

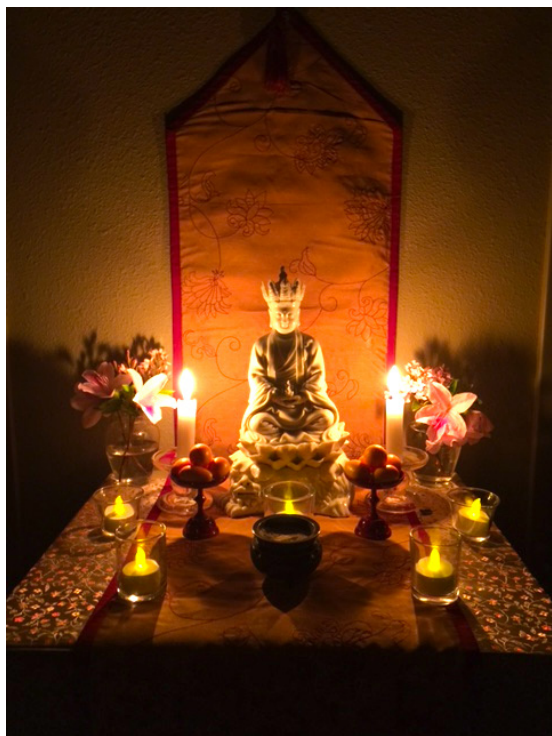


The Oak Tree in the Garden

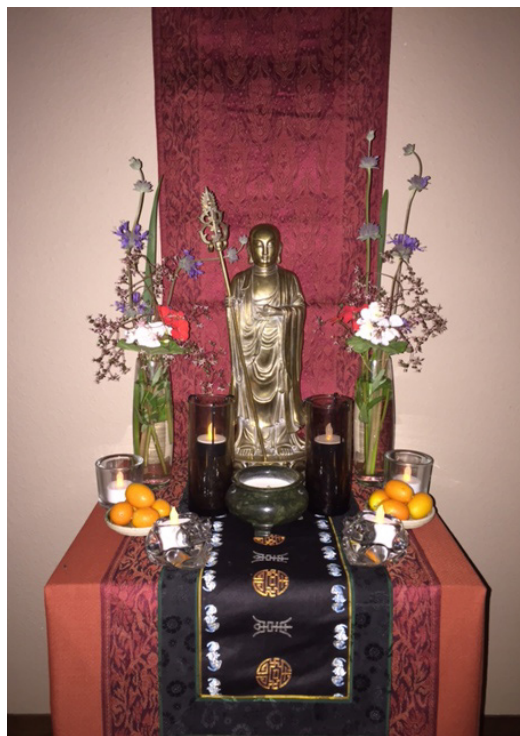
Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

Buddha's Birthday (Vesak) 2016

The first event of the celebration at HVZC was Temple Night, a very special evening during which Sangha, family and friends were able to sit quietly, do prostrations, visiting the various special altars set up in the zendo, coming and going as they were moved to do so; there are no bells or clappers, no set rounds of zazen. It's an evening for free-form practice, each person deepening in their own way in an environment of peace, gentleness, and awe. Below are two of this year's Temple Night altars. The first is for Ksitigarbha, the bodhisattva revered for his vow to liberate all beings from hell. The second is for Jizo, protector of women, children and travellers—including those traveling in the after death state. He graces the children's altar.



Temple Night is always a Friday night, and Saturday morning brought a change of scene as Sangha families and friends gathered in the zendo to offer gifts of fruit and flowers and “bathe” the baby Buddha with sweet tea. This year something new was added to the ceremony: Once the Buddha had his bath, we recited the Metta Sutta—the Sutra of Lovingkindness. Then everyone gathered in the dining hall for a wonderful Vietnamese feast, the gift of one of our members on the occasion of Roshi's 75th birthday. After the meal, Roshi was presented with a further gift, this from the



whole Sangha: a mounted calligraphy, a photo of which is on the following page.

Roshi gave a teisho as part of the Sunday morning sitting and chanting, and this was followed by the customary post-sitting gathering of the Sangha in the Dining Hall for refreshments and the enjoyment of Sangha family.



Mitra-roshi and Sozui-sensei before the calligraphy presented to Roshi. The calligraphy reads: "Katsu! The shout that is never used up!"

Challenging Practice!

The following writing is by Sozui-sensei.

Just because it's so very close, you cannot get this truth out of your own eyes. When you open your eyes it strikes you, and when you close your eyes it's not lacking either. When you open your mouth you speak of it, and when you shut your mouth it appears by itself. But if you try to receive it by stirring your mind, you've already missed it by eighteen thousand miles.

