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<p>740 Park Avenue July 2004</p>	<p>Arcata, California 95521 www.arcatazengroup.org</p>	<p>707/826.1701 Summer begins as it does.</p>

Sitting With Jail Time

Michael Twombly

It always happens. I am in a circle of inmates at the county jail on Thursday night, and we have just finished sitting, and our eyes are slowly opening, and we are coming into ourselves again in the darkened concrete-block room, and all I can see around me is a circle of orange-robed monks, opening eyes slowly, gently after meditation.

Sitting together, monk and inmate, there is no difference.

I'd like to share parts of a recent letter from Tom, an inmate I sat with more than a year ago at the Humboldt County Correctional Facility, a bright and gentle young man who had violated his probation by coming to California and was extradited back to Wisconsin, serving a seven year sentence at Dodge Correctional Institution.

I continue to make the best out of my days despite the environment that I am in. As for my practices, I do my best to set time aside every morning and night to meditate and do some yoga which keeps me growing within and on track spiritually. It's amazing how my life has changed so much by meeting you there (in the jail) and the knowledge you shared with me. I don't think I would be where I am now within if i didn't run into you which I thank

you greatly for coming to the jail on Thursday nights for the meditation classes.

Thank you for the seed which I cherish and nourish the best I can so that it continues to grow and germinate into more seeds that I may plant into others and together we make this world one with more love and happiness.

Tom
Dodge Correctional Facility
Stanley, Wisconsin

Recently, Bill and Mike, two county jail inmates with whom I had been practicing for over a year together were "rolled out" to San Quentin State Prison to serve life sentences. The criminal justice system "treats" offenders as garbage; what I see are sentient beings acting out of ignorance as we all act, in whom the seed of compassion may grow as it is growing in Tom.

Meditating in prison and jail provides a unique opportunity to learn about listening to the song of the heart, about slowing down and about being mindful. Free or not, we are all in the process of awakening to our challenging situation.

Prayer flag
Battle flag
Makes no difference to the wind

**Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one's being,
and it points the way from bondage to freedom.**

-- D.T. Suzuki

Meditation Schedules

Weekday Mornings Zazen (Monday to Friday)

5:30 to 6:10 a.m. Zazen
6:10 to 6:20 a.m. Kinhin
6:20 to 7:00 a.m. Zazen
7:00 to 7:10 a.m. Service

Tuesday Evening Zazen (Meditation Instruction) 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Orientation to Soto Zen Meditation, instructions, guided meditation, question and answer period, and discussion.

Thursday Evening Zazen

7:30 to 8:00 p.m. Zazen
8:00 to 8:10 p.m. Kinhin
8:10 to 8:40 p.m. Zazen

Sunday Morning Zazen, Service and Dharma Talk (Held at the Aikido Center, located off the public parking lot at 8th and F Streets, behind the fire station, in Arcata)

8:10 to 8:40 a.m. Zazen
8:40 to 8:50 a.m. Kinhin
8:50 to 9:20 a.m. Zazen
9:20 to 9:30 a.m. Service
9:30 to 10:30 Dharma Talk or Reading



Arcata Zen Group is a nonprofit organization in the Soto Zen lineage. AZG welcomes persons interested in learning about and practicing the teachings of the Buddha. We offer introductory classes in zen meditation and zen philosophy every week at 7:30 PM on Tuesday evenings at 740 Park Avenue in Arcata. Membership is free.

AZG maintains a lending library for all sangha members.

Rin Shin-ji Arcata Zen Group newsletter is published six times a year. To submit articles or announcements to the newsletter, e-mail Mike at: darkrain@humboldt1.com

AZG Announcements

Jukai With Angie Boissevain and Alan Senauke

Friday, August 20
to Sunday, August 22

Friday 8/20/04, 7:00 p.m.
Alan Senauke Dharma talk in the Zendo.

Saturday 8/21/04, 7:00 p.m.
Angie Boissevain Dharma talk in the Zendo.

Sunday, 8/22/04, 11:00 a.m.
Jukai Ceremony at Aikido Center.

Sunday, 8/22/04, (following Jukai
Ceremony)
Reception at Park Ave. house after Jukai
Ceremony for sangha and participant's friends.

