

# Wind Bell

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## UNDERTAKING GREAT COMPASSION WITHOUT DELAY

Lecture by Abbess Linda Cutts  
July 9, 2006, Green Gulch Farm

Good morning. It is a beautiful day. The fog is burning off and the sky is indescribably blue. Every morning before zazen I have the pleasure of having tea with the Jisha, the person who assists me by carrying incense, the Anja, who makes the tea and tidies up the room, and my assistant, so there's a little tea party every morning before zazen at about 4:30 a.m. Often during this spring and early summer we've been talking about (even though usually there is not talking before zazen in the morning, we do) the wildlife here at Green Gulch.

There are two foxes who have taken up residence under the Ranch House and they have various capers that they are doing, bringing rabbit feet and fur and leaving them as offerings on the Ranch House doorstep, scampering across the roof of Cloud Hall and the Zendo. They have a very wide territory: they have been seen up on the hill, in Spring Valley, and in the central area. We do not know if they have any kits yet, but they may soon. Then we have the owls, various encounters with great horned owls standing on the road, and the babies sitting three in a row on their perch all day by the guest house, the mother guarding them. The coyotes wail in the night and wake me up from the hills called Coyote Ridge. The quail babies have hatched. They run very fast, dozens of them among the weeds making their wonderful noise. The garden and the farm are producing and we're taking produce to the Farmers' Market at the Embarcadero each week; and people there are happy to see us.

As I describe these things, feelings of love for this place come up for me. I do not mean just Green Gulch Valley; I mean this earth, this land, the whole Buddha-verse, the whole universe. But it starts with love of what we know best, what we are most intimate with—when the roses bloom, when the wildflowers come up. Each of you I am sure has this kind of loving feeling with people, animals and plants, with mountains and rivers. And along with love, if we allow it, comes a natural feeling of wanting to protect, wanting to take care of.

After the lecture two weeks ago I made an announcement, perhaps uncharacteristic for me. I recommended and asked people to see “An Inconvenient Truth.” I am sure many of you have seen it or are planning to. What has happened for me through an accumulation of things—not just this movie—is that I’ve gone “over the top” about the issues of global warming in particular and the environment in general. And I feel that this topic needs to come up from the dharma seat, to be brought forward as a practice issue, not a political issue. That’s how it is coming up for me.

Today, I want to bring dharma practice very closely in alignment with our concern for this world, and concern for global warming in particular. Practice, on the one hand, and loving and protecting the earth, on the other, are completely intertwined, really one thing. Yet we sometimes separate them or feel we have to do one thing first and then another. I have been asked to be on the steering committee for a group concerned with global warming, California Interfaith Power and Light. The group was begun by an Episcopal priest, Sally Bingham, from Grace Cathedral. Her ministry is, actually, environmental action, especially global warming. Zen Center and many other churches, synagogues and mosques are members of this organization. The California Chapter is part of a nationwide organization called the Regeneration Project.

I often get books in the mail that people want me to read because I am what is known in the book publishing industry as a “big mouth.” [Laughter.] If I like a book I have access to various groups and I can talk about it here on a Sunday. I am taking my dharma position as a “big mouth” today in a different way, not promoting a book but talking about our practice in relation to these issues of caring for our world. When we read the *The Avatamsaka Sutra (The Flower Ornament Scripture)*, we find Sndhana inquiring of various bodhisattvas how to practice the bodhisattva way, the way of a person who has awakened the mind that wants to live for the benefit of all beings. Each bodhisattva gives him teachings and sends him on to the next. After many visits he is sent to see Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, who embodies compassionate energy. This bodhisattva is known in many countries by many names: Kuan Yin in China, Kannon in Japan, Chenrisig in Tibet; and the name translates as Sound Observer,

or The One Who Hears the Cries of the World. Avalokiteshvara is seated on a diamond boulder on a plateau in a wooded mountain clearing, adorned with springs, palms and streams, sitting wakefully expounding the teaching to a group of people.

Sudhana asks: "I have set my mind on supreme perfect enlightenment, and I ask you to tell me how to learn and carry out the practice of enlightening beings." Avalokiteshvara, the personification of infinite compassion, says: "I know a way of enlightening practice called 'undertaking great compassion without delay,' which sets about impartially guiding all sentient beings to perfection, dedicated to protecting and guiding sentient beings by communicating knowledge to them through all media. Established in this method of enlightening practice, 'undertaking great compassion without delay,' I appear in the midst of the activities of all sentient beings, without leaving the presence of all buddhas, and take care of them by means of generosity, kind speech, beneficial action, and cooperation." Another translation is "identity-action."

Then he describes other ways that he helps beings, "I take care of them and develop them by speaking to them according to their mentalities, and by showing conduct according to their inclinations, ... producing various forms commensurate with their various interests, and by inspiring them to accumulate good qualities, ... appearing to them as members of their own various races and conditions, and by living together with them." Here is Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva saying, this is how I protect and help beings. I speak to them in a way they can understand, according to their inclinations, their mindsets. I take any



PHOTO BY LUCY XIAO

*This summer at Tassajara, Abbot Ryushin Paul Haller led a retreat with Brother David Steindl-Rast on The Spirit of Practice—Christian and Zen.*



PHOTO BY MICK SOPRO

*On July 4, Green Gulch celebrated Interdependence Day with a farm game pictured here called catch-the-dragon's-tail.*

form and I live together with them. We do not necessarily know who or what is Avalokiteshvara, because this bodhisattva takes any form that will help beings, whatever anyone needs.

The sutra continues: “Perfecting this practice of unhesitating compassion, I have vowed to be a refuge for all sentient beings, to free them from fears of calamity, threat, confusion, bondage, attacks on their lives, insufficiency of means to support life, inability to make a living”—all these things we have anxiety and fear about—“the perils of life, ... miserable conditions, unknown hardships, servitude, separation from loved ones, living with the uncongenial”—which is one of the most difficult sufferings—“physical violence, mental violence, sorrow and depression. I have undertaken to be a refuge for all beings from all these fears and perils.”

This is “undertaking great compassion without delay,” taking any form that’s necessary with no hesitation; and, in particular, offering four specific practices or methods of guidance: giving, kind speech, beneficial action, and cooperation or identity-action. Grounded in this sutra, which was composed in the first and second centuries C.E., these practices were put forth as bodhisattva practices. They are for anyone, and they help us to become Avalokiteshvara ourselves. This is basic practice.

When we think of caring for suffering, we must first care for our own suffering. We cannot skip over that because if we are not there for ourselves, listening to ourselves, we can’t help other beings. Then we can listen to those around us, family and friends, and it spreads from there. Now we are hearing the

cry of the Earth. We have heard it for decades, but now it is urgent, unmistakable. Our existence and the earth's existence is an interrelated, interdependent event. There is not one without the other. These practices of generosity, kind speech, beneficial action and identity-action are ancient, being offered to practitioners, even from thousands of years ago. How can we take up these practices now? If we do not take them up, there will be no great horned owls, no trees, no loved ones.

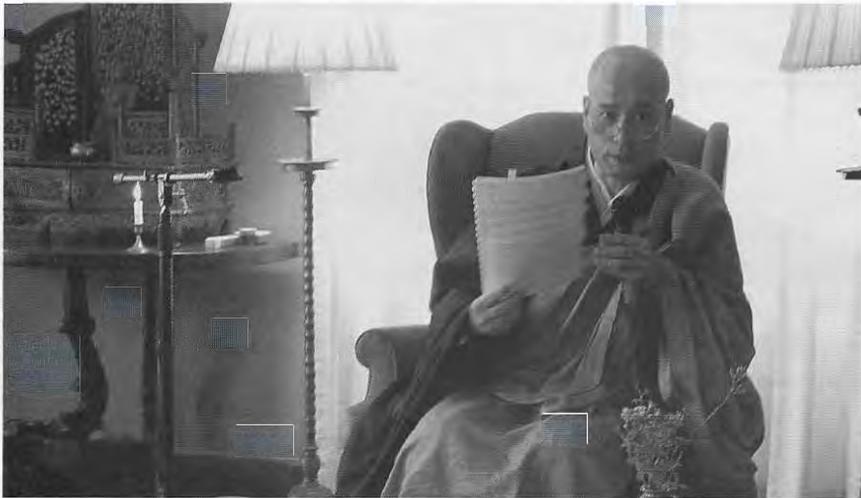
Let us look together at practicing "undertaking great compassion without delay." That is part of how seeing this movie has helped me. People say, "It's preaching to the choir. People who go to see the movie already know these things, they already care." And I would count myself among that "choir": I have been on the Environmental Committee of Zen Center, I have composted, recycled for years, and bought organically grown foods. But recently something pushed me over the top. For example, I have finally gotten around to putting in compact florescent light bulbs (takes one out of her sleeve). I realize that I do not like the quality of this light aesthetically. It's garish, too bright. I don't like it. But I say to myself, "Tough! It doesn't matter any more whether the aesthetics are soft glow." There is something about doing it now—unscrewing the incandescent bulb and screwing in the compact florescent bulb, without delay. Their shape is very beautiful actually, with the swirls. What are we waiting for? It's at that level that I felt I got pushed over the top.

