



kai han

The Newsletter of the Albuquerque **Zen** Center
No. 6 Winter 2019

Breathing and Relationship by Seiju

These days, we all seem to have busy lives. We budget our time around various responsibilities, weighing the value of each one against the rest. Perhaps we think of Zen practice as another commitment we have to juggle, but if we realize a deeper understanding of practice, the conflict between practice and ordinary obligations disappears. Then the practice will enrich every aspect of our lives.

Impermanence is a fundamental teaching of Buddhism. My teacher explained impermanence as the fundamental dharma activity that gives rise to everything. More specifically, everything arises from the interaction of two fundamental activities: expansion and contraction. The interaction of these two activities unifying and dividing is Dharma activity; this is the foundation from which everything arises. However, because the teaching is difficult to approach directly, Zen teachers have recommended breathing practice as the best way to begin. We study Dharma activity through breathing practice.

We are breathing every moment, but rarely conscious of it. To be aware of our breathing is not to control or manipulate it. Complete breathing is unifying body and mind with the activities of inhaling and exhaling. My teacher emphasized we must manifest our inhaling, manifest our exhaling. This complete breathing is complete, pure activity. Mind, body and activity are all unified; we are one with what we are doing. This is selfless activity; there is no separation or duality.

In the cycle of breathing, we exhale until we are finished exhaling, then we inhale until we are finished inhaling. These "endpoints" in our breathing, which are realized through selfless activity, deserve special study. They are not the

result of self-conscious or artificial breathing techniques. The intent of complete breathing is not to induce some special state of consciousness by manipulating our breath. Rather, we want to realize the selfless nature of breathing activity, which will give us insight into the selfless nature of all activity.

At these two endpoints, the activities of inhaling and exhaling reach a dynamic balance, and for an instant cease altogether. In the instant of complete exhalation, there is no more exhaling and inhaling has not yet begun. All activity rests. Similarly, in the instant of complete inhalation there is no inhaling, but exhaling has not yet started. All activity rests. These two points of equilibrium are instants of rest, unity, and peace. However, natural moments do not linger. They cannot be extended through an act of will, nor can they be observed. Any such effort distorts the natural, selfless cycle of breathing.

Where does inhaling come from? It arises from complete exhalation, just as exhaling arises from complete inhalation. Where does inhaling go? It disappears in complete inhalation; exhaling disappears in complete exhalation. Each activity's origin is the completion of the other activity; each activity disappears with its complete manifestation. In complete breathing we arise from peace and unity and we return to peace and unity. We sense this when we relax and give ourselves to our breathing. However, to deeply realize this truth our breathing must be pure activity.

Breathing practice is powerful and effective, but its value is limited if it is confined to formal practice situations. Our breathing practice rests on the truth of Dharma activity; therefore, we can apply these principles to other areas of our lives. In this way we can realize the benefits of practice throughout our lives. (contd. on page 2)

Breathing and Relationship

(contd.)

The practice of complete breathing is a basis for realizing complete relationship. The selfless interaction of inhaling and exhaling arise from and return to peace and completeness. Complete breathing is the realization of this natural, selfless rhythm. So it is for relationship.

Normally, we consider relationship as the interaction between two people. The individuals are seen as the main focus of the relationship; it begins and ends with them. However, the lessons we learn from breathing practice emphasize activities, not entities. To truly understand breathing, we must dissolve ourselves into breathing's activities; to understand relationship we must dissolve ourselves into the activities that comprise it. Individuals involved in a relationship are subsumed within the essential activities of relating. They do not stand separate from this interaction, which is how we think when we focus on the individuals rather than the activities.

As with breathing, a relationship has two essential activities: giving and receiving. The dynamic interaction of these two activities is more complex than breathing, and occurs much faster, but like breathing, relationship is cyclic. Like breathing, the origins and destinations of relational activity are peace and unity, which are realized only when selfless giving and receiving are the heart of relating.

