

The Hazy Moon

Great Mountain Zen Center Newsletter



Winter, 2008

Welcoming Back *The Hazy Moon* After a 2-year Vacation!



Kuden's Shuso-Hossen October 14, 2007

In this Issue:

- Dharma Talk: Shishin Roshi
- Interview: Heather Kuden Collins
- News & Announcements
- Poetry & Cartoons
- Photos
- *The Bodhisattva Dog* by Hakuju

Dharma Talk

Denkoroku Case #23: Manorhita by Gerry Shishin Wick Roshi November, 2007

The 22nd Patriarch, venerable Manorhita, asked the 21st patriarch Vasubandhu, "What is the bodhi of all the buddhas?" [This can be translated as "What is the way of all the buddhas?"] Vasubandhu said, "It is the original nature of mind." Master Manorhita asked again, "What is the original nature of mind?" Vasubandhu answered, "It is the emptiness of the six sense bases, the six objects and the six kinds of consciousness." And hearing this, Manorhita was awakened.



The six sense bases are seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and so on. The six objects are forms, sense, sounds, and so on. The six consciousnesses are the acts of hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and so on. We chant, "No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind. No color, sound, smell, taste, touch, phenomena." We chant it every day in the *Heart Sutra*, but when Manorhita heard it, he was suddenly awakened.

I've been chanting the Heart Sutra for thirty-five years. What's going on here? A lot of it has to do with how Manorhita asked the question, the state of mind when he asked it, and what he went through prior to asking it. They seem like simple questions, but actually Keizan praised him highly for asking these questions. We've all asked them ourselves. What is the original nature of mind? Vasunandhu says it's emptiness. Well, let's talk about emptiness a bit because that seems to be a popular word in Zen.

What does emptiness really mean? The sanskrit word is *sunyata*, which is translated as emptiness. Translations can be confusing. In fact, a number of years ago, I read that one of the Popes commented about Buddhists believing in emptiness. He took it to mean nihilism – blankness, or a lack of values. He didn't quite understand the implications of what emptiness means. But the actual implication of

*Gerry Shishin Wick
Roshi*

*Co-Spiritual Director,
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Center*

*"When strong
emotions arise, that's
the best time to study
the self."*

the term is an absence of separation, an emptiness of division or boundaries; and therefore freedom from definition or identity. So, in a way, emptiness is the same thing as non-duality.

Sunyata is really a wonderful, tender, limitless embrace. It's always complete. It is without having to strive, without having to not strive. Another implication of emptiness is empty of any fixed position or state of being. So when we say that the original nature of mind is non-dual, what are we actually talking about? When you realize 'non dual', then we'll say that it's not dual and it's not non-dual either. So as soon as you think you've accomplished non-duality, you have to let go of *that* because that can become a fixed position, and that's not emptiness.

The Lenz foundation, which provided some support to Sensei and me in our book the *Great Heart Way*, started funding a project called The Vast Sky. It involves Ken Wilber, Bernie Glassman, and Genpo Merzel. One of the purposes of The Vast Sky project is to promote and market non-dual religions in this country. Ken Wilber believes that when ten percent of the people in this country are adherents of non-dual religions, it is going to be enough to start tipping the scale – the balance. That's the critical mass. But the funny thing is that they will probably have to use dual advertising and marketing to promote a non-dual religion.

If we think about the cause of suffering, the second Noble Truth of the Buddha, we realize we suffer because we identify events and objects as being independent of ourselves. Then we grasp at them or we push them away. They are both attachments whether trying to hold onto something or trying to avoid something. At the very root of our suffering and anguish, and also our inability to really practice, is this self-grasping ignorance – thinking that there is something different outside of ourselves; thinking that we have a unique, independent self. So to really practice effectively, we have to go right after that ignorance.



There's a Taoist book called the *Art of War*. The strategy that the generals use to defeat the enemy is to destroy the leader. In practice, the leader is our self-grasping ignorance. There are two kinds of ways that we grasp after the self: (1) the idea of the self in relation, and (2) our idea of an independent being. First, we grasp after the self that is in relation to other things – to external phenomena, separating ourselves from others. Part of that separating is elevating ourselves and putting others down. One way we do that is by down-sizing others, speaking of their errors and faults.

