



Dharma currents

N E W S L E T T E R

Book Review Essay by Ace Davis

An Invitation to a Reading Project: ...the Mumonkan

I had read Aitken's *The Gateless Barrier* several times with great pleasure but also the conviction that I was missing a lot. Finally, I had the notion of different strategy that might break up some of my intimidation and help me claim a piece of our heritage with greater depth.

The idea was to read four different translations of the Mumonkan in tandem, i.e. reading each case in all four versions in turn. Please be clear – koan study does not seem to be my path. I've sat with "Who hears?" for eleven years and have only been able to offer two semi-acceptable answers.

My general experience with koans is to not so gently reinforce the view of myself as dull and klutzy – having a lot in common with my daughter-in-law's description of her experience of the first year of marriage as "groping in a dark closet." So who am I to tackle writing about this? It's down to Jack's urging (as so much is). The four translations in the order I read them are:

- **Katsuki Sekida: *Two Zen Classics***
(Boston, Shambhala Publications 2005)
- **Zenkei Shibayama: *The Gateless Barrier***
(Boston, Shambhala Publications 1974)
- **Koun Yamada: *The Gateless Gate***
(Boston, Wisdom Publications 2004)
- **Robert Aitken: *The Gateless Barrier***
(New York, North Point Press 1995)

Sekida is the most straightforward of the bunch as he gives the backstory. If his was the only available version, I think I would be even more at sea. But he provides help - for instance, here is his explication of "nen:"

"The word nen, which has no equivalent in English, means either a unit of thought or a steadily willed activity of mind. Zen theory sees the activity of consciousness as a continuous interplay between a sequence of nen. Thus, the first nen always acts intuitively and performs a direct, pure cognition of the object. The second nen immediately follows the

first and makes the first its object of reflection. By this means, one becomes conscious of one's own thoughts. The successively appearing secondary nen integrate and synthesize preceding nen into a continuous stream of thought. It is these nen which are the basis of self-consciousness and ego-activity.

The integrating, synthesizing action of consciousness is the third nen. Reasoning, introspection and so forth come from the third nen. But this third nen, clouded by its ego centered activity, often argues falsely and draws mistaken conclusions... Zazen practice, when it leads to absolute samadhi, cuts off delusive thoughts. The activity of the second and third nen ceases, and gradually, through constant practice, the first nen is freed to perform its inherently pure and direct cognition. Each nen is accompanied by internal pressure, which remains behind and affects the ensuing thoughts. So causation here represents the effect of each nen-thought on the next. It is not so much the actions of killing, stealing, wronging others, and so on that give rise to evil karma as it is the delusions of the nen-thought, which thinks of killing stealing, or wronging others." (pp 32-33)

Shibayama and Yamada are both much more generous with backstory – the rich relational matrix of who studied with who along with delicious details of their Zen careers. Yamada is the most discursive of the four. Aitken is, far and away, my favorite – the richest, most tender and evocative. There are wild discrepancies in translation addressing the same thing while revealing a sense of the different authors: e.g. take the second two lines to the verse of Case 48 Kan-feng's One Road:

Sekida: *"Though each move is ahead of the next, There is still a transcendent secret."*

Shibiyama: *"Even if at each step you may be ahead of him, Know there is still another way up."*

Yamada: *"Though you may take the initiative point by point You must know there is still the all surpassing hole"*

Aitken: *"Though your every move is ahead of the last, Remember the vast all-encompassing crater."*

Or consider these descriptors of Joshu from Case 31:

Sekida: *"He displayed no trace of being a great commander"*

Shibiyama: *"Yet he does not look like a grown-up."*

Yamada: *"He hasn't the air of a magnanimous man."*

Aitken: *"He didn't have the aspect of a great person."*

Reading the cases with this method made the basic structure of the cases a little easier to see. They are basically somewhere out there between the theory of logical types and double-bind theory. Repeat after me "the map is not the territory, the map is not the territory..." but in these cases, the

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"The mystery does not get any clearer by repeating the questions. Nor is it bought with going to amazing places. Until you've kept your eyes and your wanting still for fifty years you don't begin to cross over from confusion." Rumi

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An Invitation to a Reading Project: ...the Mumonkan



Reflections by Karen Rosenstiel

Skull Dance

- A newly-updated **Directory of Sangha Participants** has been published and is now available at the Practice Center. Look in the file bin in the kitchen desk with the Orientation documents and take a copy if you wish.
- A revised **Bibliography** is also now available.
- The newly-adopted **Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Policies and Procedures** document is in the file and posted on the TTS website.

territory is not even the territory. Each case is liberally sprinkled with trip wires that release the trap by the realization that it is not a trap.

