

TWO WEEKS IN AUGUST 2017  
MEDITATION PROGRAMME



JUST SITTING

## FORWORD

The seed of this programme was planted around five years ago, sometime in 2012, when I found that I wanted to see if I could convey to a group, or allow to happen within a group, something of what I was experiencing in unstructured seated meditation. The occasional MEDITATIONS STUDY DAYS were the result, although these included standing, lying and walking, alongside seated practice. Preparing for these days, preparing what I will say or offer in terms of guidance or direction takes a good deal of mind-time and a particular kind of awareness so that when the mornings begin I can let myself be relaxed, dispense with written notes, and let the right words come. I started to wonder if I could do this over a sustained period.

Also, over the past two years, the strong prompt I have felt to shift my Tai Chi teaching and practice more into this area, of felt experience, has intensified. Look at the articles I have published on my website during that time and you will see a noticeable change; I detect an urgency there that points directly away from the current app-mindfulness fad toward a more austere, rigorous 'just sitting' discipline.

Within myself the return to and re-reading of texts, of meditation journeys, that I more than admire, reacting to often in a physical way – a sudden punch of adrenalin in the body, saliva fizzing under the tongue – also draws me on. I wish to retreat, yet cannot (circumstances in my life do not allow it). So I go deeper, solitarily.

I do not remember with any clarity the exact moment of decision, 'I'm going to do this, offer this as a programme', but certainly within a couple of hours of piecing it together, knowing that the studio space would be free for me to use unhindered for a complete fortnight, an uncomplicated and natural structure emerged in how it might happen, of how to proceed.

There were doubts: Could I actually complete such an undertaking, without a stumble, without quitting, the very early rising, always to be there in the studio, lucid in mind clear in word? It felt immense; it also felt right, and a proper step on. I consulted friends. I rechecked dates with the studio, seeking permission. I opened the seer I-Ching finding: Hexagram 22 'Grace/Adornment' and the image thus, 'Clarity within and quiet without, the wise man has time for meditation.'. It seemed the matter was sealed; by that afternoon's end I had typed out an introduction and sitting schedule. From then on little changed, other than the running down of days toward the initial morning of commitment from which there was no turning back.

I decided to keep a journal.

Before coming to that, here, using a familiar style and with relaxed grammar that I continued into writing the journal, is a summary of the two-week programme as it was offered.

## MEDITATION PROGRAMME OVERVIEW:

'For some time now I have wanted to run a traditional meditation programme within a reasonably constrained timeframe. This coming August the Park Street studio will be less used than usual, providing me, and us, with the opportunity.

The wisdom tradition of concentrated meditation programmes, or retreats, reaches us from a very distant past. From the point of view of this studio we trace a path from Tao, through Chan/Zen, to the present day. Given our largely metropolitan lives we are necessarily unable to sequester ourselves for the more properly observed week or ten days (even thirty or ninety days), but I hope that the schedule given here will allow those who wish to participate a chance to begin or extend their practice.

Emphasis throughout the fortnight will be almost entirely on **sitting practice**: (called **tso wu hsin** or **tso chan** in Chinese, **zazen** in Japanese – though these are just words and should in no way put you off).

This is a training – a spiritual training, if you will: a gentle austerity (in the proper sense of the word), a gentle discipline, but a discipline nonetheless.

The programme is open to all, whether part of my current student group or not. You may like to come with a friend; it can be helpful to have a meditation buddy. In truth, an approach in sincerity is the only requirement.'

## SCHEDULE:

Sixteen meetings are listed at easy to remember times. You may attend all or as many or few as you wish, though it should be noted that benefit accrues.

A general outline of the programme is as follows:

- Each period will run for an hour.
- After quiet greetings we will observe silence.
- There will be guidance in sitting posture.
- There will be guidance of process.
- There may be short discourse or commentary.
- Time allowed for sitting: up to 45 minutes.
- Evenings may also include a stillness-walking element.
- Private one-to-one investigation (**ducan** or **dokusan**) is offered at the close of each period, by request.

## TIMETABLE:

Week 1	Saturday 5 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 6 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 7 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 8 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday 10 <sup>th</sup>	Friday 11 <sup>th</sup>
Morning	9.00	X	7.00	7.00	X	7.00	7.00
Evening	X	X	7.00	TAI CHI	X	7.00	X
Week 2	Saturday 12 <sup>th</sup> / 19 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday 13 <sup>th</sup>	Monday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Wednesday 16 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday 17 <sup>th</sup>	Friday 18 <sup>th</sup>
Morning	9.00/9.00	X	7.00	7.00	X	7.00	7.00
Evening	X	X	7.00	TAI CHI	7.00	X	7.00

## ON TIM'S MEDITATION:

'Look at the [ABOUT](#) page on my website and you will see that my interest in meditation began almost as far back as I can remember. Certainly, the path that has led me to offer a Summer Meditation programme this year started sometime, as a young adult, in the late 1970s. By the early 80s I was learning Tai Chi; from the mid 90s teaching it, as I still am today, every week; go [HERE](#) and you'll find lots that I've written about it. Consequently, it seems to me entirely natural that I should wish to practise and teach meditation in stillness alongside meditation in movement. And as I have long-studied the martial aspect of Tai Chi (other disciplines too), I know that I am strengthened in the Ways of sitting quietly with yourself.

