

SEVEN THUNDERS

newsletter

www.seventhunders.org

September 2016

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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.

OF SACRED PLACES AND FORGIVENESS

by Leonard Marcel

There are many special, sacred and holy places throughout the world, made so by the faith, devotion and spiritual practice of their inhabitants and visitors. One such sacred area was (and still is) the deserts of Egypt in the third, fourth and fifth centuries, most notably the area northwest of Cairo and southwest of Alexandria, known in the Christian literature as Scetis (Scete) and in the geographic literature of Arabic as the deserts of the Wadi Natrun, because of the many saline ponds in that area. In that desolate and isolated region, a number of men, and some women, fled the Romanized urban areas in order to work out their salvation in silence and solitude. They were the first Christian hermits and, in time, some of them coalesced to form the first Christian monasteries. Several of those monasteries still exist in the Wadi Natrun, and even today, from certain vantage points, one can see anchorite cells at some distance from one another and within a day's walk of the nearest walled monastery. Only today, instead of caves and mud brick huts, the cells are built of cinder block with stone or palm frond roofs.

In that desert, there lived a celebrated hermit by the name of Moses. He knew that one does not have to travel in order to find a sacred space. In a well-known incident, a young aspirant came one day to Abba Moses and asked him for a good

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word. And the elder said to him: "Go, and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything."

Go, and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.

For those of us who are not desert hermits, Moses' advice must be interpreted as something more than just confining oneself within a space of four walls. The desert is a solitary region, the region where one is alone with oneself and with that ultimate reality we call God. When we sit down on a chair or bench or cushion, straighten the back, put the head over the spine and bring ourselves into silence and stillness, we create for ourselves an interior desert.

Continued on page 8





SEVEN THUNDERS RETREATS & EVENTS

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 2016 and 2017:

- October 1, 2016, Brother Mark Filut
- November 5, Leonard Marcel
- December 3, Sister Joan Saalfeld
- January 7, 2017, Brother Mark Filut
- February 4, Leonard Marcel
- March 4, Leonard Marcel
- April 1, Leonard Marcel
- May 6, Sister Joan Saalfeld
- June 3, Brother Mark Filut
- *July 8, Sister Joan Saalfeld
- August 5, Leonard Marcel
- *September 9, Leonard Marcel
- October 7, Sister Joan Saalfeld
- November 4, Leonard Marcel
- December 2, Brother Mark Filut

* Indicates 2nd Saturday of month.

RETREAT SCHEDULE 2016 - 2017

- October 21 - 23, 2016 – Zen kosesshin at Stones and Clouds co-led by Leonard Marcel. and Lee Ann Nail. Fully subscribed.
- December 3 - 8, 2016 – Zen Rohatsu sesshin at Stones and Clouds led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 11.
- January 26 - 29, 2017 – CIR at Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey with Sister Joan Saalfeld. Registration information on page 12.
- April 19 - 23, 2017 – Zen sesshin at Stones and Clouds led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information in next issue.
- June 22 - 25, 2017 – CIR at Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey with Sister Joan Saalfeld. Registration information in next issue.
- July 11 - 15, 2017 – Zen sesshin at Stones and Clouds led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information in a future issue.
- October 20 - 22, 2017 – Zen kosesshin at Stones and Clouds co-led by Leonard Marcel. and Lee Ann Nail. Registration information in a future issue.

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) are not received by March, you will be sent an announcements-only version of the newsletter. ⚡

ZAZENKAI

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

- September 24, 2016
- February 18, 2017
- March 18, 2017
- September 23, 2017

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 to reserve a place 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. ⚡





JOIN SEVEN THUNDERS – MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership is open to all persons interested in developing and continuing their contemplative prayer or Zen practice, regardless of religious affiliation. We encourage you to renew your membership – or join us – if you have not yet done so this year. Dues are \$30 per year. For those who can afford it, the Board encourages one-time or periodic contributions beyond the basic dues amount.



**SEVEN THUNDERS
2017 MEMBERSHIP AND DONATION**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Membership (\$30)
 I am pleased to be able to include a Donation of \$ _____
Total enclosed is \$ _____

Please address this form with your check to Seven Thunders Treasurer Nancy Roberts, 3830 NW Polk Ave, Corvallis OR 97330
Although payment by check is preferred, you may also utilize the Seven Thunders website to pay with Paypal/credit card.
Simply go to www.seventhunders.org and click on the **Contribute** tab.

SEVEN THUNDERS LOCAL SITTINGS

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.

