



# Berkeley Zen Center



May 2009 Newsletter

## Spring Practice Period

The spring 2009 practice period is rapidly approaching, with Yakuso Ryushin Andrea Thach—Healing Source/Dragon Heart—as shuso this year, sharing the Abbot's seat and setting an example for us all.

All of the relevant notices and signup sheets are now up on the main bulletin board. Make sure you sign in multiple places.

### Practice Period Events

Opening sitting: May 9, 5 a.m. to 9:10 p.m.  
Opening/Shuso Entering Ceremony: May 9, about 11:15 a.m.

Shuso talks: May 11, 23, 29, and June 6

Classes: Thursday evenings, May 14 to June 11

Bansan: May 15

Dinner and skit night: Saturday, June 6, 6:00 p.m.

Shosan: June 5 and 15

Lay Ordination: June 13

Five day sesshin: June 17 to 21

Shuso Hossen, June 21

Pleeeeee . . . think of a skit or performance for skit night on June 6. This is always a highpoint of sangha life, in which everything is revealed. Sometimes more, even, than you might wish to know.



### **Affirmation of Welcome**

Walking the path of liberation, we express our intimate connection with all beings. Welcoming,

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

### May

#### **Half-day Sitting**

Sunday, 5/3, 8:00 am-noon

#### **New Member Entering Ceremony**

Monday, 5/4, 6:20 am

#### **Founder's Ceremony**

Monday, 5/4, 6:20 pm

Tuesday, 5/5, 6:40 am

#### **One-day Sitting, Spring Practice Period Opens**

Saturday, 5/9

#### **Bodhisattva Ceremony**

Saturday, 5/9, 9:40 am

### June

#### **Founder's Ceremony**

Wednesday, 6/3, 6:20 pm

Thursday, 6/4, 6:40 am

#### **Practice Period Dinner & Skit Night**

Saturday, 6/6, 6:00 pm

#### **Bodhisattva Ceremony**

Saturday, 6/6, 9:40 am

#### **Half-day Sitting**

Sunday, 6/7

#### **Lay Ordination/Zaike Tokudo**

Saturday, 6/13

#### **Five-day Sesshin**

Wednesday-Sunday, 6/17-21

#### **Shuso Hossen, Practice Period Ends**

Sunday, 6/21

## **Changing Hands**

After doing the ground work for our temple office and changing more IP numbers than any of us have fingers and toes, **Greg Denny** is taking leave to tend to Sam and Eli. Many thanks to Greg for untold hours of planning, care, and communication with all of us who use the office. And we are fortunate to welcome **Barry Waldman** into the IT Manager position.

Barry hands off the position of community room care he did with fine attention to **Judy Bertelsen**. Welcome Judy!

Belated thanks to **Ellen Webb** for tending to the community room porch bulletin boards over the last year. **Ed Herzog** will be overseeing the Boards. Look for some changes in layout and accessibility of the information we post in the upcoming months.

Thanks to **Deborah Good** for her stint as bathroom attendant, and welcome to **Veronica Reilly**, who will be taking that position.

## **New Member**

This month we welcome new member **Mark Drevno**.

### **LAY ENTRUSTMENT CEREMONY**

**Shu Getsu Myozen Meghan Collins**, longtime practitioner at both BZC and Clear Water Zendo, will receive Lay Entrustment from Clear Water Abbess Zenki Mary Mocine in a ceremony to be held at Clear Water Zendo, 607 Branciforte Street in Vallejo on Saturday afternoon, May 30, at 2:30 p.m.

As a lay teacher, Meghan will be authorized to lead groups and otherwise teach the dharma.

All are invited. For directions and information about the temple, see [www.vallejozencenter.org](http://www.vallejozencenter.org).

### **THANK YOU!**

BZC would like to thank **Gina Matesic**, wife of Courtney Gonzalez, for her gift of a grabber tool. We've been looking to get this simple device for retrieving items which have fallen to the ground from the laundry line as well as highly placed things in the community room kitchen. It is stored hanging off the kitchen shelf near the sink. It will be a big help!



