

Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

April 2012 Newsletter



A Koan of Conditioning: Refrain, Face, Feel

Recently Ezra and Al Zolynas both spoke about meticulous practice, which includes knowing how various practice tools work together. The baseline practice is *open inclusive awareness*, a context for cultivating compassion, and seeing through the solitary confinement of the ego. All of these interweave as we investigate a murky area that is closer than our own skin: eighteenth-century Zen Ancestor Menzan Zenji called it “the root of delusion: if you think you have cut off illusory thought, instead of clarifying how emotion-thought melts, it will come up again, as though you had cut the stem of a blade of grass and left the roots intact.”

Zen training arose in part to help us see through the ego’s aggregates, which are the roots of our conditioned suffering. The frozen mass of emotion-thought (FMET) has two aspects: *emotion-thought*, our habitual emotional tones and attitudes; and the *frozen mass*, cellular/muscular bodily residue, that has accumulated over the years, following painful experiences.

FMET shows its face in our out-of-proportion reactions to events, unskillful words or actions, and attempts to feed the perceived hungry hole inside. Menzan Zenji emphasized the importance of knowing how practice allows FMET to resolve since, unaddressed, it prevents practice from taking hold. It is a passport to misery, sabotaging relationships and keeping us from appreciating life. Even when we’re superficially

comfortable, gliding through life’s fields, we can sense quicksand lurking, in that subtle sense of unease that pervades even good times.

We may not want to look deeply, since encountering the unknown, or something potentially unpleasant, often brings up dread or resistance. Our avoidance is probably hard-wired: babies don’t seek out discomfort, they wiggle away from it. When we start practice, we may naively expect meditation to obliterate painful conditioning—gone with the wind of enlightenment! This is called *spiritual bypass*, and it’s like expecting to learn piano without sitting down at a piano. We can’t bypass what’s already within; that’s why we need skillful ways to investigate our misguided attempts to seek peace of mind in all the wrong places.

A further complication is that we often regard our self-images, strategies, compensations and cover-ups as “the real me.” So our first step is to recognize the ways we try to seek comfort and avoid pain. Ironically, these are the primary things that amplify the FMET that is already on board.

Our patterns might look culturally acceptable, or obviously harmful:

- ◆ culturally acceptable: making efforts to portray a positive self-image; keeping the peace at any price; workaholism; being overly helpful.

- ◆ harmful: overdoing substances, activities and other cravings; seeking constant stimulation and distraction; emotional reactivity; dissatisfaction; stuffing our feelings.

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A Koan of Conditioning: Refrain, Face, Feel

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REFRAIN, FACE, FEEL is a *koan* of conditioning, a five-step antidote to enlighten FMET. Choose one of your familiar patterns for seeking comfort and avoiding pain. Move along fairly rapidly, to avoid falling into thinking and analysis. Examples are included, as triggers:

1st: **IF I REFRAIN FROM** (pick a pattern, strategy, craving, attitude or intended self-image): ie, overdoing substances or activities; trying to look appealing; worrying; judgmental ness; drama; needy-greedy (“please make me feel good about myself”); staying busy, other:

2nd: **I’LL HAVE TO FACE** (negative core identity, the fear-based afflictive lies we tell ourselves: “If people could see the worst thing about me, they’d see that I’m utterly _____: unworthy, unwanted, flawed, incapable, worthless, stupid, unlovable, useless, fraudulent, hopeless, nothing, other:

3rd: **I’LL HAVE TO FEEL, PHYSICALLY**: the frozen, or molten, mass of core pain (body sensations triggered by #1 refraining and #2 facing): constriction; empty/hollowness; restlessness; agitation; numbness; ache; slump (“core belief posture”); other. Any unpleasant sensation triggered by refraining and facing is in the territory of core pain. If nothing stands out, simply feel the breathing sensations and movements.

These next two steps are essential, or Refrain-Face-Feel might be misused, and reinforce our ego-isolation, since if we stop here, the mind tends to add “And That’s Bad.”

4th: **HEART’S BREATH**: feel the inner spaciousness of the chest center, the heart’s breath, letting it

provide company for bodily discomfort, by being breathed in on an inhale. Exhaling, let things just be.

5th: **OPEN AWARENESS**: now attention extends into environmental spaciousness, as the sounds call awareness to the boundless horizon of perception.

