

Mount Equity Zendo Zephyr

December/January 2012/13

Mountain Seat Ceremony For Shao Shan Temple

Rev. Taihaku Priest who was of such help as Tenzo at our Shinzanshiki will be having her own Shinzanshiki, or Mountain Seat Ceremony this September, conferring on her the right to be the Abbess at her temple in Vermont. Rev. Taihaku is pictured here requesting Abbess Dai-En to accept the position of Godo, or Training Master for the ceremony.



The manner in which Rev. Taihaku asked this of Abbess Dai-En is not only the epitome of what it means to be a Dharma Friend, but is also an example of how to practice with Senior Teachers. Rev. Taihaku arranged a one day visit, rescheduled because of snow, flying from Vermont to Pennsylvania, so that she could formally make her request. She desired to do this in person, wearing formal robes, and offering sincere bows. While a simple email or phone call could be the most convenient and economical, Dharma life and practice eschews convenience for making heart connection. NiOsho says, formality in practice is like the beautiful paper someone wraps to offer a gift.



Rohatsu Sesshin & Priest Practice

From December 1st - 8th, the traditional time for commemorating the Buddha's enlightenment, Mt. Equity Zendo held its first full Rohatsu Sesshin as part of a two-week intensive priest training practice with three women priests, Rev. Jisen Coghlan (left) of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh and disciple of Rev. Kyoki Roberts, Rev. Jisho Siebert, disciple of Akiba Gengo Roshi, and Rev. Kaikyo Roby, disciple of Shohaku Okumura Roshi. In addition to their inspiring Dharma Talks, we also heard uplifting talks from MEZ senior lay students Daijun Brenner, Tokuen Gray, and Nanshin White. All the talks can be found by clicking [here](#).



At the conclusion of Sesshin Reverends Jisho (left) and Kaikyo practiced intensively for the second week to refine their priest practice. Rev. Jisho has been working the past 10 years assisting women victims of domestic violence both in the U.S. and abroad. Her most recent activity is in Haiti where she has been living the past two years.



Rohatsu Sesshin & Priest Practice (cont.)

Rev. Kaikyo (left) will be entering the Women's Monastery in Japan from April to fulfill her last priest requirement. She has been a certified hospice chaplain in Florida, working in the field of hospice for the past 10 years. Her work with the terminally ill has helped to better communicate the reality of impermanence and the importance of how to be skillfully there with those in transition.



Daijun Brenner (left), Tokuen Gray (center) and Nanshin White (right) offering Dharma Talks.

Welcoming 2013, the Year of the Snake



Ending 2012 with a small but intimate one-day sesshin was a wonderful way to prepare our minds to bring in the Year of the Snake. The Snake is symbolic of the protective energy of the universe. Snakes play a special role in Buddhist lore where they are symbols of protection, as remembered in the story of Siddhartha sitting earnestly in his quest for enlightenment and being protected by a king cobra from the rain. Snakes have also been seen as, for obvious reasons, very dangerous. In the *Dhammapada* the Buddha warns that the mind is like a viper in your room. Take the hook of mindfulness and remove the viper from your room. Then you can rest in peace. Either way we look at the snake, we welcomed this year by ringing the bell and offering 108 bows completed just at midnight, sending our blessings and wishes that the trials and tribulations of all sentient beings be dispelled by the sound of the bell and our sincere bows.

In Zen practice I don't often come across the word forgiveness. Not that it isn't a part of our practice, but when reading the sutras I don't easily see mention of the word. I see more often words like compassion, equanimity, loving kindness, letting go, understanding, inter-dependence, emptiness, etc.

Recently, at the Drug and Alcohol Rehab center where I teach zazen, a disgruntled man came into class about 10 minutes late. I was about to ask him to leave because I had already done my introduction which I ask that all patients hear before I begin. I wear my robes, make it clear that I am a Zen Buddhist priest of 9 years, that I've been practicing meditation daily since 1994, that I myself had issues with drugs and alcohol which led me to this path, and that they don't have to become a Buddhist in order to benefit from meditation. There are Catholic priests, Lutheran ministers, and Jewish Rabbis that meditate and are Zen teachers. Buddha, I tell them, was not a god.