As to my own meditation journey: it would true to say that I have received little formal training from recognised meditation masters; some, a very long time ago... **BUT**, and with modesty, I can say that I am **self-saturated** in the tradition, in the transmission. Lao Tzu, Dogen, Hakuin, The Cloud of Unknowing, Watts, Blofeld, Leggett, Matthiessen, Trungpa and Suzuki: these are among my inspiring exemplars.

So, I draw from the ancient line, which does not too much over-ritualise – though this is not quite the same as lacking formality. I draw on the Japanese tradition too, with its precision and clarity of placing the subject, including the subject of one's living self, in space and time.

I glance with shaded eyes at the dazzling mysticism of the high Himalayas.

What I am offering here is the long continuity of my experience: of truth not far but nearer than near.'

## ABOUT THE JOURNAL

This is a personal document. It is set down in the singular first person. Subsequently it is chock-full of 'I, me, mine' which when writing about meditation, an activity that is largely predicated upon a reassessing of the self (our-self, myself) is perhaps less than ideal. In the process of transcription I did in fact play with the idea of re-casting it all in the third person: 'He comes prepared', rather than, 'I come prepared', etc, but I found that the sentences – which are in the main written-out thoughts – became at once stiff and lacking of immediacy; so, in the first person it remains.

The entries were hand-written contemporaneously, between practice periods (Lamy 2000 fountain pen, Midori A5 notebook, Marron/brown Waterman ink); my idea was to keep as fresh a record as possible. However, in most cases I did allow a few hours to pass before setting anything down, with the understanding that what one experiences then, in that interim, may be as key, as revelatory as experiences found in the stillness. I resolve to be truthful, otherwise there is little point; I resolve to polish the original text as little as I can, wherever possible only if some grammatic or linguistic sense needs to be corrected or ironed out.

Where others joined me to sit they are denoted by initial/s as I have not sought their permission to use their names.

There are sixteen periods, sixteen entries; the accompanying images were also made during the two weeks.



**First: Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> 9.00am. I sit with DH, CC and AS.**

We begin with tea, a Baozhong of Taiwan that I have chosen to go with us through the fortnight; it is a favourite in the studio. It is so pale at first, then yellow into green floral as it is replenished with a second infusion in the tiny celadon-coloured Jingdezhen tea-pot. We move into the larger room to sit. I take to my own cushion that I have brought from home, sitting half-lotus, dressed for the occasion in my Green Dragon coat. I have decided, although not in too-set-a-way, that the forty-five minutes we give over to the practice will be divided by a short interval, each starting with a bell ding and ending with a wood-drum bok.

I have come prepared with a quotation adapted from a saying of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, but before we start instead talk about ‘just sitting’ as an idea: I say that the ‘sitting’ part is relatively the easier, given that as Tai Chi students they have had a good deal of training in the required posture; it is the ‘just’ part where the difficulty, and the depth, resides. To encourage them I say that in working continuously on the posture the ‘just’ part will eventually take care of itself: something I believe. We cast our eyes between ourselves; there are smiles. Then I place before them on the floor the quotation, typed out:

**“‘Just sitting’ is to get to our Being-Mind, the mind not accessible to thinking.  
This mind cannot be consciously known by ordinary efforts. An unusual effort is necessary.  
This effort is ‘just sitting’.”**

I have changed Suzuki’s word True-Mind to Being-Mind – a variant that came to me earlier in the week, seeming then to be a better fit, but as I go through the quotation now, teasing it open before we start, I find myself changing again, saying ‘Mind behind mind’, which perhaps emphasises just how unreachable with words these things are. Also, where I have used ‘just sitting’, Suzuki had the Japanese ‘zazen’, meaning ‘sit meditation’; again, I feel the need to un-hide in the use of language.

To wit: before leaving home, responding to a bell-like impulse, I had dashed down on a piece of grey card and with a wide-nibbed felt pen: **‘Sit with Heart, Sit with Marrow’**, the exhortation coming to me as an echo from Peter Matthiessen’s *Nine Headed Dragon River*: he talks about ‘the heart and marrow of this book’ at some point near the beginning. I am currently on a third reading of this text, even after having gone through it extensively making notes, which is something I hardly ever do. It so inspires me, even to an extent inspiring this whole meditation programme. We sit.

At the end of the period, ding to bok, ding to bok, we share another round of tea, it’s so-fresh savour now somewhat bruised.

