

Still.

News from Still Mind Zendo

WORK PRACTICE AND ZEN

by Sensei Janet Jiryu Abels

Work practice (*samu* in Japanese) is one of the four essential components of the Zen way, along with *zazen*, *dharma* study and *daisan*. Being aware of the history of work practice and why it became so foundational as Zen developed, is important for all Zen practitioners to know because such knowledge takes work practice out of the realm of "task" into something far more profound.

Work practice began in China after the Indian monk, Bodhidharma, brought the essence of Zen to that country - but it was not part of Zen from the very beginning. Meditation, along with study of the Indian sutras, or ancient religious texts, was the primary occupation of the monks who came to study and train with the early Zen ancestors. None of them did any manual labor. The primary reason for this is that most of these practitioners were trained in the rules and regulations of the Vinaya School (which was based on strict adherence to the ancient Indian rules and precepts) and often shared monasteries with followers of that school. The Vinaya expressly forbade manual labor of any kind because the first grave precept forbade the killing of any creature (even insects), something that would have invariably happened if the soil was tilled.

Though there is evidence to suggest that masters like Hongren and Huineng (the Fifth and Sixth Ancestors respectively) were in charge of monastic centers where manual labor played some kind of role (Huineng was told to work in the rice shed when he first came to study with Hongren) it was not until the beginning of the ninth century that things changed dramatically. Baizhang (Hyakujo), Huineng's great-grandson in the *dharma*, who was a gifted organizer as well as a brilliant teacher, formally defined Zen for the first time by formulating a particular set of monastic rules known as the Baizhang Zen Monastic Regulations. As leader of his monastery, he discarded those parts of the Indian monastic code that no longer worked, replacing them with practical rules that supported the needs of the monks under his care. The role of manual labor was a major change.



Photo by Bruce Sengan Kennedy

Baizhang obviously saw through the double standard of monks not tilling the soil (because this would kill insects) and passing the "killing" onto others and so he abolished the rule. He also realized that work had to be a primary component of daily life because work was now a necessity in most Zen communities. They were located off the beaten track and there weren't others around to do the work. Work had to be an essential part of each day. He famously said: "A day without work is a day without food" and himself worked alongside the others until the very end.

More importantly, Baizhang came to see work as a necessity of practice. By introducing manual labor as a major component of Zen, he brought to full flower the *dharma* of his teacher, Mazu, - the *dharma* of "functioning." Insight is not enough, it must be connected to one's life, and Baizhang was willing to break the rules of Vinaya to express this teaching. As the late Roshi Robert Aitken put it, "Samu (work practice) is the extension of meditation to its function."

And this is why work practice remained an essential ingredient of Zen even after monastic centers were no longer isolated. This is why work practice remains an essential ingredient in Zen to this day, even as it leaves its monastic roots to take hold in the lay world. This is why regular, formal work practice must be an essential part of any Zen community, for its disciplines (such as the guidelines laid out inside) can then follow through into the fullness of daily living, both in our work situations and in our homes.

Work and practice are not two separate entities. They are one. If we can but see them as one, our daily work will not be simply a "task" a "job" a "paycheck" a "burden of housekeeping" but, rather, a deep and fulfilling practice of awakening to the delight of "just this."

NO SECOND-GUESSING

by Rosemary Shields

“Kill the rats first thing in the morning.”

I got this piece of advice from a time management specialist at a workshop for middle managers. The premise is that you take the very thing you dread the most—calling a client with bad news, reconciling expenses, dragging the laundry to the basement to sort and wash—and you do it first thing in the morning. If you don’t deal with the odious chore right away, it will gnaw at your mind and affect the quality of your day for the rest of the day, just like gnawing rats. And by doing this chore, the reality of it usually turns out to be no big deal. You wonder what you were actually dreading about it in the first place. Yet we have to practice this again and again because the mind is always convincing us that its thoughts are real.

Work practice at the zendo gives us a detached opportunity to take a chore and practice the reality of it. What I especially like about work practice at the zendo is that each chore is divided up into its basic components. The work card doesn’t say “clean the bathroom.” It says, “1. Gather

up the towels in the wicker basket and put them in bag under the sink. 2. Roll clean towels and fill the wire basket. 3. Check that a fresh toilet paper roll and tissue box are available.” There is absolutely no thinking necessary when doing these chores. We just do the next action on the card. It’s a chance to be judgment-free and to rid our mind of chatter and second-guessing.

