



# The Oak Tree in the Garden

Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

*The following several articles were written by Sozui-sensei.*

## **Beyond Stillness and Activity, Transcending Ordinary and Sacred**

In Zen Practice we use *susok'kan*, the extended out-breath, to get directly in touch with life itself, sensing our breath, focusing all into ONE. After some practice we may recognize how we are getting in the way of allowing a natural settling down by willfully trying to reach an imagined goal through effort and manipulation. Obviously this does not work. Instead of settling down we find ourselves creating tension. The act of willful striving, trying to reach some future goal, is itself an expression of and creates and maintains the distance and separation that that very striving seeks to overcome. However, as we may have seen is true with the rejection of thoughts as well, the mere rejection of striving will not do either.

A Buddha is a person who does not seek. If you seek this you spoil it. The principle is one of non-seeking. Seeking this [non-seeking] is still the same as seeking. (Zen Master Hyakujo)  
Now what? Be careful here! Just telling yourself that everything is ok as it is won't do either! Having seen this far we may be at loss as how to precede. A precious opportunity! True practice begins here, when you realize that Self cannot do anything about it. Self cannot attain it. Are we now ready to let go completely and open into the unknown? Are we ready to open anew and more fully to what is already there, to the living breathing "ordinary" that we previously had hoped to transcend?

*"When you recognize yourself tensing toward an accomplishment, there is no secondary act of will necessary for change. When you see that the tension actually takes you in the opposite direction of the movement of your deepest longing, you stop pressurizing yourself, and disentrail from the illusion that straining will lead to a better moment. When you are naturally loving what you love, there is no arrival, and nowhere to get to. Whatever you are engaged in serves as a perfect portal to awakening in this very moment, just as it is."*

—Risa F. Kaparo

Diving fully into the "ordinary", we are now willing to see through and let go of the root cause of our restlessness and discontent: attachment to and identification with ego-self, its fixations and presumptions. We are now willing to live our lives as practice, supported by deepening awareness through *zazen*. Now anything can be practice, if by practice one means, not one activity among others that one does toward a presupposed imagined goal, but just what one does, but done completely!

## **Chopping Wood and Carrying Water**

For the struggling Self (delusion), trying to attain something, including nothing, is all it has. Can Self attain no-Self? "I want this, tell me what to do so I can get there." Well, you cannot! Eventually all ways have to be done away with. As it is said:

*“An ordinary person realizes it and becomes a sage. A sage sees through it and becomes an ordinary person.”*

—Zen Sand

We have to not attain but realize it, actualize it. Do you see? Really realizing what it is to be a sage is to be, and be content with, the ordinary person that we are. No stink of enlightenment. Layman P’ang, a deeply realized lay person who lived during the Tang dynasty in China put it this way:

*“Carrying firewood and hauling water—how marvelous!”*

He broke through as a lay person, and he did it in such a way that it naturally became what he was doing. For Layman P’ang it was not some other place, but the very everyday activities of carrying firewood and hauling water. He did not attain it, but realized, actualized it.

Just doing what must be done at that time and place IS the freedom we seek. But ego-self cannot attain that. Eventually we have to enter the practice, whatever we are doing, so fully that there is no one being busy or quiet. We don’t practice in order to get something. We do it so purely and wholeheartedly that there is no room for “Am I going to get it? Am I closer?” Give yourself so completely to your practice, to life itself, that there can be no room for such things! Practice properly, which includes doing it without any purpose at all. If you have any intent to become awakened or reach anything, your practice is not yet pure. Precisely because it cannot be contrived, it can’t be engineered, we don’t stop sitting. On the contrary, we sit completely! And it is always right here and right now. It is not something we will attain in some remote future after some kind of superhuman effort.

*THIS—pain in the legs right now—IS the mind of Nirvana, if we actually see through it. It is unmistakable. No one can take that away from you; no one can give it to you either. From there struggle and distress is transformed into the Way itself.*

—Jeff Shore

By really being who we are, we realize what it is to be a sage or a Buddha: hauling water and carrying firewood, checking e-mails and making phone calls, washing dishes and doing yard work—how marvelous!

