

Joko Beck interviews with a Zen phone student

Here are transcripts of my many phone interviews with Charlotte Joko Beck. I recorded the interviews so that I could remember them accurately. I also added a heading, to make it easy to find what I wanted by flipping through pages.

All this was long ago. Nearly a decade passed since I'd last looked at the transcripts. Then I heard of Joko's death and was moved to read all the transcripts again. And felt so grateful. This teaching, including much practical advice about life, was given freely to me. So let me pass it on.

Tom L.
Australia

(hosted at www.viacorp.com/joko-beck-transcripts.html)

1994

26 March — "Just do it, like you brush your teeth."

Tom: Is that Joko?

Joko: Yes.

Tom: Hi. It's Tom from Australia. We spoke on Monday. [When I visited her at her Zen Center in San Diego.] You know who I am?

Joko: Yeah! Well, I don't remember all the details, but I certainly remember you.

Tom: You said you'd be away for a few weeks, after this week, for these kind of calls.

Joko: Yeah, I will.

Tom: Could you remind me when the next time to call would be?

Joko: Well, today is what? Friday. Not the next two Fridays, but the Friday after that.

Tom: So skip two Fridays.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: In the meantime, we didn't actually talk about what I should start to be doing. I thought that if it was appropriate, I'd ask you that now. Because I've got about three weeks that I could be doing something along the lines you suggest.

Joko: Yeah. Well, you've read my books, haven't you?

Tom: I certainly have.

Joko: Well, I want you to do something quite simple at first, because we can then talk about it. All practice just consists of maintaining awareness of everything. That means everything external to you, everything in the body, and everything in the mind. And that covers about everything.

Tom: This is the sort of thing that Greg led us into at the intro. [When I visited the Zen Center of San

Diego.]

Joko: Yeah, yeah. It's always the same thing. But to do it is of course is difficult. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] OK.

Joko: When you sit there, I simply just want you to — in a way, it would mean to do nothing. Just let the ears be open, then you hear sounds. The eyes are looking straight ahead, but you see what you see. And you feel what you feel in the body — certain sensations, tensions, things going on. OK?

Tom: Thoughts as well.

Joko: Well, let's just stay on the first part, which is simply maintaining awareness of the outward world and the bodily sensations.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Now that in a way is very simple. It really means to do nothing. But for a human being, it is not simple. It helps sometimes to follow your breath. Just feel it, in other words. Don't try to do anything with it. Just feel the breath, but not so strongly that you shut out, like the sound of cars or whatever is going on outside.

Tom: Yeah, well, OK. Way back I did breathing counting, but you're not talking about that here.

Joko: No. That's a little too concentrated. I want the breath to be very light. But it gives you enough of a focus that it's easier to stay with it.

Tom: OK.

Joko: And then when the mind wanders, simply label it. Like, "having a thought of next week, having a thought of what I have to do later today." Or about some person. Anything. The mind will throw up all sorts of things, as you know by now.

Tom: It will, yeah.

Joko: Now, if your mind is still thinking after say three or four minutes, then simply stop it and go back to the body and breath. In other words, I don't want you to label your thoughts for 30 minutes.

Tom: OK, I've got the drift at that. It's quite clear to me.

Joko: And that's a very simple practice, but very difficult to do.

Tom: Yes.

Joko: And then when I talk to you next time, we can discuss this. What questions you have. OK? And then very slowly, into the rest of your life. But the first thing I want to do is just make sure your sitting is making sense.

Tom: OK.

Joko: That's the foundation. OK? Have you any questions on that?

Tom: No. I'm pretty clear on that. And I'll get on with that in the next few weeks, daily. I sit daily anyway. I get up early in the morning, and do that. So I'll start doing that instead of the "Who am I?"

Joko: And don't expect anything about it. Just do it, like you brush your teeth.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Don't have big ideas. OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: [laughs] Anything else?

Tom: No. I think that's all. Thanks a lot, Joko.

Joko: OK. Bye.

16 April — emotions = thoughts + body sensations

Tom: We last talked three weeks ago.

Joko: Yeah, that's about right.

Tom: And you gave me some instructions on just sitting, basically. Which I have been doing.

Joko: How's that going?

Tom: Well, it's a lot more interesting and surprising than I thought it would be.

Joko: Ah ha!

Tom: [laughs] I guess the first thing to say is that it goes over into the day in a way that I never expected it would. Every other technique I've ever used tends to shut down at the end of the sitting. But this involuntarily almost mucks up certain parts of my day. So that's one thing. The other thing, I had trouble with a certain aspect of it, which is I guess the important thing to talk about. What do you do when you feel like you're, I guess, riding a bucking animal which you can't describe? It's an emotional thing, and you don't know what the emotion is. Some deep one. Breathing is getting funny and thoughts are getting thick and I just can't put a name to it.

Joko: It's good that it's happening, because part of what has to happen in sitting is that you get those buried things up to the surface. And they can be a little rocky when they come up. But remember that an emotion is a combination of two things: one is your thoughts, and the other is your body sensations. So that's all any emotion is. So when something comes up like that, you want to mostly just try to be the body sensation itself, which can feel tumultuous. But just try to do it. But without thinking, OK?

Tom: I didn't know whether I should try — there are an awful lot of thoughts flying around — I didn't know whether I should try to...

Joko: If possible, you can start at either end. You can start with trying to label the thoughts. Or you can start with trying to feel the body. But what breaks an emotional reaction down is to split those two apart. In other words, so you can see the thoughts as thoughts, and you can just feel it in your body.

Tom: I see. Uh huh.

Joko: As say a tension or a nausea or it can be lots of things. It depends what the emotion is, of course.

Tom: Well, I won't go into all that, but it's a combination of all sorts of things.

Joko: Yeah, well remember what grounds you and teaches you something is to experience the physical part of the emotion, which is the body tension, without the thoughts. Now that's very hard to do. But I want you to work at that.

Tom: Yes, OK. It's only come up a few times, this one.

Joko: Well, all right...

Tom: But it's been the main problem I've had.

Joko: Well, it's not a problem. It's just part of your sitting. You know, there are no problems in sitting, because we're just looking at whatever occurs. OK? We're not trying to have a smooth, calm, perfect sitting. We're trying to see ourselves as we are at any given moment.

Tom: Yeah, I've got that. It's certainly been like that before. I didn't really know what to do about this one.

Joko: Well, try to work at that, and the next time you call, we'll talk about it. We may have to talk about this a number of times before it gets clear. OK?

Tom: OK. Apart from that, some of the work I do is imaginative work and this awareness of my own thoughts there is essentially interfering with that a little bit. It's actually changing the character of it. I don't think there's anything wrong with it particularly.

Joko: What is the kind of work you do?

Tom: I've been writing some short stories and a play, as a filler, and I sell them. It's actually mucking around in that, if I get involved in thinking about these...

Joko: You see, that's imaginative thinking, and that's fine. But when your personal stuff comes up, just notice that it comes up and then just let it go, and go back to your work, OK? You see, the imaginative use of the mind is perfectly healthy and normal. But it's the self-centred thinking that we want to be aware of and just let it go. OK?

Tom: I see the distinction.

Joko: They shouldn't interfere with each other. See people have some idea that like Zen masters are not scholars. But they often just do nothing but scholarly work ten hours a day. That's perfectly fine. But that's not the same as self-centred thinking. OK?

Tom: I get you.

Joko: All right?

Tom: Right. I'm clear on that, I think.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: Ah... no, I don't think so.

Joko: All right, well, I don't want to run your phone bill up, so.

Tom: I'll just carry on!

Joko: Yeah. Good.

30 April — getting into upsets

Tom: We spoke a couple of weeks ago and I was asking you how to deal with emotions that come up. And you said to focus on — actually I was quite astounded by what you said — that emotions have two components: a bodily sensation, and a kind of pure thought. And I wanted to ask you about that.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: I'd always thought of emotions as being entities, in a way. Like whole living units that have independence and autonomy.

Joko: Nope.

Tom: But actually to split it into physical sensation and something that doesn't have a feeling in itself, a thought, was quite surprising. And I've been working on that.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: But that's actually the gist of what you said. Is that right?

Joko: Yes, how we work on it, we might have to talk more about. Remember, Buddha is someone who has no emotion. The only emotion Buddha has is compassion, love. He has no other emotion. Now we're not Buddhas, but that's just an interesting fact.

Tom: OK. Um, but let me get this straight that's there no sort of twitch or feeling in the mind itself. You're saying that all the...

Joko: Oh, there is for us. Yes.

Tom: Ah! OK.

Joko: Sure, there's plenty. [laughs] But over time, it certainly diminishes.

Tom: Well, it certainly has diminished with me down the years, with various odd practices I've been doing. But I've never really seen it that way and I'm just trying to get a handle on exactly how you split things up. That's in fact what you're saying? That that's at least the way to work at it?

Joko: Well, the point is, we always have to be practical.

Tom: Yes indeed.

Joko: If you know something, but if you don't know what to do with it, it doesn't help. You know what happens to us all day long — sometimes it's so slight it's almost invisible — is we get upset. We probably get upset a hundred times a day, but most of it is so tiny, we don't think of it that way. But some time during that day, something will happen that really upsets us. Like, somebody will criticise us or they may say something that's unfair or there may be just something happen in life.

Tom: Tell me about it. [laughs]

Joko: Well, you know, this is what life is. Something's happening. Well, let's say we've been criticised, OK? Unfairly. Nobody likes that. So the first thing that happens is the mind starts to work. He or she shouldn't say that. Really they're treating me most unfairly. That's terrible! I really don't want to talk to that person any more. I don't want to have anything to do with them. That's the thinking part, OK?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Now the minute you have thoughts like that, the body begins to tighten. Because it thinks you're telling it that it needs to protect you, so it begins to ...

Tom: Oh, I see. Ah hah.

Joko: We're animals, basically. The mind is passing on that you've got a threat coming in and the body tightens up. And at that point, you have an emotion. OK?

Tom: Yeah, the emotion is what? The feeling is actually where?

Joko: The feeling's in the body. Just picture yourself saying even a sentence like, "I really can't stand her!" See? You can't say it, without the body tightening...

Tom: It does seem to be right. I've been doing what you said in focussing on the body sensations, but I just had a lingering question whether there was any sort of feeling or affect, I guess, on the other side. On the mental side.

Joko: Well, there is. Sometimes it will seem to start in the body. Most usually it will start in the mind. Because something happens. The minute it happens, the mind starts to think. See it's interesting if you take an emotion like anger, "I really can't stand him!" And then deliberately relax the body, you can't keep up that kind of thinking. See what I mean? It's gone. Now when we're upset, however, we don't care about being relaxed because we want to be right about this. See what I mean?

Tom: Quite.

Joko: So our interest is in continuing the thought. So we label the thoughts until they begin to lose their punch. If you label a thought like, "Oh, he's a terrible person." Then you do it again. "Oh, he's a terrible person." But by the time you get to ten or twenty, "Oh... he's a terrible person..." It begins to lose its zing. And then the very last step is simply to feel the body, the contraction, the residue of that little game, OK? Now if you'll stay with the body sensation without thinking about it, it just disappears.

Tom: Yes, I've been finding that. I find it very interesting. I was trying to get a little more, I guess discussion...

Joko: Well, see at that point you're a different person. You're not angry with that person that yelled at you any more. You're just interested. In other words, there might be something you want to talk about with him, or you might do nothing. But it's a different world when you're not angry. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yep.

Joko: And that's the place from which we should take our actions. Not from the angry place.

Tom: Well, OK, that's fine. That sorts that out quite well.

Joko: Well, that's a practice that needs to go on for years.

Tom: Yes. OK. On the general practice, I guess things are going OK. I have a tendency to want to take things on as a project and succeed at them. And want to know how I'm doing.

Joko: Did you label that thought?

Tom: Yes I did! [laughs]

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: But there's quite a lot of that kind of thing that goes on.

Joko: Well, there is with everybody. But I want you to be aware that that ambition is just thinking. It has nothing to do with anything.

Tom: I was quite entertained by that.

Joko: I don't know where you think you're going to get.

Tom: Yeah. [laughs]

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: OK, any specific things to...

Joko: To work on?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: [instantly]: I want you to work on your upsets. That means I want you to work on at least one upset a day. That's anything that arouses any kind of a small emotion with you. OK?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: And then when you call next, let's talk about that.

Tom: OK.

7 May — fine-tuning the work on upsets

Tom: Last time we talked about upsets and to keep track of at least one upset a day.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: Well, it wasn't hard to find them.

Joko: No.

Tom: Actually, I had the least upset week I think I've ever had. It was just that kind of week. Anyway, pinpointing an upset, I would dwell on it when I was in the car, something like that, was that the

idea? To see how it worked?

Joko: Well, there're very specific things you want to do. The first is to know that you're upset, which you do obviously. Though you'd be surprised. Some people don't know when they're upset. But once you know, say, that you're angry about something, something that's made you at least a little bit angry, then the next step is to label the thoughts, you know..

Tom: Well, these things happen on the run, during the day and I'm maybe in the car...

Joko: Well, I'm not saying you can handle it when it happens.

Tom: Oh, I see. OK.

Joko: But to handle one thing a day means you do the best you can when it's happening. If you've been practising for many years, you can handle the whole thing as it's happening. But very few people can do that. What you need to do is go back afterwards and recreate that scene in your mind. And then work with it. OK? You don't have to wait until you sit. It usually should be done within two or three hours, or else it loses its sharpness. See what I mean?

Tom: Yes, I can't even remember what the upsets were about any more. I remember working on them at the time.

Joko: It can just be one a day. When you work on one upset, in a way you're working on all of them. Because it's a certain basic something that's causing the upsets.

Tom: Well, yes, I think: there goes another one by.

Joko: I just want you to be clear what it means to work on an upset. What you're really trying to do is to pull that emotional reaction apart. So first you see the thoughts that are there. Whatever you think about, whatever is happening. And when you go over those a number of times, they will begin to weaken, to fade in intensity. Then what you want to do is experience the residue in your body. Just to feel it without thinking about it. And stay with that as long as you can, because that's what really clears the emotion.

Tom: Is this easier with big upsets than little ones? I didn't have any dillies at all this week.

Joko: Yeah, well, I think that's good. But the best thing to do is practise with the little ones. Because when you're really upset, then you think you're right. You don't even want to practise with it. Ever had that experience?

Tom: Yes indeed!

Joko: [laughs] Well, most of us have. So in a way, it's good to practise with little ones and develop the skill. See what I mean?

Tom: Oddly, one of the most upsetting things this week was when things worked extremely well at the end of the week.

Joko: Why was that upsetting?

Tom: It was upsetting, because it was totally engaging. I was involved in a video production. I was locked up in a room for eight hours with two people I didn't know and I thought: "Oh, this isn't going to work." But it was the best example of teamwork I've ever experienced. Click, click, click. We were all concentrating full-on for the whole time, people were bringing us biscuits and coffee, while we were putting together this video. And it had such a buzz of good feeling I didn't recover for another

day. So that's a good sort of upset, I would say.

Joko: Yeah, it is. And in general, until you've been practising for a long time, we don't really worry about those.

Tom: Not such a big worry. Yep. OK.

Joko: Well, we can be very attached to things that go well. But in general, we really do most of our practice, at least for some years, with things that bother us. And there will always be something. Not a day goes by that something doesn't bother us. So try to pick one and work it through, and then the next time you call me, try to have at least one you can describe what you did with it.

Tom: OK.

Joko: And you may wonder why I talk so much about this. But see, it's these emotional reactions that block the clarity of life. And we need to know that and what to do about it.

Tom: It seems to me they must be related to clinging, what the Buddha was really talking about.

Joko: Oh yeah. Absolutely. A lot of people practise for 20 years and still don't know what to do about this sort of thing. So their practice stays pretty cloudy. So that's what I'm talking about, OK?

Tom: That's fine.

Joko: And there are other things to get into, but right now, I want to work with this for awhile.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: No, I think that's fine... The morning sittings, I get up and sit for about an hour in the morning, five o'clock here. That's going OK. I like the all-embracing sitting, where you know you're doing it because you can still hear the sounds.

Joko: Yeah. It's really wonderful. And you have such nice sounds in Australia. I can remember the Kukaburra. Anyway, that's enough for today. Just keep going. OK?

Tom: OK. Thanks. Bye.

14 May — another day, another upset

Tom: It's the first time I've got through this early. [I usually have to dial many times, and hit a lucky free moment, between her interviews with other phone students.]

Joko: [laughs] Well, I won't be here next Friday. Before I forget, OK?

Tom: OK. Thanks a lot. I've been concentrating on what you said last time, on the funny little upsets. And then finding a time later on to go through them. And that worked a lot better than trying to do them in the car.

Joko: Uh, huh.

Tom: And what I find, for example, there seems to be a pattern to it, actually. When someone tends to put me down. Like there was one on a job I was doing... Do you want to hear? What do you want to

hear about this?

Joko: Yeah, I want to hear what's happened. To see how the practice has helped.

Tom: I was working on a job for someone who is a graphic artist and really didn't appreciate the writing side. I do the writing. She thought the text was too long. Well, this has irked me for years. It's not a big upset, and I'm used to it, but it did irk me. Then I sat down later and went through this, and watched all the thoughts and watched the residual: tightened jaw, kind of grinding teeth, slightly tightened chest and all that.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: After a bit, that I guess just went away. This sort of thing happened several other times, in a kind of put-down situation. So that's where I got on that one. How's that?

Joko: OK. Well, go ahead. Finish talking.

Tom: I think I've said all I can say on that.

Joko: Yeah, OK. I think you worked through the actual upset pretty well. The idea being to break that emotion into the thoughts and the body sensations. Then it begins to fade. I think that's what happened, right?

Tom: Yeah. We're not talking about big upsets here either.

Joko: Well, that can happen. But usually you can't handle those until you handle smaller ones. And also a bigger one isn't going to fade in two minutes. You know, if someone's married and their wife leaves them, they're not going to handle that in an afternoon. See what I mean?

Tom: Right.

Joko: These are what I call systems.

Tom: Yes, I remember. I read that in your books. It indicates an underlying pattern.

Joko: Yeah, and it means that what happens isn't really what upsets you. It's your system that gets activated by what happens. What it [this practice] takes away from people eventually is our human desire to blame something or someone for what happens to us. See what I mean?

Tom: I do, yes. It was quite plain on watching all the thoughts and the pattern of it. I'd come up against this a lot of times and I've gotten a bit more used to it and sort of think...

Joko: Well, you've probably done some work with it already.

Tom: When the situation comes up, you think, "Oh, well, here we go again." But it's not like actually backing off and watching the thoughts and realising that you're doing it yourself. So that was a bit of a new one all right.

Joko: Well, if you want to put it in older terms, your true self, which is your self free of attachments, would never get upset by anything. It would just be interested in the situation and handle it. But it wouldn't be upset. In a way, that's what we working for. OK. That make sense?

Tom: Yes it does.

Joko: And it takes years. But I mean this is the process of practice, the slow freeing ourselves from

these reactive mechanisms that keep us attached. You're attached to a picture of life, when you get upset. And I tell people to work with one upset a day. Try to find one that you can work with, carefully sit with it and work it through. And when you do that, you'll be working with a lot of others too. Because they're all remarkably the same.

Tom: Yeah, I noticed that. And one upset a day is something that you can cope with. If you tried to look at every single thing that came up, you'd be overwhelmed.

Joko: Well, you wouldn't get your work done.

Tom: [laughs] That's right.

Joko: I want you to just take one, because when you work with one, you work with many. OK? And also, this isn't the only system we've got. This is the one we're talking about. So I want you to be alert to anything that upsets you. OK?

Tom: Yes, I'm... I'm trying. Yeah.

Joko: Well, simply because if you're upset, you can be sure a system is operating and need to know more about that system. That's really what we're talking about. It can leave you with five years of work. But it's interesting. After a while, you begin to be interested in slowly gaining your freedom from this sort of thing.

Tom: It's quite hard, in fact, to focus on these things, because I found I really quite like these little tiffs and things. Which is exactly what you say in your books: people are attached to their little dramas.

Joko: Ah, what do you get out of that drama?

Tom: Oh, just the feeling of being right, I guess.

Joko: And being important.

Tom: "What does she know?" And so forth. "She shouldn't be carrying on like this!" All that sort of stuff coming up. Very interesting.

Joko: And we have to see that we really like our dramas.

Tom: That was a surprise.

Joko: Well, it's true. We can't be free of them if we're just determined to stay with them and not practise. So the first step is to say, "Yeah, I'm doing that. And I even like doing that."

Tom: It's a little bit hard to actually focus on that and do that. But getting through it is... well worthwhile.

Joko: Well, it's a very difficult practice. I would never say it's easy. OK? But it leads you to freedom and also to a very, very different view of your life, in time. So you have to make up your mind to that part of it. You wouldn't be doing this if you didn't want that.

Tom: Well, I live in a kind of cheerful despair, basically. I've tried so many different things, that I feel that nothing else is going to work.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: It's like that Israeli battle dispatch that came back from the front: "The situation is hopeless but not serious."

Joko: [long laugh] I love it.

Tom: [laugh] I did. It stuck in my mind.

Joko: I like that. [laughs] OK.

Tom: OK, I'll speak to you, I guess, in a couple of weeks.

Joko: Yeah, OK. All right.

28 May — How to avoid building up a charge

Joko: How are you?

Tom: I'm all right, thanks. We were talking about upsets a couple of weeks ago. And it has changed my outlook about the whole thing. Looking for one, you tend to see them all. It becomes a bit of a... a habit, I suppose.

Joko: Well, we have a lot of them. We've got to be observant, you see.

Tom: Man oh man, you're telling me! Before, I had a system for it, it was like — I guess — philosophical shock-absorbers, where you think: "Oh, well, that's just the way things are."

Joko: That's a cover up. See, we want to be absolutely honest with what goes on with us. If we're angry, we need to know we're angry. I'm not saying to take it out on other people, but we need to know that.

Tom: I also notice that there's a threshold. Up to a certain point, I don't have trouble seeing them. But then I sometimes get caught up in things and don't really realise until later that, whoops! — that was one. That's interesting.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, as you get more sophisticated, you'll see them all over, of all degrees, OK?

Tom: It's amazing. I'm not sure about dealing with them afterwards. To what extent I'm really leaning on them enough. I find a quiet time later, when I can. Sit down and recreate the thing in my head.

Joko: Well, remember, this is something we learn slowly over time. There's not some magic formula here. But I want you, when you call me, for a little while, until we're sure you have a good knowledge of it, to really describe to me some little upset that's happening in your life. And then how you deal with it. OK?

Tom: All right. OK.

Joko: And very slowly, you'll begin to get a different outlook on this kind of thing, OK?

Tom: Well, do you want to hear one now?

Joko: Sure.

Tom: Well, the one that I didn't catch was maybe the interesting one. I was having a busy day, as usual, and had a whole agenda of things I wanted to get through. I work at home, I've got a family

(you've met my wife). I also have two young sons here. Well, not that young. And then everyone was asking me things. I'd go from A to B, and someone would interrupt me and want to show me some little thing. Then I'd go from B to C, and somebody else would interrupt me. I was constantly thwarted by little demands. Finally, by my wife, to show me some little thing. I really got quite irritated, and she was wondering what I was so cross about! And she was at the end of the line. I didn't really realise until afterwards that, whoops! — I missed that one. It was a pile-up of little things getting in the way. That was a more significant one, I think.

Joko: Well, what is practice with something like that? It's going to happen again. So what is practice?

Tom: You're asking me?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Uh, well, what I did afterwards. I sat down and re-created the situation, as I said, and I watched the thoughts and feelings around all of that. And the body feelings. And it seemed basically that the world was not doing what I wanted.

Joko: And the body is tense.

Tom: And things are not obeying my wishes at all. I have a plan which isn't working out.

Joko: Right. Mostly, in the mechanism of it, your mind is registering this irritation, but you're not really feeling what the body's doing, see? So very slowly, there's no discharge of that gathering anger. And at then at some point it discharges, see?

Tom: That's a good way to put it. It's like building up a charge, isn't it?

Joko: Now, to keep that from happening, and you may not be ready to do it, but if you're really aware of the body tightening, as that goes on, you don't have to discharge it. Or at least not as soon. OK? So when you're sitting, you need to be aware of all that. And then finally end up with just feeling the body, with no thoughts at all. Just experiencing that anger.

Tom: Yes, I know that's the aim. I'm probably not very good at that yet, as you point out.

Joko: No. But you have to do thousands of these. I mean, I hate to sound discouraging.

Tom: No, it's not discouraging. This is something I feel I CAN do. I don't mind a long program, so to speak.

Joko: Well, the enlightened state is one where we're more or less free of these reactive responses. And it is hard work, and it takes a long time. But it's not impossible. And that's what practice is, because it's better for you, but it's also better for those around you.

Tom: You're telling me!

Joko: You know, that's our motivation. And then very slowly, our life becomes QUITE different. So, anyway, each time you call for awhile, I just want to hear about something, OK?

Tom: OK, I'll do that. Thanks. Thanks for your help.

Joko: Anything else, or is that it?

Tom: I continue with the morning sittings and I find the bringing in the sound a very great help. It's like a kind of awareness meter. If you can hear the sounds, you're probably all right. And if you can't

hear the sounds, your awareness meter has dropped back.

Joko: Right.

Tom: It works quite well, that way, it stops me from day-dreaming. God knows what I've been doing all these years when I thought I was sitting.

Joko: OK, well you're learning quite nicely. Also, before I leave you, I'm changing my telephone hours just slightly, so the Friday time here would be three to five, instead of two to five. So you've have to figure that out.

Tom: In the last two hours in other words. OK, so it just starts an hour later.

Joko: Yeah, I don't think that will affect you, but I wanted you to know about it.

Tom: It starts at six here at the moment, for me. So we talking about starting from seven. OK fine. Not a problem.

Joko: OK? Good.

Tom: Thanks very much.

11 June — more work on upsets

Joko: How are you?

Tom: I seem to be going through a nice smooth patch of life.

Joko: Oh, that's nice.

Tom: I've beginning to learn that that means that things are going the way I think they should. [laughs] Meanwhile, I've been continuing with what we talked about two weeks ago, and you wanted to hear details.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: [tape not right, missed bits because of voice-activated setting, but gist was that I told the story about the woman who overstayed one evening, upsetting Sibyl and me, and then using Joko's technique on it in my morning sitting.]

Joko: The first thing you did, was to do what?

Tom: I was just watching thoughts, and was left more and more with just the contractions. And dwelled on that.

Joko: Yeah, that's good. Some people, first of all they just watch the thoughts, like, "I really don't like him, he really shouldn't do that, etc." Whatever you're thinking. And when they calm down a little bit, they go into the body, and feel what's left there. If you can do them together, it's even better.

Tom: Yeah, that's what I try to do.

Joko: Sort of see the thoughts, but again, put them right against those body sensations. And that of course takes all the starch out of the thinking and the emotion begins to fade... OK, that's excellent.

Tom: The main problem I have is a kind of logistical one, of these things happening on the fly. The one I mentioned was not that way, because the feelings went through overnight, as I slept.

Joko: Well, how do you get to and from work?

Tom: I work at home.

Joko: Oh, you work at home, OK. Some people just work on these things on the way home, they stop their car, you know.

Tom: Oh, right.

Joko: I'm just trying to think of some place in there.

Tom: I try to think of them too. Sometimes I can find a time during the day.

Joko: I'm just trying to figure out when your work day is done.

Tom: When it's done?

Joko: It's never done, huh?

Tom: [laughs]. Yeah.

Joko: [laughs]. Ok, I have to leave that to you.

Tom: Well, I'll work out something.

Joko: Well, the point is, as often as you can. To be returning to one of these little blips on our life. Where we think something's wrong. You know what I mean? Somebody's annoyed us or the situation doesn't suit us at all. From very minor, to occasionally very major. But if you get used to working this way, it changes the character of your life very slowly.

Tom: I can see that it would.

Joko: Well, when you work on one, you in a sense work on more than one. So the point is to take one — I usually say one a day — but whatever you can do. And eventually, when you get really skilled, even if it's happening, you can be working on it. Even if you sense yourself getting upset, you're already practising with it. There are many stages, so I just want you to keep working on this. Because in a sense we're talking about the most basic blockage in practice. Which is this emotional reaction to life. So, any questions about that?

Tom: No, I think that's fine.

Joko: OK, that's enough for today. I just want you to continue. And as I say, if you can do one a day, fine, or as often as you can.

Tom: Will do.

18 June — the art of Zen debt collection

Tom: I've been continuing to stir up sand with this procedure.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: It's amazing, how much there is, in fact. All the stuff I've never noticed, or accepted as normal life. So it's very interesting, apart from the results.

Joko: Yeah, it is interesting.

Tom: There was one that was of interest. I'm talking about the upsets, of course, here. One is a very old one, which has diminished anyway. That's when people don't pay me money in the business. They start telling me stories or evading payment. I used to get absolutely ENRAGED. I had one of those this week, and I still have an effect, and I noticed it right away, and I sat with it. But it's very small, but still an irritation. It's just an interest in how, in the normal course of things, you can wear these things down, just by practical life.

Joko: Oh, yes. Sure. Life is a great teacher. If we pay attention.

Tom: Yeah. I guess you have to pay attention, when it's hurting a lot.

Joko: That's the way Zen practice teaches us. To learn from our life. Instead of trying to cover up what's happening. We have various ways of covering up things, as I'm sure you're discovering.

Tom: Yeah, exactly. It's a much wider than I thought. You tend to look at it the other way around, until you start doing this odd practice. And that is, I guess: that it's somebody's else's fault. That cat shouldn't be sitting there! Or why is he doing this? All this kind of stuff.

Joko: That doesn't mean something isn't taking place. But your reaction to it is your own.

Tom: That's right. I mean, if somebody doesn't pay a bill, then they are doing something wrong.

Joko: It doesn't mean to just ignore that, which I sure you don't do.

Tom: Oh, no.

Joko: But it means to handle it. After a while, if we practise, we handle it with much less anger. And it usually works better anyway.

Tom: The creatures with the deadliest bites are those whose blood is cold.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: In terms of debt collection.

Joko: Well, not even say to be cold. Because in the long run, our practice is to benefit everyone. Even the person who owes you money.

Tom: Fair enough.

Joko: The way you handle that can be useful to that person. Anyway, our emotions are in the middle. And that's what we're learning to look at. Our reactive emotions, when things happen to us.

Tom: The other odd thing, is that if things aren't going well, then that's really OK in a way. I've never had that impression before.

Joko: They're just going the way they're going. And our job is to find a way to handle that that's hopefully beneficial. Our own reactions are just our own personal stuff. They really don't help us to

get through life. So we are learning to work with that as we practise. Tom; What happens to the big worries, like fear of death, or running out of money? I mean, eventually, you get around to...?

Joko: It's different. You know, if you ask me that question every year for say ten years, in a way you'd begin to know something about it yourself. And that's the only solution to those things.

Tom: Uh huh.

Joko: See, if I tell you how it is for me, that doesn't really help you.

Tom: OK.

Joko: That's just my experience.

Tom: But there is a kind of process there too...

Joko: Oh, everything is, and it's all yours. See what I mean? It's not a question of believing what someone else says.

Tom: I don't usually do that, in fact.

Joko: Well, that's good.

Tom: I try not to.

Joko: You may believe yourself occasionally.

Tom: [laughs] All the time.

Joko: [laughs] Well, take a look at that. That's not really much more sensible, when you think about it?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah.

Joko: [laughs] Funny. Yeah, well I'm not saying not to have self-confidence. But that's not the same thing as believing what we think. So, you can tackle that a little bit.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: No, it wasn't a turbulent week. But it was an interesting one.

Joko: All right. Bye bye.

July 2 — reversing colds, or worse things

Joko: How are you?

Tom: I'm a little bit off colour.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: I guess we could talk about that a bit. That's worth hearing about, I think.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: I was developing a... I thought it was a migraine headache, but the interesting thing is you never know what's going on. Your judgement's clouded when you're getting sick, no matter what. And so I just sat with it as if it was just a normal upset. Because it certainly has all the earmarks of an upset. Various pressures and troubles.

Joko: All illness — it's not the only thing in it — but all illness has... you're going off balance. Something's not quite being paid attention to.

Tom: And so... I get migraine headaches of various degrees. This may have been a mild one, or it may have been something like a little flu thing. But whatever it was, in sitting down with it and treating it like an upset and concentrating on the body, it actually all went away. When I stopped fooling with it.

Joko: Most illnesses will.

Tom: Beg your pardon?

Joko: Most minor illnesses or things like headaches will.

Tom: I don't mean it went away completely. I've still got remnants of it. But as I was sitting, and if I stopped just trying to do anything about it, and just listened to what was going on and all the rest, oddly enough it just all disappeared.

Joko: Well, because you restore the balance when you get out of the way, see?

Tom: Yeah, must be. It was interesting, because the pressure was fairly heavy, but it did vanish.

Joko: Well, you're learning something there. I don't want to say too much about it but, you know, like I never get colds any more. Because if I begin to feel the first little raw feeling, you know, up in the nose somewhere? I just begin to experience that. I just drop everything, because I don't have time to be sick. I just drop everything and begin to experience that rawness and in a couple of hours, it's over. So I'm not saying that will cure everything, or anything of that sort, but for certain types of things, where the balance is just off — that's what you have to do, restore the balance. OK? It just really means your mind is not always been in the present moment. You've been doing something else.

Tom: You're telling me. [laughs]

Joko: Well I know. We all do and we all go out of balance. Including me. But I don't do it very much any more. Just a little bit.

Tom: Well, that's interesting. Apart from that, I've just been proceeding as programmed.

Joko: OK. You're learning. All right. Good.

9 July — background microwave radiation

Tom: I wanted to talk about something briefly, if you don't mind, about... I guess, underlying fear.

Joko: Uh, huh.

Tom: And I notice that it's like the background microwave radiation from the Big Bang, you know.

When you've got sensitive instruments you can notice it in every direction. Where does this fit into Buddhism? I've never read in my Buddhist writings that...

Joko: Well, Buddhist writings tend not to... You know, we live in a modern age that dissects things more than they used to. But in one way or another, there is a lot of writings about what we would call the ego.

Tom: But they don't express it in that way.

Joko: No. So we have a modern vocabulary. But essentially that fear is the fear, as you practise particularly, of losing the sense of your own boundaries.

Tom: Ah...

Joko: The fear that you'll be nothing. Oh course, you won't be. But the ego doesn't know that, so it's afraid of that.

Tom: Well, it seems all-pervasive.

Joko: It is all-pervasive.

Tom: Intriguing. Also, that ties in with something else that comes up: what if something goes wrong with this practice? You know, I guess that's the same thing, isn't it?

Joko: Well what could go wrong?

Tom: [laughs] I don't know.

Joko: See, the point of practice is to face the truth of your life at every moment. When you do that, in a way there's nothing that can go wrong. See what I mean? Because it is the truth.

Tom: Yeah, I do see that. When I'm sitting in the practice, and everything is just part of the practice, that's right.

Joko: Same way in your life. Something frightens you or makes you feel bad, that's the truth of the moment.

Tom: It's not usually in my life that things frighten me very much. It's in my sitting! [laughs]

Joko: Well, things get clearer.

Tom: Yeah, that's right. I've noticed that particularly.

Joko: All right, ask yourself when it comes up: what does this feel like in my body? And try to let the thoughts go and just feel it.

Tom: It's very dim.

Joko: That's all right. It still feels like something, because it's a residue of the ego. And as long as the ego's present, there will be tension. It may be very tiny, but it's there. Like that background radiation you're talking about. It's always there. Until you're free of that sense that you're a separate self. It's bound to be there.

Tom: Ok, I'll tackle it that way.

Joko: You know, you can't try to get rid of it, because that would be another effort of the ego. But you can experience it.

Tom: I guess I missed that. I got sort of interested in it.

Joko: It is interesting. But what I want you to do is see what the practice is, OK?

Tom: Right, I've got it.

Joko: All right?

Tom: OK.

Joko: All right. Anything else?

Tom: No, I think that's the one I was worried about.

Joko: OK, that will keep you busy!

Tom: It will, yes! [laughs]... Thanks a lot.

16 July — who we are

Tom: A few things. This business of experiencing the body contractions. It's getting pretty clear, I think.

Joko: All right.

Tom: I catch myself doing that, all the time. Or most of the time during the day, I don't even think, "UPSET, I'll have to store this for later." I can actually feel it as it's happening.

Joko: All right, that's good.

Tom: I often don't have time to sit there and do anything about it. It's a bit of a help.

Joko: No, it still does something. You just feel it, you see what I mean?

Tom: Yes, I think I'm on to what you've been telling me, finally. When I do get a chance to sit with it, then it's like cleaning your glasses or something. I sit there and watch it, and something happens and it just goes away.

Joko: Usually.

Tom: Yeah, usually.

Joko: So we're not doing it to make it go away.

Tom: Well, that's the question I had.

Joko: No, that's thinking, see?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: I have this unpleasant thing going on, and I want it to go away.

Tom: I want to fix this, yes.

Joko: And if you do, the chances are, it won't go away. Unless it's very minor. OK?

Tom: I was noticing that. And I was thinking, ahhhh, this can't be right.

Joko: No, it isn't right. And the thing that transforms your life, is to see that every moment of your life is — in a way, we call it the absolute. It is just your exact experience. See what I mean? And we want to appreciate that, and just let it unfold.

Tom: That's kind of a tough one to embrace.

Joko: I know! [laughs] That's why practice is difficult. See?

Tom: Ummm.

Joko: If it all felt just wonderful, I'd have no problem with students. But see, that's not the way it has to go.

Tom: Yeah, it's fairly rough... The other thing that comes up sometimes with these contractions is a feeling of an image of the emotion. Like a picture.

Joko: OK, could be.

Tom: Is that rubbish?

Joko: Just be aware of whatever comes up. Since all of these emotions are tied into your early past, childhood, sometimes you get a flash or a sentence, something...

Tom: Well, it's more like a facial expression, a caricature of what the feeling is like.

Joko: That could be. Just be aware of it. And feel it.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Just feel it. There's nothing that's a problem, Tom. Nothing. Just be aware. What could be a problem? See, it's all just life.

Tom: Yeah, OK. [laughs]

Joko: Isn't it?

Tom: Yeah, that's right. It is. But I've had a lot of experience of regarding things as problems to be fixed.

Joko: Everyone does. That's why in general, life doesn't work very well.

Tom: Yeahhh.. This body sensation, is that embedded in Buddhism? In early Buddhist teachings as mindfulness?

Joko: It is, but you have to see it. It's not said as clearly as I'm saying. The way they would say, is just to be aware of life as it's happening. But see, life as it's happening consists of what? It consists of

hearing, touching, smelling... see, there is no life, except that we sense it. You get what I mean? If you had no senses, you'd be dead. And the senses come in through the body, that's all. It's not the body we're interested in. It's the fact that the body is a vehicle. It is the sensing of life. Without your body, could you live?

Tom: No, I see. It's obviously such a potent thing, I wondered why I hadn't come across it. I guess I had in bits...

Joko: Well, classical Buddhism would speak of it in terms of the senses, you see what I mean? But where are the senses located?

Tom: OK.

Joko: OK. All right?

Tom: Yeah. There was one other thing that may be rubbish, but normally I go around living in what seems like a ramshackle house. Without any particular centre to it. I often feel I'm almost invisible. I'm surprised that people actually recognise me.

Joko: You live alone?

Tom: No, no. I've got a family. But I mean, if I go into a shop a couple of times, I have this feeling of being invisible. But I'm getting a sense, like the house is developing a centre. I don't know if this is related to the practice...

Joko: Yeah, that's true.

Tom: That would be part of this, what's going on?

Joko: Ordinarily we think that all these little deviations we have, this move, that move, that thought, that opinion, is who we are, see? But no, who we are is the ability to experience that. To notice it.

Tom: Ah. So it does tie in.

Joko: And that's the centre. Otherwise, there is no centre. And that's why people feel anxious, because there's no centre, there's no base.

Tom: OK, well that makes sense.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: OK, very good. Anything else you ah...

Joko: No, not today. I'm a little bit rushed, and...

Tom: OK.

Joko: You're doing fine. Just keep pursuing what we've talked about. That's enough material for years. OK?

Tom: OK, thanks.

6 Aug — falling out of the Garden of Eden

Tom: A few things. One is that I managed to get the flu, and kept on going with the practice and it's uncanny how much it's like an ordinary upset. The same sort of stuff again.

Joko: In a way. Are you over it, by the way?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Yeah, OK.

Tom: This was after you mentioned you don't get colds any more. I rarely get sick, but I got it this time all right.

Joko: Well, I'm not saying I never get sick, but I'm saying that mind and body are one, so it isn't as though there's sickness and then there's our practice. You know what I mean? They're all tied in together.

Tom: It's so similar to an upset that... you've got the thoughts out of control and you've got all these bodily sensations...

Joko: Well, I think there's some connection. I know when I used to work in a big lab, I used to say to the person who worked with me: whenever my boss would really yell at one of the scientists, you know, really lay him out, I'd say, hum, three days! [laughs] And she knew what I meant: three days and he'd come in, or call in with an awful cold. [laughs]

Tom: Right, I see, stress. Very suspicious, isn't it? So I just thought I'd mention that. I've noticed that in practising that what I'd really like in life is air bags against everything.

Joko: Uh huhhhh. Well, see when the air bags fail, one way to handle failure like that is to get sick.

Tom: Yeah, that's a point. Nature just makes you rest.

Joko: Not only rest, but it kind of shuts out life. Because, when you're sick, the sickness takes up the space. You know what I mean?

Tom: Yes. You can't concentrate on anything else.

Joko: You really can't worry about anything else. So it's one way for nature to get a chance to get at you a little more directly without your mind being so much in the way.

Tom: The other thing that has agitated me a bit, which is kind of silly, is that I can't really understand what illusion is for. It's maybe one of these questions you shouldn't even think about.

Joko: [laughs] Well, delusion is a lot of things. I'd even have to know what you mean by delusion.

Tom: Illusion.

Joko: Well, they're different. What do you mean by illusion?

Tom: All the stuff we're trying to get rid of and deal with. I can't see what it's there for at all. Why set it up in order to knock it down?

Joko: Well, you have to go back to the Biblical symbolic tale of falling out of the Garden of Eden. You can say, why did man do that? Well man does that because the very nature of being alive is we see things from a self-centred viewpoint. The minute you do that, you're going to have illusion. It's just the nature of being put together like a human being, in the sensory way we're put together,

creates illusion. So... I wouldn't worry too much it.

Tom: I thought it probably wasn't a good idea.

Joko: In a way, it's a good teacher, because as you bump up into your illusions, it gives you something to learn from. Right?

Tom: Yeah, but only in order to get rid of the illusions?!

Joko: No, it's not so much to get rid of them. See, that in Buddhist terms that they're empty.

Tom: Ah.

Joko: There's nothing really to get rid of. We don't say we have to get rid of nothing. See?

Tom: Oh, I've got you.

Joko: Do we? No. Once you see there's nothing, in a way, it's gone. You think about that. It's a very subtle point, but very important.

Tom: Yeah. That's interesting. Very interesting.

Joko: OK?

Tom: Well, thanks a lot.

Joko: All right, Tom.

13 Aug — ethics

Tom: Something came up I wanted to ask you about. I guess the question is how does the practice focus on ethics? Because I..

Joko: It's nothing but ethics.

Tom: I seemed a bit blind to an ethical thing that came up. I thought I was doing something all right, and I talked to my wife — the gist of it was, it was a business thing — she said, "Oh, you shouldn't do that!" I don't know if we need to go into details... but I was helping someone in a high management position, who I had helped before, to get another job. And I was thinking of asking him for a favour rather than charging him — you know, the kind of usual fees for doing this for him — because he's not a mining company. He's doing this as an individual. I thought, well, you know why not just ask him to recommend a couple of people I might call who could use my services? It seemed all right to me, and I talked to my wife and she said, "Oh no! Don't do that!"

Joko: What did she want you to do?

Tom: Well, she thought that I should just do it at a reduced price and ask him for some other favour that would not be like arm-twisting. Like, for example, suggest ways to improve the business, or something like that, which is quite all right. Actually, I followed that advice, but what interested me was I didn't really see it at the time. After she said it, I thought, "OOOOooo, right." I just wondered, in practice, do you get better at seeing these things?

Joko: Of course. The whole point of practice — I don't really teach it too directly, because people don't always get it that way: to do good, to serve others. But for one thing, you know, when you do this sort of thing by phone, there's a lot missing.

Tom: Yeah?...

Joko: You know, people here, I give a 45 minute dharma talk every week. And there's a lot of stuff that's learned just being around a Zen centre. Self for service. The people who run the centre, it's all volunteer, they work very very hard, doing this. That sort of thing. One thing you might do, to help you a little bit, is to get, just write and get a number of tapes and listen to them, till you get more of that kind of teaching. Instead of...

Tom: That side of it, yes.

Joko: See, what I'm talking about on the phone mostly is your actual personal practice. And in the long run, that's what matters the most. But sometimes you need a lot of things, you know what I mean? Sure the main thing we want to do in life is, in old-fashioned Buddhist terms, is would be to save all sentient beings, which doesn't mean to run up and down the street saving them. It means, that the way you live your life, is always beneficial to others.

Tom: Ah. That's interesting. Yeah. Yeah, that's very interesting. OK.

Joko: See, now basically, if we're self-centred, which is what all this thought-labelling is about, is to bring that to our attention. We don't want to serve other people, we want to serve ourselves. See what I mean?

Tom: I guess that's brings into sharp relief that very...

Joko: Yeah, on the other hand, practice is not about saying, "I should be a kind person." It's about being a genuinely kind person. Not putting up a lot of 'shoulds' for yourself. Because that's not really very genuine.

Tom: I think that tends to backfire anyway.

Joko: Yeah, it does backfire. So, we sort of take the long way around, but where we're heading is certainly to be a very genuine, basically kind person.

Tom: Well, I've heard a number of your tapes. We get them here. But I haven't actually heard that particular thing discussed. But maybe there're lots and lots of tapes.

Joko: Well, I give hundreds of talks, you know.

Tom: Yes, right! OK. So that's a good idea... whatever tapes come our way, we listen to, you know. But I guess we don't get them all.

Joko: I don't know, it may be years ago. I take it for granted that people, for instance, know what the precepts are. That sort of thing.

Tom: Well, I know what the precepts are, but I guess it's applying them when there's fine shades of...

Joko: Well, it's not only applying them, but understanding what it means to practise with them, see?

Tom: Yeah, that's my problem.

Joko: You say, "do not be angry." That's not a very useful thing to say. Because we all get angry. The question is how do we practise with anger? It's the real question. It doesn't mean not to get angry. Because that's silly, everybody gets angry. The question is how do we practise with our self-centred anger? Do not 'feel' — what's it mean to feel? It doesn't mean just feel something, like in the obvious sense. If you gossip about somebody, you're stealing their good name. That sort of thing. So all those

things are part of practice.

Tom: Yes, I've heard all that, but I guess it's just I wasn't aware enough to actually see it... I was surprised I didn't actually see it.

Joko: Well, remember, nobody lives in some perfect way. The thing is to take things like that and really make them your practice. Your wife is useful in this aspect of things.

Tom: Oh, yes! Sure. Well, she practices too. Of course, you met her. She was the first one in line that day — I don't know if you can think back all that time, but she was just before me.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: So we have good discussions.

Joko: Well, that's good. Practice is definitely, it's not ethical, but you should be a very ethical person if you understand your practice.

