Turning the Light Around

Kathy Ratcliffe

The more people talk and ponder, the further they spin out of accord. Bring gabbing and speculation to a stop, and the whole world opens up to you. If you want the essence, get right to the root; chasing reflections, you lose sight of the source. Turning the light around for an instant routes becoming, abiding, and decay.

These are lines 15-18 of Relying on Mind, a poem attributed to Seng-ts’an, who was thought to be the third ancestor after Bodhidharma. I have been exploring these lines in dharma talks over the past few years. This translation is from Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker’s edited book, The Roaring Stream, a compendium of stories about the old Chinese Ch’an masters.

Chinese monks used to be required to memorize and recite the entire poem, much like we recite the Shodoka during sesshin. However, each line can be read individually and expresses a complete point. Let’s look at the first of these lines.

The more people talk and ponder, the further they spin out of accord.

Have you ever noticed that it’s when we stop talking that things become clearer? Pico Iyer wrote a short article on quietness, and quoted the French philosopher Blaise Pascal in the 17th century who said, “Distraction is the only thing that consoles us for our miseries, and yet it is itself the greatest of our miseries.” I’m sure he didn’t have in mind the kinds of technological distractions we have today, but those are really just extensions of what we’ve always done. It’s so easy to distract ourselves, now more than ever. We always have our smart phones and computers with us. Some of us have resisted cell phones, e-mail and social networking, but they are ubiquitous. Beyond technology, our talking and thinking are often efforts to distract ourselves from pain and disconnect that are the suffering of our lives.

Pascal also famously remarked that all of humanity’s problems come from our inability to sit quietly in a room alone (Iyer, 2011, p. 1). Sitting in a room alone isn’t necessarily an analogy to zazen. I think it implies another way to use our minds. When we allow thoughts to percolate, sometimes we can find greater meaning or new ideas. It’s like when we “sleep on it.” If we have a problem, we can go to sleep and let our brains work on it while we dream. Things are often much clearer in the morning. This is a nod to intuition versus logic, to allowing connections to be made without our directing them.

Iyer went on to point out the irony in the “new” luxury for those on the go—they pay a fortune for time unplugged. Hotel rooms and resorts are advertising time and space free from digital devices. Those implements that have been lauded as helping us free up time to do more things are now being seen as keeping us engaged 24/7.

Let’s go back to Seng-ts’an. His point is that when we engage our minds to talk and ponder, we miss the point—spinning out of accord. In the Roaring Stream, Nelson defined “accord” as “seeing things as...
they truly are and acting in harmony with the forces at play” (p. 12). We’ve all experienced times when we are wrapped up in our own emotions or ideas, and we miss what is going on right under our noses. This is an example of being out of accord. Interactions always happen in two directions. If we are out of touch with the other person, we cannot be intimate with him or her. If our own needs or our own ideas consume us, we miss the richness that interacting with others can afford us. What a loss!

When we are consumed by our own need, we miss the dharma that is fully expressed in each breath. It is through forgetting ourselves that the Dharma can be revealed.

Someone asked Lin-chi, “What was Bodhidharma’s purpose in coming from the west?”

The Master said, “If he had had a purpose, he wouldn’t have been able to save even himself!”

The questioner said, “If he had no purpose, then how did the Second Ancestor manage to get the Dharma?”

The Master said, “Getting means not getting.”

“If it means not getting,” said the questioner, “then what do you mean by ‘not getting?’”

The Master said, “You can’t seem to stop your mind from racing around everywhere seeking something. That’s why the Ancestor said, ‘Hopeless fellows—using their heads to look for their heads!’ You must right now turn your light around and shine it on yourselves, not go seeking somewhere else. Then you will understand that in body and mind you are no different from the Ancestors and buddhas, and that there is nothing to do. Do that and you may speak of ‘getting the Dharma’” (Roaring Stream, p. 110).

