

Edward Brown Informal Afternoon Talk Outdoors  
during one day sitting at Green Gulch Farm  
July 18, 2018

In Japan, they say, “When you rake, just rake.” That’s classic Zen. Suzuki Roshi told me, “When you cut the carrots, cut the carrots. When you stir the soup, stir the soup. When you wash the rice, wash the rice.” So you get in and do it. In Southeast Asia, they say, “When you rake, watch your mind.” So in Japan, they’re just rakin’. In Southeast Asia, they stand there holding the rake.

I’m sorry, but in my kitchen, I want you to cook. I want you to get the work done. I don’t want you to be standing around being mindful. I know there’s a lot of advantage to being mindful. I’ve done my share of it. I’ve practiced for a lot of years: inhale, exhale, count one-two, and—so been there, done that, and some of you may be interested in doing that, in standing in the kitchen and watching your minds. But I did tell that to Mel Weitsman, my Zen mentor. He said, “It sounds like those monks in Southeast Asia still think their minds are up here,” rather than everything is mind or activity is also mind. Things are mind. Activity is mind.

So—but anyway—so yeah, it took me a long time. I had to work through all of that, and then why—where are the recipes for no stress and no effort to produce masterpieces? Where—I thought you were going to tell us what to do so we didn’t have to think about it. That’s another classic thing, but that’s what people look for. Because, if the way you’re running, managing your world is not working, it’s not your strategy that’s the problem. It’s that you just need to improve the way you *do* your strategy. So you need a *better* recipe. It’s not that recipes don’t work; it’s that you need a *better* recipe.

So—yeah, so a woman in Portland decided to study: was there anybody who’d ever lost a lot of weight and kept it off? Because it’s just classic: you get the instructions for dieting, you lose a lot of weight, and then you gain it all back and more. And then you go on—and it’s called—it’s the “yo-yo effect” in dieting. So she found eleven people who’d lost at least twenty-five pounds and kept it off for five years or longer. And they had one secret in common: they’d each figured out for themselves how to do it. And, the last we heard, she could not get a publisher for her book because eleven New York publishers said, “We can’t publish this. Nobody wants to hear they have to figure it out for themselves, right? ...book about dieting.” So—oh god, I’m just....

So my book is about *No Recipe*—as that there’s no recipe finally for being you. Who’s ever done it before? Oh, well. So, whether you want to hear it or not, here it is. But—so I have a few copies and then—but you can also get them in the bookstore.

Audience: I’ll buy one.

Oh, you will?

Audience: Right up front.

Okay. Right up front. Here you go. Oh, then you want me to sign it.

Audience: Of course.

[unintelligible crosstalk]

Okay. Hold on to it until later. Thank you.

So we have time now if you have any questions or comments or observations or things you want to bring up or share. You're welcome to do so.

Yes, sir.

Audience: I want to thank you very much for your energy and who you are.

Yes. And...but....

Audience: No, no, no. Letting us have this conversation with you and you inviting us to take a walk—just you being so inviting to explore this space really dismantled my reverence for clarity and order and stringent adherence to rules, and I was able to really just—be with [??] and I ended up at the beach, taking a very slow, mindful walk.

Oh.

Audience: And I'm really working on movement [ ]

Yeah.

Audience: Thank you so very much.

You're welcome so very much. Yeah. Somebody's listening to what I say. There's no recipe.

Yes, sir.

Audience: Earlier, when we started, I think you mentioned that we often are trying to problem-solve [??] being supportive or receiving?

Yeah.

Audience: How do you avoid, when you're doing your Vipassana walking, where you are stepping or noticing—is that—that would become a problem to solve as well? [??]