SALEM SITTINGS

■ Wednesdays at the Salem Zen Center: 'On the Way Home' zazen from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and an evening program (chanting, zazen, silent tea and Dharma talk) from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. 504.949.3188. SalemZenCenter.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 Pittock, 541.752.6139, gpittock@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. ✨

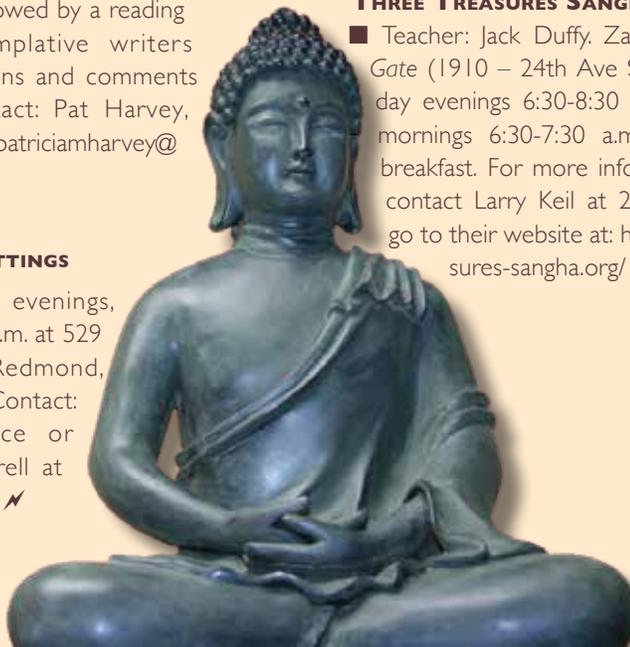
**OTHER PACIFIC NORTHWEST
DIAMOND SANGHA GROUPS**

NO SANGHA, PORT ANGELES

■ Teacher: Kristen Larson. Zazen: Saturday mornings, 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. For more information, please contact Kristen 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, 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

The Seven Thunders Annual Meeting was held on July 16, 2016 at the home of Leonard and Teresa Marcel. After a potluck that featured Mike Seely's salmon, cooked this year on alder rather than cedar planks, the fifteen of us in attendance gathered to review the minutes from last year's meeting, hear the treasurer's report and reflections about the June Contemplative Intensive Retreat (CIR) at the Abbey and the Stones and Clouds summer Zen sesshin, and discuss a number of items the board felt would benefit from input from the broader membership. Among other items, Nancy Roberts, the treasurer, reported that the Christmas card/solicitation letter that went out in December generated \$3,200 in donations at matching the \$5,000 grant to Seven Thunders from the Gilhousen Family Foundation. All of us are grateful for the generosity that has been shown following this request. After the reports, members held an election for the board. Mike Seely and Greg Smith, both finishing two-year terms, were re-elected; Naheed Brown was also elected as a new director for her first two-year term.

With regard to new business, we explored an issue that has come up periodically during 1st Saturdays when interested people with little knowledge about protocol or more formal meditation practice show up just a few minutes before sitting periods begin at 9:00. Our conversation resulted in a decision to ask the backup timekeeper to offer a brief orientation to these newcomers who are then invited to join the entire group in the meditation hall during the second sitting period. This decision proved to be useful two weeks later in early August when seven people were able to benefit from this new level of support.

We moved on to a discussion about setting aside money for a specific scholarship fund to make participation in longer retreats easier, especially for the growing number of young people who are attending Monday night and 1st Saturday sittings. It was suggested that a line for voluntary scholarship contributions be included on retreat registration forms

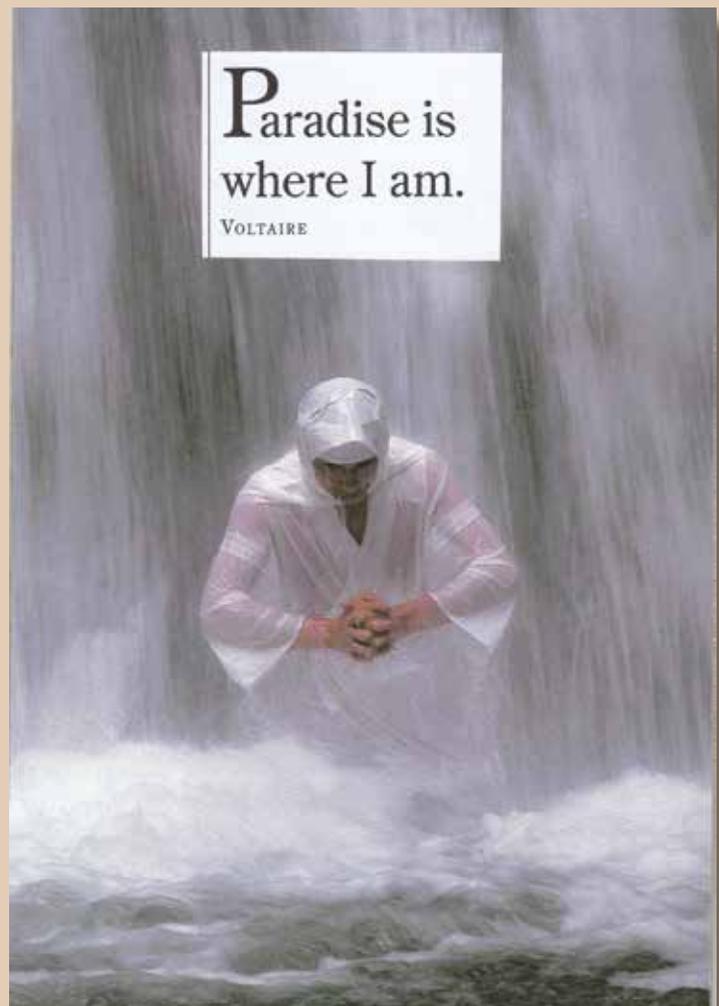
and that a scholarship fund of at least \$500 be maintained at all times. The board will consider both of these options at our next meeting in September. The next discussion item, raising membership fees (which have remained at \$30 for many years), was tabled given the belief that encouraging new members is a higher priority, and we don't want to do anything that might discourage this.

