



Berkeley Zen Center



October 2010 Newsletter

ASPECTS OF PRACTICE, 2010

This year's Aspects of Practice, led by Vice-Abbot Hozan Alan Senauke and BZC senior students, begins with sesshin on Sunday October 10, through our closing sitting on Saturday November 6. As always, this is an opportunity for new and old students to study and practice together the basics of zazen, forms, and dharma here at BZC. And of course, we will share work, practice discussion, and tea.

This year we will study short and accessible Pali *suttas*, the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness, and other key practices and perspectives on waking up. Lectures and classes will draw from these sources, and copies of the texts will be available in advance. On Thursday, October 21, we will have a guest lecturer from Sotoshu in Japan, Rev. Juko Nakano. His talk is titled "Strengthening Our Bonds with the Buddha," touching on zazen and essential Soto Zen practices.

As the seasons turn, please join us for Aspects and this opportunity to refresh our timeless practice. All the relevant information and signup sheets have been posted. See you there.

Sejiki!!!

Sejiki is a popular Buddhist festival for appeasing the hungry ghosts. We celebrate it annually around Halloween. (For a nice essay on the history and meaning of the ceremony, which we formerly called Segaki, see the essay on page 6.) This year's ceremony is scheduled for **Saturday morning, October 30 at 9:30**. Children are especially encouraged to come in costume and bring noisemakers for the ceremony. (*Ctd. on p. 6*)



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

October

Half-day Sitting

Sunday, 10/3, 8:00 am to noon

Shukke Tokudo: John Mogey's Ordination

Sunday, 10/3, 3:00 pm

Founder's Ceremony

Monday, 10/4, 6:20 pm, Tuesday, 10/5, 6:40 am

One-day Sitting, Aspects of Practice Opens

Sunday, 10/10 – Saturday, 11/6, See article p. 1

Kidzendo

Saturday, 10/16

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 10/23, 9:40 am

Sejiki Ceremony and Celebration

Saturday, 10/30, 9:30 am

Beginners' Sesshin

Sunday, 10/31

November

Founder's Ceremony

Wednesday, 11/3, 6:20 pm, Thursday, 11/4, 6:40 am

One-day Sitting, Aspects of Practice Closes

Saturday, 11/6

Half-day Sitting

Sunday, 11/14, 8:00 am to noon

Kidzendo

Saturday, 11/20

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 11/20, 9:40 am

Zendo Holiday—Thanksgiving

Thursday, 11/25

HALF-DAY SITTINGS

**Sundays, October 3 and
November 14, 8:00 am-noon**

BZC offers eight half-day sittings each year. Each includes five periods of zazen, kinhin and an informal tea. A half-day sitting is a great opportunity to focus on “just zazen” and is appropriate for beginning as well as experienced sitters. Sojun Roshi asks participants to commit to the four-hour schedule and, in support of everyone’s practice, to refrain from using scented products in the zendo. BZC asks for a \$10 donation for half-day sittings. If you have questions, contact Stan Dewey, October and November half-day director, at standewey@comcast.net or 510-528-1989.

BEGINNERS’ SESSHIN

On Sunday, October 31, BZC will offer a Beginners’ Sesshin from 8:30 am until 4:30 pm.

Nyu U Ho Sho Karen Sundheim will offer instruction in the basic forms of our practice—zazen, kinhin, service—while maintaining our ground in meditation throughout the day. There will be a lecture on zazen and plenty of time for discussion. This is a good opportunity to ask questions about our practice. Participants should bring a bag lunch, which we will eat informally in silence at midday.

Newer people are particularly encouraged to take part, but we welcome longtime students who can enjoy a day of sitting and model the richness of our practice. For more information contact Karen at ksundheim@gmail.com, or Sesshin Director Mary Duryee at maduryee@earthlink.net.

The cost will be \$15 for the day. Please see the zendo bulletin board for a sign-up sheet and further information.

