

It's interesting to look back over your life and the many things that have happened and see how unpredictable the future is; how you never know which of your many choices will lead to a huge shift in the direction of your life, and possibly the lives of many others. So I feel moved to reflect a little on how we got to this day from the only perspective I really have on it all: my own.

And I want to right away acknowledge and remember that I've had a lot more choices, options and opportunities as a middle class, white, cis-gendered, straight man for sure. It's been so powerful, and sad too, to learn a little more about those many supports that have held me up and opened doors for me in the last few years. Some of this will be familiar to some of you I think.

This morning as we approach the first jukai in a couple of years I'm reflecting on some of the choices that led to this moment. Once you start pulling on these threads you could keep going all day but one of those choices was that I choose for my senior year in high school to transfer to a neighboring high school which included a really innovative alternative program called the Learning Community. I suspect I learned a lot more in that one year with that one very intelligent and forward thinking teacher, Gary Bacon is his name. Gary had the idea that the development of kids that age isn't well served by a miniature version of college with separate classes on separate academic topics and no real attention to the other elements of human development. So he somehow convinced the school board to let him do this all morning 4-period program that included work in inner growth through a bunch of different lenses including a unit he cleverly called "Eastern Psychology" and that class included visits to temples from different world traditions. We went to an ashram, we went to a mosque, and we went to a little Zen center.

I'm sure the teacher gave a little talk and also led us in zazen and probably there was a q & a but I don't remember any of that. What I remember is the space. It was very clean, dimly lit, everything carefully arranged and lined up but those details can't quite explain the feeling. It had a feeling unlike any I'd ever encountered early in my 18th year. It wasn't just the tidy'ness - my mom was pretty much a tidy fanatic - if I

ever left anything out of place she'd toss it into my messy room, close the door, and leave a little note on the carpet just outside my door reminding me of this or that tidiness rule in the house. No, it was something else about that Zen center and it really stuck with me.

I didn't start trying to meditate or anything like that. But I definitely thought about that room. And I think it was in the background when I was experimenting with various substances with my friends being surprised and amazed by the different mental states that were possible. Also not something I ever knew before.

Not long after I was browsing one of the year books on Buddhism I found at the bookstore and flipping it open somehow the words that popped out at me were the bodhisattva vows. The same vows we'll chant after this talk. The vows that are made real by the precepts we'll be conferring to Mari and Terri this afternoon. I was amazed by those vows. How is it even possible to think of such a thing? I don't know what book that was but the one I bought was Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind which I from then on almost always had in my backpack in a ziploc bag. I'd get it out from time to time and read one of those short chapters. I didn't really understand what I was reading but there was that same kind of feeling that I'd had in that quiet zendo again. It was uncanny.

In my sophomore year of College in Santa Cruz sometime I saw a little sign by the old mission at a busy junction on the way between campus and downtown: "Santa Cruz Zen Center." I called them up, there was an orientation to zazen which I think was just me and one of the couple of residents there. And then I started getting up extra early to ride my bike there first from my house on the other side of downtown, on Mott Street I just remembered - I'd stop at the Zen Center, sit one period, they'd chant the heart sutra with very little extra to-do and then I'd continue on up the hill to the campus and be a college student.

I was pretty shy about doing this. I didn't tell any of my friends for quite a while. But I started noticing that my days went better if I went. I felt less anxious, less worried about not being good enough which I later realized was a big theme in my mind back then: I was surrounded by

very cool people: they mountain biked and climbed mountains and did cool internships at environmental centers or went up to Alaska to work all kinds of amazing things, but I never felt that cool myself. And I think now that this mind state was just a bit quieter if I'd been to zazen that morning.

The sangha there did notice that there was a quiet college kid coming. In the mornings there were only a few people there. And I later learned the sangha was in between head teachers in that era. Usually me, the two residents, and one other guy. Sometimes the residents would invite me to tea but I always said no. I was shy, yes, but I think I also didn't want to kind of sully this quiet deep important thing I was doing, but didn't at all understand, with words.

Eventually I did tell my friend Travis, he's the guy who went on to be a rock star - drummer in the band String Cheese Incident later (and I'm sure he could tell us his own very unlikely story of becoming a major musician with all of the twists and turns he went through), anyway Travis wanted to check this out with me but didn't want to get up early so I checked the schedule on their bulletin board and found out there was an evening sit with a talk. So we went to that together. It was surprising: the little zendo was really full, I'd never seen that before. And most of them were older (no surprise to us now). It just wasn't the same. And afterwards one of them tried to give me some kind of helpful advice about my sitting posture, I forget what, I never went back to that meeting. But I did stick to the morning sits.