— Ta Hui;

from Christopher Cleary. Op.cit.,p. 71

Is there anyone who has not found themselves checking how we are doing, judging our practice? 'Am I doing it right?'; 'Am I making progress?'; 'Oh no, my mind is still busy and not settling down.'; 'There is all this restlessness and now my knees and back start to hurt.'; 'My breath should be longer by now.'; 'When am I going to get there?' You may be trying very hard to focus but you find your mind is wandering. And instead of simply bringing it back you find yourself engaged in this inner dialog about how mind has wandered. Which is just continuing the whole process of mind wandering.

You may thus recognize how you are getting in the way of allowing a natural settling down by trying to get away from something or willfully

trying to reach an imagined future goal through effort and manipulation. Moving away from something and moving toward something being two sides of the same dis-ease. Instead of settling down we find ourselves creating tension. Our willful striving and efforting, is itself an expression of and creates and maintains the distance and painful separation that that very striving seeks to overcome.

Master Rinzai challenges:

Followers of the Way, people everywhere say that there is a Way to be practiced, a dharma to be confirmed. Tell me, what Dharma will you confirm, what Way will you practice? What is lacking in your present activity? What still needs to be patched up?

— Rinzai Roku Discourses XVII

A patriarch said: 'If you stop the mind to look at stillness, arouse the mind to illuminate outside, control the mind to clarify inside, concentrate the mind to enter samadhi - all such [practices] as theses are artificial striving.'

— Rinzai Roku Discourses

It's not going outward into thoughts and images, but it's not really going inward either. It's seeing through where that division arises from.

...And it's always right here and now. It's not something that we will attain some day as the result of some superhuman effort. This, pain in the legs right now, IS the mind of nirvana. And from there the very struggle and distress is transformed into the WAY itself.

— Jeff Shore

How about diving in completely, staying with the primary, physical sensations. Letting where you really are, letting THAT be the way, the teacher of the moment. Who or what else could be? No need to suppress thought, no need to listen to and believe any story you are telling yourself either. Just becoming one with what's really there, where you really are, not where you

want to be or think you should be.

Once you are relatively focused, gently drop down and relax into the gap between thoughts:

Don't continue thoughts that have already arisen and don't let those that haven't arisen yet be aroused. Just this is worth more than ten years of pilgrimage.

Rinzai Roku Discourses XVII

How about if instead of keeping life at arms length, you let go right into it with curiosity and courage? Using the extended outbreath we can find a way to sense deep down inside, underneath those thoughts.

With no idea or picture of what might happen, we simply have to wait. No amount of experience can predict the way in which the mysterious will unfold. In waiting, as with unknowing, we cannot resort to our stores of accumulated knowledge. But in leaving them behind we enter not a state of blank indifference, but one of vivid, unprejudiced questioning.

—The Faith to Doubt
by Stephen Batchelor, p.47

Replace “stuck” in the quote below with anything that comes up for you:

... here's what I've been shown. When a discomfort is arising whether it's a present scenario, what's happening now that is making me feel a certain way, or an old memory, I stop where I am, take a quiet moment and drop the storyline and details of who/what/when. This allows me to leave the languaging of it all and drop down into the experience of it. No plot line is necessary at this point. I move into pure experiencing with courage of heart (determination), curiosity (doubt) and compassion (trust). All three must be present. I look into “stuckness” with a warmth most of us only reserve for small children, exquisite

scenery or a beautiful flower. With the warm gaze I allow “stuck” to be there as long as it needs, to move however it needs and feel however it feels. Perhaps it is compassionately acknowledged somehow, and it always moves on out. Usually in a surprisingly short time and with less discomfort than imagined. I'm often left with a gift of lightness or an insight. I try not to miss such opportunity in any day, and never judge life's timing when something arises. When on fire they say, “stop, drop and roll.” I say, “stop, drop and feel.

—quote found in the comment section of
www.nicabm.com;
no longer available online

See how this cannot possibly be unfeeling, nihilistic or melancholy? It is not about detaching and dissociating, running away from things, emotions and thoughts. While we see through the emptiness of all things including ourselves, we are simultaneously in touch with their true and ever changing mysterious and ungraspable nature. Truly getting in touch and staying in touch with life's mysterious unfolding, instant by instant by instant is far from being cold or unemotional. Dying into this very moment, then this very moment, then this very moment, we come to realize what it means to be alive completely. Not burdened by expectation and judgement, not separating from what is, we begin to experience life with childlike freshness and true intimacy. From there true compassion and warmth manifest naturally. The very instant we die completely, as Shido Munan suggests, we come to life completely, functioning freely without clinging, and we realize that just doing what must be done is true freedom.