DIRECTORY TRAJECTORY

Soon we will be starting work on the 2011 Membership Directory. Would you look over your entry in this year’s directory and let me know if there should be any changes? If you have an e-mail address but haven’t listed it, it would be helpful for us to have it. Please e-mail the changes to me at sddunlap@gmail.com, or leave a note in my box—Sue Dunlap, Office Manager—on the community room porch, or call me at 525-9177 after 9:00 am. If you’re writing out an e-mail address please print clearly, lest I misread and calamity follow. Thanks.

Sue Dunlap

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

Third Friday of the month before each issue.

October deadline: Friday, September 17, 8 pm.



Family Activities at BZC

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; phone or e-mail 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 program for young ones three and up is offered on the third Saturday morning of each month (or the fourth if a sesshin is scheduled on the third). We meet at the Senaukes’—1933 Russell—at about 9:40 for a meet and greet, then sojourn to the zendo for the first ten minutes of lecture starting at 10:15. Afterwards, families reconvene at 1933 Russell for more activities, possibly including formal tea and one minute of meditation and/or free play, depending on the realities of the moment.

Zazen, Discussion for Parents, Childcare Provided

1st Friday Midday—Noon to 1 pm. Check calendar for dates. From noon to 1, childcare is offered in the community room, with zazen followed by discussion in the zendo.

3rd Friday Evening—6:15 pm to 8:00 pm. Check calendar for dates. A potluck dinner for parents and children in the community room, followed by a brief period of zazen and a discussion about family practice in the zendo. Childcare provided in the community room. For questions about our Friday programs, contact Marie Hopper, (510) 559-8831.

October 1	Midday sitting and discussion
October 2	Childcare
October 9	Childcare
October 15	Potluck, sitting, and discussion
October 16	KIDZENDO
October 23	Childcare
October 30	Sejiki Ceremony:
November 5	Midday sitting and discussion
November 6	Sesshin – no program
November 13	Childcare
November 19	Potluck, sitting, and discussion
November 20	KIDZENDO
November 27	Childcare
December 3	Midday sitting and discussion
December 4	Childcare
December 11	Sesshin – no program
December 17	Potluck, sitting, and discussion
December 18	Merry interim –
December 25	See you next year!

On the Heart Sutra

Ninth in a series of lectures

Sojun Roshi

I want to talk about the lines, “*With nothing to attain a Bodhisattva depends on Prajna Paramita and the mind is no hindrance. Without any hindrance no fears exists. Far apart from every perverted view one dwells in nirvana. In the three worlds [past, present, and future] all Buddhas depend on Prajna Paramita and attain unsurpassed, complete perfect enlightenment.*” Then it talks about the mantra, “...therefore know the Prajna Paramita is the great transcendent mantra, the great bright mantra, is the utmost mantra, the supreme mantra which is able to relieve all suffering and is true not false.”

“*With nothing to attain a Bodhisattva depends on Prajna Paramita and the mind is no hindrance.*” We call this practice the practice of no gaining. When Suzuki Roshi was teaching, that was one of his mantras: “no gaining mind.”

He used to talk about it all the time as the fundamental aspect of our practice. It was his *shtick*, actually. Whenever a student became egotistical, or asked, “What about getting enlightenment?” he hit him with that *shtick*: no gaining mind. It’s not that there is no enlightenment, but it is as Dogen says, “Practice-Enlightenment.” We don’t talk about enlightenment apart from practice. Enlightenment doesn’t appear without practice, so practice and enlightenment arise together. Suzuki Roshi didn’t emphasize getting enlightened. During the period when he was teaching, there were a lot of teachers, both Soto and Rinzai, who were driving the students to gain enlightenment during sesshin, driving them to attain a *kensho* experience. But Suzuki Roshi didn’t believe in it. Instead of emphasizing *kensho* or enlightenment, he always emphasized practice. Often enlightenment becomes this thing, the Grand Prize, that people desire and the reason for practicing. Suzuki Roshi saw this as a materialistic goal.

