

# SEVEN THUNDERS

newsletter

www.seventhunders.org

February 2026



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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.



## FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD

by Leonard Marcel

*Note: This was originally published in the winter 2013 issue of the newsletter, now slightly revised and reprinted by special request.*

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S. J., who served as the twenty-eighth Superior General of the Jesuits from 1965 until 1983 once wrote this:

Nothing is more practical than finding God; that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love,  
And it will decide everything for you.

In a similar vein, William Blake (1757 – 1827), the English poet and visionary artist, left a concise definition of the path to holiness. He wrote: "We are put on earth for a little (time), that we may learn to bear the beams of love." Blake, who regularly conversed with angels in his garden, was equally eccentric in matters spiritual and artistic. Yet his statement accords with the wisdom of

the saints. They all have agreed that sanctification is a matter of being conformed to that ultimate reality which theistic religions call God, but which is beyond all names; that is, of steadily putting off the old egocentric person and being transformed into a nature which is love and kindness, humility and compassion lived.

The Bible tells us that we are created in the image of God. That is another way of saying that we are created in the image of love, so that we are never so truly ourselves as when we reflect that image. That is our inheritance, our natural

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## 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](http://seventhunders.org). ✨

#### FIRST SATURDAY SITTINGS

■ Monthly "First Saturday" sittings are held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey, with an online option. Links to join the sitting online can be found on the Seven Thunders website at [seven-thunders.org](http://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 this year is:

- 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

- March 27 - 29 – Palm Sunday Contemplative Intensive Retreat (CIR) at Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey, led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 13.
- July 14 - 18 – Summer Sesshin at Stones & Clouds, led by Leonard Marcel. Registration information on page 14.
- December 1 - 6 – Rohatsu sesshin, led by Leonard Marcel. For more information in a later newsletter.

### ZAZENKAI

■ Unless otherwise noted, zazenkai are held at the Stones and Clouds (Rai'un) Zendo in Lake Oswego. 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 11.

- February 21
- 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto: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: MOURNING AND RESOURCING**

*by Jared Taylor*

**W**inter is settling in and I am finding myself spending more time sitting quietly in front of the fireplace than outside. As a teacher once told me, winter is the time to draw our attention and our energy back to the center. It is a time for preservation and restoration, and for introspection. I think that this is as true for the life of an organization as it is for individuals.

In mid-November we held the second installment of our conversation about preparing for death. Not long afterwards, we lost Dan Dickinson, a long-time member of our sangha, dedicated member of the Seven Thunders board, and a dear dharma friend. It is especially hard to lose friends and family when their passing is unexpected, even though, as we all know, we are of the nature to change, and ultimately, will die. I have spent some of my time by the fire this winter

reflecting on lessons that I learned from Dan, and on the necessity of approaching every moment with the same wonder, enthusiasm, and gratitude, even in the wake of loss and pain.

We must bring those same qualities to bear when encountering the suffering and chaos engendered by an increasingly turbulent political and social landscape. In the coming months we will complete a project started in the fall to add a Community Resources page to our website. Our intention for the page is to provide links to information and other resources to help those experiencing social and/or economic hardship. If you have any specific suggestions for resources that you would like to see included on that page, please let me or another board member know.

Although I am enjoying the frigid nights and cozy fire time, I am also looking forward to a full year of Seven Thunders sittings and retreat offerings, including zazenkai, contemplative intensive retreats, and sesshin. Starting in April we will again be meeting at the Franciscan Spiritual Center on the Marylhurst campus Monday nights while Leonard and Teresa are abroad. Our continuing relationship with the FSC has been a blessing, and I invite everyone to join the sitting in person whenever you are able.

As always, I am grateful for our Seven Thunders community, and for the invaluable support that we share as we walk this path together. May you all enjoy the tranquil beauty of the season, and the fruits of your practice!

Gassho,  
Jared ✨

**SEVEN THUNDERS MEMBERSHIP: TIME TO JOIN OR RENEW!**

**S**even Thunders is an organization formed to support growth towards a deepening spiritual awareness and appreciation of life. We believe each of us has a unique path, and we benefit from teachers and companions along the Way.

Your membership is a vital part of this vibrant organization and a gift to all others in this faith community. Our practices support and sustain each other as we proceed on the path of an awakened and compassionate life.

If you haven't already done so, now is the time to renew your Seven Thunders membership for 2026. If you have been receiving complimentary copies of the newsletter this past year, and have not yet joined Seven Thunders, this is the last full newsletter you will be receiving.

