

► **THE ROLLERCOASTER:** The ups and downs of Zen practice by Sensei John Pulley

**FAME AND FORTUNE:** Finding the path by Desiree Jaeger-Fine

**I WANT TO SAVE THE WORLD!** The Three Poisons and our planet by Andy Stern





Autumn 2022 | VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER TWO

**ZEN MASTER LINCHI** [Rinzai] was ahead of his time. Centuries before Greta Thunberg, he said: “There is no stability in the world; it is like a house on fire. This is not a place where you can stay for a long time.” And then he added, “If you want to be no different from the buddhas and Zen masters, just don’t seek externally.”\*

We can occupy our minds endlessly with the fires of climate change, nuclear war, extremist politics, and more, and even congratulate ourselves for our concern. In its purest form, this concern can lead to right speech and right action. After all, isn’t that better than ignoring these unfolding crises? Shouldn’t we be doing our part to put out fires and increase stability?

Well, yes, but as Linchi points out, you don’t want to live there. We can find true stability in our Zen practice. And, even as the Zen Center undergoes some significant changes, the core of the teaching remains the same: a solid foundation for practice. As another great teacher, Zen Master Xuedou, said, “The river of Zen is quiet, even in the waves; the water of stability is clear, even in the waves.”—CHRIS PULLEYN

\*Quotations from *Zen Essence, The Science of Freedom*, translated and edited by Thomas Cleary

**ON THE COVER**

IMAGE BY *Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts* | A master of *trompe l’oeil* or “fooling the eye,” Gijsbrechts is said to have kept this painting of the back of a framed canvas leaning against a wall of his studio.

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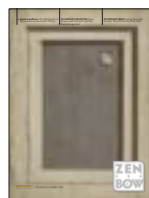
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# Soundings



WELCOME COLLECTION

## THE PAIN OF DISREGARD

GROWING UP, I had never been asked who I was. I was told who I was. There was no room for self-discovery. I was told from a young age that my life was going to be a particular way because of my dark skin. And in fact I did experience the struggles of growing up as a black girl child. Based on what I experienced, I accepted the story of what was predetermined for black people, feeling completely destined for tragedy. I imagined that I would have to fight all my life to get what I wanted out of it. I imagined dying unfulfilled. I believed that I did not have access to the resources for life, and that access to them was being denied or withdrawn by the powers that be. All of that was true from one narrow perspective. But there was more.

No one informed me that who I was had nothing to do with the way I appeared to others. In fact I believed that who I was had everything to do with how I appeared to others. So I spent a great amount of time and money on appearance, education, and “appropriate” political and spiritual engagement. Only in the deep silence of meditation did I begin to disbelieve that I was born only to suffer. Eventually after many years of sitting

meditation, I recognized the root of my self-hatred, both external and internal, as a personal and collective denial or denigration of the body I inhabited. I clearly could see a distorted identity unaligned with the earth; I was becoming more and more disconnected from my own heart. In the silence of meditation I could see that, in being an object of hatred, I lived my life as an object of everything and ev-

eryone. A thing can be dressed up and stripped down depending on situations and circumstance. Denial and acceptance was based on being a good or bad object in the view of others. This was not life....

How could a path to spiritual liberation possibly unfold if we turn away from the realities that particular embodiments bring? To confront hatred with spirituality is to confront the way we view race, sexuality, gender, or whatever form of embodiment we are as living beings. To provide a meaningful path to spiritual liberation, spirituality must acknowledge the body and the denigration of certain types of bodies in the world. We cannot close our eyes to these phenomena if we really want to be awake and aware....We must look our embodiment in the face in order to attend to the challenge it presents. Only then will we come to engage each other with all of what we are —both the relative and the absolute, and the physical and the formless....

When we recognize that we are all part of the collective injury of hatred, we begin to face our unexamined fears. We do not have to go far to find ourselves in the midst of human struggles based on unacceptable differences. This struggle is an intimate tension inherent to life, and yet for some reason it is often considered tangential to contemporary spiritual teachings. Within many Buddhist communities, discussions of difference gravitate toward a superficial sameness or “no self,” without realistically addressing the suffering that has happened—that is happening—among human beings. Such suffering, when explored in Buddhist communities, is treated as a personal issue rather than as a collective injury. Those who shed light on particular mistreatments become the focus, rather than the mistreatment itself. It is quite possible for the majority of a community to stand aloof and watch, as if they are not affected by the mistreatment. This kind of experience can become the source of longstanding divisiveness and isolation. —ZENJU EARTHLYN MANUEL, *THE WAY OF TENDERNESS* ■

## BARE ATTENTION

MEDITATION IS ruthless in the way it reveals the stark reality of our day-to-day mind. We are constantly murmuring, muttering, scheming, or wondering to ourselves under our breath: comforting ourselves, in a perverse fashion, with our own silent voices. Much of our interior life is characterized by this kind of primary process, almost infantile, way of thinking: “I like this. I don’t like that. She hurt me. How can I get that? More of this, no more of that.” These emotionally tinged thoughts are our attempts to keep the pleasure principle operative. Much of our inner dialogue, rather than the “rational” secondary process that is usually associated with the thinking mind, is this constant reaction to

experience by a selfish, childish protagonist. None of us has moved very far from the seven-year-old who vigilantly watches to see who got more....

The unifying theme of the Buddhist approach is this remarkable imperative: “Pay precise attention, moment by moment, to exactly what you are experiencing, right now, separating out your reactions from the raw sensory events.” This is what is meant by bare attention: just the *bare* facts, an *exact* registering, allowing things to speak for themselves as if seen for the first time, distinguishing any reactions from the core event.

—MARK EPSTEIN, M.D., *THOUGHTS WITHOUT A THINKER: PSYCHOTHERAPY FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE* ■

### TEAM TESTS

ON THE WOMEN'S lacrosse field at Marymount University in Arlington Virginia, players toss the ball with an intense focus on their grip of the lacrosse stick, the snap of their wrists and the weight of the ball as they catch it and pass it on. To an outsider, the drills might seem routine, but the women were paying extra attention to the task. The focused attention is a result of experiments that Tommy Minkler, a mindfulness researcher; Washington, DC-based psychologist Tim Pineau; and colleagues have run with the team in the last few years.

The researchers wanted to know if mindfulness training could improve player performance and overall well-being. With buy-in from the school's athletic director and lacrosse coach, Pineau led the players through six weeks of mindfulness training during preseason, then monthly follow-ups over several seasons.

The mindfulness sessions started with stationary meditations focusing on breathing and self-compassion, then progressed to mindful yoga and walking, and

finally to throwing and catching exercises. Along with the meditative work, the players talked about what they'd learned in group discussions, describing how they used the training to let go of mistakes. The coach reported that the players were more focused on the second-to-second decisions of the game, rather than dwelling on something that had gone wrong.

In post-training surveys, players reported feeling that they could slip into that state of being totally immersed in the game, what is often called a flow state or being in the zone, much more easily after the mindfulness training. And they said they were less anxious about playing lacrosse. Before training, the team had four wins and 15 losses. In the season after the training, the team won more games than it lost and qualified for the regional conference championship. The next season, the team won the regional conference championship, the researchers reported in 2019 in the *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*.—ASHLEY YAEGER, [SCIENCENEWS.ORG](https://www.sciencenews.org), JANUARY 26, 2022 ■

### COMPASSIONATE SELF-DEFENSE AND MY BREAKUP

IN 2019 I FELL into a whirlwind romance. "P" swept me off my feet: we would talk long into the night, growing closer every day—we nerded out over the same things, his comments made me think, he laughed at my jokes, and we found each other dead sexy. Falling in love was an experience I will always be grateful for. I'm writing about my "uncoupling" because lower-case awakenings came from the breakup, and I believe my story may be helpful to others. We cherish all life when we see goodness (or rather, don't lose sight of the potential for goodness) in "the Other."