## **Saturday Childcare**

Childcare is offered free of charge on Saturday mornings for zazen from 9:30 to 10:15, then families are welcome to listen to the lecture on the sound system in the community room. It's helpful for planning if you can let us know that you're hoping to attend; call or email Laurie Senauke, 845-2215, or [lauries@kushiki.org](mailto: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**

May 2	Childcare
May 9	Childcare
May 16	<b>Kidzendo</b>
May 23	Childcare
May 30	Childcare
June 6	Childcare
June 13	Childcare
June 20	Sesshin - no program
June 27	<b>Kidzendo</b>

**Sojun would like to make a request for a volunteer to transcribe lectures. Thank you for considering this. Please contact him if you are interested in this practice.**

# *How to Sit Zazen*

## *Posture, Gravity, and Spirit*

*From a lecture by Sojun Roshi, January 15, 1983*

### **Part I**

In sesshin or long sitting, we say, to unify the mind, or embrace mind. Strictly speaking, sesshin is five days or seven days. One day is not usually called sesshin. We usually call it one-day sitting. But whether one-day sitting, seven-day sesshin, or five-day sesshin, still the principle is the same: to unify body, breath, and mind. We realize the basic unity of our body and mind with the whole universe. That's what we mean by embracing the mind or unifying the mind. Mind is already one with things, but we just need to realize it, or re-mind and re-establish our balance and harmony continuously.

It is necessary to find our balance in each moment. What I mean by balance is to take into account and to be aware of all of the forces that are active in our body and mind in any given moment. For instance, when we sit zazen, gravity is one great force acting on our body. Another great force is what I call spirit, which keeps our body upright. These are the two counteracting forces or polarities of our life: the pull toward the earth and the pull away from the earth. The earth pulls everything toward it, and so we say we're grounded on the earth. But the counter-force of vital spirit is pulling or pushing us away from the earth, pushing us up. So we're always concerned with the balance of forces between gravity and growth or spirit—birth and death.

When we sit zazen, the whole time, from beginning to end of our long sitting, we're dealing single-mindedly with the problem of spirit and gravity. All of the problems that arise in between spirit and gravity are the factors of our practice. To sit upright and not lean to the left or to the right, not lean forward and not lean back, just to be comfortable—it's that simple. How do you just sit all day without leaning forward or backward, without leaning left or right, without moving—and remain comfortable? We struggle with this problem. Sesshin is to struggle with this problem until, finally, we stop struggling and allow our spirit to find complete unity with gravity.

What do we need to know in order to be able to deal in this way with the problems of gravity and spirit? Recently, I've been talking about how we keep time with our chanting, how we follow the rhythm and at the same time create the rhythm or push the rhythm, how we follow and lead at the same time. This following and leading at the same time is a koan for us. When you can follow and lead simultaneously, without a gap, then there's no following and there's no leading. To lead is to follow and to follow is to lead.

Without losing the unity, we can sometimes emphasize leading and we can sometimes emphasize following. But there must always be the balance in unity. This example of chanting can be taken into every situation. When you're leading the chant with the *mokugyo*, one necessary thing is to listen. The other is to lead, to activate yourself. When receiving and response is one unit, without gap, we say there's no subject and no object—chanting chants, sitting sits. The unity illuminates both subject and object. Exhaling, we give in to gravity. Inhaling, we reach for the sky. In one complete breath, the unity of birth and death.

*(To be continued.)*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ONE-DAY SITTING

Our annual Spring Practice Period opens with a one-day sitting on May 9, starting at 5:00 a.m. and ending at 9:10 p.m. The schedule for the day includes a Bodhisattva ceremony at 9:40 a.m. and the Shuso entering ceremony at 11:15 a.m. Yakuso Ryushin Andrea Thach will be the Shuso this year. Everyone is encouraged to come to the roughly half-hour Shuso ceremony, even if they aren't doing the May 9 sitting.

The May 9 sitting offers BZC members and friends a wonderful way to start the six-week period during which we're invited to increase our commitment to practice.

Sesshin information, sign-up sheets, and instructions are posted on the outside BZC bulletin board and will be available there until Wednesday, May 6. Please sign up as early as you can. If you have any questions, please contact the May 9 sesshin director, John Rubin, by phone at 510-339-7068, or by e-mail at [john\\_rubin@comcast.net](mailto:john_rubin@comcast.net).

