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# RIN SHIN-JI *Voices*

No. 1 ~ 2006

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Welcome to **Rin Shin-ji Voices**.

*This new publication has evolved from the AZG Newsletter. Here we'll be publishing articles, book reviews, poetry, and other practice-oriented works by members of the AZG and our visiting teachers. Announcements of meetings, teachers' schedules, sesshin, etc will continue to be through the azglist as well as on the website. **Rin Shin-ji Voices** will also appear on the AZG website, along with submission guidelines.*

**Arcata Zen Group**  
740 Park Ave  
Arcata CA 95521  
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*The AZG welcomes people who want to learn about and practice Soto Zen Buddhism. We have daily and weekly sitting schedules in Arcata as well as introductory classes in zen meditation and philosophy. The AZG also sponsors sittings in Eureka and Westhaven.*

*For more info about the AZG, please visit our website.*

*The deadline for submitting pieces for the next **Rin Shin-ji Voices** is May 31, 2006. You can send items to [catherinecascade@sbcglobal.net](mailto:catherinecascade@sbcglobal.net); please put "Voices Submission" in the subject line. Electronic submissions are preferred if possible; hard copy may be sent to Rin Shin-ji Voices, 740 Park Ave., Arcata CA 95521.*

**Rapture ~ Michael Quam**

Even at low tide the breakers  
Begin their majestic swell far out,  
Lift and fill the horizon, then

Release their long curling cascade.  
Its delicate spume floats  
For a moment, and is gone.

Small flocks of snowy plover  
Scurry to and fro, intent on their  
Watery task at the tidal edge,

While scruffy old man raven  
Walks stiffly along the upper shore

Rapt in thoughts of carrion.

We might think that all is driven  
By blind necessity, gravity and hunger,  
That the myriad beings all mirror

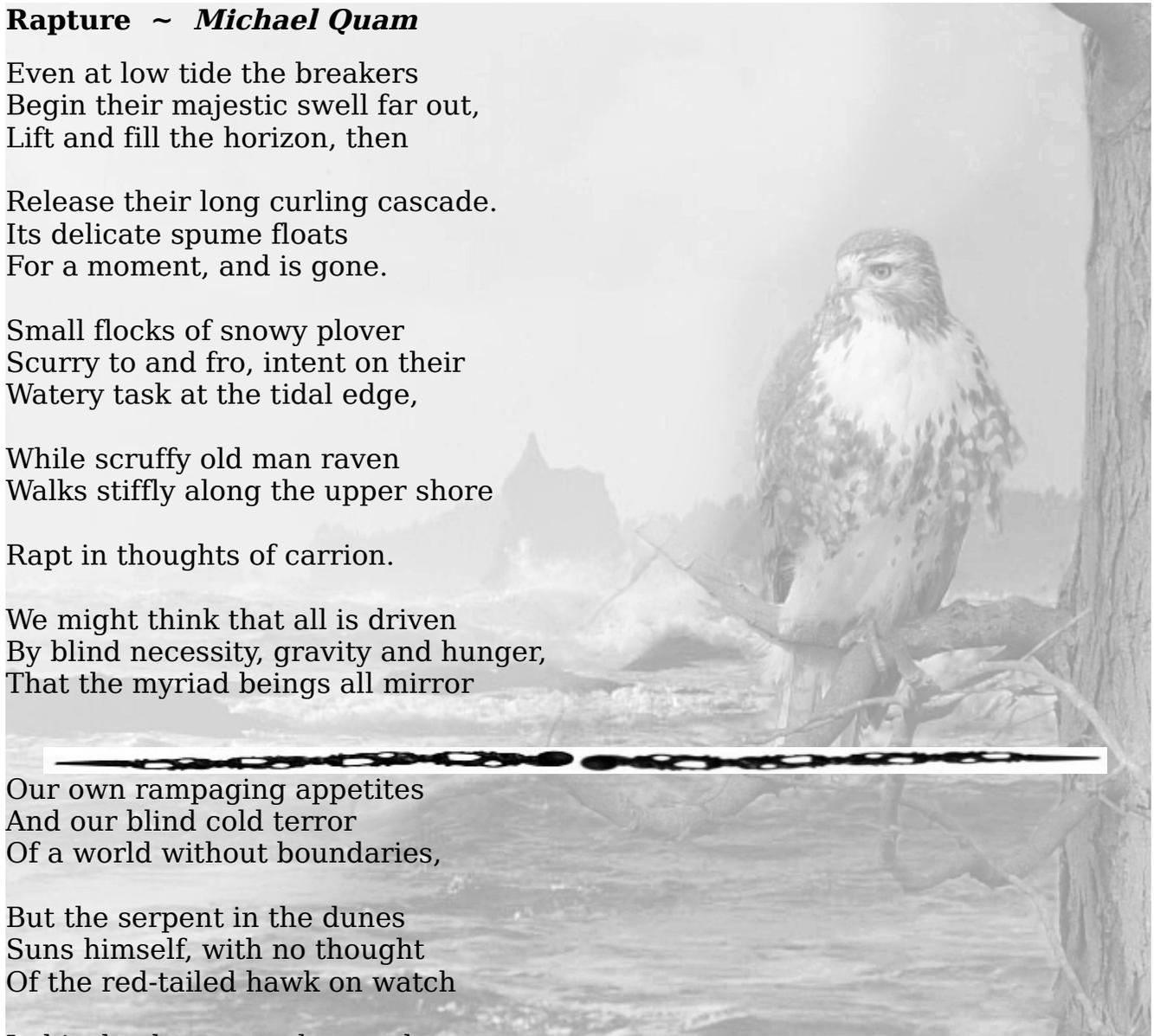
Our own rampaging appetites  
And our blind cold terror  
Of a world without boundaries,

