



Rin Shin-ji Voices



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Farmhouse Coming Home
~ Julie Clark



Beating the Drum

Maylie Scott

excerpts from January 14, 2001

Last Sunday there was some talk of appropriate action. This whole business is about activity, how we tune in to our life's activity. Sitting zazen, how we tune in to the mental activity, and the breath activity, and the physical activity, find our place, find our beat.

I wanted to talk about a case in the Blue Cliff Record, "Hoshan's knowing how to beat the drum."

Hoshan gave a teaching. "Cultivating study is called learning. Cutting off study is called closeness, nearness. Going beyond these two is to be considered the real going beyond." A monk came forward and asked, "What is the real going beyond?" And Hoshan said, "Knowing how to beat the drum." And again the student asked, "What is the real truth?". Hoshan said "Knowing how to beat the drum." And again the student asked, "Mind is buddha. I'm not talking about this. What is not mind and not Buddha?" Hoshan said, "Knowing how to beat the drum."

In the old Pali sutras a buddha said, "I go to the city of Kasi now to set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion. In a blindfold world, I go to beat the Deathless Drum."

So how do we tune into that activity?

We know that when our mind is related to something, when there's some thought, some

object in our mind, our mind is not free. And when our mind is not in relation to some object, it's free.

How do we find the place where we can act freely, without the constriction of our bodymind habits?

So: "cultivating study is called learning." And we do need to learn. We need to study and we need to figure things out. But how do we know what makes the studying, the cultivating study, what makes that helpful?

It's a two-edged sword. Reading about zen, reading about the dharma is useful and very helpful when we can include our whole being in that reading so we feel as if when we're reading the dharma we are reading about ourselves, and we see our effort there and we see our demons there and we see our freedom there and that's very helpful.

So it's a really good idea to study, but how do we manifest that so that the study tunes up our lives and tunes up the lives of others?

We have this small group in the mornings who have been studying the service: the bells, the beating of the drum, of the mokugyo, that directs the chants. When people learn, there's a crib sheet and that's the crudest way of studying. After a while they get so they can mostly put the sheets down and then they can tune in and be in tune because that's what the service is about. It's about all the people in the room being exactly in tune with one another.

So first you're glued to the crib sheet and then you put the crib sheet down and then your ears and your eyes and your body get into it and you're beating the drum when that happens.

"Cutting off study is called nearness." The sitting, the just being in the moment is nearness, just exactly being here with no judgment, no fear, just being present, and that's wonderful. How does appropriate response arise from that stillness? That's our big question.

And there are various falls, various ways in which our drumbeat gets erratic or wobbly or doesn't happen. At one extreme, the fall is imagining that there is a standard of "I ought to be doing it this way," imagining that "The group does it this way," "So-and-so says to do it this way." You know, one needs to look around and be alert and make a focused effort, but if you get too used to the painted dragons you miss the real one. You miss what's really going on, you miss that play of the dragons and fishes in deep water.

And the other extreme is that you say, "Well, I have pretty good intuition and I'll just trust it." Taking your intuition and going on automatic pilot doesn't work either.

Having too little confidence, having too much confidence.

So finding that middle way. Somebody said emptiness is not a state but a way of living in a rich and complex world without fixation. That's beating the drum.

Our experience in practice is usually we sit facing a wall and that's an exterior wall, and we also are quite familiar with the interior wall. If we're willing to keep at it, if we are willing to just sit in front of the wall, then we know from our practice that it's not so solid as it seems. Somebody said she sits in front of a wall, just a wall, well what do you do?

You take a little bite out of it, and then it's not just a solid wall.

So how do we tune ourselves in? How do we find the activity - our life activity - and keep that activity bright and available? Find the drumbeat of our lives, and carry that through our personal suffering and carry it through the world's suffering?

How do we hear it and how do we tune in?



The Ascent of Man

Michael Quam

You've seen those charts in old anthro books,
A long line starting with a shambling chimp
Up through the troglodyte hulks
And at the end a tall dusky figure,
Dark and hairy with a firm stride.
He kills to eat, as we all must do.
Surrounded by a vast family, some two-legged,
Also, spiders and bears, mountains and stars,
A thousand stories have seeped into his bones,
And his hands are guided as they hunt,
Make sacrifice and play. He finds a mate,
And from her blood spring little ones.
He watches and knows what comes for others
Will come for him. Then, with garlands
He will go back into the earth. We've all
Seen him standing by the side of the road.
He's no stranger; get to know him.

To Sit or Not to Sit?

