

SEVEN THUNDERS

newsletter

www.seventhunders.org

Autumn 2015



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INTENTION

by Leonard Marcel

When we enter the spiritual path, we are all in one way or another trying to address the problems of greed, hatred, and ignorance. We begin spiritual practice. We realize that spiritual practice is work. It requires effort and discipline. And so we sit down for meditation. After a while, we find that meditation does seem to be helping, but we also discover that in many ways our meditation itself is part of greed, hatred, and ignorance. We discover that we are doing zazen because we want something, or because we are frightened of something, or because we are trying to escape something. The Tibetan master, Gotsangpa has said, "As soon as you look for a result, that longing for a result is the sound of a devil knocking on the door." Whatever way we turn seems to be mediated by greed, hatred, and ignorance. The old masters seem to have given a lot of thought to this problem. One of their solutions addressed the matter of intention.

It is important to have intention in practice, to formulate an intention for practice. It is of benefit to want to open the heart, open the mind, open the eyes. It is important to bring intention into everything we do, not just at the start, but throughout practice – to live in intention, to become intention itself — and to do so wholeheartedly. There is a Japanese word, *kokoroire*, which means putting one's heart completely into something. It really

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does help change things. Practicing with intention changes the whole way in which we relate to ourself and with other people. One of the things we often find over time, however, is that our initial intention is too narrow and self-centered and, as a consequence, is most often blocked. Despite our effort and dedication to practice, advancing in the direction of our intention does not seem to be happening. This is the stage at which one can become frustrated, discouraged, and resistant, and yet it is important at this very stage to realize that being blocked, being discouraged, feeling resistant, is in its own fashion, the perfect life.

As you have probably already discovered, Murphy's Law operates on the Zen path as well as



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Many thanks to all who contributed their time and talents to this publication. Articles may not be reprinted without permission from the author.



SEVEN THUNDERS LOCAL SITTINGS, RETREATS & EVENTS

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

Published three times a year, our newsletter is a benefit of Seven Thunders membership. Prospective members who would like to receive the newsletter can be added to the mailing list by contacting Nancy Roberts at nroberts@peak.org. Complimentary copies will be sent for up to one year or until January dues requests are mailed. After that, if membership dues (full membership currently \$30 per year, associate membership \$15 per year) are not received by March, you will be sent an announcements-only version of the newsletter. ✨

FIRST SATURDAY SITTINGS

Monthly "First Saturday" sittings continue in Bethany House at the Trappist Abbey just north of Lafayette, OR. Orientation is offered at 8:15 a.m. and formal group sitting begins at 9:00 a.m. A talk by the teacher begins at 10:00 a.m., which is followed by opportunities for private interviews with the teacher. Formal sitting ends at noon. There is no charge, but donations for teacher support and for the Trappist Abbey are gratefully accepted. Here is the schedule for the remainder of 2015 and 2016:

- November 7, Leonard Marcel
 - December 5, Brother Mark Filut
 - January 9*, Brother Mark Filut
 - February 6, Sister Joan Saalfeld
 - March 5, Leonard Marcel
 - April 2, Sister Joan Saalfeld
 - May 7, Leonard Marcel
 - June 4, Brother Mark Filut
 - July 9*, Brother Mark Filut
 - August 6, Leonard Marcel
 - September 10*, Leonard Marcel
 - October 1, Brother Mark Filut
 - November 5, Leonard Marcel
 - December 3, Brother Mark Filut
- (* indicates second Saturday of month)

RETREAT SCHEDULE

- October 16 - 18 – Zen kosesshin at Stones and Clouds co-led by Leonard Marcel and Lee Ann Nail. Fully subscribed. To be added to the waiting list, please contact Teresa Marcel at tdmarcel@mac.com or 503.636.9009.
- October 23 - 24 – Retreat in Bend with Leonard Marcel. For more information, contact Leanne Latterel at 541.923.7607.
- December 4 - 8 – Zen Rohatsu sesshin at Stones & Clouds with Leonard Marcel. Fully subscribed. To be added to the waiting list, please contact Teresa Marcel at tdmarcel@mac.com or 503.636.9009.
- January 28 - 31, 2016 Contemplative Intensive Retreat (CIR) with Brother Mark. Registration information on page 11.
- April 13 - 17 – Zen sesshin at Stones and Clouds co-led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 12.

ZAZENKAI

Held at the Stones and Clouds (*Rai'un*) Zendo in Lake Oswego, led by Leonard Marcel:

- February 20,
- March 19

Zazenkai, followed by a study group, take place on Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. In addition to formal zazen, there will be sutra service, teisho, and dokusan. Bring a brown bag lunch (eaten in silence). Teas and water will be provided.

Please contact Teresa Marcel at tdmarcel@mac.com or 503.636.9009 if you are planning to attend and for more information about zazenkai and the study group. While there is no fee for zazenkai, a donation of \$20 will be much appreciated to help cover costs. ✨



PORTLAND AREA SITTINGS

- Monday evenings at Stones and Clouds (*Rai'un*) Zendo, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., zazen & dokusan. Contact: Leonard Marcel at 503.636.9009 or marcellj@hotmail.com.

