

## **July-August 2015**

It's been three months since Deep Streams Zen group began meeting in Ventura. I have enjoyed sitting and interacting with many of you. In July, we will begin to meet for zazen on Sundays from 2:30-4:30 (rather than Saturday mornings) in the Gooden Center at St. Paul's Church. We are also planning a daylong retreat (zazenkai) every 4-8 weeks at St. Mike's University Church in Santa Barbara. The first one will be July 11. This offers the opportunity to many in our area to engage and deepen their practice. At zazenkai, I will be offering dokusan (private dharma meeting).

I'm delighted that we now have a newsletter, a vehicle for communication and community, edited by Larry Barber. Larry will also be our point of contact. I'm glad that we are updating our website ([www.deepstreams.org](http://www.deepstreams.org)) as a hub for our programs. Jonathan Horton will improve and maintain our online capacity. Kim DeBacco will coordinate volunteers for a variety of tasks, such as setting up for zazen; learning certain dojo leadership tasks, such as leading walking meditation and beginning and ending sitting periods ("Jikkijitsu," what Larry's been doing) and leading sutras ("Ino," what Kim's been doing); as well as connecting with the community and helping disseminate program information.

It is heartening that Kim, Larry and Jonathan have stepped forward. Jack Derenale has also helped with setting up the dojo. I invite you to consider volunteering so our fledgling sangha becomes viable and our practice sustainable.

I recall sitting around the long, low wood table on the covered porch of the Maui Zendo in 1972. During a discussion with residents, Aitken Roshi asked us what had brought us there. Each of us answered, in one way or another, that we had come to practice Zen. Then someone asked him why he had come. "I too came to practice Zen. But I want to create a good place to practice Zen." The nuance was lost on most of us. Given how profoundly interconnected we are, our practice, after all, is not solely for us.

This is the Bodhisattva spirit. Let's share and grow it together.

## **August-September 2015**

Eighteen century Zen master Hakuin Ekaku revived Zen in Japan and is one of our own ancestors in the Yamada-Aitken tradition. In his "Song of Zazen," Hakuin Zenji speaks of those who listen to Zen teachings with a reverent heart and says they receive blessing without end. Then he urges us on, "Much more, turn yourself about / confirm your own self-nature / self-nature that is no nature, / you are far beyond mere doctrine."

Where and how are we beyond doctrine? (Hint: It's not some other place, time, or state.)

Hakuin continues, “With form that is no form, going and coming — we are never astray / With thought that is no thought / Singing and dancing are the voice of the Tao.”

I love these words and the vivid reality they present and invite us to personally experience. After nearly six months in Ventura, Deep Streams Zen Institute has begun offering retreats and workshops in Santa Barbara. We are also exploring relocating our weekly practice to Santa Barbara. We invite you to join us for a business meeting and pot-luck on August 15 to discuss this and other matters.

I do not glibly say "easy come, easy go." Rather, let's take to heart Hakuin's pointer, “Going and coming, never astray.” For the benefit of all.

### **September-October 2015**

On August 29, in Deep Streams' first workshop in Santa Barbara, we spent the morning exploring what awakened conduct is. What can we learn from the Great Vows for All, otherwise known as the Bodhisattva Vows? We examined this perennial Mayahana text closely, looking at various possible translations of each phrase, each vow, with a view toward connecting with it afresh.

On September 19, we will examine what liberation is and what we can learn from the Heart Sutra, another perennial Mahayana text. We will explore a number of different translations and ways of understanding its message in order to realize and personalize its truth. Join us for the second in Deep Streams' three-part series on the co-arising qualities of Dhyana, Prajna, and Sila (meditation, wisdom, and awakened conduct). Let's enjoy the fresh breeze of new understanding.

### **October - November 2015**

This is because that is. We interare, as my old teacher Thich Nhat Hanh liked to say. With speech that is bigoted, xenophobic, and misogynistic, we grow cultures of violence. How sad that this has become the order of the day in our political process. With speech and conduct that welcomes, includes, encourages, comforts, and illuminates we create quite a different climate.

How refreshing and uplifting to see Pope Francis on his recent trip to our hemisphere. How drawn we are to him. What is it, other than his celebrity and his title, to get to touch someone "holy?" I think we resonate with his radical welcome, sans judgment, his inclusiveness, and the radically compassionate and boundless love he demonstrates. A peace that passes understanding (and ideology). Can we experience and live it?