Barry Evans

*. . . with wings as swift
As meditation . . .*

(Hamlet: Act I, Scene 5)

At our Eureka sit recently, we were graced with the presence of a couple of students from Eureka High. We're used to this—we're one of the go-to venues for their "Myth and Religion" unit (not sure which one we fit under—maybe both?). During the regular discussion period following our sit, they wanted to know why we meditated. Lots of interesting answers from the group. We were pretty well maxed out at 16 bodies, so they got plenty of responses. Afterwards, they cornered me with the same question. No, not exactly. They didn't ask, "Why do you meditate?" but rather, "Why do you keep meditating?"

I told them I thought it was a bit like a Shakespeare aficionado who has seen Hamlet hundreds of times and still goes to each new performance. "They don't go expecting a happy ending," I said. "It's not like they're sitting there thinking, Maybe this time everything will work out and Hamlet and Ophelia will ride off into the sunset. They go because the story is so rich that it still intrigues them. I suppose they anticipate learning a bit more about the characters than they knew before. Or perhaps they go because they like the damn play. Same with meditation."

In retrospect, I'm not sure if I was just getting myself off the hook, or if I actually came up with a good analogy. Whatever, they dutifully wrote down what I was saying, seemed satisfied and went off happily, binders under their arms. Students, love 'em.



Mountain Spirit
~ Mark P.



Key to the Webb's Door ~ Julie Clark

The Return
Judith Louise

A million footsteps
on the ground, the porch
running over the roof
bringing back another reality
memory of another life,
other beings:
“We’re here, we’re back,
don’t forget about us!”

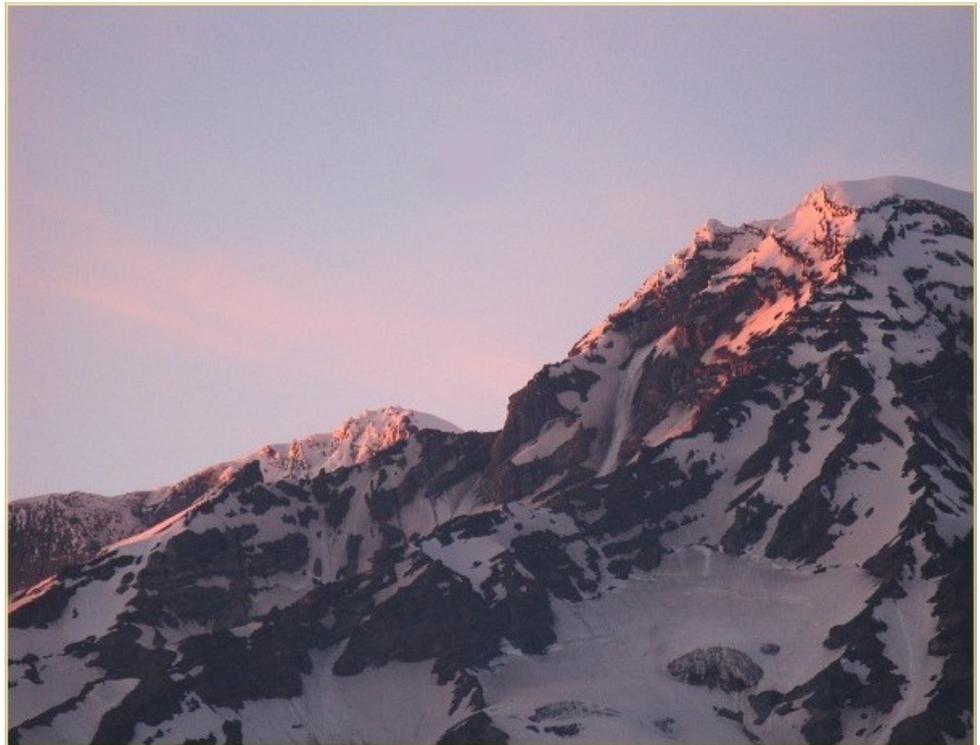
haiku for bill

hey bill!

i saw mount rainier -
it was walking!

you'd'a liked it!

