

# sangha

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA CRUZ AND MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTERS

OCTOBER 2011

## BUDDHA NATURE: THE INCONCEIVABLE INSEPARABILITY OF EMPTINESS AND COMPASSIONATE AWARENESS

To understand what is meant by “Buddha Nature,” we can look at the story of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. The first turning of the Dharma wheel is the four noble truths: that discontent arises from grasping the ever-changing phenomena of body and mind as “me,” and that freedom from this discontent is revealed through the path of not grasping anything as truly me. The four noble truths is a kind of deconstruction method. However, in this first turning, all the different elements that we can deconstruct this person into really do exist. Earth, wind, fire and water, for example: those kind of physical elements, when you break them down into their smallest bits, are indestructible elemental energies or physical matter, atoms. Early Buddhists, who were first turning exponents, had this kind of theory—that the world is made up of atoms—several centuries B.C., long before modern scientists discovered atoms. We don’t really exist as independent “persons”; we are a conglomeration of all this stuff that we think is a real “me,” but if we look closely, we only find atoms. This turning of the Dharma wheel was only the first.

The second turning of the Dharma wheel was fearlessly proclaimed in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, in which the deconstruction project goes even further. Here, not only is there no real “me,” but there are also no four noble truths, and, sorry to say, there are not even any atoms. There aren’t any particles or elements of mind, not even eyes, ears, nose, tongue or body, or colors, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, or objects of mind; all the things that were such wonderful elements to deconstruct the person into in the first turning can no longer be grasped as existent, because to do so would get in the way of our complete freedom. Sometimes this second turning is said to be the relinquishment, or letting go, of all fixed reference points. Anything can be a reference point: atoms, earth, fire, wind, earth, all the different mental elements of mind; in the end there’s nothing that can be found in an essentially existent state. All that appears is merely a construction of mind; mental imputations build on previous mental imputations, and in the end nothing whatsoever can actually be found. Ultimately, when we actually try to find an atom or anything else, we can see something there, we can feel and taste lots of things, but at the very essence of it, we can’t find anything truly existing.



The second turning of the Dharma wheel traditionally involves concentrated analysis and logical reasoning to convince our very confident mind that actually nothing can really be found; this is the amazing but challenging project of Nagarjuna. Such reasoning takes a lot of effort, applied again and again, to really undermine our beliefs, because we go about our day quite confidently thinking that things can be found. We believe that the road we walk is really made up of little asphalt molecules, but the second turning is about breaking down that confidence so that actually the road that seems to be supporting us can’t be found, and even the asphalt molecules can’t be found. That might sound kind of disturbing; why would we want to undermine our confidence that we can walk on the road? It is somewhat painful to hold the unconscious belief that the road will support us, even though such pain is rarely noticed. But the point is that much greater forms of pain are based on exactly the same principle: that we believe what appears to us is truly existent and therefore we can’t help but grasp onto it or try to get away from it.

Finally, the third turning of the Dharma wheel is the way mind is originally free from all fixed reference points and at the same time is luminously clear and aware; this is also called Buddha Nature. Not only does Buddha Nature not require analytical reasoning to prove, but it *can’t* really be proved by analytical reasoning. We might think that’s a relief, since maybe then we can skip the difficult second turning work of studying Nagarjuna’s deconstructive logic and so on, and just enter the third turning of Buddha Nature, immanent and already complete. That may be possible, since anything is possible, especially from the point of view of the third turning. But generally it’s said that to approach the realization of this naturally present, already perfect Buddha Nature, it’s very helpful to first wholeheartedly engage in the step of deconstructing everything into vast unfindability, to relinquish all reference points. Otherwise we may not be able to appreciate the full extent of Buddha Nature, or even more problematic, we might consciously or unconsciously make Buddha Nature into a reference point and get at least a little hold on it and use that to maintain our sense of security that “at least there’s this!” If nothing else, we can at least have this thing called Buddha Nature. But Buddha Nature is not a thing, and especially not a thing we can have. When the ancient Zen teacher Zhaozhou was asked if a dog has Buddha Nature, he said, “no.”

