



# ZEN PEBBLE

Number 2

News from the Zen Community of Baltimore/Clare Sangha

Winter 2003

## Teisho: Who Am I?

Janet Jinne Richardson, csjp, Roshi

Our hearts and minds are full of questions today, and it's good that we have the all-day sitting to let go of them, to transcend them and to focus at a level of awareness that can be fruitful, compassionate, and productive of wisdom. Still, the great teachers use a question to move us to that level, and we are already manifesting wisdom if we look at it. The question, the basic koan, is, "Who am I?" Who am I? When we allow this to grab our full attention, when "who am I?" attracts all our energy and strength, we uncover ourselves and find I am the result of a great network of interdependence from the past and the present. It's an all-pervasive, all-encompassing interdependence. Many cultures have uncovered this and have written and sung about this interdependence as a body: "the eye cannot do what the ear can do" or "the knee bone connected to the thigh bone, the thigh bone connected to the hip bone, ..." to cite examples from ancient Hebrew scripture, that have found musical expression in modern African-American music. So one experience of who I am is my being joined to others in some identifiable whole. Another experience of who I am is the experience of being a "wanting self," to use the phrase of the

*continued on page 2*

## I Don't Fear Death

Jim Thomas

Some time ago while talking with Sensei, I made the offhand remark that I did not fear death, and she asked me to talk about it. Before I give some background, I want to emphasize that this is a very personal journey, and each must make his or her own journey. I was in WWII and saw action and lost friends and colleagues. I am a physician and was in general practice for over 20 years – back when general practice meant house calls and even home deliveries. I thought I saw the writing on the wall as far as the practice of medicine was concerned, so I switched to mental health and worked for some 15 years at the State hospital on the Eastern Shore. I am over 80 and a widower, so I have lived and am enjoying living, but I have seen death in different aspects: my years in military service, my practice, and in my personal life. I now know more people on the other side of the veil than on this side. I am a practicing Christian.

Death while in the service was a constant reality, and one feared that one might be next. Dealing with death in my practice taught me that it was a natural part of the cycle, but this insight had little emotion attached to it: it happened, and that was that. However, I was never ever able to reconcile the death of a child. With death the cells making up the brain die, and it is within the brain that thoughts and consciousness are generated. So it would seem that things will be different. Without this body and without thought what is there?

I did learn from all of this that there has to be more than just existence in this life; I suspect most of us have similar feelings. This is not a unique finding in my opinion, as most cultures and religions teach ideas of this nature, and there are longstanding rituals of the care of the dead and the disposal of the body.

I dealt with the death of my parents without overwhelming emotions, but the illness and inevitable death of my wife were a different matter. I found I was deeply involved. I hope that I was support to her; she was a great

*continued on page 2*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Teisho: Who Am I?             |
| 1 | I Don't Fear Death            |
| 3 | Zen Meditation: Lewisburg     |
| 4 | Fly on my Nose: Sesshin Haiku |
| 6 | President's Cushion           |

poet Kabir. Wanting to be better, wanting to be stronger, wanting to be wiser, wanting to be younger, wanting to be older, and on and on. Who I am is wanting something else, so I can protect myself and enhance myself. And I suffer for this.

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*Who I am is wanting something else so I can protect myself and enhance myself. And I suffer for this.*

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We suffer because of our own desires, such as a desire to want the impossible. For example, I want a just society. Is this impossible? Does our suffering rise from such a desire? But is this adequate to say that my desires cause my suffering? Or does my interdependence impact my wellbeing? Experience tells us that our environment – the matrix, the container where we are – can mean suffering. To explore justice only from individual desire is to ignore environment, matrix, container and my participation as an interdependent member of the body. Whether we focus on my individual participation, or we throw the spotlight on the social dimension, one of the most crucial issues of who I am is to locate the arenas of freedom and to identify the points where we can make choices. Admitting that from our past action we create our suffering in the present, this is an incomplete description of our situation. Let's also admit we create our future by what we do in the present. So in the present, right here, right now, no matter how strong our conditioning, no matter how powerful those habitual patterns of reacting, there is some tiny opening of freedom available to us. We may not be able to *change* our present lot, but we *can* deal with it in many different ways. How I deal with the present influences what my future will be and the role I'll take on then.