## **November-December 2015**

### Nourishing

I just returned from the Parliament of the World's Religions in Salt Lake City. What a heartfelt, festive outpouring of love for our planet and all its many beings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama sent a video, played on the fourth day, in which he urged everyone to express their boundless love in action. Many speakers were so inspiring that it was clear from the outset they were doing just that. His final words were deceptively simple: "All beings need affection." Sharing nourishment, how do we do that?

In Case 89 of the Blue Cliff Record, Yun-yen asked Tao-wu, "How does the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion use all those many hands and eyes?"

Tao-wu said, "It is like reaching behind your head for your pillow in the middle of the night."

When we are composed and attentive, unfettered by self-absorption, then standing up, sitting down, laughing, and weeping are the activities of this bodhisattva. She has two names in Zen: Kanjizai, the one who perceives the self at rest, and Kanzeon, the one who sees the sounds of the world, the sounds of suffering, and responds in accord. Rest and responsiveness. These are not far away. They do not reside in another. Nourish yourself with your zazen, with your moment to moment attentiveness.

Now, how do you use those many hands and eyes?

## **December 2015 – January 2016**

### Bodhi In The Time Of Darkness

Next week, on December 8<sup>th</sup>, we commemorate Buddha's enlightenment, Bodhi Day. Completely absorbed, having let go of body and mind, Shakyamuni looked up and saw the morning star. All conceptual frameworks fell away. What did he realize? Legend has it that the Buddha exclaimed, "Now I see that all beings are awakened nature itself. It is only their attachments and delusions that prevent them from bearing witness." How do we live Buddha's awakening today?

In 1983 I spent the summer at Plum Village with Thich Nhat Hanh and his community. As he and I were returning from weeding in the garden, I asked him how he understood that accomplished teachers, whose enlightenment had been confirmed by respected senior teachers, could comport themselves so ignorantly, even harmfully, with their students and organizations. "Perhaps they're not enlightened at all," he said. I questioned further and his response concluded with "Enlightenment is the bomb." I knew he wasn't speaking colloquial American; he wasn't saying enlightenment is awesome.

Most of us think that enlightenment removes all suffering, but it's not true. Enlightenment that is followed up with diligent practice with a true teacher goes a long way to removing self-absorbed reactive suffering. It opens us to the world. Kanzeon, or Avalokitesvara, is the one who sees the sounds of the world, the sounds of suffering. She responds freely and wisely. Her "cousin," Kanjizai, is the one who perceives the self at rest. Perceiving the true nature of the self brings liberation, and also brings into sharp relief our intimacy with all beings.

How can it not pain us to witness the epidemic of violence scorching our country, scorching the world? If we see at all, if we have a beating heart, we will be moved. We are roiled, we are inspired, we grieve. And thoughtfully we respond. We are by nature open to the world; it is not "other." We are kindred. Practicing, we cultivate the ability to be mindful of traumatic ripples inherent in staying open. We don't have to avert our gaze, apprehensive about being constantly overwhelmed. We maintain our response ability.

That summer of 1983 Thich Nhat Hanh, An Huong, and I worked on the translation of his *Guide to Walking Meditation*. Here are the last lines. I am grateful to discover today in my own words those of my old teacher, words perennial and still to the point.

"Country roads fragrant with the smell of fresh cut hay, paths shaded by large oak trees, lanes covered with beautiful falling leaves — these are your walking meditation paths. Please enjoy them. They do not lead you into forgetfulness. Rather, as you step, you can remember, you can awaken to see the real suffering in the world. Then, every path, every street — from the back alleys of Beirut, to a hostile or violent family environment, to the roads of Vietnam where undetonated mines lie buried and still explode, taking the lives of children and farmers — every path in this world is your walking meditation path. Once you are awake you will not hesitate to go onto those paths. You will suffer, but not from doubt, worry, or fear for yourself. You will suffer with all beings, in kinship, as you feel the compassion of an awakening person, a *bodhisattva*. Then all those you encounter along the path, loving and peaceful or not, will likewise be *bodhisattvas*, your companions on the way."

## January-February 2016

### Light

As the days lengthen and the sun returns, some will ask the perennial question, "What (or where) is the light?" The great Tang period Zen ancestor Yun-men said,

"Everyone has their own light. If you want to see it, you can't. The darkness is dark, dark." Yunmen goes on to say, "The storehouse. The gate."

