

SEVEN THUNDERS

newsletter

www.seventhunders.org

Summer 2014



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HEKIGANROKU CASE 4 I THE GREAT DEATH

by Leonard Marcel

Chao-chou (J. Joshu) asked T'ou-tzu (J. Tosu Daido): "How is it when a person who has died the great death returns to life?"

T'ou-tzu (Tosu) replied: "Such a person must not go by night, but must get there in daylight."

Our practice confronts the Great Matter of life and death. It is a paradox that in order for us to be fully alive we must experience the Great Death; that is, the death of the ego.

In the koan collection known as the Blue Cliff Record (Hekiganroku), each koan is preceded by an Introduction (or Pointer), in which the main issue, the main point, of the koan is revealed. The Introduction (or Pointer) to this case reads:

Where right and wrong are intermingled, even the sages cannot know; when going with or against, even the Buddhas cannot know. One who is a person detached from the world, who transcends conventions, reveals the abilities of a great person who stands out from the crowd. Such a person walks on thin ice, runs on a sword's edge. Such a person is like the unicorn's horn, like a lotus in the midst of fire. When such a

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person sees someone beyond comparison, that person knows they are both on the same path. Who is such a person? Listen to this old teaching.

So, "Where right and wrong are intermingled, even the sages cannot know." Our dualistic minds have a tendency to lean to one side or the other: Either/Or. One of the "diseases" of Zen is to cling to the Absolute side of reality, sometimes called getting stuck in emp-

teness. Or, conversely, especially in contemporary Western civilization, there is a tendency to get stuck on the other side, the relative (phenomenal) world and to think that that is all there is. Both of these positions miss it. Truth is neither absolute nor relative. You and I are essentially the same, yet I am not you and you are not I, and all of that exists simultaneously. As we



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

Continued on page 6



SEVEN THUNDERS LOCAL SITTINGS, 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 the year:

- June 7, Brother Mark Filut
- July 12*, Brother Mark Filut
- August 2, Leonard Marcel
- September 6, Leonard Marcel
- October 4, Brother Mark Filut
- November 1, Leonard Marcel
- December 6, Brother Mark Filut

ZAZENKAI

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

- September 20

Zazen, 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 Leonard Marcel at 503.636.9009 or marcellj@hotmail.



com if you are planning to attend and for more information about zazen and the study group. There is no fee for zazen, but a donation of \$20 will 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 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)

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 zazen and retreats, please contact Larry Keil at 206.322.8759 or go to their website at: <http://three-treasures-sangha.org/> ⚡

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 Doug Speers at ddspeers.38@gmail.com. Complimentary copies will be sent for up to one year or until January dues requests are mailed. Regrettably, if membership dues (full membership currently \$30 per year, associate membership \$15 per year) are not received within the two months following dues requests, your complimentary newsletter copies will be discontinued. ⚡

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.

2014 EVENTS & RETREAT SCHEDULE

- June 26 - 29 – CIR at Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey with Sr. Joan Saalfeld. Full - please contact Doug Speers (ddspeers.38@gmail.com) if you would like to be placed on the waiting list.
- July 15 - 19 – Zen sesshin at Stones & Clouds with Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 12.
- July 19 – Seven Thunders General Meeting. See President's Letter on page 3 for details.
- October 13 - 17 – Zen sesshin at McKenzie Bridge with Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 8.
- October 18 - 19 – CIR in Bend with Leonard Marcel. For more information, contact Leanne Latterell at 541.923.7607. ⚡



A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT: ANNUAL SEVEN THUNDERS GENERAL MEETING

Photograph by Mike Seely



I love the phrase “Spring has sprung” at this colorful though wet time of year. I just returned from a visit with a dear friend in Maine. Spent a few days at his “camp” on a lake in western Maine on the Canadian border where ice still covered the water and two feet of snow greeted us on the ground. No Spring there, but within hours of our departure from the region, we were immersed in contrasts as we returned to the mid-coast of the Penobscot Bay. Here Spring was “a-sprung’in” where every blossom decided to reveal itself on the border of the bay. This contrast calls us to the moment, an opportunity to be present to the resplendent reality around us. The season’s brilliance becomes a calling to pay attention.