We then had a thoughtful conversation about extending opportunities for members to interact with one another at times other than Monday night sittings, first Saturdays, or retreats as a way to extend more hospitality to people just joining Seven Thunders. Pos-

sibilities discussed included occasional potlucks at members' homes, participation in community service activities like boxing up food at the Oregon Food Bank, or joining in social justice events like a Black Lives Matter demonstration. The board will discuss these possibilities and is likely to send an electronic survey in the fall to members to get feedback about activities that would be of interest to them.

Tapping into the creative ideas of our membership during this meeting proved to be very helpful, and I'm thankful for the energy and attention that informed our sharing with one another. ✎

FROM BROTHER MARK





SUMMER SSSHIN: A FLOWER IN THE GARDEN

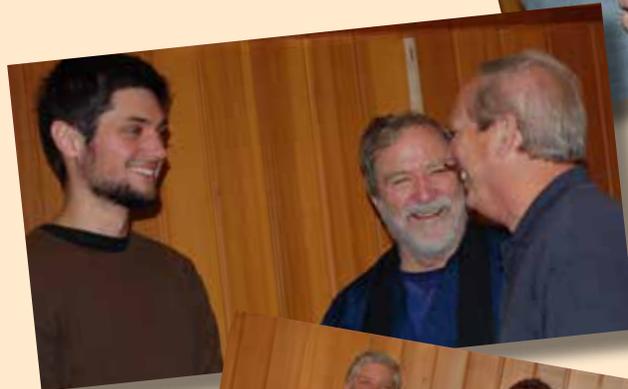
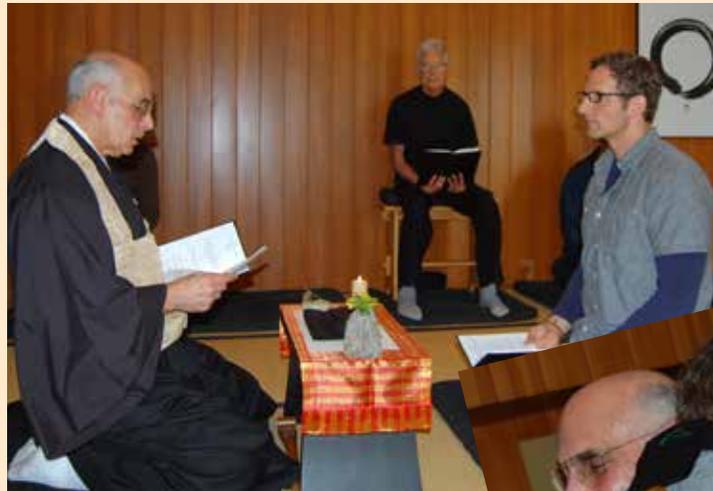
The 2016 Stones & Clouds summer sesshin was hosted by the Marcells and attended by a group of eight Seven Thunders members, including both Monday night regulars and those who traveled great distances to take part. We couldn't have hoped for better weather; and outdoor kinhins abounded with warm breezes, vibrant color; and the sounds of birds and leaves.

As a first timer to this sesshin, I was blessed with the silent guidance of experienced participants. It didn't take long to feel settled into the schedule. Even so, I was struck by contrasts with monastic sesshin. Waking up in bed at home, for instance, seemed alien in the middle of a sesshin schedule. Most notably, driving a car through both sunrise and sunset, initially a novelty, became peaceful bookends to the busy day's schedule. Before attending sesshin, I thought these sorts of experiences might break the sesshin atmosphere. Instead, I've found that the sesshin atmosphere has had a lasting influence on my practice of mindful driving.

Sesshin culminated in Matthew McTigue's Jukai ceremony. After a week of silence, the vows of Jukai reverberated deeply through the zendo. I would venture to guess that I was not the only one in the room who had heard Matthew's vows as if they had come from my own heart.

