



The Oak Tree in the Garden

Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

Harada Shodo-roshi, on Facing Challenges

On the occasion of his 77th birthday—an especially auspicious birthday in Japan—Harada-roshi gave the following talk as part of the Wisdom Lecture Series offered by Tahoma Monastery. The talk was given the day before the September 2017 7-day osesshin at Tahoma Monastery.

So many people have gathered here. Thank you very much.

Buddha was walking with his disciple Anan [Ananda]. When they were taking this walk, the Buddha bent over and put a little bit of dirt from the ground on his fingernail and he asked Ananda, “Which is greater? This amount of dirt or the amount of dirt on the whole planet?” The Buddha answered for him, “Yes, it’s obvious isn’t it. There is so much dirt on the ground in the whole world. And there is such a small amount of dirt on one fingernail. And this is just like how there are so many living beings on the planet, but how few of those living beings are human beings. And because it is such a rare thing to be born as a human being we must honor our own life and the life of others. While we hear that there are 7.5 billion people on this planet and we are all facing a huge shortage of water, a shortage of food, a terribly challenging climate change—so many different problems that we have to all face together, we see also that it isn’t only humans that are on this planet. When the Buddha was talking about the life energy of all he was including those great big elephants and the little tiny ants. And not only that, but the big whales in the ocean as well as the tiniest plankton in which you can find in one cupful five hundred thousand of those plankton. And in the sky, the huge birds that fly simultaneously with the almost invisible small insects. It is said that the universe is 46 billion years old while that of human beings is only 200 million.

It is clear that while it may seem that the Buddha was exaggerating in his response to Ananda, that’s not the case. We are able to exist after a very long history of evolution that led to us becoming human beings. And for all of those human beings, the life that we are living at this very moment can only be lived once. It’s very precious. It’s very unique. And for that reason as well Buddha was saying we have to cherish and hold very precious and important our life and that life of all beings. Whether those human beings are awakened to it or not awakened to it, every single one without exception has the same mind as God and Buddha.

When the Buddha awakened after six years of ascetic training he exclaimed, “How wondrous! How wondrous! All beings are without exception endowed from the origin with the same state of mind to which I have just awakened. Only because there are attachments and extraneous thoughts and conditioning are they unable to notice this

If we are quiet, when we are quiet, when we are settled, then spontaneously, naturally, deep wisdom comes forth and functions. Our state of mind becomes like a clear mirror that can simply, spontaneously reflect every single thing that it encounters with no separation in between. When that great compassion and the deep functioning of that wisdom comes forth then for every single person who comes before that clear mirror-like state of mind we feel deep love, without exception. That compassion is felt equally for every single person we encounter. It is just as the Buddha wrote in the Lotus Sutra, “All of the places in the whole universe are my home and all of the beings there are my children.”

This is not only true for our own children. The Nobel Prize winner Albert Schweitzer was treating people in remote areas for his whole life. He was also one who would say when people didn’t want to give the help that he was getting for taking care of the

children, "Did God ever give you permission only to take care of your own child."

When the Buddha was traveling, he would always carry a long stick with metal rings that would clang as he walked to warn all the animals to stay off the path so that he would not carelessly step on any. And when he taught his disciples he taught them always, before they drank water, to filter it through fabric. We never know if there are small insects we can't see in the water that we drink, and to prevent their being drunk down we have to filter out the water. "Don't kill." "Don't kill." The Buddha was always saying this.

The first of the precepts is to not take life. And from this first precept come all of the 500 precepts for the monks and the 750 precepts for the nuns. We have the first deep precept taught: From the most clear, profound and mysterious mind, I vow to not cut life. What our mind, like a mirror, sees how all of the beings are one continuous life energy. And that each of the individual parts of that is that precious life energy and must not be cut. This is the precept which expresses the first of all the precepts: Do not take life.

