



Berkeley Zen Center



December 2008 Newsletter

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR 2009!

Enclosed in the newsletter is the 2009 schedule. Its features reflect changing needs in the sangha, including two beginner's sesshins, one in March and one in October; a day of just sitting, or Zazenkai, in April; two work days, in April and August; and a week-long summer interim break in August. Okumura Roshi will once again lead a teaching sesshin in January. The highlight, however, is the not to be missed, open to all, free of charge, all-out, big blast of happiness on **Sunday, July 5** at the Sequoia Lodge in Oakland to celebrate **Sojun Roshi's 80th Birthday!** See you there!

ENDING 2008, BEGINNING 2009

Winter Interim begins Saturday, December 20 and ends January 2 with morning zazen. We will have informal zazen Monday through Friday at 5:40 am and 5:40 pm, and on Saturdays at 6 am for one period. If you would like to open the zendo, please sign up on the patio bulletin board.

NEW YEAR'S EVE SITTING AND PARTY

Ring in 2009 at the annual New Year's Eve Sitting and Party. Attend any portion or the entire event. Please enter the zendo between periods. Everyone is welcome. **See page 7 for schedule.**



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.

B Z C S c h e d u l e

December

Rohatsu Sesshin

Sunday 12/7—Saturday, 12/13

Annual Suzuki Roshi Memorial

Monday, 12/8, 8 pm

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Thursday, 12/11 (during Rohatsu), 8 pm

Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony

Saturday, 12/13, after lecture, 11 am

Winter Interim

Saturday, 12/20—Wednesday, 12/31

New Year's Eve Sitting/Celebration

Wednesday, 12/31, 8 pm—12 midnight

January 2009

New Year's Day (zendo closed)

1/1/2009

Founder's Ceremony

Monday, 1/5, 6:20 pm

Tuesday, 1/6, 6:40 am

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 1/10, 9:40 am

Kidzendo

Saturday, 1/17

Okumura Roshi Teaching Sesshin

Saturday, 1/24

W E L C O M E

Welcome to new member **Catherine Galloway**.

Changing Hands

Many thanks to **Ed Herzog** as our **newsletter editor** for three years of creatively bringing the personal to the face of our practice, in pictures, stories, and poetry. Welcome to **Kate Gilpin** who assumes the editor's seat with this edition. And many thanks to **Laurie Senauke** for generously "relief pitching" two wonderful editions in October and November during the transition.

Welcome to new **bathroom attendant Deborah Good**.

With the half day last month, **Sue Oehser** and **Catherine Lucas** completed three years as **the directors of the half day sittings**. During their tenure the half-days have taken firm root as an important expression of our "just sit zazen" practice. Thank you for your efforts! And welcome to **Ann Kennedy** and **Stan Dewey** who will begin directing in January.

This month **Jake Van Akkeren** and **Carol Paul** will complete their rotation as Saturday Directors. Thanks to them for their extraordinary care to detail, flexibility, and warm involvement of the sangha in our Saturday program. They pass the baton on to **Sue Oehser** and **John Mogyey**.

Our carefully constructed oryoki sets have been maintained these past uncountable number of years by **Sue Oehser**. She passes along the **Oryoki Master Builder** position to **Marie Hopper** with the first of the year.

Saturday Childcare

Childcare of charge on zazen from then families listen to the sound system helpful for can let us you're hoping or email



is offered free Saturdays for 9:30 to 10:15, are welcome to lecture on the in the room. It's planning if you know that to attend; call Laurie

Senauke, 845-2215, or lauries@kushiki.org.

Childcare for 8:45 Zazen Instruction and Beginner Orientation may be offered by special arrangement.

Kidzendo

A talk in the zendo for young ones three and up is offered on the third Saturday of each month (or the fourth Saturday if a sesshin is scheduled on the third). We meet in the community room at about 9:45, then sojourn to the zendo for the first ten minutes of lecture starting at 10:15. Afterwards, families reconvene in the community room as usual. From time to time we offer additional activities at kidzendo.

