

THE BOOK OF OzZEN:
VOLUME 1
FINDING OUR WAY HOME

*A Selection of Guided Meditations given
during the Years: 2017-2020*

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These guided meditations are offered freely, however, if you wish to make a donation to support Andrew's dharma teachings, please click on this link to the OzZen website: www.ordinarymind.com.au and scroll down to the DONATE NOW link at the end of the Home page.

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Our only guide is our homesickness.

~ Herman Hesse

CONTENTS:

Acknowledgements

Introduction

1. <u>Awareness of Awareness</u>	(27:52)	18
2. <u>I am my Body</u>	(37:19)	22
3. <u>Emotional Hurt (Acceptance)</u>	(19:43)	28
4. <u>Don't Know Mind</u>	(25:31)	33
5. <u>Deepening Awareness</u>	(24:24)	38
6. <u>Silence</u>	(19:02)	41
7. <u>This Precious Moment</u>	(35:42)	45
8. <u>Thoughts</u>	(19:14)	49
9. <u>Consciousness Only</u>	(23:05)	52
10. <u>Resting in Change</u>	(31:40)	55
11. <u>Ecodharma and the Formless Self</u>	(20:44)	59
12. <u>Enjoy the Ride</u>	(42:11)	62
13. <u>Commitment</u>	(40:50)	67
14. <u>At Home in Muddy Water</u>	(22:43)	73
15. <u>Creating a Culture of Awakening</u>	(35:25)	77

16.	<u>Resistance to Being Presence</u>	(31:16)	82
17.	<u>Being-Time</u>	(34:46)	87
18.	<u>Just Sitting (No-Gain)</u>	(34:34)	93
19.	<u>Kindness</u>	(33:11)	98
20.	<u>Interdependence</u>	(37:40)	102
21.	<u>Coming Home</u>	(34:29)	107

*I would like to acknowledge my teacher,
Barry Magid. Without Barry's steadfast
encouragement over the past twenty years these
meditations would never have manifested.*

INTRODUCTION

My understanding of the project of Modern Buddhism, is to make Buddhism relevant to people living in this time and place. To this end, Buddhist modernists such as Stephen Batchelor and my teacher Barry Magid, are reinterpreting the core beliefs of traditional Buddhism, so that it speaks to us now, in a language that we can comprehend and make our own. My own particular school of Zen Buddhism is called The Ordinary Mind Zen School, established by the reformist American Zen Teacher, Charlotte Joko Beck in 1992. The name of the school comes from a famous Zen Koan, called *Ordinary Mind is The Way*. “The way” (the Tao) came from the indigenous Chinese spirituality called Taoism. Zen Buddhism can be understood as the fusion of Taoism and Buddhism. Finding *the way*, literally refers to the way as being our home, our original dwelling place. This is what Ch’an/Zen Buddhism has always pointed towards.

These guided meditations are an invitation to you to find the way, and what the way still offers to us, living our lives now, in the twenty-first century. To cultivate the practice of dwelling nowhere – to finding our home in the midst of impermanence and interdependence. As Dorothy says at the beginning of the Wizard of Oz – “there is no place like home” - this is why the central metaphor in this collection of guided meditations is redefining home as dwelling nowhere. This is the spirit of Ch’an/Zen. According to our Zen tradition, our original dwelling place has always been here and now, but we are prevented from seeing it by our identification with delusions. Hence, we need to harness the power of intention – the intention of creating a safe dwelling place. Dwelling places made out of material substance may provide us with shelter from the elements, but in the end, they cannot protect us from our common destiny – old age, sickness and death. To intentionally cultivate our home-base - our refuge from outrageous fortune without, and the sense of uneasiness within, depending on no-thing, is finally finding the way home. This is why the Buddha emphasised right from the start, the importance of establishing mindfulness in the reality of *experiencing* of just

INTRODUCTION

this moment – so that we can abide safely amidst impermanence and interdependence. However, when we are not mindful, we can get lost in reactivity, harming ourselves and others. In the first of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, mindfulness of the body, we are creating what Joseph Goldstein refers to as the “skeletal framework of the house” we are going to build. Our home and refuge is cultivated through the practice of self-discipline. We express our care for our body-mind and world through the practice of mindfulness. However, it is important not to mistake this home as an island. We are not seeking to isolate ourselves in some kind of fantasy of autonomous self-reliance. Rather, we start off by building a bigger container, to regulate our own mental states, but it cannot stop there. We are building a home or a refuge for *all* beings to shelter under, to express our *care* for all beings and the environments in which they dwell. Our home in the end is boundlessness – total inclusivity – dwelling peacefully within impermanence and interdependence. But we can only start where we are, and it may seem paradoxical, but these guided meditations also provide a map, to a destination that is always here and now! However, as my first mentor, Michael White, the co-founder of Narrative Therapy said: “the maps that I present in this book contribute to an awareness of the diversity of avenues that are available to preferred destinations, avenues that can be charted and rendered familiar”. In other words, there are many different paths to arriving where we began! Each of the guided meditations collected in this book can be seen as a new pathway home.

Guided Meditations and Zen Buddhism

Many of these meditations were originally delivered spontaneously during 2020, in my Zoom Room, where our sangha gathered on a regular basis to keep our connection alive, following the lock-down implemented by our government to protect our community from COVID-19. It was during these uncertain and anxious times that I discovered the power of this kind of practice. I have chosen to call these writings/recordings *guided meditations*. Meditations to guide us to *finding our way home*.

Traditionally, guided meditations have not been part of Zen practice. There are few recognised Zen teachers who deliver guided meditations on a regular basis, unlike their colleagues in the Insight Meditation tradition. This is because when Japanese Zen was imported into the West, the emphasis was placed on learning Zazen (silent sitting) and Zen rituals and liturgy, supplemented by dharma talks and individual or group interviews with a teacher. However, I believe this is changing.

Well-crafted guided meditations can be understood as a form of performance art on the

one hand – and on the other hand, a phenomenological investigation into the process of meditation and the realisation of our True Self. These guided meditations often verge on poetry, which makes sense, because poetry was traditionally the preferred form for expressing the Awakened Way by many a Zen master. For example, the writings of Ch’an master Hongzhi Zhengjue are seen as “poetic expressions of meditative concentration and insight, and of the working of awakened mind”. There are many famous Zen enlightenment poems. In many ways, I see these guided meditations as a continuation of this ancient tradition, in a form accessible for today’s culture. They are also a rigorous investigation into the nature of our subjective experience as it is transformed through meditative practice. Guided meditations are an ideal genre for exploring our direct experience of self-world – our sensations and perceptions, feelings and thoughts, and how they co-arise together. We could say there is a relationship between guided meditations and phenomenology – that branch of philosophy which explores our subjective experience of our self-worlds. Finally, there is no “plot” in a guided meditation – or maybe I should say the plot is always circular – being in-depth explorations of The Now, we always end where we began!

My motivation to develop a form of guided meditation that aligns itself with the Zen Buddhist tradition was twofold: firstly, guided meditation as a form of meditation is popular and it increases accessibility, especially for new students; secondly, if we don’t develop a form of guided meditation informed by Zen Buddhism, it leaves a vacuum in the field which gets filled with non-Zen forms of guided meditation. It is therefore important to develop a Zen form of guided meditation that adheres to the four essential principles of Zen teaching, often referred to as the *Four Seals* or *Four Marks of Existence*: suffering, impermanence, insubstantiality of ego-self (interdependence) and nirvana (peace/happiness). Finally, I use the word guided, to indicate that all the meditations are pointing to the pathless path that helps us find our way home amidst an uncertain world. This guidance comes from the Source itself when we listen carefully, calling us Home.

Who is this book for?

The text and recordings of these guided meditations can be used by anyone who may have felt lost or anxious during these uncertain times or who may have a general interest in spirituality, philosophy, or meditation. However, the meditations were specifically composed for Zen students of OzZen, to complement their Zen meditation practice. This book is also written for senior students of OzZen who would like to

INTRODUCTION

develop their own skills in leading groups in guided meditation. These meditations could also be used by therapists who practice mindfulness-based therapies, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and shared with their psychotherapy clients.

I became very conscious while sitting together with my students in the Zoom Room during the year 2020, on how we miss out on the actual felt presence of sitting together in a physical room. How, if we were all sitting in the same room together, we would be more conscious of each other's physical presence. We would be able to see each other and even be aware of people breathing. Sitting together in a room amplifies that sense of physical closeness. Even before the Covid lockdowns, it was not always possible for people interested in Zen to sit with a Zen group, for geographical or other reasons. Therefore, many hours of meditation will usually be practised sitting alone in the sanctuary of our own bedroom or lounge room. However, even though you may be sitting alone, it can help to imagine you are sitting together with others. After all, we practice Zen not just for ourselves but for everyone. That's why I suggest at times during the meditations the importance of being aware of sharing this moment with each other. Of holding in mind our fellow practitioners, our fellow sangha members, all the people we care about and all the beings in the world, holding everyone in our minds as we sit. This is the nature of the inclusiveness of our practice.

Background: Mindfulness, Self-Compassion and Psychotherapy

The first forms of what became known as Buddhist guided meditations were transmitted to the West in the form of metta practice (loving kindness) which comes from the Buddhist sutra found in the Pali canon of the same name. This was introduced into the West in the 1970's by teachers of Insight Meditation such as Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg within a Buddhist context. Guided meditation was popularised throughout Western culture more broadly through the vehicle of the secular mindfulness movement, spearheaded by Jon Kabat-Sinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course in the 1990's. Kabat-Sinn, a medical doctor, adapted the method of meditation found in the Buddhist Insight (Vipassana) tradition, initially for the needs of patients suffering from chronic pain at the pain clinic in Boston. Forms of guided meditation such as the "body scan", a core practice in the MBSR training, became well-known. During the body scan, the teacher guiding the meditation literally directs the student's focus of attention to various parts of the body, working their way from the head down to the toes or vice versa. Guided meditations were also developed

for investigating thoughts and emotions. Participants practiced guided meditations during class time and home-based practice during the week in-between classes. Later, as secular mindfulness gained in popularity, MBSR was adapted for depression by integrating mindfulness with cognitive therapy.

MBSR was also innovative in the sense that it was designed to be accessible for people of all ages and backgrounds and physical abilities. The guided meditations practiced in MBSR could be done while lying down or sitting in a chair. Unfortunately, in Zen circles at the time, using a chair was often viewed as being not as authentic as sitting in half or full lotus. Again, I think this tendency to look down on using a chair is now changing and most of my students in OzZen use a chair, as do I. In contrast with the work of Kabat-Zinn, the work of Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg, founding members of the Insight Meditation Society's retreat centre in Barre, Massachusetts, base their work on the Buddhist tradition they inherited from their teacher U Pandita, a Buddhist monk from Myanmar, who taught the Mahasi method of Vipassana (Insight) meditation. Both Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg lead students in guided meditations, exploring all aspects of the curriculum they have developed for the IMS. Sharon Salzberg has also been influential in popularising guided meditations based on the loving kindness meditation, found in the Metta sutra. Loving kindness practice, like mindfulness, has also been adapted and secularised by Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff, who developed a Mindfulness Self-Compassion (MSC) program modelled on the MBSR program. Guided meditations are also now used by most secular psychotherapists, practicing in mental health, whose work integrates mindfulness and self-compassion into individual or group psychotherapy process. Examples of guided meditations can be found in Mindfulness- Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) and Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFST).

Guided Meditation and Western Nonduality Teachers

The other major source of influence on these meditations comes from the Advaita Vedanta tradition, which was revitalised by the great Indian sage, Sri Ramana Maharshi, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Advaita simply means “not-two” and teaches that Reality or Universal Consciousness is none other than our own Self. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism, another form of Advaita, were popularised in the West by the French teacher Jean Klein.

Rupert Spira is a contemporary representative of Advaita teaching in the tradition

INTRODUCTION

brought to the West by Jean Klein, what he refers to as simply the “Direct Path”. Rupert Spira’s collection of guided meditations on the essence of non-duality published in 2014 (the year I became a Zen teacher) opened to me a new way of presenting guided meditations that went beyond what I had found in the secular mindfulness tradition. Rupert Spira’s friend and teacher, Francis Lucille, has described guided meditation as essentially a poetic art. Spira’s work is both poetical and rigorous and inspired me to develop a form of guided meditation that could be incorporated into my Ordinary Mind Zen teaching. This was also the beginning of the process of integrating Advaita and Zen (and other nondual teachings) into my teaching, in the spirit of the Awakened Way being universal, which I believe is fully in alignment with the legacy of Joko Beck, the founder of the Ordinary Mind Zen School (more below). Rupert Spira’s guided meditations general run from 30 to 60 minutes. Spira himself sits in a chair at the front of a theatre style auditorium where the audience also sits in chairs. He speaks spontaneously, with some pauses for silence.

Other “nondual teachers” who have made an art of guided meditation are Adyashanti and Stephen Bodian. Both Adyashanti and Stephen Bodian started their training in the Zen tradition but later were influenced by the teachings of Jean Klein who was the teacher of Francis Lucille, Rupert Spira’s teacher. Other popular nondual teachers belong to what has been referred to as the Satsang movement, derived from Ramana Maharishi and popularised by Poonja and several of his adherents such as Mooji and Gangaji.

The relationship between Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta is a huge topic, and I would refer readers to David Loy’s book on non-duality for a more detailed exploration of the similarities and differences between Advaita and Zen. The Australian philosopher Leesa Davis has also written an excellent book on the PhD research she completed comparing and contrasting the contemporary traditions of Soto Zen and Advaita Vedanta in Australia. Advaita Vedanta comes from the Indian culture of philosophical spirituality (Upanishads), which emphasises the identity of the transcendent (Brahman/Universal Consciousness) with the Atman (Self). Suffering arises because people mistake their egocentric self with the Atman, and hence remain prisoners of dualistic consciousness. Zen, on the other hand, originates from the integration of Indian Buddhism into Chinese spirituality, which is firmly planted in the naturalist world view of Taoism. Taoism, rather than using rational language, draws on poetical metaphors taken from nature, such as Rivers and Mountains, to express spiritual teachings. This tends to give Zen a more down to earth feeling.

The differences between Zen and Advaita also reflects our experience as human beings

– how we discover ourselves initially to be both subjects to ourselves and objects to others. This subject-object duality is taken for granted whereas both Advaita and Zen seek to deconstruct this taken for granted reality, which is often referred to in both traditions as a “dream”. that we need to “wake-up” from. Advaita takes the path of showing that all we experience is exactly that – our own experience – what appears to be external is in reality nothing but our own perception, or consciousness only. Advaita teaches that the world appears *within us*, and ultimately within Universal Consciousness; and hence says “not two”. Zen, on the other hand, recognises how we are entrapped in duality, but also wants to ensure that we don’t create another object out of consciousness that we identify with. Zen develops a “third perspective” that includes both – the world of duality (the relative world) and the world of nonduality (the essential world) and hence we say in Zen, “not two, not one”. We need to be able to live in the world of duality, while at the same time see duality from within the larger context of non-duality. The work of Rupert Spira also recognises these two aspects of the spiritual journey. The first stage of the path being referred to as the “inward-facing path” in Advaita and “The Great Death” in Zen, where we see into the illusion of the separate self; and the second stage of the path, known as the “outward-facing path” in Advaita and “The Great Rebirth” in Zen, where we integrate this understanding back into the world of duality.

Guided Meditation within the Ordinary Mind Zen School

The Ordinary Mind Zen School was established by the American Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck. It has a distinctive psychologically minded approach to Zen practice, as well as maintaining an understanding of the classical Zen literary cannon (the enlightenment poems and stories about enlightenment found in the koan collections). Joko Beck also read widely from sources outside of the Buddhist tradition and was greatly influenced by the book *I Am That* by the Indian Advaita teacher Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, who died in 1981. Although Joko Beck’s teaching practice was clearly influenced by vipassana techniques (observing body sensations and labelling thoughts, come directly from this tradition), she did not practice guided meditations of any kind. For example, she was wary of loving kindness practice, worried that it might become a way of avoiding life, just as it is. However, one of Joko’s dharma heirs, Ezra Bayda, did create a loving kindness style of guided meditation, which he aligned with Joko Beck’s teachings.

INTRODUCTION

Guided Meditations and Zen Buddhism: The Four Seals

The guided meditations in this book contain the imprint of what are called the four seals found in Zen Buddhism. The word seal comes from the stamp an artist leaves on their work in Japan. These four seals (sometimes called the four marks of existence) summarise Buddhism and they refer to the universal or absolute aspects of reality that apply to all human beings regardless of culture or history. The first seal is that life is suffering. For all human beings, without exception, suffering is unavoidable; the second seal is that all phenomena are impermanent; the third seal is all phenomena, including human beings, are interdependent (this is sometimes stated as being without any inherent fixed self – they have no substantial independent existence of their own); and the fourth seal is nirvana (sometimes interpreted as peace which transcends mental states) or non-separation from life as it is. Suffering exists by the nature of being born, with the vicissitudes of life and all the vulnerabilities that go with embodied beings. However, *when we resist* the reality of impermanence and interdependence we suffer psychologically. It is this *psychological suffering* that our Ordinary Mind Zen teaching is designed to liberate us from. Practice therefore is about aligning ourselves with these universal realities and making our home amid impermanence and interdependence – defined by Zen Master Dogen as *Buddha Nature*. To rage against impermanence and interdependence is to go against our own inherent nature.

The Process of Composition and Performance

The guided meditations collected in this book were performed spontaneously and recorded live on Zoom or digital recorder. They were then transcribed and are presented verbatim as originally performed. Therefore, the guided meditations presented in this book are a form of performance art. In keeping with the spirit of Zen, the teacher or facilitator is encouraged to go within, connect with their own meditative awareness, and speak spontaneously from the Heart-Mind when giving these guided meditations. Their eyes can remain open or remain partially or fully closed, according to the preference of the facilitator. The American Zen teacher Toni Packer gave her talks with her eyes closed, and I often feel more at ease with my eyes closed when giving a meditation. This will help to pace the meditation and ensure adequate periods of silence punctuate the speaking voice. The students will resonate with the teacher's voice and the voice tone and prosody will communicate a rich tapestry of feeling.

Zazen itself is a form of ritual performance, an enactment of the Buddha's enlightenment or expression of our awakened awareness. In our Soto Zen tradition, we practice

a form of meditation known as silent illumination or shikantaza (just-sitting) – a nondual object-less meditation. Silent illumination has similarities to the practice of Mahamudra and Dzogchen as taught in the Tibetan traditions as well as the Direct Path as taught by Rupert Spira. The form of meditation I am offering here seeks to facilitate the recognition of our true nature - our natural already awakened awareness or Ordinary Mind. This is the inward facing path. Once this is recognised, the meditations also embrace the outward facing path – the path of compassion, where we see everything as being non-separate from ourselves. The listener is directed to their own direct experience of their own nondual awareness – and is free to respond to the flow of the words and silences in between the words. The silence can last from a few seconds to a minute or more. The silence in-between the words is just as important, if not more important, than the words themselves. The silence speaks the truth of just this moment – pure awareness, whereas the word comes after and can never express that which is beyond words. The silences found in the body of the text are marked by the end of a paragraph and longer silences are marked by a larger space.