CORVALLIS SITTINGS:

- Monday evenings, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. (except Labor Day) at CMLC, 128 SW 9th St, Corvallis. Contacts: Jane Huyer, 541.752.6597, ahuyer@comcast.net, or Glenna Pittcock, 541.752.6139, gpittcock@yahoo.com

OLYMPIA SITTINGS

- Monday evenings, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., and every Saturday morning from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. in the Chapel at St. Michael Church, 1021 Boundary St. SE, Olympia, WA 98501. Three rounds of sittings (from 6:00 to 7:30) are followed by a reading from contemplative writers and a questions and comments period. Contact: Pat Harvey, 360.357.8401 patriciamharvey@comcast.net

REDMOND SITTINGS

- Monday evenings, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. at 529 NW 19th, Redmond, OR. 97756. Contact: Richard Lance or Leanne Latterell at 541.923.7607. ✨

OTHER PACIFIC NORTHWEST DIAMOND SANGHA GROUPS

NO SANGHA, PORT ANGELES

- Teacher: Kristen Larson. Zazen: Saturday mornings, 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. For more information, please contact Kristen & Bill Larson at 360.452.5534 or NOSangha@aol.com.

THREE TREASURES SANGHA, SEATTLE

- Teacher: Jack Duffy. Zazen at *Dharma Gate* (1910 – 24th Ave S.) on Wednesday evenings 6:30-8:30 p.m. and Friday mornings 6:30-7:30 a.m., followed by breakfast. For more information, and for a schedule of zazenkai and retreats, please contact Larry Keil at 206.322.8759 or go to their website at <http://three-treasures-sangha.org/> ✨



A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Greg Smith

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to serve the Seven Thunders community as president of the Board of Directors. My hope with this column is to continue to share important organizational information with members in the same way that Mike Seeley has done over the past few years.

At the Annual Meeting in mid-July, two new and two returning members were elected to the Board. Ed Glad and Matt McTigue will be joining the board as its two newest members; directors Nancy Roberts and Dan Dickinson will continue for an additional two-year term. Three officers from the previous term are stepping down and leaving the board as directors.

The membership thanked and applauded Mike Seeley, Doug Speers, and Joshua Lipps for their service. Doug, who has been the organization's treasurer and web master for over a decade, will be moving to Seattle this fall. Mike Seely will continue to participate in an ex officio capacity for another year as outgoing president. Nancy Roberts and Tom Davies will be serving as treasurer and secretary, respectively.

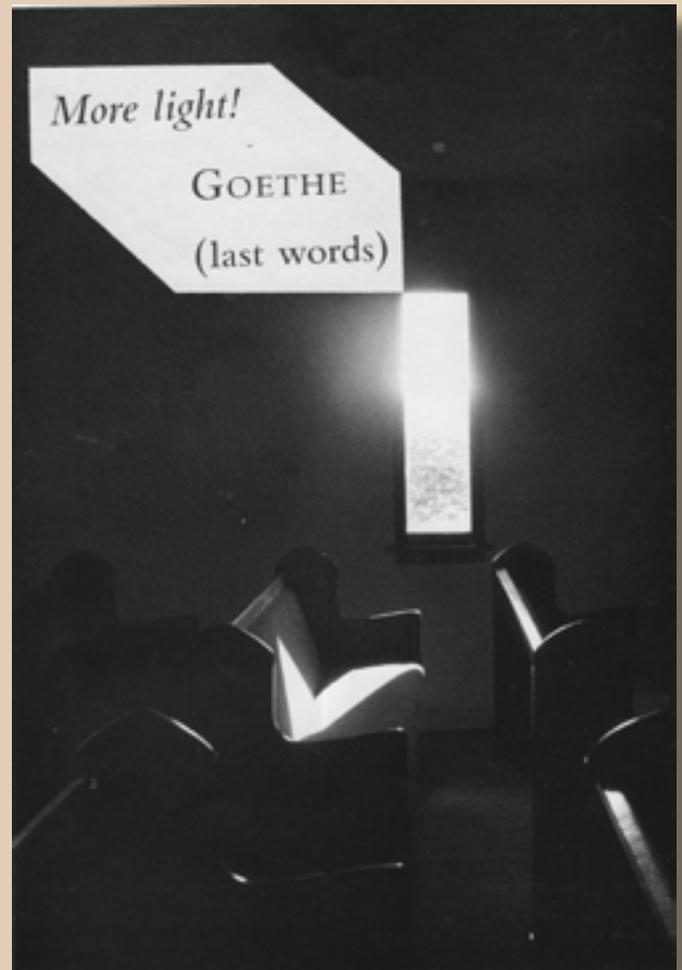
During his final treasurer's report, Doug Speers announced that Seven Thunders had recently received another \$5,000 gift from the Gilhousen Fund. Seven Thunders was the recipient of a similar grant six or seven years ago. As was the case with the earlier grant, the intent of this gift is to encourage members to make regular contributions to Seven Thunders beyond the annual membership fee and fees paid for retreats and sesshin to help cover expenses and the small compensation offered to our teachers. During this discussion, Doug reminded members that checks made out in the name of the teacher are taxable and not deductible as charitable contributions. In order to be tax deductible, checks should instead be written to Seven Thunders, a 501(c)(3) corporation, with specific notations about their intended use.

