

Open Secret

Zen Open Circle newsletter

No 6 November 2005

Truly, is anything missing now?

Susan Murphy

Martin Buber tells an old Hasidic tale of a rabbi who said, 'In this life I have always been very, very lucky. I never needed anything at all until it was given to me.'

This kind of good fortune seems to be the far side of the moon to where we live now, in the so-called 'rich nations', spinning in an out-of-control spiral of so badly wanting more and more costly things (well, briefly), to fill some aching, nameless hollow, that we are prepared to slave long, boring hours to acquire them. Then out they go, into the garage (where the oversize car can no longer fit anyway), and soon after, onto the pavement for council throw-out - from which, on most Wednesdays in our neighbourhood, a thoughtful person can now comfortably equip and furnish a home. It's been dubbed 'affluenza', and it is a global pandemic, obscene in its inequalities. When it is not afflicting the 'haves' with secret misery, it is stealing the means of life itself from the 'have nots'. That it is trashing our planet through climate change, and truly manic rates of depletion of non-renewable resources, is apparently not a problem. How many of us go about now nursing a kind of dull, persistent, difficult to articulate nausea towards this extreme state of excessive greed and conspicuous consumption, that cannot possibly be sustained - and the even more alarming fact that it is so rarely mentioned or questioned?)

Greed seems to be the enthroned delusion strenuously recommended every day in our culture. Greed is that aggrandizing and expanding of the self's entitlement at the expense of everyone and everything else, colonising more resources than we can ever make sensible use of, in a kind of sick, literalistic form of oneness. We are enjoined to overspill our actual needs and pursue endlessly created wants that are designed always to out-strip satisfaction. Hungry ghosts, in traditional Chinese and Japanese lore, have a ravenous appetite coupled with a severely constricted throat. Naturally enough, they live in a state of high irritability and anxiety. As hungry ghosts, we can never, ever have the confidence of 'enough'. The very economy calls for unstinting greed - and calls it 'consumer confidence'. As hungry ghosts, we are eating up our world, which is ourselves. (cont page 8)

We are moving to a new home

In February 2006 Zen Open Circle will move to its new zendo at Summer Hill. You are welcomed to: **The Art of Yoga, 80 Smith Street, Summer Hill, 2130 T: 9799 7108**

Sitting will be 6.30-8.30pm each Friday.

Our warm thanks to the Sydney Buddhist Centre for generously sharing their space with us in recent weeks.

I scooped up the moon
In my water bucket and
Spilled it on the grass -

Ryuhō

now and Zen

For the rest of 2005, Zen Open Circle sits **every Friday** from 6-8pm at the Sydney Buddhist Centre, 24 Enmore Road, Newtown NSW 2050
T: 9519 0440

18 December, **end of year party, baby naming and sit** to round off the year and celebrate our new Summer Hill Zendo, Art of Yoga.

Four day Australia Day Sesshin, 26-29 January at Vijayaloka Retreat Centre, Minto - application forms available on website (see back page).

ZOC and Art of Yoga **open day, 12 February,** Summer Hill zendo.



See *Tsunami survivors* story page 10

Zen Open Circle is a member of the Buddhist Council of New South Wales Inc.

Kabbalah

An interview by Nigel Bowen

It's the spirituality de jour, attracting adherents from erstwhile Southern Baptist poster girl Britney Spears to the world's most famous lapsed Catholic, Madonna. But exactly what is Kabbalah all about? ZOC asked one of the tradition's most respected figures, Rabbi David Cooper, just that.

For a supposedly esoteric tradition, which used to be confined to married male Jewish scholars over the age of 40, Kabbalah has sure been getting a lot of attention of late.

"Over the last 100 and especially the last 50 years, there has been a willingness of people to divulge the teaching and English translations [of sacred texts] have become available."

So why the secrecy throughout previous centuries?

"In every tradition there are hidden teachings that are kept hidden because the mainstream feels they could be used to confront fundamental teachings and could be misunderstood thereby leading people astray. For example, Sufism has teachings that seem to contradict mainstream Islam. The Kabbalahistic understanding of God is non-dual which contradicts mainstream Judaism's dualistic understanding."

What does being a Kabbalist involve?

"That's an excellent question! There is no book that sets out what it means to be a Kabbalist. Traditionally it was thought the Torah reveals hidden secrets about how the universe is constructed and the purpose of life. Kabbalah - which translates as 'to receive' - was used to search out the clues and discover what God had in mind in creating the universe."

