

From the Abbot

Early Buddhist writings speak of 84,000 Dharma gates. An ancient Chinese Qigong text refers to the 84,000 pores of the skin, through which one can inhale and exhale energy. These 84,000 pores are breathing right now. When we give ourselves over to chanting, the pores of our skin resonate with the sound of the sutras. The sutras are coming and going through these 84,000 pores, and are breathing us. It's a two-way street: things come in, things go out. Whether it's Dharma teachings or obstacles and conflicts coming in and going out depends on the mind.

Everything is a teaching; in fact, obstacles are our best teachers. But typically, we don't see it that way. We get caught up in feeling sorry for ourselves: "Oh! All these terrible things are entering through the 84,000 pores of my skin! Poor me, look what's happening to me!" We forget that it's totally up to us: are we being enslaved by our karma, or are we gratefully receiving the teachings that we need, and extending our gratitude by listening to and responding to those around us? The stillness of our practice allows us to feel this deeply, and to take the time and the space to be present for another.

At the beginning of July, we had an unforgettable celebration of the 40th anniversary of Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji, the 50th memorial day of D. T. Suzuki, and the 60th anniversary of the Zen Studies Society, founded in support of Dr. Suzuki's writing and teaching in the West. At the end of July, several of us attended the 40th anniversary of our neighboring Sangha, the Dongkar Gonpa Society at Gangjong Namgyal temple, founded by the late Domo Geshe Rinpoche, with whom my husband, Andy, practiced for twenty years until Rinpoche's passing in 2001.

Rinpoche departed from this life on the eve of 9/11, as if he knew he would be needed to help those who were killed that day—to be there on the other shore, arms wide open to receive them. He was a remarkable teacher, whom I was lucky enough to meet on several occasions. What one felt immediately was his deep listening; an inconceivable stillness, humility, gentleness, and caring. There was no agenda; his teaching came forth as naturally and quietly as the deer that ate from his hand. One of his students, Olivia Ames Hoblitzelle, author of *Ten Thousand Joys & Ten Thousand Sorrows: A Couple's Journey Through Alzheimer's*, noted, "Rinpoche was a 'hidden teacher:' no scene around him, no public teachings." The practice there continues in that very private way.

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Who could have imagined that in July 1976 two authentic Buddhist temples would be established at the end of Beaverkill Road, in the remote Catskills, so close to each other! It certainly bears out the prediction attributed to the historian Arnold Toynbee that future historians would see the coming of Buddhism to the West as one of the most important events of the twentieth century.

We often speak of the Dai Bosatsu Mandala in reflecting on the interconnected spiritual happenings that resulted in finding the property for our envisioned country retreat center back in the late winter of 1971, and the creation of this mountain monastery on Beecher Lake. It was absolutely apparent from the first moment Eido Roshi and Sangha members saw it that this land was, as Case Four of the *Book of Serenity* puts it, “a good place to build a temple.” The pristine lake, the deep mountain setting, the historic Beecher House—indeed, as Soen Roshi said when he first saw the property in the summer of 1971, “This is like the site of an ancient temple!”

The Dai Bosatsu Mandala is none other than the cosmic structure of our Bodhisattva vow, which of course extends beyond property lines and calendar dates. And yet, how mysterious to have these two temples come into being in the same month, the same year, as Dharma neighbors in this vast mandala!

The 40th-anniversary sacred ceremony on July 30th at Gangjong Namgyal included a *guru puja* and *tsog* offering. The texts were recited in lightning-fast Tibetan by visiting rinpoches, monks, and lay practitioners. Reading the English translation, I was deeply moved. The prayers focused on the rare gift of being born in human form; the need for absolute, unswerving diligence to honor this precious opportunity; and gratitude to all the enlightened masters who have shown through their own lives, their own struggles, what it means to be human.

We cannot squander this rare gift, even for a moment. Rather, we must redouble our efforts to relieve the suffering of all beings. This means dedicated practice; being present as this very moment unfolds, with unfaltering resolve.

Whatever the circumstances you may be dealing with in your life, you will find that this *presence* changes your mind—and therefore, how you view your circumstances. And then what? When you leave the temple, and are confronted by some difficult demand, you will feel, “OK, this is what I’m here for. Now let’s take care of it.”

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After the ceremony at Gangjong, stories were told of how the property had been found, by speakers including Sheila Hixon, who with her late husband Lex had been instrumental in the search, and Philip Glass, Domo Geshe Rinpoche's first American student. Working with a local realtor, they had looked at many sites with Rinpoche, and to all of them, he said, "No...No...No...No...This isn't it..." After awhile, he refused even to get out of the car. So finally, they asked, "Rinpoche, could you give us just a little hint of what we're supposed to be looking for?" And he said, "Well, there are two stone pillars with lions on the top. And there are two other stone pillars with peacocks. And there's a little pond by a big house, and surrounding it are hills on three sides that look like a lotus flower."

So they went to the realtor and imparted this information, and the realtor said, "Hmmm. There is a place for sale that has columns like that, and a big house. And I think there's a pond in back. You could go look." So off they went, and Rinpoche said immediately, "Yes, this is the place." They were all so happy. And then he asked, "But where's the lake?" They went back to the realtor: "Where's the lake?" The realtor said, "Oh, it used to have a lake, across the road, but some people bought that part of the property, and I doubt they'd want to sell." They went back to Rinpoche, who said, "Tell them we want to buy it. They will sell." Sure enough, the owners agreed.

The mysterious mandala that brought Dai Bosatsu Zendo into being and the prognostication that resulted in finding the property for Gangjong may seem beyond rational comprehension, and certainly from that limited understanding, it is. But, as one of my favorite sayings of Eido Roshi's goes, "The real is not rational; the rational is not real." The deeper our Buddhist practice, the more we come to appreciate this, realize this, and actualize this. What may seem like special powers are not sought after. They come unbidden, the natural result of a practice in which there is "no hindrance in the mind." It's nothing special, and yet—how wondrous!