



# The Oak Tree in the Garden

Journal of the Hidden Valley Zen Center

## Difficult Times

*The following article was written by Sozui-sensei, Assistant Director at Hidden Valley Zen Center.*

Many of us feel that we are living in exceptionally challenging times right now. At times like this it is especially important that we perceive clearly. When it is easy to be confused and moved around by the difficulty of a situation and our reactions to it, it is vital to be able to see clearly, deeply and steadily and to be able to distinguish our preconceived notions, thoughts, projections and reactions from what is really happening. Only with this as a basis will we be able to act wisely.

*In our zazen, when we sit deeply, we can experience this immovable eye that can see beyond all transient things, beyond what is always coming and going.*

—Shodo Harada Roshi

So what is beneath all that coming and going? Working with the extended out breath, patiently returning to the breath when we wonder off, not struggling against thoughts nor getting pulled into them, eventually we begin to get a sense of something that is beyond concepts, words and beyond thoughts.

When the Buddha transmitted the Dharma to Mahakashapa he said:

*I have the true Dharma Eye,  
the marvelous mind of Nirvana,  
the true form of formlessness,  
and the subtle Dharma Gate,*

*independent of words,  
and transmitted beyond Doctrine.*

We need to be able to see clearly what is going on. Not from a narrow, self-centered point of view, not from anger and fear or learned helplessness, but from a clear state of mind that is not moved around, even by our own thoughts and internal reactions to what is happening around us.

In Feudal Japan this spirit was called fudoshin, the 'immovable mind', and was most clearly manifested in the samurai's unquestionable demonstration of courage, and determination to face difficulty, danger, pain, and even death, with composure and without fear. The great Japanese swordsman, Tsukahara Bokuden said that mental calmness, not skill, is the sign of a matured samurai. This state of equanimity is essential in both the practice of Zazen and the martial and other arts. A peaceful determination and courage, endurance and determination to surmount every obstacle that comes in our way, fudoshin is associated with a clearly seeing eye that cannot be disturbed by confusion, hesitation, doubt, or fear. But what does it really mean to not be disturbed by confusion, doubt, hesitation, anger or fear? Be careful here! This is not about suppressing thoughts and unpleasant feelings! Not about the 'dead stillness' frequently cautioned against.

*If you wish to understand yourself, you must succeed in doing so in the midst of all kinds of confusions and upsets. Don't make the mistake of sitting dead in the cold ashes.*

—Zen master Emyo, in *The Zen Reader*,  
Thomas Cleary, p.140

In the Udana Sutta, in a portion titled “In Praise of Equanimity,” the Buddha taught,

*For one who clings motion exists  
But for one who does not cling,  
there is no motion  
Where there is no motion,  
there is stillness  
Where there is stillness,  
there is no craving  
Where no craving is,  
there is no coming or going  
Where no coming or going is,  
there is no arising or passing away  
There is neither this world,  
nor a world beyond,  
nor a state between.  
This is the very end of suffering.*

This is quiet wakefulness, alive and responsive to life.

In his letters to his student, the sword master Muenori, Zen Master Hakuin writes that it is not about an idea of not thinking of anything, nor is it about standing still and hesitating. But while moving freely in every direction to have full tautness so that if a person nearby us moves to our left or to our right or behind us, we can precisely perceive it, and that person's intention can be felt clearly. This is fudoshin, the unmoved mind at work. But if we have the slightest hesitation or attachment to thinking we will be cut by that person's sword. In the same way zazen is not about shutting down our eyes and ears and not perceiving and using our senses.

*Zazen is to polish the full, taut,  
openness, to fill the zendo, to fill the  
whole universe with the energy which  
surges through us!*

—Shodo Harada Roshi

In this mind state we have no time to get caught on things; we are always flowing. If we stop we are like water that gets stagnant and stale when it stops, or like water that freezes into ice where it becomes fixed. Flowing always we don't get caught on extraneous, unnecessary thinking.

