

**No. 2 ~ 2007**

*This issue of Voices is devoted almost entirely to poetry and artwork done by members of the AZG, including one of our teacher-advisors, Angie Boissevain. It closes with the Dharma Gates column and a letter from our other teacher-advisor, Alan Senauke, exploring sesshin focus and guidelines.*

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## **Poems and Artwork**

Poems by [Judith Louise](#), [Angie Boissevain](#), [Michael Quam](#), [Lynda McDevitt](#), [Mark P.](#), & [Suzanne M.](#)

Artwork by Erika Makino, Mark P., & Suzanne M.

### **Dharma Gates are Boundless**

~ Compiled with Commentary by Michael Quam

### **Fall 2007 Sesshin ~ Waking Up in Our Bodies**

~ Hozan Alan Senauke

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## Poems and Artwork

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### ***Judith Louise***

#### *The Daily Journey*

Each morning  
I sit on the cushion,  
the bell rings and I  
begin, each breath  
a step and a  
return, starting  
over again and  
again.  
The mind travels,  
I watch it and  
come back to  
the breath  
over and over again,  
each step a return and  
a new beginning.  
Thirty minutes later  
the bell rings and  
I am in a new place, yet  
still sitting, and still  
returning to the breath,  
still on the journey.

#### *Winter Benediction*

Out my high window  
behind bare branches  
two crows fly cawing  
against grey sky.

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*Bad Karma ~ sculpture by Erika Makino  
photo by Mark Shaffer*

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***Angie Boissevain***

*Silver Lake*

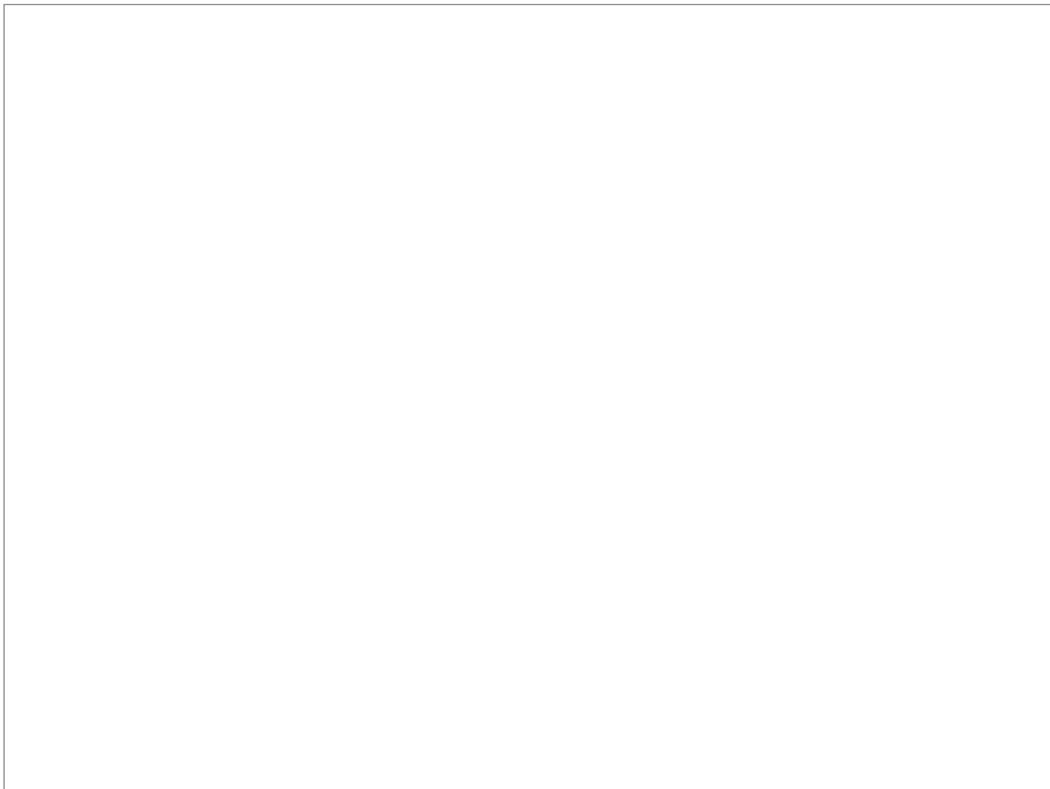
Out in open water  
clamorous and driven,  
whitecaps' agitated  
deep blue folds  
race in relentless wind.

