

Still.

News from Still Mind Zendo

HOME PRACTICE

by Jean Seiwa Gallagher

If you've ever been on sesshin at Seven Meadows Farm, you know the particular power of the dawn sitting: the stillness of things before the sun is up and while the moon is still visible; the quiet movements of the sangha getting coffee and walking through the wet grass to the zendo lit by a single lamp and filled with the sound of birds. The life-filled silence of zazen at that hour is a sustaining gift.

Since becoming the parent of a young child (which also means missing many sesshin), my home practice has often surprised me by reminding me of the early-morning practice of sesshin. These days I get up a little before 5 AM; it's dark most of the year at that time, and the city is so quiet, I can hear the birds, even on 6th Avenue. I drink some tea, listening. Sometimes while I drink tea, I read the dharma (lately, Maezumi Roshi's transcribed dharma talks), to remind me, explicitly, why I am up at this hour. Then I go into my husband's study (what used to be mine is now our daughter's room) and sit. Usually Maggie has been playing in there, and I have to move some blocks or her shoes off the zabuton.

As I sit, my mind is noisy, often: noisy with plans and expectation and remorse, with the imaginary past and the imaginary future. Sometimes, Maggie wakes up while I'm still sitting. Sometimes I simply bow and get up and go to her. And sometimes—this is not easy to do, but I practice it—I keep sitting, until my timer blinks and tells me that 25 minutes have passed. I sit with her calling “Mama! Morning now!” and talking to her stuffed dogs and bears, and maybe singing, and maybe crying, too. I sit with my own feelings arising and falling (and they certainly include guilt and doubt). I sit with the facts of the present. I sit with reality unfolding. Then I bow and get up and go to her. And that's reality unfolding, too. That's home practice, too.

This practice of sitting through a powerful impulse to get up and do something else—often something else that is quite compelling—is central to our practice, and it is a particularly strong feature of how we practice at home. Often, I find, the most important



“One suchness” by Soen Nakagawa Roshi (1907-1984)

feature of my home practice is simply to stay put and observe the impulses for movement—both physical and mental—that arise. The impulses to scratch, to stretch, to review the day's agenda, to rehash yesterday's meeting. As I sit with them, I begin to know them... and they are nothing but dharma, forms of emptiness.

Beginning each day with zazen lays the groundwork for continuing my home practice, which is nothing other than my life: at bath-time and bedtime, through the seven-thousandth reading of *Good Night Moon*. Home practice is what happens when Maggie and I go to the park and play in the sand and she says for the first time, “Maggie build it.” Home practice is what happens when I kiss her goodbye and leave her with her babysitter so I can go to work. Home practice is when I sit down to write in solitude, and it is what happens when my husband and I sit down together, us two, for dinner at the end of a day. Home practice is what happens when I wake up in the middle of the night and hear the voices of people just going home from night-clubs, or the sound of Maggie talking in her sleep, or the sound of my own heartbeat. I will sometimes practice a form of zazen then, for a few seconds or minutes of waking: counting the breaths, listening to what is.

Home practice is the space, the boundless space of attention, that opens throughout the day, when thoughts drop off and language suspends itself, and there is just this: nameless, label-less. There is always space, my teacher told me, after listening to me complain about five days traveling without childcare. And she is right. There is always space—the space of absolute, unconditioned reality—right here, right now. Welcome home.

HERMITAGE

by Carrie Abels

MONTPELIER, Vt. -- Just before ango last fall, I looked around my home zendo here in my apartment and realized it was time to practice "right renovation." The room where I sit is small -- only 15 feet long and no wider than a narrow corridor -- and a year after moving in I still hadn't covered over the splotches of paint that the previous tenant, an artist, had let drip onto the walls and floor. Finally, after a year of procrastination, and motivated by the upcoming ango, I caulked, sanded, and painted the walls off-white, then painted the floor dark brown. I wasn't surprised to find that my sitting strengthened after I brought respect and intention to the room.

Now when I sit in the morning, accompanied by birds, snow or school buses (depending on the season), an intricate peach-colored cloth tapestry from India hangs on the wall to my left, and Hokusai's classic dark-blue waves break on the wall on the right. On the back wall behind my cushion hangs a paper copy of Shitou's "Song of the Grass-Roof Hermitage," the poem handed out during the 2009 summer sesshin. In the poem Shitou says of his home, "Though the hut is small, it includes the entire world." This is how I feel about my zendo.

