



kai han

The Newsletter of the
Albuquerque Zen Center
No. 10 Summer / Fall 2023

Live your Breathing

by Seiju

After decades of Zen practice, I've collected several teaching stories about my teacher, Sasaki Roshi, that continue to inform my life. I have found that short, vivid statements resonate more deeply than careful explanations that are conceptually precise but burdensome and wordy.

One example is as a new Zen student I attended a Q&A session where students could directly question the roshi. A student asked Roshi's advice. "I'm in love with this woman, but she acts as if I don't exist. What should I do?" Roshi's response was simply, "You must fall more deeply in love."

On another occasion, a student asked what they should do when they were confused by situations. Roshi's response was again simple: "Give love."

The problem or conflict we perceive is a fabrication of our desires and attachments. Our self-interest runs contrary to the arising situation. When we identify with our self-centeredness, we are aware when the arising moment goes otherwise from our desires. We find ourselves apart from our world, situation, and surroundings. We have divided our experience into self and other.

Spurred on by our desires, we objectify the immediate experience. This is suffering, even when it does not feel uncomfortable. There is no peace when we do not embrace the immediacy of the arising moment. There can be no peace in a divided world.

In these examples, the situation is incomplete and divided. Roshi's responses point to the activity that dissolves distance and separation. Spontaneous embrace of the arising moment is the essence of love. It is also a vital threshold for realizing peace.

One of the significant aspects of Rinzai Zen practice is *sanzen*, private interviews with the teacher. While working through *koans*, Roshi would require manifestation of the underlying principle of the *koan*. The manifestation would vary with the situation, but the appropriate manifestation dissolved the illusion of conflict. Those moments were rare, especially early in my training. Too often the interview would end with Roshi noting, "Ah Seiju, still not Zero, still not disappear."

After several decades of this dynamic, my teacher gave me a simple instruction: Always manifest Zero. "Zero" was my teacher's shorthand for *sunyata* or emptiness. This emptiness is the basis from which everything arises – the unborn *Dharmakaya*. A critical point of this teaching is that the *Dharmakaya* is utterly dynamic. Everything is activity; everything is the activity of Emptiness.

Everything arises as the product of the activity of time. Life is lived in immediacy, not the conceptual narrative of our self-centric minds.

With the order to “Always manifest Zero,” the instruction is clear – disappear! The resolution of objectification is through dissolving the illusion of self and separation; disappear into the immediacy of breathing. Unify with the activity of time in the natural cycle of inhaling and exhaling – complete breathing.

Don’t objectify your breathing, live your breathing. Ground yourself in the immediacy of your inhaling/exhaling cycle. We practice in the Zendo so we can skillfully ground ourselves in the immediacy of breathing as we move through our lives. Make living your breathing the priority and see what becomes clear.

Destination by Seiju

The Buddha spoke as follows:

I will teach the destination and the path leading to the destination. Listen to what I say. What is the destination? The eradication of infatuation, the eradication of hostility, and the eradication of delusion are what is called the destination. And what is the path leading to the destination? Present-moment awareness directed toward the body. This awareness is what is called the path leading to the destination. In this way, I have taught to you the destination and the path leading to the destination. That which should be done out of compassion by a caring teacher who desires the welfare of his students, I have done for you. There are secluded places. Meditate, do not be negligent! Don’t have regrets later! This is my instruction to you.

From *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*
by Glenn Wallis

This is among the shortest of the Buddha’s early teachings. However, the Buddha declares that this is all that is necessary for us to find our way to the end of suffering. The “destination” the Buddha indicates is free from the three poisons – greed, anger, and ignorance – that haunt our everyday experience.

The task of clearing these poisons is the homework each of us must finish if we are to taste the peace of Buddhism. There are many resources to help us with this, but the effort must be our own. The energy that sustains the three poisons is energy we provide. The allure of the three poisons dissipates once we clearly see into them. Our attachment to our personal poisons is the major barrier in realizing peace in our lives.

The Buddha is explicit in the path that leads to peace – present-moment awareness directed towards the body. The path is grounded in immediate awareness, non-conceptual realization of the arising moment. Internally it is subtle intimacy; externally it is transparent and open. The peace of Buddhism is the living realization of the imperceptible origin of each arising moment.

The Buddha’s instructions are very concise, but sufficient. Every moment the path opens before us, but as long as we are enamored with our poisons, we will miss what arises each moment. This is the central activity of our lives; we will find peace when we make the effort. Work hard.