# SANGHA EVENTS AND NEWS

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Traditionally what we mean by “Buddha,” fully realized Buddha, is when Buddha Nature is fully revealed, free from all obscurations. It’s hard to say anything about what Buddha is without limiting it, but Buddha is free from this consciousness with which we’re aware of everything right now, this consciousness that’s seeing appearances of phenomena and aware of what’s happening as events outside of itself. This dualistic consciousness that appears to be split into subject and object cannot fully realize Buddha. So Buddha is already unimaginable, right? However, in the Zen tradition, it is said that this very mind is Buddha. This is not the dualistic mind as we know it, but the uncontrived true nature of mind, also called “ordinary mind.” This consciousness right now, that appears as subject and object, is actually completely empty of any fixed reference points. If we look for this mind itself, when we turn the light of awareness around to shine back on mind itself . . . Ah! It’s hard to find anything there.

So the fruition of the path in the third turning is not just nothingness, but a Buddha that is infinite compassion. It is the inconceivable inseparability of emptiness and compassionate awareness, complete openness to all. That is not mere negation—it’s infinite compassion with infinite skillful means to help beings in an infinite variety of ways, beings that are not objects outside of this awareness. Buddha, without moving a particle or going anywhere, without any effort or even intention, can immediately and completely liberate countless beings in infinite realms simultaneously. That’s not nothing! But it’s also not something; it’s completely inconceivable.

One great benefit of trusting in Buddha Nature, is that it’s a cure for discouragement in our practice. Nagarjuna, who is mostly a second turning teacher, wrote a few short third turning treatises as well, and one says something like, “Since Buddha Nature is present, one can work hard and find pure gold hidden in rock. But if Buddha Nature is not here, even if one were to work hard, one would only get tired.” Buddha Nature is always here, but just obscured. Our normal dualistic thought is like clouds obscuring the vast clear sky of Buddha Nature, but occasionally there’s a little hole in the cloud, a glimpse of a small spot of clear sky. From that glimpse we can infer that there’s a huge unobstructed clear sky behind the clouds. From the point of view of the sky, the clouds don’t even obstruct it in any way; the sky has no problem with clouds floating through it.

Another benefit in trusting in Buddha Nature is that it can undermine our tendency to praise self and belittle others, since all beings, even cockroaches, are equally inseparable from Buddha Nature. It’s quite humbling actually. And of course Buddha Nature is not exclusive to Buddhism. You don’t have to be Buddhist to have it! Obviously, right? Cockroaches aren’t Buddhist! Buddha Nature is not diminished at all when it manifests as a confused living being. It’s not improved in the slightest in its expression of an infinitely compassionate Buddha. Buddha Nature doesn’t ever change. A fully realized Buddha seems to be different from us sentient beings, but the Buddha Nature is identical. That’s one of the most miraculous qualities of this nature, that it never changes from beginning to end, and therefore it’s unconstructed, unconditioned, it’s not born, it doesn’t die, it’s not impermanent, it doesn’t come and go, but it’s not permanent either because it’s not some *thing*. It is simply the inconceivable inseparability of emptiness and compassionate awareness, shining forth right here and now.

--edited from a talk by Kokyo Henkel



## SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTER



### FALL PRACTICE PERIOD

September 28-December 7

Practice period is a focused period of time, ten weeks this fall, for a deeper commitment to *zazen*, individual and group meetings to explore Zen practice, and Dharma study. This fall practice period will include a class series by Kokyo on Dogen Zenji’s Uji (“Being Time”), a 4-day Denko-e Sesshin study retreat on Keizan Zenji’s Transmission of Light, a one-day sitting, and end with a 7-day Rohatsu Sesshin to celebrate Buddha’s Awakening.

### DENKO-E SESSHIN ON KEIZAN ZENJI’S “TRANSMISSION OF LIGHT”

September 29-October 2 (4 days), 5am-9pm (ends 5pm Sunday)

Denko-e is a concentrated study retreat on several chapters of Keizan’s Denkoroku, the awakening stories of the Zen ancestors. Each day will include morning and afternoon teachings and discussion with Kokyo, as well as *zazen* and formal *oryoki* meals. It is suggested that people participate in at least two full days of sesshin. Suggested donation: \$35/day for sustaining members and \$40 for all others. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

### SHOBOGENZO UJI, “BEING TIME”

Eight Sunday evenings: October 9,16,23,30, November 6,13,20,27, 6:35-8pm

Kokyo will offer a class series on Dogen Zenji’s Shobogenzo Uji (“Being Time”), which explores the meaning of time as being, and how to live in harmony with the time-being (translation can be found in *Moon in a Dewdrop*). Suggested donation: \$10/class for sustaining members, \$13 for all others. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. (There will also be a tea and discussion group led by the shuso during *zazen* time before class, 5:30-6:30pm).

