

Honolulu Diamond Sangha



Summer 2022

The Great Way Has No Byroads

By Michael Kieran

In his Pointer for Case 16 of the *Blue Cliff Record* the master Yuanwu says:

The Great Way has no byroads; one who stands on it is utterly alone. Dharma is not seen or heard; words and thoughts vanish in the distance. If you can penetrate through the forest of thorns and untie the bonds of Buddhahood and succession, you attain the land of intimate stability, where the gods have no way to offer flowers, where outsiders have no door to spy through. Then you work all day without ever working, talk all day without ever talking ...

Many years ago, when I was studying East-West comparative philosophy at the University of Hawai'i, sangha member and fellow classmate at the time, Bob Buss, gave me an excellent little book titled *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. Chapter Two of that book is titled "A Way without a Crossroads."

In that chapter, the author, Herbert Fingarette, notes that individual choice and responsibility are key elements of Western ethical and religious understandings of what it is to be human and to fulfill one's potential as a human being, but in classical Chinese thought this is not the case. And it's not that within this classical Chinese worldview people don't make critical choices and live profoundly ethical lives—it's just that in classical Chinese thought, the ethical life is not conceived of in terms of individual choice among real alternatives and individual responsibility for those choices.

In classical Chinese thought, the cultural soil out of which Chan and Zen Buddhism grew, ethical and religious life is understood in terms of Dao, the Path, the Way—a way, as Fingarette says, without crossroads. If we reflect on our ideas about right and wrong, about our justice system, our ideas of punishment and retribution, they all revolve around the idea of an autonomous self

that makes choices and is responsible for those choices. Responsibility in this way of thinking means "cause." If you are responsible, you individually have sufficient agency and control in a particular situation to bring about a particular result, and you will be rewarded or punished accordingly. Our lives and our various understandings of life are certainly more complex than this, but nevertheless, the notions of individual choice and individual responsibility are foundational for most of us in our understanding of ourselves and how life works. They are a natural corollary to our notion of an independent autonomous self.

In contrast to this, in classical Chinese thought, fulfillment and excellence in life come from discerning the Dao and finding accord with it. This way of life is not so much about reaching a goal or destination as it is about the process of life. One could say that accord with the Dao is the goal, but the Dao, the Way is on-going. The Dao is ever emergent and not all laid out ahead of time by a grand designer or some universal force or principle operating behind the scenes. Accord with the Dao is at once both a creative process AND a process of discernment. Dao is more a verb than a noun—discerning and opening the Way as we go, rather than simply following something already laid out.

In this way, rather than choosing among real alternatives, one either discerns and follows the Way, or one misses it. And when we miss it and find ourselves out of accord with the Way, we pick it up again, we "come back" as we say about zazen practice—come back to our breath, come back to things as they are—emergent and alive. In practicing the Way, the focus is not on the self choosing the right option, the focus is on discerning the path, the Way, as it and *as we* emerge within the flux of life, wherever we are, whatever comes along.

A while back, I heard an interesting interview with long distance swimmer Diana Nyad. Her inspiring memoir titled *Find a Way* had just been published. "Find a way" was the phrase she repeated to herself over and over when at 64 years old she became the first person to swim the grueling 110 miles of shark laden ocean between Cuba and Florida without the protection of a shark cage. Find a way. Find a way. Find a way.

In contrast to the idea of an independent autonomous self choosing between conceptually conceived alternative paths, in practicing the Dao, one's effort is dedicated to on-the-spot discernment of the way within the flow of life, while at the same time the intrinsic virtue of the Dao, the Way, draws us to it through our resonance with it. In other words, there is a dynamic mutuality in the practice of way-finding. As we learn through practice to open ourselves to the Way, the Way comes to us. Thus practice is not simply a matter of knowledge and will power to follow through with what we know, or what we think we know. There is something more subtle, immediate, intimate and dynamic going on in the practice of way-finding.