*Just doing what must be done IS the freedom we seek. But ego-Self cannot attain that. It seeks to get away from limitations and responsibility: I want to be “free.” Thus it remains shackled to itself. Ego-self cannot really recognize that doing what must be done IS utter freedom. Complete freedom. Whether we are carrying firewood or answering the telephone. When ego-self is gone, anything will do; and as long as ego-self remains, nothing will do. Thus we practice like this.*

—Jeff Shore

Like Shido Munan Zenji famously said:

*While being still alive, to die and die completely. And then everything we do is good.*

## Too busy

*Dogo saw Ungan sweeping and said, [presumably with a critical tone], ‘Too busy.’*

*But Ungan responded, “You should know that there is one who is not busy.” Dogo said, “If so, then there is a second moon.” Ungan held up the broom and said, “Which moon is this?”*

—Cleary, *Shoyuroku Case 21*

Do you see?

How fully do we occupy and engage our lives? When we do something we love doing, is there still a sense of a “me” there? Where is the one who is not busy, does not work hard, in the midst of activity? Where is the one who is not hot or cold in the midst of a heat wave like the

one we are in here in California right now?? Dogo's *"Too busy"* is testing Ungan as if asking, Are you wasting your time running on autopilot? Are you multitasking (which is really just jumping from one thing to another quickly) or lost in your habitual inner dialogue spawned by conditioning, unaware? Do you feel you are doing a something? Maybe something good or at least useful? Or are you attached to getting it over with or anticipating a specific result?

But Ungan responds:

*"... there is one who is not busy."*

He is not completely unaware, but is this just a heady, Zennistic response? Dogo checks on him further:

*"If so, then there is a second moon."*

Is the one not busy something Ungan has made up in his head? Wishful thinking? Something special other than or outside of taking care of the practical responsibilities of phenomenal reality that is everyday life? Is Ungan trying to establish an alternate, peaceful experience or state of mind, a second wholeness (moon), as an escape from the world of phenomenal particularities and its problems? Are you?

As we are experiencing phases of oneness with our breathing on the cushion, we may find ourselves wondering how to maintain it throughout our day. But the one not busy is not something to discover, create or maintain; it is already present, right there!

Are we tempted to stagnate in the pleasant experience of the relative ease and peace of oneness or even mistake it for awakening? Many koans feature this particular challenge. It is easy to get an idea about or get attached to and trapped in a temporary(!) state of forgetting oneself, of samadhi. Trying to reach or maintain anything from a point of Self—a "me" in a particular state—we are likely to end up feeling alienated by what appears to disturb us. Practicing as a group is extremely helpful here! Do we see noises, every day life activities, being

around others, our work, responsibilities as distractions? If so if rather than resolving our dissatisfaction and restlessness at the root, we may end up feeling even more divided.

Any state of self-consciously perceived, supposed oneness and wholeness needs to be broken through, let go of completely, for true moon, original Oneness to reveal itself. This original Oneness is always present. It is not a state of mind!!! Like the moon which is always there whether we see it or not, it cannot be attained and it cannot be lost. We are told this again and again (e.g. in the story of the prodigal son). We would like to believe this, but the fundamental disease, the restlessness of Self appears to diminish only as long as we are in a certain state of mind and not exposed to our personal triggers, and we do not want to lose this supposed peace and quiet. This is what Master Hakuin's teacher Shido Munan calls the dark hole Hakuin was stuck in. Later a well-ripened Hakuin warns us not to seek for a quiet place as well as not to shun a busy place.

## Bodhisattva Practice

It is said that Buddha Nature as it is, is Great Compassion. Great Compassion means to take away pain and suffering and also to offer joy at being alive, to awaken all beings, even before we ourselves are completely awakened. For this we do our practice.

*Why do we sit? To awaken to the deepest truth and from there to liberate all beings. Yet it is not about first getting awakened and then beginning to do something. Because we work in the world we know that we have to train, that we must awaken.*

—Shodo Harada Roshi

We know this and there is our main challenge. We get caught again and again on our ego. Our reactive moods teach us about our conscious and unconscious hangups. We help someone and we want to be praised for it, we want to have benefit from it, we want to be recognized for what we do. If we are so self-conscious

about how helpful we are, it is very heavy for the person we are trying to help. You have to be the one who is being helped to know this from experience—the helping person, doing what they are doing with an underlying message of: Isn't even this enough? What a miserable state for the one being helped! And when desperately needing that help as well, the ego's opinion takes the upper hand. This is the case in so many cases in the world, on many levels—a very difficult challenge.

Pictures one to ten of the Ten Oxherding Pictures show this very challenge. It is all about letting go of our small self, until finally only in the final picture, number ten, do we have Hotei entering the world simply with empty hands.

