



Mountains Talking

Spring 2016

Call and Response

By Peggy Metta Sheehan
From a teisho on Feb. 28, 2016

Wu-men Kuan, Case 17:

The National Teacher called to his attendant three times, and three times his attendant responded. The National Teacher said, "I thought I had transgressed against you, but now I see that you too have transgressed against me."

The National Teacher called to his attendant three times, and three times his attendant responded.

Zen practice and realization is genuinely this simple, this direct, It couldn't be more direct, but lord knows, it is not easy. It requires our effort to be this simple, effort akin to climbing a mountain of swords with bare feet, and it requires response. You can't just sit here.

We have a discussion coming up on the calendar in April about the Clouds and Water training program. What is it exactly? How do you begin to participate? What are current members' experiences with it? Why is it beneficial for practice and realization, transformation? What does it have to do with you, with Zen, with living kindly, compassionately, responsively?

The National Teacher called to his attendant three times and three times his attendant responded. In Clouds and Water the teacher's attendant is called the jisha. It is a traditional and honored position in any Zen training. Ananda was the Buddha's attendant for many years.

This koan I think points to at least one of the main strengths or fundamental aspects of the Clouds and Water training. "Jisha!" We allow ourselves to be



Photo by Jeff Black

called again and again and again. We intentionally put ourselves in this position, to be called. "Jisha!" And this goes for all the other positions as well – jiki, tanto, anja, ino and tenzo.

There is something called the tumbler effect. You put a bunch of jagged edged stones in a jar or barrel

with other stones and shake it. The stones rub against each other over and over, and those edges begin to smooth away. These edges, of course, symbolize our comfort zones, our habit force, our constructs of self. On the internet it said: “Using a rock tumbler to convert rough rock into sparkling gemstones is part art and part science.” I like it. It describes our training pretty well – part art, part science. Training is a tradition in Zen, and it’s not just sitting zazen.

We are still finding our way with this in the traveling zendo environment. And for the sake of this important aspect of training, I do hope we will have a practice home in the not too distant future.

Otherwise, how will we work with our own edges? You can’t just sit here. You have to get tossed around a little bit. Now, certainly life itself provides daily opportunity for this friction or rubbing, and yet it still seems that intentionality, some conscious choice to work with these energies is necessary and helpful. After all, these edges are here to protect what some might call our core vulnerabilities, the ones we guard and protect at any and all costs. There must be some willingness to look, otherwise we may lean into our zazen in order to avoid them, which is not uncommon.

So just as kinhin and samu/work practice are often described as bridge practices that help us express the understanding that is developing or becoming clear in our zazen, so Clouds and Water is another very helpful practice along this journey. Kinhin, samu, jiki, tanto, are each whole and complete practices in and of themselves, as well as opportunities to meet ourselves, to explore the edges and ultimately to see through them and allow the inherent gemstone to shine.

The National Teacher calls three times and three times his attendant responds. This attendant has become mature, transparent, so much so that the teacher says, “I thought I had transgressed against you, but now I see that you too have transgressed against me.”

Shibayama writes, “I remember when my teacher gave teisho on this koan of ‘calling thrice and answering thrice,’ said, ‘You monks, I do hope that your training will be as scrupulous and thoroughgoing as this!’”

And here is Aitken Roshi, recalling his teacher, Nyogen Senzaki, dramatizing this call and response: “*Oshin!*”

Oshin comes up to the teachers quarters from the monastery below, bows, and says, “Yes, Master?”

“Oh, there you are. Thank you for coming, but I don’t need you right now.” Then a little later, “Oshin!”

Oshin drops what he is doing and comes again, “Yes, Master?”

“Oh thank you. You many return now.” Oshin bows and returns below and again there is a call,

“Oshin!”

Again he comes and responds, “Yes, Master?”

And I am certain that all of the senior students here have stories about our teacher, Danan Henry, calling us, three times at least, challenging again and again

our dearly held beliefs, whether knowingly or not. And I’m certain that we three teachers are now returning this teaching in kind – knowingly or not.

I’ll be very honest, I’m still working on this one. Aitken Roshi says, don’t try this in a restaurant – “Waiter, Waiter, Waiter!” It gets old in families, too, though not for the one calling. There is a button that we all have and it is so familiar, so quick, so sharp. And you can only work with it IF you work with it. “Greed, hatred and ignorance rise endlessly, I vow to abandon them. Dharma gates are countless, I vow to wake to them.” Everything is an opportunity, everything. Especially the things we struggle with.

The National Teacher called to his attendant three times and three times his attendant responded. Aitken Roshi writes, “Since the attendant was a veteran monk, the second call was fresh and new and so was the third call. He did not become dulled by repetition because he was no longer oriented to sequence.”