Buddha is purported to have said, “You take the raft and go to the other shore, and, when you are on the other shore, you don’t need the raft anymore, so you let go of it,” which is very logical. It means you practice in order to get enlightenment, and then, when you have enlightenment, you don’t practice anymore. Practice is just a vehicle for gaining enlightenment, or a means to enlightenment. Actually, though, practice is not just a means to enlightenment. Practice is a vehicle for expressing enlightenment. Instead of emphasizing the carrot, we emphasize the path. The activity itself is the important thing, not the distant result of the activity.

When we say “no goal,” it doesn’t mean that we have no objectives. In order to function there must be an objective. You are born, you go to school to learn enough to go to college. Then you go to college in order to learn enough to get a good job, and to have a career, and to raise a family, and make a lot of money, and live happily ever after. (Maybe.) In practice, on the other hand, the goal is to arrive at where you are, to be where you are and allow enlightenment to express itself. We all have goals. For instance, someone has to cook our meals for us during sesshin, so this person has to have some objective, some goal. Every meal has to come out just on time. All the ingredients have to be right, and you can’t allow yourself to burn something. But within that goal of getting out a meal there is each step of preparation, and in each step is concentrated activity. In other words, the practice of the cook is to be completely merged with each step, moment by moment without anticipation. Even though there is some progression, where the cook is, is right here doing “just this.” When working in the kitchen you should clean up your space after each stage and begin the next with a clean table. Then your goal is just the next step. Ideally there should be very little or no cleanup after you are done. You are completely used up, leaving no trace. Ready for the next step.

So there is no one step that is any more important than any other. Each step, each activity has the same quality, and the same concentration, and is given the same action as every other step. It’s like sitting on the cushion. That is why the cook’s activity during sesshin is all in the kitchen, but is still sesshin. It’s exactly the same as sitting on the cushion, even though the activity is different. It’s dropping self, dropping ego, and just being totally with the activity moment by moment. This is how we live our daily lives as practice. We get so caught up in our goals that we don’t pay attention to where we actually are. Before we even settle in this moment we are already inclining toward the next. We get lost in the getting somewhere and ignore the precious quality of this moment. (*Ctd. p. 4*)



(Ctd. from p. 3) What is a mantra? We think of a mantra as specially charged words that are repeated over and over to bring forth a particular state of mind. But a mantra can be expressed as the movement or rhythm of our life. The *Prajna Paramita* mantra is the mantra of practice. In one sense, it's the zendo ritual; how we enter the zendo every morning and sit on the cushion, chant the sutra, bow, and move. When we offer incense we invite *prajna* to permeate our activity, and we invite Buddha to join our practice. If you look at the rhythm of our life, no matter how rough or smooth our life is, there is always a rhythm, and the rhythm of our life is the mantra that we are always reciting. So, what kind of mantra do we want to recite? How can we recite this mantra which induces *prajna* through our activity day after day?

I used to watch Suzuki Roshi. When I first started to practice, I remember that I was amazed because my life was so loose, and when I came to the zendo I saw this little man who would walk out of his office and enter the zendo every morning and evening, offer incense and bow, and sit on the cushion, and do zazen, fully present with concentration and ease, lead the service, and then go back to his office. At the end of zazen, we would file out of the zendo and bow to him on the way out, and he would always look at us and bow, one by one. Every time I went to the zendo he was there, and he did this. I thought, "He does this two times every day and he doesn't seem to get tired of it." His activity was so different from mine. I never wanted to repeat anything more than once or twice, but his was this life of doing the same thing over and over again, without adding something extra to doing it. I realized that the way he lived his life was like a mantra. The activity of his life was very narrow, but, within that narrowness, his life was very rich and satisfying. He didn't need to occupy himself with other things to be entertained. He had complete satisfaction doing what he did so thoroughly. It was very impressive. That was his mantra, his practice. "*So proclaim the Prajna Paramita mantra...Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi! Svaha!*" In this way, the mantra is expressed in our life day after day.

