

Zen Bow

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UNEXPECTED

Zen Bow: Unexpected

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Richard von Sturmer

Door Number Three

T. HOLIN KENNEN

As a child, when I was home sick from school, I remember watching ‘Let’s Make a Deal.’ The audience of screaming fans, mostly women, dressed themselves in outlandish outfits that wouldn’t usually be seen outside of Mardi Gras or Halloween. The more bizarre the costume, the more likely it was that Monty Hall, the host, would choose you to be a contestant.

In the final round, contestants had to choose between three doors, hoping to win a *fabulous* prize—a car, a new kitchen, or a dream vacation—or keep what they had already won. Monty Hall would drag this moment out with suitable drama: ‘Mrs. Smith of Boise, Idaho, do you want to keep the box ... or ... will it be ... Door Number One ... Door Number ... Two ... or ... *Door ... Number ... Three?*’

Mrs. Smith would bounce around in transports of ecstasy, shrieking with glee while Mr.

Hall tried to hide a visible wince by offering a gleaming smile to the camera. Momentary pandemonium would ensue as the remaining audience members shouted suggestions, ‘Two! Three! One! Keep the box!’ Usually greed would win out and the contestant would abandon their current prize in a bid for the possibility of the mysterious grand prize.

‘Um ... Door Number ... Three!’ Mrs. Smith would shout, and the curtain would open to reveal ... a donkey. A little, mouse-gray donkey wearing a wreath of flowers around its neck and a floppy hat, its halter held by a comely starlet with a smile every bit as brilliant as Monty Hall’s.

‘Oh, no!’ the audience would groan in unison.

Mrs. Smith, somewhat crestfallen, would giggle and say, ‘Well, that’s okay,’ before resuming her seat.

I always wondered why people didn't keep the nice prizes they already had and gambled on the doors instead, often with unpleasant results. Or what was so bad about a donkey, anyway? It wasn't until much later in my life that I realized the value of throwing away the predictable in favor of the uncertain.

In my work as an administrative law advocate, I am continually offered the opportunity to do what appears to be unexpected. I'd much rather negotiate than litigate—it's usually faster, gets better results, and everybody goes home happy. Given a situation where it appears that a solution is either *this* or *that*, I'll be looking for that Door Number Three—a way to solve the problem where everybody wins. This approach is somewhat unusual in the legal community, but I'd rather try to build or repair a relationship between my client and the person with whom they are having problems than create permanent division between them. Besides, a little groveling practice every now and again is good for people like me who work in law. It keeps us humble.

Even though I've always tried to look for creative solutions to legal problems, I've also been the one who already knew exactly what was behind Door Number Three, which is to say that the end result to solving a problem might be unusual or creative, but most of the time it wasn't really unexpected. I was always in control, always guiding the situation, never really letting go. That is until I encountered a problem at work about a week after my first seven-day sesshin this past April. The event in itself is not momentous, but it clarified the meaning of Zen practice in a way that was truly unexpected.

A few days after my return from sesshin I was called into my supervising attorney's office and told that one of the attorneys I work with was very upset with me. My supervisor rattled off a litany of things I had done to upset and offend this person, most of which had been totally unknown to me. This person had never spoken a word to me about what had been troubling her. I hadn't a clue. I liked this person, but she clearly had major issues with me I knew nothing

about. I tried to take it all in without rising to my own defense and went to evening sitting feeling confused and miserable. I also felt that something was terribly wrong.

I sat on the cushions that night in a blaze of pain and bewilderment. For once, I didn't try to shove it away; I drank it down like liquid fire. I'm a fighter by nature, but I knew I had to let it go this time. I knew that somewhere in the middle that fire was a door, a bridge, a way back to harmony. I had to do something different, something I would never have imagined. I had no idea what that would be.

The next morning I met with my supervising attorney. Within minutes, I was sobbing. I never cry at work, but here I was, unhappy that I had distressed one of my colleagues and that she had not felt comfortable enough to come speak to me. I can't recall exactly what was said, but I decided to leave it in my supervisor's hands instead of doing what I would usually have done, which would have been to go to the attorney and speak to her directly. Somehow I knew I needed to let go again, to be curious even in my distress, to let things unfold on their own, and to wait and see what would happen next.

