Wind Bell

PUBLICATION OF SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER VOL. 42, 2012

ZEN CENTER 50
50 YEARS OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION

CONTENTS

On the cover: Ringing the umpan, City Center courtyard, 1988. Photo by Barbara Wenger. The big hand belongs to Robert Lytle, the little one to Nathan Wenger.

Great thanks to Daigan Lueck for the use of his 1988 Tassajara poem "Practice Period" (p. 20), part of his unpublished Scattered Leaves *collection; and to Jane Hirshfield for "It Was Like This: You Were Happy" (p. 39), which first appeared in the* New Yorker *and is published in* After *(NY: HarperCollins, 2006). Thanks also to Michael Wenger for his artwork "It Can't Be Helped" (p. 25), kindly supplied by Ingalls Design. A deep bow to Kaz Tanahashi for his beautiful brushwork, created especially for this issue, on page 2.*

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Many thanks to Wendy Lewis for fielding innumerable questions along the way.

Dear Members, Friends, and Supporters of Zen Center,

With a sense of wonder and gratitude, I invite you to delve into the pages of this fiftieth-anniversary edition of *Wind Bell*. The name "Wind Bell" itself is a reminder that we always appreciate things in two ways: in the sense of ungraspable, wild, windy nature and in the sense of tangible gifts produced by the shape of our intention. The nourishing winds move willy-nilly in all directions, and the bell of our intentional vow responds with acts and voices based in the practice of wisdom and compassion. Those voices and actions have specific shape and resonance according to the time, place, and persons, offering variety and complexity. Zen Master Dōgen attributes the poem "Wind Bell" to his master Rujing who points out that no matter which way the wind blows, the bell rings out *prajña*, or wisdom—nothing less.

Wind Bell

Hanging in space by his teeth,
his whole body in his mouth.

Eastwind, Southwind, West, North
he does not care.

He talks for others in many ways,
Always *Prajñaparamita*

Tsu Chan Tsun Ryan
Tsu Chin Ryan

—*Dōgen Zenji*

In these pages you will find a range of Zen Center prajña voices, from Suzuki Roshi's creative effort fifty years ago to express the "undivided original Way" in English to those of second-generation affiliated groups that have developed their own true roots and are now branching out and blooming anew.

San Francisco Zen Center continues to be an experiment that has unknown potential. We can see that thousands of people during the past half-century have been touched in profound ways by the hearts of those who tend the zendo, the gate, and the kitchens of our three temples. It behooves us at this milestone to stop and take stock of what we have done—to listen to the voices, hear what is most deeply true, and respond with our own warm hearts and helping hands. Sometimes the hands hold brush and paper, sometimes a laptop, sometimes a dharma staff. All are tools in the service of the Great Original Way, something so great that it is not easy to see or to speak of, but can be pointed to and recognized in our mutual regard.

Thanks to all of you who continue to listen to the wild winds and respond with wise practice and who have supported Zen Center for five decades. May this effort continue to bring peace and benefit all beings.

—*Abbot Myōgen Steve Stücky*
July 27, 2012


Compassion
Kwe
2012

Dear Readers,

Writing this as I review almost-final proof pages, my most immediate gratitude is to designer Jim Hollingsworth, who has manifested this fiftieth-anniversary issue so beautifully. From there my gratitude flows to the many contributors whose writing fills this journal, and to the teachers and temples that have made all these variegated expressions of dharma possible. And, of course, from there we can go back 2,500 years or so... Given space limitations, I will refrain from listing all of our ancestors, but without question the lineage fully enlivens these pages.

Steeped in *Wind Bell* these past many months, reacquainting myself with back issues, working with contributors, and plumbing photo archives, I have been so moved by the spirit of practice expressed across decades and distance. With this anniversary edition, we chose not to take the direct historical route to covering San Francisco Zen Center's rich legacy but instead endeavored to bring you a range of voices that speak not just to Zen Center's past but to its current influence, both close to home and around the country, and to its potential ahead.

For most of its life, *Wind Bell* has been the primary means for Zen Center to announce upcoming events, report on ceremonies, and disseminate teachings. With the bulk of those functions now moved online, the possibilities for what the journal can become are thrown wide open. There are many more contributors whose voices and artwork I would love to see represented in future issues. It is my great hope that *Wind Bell* will continue to serve as an expression of Zen Center's legacy, as our understanding of what it means to embody Suzuki Roshi's teachings continues to unfold.

Nine bows to you all,

—Anne Connolly
July 30, 2012

TO ACTUALLY PRACTICE SELFLESSNESS

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi
August Sesshin Lecture
Wednesday, August 6, 1969, San Francisco

A Note on the Lecture and the Suzuki Roshi Archives Project, by Charlie Korin Pokorny

About ten years ago, a concerted effort to transcribe all available audio recordings of Suzuki Roshi was completed. Michael Wenger initially proposed this Archives Project to the San Francisco Zen Center Board of Directors, who embraced it wholeheartedly. William Redican oversaw the daunting task of transcribing over three hundred lectures, with volunteer help provided by a number of Zen Center resident practitioners. Copies were made and placed in SFZC libraries.

About three years ago, I asked Dana Velden, the corporate secretary at that time, if the wonderful treasury of Suzuki Roshi's teachings could be made available to the public through the SFZC website. Wouldn't it be great to share the fruits of his dharma offerings, as well as the prodigious labor of the Archives Project, online? A few weeks later, after conferring with the Officers and Directors, she asked me if I would be willing ro adnúnister a blog, posting both the audio recordings and the transcripts of Suzuki Roshi's teachings in chronological order. David Chadwick had done a great deal of work to organize a digital library of the Archives Project, including not just the audio files and transcripts but photos and videos as well. Tim O'Connor-Fraser set up the blog as part of the SFZC website and we were on our way. Soon after, I also started pulling out a short quote from each talk to be posted on our Suzuki Roshi Facebook page and Twitrer feed.

Suzuki Roshi's teachings continue to touch many people in many ways. So far, we have posted about 250 of the transcripts and audio files online, with about 130 left to go. David Chadwick continues to work on the Archives Project as new audio recordings are unearthed and as advances in audio technology have improved the ability to recover corrupted media files. It has been wonderful to spend time with the teachings in this way and even more wonderful to make them freely available online. Suzuki Roshi had long been interested in the possibility of sharing the practice of Zen with Westerners and when he finally arrived in America, he had a great deal to offer.

Although he was a Japanese priest trained in Japan, once Suzuki Roshi came here and spoke in English, his teachings were not really Japanese Zen anymore. In conversation with his American students, his teachings became something else, something that wasn't exactly "American" either. Such points of cultural interface in the Buddhist tradition are often relatively brief but can exert a deep and lasting influence. They hold a rich potential to touch us deeply. What repeatedly comes through in Suzuki Roshi's talks is the depth and unwavering sincerity of his engagement with what is most essential about practice and the Buddha Way and how to most effectively convey that in America. He offers a profound sense of practice and a deeply grounded, but also free and joyful, way of being alive. It is also instructive to see how Suzuki Roshi's teachings evolved over the years, as he continued throughout his life to look deeply at himself and to completely meet those who came to him seeking the Way.

The transcription project endeavored to produce verbatim transcripts in which every intelligible word of Suzuki Roshi was recorded. These transcripts, quite wonderfully, also include notations for Suzuki Roshi's frequent laughter as he spoke, a significant dimension of his dharma in its own right. What is so funny?

Photo by Tim Buckley

Suzuki Roshi and Richard Baker at Tassajara, 1967

The talks that have been published in *Wind Bells* and in books such as *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Not Always So,* and *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness* have been edited by dedicated, senior Zen practitioners in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. Editing Suzuki Roshi's talks was extremely important in making his teachings accessible and also potentially less prone to misinterpretation.

The talk included here is perhaps the first unedited, verbatim transcript to be published in a *Wind Bell.* While the edited versions of Suzuki Roshi's talks are more suitable to a broader dissemination of his teachings, these raw transcripts offer a slightly different glimpse of Suzuki Roshi. It can be more difficult to read this unedited content, but it comes with its own particular intimacy, including Suzuki Roshi's effort and struggle to work with the English language. Some passages simply are unclear, which can actually allow for a variety of meanings, some perhaps just beyond the edge of the sayable. You can also listen to this talk by accessing the blog online at *http://suzukiroshi.sfzc.org/dharma-talks/1969/08/06.* Enjoy the langhter!

Charlie Korin Pokorny was ordained as a priest by Reb Anderson in 1999. He practiced as a resident at Tassajara and Green Gulch Farm for 12 years and now lives with his family in Sebastopol. He currently teaches at the Institute of Buddhist Studies and is director of the Sōtō Zen Buddhist Association.

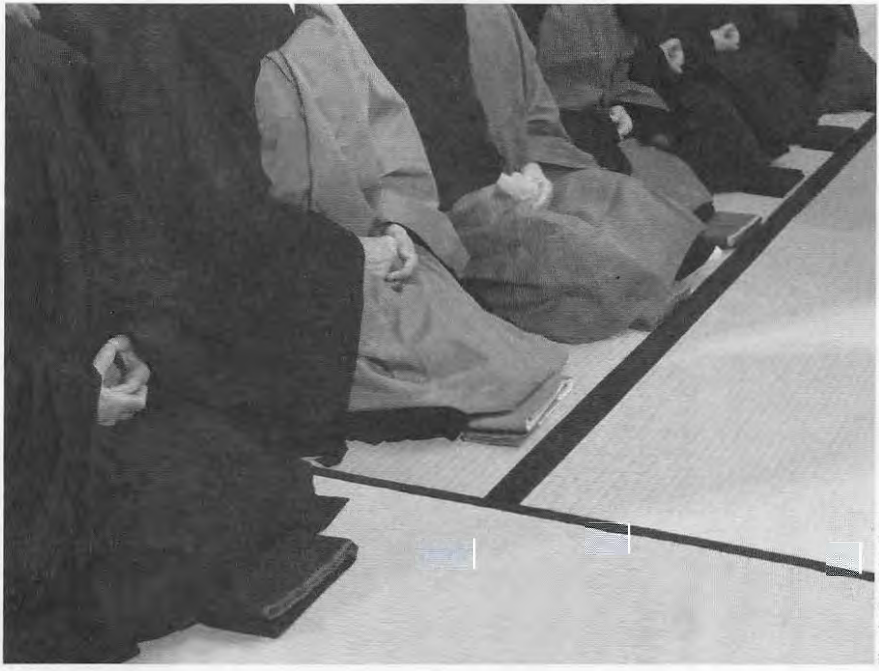

Photo by Shundo David Haye

To Actually Practice Selflessness

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

I think you are facing actual problem in your zazen practice. The worst one may be the pain of your legs, maybe. It is some—not secret, but it is some certain way to sit in pain. Because it is so direct that you have no time to—to think of some way, you know. Before you think it comes, and you are involved in the pain. But that is so-called-it, you know—that you are involved in the pain immediately means that your way, your way of life, or your attitude towards your life is not well-trained.

For an instance, if you—I think some of you must have this kind of experience. If you are going to fell, you know, from, for an instance, from the tree to the ground, the moment you, you know, leave the branch you lose your function of the body. But if you don't, you know, there is a pretty long time before you reach to the ground. And there may be some branch, you know. So you can catch the branch or you can do something. But because you lose function of your body, you know [laughs], before you reach to the ground, you may lose your conscious[ness].

But in zazen practice, first problem you face will be the pain. Even for Japanese people who are sitting always on the floor, this problem of pain. But how you endure the pain is, as I always say, to have—not to lose your power right here and free your legs, you know, from pain—having more strength here [possibly pointing to *hara*]. And this is—this kind of way—this way will be applied for various problem you have. For an instance, when you are about to be angry, you know [laughs], you shouldn't be involved in the anger immediately.[1] You have time—you must have time before you become angry. So we say count to ten before you are angry. Your anger will not come while you are counting: one, two, three, four [laughs].

My cough is, you know, same thing. You know, if I have, you know, some strength here [possibly pointing to hara], I don't cough. Even though I cough—not so bad. But when I laugh or when I am excited—in other word when I have no preparation in my tummy, you know [coughs] [laughs, laughter], I immediately cough. My doctor said: "Nothing wrong with your," you know, "throat. Maybe that is some," you know, "nervous cough." So I—I was very ashamed of [laughing] being so nervous, you know, as a Zen master [laughter]. So I decided to conquer the cough. Before I didn't matter so much, but after doctor said: "Nothing wrong with your throat. If you cough, let your wife collect ten time—ten cents each time." He said so.

[1] Suzuki Roshi starts coughing here and continues to do so intermittently throughout the remainder of this paragraph and the next two paragraphs.

So I am—I am trying, you know, to have always some power here [possibly pointing to hara], but when it comes, you know, it comes so suddenly, so I have no time to prepare for it. My cough is good, ex- [partial word]—good practice for me.