At the First Saturday on August 1, 2015, those attending celebrated the thirtieth year of these regular gatherings at the Trappist Abbey outside Lafayette. Sister Joan Saalfeld spoke with me about attending a late 1970s demonstration against nuclear submarines in Washington State where she heard Robert Aitken-Roshi speak. Conversations at that event led to the establishment of a relationship between the Diamond Sangha and the Abbey of Guadalupe. After some initial retreats, people began sitting in the Abbey library in 1985 before the construction of Bethany House in 1992 where Christians

and Buddhists have been sitting with one another ever since. This Special First Saturday included two meditation periods, a talk by Leonard Marcel, a work party to clean Bethany House, and an informal potluck.

The Board of Directors will meet on October 3, following First Saturday and then again in the winter and spring. If you have items or issues you would like the Board of Directors to consider, please send them to me at gasmith@clark.edu, and I will make sure they find a place on our agendas. ✎

FROM BROTHER MARK





SUMMER SESSHIN AT STONES & CLOUDS

by Lisa Rosser

Summer Sesshin at Stones and Clouds was fully attended by Seven Thunders members from the immediate area, as well as from all corners of the United States. Katie flew in from North Carolina, Ron hailed from Arizona, Lisa drove from Seattle, Cheryl also made the long drive from Arizona, and I flew in from Florida. Some retreatants drove back and forth to Salem each day of sesshin! I pondered just how many people come from afar to sit together in silence for days, and then to madly catch up with each other at the end of the retreat. I thought of how people gave up work time and family time to attend the retreat together. It all comes down to sangha, the fundamental importance of sangha.

How different it is to meditate together than to do so alone! To breathe as a unit, to walk in kinhin together, to eat together in silence with communal thanksgiving and gratefulness for being so mindfully nurtured by the tenzo, Teresa.

To sit together, every pore open, to gratefully consume the dharma from Roshi. "We now can see it! Listen to it! Accept and hold it!" All together, as one, not taking for granted the wisdom we are so blessed to receive. I always feel like the teisho is so pertinent to me, so personal. Then I realize, everyone feels the same! The wisdom is for the sangha, both for us as individuals, and as a group. And at the end of each day, to walk mindfully together to our cars, motoring off with the silence of the day still enveloping us.

What is sangha? It goes beyond the sharing of a retreat, or the sharing of a devotion to practice. This was truly evident during Scott's Jukai ceremony, after the closing of the retreat. His family in attendance, Scott made his vows with a full heart and profound words that deeply touched everyone present. Scott's words were for all of us, his vows to live a life of mindful compassion reminding us all that those are our vows, too.

So what is sangha? It is the living, breathing reminder that we are all one, that we are not separate, that your well-being is my well-being. Our summer retreat at the lovely Stones and Clouds Zendo was an opportunity to not only experience that truth for ourselves, but also an invitation to take this truth of oneness, of sangha, and share it with the whole wide world. 



Top:

Sitting, left to right:

Leonard Marcel Roshi and Scott Bellows.

Standing: Carol, Elizabeth and Amelia Bellows.

Above: Standing, left to right: Duncan Campbell, Nancy O'Connor, Lisa Unger, Dan Dickinson, Lee Ann Nail, Lisa Rosser, Ron Paisley, Eric Roost, Ted Fontaine, Paul Birkeland, Cheryl Diamond, Mike Seely. Sitting: Teresa Marcel, Leonard Marcel, Scott Bellows.

Left: Talking after sesshin - Lee Ann Nail, Ron Paisley, Eric Roost, Paul Birkeland and Mike Seely.



A VERY HOT JUNE CIR

by Nancy Roberts

A congenial group of five met for serious sitting and focus on the contemplative practice at the Trappist Abbey starting Thursday, June 25th. There were many wonderful aspects to this retreat. The group kept silence and the practice was strong.

Sr. Joan Saalfeld, our teacher, was at top form. The conferences were interesting explorations of parables and deeply meaningful at multiple levels. The interviews could extend a little longer because we were few in number, so the interviews were very personalized and helpful.

We mulled over stories of finding a great treasure and selling everything to access the treasure. We thought about paying attention to small mundane events and realizing the meaning of the kingdom God little by little. We chuckled at a story of Fr. Bernard as novice master plunging into the frigid water off the Oregon coast. Years of Christian contemplation, Zen practice, and good-hu-

mored spiritual direction were blended in Sr. Joan's teachings to us, true to the tradition of Seven Thunders. Priceless.

We ended our retreat at noon on Saturday because of the extreme heat over the week-end. Bethany House and the guest house rooms were little ovens, making it more difficult to focus on our practice, and potentially unhealthy. And yet, we noticed that the oak savannah and farm fields were gorgeous. Br

Mark gave a charming welcome to the Abbey. The monks faithfully continue the liturgy in the chapel and we felt their chant seep into us. Robins, sparrows, chickadees, and bull frogs filled the air with song 24/7.

