



Berkeley Zen Center



July–August 2021 Newsletter

BZC Sangha Weighs in on Reopening

You may remember filling out a questionnaire about BZC practice after Covid—asking how you felt about participating online, in-person, or a hybrid of both, once we reopen. We were gratified to hear from 82 sangha members, and your responses are shaping our planning for the coming months. This is a snapshot of what we learned:

A large proportion of the sangha (84%) expect to continue practicing on Zoom “at least sometimes.” The reasons vary: ten percent of our sangha live too far away to attend in person; ten percent are still concerned about Covid, regardless of precautions, or are unable to get vaccinated; a whopping 55% indicated that the convenience of being able to practice at home was a significant factor. They listed a variety of reasons: not having to deal with traffic; greater ease in tending family; not having to find parking or to make frequent long commutes. Of those who wish to continue participating on Zoom, most preferred the 7:30 a.m. and 5:40 p.m. weekday times.

As for in-person practice, 45% preferred a 6:00 a.m. time, while 24% preferred our previous 5:40 a.m. time. A surprising number preferred the afternoon 5:40 p.m. time (61%).
(Continued...)



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

July

Zendo Holiday
Monday, 7/5

Zazenkai (Just Sitting Day)
Sunday, 7/11

Board Meeting
Sunday, 7/18

August

One-Day Sesshin
Saturday, 8/7

Board Meeting
Sunday, 8/15

Note: BZC continues to offer many other events and activities, but during the pandemic these have mostly been via Zoom and have tended not to be planned as far in advance as usual. For more complete and up-to-date information as we begin transitioning back to a fuller and more regular in-person schedule, please check the BZC website and subscribe to BZC’s community email list.

(Reopening, continued from page 1)

We asked what activities you thought should be both on Zoom and in person. In every category, the answer “both” was by far the largest: Saturday program (93%); way-seeking mind talks (85%); all-sangha meetings (82%); daily service (76%); classes (88%); and sesshins (66%). In contrast, the next largest categories of responses came from those wishing for activities to be in-person only: daily service (22%) and sesshins (30%).

There were also numerous comments and thoughts, which we have been digesting. Typical among them were: “I am so grateful that BZC is exploring hybrid approaches”; “Online zendo has made it so much easier for those of us with disabilities and other chronic conditions to participate”; and “Thank you for sending out this poll! I understand that some activities in the list above may be more difficult to live-stream than others, but we very much appreciate the greater geographical reach of BZC during the pandemic and feel that these people should be able to continue to participate, if they so desire.”

Thanks to the work of the committee dealing with these issues: Gerry Oliva, Hozan, Ron Nestor, Ellen Webb, Laurie Senauke, and Mary Duryee.

Update on Reopening Plans

We found that we are changed by our year of practicing remotely. The task now is to shape our practice place and program to include this new reality, while returning to our warm-hand-to-warm-hand way. We have been wrestling with many questions: Is convenience an important priority? How much do we believe in person-to-person practice? How much do we accommodate people who are at a distance? We concluded that the tension is just

there: deciding the heart of practice is our practice and the way we relate is our priority.

In one of our recent planning meetings, Hozan articulated a vision of practice at BZC that acknowledges our in-person practice as sound and necessary: the ground for being able to offer something more widely. Likewise, sangha members practicing in-person are inspired by having people attend from far away places, like India and Germany. Hozan writes:

Part of the vision I have, which is coming clear to me, is having a more open front and accessibility to BZC; understanding that we are connected to the larger community and to the world. In-person practice and being open are not in contradiction to one another: one is the ground for the other. We are not looking to be expansionist; we have never advertised in any Buddhist magazines and that's fine. Rather, we are looking to be open.

Planning for reopening may be the most complex aspect of the pandemic experience to date. In addition to wrestling with our vision of practice under these new circumstances, there are the complexities of: working out the details of the schedule; establishing an Internet infrastructure that is stable and reliable without being overly expensive; upgrading our audio-visual equipment; assessing the ventilation needs of the zendo and the community room; working on adequate sanitary processes in the kitchen; and, working out what requirements we ask of those who attend in person. All of these are being addressed under the realities determined by Covid and its variants, the details of which change week by week.

The current plan, which has been discussed by both the Board and the Practice Committee, is that people physically on the grounds of BZC must be fully vaccinated. We will develop a means of verifying vaccination so that this need only happen once. We will add outdoor capacity for those who wish to distance, or

who don't have a vaccination card to show when they arrive.