The virtue, power, and nobility of the Way show in the particulars of each situation. It is not abstract. It is experienced directly in our attentive engagement with life. That is why the effort of practice is directed into discernment of the unique particulars of the emerging situation—the way is found there. This is also true of our Four Infinite Vows—they are discerned and fulfilled in the particulars of life: in seeing a greedy thought, a child's smile, the color of your toothbrush. Our effort in practice is dedicated to clear and direct discernment, while at the same time the intrinsic virtue, power, and nobility of the Way comes to us when we stop projecting our conceptual frameworks onto other people and situations.

There is a wonderfully clear passage about this mutuality of the Way in Dōgen Zenji's *Zuimonki*. Listen to Dōgen:

Have you not read about awakening to the Way through the sound of bamboo, of enlightening the mind by the sight of peach blossoms? Do you think there is any cleverness or stupidity in the bamboo? Any delusion or enlightenment? How could there be shallow or profound, wise or stupid among the flowers? Although the flowers bloom every year, that doesn't mean that everyone attains the Way. Although the bamboo echoes from time to time, that does not mean that all who hear it see the Way. It is only by virtue of long study and persevering practice, with the supporting help of hard effort in discernment of the Way, that they realized the Path and understood the mind. It is not that the sound of the bamboo alone was sharp, nor is it that the color of the flowers was especially lush. Although the echo of bamboo is marvelous, it does not sound of itself; it depends upon the help of a piece of tile to make a sound. Although the color of the flowers is beautiful, they do not bloom of themselves; they need the spring breeze to open. ... The conditions for the study of the Way are also like this; although the Way is complete in everyone, the realization of the Way depends upon *collective conditions*. Although individuals may be clever, the practice of the Way is done by means of *collective power*. Therefore, now you should make your minds as one, set your aspirations in one direction, study thoroughly, seek and inquire.

Where Dōgen says "although the Way is complete in everyone, realization of the Way depends upon collective conditions" the term translated as "collective conditions" is 眾緣 "shuen" in Sino-Japanese. 眾 "shu" is the same as in the first of our Four Infinite Vows: Shu jo mu hen sei gan do—All beings without limit I vow to carry over. 眾 "shu" means: the multitude, throng, all, the whole of, and 緣 "en" means to have affinity with, especially by prior relationship. In the Buddhist context 緣 "en" means conditioned arising (patitya samutpada). So Dōgen is saying that realization of the Way comes through our relationship and affinity with the whole of life. It is not an individual or psychological matter. Dōgen also says that "although individuals may be clever, the practice of the Way is accomplished by the power and efficacy of the whole, the multitude." To practice Zen we sit side by side in the Zendo. We sit with our eyes and ears open, living and dying together along with the wind, the birds and grasses, trees and streams, mountains and clouds. Sara's and Lish's lovely essays in this newsletter are testimonials to the power and efficacy of the particular collective conditions of one's place. Here's Zhaozhou presenting the Way without a crossroads:

A monk asked Zhaozhou, "The supreme way is not difficult, it simply doesn't pick and choose. What is this not picking and choosing?"

Zhaozhou said, "Above the heavens, below the heavens, only I, solitary and honored."

The monk said, "But this is still picking and choosing."

Zhaozhou said, "You country bumpkin! Where is the picking and choosing?"

The monk had nothing to say.

Zhaozhou presents the living fact of the first line of the well-known *Xinxinming* with the words attributed to the Buddha upon his birth: "Above the heavens, below the heavens, only I, solitary and honored." What, by the way, is the Buddha's birthday? When is the Buddha born? "Above the heavens, below the heavens, only I solitary and honored" —What is this solitariness? What I is this, this "only I"? Let me assure you, it is not separation or isolation from others. It is another name for the Dao: the whole thing, all at once, right here where there is nothing that is other.

When the delusion of separateness falls away, the delusion of control and the delusion of no control fall away right along with it. They don't fit—it's not like that! As our Zen ancestors tell us:

Originally the Dao is wordless; words are simply used to make us aware there is this matter of the Dao. Once you see the Dao, the words are immediately forgotten. To get to this point, you must first go back to your own original state.

To go back to "your own original state" does not mean to go back in time, as though your origin was at some other place and time. It means to see your own origin right here reading these words.

