

Zen Heart Sangha

Issue 22

Spring/Summer 2013 Newsletter

Special Upcoming Events

Guest Speakers:

- Jul. 22: Rev. Jill Kaplan
(ZHS)
- Jul. 29: Rev. Jill Kaplan
- Aug. 19: Rev. Tai Sheridan
- Sep. 9: Rev. Beth Goldring
(Cambodia)
- Sep. 16: Rev. Jill Kaplan
- Oct. 14: Rev. Jill Kaplan

Dharma School:

- Aug. 10: Cooking with Gulia
Bekker-Dulmage
- Sep. 14: Nature with Misha
and Kate Haimson
- Oct. 12: Yoga with
Jill Kaplan
- Nov. 9: Activity TBA

Retreats:

- Aug. 17: Mountains and
Rivers Retreat/Hike with
Middle Way Zen Center,
10am-2pm
- Oct. 18-20: Vajrapani Fall
Retreat
- Dec. 2-7: Rohatsu Commute
Retreat

Sangha (Board) Meetings:

- Sep. 12: Camille's house

The Body in Practice

When Dogen was studying with Tendo Nyojo in China, he overheard a conversation in which Nyojo said “body and mind drop away.” Dogen then deeply realized the “not two, not one” relationship of body and mind. He wrote the *Fukanzazengi* as an expression of this non-duality, explaining that the “essential art of zazen” must be practiced in the following way:

Sit either in the full-lotus or half-lotus position. In the full-lotus position, first place your right foot on your left thigh, then your left foot on your right thigh. In the half-lotus, simply place your left foot on your right thigh....Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left hand on your right palm, thumb-tips lightly touching. Straighten your body and sit upright, leaning neither left nor right, neither forward nor backward...once you have adjusted your posture, take a breath and exhale fully, rock your body right and left, and settle into steady, immovable sitting. Think of not thinking. Not thinking—what kind of thinking is that? Non-thinking.

Dogen was very specific about the role of the body in meditation that would give rise to “non-thinking.” Unfortunately for us, this instruction had to do with maintaining a very particular posture common to Asian cultures—cross-legged sitting on the ground—which, of course, is not all that common for Westerners! While some of us are flexible and can stretch our bodies to accommodate crossed legs, others find this posture physically painful to maintain for long periods of meditation.

Floor-sitting is still given priority in most practice places, and even in our sangha where we offer many options (sitting on chairs, benches, or lying-down), the unspoken belief is these other options are not “the real thing.” If we just take our cue from Dogen’s writings, we may force ourselves to sit on the floor even if we are in great pain, but to fully practice zazen means that we must also take suffering and impermanence into account. The Buddha’s “middle way” asks us to be in harmony with our bodies as circumstances change, making choices for this body at this moment.

Years ago, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (“Thai”) visited San Francisco Zen Center. After a long discussion about the various postures, Thai asked the students if they had ever heard of the “chrysanthemum posture”? They excitedly asked him what it was. He answered: “The chrysanthemum posture is any position that you can hold comfortably for at least thirty minutes!” This is a dharma model that we can embrace wholeheartedly: find a posture that suits your body and then, as one student said recently, “Say ‘hello’ to your body!”

In gassho, Misha Shungen