One Kabbalah school - the Kabbalah Centre - has massively popularised this tradition over recent decades, much to the consternation of traditionalist Kabbalists and Jews generally.

"That antagonism exists because they are seen to be exploiting people. I think there are some good teachings coming

out of the Kabbalah Centre but I'm concerned that it gets mixed up with a magic show approach."

What do you mean by that?

"This idea that if I wear a red thread around my wrist it is going to solve my relationship problem. If they were giving these red threads away for free it might be different, but they're selling them at very high prices and accumulating millions of dollars. One has to question whether they believe in the merit of what they're providing or are just running a business."

Why do you think Kabbalah appeals to so many people with no background in, or even knowledge of, Judaism?

"That's not new, in the Middle Ages a lot of Christian theologians got interested and a Christian Kabbalah emerged with Jesus playing the role of the Tree of Life. In the US, it's being treated as a secular teaching now. It's not about becoming a more devout Jew - its most famous adherents aren't Jewish."

Is it true to say that Kabbalah has been cross-fertilised by many other things - astrology, numerology and more recently psychology and Buddhist meditation techniques?

"Yes and I don't think that's confined to just Kabbalah. Cross-fertilisation is taking place in all the major religions. I think we're going through a shift in consciousness and moving in a higher direction where some of the fundamental principles of all traditions are being challenged and having to accommodate a higher knowledge and understanding. My personal view is we're moving to a post-denominational world. I might be a century ahead of myself, but there's great ferment occurring."

Why is that?

"It's an unusual period in history. We have such immediate access through the Internet to so many different cultures, there are so many different people talking to one another, there is so much science available... I don't know where we are heading but the old traditions are going to have to change and catch up."

Many religions seem to be discovering or re-discovering meditative practices as a result of the spread of Buddhism throughout the West. Why are people so interested in this spiritual practice?

"There has been a lot more interest in various meditative-contemplative practices within the institutionalised religions and that is a reaction to the way the world is moving faster with computers, cell phones and the like. People feel they don't have enough time, they feel they're too busy and they're realising it is not mentally healthy to be engaged all the time. So people are interested in finding a way they can be in the world but still have one foot in a place where they can find calmness and peace."

How much longer do you think the pop culture obsession with Kabbalah will last?

I can't predict that but I think it has already peaked and is flattening out. There will always be an interest in Kabbalah - it's been around for thousands of years and will be around for thousands of years. The popular appeal will wane but I don't see Kabbalah disappearing. You can compare it with Sufism. There was a lot of interest in that for a while and [Sufi poet] Rumi is still one of the best-selling poets in the US. Not many people hang out with the Sufis anymore but there still around and will be for a long time. Just as Kabbalah will.

For more information on Kabbalah, consult Rabbi Cooper's book God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism.

After the rain...



... the waterfall at Gorricks Run

Transcendental numbers

We were talking about transcendental numbers (as you do). These are the numbers that aren't a fraction of anything, and they aren't a square root. They have an infinite number of decimal places, and no repeating pattern. In other words, they refuse to be quantified as anything but themselves.

The most famous example is pi. To find pi, take a piece of string, and wrap it precisely around a circle, and measure its length. Then measure across the circle's diameter. Divide the first number by the second. If you use a perfectly accurate ruler and string, the number that pops out, to an infinite number of decimal points, has no repeating pattern. It is utterly unique.

After a little while, we get used to that idea that something so peculiar and unique could live in something as dry as mathematics. An oddity, with something quite pleasing about it. In that world of formulae, telling us "this is the same as that", it's nice to see something that "just is".

Now we have to lose the notion of "oddy". These oddities are the majority. A note about how to understand infinities is helpful.

Imagine you're in a prison, and there is a jailer who enjoys gambling with his charges, but with odds that are stacked against them. He says to you "I'm thinking of a counting number - one, two, three, ..., with no upper limit. I'll give you one guess each day, and if you guess the number, I'll let you go." What are your odds of guessing correctly? One in infinity, since there's no upper limit. Slim odds indeed.

He comes back the second day, and says "I wasn't quite honest with you. The number is actually an integer, so a negative number is possible. For example, minus twenty. Though the number might be positive, you must now allow for the possibility it's negative." Now what are your odds? Still one in infinity, but the infinity now somehow appears to be twice as big.

