

Mt. Equity Zendo Zephyr-

November 2011



Volunteers at work in the tsunami struck area of Japan. Photo courtesy of Rev Tenku Gail Ruff.

Abbess Dai-En after participating in ceremonies at Sojiji, near Tokyo, set out to work at a volunteer center near Iwate Prefecture, the area hardest hit by the recent earthquake. She first spent three days with Rev. Fuukan and her family and was able to witness first hand the devastation to that area. She said the tombstones of one Pure Land Buddhist Temple looked like they had been tossed around as though styrofoam.

From there with the help of her friend, Teiko Abe san, she headed to a volunteer center that provided only a place to sleep. The volunteer center was a home base which volunteers would return and food was obtained by the volunteers who had the use of one microwave. Everyday for one week Abbess Dai-En forayed out with a group of volunteers to a destination two hours away not knowing what their work would entail from one day to the next. She was asked to give a Dharma Talk at one location. One of the older men was so surprised to hear a talk on the Dharma being given by a foreign nun. This is unusual because, in Japan, there are not only very few nuns these days, most of the priests that the Japanese will ever see are not from other countries. The Japanese may have certain ideas about Americans, so to see one that has dedicated her life to Soto Zen is indeed quite overwhelming.

In other parts of the region blankets and other basic necessities were distributed. The Abbess will be returning on November 12th with many more stories.

Practicing Zazen Alone

For the past month I had many occasions where I was the only one waking up at Mt. Equity Zendo and sitting zazen. There was no one here to sit with except myself. I saw how easy it is to not do morning meditation when there is no one else to do it with. I thought at times, “better to stay under the warm covers and sleep another hour” (which I did on a couple of occasions). When I was sitting by myself I noticed other thoughts such as, “am I crazy doing this practice at this hour of the morning? What if someone came in and saw me sitting facing a wall and not moving? Maybe they’d think I am weird.”

For most sangha members it is the case that you wake up having to discipline yourself to sit. No one is telling you that you need to go and meditate. It’s easy to reset the alarm and sleep in an extra hour. I imagine many of you struggle with keeping a daily meditation practice when you are the only one on the block or in the neighborhood that is practicing and you have a busy schedule with family and a job to take care of. How can we make room for zazen on top of this?

Certainly, the answer to this question is going to vary from person to person, but here are four things to consider if wishing to have a regular meditation practice.

Make zazen the first priority upon waking.

Telling yourself you will sit later in the day often becomes a good excuse for not sitting. Put it on your schedule or “To Do” list if you need to. Set a time to wake up with the intention of sitting. Traditionally, monks sit in the early morning while the mind is a little hazy. This helps prevent ego and thoughts from coming in and directing zazen. Zazen actually is easier when we are just on the

cup of sleep. All the muscles are relaxed and the mind is not going at full speed.

Never think you are practicing by yourself.

There are thousands of people practicing meditation throughout the world, at any given moment. When you do zazen you sit among spiritual seekers no matter how far away they are. You create a node of peace in the world that connects in a spiritual way with the other nodes around the planet. You are the Universe practicing zazen. This is the meaning in Buddhism of “No Self.” The whole universe settles right on your cushion. We are never ever alone.

Create a beautiful space for zazen. If you are able, dedicate one room or a part of one room to zazen only. You may need to draw a curtain to close off that part of the room. If possible make a simple altar with a candle and flowers and a picture of a great sage like the Buddha or someone or something that resonates with your heart in a sacred way. Keep the space clean, and simple, without clutter.

Sit to your limit plus one minute. This is a teaching that the Abbess often suggests to people when sitting on their own. Don’t look at the clock to determine how long to sit. Listen to the body. Develop a deeper understanding of how the body works. Trust the body for its innate ability to do many things without thinking. The heart does not need you to tell it when it should beat. The body is deeply connected to the whole Universe and is picking up its cues of what to do from its environment. Animals know this. Humans have forgotten it. But we can remember it again by being in touch with the body, which is in touch with the deeper rhythms of the planet. Trust the body.

“Sit to your limit” means to sit to the limit of your comfort zone. Once you feel you are out of your comfort zone, then add what feels like one more minute before ending zazen.

These four considerations, if put to use, can greatly aid in persevering in meditation practice.

