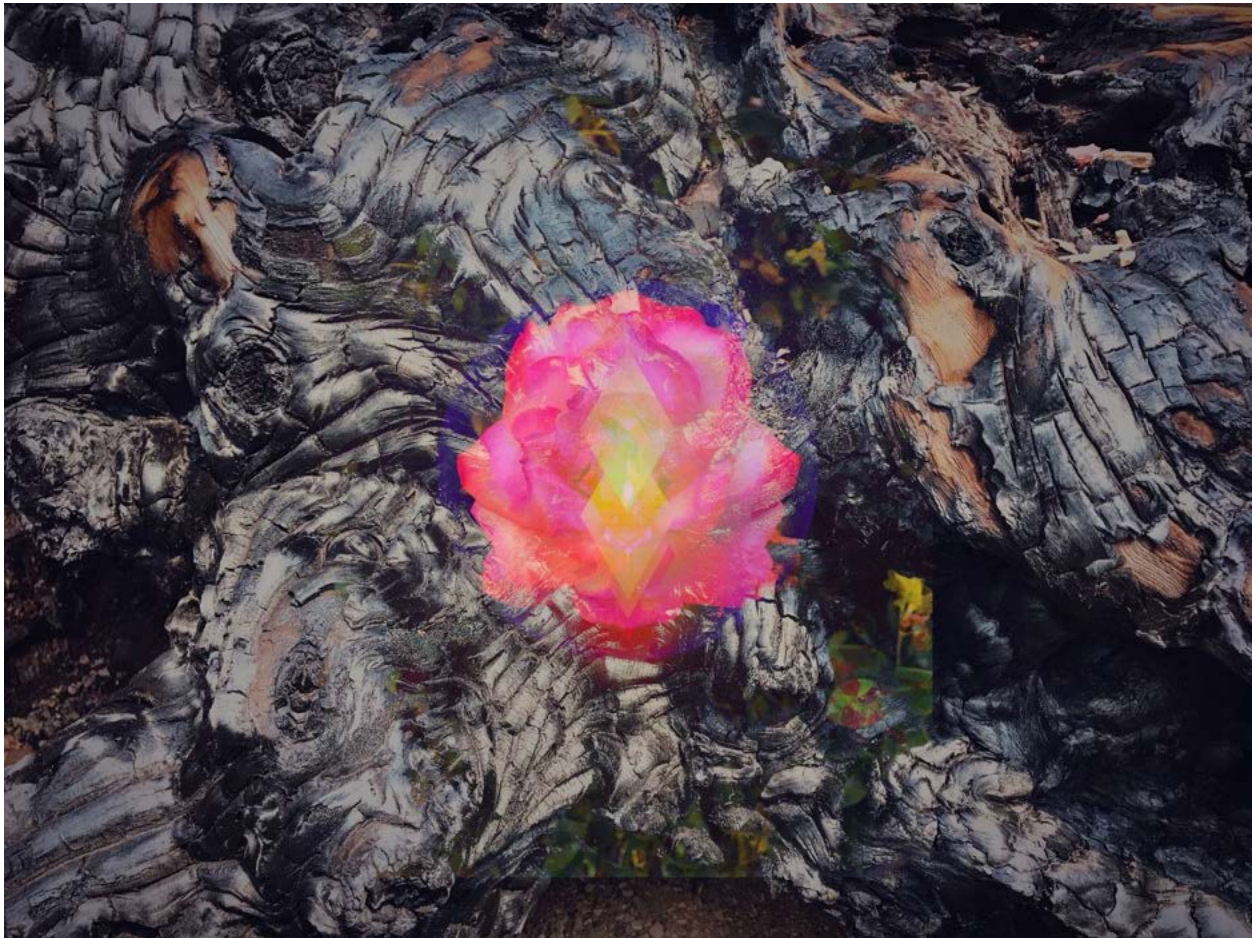


# Kanzeon Connect

Volume 1





Leigh Ascroft

“The time of the river and the time of the mountain are not disconnected.”

Shōbōgenzō; Uji

Twenty-five calendar years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer. During treatment, without knowledge of what I was doing, I started “sitting.” I sat for hours on the floor of my hospital room hospital pillow. Sometimes I sat in peace; sometimes I sat with fear; sometimes I sat in tears; sometimes I sat with joy; sometimes I sat for myself; sometimes I sat for others. I was just sitting with all my emotions and experiences. Observing and curious, I did not hide from or suppress them. Soon after this experience, I joined the Kanzeon Zen Center to deepen my understanding of what I came to know as “Zazen.”