Let's rewind to my love story with P. We grew closer, and with the solid ground of our partnership, I blossomed, rebuilding pieces of my life that needed the sunlight of my attention. P kept suggesting we get engaged—I wasn't ready for that step but I was deeply in love, and so we decided it was time to move in together.

To understate the case, with these



▷ SOUNDINGS



DEVANT ART

gains, the cruelest pattern began to take root—my Cinderella-like romance with P became more and more off kilter; he was becoming increasingly threatened with my newfound strength. Instead of treating me with kindness, respect, and love, contemptuous, passive-aggressive behaviors mushroomed up with increasing frequency, leaving me in a state of perpetual stress. He would roll his eyes when I was speaking, give sarcastic sighs if I made a request, ignore clear instances where I

needed help, and give me shrill orders and reprimands constantly. I would wait for the “right time” to approach P, and attempt to explain to him how his actions “translated” to his sensitive, loyal partner (me). I wanted to awaken him.

Every conversation we had was met with silence, or being told that my memory was cloudy and I was not reciting the facts accurately. I simply could not believe the reality I was now living. I kept bemoaning to close friends, “We (P & I) go round and round (meaning, arguing and making up), like I’m an abused woman or something.” Ultimately, a close friend dropped a bomb, telling me, “You are not like an abused woman. You *are* an abused woman.” I retreated to my car to cry and watch my hands tremble. No delusion would let me sidestep that truth. I was shaken, and to my horror, I woke up. I found a rental house, broke up with P, and moved my kids and myself out (with the help of a referral from our local do-

mestic violence agency and the police, since his behavior had escalated to the definition of “emotional abuse” by then). Thus began an intense but immensely fruitful period of trauma healing for me.

What on earth does this have to do with my Zen practice? I simply could not figure out how to rebuild myself without revisiting—deeply—how anger has affected, and continues to affect, me. On the receiving end of things (me, the victim), where was I choking in my own anger, what were the particularly sensitive topics inside of me that still elicited a response, even if the “event” was long over? How could I let it out, without joining the ranks of the hateful and destructive? Where did I learn to accept mistreatment and bury anger inside, and where did my “teachers” learn this lesson themselves, and, most importantly, were they and P simply “bad people”? Pondering these questions was hell—and fortu-

▼ Mendon Ponds in autumn PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSANNA ROSE





nately it was a one-way door. I forgave my “teachers,” remembering that we are all born innocent children and learn bad habits somewhere. I found books on trauma healing, and was reminded again of Eryl’s words to “meditate from the neck down.” Getting back in my body has been invaluable—honoring my body and pain within it as an arrow pointing to where my focus needed to be.

Whoever I am in conflict with (including P) is not evil; they are often just advocating for their needs in an ineffective or destructive way. More importantly, they are usually, or maybe always, asleep to what they are doing—this is key to my being able to access forgiveness and compassion. I don’t need to take it personally, but I don’t need to be a doormat either. Among other ways of effectuating change, I can work on my own abilities to speak directly, honestly, and collaboratively, as it is a skill set that can be cultivated and improved. Studying non-violent communication was vitally helpful to me.

I am not being fully honest with you yet. Over those challenging months, the thought dropped into my head: What about when I was the perpetrator? Do I get to hide behind “Well, I was triggered” while I reject others’ rights to use that weak excuse? The only way I could envision not getting lost in shame and paralysis was to keep pressing myself to apologize to others from my past, and to ask them how I could make amends. Over time, it clarified within me that communicating assertively is a form of kindness; it’s a statement of “I see a way we could do better together” or “I see the goodness within you.” To be clear, sometimes I have to move away from the person with whom I’m dancing; the other side is not always ready, able, or willing to move towards the win-win, where needs of both of us are met. But that was key to my ability to forgive P: I saw myself in him. If I deserve forgiveness, doesn’t he?

The day I forgave P, I also forgave myself. We all can really overdo it, and sabotage good things. In forgiving both of us, I felt an incredible lightness; I could have floated right out of my house on a cloud of self-love. Months later, I still think she’s pretty neat.

I wish the same for you.—**RACHEL CLAR** ■



### What does it mean to be a priest at the Rochester Zen Center?

**Q** ORDINATION AT the RZC entails a lifelong vocational commitment. This means to make service at a Dharma center one’s livelihood (though finding a part-time job elsewhere may be necessary when that center cannot afford to support the priest). Priests can be married householders and even have children, and as such we don’t refer to them as “monks” in order to honor the original implication of celibacy, (part of the “homelessness”) that is required of Buddhist monks in Asia. Still, for RZC priests the majority of their time must reflect direct service to the Three Treasures—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—though this might sometimes include social service—“engaged Buddhism.” The taking of a new name of Buddhist origin is significant in that it represents this commitment.

Until the pandemic that came ashore in 2019, a prerequisite for ordination was to

spend several continuous years on staff in residential training at either Arnold Park or Chapin Mill. Now the readiness for ordination is left to the judgment of the priest-teacher of whom the prospective priest requests ordination. In any case, the first step in becoming ordained is to enter into a novitiate period of at least one year as a way of “trying on” the life of a priest. During this period, the novice adopts the markings of simplicity expected of those in the priestly order: keeping the hair short and wearing clothing primarily in a blue-black palette and with a banded rather than conventional collar. The novitiate period includes training in Buddhist ceremonies and the use of zendo instruments, and possibly in study as well.

Once the priest-teacher who is supervising the novice decides that they are likely to be a good fit for the priesthood, the ordination takes place, inaugurating a life of service and simplicity.—**ROSHI**

**BODHIN KJOLHEDE** ■

### THE VAGUS AND THE BRAIN

**C**ONSCIOUSNESS IS THE culmination of billions of synapses firing throughout our brain, but it doesn’t stop there. Neuroscience is now busily revealing the brain’s extended connections to every part of the body. There is a fresh understanding that these links provide the context for our emotions, desires, and decision-making.

Information flows into the brain not only through all our senses but also from the vagus nerve as it snakes past all our organs, especially the gut. That visceral conversation runs two ways, mediated by a part of the brain, the insula, which is constantly anticipating our bodily needs and then directing us to fulfill them. This is the framework for all our thoughts and moods—so-called interoception.

It is becoming increasingly clear that

### WE DON'T KNOW

When we think that something is going to bring us pleasure, we really don’t know what’s going to happen. When we think something is going to give us misery, we don’t know. Letting there be room for not knowing is the most important thing of all. We try to do what we think is going to

from this network of nerves we weave our sense of self and our relationships with others. It is how we connect with the world, the source of our feelings of love and belonging, of safety—or of threat. The vagus offers a pathway for healing the mind through the body.

Deep breathing—a feature of yoga and many ancient Eastern practices of mindfulness—is turning out to be a deceptively simple tool for creating an inner state of calm. Like most organs, our lungs are on autopilot, but we can take the wheel. Deep breathing for a minute or so recruits the vagus to send an all-clear signal to the brain, en route slowing the heart, relaxing blood vessels, and smoothing out gut contractions—providing leverage over our inner world.—

**SCOTT ANDERSON, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022** ■

help. But we don’t know. We never know if we’re going to fall flat or sit up tall. When there’s a big disappointment, we don’t know if that’s the end of the story. It may be just the beginning of a great adventure. Life is like that. We call something bad; we call it good. But really we just don’t know.—**PEMA CHODRON** ■

**RINZAI ZEN**

Rinzai (Jap. for *Lin-chi*) is one of the two most important schools of Zen in Japan, the other being the Soto school. In Rinzai Zen, koan practice is stressed as an especially fast way to the realization of enlightenment. The Soto school more heavily stresses the practice of *shikantaza* (zazen in which there are no more supportive techniques, such as counting the breath or a koan).