On the third day, he says "I lied. It could also be a fraction. For example, 'three and seven twelfths', or 'minus seven point three'." And your odds now?

Mathematicians don't say "infinity", if they can help it. It sounds like just a big number; "the biggest number you can think of, times two". This is incorrect - "infinity" is not a number. It is a collection of undefined ways of being that are beyond numbers.

Instead of "infinity", mathematicians say "undefined". They are quite content to leave it undefined.

Back to transcendentals. Consider numbers like "one half" and "one third". Neither of these are transcendentals - they both can be expressed as a fraction. As decimal numbers, they have either a finite number of decimal places (0.5), or a repeating pattern (0.333333....).

Between the two numbers, there is a gap, and if we want to fill it, we need a more complicated fraction. Half-way between one half and one third is five-twelfths. But this only fills a single point between the two. It leaves gaping blank spaces either side.

Imagine we decided to fill that gap, listing every single fraction between a third and a half. Don't pull a face - you make a habit of sitting still and trying not to think on Friday evenings. Filling in the blanks between fractions is no more odd.

It would seem that since we have an infinitely long chain of numbers to make fractions from, we'd eventually fill all the gaps. This isn't the case at all, because no matter how precise you try to be, there is more space left over than there are places you've "named" with a fraction.

To emphasise - there are more gaps left behind than places that get filled. These gaps are where the transcendental numbers live. There are an infinite number of "understood" points - points we've named with a fraction of some sort. And there are an infinite number of transcendentals, because the transcendentals are the rational numbers' next-door neighbors. They live in between all the numbers we can explain.

Back to our jailer, who showed us larger and larger infinities. On the last day he spoke of a rather "large" infinite set of numbers - the rational numbers - positive and negative fractions. But in between

each infinitely-close pair of rational numbers, you can squeeze an infinite number of transcendentals.

Picture that - an infinite set of pairs of neighbouring rational numbers. And between each pair of rational numbers, an infinite set of irrational possibilities. Everything we could possibly label produces an infinite range of things we can't describe. This is a mathematical fact.

Pi is just one of these numbers that happens to stand out. It has some curious and useful features that apply to circles. These features make it a sort of "celebrity transcendental". But the less brightly-lit mysteries all lie there, quietly enmeshed in the fabric of everything we think as solid and sensible.

Jason Turner

Already broken

...a work in progress

ONE

Although it felt like flight, I knew the fall was wrong: my walking body upended, working to right itself even as it spiralled—headfirst, it seemed—down. I'd gone over the tiniest cliff: from darkened footpath to an unseen recessed lawn. The way I met the earth was harsh: back thwacking against cold ground, left leg twisted, a shriek rising like an animal's snared by a trap. Pain I had never known before, and I have known pain—childbirth, kidney stones, abdominal surgery. I looked up at faces—my husband Chris, my step-daughter Miriam, a nurse who'd been a guest at the memorial service we'd all just left, others whose features came and went like stars.

Stars: a skyful above me, glory I appreciated even as I writhed. The pain, the cold night air, the way my body shook in every cell, how I seemed to be dissolving inside my skin, (*You're in shock*, the nurse repeated. *I want you to breathe from your belly until the ambulance comes*), and that diamond-swept sky.

I think I might be dying, I whispered, and the nurse said again, *It's shock, darling, you're going into shock. Breathe.*

Dissolving into a heaven of stars.

You've got a broken leg. It's very painful. Breathe.

In the ambulance, a daze of morphine and motion. Someone holding my hand. Where was the sky? I could not move.

TWO

In the ambulance, time and space buckled, as my leg had. Folded back on themselves.

In the ten-minute race to Prince of Wales Hospital, through the leafy eastern suburbs of Sydney, Australia, where I'd come to live two years ago, the ambulance morphed a half dozen times: American sirens from my first fifty years clear to me as a currawong's call. My mother's and father's heart attacks; her feared stroke, his gasping allergic reaction; a daughter's car crash, a husband's suicide: all but my daughter dead for years, but their rescues—successful and failed—happening right along with mine. Their stricken bodies sharing the space of this speeding van.

What I am remembering now was something beyond memory. Other than memory. Memory suggests time, differentiates the present from the past. For ten minutes, that boundary dissolved entirely.