Full membership dues are only \$30 per calendar year. With your membership renewal, please also consider any additional donation to help support the offerings of Seven Thunders. ✨

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Type:**

- Full member (\$30 per person)
- I am unable to send money at this time, but am an active participant and wish to be a full member.
- I am pleased to include a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make out your check to SEVEN THUNDERS and send it with this form to Seven Thunders Treasurer:

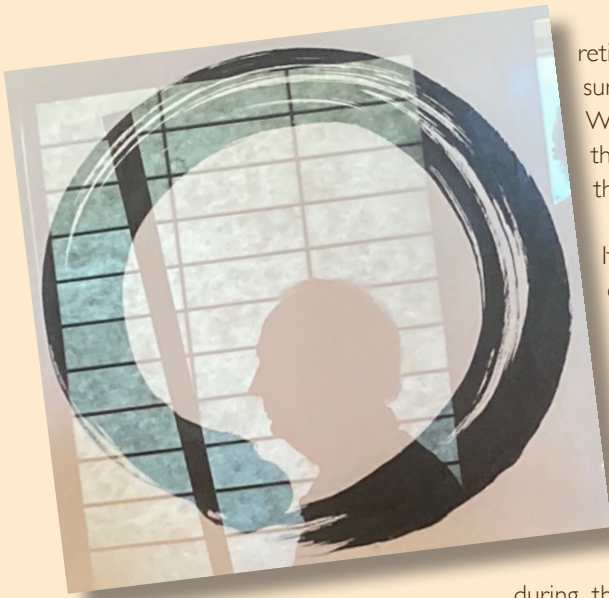
Jenny Brausch  
P.O. Box 3119  
Albany, OR 97321

Though payment by check is preferred, you may also go to <https://seventhunders.org/asp-products/donate/> to renew your membership and/or make a donation utilizing a credit card. ✨



## IN MEMORY OF DAN DICKINSON

by Greg Smith



**D**an Dickinson, one of the pillars of the Seven Thunders Sangha, passed away on December 12, 2025. Dan had had open heart surgery two and half weeks earlier and appeared to be healing quickly and successfully. On that Friday, however, an emergency medical team was unable to keep him alive after he experienced two cardiac arrests in rapid succession, something all of us had hoped the surgery would forestall. Dan's wife Lynn observed that at the end, Dan was lucid and not in pain, a blessing despite the outcome.

Dan was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 26, 1951 and lived there until he was six. He spent most of the rest of his childhood in Springfield, Illinois. He earned an undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina in Charlotte and a master's degree in human development from St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota. It was in Charlotte that Dan met Lynn, beginning a relationship that lasted 55 years, 52 of them as husband and wife. He once told Lynn that she was the best thing that ever happened to him.

When he was a teenager in Illinois, his father gave him the use of the family car one summer and sent him, his younger brother, and some buddies to the Boundary Waters in Minnesota for an extended canoe trip. This may have been the beginning of Dan's long-term love affair with wilderness. After he

retired, he would go on regular solo summer trips to the Tetons and the Wind River Range in Wyoming for three-week long pilgrimages among their peaks.

It was the possibility of accessing experiences like these that drew Dan and Lynn to Oregon while in their early 30s after visiting a childhood friend who had already migrated to the Pacific Northwest. Giving up jobs and with nothing certain in the offing, they packed their belongings and resettled in Portland, joining the Mazamas during their first years here. Many of the people he and Lynn met at this time became lifelong friends who continued their climbing, backpacking, and skiing adventures. As evidence of this, over the course of his life Dan climbed Mt. Hood, St. Helens, the Three Sisters, Broken Top, Mt. Washington, Jefferson, and Mt. Rainier. He was also an avid canoeist and kayaker, making regular early morning sojourns to Little Rock and Big Rock Islands on the Willamette River near West Linn. He even got the license needed to marry people in the wilderness, something he did at Bob's Hole on the Clackamas and at the top of Monkey Face in Smith Rocks.

All of this hiking and paddling, itself, would have kept him in good shape, but this wasn't enough for the former college runner. He made a point of describing himself as a "gym-rat" and was part of friendship groups who on a weekly basis would bike or play tennis with one another.

But Dan was much more than an athlete, as central as this was to his identity. He was also a counselor and administrator in addiction medicine at Kaiser Permanente and was the go-to guy for people who

were seriously suicidal. His clients may have sensed his spiritual depth and the fact that he got together regularly with people who shared poetry they'd written with one another. He was also a musician who played Indian flutes and delighted in an opportunity he'd once had to join musicians in an Irish pub while traveling a few summers back.

That depth was most clearly evident to those of us who got to know him at his church or the zendo. In both places, he demonstrated a profound and deeply appreciated commitment. In his church, he would volunteer to take charge of a kitchen responsible for feeding over 100 people during weekend meetings or retreats. And at the zendo, he served on the board for years in addition to taking on every leadership position needed for sesshin and zazenkai. That depth is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in two poems he wrote not long before he died. I'll let Dan speak for himself to conclude.

**Photo** above left by Paul Birkeland. Below and next page provided by Lynn Dickinson..





## Master Ouzel

It had been several years since Master Ouzel had visited.

He appeared as he always had;

At the edge of the water,

dip dip peck.

Why now?

How did he know of my troubles?