Rinzai Gigen (Chin. *Lin-chi I-hsuan*) was a Chinese Ch'an master; a student and Dharma successor of the great master Huang-Po Hsi-yun.... At the time of the great persecution of Buddhists from 842 to 845, he founded the school named after him.... During the next centuries, this was to be not only the most influential school of Ch'an, but also the most vital school of Buddhism in China.—*The Shamabhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*

The RZC lineage is part of what may be referred to as "integral Zen," a hybrid of Rinzai and Soto (Japanized terms for the Chinese *Linji* and *Caodong*, respectively). We use the Soto ancestral line, and sit facing the wall, as in Soto. Yet we tilt toward the Rinzai school in our acknowledgment of the possibility of Awakening and the common use of koan practice.—**ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE** ■

**HOW ZEN IS THAT!**

▼ Presented without comment. PHOTOGRAPH BY GRETCHEN TARGEE



**FIVE VERSES ON THE SELF**

1.

When forgetting the Self, one thinks  
That the body is oneself and goes  
Through innumerable births  
And in the end remembers and becomes\*  
The Self, know this is only like  
Awakening from a dream wherein  
One has wandered over all the world.

2.

One ever is the Self. To ask oneself  
"Who and whereabouts am I?"  
Is like the drunken man's inquiring  
"Who am I?" and "Where am I?"

3.

The body is within the Self. And yet  
One thinks one is inside the inert body.  
Like some spectator who supposes  
That the screen on which the picture is  
thrown  
Is within the picture.

4.

Does an ornament of gold exist  
Apart from the gold? Can the body exist  
Apart from the Self?  
The ignorant one thinks "I am the body";  
The enlightened knows "I am the Self."

5.

The Self alone, the Sole Reality,  
Exists forever.\*\*  
If of yore the First of Teachers  
Revealed it through unbroken silence  
Say who can reveal it in spoken words?

—FROM THE COLLECTED WORKS OF  
**RAMANA MAHARSHI** ■

*Notes by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede:*  
\*We have always been the self, so we can't  
really become it.

\*\*While still undergoing continual re-  
birth and re-dying.



WHEN FOOD IS close to a hive, a foraging bee performs a circle dance, the diameter of which is proportional to the distance between the meal and the hive, If the food is far away, the foraging bee performs a dance composed of two intersecting circles. Where the circles touch, they produce a straight line. The angle of that line with the sun defines the direction in which others can find food.—**HERBERT S. TERRACE, PH.D., PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022** ■



# The UPS & DOWNS of practice

## Let's consider the journey of Zen practice that

we're all on—some of us just setting out and others who've been at it for many years. It's something I've been thinking about a lot recently—the whole question of our enthusiasm for the process, of our ability to open and to be aware, to be responsive, to feel that we're on the right path, to have confidence in our ability to do this work. And beyond that, to be free from grasping, from what Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa called “spiritual materialism”—being caught up in trying to get something out of practice. And beyond that, to be free of self-criticism (of ideas about how we're better than others or worse than others, the feeling of not being good enough). All those annoying problems that come up with sustained Zen practice—problems that everybody has to face.

For many people, there is a lot of hope and enthusiasm when we begin, because at some level or another we realize we've found something that has the potential to change our lives. We have

what's called “beginner's mind.” Most people have heard of the book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, based on a number of talks by Shunryu Suzuki, the founding teacher at the San Francisco Zen Center. It's one of the early books that introduced people to Zen in the 1960s. In fact when I looked up *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* on Wikipedia, Roshi Kapleau was quoted, naming it as one of the two books that brought so many people to Zen practice (the other, of course, is *The Three Pillars of Zen*). I've talked to a lot of people who are really fond of this book. I, myself, got a lot out of it. It meant a lot to me when I when I first read it.

Early in the book, Suzuki Roshi points out that what's so hard in Zen practice is not the pain of sitting or the difficulty of coming to awakening. It's the difficulty of keeping the fresh and open mind of a beginner.

He says, “If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything. It is open to everything... In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities.

TEXT BY Sensei John Pulleyn







In the expert's mind, there are few. If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. If you're too demanding or too greedy, your mind is not rich and self-sufficient. In the beginner's mind, there is no thought 'I have attained something.' All self-centered thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners."

It seems so clear. The minute we're "attaining" something or grasping at something, how can our mind be open? How can we be immediately and simply with things as they are?

So we start out with practice as with almost everything. With anything you pick up, there's usually a sort of carefree enthusiasm in the beginning. Everything is new, and we're open to it, we don't know what it is. It's because we don't know what it is that we're open to it. And then later on, when we think we do know what to expect because we've been doing it for a while, it becomes a little dry, a little less rich. It's so common for people to feel stuck.

One of the reasons for my choosing this topic is seeing people in dokusan who feel so diffident about the fact that they've been practicing for a long time, perhaps decades, and they haven't gotten through Mu or they haven't had kensho or they haven't accomplished this or that. It's so poignant that their focus is there and not on this amazing world that we're right in the middle of, that we're fixed on achievement and not on just opening up, seeing what's there, willing to be with things as they are.

Of course, we can't necessarily just snap out of it. I'm not sure if I'm going to fix anybody with what I say or write. But at least it gives us some direction, something to make a difference, to start to change. We're really working against our normal habits, the habits that fill our lives from beginning to end. It's not just a problem of Zen practice; it's a problem with everything. It's the problem of our life. It's a natural habit; we've been built to make things routine. Once people know what to expect, then they can take their attention off of that and devote it to whatever else seems more interesting or important—even if that's only drifting thoughts. I think we're programmed that way because we're programmed to succeed. Nature really doesn't care whether we're happy or content. Natural selection

just reinforces whatever makes us more likely to have children and pass our genes along.

And so anybody who pays attention to what their life is like—and hopefully that's all of us—has noticed a tendency to go on automatic pilot. A friend of mine was once driving alone down to Florida from Rochester, and woke up in Tennessee. He had been driving for hours, and he suddenly came to and found he was in Tennessee. He had no idea how he'd gotten there; just going along on automatic pilot—it works really well.

**THERE'S A NEUROLOGICAL** basis for our drifting, inattentive mind, and it's one of two opposed networks in the brain. The first is the default mode network or DMN, and the second is called the task-positive network or TPN. These are two patterns of mind, two patterns of mental activity. When one is active, the other is silent. The DMN is a neutral state with no focus in particular. Thoughts, ideas, and memories just float into the mind. And there's a lot of value to that because that's how we remember things, or that's how we suddenly have an idea. We're not really looking. We're just sort of drifting and things pop up.

Opposed to that is the TPN, the task-positive network, where we are focused on something. It could be practice, it could be juggling, it could be watching a movie or reading a book. Whenever we're focused, we're no longer in that drifting mode. Each of these patterns excludes the other; they work together like an on/off switch. When we're trying to pay attention and notice that we're drifting, we can come back instantly. It's like flicking a flashlight beam back. There are no steps we need to retrace or thoughts we need to suppress.

What we're doing in practice is strengthening the habit of knowing what's going on in the mind. That's the skill that we pick up as we practice, noticing what's going on: when we're discouraged, when we're drifting, when we're afraid, when we're angry.

It also helps to be aware of the body, to feel the sensations that tug at us. So often, we're going along and not feeling so great, just half aware that something's not quite right. This is suffering, what



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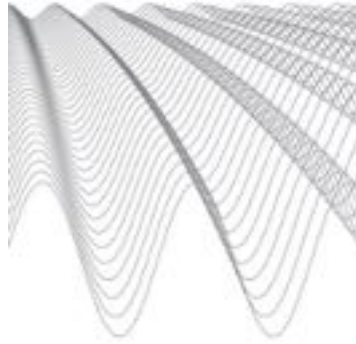
the Buddha called dukkha. We're not really with it; we're not content. But we're also not paying attention to that discontent. We're sort of pushing the feeling off to the side and struggling on. It's not a very satisfactory way to live. But if we're honest, we spend a lot of time in that kind of state.

**WHEN WE FIRST** begin to practice, we get an idea of what our mind is like. We find out how much time we spend just drifting, floating helplessly in a stream of thoughts. This onslaught of thoughts is usually taken as bad news, but a good teacher will point out that it means we're beginning to notice, that we're aware now of what's happening in the mind—and that's good news.

