

sangha

NEWSLETTER OF THE SANTA CRUZ AND MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTERS

JANUARY 2014

DESHAN LETS THE MATTER REST

Once upon a time in ancient China, Zen Teacher Deshan's attendant asked him, "Where have all the sages since antiquity gone?" Deshan said, "Huh? How's that?" And the attendant said, "The request was for a flying dragon horse as swift as the wind, but instead a lame old tortoise shows up!" (That's a kind of Zen poetic insult. It's kind of sweet, isn't it? If one is going to arrogantly insult someone, at least it can be done with poetry.) Upon hearing that, Deshan let the matter rest. He didn't come back with a defense or snide response in return. He just silently let it be. He ceased and desisted. The next day when Deshan came out of the bath, his attendant passed him a cup of tea. Deshan patted his attendant on the back, kindly, grandfatherly. Then the attendant said to his teacher, "This old fellow has finally gotten a glimpse." (In other words, my old teacher finally understands a bit of Zen.) Again, Deshan let the matter rest.

In Deshan's earlier days as a Zen teacher he was mostly known for being very fierce; he would often shout at his students to wake them up from their complacency. Shouting was a popular Zen thing in those days, and Deshan was one of the people who started that – not to be cruel, but to encourage students to really meet the present moment, cut right to the chase and not beat around the bush or hesitate. This story about Deshan letting it rest probably happened later in his life. He was quite gentle at this point. Instead of shouting when asked, "Where have all the sages of ancient times gone?" he just said, "Huh?" Maybe he'd actually become hard of hearing. The commentary even seems to suggest that he might have become senile. So when he was being arrogantly insulted, instead of coming back with a big shout or striking with his staff, or some other strong presentation, he just let it rest. This story is celebrated in Zen as an example of a perfect response, the wise and compassionate action of a great being.

There's another similar story about Deshan in his later years. One day his feisty student who was the cook at his temple was late getting lunch out, and when Deshan showed up right on time in the dining hall with his eating bowls, the cook asked rather rudely, "Where are you going with your bowls old man? The meal bell hasn't been rung yet." Deshan simply turned around and walked back to his room to wait for the bell. When accused of simply arriving on time, Deshan could have admonished the cook for being late serving lunch, but he didn't. Again he let it rest and just responded to the situation, going along with the flow. He responds with non-defensiveness

when being pushed, challenged and insulted, and is able to humbly, silently just let it be. One way of hearing these stories is just about not reacting when pushed or criticized. So hard to do, and such a radical response, especially for a strong personality like Deshan. And such a response is also a great teaching for Deshan's students if they are attentive enough to receive it.

I can be quite a defensive person sometimes. I'll often have a quick rational response if someone challenges me with something that doesn't make sense to me. I want to notice this habitual tendency more clearly, because being defensive is not joyful, and usually isn't worth the trouble. Taking things personally is painful, and it's really based on the illusion that "I" as a separate independent self am being attacked, accused, belittled, judged. Defensiveness doesn't seem so painful at the time it's happening – because we feel strong, like we know we're right – but actually it doesn't usually work out too well, it's not really enlivening at all, and there is a pain underneath it, the contraction based on the illusory sense of separate self.

In Dogen Zenji's collection of informal talks he says, "Even if you are speaking rationally and another person says something unreasonable, it is wrong to defeat him by arguing logically. On the other hand, don't just give in and say you are wrong if you think your opinion is reasonable. It is best just to leave the matter alone and stop arguing. If you can drop it, he will be able to also let it go, and nobody will get angry."

The Buddha speaks of the eight winds of the world, the winds that blow us off our seat, the events towards which we are most tempted to react in a defensive way. There are pain and pleasure, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disgrace. These are all pairs of opposites, and they are what push us off our comfortable seat. We get caught up trying to increase or maintain pleasure and trying to prevent or avoid pain. These winds are blowing on us all day long in one form or another, in light breezes and big storms. How can we just let it rest when these slings and arrows of outrageous fortune come at us? That's a major part of our practice. Zazen practice in particular can be seen as a training in letting it rest. We can just sit upright and unmoving in the midst of these winds. One thing we learn in zazen is that the winds aren't really coming from outside; we may be sitting in a nice calm, quiet zendo where nobody's bothering us, and the winds are still roaring. They are internal winds coming from our conceptual thinking and all based around the illusion of "me" which seems to be separate from the experience of the moment – thus we take it all "personally."

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(continued from page one)

Just letting it be is so simple, yet so difficult. Again and again, letting it rest: what a challenge when the winds of the world seem strong; maybe it takes being senile! It doesn't say what happened with Deshan's attendant in the story when Deshan let it rest. Maybe he had to contemplate his teacher's silence for a while. We can imagine he was waiting for the comeback and planning another attack, but when the comeback doesn't come, what then?

This kind of thing has happened with me and my teacher various times. Sometimes I would ask him, with great sincerity, to give me any feedback he would like to offer about my practice. The next day he would casually mention something I was doing that was a little bit off, and I'd quickly start justifying the reason I was doing it. When he would remind me that I asked him for feedback and he was giving it, I'd feel a bit embarrassed. I wasn't expecting that kind of feedback, rather I was hoping for the kind I would like to receive!