That you have some problem or difficulty in your practice is, I think, very good thing. It is much easier to practice zazen without any problem. If you have some problem, you have some excuse to work on it [laughs, laughter], instead of *shikantaza*. Shikantaza is actually not so easy. If you are supposed to practice shikantaza, maybe it is pretty difficult thing. It is difficult to continue it. For a while you can do it, you know. Five minutes, ten minutes—you may be able to do it, but without cessation to continue shikantaza is pretty difficult.

We say "self*less*ness." "Selflessness" is to say, you know, just—or to explain what is selflessness is—is not so difficult, but actually what it means is, you know, not something to explain, but something to *actually* practice it or attain it—the stage you must attain, although there is no such "self" you know—no such thing as self. We have no self. Originally we have no self. But we feel as if we have self. And we see as if everything has its own self-nature. But there is no such things as self-nature.

You may say water has its own nature and iron has its own nature, but that nature is conditioned by many con- [partial word: conditions?]—factors. That is why water is flowing, iron is hard. So, as Buddha said: "All constituent object are—has no self—self-nature." The nature is—universal nature takes some particular way of function and under some condition. That's all. So there is no such thing as self-nature.

Photo by Minoru Aoki

First Tassajara Practice Period Group, 1967

But although—although there is no self-nature, there is some rules. The fundamental rules is rules—rule of causality. If there is cause there is effect. That is the immutable truth. And that is, maybe, the only—only truth we can figure out. The rest of the truth—truth is—there is no special truth. To explain in this way is not difficult, and whether—whatever you feel about it, you know, even thought you say there *is* self-nature, but there is no self-nature. That is very true. Excuse me. Can you hear me?

So there is two—two ways of understanding about self-nature. Self-nature which exist, and no self-nature as a ultimate—ultimate truth. And no self-nature as a goal of practice, you know. For human being, unless we strive for—unless we make a great effort, it is difficult to realize the self-nature—no self-nature, even though there is no such thing as self-nature. For us, I don't know why, you know, it is necessary to practice and to attain no self-nature. It is—for us it is something to attain.

That is why we practice zazen, you know. By zazen we can realize—or realization of self—no self-nature will appear—will take place. Without zazen, even though you know that we have no self-nature, it doesn't work. That is why we practice zazen. And intellectual explanation of no self-nature is to give you some confidence in our practice, you know—to point out the possibility of attaining no self-nature. Or even though you don't attain it perfectly, you know, if you—you will find out—you will have some confidence in your practice. That is—we have teaching for—we have various explanation for zazen practice.

And you may ask, then, after—after we, you know, realize—or realization of selflessness happen to you, what—what will be your way of life, you know? If you, you know, think something, you know—after attaining non-self-nature you will have some, some wonderful, you know, feeling or some special power, that is also mistake. Nothing will happen [laughs, laughter]. If nothing happens, why you make such [laughs]—such effort, with pain? Here, you know, there is interesting story. Here is some interesting or famous koan.

Do you know the kōan of Hyakujō[2]—"Wild Fox and Hyakujō"?[3] Hyakujō was a famous—famous Zen master, as you know, who established special precepts for Zen monks. Before Hyakujō, Zen monks were practicing at some other temple—some temple which belongs to mostly Precepts School. Precepts master were lead [?]. There they were practicing zazen as you have been practicing zazen at Soko-ji [laughs], because they have—they haven't their own temple. And they observed mostly Indian precepts. But Hyakujō established a monastery and they—he set up monastic rules, like Buddhist—like we have precepts—like Buddha set up precepts.

[2] Hyakujō Ekai (Baizhang Huaihai): 720–814. Chan master of the Tang period. Dharma successor of Baso Dōitsu.
[3] *Mumonkan (Wu-Men Kuan, Gateless Gate)*, Case 2.

And he—one day—everyday he was giving lecture. The one old man always came and listened to the lecture. But one day he didn't leave after—after lecture. So Hyakujō asked him: "Why do you—why don't you go back to your room?" And the old man said: "I—in many hundreds of years, before you come to this temple, I was a resident priest of this temple. And I—when I was asked, 'Is it possible to be free from the truth of causality?'"

If you do something good you will have good result. If you do something bad you will have bad result. This is rules of causality in morality. And there must be various truth or theory. And—or you may say this is truth of karma.

"Is it possible to be free from karma or to be free from the truth of causality?" someone asked him. And he said: "Yes. It is possible." And that answer was not, you know, proper. "So [laughs] I reincarnated in fox, and I reincarnated [as a] fox again and again, about five hundred times, maybe," he said. "And I cannot—now I cannot be—I cannot get free from the karma because I did—I said something wrong."

And the old man asked—the fox actually, in disguise of fox asked, you know: "What will be the right answer?" And Hyakujō said: "Right answer will be, 'You will not—you cannot be free from karma.' That will be the right answer." And at that time the fox attained enlightenment. And next day he didn't—the old man didn't come to the lecture. And Hyakujō said, "We will have funeral [laughs]." And, you know, students amazed, "Who died?"

At that time, Buddhist didn't take funeral service for someone else. They take—they took funeral service for their students only or teachers only. "When no one dead," you know, "why do we have funeral?" But Hyakujō said: "Go back—go to the mountain, back of the temple." And they found dead fox in the mountain. And they had big funeral for him.

And this is the story. And since then we have—we made it as one of the many kōans. To be free from karma is one. And not to ignore karma. That is, you know, next to. We have two.

But what do we mean by, "We not ignore the truth or truth of causality?" And, you know, to be free from karma, without ignoring karma, and to get free from karma, what will be the way? After you attain enlightenment, you—you—your way still, you know—you should follow the truth of karma or truth of causality.

You sh- [partial word]—you cannot ignore the truth. But you should not be caught by it. The way is just I wear such a troublesome robe [laughs]. This is karma. Because of karma I have to wear [laughs] long-sleeve—sleeved *koromo* like this [laughs]. And without taking off the *koromo*, you know, to have freedom from koromo is the way. Do you understand?

Photographer unknown

Oryoki at Tassajara, 1967

Sometime to use koromo to hide something underneath [laughs], when it is necessary. To use karma, you know, to help others, or to enjoy the karma without ignoring it. To enjoy our life—complicated life, difficult life—without ignoring it, and without being caught by it. Without suffer from it. That is actually what will happen to us after you practice zazen.

Actually you—whether you attain enlightenment or not—if you continue this practice, naturally you will have that kind of quality. It is a matter of just slight—subtle feeling like, you know, the—this—like the sound box [speaker?]. Some, you know—there is slight difference between my own voice and the voice through the—voice you hear through the—this box. But this slight difference makes big difference [laughs]. It is, you know—you think I—you say: "I practice zazen for two–three years, but I haven't make [laughs] any progress," you may say [laughs]. But actually, you know, the feeling you give by your couduct, by your words, will be quite different.

It is like to feel something, you know. This is wood; this is cloth, you know, and this is enamel, and this is a kind of lacquer [probably pointing to or picking up various objects]. Looks like same, but if you *feel* it, feeling is quite different. And feeling you have from it—when the feeling you have from it is different, you feel as if this is something else, you know. This is quite different from that. That kind of difference—subtle difference, but big difference in our actual life.

Physically it is *very* small difference, but spiritually or—feeling you have from it is quite different. And we, you know—when we talk about our practice, we—our merit of practice or value of practice, we tentatively talk about the value in term of good feeling or bad feeling. If you help others or not; or if

you help others or don't help others; or give some—bother someone. We say "nondiscrimination," you know. Nondiscrimination [laughs]—but when we try to help others, you know, we should say "good and bad" or else we cannot help others. Good feeling or bad feeling.

But originally there is no such thing good and bad. But when peoples feel something is good and some other thing is bad, we should also involved in that kind of idea of good and bad. Even though we don't actually feel as they feel, but—it—feeling is not exactly the same, but we—we must give—we must be able to express our sympathy by some words, in term of good and bad.

That is also actually two contradictory attitude. One is nonattachment. The other is attachment—*looks* like attachment. But not actual attachment, but it looks like discrimination. Looks like attachment, but there is slight difference.

If you do not have complete calmness of your mind, you know, you cannot tell the difference. You see everything nearly the same—exactly the same. You cannot tell the difference of the quality. One may be glass and one may be jewel, but [laughs] you—you think all jewels or all glass. So if you actually, you know, practice zazen with pain, you will know what is pain in its true sense.

If you sit in calmness of your mind in pain, you will know what is pain in its true sense, but which you didn't know in your everyday life. So when you have time, you know, to wait when you are angry, you will know what is angry, exactly. So you will not make any mistake. You are so subtle, you know, in handling your words. Even though you are angry [laughs], you have time to think.

So it is necessary for us to have complete calmness always. And we should be able to go back to the complete calmness, even though sometime you are angry or excited. You should be able to go back to the calmness of your mind. Over and over, if you train yourself in this—in this way, you will have complete freedom from the karma. So, you know, not to fall into karma, you know; not to be caught by karma; and not to ignore the karma. And the third stage will be to have complete freedom from karma. And those things should not be different, as I explained—as we wear robes. It does not mean to take off. To be free from karma does not mean to take off all my troublesome robes. "*Now* I am free!"—this is not the complete freedom we mean. Do you understand? This kind of stage is the stage Buddhist are aiming at. So under—under the difficult situation, without escaping from it, we should have com-[partial word] freedom from, from the circumstances—adversity or easy circumstances.

If there is, you know, no pain in your legs, it is rather difficult to make progress. But if you have some problem, I think you will make progress easier. It is true with calligraphy or with *sumi* painting. When you start to feel some difficulty, you know, you start to make progress. When it is easy, you know, you don't make much progress.

When you are wealthy and happy, with money and with family and with everything [laughs], you don't make any progress. After you lose—you have lost everything, you know, without money, without family, without house, with begging bowl [laughs], then you will start to make some progress. That is why we go for—go for trip—trip of *takuhatsu*. But nowadays, you know, we have big temple like this; once in a while we go out with begging bowls, so it doesn't—so it isn't so difficult. But real takuhatsu should be done without anything.

But after you attain complete liberation from this world, without escaping from it, you will have all the money people has [laughs]. So there is no problem [laughs]. If, you know, every one of us—oh, no—one out of ten person have this kind of freedom, we will have no war, no social problem, we will be all happy. With this kind of understanding of practice, we, you know, practice zazen.

So we must trust people, you know, and we must trust Buddha, and you must trust yourself. And you should be completely give yourself to practice, completely involved in practice, forgetting everything: pain or various confusion.

Thank you very much.

Wednesday, August 6, 1969, San Francisco. Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Katharine Shields (6/28/00) and Bill Redican (7/31/00).

A memorable dharma teaching that has stayed with me:

"Vow to live the life you're already living."

—*Richard Baker*

It was a phrase from one of his lectures and it stuck with me. I have used it more than once in my talks, in the context of accepting things as they are. But the meaning is stronger than that: don't just *accept*, but rather *vow*, to live in things exactly as they are. Don't wish for, hanker after, or fret for something other than what you are and what your situation is. Take an internal vow to live fully in the life you are already living, just as it is.

—*Layla Bockhorst*

ABBOTS' ROUNDTABLE

Great thanks to current and former abbots Sojun Mel Weitsman, Zenkei Blanche Hartman, Eijun Linda Ruth Cutts, Myōgen Steve Stücky, and Kikū Christina Lehnherr, who gathered for a brief discussion of Zen Center past, present, and future on May 8, 2012. Thanks also to Djinn Gallagher for moderating. Some excerpts from the conversation:

Djinn [to Steve]: Can you talk about how the marketplace informs your practice as abbot, and about practicing at Zen Center and then going out into the marketplace?

Steve: First of all, I was in residence for eight years at Zen Center. Then I went out, and that was extending practice into work situations and family situations. Some of it was how I related to my children; I felt that was a practice and that they were good teachers. One thing I really worked with was responding in the moment, directly, which was a practice of regarding everything that arose not as interruption but as opportunity. I first learned that to some extent at Green Gulch. While I was there, things would keep coming up that I regarded as interruptions, and I made an effort, a very clear shift, to regard anything that might come up as just right. Anything that comes up unexpectedly is fine; children having a need is fine. Then, regarding working with clients in landscaping, it was a matter of regarding every client as someone I really needed to listen to carefully. The practice of listening made a big difference in how I related to people. And, frankly, just some of the discipline—such as getting up every morning and going to the zendo—that discipline really helped me in getting up every morning and taking on the tasks required in managing a job. For twenty-three years I ran a landscape design business.

Djinn: How did your work then affect your role as abbot?

Steve: I could talk about a number of aspects of that. One, for me, is that the financial realities of managing a household and running a business pushed me not to turn away from having to talk about money with people, and also to have a clarity in agreements. I think we're doing more written agreements now, particularly with senior people at Zen Center.

