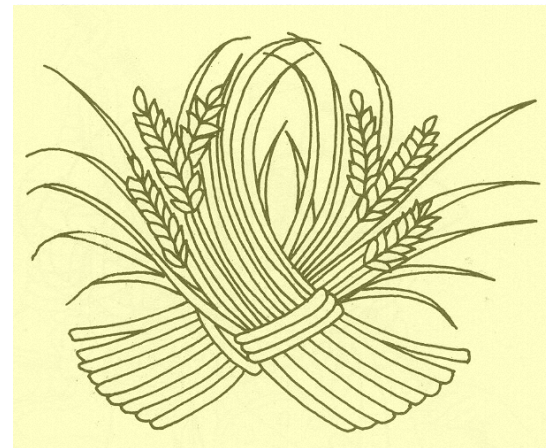


*ALL HALLOWS  
WEEKEND*

*Koan Retreat*

*October 2005*



Joan Sutherland  
The Open Source

*In the autumn the veils between the worlds grow thin, and we become aware of the deeper voices we often miss—the voices of our ancestors, of the spirits of the land, of our own hearts. Koans can help us explore how to listen for, and how to respond to, these ancient voices of the harvest season.*

## MIRROR ZEN

### HARVEST QUESTIONS

#### *This year's harvest*

Each year asks something of us  
and each year gives us something

At what altars did you worship this year? ... What  
are you harvesting? ... What have you sacrificed? ...  
What did you give up willingly, and what losses do  
you mourn? ... What prayers were answered? ...  
What unexpected grace fell into your life?

#### *What is left undone ...*

Between the harvest and the winter solstice  
is a time of taking stock & settling things

#### *... that needs completing*

When you look into your heart, what can you  
set right before the end of the year?

#### *... that needs holding a while longer*

Are there questions to which the truest answer is,  
I don't know? ... Can you allow the questions to  
resolve in their own time?

#### *... that needs releasing*

What is it time to let go of? ... Can you open your  
hands & let something fall away, so that all of life  
can take care of it?

*In medieval Japan, there was a great Zen convent called Tokeiji. The founding abbess had an awakening while meditating in front of a mirror, and so a mirror was placed in the meditation hall. It was used by generations of women, and it was the custom for those who had an awakening with the mirror to write a poem about their experience. These verses were taken up as koans by the other nuns. Here are some of those poems, and the questions that were asked about them.*

*Poem:*

If the mind does not rest on anything there is no clouding,  
and talk of polishing the mirror is a fantasy.

*Questions:*

If the mind does not rest on anything, how will anything  
be seen or heard or known or understood?  
A mirror that does not cloud and needs no polishing – set  
it before me now.

*Poem:*

As night falls, no more reflections in the mirror,  
Yet my heart sees them clearly.

*Question:*

What is the color and form of that heart which sees in the  
dark?

*Poem:*

Heart unclouded, heart clouded;  
Rising or falling, it is all the same body.

*Questions:*

Heart unclouded, what is that?  
Heart clouded, how is that?  
What is this rising and falling?

## THE KOANS

Baoning recited a verse:  
A cold autumn wind  
drones in the pines.  
The Wayward traveler  
thinks of her home.

Then he asked, "Who is the traveler? Where is her home?" After a long pause, Baoning said, "There's soup and rice in the meditation hall."



A monk asked Yunmen, "When the tree withers and the leaves fall, what's happening?"  
Yunmen replied, "It's revealing the golden wind."

[Golden Wind is the deity of autumn]



Shishuang said, "Stop! Become barren autumn ground! Have one thought for ten thousand years. Be a cold dead tree. Be an empty old incense pot. Be a blank strip of white silk."



Step by step in the dark—  
if your foot's not wet,  
it found the stone.

Shaku Soyen



Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The whole world is an omen and a sign. Why look so wistfully in a corner?"



Save a ghost



A monk asked Jianfeng, "One of the old texts says, 'Buddhas in every direction, one straight road to nirvana.' I wonder where that road is."

Jianfeng raised his staff, drew a line in the air, and said, "Here it is."

Later someone asked Yunmen about this. Yunmen held up his fan and said, "Strike the carp of the Eastern Sea once, and the rain comes down in torrents."



Great Master Ma said, "Benefit what cannot be benefited and do what cannot be done."



Linji said, "Face the world and walk crosswise."