I also remember an interaction with another teacher of mine, a monk who was visiting the monastery at Tassajara where I was living. A group of students was questioning him about some point of doctrine in a somewhat challenging way, and he was kindly responding. I wasn't so involved in the issue myself, but due to the energetic nature of the conversation, I began getting pulled in and taking sides. Isn't it amazing that, when given the chance, we can so easily form an opinion about something not so important to us, and then start defending it as if our life depended on it? So I slipped into involvement in this conversation and I started rationally arguing. I was finding myself in a debate I really didn't want to be in, but once I was in it I felt compelled to keep going; at some point the issue was no longer even important, but it was very important to be right! We were going back and forth more and more intensely until at one point the teacher just stopped. He ceased and desisted and just smiled peacefully. He caught what was happening and just stopped. And it worked. I wouldn't say I was greatly enlightened, but suddenly all the energy that I was directing at this person almost knocked me over backwards. His silence was like a lion's roar. I immediately was able to reflect on my mind: what am I doing?! I'm completely involved and I really don't even care so much about this topic. It had become just about winning the argument!

One modern commentary on this old Zen story says, "Deshan was like a grandfather who lets his grandchild be just as he is, even if the child is playing in the mud. Eventually the child will want to get out of the mud and get clean." May we all learn to be as patient, loving, and large-hearted as old Deshan.

- edited from a talk by Kokyo Henkel

YEAR OF PRACTICING KINDNESS, COMPASSION, AND ASPIRATION TO AWAKEN FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL BEINGS

The year 2014 will be a time to study and cultivate the essential bodhisattva practices of maitri, karuna, and bodhichitta. Classic Dharma teachings on these topics will be brought up, including Dogen's "Arousing Unsurpassed Mind", "Arousing Aspiration for Awakening", "Bodhisattva's Ways of Embrace", "Avalokiteshvara", "Instructions for the Cook on Kind Mind", Asanga's Treatise on the Bodhisattva's Three Pure Precepts, the Four Bodhisattva Vows, and more.

A DISCOURSE by Brian Bielefeld

the common egret, dressed
in the blinding white
robes of the sage
lifts into the air,
rises and circles, circles again
turns into the wind
a wind that matches
the lift of its body,
pauses two feet off the ground,
five seconds stolen from eternity,
flexes one feather and
settles to the ground,
completing its discourse
on the floating bird
theory of the universe.

SESSHINS IN 2014

February 13-17 (5 day) Buddha's Parinirvana Genzo-e Sesshin
April 2-6 (5 day) Buddha's Birthday Sesshin
June 6-8 (3 day) Genzo-e Sesshin at Jikoji Zen Center
June 20-22 (3 day) Silent Summer Solstice Sesshin
August 14-18 (5 day) Ocean Breeze Sesshin
October 16-20 (5 day) Denko-e Sesshin
December 4-10 (7 day) Buddha's Awakening Day Sesshin

NEW YEAR'S CHANTING OF THE DIAMOND SUTRA

Tuesday, January 1, 12:30pm.

Open the New Year with a recitation of this great jewel of our lineage, "The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion." The recitation will begin with a simple opening ceremony and end with a dedication of merit.

SHODO CALLIGRAPHY CLASS WITH YOSHI SHIBATA

4 Sunday afternoons: January 12, 19, 26, 2:30-5pm.

Learn the fundamentals of Shodo Japanese Calligraphy using traditional ink and brush. See flyer at zendo or Zen & the Arts website page for details. \$75 for sustaining members, \$90 for others, plus materials.

ONE-DAY SITTINGS

Saturdays, January 11 & March 8, 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.

INTRODUCTION TO ZEN

Saturday, January 25, February 22, March 22, 10am-noon.

A monthly introduction to the body and mind of Zen meditation and the forms of practice at SCZC. The morning includes

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sitting and walking meditation, followed by discussion. Everyone is welcome, free of charge.

WINTER PRACTICE PERIOD

February 12-April 9.

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 two 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, 6-week class series, five Wednesday evening Dharma talks, and five days of sesshin.

PARINIRVANA GENZO-E SESSHIN

February 13-17 (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 with Kokyo we will examine Hotsu Mujoshin on arousing bodhichitta, the aspiration to realize awakening for the benefit of all beings. Suggested donation: \$35/day for sustaining members, \$40 for others.

FOUNDATIONS OF ZEN: WHY WE SIT

6 Sunday mornings: February 23-March 30, 10-11:30am.

Patrick will offer a class series on seated meditation in which we will share our own experience of meditation, review the early Buddhist literature, fascicles of Dogen, and the writings of modern teachers – for those just beginning to integrate a meditation practice into their lives, and those exploring further their own relationship with sitting. Suggested donation: \$10/class for sustaining members, \$13 for others.

