

SEVEN THUNDERS

newsletter

www.seventhunders.org



October 2025

SEVEN THUNDERS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Jared Taylor
503.989.8520
jared.sunbreaksustainable@gmail.com

Secretary

Dan Brown
503.504.2955
dcareybrown@gmail.com

Treasurer

Jenny Brausch
541.971.1297
seventhunders.treasurer@gmail.com

Director

Dan Dickinson
503.632.5957
firfield@bctonline.com

Director

Nicholas Coffey
503.851.4795
nick@coffey-geo.com

Director

Karen Beal
503.490.1357
KarenAnnbeal@gmail.com

Director

Kent Kreiselmaier
615.651.9816
Kenttx@aim.com

Newsletter Editor

Greg Smith
503.758.1020
gasmith@clark.edu

Newsletter Layout

Teresa Marcel
503.534.2600
StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com

TEACHERS

Leonard Marcel
503.636.9009
LJMarcel@comcast.net

Greg Smith
503.758.1020
gasmith@clark.edu

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



SILENCE AND RADIANCE

by Greg Smith

Teaching Zen is said to be like selling water by a river. The implication is that rather than buying anything from a questionable merchant, we can simply drop down our cups and drink freely. But too often, we are like the person who while in the midst of water cries out in thirst, to borrow a phrase from the great 18th-century Zen master, Hakuin. Like this person, we don't recognize what is already swirling around us and need someone to point it out. But what are we thirsting for, and what is the water?

What we are thirsting for is likely to be unique for each person. For some, it may be a sense of meaning or purpose in the face of death. For others, a sense of security and stability. For yet

others, relief from guilt and uncertainty. And for yet still others, an answer to an intimation that there is more to our lives than what might first be apparent. It must also be acknowledged that for many people, a thirst like this may never be part of their experience at all. Why some people are thirsty in this way and others are not seems like a fundamental mystery, for such thirst can both be a great burden as well as a great blessing.

For the Buddha, this thirst first manifested itself on the day he ventured out of the palace compound where he had been sequestered as a child, adolescent, and young adult and discovered that the world included pain and loss as well as the delights and pleasures he had been afforded as the son of a local king. After seeing a person who was diseased, another who showed the signs of aging, and a third who had died, he realized that similar experiences awaited him and those he loved. He understood that what he had thought to be permanent was in fact transient and ever-changing, and this shook him to his core. He became very thirsty, enough to leave his privileged life, his wife, and a young son to find some relief.

It took him six years of strenuous ascetic practices to suspect that he was already standing in the water that would cure his thirst. He ate a light meal then stopped and sat under a tree. He

Continued on page 6

IN THIS ISSUE:

Silence and Radiance	pg 1
7 Thunders retreats & events	pg 2
7 Thunders sittings	pg 2
Other Pacific Northwest Groups	pg 2
President's Report	pg 3
Summer Sesshin, Transmission	pg 4
Zen & the Mystic Impulse	pg 9
Death & Dying Part II	pg 9
Speaking Out Collectively - or Not	pg 11
Rohatsu Sesshin Registration	pg 13
January CIR Registration	pg 14



SEVEN THUNDERS RETREATS & EVENTS

REGULAR SITTINGS

PORTLAND AREA SITTINGS

■ Monday evenings at Stones and Clouds Zendo, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., zazen & dokusan. Hybrid events with both in-zendo attendance and online via Zoom. Further details at: seventhunders.org. ⚡

FIRST SATURDAY SITTINGS

■ Monthly "First Saturday" sittings are held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey, with an online option. Links to join the sitting online can be found on the SevenThunders website at seven-thunders.org. The format includes formal group sitting beginning at 9:00 a.m., a talk by the teacher 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, the Abbey and Seven Thunders are gratefully accepted. The schedule for the remainder of 2025 and 2026 is:

- October 4, Sr. Kathleen Pruitt
 - November 1, Leonard Marcel
 - December 6, Fr. Casey Bailey, OCSO
 - January 3, Sr. Kathleen Pruitt
 - February 7, Leonard Marcel
 - March 7, Leonard Marcel
 - April 4, Leonard Marcel
 - May 2, Fr. Casey Bailey, OCSO
 - June 6, Sr. Kathleen Pruitt
 - July 11*, Sr. Kathleen Pruitt
 - August 1, Leonard Marcel
 - September 12*, Sr. Kathleen Pruitt
 - October 3, Sr. Kathleen Pruitt
 - November 7, Leonard Marcel
 - December 5, Fr. Casey Bailey, OCSO
- (* = second Saturday)

RETREAT SCHEDULE

- November 15 – Bend Retreat, led by Leonard Marcel. Online only. For more information and to register, please contact Denise Fainberg at 541.213.8001 or dsfainberg@yahoo.com.
- December 2 - 7 – Rohatsu Sesshin at Stones & Clouds, led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 13.
- January 23 - 24, 2026 – Contemplative Intensive Retreat (CIR) online only, led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 14.

ZAZENKAI

■ Unless otherwise noted, zazenkai are held at the Stones and Clouds (Rai'un) Zendo in Lake Oswego, led by Leonard Marcel. These are usually hybrid events, held from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with full in-zendo attendance available upon reservation. More details on page 10.