Dip dip peck.

Master,

How do I find my way?

My heart is broken and to fix it I will  
be changed.

I'm lost and fear losing all.

He looks at me sideways as he always does.

Saying nothing.

Dip dip peck.

I don't understand.

With all your wisdom you say not a  
word.

I fear for myself and you remain  
silent.

Please talk to me.

Master Ouzel faces me from the  
shore.

Dip dip peck.

Silently he sees through me

Tasting my fear

No secrets.

No movement no sound he tells me  
to listen to watch.

Dip dip peck

He moves to the water

Wading into the current

Looking down river he floats away  
never looking back.

I understand.

The river always moves to the sea.

Move into the current and let it  
carry you.

Do not look back for there is  
nothing there.

The sea is where all becomes one.

Three profound bows. ⚡

## Snow Dream

He dreamed an old man's dream.

Looking back at the night sky

Snowing

Not the sort of snow that falls

But the type that appears

Formed in the cold air.

Moving only by the moon's wind

Sparkling against the white earth

And the blackness above

Stirrings of space and time forever.

He is alone.

Traveling formless.

Without destination.

He has found his spirit self. ⚡





## FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD, *continued from page 1*

endowment. Thomas Merton (1915-1968) wrote: "We are what we love. If we love God, in whose image we were created, we discover ourselves in (God) and cannot help being happy, (for) we have already achieved something of the fullness of being for which we were destined in our creation. If we love everything else but God, we contradict the image born in our very essence, and we cannot help being unhappy, because we are living a caricature of what we are meant to be."

So, what is at stake is not simply the fulfillment of our longing, but also enlarging our very capacity to love; that is, to be conformed to the love, as Dante (c.1265 – 1321) put it, "that moves the sun and the other stars."

Our task on earth, then, is to learn to bear the beams of love. If we accomplish this, whether our lives are long or short, we shall have realized the purpose of our existence and shall have achieved the happiness of the saints and shall then know what the fourteenth century contemplative, Richard Rolle (1290 – 1349), called, "mirth in the love of God."

We each have a vocation to holiness. Whether one is a Cistercian monk, a nurse,

a plumber, an attorney or the widowed mother of five, with wholehearted commitment and devotion the grace will be provided to fulfill this vocation. One hears the still small voice within, the inner prompting, and responds to it with steadfast devotion and consistent practice. Holiness then becomes the embodied spirit of love and kindness, humility and compassion.

To face fully this vocation makes most people uncomfortable, even fearful. Spiritual awakening can challenge our most fundamental and cherished views of ourselves and our world. It most often moves us out of our comfort zones. Not everyone can handle it. Awakening can be dangerous. It requires the abandonment of everything we think we know about the world and our place in it and how we have defined ourselves. No matter how committed we may be to the idea of non-duality and to a unitive experience with the divine presence, everyday reality is suffused with duality. And we live with the strongly conditioned sense of a separate self. Yet, awakening to the mystery of the interdependence, the inter-penetration, and to the fundamental unity of all life, to what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "interbeing," strips away the last vestiges of duality and absorbs us in a sea of

non-duality where the boundaries between self and other are much less distinct.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of self and other, and of human being and environment, opens in us the capacity to act towards ourselves, others and nature in a manner that is truly kind, just and compassionate. Being holy, however, does not mean being perfect. It does not mean that we have reached a blissful, heavenly state, but rather, that we are in process, growing in intimacy with God and with all creation. From the beginning, there has been implanted in us a desire to experience the ground of our being, the fullness of divine life, and everyone is called to this fullness of life. St. Augustine (354-430) said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." True peace and holiness is being whole, integrated, our truest deepest self at one with the universe and bringing that integrity to each thing we do.

No searching is required for this. The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) once said that "there is no such thing as searching for God, because there is nothing in which God cannot be found." And in the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is spread upon the earth, and men do not see it." Paradise is all around us, but we do not see it.

From the ancient tradition of India, comes a beautiful image and metaphor to describe this relationship of God with us and with creation. God "dances" creation. God is the dancer; creation is God's dance. The dance is different from the dancer; yet it has no existence apart from the dancer. The moment the dancer stops, the dance ceases to be. If we think we have to search for God, we are thinking too much, reflecting too much, talking too much. Most often, when we look at this dance we call creation, the whole time we are thinking about it, talking or writing about it (as I am doing now), philosophizing about it or analyzing it. All words. All noise. All empty.



*Continued on page 7*



## FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD, *continued from page 6*

Instead, our practice of contemplation, teaches us to be still and to pay attention to the dance. Just look: a flower, a leaf, a bird, a stone – any fragment of the dance will do. Just look. Just listen. Just smell. Just touch. Just taste. It will not be long until you encounter the dance. What will there be then not to love?