Board Activities

The Board of Directors have been active

these last 12 months engaged in a continual strategic dialogue focused on the nature of the organization’s offerings, mission, and future. In the weeks before the General Meeting the Board hopes to provide information regarding possible changes in the terms and structure of Board officer roles. This may include a discussion to make adjustments in the organization’s bylaws, all essential as we embrace the future of Seven Thunders.

Seven Thunders General Meeting

Spring rapidly draws us to Summer when we are called to come together as a community. The Seven Thunders Annual Meeting will be held at Stones and Cloud on July 19th at noon with the conclusion of Summer Sesshin. I strongly encourage you as a member to attend this important gathering. It is an opportunity come together and break

bread, catch up on the activities of the organization over the last year, and have a voice in the annual business meeting. Please bring your favorite potluck dish and join the conversation. For directions, and to RSVP, please contact Teresa Marcel at 503.636.9009 or tdmarcel@mac.com.

Please do join us for the Seven Thunders Annual Meeting;

- Location: Stones & Clouds Zendo, Lake Oswego
- Date: Saturday, July 19, 2014
- Time: Noon - 3 p.m.

May your Spring blossom and bring joy.

Faithfully,

Mike Seely ✍

FROM BROTHER MARK





SPRING SESSHIN AT MCKENZIE BRIDGE

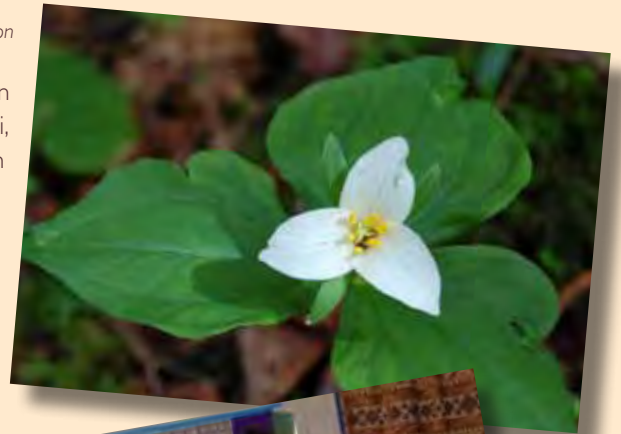
by Dan Dickinson

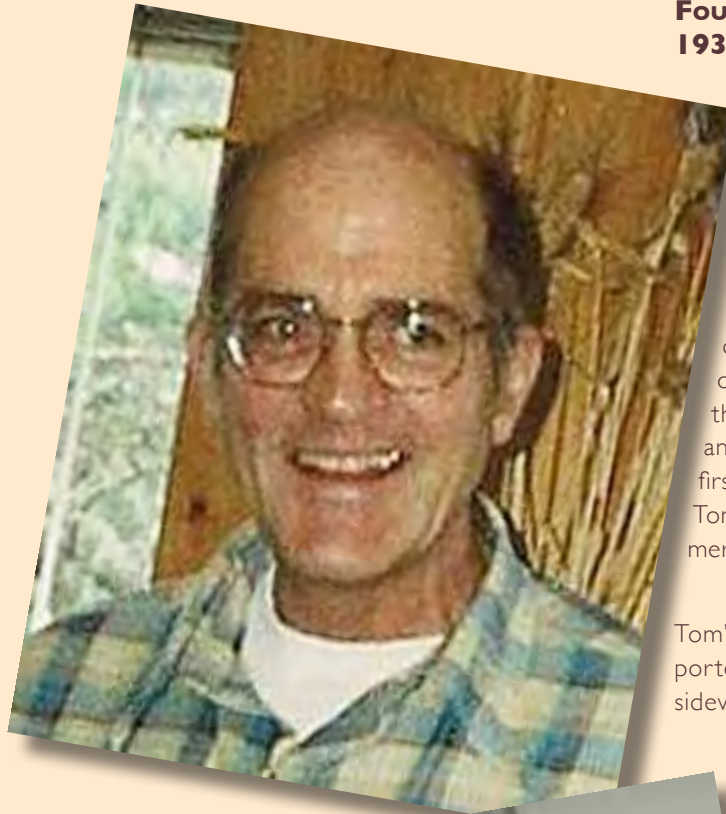
Seven Thunders held our spring sesshin with Leonard Marcel Roshi at McKenzie Bridge on April 6 through April 10, 2014. In attendance were Erik Roost, Leanne Latterell, Richard Lance, Ron Paisley, Cheryl Diamond, Greg Smith, Paul Birkeland, Dan Brown, Paul Wallin, Teresa Marcel, and Dan Dickinson.