For the "soft" opening, now slated to start August 1, we will take out half of the zabutons from the zendo for distancing, and permit chanting with masks. Some sewing has resumed in the community room among those vaccinated.

Beyond this first stage, we will evaluate the ventilation capacity of our communal spaces, understanding that it is not only Covid, but fire season and other viruses that we need to think about. We have purchased a set of air-monitoring devices, which are now set up in the zendo and the community room to get a picture of the air quality under varying circumstances. The Buildings and Grounds Committee has been working on obtaining a mechanical engineer's assessment of what the various solutions might be to both spaces. (This ad hoc committee consists of Rob Lyons, Hozan, Gerry Oliva, Ron Nestor, Ellen Webb, Laurie Senauke, Mary Beth Lamb, Ken Powelson, Cheryl Gordon, and Mary Duryee.)

The recent end-of-Practice-Period sesshin included an experiment in both in-person and Zoom practice. New and old residents, all of them fully vaccinated, sat in the zendo. The Shosan and closing ceremonies were also accomplished with both zendo and Zoom participants. This was quite successful and moving to everyone: for Zoom participants to see the zendo in use and for zendo participants to be supported by more than thirty people online, including our members from India and other remote locations. A lot of work on our Internet infrastructure preceded and enabled this experiment. (The Ad Hoc Committee that worked on this consisted of Rob Lyons, Dean Bradley, Gary Artim, Laurie Senauke, Hozan, Charlie Wilson, Carol Paul, and Mary Duryee.)

We are taking a step-by-step approach, figuring out the next thing, gathering information and experience, which then becomes the guide to the next step. Meanwhile, we are feeling grateful that we have buildings to come home to, and the tremendous support of the sangha. Thank you to all who are working on this next chapter.

BZC Welcomes New Residents

Between mid-May and mid-June, BZC welcomed five new residents: Heiko Lake and Joe Buckner moved into 1933½ Russell, Yoni Ackerman and Bri McGuire moved into 1933A Russell, and Preston Evers moved into 1929A Russell (shared with Helen Cheng). We are excited to begin again together, and to work together to assist BZC leadership in reopening plans. All are fully vaccinated and the first in-person resident meeting was held on June 8.

Zazenkai: An Online Day of Just Sitting

Sunday, July 11, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., will be an opportunity to spend a rare day online doing nothing but zazen, kinhin, bowing, and eating. We will maintain silence throughout, with the exception of bells to mark meditation periods, and chanting the Refuges aloud at 3:50 p.m.

Participants are encouraged to attend for the whole day. Please prepare a bag lunch ahead of time. A break from 12:10–12:40 will allow time to eat and stretch, while maintaining attention to our time together.

This online zazenkai will be led by Ryushin Andrea Thach (andrea.thach@gmail.com). A fee of \$15 is requested, but no one will be turned away. Please contact Andrea if you have questions about the day or your schedule.

One-Day Sesshin

Hozan Sensei will lead a one-day online sesshin on Saturday, August 7, 7:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. A signup form will be posted on the website several weeks ahead of time, which you should submit by the Wednesday before the sesshin (August 4). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the sesshin director, Mary Beth Lamb, at sesshin@berkeleyzencenter.org.

When paying for sesshin, please indicate on your check or in the PayPal note field that your donation is for the “August Sesshin.” The suggested donation is \$15, or whatever you can afford. Mail a check to BZC Office Manager, 1931 Russell St., Berkeley, CA 94703, or pay through the website using the “Sits/Classes” tab on the Donate page. Please consider a donation to Berkeley Zen Center above the suggested fee to help us maintain our practice.



Founders' Ceremonies at BZC

We are resuming our monthly Founders' Ceremony, honoring all the BZC founders, including the founding teacher Sojun Mel Weitsman and his teacher, Shunryu Suzuki.

The ceremony will take place each month, following zazen, on the morning of the 7th of the month, the monthly anniversary of Sojun Roshi's death.

Sojun Mel and Shunryu Suzuki founded Berkeley Zen Center in 1967. The first location of BZC was at the Dwight Way home of Mel Weitsman. (In the following years Mel was joined there by his wife Liz, and occasional other residents).

A touching feature of the ceremony is that, in addition to the teachers who founded BZC, it also acknowledges all those, known and unknown, who participated in making this practice place possible.