Well, classically, in Vipassana you catch yourself doing that and then you note: *judging* or *fixing* or something like that, and the idea is that that's the first step, is noticing it, naming it. The main thing I had to work through in my book is called shame. After even forty years of Zen practice, I found out: *Oh. This is called shame. I am not good enough. I am inherently not good enough. I am, in essence, a loser. So what am I doing here on the planet and why can't I get things to come out better and so on? And then how can you write a book?*

So the first step is naming it and noticing. And then you can—and at some point you start to notice that you have choice about how to work with it. And you can shift your focus a little bit. You may focus more on your feet or on the noting or what you—what's going on. And at some point in Vipassana, they suggest you practice lovingkindness meditation and sympathetic joy and so on.

I—over the last couple of years, I started doing gratitude practice. Every morning you write down twenty things you're grateful for. And I wasn't feeling very grateful at the time, so I write down *the floor, the candles, the incense, having a cushion to sit on, the sky, the sun—oh, there's some sunlight—oh, sunlight*. After a while you get—*oh yeah, and there's my daughter. Okay. All right*. So, little by little, you can have gratitude instead of obsessing about the problem. You start just generating gratitude.

So, yeah, we have habits like that which then—at some point, we're—and, as much as anything, once you name it, then you can ask, *well, what do I do?* Name it and then ask for help or what would—and you're asking, in a sense, your self. You're asking, giving your self, choice. This is classic emotional intelligence. When there's a problem, you give your self choices. And you create—you can list different choices. What would be—what might work here, what might help?

And you keep studying that: what might help, which is also what Suzuki Roshi called beginner's mind. You don't already know what to do, how to solve it, so you're—*what should I do? What should I do? What should I do? How do I work on this? How do I... And sometimes what you realize is, oh, I need more information. Just how does this work?* So see what you can find out. So I must say it's pretty good that you already notice this.

What else?

Yes, sir.

Audience: Whether it's walking or meditating or anything, the thing that I can be pretty consistently sure of is that thinking is going to be my thing that's going to get in the way—even if there's outdoors and there's other senses going on. And it was good to be able to name it while we were walking, but....

Uh-huh.

Audience: Is there any shortcut for short-circuiting the thinking?

Yeah. It's called psilocybin. Magic mushrooms. It's only a temporary shortcut. My friend Vanja Palmers, who has a center in Austria and Felsentor, is why I get to go to Europe, because that's two of the places I teach when I'm there: three Zen and cooking retreats and then one meditation intensive, *sesshin*, at Puregg. And Vanja—two years ago, I think, in February he had a *sesshin* at his spectacular retreat center that's a two-story zendo. It's originally constructed—the pieces—in Emeryville and then shipped over to Belgium, trucked to Switzerland, helicoptered up to the site (because there's no roads up there) and—incredible vistas.

And, anyway, he had a *sesshin* where half of the people had psilocybin and half didn't. And it's all with Swiss scientists and Swiss professors and through the university and the hospitals. You can do this kind of thing in Switzerland. Yeah. It's lucky up to a point. My student Thomas went and then he didn't get the psilocybin. He had to sit there for a week while other people were having such a spectacularly great time. And so then, if you didn't get the psilocybin, you got invited back to a two-day retreat later in September when, again, the first day he didn't get the psilocybin. So then he knew the second day it was his turn. So he finally got the psilocybin.

But they're—he's very big on dosage, which is why they use psilocybin, because it's—you can dose it to body weight. Dosage, setting, and intention: that this is for spiritual practice and not for just *I'm out of here. I need—I'm getting high*. So you have some positive intention and it's—and classically, historically, this is the way the thing's been used—with some intention behind it rather than just *I want to get high. I want to get out of here*.

Interestingly enough, I saw a movie the other night—I love going to a—there's a bar/restaurant I go to in—you don't need to know all this, but a little background for the story—in Munich called Schumann's, and I first went there in 2006 because my film director Doris Dörrie took me there. And, after a while, I couldn't get in. So I realized, *if I want to get in here, I need to become friends with Charles* (who's the owner and the head guy). So I brought in a copy of my cookbook in German, *Das Lächeln der Radieschen* (*The Smile of the Radishes*), which is their version of *Tomato Blessings and Radish Teachings*. I brought it in, and it was signed to Charles, and I went up to Charles, and I said, "Charles, my name is Ed. I have a present for you."

