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The Boatman of Zen

Decheng resided on a boat, ferrying people across the river and teaching them Zen. He was known as the Boatman of Zen.

One day a young monk named Jiashan came to seek out the Boatman for instructions.

Decheng said, "In what temple do you reside?"

Jiashan responded, "I don't abide in a temple. I live in a temple of No Abode.

It is not like..."

Decheng interrupted and said, "Not like! Not like what?"

Jiashan said, "It's not like the Dharma that meets your eyes."

Decheng said, "Where did you learn this teaching?"

Jiashan said, "Not in a place which eyes or ears can perceive".

Then the Boatman said, "You are like a donkey tethered to a post for a thousand eons!

You've let down a thousand foot fishing line and you are fishing very deep.

But your hook is still three inches short. Say something! Speak! Speak!"

As Jiashan was about to speak, the Boatman knocked him into the water with his oar.

At this point the young monk became enlightened.

The Boatman pulled him up and said, "Today I have finally caught a big golden fish!"

The two stayed together all night on the river, sometimes talking, sometimes silent.

In the morning the Boatman bade farewell to Jiashan and left him on the shore,

rowing out into the river again alone.

He said to Jiashan, "I studied for thirty years.

Today I have repaid my teacher's kindness by finding a worthy successor.

From now on, you need not think of me again."

Then he rowed the boat to the middle of the river and tipped it over and disappeared without a trace.

Sailing the sea for thirty years,
The fish seen in clear water won't take the hook.
Breaking the fishing pole, growing bamboo,
Abandoning all schemes, one finds repose.

(This story is based on a translation by Andy Ferguson found at <http://terebess.hu/zen/boatmonk.html> and version of the story told by Reb Anderson 7/14/2012)



Lines and Folds
from Siddiq Kilkenny

Accepting my original face,
the doorway to all faces.
an auspicious time for dissolving
into mountains and rivers

The lines and folds of skin
are full of meaning and significance,
layering the bottom of each canyon and gully
in the sediment of living.

In the middle of the music
each movement a complex inner symphony
entering and accepting
then releasing hold of the mountain

Listening to the trees
and learning how slowly they speak,
a century to complete a phrase
“each moment enters and leaves”

The Mountain sings into the river
winding down through canyon and valley
into the marshland
where life emerges,

Then loses itself in the ocean
in Intimacy beyond mind.



The Eureka Sitting Group, Ten Years Later

by Louisa Rogers

I was kvetching about something or other during one of AZG's classic potluck discussions at 740 when Gael Hodgkins, one of AZG's founding foremothers in the 70s, turned to me from across the room and asked, "Louisa, would you like us to start a meditation group in Eureka?"

"Uh, yeah. Sure," I said, not really knowing. Where did my complaint go? I wondered, mystified. Later, I was struck by the way she skillfully transformed my vent into a creative alternative.

I would never have guessed that Gael's seed would turn into something as alive and nurturing and resilient as our group has become.

A few days later she and I met to discuss logistics. Barry was interested too, so he joined us. (We've probably had no more than three such meetings over ten years.) As a result, the three of us--only us!--"launched" a weekly evening sit in the art gallery space that adjoined what was then the Consider the Alternatives bookstore at the corner of 2nd and D. We used two of owner Judith's portable dividers to cover the windows and borrowed the chimes she had for sale. During kinhin I would guiltily peek at the artwork that graced the walls. In those first years, Barry and I would carry zafus and zabutons stored in our basement down our alley to D Street and from there across 2nd, through the bookstore to the gallery.

We placed ads in the newspaper and pinned up notices. Slowly, our group grew. A county social worker joined us, then a commercial fisherman and a library worker. Sometimes as we sat, we'd hear the geese honking overhead.

When the bookstore closed a few years later, we had to hustle. First we relocated to California Essence, a hybrid private home/yoga center at the opposite end of 2nd Street. That lasted about two years, followed by another search. Finally we landed at the First Christian Church on 7th and K, an old, rambling building with a long history of welcoming sideline groups like ours into its wooden rooms. Now, for over five years we have enjoyed the privilege of our own dedicated space: no more rearranging or schlepping!

True to impermanence, however, the church is for sale, and the congregation now co-worships with the First Congregational Church.

Our format has evolved over the years. Now:

- * We gather in the hall outside the zendo before 6:00, next to our bookcase of meditation books and literature.
- * Enter in silence and sit for 30 minutes on cushions or chairs, followed by a minute of stretching.
- * Do kinhin of various lengths, depending on who's leading--I prefer 5 minutes, but some go longer.
- * "Circle in" and introduce ourselves.
- * Whoever is facilitating that week offers something, followed by sharing, then announcements.
- * "Please maintain silence within the zendo when we leave," the facilitator says before ringing the chime for the final five-minute sit, facing in.
- * Close the windows, tuck the chimes and votive candle (electric--no flames in our wooden building!) away in our small chest, collect the dana.
- * ...and we're done, out by 7:00 p.m.

In the hallway, we climb back into our Keens or tennies, wrap up in jackets--no matter what season it is, it always seems cold outside--and catch up before walking down the stairs and out onto the street.