An elderly monk was sitting with his young disciple, who was complaining to the elder: “You are hiding the final secret from me.” And he would not accept the elder’s denials. One day they were walking in the hills when they heard bird-song. The abba asked: “Did you hear that bird singing?” “Yes,” replied the young monk. The abba said: “Now you know that I have hidden nothing from you.” And the young monk understood.

When you truly hear a bird sing, when you truly see a tree, when the song penetrates you, when the sight absorbs you, beyond all labels and concepts, then you will know. What will there then be not to love?

In his book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote that “we do not have to die to arrive at the gates of Heaven. In fact, we have to be truly alive. Our practice is to touch life deeply so that the Kingdom of God becomes a reality. This is not a matter of devotion. (It is) a matter of practice. The Kingdom of God is available here and now.”

One day, a veterinarian was called to examine a ten-year-old Irish wolfhound named Belker. The dog’s owners, Ron and Lisa, and their little boy, Shane, were all very attached to Belker, and they were hoping for a miracle. He examined Belker and found that he was dying of cancer. He told the family that he could not do anything for Belker and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the old dog in their home. As arrangements were made, the parents decided that it would be good



for six-year-old Shane to observe the procedure. They felt that he might learn something from the experience.

The following day, as Belker’s family surrounded him, Shane seemed very calm, petting the dog for the last time. The veterinarian wondered whether the little boy understood what was happening. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away. The little boy seemed to accept this without any difficulty or confusion. Afterward, they all sat together for a while wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives. Shane, who had been listening quietly, piped up and said, “I know why.” Startled, the three adults turned to him and heard him say, “People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life – like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right? Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don’t have to stay as long.”

Little Shane knew naturally what Pedro Arupe, William Blake, Richard Rolle, Dante Alighieri and Thich Nhat Hanh knew from

experience. This is the prerogative of children. They are so often in a state of joy and wonder and without self-consciousness that they slip easily into the Kingdom. When we divest ourselves of all of our conditioning, all of our conceptualizing, all of our egocentric armor, then our natural endowment of love and joy will spontaneously appear.

Our prayer life, this contemplative prayer practice, guides us in this. Our spiritual life and our everyday life are not two. Do not separate them. Everything in daily life is an opportunity for practice. Make your everyday life your spiritual practice and your spiritual practice your life – one unbroken awareness, undivided attention, each moment holy. One God-intoxicated life.

Fall in love. Stay in love.

Bring your loving and compassionate heart to each sacred moment.

And it will decide everything for you. ✨



## MUSINGS AFTER ROHATSU 2025

by Susan Brandon

I moved to Oregon from Hawaii in early 2019 after many years of Diamond Sangha practice. It was a surprise to encounter variations in practice forms at the different DS sanghas I found: more bowing at one place, faster kinhin over there, sutras translated and chanted this way or that way, revealing the teachers' and sangha's varied influences and the physical places the sangha gathers (where's the kitchen, where to sleep). So many choices here (West of the river, South of the mountain, farther Southeast and beyond as the crow flies)! As particular and distinctive as the flowers in a field and each of us, yet one in deepest aspirations.

This year, Seven Thunders offered a Rohatsu Intensive, with a shorter practice day than I had experienced before. So what about this?

Every reading of Yasutani Roshi's Three Essentials of Sesshin on the opening evening

of sesshin (or an intensive) can quicken the heart - don't talk or whisper, don't look around, avoid social gestures. In turn this implies the fundamentals of zazen: don't move, keep still with as straight a back as is possible, return to your practice yet again.

At our Rohatsu, in just this manner we each found our own seat under the Bodhi Tree, which, as Leonard pointed out, is right here. All that's needed is some time perhaps and the determination to really settle and become quiet and still "inside and out" - and this can and does and did happen no matter when we bow or who's doing samu and why or how long the formal practice day or where one sleeps. Round by round such details and our ideas about them can and do fall away. Just this step, this bite of food, this bell, this breath.

And this Rohatsu as always, we all moved together. My need to label things shouts that this was a "real" sesshin, a "true" sesshin, for ourselves and all beings, thanks to our officers, steady and regular; our virtual participants inspiring in their faithfulness, Teresa's true comfort food, the old teachers vivid in sutras and talks, with Leonard and Greg's encouraging words as we went and stayed going and coming, never astray. Nine bows of gratitude to these and the trees and deer and the big bell. ⚡

**PHOTO:** Front row, kneeling: teachers Greg Smith and Leonard Marcel. Standing Left to right: Susan Brandon, Jared Taylor, Paul Birkeland, Drew Hansen, Chris Bell. Online: Pam Evans, Marian Morgan and Teresa Marcel (taking photo).





## OFF THE CUSHION: HAMBURGER ZEN

by Chris Bell

From 2006 - 2021, I was a full-time Unitarian Universalist minister, serving a congregation of about 350 people in Santa Rosa, California.