It is important to note here that this is not the same as “flow” mind states. We do have to work to improve whatever what we are seeking to improve, in Zen practice as well as anything else, not assuming that “flow” mind states will result in improvement. This is about ongoing practice, reaching deeper, opening ever more fully, letting go attachments more and more! It is not about stressing ourselves out in an attempt to better ‘ourselves’. “Flow”, while pleasant, will not accomplish the same results as focused practice. If we get stuck while driving a car, getting lost in extraneous thinking, we are endangering ourselves and others. If we get lost in extraneous thinking we are unable to perceive clearly and work, act and speak wisely according to the situation at hand. Unmoved mind is the mind that is not stopped by anything, not caught on anything, no matter what comes along. In all directions the unmoved mind is free, full, and taut. This is the actualization of our zazen in action.

It is just like the functioning of a mirror. A mirror reflects each and every thing that comes before it without making any judgments whatsoever about what it reflects. This is the unmoved mind. It is not about criticizing and judging someone or something else; rather we merely reflect them. When we are functioning in that state of mind that is completely objective and clear to the final degree, that is the unmoved mind. The difference between a mirror and a human mind is that a mirror can merely reflect, while a human can perceive the situation and with an unmoved, serene mind act in an appropriate way from a place of deep, natural wisdom.

*When our mind works freely without any hindrance, and is at liberty to “come” or to “go”, we attain samadhi of prajna, or liberation. Such a state is called the function of “thoughtlessness.” But to refrain from thinking of anything, so that all thoughts are suppressed, is to be Dharma-ridden, and this is an erroneous view.*

—Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch,  
Chapter 2

*In this teaching of seated meditation, one fundamentally does not concentrate on mind, nor does one concentrate on purity, nor is it motionlessness. If one is to concentrate on the mind, then the mind [involved] is fundamentally false. You should understand that the mind is like a phantasm, so nothing can concentrate on it. If one is to concentrate on purity, then [realize that because] our natures are fundamentally pure, it is through false thoughts that suchness is covered up. Just be without false thoughts and the nature is pure of itself. If you activate your mind to become attached to purity, you will only generate the falseness of purity. The false is without location; it is the concentration that is false. Purity is without shape and characteristics; you only create the characteristics of purity and say this is 'effort' [in meditation]. To have such a view is to obscure one's own fundamental nature, and only to be fettered by purity.*

—Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch,  
Chapter 5

When a dancer performs, or when we are doing something we love doing, we are not thinking about whether we are active or still, pure and free of thoughts or not. We forget ourselves completely to where we experience stillness within activity, thinking of neither stillness nor activity. Only if a dancer can forget him/herself that totally in what they are doing are they able to be a true master of dance. It is the same in sports, catching a ball without even mentally considering it. Functioning from a place where we have gone beyond ideas of stillness or activity (or any ideas at all for that matter), is what we cultivate in our everyday lives, keeping our practice on the cushion alive throughout the day. A musician cannot play difficult passages when still being self-consciously aware about whether being active or still. When we lose ourselves completely there is no more division between the two and we find that when the mind is still, the music plays itself. That is why doing sesshin is so important: to melt away that divi-

sion and for us to experience what it is like, so that no matter what we are doing we can be in that state of mind of zazen.

From there we can understand the definition of zazen by Daruma Daishi (Bodhidharma):

*To let go of everything that we are connected to externally and to let go of any concerns within. When the mind is like a tall, straight wall, at that time we are one with the Path.*

Clearly this is not about suppressing. We all have the ability to both experience a situation fully and at the same time be free of it. Let's continue to cultivate and deepen this innate ability on the cushion, so that it can function through us fully in any situation we encounter.

*If you wish to understand yourself, you must succeed in doing so in the midst of all kinds of confusions and upsets. Don't make the mistake of sitting dead in the cold ashes.*

—Zen master Emyo, in *The Zen Reader*,  
Thomas Cleary, p.140



The above calligraphy by Shodo Harada Roshi reads “*jakunen fudo*”; in English: Serene, Unmovable:

*The text below uses freely translated excerpts from an end-of-sesshin talk given by Shodo Harada Roshi:*

At a turbulent time in Japanese history, Zen Master Taigen Shigen Zenji is quoted to have urged, “Never forget the thousand year view!”

