

山門寺

Mountain Gate Journal

Spring 2022

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.

Zen Training Surprises

Many years ago when the Rochester Zen Center was filled to capacity with more than 30 dedicated Zen students living there and training intensively under Roshi Philip Kapleau and having the usual challenging interactions that come when people are in concentrated Zen practice, one day in response to the perplexity of some trainees, Roshi made a comment: “Everyone thinks that Zen students living in a Zen monastery, are peaceful and unbothered by things. But you have to take a look at how these Zen students were before they started Zen practice to see that there has been positive progress despite appearances.”

Any number of people training under Roshi Kapleau were annoyed and taken aback not only at the behavior of their fellow Sangha members, but also with Roshi’s behavior as well. Always in the spotlight, the parts of his personality that were less admired were on display, as were, of course, his more admirable qualities. Isn’t this the nature of human beings caught in judgment, idealization, and the so common assumption that things should be how *I* want them to be?

Harada Shodo Roshi, Abbot of Sogen-ji and Zen teacher renowned throughout the world, was also mightily complained about by some of his students. Some of them even were heard yelling at him.

At Roshi Kapleau’s 90th birthday party his Dhar-

ma successors were each asked to say three things about him or his teaching. The most important thing said when my turn came was that in all the decades I’d been training with him—and I’d been his attendant for extended periods of time both in Santa Fe NM and in Tepoztlan, Mexico, was this: Roshi, it was so clear that you never stopped working on yourself. Whenever you became aware of any dysfunctional behavior you were engaging in, amazingly, it ended. It was so deeply inspiring to witness over and over again.”

I’ve been dressed down (in Japanese, spoken with great force and intensity) by Harada Roshi, as have many of his students. But I also witnessed that he was constantly reciting in Japanese, the repentance gatha [zange]. He, too, was constantly working on himself. And it was also clear that he was exerting himself beyond seemingly humanly possible, in order to help and inspire his students to awakening.

Roshi Kapleau did the same. During one memorable sesshin when I was head monitor, I went to his quarters to see if he had any messages for me, and found him lying on the floor, profoundly exhausted. He hadn’t been diagnosed yet with the Parkinson’s Disease, but in his case one of the symptoms was profound exhaustion, and he hadn’t even had the strength to get to his bedroom and lie down on his bed. He struggled to keep going for the sake of his students. And all the while he was working on himself, fully engaged in The Long Maturation that Torei Enji,

Hakuin's major Dharma successor, spoke of as being an absolutely essential part of true Zen practice.

When I first began training with Roshi Kapleau I was terrified of him, though there was no real reason to be so. In hindsight it's clear that he was far more skillful a teacher than many of us thought back then.

At a certain point in my practice, after I'd been doing sesshin for several years, I found myself flummoxed by what seemed to be a total lack of interest in Zen practice, beginning on the seventh day of a sesshin. The next sesshin it happened on the sixth day, and the following sesshin that very sobering mindstate opened on the morning of the fifth day. Along with that apparent, complete lack of interest in Zen practice came the strong feeling that I did NOT want to come to awakening. The whole thing was both uncomfortable and perplexing. I'd moved across an ocean to be at the Rochester Zen Center and do concentrated practice there! I was convinced that going inward was my only hope of no longer being in constant anguish and reaching any lasting peace and happiness. So why the sudden total lack of interest?

I asked to have an appointment with Roshi in order to get his advice on the problem....

But the answer came back from his secretary that the roshi would not see me. (I'd had to explain, in requesting the appointment, my reasons for wanting to do so.) Taking this in, my thought was, "Well, the only solution is to figure this out by myself, I guess." And, as was my habit, I applied to the next sesshin.

But when the list of people accepted to that sesshin was posted on the bulletin board in the Link Building at the Center, my name—for the first time ever—was not on that list. In that moment I recognized with sinking heart that I DID want to come to awakening. The next sesshin after that I was, thankfully, accepted to.

