

Wind Bell

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FINDING COMPOSURE

Lecture by Abbot Myogen Steve Stucky

August 26, 2007, Green Gulch Farm

Today I want to talk about finding composure in changing circumstances. I have been re-reading some of the talks of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, founder of San Francisco Zen Center. I think he chose the word "composure" very carefully when he said that our practice is "to find composure in the face of the fact that everything changes." He was reminding his students that a fundamental teaching of Buddhism is the teaching of impermanence. That everything changes is a fundamental experience that we have; and when we are unable to find composure in the face of impermanence, we suffer.

It is pretty hard to establish your composure when things are changing but that's the challenge that each of us meets, moment by moment. In our Dharma teaching there are many suggestions and techniques to assist us in finding composure, real composure. But any technique may be interpreted in a way that is a kind of pretend composure. A false stability may be supported by the desire to look like we have composure—the desire to look good. There's a Zen story of a monk who challenged his practice of finding composure by sitting zazen in a tree. He was sometimes referred to as "Bird Nest Roshi." Bird Nest Roshi had a friend who was a local magistrate and a Buddhist practitioner. One time this man came to visit and said, "You look pretty insecure up there." Bird Nest Roshi looked down at him and said, "You look pretty insecure down there." He knew that the magistrate was concerned about his own security and the instability of his social position. Maybe he was worried about the next election.

Anything you base your security on may fail. How do you feel as you walk around—do you feel secure? Do you feel that you actually have stability? And what is it based on? What is real security based on? On another visit the magistrate asked, “What is the fundamental teaching of Buddhism?” Bird Nest Roshi answered, “Avoid doing evil, practice that which is good, and keep the mind pure.” The magistrate said, “Well, any five-year-old knows that!” Bird Nest Roshi responded, “Yes, but a sixty-five-year-old can’t do it.”

In Zen we are interested in our actual life, not some theory about it, not some handy motto or proverb about it, but how we actually live. Bird Nest Roshi was demonstrating the truth of composure. The verse he quoted, “Avoid doing evil, practice that which is good, and keep the mind pure,” was a traditional Buddhist teaching that everyone would have learned as a child at that time. The last line, “keep the mind pure,” evolved to the Mahayana understanding “Save the many beings,” or “Awaken with the many beings,” which is a non-dual understanding of purity. Purity is not set apart from that which is impure in Mahayana Buddhism. Boundless pure mind includes everything.

This summer at Tassajara I co-led a five-day retreat and training on Zen and Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy. I presented the Zen practice side and an IFS trainer named Cece Sykes presented the Internal Family Systems therapy side, which I believe complements Zen practice.



PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGER

The procession for February's Mountain Seat Ceremony was led by three of Green Gulch Farm's tea students: Max Swanger, Sheryl Leaf, and Jonathan Schaffner.



PHOTO BY CHRIS RUSEY

Myogen Steve Stucky was installed as co-Abbot of Zen Center in February 2007.

Internal Family Systems therapy has two basic assumptions. The first basic assumption is that inside each of us, in our inner world, is a “system,” a collection of different parts that dynamically interact. Just as you can look at your family or your work team or your *sangha* as a system where there are different people representing different perspectives, and interacting dynamically, something similar happens inside each of us. The second basic assumption is that there is a calm center of being that is innate in us, which means that composure is possible. Each of our inner systems has the capacity to have a locus of calmness, a sense of being connected, and that place is at the source of the arising of consciousness. This is present at birth, or before birth, and is something that is not fabricated. This is very similar to the notion of Buddha Mind, or Buddha Nature. What is it that is not fabricated?

In the Tassajara retreat one person volunteered to have her separate system parts be represented by different people in the group, and created a kind of sculpture. One of the first things that came up was fear. And it was wonderful to have fear represented by someone standing quietly, in a relationship with other internal parts—in relationship with someone representing the judging voice inside; in relationship with another part representing a happy child; and another part that is angry at the judge. Usually we don't give all aspects of ourselves enough recognition. It's particularly challenging to find composure with fear; to actually just let fear be fear, without trying to cover it up with something like judgment or anger. And standing slightly apart from all these



*Myogen Steve Stucky
outside San Quentin,
where he co-leads the
Buddhadharma Sangha.*

parts was the person herself representing the calm center that could see and appreciate how all the parts related to each other. She could see how each part would sometimes advance and believe itself to be alone and that the rest were just “things,” and that would be delusion. So the practice of stepping back and regaining perspective is a way of finding composure.

Following that wonderful week at Tassajara, my wife Lane and I drove to Colorado to enjoy vacation time with my siblings. I have two younger brothers and a sister. One day we took a river rafting trip. One of my sisters-in-law was particularly worried about how this river trip would be for her son, my nephew, who is ten years old. Was it too dangerous? So in our raft, for safety, my sister-in-law and my nephew sat right in the middle. I was near the back. We had a great river guide, a wonderful woman named Gooch, who was in the back. We came to a narrow place with water rushing around boulders and there was a raft from another rafting company trying to pass us and as we came around a rock we crashed into them. The front of the raft tilted up and I realized, “Oh, I’m losing my balance!” And I fell out. It’s a great thing to realize that you’re falling when you’re falling—how to find composure when you’re falling in the river!

My brother instinctively grabbed my foot, so my head and most of my body was in the water and he had my foot! I had a personal flotation device on and that was keeping me up, but I couldn’t reach the raft because my brother was holding my foot. Gooch told him, “You have to let go of his foot.” When he let go I was completely in the water and I got reoriented and got my head up. Then Gooch and my brother pulled me back into the raft. My worried sister-in-law said, “Are you okay, are you okay?” “Yes,” I said,

“I feel refreshed!” And she relaxed. I had survived what she had feared—I fell in the water and came out and I was okay. So we do that for each other. We are always falling out of balance and helping each other find composure. Our guide’s composure helped my brother let go of my foot, so that the whole of me could come into upright composure.

The raft in a flowing river is a great image for finding composure in a dynamic, fluid situation. The river keeps moving and turning and it’s carrying you through its changes, so you are being turned by the myriad things. Without these things, the self does not know who he or she is. The myriad things of flowing water are advancing and producing me being in the water, helped not just by the river but by the rocks, our raft, and the raft from the other group trying to pass us at that point where it was very narrow. But no one has complete control. If you wanted to have control you wouldn’t even put the raft in the river, let alone attempt to control its movements. Not having complete control makes it exciting and demanding of one’s attention. Sometimes it’s best to go forward; sometimes it’s best to go sideways; and sometimes it’s even best to maneuver backwards. If you have some idea that composure looks like going down the river nice and straight, if you have that idea, then you are not going to be happy at all. If you have that idea in your life, “Oh, this is what life should look like, going down nice and straight” then you’re not going to have such a happy life. Composure means releasing such fixed ideas and bringing flexible beginner’s mind to each situation.

When we sit zazen we realize that we are connected to the earth; part of sitting is just to cultivate that sense of bodily composure and realize that



PHOTO BY SHUNDO DAVID HAVE

Laundry day during Tassajara's winter months.

as you sit you are finding stability on the earth. As we take care of Green Gulch valley and we hear Bird Nest Roshi saying, "Save the many beings" or "Awaken with the many beings," if we remind ourselves of that, we are cultivating a sense of respect for each thing, for each of the myriad things and for the earth, the soil.

On Wednesday mornings everyone who lives at Green Gulch goes down to the farm or garden for an hour of communal work. I was hoeing around lettuces and broccoli and saw that the tractor had cultivated between the rows and covered a plant that had just been put in, and it had only two leaves, each leaf about as big as a nickel. If you are hoeing and you think, "There should be a plant there, but I can't see it," you can reach down and just brush the soil a little bit and you may discover that it's just been covered up. You can release those two leaves, and they can emerge and continue growing. It takes that kind of care, that feeling of connection, and that kind of attention. Then the plants grow, and we harvest them; load them into a truck and take them to the Farmers Market.