ASANGA ON THE BODHISATTVA'S THREE PURE PRECEPTS

6 Sunday evenings: February 23-March 30, 6:35-8pm.

Kokyo will offer a class series on this Indian Mahayana treatise which offers many inspiring practices for bodhisattvas to embrace and sustain standards of conduct, good qualities, and all living beings. Suggested donation: \$10/class for sustaining members, \$13 for others. (There will also be a tea and discussion group with the shuso, 5:30-6:20pm).

SANGHA DAY

Saturdays, January 18 and March 15 (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.

CULTIVATING THE BODHISATTVA HEART

Tuesday, January 21, 6:30-8pm.

The community is invited to share their experiences as volunteers and how their Zen practice informs their relationships in this work. People involved in the Global Sangha will talk about the

6-year project of cooking lunches for the Homeless Garden and the River St. Shelter. Others will talk about their prison/jail work and work in the schools.

CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOG ON PEACE

Friday, February 28, 7-8:30pm.

Revs. Kokyo and Dave Grishaw-Jones, Senior Pastor at Peace United Church of Christ, will have a community dialog at the church on 900 High Street.

ORDINARY RECOVERY GROUP

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

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

BREAKFAST AND DHARMA STUDY GROUP

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

KOAN STUDY GROUP

Fridays, 1-2pm, resuming January 17, with Neti Parekh, in the zendo.

Contemplate and explore koans together. A koan from the Mumonkan will be posted on the bulletin board the week before. Anyone may attend any of the sessions, free of charge.

SHUSO HANNAH MEARA

The Shuso, or head student, for winter practice period is Rev. Jishin Seisho (Heart of Compassion, Clear Voice Expression), Hannah Meara. Hannah began Zen practice with Korean teacher Samu Sunim in Chicago. In 2000 she retired early from work at age 59 to live at Tassajara Zen Monastery, San Francisco City Center, and Green Gulch Farm Zen Center for five years of residential practice. She received the precepts and her Dharma name from Rev. Edward Brown, being ordained as a priest in 2005. Hannah came to Santa Cruz to help take care of her granddaughter Stella, which she continues to this day. The role of 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.

TENZO CATHY TOLDI


Starting in February Rev. Cathy Toldi will begin a year of service as tenzo, or head cook, at SCZC. In this position she will coordinate food planning, shopping, and cooking for sesshins. She will sometimes do the cooking herself, sometimes enroll others who've been tenzo in the past, and will also train people who'd like to learn how to serve the sangha in this way. Other related activities will be announced throughout the year, such as Saturday morning cookie baking (for sesshin and Wednesday evening tea) and a fall class on Dogen's Tenzo Kyokun, "Instructions for the Cook."

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 113/115 School Street
 Santa Cruz, CA 95060

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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.

SANTA CRUZ ZEN CENTER		115 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060	831-457-0206	www.sczc.org
DAILY SCHEDULE		Diamond Sutra	Sun. Jan 1	12:30pm
		Calligraphy Class	Sun. Jan 12,19,26	2:30-5pm
Monday-Friday:		One-day Sitting	Sat. Jan 11	8:30am-5pm
5:45am	Zazen	Precepts Renewal	Fri. Jan 14	5:45-6:30pm
6:25am	Service (chanting)	Koan Study Resumes	Fri. Jan 17	1-2pm
12:00pm	Zazen	Sangha Day	Sat. Jan 18	9:15am-4pm
5:45pm	Zazen	Bodhisattva Heart	Tues. Jan 21	6:30-8pm
6:25pm	Service	Introduction to Zen	Sat. Jan 25	10-noon
Wednesday Evening:		Kobun Roshi Memorial	Mon. Jan 27	6:25-7am
6:35pm	Lecture/discussion	Shuso Entering & Talk	Wed. Feb 5	6:35-7:30pm
7:30pm	Informal tea	Precepts Renewal	Tues. Feb 11	5:45-6:30pm
Saturday Morning:		Open Practice Period	Wed. Feb 12	6:35-7:30pm
8:30am	Zazen	Genzo-e Sesshin	Feb 13-17	5am-9pm
9:10am	Service	Buddha's Parinirvana	Mon. Feb 17	5-5:30pm
Sunday Evening:		Introduction to Zen	Sat. Feb 22	10-noon
5:45pm	Zazen	6-week Class Series	starts Sun. Feb 23	am & pm
6:25pm	Service	Sobun Roshi Memorial	Mon. Feb 24	6:25-7am
		Christian-Buddhist Talk	Fri. Feb 28	7-8:30pm
		Mahapajapati Memorial	Fri. Mar 7	6:25-7am
		One-day Sitting	Sat. Mar 9	8:30am-5pm
		Sangha Day	Sat. Mar 15	9:15am-4pm
		Precepts Renewal	Mon. Mar 17	5:45-6:30pm
		Introduction to Zen	Sat. Mar 22	10-noon
		Kobun Roshi Memorial	Wed. Mar 26	6:25-7am
LIBRARY OPEN				
During tea after Wed. Lecture				
ORDINARY RECOVERY				
Friday evenings at 6:45 pm				