...Another aspect was not just having a business, but having a small temple outside of Zen Center. It was a whole different kind of role, a pastoral role which I needed to develop, unlike the monastic temple-life role. The situation helped me to understand the pastoral role in a different way than in the Zen Center. As you may know, that helped lead me to study pastoral counseling and psychological studies, all of which helped prepare me to come back and take this role as abbot.

Christina [also on work practice]: I've always worked with people. I started as a physical therapist. Deeper understandings started to happen right there... We learned, for instance in post knee-surgery therapy... that you weren't just treating a knee, that we were treating a whole being who was connected to this knee, and that each time it was a completely different story. Even though the surgery was the same, how the surgery affected the person, how the healing process was, this was a totally different story each time. There wasn't a first day and a second day—that was just a template. The real event was something different in each individual. So we immediately formed a little study group, "How Do You Meet the Being?"

Djinn: And this was when?

Christina: This was 1971. I learned about the psychological aspect of a person in relation to how the healing process was going. That began my interest in psychology, and then I worked for a long time in psychotherapy. It became clear that the framework of psychology doesn't cover all the aspects of human suffering, that there is a whole other layer to treat. During that time, in 1976, I came into contact with someone who was practicing zazen, and I sat for the first time in a zendo. I just fell into the whole mind-heart, you might say. It was a coming-home feeling.

Djinn: I wanted to ask Blanche and Mel—I'm hoping you will speak from your experience of having studied and trained with Suzuki Roshi.

Mel: Well, you know Suzuki Roshi was Japanese, and he had a Japanese character—Japanese Zen teacher character—which was very subtle. Not always saying everything that he wanted you to know, but giving you hints, and then seeing how you respond. Practice with Suzuki Roshi was, for me, more like an apprenticeship. You just be with the teacher. The more you're with the teacher,

Photo by Shundo David Haye

the more you see how he moves and how he thinks and how he responds. If you're a student, you pick up on that, but some things were so mysterious, I still think about them. One time I was in his apartment and he handed me this stick—not a *kotsu*, just a stick he used to carry—and said, "Would you open the curtains?" It was like he wanted to watch what I was doing. He wanted to see how I would do this, and I didn't know how he wanted me to do this. It made me feel very self-conscious. I didn't know what he expected. I still don't know what it was about. It wasn't about opening the curtains.

Djinn: And have you asked other people to open the curtains in that way? I mean, have you done that sort of thing with people?

Mel: Yes, I think so. I think somehow I embody Suzuki Roshi's teachings. Somehow they went inside of me. Because it's not a lot of talking, not a lot of instructions, but there is instruction by example, instruction by doing funny things, you know?

Blanche: [At first] I didn't know if it was alright for me to be [at Zen Center] because I was a generation older than almost everybody. There was Mel, and Patty, and Suzuki Roshi, and Katagiri Roshi—I don't know if there was anybody else in our generation. Maybe Silas. Anyhow, I was very uncertain of myself when I first came, and I didn't go to see [Suzuki Roshi] for a long time because I was so in awe of him. He was so kind and encouraging and supporting when I was uncertain. And then one day, I was so pleased with myself because I had counted every breath, and I said something like that and he got very stern. He said, "Don't ever think that you can sit zazen. That's a big mistake. Zazen sits zazen." And I felt quite reprimanded. But mostly he was very, very encouraging,

and extremely kind, even in this thing that happened, which I mentioned at the [alumni] retreat: There were a lot of us still smoking at that time, including me—

Mel: All of us [laughter].

Blanche: —and [one day] I was *soku* [head server], so I was out of the zendo for a while, getting ready, setting up for serving lunch. I came down carrying the offering tray and I was smoking a cigarette [laughter]. And looking back now, what did that look like to him? You know, things were pretty casual—people would all go down to Kirby's for ice cream during their breaks in the sesshin, and things like that. It was not very formal.

Djinn: You had the cigarette in your mouth?

Blanche: I had the cigarette [gestures moving a cigarette hand to mouth] and the Buddha tray in one hand [hard laughter]. Anyhow, he was coming downstairs to do noon service and he saw me, and he didn't go "Huh?!" He just sort of, with a puzzled smile, wagged his finger [waggles her finger slowly from side to side] and shook his head. You know, I can imagine that I might have responded—if I saw that now—much differently.

Djinn: What's going to happen next for Zen Center? We've had fifty years. How do you see the next fifty years?

Blanche: I think the through-line through of all this is the way Suzuki Roshi first began. When people said, "Teach us about Zen," he said, "I sit zazen. You can sit with me." And if we keep that the through-line—that's why I feel so bad about not being able to participate in the zendo so much. That's the fundamental reason for being at Zen Center, is for people to sit zazen.

Mel: You know, when the founder is around, everybody relates to the founder, and the practice comes through the founder. When the founder's not there anymore, then you have to go to other means, like study. I didn't study much with Suzuki Roshi. The library at Soko-ji was just one bookcase.

Blanche: There were hardly any books there.

Mel: So we just studied with the teacher, and that was our focus... Nowadays people want to know why we sit this way. Why this, and why that. Suzuki Roshi never spoke about why. We would ask, "Why do we do this?" He would say, "Just do it. Just do it." But he was very relaxed about formality. You never felt that he was being formal. He was into formality. And so that kind of ease—those students who were Suzuki Roshi's disciples, many of them got that in their bones. So some of us have that in our bones, and not everybody can relate to that.

Djinn: What do you see in fifty years' time? What would you like to see?

Steve: World peace [laughter]. Really. Why should it take so long?

Mel: As Blanche said, Suzuki Roshi sat zazen, and that's all he did, basically. I would like to see that continue for the next fifty years, without being diluted. In Japan, the teacher—sometimes an abbot—will have two or three students maybe that he gives dharma transmission to—maybe one and a half [laughter]. Doing more than that is like, "Hey, you greedy or something?" But for us, we need something like that. They have a whole culture of Buddhism, and also in Japan they don't have so many students. To have one student or two students that you can give dharma transmission to is pretty good. But here we have tons of students who have been practicing so long, and churning out teachers is what we need to do if we're going to expand, if we're going to continue. And some will make it, some won't. But I think we should do that. But we shouldn't do it cheaply.

Djinn: Cheaply—?

Mel: We should do it with the proper training, and to people who are ripe. In America I see a lot of people being given dharma transmission that I feel aren't ripe—that are really too green...

Steve: There are now a growing number of affiliate groups—affiliate sanghas.... And each of those groups is spawning a whole new group of students and then ordaining priests and developing sangha leaders who are a whole other generation of development. So it's a very interesting time—to see fifty years at San Francisco Zen Center, but now it's a geometric progression. All these different groups have many, many teachers out there.

Linda Ruth: Thinking about the next fifty years question: the Zen-inspired Senior Living Facility. To me, this is now cradle-to-grave. We've already run hospice, but [next is] to have a place for not just practitioners but for anyone who wants to live in community, to be assisted with basic living tasks.

Steve: But to have that also be a dharma center.

Linda Ruth: And have that be a dharma center, with practice discussion available, and a zendo, and classes, et cetera. So I think that's next. We can see it on the horizon.

Blanche: Zendo with chairs, probably [laughter].

Linda Ruth: And pull-up bars [more laughter]. I picture that not just in the Bay Area, but dotted throughout the country—those kinds of places with assisted living, practice-inspired.

Christina: You know, I'm always impressed how Suzuki Roshi's way continues to translate itself. I never met him, and when I went back to Switzerland in 1998, and people would invite me to give a talk, or talk with me, they would always comment on a gentleness and kind of flexibility that was very strong for them, very poignant for them and different than all the other places or all the other teachers they had met.

Photo by Shundo David Haye

Abbess Christina Lehnherr's procession during the Mountain Seat Ceremony, February 2012

Djinn: Within Buddhism?

Christina: Yes. There are groups that are in Switzerland and teachers that have come—Deshimaru and other teachers—and for me it was very clear, "Oh, that's the family style," which I didn't necessarily notice when I was here—

Mel: *Memmitsu no kafu.*[1]

Linda Ruth: *Memmitsu no kafu:* wind of the family house.

Djinn: Yes, the wind of the family house.

Christina: And that was such a wonderful feeling. And now I come here [as abbess] and my thought is, *Oh, I'm just going to sit in the zendo, I'm not going to see anyone for dokusan during zazen.* First I thought I'd do that maybe for a couple of weeks or three weeks and then I started to feel, *Actually, I want to just not give this an end date. Maybe it will have one, but I'm not giving it one.* So I told that to Reb when I had dokusan and he was quiet for a moment and he said, "I don't think I have seen Suzuki Roshi ever meet someone for dokusan during zazen." And I thought, *Here it comes through! I'm arriving here, and I hadn't thought about this before, hadn't made any decision, and here it appears—that's Suzuki Roshi coming through.*

[1] While *kafu* on its own translates as "wind of the family house," *memmitsu* brings in the specific Sōtō style or house-wind: carefulness or meticulousness or thoroughness or close attention to details.

Practice Period

Wind coming over the mountain
brings rain showers today pasting
the last few leaves to the windowpane
Black robes under black umbrellas
move in pairs along the muddy road
Hey there who're you when you change
from street clothes into those vestments?
From straitjacket to shroud, no?

Me, I still can't stand the taste of gruel
My boots gummed with tar, my hands reek
of kerosene. Sore back and aching bones
yet I'm still in love with the momentary gesture
of things

Grumble and grin
Summer's now just a dry wishbone
Dark shadows linger all day in the canyon
and the cold deepens as winter comes on
The three stooges named greed hate and delusion
still split my sides and roll me in the aisle
I can't tell whether I'm laughing or crying
half the time with these clown Buddhas

—*Daigan Lueck*

Photo by Shundo David Haye

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ALUMNI RETREAT AND GREAT ASSEMBLY SESSHIN AT TASSAJARA

Zenshin Tim Buckley

On April 26–29, 2012, San Francisco Zen Center held its first full alumni retreat at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center [the 1986 reunion was for Tassajara alumni only]. Forty-nine people came for all or part of the long weekend, organized by SFZC and the Alumni Steering Committee. Alumni began arriving in light rain and mist on Thursday afternoon. The sun shone again as we gathered in the courtyard before dinner and were welcomed by Leslie James. That night the group met for introductions in the new retreat hall (a simple, elegant open space amidst live oaks, framed by vast windows) and as the days unfolded, reminiscences and many stories about practicing with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, especially, became central to our meetings there.

The Steering Committee had announced that attendance was not reqnired at any of the weekend's events; alumni were free to use and enjoy their time as they liked. Still, most of us attended morning zazen at 5:30 AM. How else to really be back at Tassajara? And so the weekend went: morning zazen, breakfast in the guest dining room, a brief "no-work" circle, and between other meals, various combinations of yoga, hiking, napping, talking with each other (a lot), group meetings in the retreat hall, and hot baths and more baths in the beautiful and peaceful bath house.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught the people who gathered around him, the sangha, that they were sisters and brothers, and the sangha became known as "Buddha's children." One wonderful thing about the alumni retreat was the feeling of being part of a much bigger Buddha family, of being brothers and sisters in a large family indeed.

Seeing people again who I'd known forty-five years ago was extraordinary, of course (we "snapped together as precisely as two magnets," as I wrote one old friend later), but the really extraordinary thing was the way we all "snapped together"—old friends and new. We met on common ground physically and spiritually, and we enjoyed it and were bound together by it.

On Friday the community, alumni and residents alike, came together for a dharma talk by Leslie James. On Saturday evening we enjoyed a different form of camaraderie, with dinner together followed by a lively seventeen-act skit night in the courtyard. There was squirrel poetry and a stealthy posture adjustment ninja. Three plumbers of *serious* Zen student comportment chanted a commodious *dharani* to the beat of a toilet-seat clapper, and Abbot Steve Stücky and his posse rocked "The Jewel Mirror Samadhi Blues." The audience contributed laughter, hand-clapping and, occasionally, anarchic harmonies. Zenkei Blanche Hartman's ode to sesshin legs, sung in a sweet Broadway voice and ending in a shower of petals over those aching limbs while sitting on a zafu in good posture (no stealthy ninja needed), was unforgettable; such encouragement.

The retreat ended on Sunday morning with a ceremony at the Suzuki Roshi memorial high on the Hogback above Zenshin-ji. We went our ways after a final no-work-circle meeting for farewells, separate but inseparable. The Steering Committee did a great job. As one of its members said in that final meeting together, "I fell in love with everybody here." We all did.

The Sesshin

Ed Brown, one of Tassajara's best-known alumni, once wrote, "you're ou your own, together with everyone." The weekend retreat was a time for sociability of the highest order, but a sesshin always finds you alone on your cushion "taking the backward step" into your own miud. The five-day Great Assembly Sesshin, led by Sojun Mel Weitsman and Tenshin Reb Anderson, started on Sunday shortly after the retreat ended. Several alumni from the retreat joined with other long-time practitioners to form a group whose efforts all contributed to a sesshin energy that was committed, strong, and fulfilling.