The Shodoka says it nicely:

Always working alone, always walking alone,
The enlightened one walks the free way of Nirvana
With melody that is old and clear in spirit
And naturally elegant in style,
But with body that is tough and bony,
Passing unnoticed in the world. (p. 2)

The aloneness of true quiet— with that “melody that is old and clear in spirit,” is not the aloneness of loneliness. In fact, when one passes unnoticed in the world, it is true intimacy with all things. Quietness is not the absence of sound. It is the absence of noise.

Bring gabbing and speculation to a stop, and the whole world opens up to you.

Not gabbing and pondering doesn’t mean not talking or thinking. Ta-hui said: “When you open your mouth you speak of it, and when you shut your mouth it appears by itself. But if you try to receive it by stirring your mind, you’ve already missed it by eighteen thousand miles” (Swampland Flowers, p. 71). Our practice on the cushion, our solitude in this practice, our quietness, are all ways to allow our worldly cares to fade and drop away. The practices we use of counting our breaths, of following the breath, and of working on koans are simply mechanisms to get out of our own way! These practices don’t change what is, they simply allow us to stop our incessant chatter so we can see it.

Our gabbing and speculation can be difficult to see. Historically Zen practitioners have “left the world” in order to decrease their distractions with worldly things. But we can use these worldly things to help remind us of our chatter. The Shodoka says,

When I consider the virtue of abusive words,
I find the scandal-monger is my good teacher.
If we do not become angry at gossip,
We have no need for powerful endurance and compassion. (p. 3)

Taking offense, judging, evaluating, becoming angry—all of these activities pit the small self against some “other.” When we can see the other person clearly, he or she is just a person. When we try to defend ourselves against someone, we miss seeing who that person is. Those emotions and judgments really get in the way. I have to clean up the shit in my own yard.

I do, actually, find myself cleaning up dog shit in my yard, and I don’t even have a dog! At least once a week I find huge piles in my garden or back yard. I’ve stepped in it when watering the garden in the morning on my way to work. It makes me angry and I have thought about which neighbors might let their dogs do their business in my yard. My story about it could go on and on. What about simply cleaning it up each time it appears?

Compassion is defined as “sympathetic pity and concern for the misfortunes of others.” Cleaning up others’ shit is one way of showing compassion. When my colleague starts gossiping about others, I try to listen without commenting, and end the conversation as soon as I can. Sometimes I might say, “Oh, that must have made you feel angry,” or “That sounds difficult to deal with.”
Then I try to just file away her opinion—put it away and go on. That’s another way of cleaning up shit without getting sucked into it.

Deshan one day descended to the dining hall, bowls in hand. Xuefeng asked him, “Old Teacher, the bell has not rung, and the drum has not sounded. Where are you going with your bowls?” Deshan turned immediately and went back to his room. (Gateless Barrier, Case 13)

The case goes on, but this part of it illustrates not even having a surface for others to place their shit. When you fall, you get up. When you make a mistake, you go on. When dinner is not ready, you go back to your room. When there is no place for shit to land, how can there be any gabbing or speculation?

Ta-hui describes it in another way,

“Just get to the root, don’t worry about the branches.” Emptying this mind is the root. Once you get the root, the fundamental, then all kinds of language and knowledge and all your daily activities as you respond to people and adapt to circumstances, through so many upsets and downfalls, whether joyous or angry, good or bad, favorable or adverse—these are all trivial matters, the branches. If you can be spontaneously aware and knowing as you are going along with circumstances, then there is neither lack nor excess. (p. 3)

What does it mean to say “the whole world opens up to you?” Is this something that happens as in “everything drops away?” This dropping away or opening up is not an event, it is a realization. The whole world is already open.

There are many ways this is spoken about in our Zen literature. The Shodoka says, “When we realize actuality, there is no distinction between mind and thing and the path to hell instantly vanishes” (p. 1).

There is also no distinction between me and you. Engagement is complete engagement, where there is no ending of me and beginning of you. That is intimacy.

A monk asked Lin-chi, “What is that which is continued from the Buddhas to the Patriarchs?” The Master said, “Nothing has leaked away.” (The Recorded sayings of Zen Master Joshu, p. 84)

There are no gaps. How can anything leak at all?