The attorney came to see me that afternoon. She had misunderstood some of the things I had been doing. Once again, I needed to let go of trying to control the situation and just listen, just be present. At some point we talked about my open, West Coast style bumping up against her Midwestern reserve, and we started to laugh. She said she had always felt shy and thought I was so confident. In that very moment, that breath, the bridge appeared as if I had called it into being: I knew that I needed to let her see *me*.

'Kay,' I said, 'You know I'm a smart-ass. Let me tell you something real about me. Watch me at a meeting. I will find my place and stick there like it's a castle. I'm not as comfortable as I look, and the more uncomfortable I am, the more jokes I'll tell. So don't be fooled. It's just theater. It's not me.'

As I said this I physically felt the last of my emotional and mental defenses fall, as if the

straps holding my personal armor had snapped, and it all crashed to the floor. ‘This is *me*, Kay. Right here. Right now.’ I realized I was sitting differently, speaking differently. I felt incredibly light. The old, reptilian part of me was horrified that I had taken such a risk—no shields. I was just as open to her as I had been to the sangha at the end of that seven-day sesshin at Chapin Mill. It was dangerous. It was a crazy choice. It was exactly the right thing to do.

‘So,’ she smiled, ‘Will you tell me your first name?’

‘Now, a girl’s gotta have some secrets,’ I replied, ‘But I’ll give it to you as a riddle.’ And the next day I did. And she sent another riddle back, and we’ve been enjoying getting to know each other ever since.

‘Let’s Make A Deal’ had a pretty good idea. Sometimes when it appears that you only have two choices, you might try Door Number Three and see what happens. If you don’t have any idea of what the grand prize might be, that can be even more interesting, especially since you might luck out and get a donkey ... with two tickets tucked in its hat for a dream vacation for two. Feel the fear, and do it anyway.

T. Holin Kennen has been a member of the Madison Zen Center for two years. She is a public benefits law advocate, a drummer, a wool spinner, and an avid tea drinker.

TAKING FORM

*As Spring makes friends
with Winter,
Coaxing him to reconsider his
blustery ways,
Luring him to a slow death
with jonquils
And the breezy comfort of
eventual return
Realizable only through a
total dissolution
Into the warm embrace that sets
Spring free,
And quickens once again the seeds of
her demise.*

*Summer, now at last, I hear your
voices call to me—
Complete, yes, ‘I’m a tree!’ we romp
and stomp
And have as mine this world itself
alive in time.*

*The beauties of Autumn blush
That they be called clichéd ...
The smell of leaf mold in the air,
The rusted car just over there, within
the shade.*

*Ooh—and now the cold; can this
be right?
I huff and puff and try to live
another night.*

—LARRY McSPADDEN



Richard von Sturmer

Unlikely Ally

LEE LONDON

It is August 2002. I have been a smoker for forty years. I am performing the annual ritual of the Physical Exam, complete with the usual diagnostic testing. Apparently, I have again beaten The Reaper: chemistry good, EKG, chest x-ray and colonoscopy are clear. Just one minor concern: a trace of blood in my urine specimen. I'm referred to a urologist for a pelvic CT scan.

The urologist hangs my CT scan film on the light box. 'You have a tumor the size of two golf balls in your right kidney; it has to come out.' He points to the evil looking dark spots on the shadow of my right kidney. My mind and time-sense freeze at the word 'tumor.'

The good news is lost on me. I am probably still 'Stage One': the tumor remains encapsulated and has not spread. My mind is writhing in

a silent scream of one who has learned that The Angel of Death has taken up residence inside his body.

I ask meekly, 'Was it the smoking?' The urologist replies dryly, 'Can't say ... wouldn't hurt to quit.' I think, 'What's the point?'

The nice lady at the desk smiles a sad smile at me. I'm certain that she knows that I am a member of The Legion of the Doomed. She gives me a number to call at Rochester General Hospital to make arrangements for the surgery.

Most details of what followed have softened into a distant memory. A few vivid highlights remain: the cold dread of death, the surrendering to the anesthesia, not knowing whether I would awake, the rude waking to the searing post-surgical pain, the days, weeks, months, and

years of recovery haunted by the specter of recurrence.

