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## A World Made of Stories *by Guiding Teacher Tim Burkett*

When our ancestors looked into the night sky they were captivated by the heroes and villains who lived there. They traced lines around star clusters and projected wonderful characters onto them. They told stories about these sky beings and passed their stories down from generation to generation.

The great hunter Orion is the most recognizable constellation in the night sky. Over his left arm hangs a lion's skin for a shield. In his right hand he wields his unbreakable club. He is locked in battle against his eternal enemy Taurus, the mighty bull, with splendid long horns and fire darting out from his eye. Huddled behind Taurus are the Pleiades, the seven sisters, distraught and frightened.

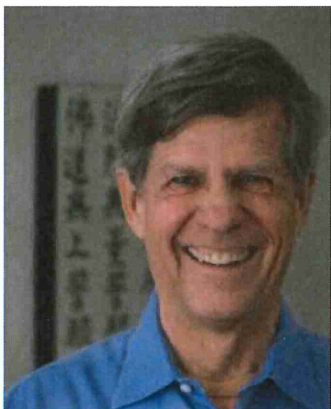
What stories we tell! Constellations are just stars and stars are just whirling clouds of cosmic dust at very high temperatures. Most constellations are made up of smaller constellations, which in turn are made up of still smaller ones. We know that the stories we tell

about the stars are fabrications. But what if someone said that you are a fabrication?

Buddha taught that the world we live in and we ourselves are just whirling clouds of dust, unpredictable and ultimately unknowable. We are made up of constellations, which are made up of smaller constellations. Buddhism teaches that a separate, isolated self is a fabrication of the mind—and like the hunter Orion our world is made of stories.

The constellation we call a “self” is comprised of five smaller constellations: form, sensation, perception, impulse or emotion, and consciousness or thought. Together they make up every aspect of our experience. Through a regular meditation practice we begin to see how these five components of self are created and see both their value and their limitations.

The stories we tell provide a sense of structure and security in an uncertain world. Security is important—but the fear that glues it together can be limiting. Through meditation we realize that our human experience is shaped by our stories and discover the freedom of a mind unburdened by their limitations.



**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:**

Tim Burkett

**Asst. Guiding Teacher**

Ted O'Toole

**Dharma Heirs:**

Ben Connelly

Guy Gibbon

Wanda Isle

Bussho Lahn

Susan Nelson

Ted O'Toole

Rosemary Taylor

**Priests-in-Training:**

Stacy Lee King

Mark Turbak

**Board Members:**

Karen Davis

Paul Gilsdorf

Bussho Lahn

Deb Mielke

Susan Nelson

Wayne Moskowicz

Randy Wedin

Jodi Williams

## First Annual Blank Friday A Success!

This fall the Board sponsored the first annual *Blank Friday: A Zen Alternative to Black Friday*. Board Member Randy Wedin organized the day. He was assisted by participating teachers Tim Burkett and Wanda Isle and many helpful volunteers. Thanks to the collective effort, it was a great success! There were more than 100 participants, with a good mix of MZMC members and people who had never visited the Center before. The four teaching sessions in the zendo drew an audience of 81 people. 57 people attended one or more of the meditation



sessions on the third floor. On the day of the year most associated with American consumerism and shopping, the Center offered a respite and an alternative that people can practice every day of their busy lives. The Board plans to make this an annual event. Spread the word and practice with us on November 25, 2016!

## Winter Practice Opportunities

**Zen Poetry: How is the inexpressible expressed?** with Ben Connelly

Many of the greatest expressions of Zen wisdom have come in the form of poetry, often focusing on encouragement for practice and appreciation of nature. Many great teachers of our past have used poetry as one of their principle means of revealing their way and their wisdom. This class will allow you to wade into one of the world's great bodies of spiritual literature. (Six Thursdays, January 21 – February 25)

**Half Day Sesshin** with Guy Gibbon

This is a good opportunity to become familiar with the traditional forms, stay in practice, or brush up after some time away. The morning includes an orientation, zazen (meditation), kinhin (walking meditation), liturgy, a formal vegetarian breakfast using oryoki bowls, and one-to-one meetings with the teacher. (Saturday, January 23)

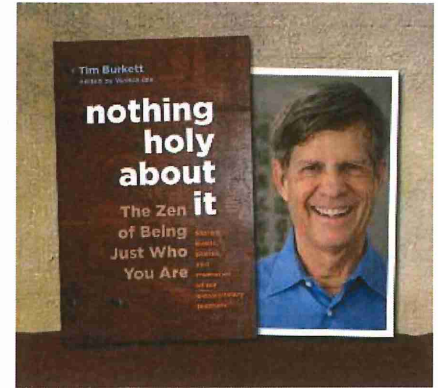
**February Weekend Retreat: *Inside the Grass Hut*** with Ben Connelly

Dive into the wisdom of the *Song of the Grass Roof Hermitage* and its invitation to “let go of hundreds of years and relax completely.” Our practice will be supported by chanting, recitation, and teachings from this classic Zen poem. This two-day retreat is contemporary in style while maintaining a deep immersion in meditation and silence. (February 27 and 28)

## Hope you can join us!

***When Snow Falls, It falls on Everything: Cultivating Compassion and Equanimity.***

Please consider joining our spring practice period led by Tim Burkett and Stacy Lee King (March 2 – April 20). Practice period is designed to help people stabilize and deepen their meditation practice. Our practice periods last for seven weeks. Participants commit to a regular meditation schedule and attend the Sunday or Tuesday dharma talk and weekly class. It is a great way to experience community support for your meditation practice. Some themes we will explore include: Off the Cushion and Into the World; Touching the Heart that Suffers; Forgetting the Self As the Only Refuge; The Boundless Nature of the Heartmind; and Dealing With Hindrances To Practice. We will be using Tim's book *Nothing Holy About It, The Zen of Being Just Who You Are*.