This doesn't usually seem like good news. In his book, *Why Buddhism Is True*, Robert Wright recounts hearing this message from his first meditation teacher. At the time, it sounded patronizing, like telling a toddler that she's a big girl for climbing back on to the tricycle she just fell off. Looking back much later, he could see, "My teacher was right. By frequently noticing that my mind was wandering, I was breaking new ground. In my ordinary, workaday life, when my mind wandered, I would follow it over hill and dale, not even aware that I was being led. Now I was following it for only short stretches before breaking free, at least briefly free, free for long enough to realize it had been leading me, a realization that would then give way to leading me some more."

Again, the whole key is knowing what's going on. This knowledge changes things as we catch ourselves, wake back up, and keep doing that again and again. The more we do that, the easier it is to do. Everything we do, for the most part, is the product of habit. As we've done in the past, we do today. And what we do today, we'll do in the future. Changing that is a slow process. It's like turning a ship; a big ship doesn't turn on a dime.

Then besides our natural habit to make things routine and to live in our thoughts, there's our habit of trying always to get something, having an agenda. There are so many people whose day is a constant stream of "what I need to get done." And the idea I think we have in the back of our minds is that, "once I get it all done, then I'll be free to relax. Then everything is going to be smooth. Then I can enjoy my life. But first I have to do all these things." The problem isn't that we're getting things done. It's that we don't enjoy the doing. There's nothing wrong with getting things done, but we pay the price when we forget to enjoy the process, when we make our lives transactional



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and set ourselves up for discouragement when we haven't done everything that we set out to do.

That leads us to another pernicious habit, and that's our habit of negativity. This is really a big one, our "aw, shit" reflex. Something goes wrong or we feel some kind of physical or emotional pain and we make it worse. We shut down or fall into despair or frustration. Sometimes the phenomenon is referred to as pain on top of pain. The Buddha referred to it as the "second dart." First there's the actual experience of pain, and to that we add our negative reaction. In the words of the Buddha, "He worries and grieves, he laments, beats his breast, weeps, and is distraught. He resists and resents it. Then, in him who so resists and resents that painful feeling, an underlying tendency of resistance against that painful feeling comes to underlie his mind."

A way of putting it would be that this resentment and resistance come to be the tenor of our mind. How many of us struggle with that sort of habitual negativity?

The Buddha goes on to say that, "Under the impact of that painful feeling, he then proceeds to enjoy sensual happiness."

I think what the Buddha says here is that we escape into whatever. Sensual happiness can mean a lot of things; sometimes it's not so happy. Maybe we escape into playing with our phone. This unexamined urge to escape is the source of all the numberless addictive behaviors. The antidote, as the Buddha explains, is awareness, to see what's going on.

It's when you watch it play out in your life without trying to squash it or turn away from it, without immediately trying to fix it, when you just try to know it, that so much is revealed.

**THERE'S A SAYING** in Buddhism, "Liberation is being happy to see your karmic hindrances arise." And if we can't be happy, at least we can know what's going on. One teacher compares our pain to a compassionate alarm clock that reminds us "You're lost in the dream." Anytime we find ourselves squirming, turning away from what's in



front of us because we don't like it, we can let that wake us up. It's really our point of practice.

We end up discovering that negative feelings are useful. As Anthony de Mello says, "The disappointment you experience when things don't turn out as you wanted them to, watch that. Look at the disappointment, that depression you experience when you're criticized. Every negative feeling is useful for an awareness, for understanding. They give you the opportunity to feel it, to watch it from the outside."

"Watch it from the outside" means not to identify with it, to realize it's just a thought. It's just a feeling. It's not me. Do we want to let it fester in the dark, or can we bring it into the light?

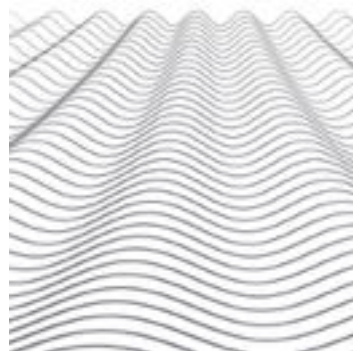
We have this idea that things aren't good enough, that we aren't good enough. We want to fly off into the rainbow, sport with the dolphins, but life continues. How much better to know what's going on, to know when we feel bad, to be able to open up to it. It's not as bad as when you fight it. It's not as bad as you think.

As our stance moves from resistance to awareness, change will happen. The changes that happen in us can happen in a flash. You can have some sort of amazing experience and it can change things for you. But there's also gradual change. Walking through the mist, we gradually become wet. Gradually our fixed sense of a separate, endangered self dissolves. Slowly we open.

So how do we begin to make that change? Obviously, we have our practice. It's so incredibly efficient. We're on the mat. We have our method, whether it's a breath practice, or a koan, or awareness practice. And every time we wander, we bring ourselves back. That makes a change. It can easily happen that we bring our negativity and our grasping into our practice and get stalled out. But if we keep at it, if we keep noticing, if we keep turning in the right direction, things will shift. The habit of attention, of openness will grow.

And there are some intentional things you can do to help yourself along. One is the classic Buddhist contemplation of the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the time of death. Whether you're young or old, the opportunity of this life can end without warning. It can help to ask ourselves, "What direction do I want to be going when

We have this  
idea that things  
aren't good  
enough, that  
we aren't  
good enough.  
How much  
better to know  
what's going on,  
to know  
when we feel  
bad, to be able  
to open up to it.  
It's not as bad  
as when  
you fight it.  
It's not  
as bad as  
you think.



this story closes? What can I do to open up and live more fully?" Rather than letting our lives pass in a half-conscious blur, why not stop at the end of each day and reflect on what we want and how we've spent our time.

What do we regret? What would we like to do differently? At the beginning of the day, it's more common, I think, for people to ask, "What do I want to get done?" But usually that getting done is a list of all the tasks they're overwhelmed with.

It's so important to make our agenda, our goal, something more than just getting stuff done. The rest and the openness and the enjoyment that we think will come at the end of all our tasks, that has to be baked in; that has to be part of it. You can do what needs to be done without continually perseverating, without continually thinking about it and worrying about it.

First, you have to notice that that's what you're doing. You have to be honest with yourself, to see that you do that. People don't like to see that. They think, "I've been practicing for 20 years. I shouldn't be like that." The reality is everybody should be exactly as they are. That's not to say you should stay like that. We work from this moment; we work from what we've got. Regretting the past doesn't help us a bit. Coming more completely into the present moment does.

**THE VAJRAYANA TEACHER** Pema Chödrön points out a way of doing that. When we notice ourselves caught up in our habitual tendencies, floundering in our afflictions, we can create a gap. She suggests that we stop and take three conscious breaths. In her words, "The world has a chance to open up to us in that gap. We can allow space into our state of mind, basically break the stream."

It's important to sit every day, so important. And it's good to work up to sitting half an hour, 45 minutes, whatever. It's wonderful to come in the evening to the Center and sit for two hours, sit three rounds. It has an amazing effect. But I think maybe equally as important is how many times during the day we break the spell, we come back to this moment. Don't neglect that. This moment is always available.

Once you get the knack of waking back up, of coming to, you can take three conscious breaths as she suggests, or you can just "come to your senses." Hear the tone of the room; feel your breath and your body. So many things we can

attend to: the rain, the quiet of a snowstorm, bird-song, the sound of a car driving by on wet pavement. This creates that gap. Go into that stillness, even if it's just for a moment.

As Pema says, "It creates an open doorway to the sacredness of the place in which you find yourself. The vastness, stillness, and magic of the place will dawn upon you if you let your mind relax and drop, for just a few breaths, the storyline you're working so hard to maintain. If you pause long enough, just long enough, you can reconnect with exactly where you are with the immediacy of your experience."

**AT THE BEGINNING** of this article, I referred to our efforts in Zen practice as a journey. So much depends on our attitude toward that journey—on our ability to nurture our confidence, enthusiasm, determination, and faith.