I'd like to express my sincerest gratitude to everyone involved with the sesshin. Seeing each person return to their zafu again and again each day, even as fatigue grew, I became inspired. I began to feel a sense of interconnected purpose that superseded my individual motivations for practice. Instead of feeling like a flower, as I sometimes do when sitting at home, I came to feel like a part of a garden. 🌱

by Josh Schindler



Photos: Top: Leonard Marcel and Matthew McTigue during Jukai ceremony, with Jack Sattler in background. **Second:** Leonard and Matthew after ceremony. **Third:** left to right: Josh Schindler, Eric Roost and Dan Dickinson. **Above:** Standing, left to right: Nancy O'Connor, Scott Bellows, Laura Haney, Dan Dickinson, Matthew McTigue, Ron Paisley, Lee Ann Nail, Josh Schindler, Jack Sattler, Eric Roost. Sitting: Leonard and Teresa Marcel. Photos by Mike Seely and Teresa Marcel.



JUNE CIR – A TIME OF DEEPENING PRACTICE

by Matthew McTigue

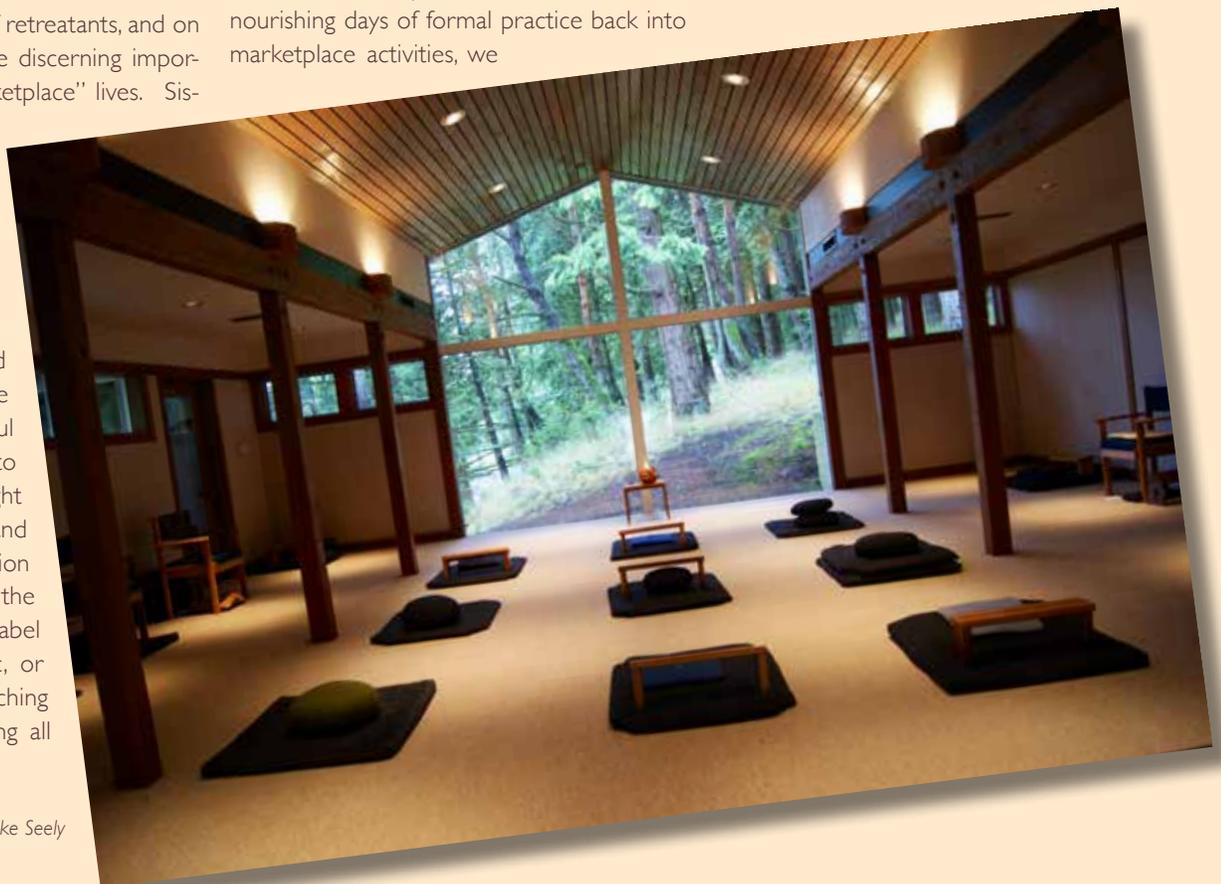
Our June contemplative retreat at the Trappist Abbey was a nourishing experience for all in attendance. As hoped, the Abbey grounds provided their gentle and life-filled energies as the container to support our group of retreatants. Bountiful landscape contours, verdant forest under blue canopy, mild heat and cool evenings, and ripening cherry trees adjacent to Bethany House complemented our silent sitting practice.