I share this story as an example of Roshi Kapleau's skill in teaching, but also as an example of what Zen training can look like. Sure, he had his "warts," but he—as is Harada Shodo Roshi—was absolutely dedicated to helping his students reach or even exceed the level of letting go, of insight, of inner freedom, that he himself had. Every authentic (be careful of that word!) Zen teacher is the same.

It's a classic experience of human beings that our original assumptions about a new and hoped for relationship will be quite positive, and last forever. But how about the end of that "Honeymoon Period"? We can—and we do—also get caught up in our ideas of how a Zen teacher must be, and find ourselves annoyed or disappointed when they fall off that pedestal we had placed them on. And of course there have—sadly—been Zen teachers who truly were so significantly lacking in deep training and human development that they abused their students and their organizations in multiple ways. (This condition is not limited to Zen teachers; it is a challenge for any human being in a position of power in any field, be it medicine, psychology, teaching, sports, not to mention being a parent.)

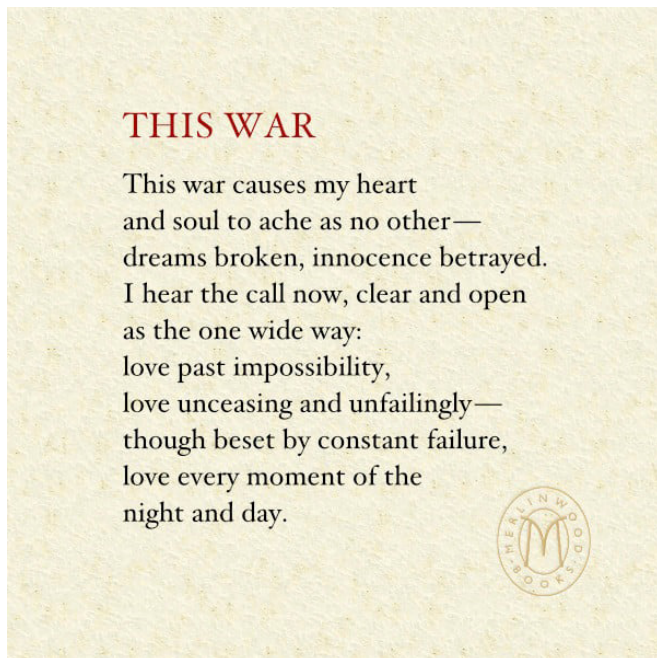
As Zen students it is our responsibility to look within ourselves and work on opening more and more fully to our innate wisdom and compassion, recognizing, and processing through to letting go of the negative habit patterns that become obvious to us through our increasingly deep practice. It's easy to accuse and cast blame on our teachers, our fellow Zen students, and whomever and whatever else, but doing so simply serves as a means to avoid our own issues.

It is also helpful to recognize—as is brought to light in one of the koans—that a teacher who is completely perfect is not necessarily an effective teacher. The koan in question reads something like this: "A woman is sitting in deep samadhi. Why is it that Manjusri [the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, the most deeply enlightened of the bodhi-

sattvas] cannot bring her out of her samadhi?" Manjusri tries and fails. But a much lower-ranking bodhisattva—one still working on himself in the lower bodhisattva realms—comes at the request of the Buddha and is immediately able to awaken her.

We can be inspired by our Zen teachers. We can be frustrated by them. We can get irritated by how they are. But ultimately, that we become frustrated, that we become irritated, is because we are still caught somewhere in our own conditioning. The Velcro still attached to the teacher is getting caught on its partner Velcro still stuck on us. Assuming the teacher is truly authentically trained and continuing their own inner work, while it is the teacher's responsibility to work on themselves; it is the student's responsibility to work on their own self and not let themselves be distracted by focusing on any perceived dysfunction in the personality of the teacher.

This in no way excuses either the teacher or the student from continuing to work deeply within themselves to come to, ultimately, full awakening and all along the way, to work on that vital Long Maturation.



This War...