Tuesday, 8/24/04,
Sangha hike with Alan Senauke; sack lunch,
gathering for discussion, great forest hike.

Thursday, 8/26/04, 7:00 p.m.
Shosan with Alan Senauke in the Zendo --
Sangha invited to participate.

Friday, 8/27/04, TBA-evening
Ordination Ceremony for Catherine Cascade
with Alan Senauke in the Zendo.

More information regarding August will be on
website as plans are formed and confirmed.

Sunday, 7/25/04 9:30am
Way Seeking Mind talk by
Karen Mueller, at the
Aikido Center.

AZG North

There is now a weekly sit in Westhaven (just south of Trinidad) at Suzanne's place. Friday, June 11, Catherine and some of the regulars did a dedication ceremony for the new zendo. We meet Tuesday mornings from 8:30 to 9:30; two sits with kinhin in between and chanting the Heart Sutra to finish. I would also like to organize an early afternoon time once a week for those who can't do mornings; if you are interested in getting that going, give me a call. I am very chemically sensitive, so anyone who wishes to sit here must call me (██████) to discuss chemical safety - not to mention get directions!

Blue Moon

Once In A Blue Moon AZG Gathering at Gael Hodgkins', July 31, 7 - 10 p.m., 2638 Pigeon Point Road, Eureka, 442-4924, ghodgkins@iopener.net. Bring lineage, that is your teacher, your teacher's teacher, etc. Tofu dogs, salad and beverages will be served.

Namo Kie Butsu

Many of us have offered to take stitches in the robes Catherine is sewing for ordination. Your offers have warmed my heart and, as the 27th of August draws nearer, I'd like to let you know when I'll be sewing and welcome you to join me for a stitch or two of Namu Kie Butsu meditation, at 740 Park Ave., in the library, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Saturdays: July 17 & 31, Aug. 7 & 14.

Altar Edification

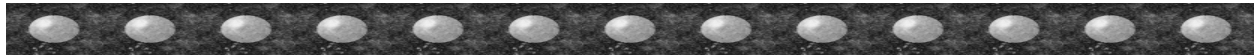
The person who attends the altar in the zendo is called the chiden. The cleaning chiden basically trims the candles, or replaces them, cleans the ashes from the incense through a process of sifting, and throws away the burnt matches. This role was given to Gael by Maylie and was later on handled by Sylviane and now few morning practitioners have shared this responsibility or have expressed interest in taking turns doing it. Pete Kayes has volunteered to build a folding board on a wall in the foyer, to be used as a table to give us a surface where we will be able to do this maintenance work more comfortably. Anyone interested in learning how to do it and wanting to sign up to take turns doing it please contact Alan Dennison, Ann Greenwater and Sylviane Levy-Boyd. If you are an evening practitioner and would like to participate let us know and we will set up an evening meeting on Tuesday or Thursday before or after zazen.

Garden Committee Updates

We are back to one committee from now on. Pete keeps coming usually with Mark to handle the major parts of the maintenance; Ann from the house, is devoted to spruce up the garden and to water the place. Gordy plans to bring water lines and faucets into the vegetable garden to facilitate watering. Kit will continue to share her knowledge of care and the placement of plants. Sylviane will start a Garden Log book available in the library by the middle of July; it will include a history of the garden, a summary of what is in the garden and a list of things that need to be done, as well as a blank page for suggestions. Also, there will be a record sheet for anyone to write down what they have done.

The summer requires more work and we are organizing a major GARDEN PRACTICE WORK DAY on Saturday JULY 17, from 9:30 A.M. till 2:00 P.M. Bring something to share for lunch to go along with a big salad. Any questions call Kit 822-6609, Gordy : 443-9663, Ann 822-1906 or Sylviane : 822-0528. Also we are offering for the next three months, regular garden practice day on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month from 9:30 A.M. to 12:30P.M.

We received suggestions and comments on the garden to be included in the log book; anyone interested in submitting other pieces of information please feel free to do so. Send them to AZG , 740 Park Ave , Arcata 95521.