*To die and die completely,
then everything we do is good.*
—Shido Munan Zenji

Give yourself to the extended outbreath. Do not trust your thoughts and stories about anything. Just see where actually doing the practice takes you. You don't need a preconceived goal. You don't need an idea of how it's supposed

to be. Just give yourself completely to that extended outbreath, so purely, and wholeheartedly, like Mumon Ekai says in the commentary to the Koan MU, with all the 360.000 smallest bones and 84.00 hair pores, we do it so completely with everything we have and are, that there is no room for 'am I going to get it? Am I getting closer?' Give yourself so completely to the practice that there can be no room for such things. That's really what a sesshin is about. Enough said. Please forget the words and let's dive in. Thank you!

Great Master Bodhidharma said: "Many understand the way, but few practice it."

—Torei Enji,

The Undying Lamp of Zen



After Dongshan [J: Tung-shan] had made offerings to a painting of Master Yunyan, another monk asked, "You've told us that Master Yunyan said, 'Just this is it.' What was his meaning?"

Dongshan said, "At that time I didn't fully understand."

The monk asked, "Did the late master fully understand 'just this'?"

Dongshan said, "If he didn't understand, how could he have said those words? If he did understand, how could he have said those words?"

—from **The Record of Tung-shan Classics in East Asian Buddhism**,
author Liang-chieh.; Powell, William F.,
University of Hawaii Press



Tilopa said to Naropa, Naropa said to Marpa, Marpa said to Milarepa, Milarepa said to Gampopa, and Gampopa said to everybody, just observe the mind without distraction.

—quoted by Tenzin Palmo,
British woman turned Tibetan nun, in her book,
Three Teachings

One day a monk asked Master Dongshan, "When the cold season comes, where can we go to escape it?"

The master said, "Why not go to the place where cold or hot do not reach?"

The monk asked, "Where is the place where cold or hot do not reach?"

The master said, "When it's cold, you die of cold. When it's hot, you die of heat."

—Case #43, **Dongshan's Cold and Heat**,
The Blue Cliff Record, tr. Cleary



When the monk Xiujing was practicing with Master Dongshan, he once told the master, "I still cannot see the essential path - I'm still not free of discriminating thinking."

The master said, "Do you think there is such a path?"

Xiujing, after some thought, said, "No, I don't think there is such a path."

The master said, "Where did you acquire your discriminating thinking?"

Xiujing said, "I ask you that with all sincerity."

The master said, "Why don't you go to the place where there is no grass for ten thousand miles?"

Xiujing asked, "How can I go to such a place?"

The master said, "Go directly! Right now!"

—from **The Record of Tung-shan Classics in East Asian Buddhism**,
author Liang-chieh.; Powell, William F.,
University of Hawaii Press



Chinese language is challenging enough to understand that even Chinese citizens in Taiwan, when speaking to each other, will “write” using their forefingers, many of the characters that refer to what they are saying, on their palms, in order to help clarify what their conversation. When it comes to translating the ancient Chinese language of, for example, the Zen masters who lived during the Golden Age of Zen in the T’ang Dynasty it becomes even more complicated, as language changes over time, and these Zen masters lived centuries ago. Add to those fundamental language changes—during which in some cases characters can come to mean the opposite of what they did at the time—the fact that slang expressions may have come in or out of favor, and you have an extremely challenging time translating the language of those Zen masters into modern English. And when the translator has had little or no Zen practice experience, the subtle meanings expressed by those Zen masters can be missed, or worse, mis-translated. So it is that one can find multiple, vastly different translations of some of the ancient stories. Below and in the next column are one of the less extreme cases in point:

In the old days Ch’an Master Tao Lin lived up in a tall pine tree on Ch’in Wang Mountain; people of the time called him the “Bird’s Nest Monk.” When Minister Po Chu-yo was commander of Ch’ien T’ang, he made a special trip to the mountain to visit him. Po said, “It’s very dangerous where you’re sitting, Ch’an Master.”

The Master said, “My danger may be very great, Minister, but yours is even greater.”

Po said, “I am commander of Ch’ien T’ang: what danger is there?”

The Master said, “Fuel and fire are joined, consciousness and identity do not stay: how can you not be in danger?”

Po also asked, “What is the overall meaning of the Buddhist Teaching?”

The Master said, “Don’t commit any evils, practice the many virtues.”

Po said, “Even a 3-year-old child could say this.”

The Master said, “Though a 3-year-old child can say it, an 80-year-old man cannot carry it out.” Po then bowed and departed.