Then I got curious about what the "next level" might be so I somehow looked around, no internet then, and found out about Green Gulch Farm north of San Francisco. I called them and found out you could come for a week for a low fee, perfect. So that was how I spent my spring break. I remember my friend Jim Kelly saying to me after I got off the phone with them, "dude: you seem a lot calmer after making that call." That was interesting.

And so I did go. I had a few important moments and encounters. I wasn't super sure about all of this still. I remember thinking, "this is like trying on new clothes only I'm just not sure if they're exactly a good fit

or not yet." But they fit well enough that I arranged to next my next year off of college and go there for a 6-week practice period. I think that was in the Fall of 1988.

The practice period was hard, but also good. I bonded with several other young students - a few of whom I'm still friends with. And after 6 weeks I was packing up my car and getting ready to go back to mom's. Maybe travel next? Maybe re-enroll at school? I wasn't sure.

I was in line at the dining hall for lunch when the director of Green Gulch, this guy Norman Fischer who'd also taught one of the Practice Period classes, tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "hi, it's Tim right? Would you be interested in working in the kitchen and joining the staff?" I immediately said yes. Another big inflection point.

And then I was living and working at Green Gulch. I think they gave me a monthly stipend of about \$130. I had a little room to myself, learned a lot about cooking, and got to Norman a bit better because they asked me to pick a senior staff person to be my mentor there - a new innovation they said because they'd had too many young new staff members who didn't go to the zendo particularly. The woman sitting next to me saw me hesitate in filling out the form and whispered: "put down Norman, he's really easy to deal with!" So...I did.

And then another big inflection point which I wouldn't find out how important it was for another 30 something years happened. A young woman, a few years older than me which to my eyes was very worldly, started flirting with me. The first thing I remember her telling me was also in the dining hall meal line: she liked my purple workshirt and purple was her favorite color. She had blonde hair in cute braids and before I knew it she and I were sneaking around Green Gulch looking for places to read poetry to each other and mess around. The relationship only lasted a few months and I never expected to see Raizelah Rosenbaum again after I moved back to Santa Cruz and she back to Berkeley and we broke up.

And then one more and I'll get to Bellingham. Once it became clear that my then long term girlfriend Janet and I were going to end up in

Bellingham I visited Norman at Green Gulch on the way north. I was going to sign out. I didn't see how I could continue with Zen without the support of these temples and sanghas I'd started with. I by then felt like Zen was a good fit but I didn't feel much inherent motivation to keep it up. I appreciate sitting, then and now, deeply but without a little structure or support it's not the first thing I think of to do. And next you know you're not really sitting. So I told Norman, we're moving to Bellingham so I'm out, no zen sanghas there, I'm all done, thanks a lot. And he said, "Huh, well is that near Vancouver, Canada? I just got invited to teach up there regularly by a Buddhist group." Sure enough, I said right across the border. "Ok, great, well maybe you can come sometime." I did and you probably have a sense of the next chapter. I started a little sitting group in Bellingham soon after connecting with Bob Penny through work in Bellingham (and bizarrely we figured out that we'd already met once - back at Green Gulch when he was passing through!) and the third person was Florence Caplow whom I'd met at the first sesshin the Vancouver group did with Norman.

- First jukai: me and Florence, John Robinson's cabin. 1993.
- First jukais after that Norman came and I helped as his jisha - maybe John Wiley then?
- Then after I ordained in 2000 until Dharma Transmission in 2011, Norman and I did jukai's collaboratively - he was really generous about sharing the ceremonial space in that way. Maybe Kate and Mari in that era. Talus?
- And the last one before this was on the deck of Talus and Dianne's house in Ferndale a couple of months before she died. Kiku Fuba - boundless energy, wind horse. And I know she's riding that spirit horse ever since.

None of this would have happened if any number of things had happened in my life and in the lives of every single person here. It's amazing really how darn unlikely all of this is isn't it? It's a miracle.

Jukai

- Brings sangha together - as Mari reminded me
- Gives us a goal in our goal-less practice

- Zaïke tokudo vs. Shukke tokudo - and the innovation of that in Soto Zen
- Dogen's Jukai fascicle talks about the importance of ordination and then describes the same precepts ceremony that we'll do today
- Ethics of Zen are humble, flexible, and responsive to circumstances
- And we realize that judging someone else's precepts practice from the outside is a violation of our own precepts - trust each other to be on our own paths