



Berkeley Zen Center



May 2008 Newsletter

Spring Practice Period

Our annual spring practice period will begin with a one-day sitting starting at 5:00 am on Sunday, May 4 and last through the Shuso Ceremony on Sunday, June 22. Sojun Roshi invites everyone to increase their commitment to practice during this period while still minding their obligations "outside the gate."

Seisen Ikushin Gerry Oliva - Pure Spring, Nourishing Heart - will be the shuso, or head student this year, sharing the Abbot's seat and setting an example for us all. Myoka Eido Colleen Busch - Subtle River Endless Path - will be serving as benji.

Our Thursday night class with Sojun Roshi will be on selected koans from various koan collections. Remember that besides signing up for practice period and turning in a registration form, you need to sign up for each individual practice period event.

Practice Period Events

Opening sitting: May 4, 5 am to 5:15 pm

Opening/Shuso Entering Ceremony:

May 4, about 11 am

Shuso talks: May 5, 16, and 24, June 7

Classes: Thursday evenings, May 8 to June 12

Bansan: May 23

Dinner and skit night: May 31, 6:00 pm

Shosan: June 6 and 16

Lay Ordination: June 14

Five day sesshin: June 18 to 22

Shuso Hossen, June 22



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.

BZC Schedule

May

One-Day Sitting/Open Spring Practice Period

Sunday, 5-4

Founder's Ceremony

Monday, 5-5, 6:20 pm

Tuesday, 5-6, 6:40 am

Kidzendo

Saturday, 5-17

Half-Day Sitting

Sunday, 5-18

Practice Period Dinner and Skit Night

Saturday, 5-31

June

Founder's Ceremony

Tuesday, 6-3, 6:20 pm

Wednesday, 6-4, 6:40 am

Half-Day Sitting

Sunday, 6-8, 9:30 am

Lay Ordination/Zaike Tokudo

Saturday, 6-14

Five-Day Sesshin/ End Practice Period

Wednesday-Sunday, 6-18 - 6-22

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 6-21, 9:30 am

Shuso Hossen

Sunday, 6-22

Kidzendo

Saturday, 6-28



PEOPLE

Thanks to **Ellen Doudna** for handling Saturday Work Leader duties this year. Ellen will take the skills she learned in this position, and work outside the gate to solve the problems of peak oil. We wish her limitless success in this endeavor, and welcome **Everett Wilson** as our new Saturday Work Leader.

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Thanks to **Greg Denny** for managing numerous projects around our property; he's passing this position on to **John Busch**. Welcome, John!

Zazen in Motion

By Courtney Gonzalez

We have zazen in stillness and zazen in activity. Actually, there is continuous zazen practice. After sitting a couple of periods of zazen as the sun rises on a Saturday morning, I have found that it is wonderful to seamlessly move from sitting practice to serving practice.



Alert and attentive while relaxed and natural.

Having a sense of immediacy without rushing.

Following the forms without losing the flexibility to respond appropriately to the inevitable surprises.

There is the opportunity to experience and embody these practices in the activity of serving a meal to the sangha in our zendo. It is wonderful - see for yourself!

If you have never served before and would like to do so, just sign up and let the head server know ahead of time (the day before, if not earlier) that you need instruction. The head server will give you instruction during the second period of zazen just before the meal period begins. Head servers who would like assistance in instructing new servers and those who have questions about serving in general should contact Courtney Gonzalez, cocolg@yahoo.com

Saturday Childcare

Childcare is offered free of charge on Saturdays from 9:15 to 11:15. It's helpful for planning if you can let us know that you're hoping to attend; call or email Greg Denny, 595-8162, or greg@techsperience.org.



Childcare Schedule

May 3	Childcare
May 10	Childcare
May 17	Kidzendo
May 24	Childcare
May 31	Childcare
June 7	Childcare
June 14	Childcare
June 21	Sesshin – no program
June 28	Kidzendo

Kidzendo

A talk in the zendo for young ones three and up is offered on the third Saturday of each month (or the fourth Saturday if a sesshin is scheduled on the third). We meet upstairs at the Senauke's household (1933 Russell) for a briefing on forms at about 9:45, then sojourn down to the zendo for the first 10 minutes of lecture starting at 10:10. Afterwards, children may join the regular Saturday childcare program if they wish.