When all our conceptions of light and dark give way, what becomes clear? It can't be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, or imagined. Yet it is closer than our own nose, it nourishes us daily, and we are embodying it moment to moment. How?

Mary Oliver writes,

3.

I know, you never intended to be in this world.  
But you're in it all the same.

So why not get started immediately.

I mean, belonging to it.  
There is so much to admire, to weep over.

And to write music or poems about.

Bless the feet that take you to and fro.  
Bless the eyes and the listening ears.  
Bless the tongue, the marvel of taste.  
Bless touching.

You could live a hundred years, it's happened.  
Or not.

I am speaking from the fortunate platform  
of many years,  
none of which, I think, I ever wasted.  
Do you need a prod?  
Do you need a little darkness to get you going?  
Let me be urgent as a knife, then,  
and remind you of Keats,  
so single of purpose and thinking, for a while,  
he had a lifetime.

A beer commercial features a rich old man telling us “Stay thirsty, my friend.”  
But thirsty for what? Some think the heart of Buddhism is relinquishing all desire. But  
Bodhicitta, the aspiration for enlightenment, is not solely the province of Buddhists, and  
enlightenment is not solely for the self. How can we mobilize this thirst? And what does  
its disciplined cultivation reveal? Mary Oliver continues,

4. Late yesterday afternoon, in the heat,  
all the fragile blue flowers in bloom  
in the shrubs in the yard next door had  
tumbled from the shrubs and lay  
wrinkled and fading in the grass. But  
this morning the shrubs were full of  
the blue flowers again. There wasn't  
a single one on the grass. How, I  
wondered, did they roll back up to

the branches, that fiercely wanting,  
as we all do, just a little more of  
life?

— (From *The Fourth Sign of the Zodiac* by Mary Oliver)

Desire in the service of liberation, peace, and justice for all. To realize the Buddha's dream. To "make of yourself a lamp."

## February-March 2016

As a lamp, a cataract, a star in space,  
an illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble,  
a dream, a cloud, a flash of lightning  
view all created things like this.

—Diamond Sutra

Illusion here is not identical with delusion. Illusion comes from *ludere*, to play. It connotes the play of appearances and disappearances. And cataract, a film than is capable of clouding our vision. But, vision of what?

My mother died two months ago at the age of 97. We grew especially close during the last year of her life, in the midst of her worsening dementia. Losing her has brought into relief the mystery at the heart of our deaths. I also realize, anew, that it also describes our lives.

Dream. Is it something we do while asleep? Something that conveys our hopes and aspirations? The values we live by? Aitken-Roshi would say "We are living Buddha's dream." He was not only referring to a perennial experience of awakening and the ancient teachings that inspire and animate us.

Dream. It is our very nature. The five skandas: form (body), sensation, perception, mental formation, consciousness, come together moment to moment in response to shifting causes and conditions. We are softly assembled.

Ephemeral and ineffable, such is the "stuff" we're made of. Completely insubstantial. What a miracle; we walk, we talk, we laugh, we weep. The raven calls, the clouds gather. Who can not be grateful for this opportunity? Let us hold it, fully cognizant of its preciousness, and devote ourselves to realizing and living it fully. A lamp, a raft, for the benefit of all.

## March-April 2016

“To carry the self forward and realize the ten thousand dharmas is delusion.  
That the ten thousand dharmas advance and realize the self is enlightenment.”

This verse, by the great thirteenth century Zen master Dogen, is from his Genjo Koan, or Way of Everyday Life. Some take the passage on emptiness in the Heart Sutra—“No sound, smell, taste, touch” and so on—to mean that sensory experience is itself delusory. This is not so. Rather, it is “chasing out through the five senses,” irritably reaching for some external solution, that distorts our experience. “Staying home,” we find affinity with all life as it presents itself in the particulars of living. We realize intimacy.

## April-May 2016

Each time you sit you enter the silence of the Great Way. As you take your Bodhi seat you are trusting your own nature. The ancient practice dates to Shakyamuni Buddha under the Bodhi tree and beyond. Wherever you are, you sit with, you breathe with, all beings. Resolve to let small-mindedness and self-absorption go. Waves rise and fall, but we settle into the vast and inexhaustible source of nourishment. This inhale, this exhale, this great silence.