Second, somehow we think that there is a unique independent self expressing itself – we think that there's something in here, that it needs to be aggrandized, and that it needs to be protected. ***But you know, it's important actually, to have a good sense of self-esteem. In this practice, we have to build up confidence in order to let go.*** Part of the practice is to really learn to appreciate ourselves and have confidence in ourselves. And then when we reach that point, we can really let go.

One of the main teachings of the Buddha emphasized these points. He talked about impermanence. And that's one of the problems for us – that the nature of everything is impermanent. We try to make it fixed. We try to identify ourselves in relation to other things, and all of these things are totally impermanent. They are always changing. You know it from your own experience.

When I lived in San Diego County, I rented a very small house right on the cliffs overlooking the ocean. It was on Fifth Street. I was talking to a geologist who was working at the oceanographic institute, and he said there used to be a Ninth Street. He would look at the tax records. He told me the houses on Ninth Street would suddenly disappear from the tax records. And then the houses on Eighth Street suddenly had an ocean view. Subsequently, the property taxes for the new row of houses on the cliffs went way up. And then the same thing happened to Eighth Street. And then Seventh Street. And then Sixth Street. Encinitas, a small town in Southern California, houses the Self-realization Fellowship of Swami Paramahansa Yogananda. It's right on those same cliffs where I lived. They had a beautiful swimming pool on the cliffs. Only half of it is there now. It cracked right down the middle and fell into the ocean. That's impermanence in action.

The mountains are impermanent. All the mountain climbers here in Colorado had better make sure that their chosen handholds are permanent, at least for the two minutes while they're trying to lift their bodies up on them. If you grab onto granite that is crumbling in your hand, you're going to be impermanent, too. The oceans are impermanent. The sun is impermanent. Human life comes and goes at a much faster pace. What about your profession and your relationships? Or material possessions?



When my daughter Lily was about ten years old, she always wanted the latest toys from the toy store. She had to do a science project, so I said let's do a science project with all of the toys that you want. When you buy a new toy, each day we'll chart how many minutes you play with that toy. And then when you get another new toy, we'll make a chart on that one. I was trying to show her that she'd lose interest in her toys quickly. She saw that she lost interest in her toys, but it didn't stop her from wanting new ones.

Even things that we think are important to us right now – *that* is impermanent. Somehow we identify ourselves with these things. It's like building a foundation on quicksand. Not only are objects impermanent, but like the Buddha says, ultimately there's no self – no fixed self. ***Thinking that there is a fixed self is another source of our suffering.*** We create this fixed self because we want to have control in our lives, to feel secure. If you can realize this impermanence and no fixed self, no fixed ego self, then that gives rise to nirvana or peace. What nirvana literally means is to extinguish conflict, to extinguish polar opposites, to realize that you and all beings in the great Earth are not two.

Why is there no self? Why are objects impermanent? Why are phenomena impermanent? It's because of this emptiness. That's the very nature of self and others, and altogether they are nothing but original mind. So when we say "mind," it's a little confusing because we should say "heart-mind." In

our culture, mind is equated with the brain, and that's not what we're talking about here. *This Heart-Mind is the very nature of reality.* Like Master Dogen said, "no creature ever fails to completely cover the ground." That's heart-mind – it covers every square inch of ground, and at the same time, there's not even one square inch of ground upon which to stand.

When the Buddha was enlightened, he said, "I and all beings are simultaneously enlightened." This "I" the Buddha was talking about covers every square inch of ground and it's not the "I" we usually identify with. When Master Dogen said, "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self," that's what our practice is about – to study the self; to see the nature of the self-grasping ignorance; to see how the ego functions; to realize who I am at the deepest level I can go. When we start looking at it, we have all kinds of thoughts and feelings and emotions and sensations. They become very subtle, and they become hard to grasp on to.

There's a story about a student who came to master Bankei, and he said, "Master, I have an ungovernable temper, a temper that I have no control over. How can I cure it?" And Bankei said, "Show me your temper. Bring it to me."

This is reminiscent of Bodhidharma and the 2nd Patriarch where the 2nd Patriarch said, "My mind is not at ease," and Bodhidharma says, "Bring me your mind, and I'll set it at ease for you."