But the serpent in the dunes  
Suns himself, with no thought  
Of the red-tailed hawk on watch

In his dead tree perch, awash  
In an ocean of wind's roar  
And flashes of shadow and light.

**Nelson Lee - Shakuhachi Music ~ Karen Mueller with Poetry by Theresa McLaren**

*(Photos by Barry and Pete)*





*Nelson Lee*

Shakuhachi artist and teacher Nelson Lee presented a beautiful, informal evening of shakuhachi music and poetry in the AZG Zendo when he, and his wife Jennifer, visited Humboldt County in October 2005. AZG member Theresa McLaren provided the poetry. (Her poems follow below).

For Nelson, playing honkyoku is a deeply meditative experience, a practice of “blowing Zen” (suizen in Japanese, a term coined by the komuso Zen monks who first began playing honkyoku on the shakuhachi). “I love honkyoku because of its haunting qualities and its use of silence,” he says. “The music can be found not only in the sounds, but between the sounds.”

Lee’s favorite Zen centers and communities enjoys connecting

who, like him, are on a spiritual path. a first-generation Chinese American and a San Francisco. He has studied and performed for more than ten years. Four years of study were spent in intensive study in also completed graduate studies in music San Francisco State University.

Lee comes from a distinguished line of shakuhachi players. His teacher, Tajima-sensei, is famous for his mastery of honkyoku and for playing long shakuhachis. Lee now lives in Santa Cruz, California, where he performs, studies, records, and teaches shakuhachi. Bamboo Bell is his organization, formed to educate the public on honkyoku music as part of a multicultural society. Nelson

**Autumn Equinox**

day and night share equal billing time light and dark in balance in cosmic tug-of-war if only for a day

audiences are other spiritual because he with others Nelson Lee is native of San shakuhachi shakuhachi Japan. Lee has education at



*At Rin Shin-ji*

and Jennifer are in the process of moving to Humboldt County and will, we hope, become another resource for our local community. For more information, see Nelson’s Website at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~neljen/>

**Poems shared by Theresa McLaren during a Shakuhachi Evening in the Zendo**

## **Nothing**

I am nothing  
a black hole  
all knowledge  
past and present

I am nothing  
what you think  
an answer used  
to avoid the truth

I am vacuous  
in solitude  
what thrives in the desert  
what one hears late at night

I am absolute zero  
a value with no value  
multiplied by any number  
the result is still the same