But identifying the structure doesn't bring you any closer than identifying a butterfly as a blue hair-streak brings you to the butterfly. Or as Yamada put it: *"IT can never be communicated to you." No matter what happens, it is quite impossible to give IT to you. IT is entirely one with you from the very beginning, so how can IT be communicated to you any more completely? Water cannot become any wetter! The sword cannot cut itself off!* (p 136)

So what makes a good answer to koan? First, one must keep in mind Shibi-yama's comment that *"The question is in the answer; the answer is in the question."* (p 37) What seems to bring the most approval are answers that are forthright, without hesitation, and neither literal nor theoretical.

Piety must be avoided as well as any appropriation of another's answer. Holding up one finger in imitation of one's teacher is to risk amputation. But humor, correctly offered, can pass - Aitken asks us to: *"Remember the old story of the demon who sat beside the road and demanded the magic pass-*

words? If people could say nothing, or if they said the wrong words, they lost their heads. Nobody could kill the demon, but the most modest farmer, pushing his cart to the market, could make him laugh and clap his hands." (p 99)

And what happens in these stories when one (choose your term) has an opening/ experiences kensho/ becomes enlightened? By all accounts it is a radical experience - as Sekida renders Joshu's description of his first kensho, it is to become *"ruined and homeless."* (p 29).

So everything is changed but, if one is fortunate, also not much - back to one's cushion for the next 40 years is a good outcome. There are many cautions about not clinging to the experience or worse yet trying to replicate it like the monk who had a vision of the Virgin and spent the rest of his career trying over and over again to paint his vision on the wall of his cell. (Aitken, p 162)

Shibi-yama warns: *"One peep into essential nature is a great release and a great encouragement but if you take it as a be-all and end-all, you'll drop straight back into hell."* (p 15)

And Aitken further cautions: *"...kensho is just the initial inspiration. Some people suppose it will somehow do their work for them. This is like expecting the honeymoon to sustain the marriage. Nonsense. The honeymoon does not guarantee you a happy marriage any more than admission to graduate school guarantees you tenure somewhere. Move on from your milestones."* (p 130)

All in all, though I certainly don't feel any more competent about koans, I am most glad I undertook this project. It has "confirmed and strengthened me" in ways I can't really articulate and has given me many moments of comfort and joy.

As I worked through the cases I became most reluctant to be finished and started limiting myself to one case a day. Now I think I am ready to read them all again. No doubt, other delicious points with pop out. And I will try to take Aitken's encouraging words to heart:

"People sometimes ask me, 'How long will it take?' My answer is, 'No time at all.... But I have been doing zazen for ten years - why isn't anything happening?' Exactly: nothing is happening, though your realization of that fact may be evolving." (p 68)

On a recent Friday morning we found a note left on the kitchen table which read: *"We noticed that Avalokitesvara's 'beads' are actually carved skulls. Is there a special significance for Buddha to wear skulls? We wondered whether it is appropriate to dedicate our practice to beings who use skulls as ornament."* This is an important and interesting question. Contemplating concrete representations of death and suffering is a traditional Buddhist practice, dating back to the Buddha himself. He began his spiritual quest when he saw a sick man, an old man and a dead man. To this day, monastics practice zazen in graveyards. Mala beads were frequently carved into skulls as a remembrance of death.

The purpose of such pictures or statues, like the great stained glass windows in old cathedrals, is to teach profound and complex Buddhist concepts in a direct way through to the heart. I have two pictures on my home altar. You probably have seen some version of one of them: it is the famous Tibetan Wheel of Life/Death.

