



The Newsletter of the Original Mind Zen Sangha of the Five Mountain Zen Order

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Princeton, New Jersey

Welcome

Welcome everyone to the Original Mind Zen Sangha's first newsletter! My name is Andre Doshim Halaw, guiding teacher of OMZS and monk in the Five Mountain Zen Order.

In Sanskrit, "sangha" means community, one of the three precious jewels that the Buddha taught should take highest priority in our lives. Our sangha meets on Sunday evenings to meditate, chant, and support one another in this beautiful life practice that we call Zen. This newsletter is an extension of that same

community. It is both an opportunity to stay current on sangha events, as well as an invitation to join us, if not in person, then in spirit. Please enjoy.

Feel free to contact me or any of our contributing members with questions you may have, or better yet, join us on Sunday nights. All are welcome.

Peace and love,
Andre

Features

Getting Through and Getting the Most from Your First Retreat

Meditation retreats of seven, three, or even one day can push us to our limits. A few members of the Original Mind Zen Sangha offer their suggestions on how to benefit from or even just survive a retreat.

Andrew Condouris has done about a dozen retreats since the humbling experience he describes below.

I had a bad cold when I went on my first retreat. At some point during the third round of sitting, I had snot running down my nostril. I wasn't going to let it distract me. I kept my focus and didn't move an inch as the gooey blobs streamed out of my nostrils and collected on my cosmic mudra.

When we had a break, I went to the bathroom and cleaned myself up. I was so proud of my hardcore

discipline and dedication. When I told the teacher about this, he said, "Next time just excuse yourself and go to the bathroom to take care of it." Duh.

Following the nature of this advice, I took some cold medication and it dried out my nose. Yes, I was able to breathe and there were no gooey globs leaving my nose. However, either out of boredom or because of the medication (most likely the latter), a vortex opened up on the wall in front of me. Something was telling me to *Jump, jump into the Great Beyond!!!*

I didn't jump.

In my next interview, I told my teacher about this vortex. He asked me if I had jumped and I told him I didn't.

"Excellent," he said. "This is good progress!"

Andre Doshim Halaw has done many one-day retreats and several weekend retreats. He suggests:

Let go of all your expectations. Usually when we approach a new situation, we try to anticipate all of the unknowns in order to prepare us for what we imagine awaits us. *What questions is the interviewer going to ask? What time should I leave?* Things of that nature.

But a retreat invites us to let go of those defense mechanisms and simply *be*. Expectations can set us up for disappointment, confusion, and even frustration when they don't work out the way we anticipated. Or conversely, they can infuse us with a false (as in unnecessary) sense of confidence.

Just try to be as open as possible to whatever experiences occur. Avoid the impulse to micro-manage your retreat. Just let what happens happen.

Lou Prococcino recently completed his first three-day silent retreat. He says:

“Don't bring any clothes.” That was a suggestion someone gave me after asking for any advice going to my first ‘silent retreat.’ Of course it was meant metaphorically and it is good advice.

The advice that I would give is not to overdo meditating on the first day, especially if you are not used to sitting and walking meditation 8-9 hours-a-day. You are not being graded or tested, so it would be a good idea to go for an occasional walk outdoors.

Being with about thirty-two other Buddhists is an inspiring experience, one that stays with you long after it is over. A feeling that can't be put in words, except to say that you feel you have taken a big step on the path. I am looking forward to going again and hopefully for a longer retreat.

Itinerant Monk, Or All Addresses are Impermanent

By Tom Inzan Gartland

At what point does our Zen “practice” get put into practice? When things are easy and smooth, who needs them? Ain't no *dukkha* here, it's all peaceful calm equanimity, I'm in, no, I am nirvana. But then there's moving.

Plans often don't quite go as planned. That's not news. But when virtually every plan ends up coming out differently than the original idea, now what? The Third Patriarch said, “The Great Way is simple for he who has no preferences,” meaning among other things, complaining isn't going to change anything, other than perhaps one's own mental state. I've never been one to find panic to be a useful problem-solving technique, so I've been comfortable with improvising as required. But there's improvising, and then there's moving.

The original plan, hatched in May, was that we'd move from Princeton to Northampton, MA. Ma lives there, she's 88, blind, and understandably less able than she once had been (and refuses to acknowledge pretty strongly). So there's Buddhist lesson 1: Old age, sickness, and death (or fear of it, or wishing for it) are *dukkha*, things we just don't like having to deal with. Ma has her preferences, none of which include her situation here & now.

