

# Inside Dharma

*A socially engaged Buddhist outreach organization  
applying Buddhist principles in prison & on the street*

## **The Buddhist Newsletter Serving the Inmate and Ex-Offender Sangha**

**"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is tied up with mine, then let us work together."** - Lilla Watson, Aboriginal activist

**VOLUME XVI \* ISSUE III**

**July - September 2023**

***The topic posed in our last issue was...***

***"Describe Your Favorite Zen koan, Zen story, belief or tradition that helps you retain mindful awareness"***

**By Daryl Inge – Mineral Point, MO**

This present paper makes no attempt at profundity on account of Zen Buddhism. The most important thing to do is to unfold to one's potential as much as possible.

Zen was first a purely personal discipline, non-monastic, non-ethical, not demanding the acceptance of any scripture or any tradition.

The reason of this is that very little of the native literature which deals with Zen has yet been translated perhaps because it is written in early Chinese colloquial, a language the study of which has been almost wholly neglected by Europeans and also (to judge by some of their attempts to translate it) by the Japanese themselves.

Books on the Far East often mention a sect of Buddhism called Zen. They say it was a "school of abstract meditation" and that it exercised a profound influence upon art and literature, but they tell us very little about what Zen actually was, about its relation to ordinary Buddhism, its history, or the exact nature of its influence upon art.

The Buddha is not to be found in images of books, but in the heart or mind and in scores of Buddhist meditative schools the spirit of serene sense of a pervasive presence, whose dwelling is the light of settings suns.

Convenience and monasticism was soon established in their sect, as in every other sect of Buddhism. The Zen practicant, though he makes no moral effort, nevertheless is certain not to sin because he is certain not to be tempted.

Can a layman with wife and children, one given over to flesh, achieve Buddhahood? Provided he contemplate his own inner-nature, he will achieve Buddhahood. It does not matter about his longings. Even a butcher can achieve Buddhahood if he searches in his own heart.

A butcher, who lives by taking life, can he achieve Buddhahood? It is not a question of the man's trade. If he has learned to know his own nature, he will be saved.

One to set about practicing, Zen ought to first put far away from himself all anger and malice, and fill his heart with kindness and compassion.

Zen also brought something new to the Japanese which might be described as a religion of tranquility, or the idea that tranquility is its sense of humor, one of the koans, or dark sayings which have come down from many centuries. Zen, with

its absurdity koan, laughs at life much the way the Marx brothers did. Zen has long used the comic view of life to deflate those who start believing their own system and categories. It is easiest to be tranquil about existence when you recognize the pointlessness of solemnity.

The follower of Zen is protected from the incursions of the world by an inverted (in our Westerners terms) understanding of what is real and what is illusory. One of the all-time favorite koans help make this clear. The koan describes three monks watching a banner flutter in the breeze. One monk observes, "The banner is moving;" but, the second insists, "The wind is moving." Finally, the third monk says, "You're both wrong. It is your mind that's moving." The point here is that, in modern times, most Westerners view the physical world as the operative reality and the unseen, nonphysical world as an abstraction (comforting or not, depending upon beliefs or immediate needs, the spiritual world is said to grow less abstract to those in foxholes).

Zen became the religion of the antirational, what might be called the counter mind. We now know that the left hemisphere of the brain governs the logical, analytical portion of our lives, whereas the right hemisphere is the seat of our intuitive, nonverbal perception and understanding. In fact, Zen masters have deliberately developed techniques (like illogical riddles or koans) to discredit the logical verbal side of the mind so that the intuitive perceptions of the right hemisphere, the counter mind, may define reality. Zen culture invites us to experience reality without the intervening distractions of intellect, categories, analysis, etc.

The Koan is a uniquely Zen creation, a brilliant technique developed by the T'ang masters for

transmitting a religion which revered no scripture and no god. It appears nowhere else in the vast literature of world mysticism.

Zen gained from Taoism the insight that total reliance on logical thought stifles the human mind.