AM Zazen Faith Bridges

Silence blankets the Zendo
until a neighbor’s angry outburst
pierces still minds
Let it go
Be a snowflake embracing the sun

Our Senses

by Seiju

Growing up in contemporary society, we absorb a variety of cultural viewpoints which can become problematic for students new to Buddhism. It is valuable to examine how we understand our experience. Most people frame their experiences in terms of “self vs. the world” or “self vs. other.” There are many variations of this dynamic, but the division of experience between self and world is the underlying tension in experience.

An example of this is the following: We are attending a social occasion with close friends and the atmosphere is warm and inclusive. In the evening’s conversation, a friend casually mentions that they find a particular current social issue to be foolish and childish. However, our friend is unaware that this issue is one that we feel deeply committed to. It is anything but childish.

How does our experience unfold from here? Do we ride with the surge of reactive energy and polarize the moment into another “self and other” situation? What is happening in this case and how can we understand it?

Buddhism teaches that we experience six senses, rather than the more conventional five senses. In addition to seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching Buddhism includes the mind. Each sense has a corresponding object and for the mind sense the object is a mental phenomenon. This may seem to be a modest distinction, but it profoundly influences our understanding of the example above.

This is easier to examine in the context of sitting practice. The normal instruction for sitting emphasizes sitting in good posture and breathing fully using the diaphragm. We are instructed to rest our awareness in our hara and fully unify mind and body in breathing.

Regarding the senses, we are transparently receptive without attachment. This is obvious with the sense of smell: a whiff of incense or of the blooming Spring foliage comes to our nose, is received, and released. From moment to moment, there is hearing, but it disappears as it arises. There is no attachment. We hear a dog bark, and the sound disappears into silence. In the next moment perhaps a new bark, and again silence.

What we have difficulty with is mind and mental phenomena. In the example above, the moment after the friend’s comment, there is a strong subjective reaction. A thought or emotion or both, we surrender to the energy and divide our experience. If we hear a loud sound while doing zazen we receive and release. We must learn to do the same thing with “loud” thoughts or emotions: receive and release.

This refutes the identification with the subjective activity which dominates our society: my thoughts, my emotions, my values, etc. If we practice this during the clarity of zazen, we can have that same inclusive clarity available when our reactive mind wants to divide the experience.

The Buddha’s teaching is our guide through our ignorance to the underlying clarity. When thinking and emotions are released rather than affirmed, what remains? The realm of realization transcends duality.

To and Fro

Kevin M. Sheetz

be unconcerned
into the night
and onto the day
be light
bee alight
from the flowers
golden heaven

By Way of the Hut

Christopher Mead



Kamo no Chōmei, Ten Foot Square Hut,
1208, reconstructed 1999.

In 1208, the Japanese poet and monk Kamo no Chōmei withdrew from the clamorous imperial capital of Kyōto to the forested quiet of Mount Hino. He made his home in the Ten Foot Square Hut (Hōjō-an). Fabricated at his direction, this simple wooden structure is long gone but its memory was preserved by Chōmei in the *Record of the Ten Foot Square* (Hōjō-ki): “This house is a mere ten feet square, and less than seven feet high. Since I was not much concerned with where I lived, I did not construct the house to fit the site. I simply set up a foundation, put up a bit of roof and fastened each joint with a metal catch, so that if I didn’t care for one place, I could easily move to another ... The house would take a mere two cartloads to shift ... Since retiring here to Mount Hino, I have added a three-foot awning on the east side of my hut, beneath which to store firewood and cook. On the south side I put a veranda of bamboo slats ... Inside there is a standing screen dividing off the northwest section of the room, where I have set up a painted image of the Amida Buddha with another of the bodhisattva Fugen next to it, and a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* placed before them. At the room’s eastern edge, I have spread a tangle of bracken to serve as a bed ... Such is my temporary abode.”



Detail: Ten Foot Square Hut

There, Chōmei passed the rest of his days in solitude, reading the *Lotus Sutra*, attending the transient seasons, meditating on impermanence until his death in 1216. He had left Kyōto in an act of “home leaving” (*shukke*), undertaken by Buddhist monks in emulation of the Buddha who abandoned the luxurious life of an Indian prince to become a wandering, homeless ascetic. As the thirteenth-century Zen master Dōgen told his students in the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Shōbōgenzō*), *shukke* speaks both to the ordination of monks and more generally to the renunciation by all Buddhists of the worldly desires that cause human suffering: “The essence of the Buddha’s teaching is contained in the act of renouncing the world.”

