



morning service.

As I exit the meditation hall, the ino, who dispenses community work assignments, sends me to the kitchen to tear lettuce leaves for lunch.

Lined up three to a side at a butcher block island, our cutting boards cheek to cheek, we slice the cores off red-leaf lettuce, then tear and toss the leaves into 5-gallon buckets until we have 16 gallons of salad greens.

To my surprise, this simple task is calming. I remember the Zen Jewish saying: "Be here now. Be someplace else later. Is that so complicated?"

I have learned a valuable lesson transferable to Real Life: Tear gently, vertically. Don't force; allow.

The second day in the kitchen, my Type-A head is back, whispering, you are an excellent lettuce tearer. A leader in the world of lettuce. Surely, if you lived here, you would be running the kitchen.

Breathe, pause, slow down. It doesn't have to be "I win, you lose." Be mindful, whatever is happening.

By that afternoon, I have slowed down so much I have to ask someone what day it is. I am into the rhythm of Tassajara. I tear lettuce, write, nap, soak in the hot springs, meditate, get a massage. How could I have thought there was nothing to do?

Periodically I lapse and pursue new projects. I interview the tenzo, head of the kitchen. Her staff of non-cooks, which includes an improv actor, a second-grade teacher and an artist, turns out three

Greens-quality gourmet vegetarian meals a day for 84 guests, effortlessly, it seems. Her only training she says is zazen.

"The main thing is not the food; it's the practice. To be present. To give with generosity and kindness. In a moment of frustration to have compassion. Are we cooking the food or is the food cooking us? Are we washing the dishes or are the dishes washing us?"

Mulling over Type-A Zen, I approach one of the lawyers.

"Can we talk?" He shakes his head. The lawyers are in silence.

Below us, I watch the stream, full and fast from recent rains, divide to circumvent boulders, reunite when the obstacle is past. It doesn't try to stop, reverse its natural course, be anything other than what it is.

Like the stream, the lawyers soon return to their natural state; they speak. I ask what I have missed at the workshop.

"What is a bodhisattva in the context of a legal practice? That's the sound bite," a copyright lawyer tells me. "What it's really about is that it's not about me, am I going to win or look good."

Over a lunch of butternut squash soup, fresh-baked bread and apple, walnut and gorgonzola salad, a family lawyer explains how the workshop applies to her practice. She represents a mentally ill mother in a custody hearing, who calls her 10 times

a day. The lawyer's Buddhist practice allows her to feel compassion, yet be detached.

A telecomm lawyer says, "I live a high-paced, driven lifestyle with me being the driver." She doesn't meditate at home, but once a year, at the lawyers' retreat, she slows down.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being "Om" and 10 being "See you in court and may you live to regret it," a lawyer's idea of slowing down seems to be around 7 or 8. They are dreamy-eyed after sitting in 108-degree water, but still forceful, direct. In light of our initial meeting, I savor the metaphor of "lawyers in hot water."

At the end of five days, I upgrade myself (or downgrade, depending on your point of view) to Type A-minus. Have I stayed too long, lost my edge, been rendered too soft for the outside world? Have I written this story or has this story written me?

Then I read the calligraphy on the han:

*Wake up!
Life is transient
Swiftly passing
Be aware ...
Don't waste time*

Type-A Zen. I'm in the right place, after all. ♦

Laura Deutsch last wrote for the Magazine about a dog subpoenaed to testify at trial.