### LOVING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

*A workshop with Shoho Kuebast*

Saturday, October 29, 9:15am-noon.

This workshop is an opportunity to get in touch with our heart and the deep capacity for loving that we all inherently have. Concentrating on the Buddha’s teaching of the four immeasurables (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity), we will explore meditation exercises that are useful for everyday life. Please bring a pen and paper/journal.

Suggested donation: \$25 for members, \$30 for all others. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

### ONE-DAY SITTING

Saturday, November 5, 8:30am-5pm

The day includes a lecture by Kokyo in the morning and tea with discussion in the afternoon. Please bring a bag lunch. Suggested donation: \$12/day for sustaining members and \$15 for all others.

# SANGHA EVENTS AND NEWS

## SHODO CALLIGRAPHY CLASS WITH YOSHI SHIBATA

Four Sunday afternoons: November 6,13,20,27, 3-5pm.

Learn the fundamentals of Shodo Japanese Calligraphy using traditional ink and brush. Shodo is a traditional art that is practiced by common people as well as by Zen and Shinto priests and artists. In Japan there is a saying: A person's writing shows their character. Shodo teaches us how to meditate and express our inner strength in our art and 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. Over the years he has taught classes locally in Santa Cruz, including workshops at UCSC. Fee: \$20/class, plus materials (see flyer or website for materials to bring).

## ROHATSU SESSHIN (CELEBRATION OF BUDDHA'S AWAKENING)

December 1-7 (7 days), 5am-9pm (ends with Shuso Dharma Inquiry Ceremony, and Closing of Practice Period 6:30pm Wednesday)

Each day will include morning teachings with Kokyo and formal Oryoki meals. It is possible to participate in any one day, as well as the whole sesshin. Suggested donation: \$35/day for sustaining members and \$40 for all others. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

*SCZC relies on fees and donations to continue its mission. If you can pay more, please consider doing so. If you cannot pay the suggested donation, please pay what you can. Talk with Gene or Michael about fees.*

## SHUSO NANNETTE OVERLEY

The shuso, or head student, for fall practice period is Monshin Tenmen (Listening Heart, Unfabricated Nature), Nannette Overley. Nannette has been practicing at SCZC since 2005, received the precepts from Abbot Katherine Thanas in 2008, and lives with her husband Chuck, who also practices at ZC, on an organic farm in Davenport. The role of the shuso is to offer oneself to the sangha by attending as much zazen as possible, leading discussion group on Sunday evenings, giving Dharma talks, and answering questions in a Dharma Inquiry Ceremony to close Practice Period.

## SANGHA DAY

Saturday, November 19 (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.

## INTRODUCTION TO ZEN

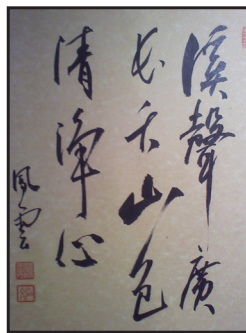
Saturday, October 22, Nov. 26, and Dec. 17, 10am-noon.

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, and discussion. Everyone is welcome, free of charge.

## OFFERING TO HUNGRY GHOSTS CEREMONY

Wednesday November 2, 6:30-7:30pm

In this ceremony called sejiki (a.k.a. segaki) we call forth the restless, unsatisfied yearnings of our own life, inviting them to be known and released, as well as raising the deep intention to nourish all hungry spirits in the world, and remembering departed ancestors and friends. Offerings of food will be made, and we will chant together for all hungry ghosts and departed spirits.



*Calligraphy by Kobun Chino Roshi, founder of SCZC: "Sounds of valley streams, broadly reaching mountain colors, pure clear mind."*

## MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS HIKE

Friday, Nov. 4, meet 8am at SCZC

Please join us for a 6-7 mile Fall Dharma Walk. We will walk in silence, pausing ten times to focus on the classic Zen Ox-Herding Poems, which consider the unfolding of one's true nature, in service of awakening with all beings. We will meet at SCZC at 8am, and carpool to the trailhead. Specific location to be announced.

## ALL-SANGHA MEETING, POTLUCK DINNER, AND EVENING OF CREATIVITY

Saturday November 12, meeting 3-5pm, followed by dinner

Everyone is invited to attend the annual All-Sangha Meeting. This is an opportunity to hear first-hand about what is happening at SCZC, our financial health, and to give input to the Board about things you would like to see happen at Zen Center. For the evening event, skits, music, and poetry are all welcome. Please contact Cathy Toldi if you'd like to participate.