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*So in the present, right here, right now, there is some tiny opening of freedom available to us.*

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So, for example, I can be angry and aggressive in my present suffering, or I can practice equanimity. The anger and aggressivity automatically causes immediate pain to me and to others. The equanimity produces peace. In this sense, isn't it just to say we each personally create our own peace? But back to the first question, the primary question: Who am I? ❖



support to me. She made the statement that the cancer might terminate her, but it would never kill her. It did not. She was able to retain her spirit, her joy, and her faith throughout and into the end. I was left devastated, but, at the same time, I knew that I had gained great insight. I found the depth of love through death, but I did fear death and dreaded that thought that this would also be my fate. Some years later the death of a granddaughter was a body blow. Then I realized that sometimes there is no rational answer.

I work with the local hospice house, and this has given me a chance to work with patients and their families knowingly facing death. I witness the bravery of all these people, and frequently there are meaningful conversations with the client on the entire situation. This can be inspiring as well as educational.

Since I have been a member of this Zen community, I know that I have grown spiritually. It has given me the opportunity to look into myself and explore who and what I am. All my life I had been so busy doing things, working, caring for others that I had never done this before. At first, my Christian belief was little more than a faith, but a faith of following the rules. I never concluded that Jesus was my pal; somehow He was more than that and separate from that but out there. With my private meditations and my attendance at the monthly sesshins and some weeklong sesshins, I began to develop a whole new understanding of myself and my relations with “that other force” which might be called God or the Trinity. I learned that this force is within me and relating to me in ways different from my body. On a weekend retreat earlier this month the talks were on the cosmos. I realized that I was around right after the Big Bang but needed a bit of assembling which took many billions of years. When these elements which make up my body are released, I can see this without fear, knowing that there are forces there more or less directing this just as the cosmos has been directed from the start – things happened at just the right moment; the distance between objects is just the right distance to make it work. When I consider what I behold as a lowly caterpillar go into a chrysalis, dissolve into an amorphous mass, and then reassemble and come out as a butterfly, I cannot doubt. Perhaps the picture of me in the future with wings is not so far fetched. Where I am enjoying my life now, I do not fear death.

In the words of John Henry Newman: “Fear not that your life will come to an end; fear rather that it will never come to the beginning.” ❖

# Zen Meditation: Lewisburg

**Rosalie Jishin McQuaide, csjp, Sensei**

In the fall of 2001, a letter came to the Zen Community of Baltimore/Clare Sangha from Sister Patricia Weidmann, a chaplain at Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg PA. Sister Weidmann asked if someone from the ZCB could come to the penitentiary to teach Zen meditation to interested inmates in the prison, the prison camp, and the boot camp. The ZCB was ready to respond, if possible, to this request and after learning more about the prison, its location, its scheduling possibilities, and the interest of inmates, a call went out to Sangha members who would be interested in accompanying me to the prison. Because of the distance – about 2¾ hours north of Baltimore – it was agreed that we would go to Lewisburg on the fourth Saturday of every month for an hour-and-a-half of zazen with the inmates. Sensei Barbara Craig arranged to go one evening a month during the week to sit in meditation with men in the prison, and she also had the company of one of the members of the Flowing River Zen Community in Wilkes-Barre.

We began in January 2002 and continue each month through the year. The chapel – a room designated as chapel, with cabinets holding sacred vessels, books and candles for use by various religious denominations – is set aside for zazen on the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of every month, from 10:00-11:30 a.m. On our first visit, we were welcomed by a group of about 12 men. One or two of them had had some meditation experience and were very helpful in the initial instruction and modeling of posture for those unfamiliar with zazen. Each month would find a few “regulars” and several “newcomers” ready to meditate together. Some initial instruction in posture, breathing, and attitude is given ahead of time by one of the men experienced in Zen meditation. The schedule follows that which is used at ZCB Clare Sangha: the first 25-minute period of zazen opens with chanting the Gatha of Repentance. This is followed by a dharma talk, and then kinhin (walking) meditation, for about 5 minutes. A second period of zazen and kinhin, and a shorter third period of zazen completes the morning’s exercise. Oftentimes, there are a few minutes available for questions and comments from anyone in the group.