AMc comes in for his short private lesson; he is late but attentive, realising I think that he has come into an atmosphere that is to some extent different from most weeks; he remains into the first part of the group class.

RS and GSF arrive, then CC with AS. DH has had to leave.

During the break, CC – whose enthusiasm is palpable today – has composed a *haiku*, a gift to the studio and to the programme, which I ask him to read aloud.

**‘Just sitting today,  
Sit with heart, sit with marrow,  
Flow like kung fu cha do.’**

In fact – and I learn something here – this is not a strict *haiku*: it is *jiamari*, meaning it carries an extra (eighteenth) syllable, to bind-in its sense. I love this as it shows a playfulness within what is often seen as a rigid form. We start the group Tai Chi class with some Taoyin (from my Eight-Part Chi Kung Taoyin Set, firmly established over several years now), revisiting Embrace the Heart, on an inner prompting, and finishing with Embrace Tao *jan-chung* standing posture.

‘Nothing is fixed!’, I exclaim, pressing them on, and myself too.

I feel somehow limitless and let it rip through me.

‘How do you **feel?**’, I keep asking, and, ‘**How** do you feel?’



**Second:** Monday 7<sup>th</sup> 7.00am. I sit alone.

CC sends word that he is unable to come as he has bike problems. I prepare as I would anyway, with tea. I sit. Before striking the bell I hum, five hums. I think this is a good idea. Although lasting only two minutes it stands in place of a chant, that would traditionally be voiced before sitting meditation; it also exercises the diaphragm muscles, strengthening the breath. I wonder if I will try it when others are present. But why not?

I sit for forty-five minutes with the brief interval at which I changeover the half-lotus of my legs. My hands-together mudra is a very simple right in left knot: later, or on another morning I shall adopt something more formal.

My thoughts tumble, un-quietly, though the edging-the-blue awareness comes for a time. Afterwards, I feel satisfied just to have got up, before 5.00am, journeyed, and done it. It gives me confidence to continue.

Moving around in the studio, gently ordering things to my way of being there, I feel as if I am on retreat – and so I am.

### Third: Monday 7<sup>th</sup> 7.00pm. I sit with CC and Á.

A visitor from Spain arrives at the studio door expecting to sit with the Soto Zen group who normally gather on a Monday evening, but they are not meeting during August. I begin to send him away but instead say that if he wants to come back in fifteen minutes he can stay and sit with me. My thought change, from brushing him off to offering him a welcome, lifts my spirit. Why else I am here? I said in the programme notes that I would sit with whomever else comes, so why wouldn't I? But I wonder if he will come back.

He does, and CC arrives too. At this point the visitor responds to my asking by telling me his name is Ángel – his voice is brown as coffee – and everything seems right.

We have tea, and then when we sit I feel relaxed and the time flows easily in the room. I wonder why it is easier to sit with other people there. Is it because I like the attention that is naturally turned to me, or at least partially so? Is it because I am 'being in meditation' to a certain degree for them? No, this is not quite it.

After the interval, during which they both stand to stretch their legs, I begin the second part with hums – just myself alone; it feels good.

My meditation has colour-field wash-overs, but little else. I am relaxed, it is true, but not yet anchored; that will come, I think.

I feel CC's awareness close to me and say to him as we finish – this flowing from the Suzuki quotation – that 'ordinary effort' has brought him to the studio but that 'unusual effort' is the key-less key to the door-less door and that he has it already in his pocket. Truth not far, nearer than near.

A few minutes later as we are having closing tea, he says, 'I think you are doing something really interesting here.' He is looking around the studio, noting, inwardly realising the fact, that I am on retreat.

It is a shame that CC is going away now, for a month, and so will miss the remaining periods.

In the uplift of a moment I invite Á to join the Tai Chi class tomorrow; I wonder if he will?

### Fourth: Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> 7.00am. I sit alone.

Getting up at 4.50am and getting here (to the studio at 4A Park Street SE1) was really no problem, or at least not the problem I thought it might be; perhaps this will come later.



(My morning journeys are: leave the house at 5.35, 12 minutes' walk to Alexandra Palace over-ground station. Catch 5.53 to Moorgate, then Northern Line tube to London Bridge, from where 2 minutes to the studio. Altogether, 35 to 45 minutes.) I prepare myself and the studio to sit alone. I make the tea, adjusting the small utensils deftly, and wonder why I feel so at ease in this formality. The answer being, that I always have.

As I begin to sit I notice how noisy it is in the street this morning, with a beer barrel delivery to the pub: a round of thump, thump-tumps, and metal-to-cobble rolls.

But I sit well. My posture feels free and good, though there is some effort – I cannot tell if it unusual or not – to make the twenty-two minutes to the bok.

I love striking the little ebony fish-drum that has come to me from Hong Kong. All these small close-to-sacred items that have come to me over the years: why?