Because I sit alone, perhaps one of the famous (or infamous?) group photos that my dad orchestrates after every Still Mind sesshin will also become part of my zendo. I've been thinking of placing such a photo on the small shelf beneath the Shitou poem. It wouldn't be the same as sitting with all of you, but at least it would remind me that even though I sit alone, the sangha "has my back."

Reflection on the Barn at Seven Meadows Farm

Walking up to it, looking up to it, always up
Inside looking up, always surprised
Testing my eyes to see so high

this temple on the grass

Stately as a tree, chestnut, hickory, beaming
Injured doors and battens
Hanging by hope

this temple on the grass

Home for owls, bats, stripes of sun
Baby barn swallows sounding like mice
One day sitting on Michael's quiet shoulder

this temple on the grass

Hammer on chisel, stone to stone
The gritty men and training boys, some soon leaving
Their backs to the work, going to fight for The Union

Leaving it to us, this curtain of silence

this temple on the grass

--Sensei Gregory Hosho Abels

Background photo is a detail of
the side of the barn at Seven
Meadows by Bruce Kennedy

SANGHA NEWS

In June, after many years in Boston, **Ronde Bradley** moved to Brooklyn, where she will continue her work with the publishing company Wiley. She is excited to be closer to the sangha.

Cynthia Brown traveled to Bhutan in late February for two weeks, seeking the black-necked crane, climbing to the Tiger's Nest temple and visiting many other beautiful shrines in that tiny Buddhist country guided by tenets of "Gross National Happiness."

Jennifer Strong and Alain Mentha welcomed their first child, **Amélie Louise**, into the world on April 28. The couple reports that she is "still beautiful" and they wish to express great gratitude and appreciation to the sangha for the fun baby toys!



Over the summer, a book that **Hank Walshak** co-authored with longtime friend Razi Iman was released. *Driven: A How-to Strategy for Unlocking Your Greatest Potential* teaches the ancient Eastern concept of *junoon* as the means to help people find and realize their dreams in a state of single-minded focus.

In October 2009, **David Mintz** was twice arrested, along with other activists, as part of a nationwide civil disobedience campaign for single-payer health care. In November 2009, he ran the New York Marathon in 3:34:43, thus qualifying for the prestigious Boston Marathon. And in May of this year, David and Amy Hartford were married in a minimalist ceremony in their backyard in South Orange, NJ.

After a five-year hiatus working for the Dana Foundation in Washington, DC, **Rosemary Shields** returned to New York to continue her work at the foundation's Manhattan headquarters and her dharma practice at Still Mind. While in DC Rosemary was a member of the Mintwood Zendo under the tutelage of Andrew Hudson. Andrew's exhortation was "The Universe is perfect as it is."

Mayumi Ishino received a fellowship for a summer residency in Ithaca, NY, through Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts. She'll be off to another fellowship residency in December, in Trondheim, Norway.

IKEBANA

On March 6, the zendo was filled with fresh flowers and 22 highly focused flower arrangers when Still Mind hosted an introductory ikebana workshop led by Junko Muira of New York City. Ikebana is the traditional Japanese art of flower arrangement and has shared a connection with Zen over many centuries. Muira is a second-generation Japanese ikebana master of the Moribana school.

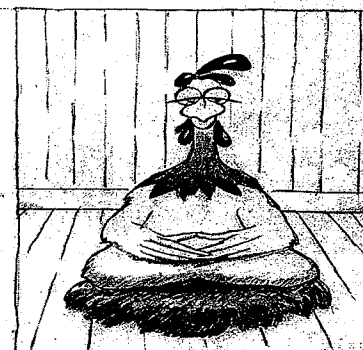


Muira began with a history of the art form and then demonstrated how to prepare the three main parts of an ikebana arrangement – the *shin*, for heaven, the *soe*, symbolizing the human, and the *tai*, representing the earth. Each participant received indi-

vidual feedback from Muira at the end of the day and got to take their flower arrangement home. Response to the workshop was so positive that Still Mind hopes to invite Muira back for another ikebana workshop in 2011.