Reb Anderson and Mel Weitsman gave dharma talks on alternate days and both offered dokusau. Reb's talks, skillfully grounded in formal tradition, returned again and again to the centrality of the ten grave Bodhisattva precepts in Zeu practice. Mel's, quite different in flavor and style, emphasized the creativity and luminosity of daily life and of the process and experience of transmission. The two teacbers' lectures were finely complementary. At the end of the last of them, Reb and Mel left the zendo together, arms around shoulders, Mel happily waving so-long as they strolled out together. It was a cheerful finale to five days of intense and serious inner work.

Photo by Judith Keenan

Alumni retreat participants at the new *torii* (traditional Japanese gate marking the entrance to sacred space), on the path to the Suzuki Roshi memorial. It was built during the spring work period this year.

Not having lived full-time at Tassajara since the late 1960s, I was deeply impressed by and grateful for the way practice has matured there. The zendo functioned seamlessly in complete support of our efforts and forty-five sesshin participants responded fully with their best efforts. For one so long away, the sense of Zenshin-ji having come of age as a Sōtō Zen monastery fully in the tradition of Eihei Dōgen Zenji yet unique in its own way was immensely gratifying and moving.

The weather was ideal; crisp in the early mornings and pleasant throughout the day. The schedule was both rigorous and humane, making time for an hour's welcome exercise of yoga or qigong in the afternoons and for a short hot bath between *oryoki* supper and evening sitting. While we all sat alone with ourselves, and largely maintained silence outside the zendo, we also came fully together in palpable unity and gratitude—perhaps more subtle but finally not unlike the feeling during the retreat.

On the last day of the sesshin we held the monthly Suzuki Roshi memorial service in the *kaisando*. The small building was completely filled by sesshin participants; the residents who had not attended the sesshin stood in rows outside. Perhaps especially for those of us who had lived at Tassajara while Suzuki Roshi was teaching there, from 1967 to 1970, this conclusion was a moving celebration of our founder's compassionate intention realized, a moment of intense wonder, humility, and joy.

Tim Buckley (Jōkan Zenshin) is resident priest at Great River Zendo in West Bath, Maine. He worked on the Wind Bell *between 1967 and 1971.*

PERFECT AND YOU CAN USE A LITTLE IMPROVEMENT

Dairyu Michael Wenger
Case 9 from *49 Fingers: A Collection of Modern American Koans*

Case

Shunryu Suzuki addressed the assembly. "Each one of you is perfect the way you are and you can use a little improvement."

Commentary

Sometimes a teacher uses a sharp sword, sometimes a kind hug. Here old Master Shunryu used both at once. Granting way and denying way. Zap! How can perfection be improved upon, or is it a dead end? Improvement is always running away from where you are. Our teachers were never complacent nor were they flighty.

Can you stand to be perfect?
Can you stand to be flawed?
Where do you turn away?

Verse

The heat of Master Shunryu's heart
burns away both faith and doubt,
leaving a withered tree in the golden wind.


IT
CAN'T
BE
HELPED
GREAT
DRAGON

YOU HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING

Expressions of Practice from Teachers Who Have Moved Beyond the Temple Gate

Martha graciously agreed to let us reprint this wonderful talk from her lay entrustment ceremony, which was officiated by Zoketsu Norman Fischer and included fellow entrustees Sue Moon and Mick Sopko on August 28, 2005. From www.everydayzen.org.

A Rakusu Is Not a Rakusu

Martha deBarros

Norman has just given us our rakusus and we have chanted "Great robe, great rakusu, of liberation, field far beyond form and emptiness..." So what is this rakusu? Who does it really belong to? When Suzuki Roshi was asked, "What is a rakusu?" he replied, "A rakusu is not a rakusu, it's just something to wear." So if a rakusu is not a rakusu then what is it we've been sewing on these many months?

The three of us have been sewing since January. We sewed on each other's rakusus and family, friends, Norman, sewing teachers, neighbors, grandchildren joined in. We sewed in Mexico together, Sue took her rakusu to Ireland, mine went to Gualala with me. During this time of sewing, seasons changed, the war in Iraq intensified, there were signs of peace in Ireland, ice caps were too quickly melting. The joys and sorrows of our personal lives and of the world were stitched in.

A piece of orange cloth from an inmate's uniform is sewn onto the back of my rakusu. Sue's envelope is lined with a piece of discarded clothing from a homeless person, Mick's with African cloth in honor of his drumming teacher and that beautiful strife-ridden country. Sewn into each, the silent voices chanting the name of Buddha with each stitch, and our vows to practice the precepts as a way of life.

So what started out as a personal project I soon experienced as something much vaster and more mysterious. As John Muir wrote, "When we try to pick up anything by itself we find it hitched [or we could say stitched] to everything else in the universe." It seems to me that our rakusus did not begin with the first stitch nor did they end with the last. They are alive; they are, after all, green—wild, fresh, always under construction.

Perhaps you imagined us over these many months as being in some kind of sewing samadhi: breathing, chanting, stitching away in silence, half-smiles radiating. Well, life is not like that. Sewing a rakusu is not like that. If you're ever short on suffering, I recommend sewing a rakusu. Greed, aversion, doubt, anxiety, pride, despair—they're all there. The voices: "I'll never get this done," "How many times do I have to redo this part?" "Hey, I'm getting the hang of this, it looks pretty good," "Exactly what kind of religion is it that insists on sewing in the first place?" Mick suggested at one point we just call out the word HELP and see what happens. Steve [Gross] said that while sewing his rakusu, he often found himself between tears and tantrums and it was a relief not to always have to be grown-up.

So, rakusu as mirror, rakusu as teacher. Hard to describe, to pin down, yet very down-to-earth—cloth, thread. Something to wear. These words describing the rakusu were a part of our formal ceremony last Thursday night with Norman: "The rakusu, a robe to clothe you throughout this life and times to come."

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I lost my rakusu, as I'm bound to do at this age. What would be missing? When I go to San Quentin tomorrow morning, I won't be wearing it. Or will I? Rakusu as our very skin. So in a sense, we're all wearing these rakusus, making our best effort to help others.

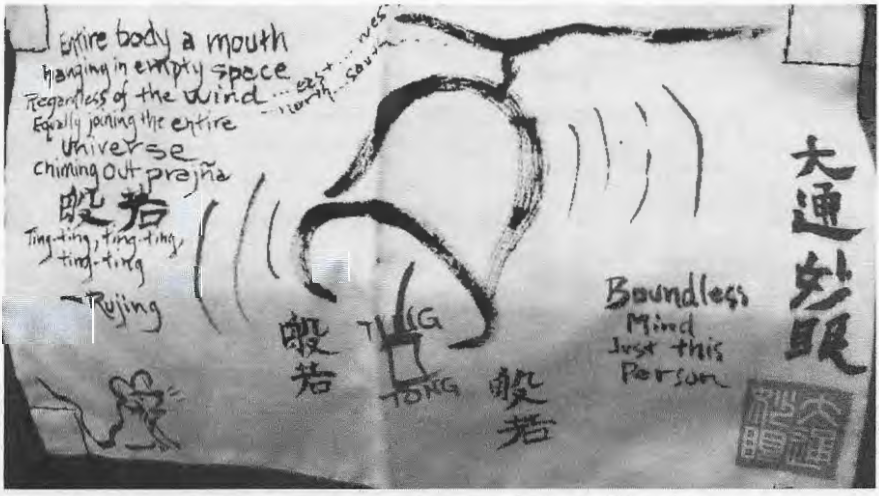

Photo by Shundo David Haye

Abbot Myōgen Steve Stücky's calligraphy on a rakusu sewn for him by Valorie Beer

Mel reminds us that lay entrustment is not a reward but a responsibility. When a student asked the teacher, "What is the teaching of a Buddha?" the teacher replied, "An appropriate response." How will we respond in the next moment and the next? As one inmate put it, "It's all about slowing down and serving others." How do we do that?

I offer this poem in gratitude for the gift of studying and sewing with Norman, Sue, and Mick, and for being here with all of you:

Apples ripening in late
summer's sun.
We sat, studied, sewed
through leafless winter
greening spring
into an intimacy
as lovely as twining vines
holding up that ancient flower
whose scent we recognize
but cannot name.

Tonight the moon
is reflected in the
turning of the
ripened apples
as they simply
let go and fall
to feed the
expectant deer.

I say:
The golden needle
pierces the ancient vein.
Tending the wounded
is our work.

— *Genkyo Jodo*
Deep Pool, Quiet Way

Martha deBarros, a longtime resident and practitioner at Green Gulch Farm, cofounded the Zen Hospice Project and is an active member of Everyday Zen. She currently teaches meditation to a group of elders and to inmates at San Quentin Prison and at the county jail in San Bruno. She now lives in Muir Beach, California.

Photo by Katherine Thanas

Suzuki Roshi with Yvonne Rand, c. 1970

The Teacher and Teachings from the Past Are Still with Me Today

Yvonne Rand

I first met Suzuki Roshi in 1966. He was the teacher for the San Francisco Zen Center, which at that time was located in a former synagogue on Bush Street in San Francisco. Shortly thereafter I became the secretary for Zen Center. In that capacity I also served as Suzuki Roshi's personal secretary.

Once a week I would drive Roshi to Chinatown in San Francisco to a fruit truck called The Orange Tree. There I bought a box of oranges sufficient for Roshi's morning glass of fresh orange juice. He loved orange juice.

In the fall of 1966 Zen Center purchased the land and buildings at Tassajara Springs in the Los Padres National Forest. Following the purchase, Suzuki Roshi spent as much time as he could at Tassajara while continuing to serve as the priest for the Japanese congregation in San Francisco. I began to drive Suzuki Roshi between Tassajara and San Francisco on an almost weekly basis.

In his teachings Roshi often emphasized the importance of respecting the Buddhist precepts as guidelines for how to live in the service of waking up and developing the capacity to be present in each moment.

In addition to savoring orange juice, Roshi also had a great fondness for fiddlehead fern soup. On one springtime drive into Tassajara, Roshi spotted a large stand of fiddlehead ferns next to the road. The ferns were growing behind a barbed-wire fence hung with No Trespassing signs.

Roshi had me halt the car, ignore the sign, clamber through the fence and, without any permission from the landowner, harvest a bundle of the fiddlehead-shaped fern tips. Roshi then urged me to drive quickly down the steep mountain road to the Tassajara kitchen. There he made fiddlehead soup. He ate it and happily retired to his cabin for the night. I realized then that Roshi's adherence to the precepts included, sometimes, not following them.

At Tassajara Suzuki Roshi began working with the stones in Tassajara Creek and its tributaries. At first he focused on making a stone garden. He worked with a young Zen student who had experience carving stones into receptacles for collecting water. Another tall, strong student worked alongside Roshi wrestling large rocks into place. The two of them built stone walls to retain the stream that runs into Tassajara Creek beside today's dining room. They built a stone wall, now somewhat overgrown, on the upper side of the vegetable garden. Suzuki Roshi also built the beautiful rock wall at the memorial site he chose, where some of his ashes would later be buried.

There are stained-glass windows set in the doors between the kitchen and dining room at City Center. One panel depicts Suzuki Roshi's hands in the mudra for greeting. You can see how a finger on one hand is bent. The bent finger was the result of an injury sustained when Roshi moved an exceptionally large rock, entirely by himself, into the garden at Rinso-in in Japan.

Yvonne Rand is a meditation teacher and lay householder priest in the Sōtō Zen Buddhist tradition who began her practice and study of Zen with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi in 1966. A dharma heir of Katagiri Roshi, she is the guiding teacher at Goat-in-the-Road in Anderson Valley, California.

Photo by Anne Connolly

Reflections on Practicing at Zen Center

Gil Fronsdal

I am immensely grateful for my time practicing and living at Zen Center. I am especially grateful for the many, many hours I sat zazen in Zen Center's quiet, peaceful zendos. Those hours of sitting had a big impact on me. I learned the value of simply being present with whatever was happening.

I was fortunate to receive very little instruction about what to do in zazen or what I might expect. Rather than directions to change myself, to improve myself, or to get rid of anything, I was instructed to simply sit upright and follow the breath. During many long sessions of meditation I learned how poorly I could actually do this. I became aware of so many ways that I would not be present. My thoughts would race off and my mind would be filled with fantasies, plans, conversations, or memories. When I did have some awareness of my present moment experience I would instantly get involved in desires, aversions, judgments, and agendas about the moment. Repeatedly coming back to being present and upright was like training a wild horse by tying it with a rope to a stake in the middle of a corral. The horse might buck and try to run away, only to eventually quiet down. Posture and breath were like the stake and rope that helped me to see how wild my mind was.