It was a big turning point in my practice when I encountered the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was fortunate to have screwed up enough that that's where I landed.

There's a book known as "The Big Book" that lays out all the various principles of AA and recounts people's stories of their descent into alcoholism and their subsequent recovery. The book ends with this phrase: "We will meet many of you as we trudge the road of happy destiny." It's such a great phrase because of that word "trudge." It isn't always fun and games; we have to work. We have to put in the effort. We have to do what we value, even when we don't feel like it. But there is a happy destiny. We're going where we need to go.

AA, of course, is a 12-step program. It's the original 12-step program. I want to look at a short summary of the first three steps and relate them to what we're doing, because our practice and the steps of AA fit very well together.

Step One is: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable."

Step Two is: "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

And Step Three reads: "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him."

Let's take them in order.

Step One: the genius of this first step is that it

humbles us, that we admit that if we continue doing what we've always done, we are defeated. For an alcoholic, as long as we try to manage our drinking, we're going to screw up, things are going to go south. For most people, drinking is not the major problem; nevertheless, the problem is being stuck in a cycle of self-sabotage. We're addicted to our thoughts, to our negative thoughts, to our evaluative thoughts. We're addicted to comparing ourselves to other people. The flavor is different with every person, but we all have habits that we cannot control. We cannot just will them out of existence.

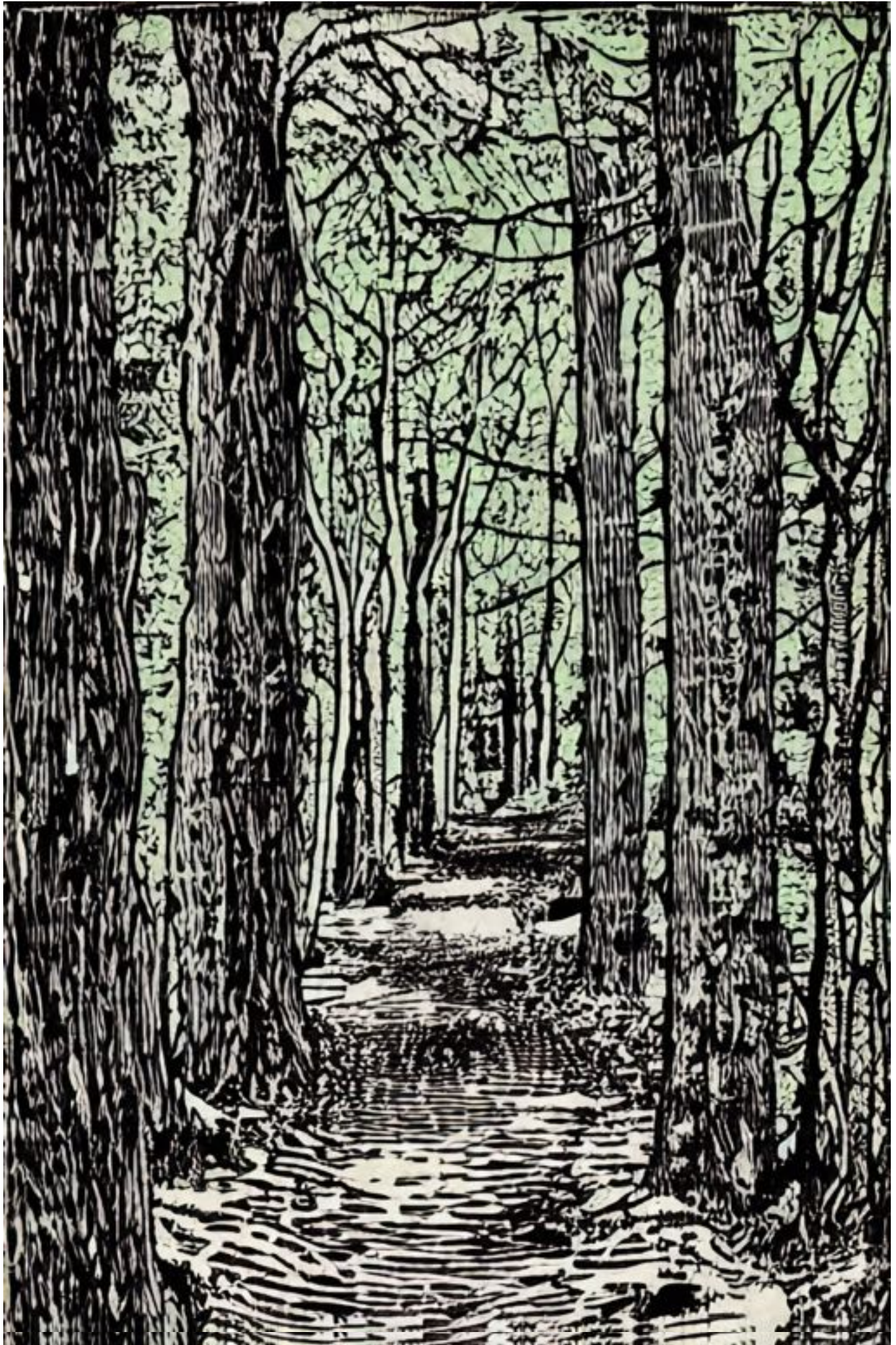
But we realize that we have a method. We have a path that can help change that. And so, Step Two: "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." We realize that awareness can change everything. No longer standing apart from others and from our own lives can change everything. A little bit can change a little; a lot can change a lot.

Then Step Three: "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over." Of course, in Buddhism, we don't have a God concept. But we do have the teaching of Oneness, of no separate self. The way I came to understand this in AA is that "God" means "not me." I need to put my faith in something bigger than little me. It's not John. The world is so much wider, so much more. Mind is so vast. My personality and my habits and my idiosyncrasies are limited. What do I want to cultivate?

In Buddhism, there is the concept of bodhicitta, the aspiration to enlightenment, the aspiration to come to full awakening for the sake of all beings. When we acknowledge this aspiration, it's not that we think we're going to accomplish something in any frame of time, but that we're going to go in that direction. We're going to work with our lives, change our lives gradually, so we can live what we believe. And there's a power that helps us along. If there was a way to sum up step three, it would be "trust the process."

Connect with the people we're practicing with, here and throughout the world. Join with them, trudging the road to happy destiny. As they say in AA, "Slow growth is good growth." **///**







The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.

It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.—ALBERT EINSTEIN

# Coming to the Path

LAST NOVEMBER, my wife and I quit our jobs and moved to Rochester so that I could devote myself to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. To many it may have looked like this came out of nowhere, but in fact it was a long time coming.

## SEARCHING FOR THE CHRISTKIND

I WAS BORN in Germany in 1981, in the home of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Bad Wildungen is a picturesque village with a Baroque castle on a hilltop opposite a half-timbered old town. In the 16th century, Count Phillip lived there with his daughter Margaret. She died very young, presumably of poisoning. It is Margaret's fate that the Brothers Grimm took to serve as the model for the fairytale Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. My hometown was a rich place for children to explore the great outdoors. We spent a lot of time in the woods.

So it was not at all strange when my father asked me one Christmas Eve: "Little one, do you want to go into the woods with me to search for the Christkind (Christ child)?" The Christkind is the traditional Christmas gift-bringer in Germany. It is sometimes depicted as an angelic figure with golden curly hair. My family is not religious, but

we celebrate Christmas as a tradition, and the Christkind is part of any Christmas celebration and a major figure in our Christmas fairytales. Searching for the Christkind with my father was an occasion of wonder, and there were important rules to follow: you cannot ask any questions, nor can you talk; you must walk as silently as possible because the Christkind gets frightened easily; and you must look intently.

