



# Berkeley Zen Center



July–August 2023 Newsletter

## Spring 2023 Practice Period

This spring Sue Oehser, Jumyo Seishin (Bright Pearl, Pure Faith) served as head student, sharing with me the abbot's seat for our thirty-third practice period. More than sixty people participated, including members at a distance online. Along with daily zazen and dharma talks by myself and Sue, there were shuso teas, a wonderful practice period dinner, a weekly class drawing on Suzuki Roshi's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, and a five-day sesshin with a shuso ceremony to close the period.

Our five-day sesshin was marked by stillness and joy, including a very welcome number of newer students. In the Soto tradition, serving as shuso is a kind of confirmation of a student's long maturation. Sue's shuso ceremony brought forth the Bright Pearl to shine for all, with Sue responding to dharma questions with clarity and confidence.

Congratulation to Sue Oesher and to all the BZC sangha for great efforts.

—Hozan



### Affirmation of Welcome

Walking the path of liberation, we express our intimate connection with all beings. Berkeley Zen Center is a sangha of Buddhist practitioners drawing from the Bay Area's many spiritual and cultural communities. Just as Shakyamuni Buddha welcomed people of all backgrounds to practice, here at BZC our activities embrace diversity, and are available to people of every color, every way of life and ethnic background, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and ability. May all beings practice in safety and equality, realizing our true nature.

## B Z C S C H E D U L E

### July

**Bodhisattva Ceremony**  
Saturday, 7/1, 9:10am

**Zendo Holiday**  
Tuesday, 7/4

**Founders' Ceremony**  
Friday, 7/7, 7:00am

**Zazenkai (Just Sitting)**  
Sunday, 7/9

**Board Meeting**  
Sunday, 7/16, 9:00–11:00am

### August

**Bodhisattva Ceremony**  
Saturday, 8/5, 9:10am

**Founders' Ceremony**  
Monday, 8/7, 7:00am

**One-Day Sesshin**  
Saturday, 8/12

**Board Meeting**  
Sunday, 8/13, 9:00–11:00am

**Half-Day Sitting**  
Sunday, 8/20

For more complete and up-to-date information,  
please check the BZC website ([berkeleyzencenter.org](http://berkeleyzencenter.org))  
and subscribe to BZC's community listserv.

**Benji Poem  
for  
Jumyo Seishin Sue Oehser**

Here we are again, as always,  
for now. Our whole lives  
we've been praying for peace  
and finally the world has grown  
quieter than silence. The main gate  
squeaks open. In the kitchen,  
a carrot is chopped like a finger.  
Who ever said that harmony  
wouldn't hurt?

And so we sit together,  
the afternoon sun sneaking  
through the zendo blinds,  
specks of dust tumbling down  
streams of light. You see,  
our skin is always dying, always  
taking flight from the body  
and becoming this air  
that we breathe.

The Buddha heaves a sigh.  
On the altar, the candle flame  
burns upright and restless.  
What are we waiting for?  
we ask ourselves and each other.  
What is the orbit of this dream?  
Out of the corner of our eye,  
a bright, bitchin' pearl  
accomplishes nothing  
with her friends,  
falling awake.

Let us hear from the shuso!

—Preston Evers



*Benji Preston, Shuso Sue, and Abbot Hozan*

**Many Communities, One Sangha**

Berkeley Zen Center recently completed its first Many Communities, One Sangha program (MCOS). Over the course of ten months we met in small and large groups to discuss how to build a more inclusive community by exploring mindful responses to racism in ourselves, our sangha, and the greater world. Here are comments by some of the participants:

*"The MCOS program was a safe container for me to heal a deep wound I've had to live with as a brown woman in America. I've found a deeper groundedness within myself going through this process. I'm encouraged by the sharings I've had the honor to bear witness to. They feel like flowers blooming at the start of spring within me—wonderful!" —Sandeep Lehil*

*"MCOS was all about creating the space to hold difficult conversations with empathy and curiosity. Rhonda modeled a compassionate listening that allowed us all to show up to and for each other. Healing the scars of trauma, especially when the causes and conditions are woven into our culture, takes real courage and vulnerability; Rhonda created a space that invited a compassionate exploration of these very deep and painful wounds. And although this was all about healing the legacies of racism, I felt it taught us more broadly the emotional skills to show up and be there for the people in our lives." —Ken Powelson*

*"MCOS is a really safe place to discuss inclusion. I see more clearly now. It helps heal old hurts. It opens up connections. It helps me appreciate other cultures." —Sue Oehser*

*"We were all indigenous at one time."* —Fulani Offutt

*"The MCOS program has been one of the most valuable teachings I have had regarding anti-racism. I have become aware of my own unconscious biases and concepts and have had a chance to reflect, journal, and share with my small MCOS group over the last 9 months. This is truly only the beginning in this most important work."* —Carol Paul

*"Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of Great Compassion, is a being who listens. The Many Communities, One Sangha program is an exploration of the transformative power of listening—to our own stories, and to those of others in our sangha and beyond—with particular consideration for people who have not been listened to enough, those whose lives and experiences have historically been marginalized, excluded, or ignored. For me, it has been a space of intimate, genuine, and healing conversation, and a joy."* —Dave Rutschman

We are delighted to announce that Prof. Rhonda Magee will continue to work with us for the coming year 2023–2024. Rhonda is a lay entrusted teacher in the Soto Zen lineage, a law professor at UCSF Law School, and the author of *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities through Mindfulness*. This is an extraordinary opportunity to come together, to listen, learn, and find a spacious venue for conversations that can be difficult. The accompanying materials were developed in coordination between East Bay Meditation Center and the Soto Zen Buddhist Association, led by Mushim Ikeda, Crystal Johnson, and Rhonda Magee.