At times I would protest against the simple practice of sitting upright with thoughts of *Surely, this can't be enough; there must be something I should be attaining; if I want people to like and approve of me, I have to do something tangible; how am I going to be a successful Zen student by just sitting here?* At other times, being present seemed too difficult, especially when there was a lot of pain, fear, or my specialties—guilt and thinking about how to get rid of my thinking.

With the practice of simply being present I learned to appreciate the value of doing nothing (or almost nothing) and how to get out of my own way. I learned that trying too hard and trying to do it "right" were as much impediments to zazen as being distracted with racing thoughts. I saw that self-conscious effort and self-referential ideations interfered with the freedom of presence. I appreciated that in zazen I didn't have to be for or against my thinking, feelings, or life circumstances. I simply had to stay present and be unaffected by them.

Slowly there grew a sense of presence or "beingness" that was independent from all the comings and goings of the mind and heart. With time this presence became more satisfying than the activities of mind that would take me away from the present. I came to appreciate the sense of aliveness and freedom that came from simple sitting and unentangled presence. This also provided an alternative to my belief that to be right, successful, or happy I had to accomplish something, prove myself, or know something profound.

Photo by Renshin Bunce

Blanche and Lou Hartman after John King's shuso ceremony, December 2000

As Zen teaches "practice and realization are one" so the practice of presence in upright zazen is its own fulfillment. Peace is realized in being peaceful, compassion is realized in being compassionate, and there is realization in realizing simple being.

After some years at Zen Center I stumbled upon Vipassana meditation in Thailand. I had no wish or idea to abandon or modify my zazen practice. Rather, I understood that the mindfulness instruction of Vipassana could help me practice zazen more thoroughly. The refined attention of mindfulness showed me I had many subtle forms of nonacceptance and agendas as well as deep, faint issues of self-identity that were more about being "someone" than just being. Surprisingly, I learned that the sense of being and presence in zazen can be too much, that they can involve a form of desire or clinging. Vipassana showed me how completely these and everything else is empty, and in so doing gave me much more confidence in the practice of zazen, of the simple sitting upright in the midst of it all.

I don't think I could have learned all this without the support of the community of practitioners at Zen Center. I am sure I could not have practiced zazen long enough and consistently enough by myself. Without the example of others sitting upright next to me I would not have seen its value. On this fiftieth anniversary of Zen Center, I celebrate all the goodness that has flowed out the practice of the Zen Center community.

Gil Fronsdal starting practicing at Zen Center in 1975, was ordained by Richard Baker, and received dharma transmission from Mel Weitsman. He is also a Vipassana teacher at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City.

Travelling the Great Road

Edward Brown

I come across Zen writing that speaks to me. Venerable Juching's poem goes like this:

> The Great Road has no gate.
> It begins in your own mind.
> The sky has no marked trails,
> yet it finds its way to your nostrils
> and becomes your breath.
> Somehow we meet like tricksters
> or bandits of dharma.
> Ah! The great house comes tumbling down.
> Astonished, maple leaves fly and scatter.

No longer in residence at the Zen Center, no longer having a regular sitting group, I take to the Great Road where there are no marked trails.

Students appear, often in cyberspace, and somehow we meet: in person, by Skype, by the Perfection of Wisdom, the Lovely, the Holy.

And so it goes. Finding an audience for this tumbled-down priest with threadbare robes—along with a sparkling new brown rakusu sewn by one of my far-flung students, signed by Sojun Roshi—is a matter for tricksters or bandits.

This message from the airport in Frankfurt, as I head for two and a half months in the Čześka Republika, Germany, and Austria: people and places that welcome me—including for the first time in my ancestral Czech homelands, visiting where my mother Františka's parents were born, and leading a meditation retreat at the Village House.

As always relying on my beloved teacher Suzuki Roshi, who said: "Some of you are trying to be good Zen students. Why don't you be yourself. I'll get to know you better that way."

And for the maple leaves flying and scattering, here's a fragment of Raymond Carver that the wind brought my way:

> And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?
> I did.
> And what did you want?
> To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.

Edward Brown (Jusan Kainei) started sitting in May, 1965 at Soko-ji. Ordained as a disciple of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, 9/11/71. In good time (1996), Sojun's deshi. The rest is history.

Conservative and Liberal

Norman Fischer

In most ways, Suzuki Roshi was a pretty traditional Sōtō Zen priest, yet he was open to "the American style." So he was, you might say, both a traditionalist and an innovator, conservative as well as liberal, without, I suppose, having an idea of being either one. My guess is he was trying to practice what he preached: beginner's mind.

In this day of so much self-consciousness about Western American Zen and all the ways we could, should, and are updating the practice, it strikes me that San Francisco Zen Center's way remains, essentially, very true to Suzuki Roshi's. Zen Center is deeply traditional and happily innovative at the same time.

This strikes me as a strong way to practice. You get the best of both worlds. Holding fast to tradition, anchoring yourself there, and trying to change as little as possible, you remain strong (understanding of course that change is inevitable, that even if you try not to change you will change without knowing you are changing). You have an unshakeable pillar holding you up. On the other hand, being fully open to new forms, attitudes, and developments, you welcome and help as many people as possible and you remain flexible, which improves your chances for survival.

For instance, Zen Center trains priests in the traditional way. Priests remain in apprentice relationships for many years with their teachers, sew and wear *okesas*, attend practice periods, master oryoki, shave their heads (at least, most usually do), and learn traditional liturgy. At the same time, in the same locations where priests are doing their traditional training, Zen Center has all kinds of nontraditional programs for lay people (and priests too!): diversity training; communication skills development; Zen and Recovery groups; workshops in everything from intimate relationship to poetry writing to hiking. Zen Center's temples are completely open to anyone at any level of experience and commitment. While this effort to be both traditional and innovative at the same place and time can and does create plenty of tension, it is also very good. It provides strength and seriousness, which requires a degree of restraint and narrowness, while also being generous, inclusive, and flexible.

Two areas in which this proclivity to be simultaneously (or serially) conservative and liberal (are we liberal conservatives or conservative liberals?) plays out are the relatively recent developments of our women's lineage and entrusted lay teachers.

The former case: over the years we have little by little begun to include the names of great women teachers along with the traditional list of (all-male, as it happens) ancestors in our normative Sōtō lineage. About a dozen or more years ago we began chanting these women's names in services and in more recent years

have created documents that are given out in *zaike* (lay) and *shūkke* (priest) *tokudo* (ordination) ceremonies. Even more recently, we've begun making women's lineage documents for *shiho* (priest dharma transmission) ceremonies. None of this has ever been done in Japan. We did it very carefully, very conservatively, and gradually over a relatively long period of time, and as an addition to, not a substitute for, the traditional chants, documents, and rituals.

In the case of lay entrustment ("entrustment" is the word we have been using to distinguish from "transmission" for priests), Zen Center's liberal conservatism or conservative liberalism has come in for some criticism. Yes, we have done something very innovative, even radical by Japanese standards: we have joined almost all other American Zen lineages in empowering lay practitioners as fully qualified Zen teachers. But, unlike most American Zen lineages, we have maintained lay Zen teachers as lay people: that is, in our line lay teachers cannot officiate at services and cannot give *jukai* (precepts). This has been a point of controversy in the national Sōtō Zen community. Many newly entrusted lay teachers feel the need and the strong desire for the power to officially offer precepts, rakusus, and lineage papers to their students and cannot understand why we don't grant it. But so far San Francisco Zen Center has been too traditionalist to take this step. This seems to some to be a stubborn and ungenerous stance, but to me it illustrates the strength of the traditional/innovative way. On one hand, yes, we do have lay teachers who have full permission to teach in whatever way they like, sanctioned by the lineage to be as flexible and experimental as their creativity and circumstances will allow. On the other hand, we preserve the purity and clarity of the priest path as maximally as possible by reserving traditional powers and obligations for priests alone. If we can maintain both tradition and innovation in full strength, I think we can remain lively and firm at the same time.

For me this conservative liberalism or liberal conservatism is not just Suzuki Roshi's way, it is the best, surest, and most satisfying way for religion: fully open to the present and the future, deeply rooted in the past.

Zoketsu Norman Fischer is a poet, writer, and former co-abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center. He stepped down from that role in 2000 and founded the Everyday Zen Foundation. He lives in Muir Beach with his wife Kathie and remains active at San Francisco Zen Center on the Elders Council and as a senior dharma teacher.

Photo by Catherine Karnow

Lunch

Today
Who could've guessed—
Macaroni & Cheese
Were more important than enlightenment

For Okusan and Blanche Hartman

honeymoon hermitage
everything
blue pine stitch.

—Barbara Marion Horn
(from Tassajara 1980–81)

No Mistake

Laura Burges

> To believe means to have faith that one is already inherently in The Way and that one is not lost, deluded, or upside down and no increase and no decrease and no mistake.
>
> —*Dōgen Zenji*

I first read these words on a card on the refrigerator of my lifelong friend Deborah West. We had grown up together in Pleasant Hill, California, and had been best friends as children but later lost track of each other. I ran into her in Davis when I was about twenty-four. Deborah had read Suzuki Roshi's gem of a book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, and we sat in her kitchen and talked late into the night about Buddhism and about the sadness and joy that life had dealt us since we'd seen each other last. It was a time in my life when I was totally lost, deluded, and upside down. Not many people wake up one morning and say, "It's a beautiful day. I think I'll go practice Zen Buddhism." Most of us have come face to face with the First Noble Truth, the truth that life is suffering, by the time we arrive at practice. Dōgen's words reassured me that my whole life had led me to find a way to live in vow.

I first heard about Tassajara Zen Monastery from my boyfriend's brother when we were living in Pacific Grove. Craig had been driving alone in his truck on the Tassajara Road in the Los Padres wilderness. He knew tbat he was running out of gas, but he figured he'd come to a town eventually. He was siphoning gas out of a car that was parked in front of the Tassajara gate when a monk appeared at bis side. The monk said, "Would you like to buy some gas?" He invited Craig in and fed him and let him use the baths. Craig paid for the gas he'd stolen and headed back up the road. This encounter had a profound effect on him. He was toucbed to be treated in this way when he had behaved badly. It was summertime when we heard this story and we made a pilgrimage to Tassajara and spent the day at the Narrows. I didn't realize that within three years, I'd be living there as a student myself.

After finishing college in 1974, I found myself at Zen Center. A lot of pain, a lot of feelings that I had blocked out, came up for me when I began to sit, like a long, hard rain after a dry time. Before too long, I was at Tassajara and practicing "as if to save my head from fire." I remember the words spoken during a sesshin: "No mystic cry or special experience can help you until you have the great matter of your own life constantly before you and in the hands of your being." Yes.

I loved the rigor of life at Tassajara. I loved the order and ritual of practice, the intensity of cold in the winter and the intentional activity of "chopping wood, carrying water." I loved the clarity that came with this radical shift in my life. There was a sense of timelessness in the mountain monastery, a chance to

step out of American culture and find myself anew, a chance to study and to sit in the old zendo in the midst of creek chatter and birdsong. My teacher, Eijun Linda Ruth Cutts, talks about the freedom of restraint. I found a new kind of freedom in not having to do whatever I wanted. Being free to sit still. Being free not to do the first thing that came to mind. I no longer felt like a leaf on the wind. While at Tassajara, I was asked to take on the job of teaching a small group of children whose parents were invited to practice there for a year. Later I went back to school to get a teaching credential.

Since 1985, an important part of my practice has been teaching children. One day, one of my students was walking by my desk and suddenly he stopped and did a little dance. I said, "Nathan, what were you thinking about just then?" And he said, "Do you ever forget that you're alive, and all of a sudden you just remember again?" The children I spend my days with are luminous beings, calling me back to the present, moment after moment.

I took a sabbatical in 2000 to serve as *shuso* (head student) at Green Gulch Farm. I went on to spend two years studying with Linda Ruth to receive lay entrustment, a more recent form of ordination that honors and affirms the path of lay practice and authorizes the student as a teacher in her own right. I now lecture and teach classes at Zen Center and elsewhere, and have been able to carry my work in the Sangha in Recovery Program to other practice centers in Northern California.

Hermann Hesse wrote, "The bird fights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Who would be born must first destroy a world." When I first came to Zen Center, I thought that I needed to "destroy a world," that I would put on a black robe and become someone else. But I have learned that practice blooms in this very mind and body. We don't have to shut the door on the past or be someone else.

Robert Thurman speaks of the importance of "the living teacher, the spiritual friend who keeps you unified in your practice so that your practice and living are one." With deep gratitude, I thank Eijun Linda Cutts for being such a teacher. I thank Zen Center for fifty years of offering a place where we might all find our path and our own way to live in vow. May all beings be happy. May they be joyous and live in safety.

Laura Burges received lay entrustment from her teacher, Eijun Linda Cutts, in 2009. A teacher of children for 26 years, her teaching methods have appeared on PBS and in the book Teach Our Children Well. *Laura lectures and leads retreats at practice centers in Northern California. She cofounded the Sangha in Recovery program at SFZC.*

It Was Like This: You Were Happy

It was like this:
you were happy, then you were sad,
then happy again, then not.