I find that if I do not introduce myself in this way, the patients have a lingering suspicion throughout the class. When I do talk in this way, they begin to relax. They come to see that meditation is something that goes beyond religion, that it is a human endeavor, a natural thing that anyone can do. They look past my robes, respect my path, and begin to listen to what I say. It's important, too, that I mention my own difficulties with alcohol and drug use, though I don't go into details. I was very lucky to not get seriously involved in drugs, though friends of mine, particularly in college, really had problems. Regardless, the patients connect with me better when I reveal my own problems, and see that what I am offering to them is tangible. I tell them that had I not found Zen, I would have had much more serious problems with drugs.

So when this patient came in ten minutes late and missed the introduction I was concerned that he would be a problem and distract the others by leaving the class in the middle (as sometimes happens). But he seemed insistent on staying, so I took a chance and allowed him to stay. We proceeded with 10 minutes of light stretching to limber up the body. When someone is going through detox they often feel stiff because a lot of toxins are moving through their body. We do light stretching to help release some of those toxins. Following this I have them lie down for 15 minutes of deep relaxation where they tighten and release the major muscle groups, scan the body with the mind, follow the breath, the thoughts, and finally release into a sense of peace. Many of them fall asleep during this. Unless they are snoring I do not attempt to wake them. One thing they are not getting enough of both in and out of rehab is true rest. This is one of the reasons why they reach for drugs or alcohol. They don't know how to use the mind skillfully in order to relax. Drugs become a substitute.

Once the relaxation is over I have them sit two periods of zazen with walking meditation in-between. The first period of meditation is guided where I tell them where to place their attention. The second period is in silence and I ask them to follow the breath and to be open to sound or any sensations in the body in a non-judgmental way, refraining from labeling the experience "good" or "bad." We then closed the class, as usual, with open discussion about what they learned.

After class I proceeded to the cafeteria to eat with everyone. About 40 minutes had passed since the end of the meditation and while I was waiting in line to get food, the man I was worried about at the beginning of class approached me. He told me he hadn't felt that good in a long time. He had been getting into fights daily with one of the other men. He felt so peaceful that after class he went up to the man he had been fighting with and apologized to him for his part. He said he couldn't have done it without feeling at peace, which he attributed to the meditation class. While I didn't say anything that day about forgiving others their faults, the fruit of this man's practice was forgiveness that led to apology. We know we are on the path of Zen when we can forgive others their transgressions more easily.

Baby Blessing



We offer our congratulations to the Takahashi family on the recent birth of their baby girl, Juna. On December 28th family and friends of the Takahashi's came to MEZ to receive a baby blessing ceremony. Mizuki Takahashi, the father, teaches in the Biology department at Bucknell University. While he has been working on the faculty for a number of years, he is now on a tenure track. We wish to extend our support to Mizuki, Yukiko, Keiju, and Juna and let them know that Mt Equity always welcomes them.

Thanksgiving in Yogaville, Va

Over the Thanksgiving holiday NiOsho, accompanied by Rev. Daishin and Koen Hunter, was invited to give a series of talks at Yogaville, the ashram near Charlottesville, VA, where Rev. Daishin trained as a basic instructor of Integral Yoga. NiOsho gave a well-received talk on the theme of gratitude entitled, "When Loss is Gain, and Gain is Loss." The talk was livestreamed

and can be viewed [here](#). We offer our heartfelt thanks to the entire Yogaville community for hosting us, and especially to Swami Dayananda (pictured left with NiOsho, Daishin, and Koen) by whose request we were invited. It was inspiring to see how Integral Yoga practices inclusiveness of other faiths through their various ceremonies, programs as well as through the magnificent shrine dedicated to all the world religions (pictured in the background). It felt good to honor NiOsho's late classmate, Sudharman, who became a Yogi through his training at Yogaville.