It seems to me that eons have passed since that time. Happily, I am fully recovered, a cancer survivor. Surprisingly, through this experience, I found the strength and the skill required to quit smoking and to finally manage the clinical depression that has dogged me for years.

Since then, I've traveled countless miles on my path. That fearsome thing that reared its head unexpectedly turned out to be a powerful ally. All that ensued honed the skill and the clar-

ity with which I live. How different it was from my expectation! My walk through the Valley of Death led me finally to my breath and to serene refuge in the simple and ultimate reality that is the moment. For that and for the opportunity to share my experience I am deeply grateful.

Lee London has worked as a cook, a gardener, an industrial engineer, and a mental health counselor. In 1976, he decided to flee from Chicago for the safety and serenity of Rochester and the Zen Center. His decision has proven to be a wise one.

Aha!

ANDY STERN

Ah, the Aha! Moment! That moment of breakthrough, always unexpected, always preceded by the work needed to lay the foundation from which the insight is generated, and always associated with a feeling of understanding, connectedness, an emotional uplift, even euphoria. Zen practitioners are all familiar with THE BIG AHA MOMENT, although the subject here is not the BIG E (enlightenment) but rather the little ones that all of us experience now and then. Some of the most profound advances in mathematics and science resulted from such moments, such as when Johannes Kepler awoke in the middle of the night after years of immersion in meticulous observation of planetary movements. Suddenly he knew that his data satisfied elliptical orbits. Or the story of Leo Szilard, credited with the first vision that smashing an atom creates enormous energy. In *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, Richard Rhodes describes the moment when Szilard stepped off a curb in London and suddenly, 'time cracked open'!

I recently read a book that blew my mind: *Eaarth* by Bill McKibben. I can't recall having an 'Aha! moment' of this magnitude in a while. The book had not been recommended, and I had never heard of either the book or the author

until I simply picked it up in the bookstore for no good reason. (I do this often and read widely, and I sometimes don't read what I buy.) So, there was no warning—it was like being hit by a silent freight train. The book is about climate change, and the topic is summarized dispassionately and credibly. There are no hysterics, although McKibben makes some very pointed and upsetting insights.

To be sure, before reading *Eaarth* I had already known something about the subject. I had watched Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*. I knew that CO₂ emissions produced by humans since the Industrial Revolution are thought to be causing changing weather patterns, and I even knew the chemistry underlying the greenhouse effect. I knew that the Greenland and Antarctic ice has been melting and that Glacier National Park has, ironically, nearly no glaciers remaining. As far as personal habits go, I have driven a hybrid car for seven years, I recycle at home, and I grow vegetables in my garden. Despite all this, the penny never dropped.

It is also true that *Eaarth* is filled with insights that I had never considered. For example, because of the large size of the oceans and atmosphere and the large size of the earth itself,

the earth serves as a buffer that mitigates any chemical change. Because of this buffer effect, CO₂ emissions created or reduced today will not actually result in any measurable environmental impact for years. The current measurable climate change is believed by scientists to result from CO₂ emissions from the 1970s. And the CO₂ emissions of today will have a negative impact on climate for the next thirty years, *and absolutely nothing can be done about it!* If all CO₂ emissions were to stop today (a fantasy indeed), there would be no climate amelioration for decades. I also learned that the Arctic sea ice is now expected to be gone, not in any distant future, but in 2012! The unusual spelling of earth in the title of the book represents the fact that the earth will forever be different—irreversibly degraded.

I have never been very engaged with local, national, or international events or politics, although I am reasonably informed. After all, what have they really got to do with me? How much of the news really has any impact on my life? Local weather? Give me a circumscribed problem I can solve, please, so I can feel competent and in control. So I was very surprised that reading this book was like a punch in the stomach and a call to action. I hardly recognized myself! Andy, get a grip!

So, how do I understand what appears to be a transformation in my relationship to the world? Why should I be so deeply moved and disturbed by reading about climate change when I don't have direct experience of it? In meditation I have lots of experience noticing thoughts—thoughts that are big and little, noble and lewd, brilliant and idiotic, profound and banal. I see them intrude and then subside. Why do I have so much trouble allowing the thought of climate change to simply arise and recede? Is it just that my practice is still immature?