It went on.
You were innocent or you were guilty.
Actions were taken, or not.

At times you spoke, at other times you were silent.
Mostly, it seems you were silent—what could you say?

Now it is almost over.

Like a lover, your life bends down and kisses your life.

It does this not in forgiveness—
between you, there is nothing to forgive—
but with the simple nod of a baker at the moment
he sees the bread is finished with transformation.

Eating, too, is a thing now only for others.

It doesn't matter what they will make of you
or your days: they will be wrong,
they will miss the wrong woman, miss the wrong man,
all the stories they tell will be tales of their own invention.

Your story was this: you were happy, then you were sad,
you slept, you awakened.
Sometimes you ate roasted chestnuts, sometimes persimmons.

—*Jane Hirshfield*

Photo by Shmuto David Haye

Photographer unknown

GREEN GULCH FARM TURNS FORTY

Furyu Nancy Schroeder

For more in-depth history, photos, and remembrances of Green Gulch, please see the 30TH-anniversary article compiled by Mick Sopko for the Fall/Winter 2002 Wind Bell, *now available online at* http://sfzc.org/download/wb-xxxvi-2_sopko.pdf.

This year we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Green Gulch Farm as one of the three residential practice communities of the San Francisco Zen Center. Zen Center acquired the farm from George Wheelwright, who had used the land for twenty years as a working cattle ranch and wanted to see it remain in agricultural use. Through the work and vision of former abbot Richard Baker and with the help of Huey Johnson of the Nature Conservancy, Zen Center was able to purchase the farm in the summer of 1972 and to continue stewardship of this truly remarkable land.

The early stage of transforming Green Gulch from a single-family ranch into a thriving residential community was accomplished by turning the old hay barn into a zendo, the barn storage sheds into student housing, and the family home into a communal dining room, kitchen, dish room, and library. Skilled carpenters under the guidance of master builder Paul Discoe added the Wheelwright Conference Center, the Lindisfarne Guest House, workshops, sheds, a greenhouse, and an office.

Further development during the next two decades included additional housing; the complete renovation of the zendo and Cloud Hall dormitory; a sauna, bathhouse, three yurts, and bakery addition; and a major overhaul of the septic, electrical, and water systems.

Photo by Steph Wenderski

The most recent building project, completed in October 2011, is the new student housing unit above the resident parking lot. Undertaken as a model of our community's commitment to sustainably living on the Earth, the housing is designed to use 90 percent less energy than a regular code-compliant new building by adopting "passive house" design elements and certification.

As part of our ongoing stewardship of the land, we have also undertaken a creek restoration project in cooperation with the National Park Service and a number of other state and federal agencies to restore natural habitat for the endangered Coho salmon as well as for other wildlife that depends on the Green Gulch watershed.

The Green Gulch Farm and Garden Apprenticeship Program began in 1994 with five young farm apprentices who, with great enthusiasm, came from all over the country to help care for the land and to follow the full zendo schedule. As of 2012, we have trained over 150 apprentices, many of whom have gone on to start their own farms or to work in other areas of sustainable living. The program is well regarded internationally; every year Green Gulch receives over a hundred applications from people all over the world... including a current apprentice hailing from Tasmania!

A famous Zen motto, printed on a t-shirt popular with our students several seasons ago, is "Working Hard, Accomplishing Nothing." And yet these amazing students, old and new alike, continually accomplish an enormous amount of excellent work as farmers, gardeners, cooks, bakers, maintenance people,

conference hosts, managers, land stewards, and teachers of Zen. For forty years now, they have gotten up together in the predawn hours, put on their robes, and gone to the zendo at the sound of the han.

Working and sitting side by side with our resident student population, our volunteers who offer their labor during the Watershed and Maintenance Work Weeks, Arbor Day, Buddha's Birthday, and our monthly Watershed Work Parties provide crucial ongoing support. We also greatly benefit from the volunteers who come weekly to help ont in the kitchen, bakery, zendo, garden, and farm. They are truly and deeply appreciated, each and every one.

Green Gulch is committed to sharing its values through several family and children's programs—the Sunday Children's Program, the Coming of Age Program, and the Environmental Education Program, which offer hands-on experience of our farm, garden, zendo, and communal lifestyle to hundreds of young people every year.

And finally, there is our successful Tea Program, headed by our resident tea teacher, Meiya Wender, with the support of teachers Scott McDougall and Christy Bartlett. Sowing the Moon Tea House *(Shugetsu An)*, named by Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi, was completed in 1985. In 1996, following the death of our dear friend and *chajin* [man of tea] Jerry Fuller, a tea garden, or *roji*, was added in front of the tea house in his honor.

Among the tea house's collection of scrolls is a newly acquired calligraphy by Kishizawa Ian, an official lecturer at Eihei-ji on the *Shōbōgenzō*. While at Eihei-ji, Suzuki Roshi had been Kishizawa Ian Roshi's student and attendant. The scroll is of a Chinese-style poem by Zen Master Dōgen and it reads:

> Sounds of the valley stream enters the ears
> Moonlight pierces the eyes

May the light and sound of practice in this peaceful valley we call Green Gulch Farm continue to benefit all beings for innumerable years to come.

Furyu Nancy Schroeder, a resident of Zen Center for over 30 years, is currently the Director of Children and Family programs at Green Gulch Farm. She received dharma transmission from Tenshin Reb Anderson in 1999.

FIVE UNDER FIFTY: VOICES FROM THE NEXT GENERATION

Some longtime Zen students, resident and nonresident, lay and priest, share their perspectives on Zen Center and practice

Lay Ancestry
Nadia Arroudj

Walking to Zen Center for the first time a few years ago, I still remember the quietude of the place and the smell of incense. I came to City Center on a friend's advice; for the past few years, I had been practicing yoga and felt a yearning to develop the meditative aspect of it. Sitting became a powerful anchor for me. For the next three years, I came through the back door (Laguna "Gate") to evening meditation three or four times a week. Sometimes Zenkei Blanche Hartman would bow us goodbye as we were leaving the zendo. Later on, I learned that Suzuki Roshi had also offered this sweet practice.

Eventually I started coming up the back stairs to the dining room and joined the sangha for the evening meal. It took me a couple of years to be curious enough to do that. Over the course of numerous dinner conversations, I learned about both Green Gulch Farm and Tassajara. The way they were described to me made me want to visit, so I committed to doing work practice in both places, first at Green Gulch for a week and then at Tassajara for ten days. A decade later, causes and conditions have kept me put at Zen Center.

My deep appreciation for Zen practice keeps unfolding every day. I feel I could not have started with a different Buddhist practice. The container in which I practice—the combination of zazen, the forms, work practice, and community—has allowed me not only an authentic self-expression and exploration but also

Photo by Jarrin Hicks

spaciousness in dealing with my suffering. To understand the intimate practice of transformation has been the greatest gift.

As a lay practitioner, I want to express gratitude to our lay ancestry, to the many for the most part anonymous people in our lineage. Ancestors are an essential part of Buddhism; it is crucial that we recognize and behold those who carry on the teaching of the Buddha in various ways.

The greatest supporters of our temple are the lay members who from the very beginning have helped sustain the teachings. The lay sangha has allowed the precious dharma to continue for more than 2,600 years by supporting the livelihood of the monks. To leave a space for laity and lay teachers to offer the dharma is to preserve and mirror more than one way of practice. It is an expression of Bnddha's generous inclusion. The diversity of paths of expressing and teaching the dharma is one of Buddhism's many strengths. I feel American Zen will benefit from encouraging and supporting lay expression, allowing multifaceted ways for the teachings to unfold.

In my position as work leader, I often practice and work with monastics from Japan who are very eager to experience and study the many programs (outreach/prison/bag lunch/recovery) we offer here at Zen Center with the idea that they can be adapted and offered to the public in Japan. Many of these programs are led and maintained by lay practitioners who for the most part are nonresidents. Without their support and commitment it would be difficult to sustain these programs. These are some of the many ways laity expresses itself, as a continuous and quiet presence.

Nadia Arroudj became a Zen Center resident in 2003 and was lay ordained by Paul Haller in 2004. Originally from Lyon, France, she is currently work leader at City Center.

More or Less?

Jiryu Mark Rutschman-Byler

It's funny to say this, but if I had to identify what has most marked my time at Zen Center, from fifteen years ago when I first started residence until now, I'd have to note my feeling of Zen Center's deep abundance. That feeling for me comes in a shape: it's evening service at Tassajara, my first summer there, and I'm overwhelmed by the feeling that I couldn't possibly accept my stipend. It was something like $80 a month, but it truly felt like gilding the lily. The abundance of the life at Tassajara was so palpable to me—the experience was so rich—that to add something else on top of that was really just too much to take.

I did accept the stipend in the end, but only because my tolerance was increasing for that strange pain of abundance. It had become possible for me to accept a slightly larger piece of the vast gift that constantly bombards us. And I've continued to stretch to accept from Zen Center far more than a reasonable person could ask—not just food, not just shelter, not just the dharma, not just the sangha, not just the Buddha... Zen Center's gifts to me go on and on, and when I think about it, I can easily feel again that it's just too much to take.

But I say it's funny to talk up this feeling of abundance because my time at Zen Center (and a good chunk of my painstakingly co-created identity at Zen Center) has been equally marked by my struggles with what Zen Center doesn't offer. Not enough, not enough, not enough. This came front and center for me around the time of my priest ordination, during which I felt something I couldn't shake about form, about our intensely monastic tradition. As I studied the forms more and more deeply at Tassajara, I came to feel that we were just scratching the surface, that although Zen Center honored and offered the forms, I yearned for a single-mindedness that was missing.

Certaiuly there was some negativity in my attitude—some sense of what Zen Center wasn't giving that it should—but actually I don't think that was ever the main point for me. My longing was fundamentally positive in that I had stumbled onto something that I wanted to pursue. Once I got clear that Zen Center wouldn't offer it, then there was no reason to have a problem with Zen Center. I just went to Japan, where they did offer it, and where I had many experiences that Zen Center does not offer. And cannot offer. And should not offer!

This time around, what I'm longing for is to rigorously study the dharma. Not just that one dharma right here, but the other one: the historical, ritual, and doctrinal ebbs and flows of this vast ocean of people, practices, and views called Buddhism. And it's clear to me again that I've hit something that Zen Center doesn't offer, cannot offer, and likely should not offer. And I'm finding it really helpful to be clear that Zen Center doesn't offer it, so that I can be really clear

that I need to look elsewhere for it, instead of asking and asking and being discouraged by the answers. This time my looking elsewhere is taking me to graduate studies at UC Berkeley.

Japanese monastic practice, systematic Buddhist study, psychotherapy, financial security, career support—these are some of the things that most would agree that Zen Center can't really offer. But what else? Can we get more and more clear about what we are good at, or will we stretch to be good at—or claim to be good at—things that we really aren't? Looking back over my time at Zen Center, it seems like this tension is more than just my own experience of trying to sort out what Zen Center can and can't offer me; I think it points to some important questions near the tangled center of Zen Center.

Without recourse to emptiness, who are we? The more comfortable we get with who we are and what we're good at, the easier it will be to happily let people know about the countless things that we can't do. I wish that for myself, and I wish that for my community.

Jiryu Mark Rutschman-Byler began practice at SFZC in 1996, ordained as a priest in 2002, and spent 2002–2003 training at Bukkoku-ji and Hokyo-ji in Japan. He is the author of Two Shores of Zen: An American Monk's Japan *and maintains the blog "No Zen in the West." A resident of Green Gulch Farm, Jiryu is currently working towards a masters in Asian Studies, with a focus on Buddhism, at UC Berkeley.*

I did my first seven-day sesshin in the spring of 1998 at Green Gulch. I couldn't sleep on the seventh night; I was absolutely BUZZING with the energy of the sitting sangha and Tenshin Roshi's powerful talks. I walked down to the beach after everyone had gone to bed and took a swim in the frigid ocean.

I walked back up to the dungeon (dorm), cold to the bone, grateful for the teacher, the teachings, the practice.

Fourteen years later… married, father, career, the marketplace. Stillness is harder to come by, but the beauty of the ten thousand things permeates.

Today, biking home through downtown Portland, I met a group of people from Dharma Rain Zen Center, a cousin of ours. We spoke. Soon I will sit with them.

Thank you for the teacher, the teachings, the practice.

Nine bows,

—*David Stevens*

The Accidental Buddhist

Shundo David Haye

I did not intend to study Buddhism, nor did I have the sense that I was drawn to it by my own suffering. My aim in life, from the onset of adolescence, was to try to live authentically, however that might mean. From the time I left college until I was thirty-five, I lived in London with, eventually, a steady and rewarding career at the BBC, a nice apartment, a jazz band, a warm circle of friends, and a wide range of cultural activities. Yet I always sensed there was more to come. From my particular karmic roots, some of whose proximate causes I knew then, I thought it had to do with love.