So Bankei says to the student who says his temper is out of control, "Bring me your temper." The student replies, "Well I haven't got it right now, so I can't show it to you." Bankei says, "Then bring it to me when you have it." The student replies again, "I can't bring it because it rises unexpectedly, and I'd surely lose it by the time I got to you." Bankei says, "In that case, it can't be your true nature. If it were, you could show it to me at any time. When you're born, you didn't have it. Your parents didn't give it to you. It must come from outside. It must arise from outside yourself. And I suggest that whenever it arises, you beat yourself with a stick until the temper can't stand it, and it runs away."

When we try to take care of our temper, it's not there. When strong emotions arise, that's the best time to study the self. Have the presence of mind and try to do something about it. It's easy to say, "I'm too depressed to do zazen," or "I'm too excited to do zazen," or "too angry to do zazen," or "too afraid to do zazen." In many ways that's the best time. You have a juicy emotion right there. You can just sit down quietly, just totally experience it. The most important thing though is to experience it without adding anything extra.

Sensei and I just finished teaching a Great Heart class at Naropa and one of the most important lessons we emphasized is how to separate how we're feeling from our stories about our feelings. I think I've told you this before... quite often when I've had students come to me in dokusan and say they're feeling angry, I've asked them, "What does it feel like, to feel angry?" The student will say, "Well, my girlfriend just left me." "That's not a feeling. That's the story. How do you feel?" "And she

took our car and our dog." "That's not a feeling. Tell me how you feel." "I feel she's an asshole." That's not a feeling either.

A feeling is something in your body. So how can you separate your stories from what your feelings are? *The stories are just our way of rationalizing and justifying what we're feeling.* We also use our stories to avoid feeling what we're feeling.

There's a whole protocol that we use in Great Heart relating to how to release the story. You begin to see, like it says in the Diamond Sutra, "This fleeting world is like a fantasy, like a dream." Everything we see, the way we see it, from the perspective of our self-grasping mind, our self-grasping ego, is a dream. But sometimes our dreams seem to be real. That's when we have to be careful not to fall to the other side.

A student went to visit Master Dokuon, and wanting to impress him, he said, "There is no mind, no body, no Buddha, no better, no worse. There's no master, no student, no giving, no receiving. What we see and feel is not real; none of these seeming things really exist." The Master said nothing, then suddenly he hit him with a staff. He gave the student a big whack! The student jumped back in anger, and calmly the Master said, "If none of these things really exist, and it's all empty, where did all the anger come from?" Where does the feeling come from?

So don't fall into one side or the other, don't fool yourself into thinking there's a self, but don't fool yourself into thinking that nothing exists. *If everything is empty, what's it empty of?*

I love the words of the 3rd Patriarch, "Don't seek after the truth. Just cease to cherish your opinions." We all have an opinion of an independent self. Can we let go of that view? Then we don't separate ourselves from ourselves. We don't separate ourselves from others. We don't make it into something else.

All kinds of things arise when we sit, and all kinds of things disappear. Emotions and thoughts and sensations – constantly arising, constantly dropping away. The 2nd Patriarch Eka said, "I have exhaustively searched for this mind, and ultimately it cannot be grasped." It's ungraspable. And when we realize this ungraspable mind, that's nirvana – extinguishing opposites. If you really see that, then you'll be like the Buddha when he said, "I and all beings everywhere in the great Earth are simultaneously enlightened." To realize that nature of mind, the original nature of mind, that's why we sit. As I said before, this mind is not something in our brains, not our thoughts. *This mind is our heart-mind, which is boundless and without limit.* It's without limit because it's not separate from anything. It can't be described because the description would limit mind. There's no limit.

About this case, Keizan wrote a verse. It says, "The spirit of sunyata is neither inside nor outside. Seeing, hearing, forms, and sounds are all empty." The name of our Center is Great Mountain Zen Center. The character for Great means it's so big that there's no outside. And if there's no outside, then there's no inside either. That's what Keizan says. The spirit is neither inside nor outside. So how do we manifest and show that spirit? Thank you for listening. That's all I have to say for now. ▲

Great Heart in the Mexican Caribbean



Shinko Sensei relaxes in front of Laguna Bacalar after *The Great Heart Retreat*. See the next issue of *The Hazy Moon* for more details of the retreat.

