



The SnowFlower Sun

November / December 2017

SHIKANTAZA, Just Sitting.

From a talk by Susan O'Leary

At Plum Village about 20 years ago, I heard Thay's beloved and closest collaborator, Chan Khong, say the words, "Make your heart large." When I came home, I practiced with this gatha. Having spent most of my life consciously above my neck and not in my body, these four words "Make your heart large" helped me to become aware of my physical humanness and of being in this very moment.

For about 15 years since then, along with SnowFlower's Linji Zen lineage through Thay, I have been reading and increasingly studying in the Soto Zen tradition established by Dogen in Japan in the 13th century. The gatha, "make your heart large," helped to open the door to Soto meditation for me.

I believe that the most important and deepest teaching in Zen is that nothing is separate. Nothing. The Soto Zen tradition called *shikantaza*, "just sitting", bows to that understanding. Dogen taught: "Buddha – dharma... is attained by letting go of the mind and abandoning views and interpretations. To see form and clarify the mind, to hear sound and come to realization is attainment of the way with the body. Thus, when you practice just sitting and continuously give up all thoughts and views, the way becomes more and more intimate. ... attaining the way means attaining it completely with the whole body. With this awareness, you should sit wholeheartedly."

It is in my body that I can go beyond thinking, beyond words. Our bodies teach us that nothing is separate. We follow the coming and going of our breath in meditation, breathing in oxygen, breathing out carbon dioxide, but our skin is also subtly permeable, and absorbs very small amounts of oxygen, too... Thinking of how our entire bodies respond to and physically take in the world -- in this subtle way that we do not generally notice -- is a metaphor for me of non-separation. It helps me to remember that when I sink into awareness of my body, and then slowly again and again let that awareness drop away, I am sinking into awareness of the world, of my connection to it.

"[If] in silence, words are forgotten, in utter clarity things appear." Hung-chi Chen-chueh on silent illumination.

Here is a guided meditation to enter into what is called "silent illumination meditation".

Let us turn our attention to become aware of the presence of our heart, its warmth, its beating, its expansiveness. If you can't feel your heart, put your hand over it and relax into the connection. If you like, put your hand over your heart during the meditation.

Slowly let this awareness move out into awareness of your torso, your limbs, your whole body, however your awareness expands. If this is difficult and gets in the way of your awareness, go back to your heart and rest there. Place your hand on your heart to help you to center in it, if that feels right.

Slowly let this awareness of your body expand and drop away, too.

If words or thoughts arise, go back to an awareness of your body to help you to drop words. Through the physical sensation of breath; through awareness of your heart; through awareness of your body and beyond.

Jianzhi Seng wrote: If your mind makes no distinctions, all things are as they are. Thusness is subtle, being free from all conditions.

"Body and mind have dropped away." Dogen

"Dropping away has dropped away." His teacher's response





“When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale, the air goes out to the outer world. We say ‘inner world’ or ‘outer world’ but actually there is just one world... Our throat is like a swinging door. The air comes in and goes out like going through a swinging door. If you think ‘I breathe’, the ‘I’ is extra. There is no you to say ‘I’. What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and moves when we exhale. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow the movement, there is nothing: no ‘I’, no world, no mind or body. Just a swinging door.”

Shunryu Suzuki Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind

November 2017

Sundays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Fridays
		11/1 The Sun My Heart Farm Zendo	11/3 The Bodhisattva Path Dave Haskin
11/5 No Death, No Fear Tod Highsmith Joan Braun	11/7 Intro to Sangha The Five Hindrances Mary Michal	11/8 The Sun My Heart Farm Zendo	11/10 The Five Hindrances Mary Michal
11/12 No Death, No Fear Pam Moran Dave Zeman	11/14 Angulimala Danger & Redemption Steven Spiro	11/15 The Sun My Heart Farm Zendo	11/12 Dharma in Prison Steven Spiro
11/19 No Death, No Fear Gerri Gurman	11/21 Compassion: When Love meets Suffering Gloria Green	11/22 The Five Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Farm Zendo	11/24 Peace in Oneself - Peace in the World Zach Smith
11/26 No Death, No Fear Celeste Robins	11/28 Reflections on Frank Ostaseski Retreat Doreen Kunert	11/29 Answers from the Heart Amy Krohn	

Join the SnowFlower email list by emailing Ann Varda at annvarda@gmail.com,

SnowFlower Sangha Cancellation Policy

In case of inclement weather, an email will be sent to the listserv by 3:00 pm the day of sangha and a notice will be posted on the door of the Friends Meetinghouse.

