

December 2002

## Our Marvelous Error

(with apologies to Antonio Machado)

by Joan Sutherland

December 2002

Two recent SMS events--Jeff Shore's talk in August and the Crestone retreat in October--seem to have raised some questions about the nature of Zen, and about our place within the Zen tradition. I'm glad to be reminded that these are good and fruitful questions to take a look at from time to time. There's a lot of ground to cover, so I'll just introduce the territory this time, and explore things in more detail in future issues of the newsletter.

One reaction to these events seems to be an idea that there's a 'real Zen' and then there's what we do, which some might call 'Zen lite'. Actually, there are different currents in the broad stream of Zen, which though flowing from the same source and headed towards the same ocean can look quite different on the way--just as a Catholic mass is a different kind of event than an evangelical revival meeting, though both are Christian. Crestone and Jeff Shore are part of the Soto current, and we are in a different one that combines both Soto and Rinzai, leaning as we go along much more towards the Rinzai. Just as importantly, we are also part of another current that scholars identify as Modern Buddhism, a recent and unprecedented development arising from the meeting of the Dharma with modernism and the Enlightenment values--egalitarianism, humanism, individualism, democracy, and the like--of Euro-American culture.

We might certainly say that the Crestone way is more traditionally Soto and more conserving of Japanese forms than ours is, but I don't know on what basis we could say it's more zen. We might say that Jeff Shore is describing a practice of meditation that is more traditionally Soto, more conserving of East Asian methods than ours, but we can't say it's more zen, either. We could discover that we feel a greater affinity with one style than another, but it's a whole other thing--and the entrance of endless heartache into our lives--to say that one style is (therefore?) better or truer. And unnecessary: To discover an affinity can be liberating--an exhilaration not often improved, in my experience, by judgment.

So yes, what the folks at Crestone do and the practice Jeff Shore describes are in some respects different than what we're doing. While we share a great deal, what we're doing is based on assumptions and understandings about human nature, the psyche, the place of practice in our lives, what we value, what we're trying to do, and how we're likely to accomplish it that are in some ways quite different. I realize that's a mouthful, and we'll talk more about it in the coming months. What I want to emphasize now is that what we're doing is actually on purpose, thought out, a particular thing in and of itself--and admittedly a work in progress. We've only been doing this for about ten years; we've hardly emerged from the vastness into form. That sense of the path unfolding as we walk on it can sometimes be frustrating, or even scary. A strong emphasis on form or an authoritative-sounding voice might seem reassuring in the midst of such provisionality; I'll admit that, as a teacher, it's challenging and sometimes exhausting to always be working at the very edge of my experience and understanding. A wise friend identified this problem twenty years ago when she asked, "How can we be initiated into a tradition that doesn't exist yet?" My problem is that I haven't been able to find anything else I'd rather be doing, and I'm sure glad some of you feel similarly.

Of course I recognize that what we're doing is a mistake, just as a more traditionalist approach would be a different mistake. Again, it's not that one way is better than another, but that, for me, this is the way with which I feel the deepest affinity, and so it is the mistake I choose. My working hunch is that it's important to make a field in which we can recognize the oldest things--the things they knew in China 1300 years ago and Northern India 2500 years ago and probably for millennia before that all over the world--in the images and metaphors of this time and place, arising out of our landscapes, our ancestral spirits, our deepest values, our poetries, our psyches, and our songs.

I confess to being a bit surprised by Jeff Shore's occasional strong judgments about traditions other than his own, and I did want to say a word or two in response to one of them. There's been a back-and-forth between Northern and Southern, or sudden and gradual, or Soto and Rinzai, or whatever we're calling it now, since the early days of Chan in China. I've always found this to be a creative tension, both in the development of Chan and Zen and within our individual practices, particularly in the way that shikan taza ('just sitting') and our kind of koan study can deepen and broaden each other. I agree that it's important to have a solid foundation in meditation when one takes up koans, but I'm not convinced that the methods are or necessarily should be strictly sequential--that one must reach a particular level of concentration through shikan taza (or some other method) before working with koans. For instance, I've seen people experience a depth and stability of concentration in working with a koan that eluded them in shikan taza, and this experience then strengthened their 'just sitting' as well. And koan practice--and the way of everyday inquiry arising from it--does include the character work not directly addressed by shikan taza, which I'd consider vital at any stage of practice. Again, more on how we're working with koans, and why, later.

Springs Mountain Sangha's open door has always been a great strength, and I hope we go on welcoming and learning from our companions of the Way in other traditions. Perhaps it's also good to remind ourselves once in awhile of what it is that we bring to the conversation, and I look forward to exploring that once again in the coming months.