And Charles says, "It's about time."

So this year I took *this* book and I go—three of us go—we go through the bar/restaurant to the outdoor eating area in the back. It's really sweet. It's—and it's a little German. It's a little formal and stuff. But it's a nice place to eat. And I say to the maître d', "Yes, three for lunch, please."

And he says, "Do you have a reservation?"

And I say, “No. But this is my annual pilgrimage from California and I have a present for Charles.”

And he says, “Please have a seat.”

How did we get started on this? Thinking. But you’re also reminding me of a story, which is a very interesting—well, a couple of stories. One is the Sixth Ancestor, otherwise Huineng. And he wrote a—there may not even have been a Sixth Ancestor Huineng, but he wrote something called *The Platform Sutra*. Or he didn’t but somebody did and said he did because it was good PR or something. And in *The Platform Sutra*, one translation says, “The Sixth Ancestor taught no-thought, no-form, non-abiding.”

So don’t think, don’t stick to any particular form as the way to live your life, and don’t hang out in the same place, at least not in your head. Don’t try to keep the same reality. Don’t try to abide somewhere. Be willing to see what’s going on in your feet or whatever, rather than just staying in your head and saying, “What’s wrong with you, Feet?”

Because the classic way we approach it is to have a self behind the eyes somewhere that snipes, it thinks. And it never gets to snipe back because it’s a sniper, and that’s the way the intelligence works. We set up consciousness. So don’t—no thought, no form, no abiding. And then he said—one day he said, “I’ve been teaching no-thought, no-form, non-abiding. Some of you are taking me literally and you are making your minds like rocks so that you don’t think at all. This is a cause of insentientcy.” Sentient beings are beings that are alive and move about and think, and “this is a cause of insentientcy, making your mind like a rock. And it’s an obstruction to the way. So when I say, ‘don’t think,’ I mean, if you have a thought, think nothing of it.”

So this is very similar to what happened—so I’ll tell you what happened when I first started and I went for my first interview with Suzuki Roshi. And I had no idea what you do in *dokusan*. Auspicious Zen master. He’s not that tall, but it feels like he is. Anyway, so I sat down and then after awhile he said—not very long—he said, “How’s your meditation?”

I said, “Oh, not so good.”

And he said, “Oh, what’s not so good?”

And I said, “Well, I’m thinking a lot.”

And he said, “What’s the problem about thinking?”

So I looked for it. What’s the problem about thinking? And I couldn’t find a problem. So all I could come up with was, “Well, *you* know. You’re not supposed to think. That’s what you teach all the time.”

And he said, “I think it’s pretty normal to think, don’t you?”

So again, it’s—if you—when you believe your thinking is important and you would need to keep track of it, then you sit there and think and keep track of it. If you think—if you decide that it may be interesting to follow your breath or do something else with your energy or your vitality or the moment, this moment, you follow your breath or sit up straight, or you do something else in the meditation hall, and you find things to do in your life that are absorbing and interesting and that—and thinking has its place.

One other story about—I once drove a man out of Tassajara, and I was talking and I said, “How was your time in Tassajara?”

“Oh, it was so hard.”

And I—“What was so hard?”

He said, “Well, I couldn’t stop thinking. I just couldn’t stop. I couldn’t stop thinking.”

But he seemed to have done a pretty good job of it. As time went on, we got towards the city and I said, “Did you talk to Zen Center about having a place to stay?”

“No, I didn’t think of that.”

“And you think you might go on to Green Gulch? Did you talk to them?”

“No, I didn’t think of that.”

So the problem is not thinking but that you have a good relationship with it, where you can think or not think and it serves its purpose. And when you need to think, you think. And the thoughts that would be useful for you come to you and other thoughts—*not interested*. But sometimes it’s a little hard to tell, but anyway...

Audience: I have a question which is kind of about thinking, but—so just sitting—so like you were talking about the hippies aren’t interested in material things but they want to improve.

Yes.