In November 2002, a few of the men who regularly participate suggested that an introduction to Zen be offered, because many of the inmates know nothing about Zen, and some sense it as a threat to their own religious practice and tradition. It was agreed that a “Beginning Zen: Introduction to Zen Meditation and Practice” would be helpful in

informing the larger prison camp population about the Saturday zazen. The word was spread during the month, and on December 28th, the Beginning Zen workshop attracted 18-20 men. Good planning and publicizing of the event resulted in a program that was well received. Practicing members of the Saturday group assisted in giving the instruction. The interest of the newcomers was evident as the value of daily practice was encouraged.

For members of the Clare Sangha, monthly visits to Lewisburg can open a new avenue of awareness and practice. The simple power of the reality of sitting together – men and women from various walks of life, religious traditions and cultures, all with many aspirations – can be an opportunity to see things in another way and to experience giving and receiving in equal measure. ❖



## SR. BARBARA CRAIG, RSM, SENSEI

At the close of the June sesshin, Roshi Janet Richardson and Sensei Rosalie McQuaide installed Barbara Craig as Sensei after her many years of dedicated Zen study and practice. Barbara is a powerful example of compassion in action in her prison work, her teaching at the Flowing River Sangha, and her life. To everyone, she offers Buddha’s gentle smile. Congratulations, Barbara, and thank you for your service to the Zen teaching and the Sangha!

## SESSHIN CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 7 – 9, 2003

APRIL 4 – 6, 2003

JUNE 20 – 26, 2003

AUGUST 1 – 7, 2003



# Fly on my Nose

Haiku from the June Sesshin

Corn rows strong and sturdy,  
“Yes, Master, up straight  
And paying attention.”

*Rosalie McQuaide*

Zendo mascot, gourmet small  
Flitting through the Zendo hall  
Who’s the tastiest one of all?

*Jane Kopas*

Sesshin. Buddha Boot Camp.  
Close-order kinhin.  
You’re in the Dharma now.

*Ed Sullivan*

Staff firmly planted  
Eye of the heart alert  
Seeing opens doors.