While I lost contact with the White Plum Sangha, I remained deeply interested in the practice of Zen. For the past twenty-five years I have been reading, studying, practicing, and teaching what I think I have learned.

For the past several years, my satori experiences happen more often, and the insights last longer. Of course, we cannot have great faith without great doubt; as my great doubt and insecurity about the authenticity of these experiences is ever present.

With that said, it seems I may be closing the gap of separation.

For instance, for the past decade I have been studying time and the experience of time. Known as relativity of time, an individual can experience their day as “time moving slowly” while another may experience their day as “time moving quickly.” Examining the

experience – can we intentionally experience time? Moreover, can we live multiple life-times within our current sentient existence?

I have learned to live twice as many years as someone my own age. How is this so? To better understand this experience Genpo recommended I study Dogen's fascicle on Being-Time from the Shōbōgenzō; Uji.

There are many great teachers dating back thousands of years; who are generally saying the same thing; “[y]et heaven and earth are not separate and the way back is only a matter of hearing and understanding” (Being-Time: A Practitioner's Guide to Dogen's Shobogenzo Uji).

On on!

John Librett



## Love and Sangha in the Time of Covid

The past ten months have been a perfect storm. A year of clarity. A year of a great Reconnecting and Reckoning.

It's been a year of being shut in but also of reaching out in new ways, and of reaching in and digging deep down... to find out what matters most ...and who you want to connect with (or not.) For me, it's been a year of talking more with my pets, getting more home deliveries from Costco. It's been a year of getting comfortable with self-quarantining and social distancing, and then experiencing the simultaneous delight and horror of being spontaneously hugged by a Costco or Post Office employee. Guards have been put up, yet guards have also dropped this year—when least expected.

It's been a year of getting intimate with compassion fatigue.

It was the end of the long dreary winter, January 2020. The snow and the horrible air took all spirits down. I had plans to turn the ex-laundromat on 2nd Ave (you know, the one Dave Howard used to work at) into a one-night gathering place for sweaty dancing, laughing and playing. The plan: A wild 70's party! I'd show YouTube videos on a big screen and invite everybody in town to come get their groove on and get down. "I've never been to a disco party," the landlord said, "but if it can wait until March, I'll break out my gold chains and learn some moves." "Great!" I said. "It can wait."

Instead: Evening death tolls, brain swabs, weekly neighborhood socially-distanced street parties in designer face-masks, crazy-ass fire apocalypses, Happy Valley windstorms-worse-than-tornados, earthquakes (and tripping over front-door-staged cat crates), and other near-misses. But most of my stress this past year has come from my immediate family (aka sisters and parents).

My aunt called. We talked about how she's been WhatsApping with her cousins in Germany. She asked me how my mother was doing. It's been really hard to get to talk with mom, especially now that her hearing is going, and especially as she's been stuck in a nursing home during this epic fail. So much of life seems to have given up functioning. Maybe, more precisely, it is that we now can clearly identify (or have the compassion fatigue to let go of) the dysfunction—such as the relationships we are born into seemingly without choice, and without voice. The relationships whose drama has driven us to the dharma. I expressed my frustration to my aunt ...and (ironically) that I teach meditation and relaxation techniques and... and then she very easily and nicely but very clearly said in her German accent, “Remember, you need stress reduction as much as anyone else does.” That really got me thinking. Have I, too, been experiencing compassion fatigue, crashing fatigue...just as those “nursing home” staff, police, emergency workers, doctors and nurses, teachers and students, and friends and strangers stuck in situations all over the planet? And that brought it home: how lucky we are to have our sangha.

You know it: compassion fatigue. It's similar to decision making fatigue, aka willpower fatigue. You try so hard. Lifting up a weight of attention and intention... and the prefrontal cortex uses up every last drop of glucose and/or oxygen and ...Bam! We do-gooders, like the nurses, doctors, police, teachers, parents, and all sentient beings... are mere mortals once again.

Since George Floyd and the rioting, there's been a lot of bias training offered via Zoom for public servants, for mental health care and health care workers, for ministers—and I've taken it all. Zoom Zoom Zoom. And Google! Did you know a new study (Nov. 5, 2020) shows that people smell fear and disgust? A group of people were

given sweaty tees that had been worn by people who had watched a scary movie, “The Shining”, or repulsive episodes of MTV’s “Jackass”. The people who sniffed the fear-soaked shirts didn’t realize they were smelling fear...they BECAME FEARFUL. But I’ve realized that bias training isn’t only about how to quell our initial fears and be more open to making new relationships with strangers. Bias training just as importantly allows us to say “No!” to the relationships we don’t want. It’s not only respect and compassion for others—it’s self-respect and compassion. And the simplest, easiest, most direct technique for shaking loose of biases that I have found is Genpo Roshi’s Big Mind training. This is actually huge.