I have felt hesitant to speak about these issues over the years because I feel that I do not know enough. I do not know the statistics, the science, but I decided not to let that stop me. We can look up the facts on the Web. I do not have to be the fount of all of that knowledge. I do feel, as this "mouth," that I want our

*Aina Alli, Mirni Ramsay,  
Abbess Jiko Linda Cutts,  
Alexis Pepper-Smith, and  
Shanna Langdon following  
a lay initiation ceremony at  
Green Gulch in May.*



PHOTO BY RENSHIN BUNCE



Visiting teacher and Dogen scholar Shohaku Okumura teaches at the Genzo-e retreat in January at City Center.

practice, our zazen practice, our practice of waking up, to come into action in as many detailed ways as possible, without delay.

Dogen Zenji, in a section of his masterwork *Shobogenzo* entitled “The Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance,” takes up the four practices first mentioned in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. I read this fascicle today as an environmentally sound dharma talk. It is straight dharma but I see how it is inextricably bound together with environmental concerns and practices.

In the first of these methods, the practice of giving, there are, traditionally, three things that we give. The first is material things, like food or clothing. Next is giving dharma, perhaps giving dharma is the most important. But it is hard to hear dharma if you’re hungry or do not have shelter. So we give according to the situation, we give what is needed. The third gift is the gift of fearlessness. Avalokiteshvara is often depicted in the mudra of non-fear. It is hard to hear about the loss of our planet. We don’t want to hear about global warming because we may become paralyzed with despair. We can’t believe that this is going to happen. In fear we turn off the radio, stop reading about this and try to avoid knowing what is really occurring.

The World Cup is today. Italy plays France. The entire world, except the United States, is tuning in for this game. One of the reasons I like to watch it is to feel the spirit of community, the almost religious spirit that happens in this sports event. I had the thought this morning—it’s like the Kyoto Accords, everyone but the United States is signed on—what if the entire world took up these environmental issues with that much fervor and spirit, like the World



PHOTO BY JESSE WIENS

City Center residents Will Fuller, William Wesson, Carl Loeffler, and Greg Fain on a bike trip to Sausalito.

Cup, joining together as a community of beings. How we could change things! Fearlessness comes from feeling that change is possible, and wanting to see that change occur. In a talk Joanna Macy gave to activists she said, if you're losing a game—an equivalent in soccer might be if you're losing one-nil and you've just got a couple more minutes—you don't give up. You go out and you give it everything. That kind of feeling, that these are the last minutes of the game, our last chance to turn this around—if you see the movie you'll hear this—could bring us together to give it everything we've got, starting with the details of our life.

I've realized, living at Green Gulch, to get anywhere, I think, I need to get in the car. It is not true! There are also legs and bicycles and carpooling. I do not like carpooling. I just want to be in my own little space and have my own radio program or tape on. That same thought came up for me—"Tough!" I really feel like I can't evaluate and discern in that same way anymore. I really feel a change in me. In the last couple of weeks I've made several decisions about *not* popping over the Golden Gate Bridge to do an errand. It's not okay to continue to do that without any thought of the effect. I offer this in the spirit of giving, as a practice of giving and non-greed. Dogen says giving *means* non-greed. I am making a commitment to look at the greed, hate and delusion of my life, which is at the core of my decisions, my thinking, my actions.

The second of the Bodhisattva's four methods of guidance, kind speech, suggests that we not be discouraged, and speak in loving words to each other. Dogen has wonderful things to say about kind speech. "Kind speech means that



PHOTO BY SHERI NORDWALL

*Dairyu Michael Wenger (2nd from left) and his lay initiates Mary Scott, Max Gimlett, and Yohan Nordwall with Senior Dharma Teacher Blanche Hartman following the ceremony in January.*

when you see sentient beings you arouse the mind of compassion and offer words of loving care. It is contrary to cruel or violent speech. In the secular world, there is a custom of asking after someone's health. In Buddhism there is the phrase 'please treasure yourself' as a way to greet someone. How do we truly treasure ourselves? As Dogen says elsewhere, "The entire universe is the true human body." We are interdependent. Treasuring ourselves truly is treasuring the whole body of the universe. Dogen goes on to say, "Kind speech is the basis for reconciling rulers and subduing enemies. Kind speech arises from kind mind, and kind mind from the seed of compassionate mind. You should ponder the fact that kind speech is not just praising the merit of others; it has the power to turn the destiny of the nation." I would say it has the power to turn the destiny of all nations. Speaking kindly about these issues that matter, that are true, and that are beneficial to talk about—not out of anger but out of understanding each other and understanding our habits—can turn the destiny of a nation, the destiny of this world. The destiny of planet Earth is very clear when you see those graphs in the movie about the effects of global warming. How do we turn this destiny? Kind speech is a way.

Third of the four methods that Avalokiteshvara put forth is beneficial action. Beneficial action is what we can do right now to benefit this situation. What haven't we done yet that is easy, as easy as screwing in a light bulb or turning down the thermostat? All these "little things" we can do today. Without delay. The next car you buy, what kind of car might it be? Can you afford a hybrid? Can you *not* afford a hybrid? Can we start to bicycle? These are beneficial actions.

Can we pass the word? Can we actually turn this?

Dogen says, “Beneficial action’ is skillfully to benefit all classes of sentient beings; that is, to care about their distant and near future, and to help them by using skillful means.” It’s not just caring about those close to us, but also those in the distant future. This is what I mean when I say I am reading this with an ecological mind. “Foolish people think that if they help others first, their own benefit will be lost; but this is not so. Beneficial action is an act of oneness, benefiting self and others together. ... We should benefit friend and enemy equally,” and I think taking care of the environment is just that. We might say, “It is hard to really know how to benefit an ‘enemy.’” Taking this practice up through taking care of the environment is benefiting friend and foe equally. Again, Dogen says, “You should benefit self and others alike. If you have this mind, even beneficial action for the sake of grasses, trees, wind, and water is spontaneous and unremitting. This being so, make a wholehearted effort to help the ignorant.” Doesn’t it sound like he’s talking to us right now in 2006? “Beneficial action for the sake of grasses, trees, wind, and water is spontaneous and unremitting.” Since we are all interconnected, how could it not help?

The last of these four methods is called identity-action, also translated as cooperation or non-difference, or “self and others are one,” or taking the appropriate form, one of Avalokiteshvara’s main practices. This is also referred to in Chapter 25 of the *Lotus Sutra*. Whatever form you need to wake up, Avalokiteshvara says, “I’ll come in that form.” This is the practice of unhesitatingly, without delay, taking whatever form is necessary. The thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, each arm holding a different implement also is a

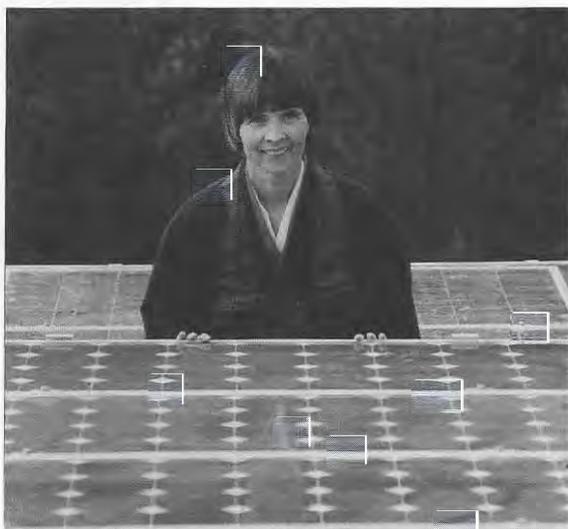


PHOTO BY LUDITH KERNAN

*Connie Cummings, Tassajara's former Plant Manager, largely initiated the solar panel project at Tassajara.*

representation of taking any form without delay. What form can we take? We can understand "An Inconvenient Truth" as a form of infinite compassion that has come to help us wake up. At this time the causes and conditions are ripe. Identity-action, the non-duality of self and other, and the practice of exchanging self for other encourage us to make an effort to understand others' motivations. If we make this effort we can understand others. A verse for bowing, which celebrates this non-duality of self and other, is:

The one who is bowing  
The one who is bowed to  
Their nature, no nature  
My body, other's body  
Not two  
Plunging into the inexhaustible vow  
Living in harmony with all

What comes from this teaching of non-duality of self and other? The inexhaustible vow of benefiting others and living in harmony with all. What more can we say for taking up these issues of the environment, living in harmony with all, not living at the expense of all? This fourth method of guidance, of identity-action or cooperation can be completely expressed by all the different practices of taking care of our environment.