To feel alarm about climate change one must overcome a few obstacles. The first is plain old denial. The subject is painful and terrifying to consider seriously, and probably hopeless to do much about. But denial is greatly facilitated by several other factors. Evolutionary biolo-

gists believe we are hard-wired to respond with alarm to dangers that are facing us *now*. Nobody hesitates for a moment when a tiger suddenly charges out of the bushes. This immediacy of response has evolved because it has enhanced our chance of survival. But there is no such evolutionary hard-wiring and subserving alarm about threats in the *future*. So to be alarmed about climate change relies more on thinking than intuition and gut responses.

Another factor that facilitates denial is the near total absence of direct experience of climate change. I am writing this essay sitting in my backyard on a gorgeous late summer evening, smelling the newly mowed lawn, and hearing birdsong. Where is climate change here? Zen holds direct experience as the *only* really valid way to know anything. The fact is that for most of us climate change is below our radar and offers no direct experience—at least for now. This certainly abets denial and leads to the suspicion that the alarm is really alarmist, an attitude cleverly exploited by some powerful corporations and politicians.

Yet another obstacle is the good old American 'can-do' attitude, implying that anything and everything is possible if your will and willingness to work hard is strong enough. Rugged individualism is our credo. (This is probably why many other countries are far more accepting and responsive to climate change than the United States.) Well, our frontier has a prominent and significant place in American *history*, but now resources are limited and diminishing. This same 'can-do' attitude probably underlies the fallacy that technology will save the day.

A good Buddhist might say that the world as we know it is, in a sense, always coming to an end. This is simply the core teaching of impermanence. But the Buddha's mission was to relieve suffering. Thirty thousand children have starved to death in southern Somalia in the last six months, possibly due to climate change. Many people believe that the severe drought in East Africa is directly caused by progressive desertification, one predictable consequence of climate change. In another projection of suffering,



Tom Kowal

as many as 2 BILLION people will ultimately die directly because of climate change. I do realize that fundamentally the cause of suffering is the clinging to the notion of a fixed, enduring, and bounded self, and the non-acceptance of impermanence. But children dying, isn't that suffering? In part, this is the age-old issue of whether meditation is enough or whether social activism, engaged Buddhism, might earn additional merit.

I believe that meditation is a huge stretch for someone like me, someone who would much rather live in the known than the unknown (please, give me anything but Mu!). I do believe that meditation alone does make a vast difference in the world, and until I read *Eaarth* I had believed that this was enough for me to contribute.

I now believe that my attitude toward local and world events—that have nothing to do with

me—is fear-based and stems from an unconscious belief that self (myself) is a firmly bounded, fixed, and enduring entity. I also wonder if my new openness and feeling of connection arises from germinating seeds of doubt about this illusion. Can Zen practice really and truly have such transforming power? I believe so. It seems credible that unknowingly I have been preparing for such an Aha! Moment for more than a decade of practice. By the time I read *Eaarth* perhaps I was ready. Back to that irritating Mu, I guess!

What have I done since reading the book? A lot. I immediately read five more books on climate change. I ordered 30 copies of *Eaarth* and handed them out. I also read more widely about the related subjects of peak oil, falling worldwide water tables, permaculture, and the transition concept. I attended 'Greentopia,' a local festival where I heard Bill McKibben speak

via Skype (he no longer travels for speaking engagements because of the environmental impact). I signed up for an upcoming conference on Transition. I joined and donated money to 350.org, Bill McKibben's on-line organization (350 is the number of parts per million of carbon dioxide that is believed to be the upper limit that would stabilize the climate and therefore the goal of climate change activism). I visited the urban garden located in the middle of Rochester's ghetto, a place I had never been. I have sought out renewable energy engineers to educate myself about the efficiency and cost of currently available systems, and what advances technology is likely to deliver in the next five years. I petitioned that the office park where my office is located begin a recycling program. I discussed with local educators the fact that what was considered 'literate' for a high school graduate even just a few years ago will no longer prepare the current graduates for the world they will face. I have studied innovative school curricula that include the economics and politics of a fossil-fuel-based society as well as the physics,

chemistry, and practical knowledge on renewable energy options. I am planning to help make a documentary film that would, somehow, make the invisibility of climate change visible. And, oh yes, I have been sitting more.

