

A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

After a 38 year journey as a practicing Zen Buddhist, I am very pleased to announce my ordination as a Zen Priest on September 28, 2018. My good friend Genjo Marinello Roshi added a new dharma name to my existing one, so I will now be known as Rev. Shin Den Sei Fu ("Deeply Transmitted Tranquil Wind"), a name that reflects an aspiration and a goal to strive for.

Someone recently asked me: "Why are you ordaining?" With someone else adding: "What does it mean?"

Both good questions.

For me, ordination represents a deeper level of dedication to my practice, which at its core means a commitment to the meditative path as a way to access the mystical core of the Universe or God, or however you might refer to the Ground of All Being.

"Zen" is the Japanese rendering of "Ch'an," which is the Chinese rendering of "Dhyana," which in Sanskrit means "meditation." So the Zen path is quite literally the "path of meditation."

This means continuing my daily meditation practice of 38 years, but with a renewed determination to go deeper. Without fear, or expectation of favour, with determination, humility and acceptance.

Gliding and flowing through form and formlessness.

It also signifies the aspiration to live into the Bodhi-



Rev. Seifu bows to have his head shaved by Rev. Genjo Marinello Roshi, who is also a longtime spiritual director. This moment was part of the traditional ordination ceremony held in Seattle, Sept. 28, 2018.

sattva vows I recite every morning, namely: to help all sentient beings as they progress on their path to greater spiritual awareness; to live a life free of bondage to attachments and delusions; to never flag in my commitment to greater and greater understanding and insight; and to honor and follow the example of the Buddha's life and insights.

All of these also flow and are in harmony with my role as a Spiritual Companion.

Living into my vows is now an even deeper daily aspiration, even when I am not in the mood, or angry, or dissatisfied in some way. Not just something that I live into when I am feeling good, elated, or happy, but even when (and specially when) I am experiencing quite the opposite sensations.

A martial arts teacher told me decades ago that "our

LETTER (CONTINUED)

true measure is how we behave when we are under the most extreme duress,” not just when we are feeling at our best, when it is so much easier. Thankfully, we all have good days. But it is how we respond on the bad ones that truly matters.

Wise words and a difficult test.

My ordination also brings me closer to aligning all of the facets of my life into a coherent whole: the fulfillment of my calling as a Zen Priest and the Executive Director of Spiritual Directors International; my aspiration to be a more loving, supportive, and thoughtful father to my six children and an involved partner to my wife; to be responsive to my friends and to the communities that I am part of; and, specially, to be a good companion and helper to those who may be interested in getting closer to their own sense of the mystery and wonder of God or The Universe.

Basically, to fall into increasing alignment.

With all parts merging seamlessly into the whole.

Finally, because Zen is by definition a mystical Buddhist approach, I want to briefly reflect on an insight initially triggered by my Christian upbringing, with a Hindu father and a Catholic mother, and reinforced through my respectful, avid and dedicated studies of many spiritual paths for several decades now.

As a graduate student in comparative religions, I wrote my thesis on mysticism across traditions. I have always been struck by how mystics, often separated by thousand of miles of geography and thousands of years of history, spoke almost uniformly about their experiences: the great night of the soul, dying before you die (a saying in both the Sufi path and Zen, tellingly), and being reborn into the light out of the darkness.

I am convinced that it is this mystical wellspring that unites and undergirds all spiritual impulses, however they may manifest.

And which informs our work as spiritual companions. So, as the Rev. Seifu, I will endeavour to set as good an example as I can, admit my limitations when I fall short, keep coming to the light, and help as many of you as want my help to do the same.

May God bless you all.

And may The Universe bring you into greater and greater alignment with your true nature.



Reverend Seifu (Anil)

CONTEMPLATION, ACTION, AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

These are uncertain, raw times we are all living through. Times that challenge our faith, our trust, our optimism.

They are also busy, and often quite crowded, with moments that can feel too full and rich. Overflowing in fact. Where we are juggling more than we can or should, with balls dropping on the floor left and right, and our efforts directed towards cleaning up the resulting messes, rather than aligning our energies more optimally in the first place.

To complicate matters, the world seems to be undergoing particularly trying times, with natural, political and human disasters of unusual intensity.

And you can add all of this on top of all of life's "normal" challenges: sickness, trauma, death, relationship issues, professional challenges and spiritual hunger. Thankfully, we can always call on a spiritual companion. And one of the most important things they can help us with is to become attuned through contemplation, to counteract some of the more frenetic aspects

of our daily lives with moments of rest and quiet.