Childcare Schedule

December 6	Childcare
December 13 Sesshin	no program
December 20 Interim	no program (note change)
December 27 Interim	no program
January 3	Childcare
January 10	Childcare
January 17	Kidzendo
January 24 Sesshin	no program
January 31	Childcare



From a Lecture by Sojun Roshi

In our life we all like to be comfortable. If we look and see what people are doing, mostly we are trying to find ways to be comfortable; to make our houses comfortable, make our automobiles comfortable, and trying to please ourselves. But you know, we never can get really, totally comfortable. We get comfortable for a little while, but then we become uncomfortable and have to change and get comfortable in another way, so we are always adjusting our position. Dogen's zazen is called the comfortable way, but it is not comfortable in the usual way. When you can actually accept yourself completely in all situations, you can be truly comfortable. So we say: "How do we express zazen in our daily life? How do we take our practice into our daily life?" When we know how to settle and have calm mind in zazen no matter what difficulty or discomfort we have, then, as we move in the world, we should be able to feel comfortable or have a settled mind in each situation. So no matter what is happening to us, we know how to settle, we know how to reach that unconditioned place.

Often I suggest to people just to pay attention to breathing because breathing is an activity which is somewhere between "I am doing it" and "It is doing me." In zazen breathing should be felt here, in our lower abdomen. Inhaling, it expands; exhaling, it contracts. Inhaling, it expands; exhaling, it contracts. But when we get tense or angry or frightened, our breath rises in our chest and this is not a condition for calmness. The condition for calmness is to feel the breath down here, in your lower abdomen. If you are always breathing deeply and are aware of your breathing, you have the opportunity to establish your mind in calmness because you are used to doing that in zazen. When a problem comes up, you can establish your self in your breath on this moment. Otherwise, we establish ourselves on our momentum.

We are all busy people, and body and mind are oriented toward accomplishing something. We are always driving somewhere, working somewhere, on the go all the time. So we easily forget about establishing ourselves on where we are. We easily forget that each one of our movements is our life; that our life is in walking and sitting and standing and lying down, in the ordinary movements. So at the same time that we are doing, we are also just being—simply existing—and this quality of pure existence is our life. Just stop for a moment, or just be aware of your body's movements while you are doing something: "I am walking from here to the store." But while I am walking from here to the store I am thinking about something, whereas one can just be aware of how the foot meets the pavement and of how one foot follows the next. How the body is being held, what the breath is like. Just being in the body. Going someplace is okay, but actually at this moment we are just where we are. So these two qualities should be flowing together at the same time—the awareness of being as well as the awareness of doing. We may get bored, but not for long. We are open to everything, we can see things. Sometimes our vision is so concentrated on doing something that we just don't see what is around us. We don't see that we are part of our surroundings because we are only focused on our own project.

Sometimes, if you stop thinking about your project, and let yourself observe what's around you, it's just incredible what you see.



STILL POINT, TURNING WORDS

A Course in Western Literature and the Dharma

At the still point of the turning worlds . . .
T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

The Dharma, from the sutras of classical Buddhism to the turning words of Ch'an and Zen masters, has been shaped and transmitted through the word, spoken and written, as much as through meditation and conduct. To this point, it has been received in the West mainly through the languages and literatures of Japan, China, Southeast



Asia, and India. Meanwhile, the West has formed and transmitted wisdom through its own languages and literatures.

In this course, informed by our excursions to the East, we make a return to the West, reading selected texts closely, intimately, as guides along the Way. In a series of five classes, from late January through February, sangha members Patrick McMahon and Lois Silverstein will be our guides to these guides, focusing respectively on Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf, both novelists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the first class Patrick and Lois introduce Proust and Woolf in the context of their time, when attention was turning from plot, setting, and character, to mind, mood, and awareness itself. In the second and third classes, led by Patrick, we read from *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, in tandem with passages from Proust's novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, focusing on what Huang Po calls the "One Mind," and what Proust calls a "secret system of life." In the fourth and

fifth classes, led by Lois, we read selections from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, focusing on the nature of time.

