



Berkeley Zen Center



August 2004 Newsletter

The Labor Day Sesshin

will be held **Saturday, September 4 - Monday, September 6.**

As has been our practice for three day sesshins in recent years, participants of this sesshin are required to sit the entirety of all three days. Our shared, sustained practice together creates a particularly strong container for sesshin practice.

If you have questions, contact Sesshin Director, Andrea Thach



Kanzeon Sitting...

will be held on **Sunday, 22 August.**

This "9 to 5" sitting is especially designed for those who have difficulty with the more rigorous typical *sesshin* schedule, but it is open to anyone. In fact, because the periods of *zazen* are shorter – 25 - 30 minutes, it is a good opportunity to experiment with a more challenging posture. Sign up on the bulletin board as usual. The cost is \$15.

Contact Laurie Senauke: 510.845.2215,
lauries@kushiki.org.



Affirmation of Welcome

Walking the path of liberation, we express our intimate connection with all beings. Welcoming diversity, here at Berkeley Zen Center the practice of *Zazen* is available to people of every race, nationality, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability. May all beings realize their true nature.

August & September Schedule

Founders' Ceremony

Tuesday, 8-3, 6:20 pm

Wednesday, 8-4, 6:40 am

One-Day Sitting

Saturday, 8-7, 5 am to 9:30 pm

Kanzeon Sitting

Sunday, 8-22, 8:45 am to 5 pm

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 8-28, 9:30am

Founders' Ceremony

Friday, 9-3, 6:20 pm

Saturday, 9-4, 6:40 am

Three-Day Sitting

Saturday, 9-4 through Monday, 9-6

Half-Day Sitting

Sunday, 9-12, 8:30 am to noon

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 9-25, 9:30 am

Women's Sitting

Saturday, 9-26, 5 am to 5:30 pm

Transitions:

Thanks to Paul Ridgway for his two years' service to the *sangha* as Zendo Manager. Paul is replaced by Eric Greene.

Thanks to Clay Taylor for his service as Head *Jikido*. We will miss Clay's exemplary practice, and strong example. Clay is replaced by Greta Pearson.

Thanks to Dean Bradley for her service to the sangha as Work Leader. Dean now joins Ross Blum as co-special projects leaders. Dean is replaced by co-Work Leaders Blake Tolbert and Maggie Vachel.

We appreciate each of you for helping to care for our temple.



Courtyard Project...

Greg Denny is managing the task of reconfiguring the area of the courtyard just west of the zendo. Greg invites *sangha* members to help with this project. Contact Greg Denny: 510.595.8162, greg@techsperience.org.



Tape Library Correction...

In the July newsletter, a mistake was made regarding self-service checkout from the library. To clarify: class recordings up until about the end of 2002 are still available for checkout from the shelves in the library, but not lectures. For all recordings of lectures and any classes not on the shelves, if you want to borrow or buy one, fill out a form (located in Tape Librarian's mailbox on porch) and leave it in the mailbox.

Caregivers' Conspiracy...

Many of us find ourselves in a situation where parents or others are depending on us for some part of their physical and emotional care; some are grieving the loss of loved ones whom we cared for. This is rather hidden work in our society, and can contribute to an unnecessary sense of isolation. Join us to conspire (as in "breath together") with potluck food and deep talk. **Friday, 27 August** in the community room. Contact: Laurie Senauke: 510.845.2215, lauries@kushiki.org.



Women's Sesshin...

This year the Women's Sesshin will occur on **Saturday, 26 September**. This has become a way for the women of the sangha to connect in a special practice day together.

All women in the sangha are welcome to participate in this special one-day sitting. Contact Laurie Senauke: 510.845.2215 lauries@kushiki.org; Baika Andrea Pratt: 510.548.8478 andrea.pratt@kp.org.

Lecture by Sojun Roshi Tassajara, 1980

This *zazen* room is a very special room; interesting that we have this special room where we just do *zazen*. And in this room our activity of *zazen* is taken care of very mindfully. And of all the things that we do in this practice life, *zazen* is the thing that we really take care of the most single-mindedly. So it seems like a very special practice to us. When we sit, our body, mind, and breath become unified, become one. We call this unification, *shikantaza*. In the morning we get up and come to the *zendo*, unifying body and mind, dropping all barriers. That becomes our starting point; zero point. From this zero point we take a step out into the world. This process of unification and then stepping out into the world of particulars, is the rhythm of our practice. Dogen zenji calls it the practice of *genjokoan*.

Sekito Kisen, in the *Sandokai*, described that unity as “in utter darkness all is one”. And, in the light, all forms are revealed. *Zazen*, this starting point, is that darkness without boundaries. These two sides of our practice, of our life, fit together like a box and its lid. This is the most basic kind of religious practice. I feel very fortunate to have this most basic religious practice, which is verified by our own effort and experience. I think the reason most of us come to this practice is because of its truthful simplicity. There are people here from different cultures and backgrounds, and yet every person here can meet in this space. Every person here can meet and feel a unity in this space.