I came to San Francisco Zen Center after meeting someone who lived there. I was curious to know what part Zen training played in making this person who she was. I knew some Buddhists in London, mostly practicing in the Tibetan tradition, and had appreciated them as good people, saying to myself that I should investigate this one day, in the way that I did about voice training or salsa dancing. When the opportunity came to move to San Francisco, it seemed natural to take it.

I don't know why I found that Zen practice fit my life so well. I didn't especially enjoy zazen, but willingly followed the schedule. Two years at City Center were followed by two years of Tassajara, where I learned to get used to being cold, tired, and hungry much of the time and to having precious little unscheduled time where I could do what I wanted. But I loved it, and when I left, all I could think of was coming back. It took me two years and a huge upheaval—since karma has a way of coming to trip you up—but I had the firm sense that being a priest was what I wanted to do with my life, and I couldn't think of a better place to pursue that path.

I feel very lucky to have been able to practice at Zen Center, where it is possible to follow something like traditional monastic training for many years; it is a deep learning that I hope will launch me on a teaching career in due time. I can't say exactly why I want to teach, but I feel strongly that this is a way of living that presents great possibilities of peace and joy, and I want others to have the chance to experience it for themselves. I take great comfort in knowing that there is no end to practice, no exam to pass, no time when you can consider yourself finished, but that you can keep the practice alive for as long as you stay committed to it. I still think it has to do with love, although I have a different idea now of how it manifests in the world.

Shundo David Haye has been work leader at Tassajara, tenzo, and ino at City Center, has been maintaining the Ino's Blog, helping to run Young Urban Zen, and taking some of the photographs used in Zen Center publications and on the website. (When not sitting, he likes to ride bicycles).

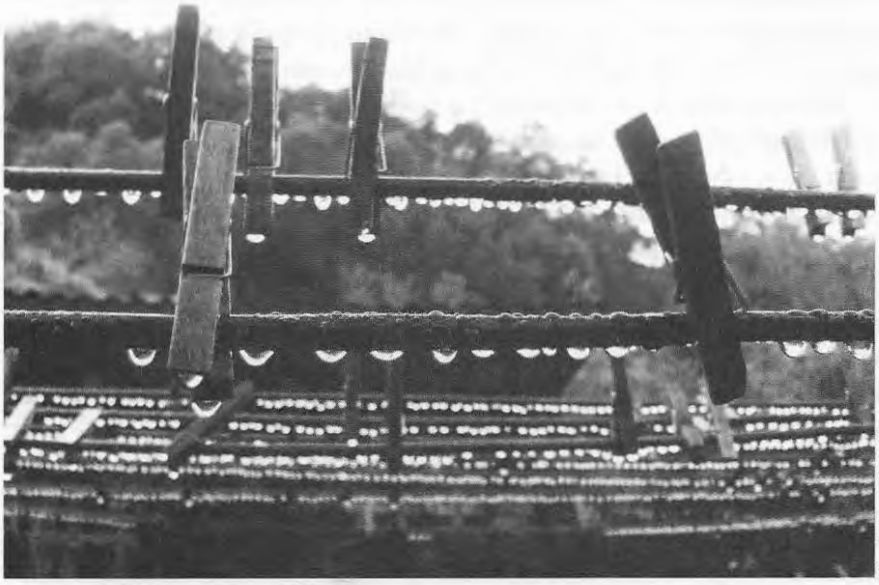

Photo by Shundo David Haye

Our Way

Keiryu Liên Shutt

Born into a Buddhist family in Viet Nam, I carried the feel and cultural essence of Buddhism in my body and heart. After years of living in overseas American Embassy communities, the plains of the Midwest, and then the West Coast of the continental United States, I came to meditation practice via Thich Nhat Hanh and other dharma books. When I went looking for sangha, City Center was the first place I tried.

Coming to a morning sit, I entered through the Laguna Street door. There was a door watch who did not acknowledge my presence. I tried to enter the zendo but was stopped by the raised arms and immobile face of a shiningly white, bald, black-robed person who silently pointed me towards the cushions in the *gaitan*. I sat, got up when everyone else did... and followed the silent stream of people out the Laguna door. No eye contact. No human interactions.

I did not go back, especially after finding the Women of Color sitting group, held at the Harriet Tubman Community Center, which sat in a circle, had check-ins, and offered dharma talks with examples I could relate to.

From 1998 to 2002, though practicing Insight Meditation, I had occasion to interact with San Francisco Zen Center as cofounder of the Buddhists of Color group and as a participant in the People of Color group. During this time, numerous instances of covert and subtle racism were evident. One example stands out in particular: In response to residents' fears that our "wandering the halls"

would lead to thefts in the building, a door watch (who had to be "a person known to Zen Center") was assigned. We were simply going to and from the gaitan and the Buddha Hall with zabutons for our meeting.

However, by 2002, and following my first visit back to Viet Nam after twenty-eight years, when the call to intensive practice became louder than any other voice, I did go to Tassajara. My intention was to do one practice period only, as I was not interested in Zen Center given my previous experiences. But after three-plus years at Tassajara as well as Zen training overseas in Japan and Viet Nam, the emphasis and practices of Zen, which come from an unshakeable trust and faith in the inherent Buddha Nature of all beings, won over my heart and mind. And, as I have become aware of Zen's ability to point towards real freedom, I have also come to understand and appreciate the expression of Sōtō Zen via the forms, rituals, and cultural mores of San Francisco Zen Center.

When I teach in San Francisco and in downtown Oakland, I am often approached by people who tell me they have gone to Zen Center wanting the dharma yet were met with noninteractions, nonresponsiveness, or unskillful responses. People of color experience these behaviors as coming from an entitled white-privileged perspective and/or the inability to make the forms of Sōtō Zen practice accessible.

Recently I co-led a People of Color one-day retreat at City Center. There had not been such an event at any of the SFZC branches for many years. Once the announcement went out, my coleader and I were both asked at various times, "Why are you leading a group at an institution known for its racism?"

On the date, most participants came specifically because the retreat was for people of color. A third of the group had had interactions with Zen Center before but had not felt welcomed or fully met. By the end of the day, there was a strong request for the group to be ongoing. I am pulled both by people's desire and need for the healing powers and innate freedom that the dharma can bring and by the fear that having such a group at Zen Center would bring those same people to an environment that could further contribute to the oppressive forces they already experience.

How can San Francisco Zen Center express its practice in the wider world? How are our Bodhisattva vows manifested in the neighborhoods and communities outside of its walls? What is the impact of the intention of these vows?

How can there be more awareness of white privilege and the ways in which it fosters an entitled presence and unskillful interactions? Until these tendencies are addressed, the ability, especially of leaders at Zen Center, to be fully with oppressed people's myriad, and most likely different, experiences is compromised. For now, reports continue that there are too many unconscious, ignorant, and/or defended responses at Zen Center, stemming either from guilt or from misguided

attempts to "help" people of color come to a "correct" view of a situation or experience through a white-centric perspective. How do we move beyond simple awareness of these issues into skillfully making a power shift towards equity and parity? And move from characterizing racist behavior or situations as simply personal or interpersonal interactions to taking steps to address them on the institutional level?

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of San Francisco Zen Center. The foundation of Zen Center rests on the teachings of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, a teacher of color. My hope for Zen Center's future, and for its present, is for more awareness and skillful effort towards making the dharma accessible for everyone.

As Suzuki Roshi said in a talk on June 1, 1969:

> And actually, what is right effort is very difficult to explain. So to realize our mistake and to start to find out how to behave—how to make our right effort will be our—our practice. This kind of practice also will be continued forever.
>
> *And the way we behave, the way we do, should be always be renewed according to the time [and] according to the place you live. On each situation we must find how to live [and] how to practice our way.* This is right effort. (italics added)

Who is it that is part of "our way"?

We take the Bodhisattva vows to save all beings. ALL beings. Including those we have been conditioned to think of as "other." If these vows could be said to come from love, then these words from bell hooks can be the call for right/wise change:

> To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility.

May all beings have ease of access to the dharma.

Rev. Keiryu Liên Shutt was ordained in 2005 by Zenkei Blanche Hartman. In 1998, she cofounded the Buddhists of Color group. In addition to her Sōtō Zen training with San Francisco Zen Center, she practiced for a year at Hosshin-ji in Obama, Japan, and in the Truc Lam/Bamboo Forest Zen tradition in Da Lat, Viet Nam. She has also completed one-month and two-month silent Insight retreats in America and shorter retreats in Thailand.

Home Leaving and Homecoming

Anne Connolly

Like so many others before me, I came to Zen Center thinking the visit wouldn't be a very long one. An eight-week practice period turned into a four-year stay, and I reentered the marketplace in 1999 with the dharma and landscapes of Green Gulch and Tassajara indelibly imprinted on my psyche. My gratitude for those years is boundless. I could wax nostalgic and appreciative about that time, but what I want to bring up here is the question of what comes after. Many years spent facing the wall gave way to many years of wondering how to face the world.

"Home leaving" is traditionally understood as leaving one's lay life to join the monastery and take priestly vows. But for anyone who lives at Zen Center for an extended time, that community becomes home, becomes family, and so reentering the world is a home leaving too. Many of us return to changed circumstances, but even if we return to the same place, we ourselves have been changed in profound ways.

What is the Zen of the world, that feels equally at home amongst the backdrop of fraught workplace dynamics, relationship tensions, and political turmoil as it does with a lovely rendition of the *Genjōkōan*? It's far easier to feel a natural alignment of one's practice with the teachings (however imperfect that understanding may be) in the simplicity and support of a monastic environment, with life concentrated down to robe, bowl, zazen, precepts.

So many of us have had to reinvent that same dharma wheel of transition without the benefit of guidance from those who have gone before. In many a conversation I've had with fellow "ex-monks" over the years, the longing for some way to participate in Zen Center in a deeper way than was available to temple leavers persisted. And so it was with great gratitude that I heard about the yearlong DEPP (Deeping Engagement in the Path of Practice) program offered by Linda Ruth Cutts in 2009, for those who had either received jukai or were in the process of sewing. While many of the participants had never lived at Zen Center, everyone was a longtime practitioner with great insights to share about navigating dharma practice in the world. I have no end of respect for those who have maintained a regular sitting and sesshin practice without the support of communal living. It was a rich year of exploration that left me wanting more, but fortunately the opportunity to help with the nascent SFZC alumni group came along as DEPP was winding down.

We're just beginning to explore the possibilities of our extended sangha, of how we can continue the conversation about what it means to practice in the world, how we can mentor transitioning students, create opportunities to practice together, and share everything from reminiscences of the old days to how we see SFZC's expression developing in the years to come. All of those things I'd hoped

for years ago as I left Zen Center are now much closer to manifesting. I was so moved by the immediate sense of sangha I felt at the alumni retreat held at Tassajara in April of this year. Although I didn't know most of the group, a wonderful sense of connection quickly established itself. The intimacy of shared forms and practice easily extended across the decades and felt like a kind of homecoming for many of us, older and younger generations alike, giving me great hope for how the bright thread of our tradition will continue in the years ahead, in the monastery and beyond.

Anne Connolly began formal practice at Green Gulch Farm in 1994 and continued at Tassajara, where she steeped in zendo and kitchen dharma from 1995 to 1999. She received jukai from Eijun Linda Ruth Cutts in 1998. A longtime book editor whose greatest vocational love is dharma publishing, she is also chair of the SFZC alumni steering committee. She lives in Oakland, California.

Words
for Katherine Thanas (1927–2012)

What is at the back of words?
What news breathes through their letters?
What blows in the spaces between them?

Can we handle them like colored threads,
grey stones skimming blue water,
leaves suddenly turning golden?

Are they reliable?
Can they listen?
Will they sit with us in silence?

—Carolyn Burke

BRANCHING STREAMS FROM COAST TO COAST

On the Joys, Growing Pains, and Practicalities of Establishing and Building Sanghas in the Suzuki Roshi Lineage

Brooklyn Zen Center

Greg Snyder

Brooklyn Zen Center began as a small group of practitioners in a cozy basement where the intermittent rumbling from the adjacent room's boiler furnished sound cover for mostly new sitters to shift on their zafus. Just over two years ago—after an interim stint in a one-bedroom apartment—a successful fundraising drive by our heroic sangha landed us in our current, much roomier space. As we finish out our seventh year, our community continues, immersed in the joys and challenges that arise with planting our lineage in New York City.

Since our most recent move, our sangha and membership have doubled. We have brought our teacher, Teah Strozer, to Brooklyn and started paying our executive director. More zazen times, classes, visiting teachers, and programs are now offered. Our Saturday program regularly sees over forty sitters. Our Awake Youth Project—a program that supports teen mindfulness and meditation groups—is now in three high schools, runs a weekly teen meditation group at BZC, and works with other teen-focused nonprofits.

