

Zen Heart Sangha

Issue 25

Spring–Summer 2015 Newsletter

Special Upcoming Events

2015 Meditation Schedule

- Aug. 17: Rev. Mary Mocine,
Guest Speaker
Aug. 29: Saturday Seminar
Sep. 7: NO MEETING (Labor
Day)
Sep. 21: Rev. Michael
Newhall, Guest Speaker
Oct. 12: Full Moon
Bodhisattva Ceremony
Oct. 24: Saturday Seminar
Nov. 2: Segaki Ceremony
Dec. 14: Last meeting of
2015
Jan. 17, 2016: First
Saturday of 2016
Jan. 18, 2016: First
Monday evening of 2016

Sangha Meetings

- Sep. 18 at Gulia's (5:30pm
to 9:00 pm)
Nov. 19: Location TBA
Jan. 18, 2016: Location
TBA

Retreats

- Sep. 25–27: Fall Retreat (at
Vajrapani)
Dec. 1–7: Rohatsu
Commuter Retreat
(Dec. 4–5: full day
retreat)
Apr. 1–3, 2016: Buddha's
Birthday (at Vajrapani)

Dharma School Dates

- October 10
November 14
December 3 (Rohatsu tea)

Right Livelihood: The Koan of Work Practice

When Pai-chang (749–814 AD) was old he persisted in working the fields every day without fail. The monks felt sorry for him, so they hid his field tools. Pai-chang refused to eat. When the monks finally returned his work tools, Pai-chang said, "A day without work is a day without food."

Pai-chang's response became the basis for work practice in early Zen communities and continues to inform our practice today: no Zen community exists without *samu* (work practice) as part of training in paying attention to what is directly before us.

Right Livelihood, one of the steps of the Eight-fold path, points directly to the fundamental importance of work as a Zen practice. It was originally described as the way of 'gaining one's living through an honorable profession that brings no harm to others.' Five trades were specifically prohibited: trading in arms, living beings, flesh (killing animals), intoxicating drinks, and poisons. While these still apply today, the Buddha could not have foreseen the multitudinous kinds of work in which the world is now engaged beyond these five specific admonitions, and the great amount of harm much of that work does. So how do we know if our work in the world is Right Livelihood? We must rely on our practice of meditation and constantly sit with the koan: "What is the nature of my work? Is harm being done?"

In Western society, work is often seen as a 'necessary evil,' something to be done in order to afford the luxury of leisure or spiritual practice. In Buddhist societies, however, work and leisure are merely experienced as two sides of the same coin, and the coin itself is understood to be the total expression of spiritual life. In *Small is Beautiful*, E.F. Schumacher writes, "The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give a [person] a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence."

When seen from this perspective, work takes on an entirely new appearance, and all work—paid or unpaid, in the home or outside of it, acknowledged or in stealth—becomes equally valuable. Work becomes a practice to develop ourselves first as individually enlightened beings and second as a society, moving in the direction of wisdom and compassion. To understand Right Livelihood we must first continually apply the precepts—and be aware of the consequences of our work. Does it support human integrity, respect, and dignity? Does it support kindness, uprightness, and mindful attention? Does it create a feeling of interconnection with all beings?

Work, *samu*, Right Livelihood—this is what we do all day every day. Like Pai-chang, having work to do gives our lives purpose and provides meaning. It brings us back moment after moment to the most important thing: right now. *Deep bows, Misha Shungen*

Zen Heart Sangha 2015-16

Head Teacher

Misha Shungen Merrill

Practice Leaders

Tanto (Assistant Teacher):

Jill Kakushin Kaplan

Ino: Diane Comey

Work Leader: Lidia Luna

Assistant Work Leader:

Hiromi Kurahashi

Sewing Teacher: Jill Kaplan

Board Officers

President: GJ Scove

Treasurer: Wing Ng

Secretary: Marya Shahinian

Board Members

Bill Clopton

Gulia Bekker

Hau Thi Long

Stewards

Outreach: Bill Clopton

Assistant Outreach: Bill Kostura

Dharma School: Stephanie Zeller

Newsletter: Anna Doherty

Setup: Gulia Bekker-Dulmage

Website: Chris Doherty

Audio Recording (temporary): Jill

Kaplan & Chris Wesselman

Committees

Membership: Misha Merrill,

Hau Thi Long, Kelly Perri

Council of Harmony:

Kate Haimson, Chris Doherty,

Skanda Goudar

Space Expansion: Skanda Goudar

(chair), Misha Merrill, Camille

Spar, Gulia Bekker, GJ Scove,

Marya Shahinian

Gassho

Gassho is the Zen way of saying 'thank you' by putting our hands together and bowing. We honor and thank our new officers: GJ Scove for her kind and steady leadership, Wing Ng for taking on the responsibility of treasurer, and Marya Shahinian for continuing as our official recording secretary. We also thank our practice leaders Jill Kaplan (Tanto), Diane Comey (Ino), and Lidia Luna (work leader) for their efforts in training and keeping our weekly practice opportunities harmonious. In addition, many thanks to all the stewards who keep this sangha running smoothly: Gulia Bekker as setup steward; Anna Doherty for continued work as newsletter editor; Bill Clopton for work in outreach; Chris Doherty for maintaining our website and email server; and Jill Kaplan and Chris Wesselman for helping with the recording of lectures.



Children and Practice

My career originally involved me working at a paying job. When I gave that up to start a family, I struggled to know my value to our family unit without a paycheck. I thought working for pay was what I was supposed to do to create value. I had to let go of the salary and find the value in the joys and satisfaction of giving. Raising a family is not a job that is often recognized as right livelihood, but to me it is as fundamentally important as any paying job.

Children provide an amazing opportunity to see who you are. They challenge you and push you, and awaken things in you that you have not seen—from both a joyous and a difficult perspective. They allow you ample opportunity to practice within this job.

Right livelihood through raising a family has taught me to listen even when I hear something very difficult. I learned to ask questions to ease the difficulty that arose when my child had to tell me something so very difficult for them. I had to learn to hold my tongue. Did I always do it right? No, of course not—and if I was skillful 25% of the time, I considered that good! Sometimes, my emotions swallowed me and filled me with fear for my child, and my responses were not skillful.

I came to practice near the end of my child-rearing livelihood, and it is only now that they are grown up can I see the value in my job.

by Camille S.

Monthly Schedule

Monday evenings*

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Service	7:40
Lecture*	7:50
Final Bows	8:45
End Evening	9:00

* except 1st Mondays

1st Monday retreat

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Kinhin	7:40
Zazen	8:00
Three Bows	8:40
End Evening	8:45

1st & 3rd Saturdays

Zazen	5:50 am
Kinhin	6:20
Zazen	6:30
Service	7:00
Community breakfast	7:20
Soji (Cleanup)	8:00
Zazen	8:40
Study/Tea	9:15
End program	10:15

Zazen – sitting meditation

Kinhin – walking meditation

to ask how I go

is more relevant than the

notion that I go

by Kelly





Dharma School
Mandala collage with Jill
May 2015
photos by Gulia K.



Navigating Right Livelihood

Finding a job that qualifies as right livelihood is a complicated matter. I drove a taxicab in San Francisco for eleven years (1983–1994). Folks going out on the town, a last minute trip to the hospital to give birth, a grieving father whose daughter had died earlier that day—30 times a day people were glad to see me or at least needed my help. It felt like useful work.

Yet, how do we calculate overall benefit versus harm? That job probably accounted for the lion's share of the gasoline I have burned in my life. Now that we know about climate change, was that wrong livelihood? I had a general sense—in fact a strong sense, even then—that driving cars was harmful. On the other hand, if I had not driven a cab during those years, someone else would have driven that cab in my place. Should that affect my calculation? Cab driving was the best-paying work I could get then. It allowed me to develop a career in my spare time, which allows me to volunteer in some useful ways now. How does that factor in?

During the recession several years ago, my regular work dried up. A grocery store job would have involved selling meat from animals that had been raised in terrible conditions, and fish that had been harvested unsustainably. To me, that's a big issue. I would have rationalized it by saying that if I had not taken the job, someone else would have, so what was the practical difference? The important thing is whether you personally purchase such meat, generating the harm to the next animal. I wasn't doing that, so would it have been okay to take such work?

The list goes on and on. Is it okay to build housing (uses wood from forests), work in the computer industry (uses heavy metals mined in developing countries), sell clothing (made by near-slave labor), or work in advertising (needs no explanation)? Given the state of the climate, is it okay to make or sell anything, since it all has a carbon footprint?

It seems like we are trapped by how the world around us is. But of course we ourselves are making the world the way it is, bit by bit, for the folks who come after us. How do we navigate these waters?

There is no simple or absolute answer to this question. My only idea is to look closely at the effects on the world (as well as I can understand them) of how I make a living, and then to look at my own emotions as I do so. We avoid looking because it is painful, but isn't avoidance of looking also an aversion, painful in a subtler way? In the long run, I think we will be happier if we look, and look again. There is a word for this kind of practice, and it is meditation.