"No Nature?"

"Can a person really have no nature?" asked Hui Tzu of Chuang Tzu.

"Yes," replied Chuang Tzu.

"But if you have no nature, how can you be called human?"

"Way gives you shape and heaven gives you form, so why can't you be called human?"

"But if you're called human, how can you have no nature?"

"Yes this and no that -- that's what I call human nature," replied Chuang Tzu. "Not mangling yourself with good and bad -- that's what I call no nature. Instead of struggling to improve on life, you simply abide in occurrence appearing of itself."

"If you don't try to improve on life, how do you stay alive?"

"Way gives you shape and heaven gives you form, so why mangle yourself with good and bad?"

But you

make an exile of your mind

and wear your spirit away.

you brood, leaning on a tree,

or doze, slumped over a desk.

heaven made this your form,

and you waste, twittering

away in a darkness of arcane

distinctions and quibbling."

from Chuang Tzu's

The Inner Chapters

trans. by David Hinton

## This is Ritual

Anything in this life we do seems to have the potential of being a ritual. Such as a cup of coffee with the morning paper. I like my coffee just so, a little cream, a little sugar approx. 1 teaspoonful and piping hot. There are also specific rituals that have worked themselves into my life as a result of practicing Zen, such as lighting a stick of incense as means of symbolizing a connection with a greater world, a greater self. The drive to the Crestone Mountain Zen Center for weekend retreats has become a ritual. A symbolic journey with a few discarded bits and pieces of myself littering the sides of the road. Many volumes of information about ritual have been written and many definitions are available so I am going to avoid being technical and stick with the ways in which I think ritual effects my own life and practice.

Quite awhile ago various sangha members answered a question in the Dharma Rag about what do you have on your altar at home? At the time I did not really have an altar so I wrote about what was on my desk. Some rocks, this and that, nothing too mystical. A bit later and after a move I decided to dedicate the top of my dresser as space for an altar. I put on my altar a Buddha figure a circle of rocks from far and wide, an incense holder, a candle, mostly the usual stuff. At first I did not think too much of having an altar space but as time has passed I have found it to be a useful and powerful part of practice. My altar is a personal space that symbolically reflects my connection with the spiritual world. It concretely points to something that I feel is larger than any definition I can think of. When I am feeling a particular need to “connect” to that larger space or address a feeling without really thinking about it I will often go to my altar, light a candle and then light a stick of incense as if I have just lit the end of how am and then offer it. It is an offering to an inherent and unspeakable nature that is intimate regardless of any judgement that I may have regarding it. I know all of this sounds nice, but what I have also found interesting is noticing how my meditation seems to have a somewhat different and deeper quality when I perform a simple ritual at a simple altar. I really cannot find the right words for it; it just has a feeling to it. Ritual just seems to have a life to it, probably a lot of my own life in there too. This year just after New Year’s day I glanced at my altar and just decided to tear it completely down and re-build it for the New Year. Re-doing it was more powerful than I had thought it would be.

Certain objects have a special meaning for me and yet would seem like nothing to others. One example is an ordinary old stick that I have. One day during the winter when I was driving downtown I saw a Cadillac with a flat tire and stopped to help. After helping mount the spare tire the driver wanted to give me some money and feeling altruistic I declined. Instead I saw a plain stick in his trunk and said how about that? He said “oh that old thing, I use it to open golfer traps, its just rubbish” and then he threw it into the snow. I picked it up out of the snow and drove off thanking him. The stick represents freedom to me (freedom for golfers too) and the fact that it is very plain is also meaningful to me. The body, I think, is a great ritual that is intimate with every thought and feeling. Every breath is a ritual, an inescapable form. A few years ago I began an ongoing yoga practice and have found that the various Yoga poses elicit various feelings. Curling into a ball like pose on the floor feels emotionally different than standing in warrior pose with arms and legs outstretched. Sitting on a cushion is ritualistic yet I know it has a very powerful effect on my body and mind. I get a similar body feeling doing a deep bow. A deep bow is such a surrender to me, hands, knees and forehead on the floor, back and neck exposed. A surrendering to my own nature, surrendering to you, to the world at large, it is faith writ large. Of course a deep bow is not the only way to experience the power of ritual but I find it helpful in practicing to let go. Sometimes I think ritual becomes depersonalized and ends up

seeming to point away from intimacy with our selves and seemingly toward an alien set of beliefs. I can see how bowing to a Buddha figure can seem alien. The Buddha figure to me is just a symbol like the symbols that make up these words. A symbol that is ultimately what I make of it, mostly to me Buddha represents everything as it is without trying to be anything else. Odd isn't it to have a symbol for that? Maybe we should just give deep bows to each other.