“The second call was fresh and new and so was the third call. He did not become dulled by repetition because he was no longer oriented to sequence.”

- Robert Aitken

Rumi wrote:

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing,
there is a field.
I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.*

So, what's this like, this "no longer oriented to sequence"? Hopefully we have touched this, even momentarily. A moment of freshness, of vivid aliveness, of the world too full to talk about, of no right or wrong, self or other, because that is actually the Truth of each moment. This very Truth that is not opposed in any way to the nitty gritty edges of life. Each moment there is always a calling, absolutely new, from the universe to you and vice versa. And you are always responding, as is the universe.

The shape and form of the call and response is infinite. What about the call of the morning dove or the morning alarm clock, the crisp morning air, the first buds in spring, the sirens that pass in the night, the taste of bitter or sweet, the cry of your new baby, the surge of fear or anger, the smell of rain, the whistle of your tea kettle or text message? Call and response, call and response, call and response. And how about when death comes calling? How will you answer?

Shibayama quotes a verse in his talk on this case:

*A mirror reflects candle lights in the Golden Palace.
A mountain responds to the temple bell in the
moonlight.*

*Candle lights in the mirror reflecting one another --
which are the true lights and which are the reflections?
In sheer brightness they can hardly be distinguished.
The mountain echos the temple bell in the moonlight.
Responding to each other in the quiet sky, the bell and
the echoes are indistinguishable.*

The calling master and the answering disciple - can you tell who is who?

Wumen's comment:

*The National Teacher called three times and his
tongue fell to the ground. His attendant answered three
times and his responses were brilliant. The National
Teacher was old and feeling lonely. He pushed the*

*cow's head down to the grass to make it eat. The
attendant would have none of it. Delicious food does
not attract a person who is full. Now tell me, at what
point was there transgression?*

So did the National teacher say too much, his tongue fell to the ground? From one perspective one call is always more than enough. It is too much. From another we are grateful to be called again and again and again.

"Delicious food does not attract a person who is full. Now tell me, at what point was there transgression?" Does calling assume there is an other? Does answering confirm?

Mother Teresa was asked once by an interviewer: "When you pray, what do you say to God? She said, "I don't talk, I listen." The interviewer then asked: "What does God say to you?" Mother Teresa replied, "He doesn't talk. He listens. And if you don't understand that, I can't explain it to you."

Wu-men's verse:

*You must carry the iron yoke with no hole.
No trivial matter, this curse passes to descendants.
If you want to support the gate and sustain the
house,
You must climb a mountain of swords with bare feet.*

An iron yoke or iron cangue is a Chinese torture device, supposedly ancient (but not that ancient – there are photos of Tibetan people wearing them in the 1920s). It's two large pieces of wood hinged together with a hole in the middle for a person's head. It's heavy and too large to be able to reach your hands to your mouth. You must rely on others to offer you some food or water each day.

So what is an iron yoke with no hole? What kind of burden is this? Unfathomable. One must let go of all attempts to comprehend it, this curse that passes to descendants. This extraordinary thing, "absurd beyond description," says Shibayama, and still it is borne and maybe even transmitted through a simple call.

This iron yoke with no hole points to the fact that there is no such thing as a true word or teaching, so what are we doing here? Well, we are sustaining the house and climbing a mountain of swords with bare feet. And if you're up for it, let's do it.

Jisha!

Who is Ringing that Bell?

By Clark Dollard

If you have been coming to the Zen Center for any length of time, you have noticed the people who lead each sitting, who ring the bells, announce dokusan, give encouragement talks, etc. These are participants in a training program called Clouds and Water, formerly called Monastery Without Walls. By any name, Clouds and Water allows participants to deepen their practice and their commitment by serving in zendo leadership positions. There are four of these positions: anja (altar attendant), jiki (timekeeper), jisha (teacher's attendant), and tanto (zendo monitor).

Clouds and Water can be thought of as a series of concentric circles of expanding responsibility, with each circle containing the previous ones. The first circle, the center, is each participant's individual practice. This is where we all start. We come to the Zen Center, we sit, we go to dokusan, we deepen our practice. In this circle, we only need to focus on ourselves and our own practice. This is both an important place to start and a part of our practice that will always be with us, no matter what leadership positions we take on.

When a student begins participating in Clouds and Water, the first step is to train as anja (altar attendant). Anjas are responsible for the altar, setting it up (in our temporary locations), cleaning it, filling the water offerings and watering the flowers. They also make incense offerings at certain points at some sittings. Spending time giving loving attention to the altars is a beautiful experience, and my relationship with the altars has never been the same. I also learned a lot about bowing and serving. At the same time, anja is a fairly "safe" position. Even though there are some precise forms to learn and follow, making a mistake such as lighting two candles when you should light three does not impact most people in the zendo very much. You hear about your mistakes from your teacher and you learn to take corrections graciously.

