

Nightlife at the Zendo

The summer sesshin is coming to an end. During the last night I plan to additionally sit in the zendo, on my own, for 5 or 6 hours in a row, meaning: 45 minutes of sitting, 15 minutes of slowly walking (kinhin) and so on. A few days after the sesshin, with all still very fresh in memory, I write this text about my experiences, hour by hour. There is no full timely exactness in this. But then, it's about Zen. The exactness lies in the deeper meaning. There and only there it's of the deepest importance.

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9:45 PM. I walk around a bit behind the zendo after the last daylife meditation session. I practice in not thinking about what I'm planning to do as being hard or ... heroish? ... Nay. It's just a simple thing to do. I've done it before and I'm thinking back of that now. I'll survive. Nature shows itself as beautiful as it can get. From the beginning of time everything has been just so as to lead to this point. And from this point it will flow onwards.

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10 PM. Just sitting down. I have company almost immediately. One, two, then at least three mosquitoes turn up for nightly supper. At first I'm not a very friendly host. I'm not prepared for a night of bzzzzzzzzz. But this is some assertive womenfolk. I ask them to please at least spare my face. Big deal. One on my ear. One on my nose. Grottesque. I slap myself. Ow. Did I miss or did I kill a sentient being right in the middle of the zendo? I change strategy. Maybe with a full belly they leave me for the purpose of their own mosquito meditation. It seems to work. During the night from time to time I get some buzzzy visitors but all in all, not much.

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11 PM. I can't help it. This place is a bit scary to me right now. As a child I was pretty afraid of the dark at times. Even in recent years this fear of darkness returns sometimes as a long remembered veil. I notice that some clicks and sounds in the zendo make my 'ears turn towards it'. You have to admit it's a bit

spooky after all. Imagine the blackness in the dark: the cushions, the zafutons... even the red carpet has turned black. Soon I 'see' some men in black too. A row of black-kimonoed patriarchs on the cushions right before me. They are very benevolent. Extremely nice all the time. They don't talk, but speak of confidence and wisdom. After a little while, I forget about them, but the feeling of being supported that they have given me, remains. I'm at peace.

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Midnight. During kinhin I remember the feeling / knowing / deepest conviction that All is Good. I remember the confidence from a prior deepest daytime experience. The trust that I can trust. Fully. I mean: fully. My peace is of the deepest kind. I feel supported by many things now: the past week of meditation, the work I did in the kitchen as a tenzo-aid, people. Even so, some extremely ugly faces of death and horror are coming up in my imagination. Mara's faces. I let them, encourage them, pull them towards me. I want to have them right before me and really completely overcome them. But soon I notice that I have to put their energy into them myself. The moment I stop doing this, they fade away without any effort required. So this way even Mara himself is helping me. I tell him so. He agrees. Well. Strange things happen between heaven and earth. Or vice versa.

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1 AM. I hear sounds of people returning from their one-time escapade to the pub. Voices of sensei and tenzo (they are a couple) going to their room. For a while I'm back into the worldly world of little-dimensional conceptualism that is hanging like an illusion on a rope inside the real reality... This is talking weirdoish enough, isn't it... I should be careful. But I'm not. The only regret I have right now is that by not telling the reason for not joining the crowd, I may have let some people down who might think I didn't *want* to. Well, this is all may and might. I shouldn't bother too much and just sit. 'Shikantaza'. Soon after going slightly up, the wave goes down again.

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2 AM. Comes to me the full meaning of 'sesshin': 'looking at / with the heart-mind'. It comes on the notes of a love song, or better: a part of it that keeps repeating itself again and again.

Which is OK to me. Actually, almost anything would be OK to me now. All pieces are part of one big whole. Then all pieces ARE the whole. The night is one big door towards the space that I am coming from and it is Love... Sorry, dear reader, I speak no more of this since (s)he who already knows, knows and (s)he who doesn't, doesn't. I can only heighten wrong impressions. The responsibility to obtain truth, is individual.

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3 AM. After kinhin I feel an urge to bow from full standing position to the ground. I restrain myself and do it only 3 times, as intensely as possible, just like it's done during the day. I would like more very much, but something tells me it would be *disrespectful*, like using a sacred thing in a way it should not be used. This is the time I would like my teacher to be here, as a teacher and as a very close friend. Nevertheless, after the bows I return to the cushion, happy.

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3:45 AM. The first five hours of this zendo nightlife now seem more like 5 minutes. I know time distortion is common to a parallel working mind. But I have never experienced it myself to this degree. If I would be looking for an indication of good meditation, this is it. The last hour however is less. Pain. This position. That position. I think I'm bumping into my own limit at present. At last, I sit on the cushion with legs straight. I have no intention to meditate more. Enjoy. Nothing more. Nothing less. Who am I kidding? This is meditation too. It seems that even when I'm getting out of it, I'm not getting out of it.

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4 AM. Out in the air. I get a most beautiful final treat. The sky is all so clear! The stars so manifold and bright! Bliss! I wanted to stay in the zendo. I want to stay here right now. I return to my room, knowing that in 3 hours or so I will be preparing myself in order to return to the zendo with all others. Can't wait.

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