Audience: So I confess, I’m—let’s face it—I’d like to be a better person. So even—so I’ll just cut to the chase. So what’s the question between aspiration and an agenda? Do you understand? Isn’t an aspiration an agenda?

I was going to say, “Let’s pass around the cookies.”

Audience: Yeah, let’s do that.

And ask a cookie.

[Chatter]

Well, you reminded me, for instance, of—I do, sometimes, meditation with people like *do you want love in your life?* So usually you think you have to earn it. You have to become a better person in order to get the love, because if you were a better person, then—the reason you’re not getting the love you want is because you’re not a better person.

Audience: That’s what I think.

So is what you want to be a better person or do you want love? So let’s get clear about this. So my conclusion has been what I want is not—I don’t care about being a better person. I want love.

Audience: Right. There we go.

So if you want love, that’s an aspiration. That’s a great, lovely desire. I want love. And—but you—what you want to do then is not fixate the love on *I want your love* or the love from this person or that person or this or that or that I need to do this in order to get the love or that I—you want it to be independent of all of that.

Audience: No manipulation.

No manipulation, no...

Audience: No strategy.

No strategy. Yeah. So if you want love, go ahead. Tune to love. Receive. This is my—this is basic support. Find the support wherever you go. Find the love wherever you are. And I don’t know what happened after Jesus said, “O my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” on the cross.

Audience: I know.

“Father, why hast thou forsaken me?” As Michael Meade said, “Family business. Bad family karma. Whoa.” But anyway....

Audience: Well, he wasn’t forsaken because he was resurrected.

Maybe so. But I don’t know what “resurrected” means either.

Audience: Me either.

I don’t know. In the bodily form or in the non-bodily form or...?

Audience: Yeah. Actually, nobody really knows.

It's always a little confusing. He was the Son of God, but aren't we all? No, not like *He* was.

Audience: Right. No. I'm with you. I admit I am in the Christian faith and I'm saying the same thing. What do you mean? How come? What's the deal?

So, anyway, aspiration is where it's not attached to getting one thing in order to get another or becoming a better person in order to have. You just go for what you want and have what you want, receive what you want. Because the big thing is not—is: your belief that you need to become a better person in order to receive the love is a mistake. The reason why you're not receiving love is because you started thinking that.

And you started thinking that when you were a child, and you didn't—and that was a good strategy at the time. *I'm going to do my best to gain, to earn love. I'll do my best. I'm going to behave well. I'm going to do what they want. And then they'll love me.* And you get—but—and maybe you get some love, but it's not directly related to that. You get what you—through your good deeds and everything, you get approval. You get recognition. You get gratitude or thanks. *Thank you for your good behavior* and so on.

But the love is something you need to be willing to receive. And then sometimes it's in the air and sometimes it's not in certain families. But the more you think *I need to perform in order to have it*, probably not. So it's good to have aspirations. I want to be at home—over the years—I want to breathe easy. I want to be at home here in this body at this place at this time on this earth. And that's—but that's not *I want to have a home where I'm safe and secure*. It's *I want to be at home wherever I am*. So those kind of aspirations are powerful and important. And that's the whole world of affirmations and intentions that I was like, *No, no, no, no. I'm working on becoming a better person. I'm going to be—I'm going to earn all of this. We're not in woowoo land here. We're in hard-core practice land.*

Yes.

Audience: Can you talk more about the woowoo land and affirmations?

Oh. Oh, somebody wants to know about woowoo land and affirmations.

Audience: There seems to be more.

Well, a few years back there was the whole business of *The Secret*. Now that got to be woowoo land because they said whatever you want, you can—you create what you want and then it will come to you. But what they didn't say is: what you want needs to be in attunement with your core, with your true nature. So the more you can voice what is actually in attunement with your core, with your true nature, then

things—and then it can come to you. So I—almost every day I put a little piece of paper on my altar. What’s up today? So safe trip to Europe, good courses. And then you can basket them within that—or my relationship, my daughter. So I affirm those things and then I ask for help. *Please help.*

And sometimes—where I actually learned a lot about this is—I have some amazing friends. In my view, they’re amazing friends. I was at a Zen Center reunion about 2004 or something. I don’t know. 2008? I don’t know. And I ran into my old roommate from Tassajara, Jack Elias. And Jack said, “Hey, how’s your bread book? You sold a lot of copies of your bread book, yeah?”