**Buddha's Nirvana,
beyond flowers,
and money.**

**Issa
from *Zen Poetry*
by Stryk &
Ikemoto**

Great Mountain Zen Center
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Interview: Heather Kuden Collins

Kuden has been practicing Zen since 1993 and has been with GMZC since 1998. She works as a director at Joycare Infant and Toddler Center while mothering two children of her own, Devon (almost 3 years) and Owen (5 years). Kuden and her husband, Kurt, live near the Center, which enables Kuden to dedicate many hours of service to the Three Jewels: our teachers, the teachings and the Center, and the GMZC sangha.

During the Fall Ango of 2007, Kuden was co-shuso with Carlos Gento Estrella. Kuden served as shuso (head-trainee) for the first half of the Ango and did her shuso-hossen during the October sesshin. Roshi described the shuso position and the shuso-hossen (a ceremony concluding with a dharma combat or dialogue) as a rite of passage for a training student. In January of 2008, I (Gendo) wanted to ask Kuden about her experience as shuso...

G: What are a shuso's responsibilities?

K: The shuso's primary responsibility is to support the teachers in caring for the center and its members. Also, the shuso should provide a container and a model for the transformation and spiritual growth of the sangha. *Rather than a position of security, the shuso's position is one of openness and vulnerability, the opening of one's whole being to the sangha.* Obviously, the day-to-day duties will vary under these tenets.

G: Would you mind sharing a moment or example of when you felt vulnerable in the role of shuso?

K: During the sesshin, before the Dharma Combat itself, I felt very intensely that the talk and ceremony should be an expression of my entire being. For me, the ceremony was about sharing a very deep and usually kept private part of my self, so I felt a lot of vulnerability. *Even if the rational mind recognizes the ego delusions that support a sense of separate self, the body will manifest any blockages.* I felt that I had to put myself "out there" to touch and manifest my heart, or what was the point of such a rite of passage. This was my struggle while embodying the role of the shuso, but I am sure that every person brings up whatever is blocking them at the time.

G: Have you noticed if any learning from being shuso has carried over into your daily life? If so, do you have an example to share?

K: I don't see anything being carried over into my daily life from being shuso specifically. I see more that the core teachings of Zen practice have penetrated my entire life. For example, being open and aware in all situations, living mindfully of every action, checking into bodily feelings; these require

constant practice every moment of every day. I don't see Zen and daily life as separate because "I am the unifying element. Does this fall under "if you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha?"

G: Sounds like it does fall into that category. Ooh, I'm very curious, are there any questions from the Shuso-Hosen that are still stuck in your mind – ones that you would have liked to answer differently or ones that are koan-like for you now?

K: There was a question that was something like "How do you know it's enlightenment?" because I had brought up in my talk Dogen's saying that enlightenment may not be recognized necessarily by the conscious mind since it's limited and enlightenment is limitless. Gyodo said I should have turned that question back onto the questioner and I agree with that. I felt like I was stumbling around in the dark with my answer and that it could have been clearer and more succinct. But Dogen's words are something of a koan for me. *On one hand, because of non-duality the ordinary mind cannot recognize enlightenment. It cannot turn it into an object outside of itself, but it is manifested throughout space and time.* Roshi said in his talk Sunday, "Being is what we work with, but non-being is what we use." Too bad I didn't know that quote at the Dharma Combat.

G: Yes, enlightenment seems to be a slippery topic for practitioners – sometimes too far away, sometimes too close. In your process of moving towards greater and greater enlightenment, or awakening, what edges do you currently work with that you'd be willing to share?

K: Currently, I have been feeling that I am in a shadowy, rebirthing process. It's difficult to describe because it seems on the surface that not much is happening. However, after having experienced continual practice for many years now, I have come to recognize that these are times of fermentation, so to speak, when stuff is working deep below the surface and then there will be a period of openings and changes that can rock my world. *It can be frustrating to feel that not much is happening, stagnation even, but it is also a time of gathering energy, and I have come to appreciate the rest and renewal periods as much as the big openings.* Accepting all facets of practice as having their own intrinsic worth is my current edge.