I am insubstantial  
non-existent for some  
undetectable by others  
the fear of the oblivious

I am what the impoverished possess  
the pot at the end of the rainbow  
what you feel for an ex-lover  
and what is sacred in war

I am less  
and I am more



*Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica, 1865 Frederic Edwin Church*

### **Clouds Billow Over Mountains**

Clouds billow over  
mountains  
engulf the blue  
eat the sun  
hang heavy with moisture  
sink down the valley  
chip away hilltops

sorrowful winds rage  
howl for the sun  
the beauty of day  
lost under darkness  
clouds tears spent

a gift imparted  
double rainbow arcs  
behind the gloom  
that moves west  
to engulf another day

### **Why Meditate? (Why Not?) ~ Barry Evans**

*...I tell [Kyodo Roshi] I want to "take my practice to a deeper level." 'Deeper level?'" He laughs again. "What you mean 'deeper'? Zen practice only one level. No deep, understand?"*

*Lawrence Shainberg, Ambivalent Zen*

"So just why do you meditate?" The question was asked with a certain tone of frustration, annoyance even. I'd been trying to explain to a fellow sangha member my belief that meditation wasn't necessarily good for anything, and that as soon as I thought it was good for something, it became like many other things in life: yet another opportunity to strive for something that I didn't yet have, but--provided I had sufficient discipline and tenacity--might yet attain.

I struggled with the question, unsure of myself. "It isn't like I think about meditating, and then make a decision to go sit, and then do it. It's more like, the bell rings--often it's me doing the ringing--and there's this moment of astonishment to find myself on my zafu or chair, yet again, wondering, 'How did this happen?'"

"But what about when you decide, in advance, to sit a sesshin, say?"

"It's a bit fuzzy. There's the time before the decision, when I'm not sure if I'm going to go, I'm weighing it in my mind. Then I realize the decision's made--I am going--or I'm not going. But the moment of decision itself slips by unseen, unnoticed. One moment I \_\_\_\_\_ don't know. Then I do. *Why* I do, I don't know."

I was reminded of this conversation a couple of weeks back, when Reverend Master Hugh Gould spoke to our sangha in the Aikido Center on Sunday

morning. He was making a strong, articulate pitch for a practice of discipline and effort, for acknowledging and looking for guidance from teachers, and for committing to and advancing along one's spiritual path. I thought, we're of two camps--more or less--here in this room: those of us who can easily relate to his beliefs and accept his encouragement; and those of us who find the whole idea of a path, much less any notion of advancing along it, the exact opposite of what we appreciate about soto zen.

And then the happy thought came, "It doesn't matter!" We don't generally label ourselves, and don't find fault with those who don't go along with what we believe. That these two camps--which seem to me quite antithetical, like Catholics and Evangelicals--can co-exist quite happily, is rather wonderful.

It's just words, of course. I really *don't* know. For everyone who claims to know something about zen, there's someone who claims the opposite. In fact, this seems to be the kernel of whatever it is that we call 'zen'--that we don't know what it is. It's the not-knowing that defines us, that we cultivate--apparently--each time we sit.

But if I *did* know, this is what I'd say...

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I'm in the latter camp, the no-advancement gang. It wasn't always so, but--after all these years--I've pretty much given up on the idea of achieving something, getting somewhere, making progress, deepening my practice, strengthening my meditation, or generally expecting that life will ever be substantially different from what it is today. I suppose I just got bored with wanting to be somewhere other than where I was, with all the attendant beating-myself-up for not already being there. I didn't experience any great revelation or catharsis, rather just a slow realization that life is never going to be substantially different from the way it is now. That all my yearning for greater awareness, compassion, selflessness and--most of all--freedom from desire was itself a never-ending spiral of desire.

It's not like I haven't experienced many changes, insights and moments of bliss in this long adventure which started the first time I tried Transcendental Meditation. But the net result seems to be that I've discovered new and more interesting ways of making myself unhappy. So long as I believe things can be any different from this moment, I'm dissatisfied.