Relationship begins with receiving. To relate with someone, we must see, hear, and feel them as they are in this moment, in the context of the entire situation, without judgment or interpretation. For our receiving to be complete, it must be selfless; we unify with the other person for just an instant, which is a moment of peace. However, if our self is our primary focus, we will only see our interpretation of these actions, not the actions themselves. If our self intervenes, the receiving is not complete.

Having received, we then give ourselves. A complete response is a response to the situation in that instant. It is a selfless act of giving, spontaneously incorporating all the characteristics of giver, receiver, and situation. It arises from unity and moves to unity. Here is another opportunity for our self to intervene. If our response is tempered by self-interest, then we are not truly responding to the situation. We are maneuvering to gain an advantage. When our self intervenes, peace and unity disappear.

The misunderstanding and confusion we experience in relationship arises from our self's intervention in receiving or giving. Our focus in relationship must be on the activities of relating, not our self-interest. If the activities are clear, they will realize their full expression, which spontaneously gives rise to a suitable response. Our self must get out of the way; we must allow the situation to speak for itself, to itself, by itself.

This does not mean that our considerations are completely ignored. Our values, interests, and preferences are all part of our giving and receiving. By emphasizing the activities of relating, however, our self-interest occurs within the context of the moment. It is not independent of the situation. In a nutshell, it is the difference between being committed to relating or to ourselves.

How do we give ourselves completely to relationship? By unifying mind and body with the activities of relating. The process of unifying mind and body comes from being awake and detached. The first step is simply to pay attention. Our initial efforts are willful; we have to bring our minds back to the activity at hand, again and again, but as our practice matures we more readily merge with our activity.

Being awake to our world is not observing or thinking, which are inherently dualistic activities. My teacher warned about the problem of two-dimensional thinking in a three-dimensional world. He emphasized the spherical nature of breathing, comparing it to being at the center of a ball that expands and contracts with the flow of our breath. "When you inhale, inhale the entire universe; when you exhale, exhale the entire universe." But be careful: We are not to imagine a sphere contracting and expanding, but to awaken to the spherical nature of experience.

Even in the simple and natural activity of breathing, our self asserts itself, commenting and comparing. It is impossible to give ourselves completely to inhaling and exhaling, giving and receiving, when we are constantly listening to our subjective commentary. Ignore the commentary, unify with inhaling and exhaling, giving and receiving.

(contd. on page 3)

Breathing and Relationship

(contd.)

The vivid immediacy of complete breathing naturally dissolves the commenting mind.

When we unify with our breathing, we realize the selfless, spontaneous nature of breathing and we are open to the peace and unity that underlie breathing. With this understanding we can approach the other activities of living and discover the same principles at work.

Each moment of our lives is a moment of relationship. Every moment is born from peace and completeness, every moment dissolves into peace and completeness. We do not realize this peace because too often we are looking for personal advantage or trying to protect the limited self we imagine ourselves to be. We miss the inherent peace of relationship because we are trying to protect a phantom.

Pure receiving is selfless; complete reception is an instant of peace. Pure giving is selfless; complete giving is an instant of peace. When we unify with our giving and receiving, we are unifying with the central activities of each moment of our lives. When we discard the illusion of a separate self, then practice, relationship, and living are one activity.

(First published in 2005)

Bear Canyon Forest Therapy

George Peknik

On Tuesday, February 12, 2019, my friend and Zen mentor David D'Agostino invited me and others to go Forest Bathing, as part of our Zen practice. Forest Bathing is the traditional Japanese practice of immersing yourself in nature to improve your well-being with the healing powers of nature. This was only my second time, but I found it much more healing than the first because of the location David chose. It was Bear Canyon in the Sandia Mountains near my east-side residence in Albuquerque and a place I have considered my personal refuge ever since moving

cross-town about nine months ago. Before I moved, my west-side place for meditation and connecting with nature was the Bosque. Nowadays, I ponder the canyon every morning from Academy Hills Park and meditate there from time to time. You could say I have fallen deeply in love with that part of Mother Earth.