I started to practice *zen* for this reason. It became obvious to me at once that *zazen* was a universal religious practice that everyone could enter into. Even though *zazen* is a so-called Buddhist practice, you do not have to be a Buddhist to practice this unification of mind and body with everyone. So, I am a Buddhist priest and I engage in this practice of *zazen*. I feel that I have faith in it, but in order to do it I do not have to be a Buddhist priest. Why I can be a Buddhist priest is because I feel that I do not have to be a Buddhist priest. Because I do not have to be a Buddhist, I can be a Buddhist.

I feel strongly that *zazen* is a universal way. I think that the world needs some universal way; not that everyone has to do some one thing, but everyone can enter into this leveling, into this most fundamental existence.

Sometimes people ask that if they are Christian or Jewish or some other religion, do they have to give up their religion in order to practice this way. They ask, “How can you practice the Buddhist way without being Buddhist? How can you practice the Buddhist way while you still adhere to some other religion?” This is a big question: does everyone have to be Buddhist in order to live in truth?

There are various levels of *Zen*. There is Buddhist *Zen* and there is *zen* before any kind of religion. There is *zen* which precedes any particular kind of religious practice. It is this *Zen* which is before any kind of religious overlay or overtone that is the basis of any religious practice. If you feel that you are Christian, what is the *Zen* of Christianity? If you are Jewish, what is the *Zen* of your Jewish nature? Where do you find complete unification, complete unity?

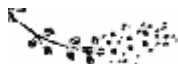
When we enter the *zendo*, whether we are Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, or any religion, when we sit down, everything falls away; there is no Buddhist or Christian or Jewish person. There is just sitting. Everything is one. When we get up and take a step, we become Christian, or Buddhist, or Jewish, or man, or woman, or black, or white, and then we can fight and kick or argue with each other. But when we sit, it does not make any difference. So I feel that *zazen* is the basic religious practice before religious practice.

When we get up from *zazen*, we have service; we bow and we chant the *sutra*. This is a kind of Buddhist service, but I don't know if it has to be. Somehow we have to allow unity in this world. If our religion creates

divisiveness, that's a sign of our misuse and misunderstanding. We notice people's differences when they quarrel. Even *zen* students have differences. *Zen* masters have differences. Someone reminded me that *Zen* masters often have trouble getting along with each other, but actually this is just on the surface. When they sit *zazen*, all differences disappear. The first step out of *zazen* is the most important step. Then our next step after that, being careful how we interact in the world of differences. How to keep that *zazen* mind in the world of differences is the other side of practice.

When I was studying with Suzuki Roshi, even though he asked me to be ordained as a priest, he never talked to me about being a Buddhist. He always encouraged people not to give up their religion to be Buddhist, but to just practice freely. I feel he had a very generous big heart. Even though he himself was not interested in some other religious practice, he felt that he was Buddhist through and through. Because he found his true heart and true mind, he could find that kind of generosity and that kind of broad openness. If we have confidence in our own way we can learn to appreciate our own roots and the roots of others. I feel it is important for everyone to appreciate their own roots and to understand the essence of those roots. So many people, it seems, leave the religious practice of their background to seek something. If you really find the truth of *zazen* practice, you can appreciate your own roots, your own background. I always encourage people to rediscover their own background and to make peace with that and then continue however they need to. I think that most young people leave their own religious practice because they misunderstand its true meaning. If you look back and penetrate to the truth of Christianity or the truth of Judaism you can appreciate what they really are and you can appreciate yourself and your ancestors.

Some Buddhist priests who come to America say, "You have a religion already, why do you want to study Buddhism?" I have had many Japanese priests say this to me. They try to understand why Americans want to study Buddhism or *Zen* when they already have great religious traditions. Many of us know why we do, but we do not always know the truth about the religious background that we come from. Anyway, when I sit *zazen*, I do not have to call myself anything. This is already a wonderful place to be. And when we proceed from *zazen*, we can enjoy everything and maintain our freedom. If our practice is, indeed, the practice of truth, we will not have to worry about anything and our practice alone will touch people without having to proselytize, advertise, or convince. So it really depends on our own attitude and our own true conviction and our willingness to drop everything and appreciate our unity as well as our diversity.



A new Dharma Group...

is forming at BZC. The intention of this group is to address the needs of sangha members whose work and/or householder activities make it difficult for them to participate in the BZC Community as much as they would like to.

The group will meet every 6-8 weeks. We will have a structure, and a focus on study and practice as we meet our lives out in the world of the lay person. Specific subjects will be decided upon when the group meets. Some possibilities include: working with Precepts in our busy lives; hearing the Dharma Bell amidst the chaos of a hectic schedule; Sutra Study such as the Vimalakirti Sutra (the understanding of the Dharma as explained by the great householder-teacher Vimalakirti); and the study of other texts.

If you are interested in joining this group, contact: Karen Sundheim, 510.336.1856 or email ksundheim@earthlink.net or Linda Eby, 510.655.4365 lindaeby@pacbell.net).

Saturday Childcare

Childcare is offered on Saturdays from 9:15 to 11:15. The cost is \$5 per family. Note that the childcare schedule is tentative. Childcare is not offered if no one's planning to come, so please call Laurie the Thursday before to let us know if you're hoping to attend. Contact: Laurie Senauke, 510.845.2215.

August 7	No program
August 14	Childcare
August 21	Childcare
August 28	Childcare
September 4	No program
September 11	Childcare
September 18	Childcare
September 25	Childcare



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