Newsletter Online

The newsletter is available online on the BZC website. You can sign up to receive an email when the latest newsletter has been posted by contacting BZC Office Manager, John Moge, jmoge@comcast.net



The Head Gardener From a Talk by Sojun Roshi, Chapel Hill 2004

In Dogen Zenji's, Pure Standards For the Zen Community (Eihei Shingi), he talks about the practice of the Head Gardener. A Soto Zen Teacher is sometimes characterized as a farmer raising a crop; mindful of the time, the weather and the seasons, in nurturing the plants to maturity. Here Dogen talks about the head gardener as a mature person.



Dogen says, "The position of Head Gardener is most difficult and toilsome and should be served by someone who has the Way - Mind (Doshin)." In Mahayana Buddhism we have the term, "Raising the thought of enlightenment." In Zen we say, way-seeking mind.

Dogen continues: "This position should not be filled by someone who does not have the way-mind. This person is always in the garden sowing and cultivating according to the season. In this position Buddha face, Ancestor face, donkey feet, and horse feet are manifest. It's like being a farmer or peasant. All day long plowing and hoeing. All day long carrying excrement and urine for fertilizing, free from self-concern, awaiting the right moment of ripening for harvesting, careful not to miss the right time."

There is so much in this paragraph. Our field of practice can be likened to a garden, a place of cultivation within a boundary. For a zen student, as Suzuki Roshi said, our practice is just to take care of the ground from which many plants will grow. By Buddha face Dogen means our original face, the source, free of all characteristics. Ancestor face is like each one of us with various characteristics and personalities. When we look back on those who came before us we call them ancestors. And those who haven't been born yet will look back at us and call us ancestors. Buddha face is the essence, while donkey feet and horse feet are the great activities of carrying water and turning over the soil. Making loose, fertile, and loamy soil for the sake of loose, fertile and loamy soil. Just doing the work; nothing special. Dogen continues, "All day long, plowing and hoeing carrying excrement and urine for fertilizing, free from

self-concern."

The important point here is the freedom from self-concern. What will happen if I don't have a self? If I have a self I will lose a self. If I have no self, there is nothing to lose. There is a self, but it is not exactly My self, and at the same time it is my most intimate self. Then, what is it?

When we are totally free from self-concern there is no self. The self arises with grasping, clinging and attachment. It is associated with ego. If we try to crush them or throw them away they just come

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Photo by Ross Blum

Outside The Gate

Skikantaza

by Colleen Busch

In the Mountains and Rivers Sutra, Dogen says that "even in a drop of water innumerable Buddha lands appear." I like to think that drop of water might also be a snowflake.

Every January, while many are making plans to escape to Hawaii, John and I go towards the mountains and the cold, like backwards migratory birds. We spend most of the winter living in the Sierras in a historic log home on the west shore of Lake Tahoe. I once asked Sojun, "How do I continue to practice when I'm away?" "Easy," he told me, "Just sit. Sometimes I do. But, I admit, when I'm up here, I ski a lot more than I sit. Today, while skiing my 50th day this season, I thought, I'm practicing skikantaza.

While shikantaza is the practice of "just sitting," skikantaza is the practice of just skiing. It's stepping into your bindings, settling into your breath, and receiving the world that passes by, which in John's and my case, is pretty slow, since we're not bombing straight downhill at a lift area. We're skate skiing at a local spot where we see heron and coyotes and once encountered a bear looting the hot chocolate supply at a warming hut. We're strapping climbing skins onto the bottoms of our skis so we can hike two thousand feet to the top of a peak in the backcountry for 360 degree views and the satisfaction of knowing we got there on our own power. Skinning up a mountain is a rhythmic, moving meditation not unlike kinhin. Inhale, pole plant, take a step. Exhale, pole plant, take another step. Skinhin.

All of the skiing we do is "free heel"-or cross country. Like zazen, free heel skiing requires a balance of effort, attention, and relaxation. If any one of those elements is missing, you invite fatigue, or frustration, or even a fall. I crashed in January in a moment of distraction-a hairsbreadth deviation in my concentration-and I tore some cartilage in my shoulder. But I kept



Colleen and John Busch "skikantazing" in the Sierras.

skiing, just as I sit through my pain unless it is the kind of pain that should not be sat through, because there is something to be learned from being fully present in this body, its sufferings and joys, all fleeting.

