

Dear Sangha,

It seems that the tension and tumult of the past two years is only getting higher with each day. While we continue to hope for peace in our city, country, and around the globe, new bouts of violence and intolerance cut through like a knife, bringing us back to sadness, uncertainty, and outrage at injustice. Whether another mass shooting, a new Covid variant, or the overturning of Roe v. Wade, it's hard to stay engaged and not get overwhelmed. It is in this time that we are once again invited to Ango, to clear a space in our lives for "peaceful dwelling." But what is peaceful dwelling in a time like this? What does it mean to sit quietly, removed from society, while the world around us is in turmoil?

I've just returned from spending a week in London. While I was walking through the city, I came upon a small Quaker meeting house, where I stepped inside to sit for a few minutes. As the sounds of the city grew quiet, the space in and around me came to life. I felt my heartbeat quicken and the wind of breath swirling throughout my body; the shimmering light reflected off the leaves of a tree just outside the window and danced on the floor; a bee buzzed against the window pane. I felt an excitement, a sense of expectation—something is about to happen.

And something is about to happen; something is always about to happen as our lives unfold, moment-by-moment. When we sit and turn our attention to it, we feel what it is to be alive in this vast, mysterious universe. The universe that spontaneously expresses itself through us, and calls us back home like a distant voice across the sea. Sitting quietly and connecting with this extraordinary experience, we are awake, alive, and ready to engage, interact, and respond.

Before I left London, I visited the crypt at St. Paul's Cathedral, and sat in front of the memorial to William Blake. It shares the first lines of his "Auguries of Innocence," which opens with a beautiful invocation of the absolute. At the end of the poem, Blake writes, "We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see not Thro the Eye / Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night / When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light." Like Avalokitesvara in the Heart Sutra, Blake directs us to see not "with" our senses, but "through" them; we must see through and beyond the realities that are right in front of us, to the deeper truths that we share as human beings. This, I think, is what Ango is all about. To witness *through* our full capacities the true pain and suffering experienced by our friends, family, and all beings; to share in the joy and ecstasy woven throughout the fabric of our lives, and lift up the communities of which we are a part; to immerse ourselves completely in the process of darkness and light, the realms of day and night into which Blake bids us journey. This is how we can show up and be of service in a world that needs our help so dearly.

I'm so excited to enter this Ango period with you. If you're able, please join us at Wisdom House for our first in-person sesshin in three years. Whatever your Ango looks like this season, I hope you will delight in the richness of this practice that we are able to share together.

In Gassho,
Shugo