PART V

A MEDICINE BUNDLE OF KOANS

Chapter Eleven

On opening the bundle

Long life, honey in the heart, no evil, and thirteen thankyous.
Old Mayan blessing

A 'medicine bundle' is a kind of tool-kit for shifting consciousness back in the direction of wholeness.

It is traditionally a miscellaneous collection of odd items—say, animal hair, a pine cone, seeds, resin, small carvings, arrowheads, beads, tobacco, teeth or claws, feathers, stones—things deemed to be of spiritual value in healing and transforming consciousness. Each of them might seem ordinary and incidental at a quick glance, but once in the field of a medicine bundle they grow more strange and begin to relate efficaciously to each other and to the world they interact with. In fact, they seem to have the power to bring the whole world with them. A resinous pine cone, half-opened, its beautifully formed structure revealed in a state of becoming, is a revelation of the nature of this world. As is the hand that holds it. Medicine bundles can look quite odd when you first unfold them. But that's okay. You look quite odd too at first, as you break back

into reality. Their other virtue is their size—they are small, and can be easily carried with you as you go.

In this case it is a small bundle of portable koans.

I will do what I can to tap on the words and help break them open a little, perhaps enough to let the koan begin to take an interest in you. Your job is to enter the world of the koan the way a story invites you in, and to let it inhabit you freely, keeping company with you the way a song might, letting it nudge or prod your habitual way of thinking into getting out of the way for a moment.

You can make yourself available to a koan in a number of ways, all of them valuable. For example, you can say the koan out loud to yourself, quite loudly, possibly a number of times, allowing the words to grow a little strange the way words tend to do when you repeat them. The more outlandish it sounds the better. Take your cue here from Alice in Wonderland when she protested to the Red Queen that 'One can't believe impossible things!' The Red Queen told her she simply hadn't had enough practice. 'Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast!' she briskly told Alice. Feel free to sing the words, shout them, whisper them, or even act or dance them out. The important thing is to let the koan into you almost bodily, before thought or self-consciousness steps in and starts finding fault. With any koan, you have nothing to lose but your dignity, and that's a small price for your mind, whole.

An equally fine way to take up a koan is to sit quietly and read or speak it to yourself before meditating for half an hour or so—not so much upon the koan as in its resonant company. Keep company with the koan not just while meditating, but in all kinds of circumstances. On a bus full of strangers, or alone on a windswept beach, if you are keeping company with 'What is my original face?' then you will carry that in your chest and belly as you sit or walk, heart and senses open, not so much looking to find an 'answer', as seeing what the koan wants to do with you.

And in the finest spirit of koan introspection, experiment! For

example, if you are keeping company with 'Shakyamuni touches the earth', you might want to do what Aboriginal elder Aunty Maureen Smith taught a number of us to do on a women's retreat: walk until you find the place that seems to want you to sit down there on the ground. Take a few quiet breaths and then touch the ground with your fingertips, easing them a little way into the earth itself, and say aloud, 'Hello, mother, this is your (daughter/son) saying hello to you,' giving your name. Wait for the response.

Every koan yields not so much answers to a question as responses from some deeper part of you that resolve the tension the koan had created. Trust every honest response that has a little bit of a shock of something new about it. Share the process with others, take up a koan in company with others and pool your findings. If you can meet in the classical dialogue situation of a Zen teacher and student, you can take this process much further, but in any case, no koan sincerely accepted as an offer ever stops opening. It shares that character with the universe itself.

My hope is that you will let each one find you exactly where you are, and in letting them engage you, help you back to your share of the playful confidence of human being in shape-shifting form: enlarged, at home on the planet, free to move in unexpected ways, willing even to be ridiculous and to fail. For each of these koans can call you back into what it is to be fully human, and how that might serve the great work of minding the earth. They may look rather slight and unlikely, but in a medicine bundle, everything *relates*, and that is what brings the whole back to life.

The thirteen koans are drawn from Zen and other places and chosen for their mutual power to return us to the mind of the earth, which is not only friendly to your life but has never been apart from it. Each of these koans is a matter to be resolved, or made clear. Once I woke from a dream with the words, 'Dreams are real till it rains.' *Realising* a koan is real rain falling right through waking up the dream. And 'making it clear' is becoming unable to respond except completely as yourself.

Every koan is a free gift, ripe to be remembered and passed along. When on earth, do as the earth does. As Walt Whitman said:

The earth does not withhold, it is generous enough.
The truths of the earth continually wait,
They are not concealed, either—
They are calm, untransmissible by print,
They are imbued through all things,
Conveying themselves willingly . . .

Fourteen koans, then—a baker's dozen, free for the taking, and an extra one for good luck.

Unnumbered. The koan *mu*

Explanatory note: You'll meet Zhaozhou more formally, below. With this koan, no explanatory note will ever stick.

The koan: **A monk asked Zhaozhou, 'Does a dog have Buddha nature, or not?' Zhaozhou replied, '*Mu*.'**

'*Mu*' is the Japanese way of rendering the Chinese character '*Wu*', which can be taken to mean 'No' or, even less than that, something like the prefix 'un-'. In the context of the monk asking whether a dog has Buddha nature or not, '*mu*' is saying, 'No, it does not have nor not have Buddha nature.' So *mu* marks the spot where you begin to dig for the fundamental self-nature that you (or a dog) can neither have nor not have. Can you either have or not have the universe?

The word is less a word than a greatly truncated expression of the whole universe and your own self-nature. It is the tiny and immense turning word that is often the first koan ever taken up by a person following the Zen path.

A turning word is some form of verbal provocation that spins you around 180 degrees to face yourself directly, if you let it. *Mu* is called 'the gateless gate', because while it lets us back into the fullness of reality that we had somehow locked ourselves out from, the moment that lock-out gate is open it becomes perfectly plain that it never existed.

It is a 'no-gate'.

Your job is to resolve not a question about dogs but the obvious and impossible question, implied here, which is 'What is *mu*?' Every great existential question is caught up in your search. What is reality? Who are you? What is this? And every minor non-existential one, too. Why is this so uncomfortable? When is this annoying koan going to leave me in peace? (The answer is, 'It's not.')

Mu throws you back into beginner's mind. It lets you approach and touch the really big question as something as close and personal as your innermost self. But the way *mu* works is by cutting

you off at every pass, just saying 'no' to every idea you try to have about it. Thus you can approach and touch it only in terms of what is *not* the case, and for which you have *no* words. It makes you tongue-tied. Nothing, but nothing, sticks to *mu*. Finding your way into great doubt and not-knowing becomes the only relief from ordinary doubt (this is hopeless, makes no sense; I am hopeless, make no sense; this is just a nasty little torture trap for the mind; I can't do anything with this).

When you truly can't do anything with *mu*, you are actually finally getting somewhere quite interesting.

At some point, this state of being implacably blocked by *mu* becomes oddly freeing. You go about putting *mu* like a joyful torch to everything you experience. You let the no-dog into the house to gulp down his no-breakfast. You walk down the no-street and look into all the suddenly mysterious no-faces of other people. You notice you are feeling a touch of no-blues today. You look in the mirror and see for the first time no-you.

You start to see the spaces between things, the place where things are not, as charged with presence. What if nothing is what you had thought? The barriers are falling.

When *mu* 'breaks open', as we say, because the feeling of release and an overwhelming 'yes' is immense, it is everywhere and in plain view to all the senses and the entire body and mind, no more hidden than the air ever was. How did it pass unnoticed right under our noses for so long—the medicine bundle of this whole universe? Nothing but *mu*.

Enough said about *mu*. In any case there is neither a koan anywhere that is not also the koan *mu*, nor a thing or being anywhere that does not already fully disclose its nature.

Basho:

Cold autumn rain
no rain hat ~
so?

1. Shakyamuni touches the earth

Explanatory note: Shakyamuni was the historical Buddha, who walked the earth 2500 years ago. No god, but a human being who woke up from the dream of himself and proceeded to live pretty much as one awake. In the course of this waking-up it is said that Mara visited repeatedly, trying to tempt him to abandon his quest and stay asleep. 'Mara' means variously delusion, destruction, death—you've probably noticed how these all work rather closely together. Even seen simply as our own resistance to waking up, Mara can certainly be persistent.

The koan: **When Shakyamuni meditated beneath the Bodhi Tree, Mara pointed to the place where he sat and demanded, 'Who witnesses and confirms your right to the seat of enlightenment?' Shakyamuni reached down and touched the ground with his fingertip. 'I call the earth as my witness,' he replied.**

The story goes on to say that with this, the earth shook, flowers rained down, the earth goddess herself emerged half from the ground (after all, earth cannot ever fully 'emerge' from what she already is), attesting to and sanctioning the right of the Buddha—of any one of us!—to enlightenment.

But you don't need to get fancy for this koan to set you on a path of minding the earth. Stay for a moment with this powerful image of contact, the touch of human finger pointing to and meeting with the fully responsive earth. A fingertip is highly sensitive body and consciousness combined. Explore the *charge* in that. Michelangelo's image of the moment of creation of human beings has the fingertip of God reaching down to touch the extended fingertip of Adam. There's a two-way flow there—Adam reaches towards God in mirror image, though one is above, one below.

In this koan, Shakyamuni asserts that the ground and source of his being is not separate from the earth, and that the ground of his being, earth itself *is* his waking up. Earth and fingertip—touch

and confirmation—are interchangeable. Who can finally say who reaches out to whom, and whether earth confirms the waking-up, or waking-up confirms the earth?

Look all the way into this trusting, tender, fearless touch of human flesh-and-bone re-igniting full contact with the responsive earth. How badly this needs to be restored to the understanding of what it is to be human, and sharing the address Planet Earth, Solar System, Milky Way, The Universe, Mind of God . . .