We have these magnificent dahlias growing in the garden. They look like our version of the lotus, lotus dahlias. If you make a mixed bouquet with dahlias, they begin to lose their petals after three days and the bouquet is ruined. Someone who was selling bouquets at the Farmers Market thought about this, and by talking to people there realized the dahlias could be sold individually or by the dozen, and they are so great! And it's okay that they last only three days, or two days, or five days. Because what happens is that you get the experience of the petals falling. You can have dahlias in a vase and the petals fall and make a free form display of petals around the vase.



PHOTO BY: ALISON BANK



*Farmers Market at
Green Gulch Farm before
the Annual Members'
Meeting October 2007.*

The exquisite experience of falling petals is included in what I mean by composure. Communication about composure with impermanence happens at the Farmers Market.

People at the Farmers Market know where their flowers are coming from, where their potatoes are coming from, where their lettuce and broccoli are coming from, and thereby have a connection with the earth. And those who shop there go beyond the notion that composure is possible by satisfying individual desires. It is recognizing that we live and find our composure in a completely dynamic interactive world including the earth and the work of farmers.

Some of you may have heard about rhinos that were being killed in a wildlife park in South Africa. The management of the park began discovering bodies of dead rhinos and found unmistakable evidence of elephant tracks. When this park had been created there were no elephants. When it was decided to reintroduce elephants, rather than capturing and transporting adult wild elephants, they thought the easiest thing was to bring in baby elephants. So they went to another park and rounded up baby elephants between infancy and five or six years old. In many cases, the mother elephants were killed in order to capture the babies. The baby elephants were hauled in trucks and released in the new park. About twelve to fourteen years later the rhinos started being killed.

Footage from video cameras showed elephants approaching rhinos. They first approached in a friendly fashion, possibly to mate with them, and finding that very frustrating, began assanlting and killing them. Over fifty rhinos



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Edward Epse Brown with filmmaker Doris Dörrie, who directed How to Cook Your Life which was released this year.

were killed. It turned out that the rhino killers were adolescent male elephants that were sexually frustrated and didn't have experience in elephant culture. When three or four mature male elephants from another park were brought in, the result was dramatic. The killing of the rhinos stopped immediately, and the young male elephants stopped going into premature musth [a hormonal change in male elephants, when they become sexually active]. So the presence of mature elephants is essential for young male elephants to develop normally. The young elephants had been traumatized as babies and could not find composure on their own. Bringing in mature elephants had a stabilizing effect like the presence of peaceful bodhisattvas may have on humans who are distressed. A peaceful place of dharma practice with people present who are emotionally mature may support and strengthen others' intention to find composure.

Dharma teaching is 2500 years old. There's a quality of maturity in our tradition of Dharma teaching. This teaching applies to the question of how to live wholeheartedly as a mature human being; of how to find composure in this difficult changing world. Just as children need a mature parent, just as young elephants need mature elephants, we adults need a mature and profound life teaching. Even the simple presence of a space like this zendo, the presence of Bodhisattva images, conveys something to us about the way to find composure in the midst of unsettling and frightening changes. I expect that in the coming decades we human beings will face many stressful, difficult times on this shrinking planet. This will require great flexibility. It will also

require great maturity. It will require us to have cultivated ways in which we can find composure in the midst of change.

In the word "composure" the root *com-*, from the Latin, means "together, being with, being connected." The *-posure* part comes from a Greek root which means "pause, or stop." Remember to pause together, stop together; to awaken in this pause with many beings, the myriad things. We all need places where we can experience this, and so we create Green Dragon Temple and other sacred places. Here we value "stopping" so much that everyday we get up in the morning, come to this zendo, and sit in silence together. From here we have opportunities to take "composure" out to the Farmers Market, to homes, to take it to schools. Don't doubt the value of your mature presence. Don't doubt the value of the contribution that you make just by being willing to find composure, even by simply recalling the thought, "How can I find composure in this challenging situation?" And to help each other to do this. This is maturity of mind. This is actually the manifestation of what we call the vow of a bodhisattva, to help beings mature; to help beings be fully present in themselves. And this is a wisdom that we all have, that each of us carries, that you can attend to and cultivate in yourself. So please remember your own innate composure.

Thank you for listening.

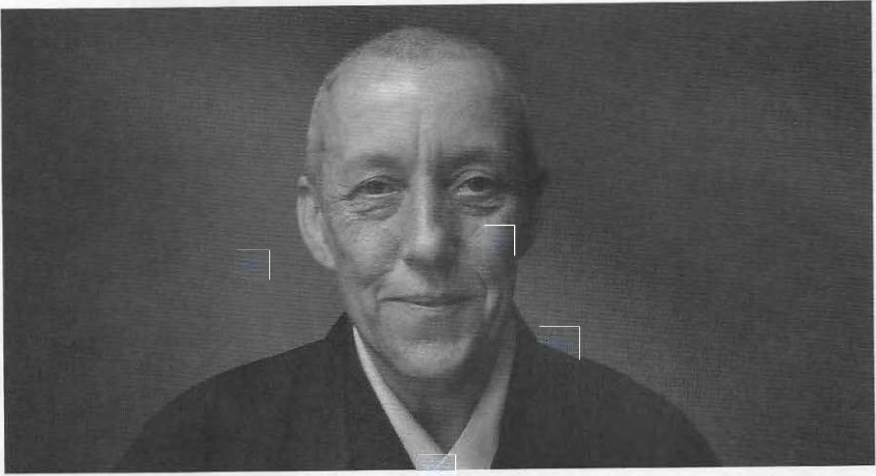


PHOTO BY JAE-RHIM LEE

PRACTICING THE WAY ON THE WAYSIDE

Reverend Jana Drakka has lived and practiced at the San Francisco Zen Center since 1992 when she came here seeking refuge from an abusive relationship and because her Tibetan teacher had moved to India. Before becoming a full-time Zen practitioner and eventually priest (ordained in 2001), Jana had been a school teacher in her native Scotland (think twin-set and pearls), massage therapist, stage manager for a drag revue, and had worked on a psychic phone line.

Through Zen Center she became involved with Religious Witness with Homeless People in San Francisco, working with then City Center director Hekizan Girardot and Ryushin Paul Haller. Her current work, as she describes it, grew naturally from there when she was invited to offer a meditation and spiritual discussion group for homeless people at the Mission Neighborhood Resource Center. She moved from this into working with residents of downtown residential hotels, offering meditation classes and memorial services for those who die without family or a real community to note their passing.

She has since developed innovative and successful group meditation techniques for homeless and formerly homeless people in San Francisco. She uses some of the basics of zazen practice combined with harm reduction principles. The latter is an approach to substance use and abuse which seeks to meet individuals exactly where they are and to work with, in Suzuki Roshi's phrase, "Things as it is."

The Mission Neighborhood Resource Center, where Jana began her work, serves the needs of homeless people with severe or chronic mental health, addiction and physical health issues. Most group members have been users of methamphetamine, heroin, and alcohol, as well as having a high

incidence of depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

For an hour each week, the group meets for zazen and harm reduction education. This format provides an excellent opportunity for discussion of issues concerning substance abuse, mental health, spirituality, and the group's interpersonal dynamics. Through this process, participants have shown greater motivation for pursuing housing and health care and are more motivated to reducing the harms of substance abuse. Participants are also more involved with their case management and their community. Jana currently offers five sitting groups in the Mission, Downtown, and Tenderloin areas.

Zen Center's Outreach Department runs a variety of meditation and service programs for the wider community: working with prisoners, children, the homeless, and those in recovery; interfaith programs; and peace and environmental work. Jana has been approached by numerous people and groups, locally and internationally, to teach group meditation and harm reduction techniques to caregivers. Her work appears on websites such as "Singapore's Online Discussion Group," *Der Buddhistische-tagespresse* (Germany), *chuy-enphapluan* (Vietnam), *blackbuddhistonline* (International), and many others.