- October 18 - Led by Greg Smith, in person only.
- February 21, 2026
- March 21
- August 15



OTHER PACIFIC NORTHWEST DIAMOND SANGHA GROUPS

SALEM SITTINGS

■ Salem Zen Center. Offerings on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Teacher: LeeAnn Nail. For more information email SalemZenCenter@gmail.com or call 971.599.1488. ⚡

PORTLAND SITTINGS

■ Ring of Moss Sangha. Zazen: Wednesday evenings, 6:30-8:30 p.m. and Sunday mornings, 7:30-8:30 a.m.; virtually on Tuesday mornings, 6:00-7:00 a.m. Contact: Teacher Andrew Mason at andrewmasonpdx@gmail.com. ⚡

OLYMPIA SITTINGS

■ Contemplative Community at St. Michael's. 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. Contact: Mary Solberg, 360.250.6362 or msolberg2@gmail.com. ⚡

PORT ANGELES SITTINGS

■ NO Sangha. 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. ⚡

SEATTLE SITTINGS

■ Three Treasures Sangha. Teacher: Lee Shields. 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, go to their website at: www.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 Jenny Brausch at SevenThunders.treasurer@gmail.com. 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 no longer receive the newsletter. Please send membership dues to: Jenny Brausch, PO Box 3119, Albany, OR 97321. ⚡



PRESIDENT'S REPORT: ON GIVING, RECEIVING AND ACTING

by Jared Taylor

As I am writing, the first big rain in months is soaking into the earth around my office. Although I am grateful for the change in season, I will miss the warm dry months and the buzzing activity of Summer. This Summer was a particularly bustling period for Seven Thunders. On June 29th Leonard and Teresa hosted a sangha discussion on preparing for death. It was well attended in person and online, and I want to thank all participants for contributing to a very valuable, and intimate, discussion. A follow-up session will be held on November 16th at 1 p.m., again at Stones and Clouds. I hope that you all will consider joining the conversation.

On July 19th we closed out the annual Summer Sesshin with the Dharma Transmission ceremony for Greg Smith. On behalf of Seven Thunders, I want to again extend our congratulations and profound gratitude to Greg for his willingness to serve our small community, and the greater Diamond Sangha, as a teacher and lineage holder. Following the transmission, we moved into the annual meeting and potluck, which was a lovely reminder that sharing a meal and conversation in person is a joyous event.

While we ate, we celebrated the founding of Seven Thunders and the early years sitting at the Trappist Abbey in Carlton. Leonard and Jane shared dear memories and stories of that time, keeping the history of Seven Thunders alive. We then moved into the business of the annual meeting and elected two new members to the board of directors, Karen Beal and Kent Kreiselmaier, bringing board membership back up to seven members. I look forward to their wise counsel in the coming months.


During the annual meeting we also discussed a proposal to share a portion of our financial resources with other organizations that are making a positive impact on the community. That topic was taken up again at our board meeting in August, where, after a robust discussion, we decided upon four recipients. We agreed to give \$1,000 from our scholarship fund to the GoFundMe campaign for Robin

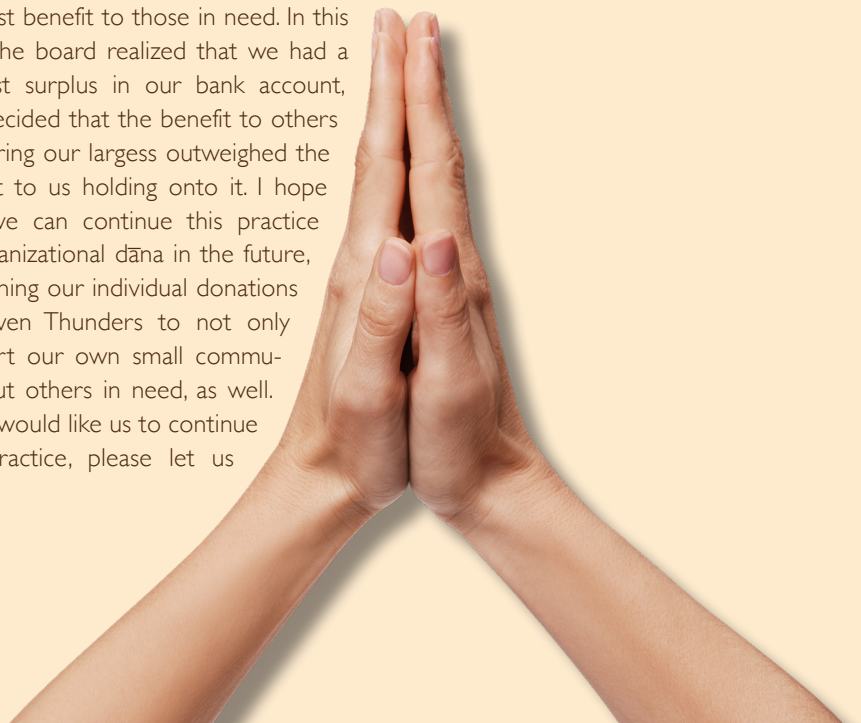
Lance. This donation constitutes a portion of the funds needed to take the next steps in her formal Soto training, which will directly benefit the Salem Zen Center. We also voted to give \$1,000 each to Oregon Public Broadcasting and the Oregon Food Bank, both of which provide critical support to our local community in difficult times. Finally, we chose to give \$2,000 to Dandelion House, a Catholic Worker house that is on the frontlines addressing critical needs and social justice (food, shelter, advocacy and spiritual care) for the most vulnerable in our area. We decided to make a larger donation to Dandelion House because they provide holistic care that aligns well with our own mission, and they are the most needful of donations.