Meditate on your own hands and feet of flesh and bone as a miracle of the earth. Where did they come from? Do you understand the full marvel of such business as 'sitting on the earth', 'sitting under a tree', or 'walking on the earth'? In walking meditation, some say a flower grows under every footstep that touches the earth as if for the first time, feeling into it with every one of the twenty-six bones of the foot, presuming nothing. The earth returns the favour in full—exactly meeting the foot or fingertip, fully returning the intimate contact, with an equal touch addressed to the awareness of the human being.

If we write off this affinity and mutuality as 'mere' gravity, that simply renames the mystery. Dante wisely named the force that sculpts all form and maintains the dynamic holding patterns of the universe, 'the Love that moves the stars and the other planets'.

It's the earth that gives us ourselves, and the earth that gives us back ourselves—by which I mean *wakes* us—when we can reduce our human noise enough to stop drowning out the signal. And at that moment of such deep response, it seems the earth has always been calling to us. Such generosity deserves to be returned. It's good to ask—does this action I might take, or situation I am in, meet with the terms and suit the spirit of the earth, or not? Does it 'cultivate a mind to follow Nature, and return to Nature', as Basho recommended?

Waking up certainly does so! Waking up goes as far as sharing one mind with the earth—literally *minding* the earth.

Walt Whitman understood what the Buddha, alone under the

Bodhi Tree, confirmed when he called on the unparalleled generosity of the earth to help him break free from a too-small dream of himself:

> Whoever you are! You are he or she for whom
> the earth is solid and liquid,
> You are he or she for whom
> the sun and moon hang in the sky,
> For none more than you are the present and the past . . .
> No one can acquire it for another—not one;
> No one can grow for another—not one.

Basho:

> Field of cotton ~
> as if the moon
> had flowered.

2. Asan's rooster

Explanatory note: Asan was an enlightened laywoman in Shinano who, late in life, encountered the towering Zen teacher, Hakuin. Hakuin greeted her simply by silently holding up one hand. Asan immediately responded, 'Even better than hearing Hakuin's sound of one hand, let's clap both hands and do some real business!' Hakuin was delighted to accede.

The koan: **Asan was a laywoman who studied Zen with Master Tetsumon, unremitting in her devotion to practice. One day during her morning sitting she heard the crow of the rooster and her mind suddenly opened. She spoke a verse in response:**

'The fields, the mountains, the flowers and my body too
are the voice of the bird—
what is left that can be said to hear?'
Master Tetsumon acknowledged her enlightenment.

As one always blessed by not one but *two* roosters in my morning sit, I can understand Asan losing track of everything she thought she was with the help of a rooster. We did have three, but a fox snapped up the exceedingly handsome Jubal Farnsworth when he rushed to defend two of his hens deep in meditation upon their eggs.

That left young Pericles, *not* a hen after all but very beautiful, and his pal, Shadrach, who makes up for stumpy tail plumes with a pompous way of walking. There's no choice at six in the morning but to enjoy their cries that claim the whole world—repeatedly. But the creek music flows right through, the wind, too. At best there's no irritated person left to hear; at worst, handy reminders to get out of my own way.

To meet Asan where she is, you have to discover what 'unremitting' and repeated practice might be like. And then the chance of discovering what she meant by 'no one left to hear' becomes distinctly possible.

Repetition can be useful—the word 'practice' already implies

something about that. But roosters take it further. They know what an acoustician like Murray Schafer knows, which is that there is no harm whatsoever in repeating a good sound.

After all, no natural sound ever comes again: each appearance in the world is its own freely accepted extinction.

'Repetition never analyses but merely insists,' says Schafer (also on behalf of roosters). 'Repetition makes the listener participate not by comprehending it but by *knowing* it.' When we find the centre, this whole body becomes an ear, and with no impediment of thought, sounds can at last bring the world whole, *knowing* it.

And it is the *whole* world that finds out the true person.

Not only roosters can deliver this lucky break but the creak of a floorboard, the clink of china, somebody's sneeze in the early morning—any sound that finds little or nothing left of you to stir and follow after it but just fills you completely can let you in directly to the shocking open secret: 'What is left that can be said to hear?'

For the Zen Master Ikkyu it was not roosters but a crow calling in the early morning as he lay in a rowboat on Lake Biwa: KARRRHHHHH!!!! How generously they give themselves away, holding nothing back, these wondrous forms of 'nothing left to hear'. Always at hand to ease us back completely into 'fields, the mountains, the flowers and my body too'. What is that body, at such a moment?

And how patiently they wait for us, the cries of the world, always ready to meet us when we suddenly let ourselves back in. Calling out repeatedly, just to let us hear what love sounds like when there is nothing attached to it. Like the girl in the old Chinese folksong, who knew her lover was somewhere out there in the dark, so she called time and again for no good reason to her maid, just so her lover could hear her voice. 'Little Jade! Little Jade!'

AURrroockkkauurrrocckkkarrrrhooooooooOOOOOOooo!!!

No-one. No-thing. No-rooster. No-me. Not even fields, mountains, flowers; waves gently slapping the sides of a wooden boat; though they're here, too.

But look, it's not just about lying back and having the whole world advance and confirm your utterly unexpected self as the cry of a bird. It's what you do next. When the mind suddenly opens, the cries of the world grow no less acute. Ask Kuanyin, goddess of mercy, who hears all the cries of the world with no picking and choosing, no barrier in her heart.

The hen, it is said in Chinese lore, listens with her heart to hatch her eggs: a useful pointer to the ripening of a practice. And listen well, says the hen. We don't know when we will be snatched by one fox or another.

In a world on the brink of crumbling in mass extinctions, how will you actualise the cry of the rooster with this whole great body and mind, of fields, mountains and flowers? As Zen Master Linji said, 'When you know who you are then you can be of some use.'

You won't be alone. Asan will be there, and one or two roosters, in fact we're *all* in this together. The helpful ongoing cry of the world. How vast it is. How important to tune in. And how interesting 'you' turn out to be!

Basho:

Sparrows in eaves
mice in ceiling ~
celestial music.

3. Welcome

The koan: **A student asked, 'When times of great difficulty visit us, how should we meet them?' The master replied, 'Welcome.'**

At the end of his masterful story, 'The Dead', James Joyce has the famous passage that begins, '. . . Snow was general all over Ireland.' It goes on to follow the snow falling softly everywhere, into the little waves of the Liffey, onto the pickets of fences, deep into the hollows of graves . . . Somehow we know this to be mercy, falling softly and equally on the just and the unjust, without distinction. A general amnesty.

Likewise in the koan: 'Welcome' is extended without discriminating worthy from unworthy. First it welcomes the question which itself, whether consciously or not, receives and extends the welcome that is everywhere too. How should we meet the crowding difficulties on our earth? May welcoming them be our only choice, if recoiling from them is the invitation for planetary emergency to become planetary disaster?

'Welcome' is a bold use of consciousness rather than a way of being polite. To commit to a practice of mind begins to return the *welcome* that is already apparent in your sheer existence. When you practise 'Welcome' you can try breathing it into every out breath, regardless of any preferences about what is currently happening. When you extend that impartial welcome, preferences start to seem like small change. Just bits and pieces of little value that will rattle about and weigh you down.

And if you relax your thoughts, grow still and look closely, the 'Welcome' offered with each breath starts to *discover* welcome, picking it up everywhere—in the way the skittish breeze picks up the leaves and has them take off across the grass, delighting the pup. It finds the welcome freely available in just what is.

Difficult times are surely visiting us. Polar bears would agree. Cool-climate species clambering in hasty retreat up warming mountainsides would agree. Islands of plastic swirling in the middle

of the ocean would seem to bear it out too. Even in difficulty, the koan tells us, maybe especially then: extend the welcome. And not just because there's nothing much to admire about running from it. Big-heartedness and fearlessness come in together across the welcome mat. Which, if you look, both welcomes whatever comes visiting *and* equally welcomes you back into the world, every time you step out from closed habits of mind.

The koan seems to think that even in difficulty you are free to not just offer but to *find* the welcome. 'Welcome' means don't protect your self from what's true. Akira Kurosawa tells of his mentor, film director Kajiro Yamamoto, chastising him for covering a moment of ignorance by pretending to know the meaning of two characters on a sign, a minor detail on the film set. '"You must not say irresponsible things. If you don't know, say you don't know." I had no reply,' Kurosawa wrote in his autobiography. 'These words have stayed with me. Even today I can't forget them.'

The welcome offered to what is true keeps us honest, alert, less likely to cut ourselves out of it. 'I don't know' is an open door to exploring the welcome. The alternative quietly clicks shut and locks us in.

Many teachers suggest you take your own inventory. Not a bad thing to do in the dark sometimes, while also softly knowing you are breathing in and breathing out. Look back at your day—what motivated you in this moment or that one? Kindness? Fear? Indifference? When did you feel yourself stepping outside the welcome? What were those brief moments of feeling perfectly at rights, entirely welcome here? Could it just be feeling water running over your skin and needing nothing more, gazing from the window for a few moments of wanting nothing. In every open moment, the welcome slips in.

'Welcome' can test and demand patience, but a peaceable mind is a crowning advantage when times of great difficulty visit. It's not immediately easy to accept insult and injury without becoming injured and insulted. But if you can truly sense that you are

welcome here without qualification, there may be no great need to be insulted or injured. Then the way to be and act is unconstricted.

Most human insults will be nothing in a hundred years, but our collective insult to the earth threatens to mean even more in a hundred years than now, delivered to the generations who follow us. We're choosing the world our descendants will have to bear. What must 'Welcome' grow to encompass in this powerful light? If we don't rouse ourselves to recover our manners as a species and rediscover how to extend the welcome to the earth and all who share it with us, the welcome that the earth extends to us, how will we live with ourselves?

