

GOOD FRIENDS



Trees are our very good friends. Without them we would not survive. They just stand there being beautiful, and mysteriously provide us with clean oxygen so we can breathe. Often, they are better left alone without any human interference. Nevertheless, they are happy to receive our love and attention, and sometimes ache for serious pruning. Zen River is lucky with the presence of a great variety of trees great and small on its grounds. In summer the buildings can hardly be seen from the road because of all the foliage.

This spring, however, nothing less than a small revolution in our tree population was called for. Especially after some grand old ones had to come down, there was suddenly room for young aspiring candidates. They got some company with new hedges, bushes and ground covers. Besides a series of crabapple trees along the west-side ditch of the property, eight skinny but brave ornamental cherry trees have been planted on both sides of the driveway. They look like offspring of the ones that were there before. We wish all these youngsters the very best and hope they will rise to their full potential. Meanwhile, we do our part; it's a friendship thing.

SUMMERY TOMATO SOUP

1½ kg (3 pounds) vine-ripe tomatoes	3 bay leaves
2 medium red onions	1½ tablespoons dried basil
3 cloves garlic	¼-½ teaspoon chilli powder
2-3 tablespoons olive oil	Sea salt, to taste
500 ml (2 cups) water	125 g (4 ounces) soft goat cheese, optional
75 g (½ cup) dried apricots	

* Bring a small pan of water to a rolling boil. Prick the tomatoes with a sharp knife and drop them into the boiling water. When the peel splits, remove them from the pan and cover them with cold water. Peel and cut into quarters.

* Peel and large-dice the red onions. Peel the garlic cloves.

* Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a frying pan on medium flame and brown the red onions and garlic cloves with a dash of salt. When browned, add the tomatoes and fry until they soften and caramelize on the bottom, about ten minutes.

* Transfer the tomatoes, onions, and garlic to a soup pot. Add the dried apricots, bay leaves, basil and chilli powder, and cover with 500 ml (2 cups) of water.

* Bring to a boil over a medium flame, turn the flame low, cover and simmer for about ten minutes, or until the red onions are tender.

* Remove the bay leaves and whizz the soup with a blender until smooth. Add a little water to achieve the right consistency if desired.

* Season to taste with salt, chilli powder, and basil. Put a round of soft goat cheese in the bottom of each soup bowl. Ladle the soup over the goat cheese and garnish with fresh basil leaves and black pepper.



WHAT DO YOU REPRESENT?

BY TENKEI ROSHI

Over the years, our weekly Right Speech Class has developed into an interesting and even popular event. It also works well online via Zoom. In these classes, participants are given the opportunity to articulate their perspectives on a Buddhist principle or quote from the scriptures that was chosen some days before. We take turns in speaking and have about ten minutes each to deliver our presentation. This way, we try to clarify our understanding by communicating it to others and can also improve upon our verbal skills.

A set of guidelines helps us in this process. For example: identify with the one(s) listening; maintain a balance between general information and personal experience; share how you walk your talk; do not take yourself too seriously; and, refer to relevant sources on a regular base. This last guideline means that as you address a particular topic, it would be wise to add something like: “in this Sutra...,” “according to our tradition...,” “in my experience,” or “in my opinion...” This clarifies where you are coming from and what you wish to represent. Do you merely express your own ideas, or something greater?

Last March, I had to spend a few days in a hospital due to a nasty fall from a loft ladder. Something that really impressed me during my stay were the verbal skills of the nurses. They were not only very kind and considerate, but they also seemed to speak from a different place than we usually do. I had plenty of time to study this, as my room happened to be quite busy; there was almost constant coming and going. Even when called upon by patients in painful or embarrassing situations, the nurses surprisingly often seemed to find the right response; and this generally led to an uplifting dialogue.

Of course, dialogues between nurses and patients are not only based on an interpersonal relationship. There is a third factor involved, which in this case is the art, science, and practice of medicine. This is the working base for everyone in the hospital, and it is so obvious that it doesn't even need mentioning. All activities are geared towards improving the patients' physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It may be a funny way to put it, but I would say that nurses and patients both surrender to medicine as the greater authority. The nurses present themselves not only as empathetic individuals, they also represent medicine as competently as they can; and, the patients accept their own role in this scenario. In the process, both parties can transcend personal differences that otherwise could hinder free and effective communication.

By surrendering to medicine, we surrender to a quality that serves us personally; yet it also goes beyond the personal. It involves something we can all share and benefit from. We are even ready to put up with some discomfort if it would help the healing process, especially when this is addressed in a skillful manner. Besides some other injuries, my right lung had collapsed and needed a drain. That

required a deep cut between the ribs with the use of only local anesthetics. No fun, when you think about it. But it was explained to me so precisely and convincingly that I found it easy to just give in and let it happen. My neighbor in the hospital had a bit of a stubborn sweet tooth, and he often asked for soft drinks. Since most of those drinks contain a lot of sugar, and one of his ailments was diabetes, the nurses refused his requests. But they did so with a healthy sense of humor and he seemed to be fine.