Dogen writes: "Identity-action means non-difference. It is non-difference



PHOTO BY RENSHIN BUNCE

*Members of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an order of queer nuns dedicated to community service, ministry, and outreach, supported Vince Gaither at his lay initiation in April. (See photo on page 44 for names of initiates.)*

from self, non-difference from others. People form a nation and seek a wise ruler, but they do not know completely the reason why a wise ruler is wise, they only hope to be supported by the wise ruler. They do not notice that they are the ones who support the wise. In this way, the principle of identity-action is applied to both a wise ruler and all the people." It has to be all of us. This may look like a political statement. After all, Dogen does bring up the "wise ruler." But identity-action is the vow of a bodhisattva. As bodhisattvas, as those who have taken up vows to live with wisdom and compassion, how do we support our government to wake up? How do we support wise rulers, or our nation, to wake up?

Shakyamuni Buddha was enlightened under the bodhi tree, and he died between two sala trees. He spent a lot of his life out-of-doors, sitting outside except during the rainy season, walking the earth, walking to villages, receiving food and offering teachings. The botanical name of the bodhi tree is *ficus religiosa*, and the great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter or grandson of that tree is still in Bodhgaya. While Shakyamuni Buddha sat under the bodhi tree he was assailed by Mara, personifying hatred, greed and doubt, trying to undermine his resolution to just sit there. At a certain point, Shakyamuni Buddha, while being attacked, touched the earth and called the earth to witness. "I have a right to be here and to take my place and wake up." The earth responded, shook in eight ways, and bore witness for him: "He has a right to be here, to sit down and realize his true nature."

I feel now that the earth is touching us and asking us to bear witness. The earth has a right to continue to live, to be happy and healthy. This touching each other is non-dual, we can't pull it apart. Right now the earth is calling. The voice of the atmosphere and earth and land and water and mountains is calling—can we hear that cry? That cry, if we are practicing "undertaking great compassion without delay" evokes a response. This is Avalokiteshvara's practice. Inquiry and response come up together. When there is a cry, there is hearing. This is *kanodoko*, spiritual communion, or resonance of awakening, call and response, like the moon in water. Resonance of awakening. Do you hear it? Our zazen practice will support us to hear it, to be fearless and calm and composed enough to hear it, to act from our practice, to do whatever we can. Please join me and join each other. Let us hold hands and take this up together, with the spirit of wisdom and compassion and love, and never let it drop.

Thank you very much.



PHOTO BY JESSE WIENS

*Zen Center's Abbot-Elect, Myogen Steve Stucky, was introduced by Abbot Paul Haller at the Annual Members' Meeting in October at City Center.*

## ZEN CENTER COMMUNITY NEWS

### On Selecting Steve Stücky as Abbot-Elect for Zen Center

by Steve Weintraub

*Myogen Steve Stücky was nominated for the position of Co-Abbot by the Elders Council on April 10, 2006 and, following the laws of procedure, his nomination was presented to the Zen Center Board of Directors. The Board confirmed it on April 21, 2006.*

#### Person

Solid and down-to-earth, Steve Stücky moves through the landscape of his life with the straightforward and determined quality of a tractor; yet he is also easily easygoing, light, warm, convivial, ready to joke or sing, easy to have as a friend. Of singular clarity and integrity, of unmitigated trustworthiness, he is overall a really good person. He's had a full life and done a lot with it. Raised in the Mennonite Kansas plains, as a boy he worked on his family's farm. In the sixties he did community organizing in Chicago. Since 1983 he's had his own business as a landscape designer and licensed contractor. He is a family man and a devoted father, having raised three children, and recently become a grandfather.

Steve came to Zen practice as many of us did—he arrived at San Francisco Zen Center in January 1972—because practice felt to him to be the deepest response to “our inmost request,” in Suzuki-roshi's words; or, as Steve himself puts it, “to live in accord with the truth of the whole of things.” He practiced in the City and at Tassajara, but among his peers he is perhaps best remembered

for his work and practice at Green Gulch Farm, learning and teaching farming and husbanding the horses that at that time were part of the Green Gulch scene. Steve received priest ordination from Zentatsu Baker in 1977, was Shuso (head student) with Tenshin Anderson in 1985, and received Dharma Transmission from Sojun Weitsman in 1993. He also counts among his teachers Robert Aitken, Dainin Katagiri, Harry Roberts and other elders and peers at Zen Center



PHOTO BY RENSHIN BLUNCE

*Abbot-elect Myogen Steve Stucky*

and elsewhere. He has been actively teaching since 1985: first leading a sitting group in Mill Valley, then founding and becoming the guiding teacher for the Dharma Eye Zen Center, located in San Rafael. Steve has also been a teacher with the Buddhadharm Sangha at San Quentin as part of Zen Center's Prison Project. He's been an active member, and two years president of the national organization, the Soto Zen Buddhist Association. All of this while being a full time business person and family man. As though this were not enough!—for the past three years he has, additionally, taken up the formal study of western psychology, completing the coursework toward a Doctor of Divinity degree in Pastoral Counseling, at the Advanced Pastoral Studies Program of San Francisco Theological Seminary.



PHOTO BY BOB HAXX

Truly a person devoted to wisdom and compassion, with deep and wide-ranging experience, with many and varied talents and interests, he has much to offer our Zen Center community.

### Process

Steve was recommended to be our next Abbot to the Zen Center Board of Directors (who are responsible for the final confirmation of the choice), by the Elders Council. The Council, a committee of the Board, is charged generally with maintaining an overview of the spiritual health and long-term spiritual direction of Zen Center, and is charged more specifically with the task of Abbot selection and recommendation. The Council is made up of sixteen of Zen Center's most senior members, including most former Abbots, whose cumulative practice of Zen and practice at Zen Center totals over 400 years. Represented on the Council are members who are in residence at each of the three practice places, as well as non-residential members. Our recommendation this time—not an easy one; difficulties and pain have been part of the process—came after thorough and lengthy consideration and discussion. It is, in part (to paraphrase the letter from the Elders to the Board), a recognition of the non-residential circle of teachers and practice centers in the Suzuki-roshi lineage; and a way of bringing fresh perspective into our community. As Zen Center matures our task becomes more complicated, in that there are successively more excellent candidates for the Abbot position each time we go about the job of choosing one. This time it took us over a year of intimate meetings, struggling with what seemed the best choice among the many excellent possibilities for this moment in time, to reach a heartfelt consensus.



## From Green Gulch Farm to Hiroshima: A Message for Peace

by Tova Green

One Saturday afternoon in May 2005, about thirty women were gathered in the yurt at Green Gulch Farm drawing Jizos on turmeric-dyed pieces of muslin. On each cloth panel the women wrote messages for peace, and included their name and age. The project was part of a one-day sitting, "The Art of Peacemaking," co-led by Abbess Linda Cutts and Wendy Johnson. Their intention was to sew the panels into a quilt and send it to Japan with the Jizos for Peace pilgrimage.

In the next weeks, one of the participants, Donna Romer, hand-sewed the bright yellow panels onto a large red cloth. In the center she mounted on blue

cloth a large lotus, painted by the Abbess. The quilt was finished just before the pilgrimage was to leave. There wasn't enough time to send it to Oregon, and I volunteered to take it with me in the one small suitcase I was allowed to carry.

I was one of the 35 "ambassadors of peace" who joined Zen teachers Chozen and Hogen Bays in a pilgrimage to Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of those cities. Our group went with the spirit of repentance and reconciliation. We brought with us over 270,000 images of Jizo Bodhisattva, one for each person who had died in the first year after the bombings.

The Jizo images were drawn or stamped on cloth prayer flags; some were sewn into quilts or banners. We also brought origami Jizos, and Jizos that were shaped from clay, or carved. Our group delivered these Jizos to peace museums, temples and nursing homes in Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.

\* \* \* \* \*

Who is Jizo? Jizo is a bodhisattva, an archetypal "awakened being," beloved to people throughout Japan. There are statues of Jizo on street corners, in neighborhood shrines, and at the entrances to cemeteries. Jizo's name means Earth Store Bodhisattva (*ji* means earth and *zo* means storehouse). Jizo looks like a simple monk in robes. He usually carries a staff with six rings in one hand and a jewel, called a wish-fulfilling jewel, in the other. The six rings jingle to warn small creatures that Jizo is coming, so they won't get stepped on. The jewel is symbolic of finding one's own inner riches. Sometimes statues of Jizo are clothed in red hats or bibs as a way of expressing tenderness for them.

In Japanese folklore Jizo has many important roles. Jizo is a guide for travelers and a protector of mothers and children. He also helps those in physical or psychological pain and relieves the suffering of the spirits of those who have died.

Chozen Bays, who is a pediatrician as well as a Zen teacher, has a special fondness for Jizo. Her temple, Great Vow monastery in Oregon, makes and sells clay images of Jizo. Chozen's book, *Jizo Bodhisattva, Modern Healing and Traditional Buddhist Practice*, is a rich source of information about Jizo's origins and significance, the qualities of this bodhisattva, and ways of practicing with Jizo.

