

Poems and Physical Guidance for Meditation

By Neil Claremon

Please note: In the text below, **blue text** denotes instructions for how to be in your body during meditation. The black text is poetry related to each set of instructions.

Introduction

There is stillness in motion, and motion in stillness.

Zen in Motion has to do with finding the stillness in actions, describing a method to stay within the self no matter how fast the horse ran. Traditionally, Zen and the sitting, meditation posture, Zazen, is based on stillness and immobility. Posture and breathing dominate. The onlooker is prone to look at the exterior facade and mistake external stillness for passivity. There is motion in meditative stillness. The world around the person does not stop and the calmer the mind, the more this motion is digested. Due to the physiology of the Zazen posture, a more subtle yet powerful motion occurs within the body. A transformation of the mind's attention results in a motion along the spine that moves the practitioner from the earthly to the cosmic. I describe this ascension, or path, as a progression through the elements--from earth to water, water to fire, fire to wind, wind to the ether--what ancient Greeks called quintessence, the fifth element. While breath concentration and long hours of sitting will bring about this progression, a guided approach assures the person that they are not wasting their time or deluding themselves about the depth of their concentration.

Guided meditation should be based on the intensity of "beaming." The guide must go through the stages with the student. In doing so, images from one mind are suggestively transferred to another, partly by meditative intent and partly by words. In oriental Zen the practitioner goes solo, both guide and student, consulting with a teacher. A koan problem serves to distract or redirect the mind so that breathing and posture transmute the body's energy. An offshoot of this method is found in healing arts like Reiki and Seiki. The healer uses a progression through the elements to rebalance the patient's body. Combining the healing treatments with the sitting practice we can produce a guided meditation.

I portray the journey from earth to the cosmic as a long horseback ride wherein I encounter each one of the elements as a separate force. When I return to the sitting position on the ground, I have images in memory to take the ride up the five stages of the spine to reach the same kind of expanded awareness I needed to shoot a bow off the horse. The point is not to shoot the arrow; rather, to achieve such an open state of being that meditative consciousness takes over. Once it does, we feel different, as if we have entered into a larger body. From this body all the philosophy and wisdom of the masters emerges-- according to tradition, effortlessly. Once awakened to the larger self, the sayings of the sages become sensible, even practical. Knowing them by rote is not the same as understanding their value.



ETHER

WIND

FIRE

WATER

EARTH

1. EARTH

Let it be spring when you sit down on the mat to spread your wings. Burgeoning growth begets the mating season. Sparrows twitter and hawks whistle. The green emerges, roses percolate from the thorn stems. Whether you are protected by fabric or wood from the earth cover, your body must sink into the soil. Drive the base of the spine, the bony coccyx deep into the ground. Stake yourself out. There is a lover in your arms, but we are not about touching now, we are about distributing the weight of the body evenly on the floor so that the small of the back can become more concave and the center of the spine can rise to hold the weight of the head evenly above the neck. As the body spreads along cheeks and thighs, the crossing of the legs becomes effortless. Inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth slowly, at least 20 seconds. Press the breath into the belly, hereby expanding and spreading the weight more widely on the ground, opening to the point where the base of the spine drops like a root taking hold. Now we can begin with the Beaming of images.

For the distance between you and the other there is anticipation as if one is at the base of the tree and the other is in the branches. From the knoll to the high ridge of rock the spinning body shows the shape of nakedness veiled in silk or netting. From the damp soil the root of the spine sends draws water to the pores of the flesh. Rich earth, black topsoil fills the nostrils with the promise of rebirth. This is the mood in which a buck hops the fence to reach the doe. WE are still while the tarantula crosses the wood slat where are toes would have been if legs were stretched out. I see you grow tense not to draw its attention to yourself, but you are the rock in the weeds the spider has no interest in. Yellow jackets find daisies in your hair, and it is tempting to raise your open hand from your knee and swat the air around your head. But this is not the way of the horse, needing only to flinch a muscle, A young couple stumbles upon and passes, never seeing your bend in the breeze of stillness blowing the grass--each stalk different from the next.

Let us meditate:

hand
 not male, not female
hand
 its elbow in the iron
core of earth
magnetic impulses flow
into my spine.
fingers
 touch my core
with earth growth
fingertips
 probe the depths
of my being

bring spring's verdancy
and birdsong
from seeds
to seed erotic visions
of fingertips
as my body sinks into earth's
blood vessels.

with me you sit in horse's
saddle...glide past
fresh leaves of spring
over logs lost to winter
and through the bog
of fungi and blue-green
lichen, algae for the soul
as we ground ourselves
in the ground.