The morphine, maybe, and the shock. And a heightened sensing into how there's only the present after all. And no separation: their bodies broken in mine, mine in theirs.

Dissolving into a heaven of stars.

Life is suffering, the Buddha taught, and he didn't say *mine* or *yours*.

We're here, the attendant holding my hand announced. The ambulance doors swung open for us all.

Joyce Kornblatt



Oz girl in robes - Nell's journey in China (p6)

Watercolor

In any piece of paper I draw a yellow sun
Adding 5 or 6 lines it is easy to make a castle

I draw with the pencil around my hand
and I give myself a glove

If I make it rain, with 2 or 5 lines I get an umbrella.

If a little drop of ink falls on the blue part of paper I imagine a sea gull cross the sky

That flies, crossing the huge North and South

Traveling through Hawaii, China or Istanbul.

I paint a white boat that travels, it is too much sky and ocean

Between clouds appears an amazing pink and grey airplane

That colours everything around, with its lights that flash

You only need to imagine that it is going, in peace and if you want to it can land.

In a piece of paper I draw a boat, that is departing with my friends enjoying life
From one America to another I can cross in just a second.

I spin the compass and with a circle I make the World

A boy walks and finds a wall

There, the future is waiting for us

The future is something that we try to control

It has no mercy and time to come

It doesn't ask for a thing, it comes and changes our lives inviting us to laugh or cry

On this journey it is not up to us to know or see what will come

No one knows where its end is

Let's go all together on this path, this watercolor that one day will fade away
In any piece of paper I draw a yellow sun, that will fade away

Adding 5 or 6 lines it is easy to make a castle that will fade away

I spin the compass and with a circle I make the World that will fade away

(Brazilian children's song - from Ricardo Riskalla)

Putting on your rocket suit

The special ceremony of Jukai, or Taking Refuge, is offered from time to time, usually at sesshin. It marks a deepening of practice and commitment to the Way, and involves sewing a rakasu (those strange, abbreviated robes of the Buddhas that people wear around their necks), personalising each of the sixteen precepts by bringing them into your own words, and receiving the gift of a Dharma name, that will focus your spirit and aspiration in practice in a powerful way.

In ZOC the rakasu is affectionately known as the rocket suit - a tribute to an American visitor who misheard the word rakasu as rocket suit.

In China

Mysteriously, I managed to take the five forbiddens when I was at Wu-Tai-Shan. Words pale the experience but I shall do my best.

Late night I was wandering around with my buddy, Lionel. We were trying to find a shop that sold robes so that I could find the right one for my jukai. We found the shop. It was shut. We wandered some more. A spritely old nun followed us into a hat shop. My dear Lionel translated that if we were the ones looking for robes she would help us.

We followed her through dark allies and back street to the robe-makers house. A family of robe-makers were making robes inside. Nun Sheng and the robe family decided there was nothing there for me so the mother took the nun Sheng, Lionel and I back through the dark streets to the robe-shop and opened it for us.

I got a grey robe, the same as the ones I had been seeing all day on the nuns of Wu-Tai. I saw brown capes with yellow rings, a Rakasu! I asked if I could get one, but was told I could not, unless I shaved off my hair and took precepts. I said I intended to take precepts as a lay-chick in Oz and, as such, hair shaving was not a prerequisite.

So we had a morning date for the following day so I could formally take the Rakasu. We took tea with Mr head monk early morn. I had to go and get photos taken for my buddhist "passport" then I was told to come back in a few hours. We went behind the scenes in a war film being made, with actor monks and actor

soldiers in this temple. Nun Sheng showed the actor monks how to authentically hold their beads. We walked back past the actor peasants when I was picked up by another nun who dug my robes. She took me to her temple, we did the bowing dance, she stuffed my bag with apples and sent me on my way.

I was waiting at the temple door for whatever was about to happen. At that moment Lindy called out to me. So of the hundreds of temples in Wu-Tai-Shan of course she was at the one temple my thing was about to happen at. Lionel was shocked at the synchronicity -but I knew they would be there. And then I took my vows in Mandarin. Lindy's translator helped out a bit but mostly I just said my unknown mu words. It was all bizarrely right, I was very relaxed....