On the topic of donations, I want to briefly touch upon the importance of *dāna*. *Dāna* is generosity, and its perfection, *dānapāramitā*, is the first of the Six *Pāramitās*. Perfecting and embodying generosity allows us to relinquish greed and attachment, a necessary part of our Contemplative and Zen practice. It also allows us to directly contribute to the well-being of others, another important aspect of our practice. While *dāna* is an important individual practice, harnessing our collective generosity can make it easier to bring the greatest benefit to those in need. In this case, the board realized that we had a modest surplus in our bank account, and decided that the benefit to others of sharing our largess outweighed the benefit to us holding onto it. I hope that we can continue this practice of organizational *dāna* in the future, combining our individual donations to Seven Thunders to not only support our own small community, but others in need, as well. If you would like us to continue this practice, please let us know.

Finally, at the conclusion of the annual meeting, longtime member Paul Birkeland raised an important issue for the consideration of the membership and the board. The resulting discussion is recounted elsewhere in this newsletter, but here I want to highlight some related questions that it brought to light. Specifically, how does a spiritual person respond appropriately to societal concerns? What are the nuts and bolts of a bodhisattva's activism? How does one effectively advocate for a cause or a specific course of action, while staying true to the Precepts and not choosing sides? I have found these questions incredibly engaging, and believe that a group conversation, in the same vein as our discussion on preparing for death, may be valuable for all of us. If you would be interested in such a chat, please let me know.

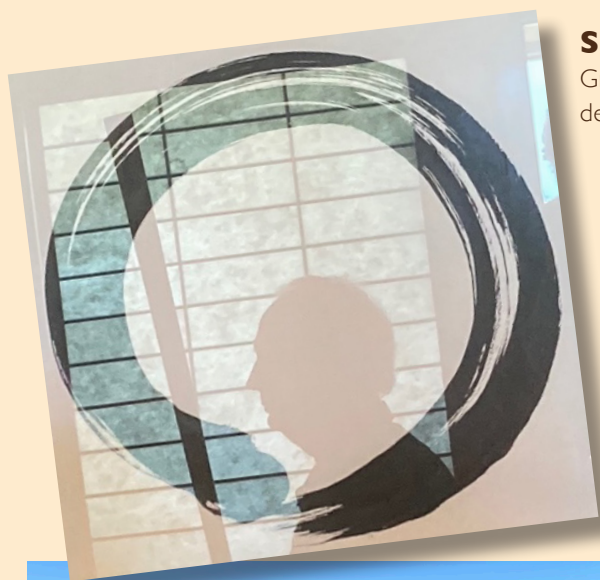
I hope that you all enjoy the cooler weather and soothing rain of Autumn, and I look forward to practicing with you as we continue on down the path together.

Gassho. 





SUMMER SESSHIN, TRANSMISSION CEREMONY AND ANNUAL MEETING IN PHOTOS



Summer Sesshin, held July 15 - 19, was followed by the transmission ceremony for Greg Smith on the morning of July 19. This was followed by a celebratory Seven Thunders Annual Meeting and potluck. Here are the events summarized in photos. ⚡



Top left: Ino Dan Dickinson reflected in the Enso picture at Stones & Clouds Zendo. Photo by Paul Birkeland. **Middle Left:** Outdoor kinhin during sesshin. **Bottom left:** sesshin attendees, standing left to right: Robin Lance, Carol Raphael, Jared Taylor, Dan Dickinson, David Stanley, Teresa Marcel, Mike Seely, Greg Smith, Paul Birkeland, Pam Evans, Kent Kreiselmaier, Tom Davies. Seated: Leonard Marcel. **Bottom Right:** Shosan. Left to right: Leonard Marcel, Lee Ann Nail, Jared Taylor, Greg Smith, Dan Dickinson. **Top Right:** Leonard Marcel and Greg Smith during the transmission ceremony. Photo by Mike Seely. All other photos by Teresa Marcel.





Top left: The two roshis: Leonard Marcel and Greg Smith. **Top right:** Leonard Marcel presenting gifts to Greg Smith during the ceremony. **Middle left:** the three Seven Thunder teachers: Lee Ann Nail, Leonard Marcel and Greg Smith. **Bottom left:** the annual meeting gathering in the garden. Photo by Mike Seely. **Bottom right:** Greg Smith's thank you note to the Sangha.

July 24, 2025

Dear Seven Thunders
Brothers & Sisters,
Many thanks for the ball
and all we have shared
over our years of practice
together. Your support and
friendship have meant more
to me than I can say.

Gassho,
Greg

**SILENCE & RADIANCE,** *continued from page 1*

recalled what it was like to sit in his parents' garden as a young child and then do nothing more than this. Sitting and observing with an open, pure awareness. When confronted with frightening or tempting images thrown up by his mind, he simply reached out and touched the earth to ground himself. On the eighth day at dawn, he looked up and saw the morning star, recognizing who and where he was. At that moment, he dropped down his cup, drank fully, and was satisfied. He spent the next forty years alerting others in his world to what they also could discover. Places like this zendo are ripples from the words he cast then.