### SOJUN'S 80TH BIRTHDAY PARTY— SAVE THE DATE!

We will be celebrating Sojun Mel Weitsman's 80th Birthday at the Sequoia Lodge in Oakland on July 5th. This event will be open to everyone. Volunteers from the sangha have been identified to take the lead in accomplishing the necessary functions and a few sangha members and other Zen centers are making donations of food and beverages.

Check the bulletin board for announcements and signup sheets for participating as a volunteer. For further information contact Alexandra Frappier

[afrappier1@gmail.com](mailto:afrappier1@gmail.com) or Gerry Oliva  
[olivag@fcm.ucsf.edu](mailto:olivag@fcm.ucsf.edu)

### SUMMER SUTRA STUDY: Dialogs from the Perfection of Wisdom

Beginning Thursday, July 9, Laurie Senauke will teach a four-week class on the Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines. As we have been doing, we'll recite the sutra, but this year with a difference: we will split into two or more groups and recite the words of the different characters in the sutra, to really bring these conversations to life.

The class meets from 7:15 to 8:45 each Thursday evening. We'll meet in the community room most nights, though on July 23, we'll meet in the zendo. Unlike most of our classes, you can come to all or some of the sessions, to accommodate your summer recreation plans. The cost is \$5.00 per class.

### B Z C C A M P O U T

On the weekend of July 18 - 19 we will have our annual BZC campout for members, families, and friends. The campout will be in Tilden Park, a mere 20-minute drive from BZC, at a beautiful spot close to hiking trails. We'll start in the afternoon on Saturday, have a potluck dinner and then a campfire, wake up to birds singing, and a breakfast is provided. It's all over at noon. Folks can come just for the evening or just for the morning if you don't want to sleep over. Details will follow closer to the time. For more info, talk to Katherine Ogburn at [klo999@yahoo.com](mailto:klo999@yahoo.com) or Laurie Senauke at [lauries@kushiki.org](mailto:lauries@kushiki.org).

### ADOPT A MONK FROM THE SAFFRON REVOLUTION

Hozan's nonprofit Clear View Project has launched a program supporting disrobed and tortured Burmese monks imprisoned by the military junta after the Saffron Revolution in the fall of 2007. Clear View invites you to write letters of support for individual monks and nuns, as well as in general support of their human rights.

The project is also collecting small donations of funds which will go entirely to support the imprisoned monastics and their families.

Details about this program can be found on their website, [www.clearviewproject.org](http://www.clearviewproject.org). There is an "Adopt a Monk" button on the home page. Information is also posted on the community room bulletin board.

## **BUDDHAS BEHIND BARBED WIRE: Practicing with the Women of FCI-Dublin By Hozan Alan Senauke**

I've been driving out to FCI-Dublin — the nearby federal women's prison and prison camp — at least monthly for the last eleven years. Finding a spot in the parking lot, I take a few minutes to collect myself, reflecting that anything can happen when I walk through the gates. I'm not talking about overt violence by inmates or personal danger, rather that the facility could be locked down and I will simply turn around and go home, there'll be no one in the chaplain's office to escort me, my paperwork has been lost, a gate officer will be rude, officious, or difficult. These things all happen from time to time. So I sit in the car and remember I am there for the women and for the dharma. I find a smile and walk to the gatehouse.

The meditation group at FCI-Dublin was set up by Maylie Scott in affiliation with Buddhist Peace Fellowship when Maylie was visiting imprisoned anti-nuclear activists in the 90s. I took over a slot from BZC friend Terry Stein, and then shared the group with Mary Mocine, who has since moved on to work in Solano State Prison. All this time we have been warmly supervised by Protestant Chaplain Hans Hoch, who has been a true support and a good friend. For the last few years our teaching group has included Bob Rosenbaum from BZC, Delia McGrath, and Bonnie O'Brien Jonsson. Recently we have added Colleen Busch to the weekly roster.

The program began as "meditation and stress reduction," but the group leaders now are all Buddhists. Since the group is diverse and self-selected — Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, as well as Buddhists — we present Buddhism with a small "b," without proselytizing. FCI Dublin is a center for immigration violations, so many of the prisoners are Hispanic women. (We count on the women translating for each other.) Bowing and chanting is optional, and some of the women see meditation as prayer. I try to present Buddhist teachings as teachings for awakened life. It's really interfaith work.

