



Dharma School: Adele shows off her drawing of Buddha's Enlightenment.

The Season of Enlightenment

December 8th is the day the Buddha's Enlightenment and is celebrated in Japan and other Buddhist countries. This is the day the Buddha realized the 4 Noble Truths:

1. There is dissatisfaction.
2. There is a cause to this dissatisfaction.
3. There is an end to dissatisfaction.
4. Following the 8 Fold Path leads to the end of dissatisfaction.

Those who are truly joyful, who live a life of service, who understand their humanity, whether they realize it or not, are living out this 8 fold path. The 4 Noble Truths are Universal, they

can be applied in any situation, and if practiced skillfully bring great joy and light to the world.

December also has at least three other events that bring us Great Light. The first is, the celebration of Hanukkah and the lighting of the Menorah. The second is the Winter solstice which is the shortest day of the year but, paradoxically, day light increases steadily from this day. The third is the celebration of Christmas, Jesus being a symbol for light.

May the light of this season warm your spirit!

Zen and Fear

by Esho Gry Gambert

FEAR

In early summer of 2007 I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. With the best of treatment, I had a 50 % chance of surviving for 5 years.

Dealing with fear was naturally the immediate challenge of getting this news. As an adolescent, I saw my aunt dying from breast cancer with metastases to the brain. It was a devastating process for her and for her family. So, I feared the seemingly endless discussions with experts and their escalating diagnostic tests - isn't it bad enough already, how much more bad news will we have to absorb? What is going to happen to me? What impact will my disease have on family and friends?

The important point of spiritual practice is not to try to escape your life, but to face it- exactly and completely.

~Dainin Katagiri Roshi

We can not choose the situations we find ourselves in, nor the thoughts and emotions that arise, but we do have choices regarding how to practice with all of it.

Every day, after taking care of the immediate decisions that had to be made, addressing my treatment and so on, I focused on living and appreciating life. Every morning I got up early, in the spirit of Sesshin. Instead of giving in to the temptation of wallowing in heavy thoughts and painful emotions I focused my attention on the tasks at hand: Taking a shower, straightening the bathroom, getting dressed, making the bed, fixing breakfast, eating, cleaning up.

Zen is not some kind of excitement, but concentration on our usual everyday routine. ~Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

As I chemo took its toll, these simple tasks sometimes took hours and all my strength, but they were hours filled with peace and often joy - the wonderful experience of a refreshing shower, of being able to eat, drink and feel nourished, of being able to pick things up, clean them and put them in their proper places.

Discomfort from the chemo agents often interrupted my sleep. I would get out of bed in the middle of the night and walk to the open window. From outside came the sweet tinkling sounds of

running water in a small fountain. Cool, moist night air flowed through the open window, perfumed with the fragrance of flowers we had planted earlier in the spring.

Focusing on the experience of the present moment in these ways, I was filled with intense joy and gratitude for how rich and wonderful life is. How beautiful and precious. Yes, those chemo-disturbed months were terribly hard, but also among the most wonderful of my life.

When I tell people that, many don't understand, but focused mindfulness practice allowed me to let go of habitual clinging to likes and dislikes, to stop carping endlessly about in hopes and fears, to let go of the thoughts and speculations about what would happen in the future - to simply breathe and be still. And life, the universe, unfolded.

"In, Out,

Deep, Slow,

Calm, Ease,

Smile, Release

Present Moment,

Beautiful Moment"

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

The gift of this kind of practice is the deep

realization that all thoughts, fears, hopes, speculations are just that: Thoughts, fears, hopes and speculations. In the end, I Don't Know: Reality is what IS, exactly the way it is.

“Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when deeply practicing prajna paramita, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering.”
Heart Sutra

That the five aggregates, the streams of form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness are empty, does not mean that they are not real, but that none of them exist on their own, they inter-are, each containing the entire universe.

“There is no birth, there is no death; there is no coming, there is no going; there is no same, there is no different; there is no permanent self, there is no annihilation. We only think there is.

~Thich Nhat Hanh

A little more than 2 years after the initial diagnosis I was diagnosed with a large brain tumor. Probably a metastases from the

original breast cancer, but no one knows for sure. Neither a biopsy nor a conventional operation was possible, due to the location of the tumor. It was also clear to both my doctors and myself that I could not live more than at most a couple of weeks more without intervention.

My husband suggested a “Cyber knife” operation. It is a procedure where a finely honed beam of radiation is focused on the tumor, without opening the skull, attempting to kill or shrink the tumor. Hopefully without damaging other parts of the brain.

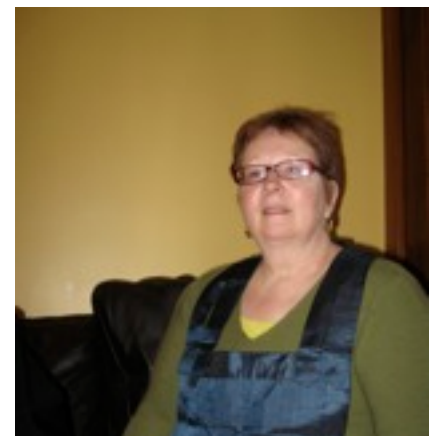
Before, during and after the procedure, agonizing speculations arose: “Is this a good choice? What is going to happen to me? Will I ever be “myself” again after this? Will I be able to think and reason clearly? What will the future bring?”

All of the unknowns were and are hard to face. All I can do is accept that the situation is indeed as it is. This is it. Then, letting go in the out-breath, opening to the in-breath, the present moment unfolds – again and again and again and again. All that is, is this present moment. Nothing else.