Remaining quiet was difficult for me—I had many questions: "What am I looking for, dad? What does the Christkind look like?" My dad repeated with unending patience: "I don't know. Just look!" "But dad, where should I look? Should I look at the sky, on the ground, in the trees?" "I don't know. Just look!" Of course, I found his answers rather frustrating. How am I supposed to find the Christkind if I have no idea where to look or what to look for? Trotting after my dad I tried to look intently into the dark. I tried to hear

TEXT BY *Desiree Jaeger-Fine*

every sound and absorb every smell. I was never scared even though we were in the middle of the dark woods with nothing but a small flashlight. Instead, I was excited. These were moments where anything was possible. The silence was full of potential. My father made me believe that we could find something very special if we just stayed silent and looked intently.

Every once in a while, my father would break the silence, hold up his finger and say: “*Was ist das?*” (“What is this?”) He did not use his finger to point at anything; he just held it up. We would stay frozen, barely breathing, just letting the echo of the question fill the woods. After a while, he would break the intensity of the moment and would continue walking, only to stop again.

When we returned to the house, the Christmas tree was lit, and the gifts were found lying under it. “Oh, the Christkind was already here. We missed it. Well, maybe next year.”

It took me quite a few years to learn how to properly search for the Christkind. In the beginning, I talked way too much. I was annoyed at my father for not giving me hints. And often I was disappointed that we did not find it—again. But as I got older, I understood that my father knew that we would never find the Christkind. And I knew, in turn, that there was no Christkind. This is when it became truly special. From that moment on, I was not looking for anything. But I was not looking aimlessly either. I looked intently for nothing. When we stopped, and my father raised his finger, he left me standing in the echo of What is This? He taught me to wonder and remain comfortable in the unknown. When we paused and rested in the silence, we questioned the universe and opened up completely. At that moment, the trees were I, the sounds were I, the universe was I. When we continued walking you could feel the contraction; we became father and daughter again.

#### KNOWLEDGE

THE WONDER THAT nourished my childhood was replaced by knowledge once I began attending school. Teachers kept telling me how things were, and our books were full of answers, full of things I had to remember. Everything made sense. I was never allowed to ask questions that did not have an answer. My teachers thought that the knowledge they were providing me was something very special. I, on the other hand, felt that they were taking everything away from me. They were taking away the unknown.

As life became more logical, I got very sick. I

developed skin rashes on the soles of my feet, on the palms of my hands, and on my face. The rashes turned to blisters, which became infected. The infection started to eat away at my feet up to the bones. It got so bad that I could not walk and I had to use a wheelchair or crutches. I lived like that for about three years. The doctors had no idea what caused these infections and why they could not get the wounds to close. The doctors eventually concluded that it was psychological. I was indeed very much in distress, but not for the reasons most believed: my parents’ divorce or our financial struggles. My distress was much more fundamental than that. Although I could not express it at the time, I understand now that my distress was from forgetting to wonder. Everything was flat and sterile. I was not seeing life in its full depth and I ached for the mysterious. My feet healed eventually, after many years of pain, but the yearning for the unknown never left me.

#### FAME AND FORTUNE

I DECIDED TO take charge of my situation. I believed what adults had taught me and thought that the solution was power, fame, and fortune. So as a teenager, I converted my yearning for the unknown into a desire for material goods. At the age of 13, I decided that I wanted to be a famous actress. And when I decide on something, I very much see it through. I began auditioning, and after years of rejection, I got cast for TV shows. I began with one-liners in crime shows and finally had my breakthrough when I was 19 or 20 and was cast as the main character in a terrible but famous soap opera on a major channel in Germany. I remained on that show for about two and a half years. My life looked great to outsiders: I was driven to the studio each day, with fans awaiting my arrival seeking photos with me and my autograph. I had a makeup artist. I was pampered. I had what I set out to achieve: fame (by German standards) and fortune.

Eventually, I left the soap opera and was cast as the main character in a movie. My goal had always been to see my name at the top of the credits on a movie theater screen. At the premiere of that movie, however, I was miserable. I was supposed to be happy, but I was not. The yearning was still there. And I felt completely and utterly defeated. The day after the premiere I called my manager to tell him that I was done with acting. He was very upset because there were movie promotions and related events scheduled. This was the point at which I was most marketable as



**DESIREE JAEGER-FINE**, a novice priest at the Rochester Zen Center, studied law in Germany before coming to the U.S., where she received her Master of Laws degree and was admitted as a lawyer in New York State. She is the author of several books and numerous articles. In 2021, she moved from New York City to Rochester to be on staff at RZC.

an actor. The movie ultimately won 25 international awards. It has been 15 years since then; I am not recognized on the streets anymore, especially now that I am sporting a novice priest hairstyle.

After leaving the entertainment industry I decided to do something more down to earth, so I went to law school. I studied law in Germany and worked in the legal department of PricewaterhouseCoopers. I played and won the U.S. Green Card lottery, so I moved to New York, completed a master's degree in law, and became admitted to practice law in New York. I quickly realized that I felt just as unsatisfied as before. My life was pretty amazing, and I was very proud of my accomplishments, but I remained unfulfilled. I was suffering amidst this amazing life of mine, and the suffering was compounded by my guilt at feeling ungrateful for all that I had been given.

I made another change and became an entrepreneur. I built a social network for international lawyers, which was purchased by another company after only two years. And very quickly, again, I was lost and sad. So I made another change and started writing. I published three books. But again, I was unfulfilled. I kept searching. I found a great position with excellent benefits at Brooklyn Law School. Part of my job was traveling the world to recruit students. But still I remained unsatisfied.

#### FINDING THE PATH

"I CAN'T KEEP going on like this," I thought, but I had no idea what to do. In my desperation, I started looking into various religions, beginning with Catholicism because my mother is Catholic. Then I explored Judaism because my wife is Jewish. We even spoke to a rabbi. But it never clicked. They always gave me answers. "It is like this and like that, and you have to believe this, and then all will be well."

I started reading about quantum mechanics, which allowed me again to begin to discover the unknown; I regained the spark of wonder that was buried within me. I started looking at the most mundane things with new eyes, quantum eyes, if you will. I did not understand anything. It was very exciting. I went from book to book and, somehow, I ended up with a book on Zen. Again, I did not understand a single thing, and I loved it. I had encountered Buddhism before, but whenever I looked into Buddhism, I was immediately turned off by the word suffering—of course, because I did not comprehend its significance, but also because I was suffering and I did not want to hear

When we  
paused  
and rested  
in the silence,  
we questioned  
the universe  
and opened up  
completely.  
At that moment,  
the trees  
were I,  
the sounds  
were I,  
the universe  
was I.

more about it. I wanted to get away from suffering.

Even before I started reading the book on Zen, I had begun sitting. I started by just sitting in a chair for ten minutes. And I started sitting without having any idea of what I was doing. I never learned to meditate. I did not have a specific practice in mind. I just wanted to sit in silence. It was exactly what I needed at that moment and still do. In my desperation, I was naturally drawn to sitting and to silence. I found the Rochester Zen Center and started sitting on Zoom.

After meeting Donna-sensei online at "Finding your Seat," I started sitting every day—without exception—at seven in the morning and seven in the evening. I did my first four-day online session shortly after I started sitting.

I had my first dokusan with Roshi at this first online sesshin. I did not know what dokusan was and I feared that like my other teachers, Roshi would give me answers and tell me how things were. I really did not want answers. I did not want him to tell me anything. And, of course, he did not tell me anything or give me any answers. As many readers know, this can be very frustrating. You wish the teachers would throw you a little bone, but good teachers in their infinite compassion let you sit in the dark, all alone, the most beautiful place to be.

When I sit, I am the little girl in the woods again. I am completely in the dark. I am not knowing, not understanding. I am just wondering. I am questioning intensely with my whole being. "What is this? What is this?" All I have is my wonder, directed at nothing and at no one. And now my life has infinite depth. I am not a famous actress anymore, or Director of International Programs, or an entrepreneur, or a lawyer. I am no one. I know nothing. And I am happy. Not knowing makes me smile.