Death may be the final welcome we need to find in this bodily life. But even then, 'final' is hard to find. Think of the resolution of the 1972 Stockholm Conference, precursor to the 1997 Kyoto Accord: 'Life holds to one central truth: that all matter and energy needed for life moves in great closed circles from which nothing escapes . . . moved through vast chains of plants and animals and back again to the beginning.'

The earth hides nothing about how to live with it, with our mortality, and with each other—and so even with our selves! When we know ourselves we know the earth—*that's* the fullness of the welcome. Walt Whitman once more:

> The earth does not argue,
> is not pathetic, has no arrangements,
> does not scream, haste, persuade, threaten, promise,
> makes no discriminations, has no conceivable failures,
> closes nothing, refuses nothing, shuts none out.

But in the face of the depth of insult offered to the earth by *our* arguments, arrangements, screams, haste, threats, promises, discriminations and failures, the form that its resilience takes this time may not fit inside human plans at all. The 'Welcome' will go on, but we may not be here to return it. Better start to return it now.

Basho:

Coolness of the melons
mud flecked
in morning dew

4. All over the body, hands and eyes

Explanatory note: Yunyan (780–841) and Daowu (769–835) were both Tang dynasty Zen masters of great note. In Buddhism, Kuanyin, the Bodhisattva of Great Mercy, embodies compassion as the wisdom of non-separation. She is said to hear all the cries of the world, and is often depicted with many (read 'countless') arms reaching out to alleviate suffering, each furnished with an *eye* in the palm of the hand. Awake and free of self-consciousness, responding without hesitation to the cries of the world direct and in person—that's compassion.

The koan: **Yunyan asked Daowu, 'How does Kuanyin use those many hands and eyes?' Daowu answered, 'It's like someone in the middle of the night reaching behind her head for a pillow.' Pressed to explain his understanding he said, 'All over the body are hands and eyes.'**

In the Song of Solomon comes the beautiful line, 'I sleep, but my heart wakes . . .'

Waking up happens when the sense of self finally drops off to sleep. Exactly as that subsides, an entirely natural ease and immediacy begins to open in the heart. 'Like reaching for a pillow in the middle of the night'—how simple and natural real help is, not straining to do good or disturb anybody, just helping everything be more at home and at ease. Kindness, like ripeness, is all.

What if the powerful correction needed to avert calamity in the course of post-industrial human life were also as simple and natural as this? Is it possible? How can we get all the way back down to that level of sanity and coherence? The koan suggests how: 'All over the body are hands and eyes.' Where's the 'doing' then?

Zen teacher Katsuki Sekida gives a glimpse into 'where' when describing an old priest close to the end of his life. The man, who lived by himself, had been ill, and was mostly just sitting quietly and basking in the winter sun by the window, occasionally

composing a haiku. In the course of his conversation with Sekida, he pointed to a pine grove in front of the temple and said, 'You know the Zen question, "The Bodhisattva of Great Mercy has a thousand hands and a thousand eyes; which is the true eye?" I could not understand this for a long time. But the other day when I looked at the pine trees bending before the cold blasts from the mountain, I suddenly realised the meaning. You see, all the boughs, branches, twigs, and leaves simultaneously bend to the wind with tremendous vigour.' He made some quiet, earnest bodily gesture as he spoke and Sekita could see his intimacy with the pine trees. Sekita saw that he was in the evening glow of his life. He died a few weeks after that meeting.

As a child I recall lots of moments when I did not really know for sure where I stopped and the grass or mud or sky began—didn't you? This *body* covered in hands and eyes is very big. It turns out to be so much bigger than my skin and bones or yours, yet does not leave me or you out. Every leaf in the wind is included, along with the scatter of red hens on the green grass, and the mountain looking on. Everything moves together, and when that is so, in a deep sense nothing moves. An ecology in its state of balance is like that.

So, too, the sensitivity of the body in meditation is like that. Helpful hands and awake eyes all over the body and right throughout as well.

When looking for a way out of paralysing fear and confusion at the immensity of the problem we are facing now, much can be entrusted to the hands and eyes all over the body of the earth, for we too are made of this responding even before thought of responding arrives. The 'tremendous vigour' the old priest saw in the soughing branches of the pines, bending as one in the wind, comes back to each of us when the sense of 'I' begins to relax away from resisting reality so hard ('I sleep . . .').

When this happens ('. . . but my heart wakes . . .'), we find ourselves right at home with our fellow beings in the vast net of life, all in it together. And this 'it' has no beginning or end, front or back,

up or down. Just looking at us, all so different, you'd never know we're family. Just joining us, it's very plain.

Kuanyin could easily be mistaken for our singular blue-green planet swimming in space, blooming with life, the most vivid expression of interdependency yet found in the universe. Now, how will you align your mind with a mind like that?

Tim DeChristopher, in his inspiring speech to the court when sentenced to two years in federal prison and a $10,000 fine for the crime of disrupting a Utah Bureau of Land Management auction in 2008 in order to preserve a fragile ecology from destruction of oil and gas exploration leases on public lands, shows what 'hands and eyes all over the body' might look like in these later days:

> Those who are inspired to follow my actions are those who understand that we are on a path toward catastrophic consequences of climate change. They know their future, and the future of their loved ones, is on the line. And they know we are running out of time to turn things around. The closer we get to that point where it's too late, the less people have to lose by fighting back. The power of the Justice Department is based on its ability to take things away from people. The more that people feel that they have nothing to lose, the more that power begins to shrivel. The people who are committed to fighting for a liveable future will not be discouraged or intimidated by anything that happens here today.
>
> And neither will I. I will continue to confront the system that threatens our future. Given the destruction of our democratic institutions that once gave citizens access to power, my future will likely involve civil disobedience. Nothing that happens here today will change that. I don't mean that in any sort of disrespectful way at all, but you don't have that authority. You have authority over my life, but not my principles. Those are mine alone . . . At this point of unimaginable threats on the horizon, this is what hope looks like. In these times of a

morally bankrupt government that has sold out its principles, this is what patriotism looks like. With countless lives on the line, this is what love looks like, and it will only grow. The choice you are making today is what side are you on.

Writer and former Zen monk, Clark Strand, pictures each species as a flame handed down, 'from deep time to deep future' by one individual to the next. The flame is protected from extinction by being passed candle to candle. It is not about protecting the self—that merely protects the candle. To protect the flame, we must protect *the other*. Everything moves together.

Life depends upon this fundamental sacrifice of self. The only way to keep any great gift is to give it away. But in full intimacy with the other, nothing can be lost. Perhaps the only way to fully restore the ancient welcome of the earth, so long ignored and trampled, is to *personally* welcome the earth's demanding difficulty right now as our own, and as vital news from home about intimacy with the other.

Basho:

Deep autumn ~
my neighbour
how's he going, I wonder

5. Your own original face

The koan: **What is your original face that was yours before even your parents were born?**

I once heard an account of a treaty signing, high above the snowline, between a party of Indians and a party of soldiers. The soldiers arrived on horseback, muffled in greatcoats, scarves and fur hats against the bitter wind off deep snow, whereas the Indians, also on horseback, arrived bare-armed, with just pieces of fur slung across their bodies.

The soldiers were impressed despite themselves. 'How do you stand the cold?' the general managed to convey through his Indian interpreter. In reply, the chief of the Indian party pointed to the soldiers' bare faces. 'You do not cover face.' The general and his men were about to protest how that was different, faces being less subject to cold, when the Indian chief waved them to silence. 'Indians—all *face*,' he said.

Only the wind had anything further to say.

The *face* bears our most intimate image of ourself. It's mysterious how acutely and comprehensively we can recognise an individual from such a tiny set of features—eyes and mouth horizontal, ears and nose vertical, with minutely different shapes and distances between—and read them for subtle signs of character and telling shifts in emotional states. How together such a small set of variables can generate seven billion utterly distinct and memorable visages that matter so much and will never be seen on earth again.

The Indian chief wasn't talking about self-presentation, ego cover or saving face. 'Face' in his world evoked something very different, and long neglected in these times: a shaping of the self through years of hard and willing discipline of mind and body, in a way of life *not* carved out as far as humanly possible from 'nature' as though nature were something threatening or inhuman.

'Face' then implied the contrary—a deep accord that had been won with nature, a trust or confidence that felt somewhat mutual

and returned, a quality of being calmly face to face with reality. The dignity and fearlessness of that strong presence of *face* silenced a victorious general.

'Indian, all face.' On the strength of such evidence of mutuality, could we dare to wonder 'Nature, all face', too?

The original face of you and me—what could be more personal than that? And yet what could be more public, too, always the place to which our eyes go first to know *the person*? And yet, the koan says *this* face preceded even our parents who formed it, which means we must look right into the disappearing point and final darkness of the word 'original'. The darkness in it suggests we try abandoning presupposing anything, while keeping eyes, ears, skin, heart peeled, as we proceed on in. Meditation, the practice of open awareness, is like this.

Clues to your original face will not be found in family trees—though the tree of life may be another story. However many updated photos of yourself appear on your Facebook wall, searching there will make it even harder to spot—though in truth there's nowhere it can hide from view. And while the story of your past does nothing to hide it, looking for it there will lead you astray. For that story is a question, too. The story that shores up your sense of self may identify your parents, as well as the one who must pay taxes in your name and remember to put out the garbage bins on the correct night, but your original face is not restricted in any such ways.

Seeking it is the very opposite of self-absorption. *That* mania, currently taking star billing in the world of boundless consumption, has probably always had more than enough time on the stage of the human mind. The disconnect from reality inside self-absorption can be very powerful; it seems reality can always be put aside in its favour.

But ignorance and a walled-off mind offer no amnesty from reality. Opening to reality *is* the amnesty. A breeze stirs the trees in early sunlight, dissolving last night's touch of frost into a brief glittering shimmer of leaves. Face to face, you cannot turn away.

