

Still.

News from *Still Mind Zendo*

Brains In Our Feet

An Appreciation Of Kin Hin

By Gregory Abels, Dharma Holder

Perhaps it takes this – waking up at night during sesshin and seeing a practitioner walking down the hall to the restroom in slow, deliberate kin hin – or passing the zendo door during break to find a lone student using one of the aisles for mindful kin hin practice. Perhaps it takes experiences such as these to alert us to the care and beauty of this ancient practice, much like the revelations provided Scrooge by the Ghosts of Christmas or like Emily in the last act of *Our Town*, realizing the joyful wonder in those details of life we take for granted. In the Buddha Way, nothing is to be taken for granted. If it were, it would not require our attention.

We must, at the same time, remember that kin hin (walking meditation) like zazen (sitting meditation), is not a means to anything beyond, no matter how munificent.

We do not fix our attention on goals of any kind but rather on the act of walking – the relationship of my feet/shoes to the ground/floor. So much of our experience is confined to the neck up, in those areas of our brain devoted to speculation, theory, abstractions, fantasy. This can keep us self-conscious, closed, defensive. Of course, all activity and sense experience is processed in the brain but when we direct attention "down" to our feet (the sense of touch), the domineering "I" becomes dethroned "up there" in our head if only for an instant. The training is to return to being satisfied with "just walking" again and again during each period of kin hin whenever the "I" attempts to jump back on its throne.

The term kin hin means "sutra walking." Sutras are,

continues on page 2



**(Ashikaga) Shizan Eon (1859-1959),
Not One Thing (Exists), ink on paper, 51" x 13"**

Shizan Eon received dharma transmission from Dokuon Ogino. He was the abbot of Myoshin-ji and earlier the chief abbot of the Hoko-ji branch of Rinzai. His calligraphy is considered by some to be the greatest of all time. He lived to be 101 years old, and painted this scroll when he was 84.

Scroll photographed by Bruce Kennedy

of course, the Buddhist scriptures. Some are based on *teishos* (dharma talks) attributed to the Buddha himself. Sutras were actually read aloud while walking during ancient ceremonies and sometimes still are. So, kin hin is recognizing the Teaching in physical form. You might recall the slogan of the Clinton presidential campaign in 1992, "It's the economy, stupid!" Well, we can say about kin hin, "It's physical, (blank, blank)!"

In the formal meal of Zen practice, kin hin is neither a side dish nor a delicacy, but rather part of the main course with zazen. The transition into kin hin begins immediately and seamlessly with the two bells that end zazen. Our concentration does not waver. We refrain from indulging in quasi calisthenics, massage or holding our head in our hands. Any tending to our muscles is minimal and discreet. Kin hin is not a break. Nor is it what Saint Augustine meant when he said "*Salvitur ambulando*" – "It is solved by walking." Many come to walking meditation mistakenly expecting it to be like a reflective walk in the forest or a stroll around the garden of a retreat center. No. It is neither precious nor casual. Any notion that spirituality and comfort must be synonymous is dispelled.

While each of us is clearly distinct, no two beings, sentient or insentient, are separate. We therefore maintain close proximity in kin hin. We focus on the "one line of all" rather than "my personal line of one." We Americans like our "space." We much prefer to maintain a comfortable distance from the other. This is not the case for the Japanese, who identify with their phrase, "dan tai sei kat su" – "group way of living from childhood." We must so adapt to appreciate true

kin hin. In the words of Sensei Janet Jiryu Abels, "It is the practice of selfless living – giving our self to the footsteps of the other."

At Still Mind Zendo, kin hin is head to toe discipline. We are not deterred from keeping our eyes down. No sightseeing! The thirteenth-century Korean master Chinul said, "When our practice is mature, a thousand monsters cannot turn our head." With chin parallel to the ground and torso open, we keep our knees engaged, no lazy legs or feet. The hands are in the cosmic mudra turned over, thumbs tucked under, knuckles facing the sky, elbows away from the body, hands at solar plexus or slightly higher. We negotiate turns at as much of an angle as possible, and our breath is regular, flowing, not held.

In the Rinzai school the walking is done fast and energetically, frequently at a jog, while in the Soto school, kin hin is practiced at a "slow-motion" tempo. Since Still Mind Zendo is in both the Soto and Rinzai lineages, we practice slow and fast. In fast, the stride is free but not loping. To compensate for various body sizes it is best to shorten the stride slightly. Practitioners try to maintain an identical left/right footfall. We follow the pace of the person in front of us rather than the pace of our own thoughts. We keep a sense of the line by stepping in the visual and aural footsteps of the one directly ahead. A variation in pace by that person, however subtle or considerable, is responded to immediately by adapting our own pace. The most important elements to be maintained are the spacing, pace and attention.

Our extremely slow kin hin is as energetic, in its painstaking way, as our fast kin hin.

The right foot is lifted from the heel very gradually through the tip of the toes and brought very slowly past the ankle of our stationary (left) foot, stretching the leg through the calf so that the heel alone can make contact with ground. The foot is then very slowly flattened to floor from the heel to the toes. Only then is our body weight distributed forward causing the left heel to lift off the floor. No close line or communal right/left is established in our slow kin hin. Each practitioner must be allowed to move as slowly as possible while never actually pausing. Half steps are best. And so we bring as much care and attention to our kin

hin, step by step, as we do to the other ancient practices of bowing, lighting incense, listening to teisho or cleaning the zendo. Each time new, over and over again. And it is this attention we carry with us when, over and over again, each time new, we step out into the world.