We were a full house of retreatants, and on this occasion, many were discerning important transitions in “marketplace” lives. Sister Joan Saalfeld, our teacher, used this opportunity to offer rich explorations of gospel messages, including an evocative interpretation of the parable of the man who sowed good seed in the field. She provided wise and skillful conferences on how to apply Jesus’ teaching “right here, and right now” and to discover the compassion and intelligence within the parts of ourselves we label as negative, problematic, or unacceptable. Her teaching was invitational – offering all

of us an opportunity to look into our own wisdom and discover greater acceptance of our total being – including both the promises that “bear fruit” and the perils of “appearing weeds” that come with being human.

There was so much gratitude for the monks who in their humble dedication and hospitality provided us with the care and stability to keep our time at the Abbey in order. As each of us anticipated the transition from nourishing days of formal practice back into marketplace activities, we

ended our time together in circle. Each of us offered a collective blessing of “thoughts, words, and deeds of the heart and hands,” so that all would go in abiding peace. Our group returned to families and friends more connected to the life within, nourished by the days of silence, and grateful for the respite and intentional welcoming that these beautiful and precious Abbey grounds provided us. ✨



Photos by Mike Seely



OFF THE CUSHION: THE UPPER ROOM

by Doug Speers

I believe I was introduced to the Upper Room sometime in the mid-1980s. I distinctly remember climbing the stairs on a dark winter morning, wondering what I was getting myself into. Little did I know that those stairs and that room would be the beginning of a new direction in my life.

When my parish priest left our church to join a monastic community, he suggested that I become an Associate of the community, where, under the guidance of a full-time monk, I would establish and practice a Rule-of-Life. The Rule typically contained disciplines such as daily prayer, spiritual study, outreach, and annual attendance at an overnight spiritual retreat. These I took up with relish because, at that period in my life, I seemed to be searching for something “more,” but I didn’t know what that “more” was.

Finding a place for a several day retreat proved to not be a problem because friends recommended the Trappist abbey, which was relatively close to my home. I immediately fell in love with the place. I made several three-day self-directed retreats over a span of a number of years, dutifully following the routine of the monks’ daily office, and enjoying a brisk daily exploration of the trails on the abbey’s property. I started my spiritual journals to which I refer to today, and I read numerous books that stirred my desire to dig deeper into the mystical dimensions of the faith journey.

ABOUT “OFF THE CUSHION”

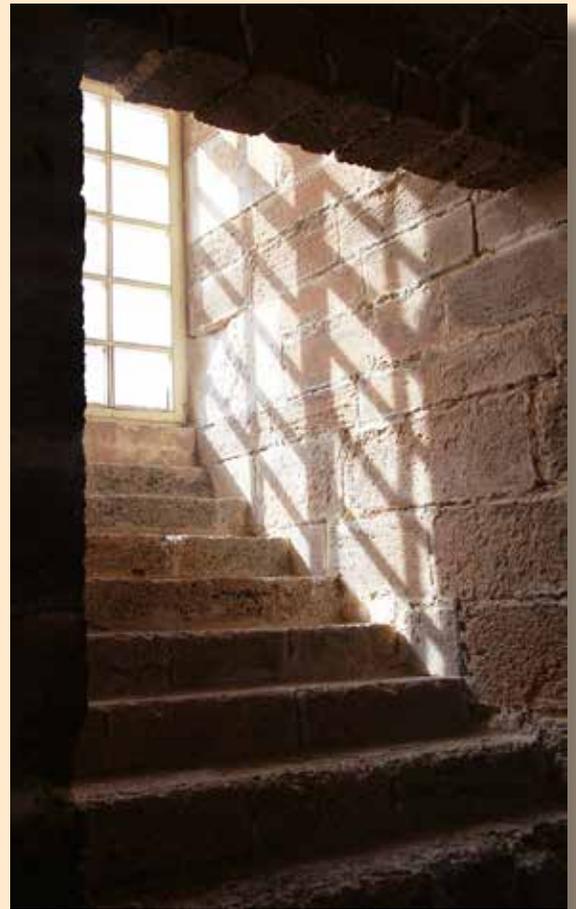
Off the Cushion is a regular feature of our newsletter. We invite you to submit articles about what your practice means to you, of activities off the cushion which feel like an extension of your practice. Please e-mail your submissions to newsletter editor Greg Smith at gasmith@clark.edu. ✍

On one of my retreats I discovered a cassette tape of William Menninger, a Trappist monk, conducting a silent retreat for a group. I took the tape to my room and listened to the lecture and then joined the 20 minutes of centering prayer that ended the tape. It was a profound experience. (Today, looking back on that experience, I am quite certain that I fell asleep during the period of silence on that tape!)

“You need to join with others in contemplative prayer,” Brother Mark informed me, and so I had my official invitation to come to sittings in the building next to the retreatants’ dining room. I rejected the sittings that took place in the middle of the night and chose a civilized hour of 6:00 a.m. The place was the room at the top of the stairway—my “Upper Room.”

Here’s my first impression of the Upper Room: dark, small, low ceiling. Shadowy figures sitting on cushions or benches in a circle facing a candle in the middle. Incense. Clouds of it! I think it must have been strong enough to permeate the whole building. And Brother Mark sounding the gong. No words were spoken; just 25 minutes of silence. Just that, but infinitely more. These words of T.S. Eliot spoke to me: “So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing.”