All BZC members are welcome to participate, including those who have already taken part in the first session and would like to continue. The program is offered in hybrid form (both online and in-person). There is a fee of \$150 for new participants, which is the actual cost of the materials. Returning participants are encouraged to provide dana (voluntary donations) for Rhonda's work with us. No one will be excluded because of inability to pay or donate.

The program consists of one meeting a month over ten months: five meetings with Rhonda and all participants, alternating with five meetings in smaller discussion groups. While the materials will be the same as those for the first year, we are folding in suggestions gathered during the first year to streamline the process and place emphasis on participation and discussion. Each meeting is two to two-and-a-half hours. Outside reading and watching video segments are additional time commitments of about five hours a month.

A sign-up process will begin in early July and the program will begin in the fall. (Meeting dates are still being determined.)

**Questions?** To sign up, contact Mary Duryee ([maduryee@icloud.com](mailto:maduryee@icloud.com)). For more information about the program, contact Sonia Tamez ([sonia.tamez@berkeleyzencenter.org](mailto:sonia.tamez@berkeleyzencenter.org)).

**MCOS Coordinating Committee:** Karen Sundheim, Sonia Tamez, Penelope Thompson, Gerry Oliva, Mauro Sifuentes, Mary Duryee, Heather Sarantis.



*In-person participants at the last MCOS meeting with Rhonda, representing half of the participants. (The other half attended online.)*



## Coming of Age Program

BZC just concluded its annual Coming of Age program with a wonderful half-day retreat. Seven truly amazing students completed the program, and in the concluding ceremony they took the five lay precepts and received a wagesa. The program, facilitated by Mark Copithorne and Marie Hopper, offered zazen instruction and sitting practice, covered the foundational Eightfold Path, and introduced them to some of the temple forms such as ringing the bells, kinhin, and kitchen practice. Congratulations to Rising Star Gentle Explorer, Hidden Stream Illuminated Way, Solitary Falcon Wisdom Sword, Burning Lotus Roaring Stream, Quiet Determination Boundless Ocean, Deep Ocean Endless Sky, and Essential Harmony Joyful Wisdom! Thanks to all who participated, and to those who supported those who participated.



*Coming of Age participants*

## Zazenkai: A Day of Just Sitting

Join us on Sunday, July 9, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., for a rare opportunity to spend a day of “just sitting.” There will be eight periods zazen, plus kinhin, bowing, and eating. We will maintain silence throughout, with the exception of bells to mark meditation periods, and chanting the refuges aloud at 4:00 p.m.

Participants should plan to come for the whole day. A lunch break from 12:10 –12:40 p.m. will allow time for sack lunches to be eaten outdoors.

There will be a 10-minute period of bowing at your own pace prior to the lunch break, and we will have two periods of fast kinhin. Both of these activities can be adapted to harmonize with individual needs and abilities.

The fee is \$15 or whatever you can afford. Please register and pay on the website. If you have any questions, contact the retreat director, Ryushin, at [andrea.thach@gmail.com](mailto:andrea.thach@gmail.com).

## One-Day Sesshin

Abbot Hozan will lead a one-day sesshin on Saturday, August 12, from 7:50 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. You may participate online or in person (in-person enrollment is limited to 33 people). For in-person participants we will offer an oriyoki lunch at tables in the courtyard. Hozan will offer dokusan and a senior student will offer practice discussion. For further information, please contact the sesshin director, Rob Lyons, at [dharmawork@yahoo.com](mailto:dharmawork@yahoo.com) and check our website ([berkeleyzencenter.org](http://berkeleyzencenter.org)) for updates.

## Board Nominations

Are you interested in serving on the BZC Board? Or is there someone you would like to nominate? If so, please contact the Board Recruitment and Elections Committee ([elweb@sbcglobal.net](mailto:elweb@sbcglobal.net)) and include any relevant information about why you or your nominee would make a good BZC Board member.

Every year the BZC sangha selects up to three at-large members to two-year terms on the BZC Board. This year we have one vacancy. Board members may serve a maximum of two consecutive two-year terms. Elections take place in October and the new term starts in January 2024. The Board will present its nominees at the All-Sangha Meeting on Sunday, September 17. Nominations can also be made by sangha members at that meeting.