For many years, Barry was the default facilitator, because neither Gael nor I wanted to. But because he and I travel a lot, others always took up the slack. A couple of years ago the group decided to more formally rotate

facilitation, and now, every few months, Barbara and I email out the calendar for the next eight weeks, and everyone signs up for a slot. The group meets every Wednesday of the year, rain or shine.

We have a wide range of facilitation styles—from the reading of a quote or a poem, to a story or a recent life experience that led to an insight. Sometimes the share is philosophical, sometimes it's raw. You never know. It's very personal.

Our simple rotating format feels deceptively powerful to me. The fact that we each volunteer to be “it” every so often creates, in my mind, a sense of responsibility. As we all know, meditation is not a passive or a derivative experience; no one can do it for us. Our format pushes each of us to bear the message, to articulate something out of that inchoate, fumbling confusion we label ‘mind’. The reason I hesitated to facilitate for so many years—and I normally like facilitating and do it for a living--is that communicating anything remotely intelligible about meditation feels so awkward and lumbering.

Yet the structure of our group invites each of us to take the seat and make the effort. And I sense this is helpful for everyone, both facilitator and group. The kindness, the affection, we all show to the person facilitating, and to each other, is palpable.

These days, we average around 8-9 people, with new folks showing up regularly. Either they find out about us through the media, or they trickle in from one of the other groups that meets at the church. Visiting teachers have a standing invitation when they're in town, and occasionally AZG “northerners” drop in. Twice a year, we're visited for two or three weeks in a row by students taking a World Mythology class at Eureka High. The teacher assigns the class a field trip to a place of worship new to them. We've had up to 15 teenagers pile in at a time, bundled in their baggy jeans and punky dark eye make-up. Some are quiet and timid during the sharing time, others ply us with questions, lingering afterwards in the hallway to interview one or more of us. I love the fact that people are introduced to meditation when they're so young and pliable. Years later, they'll always have this experience.

In ten years, we've developed the necessary structures to sustain ourselves: we have a core group, a schedule, a history, a location. But at the sound of chimes every Wednesday at 6:00 p.m., all that falls away and we each start all over again.

Pictures from Southeast Asia
from Barry Evans and Louisa Rogers

Louisa and I spent seven weeks in Southeast Asia this past fall. We saw lots of Buddhist influences--monks, temples and monasteries--in the first three countries we visited, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. We then visited old friends in Malaysia Borneo (Sunni Islam) before flying home via Seoul, South Korea, where we saw a couple more Buddhist temples. Here are a few photos from our trip, with brief notes.

Photo 4: About 200 huge heads grace the late 12th century Bayon Temple, located dead-center of the huge city of Angkor Tom (a mile north of, and built 50 years after, Angkor Wat) in western Cambodia. Whereas Angkor Wat is Hindu (dedicated to Vishnu) and classical in style (similar to earlier temples I've seen in southern India), Buddhist Bayon is much more playful and baroque.

The heads are supposed to be of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara (or just, Lokeshvara), although they also resemble the king who commissioned Angkor Tom, Jayavarman VII, who reigned 1181-1218 AD.

Avalokiteśvara is, of course, in the Mahayana tradition, but Cambodia's official religion is now Theravadan Buddhism.



Photo 12: Luang Prabang (= “Royal Buddha Image”), Laos, UNESCO World Heritage site. This in northern Laotian city was the royal capital until the 1975 Pathet Lao takeover (the former palace is now a museum, two blocks away from where I took this photo, outside our guesthouse),

The old part of town, where the Nam Khan meets the Mekong river, is home to some 500 Theravadan monks who live in maybe eight monasteries there. Every morning at dawn, they walk barefoot about two miles with their bowls to receive food offerings--mainly sticky rice, we were told. The ceremony is called *tak bat* (= giving alms). The men stand and the women sit, in accordance with the local custom.



Photo 20: This 60 ft. “Laughing Buddha” statue, 20 miles west of the old French hill station of Dalat, southern Vietnam, represents the Buddha of the future, Maitreya (“Dilac” in Vietnamese). Note the cool neon rainbow lights behind his head. Vietnam’s official religion is Mahayana Buddhism (same as Zen, but we didn’t hear of any Zen temples or monasteries where we were).



Photo 19: Exuberant--rococo, IMHO!--ceramic-work on the outside of the Linh Phuong pagoda, a half-hour train ride from Dalat. HUGE gold-leaved Buddha statues practically fill the inside of the associated temple.



Photo 24: South Korea wasn't on our itinerary, but we had half a day to kill at Incheon airport, and to our delight, we didn't need visas to enter the country, so we took advantage of the free (!) five-hour city tour of downtown Seoul. First stop was Jogyesa Temple shown here, HQ of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism.



Accept
from Toby Griggs

Accept
A lotus blossom blooms
Arising
From all of our emptiness
A quiet
Endless beginningless openness
Breathing
Out all of ourselves
Offerings
Atonement practice always
Butterfly's
Wings flutter by in the breeze
Eyes
See beyond being
Into
Our intercontinuity
Hearb
Waves of wonder and clarity
Feel
Hope help healing
Diamond
Dragon dancing decidedly
Delusions
Dashed past particularity
Pouring
All of our existence into
Everything
Embracing believing being
Love
Live each moment
Completely

