



Berkeley Zen Center



September 2009 Newsletter

CALENDAR CHANGE

The dates of the Study Sesshin have been changed to Sunday, September 6 (5 a.m.-9:20 p.m) and Monday, September 7 (5 a.m.-5 p.m.). The hope is that more people will be able to participate on these dates. Participation in the full schedule for both days is expected of all who register. In addition to our usual sesshin schedule, there will be extended dharma study periods led by Sojun Roshi. We will be studying the Hokyo Zamai ("Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi"), one of the root texts of our lineage. To register, sign up on the BZC bulletin board. If you have questions, contact the Sesshin Director, Tamar, at tlxnoch@earthlink.net.

NO SATURDAY PROGRAM 9/5

Due to Labor Day weekend, the formal Saturday program will be replaced by one period of informal zazen at 6 a.m. if someone is available to open the zendo. Look for a signup on the bulletin board. There will be zazen instruction at 8:45 a.m., but no period of zazen or lecture afterward.

Aspects of Practice 2009

This year's Aspects of Practice will run from opening sesshin on Saturday October 10 through a closing sitting on Sunday November 8. As always, this is an opportunity for new and old students to study and practice together the basics of zazen, forms, and dharma here at BZC. *(Ctd. on p. 2)*



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

September

Founder's Ceremony

Thursday, 9/3, 6:20 p.m., Friday, 9/4, 6:40 a.m.

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Sunday, 9/6, 8:30 p.m.

Two-day Study Sitting

Sunday-Monday, 9/6-7

Half-day Sitting

Sunday, 9/13, 8:00 a.m.-noon

Kidzendo

Saturday, 9/26

Women's Sitting

Sunday, 9/27

October

Bodhisattva Ceremony

Saturday, 10/3, 9:40 a.m.

Founder's Ceremony

Monday, 10/5, 6:20 p.m., Tuesday, 10/6, 6:40 a.m.

Aspects of Practice

Saturday, 10/10 – Sunday, 11/8

See article this page

Beginners' Sesshin

Sunday, 10/25

Kidzendo

Saturday, 10/24--Sejiki

Sejiki Ceremony and Celebration

Saturday, 10/31

Aspects of Practice *(Ctd. from p. 1)*

We will be doing something different this year. After consulting with Sojun Roshi and the senior students, I have invited my student Kano Kenshin Catherine Cascade to serve as *shuso* or head student for this period. As in our spring practice period, Catherine will give talks, have tea with students, and take part in a dharma inquiry — *shuso hossen* — at the end of Aspects.

This is the first time we have had a *shuso* during Aspects. But you may know that the *shuso* position, aside from recognizing and cultivating a student's maturity, is an essential part of a priest's formal training path. I felt, and Sojun and the seniors concurred, that given the circumstances of Catherine's life and practice, this is a good time for her to serve as *shuso*. I know she will do everything she can to support BZC practice, and I ask you to support her.

If you have questions about Aspects or about the practice of a *shuso*, please feel free to talk with me. Thanks.

- Hozan Alan Senauke

Sesshin to Open Aspects of Practice

There will be a one-day sesshin to open Aspects of Practice on Saturday, October 10. The retreat will run from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. All participants in Aspects of Practice are strongly encouraged to attend. Participation in the full schedule for the entire day is expected. If this will be your first sesshin at BZC, please plan to attend the full Saturday program (5:50 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.) at least once before the sesshin. Also, please attend an oryoki instruction class if you are not familiar with the form for eating in the zendo. Watch the bulletin board and newsletter for scheduling of oryoki classes, or you can receive instruction on Saturday morning if you attend the entire morning program.

For sesshin, plan to wear comfortable, loose dark clothes for sitting, and please bring additional clothes you can change into for work period projects such as gardening or painting. Please remember that we make a special effort to keep the zendo scent-free during sesshin as there are a number of sangha members who can become seriously ill if they are *(Ctd. on p. 4)*



Saturday 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; call 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 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 in the community room at about 9:45, then sojourn to the zendo for the first ten minutes of lecture starting at 10:15. Afterwards, families reconvene in the community room as usual. From time to time we offer additional activities at kidzendo.