Skikantaza is not zazen. But I practice it for many of the same reasons I practice zazen. Skikantaza makes me feel more integrated and intimate with the world around me. It gives me a felt sense of the awesome scale of existence, of which I am a small but connected part, like a snowflake is to the snowpack. "After entering mountains, not a single person meets another," says Dogen. "There is just the activity of the mountains. There is no trace of anyone having entered the mountains."

After the snow melts, so do our tracks. Sometimes we take a photo on the peak because we want to capture the view or remember the moment, but we can't stay there, on top of the mountain. Eventually, we have to go. We try to leave nothing-not even an orange peel-behind. We strip off our climbing skins, put on our skis and helmets. Then we bow to the mountain in its robe of snow and smile through every turn we take on the way down.

Stepping Off the 100-foot Pole...Again

by Diana Lion

When I first stepped back into the BZC zendo in September 2007 I felt tearful. It had been several years since I'd been well enough to enter. Everett greeted me warmly, although he had never seen me before. What a sweet sense of returning.

I had come to take Bob Rosenbaum's Qigong class on Thursday evenings. It has helped me re-enter sangha physically in a quiet way, with someone who really "gets" health chal-



lenges, in a setting which is scent-free. I had no idea when I gave sangha members information about air purifiers a few years ago that it would end up helping me attend a class at BZC. Endless bows to everyone for your compassionate remembering to come to the zendo scent-free. It literally makes it possible for me, and others like me, to breathe and be in sangha.

In July 2005 my health collapsed, after years of thinking my symptoms were just temporary and would abate on their own. Many doctors' visits later, with the help and support of too many beloved sangha to name here, I have more information. I was given diagnoses of tertiary Lyme disease, multiple chemical sensitivities, and heavy metal toxicity which together led to a life-changing case of CFIDS (chronic fatigue and immune dysfunction syndrome). This Canadian Jewish mixed-class gal, whose former drug of choice was dharma activism, was suddenly forced to become horizontal. This meant giving up my various dharma jobs, and stepping off the hundred foot pole.

I have framed this time as living in self-retreat. Like any retreat, it has its ups and downs. Unlike any retreat I've done before it has no end point, no bells, no easy access to interviews with teachers, and no set schedule. At one point I asked Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche (one of my teachers) how I should best structure this retreat (when I was really struggling with that aspect). He replied essentially: You need to figure that out for yourself, as part of your retreat. And

over time I have continued to do just that. I've noticed how the retreat has shifted and changed, in ways that could not have been predicted ahead of time. My health has changed, given the synergistic effects of the various treatments I'm doing, and so has this retreat, given the changing conditions of my life and healing.

Near the beginning I had to spend most of my time in bed. It was important to balance periods of sleep with listening to the birds outside the window, and other practices that connected me to the joys of being alive. The intense losses of what I had taken to be my self had happened so precipitously that it took "me" a while to catch up. Who was I without doing prison dharma work, or socially engaged teaching, or even walking around? The first couple of years were spent allowing those pieces to partially fall away and what was left to start rearranging. I'm still in that process, but less intensively as I dance with it more. It was also daunting to figure out day-to-day aspects of finances, meals, good quality healing practitioners, shopping, clinic rides, etc. I have become very practiced at asking for help.



What is more in awareness at this point is the primacy of not knowing. Because migraines still appear without warning, and this body's symptoms can change suddenly, I am not able to make plans with any certainty.

However I'm getting used to the platform of my life being less solid. I like it this way because it seems truer. I have less certainty about even things I need in order to be present, like creating fragrance-free spaces. As I delve more deeply, I realize that at an earlier stage of this journey I thought I knew what was right. I thought that my own need to be included mattered more than that of someone who was wearing perfume. Now I wonder whether that's true.

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Stepping Off the 100-Foot Pole

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Perhaps the woman wearing highly scented conditioner has always had frizzy hair, and was told she was ugly her whole childhood. After a decades-long search she finally found a product which works for her hair, and now she feels beautiful when she wears it. Or the woman who wears perfume that her beloved who died gave her. I'm not saying I want them to wear these products. In fact if they do wear them around me, I will likely end up with severe migraines for several days. Just that in doing this self-retreat I've noticed my heart opening more and more widely. I find that I know less and less.