Randy Simpson

Tan-hsia took an image from the altar and burned it on a cold day to keep himself warm. When the caretaker of the temple protested, Tan-hsia said, "I wanted to collect the relics [said to remain after the cremation of a holy person]."

The caretaker said, "How absurd to try to find relics by burning a wooden statue!"

Tan-hsia said, "If so, may I have another statue to burn?"

Quoted from the Gateless Barrier, Case 33

by Robert Aitken

Note from David Sligar

We've lived nearly a year in Rio Rancho, and now I've been made "redundant" due to the current business climate. Because of my work status, our next move has been accelerated somewhat -- Donna and I plan to leave for Flagstaff, Arizona in February or March. Flagstaff is a mountain town, elevation about 7000 feet. The climate is mild and very similar to Colorado Springs, perhaps a little warmer in winter, but we are looking forward to more snow than Albuquerque gets! Northern Arizona University and Lowell Observatory are in Flagstaff. We are in the process of buying a lot about 8 miles outside town, and we intend to build our home there. I'll be doing as much of the work as I can, incorporating at least a modest amount of sweat equity. Of course, all plans are subject to change! We both look forward to occasional visits to the Springs. Donna sends her affections to all, as do I.

David

Poetry & Experiments

The Monster

I am Frankenstein

A monster pieced together

From odds and ends of other people

A little electricity

It is alive! It is I

(a non a mouse)

Q&A

(Object: each player writes either a question or an answer without knowing what the other has written.)

Q: What kind of curse word would trigger an avalanche?

A: Add two coats of varnish, sand and repeat.

Q: What makes you think I know that?

A: It is not a question of taste. Nutrition must be considered.

If/Then

(Object: Players each write part of a conditional statement without knowing what the other has written.)

If prunes are mixed with chili,

Then injury or death may occur and we will be held harmless.

If you believe that you are a monkey and jump from table to table,  
Then Jacques Chirac will take away your voodoo doll.

If you slice an avocado with Manjushri's sword,  
Then Hui Neng's mirror will break and cause you much misfortune.

If you polish the shoe rack for ten days,  
Then there is no "not-you" to be thus.

If you shout, "Where's the money?" in the Zendo,  
Then the butterfly will dream of being John Malkovich.

By Stephen Doyle and Randy Simpson

"The thing you said just now"

By Stephen Doyle

The thought balloon hovers above your head,  
but time is running out  
to deliver your apocalyptic message.  
Your hair will burst into flame,  
the night will get wrinkled  
and you will find gold in the folds of your dress.  
The arms of the old clock,  
that has not worked for centuries,  
will throw the whole world out the window.  
The meters will go hay-wire,  
the homing pigeons will get lost  
and the moths will go to bed early.  
I hear the cries of sheep in wolves' clothing,  
but I can't find the bus schedule  
upon which I scribbled your name.

Not Peace, Not War, Just peace

Recently I received a free bumper sticker from an organization that I support, that promotes a variety of peace efforts. The bumper sticker says, "WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER". At first I thought wonderful! They are getting the word out and people will be able to see it. However I became hesitant about putting it on my vehicle and I felt confused. I am definitely not for War, yet I did not feel right about using the sticker.

I do have some stickers on my car, one says, "For every tall oak there is a nut that held its ground." One conclusion was that I was afraid to put the sticker on my car because a pro war person could harm me. I felt kind of like a coward and not doing my part to stop war, but an interesting insight did come up for me while considering this. If I put the sticker on my car and a pro peace person saw it they would be happy to feel support, however they are already for peace and so it would not actually be changing much for them except giving them a little more hope, which is good.

Now if a pro war person saw the sticker it would probably anger them, maybe a lot, maybe enough to even hurt me. I would not want to cause that kind of anger for them or for me. I personally feel the effect of boosting anger would outweigh the effect of boosting peaceful action. So I have decided NOT to put the sticker on my car because I think the right sticker is already there, subtle is beautiful. I do feel that action must be taken to promote peace but first that action or message must be carefully examined and the audience thoughtfully considered.

-Randy

### Responding to war with Compassion

For many months, I've struggled with the reality of the impending war with Iraq. If we cannot stop it, how do we respond to it? Randy's essay inspired me to finally articulate my thoughts on this most difficult of koans.