\* \* \* \* \*

Our pilgrimage group traveled from Kyoto to Hiroshima by train. Our first stop in Hiroshima was the Peace Museum, where we spent an afternoon viewing the effects of the atomic bomb dropped on this city 60 years before. All of us were subdued when we got on a bus that was to take us to Zenshoji, the temple where we would stay for the next four nights.



PHOTO BY CHARLE POKORNY

Children drew jizos as part of the Green Gulch Farm children's program in March 2005.

Three generations of the Yokoyama family welcomed us to Zenshoji, in the hills outside the city. Rev. Shoken Yokoyama, the 70-year-old Abbot, lives there with his wife Hitoko. Their son Taiken, his wife and their two children had just returned from living in California for many years. The afternoon we arrived, members of the temple served us a formal tea and dinner they had prepared. We exchanged gifts, speeches, and performances of melodic goeka chanting.

Zenshoji was built in 1615 in downtown Hiroshima, in what was once the entertainment district. On the morning of the bombing in 1945 elementary school students were having their classes in the temple hall. Rev. Yokoyama's wife, who was five at the time, was the daughter of the head priest of the temple. She and her parents managed to escape with little injury when the family quarters of the temple collapsed. A month later her mother died from radiation sickness and in 1954 her father died from cancer. Of the thirty young students who had gathered at the temple that day to study only one girl survived.

Reverend Yokoyama refers to August 6 as a day of prayer. He quotes the *Dhammapada*:

A winner invites resentment,  
The losers lie suffering.  
Those who throw away both winning and losing  
And whose minds are tranquil,  
Are happy in any situation.

He says, "when we give up the opposition between winning and losing and awaken to the reality in which all things are allowed to live, we will be able to

see the suggestion of how to live our own lives.” I understand these words are an expression of Jizo’s equanimity.

We hung an exhibit of banners and chains of origami Jizos in the Buddha Hall so that members of the temple could see them when they came that week for memorial services. I asked Chozen whether I could hang the Green Gulch Farm banner there and she agreed. When we were packing to leave, I gave the Green Gulch banner to the temple, hoping that the bright yellow panels would help to heal some of the emotional wounds that remain sixty years after the bombing.



## City Center Bookstore History

Celeste West, Zen Center’s librarian since 1989, inherited the job of tending our library collection as well as selling books and meditation supplies in the library.

In 1997, the San Francisco Zen Center decided to move the bookstore from its original home in our basement library to the two rooms it now occupies on the first floor of the City Center.

When Gloria Lee returned from Tassajara in 1997, she was asked to open the expanded shop on the first floor. Gloria worked with Celeste for a few months learning the ropes of book buying. During this time she oversaw the preparation of the new bookstore on the first floor of City Center, next to the front office, facing Page Street. A ramp designed for disabled access had been installed at the front of the building and the door at the top of the ramp became the bookstore entrance.



PHOTO BY TANYA TAKACS

*After 17 years working as Zen Center's librarian, Celeste West is transitioning from the world of books to environmental activism. As we say in our monk-leaving ceremony, "She goes with our heartfelt gratitude and best wishes."*



The store changed from the few shelves in the library to two rooms of mainly Buddhist books, but also books on psychology, poetry, ecology, social issues and magazines. Gloria also expanded the inventory of Buddhist statuary, malas, incense, zafus, zabutans, support cushions, audio tapes and cards. The bookstore currently has one of the most extensive selections of Buddhist books in San Francisco, both popular and scholarly. Gloria established and then managed the bookstore over a six-year period. Wendy Lewis followed her and managed the bookstore for two years. Shinshu Roberts is the current manager.

Besides selling Buddhist-related materials, the store functions as a connection point for people interested in Buddhism, meditation and Zen Center in general. The clerks assist people in finding the best fit of meditation benches, zafus and support cushions. The shop carries a variety of incense, including the San Francisco Zen Center incense. The bookstore is a place to browse or to sit and read while waiting for evening zazen to begin. Sometimes the clerks are an ear for those wanting to share their experience of Zen or how they are drawn to practice. Questions range from "What kind of zafu should I buy?" to "What's the difference between Sokogaki and Zen?" Occasionally people are moved to tears as they tell about their own awakening or the effect a book has had upon their life.

The bookstore does a little better than break even financially, but its function goes beyond making money. The shop serves as a place of refuge, as a reading room and as a resource for specific information.

The bookstore is, of course, the best place to find books by and about Suzuki Roshi, the founding teacher and abbot of San Francisco Zen Center. It also carries photos of Suzuki Roshi.



PHOTO BY KENSHIN BUNCE

## THOUGHTS ON TURNING EIGHTY

Lecture by Zenkei Blanche Hartman

March 11, 2006, City Center

At this stage in my life I would rather give gifts than receive them, and I have received one gift in my life which I very much want to share with everyone.

One day in October of 1989 I was discharged from Yale New Haven Hospital after a heart attack. As I stepped out into the sunshine I realized, "I'm alive! I could be dead! The rest of my life is just a gift! ... Oh, wow! My whole life has been a gift. Too bad I didn't notice it before. ... Every moment, every breath, every sensation ... every sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought are gifts." With that realization there was an upwelling of gratitude which is the real gift I want to offer to you today—a life perfumed by gratitude. Even at the end of our life we can be grateful for having had the opportunity to live this life and to have known and loved and been loved by all the wonderful people we have known and loved and been loved by.

There is a verse that's on the *han*—the wooden sounding board in a Zen monastery that calls us to the *zendo*. This verse is chanted before bedtime in many Zen monasteries. It is an encouragement to practice:

May I respectfully remind you: Great is the matter of birth and death.  
All is impermanent, quickly passing. Be awake each moment.  
Don't waste this life.

In about 1967, I was going along, living my life, when one day my best friend Pat had a really bad headache. She went to the doctor the next day, was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, went into a coma and died. Whoosh!

Just like that. I was stunned.

Often we don't think so much about birth and death until someone close to us—particularly a contemporary or someone younger than us—is suddenly dying, and then we get it that our life is impermanent. In the *Mahabharata*, a great sage is asked: "Sir, of all of the things you've observed in life, what is the most amazing?" And he responds: "That a man seeing all around him die, never thinks that he will die." That's certainly the way I was until my friend Pat died.

In my agitated frame of mind what I wanted to know was "Well, if you know you're going to die, how do you live?" It may feel like we've got plenty of time to figure that out. But the encouraging part about noticing that everything changes is the reminder in the *Gakudo yojin shu* where Dogen-zenji quotes Nagarjuna:

"The mind that fully sees into the uncertain world of birth and death is called the thought of enlightenment: *bodhicitta*. Thus if we maintain this mind, this mind can become the thought of enlightenment. Indeed, when you understand discontinuity, the notion of self does not come into being. Ideas of name and gain do not arise. Fearing the swift passage of the sunlight, practice the way as though saving your head from fire. Reflecting on this ephemeral life, make endeavor in the manner of Buddha raising his foot."

So, we can take this realization of impermanence when it comes to us and turn it into a powerful support for living the life we want to live—for living *right now* as we really want to and not putting it off.

Death is the great mystery. We don't know what it is. We don't know what happens when we die. A monk asked a Zen master, "What happens when you die?" The Zen master replied, "I don't know." The monk said, "What do you mean, you don't know? Aren't you a Zen master?" And the Zen Master replied, "Yes, but I'm not a dead one."

Suzuki-roshi said toward the end of his life "Things teach best when they're dying." I am certainly appreciating that with John. [John King, a long-time student and teacher who died on August 8.] It's really generous of him to share with us his experience as it is happening and to encourage us to explore our feelings and fears around death. He is exemplifying the teaching of *dana paramita*—the bodhisattva's perfection of giving—that a monk gives Dharma and fearlessness.

Suzuki-roshi said: "If, when I die, the moment I'm dying, if I suffer, that is all right you know. That is suffering Buddha. No confusion in it. Maybe



In March, Blanche presented John King with a nine-panel teaching okesa, sewn by her and members of the community in just three weeks.

everyone will struggle because of the physical agony or spiritual agony too, but that is all right. That is not a problem. We should be very grateful to have a limited body like mine or like yours. If you had a limitless life that would be a real problem for you.”

Life is a gift. When he was alive, Suzuki-roshi said something like, “Just to be alive is enough.” I didn’t understand that until I recovered from the heart attack. That was my true birthday when I thought, “My whole life has been a gift; pity I didn’t notice it before.” Life is a gift. How will you use it? How will you fully appreciate it? It’s not a gift only after you’ve just dodged a bullet. It’s a gift from the get-go.

What is it you plan to do with this one wild and wonderful life that’s been given to you? And how will you keep alive your awareness of the uncertainty of life in a way that doesn’t intimidate you but that keeps encouraging you to practice as if your head were on fire? To practice knowing that how you live this life matters.

Thich Nhat Hanh in *Teaching of the Buddha* quotes the Five Remembrances:

“I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.  
I am of the nature to have ill health. There is no way to escape having ill health. I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.  
All that is dear to me, and everyone I love, are of the nature to change.  
There is no way to escape being separated from them. My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.  
My actions are the ground on which I stand.”