When one practices these principles at the zendo, a natural spillover occurs at work and home. Instead of dreading reconciling expenses at the office, I now give myself the simple task of printing out the expense statement the day it arrives in my inbox. Early the next day I bring out the folder of receipts, highlight the dates and put them in chronological order. Then, fresh the next day, I match receipt with the line item. No receipt? I note who the vendor is, and early the following day I call the vendor and request the receipt. On the next day I assign accounting codes to each line item, and before I know it, the job is done. By dividing the entire task into days, it doesn’t weigh heavy on my mind. No “shoulds” gnaw at my brain because the job is getting accomplished with diligence and patience. And that is how we sit zazen: with diligence and patience, one moment at a time.

ACT. NO ACHIEVEMENT.

By Julia McEvoy

On hearing the second work guideline from the Monitor during Work Practice – “Have a goal but have no achievement in sight” -- I notice a tightening inside my solar plexus.

It makes my mind curious: “A goal is a goal, right?” I ask myself. “Arriving at the goal is the achievement. It takes action to arrive. There is to be no rest until that goal has been accomplished,” I reassure myself: action and achievement are two separate happenings. For instance, plants need to be watered. My goal: to do just that. Gong sounds. Last plant watered. Achievement. Goal met. Or, what about another goal: writing this article. I write, which is the action. Then, the produced article is the achievement. What am I missing? Goal, Take action, and Arrive at Achievement. The Guideline says differently, though: it says, “Let the action be the achievement.” How can action BE the achievement?

So, I listen inside a little more. First, I welcome the dissonance and discomfort without judging. It becomes clear that my annoyance is a reaction to my mind wanting to be right. The dissonance suggests there is a “more” about the Guideline about which my mind doesn’t have a clue.

Just do. I need to “not think” but rather “do” something.

That doing is to grapple with this guideline in ACTION. My goal becomes: write an article. Immediately, something inside feels hopeless. “Give up the goal of ever accomplishing a written article,” I think. So I scratch my mosquito bite that I never knew I had and think about calling a friend.

The only thing to do, write. Nothing comes. I don’t have a thought to write. I wait in emptiness. I feel doomed. I think of the written article as an accomplishment in the future. But just as there is no past, there is no future. Only each word that presents itself in my immediate experience has an existence. Whoa! I am excited with what is arising. I am totally listening and writing down each word. Once again comes silence. I want to trust it. That’s okay for a couple of minutes, but I am feeling impatient and want to have this article written. The waiting begins to feel like a joke on me. What makes me think I could say anything about this topic? I judge the silence. What’s happened to my thoughts? I can’t find one. Not one.

What is my work practice? Just this word. The word that I write NOW.

Amazing! The second guideline is achieved! Here it is. One word at a time.



"Splendid working/functioning arises from a pure heart" by Rev. Keido Fukushima

WORK PRACTICE GUIDELINES:

- Have a goal for your work. It is the catalyst for all action.
- Have a goal but have no achievement in sight. Let the action be the achievement.
- Be present – mindful. Pay attention. Return to the task at hand when your mind wanders.
 - Work with a still mind – stilling unnecessary chatter.
 - Do only one thing at a time.
 - Finish what you begin now – not later.
 - Don't judge your work or the work of others.
- The monitor's clappers and admonitions are not available outside the zendo. Be your own monitor.

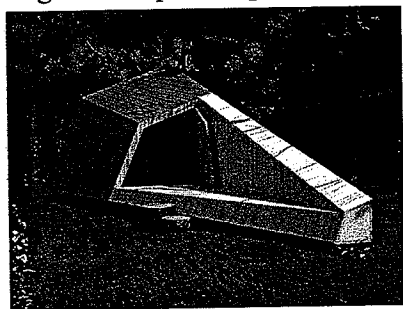
SANGHA NEWS

Charlotte Alexander became a grandmother for a second time when Sam Fine was born on February 22 to her daughter Dina. Her younger daughter, Annie, will be getting married in December.

Jean Gallagher's new collection of poems, *Start*, will be released by Oberlin College Press in January 2012. It is her third published book of poems.

In December, **Carrie Abels** launched Humaneitarian.org, a website that inspires people to give up factory farmed meat and buy humanely raised meat instead. In addition, this spring she bought her first house, a 1907 fixer-upper in Montpelier, Vermont.

Tamara Petrovic, a furniture designer who owns a design and architecture firm with her architect husband, recently designed a retreat for a Finnish artist, pictured here. The form emerged from ideas around climate, culture and function. Her firm seeks to create socially and environmentally responsible design that improves quality of life.



Cynthia Brown received a diagnosis of lung cancer in March. On treatment, her tests have shown continual improvement. She is currently walking easily, regaining stamina, and sitting regularly at the zendo. She is profoundly grateful to the sangha for their cards and messages of support, for sitting with her at home during her recovery, and for holding her in their sitting throughout this period. A deep bow.

Artwork by **Leslie Joren Wagner** was shown at Lana Santorelli Gallery in Hoboken, New Jersey, this fall. It was part of an exhibit of abstract works entitled, *Distilled*.