I maintained a Zen practice of meditation and koans throughout those years, which was a lifeline of clarity and perspective. The experience of sitting still, and the wide-open space I found there, was a much-needed counterweight to the more worldly dimensions of "church life." The actual week-in-week-out work of ministry, such as creating worship services, preaching, teaching classes, leading various teams, fund-raising, building maintenance, cheering on volunteers, and all the other duties of professional leadership, could often feel very far from the natural order of mind! Plans, politics, ideas, ideals, certainties, and many other sticky structures of mind are endemic to congregational life.

It surprised (and eventually depressed) me to realize how few people were genuinely interested in transcendent experiences of non-dual consciousness, and/or having their hearts broken open enough to include everyone and everything, which I still think is the main point of religion. It remains so for me. However, while our hopeful worship services were very well-attended, almost no one came to the prayer groups I offered, and only three people ever joined our Zen sangha, held at the church every Monday.

My Zen practice definitely helped me be a better minister, but I can't say that being a minister helped my practice, nor my overall health and well-being. I departed from ministry and Unitarian Universalism four years ago, and moved to Portland. I was exhausted and had no idea what to do next.

Fortunately, good friends caught me and held me up. I kept my faith in the Tao/God/Mind, and plugged along waiting for the Way to be revealed. I tried out various jobs, bouncing between blue collar gigs and those for which my highly specialized degrees and experience qualified me. I was a seasonal UPS driver (fun, actually), then a

hospice chaplain, then a winery tasting room host, then a hospice volunteer coordinator. Throughout all that bouncing, my heart and soul kept calling me to a very simple life with enough time to devote to prayer, practice, reading, art, music, friends and cats, though I always hoped to be helpful to the world, too.

Ironically, I found that the seemingly non-spiritual and non-religious positions usually proved more conducive to my spiritual and religious life, and made me feel more connected and useful to my human family.

I decided to yield to that insight, and now work weekdays as a cook at the Oak Hills McMenamins. To my surprise and delight, I love it. I have never had a job that was more conducive to practice. I served for several years as Tenzo for the Santa Rosa Zen community, and well knew that cooking could itself be meditation. Unlike taking all morning to leisurely cook a stir-fry lunch for 18 people, however, cooking at McMenamins can be quite intense and involve a lot of multi-tasking, but it is still made easier and more nourishing by treating it as practice.

When I first started, I had to think through every ingredient and every step of every dish, and I was awkward and slow. Now I'm at the point where intuition and muscle memory are starting to take the lead. A similar process unfolded in my Zen life, with all that early anxiety of "doing things right" slowly turning into the body taking care of walking and bowing for

me, thank you very much, with the conscious mind at ease.

Whether prepping sauces or soups, or working multiple orders on the line, cooking requires focus, concentration, and mindful presence of the moment. You do what needs to be done next, again and again. There is no time for analysis or theorizing, no room for philosophy. Just be here now, and just cook here now. On slow days there's not much cooking, but I've simply been for hours in sesshin so that's no problem. I equally like doing nothing and doing something, thanks to Zen.

I strive to be a bodhisattva for my co-workers and for the customers by spreading good cheer and being a caring listener. I cook every dish with equal love and care, and try to make it exactly right each time. All that feels like practice to me.

A monk asked Ho Shan, "What is the real truth?" He answered, "Knowing how to beat the drum." If that monk asked me the same question, I might answer "Knowing when to flip the burgers." Doing what is necessary right now with wisdom and compassion is the essence of our path, at home, in the zendo, or in front of the griddle.

I feel very grateful that I get to try to manifest that way of being every day. And with free tater tots to boot! What a fortuitous rebirth! ✨





### WINTERTIME PRAYERFUL SILENCE

by Nancy Roberts

Experienced long-time Seven Thunders members gathered for this year's online Winter CIR and quickly settled into the familiar schedule and routine of sitting, walking, listening, and interviews. The group maintained a strong container for retreat practice throughout. Our teacher reminded us of the importance of maintaining an open and receptive mind and heart in spiritual practice in order to have a free inner disposition and prepare for transformation.

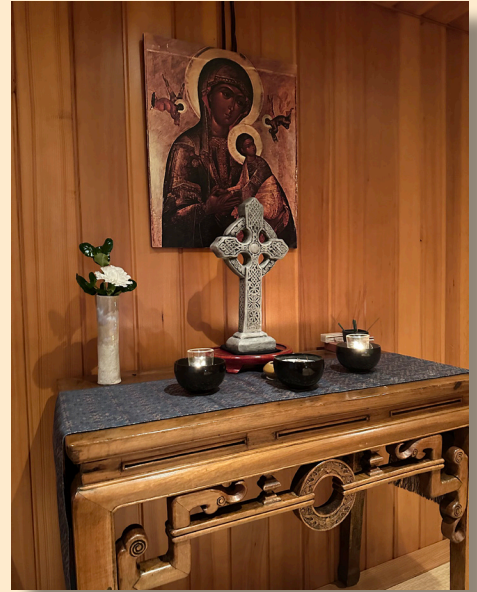
We entered into and maintained inner and outer silence, quieting the chatter and keeping ourselves recollected. Doing this over Zoom, with the steady presence of Teresa as timekeeper and organizer, was no problem.