Huineng, a Chinese peasant who became the Sixth Zen Patriarch after having drunk the same water, pointedly made the observation that there is no difference between ordinary people and Buddhas aside from the fact that Buddhas have recognized their true identities and ordinary people have not. The word Buddha simply means awakened. The Buddha woke up to that identity and so did Huineng. Huineng went on to say that the role of a teacher is not to give people anything but to help them discover what they already possess, to see the water all around and within them that is available to quench their thirst.

Over the past six years after taking on the

responsibility of becoming an apprentice Zen teacher, I've begun to get a sense of what this responsibility entails. One of its great challenges lies in the fact that it's hard, if not impossible, to find words capable of describing what the water is that some people thirst for. The great 13th-century Zen teacher Daio Kokushi observed that by letting words escape his golden mouth, even the Buddha filled heaven and earth with entangling briars. Any words used inevitably contribute to the formation of conceptions that by their nature are limiting and potentially misleading. And yet, words are one of the fundamental tools we have to share with others. How can I reconcile this paradox? How do I say, "Look, the water is right there, it's already getting your feet wet."

In Zen, that answer lies in suggesting that people simply do what the Buddha did when he stopped and sat under that tree 25 centuries ago. Stop. Sit down. Be quiet. Or as iconoclastic Zen teacher Brad Warner says, "Sit down and shut up." In this way, we might recognize the water that we have otherwise ignored. After reading Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen* when I was in my early twenties, I took this message to heart during a time when I realized I needed to commit myself to some-

thing, anything. So I sat down and shut up for initially about five minutes every morning upon waking and every evening before turning in, and I never stopped. It didn't take much to get me started – no formal instruction, just some drawings and guidelines in a book as well as some realization stories – including one about Yamada Rōshi, Robert Aitken's teacher whose picture is in the hallway. I can't say that I know what I was thirsting for when I did this, but I soon discovered that this exercise in seemingly doing nothing anchored my life in ways nothing else had done before. I found something I could commit myself to, and all the other commitments I've subsequently made are rooted in this.

So what is this? Most simply, it is the silent awareness that can emerge when we sit quietly with regularity, the silent awareness that exists below our thoughts when we give ourselves the opportunity to notice it. It's like recognizing that the splash of light on a lake reflecting the sun or moon is in fact made up of hundreds or thousands of separate and distinct images of the sun or moon flashing on and off as the water moves. I'd never seen this until I was in my mid-twenties camping in the Mountain Lakes Wilderness Area in Southern Oregon. Now I cannot not see this if I remember to look. Regular zazen provides the opportunity to remember to look for that silence and the radiance that rest below the internal dialogue which never stops, although it can be slowed.

And when that happens, the whole world might open up in the way that lake in the moonlight opened up to me a half century ago. A Zen teacher in 12th-century China, Hongzhi Zhengjue, wrote a poem that describes that relationship between silence and what can arise thanks to it. Its title is often translated as "Silent Illumination," but recently a dharma heir of Aitken Rōshi, Nelson Foster, and a noted translator of Chinese texts from this period, Paul Kroll, realized that in the original, silent does



Continued on page 7

**SILENCE & RADIANCE,** *continued from page 6*

not serve as a modifier of illumination but rather stands on its own. Furthermore, the English word that best matches the Chinese character often defined as illumination is radiance. They titled their translation of the poem as "Inscription on Silence and Radiance."

This small shift better describes what returning to that silence can bring with it. Rather than some internal illumination, some form of enlightenment from within, what happens instead is that we see the radiance that has always inhered in the universe and all its manifestations. Writing this now, the sword ferns and daisies and sunflowers are bright in the sunlight; but radiant, as well, is the marigold under the shade of the umbrella that protects the outdoor table. Looking out into the yard, the red plum tree, the Douglas fir, the catalpa, the hemlock, the vine maple all quiver in the midday breeze and glisten in the same way the moon glistened in its thousand reflections on Mystic Lake (I'm not making this up). And the song of the black-headed grosbeak brings with it the same radiance, only aural.

Our 13th-century Japanese ancestor, Eihei Dogen, is reported by Hakuin to have said to his teacher Juching after his own awakening experience, "I did as you instructed, placing my mind throughout my body. Now both my mind and body have fallen away. It is like a brilliant sun illuminating the vast heavens, although its round shape cannot be seen." This well matches a similar insight when Dogen later writes: "That the self

advances and confirms the ten thousand things is called delusion; that the ten thousand things confirm and advance the self is called enlightenment." The experience of waking up is the experience of realizing that this light – like Hakuin's water – is all around and within us. So it's not surprising that the Buddha says after seeing the morning star, "I, together with all beings and the great earth, simultaneously achieve the Way."

The challenge in recognizing the degree to which our lives are co-terminus with the universe – with everything around us – is this means that that everything includes sickness, old age and death and all the suffering they bring with them. There is no escape from the reality of impermanence and change, as well as no escape from human behaviors that disregard our fundamental interconnectedness.

