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Suturing What Has Been Torn Apart by Guiding Teacher Tim Burkett

We sit together, the mountain and me, until only the mountain remains. —Li Po

A sutra is a gathering together of sacred words from Buddhist teachers. The root word is the same as *suture*. Just as Buddhist initiates sew together strips of cloth to make a single garment that protects and adorns them, we use words to suture together something that's been split, some hurt we have, a feeling of separation alienation, or isolation from the world around us. In Dogen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, he implies that in addition to words, immersion in nature itself may serve as a sutra, a source of healing.

Although Dogen is writing about mountains, his intention is not to teach about mountains and waters. Mountains and waters are the sutra—they suture, they heal in their very beingness. They show us how to experience our primal sense of connectedness, as we intimately experience each sight and sound without being caught by our thoughts about them.

The sutra, in this case, is the earth, the trees and underbrush of the mountain; it's the lake, the stream,

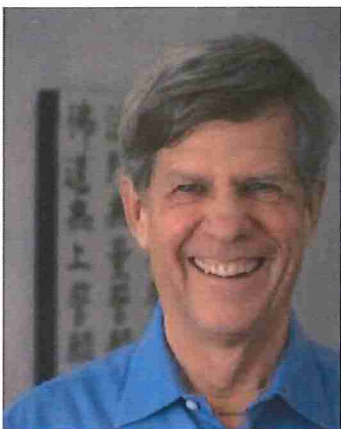
the river. Many of us notice a deep happiness or an unexpected calmness when we're close to nature. By spending contemplative time by mountains and water, our sense of separation and the anxiety and loneliness that often goes along

with it naturally abates and what has been torn apart gradually begins to heal through our suturing. Just by sitting down in the zendo or by the lake or on the mountain, the healing happens quite naturally—one breath, one stitch, one stitch one breath.

The breeze from the mountain, the breeze from the lake, the breeze from each out-breath and in-breath helps us heal each wound so we can return to our original wholeness, our original completeness. New anxieties and fears may arise to sever our feeling of interconnectedness, but there's always another breath of wind to heal or suture this new wound.

Here are abbreviated form of two nature meditations I have used over the years: a mountain meditation and a water meditation. The mountain meditation: The sun shines down on the mountain, the mountain just sits. A storm whips around the mountain, the mountain just sits. People jabber away, hiking on the mountain, the mountain just sits. The mountain is not bothered by the comings and goings of things and events. When we sit like a mountain we are not bothered by the comings and goings of thoughts, sensations, and emotions—steady, upright, without leaning toward this or away from that. When we sit like a mountain we feel deeply connected to the earth under us and the sky over us and the suturing happens on its own.

The water meditation: you lie down on your back in a comfortable position. (You might want to remind yourself your body is more than 90% liquid.) When you are ready, gently pay attention to your breath, letting it flow in and out. Gently pay attention to your thoughts and emotions, letting them flow in and out. Notice the contours of your body, and how sensations are always



Mission:

Our mission is to help people experience a deep and quiet joy—a joy that arises whenever we are fully engaged in the work or play of this moment.

Guiding Teacher:

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Ted O’Toole

Dharma Heirs:

Ben Connelly

Guy Gibbon

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Jim Niland

Wayne Moskowitz

Randy Wedin

moving, inside, outside, and all around. Experience the natural flux, the natural flow of life without clinging to anything, without avoiding anything. To cling, we first have to separate ourselves from the object of our clinging. To avoid we first have to separate ourselves from the object we are avoiding. If you practice this meditation regularly, clinging and avoiding gradually loosens up and dissolves into your natural flow and the suturing happens on its own.

It is only our preoccupation with thoughts and concepts that stifles our sense of deep joy as our lives continue to unfold. Like the mountains and waters our natural stability and fluidity were there before the appearance of thoughts and concepts. Before we were even born we were riding the clouds and soaring in the wind, naturally free and unhindered in our activities and at the same time solidly rooted in rich earth right below us. ◇

Member Drive and Annual Blank Friday by MZMC Board Member Randy Wedin

The Board’s most active sub-committee focuses on our members. With the arrival of autumn, the Membership Committee is fully engaged with planning several important events for the sangha and the public. The Committee’s most important responsibility each year is promoting membership and membership pledges during the annual membership drive, which will begin the first week of November. Membership pledges serve as the single biggest revenue source for MZMC, providing more than 40% of MZMC’s annual budget. The 10% membership growth we’ve seen each of the past several years—the most recent count is up to 165 members—is strong evidence that more and more people are finding personal value in MZMC’s community and programs.

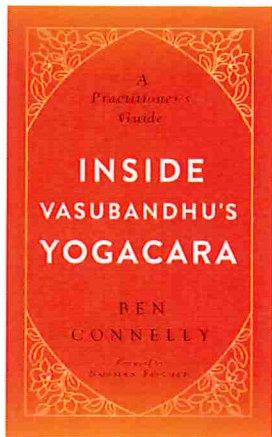
Other fall activities planned by the Membership Committee included the Japanese Tea Ceremony (October 2 and 9, photo on page 4), a New Members’ Tea (October 21), and the upcoming “Blank Friday” event (November 25). “Blank Friday: a Zen Alternative to Black Friday” will be held the day after Thanksgiving. Following up on the successful launch of this event and open house last year, this year’s event will provide the public with an opportunity to learn about and practice mindfulness. The open house, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., will feature “Introduction to Mindfulness” classes for newcomers, as well as a meditation room for experienced meditators. A new addition to this year’s event will be a “doorbuster” special—Midnight Meditation from 11:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Details are available on the MZMC website: www.mnzencenter.org/events