She also has a tenant in her two-family house that, although she had been given ample notice that her month-to-month lease was not going to be renewed, has steadfastly just refused to leave. As of this writing,

it's more than two weeks. Depending on what the lawyers and the sheriff end up doing, this could go on for a while. Buddhist lesson 2: All things are impermanent, including addresses...and plans. OK, so we can't move directly into the apartment upstairs from Ma; we'll stay in the spare bedroom and I'll work from the basement (I telecommute). The furniture: the truck will come and off-load everything into their warehouse until we tell them when to bring it all up to us. Rent a 10' box truck to bring up clothes and such that we'll actually need to function for a couple weeks...maybe months. Admittedly, the preference was that it not be months. A couple guys from the sangha help me load up, putting the Perfection of *Dana*, generosity, into practice. A friend of the family up in Mass. helps me unload. Then it's back to NJ the next day.

A 73' moving truck shows up, which has enough trouble making the turns into the street, which meant that it going into the self-storage facility was questionable at best. Having driven a truck or two before, although certainly substantially shorter than that one, and figuring that somebody must have figured out that large trucks would show up in a storage facility now and then, I was not unconcerned, but not overly concerned either. The truck not fitting was not what was happening at that moment; the moving company has contingency plans for that situation--bringing in smaller trucks (for an additional charge, of course--so I

continued on with the task at hand. This was mostly staying the hell out of the way of the movers, and figuring out what would fit into our cars that would be handy to have. Buddhist lesson 3: There is only this

present moment. Past can't be changed, future hasn't happened...until now...now...now. Still now.

To be continued....

Opening Others, Opening Ourselves

By Jonson Miller

I published a guest opinion piece in my local newspaper last month. I wrote about America's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is a topic that readily sparks anger and defensive in people, regardless of their positions. My experience publishing it and people's reactions to me taught me a few lessons about communication and relating to others.

First of all, writing for your local newspaper is a different experience from writing on a blog, in a national or international magazine, or in an academic journal; I've done all of these. You have to take greater responsibility for your writing at the local level than online or in specialized media, where your living, breathing community members aren't likely to see it.

As I wrote my piece, I had to think about friends, neighbors, and community members and how it would affect them. What would my Israeli friend think of it? He is a man who fought in the 1967 war. I've been to his house many times. I've had dinner with him. He's been to my house. What will he say when I see him next?

The reality of this greater responsibility hit home the day my piece came out. My partner and I took our granddaughter to a park for a community concert. And there was another friend of mine with the paper in his hands. There was no hiding behind a keyboard or a screen. I had to own my words. This drove home the point that I have to carefully consider what words I want to own. I hope to take that lesson to any venue in which I write.

It's not that I'm willing to change my positions to suit others or give in to fear of recrimination for taking controversial positions. But, certain writing contexts, especially online writing, encourage hostile and confrontational communication. They can feed one's sense of power. What my experience pointed me towards was being mindful about my words, how they affect others, and how they can be presented most effectively and usefully. In other words, "right speech."

Several people wrote to me privately to respond. I was disappointed that everyone had to resort to insults

in their initial reaction to me. First of all, their reactions surprised me because I didn't actually take a position on the conflict itself; I wrote only about how we Americans might think more clearly about the issue and whether or not we Americans should have a role at all. Nonetheless, the insults came in. They ranged from questioning my intellectual ability to implying my kinship with Hitler.

Yelling and insults are an unfortunately common mode of expression in American politics and public discourse. I appreciate how seductive this approach can be. It is satisfying to yell at others and insult them. It makes us feel powerful. It gives us the illusion of dominating others and, perhaps, asserting our own positions while driving out others. However, when we yell, we close off the opportunity of changing the other person. We also close off allowing ourselves to be changed.

I published my opinion piece to generate discussion and change how we discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So ignoring the insulting responses didn't seem feasible. I wanted to keep the discussion going, but I had to find a way through the insults to do so.

I responded to each writer. I ignored their insults completely. I thanked them for taking the time to read my piece and, especially, to respond to it. If I could, I highlighted some part of their response that I agreed with or appreciated. Then I responded to them as if they had made a sincere and serious argument. Some of them had.

One person did not write back to me again. But the other four all responded in the same way. They immediately dropped their insults and wrote back in the same serious and open manner that I had written to them. In fact, by the time I finished exchanging several notes with each of them, they began to compliment me. One of my new friends wrote that while he doesn't agree with me, he likes me! Others stated how much they enjoyed our discussion. I very much enjoyed the discussion as well.

We did not convince one another of new positions – at least we didn't admit to it. I did, however, at the

suggestion of one my new friends, commit to reading more about one aspect of Israeli-Palestinian history. Who knows? Maybe I'll learn something. Regardless, we at least found that we could hold opposing

positions about life-and-death matters while still being open to one another and even friendly. Perhaps we were even open to change. These were conversations worth having.

My First Sangha Experience

By Brian Callahan

Prior to attending my first sangha service I read feverishly to be sure I was going to be prepared for this new experience. I was intent on knowing what I was “walking into,” what would be expected from me, what I should be wearing, how I should be sitting, and how I should be interacting with the sangha members and of course THE TEACHER!