Officers for the retreat were Ron Paisley, Tonto, Paul Birkeland, Jiki, Cheryl Diamond, Jisha, and Dan Dickinson, Ino. Eric Roost made sure things got done as Karmdana and most importantly, Teresa Marcel kept us very well fed as Tenzo.

It seemed to be a great time for all of us. The sitting was strong and many comments were expressed about the positive atmosphere. Mother Nature helped welcome us by providing her best spring conditions, warm dry weather and abundant wild flowers. Those who ventured into the woods were treated to trilliums and lady's slippers aplenty and other surprises, including morels.

For many of us, it was our first view of St. Benedict's newest facility, Beede House. It is a beautiful new house constructed from timber harvested on the property and named after Fr. Beede, the Benedictine priest who donated the retreat center to the Dominican Community.



**FOUNDING MEMBER TOM CURRANS
1933 - 2014**

One of Seven Thunders' founding members, E. Thomas Currans, Jr., of Dundee, Oregon, passed away peacefully at home on March 6, 2014. Tom was an active member of Seven Thunders, and attended many of our spring and fall retreats during our first decade. Tom was devoted to his wife of 59 years, Ellen, a skilled potter, and they always travelled together to the annual Anacortes craft fair during the first weekend of August; for this reason Tom was unable to attend our mid-summer retreats at Loyola.

Tom's unassuming steady presence supported us for many years: sweeping the sidewalk, installing temporary wheelchair ramps, quiet conversations about Yamada Roshi's 'Gateless Gate', sitting Sunday mornings with Br. Mark in Bethany House, sharing breakfast in the Porter's Lodge or in downtown Lafayette. Tom was "a pilgrim on the way that has no end, who was learning to be a friend of God."

Tom, it was great knowing you. We are grateful for your time with us.

Jane Huyer ✨





THE GREAT DEATH, *continued from page 1*

recite in the Heart Sutra: Form is exactly emptiness. Emptiness is exactly form.

To avoid getting stuck on either side is the mark of a great person, one who is "detached from the world, who transcends conventions." Such a person is as rare as the unicorn's horn but can accomplish miraculous feats: walking on thin ice, running on a sword's edge. Such a person can also recognize another of the same caliber.

Chao-chou (Joshu) asked T'ou-tzu (Tosu): "How is it when a person who has died the Great Death returns to life?"

T'ou-tzu (Tosu) replied: "Such a person must not go by night, but must get there in daylight."

Regardless of whether one's practice is koan study, or breath counting, or the mantric repetition of a word, or precisely just sitting (shikantaza), ultimately the task is the same - to forget the self. As Dogen wrote: "To study Buddhism is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self, and to forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things." That is the test of our practice, the ten thousand things, our daily life. You are not truly practicing until your practice is manifested in your daily life, in your work and in your relations with others.

The life story of the great master Chao-chou Ts'ung-shen (Joshu Jushin, 778-897) is an especially good example of what Zen masters repeatedly stress - that an awakening experience is only the beginning of real training on the path. Chao-chou (Joshu) had such an experience at age eighteen under his teacher Nan-chuan P'u-yuan (J. Nansen Fugan, 748-835), then remained with his teacher for another forty years until Nan-chuan's death. Then he set out on a pilgrimage for over twenty years, visiting Zen masters throughout China in order to deepen his experience. Finally, at age eighty, he settled in a small monastery near the town of Chao-chou and began to teach. Students gradually

gathered around him and he led them on the path of Zen until his death at age one hundred and twenty.

We are told that he had a distinctive way of instructing his students. In a soft voice, often almost whispering, he answered his students' with short, simple pronouncements. His words, however, were very powerful, often cutting through the confused and deluded thoughts and feelings of students like a sharp sword. Many famous koan originated with him, including the most famous of all, case 1 of the koan collection called the Wu-men-kuan (Mumonkan):

A monk asked master Chao-chou:
"Does a dog have Buddha-nature?"
Chao-chou replied, "Mu."

Over the last eleven centuries, this Mu koan has helped thousands of Zen students to a first enlightenment experience. Still today, in many lineages, including our own, it is given to students as the first koan.