Childcare Schedule

Sept 5	Sesshin – no program
Sept 12	Childcare
Sept 19	Childcare
Sept 26	Kidzendo – note date change
Oct. 3	Childcare
Oct. 10	Sesshin – no program
Oct. 17	Childcare
Oct. 24	Childcare
Oct. 31	Kidzendo - Sejiki
Nov. 7	Childcare
Nov. 14	Childcare
Nov. 21	Kidzendo
Nov. 28	Childcare
Dec. 5	Childcare
Dec. 12	Sesshin – no program
Dec. 19	Kidzendo
Dec. 26	Interim – no program





Breath

*From a talk by Sojun Roshi
May 19, 2001*

Part 2

In our daily lives we meet many conditions. All we have to do is read the newspaper to get our breathing up in our chest. When you read the newspaper, let your breath go down to your hara and harmonize body, mind, and breath, and even though the world looks like it's going to pot you can still have a calm mind; you still have your composure, you don't get lost.

Breathing is a kind of involuntary activity. It has an aspect of voluntary quality, but it is also involuntary because breath is just coming and going, regardless of our desire. We can control the breath. We can hold our breath for a little while, or we can control the rhythm, but in zazen and in our daily life, just allow the breath to do its own thing, and follow the breath. In zazen we start out by letting the mind follow the breath. This is difficult; once you focus on the breath it's hard not to feel that you are controlling it. But first we say "count the breath." That's good for getting a handle on following it; and then just let the mind follow the breath, let the breath be. But we are breathed by the universe. This is just the universal activity which is inflating and deflating the lungs. We usually think "I am breathing, I am breathing," but actually breathing is just happening to you...this wonderful mystery. So, to inhale is to come to life as we know it, and to exhale is to let go of life as we know it. As I have said many times, Suzuki Roshi talked about the breath at the exhale as letting go; long breath, letting go. We put more attention on the exhale than the inhale. When you inhale the body becomes excited, and when you exhale the body becomes calm.

These are the two aspects of our life: excitement and calmness. Someone said, "A movement and a rest, over and over again." And each breath is a moment of birth and death. This is how we can understand how our life continues, it's both continuous and discontinuous.

Last week when I was in Arcata with our dear dharma sister, Maylie Scott, who is dying...for one week—six days—she was kind of gone. Lying in bed on her back, not moving for all that time, with her eyes closed. But just breathing, just breathing. And we would go in and sit with her...and the only movement was her breath, which was quite audible. Sometimes calm, sometimes labored. She was breathing, but it was just the universal activity, the activity of the universe making this movement, doing this activity; it was so obvious. And we would do zazen with her and just watch to see if it would continue, and to see if it would stop, and it just kept going on like this, day after day, one breath at a time, living life just one breath at a time. I really feel sure that her great long experience of zazen was just continuing...that just sitting still and letting her breath happen. And then at that last moment, just stopping. And this wonderful feeling of release. Wonderful feeling of letting go. I wondered how people would feel at that moment. And yet it was like *wheew*, the last breath, *wheew*.

This is how I think about that time, and about breathing, and about appreciating our breath, not just taking it for granted—harmonizing our breath in order to allow ourself to have that release. In the sutra on the mindfulness of breathing there are sixteen methods of observing the breath, or practicing with the breath. And the last one is, practicing with the breath in order to understand impermanence; in order to realize impermanence, and to practice letting go of body and mind, so that the whole life is lived consciously and the whole death is lived consciously in the same manner. We tend to grab on to life and resist our death, which is normal and natural. But to live a complete life, to be able to pass out of this world in a conscious purposeful way, is possible.