The next of our concentric circles is jiki (timekeeper). The jiki rings the bells and strikes the clappers to start and end sittings, kinhin, chanting, etc. There is a lot to keep track of, and if you miss a bell or add an extra bell, everyone in the zendo is affected. You get more practice in taking corrections graciously. You also sit in a leader's seat, facing the sangha, which was

a bit of a shock for me until I got used to it. Although it was intimidating at first, after I got used to the rhythm of being a jiki, I loved it, and it is now my favorite position. I love the musicality of the bells and clappers, the challenge of trying to hit them to get the sound just right. Jiki is also very predictable; you know at the start of the sitting exactly what you're going to do and exactly when you're going to do it. Once I got the rhythm down, it was easy to let it become a seamless part of my practice.



The next level of responsibility is the jisha, who serves as both teacher's attendant and temple attendant. The two primary responsibilities of the jisha are running dokusan and interacting with newcomers. Interacting with other humans now becomes part of the practice, and things get much less predictable. People who are fairly new to the practice might need some reminders about forms, other people might want to go to dokusan for the first time and need to get shown how to do that. Some nights two people want to go to dokusan, and some nights twelve people. When I first started being a jisha, I felt that dealing with all these people and unexpected circumstances was interfering with my practice, but over time, with the help of the teachers, I learned how to let all of these things be a part of my practice. This, in turn, helped me learn to let my life – which involves a lot of people and unexpected circumstances – be a part of my practice.

The last circle is the tanto or zendo monitor. The tanto is the person who sometimes gives an opening encouragement talk, who walks the zendo and does posture correction, who walks the stick in the closing ceremony, and who leads the chants in the evenings. Primarily, the tanto is responsible for the zendo. This

means being responsible for things like heat and light, but also seeing that people are following the forms, etc. Being a tanto pushed me to learn to practice in the midst of responsibility, which in turn helped me bring my practice into my life, where I have a lot of responsibility. I have found it to be a challenging position at times. If a newcomer is not following the forms, how do you respond in a way that will give them the information they need, but at the same time not drive them away? There are no clear rules as to how to do this, and every situation is different. The teachers have been clear that part of the practice of being tanto is approaching decisions like this as practice. It's not easy, but I find it to be a powerful practice.

Participating in Clouds and Water has become such an integral part of my practice that I can't imagine practicing without it. Of course, I attend many sittings where I'm not a leader, but Clouds and Water has helped me feel much more connected to the sangha, to my dharma brothers and sisters, and to draw support from them in my practice. Furthermore, it has helped me expand my practice beyond the boundaries of my breath and my zabuton and to integrate my practice into my life.

Clouds and Water is open to members who are working regularly with a teacher. It may not be for everyone, but if you're considering it, even a little, I strongly encourage you to talk to your teacher about it. It has been a powerful part of my practice, and from talking with my dharma brothers and sisters who participate in Clouds and Water, I know that it is a powerful part of their practice as well.

Extended Sittings in Spring

The responses to the winter ango zazenkai have been impressive. The teachers are extending the successful run of extended sittings into the spring with two zazenkai and the annual sesshin at Blue Mountain. These occasions to allow the mind to settle over hours or days can bring strength to your zazen and depth to your insights. Sweep the dust from your calendars so that you can sweep the dust from the mirror. Consider these opportunities:

Zazenkai, Sunday, April 3, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Iyengar Yoga Center of Fort Collins, 210 East Oak Street Suite A. Peggy Metta Sensei will offer teisho and dokusan. Participants should bring their own sack lunches; hot water for tea will be available. Registration



will be open initially to full-time participants, then to partial participants if room is available. Studio capacity is 20. Registration deadline will be March 27. Cost will be \$30 for full attendance.

Zazenkai, Sunday, May 22, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Santosha Yoga Studio, Wheat Ridge Center Building, 5810 West 38th Avenue, Suite 3 (upstairs). Ken Tetsuzan Sensei will offer teisho and dokusan. Participants should bring sack lunches; hot water for tea will be available. The limit here will be 30. Full-day or partial participation will be offered. Cost will be \$30 for full attendance, \$15 for partial attendance.

Blue Mountain sesshin, Tuesday, June 21 to Sunday, June 26. ZCD's traditional summer sesshin at Becky Wethington's property and zendo northwest of Lyons, Colorado fills up quickly, and capacity is limited. Peggy Metta Sensei and Karin Ryuku Sensei will teach at this sesshin. Tent camping is the arrangement. Full participation is required for this sesshin. Stay alert for information about registration and other details as the date approaches.