Cosmic Mudra

(third of a continuing series)

Judith Putnam

The position of the hands known as the mudra of concentration (*jo-in*), or cosmic mudra, is both symbolic of, and conducive to, the experience of profound meditation or *samadhi*. This position of the hands is attributed to the historical Buddha as he sat under the Bodhi tree and was enlightened some 2500 years ago. It has been used by Buddhists from that time to the present day. It is the mudra used in zen temples for formal meditation. This mudra is found in Buddhist iconography and has been used since time immemorial by yogis during their meditation and concentration exercises. It indicates the perfect balance of thought, rest of the senses, and tranquillity.

“Many mudras evolved through trial and error, by observing the sensations that arose while performing them. Some can be traced back to Hindu practices that originated before the Buddha’s time, such as the mudra we use during *zazen*, known as the “cosmic mudra.” It appears in Hindu writings several hundred years before the Buddha, depicted as an eye or mouth to the *hara*, the seat of consciousness.”

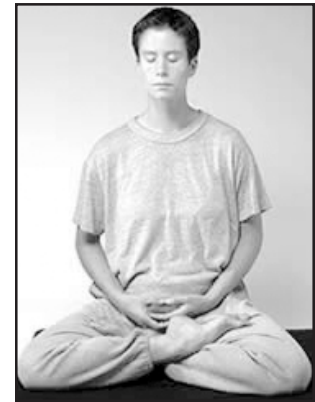
— Albuquerque Zen Center Newsletter

Typically, the mudra of concentration is used in a seated position so that the hands rest in the lap. You may be seated cross-legged on a cushion, on a bench, or chair. The back of the right hand rests on the palm of the left in such a way that the tips of the thumbs lightly touch one another. Some meditators like to place a small cushion or pillow under the hands to support them. This can help relieve arm, shoulder and neck pain.

Pat Phelan offers these insights:

“In *zazen*, we use what is called the “cosmic mudra,” in which the hands are overlapping and connected, but open. As you know there is a lot of emphasis on being upright and keeping the spine well aligned. I think that, after aligning the spine, the next most important aspect of the *zazen* posture is the position of the hands. For years, I put my hands into the mudra and then rested them, pretty much like a dead weight, on the top of my thighs, and basically forgot about them while I went on to follow my breath.

At some point, I began holding my hands a little higher on my abdomen so that my thumbs were at the height of my naval. This brings a different kind of balance to the alignment of the whole body, particularly the shoulders. When the hands are in the correct position, they allow the shoulders to relax and energy flows unobstructed. What I mean by “correct position” isn’t an objective model of how they should be, but, rather, I mean the position your hands are in when this happens. The “correct position” also brings a lightness to my posture as though there is less weight bearing down in my body, so there is less to hold up. I find that when I pay attention to the roundness of my hands, and to the very, very light contact between my thumbs, it keeps me present and grounded in my body so that I drift away much less. When my attention does drift off, my hands tend to come down, and the open shape changes and my thumbs separate.



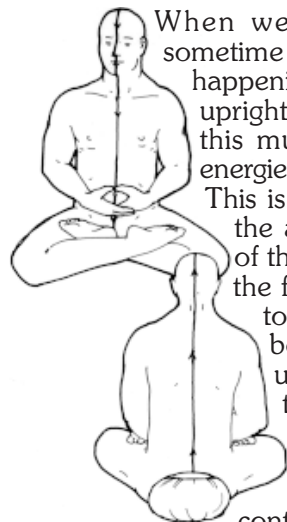
Holding the hands in this manner, requires both intention and attention, and, at the same time, the open shape and light contact of the thumbs brings a dynamic or aliveness to the hands that extends through the whole being. In a very tangible sense, the openness and connectedness of the hands and thumbs; of the arms, shoulders and hands; and also of the legs, if you are sitting cross-legged, is a model for the openness and connectedness of all things with everything else.”

If you find your thumbs slipping or slumping forward, it is because you have fallen asleep physically or psychologically (*daydreaming*) and you are no longer meditating.

Just as there are many schools that use this mudra, there are some variations in the form. When I was first learning to meditate, I was told to place the

(Continued next page...)

“dominant” hand on the bottom. Over a short period of time, I felt like I was leaning to the right during meditation. I consulted with an experienced meditation teacher and he suggested that I switch hands, so that the right one was on top. I tried it and that helped a great deal. I no longer had that leaning sensation while meditating. If you have tried using this mudra and seem to have problems with it, consider consulting with an experienced meditation teacher.