And I said, “Yeah.”

And he said, “I have a book out now, too. It’s called *Finding True Magic*. It’s doing great.”

I said, “Oh. Well, that’s interesting.”

And he said, “Yeah, I’ve become a hypnotherapist and I have a website called *Finding True Magic*.”

So I said, “Well, hey, can I work with you?”

And he said, “Well sure.”

And I said, “But I’m in San Francisco. You’re—I’m in Marin County. You’re in Seattle. How do we work?”

He said, “On the phone, Ed.”

So occasionally I work with Jack, but the first couple of times was what was the most amazing. Each one has been important. And the first time I talked with him, I said, “I’m really scared, unhappy, angry, sad—dread, fear, terror.” List them: depressed, despondent, whatever. Pretty much the gamut of—three categories of emotions: anger/frustration, anxiety/worry, and despondent/despair. Three categories. You can be against things, you can be worried about how they come out, and you can be discouraged that they’re not happening.

And it turned out that a lot of that was because I was a Type A person and I’m trying to do too much. And that’s the way it works with Type A—when you’re Type A. But I talked to Jack, and I told him about this, and then we did some work, and then he said, “Okay, Ed. Look at it. You’re unhappy because you’re watching bad movies. You’re watching the movies—you’re watching your scenes, mental pictures that elicit sadness and anger and frustration. You’re watching these. And you’re watching these same movies over and over again. Why don’t you watch some other movies?”

“But they’re true. It’s reality. It’s what happened. It’s what’s going on in my life and it’s true.”

So—and he said, “Ed, that’s called the trance of everyday reality. We’re working with hypnotherapy here, so those are trances that we can—dispel those trances, and we can create other trances.”

Now we’re talking woowoo. If you tell this to Zen people, oftentimes they say, “No, Ed. We just sit with what is. And if what is *sucks*, we just sit with what sucks.” So I don’t know that this is not Zen. I just—it’s not your typical Zen. So he told me these various things and so, at some point, we stopped talking and then I hung up the phone and I went to sleep on this solid wood floor for two hours. I thought, *wow, that’s fabulous. Isn’t that amazing? I just went to sleep for two hours.*

And then, a few days later, we talked on the phone again. “Ed, what happened?”

And I said, “Oh, it’s amazing. I had this great nap—slept for two solid hours after our phone call.”

And he said, “Ed, we call that resistance.”

So then we went over and over this. And then he said, “You’re watching movies that make you unhappy, that make you sad, that make you scared, that make you angry. You’re watching these same movies. Watch—why don’t you watch some other movies?”

“I don’t know what other movies to watch.”

“Ed, you’re in charge of the movie theater. Bring in some other movies.”

“But what other movies would I bring in?”

“Ed, you’re the screenwriter. You’re the director. You’re the cinematographer. You can bring in whatever actors you want. Make some new movies. Create some other movies. Don’t keep watching these same movies.”

“But it’s not reality. It’s not true. It’s not what happened to me. I need to keep my story.”

And he said, “But the—when you keep your story, you’re unhappy. So why are you doing that?”

And I said, “But it’s what happened. My mother died when I was three, okay? It’s what happened. And then I was in the orphanage and it’s how I remember my mother and honor her: to keep feeling her feelings for her even though she’s not here.”

Whatever. You have these rationale because you don't know any better than to watch those same old movies. So he was so persistent. It's what, in that world, you call relentless compassion or something like this. It just—completely relentless. And “Please don't do this to me. You really....” And he just kept at it until finally I said, “Okay. All right. All right. I understand. I'm watching some bad movies. I could watch some other ones. How do I do this?”

