

Mt. Equity Zendo Zephyr-

July 2011

Long Summer Sesshin with Fujita Issho Roshi

From June 19th - 25th, MEZ sat its annual week-long Sesshin with sanghas from Vermont, North Carolina, and Washington D.C. Fujita Issho Roshi gave wonderful Dharma talks on the most vivid way to practice zazen. He included the use of a model skeleton to demonstrate how the bones work and align. We should sit, he said, as though we have no muscles. Zazen is not another kind of muscle training. The muscles should be used only to develop sensitivity to the body and otherwise should be totally relaxed. Issho Roshi also emphasized respect for the limitations of the body. Zazen is not simply forcing yourself to conform to a sitting position “without your body’s permission” he said.

Furthermore, when we change one part of the body or try to fix part of our posture we can not do so without affecting the whole of our body. To demonstrate how this works he used a Hoberman’s Sphere, representing the full workings of the Universe (above embracing the skeleton). No point on the sphere can be moved in isolation from any other point. When we move one point, all

the other points move simultaneously. This is also true of our bodies. What we do to one part of the body affects us in all the other parts of the body. Drawing from the Alexander Technique, Fujita Roshi suggests that we not intentionally or directly move the body. Rather, we need to develop sensitivity to the tendencies of our muscles to move in a certain way while sitting. The direct movement of the muscles, for example, in the back, in many cases only increases discomfort. Yet to not move at all causes rigidity in the body and further increases pain. Rather, we need to develop an understanding of the “grammar of the body.”

Breath, body, and mind should be treated as one whole rather than as three separate entities. The practice of zazen is not to focus on the breath and then the body, and then the mind as in other meditation traditions. In zazen these three are totally integrated right from the beginning. Breath flows through the whole of the body. There is no part of the body it does not reach on each in and out breath.



Moreover, we should sit in a way that the various joints do not block the flow of the breath.

Body and mind, too, are not two separate things. In Dogen's writing, in fact, the word "body" comes before the word "mind" as in the famous phrase "Drop off body and mind", indicating the importance of the

b o d y i n relation to the mind. In fact, there is no "and" in the J a p a n e s e between body and mind. It's j u s t "bodymind." It is only recently in human history that mind and brain have come to be equated. In

Buddhism and Zen, mind pervades the whole of the body. So, in talking about body, mind is included. In talking about mind, body is included. In zazen, then, we simply allow ourselves to be moved by the breath.

If we think that Zen practice is about having or getting some kind of special experience, this is not the point. Fujita Roshi taught us that there is greater emphasis in Zen on "action" than on "interior experience." In many schools of meditation one's inner experience is focused on. But in shikantaza based Soto Zen one's activity in relation to people and the environment is stressed. Priority is given to our adaptability and harmonization with whatever activity we



happen to be engaged in whether it's in the kitchen, with our children, or at the workplace. These activities are not separate from zazen. Zazen does not give us some special experience to want to come back to. Rather, the point of zazen is to know that we don't do it. The whole universe and all of it's workings do zazen. Therefore, our

attention is shifted from our personal experience to activity. Once again, it's not that there is no experience in zazen but that whatever we a r e experiencing in our bodies is not the center o f o u r attention.

In fact, Fujita Roshi encouraged us not to focus on anything in particular but to have our attention spread through everything. To better understand the kind of attention needed in zazen he demonstrated by using a slack line. In order to stay properly balanced on the slack line it's better that the mind is not focused on the line. It should be focused beyond the line. The body, too, needs to be relaxed. There should be a quality of effortlessness to standing and walking on the line.

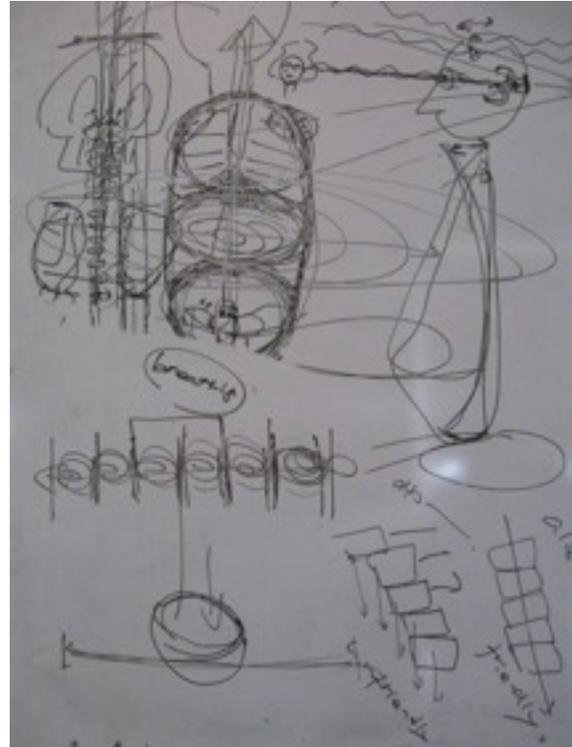
Another way Fujita Roshi helped us to better understand what he was trying to say was through the use of drawings. If we had any doubts about his words he drew us very descriptive figures to explain things such as posture, bone structure, use of the eyes and breath. He also used mathematical formulas to explain teachings such as the 4 Noble Truths:

$$S(\text{uffering}) = P(\text{ain}) \times R(\text{esistance})$$

$$H(\text{appiness}) = P(\text{leasure}) \div A(\text{ttachment})$$

Pain and pleasure, he explained, are a natural part of life. Our resistance to pain causes greater suffering. Our attachment to happiness lessens our happiness. Through practice we learn to reduce our resistance to pain and our attachment to pleasure.

We are very grateful to Fujita Roshi for his innovative and free-style offering of the Buddhadharmā to our Sangha.



Precepts Ceremony

Long Summer Sesshin was concluded with five members of MEZ receiving the precepts. Brenna *Teijun* Schneider, Bill *Daiko* Lundy (pictured holding his daughter Margaret), and Kathe *Khado* Curran all received the 5 precepts. *Meigetsu* Robshaw made vows as a Zen Oblate and Jesse Hollifield (pictured with his daughter Kyla) renewed his vows, receiving the 16 precepts and reinstating his Dharma name, *Daikan*, “Great Compassionate Seeing.”



Pictured left are participants in our Long Summer Sesshin. In addition to MEZ students, Rev. Taihaku Priest and her disciple, Rev. Kenzan (a huge help in the kitchen!) and three students, Mike, Dick, and Donna joined us from Shao Shan Temple in Vermont. Rev. Choro Antonaccio joined us from Chapel Hill Zen Center in North Carolina, and Mitchell Ratner, a member of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, joined us from Washington, D.C. We also thank Mitchell for his offering of guided meditation. We are very grateful that our Sanghas had opportunities for getting to know one another during this special one week of the year.



Pre-Sesshin Essentials

A special thank you to Donen coming from State College, Koen from Harrisburg, and Shudo, Dendo, and Michel Lau from Baltimore Dharma Group working all day Saturday before the beginning of Sesshin to prepare MEZ for all of our guests. Besides cleaning the building and setting out bedding, lunch was also donated. All of this work made our Sesshin the retreat that it was. Without you it would not have been possible.

Special Events

Introduction to Zen Meditation - Saturday, July 2nd 9:30am - 11:00am and Monday, July 11th and August 8th, 7 - 8:30pm

\$10 suggested donation.

Half Day of Mindfulness - Saturday July 9th and August 6th 1:30pm - 4:30pm

\$12 suggested donation, \$10 for Friends

Day of Mindfulness - Sunday, July 10th and August 7th 10am - 4pm

\$25 suggested donation, \$20 for Friends (bring a brown bag vegetarian lunch)

Weekend Sesshin - July 15th - 17th (Silent) and August 19th - 21st (Obon)

To be included in the email registration list for monthly Sesshin email daishin@mtequity.org.

Women's Zen Stayover - August 13th - 14th, 1pm - 11am

Please email dai-en@mtequity.org for information.

Registration for Special
Events:

daishin@mtequity.org

or

(570) 546-2784

Weekly Practice Schedule

Tuesday Evening 7 - 9:15pm

Thursday Morning 6:30 - 8:00am (includes Breakfast with oriyoki bowls - phone before coming)

Thursday Evening 7 - 8:30pm

Gratitude to the following people for making offerings of food and related items the month of June:

Nanshin, Tomei, Melodie Russell, Will Smith, Misho, Jan Hambridge, Domon, Tokuen, Daijun, Koen, Michel Lau, Dendo and Shudo Brocht, Donen, Teijun Schneider, Daikan Hollifield, Rev. Josho Phelan, Khado, Daiko, Onen and all others we may have inadvertently missed. Our heartfelt gratitude.