Lionel and I ate a formal meal at the monastery with all the spunky monks. I ate lots of rice. The other master monk present at my ceremony took us to his quarters. He was the temple's artist. He painted me a gift of a scroll that translates to "the heart of the spirit of the buddha" and then one for Lionel "strive to come in". They are bewtiful.

It was dark by now and we went to a funeral for a monk who had strolled over to the other side. Mr. head monk was conducting the chanting. I stood at the back of the room and the words "he married me at midday and buried me at midnight" came to me.

Then, like all exhausted Buddhas, I just had to sleep.

Nell



Nell and the master painter

In Oz

When I was a kid I loved books (especially the Secret Seven series); giving aid to sick animals; and being in charge. Little wonder, then, that I dragooned my local playmates into belonging to a club called "The Seven Aid Club." As the leader I got to invent the initiation ceremony the other kids had to go through. After pricking a thumb to sign in blood, swearing an undying oath, and receiving a smear of nasturtium juice on the forehead, you could be a member.

You might wonder where those kiddy ideas about initiation came from... from books or TV? Or maybe there's something bigger here...about the rites of passage we find in most human societies - which are about belonging and maintaining the cohesion of the group. And sometimes about beginning a mysterious journey into the unknown.

After the 7 Aid Club I went on to join a variety of other organisations. All of them dutifully sent me certificates of joining, usually by post! A far cry from pricking the thumb and the amazing sensations of unity produced by a childhood ceremony.

Until recently, the only formal rite of passage I had personally committed to since the 7 Aid Club, was getting married. And what a special day that was too... tears in the eyes as I said the vows we had chosen to say... and a sense that the world would never be the same again. And it hasn't.

However there really was a drought of formal committing in my life. Jobs and possessions had come and gone. Some people, sadly, had come and gone. Could anything be worthy of the commitment of a pricked thumb and a smear of nasturtium?

Then something started to yearn. Something sent me knocking on the doors of various teachers, sent me sitting on rickety chairs and even harder floors, reading endless books. Looking and looking. Is this the place? Is that the answer?

So there I was, reading the ZOC newsletter, and that mysterious word, Jukai, turned up. Once I read Susan's

invitation, there was such a sense of "Yes" I went to see her straight away.

How could I take Jukai, you might wonder, after just a year with ZOC? One answer is that these things don't have timeframes. I have such a different sense of time anyway, since I became acquainted with koans. Another answer is: my idea of the group - the belonging, the one for all and all for one - has never died. It has finally found its home in the Buddhist ethic, which I simply cannot fault, no matter how much I test it.

Thus, I took the rakasu pattern, and started a long process of pricking my thumbs, sewing it up. Since I was almost drummed out of the Junior Red Cross, because my sewing teacher, also the Red Cross Coordinator, was disgusted with my efforts, you can appreciate what an initiation the rakasu was! All the time I thought about the centuries of novice monks who had to run naked through the streets of their villages to the cemetery, to scavenge scraps of cloth from the corpses to make their robes. With no assistance from sewing machines or even the few bits of knowledge recalled from flunking out of a school sewing class. No help from a generous fellow student from far away, painstakingly crafting a beautiful wooden rakasu ring for a person he has never met.

I studied the awesome vows of the Three Jewels and the beautiful precepts, through the wonderful eyes of Robert Aitken, Thich Nhat Han, Ajahn Sumedo, Reb Anderson, Susan Murphy and Michael McElhone, my Jukai Bro. And then I ran them, like a metal detector, over my life...realizing it would take an eternity to find pure gold, but that there were little veins of crude ore there to start with.

By the time I got to sesshin, it seemed like the stage was almost set, apart from a bit of fussing about the length of the rakasu straps. But no, there was more!

There was the powerful process of choosing my dharma name...the nasturtium on my forehead...foretelling who I would try to become. From my experience it seems that choosing the dharma name is the product of an amazing dialogue between teacher and student about the symbols and metaphors of the student's life and of the Zen lineage. Most importantly, the name is an expression of how the student hopes to

engage with the great field of the dharma over time. The dharma name is a promise to strive for.

By the day before the ceremony I was in a flap - no name had appealed, no matter how many we tried. I should have taken a leaf from Susan's book and not worried. My name flowed so quickly from the early morning meditation on the day of my Jukai - and it was quite unexpected in its nature. Finding the name was like finding a critical piece of a jigsaw puzzle: there was a sudden falling into place, and a certainty that I have never felt about the name my parents gave me.