Desire is life. Whatever it is I long for--happiness, freedom from pain, Truth, an end to delusion, awakening with all beings, being done (finally!) with desire--therein lies my pain. The self that seeks the solution is the problem.

I'm a great fan of the new science of evolutionary psychology, whose claim that we're *designed* to be blue, lonely, dissatisfied--that these are the very emotional tools that ensured our  
ancestors' survival--is a  
great comfort and relief.

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I've heard many claims for meditation over the years. That it's about: gratitude; deepened and/or heightened awareness (!); compassion; emptiness;

spaciousness; experiencing one's true self; dissolving the self; being present in the moment; opening to the wonder of it all; finding peace; encountering our Buddha nature; seeing the connectedness of everything; letting go; (fill in the blank \_\_\_\_\_).

It seems to me, though, that meditation isn't *about* anything. Meditation is meditation, and any attempt to define it in terms of something else simply confuses the issue and makes it vulnerable to being treated like any other system, technique or process to enhance our lives. Lord knows, these days we have enough ways to be better people, to get closer to God, to find ourselves and to enhance our circumstances. We're swamped with therapies, self-help books and spiritual techniques which treat human lives as projects to be tweaked and fixed in order to improve our inner experience.

Meditation, if it's anything at all, is a relief from all this. It's the opposite of fixing and adjusting and striving and perpetually wanting things to be different from what they are. It's the haven away from the ubiquitous world of self-improvement. So when I hear words like 'effort' and 'discipline' and 'deepening one's practice', I wince a little.

Because there are such sublime rewards for doing absolutely nothing--unbidden, breath comes and goes, eyes see, ears hear, thoughts flurry like leaves in fall--that to set out to experience anything else (even an end to desire!)--feels like a rejection of this life lived in this moment. Mere existence is sufficient.

### **Dharma Gates are Boundless**

***Edited and Compiled by Michael Quam***

Welcome to the first edition of this new column. We expect this column to appear frequently and we're happy to accept contributions from our readers. What we're looking for are items that express the Dharma, albeit they are not expressly intended to do so. I often encounter examples of this kind of revelation—in writings, art works, music, stories, anecdotes, jokes, etc. I'm always greatly encouraged by these delightful encounters. By appearing everywhere, so to speak, they confirm the truth of the Dharma. So, please send us such expressions when you find them. I'll exercise some editorial oversight, but we'll try to keep a sense of boundlessness.

For this issue, we have four expressions of the Dharma found in poems. One of our sangha submitted the following two:

*[from] part 4 of "The Abyss" by Theodore Roethke:*

In this, my half-rest,  
Knowing slows for a moment,  
And not-knowing enters, silent,  
Bearing being itself,  
And the fire dances



*Westhaven Zendo*

To the stream's  
Flowing.

[from] "Notes for Canto CXX" by Ezra Pound

Do not move  
Let the wind speak  
That is paradise.

In a recent Dharma talk at AZG, Alan Senauke gave us the image of "turning toward" whatever presents itself in zazen and in our life. Here are two poems about active receptivity and response:

*Arriving Again and Again Without Noticing* by Linda Gregg

I remember all the different kinds of years.  
Angry, or heartbroken, or afraid.  
I remember feeling like that  
walking up the mountain along the dirt path  
to my broken house on the island.  
And long years of waiting in Massachusetts.  
The winter walking and hot summer walking.

I finally fell in love with all of it:  
dirt, night, rock and far views.  
It's strange that my heart is as full  
Now as my desire was then.

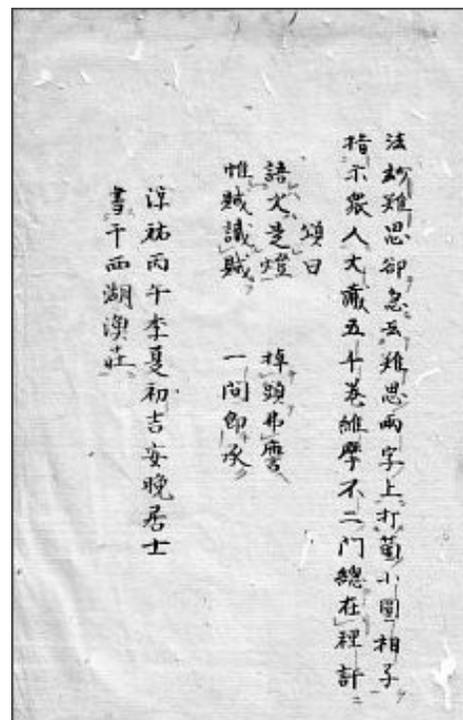
[from *The New Yorker*, January 16, 2006]

*The Guest House* by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.