I came back to that room many times, sometimes alone, sometimes with the other retreatants and monks. Once, I was late, and not wanting to bother the others fetching a prayer bench, I thought I could manage just sitting on my knees. It was sheer agony after about five minutes! But mostly my experiences in the Upper Room—and later in Bethany House under Seven Thunders’ teachers—were where I began to understand the practice of contemplation—the “more” I had been looking for.



I have been tempted over the years to let my thoughts dwell on that Upper Room where so much took place—sort of a sacred shrine to revisit periodically. But that would be merely a comfortable memory and not the real work of contemplation with its day-after-day repetition and its real-world distractions. So I have to move on, physically as well as spiritually (physically—Alice and I moved to Seattle last year).

Many people have helped me on my journey that began in the Upper Room so many years ago. To those—known and unknown—who sat next to me in silence for hours on end—thank you for your inspiration! And to friends who helped me tackle some obscure concept over a cup of coffee—thank you for your support. And a special thanks to teachers I have been blessed to have had: Leonard Marcel, Bill Ryan, and Br. Mark Filut. I am deeply grateful! ✍



OF SACRED PLACES AND FORGIVENESS, *continued from page 1*

When we sit in this way, in that sacred space, in that "cell," in our "self," our sitting and the sacred space itself proceed to teach us everything we need for a healthy spiritual life. In this way we learn the discord between how we think of ourselves, how we sense ourselves to be, and how we behave. We see what rises into consciousness, and note it with full attention. We learn that consciousness is not synonymous with its content, that thoughts and impulses and emotions come and go, but consciousness itself is the perduring context of it all. This realization brings us to the threshold of a vast desert emptiness. If we do not shrink in fear from this emptiness, we find that it is more profound and liberating than any verbal, mental or emotional assertion of self can ever hope to be. This threshold leads to an experience so joyful that images and descriptions of it pale. No words suffice. The late French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, (1889 – 1973) once wrote: "There are thresholds which thought alone, left to itself, can never permit us to cross. An experience

is required." When St Thomas Aquinas had such an experience while celebrating Mass one day, he realized that all of his previous writing was inadequate to convey the reality and never took up his pen again. The essential thing is complete surrender of self. No one has ever experienced enlightenment or mystical union who has not made this total surrender.

As we practice regularly in our sacred space, we find that one of the things our sacred space teaches us is the importance of forgiveness in the spiritual life. We know this intellectually, but often have great difficulty practicing forgiveness in daily life. Forgiveness means relinquishing the sense of entitled repayment due because of a real or imagined offense. Through the act of forgiveness, the rupture created in the relationship between oneself and God or between oneself and another person is healed. The debt is cancelled. Our inclination as humans is to hold fast to the faults of those who have sorely offended us. Our reluctance to forgive makes us at the same time distrust the reality of God's forgiveness; but forgiving and being forgiven is an extremely powerful experience, an essential human experience, which empowers us to become better human beings, more compassionate and understanding of self and others.

Abba Moses understood the importance of forgiveness. We are told that his early life had been an unhappy one. He apparently was a slave from Ethiopia. By whatever means, he escaped his early fate only to turn to robbing travelers and caravans, perhaps even murdering at times. Later in life, he underwent a conversion of heart, became a monk and submitted to the rigors of training under the venerable Abba Isidore.

Abba Moses came to be renowned in Scetis for his wisdom, mercy and forgiveness. On one occasion, a young brother happened to commit a fault and the elders assembled and sent for

Abba Moses to join them. He, however, did not want to come. The other elders sent another message, pressing him, so he arose and started off, but he took with him a very old basket full of holes, filled it with sand and carried it behind him. As he approached the meeting place, the other elders came out to meet him and said: "What is this, Father?" Perhaps remembering his former life, Moses replied: "My sins are running out behind me and I do not see them, and today I come to judge the sins of another!" The other elders, upon hearing this, said nothing to the errant brother but pardoned him.

In the community of Abba Bessarion, one of the brothers had sinned, and an elder told him to leave the community. Upon hearing that, Abba Bessarion got up and walked out with the accused, saying: "I too am a sinner!"

On another occasion, in the community of Abba Poemen, a certain brother came and asked for a good word. Poemen said to him: "Never despise anyone; never condemn anyone; never speak evil of anyone, and the Lord will give you peace."

Moses, Bessarion and Poemen understood the importance of compassion, not judging and forgiveness in the spiritual life. They knew that it is not possible to have a spiritual practice if there is someone – anyone, including yourself – in your life whom you cannot forgive.