2. WATER

Next, the drought set in. No water in the well. It was over-work, then no work at all. The sun remained relentless. Nothing grew. I put my hands on her sides along her kidneys. "Dream of water," I said. Her lower back was so stiff she could not bend or turn. To ease the pain sit in a tub of warm water up to the navel. Soak the flesh until it loosens and swells. I see now the children tossing rocks into the pool under the waterfall. I sit downstream where the water parades over stones and trickles off into the high grass. Fingers drag slowly under the belly back to the spine, pressing the loose flesh above the hips.

Imagine the tree. Like the tree water comes from the trunk and spreads through the thick branches out into the narrow limbs. It is a slow, steady process, the flow of irrigation. I stretch the sash around the hollow of my back and tighten the cloth under my belly letting the tassels hang over the groin. Cinched around the core we can feel the hourglass shape of our physical being. Most of my true self is liquid in this glass. The water pools under the sash as hands knead flesh. They are swimming in the waters of the hollow. This is the image I send you from the edge of the stream, from immersion in the tub, from where my mind wanders after the draught in the avalanche of waterfall particles. A geyser from the earth shoots fluids into spinal cord channels and drips out along my sides. When the horse lopez, my hips toggle back and forth, swinging without resistance. Once I was tight and fearful, now I offer no resistance.

Tossed to and fro
in waves of solace
no image fixed
but as in dreams
changing without
regard to how it is
here in our rigid
three dimensional life.
It takes 3 tripod legs
to hold the mind's camera
steady. On one leg it tips
bending too and fro
in waves of images
painted on the sails
of time forward, and we
are carried along tidal
currents, further
beyond rescue
and can scream
and sink, or stroke the
breakers' froth.

3. FIRE

The first image that comes to mind is walking in from the cold rain and sitting down on the brick of the fireplace with the flame on my back. Quickly, the heat penetrates, removing the chill. Of course, you can imagine standing at the edge of a volcano. I never have. Memory brings another image. I saw a documentary on Tibetan monks. In the dead cold of winter they wrapped themselves in wet sheets and sat outside. Drawing upon resources within themselves, they were able to dry the sheets without succumbing to hyperthermia. We assume they dwell on fire in the brazier. The flame spreads from mind to mind as they chant together. But, is there fire without choking smoke?

Place your hand at the center of the back. It is important to flex the fingers backward so that the palm lays as flat as possible on the other's back. Press firmly until you feel the vertebra beneath the palm, Keep the hand still. The motion comes from within, generating heat by focusing on the breath. The other cannot help but focus on the press of the hand and the sound of the deep inhale and measured exhale, over and over again. The filling of the lungs fuels the pulse, heart beat, loading the brain with oxygen that burns hot. Leave the window open, you will not feel the cold breeze. It's not necessary to press very hard since the hand warms rapidly responding to the blood warmth of the flesh underneath.

It's true dragons breath fire, only there aren't any dragons. Exhale until the lungs reply with a need for more air. On the inhale check the temperature of her spine's midpoint. The heat will amaze you, Refuse to be impressed by what is occurring. The steady breathing shuts off sensory perceptions, other than the one coming through the palm. If the fingers cramp, shake them quickly and cover the skeletal curve again. We are beaming the rhythm of the breathing. When the other catches it the duet fosters the dissemination of the warmth through the ribcage. In the palm of your hand you hold a white hot glow. The sensation is that you can toss it up into the air as though it were a small ball. This is the fire to share with those in need of warmth. Desert dwellers knew it as a dry heat.

Ever questioning

what seems so

Being uncertain of the counter-
intuitive

the log burns quickly in a fireplace

Dragon's breath replaces

the real dragon

letting off steam

No fire in the loins

No caustic smoke

The eyes burn

When I hear the chanting

imbedded in the drops of fog

rolling off the mountain

and go inside

boil water for coffee

sit down

light the candle and hear

the sound of one candle burning

in you.

4. WIND

There's the wind that turns the windmill; the one that picks up dust; another that sends the clouds across the sky. The four directions have four wind names. There's the wind that shatters the mind with dry ions. The wind in your face, the wind at your back. One that waves the stalks of grain. One that doubles you over, so leaning into the wind you grab hold of your hat. I like to beam the wind that blows flecks of hay as I carry a packet to the bin. These are march winds with just enough bite to them to cut through the jacket ripping a hole like a jagged branch. Sometimes I use a rural racetrack. On a still day the swiftness of the horse stirs the wind's motion.

You might blow on the spine tucked between the shoulder blades, only to find one can't induce the updraft it takes to flex the vertebrae, The wind you need is in the sound of bells. A wind of vibrations has a curious ring to it.

To move the life force to the next stage of the spine find a crystal. The quartz feels inert in your hand. Place the quartz in a metal, singing bowl. Hold the bowl at the bottom and strike the gong at the rim in regular intervals. When you remove the crystal there will be a "buzz" to it. Don't let your mind tell you that the charged twinge on your fingertips is not a true sensation. Run the crystal from the spine's center to the lower neck. Put it close to the skin on the upward run. Draw it away to start over. Holding the crystal properly is crucial. Use a minimal amount of grip area, yet press firmly. You do not want to damper the charge. Much like holding an arrow on the bow, the principle is to push the bow handle away without wrapping the wood enough to deaden the spring. So, too, with the fingers holding the arrow. The hand should not waver while remaining ready to open without putting any drag on the string.

