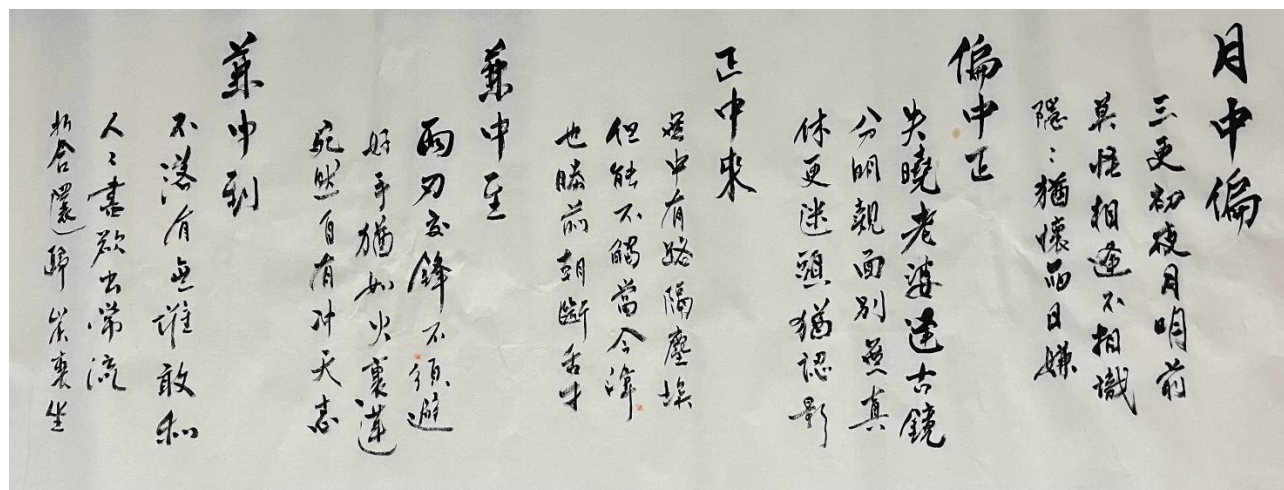


News from Cold Mountain

Summer, 2024 In Memory of Kangan Glenn Webb Roshi



Calligraphy Kansetsu Chia-ju Chang

Dongshan's "The Five Ranks"

I

In the third watch,

the beginning of the night,
before the moon is bright,
do not wonder
at meeting without recognition;
still held hidden in the heart

is the beauty of former days.

II

A woman who's overslept

encounters an ancient mirror;
clearly she sees her face-
there is no other reality.
Nevertheless, she still mistakes

her reflection for her head-

(Cont. p. 2, col. 1)



Table of Contents

Page 1
Dongshan, "The Five Ranks"

Page 2
Flowers of Emptiness
Kansetsu Chia-ju Chang

Page 4
A Heart of Oneness
Kangan Webb Roshi

Page 6
An Interview with Kankai Nathan Fishman
Kangetsu Sandy Spina and Kansei Pat Andres

Page 9
Ross Bolleter, The Five Ranks
Review by Kansei Pat Andres

III

Within nothingness is a road

out of the dust;
just be able to avoid violating
the [precepts]
and you will surpass
the eloquence of yore

that silenced every tongue.

IV

When two blades cross,

no need to flee;
an expert is like
a lotus in the fire-
clearly there is a spirit

spontaneously soaring.

V

If you are not trapped

in being or nonbeing,
who can dare to join you?
Everyone wants to leave
the ordinary current,
but in the final analysis
you come back

and sit in the ashes.

“The Five Ranks” by Dongshan Liangjie (807–869) describes the five stages on the path. The poem is highly regarded in both the Soto and Rinzai traditions.



三十八世洞山良价禅师

Flowers of Emptiness: The Little Prince and the Flower Koan

Kansetsu Chia-ju Chang

At the beginning of the spring semester, there was a conflict at my school that started with several “strong personalities.” What makes these situations so difficult is that they all hinge on identity—the social masks we wear. We all wear masks, but if you become too attached to yours, you may pay the ultimate price: forgetting who you really are. Then you may behave like the “strong personalities” I’m speaking about, stirring up confusion and unhappiness. *The Surangama Sutra* tells the story of a man named Yajñadatta who, upon seeing his reflection in a mirror, was overjoyed. However, when he moved away from the mirror and could no longer see his face, he believed he had lost his head and went mad searching for it everywhere. We become like this when we depend too much on the way we appear to others rather than living authentically.