It was during his pilgrimage years that Chao-chou encountered T'ou-tzu Ta-t'ung (Tosu Daido, 819-914). Chao-chou was forty-one years older and in his late seventies at the time. T'ou-tzu was a dharma successor of Ts'ui-wei Wu'hsueh (Suibi Mugaku). T'ou-tzu had left home at an early age in order to become a monk and had his first enlightenment experience as a monk of the Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism. Later, he became a student of Ts'ui-wei (Suibi), under whom his experience deepened. After some years of his own wandering, during which he trained for intervals with other masters, he secluded himself in a hermitage on Mount T'ou-tzu, from which his name is derived. It was there that Chao-chou sought him out. Even though these two masters were from different lineages, their understanding and demonstration of the point in question accords perfectly.

One day T'ou-tzu spread the tea setting to entertain Chao-chou. T'ou-tzu passed some cakes to Chao-chou, who ignored the gesture, not even acknowledging that the cakes

were being offered. T'ou-tzu handed the cakes to his attendant and told the attendant to hand the cakes to Chao-chou, whereupon Chao-chou bowed to the attendant three times. What was the meaning of this? What was Chao-chou saying?

Then Chao-chou posed his question: "How is it when a person who has died the Great Death returns to life?" Without hesitation, T'ou-tzu immediately replied: "Such a person must not go by night but must get there by daylight." Direct response. No hesitation. He responds immediately to Chao-chou's question. His answer exactly fits the question. He is intimate with it. He leaves no traces. What does it mean to go by day and not by night? Day and night, light and dark, appear often in the teachings. Night or dark is a metaphor for the Absolute realm, the realm of empty oneness, because, when it is "pitch dark" nothing can be distinguished; there is no differentiation. When it is light, each person and thing is seen as itself. Within light there is darkness; within darkness there is light. They are a pair.

A person who has died the Great Death has completely given up everything - no doctrines or theories, no mysteries or marvels, no gain or loss, no right or wrong. Very simple, very direct. A person who has died the Great Death has let go of all the usual ego props and attachments and clinging. This takes many years of practice, many years to reach the summit of the mountain. Chao-chou's question is not how one gets to the summit, but how one functions afterward. How does one proceed after the tyrannical ego has lost its hold and one has died to oneself? The answer is, as always, straight ahead!

Whatever one experiences in this practice, one acknowledges with gratitude as a teaching, and then throws it away. No clinging. No attachment. There is not a single teaching or experience on this path which is not intended ultimately to self-destruct. Get rid of everything. Go straight ahead. Down



THE GREAT DEATH, *continued from page 6*

the other side of the mountain, off the top of the hundred foot pole, into the market place. But, and this is most important, one must be in the market place without ever having left the mountain top; one must be on the mountain top without ever having left the market place. Not tending more toward one side than toward the other. One must die the Great Death and at once return to life. It is not that we sometimes live in the relative world and sometimes in the empty realm. It is that we live in both at the same time. How do we do this? By uniting unselfconsciously with whatever we are doing moment by moment, with compassion and kindness, whether talking to another person, cutting vegetables, making the bed, doing our job at work – and recognizing that each person and activity at that moment is the most important thing in the Universe and the least important, both at the same time; and recognizing that it is all holy and all empty, both at the same time.

It is no small thing to die the Great Death. It is very hard to let go of our conditioning, of all the things we hold dear, to move out of our comfort zone. If you hold on to anything, the smallest idea or the most noble idea, you miss it. If you hold on to enlightenment, you separate yourself from enlightenment. If you hold on to a new car, or to a cherished possession or to an accomplishment, or even to zazen, you miss it. The first step is the integration of ourselves as human beings, so that mind and body become one. As long as we worry about what someone else has done to us, or about money that has not been repaid to us for example, we are not integrated. Our sense of, and need for, ownership arises to offset our feelings of insecurity. We want to own things, to own our own opinions, to have a strategy for living, to feel substantial.

But the important thing is who we are at any given moment and how we handle what life brings us. The first years of practice are generally more difficult than later ones, but not infrequently a difficulty may arise after five or ten years of sitting, when we begin to real-

ize that we are going to get nothing out of sitting - nothing whatever. There is nothing to get. This can be a dry, difficult period in one's practice. One's personal agenda is fading. The ego is dying. Practice becomes unromantic. It is not what we read about in books. Now real practice can begin: moment by moment, just facing and responding to what each moment requires of us. The longer we sit, the less eventful our sitting becomes. The longer we look at our ego stuff, the less of a claim it has on us and the easier it is to let go. The death of the ego is a slow wearing-away process.

