



THE THREE INFINITIES

Here at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, trees are in full leaf, irises are coming into bloom, and the monastery is surrounded by baby fawns prancing around their attentive mothers. Goslings and ducklings swim after their parents on the glittering waters of Beecher Lake. It's cold today after heavy rains, but the sun is breaking through, gleaming in the droplets on each leaf, each blade of grass.

It's an exhilarating time. Not only in our surroundings, but in our day-to-day practice of sitting, working, chanting, and study, we feel a vibrant resurgence and a renewed commitment to our Bodhisattva Vow.

This is manifesting in our efforts toward sustainability. It's a popular word these days, but it's one that we are investigating as a koan, fully incorporating the Three Infinities to which I often refer: infinite gratitude to all things past, infinite service to all things present, and infinite responsibility to all things future. This koan requires listening deeply, both within ourselves and to everything that surrounds us--breathing, fluttering, nodding, swimming, and seemingly still, seemingly insentient. It means realizing how small and temporary our place is in this vast, interconnected multiverse--and how our thoughts, words, and deeds have such a profound effect, for better or worse.

It means being aware that a superficial understanding of sustainability can lead to the fallacious assumption that we are somehow in charge--the typical anthropocentric attitude that has brought this planet to a disastrous point. How can we, for example, make decisions about the forest on these complex 1,400 acres unless we really become intimate with who lives here? Myorin Catherine Landis, our naturalist consultant, is working to do just that, most recently with one of our college interns, Kate Cheseborough. Slowly and meticulously, Myorin asks questions of the land and its inhabitants, listens closely, and records what she has learned.

Placing a hula hoop on the ground and then moving it to an adjoining area again and again, she asks, "Who lives here? What is the connection among these species, some minutely tiny? And what surrounds this three-yard circle? What is the age of this next-door tree? Who are its companions? Who is living in the understory, on the forest floor? What herbs? What fungi? How are the fish being nurtured by the streamside plants? How has seasonal flooding contributed to the dynamic enrichment of these riparian areas? What complexities of water's flow are shaping the many wetlands?"

Before we can make decisions about how to maintain a healthy forest, how to sustain the environment, we must know what we have. We must initiate a conversation with the beings in our neighborhood. Unlike the indigenous peoples who were here before us, we "owners" of land haven't always done that. When those who surround us are seen as resources rather than as relatives, as Onondaga Nation Faith Keeper Oren Lyons put it, the consequence is pollution of water, soil, air, and, most egregiously, of spirit.

But as recent research in evolutionary science has shown, all beings are indeed our relatives: anatomically we are related to plants, animals, every living thing--we have the same cellular structure, the same fundamental ground of consciousness.

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During the past three years, I have stressed the importance of really hearing each other, sometimes with words and more often wordlessly, listening to what lies beneath the words. It's a practice that arises from trust; it comes from the awareness and openheartedness of our zazen. It's what we do when we meet in council: each person speaks from silence, from deep within the heart, and there is no cross talk; everyone else listens from the heart, listens to the welling up of authentic, uncamouflaged, courageous truth.

At the end of this 38th Anniversary Sesshin that begins in just a few days, we will once again hold a ceremony of purification and will then participate in council.

As we learn to engage in this kind of compassionate listening with each other, we can do so with other species. It is, after all, our responsibility to hear a tree; to hear fish, snakes, spiders; to hear our mammalian sisters and brothers, giving them our full attention and respect. They are always offering their teachings, whether we listen or not.

We have also been focusing on the sustainability of our beautiful buildings, both at New York Zendo and at DBZ. We have been given these treasures to support and encourage our practice, and we must care diligently for them, leaving no stone unturned in our efforts to find creative and appropriate ways to maintain them for future generations.

At DBZ, with the expert guidance of our Dharma friend Ed Hinchey, an environmental engineer from Syracuse who has been enormously generous with his time and knowledge, we have been engaged in months of research into sustainable and ecologically sound approaches to our energy needs. This has led to the decision to install a geothermal heating system, initially just serving the zendo and Dharma hall, but eventually the entire monastery. We will also replace a no-longer-functioning wood-fired furnace with a carbon-neutral biomass boiler to heat the rest of the building. A more in-depth summary is given by Juyo Dennis Giacomo in this issue.

To sum up, this has been an extraordinary time of investigation, study, reflection, and listening. Thus we train: offering ourselves fully and unconditionally, and receiving the dynamic fullness of being.