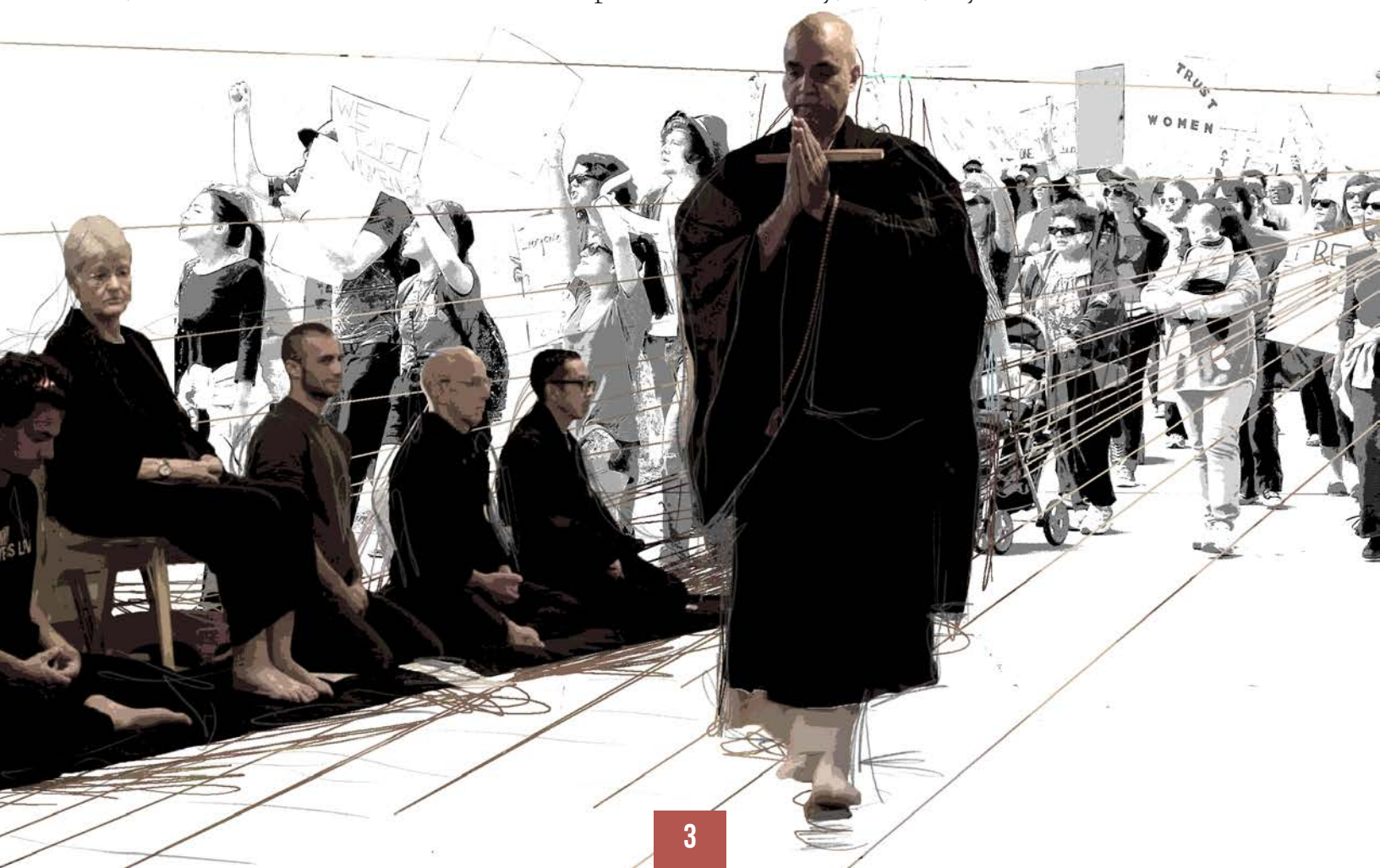
And this, in turn, helps us act with more confidence, determination and serenity

In fact, action and contemplation are not opposed.

Rather, they feed each other. And are tied together like the Taoist Yin and Yang, or two sides of a coin.

Allowing us to be contemplatively grounded in everything we do, and to be able to find still spaces within ourselves even in the midst of the busiest of places, when they are usually most needed. To be calm in the face of chaos, strife and danger. To be accepting of the flux that permeates everything, including our own beings, with dignity, equanimity, acceptance, forbearance, patience, and understanding. To act with deliberation, but also with compassion. Allowing us to be forthright, honest and direct.

And to hopefully inspire others through our example. So that they, in turn, may be calm in the face of the



many storms of our lives. Kind in the face of hate and hostility. Resilient and forbearing when challenged. Able to process and discern.