By picture number eight we realize the state of mind of no self and no other. We can let go of ourselves completely, realizing where there is a world there still it is also nothing at all. As one whole thing, with our entire being, we dive into the world with all its challenges.

*To only investigate about our own state of mind, is not enough. We have to investigate our state of mind, but then go beyond that to the place of True Mind's functioning. Our zazen has to be for all beings, not just for our own small self's satisfaction.*

—Shodo Harada Roshi

We offer our whole life to all beings. Yet we each have individual conditioned patterns that have to be seen through and let go of. Again and again! For this we do zazen. Determined to liberate others from suffering we do zazen to let go of our narrowing characteristics, so we can offer our whole being clearly. Freeing ourselves we as well are liberated in the process. What is it that we have to offer to society? What we have to offer is our most purified state of mind. Then our innate wisdom will shine forth of its own. Like Shido Munan Zenji said:

*While being still alive, to die and die completely. And then everything we do is good.*

We still make mistakes, we still have to make efforts, develop new skills, learn, grow and practice, but without Self, without stumbling over our own two feet. Without Self we can do so most appropriately and effectively.

Gary Snyder says that Zen comes down to two activities, meditation and cleaning the temple, and it is up to each of us to decide how widely the temple boundaries stretch. Awakening Bodhisattva activity we may extend our hands to respond to a range of situations in the world, even beyond our immediate surroundings.



*If you are not trapped  
in being or nonbeing,  
who can dare to join you?*

— From Tokusan's Five Ranks



*The living self has one purpose only: to  
come into its own fullness of being, as  
a tree comes into full blossom, or a bird  
into spring beauty, or a tiger into lustre.*

—D.H. Lawrence



## The Teaching of Jacques Lusseyran

Today is Day 4 of the October 2015, 7-day sesshin here at Mountain Gate, and I'd like to share with you more of Jacques Lusseyran's teachings. The way he responded to his life experiences really are teachings; hopefully they will inspire each of us to take it to that depth.

We're going to jump quite a way into his autobiography, **And There Was Light**, to where he was in Buchenwald. It's not necessary to go into the details of how he got there other than to say that being taken there was already challenging, for it was in a cattle car, each car filled with so many men that there was room only to stand up. For three days and three nights they traveled like this; on occasion the train would stop, the prisoners were herded out, given a bowl of hot soup and forced to drink it while running across the tracks pursued by SS men with guns and dogs. The train delivered what remained of them to Buchenwald in a blizzard that lasted six more weeks. From there it became only worse.

Ordinarily, being blind would have caused him to be executed straightaway, but a fellow prisoner who was doing intake whispered to him that he should claim to be a translator. But eventually...

*I came very close to dying, but how can I make you believe it, alive as I am today? I shall tell it badly, but since I promised, I'm going to tell my story.*

*In March I had lost all my friends; they had all gone away. A small child was reborn in me, looking everywhere for his mother and not finding her. I was very much afraid of the others and even of myself, since I didn't know how to defend myself. One day out of two people were stealing my bread and my soup. I got so weak that when I touched cold water my fingers burned as if they were on fire. All winter long a*

*blizzard that had no beginning and no end had been buffeting the Buchenwald hill. Being blind I still avoided one of the greatest miseries, the labor commandos. Every morning at six o'clock all the men who were fit left the camp to the blare of an orchestra—an efficient orchestra and functional, a liturgy of forced labor in caricature.... The prisoners came in at 5 o'clock at night, but never all of them. The yards were littered with the day's dead. They were dying whatever they might be doing, pulled down by the weight of a rock on the slippery paths in the quarries, felled by blows or bullets in the night, executed with ceremony before the eyes of a hundred thousand fellow prisoners under floodlights clouded by a snowstorm to the strains of a funeral march—to set an example on the square where the roll was called. Or hanged more obscurely in the barn they called "the movie house." Others were dying of bronchial pneumonia, of dysentery or typhus. Every day some were electrocuted on the charged wires that surrounded the enclosure. But many were dying, quite simply, of fear. Fear is the real name of despair.*

*I was spared the labor commandos because I could not see, but for the unfit like me they had another system, the Invalids Block. Since they were no longer sure of winning the war, mercy had become official with the Nazis. A year earlier, being unfit for physical work in the service of the Greater German Reich would have condemned you to death in three days. The Invalids Block was a barracks like the others. The only difference was that they crowded in 1500 men instead of 300...and they had cut the food ration in half. At the Invalids you had the one-legged, the one-armed, the trepanned, the deaf, the deaf-mute, the blind, the legless—even they were there, I knew three of them—the aphasic, the ataxic, the epileptic,*