It is important that we understand this teaching of the thousand-year view and to understand it by doing zazen and seeing clearly. When we can truly see from this deeply seeing eye, then our action is immediate. When we can see what is truthful and what most has to be done then we can immediately move on it with decision and from deep wisdom, without doubt and without confusion. This is what is so important!

How can this be done?

Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch (638-713) defined zazen:

*In the midst of all good-and-evil, not a thought is aroused in the mind - this is called 'Za'. Seeing into one's Self-nature, not being moved at all - this is called 'Zen'.*

—as quoted by Zenkei Shibayama,  
in **A Flower Does Not Talk**

We may wonder how it is possible for us to be in society with no ideas of what is good and bad. The Sixth Patriarch is not saying that we shouldn't perceive clearly and decisively. But he kindly reminds us that when we get carried away by thoughts and emotions about things we end up creating pain and suffering for our selves and others. Our minds get stagnant and we are less likely able to act effectively and wisely. It is that deeply seeing eye that is not moved around that allows us to see what has to be done and to simultaneously go forward with the action of what that is. To deepen enough to be able to see that is our most important responsibility as human beings.

In the Honeyball Sutra, the Buddha explains the moment-to moment construction of our world. This can be traced in our very own experience and happens thousands of times in a single day.

*What we contact we feel  
What we feel we perceive*

*What we perceive we think about  
What we think about  
we proliferate about  
What we proliferate about  
we dwell upon.  
What we dwell upon becomes  
the shape of our mind  
The shape of our mind becomes  
the shape of our world*

—**Boundless Heart**,  
by Christina Feldman, p. 132

Zen student Kurt Holting puts it like this:

*...Why I engage in such rigors [as zazen and sesshin] is not always easy to explain, even to myself. There are many forms of spiritual practice one could choose that are far less demanding. But after thirty years of Zen practice, I take it as a given that this kind of effort and intention is part of the deal if I want to gain traction against the power of fear and delusive thinking within my own mind. It's just part of what I have to do in order to stay awake and human in a world that trends relentlessly toward self-indulgence and distraction....*

*The connections between my Zen practice and my life as an activist are subtle but crucial. The point is not to achieve some special state of mind. It is not to escape the stresses and challenges of the world. It is not to become someone else, but rather to remember who I already am, beneath the layers of delusion that can so encrust my everyday life. Who I already am is invariably much bigger than I thought, much bigger than the roles I play, the titles I carry, the achievements toward which I typically bend my life. And that includes my efforts as an activist to change-maker. Taking time for Zazen, I can occasionally catch a glimpse of that much larger Self, and there is enormous freedom that comes from this act of remembering. What seems daunting in the context of my*

*small life falls into a wider perspective. Learning to align my everyday choices and actions with this wider perspective is what the practice of mindfulness is all about. As the Zen saying goes, "Never forget the thousand year view."*

*The purpose of cultivating a "thousand year view" is not to place my life above the fray, or to get lost in my head, but to plant my feet more firmly on the ground, to bring my heart more fully into the game, moment by moment by moment.*

What are we going to teach our children? How are we going to help them see through difficult times? What kind of world are we leaving behind? We have to look at this very carefully. We have to see that unless we are deepening into a place where we can see clearly and then move from there, we are not going to have anything to say to those who come after us about how we considered and looked clearly from that 1000 year view. This is the hugeness of the moment we are in.