Six Day Meditation for the Abbess’ Peaceful Return

Every morning beginning any time between **5:30 - 7:00am from November 7th through 12th** and for however long you can, consider being part of our MEZ meditation. If you cannot come to MEZ at that time, then consider practicing with us from where you are. We will be sitting “alone together” creating nodes of peace linked together by our desire to practice as one and to offer our good energy for a safe arrival of the Abbess

back to the United States as well as for the people suffering from the tsunami in Japan.

Before zazen a teacher often offers “encouraging words” to motivate students to practice whole-heartedly. A written version of “encouraging words” will be available for those who would like to join us from afar. Simply send Daishin a notice that you would like to participate in the twelve day meditation in preparation for the Abbess’ return and I will email you the encouraging words for that day the night before. Even if you can not join in at exactly the same time, or if you cannot do this practice every single day, consider joining in.

We will end the meditation by dedicating all of the merit generated to the peace and welfare of all beings. We’ll say, “May all being be safe, may all beings be well, may all beings be happy.” You can also add in any personal prayers you have at that time.



Koen Hunter, Abbess Dai-En, Rev. Choro Antonaccio, and Nanshin White stand by the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, Japan.

Giving Trees

This year we enjoyed a bumper crop of apples and pears. Thanks to the efforts of so many and especially to Eileen Georg, Cathy Emery, and Kathy Martin we were able to can jams, nectar, and mixed fruit. Much of the fruit was given away to Sangha members and 4 large boxes were given to three different charities that have food pantries for the homeless, hungry, or those that are simply being hit hard by the economy. Those places were the New Life Church which is just across the street from MEZ, the Williamsport Food Bank, and the American Rescue Workers, also located in Williamsport. I was delighted to know such places will accept fresh produce from the bounty of the Earth. This encourages me to work hard in the garden and create as much food as possible, knowing that it can be given to places where it will be appreciated and well used. In the spirit of giving, all donations from the December 10th Day of Silence will go to Son Light House, the food distribution center in Muncy.

In a related story, I was able to participate in a well attended lecture at Bucknell University by the author of "[American Wasteland](#)," Jonathan Bloom. Nanshin (Professor of Economics) invited him to the University to talk about the consequences and costs of the food we waste in our country. According to Bloom:

- 1) Over 40% of food grown in the U.S. is discarded. This equals 160 billion pounds costing about \$240 billion.
- 2) 50 million Americans are food insecure. By distributing 2% of what we throw away we would end hunger in the United States.
- 3) Landfills are the #2 source of methane gas- a greenhouse gas more potent than CO2-largely responsible for climate change. Discarded food is the main source for that methane.

There are, fortunately, many things we can do to address the issue of wasted food, the most important being reducing the amount of waste generated. Sources of the waste include present farming, grocery store, and restaurant practices. Fully 25% of food wasted comes from households amounting to \$2275 per year for a family of four. Bloom suggested the following for reducing waste:

- 1) Shop smart- don't bring too much food home. Make a shopping list and stick to it.
- 2) Question the expiration dates on packaging. Use your eyes and nose to determine whether food is edible, rather than relying on expiration dates.
- 3) Ask about portion sizes at restaurants before ordering. Skip bread appetizers if the portion is too large. Take leftovers home.
- 4) Give away excess food to the needy, including animals.
- 5) Compost food not eaten. This returns food to the land, creates soil, and prevents the emission of methane gas.
- 6) Push for legislation to: a. Ban organic food from landfills. b. Harvest all we grow. c. Streamline tax deductions for donating food. d. Fund gleaning from the fields.



Special Upcoming Events

Half Day of Mindfulness - Saturday December 3rd 1:30pm - 4:30pm

\$12 suggested donation, \$10 for Friends

Day of Mindfulness - Sunday, December 4th 10am - 4pm

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

Day of Silence - December 10th - All donations for this event go to Son Light House, the local food distribution center in Muncy

Year-End Sesshin - December 30th - January 1st

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

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:

Daijun Brenner, Ruth Steck, Luanne Potter, Mimi Rice, Daiko, Diane Hollis, Keien, Susan Gresens, Dendo, Ten Ryu, Tokuen, Bob Weiskoph, Misho, Myra K. Broach, Mike and Prudence McCabe and all others we may have inadvertently missed. Our heartfelt gratitude.

“Enlightening beings, having attained indestructible will, carry out all good works.... Making offerings to infinite Buddhas, giving charity, with self-control, they subdue their senses, out of desire to benefit all sentient beings, to cause them all to be purified.” (Verse From The Avatamsaka Sutra).