The Buddha is often called “the great doctor,” and in the scriptures we find many analogies to medicine. One could say that in our practice we also surrender to a higher authority, namely the Dharma. As Buddhist practitioners, we all try to follow the teachings of the Buddha to the best of our abilities. The Dharma provides points of reference, or guidelines, that we can share and work with, and this helps us communicate with each another. It is a third factor, just like in medicine. We could even say that we represent the Dharma; because without being practiced, the teachings of the Buddha do not come alive. Like the nurses I met who seemed to represent medicine so eloquently, we can learn to speak with the voice of the Dharma.

Sometimes we may find ourselves in the position of the patient, at other times in that of a nurse. Since the Dharma is not fixed, surrendering to it as a higher authority requires flexibility. The Dharma is not a dictatorship that allows masters to rule over slaves. Like medicine, the field it covers is so broad and complex that it defies such simplistic categories. As I understand it, medicine often works in mysterious ways; certain medications have effects that nobody can explain very well. This means that doctors, as well as patients, can't be too principled or overly self-righteous about it because there is always more to discover. Similarly, if we accept the Dharma as a higher authority, we also have to acknowledge that we may never completely understand all of its ins and outs. Nevertheless, everyone can benefit from the Dharma and use it as a factor that connects us with other beings, things, and situations.

That seems to be my mission in life. I'm not here only for myself, but because I want to represent something that we all share. Maezumi Roshi has always been a great inspiration to me in that respect. When I studied at the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Genpo Roshi once told me that Maezumi Roshi saw himself primarily as a conduit for Dogen Zenji. He wanted to make sure that his great hero would stay alive; that was his main interest. But he followed the same inspiration when he spoke about other masters. He would convey their teachings so intimately, with a great variety of facial expressions, and mimicking—no, embodying their personalities.

Maezumi Roshi was not a very big man, and it often struck me how he could sit so immovably still on his little platform that it looked like you could just lift him up and put him somewhere else, as if he was hewn out of wood.

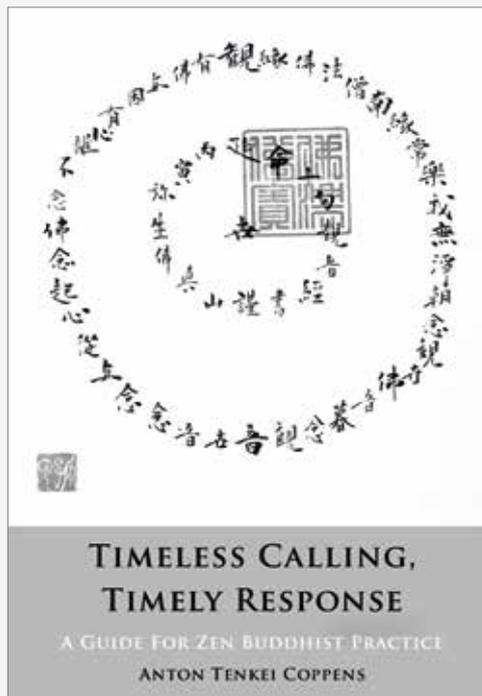
Compared to his body, though, his head was relatively large. Once, I even heard him once mention this himself. During his talks, the landscape of his face was moving continuously, from frowning to laughing and back in no time. His speech would be shifting accordingly. This gave me the impression that it was not actually him doing the talking. It felt as if somebody behind him was operating his facial expressions and diction.

Something highly mysterious imbued these talks. I could even imagine that not only was somebody behind Maezumi Roshi, but another person was behind him, and another person behind that one, and so on. Now I understand that while representing Dogen Zenji, Maezumi Roshi was representing the whole lineage of Buddha ancestors. And since there is no real beginning and no real end to this lineage, he could shift from one perspective to another very quickly. Coming from no particular place, he created an openness that allowed him to connect with anyone who was ready to acknowledge and accept that openness. At the time, this was really a new experience for me. I could hardly understand what he was saying, but the effect of his talks was electrifying. He spoke from a source that I was unable to identify, yet it often moved me to tears. Interestingly enough, I could never remember much of his talks afterwards. The Dharma manifested itself in words and gestures for some time and then returned to its ineffable nature.