Classes will be held Saturdays following the morning program, in the community room, 12:00 noon to 1:30 p.m., January 31st, February 7th, 21st, 28th, and March 7th.

The Presenters

Patrick McMahon is a long-time student at San Francisco Zen Center, Berkeley Zen Center, and Ring of Bone Zendo. He earned an ancient B.A. in Literature and Creative Writing from Reed College, and a more recent M.A. in Depth Psychology from Sonoma State University. He has written on a variety of topics, including Dharma and Western literature, for various Buddhist journals.

Lois Silverstein holds a Ph.D. from McGill University, has published three novels, *Curtain Rising*, *Dol* and *Daughter*, as well as five books of poetry, and has written and performed a one-woman show, *Valia: Woman Of Courage*. She has been a member of the Berkeley Sangha since 1992 and has co-facilitated Zen-Jewish services at BZC with Raul Moncayo and the late Rabbi David Wolfe-Blank. She also teaches women's literature at City College of SF, and maintains an Expressive Arts Therapy practice in Berkeley.

Ron Nestor, BZC class coordinator, recently interviewed Patrick and Lois:

Ron: What's your emphasis going to be in this class?

Patrick: On seeing how Dharma and Western literature contribute to each other. I'm responding to what I've noticed, in the sanghas I've been in and around over the years, as a general neglect of the importance of Western literature. I understand the reason for this. After all, Dharma has come to us from the East. At the same time, my own experience warns me that neglecting my cultural and intellectual background

impoverishes my understanding and my life. Various spokespersons of the Western tradition speak to me in a way that Dharma literature doesn't. It's not that one is better than the other, it's that together they make a more complete picture. Homer, Whitman, Dante, Woolf, Melville, Montaigne, Dickinson, Thoreau, Eliot—as well as Huang Po, Suzuki Roshi, Dogen, Aitken Roshi, R.H. Blyth—these are all so many lights along the way.

For the last ten years or so I've been reading and rereading Marcel Proust, the French novelist from the turn of the 20th century. I actually met Proust almost 35 years ago, ironically, at Tassajara. One morning during study period I looked up from my *Zen Teachings Of Huang Po* to notice Rick Levine, an old college friend and housemate at the original Portland Zendo, reading *Swann's Way*. I was a dyed-in-the-wool zennie (and closet English major) at the time, and I was perturbed, maybe even envious, at the liberty Rick was taking with our Zen study hour. After all, we should be reading the sutras! Right? "How do you get away with reading a novel during study hall?" I asked him later. "Baker Roshi recommended it to me," he said. End of discussion—at least as much as I remember of it. Years later, still worrying about why a Zen master would recommend a French novelist, but by that time fully immersed in *Swann's Way* myself, I was writing an essay called "Proust at Tassajara." Wanting to get Rick's story right, I asked him about it. He reported what Baker had said, that reading Proust was the best way he knew to lead many lives at once. I changed the title of my essay to "The Many Lives of One Mind," and Rick and I have been talking about what that means ever since.

I want to open up that discussion with the Sangha. It's clear to me that Proust was, through his art, onto something, something that, back when I was at Tassajara, I thought of as the exclusive territory of meditation.

He devotedly and in exquisite detail investigated and expressed his own experience, including the experience of his own mind, and in a very disciplined way. The most famous example of this is when he tastes a petit madeleine dipped in lime flower tea, and has his mind and the world open up before him, in an instant, and for the rest of his life. Something very precise—just this!—going beyond all categories. Zen students have a taste of that kind of opening through meditation, or cooking, or eating. How does that taste relate to the taste of the madeleine? That's an example of the kind of inquiry I'm looking forward to us making

together.

Ron: How will you present the class?

