

Mt. Equity Zendo Zephyr

Volume II, Issues 2, 3, 4

A Zen Center for Shikantaza and Mindfulness

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Multi-Newsletters

Please consider this the "Summer/Autumn/Winter Newsletter". Apologies to those who have been wondering why there have been no newsletters for so long. A lot of preparation was necessary for the visit and U.S. lecture tour last autumn of Aoyama Roshi. Still learning the computer, the basic problem remained of having no staff. There has also been a health issue, which could be repercussions from serious illness in 1982/83, or as treatable as hypothyroidism. It is now being addressed.

Sabrina Kirby, who sits with the Brown St. Zen Group in Lewisburg on Monday nights is now helping us part-time.

MEZ BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTED

After Sesshin on November 23rd, the following members were elected to positions on the Board of Directors:

President - Michael Daiyi Jones

Vice President - David Daijo Carpenter

Secretary - Susan Lingle

Treasurer - Christine Jakuen Fedorowicz

Non-Profit Status Application Materializing

Graham Miles, a lawyer from the Philadelphia area, who has begun to attend Sesshin at Mt. Equity Zendo, has come to understand our situation. Recently, we had a conference call with Graham and his CPA, and have all gotten a little clearer on what we need to do to get started. Graham has kindly donated his time, expertise, and financial help in getting us going. We are deeply grateful.

What practitioners can do to help facilitate our accounting as we make the transition to non-profit status: (1) All checks should be written to "Mt. Equity Zendo." (2) It greatly helps if the "For" blank on your check is filled in with the appropriate information.



PRECEPTS GIVEN TO SEVEN STUDENTS

On Sunday, December 14, at the end of the Sixth Patriarch's Sesshin commemorating the deep resolve of the first Chinese ancestral teacher, Taisho Eka Daisho (who, it is said, severed his left arm to demonstrate his determination to Bodhidharma), four practitioners received the Five Precepts: From left to right: Annie Ryoen (Goodly Circle) Mahler, Margaret Myoen (Mysterious Circle) Kurtz, Pamela Koen (Circle of Light) Hunter and Christine Jakuen (Circle of Elegant Simplicity) Fedorowicz.

The Five Precepts are offered to MEZ Friends and members who are prepared to deeply apply them to their lives. When practitioners are ready to take on more commitment, they may receive the full lay precepts and sew their rakus. The five lay precepts will next be offered in May. Those interested should talk with Dai-En.

On January 1, after the Rohatsu Sesshin, Jesse McKinney received the Five Precepts and the Dharma name *Daikan*, meaning "Great Contemplation," and Michael Jones received the name *Daiyi* or "Great Healer". *Daikan* had just recently published his first book, *A Mind on Wheels*, showing how he applies the teachings of the Dharma to his life with cerebral palsy.

On December 8, after a wait of one year, one month, and one day, Pete G. received the Five Precepts, a Buddha collar, and the Dharma name *Daishu*, "Great Ship," the third man from the Gateless Gate Sangha at Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary to do so.

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The Tattered Dandelion

Jesse Daikan McKinney

As I rolled along in my power wheelchair behind my teacher at a pace fit for a snail, the crisp January day became more vivid and alive. The beauty of the bare trees and briskness of the winter wind became deeply etched into my consciousness. Slowly meandering along, I came upon a muddy puddle sunken into the compacted gravel road. How wonderful that within the murky unclarity was the reflection of everything. The sky, the clouds, the trees, everything could be seen in this one small dirty puddle. It made me think of our minds...pure despite all of the defilements that plague them.

My teacher then led our small group slowly onto the soft thawing grass which was soggy from the recent rains. As I entered the saturated sod in my motorized chair, I suddenly noticed a tattered dandelion left permanently in a half-opened state by the autumn cold. The weathered petals still retained most of their vibrant yellow color except for the withering tips. It was the only flower in the entire field that had bravely withstood winter's harshness. I paused and just looked at it for a few moments enjoying it and respecting its beauty and sheer tenacity. What a great lesson could be learned from this common battered old weed.

I saw myself within this tattered flower. My body moves and twists in ways that make me look rather unattractive at times. However, my mind is still vibrant if one looks closely. Yet, at the same time, I am still just a common weed full of egotistic selfish thoughts and desires. So there is no room for me to relish in my own talents or gifts, but I still do. I still have thoughts like: "I'm better than him or her...". Is it wrong to think this way? Of course not! It is just unskillful and unwise because it leads to an over-inflated ego which, like an excessively inflated balloon, is easy to pop. Balloons are full of hot air and so is the ego. It has no substance and is ephemeral.