For the past two weeks as of this writing, a terrible war has been taking lives, as Russian troops move toward the capital of Ukraine, with the ensuing brutality as human beings of both countries are killed and hospitals are bombed and fleeing civilians are mortared. It has been horrific to watch the carnage unfold, and difficult as well to bear the information wars that swirl around it.

There are beautiful responses as well: people in Poland leaving warm clothing, strollers, food, in train stations and at their border with Ukraine, for those fleeing the conflagration to use. Social media is full of both pleas for help as well as evidence of generosity and compassion. My sisters and I each gave each other, in lieu of our standard birthday and Christmas gift cards, donations to groups helping those negatively impacted by the conflict, the Red Cross being one of those groups we supported.

There is also a tremendous amount of dis- and mis-information making the rounds of the internet and the news channels, as stakes in power and prestige enter the ring.

What can we, as human beings working to express our deepest, purest, most compassionate potential do? Here is what I wrote to one troubled student:

In Zen it's about clear mind moments, not preexisting assumptions. Those assumptions cause us all manner of pain and suffering, both to ourselves and in our reactions to others as we are subconsciously being influenced by them.

Yes, it would be wonderful if everything could be worked out peacefully, as Greg—and most people—would like. But international politics is rife with preexisting assumptions and they all get in the way. This is the sad human condition of *samsara*, and it is through our Zen practice that we are working to see increasingly clearly—and let go

of assumptions—that we and all being may experience ongoing peace and harmony.

An example of this is what Harada Roshi did decades ago when he was a monk at Shofuku-ji and was accosted by an enraged homeless person whose assumption was that the temple was cheating the homeless folk out of water. What did Roshi do? (a fine model for all of us—especially those of us doing Zen practice) He simply remained aware, attentive, silent, quietly honoring the innate perfection of the homeless man with his no-blame, honoring silence, despite the man's furious demeanor and the possibility he'd deck Harada. Harada's behavior is our model—not that of the homeless man. It is a challenge, as we human beings are constantly pulled to fight or argue or get angry and always—always!—hold opinions that drive our behavior.

You can use this opportunity to work toward embodying fully that positive model—and it will inspire others around you to do the same. Embody the other, and it inspires others accordingly as well. It is our choice.

Warmly, Mitra-roshi

The poem that precedes this article is a profound example of what is essential if we humans ever want true peace... It was written by a man I've known for more than 50 years; we sat many sesshin together at the Rochester Zen Center, and he has continued his spiritual practice ever since completing his Zen curriculum.

We have also the example of the great Zen master Hakuin's aforementioned student and successor, Torei Enji, who shared a similar attitude in his writing, which we chant regularly as Torei Enji's Bodhisattva Vow. It is a model of enlightened behavior.

Torei Enji's Bodhisattva Vow

Disciples, when I humbly observe the true nature of things,
all are the manifestation of the Tathagat's truth.

Atom by atom, instant by instant,
all are none other than this mysterious radiance.

Because of this, our virtuous ancestors extended
loving care and reverence toward even such beings as
birds and beasts.

How much more so then can we be but humbly grateful
for the food, drink and clothing that nourishes and
protects us throughout the day,
these being the warm skin and flesh of the great masters,
the incarnate compassion of the Buddha?

If it is so even with inanimate objects,
how much more should we be kind and merciful
toward human beings, even those who are foolish.
Though they become our sworn enemies,
reviling and persecuting us,
we should regard them as bodhisattva manifestations
who in their great compassion are employing skillful means
to help emancipate us from the painful karma we have
produced over countless kalpas through our biased,
self-centered views.

If we awaken in ourselves this deep, pure faith,
offering humble words and taking refuge in our True
nature, then with every thought there will bloom
a lotus flower, each with a Buddha.

These Buddhas will establish pure lands everywhere and
reveal the radiance of the Tathagata beneath our very feet.

May we extend this mind throughout the universe
so that we and all sentient beings may equally bring to
fruition the seed of wisdom!