Seeing through that disconnect is not so much a matter of self-effacement, or dwindling in scale before the immensity of nature, as recognising with simple amazement that your entire being cannot be told apart from it. Then you start to catch confirming glimpses of the original face—entirely yours—in the flashing mirror of twigs, wombat scat, droplets on bracken, washing pegged out in the breeze . . .

So take a bold look, for your original face has nowhere to hide. When you know who you *are*, then the question, 'What on earth can I do to help?' grows far less arduous and tortuous, remote. Earth's grandeur is not outside you, earth's cries are right in your own chest, earth's hand and feet are not other than your own.

'What to do' just follows on naturally from here.

Basho:

Pine mushroom ~
a leaf of some kind
sticking to it

6. One treasure hidden in the body

Explanatory note: Yunmen (864–949) is the great master towering over the end of the Tang period of Zen. His brief words, struck like sparks from a flint, carried immense force, often reducing people to powerful silence. 'The whole world is medicine' are his words that initiate the entire impulse of this book.

The koan: **Yunmen said to the assembly, 'Within heaven and earth, in the midst of the cosmos, there is one treasure, hidden in the body. Holding a lantern, it goes toward the Buddha hall. It brings the great triple gate and puts it on the lantern.'**

That's *your* own body that hides the treasure (although that's not quite the end of the story). Equipped with heart and lungs working intricately together in a way that beggars the imagination; elbows that do not turn backwards; toenails that can grow unruly; limbs that fray strangely (if you think about it) into things called 'hands' and 'feet'; twenty-six separate bones in the foot; that heavy, warm, wet, foamy jelly inside the skull called 'brain', which carries the infinitely subtle touch of thought in its cells; possibly hair growing out of that head, possibly not . . .

The body in itself begins to sound like quite a treasure! With miraculous powers. For that body can sit still and quietly breathe and come to peace, inclining the mind to follow suit. It can carry a lantern and put it on the gate. The hidden, the mysterious, the essential side of everything begins to come clear right out in the open, when this kind of thing happens.

The Buddha sat his body down under the Bodhi Tree for seven days and nights, vowing not to get up until he had unearthed the treasure and come clear—radiantly so. One story says it wasn't just the human being called Shakyamuni who came brilliantly clear when he happened to glance up and see the radiant Morning Star hanging low in the sky, finally recognising himself beyond all doubt. That one treasure within

heaven and earth, in the midst of the cosmos, which body was it hidden in? Buddha? Star?

Yunmen assures us there is just one treasure hidden and discoverable in this unlikely human form. What *is* this one treasure that seems to take every variation in its stride and make no distinction whatsoever? It cannot even seem to tell stars from human beings. But its powers are such that it can take the great triple gate, the elaborate set of gateways at the entrance to a temple complex, and set it down upon a fragile lantern. Now that needs looking into!

But in fact, even 'body' needs looking into. How is your body or mine finally distinct from, say, the grass that raised the cow that gave the milk that made the cheese you ate for breakfast? Or from the rain and soil that grew the grass, or from the rivers, glaciers, winds, rot, worms that made the soil? Or before that, the vulcanism that poured lava into mountains of intricate mineral composition? Or the infinite lineage of ancestors living and dying, and the thousands of marvellous errors and inventions that shaped the genomes that led all the way down to you, me, cow, earthworm . . .? Or the supernova that exploded to give birth to the sun and Planet Earth? What final distinctions can survive the scrutiny of the heart and mind looking into what lies 'hidden' in plain view?

Butterflies are not left out of you any more than the sound of creek water rushing smoothly over its rocks. Not with this in mind but with *this mind*, the one treasure is disclosed to your heart. Four blue and purple king parrots just flashed from one green branch to another. Four gorgeous parrots, one treasure. Now our handsome Sussex rooster, Pericles, arrives importantly beside me on the verandah, friendly in his shyly offhand way. Five birds then, and me. One treasure. Or even less than one.

Everything that is comes out of nothing and goes back in again. Not one thing exists without all the others. And these 'others' are finally hard to find. When you really look, and turn all its pockets inside out, this whole great body of form turns out to be marvellously empty of defendable distinctions. That's so even given the

fact that your fingerprints have never been seen on earth before, and never will again.

Is this strange set of circumstances the real source of the efficacy and accomplishment displayed by everything? Take the miracle of walking on the earth, placing one foot, lifting the other and then placing that one, shifting your weight forward, falling and not falling with every step. Once you bring your attention to it, like anything else, it grows astonishing—leaving you little time for anything else.

This effortless power of knowing how to move your hands and feet: where does it come from? And how wonderfully well we are constantly using it.

Sometimes, for no reason, you can suddenly see that to be as compelling as it really is. Once, towards the end of a road trip, still under the light trance of a long drive, I slowed at an intersection and saw two people coming to a halt as they waited to cross. They were gently—but suddenly mysteriously—still *swinging* their arms slightly as they talked. Have you ever tripped over how strange, beautiful and unlikely *swinging* is? Involving *arms*, whatever they really are? I found tears in my eyes. What they were doing, and how wonderfully well they were doing it with no thought of doing anything at all. Astonishing.

This one treasure hidden in the body—it is remarkable over and over again.

The natural world endows everything with this original efficacy, and when we go with it we find everything using it impeccably. So rising to the occasion of the long emergency may not seem so impossible once we stop supposing anything and meet it, together with our selves, straight on.

And it's some occasion! In the ancient image of the jewelled net of the Indian god Indra, reality is an infinite net holding everything that is, holding vast emptiness, with a uniquely faceted gem set into every knot in the net. Each of these treasures (each being) reflects in every one of its dazzling facets every other jewel in the

net. And each jewel is the exact centre of the entire net that radiates from it in every direction without end.

It doesn't get much better than this. My seven-year-old self knew this completely. Yours too.

So the one treasure hidden in the body: What if you can use it forever but never exhaust the sheer joy and unlikelihood of its magical powers? Children's dreams are made of such stuff. Adult reality is the business of making excellent use of it.

One treasure, and all seven billion of us possess it from the beginning. No need to be stingy, then, in rising to the occasion.

Basho:

I don't know
which tree it's coming from ~
that fragrance!

7. You'll never single it out

Explanatory note: Zhaozhou (778–897) was one of the great figures of Tang dynasty (618–905) China, which witnessed the 'golden age' of Zen (in Chinese: 'Chan'). It was said that a light played about his lips as Zhaozhou spoke. He lived to the ripe age of one hundred and twenty, and certainly took his time agreeing to teach, finally no longer refusing that role at the age of eighty.

The koan: **A monk asked Zhaozhou, 'What is the fact for which I must accept responsibility?' Zhaozhou replied, 'Though you search to the ends of time, you'll never single it out.'**

How reassuring, old Zhaozhou. Oh, boy, but also how demanding!

Is he telling us that only if I can legitimately find the beginning or end to 'me', will I ever be able to find a beginning or end to that which I must accept as 'my responsibility'?

Take old school photos. You scan the dim line of tiny faces for the one you love (but did not meet for several more decades), or for your brother, sister, best friend, and—from the generalising blur of the past suddenly out leaps that irreplaceable being, stamped and charged with unrepeatable life. Even if the one you look for now is dead, no difference. What responsibility that must be accepted comes with this potent charge of possessing a singular life?

Sharon Olds wrote a poem about seeing her child off to summer camp. The child disappears into the tinted gloom of the bus with all the other identikit teenagers, and yet of *course* she can instantly tell the exact line of jawbone, slant of hair, tilt of nose, tip of ear, that surfaces dimly at one of the dark-tinted windows as the bus makes off with her fledgling.

That lurch of a parent's heart. What a vast responsibility it is.

When my beautiful cat succumbed to a paralysis tick, I felt stricken for weeks, and not just by the piercing loss of her arrival onto my legs at night with a thud, the warm drugged weight of her curled dead centre in our bed, her silver-tabby markings and

startling blue eyes so cool in the ermine luxury of her fur, and that one endearing split ear-tip earned in a street fight back in feisty young-cat days . . . A whole year later I still feel the drag of my failure to find the tick in time, to catch her safely in the net of my love, and never ever let her slip away to so terrible a premature death. Responsibility hurts like love.

When the whole exquisitely wrought balance of our astounding blue-green world begins to crumble before our eyes under the weight of so many billions of us straining to live so far beyond the physical means of the earth, then 'the fact for which I must accept responsibility' is so vast that it either threatens to become the final shame from which there can be no recovery, or else offers to be the making of me as a human being.

But what if we fail? In the spirit of the earth, the jury is never quite in on 'success' or 'failure'. Earth herself is by nature unfinished, and besides, the time frame of this matter exceeds (by many magnitudes) a human lifetime.

In any case, can there be failure if the undertaking is to let this crisis be the making of us? Maybe the only failure possible is not turning up to claim life while it is still on offer.

Seven billion of us now, and yet even if you search to the end of time you can never single one of us out. This is the natural source of all generosity. In one of the Hassidic stories, a teacher asked, 'How do you know when night has ended and the day has begun?' Someone ventured, 'Is it that moment when you can't tell the morning mist from the clouds?' 'No, it is not that moment,' said the teacher. 'Is it when each tree begins to step out from the hillside, distinct?' The teacher did not accept that either. 'Then how *do* you know when night has ended and the day has begun?' they asked at last. 'It is that moment when you look into the face of another and can recognise yourself,' said the teacher. 'Until then, the night is still with us.'

The first and most comprehensive of the eight *paramitas* (literally 'perfections' or completions) of enlightened behaviour in Buddhism is *dana*, or mutual generosity. *Dana* comes down to the

principle that if you have something that could benefit another who needs it, giving it away benefits all. Life is lived entirely as such a gift. All life is lived courtesy only of other beings, eating and being eaten. Everything and everyone fully used up by living fully.

