



# ZEN PEBBLE

Number 1

News from the Zen Community of Baltimore/Clare Sangha

Fall 2001

## Teisho: WHY?

**Rosalie Jishin McQuaide, csjp, Sensei**

Anyone who has been with little children can recall being, first, amused by their incessant repeating of WHY? And then, after ten or twelve answers, being exasperated to the point of responding “Because I said so, that’s why.”

But, really, isn’t the problem not that children ask WHY? But that society – we – answer so confidently and glibly? Haven’t you found that in your lifetime, experience has taken you through the why’s of childhood to the answers of adulthood and on to the why’s again?

It is the WHY that brings us to our cushion. And we stay on our cushion not to receive an answer but to realize an understanding.

So it is with the devastation and suffering of September 11. WHY?

Life is one, and yet we are aware of life most of the time as bits and pieces. We put bits and pieces together in certain ways. When all the bits and pieces of life are together in this certain way, we say that life is good. When some of the bits or pieces move or disappear, or when other bits and pieces appear, the good life is shattered. WHY?

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## Compassionate Action: ZCB in Prison

**An Interview with Bruce Blackman and Barbara Craig**

To learn how some of our members turn practice into action and action into practice, Zen Pebble spoke with Bruce Blackman and Barbara Craig about their work with offenders and prisoners.

**ZP:** How did you get involved in prison work?

**Bruce:** My first Zen teacher, Elaine MacInnes, taught prisoners and encouraged her students to do so as well. When I returned to Virginia from the Foreign Service in 1994, I looked around for a prison program and volunteered with Offender Aid and Restoration in Northern Virginia. OAR works here with offenders in the county jails and in community service. Mentoring offenders led us to develop a course called Emotional Awareness and Healing, which we will expand into another jail in January. Janet Richardson encouraged and helped these efforts. I’m twice blessed in Zen!

**Barbara:** Back in the ’70’s, Sister Julian Baird started a program called One to One in the State Correctional Institution in Dallas, Pennsylvania. I began corresponding with an inmate, which led to visiting him in the prison. In 1977, I qualified as a trainer in the Thresholds program for decision-making, personal responsibility, and self-determination. Today I still train volunteers for the Thresholds program in the Pennsylvania state prison system, as well as teaching inmates in class and one-to-one.

**ZP:** What do you and your group do?

**Bruce:** It depends on the activity. In one-on-one mentoring, we work with people preparing to transition back to the “outside.” The needs vary a lot by individual. One inmate wanted to prepare for a technical job. Another wanted to reconcile with the family he had disappointed – he felt he had nowhere else to go. The Emotional Awareness and Healing Course helps eight to ten offenders

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> century Indian philosopher Nagarjuna devoted his brilliant mind to the question of WHY? A student of Buddhism, he wrestled with the question of contingency. Why are things as they are? He understands life as the continuous unfolding of conditions, all of which emerge contingently, in relation to each other.

The wise person, not anyone in particular, realizes and accepts contingency, the continuous unfolding of conditions, as life. By easing fixations, the wise person deals with suffering. By accepting the contingent nature of life, the wise person lives fully awake with joy and serenity in each new unfolding, each revelation of life.

Friday after the attack, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra performed Maurice Ravel's *La Valse*. Selection of this 1920s piece seemed particularly apt given the tremendous pain and devastation experienced by the world just three days earlier. The orchestra played with a taut attention and singular commitment, in a stunning performance that was generously acknowledged and applauded by the audience.

The brief program notes described the conditions that unfolded in the composer's life, leading to creation of this work. Maurice Ravel had wanted to compose a magnificent waltz ballet as his tribute to the genius of Johann Strauss, the waltz king; music which would honor – through elegant and respectful parody – the soaring beauty of the Strauss waltzes.

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*Ravel's hopes were shattered by the inconceivable horror of trench warfare and then by the death of his mother.*

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But Ravel's hopes of carrying out this plan were shattered, first by the inconceivable horror of trench warfare in the first world war and then by the death of his mother, which left him inconsolable. A new Ravel, a matured Ravel, picked up his pen again amid the debris and disillusionment of post-war France and returned to his idea of a Straussian ballet. Only this time, his music would express his personal experience of life, with its suffering, confusion, betrayal of ideals, its heroism and death. No more, the glittering and shimmering harmonies of "Artist's Life," "Tales from the Vienna Woods," "Neath the Southern Moon" – that world, the world he had known and had grown comfortable and become successful in – was gone.