*I have come  
to the frightening conclusion  
that I am the decisive element.  
It is my personal approach  
that creates the climate.  
It is my daily mood  
that makes the weather.  
I possess tremendous power to make  
life miserable or joyous;  
I can be a tool of torture or an  
instrument of inspiration.  
I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.  
In all situations, it is my response that  
decides whether a crisis is escalated or  
de-escalated and a person humanized  
or dehumanized.*

—Johann Wolfgang Goethe,  
from **Boundless Heart**,  
by Christina Feldman, p.127

For people to come here, having chosen to take time from their busy lives to deepen their state of mind, is very necessary. Unless we give our attention to that part of our being it is very hard

to see clearly through the complexities of our times. We have to practice diligently, continue to deepen and cultivate our ability to live and act from a place of deep wisdom. We are welcoming people for that in our zendos, using what has been handed over to us by those before us for the benefit of all. Please continue to come and sit and deepen and see from this place of positive activity and the unmoved eye that we all are endowed with.

*If I did not think this path and its fruition in liberation was possible for you, I would not ask it of you. Because I know this path of immeasurable freedom is possible for you, therefore I ask it of you.*

—The Buddha, from **Boundless Heart**,



## Hidden Vallen Zen Center News

We've finally replaced the 1950's-era overhead tube fluorescent lighting in the dining hall with high efficiency LED lighting fixtures that will cost significantly less to use, and be far more earth-friendly as well. The installation was accomplished by HVZC member Zach Adams,



who trained as an electrician before pursuing a different kind of work. Thank you, Zach!

At left: Sozui-sensei's mother, Christa Schubert, holds up one of the new lighting fixtures, with Zach Adams in the background.

Below: The dining hall with the new lighting installed!



# Vesak - the Buddha's Birthday

## Temple Night



The zendo entry altar, dedicated to Kwan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion



One of the several special altars set up just for Temple Night. This one is shown as it was being prepared. During actual Temple Night the zendo is lit only by candlelight so photos are not so readily reproducible in print form without significant PhotoShop work.

## Buddha's Birthday Ceremonies & Potluck



Sozui-sensei and her mother work on arranging flowers for the various Temple Night altars.



The zendo set up for the morning's ceremonies...



Peter arranges the fruit offerings for the altars; the kumquats came from Dai Gan and Dai Shin's tree



After the ceremony, the offerings waiting to be picked up. Foodstuff in the box is destined for the Interfaith Network's Food Pantry.



Peter and young guests including his granddaughter, blowing out the candles on the Buddha's birthday cakes

Vesak is the traditional name of the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and parinirvana. In Theravada Buddhism it is often spelled Vesakha or Vaisakha, depending on whether the Pali or Sanskrit spellings are used. However it is spelled it is the main Buddhist holiday of the year, and a celebration, really, of every person's potential to realize the same deep Truth that the Buddha realized and which set him free from suffering.

At HVZC, as at the Rochester Zen Center and its related centers and temples, this is a time of celebration and joy, one in which families and friends are also included. And so it was this special April 8th weekend at Hidden Valley Zen Center, beginning with Temple Night—a just once-a-year special offering for personal devotional practice in a specially arranged, candlelit zendo—on Friday night. This year it went past its usual closing hour of 9 pm because there were still a number of people sitting enveloped in the deeply peaceful energy of the zendo. The next morning there was a specially scheduled formal sitting with sanzen with Roshi followed by breakfast and the setting up of the zendo for the Ceremony of Bathing the Baby Buddha followed by the telling of the birth and life of Siddhartha Gautama, known as “the Buddha”—the Awakened One, not a god but a human being truly awakened. This was followed by a potluck meal with Sangha and family and friends, a joyful event shared together in the Center's Dining Hall under our newly installed LED lighting.

The final morning of the celebratory weekend included the usual Sunday morning sitting and chanting, followed by a live teisho by Mitra-roshi. The chanting that special morning was of the Prajna Paramita—the Heart of Perfect Wisdom—in English only, followed by the Rinzai lineage—the list of enlightened teachers going back the traditional seven buddhas before the buddha of this life cycle and continuing down through Rinzai, Hakuin and all the other masters to Yamada Mumon-roshi, the last in the line who has died. After the morning program we returned the zendo to its normal, everyday form and then enjoyed tea together.