Lending yourself consciously to the generosity of life and death hurts far less in the end than resisting it. And resisting it hurts all life—look around at the state of the biosphere, as humanity seeks to make a quick killing from the earth rather than share ourselves with it in mutual generosity. For even if you search to the end of time, you'll never single it out.

Now is the real end point of time, though when you look for it, as with the end of the rainbow and its promised pot of gold, it constantly escapes you. Searching for our responsibility is the preoccupation of this book, and I think it properly troubles every human heart that allows itself to hurt with awareness of how we have been living.

Searching for it may be different to what we think. A few timely postcards from the future would be a great help in discovering how we get there from here. But as the old joke goes, if you ask a country bumpkin for directions to a nearby city, he'll tell you sagely, 'You can't get there from here.' He's right. We can't get anywhere sane with the thinking that has created the problem. 'Here' and 'there' are simply not on the same map.

Consider the way a dog proceeds from here to there, nose to the ground, imagination on fire, intently haphazard, *dancing* the trail of a scent, disdaining nothing on the way, as Denise Levertov describes it in her poem 'Overland to the Islands'. Proceeding in this way is a kind of joy, 'every step an arrival', and every arrival a fresh suggestion about a possible way to the next. One step (leap, pounce, twirl) at a time is surely the only way to get anywhere.

Basho:

When I look carefully ~
shepherd's purse in flower
beneath the hedge!

8. Do you mean now?

Explanatory note: Once you've seen through one thing all the way to the end, koans come to be found everywhere. Two small kids talking in the lane beside me at the swimming pool gave me one not long ago. 'I can't see with these goggles!' complained one. 'They can see you but!' said the other, just like that. Yogi Berra was a legendary generator of accidental koans. How accidental, no one quite knows. 'I didn't really say everything I said,' he once explained. A major baseball player for the New York Yankees, possibly the greatest catcher of all times, he advised, 'When you come to a fork in the road, take it.' So, let's take it.

The koan: **When Yogi Berra was asked, 'What time is it?' he asked, 'Do you mean now?' It's a good question, though it made everyone laugh at the time.**

The vast majority of climate scientists concur that we have prevaricated dangerously for the past two decades and, yes, the planet does mean *now*! There is no more time to kill. Though that does not mean there is no time for human laughter too, and fun.

But what does 'now' mean? If the planet means now, and in an increasingly forthright way, could we look into Yogi Berra's question a little further and see that it equally asks, 'Does now mean *you*?'

Zen Master Dogen wrote an astonishing, mind-bending fascicle on time in thirteenth-century Japan called 'Being Time', sometimes translated as 'Time Being'. Essentially, it asks: can you drop free of a divided mind in which time is an external force that wears away all things and makes life unbearably precarious? Can you then sense how you are neither actually 'in time' nor 'subject to time'? Rather, when you look without certainty strapped onto your wrist like a tiny implacable god, can you see how time cannot be other than you; and you cannot be other than one thing continually becoming another? Which means there is no time but you. And you are now.

'Impermanence' sounds like the opposite of permanence, but—take a close look!—it *has* no opposite, there is nothing to oppose. That all things are passing through and nothing is fixed is the revelation of this universe in every one of its details. When you take to heart that you cannot step outside the ceaseless movement of one thing into another, the strange thing is that suddenly you free yourself within it. A tremendous fight with your very nature can finally be put down.

To put it another way, when you can dare explore and inhabit your own precariousness without reserve, you become precariousness itself—and can find nothing lacking there, nothing to oppose or fear. How freeing!

In Russell Hoban's wonderful *La Corona and the Tin Frog*, much loved by the adults who read it to their children, a collection of discarded childhood treasures long ago relegated to a forgotten La Corona cigar box come to life at midnight. One of them, good friend of the Literary Dormouse who publishes a quarterly literary journal, is the little Night Watchman, who (when activated) puffs out small clouds of smoke as he calls the hour. His moment of realisation comes when, instead of announcing 'Eleven o'clock', 'Twelve o'clock', he proclaims with joy, '*Now* is the only time there is!' The Literary Dormouse, caught up in the revelation, immediately realises that 'Quarterly is not enough!' From now on, she's going monthly.

And the Night Watchman is right. Without short-changing the karmic weight of history even for a moment, all time is present in a real moment of peace. Try losing yourself for a while in just the watching of your own breath in, breath out—keep it up for some time and the very nature of a moment changes quality. No longer fleeting, it is neither quick nor slow to pass; it is edgeless, and edgeless is surprisingly roomy.

Like Doctor Who's tardis, the tiny moment of this breath now might look small, ordinary and predictable from the outside, but move inside it unreservedly with the whole of your sustained focus

for a time and it turns out to be a very different sized space: This moment is the only time there is; it has no walls and no discernible edge of past or present. It is hard to say how small or big that is. Or how unexpectedly joyful to discover what can be here when you can find no time at all.

Practice means now, which is where life lives. Realisation happens only *now*. So does any action that helps things be the best they can be. For that matter, so does any breath.

In terms of responding to the crisis we're in, it is already pressingly late, and the appropriate sense of urgency keeps getting buried under 24/7 blather. Two and a half thousand years ago, the Taoist master Lao-tzu posed this question to his own much slower time, 'Do you have the patience to wait until your mud settles, and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving until the right action arises by itself?'

That's not easy when it seems the sky is falling in—just ask Henny Penny!

Any crisis is an exceptional and unprecedented learning opportunity but usually we first rush for all the known and well-worn views that come to hand or are most loudly peddled. It's not easy to go into the darkness of *that which is not yet clear*, for it calls for some patience and serious mental effort—and yet it is likely to be the only fruitful place to look.

In an old story a man searches frantically for a lost key under a lamp post. A kind passer-by joins the search but no key turns up. 'Are you sure you dropped it here?' they ask. 'Oh no, it was way over there,' the man replies, pointing off into the darkness. 'Then why aren't we looking for it over there?' asks the passer-by, exasperated. The man is greatly surprised by the question. 'Because it's far too dark to see anything over there!' he explains.

When we don't know where to look for easy answers, when we agree to live right on the edge of the not yet fully known, we're far more open in all directions. Remember the hunter's mind, at peace with not knowing, while being able to stay intently aware. 'Can

you remain unmoving until the right action arises by itself?' asks Lao-tzu of our age of perpetual motion and limitless ambition. 'Unmoving' does *not* mean passive—on the contrary, it means not easily tempted into presuming too much, and that can take considerable effort! Countless subtle movements of understanding go on under the surface of alert, patient waiting for the fresh intuition to arise in the mind by itself.

Another koan challenges us to 'Take up the plough with empty hands'. Is this a clue to the way that 'you' can mean 'now'? That exceptionally productive writer, Jean-Claude Carrière, once reflected that he probably gets so much accomplished only by doing each thing very, very slowly—which means as if it were the most important thing in the world and he had all the time in the world. But you can only have that when there is some contact with the coherent mind of steadiness and focus, and the trusting patience to let it resume itself. 'Unmoving' means drawing on that practised mind, while taking all due care.

Now is never too late. Plant wondrously slow-growing trees even in old age. Because now is you, the outcome luckily is not about you but the nature of the whole shebang—without which there's no you in any case, and in which you can rediscover your unlimited self ever more richly.

Basho:

Not long to live
you'd never know it ~
cicada's cry!

9. No axle, no wheels

Explanatory note: Yuean (dates unknown) was a twelfth-century Song dynasty master principally known for composing this koan. Xizhong was the legendary cartwheel maker who made hundred-spoke cartwheels—a technical feat that is simply unimaginable, clearly surpassing world's best practice and heading for best in universe. There is a faint drift here of the great wheel of the dharma with its countless spokes, turned by every wise teaching, by any beneficent action—indeed by every night sky of turning stars.

The koan: **The priest Yuean said to a monk, 'Xizhong made a hundred-spoke wheel cart. If you take off both wheels and the axle, what would be vividly apparent?'**

Some wonderful cart! Sounds like a ruin. That wouldn't get you far! How would the wheels turn when they have been removed and the axle has gone? Is this just more of the unmoving?

And yet at the very centre of a turning wheel—or universe—is indeed the utterly still point. The entire movement of the whole depends on this 'nothing happening', or from another point of view, comes down to it. In the very nature of the whole, there is nothing happening, and nowhere to go.

The verse traditionally attached to this case says, 'Where the wheel revolves even a master cannot follow it.' In order to 'follow' the movement of the spinning earth, 'the master' must first find some way to be separate from it. And at the very centre of the spinning nothing moves and there is nothing whatsoever to follow. A master cart builder depends entirely on this fact that lies at the core of his great skill, and lets everything happen from there.

But still a cart with no wheels goes nowhere fast. Actually, that sounds quite a restful, restorative antidote for a world 'engineered' into an out-of-control juggernaut with no easily locatable brakes.

This tiny word 'no' is not unlike the still point of the turning wheel. Nothing to it, and everything depending on it.

Zhaozhou, who we met a little earlier, famously said 'No' when a monk asked if a dog has Buddha nature or not. That 'no'—*mu* in Japanese—is not a categorical answer. As we have seen, it is an injunction to step past all thought of having or not having, of dog, monk, master. Even Buddha nature, the entire goal of realisation, disappears into the undivided mind of Zhaozhou.

Sometimes it is called 'vast emptiness', this experience of mind in its original freedom; other times, simply 'equality'—all-pervading, deeply felt equality that appears clearly in all things, empty of distinctions, when the walls in the mind fall away. 'No' releases everything from its mind cage and ensures that, though you searched to the end of time, you'd never single this mind out from all that is.