He comments:

The Five Remembrances help us make friends with our fears of growing old, getting sick, being abandoned, and dying. They are also a bell of mindfulness that can help us appreciate deeply the wonders of life that are available here and now. But in the "Heart Sutra," Avalokiteshvara teaches that there is no birth and no death. Why would the Buddha tell us that we're of the nature to die if there's no birth and no death? Because in the Five Remembrances the Buddha is using the tool of relative truth. He is well aware that in terms of absolute truth, there is no birth and death. When we look at the ocean we see that each wave has a beginning and an end. A wave can be compared with other waves and we can call it more or less beautiful, higher or lower, longer lasting or less long lasting, but if we look more deeply we see that a wave is made of water. It would be sad if the wave did not know that it is water. It would think, "Someday I will have to die. This period of life is my lifespan and when I arrive at the shore I will return to non-being." These notions will cause the wave fear and anguish. We have to help it remove the notions of self, person, living being, and lifespan if we want the wave to be free and happy.

So, this is the Buddha's teaching: to relieve us of the notion of a self, a person, a living being and to see that there is no separate, substantial thing that we can point to and say, "This is me." It is simply the ongoing arising and passing away, moment after moment, of forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. But there's nothing else beside that we can identify, "This is me"—some separate, substantial thing. This body, this life, this wave, gives us an opportunity to experience life fully. But just as the wave returns to the ocean we will return to something. We don't know what. When this body is no longer continuing, life will still continue.

In the Six Practices of a Bodhisattva, the first one is generosity or giving. A monk doesn't give material things because a monk is a mendicant. A monk gives the Dharma and a monk gives fearlessness. Since I read that about twenty years ago, I've been studying

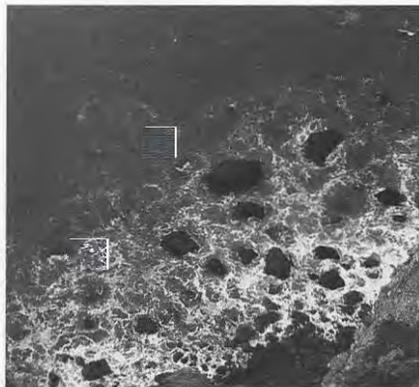


PHOTO BY BERTHA BEVERINO

“What is fearlessness?” It doesn’t seem to be never experiencing fear. It’s maybe not being overwhelmed by fear. Being able to be with fear and see it arise and subside. I think again that John is being a true monk. He is showing us how not to be overwhelmed by fear of dying; by being with us, among us, not going off somewhere to hide out, but being right here with us, teaching and eating and playing and loving and hugging and whatever—being John.

We had a ceremony to give John a new okesa that we had sewn for him. Later that day John came back over to City Center to officiate at evening service and then he went over to the jail to teach zazen and then he went to a meeting about a project called “Coming Home.” This is a project the Buddhist Peace Fellowship is working on to develop ways for people to re-enter society after they get out of prison. So, John is still living his life in the middle of his dying.

On his way to Tassajara for a visit, Abbot Paul Haller visited John. He asked John if he had a message for the students there. John said, “Tell everyone there that I love them so much.” After Paul had left he said, “Call Paul and tell him to tell them, ‘Water is water.’”

The world we live in is not made up of things that other people do as much as it is the result of our attitudes and our actions. And when we live a life of kindness, when we live a life of compassion, when we live a life of generosity, we get to live that life. What could be better? It doesn’t depend on what other people say or do. It depends on what we say and do. It’s wonderful when people meet us and want to live that life together with us in that way. But whatever someone else does, it does not impede us in following, for example, the Four Methods of Guidance: generosity, kind speech, beneficial action and cooperation. These are guides for our life that don’t depend on other people. They depend on us. Kobun Chino said,

When you realize how rare and precious your life is, and how it’s completely your responsibility how you live it, how you manifest it, that’s such a big responsibility that naturally such a person sits down for a while. It’s not an intended action. It’s a natural action.

That’s what our zazen is—it is sitting down for a while and coming to rest here in this body and mind and generating the heart of generosity, kind speech, beneficial action and identity action. Sitting down and observing what comes up in my mind that hinders me from living the way I want to live. Allowing our awareness of impermanence to be the mind of awakening, to be an encouragement to wake up to “things as-it-is” and find out how we want to live this life we have been given right here, right now.



PHOTO BY RENSHIN BUNCE

JOHN DANIEL KING (1944-2006)

Kanshin Dainei – Generous Heart, Great Peace

*John Daniel King died in his San Francisco home August 8, 2006. His partner of 30 years, Rodrigo Mayorga, was by his side. John was ordained on January 2, 2000 at City Center and was Shuso (head student) in September 2000 at Tassajara. He received Dharma Transmission in September 2005 at Tassajara. All this was through his teacher Zenkei Blanche Hartman. He founded the Prison Outreach Programs in 1994 at San Bruno County Jail, San Francisco County Jail, and San Quentin State Prison. John was also one of the founding members of Hartford Street Zen Center.*

## INTERVIEW WITH JOHN KING

By Taizan Iryu – Ernest Brown

Taizan: When did you first hear about Buddhism and how did you find your way to Soto Zen?

John: I first heard about Buddhism in theology school. I went to a Quaker graduate school. I dropped acid during the last year and first felt non-differentiation. That experience led me to eastern religions. When I came to San Francisco (1977) I looked in the yellow pages for a Buddhist center and found the San Francisco Zen Center. By then I had been influenced by reading Alan Watts. I overheard someone at Green Gulch say that his ashes were scattered there and I knew I was in the right place.

T: What helped you determine that you wanted to be a priest?

J: I was always interested in religion, the question of what is life seemed like a crucial issue to me; I was interested in being a priest from a young age. However, Quakers do not have priests. Therefore I went to theology school to follow my passion. Being diagnosed with AIDS more than twelve years ago gave me the opportunity to take the path of being a priest. At the time I thought that I would die fairly soon, but I ended up living long enough to complete the path through priesthood and dharma transmission and have two students.

T: What led you to take your practice into the prison system?

J: My father was a school principal in Attica, New York and he went into the prison to teach literacy on a volunteer basis. My parents were very socially

engaged and so I thought about following that path from a young age.

T: How does your practice of Japanese tea ceremony relate to Zen?

J: It is a mindfulness practice. Suzuki Roshi says that Sen Rikyu said there are no Buddhas and no patriarchs. Suzuki said that in every tea ceremony conducted by those who followed in his lineage, Sen Rikyu both is present and is re-born.

T: Do you know more now than you did prior to hearing the Dharma and if so, what?

J: In the context of trusting one's experience and having the tool of this practice, it's not knowledge per se but trust that this practice reveals life as it is—to be completely engaged with our lives.

The Dharma is so exquisite and we're such donkeys. We should awaken to how wonderful life is each moment. As I directly face my death I am very much reminded of this.

T: What was it like being a gay member of San Francisco Zen Center when you first arrived and how has that changed?

J: It was difficult personally to be gay when I first arrived at Zen Center. I did not come out to anyone in the community for quite a while. Hartford Street Zen Center was established to provide a place that gay people could feel comfortable to practice. We needed to feel acceptance and that being gay did not preclude our practicing. When the AIDS epidemic hit, it was a devastating period for us there.

In *Soto Zen in Medieval Japan*, Bodiford refers to the scholar Hirose Ryoko regarding participants in various ordination ceremonies, "The ordination records identify, in addition to the occupations named above, participants who were sake brewers, dyers, metalworkers ... and young boys (who, according to Hirose, probably were romantic interests of the monks)." There is no evidence of denouncing homosexuality although there is no great acceptance evident either.

Today I feel very comfortable being a gay practitioner throughout the San Francisco Zen Center sangha.

Once when I first arrived at the Zen Center I asked a resident, "Why are people in this community so unfriendly to new members?" He said, "Being friendly is just attachment to self." I think this is a misunderstanding of no-self. In fact a gross misunderstanding.

T: What are your thoughts about lay practitioners versus monastics?

J: A monastic is anyone who goes to Tassajara for a practice period. It does not matter whether you are a lay person or on the priest path. Essentially everyone in the Soto tradition is considered a priest and potentially a teacher. The priest path is simply more of a commitment to ritual and more of an opportunity to having time for zazen.

Priest path versus lay path—I believe there is no difference in the practice for lay versus priests. Some lay people's practice puts priests to shame.

T: What do you think Buddhism offers the world?

J: It is such a gift to be able to have the experience of zazen and bring that back into the world.

Over the millenniums the Buddhist texts say that Buddhism falls into decline during certain periods. Buddhism has been corrupted from time to time by government, by local leaders, etc. The strength of Buddhism is to keep it as a simple practice. It is a chance to engage in your life, not to miss it.

T: What is your message for the future of the San Francisco Zen Center sangha?