I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase “Know thyself,” the first proverb engraved on the lintel of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece. For the philosopher Socrates, knowing yourself is truly the key to living an authentic life. But for Zen people, it’s a little more complex because we don’t believe in an essential self. For us, knowing yourself means encountering the “original face” you had even before you were born. In this talk, I want to use *The Little Prince* and the koan “Buddha Holds Up a Flower” to explore the Zen meaning of “knowing thyself.”

The Little Prince is a work written by French writer and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944) a year before his death. Having experienced two world wars (Cont. p. 3, col. 1)

and participating in the French Resistance, Saint-Exupéry personally witnessed human collective selfishness and madness. In this context, *The Little Prince* is not a simple children's story. The book is dedicated to adults who have never lived authentically because as children they weren't allowed to discover who they really are.

The story begins like this: two people, the Little Prince and the pilot (the alter ego of Saint-Exupéry himself), fall from the sky into an uninhabited desert. Strangely, the first thing the Little Prince does is ask the pilot to draw him a sheep. The pilot, who has wanted all his life to paint but was discouraged from trying, can't resist the Little Prince's request and tries hard to draw a sheep that will satisfy the child. The pilot keeps failing until he comes up with the idea of simply drawing an empty box. Now, the Little Prince can see the sheep just as he imagines it, and he is also able to recognize that there is an elephant inside the snake drawn by the pilot when he was a child! This is the beginning of their friendship.

The narrator, though, still thinks like an adult. He's so absorbed in making repairs to the engine of his plane that he only listens absent-mindedly when the Little Prince tells him about the rose he fell in love with, and about the war between roses and the sheep who eat them. "You adults only care about what you call serious things!" the Little Prince says angrily. "If I know one flower in the world that only exists on my planet and does not exist elsewhere, and a small sheep destroyed it so confusedly, isn't it important?"

It turns out that the Little Prince has come to the earth because his relationship with the rose failed, but now he understands that his absence puts his rose in danger from the sheep back home. The pilot can't help him because he's an adult, but the Little Prince finally meets someone who does--a fox. The fox teaches the Little Prince how to be "tamed": when we make a true connection with someone else—based on

appreciation, care, and complete acceptance—we no longer need our masks. Like the fox in the koan "Hyakujo's Fox," this fox brings a special wisdom. "Only with your own heart can you see things clearly," he says. "The really important things can't be seen with your eyes."

Here the fox tells the Little Prince *what* he needs to do, but he doesn't tell him *how* to do it. What does it really mean to see with our hearts? For the answer to that question we need to look at another story, Case 6 in the *Gate of No Barrier* (*Wumenguan*). The koan goes like this:

When Shakyamuni Buddha was at Mount Grdhrakuta, he held out a flower to his listeners.

Everyone was silent.

Only Mahakashyapa broke into a broad smile.

The Buddha said, "I have the True Dharma Eye, the Marvelous Mind of Nirvana, the True Form of the

Formless, and the Subtle Dharma Gate, independent of words and transmitted beyond doctrine. This I have entrusted to Mahakashyapa."

This is the historical moment concerning how Zen Buddhism started. This koan shows the first dharma transmission outside of sutras. The medium for transmitting this wonderful Buddha mind is nothing else but a flower! This is the start of the importance of flowers in Zen transmission. Was it a rose that the Buddha held up—like in *The Little Prince*?

Looking at flowers through the eyes of *sunyata*, emptiness, we see the essence of things and also recognize ourselves—our true selves, not our masks. At the moment when Mahakashyapa is staring at the flower, he experiences the true meaning of emptiness, which is not separate from form. The binary relationship between the subject and the object is temporarily eliminated, and the flower at this moment is no longer an (Cont. p. 4, col. 1)

object of attention, love, or concern. It's everything in the universe. This is the revelation of Kashyapa's "smile": the joy of emptiness!

In the *Little Prince*, we see many different human beings wearing different masks: red-faced gentlemen who only count their money, kings who love to command others, people who want to be worshipped like gods, and those who keep repeating others' words. But when they realize that they're all wearing masks, they become like Yajñadatta, who can't find his head and goes mad. After staying on earth for a while, the Little Prince asks the snake to bite him and send him back to his asteroid. Maybe he is going home to save his rose, but how will he see her when he arrives?