The dream of one thing separate from another fades away and instead of searching for release you find you've always been swimming in it.

A koan is direct transmission of the nature of reality from mind to mind. The finest made cart in the world, with wheels and the axle removed—what becomes vividly apparent then? Ecology, nature, reality—now *there's* a cart with no wheels, no axle, no separate parts, completely unmoving while so vigorously unfolding. A mind that has discovered itself in the light of the strange, unexpected sanity and wholeness of 'no'—finding there is no-self, no-me, no-dog, no-mind—is likewise unmoving and unimpeded.

Have you ever stroked a no-dog? It's worlds away from stroking a dog. It is you and the dog lost completely in sheer touch, dissolved barriers, warmth of heart, groan of pleasure, nearby hillside floating with cloud shadow, mare's-tail cloud, rough grateful lick of wet tongue, the thump, thump of a tail.

'No' can take away that which is never finished with carving up the world to fit what we think we know; 'no' can help us get back closer to the real nature of what is happening. It is a curious shape, that word, for the gateway back home.

The earth does not argue with what we think we know; it silently offers itself without opinions. While it suffers from our actions,

only we can dispel our strange thought worlds that lead to so much damage. We have to do it all ourselves and in person—return to the natural terms of the earth, and the generosity inside those limits.

Once in a dream it became apparent there was a tiger outside the house in which I lived with my children, deep in the Russian woods, many miles from anywhere, and with numberless frail doors and windows that had to be quickly, frantically bolted and secured. At last the final bolt slid home—a painfully slender barricade against the massive force of tiger will. Outside, somewhere, unseen, *tiger* breathed and roamed at will. But I had made us safe. I had time to breathe again. And then, the realisation slowly dawned. I had made myself not perfectly safe but perfectly imprisoned, entombed. We never really left Eden, just fell into a dream that we are separate and that safety and security can flow from that. We're not, and it doesn't.

So 'no wheels' is prowess of a completely different kind to 'Look Ma, no hands!' A well-functioning ecology doesn't engineer a single thing, or make use of effort in the inconceivable concatenation of interrelated circumstances that sustain the whole. Can we let this prodigious 'no-thing' and 'no-action', evident everywhere in the natural world wherever we have not yet disrupted it, ease back in under our skins? Where it may provoke us to skilful response to the crisis of the planet, in greater accord with its deep ways?

The world comes whole again with the mysterious barrier-dissolving power of this tiny word 'no'. The journey from juggernaut complete with wheels, bells, whistles, the whole kit and caboodle, to finest cart in the history of the world complete with no-wheels, no-axle, is minute, a journey less than a hair's-breadth in size. It is the shift from where we think we are, to where we really are—which is the journey also from ruinous end of the Cenozoic era to actualisation of the Ecozoic era.

A tiny journey like this is hard to see only until you travel the distance (repeatedly) and become the difference. But old habits die hard, and it takes real practice to train the mind to recall its

true home under all circumstances. Mahatma Gandhi trained his heart and mind to live reflexively close to Ram, the Hindu god who reminded him of his own deepest self-nature. To call on the name of Ram was to instantly return home to that understanding. When his assassin stood before him with a gun and fired its bullet, Gandhi died crying out 'Ram!' Building the practice of minding and never forgetting the earth is the journey of a lifetime. 'No!' is the shout that can call up the courage exactly equal to a crisis.

No wheels, no axles, no walls up in the mind—no walls at all, and therefore, oddly enough, no fear.

Basho:

Cicada shell ~
just sang itself
completely away

10. How can we avoid cold and heat?

Explanatory note: Dongshan (807–869) was the luminary recognised as one of the founders of the Caodong (Soto) line of Zen. Together with the Linji (Rinzai) line, it is one of the two remaining Zen schools that began in China during the Tang dynasty.

The koan: **A monk asked Dongshan, 'When cold and heat visit us, how should we avoid them?' Dongshan said, 'Why not go where there is neither cold nor heat?' The monk asked, 'Where is that?' Dongshan said, 'When it is cold, kill yourself with cold. When it is hot, kill yourself with heat.'**

Thomas Berry said, 'This is not an abandoned world', and I think he is right so long as we dare to live our predicament with the same no-fear as the earth.

The fundamental vow of Buddhism is to ease suffering, protect life and save the many beings. So what is this 'killing' of the self? Some kind of merciful end to all the complaining?

In a warming world, the monk's question of how to avoid difficult climatic extremes is timely, even if it is more than a thousand years old. But is this remarkable old Zen master speaking just of climatic extremes?

If he is, then what's wrong with putting on warmer or cooler clothes—or just turning on the reverse-cycle airconditioner plugged into the coal-fired electricity grid? Is he really asking that we suffer more?

Dealing with the extremes of 'temperature' in human minds may actually be the most pressing and immediate concern in mitigating the approach of climate collapse. I mean hot states like anger, rage, shame; cold states like fear and denial. Maybe 'killing yourself' with these difficult states is a way of saying: why not try using them as a chance to see through yourself when they visit in overwhelming form?

The Buddha once asked an assembly, 'What is wisdom?' And

when nobody could reply he said, 'It is the ability to perfectly understand and patiently accept the truth of suffering.' The *truth* of suffering—that's surely a matter to look into for a lifetime or two. But what might 'looking into it' look like?

Many forms of fear seem to be paralysing us in the face of so much mounting damage—including the fear that far too few of us seem ready to admit that damage and take its consequences to heart. The one thing that may be equal to the utter hopelessness the situation can induce is the shortest prayer there is—a powerful and surprising one, once you dare embrace it: *'Fear not!'*

So, how to embrace unbearably hot and cold states without fear?

It's strong medicine to look honestly at our overwhelming predicament, care very deeply, never abandon that caring and be not afraid. A practice of mind as I have been describing it helps access a calmer, steadier sense of self that can be more at ease even in difficult circumstances because it can be strong and clear enough to remember 'I am not my thoughts and feelings'. Have a look: is the awareness of coldness, *cold*, or of heat, *hot*?

When we stumble on the fact that the awareness of anger is not angry, of confusion is not confused, of fear is not fearful, something in us is freed up.

So when calmed by an unmoving, friendly awareness, all the hot and cold states that make it hard to see clearly and act wisely reveal a surprising reservoir of energy and clarity exactly equal in strength to the predicament we're in. The intensity of our fear, anger, shame or grief about a situation is a gauge of intense caring that has been locked down, alienated from reach, waiting to be released.

Reaching this awareness, it is hard to find enduring hot or cold.

Anger can mask unexpressed fear, which in turn can mask unnameable grief. Self-justification arises and reports for duty split seconds after anger bursts its banks. It's usually wise to be sceptical about the highly detailed case that hot anger will present. The Dalai Lama, when asked why he does not appear filled with rage at

China's brutal occupation of his homeland, asked in reply, 'Should I let China rob me of my mind as well?'

If 'Fear not' can be the way to avoid 'cold', the saving grace for 'heat' may be 'Judge not'. Which is to say, don't move to declare judgment until the energy of anger has had time to bring some slightly more judicious thought to light—which might include checking on how far you can genuinely distinguish your own actions from the ones so greatly at fault. Whose fault exactly is it?

'Judge not' never means 'See nothing, discern nothing'. It points more in the direction of the famous Zen virtue of 'Not picking and choosing'—not 'avoiding' heat and cold in the sense of wanting things to be different, but working from the way things really are, unobscured by preferences.

The indignation and grief that can cry out, *'This must stop!'* to those pillaging the earth and laying waste to lives and life itself is immensely valuable, but it must first come clear enough to recognise itself in the face of the other. The self disappears into that clarity. Then the truth it speaks can be ruthlessly merciful and direct.

Long life is measured not in years but in ease with circumstances, which in any life will entail a fair acquaintance with suffering. The birthing, suffering, withering, dying of things, even the horrific, unthinkable destruction inflicted on people, fellow creatures and this astonishing planet, prises open our hearts and minds like nothing else can. Dongshan's recommendation to welcome the difficulties of heat and cold when they take the trouble to visit us implies that the *truth* of suffering is to be won again and again, in circumstances not usually described as relaxed and comfortable. The truth of suffering makes us true, and can draw a human being so deeply into life they end up willing to substitute the word 'acceptance', if not 'joy', for much of what was once deemed 'suffering'.

If that is hard to understand, then let me ask you what joy would be without that surprising taste of sorrow and tears—the

welcome grief of *caring* so deeply—running through it. Would it be joy? Would it be complete? Would it be even recognisable?

And by the way, when it is time to hole up and draw breath, put your feet up and enjoy the moon rising, raise a glass of wine with people you love, walk in the evening as the dew forms, play with a child . . . Why not lose yourself completely in *that*?

Basho:

How cool ~
noonday nap
feet planted on the wall!

11. It is only for your benefit

Explanatory note: We meet Dongshan again with another monk. 'Acharya' is an honorific title, like saying 'Wise One'. So he's addressing the wisest part of us and trusting its response when he speaks to the monk. 'It' is a word in Zen that always needs caution. Don't leap to conclude that 'it' refers simply to suffering. And it is valuable to know that what Zen calls the heart-mind is so wide, it no longer finds it so easy to distinguish curse from blessing.

The koan: **Dongshan and a monk were down by a creek washing their bowls when two birds flew down and tore apart a frog sitting on a stone, right in front of them. The monk asked, 'Why does it come to this?' Dongshan replied, 'It is only for your benefit, Acharya.'**

Why does it come to this? There it is, the age-old anguish, growing sharper every minute as we watch the world casually risk an unthinkable future.

Why is the earth being torn apart by the ferocity of human greed, hatred and ignorance? Why must life always come to the moments of tearing and pain, accidents and grief, sickness and old age, death and loss? Why do we lose every single thing we love (while possibly failing to notice how generously we are given every single thing we love in the first place)? And why must we give it all back, give back even ourselves?