When we try to understand Buddha Dharma within the conceptual frameworks of individual choice and individual responsibility that most of us grew up with, it doesn't make sense and we naturally have doubts—not the great doubt and great wonderment that drives us to realization—but little niggling doubts, skeptical doubts, and the many crossroads that appear with them. Nevertheless, even amidst the niggling doubts and multitude of fabricated choices, we can still take up and practice the Buddha Way. When we do this through our activity of practice, we can

begin to enjoy the clarity and stability of practice. Yet statements like "no picking and choosing" still may not make sense for a long time. As we continue to practice, we learn we can trust ourselves and trust the practice and in so doing old delusive conceptual frameworks fall away and our understanding, which is always a few steps behind our practice comes more and more into alignment with the Dharma, the way things actually are.

One time when Dongshan Liangjie was washing his bowls, he saw two birds contending over a frog. A monk who also saw this asked, "Why does it come to that?"

Dongshan replied, "It's only for your benefit."

When we take up the Way with our whole body-mind, we find that each step is the Great Way itself. As master Yuanwu says in one of his *Teishō* in the *Blue Cliff Record*:

This is the single track of the great road to the Capital; as you raise your feet and put them down, there's nothing that is not this.

This is exactly what Dongshan means when he says, "It's only for your benefit."

We may be able to appreciate "it's only for our benefit" in some birds fighting over a frog but how about endless war, systemic sexism and racism, and the mass extinction of species? Only for your benefit? Really? But if you disagree with Dongshan, who will you trust? How will you ever go beyond your own cherished ideas and opinions and awaken? If you do agree with Dongshan that it's only for your benefit, how so? What benefit do you find?

When Dongshan was taking his leave from his first teacher Nanyuan, Nanyuan said, "Make a thorough study of the Buddha Dharma, and broadly benefit the world."

Dongshan said, "I have no question about studying the Buddha Dharma, but what is it to broadly benefit the world?"

Nanyuan said, "Not to disregard a single being." What is a single being? Certainly a bird or a frog is, but what about your own anger or despair? Aren't those beings too? Can we not disregard our despair and at the same time not indulge it?

A student who has been practicing around ten years recently told me that he often experiences a flood of powerful emotions in what would seem to be fairly ordinary circumstances. He said this has happened to him for as long as he can remember and he always found it upsetting, but these days it's really okay. Not just okay in the sense of "okay, I guess I have no choice but to put up with this," but really okay. This may not be quite the same as realizing "It's only for your benefit," but it's certainly getting there. Not rejecting the way life shows up—but rather embracing it and living it. There is a wonderful generosity in this spirit of using what's given. It contrasts sharply with the stress and stinginess of the curated life—always trying to hide what we *think* is unattractive and put on display what we *think* others will like. Again, this doesn't mean indulging or justifying greed, hatred, and delusion; it means responding appropriately to what arises.

Zhaozhou, the old Buddha, once said to his assembly:

Brothers, simply improve upon the deeds of the past, don't improve the person of the past.

This is the Way without a crossroads. You can't improve the person of the past because there is no such person, never was. Responsibility is not blame; it is the ability to respond.

Let's do our very best to discern the Way and respond accordingly—

*All beings without limit I vow to carry over.
Kleshas without cease I vow to cut off.
Dharma-gates without measure I vow to
master.
Buddha ways without end I vow to fulfill.*

Notes from the Lava Fields

By Lish Troha

Due to blind confidence—or maybe hubris—I offered to be the trail leader on day one of Hele Mālie, though I'd never before hiked that trail from Crater Road to Keauhou in Volcanoes National Park. I often sign up for things I may or may not qualify for (this is how I became your Administrator, after all). Perhaps some part of me believes that, in most cases, even if I am terrible at the task at hand, things will turn out all right. And who knows? There's always a chance that I'll surprise myself by doing well.

Plus, Michael said the trail was easy to navigate, and why would I doubt his estimation? I reasoned that if I took a wrong turn, he or Kendra would blow their survival whistles. We'd stop, regroup, and work together to get going on the right track.