I recently watched a television series based on a Man-Booker award novel entitled *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Its author, Richard Flanagan, is the son of a man from Tasmania who was a member of a unit of Australian prisoners of war forced to build a railway through what was then Burma during World War II. The conditions they endured were horrific beyond belief, and their treatment by their Japanese captors was a major factor in that horror. After watching the series, I read an interview with Flanagan written not long after his novel was published a decade ago. In it, he said that his father would tell stories about his experience in the jungle, primarily re-

lating events that had less to do with the horror than the relationships among the prisoners that helped keep them alive. His father mentioned at one point that he was grateful for having been a prisoner of war since it saved him from having to kill others.

In the concluding scenes of the series, I found myself weeping in response to the protracted suffering and cruelty they depicted, but I was also surprised at the same time to feel a deep wonder about the capacity of human beings to bring forth their best selves when placed in extreme conditions. I had read the novel when it first was published on the advice of a friend in England and had found it be almost unbearable in its depiction of brutality. I questioned my desire to watch the series, but my response to it helped me realize the degree to which the opposites of our lives are like the different sides of a piece of paper – as Thich Nhat Hahn once stated. As Dogen saw, that radiance incorporates everything – suffering and pain and cruelty as well as delight, love, and compassion.

At issue for us is how we respond to these varied and unpredictable conditions, and it's here that an observation made by Yamada Roshi that Zen practice is the perfection of character becomes especially useful. When asked to elaborate on this assertion, Yamada Roshi said our daily lives can be likened to a stone in a rock tumbler whose rough edges are worn down as it bumps against others and whose best qualities are ideally polished. What is that best in

Continued on page 8

**SILENCE & RADIANCE,***continued from page 7*

us that deserves to be polished? The three pure precepts I addressed earlier in today's service provide a clear response. They are often translated as: to cease from evil, do only good, and do good for others. But this leaves open the question of what is evil and what is good. From the Buddhist insight that our own lives are coterminous with the lives and existence of everything around us, evil actions are those that disregard this common identity and fail to recognize that when we harm others we harm ourselves. Good actions are those that support and extend that common relationship. Our task as Buddhist practitioners is to bring more and more of our actions into harmony with that understanding.

Along with the Ten Grave Precepts I shared earlier, the Metta Sutra – or the Loving Kindness Sutra – provides even more explicit guidance by urging Buddhists to be able and upright, straight-forward and gentle in speech, contented and easily satisfied, humble and not conceited, unburdened with duties and frugal in all things, peaceful and calm, wise and skillful, not proud and demanding in nature. This is what it looks

like to embody the understanding that our lives are not separate from the world around us. We will inevitably fail in our effort to meet these expectations. As Norma Wong Roshi from the Chozen-ji Rinzai Temple in Hawaii has observed, "People are Buddhas who make mistakes." Even an illustrious teacher like Dogen observed that the life of a Zen master is one continuous mistake. Although there may be no way around these mistakes, in acknowledging them we are more likely to experience the polishing that Yamada Roshi associated with the perfection of character he said is what Zen practice is all about.

For me, the most profound of Buddhist insights is found in Hakuin Zenji's "Song of Zazen" when he asserts that

This very place is the Lotus Land,
This very body the Buddha.

Embodying these words requires accepting the world as it is but at the same time bringing to that world and the beings within it the perspective and compassion of a Buddha. So silence and radiance lie at the

heart of what I hope to share in my remaining years as a Buddhist and a teacher. In silence, we discover the possibility of being and acting in the world as it is, both it and us liberated from the constraining assumptions and concepts we can so easily bring to it. And within that silence, we are more likely to encounter the radiance that Hakuin's dharma heir Torei Zenji celebrates in his "Bodhisattva's Vow:

At the peak of each thought a lotus flower opens, and on each flower there is revealed a Buddha.

Everywhere is the Pure Land in its beauty.

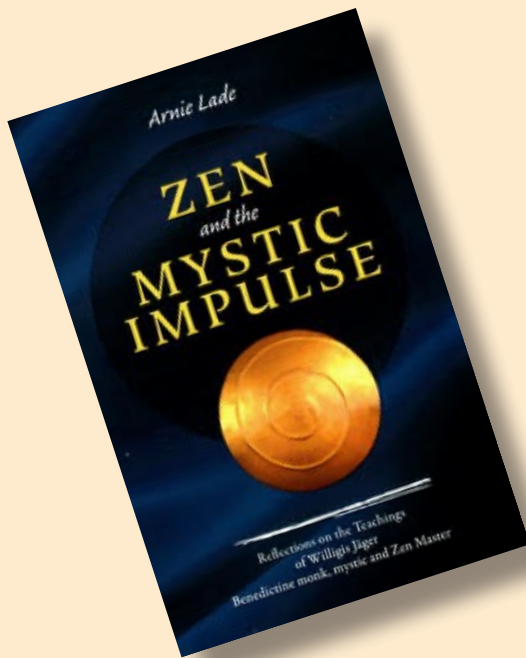
We see fully the Tathagata's radiant light right where we are.

May we retain this mind and extend it throughout the world so that we and all beings become mature in Buddha's wisdom. ⚡





BOOK REVIEW: ZEN AND THE MYSTIC IMPULSE



A book about Willigis Jäger, *Zen and the Mystic Impulse*, by one of his students has recently been published. On the recommendation of Robert Aitken-Roshi, Benedictine monk and a Zen Master Jäger played an active role in Seven Thunders during its early years. Reflecting on this volume, author Arnie Lade writes that "Mysticism is the path of transformation that leads to fulfillment, renewed meaning, and the realization of an authentic, whole person. This journey is achieved through the rediscovery and connection to the foundation of one's being and by finding true belonging in life to something greater than oneself."