The meditations that I present here are a fusion of what Heidegger calls “meditative thinking” and poetry – designed to generate a sense of the “wonder of presence”. Whether guiding attention towards body sensations, sounds, thoughts, or Awareness/Consciousness itself, Zen-inspired guided meditations point towards nondual awareness which goes by many names in the Zen tradition such as No-Mind, No-Self, and Not-Knowing, to name but a few.

Teachers or facilitators are encouraged to use a natural voice and literally welcome and invite the students into sharing their internal meditative space/home. Germer and Neff, in their Manual for facilitators suggest that another way of cultivating an invitational style is to use the present participle of a verb, ending with *ing*. For example, instead of inviting students to “feel your breath” the teacher can say “*feeling* your breath”. The present participle implies ongoing activity and conveys a sense of practicing together and keeping the focus on the here and now.

The guided meditation can be loosely divided into three parts: introduction, middle and end. If there is time left over, this can then be followed by a form of audience participation we call *shared witnessing*. The purpose of the introduction is to welcome everyone and form a connection – to create a feeling of safety and trust. (I also usually do an informal check-in before the formal start and I make a conscious effort to say hello to everyone before starting, This, includes directions as to the posture and settling into the posture). The introduction also introduces the topic or theme for the meditation. The topic or theme of the meditation comes from classical or contemporary

INTRODUCTION

Zen teaching resources or practice issues. This may include quotes from the Zen tradition, other philosophies or literature in general.

Sometimes I give a short introduction on some aspect of Zen practice before commencing the guided meditations. Within the guided meditations you will find constant repetitions – again consistent I believe with Zen tradition. This is deliberate. Key words will be repeated. Key phrases will be repeated, with slight variations. Repetition has always been a core Zen practice. Repetition of ritual and chants. Repetition of sitting and walking. Repetition mirrors the cyclic patterns of the natural world – night and day, seasons. The middle part explores the theme through many iterations and repetitions. The ending or conclusion is to prepare participants for re-entering their daily lives and integrating their zazen practice into their daily lives. Zazen does not stop once we stop formal sitting – it continues throughout the day. If there is some time remaining at the end of the meditation, participants can be given the option of continuing to sit in silence or given the invitation to share or witness their experience of the meditation, with an emphasis on describing their lived experience of the current present moment – basically where they are at right now when sharing.

The use of imagery

To the extent that we identify with thoughts, they can cause us to worry about the future or ruminate over the past. Images, another form of thought, can be equally powerful influences on mood and emotions. How we “picture” ourselves and our future can make all the difference to how we experience this moment. We can imagine a meal and our body can respond in the same way as if we were being served a meal. Images are also at the heart of poetry, communicating directly with our right-hemispherical emotional self. The more I reflected on creating guided meditations that expressed the spirit of Zen, the more I started to contemplate the continuity between guided meditation and the visual and poetic arts found in the zen tradition, such as ink paintings, haikus and calligraphy. The use of the images to convey the moment of insight are central to Zen expression. Typically, Chinese spirituality drew upon images drawn from the wilderness or natural landscape, such as mountains and rivers. This is also found in the work of contemporary Zen poets such as Gary Snyder. Imagery is also used in psychotherapy to help clients heal from shame-based wounds and embrace self-compassion.

Conclusion: Finding Our Way Home

When I first began practising Zen meditation, many years ago now, I felt I had lost my way in life. There was something missing. It is helpful when first starting Zen practice to find a guide, a teacher who has been in the same place and has found a way home. I was fortunate enough to meet my teacher who helped me find my own inner compass. Yet ultimately, life itself is the only guide we need, if we are prepared to listen carefully enough to hear the Self calling us Home.

These guided meditations come from this source of deep listening. The intention is for the words and silences contained within to act as a lighthouse – to guide your way home. But this Home is not a dwelling made of wood and stone – a mere lodging place for the night. This is our original dwelling place – the source of all dwelling on this earth beneath the vastness of the blue sky.

We find or make our original dwelling place by cultivating and caring for this world - this here and now moment we find ourselves in. This requires the practice of grounding ourselves repeatedly in this here and now world-moment – I won't call it the present moment because the present moment has already passed before we have finished speaking the word present. I do sometimes refer to it as The Now, which is also synonymous with our True Self. We are cultivating the art of presencing – letting our shared participation in Being be the light that discloses the Being of beings or the suchness of things, presencing themselves to us within our Being There. Original dwelling place is the source that manifests the ten thousand things.

I believe that the form taken by these meditations is a genuine expression of Zen, consistent with its centuries old tradition. I believe the guided meditation form, when used well, provides a vehicle that fits with our contemporary culture. Enjoy the journey home into the ever- changing luminosity of just this moment. Welcome home!

MEDITATIONS

MEDITATION 1
AWARENESS OF AWARENESS

www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/awareness-of-awareness

During this guided meditation we'll be focusing our attention on awareness itself. Awareness of awareness. Simply put, meditation can be divided into two categories: meditation which concentrates on an object and meditation which is object-less. In Zen Buddhism we draw upon both forms of meditation. Like many other schools of meditation, concentration meditation in Zen, often takes the form of simply bringing the attention back to the breath. This can take the form of counting the breath. For example, from counting one and then two on each exhalation, for example, up to 5 or 10. If you miss a count you return to one and start all over again. Little bit like life.

Sometimes in Zen practice, in koan practice, students concentrate on a single syllable word, such as *Mu*. And all attention is focused on *Mu*. For the whole of the sesshin, everything becomes *Muuuuu* ...

Concentration meditation is often very good, if you're feeling a little bit scattered and you want to maintain some sense of stability and focus. This could be at the beginning of a meditation period, or it could be the beginning of the day, or you could experiment with that at any time in your daily practice. Even very experienced Zen teachers often will go back to counting the breath at times. So, there's nothing wrong with that kind of practice. It's not just an introductory practice, it's a practice one can take up any particular stage of the practice.

If you're counting, then everything becomes one. Everything becomes two, etc ...

The other form of practice, often referred to as "just sitting" or "shikantaza", often translated as "open awareness" or "choiceless awareness", is simply allowing our attention to stay on awareness itself, much more subtle, not really an object. We become aware of awareness as the objects appear within awareness. So, awareness itself is not an object. It's not a content. Awareness is that which knows the content. But as you will see from the direct experience, *the knowing and the known, in reality, are not two*, they cannot be separated. So, the light of awareness, primordial awareness, is like a constant, and the contents of awareness, the phenomena or objects, are constantly changing, coming and going. But don't turn awareness into a thing or an object. It can't be separated from the contents of awareness.

So, during this period, I'd like to encourage you to explore, just being aware of awareness. Everything comes and goes in awareness, but awareness itself has no beginning or ending. A common metaphor for awareness is empty space, but even that doesn't quite capture it.

Boundlessness ...

See if you can find any edge or boundary to awareness ...

Awareness welcomes everything. It is like the unconditioned, unconditioned love. Has no judgment. Even prior to evaluation of pleasant and unpleasant. Evaluation arises within awareness, judgement arises within awareness. It's prior to all those categories that we normally associate with our identity: gender, age. Awareness has no age, no gender.

See how the body appears in awareness. *Feel* how the body appears in awareness. Feel the hardness or the softness. As we allow the light of awareness to permeate every aspect of our experience, we feel a very subtle lightening, softening, melting ...

Awareness itself is like, without form, and hence, you feel that spaciousness entering into the physical sensations themselves. Feeling the body as empty space. Where they may be little points of tension or resistance, little clusters, and as the warmth and love of awareness enters into those areas, feel a slight softening, allow that sense of no boundary enter into your experience of the physical sensations of the body. Feel totally held and accepted, surrendering into the arms of loving awareness. Leaning into the body with tenderness, in the same way you would hold a baby. In Sanskrit, the primordial awareness is often referred to as *prajnaparamita*, often referred to as the "Mother of Buddhas".

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

This awareness that we are is always present. So sometimes it goes by the name “presence”. It arises effortlessly because it’s already here. Hence, it often is referred to as no arising and no passing. Everything is flowing, yet the awareness is constant.

~

Surrendering into the arms of awareness, which is nothing other than Life itself.

Feeling the movement of Life.

Feeling the movement of Breath.

The movement of the heart beating.

Expanding and contracting.

This Awareness is a constant. No matter what experience we may be experiencing, positive or negative, awareness itself is constant. It’s your constant companion. It’s your home and your Refuge. When the seas are stormy, dwell as awareness. It will hold you, and carry you to the other shore.

Gate, Gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi Swa Ha!

We wake up and realize we’ve always been here.

Where else could we be?

~ ~ ~

Awareness is present, beyond or before, all our memories and reactions and habitual ways of being in the world. If we can turn around, and shine the light on awareness we are immediately free.

No longer caught in the self-centred dream: our habitual patterns of reactivity.

Come home to awareness. Return, again and again, to just this moment. This timeless moment. Feel all your usual sense of constriction, tightness and restriction melt away.

Let go of all your identity constructs.

Dwell as the light of awareness.

Meeting each other and we meet our true self,

here.

AWARENESS OF AWARENESS

As we align ourselves with this reality, this awareness that we are, we bring that into the flow of impermanence and our heart opens and compassion flows -

Two wings of the one bird - wisdom and compassion, prajna and compassion, awareness and compassion.

Big mind and big heart.

Shunryu Suzuki called it beginner's mind. Some teachers refer to it as "Don't know mind", because it comes before, prior to knowing. Prior to evaluation. It does not pick and choose.

~ ~ ~

Just allow yourself to experience whatever it is you're experiencing. This is the beauty of this practice. Whatever state, awareness is constantly present. We're not trying to produce any particular state, not even special states. We're not trying to produce bliss or peace. All we're doing, is just being this moment, and this moment is our home.

When the singer sang, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" that's because what we're looking for is right before our nose. One of the jokes about Zen practice and Zen teachers, is that we set up a stall beside the river selling water. Zen is simply about loving life and life loving Life.

Just being life.

Is this not enough?

This miraculous moment, each moment.

Being alive in this body.

Being aware of awareness.

~

This is why they say the family jewels do not enter by the front door, because it's always been within, it's always here. You don't have to go seeking for the treasure.

~

So please, enjoy this precious gift - awareness of awareness.

MEDITATION 2

I AM MY BODY

www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/i-am-my-body

Most of you would know that guided meditation is not really a traditional Zen practice. So, what I've been curious about developing is a kind of guided meditations that adheres to the basic principles of Zen Buddhism: The teaching of impermanence, interdependence or insubstantiality and Nirvana or nonseparation.

So, we always start with remembering our intention for this morning - just to connect with self and others or just to be present. Our commitment to maintaining relative stillness of the body, which requires a nice comfortable posture, whatever works for you but feels natural. Then just gently shifting our attention, which is usually caught up in our mind, our thinking mind, and just shifting the attention just gently down into the lower belly and connecting with the breath.

And the attitude we take in all these meditations is one of allowing everything to be *just as it is*, allowing our experience to be *just as it is*. We're not trying to generate any special experiences, we're not trying to grasp onto any special experience, neither do we want to push away unpleasant experiences. Training ourselves to be with this moment as it is. We're not trying to stop the movement of thought, we're just letting thought move, but doing our best not to get caught into the content of thought. As we settle into our posture, there's a natural settling that takes place, and the mind will settle, but sometimes it might not, depending on how restless it is. Generally speaking, the stillness of the

body does facilitate a stilling of the mind over the period of the sitting.

So, we're letting go of thinking, we're not trying to figure anything out.

Shifting to the non-discriminative mode. So, tuning into the lower belly, tuning into the breath. As you settle into the posture, it's natural for the awareness and the focus of our awareness to gradually expand. So, in some ways the breath will be anchored at the belly, or the attention will be anchored at the belly, but, over the period of sitting, the awareness or the attention can gradually expand to take in the whole of the body, from the soles of the feet to the tip of the head.

The world or the environment that we're living in, that we're located in right now. So, it's like just a gentle movement, from attention on the breath to allowing the attention to expand and become much more open and diffuse. As you take in that sense of vast openness if you like. The vastness of our awareness, and the sensations and feelings that are moving within it.

I'm going to take the theme for today's guided meditation from a reading on our OzZen website, it's a reading by Barry Magid, and it's a series of about five or six paragraphs, starting with 'I am my body'. So, I'll be quoting from that reading and that's what we'll be doing our guided meditation around this morning.

~ ~ ~

I am my body, a living breathing body, with all its physical sensations of comfort and discomfort, relaxation and tension, changing each moment with each inhalation and exhalation, dependent each moment on the air I breathe and the environment which sustains our life.

In many ways, guided meditations are like a form of contemplation. These words invite us to contemplate our interdependence with the environment for our existence. Including the oxygen we breathe in, produced by the trees in the environment. All the sustenance that the body needs to live.

I am, this living breathing body.

This body is Buddha, and our body connects with the body of the Earth. The mountains, rivers, sky, seas and all the creatures which dwell within.

I appreciate this body.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Care for this body.

Feel gratitude for this body.

This body that I am

~ ~ ~

Sitting zazen: becoming one with this body.

This life.

How the body is breathing us.

~ ~ ~

Through the body we realize the Dharma. So, this practice is not about thinking our way to realization. It's about listening to the body, allowing the body to teach us, as in: Life is the teacher, the body is the teacher. The body is not missing or lacking anything. The body is perfect just as it is whatever state it may be in. Whatever age it may be, whether it's healthy or ill health, the body is simply being the body.

~

I am also my desires, my appetites, my needs for love and attachment, my ambitions and my ideals. In each moment, I may experience satisfaction or lack, fullness or emptiness, learning gradually to distinguish my needs from my wants, the conditions for my flourishing from the fleeting effects of gratification.

~

Listening to our body wisely, being able to distinguish needs from wants. Caring for our needs, in order for us to be able to flourish, to be happy. To enjoy our life. This is the teaching of self-compassion. Of nurturing ourselves, looking after our needs, so that we can also be there for others and recognizing our interdependence with others, our happiness is dependent upon the happiness of others. So, as we attend to our own needs, recognizing the importance of our needs, we attend to the needs of other.

Recognizing that we come into being as a self, through the eyes and face of the other; and in turn, we pass that on to others. Creating intergenerational health and harmony

I AM MY BODY

rather than intergenerational trauma and alienation. As a community, as a Sangha, it's part of our intention to help create a more harmonious, joyful world, for all human beings and all beings.

~

I am also my emotions: my love and my anger, my sadness and my joy, my calmness and anxiety, moment after moment reflecting my inescapable dependence on others, and my vulnerability to the vicissitudes of their attention.

~

No matter how healthy or high functioning we may be, we are still vulnerable to the fluctuations of the attention of others. Could be our spouse, a good friend or even someone we don't know very well. We are all vulnerable to that - feeling ignored or not recognized.

That love and anger, sadness and joy, calmness and anxiety, are all part of the one life journey we're all on. There cannot be one without the other. As Barry (my teacher) is fond of saying, we invite them all to sit at the table. Moment after moment, as we move from one different state into another, depending on the context and circumstances and conditions of that moment. Our nonseparation from the conditions and circumstances of our life. And our humanness, the variability in our mood, our sensitivity to the attention or lack of attention from others.

~

I am also my thoughts, which pass through my awareness, moment after moment, like clouds through the sky, sometimes peacefully, sometimes not. Whatever their content, I can recognize them as "thoughts," part of the ongoing flow of my consciousness, a necessary part of what feels like "me," to be neither banished or suppressed, but acknowledged in their passing.

~

As our thoughts like birds, fly through the sky, we accept and acknowledge them as they pass by. In our practice of zazen, we're not trying to hold on to the bird, or get caught into the bird's flight. We just come back to being the Open Sky and allowing the bird to fly through it. But if we do get taken away by the bird of thought, that's okay as well. At some point we will recognize that and notice it and just return, again to our sitting practice.

Bringing our attention back to the lower belly, back to the breath, settling into the body. Into the body in the world. Living here right now. Alive and present, full of vitality.

Thoughts are very much part of the scenery of our practice life. They come and go, just like the sounds, and they are empty of substance, just like the sounds. In essence, thoughts have no real reality other than the reality we give to them.

But in another way, thoughts do shape the reality that we experience. If we are trapped in thoughts which repetitively speak of our negative identity, then we can experience that sense of deep depression.

In our zazen practice, we want to try and step back, and attune ourselves to the flow of moment-by-moment experiencing. By attuning ourselves to that flow, we will free up thoughts to flow as well, and bring them more into harmony with that sense of aliveness in this moment.

~ ~ ~

Zen Buddhism does give us that opportunity to feel a sense of deep connection to a tradition that's been going on now for hundreds of years. Our practice forms and language will vary from one historical time to another but we do our best to maintain that sense of our connection to that sense of tradition. That sense of appreciation to the ancestors, who brought this practice from India, hundreds of years ago. Through China to Japan through to the West. That deep connection to people who lived hundreds of years ago. Who sat feeling the breath in the belly exactly the same way that we are doing now. Our sense of humble gratitude for that and the sense of responsibility we all have for maintaining that tradition. Continuing that tradition and passing it on to the next generation.

~

I am also a whole person, whose body, desires, emotions, thoughts, intentions and awareness are all inseparable from My Buddha Nature, all continually manifesting the inherent interdependence, impermanence and perfection, just as they are, right here and right now.

~

So, our body, our self, with all its needs and desires, and emotions and thoughts, is arising as Buddha Nature right now. Our personal self is not separate from Buddha

I AM MY BODY

Nature. But our practice is to awaken to Buddha Nature. To see that the personal self is a manifestation of that, just as it is, it could not be any other way.

We're already in the Way.

We don't have to find the Way.

~ ~ ~

Falling into the stillness and the silence.

Ultimately words cannot express that which is, right now.

~ ~ ~

Feeling our sense of deep connection, breathing here together. Appreciating the commitment of each person who's here this morning as we come to the end of the guided meditation, prepare ourselves to continue this day.

Bringing our practice into our everyday life.

May you go well, may you go gently

into that good day.

MEDITATION 3
EMOTIONAL HURT: ACCEPTANCE

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/emotional-hurt-acceptance](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/emotional-hurt-acceptance)

Guided inquiry into emotional hurt. Please - find a posture that is both relaxed and alert. For some people that may be sitting on a cushion or on a chair with the back straight, or if neither of these postures can be practised, then simply lie down on a soft mat or carpet or bed with the head slightly raised on a pillow, with the arms outstretched at your side.