Then I thought dokusan is not so different, except that instead of following a teacher's gentle (or occasionally not-gentle) pointing, I'd just follow the ahu, scanning the horizon for the next stack of rocks to know I'm on the right track.

As we walked and walked, I repeated to myself, in time with my steps, *Ancient Buddha mind*.

The lava was dead, and the lava was alive. I'd never seen rock like that, spread for miles in

Hele Mālie –Volcanoes National Park, May 2022



This year seven women and two men walked Hele Mālie, giving it a feminine touch. There was laughter and tears, PMS and menstrual blood. We had women from 19 to 78 years old—three were new to Hele Mālie and one had never been backpacking, and we had Michael and Randy. It was rich and powerful—black lava walking.

Michael shared words from Wendell Berry that resonated with each step: “Our bodies are also not distinct from the bodies of other people, on which they depend in a complexity of ways from biological to spiritual. They are not

distinct from the bodies of plants and animals, with which we are involved in the cycles of feeding and in the intricate companionships of ecological systems and of the spirit. They are not distinct from the earth, the sun and moon, and the other heavenly bodies.”

(Continued from *Notes...*, page 5)

all directions. It was reminiscent of pictures of Mars, an uninhabitable wasteland, the very definition of *severe*. And yet the occasional petroglyphs told of those people who’d lived and died there—calling the lava fields their home.

Had this *truly* all once been moving? Had it really been a slow, gummy, red-hot substance consuming a jungle and destroying everything in its path? This must have been an incredible Hell, both terrifying and magnificent.

I find devastation gorgeous in its own way. Though the volcanic flats do not ring with bird-song and rustling palms and geckos, there is something calming in that deadness, something silent beyond the thought of silence.

Extremes have always enlivened me—at times to

my own peril. But out on the lava, we were fortunate to see such radiance in the far end of such ruins.

And the more I practice, the mundane, middle-of-the-road aspects of life (that is to say, *most* of life) take on the same radical, radiant quality I used to find only in emotional peaks and valleys.

As I walked, there was one consistent noise: The sound of my boots crunching against the rock. At times the land tinkled so delicately it sounded like I was crossing over broken glass. It was clear that we were walking in places humans rarely go, and I thought, if we don't keep track of the ahu we could easily lose the trail. But would we be lost with Mauna Loa and the ocean off in the distance to guide us?

One of my mind's most significant habits (and I

expect I'm not unique here) is to cover the world's naked beauty with a thought: *Oh wow*, I say to myself. Or, if I may be uncouth, it's often a simple, deadpan, uncomprehending *holy s**** that comes up.

That ever-spinning thought record comments on beauty out of habit. It's like I can't fully take it in, can't believe it without thinking about it. If I try, I fear I might burst into tears, fall over breathless, and drown in something as minute as the plain elegance of a pebble.

It has taken many years to reach the point where I can withstand how gorgeous *things* are. The horrors have always been easier to incorporate and stare down, owing likely to the internal callouses I was often forced to form to make it into adulthood. The callouses make it possible to shrug at deep pain and say, "well, this *is* samsara."

Sorrow surely can be overwhelming, but does not give the same astounded, monumental sensation as when I'm overcome by beauty. In those moments, it's clear that this body is insubstantial, this mind such a flash in the pan—flickering phenomena against a background that defies descriptors.

I am sure you can relate: For those who aspire to awaken—and I expect even for those who have—being overwhelmed is well understood. I have stepped outside on a glorious, sun-soaked morning to the swell of waking birds. I have paid total attention to the way the light filters through a monstera leaf. I have tasted that first sip of hot sencha tea before dawn in sesshin, its flavors and warmth filling my empty stomach just as my senses come alive.

It's too much to fathom or comprehend—the countless interlocking particles assembling, which we call *experience*.

Sometimes while walking the lava trail, I encountered striped, orange rings, like targets blasted on the ground. I did not understand how they got there. Even if geologists had been there—even if they could tell me *exactly* which Earthly processes created those orange circles—I would still not know how they got there. Before the story of the recent lava, there was the story of the forest that stood in its place. Before the forest story, there was the story of Hawai'i Island rising out of the sea for a million or more years.