Aspects of Practice Sesshin (*Ctd. from p. 2*)
exposed to scented products. Please check the labels of all body products and use only unscented products before coming to sesshin. Also note that scented laundry products, especially fabric softener, can be a problem. Please try to not to use these products on clothing you will be bringing to sesshin. If you use incense at home, please be careful to keep clothing items you wish to wear to sesshin as free from incense as possible. Store sesshin clothing away from areas in which you use incense, or air them out thoroughly ahead of time. If you have any questions, please contact the sesshin director, Tamar, at 510-644-1928 or at tlxnoch@earthlink.net.

Half-Day Sitting, Sunday, September 13

BZC offers eight half-day sittings each year, from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Each includes five periods of zazen, kinhin and an informal tea. A half-day sitting is a great opportunity to focus on "just zazen" and is appropriate for beginning as well as experienced sitters. Sojun Roshi asks participants to commit to the four-hour schedule and, in support of everyone's practice, to refrain from using scented products in the zendo. Contact half-day director Stan Dewey, standewey@comcast.net or 510-528-1989, with any questions.

Women's Sesshin: Sunday, September 27

Yvonne Rand will lead a day of inquiry into the ways that women's experiences and understandings of the dharma serve to expand the container of practice for both men and women as Buddhism takes root in the West. She has a longstanding interest in being able to see and separate the different strands of culture from the teachings of the Buddhas.

Yvonne will introduce practices which originate in mindfulness meditations, including a sequence of meditation while moving, meditation in stillness, a writing activity, lecture, and discussion. Participants should bring paper and a pencil or pen.

We will start at 8:30 and end at 5:00. Lunch will be provided, but will not be formal oryoki.

Payment for the day will be on a sliding scale. The midpoint of the scale is \$35, and if everybody chipped in that amount we'd be in good shape. The scale can slide down from there for those without much cash, and up from there for those with enough to share.

Yvonne Rand is a meditation teacher and householder priest in the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition. She began her practice and study of Zen with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi in 1966. Her other principal teachers and mentors have been Dainin Katagiri Roshi, Maureen Stuart Roshi, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Venerable Tara Tulku, and Shodo Harada Roshi. Yvonne is the founder and resident teacher at Goat-in-the-Road, a practice place

and garden in Mendocino County, where she lives with her husband Bill.

A sign-up sheet and registration forms will be posted on the patio bulletin board. Contact Catherine Cascade with any questions, catherinecascade@sbcglobal.net.

Mark Your Calendars for our Annual Potluck and Board Nomination Meeting!

All BZC members are invited to join in the All Sangha Potluck and Board Nominations on Tuesday, September 15. Potluck is at 6:30. We will hear nominations and have further discussion at 7:30. Although the Board prepares a slate of nominees, additional nominations from the floor are welcome. If you have someone in mind, please ask them before the meeting if they would like to run. The Board has been particularly active in the last couple of years regarding development, capital needs, and communication. Members with time and energy to offer are needed to continue these efforts. There will also be new nominations for President, Vice-President, and Treasurer presented this year. A signup for potluck dishes and clean up will be posted on the patio bulletin board soon. Don't let your ability to contribute to the potluck deter you, though; there is always enough food to go around. Please come and join in the conversation and planning for the next year at this annual meeting.

Save the Date! October 4 Planned Giving Seminar

On Sunday October 4 from 3 to 5 p.m. at Gerry Oliva's home there will be an opportunity for all interested sangha members to participate in a seminar on options for planned giving. The seminar speaker will be Tony Trutner, who led a similar BZC seminar two years ago, which was well attended and received excellent feedback. Tony is an attorney whose focus is on estate planning, probate, and trust work. He's a UC Berkeley graduate, and has been a trust officer with Wells Fargo Bank.

This session will provide updated tax information on alternative methods of planned giving. The informal setting will allow plenty of time for questions and a free-flowing discussion covering options others have explored and what concerns BZC participants may have. We hope that we will have some time for discussion and input on how the BZC Board should proceed in its financial planning process and what financial strategies would be most useful in meeting our future financial needs.