Ta-hui described this experience as,

So-called “Mindlessness” is not being inert and unknowing like earth, wood, tile, or stone; it means that the mind is settled and imperturbable when in contact with situations and meeting circumstances; that it does not cling to anything, but is clear in all places, without hindrance or obstruction; without being stained, yet without dwelling in the stainlessness; viewing body and mind like dreams or illusions, yet without remaining in the perspective of dreams’ and illusions’ empty nothingness. Only when one arrives at a realm like this can it be called true Mindlessness (Swampland Flowers, p. 2).

If you want the essence, get right to the root; chasing reflections, you lose sight of the source.

Jakujitsu Genko Zenji was a Zen poet. He was born in 1290 near Kyoto, and studied in Japan and China. I found some of his poems in the book Like a Dream Like a Fantasy, the Zen Teachings and Translations of Nyogen Senzaki that were translated by Senzaki.

Sitting Alone
Meditating deeply upon Dharma,
Reach the depth of the source.
Branching streams cannot compare to this source!
Sitting alone in a great silence
Even though the heavens turn and the earth is upset,
You will not even blink.
(Like a Dream, Like a Fantasy, p. 59)
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We hear again of great silence. This is the “depth [or root] of the source.” “Sitting alone in a great silence, even though the heavens turn and the earth is upset, you will not even blink.” What kind of silence is that? Where can we find it? How can we hear it? This root or source is not somewhere else. We don’t have to be on the cushion to realize it. And this great silence, may not even be quiet.

Here’s another poem that goes to that source.

**Boat Under the Moon**

Silvery moon hangs high in the sky.
I ride a tiny boat in the vast and misty sea.
Moon and sea forgotten;
I forget that I have forgotten.
And before the window
I sit quietly in meditation until midnight. (p. 62)

The image of the moon is used often in Zen to illustrate reflection. The reflection of the moon in the water, mistaking the pointing finger for the moon are phrases that we’ve heard often. Here is a reference from the *Shodoka*:

Stupid ones, childish ones,
They suppose there is something in an empty fist.
They mistake the pointing finger for the moon.
They are idle dreamers lost in form and sensation. (p. 9)

This verse equates dreaming with being lost, while the author of the previous verse has forgotten the moon completely. Those “idle dreamers lost in form and sensation” have an entirely different experience than the person who forgets forgetting, sitting quietly. It is that getting lost in form and sensation that causes the anxiety, the suffering that humans seek to resolve through zazen. It is so easy to become taken up with the myriad sensations that assail us in our daily lives. Monks and nuns “leave the world” to cut back on those distractions, but in our lay practice, we sit right in the middle of them. During sesshin we remove ourselves from the world, but only for a short time— the responsibilities and temptations are all there waiting for us. How can we see through them? Jakujitsu tells us so clearly: “I ride a tiny boat in the vast and misty sea. Moon and sea forgotten.” Each of us is riding in that boat, completely alone.

When we chase the reflections of the moon in the water, or the ideas of enlightenment or salvation; when we think that it is up to someone else to save us, that’s when we are lost. Looking outside, we miss what is right before our eyes. We cannot change the world, but we can see what is there -- or not there -- clearly.

**Turning the light around for an instant routs becoming, abiding, and decay.**

How do we turn the light around? Aitken Roshi used to tell of his first koan, Meister Eckhart’s “The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me.” He worked on that for awhile without understanding it, and returned to it later when his eye was clearer. When we turn the light around, it’s like looking in the opposite end of a telescope-- rather than seeing the far away object appear closer, the view is vast—we can see the entire landscape. Shift a bit and our eye is reflected in the telescope’s mirror, staring back! Who is seeing who? But it’s more than that, turning the light around is recognizing that you yourself are the trees and the ocean and the birds flying in the sky, seeing through your own eyes and flapping your own wings. Who is seeing who indeed.

The immediacy and instantaneousness of the realization experience is like having poor vision and putting on a pair of glasses or waking up to the morning rain. It’s the same, yet it is completely different and entirely new. We hear a similar line in Hakuin Zenji’s Song of Za-zen:

Much more, turn yourself about,
Confirm your own self-nature—
Self-nature that is no nature—
You are far beyond mere argument.