When Harada Shodo Roshi responded to the furious homeless man with respect and honor and clearly felt no need to argue or "get into it" with the man, he was embodying exactly what Torei Enji is writing about here. The more deep our Zen practice goes, and the more of the Long Maturation we undertake with commitment, dedication and humility, the more we, too, will be able to respond clearly in difficult situations.

Such situations may not be identical to the encounter mentioned above, and there are times when a different response will be most appropriate. I think of a situation involving an elderly woman walking alone down the steps into the

subway in New York during an uncrowded time of day. Suddenly she heard the clatter of fast footsteps racing down the stairs behind her. Turning, she found two young men fast approaching her, and her sense was they were intent on attacking her. She pulled herself up short, and said in a very strong and firm voice, "What do you want?" Surprised at her reaction, the two questionable characters, turned and ran back up the stairs.

I've personally had several challenging encounters in which, thanks to many years of Zen practice it was possible to clearly open to the deep Buddha nature of the people in question, and because it was possible for me to remain in that mind state of honoring the person it was possible not to get caught up in reactivity. The encounters I am thinking of could have ended quite badly otherwise.

This is not in the realm of Polyanna behavior or denial; it is in the realm of deep awareness, attention, and letting go of any felt need to react. What many people do not understand is that any interaction between or among people is an inter-action, and each party adds to the dynamic depending on how invested in a particular outcome they are, or what pre-existing assumptions are at work. If we enter into an interaction without assumptions—and we're not talking about denial here, but about truly being clear, focused, and let go of investment in the interaction—then a very different outcome is possible than if we walk in with a fixed agenda or a fixed attitude.

Longchenpa—the Tibetan Buddhist master of the 10th century—gave us a very effective teaching on how to do this; it's shared in the next column. And it is the same advice, couched in slightly different terms, as Eugene Gendlin recognized as effective in therapy, in his book, *Focusing*. In that book you will find in-depth instructions in how to practice it, and if you do so you will find your life very different!

Every identification we hold about ourselves disconnects us from the fluidity of our core nature.

--Healing Developmental Trauma:
How Early Trauma Affects..., p 34

"Though attachment, aversion, dullness, pride, and envy may arise, fully understand their inner energy; recognize them in the very first moment, before karma has been accumulated. In the second moment look nakedly at this state and relax in its presence. Then whichever of the five passions [lust, anger, stupidity, arrogance, and jealousy] arise becomes a pure presence, freed in its own place, without being eliminated. It emerges as the pristine awareness that is pure, pleasurable, and not conditioned by thought."

—from *You Are the Eyes of the World*,
a translation of a profound teaching written by
the 14th century Tibetan Buddhist master Longchenpa



We can let the circumstances of our lives harden us so that we become increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us, and make us kinder. We always have the choice."

—Tenzin Gyatso,
The 14th Dalai Lama



My domestic responsibility for the duration of the retreat was to clean the communal bathroom. I would do this chore at four o'clock every afternoon. At the very same time, though another nun would appear and proceed to wash herself before performing an afternoon ceremony at which she had to officiate. This went on for several weeks and I began to feel extremely resentful. Then one day I went down at four o'clock, and it suddenly didn't matter any more that she was there washing herself. It was my time to clean and her time to wash. How wonderful it felt to be free of resentment! Although a small incident, it was somehow very meaningful to me. It showed that meditation worked quietly. Without my intentionally forcing any changes, it dissolved the grasping and attachments that gave rise to the irritation.

—Martine Batchelor,
Women in Korean Zen, Lives and Practices, p.41

The Benefits of Zazen

Ultimately Zen practice offers total liberation. It's a long haul, but it's quite possible. And short of TOTAL liberation there are an enormous number of benefits that come forth with continued, committed practice.