So he said, “So glad you asked.” He said, “Oh, thank you. Good.” And then he said, “So you try this. You say—okay now, Ed, would you like to be happy and joyful?”

“Yeah, yeah. That sounds good. Happy and joyful—I could go for that.”

And so then he said, “All right. So, if being scared comes up, you just say, ‘Even though I'm scared, I will be joyful and happy.’ Or you can say, ‘I'm scared. Nevertheless, I will be joyful and happy.’”

*Even though or nevertheless. I'm scared. Nevertheless I will be joyful and happy. Even though I'm scared, I will be joyful and happy. I'm angry. Nevertheless I will be joyful and happy. Even though I'm angry, I will be joyful and happy. So I started doing that and one thing after another would come up and several times an hour. I'm scared. Nevertheless I'll be joyful and happy. And it would pop. It would go away. It was gone. And then I'm angry. Nevertheless I'll be joyful.... I'm so discouraged. Nevertheless I'll be joyful and happy. And, after about three days, it all just was gone.*

That's woowoo. That's serious woowoo. And I don't know if you have to believe it or not, but you do have to do the work. You have to say, “Okay, I'm going to watch some other movies. Okay, I don't have to stick to this story about who I am and what my life is about and why it doesn't work and what I need to do to fix it and why can't I do that and....” At some point, it's like *screw it. Get on with your new life.* So it's a little bit like in Zen the saying “setting aside what enlightenment would be like, if you had it, what would you do with it?” Excuse me, but do you really need to be enlightened to do that? Give yourself some permission.

Anyway, there's many versions of that, but I—that was my first practical encounter, and so then I called up Jack, and I said, “Whoa. This is like finding true magic.”

So I'm going up to Seattle in September, and I'll probably see him. I haven't seen him in all these years, but we—I refer people to him. And coincidentally we're both working with a group called One Taste. Do you know One Taste? Huh? They practice OMing. O-M for “orgasmic meditation,” OMing. Jack and I don't—as far as I know, Jack doesn't practice it with them. I don't practice that with them. I teach meditation and outdoor walking and Qi Gong, and he works with them on the phone mostly but occasionally does retreats with them. So we may collaborate and do a retreat together with the One Taste people.

They've come here two or three times, and they're much better than they were many years ago. You missed it. Ten years ago they were here—thirty of them. And in

the dining room at lunchtime they were sitting in each other's laps. And at the end—at the very end of the day, I got up from my cushion where I'm sitting, and there was a woman on the other side of the zendo there, and she was bending over to straighten her cushion like I talked to you about this morning. And, as far as I could tell, she had—didn't have anything on but black panties.

And I thought—well, it's embarrassing. You don't want to keep looking at something like this. And I forgot that I'm the teacher and I probably should say something about wearing clothes in the meditation hall. You forget it's up to—*oh, I'm the authority here. I should say something.* Little did I know. So I went back to straightening my cushion, and then when I turned around she had her clothes on. It worked out. Yeah. *Okay, I'm going to take a few minutes now to straighten my cushion. In the meantime, if you all could get dressed....*

So I could—I'll tell you one more thing, which I just got yesterday which is so—I just found this so interesting because I'm seventy-three now. When—why didn't I hear this sooner? And the person I was working with yesterday said, "The more you can appreciate how much work and effort you made as a baby and as a young child to survive in this world and how to do it here, and the more you can appreciate and honor that—all the effort that you did, that got you through your early life, the more that that energy is going to—it's going to be here in your life today."

So when I look at my three- or four-year-old—oh, he's so unhappy, so miserable. Yesterday, when we were talking about it, that [???]. I was going to survive. And nothing was going to stop me. And that energy is still here. And I'm honoring that now. I'm going to do this.

And we all did that. We all went through amazing, amazing effort. And I mentioned this morning—two months old—you learn as a baby, prone, to lift your head and look around. Huge shift. And then between—around three and a half—huge expansion of the frontal lobes. It's so huge that each neuron is now making connections with a hundred other neurons. And, given that there's millions of neurons, this is a hundredfold increase in your intelligence at the age of three and a half or whenever that happens.