And before that, there was the story of our planet itself. Its creation can be pondered yet never confirmed. I feel it's important to have a healthy respect for science, but to keep it in perspective. The highest physicists cannot explain what we discover in *zazen*; the geologist cannot explain *everything* about the appearance of said orange rings.

I cannot explain what it's like to be sprayed by saltwater that has been blasted into mist on Puna's coastal cliffs, legs damp one moment and dried by the sun almost immediately.

Maybe the explaining takes us further away from it, or maybe no experience can fully be explained. When I write, I suppose my task is to just keep trying.

At night, we sat *zazen* under the moon and stars. I oscillated between feeling like I belonged exactly where I was and feeling like we'd brought foreign things (the bells, the bowing, the chanting) into the wild, which has no use for timers or wake-up conch blows. I did not know if we'd added unnecessary things to the back country's perfection. Michael offered to send me passages about this very topic, to clear things up.

Clearing things up. I feel Zen practice is always doing this: Quietly, patiently, and unrelentingly pleading with me to keep looking and *seeing*.

When I began writing these notes down, I caught myself trying to tie it all up. *There must be some "thing" I learned, I thought, a lesson to tie up neatly: Hele Mālie taught me this....* But isn't that another mental gimmick to take anything from the past and strip it down until it becomes a concept to tuck away—another feather in my cap?

I suppose if there is anything for sure that can be summed up, it is that I love being with this world in all its forms, whether in the rainy, green expressions of the Pālolo Valley or the vastness of Volcanoes National Park. The lava, especially, reminded me how fleeting and dynamic all things are. On the lava fields, as on a tundra, or even a graveyard, impermanence is more than an idea.

I might also add that being outdoors for that long without going inside is a wonderful thing to do. And that my hiking companions were and are funny, strong, and wise. And that our time together at Hele Mālie was exactly a reflection of that.

Love Letter to Wai'ōma'o From a Former Temple Keeper

By Sara Bauer

I came to Pālolo Zen Center in the spring of 2016 on a wing and a prayer. In so many ways, my life didn't really begin until I found my spiritual practice. I was coming to Pālolo to understand it more and embed myself deeply in Zen. What I didn't expect was the relationship I would develop with this valley and its many beings. What I didn't expect was the ways the valley itself would change me and call me home. After two years as the Temple Keeper at the Zen center, I floated around the island a bit and ultimately ended up back at the very end of Wai'ōma'o Road in a hale, the first dwelling on the river after

the source running down from Ka'au Crater. It's built between two enormous lychee trees.

Jokingly, I would call these trees my roommates, but in all seriousness, I have been embraced by grandmother elephants, holding the grief of the loss of my mother, the fatigue I've experienced as a Public Health Nurse during COVID-19 response, and the deep sense of loneliness that has marked my life from the very start.

As I prepare to move back to the continent, I've been reflecting on how much I've changed over the last six years in Hawai'i. I've come to see clearly now that it was the warm embrace of the 'Āina that healed the parts of me that have felt dejected, the perpetual outsider, and deeply alone. The waxbills flying in unison always struck me as an aspiration for true sangha. Brood after brood of chicks taught me it's okay to leave things behind. The Shama thrushes have been here to remind me that spirit is ever present and bursting forth. The rain gave me permission to cry and the wind taught me that it's safe to change. The moon was my constant companion, teaching me how to float in the depths of the dark unknown and how to make choices and take action in the fullness of its light. One night as I was lying in bed, wave after luscious wave of pikake came wafting into my bedroom; as I roused in the early morning, I heard words ring out like the wake-up bell, "Forgive everyone for everything."

The last six years have been an initiation and Wai'ōma'o raised me into a stronger, more resilient adult who understands that kuleana brings more kuleana. Wai'ōma'o taught me that the source of river, that sense of home, flows straight from the heart. As for what's ahead, I'm reminded of the first teaching that stuck when I started my meditation practice years ago in Minneapolis. After expressing pain over some



Sara Bauer. *Love Letter to Pālolo part 1*. 2022. Cut and torn paper.