The line reads, “Turning the light around for an instant routs becoming, abiding, and decay.” The word Nelson used -- “routs” means to conquer or to defeat utterly, as in a war or conflict. There is no becoming, no abiding, and no decay- they have been summarily defeated and retreat in disarray. There is only now- stretching like infinity across the past and future. The past is recalled in the present through our thoughts, but we can never return there. The future is planned for in the present, but we never get there— it is always now. The present includes the past and the future, and there is no ending of it.

Now, tell me, where is the source right now?
Hele Malie

Lupita Pedroza

The warnings had been given to us and, after each of us took our positions, the sesshin began.

It was my first hiking retreat so I didn't have any idea about how it would unfold. I think this trip had a deeply significant meaning for me and for each of us participating. We were here on the Big Island because we wanted to know more about ourselves.

The day was thick with fog. I was second in line, after Kathy Ratcliffe, the hike leader this day. She would start to walk and I would follow her. We tried to keep a considerable distance between each hiker, always keeping the sense of walking together and at the same time walking alone – at our own pace and with our particular and unique expression.

We were told we would have to carry all the gear that we would need on the hike. The awareness of the weight was present because if you felt you needed more items, you would have to carry them all the way. I was thinking in my life how many things I have that I don't really need but I'm still carrying. On the other hand, the weight on your back helps you not be distracted because if you don't pay attention to what is before your eyes you might fall or lose the way.

Sometimes the path seemed very clear and I was sure about where I was going. Other times it was confusing. Just when I was feeling confused, the cairns along the way appeared, showing that if one can relax and look closely, the world can take care of you. Trusting in this, the path would be revealed as the next cairn appeared and pointed the way to follow. However the rocks are just a guide and I still had to walk the path myself and use my own judgment.

Finally at the end of the afternoon we arrived at the place where we would spend the night. The campsite was uneven so we needed to find a good spot. As soon as we set up our tents we were ready for dinner and for our first sitting, surrounded by mountains, rocks, sand and good friends.

Although the sky was full of stars, we needed to use our flashlights because to mis-step on a rock or something else could harm our bodies. I realized how important it is to take care of one's self; it was very significant on this trip because you can see that if you do something that harms yourself, it would greatly affect the rest of the group because then they would have to carry not only your body, but your gear as well. I wondered how many times in my life, due to my lack of awareness, I gave others the responsibilities of carrying my “stuff,” creating even more suffering.

That night I went to bed quite late. I couldn't believe where I was and what I was doing.

The next morning the sound of the conch woke us up -- what a beautiful way to wake up -- I immediately opened my eyes and got ready for our first sitting.

The sound of the sea was always inviting me to just listen, listen: not thought, not evaluation just splash! splash! shshshsh! How wonderful!

I was the breakfast cook, so I needed to leave early in our sitting period. We had created a place for the kitchen where we put the food and the equipment for making our meals. Every morning before breakfast we made hot water for tea. It was a time when I had a profound sense of not being separate. The sun came up and we held our cups of tea looking at the unlimited ocean and the beautiful sun rising at the very same moment. I could resonate with everything and everything resonated in me.

Every day the hike was unique and special; sometimes the path was like ‘a’ā (a rough, sharp lava) and sometimes it was rocky. Sometimes it was clear where your position was in relation to others’ and other times, because your pace was faster or slower, it wasn't clear. It

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“Hele Malie” from page 5
reminds me how often the same thing happens in life,
where sometimes you have to be in the front and some
times in the back and other times in the middle and
sometimes you don’t know where you are.

The place was really wild. The wildness manifested
in every single part of the hike, but when we got to
Halapē it was beyond any expectation. I just realized
how many times we want to cover up this pristine wild
and natural state that is our own nature. It is like going
to a nude beach and having the wonderful experience of
my own nakedness, but in the next moment feeling
ashamed that someone else can see me. Isn’t it ridicu-
los? We are fabulous human beings covering ourselves
with clothes of inadequacy.