Refreshments will be provided. Further information and a signup sheet will be posted on the BZC porch bulletin board, or you can contact Gerry Oliva at 510-652-7217 or olivag@fcm.ucsf.edu.

Sangha News

Nine bows of gratitude to **Courtney Gonzalez** for her complete and thoughtful role as Head Server these past two years. She passes the serving tray off to **John Busch**.

And many thanks to **Richard Beeson** for airing those zabutons while nourishing us on many a Saturday afternoon and looking after the order and care of the zendo this past year. We welcome **Richard Urban** to the long line of worthy Head Jikidos.

Please welcome new doanryo trainers **Laurie Senauke**, **Jake VanAkkeren**, and **Andrea Thach**. They join, senior trainers **Sojun**, **Hozan**, and **Ross**.

LATE SUMMER WORK DAY

Cooperation, coordination and good humor were the order of the day as we tackled a number of projects around BZC. Zafu airers contended with dirt flying out of a hole under the community room porch near sunning zafus, bulletin board hangers navigated a porch stacked with kitchen overflow, and the four-person kitchen painting team maintained unswerving focus in a very small space. (Ctd. on p. 7)

BOOKS ABOUT SOJUN

If you weren't able to be at Sojun's 80th birthday party in July you may have missed two of the wonderful surprises available: copies of two books specially written to express our appreciation for Sojun Roshi, and to honor him.

BZC is the distributor of the books: *Umbrella Man*, edited by Max Erdstein and Michael Wenger, and *A Path Unfolding*, edited by Susan Moon. *Umbrella Man* is a compilation of recollections of Sojun by his dharma heirs, and *A Path Unfolding* presents Sojun talking about his own life.

Both books can be purchased at the book table on Saturday mornings for \$20 and \$10, respectively. If you live farther away, or are unable to get to BZC on Saturday mornings, you can write or e-mail us for copies. Write to Berkeley Zen Center, 1931 Russell St., Berkeley, CA 94703, or e-mail us at bzc@berkeleyzencenter.org. Please note that sales from both these books will benefit BZC.

Lake Merritt Haiku

*Sitting by the lake
Geese doing kinhin en masse
Perfect harmony.*

Peter Carpentieri

Attending to Forms

The familial forms of Zen create a space in which we can fully express ourselves. They are not rules as much as opportunities to practice mindfulness and respect for each other. At BZC we encourage older students to help new people with the basics of service, oriyoki, etc. If you see someone new who looks confused during service — not knowing how to put out their mat, or where to turn in the sutra book — please just help out. This is support, not correction.

Some of us have specific training responsibilities. This would include Sojun, Hozan, and several people in particular positions like sesshin director, zendo manager, and doan trainers. If you have concern about the forms, or about someone you see missing something, please let one of these people know. Corrections, when necessary, are best handled privately when time and opportunity allow, or by comment to the whole group. Any one of us can stray, but fortunately, Zen has no word for sin.

BZC Dues

As the summer winds down we know these are challenging financial times for many of us. BZC is experiencing some of the same challenges. Despite the fact that we have increased the basic dues rate to \$40/month, the first increase in more than ten years, we are running well behind the projected 2009 dues target of \$60,000. Dues represent nearly 40% of the total \$164,000 BZC budget for this year. (The rest of our income comes mainly from rent, sesshin, classes, San Francisco Zen Center, and donations.)

We would like to remind and encourage you to look at what you intend to contribute as BZC dues for 2009 and try to stay current. Some of you have had changes in employment and some are unable to pay dues at the level of \$40 a month. Everyone's circumstance is different and no one of you is ever excluded from membership here due to financial limitations. If you have questions about whether your dues are current, or if there has been some change in your financial situation, please feel free to talk with treasurer John Rubin, office manager John Moge, or with either one of us.

We deeply appreciate your ongoing support. But over the course of this year, with two teachers and significant work projects on the BZC buildings, we have so far had to withdraw \$12,000 from our Leadership Fund. So we are simply asking you our members to pay the monthly dues you have pledged. The existence of Berkeley Zen Center depends on your contributions.