(Continued from *Love Letter...*, page 8)

difficult family relations, I cried, “I don’t know if my heart can handle it.” “But the heart CAN handle it,” my teacher replied. And since that day I have been on the hunt for the source of this. I’ve broken trail, lost trail, found it again, only to fall off and then realize it’s been under my feet all along.

I know wherever my life takes me forward the world of Wai’ōma’o and its ever-changing

landscape resides steadily in my heart. Mahalo Wai’ōma’o! Mahalo Lililehua! Mahalo Pālolo! Mahalo O’ahu! Mahalo Tūtū Pele! Mahalo Haleakalā! Mahalo Hawai’i ne! Until we meet again. A hui hou!

Administrator, HDS: Lish Troha
Temple Keeper, PZC: Patrick Klein
NL Editor & Layout: Kendra Martyn
Editorial Board: Kathy Ratliffe, Clark Ratliffe,
 Michael Kieran

Highlights from the Calendar

PZC is open for zazen and dokusan on Sunday mornings from 9 to 11 am and Wednesday evenings from 7 to 9 pm, adhering to our covid-safety forms. Deviations from this schedule and important dates are listed below. Please check our website regularly for the complete calendar and for updates: www.diamondsangha.org

August

8/7: Sun. 9:30 am to noon. Zoom zazen and Founders Day Ceremony.

8/20: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

8/21: Sun. 9 to 11 am. Zazen and Dharma Study 1.

8/26: Friday. Last day to sign up for October sesshin. Teacher will be Kathy.

8/28: Sun. 9 to 11 am. Zazen and Dharma Study 2.

8/31: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q&R with Michael.

September

9/4: Sun. 9 to 11 am. Zazen and Dharma Study 3.

9/11: Sun. 8:30 am to 4 pm. Hui Pū Mai. Come for all or part of the day. Bring your lunch.

9/17: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

9/18: Sun. 9 am to noon. Work Sunday.

9/25: Sun. 9:30 to 10 am. Zoom Zazen. **10 am to noon.** Zoom Fall Sangha Meeting.

9/28: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q&R with Michael.

October

10/2: Sun. 9 to 11 am. Zazen, dokusan. **11:30 am to 1 pm.** Leaders meeting.

10/7: Fri. 5 pm. Gather for Fall sesshin with Kathy.

10/8 to 10/10: Sat thru Mon. Fall sesshin. Temple is closed.

10/16: Sun. 9 am to 4 pm. Hiking Zazenkai. Trail head to be announced. Bring your lunch.

10/22: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

10/23: Sun. 9 am to noon. Work Sunday.

10/30: Sun. 9:30 am, Zoom Zazen. **10 to 11:30 am.** Zazen program TBA.

November

11/18: Fri. Last day to signup for Rohatsu Sesshin;

11/19: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

11/20: Sun. 9 am to noon. Work Sunday.

11/23: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q&R with Michael.

11/27: Sun. 9:30 am. Zoom Zazen, **10 to 11:30 am.** Zoom gathering. Program to be announced.

December

12/11: Sun. 8:30 am to 4 pm. Bodhi Day Zazenkai. Bring your lunch.

12/17: Sat. 9 am to noon. Orientation to practice. Advanced signup required. Please contact administrator at info@diamondsangha.org.

12/18: Sun. 9 am to noon. Work Sunday.

12/28: Wed. 7 to 9 pm. Zazen, dokusan and Q&R with Michael.

12/31: Sat. 7 pm to midnight. New Year's Eve zazen. Come for all or part of the evening.

Sesshins



**Honolulu Diamond Sangha
Pālolo Zen Center
2747 Wai'ōma'o Rd.
Honolulu, HI 96816
Phone: 808-735-1347
Email: info@diamondsangha.org
Website: www.diamondsangha.org**

Honolulu Diamond Sangha
2747 Wai'ōma'o Rd.
Honolulu, HI 96816