J: I'm encouraged about the openness of the sangha and how it has evolved to respond to member's hurts, to continue Suzuki Roshi's lineage, to keep it alive. I felt his spirit in and trusted *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*. I tried to engage the important questions of what life really is for me, what is this life; to have integrity, and to have compassion. Being compassionate with yourself and all beings is the key.

One of the great joys of life are the people I know. I've only had two students, but it has been wonderful working with them.

## ASSUMPTIONS—ON LIVING AND DYING

John King – July 5, 2006 at City Center – excerpts from public talk



PHOTO BY RENSHEIN BLINCE

I'm sure all of you know my condition, but in particular I can't take anything by mouth anymore and am unable to taste food. So I want all of you who are enjoying some delicious meal or a nice piece of cherry pie to really enjoy it. And as you take a bite, think of me. Or a nice cold glass of water.

A lot of you have gone through personal traumas in your life; you've lost people you love. Some of you have been fighting cancer yourselves or have lost people in your families through disease or other causes, so you all know what it's like to embrace death in some form. And all of you, all of us at some point will die.

On PBS, there was a two-part program about five children at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital who were dying of cancer. It's entitled "A Lion in the House." What was inspiring about watching these kids was to see their spirit. After doing some rounds of chemo the kids would have a respite when the cancer went into remission. They suddenly had all this energy and they'd run around, just being kids.

When one little girl was about four or five, the cancer had gone to her face and into the bone structure. She looked like she had been beaten up because her face was so swollen. Her mother resisted the idea of further treatment because it would be more invasive. She went home at this time and what was so powerful to see was the desire to keep her alive. A doctor in the hospital came up with a procedure and some more chemo that might be helpful, but the mother said, "No, no, let's just keep her at home." Her father, however, was very resistant to letting go of his daughter. They took her back to the hospital and within twelve hours she had died. But you could appreciate that the father really had a strong desire to keep his daughter alive.

There was one boy who lived into his later teens. You saw him coming to a deeper understanding of what it really means to die and you saw the courage that he

showed in terms of the willingness to try various treatments. He felt it was not only for his own sake but for his parents' sake, to encourage them.

I've decided to die at home and there are numerous people who have signed up to help take care of me. I counted the other day over 25 people who I have an intimate relationship with and who I really love, that I can speak to from the heart and I feel very connected with. What a gift that is. I feel for people who die alone; how difficult it must be. With cancer or with any disease there are going to be moments of terror and anxiety. So it's a great joy to have people volunteer to be present.

It's interesting to see the variety of responses from others as I go through this process. And yet, I try to just accept whatever they're giving. As sweet Suzuki-roshi called it, "Thank-you-very-much practice."

Everything is in constant flux, constant change; one thing moves into the next and so, how do we pull all this together? I mean, in terms of something that's understandable that we can relate to?

The answer is *shikantaza*, just sitting; being fully present. In that moment, all our thoughts and assumptions arise and form and we let them go. All those habitual thoughts about who we are, who we think we should be.

In this dropping away of our assumptions, this dropping away of body and mind, we can begin to see things as they are without preconditions. We can be fully present. And then we can listen deeply to what people are telling us, rather than running a story in our head about what we think they're really saying. Are they being fully present? Are you being fully present? Are you meeting each other in some significant way?

By doing this practice of *shikantaza*, we can see through our likes and dislikes, without trying to control our world; rather just seeing things as they are.

I'd like to close with a poem from Ryokan.

If there is beauty, there must be ugliness;

If there is right, there must be wrong.

Wisdom and ignorance are complementary,

And illusion and enlightenment cannot be separated.

This is an old truth, don't think that it was discovered recently.

"I want this, I want that"

Is nothing but foolishness.

I'll tell you a secret—

"All things are impermanent!"

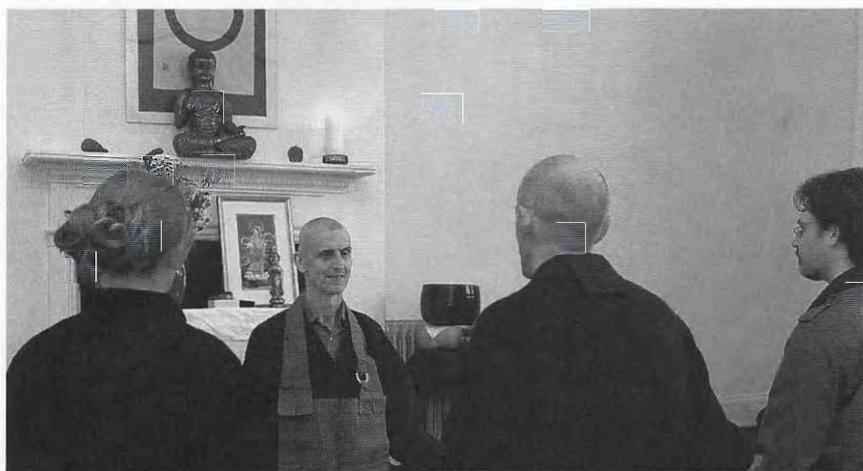


PHOTO BY: PACEMAKER NEWS AGENCY

*Ryushin Paul Haller with Louise Potter, Steve Williamson and Chris Ardill at Black Mountain Zen Centre in Belfast.*

## REPORT FROM NORTHERN IRELAND

by Stephen Williamson – the Black Mountain Zen Centre, Belfast

“Practice Intimately and Return to the True Self”

– *Great Master Dogen*

Zen? Buddhism? Mindfulness? These aren't words that would have had much recognition in Northern Ireland several years ago. It's a country so historically dominated by Catholicism and Protestantism, with all their rivalry, that other traditions rarely get noticed. Even now with an Inter-Faith Forum representing groups as diverse as Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Baha'i, Krishna Consciousness, etc., most of the traditions newer to Northern Ireland are practiced mainly by immigrants who have brought their faith with them. The response of the wider community to this development hasn't always been what it might, and Northern Ireland has been named as the race-hate capital of Europe.

Zen on the other hand seems to be striking a chord with the indigenous population. Black Mountain Zen Centre has full time premises in Belfast city centre, with affiliated groups in several other towns. Numbers keep growing. How did this come to be?

In 2000, Ryushin Paul Haller was visiting Belfast, his home city, at the same time as a high profile visit by the Dalai Lama. A handful of individuals who had previously meditated alone or in small groups had for the first time some focus. Both of these visitors exuded living practice and inspired the possibility of a true sangha in Belfast. Paul had the benefit of being able to connect instantly with individuals on their own cultural terms and it wasn't long before a small room was being hired twice a week for around a dozen individuals to come together

and sit zazen. Forms were loose and the fledgling group relied on Paul's promise to return twice every year to lead sesshin. This provided focus and direction enough to keep the group together. Daigu Michael O'Keefe, a Zen priest and student of Tetsugen Bernie Glassman, also came to lead sesshin and worked closely with Paul.

By 2003 numbers were growing and another group had sprung up in Larne. Together the two groups had enough committed members to consider how things could move forward. Through consultation with Paul, the local sangha decided it was ready to take on the financial and administrative responsibilities of full time premises, and Michael kindly made a substantial donation to the start-up costs of this wonderful venture, to be known as Belfast Meditation Centre.

With the Centre opening in 2004, a real turning point was reached. We had a "real" zendo, a space set aside exclusively for formal Zen practice and made "sacred" both by Paul's consecration of the space during the Opening Ceremony, and by the dedication of those who now had an opportunity to sit together regularly. Quite a change from meeting twice a week for an hour in a rented room, we now had the chance to open the zendo at 7 a.m. every morning to the public. As well as the established Tuesday evening and Sunday sitting, we added a Friday evening sitting. On Monday evenings we held a shorter sitting followed by a dharma discussion. Yoga classes and Chi Gong workshops have also been offered.

Zen is never about numbers, yet the reality was that we had a small handful of practitioners who were now spending as much time facilitating sittings, taking care of business, and organising sesshins, as they did with their families and careers.

There was also the financial concern of an ongoing city centre rent to be paid. Common sense seemed to say that we needed more members. With our faith in Paul, in ourselves, in the tradition and the practice, we trusted that things would work out; if they didn't, we would just have to deal with that.

Fortunately by word of mouth and with [www.belfastmeditationcentre.org](http://www.belfastmeditationcentre.org) established, new people kept arriving. Some came with an interest in general meditation, some came to learn more about Buddhism, some came having read tales of eccentric Zen masters in ancient China and Japan. Perhaps the hardest lesson of this period for the local sangha was that Zen isn't for everyone. Of every five who came, one stayed around. Were we doing something wrong? We learned to be more welcoming to newcomers and to just accept that "Hey, maybe people won't stay around but we'll keep doing our best." Maybe we learned not to attach to results. Still it was noticed that many who came and have stayed around until the present were those who had the opportunity to sit with us during one of



*Ingen Breen (center) with members of the Belfast Meditation Centre. (Maura Mc Aleenan is seated second on the left.)*

Paul's visits, who heard him give Teisho and witnessed the manner in which he conducted himself.