There is a "doing" side and there is the "being" side. The being side is just pure activity without any idea of accomplishment or goal. It is "just doing," *shikantaza*. Within a goal, our activity is pure existence. Nevertheless, we always have to do something. Even when we are sitting on the cushion we have to do something. So there is doing and being together in that activity. When we sit, we should settle our body and mind on the cushion—whole body and mind being present in great dynamic activity. That's why we need a certain posture, good posture, and with a lot of energy, and at the same time letting go of the tenseness in our body. There is a certain amount of tension that is necessary for any structure to have integrity, but what is extra is the tenseness that builds up. That is



extra. Sometimes I see it like a fountain. The energy is rising and without effort, falling. It's a cycle of energy: the energy is moving up in a strong way and falling down very gently. It's just pure effort, experiencing pure existence. I think of zazen as an offering: presenting ourselves to the universe with our best posture, and our best energy, and nothing held back. The universe penetrates and permeates our whole being. There is no gap. No barrier for light.

"*With nothing to attain...*" There is no attainment here. Enlightenment, light emanates from this activity, but it doesn't have any special color or shape. *Komyo, Komyo-zo*. *Komyo* means "radiant light," and *Komyo-zo* is "*samadhi* of radiant light," which is zazen, enlightenment. This is why we can say that practice proceeds from enlightenment. We don't practice in order to get something; practice starts from our enlightened mind, which is beyond our understanding. And our life proceeds with gradual practice forever. There is no hindrance. "*With nothing to attain, a Bodhisattva depends on Prajna Paramita,*" depends on the "perfection of wisdom," depends on this source of light, depends on emptiness, which is depending on nothing. Depending on nothing means depending on everything because emptiness is interdependence. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. What do we depend on? What do I depend on? That's a big question. What do we all depend on? If we realize that everything depends on everything, no fears exist, even though we may get scared. Of course, we get scared, but, ultimately, there is no need to fear because, whether we like it or not, whether we are good or bad, what is going to happen to us is inevitable. How can we fear the inevitable? We just open to it. That is the ultimate zazen.

Thanks to Taitaku Pat Phelan and the Zen Center Chapel Hill for transcribing these sesshin lectures given at Camp New Hope, NC in October 1994, and for allowing them to be reprinted here.

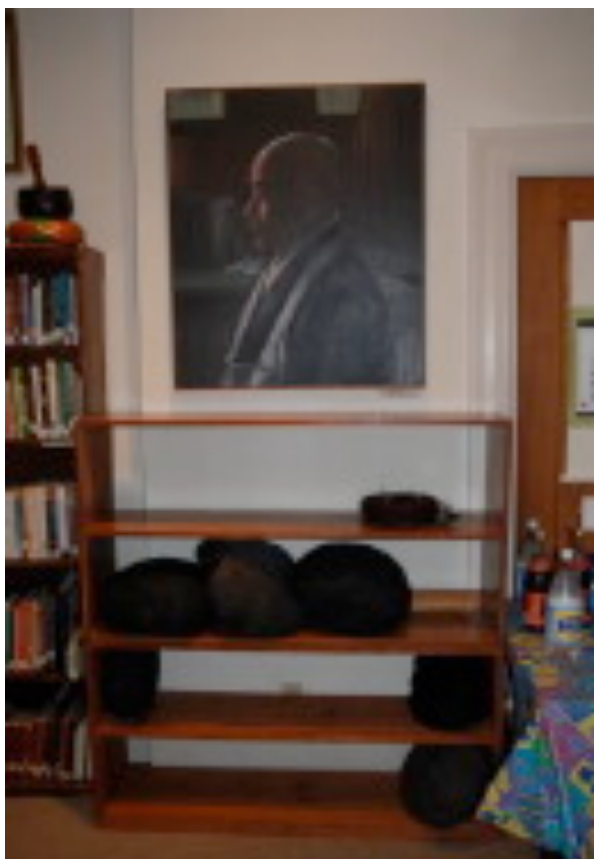
Shoes inside the door...

Change comes to the community room

We have a new shoe rack just inside the door of the community room (and *out* of the kitchen). By the time you read this we hope that a small area of bamboo flooring will have been installed as a transition space between the shoe rack, the door, and the bathroom. In the meantime, the shoe rack is ready to be used.