I stay by the small waves  
washing well-washed golden  
stones beside the shore.  
Here the light in the water  
goes clear through.

*Blue Lake*

Three weeks ago  
this meadow was asleep.  
It's now a vivid  
green of wind-washed  
willows and grasses,  
in every breeze a cloud  
of willow dust,  
and just above the last  
trees on a bare mountain,  
four patches of old snow  
leak through the rocks.

This is how I remember it  
from thirty years ago--  
sounds of wind in pine  
and fir magnify  
the silence when it comes,  
and speak what then  
there were no words for,  
and I still can't say.



*Mad Cows ~ sculpture by Erika Makino; photo by Mark Shaffer*

**Michael Quam**

*On the Other Side*

If you shade your eyes  
and look intently, you can see  
on the other side a bay  
and shoreline with no houses,  
only marshy shallows  
and forest beyond.

No doubt the water there  
is cold and coppery  
and green gold bass glide  
just beneath the reach  
of shimmering sun.  
Among the reeds a great blue heron  
steps carefully, then pauses,  
his sharp black beak poised....

We could steal a boat,  
and go there. But first,  
we have to shed this skin,  
and get our breathing right.

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***Lynda McDevitt***

Afternoon stillness  
Sunlight slides across the sill  
Not a small matter.

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***Mark P.***

*Bubble Poem*

Why am I convinced  
that there is no reason  
or a hint of an explanation  
or even a whisper of an intention  
in an eternity of instinctive acts of ambient extension  
that could account for the immense avalanche of gratuitous inosculation  
that wafts the wheel of origination

that no amount of mimicry  
can begin to mull the murmur of this november seesawing  
or whisk away the deposits lately jerked from the stays  
of these disintegrating leaves of impression

but spits out forever the coinciding of events  
that have not happened while they happen  
and the concision of events that have

## **Theresa McLaren**

### *Kinhin*

*(Walking Meditation—Angie)*

She glides as if on air  
no sound of shifting  
from left to right  
right to left.

The only hint  
of movement is a quick  
pulse of the vein in the arch  
of her right ankle before a step.

Fluid as a running stream  
she flows around the room.

### *War versus Religion*

What difference between a saffron  
robe and a khaki uniform,  
chants of peace and chants of war?  
The expectation is to be noble,  
shave the head and stand in line,  
for sake of the organization,  
the collective organism.

The probability of enlightenment  
or becoming a five-star general  
is reserved for the revered few.

To smell incense or napalm,  
admire the unfolding of the lotus flower  
or the expanding of a mushroom cloud,  
to soar through one's own mind  
or in the cockpit of an F-17  
is to hold the secrets of rebirth.

Ask a novice at a monastery or a private in the military.  
Both will say they are working for world peace.

**Suzanne M.**



*the annunciate of air*

but you are so beautiful she says  
to the man in her dream  
don't you want me to give you  
what you want?