I am fully aware that, very likely, none of this will make the slightest difference in the eventual outcome. Realistically, the only behavior that will help is to leave fossil fuels in the ground, and that ain't going to happen anytime soon. So why bother? Well, in Zen we are also taught to disengage from outcome and to simply exert ourselves fully. To focus on outcome actually impedes meditation. Zen training seems to be a wonderful preparation for action against all odds.

Who would imagine that sitting would direct me toward activism? This might work for some, but certainly not me! Beware of this practice! An Aha! Moment could be lurking around the corner!

Andy Stern, a member of the Rochester Zen Center, has been mostly a thinker, not a doer.

Serendipity

SERITA SCOTT

A friend gave me *The Three Pillars of Zen* in 1969. The limitless value of zazen was clear to me as soon as I started reading it. Using the instruction book as a guide, I began to sit zazen every morning and evening. In 1970 I met my husband Allen and heard his story about going to a sesshin that was held in tents on the grounds of a seminary in Pennsylvania, conducted by a traveling Japanese teacher. The sesshin left such a lasting impression on Allen that he had recurring dreams of running across fields to get back to sesshin. We realized that we both were committed to the same strange, foreign practice that was unknown to most of the people around us.

We supported each other's practice over the years, although practice on both of our parts became sporadic while we were pursuing graduate degrees, careers, and raising children. The intention and the will to practice was there. We talked about it and planned for it, but we did not always follow through with actually sitting down on a cushion. For inspiration in actualizing my practice, I attended a workshop in Rochester in 1978. Eight years after the workshop, our aspiration for practice intensified. We both wanted to devote our lives to practice. We believed that having a teacher would inspire us to follow through. We began an active search



Sasha Pulleyn

for a teacher. We also visited and practiced at local Buddhist centers. In 1990, we attended a workshop Roshi Kapleau gave at Omega Institute and began attending sesshins in Rochester after that.

Allen and I discussed several possible plans for devoting our lives to practice with the expectation that we could make them happen. At first, we planned to find a place in some wilderness area where we could spend months at a time maintaining an intense schedule of zazen while attending every sesshin possible. We also thought about making pilgrimages to spend some time in various centers around the continent. But once we started attending sesshin in Rochester our plan changed with the goal of living at the Rochester Zen Center for a couple of years or so.

It seemed that we would have to wait for retirement in order to carry out any of these plans.

In the meantime we made family trips to visit national parks around North America. The multiple and delightful serendipities that we encountered on a daily basis changed our plans again.

Our first trip, in the summer of 1986, was to Acadia National Park in the northernmost part of Maine. I expected to see an incredibly beautiful island, which it is. Yet I discovered that it is far more than just beautiful. We went on whale watches, sea kayaking trips, and island hopping on mail boats. Because there were so many fascinating things to do, we returned again and again for several years.

When my youngest child was in high school, we went on a family camping and hosteling trip, covering much of North America and visiting as many national parks as possible. This would take the whole summer of 1991 from the last day of school in June to the first day of school in

September. We camped most places but stayed at hostels in bear country and rainforest areas. Each day offered numerous surprises.

In Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, the deer were so tame they nudged us at our picnic table, begging for food. We did understand that feeding the deer was *not* a good thing, but we felt like the deer were magically welcoming us into their forest.

Coming out of the Smoky Mountains in North Carolina, we unexpectedly came upon a Cherokee village whose ancestors hid in the mountains, refusing to go on the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma. They were eventually coaxed out of the hills to settle in this village. At the time we were there, the people of the village were very involved with attempting to capture a black bear that wandered into a campground. They wanted to move it deeper in the Smoky Mountains so it would not harm people or be harmed by people. They were unwilling to let anyone see the bear so that it would have as little contact with humans as possible. This inspired in us an intense interest in Native American issues and their spiritual connection with animals and all of nature.