G: Wow. That felt profound. I guess I needed to hear that. For a final question, I'm wondering what keeps you faithful to Zen Practice rather than serving yourself from the wonderfully colorful buffet of spiritual plates in Boulder and the spiritual community at large?

K: Since my early teenage years I have been interested in religious experience. Before practicing Zen I looked into many religions, reading books and discussing different traditions, before I decided on Zen practice. I was disinclined to the big three monotheistic religions for varying reasons. I was very drawn to Sufism and Paganism though. I'm drawn to the mystical traditions, where one experiences divinity or reality within oneself. *I liked that Zen was non-dual in its teachings and that Buddha-nature is what we already are, even if we're delusional most of the time.* I remember the first time I sat zazen very vividly because I had found a Zen center in Iowa, gotten their sitting times, and showed up. I had never sat before, not even on my own. During that first sitting, I had a feeling of coming home, being home. I also remember reading somewhere that it's best to pick a path and stick with it. One will never really plumb the depths if continually bouncing around different traditions, they all end up being superficial. I can see that danger for me because I'm still fascinated by all religions, but the feeling of being home while practicing zazen has never left me, our true home. ▲

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

New at GMZC

Fire Circle: As part of their training, Training Members were invited to attend a weekly group facilitated by a group therapist/leader. The purpose of the group is to further develop the skills of mindful speech, awareness of internal reactions to others, and resolving any unconscious fears and resistances. It's fun too!

LGBTI Buddhist Practice and Discussion Group: On Sundays from 4:30-6:30pm, local folks from the queer community gather for two 20 minute sitting periods divided by a 10-minute kinhin, followed by an hour of discussion. The discussions revolve around Buddhist theories and practices and how they relate to the lives of the group attendees. LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, and inter-sexed. The group began January 6th, 2008 and has been a huge success. People come from Denver, Boulder, Longmont, Louisville, Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, Broomfield, and Lafayette. For more information, go to the calendar at www.gmzc.org.



2008 Questionnaire: A questionnaire was sent out via email soliciting feedback from the sangha about programs and the schedule. Some of the schedule and program propositions being considered are yoga classes, dharma classes (such as study of the precepts, sutras, and other Buddhist theories), a change in the times of the Sunday program, and the addition of more Sunday programs during the weeks when they would normally be cancelled.



Yesterday, I discovered that I am a cartoon character. I was up all night trying to decide whether I am the lines or the spaces in between.

New Members: Sean Murphy from Taos, New Mexico; Chip Chase, Boulder; Mike Brady, Boulder; Billy Osipenko, Superior; Grant Fleming, Lakewood; Donna Hagberg, Erie; Ryan Kennedy, Denver; Ryan Durfee, Boulder

Recent Events

New Years Eve Fusatsu Ceremony: On December 31, 2007, a number of people sat a zazenkai for the day. At the end of the zazenkai, many more people arrived to participate in the Fusatsu ceremony. "Fusatsu" is an ancient Buddhist chanting and bowing ceremony of atonement and purification that provides the opportunity to acknowledge karmic entanglements and obscurations. The ceremony involves chanting and prostrations.

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Memorial for Yvonne Genan Timmers (3/24/57 - 1/17/07): In January, the Zendo was packed full to remember Genan. Everyone offered incense, chanting, and bowing. Roshi and Sensei offered readings and sentiments. John Schoonbrood led a Hindu song for the attendees to take part in together. The song is called "Om Namo Narayanaya." The mantra is repeated 12,500 times to help someone reincarnate. There are many translations; however its true meaning comes when sung in the heart. Access this song performed by Deva Premal... http://www.last.fm/music/Deva+Premal/_/Om+Namo+Narayanaya

Sesshin January 25-27: With a full Zendo, we sat zazen and followed the normal schedule of sesshin. To spice up this sesshin and make it special, nine Naropa students from Roshi's "Zen Buddhism" class attended. Although most were new to meditation, the strong-willed and dedicated Naropa crew sat like rocks. Added to the schedule was a yoga class, which helped bring attention to the breath as well as lubricate, energize, and lengthen the spine and soft tissues.

Great Heart Retreat, Tulum, Mexico:

Look in the next issue of *The Hazy Moon* for more information on this inward journey in paradise.