If one does this enough, I think the seeming contradictions that plague the concept of right livelihood will iron themselves out. Then one will know what to do. One might keep that job in advertising, or quit it to take something that pays half as much. Whichever one chooses will probably be the lesser of evils. There is no road map or list of commandments to follow—we have to figure every situation out from scratch. Different people will come to different decisions. However, we can find peace in knowing that we have looked, and are sincerely doing our best.

by Bill K.

Working in the Zendo

*"Chanted" to the cadence of
"I've Been Working on the Railroad"*

We've been working in the zendo
Zabutons in line
We've been working in the zendo
See the altar shine

Can't you hear the han a'knockin
Then the bell will ring
We've been working in the zendo
Wait to hear it sing

We've been working in the kitchen
All the knives in racks
We've been working in the kitchen
See the dishes stacked

Can't you hear the bell a'ringin
Smell the incense lit
We've been working in the kitchen
Now it's time to sit

We've been sitting in the zendo
Lights from candles gleam
We've been sitting in the zendo
Everything is clean

Can't you feel the gentle silence
And our minds at peace
We're all sitting in the zendo
Now our work has ceased

by Sue P.

To Dream of Right Livelihood

To me, right livelihood is simply
right conduct.

And what is right conduct?
Right conduct is intelligence in
action. It is action that is
unhindered by the past and the
future—action that involves
continual stepping into the
unknown, not out of ignorance,
but out of awareness,
understanding, and true
compassion.

It requires extreme
vulnerability and openness, and a
great deal of courage. I think that
as long as we are controlled by our
fears, right livelihood will remain a
dream.

by Trupti G.



Photo by Gulia K.

Working on Being Present

Living in an unjust and oppressive economic system designed to maximize profits over serving human needs makes it pretty hard to think well about work. Feeling angry and disappointed about the conditions of our world and our relations seems a natural reaction, which gets in the way of making good and rational choices for oneself and others. Zen has taught me to not necessarily identify with that anger, and to see how I cause myself unhappiness by sticking to viewpoints that might not make sense in this given moment. Things are not and never will be perfect, and Zen can certainly help us in living with that kind of imperfection so we can stay—or choose to stay—happy and relaxed, and yet make choices that further our life and everyone's life.

Once one gets over some of that anger (and other strong emotions), finding some meaningful work that allows one to really focus on what one is doing right here and now can be a way to practice Zazen at work. By really paying attention to what one is doing, and thereby getting really absorbed and experimenting with the conditions that would allow one to get even more immersed—one might be able to stop saving beings by realizing that they are already are saved.

by Rén N., continued on page 8

It's All About that Gap!

"If you are lucky enough to find a way of life you love, you have to find the courage to live it."

– John Irving

A Prayer for Owen Meany

I have kept this quote on my bulletin board for years, but didn't know how to live the "way of life I love."

I separate Work with a capital "W" from what I do in the world, and in that gap is where I have trouble. When I think of Work, it becomes something about others, about being on time, looking right, performance, being enough. In other words, fear enters the equation! But as Kobun-Chino once said when asked what to do with fear, I "agree!" This does seem to help ease the gap and brings me closer.

My practice has helped me be braver, to water and cultivate the seeds sown long ago. I just started a new job, working with a non-profit conservation group, and, challenging as it might become, I marvel at the way "myriad things express themselves!"

by Kathleen D.



Photos by Gulia K.

Body, Mind, and Service

When I started my Strength Training in one of Stanford's gyms two years ago, a curious thing happened: my meditations became easier and clearer. Several months later, I asked Misha in dokusan why this might be occurring. "Oh, that's simple," she replied, "It's just like karma yogi jobs at Vajrapani."

I had been thinking it was a mind and body thing, where the weight work and stretches were clarifying some of the emotions I was carrying around in my body. My sessions are often like a moving insight meditation, where I can consider something from multiple sides and see an optimal solution. Maybe that's part of it, too, on a more subtle level.

Then, I read that when we help someone else (another person or pet, save an insect, etc.) the brain produces oxytocin, which is the caring-compassion. A-ha! the thought shot through my mind—no wonder this is my antidote to my anger!

I recently saw this quote from Albert Schweitzer:

*I don't know what your destiny will be,
but one thing I do know:
the only ones among you
who will be really happy
are those who have sought / and found how to serve.*

To paraphrase something I heard Jack Kornfield say last year: the whole idea behind spiritual awakening is to realize the suffering of others, and do something about it! *Chris W.*



Photo by Chris W.

from p. 3. In terms of applying these ideas to my own life, I have been a stay-at-home dad for 8 years. I made that choice because I really wanted to spend time with my child. I believe there is no more important work than raising your child(ren) well. My thought was that if the Tibetans can pick an “ordinary” child and raise her or him to be a Lama, then I should be able to do so as well. Furthermore, I believe that the “recipe” behind raising a child well is to be as present with the child as possible, just like in *Zazen*, and to be flexible and smart about how one is with the child. Having an involved community in this rather exhausting “work” is a tremendous help. Among other things, my community serves as a corrective for my own unresolved issues to be transferred less, and helps me to stay at ease, present, and delightful toward my daughter.