The vibrational wind of the bow shot acknowledges the charge of the crystal. One proficient in either can do the other. The secret is to transfer the muscle force to the hara point below the navel. This assures the finger pressure will not overwhelm the charge.

One ounce of breath
at the base of the neck
and I feel the profound
stillness of your presence.
One pass of the crystal
sends the chill up my spine
my vision blurs.
I am bathed in spicy oils.
One breath feels like
the cold winds of January.
I shake my head side to side
and my shoulders sink
in an end of tension.

Vibrations tingle
within the spaces
between the bone.
And I do not know whether
they are in me or you
or the quartz you hold.
Where am I when the psychic wind
blows? Where was I before?

With a ringing in my ears
my head finds a centered pose
while the spinal snake
ripples at supple speeds
ruffling my feathers.

5. THE ETHER

Visualize the planets orbiting around your head. They spin and circle. In order not to throw them off course, your head balances. Any stimulus from anywhere, the comets, the asteroids, stir the ether without changing the holographic balance. You can sense the tiny explosion of the meteor on the iceberg. Hear the crunch of ice, see the fleeting explosion, feel the cold chips like hail on your skull. Gravity draws--or feels like it draws--the planets toward you. In response your halo expands to push them back. You are inside your larger body, a static charge surrounds the flesh. It is dark up here in the ether and yet we are surrounded by rainbows from the light passing through stellar dust.

I fear the rabbit chop to the brain stem at the tip of the spine, so why is the finger pressed in the soft spot with the pulse of release lulling me into a trance without fear? I feel your heart beat in the finger tip and the rhythmic precision can only mean you are deep within the trance, too. I measure my breathing without effort. This sensation of being weightless allows me to believe I will soon levitate. How can this be when the base of my spine is driven into the ground, unless I am a vessel suspended between heaven and earth? The third eye opens with an unparalleled sight of the planets behind me.

"What's that?" you say. "You have but two eyes?" Accompany me on a ride. A procession of people dressed in 19th century clothes are re-creating a trip taken by civilians under the watchful eye of the cavalry. They ride from the town to the fort beneath the Mogolian rim. I am incarnated as an Apache scout. I've ridden to a hilltop where I can view the entire plain below. If these were the days of Indian wars, I would report back by holding a mirror to the sun and flashing. With all the women and children and the wagons it takes awhile for the column to pass in front of me. The way I am costumed and the way the horse stands leads me to believe this is real, not much different from the way it was. It's a shame I can see the highway with my binoculars. There is not much else but trees on grasslands with intermittent herds of cattle. My usually restless mount is accepting his role as sentinel and poses for the camera. There's a slow, drifting haze over the sunlit landscape. I watch the living riders turn into the ghosts of the dead. They didn't mean to die, but the shock of their death delivers a different kind of sight where I am looking through an oval monocular whose glass has a rosy tint. Something has changed. What's happening? The haze is gone. Everything is silhouetted. Ordinary motion stops; there are frame changes. Sequences becomes static pictures, and, oddly, I can see both sides of the horses at once. I have no idea how I can do this, see the carbine on the right and sword in the scabbard on the left. My one thought is that if I were an Apache this is the way I would see the enemy coming. In fact, I would be chosen to be a scout because I could open the third eye. Time doesn't seem to be important, but, oh, yes it is! The time distortion caused by the medicine man's finger pulsing in my brain stem is what opens the eye. The shock is from being in one place in two different times. In other words, sitting with you behind me in a room under a fan while also being within the meditation caused by the journey from the earthly to the cosmic taken by moving an energy field up my spine. Talk about double identity, here and not here. It's going to take me some time to get my bearings, stand up and walk out the door to the deck. I need a sign, a signal, to reintegrate myself.

The track goes up the mountain
the track goes down the mountain
both are one and the same
If you want
there are shock koans
that will lighten the weight
of your backpack
on your way
you will pass through
five life zones
and face the five elements
the air being lighter at the summit
the foliage thornier at the base
carry enough water
and jackets for the cold
some food for thought
some food for supper
because you are beside me
I have no fears

because you are inside me
I can see ten thousand things
as they guide me
and though the horse
hesitates on the trail
a Zen rider is never late
with heart and determination
he overcomes the arthritis
of age and the belly of grain.
All I can say about Zen
is that if the saddle loosens
stop and tighten the cinch
but don't over compensate.

Some teachers will tell you
and some won't say a word
for Zen defies defining
the Ki energy it observes
in the posture it demands.