I spent a month training last summer at RZC. And after my first in person seven-day sesshin in July, I knew what lay ahead. And Toni knew right away when she saw me at the train station in Albany after being apart for one month. In the car ride home to New York City she said, "We're moving to Rochester, aren't we?"

I have been in training since January. There is an openness in me that I have not experienced since I was a small child. There seems to be no bottom, no boundary, and gravity no longer has such a strong hold on me. Flying feels like an actual possibility. We all have so very much. But if we had nothing else, we always have the ultimate and infinite question: "What is this?" **///**





I WANT TO SAVE THE

# WORLD!

WHEN MY GRANDDAUGHTER Azalea was four years old, her Christmas present that year was a Moana costume including Polynesian-style skirt, top, sash, and shoes. The Disney film

*Moana* tells the story of the strong-willed daughter of a Polynesian village chief. When a blight strikes her island, Moana is chosen by the ocean itself to set sail on a mission to save her people. Azalea was quite taken with Moana, and I can't recall seeing a more excited child as she opened the box. She immediately took all her clothes off and donned the full outfit. She then took a few proud steps toward the doorway, and with her chest puffed out proclaimed, "I am going to save the world!"

Like Azalea, I too had an "I am going to save the world" moment, although there was nothing close to the magical purity expressed by a four-year-old. Ten years ago, I had just turned the last page of Bill McKibben's book *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*, a compelling account of our planet violently out of environmental balance, when I had a sudden flash of realization—that I was called to devote my life to environmental activism, focused on helping to initiate a truly meaningful response to climate change. I had already grown disturbed by the amount of horrible human suffering I saw looming, caused by climate change, which I saw as the issue of our time. I

retired from my lifelong practice of neurology and formed a non-profit, The Lost Bird Project, whose mission is "Connecting more deeply to the Earth through art." The work has taken many forms including written articles, presentations to a large variety of audiences, organizing communities, initiating actions, art projects, and making documentary films. We sought not so much to explain or convince, but more to raise awareness by touching hearts and souls, and I believe over time Lost Bird was successful in doing some of that.

But lately I have seen the threats of climate change in a broader perspective. Indeed, the suffering caused by climate change already happening now, with far more unavoidably on the way, is terrifying in itself, but there seem to be many other challenges right now that could also send mankind over the cliff:

- ▶ Pollution, toxins and environmental plastics
- ▶ Pandemics
- ▶ Leadership without any sense of moral compass
- ▶ Instability of government
- ▶ Global supply chain collapse
- ▶ Conflicts including both conventional and nuclear war

TEXT BY *Andy Stern*



- ▶ Global population explosion with widespread food and water shortages

Egads! Where does one even begin?

When a physician sees a patient with multi-organ system failure, the disease is never in just one of those failing organs, but systemic, and each organ that fails is one symptom of a single underlying cause. The approach is always two-pronged, both to keep the patient alive by supporting the failing physiological functions, and diagnosing and treating the underlying disease. It would make no sense to do just one or the other. The list of potential pending humankind disasters is long and perhaps should be thought of as symptoms of an underlying cause. Addressing each one is of critical importance of course, but what about the disease itself?

Alcoholics have addiction as the root cause of their problems, but there is a long list of their symptoms that are derivative: dysfunctional relationships, work challenges, poor hygiene, medical illness caused by the alcohol including prominently the brain, and nerve disorders of alcoholism. As a neurologist I have treated the many neurological problems caused by alcohol, but I have never been involved with directly addressing the root cause, the alcohol addiction itself. So while my care for those patients might have helped in the short term, it could not have helped the big picture of progressive decline and death. Only not drinking could alter that outcome.

The work of Lost Bird, then, in addressing climate change, is directed only at one of many symptoms. Nobody seems to be applying diagnostics aimed at the root cause itself. Does a single underlying cause even exist?

**ONE POSSIBLE ROOT** cause is the idea that all civilizations have a birth, youth, adult life, old age, and death and what is happening on Earth now is nothing more than the normal aging of ours. There is no underlying disease. According to this idea, what would be remarkable would be if it were not happening. This possibility comes from Adam Frank, chair of the Department of Astrophysics at the University of Rochester and a member of the Rochester Zen Center. In his most recent book, *Light of the Stars: Alien Worlds and the Fate of the Earth*, Adam addresses the puzzling fact that we have no evidence of life on other planets, while astrobiologists have calculated that, given the large number of planets in the universe that would be likely to have conditions compatible with life, there is almost certainly life out there. According

to those calculations, there ought to be enough extraterrestrial life that we almost certainly by now should have some evidence that proves it. The question then is, why not? Adam posits the possibility that the calculations do not consider that life on any planet may have only a short duration, so that while there may have been abundant life on other planets in the past, none have been sustained over time so that now there is far less than previously hypothesized. Adam wonders whether the relatively brief life span of civilizations may be a universal truth applying to all planetary civilizations, and that we are simply observing this pattern taking place on Earth now. Adam writes:

Maybe the universe just doesn't do long-term, sustainable versions of civilizations like ours. Maybe it's not something that's ever worked out, even across all the planets orbiting all the stars throughout all of space and time. Maybe every technological civilization like ours has been just a flash in the pan, lighting up the cosmos with its brilliance for a few centuries, or even a few millennia, before fading back to darkness.

**IT WOULD BE LIKE** observing that an old man has the symptom of hair loss and searching for the underlying cause, when the reason is simply the fact of his age. In this view there is nothing the matter, and therefore nothing to do.

We have lost our way in part because, driven by advancing technologies, and possibly in common with many previous civilizations in the cosmos, the pace of change has increased so much. Adam writes that our societies have always been morally and ethically guided by myths. But generating a myth that holds those kinds of deep truths takes a very long time. Because the pace of change has increased so dramatically in recent times, there just hasn't been time for such myths to evolve, and so we have lost the mythic guidelines that literally help sustain our societies. Also, elders have traditionally been revered for their wisdom that derives from their long-lived experience, but if the world has changed rapidly enough, their wisdom may no longer apply.

**ANOTHER POSSIBLE** underlying cause that might account for all the varied symptomatic calamities we now face is the all too familiar teaching of greed, anger, and delusion: the Three Poisons of Buddhism. Today greed and anger can lead to suffering



**ANDY STERN** has been a Zen center member for 25 years. After retiring from his neurology practice, he founded a nonprofit, Lost Bird Project ([lostbirdproject.org](http://lostbirdproject.org)), whose mission is to connect more deeply to the earth through art. For years he worked nationally to raise awareness about climate change and to encourage a meaningful response.

on a scale inconceivable at the time of the Buddha. Although the poisons themselves have not changed, because of the phenomenal mastery we have achieved in manipulating our world—again, enabled by technology—actions based upon greed and anger today have potentially earth-changing impacts. Destructive behaviors such as exponentially increased and addicted consumption (greed) and large-scale wars (anger) have directly led to widespread threats to systems sustaining the human species.

Zen holds that the cause of suffering is the delusions that are maintained largely by our addiction to thinking. Addicted thinking reinforces the delusions that the self is real and unchanging, and that we are in control. It fosters desire and attachments, reinforces a dualistic world view, and is an obstruction to seeing things as they are.

If the root cause of climate change, for example, is the addiction to thinking, then success in addressing climate change, while crucial, is only attending to one symptom. Even if the problem of climate change was magically fixed, and the threat of global warming gone, the underlying disease would still not have been addressed. Like the alcoholic, there would be no impact on the eventual outcome of unimaginable human suffering, and even our possible extinction.

**COULD OUR ADDICTION** to thinking really be the underlying cause of all the other potential disasters on the list? How might a thinking addiction lead to all these huge and destructive symptoms? Consider the potential for destructive behavior based on the concept of “I,” that the “I” is truly separate from the rest of the world, is a real entity enduring over time, and that self and other have a real boundary separating them. Such a view might enable the belief that what I do to others in the world will have little impact on me. For example, when we hear from someone that she is in pain, we often tend to question the complaint—is it exaggerated? This is why physicians tend to under-treat pain, even in terminal patients. But nobody has ever questioned the reality of their own pain. If I were deeply in connection with others and experienced their pain as my own, it would be impossible to hurt anybody else. That would be the end of violent conflict! Once again, technology facilitates this kind of behavior by transforming armed conflicts away from face-to-face combat—which makes the notion of separation more difficult—to drone strikes guided by non-combatants continents away.



