



## You Are Only This Moment

A Sesshin Encouragement Talk  
by Bill Hamaker

Since we began our sesshin on Friday night, all of us have been working hard to establish our zazen practice. Why is it so necessary to work so hard? Because, deep down, all of us know that we have very little time. We have very little time in this sesshin and very little time in our lives. This became apparent to me as never before when my youngest brother died six months ago. Eight short months prior to his truly tragic demise, he was diagnosed with fully metastasized, inoperable cancer.

He lived in Springfield, Missouri where he had a growing veterinary practice, a wife, and three school age children. He seemed to be in denial of his impending death and struggled right up until the end. On the three short visits I had with him, I saw the full horror of someone who, in the prime of his life, was having everything taken away as he faced the finality of nonexistence.

And as his world was collapsing, I felt mine collapsing too. I realized that I would soon be in his place. That all I had struggled for would be lost in oblivion; in non-being. I experienced what Pema Chodron calls "groundless-ness". The rug had been pulled out from under me. I did not know what to do and, at times, the panic I experienced kept me from being able to do anything.

The support systems I had relied on: my Zen

practice, my career, my family - none of these could sustain me.

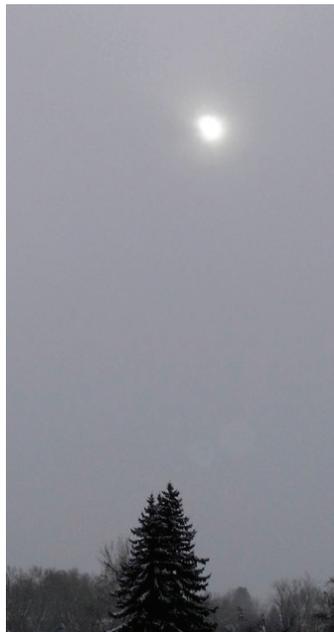
To tell you the truth, I don't know how I got out of that downward spiral. Getting good psychiatric treatment certainly helped.

After Tedd died, things inexplicably changed. I finally realized that there is only one thing I can rely on. I can rely on this moment. And somehow, with this realization, I was able to pick myself up and carry on.

We don't know what the next moment will bring. We don't know if everything we have ever done will make any difference in the world. We don't know what will happen when we die. But when we can see that we do have this moment; that we are nothing other than this moment: the sound of traffic, the birds, the sun coming through

the windows....this MU, this breath - then we have a chance. Don't waste your chance. Don't believe what I am saying. Prove it to yourself.

Our evening ritual for sesshin includes this exhortation: "I beg to urge you everyone, life and death are a grave matter, all things pass quickly away. Each of you must be completely alert, never neglectful, never indulgent!" Take this to heart and wake up to the truth that you are only this moment.



## Steps on the Long Journey:

*Endless Path,*

by Rafe Martin

[North Atlantic, ©2010,

262 pp. \$19.95

Reviewed by

Ken Morgareidge Sensei



*Endless Journey*, is an exploration of the ten paramitas (transcendent perfections) through the medium of the Jatakas. Each of the Paramitas is illustrated by a Jataka tale followed by Rafe's commentary.

When we think of Buddhism and Buddhist scriptures, the first things that come to mind are the sutras (discourses of the Buddha) and shastras (comments on the sutras) for those who study academic Buddhism, or the koans if you are a Zen student. Rarely do we look seriously at the Jatakas, tales from many sources that are said to be stories of Buddha's previous lives. They are wonderful myths of the various births and rebirths of the Bodhisattva on his path to enlightenment and Buddhahood. In the west they are generally thought of as stories for children; but can we think of them as teachings of the same depth as those we normally consider "scripture"?

In his latest book, *Endless Path*, Rafe Martin takes a leap beyond the traditional and mythic aspect of the Jatakas. He shows clearly the profound teaching they contain and at the same time conveys the Buddha's own humanity and his struggles along the way. Rafe is a long-time Zen student and practitioner. He has also been a bookseller, storyteller and is the author of many books for young people and adults that draw on myths of different cultures. *The Hungry Tigress*, a collection of Jatakas, has become a classic of popular Buddhist literature.

In the stories, the Buddha appears in many guises. He is an ascetic who falls prey to sexual obsession. He is an ox who, Gandhi-like, refuses to bow down to tyranny, yet when his master repents, forgives him. He is a deformed dwarf who, like Cyrano de Bergerac, makes an alliance

with a handsome young man in order to win a place in a king's army. He is a prince who sacrifices his own life to save a fellow creature who is starving.

