

Note

Providence Zen Center has been holding a monthly Dharma School for children on Sunday mornings since 2010. The school teaches Zen practice and tradition as well as promoting a sense of community with the children and families. Near this past Easter, the children had an egg hunt. Mina, one of the organizers, came up with the idea of hiding words inside the eggs. Afterward, the children got together in two teams and composed these poems.



Photo: Barry Briggs JDPSN

## Dharma School Poem 1

Zen Buddha has awesome kids  
Flowers dance with trees  
Hunt wet dirty eggs  
Love big blue birds  
Parents shout very loudly

## Dharma School Poem 2

Calmy water swiftly moves quickly  
to pagoda. Clouds grow  
standing silently. Silly friends hug  
garden. Meditation look funny.  
Bow is cool looking.  
Bright blue sky has fast  
whispering winds.  
Kids search for bright colored  
eggs covered in green leaves

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our True Self and deepest potentiality.

Of course nobody wants to hear that. Because this “somehow” also contains the hard spiritual truth for grown-ups: Zen is entirely up to you. No one can do it for you.

Oh, to be sure, Zen teachers can give practice pointers, offer encouraging words or a stern rebuke, poke and prod you along through the long years of kong-an practice, maybe even keep you from blundering into the weeds. And your fellow practitioners can provide their love, camaraderie, and support.

But sooner or later, by one means or another, you have to wedge your foot in the door and make your way into the shuttered, smoldering house of the mind. It is yours alone, after all. Only you can grope your way along its dreary corridors and pry open the bolted doors. Only you can climb into its stifling attics and descend into its crumbling cellars. “Somehow” means that it will not be enough to merely read about it, talk about it, or think about it. “Somehow” means that you will actually have to *do* it.

Let’s suppose that we do just that. Even if, in the beginning, we are only seeking a remedy for what ails us, some kind of pill. Then “make this practice real” means take it personally. Take it to heart, make it your own. Not in the sense of having Zen your own way—far from it! But by making Zen practice part of your life in such a way that it takes on a life of its own. Then Zen is no longer held at arm’s length, a hammer taken up to pound down a particular nail; no, eventually it lets us realize ourselves

as both the hammer and the nail, with the power to transform our lives and the lives of those around us.

Then the burning house stands transfigured. We may be startled to find the shutters gone, great tree limbs in full leaf jutting over the windowsills and into vacant rooms, and all the interior doors blown open. Or maybe the roof suddenly goes missing, leaving nothing but blue sky overhead. Or the four walls topple outward, like the sides of a flattened cardboard box, with nothing but green fields extending in every direction. Then all of those items so laboriously carried out of the house and placed on the lawn are entirely beside the point. Or better still, they can be put to new uses.

*Who Is Singing in Chinese? Notes from a 100-Year Zen Retreat* by David Peters will be available Summer, 2014, from Firethroat Press and from online and main street book vendors. [www.firethroatpress.com](http://www.firethroatpress.com).

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