Keeping It Simple in Our 25th Year

This newsletter commemorates the 25th anniversary of Clare Sangha’s founding in 1993, and credits the simplicity of our Way to the main ingredients of Zen practice – silence, breathing, posture. In experience, we find practice helps us to quiet the mind and see more clearly, to open the heart and act more beneficially. Sayings in Clare Sangha encourage the effort. Let go come back is one of them. Be the breathing is another. So is Be where you are and do what you are doing. The encouragement is keep to the present moment. What matters more than being here and now in our practice?

In From The Sangha Heart below, practitioners write of their experience, including JoAnna Allen on downsizing and where she is from; Josh Semiatin on his marriage this year; Yolanda Chetwynd on finding patience and simplicity in her sabbatical abroad; along with others, including encouragements from Founders Janet Richardson and Rosalie McQuaide.

Then, in Forgetting The Self, six members share their Zen insights from long and dedicated practice. The newsletter concludes with notices to Sangha; our practice schedule for 2019; and a Photo Gallery. May the road rise up to meet you and the Way be ever clearer!

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From the Sangha Heart

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Chuang-Tzu and the Butterfly

Once Chuang Tzu dreamt he was a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Chuang Tzu. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakably Chuang Tzu. But he didn’t know if he was Chuang Tzu who had dreamt he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Tzu. Between Chuang Tzu and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

You are the butterfly
And I the dreaming heart
Of Chuang Tzu
~ Basho

From The Sangha Heart
Living in Community/Where I Am From
JoAnna Joryu Allen

A year and a half ago my husband and I uprooted from Towson, MD and Loch Raven Village to Oakland, CA and an Oakland neighborhood called Jingletown. My husband and I have chosen to live in an elder intentional community, opened in March 2016 with 41 condo units. As is common in co-housing, we are mostly female singles and introverts. Finding Phoenix Commons (during Xmas 2015) solved the issue of how to live near our children and grandkids while still being able to lead an active life. A bonus I had not fully appreciated is that California is a mecca of meditation centers including Diane Rizzetto’s Bay Zen Center (which I attend), the East Bay Meditation Center, and Spirit Rock. We have the San Francisco Zen Center (Shunryu Suzuki) with Green Gulch Farm across the Golden Gate bridge, Berkeley Zen Center, a plethora of centers from all traditions.

I had been well associated with Heathcote intentional community in Baltimore County and knew about the challenges of consensus decision making and living in harmony (an ongoing challenge). But this was from the outside. I am now experiencing first hand fertile ground for practicing all the precepts and paramitas, especially generosity, forgiveness, patience, understanding, forbearance. I’ve even had the fleeting notion that perhaps this is training ground for sainthood and wonder how religious communities do it. They do follow a hierarchy of authority while in co-housing it is group think and group agreement and consensus that reigns. I need to add we also enjoy the many delights of living collaboratively amidst the essential need for rules and regulations. As comparison, in the California jail where I continue my prison work, all the power and control rests with the authorities, and yet there too exists community.

Three books are influencing what I am choosing to focus on for this article. They are: Savoring Changes: Discovering the Joy of Zen in Everyday Tasks by Gary Thorp, To Shine One Corner of the World (Shunryu Suzuki excerpts), and Wabi Sabi on Japanese aesthetic. What a wonderful chance it has been to downsize and live more simply, albeit taking on a huge mortgage due to California home prices. One appeal is I’ve always wanted to pare down so as not to leave the task to our children after our demise. I find it liberating to detach from so many possessions. Elderhood is a time to look back at life lived and lessons learned (or waiting to be learned), rather than having to manage a largely empty home when there is precious time not to be wasted. We now own just 880 sq. ft. and what I am experiencing at the Bay Zen Center is inducing me to live more Zen-like. We now have our last Corner of the World in which to grow old(er) and from which to shine our light. Wabi Sabi is described as “a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional…”

As I continue to set up my home, I keep in mind so much from Thorp’s chapter on “Your Space and Possessions,” Suzuki Roshi said, “Everything should exist in the right place, in the right way… When you do things in the right way, at the right time, everything else will be organized.” Thorp further interprets “The spirit of your home is very important. It might be filled with all the various items that bring some joy to your life, or it might be more austere. Whatever the case, it should simply reflect who you are.” And that last point is what I advocate for in my jail work—understanding who you are and that each of us is unique, and also one with all else. Having the freedom to be who I am is what I require from my community, as I resist being governed and yet contribute to the goal of harmony. It requires much accepting and letting go, and being judicious in knowing when and how to push back.

To support meditation in my community, I have taken charge of a bright 4th floor common space that was initiated to be a quiet room before we arrived. Every item in the room was donated by a resident or obtained from our free cycle area. The altar was a door prize I won at a weekend retreat sponsored by Buddhist Prison Pathways Project (BP3), a gathering of California Buddhists who work in its twenty or so prisons. At this time there are just two of us who attend the Wednesday evening sessions without fail but we are enough, recalling the teacher who mediated a long time alone, until he drew to his solitary sangha a key disciple.

The synchronicity of where I find myself—geographically near family and socially in a community, able to continue my jail work and having abundant opportunity to deepen my practice, tells me we are home indeed.
Where I Am From

Where are you from? I answer, “I’m from Baltimore.”
Oh, but where are you from, originally?
I say, “Milwaukee” and smile at the pause, and the look.
At times I forget, that I am a stranger still, to those
Who want but don’t ask, for my “ethnic background.”
I come from immigrancy, that today scares people,
That used to lay an obligation, to not ever lose face,
Because you represent a race, in those days--Chinese.
Which even now makes people think-- math-skilled,
And oh so hard working. My father’s Confucian ethics.
I come from frugality, learned from depression days,
That seeps into your blood, a permanent trait,
That becomes a game, because there’s no need,
But now a challenge, to live simply simply,
Because I’m trained, to have few needs.
I come from good cooking, taught to me at age 14,
When the call to return to see her mom, after 20 years,
Put me in charge of the kitchen, until the heat of Hong Kong,
Sent her back early. And her love for creating, out of little, stays.
Sewing dresses out of remnants that cost mere cents, just to see.
I come from mentoring, by a brother five years older,
Who showed me how to mow, to push up the hill,
And let it roll down, nonstop around the corner lot,
So even now, I kayak with stout shoulders, and
Admire a job well done; it’s called craftsmanship.
I come from a sister, now twenty years gone, so musical and social,
A class leader, a doctor like my brother, to prove she was as good.
Honored by her medical students, even from London, at her memorial,
Who called to remind us all of a birthday, who became the favorite,
After persisting past being spurned, for marrying him from England.
I come from peasant roots, expressed in my love for the soil,
For honesty and being plain, leaving sophistication to others.
Inheriting no need to climb socially, living on the Polish side,
Embracing the faith of my convert parents, seeing Maryknoll magazine,
Whose unconscious influence nudged me to see the world, and to dare.
I come from the power of Peace Corps service, to hold ideals,
That still thrive, through a practice of global brotherhood,
That has me ignoring, what I see in the mirror that prompts
Where are you from? I am from here, right where I am,
And wherever I go, I am from there, because I am, where I’m from.
Where do you come from?

~ JoAnna Allen, Oct. 19, 2015

Simple? Well, yes and no.

Ed Sangetsu Sullivan

In Case 7 of the Mumonkan, a monk asks Joshu, “I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me.” Joshu asks him,
“Have you eaten?” The monk answers, “Yes, I have.” Joshu says, “Then go wash your bowl.” The monk attained some realization.

Is it really that simple? Well, yes and no--a typical Zen response! Whenever newcomers come to our sangha asking for meditation instruction, we typically start by having them count their breaths from one to ten. Sometimes you can sense their disappointment. It’s as if they’re thinking, “You mean that’s it?” Yep, that’s it all right. Pretty simple, right? Well, yes and no.
Soon they discover monkey mind and that learning to stay focused isn’t so easy after all. Simple may be simple, but it’s not always easy. Once I heard a Japanese master say that it took him a decade before he could truly stay focused enough to count to ten.