Settling into the body, just feel yourself breathing. Take two or three deep breaths and feel the breath as it moves through your body with a gentle wave-like motion of rising on the in breath and falling on the out breath.

Rising and falling.

Rising, falling.

Allow the breath to breathe you. No need to control it in any way. Simply follow the breath. The breath is your constant companion, no matter what situation you find yourself in, it is always present, always available, always faithful and it will always bring you home.

~ ~ ~

EMOTIONAL HURT: ACCEPTANCE

Now, the most direct and simple route, to heal our emotional hurt is to directly experience the hurt itself - rather than trying to control the hurt, avoid the hurt, escape from the hurt, or blame the other for the hurt - which only intensifies and prolongs the hurt. We have all the resources we need within ourselves to remain open and to heal. All that we need is to experience ourselves as being awareness. Meditation itself is simply a practice of being awareness. Awareness itself is always present, but we can be unaware of its presence. It is like a gift, but we may neglect to appreciate it. We don't have to go in search of it, it is always here, always now. It has all the wonderful inherent qualities that allow ourselves to heal:

~

it is inherently wise; wisdom in this sense being the ability to just be with our experience as it is, being present to whatever is arising in this moment. It has the quality of courage, the ability to face our discomfort and our pain with equanimity and ease; and it has the inherent quality of gentleness or tenderness and non-judgement.

~

When we allow ourselves to experience our emotional hurt directly, we are practising non-separation. We are no longer divided within ourselves. We are whole and complete, just as we are. This moment is always whole and complete, just as it is. As you continue to be with the breath, you'll become aware of other body sensations. The body holds all our emotional pain, and we feel it manifesting at times as tension and tightness - tight bodily knots that we might be holding - in our belly or our neck, our shoulders, or our back, our chest, or our arms.

~

I invite you to be curious - explore your body sensations with a loving awareness - gently focusing your awareness on different areas of the body. Starting with your head, allow yourself to just feel your face, your forehead, eyes, cheekbones, the jaw - the place where we often hold some tension in our face. Just allow your loving awareness to fully embrace your face, allowing whatever tension there is, to be there. Then exploring the back of the head, down to the neck, fully exploring any tightness that may be present in the neck.

~

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Then direct your loving awareness to travel down to the shoulders, feeling any holding there in your shoulders – resting there for a while and exploring the sensations in the shoulders ...

~

Flowing down now into your upper arms, lower arms, palms and fingers and fingertips. Then directing our awareness to the upper back, lower back and resting there for a while. Feeling all the sensations in your spine and back region. Then moving through to our chest, opening into the chest or heart-centre and resting in the heart. Feeling anything there that needs to be felt. Feeling the gentle movement of the breath as it expands the chest. Feeling the heart.

~

Then down into the belly, feeling any tightness that may be present in the belly, the pelvis and the backside resting on the chair or cushion; feeling the thighs and the lower legs, calf muscles and down to the feet, soles of the feet and toes resting on the floor.

~

Now allow your loving awareness to gradually expand spatially, into the environment - becoming aware of ourselves as a constant flow, of the physical sensations of the body and the sounds in the environment, and anything you may be aware of that you can smell or feel or touch - such as a gentle breeze, if there's any breeze. Feeling the distinction between outside and inside merging into one continuous flowing stream of awareness. You are both the flowing stream and the awareness of the flowing stream – both, at the same time.

~

Let the boundaries of inner and outer fall away – experiencing our true nature as boundlessness.

~ ~ ~

When we experience the *residues* of emotional hurt, arising in our awareness sometimes there are no explicit actual memories or images. Rather, we may experience a body memory only. Through allowing ourselves to enter fully into our body sensations a felt

EMOTIONAL HURT: ACCEPTANCE

sense may arise – sometimes it may be a felt sense of deep unworthiness or loneliness, may emerge. If this happens, just stay with this felt sense, and then, if a word comes to mind, give it a label, such as “feeling loneliness” without trying to change it or fix it in any way. The residues of this kind of emotional hurt you can often discover during periods of silent meditation; at other times, in our everyday life, our vulnerable spots are triggered by certain events and situations that cause upset to us.

Even simple things, such as not having enough money to pay a bill, can trigger an upset, that can activate an old relational pattern that brings up painful feelings of shame.

~

Apart from our primary practice of sitting with open awareness, with no goal in mind, we can at times use a simple *inquiry process* during our meditation time to explore if we are still holding onto any residues of emotional hurt left over from the past. It could be a recent past or a distant past. The basic process is simply recalling a recent upset; bringing to mind the upset as it occurred with as much detail in your memory as you can. I suggest that you choose a recent upset, there is no need to go digging for deep traumas from the past. These everyday upsets, or little “t” traumas can happen most days, on a regular basis. A simple experience of invalidation, such as feeling dismissed or ignored, can easily trigger a sense of shame for not being good enough or worthy enough.

So just give yourself a few moments to let yourself get in touch with some emotional residue from a past interpersonal event ...

Bring this event to mind and allow yourself to re-experience, and really experience this emotional hurt that arose in the here and now of this present moment, in the safety of this space and in the comforting tenderness of your loving awareness. You will be able to process any residual emotional hurt that is left over or unresolved.

Just allow yourself, if you're feeling sad, to be sad. Or if you are feeling anxious, to be anxious. Whatever the feeling is, just allow it to be there.

~ ~ ~

Trust in the natural inherent courage in your being awareness. Your awareness is the container for all we experience, including this emotional hurt. You are infinitely bigger than any emotional hurt you may experience. You are infinitely wiser than any hurt you

can experience. Allow yourself to feel the hurt now ...

The deep hurt of feeling criticised or not recognised, of unworthiness or personal failure, of loss, or whatever hurt it may be. The hurt itself can simply pass through us - into the boundlessness that we truly are. It can't do us any harm. It's only the holding onto the story about the hurt or the attempt to avoid feeling the hurt that creates the difficulties. Often anger itself can be a way of defending ourselves against feeling the hurt.

~

However, if we allow ourselves to feel the hurt directly, right here and now, it will simply dissolve itself in the ocean of your loving awareness. You have the power to comfort yourself in the same way as an attentive mother comforts a hurt child. Our loving awareness is itself Avalokiteshvara, the Mother or Bodhisattva of Compassion.

~

Whenever we experience this moment (and this moment is the only moment we can ever experience) directly with no separation, we are experiencing our oneness - the absolute reality that is always present and that contains everything. Stay with the hurt till you feel it dissolving, feel the hurt melting away in the warm loving light of your healing awareness.

Awareness itself is just like a mirror. When we look into the mirror our face naturally appears, no effort at all. When we allow ourselves to practise being awareness, everything just simply is what it is, and we can feel it and there is nothing to be afraid of. We are so much more than just this body, so much more than our personal dramas.

Let the light of your awareness heal you now.

May you be at peace.

May you live with ease.

MEDITATION 4
DON'T KNOW MIND

www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/dont-know-mind

Three bells ...

So, please settle into your posture. Feeling the gentle, rhythmic movement of the breath. Sounds naturally appearing in our awareness. Taking this special opportunity just to stop. Just to be here, being no one, doing nothing, going nowhere. Just taking some time out from our busy distracted world our worldly concerns. Leaving them outside the door.

Last week we focused on the Aboriginal word *Dadirri*, recognizing an indigenous lineage or ancestry in this ancient land which goes back thousands of years of just sitting quietly and just being. Today I'm going to tell an old story again of the founding teacher of what's known in China as Chan - known in Japan as Zen. The legendary figure of Bodhidharma. The story today is from the collection of Koan's, known as the *Gateless Barrier* or sometimes translated as the *Gateless Gate*.

This gateless gate or barrier is in itself, an important metaphor. In essence, there is no barrier, there is no gate - just this - we're already here, but so often we feel as if we're trapped outside of it.

This English version of the Gateless Barrier was translated by Robert Aiken, the

founder of the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii. Aitken Roshi later became the founding teacher of the first Zen Group in Australia in Sydney, back in the late 1970s, leading to the establishment of the Diamond Sangha lineage in Australia. There's quite a few different translations of the Gateless Barrier, but I think Robert Aitken's version is my favorite translation.

This koan, which is numbered Case 41 in the collection, is called *Bodhidharma Pacifies The Mind* and the dialogue goes like this:

Bodhidharma faced the wall. The second ancestor stood in the snow, he cut off his arm, and said, "Your disciple's mind has no peace as yet. I beg you, Master, please put it to rest." Bodhidharma said, "Bring me your mind, and I will put it to rest." The Second Ancestor said, "I have searched for my mind, but I cannot find it." Bodhidharma said, "I have completely put it to rest for you."

So, that is the dialogue.

In our Ordinary Mind lineage, we don't give classical koans to practitioners as meditation objects, we just encourage people to work on the natural koans that come up for them in their everyday life. But of course, the most important koan really, that's behind all of this, is the question of "who am I?" or "what is this?" And this koan, like most of the koans, is pointing towards this question in different ways. But first of all, just a little bit of a backstory.

As some of you probably know, Bodhidharma, was kind of a legendary figure, but there was obviously some Indian teachers who came to China round about this time. Bodhidharma was the third son of an Indian king, and he studied with a teacher called Prajnatarā, who was the 27th successor of the Buddha Sakyamuni and Prajnatarā gave Bodhidharma dharma transmission. He taught in India for a long time, but then journeyed to China about CE 520.

There's a famous story about when Bodhidharma arrived in China, which is worth re-telling.

So, after arriving, he went straight to see Emperor Wu. At this time in China Emperor Wu was a Buddhist himself, and he had founded many temples and so as part of the dialogue when they first met the Emperor asked Bodhidharma, "I have endowed temples and authorized ordinations, what is my Merit?" Bodhidharma said, "no merit at all".

So, merit, is the kind of virtue one accumulates, by giving and it's often referred to as *dana* in Buddhism, roughly translated as charity. It's the first of the six Perfections or

paramitas that Buddhist's follow. So, giving dana is the expression of gratitude for the gift of Buddhadharma, so in return gifts of housing and food and clothing and medicine are offered to those who teach and maintain it. And so of course, in those times there was also an idea of accumulating of merit, a kind of spiritual credit. In other words, it would be some kind of credit towards an auspicious rebirth and when Bodhidharma says "no merit at all" it's a very courageous thing to say to a powerful Emperor, quite a shocking thing in those days.

So, the emperor then says, well, "what is the first principle of the Holy teaching?" and Bodhidharma says, again, key metaphors, "vast emptiness, nothing holy", and when the emperor says, "well who is this confronting me"? Bodhidharma simply says, "I don't know".

And so, these two dialogues are intimately connected. Bodhidharma's answer to the Emperor's question who are you is, "I don't know" prior to that he talked about vastness, vast emptiness. And in the story of the second ancestor, he sends the second ancestor (we can imagine the second ancestor would have been meditating for quite a long time before he came back) away basically with the instruction to see if he can find his self. Find his mind, find his self. What is this I? Basically, who am I? And when the Second Ancestor returns, he says, "Master, I have searched for myself, but I can't find it anywhere." Bodhidharma simply says, "That's it! There you go, I have pacified your mind".

So, in Zen, like in other spiritual traditions, this kind of inquiry is sometimes referred to as the inquiry of *un-findability*, which leads us to the place of this "don't know" this "don't know mind", not identifying with any particular phenomena. We look for the one who experiences, the experiencer, and we can't find it.

I would encourage you, if you haven't already done so, to dwell on this question and see if you can find yourself ...

What we quickly realize, is that we can find that which is conditioned. We can find the objects which come and go, which appear and disappear. This is the constant stream which is happening all the time: Sounds, your breath moving, all the various sensations which are coming and going, all the different moods and feelings which come and go, all the different thoughts which come and go.

A nice distinction to make is between the conditioned and the unconditioned. This preliminary distinction is very helpful. In a sense, we can know these objects which come and go. But the source of this knowing, the question who or what is hearing? Who

or what is seeing? Who or what is thinking? We cannot see or perceive, otherwise it too would just be another temporary passing phenomena which comes and goes.

The conditioned mind is all the layers of our historical dynamic self; all the memories that are still accumulated in the unconscious and in our bodies. All the identifications, numerous identifications, the core beliefs that we inherited, our preoccupations in our daily lives, our concerns about finances, relationships, family. These are all the conditions, and they are produced by other conditions and circumstances, the situation that we're born into and live in.

~ ~ ~

What is this, this space, this awareness, in which we experience all these conditions? This is what Bodhidharma is pointing to when he says, "I don't know", or "vast emptiness". This is the place or the space, the space of no one in particular, there is no one here. This space is totally complete. There are no "needs" in this space, unlike our conditioned self, which has preferences and needs etc, etc.

This is why this space is associated with Peace.

Fortunately, it doesn't require the kind of cutting off your arm effort that the Second Ancestor demonstrated. I don't require you to do that. All it requires is just a genuine sincerity, just to stop and get off the Merry-Go-Round.

Just to be.

It's very difficult in our culture, just to be.

But just stop, listen, like on Sunday when it was raining in Sawtell. Just listening to the rain. Just listening to the birds, the deep listening of Dadirri. When we listen deeply, the rain is neither good nor bad, it just is. The sound of the bird is neither good nor bad, it just is.

This is our natural, true, functioning mind - true nature, just naturally functioning, requires no effort, just like our heart is beating, our bodies are breathing, its our natural functioning. But we take it for granted, we don't appreciate it and dwell in it.

When rain is then put in the context of farming and droughts, then it becomes an issue of evaluation, good and bad. This is the conditioned world, the conditioned mind. But we can drop out of that, literally, into the unconditioned, and the rain is just *drip drip*,

DON'T KNOW MIND

the birds are just ... that! Just this. Just this goes on forever. It has no beginning it has no ending, and really, it is not concerned with the amount of money we may have in the bank, whether or not our bills are going to be paid. This eternal now is, just this ... this is always here. But you can't pin it down, you can't grasp it. We give it names: true nature, unconditioned awareness, natural functioning. It goes by many names. But even if we call it the nameless, its still beyond any name ...

We can only be it. You have to realize it, it starts with little glimpses, and we fall out of it, back into the conditioned world, but if you persevere, not only doing a formal meditation in the mornings but stopping on regular occasions throughout the day, you just drop into this space, just this deep listening, breath breathing, attuned to that space, be at one with that and then, gradually, you will start to make that real, in the sense in which you will start to recognize it more and more, and it will slowly begin to percolate into our conditioned mind – conditioned mind, and this brings about the final realization that this ordinary mind is exactly it! There's absolutely no difference between the unconditioned and the conditioned, but, before practice, we are all of us, almost 100%, identified with the conditioned.

With practice we start to get glimpses of the unconditioned. And then for the rest of all our lives we're integrating - the unconditioned and the conditioned are just the flip sides of the same coin, but once we have realized the unconditioned, deeper and deeper, the more we realize it, then the less likely it is we're going to get attached or resistant to the conditioned.

Realizing the unconditioned doesn't mean we're still not going to have bills to pay. There's always going to be those kind of little problems, but when we realize the unconditioned, those problems are just problems. Just something that needs to be dealt with, you don't have to get involved in the drama about it because we just come back, just to the simple sound of the rain, drip drop, the sound of the bird, movement of the breath, the voice of the Beloved. All calling us, simply to be here, now.

~

So please enjoy this “don't know mind” and allow it to infuse your daily life.

MEDITATION 5
DEEPENING AWARENESS

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/deepening-awareness](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/deepening-awareness)

So please settle into your posture. Relaxing body and mind, relaxing our head, forehead, eyes, cheeks, jaw, relaxing the neck and shoulders. The upper arms and lower arms, the hands just gently resting. Relaxing the upper torso, chest. Allowing the breath to breathe freely. Relaxing the upper legs, knees, lower legs. Becoming aware of the feet resting on the floor. So, whether we're sitting on the mat, or sitting on the chair, just that gentle sense of the body at ease and repose, relaxing into the posture. Creating the conditions for the complete letting go.

We move into just sitting. If it helps to follow the breath, follow the breath for a little while. And then just ease into becoming aware of the totality of the body. The totality of body sensations arising in our awareness.

Becoming aware of the environment and the sounds, and the sense of the inner and outer distinction falling away. So, we are harmonizing body, mind and environment. It's one seamless field of awareness and phenomenon.

Just allowing our attention to rest in awareness.

Dropping into or tuning into this naturally awake awareness which is always present. Requiring that no effort, only to remember to stop and drop and rest in this naturally,

DEEPENING AWARENESS

effortless, awareness which is always constantly present.

~ ~ ~

Noticing how each moment is changing from moment to moment, watching the different sensations and perceptions, thoughts and feelings, arise and disappear.

~ ~ ~

Feeling our way into the felt sense of this naturally arising awareness. This natural functioning of Life itself, life itself as awareness. If at some point we become carried away by a thought, or caught in a thought, then just come back again, feeling your way back into this awareness, just naturally arising. Noticing the quality of its awareness being very open.

Spacious.

Very hard to discern any age or boundary to it.

This awareness itself, sounds are appearing within it, but awareness itself is the quality of silence. Awareness itself is the deep listening in which the sounds are experienced. Awareness being the naturally arising Stillness, within which everything is moving.

~ ~ ~

Both the contents or the objects of awareness and awareness itself, both co-arising, different sides of the same coin. Each one illuminating the other.

Everything in flux, flowing like a stream.

Awareness itself has no judgments, likes or dislikes, accepts all contents or objects equally without discrimination or aversion or attachment. Naturally non-abiding. Rest in this non-abiding awareness.

~ ~ ~

Each of the ten thousand things penetrating the core of our being, complete immediacy, intimacy, at one with this awareness. Flowing, changing,

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Impermanence.

There is nothing to grasp or hold onto from one moment to the next.

It's all moving ...

This is the deep vitality of Life.

Life itself.

Awareness itself.

Appreciating this life that we are.

~ ~ ~

This naturally arising, life-awareness is the unconditioned. The conditioned arises within it, two sides of the same coin. We abide neither in the unconditioned, nor in the conditioned.

The Middle Way.

~ ~ ~

Awakening is now! And awakening *never ends*.

Moment by moment we awaken.

Awakening to this moment, just as it is.

MEDITATION 6
SILENCE

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-silence](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-silence)

Silent Night, Holy Night.

Earlier on today, we had two stories, one about Shakymuni Buddha twirling the flower and the other about the lay wise person, Vimalakirti, who replied to the question: “What is the Bodhisattva’s Gate to the One and Only?” and his response was silence.

I like that, the name for the nondual, the one and only. The one and only. Very intimate.

So, this evening I am not going to give a talk, it’s going to be more like a guided meditation, or more like a guided contemplation, on a prose piece by a teacher called Jean Klein. Jean Klein was not in the Zen Buddhist tradition. He was in a different tradition, *Kashmir Shaivism*. A kind of yoga tradition that he came across a teacher in India. He was a medical doctor, I think, died in the late nineteen seventies or eighties, I can’t remember. His lineage is quite influential in the West. One of his students, now teaches, was a man called Francis Lucille, and Francis Lucille was the teacher of Rupert Spira. This is what’s known as the Advaita tradition, “not two”, nonduality. Zen Buddhism, Dzogchen, Advaita, Taoism, and the esoteric teachings in Islam, Sufism. These are all different streams of nondual teachings.