Jana and her co-worker at the Mission Neighborhood Resource Center, therapist Anibal Mejia, recently presented a white paper at the 2006 National Harm Reduction Conference in Oakland, California, on the effects of Jana's work. Their experience working together was described in an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of January 3, 2007:

Meditation, aside from lowering blood pressure and stress levels, can also promote a practitioner's self-awareness, according to a study published last year by Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin who studied data collected from a dozen Buddhist monks, including the Dalai Lama.

Mejia said that since Drakka has worked at the center, he's seen clients reduce stress and become more productive, especially methamphetamine addicts and alcoholics. In one case, Mejia said, a former meth addict credited meditation as the impetus for his return to the straight life.

"With this population, holding a focus is not an easy thing to do," Mejia said. "But it is a very effective thing... Jana helps us. We're just looking for something to make today a little better ... and build from there."

Jana spoke at the 2006 Sixth National Harm Reduction Conference and has been asked to speak again at the 2007 conference; she also has received requests to help start meditation and harm reduction groups throughout the country and in Canada for many of their "hard to help" populations.

Since the publication of the front-page story in the *San Francisco Chronicle* cited above (see <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/01/03/MNG73NC2QC1.DTL>), Zen Center has received numerous requests to lead additional sitting groups, as well as to train and counsel leaders in a variety of settings, including Episcopal Community Services Grief Response Team, Tenderloin Housing Clinic, San Francisco Community Clinics (12 community clinics in San Francisco), Glide Memorial Church, Marin Shambhala Training Center, and other community awareness and treatment centers locally.

During the past three years, Jana has led over 100 memorial services in single residence occupancy hotels in the Mission, Tenderloin, and South of Market districts of San Francisco. She leads large annual community memorials for people who have died on the streets and performs dedications and other community ceremonies to mark major events for the caregiver community. These ceremonies have included the opening service for the 2006 National Harm Reduction Conference, the annual service for Zen Hospice caregivers, and dedications at the Maitri Hospice. Unless requested otherwise, these services are nonreligious and are adapted from Buddhist forms to be all-inclusive.

Jana herself has suffered from post-traumatic stress and homelessness. Because she has personally experienced the conditions that many of her clients face, she has street credibility, and is an example of how Buddhist wisdom and practice can change someone's life. Because of her unique ability to combine unconditional love and hardheaded realism, these interventions have had a strong positive impact on the lives of the populations served.



PHOTO BY SHUNDO DAVID HANE

ON THE SANDOKAI

Lecture by Abbot Ryushin Paul Haller

July 11, 2007, Summer Intensive at City Center

The guiding theme of the Intensive is the teachings of the *Sandokai*, a Zen poem written in the eighth century that expresses an appreciation of the ideas and images of the Dharma.

An English translation of the first couplet in that poem is, "The Mind of the Great Sage of India is intimately transmitted from west to east." This couplet and a poem by Pablo Neruda called "Forget About Me" both explore the transmission of teachings beyond words. Here's the last part of Neruda's poem:

Let us look for secret things
Somewhere in the world.
On the blue shore of silence, or where the storm,
Like a rampaging train, has passed.

These poems, the *Sandokai* and Neruda's, point towards a disposition of mind-heart that was demonstrated here this morning. As part of the Intensive there is a daily class and we have invited teachers from different Buddhist traditions to teach the class. This morning a Jodo Shinshu priest, Bishop Ogui, who was a close Dharma friend of Suzuki Roshi, came to talk about practice from the perspective of his tradition. Suzuki Roshi and Bishop Ogui practiced together in Japantown in the early sixties. He thought of Suzuki Roshi as a mentor and an elder brother. This morning before he gave his presentation to



PHOTO BY CHRIS RUSEY

Participants in City Center's Summer Intensive explored the teachings of the Sandokai through field trips to a number of temples of other Buddhist lineages.

the class, he asked to go to the Founder's Hall to pay his respects to Suzuki Roshi. As he approached and entered the Kaisando he seemed to be silently talking to Suzuki Roshi.

As I think about his demeanor, deep feelings arise. He sighed deeply as he saw the statue of Suzuki Roshi, my Dharma grandfather, filled with that special tenderness evoked by coming to greet a dear old friend. Seeing him being deeply moved, moved me. The occasion felt very alive and heartfelt. Going through the usual formalities of offering incense and bowing, he made guttural, incomprehensible sounds “ah, oh, nnh, mmm”—an extraordinary non-verbal expression of reverence and devotion. The incense and the bows seemed to express a gratitude and appreciation that couldn't be articulated.

I thought of how our practice is guided by deep feelings that can sometimes mysteriously convey the Dharma more thoroughly than our thoughts, as if they were a secret even to ourselves—deep feelings of connection, of appreciation, of gratitude, and of reverence. Not a reverence that complies with the expectations of formalities but rather, in the spirit of Pablo Neruda's suggestion to “look for secret things somewhere in the world,” honors the gift of moments of intimate connection in the world, where fully meeting the moment engages the intimacy of “secret things” that can't be expressed in words. This reverence conveys a deep gratitude for the guidance and awakening experiences that intimacy brings into being.

In his Dharma talk Bishop Ogui spoke of his life's journey, from Los Angeles as a newly ordained 23-year-old Jodo Shinshu priest who, by his own assessment, was struggling to fit into American society. He had a very serious car accident and ended up in the hospital. His superiors thought he was unsuited for his position and gave him the choice of going to San Francisco or being sent back to Japan. He was too embarrassed to go back to Japan and so he came to San Francisco. There he met a Zen priest named Shunryu Suzuki, and his life took a new turn.

Sometimes events turn our life and reveal how to go beyond a narrow perspective that judges our circumstances as an obstacle. To commit our life to practice is to be turned by life's ever-changing circumstances and to continually discover the path of liberation. Through the shift in perspective, what has been called a hindrance can be seen as offering a teaching. There's a wonderful stanza in a poem by Antonio Machado where he says,

Last night as I was sleeping I dreamt—magnificent mistake
I dreamt that honeybees were making
White honey in my heart
Out of all my old failures—

What does it take to relate to our life in a way that turns our so-called failures into sweet honey?

By his own definition, Bishop Ogui thought of himself as a failure at that time. Yet now he looks back with a sweet appreciation for the difficulties



*The Berkeley
Buddhist Monastery.*

PHOTO BY CHRIS RUSEV

he faced. Similarly, recollections of his encounters with Suzuki Roshi bring forth a sweet appreciation that continues to support his life and transmit the Dharma. Both these sets of experiences, though quite different, have taught him how to discover “the secret things” that transmit the Dharma. These heartfelt encounters are the secret things that Pablo Neruda speaks of. How do we discover them? What kind of “looking” is that, with what kind of eyes? What kinds of teaching are transmitted by those secret things and how are they transmitted to the person who is filled with concerns, fears, yearnings, confusions, anxieties, and resentments? How are they transmitted in a way that brings a release, like “a storm passing and leaving an ease on the blue shore of silence.” Do we need the storm to have the release? How do we discover this sense of appreciation for our human life? Can we pay homage to our teachers in a heartfelt way that rekindles our appreciation and connection to their teachings? Our life will teach us and turn us when we engage it with an appreciation for what it offers.

The poetry of the *Sandokai* expresses an appreciation for the Dharma. Rather than asking us to try to figure out the meaning of its teachings it is asking us to hold them with appreciation. Then quite naturally something in us softens. When we start to appreciate a warm mid-summer evening, such as this evening, when it’s still light at eight o’clock, something opens that can release the ways in which we experience the world as not enough—not enough of what we want, and *too* much of what we don’t want.