But there was still one final "flap" before the ceremony. My dharma name threw everything into a new perspective. I was being born again, hopefully with greater integrity and congruency. When I looked at my carefully drafted Jukai vows, they were the words of another self - not the real me. So the afternoon before the ceremony, I rewrote them all. The new words hurtled out of me - about my life, my thoughts, my warts and my wounds. They were for me, and they were for all my sangha brothers and sisters. Some were hard to say - they were, after all, initiation words. On the night of the ceremony, though, everything flowed.

In the early morning after the ceremony, and many dry days, I saw the first mist of sesshin, curling around the trees. It was a joyous moment when pricking thumbs, nasturtiums, vows and the Secret Seven were one:

Oh, subtle mist
Like you, I will caress this Earth
Then pass without trace.

*Merran Dawson
Myo Mu (Subtle Mist)*



Susan Murphy Roshi invites the world in for Merran and Michael's Jukai ceremony

Truly, is anything missing now? (from page 1)

It actually costs nothing to sit in zazen. It uses up no non-renewable resources. This already makes it a radical act for the earth. It contributes absolutely nothing to the current account figures - unless you consider that it divides them all by zero, perhaps. Apparently sitting and doing nothing is almost an indictable offence in the eyes of our culture; but seated meditation actually takes everything you've got, everything you are, in order to minutely notice and become conscious of the ordinary nature of mind, and get past the grasping of its habitual impulses to realise something of that silent moonlight of original mind, as old as the hills. This is not unlike the 'poverty of spirit' that the old Christian contemplatives (and Christ, in the Beatitudes) spoke of; it is said to inherit the kingdom of heaven, and it does, with every aware breath in and out. The treasury of the moment swings open, and it turns out you may take it and use it freely. Greed, false need, haunted wanting has little purchase in this wide space of ease and plenty, which comes free as the true nature of every human consciousness. The only thing missing is the easy ability to inhabit it at will.

But when it becomes a fairly practised matter to be able to touch this mind and begin to mature a little into its wisdom of stillness and connectedness, greedy, needy impulses have a lot more trouble pushing and pulling us into mindless and destructive behaviour. It becomes possible to see that they are a reaction that 'works' by so quickly smothering anxiety and replacing it with some self-soothing gesture, such as buying something, that the fear is covered over and officially eased before it can become clear whether it had any reality in it at all. Generally, subjected to quiet, persistent inquiry, it doesn't. So moderation appears - as a natural impulse that simply fits better, rather than an injunction imposed upon us. The famous Middle Way.

Darwin's theory of the 'Survival of the Fittest' was not intended to found a manifesto of 'enlightened' absolute self-interest drawn from evidence in the natural world that only the strong and the most fiercely competitive prevail. At the

level of individuals, it is true that the fittest organisms may be more likely to survive to reproductive age (a chastening thought, in an age of obese children) - but at the level of the survival of species, Darwin was making a very different proposition indeed: that the most successful species are those that most completely (and one might add, modestly) fit their ecological niche - the enduring success of the 'most fit', not the 'fittest'. You could say they are the lucky ones, living out the earth's possibility of *happiness* - most sweet accord with what is actually *happening*.

It's an interesting fact that this marvellous, wild animal body that we walk about in is, in its own terms, simple and ultimately fearless in how it meets suffering, which it would probably simply call experience. It is here for all kinds of suffering, and all kinds of joy. It doesn't hold back. It knows how to do it - how to get born, how to come into being, which is to say *continue* to get born deeper and deeper into life, more and more richly layered by experience that is fully embraced. And then, how to let go, to give way and disappear back into that dark. But something blocks us from truly knowing what the body knows. Something balks in us and says, no, not me. I believe I've been granted an exception. This is the comfort path of misery, which has little true curiosity, or lasting joy, or real creativity to be found in it.

Why is the comfort path - that looks so easy and beguiling, and sells so well that the great earth and most of our fellow species have been placed under duress or outright notice - a secret misery? Physicist Brian Swimme's parable of the quality of 'hawkness' is helpful here. The hawkness of the hawk depends upon the extraordinary speed of the mouse. If it was *easy* to catch mice, if mice were fatter and slower, and tended conveniently to walk all the time right past hawks, gradually hawks would become fatter and more and more roly-poly, and then their eyes would go dim and they would need spectacles after awhile, and then even the ability to lurch towards a passing mouse would diminish, until we would have to ask - bereft somehow of a deep part of our *own* strength - where is the quality of hawkness? Gone, disappeared into that secret misery of comfort.

