



MEET A TEACHER

Melissa Myozen Blacker, Roshi

I WAS BORN IN BOSTON in 1954. My parents loved music (especially jazz) and politics, and they worked for racial justice and peace. I had a spontaneous spiritual experience when I was very young that didn't fit into any of the categories my parents understood, so I started a journey of exploration. It wasn't until I met my first Zen teacher in 1981 that I found a spiritual path I could follow. My current teacher is my dear friend James Ford, who ordained me as a Zen priest and then gave me dharma transmission. Meanwhile, I met Jon Kabat-Zinn and worked for him for twenty years teaching mindfulness and training mindfulness teachers. Now I'm one of four guiding teachers in the Boundless Way Zen sangha (along with my husband, David Dae An Rynick), and I'm a resident priest and teacher at Boundless Way Temple in Worcester, Massachusetts. Our daughter, Rachel, is a professional musician and teacher. ♦

What is your practice tradition?

In Boundless Way Zen, we combine teachings from three lineage traditions—two Soto Japanese and one Korean Rinzai.

What is your current project?

David and I devote most of our time to running Boundless Way Temple and teaching Zen retreats (*sesshin*) here. We also travel to different countries to teach silent Zen-influenced mindfulness retreats.

Favorite meditation practice?

I love koan practice!

Recommended dharma books?

My personal favorite, to which I return again and again, is *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki.

Your principal poison?

In Zen practice, the dharma is called a poison because it kills ego-based clinging.

Your chief characteristic?

People tell me that I make the dharma accessible through my clarity and humor. I hope that's true.

Your idea of happiness?

Just sitting around in silence with like-minded people. Sometimes this takes the form of being on a retreat, and sometimes sitting by a lake, reading and sipping something cool.

Your idea of misery?

Going to a party. I've been called a situational extrovert, but mostly I just like to be quiet.

The natural talent you'd most like to have?

Being able to sleep on airplanes.

Current TV show?

River, with Stellan Skarsgård and Nicola Walker, on Netflix. It's about a Swedish detective in London who is schizophrenic and who has illuminating conversations with people who've been murdered, including his partner. Warm, disturbing, wise, and suspenseful in equal measure.

A motto that represents you?

"Things are not as they are seen, nor are they otherwise," from the *Lankavatara Sutra*.