The talks focused on experiencing intimacy with God. In Biblical language, "the one thing" often is used to emphasize the importance of that intimacy. Giving up thought control and just sitting and listen-

ing is an act of faith. We listen to the still, small voice within and await the unfolding of the Universe. Another demonstration of receptiveness to the one thing is through performing every act mindfully and respectfully. It recognizes that the divine reality is always gracefully present.

Contemplative prayer is a silent state of maintaining an open and receptive mind, and a tranquil equilibrium. Over time, consistent practice will naturally enable keeping contemplative prayer going after a sitting is complete. We are on a journey of love that requires patience. We hope to stay with the presence of divine life, which is the vital energy of love.

We marveled at how even two days of intensive contemplative practice can refresh, rebalance and prepare us for steady practice during the coming year. ⚡



In attendance were, from left to right, top to bottom: Leanne Latterell and Richard Lance, Teresa Marcel, Leonard Marcel, Pam Evans, Kent Kreisellaier, Nancy Roberts, Lisa Rosser and Susan Freisinger.





## UPCOMING ZAZENKAI

**Z**azenkai 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, February 21**, at Stones and Clouds. This zazenkai will be led by **Leonard Marcel**.

Please contact Teresa Marcel at Stones-CloudsZendo@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.

Following the zazenkai, there will be an optional discussion, approximately an hour in length, for those attending in person. The reading will be *Novice to Master* by Soko Morinaga (translated by Belenda Yamakawa), pages 15 - 78. This book is available on Amazon.

Other zazenkai thus far scheduled for 2026 will take place on March 21 and August 15.

While there is no set fee for zazenkai, a donation of \$20 is requested and much appreciated. To offer a donation, please either leave it in the donation basket in the vestibule or 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." ✨

## SOMETIMES

by David Budbills

**S**ometimes when day after day we have cloudless blue skies, warm temperatures, colorful trees and brilliant sun, when it seems like all this will go on forever,

when I harvest vegetables from the garden all day,  
then drink tea and doze in the late afternoon sun,  
and in the evening one night make pickled beets  
and green tomato chutney, the next red tomato chutney,  
and the day after that pick the fruits of my arbor  
and make grape jam,

when we walk in the woods every evening over fallen leaves,  
through yellow light, when nights are cool, and days warm,

when I am so happy I am afraid I might explode or disappear  
or somehow be taken away from all this,

at those times when I feel so happy, so good, so alive, so in love  
with the world, with my own sensuous, beautiful life, suddenly