We first sat in a circle on cushions at a pleasant spot on the slopes of an unnamed minor peak that I have used as a focus point while meditating. David, an artist, who regularly leads the Albuquerque Zen Center Forest Bathing, chose the spot and explained the eight activities we would engage in for this excursion:

1. Intention / After David introduced the overall purpose of forest bathing, we took turns "crossing the threshold" by sharing our "intentions" — how we hoped we would benefit from forest bathing. According to Buddhist tradition, before there can be a result (karma), there is an action. Before action, there is one's will, and before one's will, there is one's intention. My intention was to raise the level of my connection to this canyon and mountain, to strengthen the bond."

2. Deep-Seeing / We were asked to slowly wander off until we chose, or were "invited by," a spot to examine closely. We were to try to foster a mental state that is present in the moment and focus only on what matters at that moment through all five senses. Then we were to reassemble.

3. Sharing Circle / Again on our cushions, David invited us to share something that we felt or noticed during the invitation (only if we would like to), by starting our sentences with "I noticed...."

I noticed the beauty and presence of my favorite Bear Canyon mountain and some of its residents, including prickly bear cacti, lovely Blue Gamma grass, which I examined closely, and tiny bits of broken rocks and minerals, and how they seem to form a connected community."

(contd. on page 4)

Donors: C Alelyunas, M Bethea, C Blocher, S Boese, D Cabral, JA Craig, J Creek, D D'Agostino, M Eddy, C Gibson, Hart, M Hughes, Seishin Jones, S Komagata, P Livingston, S & C Livingston, L Maki, Myosho Matthews, L McCann, J MacNamara, C Mead & M Penhall, K Miller, N Montoya, D Mullen, J Meyer, J Nimitz, D Nolte, L Olen, K Parker, G Peknik, A Pimentel, J Redel, M Reese, S Reiger, P Ryder, R Saadia, Open Sky Zendo, R Sanchez, F Scarlito, B Schieber, V Seiser, E Shir, S Stokhof de Jong, J & D Taber, B Teague, Thirsty Eye, B Tingley, J Trainor, Daishin Vigil, H von Briesen Jr, A Wells, T & D Whalen, D Wolfskeht, S Young

Bear Canyon Forest Therapy

(contd.)

4. Experiencing Snow / David then asked us to follow him up the slope to a patch of snow. We were asked to put our bare hands together and scoop up a large snowball, to hold it for about ten minutes, to take in how the coldness feels and to pay attention to our body's sensations.

5. Sharing Circle / Again we took turns sharing about what we noticed and felt. I noticed how my early discomfort gradually turned to numbness; and then when I looked across the western plains to Mt. Taylor in the distance, even the numbness subsided.

6. Noticing Movement / David then asked us to slowly wander in any direction to which we were drawn, or "invited", and to intentionally notice all movements in the forest as another forest therapy practice. We were not to walk single file, just to stay within sight of each other, for about twenty minutes before reassembling.

7. Sharing Circle / Again we took turns sharing what we noticed and felt. I noticed how shortly after finding my spot and sitting down, the wind suddenly but gently picked up. While until that moment I could see no movement in my surroundings at all, suddenly I was taken by how the heads of my new friends – the tops of Blue Grama grass were swaying, even dancing, with the wind.

8. Tea Ceremony / We concluded the morning's activities with hot tea on our cushions and our mutual hopes to meet again soon, perhaps in the Bosque or Ojito Wilderness.

In conclusion, I was fortunate to have three key take-aways from my second Forest bathing experience. As I had hoped, I successfully added to my Zen practice routine; I felt closer to my special Bear Canyon mountain, now that I had been able to walk up part of it for the first time; and I unexpectedly got to know a new resident of the canyon and mountain—Blue Grama Grass.