The inmates include some women with previous meditation experience, and several have a strong yoga practice. Many practice daily in their cells. While my emphasis has always been on *zazen*, each teacher has his or her own approach. Bob has been teaching *qigong*, Colleen does writing with the women, Delia and Bonnie work from their respective traditions. By agreement we do not present one single methodology or practice, but from time to time we teachers meet to check in about how things are going, and to agree on a general direction of study and inquiry.

The women are curious about Buddhism, and they like having some ritual. On my days there, we offer incense and do three full bows towards the altar. I show them how to bow and explain that we are bowing to the Buddha not as an external deity but as a way of honoring the reality of our own true nature. We chant Maylie Scott's *metta* prayer simultaneously in English and Spanish. Then we do three more bows to each

other. Meditation goes for about a half hour, starting with bare-bones instruction. In the midst of diversity and the prison atmosphere of social control, I tend to be loose about the form of meditation, not emphasizing formal posture as I might at BZC. The important thing here is for the prisoners to feel safe, to have a chance to sit quietly and meet themselves. This in itself is a rare and precious thing in prison. After meditation I take time for questions and check-in, or a brief teaching. Over time, we have studied the Four Noble Truths, precepts, the five hindrances, and other points of basic Buddhism. But our discussions always proceed from the women's experience and from the wisdom of their root cultures and religions.

One walks an interesting line practicing in a prison. We all do meditation. Silence is deep in the chapel. Meanwhile people walk by, talking in the hall. A work crew sets up near our windows. Birds sing in the trees, and then you hear the chatter of gunfire from the nearby pistol range. All of this is part of one's moment-by-moment awareness. Prison is all about social control; there's a surveillance camera in the chapel. Authorities can and do invoke rules at will. The federal system seems to be constantly cutting down prisoners' opportunities and rights. Women live together in large dormitories or "pods" with four people to a room. There is ethnic and racial tension; there is unexpected harmony, too.

It is not an easy place to be. Of course it's not appropriate for me to touch the women, so I can't adjust posture. Hugs are out of bounds, though one-armed hugs just happen spontaneously. Despite the rules, we have a growing and steady group of 20 to 25 women. Several women have been with us from the beginning. One woman, a political prisoner, has an 80-year sentence. Over time I have seen women change, settle into their lives, put aside reactivity, and acknowledge their difficulties, shortcomings, and past harmful actions.

I am always curious about how people hold their beliefs. At FCI-Dublin, I witness how deep people's faith goes. I see women who have made serious mistakes, who are far from home and family, who yet have a clear sense that there's something larger than themselves, that they're held within a larger container of life. Some of them feel that they're in prison for a purpose. While they're there, they have an opportunity to do some work. No one wants to be in prison — and my sense is that many of these women should not be in prison—but one can either make it an opportunity or nurture bitterness. I'm lucky to see the women who want to work, whose way-seeking mind leads them to sit.

So each time we sit down together, behind the fences and walls, the guards and rules, the bad food and long days, liberation is rising.





## *Ikebana Class with Barbara Strauss*

By Nancy Suib

As the sun filled the community room and illuminated the table on Saturday afternoon March 28, Barbara Strauss (flower name *Hodo*) began her Ikebana talk and demonstration. Very soon the table came alive with various types of Ikebana arrangements, both traditional and free form.

Barbara provided us with the basic principles of Ikebana, which means “Living Flowers:” The first branch placed in the arrangement—*Shin*—should be 1½ times the width of the container plus the height. It should be placed in the container so the sun hits the branch. Once in place, press the branch into the needle holder and pull back so it looks towards the sun. The second branch—*Soe*—is 45 degrees from the center and ¾ the height of *shin*. *Hikae*—the first flower used—should not be the largest flower, but not skimpy either, and ¾ the height of *Soe*. Keep taking away from the branch or stem until you can’t take away any more.

Branch and heaven stems should be cut on a diagonal, and flower stems cut straight across. Both should be cut under water, so that they keep their integrity and the arrangement will last longer. It was even mentioned that some Ikebana masters use a bit of gin mixed in the water, especially for tulips, so they stand up straight. Materials should not touch the container, but the mechanics holding the arrangement (needle holder, rocks, etc.) should be covered up. What is presented to the observer is the living aspect of the arrangement.