I begin again with hums, then the ring of the lovely Tibet bowl which this week has found its voice, making me remember why I choose it from among several others, years ago now. Its sound has a dissonant purity, not strictly harmonic in the western sense. I imagine hearing it high in the snowfields of the mountains where it was made, where it would sing a valley into life.

As I continue to sit, though aware of the needed effort, it starts to recede; I am also sometimes soaring and I run over the period – this in spite of the outside noise.

Afterwards, the brioche I buy and the coffee I make in the studio are sugared with Heaven, and cloud-eddies of euphoria come and pass through the rest of the day.

I teach a one-to-one private class in the mid-morning and then a group Tai Chi class later. Unsurprisingly, Á does not attend.



### **Fifth: Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> 7.00am. I sit with DH and YC.**

A cool damp morning after a day of pouring, pouring rain. A rooster crows as I walk across the open ground to the station. Two months today I will have completed sixty years; the cycles of Twelve Years through Five Elements (of the incredibly ancient Chinese pattern) will return me to One once more, and for the last time. I make the tea, the Baozhong, with increasing formality – a mantra of Kuan Yin on my breath – also with increasing ease. This same ease of entering-in affects the ‘just sitting’ too.

Though neither the tea-making nor the sitting are ceremony, as such, they hover near that space.

My posture is feeling solid, as if approaching a completeness, though I know this can hardly be so. I am reminded of Matthiessen’s principal teacher, Soen Hakagawa-roshi, who talks about sitting with faith, with faith in self, as there is no other: **Raise the posture in faith**, I coin for myself.

After the mid-way I start again with hums. Why is this so satisfying?

My sitting is clear of too much disturbance, though also undisturbed by so much clarity. Thoughts hardly slow and gaps are minimal, shadowy valleys.

At the end, placing the bok-stick precisely between the bowl and the drum, in a gap as I realise, I again say that to get up early and to come and sit is ordinary effort (following Suzuki), but add that the prompting, the desire, to do so is unusual effort. And I think this is true and a brief moment of insight. I am reminded of Dogen’s teaching: that the desire toward, the journey toward our personal opening, is prompted by our already enlightened Mind. ‘Mind behind mind’, as I again call it.

As he leaves YC places on the desk for me two home-made scones and a jar of likewise home-made fig jam. There is kindness and simplicity in his action. And I say farewell to DH, who will not be coming to sit again as she is going away. She will miss this, I think, and I shall miss her; watching her down the stairs I am aware of the consolidation – the immanent confirmation – in her practice over this last year; and how it takes time.

Back to Clarence Road (home), little more than an hour later. I am shining.

### **Sixth: Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> 7.00 pm. I sit alone.**

An involved long day followed the morning period, with a trip out to see PG accompanied by SL.

His tenderness and love are overwhelming; his desire that I should be always happy, always fulfilled. Three of us in the room, our eyes prick with tears.

I do not expect to be joined at the evening period and, as I am tired, take a comfort in that. I set about illuming the candles and making tea with intense, soft precision.

In sitting it is as though my posture is clear enough that it and I begin to disappear, starting at my lips, strangely.

Afterwards, as I prepare to leave, letting the studio settle, the candles dowsed, ready for the morning, I reflect on the process of the entire programme so far and see that I am taking an odd kind of, what, 'austere pleasure' in it? Wrong words, but just now I can find no better... It is something about the mapping of one sitting period upon another – the twelve-hour cycle: seven in the morning, seven in the evening. I absorb the public transport travelling, though this must be the bug-bear. This evening, fifteen hours after rising, I have the car so am driving home; it's a relief.

Yet, would I undertake such a programme at home on my own? No.

It is because the invitation is out there, to join me, to sit with me, that I can and must resist the temptation to quit. Yet this evening, coming home, that temptation is darkly present, like a growl in the room. I assume that I will be sitting on my own from now on, so why do it, why continue?

I realise again the unusual effort that Suzuki speaks of, and resolve myself. I am in bed before 10.30.

### **Seventh: Friday 11<sup>th</sup> 700am. I sit with YC.**

So I am not alone, YC joins me. This relative newcomer to the regular Tai Chi group, who in seven months has not I think missed an opportunity to attend a class or event, seems to have found something to take to heart, here in the studio; a glint of treasure perhaps. I am open to his endeavour and offer him encouragement.

And as we begin to sit I give some guidance of his posture. Although his attention is clear and set he remains a little awkward in his skin, as if unused to it; it will undoubtedly take time, but this will pass.

My sitting is uncomplicated, straightforward; I wonder if I am little sleepy.

No, that's not it.

Something is falling away at last.

This is the third so far of the twelve-hour cycles – morning evening, morning evening – and somewhere in me it is tending to the norm.

On the last minute before the bok I come into my everyday present: I project a rural retreat – a Friday Saturday Sunday, with a late sitting period on the arriving evening and four hourly periods on the following two days, interspersed with work, cooking, walking... Quite tough: proper stuff though!

