

Finding Your Seat

by Kelly Story

If you walk into the Zen Center's living room at 7:00 p.m. on the first Monday of the month, you might be surprised to find a small group of people drinking tea and talking about Zen.

Talking about Zen?! Aren't we told that to learn about Zen one must sit, not talk? Okay, truth be told we are not exactly talking *about* Zen, but we are talking about how one 'finds their seat' at our Zen Center. And I, for one, have learned a lot from these times together with new members. After all, Zen Mind is beginner's Mind.

Usually, the conversation at these meetings is directed by new and trial members' questions. Those present range from being a trial member of one week to a new member of three years. Three senior members, Josh and Heather Kelman, and I help guide the discussion, answer questions, and share wisdom and experience from our time at the Vermont Zen Center.

The goal of these meetings is to help new and trial members feel more connected, confident and comfortable as they begin their journey in Zen. At the same time, they help the senior members who are guiding and joining in the discussion to get back to the basics by reminding us of the importance of having fresh eyes in our practice.

We hope that *Finding Your Seat* is a helpful way for new members to learn Zen Center protocol such as how to do a prostration or enter the zendo. It's also a chance to answer frequently asked questions.

Participants' questions range from, "What is the meaning of the word dokusan?" to "How many teachers are there at the Vermont Zen Center?" to "How does a new member meet with Roshi?" Recently, a member wondered how new people deal with pain when sitting. Another member asked "How do I get through resistance to doing zazen and deal with feelings of preferring Metta practice to breath practice?" In the past, new members have shared discouragement with struggling to find a time to sit every day. And recently, a new member was asking questions about how things will work logistically at their first sesshin.

We have also been fortunate to have other senior members join in the discussion. Marcela Pino, Dharman Rice and Ramiro Barrantes have all attended and shared their experience and insights. When Marcela came to the group, she shared her story of how she came to the Zen Center and what her journey in Zen has meant to her. We also give tours of the Center explaining the different features of the altars.

Many new members have expressed that these meetings and the personal support and understanding they have received has really helped them feel welcome and more confident as they 'find their seat' at the Vermont Zen Center.

Often, after the guests have left, the chairs have been put back, and the tea cups washed, Josh, Heather and I reflect on what great questions people ask, how wonderful the discussions are, and how privileged we feel to share in this journey with new members.

If you are a new member and want to join us, we welcome you! If you are a member who would like to come and join us to support our newer members, we welcome you too. To find out more about the *Finding Your Seat* Program and how to get involved you can contact Kelly Story at kelly@vermontzen.org, Heather Kelman at heather@vermontzen.org or Josh Kelman at josh@vermontzen.org.