Tom: It's not that I don't try. It's just, as I say, this caught me. I thought, "Oooo, how come I didn't see that?"... Ummmm. OK.

Joko: One test is that any action we take should not just benefit us. It should benefit somebody else. And this can be the person that's doing you in. See what I mean? So what action can you take that would benefit yourself but also benefit that person? Someone who is treating you cruelly. See, that's major practice. Most people don't think they have to benefit somebody who's being mean to them.

Tom: No, that's universally believed...

Joko: Well, it's not my belief.

Tom: Yes, I see... that's very interesting.

Joko: That's mature practice. I mean, someone new to practice wouldn't even know what we're talking about. Maybe you don't — I don't know. But I would always get to that... if someone even said something about me that was way off base, very dishonest and cruel. I would have to find some way in handling that that would be good for me, but would also be good for them. And that's very difficult.

Tom: OK, yeah. That doesn't often happen to me, that somebody's...

Joko: Well, I'm just saying that most people think that they have to be good in the obvious ways, but it doesn't dawn on them what this really means: it means responsibility for everything, even people you don't know. So, that's a big order.

Tom: I see. That makes better sense of it.

Joko: OK.

Tom: OK, thanks.

27 Aug — dopiness

Tom: Is there anything to do about dopiness? Because every now and then - I guess everyone does - I

just go doping off on the cushion.

Joko: Yeah, I think everyone does. If you don't do it regularly, I wouldn't worry about it.

Tom: Sound helps a lot to bring me back.

Joko: I wouldn't worry about it, unless you do it every time.

Tom: Oh no. No.

Joko: There's no one who sits who doesn't get drowsy. It doesn't matter. OK. Not a sin.

Tom: It's nothing special?

Joko: No. It's certainly not special. It's just being human.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah. All right.... So that's about it, I think... I was thinking, I feel sort of funny always dealing with these tiny, icky points. I'm used to...

Joko: You're used to what?

Tom: I'm used to, I guess, making things interesting for people.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] That's one of my jobs. I'd never dream of carrying on like this...

Joko: Well, maybe next time we'll talk about that more. OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: I think there's something interesting there. So bring it up next time. OK?

Tom: OK.

3 Sept — the little stuff of life

Tom: Last time, we ended on something you said to bring up again, which was my odd feeling that I shouldn't be boring you with all this stuff, I guess. All the...

Joko: All the what?

Tom: Well, all this little stuff.

Joko: But what does life consist of, but little stuff?

Tom: Yeah, well, I've been thinking about that. [laughs]

Joko: I've never noticed any great... anything else. I mean, that's what life is, is little stuff. It's how we handle that, that really makes it something else. But go ahead, I'm not trying to give a speech here. Go ahead.

Tom: No, that's just about it... it wasn't a big thing, but I felt, ah, poor Joko, she's got to listen to all

this stuff all the time [laughs]

Joko: Well, that's not really what you're saying.

Tom: I mean the experiencing it is one thing, and listening to somebody else's, is another. But it wasn't a big deal. I just thought I'd mention it.

Joko: Well, remember: I'm not just listening to your stuff. I'm trying to have you begin to learn something about your life. OK?

Tom: Yeah, I realise, yeah.

Joko: Uh-huh. In other words, that's the material we're dealing with, because life consists of little stuff. You know what I mean? It's not big stuff.

Tom: Well, OK. The other point, I guess, is how do you know... ah, when you're actually settling in and experiencing this? Because I've been doing this for awhile now, and I think I'm right. Is there some way of knowing?

Joko: Well, when you're experiencing, you're not... you're being aware, but you're really being aware, not thinking about it. You see what I mean? So if I'm angry and kind of sit and boil in the anger....

Tom: Well, that's right...

Joko: That's not experiencing it.

Tom: That's NOT experiencing it?

Joko: No. Not unless the mind is quiet, there's no thinking... you know, usually if we're angry and boiling we're thinking, "Oh, I sure don't like that, I sure don't like her, I don't like anything. I've got to do something about this!" See, it's the thoughts that are boiling.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: If there're no thoughts, then there's just the physical sensation of anger, it will just wear itself out.

Tom: That's what does seem to happen. It just seems like nothing much is happening, but after awhile very often something will just give way.

Joko: That's right.

Tom: It's hard to know what it is, but it's like something's just given up or...

Joko: Well, what you really begin to get — well you may not get it in words — is that anger is an illusion. See it's a combination of thoughts that you cling to, plus bodily sensations.

Tom: Well, that's speaking of anger, but any of these things...

Joko: Well, anything. I was just using anger as an example.

Tom: It does seem that I must be getting it about right then.

Joko: Yeah, I think so.

Tom: Right, OK.

Joko: Uh-huh, great. Wonderful.

Tom: And I had a very nice week with my young son. My wife went away to camp with the other one, and I got left with the younger one. And he's a lovely kid and we had a great time.

Joko: Had a great time. And this wouldn't have been true at one time?

Tom: Ah, well I don't actually know, because I haven't been left with him before. [laughs]

Joko: Yeah, right.

Tom: But probably. I certainly really did enjoy it a lot. We had a smashing time. I don't know whether to attribute it to that [Zen practice] or not, but I've felt a general lifting.

Joko: It might have something to do with it, but maybe not all. So just continue, Tom. I think you're beginning to understand something. Now, the thing to do is to stay awake with your life. See what I mean? Don't let upsets just ride over you. You have to just look at them. Feel them. OK?

Tom: Yeah, I think I get the picture now. On we go.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: No, that's it. Thanks a lot.

10 Sept — security

Tom: The thing I wanted to ask about, was something that you actually mentioned in a talk when I was there. And that's the issue of where you draw the line on security. I recollect you were using examples of...

Joko: I can't always remember what I've said but..

Tom: Pepper spray, and things like that. When do things get ludicrous and when are things just prudent? Because this is always a huge issue for me. I mean, I do things which I'm sure are just prudent, like put a fire extinguisher in the house.

Joko: Oh, I don't see anything wrong with that.

Tom: On the other hand, people feel I go off the deep end when I deeply encode everything on my computer in case it gets stolen. Things like that.

Joko: Well, we have to do what's sensible. I mean, if the material on your computer is important to you, what's wrong with protecting it? There's a difference between protecting, in a way that makes sense, and protecting as an emotional system. What's the difference?

Tom: That's what I was wondering about. I was wondering if... I think it will probably all come out in the wash, just in practice anyway.

Joko: Yeah, I think so. I mean, there are very few things that we do that aren't mixed. I mean, I might genuinely want to help somebody with something that I can do. If they're ill, I might bring them

something to eat, that sort of thing. That's genuine, some of it. But there's also the part that we might have: oh, this is nice of me for doing this.

Tom: Oh yeah. All this add-on stuff.

Joko: "Did anyone notice it?" You know. So we're always a mixture, see what I mean?

Tom: I do.

Joko: Which isn't good or bad, but if you keep really noticing what you're doing, there's a part of you that's sorting this all out anyway.

Tom: Ah.

Joko: You know, particularly if you're experiencing the body, as you even get a little bit upset, it'll all sort itself out.

Tom: I thought so, but it was particularly interesting to me because I think it's a strong thing with me always. I love security systems.

Joko: Well it may have a system in there, see. But if you sense real tension and possible emotions with it, that's what the system part is.

Tom: Right. OK.

Joko: "I have to protect this and the world will come to an end if anything happens."

Tom: Rather than just: "this is a good idea."

Joko: This is a good idea, and I won't like it if something happens. But it's also not the end of the world.

Tom: Just statistically, there are accidents like this, so we'd better do something about this. I see, yeah.

Joko: I mean San Diego is a high-crime city and I always keep my door locked. I don't like to do that. I never used to have to do that. But I do.

Tom: Yeah. Because it just makes sense.

Joko: It just makes sense.

Tom: Right.

Joko: But there can be a system in there too.

Tom: [laughs] I think there probably is.

Joko: Well, sure, probably. So keep an eye out, OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: Right? What else? Everything else reasonable?

Tom: Yeah everything is really quite reasonable. Work is down though. Work goes up and down and up again. I'm having an off period. But I'm used to that. I'm used to things kind of balancing out in the end. So it doesn't really bother me.

Joko: It doesn't really bother you. OK.

Tom: And I've always got a fill-in project which I guess will...

Joko: Uh-huh. Right. It sounds like you know your way around that one.

Tom: Oh, yeah. It's not a problem. [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] OK, Tom, nice to talk to you.

17 Sept — getting old

Tom: The sky is building up to a wonderful West Australian thunderstorm.

Joko: Oh!

Tom: I look forward to it later in the day.

Joko: Wonderful.

Tom: There was a very, to me, interesting, I guess, upset. Because it was an upset I've seen so many times I didn't realise it was one. And I just went into the practice and suddenly realised that all the years I've been saying that like, it's a bad day, and things are slow and depressed, right?

Joko: That's your thought.

Tom: It's the first time I actually, by going into the body that I saw it was me, and not the world.

Joko: Um hum.

Tom: Which felt pretty odd.

Joko: It's a valuable piece of learning.

Tom: Yeahhh. I'm not talking about heavy depression here. I just felt a bit low, you know? But it's one I've seen so many times before but I just put it out there, instead of seeing it's my own thought.

Joko: That's good. You want to try to find things to work with like that. There was someone I was just talking to. You know, we get angry every day or upset about something. So you need to work with at least one a day, like the American vitamins, you know? One a day.

Tom: [laughs] We have them too.

Joko: Well, during the day there's usually one thing in a day that sticks out a little bit more than the others. And that's the one to work with.

Tom: I didn't even see the thing as sticking out. I thought this is just normal, like this is just a bad day.

Joko: Well, there's no such thing as a bad day.

Tom: No, it seems not. You know. [laughs] The other thing I wanted to mention is ... is my wife says to me that, "Well there's no advantage in getting any older than we are." [laughs] And I say, right, OK. But the other day I noticed my fingers were stiffening up. And I got all upset about: oooooo, aaaaaah, how'm I going to type and make a living if I'm getting arthritis or whatever? And all this sort of stuff. The question is, where you draw the line in all that kind of kafuffle?

Joko: Well, when we have anything physical wrong with us, we do all we can to remedy it. Because the body is what we live through. But there's a difference between that and being emotional about it. If we're emotional, we need to practise with that. You know, I'm getting old too. All sorts of little things are beginning to go. But there's a difference between working with that, and feeling there's something wrong. It's just life doing its thing. So what kind of arthritis do you think this is?

Tom: Oh, I don't know. I'm going to see a doctor this morning. But I even have trouble opening an envelope, that kind of thing.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well I used to have arthritis. And when I began to eat differently, it just went away.

Tom: Oh, is that right?

Joko: And remember that the average western-style doctor doesn't know much about this.

Tom: Ah. You changed your diet, did you?

Joko: Yeah. Uh-huh. A low-fat diet, lots of fruits, vegetables, grains and nuts. Just only very tiny amounts of meat.

Tom: Well, that's kind of what I do anyway. It's not very bad, I just wanted to stop it from getting any worse. I can sort of cope with it at the moment. I'm not sure that's what it is. I'm going to find out.

Joko: It may not be. I'm just saying that with anything like that, you want to look into every possible approach, without getting morbid about it. Then just do your best, you know.

Tom: Right.

Joko: But that's different than thinking there's something WRONG. There's just life doing what it's doing.

Tom: Yes, that's it. That's what I wanted to get at.

Joko: You know, as we get older the body is going to begin to give way. And that's normal, isn't it?

Tom: Yes. And what sort of attitude, and how do you cope with this?

Joko: Well the attitude is to start thinking about it, which is useless. It doesn't do any good, so we just see it as thinking and feel the fear, which is what's really going on.

Tom: Yeah. That's right, yeah.

Joko: Our Zen centre cat's dying at the moment and it's interesting to watch a cat die. It's just withdrawing more and more, gets more and more quiet, more and more withdrawn. I don't think it bothers him at all. It's interesting.

Tom: Yeah, I've seen cats go too, in fact.

Joko: Because they don't think, it's just a natural process. Yeah, so anyway, you think about this,

Tom. It's good thinking, to beginning to see how to run your life a little differently. [pause] So, anything else?

Tom: No. I sort of bring up what bugs me during the week.

Joko: Well, it's your own practice, see?

Tom: Ummmmm. That's right.

Joko: See, you're only bugged, because you want life to be different from the way it is. Isn't that true?

Tom: Yeah. That's right. That's where the friction is.

Joko: Oh, sure is! [laughs]

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: OK. Good enough.

1 October — books can drive you crazy

Tom: A couple of things, as usual. One is, in sitting I get into a position that seems similar to what I've read in the books, and I wanted to check it out. Your book. And it seems like instead of riding a horse that wants to go some other place, it's like the horse and the rider are more together, and even though the thing isn't pleasant, things are going on that hurt and that are not pleasant. But the horse and rider aren't in disagreement.

Joko: Right. This means you're experiencing your life as opposed to thinking about it.

Tom: Yeah, it seems more like that and it's really all right, even though things aren't right about it. I mean, in a normal sense.

Joko: Well, that's just your opinion.

Tom: In the normal sense.

Joko: Yeah, right.

Tom: It really is OK. It's similar to some of the stuff I have read in your books. Does that sound right?

Joko: Yeah, well the thing we're trying to get is the state of awareness. That means you're just sitting there and not playing with thoughts: "this is unpleasant, I don't like it. I wish the time was up." We may have those thoughts, but they get to be relatively unimportant.

Tom: Yeah, that's right. That's what it's like and the thoughts seem to be very few and just everything is part of a bigger picture.

Joko: Yeah, you just sit there and experience whatever there is to be experienced and without at least being dominated by thoughts that it's pleasant or unpleasant. Which is after all just your opinion.

Tom: OK, that's fine... Earlier we were talking about books, and I thought I understood what you meant but you said it's all right to read books and love books, if you don't believe what you read. But you don't mean factual material like when Napoleon left Elba, and things like that? That's something

else.

Joko: Well, I meant, you know, any kind of a technical book is fine. But when it come to books about...

Tom: Psychology.

Joko: [chuckle] Right. Remember, all sorts of people write books. So you really... you can try things from books, you can learn from them, but the only thing that really is a test of anything is what happens in your life from doing it. See what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: I had a telephone call once from a lady in Kansas, and she'd been reading books all her life and never had a teacher. And they were about to hospitalise her. Her mind was so screwed up. She'd read this term 'no thought' in some Zen book. So she'd been trying never to have any thoughts. And she'd almost driven herself crazy. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] OK. Right. Well, I didn't mean that... I...

Joko: No, I know you didn't.

Tom: If you read Tolstoy or history or mathematics or something, it's doesn't sound like a problem. Is that right? Yeah?

Joko: Well of course you can even get two opinions about something like mathematics sometimes.

Tom: Oh you can. Yes.

Joko: People have a way of worshipping anybody that writes a Zen book and there are some real screwy Zen books out.

Tom: Well, I've written enough books myself to know you mustn't believe them! [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] Well, OK, then you're all set.

Tom: [laughs] Yeh, OK.... There was just one last thing, from last time. The fear of death coming up, but that actually that was in the middle of the night, when maybe... it's not like I wander around in the daytime biting my nails.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, fear of death is...

Tom: But that hasn't happened recently, but at night I worry about cash-flow or fear of death or any other of these major problems!

Joko: Well they're all just unlabelled thoughts. OK? [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] OK. Thanks a lot.

15 Oct — it's comfortable at the bottom

Tom: Maybe for the first time, I haven't got a nest of questions for you.

Joko: All right.

Tom: But it's interesting to me that I had, I guess, a fairly rough period. It seemed like that. But then in a way it didn't matter, because I was just resting in it, in a way.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: A cushionless situation, where you just stay with it. Maybe it's uncomfortable, but it doesn't matter at the same time. It's like you haven't got anywhere to fall to. It's comfortable in the sense that....

Joko: It's the bottom. [laughs]

Tom: It's the bottom. [laughs]

Joko: Well you know, where you hit the bottom is where it's comfortable. Because in a way, there's nowhere to go. So you're comfortable.

Tom: Yeahhhh. I'm not even sure there any question of what's next here.

Joko: Well, the whole thing in life is to experience what it is you experience in the moment. And if it's an emotion, you have know that you feel that. That you feel angry, you feel unhappy, you feel whatever you feel. And practice is simply to experience that without trying to fix it or change it. Just rest in it.

Tom: Yeah, it takes a little while to get to that.

Joko: Well, it can take a lifetime. It takes a lifetime to really do this, you know, a lot. But any amount you do it, begins to change your life.

Tom: Yeh, I noticed....The last couple of days I was flying around up north doing a job. So I guess that's at least a lift in physical terms. [laughs]

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah! That's fine. So ask yourself, am I right here? Am I experiencing whatever I am at this moment?

Tom: As you go through the day...

Joko: And that's a good question. Hum? Go ahead.

Tom: Right through the day, as much as possible...

Joko: Well, I don't mean to distract yourself from your work. But this gets to be almost subliminal after awhile. You know, you're sitting in a meeting - you do meetings?

Tom: Yes. I had two days of meetings in fact.

Joko: If you're sitting in a meeting, you ask yourself: what am I feeling right now? Do you feel: "It's boring. I resent being here." It doesn't matter that it doesn't make any sense. You have to feel whatever you feel. [chuckles] OK?

Tom: Yeah, I understand.

Joko: Then it evolves into something that makes sense. But you have to start with what you honestly

feel.

Tom: That's where you are. The bottom, like the bottom line, as they say.

Joko: Uh-huh, that's the bottom line.

Tom: I wonder why all these things are here? Nature seems to have overdone it a bit. I mean, a coke machine doesn't work and you get quite upset.

Joko: Well, that's very primitive stuff, and you know, we are animals. We forget all about it, because we think we're better than that. It's not all we are, but that's there. See what I mean? If we pretend it's not there, then that angry energy just comes out someplace else.

Tom: I guess it has a use. But it's certainly overdoing it.

Joko: Well, the energy is useful, see? The energy is very useful. But as long as you identify something with yourself, which is what anger is, it tends to be destructive. It frees up energy if you can get out of your personal identification with whatever you're angry about.

Tom: It's all helping. It's helping a lot.

Joko: So if you're beginning to feel a little differently in your life, then your practice is working.

Tom: It's surprising that it takes this particular course, but it really helps.

Joko: OK?

Tom: OK. I'll just wish you a good day, I guess.

Joko: Yeah. OK. [laughs] Have a nice weekend.

22 October — something larger, and the internet

Tom: Last time, at the end, you said something that's been going around in my head a bit. You said that in doing this observation of what's going on, it doesn't matter if it doesn't make sense. Now I didn't know whether you meant that it didn't matter whether the feelings and things you observed don't make sense, or whether the whole process doesn't make sense. *Joko:* Well, the process makes sense.

Tom: Not to me, you mean?

Joko: Well what I'm saying is what usually doesn't make sense is we find that we may have a feeling of resentment when everything really...

Tom: Ah.

Joko: It's not like that. See what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, OK.

Joko: Because we're not really rational beings. We think we are, but we're not.

Tom: OK, well that does make sense. OK. I get you.

Joko: All right... Any other questions?

Tom: Yeah, I was wondering... it's clear that I don't run this show. Who does?

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] You know what I mean?

Joko: Well, is there any show? That would be the next question.

Tom: Ahhh. Well, all that goes on, all the interconnected events.

Joko: Seemingly goes on. Seemingly goes on. Yeah. See, one thing you see clearly if you've been sitting long enough is there is no space or time. So if there's no space or time, what is all this?

Tom: That's why I like talking to you... I always get knocked back to the centre.

Joko: I'm not going to answer that. Because you have to answer these things for yourself, Tom. See that's another side of sitting, but you can't really do that until you're fairly free of your personal agenda. That's why the practice is always with the personal agenda. When your mind is just clear and still, without any interference with all these things we think we want, and the emotions and all that stuff. Then we begin to sense some of this. But it's not something you can talk about....

Tom: OK. Fair enough.

Joko: If you talk about it, it's just philosophy. See what I mean?

Tom: I do, yes. OK. Well, it wasn't a big deal, I just sort of...

Joko: No, but I'm just saying that the whole course of practice is to become freer and freer of this domination of the personal self. See what I mean? And until that's true, you can't see something that's larger than that.

Tom: No, that also feels right and also makes sense in itself. OK.

Joko: Right. See if you were in a closed room with no windows, if that's the world you're living in, that closed room, you can't possibly even know that that room is contained in a much larger room. See what I mean?

Tom: I do.

Joko: There's no way. You might think about it intellectually. But you don't really know it. So that's what practice is about. To break out of that small room, you might say.

Tom: I had a nice metaphor of that this week: I got onto the internet. Plugged into the internet. My word, that's a big world out there!

Joko: Sounds like fun.

Tom: Stepping into infinity. It really is.

Joko: I wish I knew how to do that computer stuff. I think I'd enjoy that.

Tom: I was on to the NASA computer and I was all over the place. All at the cost of a local telephone call.

Joko: Amazing.

Tom: It is really amazing. It was exactly the feeling of stepping out. Anyway.

Joko: I think the actuality is, it really is one world. I mean in that sense. And that we really haven't caught up with it yet.

Tom: It's a beautiful system. I mean, I shouldn't be yakking away to you like this, but it's a big a thing as the invention of printing. A big change.

Joko: Well, the idea we have separate countries is already crazy. You know what I mean? Financial interchanges..

Tom: It doesn't seem like that sitting here.

Joko: [laughs] Well, I think it's again a lot like the little mind. If you're caught by this notion of separate countries, then we get into trouble. You know. They're colourful and interesting. It's fun. But you can't get caught by anything. So... it's just about like sitting. So... anything else, Tom?

Tom: I had this interesting kind of rough and elated ride on the internet, which then actually brought up a lot of stuff as I went along, like a kid trying to learn how to ride a bicycle. You fall off and bump your knee, and then you're feeling good for awhile. So that's all interesting, as a practice. But anyway...

Joko: Uh-huh. I think so.

Tom: Some week. OK?

Joko: OK.

Tom: Thanks a lot.

29 Oct — old territory

Tom: A week of going around old territory. What would happen is I'd think: I'm not doing very well at this today. And then I'll think: ah, that's just another one of those things, isn't it?

Joko: One of those thoughts.

Tom: Just one of those thoughts. And so it would go. Basically I'm re-doing things I've done before. I guess there's no harm in that.

Joko: There's no harm in anything.

Tom: [laughs]

Tom: That's a fresh thought. And that's about the way it's been, except that I've been involved in exploring the internet. And that's been like exploring a labyrinth...

Joko: It's nice...

Tom: It's fun. As I was doing that and having so much fun, I thought: should I be having so much fun? [laughs]

Joko: What's wrong with having fun?

Tom: I guess nothing.

Joko: [laughs] Why do you have thoughts that it's not? Just have fun. Do you want to stop and analyse and think and get hard on yourself?

Tom: Well, not very much, no. Occasionally, when I'm going really over the top and it's been going on for hours...

Joko: OK. All right, just enjoy yourself.

Tom: Yeh.

Joko: Any questions?

Tom: No. That's about it. That's interesting! [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] All right. Bye-bye.

12 November — in control of what?

Tom: Is there something unusual about today? I had a long time getting through... have there been any changes?

Joko: Most people do. [laughs] What's unusual is if they don't. Anyway.

Tom: So there's no change at that end or anything?

Joko: No.

Tom: I know you're onto daylight savings time now.

Joko: Uh-huh. Right.

Tom: Ummm... Ah, I feel a bit lost, actually. Maybe it's not a bad thing, but I used to think I knew what I was doing in the sitting. But now the sitting seems, ah, well, I get the feeling I don't know what I'm doing so well any more. But during the day, it's actually clearer.

Joko: Well, remember sitting isn't about doing something right. What's it about?

Tom: It's about being aware of what comes up.

Joko: Yeah, and you know, if we're kicking up some turmoil stuff, it's not going to feel very good or very clear. But it's still essential. You get the difference?

Tom: Yeaaaah. Ah... well, what you said last time, has been a great help, that one must expect to... how you'd put it?... if it doesn't make sense, that's still all right. It doesn't have to make sense.

Joko: Not necessarily.

Tom: Not necessarily. Right.

Joko: Well, because the levels of ourself we're dealing with are not the superficial logical levels. You know, there's a certain amount of chaos in any human being. And as that boils around and surfaces one way or another, all we can do is to be aware of that. And that's not necessarily always going to feel good. But it's freeing. You understand?

Tom: Yeh. I have to take that on faith obviously, that it's freeing. But it's certainly confusing. I used to feel there was a substratum of things which were right and obvious. Now even those things don't even seem obvious any more.

Joko: What's right and obvious is that we're alive, we're free to do whatever we want and we can always be happy. That's the substratum you're talking about.

Tom: Ah.

Joko: But that is always muddled up by what I call systems. In other words, our personally centred thoughts.

Tom: I think I was talking about systems which I had assumed were correct and now it's becoming obvious that even those kind of deeper systems are just more of the same sort of stuff.

Joko: Well, the kind of systems I'm talking about are decisions made way back in childhood, where our life goes way off the track. And this is almost universal. And sitting is simply to put us back on the track, so we can see that from the very beginning, we're free. For the most part, happy. So do you know what I mean by that?

Tom: I'm not quite sure. I've heard that before, and it's encouraging but I haven't...

Joko: You haven't personally encountered it. Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, I've had a very long day with a lot of emergencies, so I don't want to do it today, but next time you call, I'd like to do some direct work on that. OK?

Tom: On what?

Joko: A little different kind of work than we've done.

Tom: OK, I'll bring that up next time.

Joko: Yeh. And in the meantime just continue to label your thoughts, feel your body sensations and notice you always have an agenda for your life. The way it's supposed to be. Isn't that true?

Tom: That's right.

Joko: Now who set up that agenda, Tom?

Tom: Well, I don't know.

Joko: See life is always just doing what it's doing. It bounces along, but it's how we view that that's the interesting part.

Tom: Some of these things are like tree stumps that are so rooted it's amazing. That's what it feels like.

Joko: Well, that's what I'm talking about. But that's you, see? Life itself is really no problem. But if

we're rooted in this belief system or that belief system, then life is nothing but problems. The key to a free happy life, is to root out the systems.

Tom: Well, the life seems all right. It's the sitting that seems confused.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: The day seems bright and clear, and as soon as I sit, then it gets murky and confused.

Joko: Uh-huh. What do you mean by that?

Tom: Well I don't know what's going on. I don't know what to make of it and...

Joko: You have to know that?

Tom: I feel lost in all of these... this process.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I'm not too worried about it, but that's how I feel at the moment. Whereas before, I used to...

Joko: Feel what?

Tom: Huh?

Joko: What would it feel like to you not to be lost?

Tom: Well, to feel that I had an agenda that I knew what I was doing,...

Joko: That you're in control.

Tom: In control, a program that I...

Joko: Ahhhhhhhhhh! [laughs]

Tom: Which is what I used to feel like [chuckles] in sitting.

Joko: I know.

Tom: I feel: ah, well this is where I'm going...

Joko: Did your life work?

Tom: Well, obviously...

Joko: In other words, what did you call me for?

Tom: [laughs] No, well, OK.

Joko: The business of control, if you see what that means or doesn't mean. Is what we're really talking about.

Tom: I see what you're getting at. I've noticed that change, what we're talking about here, the lack of

control.

Joko: Tell me something you're in control of, Tom.

Tom: Uhhh... in control of. My computer? [laughs]

Joko: Maybe.

Tom: Most of the time, yeah.

Joko: Things like that, I mean in a certain sense.

Tom: Some technical things, yes.

Joko: But are you in control of your body?

Tom: No!

Joko: No?! [laughs] It's a good part of your life. Are you in control of your mind?

Tom: Not very well.

Joko: Not really. Not really. Never will be. It just pops up stuff. Uh-huh. Are you in control of other people?

Tom: Certainly not. Definitely not.

Joko: No? You're not in control of anything really.

Tom: I guess it's adjusting to this that's causing the problems.

Joko: Well, see, we really think if we're in control then we'd be safe.

Tom: Yeah. Yeah.

Joko: So if you're not in control, what's it mean to be a happy person?

Tom: Not in control, what's it mean to be happy...

Joko: Ah, sticky, huh?

Tom: Yeh. That's interesting.

Joko: It's just like your sitting. It's confusing. See your sitting is beginning to loosen that way of thinking, and that's why you're beginning to find it confusing. And that's just fine.

Tom: Good. Well that's good to hear.

Joko: Oh course. You're doing real well. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: Somebody said that Zen is the only real self-destruct... you know, it's the one practice that destroys itself. [laughs] So, as you sit you slowly lose these belief systems. So, you're doing just fine.

OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: But remind me next time to do this other kind of work. It will also make some things clearer. OK?

Tom: OK. Thanks a lot.

Joko: All right? OK, Tom. Bye-bye.

19 November — losing a bit of control

Tom: Last time you said to remind you about doing something different. I'm not sure what it was. We were talking about control.

Joko: Yeah, OK. I get it.

Tom: Which has certainly been...

Joko: The bane of your existence?

Tom: An arresting thought [laughs]

Joko: All right. Let's do this. It's a process. The first step is you have to state something that's making you feel unhappy.

Tom: Right at the moment, you mean?

Joko: Any stuff, like I'm unhappy because my husband's running around with other women. Something like that. Plain ordinary stuff.

Tom: I guess I'm a little bit unhappy that I'm having trouble with somebody I'm collaborating with on a project. Is that good enough?

Joko: It could be. It has to not just be it kind of bothers you a little. But that you're really a bit unhappy about this. Is that true?

Tom: Uh, it's minor, actually. It's an irritation.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, let's try it.

Tom: OK. [laughs] I've written something, and he's come in and sort of messed it up. And I've got to get along with this guy, and it's a bit of a problem.

Joko: I see.

Tom: It's happened before.

Joko: OK, let me ask you what bothers you about that. In that sort of situation, what bothers you?

Tom: Well, that I should be doing it, not him. He doesn't really realise what his position is here. I have to educate him on that, I think.

Joko: OK, so it bothers you that he enters this project in a way you don't feel he should. That right? That accurate?

Tom: Yes, he doesn't understand his role properly yet.

Joko: And what bothers you when somebody doesn't understand their role?

Tom: [pause] It gets in my way.

Joko: Say a little more about that.

Tom: [pause] Yeh, I can't do what I want, I guess. [laughs] I can see what's happening here... It gets on my patch, and I can't do it the way I think it should be done.

Joko: You feel in a way, he's in your territory and it takes away your control?

Tom: Yeh.

Joko: Is that accurate?

Tom: Yeh, that would be right.

Joko: OK, and when your control is at least not perfect, how does that bother you?

Tom: When it... sorry? When it's not perfect?

Joko: Yeh, well, when you lose some control. Why does that bother you?

Tom: [pause] Why does it bother me? Ah. That's a good one. Well, a territorial feeling. It's my patch. I should be able to deal with...

Joko: Nevertheless, it's true enough. But I'm saying why does that bother you?

Tom: It's not obvious why it should bother me.

Joko: I'll tell you, Tom, we're in the middle of a long process. But I'm concerned that each step accurate. So I'm going to leave you with this step right here.

Tom: Yeah?

Joko: It's like a koan. I just want this to kind of slip through your days and your sitting, OK? And the question that you stated is - or I'm stating it partly - is: why does it bother you when you lose a little bit of your control?

Tom: Yeh, OK.

Joko: Have you got that?

Tom: Yes. I definitely have it!

Joko: OK, so write it down, when you're off the phone. And use it as a koan. Which means you don't sit and worry about it. You just kind of let it float around.

Tom: It's already floating around.

Joko: Even if you let it float in your sitting, OK?

Tom: Yes.

Joko: All right?

Tom: Very interesting.

Joko: OK. That's all we're going to do today.

Tom: Fine.

Joko: All right. Cheap phone call.

Tom: [laughs] See you. Bye.

3 December — the collapse of dreams

Tom: I was working on that deeply puzzling question that you posed last time and it got me going. I haven't really got an answer to it. It seems to be associated with somehow primitively labelling things MINE.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: But I get all kinds of funny answers that come up.

Joko: Well, it's something to do... one exercise you might do as you continue to work on it, is to just write down everything that you were trained to be when you were a small child.

Tom: Yeah? That I was trained to be?

Joko: Well, you know, where some people are trained to be orderly, some people are trained to be good, some people are trained to be spunky little kids.

Tom: Yes.

Joko: But what were you trained to be? See? Not just your parents, but just the general culture, what it was telling you.

Tom: Ah. Well, yes that's certainly at the level I'm kind of getting answers back on this question.

Joko: Yeah. That has something to do with it, see?

Tom: I let it float around in the background, as you said..

Joko: Yeah. Well, you don't HAVE to do this but there's something in here that will be useful to you.

Tom: Oh, yeah. I think there is. The other thing, I don't know if you're into dreams, but I had one that was almost more than a dream, almost a message. I was walking down a country road and I felt all my dreams collapse — had collapsed. From childhood. Like I once dreamed of being an eminent scientist. But I felt it had all fallen down. And it was such a nice feeling.

Joko: That has something to do with this koan.

Tom: It has?

Joko: Yeh.

Tom: Not surprised. It was a wonderful day I had after that. Feeling it had all dropped away.

Joko: Well there's something here, it will get clearer to you. But I think you're getting something out of it just by considering it. See what I mean?

Tom: I think so.

Joko: I'll help you with a little bit after awhile, if you need it. But I think you're learning just by playing with it. OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: Even on a level where I think you hardly know. So, that's good.

10 December — three lists

Tom: You asked me to write down a little list of what people expected me to be when I was young. That was quite easy to do, in fact. Tidy, clean, quiet, hard-working...

Joko: Well, I want you to keep adding to these lists.

Tom: Yeah?

Joko: What we learned when we were little is thousands of things really.

Tom: Yes.

Joko: It's not just that we were told to be good or told to be this or that. That's part of it. For instance, you learn something by just how your household was. It was very quiet, it was very noisy, it was very friendly, it was very subdued. You see what I mean?

Tom: Of course, there were other influences too. My grandparents were quite different, and I spent a lot of time there. And it was a strong contrast.

Joko: Yeh, that's also in there. See, I want you to include anything like that.

Tom: Oh. Ok, well, that's going to be quite a...

Joko: A young child is just looking, trying to make sense out of life. So naturally the people he looks to are these big people that take care of him. And he's listening and, not just to how they tell him to be, but he's watching, absorbing and learning. OK?

Tom: Definitely, yeah.

Joko: Some of it's good, some is something else. But this material, out of which you form yourself.. My house, because nobody ever spoke to anybody, was very very quiet, very gloomy.

Tom: Oh -- really?

Joko: Uh-huh. So you see you learn from that...

Tom: No one spoke to anybody. You mean, they just didn't talk much?

Joko: Well, we'd have meals sometimes, where no one said anything for months.

Tom: [laughs] Not like around here, I can tell you!

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, I'm saying, this teaches the young child something. You see what I mean? You draw conclusions out of this. So, I want you to look not just at the obvious things, but some of the more subtle things, OK?

Tom: Right. OK.

Joko: All right. For instance, I woke up the other morning and it dawned on me -- I'd never thought of this before -- that I was trained, when I was a child, to get out of bed, to get dressed very carefully, very neatly, to come down to breakfast, to be very quiet, not to bother anybody. Just to get off to school without causing a ripple. You see what I mean?

Tom: [chuckles] Yes.

Joko: And I still do that. It just dawned on me that nobody, when I was little, taught me to celebrate the beginning of a day. See what I mean?

Tom: Oh, yeah.

Joko: See these things are very much in the forming of the way you see your life. So I'm just saying, be aware of what's going on. That's all... So what's on your list?

Tom: Oh, what's on the list is tidy, clean, quiet -- particularly, children are supposed to be seen and not heard, that kind of stuff, which I actually heard as a definite statement [chuckles] a lot -- hard-working, and potentially famous. There was a drift in that direction, to do something really amazing.

Joko: Really amazing.

Tom: But that was on my parent's side. The grandparents side was very different. They ran a little farm and they encouraged me to enjoy myself, to take risks, have a good time, go out and get dirty -- it didn't really matter. What a contrast. So that's the list I've got so far. It's not an extensive one.

Joko: This isn't something you sit down and think about. Just like I didn't think about that little thing the other morning. But once you get your mind so it includes this, it's amazing what floats up. You see what I mean?

Tom: Oh yes.

Joko: Uh-huh. Now the second list, did you work on that?

Tom: What second list?

Joko: Oh, all right. That's the first list. How you're required to be, OK? I want you to continue with that, if you can think of anything. OK? Including your grandparents input. Now the second list I want you to work on is... you see what happens is that after we get a little bit older, at some point we point we take all this material — it's as though you entered a room and dragged all this material in —

which you've been learning. Then you shut the door and decide this is yours now, this is the way you have to be. You forgot that somebody taught it to you and now it becomes yours. Some of it may be identical with what was taught to you. Some of it may be a rebellion against it.

Tom: I get you. You fashion a kind of Leggo personality out of all those things.

Joko: Yeah. Because this is where, what I call systems, are born out of this. Because we require ourselves to be these things. Not that we even necessarily want to be them, but we think we have to. See what I mean?

Tom: I see. Yeah.

Joko: You might have an idea: I always have to be on time. Or I always have to be a kind, thoughtful person.

Tom: So these are self-constructed things based on that material.

Joko: Yeah. Right. I want you to see that this isn't exactly necessarily what you want to do with your life. Some of it may be. But some it is just almost a mechanical construction.

Tom: Popped in there somehow, yes.

Joko: And you think now, that this is who you are. And what's more, if you don't fulfil these qualities that you think you have to be, you will feel angry or depressed or something of that sort. Because a small child that isn't a good child — it doesn't have to be said in words — but somehow you get the idea that you should feel bad about that.

Tom: So that second list is a list of these constructs, like I should be this and that? Is that the idea?

Joko: Well, the second list now, the one you really make out of the first list, you see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah. I was just looking for a key kind of question. I get the idea, but...

Joko: Well, the heading of the list would probably be: how I require myself to be, as a grown-up.

Joko: There can be a third list. You can do that too if you want: which is, since I feel required to be this, there's bound to be anger and resentment underneath it.

Tom: Uh-huh.

Joko: And I want to see what kinds of negativity you have. Some people get depressed, some get kind of critical, some get gloomy. There are all sorts of ways of expressing that anger of being required to be a certain way.

Tom: I get the picture.

Joko: So for the next time you call, I want you to complete all three lists. It's not that they're ever complete. But at least get some of the main ones, OK?

Tom: Meanwhile, on this enigmatic question...

Joko: See, that's related to this.

Tom: Oh, right. OK.

Joko: That's why we're doing it.

Tom: So I won't bother with that then.

Joko: Well, if you have anything to say about it, I'd be glad to hear it.

Tom: Well, it's just that it's very puzzling. It seems to go back to "I want" something, or "I don't want" something. Then if it happens or it doesn't happen, then I get mad. But I can't understand why I get angry about it.

Joko: Well, what would it mean about you if it were absolutely OK for you to be a failure?

Tom: I wouldn't exist.

Joko: There's more. See you are getting it. That's one and then there's more.

Tom: It's an awfully fundamental thing.

Joko: Well, there's a point we're making out of all this, that I could tell it to you, but it's different if you scramble through it yourself. You see what I mean?

Tom: Oh yes, yeah. I appreciate that.

Joko: So, you're beginning to get it. See, what would it show about you, or what are you afraid it would show about you? If you just didn't care you were a failure?

Tom: It's another angle on it. I'll run with those.

Joko: All right, and complete you lists --- I don't say complete, but work on them. All right. Enough for now. Yeah.

Tom: Righteo.

Joko: All right, Tom. Bye-bye.

17 Dec — it's OK to be a failure

Tom: Well, you left me with some interesting things. Could I ask you about the one that's been puzzling me most?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: That's the one where you said, "What would it be like to you if it were absolutely OK to be a failure?"

Joko: What would it mean about you, see?

Tom: What it means.... could I ask you a bit, I'm not sure I've really got the right angle on this thing.

Joko: [chuckles] OK, well -- it's a koan, see?

Tom: [laughs] Is it?! Oh. OK.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: If I'm a failure, then we wouldn't have any money in the family. And then I go down that path of consequences. And that's probably not what you mean, is it?

Joko: No. Failure is the way you see yourself. See, that's got nothing to do with what's really happening.

Tom: Ah, OK. So I was operating on it the wrong way.

Joko: There are people that in the eyes of the world are very successful. And they still see themselves as failures.

Tom: Sooooo... I'm not too sure...

Joko: Tom, I'm going to leave you with that.

Tom: Yesss..

Joko: I can help you with it maybe. But I don't want to do it today. I want you to work something else, which will be related to this. I want you to make three lists. The first list is how you were trained to be, when you were a small child.

Tom: I've actually done that.

Joko: Have you done the other two?

Tom: Yeah, I worked a bit on the other two. I've got those written down in fact. So I have been working on that, yeah.

Joko: All right, as long as you're working on that. The thing I want you to get is the third list, which is the negativity which is underneath the second. Have you done work on that?

Tom: Yeah, I have. That was pretty plain, actually.

Joko: Yeah, well see if you have a life where you require yourself to be a certain way, which is what this second list is, it's bound to have negativity in it. Now the question, the koan, see if it were to be OK with you to be a failure...

Tom: Yeahhhhh....?

Joko: You see that would be...

Tom: Related, certainly, yes...

Joko: That would be a violation of what you require yourself to be?

Tom: Ahhhhh, yes, quite right.

Joko: You see what I mean?

Tom: Yes I do. OK.

Joko: See the point is, if you're going to live a life out of requirements, which is what we do. It's not

OK to be anything negative, you see what I mean? Because that would be, from the standpoint of your requirements, a very bad thing to be. See what I mean?

Tom: Definitely, yes. OK.

Joko: So you require yourself then, also to be miserable.

Tom: Huh? [laughs] Sorry, what was the last one?

Joko: [laughs] Well, if I'm living a life, as most people are, where I require myself to be a lot of things. I might require myself to be...

Tom: Yeah, I got it up to that very last point. I didn't see the last step.

Joko: Well, you see if you were an enlightened person, it would be OK with you to be a failure. Because you just see that and move on to something else. But it's not OK with you to be anything like failure, worthless, depressed or whatever you're doing. Because that would be going against your requirements. You see what I'm saying: there's no way you can have a life that's pleasant, because those requirements will be kicking up this negativity all the time.

Tom: Yeahhhhh. I see how it all ties in. Yes, I get what you mean.

Joko: See how it fits?

Tom: Yeah, if I just dwell on that a bit.

Joko: Well, I want you to see that the average human life -- it may not look like that to outsiders -- but underneath those requirements, there's unhappiness.

Tom: I'm well aware of what's underneath my requirements. Yes.

Joko: See, the third list is really glued to the second list. It's like the backside of the second list. So if you have a life requiring yourself to be a certain way, you're also requiring yourself to be unhappy. See that's the point. Now the enlightened life, is sort of to peel the third list off the second list. Then you have a life of no requirements. You respond to what life wants, as opposed to responding to what your systems want. See what I'm saying?

Tom: I do, yes. That's very neat.

Joko: So whenever in your life, you find yourself being any of your negativities, whatever that list is. It could be depressed, anxious. Then you want to ask yourself the question: well, what do I require myself to be? See? Something is violating that requirement.

Tom: Ah, OK. So it's tripping off a system.

Joko: And then you can, in your body, feel the misery that's going on. Just stay with that until you can sort of come up for air. And then at some point you can ask yourself: well, do I really need to do this? You DON'T need to do it. What you do need to do is face the problem that's existing there. And work on it.

Tom: You mean the actual problem in life.

Joko: Well, yeah, that's all you can ever do. And you don't have to like that problem. But that's different from personally being upset by it. You see the difference?

Tom: I do. Yeah.

Joko: The reason I put so much time in on that -- you might say a sort of a picture of the ego structure -- those three lists give you a picture of how you're wired, see what I mean?

Tom: It makes it a lot easier. Because you can look at yourself, in a way, in the same way you look at your fingernails.

Joko: Right. You can say, Oh -- what requirement is being, I might say, kicked at here?

Tom: Yeh. It becomes more objective, the whole thing.

Joko: It's kind of neat, because once you get the idea, it makes for a very -- not easy -- but a clear practice. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, I do indeed. That's come together very nicely.

Joko: OK. Well, that's why we're doing it.

Tom: I couldn't really understand how the bits were fitting together. I was having a lot of trouble with this being OK to be a failure. I couldn't see what you were getting at.

Joko: Well, see, as long as you have requirements on yourself, it's not OK, because you'd be a terrible person if you were just not struggling with that all the time. Because you tell yourself: I have to be a certain kind of person.

Tom: Yes, very strongly in fact. Hmmmmm [laughs].

Joko: [laughs] See, there's nothing wrong with being that way. But it's the requirement that it should be that way, which is the trouble. You get the difference? I mean, if I require myself, for instance, to be endlessly patient.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: There's going to be anger under that, see what I mean? Now there's nothing wrong with being patient. That's a very nice way to be, when it's just your natural self.

Tom: I just have to tell you something I saw on the wall. You know mottoes and things that people put up on the walls. I was in a house with a traditional Irish family yesterday. And I saw one of these embroidered things. What it said was: Lord give me patience... but, please hurry.

Joko: Yes, that's cute. Welllll, relate it to what we're doing. That's wonderful. Yeah OK, Tom, that's all I'm going to say about that. Because I think you see where to go with it now? See, it's a very rich vein.

Tom: OK. Are you -- I've had some newsletters from you -- are you in next week? Are you there next week?

Joko: Yeah. But I won't be teaching. [laughs] What you meant, is would I be on the phone. No. The last two weeks I won't. It's just impossibly busy here.

Tom: Well, good Christmas, good sesshin...

Joko: Yeah, same to you. Bye-bye.

1995

7 Jan — keep off my list!

Tom: It's getting better. It's all right. Here I am surrounded by various interesting lists, which we were talking about last time.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And a few times before. This is one of the most useful things I've come across. Because whatever happens..

Joko: Yes. That's what everybody says.

Tom: It's...

Joko: I don't want to go through your whole list, Tom. But I'd like you to read me a little bit of each list. First list, what do you read?

Tom: The first list is a more traditional quiet, good, hard-working, tidy, on-time, clean, kind of things.

Joko: Uh-huh. OK.

Tom: And the second list, required to be, is like efficient, accurate, hard-working, and interestingly enough, independent. I don't really want to feel that I depend on other people, and because these other things felt too stifling.

Joko: Yeah. Would you call this rebellion against your first list?

Tom: Probably. Yeh.

Joko: Because the second list usually consists -- with some people, it's just a copy of the first list -- with some people it's partly that and partly, "I want to be the opposite."

Tom: Yeh, well it's a bit of a mixture. It's an efficient rebellion against it in a way.

Joko: Yeah, well...

Tom: My mother was a schoolteacher, and my father was in the military. And so are very bound-in kind of professions, of course.

Joko: Uh-huh. Right.

Tom: And have these various features within the first list. But then I seem to have carried some of that stuff away and decided I didn't want to get tied into a structure like that. But I carried away what I guess you might call some of the virtues. Which seems quite interesting to me.

Joko: Well, we carry both. And sometimes we even have requirements that contradict each other. I have people that want to be out in the world and have everyone admire them, but they also want to isolate themselves. [laughs] So you can't do both! But they've learned both. Maybe one from the mother, and one from the father. So it's interesting to see how people live their lives with these contradictory requirements.