*Mumonkan (The Gateless Gate) 1246*

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

*[from The Essential Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks, 1995]*

Another sangha member received a copy of the following statement:

*Message from the Hopi – People of Peace*

You have been telling people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you must go back and tell them that this is the Hour.

And there are things to be considered:

Where are you living? What are you doing?

What are your relationships? Are you in the right relation?

Where is your water? Know your garden.

It is time to speak your Truth. Create your community.

Be good to each other. And do not look outside yourself for the leader.

This could be a good time! There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and so swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold onto the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly.

Know the river has its destination. The Elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open and our heads above water. See who is in there with you and celebrate.

At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all, ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word “struggle” from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

The Elders, Oraibi, Arizona, *Hopi Nation*

***The Biology of Belief by Bruce Lipton ~ Book Review by Erika B. Makino***

I wanted to write a detailed report about this book which I find very important. However, a bad case of flu got me and the deadline was approaching. I decided to forget all my notes and just write about what I remembered. On the third day, I crawled out of bed to the computer, wrote a few lines and back to bed. After some naps, I continued. And so on for a few days. This is then a fuzzy head report.

Bruce Lipton comes through as a very alive human being with a gentle sense of humor. It doesn't happen often that a scientist makes a connection between his research and his life. The results of his explorations changed his attitudes and

reach far beyond his own life.

All of us have heard the axiom: Your thoughts influence your health and your life. We may have responded with a "Perhaps so, but..." and went on living with a not so happy and not so healthy self.

However, this time I listened. Here was a cell biologist who had observed the minute details of the cells' architecture and function. Lipton has an unusual talent for making complicated processes clear with the help of images that stick in your mind. He explains that the DNA in the nucleus of the cell provides only the blueprint. It is the receptors on the cell membrane that pick up signals from the environment. Sometimes there are even signals that alter the genetic code. We are definitively not the victims of our genes.

The receptors respond to physical signals, for instance histamine molecules. Others read energy fields like sound, light, microwaves, radio frequencies and thought. The cell system is powered by positive and negative electrical charges. Receptors, effectors, strands of proteins and amino acids are engaged in wild dances at 100 beats per second. Our body is made up of a family of 50 trillion cells.

What about those positive thoughts? Why don't they work better? I imagine our subconscious as a fat, old toad. It is filled with survival mechanisms but also with limiting beliefs we picked up in our childhood. When it hears a pep talk from above like, "I'm loveable, I'm loveable, I'm loveable," it chuckles, opens its wide mouth and gulps down those thoughts as if they were flies. So first we must reprogram our unconscious. It takes some work. You know how toads are. But it can be done.

Newtonian physics still applies to the organs of the body, but on the cellular level quantum physics is necessary to understand the processes. In a quantum universe, alternative treatments that are based on energy fields like acupuncture, herbs etc make sense. Alas, quantum physics is not taught at the medical schools. And here is some shocking news: According to a conservative estimate, the third leading cause of death in this country is iatrogenic death, meaning death as a result of medical treatment.

If you don't want to read the whole book don't miss the chapter on organ transplant. You get a hint whose music the cells are listening to that makes them dance.

I want to quote Joseph Chilton Pierce, Ph.D., author of Magical Child and Evolution's End. "Bruce Lipton's book is the definitive summary of the new biology and all it implies. It is magnificent, profound beyond words, and a delight to read. It synthesizes an encyclopedia of critical new information into a brilliant yet simple package. These pages contain a genuine revolution in thought and understanding, one so radical that it can change the world."