Braving the heat and subsequent change to our schedule, but enriched by powerful ideas in the talks and interviews, we view our practices in a new light and came away inspired. ✨



Above: From, left to right: Helen Jackson, Kathleen Horton, Nancy Roberts, Sr. Joan Saalfeld, Sr. Sandra Lincoln.



SPRING & FALL RETREATS IN BEND

In April, fourteen retreatants enjoyed a weekend of sitting with Leonard Marcel in Bend, Oregon. Leonard leads retreats in Bend in Spring and Fall.

The Fall retreat will take place October 23 – 24, 2015. The retreat starts with a two-hour introductory session on Friday night, October 23. On Saturday, we will sit from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The schedule includes 25-minute sittings followed by 5 minutes of walking meditation, a talk by Leonard morning and afternoon, a short work period in late morning, and a silent potluck vegetarian lunch. For more information and registration, please contact Denise Fainberg at dsfainberg@yahoo.com, or 541.213.8001. ✨



INTENTION, *continued from page 1*

everywhere else: what can go wrong, will go wrong, and it often does on this path. Dogen said, "A Zen master's life is one continuous mistake." Yet, in a very real, but often incomprehensible, way, that too is a blessing. There is an old Rinzai saying, "Do you think that you are afraid of hell? Hell is to sit in the zendo and not realize the Great Matter, not know your own true nature." Zen practice challenges us to address the Great Matter: What is life? What is death? What is truth? Who am I? Hell is not to be on the path, not to be practicing. If you are on the path and have even the merest toehold, you have escaped hell. Some light is entering your heart, and that is a matter for gratitude, endless gratitude. And then you begin to realize that the intention with which you began practice is much narrower than where your practice will take you. As a result, the width and depth which opens before you in practice is a commitment to much more than yourself. It becomes a commitment to practice for the welfare of all beings, from the smallest gnat to the largest human, and includes the mountains, rivers and great earth as well.

In other words, it is important to hold intention as something which is not only for oneself alone, but also for the world at large – for the ants, and country mice, and spiders, for the stones and clouds, and for the songbirds singing so faithfully in the trees at dawn, for those we love, and those for whom our being compassionate is difficult. When we first hear that all of them, too, are our original face, we hear it as fine poetry, but we do not understand. So we just have to trust that it is so and continue to practice. At some level we come to realize, to experience, that we are not in this for oneself alone, and then our intention begins to expand, and compassion begins to develop. Recognizing the interconnectedness of self and other, of self and nature, opens in us the capacity to treat oneself, others, and nature in a manner that is just and compassionate.

Zen is always inclusive. This means that everything which arises during zazen, during zazenkai, during sesshin, during every moment of every day, needs to be accepted just

as it is. If we do that, then our life becomes spacious. When circumstances arise outside, they need to be accepted just as they are, including the struggles and conflicts. That is the gift. On this path we love and care for and about each other through the struggles and the conflicts. Practice is not about accepting what we like and rejecting what we dislike. It is about accepting the whole great show just as it is. When our intention is that inclusive, then wisdom and compassion naturally follow.

In case 19 of the *Mumonkan* (*Wu-men Kuan*), we learn not only about Chao-chou's (Joshu Jukin, 778 – 897) enlightenment experience, but we are also given a glimpse of his intention: Chao-chou asked Nan-ch'uan, "What is the Tao?" Nan-ch'uan replied, "Ordinary mind is the Tao." Chao-chou asked, "Should I try to direct myself toward it?" Nan-ch'uan replied, "If you try to direct yourself, you betray your own practice." Chao-chou asked again, "How can I know the Tao, if I do not direct myself?" Nan-ch'uan said, "The Tao is not subject to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is blankness. When you truly reach the genuine Tao, you will find it as vast and boundless as outer space. How can this be discussed at the level of affirmation and negation?" With these words, Chao-chou had a sudden realization. This exchange occurred early in the training of Chao-chou. He would live another one hundred years after this and become one of the greatest and most venerated masters. Here we see him during the early years with an earnestness of serious mind, striving to make something happen and, truth to tell, being in it at this stage just for himself. Nan-ch'uan (Nansen Fugan, 748 – 835) is completely kind in showing his student the vast spaciousness of Dharma life.

