

This week's readings are in honour of the winter solstice, marking our entry into winter, with its coldness, darkness, and silence. What challenges/gifts/inspiration does the winter bring to your life, to your practice? What lies within within?

Within within by Peter Levitt

*Spring is within a plum twig, bearing the snow—cold
(Eihei Dogen, 1243)*

No one can say what this life is.
Snow, spring, plum twig and bearing,
each thing is cold cold cold
and cold cold cold
is snow, spring, plum twig and bearing.

This is within and this is
what is within. Bearing
sorrow in silence
or holding our happiness
for the world
are just plum twigs
bearing snow.

Shouting joy at passing cars
or whispering I'm going
to kill myself
is the heat of petals
in winter, the blossoming
of snow drops in spring.

Don't try and don't quit,

that's the best I can say.
People who love you
and people who need you
and people you love
and those you hate
come to the same thing.
No matter how you turn,
you can never turn fast
or far enough. There
is no escaping
the ten directions
or ten thousand things,
even when you die.

So take it easy.
Have a Cuban cigar.
Your shoulders are
wide as the path
is wide, your heart as open
as one blossom,
two snow falls
three bows to the east
and four kisses,
one on each cheek.

From "100 Butterflies" by Peter Levitt

You ask my lineage?
Plum blossoms in spring,
empty branches
beneath the winter sky.

Joyce Rupp's "Winter's Cloak"

This year I do not want
the dark to leave me.
I need its wrap
of silent stillness,
its cloak
of long lasting embrace.
Too much light
has pulled me away
from the chamber
of gestation.
Let the dawns
come late,
let the sunsets
arrive early,
let the evenings
extend themselves
while I lean into
the abyss of my being.
Let me lie in the cave
of my soul,
for too much light
blinds me,
steals the source
of revelation.
Let me seek solace
in the empty places
of winter's passage,
those vast dark nights
that never fail to shelter me.

“To know the dark” by Wendell Berry

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

Two anecdotes of Suzuki Roshi from “Zen is right here.” Edited by David Chadwick

During one sesshin at Tassajara it was very cold in the unheated zendo. After lecture a student said, “Roshi, I thought you said that when it got cold we’d figure out how to stay warm within our zazen.”

Suzuki Roshi answered, “it’s just not cold enough yet.”

I had dokusan with Suzuki Roshi during sesshin. I felt lost and far from home at that point in my life, and I asked him if big mind was lost in the dark, too. He said, “No, not lost in the dark, working in the dark!” And he moved his arms about, demonstrating. He said it was like the many-armed statue of Avalokitesvara, and he made the statue come to life for a moment.