Tom: Yeah, it helps...

Joko: It helps a great deal to see this.

Tom: Whatever pressures come up, you can relate it to the structure. And it makes sense.

Joko: Well, I'll talk more about it in a minute, but just tell me briefly about your third list. The emotions, that ooze out of the second list.

Tom: Well, a kind of anxiety about not getting things perfect. I can't believe the ridiculous requirements I've been putting on myself, now that I see them.

Joko: Well, were they born early in the first list?

Tom: Sorry?

Joko: Do you see that the requirements of the second list were born from the first?

Tom: Yes. I can quite well. But kind of over-the-top versions, in some cases. In the sense of wanting to become absolutely the best in certain areas. Things like that. Which doesn't at all match reality. Yet they're still stuck in there. Amazingly.

Joko: Yeah, well the third list is produced by the second list. I always say it's like it's glued onto it. Now what would practice mean with all this? See, the three lists are really your ego structure.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Now what does practice mean in all this?

Tom: It would have to mean, I guess, being aware of how what happens fits into the list.

Joko: Yeah, that's the first thing. For instance, if somebody makes you angry or hurts your feelings, the human natural thing to do is to feel is that person is responsible for your misery. Now, he isn't. All he's done is to attack your list.

Tom: [laughs] I like it! Keep off my list, mate! Yeah.

Joko: In a simple sense, what a person does might make you angry, but it might not make somebody else angry.

Tom: Sure. Of course.

Joko: So it's the not the fact that he does that, but...

Tom: He stepped on my list.

Joko: Yeah, he stepped on your list all right. So the thing that finally frees us, slowly, from our list, is to experience your anger or emotion or anxiety, as a pure physical sensation.

Tom: Yeah, this is the very first thing we talked about, way back.

Joko: But I want to show you more about how it fits into your life. Because that begins to weaken the requirement that second list consists of. See everything on the second list isn't bad. It's just that you

require it of yourself, so it's rigid. It doesn't have any fluidity.

Tom: That's clear. Or much clearer than it used to be.

Joko: So the point of experiencing is that it begins to take the requirement out of the second list. And it leaves you then much more open to just responding to life in an appropriate manner. Instead of responding to your list, really. You see what I mean? That's the enlightened state.

Tom: I see exactly what you're saying.

Joko: So there's endless things to say about these lists, but for your next go-round, I want you to just be aware during the day of the flickering of the third list, which is your little reactions to what's happening. See?

Tom: Yeah. It's really a reaction to, basically, a requirement.

Joko: And then just see if you can find the requirement that is being upset.

Tom: Yeah, well, that's been happening almost by itself now that I've become aware of the list. Just because I've got that structure.

Joko: See, there are a lot of things that you don't see at first, even as requirements. You might think just think that's life. And they might very well just be a requirement.

Tom: I can well see how it could go on for quite a bit.

Joko: It can go on for years. And there are other subtle things. I don't want to get into today about it. Mostly I just want you to do what you're doing. Which is to be aware of when the third list is activated. And that will point back to your second list. OK?

Tom: Indeed. Yeah. OK.

Joko: And that enables you to be freer to just experience it.

Tom: OK.

Joko: And that enlarges your life. OK?

Tom: It's helping already.

Joko: Well OK, I have more to say about it. But I can't say it today. And you have enough to do.

Tom: Indeed I do. You too.

Joko: So much work to be done with this. Yeah. OK, Tom?

Tom: Thanks a lot.

14 Jan — kids shouldn't be fighting!

Tom: Last time we were talking about the lists again. And you saying to concentrate on the flickering of the third list.

Joko: Uh-huh. That's what shows up.

Tom: Actually, I wasn't very successful at it. [laughs]

Joko: That's what you're going to learn to be more successful at. See, that's in the body. And this is a kind of practice you have to strengthen, and it takes time.

Tom: Well, I guess I was successful in spotting little twitches and flickers. But I couldn't really relate it to a requirement. I guess that was the problem.

Joko: Well, what was happening? How come your body was twitching at all?

Tom: Well, maybe they're there, but I couldn't really put my finger on it. I guess I get absorbed watching what's going on in the body and that absorbs about 100% of my attention.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: And then I don't have any left over to try to work it out. Where the requirement's coming from.

Joko: Well, you know the body wouldn't be reacting unless something isn't going the way you think it should go. Somebody's not nice to you, or you're critical of something yourself that you're doing. See, those requirements are very rigid and so they're being attacked almost all the time.

Tom: I don't doubt that's what's happening. I just couldn't really get to it.

Joko: Well, that's all right. After you catch one or two, you're going to get to be more able to do that. It's like labelling your thoughts. At first we don't do very well at that. Then over time it gets a little bit better and then a little bit better. This kind of work is closely related to that. Do you see that?

Tom: Yeah, obviously it would be. Uh-huh.

Joko: I mean your second list is really just the thoughts that buzz around in your head all the time.

Tom: I seemed to be getting quite a lot of that the week before. Discovering insane requirements I was making on myself.

Joko: Right. Well, just tell me in a conversational way, what sort of ways you feel miserable.

Tom: [pause]

Joko: Nobody ever makes you mad?

Tom: Yeh, the kids do, when they fight.

Joko: OK, then you have a requirement that they not fight. Right?

Tom: Yeaah. That's right. [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] Isn't it?

Tom: Ummmm. Yeah. I see what you mean.

Joko: That requirement is rigid. It's not real. You see what I mean? You don't have to like their

fighting, but if you have a requirement they not fight, then that's unreal.

Tom: I don't know why I didn't see that.

Joko: So anything that makes you angry. Your wife ever make you angry?

Tom: Yes. She does! [laughs]

Joko: What do you require her to be then?

Tom: Ahhhhhmmm. I get cross when she goes out a lot and leaves me with the kids.

Joko: So you have a requirement that she not go out and leave you with the kids. Is that right? At least not too often.

Tom: That's right, actually.

Joko: Uh-huh. That right?

Tom: Yeh. It's maybe not so hard as I've been making out.

Joko: No. I'm just trying to point out to you, that everything in your life is pointing out to you where you're rigid. Your requirement is rigid.

Tom: Yeah, but fighting... well, it seems: Of course, they shouldn't be fighting!

Joko: Why not?

Tom: [laughs] Yes, why not?

Joko: You never fought when you were a kid?

Tom: All the time. Yeah.

Joko: See, I'm not saying they don't need to be taught something. But you're saying they shouldn't be fighting.

Tom: You're right. I just assumed that they shouldn't be.

Joko: Ah-hah. They're human beings, see?

Tom: Isn't that interesting. Well-well. OK. With renewed vigour, I'll keep going here.

Joko: Well, I'm trying to say anything that makes you unhappy is pointing to a requirement, see?

Tom: I guess the problem is that I assume they're part of nature. But actually, they are just the requirements.

Joko: I mean, I didn't say that there's anything wrong with kids not fighting, but

Tom: Yeh, I heard that...

Joko: But to require them not to fight is an error. Because sometimes they'll fight. And maybe they learn something from that occasionally, you know? I think they can learn to handle things, other than

by fighting, but see an enlightened person is simply somebody who has no requirements. And they'd handle each disagreement with the kids according to what's really happening. See what I mean? Instead of just having a blanket requirement that you just dump on the whole thing.

Tom: Kids fighting particularly, is acutely difficult, because they're both blaming each other for a start, and you weren't there, so you don't know where the thing started. Both foaming at the mouth, and I find it very difficult.

Joko: Well, I'm not saying not to do anything about it. That's not what I said. But I said to have a requirement and to be angry is a waste of time.

Tom: Yeah, I see that clearly, now that you've pointed it out.

Joko: See, all you can do is to handle their fighting. But you don't have to be angry about it. You can be stern. But you don't need to be angry. It just wears you out, doesn't it?

Tom: Very, very interesting. OK. I got the point.

Joko: That's the sort of thing I want you to look at, see?

Tom: I was struggling, but I really wasn't getting at it.

Joko: Yeah, well something bothers you, it's pointing to a requirement, see?

Tom: Amazing. I'm surprised I didn't see that. Obviously they're all there, aren't they? Just pretending to be things you can't do anything about, or laws of nature almost.

Joko: Well, I don't think the laws of nature are like that.

Tom: No. [laughs]

Joko: See your wife is a complex human being. There isn't some way you can require her to be...

Tom: Indeed.

Joko: All right. That gives you a little grounds for thought. So just proceed with that OK?

Tom: Yeah that's good. That's what I needed. I couldn't sort of break through it.

Joko: Well, we'll keep talking. It's not that it's the only way to practise. But see the things like that that remain hidden, are rigid. They're running your life. It's not what a free life is about. It doesn't feel good to YOU. It feels angry.

Tom: I don't doubt the pattern. It's just so surprising how obvious it is when you point it out. [laughs]

Joko: All right. I want you to begin to be able to see it yourself. OK?

Tom: Yeah. OK.

Joko: OK, we'll talk again.

21 Jan — they're everywhere

Tom: An interesting week. We left off, you urging me to try to find the requirements that pop up, to

do it bit better.

Joko: You made your list?

Tom: Well, yeh, I made a list. But the last time I was complaining I was finding it hard to actually see them. You were pointing out some, very easily, to me that I hadn't seen.

Joko: I realise that, yeah.

Tom: And they're sort of popping up everywhere. I was horrified.

Joko: Well, it's not horrifying. It's necessary. Let's put it that way.

Tom: It was a horrifying discovering, in a way...

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: ... because it had been going on for so long. You know what I mean? [laughs]. Oooo.

Joko: It's really just a slight shift in your point of view. OK?

Tom: Boy, yes. It is. They're everywhere!

Joko: It's nice to see it, isn't it?

Tom: Yes, it is actually. It sort of painful, each one. But afterwards, you think: ooooo, that's nice.

Joko: Well, it's the gate to freedom. Isn't that what practice is about?

Tom: I can see that. That would be the way. My word. Quite a shock.

Joko: Uh-huh

Tom: OK, so that's what's been happening. Things like: I hire somebody to paint the house, and then I don't like the paint smell. They shouldn't be making that smell! Ridiculous stuff like that. The most crazy sort of demands.

Joko: So you have conflicting demands?

Tom: Very, very weird.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: So I'd say that's going well.

Joko: Yeh, well the first step is what you're doing. It leads you to see what your second list really is. See what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, that's right. Every time a red light goes on, you know...

Joko: Well, you feel it in your body for one thing.

Tom: Yeah, that's the red light. You know something's going on. You just look for it ... and the thing is, it lies on the surface too. I expected these things would be in the depths, but noooooo. It's quite

simple stuff.

Joko: Well, there may be some in the depths. But the first things you'll see for quite a while are the ones that you see easily.

Tom: It's like that Conan Dole story, where they hid a letter just by leaving it in the open. Nobody could see it, because it was so obvious.

Joko: Right.

Tom: It's a bit like that.

Joko: Well, at first that's true. But there can be things eventually that you can't find on your second list. But they still bother you.

Tom: I get the picture there. They're just sort of pressures that don't seem to be verbal requirements.

Joko: I'm not going to talk about those today. But I just want you to continue doing what you're doing, because it seems to be fruitful. And don't be upset about it. But just see what is. It's fine. And very slowly, as we work, you'll be a freer man. Isn't that what you want?

Tom: That's right.

Joko: And also happier. [chuckles]

Tom: Yes. [laughs]

Joko: Nothing wrong with that one, right?

Tom: No. That's correct. Yeh.

Joko: OK. Have you any questions?

Tom: No, I don't think I have questions. I guess I just wanted to enthusiastically report this.

Joko: Well, any real leap, any change like that is exciting. Because it frees up a lot of your life that you hadn't thought needed it.

Tom: Exactly. Yes.

Joko: Uh-huh. All right. Good.

Tom: OK.

Joko: So just continue and then we'll slowly do other things. But right now this is fruitful, so just keep doing this. OK?

Tom: Will do.

28 Jan — regressing to the first list

Tom: I was continuing as we've been discussing, and I maybe have an unwarranted feeling that I can get this all sorted out. Or rather that it will all get sorted out.

Joko: Well, it's not a cure-all. But it gives you an approach to your life that makes sense. See what I mean?

Tom: It's settling down things and whenever an aggravating situation arises, then I immediately go to that. It's astonishing. As you well know. Astonishing what you're assuming should be -- the world should be this way or that. Of course it isn't.

Joko: The world is always going to be the way it is, OK? Because other people have lists too, you know. You're not the only one. [chuckles]

Tom: [laughs] Yeh!

Joko: You got your list from your parents, and you're trying to live out of them, but other people have also got lists [laughs] and they're all doing the same thing, you know.

Tom: It's not only people, of course. Inanimate objects have their own willpower, in a way.

Joko: Oh yeah.

Tom: A certain way of doing things, machinery particularly.

Joko: Oh yeah, right!

Tom: [laughs] Yes, OK.... And in addition, when I'm sitting, now and then I get into I guess one of the ones that seems nameless. It's a feeling that sits there and grinds away and almost pops into focus. It doesn't seem to be in the same category -- at all. It seems to be much more primitive.

Joko: Well, don't worry about it. Just feel what you feel when you sit. But if in your daily life something is upsetting you or bothering you, and you can't find it on your second list. Then you need start asking, well, what is this? You know. I mean the other week I had a vague feeling of irritability. Restlessness. And yet there was nothing happening. Nothing on my list that was being disturbed, you know what I mean? So that's what I call looking in your first list, OK?

Tom: Ah. OK, I understand exactly what that means.

Joko: And that means you sit and just kind of ask: what is this? Not trying to answer it, but just letting it slowly surface by itself. See? That make sense?

Tom: That makes perfect sense, because I've had a few experiences of that. Not intellectual enough or verbal enough for the second list.

Joko: Well whatever bothers us is always born somewhere in the first list. If we didn't have that, we wouldn't be bothered. And so when you go back like that, you usually find something. Then out of that, you can see what's bothering you, what is your present second list. See what I mean? This is an interesting... a very sophisticated way of putting practice. But I still find people seem to know what to do with it. So... I'm making sense?

Tom: Yeah! It seems to me to be a lot clearer and easier to understand than, I don't know, Huan Suan talking about pink clouds in the 9th century, and things like that -- I have to admit.

Joko: Well, if you work this way long enough, you'll find that mostly they're saying: look, look to see what's going on. Don't get so caught in your head. But what we're doing enables people to understand, you know, how to work with that.

Tom: A bit of the structure.

Joko: Right. Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: Well, I can't say I've got any problems, except for the usual ones of life. [laughs]

Joko: Well, life keeps presenting problems, an arena for learning. So it will always present you with the next thing that you need to learn.

Tom: Particularly today! [laughs]

Joko: Well, that's what it does. We don't always like it, but when you take this approach, it begins to be rather interesting. OK? All right. Any other questions?

Tom: No, not really. I'm just checking...

Joko: Well, you will have questions. And then we'll talk about them.

Tom: OK.

4 Feb — is this damn thing safe?

Tom: I guess my feeling is: ummmmmm, interesting. I've calmed down on the surprise of seeing how many requirements there are.

Joko: That's a necessary stage. Now that you know it, what do you do with it?

Tom: Well, just keep at it, but ah....

Joko: What do you mean, keep at it? What does it mean to keep at it?

Tom: There's a bit of process now, where if a red light goes on, I look for a requirement, almost automatically. I guess that's what you mean by keeping...

Joko: That's the first step. But the second step that really weakens the requirement is what?

Tom: To sit with it and almost in a no-thought mode just get into the feeling of it.

Joko: Yeah, just feel it. Uh-huh.

Tom: And that was the second thing – I almost feel I'm back to square one.

Joko: Ohhhhh... did you think you were going somewhere?

Tom: [laughs] Round and round maybe.

Joko: See you are always basically perfect, because you are -- whatever you want to call it -- reality. Whatever. That's who you are. There's nowhere to go. But what can be done is to remove the -- you might say -- the blockage that you've covered over the reality of yourself with. You don't really have to go somewhere.

Tom: Yeahhhh...I was going to say that same sort of thing seems to come up in terms of feelings, but the second or third or tenth time around, you think: ah, this again! And it just hasn't got any sting any

more.

Joko: Right. Well, it gets less and less, yeah. And that's the process of practice.

Tom: I notice I get a feeling of me getting smaller and the world getting bigger, and thinking: can I really trust this?

Joko: Uh-huh. Well is there any YOU?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah.

Joko: What is there to get smaller, see?

Tom: Yeah, OK.

Joko: See, what you think of as YOU, is all these requirements you have, which are made of memories and thinking. It's just a totally mental invention. There really is no you. There's just ongoing life. So there's nothing to get smaller. In fact, you'll feel better, not worse.

Tom: [chuckles] Yeah, I can actually believe that.

Joko: See that's just a sentence. OK?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Anything else? I'm just ah...

Tom: Yeah, there was a joke, an old Groucho Marx joke, that tickled me a lot in the last few weeks.

Joko: Which is?

Tom: There's a condemned man on the scaffold, about to be hanged, right? They've just put the rope around his neck and the priest says, "Any last words, my son?" And the guy says, "Yeah! I don't think this damn thing is safe."

Joko: [laughs] I like that. [laughs more]

Tom: I meant something to me. I'm not sure what, quite. But anyway....

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: There's something in that, isn't there?

Joko: [chuckles] But it's only not safe for someone who thinks they're a self. Then it's definitely not safe.

Tom: Well, I guess, I haven't really got any questions.

Joko: Yeah, right. Well we won't run you phone bill up then.

Tom: Things are certainly changing.

Joko: You'll have a cheap phone bill for a change. OK?

Tom: OK.

11 Feb — through the treacle

Tom: I thought it might be a message today. I didn't know you'd be there.

Joko: Next week you get a message.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: There's a sesshin next weekend.

Tom: Ah, OK. Right... Things are getting fairly... like ploughing through treacle or something. I feel like I'm a fish in foggy water.

Joko: What's troubling you? You mean your list?

Tom: It's just, I guess, a lot of stuff to deal with. Or it seems a very thick... hard going. Not any particular thing. I'm trying to give you the feeling of it more...

Joko: You mean if you watch your reactions to your life? What's going on?

Tom: Well, particularly in sitting. Watching reactions to life is ... that's going OK. Sitting is like glue. But I guess I've had that scene before...

Joko: The physical experience feels like that? Or what?

Tom: Yeah, it does, actually. And everything seems sluggish, and I feel: oh, back here again. What am I doing?

Joko: What are you doing? What are you holding onto?

Tom: Yeah: what are we doing, what are we doing? So I don't know. But I remember having this kind of stuff before from time to time. Anyway, that's where it's at at the moment.

Joko: Well, that sticky feeling is usually what we call the third list. There's something going on. So try to see what on your second list is getting clobbered a little bit.

Tom: Ah, coming from that, you think?

Joko: Oh sure.

Tom: Yeah, I worked on that a bit and couldn't come up with anything.

Joko: Well, you may not have everything on your list yet either.

Tom: [laughs] Good point. Yes.

Joko: [laughs] Uh-huh. But anyway. Just keep sitting and try to keep feeling this feeling you're feeling. But feel it. Don't think about it. OK?

Tom: Yeah. Yes, I've done that.

Joko: Uh-huh. And just if you do that, very slowly it will make a difference.

Tom: It does seem to clarify itself somehow or other.

Joko: Yeah, it does. And you know sitting, there are all sorts of things go on when we sit. And you're bound to bump into these times. But they're usually good, because there's something you're sort of getting at that has been dormant, you might say. So don't expect it to be always nice. It's not going to be. But it will clarify your life, and eventually it will be, you know, much nicer, really.

Tom: I'm hanging in there. I'm telling you just what's going on. Not in the nature of a complaint or anything.

Joko: No, no, I know that. I'm just saying there's no practice that as it moves along doesn't have some struggly spots.

Tom: [laughs] Struggly! I like the word -- yeah.

Joko: Yeah. That's the nature of the beast. So, ah, just stay with it. Which means to feel it. Don't try to think about it. OK?

Tom: Yeah. OK. That's what I've been TRYING.

Joko: And don't get discouraged. This is just normal stuff. OK?

Tom: No, I'm not actually discouraged.

Joko: Yeah. All right, Tom.

25 Feb — where it's all leading

Tom: You can probably hear the wind in the background. It's like a metaphor of our busy life at the moment.

Joko: [chuckles] Westerners tend to be very busy.

Tom: Yeah, well it's just one of these hyped-up phases, where we're going through lots of demands on us. Business demands... Yeah, uh, I'm basically doing the two things. One is continuing to discover how much I demand the world to be the way I think it should be. [laughs]

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, it's nice to see that, yeah.

Tom: Dear-oh-dear. And the other is really sitting and merging into these, I guess the feelings behind the list, the stage three list.

Joko: Just letting them be.

Tom: Yeah, just let them be, and merge into them. So those are really the two things I'm pursuing. It's seems to be changing a lot, actually. I don't know quite what's going on, but it seems a good thing.

Joko: Well, we could analyse it, but if it feels right to you, it probably is.

Tom: But as I say, I wouldn't like to try to explain it or to describe it to somebody else... you would know...

Joko: Well, it's not good to talk about practice to other people. I could explain it a little bit, but at least not today. I would suggest you just keep going, Tom. You know there's a point at which you begin to get what practice is. It's a very different thing than not getting it.

Tom: Yeaaaah?

Joko: That make sense to you? I mean, where you begin to look at every situation in your life as practice. That's a very different way to live your life.

Tom: Yes, I can begin to see a bit of that.

Joko: Uh-huh. You have to really keep experiencing what's going on. It just changes everything, but I'm not going to go into the details today. But if you're doing that to any degree, you're OK.

Tom: It sounds OK, does it?

Joko: Oh yeah. It does... Any other questions?

Tom: No, actually. It seems on such a fruitful path, I don't wonder about like -- where is this leading? -- particularly. I just think it's OK to keep on going like...

Joko: It's leading to where you already are.

Tom: [loud laugh]

Joko: [loud laugh, continuing]

Tom: [more laughing] Yeah, right. You keep SAYING that! [laughs]

Joko: Where could you possibly go? Just living right this second, you know.

Tom: Yeah, but we're so... I don't know, trained like things for tomorrow and tomorrow, aren't we?

Joko: Well, that's a linear-type mind. It's OK for ordinary circumstances, but it's not really what your life is.

Tom: Ah, OK. [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] Well, don't worry about it. The less you think about things like that, the better.

Tom: [laughs] Well, thanks a lot. OK.

Joko: Yeah, OK, Tom. We'll talk again.

4 March — doom above, doom below

Tom: I've got a young son downstairs, playing Doom on the computer. [laughs].

Joko: Uh-huh. [laughs]

Tom: And I sort of play Doom in my sitting, I guess... One thing I wanted to ask: there's something, I guess, astonishing. You sit down, and feel a pressure, one of these vague irritations. Gradually it becomes: I've got to get rid of this! And it turns out that the pressure itself is wanting to get rid of it.

You see what I mean?

Joko: Yeah. Unless, you would just let it stay. Do nothing, and it will get rid of itself.

Tom: Well that's what seems to happen. I discover that the wanting to get rid of it is the problem itself.

Joko: Well, that's the thought, see?

Tom: Well it's very strange.

Joko: Leave it alone. If you're depressed, just leave the depression alone.

Tom: It's a bit hard to do.

Joko: I know!... hold on a minute [goes off for awhile and deals with someone who has come to the door]. Sorry. Are you there?

Tom: Yeah, sure am.

Joko: Yeah, well, if you have a depression and just let it sit, like you'd let a rock sit in your stomach and pay no attention to it, you know what it will do?

Tom: Just feel it...

Joko: It will dissipate, yeah... You're learning.

Tom: It is a little bit hard not to want to...

Joko: I didn't say you wouldn't want to. And if you want to, it's fine to want to. [laughs]

Tom: To do something about it...

Joko: And it's fine to want to do something about it. But when you cease doing that, paradoxically, you get what you want in some odd way.

Tom: Yeah, it's certainly very strange.

Joko: Well it is strange, but human beings are very strange.

Tom: Hmmm. OK.

Joko: All right. You're learning. Anything else?

Tom: No... uh, everything all right there? You sound like you're breathing a bit hard.

Joko: Yeah... I'm just racing around here.

Tom: OK.

Joko: I'm fine. And so just keep going, Tom. All right.

Tom: Right. OK.

18 March — let it be

Tom: I had a particularly interesting thing happen. I've got one son who's about 12. And now he's developed an irritating manner, as they sometimes do. And I was just sitting with this, in front of the computer with him, listening to all this babble and cross-talk, and just watching the feeling of it. Or half-watching. And suddenly it all just collapsed and I felt really quite happy about the way he was, the situation. And I thought: that was a bit of a breakthrough.

Joko: It's your only job, in the sense that it's to let this moment alone. Let it be. Then you learn to get open and spacious, and you can see what to do more clearly. Or maybe do nothing. Just that's the whole job.

Tom: Yes, spacious is right. It's a feeling of the outside there being OK. So that's all I wanted to mention.

Joko: That's one incident, but you know our life presents us with things all the time that we don't like.

Tom: [laughs] Oh yes? [laughs]

Joko: That we want to change, you know what I mean.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: It's important to see what practice is at that. It doesn't mean that you always end up liking everything in the world, but it doesn't push you emotionally.

Tom: Yeah, I see.

Joko: I mean, I may dislike bananas and like oranges. But there's no emotion there. It's just a fact. See what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, I do. Yeah, I can see that... better.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: I haven't actually got any questions. I sometimes wonder if I should have.

Joko: No. Not if your life and practice are just going along. And you have at least some idea what you're doing.

Tom: It certainly seems to be working and changing things.

Joko: Well, that's the test of it.

Tom: I haven't actually got any real questions, and I don't want to make up any.

Joko: OK. Fine.

8 April — stepping on Sibyl's list and vice versa

Tom: I've had an interesting week, including a beneficial row with my wife, but that's all sorted out, so I don't really need to go into that much.

Joko: Uh-huhhhh.

Tom: But I find underneath... I guess there are two things: one is I think "Oooo, is this going to go on forever? All this watching of stuff all the time?" And the other thing is a sense of looking for a secure position, somehow or other.

Joko: Oh, that's all we do. [laughs] That's what we're doing, see? That's what the second list is. It's an effort to always be looking for that which is safe, pleasurable, secure...

Tom: Oh, is it? The whole second list?

Joko: Right. Of course. Sure.

Tom: Ah, the requirements. Well, I guess... what about someone having a requirement for adventure?"

Joko: Well, a requirement for adventure isn't what I mean by a requirement. That's just... unless it's a compulsion with you.

Tom: No, I'm not saying... I'm just looking to get a handle on this.

Joko: Yeah, well it might not be something that should be on your second list. It's harmless, but the second list is psychologically based, you know what I mean? I require myself to be the best at everything, or it could be the worst at everything. Or I require myself to be liked by everyone.

Tom: But if you're the worst at everything, how does that make you feel secure?

Joko: Well...

Tom: That's not my case, but I was interested.

Joko: Well, oh, easily. A lot of people do that.

Tom: Huh! And they feel comfortable with that, do they?

Joko: Well, because that's what they're used to. And that gives them a feeling of security. And it also keeps them the centre. You see, victims like to be victims. They wouldn't say so. They'd say they're suffering. But there's another aspect to it, which they don't see.

Tom: Oh, OK. So either way, it's a comfort zone in a way.

Joko: Well, it's a security zone.

Tom: A security zone. OK. So we're just talking about the dear old second list here.

Joko: Uh-huh. That's why we're practising. OK?

Tom: Right. So that's "no new news here," is it?

Joko: Well, I want you to understand what it means to practise with that second list. You understand it?

Tom: Well, you look for the requirements...

Joko: When anything upsets you, for instance in this fight with your wife -- what was it she was doing or saying that upset your second list?

Tom: Well, we upset each other's second lists, thoroughly.

Joko: Well, that could be. But I can't say about your wife's practice, but with you, you certainly should have identified eventually what it was that she upset. Because she going to upset it again.

Tom: I upset her more than she upset me. She upset me by kind of storming out in an incomprehensible way. I couldn't understand what was wrong.

Joko: So you have a requirement that people be comprehensible, right?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, I see.

Joko: They make sense to you, because then you're more in control?

Tom: Well, yeah, actually we got to that point. I did understand what was going on. And I recognised what I was doing and saying. And we got it all sorted out. It was very interesting on both sides.

Joko: I'm not saying it wasn't a good fight. But I'm saying that all fights mean that somebody is jiggling our second list. And you need to know what that is. And you also need to experience in your body the frustration or rage or whatever was in there.

Tom: I felt a bit of that all right.

Joko: Oh I'm sure you felt quite a bit of it. See, sometimes when a fight is over, it's useful to go back and take a look at it. Because you know, husbands and wives have a way of fighting about the same thing, over and over and over. I mean, it may have different clothes on, but it is basically the same argument. So you need to know more about that, and understand what it means to practise with it.

Tom: Well we usually sort things out by getting to the bottom of how the other person is actually looking at it. The other person is usually standing in quite a different position and you don't really realise it. And we sort that out. And we don't tend to repeat rows.

Joko: OK, then you fight pretty well.

Tom: We've been married 30 years or something. We must have something worked out here.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: But that's interesting. I didn't really think in terms of requirements in the heat of battle.

Joko: Yeah, you won't in the heat of the battle. But sometimes it's useful to go back when it's over, and to see what... it's like looking at something and trying to see the real structure of it. So you learn something.

Tom: OK, I guess that's it for this exciting week. [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] It sounds like you've had quite a week. So anyway, we'll be shut down here next week.

Tom: OK. Thanks a lot.

22 April — where am I going?

Tom: A couple of things. For the first time, I've been wondering what I'm doing with my life. I've never really had that problem before. I wonder if it's the outcome of what I've been doing?

Joko: You mean professionally, or?

Tom: Well, yeah. Should I be doing something in addition? Or should I -- not so much something else..

Joko: You like what you're doing?

Tom: Yeah, I do.

Joko: Well, that's fine.

Tom: But I've got other time, you see. In what I do, the work comes in bursts, so I've found fill-in projects before, which I could work on in my own time.

Joko: Uh-huh. That's good.

Tom: Normally I just leap into something, but now I feel maybe I'm missing something here.

Joko: Well what's all that dissatisfaction about?

Tom: I don't know.

Joko: Well ask yourself that then. Don't jump too quickly at 'what should I do?' as 'what is this dissatisfaction about?' You see, until you answer that, you won't know what you're doing.

Tom: I knew... I thought it should be tied in with something I'm doing here. OK.

Joko: Well, ask yourself that question. It's like a koan. It doesn't have to be answered in two minutes. Just: what's the dissatisfaction here?

Tom: Yeah, that's the point. I missed that. That would be a good one.

Joko: And the other thing was, when a tension or problem comes up, I find it easy and natural -- well, maybe not easy -- to settle into a feeling of the thing and let the thoughts drop away.

Joko: Fine.

Tom: But at the same time, I wondered if maybe there's a requirement lurking here. And I can't seem to do both at the same time.

Joko: Well, the requirement is the thing that you think is being bothered. And what you're doing is you're way out of the tyranny of the requirement. It's just fine what you're doing. You see what I mean? Maybe you don't. Well, see: what is your favourite requirement? The one that can get upset easily?

Tom: Oh, people not keeping promises.

Joko: Yeah, you require people to keep promises. Now, in your body, that's anger -- OK? So if you can just be your body without thinking all those thoughts, you begin to slowly settle out of that. You

get the point?

Tom: Even if I don't sort of stop and think about what's the requirement here, you mean?

Joko: Well, the requirement is artificial. That's not real. How other people should be is none of your business, really. They're just doing what they're doing. When it bothers you, that's what makes is practice -- see?

Tom: OK. So that's kind of caught the thing anyhow.

Joko: Yeah, right. That makes sense?

Tom: Yeah, it does. OK.

Joko: Sure. I want you to know what you're doing when you practice. Otherwise it's hard. That sounds OK. Anything else?

Tom: OK. Good. Thanks a lot.

6 May — living on Olympus

Tom: Last time we talked, I was saying I was trying to decide what to do with — I guess part of my life that I had some time to do something with. And you were saying that the interesting thing would be to focus on the dissatisfaction. It certainly was. It seems that I really secretly would like to be a god on Olympus.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] Yeah.

Joko: Well, you can note that.

Tom: I DID note it — I can tell you.

Joko: It's just a thought, yeah.

Tom: I don't mean really like a god on Olympus. But that kind of situation, where interesting things happen, and you're involved in squabbles but you always win, and you don't run out of money or food, and there's lots of lively things going on. And you live forever.

Joko: That's like a daydream.

Tom: That's in the background. It's weird that such a thing could be in the background.

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: Where would that come from?

Joko: Well, I don't want to get into all that. But your job is just to notice it and come back to what's really real, OK?

Tom: Well, I did, having noticed it, and having acquired laryngitis, which doesn't really match up too well with an Olympus god. Then I realised that what I'm doing and what I normally do is really OK, even though it's — basically all that sort of collapsed. I was left with what I actually do, and it

seemed the same, but better.

Joko: All right. You learned something there — I don't know exactly what. But you did, so — you know, whenever we get with the reality of ourselves, it tends to solve the so-called problem.

Tom: It was — yeah — a bit of an odd one.

Joko: Well, as you get more expert at this, at looking at these things...

Tom: But there's still a question about what causes dissatisfaction. Because I wouldn't say that I got rid of dissatisfaction in this process.

Joko: Well, some day we'll talk about it, but not on Friday. OK?

Tom: [laughs] Not on Friday, OK.

Joko: It's the end of the week, and I don't want to get into that stuff. I just want you to practise, OK?

Tom: OK.

May 20 — out of the daydreaming

Tom: We've all been coughing around here. It's winter.

Joko: Uh-huh. Winter [chuckles]. We're backwards, yeah. Go ahead.

Tom: Cough season. I've learned to lean quite a lot more on just sitting with whatever the feeling in the body is. And I find myself just doing this when I've got a few minutes in the day. Especially if anything is going wrong. And that's a change. I find that really useful indeed. Doesn't necessarily change anything...

Joko: Well, it's real.

Tom: Yeah, that's it!

Joko: Well, it changes things when you're in contact with life directly. You may not see it as a change of things, but somehow it's clearer. I can't put it into words, because it's not that kind of thing. But anyway, just keep doing that. That's the way to go.

Tom: And I've noticed the collapse of, I guess, outrageous hopes.

Joko: I hope so.

Tom: [laughs] You hope so. Right.

Joko: Hopes are just pictures, thoughts in your head. You see? That's not a good thing to base your life on.

Tom: It's almost like little kids wanting to be a train driver or something.

Joko: Yeah, it's a form of daydreaming really.

Tom: Yeah, and I find that's all gone and I'm left with what I'm doing. And sometimes it's OK, and

sometimes it doesn't seem OK, but I carry on.

Joko: Well, more and more it will be OK with you. I don't know, I used to daydream all the time. And now even the thought of it would bore me, just to do that. It's just that it's not satisfying. Empty.

Tom: So I guess that's a sign of change all right.

Joko: Oh, sure. See, the changes that come in practice are very subtle. It's really the way you are as a person is changed. You can't even see it, because it's you. But it is change. After a while, you sort of know that. Even though it would be hard to give a talk on it, you know.

Tom: Oh, yes. It sure would.

Joko: So, I think that's fine. I don't have a lot to add to that. See people always want something spectacular in their practice, and that's their hope — that something amazing will happen that will take care of them. So you're doing fine. And I don't particularly want to add anything to that today. Anything else?

Tom: You're away next week, aren't you?

Joko: Uh, no. No.

Tom: I've got various pieces of paper from your group, and I thought it was next week you were away.

Joko: No, I was away last week..

Tom: OK, I'm clear now. Talk to you next week.

Joko: Yeah. Very good.

27 May — OK to be a hermit?

Tom: I wanted to ask you about something that's been a part of my life for a long time. A kind of hermit-like or shyness side. And my wife in fact is still astonished that I go out and make talk to people. I'm quite satisfied with the family. I adore the kids, and I go out and meet plenty of people, but I just don't make any friendships outside the family. I seem satisfied with that.

Joko: Are you truly satisfied with it or is it just... fear behind it?

Tom: Well, I don't know. That's what I wanted to bring up: how does this relate to sitting and what I'm doing? Because in a way it's satisfactory. I seem to be quite happy to curl up and read a book, when nothing's happening. Plenty of work on. On the other hand, people do notice this. And I wonder myself...

Joko: Well some people live very reclusive lives. But they really don't want to. They're just afraid. And there's a difference between that and somebody who's truly contented with the family and stuff like that.

Tom: Well maybe I'm more like that.

Joko: But I think we should look into it.

Tom: What do I do? Keep it in mind, or?

Joko: Well, also notice how you actually feel if you're invited to do something. Or you meet somebody you maybe you think you'd really like to be friendly with. In other words, what do you do about that area of your life? Is there any tension about that?

Tom: Oh, I see.

Joko: Fear? You know, I remember a time in my life, many, many years ago. I had to go to a large party. I remember pacing up and down outside for 15 minutes before I'd go in...

Tom: I seem to remember something in a book or a tape about this, yes.

Joko: Could be. Yes, I was really frightened that they wouldn't like me, or I wouldn't know what to say or something, you know. Now that requires some work, OK? You know, I'm not like that any more. I don't give a damn. I just enjoy myself. And I am still basically a quiet person. I'd rather spend an evening with one or two people, than be at a large party. But that's different than being uncomfortable. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.... I don't think I'm uncomfortable.

Joko: Uh-huh. I don't know what to say exactly? Because if there's fear there, it's very mild. It's not something that's going to jump up and hit you. See what I mean?

Tom: OK. But it's very noticeable to people that I go mix with, and I seem to enjoy myself and chat to people. But basically nothing ever happens. I just home and go back to what I'm doing. And I basically forget about the whole thing. Suddenly someone will call again and I'll think: oh yeah, him! Or her!

Joko: Well some of us are more interested in other people than others. That's just the way the human race is designed. But I still think you should take a look at it, OK?

Tom: You mean, watching things as these situations...

Joko: Well, you know, when I was younger I used to go around with scientists a lot. Their work is so interesting to them, that really they don't need surface very much for people. So they do see people, but it's a minor part of their lives. There's nothing wrong with that. It's just the way they are.

Tom: At the uni, I was in science subjects. And I was very hermit-like. I loved the whole subject so much, all the courses that I took, I hardly knew where I was.

Joko: But if your wife is feeling you don't see enough people, you have to take that into consideration.

Tom: Well, it's not she feels I don't see enough people. She feels that, I guess... I go out in groups and actually have a good time. Then she says: "You never call anyone up! You still don't have any friends out there."

Joko: Well, it could be she's just going to have to do more of that than you. You know, you can't be what you aren't. I'm only talking about the person who'd rather have more social contact, but because of other reasons, doesn't have them. And that can be worked on with sitting. So I don't think there's anything wrong. But I'm not sure. And when I say wrong, it means that there's something you'd really like to have, but don't have — you see what I mean?

Tom: OK. I'm not sure about that myself.

Joko: Well, if you gear up your attention, and become more observant in social situations, you'll learn something, OK? If you need to learn it, that's all. It's the subtle things. It's not going to be something that hits you over the head. But just do that, OK?

Tom: It's subtle all right. OK.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: No, I don't think so.

Joko: Enough for today?

Tom: Yeah! [laughs] You're away next week, I think, is that right?

Joko: No.

Tom: You there next week?

Joko: Yes. I've got to get that message off the phone!

Tom: Right. Thanks a lot.

June 3 — how to solve hard intellectual problems

Tom: A couple of things I wanted to ask you about. One is mental overloads. A feeling I've got too much to do. You must have that too, from time to time. And what do you do about it? I sometimes feel like one of those worms they must have built the great pyramid on top of. You know — oh, no!

Joko: Are you talking about just a lot a work that you spin around in your head? Or what?

Tom: Well, a lot of work coming in, and then carrying the idea... I realise it's a mistake here. Carrying the idea, that: "Oh! All this to do and I've only done so much of it." And I guess the thought component of it is what makes it daunting.

Joko: Well, do you have to do that? See, that's the question?

Tom: Do I have to do it?

Joko: You don't have to think like that. You can notice: I have that thought, but as a matter of fact, I can work hard and do the best I can, and that's what I can do.

Tom: Yeah, I'm coming around to that. I wondered if there was a [cough]... sorry, I've got the family cough here. I guess, take some breaks and realise what's going on? That sort of thing?

Joko: Well, what you're not doing, is returning to your whole self. You do have a body, you know. And you need to take pauses during your work, and just stop and see what's going on. What your body feels like, and see the thoughts, and just try to re-anchor yourself. Some deep breathing for a few minutes helps. You're just getting lost. That's what's happening.

Tom: Yeah. OK. I can certainly spare that time.

Joko: Well a good student is one who knows how to keep practising, in the sense of maintaining

some sort of awareness, even when the going gets heavy.

Tom: OK. Well, related to this, when I was trying to solve a hard problem, and there was a lot of struggle involved in trying to find a solution to this, this kind of creative problem that a client presented — a mess, basically. And I noticed when I started looking at just at the struggle, and in between observing the struggle and all the thoughts going on, the oddest sort of thing — I don't know if I can explain it — but the answer crept in between the cracks in all this.

Joko: Sure.

Tom: Just from nowhere, without any effort — there was the solution! I would just make a note, and go back to observing the struggle. It occurred to me after all this, that normally I would have felt that the struggle had achieved the answer.

Joko: No.

Tom: I would have felt that, normally.

Joko: Yeah, right.

Tom: I don't think that's right now.

Joko: Well with real problems that require a creative solution, it nearly always comes from bringing your mind into the present moment. And in your struggle and your observation, you were doing that. Well, it's the only way for creative work. There's another kind of thinking: you know, where you sit down and think out a shopping list, which isn't quite like that. But all real thinking comes out of this creative space, just being here, being present..

Tom: I get these problems quite often. You never know if you can actually do them, because there's no routine way of doing them at all. The answers just have to come from somewhere.

Joko: Years ago I used to go around with a famous scientist. He worked at MIT. You know where that is?

Tom: Oh yes.

Joko: He was a professor there. And when he'd get to somewhere in his research where he couldn't move any further — you know what I mean? He was stuck. He used to go over to Europe for two or three weeks and just eat in all the four-star restaurants.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] In other words, forget about it! Do something else for awhile. Then when he came back, the solution would just pop up. It's the same sort of thing. He would just really let his native intelligence take care of it, instead of trying to force an answer.

Tom: Well, in a case where you're working on your own project, you can do that. But I've got the added problem of deadlines. Someone wants something by Tuesday.

Joko: I know. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm still saying that that's how it works, and you can do as much or as little with it as you can. But somewhere in there is the way things really work.

Tom: Yeah, I got a bit of a glimpse of it. Very interesting. OK. That's the kind of week I've been having anyway.

Joko: Yeah, I appreciate that. I'm not saying there's some formula for all this. But having some instinct within yourself of what needs to be done, is also useful.

Tom: OK.

Joko: OK? Anything else.

Tom: Are you there next week?

Joko: Yeah, I guess so.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: You're not scheduled... I lose track...

Joko: No, I will be here.

Tom: [laugh] OK. Good. Thanks a lot.

10 June — the peace of the icy couch

Joko: Hi. How are you, Tom?

Tom: Quite different from last week. You may remember, I was very whizzed up about work. And you reminded me that I had a body, and a few timely hints like that. Well because I was — I guess — so far away from the body sensation, it had quite a wallop.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And then all week long — I never had a week where I noticed it so much. I would stop and sit and rest in this kind of icy couch situation. I guess it's the contrast that really sunk in. I'm just reporting that it's been a very different week from last week.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, have you learned something?

Tom: Yeah, for sure.

Joko: That's good.

Tom: I would say, there's a sort of silly worry that if this goes on like this, how am I going to make a living, sitting there like that? Because I rely on...

Joko: What that does — to sit there like that — it gives you clarity and alertness. And believe me, that's the best way to do anything. See what I mean? I don't recommend that you sit there forever, you know? I'm a very active, hard-working person. But the reason I can do that, is because I sit. You see what I mean?

Tom: I do. I begin to see that, yeah.

Joko: See, if you have a mind and emotions that are ripping you apart all the time, you're not in good shape to do anything.

Tom: Like driving with the brake on, like somebody said.

Joko: Yeah, right. So this isn't some escape from life. It's to get you so you can live your life. That make sense?

Tom: It does, definitely, yes. It certainly is unpleasant at first when you settle into these things.

Joko: At first. Then what happens?

Tom: Then it becomes unpleasant but it doesn't matter. And then it becomes nice in a weird way.

Joko: Yeah. Yeah! And you're at peace, you see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, because you just accept it, I guess. That's the way it is.

Joko: Not only that, but if you can really be in your trouble, you don't have to worry it's going to catch up with you. See what I mean?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, quite.

Joko: Well, it's peaceful, because in a sense the worry is gone. See what I mean?

Tom: That's right: you're right with it.

Joko: Right. There's nothing to worry about. So in some odd way, it's the only place you ever are at peace.

Tom: In the middle of your trouble.

Joko: If you learn anything about that, you're doing very well. But just begin to investigate that. You know, people are always looking for the place where there will be peace. And it's of course always right under your nose.

Tom: Yeah. Fascinating... I've never seen it so many times. Time after time, during the week, I would stop what I was doing, and settle into that for a bit.

Joko: Well, that's good. We tend to get these crises, so we can learn. If you didn't the crisis, you wouldn't learn. They show up right on schedule...

Tom: Well, you were certainly on schedule too. I called right at the time I was most frantic about things, most detached I guess from reality.

Joko: Well, it's my business. Anyway, Tom, I'm delighted for you, and let's just keep talking about things like this. This is the area that gives you freedom. And also the ability to work well, if that's what's on your mind, OK?

Tom: I can see how it all fits.

Joko: So you are learning something. And don't expect it to be complete, or anything like that. We just keep learning.

Tom: I realise it's a long pull.

Joko: Yeah. Good. I'm glad you're feeling better.

17 June — waves of life

Tom: The week was serene on the outside, but [laughs] very turbulent internally.

Joko: Well, it means you're reacting to things. So what are you reacting to?

Tom: Well, it seems to be reacting to the realisation that what I've got is right in front of me, and not some dreams.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: Well, something doesn't like it.

Joko: [mock serious:] Ohhhhhh. Not the way you want it? Right?

Tom: That's right. So there's this battle going on.

Joko: I didn't say not to try to make things more the way you want them. That's fine. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that any given moment, life is the way it is. You can do battle with it, if you want to. But if you do that battle with the idea that can only be happy if it turns out the way you want, then you're in trouble.

Tom: Yeah, I think it's... that's pretty plain. And getting plainer.

Joko: The thing is to recognise what it is you want to change. I'm not saying not know that you want to change it, and you're unhappy about it. You need to know all that.

Tom: Oh, doing practical things, making changes which are likely to work.

Joko: That's fine.

Tom: I guess it's the kind of grand stuff — you know, the grand images of the way things are going to be or might be. And you realise that's not what's going to happen.

Joko: Well, it's not necessary that it happens, see? If you don't fight with life, if you can just let each moment be, as it is, and that doesn't mean not to try to change at the next moment. But without this sense of “you've got to get somewhere else.” This is what is so poisonous to you. Because that means this moment is never OK. I'm always waiting in vain for a moment that will never come. You see what I mean?

Tom: I do. And I see that if you can settle into this and make it your life, that would take care of everything. I mean, that you'd be doing what you'd be doing anyway, but wouldn't really be kicking up about it.