In the scroll pictured at left, brushed by a late *kancho*—head abbot—of the great Rinzai Zen headquarter temple in Kyoto, the characters read, “Though the Eight Winds may blow, ‘It’ is not disturbed.” The Eight Winds refer to the plethora of emotions felt by human beings. There are various traditional specifications as to what those Eight Winds are, but the expression can refer to any challenging emotion, and even to joyful ones. We are all subject to feelings—emotions, in this case—and some of them can be painful or even prompt us to engage in behavior we may later regret.

But with ongoing, committed, deepening zazen we begin to become aware of the “It”—our True nature—that lies beneath the waves of feelings. We also become

aware of the habitual assumptions, the conditioning that lies beneath those feelings and triggers them. Becoming aware of what is driving our behavior offers us the opportunity to free ourselves from the bondage of that conditioning. As a result, we are more and more able to be at peace and un-moved by those emotions. (We're not talking about dissociation here, where we just override feelings so we don't feel them; that is not freedom.) This freedom in the midst of all

manner of experiences, positive and negative, painful and joyful, is the only real freedom there is. Becoming uncaught by circumstance, fully present and clear, we are able to move in the most effective and compassionate direction in each moment. And it's built it! We only need to uncover it through our ongoing, dedicated Zen practice!

One student has reported recently on the benefits of his zazen, especially after doing sesshin:

These days I have fewer interactions with people but when I do there seems to be an intimacy and loving caring attitude more so than pre pandemic. Even taking my mother to the doctors yesterday and the day before was engaging and everyone was present and very caring. Maybe it has to do with my mother being 95 and everyone shows her respect and my mother can be quite comical as well. But my mother can also be very challenging.



The living self has one purpose only:

to come into its own fullness of being, as a tree comes into full blossom, or a bird into spring beauty, or a tiger into lustre.

– D.H. Lawrence



Prajna is the word around which Mahayana Buddhism formed in the Kushan Empire of Northwest India, Pakistan and Afghanistan just before the beginning of the Christian Era. It means “what comes before knowledge” and refers to our original mind undefiled by discrimination or what passes for knowledge: Adam and Eve before the apple, religion before religion, the mind before mind. In a word, prajna means “wisdom.” And adding the word paramita distinguishes it as

“ultimate wisdom” or “the perfection of wisdom.” It’s the cultivation of such wisdom that enables a person to see things as they are, empty of self-existence and inseparable from the mind that conjures them into existence.”

—pp. 7–8, *Zen Baggage*, by Bill Porter



What’s Happening at Mountain Gate

The photo above shows the constructing of the root cellar (dubbed, “Soterrano” by our Spanish speaking neighbors). When the building addition was first started, we ordered extra adobes to be used to build a low wall in front of the western end of the front of the building, to keep people from walking directly in front of the zendo as they came from the parking area. But as things do, plans changed. Better ways of directing traffic became more obvious as the building was built. Then we were able to get fiberoptic cable for both internet and phone, underground, the cable coming directly to the corner of the older part of the building where the planned wall would begin, complicating potential footings. Our neighbors are so skilled at working with challenging circumstance through creativity and centuries of having to make things work without modern equipment, that they could have done it anyway. But then gas and oil prices began to rise, and transpor-

tation became more and more costly, directly impacting food chains. Santa Fe is an hour’s drive away from Mountain Gate, which means a minimum of two hours’ of using fuel in order to bring increasingly expensive—due to increased transportation costs—food up here.

It makes more and more sense to grow as much of our food as possible. But how many refrigerators and freezers can we support? Our ancestors—not to mention some of our local neighbors—have for centuries taken advantage of the mitigating effects on temperatures of storing underground. And we have all these leftover adobes. So...we are building the Soterrano—the root cellar—in anticipation of growing more and more things like potatoes and squash and beets and turnips, that can be stored effectively in such a structure. We’ve also upgraded our 15-year-old greenhouse with new glazing, and just began planting it this season: peas, lemon cucumbers, bok choy, beets, salad greens—and after they’ve had a couple days to soak in damp towels, turnips. In the raised beds outdoors we will be again planting squash and potatoes once the threat of frost lessens, and our biggest raised bed was fully planted with raspberries last year. We also planted the first of two blueberry bushes in a huge decorative pot near the front door.