After lunch during a zazen kai, I might do a riff on Joshu’s koan during my interviews with students:

“Have you eaten?” I’ll ask.
“Yes, I have,” the student replies.
“Did you taste your food?”
“Of course I tasted my food.” At this point, the student is becoming leery. This is, after all, a Zen interview.
“Tell me, what did your third bite taste like?”

Seeing their looks of bemusement and frustration, I may end the interview saying, “Then go eat your cookie and drink your tea at the next break. Eating mindfully is simple but not so easy.

For me, one of the most appealing aspects of Zen is its simplicity. Sure, we have our chants, bells, and incense, but, for the most part, we meditate. Zen folks love to meditate. Some might say that it’s part of our quest for enlightenment. I think it’s our quest for simplicity—and by that I mean clarity. Too often we overlay our experiences with the filters of our past experiences. As soon as we bite into a chocolate chip cookie (with big chunks of chocolate, naturally), we’re thinking, “Well, there goes my diet! This thing must be at least two hundred calories. I’m going to have to…,” and we’re onto a five-minute interior rant completely ignoring the wonderful taste of that cookie.

I am reminded of an old Zen proverb that says, “Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.” Is it really that simple? Well, yes and no.

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**Friendship**

We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop that makes it run over, so in a series of kindnesses there is at last one which makes the heart run over.

~ James Boswell
Bodhisattva Vows for Marriage
Joshua Hotokegime (仏気目) Semiatin

As I prepared for my wedding this past July, I had been considering for months how to integrate my Zen practice and commitments into the service in a way that felt genuine. The core of any meaningful wedding ceremony, including those of Buddhists, is its exchange of heartfelt vows. In May of 2016, I took the bodhisattva vows from Senseis Bruce and Ed, along with fellow Clare Sangha member Andy Ryushin Santanello (竜心), who again joined me this past July, this time as a groomsman. It seemed altogether fitting to recommit to these bodhisattva vows as I entered into marriage with my partner, Beth Klingaman. After all, her cloth donation (a piece of her bathing suit from our trip to Greece, years back) is featured centrally on my rakusu, itself symbolizing these precepts, which I wore that day.

I’d like to share with you the 16 bodhisattva vows that I made to her on that day in July. May we all continue to re-commit to our vows daily, to ourselves and to all beings.

- I vow to love you through the years, through everything that changes, knowing that you, just as everything in the universe, is constantly unfolding just as it should.
- I vow to be teachable in our relationship, and to take responsibility for my misunderstandings.
- I vow to take refuge in our marriage, and to foster a marriage in which you can take refuge and encouragement.
- I vow to let go of fixed ideas that I may have of who you are, and to strive to encounter the real you, as you are in each moment.
- I vow to bear witness, with an open heart, to your joy and suffering, and to respond with loving actions, regardless of circumstance.
- I vow to encourage and nurture your spirit and creativity, rather than stand in their way.
- I vow to take from you only what you freely give, and to honor your inherent dignity and autonomy.
- I vow to speak to you, and listen to you, from the heart, without hidden intentions.
- I vow to work hard to see you, others, and the world, as clearly as possible, to promote peace and compassion in our home.
- I vow to unconditionally accept what each moment in our shared lives has to offer, and to focus my energies on understanding your true intentions, rather than focus on your mistakes.
- I vow to share with you what I understand to be true, without blaming you.
- I vow to share all that I have with you, and to continually let go of greed, anger, and ignorance, which may place unnecessary barriers between us.
- I vow to strive for a marriage that contributes to peace in the world, both now and through the generations to come.

Bowing, Josh

The Simplicity of Samtusta
Ven. Thu Nguyen

This is an excerpt from Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh’s book “Reconciliation – Healing the Inner Child” that you may include in your newsletter. Thay talked about “Samtusta,” the awareness that we have enough to be happy.

“The Buddha spoke about the practice of samtusta, recognizing that we have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. We don’t need to obtain any more. Samtusta has been translated as realizing that one is satisfied with little. When we go home to the present moment, we view all the conditions of happiness that we have and we may find that they are more than enough for us to be happy right now. We need to stop running after things, because even if we get the object of our desire, we won’t be happy and we’ll want to run after another one.
“If we feel safe enough, it’s possible to have no more desire. My little house is good enough. I don’t need a bigger one. I have many windows and the landscape is so beautiful. We have plenty of conditions to be happy already; we don’t need to run into the future and get a few more conditions. What we have is enough for us. Once we adopt that style of living, we become a happy person right away.

“How can we adopt this wisdom in our modern life? Many people still believe that we can only be happy when we have a lot of money and power. Looking around, we see many people who have plenty of money and power, but who still suffer very deeply from stress and loneliness. So power and money are not the answer. We have to educate ourselves in the art of living mindfully.”

The Angel that presided ‘oer my birth
The Angel that presided ‘oer my birth
Said, “Little creature, form’d of Joy and Mirth,
Go love without the help of any Thing on Earth.”
~ William Blake

A Million Objects
Andrew Ryushin Santanello

Koan No. 27 from The Iron Flute: Yang-shan asks Kuei-shan, “If a million objects come to you, what do you do?” Kuei-shan answered, “A green article is not yellow. A long thing is not short. Each object manages its own fate. Why should I interfere?” Yang-shan paid homage with a bow.

How should we meet the “million objects” that confront us in our lives? How do we find simplicity in an increasingly complex world? How do we find our way when our cell phones demand more and more of our time, buzzing, crying for our attention? What to do when our minds tell us to do everything at once?

The urge to “do more” and to “multitask” is something that probably all of us can recognize in our lives. If only we can work faster, harder, more efficiently, then we can “clear our plates.” Then we can rest and be at peace. But, if we look closely, we notice that our efforts in this regard end up creating more of the suffering that we are trying to eliminate. We feel an even stronger urge to resolve our stress so we can be at peace, and even our brief moments of peace are threatened by worries and thoughts about the next set of tasks and obligations. It’s as if a baby tiger shows up at our door one day. We placate it by offering it some table scraps, and it leaves us alone for a while. But the tiger returns with a larger appetite. So we feed the tiger more and more, and it keeps coming back until our lives are consumed with feeding the tiger. Even when the tiger is gone, we are thinking about the tiger and the next time he will growl and scratch at the door. When will the tiger leave us at peace?

Our suffering is our ally if we pay attention to what it has to say. We can clearly see the limits of the mind’s ability to help us live our lives. When we respect those limits, we can act from a place of focus and compassion. We can really see and bear what needs to be done. We can be bodhisattvas. When we ignore those limits, we are caught in the endless cycle of striving and suffering: struggling to escape the quicksand while our efforts only get us more stuck.

Kuei-shan’s reply to Yang-shan challenges him to look deeply into the problem of his own life. We can imagine that maybe Yang-shan has many responsibilities and concerns and really does not know where to start. His mind is full of thoughts. His heart full of emotions. He really doesn’t know how to “process” all of it and goes to his teacher to ask for his advice. Yang-shan shows him reality: there is only this present moment and in this moment, there is only room for one thing at a time. In reality, everything is “one thing at a time.” Delusion is “everything at once.” The way of “one thing at a time” is also the way of “everything at once,” but the way of “everything at once” is not the way of “one thing at a time.” What is there for Yang Shan to do but bow to his teacher?

So, what do you do when a million objects come to you?

A million objects
All at once! Where do I start?
One thing at a time.

If I regret anything at all, it’s the way we wasted our time and skills.
All the false alleys and bogus friends, the misapplication of our energies.
All the delusions we had about who we were.
The Secret Pilgrim  ~ John Le Carre
Lessons from a Garden
Anne Christoffel

In the past year I have started taking early morning walks in an older residential neighborhood near my home in Arlington, Virginia. On one of these walks, I discovered an amazing flower garden. It is in the corner of a yard against a 4-foot high fence. It is not the kind of garden a professional would design. Just all kinds of plants everywhere. At first it looks haphazard, but looking more closely you can see that each plant was carefully chosen and sited to get sun and not to encroach on its neighbors. And it works. All summer and well past the first frosts it flourished. In late February new shoots appeared.