You may also notice a shelving dedicated to zafus underneath the portrait of Suzuki Roshi, and additional shelving in the library area. As you pass through the kitchen (without taking off your shoes!) you might also notice new shelving with a counter top adjacent to the stove. These changes have been made to create a smoother traffic flow through the kitchen, and increase counter and storage space.

Thanks to Dean Bradley and Dianne Schnapp for their help with the finishing; Sojun for his help with the staining; Jean Selkirk and Ko Blix for their help with the installation; and especially Mary Duryee for seeing the project through from start to finish.



NEW DHARMA GROUP AT BZC

BZC sustains several dharma study groups which provide an opportunity for more “horizontal” sharing of our collective wisdom and practice. These are small groups of BZC members who meet once every three to four weeks, to study a variety of Buddhist teachings and discuss the dharma, especially as it manifests in our everyday lives. The groups are usually facilitated by a senior student.

We are starting a new dharma study group, led by our most recent shuso, Alexandra Frappier. The first meeting will be in November, after the end of the Aspects of Practice period. The group will begin with the study of *Hsin Hsin Ming*, verses on the faith-mind by *Sengtsan*, the third Zen ancestor. The first meeting will be announced in the November newsletter, and at that meeting the group will decide what day and time to meet. If you want more information, talk to Alexandra or e-mail her at afrappier2@gmail.com.

For general questions about how BZC’s dharma groups work, contact Laurie Senauke at lauries@kushiki.org.

OPEN HOUSE HUGE SUCCESS

We had a fine turn-out for last month's open house with a mixture of longtime members and people new to BZC. The food was great, and the music (courtesy of Alan Senauke's bluegrass band "The Vulture Peak Playboys") was outstanding. The sunny warm weather was ideal. Lots of positive feedback was heard from those who came to the event. People seemed to especially enjoy being able to chat with the residents in their homes and see some parts of our zen center that are normally not open for viewing, such as underneath the zendo and Sojun's office.

The open house also served as a great kickoff for BZC's building improvement plan. After Sojun's lecture touching on some of the history behind our Russell Street location, folks convened outside, where BZC President Gerry Oliva and Project Management leader Walter Kieser made the case for our 2010-11 fundraising campaign. Judging from initial donations received, we're off to a promising start. Be sure to look for more information about upcoming building projects and the corresponding fund drive in future newsletters.

If you were unable to be at our September party, Ko Blix took plenty of photos and they will be posted soon.

On Segaki *Roshi Kyogen Carlson*

The name *Segaki* means "feeding the hungry ghosts," and the festival contains a great deal of teaching about training in Buddhism. On one hand it is a time of remembering the dead and resolving our karmic connections with those who have died, but it is also a time of resolving our own internal, karmic difficulties and for letting go of the obstacles and blockages we carry around with us. The festival is said to have begun when Moggallana, a disciple of the Buddha, was plagued by dreams of his recently departed mother suffering in a world in which she could neither eat nor drink. Food would turn to fire, and water would turn to blood or pus whenever it touched her mouth. Moggallana went to the Buddha and told him of his dreams, which plagued him every night. The Buddha explained that Moggallana was seeing the suffering of his mother in the world of the *gakis*, or hungry ghosts. *Gakis* are usually depicted as having long skinny necks, with throats much too small for swallowing, and the bloated, bulging stomachs common with severe malnutrition. This imagery is a fantastic description of a spiritual state that can be seen every day, right here in the physical world of men and women. It is a condition which everyone has suffered from, to some degree or another, at some point in his or her life. On the most spiritual level, this is the state of someone who desperately wants to know the Truth, but who cannot accept the teaching. He knows that he is suffering and that religious practice will help, but he just cannot stop resisting and holding on to his personal opinions. He goes to drink, but his throat will not accept. Each time he rejects the teaching it turns to fire in his mouth. On the everyday level, this condition is that of someone who has desperate needs but, like a person with a phantom itch, can find no relief. Women who frantically cling to their children long after they are grown, and men who cannot get enough wealth and success, are everyday examples of "hungry ghosts." In examples such as these, the problem lies in trying to satisfy an inner need for peace of mind through grasping after external things when it is really found in all-acceptance. Too often our attempts to obtain the things we want are like this.