JUKAI

Four sangha members received jukai in a one-hour ceremony at the zendo on May 25. This was the third year that Still Mind members have taken the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts as a way to formally mark their commitment to the Way of Zen. During the ceremony, the preceptor, **Sensei Shinryu Thomson** of Village Zendo, gave the four sangha members their new dharma names: **Carrie Abels** received the name **Kishin**, or Shining Heart; **Stephen Nadler** received the name **Jigen**, or Compassionate Eye; **Bob Adler** received the name **Eisho**, or Everlasting Pine; and **Charlotte Alexander** received the name **Jisen**, or Compassion Spring. Congratulations to all four.



CHICKEN TAZA

Cartoon by Max Gyllenhaal

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.

EMPTINESS IS...

by Gilbert Lo

Emptiness is frightening! During last year's sesshin in the city at Still Mind, I ended Saturday exhausted, sleepy, jet-lagged, and sore. I dragged my body back up to midtown and, on entering my apartment, instinctively reached for the remote to the TV. Then I stopped and reminded myself that I was still on sesshin – which meant no TV, no computer, cell phone, or even reading. This frightful sense of “Oh my god, what will I do now?” came rushing into my mind. It was at that point I truly felt how dependent I was on external stimuli to keep my mind occupied, just to avoid that uncomfortable feeling of not-knowing and emptiness.

So there I sat in my living room, observing my mind struggling to grasp at something, anything, for security. I stayed in the space of unease until it gradually gave way to a stillness that was empty, yet full. And it was enough. I didn't need anything more. How about that?

After taking my bath and brushing my teeth, I headed for bed, but since I was still on West Coast time, my body was not ready to sleep. So I just lay there against the

softness of the sheets on my skin, feeling my tired body sink into the mattress, staring into the night sky of dark clouds. No agenda, no pressure to go to sleep, letting go of the thought of “got to get up early for sesshin tomorrow.”

Next day, after the close of sesshin, I wanted to see if I could carry that stillness further – maybe through a quiet path in the woods. Well, not quite. I'd forgotten that after a few days of gloom and rain, all of Manhattan would flock to Central Park on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

Normally, I'm not one for crowds. But I found myself sitting at a park bench in the midst of a busy path by the lake. Throngs of people passed by with their barking dogs, screaming kids. But the funny thing was, it didn't bother me at all. The gentle, cool breeze caressing my face demanded most of my attention. So I sat there, just noticing, just being. I felt joyful. I was grateful..

Emptiness is not frightening, not bad, not good, not anything – and it's not even empty! I felt so free that I dozed off on the park bench.....

On Koan #2: Hyakujo and a Fox

Beyond delight and sorrow
The fox hunts for mice
And the monk straightens his back

— Stephen Jigen Nadler



Rev. Torin Ozeki - Self Denial

WHEREVER SITTING

by David Mintz

I used to live alone in downtown Jersey City, and could find ample time for practice. Then I moved into the suburbs with my wife and her three children. With my own six-year-old daughter staying over three nights per week, our blended family consists of two adults, four kids age 10 or under, and two cats -- all delightfully idiosyncratic and challenging personalities.

This householder life is rewarding beyond words. The trick is to have it both ways by maintaining a strong practice: find a way to sit every day, even if not for as long as one might like.

The commute from South Orange to downtown Manhattan is considerable at around 75 minutes. But one can make use of the time by working on a koan while sitting on the New Jersey Transit train, where I have found solitude-within-a-crowd peculiarly conducive to study and reflection.

At work, I take a 15-minute break to haul a chair into the stairwell and sit under the stairs. The motion-sensitive fluorescent lights time out, leaving me in perfect darkness. Once I was confronted by two security guards responding to a “suspi-

cious person” report. I bowed to the wall, stood up and explained that when you're a Zen practitioner you sit whenever and wherever you can. They left me alone.

At home, I occasionally excuse myself to go sit in my closet-zendo, a carpeted nook about one zabuton in width, with windows providing light and air. I share this space with a clip-on desk lamp attached to the window-sill, an ironing board, and little else. The cats often join me. Master Lin-chi -- not the Dharma ancestor, but the eponymous cat -- has been known to jump onto my shoulders from behind. He serves as my posture police, not-so-gently reminding me to pay attention. Setting the timer, I sometimes tack on a few extra minutes, like a thief. You've heard the expression *cutting corners*. This is stuffing and stretching those corners as best we can.

One advantage of heavy emphasis on home practice is that it underscores the fact that the ultimate teacher is the one who sits. Home, train, workplace, or zendo -- it's all practice. Accept with gratitude whatever opportunities are available, and carry on.