So you figured out how to do this, what to do with that. And yeah, certain things were hard, but you figured out a lot and you made it and you survived all of that and you've been working on a lot of things all these years. And so the more you honor all of your—the more we honor our huge effort, our huge—the great accomplishment is to even be here. The more we honor that, the more that energy is here today for us, too. And we don't just go, "Oh yeah, that sucked." So that's, again, a different view. And that's not so woowoo in my world. That has a little more reality to it. Does that make sense?

Yeah.

Audience: I started practicing with you the first time in '85.

I was thinking it's probably been about twenty or twenty-five years. Or thirty.

Audience: And in all the thousands of hours of meditation since that time, I have remembered the thing you said the very first time.

And now we get to hear it if we're lucky.

Audience: It was, "If you are coming to meditation for any particular thing, you will get nothing from it. There is nothing to get from meditation. Nothing."

Oh my goodness. I was serious, was I? The same message today but a little softer. Yeah. Sweet. Thank you, Carol.

Audience: Thank *you*, Ed.

Yes.

Audience: Following up on the clothing, I wanted you to tell us a little bit about what you're wearing.

Oh, the clothes. Yeah, in Zen we have outfits. I was at a Buddhist teachers' retreat at Spirit Rock about ten years ago—twelve, fifteen years ago. And they had little—what they called home groups, so you were paired with—not exactly paired—but you were in groups of—the Zen people were put in these—there was eight or ten people in a group. And so I was with some Vipassana people, some Tibetans, some Zen people. There's ten or twelve people. And we all introduce ourselves.

And I happened to be sitting next to Joseph Goldstein. So I'm sitting there—black pants. Not gray but black. Black *hippari*. And this is a *rakusu*. This is a miniature Buddhist robe, which the Chinese and Japanese liked. As far as I would guess is that in Asia, with the big robe that you wear over your left shoulder and under your right shoulder and you tuck it in somewhere. In Asia, it was saffron. The Tibetans have maroon ones. The Chinese and Japanese and Koreans like gray and black and sometimes brown or tan or something.

In India, originally, as a monk you weren't supposed to work. You just lived by begging. And the Chinese did not like that, so they're the ones—*yo, let's have our arms free to do some work*. So they—as far as I can tell, that's where this came from. And traditionally, you got scraps of cloth and then purified them and then sewed them—and dyed them and sewed them together. So we mostly take new material, cut it up, and sew it together. But I saw some magnificent *rakusus* at the Zen Center of Los Angeles that are done with different-colored fabric. Oh, man. Why don't we all do that? It's like art. It's like—anyway....

So I was sitting next to Joseph Goldstein and there were three Tibetan teachers across from us: Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Gelek Rinpoche, and Sogyal Rinpoche. And after

we'd introduced ourselves, Tsoknyi Rinpoche looked across at me and he said—and this is so Tibetan, “So Ed, what’s the difference between you and Joseph?”

Got your bullet point? What’s Zen and what’s Vipassana and what the difference is. And you’re supposed to be articulate about all these things. And I said, “Well, we have short hair and we have outfits, and they don’t. Look at him. He’s in a cardigan sweater and his hair is much longer than mine.”

And Tsoknyi Rinpoche looks across at me and he said, “No, Ed. I’m serious.”

And, damn, to this day I’m wishing that I knew enough to say, “And I guess that’s the difference between you and me.” And instead I’m like, “Oh, I’m so ashamed I don’t have the little two sentences for you about the difference here. Oh, we just sit and they practice noting” or whatever bullshit you want to talk about.

Oh yeah. So then when you do these, then you give it to your teacher and they write on the—writes on the back of it. So someone made this for me. I don’t remember who.

Audience: Marjorie.

Is it—this is Marjorie’s, too?

Audience: Didn’t Marjorie make that for you?

Marjorie made the new one. Did she make this one, too?

Audience: No.

