



## On SEEING and INSIGHT

by Rev. SeiFu Anil Singh-Molares

*Rev. SeiFu delivered his first dharma talk as an “Osho,” or full temple priest, at a ceremony commemorating his new role on June 28, 2024. “Osho” means a high priest or teacher, and is a status conferred after an extensive period of training. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, Oshos can train and ordain lay people and priests, and run their own temples. As Rev. SeiFu sees spiritual companionship as the main incarnation of his role as a Zen priest, we are sharing this talk with the SDI community, with the hope that some of you reading it may find something of value here.*

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### Case 16 of the Mumonkan

#### When the Bell Sounds

Ummon said, “The world is vast and wide. Why do you put on your seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?”

**MUMON’S COMMENT** In studying Zen, you should not be swayed by sounds and form. Even though you attain insight when hearing a voice or seeing a form, this is simply the ordinary way of things. Don’t you know that the real Zen student commands

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## ON SEEING AND INSIGHT (CONTINUED)

sounds, control forms, is clear-sighted at every event and free on every occasion?

Granted you are free, just tell me: Does the sound come to the ear or does the ear go to the sound? If both sound and silence die away, at such a juncture how could you talk of Zen? While listening with your ear, you cannot tell. When hearing with your eye, you are truly intimate.

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You might think that after reading this case, I am going to discuss this wonderful koan, but actually I'm not. My focus instead is on the last line of Mumon's comment:

"When hearing with your eye, you are truly intimate."

What is this type of eye, and this type of intimacy that he speaks of?

Let's begin with by considering a couple of Indian terms. The first is the familiar greeting "Namaste," which literally means "I bow to you." But not just any old "you," which is why it is usually rendered as "the Divine in me recognizes the Divine in you," which I prefer to translate as the "the Beyond in me recognizes (or sees) the Beyond in you." No ordinary "seeing" here.

Consider another term as well, the Sanskrit "Darshana" which literally means a "glimpse of the Holy," and which I would render as "I invite you to see the Beyond in me, so that you might recognize (or even better, "remember") it in yourself.

In the west, we use expressions such as "the eyes are the windows to the soul," or refer to our "third eye," or "inner eye," as deeper seeing.

These types of seeing sound lofty and unattainable for most of us. But are they really?

Let me use an encounter I had, which is likely similar to some that each of you have also experienced.

Some time ago, I used to run a team in Tokyo for a large software company. One night, my team went across town to have dinner. I stayed behind at the office as I had to take a call from HQ, and then set out to join them. The office was close to Shinjuku station.

Have you all been to Grand Central Station in NYC? Shinjuku is like that. Only worse. This is where there are crowds like you can't begin to imagine. And where they have personnel (literally called "pushers") to shove people into the train cars. As I am standing on the station, having decided to wait for the next train, I catch an older gentleman's eyes. We are transfixed by each other. And that look between us is not just any "look." It becomes a portal. Deep, penetrating, transcendent. The kind of look that contains an entire lifetime, which was transmitted to me, with all of its joys, sorrows, hardships, achievements, heartbreak and wisdom. But as I looked deeper, it wasn't just this man's life and mine I was seeing. But rather the lives of everyone. All of those who have been, are, and will be. All births, deaths, tragedies, happiness, music, dance, youth, and old age. All contained in one 45 second gaze. One beyond the reach of the ego driven "I," but clearly discernable by the Cosmic "Eye."

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A portal to eternity. A gate to forever. The lives and experiences of everyone flashing before me. That kind of look!

Why did it happen there and then? I don't know. Why did we pick each other? I don't know. But I can confirm this was no mere gaze or accident. There was intention and recognition, even though we were technically strangers. We remembered ourselves in each other, and into each other. We couldn't take our eyes off one another. And as he pulled away there was a melancholic joy in both of us. I felt his, and he apparently felt mine, confirmed by a forlorn smile. And while on multiple levels he is long gone by now, yet he will never leave me.

Which brings up Mumon's conjoined concept, intimacy. We saw each other with an intimacy that transcended the kind we might have with our partners, children, or beloved friends. Something that runs much deeper even than that. Forever in a long, penetrating look.

And isn't that the point of our practice as spiritual companions?

Consider the look the Buddha and Mahākāśyapa exchanged in the well know Buddhist Flower Sermon, which details the origin story of Ch'an (or Zen) Buddhism, also the subject of Case 6 of the Mumonkan. The Buddha holds up a flower, everyone in the assembly falls silent, and only Mahākāśyapa smiles in recognition. But consider that this is not really a sermon about a flower! Instead, it's a story about the look that the Buddha and Kāśyapa exchanged. It's that look that seals the transmission of forever, not the flower! With all of this said, why then do we go about our daily lives not staring at each other through our Cosmic Eyes?

One answer is that we are so intensely preoccupied with the hubbub of our daily lives that we literally lose sight of one another. As well as ourselves! Our egos can easily run rampant, narrowing our field. And yet some part of us recognizes the incongruity and disharmony of doing this, so we scurry about yelling "I am blind! I am blind! I can't see!"

Why not open our eyes then?

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## ON SEEING AND INSIGHT (CONTINUED)

Perhaps because we fear what we might see. We don't want to witness the death of our egos, and don't want to embrace our own mortality. We dread losing ourselves into the endless expanse of an abyss, and recoil at the prospect of finding our being untethered and unmoored, sliding into oblivion.

Well, I have a news for you. We are each but one speck out of eight billion human specks. On a planet that contains millions of species. In a tiny solar system. Part of a small galaxy. And the latest computer estimates put the number of galaxies in the Trillions!