Chrysanthemums

Petals nesting petals nesting petals, silky pockets.
As they age they become beautifully bedraggled.
Their inside colors become visible.
these revelations are the backbone of the glamour.
It is strength and tenacity, hardiness and non-opposition.
Fearlessness in exposure, full sunlight means a strong stem
Being very social plants,
they like to grow near one another in beds made for them.
Though they may have been at one time, they are not really wild;
as when walking through a forest and coming upon a meadow.
I think their fragrance smells real.

-- Leslie Joren Wagner

DISTANCE AND BALANCE

by Jim Gennin Scalese

Zazenkai always begins for me on Friday night. It's Friday night when I set out the clothes I'll wear, make sure the coffee maker is prepared and set my alarm for 5:00 a.m. By 5:20 Saturday morning I'm on the road driving the forty minutes from my home in Haddonfield to the NJ Transit stop in Hamilton where I catch the 6:05 into Manhattan. Ninety minutes later I'm making my way through Penn Station to catch the 1 Line subway for the short ride downtown to 18th Street, a few blocks from the zendo. It's only 8:00 when I finally open the door at Still Mind and break the silence of the long trip with my first words of the day, said in response to an embrace and a greeting. It's good to finally arrive.

Living within fifteen minutes of Philadelphia, it's not unusual to be asked if there's not a zendo there I could attend. Why would I subject myself to losing Saturday morning sleep and facing all the travel logistics just to get to Still Mind? The answer doesn't lend itself to a quick reply. Since my initial visit to the zendo for the Rohatsu zazenkai in December 2005, I have experienced here a depth of committed practice and patient teacher guidance that sustained me during those tentative and on occasion lonely times as a Zen beginner, when the central thought flashing in my mind was, "Why am I wasting this day on this cushion?" Now, with a somewhat more nuanced understanding of "wasted time," the reason I continue to come has shifted as well.

New York can seem a distant planet from South Jersey. Obvious differences between the city and my leafy suburb aside, there is the more subtle contrast between a solitary home practice, built around my choices, and a zendo schedule with time and ritual formatted by and practiced with others. As the gravitational pull of the zendo decreases with distance, a guarded, disciplined attention is required in my home practice; a commitment to attend the monthly extended sittings helps prevent my drifting away. If the zendo were too close it might be too easy to take it for granted, to shrug off a scheduled zazenkai or sesshin with an "I'll drop by during the week" that might not be serious.

So the tension of distance between home and zendo is part of my practice and has achieved a balance for now -- the trips reinforcing my home practice, which in turn strengthens the commitment to continue with periodic travel. There may be a zendo closer, but Still Mind is my home and more than worthy of the trip.

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Enso (sumi circle)
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Mayumi Ishino

Still Mind Zendo is a nonsectarian Zen community in the Soto/Rinzai lineage of the White Plum Asangha. Founded in 1994, it has two resident teachers, 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

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Vice President:

Gregory Hosho Abels

Secretary:

Cynthia Zuiyu Brown

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Still Mind Zendo Schedule

<p>Zendo Closed Sundays and Mondays</p>	<p>Tuesday Morning Sitting Arrive 7:20 A.M. Sitting 7:30-8:30</p> <p>Evening Sitting Arrive 6:40 P.M. Sitting 7:00-9:00</p>	<p>Wednesday Morning Sitting Arrive 7:20 A.M. Sitting 7:30-8:30</p>	<p>Thursday Morning Sitting Arrive 7:20 A.M. Sitting 7:30-8:30</p> <p>Evening Sitting Arrive 6:40 P.M. Sitting 7:00-9:00</p>	<p>Friday Morning Sitting Arrive 7:20 A.M. Sitting 7:30-8:30</p>	<p>Saturday Morning Sitting Arrive 8:55 A.M. Sitting 9:00-10:40</p>
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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 and click on the link "Monthly Calender".

Extended Sittings

Weekend Sesshin:
November 12-14, 2010
February 11-13, 2011
—Garrison Institute

Zazenkai (all day sitting):

(2010) September 11, October 16, December 11, (2011) January 8, March 12, May 7

Sesshin in the City:

April 8 - 10, 2011
—at Still Mind Zendo, NYC

Week Sesshin, 2011

June 12 – June 18
July 10 – July 16

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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