When we sit in meditation, we sometime may feel like “nothing is happening”. Sitting quietly, in an upright posture with the hands in this mudra, helps to get subtle energies flowing through the body. This is shown in the diagram as the arrows going up the back of the spine and flowing down the front of the body from the top of the head to the tail bone. A circular flow is set up and can be consciously thought of during the first few breaths as you settle into your meditation. There is no need to continue to think about it as the flow just goes on by itself. The nerve channel associated with the mind of enlightenment or Bodhichitta passes through the thumbs. Thus, joining the two thumbs in this gesture is of auspicious significance for the future development of the mind of enlightenment.

The symbolism of the *jo-in* is closely associated with the Indian concept of samadhi. The right hand represents enlightenment or the world of the Buddhas. The left hand represents sentient beings, or the world of appearances: the physical world. The relative position of the hands represent the relative position which these two worlds occupy and the fact that Buddha and sentient beings form one and the same unity. The Law conceived by Buddha is sustained by sentient beings who integrate themselves

into it completely. The touching thumbs of the two hands form a shape sometimes referred to as “Buddha’s smile”. In variations of the mudra where the thumbs are slightly closer together, they form a mystic triangle. The esoteric sects attribute a multitude of meanings to this triangle, the most important being the identification with the mystic fire that consumes all impurities. This triangle is also said to represent the Three Jewels of Buddhism, namely the Buddha himself, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Every position assumed and every gesture performed by our mortal body may be said to send forth a continuous stream of vibrations that impress everything around us. But to be really effective, there must be a deliberate and intended arrangement of the body or parts of the body. Such an arrangement is the yoga of mudra. It is the ability to bring the physiological system in harmony with the cosmos and so form a symbolic microcosm through which the macrocosm can be experienced, channeled, and utilized. The mudra in all its variations is, therefore, a traditional body pattern.

Consciously performing mudras allow us to become more aware of inner energy and to control it so that we make the most of each moment. The effect is total, at once subtle but powerful. In this way, we learn to integrate our dissipated thoughts and actions, so that life becomes a graceful flow of energy and understanding. Our whole being can then become a mudra, a gesture of life within, reflecting into our external life.

Ann Klein said, “To inhabit our body fully, and to feel connected through it to the earthy body beneath us is to be physically grounded, able to inhabit our bodies as the mooring and support for all our activities.... Such physical grounding facilitates emotional grounding – the strength to hold ground and fill space, in other words, to be present with all our being....such grounding means accepting our body, not trying to escape it....For stillness of mind, stillness of body is crucial.”





Pelican Bay Chronicles: 6/10/04

Mneesha Gellman

Sun barely waking with me Saturday mornings I arise relying on habit to guide
through the ritual of leaving home, I slip through trees, past ocean
and decimated po-dunk towns that never saw glory days,
burl art and deli sandwiches the economy here
don't ask why the schools can't launch local youth to stardom.
The metal gates whirl and click, the guards have gotten meaner,
compassionate practice testing me long before I make it into the facility,
a Buddhist pop quiz, quick!
smile at him, or he will go home and take it out on his wife.
Inside at last, CO humor not my style, the women as callous,
gotta play like men if they want respect, or equal pay.
Chaplain is greeted, a kind man, interested in life skill building,
he harbors no outwardly manifesting animosity towards us of a different faith,
but reminds that Pagan or Odinistic material is not allowed
because the white supremacy groups have twisted it into rationalization for their hatred proving that
people can distort any theory to fit a need,
if one is desperate enough for identification, affirmation.
Finally, the group trickles in, bodies tense at the strange calmness in the room. How does
one learn to exhale after holding the breath in for 12 years?
A rattling of chains causes heads to turn, like little boys in school they are told
No, you cannot go to the bathroom.
You have to wait. They have professional degrees in waiting.
But will be paroled lacking life skills and DOJ calls it
criminal mentality when recidivism rises.
Your fault. Blame, because you are stupid, inferior.
How can one person attempt to untie these knots of oppression?
I sit, smile, trying not to wonder how sitting is for everyone else.
Ring the bell, forget how many times, chant, my voice on its own because they are still
cautious of saying words they don't mean.
But the process is starting here, the go-rounds delving deeper,
what came up in the last two weeks? How are you right now?
How many people ask you that really want to know?
I come here because I believe in them, that they are good people,
essentially that we all are, gone astray in our various astral projections
and poor choices guided by the tight reins of racism, classism,
and all the other isms that sit on our throats like concrete, monitoring how we chew and what
we swallow, how much of the pie we eat, and hardening quickly if we dare open our mouths too far
in protest.
Their faces stay with me after I leave, forgetting rule of no attachment, I hover
in the awkwardness of exiting, they, returning to their cells,
bars built to house human beings society is afraid of because they are TOO poor, TOO not-
white, TOO threatening to the American dream
to stay out in the streets that were built by them but not for them.
I hover in my privilege the rest of the day, because there is little difference separating me
from them, choices, it is about choices, and who we have had in our lives to guide our choices. So I
make the journey north to sit with a peer group I would meet for lunch if I knew them on the street.
The injustice tests all my theories of karma.