Snowflower Sangha Mentoring Program It is natural that newcomers to the practice may have questions, and a mentoring relationship supports a newer practitioner by clarifying matters of personal practice and sangha practice. For 2017, a list of mentors is available from Karuna Namenwirth, who can be reached at (608) 832-6658. The logistics of the mentoring relationship (duration, frequency of contact, etc.) are up to the mentor and mentee.

December 2017

Sundays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Fridays
			12/1 Intro to Sangha Compassion: When Love meets Suffering Gloria Green
12/3 No Death, No Fear Tod Highsmith Joan Braun	12/5 Letting Go & Other Lessons from Trees Bonnie Trudell	12/6 Answers from the Heart Amy Krohn	12/8 Letting Go & Other Lessons from Trees Bonnie Trudell
12/10 No Death, No Fear Celeste Robins	12/12 Who Am I? From a Buddhist Perspective John Reed	12/13 Answers from the Heart Amy Krohn	12/15 Who Am I? From a Buddhist Perspective John Reed
12/17 No Death, No Fear Gerri Gurman	12/19 Mindfulness of What? Walt Keough	12/20 Ancestors Prayer Amy Krohn	12/22 Mindfulness of What? Walt Keough
12/24 No Death, No Fear Gerri Gurman	12/26 Amy Krohn	12/27 Answers from the Heart Amy Krohn	12/29 Ancestors Prayer Rosebud Sparer
12/31 No Death, No Fear Tod Highsmith Joan Braun			

Tuesday and Friday Sangha Meetings are held at The Friends Meetinghouse, 1704 Roberts Court, Madison, WI. 7 – 8:30pm.

Wednesday Daytime Sangha Meetings are from 1:30-3 pm every Wednesday at Farm Zendo, 1834 S. Sharpe's Corner Road, Mt. Horeb during the warmer months. Information regarding location and topic will be sent to the listserv every Sunday.

For info, contact Mary Gallagher (608) 274-2769. Wednesday Sangha includes sitting and walking meditation followed by dharma sharing and discussion.

Sunday Morning Sangha Meetings are held at the homes of SnowFlower members from 10 – 11:30 am. Information regarding location and topic will be sent to the listserv every Wednesday. Join by emailing listserv@snowflower.org. Or, call: Tom Loomis (608) 334-4532, Finn Enke (608) 243-7971. Sunday Sangha includes sitting & walking meditation followed by dharma sharing and discussion.

METTA INSTRUCTION

By Cheri Maples (Oct., 2015)

Metta (loving kindness) is a wonderful tool for helping us maintain the balance between compassion and equanimity. It is a tremendous blessing in the knowledge that there is a choice about what we choose to feed in ourselves, that there is the possibility to remember what we most deeply treasure and value, and then to translate that possibility into an embodied way of being moment to moment!

Most of us have experienced some kind of socialization individually and collectively that has made the cultivation of an open and receptive heart quiet challenging. It takes remarkable strength to live with an open and receptive heart in a world which is so burdened with pain, violence, rage, and sorrow.

The loving kindness practice always starts with oneself. It involves using phrases which reflect our sincere aspirations and turning them into a type of prayer to which we give our hearts and our complete attention. Like prayer, loving kindness practice is a powerful way to move energy.

“May I be peaceful.” “May I be safe and protected.” “May I be filled with great ease.” We keep metta from feeling artificial or mechanical by, with time, finding phrases that really resonate for us, phrases that reflect a deep knowing of your aspiration for yourself. The sincerity of heart we bring to the practice is what determines its power or lack of power for us.

Traditionally, after ourselves, we move to a benefactor; then to someone we love; to a neutral person; and to an adversary or challenging person. There are many ways to practice metta. It can be our entire meditation; or be used to start or end a sit; or, when we are quiet and content, be used to extend that feeling to others. “May everyone in this room be happy and healthy.” “May the people in my family...” “May all beings everywhere...”

Metta can be used not only for those we love and care about, but equally for those who threaten us, for the countless people we don't know, for the homeless person we meet on the street, as well as the inevitable situations of anger, resentment, and disappointment we experience in relationship with others.

Personally, I like to use metta practice when I feel particularly restless with regard to something that is going on in my life. Then, rather than the breath, body, or sound, I let metta practice become the anchor of my concentration practice. In this way, the quality of loving kindness is not only cultivated when our hearts are undisturbed. It is in challenging times, in relationships for example, that we often learn about the depths of acceptance and understanding that are possible for each of us. It is then that we learn about dignity, meaning, and greatness of heart.