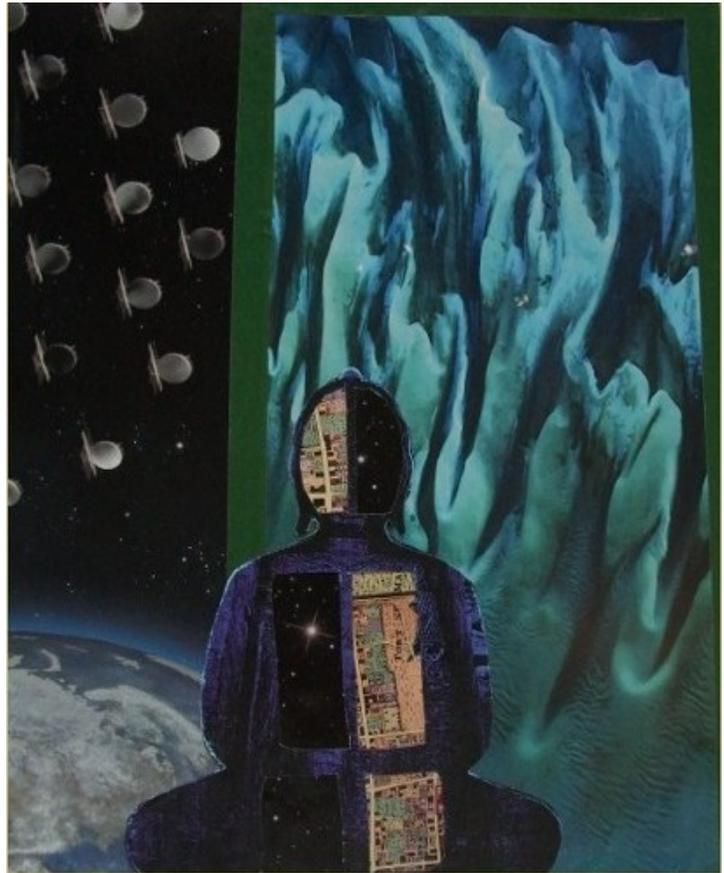
-s!



Why

Toby Griggs

What is this?
Who am us?
Where are we going?
Why?
Does it matter?
Do we care?
How much?
When,
We believe,
We might,
We are,
Here?
Far away?
In emptiness,
Forever never,
Now,
We sleep there,
On the streets,
Beat busted,
Bare.
Who are we?
You are we,
We are you,
Care.
Balanced being,
Harmonious,
Uninconspicuous,
Aware.
We are perfect,
Beginningless,
Neverendless,
Fearless.
For out here,
In our hearts,
Our mind is,
Open.
In this moment,
We realize,
Hope healing,
Empathize.
It is only,
What it is,
Our whole,
Lives,



AZG ~ Kathleen Cameron

Together,
We can breathe,
Smile be,
Why?
We am us,
It is now,
We are here.
Hi!



Trinidad Beach ~ Karen Mueller

Untitled
Uzi Selcer

Steam rising from my cup.
It was tea,
 Now it's air,
Tomorrow maybe rain,
 river,
 Redwood sap...
Or maybe tears...
 Yes, perhaps it will be tears.

Autumn in Samsara
Christian Jarquin

black birds
ceremoniously sway
& flutter amid
the most glorious twilight of autumn,
& the universe
makes love to me
in the middle of the street.

*Tassajara Bell ~ Karen
Mueller*



First Leaf
Christian Jarquin

After sweeping
The porch of this flowing cabin
The first leaf falls back down
Right before my eyes
And I hear its body
Hit
the wood.

The Encounter

Suzanne

Patrick's Point State Park. Foggy, cool, mid-morning. Very forest primeval.

And where was I? Inside me - ooo Poor Sue, her hips - her knees! Why, her very being! Yes, yes - occasionally I'd notice - a bright orange banana slug. A really cool mushroom. Enjoying hanging out with Mark, the physical act of walking, the sounds of ocean, creek, and birds. But mostly the background noise was, me.

We stopped for a rest, Mark disporting himself comfortably among the roots of an old spruce, me standing, sorta rooted to the spot. Then, looking back down the trail, the fog breathed in and I left off.



The drip of fog from tips of spruce to forest floor. The softness of moisture-laden air against skin. A flicker calling not far away. The density of life, and the just-beauty.

We resumed our walk, and Mark pulled ahead of me on the trail. Harsh cries of angry birds above drew my attention, and I turned and looked up. Right into the eyes of a Great Horned Owl. On a broken limb of the tree nearest me, maybe 15 feet up. Watching me while being mobbed by smaller birds.

It was grey, the barring on its feathers blending with the trunk of the spruce, looking like a jagged bit of branch, ear tufts and all. If it hadn't been so close, I'd not have realized what it was.

It didn't fly off. I assayed a very quiet, "Mark?" He came back down the trail, and together we watched the owl. After several minutes, it ruffled its feathers ("Oh!"), looked around at the smaller birds, and slipped off the branch with its wings outspread. Silently it negotiated a path among the trees, and settled on another branch.

We followed to that tree, and another, until finally the smaller birds left off mobbing it. We left, too; turning for one last look, it was gone.

On the way to the car, several flocks of wild geese passed unseen overhead, their calls muted in the fog. The-one-who-heard-them not the same as the-one-who-started-out.