In the two years since then a lot has happened. We've been through the stage many young Zen centres go through, especially when a teacher is not resident. We've at times indulged in "senior monk syndrome" where members saw more clearly than others where we should be going and why everyone else should get behind them. There's a "Dharma the Cat" cartoon strip, which shows a Zen monk in full lotus beneath a tree; a thought-bubble beside his head reads, "This Zen practice is truly wonderful for getting rid of the ego. Soon I shall be the most advanced novice in the monastery!" Admittedly in coming through this stage we lost a few members but by consultation with Paul, by Ingen Breen's calming presence for a month, and by just sitting on our cushions we seem to have come through it stronger than ever. We've learned that opening our hearts to each other as sangha and practicing real compassion is just as important as cultivating wisdom. When these two aspects are in balance and expressed appropriately we seem to get it right, whatever that is.

These two years have been a time of dynamic growth. Some of the longer established practitioners have received Jukai [lay ordination] from Paul in beautiful ceremonies both this year and last. We were fortunate to have the wonderful presence of Zesho Susan O'Connell this year at sesshin. Sesshins have grown so popular that we now hold three fully booked sesshins per year, two with Paul and one with a guest teacher. These have been attended not only by the local sangha but by students from San Francisco Zen Center and by people who have spent time there in the past before returning to their own countries in Canada and Europe. Under Paul's guidance both Ingen and Andre Elsen have really helped us develop the forms and it has transformed the atmosphere of

mindfulness in the zendo and at sesshins.

This traffic has been two-way and several local practitioners have had the opportunity to visit San Francisco Zen Center. Tassajara always elicits golden memories as a place where time seems to drop away. Recently Maura [Mc Aleenan] attended Paul's practice period at the San Francisco Zen Center with focus of study on the "Genjo Koan." She related afterwards, "How to engage practice in everyday life; that was the challenge ... in every moment, with every breath ... how to be present in body and mind to whatever comes. I reflected on the story of how Master Dogen had experienced the loss of both his parents by the time he was seven years old. Watching the smoke rise from the incense at the side of his mother's coffin made him deeply aware of impermanence. Apparently that was his primary motivation for becoming a monk. Is it the suffering heart that acts as the catalyst to engage in practice? What is it to engage in practice? For Dogen, to return to the true self is the major aim of practice, *when* all dharmas are buddhadharma."

Some members have set up affiliated sitting groups in their hometowns around Northern Ireland—in Coleraine, Newcastle, Derry, Benburb, and the newest group in Ballymena. This last was set up just at the beginning of this year and the value of such groups can perhaps be seen in this report from Liam Clarke, the group facilitator: "Let's call it Ballymena Zen Group, let's say something positive about this town." This summer the town is attempting to tackle sectarian tensions which culminated in a spate of burnings-out and the murder of a teenager earlier in the year. The Ballymena Zen group was set up following a public meeting addressed by Ingen Breen and started meeting regularly each Sunday in March. Within a few weeks most members were moving off chairs and buying



PHOTO BY: CHRIS ARDILL

zafus or seiza benches for use at home. In June, chanting was introduced. Some had felt it would be like a night class when they first attended but found that it meant much more to them than that. All agree that their practice is not something sacred or remote; it was the moment-by-moment process of working through their suffering. It is evident that people are beginning to build mindfulness into their lives and that the wheel of dharma is turning in one more part of this troubled earth. Everyone is looking forward to Paul Haller's visit to Ballymena in August. See <http://ballymenazen.blogspot.com/> for more information.

These local groups have now around a dozen members each, and with the Belfast zendo seeing full attendance at most sittings, the future is looking bright for Zen practice in Northern Ireland. The Belfast zendo has just this year been renamed as Black Mountain Zen Centre – [www.blackmountainzencentre.org](http://www.blackmountainzencentre.org).

The second of Paul's sesshins this year takes place in August, and we're hopeful that both Ingen Breen and Susan O'Connell will pay us return visits. Before that we have something of an infamous outdoor mountain retreat in July. Although a less formal environment than traditional sesshin, there's something about being cold and wet and sitting zazen in the Mourne Mountains to really put you in intimate contact with nature!

In November Michael O'Keefe and Tetsugen Bernie Glassman will visit, and there will be a third sesshin in December with Robert Kennedy of the New York Zendo. We are currently exploring the possibility of a third sesshin in 2007, led by a past abbot of San Francisco Zen Center.

This year has also seen our taking part in the concept of Buddhist Network Ireland ([www.buddha.ie](http://www.buddha.ie)), coming together with other schools of Buddhism to participate in the opening ceremony of the Maitreya Project's "Heart Shrine Relic Tour" in Dublin. We also continue to explore the possibility of establishing Ireland's first residential Zen Monastery away from the city, and while this might still be some years away in terms of finances, the vision for it is strong. Wishing always to strengthen our ties to San Francisco Zen Center and the Suzuki Roshi lineage, we hope to soon be able to attract a full time resident teacher, and with Paul's guidance we'll know when the time is right for that.

Expansion and grand visions aside, we hope to embody Great Master Dogen's simple advice, to continue practicing intimately and returning to our true self. Our eternal gratitude goes to Paul, Ingen, and all at San Francisco Zen Center, who have welcomed us into their true presence, and who in turning the Dharma Wheel have made this practice possible in Ireland.

In *gassho*.

May all beings be well and happy.



## BUDDHISM IS NOT A SPECIAL TEACHING; ENLIGHTENMENT IS NOT A PARTICULAR STAGE

Lecture on Eihei Dogen's "Genjo-Koan" by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi  
August 23, 1967

*When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no end to the water, no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies in the sky, there is no end to the air, no matter how far it flies. However, the fish and the bird do not leave their elements. When the use is large, it is used largely. When the use is small, it is used in a small way. Though it flies everywhere, if the bird leaves the air, it will die at once. Water makes life and air makes life. The bird makes life and the fish makes life. Life makes the bird and life makes the fish. There are further analogies possible to illustrate, in this way, practice, enlightenment, mortality and eternity.*

*Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place. When we find our place at this moment, then practice follows and this is the realization of truth. For the place and the way are neither large nor small, neither subject nor object. They have not existed from the beginning, and they are not in the process of realization.*

*Thus in our practice of Buddhism, when we gain one truth, we master that one truth; and if we encounter one activity, we complete that activity. Here is the place, and here leads the way. Therefore, understanding is not easy, but it is simultaneous with the complete attainment of the Buddha's teaching. Do not suppose that what we realize is knowledge in terms of concepts. Though we have already attained supreme enlightenment, we may not necessarily see. Some may, and some may not.*

Buddhism is not a special teaching, and enlightenment is not a particular stage that you attain. When you understand your life completely, that is enlightenment. Though the approach to it is not the same, as long as you study sincerely, you will reach the same goal. You may think you have discovered a new teaching, but almost all the teachings we discover have already been discovered by Buddhist teachers. You may say Buddhism is the accumulation of our human experience. Whatever you make effort on, there is the way.

People are always trying to discover some particular way for themselves. That is not the true way to study; this kind of idea is utterly wrong. So we say, "Don't seek for any particular enlightenment." Enlightenment is not something particular. When you start to study Buddhism, you think that it is good to expect that Buddhism will give you some particular teaching. If you cannot satisfy your expectations, you will give up. This is not how to study.

So here [in Eihei Dogen's *Shobogenzo* chapter "Genjo-Koan"] Dogen-zenji says, "When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no end to the water, no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies, there is no end to the air, no matter how far it flies." When you think the sky or the water is something special and try to discover its end, you cannot. You have no chance to study, because you cannot reach the end of the water or the limit of the air. Dogen says no matter how far it flies, there is no end to the air.

"However, the fish and bird do not leave their elements." A fish or bird does not go out of the water or air. The water or air we want to study is for everyone, they are not particular things. You cannot live without water or without air.

"When the use is large, it is used a large way. When the use is small, it is



PHOTO BY MARIA MATSUKAWA

Carol Dougherty and David Zimmerman were ordained by Teah Strozer in January 2006.



*In September, Alison Kreider, Antoine Courtemanche, Robert Rigamonti, Charleen Adams, and Michael Novak received the Bodhisattva Precepts from Furyu Schroeder.*

used in a small way.” Whether you are aware of it or not, you are in the air and you are in the water, and according to the way you live, there may be more or less water. The water under this limitation is not the whole water you want to study. But even though it is a small amount of water, it is water, and it is the sky.

“Though it flies everywhere, if the bird leaves the air, it will die at once.” Our way which we study is like air or water. So before we try to figure out what it is, we should practice it. We should live in the water or the sky. That is how we study Buddhism. Not by trying to figure out what it is intellectually, but with all of our mind and body, we should practice our way.