The antecedent to Chōmei’s wooden hut dates back another seventeen centuries to a lay practitioner and follower of the Buddha named Vimalakirti. Despite his wealth, Vimalakirti occupied a humble, one-room stone hut in Vaishali in northeast India. The room is described in the *Vimalakirti Sutra* as barely large enough to fit his sick bed yet able to seat the great host of 32,000 monks, bodhisattvas, and dignitaries who came to hear him speak on impermanence as he faced his own mortality: “This body is impermanent, without durability, without strength, without firmness ... a cluster of foam, nothing you can grasp or handle.” Because the dimensions of phenomenal space and time do not affect the absolute emptiness from which all things arise, Vimalakirti’s room could be at once tiny and vast.

Minimal. Demountable. Movable. Temporary. Like every traditional house in Japan, Chōmei's hut was crafted from the trees, bamboo, clay, and thatch that had been gathered from nearby forests, fields, and rivers. Assembled in a modular wooden frame, these houses could easily be dismantled and moved elsewhere as need and circumstance required. Chōmei's hut distilled the vernacular habits of his country into the elemental form of a ritualized home that was interchangeably a place of spiritual practice and daily life. It became in turn the model for the Japanese teahouse, whose typical floor plan of four-and-a-half rectangular straw mats (*tatami*) measures out the same 100 square feet enclosed by the Hōjō-an. The sixteenth-century tea master Sen no Rikyū spoke to this coincidence of sacred and profane in the house, the hut, and the teahouse: "You must practice and master the tea ceremony in a small hut, first and foremost, according to the teachings of Buddhism. The comfort of a home and the taste of meals are merely worldly concerns, and a house which shelters you from the elements and food sufficient to prevent starvation are all you need. This is the teaching of the Buddha and the intent of the tea ceremony." For the same reason, the abbot's quarters at Zen temples are called a *hōjō*, laying claim to the huts of Vimalakirti and Chōmei even though the abbot usually resides in a grand hall, not a modest hovel. As in Vimalakirti's hut, conventional distinctions between large and small dissolve into the emptiness of all things.

The hut and the teahouse were demountable and movable because they belonged anywhere and nowhere in particular. Both gathered space inward into a cramped and confined interior that turned its back on the greater world outside. Whenever we build a house, we separate ourselves from the world. Its threshold fixes a border between outside and inside, a barrier between the world outside and the place inside where we shelter from the world. We go inside to leave the world behind.

Yet Dōgen insisted that our apparent separation from the world is an illusion: "Abandon notions of outside or inside, coming or going. Undivided mind is not inside or outside; it comes and goes freely without attachment. One thought: mountain, water, earth ... Undivided mind transcends opposites." In the second century, the Indian and Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna had reasoned that nothing in our experience exists as an independent, essential reality defined by inherent qualities. Any thing can only exist in relation to other things, which all arise from the same condition of universal emptiness. Everything depends on everything else in what Nāgārjuna called the Middle Way: "A different thing depends on a different thing for its difference. Without a different thing, a different thing wouldn't be different." Because all phenomena are relative to everything else, it is logically impossible to take a position that excludes its opposite since to do so would eliminate the possibility of having a position in the first place. You cannot have an inside without an outside: they are necessarily codependent.

Dōgen used *zazen* to illustrate how our experience unifies in each new moment: "When you sit in *zazen* facing a wall, it appears that the sitter and the wall are two different things but actually, they are not separate. In order to understand this, we need the everyday mind of 'wall, tiles, and stones' ... the mind of universal emptiness." You and the wall are united rather than divided by the space between. Any perceived difference—between you and the wall, inside and outside, your house and the world—disappears into our inescapable connection with everything else. We think that our house separates us from the world when it actually unites us with the world. Chōmei withdrew to his hut in a forest, not to escape the world, but to inhabit the world more completely. When he left his home in Kyōto, he never in fact left home because he was always and everywhere at home in the arising world.

The Zen Librarian

John A. Craig

The AZC library has more than 2,500 titles on all things pertaining to Buddhism—from reference books to sutras and a modest selection of DVDs. It is a tremendous resource for our members and Sangha. There is not much to say about the role of zen librarian. While words are essential to our functioning in society, they stand like a brick wall between us and the present moment. I am beginning to appreciate the shape of many of the stepping stones in our collection. The library is open for browsing two days a week and by appointment. You can browse the collection via the Libib app. Contact me (johnacraigjr@gmail.com) and we can begin your exploration.