Blank Friday: A Zen Alternative to Black Friday
November 25, 8:30 – 4:30

Inside Vasubandhu's Yogacara by Ben Connelly

Join us to Celebrate the Launch of Ben's New Book on December 10 at 7 pm



There I was, sitting in a circle in the third floor classroom at MZMC and looking at a text called “Vasubandhu’s Thirty Verses” in complete bafflement. I was just a few years into Zen practice. Tim Burkett, who was leading our morning study group, had just passed around the photocopied sheets. After a few weeks of talking about this mysterious poem in that circle of Zen friends, though, I began to sense in it a deep wisdom, a vast spaciousness, and a way forward for cultivating peace. It began to transform my life. Now, a dozen years later, I await the publication of a book of commentary on “Vasubandhu’s Thirty Verses” I recently wrote .

Vasubandhu is a titan of Buddhist teaching. He is deeply embedded in all Zen lineages and is one of the “six ornaments” of Tibetan Buddhism. In his day, his work was studied by students of an unparalleled array of differing schools of Buddhist practice. His work brings together and harmonizes the most powerful practices of the entire breadth of Buddhism. The Thirty Verses is his most concise and accessible text on practice.

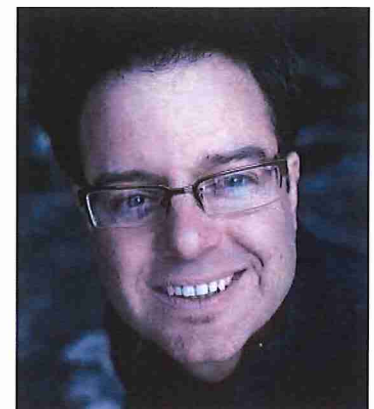
Vasubandhu and his half brother Asanga lived in the middle of the first millennium and are known as the great masters of Yogacara Buddhism. Yogacara means yoga practice. Yoga here doesn’t refer to the postural practice so popular in America, but to union, to yoking the self to the infinite, to the practice of alleviating suffering by working with our minds and actions. Yogacara teachings show that Buddhist practice is most powerful when the psychology of Early Buddhism is harmonized with the mystical teachings of the later Mahayana Buddhist traditions.

Our guiding teacher at MZMC, Tim Burkett, has practiced both Zen and psychology for many years. His teachings have always shown that letting go of the ego needs to be integrated with developing a healthy ego. There is no school of Buddhist thought that more closely reflects this approach than Yogacara.

Yogacara sets all its teachings, even the most mystical, in a psychological framework. It makes room for all kinds of religious expression and understanding, but does not demand what most of would think of as religious belief. It welcomes people of a wide array of understandings and presents a comprehensive path to well-being and a life of love and service.

Studying the work of Vasubandhu has allowed me to encounter the wisdom and practices of one the most extraordinary figures in the history of Buddhist thought. Vasubandhu’s path is a timely one that shows how we can draw on the vast array of Buddhist teachings now available to us. He shows we can do this while honoring difference and without watering things down. We can engage in a body of practice that helps us shed our harmful emotional habits and our sense of alienation from the world. We can learn through Yogacara practice to meet each thing with an open heart and a deep sense of connection with everything.

Ben Connelly’s *Inside Vasubandhu’s Yogacara* will be Published by Wisdom Publications on December 6. Look for articles by Ben on Yogacara in the Summer 2016 issue of *Tricycle* and the Spring 2017 issue of *Buddhadharma* magazines.



Ben Connelly

Extended Meditation Opportunities

Rohatsu Sesshin from November 27 through December 4

Rohatsu (Buddha's Enlightenment) sesshin is arguably the year's most important event for Zen Buddhists. All over the world we sit in meditation, celebrating Buddha's awakening to an intimacy with all life as our own awakening. This formal retreat includes zazen, kinhin (walking meditation), liturgy, dharma talks, formal vegetarian meals using oryoki, dokusan (meetings with the teachers), and work practice. All participants should attend the orientation on Sunday, November 27, at 7 p.m. This year the retreat will be lead by Tim Burkett and Ted O'Toole. There are one , two, five, and seven-day options. Please register by November 22.

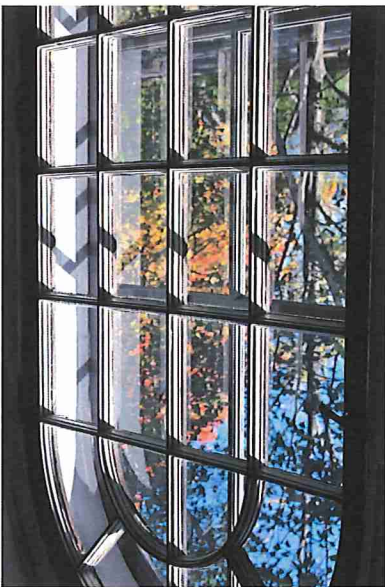
Sitting with Sutras on Saturday, December 10, from 1 –3 pm

Spend a weekend afternoon in silent contemplation with some of the great words of Buddhism. We will read short passages from the sutras, listening deeply as we prepare to enter into silence with them. Led by Busshō Lahn.



Fall Tea Ceremony at MZMC
Photo by Karen Davis

Photo by Karen Davis



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