One of the last books of the late Robert Aitken Roshi is called *Zen Master Raven*. It is a collection of short sayings and anecdotes using animals allegorically, not unlike Aesop's Fables. The featured character is a raven. One story is of a meeting at a place called Tallspruce. Badger asks Raven, "How can I get rid of my ego?" Raven replies, "It's not strong enough." Badger persists, "But I am greedy, self-centered, and I push others around." Raven replies, "Like I said."

Greed, hatred and ignorance rise endlessly; I vow to abandon them – endlessly. We are greedy and self-centered and we push others around. Is your ego strong enough to be relinquished? Let go. Let go. The process is slow. It does not happen in a day or in a short time. Perseverance is required, day after day.

I have recently read a biography and some writings of Omori Sogen Roshi, a Rinzaï master well known in Japan who died in 1994 at the age of 90. In addition to being a Zen master, he was also a kendo master and a master of hitsuzendo (Zen calligraphy). He tells of attending Rohatsu Osesshin at Tenryu-ji, a monastery in Kyoto, after he had been practicing as a layman for several years. He went determined to die the Great Death, but found that "by the evening of the first day I was already tired ... The next day I thought, 'this is no good.' My legs hurt, I had



stiff shoulders I was sleepy all the time. Although I was doing zazen to relinquish my ego, I kept finding excuses for not (letting go)."

We can all identify with him. How often we find excuses for not letting go – until we run out of excuses, and then the only thing to do is go straight ahead and let go. It is not a matter of understanding first and then letting go. It cannot be understood. It is simply a fact of the spiritual life. Every great religious tradition emphasizes the necessity of transcending ego concerns in order to experience the true Self. Then at last we can experience ourself as we truly are – the empty center of the Universe and containing all of it.

At the end of that process, beyond all of our ego conditioning, we find a person, pure and undefiled, no different from the whole universe, what master Lin-chi (J. Rinzaï Gigen, d.866) called the True Person of No Rank, fully alive and vigorous on both the mountaintop and in the marketplace. That is what must be realized, experienced directly. The only way to see it is to be it. The only way to be it, is to forget the self.

So, empty yourself, and when you have emptied yourself, throw that away also. It is another trap, another concept. Trust your direct experience. Die the Great Death, for when one has died once, there is no need to die again. ⚡



FALL ZEN SESSHIN AT ST. BENEDICT LODGE, MCKENZIE BRIDGE, OREGON, OCTOBER 13 - 17, 2014

The Seven Thunders Fall Zen Sesshin will be held October 13 - 17, 2014 at McKenzie Bridge, Oregon. It will be led by Leonard Marcel Roshi and will be conducted according to the standard Diamond Sangha format described in Robert Aitken Roshi's book "Encouraging Words." The sesshin will take place at St. Benedict Lodge, McKenzie Bridge.

Please plan to arrive between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. on Monday, October 13, for registration. Sesshin will begin with supper at 5:00 p.m. followed by orientation and zazen at 7:00 p.m. It will end on Friday, October 17, after cleanup around 1:00 p.m. The daily schedule includes about nine hours of zazen with breaks for daily work assignments and rest. Total silence will be observed for the entire sesshin. All attending must participate fully in the daily cycle and in helping to restore the facility after the retreat.

St. Benedict Lodge is 50 miles east of Eugene, Oregon. The center has 70 acres of wooded grounds, bounded by the McKenzie River on one side and Willamette National Forest on the other. For more information see www.sblodge.org.

Things to bring: your own sitting cushion or bench and zabuton (include a zabuton or mat even if you will sit on a chair from the lodge because the zendo has a cold cement floor). Plain conservative clothing of dark or subdued color to wear for sitting. No shorts, sleeveless tops, or unnecessary jewelry, please. You may want to bring socks with grid bottoms as the smooth zendo floor can be slippery. Bring hat, coat, and shoes suitable for walking outdoors (the days can be frosty, warm and sunny, rainy and stormy). Bring all your own bedding and linens (towels, pillow, sheets, and blankets or sleeping bag). St. Benedict Lodge does not provide these. Also bring all your own toiletries.