Gregory Abels is a Dharma Holder and destined dharma heir of Kennedy Roshi. Gregory has been a member of Still Mind Zendo since its earliest years and continues to serve the zendo during this "teacher in training" period.

November

My tongue swells from wishing
cold is a memory of wanting warm
so much color inside my day
how it gets distributed
between children waiting
and broken household appliances
necessities
toothpaste
meditation, far off fantasies; meditation
I become
the child when
all is well, no more synthetic additives
to be distributed
in the dark
where all words are made
one, all is won
clear winds thread through my meniscus skin
distributing the cool night

Allegra Parks
2005

News and Notes

Mayumi Ishino's performance piece, "Seesaw," was on view at ExitArt in Chelsea for a weekend in June, along with work by 20 other artists, all seeking to feature forms of prayer and performing concurrently at or near the gallery window for passersby to see. Mayumi's performance, with sounds of bells, involved slow kin hin on the seesaw, to demonstrate mindfulness and transience, pausing but not staying in the middle.

In June, **Tom Carney** replaced Janet Jiryu Abels as president of the SMZ Council. A charter member of the sangha, who began sitting in 1995, Tom has been present in all of SMZ's various incarnations, commuting an hour each way from his home in Yonkers.

Happy husband of Elaine for 47 years, father, grandfather, and engineer, Tom brings his Zen practice to the long-distance swimming that is his (other) daily discipline. He is known to most of us as the leader of samu practice and one of the linchpins of our collective life as a sangha. His replacement of Sensei allows

her to cut back on administrative tasks and serve as the sangha's spiritual director.

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in September, **Marisa Cespedes**, a correspondent with Televisa, spent ten days in the devastated area. With a small crew she dispatched three live reports a day to the 300 million people who watch the network in the US and Latin America. The crew shared their supplies and gasoline with displaced people, ate whatever could be bought in the few shops left standing, and often slept in their car, amid warnings of possible new flooding.

In this upheaval, Marisa felt her practice helped her cope with fear and distress. "After a while I felt it was okay, not knowing, even if there was danger. Sitting on pillows on the floor, breathing. When you have no structure, you look for little bits of time to find a no-mind situation." Kin hin was especially grounding, "walking on garbage and glass, mindful where to walk."

The annihilation of the area combined, for her, with a powerful sense of the assertion of nature. "The whole thing opened up like a big mirror, cracked in a thousand pieces but also a whole."

Not Brain Surgery, **Dominic Cappello's** animated social satire about a French supermodel who becomes a defender of the world against dastardly drug companies, premiered to cast, crew, and Supermodel Sonya Fan Club members at the Two Boots Theatre in New York on October 1. Three and a half years in the making, the independent film features, among many highlights, the voices of two actors who are also members of the sangha.

This Minute, **Jean Gallagher's** book of poems, was published in November by Fordham University Press. Jean won Fordham's Poets Out Loud Prize for the book, and followed that with the Field Prize from Oberlin College, for her forthcoming collection, *Stubborn*, due in spring 2006.

Two Haiku

house slippers
simply from being worn
they've become left and right

the rose garden gate
opening and shutting
gusts of snow

Bruce Kennedy
2005

Still.

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Editor
Cynthia Brown

Design
Mark Rubin

Poetry Editors
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Gregory Abels

Production
Stephen Nadler

Enso (sumi circle)
artwork by
Mayumi Ishino

Still Mind Zendo is a non-sectarian Zen community in the Soto/Rinzai lineage of the White Plum Asangha. It was founded in 1994 by its now resident teacher Sensei Janet Jiryu 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: Tom Carney
Vice President: Gregory Abels
Secretary: Julia McEvoy
Treasurer: Bill Manty
Cynthia Brown
Jean Gallagher
Marisa Cespedes
Mark Rubin

Spiritual Director:
Janet Jiryu Abels

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and poetry for Still.
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Still Mind Zendo Schedule

<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
Morning Sitting Arrive 7:20 A.M. Sitting 7:30-8:30	Morning Sitting Arrive 8:45 A.M. Sitting 9:00-11:00 Tea (optional)				
	Evening Sitting Arrive 6:40 P.M. Sitting 7:00-9:00	Intro to Zen* 1st and 3rd Wed. eve. of each month	Evening Sitting Arrive 6:40 P.M. 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 recommend that you register for our Introduction to Zen.

****Introduction to Zen***

Twice a 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.

Becoming a Formal Student

For practitioners interested in becoming a formal student of Sensei Abels please speak to her. *Requirements:* to be a current member of SMZ; to have practiced regularly with the sangha for at least one year.

Special Dates and Events

Weekend Sesshin:

February 10 - 12, 2006
-Garrison, N.Y.
April 7-9 (at SMZ in the city)

Focusing Workshops:

Intro Evening:
March 8
Weekend Workshops:
Saturday/.Sunday
March 18-19

***Zazenkai* (all day sitting):**

January 14
March 11
May 20
June 24
From 9A.M. to 5:30 P.M.

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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