Does this suggest something about the lovely necessity of the demands a practice makes on us? ...About the value of rigour, and a certain 'poverty' of means?

At the most moment by moment level, the ceaseless, restless movement of the mind is itself a kind of experience of greed - longing to be diverted, looking for more, doubting what is provided, loving to accumulate and rehash ideas, memories, fantasies. The restlessness is a craving, a sense of needing something for completion, or momentary relief... from restlessness itself. All frantic sifting through like and dislike is an act of propping up the small, shaky self, searching down new blind alleys for a possible way to make the self immune to change, dissolution, death. Greed is a kind of mesmerism. Can meeting this moment of breathing and being, with undivided, heartfelt attention, be a response powerful enough to begin to loosen and undo all the continuously arising vested interests of the self? Find out for yourself.

Just appreciating the going and returning nature of breath is already distilling the antidote. Consider how the breath teaches about greed: our body is filled with each freely given in-breath, and yet it leaves no trace as we exhale, erasing our footprints from the sand. Nothing remains, again and again, and yet we are filled and sustained. You can't get greedy with the breath. Try to hoard it - what happens? You have to loosen and let go in order to live. Actually, you never stop practising this fact. Meditation is just agreeing to grow conscious of what the body has always known.

So rather than reviling greed, meditation is a deep agreement to begin to meet it intimately in our heart of hearts: to grow more skilled at tasting it, recognising it, understanding (and forgiving) its dysfunctional survival strategies; allowing it to moderate, to let the mind at rest grow us into more modesty in terms of wants and needs; and above all, to begin to be able to distinguish between the forms of desire - love, friendliness, willingness, connectedness - that reconcile us to each other and to our great life, and the negative forms of desire - greed, neediness, stinginess, envy - that diminish and maroon us short

of freedom. When we practise becoming more porous and boundless, the full intensity of the natural world both gradually and suddenly breaks through. That amazing discovery can feel rather like being in love with all beings and the whole world, just as it is - a very expansive state of free interchange with all beings, where terror or loneliness or any of the other anxieties that drive compulsive hoarding and consumption can get no grip.

Such an expansive state brings to light and rests upon a kind of confidence in our place at the heart of things - the confidence of seeing who you really are, what *this* really is. Equally, it rests at the very same moment on the absolute clarity that there is nothing at all to cling to, that we are, ourselves, nothing fixed but pure contingency, like the moving world itself. From this grows a fearlessness that is not dependent on any kind of personal reassurance.

'When the wind blows, the downy willow seed floats away', says a Zen koan, inviting us to find the *most fit* relationship with the actual abundance and natural ease of a life in this world. It is as simple as that, and so it is a lifelong challenge for those of us with a human form of consciousness, in a mortal body. If you can see the generosity, clear right through, in the way the rain falls and the earth gets wet, the baby cries and the mother responds, the grass grows without our effort and the clouds pass through the sky without leaving a trace - then you know that nothing bumps into anything else and there is no need to fear scarcity until our own greed creates it. Truly, is anything missing now?



Tsunami survivors

A baby hippopotamus that survived the tsunami waves on the Kenyan coast has formed a strong bond with a giant male century-old tortoise, in an animal facility in the port city of Mombassa.

The hippopotamus, nicknamed Owen and weighing about 300 kilograms (650 pounds), was swept down the Sabaki River into the Indian Ocean, then forced back to shore when tsunami waves struck the Kenyan coast on December 26, before wildlife rangers rescued him.

"It is incredible. A-less-than-a-year-old hippo has adopted a male tortoise, about a century old, and the tortoise seems to be very happy with being a 'mother'," said ecologist Paula Kahumbu, who is in charge of Lafarge Park.

"After it lost its mother, the hippo was traumatised. It had to look for something to be a surrogate mother. Fortunately, it landed on the tortoise and established a strong bond. They swim, eat and sleep together.

"The hippo follows the tortoise exactly the way it follows its mother. If somebody approaches the tortoise, the hippo becomes aggressive, as if protecting its biological mother.

"The hippo is a young baby, he was left at a very tender age and by nature, hippos are social animals that like to stay with their mothers for four years," he explained.