That monk by the old creek is staring at our world too. All this that we are threatened by is 'only for our benefit'? What!

Dongshan's 'It is only for your benefit' is remote from someone telling you, 'No pain no gain', or 'You can't expect to be relaxed and comfortable all the time'. (Though they're right.) When 'it' occurs in a Zen koan, always reach for your whole mind, which means undivided reality. 'It' *includes* suffering, of course—it includes everything, but does so without picking and choosing, not singling out anything at all on which we could try to hang an accusation or a dream of saving ourselves from life, nature, reality.

This *benefit* Dongshan extends is quite severe. Most great blessings are. It asks that we rigorously give up any dream of the self as separate from the rest of life and exempt from unavoidable suffering. But in reply it gives us back the whole world, an inconceivable grace—able to include both suffering and joy, torn frogs, and two at least half-satisfied birds, without a hint of self-pity.

All things are passing through the mysterious interchange from not being, to being, to not being. The universe itself shares this self-nature with us. That which we are, we will not be; that which we have, we will lose. We eat now but later we will be eaten; prevail now, but later will yield. The way one thing insists on continually becoming another is beyond judgment: it is just the way things are in an ongoing creation event that, for reasons undeclared, brings all things into being from nowhere, and releases them back there again.

Moment by moment we are born into this and we die into that, on and on until you cannot precisely tell the one from the other. The *entirety* of this, says Dongshan, is its benevolence. 'It is only for your benefit' implies an open response to suffering, an openness that is exactly a readiness to be of help.

Gary Snyder, poet and essayist, evokes that same generous courage: 'The Bodhisattva must live by the sufferer's standard . . . to be effective in giving aid to those who suffer.' A Bodhisattva is one committed to helping all beings become at ease in their own self-nature, which means freed from all avoidable suffering. When you know who you are, then you can help others. Enlightenment *is* helping others in need, and into enlightenment. By helping others we help ourselves to enlightenment. We're all in this together. That is the great benefit.

So why stand apart and leave yourself out of the benefit? To be effective in giving aid to those who suffer, give yourself freely away. That's the Bodhisattva way of clapping hands and doing business.

Must we live by 'the sufferer's standard'? With sentience, as the Buddha noted in the First Noble Truth, comes suffering. It hurts to

live. We're born covered in blood and it unfolds from there in all its joy and pain. So in one sense we have no choice in the matter. But maybe there's a positive reason too.

We can't know and respond to the pain of others until we have felt pain, and, going further, *borne* pain. 'To suffer', in the light of its root meaning, means 'to bear', 'to allow' and 'to support'—to provide or ripen a capacity to hold such experience. So 'to live by the sufferer's standard' implies living open towards our own and other's suffering, letting that temper and make us tender.

To live by the sufferer's standard is not a passive submission to pain but a *standard* to live by—actively seeking the truth of suffering so as to be of some use to a suffering world. In the Grail legend, the truth of suffering is borne through the feast hall with great ceremony as the sacred chalice, and belongs—*instantly*—to the first who is moved to ask the guardian of the Grail (the mortally wounded Fisher King), 'What are you going through? How can I help?'

The natural rising of concern for the other *is* the Grail, the thing of supreme value. 'Only for your benefit' ripples out in mysterious, ever-widening circles. Moved to help someone, it turns out to be *you* who are so greatly helped.

To seek no escape from the reality of suffering while taking the risk to keep your heart receptive and open—does that actually hurt more than it heals hurt? Remarkable how courage can spring up so powerfully when things are disastrous. The frog, the child, the town, torn apart in front of our eyes. When disasters happen, great things can appear in human beings. The need and painfulness of the suffering of others can grow fresh hands and hearts in people.

So, in order to meet what is shaping as a massive, slow-moving disaster for our planet, can you risk uncovering and ripening a bravely open heart? Perhaps the even better question is, can you risk *not* doing so? Can you live with that?

The current of connection that is compassion shapes all of life and holds it together. In all that is so wrong with the world it would

be wrong to forget the altruism of the most fundamental bonds between people. It is easy to focus on their shortcomings and miss the fact that other people are here, they're alive, they are breathing, they are in front of us, feeling love and pain, usually doing their best.

When we meet people who have found their way to ease the suffering of those around them in a profound way, by mastering ease with their own suffering, we can't turn away from it. The relinquishment of self that we see in front of us is beautiful instruction. They have let their circumstances take them away completely. It doesn't mean they are not present, by the way—they are *very* present. But they are, themselves, not *in* the way. There is no noteworthy 'I' straining their presence. And no mosquito whine of self-pity marring their generosity.

We live as best we can, we tough yet fragile beings, frogs and humans, all so briefly here. We swim in timelessness at every point of joy and suffering when we look at what is happening with clear eyes, place our feet firmly on the earth and find the courage to love the whole of it.

'It', the whole shebang, is only for our benefit in a most personal sense. It is our light, inseparable from the natural 'no you no me' that rises in us in the presence of another torn by suffering, unbidden and immediate, with no thought even of needing to help.

Unless we know this 'it', are we actually *alive*? When we know it, the benefit is precisely what we are—and impossible in the end to tell apart from the tearing. A man awaiting open-heart surgery for replacement of his entire descending aorta writes, 'In my "medical Sesshin" (or seven day silent meditation retreat) the bells are now beeps, my cushion an electric bed, and I meet new companions daily. My teachers are many. All caring hearts are one. Not exactly a silent retreat though! . . . I am thrilled to be here and desire to be nowhere else. It is where my feet are.'

And the threat of climate crash hanging over a smallish blue-green planet in a remote corner of the Milky Way finally begins to

wake up its large, clever, but often oblivious two-legged population to the fact of where their feet actually are.

With the beautiful tearing shock of discovering we really *are* all in it together.

Basho:

Departing spring!
birds cry out,
tears in the eyes of fish

12. I have already become like this

Explanatory note: Tongan Daopi (date, uncertain) was a tenth-century Song dynasty master. Monastic forms of practice customarily renounce or relinquish 'the world', meaning desires for worldly things.

The koan: **A monk asked Daopi, 'An ancient master said, "I do not love what worldly people love." I wonder—what does your Reverence love?' Daopi replied, 'I have already become like this.'**

Renunciation is actually not so much rejecting something as choosing to keep resolving *not* to give way to a weakness, a choice renewed on every occasion the pull is felt. 'All face', for example, in that party of Indian warriors, may be understood in part as strong fidelity to something discovered to be actually far more interesting than 'I want', 'I need', 'I should have' . . .

Such mana holds itself in check and communicates itself by doing very little or nothing at all. Consider the mana contained in the sight of a powerful mountain face. Just being itself and holding up the light seems to be enough to help the many beings in sight of it.

This monk in the koan would also have renounced worldly things to enter a monastic life, but would be no less prone than anyone else to wanting things. Perhaps more so, since he has risked becoming fully conscious of the wanting. Now he asks about what his teacher loves.

A psychologist may have some useful things to say about love, but Zen master Robert Aitken said in all seriousness that a Zen teacher no more resembles a psychologist than a persimmon resembles a banana. That a flea bears a closer, clearer resemblance, or a mountain, perhaps, or cool breeze.

'I have already become like this,' is all that Tongan says.

'Love' is a word that this koan looks into. So, of course, is 'this'—'like this'. 'Love' is a word routinely emptied of its meaning

a thousand times over, on Academy Awards night alone. No one can keep track of its ongoing abuse in greetings cards, self-help books, love songs, SMS texts (where nothing more than x marks the spot of its disappearance).

It's also a word mistrusted as 'desire', 'attachment' or 'the flesh' by religions that fear life and pit longing for God against some parts of the reality in which such longing is born. Just as though some parts of creation should—or could—be thrown out of the universe. When all along the universe shows nothing but the power of inclusion. No part of it is possible without the rest of the whole. Persimmon, banana, flea, cool breeze, mountain, distant rooster crow . . . Each one, the face of the whole. Becoming 'like this' is free interchange with each thing just as it is. Is that inclusiveness not love?

'Becoming like this' is a position as modest as river stones lying deep in the stream; giving way to so much flow rounds them greatly. Tolerance is not being comfortable with what is happening but the willingness to be *un*comfortable with it.

'Becoming like this' and renouncing preferences can be a joyful, playful business with considerable creative payoff. Zen Master Banzan showed how. Or rather, a butcher showed him how, quite by accident, when Banzan overheard him talking to a bossy customer. The customer demanded, 'Show me your best cuts of meat. I want only the best meat in your shop!' The butcher protested proudly, 'But everything in my shop is best! There's no piece of meat in my shop that is not the best!' Banzan was struck by collateral lightning, you might say. *'Everything is best!'* hit him with such force that he could never quite shrink the world back to his own small terms again.

In some parts this is called 'enlightenment'. But really, it's just consistently dropping the resistance in your mind while doing all you can to be of some help. After a while, it will be hard to tell *you* from a cool breeze passing right through.

This *best* has no room in it for better or worse; in fact it has

trouble separating you from me, or valuing this leaf on the tree while finding that one hard to like. That threadbare leaf on the ground, is it not as completely itself and in place as a shining one still intact on the tree? 'Everything is best' sees right through preferences to the reality of infinite relationship in which everything counts and is completely worthy of awareness and care. 'This' is a word for it in the present koan. 'Become *like this.*'

It's actually not so hard to try it out. Watch waves rolling to shore or breaking onto rocks for an hour or so and try to find a single one you can't admire. Or a patch of grass with one blade of grass that fails to be the best.

Another Zen troublemaker, Linji, was heard famously to say, 'There is nothing I dislike.' This did not make him a pushover, just a bit more fluid, responsive and in the right place at every moment, the way the creek flows, the mountain stands its ground, the clouds dissolve and form. What makes such relaxed readiness possible is having no constant interruption from a self that needs to say, 'But what about me. I deserve the best!'