Taoism is the original religion of ancient China. It is founded in the idea that fundamental principle,



the Tao, underlies all nature. Long before the appearance of Zen, Taoists were teaching the superiority of intuitive thought, using an anti-intellectualism that often ridiculed the logic-bound limitation of conventioned Chinese life and letters.

The Zen masters took a page from the Taoists and began using nonsense conundrums, later known as koans, as well as frustrating questions-and-answer sessions, known as mondo, to undermine a novice's dependence on rational thought. A new monk would be presented with an illogical question or problem by the head monastery, who would then monitor his response. If the novice struggled to construct a response using logical thought processes, he failed; if he intuitively and discursively grasped the truth within the koan, he passed.

The supposedly wordless doctrine of Zen has been accompanied throughout its history by volumes of koan riddles, sutras, and commentaries.

Just as the koan taunts the logical mind, the Zen arts, by toying with perception, remind us that there is a reality not subject to the five senses.

The aesthetic ideas embedded in Zen culture and its perception-inducing works of art are among the most stunning achievement in world art history. Zen culture, concerned as it is with the process of perception as much as with actual words of art, can open our senses so that we exercise anew the arts of both East and West, ancient and modern.

Art was regarded as a kind of Zen, as a delving down into the Buddha that each of us unknowingly carries within him.

In his more elaborate depictions of nature, the Zen artist is led by his love of nature into that common pitfall of lovers-sentimentality. The forms of Nature for him to function not as forms but as symbols. Signs and symbols are for the conscious mind.

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***Those who live passionately***

***Teach us how to love.***

***Those who love passionately***

***Teach us how to live.***

**- Paramahansa Yogananda**



***“ Long Practice”***

**By Reverend “Shindo”  
Tom Bradshaw  
Inside Dharma  
Zen Meditation Center  
St. Louis, MO**

We know from living day-to-day that life has ups and downs. These ups and downs have different sizes and duration.....like waves that range from small to large.

Each day there are ups and downs; I find myself cranky from bad sleep, but a friend comes to visit later and I find myself happy.

Each week there are ups and downs; maybe it's terribly hot the Monday yard work must be done, but it rains on Friday and the garden doesn't need watering.

The months and years have ups and downs too; perhaps we lose someone we love in an accident, but later in the year we become an aunt or uncle for the first time.

Unlike these examples, the ups and downs in real life don't follow this pattern, but I imagine you get the picture.

Zazen as a lifelong practice changes the relationship to these ups and downs. This starts the first time we sit zazen. Sitting zazen even once is good.

I still remember the first time I sat. My teacher Rev. Kalen McAllister was leading the beginners' night at the Missouri Zen Center. After instruction we turned around to face the wall and the bell rang. It was so hot that sweat was rolling down my back and this thought occurred to me, "What

on earth is this going to do for me?! This is ridiculous.” But I just sat there.

Years later I look back and appreciate that first time; I had become aware of that thought but didn’t act on it by getting up.

Sitting zazen daily is good.

There was a time in my life where my schedule allowed me to sit morning, afternoon, and evening. This is interesting to do because we begin to notice the differences in the mind at these times. (This is one of the most eye-opening teachings that I remember Kalen giving over 20 years ago.)

I began to understand that in the morning my brain tended to plan, anticipate, worry, and look forward to things for that day.

In the afternoon zazen tended to be sleepier and I found myself dozing off despite my best efforts.

Then in the evening my brain tended to review the day.

Sitting every day lets us know ourselves in this new way; we begin to see the daily cycles of our brain. This changes our relationship to thought.

When we sit zazen for months and years, we end up sitting through the ups and downs that occur daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly – from the small waves to the large ones.

One of the lessons we learn from this long practice is that there is no good zazen or bad zazen. Each zazen is different and new; there is tired zazen, angry zazen, sad zazen, happy zazen, hungry, peaceful, anxious, fearful, *you name it* – all types of zazen! None are better or worse than others and none of them mean we’ve failed.