Joko: Yeah, that doesn't mean not to have goals that you try to reach. But it's not with the idea that if I don't reach that goal, then it's awful. We're not going to reach all our goals. We reach some of them, and some we never will reach. And there's some parts of life that are inevitable, such as that you're getting older.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: And if you want to fight with that, good luck. It just makes for an unhappy life. And it's not necessary.

Tom: Yes. It seems like progress. The needle is shifting from left to right, or something like that.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, look at it this way: suppose you think of wave in the ocean, OK? The wave has a crest, which is the top. And a wave has the bottom, which is the trough, right? Is there any way to have a wave without both of those?

Tom: No, you couldn't, of course.

Joko: See, what you're saying is you want all of life to be crests.

Tom: Oh yeah. [Chuckles] Right!

Joko: See, it's not real? That's what I'm saying. See the beauty of a wave consists of both parts. And human beings only want to be at the top. Which is impossible. You can't have the top without what?

Tom: Yeah. Without the foundation at the bottom.

Joko: Right. And it's like good and bad. You'd never know what was good if you didn't meet bad. You wouldn't know what health was if you never felt sick. So life is always about those pairs — you see what I'm saying? And we're always going to be going up or down that wave. It's not bad. See, you can be halfway up the wave, and since that's where you are, it's fine. Because it's part of the wave. You see what I'm saying?

Tom: Yes, speaking of which, if say you get a headache — I had a headache for three days. I get mild migraines, which I treat with herbs. And I didn't even know I had them until about two years ago. They weren't like the brain-busters that some people get.

Joko: Migraines. This is the kind of ambition you're talking about.

Tom: Hey?

Joko: Part of migraines is also the sort of tension and ambition you're talking about.

Tom: Is that right?

Joko: Oh, of course. I had good migraines, and I don't have them any more. Because I finally got the point.

Tom: Ah. I settled in and simply watched the thing and thought, well this is what I'm doing now. I'm having this thing.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: I feel I got something out of it.

Joko: I know you don't like it. I'm not saying to like it. But that's just halfway up the wave, or on the way down. See what I mean? It's not bad.

Tom: These are associated with exactly the sort of thing I've been talking about, is that right?

Joko: Yeah. Right.

Tom: Oh, right.

Joko: Now don't get ambitious about that. I'm just trying I'm just trying to point out that this constant tension of trying to get somewhere, is the onus of modern life. It's just not real. See what I mean?

Tom: I'm beginning to.

Joko: Think a lot about the wave. It's a very interesting analogy.

Tom: Good. OK.

Joko: There can't be any life as we know it without the ups and downs.

Tom: No. It doesn't make sense. It wouldn't be possible.

Joko: No. So what do you have: nothing?

Tom: Unless everyone was reborn in a perfect world, like the Jehovah's Witnesses think. [laughs]

Joko: Well, there is no such thing.

Tom: Not feasible, no.

Joko: No.

Tom: Whew....OK.

Joko: OK?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: All right, you rattle that one around a little bit, OK?

Tom: [laughs] OK. Will do. Thank you very much.

Joko: You're getting there.

1 July — forgetting things while shopping

Tom: I was thinking about your waves of life, the peaks and the troughs, and I'm not really quite sure what these waves are...

Joko: It means that life is constantly changing.

Tom: But you don't mean by the troughs that..

Joko: Troughs are the human impression of the waves.

Tom: OK! OK.

Joko: See what I mean? As the wave goes up or down, of our life, for instance. Supposing you lose your job, you get a job, you're in love, you're not in love, all those things we interpret as that we're either at the top or the bottom. You see what I mean?

Tom: I see what you mean, yeah.

Joko: As we assume that one is good and one is terrible.

Tom: Yeah, OK. So we're making the waves, basically.

Joko: Well, we're interpreting the waves.

Tom: By interpreting events in a certain way. Because some people might lose their job and think it's great, for example.

Joko: Or just that they lose it. They may not like it, but just work on that — see what I mean? Without necessarily feeling it's just terrible or wonderful, you just do it.

Tom: Yeah, OK. I get the picture.

Joko: OK?

Tom: And I sometime get these sitting things — I mentioned this before, I guess — when I sit and can't understand what the burning sensation is about. There's a sort of wanting, a strong wanting, but I don't know really what it is, and I can't get at it. So I just sit and watch the body sensations and that's about all I can do with it.

Joko: You don't have to understand it. What you have to do is to see anything as thoughts that are floating around. And then just sit and let that sensation just be. See, we always think we have to fix something or understand it. And we don't.

Tom: Yeah, particularly me.

Joko: It'll fix itself, if it needs fixing.

Tom: That's interesting. If it needs fixing. OK.

Joko: Well, we always assume that anything that doesn't please us needs fixing. We could be having a hurricane, and that hurricane is immensely beneficial to some forms of life. Maybe not to others, and certainly not to our houses. But it doesn't mean it's a bad thing. A hurricane's just a hurricane.

Tom: That's interesting, yes... One other thing: these little errors that people make during the day. Like you set off to buy a list of things and you forget to buy one item you intended to, or you're making tea for your guest — your guest has said tea — but you're always making coffee, so you come back with two cups of coffee instead of a cup of tea and a cup of coffee. This means you're not carrying in your mind a thought — in other words, a plan.

Joko: That's true.

Tom: Because the plan has to override what you normally do in some cases, doesn't it?

Joko: See, there's nothing wrong with the conceptual part of life, as long as it's about getting coffee or tea or something at the store. That's part of human life. We don't need to worry about that.

Tom: I guess the question is: is this kind of a marker of a lack of attention, in fact?

Joko: You mean if you forget something?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: But then we all forget things. It's not a question that we should be perfect. I forgot something at the store the other day. The one thing I went to the store for — I got ten other things [laughs] and came back without the one I wanted.

Tom: Yeah, well that happened to me yesterday.

Joko: See we're human. We're not trying to be perfect. We can notice our lapses in attention and just keep going.

Tom: So it doesn't necessarily mean — you can use it as a marker of...

Joko: No.

Tom: General attention or something?

Joko: No. We have a great many situations we're handling. That's just the way it is. Practice isn't about getting somewhere. It's being attentive to where you're at, and that includes noticing that you miss things.

Tom: I'd thought that might be the case, but I wanted to check that one out.

Joko: Fine. Don't get caught in the idea that if I practise long enough, I won't do it that way. That's another ego illusion. That make sense?

Tom: It does. That checks it. [Chuckles] OK, right.

Joko: All right. Anything else, Tom?

Tom: No, those were the things that had accumulated, that I wanted to ask you.

Joko: Yeah, fine... All right, we'll talk again.

Tom: Thanks a lot. Bye.

July 8 — the grace of God will fix it

Tom: The comment you made last time, that if anything needs fixing, it will fix itself — that was if, presumably under conditions of awareness...

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: It wasn't just that it would automatically happen?

Joko: No. I'm saying your job is to maintain awareness.

Tom: Not to try to get behind the thing and tinker with it?

Joko: No. Well, there's a saying in the Christian religion called the grace of God. In other words, the student's job in those terminologies is to put himself in the hands of God. And the grace of God will fix it. What does the grace of God mean? It's means that you sort of make things ready with your awareness and practice, and then the grace of God, in other words...

Tom: Something else fixes it.

Joko: Yeah, right. I don't mean by that a person. I'm not talking about that. That make sense?

Tom: That helps a lot. I thought that's what you were talking about.

Joko: Well, it's the whole secret of practice. See, we're brought up to feel that if there's something wrong with us or wrong with our life, we have to fix it.

Tom: I think you pointed out that shelves groan with the weight of how-to-fix-everything books.

Joko: Right. And it doesn't mean not to do your best. I'm not saying that. But there's a different basic understanding that develops in a mature sitter.

Tom: Yeah. And leave it alone, but kind of aware that it's there.

Joko: Well, it means your own awareness and observation, all that sort of thing, is extremely sharp. But that's what YOU do. And then at some point, things fix themselves — if they need to. Not everything in life needs to be fixed that we think needs to be fixed. We're also assuming then that we know how things should be. Sometimes we are meant to stay with our problems, and so are other people. Because that's what we need at that point — see what I mean?

Tom: It makes sense. Something can break down, and it's actually useful. A car breaks down and it seems to help, in a way.

Joko: Uh-huh. OK?

Tom: OK, that's good, right... I've noticed down all these months a measurable change in my life. I'm now kind to the cat. [laughs] It may not seem like a big thing, but it's something I've noticed.

Joko: I think it's very important.

Tom: When I went into the supermarket, it used to be a supermarket mind of befuddlement and total unawareness — I got confused, because I guess they make it that way. Where things are, the lights...

Joko: Oh, that's a science for them. [laughs]

Tom: This is as opposed to a kind of an aquarium state of mind, where you're looking at fish going by, and you're hardly aware of yourself, and it's all very peaceful. But bright and clear. But now I go into the supermarket and it's like the aquarium state of mind.

Joko: Yeah, well your sitting is slowly taking hold. And the question of course is to understand more and more what it means to practice. So I can't add much to that. Let's just keep going, OK?

Tom: OK. Talk to you later.

15 July — the silk coat lesson

Tom: What has been in the background for a long time, and I'd like to hear what you have to say, is the business of feeling that we can fix things. Because I think way back to when I first read about Buddhism, it must have been thirty years ago or even longer, I would have said, in modern terms: "Hey, cool! A eight-point program to fix everything." And I still carry that.

Joko: What are you going to fix?

Tom: Well, I think, fix unpleasant feelings about things.

Joko: Well, you don't have to have those.

Tom: What?

Joko: Unpleasant feelings are a total waste of time. You don't have to have those.

Tom: Yeah, that's what I feel that I can fix. And you say that's not wrong?

Joko: Well, what do you mean by fixing it? See this is where you get into the real trouble.

Tom: Get rid of them! [laughs]

Joko: Ohhhhhhhhh! See, that will never fix them. That just means you've kind of stuffed them somewhere for a little bit, and they'll be back.

Tom: That's what I wonder what to do about.

Joko: Well, what have I always said to do with your unpleasant feelings?

Tom: Oh, I know what to do about the unpleasant feelings. It's this other thing, which lurks in the background: "Hey, this is good, I'm really fixing this!"

Joko: It's a thought. Have you labelled it?

Tom: [pause] Ah. Yeah, that's a point.

Joko: Uh-huh. Sure. It's just a thought.

Tom: Some of these seem like real thoughts, and some seem like...

Joko: There's no thought that's real. I'm not saying that some thoughts are not useful.

Tom: It's in the same category, isn't it?

Joko: Right.

Tom: OK. Yeah, right. I've got it. [laughs]

Joko: Uh-huh. All right.

Tom: And the other thing I might just bring up, just maybe for your amusement — or interest — is that we decided not to have a family holiday here. Instead, everyone would get something they wanted. The kids would get a pool table. Sibyl would get a new coat — she went out and bought herself a fancy silk jacket she fell in love with. And my special treat was not to have to go on holiday!

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] But what happened last night is we went out to eat, and the waitress absolutely

showered Sibyl's new silk coat with a cup of coffee.

Joko: Eeeeek.

Tom: And ruined it. Oh dear, oh dear. So that was one of these happenings that I guess you'd rather not have happen.

Joko: Can it be dry-cleaned?

Tom: No. She'll have to replace it. It's one of life's little happenings, isn't it? Wow.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: You don't forget ones like that.

Joko: Those things happen, and you could do the restaurant. But I just feel you let it go, and in time you replace it. That's all.

Tom: Oh, well they were good about it. They gave us the meal free, and they signed a thing saying it was their responsibility. So it's just the shock of the thing.

Joko: Yeah, of course.

Tom: A good example, I thought, of these waves, you know?

Joko: Well, it's also a good example of how we try to have these little things make us happy [chuckles] And they do, for a little bit, but then something happens.

Tom: That was a powerful example of all kinds of things.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: Well, that's how life's going here anyway.

Joko: Yeah, well that's sounds like life.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] Yeah, OK, Tom. Nice to talk to you. You sound great.

July 29 — that blotto feeling

Tom: I'm looking at a very long list of tapes here, which were sent to me by your group, which I asked for.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: It seems the system must be pretty clogged. They say we can we can have four tapes, under complicated conditions. And I wondered if I could presumptuously suggest there might be a different way of doing it?

Joko: Well, there are different ways of doing it. For one thing, all sorts of commercial places would like to take over our tapes. But we resist that, for lots of reasons. And the other is, this is a volunteer centre. See, there's no staff. The people who send out the tapes are people who come over on

Saturday or Sunday.

Tom: Yeah, I gathered that.

Joko: And run the tapes and send them out.

Tom: But essentially they're not being made available at a low price, instead of being made available (like your books) at a commercial price.

Joko: They're not being made available at what?

Tom: Essentially, they're NOT available in a voluntary way and at a low price, whereas in a commercial sense...

Joko: What does a tape usually cost commercially?

Tom: Oh, I don't know: fifteen bucks, something like that.

Joko: And what do we charge?

Tom: Four. Well, it suggests four. But I would suggest if it was done commercially, they would be made available, like books. Instead of unavailable.

Joko: I just don't want to get into that commercial business.

Tom: I can understand.

Joko: Even though what we do is slow and awkward. I just don't want to do that.

Tom: OK.

Joko: You know, lots of things get real slick and efficient and effective, and they lose something.

Tom: Well, if there are other reasons for doing it. But I thought I just put my two cents in.

Joko: Yeah, we get a lot of complaints about this.

Tom: [laughs] OK, we'll all live.

Joko: Our whole centre runs that way. But it's a good centre. That's why I think it stays so genuine, because it's not at all slick. It doesn't work very well! [Chuckles]

Tom: Well, I'm glad I asked that question. I just wanted to see what was behind it, as well. OK. I'll work with the system as it is. I won't suggest any more [laughs] improvements.

Joko: Well there are things we probably don't think about. But people here, you know, they have an hour here or an hour there. And you take what you get — that's all.

Tom: I gathered that was the situation. OK, apart from that [laughs] problem, the only other thing I wanted to ask is what do you do if you're feeling really sluggish and dull. I wondered if I should be doing something about it and perking up. First of all, can you do anything about it? And should you?

Joko: I don't know exactly what you mean by that. You see, it could be that physically you could need to do something about yourself. I don't know. I mean, lots of things enter into a human being:

just their physical state, what they eat, how much exercise they get. These are things that people don't think about, but they're important.

Tom: Well, there are periods during the day when I go blotto. But not day after day.

Joko: Well, I suspect you want to go blotto. You know we do about what we want to do. And if you go blotto, then all you can do is notice that. And make it your practice to be aware of the ups and downs. That in itself changes something.

Tom: I thought that might be the right way to look at it. The ups and downs are just part of the waves again...

Joko: Sure. It's part of what's going on. There isn't some ideal way you're supposed to be all day. But you DO need to be aware of how you are. We think we should be some wonderful way all the time.

Tom: That's right.

Joko: We're not. That's an ideal. See? The fact is, you are the way you are.

Tom: I thought that was probably the right practice for it, but I wanted to check it out.

Joko: OK, anything else?

Tom: No, we haven't had any [laughs] dramas with coats this week.

Joko: [laughs] Well, there'll be more.

Tom: I can hardly wait.

Joko: You'll get your chance.

5 Aug — why do I get up at 5AM and sit?

Joko: How're you doing?

Tom: I'm doing all right. But there seems to be a constellation of problems around getting out of bed to sit. I'm sure you've heard that one before. I get up at five, right? And sit for an hour, before anything happens around here. Which is good. It's quiet. No one's around. But I find two things are happening. One I'm kind of losing a clear idea of what I'm doing, I think. And maybe that's not a bad thing.

Joko: Well, it's both ways. But mostly what I think you're losing sight of is what we practise for. "What is this about?"

Tom: It's like I think we're practising just to practise.

Joko: Well, that's on one level true. But for instance, I know that if I don't practise — well it probably wouldn't show any more — but I have less patience, life doesn't go quite as well. I have all sorts of reasons I practise. And on another level, I practise just to practise. But what I want you to do is when you call me next time, to have thought this out, so you can really tell me why you practise.

Tom: Ah-hah.

Joko: See, unless we really know that, it gets to be a mechanical thing, and we begin not to want to

do it. Just that, well, I want you to think about it, OK?

Tom: Yeah, I have been thinking about it. I'll think about it some more.

Joko: I want you to think enough so you can tell me about it. Because in a sense, when we sit we're training our mind. And it's not a trivial matter. Unless our minds become different, in other words not caught by every this and that that happens, we have a horrible life. And that training is never complete.

Tom: Yes. I guess that's it. It's the sort of everlasting feeling of this thing. I guess also the collapse of those golden vistas I read about in books early on.

Joko: Well the golden vista is an enormous feeling of serenity and joy that comes in your life a lot more later. You may not be there yet. But it's a natural thing. It's not like the books make it out, OK?

Tom: Yes, OK.

Joko: Those are more like drug-induced states, and that's not good for you. So anyway, I want you to work on that. It's surprising how useful it is to have to get things into a state where you could write them out. Or give a talk on them. See what I mean?

Tom: Mind you, yes, I'm often doing that for other people. I'm used to kind of vague and messy confusing situations, coming into them and straightening them out. I'll try to straighten this one out.

Joko: Well remember, practice is a difficult thing. Particularly the way you are, sort of doing a lot of it by yourself. This is not easy, and so we need to keep much on top on what's really going on. So you work on that, and then next time you call, we'll go over it, OK?

Tom: OK.

12 Aug — looking forward to reincarnation

Tom: I was going down fast with a migraine yesterday, and I took one of my powerful pills — which I rarely have to take. So I feel a bit shaky, actually.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: A kind of migraine headache — so you know what that would be, I guess?

Joko: I've never had one.

Tom: I thought you said you used to have them?

Joko: No, I had asthma.

Tom: Oh, asthma. I had that too!

Joko: How do you practise with your headaches?

Tom: I just do the usual stuff, watching the reactions, as you say, instead of trying to get behind it. Just watch what's actually going on. Just settling into it. I wanted to ask you if there was anything else?

Joko: Well, how often do you have them?

Tom: It's interesting. I tend to get them regularly, on Sundays. But very mild. I don't get heavy ones. I just get a bit ga-ga. And it's Sunday, when I relax, that I get them. This seems to be common with people who get migraines. As soon as the pressure goes off, the migraines comes up. So that's the only actual regularity I've noticed to it. It doesn't seem to connect to anything else.

Joko: Well, I'm not of much help with that. I'll ask the girl I particularly worked for so long with migraines. Who doesn't have them any more.

Tom: Oh!

Joko: I'll ask her what she thinks about it.

Tom: Yeah, what she can do. It would be interesting. It is one of my problems. I take a herb called feverfew, which is actually one that is recognised to cut them down, and it does. It helped a lot. So I don't really have a big problem. Yesterday I was really sinking with the thing. And I thought: oh, I'd better take one of my powerful ones, or I wouldn't be walking tomorrow. So I did. Anyway, last time, you asked me to think about why I actually sit. You remember that conversation?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: So that's really the reason for the call here. The real reason I seem to sit is because it sets me up better for the day.

Joko: It grounds your life. Uh-huh.

Tom: It puts me in touch with something, and if I didn't touch it any more I would feel awful.

Joko: I understand.

Tom: The secondary thing is far more grandiose, long-term type things. A better next life or...

Joko: Where's that?

Tom: [laughs] What? Reincarnation and...

Joko: Where's that?

Tom: Where IS it?

Joko: Yeah. Where does that take place?

Tom: Where does it take place? [Pause] In the future.

Joko: Where's that?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, I see what you mean! Um. So that's not really such a hot reason for doing it.

Joko: That's hope. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] Yes.

Joko: That's hope that something's going to save you.

Tom: Yeah, that's right.

Joko: Maybe it will. I doubt it though.

Tom: That's more of a kind of Christian hope, isn't it?

Joko: Yeah, uh-huh.

Tom: It's not actually enough to get you out of bed at five in the morning on a cold, wintry, rainy. That's the trouble I was having. Not actually sitting, but hauling myself out of bed into the cold house, all by myself, you know. And doing it. And the reason seems to be — the only valid reason seems to be — because it's the right thing to do.

Joko: It clarifies your life, yeah.

Tom: Does that sound reasonable?

Joko: Well, if it's reasonable to you. You know, I don't think people should just sit mechanically. I think we do it to clarify our life. I had to say to become better people. It's not exactly that. But something clears up when we sit. Without us even worrying about it. So, we'll let that go at the moment. It's a question that needs to come up though. Very occasionally you need to bring that one up.

Tom: I hadn't done that in a long time. "What AM I doing here? What is this? What's the point of getting up early in the morning?"

Joko: Can you picture yourself not doing it for a year? What would that be like?

Tom: Oooooo. No thanks.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, we'll let that go at the moment. I think you learned enough.

Tom: OK.

Joko: All right. Well, I hope you feel better.

Tom: Yes, well I'm just a bit shaky and groggy at the moment.

Joko: Well that's probably enough talk. You take care of yourself, OK? And I'll ask Lisa what she thinks about that.

Tom: Yeah, that would be helpful.

Joko: All right. I'll do that, Tom.

26 Aug — how would you feel if you had 10 minutes to live?

Tom: Last time you were going to try to find out about Lisa and the migraines. Did you manage to speak to her?

Joko: Uhhhhhh. No.

Tom: Ah. OK.

Joko: We've had a sesshin here. I didn't really get a very good time to say that.

Tom: OK. We can leave than one, OK.

Joko: Well, hold on a minute. Just while you're here, let me write it out. It isn't I'd forgotten it exactly, but I find if I write things down...

Tom: Yeah, you're not the only one!

Joko: I know.

Tom: I write everything.

Joko: Yeah, I sort of keep things in mind. But it helps to be more... OK. Lisa on migraines, OK.

Tom: That would be good. I'm interested in that. How old is she?

Joko: Early forties.

Tom: Yeah, well it might be menopause, because my wife used to have them slightly, and then she went through menopause and stopped getting them at all. So that could be another explanation...

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Which I'm unlikely to benefit from myself. So we'll see.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: It might have been something else as well.

Joko: I'm not saying there's just a magical cure for migraines. It really was sort of a whole phase in her practice that she had to work through.

Tom: Well, all I can do is just sit there and look at the thing and don't really penetrate it.

Joko: Where does that tension come from?

Tom: Yeah, feeling sick as well.

Joko: Oh, they're miserable things. But in some way you're protecting yourself from something that you're not really being very conscious of.

Tom: There must be, yeah. OK. Well, keep at it.

Joko: There are medical things they do for it, but...

Tom: Oh yes, I deal with it. I take a herbal thing. Which actually does work pretty well.

Joko: OK. I just feel that things like that are not natural. In other words, the human body was not born to have migraines. So we need to really investigate.

Tom: Interesting point, regarding it as a message.

Joko: Yeah, well I feel whenever I — I don't mean a mild cold or something — but if I'm really not feeling well, there's a lot to be looked at. It's not natural not to feel well. I mean, there're dips in that, ups and downs, but basically the human body is well-designed and until it gets really, really old, it should function pretty well.

Tom: So if it's not, then it's telling you something?

Joko: Or something's out of balance. Or you're ignoring some basic need, or something like that.

Tom: Well, I'll just do what I've been doing on that. Maybe, if Lisa has some advice, that might help.

Joko: Maybe. I can't remember. She had these for some long time, and they very slowly faded out. But she was also changing a lot as a person. Anything else, Tom?

Tom: Well, life seems to be coming much more into Now all the time. I guess I'm accepting it's all really now, with thoughts about other things.

Joko: It sure is. And the mind is able to think of the past and future, but your actual life takes place, right now.

Tom: You're doing it right now. And actually it gives you confidence that you can do the rest of your life. [laughs]

Joko: Well, it's only one second ahead at a time.

Tom: That's right. Whatever goes on, you cope, because that's what you have to cope with.

Joko: Right. Absolutely.

Tom: Well, anyway, that's not very deep, but it's how I'm feeling.

Joko: Well, it may not be deep, but to just really make it a practice, to think: just this second. Really do it as well as you can. Just this, just this, just this. That's what life is. I don't mean with a punishing attitude towards yourself. But just to fully engage with what you're doing. And we never completely succeed, but we keep trying.

Tom: Punishing attitude. You mean people do this as a kind of whip?

Joko: Well, you can punish yourself: I HAVE to stay with this moment.

Tom: Oh, I see.

Joko: Then you really added a thought onto just doing it.

Tom: It becomes a grim practice then, you mean?

Joko: It's really a mental punishing practice then. Instead of just the enjoyment. A person with ten minutes to live would give anything for the ability just to look at simple things for month. Just the pleasure of a flower, or feeling a breeze, or eating your lunch. As those seconds slip, a person would give anything — I mean if they feel well enough to think of things like that. But when we're living, we just don't think about those things.

Tom: That's a help. That's very useful, that.

Joko: All right, Tom.

Tom: Thanks.

2 Sept — your migraine is your friend

Joko: Hi, Tom. How are you?

Tom: I'm all right today.

Joko: Aren't you always all right?

Tom: [laughs] Um, yeah, actually that's something I wanted to ask you about. Because I find that settling in and watching everything, that it's like wearing different kinds of clothes. Some are clinging, and some are uncomfortable and some feel nice — and you observe all this. But it becomes a bit like a Roman stoic. Is that correct?

Joko: No. No. The word stoic isn't quite it. A stoic sort of implies: I'm putting up with all this.

Tom: That's right.

Joko: But I don't really like it. And that's more like resignation. Life is the way it is, and I can see that. So I just calmly put up with it.

Tom: Yeah, that's the way I get a bit, when things are not entirely to my liking.

Joko: There's a better way to observe life. It's more in accord with practice. See, that's still pretty dualistic. You're looking at life and judging it.

Tom: Yeah. That's quite right, isn't it?

Joko: It's not really a practice viewpoint. It sounds like it. But it isn't.

Tom: I thought something was a little bit off-track there. It didn't feel quite right.

Joko: No, it isn't.

Tom: OK, well you were asking me at the beginning, and I said I was all right, I guess...

Joko: Well, it's an old koan: every day is a good day. Every day is a holy day. And it's true. Every day is a good day. Every day is a holy day. And the only difference is that some days we like, and some days we don't like. Every day is a good day.

Tom: So, um, what exactly? Just to be aware that..

Joko: That you like it or don't like it. You can notice all that. I didn't say you had to like it.

Tom: Just be aware if you don't like it, it's just another...

Joko: Experience that aversion, you might say. Then something begins to draw everything together. Much more what practice is about.

Tom: I do notice that it's like ice has been melting in me over the last months. I'm a lot more friendly to outsiders than I used to be. It's definite. I suppose it must be part of what's been going on.

Joko: Yeah, right.

Tom: I can't see what else might be doing it.

Joko: Remember in one of my books, I don't know where, there's a talk about ice cubes.

Tom: Oh was there? I don't remember that one. Ice cubes.

Joko: It was probably in the second book. I can't remember.

Tom: Maybe I do actually. Yes I do remember something about it.

Joko: Eventually you just melt into warm puddles.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, right. Not sure I like the idea of being a warm puddle either. But never mind.

Joko: Anyway, you might look that one up, OK?

Tom: Yeah, OK... Any luck with the migraines? Or were you not able to contact her?

Joko: No, I haven't. Not because I forgot it. But because I've been so frantically busy. This is the end of the summer, with guests all over the place, obligations, dinners.

Tom: I get it.

Joko: You know there's a lot of research out of migraines, both from a purely physical point of view. You know, there're all sorts of ways people are looking at the problem.

Tom: I'm tuned into quite a lot of it, but I'm not tuned into any source that's been through it in a practice way. I mean, I get newsletters from the National Headache Foundation in Chicago, and the scientific results of different tests and things that people take. I get that kind of material. But I haven't heard anything about some of the work in practice, which I'm trying to get at.

Joko: Well, you take any pain. I mean, let's forget migraines. But any, say an illness. Suppose you have a sore throat. What is the practice on that?

Tom: Well just be intimately and intricately aware of all the feelings and nuances of...

Joko: Sensations, and just to leave them alone. When you leave them alone, there's a kind of a pressure taken off. Migraines are about pressure. You remove the pressure from the migraine and just let it be. It tends to begin to solve itself. It's very difficult, because they hurt so much.

Tom: Mine aren't terribly painful. They just make me ga-ga, groggy. But anyway, I don't want to go into all that and take your time.

Joko: Try to take the viewpoint that the migraine is not your enemy. It's something the body's creating for some good reason. And your job is just to be intimate with it. To be friendly. Not be to wanting to get rid of it.

Tom: OK.

Joko: It's very hard.

Tom: All right. I certainly haven't taken that attitude before.

Joko: When I'm ill, it's subtle: it doesn't mean I don't do what I can to seemingly get rid of it. But psychologically, I just settle in and let it alone. Just really feel it, and welcome it and when you do that, it begins to work its own way out of me.

Tom: Well, I'll no doubt get an opportunity sooner or later [chuckles].

Joko: It's more the attitude that illness is not our enemy. Illness is always a teacher. And unless you get intimate and friendly with it, you can't hear the teaching. See what I mean?

Tom: That's a radically different point of view than most people I know, including me, have.

Joko: That's what I do with anything that goes wrong with me. It is different. But it's healing.

Tom: OK, I'll try that.

Joko: You can experiment with other things — you know, we all have small ailments that come and go. I'm not saying not to do what would seemingly help them. That's like a mechanical thing you do. It's the attitude you have. So, fiddle around with that.

Tom: Yeah, I will. Very interesting.

9 Sept — what to do when something that doesn't exist asks a question

Tom: Last time we talked, you were talking about illness, and not treating it as an enemy. And I had a few opportunities to try that, and it was useful, not to say extraordinary, the change.

Joko: Uh-huh. Sure.

Tom: I'd always tried to keep it at arm's length, and treat it virtually as an enemy. But yeah, that's a big change.

Joko: Right!

Tom: It seems like part of me, and part of me with a problem, and you know — it almost makes you weep to think you've been doing this the whole time.

Joko: Well, we're trained to think of illness as the enemy. And there's no life without illness. You could say in some sense, we're never really well.

Tom: [chuckles] Yeah, that's the other thing. It really just seems like an amplification of the usual kind of thing. In fact, doesn't it?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: Illness is just more mental stress, and...

Joko: Well, mind and body are one, so...

Tom: It all just seems to be turned up a bit, that's all.

Joko: I'm not saying that by practising, we avoid illness. But it's more to see illness as a teacher. And I will admit that when you work with these things, you tend to be sick less. Because anything that's conscious is not as hard on the body. That make sense?

Tom: Yes. I get you. Well, the only other thing is this awful question, about where this thing is getting? Of course I kind of know what the answer will be.

Joko: Where you're getting? Where's what getting?

Tom: Where is this whole practice leading to?

Joko: Well, only an "I" would ask that question.

Tom: [loud laugh] Yeah, I guess there's no answer to that one. That's true. But it is a question that does pop up.

Joko: I'm not going to answer that, because it's not a real question, see? There is no "I". So when something that doesn't exist asks a question, we just ignore it.

Tom: [more laughter] Well, it's good to hear that from time to time.

Joko: Well, your point in answering the question is to reinforce your own "I". And of course that just doesn't work. See what I mean?

Tom: Because it just feeds on itself.

Joko: Yeah, sure. It's not a genuine question.

Tom: Cor, that's interesting. Right. OK. That's useful, right.

Joko: I'm not going to answer that. So what else?

Tom: No, well that...

Joko: That's the question for today?

Tom: [more laughter]

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: Yeah, you could say so.

Joko: OK?

Tom: We had a busy week, but we cope with that all right. We work pretty smoothly operating in business. It's not really a problem I need to worry about, I think.

Joko: Yeah, all right, Tom. [chuckles] That'll do you for today.

Tom: Yeah, thanks..

Joko: Great. Right, bye-bye.

23 Sept — fighting an octopus

Joko: Hi, Tom. How are you?

Tom: Well, I've discovered that I'm not OK, but I can be fixed. [laughs]

Joko: Oh. What's the trouble with you?

Tom: I've discovered this is one of these patterns... these list things. And I hadn't really seen until the last week or two. This is really something imprinted by my family. "Not OK, but can be fixed," is the way I've been working for a long time. And I guess it's an attitude toward the practice as well.

Joko: Oh yeah.

Tom: We've got to fix things, you know.

Joko: Well that's what people think practice is.

Tom: Yeahhhh. And actually it's a relief to have that lift a bit.

Joko: Just be able to sit, uh-huh.

Tom: And feel that maybe things are ... you keep saying that: "You are OK. Aren't you OK as you are?" And I think: hmmm.

Joko: Right. [laughs]. That's why working with these lists is really useful. You don't feel them right away, but once you see it, it's really helpful to see that we spend our life never satisfied. But always trying to get it fixed.

Tom: That's exactly right.

Joko: And it's always fine. [chuckles]

Tom: I see what you mean now. Yeah, I get at least the edges of it. So that's a relief.

Joko: Wonderful.

Tom: It's amazing, you can just go on and on and on, and have this thing in the background all the time. It kind of drives things.

Joko: Well, it's an attitude toward life that was drummed into you. And have just taken it over without questioning it. And in practice, we have to question everything. But the first trick is to see it. So I think you've seen something here that you can really be alert to now.

Tom: I think it came up when I was leaning hard against a ... I was having one of these migraines. And nature had provided me with a time to actually sit through it. Sometimes I've got other things to do, or the kids are around. Actually, everyone was away, and I had this thing, and I just sat really hard against it, like fighting an octopus for two hours. And I think it came up then.

Joko: Well this is often a teacher.

Tom: This is just a report on...

Joko: Well, it's not a minor thing. See the average person goes through an entire life, trying to fix

everything. And hoping that sometime it'll be all right. See it's always in the future: I'm not quite there. "Well... maybe." You never quite get there. It keeps moving ahead of you.

Tom: That's right. You feel a little bit of exhilaration on a small amount of progress you think you've made. Then on to the next one.

Joko: Yeah, right, but it never, never satisfies. Because that's a mental picture of life. It's not life itself. So that's why we sit so much, just feeling and experiencing. Because that's really what life is. Not our opinions about it.

Tom: I lean on the raw edges of things all the time. Just sit there, and whatever it is, sometimes it's good and sometimes it isn't.

Joko: Doesn't matter. That's your life at that moment. So that makes it perfect.

Tom: You can't argue with that.

Joko: No, you can't. So that's good, Tom.

Tom: Well, yes, I was pleased to have that happen.

Joko: Well, practice is learning, and every once in a while you really see something. So that was very good news. So just keep working with that, probably for a long time.

Tom: Bless you. Thank you very much.

Joko: Yeah. All right.

31 Sept — fixing modems and everything else

Tom: I'm looking at a sheet I got this week from your group, called "Suffering and Joy." Did you write that one?

Joko: No. One of my students wrote that.

Tom: I thought it was a beautiful piece of work. It really sums up what we've been going over for quite a while.

Joko: Yeah, he tries to write exactly what I would write. I mean, in his words. But it's very close to what I would say.

Tom: I thought this was admirable. Particularly as it's so on-topic. That part of it about, "If I do this, it's going to fix things." You know, it's one of the little traps.

Joko: Oh, it's a major trap.

Tom: Yeah, that's the one I still notice. I guess you just keep noticing, do you? *Joko:* Yeah, you keep noticing.

Tom: That you're doing that?

Joko: Yeah, because you're adding thinking onto whatever your life experience is.

Tom: Yeah, it's pretty clear. But it's also pretty clear that it goes on an awful lot.

Joko: You'd be surprised though. It's possible to watch it, and to say: "Oh, yeah, I'm doing that." Now what is the experience? Just in itself. What is it? See? Just feel it.

Tom: I've got that, but I don't seem to be trapped by the other ones mentioned, or that you've mentioned before. Not so much. But that one certainly gets me all right. As I say, it's built in, this business of wanting to fix things.

Joko: I call it ambition.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: Ambition to fix the world up. So, if I really fix it up, it will suit me a lot better. See what I mean?

Tom: I've noticed what bugs me. In daily life, maybe a modem that doesn't work. That sort of thing. It won't work, it won't work! Try everything. That was one of the more disturbing features of the week, even though I can recognise what's happening, it's still there.

Joko: If it doesn't work, it just doesn't work. All you can do is just to fix it, see? In that sense, it's OK to fix it. But when you try to fix everything in life, it's different than that. You see what I'm saying? You get that? I mean, if something's broken down, sure you try to fix it.

Tom: It's all the attitude on top of it.

Joko: It's the attitude that this shouldn't be happening.

Tom: I should be able to fix it.

Joko: People should make things better. We always have a lot we add on. If a practical thing breaks, that's one thing. But I'm talking about the psychological fixing. The desire to fix people close to us, for instance.

Tom: Well, I don't know about that. But fixing myself is one I've mentioned to you before as being embedded.

Joko: That's another version.

Tom: It's pretty noticeable now.

Joko: Well, good. This will give you a lifetime of work. [laughs]

Tom: I think you may be right, actually. [laughs]

Joko: Oh, yeah. But some of this is pretty subtle. You get some of the obvious stuff, but there are many subtle ways we try to fix ourselves that we hardly are aware of at first.

Tom: I can believe that. I was startled by one thing you said several times ago, that ... what did I ask you about? Where this was leading or something? And you came back and said, "only the ego would ask that question. I'm not going to answer it." I thought: my word! How do you know when you're doing that?

Joko: Welllll, one reason we sit, is we get more and more sensitive to all this stuff we're doing. Just

gets more and more obvious.

Tom: I suppose that's the only way. Just keep at it. There's no kind of magic way to flag these things. You just keep doing it and doing it.

Joko: Your own mind gets very sharp after awhile. When you've been sitting for a number of years. You pick all sorts of things you wouldn't have picked up the first year. It's not so hard. The hard thing is be willing to keep at that, so after a time, you don't do it so much. That's all. It's hard on other people if you're always fixing them. It's hard on yourself, if you're always fixing yourself.

Tom: That's right. It's not fair to yourself either, is it?

Joko: No. You never feel content with yourself and your life. A miserable way to be.

Tom: Anyway, my congratulations to the fellow who wrote that item.

Joko: Well, he likes to do it. He finds it fun. And I hate to do it, so...

Tom: Oh, right. [chuckles]

Joko: I don't want to think about all this stuff, you know. I don't want to write about it.

Tom: I'm glad somebody does, anyway.

Joko: Well, I told him to keep a collection of the stuff he's written. And eventually he might get a little book or something out.

Tom: It's a very fine piece of writing. Very crisp. Meant a lot to me, certainly.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah, good. I'll tell him.

7 Oct — I tell people this thousands of times

Tom: What in the past would get me running round and round and round, some disturbance, because of what I've been doing with you, I automatically go to the body sensation, and then the whole thing becomes no big deal. The thoughts collapse, more or less, and the body sensation just becomes part of the scenery.

Joko: Right. It enlarges your whole viewpoint. See, the body sensations themselves, are really just not space and time, you're just entering into another way of looking at things. You may not see at that, but that's what's happening. So just keep it up. That's the absolute thing you have to learn.

Tom: It sounds correct? Maybe I didn't put it very well, but that seems to be the change I have noticed. It seems routine now, almost. But thinking back, it certainly wasn't that way at ALL.

Joko: That's true. Well, if you can learn that, which means — I'm not saying not to think about practical matters — but most of what we do in our heads is that kind of whirling things around.

Tom: Yeah. Powered by something or other. There's something pushing it.

Joko: Yeah, a mild worry or something of that sort. And if you stop that and just go for the body, it just reverses our life. So that's basically the main thing to learn in practice.

Tom: It's difficult at the beginning to believe that it's going to work. Or it seems like the most boring

thing you can imagine.

Joko: Right!

Tom: And the last thing you want to do, etc, etc.

Joko: Right, absolutely.

Tom: But when you start doing it, it's quite the other way around.

Joko: That's right. Well, I just had to give a talk. [laughs] That's what I tell people. I tell people this thousands of times, but only a few hear it. Anyway, you're doing real well if you've heard it.

Tom: Yeah, I used to teach people how to write things. And it must be similar, because you can tell them once, and tell them clearly and they can nod and agree. But they still don't do it. And then you look at some of their writing, and say: well, look, this is the passive voice. And they say: "Oh! So it is. I did it there, didn't I? I didn't realise that."

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And you have to keep telling them and telling them [chuckles]. I suspect that it's that kind of situation.

Joko: Right. Right. Well, if you're catching on to that, to any degree, that's valuable. So just keep working on that. See all of practice is in that little area. All the fancy stuff boils down to that. After a while, we can talk more about why that is so.

Tom: Well, I believe it. I believe it now anyhow. Yes. It's been creeping up on me for a long time. I just thought I'd articulate that, because it seemed worth saying.

Joko: You know, as you keep going, you may still have questions. So just them coming, and very slowly it will all iron out, OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: You know the point of all this isn't that you should have to keep calling me forever. But that you begin to know how to run your own life.

Tom: Yep.

Joko: So I think you're getting there. OK?

Tom: OK. That sounds good news.

Joko: I know. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: Uh, no. I think that'll be OK.

Joko: [chuckles] OK.

Tom: Bye.

21 Oct — the trouble with expectation

Tom: I've been feeling like I've been pushing through waist-high molasses. That feeling of frustration of things not working out. Now I know you're going to tell me that's because I'm expecting things, putting expectations on things.

Joko: Absolutely.

Tom: Well, I know that, but I still... it's very hard to do, as you go along.

Joko: I didn't say it was easy. It takes years.

Tom: I beg your pardon?!

Joko: Well, it takes years.

Tom: Oh, I thought you said it takes "tears." [laughs] That might be true too.

Joko: Well, sometimes tears too. We all want something, a quick outline that we can go through, and that's it. Life isn't like that.

Tom: Yeah. OK. Well, I've had a particularly heavy patch of it. So it's been accentuated. I wonder if there's anything else I'm missing there. But maybe you've just got to keep on with it...

Joko: Well, there's nothing you're missing.

Tom: What, in technique and practice you mean?

Joko: Well, you understand what it means to just be our life, to just be what's coming up for us. It's very difficult. If you do, there's eventually a calming. A shift. But you may or may not be feeling that. If you aren't, you aren't. That's all.

Tom: Well, sometimes, I do. I feel maybe slightly proud of myself: "That would have bothered me before, but it didn't this time." Even though some machine isn't working and it hasn't worked twenty times in a row, but it still hasn't hung me up. But I guess a huge accumulation of these things, machines breaking and people not keeping promises.

Joko: You expect people to keep promises?

Tom: Well, [sighs] yeah.

Joko: Oh, you do?

Tom: Yeah, that's right. [laughs]

Joko: [chuckles] People do what they do, I can assure you.

Tom: Yeah, I'm afraid so. Uh-huh.

Joko: Most of the time they will. But you can't expect anything. OK?

Tom: Yeah, particularly with computers.

Joko: I know.

Tom: Yeah, OK. So I'm not really missing anything there.

Joko: Well, you're missing the fact of not being clear enough about the fact that things are as they are, always. And our desire for them to be otherwise is the trouble.

Tom: I knew all that. And I...

Joko: You know it in your head, but it's not yet...

Tom: Yeah. It's not always possible...

Joko: And that's fine too.

Tom: The soup gets too thick. And the other thing I've noticed is a kind collapse of ambition. I think, "Oooooo, I haven't really got any grand plan any more. I'm just coping with things going on day by day." I don't know if this is an outcome of what I've been doing, but it's certainly... different.

Joko: Well, practice doesn't mean we don't have a grand plan. But we don't believe in it. We just do it as best we can. Grand plans usually come out of an interest in life. You know what I mean? For instance, suppose you want to be a really fine musician. It's not a grand plan. You really want that.

Tom: It may or may not happen.

Joko: No. But you begin to do what you can. It's when we think we have to have a blueprint of all of life — it just doesn't work that way.

Tom: Well, this is all really on the same topic, isn't it?

Joko: Uh-huh. Expectation.

Tom: Yeah. Expectation. That's it. Right.

Joko: Yeah, be at peace. Everything's perfect. What else could it be?— since it is. What else could it possibly be? It just is.

Tom: [long pause] Yeaaaaah. [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] You see, the only thing that keeps you from seeing that, is you have thoughts it shouldn't be that way.

Tom: I do get that sometimes. Yes.

Joko: I know.

Tom: So... carry on.

Joko: Uh-huh. Right.

28 Oct — humans don't believe things are perfect

Tom: A couple of things. One is that I seem to be getting to fundamental assumptions about what life is like. They are beginning to look a bit shaky. Like I've always carried around the idea that the world is a hostile place and you're got to look out.

Joko: Well, all people have hostile elements in them. But I don't think that means they're hostile. You know what I mean?

Tom: My basic assumption has been is that it's an enemy until proved otherwise. But that's a bit over the top.

Joko: Instead of thinking either way, that it's true or not true, I would just be alert. That's all. Either way, it's a thought.

Tom: I found that and also some other very primitive assumptions are coming under doubt. And it looks as if there's nothing behind it. There seems to be a great void behind the whole thing.

Joko: There is. There is. Ok, that's good. Just looking, OK?

Tom: It's like coming down to a bedrock floor, and finding the floor is beginning to crumble.

Joko: Well, it's just like people. They're neither good nor bad, though they may do good or bad things. People are just people. They're stumbling along. Life stumbling along, and it's not really anything. It's just doing what it's doing at given points. At one point, your friend may be irritable. Another day, not irritable. But your friend is still your friend. And he's doing various things. But to have a viewpoint about it, that you stick with, is what the error is.

Tom: Yeah. Seems these fixed viewpoints are being called into doubt. Whereas before, I just automatically assumed: "Of course that's the way things are. Boom."

Joko: Well, they're not. They're just as they are. I mean, they aren't one thing or another. They're just as they are at the given moment.

Tom: Yeah, which...oh, something just fell on the roof! Which leads me to the other thing that's been bugging me. You've been saying that everything is perfect as it is.

Joko: What else could it be?

Tom: What else can it be? I can see that in a sort of light way, but I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do with it. It doesn't feel right.

Joko: It doesn't feel right, because as a human being you don't think things are perfect.

Tom: No.

Joko: But when you say something like "things are perfect" that's from the absolute standpoint. In which everything is changing, but there's nothing that ever really happens, you see what I mean?

Tom: In a way.

Joko: And that's the absolute standpoint. From the human point of view, things are definitely happening and some you don't like and some you do. But again it doesn't need to stick to any of it. In a certain sense it's all perfection. But from the human point of view, no it's not. But the reason we want to see the absolute point of view is because then we don't stick with things.

Tom: But there's nothing I'm supposed to be doing about that, is there? It's the thought that bugs me.

Joko: Well, it just helps to see that this person who's being so absolutely obnoxious, is perfect as he is, except that he does obnoxious things. And you can decide what to do about the obnoxious behaviour. But you don't have to be angry about it.

Tom: Well, OK. For example, we had a very good row the other day around here. We've been married 28 years and our rows don't last very long — about ten minutes, is about the max. It was a dilly.

Joko: Well, you might look into that. How come you have them at all? It's always something, the desire to be right.

Tom: Well, we do look into it. And it become a part of the whole practice, but I just thought of that as an obvious example.

Joko: Uh-huh. That's good.

Tom: Well, that's where we're at here.

Joko: I've said many times the only test for a practice is whether or not, over time, it seems to be getting more spacious, with less real upsets in it.

Tom: I think that applies. The upsets are minor and quick, and all done.