Another principle is never to use four elements, only an odd number of branches, and flowers should be utilized in the arrangement. The idea is to keep it simple and never cross stems.

We were infused with the message that we are making something living. Each flower has its own personality. The idea is to think about the space between each branch and flower, as well as each branch and flower as they relate to one another. The three elements you are working with are mass, line, and color. Many of these principles remind me of our zazen practice.

While we sit up straight, our bodies are supple. We create both form and space.

A very deep bow to Barbara Strauss for providing a rich and satisfying afternoon.

### *OUR BEAUTIFUL NEW SCROLLS*

As mentioned in our April newsletter, Sojun has just received three new scrolls and an antique scroll chest from longtime BZC supporter Belinda Sweet. Two of the new scrolls are now on display. Both were painted by Kasumi Bunsho (1905-1998). The first, called “Mt Fuji,” is hanging in the front of the zendo. It contains the verse

*It is fine when it is cloudy  
And fine when it is clear  
The original form of Mount Fuji  
Never changes*

This image and verse reminds us of our true nature, eternal yet ever changing. The second scroll is called “Zen Fan,” and is hanging in the community room above the antique chest. The verse reads:

*When you use  
It skillfully  
Spring comes again:  
For a fan to work  
You need not rely on others.*

This verse suggests that a fan, which is very simple, easy to use, and effective, may be a model for how a Zen student should live.

Kasumi was a student of both Nantembo (1839-1925), whose calligraphy “The Turtle” is familiar to many in the sangha, and Dieryu (1895-1954), who created the wonderful dragon scroll which often hangs in our zendo. Kasumi, like his teachers, loved to paint monks begging (*takuhatsu*), which he believed was an important monastic practice of humility and gratitude. He painted large murals of begging monks on the *fusuma* (room-dividing screens) at Kaisei-ji, the temple where his teacher Nantembo was abbot, and larger figures on the exterior walls of the temple's buildings.

Kasumi became the Zen master of Kaisei-ji in 1943, and reopened the monastery in 1949. In 1990 he became the 642nd abbot of Myoshin-ji.

## **THE SANGHA SUPPORT PROJECT**

**By Alexandra Frappier**

A number of years ago, sangha member Clay Taylor and a few others envisioned a system of support for sangha members in need. This vision came to life when people who were interested gathered to meet on a regular basis to talk about



creating a sangha support network. Clay became the point person for people to contact if they needed help due to illness, disability, the pressures of caregiving for others, etc. Eventually, Clay moved to Colorado and the

project faded into the background.

I would like, with the help of those who are interested, to resurrect this project and recreate the sangha support system Clay started. We would provide services to our members and friends who suddenly find themselves overwhelmed by the inevitable challenges life brings— sudden or chronic degenerative illness; death of a family member, close friend or partner; loss of a job

and the impact of that loss; transitioning into retirement; giving up the pursuit of a personal career to raise children; divorce— the powerful events that can shake up our lives. We may just need someone to come over and help with practical things like shopping for food, cleaning the house, or calling our friends to make arrangements. Or we may need advice on how to proceed.

There are many possible responses in any given situation where someone finds himself or herself overwhelmed and in need of help. The idea of this project is to start with one person at a time and see how it goes.

In a grassroots fashion we could develop, over time, a system of support for the sangha that would be unobtrusive, helpful, and community-building.

If you are interested, or if you have ideas about developing our support system, please contact Alexandra Frappier at [AFrappier1@gmail.com](mailto:AFrappier1@gmail.com). or 415-613-9210.



*Walking up Russell Street one recent morning  
I passed this lone blade of vegetation rising up  
from the earth. The sunlight passing through it  
caught my attention and, as is my habit, the  
camera came out of the bag. Case #4 in The  
Book of Serenity recounts the koan of the  
building  
of a sanctuary from a blade of grass. As we sit  
we become more transparent and thus allow  
the light of Buddha to illumine us. While there  
is a great body of Buddhist literature for us to  
study and refine our understanding of  
the Buddhadharma, sometimes it is right there  
before us. As we recite in the Sandokai,  
"...If you don't understand the Way right before  
you,  
how will you know the path as you walk?... "*

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