What will this all be like?! I read and read and read some more and timidly decided to attend for the first time earlier this year. I mapped out the driving directions and planned my journey to the location and left extra early just to be sure I didn't get there late. I played out many scenarios on how this first sangha meeting would go as I was driving there- everything from a smoke filled room with chanting to a room of meditating people for the entire period.

My first sangha experience was not at all what I had anticipated - fortunately. The sangha members were friendly - not intimidating or rigid like I had experienced in other religions and organizations. The overall service, meditation, Dharma talk, and chanting was peaceful, but at the same time full of energy - not overly formal. I just followed along like the others. It was as the service concluded that I began to realize that this first session became my very first Zen Buddhist teaching and the start of my practice.

The learning achieved in my first experience was a foundational one – “go with the flow” and be mindful of the present. I had tried way too hard to look ahead as most of us have been trained to do so in this fast paced world we live in.

Reviews

Philip Shepherd, *New Self, New World: Recovering Our Senses in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2010).

New Self, New World is not a book about Zen. Nonetheless, it is one of my favorite Zen books, because this Canadian actor opened me up to Zen and has contributed to my practice in concrete ways.

As a young man, Philip Shepherd biked across Eurasia – not Europe, but Eurasia! He started in England and ended up in Japan. Not surprisingly, he learned a thing or two along the way. Experiencing so many cultures broke him free from his own cultural assumptions.

The outcome of his explorations was the core lesson of this outstanding book: We have cut ourselves off from our bodies and live in the isolated tower of our minds. We relate to the world in the same way we relate to our bodies – cut off and in a relationship of domination and conflict.

We say, “I think; therefore I am.” Shepherd rejects this statement as that of the narcissistic, tyrannical

mind. Instead, we must adopt the slogan, “**I relate; therefore I am.**” Shepherd rejects the clearly-bounded individual, saying, “**[E]xistence is contingent upon interrelationship, and nothing exists except through its interrelationship with everything else.**”

Shepherd discusses our mind-body relationship through a variety of dualistic metaphors or images, including male versus female was of doing and being, the cranial brain versus the gut brain (a real thing!), and comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell’s “hero” versus “tyrant.” We must overcome this dualism and reintegrate ourselves into wholeness of our bodies. In so doing, we reintegrate ourselves into the world.

To do so, we must make a choice. He says, “**[Y]ou can either be ‘who you know yourself to be’, or you can be present. One or the other. Not both. And you can transcend the fractured divisions of self-definition only by risking the discovery of what it means to be whole.**”

Buddhists and Taoists will recognize Shepherd’s language and experiences. Reintegration of the mind and body results in or is the result of being present.

Rather than viewing ourselves as separate from the world, we can let the world flow through us in a seamless whole. And we can flow through the world.

The deepest cultural strata of the West teach us that up and higher are good and down and lower are bad, especially in a spiritual sense. A decade of spiritual practice, in a variety of contexts, including Hindu, reinforced this dichotomy for me. At times, I avoided the up-down dichotomy by thinking of an inner/outer hierarchy, with inner being better. Shepherd broke me of this. Instead, the dichotomy I think of now is interrelated versus separated. This insight opened me up to Zen.

Shepherd offers a remarkable critique of modernity and our sense of Self, but he does more than that. Despite his frequent use of etymology, archaeology, biology, history, and other fields, this is a practical book. As he says in his introduction, **the ideas in the**

book “are accountable first and foremost to experience; and that means that they are woven into the world rather than being tidied back into themselves.”

Shepherd provides exercises to help us learn to reconnect to our bodies and our world by becoming more present and mindful. Some of his exercises are of his own invention; others come from acting techniques and elsewhere.

I have integrated his exercises into my own formal practice. His ideas and exercises have made it easier for me to understand and apply Zen’s teachings about mindfulness, ordinariness, and suchness. Conversely, I suspect that Zen practice will make it easier for a reader to understand and apply Shepherd’s teachings.

You can learn more about Shepherd, his book, and his work at philipshepherd.com.

Jonson Miller

Announcements and Events

Original Mind Zen Sangha

Sundays, 6:45 to 9 pm

The Original Mind Zen Sangha meets every Sunday from 6:45 to 9 pm at the Fellowship in Prayer building at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey.

Please join us for sitting and walking meditation and a dharma talk. We provide cushions and mats. Please dress comfortably.

Newcomers should come fifteen minutes early for basic instruction and an introduction to the sangha.

For new visitors: The **first Sunday of each month**, we replace one meditation session with a **Q&A session**. This is a great opportunity to find out what were about and to get started in your practice.

For more information, see originalmindzen.com.