Why did [the roshi] begin the talk today the way he did? He began this talk because every June he goes to Europe, to Hokuozan Sogenji, his monastery there—a place for people to come from all over Europe, all of his disciples and others. Seventy-five people from all over Europe came to do sesshin there. From there he went on to Lithuania, which is one of the Baltic countries along with Estonia and Latvia. He has many, many disciples in these Baltic countries so there was a sesshin in Lithuania where 70 people again did a sesshin. They all sat very whole-heartedly. One night he gave a talk at a university before which there was a small bit of time available so they took him on a side trip to the Japanese embassy. And he learned something he hadn't know anything about before; it was about a Mr. Sugihara Chuine. Although it was a day when the embassy was not open to the public, because one of his disciples was a friend of a person there they opened it; there he found out about this person who had saved the lives of 6,000 Jewish people.

Sugihara Chuine was later honored with awards for the great work he did, along with a Swedish man named Raoul Wallenberg, who is still missing, and

Oskar Schindler. They were all given awards for what they had done at that time

Sugihara Chuine had worked in the embassy in the city it was in at that time; it was the year 1940. One day, suddenly, hundreds of Jewish people came to this embassy pleading for a Japanese visas. He had no idea why they were there. Daily they increased in numbers, and there were thousands of them standing chaotically in front of the embassy begging for visas. Refusing to leave, they couldn't go home they said until they received these visas. He asked five of the people there to immediately explain what it was that they were there for, and how they had come to be there. He was told that 2,000 years ago they had lost their country, traveling since then as refugees on a very thin line of support wherever they went all over Europe, eventually going to Poland. And then, because of the Nazis having to leave there as well, and the neighboring country from Poland was Lithuania, and that is why they were there now. The Nazis were annihilating the Jewish people and for that purpose had built Auschwitz. Some knew, not everyone, but the people who spoke about it were killed, and so people were silent.

At that time there was a famous ambassador in Holland who made available to them, although they never needed to go there, the use of an island that was empty of people, and made them visas saying those people could go there. People from all the countries that were at war all over Europe also went to Lithuania at that time to find a solution; things were getting worse and worse. They were given visas to that island in order that they would be able to then cross on the Siberian railway for 10 days and go to Japan by ship. With visas they would arrive in Yokohama, in Kobe. From there they might go to Shanghai or America. From behind they were pursued by war and bombs. They could not retreat. Sugihara Chiune decided to offer these visas, and he asked for permission to the Japanese headquarters, but no answer came to this question. At that time, Japan was involved in an agreement with those three countries, including Germany, and he was told not to do it.

Sugihara Chiune had waited two weeks to receive a specific answer to his letter, and although he knew the official position he struggled deeply with-

in. What is our true country? He knew he would be at risk of punishment for the rest of his life, yet on the 29th of July he began to sign and give the visas that he had been requested to give.

From then on, from the 29th of July on for the one month following, he gave up his sleep, he gave up everything, and wrote in every moment. In those days visas were handwritten. He wrote every single one, breaking pencils, breaking pens, with sore shoulders he continued. Not even wasting one precious moment he continued to write the visas. On the 3rd of August Lithuania became a Russian country and he wrote until 15th of August, even though as he was ordered to stop. On the 15th of August the embassy was closed. He had written by then 2,000 visas which became the freedom for 6,000 people because the 2,000 visas were for families as well. That is why he was able to save the lives of 6,000 people. It has been said, coming out of the country of Israel, that 70 years later after these visas were written, the number of descendants of all the people who were saved by these visas is 250,000.

If he had followed the country's orders at that time all of those people would have been taken to Auschwitz.

In his diary he wrote, "I am a failure at my ambassador job. I could not stand to not do this and see all these people killed. I am not ashamed. I only have to ask: What is it to be a citizen of a country? This is what I thought about and this is how I had to answer." This is what he wrote in his diary.

After the embassy closed down he moved to the Metropolitan [actually Metropolis] Hotel where he continued to write and issue visas. By then he was told by the Japanese country to go to Berlin, and he was writing them until the train for Berlin left. He was excellent at speaking the Russian language. He requested to the Russian embassy these people would pass safely through the country, and he was given permission for that.

