

# sangha

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA CRUZ AND MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTERS

APRIL 2013

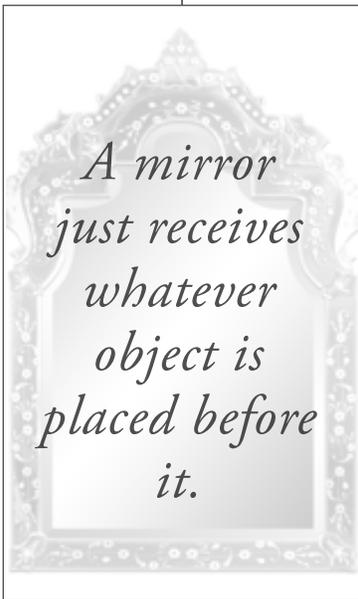
## MIRROR AWARENESS, THE TRUE HOST

The true nature of mind is mirror-like awareness, always just reflecting what's happening, whether we notice this or not. It never shuts off or stops functioning, even when we're completely engrossed in conceptual thinking or strong emotions. A mirror just receives whatever object is placed before it, neutrally and naturally. It has no opinions about the object. The mirror doesn't prefer red over blue, it doesn't discriminate among these things, and yet it doesn't block them out, reject them, or alter them in any way. It is just open receptivity, without adding any commentary. The reflections on the mirror don't stick to the mirror, and the mirror doesn't have any lag time – when something is put in front of it and then taken away, the image doesn't stay there for a minute and then slowly leave. The mirror just immediately and spontaneously responds, effortlessly reflecting the next image without hesitation. It doesn't try to manipulate the situation, thinking, "Can we have just a little bit longer with that blue color?" When we look at a clear mirror directly, all we see are the reflections on its surface, which appear quite real. If there's a smudge or dust on the mirror, then maybe we can see a bit of the surface where the reflection lies, but a clear mirror can't itself be seen. If our eyes try to behold it, all they behold is the image on its surface, just a reflection, an illusory appearance.

All these qualities of the mirror are also qualities of the nature of mind, the naturally present open awareness of Buddha-Nature. This mirror awareness doesn't just reflect visual objects – when sounds come, it reflects those sounds. Smells, tastes, physical sensations, thoughts, emotions, and all kinds of mental activity are also reflected clearly on the surface of the mirror, without sticking to the mirror. Thoughts and emotions, which are reflected in mirror awareness, much more than sensory objects, really pull our attention away from noticing the mirror. We get so caught up in the reflections, the experience happening on the surface, that we forget the background awareness. One of the most wonderful qualities of mirror awareness, that a glass mirror doesn't have, is compassion. Buddha-Nature is naturally and effortlessly compassionate, openly receiving suffering without turning away in aversion.

When we're practicing zazen, whatever our specific practice might be – whether it's following the breath, mindfulness of the body or feelings, attention to thoughts arising, no thoughts arising – mirror awareness is always present, simply reflecting what's happening, including the object of meditation, such as the breath, and also the

sense of ourselves as the meditator. A spacious, background awareness just observes, just receives what's happening. During zazen we can open to this receptive mirror awareness. If we try to look directly at it, try to grasp the mirror, we won't be able to; we will only get to see our ideas of it reflected in it. Therefore the practice is, rather than trying to see the mirror, simply to be the mirror. If we try to be the mirror and also try to figure out what the mirror is, then such figuring is simply reflections on the mirror. It seems quite challenging to just reflect like a mirror, since we are so accustomed to discriminating, preferring, assessing, and getting caught up in the objects placed before us. Though it is challenging, it is also very simple, almost too simple for us to accept.



*A mirror  
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object is  
placed before  
it.*

One of the wonderful things about this mirror is that it isn't just functioning during zazen while we are on our cushion. We take the mirror wherever we go, we can't leave home without it. It's always available, even in the busiest, most chaotic situations. We always have the opportunity to step back, turn around and recognize the mirror in the background. Sometimes when we are really anxious, that moment might be what reminds us to look. And when we look, it's not that we're seeing the mirror exactly, because it's not something that can be seen, but we can appreciate and embody that compassionate, spacious awareness that's holding our little anxious experience.

I remembered this today as I was rushing back from town on my bike to give this talk. I was experiencing some stress because I was late, and the thought arose to look for the mirror, and there it was – just reflecting the panting breath, the fast heartbeat, the concern about being late. And in that moment the question arose: Is this practice about being happy and relaxed, or is it about being free? Although I didn't feel totally happy and relaxed right then, there was some spacious freedom in the midst of the rushing anxiety, freedom from the constriction of fixation on little "me." I was still moving fast, but the experience was being held quite differently in the mirror awareness. It's so easy to focus on "good feelings" and think that our practice is all about creating more of them.