Just close your eyes and allow the words to seep in. Allow the words to speak to you.

Silence is our real nature. What we are fundamentally is only silence.

Silence is not the absence of sound. Rather sounds appear in silence. Silence is another word for awareness or the Presence of Being. Being Silence, although thoughts may arise, we are free of the identification with the apparent separate self.

Silence is free from beginning and end.

Where does silence begin or end? Or is it timeless? Silence has no beginning and no ending.

It was before the beginning of all things.

Silence is not a thing or an object. We cannot observe silence because silence is who we are. It does not come and go.

It is causeless.

Being causeless means, it is unconditioned. It is unborn and undying.

Its greatness lies in the fact it simply is.

Isness cannot be expressed in words.

In silence all objects have their home ground.

All things return to the One. Silence is our home ground. The ground of Being.

It is the light that gives objects their shape and form.

Silence is awareness or consciousness – the knowing that knows objects – the light.

All movement, all activity is harmonized by silence.

Silence is also stillness out of which movement arises.

Silence has no opposite in noise. It is beyond positive and negative. Silence dissolves all objects.

Silence cannot be named. The word silence is not silence. Silence is nondual. Not two, it contains everything and excludes nothing.

It is not related to any counterpart which belongs to the mind. Silence has nothing to do with mind.

SILENCE

Mind is the activity of thought. Thought cannot know or comprehend silence. It is beyond thought.

It cannot be defined but it can be felt directly because it is our nearness.

Silence makes intimacy possible. To listen with open heart is to be intimate with all things. This is essence of meditation. To dwell in intimacy with what is.

Silence is freedom without restriction or centre.

Silence cannot be caged because it is impossible to grasp or hold onto. Its centre is everywhere.

It is our wholeness, neither inside nor outside the body.

The body appears in silence.

Silence is joyful, not pleasurable.

Pleasure comes and goes. The joy of silence is ever present.

It is not psychological.

Silence is prior to the historical, conditioned self. It is the dove call. The water-fall. The crimson sky at dusk.

It is feeling without a feeler. Silence needs no intermediary.

Feel the silence. It is peaceful.

Feel the silence. It is peaceful.

Silence is holy. It is healing.

It asks for nothing and is completely giving. It is the whole. It is the doorway into the infinite.

There is no fear in silence.

Fear belongs to our animal body which we then identify with as “me”.

There is no fear in silence.

Fear belongs to our animal body which we then identify with as “me”.

Silence is autonomous like love and beauty.

Which is prior to the social.

It is untouched by time.

Time is a construction of mind.

Silence is meditation, free from any intention, free from anyone who meditates.

Silence is the absence of oneself. Or rather, silence is the absence of absence.

There is no separate meditator. Silence meditates on silence. Silence is complete, full and empty at the same time.

Sound which comes from silence is music. All activity is creative when it comes from silence. It is constantly a new beginning. Silence precedes speech and poetry, music and all art. Silence is the home ground of all creative activity.

Silence is infinite potential. Openness.

What is truly creative is the word, is Truth. Silence is the word. Silence is Truth.

Truth is what is.

The one established in silence lives in constant offering, in prayer without asking. In thankfulness, in continual love.

Recognise and then establish yourself as silence – fall in love with the silence.

The words end there.

We will now just sit in silence.

MEDITATION 7
THIS PRECIOUS MOMENT

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/this-precious-moment](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/this-precious-moment)

Just relaxing body and mind. Just relaxing the forehead and the eyebrows and the eyes and the cheeks and jaw. Relaxing the neck and the shoulder muscles. The upper arms and lower arms. The hands. Resting the upper torso and the belly. Allowing the breath to come and go, freely. So wonderful how the rhythm of the breath Intimately connects as with nature. Just the slow peaceful rhythm of life itself, breathing. Resting the upper legs and lower legs and feet resting on the floor or on the mat.

It's fine to just follow the breath if that's something that you practice on a regular basis. But I'd also encourage you to just rest in the awareness of the total sensations of the body. Sitting, just sitting. Becoming one with the body and mind. And then expanding out to the environment becoming one with the environment. Noticing how in the field of awareness, everything is arising in the same spaciousness, whether it be sounds or sensations or thoughts or feelings.

~ ~ ~

Becoming aware of this naturally arising, naturally functioning, Awareness. Life being aware of life. Just dropping into it, effortlessly.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

~ ~ ~

So welcome to your home - this here – now - timeless presence. This here now - the only constant in our life. The shimmering stream-of-consciousness. This river of life. This bubbling creek. Where not even the present can be grasped, it's gone before we can blink. All we can do is surrender to the flow.

~ ~ ~

This awareness, that we are if you like, is kind of the mother of all Buddhas. Expanding in every direction, it's nurturing embrace hears all, rejects no-one.

~ ~ ~

This awareness is entirely complete and at peace with itself. It does not argue or struggle with the reality of what is. It's just this - suchness. It is reality.

As soon as we get caught up in our likes and dislikes, our judgments, that's what makes the hairs breath of difference which creates the gap which separates us. Where the suffering comes in.

~ ~ ~

This awareness is the deep silence because it is that which is listening. Listening without any agenda or evaluation. Not judging the sound. Sound of car engines and birds are equal. In this awareness ... everything can appear as miraculously beautiful in this awareness. Like the famous Zen koan, when the master pointed to the "shit stick" in the latrine, after the monk asked him, what is Buddha?

Awareness itself doesn't discriminate between poop and ice cream. Not to suggest that one would eat poop and not ice cream. There is a place for smells and our natural animal self which can detect which is something which is edible and something which is not edible. Again, that's just part of the natural functioning of survival. How the animal body adjusts to the environment. And no matter how much meditation we may practice we don't stop being our animal nature. Neither should we deny it in any way. But it's held in the wisdom and compassion of this awareness which is freely accepting of all things.

THIS PRECIOUS MOMENT

~ ~ ~

In this field of awareness everything is new. There is no memory of the past.

Each moment is unrepeatable.

~

Even when we experience a memory, we're experiencing that memory, for the first time, newly in this moment.

~ ~ ~

Language, although advantageous from an evolutionary point of view is one of the barriers to experiencing each moment newly. How we classify things, the word tree, for example, reduces all these beings that we call tree, to one concept, one category, 'tree'.

Whereas the way I experience tree and you experience tree, is always going to be unique in each moment.

Is there any tree, apart from our experience, of the tree?

~ ~ ~

I experience this body; you experience your body. Our experiences are unique moment by moment.

~ ~ ~

And yet there's nobody doing this. It's all just happening. We don't turn the 'on' switch on to awareness, awareness is already here. So life and its diversity - Sameness and difference, equality and differentiation, the one and the many.

You're all the manifestation of this one life, this one intelligence.

And each of us is a unique little Buddha being. In the totality of the universe, this is hard to imagine, duration. But from a cosmic perspective, I guess, we're here and gone in an instant almost.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

~ ~ ~

Let us hold and maintain our awareness of the preciousness of this life, this moment.
Let us bring this realization into our everyday life and share it with our loved ones, our friends and with strangers.

Each moment is so precious.

Share the gratitude for this life.

MEDITATION 8

THOUGHTS

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/thoughts](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/thoughts)

The second vow of the Four Great Vows of Zen Buddhism is, in one translation:

Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to release them, or I vow to transform them. The inexhaustibility of delusions points to that this Waking up from the dream processes is never ending. As delusions are inexhaustible, each moment is our opportunity to awake from them. So don't be disheartened. When thoughts continue to arise one after the other and how even the most experienced meditators can still get lost in thoughts.

One of the reasons why we sit in a formal meditation practice like this is to help us see clearly as best we can the arising of a thought and the ceasing or passing away of a thought. Not so easy to observe, to do that, in our everyday life. Getting lost in thought is equivalent to the delusion, sometimes it can be quite harmless such as daydreaming, other times it may well be a judgment that could lead to an intense reaction of anger.

So, as we settle into our body sensations, the gentle rhythm of our breathing, sounds of the environment, do your best to be observant of thoughts which are arising, and see if you can notice them coming and going, arising and passing away. There's no need to grab hold of them, just letting them go. And when you do become lost in a thought, at some point, notice that as well. And, if you can notice the momentary gap between one thought and the next thought. That's really important. To rest in that space between thoughts.

If you like, this is the gradual methodology of how we release ourselves from the delusion of an “I” or a separate self, that is behind our thoughts or actions.

In the Ordinary Mind Zen School, we’re not so concerned about “Kensho” or “Satori” or peak experiences of one kind or another. We’re more concerned with seeing how we can be free in this ordinary mind this ordinary consciousness, that we all participate in. That freedom is here and now. It’s not dependent upon some mighty effort to break through at some point in the future. But we can see through delusions now. By clarifying that space in between the thoughts.

See consciousness itself is empty of self. The feeling or sense of being yourself is generated by the thought-emotions which rise and the habitual tendency to believe we have something to protect, namely a self. And we can witness this often in our everyday life, especially in our relationships. So, these times when we sit together like this, are wonderful opportunities for clarifying the gap between the thoughts and noticing, clarifying it, seeing it. Seeing that even a thought arises, Consciousness is not a thought. Or an emotion arises with that thought, that the awareness itself is distinct from that emotion. You may be feeling sadness, but awareness itself is not sad. This is very subtle.

To see that we can be both sad and not sad at the same time.

One of the paradoxes.

I guess when we speak of metaphors like “purification” in Zen it’s really important not to see that as some kind of puritanism. It’s more about just the pureness of the sadness and not complicating it by having another reaction. Most of our problems and suffering in life, comes from the reaction to the difficult feeling. Our inability to just let it be, to fully embrace the sadness as it arises, without getting entangled in judgments about the sadness, whether we are judging ourselves or someone else - just the sadness.

It’s a similar thing with thoughts as well. How we may well observe judgmental thoughts, during the day about ourselves or others. These thoughts we have no control over them, they just come up like all of different kinds of thoughts. But if we see them clearly as just a thought then we can watch the thought arise and pass away without a reaction. So, it’s very important not to be judgmental about being judgmental.

~ ~ ~

Weeding is a metaphor that is often used in Zen, a metaphor I’m quite fond of, not that I do much literal weeding myself. Not something I gravitate towards very much but the

THOUGHTS

actual practice of zazen, the process of weeding is, letting go of the thoughts. Thoughts ... the delusion is when we get lost in the thought, that's the weed. It's a never-ending process - the weeding. The more consistently we weed, then, we start to see, the soil in between the leaves, the soil doesn't get covered, we see the weeds more distinctly. And our attitude towards weeding the thoughts is the same as, hopefully your attitude towards weeding in general, that we approach it with a mind of equanimity. No point getting angry with the weeds. The weeds are just weeds. The thoughts are just thoughts.

~ ~ ~

The important thing to see, is that there is no thinker behind the thoughts. There's no little person behind our eyes pulling the leavers. Although sometimes it feels like that. As we rest, in our awareness, in-between the thoughts, and start to see clearly, the difference between being aware and being lost in thought, you start to feel the difference in feeling tone the lack of self in Awareness itself, and the freedom that generates. Even if it's only for a few moments. Don't underestimate the power of a moment. One moment of freedom increases the possibility of another moment of freedom.

Hopefully moving away from a life centred around self-centred reactions to a live cantered around living responsibly. Responding from our Compassionate Heart rather than from our self-centred reaction. So gradually we weed and uproot the attachment to the self. Which is a lifelong process, I don't know anyone who's 100% clear of being attached to some form of self.

MEDITATION 9
CONSCIOUSNESS ONLY

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-zazen-is-the-teacher](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-zazen-is-the-teacher)

Welcome everyone to Wednesday morning Zoom Zazen. Thank you all for making the effort to join us this morning to support each other's practice. It's always a good idea to, before we start to sit, to just bring to mind our intention. The intention could be too just to be awake to this moment, could be to be kind to ourselves, kind to our bodies. So, it's nice to be aware of the intention for sitting. And to bring our attention then to our posture.

So, our intention is always informed by Barry Magid's notion of a "bottom-up" practice. That is, we don't sit to become Buddha's, we sit because we're already Buddha. We are sitting to express our Buddhahood.

Of course, there's a lot of resistance that arises to that idea and that's where we often, that's where we practice - with our resistance.

So, settling into your posture. There's so much meaning in that word, to settle, to settle. Settling. We often feel unsettled in the world at times. We often start our practice periods, our Zazen periods, with a feeling of unsettlement. But often by the end of the half hour sitting, or however long it is you sit, we tend to feel this sense of everything just settling. Sometimes referred to in Zen as the self, settling into the self. This notion of the two selves, the personal self and the true self or the universal self. Self, settling

into self. Becoming one. You can also see this as a movement from Andrew doing zazen, to zazen doing zazen. So, our practice is about building up that trust in zazen, so that we can just totally surrender to the zazen, just to put everything aside, put all our personal concerns aside, as we settle into our meditation practice.

So - just sitting or calmly abiding in change - is the most simplest practice but also probably the most advanced practice, is not always easy just to just sit - there's so much in that just - and it's perfectly fine to use different modalities or techniques, such as just being with the breath or counting the breath, or even the kinds of self-compassion practices that we sometimes do. So, we're wanting to prepare the ground, to prepare the conditions for just being able to just sit, something that doesn't always come naturally.

So, just settling into your posture, settling into your breathing. Bringing that sense of kindness and tenderness to your attention. Enjoy your sitting. We're going into silence for a while now.

~ ~ ~

So, as we settle deeper and deeper the keyword is feeling. So many feelings, very, very subtle. Little feelings, feelings that we don't often pay attention to - the obvious ones such as feelings of tightness or tension, in the belly or the shoulders or the neck or the face. But also, more subtle feelings, could be feeling which goes with the sound of a bird. The feeling which goes from the kind of associations or memories of doing meditation before. The subtle feeling or could be a feeling of anxiety, could be a feeling of sadness. Or it could just be a simple feeling of tenderness or kindness. So go to the feelings and just allow the thoughts just to, just to arise and fall away. Stay with the feelings. And as you stay with the feelings, just imagine that zazen itself is holding all of those feelings, is containing all of those feelings. No matter what we feel it's perfectly acceptable. Perfectly held and accepted by zazen itself.

Now you can just rest in the arms of zazen, just let everything be, just give it all over to zazen.

~ ~ ~

One of the insights which arises on the Zen path and it's very simple and obvious but it's quite revealing when it reveals itself is that, all we ever have is experience. And the

only experience we ever have is our own experience.

We can empathize with other human beings and other animals or even trees and plants, but, the only world we experience is our own world. The only experience we experience is our experience and our whole life is about experience. Twenty-four hours a day.

So, our intention in our practice is to transform that experience. We work with our experiences. Our experience of this moment. So, when we we're experiencing, experience can only be now. So, each moment is the opportunity to be with our experience. And through the practices of intention and attention, we bring a sense of compassion to our own experience. An insight into our own experience. Which can completely transform how we experience others. In other words, if we're going to be friendly with others, we have to befriend ourselves. If we're going to be open to others and vulnerable, we need to be open and vulnerable to ourselves.

This is your world, your experience. Want to make it our home. A kind place to be living in. Our practice can give us the confidence that we can transform our experience. That we're not helpless victims of the world. That our experience is our world, it's our universe. And it's totally unique to ourselves. And it's a precious gift. Hold it, treasurer it.

It's the hidden jewel.

So, to put it simply, when you see the star in the morning, you're seeing *your* star. Because that star is you, it's your experience of the star that you're seeing. What's even more difficult to I guess, get our heads around, is that, that person we see before us is our experience as well. We're not separate from anything. Our experience is our experience, and we can't get beyond that. That's all there is - experience.

MEDITATION 10
RESTING IN CHANGE

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/resting-in-change](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/resting-in-change)

Lovely morning, sun shining, first glimpses of the sun, orange light on the trees. Early morning glow. Settling into your posture. When we're first starting to sit for a period, as a means of helping the settling process, it's usually a good practice to start with the focusing on the main object that we would normally use, most people use the breath either at the belly or chest or the nostrils. Just settling into the movement of the breath. Sensations of the breath.

Just notice how we are effortlessly aware.

As we settle, into the relative stillness of sitting, we become more alert and aware to the flow of everything. Just going to quote from dedication that Joko Beck use to read out:

Unceasing change turns The Wheel of Life. And so reality is shown in all its many forms. Peaceful dwelling, as change itself, liberates all suffering sentient beings and brings them to Great Joy. Peaceful dwelling as change itself means feeling throbbing pain in my legs, hearing the sound of the car.

Just experiencing. Experiencing. Just dwelling with experience itself. Even the pain is changing minutely, second by second by second. Peaceful dwelling as change itself,

liberates all suffering sentient beings and brings them to Great Joy.

So formal practice-realization is an opportunity to experience this great joy, of resting in change itself. Resting in the midst of impermanence is where we find peace, where we find Nirvana. It's not somewhere else, it's right here, in the middle of all this.

Of course, in our practice principles we chant: *Caught in a self-centred dream, holding to self-centred thoughts.* These metaphors describe how we often find ourselves resisting change. So, during formal practice-realization, we have an opportunity just to see this in a more concentrated or minute detailed way.

So awareness is effortless. It's already here. Sensations, sounds, feelings, thoughts, are arising and passing in our awareness. This light of awareness, or this knowing of awareness, which is this kind of constant, which is in the midst of this change. So, this practice of abiding in impermanence or non-abiding, non-attaching, is a process of letting go, of opening. As opposed to hanging on, clinging, attaching, closing, contracting, tightening.

So perhaps, one of the easiest ways to directly experience this core of holding-letting go, is in the direct experience of the body itself. So, as we're sitting we get the opportunity to allow our awareness to penetrate into deeper sensations of the body. And you become aware of, often in the belly, or the shoulders or the back of the neck or the face - you become aware of pockets of tightness, contraction and that maybe is the residues of past conditioning or past experiences of holding on of contracting, of fear and anxiety, these residues which remain in the body in the form of contraction tightness.

So, as the breathing naturally slows and as the silence naturally permeates our awareness. Just allow the gentle rhythm of the breath, the subtle movements of the body, just see if you can be aware of the very subtle with letting go in the body. Sometimes it might be more dramatic, almost like a spasm of relief sometimes. Without trying to change anything, not forcing anything, just allowing your awareness, which is accepting of everything. If there's an area that you're aware of which is tight or feels contracted, just explore it for a little while. Then maybe move to another part of the body and explode it for a little while. Then come back to the whole awareness of the body, from the bottom of our feet to the tip of our head.