I am not much of a gardener but I know enough to appreciate the level of care manifested in that garden. Such mindfulness of both the individual plants and of the garden as a whole. The thought arose, “What if I brought that same level of care to what I do?” So I have tried to make that a practice. Driving with the thought that I am keeping my passengers and other drivers safe. Going about my office tasks with the intention to put taking care of our clients first. Putting kindness and helpfulness on the phone when it rings. And when attention wanders, as it always does, letting my heart gently bring it back.

Looking back on my life, I recall times when my capacity for mindfulness was gone – lost to illness, to fear, to pain. But the intention to harmlessness held on. My heart is stronger than my mind, and simpler, too. As I approach the challenges of aging I take great comfort in that.

Congratulations to Clare Sangha for maintaining their lovely Dharma garden for 25 years. I have always found it to be such a welcoming refuge – thank you one and all!

The Tathagata

Just as a blue lotus blossom,
A red or white lotus blossom
Is born and grows in water
But comes out of water
And is not attached to water,
The Tathagata (the Buddha)
Is born and grows in the world
And comes out of the world and
Is not attached to the world.

Buddha

Simple Gifts
Jon Seichō McCollum

It is somewhat ironic that the technological devices that promise to make our lives easier have also made our lives more intensified and hurried. Although we are more digitally connected, many of us feel more alone than ever. Do we truly listen to others when they are speaking? In the “Universal Door” of the Lotus Sutra, Avalokiteshvara’s voice is described as the wondrous voice, the voice of the world regarded, the brahma or “noble” voice, the voice of the rising tide (Buddhadharma), and the voice of world surpassing. These are good voices to bear in mind as we live our lives. While we may all be essentially alone in the sense that no one can really know what the other is thinking or dreaming, the simplicity of sitting zazen together and taking refuge in our sangha allows us to be “alone” with others with considerate support. The practice of zazen calls one to the state of mind called mushin, being focused on a task, absent of discursive thought. By concentrating and achieving flow, the ego is subdued, freeing the mind from suffering. Zazen helps make our existence simpler and more manageable.

Western society conditions us that more is better, which makes it difficult to adapt to a life of simplicity. Ultimately, this difficulty is within ourselves; it is about fear – fear of being unhappy, successful, cared for, financially stable, etc. The phenomenal world highlights these internal fears to which society predisposes us. It is here that we pigeonhole every thought to fit within acceptable constructs that are imposed upon us. Zazen helps us transcend this. It makes us aware of the illusion of the duality between “self” and “other” and opens the door to our essential nature.

Some years ago, my wife and I adopted the philosophy of simple living. We chose to develop a lifestyle with a deliberate focus to purposely reduce both material and emotional excess. For us, living more simply is a choice of compassion, so that our relationships with each other can be more meaningful. For the world, we strive to reduce our environmental footprint. Living simply is not always easy and we sometimes falter, but through the years, small choices have changed our lives in significant ways.
Choosing simplicity frees me to focus on my life as a musician, artist, teacher, and scholar. It also allows me time to reflect on things that I find important and be unselfish with my time in regards to my family and friends. One simple activity that my family enjoys is walking together with our dog, Maxx, in tow! Nature is simple and effortlessly beautiful. One easily finds splendor in its myriad colors, shapes, and waters, but it is its abstract qualities that gently tug me in. In particular, I am drawn to its melancholy, a feeling that, for me, is not merely a preoccupation with sadness, but rather something that embodies potential. I appreciate staring at a dark spot of fungus on a leaf in spring or in winter, watching the leafless weeping willows in my backyard move under the momentum of gentle cold wind. Simplicity is a choice that involves the conscious letting go of life’s complications and appreciating this very moment. What gifts are available to us right now?

You make every day a special day just by being you, and I like you just the way you are.
~ Fred Rogers

May Our Sanghas
Carolyn R. Whitt
This article is an offering to look within ourselves and examine how we are living our dharma as we interact with others. I am a yoga practitioner and meditator, who works in Lancaster, Pennsylvania as a clinical psychologist. I have participated with Red Rose and Clare Sanghas and taken longer retreats at the International Meditation Center in Maryland and Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts. In May of this year, I participated in a workshop led by monks from the Blue Cliff Monastery. Their style of meditation was different from my past experiences of no talking or talking allowed only when necessary. At times during this workshop we were allowed to share with one another. Being able to share during this workshop I had an experience where I felt I was in the scene in the Black Panther movie, when the newly crowned king entered his sister’s laboratory and she responds with such enthusiasm, “What is this?”
Later in the same month I attended a weekend retreat at Claymont Society in West Virginia led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen. Anh-Huong greeted me in the stairway with a warm hug and her acknowledgement stuck with me. Later in the workshop during the walking meditation we were instructed to hold hands while walking. The white male standing beside me appeared agitated and having a problem with an African American woman being at the end of his hand. Eventually, he released my hand and began wiping his hand on his pants as if trying to get something off of it.
In that moment I realized I had a choice: I could allow myself to get lost in the hurt of his reaction or choose to know I belong. The welcome from Anh-huong flashed in my mind. By the time my other foot touched the ground I had chosen the latter and continued walking, aware of the tension of the disconnect and the joy of being in the connectedness, of breathing in and breathing out.
As we reach out to create diversity within our sanghas let us also reach within ourselves to examine how we are living the teachings of the Buddha (I take refuge in the Buddha). Those of us who have chosen this path (I take refuge in the dharma) have elected to study these teachings and emulate these teachings in our daily lives. Sanghas led by aspirants who are skilled in the Buddha’s teachings and are able to discuss racial issues will aid in creating a valuable learning experience for all present, as well as deepen and enliven the teachings and strengthen the container of the sangha (I take refuge in the sangha). May our sanghas be places where we can address our ingrained beliefs and cut through illusion when experiencing inappropriate behavior.

It is for love that the whole universe sprang into existence and it is for the sake of love that it is kept going.
~ Meher Baba

Kilimanjaro!
Ed Stokes
At what moment does a journey begin? My wife Karen and I on something of a whim joined three other acquaintances from Baltimore for a trip to Tanzania in May 2018, to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. At 19,300 feet this snow-capped mountain in East Africa is near the upper limit for a non-technical climb—you can simply hike to the summit! We spent four days getting acclimated to the thinner atmosphere of the higher altitudes, walking for 8 hours or more each day through steep, desolate and rocky terrain.
Our ascent began at midnight on the fifth day starting from our base camp at 14,000 feet. Ours was a still and clear night with temperatures in the 20’s and a full moon—an auspicious sign for a Zen mountain climber! The climb was extraordinary—the arduous climb required my full attention to every labored breath and step. I arrived at the summit at 6:00 AM in time to witness a glorious sunrise in the east while the full moon shown in the west.

You could say it’s been all downhill from there. When I returned home, the following poem practically wrote itself:

**Mountain, Climbing!**

Whence this air, this breath, this breathing?

Whence this path, each step revealing?

Whence this mind, this thought of thinking?

Whence this mountain, rising?

Whence this moon’s reflected light?

Whence the dark in which it shines?

Whence the silence that holds the sounds
Of footfalls, and mountains?

Breathing.

Walking.

Shadows casting.

Mountain, climbing!

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**The Practice of Patience and Simplicity - Without the Sangha**

Yolanda Chetwynd

When you arrive in a new country unable to speak the language it is a test of how patient you can be with yourself. Also, as you acquire a new language, it strips communication down to a very simple basic level. That is the experience my husband and I have had on choosing to spend this sabbatical year in Nantes, France.

When we first arrived we literally could not understand anything or anybody. Then as the confusion cleared we realized that though we could not understand what was being said, we found that we read people’s body language and tone of voice with more precision and sensitivity.