In parenting, I don’t mind looking like what could be perceived as “foolish” or “silly” with the children, playing with them on their level—even if people think it’s weird. Practice has helped me to think on the level children do and to value all the little things they discover roaming the world. If they have questions, or something is going on, I can just be there and respond more appropriately to the situation (and, if needed, playfully). In addition, there are not many men doing this kind of work, and even though there is a lot of support there is also a lot weirdness coming my way. *Zazen* helps me to just stay present with that.

Even more so, I have made it my “mission” to bridge all the perceived differences being upheld in our society. Practice has allowed me to get closer to other women and men who do the same work and are from totally different backgrounds. For example, in Brooklyn a lot of the caretakers and nannies are from Russia, Ukraine, Pakistan, or India. Making friends certainly was—and is—a learning experience that has expanded all of our cultural, gender, and economic understandings of each other. One female friend from Pakistan could only be my friend after I met her husband and her husband met my wife; then they came to the conclusion that I could have the status of a younger brother so we could actually do stuff together.

So, practice taught me to be okay with feeling awkward or out of place—and to be in charge of whatever situation I find myself in. I definitely came to appreciate the beauty and gentleness of the way other men are able to connect with children (theirs and others’). Finally, I hope that practice has allowed me to (in a very small way) make a difference in how men are being perceived in society—and to help women feel less alone as caretakers and more free to not automatically “fall” into that role. *by Réne N.*



public domain images,
searched and selected by
Anna D.

Mostly Haiku

Winter

*Spidery shadows on the white wall
Reflecting Winter's bare branches.*

Spring

*Explosions of fuschia, popping out of
a bright blue sky.
How little time!*

Fall

*Raindrops slide down the windshield
Rippling outlines of dark tree branches.*

Summer

*Full moon on the balcony,
Deer rustling in the woods
All this breathes in.*

by Kate H.

The Work of Showing Up

I am blessed to make my living helping people find their words and share their ideas with the world. I spent my childhood mute with fear, amid abuse and neglect; giving voice to the otherwise silenced is deeply meaningful work for me. But right livelihood goes so far beyond money-generating activity. In my life, sitting zazen is like frosting on a cake—much appreciated, but not often experienced. Work practice, on the other hand, is something I can (and often even do!) incorporate into my daily life. In parenting, spousing, and doing all of life's adult tasks, I find boundless opportunities. I exert myself to create a moment of true human connection with every clerk and helper I encounter. With my neighbors, with random passersby—I always face a choice about how I present myself. My practice is to try to show up and really listen, and that is also right livelihood for me. Every conversation is a kind of “work”, and being present is a constant but rewarding challenge. *by Anna D.*

Livelihood by Wandering Around

I am one of the lucky ones whose livelihood mostly depends upon my volition. Time constraints and deadlines do arise regularly, but not on a fixed schedule. Each day I must decide where and upon what to spend my energy. As always, there are multiple projects and possibilities to choose from—does this mean that I would be more comfortable with a “job” that I go to each day at the same time and place? Not for me, at least.

I enjoy being a dilettante—taking on projects never before attempted and turning out an acceptable end product (after a sometimes difficult and steep learning curve). I may never do that particular thing again, but the skills learned often transfer to other projects that are therefore easier to accomplish. Of course there are also “mundane” tasks that are quite familiar through daily or almost daily repetition: cleaning, cooking, weeding, whacking, trimming. Here is the opportunity to approach these tasks with a clear mind and attempt to stay in the present while performing.

In a years-ago talk, Misha stressed “completion” as an important part of right livelihood. Being an early adopter of attention deficit disorder (from birth, I suspect—I used to be called “easily distracted” before the ADD label came along), taking one task to completion sometimes requires multiple attempts or iterations. I practice “completion” as a goal, being conscious of staying with familiar tasks until they are done rather than spinning off to the next little popup my brain presents. It sometimes takes several comebacks before the task is finished.

For me, the “right” translates to fully involved, consciously attending, and seen to completion. It doesn’t always happen, but I am slowly improving. *by David S.*



Dharma school
Sushi-making
August 2015
pictures by Gulia K.