PHOTO BY: RENSHIN JUDY BUNCE

In February 2007, Eijun Linda Cutts stepped down as co-Abbess and was honored for her seven years of dedicated and inspiring leadership.

Senior Dharma
Teacher Linda Cutts
with her family for the
holidays: her husband
Steve Weintraub and
her adult children
Sarah and David.



Just how do we go beyond “not enough” and “too much”? It’s a mystery to us. It’s as if we’ve been reciting the mantra of not enough since we were about 18 months old. We’ve recited it until we’ve become a virtuoso. We can take any situation and justify the mantra in terms of its particulars.

Each person is utterly amazing. Each person has gone through some extraordinary series of events to be right here. Recently I read an article by a biologist who was calculating the odds of this moment being exactly the way it is. So many billions of causal factors have to line up to make this moment exactly the way it is and yet we, with just a glance, can judge it as not enough. So much so, that “Just this is enough” is a “secret thing.” “Just this is enough” becomes the esoteric, “intimately communicated” transmission of the Dharma. *Just this is enough.*

Pablo Neruda says, “Let’s go look for those secret things somewhere in the world” and the *Sandokai* says, “The Heart-Mind of the Great Sage of India is intimately transmitted.” That way of engaging, that way of being, that way of non-being, that realizes every event as the beautiful expression of suchness, is the expression of the heart-mind of Buddha. *How* does a human being do that? It’s a mystery—a secret teaching beyond the strategies of gain and loss. In the Zen school we are guided by zazen posture. The more intimately the posture is engaged, the more the subtle details of being body reveal the Dharma. “Thumb tips lightly touching” intimately transmits the teaching of right effort. When our hands are in *gassho*, rather than thinking of pressing them together, think of them as stuck together, and that you’re very gently pulling them away from one another without breaking contact. Then look for the secret things that happen between your shoulder

blades. Our body is an endless resource of secrets. The level placement of the pelvis gives rise to the balance of the spine up through the crown of the head. Lengthening the front of the body from the groin to the throat opens the whole abdominal region from the solar plexus to the groin and invites in the body-breath of zazen that flows in and out without hindrance. This body-breath of zazen flowers into an appreciative disposition that inclines any and every experience towards realizing the secret of Dharma—*just this is enough*. Just this is complete.

We can turn it into words so easily, but they say nothing until they're taken in, embodied, and actualized. Then the alchemy that inspires the heart-mind to give itself to the experience of the moment is activated. The Heart-Mind of the Great Sage of India is activated. Fully activated, the Dharma is transmitted from a Zen priest to a Jodo Shinshu priest, who finds in chanting the name of Buddha the same intimacy his teacher found in zazen. So if we look for secret things in the body, if we look for secret things in the breath, if we look for secret things in the flowering of mind-heart, the world is perfumed with appreciation. In the *Sandokai*, the term "do" can translate as "inquiry." But to inquire into something, we have to let go of the mantra "this is not enough" and we also have to not already know what the moment is. We have to be available to learn. The awareness that arises from inquiry in and of itself brings about a harmonizing. The last term in *Sandokai*, "kai," means to harmonize. This is the intrinsic healing of the Buddha Way. As we bring awareness to the heart-mind that says "not enough," it is healed of its distress and that very same experiential content becomes a teaching. When we sit immersed in the body-breath of Buddha-mind, of Buddha-heart, of the mind-heart of the great sage of India—then the mind, as it says in the *Heart Sutra*, "is no hindrance." The secret becomes an open secret and the transmission occurs. We discover that it's not that the moment was lacking something, or that the situation was lacking something, rather we discover that the insistence upon *lacking* that made such compelling and convincing sense to us, was misguided.

Seemingly, as Bishop Ogui now reflects back on his early years in the United States with sweet appreciation, they are beyond success or failure. They were just the activity of a human life in the continual flow of cause and effect.

This is the continual movement of the transmission from west to east. From L.A. to San Francisco; from a Zen priest to a Jodo Shinshu priest. There's always interaction offering the transmission of the Dharma. Each day we have the full array of amazing experiences. Each day we recite the



Flower arrangement by Chris Rusev on the landing near City Center's Founder's Hall.

mantras “not enough” and “too much,” creating, as Pablo Neruda says, “a storm, raging like an express train going along.” And somehow, in some mysterious way, there are moments of pause. Mindfulness is the art of being available for the pause that reveals the experience of the moment. It’s to discover that between the inhale and the exhale, there’s a pause. It’s to discover that between this thought and the next thought, there’s non-thinking. It’s to discover that in the midst of having an experience and reciting the mantra “not enough” or the mantra “too much,” there’s a moment of just experiencing. To pause is to create the opportunity to experience the constant flow of causal existence just as it is without the need to change it.

Our practice is letting those moments of pause reveal the so-called “secret things,” to discover that the pause in the traffic noise is directly related to the traffic noise. That it’s awareness of our grasping that reveals releasing. That it’s awareness of contracting in response to our karmic life that teaches us how to open, and that it’s the realization of the heart-mind of the Great Sage of India that reveals the path of liberation.

Bishop Ogui and I never talked about what was going on in his mind and his heart when he was bowing in the Kaisando, but I know that I felt deep appreciation for practice just observing the reverence and appreciation he expressed. Something seemed to be transmited. Was it just the product of my own imagination? Was it how he moved? Was it how he carried his body? Was it the expressive sigh? Was it the seeming appearance that in that moment, he just forgot who he was and remembered how much he loved that



Hanging scrolls with calligraphy by Rick Dreher draped over the Tassajara dining room.

person he was bowing to? His dear Dharma friend. Was it that that moment of deep appreciation went beyond the personal relationship between the two of them and revealed the human capacity to forget self-centeredness; that selfish as we are we have this extraordinary capacity to drop it and to let the world be embraced with deep appreciation? Who can do such a thing? What are the workings of the mind and heart that enable such a thing? It's a secret. As Rumi would say, it's an open secret, for anybody who wants to know it. It's a secret that we can explore with every breath in zazen, with every moment of mindfulness, with every interaction, with every exchange. We can explore with every contraction and every expansion. With absorption in that exploration something beyond words is transmitted. Do we know exactly how this transmission will unfold as it moves from west to east? Did Suzuki Roshi know, "I'm going to tell this person to come to zazen, and 45 years later he'll be sitting in the dining room in Zen Center saying complimentary things about me"? Or did he just walk into the Buddhist bookstore and let the intimacy of meeting Bishop Ogui express itself with an invitation to join him in sitting zazen?

The transmission goes beyond the contrivance of human endeavor. That's why it's mysterious. It's a humble expression of the nature of existence; that reality is more than what we think it is. It's expressed through the very life force running through us and giving birth to thoughts, feelings, opinions, and the mantras "not enough" and "too much." That's what Buddha teaches to Buddha. That's what west teaches to east.

So here's the rest of Pablo Neruda's *Sandokai*, which he called "Forget About Me":

Let us look for secret things
Somewhere in the world.
On the blue shore of silence,
—or where the storm
Like a rampaging train, has passed.
There are faint signs left,
Coins of time and water,
Debris, celestial ash, and the irreplaceable rapture
Of sharing in the labor of solitude
And sand.

This "irreplaceable rapture of sharing in the labor of solitude and sand" is the diligence of our practice, but it's also just a giving thanks. It's just an offering. It's just saying that this human life is just a stick of incense offered on the altar of existence. That's the enactment of our vow to be Awakening Being.

Thank you.