Post Sesshin Essentials

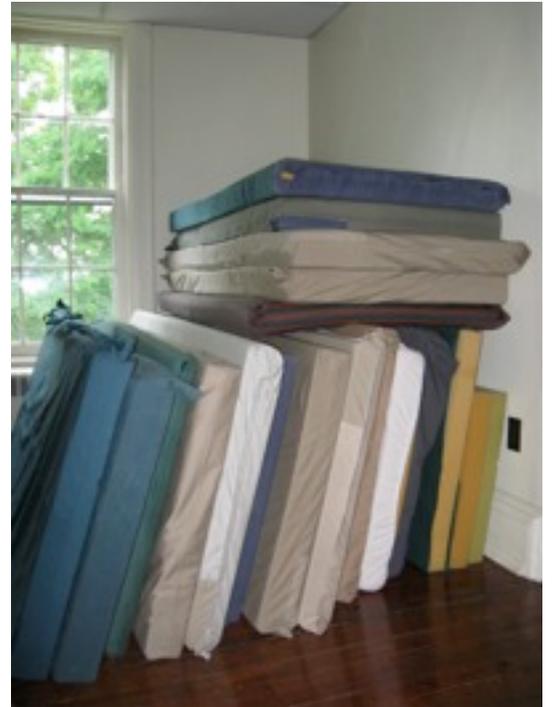


Many students from afar have asked us what they can do to help out. As much as we need a hand with cleaning and other details before Sesshin, it's just as important that we receive support at Sesshin's conclusion. In the past, some people, such as Tomei, Kevin and Dan, have helped by recycling plastics or batteries that we are not able to recycle here in Lycoming County. This helps us and the environment. Please help by taking the wrinkles out of the futon that you've slept on and neatly stacking your futon back in 2 East. Another way of helping is by strongly wringing

out the floor cleaning cloths, draping them properly over the buckets and returning the buckets to their proper place when finishing cleaning the floors. This allows the cloths to dry and prevents them from getting moldy.

The care of oriyoki cloths is related to the care of cleaning cloths. It's helpful when removing the bowl cloths in order to wash the bowls at the end of Sesshin to make sure the cloths are not left folded. They need to be opened up completely and shaken out. This ensures not only that they dry properly, but also that they are washed properly when put into the washing machine. Otherwise the cloths tend to stay folded even through an entire wash cycle.

“Good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end” is a zen saying. To all things there is a start, a doing and a finishing. The beginning, middle, and end encompass the range of our practice. Please continue to help us in many ways by giving attention to each moment and also by communicating to us about what seems to be out of place.



O Chuu-gen

July is a time of gift-giving in Japan called “O Chuu-gen” to those who have supported us in some way throughout the year. This is also the birthday month of our grounds keeper, Sonnie, 70 this year. The small golden box will be available in the Zendo Hall at July Sesshin and throughout this month for anyone who wishes to acknowledge his efforts this first half of the year. Gassho, NiOsho

The Sock and Tee Shirt Campaign for Japan Quake Relief

The Long Summer Sesshin behind us, I was delighted to read that Milt Machalek's local sitting group, the Red Rose Sangha in Lancaster, had gotten together a package of 81 pairs of colored socks to send to Fuukan-san's temple. My friend, Patricia Deridder of Tucson, AZ also sent out a package of socks. These socks will be distributed to some of the neediest of the 90,000 still living in evacuation centers nearby. This spurred me on recently to go to the Mall and purchase 54 beautiful pairs myself to send off. We were visited yesterday by On'en Cramer of York, who told me he would inform his local sitting group, the Susquehanna Valley Sangha, to do likewise. If you pick up a Priority box, small, medium or large, and fill it with socks--for adults too-- that are not white, and with tee shirts for children mainly, but also small sizes for adults, Fuukan-san tells me that this is one of the greatest needs at present in this time of Japan's monsoon season. Going together as a family, as a neighborhood, as a Sangha, helps to divide the cost, and multiply the happiness! Please do consider this and get in touch with me when you are ready to send it out and require Fuukan-san's address for mailing. - Gassho, NiOsho

July 15th-17 Silent Sesshin

We go right into Silent Sesshin as our chance to "lay it all down" and apply the invaluable lessons we learned from Fujita Issho Roshi's teachings on shikantaza, the style in which he trained for many years at Antaiji.

August Sesshin 19th-21st with Dharma Combat

June, July and August are the months for our Summer practice period we call Ango, for which Nanshin is our "Shuso" or "Chief Junior Seat." The practice period culminates with a "Dharma Combat" ceremony to be held at the end of our August Sesshin. Nanshin will be challenged to give Dharma responses to your questions. Mark the date on your calendar, and come prepared with a question for Nanshin!

International Symposium in Japan

This October in Japan, NiOsho will be attending an international symposium. The symposium will be held in conjunction with the 100th anniversary commemorating moving the second head temple of the Soto School, Sojiji, from Western Japan to Yokohama. NiOsho is planning to visit Fuukan-san's temple and hopes to spend enough time in Japan to visit some of her venerable female teachers and collect some of their most important experiences of Zen practice.

Kevin Gaughen reminded us of a poem from Kipling about not being pulled or pushed by any extremes:

"Meet with triumph or disaster and treat those two impostors just the same."