A different glimpse of intention is provided to us in case 86 of the *Shoyoroku* (*Book of Serenity*), where we have the enlightenment story of Lin-chi (Rinzai, d. 867). Lin-chi (Rinzai) was in the monastery of Huang-po (Obaku, d. 850) for three years and had never approached the master with a question or for dokusan. He just sat and followed along,

but he was a very serious student. He neither resisted, nor put himself forward, nor held back. He just followed the circumstances and was considered unusual and promising. After three years, the head monk, Mu-chou (Bokushu Domyo, 780 – 877) said, "Why do you not go and ask something of the teacher?" Lin-chi (Rinzai) said, "I do not know what to ask." Mu-chou (Bokushu) suggested, "Why not ask him what is the essential meaning of Buddha's teaching?" Lin-chi (Rinzai) agreed and went to Huang-po (Obaku) and asked his question. Huang-po (Obaku) hit him. He went back again and asked the same question, and was hit again. This also happened a third time. Lin-chi (Rinzai) then went back to the head monk and said, "I do not understand the master's teaching. Perhaps my affinity (karma) does not belong in this place. I think I should leave and train somewhere else." Mu-chou (Bokushu) said, "Leave if you must, but see the teacher before you go." Mu-chou (Bokushu) then went and told Huang-po (Obaku), "This young monk has some ability and he is planning to leave. I just thought you should know." Huang-po (Obaku) then interviewed Lin-chi (Rinzai) and suggested that he go to train with Dagu (Dayu, n.d.).

When Lin-chi (Rinzai) met with Dagu (Dayu), he explained what had happened and then said, "I do not know if I was at fault or not." Lin-chi (Rinzai) has at times over the centuries been criticized at this point, but I think, actually, that this is a very good attitude for a student. He does not know, but has an open mind. He is wanting to learn. He has good intention. Dagu (Dayu) replied, "Huang-po (Obaku) was as kind to you as a grandmother. He did his utmost for you, and still you come and ask whether you were at fault or not!" Lin-chi (Rinzai) was suddenly greatly enlightened at these words. Thereupon, he said, "There is nothing much to Huang-po's (Obaku) Buddhism after all." Dagu (Dayu) then exclaimed, "You bed-wetting devil! You just asked if you were at fault or not, and now you say that there is not much to Huang-po's (Obaku) Buddhism!" He then grabbed Lin-

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chi (Rinzai) and said, "Speak! Speak!" Lin-chi (Rinzai) hit him three times. Dagu (Dayu) then released him and said, "Your teacher is Huang-po (Obaku). This has nothing to do with me." And he sent him back.

Lin-chi (Rinzai) returned to Huang-po (Obaku), who said, "Coming and going, back and forth, when will it ever end?" Lin-chi (Rinzai) then said, "Why talk of coming and going? How about right now?" and he threatened to hit his teacher. Huang-po (Obaku) laughed and said, "This lunatic comes to grab the tiger's whiskers." Lin-chi (Rinzai) gave a shout, "Katsu!" Huang-po (Obaku) then said, "Attendant, take this madman to the meditation hall."

Lin-chi's (Rinzai) intention changed during this process from just going along with circumstance to something broader; an intention which has energized his lineage through the centuries to this very zendo. Mu-chou (Bokushu) is a catalyst for change and a model for practice in the history of Zen. He is the head monk who directed Lin-chi (Rinzai) to go to see the teacher. There is often a Mu-chou (Bokushu) in our life, someone who turns us in the right direction, and helps our intention in that way when we are wavering, when we fear we have lost it, when we do not know what to do. Mu-chou (Bokushu) also was a force in the enlightenment of Yun-men (Unmon, 864- 949). When Yun-men (Unmon) was in training, and not yet the great teacher he was to become, he came to Mu-chou (Bokushu), who was in his nineties by then. Mu-chou (Bokushu) would sit in his room and listen to the footsteps of the approaching student. If he felt by listening to the footsteps that the student was not promising, he would not open his door. When he did open the door, he would grab the student immediately and say "Speak! Speak!" Yun-men (Unmon) was shocked when this happened to him and could not reply, so Mu-chou (Bokushu) threw him out and slammed the door, breaking his leg. At that moment, Yun-men (Unmon), in great pain, also had a profound enlightenment. When he was not treating students thusly, Mu-chou (Bokushu) made sandals for peo-

ple, secretly, in his room. He would then put them out by the roadside anonymously so that any pilgrims or travelers who had worn out their sandals would be able to avail themselves of a new pair. He was a secret Bodhisattva. His intention was remarkable, all encompassing.

Still another example is the Zen nun and artist, Otagaki Rengetsu (1791 – 1875). She was adopted as an infant, widowed twice, and had several children who all died at young ages. Her personal life was a relentless teaching on impermanence and her decision to become a Buddhist nun was a heartfelt effort to make sense of this impermanent life. This was her initial intention. After she was ordained, she settled into a hermitage on the grounds of her adoptive father's temple. When he died nine years later, she was evicted. Without a place to live and without a means of support, she decided to make and sell pottery inscribed with her poems, as well as calligraphies and drawings on scrolls. She produced more than fifty thousand pieces of art. For her, the practice of Zen art was much more than simply a way to make a living. Her intention had expanded to include sharing the Dharma with others. Her expanded intention became tangible.

Those who encountered Rengetsu's work could hold and touch her enlightened mind and ponder her poems while doing something as ordinary as sipping tea from one of her cups. Here is one of her poems:

From dawn to dusk
 spending the day
 gathering clay.
 Surely the Buddha would not
 think this a trifling matter.

Here we have ordinary worklife uplifted. Whatever your position, she says, your life is not trifling. The Buddha mind holds all effort in the steady gaze of compassion. Her work welcomes us into her spacious view of herself – and of ourselves. In her work we see a path illuminated by effort and intention breaking through self-limiting mind. Here is another example:



Yesterday
 I shattered the ice
 to draw water.
 No matter. This morning –
 frozen just as solid.

