

# sangha

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA CRUZ AND MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTERS

JANUARY 2013

## KARMA, FREE-WILL, AND DETERMINISM

*Karma* is a term that arose in India before the Buddha lived. It literally means “action” or “activity,” particularly “intentional activity.” The Buddha said that karma is defined as intention, volition, or will. Karma can take three forms: body, speech and mind. We do intentional activities with body and speech, which are based on intentions of mind. There are also actions of body, speech, and mind that are not karmic because they are not intentional: When you go to the doctor and he hits your knee with a little hammer to test your reflexes, your leg goes up. That’s a bodily action that’s not intentional; you don’t have to decide to do that. Also our heart beating and our breath moving in and out are not karmic activity.

Karma also gets classified in terms of wholesome or unwholesome. Wholesome or harmless actions of body, speech, and mind lead to more pleasant results, and unwholesome or harmful actions lead to unpleasant results. Greed, hate and delusion produce certain kinds of karma, and non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion produce different kinds of karma, and therefore different kinds of karmic effects. Karma is a cause and every karmic action has an effect. It is quite astounding and sobering to contemplate how every intentional thought that arises has an effect on this world. Therefore an important part of practice is to examine that process, to pay attention to our intentions and what we are doing, and notice the effects of what we are doing; this seems pretty simple on the surface, but hard to do a lot of the time, hard to remember to do. We like to just do karmic activity and not pay much attention to the effects. It’s an important and challenging practice to watch more and more carefully the effects of all of our thoughts, speech, and physical actions. Often we can’t see all of the effects, but we can watch the process. We could even say that one aspect of zazen is attending to karma, being present with our intentions.

Another aspect of karma is that it is the intention of a sentient being who perceives him or herself as an individual independent self, as a particular “me.” The sense that there is somebody doing the action, an “intender,” is part of what is meant by karma. There is the sense of a “self” that is doing something. One could be just sitting zazen without that sense of self doing something; breathing is happening and even mental activity is happening, like noticing the sound of a bird without the sense that “I am noticing the sound of a bird.” However if we think, even very subtly, “I’m going to pay attention

to this sound,” now that’s karmic activity. Karma involves the sense or thought that “I” am in control or doing something.

Buddha’s teaching is that the “actor” or “intender” is really just an illusion. We can see that actions are happening, and we have the strong sense that somebody is doing them, but Buddha teaches that if we really look for that someone, we’ll just find different mental factors, different aspects of mind that are constantly arising and ceasing.

But we won’t find any “doer.” One of the things we might find, if we are looking for a doer, is the mental factor called “intention.” It’s a factor that is present with every experience, but not it’s not “me” or “my” intention. Of all mental factors, intention is one that we most commonly mistake for “me,” since we like to think that “I” am in control of my decisions and life. So intention is just an arising and ceasing conditioned phenomena, it’s not an independent controlling “self.” This is one of the most profound teachings of Buddha-Dharma. I think that “I” decide to do things when actually it is an intention that is deciding to do things, and the intention is just a conditioned mental factor, conditioned by past intentions that were dependent on other conditions and other mental factors; it’s all just conditioning all the way back.

This naturally brings up the question of *free will*. As someone who hasn’t studied a lot of Western philosophy, I just looked up free will in the dictionary. Free will is “the freedom of humans to

make choices that are not determined by prior causes or by divine intervention.” We don’t talk much about divine intervention in Buddhism, but we definitely talk about prior causes. So, if we go with that definition, it doesn’t look like there is free will in the view of Buddha-Dharma because everything that happens, including “choice” is determined by conditions. Volition is a mental factor that arises dependent upon conditions, which is precisely what makes it not an independent self. If there were an independent self, then it could have free will, and in fact that’s what we feel to be true as humans. We believe that “I” as a free agent can, within the limits of conditions imposed by the world, decide what to do now. Don’t we think so? Free will may sound like a really great thing to have, but it seems to me that it would be kind of a burden to have free will. A question you can contemplate is: If it feels like “you” have to decide anything, do you feel a little bit of unease with that “freedom” of so-called free will? If you open to the possibility that the boundless totality of conditions is determining your every move, that your “self” is receiving its function from myriad conditions, do you feel some ease with that sense of “being controlled”?