Joko: I have nothing startling to add to that. That's what practice is. I wouldn't say equanimity. But there's increasingly peaceful aspect to life, you know? It's enjoyable most of the time. So I hope yours is. But anyway, you're headed that way.

18 Nov — books, papers and the truth

Tom: I just read a book called Darwin's Dangerous Idea. It's about the arguments for and against Darwinism, right? And it had a big effect on me because it left me with the impression that: oh, it could have been that way. That it all just happened to happen.

Joko: Well, remember these are belief systems. Don't believe any. Just be interested.

Tom: Yeah, that's what I wanted to bring up. I realised that this is all a form of thinking, but it's pretty hard to resist this sort of thing as it crosses your path, isn't it?

Joko: Don't try to resist it. Just notice that you want to believe it. That's all. Yeah there are many, many interesting things in man's thinking. And some of them have some truth in them, some of them little, and so on. The thing is just to be open but don't necessarily believe them. The essence of what we're doing is to believe in nothing. Except the truth, see. The question is, what is the truth? And books rarely contain the truth.

Tom: I am susceptible to this kind of stuff, as it passes by. So I thought because it did wallop me, I thought I'd bring it up anyway.

Joko: I've read lots of science books. But science — remember — doesn't deal with the truth. It deal with theories.

Tom: This was particularly interesting one, because it's the theory of our origins, of course. Well, I won't go into the book, but it's having...

Joko: I know that sort of thing is fascinating, but then, who are you?

Tom: That's right, yeah.

Joko: [laughs] If you want a really sticky book, I can tell you another one. It's called: How can the world be the way it is?

Tom: What's that about?

Joko: Well, science, philosophy, perception. The guy that wrote it is a Zen teacher. A student of Katagiri Roshi.

Tom: Oh, I see. It's a Zen book.

Joko: Not exactly. And I'm not telling you to get it. I'm just saying if you want a real tough book, this will keep you busy for a long time.

Tom: Ah, well, no. OK, I'll keep that in mind.

Joko: I'll give you author and you can put it away and do something about it. The author is Steve Hagen.

Tom: OK. But back to, I guess, more fundamental things: the headaches that I was reporting way back have gone away. I haven't had a headache in weeks. I had an insight into it during one sitting. After that, it really hasn't come back. And that was like having an image of myself which was too far out of whack with what I actually do, and am.

Joko: Right. Well any image will make you sick. [laughs]

Tom: Yeah! [laughs]

Joko: Well, there's tension in trying to live up to it.

Tom: I think that must be it. Because it seems to have gone right away after that. Which is extraordinary.

Joko: Good.... And it may be back. If you develop some other image. But you'll learn to be suspicious of these things. OK?

Tom: Yes.

Joko: All right?

Tom: And the last thing that's happening is I'm chucking out all kinds of old papers and stuff. I've now got a mania for throwing out junk that I've collected. Dozens of archive boxes of stuff, old magazines. Clearing it all out, and feeling a lot better. Maybe that's got something to do with the whole business. So that's what's happening here.

Joko: Uh-huh. Good.

Tom: A mixture of theory and practice.

Joko: Well, it's really only living at this moment. And that includes throwing out things. I love to throw things out.

Tom: Oh, you do too?

Joko: Yeah. I'm a thrower-outer. Liz, who helps me here, is a keeper. So we're quite contrasting.

Tom: I'm a keeper until I reach my limit. And I've certainly reached my limit on this lot. I just can't walk in the place.... but in the actual sitting, anytime I get a chance, it goes right back to the feeling now.

Joko: All right. Good.

Tom: And the thoughts seem to kind of settle down around the feeling. Which is something I never used to do before I started working with you. Before it was all following thoughts around and around. So this is really quite different. It always does work.

Joko: Thoughts are not the truth. Just our perception right at this second, OK? So of course the truth works, and you're beginning to head in that direction, and that's good. Good for your life.

Tom: It is.

Joko: All right. Fine.

2 Dec — what is a cup?

Joko: Hi, Tom. How are you?

Tom: I'm surprised. That's how I am. [laughs]

Joko: Oh, you're surprised?

Tom: Because I dialled once and got you.

Joko: Uh-huh. It happens.

Tom: It does happen, yeah. Statistics.... I was just wanting to talk around the subject of settling in to the feelings of things. This happens at all kinds of times now. When I'm on the way to a business appointment and I feel the wind in my face and kind of stop — not physically stop — but I find myself settling in to what's actually happening. And at the same time I feel the whole thing is a little bit uneasy.

Joko: Is that because you feel you should be doing something else?

Tom: It's more like it's coming to be all there is, just what's happening now.

Joko: What is that?

Tom: I suppose that's correct.

Joko: Well, you aren't answering the question: what is this?

Tom: What is what?

Joko: What's happening now. What is it?

Tom: Yeah — that's the other thing. Who is doing all this?

Joko: What is this business you're looking at? You think you know?

Tom: Yes. I suppose that's right.

Joko: Huh?

Tom: I suppose that's right. I suppose I do think I know.

Joko: No. You don't know. All you know is that it looks like this, maybe it feels like this. You don't know what it is. See? That's the real mystery. You don't know. You don't know what a cup is, or a person or a carpet. What are they? What are they?

Tom: Yeah, OK.

Joko: See, the nature of reality, when you come right down to it, is what practice is about. It doesn't seem that way, because the obstacle is always the fact that we aren't even interested in that. What we're interested in is our idea of ourself and what's going to happen to us. So we spend all our time thinking about this imaginary "I".

Tom: Well, you're right, because when you mention what a cup is — the feeling is like, who cares? [laughs].

Joko: Who's this "who"?

Tom: Yeah, right. What you say actually cleaves it nicely. A perfect description of where I was at there.

Joko: Right. There's an interesting new book out. I always hesitate to recommend books to people in Australia because I know it's expensive for you — isn't it — to get books?

Tom: Well they cost about twice as much, for some reason.

Joko: Really?

Tom: I don't know why. I never understood.

Joko: Well, the shipping I suppose.

Tom: Is this the one you mentioned last time?

Joko: What did I mention last time?

Tom: Ah, let's see. I couldn't tell you the title offhand. I wrote it down.

Joko: It's How the World can be the Way it is. Is that the one?

Tom: What as the author's name? Yes, I think it was, actually.

Joko: Steve Hagan.

Tom: Yes, we've got that on order.

Joko: Well, the reason I bring it up is because it's about that. See, ordinarily when we look at the things around us we say: you know, first we say — what is it? Well, it's a cup. Or it's a person. Or it's a wall. Or it's sunshine. But we don't really ask the real question, which is: “what is it?” See?

Tom: In itself?

Joko: Yeah. We don't know what it is. All you see is the surface of a cup. You don't know what a cup is.

Tom: Um. So what practice comes out of this?

Joko: I'm not so sure it directly helps practice. But it makes us realise that we just are always looking at life on the surface. This little “I” is just interested in all these little objects out there, so it can manipulate them for its own purposes. But a real life is immersed in what it is. There's a transition that begins to slowly happen, as you experience more and think about things less. And the book, I think, wakes that up a little bit.

Tom: Well, it's on the way.

Joko: OK I'm not saying it will do miracles.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: But you're asking, see, a lot of things, and you're not seeing you're kind of glossing over them. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeaaaah?

Joko: You can say: there's my cousin Rachel. She's so old and she works at this, and she has whatever in her life. That's not what cousin Rachel is. But that's what we do with things, isn't it?

Tom: Exactly, yes. I'm just about to be invaded by my young son, I think, here.

Joko: Yeah. OK. I'll let you go. This is a big question you brought up. So let's just stay with it a little bit. OK?

Tom: OK. 9 Dec — rubbish!

Tom: Maybe the right thing to talk about is rubbish. Because I've been having a big do about rubbish this week. And there must be something behind it. The Council here has imposed a new rubbish-collection system, and they've essentially allocated substandard sizes — or at least a size of container which is [laughs] too small for us. Some people it's OK for. You know, it's like one size of shoe for everybody?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And some people are going to be pinched, and some people are going to be OK. So I've been in a uproar about this. An aggressive phase of attacking the Council, trying to get another bin in there. Not many people will go into that mode. They'll just accept it or take the extra stuff to the tip themselves. But I've actually faxed, and put stuff up on the Internet and written letters to the press. And I've got them to take away an extra bin, whereas no one else has as far as I know. That's what the week has been like — and all about rubbish and wanting to get rid of it. You know: why can't they take the stuff away, blah, blah, blah.

Joko: Uh-huhhhh.

Tom: It's been turbulent. And I've felt all along that maybe I should be doing better with this, in terms of practice. But on the other hand, it's all been interesting.

Joko: The turbulence is just there. But on the other hand, it's impractical. I don't say not to fight for the extra bin, you see? But how can you fight for something without getting so upset? What you're really saying is there's something wrong with them. Now the nature of government is quite often they have to just play to the average. They can't really meet every little minor difference. Or maybe they can, but I'm saying quite often...

Tom: Well, this was a point I was making: people produce rubbish on a Gaussian curve. I mean, they can't sometimes help it, you know. You've got bigger families or whatever.

Joko: Right.

Tom: And if you stick an average bin out there, it's not going to suit everybody. They'll be people who'll produce more and what are you going to do about those people? They're discriminated against.

Joko: I think it's fine to fight for what you think is right. OK? What's the difference between that and being angry?

Tom: Um. Well, I'm not too angry. I just feel that I want to fix this thing.

Joko: That's all right. Just go ahead and try to fix it. But see the point is, you will do all you can do, and it will work or it won't work. And if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. I mean, it's true of a lot of things in life. We'd like them to be a certain way but they just aren't going to turn out that way.

Tom: Well, I've got that view that I can live with whatever happens in this, but I'm going to have a go at it.

Joko: That's fine to have a go at it. OK? All I'm saying is if there's any anger in it, that's your practice. Because that's impractical. It doesn't help solve the situation, and it just makes you upset.

Tom: Yeah, I do get angry. I've had people lecture me that I should be doing this differently. I shouldn't be producing so much rubbish. I should be sorting it in fifty different categories and taking it around to different places. And that does make me angry. That's their scene. That's not my scene. That does tick me off a bit. That makes me madder than the Council, I have to say.

Joko: Um.

Tom: So maybe the practice is in that one.

Joko: Oh, there is.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: Any anger there's practice, OK? We have to recycle here, so, forget it! [laughs] We get four or five little bins, that all have to be sorted out.

Tom: Well, that I wouldn't mind. But they don't provide those. They just give one small bin, and expect you to figure it out. And make all these trips all over the place.

Joko: You see I think that whole rubbish bit is just beginning to be a problem that will be looked at in

many ways before it's done. What I'm saying, is if you're angry about it.

Tom: Yeah?

Joko: You stand much less chance of getting what you want, for one thing. People just get angry at you, see? They don't listen to you.

Tom: Well, I didn't approach it in an angry way to the press. I approached it in a humorous way.

Joko: OK.

Tom: [laughs] It's pretty funny, I have to admit.

Joko: All I ask is that you see there's practice in there. Not for my sake, but for your sake.

Tom: That's what I was wondering, because it's certainly a busy time for me here on this particular topic. A campaign.

Joko: Also, sometimes we can get so caught up in a campaign that we don't see other things that need to be done. I mean there has to be a sense of balance. I don't know. So you just keep looking at this, OK?

Tom: Right....

Joko: We tend to always believe our thoughts, instead of really, really looking. And so let's see what happens.

Tom: Yeah, believing one's thoughts, that's all too easy.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well that the human thing. And it creates more ills on the planet than rubbish.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, right. Indeed.

Joko: Yeah, well you just look at that, OK?

Tom: OK. Back next time.

Joko: You can tell me about the rubbish [chuckles]. You have to look at these things carefully, OK? All right, Tom.

Tom: OK, thanks.

16 Dec — I may as well just sit here

Tom: I just bring up whatever is on the top the kind of list each week. I don't tend to bring any coherence or pattern into this. Is that all right?

Joko: Uh-huh. It's all right. It'll straighten itself out.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, right. OK. What I noticed recently, the past some weeks, is a kind of tactile feeling of the world. Without actually trying to do anything, I notice when I'm drying my hands on the towel and feel the whole thing.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I'm pushing a chair, I seem to just be doing that. It's odd, because a long time ago, you know, I remember talks on mindfulness and being urged to do this kind of thing. And even with a bit of effort, it never really did work. But now, without actually trying, it's happening.

Joko: Well, you're just not spending so much time thinking about yourself. It's really what it amounts to. So that you're open to the appreciation of these things that are happening all the time. It's very rich. You know, life is a very rich thing.

Tom: Yeah. So, I thought that was intriguing, and nice.

Joko: Uh-huh. It is nice. That in a way happens more and more as we practice. It also shows you're doing something — I hate to say "right" — but you know, you're on the right track.

Tom: It did seem to tie in what I'd been told a long time ago and never really quite got.

Joko: Yeah. It's just fine.

Tom: And the other one was maybe tied in. A kind of putting down of things while sitting and just letting it drop. You know, realising that all of this restless activity is a waste of time. And if I sit there, I might as well just sit there. And listen, and feel things.

Joko: Same thing in your ordinary life too. Endlessly fuss about everything instead of just letting it be. Experiencing it. You see what I mean?

Tom: I never really quite believed, I suppose. I felt, putting it another way, that unless I was mentally active, I wasn't achieving anything. Something like that.

Joko: We need to use our minds well, when we use them. But most of what we do with our minds is just a waste of time.

Tom: Yeah. That was the impression. All this is just rubbish. I might as well just sit here, rather than go around like this.

Joko: Uh-huh. Right.

Tom: And it keeps happening.

Joko: It doesn't mean not to use your mind well, when you really think. But most of what we fiddle around with doesn't make any difference. You know what I mean?

Tom: Yeah. It's one thing of course to be told that, and sort of half believe it, and another to see: "Oh, well, that's just a pile of rubbish. Why not let it go?"

Joko: Well we learn that in practice. Yeah. Right. That's good. Anything else?

Tom: No, that's all, I guess.

Joko: Yeah, all right.

Tom: We're getting to the holiday season with all its preparation.

Joko: Yeah. We are too.

Tom: I bet, yeah. This is a good phone line, actually. I've been dialling previously on a fax line, because you usually get better lines that way. And then this morning I got bumped off. The phone company finally got wise to it. I got a recorded message saying, basically: "Get off this fax line and use an ordinary line!" [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] All right, have a nice holiday, Tom.

Tom: Are you around for a bit more? What is this? The sixteenth aren't we?

Joko: Ah, I won't be doing phone hours next week, or the week after. Because of the sesshin.

Tom: Oh, OK.

Joko: There're just so many visitors coming in, about the middle of next week. I just don't have time.

Tom: Yeah, I can imagine. OK.

Joko: OK?

Tom: Speak to you after Christmas.

Joko: Yeah, we'll talk after.

1996

3 Feb — post-holiday fog

Joko: Hello. [Weakly]

Tom: Ah, Joko. Hi.

Joko: Hi.

Tom: All back, huh?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: How are you going?

Joko: I'm OK.

Tom: Good.

Joko: You know, getting there. I'm fine. So what's up with you?

Tom: Well, it's pretty normal. I have a system now - I'm not sure that's entirely good - but I manage to cope with most things. By using what I've been practising for all this time. Whatever comes up, even in the middle of the night - you know, I used to worry about cash flow and things like that in the middle of the night. And now if this comes up in the night, I just think: this again! And almost sit with it a bit, and it goes away.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: So what nags me in the background is I'm not sure what's really doing this. Who is doing it? I

can't see how these ignorant and self-serving bits can actually further a larger process.

Joko: Well, that self-serving thing is simply your personal thoughts. You get to feel they're the whole world, you see what I mean? Instead of watching them.

Tom: Everything seems to be made up of these little self-serving thoughts, and what could actually drive a larger process of actually observing the thoughts, is odd.

Joko: Well the thoughts themselves are part of the process, but it's not there's something wrong with them. It's the fact we believe them and make them into the whole thing. When we do that, we can't see that everything is the process, even the little thoughts. But the observer ceases to function. You get what I'm saying? Everything in the universe is the same thing, it has to be. That includes your thoughts.

Tom: I still have a feeling that the irritating little thoughts are rubbish to be gotten rid of.

Joko: You don't have to get rid of them. But you have to see that they are in Buddhist terms, just empty. They're just little blips. You don't really need to get rid of them, but you have to see that you don't need to hold onto them.

Tom: Well, maybe not get rid of them. They just...

Joko: Well, to see that they really have no - you know, for one thing, they're constantly changing. We act as though they're something solid. They're really just little flowing bits of energy. There's nothing solid about them except we make them so. By constant thinking and holding onto them. That make sense?

Tom: It does. When I think about it, when I focus on it, that's quite right, I guess. But what I carry around usually is.... yuk!

Joko: Well, be aware that you're carrying it around. See?

Tom: Ah, OK.

Joko: I mean, you need to pause a number of times during the day and just take a look.

Tom: Yes, that's another thing I was wondering about. You know, when some pressure builds up, then I can sort of sit back and just feel things. But I wondered if there are other things I could be doing other times of the day, even when things aren't going wrong.

Joko: The whole trick is to let the attention be aware of everything. Instead of narrowing your life down to just what you're thinking and believing. But we do that, and we have trouble. But you seem to be developing some ability at least to watch some of what's going on.

Tom: Oh yes. I can watch the irritating bits. That's not a problem. They do get your attention, don't they? Like teenage sons.

Joko: They sure do. Yeah, well, I'm not as sharp as usual, so I'm not sure I'm picking this up in the best possible way. But I think you're doing OK.

Tom: Well, yeah it seems OK. I was just reporting on global things. It's been a while, and here's what the pattern is.

Joko: Well, we'll talk more on this again, and I'll see. From what you're telling me it sounds OK.

Tom: Yeah. It seems basically OK.

Joko: Well, I'm not the world's sharpest person yet either. So, we'll talk again - in a few weeks or something, or whatever we do.

Tom: OK. See you later.

Joko: Nice to talk to you. Bye-bye.

24 Feb — what's my Zen score?

Tom: Let's see, how to put this? I feel that you've answered thousands of questions and I wonder if I'm getting a blue-ribbon result. I feel I should be presenting you with better results.

Joko: Noooo. It's not about results. It's about a growing sureness about what the problem is.

Tom: Ah.

Joko: One thing about knowing what the problem is, we don't expect results. Because results would imply there's something you could fix. You know what I mean? Life just flows along. And there's no me, and there's no problem. We just do our best with what turns up. But it's a very subtle, slow change in the way we see our life. And it's not a formula. There isn't something you learn that just works.

Tom: Yeah. It's awfully hard to get around that idea that one sort of gets a certificate or something out of things. Everything is a bit like that, isn't it? Usually. [chuckles]

Joko: A bit more perhaps in Australia than southern California.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: I suppose that's true.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah. There are no certificates. The longer you go, the longer you know life is just as it is. You might as well enjoy it. That's really [chuckles] a very important part of this. But when you're looking for certificates, you're saying "Well, I don't quite have it yet. But when I get my certificate, I'll be happy."

Tom: I'm more concerned that I'm letting the side down in some way. Because I keep trying but I've had two really busy weeks, when I've hardly had time to sit down, much less sit. You know, with clients...

Joko: That happens.

Tom: Clients piling on, and dental problems, and heaps of family whirl. I think, uuuooooo, I'm not really holding up my side here.

Joko: Well, we just do our best. What else can we do? We all get times when we're just over our head. We just do what we can do. And trying to keep enough out of our practice, even when we're busy, that life just doesn't drive us crazy, that's all.

Tom: Well that sounds like what I can manage [laughs].

Joko: Well what's wrong with that? I mean, isn't that real life?

Tom: Yeah, it actually is. That's what goes on.

Joko: There isn't some millennium when there're no problems and no being overstressed. You know, that's a part of life. At least modern life, for most of us.

Tom: It's not always like that. I go way up and way down, in terms of busyness. But that's what's been happening recently. OK, well that's... yeah, thank you for that.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: I feel I'm not on the wrong track really, in my degree of effort.

Joko: It's better to look at your life over a period of a year or two. And just sort of see, if on the whole it seems to be somewhat different than it used to be. That's about all you can do.

Tom: OK. It passes that one.

Joko: Well that's enough. You can't look every two weeks. Especially not when you're in these busy, busy periods. So just do your best, and say: OK, this is what I'm doing. That's fine. No one's giving you a grade, OK?

Tom: Well, I feel I'm giving myself a grade.

Joko: I know. But that's your thinking, see?

Tom: Yeah, I know. It's round and round you go.

Joko: That's one of your systems. You need to watch that. "I have to do it right. I have to get it right." You know, all that stuff.

Tom: Oh, very much.

Joko: It's OK to do it right, but the fact that you're sort of on top of yourself all the time is extra. You see what I mean?

Joko: Yeah. All right. Just plough along for a while, OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: Good. All right. That's enough.

9 Mar — anything worth doing...

Tom: I've been working away for weeks and weeks on projects — I may have mentioned last time. I think I did.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: Heavy pressure. Yesterday it all eased off. And I thought: "Thank goodness for that! People will stop pounding on the door." And then this morning I got one of my migraines, but very mild. I

haven't had one in a long time. I thought: that's interesting. I ease off, and some sort of message comes up.

Joko: Yeah, and the other realistic level — you know, there are many levels of upset and illness. What do you do in very practical ways to take care of yourself when this sort of thing comes up? You ever get a massage? Or something to help you?

Tom: What do you mean?

Joko: Well, you have a mild migraine, and you're obviously tired. And what do you do to help yourself?

Tom: This morning, I just sat with it, and that helped.

Joko: That certainly helps.

Tom: Just watched in great detail.

Joko: That's the deepest level. What I'm saying, at other levels, what do you do?

Tom: Ah, I might take a hot shower.

Joko: That's all right. That's fine. Do you do any kind any kind of stretching exercise, or something of that sort?

Tom: Ah, no. I don't.

Joko: You might look into that. What do you do, to take care of the body in general?

Tom: Not a lot.

Joko: Not a lot, huh? Ha! How old are you?

Tom: Fifty six.

Joko: See, you're still on the edge of being young. [chuckles] But, you know, you need to be doing something.

Tom: Yeah, my wife tells me that too.

Joko: I mean, like a forty minute walk, five days a week, something like that.

Tom: Cor — that's a lot of time!

Joko: Ummmm. It takes a lot of time to have a heart attack too.

Tom: Yeah, that's a point.

Joko: Or to be really ill. You know what I mean? It's funny how we ask our body to serve us 24 hours a day, and we do very little for it.

Tom: I do a little bit of exercise, mind you. Kind of routinely. I forgot about that.

Joko: Well, that's great. I'm just saying: are you doing enough? That's all.

Tom: OK.

Joko: In a way, it's none of my business. But you know, we aren't just a mind. We're a mind and a body. And you have to take care of it. Now sitting takes care of the deepest levels of adjustment. But I think it's important to be doing other things. So you think about yoga, something like that.

Tom: I used to play squash.

Joko: That's a pretty strenuous sport.

Tom: I don't think I'd be quite up to that now.

Joko: Well, you might, at some level. But I'm saying I want you to give some thought to this. And I second your wife, OK?

Tom: Oh, OK. Right.

Joko: Well, you know, we're sort of freakish about that in California. Everybody here does something to take care of their health.

Tom: Yes, I know, there're all sorts of programs for everything.

Joko: Well, people make fun of it, but you know, by and large, it also works. So, anyway, that's one level of things. What else do you want to talk about?

Tom: The only other thing is that looking over my life from time to time, I feel that nothing's happened. [laughs]

Joko: Happened?

Tom: Nothing has happened.

Joko: But you've been living, haven't you?

Tom: Yeah, but I get this odd feeling — of course it's a bit strange — because lots of things happened. But I feel that nothing has really happened.

Joko: Maybe you didn't pay much attention?

Tom: Possibly. I wasn't fully with it. I mean, there's been lots of things. I've done lots of things. But one could greet it with a big shrug.

Joko: Well, you're sort of giving me the usual line that, "Is this all there is?" You're not really satisfied, see? If you're not satisfied, it's because you're not really there. And that's why we practise, is to be really to begin to recover that ability, and to just be here.

Tom: Yeah, I thought that that would be it. It hasn't been like that, certainly more recently. I can't shrug about the past year or two.

Joko: No, you're changing. But it's important to be as clear about this work as we can be. You know what I mean. It's essentially about recovering the ability to be directly with our life. And when we can be, then life will be satisfying. But you have to want to do that. It has to be on your mind every day, so it's kind of infiltrating all the time. You can't just practise once in a while. I don't mean you

should sit and think about practice all day, but it's sort of there.

Tom: Yes. Keep it going, yes.

Joko: Kind of on a secondary level. It's always there.

Tom: That's clear. I know about that. As I mentioned a time or two ago, I don't feel I do brilliantly well at that.

Joko: Well, we're not talking about doing brilliantly well. We're talking about doing something. OK?

Tom: [laughs] Yes.

Joko: One of my best students here, he came up with a wonderful one. He said: "Anything that's worth doing well, is worth doing in a half-assed way."

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] He turned it right around, in other words. You know what I mean? Usually we say, if something's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

Tom: That's what my mother used to insist.

Joko: But turn it around. Anything that's worth doing well, is worth doing in a half-assed way. In other words, if you can't walk forty minutes, five times a week, if that's what you decide to do, then cut it in half. It's still worth doing.

Tom: That's memorable. Yes. Good, good.

Joko: A wonderful saying.

Tom: I can cope with that one, yes.

Joko: Well, I have a way of thinking: if I can't really clean the whole room, well, what's the use? I won't do anything, see?

Tom: Ah yes.

Joko: Instead of just doing, you know, a little piece of something.

Tom: A corner.

Joko: Yeah, right. It sounds silly. At least a lot of us work that way. So if we can't really do something all together, we just kind of throw up our hands. So think about that.

Tom: Yeah, that's a good one. Very useful. I like it, and I can remember it. And I partly do operate that way.

Joko: Uh-huh. Me too. I was so amused when he said that. Ever since, it sort of stayed in my mind. I was saying to him: "Well, I don't know how much longer I can really keep doing the schedule I'm doing, this number of hours a week, you know." And he said: "Well, cut it down." [laughs] See but that doesn't occur to me. Because I feel that if I don't do it really absolutely, I don't do it at all.

Tom: A lot of people are that way. I'm a bit that way.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, you think about that a little bit. OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: All right, Tom. Nice to talk to you.

23 March — are you walking enough?

Tom: Happy equinox.

Joko: Ah, happy equinox, true enough.

Tom: It must be close to it, anyway. Last time, you said I should think about exercise. I have been. This all ties in with an old myth I've had about sitting: that after awhile, you're going disappear into a luminous cloud of some kind.

Joko: I haven't seen anybody who's done that.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] I don't want to be a luminous cloud.

Tom: Not necessarily in Zen, but partly in Zen — in some of the books you can read. Also the Tibetan stuff is full of this kind of thing.

Joko: But you do really know that?

Tom: Well, no.

Joko: Well, then it's just an idea.

Tom: Yeah, it is.

Joko: Right.

Tom: So anyway, this brought up all that. And I'm thinking: well, this sitting and practice I've been doing is very earthy. And physical.

Joko: It doesn't mean it doesn't in time affect your mind and your body. It does. But not in some sort of literal way, like you pull out of books.

Tom: Yeah. OK. Anyway, on the exercise thing, I started thinking about it, and I thought of a number of things. I suddenly remembered I'd read a book called "The Exercise Myth" in which some statisticians got in there and established, pretty well, they thought, that exercise doesn't have any bearing on health.

Joko: I don't think excessive exercise does, but I think a certain minimal exercise is very important. You don't have to be a big athlete to be healthy. Which some of them overdo, and they aren't healthy at all. But to walk, say five times a week for at least thirty minutes, makes an enormous difference to your health. I don't think there's much disagreement about that really. I think you're just trying to find books that say you don't have to do anything.

Tom: Well, that could be. But in thinking about it, I thought of that, and also an Alastair Cooke broadcast where he announced that somebody had studied the problem of jogging.

Joko: I don't think jogging is good for you. But walking is. Jogging unsettles the joints.

Tom: Also, apparently the life prolongation of jogging is more or less exactly equal to the amount of time you spend jogging. [Chuckles]

Joko: It isn't so much that you live longer. It's that you feel better while you live.

Tom: OK. That's a point.

Joko: And the oxygenation of the body. Really breathing deeply.

Tom: Yeah, that was a point in this book, which you were criticising slightly. It said, even though it didn't improve health, it did make people feel better.

Joko: I think it does improve health really. I mean, I've just been sick but it's the first time in sixteen years. And I lead a horrendous life in terms of schedule, for my age. And I've never been sick.

Tom: Because you do walking?

Joko: I do walking. But I do yoga. I do a little of a lot of things. Primarily, I walk.

Tom: This is rattling around in me, so I think that you've struck something here.

Joko: Well, try to read things, not fanatical things, but try to begin to get interested in some of these subjects. OK?

Tom: OK. Yeah.

Joko: Where do you live, in a place that's fairly pretty? Are there pretty walks?

Tom: Oh yeah, there're heaps of them. We live in the country practically. There're horses in the field next door and that sort of stuff.

Joko: Oh, you're lucky.

Tom: There are nice nature walks, yes.

Joko: I always have to walk on city streets.

Tom: I do walk from time to time. It certainly isn't a very regular thing. But the whole family will want to go out, and say "Let's go" — and we go. But it's not a scheduled thing. We just take off... I mean, I don't sit in my chair all the time. Maybe I give you slightly the wrong idea. It's just that I don't have any program for it.

Joko: I'm not talking about a strict program. But keep something in mind like walking five times a week for at least thirty minutes. It doesn't have to be exact, something like that. Do that. And if you're underweight, overweight, all that stuff, you need to look at. You know, life isn't any fun if you don't feel well. I don't care what you study. I hate to be sick myself.

Tom: I do look after myself. I have regular checkups. I have a whole schedule of things, eye tests and everything else I go through.

Joko: That's fine. But that's not basic. I mean, you have to do that stuff. But that's not going to make your arteries healthy and body full of oxygen. You need to eat well, you need to keep your weight normal, all that stuff.

Tom: I think I do those two OK. Maybe. All right. I will cope with this one. Mmmmm.... I'm here alone with my two boys, and Sibyl's taken off — she's gone on a sesshin for a week and a bit. Anyway, I've noticed for the first time how I plug into her systems so much. If we left here, I realise that there's no one I would really need to say goodbye to. All the social stuff she organises and lays on. What time I have left, I think, ooooo, I'll just keep to myself, because I have hardly any time at all.

Joko: I don't think you have to be what you call a social person. But I'd hate to see you not do some social things.

Tom: Oh, I do plenty of social things. Heaps. But it's all her stuff.

Joko: You need a good friend. Not your wife, but somebody else.

Tom: Yeah. I haven't got anybody like that here. I could just leave tomorrow and I wouldn't really say goodbye to anyone.

Joko: Well, I don't know about that.

Tom: I don't know about it either.

Joko: Actually, what to do. I'm just saying these are things to look at. You see what I mean? Because sometimes there are systems behind that sort of thing. Not necessarily, but I'd certainly want to look at it.

Tom: Yeah, because it clarifies when she's away. And I can see how things work. OK. Ummmm.... I think that's about it.

Joko: Well just keep looking into these matters. It's not so trivial, OK?

Tom: Yeah, OK.

Joko: How old are you, Tom?

Tom: Fifty-six.

Joko: Time to get busy, OK?

Tom: [laughs]. Busy, yes.

Joko: Well, you need a good old age. Old age can be hell if you don't feel well.

Tom: I see what you mean.

Joko: You've got to earn that after a certain age. OK?

Tom: Will do.

Joko: All right? [Chuckles] Good enough. Bye-bye.

13 April — now I'm walking around

Tom: I've been away last week, on a family holiday.

Joko: Uh-huh. Good.

Tom: Recovered from. It was actually quite fun. We were talking last time about exercise, and I'm pleased to report that I've taken that on board. I'm climbing a hill which rises from our house. Regularly, every day. It's nice, actually.

Joko: Don't go crazy about it. Just do something.

Tom: Yeah, that's what I thought [laughs]. I'd make a start on this.

Joko: At the beginning, it's important to have a little rest, then do it, then you rest, then you do it. You know, until you build up your strength.

Tom: But also, it seems to be tied in with a resistance to wanting to go out at all. I now notice people more than I used to. I didn't pay much attention to a lot of people before, but now the checkout clerk at the supermarket and people like that, they come into focus a bit more.

Joko: Good. That's your life, you know. Sure.

Tom: I was also struck by that list which came from your group, a whole list of fears. You know that one? I thought: oh yeah, I've got all these! [laughs]

Joko: One of my students wrote it. It's good.

Tom: Yeah, it's useful. But you feel that all this personal stuff, you get a bit tired of it. You sense there's something else that's in fact doing it.

Joko: There is. But we have to be very honest about what's going on with us first. Not just cover it up. OK?

Tom: Yeah. So I guess all the constant focus on it, I guess you get tired of yourself after a bit, don't you?

Joko: Well, it gets repetitive, so you do get tired of it, yeah.

Tom: Well, that's about where it's at at the moment. Sound all right?

Joko: Well, it's not so little. I'm glad you're doing the exercise. So you know: don't get fanatical about it or not fanatical. Just do it.

Tom: I made a start. It seems a good thing but I don't intend to open a gym. I'm also willing to go on longer walks with people, if they want to.

Joko: I'm sure there're things in your area that, if you want, you can get into. But the most important is to get it done some way.

Tom: So that's done. That's caught hold. That's a good one.

Joko: Right. Excellent... well, that's basic, you know. If you don't have your health, there's nothing

else that really looks very good. I really believe that.

Tom: It's true enough. I came back from our trip [to New Zealand] having caught something. We were in a campervan for a week, and it was pretty rainy. Not very clean in some places. I had a whole week afterwards of feeling pretty yukky. So I've had a recent experience of that.

Joko: Nothing feels good if you're not healthy. I mean, if we have to be sick, our sick. That's our practice, but I really feel it's worth putting some effort into being healthy. All right, Tom. Sounds OK. Anything else?

Tom: No. I think that's about it.

Joko: Good. All right. We'll talk again. Bye-bye.

27 April — the insecure core

Tom: A couple of weeks ago I got thoroughly shook up by small events, and it seemed like a message got through to way down, that things are basically insecure about life. As I was sitting with this, it's like discovering one of these cross-sectional drawings of the earth, where the core of the earth is revealed, right?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: It's like seeing really clearly for the first time that practically everything I do is based on an almost infinite drive for security.

Joko: Sure.

Tom: I wonder where all this stuff comes from.

Joko: Well, it comes from a lot of things. Some of it's our early conditioning, and some is just the fact that we are — whether we like it or not — we're animals with all sorts of drives and things built in, for security, food, shelter, all sorts of things. We really feel our job is to scramble for those things.

Tom: It's powerful, wow.

Joko: Fight for them, yeah.

Tom: I was amazed. I hadn't seen that as a kind of unit. It's almost like a driving unit.

Joko: It is a driving unit. And that's what we call the ego.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: Well, in itself, there's nothing wrong with it. I mean, but when it dominates everything to the exclusion of seeing anything else, then there is something wrong with it.

Tom: It's come into focus now. I'm happy about that. I can see it like a core, on its own.

Joko: Uh-huh. Excellent.

Tom: OK.... the other thing, my wife's very kindly gone out and bought me a copy of the Steve Hagan book you mentioned quite a while ago. I just got that yesterday. I'm going to sit down and enjoy that

this weekend. It seems to be a mixture of Zen and physics. Is that right?

Joko: Yeahhhh. And it's probably not a book for people who can't get that at all. I don't really get it. But I get it — I don't know how to put it. Cause I know exactly what he's driving at. He's a Zen monk, you know.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: I understand what he's saying. But I don't know how much you'll enjoy it, but I still think it's an important book.

Tom: I think I may enjoy it. I've flicked through it. It seems to be my kind of thing. Thanks for that.

Joko: OK... all right? Anything else?

Tom: No. That's about it.

Joko: All right, Tom. We'll talk again.

11 May — another good day

Tom: We've got a gorgeous sunrise here, after a cold night.

Joko: [chuckles] Sunrise. No, it's getting ready to set here. Not quite yet.

Tom: I've been feeling that I'd like to contribute something to the centre. I'd like to have some sort of input. I don't know how to donate or anything. Is there somewhere I could send a cheque to help, just generally... you must have expenses.

Joko: Well, you can always do that. Some people do it that way. You don't have to do anything. I don't know a thing about your financial situation. This is not something I do. I don't even think about stuff like that. But if people want to do it, then they either send a cheque, or they become some sort of an associate member at a distance, which is — I don't know what it is. Some small amount a month — \$10 or 15, something like that.

Tom: Do I just write to the Centre and ask? I don't know the first thing about it.

Joko: If you want to do that, then you write to Membership and somebody will answer you at some point.

Tom: We've been getting a newsletter, and there's postage on that.

Joko: Well, it's all right. We have enough money.

Tom: Yeah. [laughs]. Well, it would be nice to feel that I'm doing something anyway.

Joko: You're free to do whatever you want. The amount of the cheque could be little, big, it's up to you.

Tom: OK. That'll help me anyway. You've been there, you know, for two years or something like that. I'd feel very lost without all this.

Joko: The only question is whether or not the practice really opens up your life.

Tom: And now it seems very clear and reliable. Every time I look at trouble, it turns out to be nothing, or practically nothing. It dissolves into just the feelings and tensions of the body, and a thought, or a bunch of thoughts. And I actually know that's coming now.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: [laughs]. Here we go! This is not really going to be a big deal. So that's really where I think I've come to. And that's reliable.

Joko: That gives you a little bit more self-confidence in living your life.

Tom: Oh, indeed, yeah.

Joko: You know you can really take care of these things.

Tom: That it's not going to be a hard fall. It's going to be that kind of thing again, whatever it is.

Joko: Also, it's not a hard fall. It's really just something that teaches you. Because the things we encounter, as we experience them, then they become our teacher. And that's the real teacher. The outward teacher is just there for a while to let you know that. OK?

Tom: Right. Yeah, if you keep seeing each of these things coming up as a reminder, I guess.

Joko: Well they need to come up. You know, if you picture life with no problems, frankly, what would we ever learn? We wouldn't learn a thing.

Tom: It's like the gods, with nothing to worry about.

Joko: We can learn to have life's troubles, and at the same time, freedom in dealing with them. I don't know how to put it. It's a different world. It doesn't mean we like the problems, but we know how to do it somehow.

Tom: It becomes part of the fabric of things.

Joko: That's true. It makes for a very different kind of life eventually. And it deepens almost indefinitely. Throughout a lifetime.

Tom: It is indeed slow, but kind of reliable.

Joko: Your practice then becomes yourself. Very, very slowly, you know what I mean? It's not ever quick, or it probably shouldn't be quick. So it needs to be slow enough so it becomes you.

Tom: Gradually sinks in.

Joko: Yeah. You don't think about it. It just is you. Yeah. So that's good... any other questions?

Tom: No, that's just a couple of points I wanted to bring up.

Joko: Yeah, OK.

Tom: Just checking in.

Joko: Yeah, all right. Well, OK, Tom. Enjoy your morning. It seems a nice one.

Tom: A good one, yeah.

Joko: And we'll enjoy our evening here. Isn't that funny?

Tom: Yeah. I'm used to it. I keep having to not say "good morning" when I call.

Joko: Every day is a good day. Every day is a holy day. That's one of the old Zen sayings. A nice one, huh?

Tom: Oh, that book I read by — what's his name? — Hagen. I read most of it in a sitting last week, and at the time I got a lot out of it, but actually thinking back, I can't remember anything. [laughs]

Joko: The kind of book you don't have to remember, but if you keep re-reading it, something settles out. I don't mean to re-read it immediately. But at some point, yeah.

Tom: I've got a background in physics, so I understood the physics all right. It all jumped out at me. But it's like one of those lectures where you get a real buzz off it, but when somebody asks you what it was about, you can't say two words about it.

Joko: Yeah, I know. Well, maybe it's not a good book. But anyway, I've got another on that's good — if you want to order this one. OK?

Tom: Yeah, what's that?

Joko: It's called the Tao of Chaos.

Tom: [laughs]. Oh really? Who's that by?

Joko: By Stephen [with ph, stphen] Wolinski.

Tom: OK. I'll check on that one.

Joko: I don't know what you have there and don't have. But that's a good one. All right? [Chuckles]

Tom: OK. [laughs]

Joko: And it's much more close to your practice maybe than the Hagen book.

Tom: Right. I've got a good system for finding books.

Joko: Yeah, all right. Good.

Tom: Thanks a lot.

1 June — we'll do it our way

Tom: I think the practice is going OK. Whenever I sit, it settles into the feelings.

Joko: Body sensations. Yeah.

Tom: Yeah, sensations — and that seems to clear up ANYTHING.

Joko: Oh, it does. It does.

Tom: You simply can't argue with that. That's what actually is happening.

Joko: Right. And if you learn the depths of that, your practice has no limits. And it will be your teacher, eventually.

Tom: It seems like even if it's a very tense knot of things, that you don't know what's happening...

Joko: Let it be.

Tom: Just let it be and it seems to... work well. Other times, though, I spend an awful lot of time thinking about, say, cosmic influences on local life. Like my wife and I are having a discussion — not a discussion, even an argument — about whether or not to borrow money and buy a house as an investment property. Now this is her idea. The outlook interests me, because she sees a house as real and a secure investment. But I look at everything else — it doesn't mean anything to me — and I just look at all the effects.

Joko: It will either be a good investment or it won't, I can tell you that much. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] Well, it might be neutral, I suppose. You just go to a lot of trouble for nothing.

Joko: Right.

Tom: But her outlook is that she sees a house as a real object, and how can you lose? I say: look at the interest rates, and the possibility of a stock market collapse and all the other effects. I don't even see the house.

Joko: You're both right. It isn't a question of somebody being right and somebody being wrong. But how could you come together in something like that, without having it have to go one way or another?

Tom: Ah, I don't know. We've had this kind of problem before. I mean it's not really a heavy marital problem.

Joko: I'm just saying that the problem with most people, they think it has to be either your way or my way. So what would it mean for it to be "our" way?

Tom: Yeah, I think that's what we have to get to.

Joko: You do. But it has to be a conscious desire on your part, you see? To really work it out that way, and then you'll find a way. It's amazing.

Tom: I think that's what we do do. We must do something like that, we've been married a long time...

Joko: That's good. But you might polish it up a little bit. OK?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah. Make it "our way". Yeah, that's right. Yeah that's clever.

Joko: Yeah, right. I don't know what that means, but somehow both of you do.

Tom: I get the picture immediately. Yeah, that's a good one. Well that's the only actual problem that I'm having at the moment. [laughs]

Joko: [chuckles] Well, you're OK. The rest of the world's in turmoil. So that's if all you cook up, you're OK.

Tom: OK. That's all at the moment.

Joko: All right... well, I'm not in the mood today for going into anything new, so we'll let it go at that.

Tom: OK. All right.

Joko: You're doing fine.

13 July — losing the empire

Tom: I've been shocked, been struggling with something I haven't really made clear before. It became all too evident that I really figure out everything and make the best moves.

Joko: You mean you're shocked to realise that?

Tom: I'm shocked, yeah! [laughs]

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: It's been one of my big things: if I study the whole problem, the whole world, then I'll be able to make the best moves. Now I feel like I'm living among the ruins of my self-built Roman Empire.

Joko: That's the viewpoint of science. It's remarkably useful within a certain domain. It's when we try to make it everything that we really get into trouble. Because there's nobody, scientists or not, who understands really what this universe is.

Tom: I guess I knew that before, but in struggling with a headache...

Joko: I think you use your mind also to try to get security. If you can understand everything, you think you'll be safe.

Tom: Exactly. That's right. And now I feel: eeeeeu! Now what?

Joko: Well great!

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: You have to reach that point or else nothing can happen. OK?

Tom: It feels a bit scary, and good as well.

Joko: Uh-huh. I'm delighted. You know realisations like that very nice because you begin to lose some of the really false ego viewpoint.

Tom: I can see it's going to make things more realistic.

Joko: I think so. So, any other questions?

Tom: Not really. I've been by myself here for a week. Now I'm going to pick everyone up. In about half an hour.

Joko: All right?

Tom: OK!

Joko: Yeah, OK, Tom. I'm not going to say more than that today.

27 July — it's not enough

Tom: Last time I mentioned that I was shocked by discovering that I couldn't work out everything, understand everything.

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: And then there's been a bit more of that, like discovering a molasses-like tendency to want to hold on to whatever money I've got, and try to increase it, as a security thing.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: That and a few other things are loosening. In a way, it's nice. And in another way, it's a worry.

Joko: Well, remember, there's nothing wrong with saving money. But it's the reason you save it. If you save money, just because it's a reasonable thing to do, that's one thing. But if you save it, because you think it's going to save you.

Tom: Well, that was more like it, yes.

Joko: Then that's what needs to be looked at. By all means, save some money. That's a good idea. But don't expect it to save you. And you could also lose it all. We all could.

Tom: Yeah, that's right.

Joko: We all have crazy governments. They could all collapse. We just don't know.

Tom: [laughs] Yes.

Joko: You know, that's just part of life. But the issue is what's going on with you when you get upset by this stuff.

Tom: I've been carrying that one a long time. Also, I notice my breathing is getting different. I used to be asthmatic, and from time to time my breathing would get quite tight. Not actually coughing and wheezing, but kind of reminiscent of way back, when I was a kid. That's loosening up too.

Joko: There's a strong connection between the emotions and asthma, because I used to have severe asthma.

Tom: That's right. When I used to get upset, I was more likely to get it.

Joko: I don't know if it's true of all asthmatics but they tend to be very sensitive people. I was anyway.

Tom: I'm also feeling that it's quite enough to do what I'm doing, without feeling I should be doing more.

Joko: Uh-hhhhhuh.

Tom: A lot of the time I felt that what I was doing wasn't quite good enough or not big enough.

Joko: You know, have we worked yet on your core beliefs?

Tom: Yes.

Joko: Well, you see what that is there? What's your core belief, when you get into that stuff?

Tom: Into that particular one?

Joko: Yeah. That it's not enough

Tom: Uh. Well, I should be...

Joko: Well, 'should' is a system that comes out of the core belief.

Tom: Oh, I see. Well, systems we talked about. Core beliefs...

Joko: Maybe we haven't talked about them thoroughly.

Tom: Well, I don't think you've used that term before. Core beliefs.

Joko: We may not have actually talked about it. I think we should. But I don't feel like doing it today. So next time you call. Remind me. OK?

Tom: Core beliefs. OK.

Joko: I had an especially disastrous day. I'm tired. And so I don't want to do it today. But next time.

3 Aug — the core belief, explained

Tom: The last couple of times, I was talking about things which then triggered you off to say that we should talk about core beliefs.

Joko: People here are finding it a very useful approach to practice. So if we haven't done it, I think it might be a good idea. So let's see what I mean by a core belief, OK?

Tom: Well the phrase itself is striking and makes you think about what it might be.

Joko: Let's take the analogy of a wheel. The hub of the wheel is the core belief. Out of the hub of the wheel stick the spokes. Those are the systems. So what we want to know is what we mean by that core belief. I don't know what I said about this. Did I say very much?

Tom: No. You didn't say anything. You just said that you didn't really feel like getting into it that time.