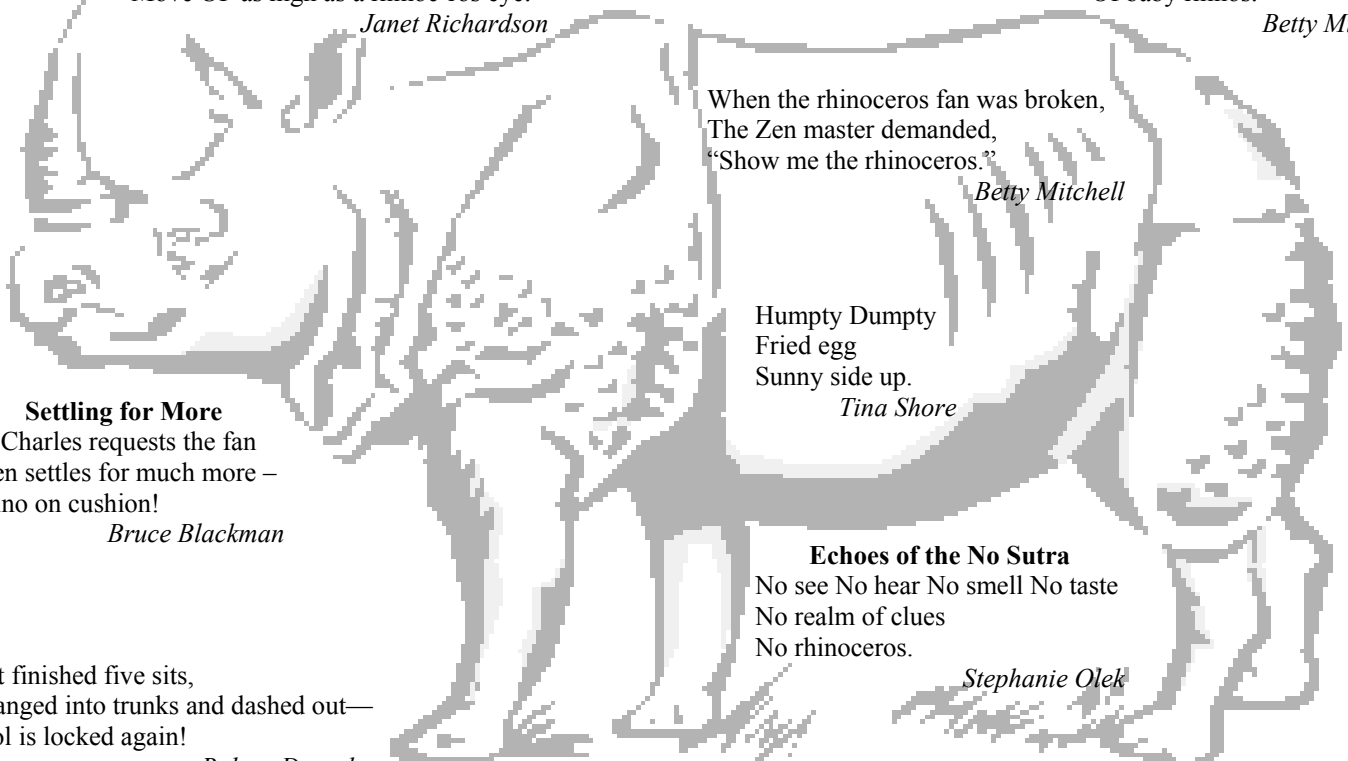
*Rose Mary Dougherty*

Corn row kinhin  
No step ahead  
Move UP as high as a rhinoc’ros eye.

*Janet Richardson*

Midday sun bears down hard,  
Mid-wifing at the birth  
Of baby rhinos.

*Betty Mitchell*



When the rhinoceros fan was broken,  
The Zen master demanded,  
“Show me the rhinoceros.”

*Betty Mitchell*

Humpty Dumpty  
Fried egg  
Sunny side up.

*Tina Shore*

## Settling for More

Sir Charles requests the fan  
Then settles for much more –  
Rhino on cushion!

*Bruce Blackman*

## Echoes of the No Sutra

No see No hear No smell No taste  
No realm of clues  
No rhinoceros.

*Stephanie Olek*

Just finished five sits,  
Changed into trunks and dashed out—  
Pool is locked again!

*Robert Druecker*

Serene! Deep breathing.  
Black umbrella over head.  
Sensei Charles. A wise teacher!

*Doris Mical*

Thoughts, like Zendo fly,  
Buzz around my head.  
“I’m here,” each says, “Play host.”

*Rose Mary Dougherty*

An itch? An ant? A tick!  
Very aware.  
Who said time passes swiftly?

*Ed Sullivan*

Wednesday, too early, teacher bellowing.  
A rush of expletives crashes the Zendo,  
Wilding, then passing.  
Raiding party gone.

*Greg Hartley*

Sore knees, numb toes  
Not the karma  
Of Bodhidharma.

*Tina Shore*

## Tame Flies

Tame flies while you sit  
Frog-like on zafu: “reb-bit!”  
They hear the dharma, too.

*Judy Bond*



### First One Through

Unseen chore of kinhin guide  
On the narrow path we take –  
Clear cobwebs!

*Bruce Blackman*

More wondrous than wind  
You, my brothers and sisters  
Your hearts blown open.

*Mary Garvey*

Old ladies whisper:  
“Like they ain’t seen wind before!”  
“Now, ain’t that the truth.”

*Mary Garvey*

Little insect on my arm  
Shows his bright back  
Of chartreuse and yellow.

*Barbara Harkleroad*

The elm sits for a century  
Grateful for the slow kinhin  
Of its shadow.