## GLOBAL SANGHA NEWS

We wish to thank Rev. Gengetsu Jana Drakka for the inspiring workshop on September 10. She shared with us about her work with homeless people in San Francisco and demonstrated how she used her own life experience to remove barriers between herself and others. With her guidance we explored the concepts of intimacy, compassion, and presenting the original self. We ended the day with walking meditation through the fields of the Homeless Garden Project. Lunch was prepared by Global Sangha members Oai Fang and Chuck Overley.

## NEW YEAR'S EVE

Saturday, December 31, 8:30pm-12:30am.

The evening will include sitting and walking meditation until midnight, when we welcome in the New Year by ringing the bell 108 times (for the 108 delusions). Then there will be a fire ceremony in the courtyard, letting go of 2011 by burning up habits, etc. we aspire to drop for the coming year. Tea and noodles in the house will follow.



## MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTER



### SUNDAY CLASSES WITH KATHERINE THANAS

Our ongoing class, investigating the dimension of time, continues through October 9 in Monterey. Sundays, 10am-noon. We will continue with the commentary by Dogen Zenji on “Being-Time.” \$10 per class. Scholarships available. 98 Via Campana, Monterey, (831) 375-7826.

### KATHY WHILDEN RECEIVES DHARMA TRANSMISSION FROM ABBOT KATHERINE THANAS



Kathy Whilden and Abbot Katherine are pictured here following a week of practices at Santa Cruz Zen Center in late July, culminating in the ceremony of Dharma Transmission. The ceremony continued for seven days of calligraphing lineage documents,

processing around the Zen Center grounds, and offering incense at various altars, in recognition of the generations of ancestors who preceded Kathy. Katherine is in the 92nd generation of succession after Shakyamuni Buddha, thus making her disciples the 93rd generation. Rev. Carolyn Atkinson who leads the Everyday Dharma Zen Center in Santa Cruz, and is a disciple of the late Kobun Chino Otogawa Roshi, taught the bodhisattva precepts to Kathy during the ceremony. Chino Roshi gave the same precepts teaching to Katherine in 1988 during her own Dharma Transmission ceremony at Tassajara. We congratulate Kathy on the accomplishment of this step in her practice.

### SEGAKI CEREMONY: THE RITUAL FEEDING OF “HUNGRY GHOSTS” OR “GAKIS”

In Buddhist mythology, hungry ghosts are creatures who, because of their past actions, can never satisfy their hunger or thirst. Their mouths are so tiny they can't fit any food in them, and when they try to drink, water turns to fire before they swallow it. The hungry ghost symbolizes our own unresolved karma and the tenacious quality of craving. The Segaki ceremony represents both our willingness to bring this karma to resolution and the gentle accepting approach we need to take to achieve any resolution. Segaki is also a time to remember those who have died and to be thankful for their having lived. Costumes are encouraged! Children are welcome! After the ceremony, refreshments will be served.

Tuesday, October 18, 6:30-8:30pm at the Cherry Center, Carmel.

### “SECULAR BUDDHISM” WITH STEPHEN BATCHELOR



Stephen Batchelor, best known for his secular or agnostic approach to Buddhism, will give an evening presentation at St. James Church Episcopal Church in Monterey, presented by the Monterey Bay Zen Center, in conjunction with St. James Church.

Mr. Batchelor considers Buddhism to be a constantly evolving culture of awakening rather than a religious system based on immutable dogmas and beliefs. In particular, he regards the doctrines of karma and rebirth to be features of ancient Indian civilization and not intrinsic to what the Buddha taught. According to Batchelor, Buddhism has survived for the past 2,500 years because of its capacity to reinvent itself in accord with the needs of the different Asian societies with which it has creatively interacted throughout its history. As Buddhism encounters modernity, it enters a vital new phase of its development. Through his writings, translations and teaching, Stephen engages in a critical exploration of Buddhism's role in the modern world, which has earned him both condemnation as a heretic and praise as a reformer.

He is the translator and author of various book and articles on Buddhism including the bestselling *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. His recent publications are *Living With the Devil: A Meditation on Good and Evil*, and *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist*.