Abbot's Tea

From July through September Hozan Sensei will offer Abbot's Tea on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom for up to twelve people per meeting. For registration and information, please contact Hannah Meara (hmeara@gmail.com).

To date we have had ten of these teas over the last months, including four during practice period. There has consistently been lively and free-ranging discussion focused on practice and dharma.

Coming-of-Age Group Forming

BZC will be offering a Coming-of-Age program for 7th and 8th grade youth. Participants will study basic Buddhist teachings, mindfulness, precepts, and communication skills, and explore ways to celebrate their journey toward adulthood.

The program will meet monthly for two hours on Sundays from September through June. For more information, please contact Marie Hopper (marie_hopper@sbcglobal.net).



Gardening at BZC During the Pandemic

Ever since the pandemic began, our head gardener Mira Queen has spent countless hours tending to our lovely grounds at BZC. Thank you, Mira! We are also grateful to the residents, who have continued to water the garden areas throughout this time. Additionally, once a month, Mira and Susan Marvin have organized sangha members to meet for an afternoon to garden together – planting, weeding, pruning, clipping, raking, and doing general cleanup to maintain the property. Since the beginning, a limited number of volunteers have gathered, wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Now that so many of us are vaccinated and our lives are once again opening up safely, we are able to shed our masks to enjoy the fresh air and each other's faces!

These gardening meetups have been a way for all who participate to benefit from being with each other, as well as spending regular time together on our temple grounds. We work alongside each other while having time to converse, catch up, and check in. We take breaks, eat safe snacks, and partake in the garden dharma.

If you would like to join us, watch for upcoming announcements on the BZC listserv.

Interested in Becoming a BZC Member?

Membership is a significant step in our practice at Berkeley Zen Center. It acknowledges our commitment to be actively engaged in a regular zazen schedule with our teachers and sangha. During this time of Covid, we have developed ways to keep our practice alive and thriving using Zoom. If you have been sitting with BZC regularly for a few months or longer and wish to contribute to support the practice, we encourage you to become a BZC member. Members make regular dues donations, vote in Board elections, and can check out library books (after Covid). They also may be asked to join a committee or hold a practice position.

If you are interested in becoming a BZC member, please email: membership@berkeleyzencenter.org.

We thank Leslie Bartholic for her years of loving service as membership contact person. Sue Oehser is now taking on that position.

Bag Lunch Project

Many thanks to all who contributed toothbrushes and toothpaste for the homeless women and children served by the Women's Daytime Drop-in Center in Berkeley. Because of your generosity, 100 toothbrushes and 150 tubes of toothpaste were collected.

We continue to put together 20 bag lunches twice monthly for delivery to the WDDC, and since the lockdown was lifted in March we have also resumed offering 20 bag lunches twice monthly to homeless folks in downtown Berkeley.

Since the last update to you, Penelope Thompson, Gary Artim, Emily Douglas, Peter Pfaelzer, and Ben Clausen have joined the project.

Thanks to all who have donated money to this project. Your contributions, along with

BZC's monthly financial support, allow the project to continue. People on the street keep telling us how much they appreciate the lunches, and workers and clients at the WDDC are also grateful for our ongoing support.

Our present drive is to collect packages of *unscented baby wipes* for the WDDC, which both babies and adults use. Until July 5, if you would like to donate, please leave packages in the box on the Senaukes' back deck. Thank you in advance!

If you would like to make a donation, please send your check to the BZC business manager, Helen, and note "Bag Lunch Project," OR go to the BZC site and make a donation there. In the latter case, be sure to then send Helen an email (bzcofficermanager@gmail.com) to let her know it's for the Bag Lunch Project.

If you are interested in joining us or have ideas or contacts to help with or initiate any project ideas, please email Susan Marvin at lai_hang@yahoo.com.

County Jail Pen Pals

This program will connect BZC participants with incarcerated people in the Alameda County Jail who are looking for friendship. Participants will build bonds with our incarcerated community members, offer emotional/spiritual support, and learn about life inside the county jail. The program will also provide a network of support, a listening ear, and a sounding board for BZC participants. Though not a requirement for participation, BZC members will also have the opportunity to join an ecosystem of individuals and organizations advocating on behalf of loved ones incarcerated in Santa Rita. The project will have its own P.O. box for receiving letters. See the BZC website for more information about the BZC County Jail Pen Pal Program.