After each breakfast we cleaned and packed every-
thing and then got together and listened to a talk by our
teacher Michael Kieran. I enjoyed that particular time
because I could hear the sound of wisdom and feel the
longing for compassion in myself and our group.

When we left Halapē for ‘Āpua Point, the last
campsite in the sesshin, I was feeling more relaxed and
lighter because part of the weight that I was carrying was
the food and it had been eaten. Then, along the way, we
needed to take on and distribute the water that would be
needed for the rest of our hike because ‘Āpua Point does
not have a water supply. And what did that really mean?
More weight than I was carrying before!

I thought this happened because we were getting
stronger. I’m just getting used to these kinds of funny
situations in my life because I’ve started to believe more
and more that when I’m finding some sense of comfort in
my actual situation, life manifests and gives me another
challenge to keep me awake and humble, expecting the
unexpected with my arms wide open. If I continue to
resist it, the rest of my walk will be heavy.

At sesshin’s end, as we got together for our last
group meeting before leaving the lava fields to meet with
the friends who, thanks to their generosity, would be tak-
ing us to the airport and home, I realized how wonderful
the experience had been, what an intimate connection
the group had made with each other. The group was the
perfect size. We took care of each other in different ways
and, knowing that somebody was always walking behind
and in front of me, I had confidence in our walking all
together. Having this conviction I can say, “THE
MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS ARE WALKING AS
WELL.”

Thank you very much all who made this possible.

Late Spring
Coming into the high room again after years
after oceans and shadows of hills and the sounds
after losses and feet on stairs
after looking and mistakes and forgetting
turning there thinking to find
no one except those I knew
finally I saw you
sitting in white
already waiting
you of whom I had heard
with my own ears since the beginning
for whom more than once
I have opened the door
believing you were not far

– W. S. Merwin
Sangha News

Administrator Position

Our search for a new administrator is over. The Board is very pleased to announce that starting August 1, long-time sangha member Susan Brandon will become the new administrator after Roland. Our thanks go out to all who showed interest and applied.

Residential Program

There have been many comings and goings in the residential program so far this year. Residents have enjoyed the vitality of a busy residential program.

Crocker Clark moved out March 1st after one and a half years of residency to an apartment in town. Crocker expressed his gratitude for his time here. And our residents Khevin and Gaga have extended their original six-month stay for at least another six months.

Jukai Ceremony & Hanamatsuri Celebration

On Sunday, April 13, the Sangha will be celebrating two big events.

In the morning on April 13th, five sangha members will receive the sixteen Bodhisattva precepts in a Jukai Ceremony. Since March, 2013, Clifton Royston, Genevieve Manset, Joan Volk, Matthew Stuckey, and Michael Hofmann have been meeting regularly with Michael, exploring the meaning of the precepts and how they operate in their lives. Receiving the precepts is not so much a matter of adopting an external code of behavior as it is the discovery through study and practice that the standards set by the precepts are one’s own personal standards. The Jukai ceremony acknowledges this discovery and commitment and how it is uniquely embodied in each Jukai recipient.

The Jukai Ceremony will take place from 8:30 AM to approximately 10:45 AM followed by a short break and the annual Hanamatsuri celebration at 11:00 AM. The Hanamatsuri service celebrates the traditional birthday of the Buddha. Participants pay homage to the birth of Buddha by sharing stories of the Buddha’s life, offering incense, and pouring sweet tea over an image of the baby Buddha. Children of all ages are welcome to join at 11 AM.

Tea, refreshments, and conversation will follow on the lanai at Noon.

Sangha Circle

We had an enriching discussion at Sangha Circle on February 22. The topic was healthy and unhealthy relationships: family, intimate, work, and sangha. Together we talked about our lives and experiences in these areas in the context of Zen practice. We have two Sangha Circles a year, the next on August 23rd on a topic not yet decided.

“Under Construction”

The rumors are accurate, a major redesign of the website is underway and slowly progressing. Everything is being re-written and updated with new functions added. The prototype will be rolled out soon to the Board and a few others for feedback and further development.