First, I think pro this and anti that stickers are divisive and tend to over simplify the issues. I like Randy's oak tree sticker because it offers people something to think about and doesn't spoon-feed them someone else's pre-digested opinion. Many stickers express a black and white perspective that doesn't leave a lot of room for reflection.

Secondly, while being threatened by people who do not share your views is unpleasant, (I've been in that situation before) it is sometimes unavoidable. There is always risk involved in expressing yourself.. But such confrontation allow us to cultivate compassion for those who are obviously in pain. People who support the war are not for war per se but probably know someone in harm's way and they want to be supportive of them. They might attack people opposed to the war out of a sense of helplessness since they don't have the power to bring their loved ones back from a war or from death.

Regardless of the issues being fought over, in war, people die, people suffer, the land suffers, the country suffers, and that suffering fuels the potential for future war. Perhaps, in addition to waving peace placards and passing around petitions, we also ought to send loving kindness to the ultimate victims of war: the soldiers who have no choice in where they are sent. Not just to US soldiers, but to all soldiers who are caught in a bad situation. In "Blackhawk Down," the film about the 1993 Somalia action, one soldier says to another, "When the bullets fly, ideology goes out the window." This is a telling statement about the futility of accomplishing peace through war. A battle is no longer about promoting a policy, or a dogma, but about survival.

Let all people who find themselves in a conflict anywhere in the world do what they need to do to come home again. And let those of us in relative safety remember their suffering and honor them by finding new ways to resolve conflict so that war need not be necessary.

Metta,

Stephen

### Notices & Announcements

#### Call for Books for the SMS Library

We are setting up an intra-Sangha loan library and need contributions to broaden the selection. At the moment we have some excellent materials from Jeff Shore and three copies of "Taking the Path of Zen" by Robert Aitken.

To check out any of these materials or to donate to the library please contact

Annie Bane at 442-0099

email: annie.o@iname.com

To read is to be aware--To donate is to open doors.

#### Upcoming PZI Sesshin Schedule:

January 11-16 PZI Bare Bones Sesshin with David Weinstein & John Tarrant

April 9-13 SMS Spring Sesshin with Joan Sutherland

June 22-29 PZI Great Summer Sesshin with Joan Sutherland & John Tarrant

July 16-20 Mountain Cloud Zen Center (Santa Fe) Sesshin with Joan Sutherland

September 17-21 SMS Autumn Sesshin with Joan Sutherland

#### Teacher Residency

Joan Sutherland, Springs Mountain Sangha's holding teacher, will be here in April for a month's residency. In addition to leading our April 9-13 sesshin (meditation retreat), Joan will meet with the sangha and will work individually with students throughout the month. Early plans also include several public talks, an introductory workshop, and possibly an integrative retreat on Zen and myth. Look

for further announcements here and on our website, [www.zencorner.org](http://www.zencorner.org) .

### Meditation Instruction

Springs Mountain Sangha's meditation instructor, Sarah Bender, will be offering an eight-week introduction to Zen practice, Thursday evenings starting January 23, at 7 PM in the Susan B. Anthony Annex. Feel free to call Sarah at 594-0724 if you would like further information about this class.

Sarah is also available by telephone or to meet with you, if you'd like to discuss questions or concerns about your practice.

### Supporting the Sangha

We are sometimes asked if there are membership dues for Springs Mountain Sangha. So far we have not found it necessary to assess membership dues, but there are some ongoing expenses which are paid out of the contributions of those who attend our sittings on Monday evening, Wednesday morning and Saturday morning.

Our monthly expenses are currently as follows: \$100 to Joan Sutherland, our holding teacher from the Pacific Zen Institute; \$200 to All Souls Unitarian Church for the use of the Suzanne B. Anthony annex; \$40 for the telephone answering service; and \$25 towards the cost of the quarterly publication of the Dharma Rag. There are other miscellaneous expenses from time to time. So we need to bring in about \$400 a month in order to break even.

We hold three retreats a year and they are expected to pay for themselves from registration fees and contributions. This is not always possible, so it helps to have some reserves in the treasury.

If you would like a suggestion for what to contribute, we recommend \$5-10 per week. You may place your contribution in the donation bowl at one of our weekly sits, or you may go to our web site and contribute on line. But please feel free to sit with us, whether you can contribute or not. Your presence is your greatest contribution.