No matter what we have done before, each day we face ourselves anew. Each day our practice aids us in the calm acceptance of this condition, aids us in the steady commitment to breaking the ice, to continue working on frozen and stuck places in mind and heart. Rengetsu's work, her vulnerability and her ability to express her enlightenment and her Dharma in very human terms has been a gift to all from her spacious intention.

So, intention is important in practice. What is your intention for practice? You must gather it, and when you have gathered it, then commit yourself to it through continuous practice. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, remember your intention for practice. If you can control the focus of your mind from moment to moment, then it is possible to change your life. How are you keeping your mind right now? How you keep your mind in each moment determines your whole life.

Practice with intensity. Intention magnifies intensity, and intensity magnifies intention. If you make your intention generous and broad enough, it will in due course come to pass. You just have to be faithful and wholeheartedly committed to walking the path. When you bless and accept everything that arises, then the sun will rise in your own hands and in your own heart. You and the sun, and the birds and the trees, and stones and the clouds all then have the same original face. ✨



OFF THE CUSHION: AUTUMN'S THRESHOLD

by Matthew McTigue



"... **○** sacred season of autumn, be my teacher, for I wish to learn the virtue of contentment. As I gaze upon your full-colored beauty, I sense all about you an at-homeness with your amber riches, You are the season of retirement, of full barns and harvested fields..."

These words by Father Edward Hays, in his book "Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim" superbly capture our encounter with this emerging season. Autumn can be a time of intention and patient reflection as we slow down and experience the wonder of changing color, light, and temperature. Personally, this is a time of "amber riches" as I prepare to celebrate the births of my two children, Milo and Gratia. Autumn is also a time of letting go, a symbol of detachment, and a time of year when I offer specific gratitude for the work that I do in end-of-life ministry.

"Be my teacher," prays Father Hays on our behalf, and the season responds by gently carrying us toward its threshold. A threshold,

from the root 'to thresh', means to separate, as hands work the grain from the husk. As we sit on our cushion, we open ourselves to this season's message. We listen. We watch, and observe repeatedly the subtle ways this practice helps thresh us from our grasping. As we let go, so too we wake up. Today, the hummingbird does not return to a particular withered blossom.

Moving through our days, we begin to see the simplicity of this season's teaching presented in the maple leaf's green-yellow transition. As we celebrate October birthdays, we see the season's teaching in an earth that empties her womb, also the womb that once sheltered each of us, until the harvest of birth relinquished its grasp. If we have had the privilege to accompany the dying, we see the season's teaching as we enter the profound "now" of threshold, as it silently calls our dying brothers and sisters to detach from life at the last exhale. If we listen to autumn, we hear the arrival of life and the arrival of death not as two different thresholds of human experience but as one birthplace. We realize that the profanity of death is the sacredness of life. We discover sameness.

Off the cushion, we have an invitation to celebrate and honor the wisdom of this season when we persevere in the world. As the earth lets go, we can let go in the form of generosity and service to others. Through the qualities of tenderness, love, and humility, we learn to give away our own humanness and vulnerabilities more peacefully, knowing there is nothing to hold on to for ourselves.

Can we see the "amber riches and full barns" in each one of our daily experiences this season? Can we enter the "at-homeness" of autumn? Becoming fully present to this season, we find stillness, rest and contentment with what is. We grow to trust life's unfolding nature, and the inner nourishment that comes with threshing. Eventually, every one of us will encounter the threshold that sheds us from "have and have not", "gain and loss," "sacred and profane," "young and old." Even life and death will cease, as we, perhaps with the eyes of a first-timer, gaze upon the full-colored beauty of autumn. ✨

ABOUT 'OFF THE CUSHION'

○ Off the Cushion is a new feature in our newsletter, in which we invite you to submit articles about what your practice means to you, of activities off the cushion which feel like an extension of your practice. Please e-mail your submissions to newsletter editor, Greg Smith at gasmith@clark.edu. ✨



TOWARDS A SOCIAL DHARMA – CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME, OUR TRUE BODY

by Hozan Alan Senauke

The Buddha was enlightened under a tree. Sitting under that Bodhi tree on the banks of the Neranjana River, he was taunted by the demon king Mara who did his best to plant seeds of doubt. Mara asked by what right this man Gauthama claimed the seat of enlightenment. The Buddha remained steady in his meditation and simply reached down to touch the Earth. The Earth responded loudly: "I am your witness." Mara fled and the Buddha continued to practice meditation. The Earth was partner to the Buddha's work, as she must be our partner and our support.

In late June Pope Francis released his encyclical *Laudato Si'/Praised Be*, a passionate plea for environmental sanity and social/spiritual transformation. This eloquent document — subtitled *On Care for Our Common Home* — is addressed to "every person living on this planet," inviting us all to take part in dialogue and action to protect our future, that of our children, and of all beings.