## May-June 2016

I recently heard a talk by Vandana Shiva, Indian scholar, environmental and anti-globalization activist, and author. She is a fiercely compassionate, fearless, and wise elder. Mantra literally means true word. “Inspiration” does not do justice to what happens when we listen to true words linked together over 90 minutes. Her most recent book is *Soil, Not Oil*. If the soil could speak for itself, it would have the voice of Vandana Shiva.

A translation of the great Zen master Kobo-Daishi came to my attention. The translator probably took liberties with the original: “You can tell the depth of a person’s awake-ness by how they serve others.” Not ‘serve’ in a patronizing or self-aggrandizing way. Rather, ‘serve’ by understanding that our own benefit and the benefit of others are radically interwoven. Then we can respond freely and generously in ways ordinary and creative. Amid the greed, hatred, and delusion we practice dhyana, immersive awareness; prajna, penetrating discernment and emancipatory insight; and sila, awakened activity. Without a smack of saintliness or the stink of zen, (*Zen no akushu*) we vigorously make common cause with soil, air, water, animals, the great web of all beings. Kwan-Yin Bodhisattvas all.

## August-September 2016

In dark times such as these, when senseless violence and endless war prevail, I recall my old teacher, Aitken-Roshi, manifesting the dharma of loving action. He did this by calling out systems, not excoriating individuals. In these times, more than ever, we need one another. And we are making common cause in surprising places. Right in the eye of the storm, we find connection with those we may have considered strange bedfellows: “Other.”

I recall my old friend Joanna Macy, who for 40 years has been reassuring activists struggling with grief that their tears express their love for the world and all its creatures. We begin by stopping, looking, and listening; not allowing ourselves to be swept away. Right now, in this moment, we resolve: Let there be peace and let it begin with me. With this inhale, this exhale, these steps. With these words, this conversation. Opening to suffering is part of our path.

Injustice spawns massive suffering, individual and collective. Some of us choose to challenge unjust systems. Buddhist Peace Fellowship recently sponsored a leadership training called “Build, Block, and Be.” It was in this spirit, at the inception of the Iraq War, that leaders from diverse faith traditions rallied in front of the San Francisco Federal Building to protest and stem the rush to aggression; some carried out civil disobedience. Amidst the violence and suffering, we find our way, we practice, we ‘demonstrate’ the Buddha way through our actions.

Another old teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, was asked how he developed The Miracle of Mindfulness after the lessons of the Vietnam War. He imperceptibly corrected the interviewer by saying that he developed and shared the practices during the war, so that those in his own sangha, the School for Social Service, and all those caught up in the devastation, could find some measure of composure and resist the draw to perpetuate the cycle of violence.

We cannot help but feel the impacts of greed, hatred, and delusion. As Kazeon, the bodhisattva of compassion, we hear the sounds of the world, the sounds of suffering. Aitken-Roshi would add we are also Kanjizai, a related aspect of the bodhisattva, who ‘perceives the self at rest.’ Moved and composed, we respond. It may be right in our neighborhood, our garden, our relationships, our conduct, speech, and thought. It may be ‘building, blocking, and being.’ Some say we are a drop in the great ocean. But the ocean is also us. The waves are strong, but they need not sink us. This moment before us is open. We are buoyant, we rise together.

## **September-October 2016**

Sometimes a work of art conveys directly—showing and telling—the unique depths of our living and dying. I found the Japanese film *Sweet Bean* to be such a work.



Sentaro, a middle-aged man, makes and sells a Japanese confection called dorayaki, made from small pancakes and sweet azuki bean paste. Kokue, an old woman, appears one day and expresses interest in a part-time job opening. Their relationship, conveyed with slow pacing and silence that let the human and natural beauty shine, is at the heart of the film.

I won't spoil it but, in a distinctively human way, Kokue is as emotionally transformative to Sentaro as the monju (bean cake) lady was spiritually to Te-shan in the old Zen story: A Diamond Sutra scholar, Te-shan stopped for refreshment at a food stand while traveling. The woman vendor asked him, "I hear the sutra says that past mind cannot be grasped, present mind cannot be grasped, and future mind cannot be grasped. What mind do you intend to refresh?"

Te-shan's world of concepts cracked open and his Zen practice came to life. Perhaps his heart opened too, as ours are likely to do upon entering Sentaro and Kokue's world.