I have always wanted to make time for a long retreat. Maybe 100 days. Now I think just going to a new country is like being on retreat. My husband is at work nine hours a day, five days a week and therefore there’s plenty of time for silence and practice. In our cozy house, with its pocket-hanky sized yard, we turned one of the children’s bedrooms into a practice room. We invested in two yoga mats and retrieved a Zafu and Zabuton from my father’s Zendo. This room anchors my meditation and yoga practice and from there infuses into my being.

Gradually I have learned the French language, made friends, and have done a lot of artwork. Nantes is a beautiful city at the mouth of the Loire river, on the Atlantic coast of France. It has many beautiful gardens and I have taken to drawing and painting in those gardens. Also, I’m having an exhibition here in the center city; I wanted to share a few images from that show:

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www.yolandachetwynd.com
Remembering Roshi Bernie Glassman
Anthony Hoetsu Falcone

I started reading about Zen in 1967 when a friend of my sister gave me Zen Flesh, Zen Bones. Then I read several other books; and began home meditation upon reading The Three Pillars of Zen. I was inspired by the enlightenment stories and eventually decided that I needed a teacher. Researching, I found the Zen Community of New York and the Greyston Bakery in Yonkers. In the early 1980s, I drove to Greyston Bakery for a three day sesshin and met Roshi Bernie Glassman. I remember being greeted warmly by sangha members and by the warm aromas of the bakery. Most vividly, I remember my first dokusan with an actual Zen teacher.

I entered the dokusan room, bowed, and sat on a zabutan. Roshi Glassman sat facing me. As instructed, I introduced myself, “My name is Tony and I have assigned myself the koan Mu.” Roshi said, “Show me Mu.” I had no idea what to do, so I centered myself cross-legged, took a breath, and began intoning Mu on the outbreath. I felt self-conscious; Mu was thin and tentative. Roshi Glassman said, “No, this is Mu: MUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU,” loud, strong, lasting seemingly forever, finally trailing off as his breath ran out. I was too deluded to understand, but I could not help seeing, and what he showed me is still with me today.

I drove to Greyston several more times before finding and landing with ZCB/Clare Sangha. Other occasions revealed the power and presence of Roshi Glassman. At one sesshin, he said a few words about the death of someone related to one in his sangha. “You have shocked the universe,” he said in a powerful voice, and several burst into tears. At another sesshin, one of his students suddenly broke out with clear, robust peals of belly laughter. Roshi took him laughing from the meditation hall to dokusan. He eventually confirmed the student’s insight experience.

I last saw and spoke with Roshi Glassman at the ZCLA 50th Anniversary teachers meeting. It was obvious that he was respected and revered by everyone there, yet he was down to earth and unassuming. I met Roshi Glassman at the beginning of my formal Zen training. I was inexperienced and unsure of myself in a world that he knew intimately, but the force of his presence made it clear to me that I had found my spiritual path. I am forever grateful to him for that gift. We of Clare Sangha mourned his passing this November. May his memory be a blessing.

“One kind word can warm three winter months”
~ Japanese Proverb

Bearing Witness to a Genocide
Bruce Seiryu Blackman

The dictionary defines genocide as “the systematic killing of a national, ethnic or religious group.” In its human meaning the word is eerie: a race of beings (geno) is judged not deserving to live but rather to be cut down and exterminated (cide). Yikes! The first genocide in the 20th century was not Nazi Germany’s attempt to exterminate the Jews, but the killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks, including the slaughter at a Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica 100 years ago. Pope Francis remembered this genocide in April 2015; as many as 1.5 million died in it. Genocides since then include Rwanda, Pol Pot’s in Cambodia; before then, early European American efforts to eradicate Native Americans; among others less publicized. Today a genocide or “ethnic cleansing” goes on in Burma against the Rohinga Muslims.

I went on the Zen Peacemaker retreat to Auschwitz in 2011. Taking the train from Berlin to Krakow, I sensed how travel went for the thousands of Jews sent to Auschwitz in cattle cars 70 years ago. Not knowing their destination, many were just told “you’re going to a new place to live and work.” I joined the Zen Peacemaker leaders – Roshis Bernie Glassman and Eve
Marko, Genro Gauntt and Barbara Wegmuller – and the other participants in Krakow, some 110 people from 15 countries, many interesting people. On Monday morning we took a short bus ride to Auschwitz (Polish name, Oswiecim), and walked in with our guides.

**Auschwitz I**: We entered the camp under the sign *Arbeit Macht Frei* – “Work will set you free.” Inmates were the main construction workers of the camp. In the barracks we saw small rooms and heard tell of the many squeezed into them. If anyone escaped from Auschwitz, the SS practice was to shoot 5 people who knew the escapee. There was no pleading with them. SS stands for the Schutzstaffel – the special police force of Hitler’s Nazi Party.

For other offenses – such as sharing food with an inmate or not making a work quota – various punishments were devised. One was forcing the culprits to stand all night in narrow concrete stalls so close-in no one could sit or lay down to rest, then having to work the next day exhausted. Seeing those stalls resonated strongly in me: *Geesh, how could one work a hard quota after up all night like this?* We didn’t have to ask what happened to those unable to make the work quota. An uncanny sense came into me as I realized right then that we would be feeling what the inmates experienced 70 plus years ago – we would bear the witness to it in our time.

We continued in Auschwitz I that day with visits to the gas chamber and to the “Execution Wall” where inmates were taken to be shot. A multi-faith service was held at the Wall, including Buddhist, Christian and Jewish forms. There were several such services during the retreat.

**Birkenau (Auschwitz II)**: The rest of the week we were in Birkenau, the much larger camp in Oswiecim. Many of us walked the 1.5 miles to Birkenau in the morning and back at night. We entered through the main entrance – the “death gate” – where train tracks run into the camp.

When new arrivals got off the train they walked to a selection site where an SS officer would point one way if he decided the individual could work; the other way if he decided the person was unfit for work, thus condemning him/her to the gas chamber. Children were often separated from parents in this selection process.

We went to the building where arrivals were inducted. The number tattooed on the arm of each inmate became his/her identifier, substituting for family names. Heads were shaved during induction, after which family members often couldn’t recognize each other and got separated. The dehumanizing of inmates began with induction and continued to the end.

Possessions were taken from them. The possessions piled up and inmates called that site “Canada” for wealthy place. There’s a play on words in Yiddish-German language: *Keiner da*. It sounds like Canada, means no one there; *place of valuables, no one there* was the sense of it.

The wooden barracks at Birkenau often had no foundation, and were very cold in winter. One barracks was called “Mexico” because the women staying there put blankets around their shoulders which resembled ponchos. Naming these buildings Canada and Mexico showed the spirit of the inmates. Even in degradation they had their humanity.

In day 2 at Birkenau, we went to the barracks where women no longer able to work were held for the gas chamber and crematorium. Several anecdotes of brutality and cruel treatment were told by our guides. The rabbi led a service and song to all the women of this last stop barracks:

_How could anyone ever tell you you are anything less than beautiful?_

_How could anyone ever tell you you are less than whole_

_How could anyone fail to notice that your loving is a miracle_

_How deeply you’re connected to my soul._

We all sang it several times.

In day 3 we began chanting the names of the dead near the train tracks for part of each day. To the sheet of names given me I added the grandparents lost to friends in Virginia. Chanting the names of the dead and singing to the women in the last stop barracks were moving forms of bearing witness. It brought us to tears.

Increasingly we felt the presence of those lost at Auschwitz-Birkenau (upwards of 1.5 million a guide said). We mourned for them, we were in some relationship with them. This was clear in our council meetings held both morning and night.

The holocaust (*Shoah* in Hebrew language) was not limited to Jewish people. Our last day we heard from a gypsy (*Roma*) woman. She spoke in an unknown dialect, recounting a time when Roma from around Europe were shipped into Birkenau.

The woman sang a song the Roma made up there, translated something like this:

_We work hard all the day, and what do we get – only kicks and shoes!_

_We work hard all day and what do they want – they want us dead!_

Tears streamed down as she sang the song. Unlike many Jews, the Roma knew where they were being sent. They resisted when the SS tried to force them into the gas chamber. *It was a terrible fight*, she said, *we know how it ended*, continuing to weep.
The Roma woman was experiencing the story she told, reliving what happened to her people at Birkenau. Past was present for her. It was the same in our bearing witness – we were feeling one-with those lost there. As St Augustine said, “If there’s a line between past and present, then show it to me.”