We all deserve the best, it's just a matter of seeing how you already have it. When you can see in all directions nothing but the best doing its best, we're freed up to be of some use. Until then, the sense that so much is wrong, and it has grown too late to fix it may defeat even the best of us.

Nothing is held back in the natural world, neither life nor death, and by this unparalleled generosity we continually test our limits. Giving away what we are, and have, until life goes back in to the mysterious place it came from—that's the only way to hold the gift of being here. Our limits are transparent, with no final state. They don't need to hold us back, so we just go beyond them. That's 'becoming like this' too, a more fearless generosity that knows that uncontrived reality is the only safe place from which to act.

So 'I have already become like this' cedes a lot—everything, to be exact—to the way things are, and the generosity hidden in that is easy to appreciate because it embodies love that leaves nothing

out. This 'already' quietly contains a lifetime of rigorous practice of awareness.

It takes all you are to know yourself this way. But that's love, and it keeps us entirely on our toes and in the world.

Basho:

Spring!
a nameless hill
swims in the haze

13. Reconcile with *this!*

Explanatory note: Uncle Max Harrison, Dulumunmun, is an Aboriginal elder from Yuin country (south coast of New South Wales) who has been right through initiation into blackfella law. He was born in the 1930s, and was still classed under an antique law as 'fauna'. Since the 1980s, whitefella concern about past and present wrongs became the Reconciliation movement, supported by government to draw both mobs together. Blackfellas were invited to sit down with whitefellas to talk about the impact of past and present government policy and share their life stories, law and culture.

The koan: **Uncle Max said, 'I don't hold with this talk of reconciliation.' The people listening were shocked. He continued, 'How can you have *reconciliation* where there's never been a relationship in the first place?' He knelt and cupped a handful of dirt from the ground. 'I just tell both mobs, "Reconcile with this!" and you won't need any "reconciliation" after that.'**

'Become like this', 'Reconcile with this'—what's the difference?

The cartoonist Michael Leunig once remarked that the best thing about talking with a duck is that you have to get down on the earth on your hands and knees, usually in mud. Gary Snyder pointed out the virtues of going *crawling* when fire has made the Sierra manzanita grow back too thick to walk through. You lose all dignity in the best possible way—in exchange for fern dew on your face, intimate meetings with exceptionally shy animals never seen in the open, and literally sniffing your way to where the most delicious Boletus mushrooms are growing. And that interesting thirteenth-century Zen monk, Myoe, was fond of digging a hole in the ground and talking into it. In fact, he was doubtful of the worth of really getting to know anyone who found this unusual, or who could not understand the reason to talk with trees, and he regularly meditated seated high in the branches of his favourite tree.

Myoe once had his monks deliver a letter he had written to an island well known to him as a child and greatly missed as an adult. He referred to his island as 'truly an interesting and enjoyable friend', and his famous letter says in part:

> Even as I speak to you in this way, tears fill my eyes . . . I am filled with a great longing for you in my heart, and take no delight in passing time without having the time to see you. And then there is the large cherry tree that I remember so fondly. There are times when I so want to send a letter to the tree to ask how it is doing, but I am afraid that people will say that I am crazy to send a letter to a tree that cannot speak. Though I think of doing it, I refrain in deference to the custom of this irrational world . . .

His monks dutifully got ready to depart with the letter to the island—a virtual set of whole earth *reconciliation* instructions for the very monks who carried it—but then they faltered, a bit embarrassed by the whole thing, to ask to whom they should actually deliver the letter. Myoe told them to simply stand in the middle of the island, shout in a loud voice, 'This is a letter from Myoe of Tonganoo!', deliver the letter into the hands of the wind, then return.

Which they did. It is not recorded what the island wind had to say in reply.

'Truly an enjoyable and interesting friend.' How many think to treat and speak of the world this way? As Uncle Max makes uncomfortably clear, reconciliation can't begin without mutual relationship. The instincts that tend good friendship would tend the whole world very nicely. But friends need to be able to sit down together and chew the fat—exchange ideas and emotions.

Sometimes I think of good meditation like that. Meditating out in the open, under a tree—even *in* a tree—often goes very differently to sitting inside a room full of human energies. You can touch the earth with your fingers and reintroduce yourself. The earth

never ever holds back in returning the greeting. The intelligence of feeling passes surprisingly freely between you both.

Uncle Max has remarkable grace of character for a person who was technically a non-person until more than halfway through his life. In the fringe camp of Wallaga Lake, provision of formal schooling for Aboriginal children was scanty. Yet his education was immense because his mother held a lot of important law, and so he was taken comprehensively through law—by five remarkable elders he calls 'those old scientists'. One was his grandfather, who rode broncos in country rodeos into his nineties. Not purely for fun, by the way. It was the only way available for him to make a living.

He doesn't trouble to hold a lot of blame or anger for the injustices of his life, seeing integrity resting in taking your own inventory, not someone else's. 'It comes down only on us,' he says—another excellent koan for our times.

At one point of being taken through law, he was required to spend ten days alone in difficult country with no water. A stone saved him—by sucking on a stone he never became overwhelmingly thirsty. He had to endure and just *be*, testing his wits and depending on the strength of his spiritual practice. The trick was accepting hardship without doing a runner either physically or mentally. 'If I didn't succumb,' he says, 'I could come to know my body, mind and spirit.' He found this harsh experience no imposition but the biggest gift of all from those old scientists.

'If I hadn't learned, I would have been punishing myself,' he says. Every time we squander the offer that comes inside hardship and difficult times, and fall back into the ultimately tedious dramas of the small self, we punish ourselves. The punishment is that the chance is wasted.

Living as if we were the only show on earth is clearly living in dangerous ignorance of the very terms of life on earth. In reality, the interdependency that *is* this very life goes so deep that in the end you cannot entirely say where you and another begin or end. Acting in ignorance of this tears the web on which each life depends,

and can only be tolerated for so long. The time comes—the sooner the better, actually—when you have to tell an out-of-control two year old to *stop*.

Shaman and activist-poet Martin Prechtel insists 'The next revolution is composting.' Nothing wasted, and everything that is used yielded back to the growth of the soil. Human life organised around not the endless take but the ancient principle of the gift cycle, everywhere apparent in the web of life. My life becomes your life. As Uncle Max puts it, 'The only way to keep any gift is to keep giving it away.'

Our world is excruciatingly split along a thousand fracture lines, the loving act of mending long overdue. It begins with the split in our minds between the world and our selves and goes on from there. The slow-motion collapse of the biosphere. The yawning gulf between rich and poor. The less than fully human status of any perceived 'inferior' in terms of race, religion, gender, sexual preference. And on its goes, the cut that keeps on cutting . . .

Zen Master Nanchuan is infamous in Zen circles for having cleaved a cat in two. He found the monks of the Eastern Hall and the monks of the Western Hall arguing over a cat. No one knows now if it was a metaphysical dispute or just that the cat was a damned good mouser and both mobs wanted it guarding their storehouse. And anyway, how quickly we can get such things confused!

Nanchuan picked up a knife and held up the cat, saying, 'Monks! If one of you can say a turning word, I'll spare the cat!' No one could say a word, so Nanchuan cut the cat in two, right before their startled and appalled eyes.

Who can defend such actions of a mad Zen monk? But equally, who is left by his action unaware that one cut cuts all? 'I' and 'you' are cuts. 'Good' and 'bad' are cuts. 'Put down that knife!' and 'This must stop!' are mends. His action brings us down to rock bottom. Reaching rock bottom may be all that will finally goad us into minding and mending the earth. Nothing could more clearly show how to practise that mind than the earth itself.

For what holds up original undividedness more clearly than its loss—in climate collapse, ecological and biodiversity collapse, toxic chemicals and radioactivity entering groundwater and biosphere, desertification of the oceans, decapitation of mountains, destruction of rainforests, oil spills, genetic mutation, a once blue sky engineered to iron brown?

But equally, one mending mends all. That one mending—it comes down only on us.

'I have already become like this' is the inward, personal stage of the outward, shared revolution of mending the earth. 'Reconcile with this!' is its call to arms. Arms that entirely embrace difference.

Like Eretz Shalom (Land of Peace), which is a small group of West Bank settlers who have become *un*settlers of the Israeli settlers' movement narrative that so ruthlessly dispossesses Palestinians from land, creating a wake of mutual hatred. Eretz Shalom sees the group's mission as changing awareness and consciousness in relation to the land from a claim of attachment to a sense of belonging. *Belonging* to the land means you are part of the land, which then makes it impossible to ignore how strongly the belonging of others makes them equally part of the land. 'Reconcile with *this*.'

Consequently Eretz Shalom members are engaging as allies in the daily human rights struggles of their Palestinian neighbours, setting up economic cooperatives, exploring ecologically sound practices, and learning to speak Arabic. They support the notion of a Palestinian state within which they would hope to continue living as a trusted Jewish minority. They are attempting to carve out a new story that emphasises the reality of two peoples who feel an equally strong and justifiable sense of belonging to the land, and who must learn to accept and care for each other as equal tenants and stewards of this beloved place. To reconcile with the earth is a work of profound social healing, in which establishing peace is inseparable from establishing empathic understanding of the needs of the other.

If we do manage to reconcile collectively with this great earth,

the contesting differences between all the various mobs that make up humanity will have had to do a mighty lot of composting of differences along the road. Achieving the transition to the Ecozoic era will have healed *us* as much as the biosphere.

'This' is the great matter that addresses each of us, intimately, now, and in person—while requiring that we take nothing personally, least of all our selves.

Basho:

Harvest moon ~
the rising tide
edges to my door