Moggallana's dreams were due to his deep connection with his mother, and the Buddha's advice to him was that he make an offering to her of whatever food she could most easily accept and digest. This was to be done in a ceremony, dedicated in her name, at the time when the monks conducted their regular gathering to confess their transgressions. This is where the connection between making offerings to the dead and the cleansing of karma, personal or in connection with someone who has died, becomes apparent. Today, the tradition that started with this ceremony is continued every year in Buddhist temples by making an offering on a table far away from any statue or picture of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. For those who reject religious teaching, kindness is offered without doctrine as a truly religious act. For the Dharma to be really Dharma, it can only be offered in forms that can be accepted and truly made use of. Offerings of any type made in such a manner will naturally benefit both the recipient and the donor. This principle applies to so many situations we encounter in everyday life. Such action naturally expresses all-acceptance in a way that touches and deeply affects all concerned.

Hungry ghosts are not the only ones to be remembered at *Segaki*, however. It is a time to remember all those who have died, to be thankful for their having lived, and to give thanks for the teaching their lives give to us. It is a time to let go of those who have died, to realize that their training goes on in whatever form it now takes, and that they do not need us pulling them back to this world through our attachments. By letting go of those who are now gone, we can also resolve any painful memories that can linger on to become the nucleus of a multitude of other problems.

All-acceptance is still the key, for if we completely accept those who have gone on as they were, we can understand them better and offer them what they need to go on, which is, most often, our forgiveness and blessing.

If you apply this process to yourself, looking at your own past actions as that which must be let go of, it is easy to see the connection between *Segaki* and personal karmic cleansing. It becomes a time of deep, personal, spiritual renewal. In the way we are adapting Buddhist traditions to our culture—*Segaki* is celebrated on or near Halloween day. In western culture, Halloween, or All Souls Day, is when all the ghosts and goblins from the past come out of hiding. What better time to offer them merit and put them back to rest? The themes of death, change, and spiritual transition have for centuries in the West been remembered in the autumn, at the time of the change from light to dark, from heat to cold. Although in the Far East, *Segaki* is celebrated in mid-summer, within that culture it is a time similar to Halloween in ours. The summer solstice is the time of transition, just as the autumn equinox is, and they both represent a time of change; when the past can be left behind and a new beginning is possible. *Segaki* then, is a celebration of this on every level.

According to popular Chinese legend, Moggallana developed a deep resolve to help his mother when he saw her suffering in his visions. He traveled down to hell to try to rescue her personally. He broke the lock on the gate to hell, and because of this, all the hungry ghosts in the realm of the *gakis* got loose, and wandered about in the world of men. The festival was then done to satisfy the ghosts, and to convince them to return to where they needed to be. Some, through the festival, gain release. This tradition expresses that even those who do not gain release are in the process of learning something they need to learn, and that their time to advance to something else will come. In China, the seventh lunar month is the month of the dead. For this festival the ghosts are released from hell for the entire month. During this time, people pay respects to all their ancestors and make offerings to them, particularly of food. They also make offerings of entertainment, like Chinese opera, puppet shows, spectacles, and circuses; anything people think the ghosts might enjoy. The entire month becomes a huge celebration, and a time of great happiness when people feel very close to their ancestors, whether they happen to be in the realm of *gakis*, or elsewhere. The quality of celebration is the same as the offering of dancing and joyous music done at *Obon* in Japan. Rather than being grim or solemn, the whole affair is very joyous, even raucous. In China, popular legend also has it that after giving aid to his mother, Moggallana made a vow to once again enter hell. He vowed to do his own training there for the sake of those suffering in that realm. “If I do not do so, who else will?” he said. He became a Bodhisattva, an “enlightenment being” dedicated to helping others before enjoying final enlightenment himself, offering Dharma to all those suffering in the nether worlds. To this day he is greatly venerated for this act of great compassion.



Halloween

Halloween:

shouts and screams

are echoing on the streets.

- Kazumi Cranney

Haiga painting, haiku, and translation by Kazumi Cranney

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