—from **Swampland Flowers:
The Letters & Lectures of Master Ta Hui,**
tr. J.C. Cleary

And a second version:

Pai Lê-t’ien [Pai Chü-i or Po Chü-i, 772–846] was a great poet of T’ang. When he was officiating as governor in a certain district there was a Zen master within his jurisdiction popularly known as Niao-k’ê, the “Bird’s Nest,” for he used to practise his meditation on a seat made of the thickly-growing branches of a tree. The governor-poet once visited him and said, “What a dangerous seat you have up in the tree?”

“Yours is far worse than mine”; retorted the master.

“I am the governor of this district, and I don’t see what danger there is in it.”

“Then, you don’t know yourself! When your passions burn and your mind is unsteady, what is more dangerous than that?”

The governor then asked, “What is the teaching of Buddhism?”

The master recited this famous stanza:

*“Not to commit evils,
But to practise all good,
And to keep the heart pure -
This is the teaching of the Buddhas.”*

Pai, however, protested, "Any child three years old knows that."

"Any child three years old may know it, but even an old man of eighty years finds it difficult to practice it." So concluded the Zen master up in the tree.

— tr. D.T.Suzuki
in **Essays in Zen Buddhism (Third Series)**,
Rider & Co., 1953, p. 368



Letting Go...

The practice of *susok'kan*—the extended outbreath—is an extremely powerful practice. When practiced regularly and with commitment, it brings to light places where we're caught, where we have attachments. Moreover, as we allow ourselves to fully experience those tugs in the chest that indicate an attachment, we find that they begin to let go—*assuming we want to let them go*. (Important caveat!) Until we see them and are able to let them go, they drive our behavior subconsciously. Yet we have the capacity to be truly free of attachments, and to live a life of peace and joy in which our activity stems from compassion and wisdom. Below, some comments by a senior student:

The process of letting go is the most rewarding and yet most difficult project any human being can undertake. Holding onto our idea habits that generate attachment feels safe and entertaining. Until we start to see through our attachment patterns, it seems impossible and terrifying not to keep them going. Once we do see the freedom on the other side of letting go, it continues to be difficult, because attachment patterns are sticky and challenging to work through. Living in our idea mind seems familiar and safe, although in reality it just creates a whole world of darkness, suffering, constriction and flatness. Acting out of this attachment mind creates additional suffering for others as well.

Even when we start to see beyond our idea mind into the true reality, which is full of light, joy, and unending freedom, we can still get

stuck in our ruts of habitual attachment-generated thinking and bog ourselves down in those attachments. It's an extraordinarily painful process to witness, because we know and can intermittently see a world of wonder and fullness, in which each moment is unfolding brand-new-ness. I recently received something I spent most of my life longing for, but then, though, I was on the verge of losing it for awhile. Even though I knew that engaging in thinking and longing for it would generate that flat, dark mind of attachment and suffering, I did it anyway!

To back out of that mind state I had to open fully to the fear, pain and old habits of mind that were driving the attachment. The gift of this was that I could more fully and precisely see the attachment habits. Now I'll be able to catch them more quickly if they should arise again, by feeling the energy and physical sensations in my body, and NOT perpetuate them with additional thinking.

I'm writing this so that I can remember what I have re-learned: The way to live in this wonderland of freshness and freedom is to be completely present in each moment, resist the urge to generate thinking. Allow thoughts that do arise to fall away on their own. Be aware of feelings in the body, especially tugging feelings that signify strong attachment. Just becoming fully aware of those feelings without amping them up, and continuing to be increasingly aware of all things, will weaken the habits of attachment. Eventually, you'll know in your bones the rewards of immediately dropping attachments as they arise and you'll strive to live from a place where you have the choice not to bring them up. That's the way human beings are meant to live. In that place, every day is a good day, because every circumstance is a perfect arising of True Mind, free and pure and joyful in it's intrinsic nature. There is nothing outside us, because everything IS us, unfolding in perfect beauty and joy. There is truly nothing to lose, and nothing to gain. Heaven is truly the earth where we stand.

As Mumon-roshi said in his final poem, there

is nothing left to do, but let go everything in the whole universe. When we let go, we lose nothing but suffering, and gain only the freedom to live our life in the most joyful way possible.



Mind Stuff & the Truth

In our lives, we engage in countless activities and receive huge sensory input from the world around us. We tend to see all these activities and the phenomena that appear to us as absolutely true. In other words, we are deceived into thinking that things exist in the way they appear to us. This discrepancy between how things appear and how they really exist is the source of much of our trouble. Consequently, examining this discrepancy and investigating reality, the ultimate mode of existence, is the nexus of all Buddhist philosophical thought. The ultimate mode of existence is established through analysis, investigation, and experiment.”