Sesshin February 22-24: Much like the January Sesshin, this retreat was well attended and offered a deepening of practice.



Upcoming Events

The Great Heart Way Retreat, March

21-27: This is a program that combines traditional Zen meditation with intensive workshops, aimed at uncovering our personal conditioning that obstructs our experience of oneness. The aspects of this retreat that are different from sesshin are the additions of journaling time, group sharing, and the attention to old maladaptive beliefs accessed through meditation and body awareness. For more information, go to www.gmzc.org.

Sesshin April 25-27: Take a weekend to sink into your practice. The weekend includes many hours of zazen and kinhin, work practice, yoga, oryoki breakfasts, dinner and lunch buffets, dokusan with Roshi and Sensei, Dharma Talks, and free time. The weekend is spent in silence, sharing the space of unconditional heart-mind with fellow practitioners. For more information, go to www.gmzc.org.

Zazenkaï May 10: Block off this day in your schedule to check out of the world and check into your body, heart, and mind. Clean the cobwebs from your practice, take a deep breath, and push your reset button. Begin around 8am with zazen and kinhin, and continue with work practice, more sitting, lunch and dinner buffets, more sitting, and finish the day around 9pm. For more information, go to www.gmzc.org.

The full GMZC calendar can be accessed at
<http://www.gmzc.org/schedule>

Thanks

- *Christopher Daishin Melton* for all of his work on the deck; assisted at various times by *Shishin Roshi, Richard Shinzen Blackmore, Chip Chase, Ed Gensha Hansen, and John Kain*
- *John Schoonbrood* and his crew for installing the sprinklers and irrigation system
- *Mike Gendo Lewis* for compiling and editing *The Hazy Moon*
- *Shinko Sensei* and *John Izzo Isaacs* for improving and beautifying Yvon Genan Timmer's memorial stupa
- *Naropa students* for cleaning trash from Waneka Lake
- *Brandon Gaither, Richard Shinzen Blackmore, Peter Tetsuji Van Etten, John Izzo Isaacs, Rich Goho Torres, and Brad Keller* for contributions to the Student Scholarship Fund

Stories are mental fabrications,
judgments or interpretations of our
experience. We use our stories to draw
conclusions about who we are and to feel
in control. Usually we're not even aware
of the stories. Unconsciously we come to
believe they are an accurate portrayal of
reality, but meditation helps us see
through them by cultivating awareness.
Sensei & Roshi, The Great Heart Way

The Bodhisattva Dog

By Hakuju

I was sitting on the couch, sore-boned and groggy at dark-thirty a.m., waiting for the coffee to finish brewing. My objective for the day was just to make some money. I was thinking about that. I've never been real enthusiastic about money, except that I always need it. So it suddenly came to me that if I loved it a little more I'd probably have more of it and I wouldn't always have to work so hard to get it. I began to feel a little guilty for not being greedy enough. As I sat there trying to parse out the implications of *that*, I felt a nudge on my leg.

It was the Bodhisattva Dog, come to remind me. He knew I had the treasure and he wanted me to quit fretting over economics and get it out and show him. He offered me his paw in pledge. But I wasn't ready to get off the couch yet. I hadn't even had my coffee. I pushed him away.

Then, the littlest boy, the third grader, came stomping out of his bedroom, frowning with every wrinkle his face could muster. He looked like he'd been sleep-boxing and just lost a three round decision. He was tired and in a bad mood. I admired his scowl. His hair stood up like Einstein's.

"Ready for some breakfast? I'll fix you a waffle and syrup."

"No! Breakfast is stupid!" One thing I really like about my younger son is that he always expresses himself clearly. Whatever he's got on his mind, you can bet he'll let you know what it is. He's usually full of joy and silliness, but not this morning. And when he's bad, he's bad. I got up and poured myself some coffee.

"OK. How about some lunch then? I could fix you a waffle with syrup."

"No! I'm not hungry! Why did they make morning so early? Why do I have to wear this dumb shirt? Why do we have to go to school? I hate school!"

Judy said, "You do not. Calm down."

"I do too! School is stupid! Morning is stupid!"

"Do you want a waffle, or not? With syrup."