In the very first paragraph of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis references the lyrical work of his namesake Saint Francis of Assisi. In "Canticle of the Sun" St. Francis reminds us that:

...our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace

us. "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

For many of us Pope Francis is a breath of fresh air: a world religious figure who is not afraid to speak of the plight of the poor and the hazards of a "throwaway culture."

He can speak the truth bluntly, "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth," and argue wholeheartedly for an "integral ecology" which sees:

...a relationship between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.

Such understandings and concerns are certainly present within Buddhist traditions going back to the Buddha's awakening. In recent decades we've seen the development of socially engaged Buddhism. But it seems to me we are still lacking a rigorous Buddhist equivalent to the "Social Gospel."

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People of faith carry their message into the Vatican and out to the world.



The author, Hozan Alan Senauke, with Pope Francis at the Vatican in June of 2015.





TOWARDS A SOCIAL DHARMA, continued from page 9

We need a "Social Dharma" to care for our common home. This Social Dharma must reach across our different cultures and Buddhist traditions. That means to care for our bodies, our communities, and our planet. It means to understand the connections between climate change, poverty, racism, and militarism. All these are threads in the common garment of domination and oppression. To ignore them is to invite the destruction of all we cherish.

Rising in the early 20th Century from the squalor of the industrial revolution, the Social Gospel was a fresh approach to Christ's message and Christian ethical teachings, which were interpreted in the light of social justice including poverty, racism, child labor, war, crime and much else. While earlier popes had addressed these issues in various ways, none in memory has been as outspoken as Pope Francis, so clear about the inequities of our world and the dangers of our way of life.

Again and again Pope Francis hammers home his Social Gospel in the pages of *Laudato Si'*:

Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. This task will make such tremendous de-

mands of man that he could never achieve it by individual initiative or even by the united effort of men bred in an individualistic way... The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.

We need a "Social Dharma" to care for our common home.... to care for our bodies, our communities, and our planet.

As Buddhists we can embrace the Integral Ecology of the Pope's message and place it at the heart of a Social Dharma. Integral Ecology is not Christian or Buddhist but truly human. The core Buddhist teachings and precepts are about our relationship to all beings, not treating anyone or anything as an object for our manipulation.

In the Zen tradition Master Dogen writes, "Understand that the ancient Buddha teaches that your birth is not separate from the mountains, rivers, and earth." This means that we are responsible to and for the world we live in. Elsewhere, Master Dogen offers these encouraging words:

...Give flowers blooming on the distant mountains to the Tathagata. Offer

treasures accumulated in our past lives to living beings... We offer ourselves to ourselves, and we offer others to others.

A gift that has been given to us to sustain, take care of, and share with everyone. The whole earth is my true body. We all stand on the same ground and this ground is unstable. The planet is at risk. Those who are poorest, those with the least access to resources suffer most. But, really, we are all threatened. In the light of interdependent reality, in the circle of giving and receiving we all suffer. So I ask can we let go of harmful things: fear, privilege, and the vain quest for comfort at the expense of others' lives? In the spirit of Right View can we create a Social Dharma? In words from a fable written by my old teacher Robert Aitken Roshi:

Owl said, "What are Right Views?"

Brown Bear said, "We're in it together and we don't have much time."

So...what shall we do? We don't have much time. ⚡

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Through the streets of Rome and then into the Vatican itself, Buddhists and other faith communities took their message in

June of 2015. This banner, created by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship was first unveiled in May in front of the US White House.



CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR) JANUARY 28 - 31, 2016

The retreat will be held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey, Lafayette, Oregon. It will begin with supper at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, January 28 continue all day Friday and Saturday, and end after lunch on Sunday (about 1:30 p.m.), January 31. Please arrive well before 6:00 p.m. Thursday, check in, and get your room assignment at the Porter's Lodge. Brother Mark Filut, OCSO, will be the retreat teacher, sitting with us, presenting talks, and offering interviews.

The retreat differs somewhat from our standard CIR in that it integrates most of the monastic liturgies into our schedule — from Lauds and Mass (6:30 a.m.), through the Day Hour (12:30 p.m.), Vespers (5:30 p.m.), and Compline (7:30 p.m.). Vigils (4:15 a.m.) is optional. Our normal sitting schedule will begin at 6:00 a.m. and conclude at 9:00 p.m. This is a short and intense CIR retreat. All retreatants must commit to participating fully in the entire schedule of group sittings.

The Abbey's guest facilities limit overnight attendance to 9 people. Each retreatant will have one of the two private rooms in a guest unit, the two sharing a toilet and shower. Meals are prepared by the monks; the fare is vegetarian, simple, and balanced.

We will sit together in the meditation hall in Bethany House, which is big enough to seat about 20 of us, as well as the few monks who will sometimes join us. This means we can accommodate 10-12 additional retreatants who wish to attend part of a day as commuters or who have a place to sleep outside the monastery and who will provide their own (brown bag) meals.

While there is plentiful sitting equipment on hand at Bethany House, you may wish to bring your own to be sure you have what you need or prefer. Dark, layered clothing is right for this occasion. Distracting jewelry and perfumes are not. Bed and bath linens are provided.