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.



Owen and his 'mum'.

This story originally appeared in several newspapers and online so we are unable to acknowledge the original authors but thank them.

The small self goes to sesshin

Day One

I've put up my tent and said hullo to the land
Supper was good and the stars are quite grand.
I'm aiming for satori, so I've promised not to speak,
I'm going to get enlightened, it'll only take a week!

Day Two

Why do we have to get up before dawn?
My feet are now freezing and I'm starting to yawn.
This cushion's too hard and my stomach is rumbling.
Someone keeps sniffing! My backbone is crumbling!

Day Three

Well there's sitting and sitting and sitting again.
All I can think of are my knees and the pain.
I'm working on stillness, which isn't much fun,
I've given up on counting breath, I never got to one.

Day Four

We chanted a little and then sat here all day!
I'm no longer sure I like walking the Way.
I think I've lost interest in koans and Zen,
They're surely for roshis or maybe Dogen.

Day Five

Zafu's getting softer; I'm doing pretty well,
I nearly didn't get up when I heard the kinhin bell.
I don't think I am enlightened but the silence is quite nice,
Wonder if for lunch today we're getting any rice.

Day Six

The silence feels much deeper and the dojo is a haven.
I haven't reached nirvana but I'm close to Master Raven,
The people all around me are not making so much noise.
I'm sitting on my cushion with panache and so much poise.

Day Seven

We've now come out of silence and I'm feeling pretty good,
I might even take the precepts, be a buddha, spread the word.
Trade roly poly choices for the chance of sitting still?
If I get past my resistance I very likely will.

Ann Williams



October sesshin

Bare bones, silence, community, jukai, the land, the stars and the mysteries of the wombat.

Nothing missing.

Front row: Lindy, Merran, Susan, Michael, Judy, Jacqui

Middle (kneeling): Robyn, Cecile, Rose, Deborah

Back: Nell, Chris, Annie, Daniel, Nigel, Steve, Sue, Barbara, Naomi

Instructions from the cook

Eggplant and Tomato Stew

Serves six people

2 large eggplants (sliced into 2cm rounds, then into ¼ moons, salted)

¼ cup olive oil

2 large onions (finely chopped)

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 cup grape juice or good white wine

1 × 800 gram can crushed tomatoes

2 cloves garlic (chopped finely)

1 red chilli (finely chopped) *optional*

½ cup currants

1 bunch (3 tablespoons) fresh coriander (chopped)

- Heat olive oil in a large pan, add the onions and cook over low heat for 10 minutes or until caramelised.
- (While the onion is cooking, rinse the salted eggplant, and set aside to drain).
- Add the cumin and stir for 1 minute
- Add the grape juice or wine and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes, or until the mixture has reduced by three-quarters.
- (While it is simmering, in a large pan begin frying batches of eggplant in olive oil).
- Add the tomatoes and bring to the boil, reduce the heat and cook for 10 minutes.
- Add the garlic, (chilli), currants, and fried eggplant. Simmer for five minutes.

Open Secret is edited by Ann Williams with ZOC

Please send your words, random thoughts, stories of the way, jokes, puns, suggestions and pictures to: Ann Williams
email (*with ZOC in the subject line*)

annwilliams52@bigpond.com.au or ring 0414 500 456

If would like to be on our email list, please send an email to

jacquelinegodwin@dodo.com.au and put ZOC Mailing List in the subject line.

He does not know the last word

“So maybe our response to chaos should be counterintuitive. Rather than clinging to the stable and the unknown, we should embrace uncertainty...”

“Instead of clinging to the false promise of safety, we should linger awhile in the uncomfortable realm of uncertainty. Because, as artists know, that’s where real innovation is born. In upheaval, often the shorthand of conventional wisdom fails us and only a radical reassessment of the facts can save us.

“... it’s what precariousness requires of us and inspires in us - vigilant awareness, heightened perception, a rare openness to risk - that equips us to approach today’s problems with creativity.

“Thrown for a loop, we become nudged out of complacency.”

Paul Schmelzer, ‘Perilously Inspired’ in *Adbusters* Nov/Dec 2005, #62 volume 13 Number 6.

www.zenopencircle.org.au



Membership of ZOC is open to everyone for an annual fee of \$50. Membership forms are available from our secretary Jacqui Godwin.

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