Not from our home life family dynamic “training”—but because of our Zen training, when we hear that somebody is sad we understand that it is multivocal, that there is probably a lot going on behind it. We know there is reality and we know there is bullshit.... but there is always respect. We know there may be anger and other emotions. We know not to assume. As emotions are addressed or assumed or felt and expressed by another person—we know that is an opportunity for us to experience them for ourselves. With our training we see all communication as an opportunity to reach out physically/mentally/spiritually instead of lash out. We know to stay present. And we forget. But we are here to remind each other.

Do I “like” and feel connected with all sangha members? No. Not at all. Truth is there are teachers in this lineage I’d sooner run away from than study with. But I find most communication with sangha members very respectful, supportive, and present. Like or don't like, attraction or avoidance, with our training we have an understanding of communication and respect and presence—and we realize how precious it is. Even face-to-face with those I don’t seek out, when we are “present” all preferences do fall away. The world is easier then.

And how lucky we are to be here now.

We're so lucky to have nice relationships to focus on, and the COVID-safe means to do it, like Facebook, WhatsApp, texting, phone, Skype and Zoom...for those of us who can't be in the same room. Life and love during COVID has brought us the need to use these tools more than ever for work, school, shopping, and connecting. (I haven't driven my car in months...and, Yes, I'm the person with the car that doesn't work parked on the street now.)

It was an epiphany for me to realize that I could just as easily connect with people around the world as I can with those in close physical proximity. Differences in countries, time zones, datelines... even languages... seem almost irrelevant. I have seen more of old friends in Amsterdam, Berlin, Cologne, Dublin, Este... and I've made more new friends, who I see regularly, in Denmark, Guatemala, South Africa, Iowa, Oklahoma... than ever before. It's been really interesting to embrace technology and the spirit of sangha...and to let go of masochistic obligations, habits, addictions, relations.

I am in a state of deep appreciation for this connection and reconnection. I'm appreciative for the intense training that we all go through and have been through— which is so personal and unique to each person. But it's not just the training that I appreciate. While families and cultures are falling apart, on their own or being torn apart by others, it seems to be that it's the desire for the training that pulls us together. It seems to be a mechanism, an opportunity, a way for us to connect physically, albeit cyberly. It's truly amazing that we've all found each other throughout space and time...through a desire that manifests uniquely in each of us. A desire to be compassionate.

There's always a need for compassion, but right now we have a special opportunity. Yes, there seems to be a rise in hate and hate groups. But when we hate the haters that just makes us a



hater....and, unfortunately, commiserating and fueling the hate of haters with our friends, we only add to the number of hate groups. In my daily sitting I sat as Trump. I sat as Trump's supporters. It felt like a fire line...after, there was nothing left to burn.

We sort ourselves. Karma? Choices:

Luckily, I'm shackled up with someone with whom there's no fear of being locked up together in a box for a year.

A dharma brother of mine gave a beautiful dharma talk recently about how special it is to see his new (first) grandson develop an ego—his first Ego.

Another friend of mine, a very close friend and a dear member of the sangha, is losing her memory. I spoke with her over the phone the other day. Mid conversation she apologized and asked me to remind her what my name is. I could feel her embarrassment and frustration, but also her self-compassion. I'm so glad that hadn't faded. And I was relieved, and surprised, that we both shrugged it off and continued our conversation.

And my mom has passed since beginning this piece. I don't know if she ever fully acknowledged what was happening as the end of this life came. That's the thing I'm most sad about from this past year. But it also reminds me of how lucky I am to realize that we all could go in an instant. And how lucky I am, we are, to have this practice of appreciating this life. And that may be what I am most grateful of sangha, you, for: Reminding me of that.

**Jige – Compassionate Flower, Anna Zumwalt**



Doug Wildfoerster

## Zen Nursury Rhymes

By Monk Eno

*Little Jack Horner*

*Sat in the corner,*

*Eating a Christmas pie. He put in his thumb,*

*And pulled out a plum,*

*And said, "What a good boy am I!"*

Little Jack Horner

Sat with no reason,

Not grasping at thoughts going by;

Space arose, confusing his nose and his toes

He said, 'who in the hell am I'?



*Little Boy Blue*

*Come blow your horn,  
The sheep's in the meadow,  
The cow's in the corn.  
But where is the boy  
Who looks after the sheep?  
He's under a haystack,  
Fast asleep.*

Awaken. Awaken and gather your flock  
Life is too short to live like a rock  
Turn your gas inward and explore the terrain  
What you will find, might just make you sane.  
Aftr a while, your house ordered a bit  
Life will be better when you work, love and sit.