Six thousand people - For them it was a very challenging and difficult time from that point on as well until they finally arrived at Nagasaki in Japan. It seemed like heaven to them arriving in their ragged clothes and broken down shoes. Of course they had only a transit visa for 30 days and that is why,

for all of Yokohama and Kobe, getting ships to the leave the country was the next important step. But all of the 6,000 people, thanks to the hands of Sugihara Chiune, were able to have their life.

Later he was arrested in Russia and spent one year in jail there. And when he returned to Japan, because of how he had gone against his orders, he was also punished. He was first acknowledged by the country of Japan for the great work he had done, in the year 2000, and, of course, by then he had died.

The Buddha himself saw his very own country completely crushed.

The Buddha always was teaching: "Do not be in conflict." "Do not fight." "Do not kill." There was a neighboring with which his country was always in conflict. He bravely and ferociously tried to prevent them from fighting with each other.

Of course the Buddha wanted to save his own country, and so when the opposing country under the direction of Virudhaka came with elephant forces the Buddha sat down in front of the oncoming elephant forces in the burning sun of the hot day to prevent the attack from happening. Virudhaka, the leader of the opposing, asked why the Buddha sat there in that hot sun. Why didn't he go where there was a cool breeze and shade? To which the Buddha answered, "Yes. A cool breeze is important." And Virudhaka knew very well what the Buddha was talking about. That to have one's country safe that cool breeze is important, and he withdrew.

But many years later, again, Virudhaka and the elephants came. And again, the Buddha, in the same way, sat down in the hot summer sun, and again they retreated. But the third time it happened the Buddha realized that this was what had happened because of the way his country, led by the Shakya clan, had lived, and this time he did not come out

Why did the Buddha decide this? It is because Virudhaka's father, the king of this high country—which was a fairly new country while the Shakya country was a well-settled, old, and proud country—asked for a Shakya princess to be his wife. But the Shakya country did not want to give their princess to the high country for the hand of the king. So

they had instead, in place of sending the princess and without telling them, had sent the daughter of a slave. This was discovered by Mahanama that this was the parenting of the King Virudhaka. Because of this the Buddha had said that what had happened had come to this dispute. The moment that Virudhaka realized that he was the child of a slave was when he was young and he had gone to his mother's country, the Shakya country. He was playing around on the throne when a person who knew the history of who he was, pushed him away and told him that he was a common slave child and to get away from the royal throne. So for the first time he found out in great shame about his own birth.

The resentment of this could not be forgotten by Virudhaka. He vowed to conquer this Shakya country, and he went over the heads of both his father and his older brother and became the head of his country. Virudhaka had such resentment that he three times went to go to war and conquer the Shakya country. The Buddha knew this whole story although he hadn't been there when it happened because he had already left the palace by that time

Twice the Buddha had stood up to Virudhaka's attack, but the third time the Buddha did not go and interfere, because, he said, the Shakya country had to reap what they had sown. At that time, the person who had known about this and had actually caused for it to happen because of what he had arranged in the marriage—he knew that what he had done was the reason for all of this—said, "Please don't conquer this country. Don't come." He had said, "Just give me the time; I will jump in this lake, and until the time I come up, please don't attack." Meanwhile, he had made it so that he would be caught by a nail at the bottom, and never be able to return to the top of the water. But it didn't work. The Buddha's own country thus died.

How few experience this terrible pain and misery in their life, and yet, the Buddha kept to his teaching of the Middle Way, refusing to take lives, and always, always teaching to be in peace no matter what. This is the teaching of the Middle Way.

Today, Israel has a country, but it is still in deep conflict, and there are refugees there from all over the world, all over Europe. Today, the whole world has problems with China, with Russia, with North

Korea. North Korea who now says they have a hydrogen bomb, and while people say they will never use it, who knows that?. It's an impossible time to know about what's going to happen next. Today, it is a world where it is tension upon tension upon tension mounting. Tomorrow will be the 11th of September—9/11. It was sixteen years ago that the World Trade Center was flown into. At the time of 9/11 there were 52 people doing an osesshin at Tahoma. It was the sixth day of the osesshin. At 8 o'clock in the morning one of [the roshi's] disciples who worked for Alaska Airlines had heard the news earliest and ran to his home to tell him and showed him the filming of it. "In the USA's history, something like this has never happened before, so please tell everyone in the sesshin about it!" And although he told them, no one left the sesshin. Although there were telephone calls made, discussion of it, everyone stayed sitting.