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# SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTER

(continued from page one)

The opposite of free will is *determinism*. Here's the dictionary definition: determinism is "a theory that acts of the will, occurrences in nature, or social and psychological phenomena are causally determined by preceding events." This sounds to me a lot like Buddha's teaching of dependent arising. We could add that we are not talking about "strict" determinism; this would mean that every time I yell at a person, it means they are not going to talk to me tomorrow, no matter what – one karmic cause would always lead to the same karmic effect. Buddha-Dharma is not like that actually. In the view of dependent arising, it means there are many other conditions involved as well; like that person is in a really good mood today so, even though I yelled at them yesterday, they're happy to talk with me today. I think that often we don't look at this issue so deeply. Without looking deeply, it seems like in the middle of the dependently arising universe there's this one free unconditioned agent that has the choice to do what it wants; there are many conditions arising, but "I" as the "decider" am the one exception. If we want to posit free will, we have to ask whose free will it would be.

So the very fact that we practice or don't practice, do wholesome activities or harmful ones, is completely conditioned. And this is one of the most awesome, maybe frightening or depressing, possibly joyfully liberating, insights we can have – depending upon our conditioning. We can say, "I can decide to make more effort." But not really! And yet we may find this body and mind making more effort... and that is the wonderful thing about Buddha-Dharma, that it feeds on itself through conditionality, so that once we get into it, it starts to condition us in a new positive kind of way, without any actual "self" needed to do the work. The only thing really needed is paying close attention to how the process actually works – and of course the intention to pay attention will arise or not according to conditions; and hearing such a teaching is one of the conditions!

However we are left with the problem that if all decisions are simply determined by conditions, then who's responsible? Responsibility is moral accountability, which is a basic human convention. Since we live in a world where people do believe in free will, then we agree to go along with this conventional appearance; if other people believe I am a "self" with actual free will and that I am responsible for my actions, then as a bodhisattva I would vow to go along with them. A bodhisattva is one who is willing to play the game of appearing as a sentient being who is in control of herself and living in accord with other sentient beings, completely willing to receive the effects of karma, even though ultimately the set of conditions we called "me" that did the action is not the same set of conditions called "me" that receives the result. The freedom of the bodhisattva is that by seeing the illusory nature of free will, they are willing to receive whatever effects come. Also, since they are no longer so concerned about their limited "self", they don't take advantage of others; they don't say, "Since I'm not in control, I'll hit you." They don't cause harm, since intentionally harming others always comes from thinking there is a self that is in control and must meet its needs even at the expense of others. In Zen it is not said that a person of great practice no longer falls into cause and effect; it's that they no longer are blind to cause and effect, they are always aware of conditionality, which makes them quite harmless and quite beneficial to others.

- edited from a talk by Kokyo Henkel

## YEAR OF MIRROR AWARENESS

The year 2013 will be a time to study and cultivate our natural mirror awareness. Classic Zen teachings on this topic will be brought up, including Dogen's "Point of Zazen" in which he comments on the story of "polishing a tile to make a mirror," Dongshan's "Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi," Baizhang's present mirror awareness, and Dogen's "Ancient Mirror."

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## SESSHINS AND STUDY WEEKS IN 2013

(to put on your calendar now; see website for more events)

February 14-18 (5 day) Buddha's Parinirvana Genzo-e Sesshin

April 3-7 (5 day) Buddha's Birthday Sesshin

May 24-26 (3 day) Genzo-e Sesshin at Jikoji Zen Center

May 26-30 (4 day) Genzo-e Study Week at Tassajara (reservations through sfzc.org open in February)

June 20-24 (5 day) Summer Solstice Sesshin

August 16-18 (3 day)

October 3-7 (5 day) Bodhidharma Memorial Denko-e Sesshin

December 5-11 (7 day) Buddha's Awakening Day Sesshin

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## NEW YEAR'S DAY CHANTING OF THE DIAMOND SUTRA

Tuesday, January 1, 10am, 12:30pm, 3pm.