Now, according to Mahayana Buddhism, we are all representatives of buddha-nature. We all embody this ungraspable quality and manifest it continuously, even without being aware of it. In principle, this should enable us to interact fluently with one another and respond to each other's needs very naturally. Unfortunately, most of us have developed such strong opinions about ourselves and others that we often clash with our fellow beings – who also have strong opinions about themselves and about us. Altogether, we seem to forget what we actually represent. It is a very sad sort of ignorance. We miss out on the third factor, a higher authority that can smooth out our communication. Rather than rising to the occasion and making use of the legacy of the Dharma that would naturally enrich our personality, we easily get stuck in very narrow concepts of who we really are. When we do so, we often end up lying. If our speech is based on those concepts, we go against the very nature of the Dharma; we are simply not truthful. No wonder that we get into trouble. Instead of taking on our due role as a representative of the Buddha Way, we opt for a limited narrative that will never be satisfactory.

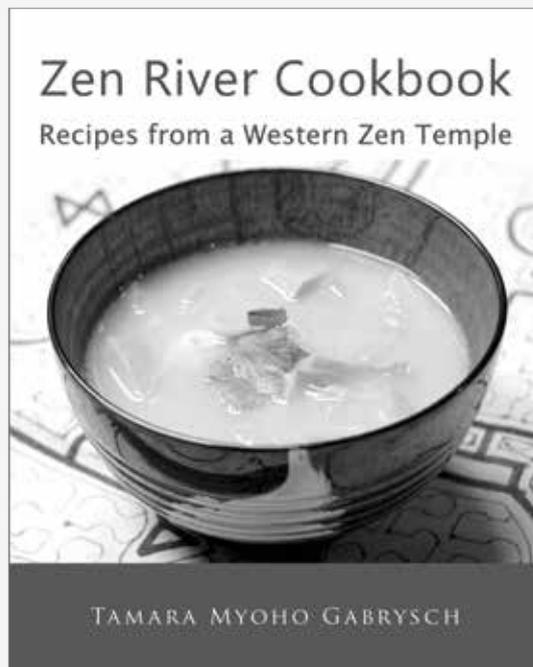
Of course, effective communication requires the cooperation of at least two partners. Ideally speaking, both nurses and patients agree on the authority of medicine, and in the hospital where I stayed that really seemed to be the case. In other words, the trust in medicine needs to come from both sides. And this is also true for the Dharma. We all know that when you are at a family party and there happens to be no common theme, conversations can get pretty superficial. Even conventional wisdom tells us that friendships between people who share a

ZEN RIVER TREASURES



The publication of *Timeless Calling, Timely Response* has been very well received internationally. In his review, Genpo Merzel Roshi calls it 'one of the best books on Zen practice for Westerners that I have come across' and 'a must-read for those interested in true Zen practice in a way that will keep the tradition of Zen alive'. Many others responded similarly. The beautiful hardcover edition can be ordered directly via our website at zenrivertemple.org/shop/.

Mostly to avoid high shipping tariffs for those living outside Europe, the book is now also available in paperback and Kindle versions via Amazon. The *Zen River Cookbook* which has become a real classic over the years is, for the same reason, now also available as a paperback via Amazon—with a lovely new cover picture. May the Dharma flourish through all the senses and beyond!



similar interest have more of a chance to flourish—almost regardless of what that interest may be. Once, during a private conversation with Maezumi Roshi, he urged Tammy and me to make sure that we would keep looking in the same direction; that we would express our love by helping each other in serving the Dharma.

I often feel the relevance of his message very keenly in the zendo. As we share our zazen practice, we manage to wordlessly communicate something that is very difficult to communicate in any other way. And that is because a third party is involved. There is you, me, and another factor that we take on as a higher authority. This gives all of us a much-needed vision that we can aspire to live up to together. Because, let's face it, what do we really live for? I often ask myself that question. We may manage to get through this life in one piece, but what for? It often comes up for me in supermarkets. When I stand in line for the cash register with a big cart full of food, and I see other customers having similar piles in their carts, I cannot help but wonder: Why do we eat all of this? What is the purpose? I don't dare to ask anyone, but I would be curious to hear some of their answers.

After falling off that loft ladder and landing in the hospital, I came to two conclusions: a sad one and a happy one. The sad conclusion is that I am getting older, and may have to leave jumping around on steep ladders while carrying things up and down to the younger generation. It is not my expertise anymore. The happy conclusion is that I am more grateful than ever for the opportunity to contribute to a place and a practice program that may serve that younger generation and enable them to share the Dharma in the future. It is the most essential mission in my life, and so it is worth living a little longer.

This spring we planted quite a few new trees. I may never see them grow to their full potential but I am so happy that they are given the opportunity. They all seem to have their own particular destiny, and the same is true for us. Like trees naturally trust their nature, we too can learn to trust our buddha-nature, the inherent quality that we represent and that wishes to express itself in our body, mind, and speech. As I see it, our temporary existence on this planet is an opening to the timeless life of all Buddha

ancestors. Who knows what future lives will look like?