Until the end of the seventh day, everyone stayed at the osesshin. And all of them in fact said they were so thankful that there had been a sesshin; otherwise, they would also have been constantly at the TV, only looking again and again at this tragic happening.

From the supermarket, all of the commodities were disappearing in the tension people felt and the fear of this moment. People were going to pray in church not knowing what to do with themselves, but they could not settle down. Those who were sitting zazen felt that they come to a place in their state of mind where they could move through this creatively.

We are easily moved around in these complicated, excited, and chaotic times, like the Jewish people in World War II who are not able to speak out and it ended up in silence. But we all have an objective, quiet, clear, state of mind. This is what the Buddha was referring to when he was awakened and he said, "How wondrous! How wondrous! All beings of exception, are from the origin endowed with this bright, clear state of mind to which I have just awakened." When we are sitting and quiet we may be able to know just what we have to do because that state of mind is within each of us.

In Asia there are many ancient paths, such as the path of tea ceremony, flower arranging, kendo, judo, the Noh theatre, and Zen is found in all of these. In flower arranging the vase is the flowers.

The thin board the vase lays on is the flowers. The water is the flowers. The actual flowers in the vase are the flowers. The putting of the flowers in the vase is the flowers. This is the way of that arrangement of flowers. Not only in a vase, but when the whole world is in that stillness, then everything is the flowers.

In the Confucian Analects it is taught that there is a disciple who asks Confucius, "How does one live in filial piety?" To this Confucius answered, "Even dogs and horses can raise children, but this is not the best way to raise a child. In humans there must be a mind of deep respect for each of them; a mind of deep respect for the most profound mind in the other." And this is how it has to be done.

Twelve hundred years ago lived a great Zen Master, Rinzai Zenji. He left the words, "In this five foot lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank always coming in and going out. If you have not seen this yet, see it now." Everyone has a physical body. It may be tall, short, fat, thin. It may have different eye colors, it may have different hair colors, but that which uses this physical body has no form and no shape. This is the true master and when that true master leaves the eyes it becomes the mountains. It becomes the flowers. It becomes the river. When the true master goes through the ears it becomes the birdsong. It becomes the sound of the raindrop. And from our nose it becomes all the fragrances. From our body it becomes hot and cold. This is our true ability that we are all able to realize, that no one is missing.

In this body of shape and form we encounter people: people who are suffering, people who are sad, people who are miserable to the point where they can barely stay in existence. But that is not a someone else. That is me. We don't need to be able to view any kind of difficult explanations or words for these people. They suffer, I suffer. And finally we return in this way to that Original Mind. The man at the Japanese embassy saw all those 6,000 people as himself. He simply could not stand to see all those people killed.

Sugihara Chiune did not do zazen. This is not how he became because he sat zazen. We are all without exception endowed with this state of mind which we don't notice that we are, but by doing zazen there is availability of virtue that allows us to

notice that and realize it.

Please, today, right in front of us are all kinds of varieties of challenges. Don't be deceived by the conditions. We have to keep our sight firmly on our deep, truest faith and belief.



Further Resources

A new book of Harada-roshi's teachings is due out in January: **Not One Single Thing: A Commentary on the Platform Sutra**. You can pre-order it through Amazon.com here, and if you do it through this link, a portion of the price is donated to help support Mountain Gate :

https://smile.amazon.com/Not-One-Single-Thing-Commentary/dp/1614291144/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1508373520&sr=1-1&keywords=Harada+Shodo

Harada Shodo-roshi is a premier Japanese Rinzai master and abbot of Sogen-ji Zen temple, a training monastery in Japan. His own training was deep and of course is ongoing, and he is utterly committed to his students' coming to awakening.



Every identification we hold about ourselves disconnects us from the fluidity of our core nature.