*the gangrenous, the scrofulous, the tubercular, the cancerous, the syphilitic, the old men over 70 and the boys under 16, the kleptomaniacs, the tramps, the perverts, and last of all, the flock of madmen; they were the only ones who didn't seem unhappy. No one at the Invalids was whole, since that was a condition of entrance, and as a result, people were dying there at a pace which made it impossible to make any count of the block. It was a greater surprise to fall over the living than the dead. And it was from the living that the danger came.... Toward the end of the month all of a sudden it became too much for me and I grew sick, very sick....*

*They said several doctors, prisoners like me and friends of mine, came to listen to my chest. It seems they gave me up. What else could they do? There was no medicine at all at Buchenwald, not even aspirin."*

And here he lists the other severe medical conditions that befell him.

*More than 50 fellow prisoners told me this later; I don't remember any of it myself. **I had taken advantage of the first days of sickness to leave Buchenwald.** [bold text by editor]*

It's important to comment on this last sentence: "*I had taken advantage of the first days of sickness to leave Buchenwald.*" What did he mean by this? Did he dissociate? Was he nuts? Or was it something else? If he had dissociated, what followed could never have happened. If he had checked out in some other way, the same thing. When he wrote that he took advantage of the sickness to leave Buchenwald, what he meant was *he let go of his ideas about what it was like to be there—the horror, the fear, the anguish.* He let it all go, through complete presence with the felt sense of the illness. And within that presence he came to awakening.

We have a video, **Project Grizzly**, here at

Mountain Gate. It was created by a Canadian man who had been hiking deep in the Canadian wilderness, with a rifle in one hand and a knife in another, a heavy pack on his back. For three days he had had the uncanny feeling that he was being watched. On the third day he came into an open meadow, and there was a grizzly bear—close. It shocked him so that he fell over backwards, his rifle flying out of one hand and his knife out of the other, and he ended up, weaponless, propped up ignominiously by his pack. Encountering a bear, the prescribed reaction is to play dead—but how could he play dead propped up by his pack?

Then something happened, not so different, perhaps, from what happened to Jacques, although clearly not as deep. He suddenly opened into a mind state of full presence—all assumptions, all ideas, temporarily cast aside. The fear was gone—or rather, there was no room for it, and he stood up. The bear advanced, pushed his snout into the man's chest, then turned and ambled away.

Unlike Jacques, however, the Canadian immediately tried to hang onto that mind state and spent several hundred thousand dollars attempting to create a bear-proof suit in which he could once more encounter a bear and again have that amazing experience. But of course he would never have been able to repeat that under such protective circumstances. And the final bear-proof suit was so reinforced and so heavy that he could only take two steps forward before he fell over and had to be hoisted up. Then winter weather set in and he and his seventeen back-up sharpshooters on horseback made their way out of the wilderness, leaving the bear-proof suit—which had had to be helicoptered in—forlornly behind.

For Jacques in Buchenwald, what were his choices? He could have dissociated, he could have gone crazy, as men did in that camp, he could have turned his face to the wall and died, as orphans during the Vietnam War did when orphanage staff was so overwhelmed with the sheer numbers of babies that they could not possibly have held and nurtured them. But

instead he opened totally into the experience of his body—and this is our lesson.

*Two young boys I was very fond of—a Frenchman with one leg and a Russian with one arm—told me that one morning in April they carried me to the hospital on a stretcher, “The hospital” was not a place where they took care of people but simply a place to lay them down until they died or got well. My friends, Pavel and Louis, didn’t understand what happened, and later they kept telling me I was “a case.” A year after, Louis was still amazed. “The day we carried you, with a fever of 104 or more you weren’t delirious; you looked quite serene. Every now and then you would tell us not to put ourselves out at your account.” I would gladly have explained it to Louis and Pavel, but the whole affair was beyond words and still is.*

And that’s another clue. To reach what is called “awakening” or *kensho*—seeing into the true nature of reality—we have to go beyond words. There is no other way to do it. We can’t think our way to awakening. We can’t think our way to freedom; it has to be through a search beyond words.