Joko: Well, the core belief is born out of the unavoidable trauma of growing up. I mean, you can actually have wonderful parents, to some degree you will have a core belief. It's unavoidable for human beings. And it's always negative. I can't analyse why right now. And it's always something like: I am worthless. And then that can have a particular flavour, depending on your conditioning. For instance, it might be "I am not able to succeed" or "I am a disappointment" or "I am unlovable."

Tom: Is there only one core belief, you reckon?

Joko: Well, for you there'll be a particular flavour. See it's always in a way: I am worthless. But each person it has its own particular flavour. Or "I am incapable of really doing anything right." Things like that.

Tom: Uh-huuuuuh.

Joko: And the first part of this is to find out what your core belief is. Remember this doesn't mean the core belief is real. It's just something we learn to believe in very early and we really do believe in it. It runs out life. It's into everything.

Tom: I keep running into stuff like that. For a long time, it's powerful feeling that seems absolutely true. Then suddenly you see it isn't true. It's just there.

Joko: Practice over the years markedly weakens it, but I've never met anybody I think that didn't have a core belief. If you sat for 30-35 years, it's no longer functioning much, but it's there. And we need to know what it is because we keep it hidden, even from ourselves. And yet it continues to operate. So it can be running your life, and you can be fairly ignorant of it.

Tom: Is this something you have to discover in a certain way, or is it something that comes out of sitting?

Joko: I would bet that even with what I said right now, you might have a vague idea what yours is.

Tom: Yes, you immediately start fishing around, don't you?

Joko: Well, the point is what we want to find is that which is absolutely right for you. You see what I mean? If you find your own core belief, it's always an unpleasant shock. We don't want to know about it even. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Because the core belief almost puts you outside of the realm of human beings. You're such a disaster, that really!

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, right.

Joko: But we want to get the exact words that would be true for you. And they always start with "I am" and then you finish the sentence. And all I want you to do until we talk again is to begin to see if you can find it. And the way you find it is particularly in situations where you get upset. Because when you get upset, it means something's going wrong with your core belief. And as you sit and feel that pain and watch the thoughts, it might dawn on you what the sentence is, starting with "I am". Or you might get close to it.

Tom: That's intriguing. And correct.

Joko: It is correct and people here have found it immensely freeing to work with this. And how we work with it — I want to take it one step at a time — so the only thing I want to do today is to have you begin. It doesn't mean to think about it as much as to kind of let it run around in there. More like a koan.

Tom: Yeah. OK.

Joko: See, my core belief is: "I am not capable. I can't do anything." Now it doesn't matter, in fact I'm very capable. But the thing we put out to the world is often the total opposite of what we really feel

about ourselves.

Tom: Sure. Yeah.

Joko: I mean, very very successful people sometimes have the most devastating core belief. So, anyway... do you see enough from what I'm saying to go ahead?

Tom: I see all kinds of things already. Yes indeed.

Joko: All I want you to do is play around with that for a week or two.

Tom: OK. Yes. You got me captivated just by mentioning it last time.

Joko: You'll find eventually how it fits into your practice and into what we would call our basic freedom. Which is what we're looking for in practice. But let's just start with the first step. So what I'm looking for is a sentence that hits home to you, of a negative type, that begins "I am.... blah, blah, blah, blah." So it's kind of fun in a way.

Tom: It is, yes. Gripping! [laughs]

Joko: All right. Good.

31 Aug — I am nothing, he discovers

Tom: I'm a bit sleepy this morning. And Australia's a bit wet, where I am. A real slosh of a winter here.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I missed you for a few weeks. For one thing or another — you weren't there, and I had to pick someone up at the airport and I couldn't get through in time. So anyway, here I am back.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: The last thing we were talking about, and I've been working on, is this business about core belief. I went through an awful lot of stuff, and discovered I guess these startling, strange beliefs. There were all centred around things like: I am unimportant. I am insignificant. I don't matter. I tried to put it all together and nothing really seemed to...

Joko: Well, you don't necessarily have to put it all together, because all those they twine together, you might say.

Tom: Yeah, but there's one word that seems to sum it up: that I'm nobody.

Joko: I'm nobody. Well, OK.

Tom: Some of them seem pretty fictional, like, "Oh, how'd I ever believe that?" But "I am nobody"...

Joko: Well, intellectually you may not believe it, but emotionally you do.

Tom: Sure do.

Joko: And then it runs everything you do. And tends to determine the kinds of systems you're trotting

out all the time to solve your problems.

Tom: Yeah, so that's pretty useful. I don't know what else I'm supposed to do about it.

Joko: At the moment, just continue to observe. For instance, if somebody upsets you, see if you can find out what's going on with you. We always think it's because of them, but not really.

Tom: Well, this is like the systems, isn't it?

Joko: It's similar to systems.

Tom: That come out of this.

Joko: It goes a little bit more directly into your self. And people seem to handle it better sometimes than systems. Systems can be a little bit cold and intellectual. They don't have to be. But just what some people do with them.

Tom: Yeah, OK. That makes perfect sense.

Joko: And of course the end of all the investigations that you'll do will be to work your way back to the pain of the core belief. Because instead of keeping it buried, what helps is to get it right out in the open, so we can really feel it. That's what heals us.

Tom: It seems pretty convincing at the moment. It seems like a pretty solid thing, like a nugget there.

Joko: Oh yeah. It is a nugget.

Tom: Nugget isn't quite the right word. An iron core.

Joko: Uh-huh. So just more or less get used to — I don't mean to think about it all day — but to be aware when you are getting yourself snarled up that you core belief is what's running things. See? See the connection between your snarling...

Tom: [laughs] Yeah right.

Joko: And the core belief. OK? Because it will be there. And then you don't get anywhere with that, we need to talk about it.

Tom: Does it sound like I got there? Does it sound like a perfectly plausible core belief?

Joko: Oh sure.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah right. OK.

Joko: It's startling when you first see it. You'll get used to it, and in some odd way, it makes you feel more free.

Tom: Well it did. Yeah it did actually. To realise that's what was there all the time. It's pretty odd... I can't really understand — maybe I shouldn't worry about this — but why a core belief has to be negative. It's awfully strange. You say everybody's got negative ones?

Joko: Because the nature of being a child is that in any child's life, things are always going wrong, you know — from the child's point of view. It might just be that mom is tired and can't meet the child's demands. In his or her opinion, you see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: But it's frightening to find fault with mom and dad.

Tom: Ahhhhh, I see. Yeah. Of course.

Joko: They hold up your life. So we find fault with ourselves.

Tom: It has to be me.

Joko: I mean, that's oversimplifying, but...

Tom: I get the picture. Right. So everyone would of course be put in that position, because they were small at one time.

Joko: Yeah, and you certainly aren't going to tear apart that which is supporting your life. That would be too overwhelming. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah. OK... right. Well, nice to hear from you — again. [Little laugh]

Joko: Yeah, all right. Well just continue with that. All right?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: OK, Tom. Bye-bye.

14 sept — Hey, you! You don't know what you're doing.

Tom: I read a book a couple of weeks ago that defined, I guess, what I'm doing. It was by an American comedian. I can't remember his name. He kept having this fantasy that he'd be walking down the street and two official-looking people would rush up and say, "All right. We've been monitoring you and you don't know what you're doing." [laughs]

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: And similar to that, this core belief that I'm nobody. That fits that so well. You know, I know exactly how he feels. [laughs]

Joko: Well, remember, you've got a lot of company.

Tom: Yeah! That's the other thing that's coming through. When you land on that, and realise that's there, then you start noticing other people aren't in such hot shape either.

Joko: Oh no. [laughs]

Tom: Because you know, for a long time, I've felt like I'm the only one. And everyone else really knows what they're doing.

Joko: Except for a few people in the world, who practise a long time, people are caught in their core belief and then they do what they do out of it — not usually with very good results.

Tom: Well, this has been very illuminating. I don't feel I've landed on it with both feet yet, but just touching it with my toe from time to time is very good. So that's what's going on here.

Joko: Well, it's a long, ongoing investigation. But once it gets opened up, it's interesting in some way. We keep doing it. We keep looking. OK?

Tom: It affects everything. Right.

Joko: Oh yeah. Everything comes out of it. So we don't want a core belief which isn't even real to be our master. You see what I mean?

Tom: Oh yes. But I still believe it, kind of.

Joko: I'm sure you do.

Tom: On the other hand, I see it's there now.

Joko: And once you see it, you want to begin to work with it. Which means: don't always let it run the show. Go against it. OK? And really experience it. Don't just think about it. You really have to feel the pain of it.

Tom: Well, I'm little by little getting there, I think. Yeah.

Joko: All right. That's good.

Tom: OK. That's about it.

Joko: All right. Well that's enough!

5 Oct — the burning pit

Tom: Oh dear oh dear. I'm working on the core thing, and pushing at this notion that I don't feel that I'm anybody. I get in a trap. For days and days, I feel like I'm sitting in a burning pit. I wake up at night, and feel this pressure all the time. But I don't feel I can do anything about it.

Joko: Well, remember, it's something you have to be careful of in your practice. You see your problem is you believe that. Even though the core belief is just the thoughts of a little kid, really. But you believe them, and practice is to see that you have those thoughts. But to really experience what?

Tom: I guess, what it feels like to sit in... experience the feeling of it. Settle into it?

Joko: Well, settle into the physical feeling of it. But that's not the same as settling into a lot of thoughts about it. In fact, if you do that, you just create a mess. So we're talking what's necessary to free ourselves from that core belief. And if you think about it and believe it more and more, that doesn't help you. You see what I mean?

Tom: I was doing that a bit, but I remember exactly what you said and every time this happened I concentrated again on the background, burning trapped feeling.

Joko: Just be that. But as much as you can, without any thoughts.

Tom: That's what I have been trying. And know that's the idea. But it's going on a long time.

Joko: Well, it's been going on your whole life.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: There isn't some little quick fix that's going to fix your whole life in a few weeks. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: It's a very, very slow business. But I would just do that.

Tom: Ok. Well, there's nothing else I can do, really. It's coming up almost by itself, this thing.

Joko: Try also to go against your core belief. Is it clear to you what I mean by that?

Tom: Yeah. It is actually. And I think that may have triggered off all this. I do see that none of this is correct, and to even act in ways that which I guess are not normal for me. Because when you have a core belief that you're nobody, you don't want people to know that.

Joko: Right.

Tom: And therefore you don't really want people to know anything much about you.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And that's the way I act. I just don't tell anyone anything very much. One of the ways I can react against it, is to open that up a bit.

Joko: I don't mean in ways that are too scary for you, but some little thing.

Tom: That's what I've been doing, trying like that. That sound right?

Joko: Yeah. Once you do it, you find the world doesn't come to an end. Does it?

Tom: [Laugh] No. So, yes, it's obviously a big one, this one. As you say, driving the whole lot, and it seems like it... Well, OK, if that sounds like that's not far off the track, I'll just carry on.

Joko: No, I don't think you're far off the track at all. I think what we want is a result, you see what I mean? Remember that practice is always just about being with our life exactly as it is. And that doesn't mean it's going to be some ideal life. So when you experience a core belief, it's really just what's going on with you. You see what I mean?

Tom: Oh yeah.

Joko: We call it something because that way we can understand a little bit better how it's generated, and how it begins to take over our life. But it's really just what's going on. So don't make it too complicated, OK?

26 Oct — when the cool one comes

Tom: I've been looking back and noticing changes, and you remember that I discussed migraine headaches with you.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I still get something, but they aren't really headaches any more. They don't hurt. It's more like a disturbance, and almost a welcome disturbance than a headache. That's a definite measurable change.

Joko: Uh-huh. What do you think caused that change?

Tom: I think it must have been discovering some of the stuff that's behind the headaches. It's still unpleasant to go through, but it seems to come with a message, and it makes me stop to see what will happen.

Joko: Uh-huh. All right.

Tom: And the other thing that's striking, something that at the beginning that I didn't quite believe: that when things are not going well, then that's part of the wave. It seems like that now. When I'm having a bad day, then that's just what's happening.

Joko: Just something's happening. We may or may not like it, but it's just happening.

Tom: Those are two things that are evident. The other thing, lurking in the background, is that I can't really shake off the notion that there is some big discovery to be made here. It's like the Three Pillars of Zen stuff.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] All this little stuff is all very fine, but when do we do the really neat one, you know?

Joko: You do the really neat one when there's nothing of you left. Then it's automatic. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: It's not so much getting something, it's an absence of something.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: What's it an absence of?

Tom: All this... illusion.

Joko: All the self-centred delusion. Even the idea that you have to get somewhere is part of the delusion, see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, I do see. But I just thought I'd mention that.

Joko: I'm saying it because people always think there's something added to get. Something that will add to your life. It's when all that is lost that you see it. We don't want to lose it, so you have to have a war going on.

Tom: Yeah, that's the other complaint against Nature: why do we have to do all this stuff? [laughs] Why couldn't things be arranged a bit better?

Joko: Because you'd never, never get the point if it was better. [Chuckles]. We have to have something to practise with, you might say. In this world, which is a troublesome world, it's just lots of stuff to free ourselves with, you might say. If it were all just nice, an endless succession of — I don't know what you think is nice — mashed potatoes or something. I don't know.

Tom: Not mashed potatoes.

Joko: We all have things we think are really nice, you know. And we wish life was all like that. But if it were, you'd probably just vegetate and you'd learn nothing. So I'm not saying I know why the

world is the way it is. Nobody knows that. But certainly until we're at ease with the way the world, that is seeing it as just happening — we don't have to like it. I don't mean that.

Tom: I realise it's one of the questions the Buddha said you needn't fuss with. You should just get on with ...

Joko: Welllll, the whole thing is a question — the idea that we're a little self, and that things should happen that are really wonderful to this little self. And of course there isn't any little self. So as long as you have that, your understanding will to that degree stay stymied. You can't go anywhere. My way of practice is always about reducing the amount of the little self that you have to deal with. When that's small enough, you begin to see life so differently that it's a awakening. But books like Three Pillars of Zen have done a lot of harm really. I was excited about the book too, when it came out.

Tom: A big thing, and everyone wants a big thing that will solve it.

Joko: That's just another ego thing, you see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah. I do. But I thought I would mention it. I realise what I was saying. But I thought: well, put it in words.

Joko: Well, the actual training at Zen monasteries where these insights came out of, you know the monks most of the time didn't even sit for three or four years. They just had to work very very hard from morning to night. And their work had to be perfect.

Tom: Ah.

Joko: If they had to scrub a hall, it had to be spotless. I mean the sort of pie-in-the-sky stuff we've added to everything just wasn't the way they were trained at all.

Tom: I was out there a long time ago, with Soen Roshi at Ryutaku Ji.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: Yes. I know how they scrub.

Joko: That's the training, you know. But Americans have left out all that hard training, and we just want the thing at the end of the rainbow, without doing any of the work. The work is the thing that reduce the sense of ego, of self. The little self, I mean. So anyway, you think about that a little bit.

Tom: [Chuckles]. I kind of suspected that, but it's nice to hear it. Good.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tom: OK. All's well there?

Joko: Yeah. We're just finished sesshin, and we're tired.

Tom: Oh. Right.

Joko: Everything's fine.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Nice weather. Beautiful.

Tom: Yeah, it's a glorious day coming up here too. One of WA's finest. We're coming into the summer and sun really gets turned on full, I can tell you.

Joko: We're going into winter. Of course we don't have winter here, but... the rest of the country is getting colder. So it's interesting, isn't it, huh?

Tom: Yeah. OK.

Joko: All right, Tom. [Chuckles]. I'll let you struggle on. You're doing fine.

Tom: OK. Thanks. Bye-bye.

7 Dec — Christmas through a transparency

Tom: I've been — how do I want to put this? — in sitting and practising, it's like a feeling that the world might be grey and then noticing the fact that you're just looking through a piece of grey transparency. When you notice that, it's like lifting it off the scene, and seeing that's how it works. That's what it's a bit like for me. And then after that goes on for a while, anytime that anything comes up, even during the day, you think: "Oh, it's not really true. It's like one of these transparencies again. It's there, even though I haven't quite seen it." I know it's not true — some of these messages you tell yourself. It's a nice change. It's a bit like Peer Gynt and the onion, you know, where he keeps looking for the core and there isn't any.

Joko: No. There's nothing hidden. [laughs] It's right there in front of you. That's one of the old Zen sayings: there's nothing hidden.

Tom: So that as you keep going, then I guess whatever is true is what is irreducibly left after all that. What else could it be?

Joko: What's always left is just what you're experiencing and living through right this second. See, that's the truth. And the transparencies or their absence are aspects that you add to that.

Tom: Ah.

Joko: When you wake up, it could be raining or miserable or whatever. But then we add the thought: "Oh, I can't stand this." See what I mean?

Tom: Ahhhh. Yeah, OK.

Joko: We tend to do that with everything. Even if you're starving to death, you're just starving to death [chuckle]. And to think the world is terrible... you just happen to be starving to death, that's all. Now that's an extreme example. But you get the point?

Tom: Yeah. So what I said is sort of on the right track then?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: I do the sitting, really hard up against whatever the feeling is there.

Joko: Uh-huh. What's there is there, right?

Tom: It seems a natural thing to do now. Also we have been sitting with a little group of neighbours. The neighbours approached my wife. Every Thursday night we sit — it's quite nice here. The kids go

to their house. We get a quiet sit. It's a bit of a change.

Joko: Nice. Nice. Do you do something like reading?

Tom: Sometimes. Yeah. But we don't even enquire into each other's practices. We are doing different things, I suppose. It's a kind of Zen-type format with a bell and walking in the middle. It's all quite pleasant.

Joko: All right.

Joko: Practice works, no matter where we are. All right, Tom. You seem to be ploughing along.

Tom: Yeah, that's about right. Well, I hope you have a good Christmas.

Joko: All right, Tom.

14 December — demanding clients

Tom: Last week, you said we should maybe review my core belief.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I'm sitting here feeling kind of pooped, with the season coming on.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: All the work piling up.

Joko: Right. Right.

Tom: When you think about all that stuff you've got to do, and the clients as well...

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: But you have that all the time.

Joko: Well, all you can do is work one minute at a time. All the rest is just adding to your problems. It doesn't help you.

Tom: That's right. But every now and then it gets me.

Joko: Ah, well notice that it gets you.

Tom: [laughs]. Right.

Joko: You have a choice between just working patiently, one minute at a time, or getting excited about it.

Tom: OK. Normally it goes on... I'm a little bit worried about a general decline of energy.

Joko: Well, are you taking care of yourself?

Tom: Yeah! I guess it may be age creeping up. I'm careful about what projects I get involved with. I used to go tearing off after anything that interested me. Now I step back and think: "Ah, do I really

want to spend all the time to read that complicated book? Is it really going to be worth it?" That sort of thing. I husband my energy a bit more than I used to.

Joko: How old are you?

Tom: Fifty-seven.

Joko: Ah, you're young.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, I'm not too bad.

Joko: Well, I mean do you take a long walk every day, or do something?

Tom: Yeah, yeah, I do. On your advice. We talked about it quite some time ago, and I've been doing that. Very consistently, and I enjoy it a lot now.

Joko: Do you eat well?

Tom: Yeah! I eat healthily. I don't smoke, I don't drink.

Joko: Plenty of vegetables?

Tom: Yep. I think I do everything about right.

Joko: All right.

Tom: Core beliefs... the one I came up with was feeling I'm nobody, that I don't really matter. Then of course there's a lot of reactions to that: like, oh, we'll see about that! [laughs]

Joko: All right: I don't want to do a lot with it while you're this harried. As you get upset during the day, that's the time to consider your core belief. Feeling you're being so harried and stressed. There could be anger in there. I don't know.

Tom: That's right. I get pretty annoyed with clients who keep demanding and demanding.

Joko: Does your thinking go anything like: "I do all this for them, and I work really hard, and they really don't appreciate it anyway."

Tom: This particular one appreciates it. But I mean — he comes here at seven o'clock in the morning to my house for a conference [laughs]! Oh dear, oh dear.

Joko: In other words, what you're really saying is that it's too much.

Tom: Yeah, it's too much. On the other hand, he's such a nice guy, but he's just over the top a bit. He's a good client. So that sort of thing gets me after a bit.

Joko: One thing to learn is to be absolutely honest about your feelings about it. It doesn't mean you have to show that to him. But for yourself, don't kid yourself. OK? Because I think there's anger here.

Tom: Well that's right. Actually. Now that you mention it, it's quite plain that I'm annoyed.

Joko: The anger wears your body out. It needs to be experienced and felt. But not thought about. I mean, you need to know: "Yes. I am angry."

Tom: OK. That's a help. I have that feeling I shouldn't be angry because...

Joko: That's an ideal. That's your second list.

Tom: Ah-hah. I see. That's exactly what's been going on.

Joko: Isn't that true?

Tom: Yeah, I get angry with him, but I don't dare admit it because he's not doing anything wrong, really.

Joko: No. But you can be honest with yourself. And you can maybe trim in your sails a little bit here and there. You have to really think. But once you're honest about it, it's not so hard to see what you might do. See what I mean? There might be some little things that would ease it a bit.

Tom: Well, this project's about to end. It's got to end on Monday. But the pattern will be there.

Joko: I'm talking about the pattern, see? It's more: "I have to do these things I'm supposed to be. This is what good people do. And I'm angry about it." That's your third list.

Tom: Yeaaaaah. That could be exactly what's making me feel a bit...

Joko: And that will make you tired.

Tom: Tired about this whole thing. Yeah... Ah-hah... Thanks for that. I hadn't unravelled that.

Joko: All right. You think about that quietly a little bit. OK? And we'll continue with that, because I think you do more of that than you think you do.

Tom: Of that particular kind of thing?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: It must be. Because I certainly hadn't seen it.

Joko: Uh-huh. OK?

Tom: OK.

1997

18 Jan — troubles constructed out of nothing

Joko: How are you?

Tom: Well, yeah, we got through it all right. The holidays. In sitting hard, these things which are like deep structures — which you don't really want to know about — you sit with them, and don't think about them. This is old stuff we've talked about before. I've noticed that first of all something new happens. It seems like I am these painful and very, very rigid structures. And then it seems that I'm not. It seems they're just nothing. They're just built out of nothing.

Joko: They're built out of your thinking. And the degree you believe your thinking is the degree you think they're yourself. But the degree to which you experience them in your body, they're nothing.

They're just... nothing. [Chuckles]. Both are true, but the second is really what's true.

Tom: The transition is strange, because I can't really understand how it works. Because I sit there and I don't do anything. After a bit I just realise it isn't anything, really. After all this trouble.

Joko: Yeah. Right.

Tom: It seems like a good thing, but certainly very odd.

Joko: It's not really so odd. It's the difference between believing our thoughts and not believing in them. If you sit long enough, the thoughts begin to be transparent. They fade out.

Tom: That's maybe it. Then when that happens, I get a feeling of something else being bigger and real. Out there.

Joko: Uh-huh. Yes, that's true.

Tom: I'm not sure what it is.

Joko: It's something, but nevertheless I don't want to say. OK?

Tom: Yeah, so that's about it.

Joko: Try to begin to see the relationship of that to the events of your daily life. What is it related to, say, getting angry?

Tom: I guess I'd be touching off one of these structures.

Joko: Yeah, the structure, and they seem real. The anger seems real.

Tom: That's for sure. Yeah.

Joko: As long as you believe the thoughts. You see what I mean? But if you were to sit with that anger long enough, it would fade into nothing. And you'd begin to see something larger than your anger. I want you to not just see this as something in sitting, but to try to begin to relate it to your living, OK?

Tom: Well, I do that a little bit.

Joko: I'm sure you do. I'm just trying to make sure.

Tom: I read a little article a little while ago, about someone who'd done something along the lines of my work, and they'd gone a lot further and built up a really successful organisation. And I sat there and thought: "Damn! I could have done that." I felt irritated with myself. But I realised what I was doing. So that's a sort of example that I can catch these things. Is that what you mean, something like that?

Joko: Something like that. One of the fruits of practice over time is that we are much less reactive. And much more just open and appreciative of everything around us. You know, it's a slow business. But that's what practice is. So whatever you're learning on the cushion, you want to be sure it's pervading everything you ordinarily do. Because if that doesn't happen, you know, why bother?

Tom: [Chuckles] Well I think it is happening.

Joko: Sure. That's good. That sounds fine, Tom. Anything else?

Tom: No. I think that's really it. I mean, there've been a lot of events around here, but that's what I wanted to talk about.

Joko: Life has lots of events. It's how we are with them that changes.

Tom: Including the lovely bird I went out and taped at five o'clock this morning. I was trying to identify it. The first bird of the morning. It's all by itself. And then when it finishes, there's a gap, a silence. And then the other birds come in. And I wondered what this amazing bird was. I taped it. I'm going to talk to bird lovers and find out.

Joko: [laughs] When I was in Australia, people gave me a tape of Australian birds. They're very different than what we have.

Tom: You really know when you arrive here and hear the birds.

Joko: The kookaburra and some others. It's a really interesting tape.

Tom: I've heard tapes like that. But it wouldn't necessarily help me identify this strange bird.

Joko: No.

Tom: [laughs].

Joko: Coming from here, it's very obvious this is something different, you know.

Tom: Well, I came from overseas too, and the birdsong in the morning is convincing evidence that you're in a different place.

Joko: Australia is different. In a very nice way. I've got an Australian here at the moment. He's from Brisbane. Comes once a year.

Tom: Oh right.

Joko: OK, Tom. Annnnnnd.... we'll continue!

Tom: OK.

8 Feb — the well-oiled transmission

Tom: I've got my wife coming back today, after being away for a week.

Joko: Away?

Tom: Yes, there's a big Zen carnival going on here. It's a transmission ceremony. Mobs of people have converged for it. So she's gone off to sesshin that comes before that. So I've been looking after the family. I've actually been having a very good time here.

Joko: [laughs] It's nice to be alone, isn't it? Sometimes.

Tom: Yeah, with two boys... I'll go off on Sunday night to see the actual transmission, as a kind of impartial observer.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: But it's not really my scene. [laughs]

Joko: Well, I just do it by telling somebody. [Chuckles] I'm afraid I'm not fancy.

Tom: Oh, right. Well this is an incredible scene. It's going on for hours, a big meal and people from everywhere. I guess it's worth seeing as a sort of event.

Joko: Well, maybe. OK... [laughs] I'm more like you.

Tom: Yeah, oh, jeez. It's happening.... Yes, things have gone OK here this week. I have noticed more and more... remember we talked about migraine headaches, on and off?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: And all the punch has gone out of them now. It's like the hurricane has just dissipated into a few puffs of wind. When they come, it's more like a kind of spell than anything really hurting. It's like feeling a bit spooked. They seem to come with a message that I haven't quite heard, somewhere in there. Even when things are feeling fairly unpleasant, and they still do, it's like there's a message of love behind it. It's very strange. I don't know what's going on quite.

Joko: I suspect your grip on the ego is weakening a little bit. Migraine headaches are a form a tension. And I've seen three or four people who've had them so badly, and now they have one once in a while, and then they're very mild. They've changed enormously. It's the people who have changed.

Tom: Something has changed. It's nothing like at all what it used to be. It's a ghost of the thing.

Joko: Just keep going, without probably even too much thought about even the headaches. They're just a manifestation of yourself. And you know, the ego grip is a very tense thing. And as that weakens from practice, everything else weakens. So something like that, I mean. I may not be saying it very well, but you know what I'm talking about.

Tom: Yeah, that sounds fine. So apart from the usual daily work, sitting, that's ...

Joko: There's work, and then trying to carry it out in your life, which is weakening things, the ego I mean.

Tom: Also a sense of labelling things as good and bad. I've noticed how much I actually do that. Something happens that's not quite according to ones wishes, it is bad. Actually it is just of course thinking that it's bad.

Joko: There's something in Shakespeare about that. I can't ever remember it. Something like "there is no good or bad but thinking makes it so."

Tom: That's pretty close, I think.

Joko: You feel you have some knowledge of how to go about things now in your daily life? When things come up that upset you?

Tom: Well, there's a separation between the actual event, whether it seems to be good or bad, and the judgements about it. The judgements are quite clear.

Joko: They are just thoughts.

Tom: They are just vaporous. The events are what count. You don't have a whole lot of control on that.

Joko: Well, you don't. But they're just happening. And if you don't react particularly, just take care of them. Then they become less momentous, you know what I mean?

Tom: Like when your computer monitor goes funny and you have to fix it but you don't want to. And all that sort of stuff.

Joko: That's true. Life is just stuff like that, you know. Well, you're learning something. Anything else you want to bring up?

Tom: Now, really just checking in and telling you about...

Joko: Well, sometimes I have my latest bright idea, but I don't today.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: We'll let it go at that. So enjoy the transmission or whatever.

Tom: I'm bound to enjoy it at some level. It should be a good show.

Joko: Well watch your thoughts about good and bad when you're there.

Tom: Right.

Joko: All right, Tom. Bye bye.

22 Feb — the worldwide shortage of llamas

Tom: It all seems like an awful lot of work, just to end up, back here — doesn't it?

Joko: [laughs] What do you mean, back here?

Tom: Well, I mean, just like here and now.

Joko: Well where else would you ever be?

Tom: Yeah, I know all that, but...

Joko: In your body, you don't know it.

Tom: Yeah, it seems like not enough payoff or something.

Joko: Uh huh.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: Your little mind always wants a payoff. But the little mind lives in the past and future, which don't exist. So, interesting thing you're cooking up there.

Tom: Yeah, I know that. It's the little mind complaining.

Joko: Uh-huh. Your little mind is complaining.

Tom: “How come this isn't cool enough?” Or something?

Joko: Uh-huh. Because it's not.

Tom: I guess I brought that up, because I was just on a walk with my wife — we walk most mornings for about an hour, down a country path.

Joko: Sounds great.

Tom: It is. I get a chance to talk to her and catch up. We used to have tea in bed, but this is better for both of us. So on this walk this morning, we spied a man walking along with a llama, believe it or not.

Joko: Isn't that funny — you know what?

Tom: What?

Joko: During the sesshin last weekend I looked out the window, and there was a llama walking down the street! [laughs].

Tom: That's the weirdest coincidence.

Joko: Some kids were having a birthday party down the street, and I think they hired this llama. But it's so funny that you mentioned that, you know, within a few days after.

Tom: You know, I've never seen a llama ever before, just loose.

Joko: I've seen them in the zoo. It was so funny, the animal just walked with his head high down the sidewalk. I mean, this is a busy city street. [Chuckles] It's just so funny.

Tom: Well in this place, you see people with dogs. But llamas — never! So we stopped this guy and talked to him. We said, “What is this??” And he said: “Ah well, you know, this llama is no good. People are breeding llamas around this place now.” We're going “Huh? Is it for the wool?” And he said no. There's a big pyramid scheme in llamas. They sell for \$15,000 or \$20,000 each. And it's like tulip mania, you know? Because there's a world-wide shortage of llamas. The prices are ridiculous. People who got into llamas early and got out, sold the llamas off to the other people who are just getting into it, made millions and retired.

Joko: Ah, isn't that crazy...

Tom: Yes. But that set off another thing was disturbing me. When you hear about somebody else doing really well [laughs]... these success stories, you know?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: The thing is that the success stories get passed around, and you hear about them, like someone winning the lottery. And you don't hear about the millions of failures that go on.

Joko: Well, not only that, but once they have the money, then what?

Tom: Yeah. They're still in the same position.

Joko: [Chuckles]. Sure. I've never known anybody who was unhappy, who is happy after they got

some money. I mean, money is useful. I like it. But money itself doesn't do anything. You think it would, huh? For your case, you think: oh yes, but it would.

Tom: If we just had a few more drachmas everything would be OK! [laughs].

Joko: Let's face it. It's nice and it's convenient. But just having money per se doesn't do it. But if you don't believe that, you will one day.

Tom: Well, I do. Because I've been through that exercise. Somebody gave me a bunch of lottery tickets. I never bought any in my life. I did them a favour, and they sent me lottery tickets. I thought: "Oh, what's this?" I looked into it and it turned out that if I won this thing — it was a very special lottery — I would get sixteen million dollars, right? [laughs]

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And then I started thinking about this. I talked to Sibyl about it. What would the effect of that be? We worked through the whole thing. There would be an awful lot of problems, you know!

Joko: Yes. People that win the lottery here in the United States, when they're interviewed a year or two later, they're just really in a mess.

Tom: So I've been all through this intellectually. Still, you hear about these things that somebody breeds llamas...

Joko: Yeah, well, we all want life to be nice. That's what the little self is constantly looking for.

Tom: Maybe that's what I'm talking about this morning.

Joko: Well, just observe what you're doing. That's all you can do. OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: You're dreaming. [laughs]

Tom: Yeah. Right. Fair enough.

Joko: You might win the lottery. But even so...

Tom: Ah, yeah, I knew that. It was just an exercise, because I'd never even considered buying lottery tickets. Somebody gives you one, and "Oh, what would this be like?" It was the first time I actually considered it.

Joko: It's not what makes people happy. In fact, American money as it floats around the world is creating havoc everywhere. It's terrible. You know what I mean: we enter these simple styles of life here and there, around the world, you know? And they begin to watch TVs. They never thought they were poor before. But they watch some of this American stuff and...

Tom: Everyone lives in \$500,000 houses.

Joko: So for the first time they think they're poor and hungry and victims of life, you know?

Tom: Ooooo, yeah.

Joko: They were happy before. .

Tom: I've been through these places. They're all smiles, standing in the mud, grinning from one side of the face to the other. And if you tell them what a lousy life they have, of course it will have that effect.

Joko: They see these pictures with their very own eyes. And then their life looks like nothing. So, anyway the lottery and all that stuff is an extension of that.

Tom: True.

Joko: Just keep watching what you're doing. Everybody has ideas like that. Keep watching, OK?

Tom: OK. Well thanks for that.

Joko: Right, Tom.

Tom: Funny about the llamas.

Joko: It is funny about the llamas. Isn't that funny? All the way around the world, and we're both talking about llamas. [Chuckles]

8 March — the invisible advertising writer

Tom: I go through the day feeling there are all sorts of ghosts and irrational pressures still with me.

Joko: It's your core believe that's been pushing at you.

Tom: Yeah, it goes on and on.

Joko: The core belief does go on and on. And it is important to know about it and to practise with it. It's not equipped to run your life, which is what it's trying to do.

Tom: That's what it feels like. It feels like I'm being tugged by little strings.

Joko: So can you really get what sort of episodes bring this on particularly?

Tom: It's not even necessarily very strong. It's just like little invisible threads pulling this way or that.

Joko: What is it you're desperately trying to maintain? The image of what?

Tom: [Pause]. I don't know. Image of what?

Joko: You see, if I didn't have an image, nobody could kick it. You see what I mean?

Tom: Well the core belief we talked about some time ago, was that I was nothing. Kind of a zero.

Joko: Does this extend to a more specific version? Say: "I really can't do my work very well. I'm not able to do that." Something like that?

Tom: It doesn't seem to have much to do with work.

Joko: All right. What's it have to do with then?

Tom: [Pause] It's not being important, or noticeable.

Joko: Do you feel in your whole day that you're just kind of... well what do you feel, that you're not being recognised or what?

Tom: I feel invisible, except when I want to be noticed. And then I raise a big flag and make sure that I am.

Joko: Would you like to be invisible?

Tom: Yeah, kind of. I feel that I can walk into the same village shop every day and I'm surprised that people actually recognise me, even though I've been in there every day for, what? Five years.

Joko: So what is there that's bothering you about all this?

Tom: [Long pause] I sense that we're onto something here, but I'm not too sure what it is.

Joko: I think you do sort of sense something and I want you to be more attentive. Just take that episode of walking into the shop. Just be attentive, and when you go out, kind of review it. Just see what the body felt like, what are the thoughts coming round. Try to pin some of this down a little more specifically. Because it seems to be running things. I mean in a very quiet way. That fact that you notice it means something's going on there. So don't just brush it off with "it doesn't matter." It does matter.

Tom: It's pervasive. I do feel pretty invisible, except when I want to. I'm in the publicity area. I write stuff for people and do ads for them. I know how to get attention when I want it! [laughs]

Joko: It's interesting that you're in that field. What is there that disturbs you in that field?

Tom: I'm not sure.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, I'll leave you with it. I want you to play with this a little bit. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah, it's fundamental.

Joko: You may not get it immediately. Be patient. But learn to be very attentive. See if anything during your day disturbs you. Certain kinds of remarks, for instance. Little happenings. See, if it disturbs you, that's your way of finding out. OK?

Tom: Yeah, OK. Good. I'll do that.

Joko: For instance, one person told me the other day that when she's in a group, standing there with three people, everyone talks to the other two people. And she feels just miserable.

Tom: Well, it's not like that.

Joko: No, I'm not saying... I don't know what it's like. But something is like something.

Tom: That sounds fine.

Joko: Well, it's also very interesting. This is interesting stuff. And so, get interested, OK?

Tom: That's right. I've tended to brush it off a bit. Thinking: oh, well, that's the way I am, or something. Or the way things are.

Joko: That's the way you are. That's the way your core belief is.

Tom: It's a little bit strange, that's for sure.

Joko: All right, Tom. Good. So do some research.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] OK. Bye-bye.

22 Mar — heavy-duty dread

Joko: How are you?

Tom: Well, I could be better.

Joko: What's up?

Tom: Last time we talked about me going into the village shop and trying to work out why I felt like I wasn't there.. or noticed. And I've been working on this. About a week ago, there was a kind of cave-in on this. And for several days, actually right up until now in fact, I felt a dread in the background. A heavy-duty dread, which I don't normally get. Normally I worry about specific things, you know.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And then just yesterday I realised that this was all centered around not knowing who I was. That popped into focus. Like: "I don't really know who I am." A dreadful thing. It's been bothering me for days. And I can still feel the edge of it. Does that tie in?

Joko: Yeah, sure.

Tom: It seems significant to me.

Joko: Uh-huh. It ties in. Sure.

Tom: I don't know quite what to do about this. I've been watching it.

Joko: I would suggest you do very little. Just more or less let it alone. Which means, mostly to feel it, but with as little thinking as you can manage. When you do that, it sort of takes care of itself. Try to keep your own heavy hands out of it.

Tom: Which is tempting, of course to do. You try to get in there.

Joko: Try to just let it be, without being too serious about it. I don't mean that. Just let things alone.

Tom: Um. But just sort of know it's there, you mean?

Joko: Just feel it. Know it's there. Go about your business. OK? And it will take care of itself.

Tom: OK. I certainly wanted to check with you on this one. It's been a whopper.

Joko: Uh-huh... Are you all right?

Tom: Oh yeah. I'm coping... We having business troubles here too, which I guess piles in on top of it.

Joko: Well, for sure... Nothing is separate you know. Sure.

Tom: Well, all right, we're coping.

Joko: I hope so. OK?

Tom: Oh, that's fine. I'll just do that. It's actually clearing up at the moment.

Joko: All right. Most things like that have their own organic life. If you don't interfere too much, they just clear up and teach you something. It may not be about something that you can put into English sentences. The very nature of our being remains a mystery. So you can't expect little sentences about all this stuff. But when you feel calm and functioning, then you know you're all right. So let's see what happens.

Tom: I'm functioning, but I'm not very calm at the moment. That's for sure.

Joko: Just let that seething be seething, but without trying to put a lid on it. Do you see what I mean? Don't think. Don't think about it.

Tom: OK.

Joko: That's not easy, but you can do it.

Tom: OK. Will do.

Joko: All right.

19 April — the antidote

Tom: Last time — I think it was last time — I was, I guess, containing a discovery, just sitting with it and not thinking about it. Just to feel it and that worked. And eventually it settled down. That was this business about the core belief. Stirring it up.

Joko: It's just thoughts, really. And the antidote to thoughts is to just be. To feel your life as it really is. The core belief is just thinking. It's not some magical thing. But its beliefs are very tightly held and very deeply held.

Tom: I keep circulating around this major thing of feeling — well I guess in old-fashioned terms — its a sort of shyness about everything.

Joko: Uh-huh!

Tom: I mean that's at the bottom. I mean people wouldn't necessarily know that.

Joko: Right.

Tom: Particularly in the field I'm in. But...

Joko: But you know it.

Tom: But I know it, yeah. I didn't actually know it before. And I keep seeing how it controls things.

Joko: Right. And also try to see how you go against that in simple ways. You know what I mean by that?

Tom: I think I do, yeah. Is that all I need to do about this? Keep watch?

Joko: Well that, and it's when you can really get so you really feel that sensation. The core belief is an inward tightening, withdrawing. And you get so you really know that. Be aware of it in your life, and when you can — particularly in sitting — just stay with that sensation. If it's present, just stay right with it. Don't try to fix it or change it.

Tom: I can do that a lot of the time. Particularly when I'm sitting.

Joko: Nobody can do it all the time. But when you do it, it transforms you. And that's what practice is about.

Tom: Apart from that, we're having a rough but amusing time. When things go wrong a lot, equipment breaks, clients don't come in or they act up, or things just generally seem to go wrong, it seems like a bad time. But actually it's quite fun.

Joko: [chuckles] Life is never good or bad. It's just the way it is. And if you know how to practise with it, it's OK. So I hope you're beginning to get the idea.

Tom: I hope so.

Joko: It makes a difference. So any other questions?

Tom: No. I just really wanted to talk about that first thing a bit. To see if that sounded OK.

Joko: That's fine. Right on.

17 May — mind and body

Tom: What's on top of my mental activity has been thinking about business. About business survival. Because we live pretty much like on-the-road. I mean we've got a house with a bunch of telephone lines, but we never know what's going to happen next. Whether we'll have any business or not. Sibyl's involved in this too. When I sit, I find myself noticing that I spend an awful lot of time wondering how to keep the business afloat, how to find more business, what's going to happen next, all that sort of thing.

Joko: That's human. It would be a good idea if you could do your planning some other time.

Tom: Well I'm not saying I sit and think about the business. What I'm saying, is when I notice what I'm thinking about during the day and other times, an awful lot of time spent on that topic.

Joko: Well, that's OK.

Tom: Yeah?

Joko: I think about my work all day. So why can't you think about your work all day?

Tom: I suppose you do. Yeah.

Joko: You see, there's a difference between thinking about your work, which is necessary, and

obsessing about it. What's the difference?

Tom: I guess in obsessing, you're going in useless loops.

Joko: Useless... see, we all have to think about our work. But there's a difference between thinking that results in something, or might result in something, and just fruitless just going over and over... worry.

Tom: OK. I don't do that much. I am actually quite productive.

Joko: Yeah, fine. There's nothing wrong with that. The mind's meant to be used you know. But it's not meant to be used in a fruitless way.

Tom: Well that's reassuring. Because I thought: maybe this is overdoing it a bit. I have been noticing that a heap of time is spent on this particular topic.

Joko: Fine!

Tom: The other thing was that my doctor has put me on a beta-blocker. Which are normally used for reducing blood pressure. But it's also a treatment for migraine. And he put me on these because you get cheaper migraine pills — I like to have a few of them in case I have trouble. I tried this stuff. I didn't have any confidence in it at all, I have to admit. And you know, it worked perfectly! I haven't had a touch of anything. This had made me wonder about mind and body difference. Because all this time, I've been thinking: well, this is some psychological problem that I'm gradually working through and suddenly I take this drug and it's just GONE, vanished.

Joko: It might also be psychological. You see there're all sorts of things. But I would just take it. And then maybe taper it off at some point. When you think you can maybe handle it.

Tom: It's been an interesting sort of trip, to watch all that happen and feel the effects. As I say, the business about tending to blame your own mind for your sicknesses.

Joko: I don't.

Tom: You don't?

Joko: I think everybody gets sick. The nature of the body is to get sick, get well, get sick, get well. That's how the body learns. I think it's not bad to get sick. I mean, I do my best to stay well, but I don't think it's terrible to get sick.

Tom: Aha. OK.

Joko: The body is a very intricately balancing mechanism. When it does something wrong, it can learn from that. You see what I mean? The body wants to be healthy. But it makes its mistakes. And if I was sick enough, I'd be glad to have a medicine that makes me feel better. So it's complicated.

Tom: It sure is.

Joko: We don't want to go around blaming ourselves for illness. Illness is a part of being healthy.

Tom: Well, I had tended to do that, thinking: well, this is some lingering problem I've got. It'll go away when I get through all this process.

Joko: I think over time things do go away, more and more. You just get more at ease with yourself. A lot of these compulsions we put on ourselves — worrying and so on. When that dies down, it

certainly does benefit our health. But I also think you can't go around blaming yourself.

Tom: I wasn't very actively doing that, but it was in the background all the time.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well you think about that. OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: I don't think it's anything but the body attempting to learn something.

Tom: It wasn't even very severe. It was just a nagging kind of thing. I don't get wallopers any more.

Joko: Well, that's fine. I've had students with migraines and they don't get them any more. But they don't know and I don't know exactly why they faded out at some point.

Tom: I have been noticing that right through, for a long time. Getting better. But suddenly along comes this simple drug, and boink! Gone. I thought, wow, this is strange.

Joko: Right, use it. But with all drugs, because they all have some side-effects, use it as little as possible, that's all.

Tom: Well, that's about the size of it anyway.

Joko: Well, it's nice to talk to you. You sound fine.

Tom: Yeah, things are OK. I couldn't tell you whether things are going well or badly at the moment.

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: Because it's such a mixture. I guess it always is.

Joko: Things are going, aren't they?

Tom: Yeah, they're going all right! [Laughs]

Joko: Right. Life is always going up and down. Always going well, it never will. But we become comfortable with that, the more practice.

Tom: But maybe that's it. I'm happy to accept the whole carnival.

Joko: Well. Sure. That's major, OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: OK. Wonderful.

7 June — the importance of disappointment

Tom: We've had a week of rain, and I've got a bit of the flu, and my ear hurts [laughs]. Under these circumstances, you think: ah, it's nice to have dreams, isn't it?

Joko: I don't know whether it is or not, actually.

Tom: You don't know whether it is or not?

Joko: Well, dreams are usually illusions, but anyway... I don't know what you mean by it.

Tom: Well I've noticed that I don't really believe that anything's going to do the trick any more.

Joko: Nothing has to do the trick. Because everything's perfect already, being as it is.

Tom: [laughs] That may be, but when it's been raining for a week and you're just recovering from the flu and your ear hurts, it's doesn't necessarily...

Joko: Well the flu comes and goes, and we'd give anything for your rain here. We wait, we wait, and it doesn't rain. So that's the other side of the picture. We need rain and we can't get it. You got rain, you don't want it. So, that's being human. See what I mean? And we all get sick, and when we're sick, things look really down, but then we get over being sick.

Tom: Oh yeah, I'm getting better already. It's no worse than I recollect hangovers were [laughs]. Which I don't get any more, because I don't inflict them on myself.

Joko: Right, right. Well remember life isn't a question of getting it so it's all right. What would you say it is?

Tom: I think that's bothering me. The collapse of all the cool promises.

Joko: I never promised you anything.

Tom: [laughs]. No, you've been very good about that!

Joko: See, you want to promise yourself something. And it's the slow disappointment with all that which is absolutely necessary.

Tom: Yeah... OK.

Joko: Uh-huh... Why is it necessary?

Tom: That's the interesting point, isn't it?

Joko: Uh-huh... I'm going to leave you with just one thing to work on. You know, I often give dharma talks and say the most important thing is to be disappointed, over and over and over. Now why do I say that? I'm not a gloomy person. Why do I say that? I want you to work on that.

Tom: All right. I haven't heard you say that before. The most important thing is to be disappointed over and over.

Joko: Why?

Tom: Huh. Why is it?

Joko: Why in terms of practice? Why is that important?

Tom: Ah... OK.