Jackie Apone and **Tim Kennedy**, members of Plum Blossom Zendo in

Pittsburgh, were married on August 8, 2010, on the third floor of their Pittsburgh home, where Plum Blossom meets for sittings. Neal Griebing, a trained Zen chaplain and also a Plum Blossom member, performed the ceremony, and the sangha celebrated afterwards with a wedding brunch in the dining room.

Cesar Bujosa's book *Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction: Enlightenment and Liberation from Psychological Suffering* was self-published in June. It presents the idea that non-conceptual awareness, as taught in the practice of zazen, is restorative, promoting psychological healing. The book is available at Amazon.com.

In July, **Stevie O'Grady** was the featured artist of the month at the Warehouse Art Gallery at the Lorton Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia. In November, she had a show open at the Publick Playhouse in Cheverly, Maryland. It's of a series of work called "Dancing Squares"—very colorful, non-objective paintings on canvas which contain geometric shapes that appear to be either spilled or dancing on the surface.

Kirsten Broderick now works with the Knowledge Exchange group at the World Bank Institute, encouraging collaboration and knowledge exchange among developing countries with the goal that they reach and sustain development goals. She divides her time between Washington, D.C. and New York City, making her Amtrak's customer of the year.

On June 1, **Mark Daiyu Rubin** graduated from Phillips Beth Israel School of Nursing Magna Cum Laude and was the class salutatorian. He passed the NCLEX (the national licensing examination) in August and is a Registered Nurse in New York. He is now working at Beth Israel Medical Center in Manhattan as a Critical Care nurse in the Medical ICU.

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**Pat Murphy** wrote in with reflections on Zen and Feldenkrais training: I began to take a serious interest in the Feldenkrais Method of Awareness Through Movement when I started to have back pain a few years ago. Feldenkrais is a system originated by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, a physicist and black belt in Judo who died in 1982. Students learn to move with awareness and relaxation to become more aware

of their day-to-day functioning. This occurs by slowly practicing simple, everyday movements while tuning in and becoming aware of each movement.

I have found that the movements have been helpful in alleviating my back pain and in making me feel more self aware, calmer and freer to move in my life -- just as being a Zen practitioner has. In fact, I have come to believe that Feldenkrais and Zen are similar. In Feldenkrais, as in Zen, we are not asked to make an effort in the way we normally think of effort; both practices call on a person to move slowly, with patience. In Feldenkrais class we are encouraged to rest between movements, as we rest between meditation periods, and we are urged to do less than we are able to do, which is liberating. This eliminates trying to move correctly, just as in Zen there is no correct way to meditate, and yet there is. In Feldenkrais, when our attention wanders we are asked to notice it, and that brings us back to the movements, as in Zen. There is a lead-up to more involved movements but this is entirely up to the student; there are no goals, just as there are none in Zen.

And just as in Focusing -- a practice which is studied at Still Mind as a kind of parallel process to Zen practice -- in Feldenkrais movement, one senses the body-mind feelings and movements from the inside out. Just as Focusing draws from the deeper and wiser self, Feldenkrais practice looks to our deeper body-mind feelings. The Feldenkrais lessons are arranged so that we can concentrate on, and pay attention to, feeling the smallest differences in our movements, so that we can proceed to the next stage of movement, just as we move in stages through the Focusing process.

I have been attending the Feldenkrais Institute in New York, studying with David Zemach-Bersin, a student of Moshe Feldenkrais. I would be happy to talk with anyone at Still Mind about Feldenkrais and my experience with it, or give a group lesson to those who might be interested.

Still Mind Zendo is a non-profit organization which relies in part on donations. Please consider a gift to the zendo, or including SMZ in your will. All gifts are tax deductible. To discuss a gift or bequest, contact us at [info@stillmindzendo.org](mailto:info@stillmindzendo.org).



Photo by Bruce Sengan Kennedy

## Winter Practice

Winter is its own  
green season mind's green  
wood not burning good  
for waiting.  
How do I do it?  
Keep blowing the candle out.

-Jean Seiwa Gallagher

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Editors

Cynthia Zuiyu Brown  
Carrie Kishin Abels

Art Director/Layout  
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Poetry Editors  
Jean Seiwa Gallagher  
Gregory Hosho Abels

Art Editor  
Bruce Sengan Kennedy

Enso (sumi circle)  
artwork by  
Mayumi Ishino

Still Mind Zendo is a nonsec-  
tarian Zen community in the  
Soto/Rinzai lineage of the White  
Plum Asangha. Founded in  
1994, it has two resident teach-  
ers, Sensei Janet Jiryu Abels and  
Sensei Gregory Hosho Abels.  
Still Mind Zendo is incorporated  
as a not-for-profit organization  
in the State of New York and  
run by a Council (the Board  
of Directors) made up of SMZ  
members.