~ ~ ~

And as we become more aware of awareness as a kind of empty field, expanding in all

directions, see how the field of sounds, the soundscape, also is sharing the same field as the body sensations, and how our awareness of the sounds can help us feel our way into the spaciousness in the body itself. Contraction and tightness often feel very dense like a tight knot. And we can sense our way using the feeling of the spaciousness of sounds, to also loosen up those tight knots, to see the space within the knots itself. To see that the body is *full* of space.

So, we can take this opportunity to experience the phenomena of rising and falling, or appearing and disappearing, happening at great speed: car sounds, bird songs, sensations, appearing, disappearing, rising, falling, very quickly -

Everything is falling. But we can rest in our, rest our awareness in the security of our posture and feel this flux of life. We can let ourselves go into the stream - *be* the stream, even if it's falling over the cliff as a waterfall. The only bottom you'll experience is groundlessness.

This is the Great Joy, the great Freedom - nothing stays the same, not even for an instant, at this level. Of course, we have a different experience when it comes to thoughts or beliefs and viewpoints. Human beings get so attached to the permanence of their viewpoints. But this practice at the level of the body sensations sounds it's preparing the ground for us to also loosen up our attachment to our viewpoints our attachment to our core beliefs. Even our core beliefs about Buddhism. Let go of them. Let go of everything. Nothing is permanent. Find your peace in the midst of that impermanence.

~ ~ ~

The practice that Joko taught, (not just Joko, it's present in other traditions) as labelling thoughts, is a kind practice of helping to loosen up our identification with thoughts. When we have a judgemental thought in particular, they're good opportunities for noticing that. Otherwise, just allow the thoughts to melt into the background and maintain awareness on the flow of sensations and sounds and the thoughts themselves will just naturally, what the Tibetans call self-liberate. They will just vanish, disappear.

~ ~ ~

If you find yourself getting drowsy or daydreaming, or floating of in some nice little daydream, that's perfectly fine, but when you notice that - just come back, adjust your

posture a little bit, move it a little bit, get back into your posture, open your eyes if you want to, and come back to being present to just this moment.

~ ~ ~

Paradoxically we find our home in the midst of change. There is nothing to lose, nothing to gain. How can the universe lose or gain anything? It's only when we construct the unreal boundaries of "this is mine" and "that's yours" that we create for ourselves, the suffering of loss and gain. In the universe there are no boundaries. There's no mine or yours. There is just the constant flux of life itself. Sometimes, this constant flux, doesn't go in the direction we would like it, too. We don't necessarily always have to like what we're experiencing right now. We don't have to rejoice at the pain in our knees, but all we have to do is see that it's part of the flux of Life.

If we didn't experience pain, we would be in great trouble.

Life wants to live. Everything we enjoy and appreciate about life would not be possible without change. Can you imagine a world without change? Yet one of the fundamental errors we make, is to try and stop things from changing. People, nature itself, is not going to conform to our requirements. So, when we are practicing resting in impermanence, loosening up our fixations, expectations, attachments, Loosen up our requirements! Be more flexible, allow the direct experience of change itself to liberate - to liberate us from our requirements of our lives and how other people should be.

MEDITATION 11
ECODHARMA and THE FORMLESS SELF

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/ecodharma-and-the-insubstantiality-of-self](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/ecodharma-and-the-insubstantiality-of-self)

So, I'd encourage you in this meditation to let go of everything that makes up your sense of social identity. And we do that by focusing on feelings, sensations. We can't really feel age or gender, they're just concepts. However, because we identify with concepts, we can feel hurt if someone insults some aspect of our social identity. So, let's leave these identities behind us. Let's de-identify from these constructs by just bringing our attention to our direct experience, right now.

Where in our direct experience can you find gender or age? Or occupation? Or citizenship? Or ownership for that matter. We sometimes say things like, 'I feel my age.' But when you take away the story, all we feel is a flow of sensations. We are a bundle of sensations from the moment we are born to the moment we die. And can you really feel gender? Now you may feel hurt, again, if someone insults your identification with gender. But that hurt feeling is a feeling. Again, gender is a social construction and it's not a feeling.

Zazen in a way reveals our utter nakedness, in the sense of identity. When you're stripped of all our identity.

When we focus on our inner self, the 'me', our most private inner Sanctum. The flowing stream of thoughts, feelings, memories, imaginings, constantly changing from one

moment to the next. Notice how it's always embedded within the world. How our awareness includes presence of the world: sounds, taste, touch, colours ... in this flow of experience our inner-self is always embedded within this larger context of the world. It's always appearing and disappearing within something much larger.

~

And notice how our awareness, that is aware of the 'me', is the same awareness that is aware of the sounds and the colours, the smells, the taste. How the personal self in a way, is part of the world, same way as a flower or a mountain, a river stream. Not separate.

It's always arising within the richness of Life all around us. The World Self, selfing in the same way as the personal self is selfing from moment to moment. The sounds and feelings are all arising, co-arising, intermingling, one stream or flow of consciousness. To come back to Dogen's poem:

Colours of the mountain peak

And Echoes of the Valley Stream

All of them as they are, are nothing other than,

My Shakymuni's voice and appearance.

The colours, and the sounds, are all my body. This very body. The body of Buddha, the body of Earth, the body of mountains and rivers. And all the countless beings that dwell there are not separate from us. A personal self is always embedded in this World Self, in this Buddha Nature. The stream of Life. The personal self is ultimately a fiction, a necessary fiction, which is seen through by the same awareness which constitutes it and brings it into being.

Awakening to this Self-Realization is simply seeing the insubstantial nature of the self and the interdependence of all life. Realizing the Self as well, which is inclusive of all beings.

~ ~ ~

This mystery of Life. Exactly this - hearing, smelling, seeing, feeling. There is the 'me' which is precious, and there is Life. We are Life and Life is precious. First precept in Zen is to cherish all Life, to hold all of Life in reverence. Without Life there would be no experiencing anything.

Life as it is the only teacher.

That's why we call Zen a religion of Life. This reverence which calls us forth, to be Guardians of that which we love. Gratitude for being alive is an expression of this love. Ultimately, our Zen practice teaches us to love Life. To love Life in all its inclusivity.

This is who we are.

Just this.

And the love of just this calls forth our care, our tender care for birds and beasts. Our tender care for all beings. Sentient and non-sentient.

~ ~ ~

We are all expressions of this unique, wonderful diversity we call Life. Each one of us. Each one of us totally unique in our manifestation from moment to moment. Each leaf on the tree, totally unique. From the one tree, an infinite number of unique leaves.

~ ~ ~

The colours of the mountains and sounds of the valley stream are themselves the Sutra - they are themselves the teaching. There's no need to read the Sutra, one just hears and see's the Sutra. There is nothing hidden in Zen. The precious sacredness of Life is there for all to see and hear. All we have to do is open our hearts, let go of the self-centred dream. We all know this. Not with our heads but with our hearts.

~ ~ ~

This little OzZen community, part of thousands and thousands of little communities that are all dedicated to opening our hearts. Trying to reverse the cycle of catastrophic devastation. From a left-centred, head-centred civilization. One that can embrace Interconnectedness and interdependence of the whole of Life.

Zazen is the opening of the heart.

MEDITATION 12 ENJOY THE RIDE

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-wisdom-and-compassion](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-wisdom-and-compassion)

Most of you would be familiar with the basic teachings of Buddhism, which you can basically group into two: the wisdom teachings or practices and the compassion teachings or practices. So, the wisdom teachings or practices are sometimes called the *prajna* teachings or the Emptiness teachings and practices, such as what is called in the famous Heart Sutra, Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is form, those wisdom teachings are seeing into the impermanence and insubstantiality of all conditioned existence including personal self; and then the Compassion teachings, also building on, flowing from the wisdom teachings, emphasizing the interdependence and interconnectedness of all existence including ourselves.

And so the two sort of mutually support and complement each other all the time. It's kind of like, we're always working with the two teachings or practices. Sometimes I call them the existential practices or the existential kind of aspects of Zen and the communal aspects of zen. So, the practice of *zazen* itself is kind of like it's both a wisdom practice and a communal practice and that's one of the interesting things about it. So it brings the two together in the one kind of practice, even though we're not talking to each other in *zazen*, normally, we're sitting together and it's very much a communal practice in that sense.

On Sunday we were discussing *Ecodharma* and looking at how the eco-crisis can bring

up a lot of painful grief and despair at times. So, it's really about how our Zen practice can help us to support ourselves to face that pain that may come up, and to engage in whatever ways we can to address that issue. The wisdom teachings and the compassion teachings flow into that as well, so in these times of Covid, you know where the mental health services are really stretched and there's a lot of mental distress, in order to face things like the eco-crisis we really need to be nurturing strong and resilient selves as distinct from egocentric selves and egocentric communities. We are wanting to build resilient compassionate selves and resilient compassionate communities, as opposed to egocentric selves and egocentric communities.

In my therapy practice I meet with a lot of people who experience self-hate, this comes up a lot and so self-hate manifests in a lot of different ways. It could be a sense of personal inadequacy, personal defectiveness, personal failure, or I'm not good enough. A lot of people these days talk about the "Imposter Syndrome", and this is very common and comes up a lot in my therapy practice and I'm sure there are other therapists here today that they would also come up. You've probably come across it with your friends as well. And in your own life. It's certainly come up a lot for me in my professional life, too.

And so, you know, it's good to reflect on the origins of all this self-hate which totally surprised the Dalai Lama when he first came to the West, he wasn't just really used to that kind of idea in his Tibetan culture. I guess there's lots of ways of understanding that, but you could break it down into two basic ways how that arises. One way is how self-hate originates is through relational devaluation. We could be devalued as a child growing up in a family or we could be devalued in an intimate relationship and that sense of devaluation undermines our sense of self-worth or self-esteem and creates all these various forms of self-hate which we then internalized and identify with.

The other way of understanding self-hate is to see it as a cultural phenomenon, you know, we live in a culture which is very evaluative and competitive and sets up people to experience themselves as failures in all kinds of different ways. So again, it's part of our Zen practice to undermine that sense of self-hate and shift to a sense of Self-Compassion or self-acceptance. And we want to create more compassionate communities where we can build resilience and sense of positivity and connection rather than this sense of separateness and devaluation and failure. So, these two things, the insubstantiality of self and the connection through our communal practices are really central to this work.

So will stop there and we can now move into our guided meditation. We can explore

how just the simple practice of sitting with sensations and seeing into the flow of insubstantiality and impermanence can really help us to also see how self-hate itself is insubstantial as well. And to help us free ourselves from that kind of identification.

Three bells ...

So, just settling into your posture. Sitting in relative stillness. Settling into the silence and at the same time feeling the subtle movements and the sounds. So, we'll just sit in silence for a few minutes while you settle into you to your posture.

~ ~ ~

So, imagine we are all sitting in a bus or a train and take our seat. Only in this case, in this journey, we're staying perfectly still. Sitting in the same spot. There's nothing really moving except our mind. So, there is stillness in movement and movement in stillness. We're still but everything is moving. If we were to look out of the window of our imaginary bus or train, we would see scenery flashing by. In the same way, in our stillness, the scenery is flashing by in the form of sensations, feelings, thoughts, memories, imaginings, all flowing swiftly by. Sounds coming and going. Visual images, whether they be in our minds or whether they're clouds in the sky, come and go. Passing traffic sounds come and go. So even our stillness, is only relatively still. Our belly is always rising and falling with the breath. There might be a slight swaying motion of the upper torso. But still, we maintain our stillness with our posture. Feet on the floor or on the mat, sitting on the chair or the cushion, forming that kind of tripod. Which allows us just to relax and feel the flow.

Enjoy the ride.

In our practice of course, the destination is irrelevant, there's nowhere to go, no one to be, other than just this moment. Be still and feel the movement, be silent and hear the sounds.

Enjoy the ride.

Just allow business as usual or our agenda for the day, our plans, just let them go, let them melt, let them dilute into the background - this immense vastness that we are when we sit in silence and stillness. Thoughts will arise, thoughts will disappear. Let them all be diluted in this great web of interconnectedness, this great vastness of this present moment.

ENJOY THE RIDE

~ ~ ~

Zazen could even be seen as a form of play. There's nothing to be gained, Nothing to be accomplished, we're just sitting for the sake of sitting, playing for the sake of playing, just enjoying dance of Life, the immediacy of the moment, the vitality of this moment.

~ ~ ~

Relaxing the belly. Let the breath moving the belly connect you to the rhythms of nature. The cycles of the seasons. The rising and falling of the waves.

Open the heart. Open that which is most inner, most sacred. And smile, feel the smile. Feel your sense of connectedness and goodwill, towards yourself and others. It's okay to enjoy sitting.

Dogen called it the Dharma gate of ease and joy.

~ ~ ~

Zazen is the doorway to liberation from the egocentric prison. There is nothing lacking in zazen. Its only egocentricity makes it so. Egocentricity arises from fear, separation. Devaluation. Zazen teaches the appreciation and valuation of life. First precept: Cherish all Life. Appreciate this life that we are. It's already complete. There's nothing we can add to life.

~ ~ ~

Whatever comes up in our practice, just let it come. If sadness comes, roll with the sadness. If anxiety comes, let the anxiety come. If tightness is present, let tightness be present. We just open the door. Trust in the zazen.

~ ~ ~

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Zazen helps us to hold ourselves like the mother holds an infant. Zazen accepts ourselves exactly as we are, with no expectations or requirements.

It's a healing process.

MEDITATION 13 COMMITMENT

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-commitment](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-commitment)

So just before the we start with the formal meditation, I'll just say a few words about some aspect of Zen practice. So today I'm just going to say a few words about commitment. I guess many of us struggle with our commitment to Zen practice and sometimes in the same way as we struggle with commitment in intimate relationships and they're quite similar in many ways. But given the fact that the Zen is a communal practice commitment has always been a central part of our practice and the commitment is in the traditional classical Zen tradition is embodied in what's called the *Four Bodhisattva Vows*, the sense in which what we aspire towards, the same kind of thing when we talked about being clear about your intention or intentions when we practice, so the sense in which we practice from a position of vowing or aspiring. I'll just read to you the four Bodhisattva Vows and then At the end of all meditation practice. I'll recite the vows for you instead of the practice principles this morning. So the four traditional vows on the Zen path are -

The many beings are numberless, I vow to save them.

Greed, hatred and ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to abandon them.

Dharma gates are countless, I vow to wake to them.

Buddha's way is unsurpassed, I vow to embody it fully.

So they are the kind of traditional Zen aspirations, and in traditional Zen practice, this is often expressed in a formal public ceremony called the Jukai ceremony, where the Zen practitioner takes up the path through a formal commitment to the various precepts in Zen Buddhism. So ultimately I guess when we committing ourselves to something, that the core of that is something we value, something which is very precious to us, and we put into practice what we value. So ultimately Zen really is a path of service as expressed in the those Four Vows. There's a practice of service to each other here in our community and we make a commitment to each other.

I think in some ways Zen commitment is a little bit like analogous to the Metta practice, the loving kindness practice, that we sometimes do. Remember in loving kindness practice we start by expressing kindness towards ourselves. So in a sense, usually, then we work from ourself to people that we are very close to us, to family, to friends and sort of outwards to more people we don't know, to people we might dislike and so on, and so on, to all beings in the universe.

So I guess the movement in Zen practice in a way is starting with the commitment to ourselves and then moving and then as we mature in our practice that just grows and it just grows and grows, until that, that commitment includes starting with people we are close to and looking at the benefits we get from practice in that regard, moving to a sense of commitment to a group we might be sitting with, to the community we live in, to the Nation we live in to the world we live in, etcetera. So that commitment - that infinite kind of aspiration, to save all beings as embodied in the Bodhisattva Vows.

So when we make that first vow, to save all beings, my teacher is very fond of saying don't forget to save yourself, as well. So, when we doing the Zazen practice, it's like making that commitment to our self. Just that commitment to try and establish a daily practice for example, 20 minutes a day or 30 minutes a day, 40 minutes a day, where we make an appointment with ourselves just to show up and give ourselves that time of self-care - just to be able to just to sit with our selves - and that establishment of that daily practice is really important in terms of it then growing and expanding to bring it into our everyday lives.

So, in a way we could say that basically Buddhism is really founded in ethics rather than metaphysics. The first teachings of the Buddha were the four noble truths where he starts to talk about suffering right from the get-go. It doesn't talk about the ultimate nature of reality, he says don't worry about that, let's pull the arrow out from our chest.

COMMITMENT

Let's relieve ourselves from this suffering that we are experiencing, and often people are drawn to practice because of our personal suffering that we're going through whatever form that may take but as our practice matures we start to see how it's all interconnected in this all interdependent as suffering is a very much a communal thing even though we all experience it in our own unique ways, and the more we go into the practice we more we see through the duality of self and other more we start to experience the other as being yourself as well.

So we get that commitment towards alleviating the suffering of others as well.

However, we cannot appreciate other people and value other people unless we ourselves have been valued and just to a quote here to see ourselves as being a value, we need others to see us as being of value. So in other words, we kind of find ourselves in the face of the other and in turn the other finds themselves in our face.

This is why I talk a lot about the metaphor of the smile and when we're sitting together here on Zoom, we just basically not physically present with each other in the room, but we seeing each other's faces and we're connecting in that way. So

showing up in these mornings and on Sundays is kind of, is it is a commitment to ourselves and to each other and it's a valuing of ourselves in each other and every time we show up like this we're showing that how we value each other in our practice. So I just like to finish with a quote from Joko Beck from her first book on her chapter called Commitment where she gives us a definition of commitment.

"Commitment and true love are twin sisters. The word 'commit' is from the Latin committere, which means to join, to entrust, to connect."

So let us enjoy trusting and connecting with each other this morning.

So will now start the meditation.

Three bells ...

Zazen practice is all about harmonizing our body, mind and breath. One of the best ways of doing that is simply just to follow the breath. Getting the right balance between effort and ease. The sense in which we make an effort to hold our posture. This is kind of the personal part of practice. Just making that effort to first of all to show up, clarify our intention and sit with our back relatively straight. Establishing a firm base on the chair or the cushion.

To allow that sort of flexibility of movement from the waist up. Feeling the solidity of the base that we can actually surrender to - that's the feeling at ease with.

The being at ease with is the kind of Buddha-nature of our practice, no effort involved. The realization kind of comes from the effort that you make.

In our Zazen practice, we don't worry about trying to stop our thoughts or control our thoughts. They just tend to - just allow them to come and go, like sounds come and go. We can acknowledge them, respond to them, let them go. But if we find ourselves getting caught up in them, or reacting to them, just simply come back again to our Zazen, to the thought of Zazen. Just come back to the posture if you like and just simply scan your posture.

Just allow the zazen to do the zazen.