Willem Schuitemakker

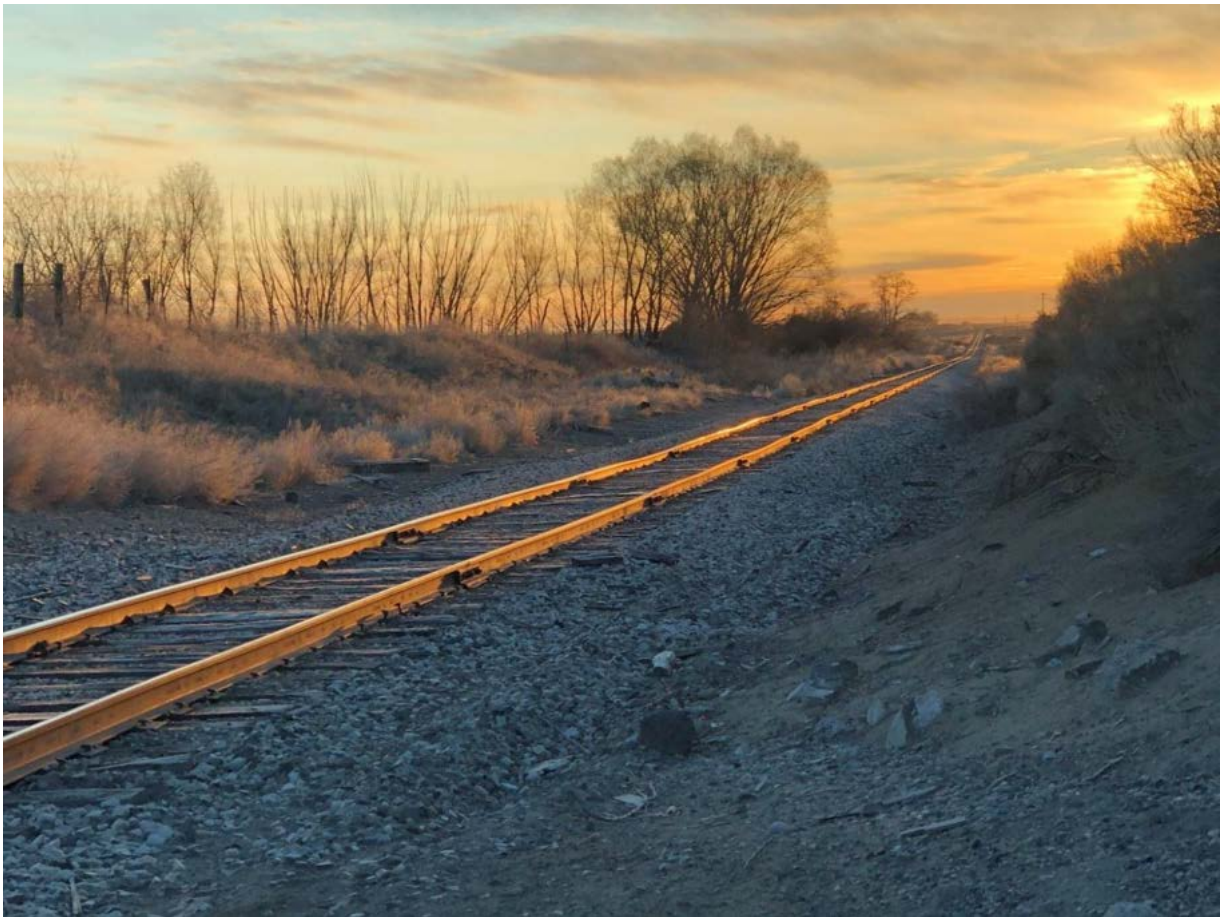
## The Junction Box

The trains of thought that rattle through the mind  
The carriages, the passengers, the freight  
All must be scheduled, routed, kept in line  
Brought safely to the platform, never late.

Alone, unliked, stiff, upright, uniformed  
I set the points, decide the destination  
Then change the lights, the rituals performed  
I grab my cap and scurry to the station.

As disembodied voices disembark  
Ten thousand faces pass me, all are known  
Their tickets checked, directed to their marks  
Or buried deep, denied, and then disowned.  
Though spurned I do my job - I keep control  
Fear not, I'll not unbind the fettered soul.

Simon Townley



Michael Johnson

Hank Malinowski Sensei

Contributions from Kanzeon Sangha friends and members