Kai Han is the newsletter of Albuquerque Zen Center. Striking the han signals dawn, dusk, and evening in zen centers and monasteries. If you are interested in contributing essays, book or movie reviews, poetry, drawings or photographs contact Michele at mmpen1891@gmail.com.

Neither Coming Nor Going

Kevin M. Sheetz

sitting alone
and breathing
as the wind gently moves
the leaves of the trees
sparkling with sunshine
the sound of birds
does not obstruct the silence
that blooms from within
and without



News from the AZC Board of Directors

The grounds at the Center are the focus of many samu Saturdays. This spring 30 yards of mulch was distributed by volunteers around the dirt areas to control weeds, conserve water and to improve the overall appearance. We thank everyone who helped with this project. We want to expand the use of the backyard for more activities. If you have a project or activity you want to pursue using AZC, please contact a Board member. Your in-kind support is vital to AZC and helps to keep the sangha strong.

AZC is investigating options to install solar panels on the roof of the main building. This would greatly reduce our electricity bill, reduce our carbon footprint, and free up funds to use for other projects and building maintenance. If anyone has ideas about how to fund this or know of grants that may be available for non-profit organizations, please contact John at johnacraigjr@gmail.com. Also, if you have had a positive experience with a local solar company, let us know as we are in the process of obtaining estimates.

The Abbott Retirement Fund was established last summer to raise money in support of Seiju and his eventual retirement. This campaign is ongoing, and the initial response has been positive. You may have recently received a letter as we are reaching out again to continue to grow this fund. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed and look forward to growing this fund which will provide Seiju with an income upon his retirement.

There are many ways to donate to AZC. You can find a link to the retirement fund on the website, azc.org, or you can mail in or drop off a check at AZC. In addition, if you are doing estate or other long-range financial planning, please consider the retirement fund as part of your donation. Feel free to speak with an AZC Board member about your donation if you have any questions. Membership information can be found on our website, in the twice monthly newsletters or by contacting a board member. Please consider becoming a member and know that your support, at any level, keeps AZC thriving and moving forward. Gasshō

Gassho to all our donors

C Alelyunas, J Andrade, R Arellano, M Barcenas, J Becker, W Beems, C Blocher, S Boese, F Bridges, K Burr, D Cabral, R Manring & C Cadman, H Casson, T Cleaves, JA Craig, K Cummins, D D'Agostino, V Eastep, M Eddy, T Faber, B Fletcher, T Ford, G Galsworth, C Gibson, M Hart, S Crozier & P Humphreys, Seishin, P Livingston, N Macri, L Maki, N Marsh, M McCamey, L McCann, J McNamara, C Mead & M Penhall, N Motanya, J Nimitz, D Nolte, M Ortiz, K Otsuka, G Peknik, L Petersen, A Pimentel, B Porter, R Rappuhn, J Redel, H Roth, J Rothschild, P Ryder, S Salazar, R Sanchez, Doan & Rihab Schabarum, V Seiser, L Smith, L Smolovitch, C Tatman, K Thalhammer, B Tingley, I Vigil, Daishin, SWI, T&D Whalen, B Whiting, J Winslow, B Worthen, Bodhi Manda ZC, AZC Sangha

Albuquerque Zen Center
2300 Garfield Ave. S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106
505.268.4877

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO 870
ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Address Service Requested

Albuquerque Zen Center

Founded 1989
Abbot: Seiju Bob Mammoser

Board of Directors:

Michele Penhall, President, mmpen1891@gmail.com
Aishi Charlie Blocher, cblocher@me.com
John A. Craig, Secretary, johnacraigjr@gmail.com
Jundo Stephen Slusher saslusher@yahoo.com
Brad Tingley, btingley@salud.unm.edu
Daishin Patrick Vigil prvigil@hotmail.com

Membership levels begin at \$30.00 a month and no one will be excluded based on income or inability to pay. It is always possible to make alternative arrangements to include service and work at the Zen Center or other contributions. Please see the website for further information.

officeazc@gmail.com / www.azc.org

©2023 Albuquerque Zen Center
All rights reserved

Weekly in-person practice:

Monday-Saturday morning zazen
6:30 am

Monday- Thursday evening zazen
6:00 pm

Monday & Thursday Book
Discussion Groups
6:30 pm

Friday evening closed

Saturday samu 8:30-9:30 am
Mid-morning practice 10:00 am

Sunday Informal Silent Practice
7-9 am

All sessions except Sunday are available via Zoom. ID #s and passwords are on the website.

Schedule subject to change.
Check the website for current health and COVID policies.