practice, I found it challenging to find zazen when I wasn't sitting. Now, I feel as if zazen can be found everywhere, which brings me back to the line from The Gospel of Thomas that we spoke about during sanzen: "Split the wood, I am there. Turn the stone, and you will find me there."***



## **Zen Practice: Honeymoon & Aftermath**

Many people feel that the spiritual path is a path of ecstasy, enthusiasm or excitement. We want to see dazzling images of Christ or Buddha...not nothingness. Yet it is in the complete absence of excitement, bereft of enthusiasm, dried up of emotion that the true cleansing of the soul, the real purging of the spirit takes place. This is the true purgatorial fire through which we must pass....

We always come in to practice bathed in the magic and miracle of "At last I've found my way home." The beginner's mind is so wonderful to see. One sees it in workshops. It is a pleasure to give workshops. People's eyes are sparkling after a workshop; there is a sense of energy and one can feel that. Sometimes people write afterward saying how much their lives have changed and how they now see what is necessary in their life.

A lot of the accounts that one reads about spiritual work and spiritual experience are written by people who have had a week at the most of meditation, perhaps twenty minutes a day, and they go into raptures about how im-

portant the practice is. It is this kind of writing that leads us to believe that this is really what spiritual practice is about: these great moments of insight, these dazzling times of serenity, this sense of peace and beauty and wonder that pervades the whole world.

Just in case you think that this has no bearing on spiritual work, let me read you something from St. John:

*"One is left in such dryness that spiritual things and devout exercises, wherein one formerly found pleasure and delight, appear bitter and insipid."*

We know that changeover. That's when one begins to think, "My God, what have I let myself in for?" It is, of course, at this stage that ninety percent of the people who came in and enjoyed the magic and who were going to practice and go to monasteries, leave...."

—Albert Low,  
from his commentary on *Blue Cliff 17*,  
*Sitting Long and Getting Tired*

This is where the real work begins: when we are faced with our "sticky places," as my friend Chi-san calls them. Our attachment and investment in these sticky places is the foundation of our suffering, and it is in dismantling this firm foundation that we can begin to find our true freedom—the freedom to be free even in the midst of adversity, of boredom, of challenge. It is the gift of committed, persistent Zen practice that we can meet these sticky places face to face, see through them and let them go. And when we do so we become lighter, more flexible, and truly more free. As someone long ago said after a very challenging sesshin in which she persisted in engaging her practice,

This practice is truly bodhisattvic! First it shows us where we're caught. And

then it sets us free!

We cannot be free until we see, recognize and own where we are caught in dysfunctional habit patterns, in greed, in anger, in misperception. Freedom gradually comes through the work of this Long Maturation that Torei Enji speaks of as an essential part of advanced Zen practice. It is an essential part as well of our maturing into the wise, compassionate being-ness that is revealed as we do this hard and challenging work. What an incredible gift to be able to do this work, to have these tools to see through and let go of those *kleshas*—"mental states that cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions," to quote Wikipedia, and manifest the wonderfulness that we are!



And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death

—Anais Nin



Wisdom tends to grow in proportion to one's awareness of one's ignorance.

—Anthony de Mello



Because of danger, there's this wonderful human response, which is to think in a new way.

—Gianna Pomata, retired professor at the Institute of the History of Medicine, at Johns Hopkins University, from *How Pandemics Wreak Havoc—And Open Minds*, *The New Yorker*, July 20, 2020 Issue. She is speaking of the Black Plague and how it ushered in the Renaissance in Europe.



## Mountain Gate Update

Thanks to a generous donation we have been able to begin again the construction by adding the planned, more expansive portal [porch] roof on the west end of the building as well as continuing the repairs (thanks, woodpeckers!) and color coating of the exterior, which had received the grey coat of stucco all around and the color coat only partway.



We were able to buy and paint these chairs to add to the chair donated by a woman vet!



This is the north side of the building, now with woodpecker damage repaired and fully color-coated.



And the west side. The south side repair and color-coating is in process. The east side is done.

The work on the south side of the building (see below) goes more slowly these days, as the sun is still quite high and the weather so hot that by 10 am the stucco color coat begins bubbling and the tape used to protect non-stuccoed areas is no longer sticking. So construction begins these days at 6 am, as soon as it's light enough to see well enough, and ends at 10.



**September 22-29 7-day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Attendance in house for anyone fully vaccinated or by Zoom. *Anyone wishing to attend in person must submit a sesshin application; anyone wishing to attend any full day by Zoom must also submit a sesshin application.* All in-house attendees receive sanzen twice a day; anyone attending any full time days via Zoom receives sanzen twice a day on those full time days. **NOTE: This applies to all subsequent sesshins until further notice.**

**October 26-November 2 7-day sesshin** - the first sesshin of the Fall "double header"

**November 7-14 7-day sesshin** -- the second sesshin of the Fall "double header"

**November 30 - December 8 Rohatsu sesshin** this is the major sesshin of the year in Buddhist temples as it commemorates the Buddha's own awakening.

For information about the RegainingBalance program and to offer support: [www.RegainingBalance.org](http://www.RegainingBalance.org)  
For information about Zen meditation practice and sesshin [meditation retreats]: [www.sanmonjizen.org](http://www.sanmonjizen.org)