Refrain-Face-Feel illuminates the well-intentioned tendencies that reinforce FMET. If we have a bland response, our chosen issue is probably in the shallow waters, rather than the depths of our impacted conditioning. With practice and perseverance, we’ll come to the inevitable bottom of the barrel—and freedom. One of my examples was: If I refrain from trying to be indispensable, pleasing and helpful, I’ll have to face (core beliefs) being unwanted, unloved, disregarded and thrown out like a dishrag. I’ll also have to feel (core pain) crumbling, shriveling, and a sinking ache.

When this actually happened, it was a transformative opportunity, as outworn patterns could deconstruct, freeing attention and energy to reconnect with increasing genuine strength—and the capacity to love. As Refrain-Face-Feel makes our conditioned FMET more transparent, we’re less likely to be blindsided by it. We may even find that our resistance and dread have been more painful than learning to reside experientially in core pain, for short interludes.

It’s liberating to be unburdened of the misery inherent in masquerading as our two main false i.d.’s: our desired self-image, and its shadow, the negative core belief identity. Both of these self-images are like veils over identity, blocking our clear vision, and our aspiration to see what’s always right before our eyes: the gateless gate, the wonder of existence.

by Elizabeth Hamilton

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Sesshin Schedule and Application

Schedule

Sesshin Dates	Length	Member	Non-Member	Mail-In Date for Application
April 2-7	5-day	\$150	\$175	February 18
June 14-17	3-day	\$90	\$105	April 16
August 14-19	5-day	\$150	\$175	June 9
October 11-14 (Questhaven)	3-day	\$175	\$200	August 15
December 26-31	5-day	\$150	\$175	October 10

Arrival/Departure Schedule

Arrive by 6:30 pm the first night, unless this is your first sesshin. Newcomers please arrive in time for orientation, which begins at 4:30 pm. A light snack will be available the first evening.

Last day will end about 3:00 pm.

Application Instructions

Circle the sesshin for which you are applying.

Please print clearly to avoid delay in processing your application, and please fill out this form completely.

Mail in form no *earlier* than the mail-in date above, marked: *Attention Sesshin Coordinator* to the address below. The postmark will be entered as the application date. Please wait to make air reservations until your application has been confirmed. We will notify you as soon as decisions have been made. If you haven't heard from us exactly one month before the sesshin begins, please contact the Center.

Please note: Applications cannot be considered unless a check for sesshin fees is included. Make checks payable to the Zen Center of San Diego. Mail to: 2047 Felspar St., San Diego, CA 92109-3551.

Contact/Personal Information

Name _____ Age _____ Gender _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

Emergency contact (must be blood relative or spouse): Name _____

Relationship _____ Phone _____

Have you ever attended sesshins at ZCSD? Yes No This will be my 1st 2nd 3rd + sesshin at ZCSD

Date/location/teacher of your most recent sesshin _____

Work Skills (circle): cooking, shopping prior to sesshin, electrical, carpentry, painting, computer, gardening, sewing, flower arranging, jobs prior to sesshin, other: _____

Physical conditions limiting participation: _____

Agreement

I agree to maintain a daily sitting practice from the time of this application through the sesshin. I will participate in the entire schedule, including interviews, sittings, meals, work, and any assigned tasks. I will be on time for all activities. I understand that my physical, mental, and emotional well-being are my own responsibility. Zen practice is not a substitute for therapy. I am capable of undertaking the rigors of a sesshin at this time. I am seeking medical or therapeutic treatment for any condition(s) I have, and have revealed all pertinent information on this form. I will sign a waiver releasing ZCSD from accident and injury liability.

Name (please print legibly)

Signature

ALL BLANKS ON APPLICATION FILLED IN? Yes No

Revised 2-12-12

Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

Donations

Thanks in part to both large and small donations, the 2011 ZCSD budget was only slightly in the red. Our intention is to keep both membership dues and sesshin fees low, so that practice will be accessible to everyone. We ask those of you who can afford it to make a tax-deductible contribution to the Center.

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Schedule

Dawn Sitting

Weekdays, Monday-Friday, 6:00-7:00 am

Tuesday Evening

Two Sittings, 6:30-8:00 pm

Wednesday Evening

Two Sittings, 6:30-7:40 pm

Practice Seminar follows
(until about 8:20 pm)

Thursday Evening

Two Sittings, 6:30-8:00 pm

Saturday Morning

8:30 am Work Practice

8:45 am Introductory Workshop
for newcomers; Follow-up
instruction for those who have
attended introduction

9:00-Noon Three Sittings, Dharma Talk

First Sunday Morning Each Month

Three Sittings, 9:00-11:00 am

Parking is Practice

Please park at least two blocks away and please be mindful of our neighbors.

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Zen Center San Diego

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San Diego, CA 92109-3551

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