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"When we make a rare and praiseworthy effort to direct our attention to things which we easily forget, this is to be explained by our desire to be sincere with ourselves." Simone Weil, Lectures on Ethics and Aesthetics

Essay by Chris Nielsen

In Defense of Words and Letters

Zen is famous for declaring itself to be "a special transmission outside the sutras," and to have "no dependence on words and letters," in the received formula of Bodhidharma. It's also said to be "beyond philosophy." This has been one of its attractive elements to many westerners. Zen is usually presented as being directly experiential and non-intellectual – even anti-intellectual.

Scholarship and philosophical thought have often been derided in Zen, and students have been explicitly discouraged from studying sutras or other

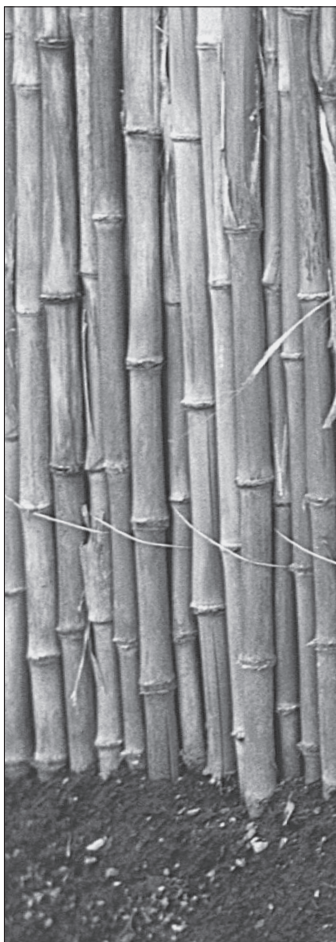
Buddhist or philosophical literature, and from thinking in "dualistic" ways.

Over the years, though, I've come to think that there are some serious problems with this attitude. It obscures the real history of Zen with a naively-accepted mythology and dogma about its sources and development. That has led to sectarianism, in opposition to other Buddhist traditions and perspectives. It can encourage a kind of complacent

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Skull Dance



Terrifying Yama Raja (King Yama) holds up the wheel that shows all the universe mired in suffering. But the important thing to notice is that a Buddha appears in every realm and also in the upper corners. There is no place you can go that is without hope for liberation.

The other picture shows Kannon (the Japanese version of Avalokitesvara) seated in a garden and holding up a mirror to a little frog. But if you look closely you see there is a snake who is looking pretty intently at that frog. After all, snakes eat frogs. So this cute, innocent little picture really turns into something different. Even a beautiful heavenly garden has its snake.

Joy and peace are half of our practice, but death and suffering are the other half of practice that is all too easy to sweep under the rug and not think about it. Unfortunately, bad things happen to nice Buddhists, too. Think of the Zen master, attacked by temple robbers, whose dying screams aroused the whole neighborhood.

But here's the trick, folks. Both these pictures are really the SAME THING. Yama Raja is what the Tibetans call the "wrathful aspect" and Avalokitesvara is the "peaceful aspect." They are not Buddhas. They are Bodhisattvas, beings who give up their own final Buddhahood in order to liberate sentient beings. Both figures are holding up a mirror to look into, and there we see ourselves, both internally/psychologically and externally as the complete universe we are part of.

One is from the viewpoint of being unenlightened and the other from the viewpoint of enlightenment. It is important to understand that Yama and Avalokitesvara are not the cause of suffering or

punishment, nor do they rejoice in suffering and punishment - they show us what IS. We are birthing and dying right this very moment. Even if our lives are longer than a bug or a dog's life, we will not live as long as a tree or a rock or a planet. Yet they too will die and be gone all too soon.

We do not worship a statue or a god named Avalokitesvara. She/he is a representative of a compassionate spirit. This spirit of compassion can contain us in death as well as life. It contains our kindnesses and meannesses, our soft, fine skin in youth and dry, crinkled skin in old age. Beams of morning light on the flower on the kitchen table and on the spider crouching on the flower. *Piss, shit, blood and farts.*

That doesn't mean you have to like pain and suffering or tolerate violence. It means that walking on the beach you can see a shell and an old beer can with the same peaceful eye, and quietly pick up the can to recycle it without drowning in rage or brooding or despair. Sitting with Avalokitesvara, we can listen to all and everything, and reject nothing. Sitting with Avalokitesvara, we can open our hearts gently to ourselves in our great need and fragility. Only then can we open to the need and fragility of all beings.