## ***Urgent Need for a Replacement Vehicle!***

*As some of you already know, the 22-year-old Suzuki Sidekick vehicle that was kindly donated to us many years ago is on its very last legs. It's clear the electrical system is failing. The backup lights do not work (and it's not a fuse problem or a bulb problem). The vehicle has been in two accidents, one of which did damage to the front end when a tire blew on the freeway and the car veered into a concrete barrier. The outside rear view mirror controls no longer function. And that small SUV is known to be unstable on the road and unsafe; we've been told that because of that, that model was removed from market. It is, in classic terminology, “an accident waiting to happen.”*

*It's vital to replace the Suzuki before that does occur. The Center needs a vehicle for its day to day functioning.*

*If you have, or know anyone else who has, a small SUV in good condition and you'd like to pass it on please let us know asap. We're searching for a ±2010 Honda CRV or Toyota RAV4; they appear to be the most reliable and highly rated vehicles of the sort we need. Hidden Valley Zen Center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit and donations can be deducted from income taxes to the extent of the law. (If you don't have a vehicle to pass on, perhaps you might honor us with a donation to help with such a purchase?)*

**May 20 All-Day Sitting** led by Sozui-sensei

**May 31-June 4 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress, at Mountain Gate;** these retreats are only for women veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. They are not Zen sesshin, but are part of a free, nonsectarian outreach program of Mountain Gate, as are the monthly **Day of Mindfulness: Meditation & Writing for Women Veterans, Active Duty, and Family Members.** For more information on this last offering please go to [www.sanmonjizen.org](http://www.sanmonjizen.org)

**June 2-4 Weekend Sesshin** led by Sozui-sensei; *because of this sesshin, the Half-Day Introduction to Zen Practice will be held June 10th.*

**July 4-9 5-Day Sesshin;** Mitra-roshi expects to be at HVZC July 3-10. This is the only other longer sesshin at HVZC besides the January sesshin. ***PLEASE NOTE: It is VITAL that anyone applying to any sesshin at HVZC or Mountain Gate send or bring in an application with deposit or full payment BY the deadline for receipt of applications indicated in the calendar. If you wish to attend but cannot commit by that date to attend, please speak with the teacher who is conducting the sesshin to possibly make other arrangements. It is important for the Center to know far enough in advance who will be attending sesshin and the details of that attendance; otherwise it is impossible to provide the appropriate amount of food for the sesshin. Please be prompt with your application; if it is not received by the deadline, you will not be accepted to that sesshin.***

**July 12-19 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications is July 1.

**July 28-31 Regaining Balance Retreat for**

**Wives/Female Partners of Veterans with PTSD, at Mountain Gate.** This is part of a free outreach program to help veterans' spouses deal with their own stress from their partner's post-traumatic stress symptoms by teaching them tools that can make a difference.

**July 28-30 Weekend Sesshin** led by Sozui-sensei

**August 12 All-Day Sitting** led by Sozui-sensei

**August 19-26 TTZC will be using HVZC's zendo, dining hall and hut.** *During this time, HVZC Sangha sittings will take place during that time in the Kannon Room at the Kannon-do. Help is always welcome before and after this event, as kitchen items need to be moved to the Kannon-do to allow room for TTZC supplies in the main HVZC kitchen.*

**August 24-31 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications is August 10.

**September 29-October 2 Weekend Sesshin** led by Sozui-sensei

**September 27-October 1 Regaining Balance Retreat for Women Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress, at Mountain Gate;** these retreats are only for women veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. They are not Zen sesshin, but are part of a free, nonsectarian outreach program of Mountain Gate, as are the monthly **Day of Mindfulness: Meditation & Writing for Women Veterans, Active Duty, and Family Members.** For more information on this last offering please go to [www.sanmonjizen.org](http://www.sanmonjizen.org)

**October 6-13 7-Day Sesshin at Mountain Gate.** Deadline for applications is September 25.

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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!"*