The cost for this sesshin, including lodging, meals and tuition, is \$350. The cost for Seven Thunders full members is \$320. A member rate is now 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 \$100 is required with your registra-

tion (or \$130 if also paying member dues), with the balance due by March 5 unless other arrangements are made. All but \$25 is refundable until September 29. If you cancel after that date, all but \$80 is refundable.

If the sesshin fee is a barrier to your attending, please check the box requesting a "scholarship" or contact the registrar. Although we need to balance our financial books, we also need and deeply appreciate your presence. Donations are also appreciated and they are tax-deductible.

To register for the retreat, complete the form below and send it, with your check payable to **Seven Thunders**, to registrar **Dan Dickinson, 16815 S. Henrici Rd, Oregon City, OR 97045**. You will receive a confirmation message. Questions? Reach the registrar at 503.632.5957 or Firfied@bctonline.com.



**REGISTRATION FORM
ZEN SESSHIN, MCKENZIE BRIDGE, OCTOBER 13 - 17, 2014**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

- First retreat with us? _____
- I will bring my sleeping bag or bedding, towels and toiletries.
- If needed, I can bring an extra set of bedding and linens to lend to someone else.
- I will bring my own pad (zabuton) and cushion (zafu) or bench.
- I might be able to give someone a ride from Portland _____ or Eugene _____
- I need to borrow: _____

Other needs (rides, food, etc) _____

I request a scholarship of \$ _____

Please make checks payable to Seven Thunders.

Current Seven Thunders members:

- I enclose full payment of \$320 (the member rate).
- I enclose a \$100 deposit (balance of member rate due by March 15).

Not a current Seven Thunders member:

- I enclose \$350, please apply \$30 to Seven Thunders member dues.
- I enclose a \$100 deposit (balance of non-member rate due by March 5).
- I enclose \$130, deposit & member dues (balance of member rate due by March 5).
- I also enclose a donation of \$ _____



OFF THE CUSHION: CONTEMPLATING COLOR

by Teresa D. Marcel

Sitting in the predawn darkness of a Pacific Northwest Spring morning, the vanilla infused aromas wafting from the hot cup of tea between my hands proffer a gentle invitation to be savored. Although I can see that the color of the tea is actually a warm golden brown, it tastes like creamy, velvety white. Is it because the vanilla blossom is white, even if the pod and its flavorful seeds are brown, and I associate it with this wondrous flavor? Is it the relaxing, peaceful effect of immersing myself in this quiet moment as a new day begins that gives it this white flavor? Does the aroma and flavor crystalize in my awareness the new day as a clear, unblemished blank slate, despite the grayness that emerges with the dawning light? I don't really know, but the tea does taste white.

Under the thick mass of heavy gray clouds, which promise rain later in the day, playful wisps of gray fog tantalizingly veil what is and what may be. They rise, fall, dissolve, reappear. This flowing lightness – this aliveness – feels like such a contrast to the weightiness in the sky above. People 'in the know' say that gray is neutral, that it provides a neutral background for other colors. Sure doesn't feel 'neutral' as I contemplate these grays – they have such presence, such variations of strength, of perceived texture.

Off the cushion, my daily world and work consist of a focused observation, absorption and contemplation of color. This has been so for decades now, but particularly so during the past three years. I've been observing the flow of color, marking, for example, where indigo blue is no longer blue and becomes something else – the point at which that deep indigo blue of the evening summer sky flows into star-studded blackness. The color, like the sky, feels vast, and yet deeply concentrated, unbounded and yet centered.

Part of my work is also to observe the effect on people of a particular hue at different stages of the hue itself, and of the person's life as well – even if each 'stage' is part of the flow, and a

ABOUT 'OFF THE CUSHION'