The Jatakas are not about the *The Perfect One*, as we normally think of the Buddha. In the story of Prince Five-Weapons, the Bodhisattva is a warrior whose bravery approaches the foolhardy. When none of his conventional weapons can conquer the monster, Sticky Hair, his ultimate weapon, supreme confidence along with a dash of blarney, saves the day. In the story of The Black Hound, the Bodhisattva takes the form of a god with absolute power, and he uses that power to browbeat and threaten a city to reform its ways. Whatever looks like it will work; skillful means.

Like our own lives, each Jataka represents an experiment in the Bodhisattva path, just one more step.

Each tale is told in Rafe's usual spare and direct style. The commentary that goes with it is more conversational and covers a huge range of topics: other versions of the story, related koans, poetry, and anecdotes of Rafe's own life and experience of practice. It is these commentaries that take us from the myth of the "high and far-off times" to the present, our own earthly dilemmas, foibles and difficult choices, and ultimately to see clearly our own destination.

Many Jatakas present the Bodhisattva as the mythic hero conquering impossible odds or making the supreme sacrifice. But anyone who has read the life of the Buddha himself knows that the supremely enlightened one, the Buddha, didn't operate that way in his last visit. He actually lived the rather ordinary life of a monk, traveling and preaching. As Dogen says, the person who advances in the Way is an ordinary person.

Using the example of Odysseus, Rafe puts it this way [Pg 165]:

*After years of danger and difficulty, the hero has finally got it made, can live with a gorgeous goddess in a timeless realm for all eternity. And what does he do? He mopes. He wants something more commonplace. He wants above all to return home-*

so *Odysseus* sets out for home, his own home, to our very own ordinary, dusty familiar, all too fleeting human realm, the very place we're so often trying to get away from in our restless search for something permanent, lasting, and eternally fulfilling.

Compare with Tung-shan's fifth rank:

*Not falling into being or non-being--who can be in accord with this?  
Everyone longs to leave the eternal flux,  
Not just to live in harmony, but to return and sit by the charcoal fire.*

Full circle: we end up sitting by our own little fire wherever and whatever that might be, and that is just enough. One can think of Chao-chou at home in his little run down monastery, or Te-shan quietly returning to his room. But the Jatakas show the steps, and that every step is complete in its own way.

Richard Wehrman's powerful monochrome illustrations set the mood for each story. They show the Buddha in all his guises, human and animal, in power, in sacrifice and in sadness.

The Jatakas can be seen as not about *the* Buddha, but about *Buddha*, our true nature manifesting continuously over and over and through time and space, the endless, beginning-less path that we all follow. With Rafe's guidance we see the Buddha, warts and all. We see Buddha in the past and in the present, in myth and in ourselves.



## negative hand by Hoag Holmgren



the *nagual* drops the bone pipe  
mid-inhale jaguarling  
himself see: paw-prints  
in rivermud

evidence equals strength  
as nightsky's needling lights  
charm the hunt

the waspling's clear wing reveals  
through it  
knuckled earth's crouch

butte-hails echo along sandstone bandings  
by sunrise and sunset swift voice filings  
weave clan-totems of wind

wooly rhino knaps the breath  
as muscled canyon  
groans into limestone  
offering the womb-gourd  
*here*

Sitting in zazen  
Mind like a naughty puppy  
Heel! Heel! Okay - jump!  
*Francine Campone*

## A Thousand Hands Unlimited

The thousand hands of Avalokiteshvara! A familiar, yet powerful image of compassionate action. This is the basis for *A Thousand Hands Unlimited*, which was established years ago at the Zen Center of Denver to support our Sangha in social action and community service. In recent years our focus as a sangha has been on other important aspects of practice and *A Thousand Hands Unlimited*, as one body of the ZCD, has slipped into relative obscurity. However, it is exciting to note that there seems to be a resurgence of interest in *A Thousand Hands Unlimited*.

Compassion is central to Buddhism and pervades all our relationships, not just with other people, but with the environment, animals, and ourselves. So it seems only natural that we would have a visible expression of compassionate action at the Zen Center of Denver. You are invited to help revitalize *A Thousand Hands Unlimited*, by continuing to explore with us what it means to engage in compassionate action. We would like to hear from members of our Sangha: How does loving-kindness and compassion manifest itself in your own life? How do you think *A Thousand Hands Unlimited* might serve and support our Sangha? These are some of the ideas that have been proposed thus far:

- Provide support to members of our sangha through health and wellness offerings at the Center, such as yoga, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, QiGong, and the Sedona Method of "letting go."
- Help each other by visiting sangha members when they or their family are sick or dying; or by offering respite, or other forms of support when it is requested.
- Create opportunities for social action and community service through volunteer work.