### Council

*President:*

Marisa Seishin Cespedes

*Vice President:*

Gregory Hosho Abels

*Secretary:*

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*Treasurer:*

Tom Hakuyo Carney

*Spiritual Director:*

Janet Jiryu Abels

Carrie Kishin Abels

Ronde Bradley

Mark Daiyu Rubin

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Submissions of articles  
and poetry for Still. should be  
sent to:

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## STILL MIND ZENDO'S TWO TEACHERS ARE BOTH PUBLISHING BOOKS

### **Making Zen Your Own: Giving Life to Twelve Key Golden Age Ancestors**

Since 2001, Sensei Janet has given talks about Zen's most notable Chinese ancestors at each of our week-long sesshins. Her illumination of these ancestors' lives, personalities and teachings has helped practitioners realize that the Zen struggles and achievements of these ancient teachers were no different from our own. She has now written a book based on these talks, and in February 2012, Wisdom Publications will publish *Making Zen Your Own*, which will be for sale at the zendo, in bookstores and at Amazon.com.

Still Mind Zendo's **Zen Ancestors' Tour of Southern China**, led by Andy Ferguson's South Mountain Tours from September 15 to 30, 2012, is partially based around this book. The trip is open to all; for more information, go to [www.stillmindzendo.org/chinatrip.htm](http://www.stillmindzendo.org/chinatrip.htm)

### **Never Something Else: Poems from the Eye of Zen**

The poems by Sensei Gregory presented in this collection invite the reader's attention over and over with gentle insistence. Written over the past two decades -- many on the senseis' land in the Hudson Valley -- the poems easily resonate with Zen practitioners but are also accessible to non-practitioners. Roshi Nancy Mujo Baker has said: "Not only is each poem a sparkling gem but the act of reading them through one at a time is a great teaching."

The self-published collection may be purchased at the zendo (ask Sensei Gregory) or at the following link: [www.stillmindzendo.org/never\\_something\\_else.htm](http://www.stillmindzendo.org/never_something_else.htm)

Congratulations to our teachers, and to the handful of SMZ members who assisted in the editing and production of these books.

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New York, N.Y. 10011



## Still Mind Zendo Schedule

|                                        |                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                             |                                                                           |                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Zendo Closed<br>Sundays and<br>Mondays | <b>Tuesday</b><br>Morning Sitting<br>Arrive 7:20 A.M.<br>Sitting 7:30-8:30 | <b>Wednesday</b><br>Morning Sitting<br>Arrive 7:20 A.M.<br>Sitting 7:30-8:30 | <b>Thursday</b><br>Morning Sitting<br>Arrive 7:20 A.M.<br>Sitting 7:30-8:30 | <b>Friday</b><br>Morning Sitting<br>Arrive 7:20 A.M.<br>Sitting 7:30-8:30 | <b>Saturday</b><br>Morning Sitting<br>Arrive 8:55 A.M.<br>Sitting 9:00-10:40 |
|                                        | Evening Sitting<br>Arrive 6:40 P.M.<br>Sitting 7:00-9:00                   |                                                                              | Evening Sitting<br>Arrive 6:40 P.M.<br>Sitting 7:00-9:00                    |                                                                           |                                                                              |

### **For First-Time Visitors to Still Mind Zendo**

Whether you are new to sitting or have a long-held practice, please call Still Mind Zendo at (212) 414-3128 prior to visiting the zendo for the first time. For first-time Zen practitioners, we ask that you attend our Introduction to Zen workshop (see below).

#### **\*Introduction to Zen**

On the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month the zendo offers newcomers an Introduction to Zen workshop. Please visit our website for details or call us for a brochure.

### **About Becoming a Member**

Membership is an option for those who have decided to make a longer-term commitment to their Zen practice with SMZ. Further information membership can be found on the Membership Registration Form available at the zendo or on our website.

#### **Monthly Calender:**

For a detailed monthly calender/schedule please see our website. Go to: [www.stillmindzendo.org](http://www.stillmindzendo.org) and click on the link "Monthly Calender".

### **Extended Sittings Weekend Sesshin:**

February 3-5, 2012  
-Garrison Institute

**Zazenkai (all day sitting):**  
(2012) January 7, March 10,  
May 12

**Sesshin in the City:**  
April 13 - 15, 2012  
-at Still Mind Zendo, NYC

#### **Week Sesshin, 2012**

June 3 - June 9  
July 22 - July 28

### **Registration for all Events**

Please contact the zendo or visit the website for event information and registration.

### **Zendo Location & Contact Info**

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