

Weaving Wind and Stone

Talks on Zen and Relationships

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Introduction

In the historical Buddha's story, he was so compelled to find a way to live in this world of inevitable loss that he separated from his community and his family. He tried many practices without resolution before sitting under the Bodhi Tree for seven days and seven nights and truly seeing the Venus star as it was on the morning of the eighth day. Sometime later, he rose and joined his friends.

Stories of our ancestors fashioned into Zen koans have been used for more than a thousand years to aid us in seeing that which there is to see and responding in accord. With every koan, each of us as Buddha has the opportunity to see what is before us. The years and miles that separate us from these ancient stories fall away, and within these ancestors we find ourselves.

This book began with a series of talks that used koans to step into the humanity of interactions. For the koans discussed, their vitality lies in the human interaction, the chafing we can't avoid even as we try to separate ourselves through the meditation techniques we hope will protect us.

The Diamond Sangha tradition in which I have studied was founded by Robert Aitken in Hawaii and has been a lay tradition going back to his teacher in Japan, Yamada Kôun Roshi. For us lay folk, we know the rub of *that person* at work, *that family member* making it awkward, and the disconnect between our bank balances and bills. Although, in the short time I stayed in a monastery, I didn't see the humanity of interactions there as much different in this regard. It is, perhaps, all the better that our koans are no purer than me, you, and the lives we lead.

The material for this book arose from my own metabolization of this ancient practice into my life of love and loss, peace and discord, which mix poignantly together. I turned it into a book to share with others who are finding their own ways to bring Zen to the unvarnished mess of this one life. While our practice is solitary, koan stories also show that together we are engaged in meaningful ways, with mutual support present in our traditions.

In my day job as a psychotherapist, I have the honor of seeing the timelessness of these ancient stories in another context. I use koans and other stories like myths that collapse the distinctions of millennia and miles. They show undeniably that you and I live in this world of pain and beauty and must navigate at times when all choices are undesirable, if not aversive. When anxiously waiting two weeks for a biopsy report to tell me whether I have cancer, just this. When watching a loved one dying slowly, just this. Separate from Zen training, we all are practitioners of the Way.

This book begins with two koans that pull us out of our pristine quiet and into the humanity we never left, reminding us that there is no one we meet who is not our teacher and who is not the Buddha. The book then highlights the form (observable ritual) of our practice when we are not within the walls of our meditation rooms, asking the question: When we don't have the clear form and guidance of our practice, how do we carry Zen? The chapters that follow pair ancient koans with contemporary stories and poems, and linking them to important and disordered aspects of life and relationships.

Years of practice and the number of koans addressed are no credentials when rubbing against those we live, work, and vote with (and against). This rubbing creates the heat in many of the stories in this book as well.

Whether in retreat, reading a book, or in front of the TV, you and I are under the Bodhi Tree. We care for our bodies with meals, sleep, sitting and walking meditation, and interacting with those around us. Central to our practice, whether in a room of black cushions, in the kitchen over an informal lunch, or joining the cacophony of life, is the letting go of concepts and standing with that which is simply true, not constrained by words.

Yet we are all social creatures. Shame and embarrassment are intense emotions arising from our awareness of others, the need to belong, to be respected, and to be cared for. We also all know what it feels like to be angry, hurt, let down, or misunderstood. We may also feel called to respond to what we see as injustice, exploitation, and mean-spiritedness. Finding ourselves in the old stories and in our lives today, the questions naturally arise: Where is Zen now? For me? Here?

These stories are valuable to me, though some were not immediately so. I've carried them for years and distilled them in talks with students and with others in my life. It was my honor to write this and reflect on my embrace of the stories, dynamics, and questions they stimulate. My hope is that you, as a reader and practitioner, will make each story your own, in your way.

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