To look upon a tattered dandelion is to exist in utopian happiness. Yet, we see this thing of beauty as a useless weed, a menace to a perfectly manicured swath of seamless sod. Kill this insidious blemish, we think. Erase this worthless intrusion and replace it with another piece of uniformity. What if this useless weed was growing on the surface of Mars? It would suddenly become the biggest news story on Earth. Yet, simply because we have seen a few hundred or thousand dandelions in our lifetime, we stop seeing them. This is a pity. There are so many beautiful things all around us at every moment. Why not stop and take notice?

Winter Notes on MEZ

Six Month Duties



Duties of Tenzo, Ino, Fukuto (Mokugyo and Inkin) and Jisha will now be held for six-month periods. Those interested, please speak to Dai-En.

Kesho Risbarg --Tenzo. Daisen Hess -- back-up, preparing for the next period. Ino -- Daisen Hess, Myoen Kurtz serving as back-up and apprentice for the July-December period. Ryoen has volunteered for Jisha; back-up person needed. The position of fukuto is open.

Contacting Dai-En

Around office mostly 9am to 5:30pm (Mon. to 3pm)
Evenings: Mon - 10pm - 10:30pm (no calls Tues.eve.)
Wed-Sun - 7-9pm & 10-10:30pm (not Sesshin)
Please limit calls to no more than 15 minutes.

Financial Status of Contributions

With deep appreciation to all who have been supporting MEZ for seven years, we are hoping that this is the last year that they will not be tax-deductible. We are grateful for the help of Graham Miles in beginning non-profit status application, as well as Lucine Folgueras for offering professional financial advice to us.

Needs and Wishes List

"Windows 5" operating system on 3 1/2 in. floppies
Shelving for empty space in office's closed fireplace:
24 in. h.(mid.shelf 12 in.) x 35 in.w. x 16 in. d. (white);
for Zendo kitchen to replace CD stand holding teas.
17 in.wide x 8 or 9 in. deep x 45 in. high
Please call first so there are no duplications

"A Mind on Wheels"

"A Mind on Wheels" written by Jesse Daikan McKinney is full of inspiring essays of his daily life, of his wife Chris Ling-mei expecting "little Tiger" late in April, of their cat with five disabilities, wisdom seeds, and being grateful for hardships. Copies can be ordered by emailing Daikan at <jessem@postoffice.ptd.net>

\$6.50



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Aoyama Shundo Roshi Visits Mt. Equity Zendo and Six Other Zen Centers and Cities in the U.S.

In August of 1995, accompanying Aoyama Roshi and her *jisha*, Rev. Etsudo Sasakawa, as the interpreter for Roshi's speech in Assisi, Italy, our van was racing along two rainbows arching the Italian Alps, taking us to our planes at Milano. All duties completed, I had the opportunity to ask her to come to America again, this time to see what had evolved into Mt. Equity Zendo. After 23 years in Japan, and 15 of those years in Zen training, I wanted to see if my efforts back in the United States were on the right course, and what might be Aoyama Roshi's suggestion for the future. No less did I wish to have her see the vitality of Soto Zen practice, particularly women's contributions, in a culture very different from Japan. This dream came true a little over two years later as MEZ students, both regular Sesshin attendees and those who can come less frequently, all pulled together and made her visit here a success while I was totally occupied in being her interpreter.

A gigantic rice cooker was purchased through Pam Koen Hunter; Howard Parks who builds using Japanese jointwork, made Aoyama Roshi's state-of-the-art raised platform to sit on for her talks; an extremely helpful mini-PA system, thanks to Michele Lefevre, traveled up from the state capitol city.

I told the students, "You are entirely on your own, as my role is as interpreter. Just go by 'What is needed right here and right now in the Dharma?' and try and do it."

Going for a short walk outside, Aoyama Roshi later said, "It appeals to me. I like Mt. Equity."

Thirty students filled every inch of space in the Zendo. Meal gathas were recited in English as we ate with all the oriyoki bowls that we owned.

The meal of the first day was prepared with the great help of Norio Abe from the Philadelphia area. In spite of having lost his sister within the week, he insisted that preparing the meal was what he wanted to do, in her memory and for her merit. We felt very grateful for his wholehearted efforts at such a time.

Aoyama Roshi lectured both afternoons on parts of her speech "The Ten Ox-herding Pictures". Afterward we had tea with the sweets she had brought us from Japan, and asked her questions. Rev. Taiken Yokoyama of the North American Soto Zen Education Center, and also a Guest Lecturer here at MEZ a year earlier, accompanied Aoyama Roshi and Rev. Sasakawa from Los Angeles. He helped greatly in interpreting, too, on various occasions during the tour.

