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## Your Quarter-Second Window by Guiding Teacher Tim Burkett

In the 1970s, neurosurgeon Benjamin Libet was involved in research investigating human consciousness and free will. Dr. Libet made a dramatic discovery that suggests why meditation can be a powerful tool for bringing intelligence to our emotional lives.

Dr. Libet conducted a series of experiments with patients during brain surgery, when they were anesthetized but alert. (It is important that patients remain awake and alert throughout the procedure because communication between patient and surgeon is crucial.) As he monitored the electrical activity in the patient's brain he asked the patient to move his finger. Using a clock that tracked time to the thousandths of a second, the patient was able to report the precise moment when they became aware of the urge to move the finger.

This allowed him to see when the brain actually began activity that would culminate in the movement. In short, it let him separate the moment of awareness of the intent to move from the moment of actual action.

Dr. Libet discovered that the part of the brain that regulates movement lit up a quarter of a second before people became aware of their intent to move the finger. In other words, the brain acts on an impulse before we're even aware of our intention to act.

Fortunately, Dr. Libet's experiment didn't end

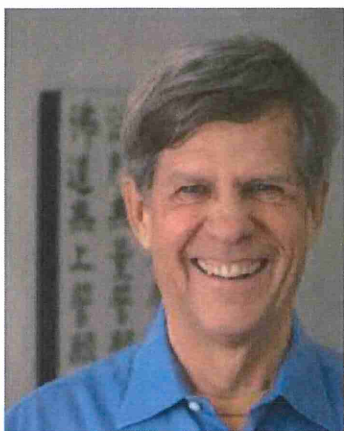
there. Once we become aware of the intent to move there is another quarter-second before the movement begins. This quarter-second window is crucial. It is the moment when we have the freedom to both discover and settle into the space that surrounds each impulse and decide whether to act on it.

So how do we access that quarter-second gap and remain in the driver's seat of our lives, especially during a strong emotion? The answer is simple: through our daily meditation practice. And little by little this ability to access these quarter-seconds spills over into our daily lives.

In 1995, Daniel Goleman coined the term emotional intelligence, which he defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately, to be empathic, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior." In his book he talked about how strong emotions hijack our lives. Impulse is inherent in any strong emotion: anger translates into lashing out at others or at ourselves, fear becomes withdrawal and freezing up, hurt becomes tears.

Meditative awareness of the quarter-second gap allows us to free ourselves from the chain of reactivity and choose a different response. This means we are not owned by our conditioned thoughts, patterns, and impulses. Through our sitting practice we become aware of thousands of quarter-seconds and learn to find deep composure and stillness as we access one after another — choosing each time whether to act on what has arisen. First, we learn through our daily

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**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:**

Ann Bauleke

Stacy Lee King

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Bill Woywod

**Board Members:**

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Paul Gilsdorf

Bussho Lahn

Deb Mielke

Susan Nelson

Jim Niland

Wayne Moskowitz

Randy Wedin

## December Board Update

As we look back at 2016, we realize what an active and wonderful year it has been for our community. Since the last update, the community held its second annual *Blank Friday: A Zen Alternative to Black Friday*. We were pleased to have over 80 people stop by to meditate and learn more about the healing power of staring at a blank wall. Many found out about the event through media coverage: an article in MinnPost.com, a front-page article in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, an in-studio television interview by Channel 9 (KMSP, Fox), and an in-zendo television interview by Channel 5 (KSTP, CBS). The Board thanks all volunteers, and especially coordinator Randy Wedin, for making *Blank Friday* a great event. We plan to continue this offering in 2017.

The Board would also like to thank you for your support of the Center this past year. Your generosity in all of its forms is the reason we are here doing this practice together. We are currently in the midst of our 2017 membership drive, and only \$10,000 from our goal of \$73,000! Thank you to those who have pledged for the coming year; the drive goes through January 15. As many of you know, membership serves as the single biggest revenue source, providing more than 40% of the annual budget. The membership growth we've seen each of the past several years is strong evidence that more and more people are finding personal value in MZMC's community and programs. MZMC Board Members wish you a joyful winter season and happy new year!

## Winter Practice Opportunities

**Four Noble Truths: How do we walk the path from suffering to peace?**

Wednesdays, January 11 – February 15, 7:15 – 8:45 pm, with Ted O'Toole

**Zen Forms and Etiquette**

Friday, January 20, 5:15 – 6:30 pm

**Half-Day Sesshin**

January 21, 5:45 am – noon, with Guy Gibbon

**Yogacara and Buddhist Psychology: How do we work with the mind?**

Wednesdays, January 25 – March 1, 7:15 – 8:45 pm with Ben Connelly

**Beginner's Mind Retreat**

Saturday, February 11, 1 – 4 pm, with Busshō Lahn

**February Weekend Retreat, with Tim Burkett**

Friday, February 17, at 7 pm through Sunday, February 19, at 4 pm

Hours for full day: 5:45 am – 9:00 pm

Please join us for one or more of these practice opportunities. To find out more about an activity or register for it, see the website <http://www.mnzencenter.org/> or contact the MZMC office [info@mnzencenter.org](mailto:info@mnzencenter.org)

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sitting not to react when emotion comes up, and gradually we generalize this into our daily lives. How lucky we are to be able to transform ourselves through this simple practice of bare awareness (commonly called mindfulness).