The Little Prince says the most important things in life cannot be seen with the eyes. But the Flower koan tells that we see with our hearts only when we embrace emptiness.



A Heart of Oneness

Kangan Glenn Webb

Arrival in Kyoto (1967)

In Kobe we boarded a train for Kyoto with our five suitcases taking up space between our car and the next one. I could not quite understand the announcements for each stop, and the signs hanging in each station with the name of the town written on it went by too fast for me to read them. I was worried that we would miss the Kyoto stop. When the train reached Kyoto, all the other passengers in our car immediately got up and silently carried *our* bags out of the train and onto the platform. One of the passengers even secured a porter to carry our suitcases to the front of the station. The Porter disappeared, and when the three of us entered the station, we couldn't find our luggage and we were frantic.

Did I mention that it was July? It was stiflingly hot, our son was crying, and all the people in the station were staring at us. Suddenly a beautiful *maiko-san*, a young geisha in training, appeared out of nowhere like a Fairy Princess and asked in English if she could help us. I tried to explain our problem, and she told us to wait a while. She left for a few minutes and then returned. She had a plastic bag with two goldfish in it. When she gave the bag to our son, he stopped crying instantly, and the little *maiko-san* led us around to the side of the station next to the baggage department, where our porter was waiting patiently for us with a taxi. We loaded ourselves into the taxi, handing the driver the address of the inn where we would be staying until we could find permanent lodging. The *maiko-san* stood there waving and bowing until we pulled away. That was our introduction to

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Kyoto!

To this day I can see every detail of that scene very clearly in my mind. Before we left Chicago, I was told by a wonderful Japanese gentleman who worked in the Asian Library at the university, Mr. Saburo Kitakoji, that Japan's real beauty lies in its people. He taught me the expression *kayui tokoro nimo tega todoku*, and he said this phrase summed up what the Japanese people were really like. Literally, the words say that in Japan, a person is always willing to scratch an itchy place on your body that you cannot reach yourself. I don't think I knew what he meant by those words until after our episode in the Kyoto station! Looking back on how kindly we had been treated, we both—that is, my wife and I—recognized how the hands of many Japanese strangers had reached out to help us to. Mr. Kitakoji's definition of the people of Japan still seems quite appropriate to me, even after countless trips back.

However, a few lessons at first seemed to be of the very opposite kind. I remember a time early on when I became very frustrated with one well-known priest at Daitokuji, a Rinzai temple in Kyoto. Much of the data I needed to see as part of my doctoral research was stored in various temples in the Kyoto area, and that particular temple had a 12th century Chinese ink painting that was pivotal to my research. It was well known in my field, and photographs of it were widely published, but I wanted to see it with my own eyes, along with the historical documents that accompanied it, so I wrote the temple's Abbot even before leaving Chicago, telling him of my research needs and asking for his assistance.

Shortly after arriving in Kyoto, I called the Abbot, and he very kindly set a time for my visit with him. The director of the Kyoto

National Museum provided me with a formal letter recommending me to the Abbott, and I brought that letter, along with cameras, lenses, a tripod, and everything I needed to record the event. The Abbot, now long deceased, was very cordial. He prepared sweets and green tea—matcha—for me, and we talked about my research, the painting, its famous Chinese artist, and the details of how the painting came into the temple's collection sometime in the 15th century. But after several hours passed and he still had not shown me the painting, I finally asked him if I could see it. He said in a very calm voice and with a faint smile on his lips, “No.” We were speaking in Japanese, so I thought I must have misunderstood. I asked again if he would please show me the painting. This time he said, “No, I will never show it to you.” My mind couldn't accept his refusal, so I suggested that maybe I could come back another time. He simply nodded his head “no” again and invited me to come back instead to practice *zazen* with a group of his disciples. I visited frequently after that, and even began showing up for the meditation sessions, but he never mentioned the painting or my request.