--**Healing Developmental Trauma**, p 34



Every moment lived in absorbed attention is simultaneously a beginning and an end, at once a birth and a death. In such attention we are radically open to the unexpected, to letting life live us. Any event, however small or seemingly trivial, properly attended, opens the door to infinity.

—Flora Courtois,
from *The Door to Infinity*,
published in *Parabola*,
Vol. 15 No.2 Summer.1990, Pp.17-19



WHAT I KNOW

What do I know
but that in my life
damage has been done—
by anger carried out in
words and deeds,
by unkindness flowing
from my own self-hatred,
involved and thrown
back at others;
by my unwillingness
to look and see
how my hurt turns
to abuse of other beings—
and how my ego
grows to great self-righteousness
by knowing *I am right*
and others are so wrong;
then wonder in the dark of night
at pain that racks my body,
mind and soul.
These are the things I know,
and in the incompleteness
of my knowing—can
only grieve for what I do,
for what we all do,
holding up ourselves
by standing on the necks
of those who are
our brothers.

Richard Wehrman's Work

Richard Wehrman is a gifted illustrator and graphic artist, as well as an equally gifted poet. (His wife Vicky is also an accomplished artist and graphic designer.) He is also a long time spiritual practitioner, for decades working through Zen Buddhist practice at the Rochester Zen Center and more

recently through the Diamond Approach of A.H. Almaas. His poetry expresses an unusually deep awareness bred of his long years of ongoing spiritual practice, and can provide inspiration and insight. Like many who take up spiritual practice, Richard is not a stranger to suffering, and perhaps that has given him a significant assist in his spiritual work, as it has for so many.

Many of Richard's poems are published in books—available through Amazon.com; enjoy his design skills when you view the covers!

Being Here

https://smile.amazon.com/Being-Here-Inquiries-Richard-Wehrman/dp/0991388259/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1508349191&sr=8-1&keywords=Wehrman

Light Was Everywhere

https://smile.amazon.com/Light-was-Everywhere-Richard-Wehrman/dp/0983226113/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1508349316&sr=8-3

Talking With the Wind

https://smile.amazon.com/Talking-Wind-Richard-Wehrman/dp/0991388240/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1508349316&sr=8-2&keywords=Richard+Wehrman

The poem shared to the left here can be a source of inspiration for inner work for us all—vital inner work if the world is not to continue in its increasingly negative and destructive direction. The poem on the right gives clear sight and insight into that world we have created through greed, anger, and the illusions bred of conditioning—and are continuing to create.

How to step off that train? We have tools, taught for centuries and millenia and in many cultures—and proven to be extremely effective when we put them to regular, committed and persistent use. Patience, determination, and a deep willingness to walk into the felt sense of whatever might come up have the potential to bring us to a depth of true freedom such as we cannot begin to imagine!

WORLD OUT OF BALANCE

In these times
this world of men
is a world out of balance.

Trading what they cannot see
for what they can touch
and hold, grasp and possess,
the world wobbles like a bent metal plate,
spinning toward destruction.

Deep knowledge of the soul
has floated away,
become vaporous and insubstantial.

The meaning of our lives,
our connection to the gods and to the earth
is broken, and we find ourselves
only bodies—bags of flesh blown
by trivial desires and greed-
inflated lusts.

Some souls anchor
the chaos of the soul-less.
But this is not sustainable—a strong dam
is a small thing to hold back
the waters of the world.

Some have awakened.
More will come to awaken, allowing
love to return to their hearts.
Small movements may not prevent
catastrophe, yet still effect
great change.

Let us pray that love
for ourselves and for each other,
and for this earth,
will re-ignite the unity we so
desperately need.

*Last night I was finally able to feel the
rage that was frozen. It was a more
visceral level of it, and harder to feel. I
woke up finally NOT sick anymore! The
sore throat/fatigue has been dragging
me down. I could tell it was unpro-
cessed energy, but I couldn't feel it, so
I wound up being on/off sick since last
week. Anyway, I think it's over, and that
level of anger is gone. At least for now!*

—from a Zen student
dealing with a history of trauma

It is known that people who have been trauma-
tized are often drawn to spiritual practice, and Zen
practice is one of those areas of spiritual work.
Flashbacks and other expressions of that trauma
don't always surface in the beginning, but at a cer-
tain point the practice hits a wall where the tug of
war between repression and the yearning to be-
come free ramp up the fight. Going to work with a
therapist trained in trauma work and with a history
of Buddhist practice—and more and more is be-
coming known about how clinicians can effectively
work with people who have a history of trauma—
can make a big difference.