Rafting on the Rio Grande between Texas and Mexico, the guides told our group to get out of the raft and ride the rapids in our life jackets. We were all a little scared and thought the guides were crazy, but most of us did as we were told. It was so much fun that we elected to ride the current, giving ourselves over to the will of the river and becoming part of the river for the rest of the trip. This experience inspired me to do something similar while hiking along the Virgin River in the canyons of Utah's Zion National Park. In some spots of the river, we could reach our hands out from both sides and touch the walls of the canyons. On the way back out of the canyons, I lost my footing in the river and started to float with the current. I chose to simply ride the current all the way back to the swimming hole by the parking lot.

Outside of Yosemite we had to park our van a half mile from the hostel and carry our food by foot. Carrying our food for a half mile in bear

country? This wasn't in our plans! Thankfully, there were no bear encounters on the way. But imagine our surprise when we found ourselves at the foot of stairs that led into a tree house. Nobody was there. There was a note on the door explaining how to use the fuel for lighting the lamps and stove, how to use the compost toilet (or otherwise urinate in the woods below), and how to use the outdoor shower. We took showers while looking out over the treetops. We felt like a wilderness family. There was a u-shaped room around the kitchen area with about twelve or more platform beds. We chose our beds and went to sleep. When we awoke the next morning, there were people sleeping in the other beds. We never heard anyone come in during the night.

In a costal wine vineyard, Allen and I had tasted too much wine and asked the owner if he knew of a campground close by. Instead, he invited us to be the guardians of his vineyard for the night and told us to set up our tent right in the vineyard. The next morning we woke up in a dense fog. Bent over looking for the things we needed for a tailgate breakfast, we could barely see anything. Our daughter was the first to stand up straight. Her exclamation of awe and wonder brought the rest of us upright. Our heads rose above the cloud. We looked out over the chest-high fluff of cloud and saw the tops of grapevines poking up in bright sunshine and clear blue sky.

It wasn't planned but we just happened to be taking the ferry from Takoma, Washington, to Vashon Island at sunset. Instead of watching the sunset in the west we looked east to watch the changing colors of the sunset reflect off the glaciers of Mt. Rainier. At the hostel on Vashon Island, the accommodations for a family consisted of a tepee, a buffalo hide wrapped around a cone of wooden poles. Single visitors got to sleep in covered wagons. Our tepee had a fire pit in the middle of the floor and beds around the pit. We felt like we traveled back a century in time.

Whenever we made a wrong turn in the road, that is when we saw a stunning hanging glacier,

or a moose, or a bear, or antelope, or mountain goats, or breath-taking waterfalls. If we knew that these serendipities were going to happen, we would have gone there on purpose. Very early in the trip we gave up on expectations. We got up in the morning with the thought, 'Okay, day, here we are ... happen.' We listened to chanting tapes while driving through deserts, rainforests, and mountains. We did zazen in our tent, on rims of canyons, along banks of rivers, on lake or ocean beaches, and beside glaciers.

Everywhere we went, there were retired people doing volunteer work in the park campgrounds. They were greeting guests, showing them what is available, cleaning toilets, etc. We decided that this was a great way to practice. We wanted to be among the retired people and do volunteer work a few months at a time in different parks, starting in the far north and working south, staying ahead of severe weather. We wanted to practice in wilderness areas and wake up each morning with only the expectations to fulfill our volunteer duties and be open to whatever the day had to offer.

We tested our plans out a little more to see if this was what we still wanted. We hosted around Florida one winter break in the mid 1990s. At a later time, we camped and hosted around Maine and in the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Each time we were more convinced than before that this is what we expected to do in our retirement. This is the way we wanted to practice, to greet each day as something new and delightful with infinite potential.

However, my husband got sick. He had been in a motorcycle accident during the time we were looking for a Zen teacher. That was in March of 1988. Nine years later, while we were in the midst of planning for our eventual retirement,

the effects of the head trauma began manifesting and he was eventually diagnosed with a type of Alzheimer's disease. I did retire when the time came, but immediately took another job to help pay for caregiving expenses, first for day care, then for six years of live-in caregivers, and now for a wonderful care facility that is affordable with the help of grants and endowments.

I no longer entertain any thought of devoting my life to practice by living in a Zen center or by becoming a traveling volunteer in national parks. I carry within me the wonderful things I learned through our experiences at the Rochester Zen Center and in our travels. I continue to practice and go to sesshin whenever it is possible. Eventually I realized that I don't need to leave home to devote my life to practice. I don't need to go any further than my own gardens to experience the wonder, awe, newness, and serendipities of each day. I don't need to be fully retired to fully devote my life to practice because work, every kind of work, is a truly sacred practice if performed consciously.