In an exchange of gifts, MEZ presented a hand-sewn Pennsylvania Dutch Amish quilt to Aoyama Roshi, and hand-sewn quilted art work to Rev. Sasakawa. Aoyama Roshi brought a new kind of incense from our head temple, Eiheiji, and an *okeso* (Buddha robe) with the Eiheiji crest that had been presented to her by Hata Zenji at his Installation Ceremony at Eiheiji twenty years ago.

For people who live near Mt. Equity Zendo, but who do not have a zazen practice, a talk was offered the second evening at the Pennsdale Quaker Friends' Meeting House, built in 1799. A fire in the fireplace was built to make Aoyama Roshi feel at home. Many questions were asked after the talk.

Although we had made plans for nearly two years for Aoyama Roshi to visit our Gateless Gate Sangha and its two precepted practitioners in the Lewisburg Maximum Security Federal Penitentiary, it was not to be, due to a lock-down. Earlier Monday afternoon, Aoyama Roshi spoke to the students from Bucknell University that do zazen on Monday afternoons at Rooke Chapel.

(cont'd.)

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Aoyama Roshi paying a visit to the new Bishop of North American Soto Zen Headquarters, Rev. Gengo Akiba, with his disciple Rev. Pamela Myoshu Wren at Kojin-An Zendo, Oakland, CA.

American Zen Teachers' Association 10th Annual Meeting Held on the East Coast

Ordained American women Zen teachers gathered for a day together at Syracuse Zen Center early last August, before moving on to the Annual Meeting being held at Zen Mountain Monastery. Pictured from back to front: Revs. Gyokuko Carlson, Dharma Ram Zen Center, Portland, OR, and Nicolee Jikyo Miller, Three Treasures Zendo, San Diego, CA; Sukha Murray, Zen Buddhist Temple, Ann Arbor, MI, Carey Jisho Warner, Stone Creek Zendo, Sebastopol, CA, and Bonnie Myotai Treace, ZCNYC; Blanche Zenkei Hartman, Abbess, SFZC, Karen Sekijun Sunna, Abbess, MZMC, MN, and Katherine Thanas, Santa Cruz Zen Center; Sherry Roko Chayat, Zen Center of Syracuse, Helen Yuho Harkaspi, Plain Water Practice, Gardiner, NY, and Dai-En.



(Aoyama Roshi visit cont'd.)

Afterward, we were all treated to a Japanese dinner at the home of Mrs. Fujiko Robbins, with Mrs. Sachiko Presser and Mrs. Kazuko Kuehnert, all long-time residents of the United States. Aoyama Roshi delighted them by writing many poems in Japanese with ink and brush on autumn leaves she had gathered.

Smith College in Southampton, MA, already knew of Aoyama Roshi because Prof. Taitetsuro Unno uses *Zen Seeds* in the classes he teaches there. Prof. Unno, retiring next year, is a respected scholar of Pure Land Buddhism.

A pleasant drive was made into the forests to visit at Valley Zendo, founded by disciples of Uchiyama Kosho Roshi, a core teacher of Aoyama Roshi's. Over a tasty potluck lunch, Rev. Issho Fujita, also a recent Guest Lecturer at MEZ, had his students ask questions for which we all took turns interpreting.

At Bean Town Zendo in Boston, another disciple of Uchiyama Roshi and former resident of Valley Zendo, Rev. Eishin Ikeda, welcomed us. Rev. Duncan Ryukun Williams, a Harvard Ph.D. candidate, aided us with the interpreting at both Bean Town Zendo and Harvard University. At Harvard, Aoyama Roshi was able to meet our precepted student, Judith Daiyu Randall.

Upon our arrival in San Francisco, we participated in a dinner with a number of the women priests from San Francisco Zen Center: Co-Abbot of the SFZC Blanche Zenkei Hartman, Vicki Shosan Austin, Fuyu Schroeder, Teah Strozer, Angie Etsudo Runyan and Kokai Roberts, with Jiko Linda Cutts unable to attend. We had the rare opportunity to meet and look at the practice from the viewpoint of women's needs, east and west.

Green Gulch Farm greeted us with a completely packed zendo. It was gratifying to have such interest in what a woman master had to offer. Afterward, Aoyama Roshi and our party participated in a tea ceremony in the new tea ceremony house, led by Angie Etsudo Runyan, who had been given the precepts by Suzuki Shunryu Roshi.

Aoyama Roshi and Rev. Sasakawa took in the adventure, going along the carved-from-a-cliff road to Tassajara, the main shikantaza practice center in the United States, near Carmel, CA. Jeff Dainen Barkstrom, in training there this year, welcomed us after Aoyama Roshi's lecture given in the yurt. Thus, all of MEZ precepted students met Aoyama Roshi on the tour.