If you want to read more about Buddhist psychology and art, here are some references:

- **Francesca Fremantle: *Luminous Emptiness: Understanding the Tibetan Book of the Dead*** (Boston, Shambhala Publications 2001)
- **Thich Nhat Hanh: *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*** (New York, Broadway Books 1998)
- **Lama Anagarika Govinda: *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy*** (New York, Samuel Weiser Inc. 1970)



"Joy and suffering are two equally precious gifts both of which must be savored to the full, each one in its purity, without trying to mix them. Through joy, the beauty of the world penetrates our soul. Through suffering it penetrates our body." Simone Weil

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In Defense of Words and Letters



ignorance, and discourage critical thought. At worst, that can lead to a kind of cultism, which contributes to ethical confusion and disillusionment. It might also be blamed for the unreflective subordination of Japanese Buddhism to the militarism of the last century, as described in Brian Victoria's *Zen at War*. At the very least, I think it makes for a shallowness in our practice, because

of our lack of knowledge of the ideological and cultural complexities of our religious inheritance.

The traditional anti-intellectualism of Zen can be understood as a reaction against the heavy scholasticism of early Chinese Buddhism, which it inherited from India. Even a brief attempt to study that literature can lead to exasperation, I admit. Its logic is arcane by modern standards, it seems unsystematic and contradictory, and it's burdened with repetitive formulas of dubious meaning and value. (Who really cares how many *vjnanas*, levels of *samadhi*, or *bodhisattva* stages there are, or if there are any at all?)

But the fact is that our practice did grow out of that tradition, and many if not most advanced practitioners of Zen probably always had some degree of cultural knowledge of it. Even if they disregarded it to some degree, they at least were conversant in what they were disregarding, which westerners usually aren't. And buried within the verbiage are many of the basic ideas behind Zen, and we can learn a lot by considering them in their original context.

Happily enough, the field of academic Buddhist studies in English is expanding by leaps and bounds. Some of it is admittedly just as arcane as what our Zen ancestors turned up their noses at, but some can give us new insight into our practice and improve our cultural literacy. Peter Harvey's *An Introduction to Buddhism* is an excellent place to start. Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible* is another, and Harvey can be a good explanatory companion to the traditional texts in Goddard.

Good scholarly books more directly related to Zen are Hee-jin Kim's *Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist* (of which Robert Aitken once said that you can't understand Dogen if you haven't read it), and Dale S. Wright's *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (also recommended by Aitken Roshi), which examines the writings of Huangbo.

Beyond the question of our relationship to other strands of Buddhism, I think a naïve acceptance of Zen's anti-intellectualism makes it difficult for us to set our practice in perspective with the modern ways of thought that we take for granted. The basic secular humanism that most of us share isn't completely harmonious with traditional Buddhism, including Zen. I suspect that most of us just take what we want from traditional Zen and leave the rest, but how many of us really think through our rationales for doing so? And if we don't think them through, how "mindful" is our practice, really?

Some writers (Thomas Cleary, for example) have postulated an essential "secularism" in Zen, and others (like Manfred Steger) have made much of Zen eccentrics who seem to validate a "hip" vision of Zen that appeals to modern counter-culturalists. Those characterizations seem a bit dishonest to me, like one-sided projections of modern values onto the past. They both seem to ignore the fact that the vast majority of Zen practitioners we've heard of were celibate monastics. I don't advocate monasticism for ourselves, but I think we should be conscientious and principled in our choice against it, and against other aspects of traditional Buddhism that we might consider archaic and inappropriate. Again, we should know what it is we're rejecting, and why.

It's inevitable that Zen will be acculturated in the West, as Buddhism has been in all cultures. But to be truly mindful, we can't afford to be unthinking in the way we participate in that process. Western values like critical thought and individual dignity need to be balanced against received religiosity and non-dualism. We shouldn't let non-dependence on words or letters mean a total rejection of them.

Going beyond philosophy shouldn't mean avoiding philosophical thought altogether. However simple, direct Zen pretends to be, it has a subtlety and complexity that we shouldn't ignore. And its place in our lives and our culture can take some figuring out beyond "just sitting with it."