This orchestral piece is brilliantly conceived by Ravel: it starts out with an elegant, lavishly orchestrated waltz. Within a few minutes, the  $\frac{3}{4}$  waltz time is upset; a few measures here and there of  $\frac{5}{4}$  interspersed; discordant tones from the woodwinds set off a kind of uneasiness in the strings; what is going on, the listener asks?

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*This is not a waltz, you cry! I want the waltz back!*

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Chaos sets in and all you can do is experience it, witness it. Where does the chaos set in? In your own heart. The uneasiness is not among the players only; it is in the hearts and minds of the audience as well. The piece seems to be blowing itself up! NO! NO! NO! THIS IS NOT A WALTZ, YOU CRY! I WANT THE WALTZ BACK!

But Ravel, always admired for his command of form and balance, takes the chaos, these fears and anxieties, and transforms it, musically, into something new! Same instruments, same performers, same listeners, but new configurations, new combinations, new understanding. Letting go of what no longer exists, he expresses and gives meaning to life changed and transformed. And the audience must do the same. The audience must let go of what no longer is and pay attention to what – right here, right now – is. And not only pay attention to it but embrace it, accept it, love it, live with it!

Since Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup>, we have heard well-meaning calls for life to return to normal, but Zen students know, through their own life experience, there is no returning – that unending change is normal, and it has been an illusion to think otherwise. Rather than give in to despair, rather than retreat from reality, we intensify our efforts to wake up to the fullness of life every minute! Our Zen practice teaches us to see and to be open to the oneness of life in the small chaotic events of our daily lives, and to summon the true self of compassion and understanding to our chaos. Zen practice shakes off the delusion of self-righteousness and the confusion of standpoint or viewpoint that blocks our true nature from acting in clarity and wisdom. Life, as such, is all there is and everything there is. Let us be one with life.



*The Great Expanse:*

"Anger sinks the boat.

Now we are not praising that 'drowning' in his ocean, Just crossing the great expanse of each minute with all the compassion and dignity we can find." – *Hafiz* ❖

## BRUCE BLACKMAN, DHARMA HEIR

At the close of the ZCB/Clare Sangha June sesshin, Roshi Janet Richardson named Bruce Blackman dharma heir. Bruce has studied Zen for 21 years, first with Sister Elaine MacInnes and Reuben Habito and more recently at the ZCB/Clare Sangha with Janet. He has been a senior student here and now moves into a new phase, that of dharma heir. Congratulations, Bruce, and thank you for your service to the Zen teaching and the Sangha!

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FALL SESSHIN, NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 2, 2001

SPRING SESSHIN, MARCH 1 – 3, 2002

SUMMER SESSHIN, JUNE 21 – 27, 2002

All sesshins will be held at the Precious Blood Spiritual Center, Columbia, PA

## Heady Words: Sangha

### Turning Word by Elizabeth T. Mitchell at her Installation as Head Monk

I am grateful to the Sangha – to each one of you. I would find it difficult to carry on my practice without the undergirding that comes from knowing that you are there, that you are making the commitment as you sit on your mat or in your chair and take up formal practice.

And far beyond that, I feel the encouragement of the lives that you lead and the growth that comes from your self-knowledge and awakening to the depth of existence. We simply cannot do it alone. We need each other. We need the energy that each of our lives sends out in invisible waves – in deep currents of compassion, in ripples of caring.

When you care for a member of your family, you are caring for me. When you work in your garden, you help me care for mine. When you speak to a stranger kindly, I am encouraged to break through my small ego self and open my life to another human being, to a frightened rabbit, to a budding tree. When you forgive someone an ancient

in a class develop a mindfulness and awareness practice, including silent and verbal prayer and service to others. And this year it's my "turn in the barrel" as President of the Board of OAR. Approaching all this work in a spirit of openness and bearing witness leads to appropriate action.