Joko: See, most people try to spend a life in which they're never disappointed.

Tom: That's for sure.

Joko: Get it all fixed, so I'm never disappointed. I get a nice life all the time. I'll leave you with that.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: No! [laughs] That'll be fine.

Joko: That'll keep you busy. All right?

Tom: Yeah.

14 June — living in comfort eating dry leaves

Tom: Last time you left me with a question about why it's absolutely essential to be disappointed again and again in practice. This really got me going. And I'd wondered if I'd been operating under a huge optical illusion all this time about what I'm expecting.

Joko: Probably.

Tom: [laughs].

Joko: That's the practice, to slowly drop away those illusions. Because you're never going to be content with life until you do.

Tom: Well, also at the same time, came a message — one of these newsletters came from your group about the 83 problems. A person comes to the Buddha with 83 problems. It seems like exactly the same thing.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Are you suggesting that the practice won't actually get rid of the 83? It will only get rid of the 84th?

Joko: There's no practice that gets rid of the ordinary things that come up in your life. You're still going to get a flat tyre and a sore throat. And a friend that you thought you could trust, you find you can't trust. The problems in life never cease.

Tom: What we can deal with is reactions to that?

Joko: Right.

Tom: And expectations around all that?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: OK. In thinking about this and brooding on it, I thought that must be what you had meant there. Because if you're disappointed, you must have expected something that didn't happen or did.

Joko: You had some picture of life, that it should be a certain way.

Tom: So you basically got it wrong, and you're kidding yourself in some way or other there.

Joko: Right.

Tom: That would be why these disappointments are necessary, in order to point out what you're doing, really.

Joko: Yeah!

Tom: And on the other hand, I can't actually see why it's absolutely necessary. What if you sit in a cave and live on dry leaves? You can still go though all that same stuff, can't you?

Joko: [chuckles] I'm not saying we have to sit in a cave and live on dry leaves. Unless we have to. Say, supposing you're escaping as a prisoner of war, and that's all you can do. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Then to do that and to be upset about it is a waste of time. That's what you have to do at that point.

Tom: Let me just get this straight, in my terms. What if I sat in an easy chair and ate TV dinners, and never went out? And nothing much ever happened. And therefore I didn't stir up all this stuff that's just kind of there and never gets the chance...

Joko: It's already stirred up.

Tom: Ah. OK.

Joko: Because you're in an easy chair, it doesn't mean it's not stirred up.

Tom: You could in fact tackle all this by sitting like a hermit in easy circumstances? You don't really have to go out and have a flat tyre. Is that what you mean?

Joko: Well, you think about that a little bit. Sometimes if we look around our friends, there are people who seem never to have had trouble in their life, and they're not happy.

Tom: I guess that's the other point I was trying to work on here.

Joko: I want you to keep working on it. You're beginning to see it now. But it could be clearer.

Tom: I think it could be. That's why I'm asking all this.

Joko: You see: work on that question you just brought up. What about the easy chair? Why isn't that going to do it?

Tom: MMMmmm.

Joko: Because you know, if that were true, we could say that anyone who has enough money — doesn't have to work, and can just sit and have a few beers a day and sit around, are going to have the secret of life. Are they?

Tom: The other side is what someone who's a serious sitter, who sits in circumstances where nothing much bad...

Joko: What's it mean to be a sincere sitter, see?

Tom: Yeaaaaaah. OK. Well, someone with not a lot of bad stuff happening to him, because it just doesn't. But he could still go through it, couldn't he?

Joko: We tend not to go through things until they really hit us. I mean, how many novels have you read about great suffering? Has that transformed you?

Tom: Oh. OK.

Joko: I still want you to keep thinking about this. I think you're beginning to work your way into it. But you know, I want you to keep going.

Tom: Yeah, OK. I don't think I could really stop actually. [Chuckles.] Hummm.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, it's important. Because your life is going to have suffering in it. And either that means you'll be suffering, or you won't. Your life can have suffering in without it making you suffer. You see what I mean?

Tom: I do. Yeah. I'm beginning to. OK. OK, good.

Joko: All right, Tom. Good. Bye-bye.

12 July — disappointment is the path to freedom

Tom: Last time, or a few times ago, you left me with a question of why you say it's necessary to experience constant disappointment in the practice.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Could you repeat that? Is that correct? Am I saying that right?

Joko: The path to freedom, you might say, is through disappointment. One after another. By that I mean, as we interpret life, from the standpoint of our human ego, life is disappointing.

Tom: But it's not like it's unique to practice. I mean, you have these disappointments all the time anyway.

Joko: The practice is our life, you see. But the point is, we think there's something wrong with being disappointed. It's the very nature of life that you get lots of disappointments.

Tom: Yeahhhhh.... OK. So is there something I should...

Joko: Maybe I'm not stating this very clearly...

Tom: Well, what you said is clear, but I can't see what the question is any more, in a way.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: It's been knocking around in the background, bothering me. Like I sort of go: DUH. And it bothers me and I feel I can't get at it.

Joko: Well let me think for a minute now [pause]... Let's put it this way: what do you do when you're

disappointed? Say there's a disappointment about work, OK?

Tom: Sure, OK.

Joko: Well, you're not a young lover, but it could be something to do with relationships, you know what I mean?

Tom: Yeah...

Joko: What do you do?

Tom: These days I look at what I was expecting in the situation, and realise that what I was expecting is obviously out of whack. If I was expecting my computer to work when I turn it on in the morning and it doesn't, well then... it's just not working! It's not like my expectation was unrealistic.

Joko: To some degree there, you've learned to deal with disappointment, you see what I mean? The average person, when something doesn't work, they get upset.

Tom: They want to kick the computer, or whatever.

Joko: Uh-huh, right. Or kick the washing machine.

Tom: [laughs] Sometimes that helps.

Joko: If you feel better. I'm not saying we don't do horrible things like that. In terms of our life, it's more or less a question that life happens as it happens. And instead of getting so upset by it, we just deal with it. It's the mark of strengthening practice. It might be for instance that you get a severe illness you don't want. Things like this happen to us, right?

Tom: Yeah... OK. I get that all right.

Joko: What is it you don't yet want to get?

Tom: About this question, you mean?

Joko: What is there in your life that you're not willing to face, you might say?

Tom: So those are the disappointments you don't get at, in a way.

Joko: That make you angry. That make you feel life's not fair.

Tom: Yeahhhhh.... OK. So those are the valuable practice points?

Joko: Sure.

Tom: Well, that I can accept. No problem. OK.

Joko: Certainly you've learned a lot, but since we're human, there's always things that you know, upset us. We're disappointed. What I'm trying to say is very important. It's something like what the question I left you with.

Tom: It is quite hard because there's a difference between stepping back from it and saying: uh-oh. And just realising you're even doing it. Kicking the computer, or whatever. I understand that difference. Once you make that step across, then you don't really do that next time. At least not with that situation.

Joko: Yeah, and I'm not saying you won't get upset, but to see it as practice. As opposed to just getting upset.

Tom: I see the importance of that. Because it's everywhere.

Joko: Oh yeah. But you get a group of people together for the evening, a so-called social evening, and what do you hear about? All their complaints!

Tom: That's true. All the things going wrong.

Joko: That's what the conversation is usually about.

Tom: Yes. The newspapers are like that too. It's all the bad news. Whoever hears about the things that are going smoothly?

Joko: All right, well give that a little bit more thought. And then see if they're any questions left in a situation for us to work with.

Tom: OK.

Joko: At this point, just see if there's something in this yet that bothers you, or that you have questions about. If not, then we just go on. OK?

Tom: OK.

9 Aug — boring work

Tom: It must have been a year ago or more you talked me into taking walks now and then. I just wanted to tell you that they're major my life. I try to go every day. I notice that I actually like it now, and the odd thing is that it seems to be the most real thing in my life.

Joko: It is real. You have contact with yourself, your feet, nature.

Tom: That's what it feels like.

Joko: Well that is real. So much of what we do is just spinning stuff around in our heads.

Tom: Particularly me. A lot of the time I'm in front of the computer screen, or dealing with documents. And you look back on the day or week, and what stands out? — the walk! You meet different people as you go along, and dogs, and even llamas, as I mentioned to you.

Joko: And all the time you're helping your health out.

Tom: Exactly. So that's worked out really well.

Joko: Good. And do you eat well? To the next subject.

Tom: Yeah, we do. We don't drink, and we don't smoke. We have quite a good diet, I reckon.

Joko: Good vegetables and things like that?

Tom: Yes, yes. I have a salad every day Someone said the secret of health is to run from salad bar to salad bar.

Joko: [laughs] Well it certainly has something to do with it... all right that's good, Tom. And hope that you feel better for one thing.

Tom: I do, yeah. But I wanted to ask you one thing that bothers me. During the day my concentration varies a lot.

Joko: Well give me an example. 'Concentration' can be used in a lot of ways.

Tom: Concentrating on a manuscript, for example. Especially during my work. My mind will wander off and I'll find it hard to bear down on the thing. Other times I'm really sharp.

Joko: You have to make it a practice of asking yourself every say ten minutes or so: what's the truth of my life right now? Which will really mean, "Am I happy doing this work? Or bored doing it?"

Tom: Uh-huh!

Joko: Just face the truth. See, what you're trying to do, is to make yourself be a certain way. Face the fact that right now, no I'm not really very interested in this manuscript. That's the truth.

Tom: Oh, I see. Yeah.

Joko: What you're trying to do is, "I should be attentive all the time." I'm not saying not to be attentive, but surprisingly, your attentiveness will increase if you're honest like that.

Tom: Ah, I see. I was looking for something like that. I'll try that!

Joko: And for a second just feel in your body... when you don't want to do something, there's going to be tension. Just feel that for a second. And then go back to work, OK?

Tom: Right. I was trying to force myself to be attentive. Rather than try to figure out why not.

Joko: Yeah, to force yourself to be a good person.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: What we want to stay with, is the truth of who we are at any given moment. It doesn't mean you have to act on that — the fact that you don't want to be working. It doesn't mean you're not going to finish a day's work. But it helps to be honest.

Tom: Yeah. Exactly. OK.

Joko: I had a student the other night, and she said — my students learn to be pretty honest — she said, "Well the truth of the matter is I really don't want to be here tonight talking to you." And I said, "What makes you think I want to be here talking to you?"

Tom: [laughs] Yes, right.

Joko: [laughs] And she looked at me in absolute amazement. Because it never dawned on her that teachers don't always want to be there.

Tom: It dawned on me from time to time, but anyway. Hmmm. Yeah, I see what you mean.

Joko: It doesn't mean I'm not there, and by and large probably enjoying the evening. But I wanted to let her know that the first step is to be honest. It doesn't mean I wasn't there, doing a good job actually. Because otherwise, if you've done your lists, you just have a requirement there, you see?

You see the requirement?

Tom: It's to be perfectly attentive and spot-on all the time.

Joko: And underneath the second list is the third list: I resent having to be that attentive all the time! See what I mean?

Tom: I do.

Joko: There's resentment. That resentment needs to be experienced for a second.

Tom: Well, that's what I was looking for. This also seems important because it's right through the day. It gives me something usefully to be doing in the practice.

Joko: Well, it also keeps you honest.

Tom: Yeah. OK. Very good!... Thank you. I'll carry on with that one.

Joko: All right. That will open up a lot of things for you if you do it without being obsessive about it. Just do it. OK?

Tom: Yeah. Will do.

Joko: OK, Tom.

Aug 30 — I want, I want

Tom: The sun just came up.

Joko: It's getting ready to go down here.

Tom: It would be... There's a question, that's a sort of background thing. All the time, there's a feeling of: I want, I want, I want. And I can never figure out what it is... even if I sit with it, and try to concentrate loosely on what the feeling is and the thoughts, it doesn't lead anywhere.

Joko: Basically what human beings want is to be totally happy all the time. [laughs] It's ridiculous. It's what we want. We want total safety, total love, total comfort. That's what we want.

Tom: OK. So if it's not like that, then this little mechanism still goes ticking away. Is that?...

Joko: Well it means that this 'I' can never be satisfied really. The 'I' is the biological instinct to preserve yourself — forever. We can't do that. So there's always an inherent conflict in life. Between that and the way it really is.

Tom: So it's a permanent, innate thing. That right?

Joko: The basic human koan is: I want to live forever and as a matter of fact, I'm going to die. There is no thinking that can solve that.

Tom: I'm beginning to feel that. I think: “Oh, approaching 60 and on the downslope now.” The winter side.

Joko: Not really yet. It's just beginning, yeah.

Tom: That's the thing that been puzzling me. I can't figure out why this thing never stops.

Joko: Because that hunger to be immortal is in every human being. Unless with a very few people they're suffering so much physically they can't stand it. But I mean if they're not doing that, they all want to live forever.

Tom: The last infirmity of the noble mind.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I can't remember, Milton or who said that. OK, I see. So there's nothing to do about that in particular. Just go on with the rest of the practice.

Joko: There is an answer to it, but not at the level we ordinarily think about things.

Tom: So it's not really a problem or anything to do in terms of the practice.

Joko: Practice is always feeling that self-centred push we have about our life. That incessant desire to make ourselves happy and content. Free from all sorts of troubles. And I'm not saying not to do what we ordinarily can do, but the point is we can't do it completely. That dissatisfaction poisons human life, do you see?

Tom: I do. OK. Well, I'll just carry on. That gives me the answer to that really, because I was wondering if there was anything specific, a specific problem..

Joko: If you look, it takes specific forms. But all human problems have that problem underneath them. The fundamental problem. The fundamental koan.

Tom: Yeah. The dissatisfaction: I want, I want. Um. Righteo. Well, at least the sun's just come up here!

Joko: The wonder is always right there. Isn't that wonderful that the sun came up?

Tom: Nice after the weather we've been having... and I've got a birthday party today.. My son's.

Joko: Oh! Enjoy yourself.

Tom: OK. Good. That helps.

Joko: All right, we'll try to see what it is that you're battling in your life, and what you think practice has to do with that. See, it does have something to do with it. But I don't think it's clear to you yet.

Tom: ... What I'm battling, and what practice has to do with it..

Joko: I want it to get clearer to you. We touched on it today.

Tom: OK. Carry on.

Joko: My time's limited today for various reasons. But sometime we'll talk a little longer.

Tom: OK.

Nov 22 — sainthood by beta blockers

Tom: I called a couple of times and heard about the jury duty. [She was away.]

Joko: Right.

Tom: I'm not too sure what to ask any more. I've asked you so many questions.

Joko: I'm more interested in what you're doing with your practice in your life. The sort of things you don't seem to know what to do with.

Tom: Yeah, well there's one like that for sure.

Joko: Those are the ways we learn. Both with practice and what to do with it.

Tom: There're two main areas I've noticed that I spend a lot of time thinking about. One is business. I'm getting older and I get worried that I have people to support here. People get chucked out of their jobs five years younger than me. So I do this independent work, and it goes all right, but there's absolutely no security in it. It's like walking down the path and selling baskets. I guess I'm used to that. So that's one thing that's on my mind a lot. The other thing, that in a funny sort of way is a dilemma. A long time I mentioned that the doctor had prescribed — well I won't go into the whole thing — but in a roundabout way in order to get this headache medicine, this migraine medicine which I had to take before, they required a test of a preventive medicine. A beta blocker. So I tried this and I said it seemed to be working, and you warned me there might be side effects. [Chuckles]. I'm been taking these things now for seven or eight months and I haven't had a single headache. Right? Complete success! But meanwhile, my libido is dropping and dropping until now...

Joko: That's the side effect...

Tom: [laughs]. That's the side effect. It's almost like being a saint. Where there's no problem. You know?

Joko: Yeah, well.

Tom: So then I'm caught. What do I do with this?

Joko: What the beta blocker does is control your brain from going crazy. That's your practice, you need to look at that. I'm not saying to drop the beta blockers right away. But it's something like antidepressants. They're just doing something that you should learn to do for yourself.

Tom: The doctor says to ease back on the amount and see what happens.

Joko: You can try that. But I suspect you're having these migraines and that you're not aware of all your thinking. You know, I have people come here with migraines too.

Tom: Yes. You mentioned it before.

Joko: And we work through them. In general we reach a stage where they don't have headaches. And when the headaches begin to recur, sometimes after two or three years, we begin to see what's lapsed in their practice. You see what I mean?

Tom: Right, OK.

Joko: Now it's harder for a phone student to do this thoroughly enough. But why don't you just try dropping back with them.

Tom: I also get myself committed on important work. I say I'm going to have something by next

Thursday. So I really can't afford to be blotted out for a few days by a migraine when I have that commitment. So I have this super system now of not having that happen. So I might have to try it on the holidays.

Joko: Well, there are lots of ways you have to fiddle with things. And learn what we need to learn. But also try to be very aware of the angry thoughts and the body sensations that I'm sure are there if you're having migraines.

Tom: I was once having episodes about once a week. Enough to make me gaga. I don't get these whopping headaches any more. I get other symptoms, which other people get as side effects. It's enough to make things not work.

Joko: Well start with the medicine and begin to look at yourself a little more... see if you're really aware what's going on in you.

Tom: I see what you're saying, and I always feel I'm never tackling it all.

Joko: Nobody tackles it all. There's always some connection between the mind and the body. OK, is there anything else? I mean, I can't...

Tom: No, no. That's the big one at the moment. That's the most vivid thing that's going on.

Joko: Yeah. OK. Well, keep in touch. We'll follow this, OK?

Tom: OK.

Joko: All right, Tom. Nice to hear from you.

6 Dec — you cretin!

Tom: I haven't made any progress on the thing we talked about last time. These pills. I'll get to that.

Joko: All right. Just talk.

Tom: What's on my mind right now... all of this work.. back for a couple of decades, simply watching your delusions and misconceptions and slip-ups during the day, you feel that's what you are after a bit.

Joko: That's not what you are. That's what you're doing. [laughs]

Tom: Other people are not disadvantaged with [laughs] this discovery, I guess, or this vision of how you are.

Joko: You want to be careful that when you notice things you're doing, particularly things that aren't great, that you don't follow that with more thinking about how terrible you are for doing this. That doesn't help anything.

Tom: Yeah, I don't actually do that too much. It seems like [laughs] a kind of background picture of "that's the way I am." All you concentrate on is the misconceptions and the things where you're going wrong.

Joko: The main thing we can do in life is to see the facts of the situation. And not keep evaluating ourselves as we deal with it. We do our best, that's all. And it may be crummy, but we just do it. I don't know if I'm saying this clearly enough.

Tom: I get the picture. I just suddenly realised I'd built up this background picture. Because some guy was shouting at me yesterday. I guess this is what brought it up. I had my car lights on and he pulled up alongside me, beeping and shouting "Turn off your lights, you cretin!" And I thought: well here's somebody who's got no problem with being right [laughs].

Joko: He thinks he's being right. You know, his problem is not with you. It's with his own anger.

Tom: Yeah, I realise that. But then I thought: well I go around all the time thinking whatever problems arise, probably I've got a hand in here. And I'd better watch what I'm doing.

Joko: There's nothing wrong with watching what you're doing. But it's different from being upset about it. See, in a way we like to be upset. Because that confirms our core belief about ourselves that we're really worthless. And we're pretty quick to jump into that. We always want to confirm that core belief. Because that's who we think we are. And we'd be very upset if it were taken away from us. So when somebody yells at us, we're quick to think: "Oh yeah, that's right I really am a worthless hopeless person." It's just all thinking. See what I mean?

Tom: Yeah. I coped all right with that one. I mean I didn't actually believe the guy. [laughs]

Joko: Well, you might even say "thank you". [chuckles]

Tom: Yeah. "Thanks for pointing that out!" [laughs]

Joko: Well it is a service in a way. He didn't do it very well, but I sometimes at twilight forget to put my lights on you know? And that's dangerous. It's good if somebody — even if they snap at you — it's good to have it pointed out. You know, to have a dark car in the middle of traffic, it's not very safe.

Tom: As I say, it triggered off this: here was someone who's got this apparent assurance, but I go around all the time thinking: "Better watch this, better watch that."

Joko: But he doesn't have absolute assurance. Under that he's scared.

Tom: Oh, yeah... are you... what's happening around Christmas there?

Joko: We have a Christmas sesshin, of course. One of the big ones in the year is between Christmas and New Year.

Tom: So you'll be off line around there?

Joko: Yeah, that week, and a few days on either side of it. Very busy here.

Tom: Well it gets busy everywhere of course.

Joko: It does and having a sesshin on top of this. Really hard time of year. Yeah. Well, Tom, I want you to be very alert to your tendency to yell at yourself, OK?

Tom: ...Yeah.... OK.

Joko: It's not helpful. It's just a waste of time. You want to learn what you can. If there's something to be learned. Then just turn to your life as it is. We'll keep talking about that, because I think that's an interesting point you brought up.

Tom: Thanks.

Joko: OK. Bye-bye.

1998

17 Jan — it just creeps up on you

Tom: I think things are going OK. But there's one thing you said that's been haunting me. It's about the... I'm not sure quite how you put it, but the major human koan is that everyone wants to live forever, but they all know they're going to die.

Joko: Uh-huh. Right.

Tom: At least some of them do.

Joko: [laughs] We say we do. But there's that blindness that says, no, I'm going to live forever.

Tom: Yeah. I mean, once it was expressed so clearly, I've been seeing these strategies everywhere... not only in myself, but people trying to live forever.

Joko: Right.

Tom: Or at least their fame will live forever, and that will do it. All kinds of amazing things going on. I suppose I don't quite know what to do about this. All these details of practice, but behind all this, you go: ahhhhh...

Joko: Remember, the whole detail of practice is for one objective only. What is that?

Tom: To clarify what's happening, I think.

Joko: To clarify the nature of this 'I'. The one that wants to live forever. As you maintain awareness, particularly of your thoughts, at some point it dawns on you that you're not really all that stuff. All you are is the functioning. And you're not some fixed thing called Tom. See what I mean? It just creeps up on you. It's not something you realise in your head.

Tom: I know that when I think about it, but then in the matrix of things...

Joko: All practice is just to weaken that sense of 'I'. Because you can't possibly see what life is as long as you have a distorted view of who you are. The everyday nitty-gritty of practice. But we don't want to know that. We want some magic wand to come and do it. But it doesn't work that way.

Tom: That's right. My life has been a lot of that: thinking of a final solution — this is going to do it, or that is.

Joko: Nothing's going to do it. But just being alive each second. If you're fully present, that does it, see? But we don't want to be fully present. We want to think about ourselves. So you have a little koan that runs all the time. See what I mean? Very different to really totally cut up a carrot. And not to just totally just cut it up. See what I mean? We never do anything totally. We always have a little part of us that's doing something else.

Tom: That's I guess what I needed to hear. It's been bothering me.

Joko: It bothers people here too. But it's interesting to me, to see people who just keep going on their practice. They don't always want to. They don't always feel it makes any sense. And they're beginning to have these spaces in their life now that are different. Where they begin to see things

differently. It's wonderful to watch. It does happen.

Tom: Things certainly get better. But there's that underlying... Oooooo, this isn't really going to be the big one.

Joko: That's still the ego, see, wanting to get somewhere.

Tom: Yeah. I see.

Joko: All right. Anything else, Tom?

Tom: No. I don't think so. That's what's been really nagging me.

Joko: All right. We'll talk again. Think about that a little bit.

7 Feb — happy as a puppy

Tom: Every time I get on the line, I talk about my troubles. But this time I wanted to say a couple of other things. One is that every now and then, something new is happening when I'm sitting. All the hassles just stop, everything just stops, and it's like peace. Everything is what it is, and it's the most glorious sort of thing... briefly.

Joko: That'll get stronger over time, but you can't look for it. Keep practising. It's a natural result.

Tom: That's been coming up. It's quite new that... and the other thing, is we got a puppy! Wonderful. [chuckles]

Joko: [laughs] What kind of a puppy?

Tom: A terrier.

Joko: Uh-huh. Wonderful.

Tom: What a difference that makes. I don't know what it is about a dog.

Joko: They're absolutely innocent, I think is what I like about them!

Tom: Particularly puppies. My word!

Joko: I'd love to have a puppy. I just can't, the way I live. I grew up always with a dog.

Tom: Yeah, I had one too. It brings all that back too. It makes friends with everyone, even our grumpy old cat we've got. Which is really going some... OK, well, that's what's been happening [laughs]

Joko: That sounds good. What can I say? Don't be ambitious about your practice. Just keep going, OK?

Tom: Gain little by little. Or lose little by little.

Joko: It does seem to be settling out for you. That's good.

14 Mar — walks and pills

Tom: I've got a little dog I mentioned. And I take him for these walks And quite a long time ago you got me out of my chair and out on walks.

Joko: Uh-huh! You're still walking?

Tom: Yeah. And it's become such a feature that I'd hate to give up. Now with the dog, particularly, we've got lovely walks around this place... I wondered if you had any more tips like that? [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] Well..

Tom: Because that was such a good tip, really. I was all day in the office, in front of a computer and never even thought about going out for a walk.

Joko: You know the body's what you live through. The body's a channel for whatever our life is.

Tom: I feel better. And I really enjoy it. A great feature of the day. I do it at the end of the day. An obvious sort of thing, but I somehow never thought of it.

Joko: One thing I try to do, somewhere during the day... on a walk, but I also have a physical discipline... is I try to get my heart rate up. Really do it until it's about a high as it will go. And do that a number of times during the day. That gives the heart muscle a workout, which it needs. Sometimes just walking isn't...

Tom: Ah, yeah, but this walk starts up a really steep hill. Miles up. Even the dog's puffed.

Joko: Oh, you've got it made then. Fine... ah, I'm so proud of you [laughs].

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, right.

Joko: Wonderful.

Tom: Yeah, it's nice to have a dog along...

Joko: Good for the dog too. And aren't you lucky to live somewhere where it's like that?

Tom: Oh yeah. Beautiful around here.

Joko: I live in the city. Luckily we have a little park a few blocks away that goes straight up. And it's very pretty. It overlooks the pacific.

Tom: I can picture it. I know the area you're in, but I didn't see the park.

Joko: It's just a little park. A neighbourhood park. But it's pretty and it goes straight up, so I just go up and down, up and down.

Tom: You may get to know people that way.

Joko: Yeah. Sure.

Tom: Recognise them anyway.

Joko: This is a little park where people run their dogs. The place is covered with dogs racing after balls, having such a good time [chuckles]. You can just sit there, it's like a circus going on all the

time.

Tom: It would be. Dogs are funny. And the owners.

Joko: Dogs are great. Anyway, I'm so happy that you're doing that.

Tom: I just wanted to mention it, and say what a delightful part of my life it's become. I'd fight if I had to give it up.

Joko: Well, don't give it up.

Tom: I won't. I mean I'd fight against anybody who tried to make me give it up.

Joko: Well, nobody should. Because if you don't take care of your body, eventually you take care of being sick. You don't really save any time by not doing these things. It's expensive, and it doesn't feel good... anyway, I'm pleased. Because most people by the time they're adults, they won't give anything up or change. It's very hard to make them do anything different.

Tom: I don't know... whatever you said... It was a couple of years ago.

Joko: Yeah. I remember.

Tom: Yeah, anyway, here we are.

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: We've been through all kinds of ups and downs, financial disasters and saving ourselves and all that kind of stuff. But we got through all that lot all right. Business is OK... Again on these pills, I've been taking beta-blockers, for migraines. You were saying cut back, so I tried cutting back, and I feel a lot better.

Joko: They're dangerous pills. Please try to get off them.

Tom: I've reduced the dose in half. And I haven't noticed any decline in effectiveness, but I feel a lot better.

Joko: There's a lot of literature that outlines the drawbacks of them, you know what I mean? So the less medicine you can take, the better.

Tom: Well, I'm getting there.

Joko: And the more you walk, it has a lot to do with it.

Tom: One last thing. We've got a little sitting group. We don't even know what some of them do. Word got around that we hold this little sitting thing, a kind of Zen format, where we walk in the middle and sit again, and ring a couple of bells. People keep joining. Sibyl is astonished.

Joko: Do some of them have teachers?

Tom: Yeah, they do. They come from different backgrounds. But they have no one to sit with. They enjoy it. They even apologise when they can't come. Once a week.

Joko: Where do you meet?

Tom: In different people's houses.

Joko: [chuckles]. So you're a busy boy. [laughs]

Tom: [laughs] OK.

Joko: OK. Thanks for calling.

18 Apr — love

Tom: I'd like to talk to you a little bit about motivation for doing Zen.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I've noticed that I started out 30 years or more ago, with whopper dreams and ideas. Which turn out to be way off base, as we've discussed. As you go, it seems that the practice itself eliminates the reasons for doing it.

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: Not that I've stopped. You know what I mean?

Joko: Well, not really. It changes it. There's a shift.

Tom: I'm not saying I've stopped. It's just that I can't exactly... it's something that I have to do. I have a busy day and find I can't live without it. But I don't know why I'm doing it, quite.

Joko: Well, why do you think you're doing it? Let's get right down to rock bottom here. Why do you think you're doing it?

Tom: [pause]

Joko: Why do you think I do it?

Tom: I'm not too... it changes the character of your life somehow. The way you go through things. If you don't sit, it's like not practising a violin. Everything gets out of tune or stops working.

Joko: Partly. But aside from getting out of tune, when you practice, you also play well, you see what I mean? What's it mean to play well in terms of our practice?

Tom: In doing the practice, or...?

Joko: What happens to a person after... I'm not saying the first few years, but when you practice for many years, what happens?

Tom: Um. What happens in the person's life, or during the practice?

Joko: What happens to a person who sincerely practices?

Tom: Well, you see that an awful lot of what the mind does as an empty whirligig and clanking machinery.

Joko: Where does that leave you?

Tom: [laughs] Well that leaves you basically free of an awful lot of influences and distractions and noises and problems which you otherwise would have had. I suppose.

Joko: What else?

Tom: [pause] What else?

Joko: Uh-huh. That would free you. But that's not what your life's about.

Tom: [pause] Can you put that in a different way? I'm not quite getting this.

Joko: Well, we do learn that the things we've been attached to and drive us crazy are just thoughts and begin to abandon them. And they don't bother us so much after a while. Which means that we are more free. Right?

Tom: Correct.

Joko: But that's only the beginning. Then what?

Tom: I'm not sure. But I guess that's what...

Joko: Let's put it this way. If you use terms like false self and true self — not that there are two selves — but it sometimes almost feels that way. But the false self is the egocentric self that wants this, wants that, is bothered by this, doesn't like that.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. I know. Yeah!

Joko: It's never satisfied. Has to have more. That's the false self. Now what practice does is to strip away the false thinking that makes us a false self. Now if that's stripped away, to any measurable degree, what happens?

Tom: Well then logically you get into the true self.

Joko: And what is the characteristic of the true self? Free of this mucky muck, maybe not completely but largely free of it. What's the difference?

Tom: I guess that's what I don't know.

Joko: What do you think I do the work I do for? I mean I don't have any of those little things that you work so hard to get rid of. I did that a long time ago. So what keeps me practising?

Tom: [pause] Well, I don't know. I just assume... um, that's a good one. What keeps you practising? It would deepen it in some way. But it I really wouldn't know.

Joko: Deepen it. But deepen what?

Tom: Yeah... oooo. [pause] OK, well I don't know.

Joko: I'll give you a clue. I'm not trying to... I'll give you a clue, and then you can think about it, OK?

Tom: All right.

Joko: You know in Zen the word love is never used. Somehow, people don't use that. Well, for one thing it's so misunderstood. But in very simple American terms, I suspect Australian terms, the point of practice is to become a loving person.

Tom: Eh-heh.

Joko: A truly loving person. Not one who pretends to be a loving person. A compassionate person, a loving person, one who wants to do good, not in order to get something from it, but just wants to do that.

Tom: Well, I'm a bit distant from that yet. But I realise that...

Joko: Well you may be, but see that's where you're heading. And it's the most important thing in the world. But you can't be a loving person as long as you are caught by your own anger and judgements about the world. And so the slow dissolution of all that stuff leads to being a more loving person.

Tom: I'm beginning to see a little bit of that in fact.

Joko: But that's also a life of service. And I don't mean service with a capital S. And I don't mean that you even think about it, but it's a real joy to you when you do something and other people's life opens up a little bit. See what I mean?

Tom: Right. I see exactly what you're saying.

Joko: And there's no end to that. The reason I keep practising is because like all human beings, I still have a lot to learn. But maybe not the things a beginning student has to learn. But I still have a lot to learn. There's no end to it.

Tom: Well, that's a huge help.

Joko: See what I mean?

Tom: That's exactly what I couldn't quite put into place.

Joko: The Dalai Lama says the only important word in practice is kindness.

Tom: Really?

Joko: Yeah. Not some esoteric experience thing. Kindness.

Tom: Wow.

Joko: All right. Anyway, that's all I'm going to tell you. And you can worry that one down a little bit.

Tom: [laughs] OK.

Joko: OK?

Tom: Excellent. Yeah.

Joko: All right. Good... Bye-bye.

16 May — Uncle Bob

Tom: I've got a situation I wanted to ask you about.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: My brother called me up and said that my uncle Bob has six months to a year to live. He's been diagnosed with bone cancer. I've always liked the guy, but I've never kept in touch with him. I've learned a lot from him. I just wondered... I would quite like to call him, but I'm not too sure what to say.

Joko: Just say there's something you want to say to him.

Tom: Ah!

Joko: And nobody's ever going to fight with the idea that they've meant something in your life, that you've learned something from them. That's what we're all waiting to hear! [laughs]

Tom: [laughs]. Right. OK.

Joko: Well, think of yourself, if you're ill. You know when you're ill, it really makes you feel like you've never done anything. You know.

Tom: That's right.

Joko: We love to have somebody tell us at that time: well, your life has not been in vain, you know. You've meant a lot to me.

Tom: I wasn't sure that was really on, because I've never really kept in touch with the fellow.

Joko: That's all right. Even if he didn't know you, he'd be glad to hear it.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: He would remember you.

Tom: He'd remember me all right. He used to lend me his car and things like that when I was in high school.

Joko: Those are the sort of things in life we tend not to say, and we should say them.

Tom: I'd sort of like to, but I wasn't sure it was really... after all this time. OK. Well, I'll call him.

Joko: Do that. Uh-huh.

Tom: He's a rough old character, you know. But he was good fun. All right, that's the main thing that's exercising me.

Joko: Yeah. Do it. Because I remember I went to my older son's wedding... I don't know if I told you about that?

Tom: No.

Joko: He was a famous rock climber. So this is a bunch of rock climbers getting married at 9000 feet up in the Sierras.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: And it was really hard just to get up there. To arrive at the wedding site.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: So my brother, who has something wrong with his knee, couldn't do it. He couldn't go to the wedding. But he hasn't kept in touch with my son, or my son with him, I hate to say. For many, many years. But my son, for some reason, went on and on at this wedding about how important this uncle had been to him. He'd learned this, he'd learned that. Introduced to this. So when the wedding was over, a day or two later I called my brother. I told him this. And my brother started to burst into tears. Now he never cries. Very stoic number he is. Very brilliant and intellectual and all that stuff. He doesn't show emotion.

Tom: But he did.

Joko: He was getting older too, and he was so touched that somebody have even thought of him at the wedding, let alone talked about him for five minutes.

Tom: OK. That answers that. I'll just go ahead and do it.

Joko: Yeah. Do it. Do it. By all means, do it. I mean, do ask when you call if it's a good time to talk for a minute, because when you're that ill, you never know... people have their days.

Tom: OK... I thought he was all right now.

Joko: Some of these dyings go easily. Some don't go easily. You don't know which one you're dealing with here.

Tom: That's the problem for the day anyway.

Joko: Yeah. Good... Everything else all right?

Tom: Yeah, I was thinking about what you said last time about... a lot.. about what's beyond the clankings of the mind. And where it's all leading to. That's been exercising me a fair bit. Because that's where... all the theories today say the mind is like a survival Swiss army knife, built down the eons, and there's nothing beyond the survival mechanisms. All the things we do have a survival value. But it's not the way things always work: some of this isn't actually very useful, like spiritual things.

Joko: Spiritual is simply that element that is indescribable. But as I often say to people: you always know if there's someone in a room who loves you. You always know that. You know very well if they love you or not. Right?

Tom: That's for sure, yeah.

Joko: Yet if you actually had to explain to somebody, it's kind of hard, you know. And a so-called enlightened person is someone who loves unconditionally. And that's the point of our practice. The way of life, is to do these things that are kind. Not leave them undone. We all do some of them. I've got one right on my desk right now, a letter I just haven't gotten to and I should. She's dying.

Tom: Uh-huh.

Joko: I have to write it, you know... but I will do it. But that's what life's all about. See?

Tom: OK. Thanks.

Joko: All right, Tom. Bye-bye.

27 June — from door-breaker to sweet old man

Tom: A long time ago, you said something that's been with me practically daily. That everyone wants to live forever, but they know they're going to die, and that's a fundamental human koan.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Have you made any tapes about that? Or written about that anywhere?

Joko: I don't know. I probably have. But I never know about my talks. I forget them as fast as I give them.

Tom: Ah, OK. Fair enough.

Joko: Uh-huh. But it's obvious.

Tom: It's obvious, but somehow you don't see it until somebody says it clearly.

Joko: It's also what makes life so precious.

Tom: You see it everywhere. You see these strategies. Not only in me, but the craziest sort of stuff goes on, to solve this one.

Joko: Well you can't solve it, but you can be it. There's a difference, you see. You can't solve things like life and death in your head. That's not possible. But you can learn to experience life directly, as much as you possibly can. And when you do, the questions that you're bringing up get solved. Maybe not in words, but they get solved. The only thing I ever ask myself is: am I present? Am I here? That's enough. Enough to do that.

Tom: It's such a driver of humanity out there. I called my uncle... I guess that's what set it off. The one I hadn't talked to in a long time, and I was asking you what I should say to this guy. And I did call him, and I'm very glad. He seemed surprised to hear from me and hear me telling him he'd had a big effect on me. And how much I'd appreciated his help.

Joko: Great.

Tom: He said: "Oh, those were the days!" His attitude was, having a short time to live, was he was going to fight it all the way. Fight it "to the bitter end". He's that kind of character. That was his strategy. Other people put brass plaques up to commemorate a bridge or something they've done... really strange.

Joko: I hope he has a happy remainder of his life.

Tom: I think he's gone. I got an email a few days ago saying he was only given hours to live and all his children were assembled there. So Sibyl went out and bought a fat white candle and lit it for him, which was nice. It burned for a few days.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I'm not in that close touch. I don't think it would be appropriate to keep calling and say: how are you going?

Joko: Well, it's amazing that people can become very happy just before they die.

Tom: Yeah... so I hear. I don't know about him.

Joko: It varies. But it's quite common.

Tom: His kids describe him as "a sweet old man". My word! You should have met this character. Sweet old man he was not. He'd break down doors and things like that. His kids were entirely estranged from him for awhile. Sweet old man! [laughs] Right. So it must be right.

Joko: Something went on with him. You know. We'll see how you do it, or how I do it.

Tom: Ummmm. OK.

Joko: [chuckles] Well when you have thoughts like that, just ask yourself: am I present? You see?

Tom: OK.

Joko: That's real. Whatever's going on right this second is real. Your thoughts about death aren't real. It doesn't mean we don't die, but thinking about it isn't real.

Tom: Well, I think that's what I need to know.

Joko: All your practice can boil down to: am I here? We're hardly ever here. Coming back, coming back. Everything else all right?

Tom: Yeah, things are fairly right. I won't go into the problems, but they're always happening.

Joko: Yeah, life consists of problems. That isn't going to change, but how we see the problems change.

Tom: I can more or less greet them with a smile.

Joko: Well you don't have to like them even. But they're still just what they are. So no need to get upset either.

Tom: Thanks. Yeah.

Joko: All right. Good. Bye-bye.

1 August — when you're upset, or moody, or feeling bad

Tom: The practice is.. I can settle into a feeling now, just leave it alone.

Joko: Uh-huh. Good for you.

Tom: That's always a help in some way. I don't know quite what happens.

Joko: You're returning to reality. Not your thoughts about it. But just the plain reality.

Tom: And I remember at your Centre, when I first went to an introductory talk, by some fellow there, and he was saying just to do that. I thought at the time: what an absolutely horrible thing to do!

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: It was absolutely the last thing I wanted to do.

Joko: I know. That's why practice is difficult, see.

Tom: And it's finally come around, well over the last month or two, what he was actually talking about.

Joko: You have to do it yourself. Because to hear about it... you know, why settle into something that's painful?

Tom: Yeah. I was thinking, at the beginning Buddhism give you this simple promise: there are problems, they result from clinging, you can get rid of the clinging, then you go to Nirvana and everything is splendid forever.

Joko: Well, it's true, but how do you do it? See?

Tom: Right. And I also find myself quite a lot milder towards people. I don't know what's going on quite... I feel more agreeable.

Joko: Well, keep asking questions. Because to understand this, to understand what practice really is...

Tom: Asking questions about what?

Joko: So that you really understand. You're stumbling into it. But you need to understand as well as you can. Because this is what you call the secret of life, OK?

Tom: What I'm doing? Settling right into what's happening?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: OK... It seems right. I can understand the point now.

Joko: To boil it down, whenever you're upset or moody or feeling bad, just briefly notice the thoughts. Then go to the body, OK?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. Oddly enough, that works absolutely fine.

Joko: It does, and we don't want to do it.

Tom: Yeah... and the other thing is I've got a weekend of grumpy teenagers, one of my sons and his friends here, with me by myself. I turned the leaf of my calendar to the 1st August today — and I've got a polar bear calendar. You know, photos of polar bears. And what do I see for August? Two fighting polar bears! [laughs] Happy Saturday. Right. Anyway it's early here, and they're not up yet.

Joko: Having a bunch of teenagers is aggravating at times. A chance to use your practice.

Tom: That's what I reckon. [laughs]

Joko: If you can't do it right away — sometimes when we're in the middle of things. But then go back to it later. And re-create it in your mind. You get what I mean by that?

Tom: Well that's easy to do, isn't it? To bring it back. Particularly if you're upset about something.

Joko: That's the secret, OK?

Tom: Well, that's about it.

Joko: All right. I'm pleased with you. That's good.

Tom: And how are things there? I get your newsletters, which are very, very valuable... written by Ezra?

Joko: He's my newest dharma successor.

Tom: That's right. Yeah, I read about that.

Joko: Just got married to Elizabeth. [chuckles]

Tom: I don't think I ever met Elizabeth, so I can't quite picture that... or either of them, in fact.

Joko: She was my first dharma successor and they just got married.

Tom: That must have been something.

Joko: Her greatest gift isn't writing. She has other gifts. But he's very good at putting things in a rather simple fashion.

Tom: He certainly is.

Joko: Anyway, I'll tell him you like them.

Tom: Yeah, a great help. And I pass them on to Sibyl. Well... Thank you.

Joko: Yeah. Good. All right. Bye-bye, Tom.

29 Aug — the secret of life

Tom: The secret of life. Last time we were talking about this simple but off-putting practice of just observing of what goes on. You referred to it as the secret of life. And that's been going around in my thoughts.

Joko: Well, not just observing, but of course experiencing.. I hope it's clear. It means just being aware at this second of what your life is. Which is what? I'm in a chair with my feet up on the bed, talking. And I'm looking at all the things there are to look at in the room.

Tom: I understand. I'm just surprised at having it described in such a large way, as the secret of life.

Joko: Unless you're in contact with life, and the only way human beings can be in contact with life, is how?

Tom: Well, being aware.

Joko: Being aware. And that means being aware also of your inner world, which is your thoughts. You have to be aware of all of that. Otherwise the thoughts take over and you're not aware of anything. Once you're really in contact with life, of what is. If you're never in contact with it, you can't possibly... For instance, if I said, suppose you'd never stroked the fur of a cat. I said: oh, I'll show you what that's like. And I held up a cat, but the cat had a piece of plastic around it. You could

see the fur. But it was kind of blurred under the plastic. You still don't know what the fur is. You need direct contact with that fur, to really know.

Tom: Ok... why is it the secret?

Joko: Well Zen students and people who do practice like this are always in a dither, looking for the secret of life.

Tom: That's right! [laughs] Exactly. They want some big deal.

Joko: Well, there's a story — I think it's in my book — about this fish that went to some big man: great master, where can I learn about the great ocean? Because he was immersed in it, you see what I mean? The master just laughed. The life we're looking at. But people don't really notice their life. What are they doing?

Tom: They're living by pictures, I suppose. Everything's overlaid with hopes and all kinds of stuff.

Joko: Right. That's why in dharma talks I often say, you have to be thoroughly disappointed to do this practice. That means you begin to see that just hopes in your mind forever is a waste of time.

Tom: I don't have trouble with that. It's just this actual term: the secret of life. I thought, boy, that's something! Because I guess earlier on, I got the idea somewhere there is some big secret of life, a really big, punchy thing.

Joko: If you see it clearly enough, for some people it really is big. I just had a call from someone in Montana. She was taking her dog to the vet in the middle of a lot of traffic and going on. Suddenly she remembered what I said, and she saw the world as she'd never seen it before. It was perfect. There was no problem. It was absolutely different. And all she'd done for a second was stop thinking. But for her, a brand new world. She's still taking about it.

Tom: It was the secret of life. OK. That's got it.

Joko: Some people will have glimpses like that. But they're so easily deflected. They have something happening to them they don't like. Or they don't feel well. Or someone insults them or hurts their feelings. Then they're gone.

Tom: I sometimes have trouble pulling back, if there's aggravation.

Joko: Until you learn how to do that, this is not open to you.

Tom: That's right... those words went in like a spear, and I couldn't draw it out.

Joko: That's the secret of life. Most of the time I'm busy, of course. But if I have an hour or so, and I can just sit around, the world is just absolutely joyful. I have that all the time, which is nice. Unlike a lot of other old people.

Tom: Definitely not, the grim faces you see on them.

Joko: But what I'm trying to say, is that you have to earn that through your practice.

Tom: You wouldn't expect it... just to happen by itself.

Joko: Maybe it could, but I've never met anyone. But you also have to know what practice is. Sometimes I'll tell people as simply as what I told you: “Yeah Joko, but what's the real Zen?”

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: What's kensho? What's satori?

Tom: It has to be something mysterious.

Joko: Life is mysterious. I don't know what it is. But you can appreciate it. People want something else. I don't know, some form of Greek or something.

Tom: Thank you.

Joko: All right, Tom.

3 Oct — nobody bothers you at 5AM

Tom: I've got a kind of low-level one. You must have heard this a lot of times. What do you do if you've been going along for years getting out of bed at five o'clock in the morning to sit and suddenly you can't do it any more? You can't somehow drag yourself out.

Joko: It could be you actually do need more sleep. Have you considered that?

Tom: I still go to bed at the same time. No, I hadn't considered that. It could be that simple, I suppose.

Joko: Well I don't think it is. But I certainly would find out. You do need to sit. The question is, if you get up somewhat later, can you still sit?

Tom: Well, no. Because things get noisy around here. Everyone wakes up. If I get up at five, I can sit from five to six, which is pretty perfect. It's always been a little bit hard doing that in the winter when it's grim and dark and difficult.

Joko: I understand.

Tom: But I've always done it. But in the last couple of weeks, I've found it quite difficult to do.