“There is neither ignorance nor extinction of ignorance... neither old age and death, nor extinction of old age and death; no suffering, no cause, no cessation, no path; no knowledge and no attainment. With nothing to attain, a bodhisattva relies on prajna paramita, and thus the mind is without hindrance. Without hindrance, there is no fear. Far beyond all inverted views, one realizes nirvana.”

Heart Sutra

Thank you, my Teachers and Dharma Sisters and Brothers at BDG, MEZ and Clare Sangha, family and friends – you have comforted, helped and encouragement these past years. I am so grateful.



Gratitude



Carrot from
the Heart's
Garden

Last year's garden continues to bear fruit. We are still eating carrots, daikon, and beets as well as frozen vegetables like broccoli, spinach and green peppers. These and many other veggies were grown in MEZ's garden. But really it's thanks to so many Sangha members who contributed to the garden either through buying seeds, planting seeds, harvesting, turning over the soil, that

the garden was so productive.

Food contributions have also come from the "larger garden" as well. We appreciate food donations from Sesshin, Days of Mindfulness, and other times. A special thanks to Diane Hollis who's been coming out on Tuesday mornings to follow the a.m. schedule and help with the cooking.

Mt. Equity is now also making food donations to the local food bank in Muncy. If you have canned goods that you would like to donate for that purpose, please bring them. By helping the community around MEZ we also help MEZ. When MEZ is helped, the local community is helped. This is the practice of inter-being. When helping others, we simultaneously help our self.

Thank You List

Daijun Marcy Brenner- Sweet Potato Latkas from Hanukkah celebration.

Nanshin Nancy White & Tomei Tom Knapp- Oats, bread, jam,

Dendo Debbie Brocht- Bread, TP, Kitty

Litter, Eggplant Parmesan

Tenryu Kenno- cake, shiitake, asian pears

Jakusho Janice Belgraden- Jam, Adzuki Beans,

Misho Audrey Indelicarto- Cider, potatoes, garlic, onions

Hoyu Horst DeLorenzi- Bread, cheese

Susan Gresens- bananas

Donen Sean McGraw- Brown Rice, Goat Cheese, Noodles

Tokuen Barbara Gray- Sesshin Groceries

Diane Hollis- Lettuce, grapefruit, bean soup, tomatoes, nuts, Adzuki beans, apples,

butternut squash, orange, kiwi, spaghetti squash, miso soup, turnip, cauliflower soup, bouillon cubes, peeler

Susan Faeder- Cranberries, Apples, Cookies

Zen Center of Pittsburgh- Pasta, sauce, tofu sausage, chocolate, cookies

Dan Washington- Granola bars

Keien Mary Boutselis- chili over pasta.

Ruth Steck & Luanne Potter- Free Range Eggs

Kevin Gaughen- Recycling 3-7 plastics

There were many others who've made "secret" donations for which we are grateful as well. My apologies if I have inadvertently left someone out.

We would like to thank the McCabe family for donating money enabling the purchase of a new computer. Hoyu, Tomei, and Dan Washington have given extraordinary help in the realm of computerese.

Nanshin and Tomei we thank for their hard work in helping Daishin in innumerable ways including cleaning the Zendo, making Dinner, and being good ears.

We wish to acknowledge Michel Lefevre for his generosity towards the future replacement of the West Porch Storm Door.

Gyokuen Lucine Folgueras teachings of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, has been tremendously helpful to Daishin.

Bob, Don and Deb Weiskoph's warm extension of hospitality to the residents of Mt. Equity Zendo during Thanksgiving was much appreciated.



For those looking for ways to help MEZ, donations designated to the "Building Fund" will be used for repairs and on-going energy efficiency projects for our old building.

Other ways of helping include working as Tenzo (cook) for a meal, and Chiden for an afternoon (cleaning the Zendo). These contributions greatly enhance Mt. Equity's ability to create future programs, retreats, workshops, and out-reach that are beneficial to the wider community.

Upcoming Events

The Alexander Technique: A Method of Encouragement With Zen Center of Pittsburgh's Rev. Jisen Coghlan

Thursday, February 18th from 7PM -8:30P M

F.M. Alexander (1869-1955) discovered a practical method that is alive, open-eyed, and watchful; the teacher and student work together examining habitual patterns and thereby eliciting ease and balance. Using a guiding touch and verbal instructions, the teacher encourages the student's awareness of imbalances that are expressed as patterns of tension and stress found in sitting, standing, walking and lying down. Please join us for an evening of investigating how the body may change and grow through deep listening.

email to reserve space:

daishin@mtequity.org

Suggested donation is \$8.



Rev. Jisen has been a long time disciple of Rev. Kyoki Roberts, founder of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh. Rev. Jisen will also be offering instructions in Alexander Technique for February's Sesshin from the 19th through the 21st. We look forward to hearing the teachings of Rev. Jisen this month.

Finding Balance Through Yoga, Meditation, and Healthy Food

February 28th, 9:30am-5:00pm

If we are off balance physically, mentally, or spiritually, how can we be happy? This class is for those interested in integrating healthier eating with healthier ways to feed our mind and spirit. Our guest teacher is Brenda Emerick, a certified Macrobiotic Cook. Please bring yoga mats, blocks, belts, blankets and any other yoga props you have to use and/or share with others. Space is limited.

Registration Deadline: February 14th

Suggested Donation: \$25 (due at time of registration)

To register: daishin@mtequity.org