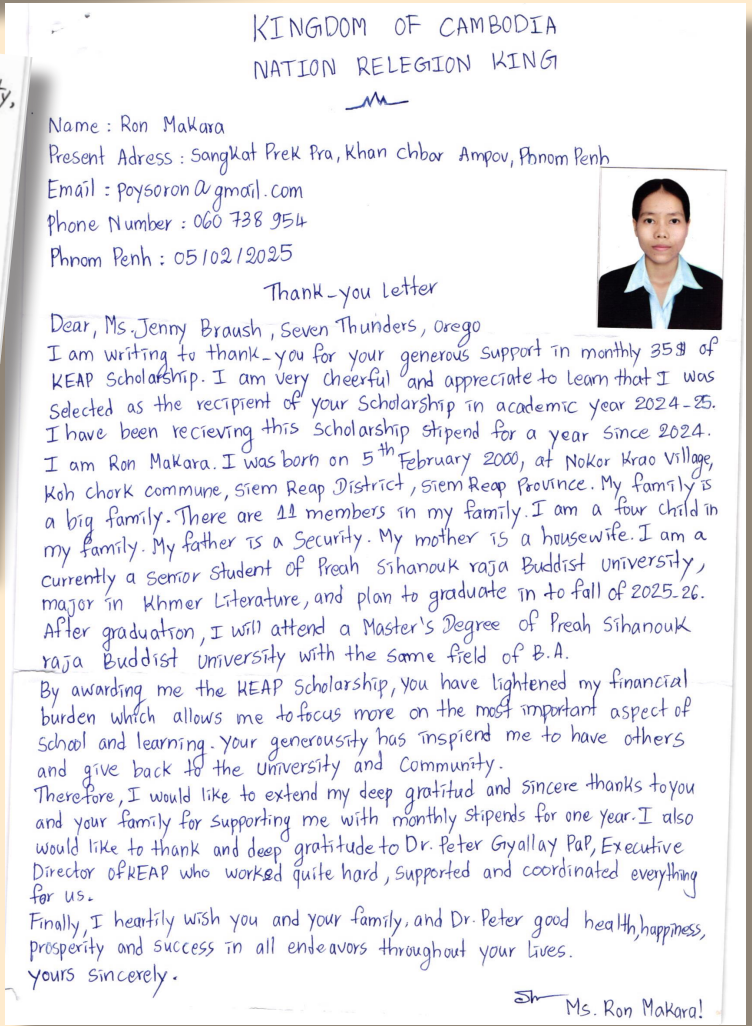
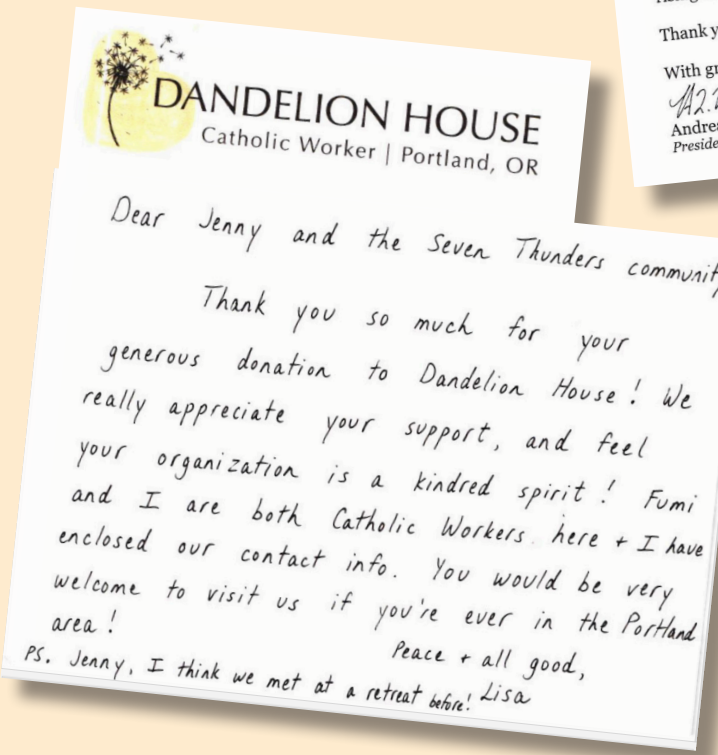
I think about all the suffering and pain in the world, the agony  
and dying. I think about all those people being tortured, right now,  
in my name. But I still feel happy and good, alive and in love with  
the world and with my lucky, guilty, sensuous, beautiful life because,

I know in the next minute or tomorrow all this may be  
taken from me, and therefore I've got to say, right now,  
what I feel and know and see, I've got to say, right now,  
how beautiful and sweet this world can be. ✨



SEVEN THUNDERS DONATIONS THANK YOU

At a late 2025 Seven Thunders board meeting it was decided to make several donations to our community, as well as our yearly sponsorship of a student in Cambodia through the KHEAP organization. Donations were made to OPB, Dandelion House and the Oregon Food Bank. Here are some of the thank you notes and letters we received.





**PALM SUNDAY CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR)  
MARCH 27 - 29, 2026**

This annual retreat will once again be held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey, Lafayette, Oregon. Timed with Palm Sunday, it is an opportunity to deepen your contemplative practice by sitting intimately with the experience of Holy Week. Leonard Marcel will lead our retreat, sit with us, present a talk and offer interviews.

The retreat will begin with supper at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, March 27th, and continue all day Saturday. It will end at noon on Sunday, March 29th. Retreatants are invited, but not required, to attend the Palm Sunday Mass in the Abbey church.

This retreat 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.

The Abbey's guest facilities limit overnight attendance to 8 people. Each retreatant will have one of the two private rooms in a guest unit, the two sharing a toilet and shower. Bed and bath linens are provided. Rooms at the abbey are in great demand for that weekend, so **we need to know by March 6 if you plan to attend this retreat** and stay at the abbey. Meals are included; the fare is vegetarian, simple, and balanced. If you are staying at the

Abbey, please arrive well before 6:00 p.m. on Friday night in order to check in and get your room assignment at the Porter's Lodge.

Contemplation periods will be conducted in Bethany House, which is big enough to seat about 20 of us. This means that 10 to 12 additional retreatants can be accommodated as commuters who have a place to sleep outside the monastery and who will provide their own (brown bag) meals. Commuters are expected to attend all sitting periods.

The total fee for the 8 overnights is \$260 for Seven Thunders members, \$290 for non-members. The commuter fee is \$80 for members and \$110 for non-members. The extra \$30 of the non-member fee can be applied to your Seven Thunders membership, which then qualifies you for the member rate.

Fees are payable in full with your registration. Should you need to cancel, all but \$30 will be refunded for cancellation requests received by the retreat coordinator on or before February 27; half the fee (\$130/\$40) will be refunded if received by March 6; no refund in the last 3 weeks before the retreat. Partial scholarships are available to Seven Thunders members.



**Registration process:**

1. Please contact retreat registrar **Jenny Brausch** at **seventhunders.treasurer@gmail.com** to reserve a place. Please indicate whether you wish to stay at the abbey or will be a commuter.

