

For Charlotte

Don't use your eyes like forks,
Charlotte used to say,
wisely sweeping past
one hundred years to stir
a century and more
in her probing,
sensitive hands.

Through her, my eyes became bowls
and the world, food.
There is no need for utensils
when there's nothing to pick apart.

Poem by Cathy Edget

tives. But there is some truth in this. In traditional mindfulness practices, breath is presented as the preeminent object on which to focus our attention. For 2,600 years the Buddha's teachings – and other teachings, the Hindus were very advanced too – have been focusing their attention on breathing. Breath and sensations, these oceanic forces, hammer away at the flimsy breakwaters of our resistance. The posture of meditation turns the body into a channel or conduit through which these forces can run freely. Breathing is a joyous and precious event, therefore. It is here for the taking, free to all of us that have a hunger for nourishment. Every breath you take could be a joyous act, a deep surrender to the mystery of life in all its



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energy because it is cold? Then I could laugh about myself. When we laugh about ourselves, we have much more fun and we can master our lives. This is right understanding. If you get this right away, you have the best medicine against suffering.

Back to the breath: Breath is the food on which sensations live – on which aliveness lives. When the sensations are fed they come out of their dullness. It's not simply the air, it is the force of movement. Breath is the switch that turns on the lights of the sensations. When they come to life, they flicker and they shine, just like the stars at night. Now, you can be a romantic about it. I hate it actually. We get so quickly into these superla-



Richard Lowe: Artful Practice - Integrating Sensing and Daily Life.

potency and force. Let breath become an act of surrender to the urgency of the life force just as giving the weight of our body and mind is an act of surrender to the potent pull of gravity. You don't have to force deep and full breathing to activate an awareness of the whole body. All you need to do is surrender to this most powerful bellows. Breath wants you. Breath wants to breathe you.

Rejoice in coming to your breath and allowing it to touch you all the way through. When it is not interfered with a thought or with any comment, when it is left alone in its natural rhythm, then you are in good hands and you are sure to attain and actualize the dream of your lifetime.

Ruth Denison was the first Buddhist teacher to lead an all-women's retreat. She was a student of Charlotte Selver and hosted Charlotte's first workshops in California in the late 50s and early 60s. Ruth was also the first teacher to use movement and dance to instruct her students in mindfulness. At 85 years old she still leads retreats in many places and runs Dharma Dena Meditation Center in the Mojave desert of California. For more about Ruth Denison, see our Fall 2005 newsletter.