Open the New Year with a recitation of this great jewel of our lineage, "The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion." We will recite it three times: once at 10am, a second time at 12:30pm, and a third time at 3pm. Each recitation will begin with a simple opening ceremony and end with a dedication of merit. Bring a bag lunch if you will stay through the day; tea will be provided. Please sign-up at the zendo so we can provide enough sutra copies.

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## SHODO CALLIGRAPHY CLASS WITH YOSHI SHIBATA

4 Sunday afternoons: January 6, 13, 20, 27, 2:30-5pm.

Learn the fundamentals of Shodo Japanese Calligraphy using traditional ink and brush. Shodo teaches us how to be present and express our inner strength in art and in life. In this workshop we will start with the meditation of making ink, then continue on to learn basic strokes using a calligraphy brush. No experience necessary.

Yoshi has been practicing shodo since he was 5 years old and has won a number of national calligraphy competitions. Fee: \$100/120 for series, plus materials (see website for materials to bring).

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## ONE-DAY SITTINGS

Saturdays, January 12 & March 12, 8:30am-5pm.

January led by Patrick, March led by Kokyo. Please bring a bag lunch.

Suggested donation: \$12/day for sustaining members and \$15 for all others.

# SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTER

## INTRODUCTION TO ZEN

Saturday, January 26, February 23, March 23, 10am-noon.

A monthly introduction to the body and mind of Zen meditation and the forms of practice at SCZC. The morning includes sitting and walking meditation, followed by discussion. Everyone is welcome, free of charge.

## PARINIRVANA GENZO-E SESSHIN ON DOGEN ZENJI'S "POINT OF ZAZEN"

February 14-18 (5 days), 5am-9pm (ends 5:30pm Monday).

Genzo-e is a concentrated study retreat on a chapter of Dogen Zenji's Shobogenzo. In this retreat we will examine "The Point (or Acupuncture Needle) of Zazen" (Zazenshin), Dogen's most extensive presentation of his understanding of sitting meditation. Each day will include morning and afternoon teachings and discussion with Kokyo, as well as eight periods of zazen and formal oryoki meals. Sesshin ends with a ceremony to commemorate Buddha's Parinirvana at 5pm. Suggested donation: \$35/day for sustaining members and \$40 for all others.

## SONG OF THE JEWEL MIRROR SAMADHI

6 Sunday evenings: February 24-March 31, 6:35-8pm.

Kokyo will offer a class series on the ninth-century Chinese Zen poem "Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi" by Dongshan Liangjie. Chanted regularly at Soto temples in Japan and America, including SCZC, this poem about the mind of zazen is filled with rich imagery and references, much of which is difficult to fathom without commentary. Suggested donation: \$10/class for sustaining members, \$13 for all others. (There will also be a tea and discussion group, 5-6:15pm).

## SANGHA DAY

Saturdays, January 19 and March 16 (9:15am-4pm).

Sangha Day is a time to come together and help take care of the temple and grounds: cleaning the zendo, making candles, gardening, etc. Please bring something for a potluck lunch.

## ORDINARY RECOVERY GROUP

Friday evenings, 6:45pm-7:45pm, in the zendo

A weekly meeting discussing Buddhist practice with addictions, emotions, and relationships. A short meditation, a Dharma reading, compassionate discussion and support.

## TUESDAY MORNING BREAKFAST AND STUDY GROUP

Informal breakfast with conversation in the community room at 7am most Tuesdays, followed by Dharma study group 7:45-8:45am. Currently we are reading Uchiyama Roshi's commentary on Dogen's Genjo Koan. All are welcome to either or both events, free of charge.

## WINTER PRACTICE PERIOD

February 13-April 10.