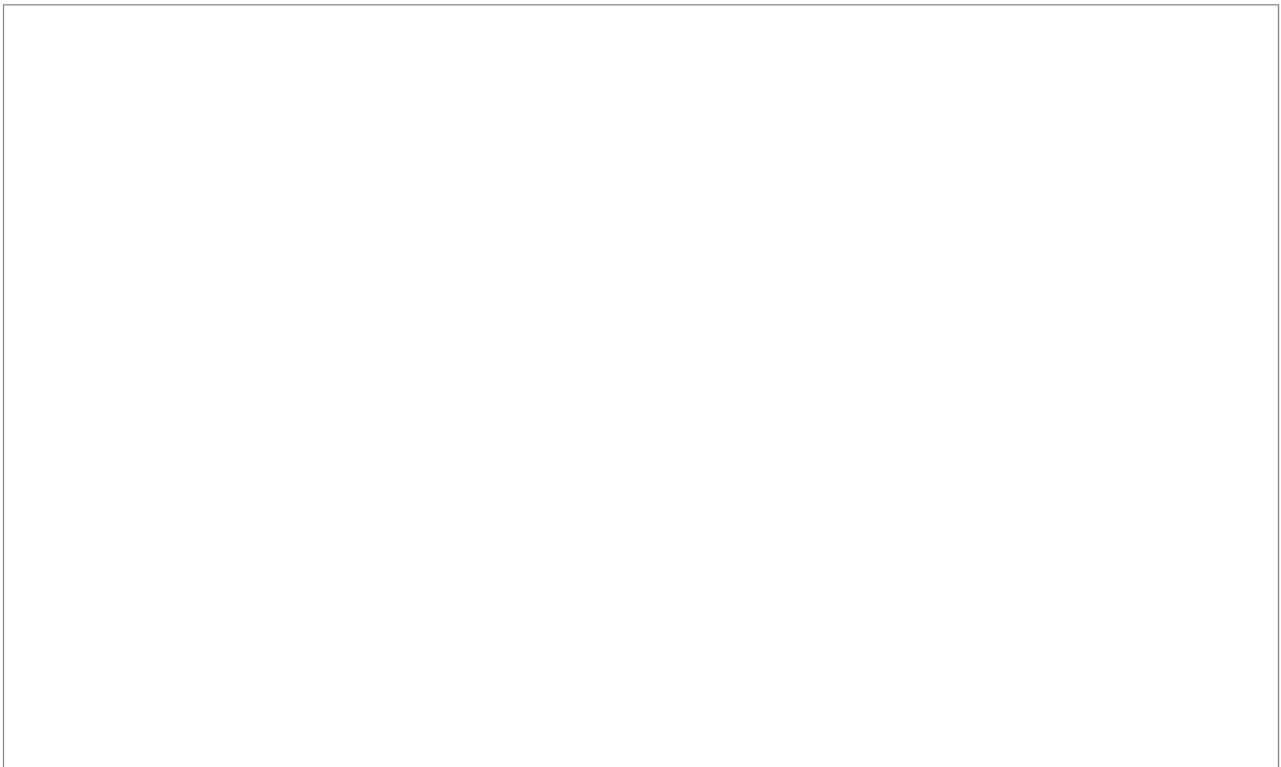
he fondles her breasts.  
there are six of them.  
neither of them seems to think this is odd.  
she notices the man is moaning.

wasn't i just climbing a long stair,  
she wonders,  
a young priest in veridian robes  
leading the way, my breath faster, shallower  
as i climbed the marble expanses  
of copper-veined titanium.

just moments ago in fact,  
i walked into a room to await an audience,  
a room like sandstone caves under lost oceans,  
my own robes, prussian blue and gold flake,  
foaming about me like breath on a winter eve,  
and yet i'm here.

she looks down.  
the man is now nuzzling her breasts.  
she wonders why.

she remembers the endless ascent  
of the sweeping steps;  
something to do with her breathing,  
the labor of it all,  
and the slow rise to consciousness  
at the head of the marble stair.



*Little Petroglyph Canyon, CA.; photo by Mark P.*

## ***Dharma Gates are Boundless***

*Compiled with Commentary by Michael Quam*

Since this issue of *Voices* has an emphasis on poetry and art work, I thought some words about poetry would be helpful. I frequently hear someone say, "I don't read poetry. I just don't get it. It doesn't do anything for me." It's true that sometimes the diction of poetry is difficult and, compared to most prose, it may seem indirect, even obscure. Still, the experience of reading or hearing a poem can awaken us to a truth deeper than the ordinary order of words can reveal.