Our last day at Birkenau we went to gas chamber/crematorium No. 4. The buildings are no longer standing, now just rubble, having been dynamited down by the SS before fleeing the oncoming Russian army in 1945. Our last service was at the pond beside the crematorium where human remains were dumped.

As the retreat came to a close, I reflected on all we had seen and done. We sang to those lost at Auschwitz-Birkenau, chanted their names, listened to stories about them, we became their situation best we could to remember them, we mourned and grieved their loss. When we bear witness and become the situation, there is no way to become superior or better. We’re just one of the gang, human beings together, crying, laughing, experiencing sorrow, joy.

And I recalled a verse by William Blake:

Can I see another’s woe,
And not be in sorrow too?
Can I see another’s grief,
And not seek for kind relief?

(This account first appeared in Pearls of Ash and Awe (2015): 20 Years Bearing Witness in Auschwitz.)

May your preparation meet its opportunity.
~ Doc Mutimer

Founders’ Corner

The founding teachers of ZCB/Clare Sangha – Roshi Janet Jinne Richardson and Sensei Rosalie Jishin McQuaide – send their congratulations and encouragements in this our 25th year. Roshi writes: This anniversary occasion offers us, as ZCB members, the chance to recall our heritage and the long background we enjoy. It signifies also a challenge to us to sit well, and to share compassionately the wisdom we have inherited. Let us rejoice!

Sensei writes: What is it that is so appealing about Zen meditation? Eyes open. Calm breathing. Companions along the Way. Self Awareness. Solidarity with all creation. One with all creation.

Roshi further writes about her Travels in the Interior: Travels in the Interior challenge and reward the voyager brilliantly. As life advances, these travels gain significance and become the end-all and be-all for the traveler. For this nonagenarian, other dimensions pale as compassion takes on a new value and motivation. The traveler rejoices in the good fortune that brought her to this journey and to the travelling guides and companions along the Way. These gain in beauty and splendor as the trip proceeds. The scenery fascinates, the landscape takes the breath away, and the discoveries can blow the mind. New roads invite me to take risks. Dead-end streets are abandoned. Ideas vanish, wordless praise and exaltation persist. At the opening of the Space Age, hero Charles de Gaulle reportedly noted that the Space Age adventures fade when compared with Travels to the Interior. You ask about the cost? One person paid 9 years facing a wall. Then you may ask: Amtrak? Air France? Delta? United? Simply sit. Just sit.

Forgetting The Self

To study the Way is to study the self;
To study the self is to forget the self
To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things;
To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between oneself and others.

~ Eihei Dogen

Clare Sangha follows Master Dogen’s formulation of the Way, composed from his own experience. Through zazen meditation, we study ourselves and find this world right here and now always has the potential to wake us up; any of the myriad things can wake us up. We find that to forget the self is to inhabit all that’s around us, not to be separate from it. And that, with continuing practice, Zen makes us freer, simpler, kinder, more alive and connected with everything. And more secure – an anchor to windward.
Dogen’s formulation is confirmed in the teaching of modern Masters. In his book Encouraging Words, Robert Aitken Roshi quotes his principal teacher: “Yamada Roshi has said ‘The purpose of Zen is to forget the self in the act of uniting with something’… Zazen is our model... There is nothing in the way when you forget yourself.”

Below are reports from six senior members of Clare Sangha from their long and dedicated practice.

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Zen Experiences
Anthony Hoetsu Falcone

My first notable experience occurred many years ago and it happened unexpectedly. Out of the blue is an appropriate expression. I was lying on my bed doing Mu when I noticed a tingling sensation in my abdomen which quickly became vibration. The vibration intensified, spread to my entire body inside and out, and everything dropped away. No me, no body, no room, no thing. I swam back out of that sea of vibration into myself changed in some undefinable way. I experienced something vast, without boundaries, always present, from which all phenomena arise. It cannot be described, but it can be experienced.

Since that experience I’ve noticed that a state of non-separation occurs frequently. The bell rings signaling the beginning of a sitting period – I am the bell, the bell is me. In fact, there is no me and there is no bell. Bong is all there is, bong fills the meditation hall, bong occupies the entire universe. Just bong. The mind not busy characterizing it – just bong.

I was in a coffee shop in New York looking at the intersection of three streets, at the people moving around, and suddenly the entire scene was me and I was the entire scene. I was no longer observing the street, nor was the street something being observed. There was no subject, no object, only what existed in that moment, just as it was.

Gratitude and undirected love arise with each experience of non-separation, and the experience arises and wanes without “me.” I know that the initial experience arose from just sitting Mu, from becoming Mu. Thoughts of progress arose, let go and return to Mu. Feelings of elation arose, let go and return to Mu. Frustration arose, let go and return to Mu. Thoughts of enlightenment arose, let go and return to Mu. I became consumed with penetrating Mu, let go and return to Mu. I also know that additional koan study has broadened and deepened my initial insight.

The patriarchs, ancestral teachers, and the current Roshis and Senseis, tell us Zen is a path anyone can follow. It is a path anyone can practice and anyone can benefit from.

I was not deceived.

A Tale of Two Sittings
Carl Pohlner

Kensho to me is an exuberant awareness that is life-changing and compassion-based. In 1994, three years before I discovered Zen, I found my face pushed into a concrete wall as my doctor told me I had a historically fatal cancer and had about a year or so to live. Samuel Johnson said “nothing so concentrates the mind as the prospect of hanging.”

And so my mind was really focused a few days later as I drove to my first MRI scanning. Just what was I going to do to make the final days meaningful? No ideas made sense. Then in a second the answer came crashing down like it had fallen out of the sky, and I felt like that Biblical person who had “scales falling from his eyes.” The awareness I received was Be cheerful and help others.
It could have been a fortune cookie message. Yet, there it bomb-dropped was. I felt relieved, whole-body evacuated. I was free from all anxiety through all that followed. I had been handed the meaning of life. And I had also been handed the Buddha Dharma without realizing it had a name.

My surgeon thought I might be – and as it turned out – a fortunate survivor. Three years later I took up Zen with Clare Sangha after reading Suzuki’s Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind.

Then after 20 years of sitting with Clare Sangha, I had a second awakening. This time in a Zen context. In 2015, I began a koan practice with Sensei Bruce Blackman. My encounter with Mu was not going well, so on one morning in January 2016 I stopped saying Mu on the outbreath and fell back to my long-time practice of mantra chanting with a mala, using the syllables in the Om mani padme hum mantra (Homage to the jewel in the lotus) to help me focus on my breathing. I had been practicing probably since 3:00 a.m. in my dark bedroom in front of a Buddha shrine with a little candle. I was focusing very hard on just what exactly the “jewel in the lotus” was and and I was envisioning a cool, green emerald cradled in damp lotus leaves.

Then at 5:00 a.m. it burst out loud and clear that the gem was not separate from the lotus; rather, it was the transformative engine of the lotus itself – its very DNA – that enables the flower to emerge from the mud. I felt a visceral sweep like that coming from the arm that sweeps the deadwood off the bowling alley as I realized this. I was the jewel in the lotus. And I sensed the responsibility in the shadows.

During my next sitting a few days later while chanting Enmei Juko – one mala bead for each two lines – everything began to go wild almost immediately. I could tell my experience from days before was being continued as if no time had passed. Each bead felt like exploding popcorn. Every line of the chant burst like fireworks into brilliant flowers, and the closing lines nen nen ju shin kij nen nen fu ri shin roared. My arms were shaking.

A month later a haiku fell into my mind that probably was meant to sum things up:

A bird call quick and sudden
I raise the window high
Melting snow outside.

I have been staying with koan practice with Sensei Bruce ever since. I am sensing that in it there is even more than what I have experienced so far. Also, I have been acting on my new awareness about being a “transformative engine” by doing community service, and trying to be more loving to those around me.