Not everybody can sit in the classical postures of the half Lotus or even the Burmese posture, many of us sit on chairs. It's best not to lean back against the chair but some of us need to lean back on the chair. It's perfectly fine. We're all at different levels of physical fitness and age. Getting the right balance between effort and ease will vary from person to person, and it doesn't matter what our zazen looks like from the outside just find that the best posture that works for you, to accommodate to your body. Let your effort match your circumstances. Okay, let's just go into silence for a while.

~ ~ ~

As my teacher used to say, we can't do this practice, right or wrong. This is a gentle practice. We entrust ourselves to zazen and zazen will hold us. We voluntarily surrender to zazen. It's not an act of submission, it's an act of surrender. We're not trying to be perfect or get it right. We're just trusting to our practice. That's the *at ease* bit, just being at ease with it. Like a floating down the surrendering when you lie down in the water of the ocean or something like that. So that complete letting go. Knowing that you won't sink. Knowing that you won't drown, that zazen will hold you up.

~ ~ ~

So, our effort is not to get caught, not to get reactive. The hardest thing is to stay focused on zazen and when we do get carried away just simply return again, that's commitment. Just coming back again, it's coming back again.

COMMITMENT

Sometimes zazen might not feel very interesting - a sense of boredom may arise. Again, that's an indication that we've kind of like become disconnected. So we return again to the practice. When you feel sense of boredom, a sense of disconnection, a sense of disengagement, we return to our attention, return to scanning our posture. Come back again. So when boredom arises is kind a little, there's a gap that's opened up, and we come back again to our practice and close the gap. We are constantly closing the gap. It's from the gap that suffering arises, come back close the gap. Returning and returning again, coming back to zazen is re-engaging.

It's a common part of the practice - that movement - disengage, re-engage, disengage, re-engage. Bit like a personal relationship.

~ ~ ~

This simple practice softens the hard knots of tension It's a softening process, marinating in zazen. Joko used to use the metaphor of the ice cube - that the Ice Cube is, the hard edges of the Ice Cube just gradually melts so we become little pools.

~ ~ ~

So, in our Zazen practice, we are expressing our core values - preciousness of life, our appreciation of life. The valuing of our self and our interconnection, the valuing of our connection with each other, and the valuing of each other. All come together in zazen.

~ ~ ~

How, in this one moment right now, are we saving all beings?

As Walt Whitman said, "I contain multitudes".

~ ~ ~

Relaxing the belly.

Opening the heart.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Embracing your smile.

We are letting go, we are abandoning, greed, hatred and ignorance. We are Awakening to the Dharma gate of this moment. And we are fully embodying the Buddha way.

~

I'll just recite the Four Bodhisattva Vows (three times):

The many beings are numberless, I vow to save them

Greed, hatred and ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to abandon them.

Dharma gates are countless, I vow to wake to them.

Buddha's way is unsurpassed, I vow to embody it fully.

MEDITATION 14
AT HOME IN MUDDY WATER

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-at-home-in-muddy-water](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-at-home-in-muddy-water)

Do you have the patience to wait until your mud settles and the water is clear?

~ Lao Tzu

In a sense, our practice is always to bow to life as it is. Certainly, in our zazen practice, every moment we're bowing to life as it is. We often use metaphors in Zen: Mud, sticky, dirty. Children like to play in the mud, but as we get older, we're often told not to play in the mud. Stay clean. Don't get muddy. So it's also the sense of the image of the mud in the water in a glass when the glass is shaken the water gets cloudy. Then when we leave the glass alone, mud gradually settles to the bottom of the glass.

I think one of the interesting aspects of this verse:

May we exist like a Lotus

At home in the muddy water

Thus, we bow to life as it is.

is "may we" be "at home" in the mud. May we make our home in the messiness of our life. So, the Zen that we teach here is not a purification practice, but it is a practice.

We usually start this practice because we *don't* feel at home in the muddy water, far from it. In fact, we want to escape from the muddy water, or make the mud go away. Or the other strategy we might use is to try and purify the water and get rid of all the bad parts. All the parts we don't like about ourselves. But our practice is to welcome *all* these parts, or give them all a place at the table as my teacher, Barry Magid, would say.

So our Zazen practice helps us to cultivate patience and perseverance:

Tolerance.

Acceptance.

Forbearance.

Patience includes tolerance for people, situations, and experiences outside our comfort zone. The mud can represent anything in our practice which we see as being difficult, messy or uncomfortable. Patience and perseverance. Not just during the half-hour of our sitting practice or for a day or a month or a year. Patience and perseverance that goes on continuously, that goes on with no end ...

~ ~ ~

One of the great things about Zen is that it's all contained within Zazen. All the teachings, all the Four Noble Truths, the Six Paramitas or Perfections, the Precepts, are all expressed in this simple practice of just sitting. Just sitting is practicing patience, perseverance, acceptance.

My teacher's teacher, Joko Beck, used to say, practice your ABC's, that is, when we're practicing zazen we're building a *bigger container*. A container that can contain multitudes. All the different, infinite number of self-states we experience on a day-by-day basis, moment by moment. We're cultivating an ability just to stay with the moment. However, difficult it may feel. Practice can be difficult. It can be also very pleasant. But just to stay with whatever is happening, whatever we are experiencing, and just allowing it to be there is all we need to do.

As I said at the beginning, practice is finding the middle way between effort and ease. Getting the right balance, not making too much effort, not pushing too hard. And on the other hand, not just, kind of, relaxing into a dreamy state. But keeping the balance as Joko would say, walking on that Razors Edge:

AT HOME IN MUDDY WATER

This present moment.

Being awake to this present moment.

Being one with this present moment.

It's easy to be one with pleasant states, not so easy to be one with more difficult states. After a while, you'll notice how the effort realizes the ease. When you are first starting to sit in the morning, it's probably not that easy, there might be a lot of resistance to actually just commencing. But after 10-15 minutes or so, you find yourself easing more into it. If you're lucky, the resistance dissipates, sometimes it doesn't.

~ ~ ~

Practice is becoming intimate with our self.

Feel your feelings.

Feel your sensations,
feel the tightness.

Feel the tension.

Feel the breath,

Feel this life that we are.

~ ~ ~

Sometimes the mud in the water settles. It might not settle fully, but maybe it settles a little and sitting goes well. But any of us who have been doing this practice for quite a while, know that something will inevitably come along, muddy the water again. So, it's not a matter of the mud settling finally forever. We never get to any kind of finality in our practice. We just come back again and again and again.

Settling.

When the mud gets disturbed, settling, settling in the mud. Allowing our zazen just to hold us. Settling into zazen, just allowing the muddy water to settle naturally, like the breath settles into its own rhythm.

~ ~ ~

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Sometimes there may be confusion arising or anxiety arising, or some kind of emotional reaction. Or we may be experiencing peace and tranquillity. It doesn't matter. We're not trying to achieve and hold onto any particular state. All states are transient. Some may stay longer than others, but we don't need to try and hold on to what we like and reject what we don't like. We just stay with it all, embrace it all. We just give it all over to zazen.

~ ~ ~

To some extent it all begins to settle but we have to do it many times and we have to develop the patience to keep coming back and beginning again and again and again. It does not matter whether we have been sitting for a few months or for 40 years. Practice is always coming back, again and again.

~ ~ ~

Alan Watts once said: "*Muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone*".

When practicing zazen, leave yourself alone, my teacher would always say. There's nothing we can improve upon. *Right there* is the practice, the practice of patience, of watchfulness, of giving up trying to control anything or fix anything or change anything. We're not trying to get rid of anything, not trying to achieve anything, take all of that away and leave everything alone. Give it all over to zazen. That's the great mystery of our practice. That we learn, not by exercising control but by leaving it alone. That we are transformed, by leaving it all alone.

~ ~ ~

We don't sit to become Buddha's; we sit to express our Buddha nature.

~

Or, simply to express our nature.

MEDITATION 15
CREATING a CULTURE of AWAKENING

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-let-it-be](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-let-it-be)

It's often a good idea to also just be aware of our intention when we're sitting. It could be just a simple one like, being awake, being present ... with the intention just to connect to self and others.

~ ~ ~

Just letting be.

~ ~ ~

Settling, like the mud settling in the jar. Allowing everything just to be as it is. Allowing the breath to breathe its natural rhythm. Just allowing the mind to do what the mind does. Just to think but doing our best not to get caught into the contents of the thought. If you do get caught in the contents of the thought that's perfectly fine. Just become aware of that and just return to the just sitting.

~ ~ ~

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

The metaphor of a tree is nice when sitting zazen. The sense of the base of our sitting, below the waist, the tripod – or the three points of the knees or the feet on the floor, and the backside on the cushion or the chair, providing the stability of the roots going down into the earth. In a sense we could all identify as trees sitting together, standing together, our roots going down into the earth ... our roots connecting and supporting and nurturing and nourishing each other as we sit ... and then like a tree from the waist up, there's a gentle movement, like swaying in the breeze a little bit, swaying with the breath. A sense of flexibility – we're not stiff trees, we're flexible trees ... and our leaves and branches are reaching out to the sky, touching the sense of infinity.

~ ~ ~

During the duration of our sitting period, there will be different creatures that come to sit on the branches. They'll stay for a little while, they may even sing a song or tell a story, then they will fly away. Another creature will arrive, sit on the branch, stay for a little while, then fly away. So as a tree we have no preferences. We accept all creatures who come to perch on our branches ... we can give them space, give them attention. Allow them to be who they are. So, in the same way, we make space in the room for all our different sensations ... we make space for all our different thoughts and feelings ... and we welcome the world, with all its sounds and images.

So, in our practice you can have your eyes closed if you want to, or you can have them open or slightly open.

We may even have friends, long forgotten, who come to visit us in zazen, who stay for a while and then go away. Parts of ourselves that we usually like to keep hidden, that may wander into the light of our awareness. We welcome them. Wanting all the different parts of ourselves to be able to rest in zazen.

~ ~ ~

So, relaxing the belly, as best we can. Just feeling the breath, sometimes feeling the tension in the belly. It can often sometimes feel tight. Just allowing the tightness or the tension to be felt. Bring a sense of warmth and tenderness to the belly, the same way as you would lean tenderly towards an infant.

Feeling the upper torso, the shoulders which are often tense, allowing them to relax. The heart space, opening the heart of connection.

Feeling the face, the muscles in the face, relaxing the forehead, the eyebrows, cheeks, jaw, which can often hold a lot of tension. And of course, feeling the smile, the half Buddha smile.

~ ~ ~

Bring someone to mind who you care deeply for. Send them some loving kindness. Especially if their lives may be difficult at the moment in some way. The intention is to wish them well:

May they be safe.

May they be well.

May they be serene in their suffering, if they are suffering.

Then direct the same loving kindness towards yourself, towards *this* body ...

Nurturing and caring for the self.

Allowing the self to rest in zazen. Allowing the self to feel held, supported, recognized, acknowledged, honoured, and loved.

~ ~ ~

And when we sit like this together, or even when we're sitting on our own, be mindful of a sense of gratitude, which just naturally arises. You don't have to even, bring it forth, it's already here, in a sense. When we start to settle and open in our hearts ... it's a natural sense of gratitude which arises. A sense of gratitude we share with each other, for being here supporting each other.

~ ~ ~

Even though we are all appearing on the screen as boxes or within boxes, we can also imagine ourselves as an open circle, connecting with each other, or metaphorically holding hands in an open circle. The sense of the energy, the shared energy, that can arise, even connecting via screen like this.

So, in the same way that trees nourish each other, we nourish each other in our sitting together.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

~ ~ ~

At the core of zazen is a sense of intimacy. The sense in which the boundary between inside and outside begins to dissolve.

There's not a self in here, hearing a sound out there. The sound is intimate, the sound interpenetrates with the self.

They're non-separate from sound.

Self and world interpenetrate, intermingle, joining each other in that stream or flow of consciousness or awareness.

~ ~ ~

We may at times, of course, get caught up in a thought of somebody in our lives that we might be worried about. We might get caught up in a thought about a task that hasn't been completed. A task that needs to be done during the day. If this is what the mind does - just acknowledge that, and come back to Zazen, come back to the open awareness of Zazen, just sitting. Just allowing everything to be as it is, just allowing everything to flow. There's always going to be something we haven't done. Something that needs doing. There is always going to be a 'to do' list somewhere. Just allow yourself to have a break from that during Zazen. Just come back to this Eternal Now.

Enjoy this moment.

Enjoy this moment of being alive ...

~ ~ ~

So, Zazen presents us with this wonderful opportunity to leave ourselves alone, to accept ourselves exactly as we are.

To accept this moment exactly as it is. Or, to notice the resistance to this moment, exactly as it is. Which is part of what exactly is. Resistance is included in the moment-by-moment flow or stream. The desire to escape - go away, disappear. We just come back. Come back to being present, again and again and again.

~ ~ ~

CREATING A CULTURE OF AWAKENING

Again, I'd just like to acknowledge everybody here this morning. Your dedication and commitment to being here. Your intention to respond to yourself and the world with compassion. Whatever form that might take, however we go about our daily lives, whatever projects we may be involved in. The goodwill that we send to each other.

The smile that we bring to the shop assistant at the supermarket, or any other shop we might go into. The sense of appreciating all the work of everybody that allows us to have our food and clothing and shelter. Just acknowledging our interdependence. How we need each other to support ourselves doing the work that we do. How we are creating a community of care, compassion, a Culture of Awakening.

How there are so many other groups like ours meeting probably right now all around the world.

~ ~ ~

So, bringing our attention once more back to the body, feeling the shoulders, is there any tension still there? Feeling the belly, is there any tightness still there?

Opening the Heart.

Feeling the Smile.

Feeling our connection with each other.

Appreciating our shared intentions.

~

May you go well throughout the day.

MEDITATION 16
RESISTANCE TO BEING PRESENCE

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/resistance-to-being-presence](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/resistance-to-being-presence)

So, this short piece (by Toni Packer) is called *The Wonder of Presence*:

What a quiet Sunday it is, overflowing with golden light. Taking a walk this morning along the driveway, with the sound of crunching white snow, evergreen branches shedding sprays of glistening crystals when touched by the breeze; the taste of tiny flakes on lips and cheeks, descending to the freezing creek with its gurgling waters splashing over icy rocks, playfully sparkling in the light of the Sun. Crows cawing loudly to each other throughout the woods. What heart would not be gladdened?

Under a vast blue sky this wondrous presence is here, replacing habitual worrisome thoughts and feelings; they can't survive the Deep Silence of open being. It is not brought about by anything or anyone. It is here without effort. Without time. In this sunlit Hall with green plants cascading down the wall, sitting together, listening, breathing and wondering in Stillness.

We are all alone yet all one. When thoughts about my problems, my fears, my needs and desires abate in silent presence, what could possibly divide us? If thoughts are whirling about, let them be like dancing snowflakes in empty space. This moment of light and warmth and cool air, inhaling and exhaling softly. Are we here? This instant of opening eyes and ears widely, beholding the wooden floor, the distant Blue Hills and Silent People

all around. What else is there? Is the mind thinking about all this or can it quiet down in simple wondering without knowing?

~

So, as we sit, we become aware of this presence, presencing itself. The world presencing itself to us. And how the flow of the self, the thoughts and feelings, intermingle and interpenetrate with the world, in this constant changing flux, moment by moment. So another expression for zazen might be 'being presence'. Simply being this presence that we are. But often when we first sit down or sometimes even before we sit or maybe we never get to sit. We may experience a strong pull, away from being present. Almost like being caught in a rip current. Sometimes it's best not to resist the resistance, and allow ourselves to be gently carried away by the rip, in the faith that it will naturally come to an end, and we will wake up again, in the light of a deep sense of being presence. That is our faith in a sense, that we will always come back. Just naturally come back. Just naturally come back to being presence. However, sometimes, we may remind ourselves of our attention, intention, to be present, and return back - again, and again, we get carried away by the rip and then just come back again. Just come back to feeling the sensations, hearing the sounds. So resistance to just sitting, is a natural part of just sitting. It is hard to just rest in being here now. Without desiring something to happen. Or to be entertained in some way, or to get involved in our thoughts. Or to get preoccupied with constant evaluations of, are we doing this right or wrong? How are we going? Am I there yet, as if there's somewhere to get?

~

As my teacher Barry Magid says: "*In that just sitting, we enter a place which is neither right or wrong*". We don't have to make anything happen. It's effortless in that sense. It's happening already. And as Barry says, this practice heals our separation from life. We could reinterpret the word "Nirvana" as nonseparation from life. Non-separation from our feelings, from our thoughts, even from our preferences, fully embracing what is, in this moment. Being wholehearted in our practice - nonseparation. Rather than thinking about the world, we are the world. This is our healing.

~ ~ ~

Feeling touched by the world.

Feeling the presence of the trees and the mountains.

Appreciating the objects in the kitchen or the lounge room and the sunlight coming in through the window. Like a Vermeer painting. I still have a memory of being a child sitting on the kitchen floor with my Mum working in the kitchen. With the sunlight shining through the window and being mesmerized by the dust motes dancing in the sunlight.

Feeling totally safe and at home.

What a magic garden of Eden it was for many of us in our childhood. Appreciating the wonder of presence.

Then for many of us, re-experiencing that in our adolescence. The second birth into the wonder of presence. So, our zazen nurtures that being presence. We could say that, resistance is the pull back into separation, to thinking about the world, to thinking about things. The pull back into Dreamland. Dreamland can be a pleasant daydream, or it can be a repetitive rumination that drives up our anxiety levels. In fact, we can see that we are often preoccupied with the activity of not being presence. And the activity of not being presence we could call resistance. Resistance often takes the form of, getting caught in thoughts. I'm beginning to call getting caught in thoughts *emotional thinking*, influenced by Joko's work, where she speaks of emotion- thought. But I think it's also important to make a distinction between, emotion thinking or emotional thinking, and reverie. Or reflective, contemplative thinking. The difference is, with emotional thinking we have become identified with or become the thought. We are the passive victims of thoughts which are often linear, black-and-white or judgmental; often focused on the future or the past. In the sense of thinking about it. Whereas reverie, contemplative thinking, we allow the thoughts to come and go, give them the freedom to come and go. To merge and interpenetrate with the flux of life. Sort of captured in that metaphor that Tony Packer used – "thoughts whirling about, let them be like dancing snowflakes in empty space". Images, thoughts, reverie.

Part of the flow of being presence.

~ ~ ~

All those layering's of how the past, in the sense of our memory, colours the present. So, in that way, the past is part of presencing.

So, in that sense, we could talk of a meditative kind of thinking, a reverie, contemplation, flow, which is in harmony with our Zazen.

~ ~ ~

Being presence or presencing, as in the verb, presencing. Ceaseless change. This is a quote from a Japanese Zen Teacher called Harada:

The present moment is a condition where there is absolutely no separation between yourself and things. This is not to say though, that there exists such a thing as the present moment. The condition we refer to as now, is where there is truly no gap, between yourself and other things. When you don't have peace of mind, this means that you are in a condition in which you are constantly aware of a distance between yourself and other things. In our present life, regardless of whether we know it or not, we are one with things, this is what is meant by the challenging expression: all things are impermanent.