Here I go again, making plans rather than sitting where I am.

We finish as a fine morning sun appears, coming in through the large studio windows. Everything changes.

### **Eighth: Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> 9.00am. I sit with AMc and CJ.**

This is halfway into the programme. A cool clear morning that promises heat. To get to the studio for a 9.00 start feels like arriving too late. I am not surprised when AMc and CJ arrive as I had already had the thought of it last

night, gazing into the still new garden, the Solace Garden, from my open back-door at home. Nevertheless, as they come up the stairs I miss a beat – I miss a beat – and for a moment, and perhaps for the first time in several days, I am un-grounded. They, together, are quiet, as if expecting some solemnity; I speak too much, more than I have got used to. Why?

We have tea, then sit. They take the posture with the self-assurance of knowing what they are doing, and AMc certainly should. I am aware of their younger-than-me-ness, and I see that they sit as a couple – of course, and notice their making of hands-to-knees mudra, rather than the joined hands that I always take.

I push the first half to twenty-five minutes, even giving myself a startle as I strike the bok.

We continue, and then toward the end Suzuki's 'unusual effort' begins to play in my ordinary mind.

In 'just sitting', the sitting is ordinary, the just is unusual? Sitting is time, just is space. The deeper into Tai Chi practice, into yogas, into meditation, then the deeper into space, into the gaps between, moving further from our personal span in time.

To be born here is unusual, to live is ordinary, to die is both; the opposite too is true.

Form is emptiness, and emptiness form. There is love and there is mortality, and how we make and un-make these pairs is the ground of the practice, whether mastered or not: of the Earth, of Heaven, of the just-ness, the this-ness, the revelation of present and future dissolution.

I feel satisfaction at having completed the week, and that I have been so even-minded – except for this mornings' dropped beat. Now I want to go, try, further and harder.

I want to fall.

'Happy?' I ask at tea's end. Together AMc and CJ assent. They ask me to join them for breakfast. I resist, just, in order to remain monk and to allow them their couple-ness.

When AMc returns about forty minutes later for his tutorial we discuss the place of meditation in his life – in mine too. I say that it is not a constant, nor need it be, nor perhaps should it be. I do not ask whether he and CJ meditate together at home, though I would like to know.

I encourage AMc to practise his Tai Chi Form as if he were still sitting on his meditation *zafu*; something that had come to me earlier in the week. We practise a small part of the Form together – a 'just sitting' Form – in particular the Ward-off to Roll-back drill we have been working on recently.

He gets it at once and his postures come alive with spirit. I over-compliment him as a result; but it is a kind of on-going (and wonderful) bafflement to me how, with unusual effort on both our parts, and over many years, just how so much of what I know and understand (in the ways of Tai Chi plainly, but in other ways too) has passed into him – where it is now transformed into what he knows, and hopefully treasures too. I understand also, that it will almost certainly not happen again; that I have had, have, a close-to-home-student (an 'indoors student' tradition would say), and for the time being, even after sixteen years, he still comes... often bearing coffee beans.

Writing this a few hours later I recognise the meditation euphoria that colours these last sentences, but decide to let

them stand. After all, I aim to be light un-adumbrated! (what a word), so why not now?

### **Ninth:** Monday 14<sup>th</sup> 7.00am. I sit with YC.

I suppose I was a little more tired, rising this morning at 4.50, but also more relaxed. As this programme unfolds I am finding more confidence. It is another fine, dry morning and as I am writing this (now 10.45), hot!

YC and I sit easily. I give some posture guidance again, explaining that as his posture develops, adjustment disturbance and obstacles will undo by themselves; that he should not do too much, as he is wont. This is no criticism: our society enjoins us always to do something in order to effect a change, rather to allow and let things happen. Yet as long as the direction of travel is understood, as in this case it is, this 'letting things happen' is by far the best way to progress, and is a necessary and proper way of taking time.

I sit strongly and the first period runs long. I cannot say that too much in the way of thought-valleys or gaps appear but I follow the path of falling away, failing away. How unusual the effort, indeed, to fail, to fail and never succeed... The result: a deep thump in the heart, as thunder. This is the root of Kuan Yin compassion, I realise, knowing again what I already have known.

As we conclude sitting I raise with YC the importance, as I see it, to turn whatever the condition that results of his meditation outward at some point during his day; to engage a stranger, or in fact anyone, directly with his gaze, and with absolute openness, unconditionally. He accepts this direction, although somewhat too bluntly put by myself. I do also. Balm to oneself as to all flows with this.

### **Tenth:** Monday 7.00pm. I sit alone.

Through the afternoon it grows steadily warmer.