That Zen priest became one of my teachers. I gradually got over my need to photograph the painting. I actually saw it displayed on several occasions during the time when Daitokuji held the annual airing of its treasures in the autumn. But the Abbott did not show it to me himself until many years later, and in a very dramatic way. I had been attending meditation retreats at that temple and others quite regularly. On the last day of a winter retreat, I remember going to the toilet, and as I was squatting there over a traditional hole-in-the-floor, the Abbot must have quietly opened the sliding door behind

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me and gently placed the scroll painting, all rolled up, on the wooden box of toilet tissues at my side. Imagine my surprise when I reached back for a tissue and put my hand on a national treasure! I understood immediately that I had finally passed the Abbott's test. I no longer considered the painting an object to be studied and photographed but could see it merely as an exercise, a scene that a Chinese Zen priest had painted countless times during his struggle to reach, before he died, the transcendent reality of things. The Abbott seemed to be telling me that I had grown up spiritually. Whenever I relate this story to my friends in America, they usually look puzzled. I sometimes try to explain, but how can you explain something like this? The priest was very kind to me, but his kindness did not seem kind at first. My eyes had to be opened.



An Interview with Kankai Nathan Fishman

Kangetsu Sandy Spina and Kansei
Pat Andres

CMZ: How long have you been practicing?

Nathan: I would say that I have been practicing for almost 10 years. I've chosen that number because I started around 2012, and I've been practicing either pretty frequently or very frequently. But there have been stretches of time in between when I have not been practicing, so it's hard for me to put a number on how many years. But I say almost 10 years or maybe 12. I would definitely say 12 more confidently if I had practiced consistently through the years.

CMZ: That's great! How did you find us?

Nathan: I found CMZ through looking around for what was available for meditation in Central Jersey. I was almost going to pay a lot of money to go to a professional meditation program. I got diverted from that at first to the CMZ group in Princeton. I tried the Princeton group once or twice, and then someone in my neighborhood had heard about the group meeting at Rutgers, and so once I went to Lucy Stone, I never turned around from there.

CMZ: Wonderful! You're a real regular on sesshin.

Nathan: Yes, finally. Like everyone says, it's very intense. I worked my way into being at a place where I really enjoy it and I look forward to it and grow from it.

(Cont. p. 7, col. 1)

CMZ: Could you talk a little bit about what you do every day and maybe relate it to your practice?

Nathan: Well, every time I talk about what I do for a job I disclose something really personal. I work as a Mental Health Peer Support Associate. When I was about 19, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and that became a really big part of my life. I would, say, though, that having bipolar disorder has not had as much of an impact as the experience of being diagnosed with it and having to go through all these different treatment settings. Anyway, part of how I overcame that is by getting a master's degree in social work. I got a bachelor's degree in business and then a master's in social work, and while I was finishing, I found CMZ. And now, what turned out to make the most sense for me was to find this peer support role. There's a piece of it that relates to people and sharing how I've responded to the stigma and things like that. It has been really fulfilling.

CMZ: It's so beneficial for the people that you're working with. You said that you were "looking around" for a practice. What made you look around? What was that spark?

Nathan: I came looking for meditation to feel better after being overwhelmed by things like pursuing a graduate degree. And I was also motivated to be ethical and socially responsible. That's what made me go from the business degree to the social work degree. I wanted to do something that is more ethical, more meaningful, that contributes more to humanity. So the spark was really to maintain my health then and Zen did that. It has done that. And of course, I've also learned now it's the other way around. Now I want to be healthy so that I can practice.

CMZ: That's great! If you think really far back, was there anything you knew

growing up or at any time in the past that was pointing you in the direction of meditation?

Nathan: That's an awesome question! Yeah, like glimmers. I'd say that, so you know it sounds silly but reggae music pointed me to wanting to do things very differently including being happy with simplicity. That was not so subtle. I got really into reggae and then I was really driven by reggae music inspiration. But it wasn't long before I started to want to find out about meditation. Actually my good friend George loaned me a book by the Dalai Lama, *Freedom From Exile*, and when I read that book, I was really interested in how the Dalai Lama lived a political life and a serene, spiritual life.

Then, later, I'm really proud to say that I brought George into CMZ, and he really practiced for the year he remained in New Jersey. He's having some tough times with his family right now, and actually he wanted me to send his regards to the sangha. I think this is partly out of feeling glad to have the experience he's had with us to draw on right now.

George has been a very important part of my practice. I have another friend, I'll call her Tara, whom I talk with quite frequently and who knows that I'm not available Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings if she calls. She also knows that I go away to sesshin for stretches of five days. And just from knowing about this, she started asking about my meditation group and "What is Zen." Her question gives me a little chance to tell her about it. That's when I describe that for me it was trial and error to find the right pace. At first I was sitting as much as I possibly could, and I didn't sustain that. I wound up sitting too little for a stretch of

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time, and then eventually found what the right amount for me was. It has been increasing ever since. Now I sit quite a lot.