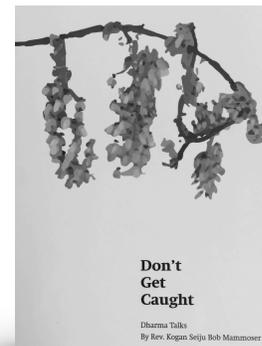
Welcome to AZC

AZC recently welcomed new sangha members: Samani Lea Hughes came into the world to Michael and Elena on Oct. 28th; Casey and Casey saw the birth of their first child, Violet Rose Buccino-Mullen, on Sept. 22nd; and Jordan and Zuzia delivered Rainer Vick on Nov. 30th.

AZC News & Event

The Albuquerque Zen Center celebrated its 30th Anniversary on November 9th with a special ceremony followed by a New Mexican feast. It was a time for reflection and a time to express gratitude to the many individuals--past and present--who have devoted time, energy, and resources to keep the Center open and the sangha thriving.

As an expression of gratitude to Seiju, AZC published 30 dharma talks titled *Don't Get Caught*. The essays range from the basic practice of sitting and breathing to deeper discussions about understanding silence, how to find peace in one's life, and living in the present moment. The books are \$20.00 and are available at AZC and on the website. They can be shipped for an additional \$4.25. All proceeds go directly to AZC.



The "turning point"
of practice we speak of?
Raven leaps, Hawk spreads
its wings; storm arises and,
falling, rain sings.

In the breath, laughter,
in the breath, pain.

Pyrrhic embers
relinquish fire;
thoughts of gain
flare, expire.

we turn
we gyre
through birth,
through death.
we are dancers,
on the breath.

Anonymous

**Heart Suture [Sandia Crest Remix, Thigh Mash-Up at 10,678 feet]
by Lisa Gill**

what chant is not butterscotch
nose pressed to bark

of ponderosa two hundred feet below
the peeking towers, well past the signs

announcing Danger: No Trespassing
what's "no" to rope and carabineer

what's yes to a few teenagers
except descent

at the base we are rappellant, unclipping
everything we come unhitched

heady with altitude or adrenaline
in our ears nothing but the roar of city

reduced to wind, that sun-sheered chill
mirroring all our bright expectations

I hear it crack--
the future, our big break, and see

how the forthcoming tumble will strike me
send a slab of rock sailing straight

through my torso, the image whole when
I am hollowed out, body as picture frame:

form is emptiness, emptiness the form
of ponderosa visible through my core

that window where body once was
beautiful I gasp

then start--
to run too late is to hear the cap break

off granite cliff the clap of thunder
pure plummet I catch midstride

and here I am for a split second
before everything and my body crashes

to ground
with my thigh cradling mountain

as if this chunk of limestone were gentle
my leg a sandstone and mica pinking

every tree and cloud patiently awaiting
my body as viewfinder, bent

double the horizon line still
baited on the unfinished story

so what broke?
my breath and the stone teaching me

how to shatter how
to shimmer how decades later

to explain the work of ascending
what it means to look up and up

and the pain--up--of distance perceived
by flesh impaired with vision

enamored and almost understanding
the fallen mandate:

"be this open"
but how I ask

can I continue to hoist my flesh up
each cliff each day and how

can I not?

Upcoming events

The Zazenkai/Day Sits with Mitra Bishop, Roshi for 2020 will be held on: January 18, April 4, June 6, and August 29. They run from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm. Please bring a brown bag lunch. Sanzen is generally offered. More details will be available in advance of each Zazenkai. For more information please contact Daishin Patrick Vigil at prvigil@hotmail.com.

Jodo Practice

The second season of Jodo training at AZC begins on March 7th. For more information, pick up a brochure in the meeting room or email Jim at knowthewind1@gmail.com.

Kai Han

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

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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.

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Weekly Practice Schedule

Monday-Saturday morning zazen
6:00-7:30 a.m.

Monday- Wednesday evening zazen
6:00-7:00 p.m.

Thursday Discussion Group
6:00-7:00 p.m.

Saturday Samu Practice
8:15-9:15 a.m.

Saturday mid-morning zazen
9:30-11:00 a.m.

Friday evening & Sunday
closed

Beginner's Instruction

Second Saturday of every month
10:30-11:30a.m.