Following the morning period when I am still at the studio I receive a phone-call from RN; we talk of Japanese antiques, exchanging whispers of desire for items we both have been looking at on an on-line collection. Also in our conversation, he spoke of one of his students (RN also teaches Tai Chi) who had been extolling the great virtue of a *vipassana* retreat she had attended; kindly, he thought it might be something I would be interested in. My quick response, that I had received instruction in it forty years ago, had a boasting, crowing note. Why do I do this? Really, why? RN and I often have these moments – tiny skirmish provocations – but he is such an admirable friend, a close one too, who often shows the mirror to me. The thing is, we share some of the same knowledge – some of it wisdom, I think – yet come by it, understand it, interpret it entirely differently; and what could be more natural.

Anyway, there is laughter and warmth in his voice today.

And talking of *vipassana* I realise that it is indeed forty years since my few days of retreat to the forest monastery in

Thailand (with CR and KT), the thought of which chimes with what, I see now, is what I am doing over this fortnight: it is 'continuous practice', straight from the heart of the teaching of mighty Dogen.

The evening sitting starts with my feeling that I might be getting a cold as I am coughing a little. Also, as I prepare the tea, I choose for myself a different cup from the tray. It has a small blue lotus flower design in its tiny bowl that turns colour under the steaming Baozhong. 'Sit with Tea' has been my exhortation today; I have added it in green brush-pen under my previous 'Sit with Heart, Sit with Marrow.'. And as I am sitting it transforms, becoming 'Sit with This.'.

I have a sense of aperture, a stirring at my *bai hui* (head's crown), which I try only to notice and not to effect; also again, the feeling of disappearing – I want to write the word 'ascending', but don't know why.

Then, finishing: I want to get home, quickly. And on the journey I understand, or at least feel in my body, a significance in the fact that the sittings are beginning to take on an undifferentiated character, heightening and confirming the 'continuous practice' element.



## Eleventh: Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> 7.00 am. I sit with JK.

Dry again, setting off to the station at 5.35, but more people about and on the train. I wonder why? JK comes to sit with me; I sense her apprehension. She kneels close by as we have tea (rather than sitting on the bench); no one else has done this. Before we start I talk for a minute or so about posture, about it being the key, the mantra as I see it: the way in. It is clear from her attention that she has done very little of this, if any. Why should she have?

We begin the first period with hums. I ask her to join-in with me and she does. Sitting to the interval passes, and within my awareness, which is almost silent and without breath, I feel JK's discomfort. By the time I open my eyes to make the bok she has stretched her legs forward. She stands. I think she wants to leave, and hope that she does not. I get up (this is the only time I have moved from my cushion in all the sittings so far) and bring through the chair. We continue. We finish.

I begin to talk about 'just sitting' being at one end of a spectrum, in my overall understanding, in terms of principles, of the physical discipline of Tai Chi (as opposed to its purely philosophical doctrine) – with fighting skills being at the other. So, at one end: fight skills – trained response, action with almost no processing thought. Next to: Partner work – testing action and response, reflexive thought. Then: solo Tai Chi Forms – thought/mind with body in time and space. Then: Chi Kung/Taoyin – the body becoming aware of/by itself. To finally: 'just sitting' – thought into space, nowhere everywhere, all refuge no refuge.

Two hours later JK returns for her regular private Tai Chi class – and I had wondered if she would. We don't talk about the sitting practice before starting, and then we do; I open it into the room at the moment of growing sunlight. I was correct in that it was a first time for her, and she couldn't believe how 'just sitting' – stillness for forty-five minutes – could be so incredibly hard.

I am impressed at her bravery and talk to her about Kuan Yin, going over 'Turning back the shutters to see the Moon' Taoyin, which she has only just learnt, as my vehicle in doing so. I speak of compassion as action, in a fully practical sense, realising with some force as I do so that my meditation has been solid, and a foundation for her. Something is achieved.

## Twelfth: Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> 7.00 am. I sit alone.

A hard start. I am expecting this, expecting also to sit alone for the remaining five periods. It is only near the end that I realise that I am also sitting with the revenant presence, coming to me from across or within time, of all those that I consider to be my teachers – all those beginners' minds. And in my own mind, remaining ordinary and not quite opening this morning, I place Suzuki-roshi a little behind and to my right, and Matthiessen a little behind and to

my left; the refuge of being three together in the studio, on the face of the mountain... But this is not how the morning started... Also, just to add in conclusion of this thought: I wish I could speak like the former and write like the latter; so often my phrases, spoken and written, falter.

So, it was one of those flattened out mornings. Drizzle came with the train bringing me to the studio. Outside, as I begin to sit, the noise, ugly and insistent, impinges. Even the stillness-walking, that I make before commencing (as I have been doing regularly from the beginning) is somehow sans quality.

Sitting: there is an ache in my left eyeball. The approaching glass-disposing truck corners the market below, and the shattering of refuse bottle-bags being emptied-out cuts a crushing, shrieking scar down the street.

I take the emptying-out as a sign, urging myself to 'Empty like this, empty like this', but cannot. Then, and with a roaring-off, the cascade of glass-fall fades; a sour, pinging, semi-tone alarm interval that must have been going on since before I arrived, becomes silent.