Of course, this kind of freedom comes with a price. It takes time, effort, and patience to break our patterned behavior. First, we have to slow down our thoughts enough to see them. Otherwise, the quarter-second gap would come and go so quickly we'd miss it. Slowing down our thoughts so we can see the gaps between them creates the possibility to intervene, to make a course correction. Sure it takes time, effort, and patience, and it's often difficult and confusing. But we can no longer be content to live on autopilot, allowing ourselves to be driven continually by impulse

and emotional reactivity and miss the wonderful freedom that surrounds all thought and emotion.

Habituated behaviors are convenient and often helpful but, with overuse, even our strengths can become weaknesses when our patterns become a crutch. When we are trapped in a pattern, we're stuck in the past. Nuance and freshness are lost. Subtlety and intimacy are lost. Meditation practice allows us to see the blind spots that habit patterns create and by working with the quarter-second gap we're able to meet life directly, moment by moment, with fresh eyes. As we learn to settle into the wonderful stillness that manifests itself in one quarter-second after another, we can gradually free ourselves from addictive emotional responses and experience a timeless freedom that is always at hand. A quarter of a second is much longer than you think! ◇

## ***Inside Vasubandhu's Yogacara: A New Book by Ben Connelly***

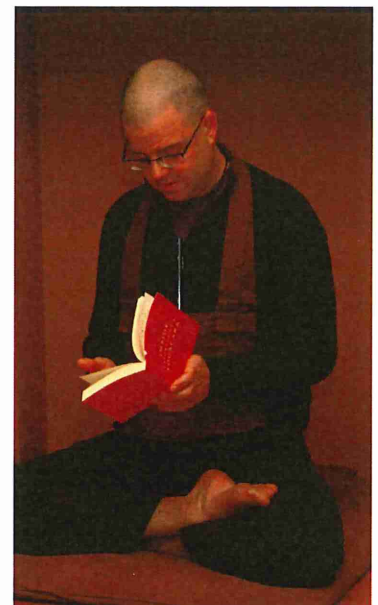
*MZMC Senior Priest Ben Connelly just released his new book on December 10, 2016. For more details, including Ben's national book tour schedule, see: <http://mnzencenter.org/connellybook.php>*

*Ben will be offering a class using his new book this January at MZMC. (See page two for details.) Below is an excerpt from his new book.*

We can observe emotions with an open heart and mind and watch them pass away without acting on them. This is how we take care of ourselves in the moment, step into responsibility for our own lives, transform our mind so it can be more well, and choose to act in a way that is beneficial rather than harmful.

In the Anguttara Nikaya Buddha is quoted as saying, "Action (karma) willed, performed, and accumulated will not become extinct as long as its results have not been experienced." Remember that Buddha, in another text, defines karma as intention and that intention, in this context, is closely linked to emotion. If you experience envy you will never let go of the habit of envy until you actually have directly and intimately experienced it as itself, not the mental

projection it creates. We must taste the feeling, instead of just believing the story, the mental projection that mind makes out of it. This allows the seed of affliction to bear fruit and exhaust itself while we watch, but not create more seeds of affliction. Mindfulness is the practice of this direct and intimate experience, and mindfulness of afflictions is a wonderfully effective means to let go of the tendency to experience the same afflictions, over and over again. It is how we can truly let go. As Zen monk Shitou says in "The Song of the Grass-Roof Hermitage": "let go of hundreds of years and relax completely." By seeing ourselves how we are right now, we can let go of the bondage of the past, of our karma.



Ben reading from his new book  
Photo by Paul Gilsdorf

## Midwinter Fun at MZMC Movie Night

Join us for a movie, food, and fun! All are welcome.

Date and Time: Friday, February 3, 7:30 pm

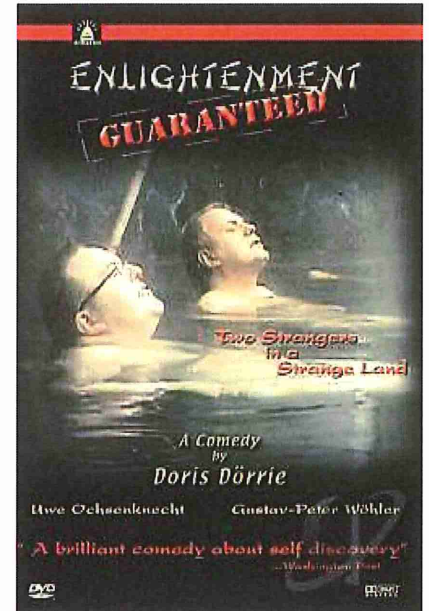
Location: Spring House Ministry Center, 610 W. 28 St., Mpls.

Featured Film: *Enlightenment Guaranteed*

In addition to providing an evening for the community to enjoy, this is also intended to be a fund raising event sponsored by the MZMC Board. A \$10 donation is suggested, but please donate as much as you're able! No preregistration is necessary.

### More about *Enlightenment Guaranteed*:

*Enlightenment Guaranteed* is a German film directed by Doris Dörrie about two brothers, Uwe and Gustav, who travel to Japan to sort out the mess of their lives. Their plan is to visit the Sojiji Monastery in Monzen, near Tokyo. On their way there, in a rather literal Buddhist moment, they lose all of their belongings. When they at last make it to the monastery, they find that even there, enlightenment can be elusive. To find out more and watch a trailer for the film see <http://mnzencenter.org/movienight.php>



*Enlightenment Guaranteed*  
Directed by Doris Dörrie

Photo by Karen Davis  
Rohatsu Altar 2016



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