Thanks for your practice and generosity.

Sojun Mel Weitsman

Hozan Alan Senauke

LAY ORDINATION AND SEWING BUDDHA'S ROBE

For a number of years Jean Selkirk has held the position of sewing teacher at BZC. She helps prepare practitioners who wish to receive the precepts in the ceremony of Lay Ordination — *Zaike Tokudo* (home dwellers entering the Way) by guiding them in the sewing of their *rakusu* (a small version of the priest's robe) worn around the neck. During her sewing classes the ordinees also receive guidance from our practice leaders in understanding the meaning of taking the precepts in the ceremony. She also assists the priests and abbot in preparing and maintaining their robes, here and in other sanghas, and supports and trains sewing teachers. Class Coordinator Ron Nestor asks Jean about how the Lay Ordination path works at BZC in the following interview.

Ron: Jean, can you briefly explain what Lay Ordination is in the Soto Zen tradition at BZC?

Jean: I would characterize taking this step of formally receiving the precepts as one means of deepening both our practice and the relationship with our teacher whether begun a long time ago or recently. The phrase that always comes to my mind about receiving the precepts — *Jukai* — is this: "affirming an aspiration." We do this publicly before our sangha, friends, and family, personally committing to create a place for the precepts in our life and vowing to do one's best to work with them while continuing to practice. That's going to go on forever.

Yet there's a process. We first ask our teacher for permission to receive the precepts. Though we often talk about "asking to sew" as synonymous with receiving the precepts they are not the same. Also, our teachers are associated with this practice place so we're deciding to formalize our relationship not just with our teacher but with their practice place.

Then comes the preparation for Lay Ordination. Customs can evolve over time and vary by practice place. The BZC sewing class now includes an introduction to the precepts through talking about them and their role in our lives with our practice leaders. In our Soto Zen lineage we sew by hand a *rakusu*, Buddha's robe, which we will then receive from our teacher.

Ron: If we have the desire to take should we do and when?

Jean: After receiving permission, sewing teacher as soon as possible, time and space to prepare for Lay and finish together during a three-mid-January until Practice Period weekend for four hours to sew, forms and chants for the ceremony, they consider this like an extended practice period that you plan to do you can).

Ron: What if someone isn't free every weekend?

Jean: Besides the weekend classes we also have an optional two hour week night class every other week.

Ron: This is a fairly intricate sewing project, so how about people who don't know how to sew?

Jean: Sometimes they're better off!! Students need to bring their beginner's mind to class. We just focus on one step at a time so that hopefully, this is not overwhelming. The key is focusing on the stitching while keeping in mind work practice basics which include close attention to how to put one's whole body and mind into the effort and following directions.

Ron: Besides the sewing you also have discussion teas with senior students. How does that work?

Jean: During our scheduled classes we have six teas. Our practice leaders come in as our guests, give a short talk about specific precepts and lead the ordinees in a discussion. What really starts to happen as we share in the teas and sew together weekly is that the class becomes like a short term Dharma group where there's a sense of getting to know each other and supporting each other. We also schedule two chanting sessions with senior *kokyos* to help prepare for the rehearsal and ceremony.

Ron: You are meticulous and put a lot of sustained attention and effort into this program. What do you most enjoy about it?

Jean: The Japanese word for the center of the *rakusu* is *kagami*, it means mirror. What happens in the process of sewing is that people have a chance to really see themselves. Just by facilitating the sewing without trying to make something happen, something does occur quite naturally. This is truly a wonderful thing. Practicing zazen outside of the zendo, we chant silently while sewing in an atmosphere of quiet even though a good deal of activity is taking place as others are receiving instruction. We enter into that space each time as if we are at sesshin work period and something very interesting starts to arise. I enjoy being there to support that and feel privileged to help in this way.

Ron: My last question: Is it true you used to drive a semi truck cross-country?