Somewhere inside, I stop.

I am tired, I finally acknowledge, and with a long day ahead of me as I shall be driving out to see PG later, before heading back here to the studio again for the evening period.

The temptation to quit falls on me like a long-ton hammer, but also the knowing that I will not, not now. I will allow unusual effort to sustain me – this mind behind mind WIDE-OPENESS, open before my opening, with its ocean-deep pressure, its thrumming soft intensity...

I find I have completed the hour.

### Thirteenth: Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> 7.00pm. I sit alone, or at least...

I have been at my weariest and fall to slumber on the futon rolled-out in the smaller room when I get back to the studio at around 4.30. Retreat as action.

When I get up again, to prepare for the evening, I feel sure that I will sit alone – steadily and accepting.

I practise stillness-walking, both forward and back, wondering which way is toward and which away, and why?

I slip into the ease, or custom now, of tea, closing the street-side window to soften the growing sound – a clamour almost – outside the pub.

Finding myself on my cushion – when did I walk to it? – finishing hums and voicing the bell, I am suffused in a golden calm rising over me from behind in a protective un-burning flame; this image-feeling is so much like my small gold-traced Buddha carving from Japan, recently acquired. In some iconographies this protective flame is depicted as the sacred cobra with hood raised.

Suffusion is the only word. Suzuki and Matthiessen are nearby, and others too. How plastic, how short or long is time!



And then, the door-buzz buzzes.

I get up to admit JMc, who is as ever polite, apologising for lateness, a touch of the gracious about him.

As he gets ready in the smaller room I stand before my improvised circular tray of objects, 'impulses toward devotion'(Matthiessen), that have gathered themselves together. How, and how many days ago did that happen?

I am still present within my meditation, I realise, and continuing to be so... I contain three (at least) awarenesses without differentiation:

Firstly, that those few minutes before the door-buzz were the most tender, clear and deep of the entire two weeks so far – as if a direct receiving.

Secondly, a murmur of dissatisfaction at the interruption.

Thirdly, that it's really fine, okay.

JMc's is a very gentle spirit on these occasions, as I have noted before. Also, having not seen him for a few months, I remark to myself that he has lost weight. He is tall, over six feet, slim and long-legged; his knees trouble him.

When we go to sit his usual trial with cushions takes place: he piles three *zafu* together and lowers himself. At the interval he seeks out soft blankets with which to fold knee-pads.

My mind muddies briefly, is not so clear as earlier; regret is like a tug on my sleeve. Yet the trace of suffusion persists as a reminder that it is not only an unusual effort the that we require but an unusual self-allowing too.

As we finish – I have made no record of having said anything, but I expect I did – I have this thought, and not for the first time: that Suzuki – other teachers too – gave spoken guidance with intuitive-care and not always fully, or to completeness, so as not to over-burden his students. For example, he would allow their questions concerning 'enlightenment' to glance off him, often with humour; this is 'skilful means' (*upaya*), and another lesson.



#### Fourteenth: Friday 18<sup>th</sup> 7.00am. I sit alone.

I walk to the station in a steady rain. I wear my father's raincoat, mindful of this purpose, this action I am making: it is the last 4.50am start.

And I remember to record here a coincidence, or a known or felt afore-hand incident of yesterday evening: which is that as I placed the candle on the studio stairs, as I have done on each occasion as a gesture of welcome, I quoted to myself the line of Mosca's (from Volpone), 'Present to any humour, all occasion...' I am ready for anything anyone, to happen or appear. Then, still alone, as I poured the first tea, a speck of leaf came into the lotus tea-bowl. 'Me?', I wondered? At second pour, a tiny upright twig-leaf circled, which in tradition connotes the arrival of someone unexpected. Soon after, as I wrote yesterday, JMc arrives who is an infrequent visitor to the studio now. I intuitively understand that something intrigues him in my teaching, my method, such as it is; I also know, he doesn't quite know what or why. It is one of those faint-trace karmic connections.

Karma directs the morning period also; old wounds long-buried surface, breaking open my earth. There is a tearing into, a desperate goading... This is heartache too private for these pages. BUT, and this felt of some significance: I was, and simultaneously, able to acknowledge that these burning demons, as such they are, would in a few short breaths, sputter, extinguish themselves, fail from hindering me more.

And so they did, and do, and must, and will.

I sit with Wu, sit with Mu, sit with This, sit with Living, sit with Dying, sit with End, sit with Beginning.

And after this evening's hour, I tell myself, I will take away all sign of my being here, of my ever having been here, so that tomorrow, at the last period, I really will sit with nothing: *SHIKAN TAZA*.



## Fifteenth: Friday 18<sup>th</sup> 7.00pm. I sit with JMc.

JMc arrives promptly, in fact I do not hear the door-buzz at first.