Here's another way of talking about this mirror – usually my activity is being "hosted" by me, as if my life is a talk show, and the host of the show is this sense of reified independent self, "me." The self is the commentator on the talk show called "My Experience." Sometimes very disturbing guests are invited onto the show, such as anxiety or anger. The host might start teasing them and trying to get them under control – this annoys the guests, and sometimes they even

# SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTER

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get up and start shouting or throwing things around the stage. The host easily gets exhausted from trying to keep all the wild guests in line. Sometimes the guest is quite well behaved, like someone giving a Dharma talk, but right in the middle of the Dharma talk the host might start commenting, "Your Dharma talk is really kind of boring; don't you think people will fall asleep soon?" The host has a hard time just being quiet, without adding lots of commentary, much of which is quite rude.

So, instead of having our small self "host" our day, we can let the mirror be the host. The mirror actually already IS the host, but we don't give it much credit. I like to take over my talk show, and when I do, the mirror is so gracious. It just says, "You can do that if you'd like." The mirror doesn't have any power trips. It says, "It's okay if you want to run the show, go right ahead. I'll just watch, from back here." During zazen, or in a moment of stress, at any time at all, we can stop and say, "Would you like to take over for a while, mirror awareness? You can host the rest of this period of zazen. Since I know you're already doing it anyway, I might as well let you. After all, it's really your show." Then the true host, mirror awareness, can invite any guests who would like to come on the show; it doesn't discriminate at all among them. Even if they are really obnoxious it treats them all equally. And it doesn't add any commentary, it just compassionately listens to all their long strange stories.

The host, mirror awareness, doesn't even mind "me" staying on stage and interacting with the guests, while I pretend to be in charge of the show. Today's guest may be the breath, and I can just be sitting with her, paying attention to her, but I still might feel like it's a bit of a chore to sit here and keep paying attention. At such a time, the mirror can be invited to host, and then I can still sit with the breath, but it's no longer a chore since I don't have the burden of feeling like the host. Sometimes I like a really lively show, so I can get into it with the guests and we can even throw things at each other and call each other names, but if I can remember that I'm not really the host, then I don't take all the rabble-rousing on my show quite as seriously. And if I'd like to take a break from all the commotion, I can just quietly sit down with the guests and let the mirror take over. Then nothing of much interest happens on the show, but it's quite relaxing, refreshing, and enjoyable!

-- edited from a talk by Kokyo Henkel

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## 5-DAY BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY SESSHIN

April 3-7, 5am-9pm (ends 4pm Sunday).

Each day will include morning teachings with Kokyo and formal oryoki meals. Sesshin ends with a ceremony to celebrate Buddha's Birthday at 4pm, to which all are welcome. Suggested donation: \$35/day for sustaining members and \$40 for all others.

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## DINNER & EVENING OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Saturday, April 13, 5pm.

Everyone is invited to an outdoors potluck dinner and an evening of skits, music, and poetry. Please sign up at the zendo, where you can also request the assistance of other actors, backup singers, etc.

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## SHODO CALLIGRAPHY CLASS WITH YOSHI SHIBATA

3 Sunday afternoons: April 14, 21, 28, 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 Shibata has been practicing Shodo since he was 5 years old, beginning at a temple in Japan where he studied calligraphy along with other traditional Japanese arts. He has won a number of national calligraphy competitions.

Fee: \$75/90 for series, plus materials (see website for materials to bring)

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## BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS CLASS

4 Sunday evenings: April 21,28, May 12,19, 6:35-8pm.

Patrick Teverbaugh will offer a class series on the precepts. The precepts are Buddha's ethical guidelines and were a pivotal part of the teaching in his lifetime. They still occupy a central place in our practice 2500 years later. Practicing with the precepts is thoroughly exploring the Self and its relationship with the world. Katherine Thanas said that the precepts point to one thing — "Be Buddha." Let's take

on this practice together. The class will use hand-outs, group discussion, and our own experience to bring energy to our practice of the precepts. This is a good class for people just starting practice or thinking about jukai (ceremony of receiving the precepts). Seasoned practitioners are invited to deepen their work with the precepts.



Suggested donation: \$10/

class for sustaining members, \$13 for all others. (There will also be a tea and discussion group during zazen time before class, 5:30pm-6:30pm).

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## ONE-DAY SITTING

Saturday, May 11, 8:30am-5pm.

Kokyo will give a talk in the morning. Please bring a bag lunch. Suggested donation: \$12/day for sustaining members and \$15 for all others.

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## 3-DAY GENZO-E SESSHIN ON "MIND CANNOT BE GRASPED"

May 23 (6pm) - May 26 (noon).

This sesshin will take place at Jikoji Zen Center, with the Jikoji Sangha. Each day will include zazen, oryoki meals, morning

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and afternoon teachings and discussion with Kokyo Henkel and Michael Newhall on Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo Shin Fukatoku*, "Mind Cannot Be Grasped." \$40/day, which includes overnight lodging. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. Call Jikoji to register: (408) 741-9562

## TASSAJARA GENZO-E STUDY WEEK

Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, Sun, May 26-Thurs, May 30

With Kokyo Henkel. Mornings include *zazen*, chanting, and work with the monastic community, and in afternoon classes and discussion we will investigate Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo Shoji*, "Birth and Death" and the nonduality of *samsara* (the painful cycle of getting stuck again and again in habitual patterns) and *nirvana* (the joyful freedom from habitual patterns and suffering). \$68/day for shared guest accommodations, plus a \$6/day teaching donation. Private rooms are available for two. To register, call Tassajara reservations at 877-833-5963 (toll free) or 415-865-1899 or email [tassreservations@sfzc.org](mailto:tassreservations@sfzc.org)

## 5-DAY SUMMER SOLSTICE SESSHIN

June 20-24, 5am-9pm (ends 4pm Monday).