Tuesday, Nov. 8, 7pm, St. James Episcopal Church (corner of High and Hellam Streets), Monterey, CA. Contact: Robert Reese (831) 624-7491 or 920-8303, or e-mail: yblnwj7965@sbcglobal.net \$10

### LIVING THE PRECEPTS: THE ENGAGED PRACTICE OF THE ETHICS OF ZEN MEDITATION

with Robert Reese

“When you observe precepts in the same way as you practice zazen—that is perfect precepts transmitted from Buddha to us.”

— Suzuki Roshi

According to Suzuki Roshi, the precepts are an expression of our **A**inmost nature, rather than rules or an abstract code of ethics. Studying the precepts heightens awareness of how they can inform and enliven our daily words and actions, assist us at work, and in our interactions with friends, family, and the wider world. In meeting the ethical challenges of modern life, the sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts offer a clear and engaged path of practice. The Zen precepts show us what the heart and mind of Zen look like when immersed in the world. Through talks, discussion, journaling, reading and meditation, we will explore practicing the precepts with ourselves, our communities, and with all of life. This class is for those new to Zen practice and for those preparing for the Bodhisattva initiation ceremony. Robert Reese is a priest in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi.

Saturdays Mornings: 10:30am to noon, beginning Saturday, October 22nd, Carl Cherry Center for the Arts, Information: (831) 920-8303 or 624-7491 or e-mail: Yblnwj7965@sbcglobal.net.

**DAILY SCHEDULE**



Monday-Friday:

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

Wednesday Evening:

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

Saturday Morning:

8:30am            Zazen

Sunday Evening:

5:45pm            Zazen  
 6:25pm            Service

**LIBRARY OPEN**

During tea after Wed. Lecture

**ORDINARY RECOVERY**

Friday evenings at 6:45 pm



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.

Bodhidharma Memorial	Wed. Oct. 5	6:25-7am
Being Time class series	Sundays, starting Oct. 9	6:35-8pm
Precepts Renewal	Thurs. Oct. 13	5:45-6:30pm
Introduction to Zen	Sat. Oct. 22	10-noon
Loving Kindness wrkshp	Sat. Oct. 29	9:15am-noon
Hungry Ghosts Offering	Wed. Nov. 2	6:35-7:30pm
Suzuki Roshi Memorial	Fri. Nov. 4	6:25-7am
Mtns. & Rivers hike	Fri. Nov. 4	8am
One-day Sitting	Sat. Nov. 5	8:30am-5pm
Calligraphy Class	Sun. Nov.6,13,20,27	3-5pm
Precepts Renewal	Thurs. Nov. 10	5:45-6:30pm
All-Sangha mtg., dinner	Sat. Nov. 12	3-5pm mtg., dinner
Sangha Day	Sat. Nov. 19	9:15am-4pm
Chino Roshi Memorial	Fri. Nov. 25	6:25-7am
Introduction to Zen	Sat. Nov. 26	10-noon
Rohatsu Sesshin	Dec. 1-7	5am-9pm
Suzuki Roshi Memorial	Sun. Dec. 4	6:25-7am
Shuso Dharma Inquiry	Wed. Dec. 7	6:35-8pm
Precepts Renewal	Fri. Dec. 9	5:45-6:30pm
Introduction to Zen	Sat. Dec. 17	10-noon
Year-end break	Dec. 24-31	after am zazen on 24th
New Year's Eve	Sat. Dec. 31	8:30pm-12:30am

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

We meet Tuesday evenings, Monday and Thursday mornings at the Cherry Center, 4th and Guadalupe in Carmel.

Tuesday evening schedule:

Zazen                    6:30  
 Walking Meditation    7:10  
 Service                    7:20  
 Lecture/discussion    7:30-8:30

Monday, Thursday mornings:

Zazen                    7am

(followed by service and soji)  
 Zazen instruction is offered the first Tuesday of each month at 5:30pm. Everyone is welcome. For further information call 831-375-7826 or go to our website: [www.montereybayzencenter.org](http://www.montereybayzencenter.org).

K. Thanas classes	Sun. Oct. 2,9	10-noon, 98 Via Campana
Chanting practice	Tues. Oct. 11	5:30-6:30pm, Cherry Center
Segaki Ceremony	Tues. Oct. 18	6:30-8:30pm, Cherry Center
Precepts Class	Sat. Oct. 22	10:30am-noon, Cherry Center
Half-day Sitting Monterey	Sat. Oct. 29	8:30-noon, St James,
Secular Buddhism	Tues. Nov. 8	7pm, St James, Monterey

Santa Cruz Zen Center  
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Santa Cruz, CA 95060

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