Not knowing seems to be a place of freedom for me where all possibilities are available. I feel connected with all parts of myself and others. And then, at times, my strongly held opinions come rushing back, each crowding in for air time, and the only thing I can say is: how human! This "lockdown mind" (a prison term I'm borrowing for "I know" mind) keeps everything tightly buttoned up. It's when I'm sure I'm right. My religion used to be self righteousness, and I'm in recovery.

Several people in the BZC sangha have joined my Share the Care team, to bring meals, shop for groceries, give me rides to my clinic up north, and coordinate team efforts. Not only their work on my behalf, but also their contact and support is truly encouraging for my practice, my life, and my ongoing joy. To belong is so nourishing.

From all of "me" (including the parts that are sick, and the parts that are beyond being sick) to all of you - boundless gratitude. BZC is truly a place of peace to walk into. My whole heart settles each time I am strong enough to walk through the gate. Thank you.

If I had to summarize this self-retreat I'd use Izumi Shikibu's words from a thousand years ago: "Watching the moon at dawn, / Solitary, mid sky, / I knew myself completely, / No part left out."
Aaahhh.

The Head Gardener By Sojun Roshi

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roaring back like the head of Medusa.

It is just discriminating mind. Therefore, letting go of ourself and totally embracing our activity is totally accepting and embracing ourself which is one with our activity. In zazen many people worry about all the thoughts whirling around in their head, as if when all the thoughts are gone there will be sitting in pure bliss with no delusion. That's another delusion. The fact is, when we sit, we are just sitting in the midst of delusion. Settle on the self in the midst of delusion. When we realize what is delusion, that is enlightenment. Enlightenment recognizes delusion. If you say, "I am not crazy", that is a delusion. We are all a little bit nuts. If we realize this, we can enjoy our delusions because they have no grip on us. When the wheel of practice is turning, it loosens up our clinging and things drop away.

(to be continued)



Photo by Ross Blum

SAVE THE DATES

Zen Women's Retreat 2008: Female Zen Lineage Comes Alive, July 10-14,

Situated in the warm grasslands and oak woodlands of the western Sierra foothills, the Third Annual Zen Women's Retreat will be held July 10-14 at Empty Nest Zendo in North Fork, CA. Attendees will enjoy the synergy and friendship of skilled women teachers and other women practitioners, in the context of zazen, body-awareness exercises, mindful writing and Zen trainings. All this in an intimate setting that will make time for swimming, relaxation, stargazing, hiking and barbecues.

Those who attended last summer's retreat may recall the exhilaration that brewed when a collective of three Zen Dharma heirs and one Buddhist Studies scholar openheartedly shared the teaching seat. The distinguished women teachers brought forth a potent and rare collaboration, backed up by years of dedicated practice and study. Female Zen lineage pulsed to life in the assembly hall-with freely exchanging ideas, tussling over perspectives, and amplifying each others' points in a stunning mix of recognized authority and mutual appreciation.

Zen Women's Retreat 2008 will be a continuation of the last year's collaborative teachings by Floating Zendo founding teacher Angie Boissevain, Kobun Chino lineage Dharma heir and accomplished poet; pioneer Buddhist scholar and translator of female Chinese ancestors Professor Miriam Levering; Russian River Zendo founding teacher Kenpo Darlene Cohen, Suzuki Roshi Lineage Dharma heir and recognized

leader in body-friendly zazen; and Empty Nest founding teacher Myoan Grace Schireson,

Suzuki Roshi lineage Dharma heir, and female Zen ancestors researcher.

Accommodations provide for (air conditioned) rooms or bring your own tent depending on preference and availability.

Spouses are invited as required for childcare as space allows. Retreat

fees - \$45/day. Accommodations- \$35/night room, \$15/night tent space. For more information, or to register, contact flora@haas.berkeley.edu or call 510-643-2996.



BZC Campout

On the weekend of August 2nd and 3rd, we will have our annual BZC Campout for members, families, and friends. The campout will be in Tilden Park, a mere 20 minute drive from BZC, at a beautiful spot close to hiking trails. We'll start in the afternoon on Saturday, have a potluck dinner and then a campfire, wake up to birds singing and a breakfast is provided. It's all over at noon. Folks can come just for the evening or just for the morning as well. Details will follow closer to the time. For more information talk to Marie Hopper.



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