Poetry by Sean Walsh

A Garden Reverie:

**Stone Buddha in the late
spring garden,
embraced by pea vine and
arugula,
enjoying the silence of
river pebbles
dropped by children into
its lap.**

**All day we've worked in
this garden,
At the evening meal,
cloves of garlic
resolute in their tiny cells
share the
sharp-tongued secret
they learned
from beetles and earth-
worms those many months
underground,
whispering as they pass:
perseverance, perseverance.**



"But as you practice, as your central concern about what you really want for your life changes, desires and indecision drift away. The knowledge of what needs to be done slowly clarifies with practice. And decisions become just decisions, not heart-rending problems." Charlotte Joko Beck in *Everyday Zen*

Opportunities to Participate
2006 Calendar of Scheduled Events



Keeping in Touch

Sangha Contact Information

- | | | | |
|----------------|---|-----------------|---|
| JUN 24 | Gardening Day 11am-4pm (<i>flexible</i>) | SEPT 10 | Zenkai Sunday 6:30am-1pm; sangha mtg |
| 28 | Zazen and Dokusan 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) | 21 | Dharma Currents Newsletter Deadline |
| JUL 9 | Zenkai Sunday 6:30am-1:30pm (<i>without Jack</i>) | 30 | Gardening Day 11am-4pm (<i>flexible</i>) |
| 15-19 | Sesshin at Mtn Lamp (<i>for beginners 360 592-0600</i>) | OCT 25 | Zazen and Dokusan 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) |
| 26 | Zazen and Dokusan 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) | 28 | Gardening Day 11am-4pm (<i>flexible</i>) |
| 29 | Gardening Day 11am-4pm (<i>flexible</i>) | NOV 3-10 | Sesshin at Indianola: Walking Rain |
| AUG 12- | Zenkai Saturday 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) | 16-19 | Retreat in Spokane (<i>Ellen Cote 509 534-2617</i>) |
| 13 | Zenkai Sunday 6:30am-1pm; sangha mtg | 29 | Zazen and Dokusan 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) |
| 26 | Gardening Day 11am-4pm (<i>flexible</i>) | DEC 9- | Zenkai Saturday 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) |
| 30 | Zazen and Dokusan 6:30-8:30pm (<i>with Jack</i>) | 10 | Zenkai Sunday 6:30-11:30am; sangha mtg |
| SEPT 9- | Zenkai Saturday 6:30-8:30pm (<i>without Jack</i>) | 27 | Zazen 6:30-7:30pm Sushi & Sake (<i>with Jack</i>) |

Dharma Currents Newsletter

The newsletter is published three times yearly. With submissions or questions, contact the designer/editor, Cindy at cindy@w-link.net or 933-8100. E-mail submissions to Cindy within the message section (*no attachments*). Dharma and practice-related articles are to be previewed by either Jana at zeedyk@integraonline.com or Rebecca at rossrm@comcast.com prior to sending to Cindy.

Three Treasures Sangha on the Web

Visit <http://three-treasures-sangha.org> for general sangha news and updated event information. The Orientation series is posted along with current and past issues of *Dharma Currents* newsletter. Contact the webmaster and site editor, Jeff at jeffj@oz.net or 783-3980 with any site additions and questions.

Three Treasures Sangha Membership

If you unsure of your membership status and dues payment record, please contact the bookkeeper, Jan Mikus at 363-9650 or jam2@drizzle.com. Note that reduced sesshin registration rates are offered only to those members whose dues are current.

Sangha Lists: Mail, E-Mail and Telephone

Mail, e-mail and/or telephone are used to contact sangha participants. To add or update your information, contact the list coordinator, Barbara at bbreck@nwlink.com or call 425 775-2715. Schedule revisions are communicated via e-mail or phone.

Contacting the Sangha by Telephone

Call Three Treasures at 206 324-5373. Leave a message on the machine and your call will be returned.