Stacy, who has been practicing at Zen Center for seven years, will serve as Shuso, or practice leader. During the last evening of practice period Stacy will field questions from members of the community related to Zen practice. The Shuso Ceremony is a traditional rite of passage in Zen and a joyful occasion. Hope to see you there!

## Students Learn and Serve at MZMC by Rosemary Taylor

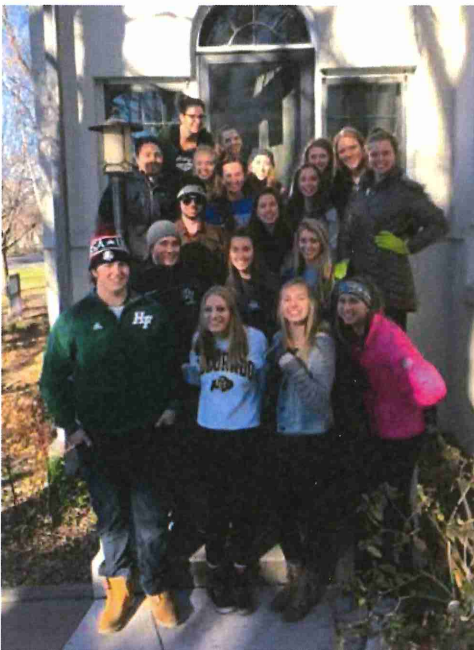
A few years ago, we got a request from the World Religions teacher at Holy Family Catholic High School in Victoria, MN that was unlike any we'd received before. He explained that every year in the Fall, they send their seniors out to do service projects, and asked if we'd be interested in hosting a group of students for a morning. Would we ever!

The first visit was a hit, and now we look forward to hosting them each Fall. This year Mr. Schlepp and 20 students arrived with many rakes, ready to rake up the last of our enormous bounty of leaves. But first they spent time in the Zendo hearing about Zen, practicing zazen, and asking questions. (Great questions!) They spent the remaining hours doing chores for us. Leaf-raking is a perennial favorite job for many, while others washed radiators, ironed oryoki

linens, folded brochures, swept leaves from the third-floor balcony, scrubbed down all the shelves in the kitchen cabinets, and vacuumed the front porch and back entryway rugs.

When asked what the students take away from the experience, Mr. Schlepp replied that "the students learn how to think about calming their minds. High School is fueled with so many activities and events that most of my students have trouble focusing their minds on the moment at hand. I think their experience at the Zen Center, doing sitting meditation and discussing Zen Buddhism, helps them see a way of letting go of some of their trivial anxieties and to look at life with a mind of serenity. They are always smiling and happy afterwards. I love seeing this joy."

What an endorsement! I look forward each year to the HFCHS visit: The students are very engaged and as members of a religion with a long history of contemplative practice, they "get" meditation. They also do a lot of work and seem to have a great time doing it. What an impressive group they are.



## Zen Teacher Norman Fischer Returns to Minneapolis MZMC Sponsors Workshop for Twin Cities Businesses

On March 25, 2016, MZMC is offering a unique training opportunity for Twin Cities businesses and corporations. We are bringing to Minneapolis the co-creator of Google's wildly successful leadership training program called *Search Inside Yourself*. Zen Master Norman Fischer will present a one-day workshop for those who work in the business world, "Eight Mindfulness Practices for Effective Leadership." It will be held at the Opus College of Business, St. Thomas University.

The workshop concentrates on eight practices that grew out of Fischer's work with Google and other professionals. These practices are based on meditative techniques found in the Zen tradition; they increase your capacity to be more aware, resilient, and empathic. Being more aware of yourself and more connected to others can have a significant impact on both leadership and everyday coping skills.

We are very pleased to have the following sponsors for this event: Atmosphere Commercial Interiors, CoCo Coworking and Collaborative Space, Enova Illumination, Hennepin County Medical Center, Maslon LLP, Medtronic and United Theological Seminary. For more information or to register go to <http://mnzencenter.org/events.php> or contact the MZMC office.

Norman will also be teaching at MZMC. He will give an evening talk on *Zen Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Friday, March 25) and lead a workshop *Experiential Writing as Spiritual Practice* on (Saturday, March 26). He will also be signing his two new books: *What is Zen?: Plain Talk for Beginner's Mind* and *Experience: Thinking, Writing, Language and Religion (Modern and Contemporary Poetics)*.