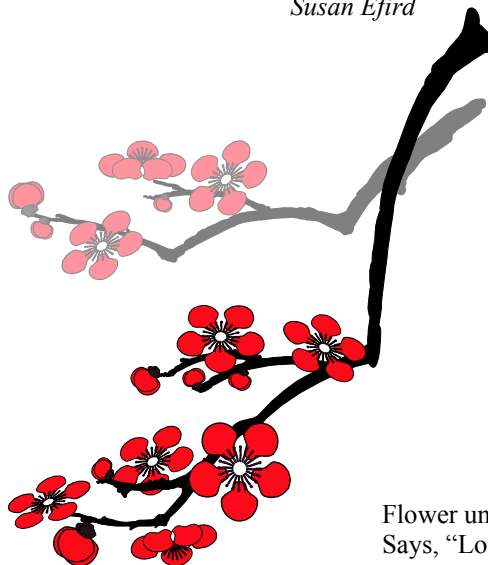
*Susan Efird*

Child inside hurting  
One way out. In.  
Just sitting. Aware. Compassion.

*Kirsten Madden*

Fireflies flash at random  
We sit in very straight lines;  
All are enlightened.

*Jim Thomas*



Breathing in creations  
When we are Aware!  
Breathing out creations  
When responsive to what we see!

*Mary Byrnes*

On my plot of earth, pine-tall,  
Knees bent like roots  
Breathing – opening the sky.

*Susan Efird*

Flower under the tree  
Says, “Look at me –  
I’ll show you what real red is!”

*Barbara Harkleroad*

Wait for interview:  
Yak, yak! How long can they talk?  
Moon rises . . . still lake.

*Robert Druecker*

Two yellow line through sleeping corn  
Road rises, foot falls  
Orange moon sinking.

*Norm Saunders*

**Precious Gratitude Practice**  
Darkness. Gratitude.  
Dharma. Gratitude.  
Clare Sangha. Gratitude.

*Kirsten Madden*

## KYOSAKU

Find the still mind of awareness between exhale and inhale  
– the Zen gate opens a crack!

Zen is not self-improvement! You are perfect as you are.  
Stop trying to get somewhere and let this moment have its  
way with you. Joy and compassion blossom.

*Norm Saunders*



## DO'S

A new residential Zendo. More weekend sesshins. *Two*  
6 day sesshins. Zen texts, chanting, and service  
workshops. Prison outreach. Opportunities for training  
and practice have multiplied at ZCB in the past year,  
thanks to the enthusiasm and dedicated efforts of our  
teachers and many others. It also takes money, so the  
Board has increased membership dues modestly to  
\$200/yr. But it won't be enough. Please do give what  
you can to help spread the Dharma!

## PRESIDENT'S CUSHION: THE TENZO

My first experience as Tenzo [sesshin cook] began as many of my first experiences. An opportunity needed a volunteer. I often wonder what compels one to volunteer. Is it the want to feel good about yourself and recognition? Is it the inability to say no when the opportunity arises or when someone asks? Is it the thrill of the challenge to achieve something that has yet to be done? Is it in your being? Is it the want to serve those in need?

For me, volunteering mirrors my Zen practice. It is who I am. It is an opportunity to serve the immediate community whether it is my family, Clare Sangha, work, or the community at large. Time and effort is one of the greatest gifts that can be offered. It is the gift of being yourself, not who you think you should be or who the community thinks you should be, but who you are through action. Action and inaction speak volumes. Action allows you to communicate in the present moment. Action and awareness allow you to move through and sense your surroundings.

As Tenzo my experience was wonderful. It was not wonderful because everything went smoothly. You would

need to exclude: buying too much food, burning the soup, trying to organize the line to serve food, not sleeping well for fear of oversleeping and not making the morning coffee. It was wonderful thanks to those who assisted me the entire weekend. Everything was planned except for the unexpected. As Tenzo I was able to work through each planned event. For the unexpected events it was those who assisted me through their actions that made the difference. A strong community approaches the unexpected with harmony knowing the final outcome will be what it is.

As Thanksgiving approaches, I find myself volunteering to cook a turkey for a Baltimore City Shelter (planned event). Due to the hours that I have recently worked (unexpected) I once again find that Kathleen has volunteered cheerfully to cook the turkey with herbs from our garden.

We are all Tenzos whether we are in the kitchen or not. Alone we can plan, with our community we can achieve. Through our practice we understand what life has to offer.

*Mark Wiess*

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PLACE  
U.S. POSTAGE  
HERE

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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