LAY INITIATIONS, ORDINATIONS, AND DHARMA TRANSMISSIONS

CITY CENTER

- December 2006 Mark Lancaster received dharma transmission from Dairyu Michael Wenger.
- January 6, 2007 Margaret Bertrand and Robert Dodge received the precepts from Dairyu Michael Wenger. Chris Stillson and Bob Curry received the precepts from Gigen Victoria Austin. Greg Wallace received the precepts from Zenkei Blanche Hartman on behalf of Ingen Breen.
- June 23, 2007 Ferlie Andong, Michelle Burns, Sheryl Leaf, Patti Mitchell, and Cecilia Rodrigo received the precepts from Kiku Christina Lehnherr. Jim Shalkham received the precepts from Dairyu Michael Wenger on behalf of Jeffrey Schneider.
- September 15, 2007 Ann Baker, Keith Baker, and Graham Ross received priest ordination from Ryushin Paul Haller.

GREEN GULCH

January 24, 2007

Sarah Fry, Donna Romer, John Sheehy, and Marjorie Yasueda received the precepts from Tenshin Reb Anderson.

June 17, 2007

Marianne Jago, Lauren Majowicz, Lasse Loske, Amy Conley, and Daline Limbaugh received the precepts from Eijun Linda Cutts.

July 22, 2007

Melissa Dimmitt, Seth Kutzen, and Joyce Crews received the precepts from Daigan Lueck.

August 19, 2007

Carolyn Cavanagh received priest ordination from Tenshin Reb Anderson.

November 11, 2007

Kären Briggs, Lee Ferguson, Pam Heller, Yuki Kobiyama, Cormac Levenson, Roman Lewszyk, Karen Mueller, Joseph Murphy, and Karen Umezawa received the precepts from Tenshin Reb Anderson.

November 25, 2007

Reirin Gumbel received priest ordination from Furyu Schroeder.

TASSAJARA

September 12, 2007

Lane Robbins and Tyler Leedham received the precepts from Kosho McCall.

December 12, 2007

Rocky Stephen Burgess received the precepts from Myogen Steve Stücky and David Coady received the precepts from Kosho McCall.

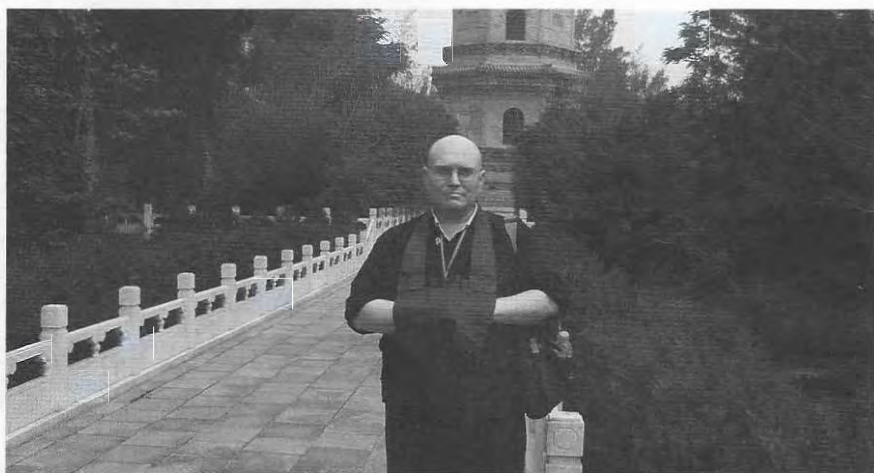


PHOTO BY MIKE BIENIEK

Taigen Dan Leighton in front of Yun Ju Temple in Northern China on a pilgrimage in June 2007.

DOGEN AND THE LOTUS SUTRA*

From a lecture by Taigen Dan Leighton

May 19, 2007

*This lecture was presented in conjunction with a book signing for Taigen Leighton's new book, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra*, published by Oxford University Press, 2007.

Dogen is the 13th century Japanese Zen monk who went to China and returned to Japan with the lineage that we practice at San Francisco Zen Center through its founder, Shunryu Suzuki. I have translated a number of Dogen's writings, but in this book, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra*, I have a chance to talk about him.

The *Lotus Sutra* is arguably the most important scripture in East Asian and certainly in Japanese Buddhism. There is a poem Dogen wrote toward the end of his life at Eihei-ji, the mountain monastery he set up in northern Japan:

How delightful, mountain dwelling so solitary and tranquil.
Because of this, I always read the *Lotus Blossom Sutra*.
With wholehearted vigor under trees,
what is there to love or hate?
How enviable; sound of evening rains in deep autumn.

In the book I focus on his comments about the central story in chapters 15 and 16 of the *Lotus Sutra*. In the first half of the sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha keeps asking his disciples and the bodhisattvas in his assembly, "Who will take care of this *Lotus Sutra* teaching in the distant future, evil age, after I am



PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGER

Youth from the John Muir School view the Peace Wall installed on the Koshland Park retaining wall across the street from City Center.

gone?" The Buddha keeps asking and at some point a bunch of bodhisattvas arrive who have come from a distant galaxy to hear the *Lotus Sutra* being preached. They say, "We'll do this, we'll keep alive the Lotus teaching in the distant future evil age after you're gone." And the Buddha says, "Well, actually you don't need to do that," and he points to the ground and from the open space under the earth spring forth thousands and thousands of great ancient bodhisattvas, many of them with retinues of many thousands of great ancient bodhisattvas. They make homage to Buddha and they're obviously ready to take care of all the suffering beings.

This is the first part of the story. And then Buddha's regular disciples say, "Wait a second, who are they? Where do they come from? Who taught them?" And the Buddha says, "I'm their teacher." Maitreya (the next, future Buddha) says, "We know that you left the palace 40 years ago and wandered around and finally were awakened and you're in your final teachings and getting ready to pass away. You couldn't have been their teacher; they're very ancient. That's like saying a 25-year-old is the father of a 100-year-old." And then Buddha reveals that he only seems to pass away into nirvana, but really he's been around for a very long time, an unimaginably long time. And he will continue to be here for twice that long.

That's the basic story and it's the crucial story in the *Lotus Sutra*; it divides the two halves of the sutra; according to the scholars, the cause-of-practice side and the fruit-of-practice side. It's right in the middle of the sutra. It's also a marker for the shift that happens in Buddhist history from the idea of many

lifetimes of practice, thousands of lifetimes of practice before one can be a Buddha to the other side, which is more Japanese Buddhism of realizing the truth of Buddha now.

Dogen uses this story particularly to show his view of reality; of the Earth itself, of space, of time, as mutually beneficial bodhisattvic agents helping us in our practice. One of the aspects of working with the *Lotus Sutra*, with its very colorful parables, and with Dogen who turns and twists images, is to understand and respect the importance to Buddhist practice and teaching of fantasy and imagination, and vision and dreams. Hee Jin Kim's wonderful book, *Eihei Dogen, Mystical Realist*, is still the best introduction to Dogen. He says, "Dogen was a religious thinker, not nearly or even primarily a philosopher. Dogen's most philosophic moments were permeated by his practical religious concern, against the background of which his philosophic activities stand out most clearly in their truest significance. What Dogen presents to us is not a well-defined, well-knit philosophical system, but rather a loose nexus of exquisite mythopoeic imaginings and profound philosophic visions." Dogen is famous for being playful in turning around images, turning around stories from sutras, playing with the images, making something very provocative with them.

So I want to explain how Dogen uses this story from the *Lotus Sutra* to show the vitality and dynamism of the Earth and space and time. In 1241, Dogen gave a dharma discourse (it is included in *Eihei Koroku*, which Shohaku Okumura and I translated as *Dogen's Extensive Record*) in which he speaks poetically of the spiritual fertility of the Earth when all beings abide in their

An unveiling and celebration was held in June 2007 to mark the completion of an eight-year labor of love, the Western Addition Peace Wall.