*Sickness had rescued me from fear. It even rescued me from death. Let me say that simply without it I would never have survived. From the first moment of sickness I had gone off into another world, quite consciously. I was not delirious, Louis was right.... I watched the stages of my own illness quite clearly. I saw the organs of my body blocked up or losing control, one after the other: first, my lungs, then my intestines, then my ears, all my muscles, and last of all, my heart, which was functioning badly and filled me with a vast, unusual sound. I knew exactly what it was, this thing I was watching: my body in the act of leaving this world. Not wanting to leave it right away, not wanting to leave it at all. I could tell*

*by the pain my body was causing me, twisting and turning in every direction like snakes that have been cut in pieces.*

*Have I said that death was already there? If I have, I was wrong. Sickness and pain, yes, but not death. Quite the opposite: life—and that was the unbelievable thing that had taken possession of me. I had never lived so fully before.*

Present in a workshop for people who were dying was a woman whose illness went into remission. Her comment? “I was never so alive as when I was dying!” So often at the first hint of difficulty or unpleasantness or disappointment or fear we hold it at arm’s length, hoping if we don’t feel it it will go away. Jacques Lusseyran did the opposite. In doing so he has shown us a very different way to work: to go right into that experience! Not to think about it, but to open to it, explore it—beyond words. To search wordlessly for who it is that is feeling these things.

*Quite the opposite: life—and that was the unbelievable thing that had taken possession of me. I had never lived so fully before. Life had become a substance within me, had broken into my cage, pushed by a force a thousand times stronger than I. It was certainly not made of flesh and blood, not even of ideas.*

Especially not of ideas! And not of conditioning, not of assumptions! It is through our absolute presence with the experience of extending our outbreath, fueled by a felt need to know what lies beyond the known, by a felt need to return to that ineffable something that we seem to have lost touch with yet sense is so deeply important to reawaken to, that we will return to that complete letting go that allows us to awaken to it. That Jacques could do it in the midst of hell means that certainly we can do so in the midst of our by comparison easy life! Go for it! You have everything you need to succeed!

**November 2** there will be a **Jukai [Precepts] Ceremony**, an opportunity for Sangha members to recommit to their practice and to working toward living the Precepts. This is the only time this year Jukai will be offered at HVZC. Mitra-roshi expects to be here October 27 to November 3.

**November 17-24 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications: Nov. 5.

**November 30-December Rohatsu Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications is November 15.

**December 6 Rohatsu Mini-Sesshin** led by Sozui-sensei; the sesshin will continue with extended sittings morning and evening through December 8th, the day of the Buddha's Awakening on seeing the morning star; members are welcome to sit all day as well on those additional days. Rohatsu sesshin will be continuing at Mountain Gate through the morning of the 8th, and in sitting at HVZC as well we are combining our commitment and our energy—with the potential result of going much deeper!

## 2016 Calendar

**January 5-12 Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications is December 28.

**January 9 All-Day Sitting** led by Sozui-sensei

**January 26-31 5-Day Sesshin** Mitra-roshi expects to be here January 25-February 3.

**March 4-11 7-Day Sesshin at Turtleback Zendo** For more information and to apply, contact Serita Scott: [seritas@comcast.net](mailto:seritas@comcast.net)

**March 18-20 2-Day Sesshin** led by Sozui-sensei

**March 18-23 Elder Sesshin at Mountain Gate** Deadline for applications is March 2.

**March 25 - April 1 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Application deadline March 17

**April 8-10 VESAK - Celebration of the Buddha's Birth** More information forthcoming closer to the dates!

**April 19 - 26 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Application deadline April 14.

**April 29-May 1 2-Day Sesshin** led by Sozui-sensei.

**May 4-8 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate.** These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats for women veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. These retreats are offered free to the women they serve; if you would like to help support this effort, please send your check to Mountain Gate, HC 65 Box 78, Ojo Sarco NM 87521-9604; donations are tax-deductible and most gratefully received!

**June 3-5 Regaining Balance Weekend Retreat for Wives & Female Partners of Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate.** These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats, offered free of charge for partners of veterans suffering from PTSD. For further information see [www.RegainingBalance.org](http://www.RegainingBalance.org)

**June 10-12 2-Day Work Sesshin** Mitra-roshi expects to be here June 8-15.

**June 25 All-Day Sitting** led by Sozui-sensei

**July 8-15 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications is June 25.

**July 30-August 6 7-Day Sesshin** Although HVZC members are welcome to apply to attend longer sesshin at Mountain Gate in New Mexico, this is our only 7-day sesshin at HVZC. *Because of the sesshin there will be no Half-Day Introduction to Zen Meditation on August 6th.*

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*A monk in all earnestness asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West? Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the garden!"*