



Berkeley Zen Center



October 2011 Newsletter

ASPECTS OF PRACTICE: ORYOKI

As part of our ongoing Aspects of Practice this month, Ellen Webb will be teaching oryoki in the zendo on Saturday, October 1, from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm. There is no sign-up. If you have questions, please contact Ellen at elweb@sbcglobal.net.

ELECTION NEWS FROM THE BOARD

As you know, we're in the midst of our annual election for board members. Ballots and a ballot box are located on the patio bulletin board shelf. Candidate statements and photographs are posted on the bulletin board. We're trying something new this year: there will be a "meet the candidates" tea on Saturday, October 8, immediately following the lecture. We hope you take advantage of this great opportunity to get to know the candidates a little better. Our candidates are: Ross Blum, Shelley Brock, Greg Denny, Ron Nestor and Veronica Reilly.

BEGINNERS' ONE-DAY SITTING

On Sunday, October 9, BZC will offer a beginners' sitting 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. The cost will be \$15 for the day. Please see the zendo bulletin board for a sign-up sheet and further information, or contact Karen at ksundheim@gmail.com, or Sesshin Director Mary Duryee at maduryee@earthlink.net.



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

Founder's Ceremony

Monday, 10/3, 6:20 pm

Tuesday, 10/4, 6:40 am

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 10/8, 9:40 am

Meet the Board Candidates

Saturday, 10/8, 11:15 am

Beginners' Sitting

Sunday, 10/9, 8:30 am-4:30 pm

One-day Sitting,

Aspects of Practice Closes

Saturday, 10/22, 5:00 am-9:00 pm

Sejiki Ceremony and Celebration

Saturday, 10/29, 9:30 am (See p. 4)

November

Founder's Ceremony

Thursday, 11/3, 6:20 pm

Friday, 11/4, 6:40 am

Women's Sitting

Sunday, 11/6, 8:30 am-4:30 pm

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 11/12, 9:40 am

Half-day Sitting

Sunday, 11/13, 8:00 am to noon

Kidzendo

Saturday, 11/19

Zendo Holiday—Thanksgiving

Thursday, 11/24

Dear Sangha,

As most of you may know, I have been invited to co-lead the Fall Practice Period at Tassajara with the present Abbot, Myogen Steve Stucky. The last practice period I led was in 2005. This is a rare privilege, as I don't know if I will do this again in the future. I told the abbots' group that I would be willing to share a practice period half time with one of the abbots, and Myogen took me up on it. We have taught together at Tassajara for the last three summers and have a feeling for doing that. So I will spread the six or seven weeks that I will be there over the ninety days of the Fall Practice Period. I will leave on or around the thirtieth of September.

It so happens that Rinsoin, Suzuki Roshi's temple in Japan, is celebrating its five hundredth anniversary from October 20th to the 23rd, and former Abbess Blanche Hartman and I have been chosen to attend. I plan to be back here on the 25th or 26th in time for Sejiki on the 29th. As for November and December, I will have to verify those schedules closer to the time.

When I was Co-Abbot of SFZC from 1984 to 1987 I led a practice period almost every year, and a few before that. So the sangha was used to me being gone at those times. While I was gone the members maintained the daily schedule and took care of each other, making sure that everything ran smoothly. Now we have a Vice Abbot, Hozan, a well-managed and mature board, a dedicated practice committee, a highly competent coordinator, Peter Overton, the senior students, and you, the members maintaining responsibility for your practice positions. So organizationally we are in good shape, and as long as we maintain and renew the true spirit of our fundamental motivation we should be fine. From time to time when I look around it occurs to me what a great privilege it is to work and practice with all of you.

Sojun



Family Activities at BZC

Saturday Morning 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 email 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 BZC is canceling our 3rd Friday family potlucks for the time being. We would like to try a monthly dharma group for parents, and we welcome parents in all stages to join us. The meetings will include zazen, check-in, and study. Childcare will be provided for those who need it. We're thinking about Sunday mornings or afternoons. An informational first meeting will be held on Sunday, October 16 from 10 am to noon. The group will be led by BZC Senior Students Laurie Senauke and Greg Denny. Let us know if you are planning to come, or if you would like to participate but can't make the first meeting. For more info, contact Laurie (lauries@kushiki.org), Greg (greg@techsperience.org) or Marie Hopper (marie_hopper@sbcglobal.net).

Family Practice Email Group To make it easier to publicize, announce and remind ourselves about family practice activities at BZC, we have a Yahoo group. We'd love to have you join this list if you have children in your life, even if you don't typically attend family practice events. We promise to only send, at most, ONE email per week, just a short reminder of upcoming events. To join, just email Laurie (lauries@kushiki.org) or Marie (marie_hopper@sbcglobal.net).

October	1	Childcare
October	8	Childcare
October	15	Childcare
October	22	Sesshin – no program
October	29	SEJIKI Ceremony—come in costume!
November	5	Childcare
November	12	Childcare
November	19	KIDZENDO
November	26	Childcare
December	3	Childcare
December	10	Sesshin—no program
December	17	Interim—no program
December	24	Interim—no program
December	31	Interim—no program

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION DEADLINE:
Third Friday of the month before each issue.
November deadline: Friday, 10/21, 8 pm.