If you are interested in joining this project or if you have any questions, please contact Project Coordinator Preston Evers at prestonevers13@gmail.com.

Sheltering-in-Place Schedule

BZC is continuing to offer all programs on the Zoom platform. To take part in any of these public programs, go to the BZC website—www.berkeleyzencenter.org—and then click the “Enter the Zendo Now” link.

Zazen Monday–Friday:

- 6:00–6:40 a.m. (Note time change.)
- 7:30–8:10 a.m. (See Calendar for special Monday morning schedule.)
- 5:40–6:20 p.m.

Note: Check the website for in-person opening plans, probably beginning in early August.

Chanting for All Who Are Suffering:

Tuesdays, 8:15–8:45 a.m.

Well-Being Service:

Wednesdays, 8:10 a.m.

Wednesday Night Drop-In:

See BZC website for details.

Saturday Program:

Zendo opens: 8:30 a.m.

Zazen: 8:40–9:20

Service: 9:20–9:30

Kinhin/break: 9:30–9:40

Zazen: 9:40–10:10

Lecture: 10:15–11:15

Zazen Instruction is offered every Saturday from 8:40–9:20 a.m., but via a different link.

Go to the BZC website and click “Zazen Instruction.”

Saturday Speakers, 10:15 a.m.

July 3:	Gerry Oliva
July 10:	Hozan Sensei
July 17:	Judy Fleischman
July 24:	Hozan Sensei
July 31:	Karen Sundheim

August 7:	Hozan Sensei
August 14:	Penelope Thompson
August 21:	Hozan Sensei
August 28:	TBA

Monday Morning Talks, 8:00 a.m.

July 5:	Zendo holiday
July 12:	Charley Ware
July 19:	Dean Bradley
July 26:	Jeff Taylor

August 2:	Open Discussion
August 9:	Heiko John Lake
August 16:	Kelsey Chirlinn
August 23:	Alex Roehrkasse
August 30:	Ben Clausen

Friday Afternoon Talks, 5:50 p.m.

July 2:	Tom Painter
August 6:	TBA

Abbot's Letter

Dear Friends in the Dharma,

Our 34th Spring Practice Period ended Sunday, June 20, on the summer solstice, with a three-day hybrid sesshin. For the first time in sixteen months our sangha on Zoom was accompanied by BZC residents sitting in the zendo. This experiment taught us about the challenges of hybrid practice, which will serve us well as we move toward reopening in the coming months. Opening plans are explored elsewhere in this newsletter. The Practice Period was a remarkable experience, with more than sixty members participating, including members in India and elsewhere in the U.S. Our heart is very much in Berkeley and in our zendo, but our body now reaches more widely.

I would like to share some of the activities happening in our community. Very soon we will offer free online access to nearly 3000 talks, mostly by Sojun, dating back to 1980. This is an astonishing and rich body of wisdom. Great appreciation to Charlie Wilson of Engage Wisdom, who has been digitizing all of this. We will need your help in creating the metadata for these talks, which will make them searchable and accessible. More about this soon. In the future, I hope to share transcribed versions of dharma talks by BZC's other teachers, as well as forty years of Sojun Roshi's lectures.

Through the last year of his life, Sojun worked on completing two books. The first book is a combined memoir and selection of his talks. Ron Nestor assisted him with this work, along with Kika Hellein, Andrea Thach, and more recently Raghav Bandla. The second book is a new collection of Suzuki Roshi talks, which was shepherded by Sojun and Jiryu Rutschman-Byler at Green Gulch. Laurie Senauke is assisting Jiryu with this project.

Liz Horowitz has asked me to serve as Sojun Roshi's literary executor to see these projects through to publication. She has also designated that royalties for these projects will come to BZC, which will be a wonderful, generous, ongoing gift. Several Buddhist publishing houses are interested in other collections of Sojun's work. For now, the main thing is to keep these two projects moving forward toward completion.

In his last days, Sojun asked me to make the necessary arrangements for his "stuff"—papers, books, robes, and many items given to him over the years. For several months, Maria Winston and I have been going through all the papers in the Abbot's office, sorting them into three categories: material to keep for future reference and use; material to pack for the Stanford archive; and duplicates, triplicates, and unneeded material to discard. I have begun to work from this office, and it is a wonderful, relaxed space for writing, studying, and meeting with people. Those of you who met with Sojun there will find the space familiar and essentially unchanged.