Is it not natural, you may ask, that we should feel unforgiving when we have been injured, perhaps severely and irrevocably? How does the victim of childhood abuse forgive? Or the victim of rape? How do the survivors of Kosovo and Rwanda, of Afghanistan and Syria forgive? From the ordinary standpoint, the answer is "yes"; but, from the standpoint of our practice, the answer must always be "no." Contemplative practice requires us to forgive even if it takes a lifetime of practice. In the Gospel of Matthew, when Peter asks how many times we should forgive someone, Jesus replies, "Seventy times seven..." (Matt 18:22). In other words, an endless





OF SACRED PLACES AND FORGIVENESS, *continued from page 8*

number of times.

Failing to grasp the importance of forgiveness is always part of any troubled relationship and is a factor in our anxieties, depressions and sometimes physical illnesses. Our inability to forgive prevents us from knowing true joy. To be sure, forgiveness is not easy. The main obstacle is rooted in our habit of thinking self-centered thoughts. When we believe such thoughts and act accordingly, it is like a drop of poison in a glass of water, as experienced by a desert brother who had been insulted by another, and wanted to take revenge:

He came to Abba Sisois and told him what had taken place, saying: "I am going to get even." But Sisois beseeched him to leave the affair in the hands of God. "No" said the brother, "I will not give up until I have made that fellow pay for what he said." Then Sisois stood up and began to pray in these terms: "Oh, God, Thou art no longer necessary to us, and we no longer need Thee to take care of us since, as this brother says, we both can and will avenge ourselves." At this, the brother was enlightened and promised to give up his idea of revenge.

When we begin to observe our self-centered thoughts dispassionately and begin to label them, then they begin, in turn, to lose their emotional charge. Then the physical sensation of anger begins to subside in the body and the passage to forgiveness is underway.

It is here that the practice of contemplative prayer can make a real contribution. As you know, this is a path of simply perceiving and responding to what is, just as it is, given to us here and now in this moment. In other words, our practice makes nothing of anything. In the immediate attentiveness that comes when you take a breath and see and hear, really see and hear, what is right before you, there is immense freedom – freedom from prejudice, fear, anger, delusion. Each moment is fresh, each encounter open. When a contemplative moment happens, especially

in the midst of conflict, it is like everything has been washed by a flood of forgiveness.

How does this forgiveness come? Forgiveness is not the act of a weak person, but of a strong, mature one, one who is willing to let go of an offence – to cut it loose (the meaning of the Latin verb *absolvere*) – even while beset by feelings of anger or contempt. It does not come from releasing such bad feelings and replacing them with positive ones. It comes from being present, being real with the real, pausing from all strategies and judgment. There, where there is nothing left but what really is, you can actually feel the other person's agony (some of which you may have caused yourself). Perhaps you also sense the other person's fear or hatred. There you are, making nothing of it, having nothing to do about it, just being, undefended and vulnerable. It is then that you can glimpse the simple power of pure presence. In such a moment, forgiveness is also present. In such a moment, being fully present transforms the past and enhances the humanness of both the forger and the forgiven.

It has been said that the only true poverty is the absence of compassion in the heart. This transformation to forgiveness is connected to compassion and can take place because the dualistic world of the self-centered ego-mind and its thoughts has been transcended by a unitive, non-personal experience in which there is no "other." In this realm, there is no "I" and "mine" opposed to "you" and "yours." When such mental clutter has been stripped away, you can then discover the intersection between forgiveness and compassion. In a contemplative moment, forgiveness and compassion are the delicate essence of all creation. They do not come from developing a new and better image of the other person, nor from empathizing, nor even from understanding. All of that may happen, but forgiveness is something more. It is the pres-



ence of grace, always present, shining through when we stop creating our self-centered dramas. Forgiveness, like gratitude, is a state we live in.

It is not easy, this practice of ours. Every time we wake up to compassion and forgiveness, we also become aware of all the times we have been insensitive and preoccupied with self. It is difficult medicine to tolerate that awareness in our consciousness, but until we can accept it as part of our history, we cannot accept it in others. So, to be familiar with our dark side, with our insensitivity, with our self-preoccupation, enables intimacy with all others who are asleep to what is real. One-self and others are not two. This intimacy, when practiced with steadfast moment-to-moment compassion, particularly during troubled times – times of fear, despair, darkness, hurt, anger – liberates us and puts us at peace. When we are fully present to the grace of each moment, then we become love and compassion and forgiveness lived.

So each day we return to our sacred space and to our practice with the awareness that we do not sit alone. All of our great contemplative ancestors sit with us: Moses, Bessarion, Peomen, Sisois, the great Anthony and other Desert Fathers and Mothers, St. Benedict, St. Bernard, Hildegard of Bingen, St. Francis and St. Clare, Brother Lawrence and Therese de Lisieux. They teach us what it is to be an anointed son or daughter of God. Their lives are our lives. Our lives are theirs. ✎



EXCERPT FROM NORMAN FISCHER’S “THE PROBLEM OF EVIL”

This article by Norman Fischer, a Zen teacher in the Suzuki Roshi lineage, was published on the Lion’s Roar website in mid-July after the killing of two Black men by police in Minnesota and then the assassination of police officers in Dallas. It speaks directly to some of the difficulties of the previous months. The entire essay is available at www.lionsroar.com/the-problem-of-evil and is printed here with permission of the author.