Key Contacts within the Sangha

Coordinators, Committees and Board Members



Three Treasures Sangha Practice Committee

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Madelon Bolling..... | 527-1190 |
| Ace Davis..... | 632-8889 |
| Jack Duffy | Teacher..... 360.592-5248 |
| Nils Larsen..... | 360.293-5866 |
| Rebecca Ross..... | 546-8535 |
| Jana Zeedyk..... | 503.220-0508 |

Three Treasures Sangha Board

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| President | Karen Rosenstiel. 325-4334 |
| Vice President..... | Chris Nielsen 546-8535 |
| Secretary | Mary Ersek 784-5052 |
| Treasurer | <i>to be determined</i> ..000-0000 |
| At-Large/Historian | Rebecca Ross..... 546-8535 |
| Teacher | Jack Duffy... 360.592-5248 |

Practice Center Committee Representatives

- | | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Kay Peters..... | 322-8759 |
| Chris Nielsen..... | 546-8535 |

Sangha Contacts and Coordinators

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Bookkeeper..... | Jan Mikus. 363-9650 |
| Communications | Rebecca Ross..... 546-8535 |
| Dharma Friend Coord . | Kay Peters..... 322-8759 |
| Garden Coordinator ... | Kay Peters..... 322-8759 |
| Librarian..... | Eric Ervin 334-0581 |
| List Coord.... | Barbara Breckenfeld.... 425. 775-2715 |
| Newsletter Design | Cindy Jennings .. 933-8100 |
| Orientation <i>Wednesdays</i> ... | Ace Davis..... 632-8889 |
| Orientation <i>Fridays</i> | Kay Peters..... 322-8759 |
| Orientation <i>Zenkai days</i> ... | Rebecca Ross..... 546-8535 |
| Sesshin Coordinator .. | Ace Davis..... 632-8889 |
| Sesshin Set-Up Coord. | Emily Warn..... 322-8750 |
| Volunteer Coordinator | Ursula Popp..... 783-3921 |
| Zazen Leader <i>Wednesdays</i> . | Ace Davis..... 632-8889 |
| Zazen Leader <i>Fridays</i> | Kay Peters..... 322-8759 |
| Zazen Leader <i>Portland</i> | Jana Zeedyk. .503.225-1390 |
| Zenkai Coordinator.... | Rebecca Ross..... 546-8535 |

Time Value Material: Dharma Currents... Early Summer Issue

Recurring Throughout the Year *Sangha Activities*



Orientation to Three Treasures Sangha

Introductory orientation is offered monthly to all those new to zazen and/or new to our sangha to overview our meditation practice and sangha customs—all followed by a period of sitting. Contact one of those listed for *Orientation* under Sangha Contacts or call 324-5373 to leave a message.

Weekly Zazen Opportunities

AT THE PRACTICE CENTER. Sittings during the week: Wednesday evenings 6:30-8:30pm (dokusan is available when Jack Duffy is present which is usually the last Wednesday of each month) Friday mornings 6:30-7:30am (followed by coffee as well as dharma discussion on first Fridays)

UP NORTH. Daily sittings at Mountain Lamp 6:30-8:30am with dokusan at 7am followed by breakfast on Fridays at 8:45am. (contact 360 592-5248)

DOWN SOUTH. Regular sittings are held at the Open Gate Zendo in Portland. (contact 503 225-1390)

Monthly Zazenkai (zenkai)

Single or multi-day retreats including meditation, teisho and dokusan with teacher Jack Duffy.

Interviews (dokusan) with Teacher Jack Duffy

Private interviews available during zazen in zenkai or sesshin to discuss any practice-related topic.

Semi-annual Sesshins

Week-long intensive retreats including meditation, teisho and dokusan with teacher Jack Duffy.

Quarterly Sangha Meetings

Meetings of the sangha members and the Board are held regularly at the Seattle Practice Center, 1910 24th Avenue South. For schedule, leave a message at 324-5373; your call will be returned.

Leadership Training

Instruction in the various jobs that contribute to the smooth operation of the dojo and retreats. Leave a message at 324-5373 for information.

Monthly Gardening Opportunities

Gardening sessions are regularly scheduled 11am-4pm on the final Saturdays of each month from February through October at the Practice Center.

Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound

The group with whom Three Treasures shares the Practice Center—MCPS—meets at the Center on Monday and Thursday evenings 6:30-8:30pm for sitting and discussion, and Thursday mornings 6:30-7:30am (followed by coffee). Led by Eileen Kiera.