Jane Hirshfield is a marvelous poet, and she is also a skillful guide to understanding the craft and the experience of poetry. In her book *Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry*, she begins by saying, "Poetry's work is the clarification and magnification of being. Each time we enter its word-woven and musical invocation, we give ourselves over to a different mode of knowing: to poetry's knowing, and to the increase of existence it brings, unlike any other." (p. vii) I'm tempted to continue quoting at great length, but instead I'll just give you the last two paragraphs of the first essay, "Poetry and the Mind of Concentration."

"No matter how carefully we read or how much attention we bring to bear, a good poem can never be completely entered, completely known. If it is the harvest of true concentration, it will know more than can be said in any other way. And because it thinks by music and image, by story and passion and voice, poetry can do what other forms of thinking cannot: approximate the actual flavor of life, in which subjective and objective become one, in which conceptual mind and the inexpressible presence of things become one.

"Letting this wideness of being into ourselves, as readers or as writers, while staying close to the words themselves, we begin to find in poems a way of entering both language and being on their own terms. Poetry leads us into the self, but also away from it. Transparency is part of what we seek in art, and in art's mind of concentration that is both capacious and focused. Free to turn inward and outward, free to remain still and wondering amid the mysteries of mind and world, we arrive, for a moment, at a kind of fullness that overflows into everything. One breath taken completely; one poem, fully written, fully read—in such a moment, anything can happen. The pressed oil of words can blaze up into music, into image, into the heart and mind's knowledge. The lit and shadowed places within us can be warmed." (pp. 31-32)

Poetry is like medicine for our culture of hyperactivity. It must be read slowly if it is to make sense, to awaken our senses, to do its artful work. Like a fine painting or a moving song, it can be, it should be, savored over and over.

Mark Pringle sent me two contributions for this column from Michael Mott's biography of Thomas Merton, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (p. 293 and pp. 252-253) The first is one of Merton's poems called "In Silence."

Be still  
Listen to the stones of the wall  
Be silent, they try  
To speak your

Name  
Listen  
To the living walls.  
Who are you?  
Who  
Are you? Whose  
Silence are you?

The second quote comes from a section in the book that covers Merton's ordination as a priest in 1949. The author describes a gesture and a comment made by Merton as he is meeting with some friends who have come to Gethsemani to celebrate the occasion.

“He made the Cistercian sign for the letter O, the circle, joining his right thumb and index finger, then placed the tip of his left index finger where it made the center point. He said he had arrived at the center, a mystery from which earlier mysteries looked less mysterious.”



*Autumn ~  
Suzanne M.*

Dear Members and Friends of the AZG,

I look forward to our upcoming sesshin at Rin Shin-ji, beginning on Tuesday evening, September 25 and continuing through Saturday afternoon, September 29. This sesshin begins AZG's fall practice period, so I encourage everyone to attend as much as they can.

Translated from Japanese, sesshin means something like "to collect the heart/mind." This is one of the traditional Zen practices we have — along with daily zazen, study, and meeting with a teacher. But as much as any of these essential practices, sesshin is a way to deepen our concentration and engage with ourselves very closely, supported by the warm energies of sangha sitting together. I clearly remember my first sesshin, and how, over the days of sitting, I could see the miraculous life that flows in all beings and things. In sesshin, this awareness is available to us all.

My main subject for this sesshin will be how to embody the practice. Zen practice is something we do with our whole body, so we have to know and honor our bodies closely. Dogen Zenji wrote, "In this life, save the body, which is the fruit of many lives." So along with our body/mind practice of zazen, we will study ancient and modern wisdom, have a Full Moon Bodhisattva Ceremony, walk in the forest, work, eat, drink, and talk together. All of which we do with our bodies.

I hope we will have a good turnout for sesshin, and I am asking that each participant come for the opening on Tuesday evening, and attend at least two full days. If you have questions about your schedule or wish to sit some partial blocks of days, please speak with the sesshin coordinator, Ann Greenwater. Of course, lectures (in the evening except for Saturday) are open to all.

I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Hozan Alan Senauke