Once we come to terms with this we realize that these surface emotions don’t trouble us as much as they used to. (That doesn’t mean that they never trouble us though – that’s not the point of practice.)

Settling into zazen like this year after year we relax into these emotional layers – which give us the opportunity to see the underlying ups and downs mentioned earlier.

Sitting through this range of human emotion is where we find dedication to zazen.



As I look back I can see something I couldn’t see before I began practice.

When life was at an up I felt good because things were going my way. But in the back of the mind there was fear because I knew the good times weren’t going to last. I struggled to keep the happiness as long as I could.

When life was at a down I felt bad and struggled to get out of it.

Both were battles I’d fight tooth and nail.

With all our focus on trying to stay happy (on an up) and never be unhappy (avoid the down) we fail to see the cycle itself because we’re so caught up in the struggle of fighting the cycle.

It occurs to me this is the second meaning of the simple saying of so many teachers that came before us: Just sit. It doesn't only mean in the moment to 'just sit' it means as a lifelong practice to dedicate life to sitting. This is shikantaza – the practice of just sitting for life.

One of the best ways I've seen this put is by Uchiyama Kōshō Rōshi:

"I would like to compare our life to sitting behind the wheel of an automobile. When we drive, it is dangerous to fall asleep at the wheel or to drive drunk. It is also risky to think about other things while driving or to be nervous and tense. That goes as well for sitting behind the wheel of our life. The fundamental approach to driving our life has to consist in waking up from the haze of sleepiness and drunkenness and from the distractions of thinking and nervousness."



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## ***"Thoughts"***

**by Brian Craig – Fulton, MO**

Buddha

A disguised incarnation of the Supreme Lord who preached atheism in order to divert the people of the time from misusing the ritualistic sacrifices of the VEDAS as a license for animal slaughter.

Self-Realization

I wish that You may deliver them. Therefore, if You so desire their deliverance, then only will they be able to understand Your message.

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**Koan - 28 Ryutan's Candle** – Tokusan, "It's dark outside." Ryotan gives him a candle and blows it out.



**Kris (Kyoryu) Ash**  
**Inside Dharma**  
**St. Louis, MO**

**EDITOR'S CORNER:**

Dear Readers,

Please remember that our address is:

4001 Utah, St. Louis MO 63116.

Thank you for your various submissions. Please know that they are deeply appreciated. However, due to the changing of the prison system bulk rate receiving guidelines, the dwindling contributions towards our Inside Dharma budget, and the decreasing number of received submissions from inmates, we will be publishing our last issue this next quarter (Oct.-Dec.) of 2023.

Thanks so very much to each of you who took the risk to share your experiences, thoughts, and beliefs with your various submissions. It was the gracious merit of each of you who kept this newsletter going over the past 25 years.

In gassho,

Kris (Kyuryo), Editor

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**Submission Guidelines:**

1. Submissions need to be typed or printed neatly (readable).
2. Submission topic should support the belief in Buddhist values and the connection to the life of an offender.
3. Submission writing needs to be of adequate font/written size. (Not small)

4. Include paragraph breaks between major points.

5. Length **1000 words or less**.

6. **Please proof read** your submissions for sentence clarity. (Know that the audience of your written work can not read your mind. Each sentence thought needs to be clear. If not, I will edit this.)

7. **NOTE: Submissions will not be returned.** (Whether used for publication or not. Sorry!)

Reminder: We will publish one final time in **2023. Deadlines for submissions: 4<sup>th</sup> quarter – Nov. 30<sup>th</sup> deadline.**

Reminder: **Our last issue issue deadline for submissions is November 30th.**

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**RESOURCE DIRECTORY –**

To request copies of the resource directory for St. Louis, please write to:

Heartland Zen  
9648 Olive #364  
St. Louis, MO 63132

***Note: There is only ONE directory and it is only for St. Louis.***



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***For our 2023 Oct.-Dec. Issue  
We will publish your thoughts on....***

***Which of your practices  
help you maintain  
awareness and minimize  
your ego.***

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