The opportunities for compassionate action are unlimited! Please call or email me if you are interested in joining the committee for *A Thousand Hands Unlimited*, or if you would simply like to share your ideas or observations.

With Much Gratitude

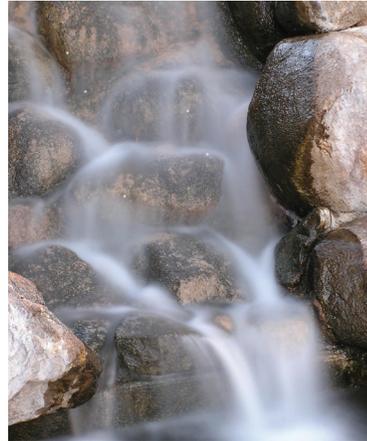
Heidi Reichhold



## Entering the Gate

Please welcome new members to our sangha (since August 2010):

Kim Baker, Jeremiah Wathen, Brian Meadows, Ben Freund, Emily Bettencourt, Angie Martin and Chris Chase.



## Sailboat in Fog, by Yushin

We start as a boat  
Sailing across the infinite ocean.  
As we grow we see the  
Birds ocean, torn sails and sticky rudder

Life accelerates around us as a fog  
We lose sight of all we are and all there is

Isolation abound as we lose our connections  
Practicing awareness we begin to see our pain  
and isolation.

Continued practice exposes us to the loom which  
we thread our threads of fog.  
Deepened practice empowers the solubleness of  
the fog.

Life long commitment to the practice slows the  
looms' production of the threads of fog  
With periodic then regular interruptions in the  
fog production.

Finally, maybe, back to sailing the boat.

## Sangha Meeting

As most of you know, the Zen Center of Denver was awarded a CSHF grant of \$183K to do major restoration and preservation work on our building. But to be eligible for that we have to come up with matching funds of \$61K. We have received pledges that cover a significant portion of that amount (much gassho!).

The Board of Directors is proposing to take out a bank loan to cover the remainder (about \$40K). We are scheduling a special all-sangha meeting for **Sunday, April 10, starting at 8 am**. At that meeting we will present the details of the loan in the context of our overall financial picture. The Fundraising Committee has also come up with ideas for income generation which we can discuss and add to.

A lot of people have worked hard and long to bring us to this point, but in order to continue, we need the active and continuing support of the entire sangha.

This is the most important step so far in the Preserving the Impermanence Project. So please come if you possibly can, or give your proxy to a member who will be attending.

## Vesak

There are a number of holidays that we celebrate here at the Zen Center, but none is more sacred or more filled with joy than Vesak. Vesak is a time in which all the various schools throughout the Buddhist world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and paranirvana of our founding teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha.

On May 22nd, we will come together as a sangha, as families and friends. We will pay homage to the baby Buddha, share food, songs, and stories; in this way we recommit ourselves to practice and realization and to the liberation of all beings.

Everyone is welcome!

## Damme, Germany 2011

The three teachers will travel to Germany in May to attend the Diamond Sangha Teacher's Circle meeting. They look forward to renewing friendships and meeting new faces who were not able to attend the meeting in Denver in 2007. The meeting agenda generally consists of administrative items and koan work. This year may include discussion on the future structure of the Diamond Sangha as well as a vision for the Teacher's Circle. The teachers have felt very welcomed and are happy to participate this year. They will be gone from May 13-21 and will return just in time for Vesak!

## Calendar Highlights

Samu	April 2
Dharma Discussion	April 3
Board of Directors Meeting	April 4
<b>Sangha Meeting</b>	<b>April 10</b>
<b>Sesshin</b>	<b>April 16-23</b>
Center Closed	April 24
Kannon Ceremony	May 1
Samu	May 21
<b>Vesak</b>	<b>May 22</b>
Diamond Sangha Teachers' Meeting (No Dokusan during this period)	May 13-22
Center Closed	May 28-30
<b>Mtn. Sesshin Application Deadline</b>	<b>June 1</b>
<b>Seminar</b>	<b>June 4-5</b>
<b>Zazenkai</b>	<b>June 12</b>
Workdays	June 18 & 19

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