2. Once she confirms a place is reserved, send the completed form with your check to:

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

Alternatively, you may e-mail your registration to her and pay the fee online at **www.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.)

Registrations will be made in the order received. When the 8 overnights places have been filled, all remaining registration applications will be placed on a waiting list. A similar process applies to those who choose to register as commuters. ⚡

**REGISTRATION FORM**

**PALM SUNDAY CONTEMPLATIVE INTENSIVE RETREAT (CIR) MARCH 27 - 29, 2026**

- I wish to register as a full-time overnight guest of the abbey.
- I wish to register as a day commuter.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Special needs \_\_\_\_\_

Full payment of \$290 enclosed

\$260 (Seven Thunders members)

Commuter member fee of \$80 enclosed

Commuter non-member fee of \$110 enclosed

Donation for Scholarships \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Request a Scholarship of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- I commit to participating fully in the entire schedule of formal group contemplation.
- I wish to apply the extra \$30 of my non-member fee towards membership.



**HYBRID SUMMER SESHIN AT STONES AND CLOUDS ZENDO JULY 14 - 18, 2026**

The 2026 Seven Thunders Zen Summer Sesshin, led by Leonard Marcel and Greg Smith, is planned as a **hybrid event** to take place from 7 p.m. Tuesday evening, July 14 to 10 a.m. Saturday morning, July 18.

Both in-person and online attendees will follow the *revised sesshin schedule (9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on full days)*. The fee for in-person attendance is \$210 for members, \$240 for non-members, and includes only the midday meal. As this is a non-residential event, accommodations are not included.

If attending via Zoom, you will sit in your own space, access the retreat on your own device and provide your own meals. For online attendance, the fee is \$130 for members, \$160 for non-members.

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. **Registration deadline is June 23.** Should you need to cancel, all but \$30 will be refunded for cancellation requests received by the retreat coordinator on or before June 30; half the fee will be refunded if received by July 7; no refund in the last week before the retreat.

Registrations will be accepted on a first come basis. Part-time attendance may be possible as schedules permit.

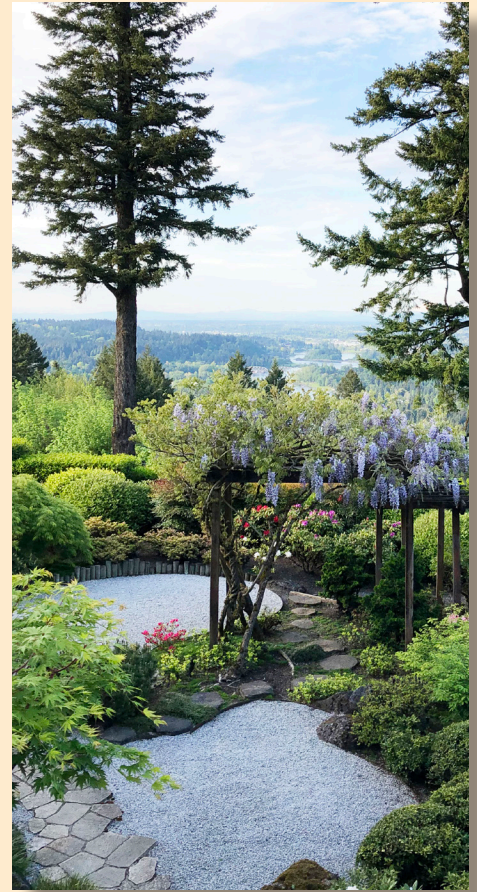
Once your registration has been received and accepted, you will receive a confirmation from the registrar. If for any reason you find the full fee a barrier to attending, please check the box on the registration form requesting a "scholarship" or contact the registrar. Affordability need not be a deterrent to attendance. Full or partial scholarships are almost always available. Donations for such scholarships are both appreciated and tax-deductible.

Silence will be observed in the zendo. For those attending online, please make every attempt to maintain silence to the extent possible, as your circumstances permit.

To register for the retreat, please email registrar at [StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com](mailto: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 [www.seventhunders.org](http://www.seventhunders.org) (click on the 'Contribute' tab and follow the donation process). Questions? Please contact Teresa Marcel at 503.636.9009 or [StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com](mailto:StonesCloudsZendo@icloud.com) ✉



**REGISTRATION FORM**  
**STONES & CLOUDS SUMMER SESHIN, JULY 14 - 18, 2026**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contact name & Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like to **attend in person**, and enclose full payment of \$210 (the member rate).
- I would like to **attend in person**, and enclose \$240.
  - please apply \$30 to my Seven Thunders member dues.
- I would like to **attend online** and enclose full payment of \$130 (the member rate).
- I would like to **attend online** and enclose \$160.
  - please apply \$30 to my Seven Thunders member dues.
- I request a scholarship of \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- I enclose a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to Seven Thunders**