This is what spiritual companions attempt to do. Enabling us to find peace in the face of strife; serenity in the face of chaos and pain; and insight in the face of confusion and loss.

Allowing us to find the place where we can abide, strong and faithful, unworried, with our essence uncompromised.

So, spiritual companions listen. And encourage. Inviting us to break through the obstacles we may face, whether imposed by others, or by our selves. So that we may find the strength that already resides within us.

And once we have found harmony between contemplation, action and compassion, we will likely find

ourselves flowing through life, overcoming the inevitable obstacles before us, and allowing us to respond with grace, empathy and serenity to the many challenges confronting us and the world.

May It Be So.

Rev. Seifu (Anil)



Listen

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We WELCOME your feedback on any aspect of this issue of LISTEN, or on SDI as a whole. Please send your comments to
LISTEN@SDIWORLD.ORG



The following questions are offered for guidance, journaling, or meditation.

1. In your contemplative practice, what brokenness and suffering burns in your heart?
2. Can spiritual practice hold both inner peace and the suffering of the world?
3. How might you offer spiritual companionship to others engaged in activism?

If anything arises that you would like to share with the community, please tell us at listen@sdiworld.org.

artwork by Matt Whitney



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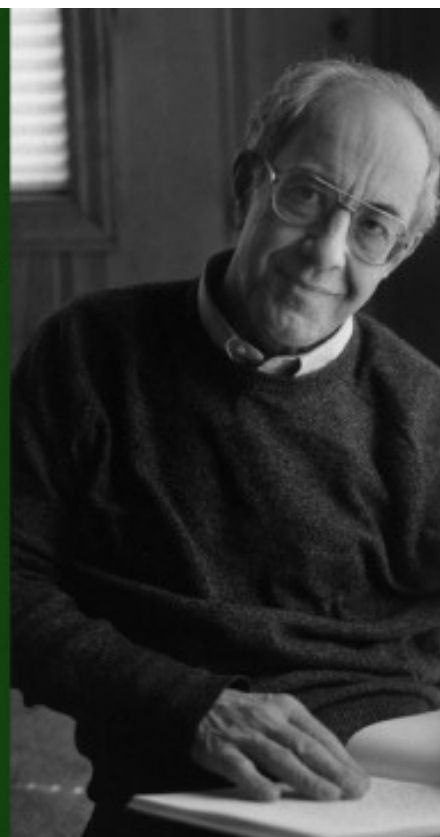
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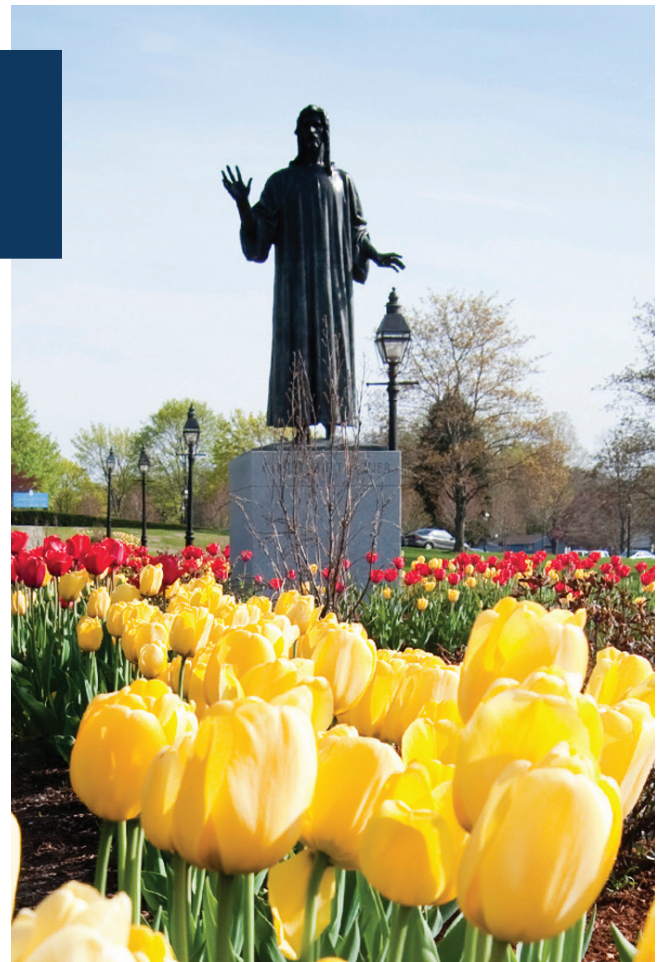
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MY CATHEDRAL

Vaulted sky
Beams of light
Redwood columns
Choirs of birdsong
A fawn
Your incarnation
Morning dew your chalice
Your cup overflows
and I am fed
with your presence