CMZ: Have you noticed in your life how when you're off the cushion, your “on the cushion time” really affects that or helps that?

Nathan: Yeah, yeah, and you know, it's the weirdest thing. The only thing that I always know is that zazen is going to change everything when I sit on the cushion. I never have any idea how or what it will look like afterward. So, it's such a mystery still every time!

CMZ: How did your family respond to your meditation practice?

Nathan: Well, I'll just say the most current thing, and it's really, really positive. I've had an online meditation group with family members for going on five months now. Yeah, every Sunday morning after our CMZ sit, I sit for 25 minutes with my brother and mom.

We've been pretty consistent, and they've been doing a great job. We're really appreciative of each other.

CMZ: Are they far away?

Nathan: My mom is in New Jersey. My brother is in Florida. So zoom works well, yeah.

CMZ: How about other friends or people, actually maybe not even friends but do any of the people that you support in your work every day know that you do meditation?

Nathan: So sometimes it's kind of tricky bringing up meditation at work. I mean it gets brought up often by people who are guests, who come and stay as guests. A lot of people want to learn meditation as what

they call a coping skill, and it's nice. I often get the chance to do a ten minute meditation with someone who is just starting a routine. So that's nice.

CMZ: Everything you said is great, that it's been a genuine path for you and it included others in your life: George, the peer group and your social work clients, your family. It spills over. It does.

Nathan: I've also noticed that practicing in a group adds an element of mutual support. It's about everyone sharing even though they don't necessarily have anything else in common--except sharing this love for the practice and supporting each other. I think it's helped me be in other community settings where we're sharing some other focus on something and be able to be kind to each other and to work as a team together. I've done some volunteer work over the last few years with Habitat for Humanity to restore houses and with the Poor People's Campaign and more recently as an assistant teacher for an ESL class. My practice has helped me with all of that. It's valuable to me to be able to go into a group of people and be really focused on what we're doing together and to enjoy it, to be working in teams and in community with folks who aren't even doing Zen.

Something that has been on my mind lately is like having a lot of self-love. You know--maybe on the cushion I'm having a deeper experience than self-love, but I think off the cushion I'm really taking a “self-love” with me that just makes it very much easier to love other people.

CMZ: Have you noticed how you feel after sesshin? Has that changed over the years?

Nathan: I'm always glad to get home after

(Cont. p. 9, col. 1)

sesshin. Sesshin always feels great to me and then home always feels totally new when I come back from sesshin.

CMZ: What is your routine like? The first few days after you get back home do you get right back into your routine or does it take a little adjusting?

Nathan: So, with my work being per diem, I always give a little bit of notice. If I can I try to leave that first day back from sesshin somewhat open. My routine is not so repetitive. I can wake up and I don't necessarily have the same thing to get back into. I can change everything if I want. I have a lot of flexibility in my schedule. I have a lot of time in my schedule for self care. Different from scheduling things, I've worked a lot of time into my schedule for self care and do things differently when I need to.

CMZ: It's so good to talk with you about your practice. You're always an inspiration during the Zoom or in-person Sits and on sesshin. We understand you're now leading Zazen sitting one night a week at a library in the New Brunswick area. That's wonderful! Thank you for talking with us and for being a member of our Sangha!



Ross Bolleter,
[Dongshan's Five Rank:
Keys to Enlightenment.](#)

Wisdom, 2014. Online at
terebess.hu/zen/dong.pdf

Book Review by Kansei Pat Andres

If you are reading Cold Mountain Zen's newsletter, chances are you're familiar with koan practice. If so, you've likely encountered Dongshan (Jap. Tozan) in the *Mumonkan* or *Hekiganroku*. Dongshan (9th Century) was a student of Yunyan, who also taught Caoshan, whose lineage, Soto Zen, is still practiced today. What is perhaps Dongshan's most famous koan appears in the *Hekiganroku*: "When cold, let it be so cold that it kills you; when hot, let it be so hot that it kills you." Enigmatic, paradoxical and powerful, these lines serve as an introduction to Dongshan's teaching style in *The Five Ranks*.