(Ctd. on p. 7)



the precepts and sew a *rakusu* what

then the student needs to contact the Next, the student needs to arrange for Ordination. Here at BZC we all start to-four month period from early to starts in early May. We meet each discuss the precepts, and learn the I usually suggest to the students that practice period. Sojun suggests about everything (and then do everything

Jean: Yes (*laughs*). This was as part of a team with a partner.

Ron: That's a long way from sewing a *rakusu*.

Jean: I think what's similar about them is that when you're used to long trips you understand how to settle into a process. In many ways I feel the time I spent driving was "white line" meditation. The scenery would change but there were hours and hours of quiet and nothing to distract me from what was going on inside of me. Tired, sleepy, exhausted, sick, no matter what the weather, you have to keep going. This was very beneficial and transformative, and the experience has stood me in good stead over the years. When you sew an *okesa* (priest's robe) this takes ten times as long as a *rakusu* so you really have to settle in and keep going.

Ron: Well let's just start with sewing our *rakusu*. Thank you very much.

Sangha Support Network

A Wake-up Call

By Lisa Nelbach

On a Saturday afternoon a few months ago I began to feel strange abdominal pains. I thought I'd better just go to bed and sleep this off. However, within half an hour, I was in such pain that I couldn't think clearly. I couldn't find the right phone number at Kaiser to ask if I should come in. There were no family members I could call on. In the end, a neighbor called an ambulance and came to the emergency room with me. I left home not knowing if I would return. I didn't have a spare house key and had no way to get my dog taken care of if I should be admitted to the hospital or go into surgery. In the end, the pain resolved after five hours and my neighbor drove me home. "Suspected gallstone," but no definite explanation. What was most humbling about the experience was how rapidly I became unable to help myself, and how much I needed support on short notice. The illusion of being self-sufficient and able to manage most anything was shattered. I was tremendously lucky that my neighbors were home, able to make good decisions, and willing and able to stay with me.

I read in the May BZC newsletter about the new Sangha Support Network. In light of my recent experience I could see how beneficial such a service would be to our sangha where those in need could be put in touch with fellow sangha members who have offered to be of assistance in any way they can. Then, ironically, that very week a sudden event showed me the need in an immediate and personal way. I'm grateful for this teaching. As I am approaching retirement, facing an empty nest, and have more time than I used to, I hope to be able to give back based on what this experience has taught me.

The Sangha Support Network has created a Volunteer Signup Survey form for those interested in joining this network. It will be located in a manila folder on the community room porch bulletin board. Leave filled out forms in Alexandra Frappier's mail box on the porch and call her with any questions at 415.613.9210.

SUMMER WORK DAY (*Ctd. from p. 5*)

Meanwhile, the exterior house painters on the western face of 1929 Russell Street climbed high and low, sanding, spackling, and priming. Luckily, this buzz of activity generated good appetites for the delicious outdoor lunch and the camaraderie present throughout the day. Thanks to everyone whose efforts, seen and unseen, made this day a success.

HORSE BREATH

(*Mountains & Rivers Sesshin, July 2009*)

Finally!!!! an entry into the M/R Sutra!
walk the mountains, sit with the surf, sleep with the dew
(I've been reading the thing for years, even took a class)

The irrefutable logic of Zen: if you want to get it, go there.
BE there, be in them, BE them!
I am mountain, I am water . . .

If you want to understand your own walking, walk!
Primordial steps, hips hurt, back hurts, everything hurts.
Yes this composite being now moves from one side of the
mountain to the other.

But what, after all, is really happening? Nothing. I get it. Nothing.
. . .
But wait! horses are coming up the hill.
I move off the trail, wait for them to pass.
The horse passes and the horse breathes.

BREATH. I hear the breath!
Pure, free of attitude, intention, nuance
Just breath! Just breathing.

The beast of burden, completely roped, completely broke,
completely
ridden, shod
Breathes freedom
Completely breathes breathing

I step back on the trail
Breathing horse

Rocky Burgess

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