Good Morning

Sojun's Reminder, October, 2011

Sometimes when I arrive in the morning, I pass sangha members emerging out of the darkness and fading into the darkness. When we pass, I bow. Some bow back, some look surprised, and some just walk past without acknowledging my presence at all. It often feels like ships passing in the night, or like disembodied ghosts drifting in their own worlds. Do I know you?

One of the primary practices we learn at the monastery is bowing whenever we meet or pass someone. There is no need to think of something to say, no need for platitudes; just simply connecting on a deep, fundamental level. It means that we have an opportunity to stop and let go of our self-absorption for a moment, which allows us to meet as equals; the barrier of subject and object is gone. This is shikantaza, our active form of zazen. It is letting go and merging, just doing, without any other motive. Time stands still for that moment. I think bowing is sometimes ignored in the afternoon because there are people coming and going who are not familiar with this practice. But if we practice bowing to our familiars, they will begin to understand.

Master Dogen said that as long as there is the practice of bowing, the Dharma will flourish. One time I entered Suzuki Roshi's room and he prostrated himself to me. I was so taken aback and flustered that I just stood there. He admonished me, saying that when a teacher bows to a student, the student should also bow. He also said that a teacher should not feel above prostrating himself to a student. The angle of the bow expresses our state of mind at the time. One angle expresses our stinginess, holding back, or not giving ourself completely. Another posture is ostentatious, overly generous, trying to look sincere. When neither of these is present we can actually meet without fear or judgment. When we put our palms together, ordinary mind and way-seeking mind become one. This is a moment when everything stops, and we can experience and share, as master Bankei says, our original, clearly illuminating, unborn Buddha mind.



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 p. 5.) This year's ceremony is scheduled for **Saturday morning, October 29 at 9:30**. Children are especially encouraged to come in costume and bring noisemakers for the ceremony.

SAVE THE DATE: WOMEN'S SITTING

All women are invited to attend the upcoming BZC women's sitting, to be held on Sunday, November 6, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Look for more information on the patio bulletin board. You may also contact Marie Hopper at marie_hopper@sbcglobal.net.

NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome new members
James Biggs and Melisa Spence.

Notes from the Zendo Manager

PATIO BULLETIN BOARD UPDATE

Hello, everyone,

The patio bulletin board is back online, although further improvements (lighting and weatherproofing) are still planned.

I am experimenting with organizing notices by topic rather than by upcoming/ongoing. Classes and sesshin will be in the center, and other types of events will be on the left and right. You may, therefore, find notices about current events on the left and right sides of the bulletin board—not just in the center. So please scan the entire bulletin board when you are browsing for fun things to do at BZC. Please feel free to let me know if you have any ideas or suggestions regarding the bulletin board.

- Tamar Enoch
Zendo Manager



CHIDENS—OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!

Seeking new chidens to fill openings in our fall and winter schedule, dates negotiable!

Caring for the altars in the zendo, a chiden deepens personal practice while supporting the practice of all. Tasks include arranging flowers, filling water bowls, caring for candles, dusting, and straightening. A chiden signs on for one week (M-F), coming each day to prepare the altars. (You may repeat once every six months if you are available.)

If you'd like to make this quiet offering to the community, please call Head Chiden Catharine Lucas at 526-3100 to arrange training.

Gassho!

OFFICE MANAGER'S CORNER

- Reminder: For all payments to BZC, please itemize exactly what the payment covers, with amounts specified for EACH ITEM, even if you think we know what it is for. Separate payments may be combined in one check, but the amounts must be clearly specified. Many thanks for your help.

- Reminder on how to reach the Office Manager on BZC business:

- **Email:** please use the email address: bzcofficemanager@gmail.com.
- **Payments, reimbursements, valuable or sensitive information:** Mail slot in kitchen door.
- **General:** Office Manager slot on community room porch.

NOTE: Sesshin information sheets go in the Sesshin Director's slot, **NOT** the kitchen door, where the director does not have access.

Notes from the Librarian

Dear Sangha,

Greetings from your librarian! I'd like to remind you that library hours are here, and you are welcome to stop by the community room with a question or a suggestion, or just to browse the library. I will be available there on the first and third Tuesday of each month from 6:30-7:30 pm. This month the dates for library hours are October 4 and 18. Additionally, I will be available on Saturdays after lecture as often as possible. Hope to see you soon!

Gassho,
Veronica Reilly
very23@gmail.com

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 that 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. In western culture, Halloween, or All Souls Eve, 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.

Kyogen Carlson Roshi is a Soto Zen roshi and co-abbot of Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon, along with his wife Gyokuku Carlson Roshi. His essay on Segaki has appeared in our newsletter several times in the past.

From Ko Blix:

There are two new additions to the wonderful and growing BZC Photo Library: *Mountains and Rivers 2011*, and *Work Days 2011*. The Photo Library link can be found at the top of the BZC website: berkeleyzencenter.org. After clicking on that link, select from any of the categories, including “Mountains and Rivers 2011,” and “Work Days 2011.”

Pictured here are two photos from those categories. In the Mountains and Rivers photograph are Heather Ferrill and Eric Ferry, among others. In the Work Days photograph are Walter Kieser and Angela Gifford.



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