*Linda Forsberg serves a Lutheran congregation in RI, and is a graduate of Brown University, Harvard Divinity School, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.
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photo by Linda Forsberg



RETREAT

Lenore F. LeVoy

I leave agendas schedules
calls clamoring for attention
I leave city traffic noise
tasks tugging with distraction

I turn slowly onto the gravel road
to the cottage in the woods
A small loaf of homemade bread
awaits me on a board

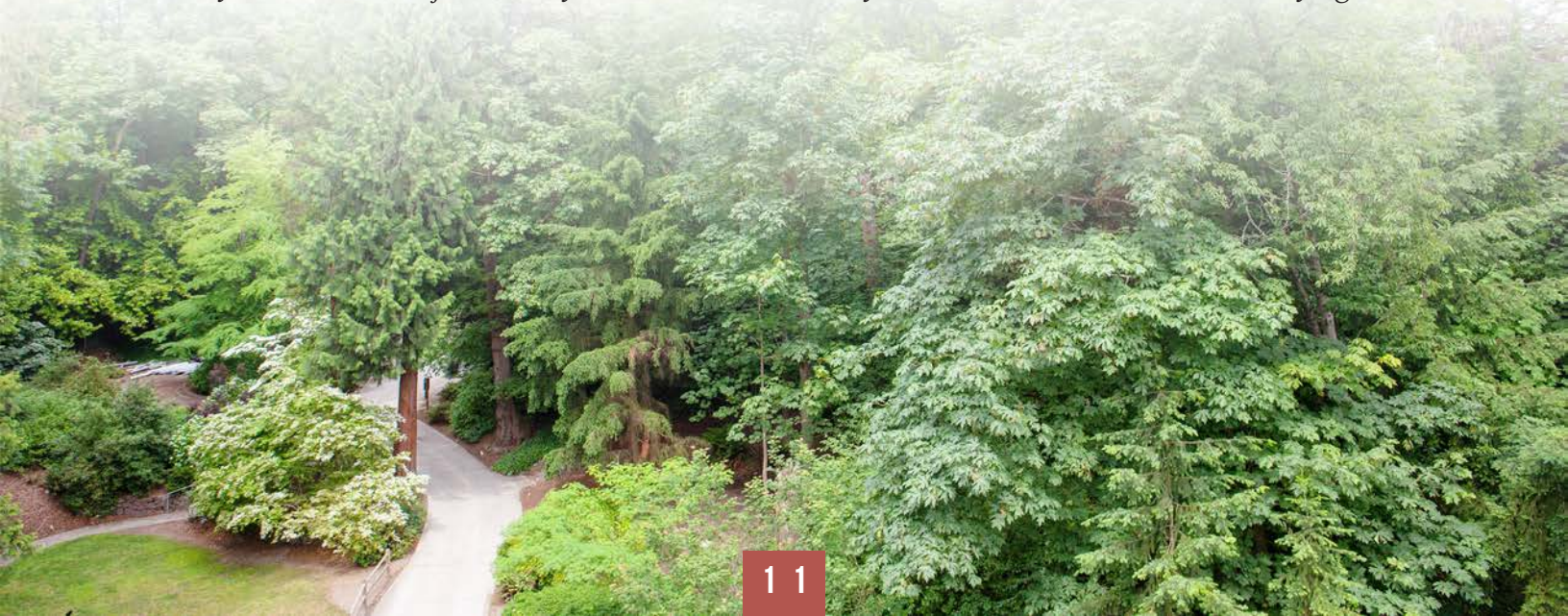
I bring in a suitcase
bag of books
a cooler
I carry too much

Billowy white clouds drift
in blue sky
call me to walk
in the woods

Virginia blue bells nod
in gentle wind
Basswood stretches
its gnarled roots along the stream

I sit on a rock
radiant sun touches my face
listen to the quiet
in this holy place

Lee LeVoy is the director of Sanctuary, a retreat in Ellison Bay, Wisconsin, USA. E-mail: lee.levoy@gmail.com



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A traditional Japanese ink wash painting (suiboku-ga) depicting a person standing under a large, gnarled tree. The person is shown in a simple, sketchy style, wearing a robe and standing with their back to the viewer, looking up at the tree. The tree's branches are thick and dark, with some lighter, more delicate branches extending upwards. The overall style is minimalist and contemplative, typical of Zen Buddhist art.

“To study the self is to forget the self;

to forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things.

When actualized by myriad things,
your body
and mind
as well as the body
and mind of others

drop away.

No trace of realization remains
and this no-trace
continues endlessly.”

Dogen Kigen

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