

Introductory Talk  
Awakened by Bird Song Retreat  
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Springs Mountain Sangha ~ Colorado Springs, CO  
April 2005

Someone asked one of the great, old Chinese teachers Zhaozhou, "What about when it's a disaster?" And Zhaozhou said, "That's it!" And it seems that in the last year or so we've had many many opportunities to bring this koan to mind. It has often felt like a disaster. It has often felt that it is required of us to consider this thought that even when it's a disaster, *that's it*.

And now it's spring and it might be important to remember that *that's it*, too. We shouldn't turn away from the beauties, the tendernesses, and the fierce returnings to life of this season. It's really as though everything is awakening together right now : the buds in the willows, the robins, the crocuses in the snow. I was in a drugstore today and there was a man talking about how he went out this morning to get the newspaper and there were three mountain lions in his front yard. Everything, everything waking up together right now. How wonderful to be able to sit in the midst of that.

And it's really important that we say *That's it*. Spring is a beautiful child walking towards us with arms full of flowers. You would be crazy to say 'no'. You would be crazy to say 'no'. This residency is called Awakened by Bird Song. That comes from the story of a Japanese woman who was sitting in her room in the early morning and out her window heard the call of the bird, and was awakened by the bird. She wrote a poem about it. She said :

The fields, the mountains, my body, the sky, everything  
The voice of the bird.  
What is left over to listen?  
Nothing, but the voice of the bird.  
No one to hear, no one there anymore to hear.

And that's spring. Sometime later, Pablo Neruda wrote a poem about that bird. It goes like this, it's called "Spring" :

The bird has come to give the light  
From each trill of his, water is born.  
Water and light unroll the air between them  
the spring is now inaugurated  
Now the seed knows that it has grown  
the root is portrayed in the corolla  
At last the eyelids of the pollen uncloset  
All this was done by a simple bird  
from a green branch.

There's so much in what we do in this meditation thing about learning how to be fetched. The world is always coming to fetch us in one way or another. So much of what we do is getting free enough to be able to be fetched.

There's a movie that's pretty popular in California right now called "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill." Do you have that here yet? There's a flock of wild parrots who live in this area of San Francisco called Telegraph Hill. They don't know how they got there, whether they're domestic birds, escaped over the years and congregated, or whether there was some strange accident where a truckload of exotic birds broke open on the freeway. Anyway, there they are. There's an amazing man Mark Bittner who was virtually homeless, was living and taking care of the parrots, feeding and living with them for years. At a certain point he decided to write a book about his experience, and someone gave him a little cottage on the land near where the parrots were. So he went and holed up in the cottage and started to write.

It took the birds a couple of days to find where he was, but they did. They would come to the cabin and they would rush the windows squawking, pecking, and screaming. He said, *There I was sitting at the table writing about how wonderful the birds were and how much I loved them, and then I would get up and go 'Go away! Go away! I've got some writing to do. This is really important!' And I thought how like that we are.*

*Go away! Go away! I have some really important meditating to do.* So I would like to encourage you to let the wild birds of awakening come get you during this retreat. Don't shoo them away. Open the windows and see what happens. If that's one side of it — the willingness to be fetched — the other side of that is a willingness to fetch.

There's a way in which you have to go get this. You have to go get this awakening, you have to steal it. Steal this dharma. You have to do something to make it yours. And so that's one of the things we'll be talking about during this retreat. We'll talk about the sense of everything awakening together, and allowing ourselves to be fetched by that, and also about the part of love that is the courage to steal the dharma, the part of love that is to make this happen for you and for everyone, at the same time. So the first couple of nights, we'll be looking at a Celtic ballad called The Ballad of Janet and Tam Lin. It's a wonderful story about the courage to steal the dharma, the courage to steal your own awakening, to go fetch it and bring it home. I'd encourage you to take a look at it before tomorrow night when we start talking about it.

The thing that keeps going through my mind is *Warriors for Spring*, whatever that means.

Let's be Warriors for Spring for the next week. Let's be fierce in our dedication to the awakening of everything and everyone together in this Spring. Let's be fierce about our freedom. Let's be fierce about loving this world.

One of the things in particular that I'd like to ask, to second something Sarah said, please keep the silence. I make a personal request that you keep the silence. Sometimes keeping the silence means it's important that you talk to somebody. When you do that, do it in away that's respectful to everyone else. Go off behind a rock somewhere and whisper. In general, let's see if we can shut the hell enough for long enough to hear the call of the bird when it comes, okay?

I'm really looking forward to the week, thank you.