Reviewers have been positive about the book's value:

"Intimacy is the essence of Zen. Arnie Lade's profound offering carries a deeply intimate portrayal of teacher Willigis Jäger. Reading this book gave me the feeling of being in the

presence of a humble, wise friend. This transmission from Willigis through Arnie is a great gift for anyone on any spiritual path."

— Russell Delman, Founder of the Embodied Life

"When the world seems to fall apart, it's even more important to be well-rooted. Zen and mystical practices have the ability to access the deeper layers of human existence and to both energize and calm our souls. This, however, requires experienced guidance as provided by Arnie Lade through his insights and reflections on the teachings of Willigis Jäger, a modern-day Christian mystic and Zen Master."

— Dr. Christoph Quarch, Philosopher and author

Zen and the Mystic Impulse can be ordered online at Amazon.com. It is also available directly from the publisher, Lotuspress.com. ⚡

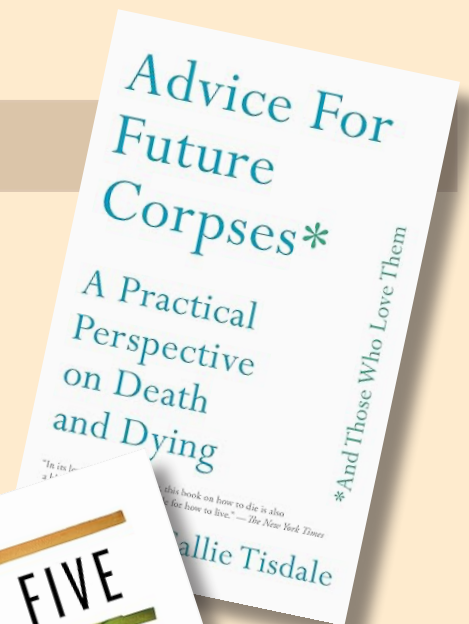
DEATH & DYING, PART II – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16

A follow-up discussion to our June discussion about preparing for death and dying will be held on **Sunday, November 16, 1:00 p.m.** at the Stones and Clouds Zendo. As for the previous meeting, this will be a hybrid event. If you would like to attend, please e-mail Teresa at stonescloudszendo@icloud.com, specifying whether you wish to attend in-zendo or online.

This gathering will give us an opportunity to report on our own efforts to deal with some of the practical details related to the end of our lives – power of attorney, advanced directives, wills, lists of passwords, instructions for funeral services and what to do with our bodies. It will also give us a chance to explore what death means to us as practicing Buddhists.

Two books could be helpful in preparing for this discussion. Sallie Tisdale's *Advice for Future Corpses: A Practical Perspective on Death and Dying* does a good job of describing ways that we can make our passing less burdensome for our families and those we love. Frank Ostaseski's *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully* delves deeply into the ways that death can contribute to life.

As Dogen notes in his fascicle, *Shoji*, when we talk about life and death, we are really talking about life-death. ⚡





DIAMOND SANGHA: DEFINING STATEMENT

In April, 2025 ten of the Diamond Sangha teachers who serve sanghas in North America, Mexico, and South America gathered at the Ring of Bone Zendo outside Nevada City, California, for five days of meetings. One of the topics focused on the crafting of a statement that could represent the Diamond Sangha to the broader world, especially during this period of transition and uncertainty.

In our discussions, the ten of us spelled out the central issues we believed were important to include in such a statement. Three of us took responsibility for fine tuning the language and then distributing it back to this initial group. Once we were satisfied with what we'd developed, we shared it with the entire community of Diamond Sangha teachers including those who were not able to join us from North America as well as our colleagues in Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, approximately sixty people in number. Feedback was sought from everyone, even if this required multiple e-mails and on occasion phone calls. We urged people to see this document as a good enough description of our family resemblance. At the same time, we wanted our fellow teachers to identify passages that they believed needed to be revised. This led to a four-month on-line dialogue that in the end resulted in the following document.

It is hoped that this statement will provoke conversation in zendos throughout our widespread sangha and serve as an introduction to the practice we offer to newcomers:

The Diamond Sangha is a lay Zen Buddhist lineage grounded in the heritage of our Chinese and Japanese traditions and drawing upon both major streams of Zen, Sōtō and Rinzai. We work to further the way of practice and realization laid out by Chan and Zen masters down through the ages and especially by our founding teacher, Robert Aitken Rōshi. Communities of the Diamond Sangha are functionally independent and diverse in many respects yet united in a commitment to penetrating inquiry into the great matter of life-and-death and to the welfare of all beings, including the mountains and rivers themselves. We hold that practice and realization must be embodied not just in the way that we conduct ourselves at temples and training centers but also throughout our lives – in relationships personal and familial, social and environmental, economic and political. ⚡



UPCOMING ZAZENKAI

Zazenkai are an opportunity for intense practice with the sangha in a shorter time-frame than a sesshin, since they are limited to one day only. They take place between 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. In addition to formal zazen, the day includes a sutra service, teisho, and dokusan.

The next zazenkai will take place on **Saturday, October 18 at the Franciscan Spiritual Center, 3159 Furman Dr, Marylhurst, OR 97036**. Exceptionally, it will be **in-person only**. This zazenkai will be led by Diamond Sangha teacher **Greg Smith**.