I look forward to sitting this evening even though it has been a tiring day again: a visit to a foot clinic in the early morning, shortly after sitting so strongly. How annoying this sole-corn that spoils my *jan-chung* standing practice... And then not long after, an unexpected private Tai Chi class for VR who wishes to consolidate her Form. I agree to teach her even though I am physically somewhat spent, and now sore of foot too.

Then, preparing to sit with JMc in the evening, I feel refreshed, expectant even, although Eido Shimano-roshi (a teacher to Matthiessen) exhorts us to, 'Expect nothing!', and quite rightly too.

I go over with JMc how I see 'just sitting' in the overall Tai Chi spectrum, feeling he will enjoy this approach. I am much clearer in my delivery of this, this time. I realise that before, when I was outlining the same teaching to JK a few days ago, that in that instance I was speaking as the thoughts were coming to me, just emerging. I often teach in this way, allowing the words as they come. This time, however, the words have become their own truth.

We begin to sit, with JMc opting for the bench, at least to start with. Once again, I go over the importance as I see it of posture: making the posture mantra.

How quickly things fall away: I am burnished, tempered, adamant, lightning-white, then... star-night dark suddenly.

And suddenly too, two hearings coming together, simultaneously and repeated:

'There you are! There you are! There you are!'

'Who is this? Who is this? Who is this?'

I am with my, with an, original self.

And I am taken in surprise, not ready, even after these two weeks and forty years.

I draw away from this nearness, finding PG there too, with the look he gives of inseparable love when, in life, he suddenly sees me, after not having seen me even though looking.

Tears come in my eyes, but I do not cry and they do not run out.

I make it to the interval holding the words I had written out in the afternoon: **Sit with Wu, Sit with Mu, Sit with This...**

In the short break, JMc finds cushions. I hardly pause, do not change the half-lotus, but plunge back into the second part. The emotion is still there, overflowing, but I leave it alone.

Awareness is entirely concurrent.

I realise that the Tai Chi line spectrum I had been detailing earlier is not, of course, a line, but a bracelet of 'unusual efforts', so that 'just sitting' comes beside 'fight skills'. And I have the sense once again of 'knowing' something that I already knew, only with far far more precision. I see precision in everything, everywhere.

We come to the drum bok. We have sat well into fifty minutes. I speak – it just starts – talking to JMc about different ways of 'just sitting', raising the subject of *Shikan taza*: Dogen at his most terse, 'Sit! Nothing but!', also of 'Skillful means': guidance where the spoken word (or gesture, or image) un-stops and opens the Ear (or Eye) of the sitter, exemplifying the deepest possible gift – of truth given freely from the spiritual-self. I talk of *koan* too, and offer

him the first line of my five-line verse-riddle: **‘Go through this practice.’**

‘Which in the four is the ‘turning word?’ I ask, ‘Find it, and you will have a *koan* to sit with and anchor a life.’ I tell him not to answer at once – but he does, saying that he intuitively moves to ‘practice’. When I ask him to explain, he says because he knows it is something I so strongly emphasise, but then, that he also suspects he is wrong. He is: but when he has uncovered it, well then... then a greater-than-diamond will have changed hands.

As I have done earlier in the week, I fall to the complimentary, saying how sympathetic is his presence, how compatible he is to sit with. I tell myself again that I need to pull-back on this tendency. A guider-in-meditation shouldn’t flourish like this, should he? I realise that it’s just a personal thing, a little bit of Tim-compassion, and of no harm in the world. I also realise that these few minutes have been a proper, if informal, *dokusan*: a one-to-one encounter and direct pointing.

We finish, conversing easily, interestingly until he leaves. The door at the bottom of the stairs closes.

Something moves in me, and physically moves me: within half an hour I have packed-up these two weeks – tea, tea-bowls, tea-pot, Tibet bell, Hong Kong fish-drum, beater, reed-cushions, sitting cushion, writing, basket, coffee, trays, futon, blankets, trousers and Dragon coat – so that nothing remains but the hover of emptiness in the studio and raised voices from the street below. Then the car is stowed and I am on my way home, driving.



**Sixteenth:** Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> 9.00am. I sit alone.

I sit with nothing.

## AFTERWORD

It is still August, almost into September now, as I conclude transferring these notes from the hand-written page to this document. It has taken a little over ten days of my intermittently coming to my desk, to amend, layout and type; I enjoy this process.

And I find too that this transferring, this transmission, has, as if living within it, the capacity to make me experience again the Mind, the stillness, the confidence, the awareness that I had during the periods of 'just sitting'; there is an enduring resonance that I cannot quite explain, but it has about it a sense of coming home.

The last thing I wish to record here is a second saying of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi that seems to me to make a pair with that set down at the beginning of this journal, and a fitting conclusion. He would say it and laugh.

**“If you were not born in this world, there would be no need to die.  
To be born in this world is to die, to disappear.”**



IN THE SOLACE GARDEN