Original Mind Food Donations

Ongoing

Please remember that we are donating food to the Pennel, Pennsylvania food pantry of the Bucks County Housing Group. Bring donations to the sangha any Sunday night. Keep in mind that this is food that will be distributed to individual families, rather than being used in a dining hall. So it isn’t necessary or even desirable to find the biggest jar of food you can to feed as many people as possible. In

fact, it is better to buy several smaller containers so that some food may be given to several families.

For a list of specific items the pantry needs, please scroll down to the bottom of the page at www.bchg.org/food-pantries.

One-Day Retreat

Original Mind Zen Sangha

Saturday, October 18, 9 am to 3 pm (Tentative)

The Original Mind Zen Sangha will hold a one-day meditation retreat. The date is tentative, so please contact the Sangha to confirm the day, time, and other details.

Precepts Ceremony

Original Mind Zen Sangha

November (Date to be announced)

Andre Doshim Halaw will be offering a precepts ceremony sometime in November. For more information about the first precepts in the Five Mountain Zen order, please see

<http://www.fmzo.org/the-lay-practitioner.html>.

Contact Andre at [originalmindzen \[at\] gmail.com](mailto:originalmindzen@gmail.com) if you wish to take the precepts.

Contributors

Brian Callahan is an active member of the Original Mind Zen Sangha.



Andrew Hyeonjeong Condouris is a novice monk and soon to be abbot of the Original Mind Zen Sangha. He is a video artist and writer with a penchant for good coffee and cake. When he isn't meditating, he can be found reading fiction or writing it.

As a video artist, he explores "essence of mind" in the realm of the abstract.



Tom Inzan Gartland is a member of the Original Mind Zen Sangha. He received lay ordination in 2009 from the San Francisco Zen Center, and renewed the precepts in November 2013 from the Five Mountain Zen Order, where he is

currently a Sramenera Monk. He now lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. You can follow his blog *No-Bodhi Knows* at nobodhiknows.blogspot.com.



Andre Doshim Halaw is the founder and teacher of the Original Mind Zen Sangha. He is the author of several books on Zen. You can read his blog, hear his dharma talks, and learn about his books at originalmindzen.blogspot.com.



Jonson Miller is a member of the Original Mind Zen Sangha and is the editor of this newsletter. He writes about technology, international affairs, genealogy, and other topics at jonsonmiller.wordpress.com.

Lou Procaccino participates in several Buddhist groups in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, especially the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County.

Letters to the Editor

To submit letters:

1. (Preferred). Email your letter to the editor at [jwmiller \[at\] mail.com](mailto:jwmiller[at]mail.com). Title your subject line "Original Mind: Letter to the Editor." Include your letter in the body of your message, rather than as an attachment.
2. You may mail your letter to the editor. If so, be sure to include a phone number so that the editor may contact you to confirm that we have your permission to publish it. Mail your letter to:

Jonson Miller
Original Mind Newsletter
559 Florence Avenue
Langhorne, PA 19047

We limit letters to 250 words. If you have more to say than that, then consider writing an article for us.

Thank You

Thanks to all of the readers of and contributors to this first issue of *Original Mind*. Please consider submitting something to future issues.

We hope this newsletter will, in the spirit of the sangha, assist you in your practice.

Sincerely,
Jonson Miller, editor

About *Original Mind*

Original Mind is the newsletter of the Original Mind Zen Sangha based in Princeton, New Jersey. We are members of the Five Mountain Zen Order.

This newsletter serves several audiences and several purposes:

1. Spread the dharma and save all sentient beings.
2. Alert members of the sangha and our local community about upcoming events at our sangha or in the region.
3. Show new or prospective visitors what we're about so they can better decide if they'd like to join us.
4. Connect sangha members to the broader order by providing news about order events, publications, institutions, leaders, and fellow sanghas.

5. Connect sangha members with the broader Buddhist community in our region through announcements of and articles about relevant events and groups.
6. Support one another in our practice.

You can learn more about our sangha and our order at the following websites:

www.originalmindzen.com
www.fmzo.org

Contact the editor at [jwmiller \[at\] mail.com](mailto:jwmiller@mail.com).

Submission Information

Original Mind welcomes original articles and interviews on any topic related to Zen, broadly conceived. We also want book and film reviews, announcements about events of the Five Mountain Order, and announcements of or articles about local retreats and lectures. We cannot pay for any submissions.

If you would like us to consider your writing for publication, email your submission to [jwmiller \[at\] mail.com](mailto:jwmiller@mail.com). Title your subject line "Original Mind Submission: Article Title." Please provide your document in Word format. Name the file

"lastname_abbreviated_article_title." Send shorter pieces, such as announcements, in the body of your email. Please write if you have any questions about submissions, possible topics, formatting, etc.

Authors retain ownership of their works and are free to publish them elsewhere. By submitting your writing, you are claiming authorship of it and are stating that you did not submit the work of others.

We may edit your work for clarity, consistent formatting, or length.

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