### Service Opportunity

Vermijo House, in Old Colorado City, provides low-income housing to about 10 people. Dinner is provided each night by volunteers. As you might imagine, it takes a fair number of volunteers to cook dinner every night each month, and a few people end up shouldering quite a bit of that load. New volunteers would be much appreciated! It's quite a lot of fun to go down, serve dinner and share it with the residents, who are interesting and enjoyable to hang out with. If you think you might be able to cook, say, once a month, please call Sheldon King at Ithaka Land Trust, 578-1629. If you'd like first to hear a little more about what's involved, you can call Sarah Bender at 594-0724.

### Steering Committee Meeting 12/13/02 Minutes

Annie, Donella, Robert , Elizabeth, Randy, Steve and William met at SBAA at 5:30 pm.

- Approved minutes of the last meeting.
- Treasurer's report: Robert reported that we were in good shape having recouped our losses from the last several sesshin at Rohatsu. This was largely due to those who donated food. In related business, Randy will set up website to accept Dana. Also, Robert will publish and appeal and explanation for donations to the Sangha. This will list our financial commitments in detail.
- Discussing Sesshin, we were generally pleased with the Rohatsu gathering. We felt that the intimate setting added to the experience and the only drawbacks were the steep stairs and having to house some participants remotely.
- We will schedule halfday sits for the 18th of January and the 15th of February. We will forgo March because of Kaz's visit.
- We will accept Ralph and Carol's invitation to host a New Year's Eve celebration. We will sit four blocks, eat and be merry until midnight when we will ring the bell 108 times.
- We scheduled a leader's meeting after the sit on Jan. 4 to clarify and practice form for sits and

sutra services.

- Sarah presented her conference with Joan about April's residency. We had a long discussion about what we would like to do with Joan while she was here and scheduled some events. Sarah will return our hopes and ideas to Joan while several of us will check out the possibilities here.
- We postponed several items due to time constraints, set up leaders for the coming month's sits, and finished up at about 8:00.
- These minutes were compiled and offered by William 12/20/02.

### Peace Meditation Walk

Please join us on the third Sunday of every month for a peace meditation walk. This peace action was suggested to people world-wide by peace activist and Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh.

We meet in different areas of Colorado Springs and walk around for about an hour.

Children and pets are welcome.

Following is the schedule through April:

All walks begin at 1 pm.

December 15th: Demonstration garden at Glen and Cache La Poudre streets

January 19: Shove Chapel-Meet on the Nevada Ave. side of Colorado College.

February 16: Palmer Park-meet at the parking lot on Maizeland near Academy.

March 16: Shove Chapel

April 20: Garden of the Gods-meet at the visitor center on 30th St.

For more information, please call Ralph Fritz 685-2469 or Paula Gossage 632-6189.

\*May we walk in peace\*

Ring in the New Year

with Springs Mountain Sangha

SMS will hold a New Year's Eve Gathering (the third annual!), this year at the home of new members Ralph and Carol Fritz.

Schedule for the evening's festivities is like this:

7:30 arrive, put pot-luck food offerings in kitchen, and set up cushions (please bring yours, if you have them.)

8:00 to 10:00 Sit four periods, ending with reciting precepts.

(It's fine to arrive at any time and join in during the walking times.)

10:00 Eat, drink and be merry---bring whatever you'd like to share: music, instruments, poems, your thoughts, food or drink.

12:00 Ring in the new year with 108 rings of the big bell.

Those who wish to will bring their accumulated incense stubs, which we will burn all together (outside).

Bring friends, if you like, for any and all of the evening.

Directions to Ralph and Carol's house:

From Colorado Springs-

Hwy 24 west past 31st street and Ridge Rd. to the first Manitou Springs exit (sign says "Garden of the Gods, Cog RR, Manitou" etc)

Bear right around the exit ramp and continue west on Manitou Ave. Make a left turn at the second traffic signal onto Crystal Park Rd (Savelli's restaurant on left and Subway on the right)

Follow Crystal Park Rd. around a curve to the left and then around a sharp curve to the right next to a stone wall.

Make the second left turn onto Sutherland ROAD.

Bear right at the next intersection and make a left turn at the next intersection at Sutherland PLACE. We will be the third house on the right at # 6 Sutherland Place. You can mostly just see the garage from the street. Park anywhere on the street or in the driveway if there is room. Come thru the gate on the left side of the driveway and come up to the house.

From Ute Pass-

Exit into Manitou and continue East on Manitou Ave until Crystal Park Road (Savelli's on right and Subway on left).

Turn right and follow directions above.

We are looking forward to seeing you all for News Years Eve.

Peace-

Ralph and Carol Fritz

6 Sutherland Place

Manitou Springs 685-2469

Dharma Connections the same