—the Dalai Lama,
from *The Joy of Living and Dying in Peace*

“Consequently, examining this discrepancy and investigating reality, the ultimate mode of existence...is established through analysis, investigation, and experiment.” This is one way of saying that our practice is about exploring mind. Using the powerful practice of *susok’kan*—the extended outbreath—to focus and become increasingly aware, we naturally let go for the moment at least some of the background noise. This in turn allows us to begin to see more clearly our thoughts and actions. As we do so we may be shocked by what we now see—ways of acting and interacting, for example, that are not at all in line with how we would like to be acting and interacting. Ouch! And often simply seeing this so clearly is enough to cause a sort of warning sign to light up the next time we move in the direction of one of those dysfunctional ways of being. At that point we have a choice: we can ignore and do what John Welwood called “making an end run around your

issues—or we can opt out of that way of behaving. When we follow the latter course we discover how easy it is no longer to indulge in whatever that inappropriate action was. This allows for more clarity to open up, and gradually we move closer to true liberation.

When we can tune in to whatever the sense was that motivated us to begin practice to begin with, we have the benefit of a natural koan working to help us comprehend the nature of Existence, of Truth, of Life, or however we would word it. Words are not at all essential here; in fact, more likely the question cannot be expressed in words yet is a driving force in practice. We can take advantage of that natural koan by tuning in to the sense of it and letting that ride far out on the outbreath, as if we’re reaching through the breath to what it is we need to return to intimacy with. Again and again tuning into this sense, bits of truth are revealed. And we find ourselves responding from a mind state of clarity more frequently, even though there may be no obvious “progress” in our practice. Keep persisting, and you will eventually open in a bigger way to the Truth! But don’t stop there! This is, as a long-time Zen practitioner once said, “Kalpa Work.” What is a kalpa? An infinitely long—and now joyful—period of time....

NOTICE

The morning following a weekend sesshin is a “sleep in” morning, i.e., there is no morning sitting that day; there will, however, continue to be an evening sitting the day following a weekend sesshin.

As usual, the day following a longer sesshin—one of four, five, or seven days—will be a “free day,” i.e., there will be neither morning nor evening sittings that day. It’s a day off.

April 29-May 1 2-Day Sesshin led by Sozui-sensei.

May 4-8 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate. These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats for women veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. These retreats are offered free to the women they serve; if you would like to help support this effort, please send your check to Mountain Gate, HC 65 Box 78, Ojo Sarco NM 87521-9604; donations are tax-deductible and most gratefully received!

June 3-5 Regaining Balance Weekend Retreat for Wives & Female Partners of Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate. These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats, offered free of charge for partners of veterans suffering from PTSD. For further information see www.RegainingBalance.org

June 10-12 2-Day Work Sesshin Mitra-roshi expects to be here June 8-15.

June 25 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei

July 8-15 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline for applications is June 25.

July 10 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei; this all-day sitting coincides with Day 2 of the sesshin at Mountain Gate, and offers HVZC members a chance to take advantage of that sesshin energy to deepen their practice at Hidden Valley Zen Center.

August 6-13 7-Day Sesshin Although HVZC members are welcome to apply to longer sesshin at Mountain Gate in New Mexico, this is our only 7-day sesshin at HVZC. *Because of the sesshin there will be no Half-Day Introduction to Zen Meditation on August 6th.*

September 24 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei.

September 28-October 5 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate. Deadline: Sept 16.

October 14-16 2-Day Sesshin; Mitra-roshi expects to be at HVZC October 13-20.

October 26-30 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate. These are not sesshin, but specialized retreats for women veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. These retreats are offered free to the women they serve; if you would like to help support this effort, please send your check to Mountain Gate, HC 65 Box 78, Ojo Sarco NM 87521-9604; donations are tax-deductible and most gratefully received! And if you know of any women veterans who might benefit from attending a Regaining Balance Retreat, please let them know about these retreats. For more information: www.regainingbalance.org

November 4-6 2-Day Sesshin; Mitra-roshi expects to be at HVZC November 1-8.

November 19 All-Day Sitting led by Sozui-sensei.

November 15-22 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; Application deadline: November 9

November 30-December 8 Rohatsu Sesshin at Mountain Gate; deadline: Nov 9.

December 31 New Year's Eve Celebrations

2017 Schedule:

January 10-17 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate; Application deadline: January 1st

January 24-29 5-Day Sesshin at HVZC; Application deadline: January 20. Roshi expects to be at HVZC January

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A monk in all earnestness asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West? Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the garden!"