Because this one says, “Ascending the Mountain Seat of Yoshinji, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, Year of the Horse.” So I have a little backyard zendo and then I became the abbot of my backyard zendo with a big ceremony. Thirty-five or forty of my friends came, and we had this ceremony, and then I received this *rakusu*. And then it says, “The deep ocean of tranquility holds the mountain form in its loving embrace.” And that’s—Mel only writes classic poems. He doesn’t make any of this stuff up. So—and my Buddhist name is Longevity Mountain, Peaceful Sea. So “The deep ocean of tranquility holds the mountain form in its loving embrace.” Yeah.

So this morning for a few minutes I had lost the *rakusu* I’ve been wearing recently, which is one that Marjorie made—my student in Seattle. And then—so I pulled this one out and I thought, *oh, Ascending the Mountain Seat of Yoshinji*. Yoshinji, by the way, is Nourish Heart Zen Temple, my backyard zendo. So this is also reminding me that I have—I’m going to put out some sheets of paper for an email list. If any of you would like to be on the list of—to receive information about events at my backyard zendo and/or other locations, you can put your name on the list. And these—I’ll put these over in the—I can put these over in the zendo, too, eventually. But if, in the meantime, you want to be on one of these lists, you can...

Audience: So who was abbot before you?

Oh, I was the first. Okay. So here. And we're coming to an end. It is 2:40.

Audience: Ed, will you say a little more about how it's all hand-stitched and there's a chant you do.

Oh my goodness.

Audience: It's a big deal.

It's a big deal. These are—you sew these yourself for the most part. I'm in this position now where people seem to be sewing them for me. But—and it takes about a week—at least your first one, probably forty hours or more.

Audience: It took me a year and a half.

Well, you weren't working on it eight hours a day, were you? I'm talking about where you sit down and it's sewing intensive. I understand that it can take a year and a half. So—but you study with a sewing teacher and then you ask your teacher, first of all, for permission and you—and to receive precepts. And we do a ceremony with sixteen bodhisattva precepts. And then—and classically, at the Zen Center, they have periods of time where you should have been practicing for three years this and you should have done that and so on. And then you can ask for permission, and then you study with a sewing teacher. And you get the fabric, and you cut it all out, and then you have to sew each of these lines. And there's a procedure for—you sew the vertical pieces together, then you sew the stripes this way, then you sew these together—sew them together—and then you have to sew around the outside and so on, and you sew the straps and....

So it—year and a half—a week to a year and a half. And then each time you make a stitch, you say, "I take refuge in Buddha," or you say it in Japanese: *Namu kie butsu*. And I don't know. I'm sorry, but it's a great religious experience or it's something to do to pass the time. It takes—it's—I don't know. You decide. How do you want to spend your time? I think it's a—after a while—and then some people become....

Audience: Well, I combined it with dinner at Hayes Street Grill.

Oh, yeah. Anne used to go to the—you went to class first?

Audience: No. I went to Hayes Street Grill...

You went to Hayes Street Grill first and then you went to sewing class?

Audience: Yes.

But weren't you having a martini when you were at the Hayes Street Grill?

Audience: A martini.

Oh, okay. So she just—usually there might be more, but on the days that she—the nights she was going to be sewing at the Zen Center, just *one* martini at the Hayes Street Grill. So please meet my student Anne Hinckle. And she could show you the back of her *rakusu*. I peeked at it earlier, and it says, “Buddha on the spot.” And this is—which is Dogen. Yeah, I wrote it.

Audience: Yeah, you wrote it.

Buddha on the spot. And “Buddha on the spot” is from Dogen’s teaching: aim to hit the mark. And hitting the mark is to realize you’re buddha on the spot without changing anything about your body or mind. Without changing anything, you’re buddha on the spot.

Audience: Is that when you get your dharma name—when you finish the *rakusu*?

Yeah. Then when you finish the *rakusu*, and you have the ceremony, and you receive your dharma name. Yeah.

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[???] indicates unintelligible

(Edward punctuates his talks with frequent laughs)

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