PHOTO BY TRACHTENBERG/LIEBERMAN

dharma positions with Buddha's enduring presence. Dogen starts by quoting Shakyamuni Buddha from the *Lotus Sutra*, "Since I attained buddhahood, I always remain here expounding dharma." Dogen comments, "All dharmas dwell in their dharma positions. Forms in the world are always present. Wild geese return to the north woods. Orioles appear in early spring. Not having attained suchness, already suchness is attained. Already having attained suchness, how is it?" He continues, "In the third month of spring, fruits are full on the bodhi tree. One night the blossom opens and the world is fragrant."

The fertility of the Earth is the point here; this is what it means that the Buddha is always remaining here expounding dharma. Dogen uses the story of the Buddha's continuing presence as an inspiration and an encouragement to continue practice and to see the fruits bursting forth in the third month of spring. When Dogen talks about Earth, he often talks about it in terms of space too, the "Earth" of the "ten directions"—north, south, west, east, and the directions in between and up and down—this is a way of saying everywhere. He talks about the Earth itself supporting our practice, supporting awakening, bursting forth with lotuses and other blossoms. And he talks about that in terms of space as well.

We might think of space as the space of San Francisco or the space of the Bay Area. We also think of space as emptiness or open space, outer space or the space between me and another person, but there is actually space between my ears, between my head and the cushion, space is also the things; it's not just empty space.

In a story about two Zen masters, older and younger dharma brothers, they're sitting talking and the older one says, "Do you know how to grasp



PHOTO BY: CATHERINESOPHIA

*Poet David Whyte
returned this year
to speak at an event
sponsored by Zen Center.*

space?" And the younger one says, "Yes, I do." And the older one says, "How do you grasp it?" And the younger one stroked the air with his hand. And the older one says, "You don't know how to grasp space." And the younger one says, "How do you grasp it, older brother?" And this other one grabbed the younger one's nose and pulled and actually according to the Chinese reading it could be that he even stuck his finger in his nostril and pulled. Anyway, the younger one said, "Agh! You're killing me; you're going to pull my nose off." And the older one said, "You can grasp it now."

Dogen talks about time in terms of this image of the Buddha who endures through time, who has an inconceivable lifespan. He says that we should question time; we shouldn't just take it for granted. So in some ways of course there's 10:15, 11:00, 11:15 and at some point they'll ring the bell for lunch because the clock says it's time. But that's just one aspect of time; as Dogen says it's actually moving in many different ways—from present to future, from present to present, from future to past. Some of you may remember previous times of being here in this room—I can think of many such, long, long ago. Some of us may imagine future times when we'll be in this room. Time itself moves in many directions. Time itself is available to help us, but we have some responsibility for time, time is not just some external container.

Dogen's emphasis on the temporal unity of practice and realization means that we're not practicing and waiting for some enlightenment in the future. This is our expression of enlightenment right now. How can we think of the sky or space itself or time itself as supporting us? How can we see our responsibility for time's motions? How can we take on showing up and paying attention and continuing to breathe and paying attention again? Without being caught up in the value judgments or if we get caught up in those, that's just more time flowing. How can we see reality itself, the fabric of reality as a bodhisattva, as a Buddha, as support for our practice? Space and time and the Earth itself are asking us to show up, to be present, to pay attention, to look at what's going on, to respond, with responsibility. And at the same time, in some way that is not how we usually think about things, space and time and the Earth itself are supporting us.

Thank you all very much.



PHOTO BY: TONY PATCHELL

Construction on the Russian River Zendo was started in October 2005. The zendo was completed in August 2006.

IT TAKES A SANGHA TO BUILD A ZENDO

by Lisa Hoffman

When Darlene Cohen and Tony Patchell began talking about moving to Spokane, Washington in 2003, their students and sanghas said no.

Darlene and Tony are long-time members of the San Francisco Zen Center community. Forced out of their apartment across the street from Zen Center during the dot-com boom by an opportunistic landlord, they moved to a four-room redwood cabin in rural Guerneville, California, about 1½ hours north of San Francisco.

Darlene initially commuted to San Francisco for weekly dokusan with her students, but expected them to find other teachers as she withdrew to the Russian River area. She discovered that her students were coming to her for Sunday practice days and other dharma activities. Darlene and Tony offered Saturday morning sittings and Dharma talks for neighbors and friends in their large main room, where people sat around their queen-size bed. Darlene and Tony had the beginnings of a Russian River Sangha. The problem was that they had no Zendo, and no money for a bigger building or to renovate their attached garage as the community outgrew the redwood cabin.

Then Spokane came knocking. Darlene and Tony had deep connections there with a robust sangha that badly wanted a teacher. San Francisco Zen Center was very supportive of this move because there were many teachers in the San Francisco Bay Area and none in Spokane. As Tony and Darlene considered this move, shock waves rocked their sanghas. We could not bear to lose them, and we said so. Several students convinced them it was possible

to raise the money to renovate their garage. We would build a Zendo. Deeply moved by the devotion of their sanghas, Darlene and Tony decided to stay.

We formed a board of directors, which included a lawyer, a professional fundraiser (me), and a real estate investor—all Tony's and Darlene's students or long-time Zen Center community friends. The first meeting was on October 2, 2004. Our lawyer, Sara Theiss, agreed to take on the long process of incorporation as a 501(c)3 nonprofit, so donors could deduct contributions. Tony became our construction project manager. Through his dogged efforts with architects, the county zoning board, and knowledgeable members of our board, we established a \$100,000 goal to build our Zendo. With additional construction costs and operational expenses for the first year, this figure soon increased to \$120,000. We were off on our first capital campaign!

Now, how were we going to raise \$120,000? I knew we needed to start with our board. We could not credibly ask others to give if we—those closest to the vision—had not done so ourselves. Using myself as an example, I explained the importance of commitments that were a stretch for each of us. Because of a chronic health condition, I work part time, but I made a \$1,000 pledge—a major gift with my financial situation. I urged other board members to do the same. Most capital campaigns identify a specific amount to ask of each individual, including board members. But we didn't need to do this because our board was so ready to give. One by one, board members contacted Darlene and Tony, made their pledges, and committed \$18,000!

One board member told us how he had helped raise money to establish Hartford Street Zen Center in the early 1980s through a series of fundraising events. We decided to use this model. We planned three events in areas rich with students and friends—San Francisco, at Darlene's and Tony's home in Guerneville, and Oakland. We wanted our invitation to reflect clearly and tastefully the evening's intention, so we included the phrase "donations invited" underneath the date and location.

The San Francisco event was held on December 11, 2004, at the Haight Street home of our board president, Kirk Phillips. This late afternoon hors d'oeuvres party kicked off the campaign. We agreed on a simple program: Kirk offered a "presidential" welcome; Blanche Hartman and Michael Wenger spoke about the importance of small sanghas; Darlene described the Russian River Zendo vision, and I gave the fundraising pitch. I knew this event had good fundraising potential because of the number of people invited, several with the capacity to make larger level gifts in the range of \$1,000-\$5,000. During the pitch, I mentioned my stretch gift and asked other board members to share the amount they had committed. I knew it was important to create



PHOTO BY: TONY PATCHELL

Lunch at a Practice Day at Russian River Zendo. Lisa Hoffman is seated fourth from the right, across from Darlene Cohen.

a gift range, so people with the ability were encouraged to give on a higher level, and so each individual would feel good about whatever amount he or she could contribute.

The event was attended by about 50 people, and the program and pitch went exactly as planned. As I made the “ask,” pledge forms, envelopes and pens were distributed, followed with a few moments of silence to give guests time and space to consider what they wanted to do. We raised \$22,000 during the evening, and several people committed to send checks, amounting to an additional \$7,000. By January 15, we had raised \$48,000. Other contributions came in as Darlene and Tony talked throughout the community about our vision, project, and capital campaign.

