



Berkeley Zen Center



November 2007 Newsletter

Rohatsu Sesshin

This year, Rohatsu Sesshin begins Sunday December 2 and ends Saturday December 8. Each day begins at 5:00 am and ends at 9:10, except for the last day, which ends at 3:30.

With the intention of accommodating sangha members who work during the week, the attendance requirements are the following: Either sit a minimum of three entire days, with two of the days being consecutive; or sit Monday-Friday, arriving at 5:40 pm and staying through supper and evening zazen until 9:10. People choosing this latter option would also be expected to sit the entirety of either or both Sunday or Saturday.

The sitting fee for people sitting entire days is \$25/day for dues-paying members and friends, \$30/day for all others. The fee for people sitting the Monday-Friday evening only option is \$5 for each partial day. Leave checks marked "Rohatsu" in the kitchen porch door donation slot. Please pay in advance. If this is your first multi-day sesshin, please contact the Sesshin Director.

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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.

November & December Schedule

Founders' Ceremony

Thursday, 11-1, 6:20pm

Friday, 11-2, 6:40am

Alternative 40th Soiree

Saturday, 11-3, 6:00pm

All Sangha Potluck

Tuesday, 11-6, 6:30pm

Bodhidharma Ceremony

Wednesday, 11-14, 6:40am

One-Day Sitting

Close Aspects of Practice

Saturday, 11-17

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 11-24, 9:30am

Kidzendo

Saturday, 11-24

Rohatsu Sesshin

Sunday 12-2 through Saturday 12-8

Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony

Monday, 12-3

Suzuki Roshi Annual Memorial

Monday, 12-3, 8pm

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 12-15, 9:30am

Kidzendo

Saturday, 12-15

Winter Break

December 18 – December 31

New Years Eve Sitting and Party

12/31, 8pm

Rohatsu Sesshin continued

It is helpful to participate in a one-day sitting first.

Registration forms will be available on the bulletin board shelf when the sign-up sheet is posted. These forms must be completed and turned in by Tuesday November 27 to verify participation. Leave the forms in the sesshin director's box on the community room porch. If you have questions about sesshin or sesshin attendance, please speak with the Sesshin Director, Leslie Bartholic (925-933-3486, before 9 pm). If you wish to stay overnight, contact the BZC shika, Ross Blum, at 843-5471

Sign-up deadline is Tuesday, November 27. Registration forms must be turned in to complete sign-up.



People...

Welcome to new member Renata Casale. Renata has been practicing at BZC since April and had previously practiced at San Francisco Zen Center for two years.



The BZC People's 40th Anniversary Alternative Soiree

If you have not had your fill of celebration, food, talk, and auction, please join us for a Totally Free Dinner on Saturday November 3, 6pm at BZC.

Free food, free (nonalcoholic) drink, free conversation, and so on.

Even free verse may be permitted. Hmmm, that is possibly going too far.

There will be a Noisy Auction of some very unusual and pertinent items, priced (we guarantee it!) to fit everyone's budget. But the main thing is just to hang out with each other.

So come on down. Signup on the bulletin board, and consider whether you have time to help with cooking or cleanup.

Thanks,
Alan



SOME TIPS FOR DOANS

On October 13, Sojun Roshi offered a training for doans, kokyos, and fukudos. The group thought it would be good idea to report in the newsletter on the teaching that unfolded during this training.

The main topic was relationship. Sojun began by discussing the relationship of items on the main altar, for the chidens among us, but also for all of us to appreciate the altar arrangement:

Don't block the view of statues with the deceased name cards. Center everything, starting with the Buddha and then the paired objects. Don't put anything on the front strip of wood, and always leave room on the left front corner where the offering tray sometimes goes. Make sure the candles are straight. On the small altar keep the candle in the center, unless the flower arrangement that day might be singed.

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Lecture by Sojun Roshi

Transformations, Spring 1997

Sesshin is the practice of patience—great patience. The root of the word patience is the same as that of passion both of which refer to painfulness and suffering. Patience is the ability to endure. To endure the painfulness in our life is an ennobling quality.

"Life is painful" is a good interpretation of Buddha's first noble truth. There are other interpretations of dukkha, but for the purpose of this talk I will use this one. The truths are "noble" because, coming from the "well born" buddha mind, they teach us the most basic means of dealing with the pain and the suffering that occur in our life.

The second truth tells us that life is painful due to our delusions based on desire. Desire itself is neither good nor bad. It just gets us into trouble mostly because we don't know how to deal with it. It gets out of hand. Suzuki Roshi used the analogy of a smoky kerosene lamp; when the wick is too high the combination of fuel and air is unbalanced and the flame burns the chimney. We should be able to adjust the wick so that all the elements are in balance and the light is fully functioning. Our desire is a flame and when it is out of proportion we have pain and suffering.

