



# Berkeley Zen Center



May-June 2020 Newsletter

## Sheltering-in-Place Schedule

During this time of the coronavirus, BZC has moved to all-online activities, on the Zoom platform.

### Zazen Mon – Fri:

7:30 – 8:10 am and 5:40 – 6:20 pm

### Saturday Program:

9:45 am Zazen

10:15 am Lecture

### Wednesday Night Drop In:

See BZC website for details

### All-Sangha Gatherings:

7:00 – 8:30 pm – every two weeks

Details below.

Please check the website for Zoom links:

<https://berkeleyzencenter.org/corona-19-changes/>

### All-Sangha Gatherings Every Other Week

For the time being, we are holding All-Sangha gatherings on Zoom. The meeting will last 60–90 minutes and be facilitated by a pair of practice leaders and long time students. Meetings may take a variety of shapes, including a focus topic announced beforehand and possible break-out sessions.

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

### May

#### All-Sangha Gatherings

Sundays: May 3, 17, 31

7 pm – 8:30 pm

#### Saturday Speakers

May 2: Hozan Senauke

May 9: Sojun Roshi

May 16: Judy Fleischman

May 23: Ross Blum

May 30: Gerry Oliva

### June

#### All-Sangha Gatherings

Sundays: June 15, 29

7 pm – 8:30 pm

#### Saturday Speakers

June 6: Hozan Senauke

June 13: Peter Overton

June 20: Sojun Roshi

June 27: Carol Paul



### 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.

## Practice Has No Gaps

Dear Sangha,

Being that we are so well informed, the state of our virus situation needs no more information from me. But what I do wish to talk about is how we manage, or practice as a Zen student in this trying time. We always talk about how in this Saha world (of suffering), facing our trials and difficulties is the ground where our personal dramas are played out. What we are dealing with now is no exception. This is a great test for our practice.

Every one of our lives has been altered. Some will not go back to the way it was and for them life will never be the same. Others will not be so affected. For many of us, both the present and future are tragic and unknown. For some, the shut-down is a kind of blessing; a relief from the day-to-day grind, and a chance to lay down the burden while the curtain is open.

Whatever the circumstances, at this time we all share the imposed condition of personal confinement. The Zen temple, the center of our shared practice with its AM and PM schedule, the talks, interviews, classes, and the immovable bedrock that we are sure is always there suddenly has exploded. The pieces have scattered, and a complete piece has landed in your lap and my lap. For now, each one of us is on our own, confined to our personal hermitage.

We are used to practicing all together in one space in the Japanese fashion. Now we need to adjust to the solo meditation way as is done in other countries. I suggest that you set up an altar where you sit if you don't already have one, and offer flowers or incense before you sit. When you make a meal, do an offering. This is a good time to study one of those Buddhist books that has been taking up space on your shelf and flashing at you every time you walk by. The fundamental thing is to not dwell on when you are going to be released, but to completely live your life situation right here, one moment at a time.

This is a time to look at the tide pool of your environment and let those things that have always been there but you rarely see, reveal themselves. Everything is significant. This is how we do zazen continuously. Instead of seeing this confinement as an imposition, it can be seen and be experienced as an opportunity. It's great that we have Zoom and other forms of communication, and that our practice leadership is working hard to keep the ship afloat. Another suggestion is that we take advantage of the practice leaders' offering of dokusan and practice instruction. So there are two sides; one is to keep the lines of communication flowing, and the other is to enjoy our solitude. Blessings to all, and I am always open to your call.

Sojun Mel  
from my cozy full service zendo



### WELL- BEING AND MEMORIAL SERVICES

After zazen on Wednesday mornings (at 8:10 am) we will hold an ongoing well-being service. Due to the limitations of Zoom, congregants will be muted while we each chant along with the doshi/kokyo. If you would like to have a name added to the ongoing well-being list, send your request by email to Co-Zendo Manager Hannah Meara: [hmeara@gmail.com](mailto:hmeara@gmail.com).

In addition, all are welcome to request a personal service for an individual when there is need for prayers for well-being or when someone has died. Hannah is also the contact person for these requests.