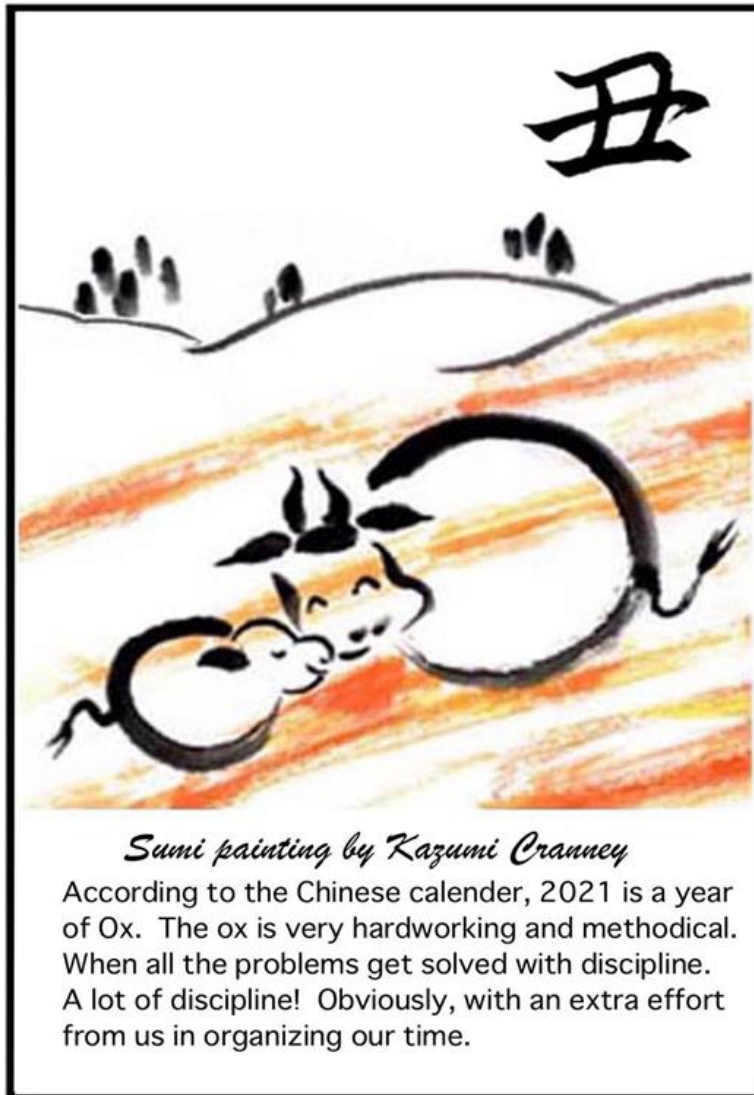
The vision of BZC as a lay sangha has always meant involvement with our Bay Area community and with the wider world, learning and giving, offering our practice where it may be of value in the work of spiritual and systemic liberation. I am encouraged to see the sangha's dedicated work toward goals of deconstructing racism, which parallels efforts in many Buddhist communities across the country. We have an active BIPOC (Black-Indigenous-People of Color) group, and an open antiracism initiative in the sangha at large. Together, these groups allow for introspection, education, and action. In the context of Berkeley Zen Center itself, they help us strategize about how we might address BZC's administrative and teaching structures, moving toward broader diversity and greater equity.

I am eager to find the time to teach and meet with sangha members for individual study. But presently, all of us are absorbed in the project of reopening the zendo while sustaining the rich online practice that has developed during the Covid pandemic.

I deeply appreciate the support of the Board, the senior students, the coordinator, the Practice Committee, and all our members. I think we share the priority of continuing and mindfully expanding Sojun Roshi's and Suzuki Roshi's Zen practice. I wish to support you in this practice, day by day. Please let me know your thoughts, questions, and views. My door is always open.

May we continue in wisdom and compassion,

—Hozan



Sumi painting by Kazumi Cranney

According to the Chinese calendar, 2021 is a year of Ox. The ox is very hardworking and methodical. When all the problems get solved with discipline. A lot of discipline! Obviously, with an extra effort from us in organizing our time.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION DEADLINE
for the September–October 2021 issue is
Friday, August 20.

Please submit items to
knabb@bopsecrets.org.

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