**Barbara:** The Thresholds program seeks to wake up prisoners to self-determination, to realize "I am responsible for my life. I am unique, important, irreplaceable." It's for men who are getting out in a year or two. For many years, I also ministered to Hispanic inmates. I started by simply visiting the prison Spanish Club, and I saw so many needs.

**ZP:** What was it like entering the prison the first time?

**Barbara:** It's been so long, I can't remember the first time! The prison is like a second home to me. Only once was I ever in a touchy situation, and nothing happened.

**Bruce:** OAR volunteers complete a training program before entering the prison, so we know what to expect. We learn the security procedures and carry an ID badge with a button for assistance. All the locking doors, concrete, steel, and the very few windows still impress me in a severe way.

**ZP:** What effect has prison work had on your practice and your life?

**Barbara:** My reverence for life grows in the prison as it grows in my practice. I've learned you don't need a plan – just go and listen. You find where your spirit is leading and your energy is going and you follow.

**Bruce:** The needs are many and great. This human service is a good way to practice the peacemaker vows of not knowing, bearing witness, and loving action. There is comfort in helping another. Prisoners are surprised and gratified when you're there with no agenda except to help. ❖



grievance that is crippling your growth, it makes it easier for me to forgive someone in my life. It is not possible for me to add one cubit to my stature, to change my consciousness, or to make my actions real, without agenda, without desire to manipulate. It is in the midst of the Sangha that change, simplicity, realness take place. It is in the ordinariness of life that the Sangha, though not present, helps me open my eyes, feel compassion, peace, joy, stability. You help me open up to the moon, feel pity for the fallen bird and remove it from a car's path, bond with a dying friend, spend time with a depressed friend. Zazen is the process, the practice that has deepened my Christian faith. It gives me gratitude and love for living and respect for dying. ❖

# Riding the Horse

Haiku from the June Sesshin

Illustrations by Yolanda Chetwynd



People like trees have within  
A piece of good news  
Whether touched or untouched  
An imperishable gift.

*Mary Byrnes*

## Impermanence

Quick! Look at that cloud  
A dog's head, his muzzle, his eyes  
Poof! He's gone.

*Betty Mitchell*

Oh Joy! Meatless sauce  
Splat! that stains my clean top  
Impish grin wear I.

*Yolanda Chetwynd*

I ride my breath like a bronco  
Fingers woven tightly  
In my mane.

*Norm Saunders*

## The Lesson of the Water Lily

Gift and mystery  
Cycles of birth, life, and death  
Dance of all be – ing.

*Doris Mical*

Gratitude fills all  
To be alone together  
Encircled forever.

*Yolanda Chetwynd*

## Who Knows My Home

Moved from heat to shade  
Worm writhes, slowly dies  
Only worm knows home.

*Rose Mary Dougherty*

## Rosemary's Yellow Hat

When she puts it on  
Kihin is in the sun  
And I wear my hat, too.

*Bruce Blackman*

## Incense Lady

Incense speaks  
Gatha is silent  
There must be a full moon.

*Tina Shore*

## Openings

Code pushed, door opens  
No such formula for life  
Only be here now.

*Rose Mary Dougherty*

## Absence

There's the Buddha's chair  
If I sit in it,  
Will it be empty?

*Rosalie McQuaide*

## Daredevil

Robin on the bench  
Should I jump into the sky  
Or just play it safe?

*Rosalie McQuaide*

## Trees

In stillness or storm  
Bare or clothed  
It's there is-ness that amazes me.

*Barbara Craig*

Don't be a stinking Buddha  
Be an old joke –  
Lights on, nobody home.

*Norm Saunders*

Bell, best instructors,  
Trifling student. Still bell sounds  
More of me than bell.