The total fee for the 9 overnights is \$230. The fee is \$200 for Seven Thunders full members with current account balances. The deposit to hold your place is \$75, with the remaining balance due on arrival at the Abbey. All but \$25 will be refunded for cancellation requests received by Nancy Roberts on or before Jan. 1; after that date, all but \$50 will be refunded. Registrations will be made in the order of postmark dates, alphabetically by last name within each date.

When the 9 overnights places have been filled, all but three of the remaining registration requests and fee payments will be returned. The three requests will be notified of their status and, if desired, held on the waiting list. A similar process applies to those who choose to register as commuters. Commuter fees: \$75, two whole days or more; \$40 one whole day; \$25 half day. No deposit, pay on site. Please return this completed form with your check (if required) by snail-mail to retreat coordinator and registrar:

Tom Davies
3824 SW Coronado
Portland, OR 97219

Questions? Contact Tom Davies (Retreat Coordinator) at tom_davies@comcast.net, or 503.312.4545.

Please note: since the rooms will be available, the abbey invites any 9 of us to stay on another night (Sunday night) and leave the next morning by 10 a.m.; Sunday supper and Monday breakfast included for \$35 total. This opportunity is available to retreat commuters as well as overnights. ⚡



**REGISTRATION FORM
CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR)
JANUARY 28-31, 2016**

I wish to register as a full-time overnight guest of the abbey (deposit required)

I wish to register as a day-to-day commuter (no deposit required)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Special needs _____

I commit to participating fully in the entire schedule of formal group contemplation.

Full payment of \$230 enclosed

\$200 for full members

Deposit of \$75 enclosed

Donation for Scholarships \$ _____

Request a Scholarship of \$ _____

I wish to reserve a room for Sunday night, January 31, and will pay then.



SPRING SESHIN AT STONES AND CLOUDS ZENDO APRIL 13 - 17, 2016



The 2016 Seven Thunders Zen Spring Sesshin will be held at the Stones and Clouds Zendo in Lake Oswego, OR, from Wednesday, April 13, at 5 p.m. until Sunday morning April 17, at 10 a.m.. Sesshin will be led by Leonard Marcel. Registration deadline is March 23. Registrations will be accepted on a first come basis. As this sesshin is usually well subscribed, early registration and payment is encouraged. Part time attendance will be possible.

Space is limited to a maximum of 16. Additional applicants will be wait-listed in case of cancellations. Sesshin fee is \$210 (member rate \$180) and includes all meals (vegetarian). A member rate is available to regular members at all sesshins and retreats throughout the membership-year. Non-members may choose to join Seven Thunders (dues are \$30). They then qualify for the member rate at this and other Seven Thunders regular retreats and sesshins. A deposit of \$80 is required with your registration; payment in full is appreciated. Any balance is due by March 23. Should you need to cancel, all but \$25 is refundable until March 23; after that date all but \$80 is refundable. You will receive a confirmation from the registrar. If for any reason you find the full fee a barrier to attending, please check the box on the registration form requesting a "scholarship" or contact

the registrar. Affordability need not be a deterrent to attendance. Full or partial scholarships are almost always available. Donations for such scholarships are both appreciated and tax-deductible.

This is a non-residential retreat. For non-commuter participants, information about local accommodations, as well as limited accommodations in members' homes is available. Information about local accommodations and carpooling will be sent to out-of-town registrants upon receiving your registration and deposit.

As always, total silence will be observed for the entire sesshin. All attending are required to participate fully in the daily sitting and work schedule, including cleanup at the end of the retreat. You are asked to wear plain conservative clothing of dark or subdued

color during sesshin. No shorts or sleeveless tops, please. Zabutons, zafus, low and high benches will be provided, but if you have a favorite zafu or bench (no chairs) please feel free to bring it.

To register for the retreat, complete this form and send it with your deposit to retreat organizer and registrar: **Teresa Marcel, 1333 Skyland Drive. Lake Oswego, OR 97034.** Please make checks payable to **Seven Thunders.** Alternatively, you may e-mail your registration to the registrar and pay the deposit/fee online at SevenThunders.org (Click on the 'Contribute' tab and follow the donation process, leaving a note in the last window saying that this is your Spring sesshin fee payment.)

Questions? Please contact Teresa Marcel at 503.636.9009 or tdmarcel@mac.com ⚡

**REGISTRATION FORM
STONES & CLOUDS SESHIN, APRIL 13 - 17, 2016**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I will be able to provide accommodation for ____ people.

Special dietary requirements: _____

I will bring my own zafu or bench. This is my first Seven Thunders Retreat.

I request a scholarship of \$ ____ I enclose a donation of \$ ____

Current Seven Thunders members:

- I enclose full payment of \$180 (the member rate).
- I enclose a \$80 deposit (balance of member rate due by March 23)

Not a current Seven Thunders member:

- I enclose \$210, please apply \$30 to Seven Thunders member dues.
- I enclose a \$80 deposit (balance of non-member rate due by March 23).
- I enclose \$110, deposit & member dues (balance of member rate due by March 23).

Please make checks payable to Seven Thunders.