A Personal Journey
Christopher Biggs

Over ten years ago, I began my Buddhist practice at Maria Kannon Zen Center in Dallas, Texas. The spiritual leader Ruben Habito Roshi asked me the following questions. My answers are listed:
- What do you seek in this practice? To find a personal spiritual practice responding to a friend’s recommendation. 
- What are you looking for? To develop a healthy practice and benefit from healing.
- What led you to learn about Zen? To seek inner peace recovering from the loss of a loved one.

Ruben Roshi initiated my koan practice by assigning me “Joshu’s ‘Mu.’” Mu is not a word. Mu is a sound that doesn’t stick in your ear but burns in your throat. Koan practice goes against the logical way our mind tries to solve a problem. Mu confounded me for years. Mu is who? My empty self is Mu. How can Mu be so many things or sounds at the same time?

In “emptiness” the answer fell out. Therefore, I am Mu. My koan practice began in earnest. My own rules for koan study go like this: 1) look for “things” mentioned in the reading and 2) ask what is the “action” that the thing performs, then 3) demonstrate your answer without words. From the Diamond Sutra. Thus I hear. The “thing” is the Diamond Sutra, and the “action” is to hear. Cup your hand around your ear and listen (like the RCA Victor’s trademark Nipper/“his master’s voice” pictured above).
A life-changing event occurred about five years ago necessitating a move from Texas to Virginia to care for my elderly mother. One morning she awoke to discover that she lost her sight. In short order, we moved her from rural Indiana to community living in Maryland, and I changed jobs to be nearby in Virginia.

Upon moving, Ruben introduced me to Bruce “Seiryu” Blackman Sensei and Clare Sangha. My practice changed states but kept the same connection. My practice continues to this day with Bruce Sensei teaching from “The Miscellaneous Koans” in The Flowing Bridge by Elaine MacInnes Roshi who was Bruce’s teacher. Both Elaine MacInnes and Ruben Habito were students—Dharma Sister and Brother—of Yamada Koun Roshi. Thus, another circle in “connectedness” comes around.

Bruce also teaches from The Iron Flute, translated by Nyogen Senzaki and Ruth McCandless. For example Koan #8: Yunchu’s Instruction which took place when a recently awakened student wanted the master to explain his new enlightenment experience. The student was from Korea – and had not fully returned to his Buddha home – so the Master did not try to describe the inexpressible, but he proclaimed “Korea, Korea!” These words penetrated, and inspired me to go home, too. “Indiana, Indiana!” is my response.

Clare Sangha connects with other spiritual schools. One is the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax. Thu Nguyen, a mindfulness meditation teacher ordained by Thich Nhat Hanh, transmits the 5 Mindfulness Training to remove discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. Carl Pohlner helped prepare me for this transmission. During this preparation, I began a journal which I maintain today towards my jukai (precepts) practice. Each day begins with a written intention towards reverence for life, true happiness, true love, loving speech and deep listening, and nourishment and healing.

Whenever a new koan (or day) presents itself, I am surprised that no matter how difficult the challenge, Angel (my wife) seems to know the story and offers Asian context. Her spiritual tradition originates from a life-long Tibetan-Vajrayana-Nyingma Buddhist practice. It is a special gift to have a partner with whom to experience life’s curiosities. I am very grateful for her endearing trust as we share our life paths. I dedicate this narrative to my teachers, Angel, and those who follow the middle way.

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Die while alive, and be completely dead,  
Then do whatever you will, all is good.  
*Waka* poem by Shido Bunan

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**Sesshin Insight**  
Andrew Santanello

At the end of our June sesshin, I experienced a Zen insight and was asked by Sensei Bruce Blackman to write a brief description. Here it is:

Several minutes into the second zazen period on the last day of sesshin, I noticed a strong feeling in the area below my belly button. It was a “warm fuzzy” feeling, yet intense and strong. It’s hard to describe but it was like this really warm magnet that was sucking me in. I came back to Mu on the out breath, but then the tears started to come. The feeling was very strong, so I let my awareness go to the feeling. At that moment, I had an intense memory of being a little kid running across our neighbor’s lawn. They had one of those Mary statues with her arms open.

As I ran past, I stopped in my tracks right after I noticed the statue, ran over, and gave it a full embrace then ran on. I had the same exact feeling in sesshin that I did that day. It was sort of like the line Sensei repeated from the video we watched, “*When reality embraces you, you might as well embrace back.*”

Right after the memory flashed, I had this sense that the boundaries of my body expanded first to the entire zendo (and everyone and everything in it) and then out as far as my perception reached and then the sense that it went even farther than I could perceive. Everything I could see and hear was as familiar as my fingers and toes: Carmen wiggling her foot, the birds chirping, the books on the shelf. It was all me and I had a great sense of affection for the whole thing. I had to hold in my tears of gratitude. I went upstairs to use the bathroom during break when I saw Sensei. He was me too. And so was the coffee that I knocked out of his hand by accident.

After the sesshin I told Sensei of my experience. He asked several checking questions and I responded. Later, he confirmed my insight, then laughed and said “I sensed you were *in the neighborhood* this sesshin. Congratulations on your perseverance - well-done!” I thanked him for his encouragements. “All right then,” he said, “it’s on to the next koan!”

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How invisibly it changes color  
the flower of the human heart  
~ Komachi

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Experience at Zen Mountain
Jon Seicho McCollum

It is through the simple act of letting go that we open ourselves to forgetting the self. The Japanese term “kenshō” expresses the inexpressible, that of an immediate awakened awareness. One pathway to this experience is koan study. The koan *Joshu’s Dog*, states: “A monk asked Jōshū in all earnestness, ‘Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?’ Jōshū said, ‘Mu!’”

I began work on this koan with Sensei Bruce Seiryu Blackman in 2015. In February of 2017, I joined a seven-day Bodhidharma sesshin at Zen Mountain Monastery that had no dokusan—just zazen. I needed to be “alone with others” as it is sometimes said.

The last night of sesshin, there was an abrupt winter storm. Sitting zazen below an open window, deep in practice, I felt the energy of everything around and within me. An enormous gust of wind blew into the space and I was accosted. A wood shutter fell crashing from the window and then, suddenly, everything dropped away. In an instant, everything united into one. I could feel myself descending into the depths of all things—exalted, but at the same time still and tranquil. Tears came to me with a deep love for everyone and everything.

I told Blackman-sensei of this experience. Questioning and checking me out in this, he later confirmed the insight experience, then congratulated me on my persistence with Mu. Upon Sensei’s recommendation, we have expanded koan study from *The Flowing Bridge and Iron Flute* collections into *The Gateless Gate*. This is the focus of my training since the experience at ZMM.

*Alone, I have thawed
Sitting in a winter squall
CLAP!! Then quiet’s deep.*

Working with Mu
Diana Schulin

About two years ago I took up the koan of Mu (*Joshu’s Dog*). Here is my experience working with Mu.

**Mu at the Office:** Two of my colleagues were getting a bit heated about how to handle a certain situation and getting nowhere. I was also in the meeting, but my role was more peripheral, so I wasn’t part of the back-and-forth. Still my mind was busy trying to decide who was right and who was wrong, judging how one colleague was aggressive, with related thoughts and opinions. Suddenly, I heard a loud, internal voice saying “Mu!”—almost like a thunderclap—and then there was total silence internally. It was for just a split second but so refreshing!

**Mu at the Movies:** Another insight came to me while watching the movie, “Kung Fu Panda 3.” There was a point where the panda was in big trouble fighting a horrible monster. His community, desperate to help, all clasped their hands in a kind of group mudra to send him chi energy. As this was happening, there appeared in the background a swirling yin/yang symbol. Wow, the meaning of the symbol suddenly struck. It wasn’t an intellectual understanding, but an intuitive sense that yin and yang represent the manifested Universe and the duality of this world. And yet, that duality completely melds and merges into a single, underlying essence. The Buddha nature in all, the enlightened sage and the murderer—Mu!