"Waffles are stupid!" As he stood there, glaring at the whole living room, his big brother came out and dropped a couple waffles in the toaster. I gestured at the high standard he was setting, but the little boy made no response. Judy finished packing their lunches. It was almost time to go.

"You've got to comb your hair before you can go," I said. "Get your coat. Hurry up!"

"I don't want to comb my hair!"

Now in this, you'd think, I would sympathize with him. I don't like to comb my hair either and I seldom do. I think I've set him a poor example in that respect. But I wasn't, mercifully, going to school, and he was. So I said, "I didn't ask if you wanted to. Go in the bathroom and comb it!"

"Combed hair is stupid! Why do I have to comb it?!" He stared back at me, defiantly. "Either you comb it, or I will," I said, beginning to feel a little testy myself.

Andy Hakuju Smith

lives in

*Deadwood, South
Dakota with Judy
and their two
wonderful boys.*

*Hakuju works as
a Forester and
runs a bonsai
nursery, so he has
devoted his life to
either counting or
watering trees.*

*He has been with
GMZC for eight
years and sits at
least two sesshins
per year.*

*Hakuju's favorite
'80s movie is
"Groundhog
Day!"*

He caught my drift and stomped into the bathroom to comb his hair, slamming the door behind him.

We had recently remodeled the bathroom and now it was just the kind of place you'd want to go if you had hair to comb, teeth to brush, or a face to wash. We painted the walls a bright blue and put various tile on the floor. We put in a new mirror and lights, added a shower to the tub and a pedestal sink and a new low volume toilet that won't flush a gnat down but is supposed to save water. It looked pretty swell, I must say. That old dingy feeling was gone.

And, we bought a faux wooden cabinet from the hardware place and set it beside the sink to keep combs, towels, toilet paper, toothpaste and you-name-it in. It was the last one in stock and a perfect fit.

On top of the cabinet I had put one of my favorite viewing stones. Viewing stones, or Contemplation stones, are frequently displayed as an accent to a bonsai tree in a formal show, but they are also collected and displayed in their own right. My main interest had always been more in bonsai trees than in viewing stones, but over the years I had come to collect quite a few viewing stones as well and I displayed them in whatever empty space was available.

The main thrust of a viewing stone is that it be perfectly natural, that is, not cut or carved; and that it be evocative of something. The most typical viewing stone would be a landscape stone that looks like a mountain range seen from a distance, perhaps like something you might glimpse out your window if you lived near, but not in, the mountains. Stones that represent animal and human figures are also very popular, as are stones that remind one of thatched huts, boats, waterfalls or even abstract works of art.

The particular viewing stone I had in the bathroom was a favorite of mine because it fit several of these categories. It was off-white in color, about 16" tall and worn smooth by wind and water. It was an abstract form, but in shape vaguely resembled a woman's figure. But it also reminded me of a hand, with the finger and thumb together to make the OK sign. The best thing about it though was that it had a lemon-sized, nearly perfectly round hole through it. The hole was connected to the outside world by a worn crack coming down from above, just thin enough to let light through. It looked just like someone had poured a bit of the void down into the stone, and it got trapped there.

I thought of this hole as symbolizing Emptiness, and therefore our practice. Something about it reminded me of an *Enso* painting, a not quite closed circle. I had laboriously carved a wooden base for this stone to set in, with a dragon on it, so that it stood precariously upright. In the morning you could walk into our newly remodeled bathroom and look out the window at the rising sun through the hole in my viewing stone so that the empty space was filled with brilliance. That usually made me smile.



Of course, you didn't have to do that. You could also stomp angrily into the bathroom looking at your feet and never even notice that the stone was there. That's what the littlest boy was doing. I could hear him in there still complaining out loud about the injustice of having to comb his hair. "Comb it!" I yelled, by way of fatherly encouragement.

I heard him open the cabinet and get a comb, then slam the door closed. Then, there was a moment of perfect golden silence. I think it's what they call a "turning point," when the whole universe spins on its axis and you're right beside it. I was right there. I heard it myself. It was as silent as a rock falling through empty space.

Then everything exploded. There was a scream from the boy and an enormous crash and the sound of shattering porcelain going everywhere.