Especially since getting to know my dear friend Rev. Jerry Hirano from the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist temple in Salt Lake City, I have a deep appreciation for the Pure Land School. As you may know, this tradition puts a lot of emphasis on cultivating faith in Amida Buddha. And I think that his Pure Land can serve us too as a great inspirational vision for accomplishing the Way. Of course, Zen masters like Hakuin emphatically state that Amida's Pure Land can only be found right here right now, in this samsaric existence. But without the right faith, we just may not manage. Besides faith in the energy we can generate from within ourselves, we also need faith in the energy that comes to us from other sources—in other words, from all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and the vision they represent.

Sharing this vision does not only give us a chance to communicate more fluently with one another, and to help us to rise to our full potential. As representatives of the Dharma, we also have an opportunity to find our specific role in the grand process of awakening which involves teamwork throughout space and time. My fall made me realize again just how precious this life is. I don't think I passed out, yet there was a sense of returning. Suddenly, my whole system got reset into the most basic mode: Here I am! Now what? It also made me wonder what I would have left behind if I had not made it—which could have easily happened. Would anybody benefit from the life I had lived?

Again, what we hope to leave to the next generation gives us something to work on together. In that sense, we do not represent the practice of the Dharma only during our limited lifetime; we also represent the practice of future generations. In what kind of places will they be able to get together, and who will keep the inspiration going? How will they practice zazen, investigate koans, deliver or listen to Dharma talks, make bows and recite sutras, study the scriptures, work with the precepts, develop social skills, and connect with other traditions of the greater Buddhist sangha—all to find their true function in life and engage in bodhisattva activity?

When you think of it, providing these opportunities involves quite a responsibility! ♦



SHUSO FOR SUMMER ANGO



We are happy to announce that Liliann Shurei Manning has been assigned the position of Shuso (head monk) for this summer's Ango. She will do the full three months of intensive training (May 22-August 21) and learn the various skills that are expected of a senior practitioner. The Ango includes our traditional Summer Month-long sesshin (July 24-August 21). The Hossenshiki (dharma combat ceremony) is scheduled for Saturday, August 21 at 11am. We hope that by then it will be possible to welcome more people once again so that we can really celebrate this festive event together.

Born in Bolivia, Shurei obtained her PhD in psychology in Madrid, Spain, and did her post-doctoral specialization in neuropsychology in Oxford, UK. She has worked on research in different countries and served as a full-time professor at Strasbourg University in France. Her husband and three daughters are French. At present, she works in Lille as a consultant neuropsychologist.

Shurei started with transcendental meditation in 2000 and practised in other spiritual traditions until she came across Soto Zen ten years ago. She received Jukai at Ryumon-Ji (Weiterswiller, France) and Shukke Tokudo at the Lanau Zen Centre (Lanau, France) in 2017. Two years later she came over to Zen River and joined our programme with great enthusiasm. Shurei soon became a student of Tenkei Roshi and resides at our temple as much as she can, including for extended periods of time. She moved from Strasbourg to Lille to be closer to Zen River. We are all happy to see her here and wish her the very best!

ZEN RIVER TEMPLE

SUMMER ANGO MAY 22 – AUGUST 21

May 22–27.....Falling Flowers Sesshin
 June 5–10.....Gyōji Week
 June 12–17.....Gyōji Week
 June 18–20.....Weekend Sesshin
 June 26–July 1.....Gyōji Week
 July 3–8.....Young Minds Seminar
 July 10–15.....Gyōji Week
 July 24–Aug 21.....Summer Month Long
 July 24–29.....Sesshin Part 1
 July 31–August 5.....Sesshin Part 2
 August 7–12.....Sesshin Part 3
 August 14–21.....Sesshin Part 4

FALL INTERIM

September 11–16.....Gyōji Week
 September 11–12.....Intro Weekend
 September 17–19.....Weekend Sesshin
 September 25–30.....Gyōji Week
 October 16–21.....Falling Leaf Sesshin
 October 30–November 4.....Gyōji Week
 November 20–27.....Rohatsu Sesshin
 December 4–9.....Gyōji Week
 December 27–January 1, 2022.....New Years Sesshin

ZEN BOAT

June 5 and July 3: Zazenkaï with Senseis Senko & Jifu.
 Intro Courses: see website

AT OTHER LOCATIONS (TENTATIVE)

Havelte, Drenthe.....July 7–11 Sesshin Kanzeon
 Zen Centrum Rotterdam, led by Jifu Sensei

CONNECTED!

O-membership brings our common practice closer to you at home. And, of course, it is also a way to keep the River of Zen flowing. Here is what is included in the online package:

- Live-stream zazen and services
- Right Speech Class via Zoom, Sat. 16:30 hrs
- Study Class on YouTube, Sundays 11:30
- River of Zen Class on YouTube, Mon. 20:10
- Dokusan via messenger or Skype, weekly
- Online participation in most sesshins



Editors: Tessa Gyosei Overbeek, Wynn Seishin Wright, Paul Taian Davies and Robert Doin van de Roer

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