- George Mathews



Photo by Josh Mather

The Bonsai in the Window: Lay Practice in Chi-town

By Josh Mather

Seven years ago, I decided to move to Chicago to pursue my career as a musician and artist as well as help my partner through grad school and beyond. Moving away from the Zen Center was a shock to the system for me spiritually. I missed the sound of the traffic on Speer, the elegance of the Buddha in the zendo, and most of all the endless fellowship with friends over tea and cookies, and even beer and cheese. I found myself floundering to find stability in my practice. The rug had been pulled. There was no wall to lean against.

Throughout my years in Chicago I have sat with several different centers, but none of them felt quite like home. I was lucky enough to come back to Denver for sesshin as well as regular “Skype-usans” with Karin Sensei and rediscover the practice that had supported me for so many years. These short spurts of practice have been a beacon, a lighthouse seen from afar that has helped keep me on my personal path. Sesshin as a focused, intense practice is there to remind me of the well of spiritual water that is always there to drink no matter where my life circumstances have led me. It has helped support me during tough times and allowed me to get myself to the mat at 5:30 in the morning no matter the condition of my body-mind. I am so grateful to the Center and all it has given me, but ultimately I am the

one who decides to go over to the mat and stare at the wall for twenty-five or thirty minutes.

Recently, I purchased a bonsai tree and placed it near my altar and sitting place in the window amidst my other plants. At some point, I decided – not sure why – that I would only water this plant during my ritual before sitting. Light the match... light the incense... put the incense to my forehead... put it in the pot... water the bonsai... sit down... set the timer. This seemed appropriate. The plant sits on the windowsill and just is. It accepts when it doesn't get water, and when it does. It is there when I sit, and when I don't. And yet, it fills me up when I pour the water over its branches and see it get what it needs. To see it drink, to help it live. It is a reflection of my mind and my awareness. The mat functions in exactly the same way. The cushion exists whether I sit on it or not. It is totally fine with just being a cushion whether or not I use it. And yet, it seems happy to fulfill its purpose. It seems lonely without me – ha!

This is a metaphor that helps with my practice. I am exactly what I am, whether I formally practice or not. Yet when I sit, I can see into what makes me tick, what makes me feel, what makes me, me. There is no need to judge the sitting before or after. Just to sit, just to light the candle, just to water the bonsai. When I pour the water over its branches, I pour water into the universe, the Buddha, the phenomenal world. The bonsai is a reflection of my practice and my practice is a reflection of its life.



"Water and Moon Kuan Yin," color pencil drawing by Joel Tagert 7

Instructions for the Cook

Turkish Red Lentil Soup with Mint (Ezo Gelin)

This is the elegant queen of lentil soups, rich and complex without being in the least overbearing. The juice of a lemon wedge squeezed into the soup just before serving combines with the mint for a wonderful lightness that contrasts with the natural earthiness of lentils. Serves 6-8.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, diced
2 medium garlic gloves, minced
1 vegetable boullion cube (Rapunzel brand is excellent)
6 cups water
1 cup red lentils, rinsed
1/4 cup white rice
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 teaspoons paprika
2 tablespoons dried mint (peppermint tea is just fine)
1 tsp salt, or to taste
cayenne pepper to taste, if desired
wedges from 1 lemon

In a medium-large soup pot, heat the oil on medium-high heat. Add the onion and garlic and saute, stirring periodically, until the onion is translucent and beginning to brown.

Add the water, veggie boullion, lentils, rice, tomato paste and spices. Continue cooking on medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the soup begin to bubble. Then reduce heat to low and simmer. Add more water if it looks too thick.

When the lentils are thoroughly soft and falling apart, remove soup from heat. Use a blender to puree it in batches so the soup is smooth and creamy. It should be light rather than thick, so add water as needed.

Serve with a lemon wedge, and enjoy!

-Joel Tagert

Gassho Corner

Our special thanks to George Mathews, Merilee Schultheiss and Francine Campone for helping organize our various zazenkai, along with Cathy Wright and Darren Christensen for offering the use of the Iyengar Yoga Center of Fort Collins and Santosha Yoga in Wheat Ridge, respectively.

Calendar Highlights

April 3, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. - Zazenkai with Peggy Sensei at the Iyengar Yoga Center of Fort Collins

April 10, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. - Samu (RMMC)

April 17, 8:00 a.m. - Sangha discussion on Clouds and Water (RMMC)

May 22, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. - Zazenkai with Ken Sensei at Santosha Yoga

June 5, 8:00 a.m. Sangha meeting (RMMC)

June 19, 8:00 a.m. - Jukai ceremony (RMMC)

June 21-26 - Blue Mountain sesshin

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