Gratitude

Our gratitude to the following people for making donations of food for the months of November and December: Susan Gresens, Michel Lau, Khado, Annie Deighton, Tokuen, Itay Nachson, Eileen George, Ling Mei, Meigetsu, Rhonda Farley, Rod Snyder, Daijun, Rev. Jisen, Jane Keller, Meigetsu, I'en, Nanshin, Tomei, Swami Dayananda, Chong & Yogaville, Keien, Tokuen, Shudo, Tim Farrar, Teijun, Tenryu, Mitsuko, Rev. Taihaku, Koen, Mike & Prudence McCabe, Rev. Ryoshun, Tara Moberg, and anyone else we may have inadvertently left out. Our heartfelt gratitude.

Upcoming Events

•Intro to Zen Meditation

Saturday, February 2nd, 9:30 - 11:00am

•Half Day of Zen

Sunday, February 3rd, 1:30 - 4:30pm

•February Sesshin

February 15th - 17th

Partial Attendance is possible. Consider coming from 1:30 - 5pm on Saturday, the 17th, or in the evenings on Friday and Saturday from 7:30 - 9:30pm. See the schedule to the right.

•Full Day of Zen

Sunday, March 3rd, 10am - 4pm

•March Sesshin

March 15th - 17th

You are welcome to come and go during the day for any of the zazen periods. See the schedule to the right.

To register for events email dai-en@mtequity.org

NiOsho has been called to Tuscon, AZ to offer a blessing ceremony for the Yume Japanese Stone Garden, designed by her long-time friend, Patricia Deridder, being held January 15th.

NiOsho will be away most of March, giving talks and retreats at the Soto Zen temples in Hawaii as part of their commemoration of 110 years of Soto Zen overseas.

Sesshin Schedule

Evening

7:30pm	Zazen
8:00	Kinhin (walking meditation)
8:15	Zazen
8:45	Kinhin
9:00	Zazen
9:30	End of Zazen
10:00	Lights Out

Morning

5:00am	Wake Up
5:30	Zazen
6:05	Kinhin
6:20	Zazen
7:00	Service
8:00	Breakfast
9:30	Zazen
10:05	Kinhin
10:20	Zazen
10:55	Work Practice

Afternoon

12:00pm	Lunch
1:40	Zazen
2:10	Kinhin
2:25	Zazen
3:00	Tea
3:30	Dharma Talk
4:30	Zazen
5:00	Body Practice
6:00	Dinner

Heating Costs in Winter

After the holidays we noticed we were out of heating fuel, and called the oil company to have them fill our tanks. The cost came to \$1656.08 for 473 gallons. We have fuel bills like this two or three times a month during the Winter. Last winter, which was very mild, we spent \$3654.43 dollars in heating oil.

This month of January we were hoping to continue with the project of insulating walls but realized how big an impact that would have on our ability to offer events at MEZ because the insulation was planned for the Arhat Hall, dining room, and kitchen of the second floor. It is not feasible to insulate this space at this time. This is part of the reason we had decided to close MEZ in January, but we have re-opened to local sangha since postponing this project.

We have been working diligently over the past several years to better insulate the basement and attic space, certain ceilings and exterior walls. We've also cut pipes in certain sections of Mt. Equity so that only 1/3, about 3300 square feet, of the whole building is being heated, except for special weekend events. We also keep our heat down to about 60 degrees and use electric heaters to space heat certain areas we spend the most time working in.

As you know from our website and brochures we never want anyone earnest about this practice to consider not coming for financial reasons. Therefore we've always made efforts to be as flexible as possible to include all who are serious about Zen practice.

Please consider the cost of fuel oil at Mt. Equity when coming for retreats in the winter. Meanwhile, we are continuing to look for ways to have MEZ more cost efficient and better insulated and encourage our members to do the same with their own homes.

Nyoho Zen

All precepted students of MEZ are recommended to look at Rev. Koun Franz's blog, nyoho.com. Rev. Koun has a perspective and practice experience that helps to bridge the gap to better understanding Zen in Japan and its relevance to Zen in America. From Montana, he is 39 with a wife and two children, and has trained assiduously for several years at Zuioji and Shogoji monasteries in Japan. He presently lives in Japan with his family.

“As for sickness: are we not almost tempted to ask whether we could get along without it?” -Nietzche