“The bird makes life and the fish makes life. Life makes the bird and life makes the fish. There are further analogies possible to illustrate [this].” The bird and life, which is water or sky, are the same thing. So the bird makes life and the fish makes life. Fish is fish made of water; bird made of water, and life made of bird, and life made of fish. Life and bird or fish, or water and sky and fish and bird, is not different. “There are further analogies possible to illustrate.” There may be many ways of analyzing this truth.

“In this way, practice, enlightenment, mortality and eternity...” So mortality and eternity are one, and enlightenment is one. Bird and sky is one. We should understand it in this way. So where we practice it, there is the way, there is enlightenment.

“However, if a bird or fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, this bird, or this fish, will not find its way or its place. When we find our place at this moment, when we find our way at this moment, then practice



*Paul King, Jeffrey Schneider, Vince Gaither, Tim Wicks, Michael Wenger, Paul Haller, Alexandra Colton, Victoria Austin, Linda Harrington, and Camilla Dickinson after a lay initiation at City Center in April.*

follows, and this is realization of the truth. "For the place and the way are neither large nor small." Our way cannot be compared with some other practice. Each practice is perfect, including everything, and independent.

So, neither subject nor object: "There is no subject who practices and no object which is practiced. They have not existed from the beginning." When you practice it, reality appears. Reality did not exist before you practiced it. "They have not existed from the beginning, and they are not in the process of realization." Each moment is realization and is not in the process of realization. Do you understand? It is not process, you know. At the same time, it is in the process of changing into some other practice. But although your practice is a continuous one, at the same time it is discontinuous. Today you have done something, and what you have done will be continued tomorrow. But even though we do not know anything about tomorrow, tomorrow is included in the present. Your work has its own tomorrow and past. Tomorrow what you have done will have its own past and future. What you have done today will belong to the past tomorrow. So it is not the same. Do you understand? Not the same at all. Tomorrow is independent, and today is independent.

Although there is a relationship, you cannot compare what you have done today to the things you will do tomorrow. So you must be satisfied with what you did today. Tomorrow you should be satisfied with what you will do tomorrow. So when you compare what you have done today with what you will do tomorrow, it is like trying to mix oil with water. You cannot compare them. Oil is oil and water is water. You cannot say which is better. We cannot ignore

the relationship between two things, or between many things, but each one is independent. So each one includes everything. You may say what you have done is small, but that's because you compare it. Actually, you should not compare.

"They have not existed from the beginning, and they are not in the process of realization." They are not in the process of realization. Do you understand? Your practice is not in the process of realization. So will you give up? Your practice is not in the process or realization—it's better to give up ... there is no hope. This kind of practice is not our practice. Even though you practice our way for a whole lifetime, some of you may attain enlightenment and some may not. You see? If so, do you give up your practice?

When I say some may and some may not, it means I am comparing someone's practice to someone else's practice. But your own practice itself is originally independent and perfect. So what is wrong is the comparison. You are limiting the actual value of your practice. Your small mind is a big limitation to your true practice, that is all. So it is not the practice that is good or bad, but your understanding makes practice seem good or bad. This is why we say do not seek for some particular enlightenment. You should be satisfied with your practice and practice hard moment after moment. Then there is enlightenment.

"Thus, in our practice of Buddhism, when we gain one truth, we must have mastered that one truth. And if we encounter one activity, we complete the activity. There is the place, and here leads the way." When there is place there is way. That is complete practice without calling it good or bad practice. When you encounter one activity, you should do it with our best effort. That is the way.



PHOTO BY RENSHIN BUNCE

Lay initiation in September. Pictured: Katherine Kerr, Jordan Thorn, Blanche Hartman, Herb Harris, Chuck Gould, Halliday Dresser, Teah Strozer, David Jacob, Emma Mankin, and Julia Loo with daughter Cyane.

*Ernest Brown and Edwin Critchlow received the Bodhisattva Precepts from Shishin John King (renamed Kanshin upon his death) in a lay initiation ceremony at City Center in March.*



Therefore, Dogen says, "Understanding is not always possible, because it is simultaneous with the complete attainment of the Buddha's teaching." The complete attainment is simultaneous with when you practice, so it is not possible to understand what it is. If they come one by one at different times, you will have a chance to see what Buddha's teaching and actual practices are. When they come at the same time that you are practicing them, there is already attainment. So there is no way for us to know the other side, which is attainment.

When you are busy working on something, it is not possible to see what you have done. If you want to see, you have to stop doing it. Then you will know what you have done. Even though it is not possible to see what you have done, when you have done something, there is attainment. There is no doubt in it, but usually we are very curious about what we have done. This is all right; but when you see it, you have already put your practice in a limitation, and you are comparing it to some attainment. When your attainment is better than what you did before, or better than what someone else did, you will be pleased with it; if it is not, you will be discouraged. But that is not because your attainment is not good enough or not perfect.

"Understanding is not possible because it is simultaneous with the complete attainment of the Buddha's teaching. Do not suppose that what we realize is knowledge in terms of concepts." So your knowledge about what you have done is not the same as what you realized. "Though we have already attained supreme enlightenment, we may not necessarily see. Some may, and some may not." This is a very important point and is the secret of the teaching. "Don't suppose that what we realize is knowledge in terms of concepts." Though we have already

attained supreme enlightenment, that secret attainment, attainment which is more than you understand, cannot be seen by you. The way it appears to you is not necessarily the same.

As you know, we live in a world which is mostly perceptions. It is difficult for us to be satisfied with everything when your understanding accords with what we see or think. But we have to know that everything we see or think is under some limitation. You are not seeing or thinking about the thing itself. This point should be remembered. What you see, what you understand in terms of concepts is not always true. This is the secret of Buddhism. This point should be remembered completely.

So don't be disturbed by the ideas you have in your mind. This does not mean that you can ignore your thinking. Thinking should be systematic and should be right. But even though it is right, that is not complete. And what you think is right is not always actually right. Most people attach to the truth which they understand. The confusion arises from this hasty understanding. This is a very, very important point.



PHOTO BY JESSE WIENS

*Zen Center President Robert Thomas opens the Annual Members' Meeting on October 14 at City Center.*

## BRANCHING STREAMS: A NETWORK OF RELATED GROUPS

by Jeffrey Schneider

On the first weekend of May, representatives from fourteen different sanghas met at City Center. Each of these groups is related to San Francisco Zen Center and the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. This was the third annual gathering of this sort, the first being during the weekend celebration of Suzuki Roshi's centennial three years ago. At that time, the representatives of the related sanghas resolved to come together as an organization to share experience and dharma assets. A coordinating committee was established and, slowly, a structure evolved.

At this latest gathering, the name Branching Streams was chosen for the organization and a mission statement agreed upon. The name comes from the Zen poem *Sandokai* (The Merging of Difference and Sameness), an important teaching on which Suzuki Roshi lectured. (The lectures were published as *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness* by the University of California Press.) Although the streams may go in different directions, some great and some small, they all originate from the same source—in this case, the Soto Zen of Dogen Zenji, as brought to us in the west by Suzuki Roshi.

The mission statement reads as follows:

- *Branching Streams is a network of dharma centers in the tradition of Suzuki Roshi. Our intention is to encourage the practice of Soto Zen in inclusive and creative ways in centers large and small.*
- *The members of the group will stay in touch with each other and learn from each other's experience.*

- *Branching Streams exists to explore our interconnectedness, to nourish each other's practice and to find new ways to benefit each other.*

At this meeting, the group elected a Coordinating Committee for the upcoming year and gave itself the following tasks:

1. To make the glossary of temple terms and forms from San Francisco Zen Center available to any member group requesting it.
2. To provide help in developing classes and study aids for member groups.
3. To make available a DVD of Suzuki Roshi video footage and lectures.
4. To create materials for a series of Introduction to Meditation classes.
5. To provide printed zazen instruction.
6. To create a website, linked to the SFZC one, for all member groups.
7. To research needs of lay-led/lay-founded groups.

If you would like more information about Branching Streams, please contact Dairyu Michael Wenger at [dairyu49@hotmail.com](mailto:dairyu49@hotmail.com).

An expanded and updated list of Zen Center's Related Groups can be found on our website at [www.sfzc.org](http://www.sfzc.org).

## CORRECTIONS

The *Wind Bell* staff would like to apologize for the following errors printed in the previous issue (Fall 2005).

Cover: The photo credit on this photo was missing. The photographer is David Haye.



PHOTO BY RENSHIN BUNCE

Page 21: The caption for this photo was incorrect. It should read: *"In June 2005, there was a lay initiation ceremony at City Center. Amy Buzick, Jefre Cantu, Lisa Dunseth, Josh Fitzgerald, David Hyry, and Aileen Rodriguez received lay initiation from Teah Strozer. Lyn Jung, Carolyn Reyes, and Earthlyn Manuel received lay initiation from Blanche Hartman. Don Wiepert received lay initiation from Victoria Austin. Also pictured are Ryumon Hilda Gutierrez-Baldoquin (far left) and Christine de Guzman-Stein (far right).*

Page 43: The photo credit was incorrectly printed as Meiya Wender. The photographer is Tom Flechtner.

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