**Dreaming Mu:** One night, I had a dream about Mu with one of my teachers from the yoga tradition. In the dream, she was sitting very close to me and leaned in with a smile saying, “I’ve been thinking about something…” This took me by surprise because she would always insist that while thoughts come and go, she was not/is not the thinker. Then she was silent briefly and then there was total silence internally. It was for just a split second but so refreshing!

**Mystery of Mu:** In her book, *The Flowing Bridge*, Elaine MacInnes shares a telling story about a disciple working with Yamada Roshi, who was heard shouting at the Roshi, “*Muji ni sanjite orimasu*” (“I am working on Mu!”) After he shouts this again, the master, rubbing his eyes and face, looked at the disciple and gently asked, “What did you say?”

**Buddha Nature or Not? Mu!** One recent evening, I took a walk after dinner and came across several of my favorite neighborhood doggies, walking along with their humans. As I saw each dog, I smileingly thought, “Buddha nature or not? Mu!” Then it struck me that I have never questioned whether or not I have a Buddha nature. In other words “Who am I?” at the core of my being?

Later that night in bed, I began to earnestly ponder the question, “Who am I?” The more I tried to pin down an answer, the less I could find—until I discovered there wasn’t a Diana anywhere to be found. At this point, I felt myself almost floating in a big ocean-like place in my mind, as if I were a minute particle in an ocean of pure aliveness. There was a feeling of peace, oneness and aliveness all at the same time.
“I” was just pure being and at the same time some part of me was also enjoying the experience. It couldn’t have lasted for more than a few seconds when a question popped up, “Wow, what’s going on?” And then—poof—I was back to being Diana again, lying in bed wondering about what had just happened.

I told Sensei Bruce Blackman of this experience. He inquired and we discussed it for some time, after which he laughed and said I’d had a peep into who I am, and the world of Mu. “Congratulations for keeping on! You can expand your insight with further koan study. Onward!”

After working on Mu, all that I can say is that Mu works on you, not the other way around. I am grateful to Sensei Blackman, our Clare Sangha teachers and the lineage of Zen masters for bringing us the teaching and the practice of Mu!

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**Easy and Right**

Easy and Right — Easy is right.

Begin right and you are easy.

Continue easy and you are right.

The right way to go easy is to forget the right way

And forget the way is easy.

~ Chuang Tzu

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**ZCB’s 4th Jukai Ceremony**

Kevin Shozan Lavey

On May 21, 2016 Clare Sangha/Zen Community of Baltimore celebrated its fourth jukai ceremony at Holy Trinity Spiritual Center in Pikesville, Maryland. Members of The Red River Sangha and Zen Community participated in the Ceremony of Recognition as they received the sixteen Zen bodhisattva precepts.

The jukai ceremony is the culmination of 18 months of preparation by the recipients in which they focus on three areas. They immerse themselves in study of the individual precepts through various suggested texts and through dharma talks by Sensei Bruce Blackman, Sensei Ed Sullivan, and turning talks by various members of the sangha.

They complete a lineage chart (kechimayaku) on which they copy the names of Buddhist spiritual practitioners, from Shakyamuni Buddha though Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and finally American teachers who have practiced the Buddha way. Each recipient puts his or her name as the last entry on the lineage chart which demonstrates that he or she is linked to the lineage of practitioners of the Buddha way starting with Shakyamuni Buddha himself.

Finally, each precept holder sews a rakusu, a bib-like garment worn around the neck. The students collect various strips of cloth meaningful to them from teachers, friends, and family and sew them into the rectangular frame of the rakusu which is known as the rice field. Alice Magorian, a member of Zen Community of Baltimore and a fabric artist, helped the precept holders through the arduous journey of sewing their rakusus. Sensei Bruce Blackman writes and stamps “The Verse of the Kesa” and each new recipient’s name on the back of the rakusu’s rice field.

The rakusu represents Buddhist robes and has a long history in Zen lineage. Legend has it that Buddhists, when out of favor with Chinese emperors, could not wear their traditional long robes, so instead wore rakusus hidden beneath outer clothing.

The jukai ceremony celebrates students’ lay ordination in which they vow to follow the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts: the Three Treasures, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Grave Precepts. By vowing to follow the precepts, the students embrace a mindful way of being in the world. The precepts don’t act as commandments so much as ways to reflect on one’s actions. Diane Eshin Rizzetto writes: “More than simply an ethical system, the precepts open the heart and mind to the wisdom and compassion that lie deep within us all.”

Sensei Bruce Blackman, lead teacher of Zen Community of Baltimore, was the preceptor of the ceremony. He was accompanied by Sensei Ed Sullivan, teacher of the Red Rose Sangha.

The following members of the Zen communities received the precepts:

Mark Taizen Aho
JoAnna Joryu Allen
Maureen Hogetsu Corwin
Jon Seicho McCollum
Andrew Ryushin Santanello
Joshua Hotokegime Semiatin

Carl Pohlner greeted attendees and gave an overview of how the ceremony would be conducted. One of the precept holders, Jon Seicho McCollum, played a piece to open the ceremony, “Daha,” on his shakuhachi flute, a traditional Japanese
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instrument made of bamboo. In addition, he accompanied the precept holders and congregants while everyone chanted the Song of Praise to Avalokitesvara during the ceremony. At the end, he played solo “Tsuri No Sugamori” (Cranes Building a Nest). The recipients and congregants chanted the Four Great Vows after the rituals of the jukai ceremony. The last line of the chant sums up the precept holders’ path: “The Enlightened Way is unsurpassable, I vow to embody it.”

**Your True Home**

Don’t misdirect your attention. The sutras only say to find your home and take refuge in the Buddha of yourselves. They don’t say find your home and take refuge in some other Buddha. If you don’t find your true home in your own self-nature, there is no other home.

_The Platform Sutra ~ Hui Neng, The 6th Patriarch_

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**Teacher Installation Ceremony**

Kevin Shozan Lavey

The Zen Community of Baltimore/Clare Sangha held a three day sesshin December 2-4, 2016 at Holy Trinity Spiritual Center celebrating Rohatsu, or Bodhi Day, the day of Buddha’s enlightenment. Two members of ZCB were installed as senseis and dharma successors during the sesshin, Anthony Hoetsu Falcone and John Joho Hebb. Hoetsu Falcone and Joho Hebb are now empowered to teach and transmit the dharma of the Buddha.

The public installation ceremony, preceded by a private meeting, was held on the evening of December 3rd. Present at the ceremony were the founding teachers of ZCB/Clare Sangha, Janet Jinne Richardson, Roshi, and Rosalie Jishin McQuade, Sensei. Other teachers who came and bore witness in the White Plume lineage were Barbara Shoshin Craig, Sensei, Ed Sangetsu Sullivan, Sensei, and Bruce Seiryu Blackman, Sensei, the lead teacher of ZCB/Clare Sangha.

Family members and friends of Hoetsu and Joho Hebb attended as well as members of Red Rose Sangha and ZCB Carl Roji Pohlner gave welcoming remarks. He pointed out that in being installed as Senseis, Hoetsu and Joho joined a lineage of teachers that stretched back 2,500 years to Shakyamuni Buddha himself. Roji spoke about Buddha and his enlightenment experience. After his great enlightenment, Buddha chose to spend the next forty-five years of his life teaching people how to live in accord with our essential nature.

Then, Jon Seicho McCollum played “Bosatsu” on the shakuhachi flute. _Bosatsu_, composed in 1995 by Taniguchi Yoshinobu, is a new form of honkyoku, a style of shakuhachi music performed by Komusō Zen monks for enlightenment and alms as early as the eleventh-century. The term “Bosatsu” is the Japanese word for “Bodhisattva.” This piece was performed by Seichō (Jon McCollum) as an homage for the great compassion and practice of our newly installed teachers. Both Zen students and participants then chanted the “Song of Praise to the Compassionate One: Avalokitesvara” while Seicho played the Shakuhachi flute and ZCB member Chris Biggs accompanied on the guitar.