Our second event was at Darlene’s and Tony’s home on January 19, 2005. We envisioned this evening to be more of an open house for friends and neighbors, with a very low key invitation to support our Zendo project. Mary Mocine and Steve Stücky spoke about small sanghas, and the event raised \$4,400 that evening, with an additional \$1,300 mailed in by guests. At our April 9, 2005 board meeting our treasurer, Susan Spencer, giddily announced that \$54,000 had been raised to date.

We scheduled our Oakland event for September 17, 2005, hosted by Roland Brown and Rachel Flynn, two of Darlene’s long-term students, at

their cozy apartment. This event was also low-key, with a soft pitch to the 25 or so friends of modest means raising \$4,525.

Grace Schireson, of Empty Nest Zendo in North Fork, California, and a long-time member of the Berkeley Zen Center community, unexpectedly volunteered to lead a day-long conference on women ancestors in Zen to benefit the Russian River Zendo building project. We were delighted! Eighty people attended the conference on March 5, 2006, probably the stormiest day on record for that year. Our drenched guests contributed over \$1,700 after expenses. Darlene and Tony also felt that Grace's significant and scholarly topic announced our presence as a serious practice community.

We had raised \$80,000 by our April 22, 2006 board meeting, and had another \$40,000 to bring in. Proud of all that we had accomplished, we knew we'd have to roll up our sleeves a bit further to finish the job. It was clear that we had maximized our event fundraising, so we formed a special committee. This new fundraising committee met at the beginning of May, and I laid out a plan to raise the remaining funds. Our focus was on individual meetings with a short list of people capable of giving \$1,000-\$5,000, beginning at the \$5,000 level. Though some had already given, we felt they might give again to help us reach our goal.

Darlene and Tony eagerly agreed to be lead solicitors for these meetings—they love having lunch with their friends! We also decided to send a final fall mailing to the many students, friends, family, and acquaintances who were so



PHOTO BY TONY PATCHELL

supportive of our Russian River Zendo project. Our treasurer, Susan Spencer, and I would conclude the campaign by soliciting institutional support from the San Francisco Zen Center.

Our completion campaign got off to a strong start with several board members contributing additional gifts. Ultimately, the board contributed \$45,000 to build the Zendo. Darlene's and Tony's meetings were also a great success, bringing in \$21,000. By the October 21 board meeting, we had raised \$113,000—only \$7,000 to go! Time to meet with San Francisco Zen Center.

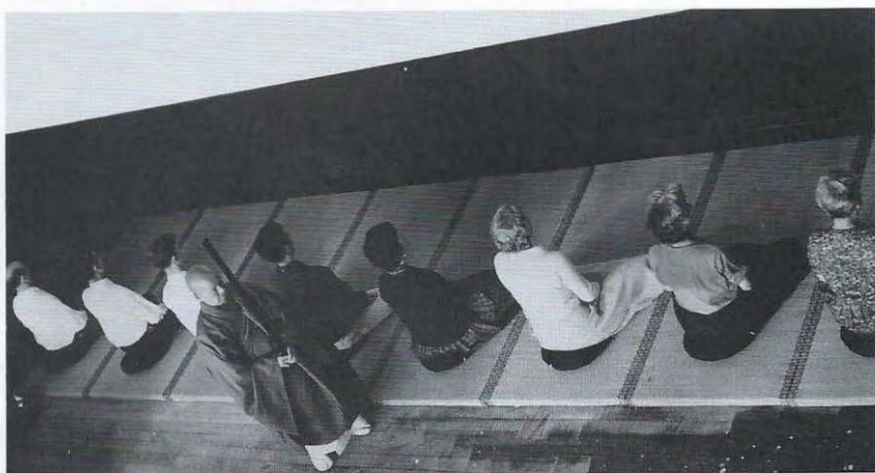
An early December luncheon meeting with Susan O'Connell and Michael Wenger yielded an invitation to submit a written request for the \$5,000 we had solicited. Meanwhile, we sent hand-made holiday cards to our many friends and beloved donors *without* an "ask" because Darlene wanted simply to thank people for what they had already done. We were surprised and jubilant when, in response to our cards, the checks started coming in.

By mid-January, our holiday cards, along with other surprise contributions (a remembrance in a will), raised another \$13,000. We were over our goal by \$6,000! Since our request to San Francisco Zen Center had been specifically to complete our capital campaign, we decided to withdraw our proposal. We were happy for Zen Center to give this money to another small sangha seeking to build a Zendo.

Our sweet little Zendo opened to sitters Saturday, August 26, 2006. It has bamboo floors, large windows overlooking the beautiful countryside, and places for about 25 people. The Russian River Zendo has become part of Indra's Net.

In all, 215 people contributed to our capital campaign.

It takes many Sanghas to build a Zendo.



Suzuki Roshi at old Sokoji during zazen, circa 1962.

UNIVERSAL PRACTICE FOR LAYMEN AND MONKS

Lecture by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

July 25, 1971, Tassajara

It is rather difficult to make actual progress as a monk or as a layman without understanding what practice is. I will talk about a kind of universal practice for both laymen and monks.

Whatever you do is practice: to drink tea or to eat or to sleep, to walk, or to sit down. But how you understand these things is very important. If you miss the point, even though you look like you are doing a proper practice, it doesn't work. This is very important.

Whether you do it for yourself or for the sake of the truth, or for the sake of Buddha, or for the sake of people. If there are many types of fruit in a basket, my way is to eat the worst fruit first. Why do you eat the best one first? The last one, you know, will also be the best [laughs]. The last one is also the worst one.

When you eat the best thing first, you discriminate the best one from the not-so-good ones. That is a kind of discrimination. It means that the idea of self comes first. If only one person is eating fruit, there will not be a problem. But if many people are eating from the same basket, you will be in trouble. If you eat the worst one first there is [laughs] no trouble, even though you eat with many people. And this attitude of eating the worst thing means non-discrimination. You may say it is a kind of discrimination, but a self-centered attitude is not involved.

The point is do you develop your idea of self, or do you develop buddha-mind in your everyday practice. We should always put the buddha-mind first

and the self next. We should always follow buddha-mind. To follow buddha-mind, it is necessary to realize what is buddha-mind. How to realize buddha-mind is zazen practice.

Zazen practice has two sides or two virtues. One virtue is that through practice you will intuitively know what is buddha-mind because your selfish idea or your small self becomes smaller. Another virtue of our practice is you will get accustomed to what you have realized.

But it is difficult to actualize your intuition in everyday life. So how to actualize your small enlightenment or deep enlightenment of your everyday life is by practice. The more you continue to practice, the smaller your small self becomes. Big self will take over your small self. Just as you eat fruit from the basket. If you eat all of the basket, you know, that is Buddha. Whether you start with bad ones or good ones, if you finish everything, there is no problem. Anyway, you have eaten. So in its wide sense, if you continue your practice through and through, it is okay. But if you choose bad practice, you will have more difficulties, that's all.

It looks like it is easier to choose the best ones. It looks like easy practice; but actually, if you have to continue that practice until you finish the fruit, you must think, "Which is better?" When you eat two or three, it looks very easy. But when you have to continue to eat through and through until you finish everything, it is not so easy.

You will attain enlightenment if you eat the fruit, continue to eat the fruit; you will finish all the fruit. Then after you finish it, there is no



PHOTO BY BARBARA WENGER

Zen Center Board meeting in September 2007 in the private dining room of Greens Restaurant.



Green Gulch Farm manager Sara Tashker. Profits from the farm exceeded budget expectations by over \$30,000 this past fiscal year. Congratulations, farmers!

problem. Before you finish it, you compare which way will be better and you will wonder which way will be better. But if you finish it, you will know what you have been doing. Better to eat the worst one first for the sake of everyone. That is a much easier way. You will have enlightenment after you finish eating all the fruit. You will be enlightened about what is bad. And, on the contrary, the people who eat the good one first, after they finish it, they will realize their enlightenment is over something good. The enlightenment itself is not different—same enlightenment. When you realize what is bad, you will realize at the same time what is good. And if you know what is good, then you will know what is bad and what will be the way to follow the truth. To follow the truth is something good. And if you do not follow the truth, that is bad.