## **October-November 2016**

### Approach

Swimming at Miramar  
wings glide inches above  
the waves  
ah, Pelican

## **November-December 2016**

### Fueled By Outrage: Turning Swords Into Compassionate Action

I don't know where to begin. Shall I start With Michelle Obama's speech, skillfully channeling her profound hurt and anger, her words redolent of truth, denouncing Trump and de-normalizing his hate toward women? Conservative Marybeth Glenn forsaking Trump because of his misogyny and sharply challenging her fellow conservatives to join her? Or Robert De Niro's unusual (for him) public proclamation and take-down of Trump? Let's not forget the release of "13th," Ava DuVernay's scorching, painful, brilliant, inspiring documentary that connects the historical dots of endemic racial injustice, inequality, and violence in our country. And Women's Boat to Gaza, 13 activists bringing world attention and supplies to the isolated and suffocating occupied territory, spearheaded by a retired U.S. Army colonel and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient? Let's not forget the widening non-violent actions against oil pipelines in the American West by Native and non-native peoples. This week, it's been people doing their level-headed best to stand for our collective humanity, to advocate, to struggle.

One thread that runs through it is channeling our outrage. That we hurt demonstrates we are human. That we react emotionally also conveys our common instincts. But to be hurt and not react blindly, to let the traumatic impacts settle and sink

deeply into our roots of peace, that takes doing. Yet we are seeing more and more people doing just this, whether or not they have formally practiced Buddhism! Bravo!

I still hear Sister Chan Khong, lifetime collaborator of Thich Nhat Hanh, at Deep Streams Zen Institute's recent program, "Being Peace In Divisive Times." She focused on anger, on outrage, and conveyed how to face it without suppressing, ignoring, or pretending it is not there. In word, song, and presence, she showed us how to stop — "Don't just do something, stand there" — resisting the urge to react impulsively. Coming home, grounding ourselves in focused, kindly attentiveness: Being peace. Responses then emerge as skillful action, compassionate expression.

Many of us are looking for ways to create "safe zones," as much inside ourselves as with others, so that we stay "fit for duty" as agents of transformation, as Bodhisattvas. A few years ago I had the good fortune to meet a group of social workers visiting from Gaza. We compared notes about working with trauma survivors; long-term residents of occupied territories (them) and veterans of war (me). I felt connected with these therapists, especially one, Hassan El-Zeyada.

During the military operation launched in Gaza by Israel on July 8, 2014, I saw my friend's name in newspaper reports. Attacked while sheltering in the basement, he had been seriously injured and had lost his family in an Israeli bombing: three brothers, his mother, his niece, and his sister-in-law. At the point of greatest shock, injury, and loss he suddenly became the parent of many of his nieces and nephews. His experience echoed others' and went to the heart of the trauma:

"I am so afraid in this building. They may hit it at any time. There is no safe place. Psychologically, that is the problem." He noted that his young daughters had already experienced three wars. "Can you imagine what this means to the new generation? Scared parents cannot assure or secure scared children."

Back in the U.S., Pamela Bengé, the mother of Alfred Alongo, killed in El Cajon, CA, said, "We came from a war zone, Uganda. We wanted protection. That's why we're here. I wanted the children not to be running around, being in fear every night, sleeping in the bush. Being a refugee, I know there are millions of refugees here, seeking a better place, a safe place. That's all—safety. We just wanted to be safe. But now, I ask: Where should we go? I don't know."

Even in our celebrity culture, stars are not immune from threat, terror, and real danger. LeBron James said he was scared these days. Despite having told his kids to comply and be respectful to the police, he was not confident that, if his son got pulled over, he would actually return home.

Nine-year-old Zianna Oliphant, from Charlotte, N.C., spoke at a City Council meeting after another fatal officer-involved shooting: "I feel that we are treated differently than other people," she said, pausing tearfully. "It is a shame that our fathers

and mothers are killed and we can't even see them anymore. It's a shame that we have to go to the graveyard and bury them."

An aunt whose nephew was killed by police struggled with how to best respond, "I believe that not 'everyone' is bad. It is just the ones that are ignorant, afraid, uneducated, and insensitive that are affecting millions and millions of lives." She signed off her Facebook post with the words, "I Won't Be Silent."

At the moment of most extreme strain, when reactivity and outrage is at its highest, when it feels like there is no safe place and despair and hopelessness prevail, we can turn to our deep resources— inside us and with and for others and our communities— to create a safe place to think, feel, and be. We can come home to our collective humanity and respond in accord.