While the digging equipment was here we also dug five deep holes in anticipation of the April first opening this year of Tooley’s Trees, located just outside our neighboring village of Truchas. If you would like to donate an apple tree or two, or a peach tree or a plum tree, we will plant them in those holes after the holes have been upholstered (yes, pricey, but it keeps the gophers from getting at those tender young roots) with coated hardware cloth.

And later this summer when we have a couple of extra people in residence, we hope to build another couple of raised garden beds, to further expand our potential food supply. Gardening is a wonderful meditative practice, and while somewhat challenging at this altitude, is worth it!

2022 Calendar

March 13 - Zazenkai, 9 am-4 pm, with an hour break from noon to 1 pm for lunch. The zazenkai will be Zoomed, and closer to the date the Zoom link will be emailed to those who are on the Zoom list. If you are not on that list and would like to be, please email mountaingate1@gmail.com to request being added to the list.

March 28 - April 4 7-day sesshin at Mountain Gate. Because Mountain Gate is an hour's drive from any food sources it is important for people to apply to sesshin early enough that applications are received at least a week in advance. Until further notice, all sesshins and zazenkai will be Zoomed.

April 10-17 7-day sesshin at Mountain Gate. Because the October-November dual sesshins provided such an enhanced and successful zazen intensive, particularly to everyone who remained at Mountain Gate through both sesshin, we have scheduled these upcoming 7-day sesshins in similar close proximity.

April 24 - Zazenkai, 9 am-4 pm, with an hour break from noon to 1 pm for lunch. The zazenkai will be Zoomed, and closer to the date the Zoom link will be emailed to those who are on the Zoom list. If you are not on that list and would like to be, please email mountaingate1@gmail.com to request being added to the list.

May 15 - Zazenkai, 9 am-4 pm, with an hour break from noon to 1 pm for lunch. The zazenkai will be Zoomed, and closer to the date the Zoom link will be emailed to those who are on the Zoom list.

May 29 - Zazenkai, 9 am-4 pm, with an hour break from noon to 1 pm for lunch. The zazenkai will be Zoomed, and closer to the date the Zoom link will be emailed to those who are on the Zoom list. If you are not on that list and would like to be, please email mountaingate1@gmail.com to request being added to the list.

June 21-28 7-day sesshin at Mountain Gate. Because Mountain Gate is an hour's drive from any food sources it is important for people

to apply to sesshin early enough that applications are received at least a week in advance. Until further notice, all sesshins and zazenkai will be Zoomed. Applications are required for any full days' attendance, whether by Zoom or in person

July 22-29 7-day sesshin at Mountain Gate. Because Mountain Gate is an hour's drive from any food sources it is important for people to apply to sesshin early enough that applications are received at least a week in advance. Until further notice, all sesshins and zazenkai will be Zoomed. Applications for any full days are required, Zoomed or in person.

RegainingBalance Retreats for Women Veterans with PTSD are scheduled for June 8-12, July 13-17, and August 3-7 this year. These are not sesshin, but special retreats specifically to both offer respite to women veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, as well as share with them tools that can help them de-stress. If you know of a woman veteran who might wish to attend one of these free, nonsectarian retreats, please pass the word. As with sesshin, anyone attending in person at Mountain Gate must be fully vaccinated, including a booster, until otherwise determined by the health administration of New Mexico. For more information, please visit the website: www.regainingbalance.org

In the interest of everyone's safety even as the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be winding down, anyone attending a sesshin or zazenkai in person MUST be fully vaccinated, including a booster shot, and be willing to wear a mask indoors. Anyone coming from out of State must either have a negative COVID test within two days of arrival, or have quarantined for two weeks in New Mexico prior to arriving at Mountain Gate.

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