Sangha members, residents, and Vipassana Hawaii friends have all focused efforts on PZC’s gardens recently, growing ornamentals for our altars, and taro, basil, kale, okra, lettuces, arugula, and more for our bellies. There is space to expand and planning continues. All Sangha members and friends are encouraged to get involved.

Work on the Sangha library certainly has proceeded in fits and starts, but this spring activity should be picking up as Library Committee members Dawn Sueoka and
### APRIL 2014

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<td><strong>22</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen/Dokusan&lt;br&gt;9 am – Noon</td>
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<td><strong>24</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen, 7 - 9 pm</td>
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<td><strong>25</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen/Dokusan/Q&amp;R&lt;br&gt;7 - 9 pm, tea</td>
<td><strong>26</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen, 7 - 9 pm</td>
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<td><strong>27</strong>&lt;br&gt;Orientation&lt;br&gt;9 am – Noon</td>
<td><strong>28</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen/Dokusan&lt;br&gt;7 - 9 pm</td>
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<td><strong>29</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen/Dokusan&lt;br&gt;9 - 11 am, tea</td>
<td><strong>30</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zazen/Dokusan&lt;br&gt;7 - 9 pm</td>
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**Note:** Morning Zazen: 6:00 - 7:00 AM, M-Th during regular schedule; 5:25-7:00 AM, M-Th during intensive practice periods. (No morning zazen during informal/reduced schedules, on the day after sesshin, on holidays, or during Vipassana.)
**Sangha News** from page 6

Michael Hofmann plans some serious cataloguing. The plan is to have the majority of the cataloguing completed by the end of the calendar year.

**Board Elections**

There is an opportunity for new candidates to join the Board at the Board elections at our Annual Meeting on April 27th. Think seriously about joining the Board; it’s a big commitment, but is very rewarding.

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### From the Calendar

**Hele Malie Sesshin:** May 17 through 22.

**Summer Sesshin:** July 3 through July 10. **SIGN-UP DEADLINE is Sunday, May 25.**

**Intensive Practice Period (IPP):** Begins Sunday, June 1, with a ceremony during zazen, and extends through Sunday, July 13.

**Jukai Ceremony & Hanamatsuri Celebration:** Sunday April 13, 8:30 AM to Noon. The Jukai ceremony will begin at 8:30 followed by Hanamatsuri at about 11:00.

**Hiking Zazen:** Sunday, April 6, from 8:30 to 4 PM.

**Zazen:** Sunday, June 1, from 8:30 to 4 PM. The IPP will begin with a ceremony toward the end of the zazen.

**Teacher’s Question & Response:** April 2, May 28, June 25, July 30.

**Sangha Annual Meeting:** Sunday, April 27, 11:30 AM until 1:30 PM.

**Sangha General Meeting:** Sunday, July 20, 11:30 AM until 1:30 PM.

**Zendo Leaders’ Meeting:** Sunday, May 11, 11:15 AM - 1:00 PM.

**Samu:** Sunday, June 15, July 27, from 9 AM to Noon, lunch following

**Work Party:** Sunday, May 4, from 9 AM to Noon, lunch following

**Orientation:** Saturdays, April 26, May 24, June 28, July 26, from 9 AM – 12 PM

**Relaxed Period:** April 14 - 25. No Sangha programs at PZC.

**Neighborhood Party:** Saturday, April 19, time to be determined

**Board of Directors:** Thursdays, April 10, May 8, from 7 PM. All Sangha members are welcome to attend.

**Vipassana Hawaii:** Retreats, April 4 - 10, May 10, July 12. No Sangha programs at PZC.

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<th>JULY 2014</th>
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**Hele Malie**

Our Hele Malie Sesshin will be held this year from May 17 to 22. A small-but-determined group has committed to participate so far. The sign up deadline was March 30th, but if you are interested in participating in this awesome experience, speak with Michael Kieran as soon as possible. During this sesshin we carry our food, clothes, and water on our backs as we hike along the rugged volcanic coastline of the Big Island for five days. (See article on page 5.)