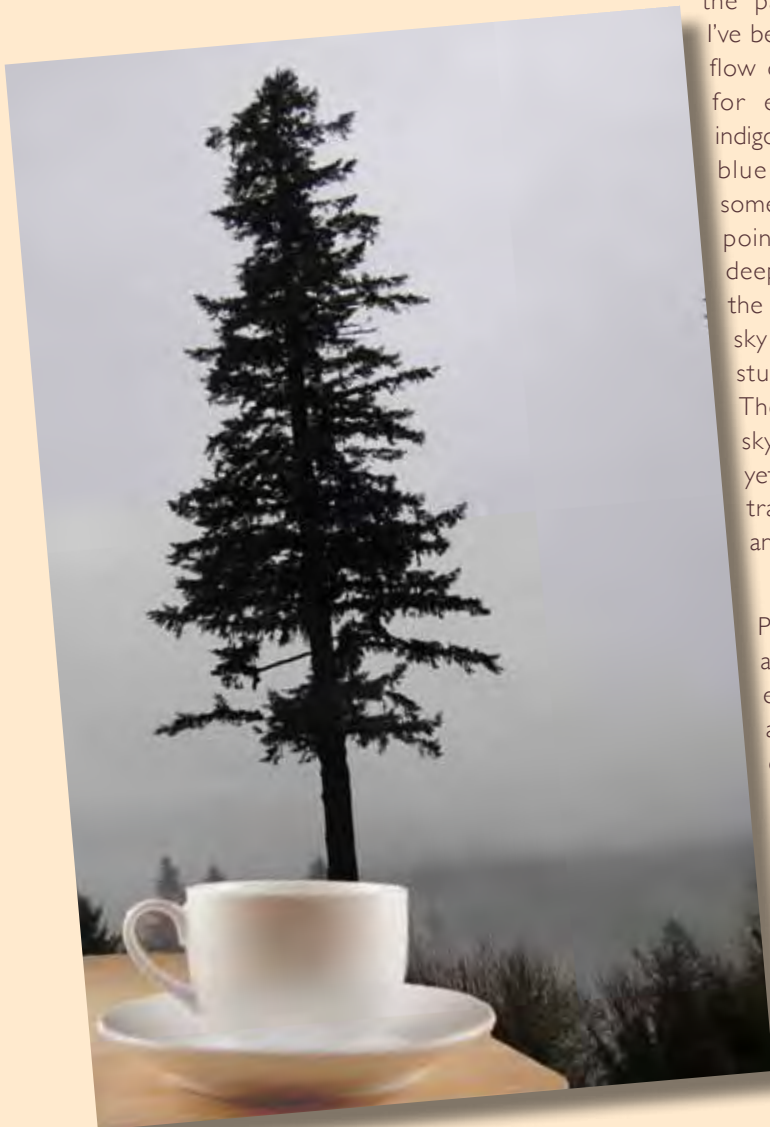
Off the Cushion is a new feature in our newsletter, in which we invite you to submit articles about what your practice means to you, of activities off the cushion which feel like an extension of your practice. Please e-mail your submissions to newsletter editor, Joshua Lipps, at joshualipps@gmail.com. ✍

color in its own right, not unlike the process we witnessed in Kyoto a few years ago, when we visited the shop of a traditional natural indigo hand dyer. The deep blueness of the garments he creates emerges in stages progressing from blue jean lightness to its final depth through the time-honored, mindful process of soaking the fabric in vats of blue and hanging it in the breeze to dry fifteen to twenty times.

Apart from feeling called to it, there are good reasons for this work, this contemplation of color. Most obviously, there are practical applications which help us create beauty and harmony with color.

Over the years, this work with the flow of color has been an example to me of the impermanence and essential emptiness of things. Form, after all, is exactly emptiness. This practice of color also shows me that in the contemplation of a small part, the whole is perceived.

This being so, I return to the whiteness of my cup of vanilla tea – which is now flowing into grayness, for the skies have opened and, though protected and apart from it, I am enveloped in earthy, thirst-quenching gray rain. ✍





MOUNTAINS WALKING

by Lee Ann Nail

There are few places of serious Zen training that integrate the traditional Zen arts as skillfully as Stones and Clouds Zendo. Last Saturday's zazen and jukai ceremony were another beautiful example of the many ways that practice awakens our senses and challenges the illusion of who we think we are.

During the full day of sitting, chanting and Dharma study - many of us also noticed that a bald eagle had appeared in the tall trees that overlook the Willamette River. Perhaps it was the same one we watched be (not so willingly) forced from its nest by its dedicated parents during last July's sesshin. That sesshin, we had walked kinhin in the garden amidst his loud complaints as the parents confidently encouraged his first flight. We realized that the 'first landing' was actually much more important than the 'first flight.' The parents had stayed ever so close, often forcing the direction of the novice's trajectory back to the safety of the nest.