The list of potential pending humankind disasters is long and perhaps should be thought of as symptoms of an underlying cause.

Addressing each one is of critical importance, but what about the disease itself?

**ANOTHER WAY AN** addiction to thinking might threaten our very existence is by confusing our own thoughts with reality. Consider the concept of progress. Every step humans have taken for the last ten thousand years—from the discovery of fire and agriculture; through the stone age, the bronze age, and the iron age; the invention of writing and the arrival of technology—has always been portrayed as an obvious advance for the good, as progress. Maybe it’s so. Nobody wants to be left behind as the next new technological developments emerge. If we have convinced ourselves that the concept of progress itself is valid, even intuitively obvious, then anything we come up with that seems to fit into that category is something we should aggressively pursue and scale up. How else could Apple have been successful with all 13 successive incarnations of the iPhone, with 2.2 billion sold since 2007? But what if the very concept of progress itself is only one of our clever thoughts, and is not valid at all? Then all those seeming advances have only been leading us closer and closer, one step at a time, to the brink—where we are now. By embracing the concept of progress itself, we fail to see this.

Maybe even acting on the “I am going to save the world!” calling, while seemingly blessed, is an arrogance we can no longer afford. In trying to scale up to make the biggest and best impact, many of the Lost Bird team flew constantly, coast to coast and internationally. How do we know that sufficient environmental awareness and activism was created by our efforts to outweigh the enormous direct environmental impact of all our flying? I have no doubt that some part of the thinking that created and directed Lost Bird was “I”-based, and therefore biased and distorted. Mankind is in trouble and we can no longer act blindly out of our delusional “I”-based thinking.

Even if Adam Frank’s idea is right, and we are just witnessing the natural end of our civilization on Earth as many other extraterrestrial civilizations before ours have witnessed theirs, we are still called to lessen suffering. How? In Zen, zazen is the addiction recovery tool. At the time Master Hakuin wrote *In Praise of Zazen* in the 18th century, there was not yet any of the awareness that we have today of how we not only have sufficient means to end human life on earth, but may well be already heading there. If Hakuin were composing that chant today, I wonder if his praise of zazen would be even higher, that zazen is not only the gateway to lessen suffering, but also the best hope for our very survival on earth. Maybe the only hope. **///**





# Sightings



## 2022 UPROOTING RACISM DHARMA CAMP AT CHAPIN MILL

“The best part of camp was maybe just being with a lot of the kids that I know, and being able to talk about racism freely with them. It’s kind of nice to just talk about it because I don’t know much about it, and haven’t talked about it much.”

This evaluation from one of the eight campers who participated in the Center’s first-ever sleepover camp for Sangha children and invited guests was consistent with all the campers’ feedback, and 100% of participants said they would come back to the camp next year.

The teaching staff included Dr. Sonia James-Wilson, educational consultant; Eryl Kubicka and Chris Maley, Zen Center Youth Program leaders; Lila Redding from the Sangha Engagement Office; and Brianna Williams, a Youth Ambassador from the Center for Youth Empowerment. The curriculum linked basic Buddhist concepts with anti-racism training in group discussions, and campers enjoyed a wide

range of activities, from art projects to campfire games, yoga, and forest bathing. And, oh yes, meditation instruction:

► “I already knew about it, but I think I’ll keep doing it after camp. Camp made me want to do it more, because then I knew more about it and how to do it.”

► “I like it. If you just need something to calm down then you can just meditate for a little bit.”

Campers also benefited greatly from working with Brianna Williams. One camper commented, “I learned about [how] some people experience racism. It was helpful when Brianna talked about going to protests and her experience

there. It was kinda cool to meet somebody that does that stuff.”

Plans are already in the works for next year’s camp.

## BEGINNINGS A SEASON OF CEREMONIES

An uncharacteristically warm and sunny autumn saw a number of ceremonies in Rochester, ushering in a new generation of spiritual leadership. Sensei Donna Kowal was sanctioned as a Zen teacher by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede, and four students—Dené and Scott Redding, Jeanette Prince-Cherry, and Kathryn Argetsinger—were ordained as Zen priests. Dené and Scott (now Lila and



▲ The second of this past summer’s outdoor Sangha brunches. With the pandemic having eliminated the usual Sunday brunches, the Sangha Engagement Committee decided to prioritize hosting two outdoor brunches with full menus, table games, and cooperative weather.

Danan) were ordained by Roshi Kjolhede and Jeanette and Kathryn (now Jissai and Kanji) by Roshi Amala Wrightson, whose students have just requested to call her Roshi after 20 years of leading the Auckland Zen Center.



▷ SIGHTINGS



▲ TOP LEFT: Roshi Amala Wrightson conducts the ordination ceremony for Kanji (formerly Kathryn) Argetsinger and Jissai (formerly Jeanette) Prince-Cherry. TOP RIGHT: Jissai and Kanji after the ceremony. MIDDLE LEFT: Rehearsal for the ordination ceremony for Lila (Dene) and Danan (Scott) Redding; left to right: Trueman Taylor, Danan Redding, Roshi Kjolhede, Lila Redding, Roshi Wrightson. MIDDLE RIGHT: Lila and Danan after the ceremony. BOTTOM LEFT: Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede and Sensei Donna Kowal during her sanctioning ceremony. BOTTOM RIGHT: Roshi Kjolhede hands the teacher's rakusu to Donna.





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## TRY AN ONLINE SESSHIN

AFTER TWO YEARS of experimentation and fine-tuning, the Zen Center's online sesshins have become worthy substitutes for the in-person experience. If you've been thinking about attending sesshin but live far away and/or have limited travel time, an online sesshin is worth a try. It can't replicate the total Chapin Mill experience, but most of the major features of sesshin now work very well online.

The sesshin schedule is organized around four blocks of sitting. Many online participants, especially those who are in different time zones, elect to sign up for two or three blocks, depending on their needs. This is perfectly acceptable.

## DAILY SCHEDULE

*NOTE: This schedule changes slightly for Rohatsu*

Block 1: 4:45–7:00 AM  
Zazen, chanting, and dokusan

Block 2: 9:30 AM–12:30 PM  
Zazen with teisho

Block 3: 1:30–3:45 PM  
Zazen, dokusan, and chanting  
*The last afternoon round (4:40–5:15) is optional for those online*

Block 4: 7:00–9:25 PM  
Zazen and dokusan

## CONCERNED ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY?

On the first night, those participating online have a special orientation session with the sesshin monitors, who will walk you through how dokusan works, etc. And during the entire sesshin there is always an online monitor available for any technical glitches that might arise. Recently the online sesshins have been blessedly free of problems, making it easier to participate as fully as possible at a distance.

## UPCOMING SESSHINS

### JANUARY 7-DAY SESSHIN (ROHATSU)

January 7–14, 2023  
Led by Sensei John Pulleyn

### FEBRUARY 4-DAY SESSHIN

February 21–25, 2023  
Led by Sensei Donna Kowal

### MARCH 7-DAY SESSHIN

March 25–April 1  
Led by Sensei John Pulleyn

### MAY 2-DAY SESSHIN

May 5–7 2023  
Led by Ven. Jissai Prince-Cherry

### JUNE 7-DAY SESSHIN

June 10–17, 2023  
Led by Sensei Donna Kowal

### JULY 7-DAY SESSHIN

July 22–29, 2023  
Led by Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede

### SEPTEMBER 2-DAY SESSHIN

September 8–10  
Led by Ven. Trueman Taylor

### SEPTEMBER 7-DAY SESSHIN

September 23–30  
Led by Sensei Donna Kowal