*Susan Efird*

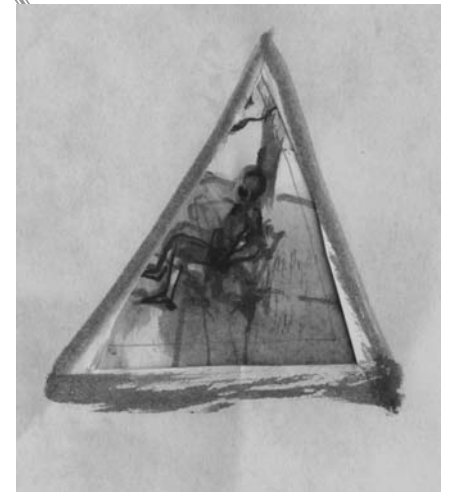
## Nature's Way

Clover blooms waft  
Exquisite scent tantalizing  
Eager worker bees.

*Betty Mitchell*

Corn rows planted nice and straight  
Grow up nicely curved  
Things sometimes end up nicer.

*Janet Richardson*



### The Dance Begins

Ballerina heart  
In combat boots hears music  
Marching becomes dance.  
*Rose Mary Dougherty*

Echoing Sesshin  
Then, celebrate with sake  
Today with poems.  
*Yolanda Chetwynd*

### Gatha for Kyosaku

Steady as you go  
Take good care! And with Tina  
Go around the hair.  
*Bruce Blackman*

### At Dusk

Ev'ry one outside – be transformed  
By the enlight'ning bugs  
On the grass.

*Barbara Craig*

### Spurned

A firefly hovers close, checks me out  
Too bad, wrong gal  
Maybe next life.

*Betty Mitchell*

### Bird Calls

Bird perched high on roof  
Singing for all he is worth  
Dharma, come and get it!  
*Rosalie McQuaide*

### Above My Porridge

Impossible you say?  
Such talkin'! – Pigs can fly  
In kitchens anyway.  
*Bruce Blackman*

Fly on my face, sharing my cushion  
Aware of our breath  
Let's sit well.

*Susan Efir*

Fireflies dance a grand ballet  
Only we would think  
What a haiku!

*Norm Saunders*

Corn rows planted nice and straight  
Grow up nicely curved  
Things sometimes end up better.  
*Janet Richardson*

**Do You Have to Say Everything?**  
(clap), (clap), (clap), (clap), (clap)  
(clap), (clap), (clap), (clap), (clap), (clap), (clap)  
(clap), (clap), (clap), (clap)

*Charles Birx*

## KYOSAKU

For sitting at home, set aside a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. If you wish, make a small altar with a Buddha or Christ figure. Add some flowers. Light some incense to freshen the air. An attractive space will encourage you to sit!

*Janet Jinne Richardson, csjp, Roshi*

## ZCB SUPPORTS OXFAM

Looking for a way to act out of compassion for the wider world? Consider a donation to the Oxfam basket outside the Zendo. Oxfam America creates "lasting solutions to hunger, poverty, and social injustice through long-term partnerships with poor communities around the world."

## DUES ALERT: A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

We are going to end the year about \$900 in the red. Because cash inflows and outflows are expected to be about the same next year, the ZCB Board voted on Oct. 20 to raise annual dues from \$120/year to \$150/year effective Jan. 1, 2002. Of the 34 dues-paying members this year, 30 are paying the full amount. By increasing annual dues by \$30, we should cover the \$900 shortfall.

Annual dues should be paid during the month of January. We encourage those who can pay more to do so. We continue to appreciate the support provided by those who make contributions to the Donations Basket in the zendo. Those dollars really do help us squeak through each month.

*Carl Poblner, Treasurer*

## From the Hinterlands

### Eastern Shore

Our group meets in Easton on the 1st and 3rd Monday evenings.

*Jim Thomas*

### Flowing Rivers Sangha, Wilkes-Barre

We meet on Thursday evenings. In January, we will celebrate five years of sitting together. On November 10<sup>th</sup> we held an all-day sitting with Janet and Rosalie. We also have a new, smaller group that meets at Mercy Center in Dallas, PA, on Tuesday afternoons. We are planning an introductory session for people interested in this group on December 4<sup>th</sup>.

*Barbara Craig*

### St. John's College, Annapolis

We sit together Monday evenings and Wednesday mornings at St. John's College when classes are in session.

*Norm Saunders*

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ZEN COMMUNITY OF BALTIMORE  
CLARE SANGHA

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*Pebble breaks the still surface of a pool;  
Wave crashes on a distant shore.*

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