Each day will include morning teachings with Kokyo and formal *oryoki* meals. Suggested donation: \$35/day for sustaining members and \$40 for all others.

## INTRODUCTION TO ZEN

Saturday, April 27, May 25, June 29, 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.

## SANGHA DAY

Saturdays, May 18 & June 1 (starts 9:20am).

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

Everyone is welcome to informal breakfast with conversation in the community room at 7am most Tuesdays, following morning *zazen* and service. Breakfast is followed by a Dharma study group 7:45-8:45am. Currently we are reading and discussing modern commentaries on Dogen's *Shobogenzo*. All are welcome to either or both events, free of charge.

## GLOBAL SANGHA EVENTS

*Pride Parade: Sunday, June 2*

Celebrate diversity with other Sangha members as we march with faith-based organizations, welcoming everyone to practice at Santa Cruz Zen Center. This event is a lot of fun – spending a sunny morning together, waving to the crowd, and manifesting the interconnectedness our community! It's a brief but lively affair, 10am to noon.

*Japanese Cultural Fair: Saturday June 8*

Zen Center once again will open the Japanese Cultural Fair with a chant of well-being. While the Fair continues in the park with taiko drumming, food and crafts, we will host *chado* tea ceremony, *sejiki* ceremony for departed ancestors, *bonzai* demonstration, *ikebana* flower arranging, and kimono fashion show on our Zen Center campus. We also have an open-house during the Fair and give people tours and information about Zen Center. Come spend an hour or the whole day at this great annual event!

## NEW SANGHA SUPPORT NET PROGRAM

from Practice Leader Eugene Bush

I have begun to give some shape to a vision I have had for SCZC for quite some time. The Board and Leaders fully endorse this proposed offering. Over the next few months I will develop, with the support of all of you, the Sangha Support Net Program for SCZC members and sangha members' families during times of challenge or times of transition. These challenges could include such times as: accident, temporary illness, hospitalization, long-term illness, death of a loved one, or death of a pet. Fellowship may be also offered for life transitions such as: starting a relationship, ending a relationship, marriage commitments, birth of a child, the transition from youth to adulthood, or house blessings; this support will be based on the individual's needs and the liturgy and forms of Soto Zen Buddhism.

I invite all Sangha members to participate in this ongoing practice of generosity – the giving of time and energy – forming a team to support each other in times of need. I will guide and counsel team members in order to increase the skillfulness with which this practice is undertaken. Depending on your skills and time availability, your offering could take the form of: preparing food, running errands, providing transportation or taking care of basic needs for a limited period of time such as childcare, cleaning or laundry. You may also be asked to hold a *zendo* role for ceremonial expressions of support and community. I am exceedingly grateful for the opportunity to practice with the community in this way. Please let me know how we can serve you in times of transition, and please let me know if you are interested in making a 6 month commitment to this team: 457-0206.

SCZC relies on fees and donations to continue its mission. If you can pay more, please consider doing so. If you cannot afford the suggested donation, please offer what you can. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Santa Cruz Zen Center  
113/115 School Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

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If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please call 831-457-0206 and leave your name and address. This will help reduce our operating costs. Thank you!



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.

**SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTER**      115 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060      831-457-0206      [www.sczc.org](http://www.sczc.org)

**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

Buddha's B-day Sesshin	Apr 3-7	5am-9pm
Buddha's Birthday	Sun. Apr 7	4-5pm
Shosan, Closing P.P.	Wed. Apr 10	6:35-7:30pm
Dinner & Entertainment	Sat. Apr 13	5-8pm
Calligraphy Class	Sun. Apr 14-28	2:30-5pm
Bodhisattva Precepts class	Apr 21-May 19	6:35-8pm
Sobun Roshi Memorial	Wed. Apr 24	6:25-7am
Precepts Renewal	Thur. Apr 25	5:45-6:30pm
Introduction to Zen	Sat. Apr 27	10-noon
One-day Sitting	Sat. May 11	8:30am-5pm
Sangha Day	Sat. May 18	starts 9:20am
Precepts Renewal	Fri. May 24	5:45-6:30pm
Jikoji Genzo-e Sesshin	May 23-26	starts 6pm on 23
Introduction to Zen	Sat. May 25	10-noon
Tassajara Genzo-e Study	May 26-30	starts 4pm on 26
Kobun Roshi Memorial	Mon. May 27	6:25-7am
Sangha Day	Sat. Jun 1	starts 9:20am
Sejiki and Cultural Fair	Sat. Jun 8	11am-5pm
Summer Solstice Sesshin	Jun 20-24	5am-9pm
Sobun Roshi Memorial	Mon. Jun 24	6:25-7am
Precepts Renewal	Tues. Jun 25	5:45-6:30pm
Introduction to Zen	Sat. Jun 29	10-noon