As Ross Bolleter explains, *The Five Ranks* is a "five-verse summation of Chan [Zen] teachings." At the end of Part I of his discussion, a general introduction or as he calls it, an "overture," Bolleter tells us his goal: "I hope that this book on the *Five Ranks* might serve as a rough mud-map of the trackless Way, and that it might illuminate a little of the country traveled." Composer, scholar, poet, awakened Roshi, Zen teacher, and musician, Bolleter is well-suited for the task of elucidating Dongshan's work, which reaches into the ineffable to illuminate the path to Awakening.

Although the title *The Five Ranks* is often applied only to the five verses that appear on p. 1 of this newsletter, Bolleter also discusses a second cycle of poems, which he

(Cont. p. 10, col. 1)

sees as building on the first in this way:

1. The Five Ranks, or The Gatha of the Five Positions of Ruler and Master
2. The Five Stages of Merit

The first cycle (1) describes the search for “enlightenment in terms of the stages on the journey to awakening.” While Bolleter treats the stages as distinct, he is careful to point out that each stage contains the others and that any one of them can take us to awakened buddha-mind, where everything is simultaneous, interdependent and interfused. The second cycle (2) describes what happens after awakening—after the enlightened person goes back to “sit in the ashes” of our confused ordinary world.

The Five Ranks is sometimes referred to as a *gatha* (Sanskrit). Bolleter explains that the Chinese transliteration of the word *gatha* is “an intimate meeting,” a meeting with the Buddha in each of us. Below, you will find a brief examination of the first two verses in *The Five Ranks*. They might inspire you to further study of the poem, which describes “five ways of intimately encountering buddha-mind, which is to say, five ways in which we encounter our true nature.”

1 The Contingent within the Essential

*At the beginning of the third watch, before moonrise,
don't be surprised if there is meeting
without recognition;
one still vaguely harbors the elegance of
former days.*

The “third watch” refers to the period beginning roughly at midnight during the time in old China when the span “between sunset and sunrise was divided into five two-hour watches.” This watch, “carries the spirit of vigil,” and “evokes the Buddha’s long night of meditation, which ended when he awakened upon seeing the Morning

Star.” The third watch, Bolleter continues, “is suggestive of our own time before enlightenment, when awakening is nascent. Moonrise, on the other hand, evokes enlightenment itself, which has no season or date.”

The “meeting without recognition” refers to an encounter with our true nature, without yet recognizing it as such. We might see leaves in a breeze, our face in the mirror, a darkness in deep meditation, but “we don’t recognize the vastness of our true and essential nature, because we are it and it is us, without remainder. . . . Yet, regardless of how we express it, when we genuinely encounter the darkened mirror of our essential nature we are changed in our depths.” The final line, “one still vaguely harbors the elegance of former days,” evokes, according to Bolleter, a feeling of kinship with the ancestors because waking up to emptiness “feels ancient.” The line also carries the implication that we might cling to an experience of awakening when we “need to move on from it.”

2 The Essential within the Contingent

*Having overslept, an old woman encounters
the ancient mirror.
This is clearly meeting face-to-face – only
then is it genuine.*

Don't lose your head validating shadows.

The old woman’s encounter with the “ancient mirror,” Dongshan’s metaphor for awakening to our true nature, takes place in that liminal space between wake and sleep; it is unscripted, unexpected. The meeting is “face-to-face,” “genuine,” and recognized. Bolleter focuses on the intimacy of this genuine meeting with our deepest nature: “The mirror isn’t actually a mirror, limited in time and space, but is timeless, dimensionless reality.... Whatever we encounter is our true nature.” As in the first (Cont. p. 11, col. 1)

verse, the final line is instructive and cautionary. It evokes the story told in the *Surangama Sutra* of Yajnadatta who delights in seeing his image in a mirror but later thinks he has lost his head. The last line warns us not to hold on to old images of ourselves-- “validating shadows.” Even breakthroughs can become a barrier if we hold on to them. As Bolleter says, we need to keep letting everything go: “if the encounter is genuine, that’s it. No need to think about it or add anything to it. To do so would only ossify the encounter into ideas and stories. And stories and ideas are merely shadows.”

All of Dongshan’s poems included in the book – the *Five Ranks*, the *Five Stages of Merit*, the *Stream Gatha*, and the *Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi*--reflect an enlightened consciousness that has awakened to and become one with buddha-mind. Bolleter says that Dongshan’s *Five Ranks* is “an intimate act of kindness.” I would add that Bolleter’s book is a generous gift to modern practitioners of Zen.