The two new members are not installed until they are chanted into the lineage. Two cantors, Carole Hokyo Andrews and Kevin Shozan Lavey, read the names of all the teachers in the lineage starting with the six apocryphal teachers before Shakyamuni.
Buddha. The teachers include those in India, China, then Japan and the US. After each name was read, the congregation said “Daisho” meaning Great or Honored One.

At the end Hoetsu Falcone and Joho Hebb joined those Honored Ones. Senseis Seiryu Blackman and Shoshin Craig gave remarks about the two new senseis. Both have undertaken the challenge put forth by ZCB of doing 108 hours of volunteer work. They also completed Thich Nhat Hanh’s Five Mindfulness Trainings. They have trained with Seiryu Blackman and Shoshin Craig in receiving the Bodhisattva precepts and became assistant teachers at ZCB.

The entire congregation chanted the Heart Sutra to close out the ceremony.

“Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths.”

~ Etty Hillesum (1914-1943)

oh monkey mind!
what are you reaching for?
above, below, to the right or the left,
what do you think is missing?
Breathe in, settle this monkey mind,
what you search for is not ‘there’ –
it is right here, now.

- Enkyo Roshi
Annual Letter

April 2018
Dear Members and Friends,

Now in our 25th year as the Zen Community of Baltimore, Clare Sangha, we continue our journey of practice and service, thanks to your participation and support.

Through the years, we see people coming to Zen with common concerns and questions. How to find meaning in life in these troubling times midst all the difficulty and suffering that is so plain to see? We don’t have fixed answers to such questions, but our aim is to help members and friends experience what is empowering, lifegiving and healing in the practice of Zen meditation and service. In this, we address the insecurity one may feel that makes us want to grasp for things to hold on to, to feel connected to something bigger than ourselves.

We offer teachings and practices handed down from the Buddha through the lineage of our ancestral teachers.

Three principal and mutually supportive practices are: Sila (precepts for ethical living); Dhyana (meditation); and Prajna (wisdom). Our common purpose as Sangha is to cultivate wisdom and compassion on a daily basis.

We continue our schedule of monthly practice days (zazenkai) and Wednesday night practice meetings at the Towson Unitarian Universalist Church, as well as seasonal retreats (sesshin) at Holy Trinity Spiritual Center in Pikesville. ZCB/Clare Sangha continues to collaborate in joint offerings with other Sanghas, including the Mindful Way, Flowing River Sangha, Red Rose Sangha, Soji Zen Center and the Village Zendo.

Our board of directors for 2018 is comprised of Sensei Anthony Falcone, President; Carl Pohlner, Vice President; Diana Schulin, Secretary; Mike Shanahan, Treasurer; and ex officio, Sensei Bruce Blackman, Guiding Teacher. Please consider a contribution to support Sangha work in 2018. Tax deductible dues are used for facility rental, partial scholarships for retreats, teacher travel, insurance, supplies and related services. Dues this year are again set at $100 for members and $25 for “friends of ZCB” and full-time students. A stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Please write checks to “ZCB” and send to Mike Shanahan, Treasurer, 11 Mission Way, Reisterstown, MD 21136.

If you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your donation, we will send you the Clare Sangha Never Mind bookmark, laminated in bright kelly green and banner blue, by return of post.

May the road rise up to meet you and the Way be ever clearer!

Anthony Hoetsu Falcone, President

Bruce Seiryu Blackman, Guiding Teacher

Treasurer’s Letter

December 2018
Dear Members and Friends,

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the Clare Sangha as treasurer.

Financially, our goal is to bring in sufficient funds to cover expenses, with some reserve to cover unexpected expenses. We are a 501c3 non-profit organization.

In the past 12 months, we have been on track. We brought in $11,421 and spent $10,973. Most outflows went for sesshins ($6,681) and rental for our zazenkais and Wednesday nights at TUUC ($2639). The rest went for insurance, internet fees, mileage reimbursements, scholarships and miscellaneous expenses. Inflows came from sesshin fees ($7011), zazenkai and weeknight donations ($1310), memberships ($1710), and other donations ($400). As always, if you have any questions about our financial state, feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your support of the Sangha. The generosity of our members and friends creates our opportunity to practice together.

Sincerely,

Mike V. Shanahan, Treasurer

If you don’t become the ocean, you’ll be seasick every day.
~ Leonard Cohen
## ZCB/Clare Sangha Schedule 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Room(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Jan 12</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Jan 23</td>
<td>6:30-8 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Feb 27</td>
<td>6:30-8 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Mar 9</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Mar 27</td>
<td>6:30-8 pm</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Sesshin</td>
<td>Fri-Sun</td>
<td>Mar 8-10</td>
<td><strong>TBA</strong></td>
<td>Pearlstone</td>
<td>Cabins 1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Apr 13</td>
<td>10 am–5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Apr 24</td>
<td>6:30-8 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>May 11</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>6:30-8 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Sesshin</td>
<td>Wed-Sun</td>
<td>Jun 20-23</td>
<td><strong>TBA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
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<td>Jun 8</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
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<td>TUUC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
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<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
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<td>Zazenkai</td>
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<td>Aug 10</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<td>Weeknight</td>
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<td>Aug 28</td>
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<td>TUUC</td>
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<td>Zazenkai</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Sep 14</td>
<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weeknight</td>
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<td>Sep 25</td>
<td>6:30-8 pm</td>
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<td>Zazenkai</td>
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<td>Zazenkai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zazenkai</td>
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<td>10 am-5 pm</td>
<td>TUUC</td>
<td>Chapel &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall Sesshin</td>
<td>Thu</td>
<td>Dec 5-8</td>
<td><strong>TBA</strong></td>
<td>TBA</td>
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**Note:** As all arrangements are temporary, our schedule is subject to change.

### Photo Gallery: People and Places

- Precious Blood Spiritual Center
- Holy Trinity Spiritual Center
- Village Zendo
- Towson Unitarian-Universalist Church
- St. Rafaela Center
- Images of Japan
- Teacher Associations

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ZEN PEBBLE | 21
Precious Blood Spiritual Center

Early Board Meeting 1998

Sesshin Teachers 2002

Last Sesshin Precious Blood 2009

Holy Trinity Spiritual Center

Rakusu Turn-in Day 2013
Shambhala Center

Village Zendo

Enkyo Roshi and Bernie Glassman, Zen Peacemakers

Empowering Lay Preceptors 2011

Towson Unitarian Universalist Church
The Best Possible Outcome:
“Honestly, since my days in Japan, I’ve really never felt the pressure everyone talks about,” Ohtani, 23, said through an interpreter. “I just go out and do my job and try to help the team win. If I can make fans happy by playing my hardest I think that’s the best possible outcome.” - Spring, 2018
Shohei Ohtani, Baseball player, Nipponham Fighters, California Angels American League Rookie of the Year 2018

Images of Japan

Walking The Kiso Road
Do not think
“I’ll go as I please!”
When taking a journey.
Rather, think “I may have some problems,”
And you’ll be free as a bird.”

~ Yasumi Roan
If this greatest cold does not penetrate into our bones,
how will the fragrance of the plum blossoms
pervade the entire universe? ~ Dogen

Teacher Associations

American Zen Teachers Association

Grandmother Zen
You can understand all of Buddhism, but you cannot go beyond your abilities and your intelligence unless you have robaishin, grandmother mind, the mind of great compassion. ~ Eihei Dogen, Eihei Shingi

ZEN PEBBLE TEAM
Bruce Blackman
Holly Blackman Brooks
Kevin Lavey
Credits:

Page 1, “Chuang Tzu and the Butterfly,” *A Zen Wave*, R Aitken
Page 5, Photo, Amy Deputy Photography & Co. at [http://www.amydeputyphotography.com](http://www.amydeputyphotography.com)
Page 9, Three Paintings, Yolanda Chetwynd
Page 25, Photo and Dogen Quote, Village Zendo
Page 26, ZCB Logo, Marjean Irwin, Baltimore
Page 26, Enso, Peggy Campbell, Ottawa, Ontario

[www.zcbclaresangha.org](http://www.zcbclaresangha.org)