Are human beings basically good or basically evil? This isn’t a sensible question. Human beings are buddha, because life is buddha, all-inclusive. Understanding this, you know you have to forgive, although not forget. You know that you can’t go forth with vengeance and hatred, or with a sense of moral superiority. Because you are you and not someone else, you know that there will always be foul water in your mouth – that the evil deeds of others are yours as well, that they are ours collectively. So you protect and defend as you can, but you don’t condemn. Evil is part of all of us – and part of buddha too, according to the Zen teachings.

There’s a line about this story of dying the great death that appears in *The Blue Cliff Record*, a Zen koan collection: “Where right and wrong are mixed, even the sages cannot know.... She walks on thin ice, runs on a sword’s edge....”

Moral choice is fraught. The more you know and the more you appreciate about a given situation, the more fraught it is. At the beginning of this piece I mentioned drone attacks. Are they good or evil? Do they kill innocent civilians? Yes they do. But even when they don’t, are they targeting the right people? Who are the “right people”? If someone is forced, by social pressure and the threat of murder, to harbor a so-called terrorist, or even to commit so-called terrorist acts, is such a person worthy of being targeted? Is anyone? And who decides? On what basis?

Can anyone, in this corrupt, unjust, unfair, confused world, claim a position of moral superiority? Is there anyone who can sit on a pristine throne of moral rectitude from which to proclaim the judgment of who shall live

and who shall die? According to this commentary, not even the sages can say. They, like us, are walking on thin ice that might break through at any moment. Yet we must walk and run; we must make ethical choices based on our best understanding of and firm commitment to precepts and the goodness they represent.

The three pure precepts of Zen come from the earliest Buddhism, long before Zen. They are: “To avoid evil, To do good, To benefit all beings.” We may not really know what this means. We may not know how to do it. But it is our commitment, the effort of our lifetime, to be carried out with energy, appreciation, forgiveness, non-condemnation, understanding, and grief. ⚡





ROHATSU SESSHIN AT STONES AND CLOUDS ZENDO DECEMBER 3 - 8, 2016



The 2016 Seven Thunders Zen Rohatsu Sesshin will be held at the Stones and Clouds Zendo in Lake Oswego, OR, from Saturday, December 3, at 5 p.m. until Thursday, December 8, at 10 a.m.. Sesshin will be led by Leonard Marcel. Registration deadline is November 19. 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 14. Additional applicants will be wait-listed in case of cancellations. Sesshin fee is \$270 (member rate \$240) 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 sesshin through the remainder of that calendar year. A deposit of \$100 is required with your registration; payment in full is appreciated. Any balance is due by November 19. Should you need to cancel, all but \$25 is refundable until November 19; after that date all but \$100 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 available to Seven Thunders members. Donations for such scholarships are both appreciated and tax-deductible.

This is a non-residential retreat. For non-commuter participants, information about local accommodations is available. Limited accommodations in members' homes may also be 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 Summer sesshin fee payment.) Questions? Please contact Teresa Marcel at 503.636.9009 or tdmarcel@mac.com ⚡

REGISTRATION FORM

STONES & CLOUDS SUMMER SESSHIN, DECEMBER 3 - 8, 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 \$240
- I enclose a \$100 deposit (\$140 balance due by November 19)

Not a current Seven Thunders member:

- I enclose \$270 – please apply \$30 to Seven Thunders member dues.
- I enclose \$130 (deposit + dues) (\$140 balance due by November 19).

Please make checks payable to Seven Thunders.



CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR) JANUARY 26 - 29, 2017

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 26 continue all day Friday and Saturday, and end after lunch on Sunday (about 1:30 p.m.), January 29. Please arrive well before 6:00 p.m. Thursday, check in, and get your room assignment at the Porter's Lodge.

Sr. Joan Saalfeld, SNJM, will lead our retreat, sit with us present talks and offer interviews. Sr Joan is a member of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary currently living and working in Portland, Oregon. She has studied and practiced Zen and Contemplation for 35 years, first with Robert Aitken, then with Fr. Willigis Jaeger, OSB, and most recently with Fr. Pat Hawk, C.Ss.R., who encouraged her to teach in CIRs.

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 \$310. The fee is \$280 for Seven Thunders members. Partial scholarships are available to Seven Thunders members. 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 re-

quests 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 contact retreat coordinator **Nancy Roberts** at nroberts@peak.org with any questions and for details on where to return this completed form with your check. 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 CIR fee payment.)

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 26-29, 2017**

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 \$310 enclosed

\$280 for Seven Thunders members

Deposit of \$75 enclosed

Donation for Scholarships \$ _____

Request a Scholarship of \$ _____

I wish to reserve a room for Sunday night, January 29, and will pay then.