Please contact Teresa Marcel at StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com to **reserve a place for Zazenkai**. She will confirm your reservation and send you the zazenkai schedule and guidelines a few days before the event.

A study group will follow the October zazenkai. This study group will last approximately one hour and will involve listening to a recording of a segment from the *Platform Sutra of the Chinese Sixth Patriarch, Huineng*, followed by a discussion.

Zazenkai thus far scheduled for 2026 will take place on: February 21, March 21 and August 15.

While there is no set fee for zazenkai, a donation of \$20 is requested and much appreciated to help cover costs, including rental of space at the Franciscan Spiritual Center. To offer a donation, please either leave it in the donation basket in the hallway leading to the room used as a zendo, donate online at <https://seventhunders.org/asp-products/donate/> or send a check to Seven Thunders Treasurer:

Jenny Brausch
P.O. Box 3119
Albany, OR 97321

Please make checks out to "Seven Thunders." ⚡



SPEAKING OUT COLLECTIVELY - OR NOT

*Jared Taylor and Paul Birkeland,
edited by Greg Smith*

At the 2025 Seven Thunders Annual Meeting, our long-time member and regular jlkijitsu for summer sesshin, Paul Birkeland, spoke of his concerns about the current direction of the U.S. administration and his belief that our organization should speak out against its policies and actions. A rich and heartfelt discussion ensued, followed by a formal request from Paul to the board about the crafting and dissemination of such a statement. At its meeting on August 20, 2025, the board decided to not follow through with this request while at the same time encouraging Seven Thunders members to act as individuals when they felt moved to do so. Prior to and after this meeting, Paul and board president Jared Taylor engaged in an extensive on-line conversation about this issue.

One of the first issues raised about making and distributing such a statement was that it could endanger our status as a non-profit organization. In an early communication with Jared, Paul addressed this issue, something that was quickly resolved as the dialogue continued.

Paul: I understand the concern that speaking out or acting as an organization on a “political” matter could result in the loss of non-profit status. But I guess I look at it another way. Speaking out or taking action at the risk of losing our non-profit status makes our words and actions more powerful. Speaking out is easy when there is nothing to lose. When there is genuinely something at stake, one’s words and stance have much more weight and credibility in one’s community, amongst one’s peers, and to the public at large. If it is true that we are risking our non-profit status, then that is all the more reason for Seven Thunders to stand up.

Jared: You know that I, and others, have raised the issue of the prohibition on political action by charitable organizations. The original rule defined a charity or church as an organization “which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.” The rule really only pertains to the support of candidates and campaigns, not necessarily of supporting or opposing wider policies.

Paul argued, as well, that the motivation for his recommendation was not political so much as it is moral.

Paul: I think there is also a strong argument that the actions we are fighting are not a political issue. I don’t think that “disappearing” people to face torture and inhumane conditions in concentration camps, or to be sent to countries they have never been to and simply released with just the clothes on their backs, is at all political. Less dramatically, the repeated and intentional violation of our individual rights and our Constitution, i.e. the destruction of our democracy, is not a political issue. History has shown that such actions result in a deepening spiral of oppression and violence that we can avoid by taking action.

Jared: I think that there is a lot that we can say and do that falls short of supporting/opposing candidates or campaigns. Taking a moral stand in opposition to the incarceration of innocent immigrants should be allowed. Taking a stand on the importance of funding climate science and medical research should be allowed. Supporting justice projects, legal defense funds, food banks, and even public broadcasting should all be allowed. Signing a joint letter in support of treating all beings with respect and dignity is allowed. Calling for an end to war, violence, and injustice is allowed. That’s quite a lot of room for action! Calling for the impeachment of a president would not be allowed.

After it became clear that the writing and dissemination of a statement about specific action and policies would not in itself jeopardize the organization’s non-profit status, Paul and Jared

Continued on page 12





SPEAKING OUT COLLECTIVELY - OR NOT, *continued from page 11*



grappled with the central issue: whether it was appropriate for Seven Thunders to do something like this in the name of all of its members. Paul's argument for doing so and Jared's response follow:

Paul: As John Updike wrote, "We are living in the time between the death and the birth of the gods." What gods do we want to see birthed? Compassion? Generosity? Justice? If so, we need to work to bring those about. This is our chance! Otherwise, the gods of fear, ignorance, and hate will come to rule. This is the proposed action I feel most strongly about:

1. Seven Thunders should take a Public Stand.

2. I would like to see Seven Thunders develop, release, and publicize a statement opposing actions [the abduction and deportation of documented and undocu-

mented immigrants and Presidential actions that violate Constitutional norms] from a moral position.

3. I would like Seven Thunders to take the lead in reaching out to and recruiting other spiritual communities across the nation for a joint statement and call to action.

Such a statement from an organization carries more weight than an individual statement. It makes clear to people that those actions are immoral and should be resisted and fought. It takes away social license from our government to execute such a program. It gives people social license to resist and fight, however they see doing it.

Jared: I think that it is more important to encourage our members to be aware of what is happening in this country and around the world, and to respond in an authentic way than to take a public stand on behalf of Sev-

en Thunders. I would rather see fifty of our members working with the food bank than add my signature to an open letter on behalf of the organization (although I will sign a thousand open letters, and contribute to their drafting, as an individual). We can each take a stand, as individuals, without holding signs announcing that we are from Seven Thunders.