(Don't ask me how they came up with that number, but rest assured that it is almost certainly wrong, and that sentient beings in the future will look back on us with a measure of disdain for our positively primitive beliefs.)

But the point is that we are already hurtling through space, one seemingly without any boundaries that we can truly grasp or define. *So why are we so worried? We already are what we fear!* The tiniest of specks in a wide expanse beyond our comprehension.

Of course in Zen, "not knowing" is at the heart of our practice. But our awareness that we cannot ultimately know anything is something we can experience, deeply and truly. Groundlessness and impermanence are the only truly solid things in the Universe.

So it is that we need not fear the intimacy of eternity, as it is always with us.

We have but to look in each other's eyes to see it. 🌕

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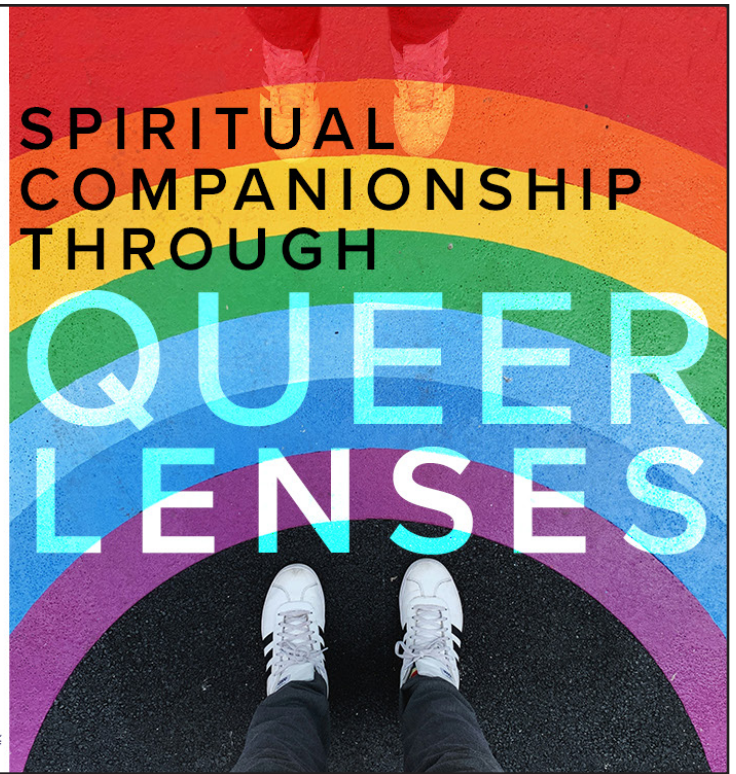
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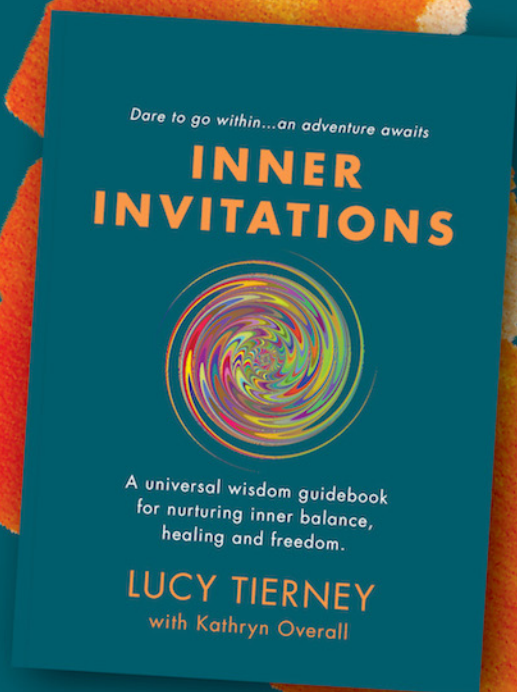
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and pickle your defenseless socks

later the same day  
your reclaimed feet may kick  
up a cast of mosquitoes  
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abuzz with that cry incomprehensible  
"Crucify! Crucify!"  
around your swimming head

your path may fold back  
upon itself a dozen times  
as if the labyrinth after hard rain  
had overflowed its trim banks  
and flooded all the fields  
with its sly convoluted smile

but you really won't get lost  
if you don't jump fences  
here at this retreating  
(joyfully off-) Centre  
you see,  
there's an inner compass on the land  
including the part known as your heart  
that forever points the needle  
to the Rock in deepest invisible attraction...  
and that's what's called round here  
spiritual direction.

**Gregory Kennedy** works as a spiritual director and retreat facilitator at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre, in Guelph, Ontario, where ecology and ecclesiology converge. His most recent books are three volumes of Reupholstered Psalms (Novalis Press).

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Holy One  
Hear my cry!  
What have we done?  
To our rivers,  
Our oceans,  
To our streams,  
Our ponds,  
And our lakes?  
Our grandchildren will  
Inherit this devastation.

The little ones  
Who delight in  
Butterflies & frogs,  
Fireflies & lizards  
Will be left with none.  
The teenagers  
Will not know  
Swimming wild.

Holy One  
Awaken your people  
To this theft of  
Beauty & Vitality  
Fertility & Pleasure  
That is your creation.  
Let us become  
The stewards of  
Your flowing waters  
For the sake of  
Our precious children.  
Amen

Jeanne M. Schul, PhD earned her doctorate at Pacifica Graduate Institute where she has taught for the last ten years in the Depth Psychology programs, specializing in Somatics, Dreamwork, and Creativity. She holds an MA in Dance from Texas Woman's University. She was Artistic Director of the Berry College Dance Company for 24 years.

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If you doubt fully,  
you will awaken fully.”

Hakuin Ekaku





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