~

Our practice is to become one with impermanence. Which includes the impermanence of our feelings and thoughts. The impermanence of the self itself, in constant flux, changing from one moment to the next, like a will-o'-the-wisp. You cannot grasp it or Pin It Down.

~ ~ ~

The world is the Self, the Self is the world. We meet our Self from moment to moment. The sound of the dove cooing gently. It's cooing us. The lawnmower in the distance ...

Notice the resistance to this being presence and the subtle forms it takes - takes many different forms. I'm sure you'll be able to identify all different kinds of ways in which resistance manifests itself. Boredom is a kind of resistance. Thinking, in the sense of becoming involved in our thoughts, is also a form of resistance. So is daydreaming. We practice our patience and persevere, to stay awake as presence. Eventually, the layers of resistance will evaporate. And we are left with the still quietness of just sitting, just being presence. The world is presencing and we are the world presencing in this human form right now. As we enter the Deep Stillness of the world, presencing as sounds and sensations. And when we finish sitting, and we might take a walk outside in the garden, the garden is bursting forth in "all the colours of the rainbow with symphonies of music in the sky". To quote a Australian bush singer/poet.

So, the colours of the world enrich our souls in that way. We're very blessed in Australia

with a very colourful world, in nature, flora and fauna, are outstandingly beautiful and colourful.

~ ~ ~

So, take notice of these metaphors of, how we get disconnected from being presence. And how we can, allow resistance just to be resistance. And in a sense, paradoxically, become non-separate from resistance itself. If we fully embrace resistance, if we become non-separate from resistance. Then resistance naturally dissolves.

This is the wondrous thing about the 'just sitting' practice of Zen. It's so much not a part of our culture, just to sit. Our culture is so much about having a reason or purpose, we have to be doing something or being entertained.

Zazen is a radical statement of completeness. Of performing no lack, no gain. Totally off the page of our competitive, seeking, gaining culture. And in that *just sitting* our separation just melts away.

~ ~ ~

So, noticing now how the body is naturally more relaxed than when we first started, or you may just be more aware of areas of tension or tightness, but the general sense of that softening of the body ...

The stillness and openness of being the softness and gentleness, we can take into everyday life when the meditation ends and the meditation continues throughout the day.

When the world will continue to intermingle with ourselves sometimes with the sound of a lawn mower or machinery. But we give it space. And we allow it to move through us, like the sounds of birds. Sound of people on their way to work, the sound of traffic. The activity of life.

So may you go well throughout the day and evening. May you bring this being-presence into your everyday life and relationships. So once again, thank you all for being here this morning, this evening.

MEDITATION 17
BEING - TIME

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-being-time](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-being-time)

It's lovely how the sound of the Bell just gradually, gently fades back into where it came from. Sound of the bell is always a lovely way to segue into the zazen, meditative space. It's a rare opportunity we get to sit together like this so thank you very much for being here again this Wednesday morning. I think it's the 21st of October. Today's guided meditation is going to be a meditation on Being-Time.

Time passes.

Or does it?

Maybe time passes and maybe time doesn't pass.

The Time of Our Lives.

I'm going to read out two quotes. The first one most of you are familiar with. It's from a Zen verse. The admonition verse that is usually chanted at the end of an evening of zazen on a sesshin or retreat:

Time flies faster than an arrow.

Life disappears like dew on the grass -

Emptied in an instant

Vanished in a Flash!

Let each of us strive to awaken - be awake!

Do not squander this precious life.

The next quote is from Dogen:

The Time Being means Time

Just as it is, is Being.

And Being is all Time.

In some ways, these two quotes encapsulate the two different ways we experience time. There are probably other ways we experience time as well, but these are the two I'll be focusing on this morning. That sense of time slipping away. Which is usually our most normal experience of time. The sense of time being linear - the ticking of the clock. The sense that time passes by in a flash. A flash of lightning -

10 20 30 seconds flash by

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70 years flash by ...

The older we get, the more our life seems to have flashed by ...

I want to suggest that linear time and the experience of linear time, is time seen from the relative perspective, the perspective of delusion. We experience linear time as if we are a separate self, standing out from existence, standing apart from reality as it is. And kind of watching time go by. As if we can sit on the bank and watch time go by. Dogen refers to this as "when there are Buddhas and sentient beings". In other words, usually where we find ourselves. In the sense of it being a separate self. And this generates emotion-thought, in the experience of loss. It's important

to note that in our practice, and in Barry Magid's teaching, we're not doing our practice to escape from the experience of loss. We embrace the relative separate self in that way. The separate self, using the old metaphor, is like the wave that doesn't realize it's also the sea or the ocean. Even though this is a delusion from the perspective of the Absolute, the ocean, it still feels real to us. So, when someone we love dies we suffer, we feel the pain of loss. This is what it means to be human and to be secular. However, like in all Zen teachings in the Emptiness tradition, there's always two sides to the same coin. On one side, there's linear time and on the other side, there is another dimension to time, what we might call the religious dimension. The realization of Eternity. However, in my view, for Zen, Eternity is not endless duration which never ends - that's linear time. Eternity is timeless in the sense that, time as a measurement of duration is no longer applicable to our experience. We could say that Eternity is not endless

duration, but non-separation from just this moment. Wherever we may go, to the top of the highest mountain or to the depths of the deepest ocean, we are always here, in this moment, in this present moment, presencing.

Being this immediate presence, or the presencing of all things as they truly are in their suchness, untouched by our conscious strivings. Let's take a few moments just to settle into this presencing, this present moment.

What's presencing right now?

Our breath is breathing.

Sounds are sounding.

Sky is Blueing ...

Feelings, changing from one moment to the next. Pain transforming into pleasure, pleasure transforming into pain.

The wheel of change, turning, turning. And then that still point in the centre, presencing, presencing.

Is it really possible to step outside the stream?

Or are we the Stream?

Sure, we can feel ourselves witnessing, observing, awareing. But what is this? What is awareness? If not just hearing, seeing, feeling?

In fact, we might say, we are coming and going in and out of existence so rapidly we don't see ourselves as change itself. We experience instead the illusion of continuity. Rather like an animated movie where the film, the motion picture, is a series of discontinuous still images.

Maybe the metaphor of time flashing by. And the sense of linear time. Is where we can integrate linear time into this just now, in this Eternal Now. Gone in an instant. Hence, the diamond Sutra says:

The past cannot be grasped.

The future cannot be grasped.

And the present also, and this is the most important point, the present also cannot be grasped. We can't think the present. Thought is always in the past. Leaving a trace.

So, Time is Being. And Being is Time. Or if you like, Being-Time.

There is nothing missing in this present moment. The sense of lack, of something missing, only arises when we identify with the separate self. The self that experiences separation in the sense of standing apart from the Eternal flux of existence. No wonder the separate self experiences insecurity and anxiety like the wave that feels itself separate from the ocean. It is forever out of kilter, out of joint.

Like the axle in the wheel. The definition of dukkha (suffering).

To experience duration, we must buy into the *necessary* fiction that there is an identity that stays the same while changing. We must buy into the fiction, that there is an identity that stays the same while changing. This gives us the sense of our continuity of identity. But from the perspective of the Absolute in Zen, from the perspective of Emptiness there is no thing that doesn't change.

Master Gettan, asked a Monk, Keichu made a hundred carts. If he took off both wheels and removed the axle, what would he make clear about the cart? A little two-wheeled cart. You start to dismantle it. Take off the wheels and the axle. Could even dismantle the Box. What is left?

The True Self is emptiness - the self seen from the perspective of non separation from the perspective of impermanence and interdependence or being-time. The separate self is exactly the same self, seen from the perspective of separation and standing apart from. So, coming back to this moment, presencing.

Is there anything before this moment?

Is there anything after this moment?

Or maybe before and after is a delusion. A necessary delusion. Albeit, but still not real. We can't experience before and after. As you all know we can only experience now. This is the Paradox of time.

This is why when asked if the dog has a Buddha nature Joshu, simply replied mu, meaning, is not. Everything comes and goes, but everything comes and goes at the same time. What is the difference between coming and going? There is no unchanging identity underneath the changing phenomena. As Heraclitus said, we cannot step into the same river twice. In fact, we cannot even step into the same river once. In fact, we can't even step into the river. We are already the river.

~ ~ ~

BEING-TIME

Dogen teaches there is only one Being-Time. And that is Being-Time. All the finite being-times participate in this eternal being-time. The Eternal being-time is not duration. It is the presencing of this moment from absence, that which comes and goes comes and goes at the same time. This is the undying and unborn process of presencing. Not unborn and undying because we are never born and never die, but unborn and undying because there is nobody that is ever born or ever dies. We are never separate from the universe, the stream. However, this doesn't mean that separateness doesn't feel real. Doesn't mean, we need to cut off all attachments and strive to become non-human. We can embrace our separateness, seeing at the same time our non-separation. In other words, when we experience grief over loss, we experience grief over loss. Whether that be the loss of a friend a child a partner, or even a treasured library that burns down.

We are the stuff that dreams are made of. We are simply a dream, but, it feels real to us. So, we move in and out of linear time and Being-Time, while always remaining being-time. As the Heart Sutra teaches us there is sickness old age and death seen from the human or the relative of the dualistic perspective. And there is no sickness, no old age. No death seen from the awakened or absolute perspective. There is gain and loss and there is no gain and loss. In Zen we can hold both perspectives. The relative reality of finitude and yet and yet, at the same time, dwell in Being-Time the Eternal now. We can have our cake and eat it too.

~ ~ ~

As we sit in a boat, going along the river and we stare at the shoreline, it appears that the shoreline is moving. We forget it is the boat that is moving. In the same way, from the perspective of the separate self, it appears that time is moving and passing us by. Yet when we identify as this moment and see that we ourselves are time itself, Presencing. Then the illusion of time passing disappears.

No matter where we go.

No matter where we are.

We are always now.

And, right now, no matter what time zone we are located in we are all experiencing this now, this Being-Time. We sit together intimately experiencing this now.

Time passes.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

And we are the passing.

Without the feeling of time passing it would be very difficult to be motivated at all. So, we're not trying to do away with the delusion of time passing. Time is precious in that sense. Literally, it does Flash by. Literally, there is only a certain limited amount of time we're allocated, and we don't know when it comes to an end. Yet we can also participate in Being-Time.

May your day be well.

May you enjoy the passing of time.

May you accomplish what you want to accomplish.

~

May you value what you value and bring it into being as best you can.

Participating in the vastness of this Wonder.

MEDITATION 18
JUST-SITTING (NO - GAIN)

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-just-sitting](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-just-sitting)

Well, welcome everybody. Thank you for being here on Wednesday morning Zazen. Today we'll be doing a guided meditation on *Just Sitting*. In a way all these guided meditations are kind of like an exploration in our main practice - the practice of Just Sitting or the Koan of Just Sitting. It's the main practice in Soto Zen. Barry Magid has a nice chapter on it, chapter 17 in *Nothing is Hidden* called "Uselessness: The koan of Just Sitting". It starts with a quotation from Dogen:

Eihei Dogen said, "Zazen is not a meditation technique. It is simply the Dharma gate of joyful ease; it is practicing the realization of the boundless Dharma way. Here, the open mystery manifests, and there are no more traps and snares for you to get caught in."

So please, settle into your posture. Comfortable and relaxed, yet stable. Relatively still, yet not inflexible. You can have your eyes open or closed. Feet or knees firmly on the ground if you can. Hands resting in the Zen mudra or just resting on your lap. Mindful of being here together, appreciating each other's presence, as we sit together communally, supporting each other's practice.

Just allowing the breath to breathe itself. Just like the heart beats, the breath breathes.

Life goes on.

Today will be meditating on the teaching of no gain. How Zazen teaches us to let go of all gaining ideas. The Koan could be expressed as, if there is nothing to gain from just sitting then why sit? Dogen always emphasized that practice and realization are inseparable. Practice is not a means to an end of realization. Practice is realization and realization is practice. Zazen itself is the complete manifestation of the awakened way.

To start our guided meditation today I will be reading from a text written by Jundo Cohen and see where that will lead. Jundo is a teacher and founder of the Treeleaf Zendo an online Soto Zen community. He received on a transmission from Master Gudo Wafu Nishijima. The title of this text is *No reason for Zazen*.

There is no reason whatsoever to sit Zazen ... nothing to attain from Zazen ... nothing to fill with Zazen ... nothing to do in Zazen ... no best time for Zazen ...

no way to measure Zazen ... nothing to fix or upgrade with Zazen ... no prize from Zazen ... no ideal posture or clothing for Zazen ... no desires to satisfy in Zazen ... no way to get free by Zazen ... no place to go with Zazen ... no improvement from Zazen ... no grand realization to expect from Zazen ...

Thus, we sit Zazen each day. Zazen is indispensable.

We sit zazen each day for it is the very best medicine for our human hunger to attain, to judge, to fill a void, to measure, to upgrade, to fix. To do to do right, to win, to conquer, to get free. to go. to arrive, to improve and all the rest.

Zazen is the very best medicine for our human hunger to gain something.

Yes, there are some things we should do in zazen to do it right such as sit in a balance posture, breathe naturally, not grab at thoughts. Let thoughts go. But if folks are trying to do in zazen and to do it, right, rather than sit in freedom from all need to do, while dropping all measures of wrong versus right they are doing zazen wrong by any measure. The more one seeks to be free, the further one is from freedom. The more one reaches for the brass ring, the further the ring drifts away.

I think it's especially important in this age in which meditation is just another commodity and tool.

Then rising from the sitting cushion, we return to our daily life of things to attain, problems to fix in this world, and places to go ... Nothing is lacking. Yet, there are hungry children to feed.

JUST-SITTING (NO-GAIN)

So even if you don't believe, that nothing is missing and nothing is lacking. Even if you're always, not always, but even if you're often caught up with thoughts that there's something wrong with me.

Just pretend there's nothing lacking. Pretend there's nothing missing, just sit. Sit zazen as if you are Buddha. And in the sitting itself, all those "lacking" thoughts all those thoughts of "something wrong" will gradually be seen just as empty thoughts, falling like autumn leaves from the tree.

As you all know, Dogen instructed us to practice *non-thinking* when sitting zazen. This itself is a kind of Koan. Non-thinking doesn't mean there will not be thoughts arising and falling.

There will always be thoughts arising and falling. Just as there will always be sensations. There's no being alive as a human being without sensations and thoughts. There's our nature to breathe to feel and to think. So, what *does* Dogen mean by practicing non-thinking? In a sense, I think he's pointing to the sense of no gain, of this inherent wholeness, this inherent completeness that we are right now. inseparable from the universe. There's nothing we can add, to nature, or to the universe. There's no way we can improve a tree or a mountain. They're complete and perfect just as they are, and we participate in that through our Zazen.

As you're sitting deepens, the sense of completeness is present, it's not a thought though. It's not a thought, "I am complete". It's not a thought, "I am whole". It's not a thought. "there is nothing lacking". They are just thoughts. What we're doing is seeing through thoughts. All thoughts. When we are no longer caught "in the traps and snares" freedom naturally arises.

Being just this moment.

The human hunger or the desire to attain, to judge oneself or others, to fill a void to measure, to upgrade or downgrade, to fix, to do it right, do it wrong, to win to lose, to conquer to submit, to get free to go to arrive to improve and all the rest. It's like that carrot dangling in front of us that we continually follow trying to get to and never arrive at. It's the donkey chasing the carrot. With the misconception that once I get the carrot, I'll be free, once I get the carrot I'll be complete. Once I get the carrot, I can relax and enjoy this life. No - set the donkey free from the carrot.

Think non-thinking. This moment right now, is it. There is nothing you have to attain. Only to be present to this moment. his now moment of practice.

Which never comes nor goes.

It's not in the future or in the past. This is our no gain practice.

As the old Zen joke goes, we are selling Water by the river.

We are always wandering around searching for the treasure which is hidden in our pocket. When all thoughts of evaluation evaporate, what is left? When all thoughts of right and wrong disappear like dew on the grass, what is left?

Nothing is lacking, yet, there are hungry children to feed. Zazen, Zen practice itself, is not an escape from this world. It's a complete immersion in and acceptance and commitment to this world. We bring our no gain practice, our no gain mind, into the world. So we can help to feed the hungry children. Hungry children being a metaphor for endless desire, of all peoples. Of course, we have to attend to food and shelter primary. But unfortunately, the nature of human beings is not satisfied just with food and shelter and adequate clothing. We want bigger and better cars more and more houses, more and more money. Gaining, gaining, gaining, profiting, profiting, profiting, never endless cycle of greed and hunger. Hungry ghosts, never satisfied. Zazen is a complete Liberation from all of that. How sweet, how refreshing ...

Just to sit.

Nothing missing right now.

Feel everything - all those burdens and baggage's dropping away. Let it all go ... Just sitting. Most simple thing in the world. Doesn't require much just to sit.

So why sit?

This a good question that you can bring to a private interview with a zen teacher or just sit with it yourself. From your own practice experience - What happens if you don't sit? That's another way of looking at it. There is a certain discipline involved in sitting. An effortless effort but nevertheless it's an effort. How come this most simple thing in the world, is such good medicine? People don't value it. That's why all those stories in Zen about people wandering all around the world in search of the treasure, which is hidden in their pocket. People only value often medicines which cost a lot of money. They think because it costs a lot of money it must be good medicine. Zazen is free, doesn't cost you anything ...

Okay, feeling the belly relaxing.

JUST-SITTING (NO-GAIN)

Feeling the chest, the heart opening.
Feeling your smile smiling, that's the smile of no gain.
The smile of completeness.
The smile of nothing lacking.
The smile of the Buddha holding up the flower.
The smile of Kasyapa when he recognized the flower.
The recognition by the Buddha of the Morning Star.
Nothing lacking, everything complete, just as it is.

~ ~ ~

I would like to dedicate this sitting practice to our friends in the United States. I'll just read one of our Zen dedications, called Peaceful Dwelling as Change itself.

*Unceasing change Turns the Wheel of Life,
And so, reality is shown in all its many forms.
Peaceful dwelling as change itself
Liberates all suffering sentient beings
and brings them to Great Joy.*

Whoever wins the election, may there be a peaceful resolution and transition of power. No matter which way it goes. May our practice of no gain, our practice of completeness, bring a sense of sanity to the world, enabling us to practice kindness, without any expectation or reward.

May your days go well today.

May you enjoy your day of no gain.

May you flourish.

MEDITATION 19
KINDNESS

www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-on-kindness

So please settle into your posture, allowing the body to relax naturally ...

Allowing the body to come to a place of stillness and quiet, just resting in the natural, effortless awareness, which is here and now. Becoming awake to this moment, becoming awake to this awareness that is always present:

Hearing.