## Hopelessness—Reflections in the Viral Age

### Hozan Alan Senauke

Plagues and natural disasters appear regularly throughout human history. No times, places, or people have been immune to these occurrences. During Japan's Kamakura period a series of plagues and famines burned across the country. During the Kanki Famine in 1230-31 roughly a third of Japan's population died—from 1.5 to 2 million people. In that year Dogen Zenji left the famine and sectarian strife of Kyoto to practice in an abandoned hermitage south of the city. I think of this as Dogen's approach to social distancing in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

What did Dogen rely on during this terrible time? Zazen for sure, but we don't exactly know more, except, that in the midst of crisis he moved away from the center of the turmoil. Did he cultivate hope or radical hopelessness? Are they different? Dogen turned inward for a time, surely digging into zazen. He turned inward, then opening his dharma eye he widened the field of enlightened action and stepped forward into his world.

In 1231 Dogen began composing *Shobogenzo, Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, and wrote *Bendowa*, the first expression of zazen in the Japanese language. Two years later he founded Kannon-dōri Temple in Fukakusa, the locus of practice for his community over the next ten years, before he moved to Fukui Prefecture and built Eihei-ji.

The *way* of our zazen practice is to turn inward, noticing and embracing everything that happens within us, which allows us to regulate and harmonize body and mind. Zazen enables us to put our mind in order. The *purpose* of our practice is, with a well-regulated mind, to take beings across to the shore of liberation. The *form* of our sangha practice is to create an island of sanity in a world of turmoil. We do this by offering material needs, dharma teachings, and fearlessness. We reflect on justice, a sense of proper balance among all people and beings.

In this pandemic moment we need all these offerings: inner reflection and work for justice. These are strange days. Streets are virtually empty but for people in masks, stores are shuttered, businesses are going broke, religious services have morphed into video conferences. We hardly dare to imagine the future. For the last month, as we practice social distancing to tamp down Covid-19's impact, it is sometimes hard to know when we are turning inward and when we are moving in the wider world. Such provisional distinctions seem less clear with each passing day. It feels as if we are living in a dystopian novel, a bad dream. And we are writing that novel as we live it. But there is a lot of love out there. Warm greetings as strangers pass on the sidewalk.

At Berkeley Zen Center, where I live, we are sewing masks, offering food and funds to those in need, sweeping the temple grounds, and sustaining a daily zazen practice and Saturday dharma talks, cultivating fearlessness even as we learn of friends and family struck by the virus. Actually, we are sustaining Zen practice and it is sustaining us. Right now I am not much thinking about the future. There's something fresh and creative about such "hopelessness." Not to hope for things to return to some imagined normal, but to feel alive and full of questions right now, and now, and now.

We would never wish for a time like this, and we grieve for the thousands of lives lost from Coronavirus and from governmental irresponsibility. Still there is an opportunity here for each of us to stabilize our mind and be of service, as Dogen did in his own time of crisis. What is that opportunity for you? How does practice teach us to love each other?

**NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION DEADLINE**  
**for the July-August 2020 issue is**  
**Friday, June 19.**

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

BZC is using our yahoo group to make regular announcements. To join the group, send a request to: [bzc\\_community-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:bzc_community-subscribe@yahoo.com); then check spam for an email asking you, Are you sure you want to subscribe? Then check spam again a few hours later for your confirmation. If you have difficulty with this approach, contact [lauriesenauke@sonic.net](mailto:lauriesenauke@sonic.net) for assistance.

#### Who Holds It All?

When you wake up to a new and terrifying reality  
When everywhere you look you see maps and charts  
Displaying what feels like an inexorable progression of  
sickness and death  
When your crops are being devoured by locusts  
And you wonder if you will be able feed your children  
When you look at a smoggy sky,  
garbage washing up on the shore  
Tearful and heartbroken about the earth's destruction  
When you awaken in the night, short of breath  
Struggling to inhale  
When your throat is sore, and your head feels hot  
Thinking "Is this IT?"  
When you're in a hospital bed attached to multiple  
devices  
Terrified and not knowing where you are  
When you're waiting at home for news of a loved one  
When no one will answer your calls and you can't visit

When you work in the hospital every day  
Always aware of the risk of contagion  
When you enter a store and feel the terror  
Of getting too close to others, touching anything  
When your job puts you in danger everyday  
But you can't support yourself without a paycheck  
When you're homeless, vulnerable, scared, forgotten  
When you're in an immigrant detention center  
A nursing home, a home for the mentally or physically  
disabled  
Understaffed and people around you getting really sick

Overcome by the enormity of it all  
Is it possible for us to finally awaken?  
To our universal interconnectedness  
A connectedness of spirit, of compassion  
That holds it all

Gerry Oliva  
April 11, 2020

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