Some of the various skills the Board seeks in nominees are oral and written communication, organizational experience, information technology, money management, fundraising, engineering, building maintenance, and non-profit law. Nominees should be members of BZC. Board members attend about ten Sunday morning meetings a year plus an all-day retreat in the first part of the year, and serve on at least one working Board committee: Finance; Buildings & Grounds; Development; Electronic Communication & Social Media; Archive; and Elections & Nominations.

## Current Weekly Schedule

Many of our programs are now open to a limited number of in-person masked attendees. If you are interested in attending, please send your vax and booster information to the Office

Manager ([bzcofficermanager@gmail.com](mailto:bzcofficermanager@gmail.com)) at least one week before you attend. (If you come sooner than that, also bring your vax card and ID with you.)

Our programming varies between in-person-only, online-only, and hybrid. See the BZC website ([berkeleyzencenter.org](http://berkeleyzencenter.org)) for details.

## Saturday Speakers, 10:15 a.m.

July 1:	Karen Sundheim
July 8:	Dave Rutschman
July 15:	Abbot Hozan
July 22:	Abbot Hozan
July 29:	Carol Paul & Hannah Meara
August 5:	Zengyu Paul Discoe
August 12:	TBA (sesshin speaker)
August 19:	Ryushin Andrea Thach
August 26:	Abbot Hozan

## Monday Morning Talks, 8:00 a.m.

July 3:	Open Discussion
July 10:	Mike Changaris
July 17:	Chloe Hsu
July 24:	Margret Wotkyns
July 31:	Ajayan Idukki
August 7:	Open Discussion
August 14:	Mark Copithorne
August 21:	Daryan Rezazad
August 28:	Jake Van Akkeren

## Friday Afternoon Talks, 5:45 p.m.

July 7:	Alex Roehrkasse
August 4:	CHI (Chronic Health Issues Dharma Group)

# Nothing Was Delivered

*Nothing is better, nothing is best  
Take care of yourself and get plenty of rest  
—Bob Dylan*

There's a chapter in Suzuki Roshi's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* titled "Believing in Nothing." I return to this piece frequently because it is about faith and emptiness. Or faith in emptiness. It reminds me of the banner we bring out for special occasions at BZC which reads: "Accomplishing Nothing Since 1967." Quite an achievement!

The chapter begins like this:

I discovered that it is necessary, absolutely necessary, to believe in nothing. That is, we have to believe in something which has no form and no color—something which exists before all forms and colors appear.

Nothing is not a thing itself. In fact, it is "no thing," which is another way of expressing emptiness. When Suzuki Roshi speaks of "something which exists before all forms and colors appear," he is not really talking about some thing, but about the vast potentiality from which all the "things" we perceive arise. In a recent reworking of the *Heart Sutra*, Kaz Tanahashi and Roshi Joan Halifax translate emptiness as "boundlessness." While I'm somewhat attached to our version of the *Heart Sutra*, I think that boundlessness is an useful way of pointing toward potentiality as a way of understanding Buddha nature.

Given that we chant the *Heart Sutra* twice a day, emptiness is kind of our theme song:

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when practicing deeply the prajna paramita, perceived that all five skandhas in their own being are empty, and was saved from all suffering.

The point here is that the five skandhas and all dharmas or things are empty of "own being." "Skandhas," by the way, are the aggregates of form and mind from which we create our provisional, always changing "self." Another way to see this is that every thing is created by the coming together of causes and conditions, which are themselves co-created. There is no thing that has its own permanent being. And this no thing is continuously generated and delivered to us.

Suzuki Roshi writes:

If you understand yourself as a temporal embodiment of the truth, you will have no difficulty whatsoever. You will appreciate your surroundings, and you will appreciate yourself as a wonderful part of Buddha's great activity, even in the midst of difficulties.

Maybe with this understanding we will have no difficulties whatsoever. I'm not so sure. Difficulties naturally arise from living in this world and having a body. But as a "temporal" or temporary embodiment of the truth, one can breathe in the cool air of impermanence. Even our difficulties are impermanent. After asserting that we "will have no difficulty whatsoever," in the very next sentence Suzuki Roshi explains how we can appreciate ourselves even in the midst of difficulties. This self that we appreciate is "no thing," and our difficulties are likewise "no thing."

Finally, as in all his teachings, Suzuki Roshi does not arrive at "nothing" as a philosophical idea or a matter of Buddhist doctrine. He leads us back to enlightenment and practice. When we settle our self on our self in zazen,

we should begin with enlightenment and proceed to practice, and then to thinking. Usually thinking is rather self-centered. In our everyday life our thinking is ninety-nine percent self-centered. . . . But if enlightenment comes first, before thinking, before practice, your thinking and your practice will not be self-centered.

For Suzuki Roshi and our Zen Ancestors, enlightenment is always there. Dogen Zenji describes it elsewhere as One Bright Pearl. Practice is the function and expression of this all-present enlightenment. Believing in nothing we naturally put enlightenment into action.

—Hozan Alan Senauke

**NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION DEADLINE**  
for the September–October issue is  
*Friday, August 18.*

Please submit items to  
[knabb@bopsecrets.org](mailto:knabb@bopsecrets.org).

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