An addition on the house has been turned into a zendo, a small portion of the garage has been partitioned into a foyer for the zendo. On the boundary of the property where the woods begin, an interactive mindfulness trail has evolved. There is a small group of us who have been sitting together for twenty years. Now we have a dedicated zendo with future plans to increase the number of sittings, and add all-day sittings. Right where I am, the unexpected produces serendipities, and if I could know they might happen, I would try to make them happen on purpose.

Serita Scott and her husband Allen have been members of the Rochester Zen Center since 1990.



Building Sangha

As anyone who has partaken in a Sunday brunch at the Center knows, it's enjoyable to spend non-zendo time with our Dharma friends. Aside from sharing bagels and tea, what other activities might we engage in together? This was the focus of an online survey fielded in mid-2011 by the Development and Outreach Committee. 136 members responded by ranking a list of possible activities and suggesting many others. With the help of the Special Events Committee, the highest-ranking results are being moved forward. A group has already formed to discuss the topics of sickness, old age, and death from a Buddhist perspective, and a lecture series with visiting scholars from local universities is in the works, just to mention two. Stay tuned for further developments and opportunities for involvement.

Sweetcake Enso Exhibit

On October 14–15, 2011, the Center hosted the eighth installation of the *Sweetcake Enso* traveling art exhibit. The exhibit of enso-themed artwork originated with the Empty Hand Zen Center in New Rochelle, New York, and is traveling to Zen centers and other Buddhist groups across the country.

The Special Events Committee spearheaded the project, publicizing, mounting, and staffing the exhibit. The public was invited to view art-

work that was displayed in the Center's link, zendo foyer, and dining room while enjoying tea, hot cider, and enso-shaped cookies. Catherine Spaeth, an art historian and the exhibit's curator, was on hand to answer questions and provide background information about the artists and their work.

Artists from the local sangha that hosts the exhibit contribute as well, and make each installation unique. Several Rochester Zen Center sangha members contributed works, including Amaury Cruz (photography), Terryn Maybeck (felted wool), Gretchen Targee (calligraphy), James Hatley (photography), Rosette Schureman (photography), and Cody Kroll (sculpture). Examples of the works featured in the *Sweetcake Enso* exhibit are shown at <http://sweetcakeenso.blogspot.com/>

Roshi Goes Viral

Recently Roshi participated in an 'online retreat' sponsored by *Tricycle* magazine. During the time of the retreat four videos of Roshi speaking on the precepts were available online to *Tricycle* subscribers and donors. The online videos were mirrored in the print issue (Winter 2012) of *Tricycle* in Roshi's article, 'Pain, Passion, and the Precepts.' In a few months we'll be permitted to post the videos as well as the article for viewing/reading on the Center's website.

Annual Temple Cleaning

In preparation for the New Year, Zen Center staff and volunteers rolled up their sleeves and cleaned all those hard-to-reach places and tiny crevices at Arnold Park and the Chapin Mill Retreat Center.



Countless Good Deeds.

If you're thinking about financial planning, estate planning, or both, please remember that there are myriad ways you can help the Rochester Zen Center through planned giving. The right kind of plan can help you reduce your taxes significantly while providing for a larger, longer-lasting gift to the Zen Center. Because there is a wide array of bequests, annuities, trusts, and other financial vehicles to consider, you'll want to work with your financial advisor to decide what's best for you. Long-time Zen Center member David Kernan, an attorney who concentrates his practice in tax law, has generously offered to help point you in the right direction at no charge. For more information about planned giving and David's offer, please contact the Center's receptionist.

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Sesshin

Sesshin is a core component of Zen training. In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Roshi Philip Kapleau describes the purpose of sesshin as, '... to enable one to collect and unify one's normally scattered mind in order to focus it like a powerful telescope inward in order to discover one's true Self-nature.' For those who have participated in sesshin, it can be one of the most indescribable experiences. One sesshin can forge a practice. Decades of regular sesshin can deepen and renew one's practice continually.

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