Practice period is a focused period of time, eight weeks this winter, for a deeper commitment to zazen, individual and group meetings to explore Zen practice, and Dharma study. This winter practice period will include a class series, a 5-day Genzo-e Sesshin study retreat, a one-day sitting, and end with a 5-day Sesshin to celebrate Buddha's Birthday. Participants are encouraged to attend at least three zazen periods a week at Zen Center, the 6-week class series, five Wednesday evening Dharma talks, and five days of sesshin.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

As 2012 comes to a close, I have deep gratitude for the time, effort, and energy of the Board, leaders, and community members in warming this temple. The November All-Sangha meeting was well attended and we learned what inspired, challenged and surprised us. Input from the sangha about what is wanted in 2013: having movie nights (not just Zen movies), potlucks, exploring how SCZC can provide hospice services, and more. Looking to 2013, the Board and leaders are planning a retreat in February to clarify the future vision of Zen Center. Thank you for expressing what matters most. Please stay tuned as the Board and leaders incorporate your input into planning for 2013. With deep appreciation,

Edie Brown, President

## GLOBAL SANGHA RECEIVES AWARD

Our weekly lunch preparation for the Homeless Garden Project (HGP) was awarded one of the thirteen "Be the Difference" Awards for Groups by the Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz at a luncheon ceremony on October 23. We were nominated by the Homeless Garden Project staff and chosen by a panel of judges from the Volunteer Center. All awardees were invited up on the stage and given commemorative certificates from the Volunteer Center as well as the offices of State Government officials Joe Simitian and Bill Monning.

The Global Sangha lunch program was recognized for providing "healthy organic lunches for the Homeless Garden Project's staff, crew and homeless volunteers every Friday for the past five years." Many sangha members over the years have contributed to the lunch program. Participants have included cooks, food donors, and financial supporters. This has been a nurturing practice for all of us. This project continues and anyone interested in participating may contact Patrick Teverbaugh.



Head Student Neti Parekh in Dharma Inquiry Ceremony

**DAILY SCHEDULE**



**Monday-Friday:**

5:45am Zazen  
 6:25am Service (chanting)  
 12:00pm Zazen  
 5:45pm Zazen  
 6:25pm Service

**Wednesday Evening:**

6:35pm Lecture/discussion  
 7:30pm Informal tea

**Saturday Morning:**

8:30am Zazen  
 9:10am Service

**Sunday Evening:**

5:45pm Zazen  
 6:25pm Service

**LIBRARY OPEN**

During tea after Wed. Lecture

**ORDINARY RECOVERY**

Friday evenings at 6:45 pm

Diamond Sutra  
 Calligraphy Class  
 One-day Sitting  
 Sangha Day  
 Kobun Roshi Memorial  
 Precepts Renewal  
 Introduction to Zen  
 Open Practice Period  
 Genzo-e Sesshin  
 Buddha's Parinirvana  
 Introduction to Zen  
 Jewel Mirror class  
 Sobun Roshi Memorial  
 Precepts Renewal  
 Mahapajapati Memorial  
 One-day Sitting  
 Sangha Day  
 Introduction to Zen  
 Kobun Roshi Memorial  
 Precepts Renewal

Sun. Jan 1 10,12:30,3pm  
 Sun. Jan 6,13,20,27 2:30-5pm  
 Sat. Jan 12 8:30am-5pm  
 Sat. Jan 19 9:15am-4pm  
 Fri. Jan 25 6:25-7am  
 Fri. Jan 25 5:45-6:30pm  
 Sat. Jan 26 10-noon  
 Wed. Feb 13 6:35-7:30pm  
 Feb 14-18 5am-9pm  
 Mon. Feb 18 5-5:30pm  
 Sat. Feb 23 10-noon  
 starts Sun. Feb 24 6:35-8pm  
 Mon. Feb 25 6:25-7am  
 Mon. Feb 25 5:45-6:30pm  
 Fri. Mar 8 6:25-7am  
 Sat. Mar 9 8:30am-5pm  
 Sat. Mar 16 9:15am-4pm  
 Sat. Mar 23 10-noon  
 Tues. Mar 26 6:25-7am  
 Thur. Mar 28 5:45-6:30pm

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MBZC AND SCZC ARE ON FACEBOOK: you can "like" the two Zen Centers Facebook pages for current information on what's happening there, photos of events, and more.