Patrick: I'll present passages of no more than several pages each, giving the context in the novel, and facilitate discussion. We won't be doing anything much



Marcel Proust

different from the original classes at BZC. You were there, Ron. I remember reading *The Platform Sutra of Hui Neng*, line by line, with different translations side by side. That kind of study taught me much of what I now know and value about reading.

Ron: Lois, how about you?

Lois: While Patrick was talking I was thinking of a passage in Virginia Woolf who is the writer, if we're going to limit ourselves, that I'd choose. She and Proust were near contemporaries, which is interesting in itself. In the zeitgeist of that period of time, the moment figures big, the "now" containing so much more experience than we usually think of as being the

present. So I think there's compatibility between the two writers, and the selection that I was thinking of originally is about twelve pages long, the middle section of *To the Lighthouse*. It's a linking passage between two major sections, and is called "Time Passes." It's a study of how a house lives without the people in it, so it's an impersonal exercise. It's an issue of time that overlaps Proust's *In Search Of Lost Time*. What is time when there's no one in it?



Virginia Woolf

What's a house when there's no one there?

We could call the class "The Still Point" after T.S. Eliot, the hub of a wheel where things are moving but with stillness at the

center. The reason to explore ways of understanding alternative to the meditative experience is to see that the West has these ways in forms of art that inspire people to become conscious and deepen their lives without necessarily going through a formal religious undertaking. It is practice outside the gate. These ways involve teaching and even kensho experiences. You are in private, you read by yourself, in solitude, digging deep, and if you've got a writer who leads you into that territory, it's like looking at a wall. I had that kind of experience many years ago in the Columbia law library one day reading Proust. I was sitting there and burst out with "OH!" This was it . . . time. I've got it—and I never had to worry again.

Patrick: I would use the phrase "teacher/student" for that experience of transmission. As a student your experience is your own and no one else's, yet the teacher can help you to it by clearly, vividly

expressing his or her own experience. This kind of relationship is alive and well in the lineage of Western literature, in the transmission between author and reader.

Lois: We'll be looking to see what the writer was trying to get at and seeing how that squares up with what the reader gets and seeing where we join and where we don't, as well as realizing things we wouldn't have seen. So it will be a reading meditation.

Ron: Thank you both. We look forward to it.



Notes from the Board

After finally completing the plumbing upgrade and kitchen/bath remodeling project at 1933 Russell, we are taking some time to work out a more comprehensive approach to planning and executing these bigger jobs.

The results of the work are very satisfactory, but we found ourselves more surprised than we expected by how the project expanded as we discovered what was behind the walls.

Walter Kieser on the Board has taken initiative to work with our project manager, John Busch, and with some of our more experienced members, Bill Milligan and Doug Greiner (also on the Board) to craft a protocol for approaching and dealing with bigger projects. I am grateful for their support in pro-actively thinking about how to handle the complex tasks involved in caring for our center.

As this program develops we'll share the details.

Peter Overton,
President

DHARMA GROUP OPENING

There is an opening for one or two people who practice at BZC to join an ongoing Dharma study group, currently reading Suzuki Roshi's *Not Always So*. Please call facilitator Charlie Ware: 510-658-1905.

Three Winter Haiku

*This cold winter night,
that old wooden-head buddha
would make a nice fire*
Buson (1716-1784)



*Winter showers,
even the monkey searches
for a raincoat*
Basho (1644-94),



*The winter fly
I caught and finally freed
the cat quickly ate*
Issa (1763-1827)

LOST AND FOUND

If you are looking for a Minolta XG7 camera left at Berkeley Zen Center, please contact the Office Manager.

SCHEDULE FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE SITTING AND PARTY

(Continued from page 1)

8:00 pm Zazen
8:35 Kinhin
8:45 Zazen
9:20 Kinhin
9:30 Zazen
10:05 Tea
10:13 108 Bells Begin
10:30 Kinhin
10:40 Zazen
11:20 Kinhin
11:35 Zazen
12:10 am Slow chant of Heart Sutra and end sitting, followed by a celebration in the community room. Watch the bulletin board for details and sign-up to help make merry with food and to clean up.



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