Pain and suffering are not the same. Pain is a feeling, and although suffering is painful, it is more of a response or an attitude. Buddha's third noble truth says that there is a way to deal with, or accept our suffering and not be bound by it. When we examine it we can see that suffering is mostly attachment to pain, and if we try to escape the pain we end up with more suffering.

Sesshin takes great patience to be present with our life as-it-is, without attachment to any particular state of body, mind, pleasure, or pain, and to be free from suffering. Patience is like a (western) persimmon. If you try to eat it before it is ripe, its

astringency will make your mouth pucker up in the worst way. So you have to wait until it is ripe before it gets sweet. If you try to remove the astringency, the persimmon will not get ripe. You just ruin the persimmon, because within the astringency is the element that transforms into the astonishing sweetness of a ripe persimmon.

In a similar way, if you try to cut off all your troublesome thoughts, anger, lust, criticism, all the demons, in order to have a peaceful mind, they will continue to sprout, and the process of transformation will be sidestepped, because the root of the passions is the same as the root of bodhi. This is why we must be very patient, compassionate and understanding with our fellow practitioners. There is the saying: "Great passion ~ great Buddha."

The process of transformation takes place by itself along with our devotion to practice, and it can be painful. Endurance and right intention are also necessary, and these qualities bring forth joy, and a sense of deep gratitude. So, within joy there is pain and within pain is joy. We can't have it one way. We usually take up something because we find pleasure in it. But eventually we feel the pain. Then we look for something else. It is easy to become addicted to the pleasure principle, and view the painful side as a nagging annoyance to be rid of. But the one follows the other like a shadow.

The process of transformation, like electricity, does not work without both the positive and the negative. In zazen, we say over and over again to let go of aversion and grasping. Let go of discriminating judgment. Let garbage be garbage. Our stinky mental garbage is the vital ingredient that is transformed into sweet compost, the fertile ground, from which the Bodhi Tree is nourished and grows.



Some Tips for Doans continued

The next relationship discussed was doan-kokyo. It is important for the doan to hit the bonsho (big bell) loud enough after the kokyo has introduced a sutra to inspire the chant energy; a weak strike drops the energy. On the other hand, a hit should not be much louder than the kokyo. If the kokyo's voice is soft, then a little louder is okay. When the zendo is quiet, for example at the beginning or end of zazen, the bell should be hit more quietly.

In discussing timing, Sojun asks the doan to follow the pace of the kokyo and/or the fukudo, especially not too quickly. Sojun made the distinction between doing it right and doing it perfectly. We don't worry about doing it perfectly, but we should all know what we're aiming for.

Doans, kokyos, and fukudos are encouraged to come 15 minutes early, or some time when the zendo is unused, and to get together with another to practice together. Also to ask Sojun and the other trainers - Alan, Ross, Eric - for feedback. The most convenient time is immediately after a service when it is still fresh in everyone's mind.

-- Ko Blix



Sewing Buddha's Robe

If you are interested in preparing for Lay Ordination next year, sewing classes start in the last half of January. Classes are open to those who have asked their teacher if they may

participate.

Before the winter break (mid-December), please speak with Sojun Mel Weitsman.

After you speak with your teacher, promptly contact sewing teacher Jean Selkirk. Check the bulletin board for further announcements.



Saturday Childcare

November 3 Childcare
November 10 Childcare
November 17 Sesshin – no program
November 24 Kidzendo
December 1 Childcare
December 8 Sesshin – no program
December 15 Kidzendo
December 22 Interim – no program
December 29 Interim – no program



New Jikido Procedure

We've started our new jikido system, and we still need a few more folks to stay once a week for an extra long soji – it's been taking about 10 minutes for a full team of 4 people; we're done by 7:10 every day. Those of us who've been doing it are finding it a great way to start the day's activities, so please join us!



All-Sangha Gathering

Our next All-Sangha Gathering is Tuesday, November 6, 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Community Room.

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All-Sangha Gathering cont'd

Following a potluck dinner, we gather in a circle and go once around, each person in turn briefly saying whatever he or she wants to say about BZC practice or anything else. After we have gone all the way around, the format shifts to a general discussion where people can respond to any of the issues that have been raised.

Please feel free to attend even if you don't have time to bring anything (there's always more than enough to go around). The food is tasty, the socializing is fun, and the discussions are lively and provocative. If you have any questions, please contact Ken Knabb -- knabb@bopsecrets.org / 527-0959.



Legs in the Zendo

Traditionally, we do not stick our legs out whereby our feet face the altar as this was viewed as a sign of disrespect. In this day and age of casualness and (most) anything goes, there is one exception however where legs and feet facing the altar is ok, encouraged and highly esteemed--when returning the folding chairs underneath the tan! If they are stored in the reverse (backs facing the altar) we run the risk of losing the protective feet and going unnoticed the chairs are set up and the floor gets

marred. Thanks for noticing!

While we have your attention, Sojun Roshi asks that we do not lean against the wall while listening to the zendo talks. Be the fifth pillar.





Berkeley Zen Center
1931 Russell Street
Berkeley, CA 94703