MEZ is deeply grateful that Aoyama Roshi, Dai-En's teacher of 10 years in Japan, could be in our setting to share her wisdom. May she have taken back with her a sense of the vitality of Zen in America

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"The Monastery"

by R.S., released from Low Security Correctional Institution, Allenwood, PA.

I had known for quite some time that sooner or later I would enter a monastery. But never did I dream that I would be taken there in handcuffs and shackles. It was not quite what I expected.

Oh, it was the cold, austere environment, and we were locked in our rooms to meditate most of the day, but a light glared in our eyes as we lay on our cold steel bunks. All night!

It was a monastery for the most advanced of monks, and yet here I was, a toddler. I realized and even complained that I was not ready for the discipline required of this facility. I began to feel imprisoned.

The masters wore strange uniforms and were much younger than I had expected. Several had been part of Desert Storm. They constantly chided us, challenged us, humiliated us and if we rebelled in any way, we were locked into our cells for days and fed through slots in our doors.

During our meditation a television would be blaring outside our door. It was as if we were meditating in a war zone.

I struggled and eventually was able to stay with my legs crossed, sitting on my cell floor listening for the whirl of the heron's wings. A breath in, a breath out. At times, the master would throw open the steel door and demand to know what I was doing. He mocked me, "Are you meditating?"

"Yes." I would say without moving and he would leave with a slam of the door.

Still I railed. "I'm not ready! I'm too weak!", and yet, slowly humility came. I was moved to another monastery. After nine months there, I was handed a zafu, and a Buddhist master finally appeared. She was robed as I imagined.

Yet, as I sit in zazen, I see that the emptiness is the same before the shaven-headed monk or prison guard. I now see that the lessons of the monastery are even there in a prison.



西村公幹 阿彌陀佛
畫

<<You are Buddha, too>>

Painting of Avalokiteshvara, by Nishimura Kocho.
"Tendai Great Buddhist Teacher Dharma Seal Kocho"

Seven Years at Mt. Equity Zendo

April 1st, April Fools' Day, 1998, will mark the seventh year that Mt. Equity Zendo has had its doors open to people who have heard of us, mostly by word of mouth. Even before some practitioners officially receive the Five Precepts, these precepts have been required for practice while at Mt. Equity Zendo. With time, it has become clear how fortunate MEZ has been as a struggling new, understaffed Zendo to have practitioners who, besides observing the five precepts during practice here, have come with valuable gifts. Training monasteries in Asia prepare practitioners to enter training with "an empty cup". One of the reasons that MEZ is surviving is because so many students are coming with, and putting into use, their own gifts of: good will, stability, flexibility and "don't know" mind.

As we begin a new year, I wish to express my gratitude for this true "beginners' mind".

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"Each of us, helplessly and forever,
contains the other."

— James Baldwin —

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Wishing you peace

in all seasons.

Mt. Equity Zendo Meditation Events for 1998

January

- 10. Full Intro to Soto Zen
- 11. Day of Mindfulness
- 17. A Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness
- 23 - 25, The Deep Cold Sesshin

February

- 13 - 16, Nirvana Sesshin, Buddha's demise
- 21. Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness
- 22. Day of Mindfulness
- 27 - 3/1, Tenzo Workshop Weekend

March

- 7. Day of Zazen
- 8. Day of Mindfulness
- 15. Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness
- 20 - 22, Equinox Sesshin

April

- 4. Day of Zazen
- 5. Day of Mindfulness (MEZ's 7th Ann.)
- 11. Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness
- 24 - 26, Spring Sesshin

May

- 2. Day of Zazen (Buddha's Birthday)
- 3. Day of Mindfulness (Buddha's Birthday & Five Precepts Ceremony)
- 9. Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness
- 15 - 17. Flower Sesshin

June

- 19 - 21, Sangha-led Sesshin (Dai-En in Japan)

July

- 11. Full Intro to Soto Zen
- 12. Day of Mindfulness (Tanabata)
- 17 - 19, Midsummer Sesshin (Long Summer Sesshin continues to 24th)
- 25. Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness

August

- 1. Day of Zazen
- 2. Day of Mindfulness
- 14 - 16, O-Bon Sesshin, with special services for our deceased

September

- 5. Morning or Afternoon of Mindfulness
- 12. Full Intro to Soto Zen
- 13. Day of Mindfulness
- 18 - 20, O-Higan Sesshin

October

- 10. Day of Zazen
- 11. Day of Mindfulness
- 16 - 18, Autumn Sesshin

November

- 7. Day of Zazen
- 8. Day of Mindfulness
- 13 - 15, Gratitude Sesshin

December

- 5. Full Intro to Soto Zen
- 6. Day of Mindfulness
- 11 - 13, Dampi (arm-severing) Sesshin
- 26 - Jan. 1st, Rohatsu Enlightenment Sesshin

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