As it grew dark, the children seeking Ryokan went home, but the monk
continued hiding. The next morning a farmer found Ryokan behind a haystack.
"Hush," he said, "or the children will find me!"

Sewing the Robes of the Buddha

Judith Putnam

A sewing sesshin, called Fukudenkai in Japanese, or "gathering for sewing the happiness field robe", was held at the San Francisco Zen Center, June 19-26, taught by Blanche Hartman. I was one of two to four people helping her as student teachers for the week. We had about 10 to 12 other participants sewing either rakus (to take the precepts) or okesas (to be ordained as a priest). One of the student teachers like me was Mo Ferrell from North Carolina. She was my roommate and we got to know each other quite well. She felt like a sister to me. Mo sews robes (for lay people and priests alike) as a business. Her teacher in North Carolina is Pat Phelan.

At a sewing sesshin, one works with great concentration and intensity. Hand sewing a rakusu or okesa is a daunting task -- about 40 hours for a rakusu. The larger okesa can be done in 80 hours. We sewed after breakfast until lunch, after lunch until dinner (there was optional afternoon meditation), and after dinner until bedtime. One took breaks as needed. The day began about 5:00 a.m. -- first meditation at 5:25 a.m., then kinhin at 6:00 a.m., second meditation at 6:10 a.m., morning service at 6:45 a.m., followed by temple cleaning until breakfast at 7:15 a.m. The days flew by. We lost track of time. We were individuals who had a common goal, with similar intention, commitment and enthusiasm. We had a great group of people: fun, engaging, with real wit and great humor.

Blanche is a great teacher; at 78, still going strong. She is down-to-earth, straightforward, direct and kind. Sometimes I feel I learn more from her by just watching her than any other way. She says a teacher's job is to



Catherine Cascade sewing Buddha's Robes with Blanche Hartman



correct mistakes. Lord knows, she's seen a few! Whenever I got stuck with something, I always took it to her. Somehow, she always fixed it. Gently, kindly, quietly and completely.

These sesshins create a real bonding. We get to know each other pretty well. After just a short time, we felt comfortable ribbing and joking with each other, as if we had known each other for years. For instance, we decided we needed a "seamsters union" T-shirt. We would refer to ourselves as "just a little bit crooked", since none of us could sew a straight line, etc. Of course, we're supposed to be sewing in silence, so much of our chatter took place at breaks and mealtimes. Getting ready to leave to go home, I thanked everyone for teaching me so much. A few of the guys looked at me incredulously. "How did we teach you anything?" one of them asked with a chuckle. "We hardly know how to thread a needle without help!" "Well," I offered, "As Blanche said, my job is to correct mistakes. I've seen more mistakes here than I could ever imagine!" My comment, meant to be humorous, was met with looks of recognition and laughter.

I know I will see many of these people again. I look forward to seeing how they are doing and what has changed for them.

Blanche said she may start doing these sewing sesshins on a regular basis. If so, I hope she will include me again. I hope to provide sewing help to anyone in our sangha who would like to have it. It was a very meaningful experience for me and helped me to work more deeply within my own practice.

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