It seemed appropriate that the bald eagle had reappeared just before the zazen's closing and Mike Seely's jukai ceremony. Mike is one of the regulars at Stones and Clouds and many of us already saw him as embodying the teachings. For the past few years, he has taken on the role as board

president and to me was both leaping out of the nest (of just sitting) and encouraging all of us to do the same.

As we began the ceremony, I was struck by a little artistic humor. The Japanese calligraphy, which had joined us for the day as the backdrop on the altar (and of whose meaning I had been silently wondering about), appeared on the front page of the sutra book's Jukai ceremony. Roshi later translated the kanji as 'harmony' (*wa*). What more can be said of becoming Buddhist, than it's a life of harmony?

I sat watching the joy of the sangha, the fact that everyone present was incorporated into the container which confers the precepts. It was harmony embodied: teacher, student, family and friends. We all recited the Ti'Sarana, the Verse of the Rakusu and the Heart Sutra and Mike offered his personal interpretation of each precept. It was deeply moving. I've always loved this opportunity to get to know a sangha member's personal struggle and heartfelt expression of what a life of practice means....of leaving the nest of zazen and entering the world of choices and responsibilities. These were embodied in Mike's vows and in his new Dharma name: Mountain Walking (*Seizan Unpo*), from Dogen's *Mountains and Rivers Sutra*.

A number of us marveled at the Japanese characters in Mike's name. There is a color tone also within the kanji and the sangha struggled to decide if it meant blue mountains or green mountains. Roshi eventually chimed in "it's blue/green mountain!" I took it to mean all mountains walking.

Departing, we followed each other along the path. The mountains and rivers were all visible and we looked again for the return of the nesting eagles. There were untold scents and even subtle hints of past tea gatherings. We stood in the parking lot reflecting on the beauty of this practice, the camaraderie of sangha and the joys of spring becoming summer. ✨





ON ZEN

DEATH POEM OF BAISEKI

(translated by Dr. Furuta Shokin)

The journey west,
a way that all would travel:
flower field.

LETTER OF ZEN MASTER TA HUI TO LIU YEN-CHUNG

(translated by J.C. Cleary)

Just because it's so very close, you cannot get this Truth out of your own eyes. When you open your eyes it strikes you, and when you close your eyes it's not lacking either. When you open your mouth you speak of it, and when you shut your mouth it appears by itself. But if you try to receive it by stirring your mind, you've already missed it by eighteen thousand miles. ♪



Harmony (wa)

THE POINT OF ZAZEN (excerpt)

by Zen Master Dogen
(translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi)

Who are beginners? Are there any who are not beginners? When do you leave beginner's mind? Know that in the definitive study of the buddha-dharma, you engage in zazen and endeavor in the way. At the heart of the teaching is a practicing buddha who does not seek to become a buddha. As a practicing buddha does not become a buddha, the fundamental point is realized. The embodiment of buddha is not becoming buddha. When you break through the snares and cages [of words and concepts], a sitting buddha does not hinder becoming a buddha. Thus right now, you have the ability to enter the realm of buddha and enter the realm of demons throughout the ages. Going forward and going backward, you personally have the freedom of overflowing ditches, overflowing valleys. ♪

HAIKU

by Joshua Lipps

Between the last
bites of Sunday night rice--
children laughing

Undiminished
another sunset gone
beyond the mountains

New spring green
even the tombstones
lighthearted ♪

THIS IS IT

by James Broughton

This is It
and I am It
and You are It
and so is That
and He is It
and She is It
and It is It
and That is That

O it is This
and it is Thus
and it is Them
and it is Us
and it is Now
and Here It is
and Here We are
so This is It ♪



SUMMER SESSHIN AT STONES AND CLOUDS ZENDO JULY 15 - 19, 2014



The 2014 Seven Thunders Zen Summer Sesshin will be held at the Stones and Clouds Zendo in Lake Oswego, OR, from Tuesday, July 15, at 5 p.m. until Saturday morning July 19, at 10 a.m.. Sesshin will be led by Leonard Marcel. Registration deadline is June 24. 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 June 24. Should you need

to cancel, all but \$25 is refundable until June 24; 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 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.**

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

**REGISTRATION FORM
STONES & CLOUDS SESSHIN, JULY 15 - 19, 2014**

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 June 30)

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 June 24).

I enclose \$110, deposit & member dues
(balance of member rate due by June 24).

Please make checks payable to Seven Thunders.