Seeing.

Feeling,

Being.

Appreciating this moment as our life.

And as we settle into the stillness, we become naturally aware of various areas in the body, which may be holding or contracting - we just allow that to be and just allow our awareness to enter into those sensations ...

Becoming aware of our intention to practice kindness to ourselves and others. To befriend ourselves and others. To be generous to our friends and others. To be

KINDNESS

considerate to ourselves and others. To give ourselves this opportunity to enter deeply into appreciating our bodies, befriending our bodies. Like we're bathing our bodies in a deep bath of awareness - these bodies of ours which may often be agitated, or restless, allowing them to open up and relax and let go of any protective armoring which may be present. Just letting go, embracing each moment. Here together in this safe space, in our own rooms, alone, but together with each other. Manifesting our intention to be kind. To be gentle. To hold each other, in this space. To feel that kindness in our own faces, in our smile. In our eyes.

~ ~ ~

Sensations and sounds ... arising and ceasing ... passing away ... endlessly ... flowing ... nothing to grasp or hold on to ... just opening into to this flow, this flux of life ... surrendering our normal tendency to control ... to want to control ... to push away ... to grasp onto ... surrendering ... letting all that go ...

~ ~ ~

Allowing that clenched fist of contraction or tightness just gently open. Feeling the tummy relaxing, the belly relaxing, the shoulders relaxing. Feeling, feeling our way into this, into this moment. Dwelling nowhere, going nowhere. Just content, to be this moment. For now, nowhere to go, nothing to do. Just be.

~ ~ ~

Bringing our beginner's mind, curiosity, to each moment. Each moment, never to be repeated, gone in an instant. Each moment, a different Mind-Body configuration, constantly shifting. Letting go of wanting things to be different or the same. Feeling our bodies gently rocking with the movement of the breath. Connecting with our breath, with our smile.

Relating to our own body as you would do to an infant, holding an infant in our arms tenderly.

Surrendering to the rhythm of our breathing -

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

In, out,

Rising, falling,

Expanding and contracting ...

As the body relaxes, our hearts naturally open. Feel the expansiveness of our heart's opening. Touching, each other.

Knowing that we all share the one intention to practice kindness.

As the heart opens, we become free from our reactions, our reactivity, and are able to respond to the world, to relationships, from this place of loving kindness, compassion. We can choose to cultivate kindness. We can choose to live our lives being friendly, generous and considerate. Realizing our deep, intimate interconnectedness and interdependence with each other and with all beings, with all life.

~ ~ ~

My teacher's teacher, Joko Beck, was once asked, if she could summarize all her years of practice in one word, what would it be? And she said, "Kindness".

Each day, thousands and thousands and thousands of acts of small kindness, hold our communities together. Although we know, good news never makes a paper cell. But we all know, from our own lives and relationships, we all know numbers of people, who every day are going out there, acting kindness in all kinds of different small ways. Numerous carers, caring for people. People helping to clothe and feed the homeless. The hungry tending to the sick and the dying.

~ ~ ~

In sitting here in stillness, simply relaxing our bodies, we're cultivating kindness, to ourselves and others.

What does kindness feel like?

Feel your own way into kindness towards self.

Feel the acceptance that's always present. The deep acceptance of loving kindness.

KINDNESS

The deep acceptance of just this moment, just as I am, right now. In all my flaws and imperfections, I deeply accept myself. This is the practise of kindness.

This natural, effortless awareness that is presencing right now, is totally complete, just as it is. Lacking nothing, it desires nothing and from this place of completeness, kindness as a response to the world can arise.

~ ~ ~

What are the qualities of kindness? There is friendliness. Generosity. There is a natural attentiveness, listening, expecting nothing in return, no agenda, other than to be kind. Openness, vulnerability, tenderness. Seeing our self in the eyes of the other.

How, by our own acts of kindness, or choice to be kind, all these thousands of acts of kindness every day. We are making a commitment to creating a kinder, more compassionate society. Standing for a government service, which is more kind and compassionate. So that the economy serves us all as free individuals, not the other way around.

Choosing our representatives who also embody kindness and compassion. Creating a kinder world for our children to grow up. Including the practise of kindness to other animals.

As we sit here, in this tender silence, nursing and nurturing our vulnerable, warm, animal body, in this deep well of kindness, allowing it to seep deeper down, even into the muscular structure of the body, allowing it to rest, to be safe, to open and relax. No longer needing to be on guard.

As the body relaxes deeper and deeper, a sense of lightness naturally arises, another quality of the opening heart.

So, may your body be at ease.

May your heart remain open.

May your smile light up the day, and may you meet this day full of kindness and love.

Thank you all for being here today to share in this practice of kindness.

MEDITATION 20
INTERDEPENDENCE

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I've been very conscious throughout most of this year about sitting together in Zoom. How we miss out on the actual felt presence of sitting together in a physical room. How, if we were all sitting in the same room together, would be more conscious of each other's presence, we could probably hear each other maybe breathing, be able to see each other. That sense of closeness is a little bit more palpable.

That's why I've suggested at times the importance of being aware of sharing this moment with each other. Of holding in mind, our fellow practitioners, our fellow sangha members and indeed all the people we care about, all the beings in the world, holding everyone in our minds as we sit.

I had an apology from one of our sangha members this morning. Because she had to take her son to the hospital for an x-ray. And I said, that's okay. I mean, taking your son, caring about your son, is practicing zazen.

When it comes down to it, this practice, which we call Zazen, just sitting. Not just sitting watching TV, and not just sitting reading a book, but just sitting. Where we bring our attention to whatever it is we're experiencing in this moment. And really, it's the quality of that attention which is so important. It's perfectly fine to think of that as *loving* attention. To be attending to this moment with tender loving care. That we care

INTERDEPENDENCE

about this life, this moment. So, in a way, when we're practicing Zazen, dwelling here in this world, caring for the world, caring for the world in this moment. Just through our attention. So, let's just spend a few moments just being aware of the quality of attention, the sense of how it's occurring. The tenderness ... to pay attention to ourself, to pay attention to each other, to pay attention to our breath, to the sounds, to the sensations ...

Noticing if we get caught up, in thoughts about what we have to attend to sometime in the future today, just gently bringing back to paying attention to this now practice, this now moment of practice. Simply actualizing Buddha really, is just simply realizing the care that we bring to this moment, the love that we bring to this moment. The appreciation that we bring to this moment.

Sitting here with the appreciation that you are sitting there. Caring about self, caring about me; and I'm sitting here caring about self and caring about you.

When we say, "welcome home", that sense of returning home, to this moment. When we care about our home.

We care about *this* time. This time is me, but it's also much bigger than me. This time includes everyone sitting here right now. Together, in this zoom Zazen ... but this being here alive is much bigger than all of us.

At the same time, we are both containers, and also being contained, by that which is much bigger than all of us. We are aware of our feelings and sensations and thoughts. Memories. And at the same time you are aware of your own intimate thoughts and feelings. All of us different beings with our own unique feelings. And at the same time, we're all contained by the one Buddha, the One Reality, the one that's infinitely beyond all of us.

In our practice sitting, we're verifying or actualizing Buddhahood - the sense of caring for, of non-separation. Joyfully discovering that that's the reality, of the world, of the universe. At the heart of everything is this caring for, this loving, this compassion.

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The time right now is all there is, there is no other time, only then right now. Not just my time, not just your time. But the whole of time, the whole of Being, the whole of Being-Time ... When you were having your breakfast this morning, if you had your

breakfast this morning, you were being right there in the time right now. In the same way, that that hasn't shifted, you were right here, right now being in the only time that can ever be, which is right now.

When we show up together like this we're sharing that together. Even though we're many miles apart. Even though I can't necessarily hear your breath, I know you're present here with me. And I deeply appreciate that. Acknowledging your care, and your compassion.

~ ~ ~

Feeling my breath, knowing that you are feeling your breath. The same way that my breath rises and falls, I know you feel the same experience. In a sense, we all share the same body. Human body. We can see very clearly that we are united in that one way. We all participate in the same human body. Some of us are taller and some others are shorter. Some of us are white skin some of us are black skin. Some of us are male, some of us are female, some of us are neither male nor female. But we all share this same body:

Breathing body,

A nose, lungs.

No breath, no life.

We all share the same intimacy with our breath.

I think it's also safe to assume that we all share the same intimacy with sounds ... and sensations in general. We all feel pain and we all feel pleasure. In a sense this is another way of thinking about emptiness, of no inherent self-existence, no inherent separate self. How we are literally all one body in a sense. Every moment of kindness, of tenderness, of compassion, of love towards my body, is an act of love towards the one body.

We all have very basic similar needs. We need the air to breathe. We need water to drink. Food to eat. This is the basis for our ethics. To care for the other is to care for the self. To ensure that we all have enough water to drink, enough food to eat. Clean air to breathe ... Zen Buddhism has always been a radical affirmation of equality. And at the same time appreciation of difference.

How the one body shines through in all its myriad forms. Both one and many together. Sharing the same reality.

INTERDEPENDENCE

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Zazen gives us this opportunity to share and realize our essential nature. One doesn't need to have any special state experience, to see clearly the Oneness of this body that we all share. How we need to care for this body. By providing and helping to provide for each other what the body needs.

And then there's our heart, metaphorically, or our soul, our sense of self. That also needs to be recognized, to be loved. To be given attention. When we look into each other's eyes and smile. Recognizing each other as soul - as unique individual.

To give attention is to love. To give attention to ourselves, and to give attention to each other. To listen is to give attention. To listen deeply is to deeply attend. To nourish our souls, we give attention to each other's soul.

When our friend is happy, we share in the happiness; when our friend is sad, we empathize with the sadness, we feel their sadness. We allow them to feel, whatever it is they're feeling.

Exactly the same way as when we practice Zazen, and we allow ourselves to feel experience, whatever it is we're feeling and experiencing without trying to change or fix it in any way, knowing that bringing our loving attention, awareness is enough.

Trusting in our Buddha-nature ...

We hear the calling, from our nature, from our Buddha-nature, to return home. And then respond with compassion, to whatever situation we may find ourselves in.

Returning to the breath, it's not separate from the soul ... Just by the simple act of paying attention to the breath, can reveal very subtle feelings which we may not have been aware of before. Body, mind, soul - all connected. In Zazen we are connecting with our body-mind-soul, making us available to connect with others knowing, the importance of connection, knowing the importance of interconnection, knowing the importance of letting each other know we care.

Doesn't always need to be expressed in words - simple acts of kindness, even a simple smile can be an expression of that care.

We come together in Zazen, in our group meditations, to care for ourselves and to care for each other. To support our practice of caring throughout the day, whoever we meet,

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

whether our intimate partners, children, parents, friends, work colleagues, strangers we've never met before. None of us know what this day holds in store for us. But this practice is preparing us for the day, preparing us to remain open, to remain responsive. To care ...

As I mentioned last week, we can all summarize our practice in that one word kindness! How a simple act of kindness can transform the world. That's what our practice is all about. To create a kinder world. So once again, thank you all for your own caring to show up this morning, to care for each other, to practice together.

Every now and again throughout the day just pause for a moment and smile.

Connect to your body, mind and soul.

Connect to your inherent self of care.

May your day go well.

MEDITATION 21
COMING HOME

[www/soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-coming-home](http://www.soundcloud.com/ordinary-mind-zen/meditation-coming-home)

Well, welcome everybody to this last Wednesday morning meditation for 2020.
Welcome home!

So, just settling into your posture. Settling into the breath. Settling into the sounds. You may keep your eyes closed or slightly open or fully open if you like.

Just resting in this moment. Resting in awareness is the practice of non-abiding, for there is nothing to hold onto. Everything is changing so quickly. You're just resting in that ever-present unfolding of change.

Making your home in this moment.

Of Being-Time.

Which is all Being-Time.

And all beings in this moment are inter-being, sharing this moment with us. Every being in the universe is in this moment with us. A vast net of interconnectedness.

Our presence illuminating the presence of each other. Separated only by geography. But sharing the intimacy of this moment together - here now.

~ ~ ~

Welcome home. Literally. This is our home, right here and now. You will not find this home on any map or travel guide. Wherever you travel you will always arrive where you started –

Here and Now.

This is why we have many stories in all the great spiritual traditions of people wandering in search of their home finally realizing, THIS is their home. We are always at home, whether we realize it or not.

However, if we don't practice, we will never realize this home. That is always here. Home always arises simultaneously with our practice. No matter if we are experiencing Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha. Sun-Faced Buddha being Happy-Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha maybe being sad-Buddha or even fear-faced Buddha. This moment is always Buddha, even if not realized. But we realize Buddha through our practice.

Sitting here together we are realizing our Buddhahood, our home. Making our home in this world. Not just for ourselves, but for all other beings. Making a home that is welcoming and kind, compassionate.

Accepting ...

~ ~ ~

Making our home is a kind of direct experiencing of this moment. Just being the sensations, just hearing the sounds. Not adding on anything extra, letting go of all concepts, of what should or shouldn't be, letting go of all judgements, evaluations. That's all extra, that we add on, to our experience. Just come back to the direct experience.

Whatever you're experiencing right now, is okay. There's no right or wrong experience. It's just experience.

Just allowing the experience to be there whatever it might be, just allowing the sounds to appear within our experience. To appear within your Home.

COMING HOME

Welcome them all.

Without exception.

Or even, if we are finding it difficult to accept, just acknowledging that as well.
Allowing our resistance to be there as well. In other words, letting go of all struggles.
Letting go of any attempt to fix it, make it better, make it go away.
Just allowing everything to be, just as it is.

~ ~ ~

One of the classic, I guess now, cliché phrases, in the history of meditation in the West from the 60s and onwards is the expression “be here now”.

Be.

Here.

Now.

This being aware can only take place here and now. The now is not a now in a sequence of other nows. It's not a moment in linear time, sequential time. Stretching backwards to the past or outwards towards the future. The Now is more like the space that we're inhabiting right now. Our Home that is always here. In which everything comes and goes, appearing and disappearing, in The Now. Which is the constant flow of changing phenomena:

Being-Time,

Being is Time,

Time is being.

Presencing.

The now is also the Knower or the Witness of all that is appearing. Like we're sitting on the bank, witnessing the river that's flowing. The river of course is constantly changing. You can't step into the same river twice. And our self is always changing.

There is nothing to grasp onto just this continuous change. We are both the Witness, sitting on the bank, and the river. They're not two. The river is just appearing in The Now. So everything you experience, every sensation, every sound, every thought, every subtle feeling, is the flowing river.

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

There is no permanent self to be found there. You can go in search of it if you like. There is nothing to grasp onto. Just have to surrender, let go, melt and dissolve into this ever-changing flow.

To cease grasping or clinging.

Overcoming the fear of drowning because you yourself are the river. So, it's impossible to drown.

~ ~ ~

You won't disappear because the Witness doesn't disappear. The Now is always the Now. That's why some people call it the Eternal Now - Eternal in the sense of Timelessness not endless duration, or the sense in which we have become the time.

Or if you like, the Now, or the Timeless Presence, the Witness which is nothing but

The Absolute. The river being the Relative. Sometimes we refer to The Now or the Absolute as the essence and the river as appearance. But in reality, there is no distinction between essence and appearance. It's not two. We are the sparkling water that shimmers evanescent, bubbling, transient. And we are also that in which all that appears, being if you like the Ground of Being.

The only thing that doesn't change is The Now - this Timeless Presence, because it's not a thing, it cannot be grasped, it cannot be seen, it's not an object, doesn't belong to me or you, cannot be possessed, cannot be gained, cannot be lost, is not stained or pure, neither born nor dies.

The Eternal Now - no beginning no end. Wonderful! Just to rest in this wondrous being which is constantly changing.

~ ~ ~

There is no one breathing behind the breather. There's just breathing, breathing itself.

There's no one thinking behind the thoughts. There are just thoughts arising, staying for a while and going away. Thoughts are happening in the same way that breathing is happening. Never ending play of Consciousness. That's why just sitting, just being in meditation, there's no goal. We are already here. We are already home. You can't

COMING HOME

practice being who you are - It's who you are.

~ ~ ~

Each moment, perfect just as it is.

Can't not be. It's just what it is.

The linear grid of time is just something that is socially or culturally constructed and imposed upon the changing phenomena. It's all just unfolding in the now.

The expression, *Wherever you are, or wherever you go, there you are!* Just pointing to the fact that everything, always, the here, is always appearing in The Now. You might be in Paris or Rome or London. It's still all happening in the now, just different colours, perceptions. sensations, it's impossible to escape the now.

Even when we're lost in the dream, we're still in The Now. Maybe it's possible to have a now without a here, but that's beyond the realm of human form, as humans, as human being, we will always be here.

In The Now.

So rather than resist or try and push away the here, or wish the here wasn't here, isn't it better just to accept the here, as it is. Resistance to the here, is just the here anyway. The here is always appearing as what it is, in The Now.

Be Here Now.

Don't avoid the here, and be present to being now. Even wishing you were somewhere else other than here is still being here and now. Just notice if you're wishing here was somewhere else, sitting in Sawtell dreaming I was in Paris, or dreaming I was in Sawtell sitting in Paris, dreaming always occurs in The Now.

Seeking for Enlightenment or seeking for Happiness, or seeking for whatever it is we think we're missing, it's like The Now going in search of The Now. We can spend our whole life going in search of that which we already are. And the searching is also The Now.

~ ~ ~

But in a sense, even though we return home, and our home is always here, practice is a kind of Realizing our home or making our Home, Here and Now.

When we sit like this together, letting go of all our agendas, all our “to-do” lists and just rest in this present moment. We get that taste of what it means to feel Home, to feel at Home. And there’s still, the “to-do” list to be done. We still have to engage in sequential time so to speak. There are appointments to keep. But the essential aspect of this practice is to constantly re-engage with Being at Home in this present moment.

All of Zen can be summarized in two words:

Just this!

Just this!

Just this!

Or even one word -

Now ...

Now ...

So come back to your posture. Feel the breath. Feel the belly relaxing or tightening. Feel the breath in the chest region, in the heart region. Feel the Heart opening. And feel your face, the gentle smile, relaxing the jaw.

Being at home in our body.

Our body is our home.

Getting to know our body.

In the only intimate way that we can.

Our body is very much our home.

And of course, our body is interconnected, interdependent with the Earth and all the Earth provides for us: the water and the air, the food we produce and other people produce for us. So of course, ultimately this planet, this Earth is our home. And then whatever brought this planet to be as it is, is also our Home. The Universe, or the One Verse of all Life. Life being our home.

And all of this wondrous life can only ever be experienced now.

COMING HOME

So enjoy the Being Here Now.

Smile.

Be at Home in the world.

Share that Home with the people you care about and share that home with strangers you don't know, and all the other beings that we come into contact with throughout the day.

~ ~ ~