Joko: Well there are two or three things. You know, what's really happening is that it's become a habit. And what you're losing sight of is what you're really doing in sitting. And that's human. I'm not criticising.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: And usually if you could do a retreat, it would help. That wakes you up again. If you can't do a retreat with somebody or other, then I don't know. What I have with people that don't want to sit, I have them go to the place they sit. That means waking up of course. Having their coffee or whatever they do to get awake. And ask themselves: am I going to sit today? If the answer is no, you don't sit. Then sometimes you add another question: well, even though I don't want to sit today, can I do it anyway? And if you still get no, then don't do it.

Tom: I'm sure if I got there, I could sit. That's not a problem. It's getting out of bed.

Joko: Then you need to pose your questions differently. Am I going to get out of bed to sit? No. Even though I get that answer, is it possible for me to get out of bed to sit? If you still get no, then go back to sleep.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, OK.

Joko: But the point is to keep it conscious. See what I mean?

Tom: I see... yeah. You just make a conscious decision.

Joko: Then it begins to remind you of why you really sit.

Tom: I've got you. OK.

Joko: It provides a base for you life. And for a while you might not miss it. You might just think, oh, it doesn't make any difference. But it does make a difference. You find that out.

Tom: I try to sit at other times too.

Joko: Well, if you can, fine.

Tom: But that's more random. I have to wait until it accidentally gets quiet or nobody's bothering me.

Joko: Well your family can be trained a little bit.

Tom: I run a home office, and people call at different times. And it's pretty difficult. But it does quiet down sometimes.

Joko: Yeah, that's a little hard.

Tom: So that's why the five o'clock thing is so good. Because nobody bothers you at five o'clock in the morning.

Joko: That's right. [chuckles] Well I can't give you a blanket answer, but I think aside from any of that, what would help you would be to write two or three paragraphs — I'm not talking about an essay in grand English — just something about "What sitting accomplishes in my life is".

Tom: Oh right. OK.

Joko: You know, we forget what it accomplishes. It accomplishes a great deal. But sometimes we need to wake up to that again. So it might help you to ponder that question. And to write out a paragraph at some point to read it to me or send it to me, or something.

Tom: OK! Right. That I can do. That should sort it out.

Joko: What's really happening is you're forgetting why you sit. It is hard to get up in the morning. I know. I get up at five, and I don't like it at all. [laughs] But it doesn't matter whether I like it or not. I understand why it's necessary.

Tom: It's understanding it at five in the morning that's the problem.

Joko: But do you have any days of the week you don't have to get up so early?

Tom: The weekend.

Joko: Right, it's only five days. We're human, and if we absolutely haven't slept or for some reason, of course we can sleep in. I'm talking about what we do 80% of the time.

Tom: Oh, well I get up. I have got up at that time, every day of the week, in fact. Not just weekdays. Well, fine. I'll do that.

Joko: That's what the problem is. And I've met this over and over and over. And usually when people really get to it, and begin to realise what sitting is really for them, it works out all right. So, anyway, let me know.

Tom: I haven't backed off and thought about that for quite a while. So it sounds right.

Joko: Nice to hear from you. And keep me informed, OK?

31 Oct — what is the resistance to practice?

Tom: My son just put his head in here and said: "Anything happening today?" I said: "I hope not." [laughs]

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: It's a beautiful summer day, first day in summer. Last time I was saying I was having trouble getting up to sit in the morning, and you told me a couple of things. One of them was to make a rational choice. And that worked fine. Absolutely spot-on. I didn't have any trouble since then. And you also said to write out something about why I thought I was sitting. Which I've done. Shall I read it to you?

Joko: Sure.

Tom: So this is what I wrote at the time. "I sit, oddly enough, as a way of taking a stand. Taking a stand against letting things go by unseen, or in control because of that. So sitting is almost a jihad. Against the hypnosis of the commercial world and all the hypnosis I've used on myself. It's war against illusion, won by being more aware than the enemy." Which still makes sense to me.

Joko: Well remember the enemy is yourself.

Tom: I know. [laughs] I'm not forgetting.

Joko: Well, there is our culture. But the primary enemy is, you know, we've grown out of all that... you know, who we think we are. Go ahead.

Tom: I've never run into any problem which simply doesn't dissolve into nothing when you just go in and feel the thing and sit patiently. It's astonishing. The problems seem so real, when they thump you, it's hard not to believe they're absolutely iron-solid. But they aren't, are they?

Joko: No.

Tom: They're nothing.

Joko: Everything's changing. And that's good. But let me ask you, just to continue this: why do you think then that resistance rises? To the whole process? Because you know by now, that this is an effective and even interesting thing to do.

Tom: There must be something that keeps most people away from this practice.

Joko: Uh-huh. What is it?

Tom: All the cozy things that are laid on. Like just staying in bed, for example. It's awfully nice just

to stay in bed.

Joko: It's nice to stay in bed. It is. [laughs] We don't have to pretend we don't want to stay in bed.

Tom: There are millions of reasons why you don't want to stop during the day and practise.

Joko: But what are they?

Tom: What are they? Interesting question.

Joko: You could give me the quick things you think of. But I'd rather you take a little more time. See, there's no one who practices, Tom, for whom — at least for a long time — that 50% of their practice is resistance.

Tom: Resistance to actually doing it, you mean?

Joko: Well, resistance to practice, you know. You want to avoid it, you see what I mean?

Tom: So why is resistance there, is that the question?

Joko: Yeah, I want you to think about that.

Tom: OK.

Joko: Because it's not just you. For everybody, until you've been sitting maybe 25 or 30 years, then there's no resistance. But resistance is part of practice. I want you to look at that a little more closely. And it'll be back, you know. It's going to be back. It'll come and go. But it'll be back. So I want you to think about this a little bit.

Tom: Yeah, OK. Good one.

Joko: Sure. How's your life, on the whole?

Tom: Things are going along very well. I can't think of any particular hassles. I mean, little ones but..

Joko: Of course. The nature of life is little hassles. Or sometimes big hassles. But OK, just asking that's all.

Tom: Pretty good at the moment. As I say, it's also the first day of summer, which makes everyone's sap rise.

Joko: We're getting close to the first day of winter. It's beautiful. Well, it's San Diego Our weather's always beautiful. OK... All right, go ahead with the question I raised.

Tom: Will do.

12 Dec — two types of resistance

Tom: Last time we talked, you left me with a thing to think about: what the resistances are to practice. That has engaged me for quite a while. It seems to be there are two. I wasn't quite sure whether you meant the resistances to actually getting down and doing it. Or what resists it when you start sitting. They're similar, I'd say.

Joko: They're not that different, really. Go ahead.

Tom: One of the things that's plainly a resistance is when things are going well. When things are going well, I've noticed that it's a bit harder to get down and do it, than when you're buffeted by things going wrong. So I guess it's the old story of things going wrong being teachers in a way.

Joko: Well, we so much want things to go well. And it's almost as though when things are going well, we just don't want to even look or think of anything else.

Tom: Quite!

Joko: You know what I mean. We want to cling to that desperately. We have to look at that too.

Tom: So that's one thing I've noticed. One of the others was just the sheer enjoyment of thinking about things. I get wrapped up in a subject or project and it's totally distracting and absorbing. You don't really want to draw back from that.

Joko: Well, that's all right. That's not self-centred. That's OK. For instance, creative thinking, which artists or even a scientist does, that's OK. That's fine.

Tom: Problem solving is what I'm talking about.

Joko: Well that's not self-centred. That's what the mind is for, to solve problems, right?

Tom: It is something I've noticed that does take up time. It takes you away from practice.

Joko: No.

Tom: No?

Joko: No, that's not true. Practice is simply your life. The only thing we're thing we're trying to look at is whether we live life from a self-centred viewpoint. See, it's one thing, for instance, to work on a project, to work out whatever has to be worked out. That takes a lot of thinking sometimes. But then we can have a self-centred thought: "Maybe it's not worthwhile. I never do anything worthwhile anyway."

Tom: Oh yeah, OK. It's useless.

Joko: Then that's practice. Your little antenna want to go up at that. But you know, any artist, any musician, any composer, anybody like that is caught by their creativity sometimes. That's different than being caught by your self-centred thinking. Nothing wrong with that.

Tom: There was one final general thing. That was a kind of blank dullness. I mean, everyday I open my little dog door for my dog in the morning. It's got two little hooks, one on each side. And I know that no matter how many times I open it, the dog will never get it. I won't find him letting himself out. Simple as it is, and he could do it, he just doesn't get it! [laughs] Simply not possible for the dog.

Joko: He doesn't need to. You do it! [laughs]

Tom: Well that's one thing. But I feel like that with an aspect of this. When I was working on this particular problem you set me, I felt that coming on: Duh. You just don't get it, you know? I mean, I think about things all the time. But when I get to one of these, it's seems to be extremely hard to get past a Wall of Duh. [laughs] So that was the other thing that got in the way.

Joko: Well that's human. See it's human to go down the tubes here and there with our problems. But

when we practice, we learn: well, that's just that. And you pull yourself together and start over.

Tom: That's what happens. That's right.

Joko: But what we do is blame ourselves for our lapses. And that's just thinking. Once we've done that, we re-establish some sort of base, and begin again.

Tom: I know I used to do that a lot more than I do now. I used to think that unless you were behaving like Milarepa, living in a cave and eating dry leaves, you were not doing the full figure.

Joko: Have I ever said that?

Tom: No, no, no! [laughs]... But you know, you read this stuff.

Joko: I'm not going to live in any cave with dried leaves.

Tom: You read these books. I'm talking about me at 20.

Joko: I used to do that too. But sometimes we don't get what those old stories are really about. And also they came out of a very different, almost primitive culture. Some of them. So we have to be careful.

Tom: So there's a little bit of that. I think that's what you were talking about there. Sort of lashing yourself for not...

Joko: For not being perfect. That's not what the point of that stuff is. At least, not if it's good stuff. The really great Zen masters were just telling you to be yourself, you know. And being ourselves, is going up and down a little bit. But we don't have to stay down. We can notice that and just pick up the pieces and start again.

Tom: You've discussed that with me before. Actually, those simple things are very helpful. Just to realise that that does happen. And it's no big deal.

Joko: We think we're going to get to be superhuman.

Tom: Yeah! That's right.

Joko: That's sort of wishful thinking. See, if I could be above all other human beings, and different. Then wouldn't that be wonderful? But that's not real teaching.

Tom: Yeah, you want to join the immortal gods.

Joko: Right, right. That's a Zen type of poison.

Tom: OK, little by little. So, those are what I ran up against. I don't know if I missed anything.

Joko: That's OK. Again, these are big subjects. And we don't ever finish with them. We just keep poking away. Well I mean, resistance, because our very nature is to want things easy and nice. And preferably have somebody else do it. And so that stuff is always poking around. So we just keep watching.

Tom: Well, that's a new angle. Because I hadn't thought of resistance as such before. So it's been a useful few weeks. And as you say, it will continue.

Joko: But sometimes it will be very mild, or almost non-existent. Sometimes it will be strong. But

that's just the nature of things. OK? That help? I mean, you understand a little more clearly?

Tom: Yeah. Thanks for that. All right. That's all I wanted to go over.

Joko: All right. Let's just keep kind of working on that. I mean: you know, these questions are not something that go away. They have different forms, and greater depth or less depth. There's lots of stuff that as we go through our life, we're working with. OK?

Tom: And once it's raised, it's there. Yeah.

Joko: But once it's raised and we can see it, it's also a different animal. So be patient. OK?

Tom: OK!

Joko: All right, Tom. Nice to hear from you.

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6 Mar — practice or the real thing?

Tom: Last time we spoke, you said I should check in more often. And I've been trying. Except it didn't work. [chuckles]

Joko: [laughs] OK. I'm just... you know, practice needs to be kept sharp, until you're so sharp you don't need to talk to me. OK?

Tom: You were in sesshin a couple of weeks ago and last week I wasn't able to get through at all. So that's what's going on. So here I am. The thing we talked about last time, what I'm doing all the time is settling to what's there, without thinking about it. That's what I do when I'm sitting.

Joko: So instead of running your thoughts around endlessly, you sink back into the body?

Tom: Yes. Or into feelings of what formerly seemed like big problems. They just vanish of themselves. I know that it happens now, but it's a big thing really. Happening to you again and again.

Joko: Uh-huh. And are you finding this useful?

Tom: Oh yeah. It also means that I really don't believe in this kind of problem. On the surface of it, I think: "Well, it's another one of these, but I haven't got into that one."

Joko: OK. All right [chuckles]. Sounds good. I mean, once you get the idea of this, it makes life considerably different. Most people would say easier.

Tom: I have a problem with the word 'practice'.

Joko: All right.

Tom: It isn't practice at all. It's the real thing!

Joko: Maybe it's not an ideal word. But I've never found one that...

Tom: It's a word that's used all over the place and it's got the connotation of practising your golf stroke and things like that.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Which a little bit too light-on, I think. But with you, I don't know what other word be better. But it does tend to be misleading to people, I think.

Joko: Could be. But I don't think it is to people here. Or people on the phone or people I'm talking to frequently. No it's not ideal. People have brought that up. But here I don't see it as a problem — at the Centre.

Tom: Ah, well, not if you're there to...

Joko: To sort of make it obvious.

Tom: Make it obvious! [laughs] OK. .

Joko: Anything else?

Tom: I'm a little surprised that things don't all happen at once. I don't really understand why there's...

Joko: Why there's time?

Tom: Why these forces, these things come one at a time. They're there all the time, but they're presented one at a time. That intrigues me.

Joko: You can have fun thinking about it, but don't expect to understand it.

Tom: [laughs] OK.

Joko: [chuckles] OK? There's a difference. Reality isn't something we can really understand. We can just be with it, OK? You do have a different view of the world, but it's not the same as saying... well, for instance explaining that point. You really can't do that.

Tom: Ah, so that is an issue is it? That point surprises me.

Joko: We always want to explain the universe entirely. But that's just another way of trying to be safe. But it's also fun, see? You can do it for fun.

Tom: Well, I think it's more fun in my case.

Joko: Yeah. OK. Have fun!

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: [laughs]... All right, Tom. Good.

24 Apr — upsets that hide themselves

Tom: I know you must be having a busy day, because I think you're about to go away.

Joko: I'm going next Friday. I'll be gone, yeah.

Tom: One thing has come up that has astounded me. How I can sit, have been sitting so long, and get into all kinds of subtle items, and then hit something totally gross in my everyday life. I'll tell what it was. Somebody was carrying on about saving native forests. My reactions, was: "Oh, no, come on!"

I didn't like the attitude, presuming that I should think the same way. So my attitude was really: "get lost!" And I was talking to Sibyl about this. She said: "Oh, you do that a lot, you know." I said: "What?!"

Joko: [chuckles]

Tom: I said: "What do you mean?" She said, "Well any time anyone comes on to you with something like that, you more or less tell them to get lost, or you react that way." Suddenly I saw the whole thing, and yet it cloaks itself. It hides itself. It hid itself from me.

Joko: What are you doing there, Tom?

Tom: In what? In that particular case?

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: I've gone through that quite a bit, since then. Because it became clear as anything. [laughs]. When it was pointed out. But the question is: is there some sort of system for spotting these things that appear so gross when you see them, but are completely missed in the sitting? I am amazed that I've sat as long as I have and that never came up. I never saw it. And I totally missed it when it happened, because it justified itself.

Joko: I don't think you're practising hard enough with the upsets in your daily life, for one thing.

Tom: Must not.... but it doesn't seem an upset! [laughs]. At the time, it seemed that they're wrong.

Joko: It is an upset. Because what you're doing there isn't contributing to life at all. You're making him wrong, and you're making yourself upset.

Tom: Yeah. But because I saw them as being wrong, I could close the whole thing off. Put a big X across it, and go off and do something else. It was completely self-sealing. Until somebody else pointed it out.

Joko: That's what I'm saying. I think you need to practise more with these little upsets. Maybe not this kind. But I don't think you pick up on your body tensions.

Tom: That's what I was wondering. What I could do? What else am I missing there?

Joko: See, if something upsets me — and there isn't much that does — but I always notice that little thought, and feel the body tighten slightly. I'm very aware of that. I don't think you're very aware of your body during the day.

Tom: Maybe that would be the way. Because I need some kind of meter, to show these things are happening.

Joko: The first thing is to even to begin to know when you're upset. See, when you tell somebody to get lost, you're upset. Not a big upset, of course.

Tom: I don't necessarily tell them. I just think that.

Joko: I know. But even so... I don't tell anybody anything. But I always know if I have a thought like: "Oh, not again!" That sort of thing. See, that's upset.

Tom: Yeah, I see.

Joko: When you tell somebody to get lost mentally, on a larger scale it would be: "Get out of my country!" Just look at Kosovo.

Tom: Yeah... yeah!

Joko: When you get to the war stage, you're telling the whole country to get out. You see what I mean? Get lost! I don't want you here!

Tom: I'm not saying it's an admirable thing.

Joko: I don't think you think of things like that as being practice.

Tom: Well, no, obviously. I wouldn't have brought it up if I hadn't been amazed that I missed it.

Joko: Uh-huh. Good point.

Tom: So the way to pick them up would be to watch the tensions?

Joko: The way to get used to that is just by being more aware of these little upsets as they happen. Your wife seems to be helpful. Just ask her to point out things like this to you. Marriage is a great practice.

Tom: I certainly wouldn't have noticed it, even now.

Joko: She's valuable to you.

Tom: Yeah, OK. I felt I needed a system for this. There must be lots of other stuff like that.

Joko: Well if you were coming in to see me, as people do who live here, once a week, we'd pick up on all that little stuff. Or I can even see you sitting in front of me and tell you you're getting upset. Even if you don't. So it's a lot easier. Phone teaching is harder. We're doing the best we can. OK. Is that it?

Tom: I'd say so. I've got a couple of other things, but they're not really worth going on about.

Joko: I want you to work on just this one thing. Sometimes it's better to get one message and work on that.

Tom: Yeah. The Ben Franklin method.

Joko: Yeah. [laughs] Good old Ben... OK.

12 June — are we robots?

Tom: I've got your "suggestions for practice" sheet here. And I want to thank you for that. It's really helpful, after all this time, to have it all summarised. You know the one I mean?

Joko: Well, they're suggestions...

Tom: It came out on a single sheet, with "suggestions for practice" at the top. And a number of key points. Oddly enough, the only one that still causes me some trouble is number one. That is, why you sit, know your intention. And one of the reasons for that is that, while you were away, for the first time I seriously considered what if Darwin was right? And we're really just sort of robots.

Joko: That's thinking, you know.

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, I know.

Joko: And thinking doesn't solve problems like that.

Tom: I actually came to the conclusion that the situation is really just the same anyway. Except it eliminates the possibility of an afterlife.

Joko: Before you worry about the afterlife, you have to consider whether this is life.

Tom: Whether this is life?

Joko: Well, is there a life now?

Tom: [pause] Yeaaaaaah....

Joko: Uh-huh [laughs]

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: I don't want to get in to that, but if you ask questions like that you see... lots of questions come up like that, but that's not really the point of practice. The point of practice is to be absolutely with our life as we see it — and we do think we have a life.

Tom: I went through all that, and came back around to realise that it doesn't really make any difference. Whether you think you're a robot or something else. You might think you're a totally spiritual or ethereal being, but you're stuck with all the same problems.

Joko: That's just thinking again. They really are not valid questions, in a way.

Tom: That's the first point I wanted to discuss today.

Joko: The intention in your sitting might be just as simple as: I don't even know why I'm sitting, but my intention is still to sit well. See?

Tom: Ahhhh! Now that's interesting. I've never heard that from anyone. That rings a bell.. yeah, OK... That's where I'm at here.

Joko: That's good. I'm glad those practice notes are helpful to you. I'd forgotten. I did those years ago. And actually they came back to me from Australia.

Tom: I've showed them to a few people. To have it crystallised like that, it's very good.

Joko: You know, we can have endless philosophical problems in life. But the thing is, you just can't know that. So we just work hard at our practice, so we can live a good life. It's a very different objective.

Tom: Rather than trying to achieve this or that?

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: Like lobsters trying to understand algebra.

Joko: Uh-huh. It's not our place. OK, Tom. Anything else?

Tom: No. Thanks for that. And thanks for what you just said.

Joko: All right. Good. Bye-bye.

10 July — money worries

Tom: It was ringing a few times. I thought I was going to have an answering machine.

Joko: No, it's a quieter day than some. A lot of people are away for travel, in this part of the summer.

Tom: Your holidays are still going on.

Joko: Right.

Tom: I sent you — I don't know if you got it — a long quote from Aristotle about anger.

Joko: Yeah. Uh-huh. I liked that.

Tom: It had an effect on me. That's why I sent it to you. We'd been talking about it, on and off.

Joko: Well we have to. Because it's an important factor.

Tom: How pervasive it is! The fact that it was just the same back then. And it also made me feel that I was doing it to other people, as well. That bit about the opposite that induces calm.

Joko: Well it helps you practise and that's what changes you.

Tom: It tied in with what you were saying, and expanded on it. It made it more general and theoretical, I guess. Like Aristotle does.

Joko: Anything that works. That's the whole thing. You know, we always know if something works, because we feel more grounded, more comfortable with our life.

Tom: Had you seen that one before?

Joko: I don't think I've seen it recently. I probably have seen it. It's very good.

Tom: And apart from that, we're struggling financially. Business is down. That's another whole area that Ezra [from the Centre, in some writings] I think pointed out. Money worries is another area of practice! [laughs].

Joko: This is something temporary? Or is it something you can do something about?

Tom: Ah yeah. We can do something. It's just a matter of getting business. We run a small business and for no apparent reason, it's dropped out of sight for awhile and nothing has happened. We're running on savings. But we have a system for finding new business. So it isn't permanent. And practice goes on.

Joko: Still, money is your practice. If something happens, we have almost an automatic mechanism that starts in, a worry mechanism. See what I mean?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Fear, you might say.

Tom: It gets the mind ticking. I was up at 3.45AM this morning, at the computer writing some ideas. I thought: well, might as well do this now!

Joko: Well the ideas are fine. But the worrying is just special activity of the mind A personal little drama there. We get all embroiled in it. And it's not necessary.

Tom: Yeah, the worrying itself. The doing something about it is a different matter. Getting on with it, when you have a positive idea. Even at 3.45 in the morning.

Joko: No matter what happens, all we can do is what we can do. I mean, if you have an illness, you can worry about it. But really all you can do is what you can find to do. That true?

Tom: Yes.

Joko: So this is good practice for you. All things are practice, you might say. And you don't have any choice.

Tom: It is interesting, the money thing. Because it's a heavy one, now and then. It does drag you through stuff.

Joko: Uh-huh. Well, it's hard. This is not an easy thing to see through. But do your best to just be conscious of that running thinking. And stop for a moment, and feel it in your body without any thinking. OK?

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: Yeah. OK? You'd be surprised. It makes a difference.

Tom: I know it does, when I do it after I sit from some agitated scene. That's exactly what does happen.

Joko: All right, that's good Tom. Anything else?

Tom: No, I think that apart from those things, that's about it.

Joko: Yeah. OK... Just continue. You're doing fine.

28 Aug — on towards 90

Tom: I was thinking I've come back to where I started, when I first came to your Centre. Somebody told me there, just to do what you've been telling me in different ways, to concentrate on the underlying feelings and settle into it. And I thought that was something I really wouldn't want to do at all, when I first heard it. This is what I now do, and I thought: well, that's closed the loop. And this miraculous business happens by itself, where it sort of realises itself what's going on.

Joko: Right.

Tom: And then you're onto the next one. But it's quite a feeling.

Joko: It changes you to do it. See? It transforms you. You don't have to do it. The Christians call it

the grace of God, whatever it is.

Tom: It does itself, is the impression you get.

Joko: That's good practice.

Tom: There's no doubt about it being the right thing to be doing.

Joko: No. We know, if we do it.

Tom: It keeps going on and on. So I'm just telling you where I'm at really.

Joko: All right. Good enough... anything else?

Tom: I'm just looking at my birthday presents. [chuckles] I had a birthday yesterday and my family had to struggle hard to find appropriate presents. And they got it just right. They got me special coffee, a huge book and a hat! [laughs]

Joko: [laughs] Not bad.

Tom: All things that I like! [laughs].

Joko: That's what presents should be. Little indulgence. Great. I love to get presents that really wake me up, an interesting book or something.

Tom: You should see this book. You'd need a forklift to pick it up. They really got my number on that one.

Joko: OK. Excellent. How old were you?

Tom: 60.

Joko: That's a nice age. You're not too young to be troubled by everything, and maturing at 60, that's nice. Still healthy.

Tom: Alistair Cooke is my role model.

Joko: [laughs] All right. Good enough.

Tom: Do you ever hear him there, by the way?

Joko: No.

Tom: He gives these foreign broadcasts. He's ninety plus.

Joko: Oh, is he that old?

Tom: He's been doing it for fifty some years. And he's just as sharp and interesting as ever.

Joko: In the 90s. At least they're the lucky ones. They're great years. Well, I'm 82.

Tom: Are you!?

Joko: I feel fine. [chuckles]

Tom: You sound fine.

Joko: I'm in good shape physically, and working hard. You know. And I expect I've been lucky in some ways. But then I work hard at it too. Quite healthy. 90 doesn't sound like anything.

Tom: [laughs] Sure.

Joko: I hope you're taking care of yourself?

Tom: Yeah, I do. I'm pretty healthy.

Joko: That's good. Unless there's some accident, you know 90 doesn't mean what it used to.

Tom: Evidently not. And if you keep up interests and keep working at something.

Joko: All those work together. And that's just great.

Tom: It seems that things are going well for both of us.

Joko: Yeah. Wonderful. OK... All right. Anything else?

Tom: No, I think that's about it.

Joko: All right. Just keep going.

30 Oct — what *should* I do?

Tom: I haven't actually got much to say. I'd just repeat the same thing I said last time, in fact. Except maybe for one thing. The last time we talked, I said I'd gotten so I just settled into what's happening without thinking about it much and every now and then a black cloud will disappear, and I realise I'd been under the spell of it all that time.

Joko: Um-huh.

Tom: That still is happening. It's what I do. Meantime, another thing has come up from a book I read. Which has got me, and I wanted to ask about that. It's not a book about Zen or anything like that. It's a book about career planning, oddly enough. It said in the old days, it used to be you didn't have any choice. The question was: what do I have to do? You had to know what the requirements were. Then in the 60s, it became: what do I want to do? Like people doing their own thing. And the author [Peter Drucker] reckons the new question is: what should I do? I must admit, that's a very engaging question. It may not have any connection with practice. What should I be responsible for?

Joko: Well, I suggest you work with it as a koan, Tom.

Tom: You reckon?

Joko: Sure. Well that interests you. See, if something interests you, it's connecting with you in some way.

Tom: Well, I could do that all right. I have been, in fact.

Joko: So just use the question, phrased in the way that means the most to you. And a koan isn't

something you think about. It's something you regard. It's as though you had... what could I say?... suppose you had a beautiful little work of art in your hand. Something, a little statue or something that you liked. But you know, you'd look at it one morning, maybe under candlelight, it would look one way. And the sun comes out and you look at it again and you see different things. You turn it and regard it. You see what I mean?

Tom: Yes.

Joko: But you don't think about it. You're just investigating it.

Tom: I've never actually been attracted to koans. I always thought they were a bit daft.

Joko: Well, koans... I'd work with them with you, but they're pretty hard to work with on the phone. But this sort of a natural koan is one that people find really valuable. You take something that interests you or perhaps puzzles you.

Tom: Well, this one does.

Joko: Uh-huh. And a number of times a day, you just sort of let it come up, and regard it. You see what I mean? And then you let it float away again.

Tom: I'm glad you said that. Because I thought: maybe I shouldn't really be thinking about this at all.

Joko: No, I said not to think about it. And if it comes up in your sitting, once again you bring up the question and kind of look at it and feel it, and see what thoughts pop up and how the body feels. Then it'll drift away again. See?

Tom: Ah, OK.

Joko: Now if you do that for a few weeks, it will begin to have a life of its own. It will begin to kind of establish itself.

Tom: Very interesting. OK. I'll do that.

Joko: That's fine. You see, you have a level of intelligence that's not exactly conscious. But it works extremely well. I had a student once who been living with a woman for seven years. They were very fond of each other. They got along well. She wanted to get married. He didn't have anything against, but he said: "I don't know! I just don't know. There's something about this. I just don't know about it." So he took the koan: "What is commitment?" And worked on it for a year. And then they got married.

Tom: [laughs]. Well, good.

Joko: There was just something in there was wasn't clear to him.

Tom: I could understand how he feels. It doesn't do anything for me, that one. But this one sure does.

Joko: Because that's not the one you're interested in. So why don't you try that? Then when we talk again, let me know.

Tom: Yeah.

Joko: But remember, a koan can take two days, two weeks, two years. It's your beginning to engage that larger part of yourself. And it may throw up from time to time little thoughts, or little pictures or little this's and that's. You just keep going with it. Remember, you're just trying to turn this little

statute over and over and over.

Tom: That's a very clear image. Fine! Yeah.

Joko: All right. Yeah. You just keep at that. All right, Tom. Bye-bye.

4 Dec — stepping out

Tom: Last time I was left with the question that I came up with myself, about what I should be doing. And you told me how to deal with that, as if it were a koan. By holding it up to different kinds of light. Well I actually found the answer to the thing. I didn't expect to, but it became quite clear what I should be doing. Which is... I've been interested for a long time, and full of admiration for the research that's going on into the human genome.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: You know, decoding that.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: It never really occurred to me that I could be in it, doing something. Because I've got the background for it. I don't know why I never thought about it. So I've made a few steps, and I'm already going toward it. It was really easy!

Joko: Well, interesting.

Tom: But the other thing that happened was that then I started getting auroras of light at odd times, where my vision would be blanked out and I'd see what looked like auroras, curtains of light. It was a bit like migraines, but there was no headache or upset with it. It went on for quite a bit, and I got worried about that. So I went to see a doctor and he doesn't know either but I'm actually going down for a CAT scan this morning just to eliminate the possibility that there's something weird going on... anyway, a bit's happened there.

Joko: Uh-huh. I think so. Well, I have no opinion on this, so we must wait and see. Once you've done all the tests, wait and see.

Tom: But anyway, I was quite surprised to pop up with an answer. I didn't realise there was one lurking.

Joko: Oh yeah. We always know. See, but you have to move out of your little mind and just let that native intelligence go to work. It knows what to do.

Tom: It seems like stepping forth.

Joko: Yeah. That's good. I hope you learn something by doing that too. For future reference.

Tom: For that kind of thing?

Joko: Yeah, it's a different approach to life. People always think they can think and think and think, and come up with solutions for life's basic problems. But they can't.

Tom: Ah. Quite right.

Joko: You know the way. All right, well keep me informed.

18 Dec — we'll never find out

Joko: Hi, Tom. How are you?

Tom: I'm all right, thanks. Last time we talked I was having a weird vision thing.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And I had a check-up, and there was absolutely nothing wrong. And all that stopped.

Joko: Uh-huh. Good.

Tom: Meanwhile, I've been offered a research Ph.D. in that subject I was telling you about. So why not start at 60, right?

Joko: Why not? [chuckle]

Tom: What continues to interest me is trying to decide whether consciousness arises from matter — which certainly would explain a lot, in terms of unsatisfactoriness of the result.

Joko: Whatever gave you the idea that you could figure this out?

Tom: I don't think I can. I was just supposing it. I can't see any way of getting at it. Whether consciousness arises as a kind of spot from some vast spirit. I can't see how you can possibly tell the difference. What gave me the idea I could figure it out?... Uh. I don't believe I necessarily can.

Joko: Even consciousness, you're using it, as though you know what it is.

Tom: That's right. Yeah. That's what's so weird about it.

Joko: It's a concept. It's not anything.

Tom: But on the other hand, you've got neurological research which finds out some stuff. Not a lot. And we've got the whole scientific tradition.

Joko: I know. I've been immersed in it. I see the limitations of it.

Tom: I know you worked with those people for quite a while.

Joko: They don't know what they're doing. It's very limited. No matter where you get to, say: life begins with this. This, this, this... life begins. What is this?

Tom: Well I guess, if you keep going back, you end up with...

Joko: There's no way to really get to that place, OK? Have you ever heard of the book by Steve Hagen?

Tom: Yeah. You recommended that. And I got a copy of it. I either bought it or got it out of the library. That was quite a do, yes.

Joko: But, like any good Zen student, that's not your business. Your business is to be awake. To

experience life.

Tom: It doesn't actually make a lot of difference in practice. But it's just something that's nagging me. Because some progress has been made on the the neurological side, and you can say... wellllll. [laughs] You picture how it might be, and so on.

Joko: About ten years ago, the brain was nothing but a computer. Now they've abandoned that [laughs]. I mean, you know all these things. They do learn. It's like dividing the inch. You can divide it all right. And you can divide it again. And again. There's no end to it. I mean, there's always something to divide. I read everything there is about this stuff. I realise more and more they know nothing.

Tom: Oh, they're stumped all right. I mean, to make that leap from a lump of matter to what we all feel.

Joko: Even where's the lump of matter come from?

Tom: Oh, that's the other point! Yeah.. [laughs] Assuming it's there.

Joko: [laughs] Well it isn't there, in a certain sense. It is there in another sense.

Tom: That's the other thing, you realise all these things are not real.

Joko: They're both true. We're absolutely nothing, and we're just ourselves. We're not a permanent entity. See, you're talking as though you're permanent. There's an 'I' that can figure it out.

Tom: Ah, I may have given that impression...

Joko: I know.

Tom: I wonder what happens when all the bits. Well, I guess I won't go into that. [laughs]

Joko: You can play with this. But don't mix it up with practice.

Tom: I just wanted to, I guess, raise it.

Joko: It's fun to poke around in all the stuff. But the more I poke, the more it's crystal clear to me that we'll never ever find out. That's not our function.

Tom: Yeah, I guess that's... yeah. OK, well. Away I go.

Joko: [chuckles]. OK. We're running up your phone bill. So have a nice holiday.

Tom: You too.

Joko: I'll talk to you sometime.

2000

12 Feb — being one with the mystery

Tom: Last time we talked I was having a kind of scientific crisis.

Joko: A scientific crisis? [laughs]

Tom: Well, pushing on the science side and pushing it all the way to an explanation of consciousness. I don't know if you recollect that. I've got over all that now.

Joko: What's the error in that?

Tom: Several errors. One is simply trying to push the science side farther than it's designed to go.

Joko: Yeah, that's what scientists can't.

Tom: Can't do which?

Joko: They're very limited. I went around with world-famous scientists. And they just admit it. You know, science isn't about understanding everything. How to work with certain parts of life effectively.

Tom: It works very well on predicting some things.

Joko: Yeah.

Tom: Predicting physical systems and so forth, genetics, whatever.

Joko: It's limited. That doesn't explain why things work the way they do.

Tom: There are books out that struggle to do this.

Joko: They don't work.

Tom: Oh, well, no. Anyway, I got over that bit. And also the other error is likely that it's not possible to do that kind of thing. Just thinking about things, and finding an explanation.

Joko: No, but we turn it into an object then. There's you, and there's the object. Right there, you've got an error. You see what I mean?

Tom: I do. So I've put that aside and I'll keep science over there.

Joko: We have to see where it sits, otherwise you get lost.

Tom: We're all desperate for an explanation. And a lot of them are weird, religion-like, superstitions that you see everywhere. An explanation is what I want too, in a way.

Joko: Well you won't get that. But what you do get if you sit long enough and hard enough is the ability to just be one with this mystery. And if you're one with it, somehow you don't have to ask these questions. You just know something.

Tom: I now accept in my life that I try different things and then I stick with what works. And I know that whatever is going on in sitting, being able to uncloak things that you're absolutely sure are correct, and find out they're just... nothing. It's the most remarkable thing.

Joko: Uh-huh. That's the real thing.

Tom: Just to watch it evaporate of itself. Extraordinary. There's where I'm at. Really not much news.

Joko: It is news, because a lot of the years of practice is just to wear out all these false things we try to do. Settle back into just living. I think you've done very well.

Tom: Well, it feels... I feel settled.

Joko: Good. That's quite a bit. You'll have other kinds of questions. But it's good to get some of what you've done out of the way. So it's just fine.

Tom: Well it feels right. I had a lot of trouble with that.

Joko: Good. Well, I have nothing to add to that today. Is there anything else you want to ask?

Tom: I don't think so. I got over that.

Joko: OK. Good, Tom.

Tom: Francis Bacon would have been proud of me.

Joko: [laughs] All right. That's good. All right, we'll continue.

18 Mar — hearing sounds out to infinity

Tom: Something a little bit new. I just wanted to check it.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: I was out walking the dog, and I let the sounds take over. I started listening to the sounds, the little sounds the dog was making, and the sound I was making. It was a long walk. I went for about an hour. The whole time I was just listening to all the sounds, right out to infinity. It was strange, and a little hard to explain, and it doesn't sound like much. But it was quite a change.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And the next time, it started happening automatically. I just thought I'd ask if that's OK, I guess.

Joko: The whole thing is that you've practised long enough by now that for these periods of time, you can stay in the present moment. When you do that, a different way of being comes through easily. Then it doesn't stay, because you hop back into some sort of self-centred ideas.

Tom: That's right. It's very unsatisfactory when I start thinking about this and that.

Joko: You can't do that. I mean, if you do that, you interrupt it.

Tom: That's right.

Joko: But, as you learn to practise, you get to be more and more without the thinking. By that, I mean it's just self-centred thinking. Of course you have to think.

Tom: That's what occurred to me. That self-centred thinking is exactly what normally happens.

Joko: Uh-huh. But the fact that it happened, should be encouraging to you.

Tom: OK. It seemed... right.

Joko: It is right. You always know when it happens. It's absolutely right. There's no fear in it.

Tom: It's out there, and I'm not really responsible for it.

Joko: No. It's just obvious when it happens. Then when it's now happening, you can't find it. But don't try to find it, see? Just continue noticing when you get into your self-centred thinking and you're caught there, nothing works very well. You have to get back to your experience. And that's for human beings, a hard thing to do at certain times. It should encourage you, because your work off and on in the last years is beginning to pay off. That make sense?

Tom: Yeah. I would say so.

Joko: Amazing, amazing.

Tom: Yeah!

Joko: [laughs]

Tom: Just like that.

Joko: Well so often we hear things like this described, but we don't know what to make of it. When it happens, it's perfectly obvious.

Tom: Well, that's what I wanted to tell you...

Joko: Well be encouraged. Just go back to your normal practice.

Tom: Yeah, the normal practice is fine. It feels like. I've got a back that's tricky, and I was given a certain exercise by the doctor. A painful posture, and I don't know what's going on, but after a while there's a sort of click, and everything's right again. The sitting is a bit like that. You sure that something's wrong with the world, and after a bit it sorts itself out.

Joko: Absolutely. All right. Good, Tom. That's nice.

Tom: OK!

Joko: Good. Glad it happened. All right? Anything else?

Tom: No.

Joko: All right. Good.

18 May — progress report

Tom: I don't have anything particularly new to say. But I was thinking about where I was, looking back from when I started essentially with you and there's been a huge change in the sitting. When I started, looking at it from where I am now, I was really just following thoughts around. Heh! Even that was after twenty years of practice. But now what happens is, it seems like a merging with the grain of the wood, or a fire that just burns by itself, or something like that. And I go into the feeling, and the thoughts are secondary. So that the comparison between the two is large.

Joko: Uh-huh. It is large.

Tom: That's about what I can see from where the practice is. Every day I sit in the morning, 5am to

6am. And then whenever I can during the day.

Joko: That's good enough. You see a difference in your life, from having practised like this?

Tom: Yeah, upsets have declined to very little. And the ones that do occur don't last long.

Joko: That's good.

Tom: Occasionally I get these things like I was talking about last time, when I was walking the dog and the sounds take over, and it goes out and out.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: What else have I noticed? I'm more interested and tolerant of people.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: And I kind of appreciate all the little creatures in the world more.

Joko: [laughs] You're telling a great deal, Tom. That's wonderful.

Tom: I'm doing what?

Joko: That's wonderful. That's totally the way practice should go.

Tom: OK. All right.

Joko: It isn't something spectacular.

Tom: I think a lot of people, me included, start out with that idea [laughs].

Joko: They're all caught up with satori and words like that.

Tom: A huge vaporous puff into empyrean. Something like that.

Joko: A loss of that obsession with your self. When you strongly don't do that, satori is there. You just make it into something it's not.

Tom: Well, anyway, that's a kind of report.

Joko: All right. It's important. A very fine report. I have nothing to add to that! At least not today. So when you call again, we'll talk over some minor piece of it. But that's very good, Tom. The report. So go and enjoy your day or night. I can't keep track! [chuckles]

Tom: [laughs] It's actually starting the day.

Joko: Yeah, good. Good for you... bye-bye.

July 22 — slapdash DNA

Tom: Quite a few times ago... or maybe more than once.. you said that sitting with what's there and letting the thoughts go is really the secret of life. *Joko:* Uh-huh.

Tom: Well, this keeps coming back to me. What on earth does she mean, the secret of life? How

could it be the secret of life?

Joko: What you're really letting go, when you sit like that, is all the thoughts that swarm around your egocentric pre-occupations. You know: how will it go for me? Is life going to be comfortable? Will it work out? I mean, all human beings do that. But until that self-centred orientation towards life fades away, and that's what this kind of sitting does, you can't see life the way it really is. You don't see yourself the way you really are either.

Tom: So it's a secret, because it's so hard to punch through that?

Joko: We don't want to do that, you see.

Tom: That's for sure.

Joko: But you can do it for a few short times. You know what I mean? You can see exactly what has to be done and do it. I know it's hard, but I see for instance people at this Centre doing it... the older students.

Tom: I was just wondering about why you expressed it that way.

Joko: Well, this is a telephone conversation, and maybe I could express it better, but..

Tom: Oh, no no... that's fine. I was just looking for a little bit more information there.

Joko: It's basic. It's absolutely basic. You know, a lot of people get mixed up in something like Zen or whatever they call it. They get all caught up with the trimmings.

Tom: Well that would be me too, earlier I think.

Joko: They get caught up in the reading, the philosophy. If they practise with a group, do you hold your stick this way or do you hold it that way?

Tom: [laughs] Sounds familiar.

Joko: It's important to do things accurately and well. But I'm saying those things are not basic. What I'm telling you is basic.

Tom: I see that. Absolutely. But I was just wanting to hear a little bit more about that expression you used. Yeah, I can see what you mean. Heh, OK. Well, it's certainly the secret of life from people who haven't tried it and got there at all.

Joko: Just in terms of your very everyday life, things go better. It can be very different for you. You don't figure something out in your head. It's something that soaks into your whole life. It's what realisation is. It isn't something you can put down in a paragraph.

Tom: "Soaks in" is the right feeling for it too.

Joko: That make sense?

Tom: Absolutely. Yeah. That helps. Somehow or other, that phrase kept popping up and I wanted to ask.

Joko: That's good. It should pop up.

Tom: Right. The only other thing that disturbs me, is that I keep reading... I'm doing this research

work on molecular biology, and I get really quite disturbed by what I find there. It's pretty slapdash. Maybe it's just my perfectionism, but the DNA really isn't engineered according to German standards at all.

Joko: Uh-huh.

Tom: It's pretty slapdash. And I think: well, my word, we're all depending on this?

Joko: You mean the research that's coming out?

Tom: No, what has already been found. The little engines run along and do what they're supposed to do, but then they just keep going, like their accelerator pedal got pushed to the floor and stuck. Then they run on doing useless stuff, and churning out copies of things. But then they're immediately chopped up by some other mechanism to stop them.

Joko: Well, science is run by an egocentric mechanism too.

Tom: Beg pardon?

Joko: Most science and the research is run by egocentrics.

Tom: Oh, well yeah, that's right. But these odd findings. I mean... I talk to my wife about it, and she makes a puzzled face — like why am I going on about that? But it does affect me. But again, that's nothing to do with sitting, really.

Joko: Well, yes it does. In your work, you do the best you can, but don't always question why. Why is a very useful thing to do. The difference between doing your best and asking why...

Tom: You mean in interpreting these things that are coming out?

Joko: No, you can interpret. But you don't have to form great conclusions from that. You don't know yet, probably. I don't know.

Tom: No, we certainly don't know yet.

Joko: But everything should always be kept as honest as it can be kept. I don't know if that enters in.

Tom: Well, sort of. I'm aware of my reactions to it anyway. But I have been rocked by it. I guess most people wouldn't be rocked by odd little facts. But I am.

Joko: What do you think should be done about it?

Tom: It just seems... nothing should be done about it. It just affects our interpretation of how we got to be the way we are.

Joko: Do you think the interpretation is invalid? Is that what you're saying?

Tom: No, no I don't. I think that the facts are correct. But rather than regarding molecular machinery and DNA as something perfect and glorious, it's cobbled together, in a kind of sloppy way. Which barely works. And I think: WHAT!?

Joko: Well that's interesting. But you know but I suspect that in itself, it's had some slow evolution over millions of years. It's not necessarily perfect the way it's evolved.

Tom: That's what seems to be there. It works. It's a little bit roundabout in its processes, but it does

work. Therefore it just stays there, and you look at it and think: my word!

Joko: Well, maybe we'll all fall apart.

Tom: [laughs]

Joko: It's likely at some point. Everything else in the world has fallen apart. You know, no more dinosaurs... At some point, something happens.

Tom: That's right, yeah. That's also possible. I wasn't actually thinking about that so much as the oddity of it. Anyway, I've been going on...

Joko: Well, that's interesting to me. But again, it's just life slowly evolving. You know, in a good way.

Tom: Well it's written in that stuff all right. You can just see it, the remnants of all the kind of experiments, things that worked and didn't work, and it's pretty shattering... Well, anyway.

Joko: Uh-huh. Probably is.. [laughs]... you know, the whole world could evaporate and it wouldn't make any difference.

Tom: Uhhhhhhh... Yeah, I've heard that one before.

Joko: Well, to us it will. But you know, in time another world will somehow come into being. Heh. Another universe. Probably billions of them anyway.

Tom: Yeah, but they're not speaking to us, are they?

Joko: No, but it's not up to us to worry about that. Cause we can't.

Tom: I'm not so worried about that one. But I'm letting you know about this, just out of interest, I guess. *Joko:* Sure, it comes right home. Because we're all made of this stuff. But you know, human beings aren't made that well. They're made quite well. But it's just our egocentric minds are very strange creations, when you come right down to it.

Tom: Well that's the other thing. That's obviously evolved too. We got what we've got here.

Joko: There's a tremendous amount of work to straighten that one out.

Tom: [laughs] Well, Ok...

Joko: Well, you know. It's interesting. Keep me informed.

Tom: OK. Thank you.

Joko: Yeah... bye-bye.

2 Sept 2000

Joko: [recording] This is Joko, on Thursday August 30th. And I'm cancelling phone calls today because I'm still in a lot of pain. Monday is a holiday, so there'll be no phone calls. But I hope to get back on Tuesday. So wish me luck! Anyway, have a good weekend. Thanks. Bye-bye.

9 Sept 2000

[recording] This is Joko, on September 5th, Tuesday. There will be no phone hours this week. I am a little better, but need time. Please practise well. Thanks.

30 Sept 2000

[recording] This is Joko. There will be no phone hours again this week. I am getting better, and hopefully I'll be back soon. Thank you. Bye-bye.

27 Jan 2001

[recording] This is Joko. Phone hours will continue about as usual. Except again at half time, when it's over. And more exactly, it will be on Monday from 10-11AM, Tue from 11 to noon, and Wednesday the same 11 to noon, and Friday from 4 to 5pm. Thank you.

There were no further calls.