I ran into the bathroom and stopped. There was the boy, holding a comb, with tears pouring down his face. He'd slammed the cabinet door so hard that my viewing stone had tumbled off it and landed in the sink, smashing

both to pieces. "I didn't mean it!" he howled. "I didn't mean it!" He was OK, but the stone and sink were ruined.

It was a tense moment, right then, all through the Dharma Worlds. In front of me the gaping Hell of my own anger opened like a pit at my feet, tempting me to jump right in. And there was no reason not to jump right in. I would be more than justified in losing my temper. And I knew the way by heart.

But I had been that way too many times before and knew that it was just a pathway to endless regret. For once I saw this before, not after, the fact. Not that I had time to logic it out. Maybe my practice kicked in. I paused. Then I jumped over, rather than into, the pit of fire. I pointed my finger at my son and I said, "Comb your hair!" I really couldn't think of anything more useful to say. He was upset enough already. Then I went and sat back down on the couch. Maybe it wasn't the perfect response, but I've done worse.

This time he combed his hair eagerly, perhaps even with a bit too much enthusiasm. When he came out of the bathroom his hair was as neat and orderly as a freshly planted bean field. I said, "Get your backpack, or you'll miss the bus!" So he grabbed his things and ran gratefully out the door.

After he went, Judy sat down beside me and whispered tenderly, "What kind of an *idiot* would put a *rock* on a *cabinet* where it could fall into the *sink*?!" Then she got up and left me to mull it over. I conceded she had a point.

I just sat there on the couch. I realized I wouldn't be making any money today. I'd be spending it instead. I had to get into town and see if I could find another sink that would fit. The first one had been so awkward to put in that I dreaded doing it over. I sighed.

The Bodhisattva Dog came over and gave me his paw again. I took it, absently. He wanted me to get out the treasure and share it with him. But I still wasn't getting it, so finally he walked over to his food bowl and flipped it over with his foot. Then, he sat down and looked at me.

Ah! Breakfast! At last, here was someone who wanted breakfast! "Would you like a waffle? With syrup?" I asked. He just looked at me. So I got up and poured him out some food. He wagged his tail in appreciation, like dogs often do.

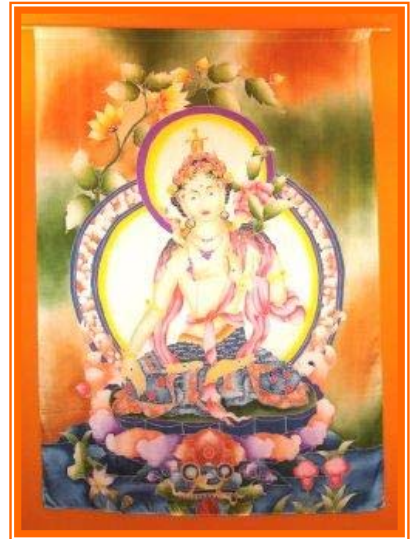
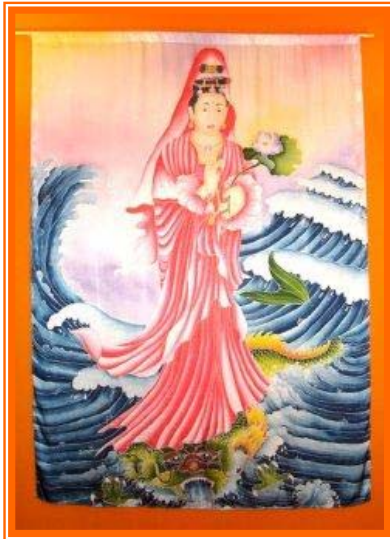
Outside, the sun was just coming up. ▲



**...since the life of each of us contains everything,
taking care of yourself is taking care of
everything else, do you see?**

Taizan Maezumi Roshi
Appreciate Your Life

Photo Gallery



Photos (clockwise from upper left): Laura preparing a delicious salad for Sunday Lunch; Kent preparing lunch during samu; Daishin getting close to completion on the Zen Center's new back deck; tapestries for sale at the Zen Center; Gento, Shinko Sensei, and Kuden preparing a meal during *The Great Heart Retreat* in Tulum, Mexico.

Gassho...