Self-centered practice does not last long. You will have time to give up self-centered practice. If you could continue that kind of bad practice through and through, it means that you are a bodhisattva. Unless you are a bodhisattva, you cannot continue. So unless you are a bodhisattva and follow Buddhist practice, it is not possible to realize what is true. Whatever the practice may be, the practice which is self-centered is not Buddhist practice. Buddhist practice is how to reduce our self-centered practice, to develop buddha-mind.

The point we should be aware of is to put the first principle first and the second principle next. And put the big self first and small self next. And try to extend the big self always. That is the point of practice.

Buddhist practice is the practice of selflessness. Whether you are a layman or monk, your practice should not be self-centered practice. It is



*City Center resident
Marvin Mercer received
priest ordination from
Darlene Cohen.*

the layman who is supposed to be very self-centered, but priests can be very selfish [laughs]. From a materialistic viewpoint priests usually are very poor; and their life looks very unselfish. But from the spiritual viewpoint, priests may be selfish. If I have a book, then you trust me. We cling to some teaching and think what Buddha said or Dogen-zenji said—"This is right." That is a very selfish way.

Laymen may say "I don't know. I don't know which is true. I don't know what to do." They are very honest. But some priests are not so honest. They think they know many things, but actually they do not know so much. They can be in the priest's role, but actually they do not understand so much.

They want to accumulate treasures in their own mind. And they are happy to count the treasures they have. "How many books have I read? How much understanding do I have?" But the reason they study so much is to be proud of the knowledge they have. That is why, spiritually, some priests are involved in a more self-centered practice.

For both priests and laymen the most important point is to develop buddha-mind instead of small self. It is not so difficult to know what is small self and what is big self. If you know that, you should try hard to develop the big self. That is our practice. Until you can intuitively choose the right path, you should continue to practice.

I'm talking about actual Buddhist practice. There are many Buddhas and ancestors who attained enlightenment, who finished eating everything in the basket. They tried very hard and they finished eating. Some ancestors, like the Sixth Ancestor, tried to eat something good as a layman for a long, long

time and realized that this was not the right path and switched their path to Buddha's way.

Maybe the Sixth Ancestor attained enlightenment when he was a layman. But what he realized was, "This is not the right path." That is enlightenment. And he followed Buddha's way. After he started to follow Buddha's way it took many years before he started to preach, to share his enlightenment with people. After he received transmission from the Fifth Patriarch, he escaped from the monastery and lived with fishermen. And for a long time, no one knew where he had gone. He was trying to digest his enlightenment, trying to extend his enlightenment to his everyday life. He was trying to express his enlightenment in his everyday activity—the way he spoke, the way he treated things, the way he treated people. It took a pretty long time before he could do so.

You may wonder why you are staying at Tassajara and practicing zazen. It is to digest the knowledge or experience, zazen experience; to completely extend your realization to your everyday life. The rules we follow are set up so that you can extend the Buddhist way of life in usual, everyday life; the way you eat here, the way you recite sutras, is how to extend your realization to your everyday activity. Even though you feel it is difficult, you will digest it more and more. And eventually what you will do will help people even though you do not try to help people.

When you come to this point, there is no Buddha, there is no layman, there is no priest, there is no teaching. Because you have it, nothing special



PHOTO BY TANVA TAKACS

Participants in Tassajara's 2007 Winter practice period led by Abbot Paul Haller begin a period of outdoor walking meditation.

exists. And you are actually always one with people, one with your friend, one with Buddha. Sometimes a Zen master may say, “No Buddha; kill Buddha.” What does it mean? What it means is to be completely one with Buddha. You don’t need Buddha any more. You yourself are Buddha. How you attain this is through your practice.

At first when you fear Buddhism, it looks like there are many precepts to observe; there are many rules to follow; there are many buddhas to worship. But if you worship Buddha, according to the Buddhist way, more and more, you yourself will become Buddha and you don’t need another Buddha. Whenever you come to Buddha, naturally you will bow to Buddha, not trying to do anything. That is more than worship. Just bow to Buddha.

When I was young, I didn’t like to bow. Teachers or monks just bow to Buddha. It looks like a very superficial practice. After long, hard difficulty it will be different.

So we have to have eyes to see which practice is progressive, mature, good practice. It is not difficult to tell which is which. But when you are young, you hate that kind of authority. We have no chance to see what is real practice. We do not see things actually as it is, as a small child may do. That is why sometimes you don’t like formal practice. But formal practice and mature, good practice—between them there is a big difference.

I understand why you do not like traditional religion from inside Christianity; I understand how you feel. But if the feeling you have comes from your strong self-centered criticism, then you must think more about



PHOTO BY: TRACHTENBERG/LEBERMAN

Senior Dharma Teacher Blanche Hartman at a protest in support of the people of Burma in September 2007.

what you say and how you understand and how you see. Before you say something, even before you feel something, reflect on yourself. This is zazen practice. Your mind should be very clear so that you can see things as they are. Without practice, if you say something it may be a one-sided view. It may be a very self-centered statement or feeling. Always what we should do is to extend our buddha-mind forever.



PHOTO BY: CHRIS RUSEV

FROM THE GARDEN TO THE PICNIC BASKET: New Books from Zen Center

by Jeffrey Schneider



Karla Oliveira, working in a long Zen Center tradition of bringing Tassajara Guest Season meals to home tables, has written *Tassajara Cookbook: Lunches, Picnics & Appetizers*. In spite of the title, however, the delights to be found within can be used in a variety of meals. You need not be hiking through the Los Padres National Forest during your stay at Tassajara to enjoy these treats. Many of them work well for a luncheon or as canapés for a cocktail party or a light first course for dinner.

The book contains spreads (including vegan recipes), pâtés and loaves (including two versions of the frequently requested nut loaf), plus relishes, marinades, cookies and other sweets. For those who want to increase their tofu vocabulary, there is an entire section of recipes using tofu. Those who have been to Tassajara in the summer will discover some of their old favorites here, as well as some new surprises.

Also delicious are the photographs of some of the delicacies themselves by Patrick Tregenza and of Tassajara in all of its beautiful seasons by Renshin Judy Bunce. This book gives the newer cook some wonderful and simple ideas and the more experienced new avenues to explore.

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Every once in a great while one is graced to hold a book which is more than a book. *Gardening at the Dragon's Gate*, by Wendy Johnson, is about a life—full of love, passion and wisdom. Wendy lived at Green Gulch Farm for more than 25 years and essentially created the garden there. Her breadth of knowledge about living systems, as well as the culture of plants and flowers is truly encyclopedic. I remember once, many years ago, walking with her through the garden. In the midst of our conversation she would point to a particular flower and tell me its meaning in Victorian flower language. (Carnations stood for modesty, because the petals never entirely open to show the flower's heart.)

One need not be a gardener, even of the window box variety, to find inspiration and freshness in this book. It contains great information about the planting and care of garden plants from preparing the ground, to composting, pest control and so on.

But to me the glory of Wendy's accomplishment is that she helps us to see more clearly and to appreciate not only planned, but accidental beauty. Consider this:

Occasionally, a garden "borrows" surprise, beauty, meaning and even context from a nearby landscape, just as the formal Japanese tea garden at Green Gulch that contains not a single flowering shrub "borrows" the voluptuous down-drift of pale pink petal confetti sloughed off by the huge sweetheart rose planted outside the teahouse gate.

Though my own involvement with plants comes in what I can grow in pots in my urban apartment, I knew when I first opened this book that it had much to tell and teach me. It is a joy to browse through and a truly wonderful accomplishment. Get it for the gardener in your life or to grow flowers in your heart.

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