It is also vital to work with that trauma through ther-
apy if our practice is truly to bring us to a place of
liberation, and working with it within the practice is
also important. The traditional Asian emphasis on
pushing aside anything that is not directly related
to whatever meditation practice one is doing can
work for awhile, but far too many fine human beings
have fled or acted out when the pressures of re-
pressing what was trying to surface but was being
denied became too much.

On the other hand, the person who wrote the quote
above is a long-time Rinzai Zen practitioner who
has, through a combination of ongoing Zen prac-
tice—including many, many sesshin—as well as
effective work with a therapist, been able to experi-
ence not only a true deepening of practice but also
the fruits of that combination, as expressed in that
quote. It's a long haul, but Zen practice, carefully
guided, can support the work of therapy, and effec-
tive therapy can support the work of Zen practice.



Calendar

October 31 - November 7 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline for applications is October 25.

NOTE: Late November Sozui-sensei will be in Japan at Sogen-ji, continuing her formal training.

November 30 - December 8 Rohatsu Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline for applications is November 15.

December 8-10 Rohatsu Weekend Sesshin; deadline for applications is December 1. This is one of the most optimal times for sesshin in the Buddhist world, and temples and centers everywhere are holding Rohatsu sesshin ending on December 8th, the day the Buddha glanced at the morning star after seven full days and nights of deepening meditation, and had his profound Awakening. That week of concentrated zazen under the Bo tree—known these days as the Tree of Enlightenment—is the model for sesshin in general and the traditional Rohatsu sesshin—which traditionally begins November 31st and ends December 8th. There will be a full 8-day sesshin at Mountain Gate, and for those at HVZC there is the excellent opportunity to “tune into” not only the Mountain Gate Rohatsu sesshin but also that at Sogen-ji and so many other places all over the Buddhist world, with a weekend sesshin at HVZC. This sesshin will take place during the final days of Rohatsu sesshin elsewhere in the world and is a real opportunity for anyone who would like to significantly deepen their practice!

In Japan traditionally during Rohatsu sesshin no one is allowed to lay down during the entire sesshin. During our HVZC mini-Rohatsu sesshin we will also make special efforts in deepening our practice, as the Buddha did during that first ever sesshin where he experienced Enlightenment. Accordingly, during the first night of our mini-Rohatsu at HVZC we will be moving to the Kannon Room at the Kannon-

do after the usual evening tea to continue our sitting informally until 5 a.m. the next morning. During that time, black and herbal tea and coffee will be available in the kitchen and kinhin can be done informally outdoors.

2018 Calendar

January 5-12 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline for applications is December 31, 2017

January 12-14 Weekend sesshin led by Sozui-sensei

February 4 Sangha Work Day

February 16-21 5-Day Sesshin; deadline for applications is February 9. *If you intend to apply for this sesshin you MUST have your application submitted by that date in order to be considered.*

February 26-March 5 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; application deadline: Feb 12

March 4 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei

March 9-16 7-Day Sesshin at Turtleback Zendo; application deadline is March 1.

March 9 Monk ordination of Serita Scott at Turtleback Zendo. Family and friends as well as Sangha members are invited to attend. This will take place the opening night of sesshin, an optimal time for such a practice-affirming event. For more about ordination, please see the July-August 2017 Oak Tree in the Garden.

Vesak [Buddha's Birthday] Ceremonies:

Friday evening, **March 30, Temple Night**
Saturday, **March 31, Buddha's Birthday Ceremonies** followed by **Communal Meal with Sangha, Families and Friends**

Sunday, April 1, Mitra-roshi will give teisho during the regular Sunday morning sitting. Mitra-roshi expects to be at HVZC March 27 to April 3. More information will be forthcoming closer to the time.

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