... it is all too easy to assume that everyone in our sangha shares the same political preferences. It may be that there are members who would object to using organizational resources to make a political statement. There may even be members that support the current administration and its policies. I believe that the Precepts encourage us to offer respectful correction to others and to stand up in the face of injustice, but also protect others' rights to cherish opposing views.

As Dan Brown raised with me after the annual meeting, we can make a difference in our community without alienating anyone. ... As an organization, we can certainly contribute to the health and well-being of all beings, without needing to lead the charge against particular policies or politicians.

Although the decision of the Seven Thunders Board reflects the position of the larger Diamond Sangha organizations as a whole, there are no easy answers to the difficult questions Paul's request raises. Hopefully, the conversations that have arisen from it will continue, and as a sangha we will consider ways that we might both individually and collectively contribute to the healing of our increasingly fractured nation and world. ⚡

NOTE: Long-standing Seven Thunders member, Paul Birkeland, is inviting any member who is interested in taking action to protest US government actions that are adversely impacting families and communities to contact him at pbirkeland@seanet.com. ⚡



The 2024 Seven Thunders Rohatsu Sesshin, will be conducted at the Stones and Clouds Zendo in Lake Oswego, OR. This is planned as a hybrid event from **December 2 - 7** with full in-zendo in-person attendance as well as online attendance.

The hybrid event will take place from Tuesday, December 2, starting at 7 p.m. and end on Sunday, December 7 at 10 a.m. We will be following an **abbreviated schedule this year, with each day commencing at 9 a.m. and ending at 6 p.m.** Only the lunch meal will be provided for those attending in-zendo.

Sesshin will be led by Leonard Marcel. Space is limited to a maximum of 14 full-time in-person and 10 online. If attending online, you will sit in your own space, access the retreat via Zoom on your own device and provide your own meals. Those attending online will be sent a link for the retreat as well as a PDF containing the retreat schedule,

all chants, and cautions a few days before retreat begins.

Registration deadline is November 11. Registrations will be accepted on a first come basis. Additional applicants will be wait-listed in case of cancellations. As this sesshin is usually well subscribed, early registration and payment is encouraged.

Sesshin fees are as follows:

In-person retreat attendance:

member: \$260, non-member: \$290.

Online retreat attendance:

member: \$160, non-member: \$190.

In all cases, the extra \$30 of the non-member fee can be applied to your Seven Thunders membership, should you choose to do so, which then qualifies you for the member rate for all other Seven Thunders regular retreats and sesshin through the remainder of the calendar year. Should you

ROHATSU SESSHIN DECEMBER 2025

need to cancel, all but \$30 will be refunded for cancellation requests received by the retreat coordinator on or before November 18; half the fee will be refunded if received by November 25; no refund in the last week before the retreat. 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.

To register for the retreat, please e-mail registrar at **StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com** to signal your intent to attend, and then complete the form below and send it with your fee to:

Teresa Marcel
1333 Skyland Drive
Lake Oswego, OR 97034.

Please make checks payable to **Seven Thunders**. Alternatively, you may pay the fee online at **seventhunders.org**. Click on the 'Contribute' tab and follow the donation process. Please be sure to enter "Rohatsu sesshin fee" in the notes section. Questions? Please contact Teresa Marcel at 503.636.9009 or **StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com** ✨

REGISTRATION FORM

ROHATSU SESSHIN, DECEMBER 2 - 7, 2025

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Special needs _____

☐ I commit to participating fully in the entire schedule.

In-person attendance:

☐ member: \$260, ☐ non-member: \$290

Online attendance:

☐ member: \$160, ☐ non-member: \$190

☐ Donation for Scholarships \$ _____

☐ Request a Scholarship of \$ _____



VIRTUAL CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR) JANUARY 23 - 24, 2026

The 2026 January CIR will take place via Zoom, January 23 & 24, 2026. It will be led by Leonard Marcel.

The retreat will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Friday, January 23 and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 24. You will sit in your own space, access the retreat via Zoom on your own device and provide your own meals. Once your registration has been received and accepted, you will be sent a link for the retreat as well as a PDF containing the retreat schedule and all retreat prayers.

The retreat is open to a maximum of 12 attendees, and the total fee is \$75 for Seven Thunders members, \$105 for non-members. **Please notify registrar Teresa Marcel at StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com** of your intention to attend this retreat. You may then register by sending your check to:

Teresa Marcel
1333 Skyland Drive
Lake Oswego, OR 97034



Or, you may pay the fee online at SevenThunders.org (click on the 'Contribute' tab and follow the donation process. In the "note" box enter "January CIR fee.")

Fees are payable in full to confirm your registration. Should you need to cancel, all but \$30 will be refunded for cancellation requests received by retreat registrar on or before January 8; half the fee (\$38/\$53) will be refunded if received by January 15; no refund in the last week before the retreat. Partial scholarships are available to Seven Thunders members. Registrations will be made in the order received by registrar. ⚡

REGISTRATION FORM

CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR) JANUARY 23 - 24, 2026

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Special needs _____

☐ Full payment of \$105 enclosed

☐ \$75 (Seven Thunders members)

☐ Donation for Scholarships \$ _____

☐ Request a Scholarship of \$ _____

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