However, our growing sangha is also a young sangha, both in terms of practitioner age and years of practice. For now we permit partial participation in our retreats, which allows a much younger, busier sangha to practice formally. The good news is this brings a wealth of vital, professional energy to the group. The challenge is that everyone has full-time jobs and staffing is no easy task. From the zendo to the kitchen to fundraising, roles must be shared. We currently have

three *jishas*, will probably need multiple *inos* soon, and are assessing how to fill key administrative positions.

Since most everyone here is very new to practice, we also lack the senior students necessary to model Zen practice for a sangha this size. This points right to the heart of the matter for us—finding our way between a broadening community and the deepening of practice. While we have the intention to continue responding to the many requests for practice we receive, breadth can mean that students are tending to too many organizational details without participating in formal practice.

Many questions arise when considering the maturation of a sangha. Should our predominantly Japanese forms be adapted? We are already considerably less formal than our training lineage—our lay sangha uses fewer forms than our priests do, and also fewer than the laity at SFZC. Here students usually take classes in foundational Theravada texts before studying Zen texts. What is the necessary language of Buddhism and what is the baggage? How do we manage childcare amid neighborhoods full of busy families who want to practice? How do we deeply support home practice? When trying to fund the extraordinary rent and operating expenses of a center in Brooklyn, even as our young sangha struggles with the cost of living in New York City, what does fundraising look like? And how do we attract senior students for teaching positions without a budget?

These are only a few of the questions that we face in determining how best to meet our vow to free all beings. There are scores more, as anyone who has loved and cared for a dharma community knows. We are honored to be cultivating the practice of Suzuki Roshi's lineage in Brooklyn. We are encouraged that the practice appears to be happening with a deep sincerity. All we can do is try our best to ensure that what is maintained and what is changed is guided by the awakening hearts of those committed to the Bodhisattva path.

Greg Snyder is a Zen Buddhist priest ordained by Teah Strozer. He is the cofounder and executive director of the Brooklyn Zen Center as well as the founder of the Awake Youth Project, a program that supports teen meditation groups in underserved schools in Brooklyn.

Chapel Hill Zen Center

Josho Pat Phelan

After practicing, living, and working at the San Francisco Zen Center for twenty years, in 1991 I moved with my husband, Tom Cabarga, and our eight-year-old daughter, Dhyana, to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Frank Ferrell and Mo Mooney Ferrell had been involved with a meditation group that evolved into

the Chapel Hill Zen Center, under the stewardship of Frank, Lois Bateson, Tom Hardison, Joyce Brown, and Eula Wheeler. In the mid-1980s Dainin Katagiri Roshi began visiting and led several sesshins. So by the time I arrived in 1991, there was a strong group of eight core members.

I had never envisioned moving away from San Francisco Zen Center, so I was surprised when, one morning during sesshin, I had a strong feeling that I would be moving to North Carolina. Eight months later we moved with no savings and no jobs. I remembered hearing that when Suzuki Roshi came to the United States, he put out a sign saying, ZEN MEDITATION AT 6:00 AM. This was my model. I loved zazen and wanted to provide an environment where people who were interested could practice zazen with others. For the first two and a half years, the zendo was in our house and then we met in someone else's house. As it turned out, it was more than four years before we had a sign and a listing in the phone book, but we made flyers that I posted, sometimes weekly, on bulletin boards in coffee shops and bookstores, the food co-op, on campus, and anywhere else I could think of.

Over time, many teachers from San Francisco Zen Center have visited—Sojun Mel Weitsman, Tenshin Reb Anderson, Jusan Ed Brown, Zenkei Blanche Hartman, Gigen Vicki Austin, Dairyu Michael Wenger, Jeffrey Schneider, and Reiyoku John Grimes—and their support of our practice has been immeasurable.

Suzuki Roshi served as an example for me, to try to let people know that if they wanted to practice zazen, here was a place to do that, and to try to present practice and the dharma in the most clear, authentic way that I could.

Today we are very fortunate to have our own property, Red Cedar Mountain Zen Temple, with a zendo that seats thirty-five people, where daily zazen and two sesshins are offered each year. About ten members of our sangha sit in four state prisons and a large federal prison. We give zazen instruction to 150 people a year at the Zen Center and try to meet other requests to visit that come from high school and university classes in the area. I can't emphasize strongly enough what a refuge the San Francisco Zen Center has been for me, especially when I lived in residence. I am deeply grateful to be in this lineage, to have the examples and teaching of Suzuki Roshi and Sojun Mel Weitsman to use as models for enacting and embodying this very simple practice of the Way.

Josho Pat Phelan was ordained in 1977 by Zentatsu Richard Baker. In 1991, the Chapel Hill Zen Center invited Josho to lead their group. She received dharma transmission from Abbot Sojun Weitsman in 1995 and was officially installed as abbess of the Chapel Hill Zen Center in 2000. In 2008, she participated in Zuise ceremonies at Eihei-ji and Soji-ji temples in Japan. For more information about Chapel Hill Zen Center, please visit www.chzc.org.

Opening Hearts in the Heartland: Ancient Dragon Zen Gate

Taigen Dan Leighton

Over five years ago I drove across the western U.S. (thanks to my dharma brother Taiyo who did most of the driving) to live full time in Chicago and guide our young sangha here, Ancient Dragon Zen Gate. For a few years I had been regularly visiting this group, started by students of mine, with visits almost monthly in the last year before the move.

I am very grateful to reside now in this lively city with many cultural treasures and diverse neighborhoods to explore. For the past three and a half years our sangha has been occupying a storefront temple in North Center Chicago, enjoying growth and deepening practice. Thanks to our highly visible location near a major intersection in a busy, middle-class, urban neighborhood convenient to public transportation, along with a variety of weekly practice offerings, our participants are increasing and we have developed a lively sangha, diverse in age, race, and livelihood, including many bright, talented people. Ancient Dragon Zen Gate now includes five priests and offers practice events five days a week, both on-site and weekly through our satellite group at the University of Chicago in Hyde Park. We recently finished our second annual Practice Commitment Period, in which twenty practitioners, all involved in busy urban lives and jobs, committed to eight weeks of intensive practice, including study of the ten *paramitas*, increased daily zazen, group dharma discussions, regular dokusan, and at least two all-day sittings. We offer an all-day sitting each month, and host a few three-day sesshins each year, including one at the end of the Practice Commitment Period. We continue to evolve as a sangha, with about seventy-five regular participants currently, and have been joined by practitioners from around the Midwest and beyond. Many who are unable to attend in person enjoy weekly podcasts of my dharma talks as well as talks from members of our sangha and from excellent guest teachers. Guest teachers have included Reb Anderson, SFZC Abbot Steve Stücky, Kaz Tanahashi, David Chadwick, Joanna Macy, Sarah Weintraub, and Marc Lesser. Many Buddhist scholar friends have also visited and given illuminating talks.

We are exploring ways to help our urban lay sangha bring Zen practice into their everyday lives. Last year we began a Children and Family Program, sponsoring several practice events over the year such as a nature walk and dharma talk followed by a blessing of the Chicago River, so that parents could participate with their children. We also host the monthly meeting of the Chicago chapter of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and colead programs with them to address current societal challenges with the values of Bodhisattva precepts.

Photo by Naomi Leighton

Taigen and newly ordained priests (from left) Nyōzan Eric Shutt, Keizan Titus O'Brien, and Eishin Nancy Easton, October, 2011

Our vibrant, diverse sangha filled with talented people is working together to bring Suzuki Roshi's teachings to life. Many committed sangha members are taking on responsibilities on our ADZG Board committees and doan staff, allowing me to continue my dharma writing, including *Zen Questions*, published last year, and another book in process on our Chinese Sōtō roots.

Challenges we face reflect those of sanghas across the country, as well as those of many individuals, during these difficult economic times. With a range of sangha members, including those facing unemployment or underemployment, all of our events are sliding scale. We are exploring creative fundraising programs to meet our expenses, including our own adaptation of Tassajara's "No Race" in a wooded Chicago park last October. This May we hosted our second successful online auction, with items and services donated by sangha members, local businesses, and other generous supporters. I hope you will join our practice anytime you are visiting Chicago. For much more information about our sangha, see our website: *www.ancientdragon.org.*

Taigen Dan Leighton received priest ordination in 1986 and dharma transmission in 2000 from Tenshin Reb Anderson. He is author of several books, including Zen Questions: Zazen, Dōgen, and the Spirit of Creative Inquiry, *and has edited and cotranslated several Zen texts. Taigen teaches online at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, where he received a PhD.*

Hartford Street Zen Center
Myo Denis Lahey

The Hartford Street Zen Center, also known at Issan-ji (One Mountain Temple), has been a presence in the Castro neighborhood for more than twenty-five years. The days of the founding abbot, Rev. Issan Dorsey, were a time of great enthusiasm, notwithstanding the many challenges facing both the sangha and the wider LGBT community as the AIDS plague began its seemingly inexorable sweep through families, friends, and loved ones. Issan's radical response, opening an *ad hoc* hospice for those mortally afflicted with HIV-related illness, challenged any narrow understanding of Zen practice, rooting it firmly in a context of simply caring for those in need. As the hospice developed in the widening health crisis, becoming the first in the country to focus on end-stage HIV disease, Issan-ji officially became two entities, the Hartford Street Zen Center and the Maitri Hospice, unified in the day-to-day experience of silent sitting and caring for the gravely ill.

In the wake of Issan's death, however, difficulties multiplied. This isn't an unusual occurrence once a charismatic founder has left the scene, bnt in this case the repercussions were severe. In traditional Buddhism, one of the gravest offenses is called *sangha-bheda*, or splitting the community. The Issan-ji sangha suffered this fate when word was spread that a "heterosexual takeover" of the temple was in process. Issan's dharma heir, Kijun Steve Allen, became the second abbot of Hartford Street, only to be accused of fomenting the so-called takeover. These charges were groundless, but great damage was done to the sangha, as many LGBT members became persuaded that Abbot Kijun intended for them to be excluded.

Although those days are now long past, their legacy lingers. With tbe splitting of the sangha, the donor/member base became fragmented, making fundraising a much greater challenge. Securing necessary funds is further aggravated by Issan-ji's proximity to the higher-profile San Francisco Zen Center. And separate, LGBT-identified groups have developed which by now have their own bistory and trajectory, such that Issan-ji's identity as a Zen temple with a particular, warm welcome for members of the LGBT community (the tone Issan himself set, all the while being clear that the temple was open to anyone who might wish to practice here) has become obscured.

Nonetheless, practice of the Buddha Way has continued apace, with zazen, sutra chanting, dharma talks, and an annual *rohatsu* retreat in addition to the yearly ceremonies of the Buddhist calendar. And the open, warm-hand invitation offered by Issan Dorsey to everyone seeking to study tbe Buddha Way, especially to members of the LGBTiQQ communities, is still very much alive.

Myo Denis Lahey is a dharma heir of Tenshin Reb Anderson and has been practice leader at Hartford Street Zen Center since 2002.

Vimala Sangha
Ed Sattizahn

Vimala Sangha was founded under the spiritual guidance of Lew Richmond in 2003. It takes its name from Vimalakirti, the householder whose wisdom was said to surpass that of all the Buddha's other great disciples. All aspects of householder life—the workplace, the intimacy of committed relationship, the challenge of raising children—are seen as instances of the Great Kōan of human existence.

Currently there are two practice sanghas: Tiburon Vimala Sangha, led by Lew Richmond, which meets weekly on Monday nights from 7:15 PM to 8:45 PM; and Mill Valley Vimala Sangha, which I lead on Friday mornings from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM. Both groups hold half-day or all-day sittings regularly.

Although lay practice is the animating force in Vimala Sangha, in 2010 Lew Richmond ordained longtime practitioners Peter Coyote, Karen Geiger, and Al Trihe as priests and gave dharma transmission to Peter Schireson and me in 2012. These formal initiations reflect the evolving needs of our sangha.

In the beginning we were quite committed to lay practice and, in fact, in 2005 I received lay entrustment (green rakusu) from Lew. We felt this was the appropriate form for my teaching the Mill Valley Sangha. But as our students matured in their practice and faced the inevitable transitions that life brings, we felt the growing need for the transformative power of ritual and ceremony. In response I was ordained and received transmission, so that I can now respond more fully to the needs and requests of our sangha members. Lew and I both see our roles much like those of a minister or rabbi, helping sangha members deal with crucial transitions in life and practice.

We run our groups somewhat informally. We sit in borrowed spaces, a church and a gallery, wear only a rakusu for the lecture/discussion and zazen, and except for very formal occasions wear the okesa over a *kairyoue*, an informal travelling robe. We conduct practice instruction in chairs. On the other hand, although we have introduced some innovation in our ordination ceremonies we mostly adhere to the Zen Center style. We have held several memorial services and weddings for our members where the service was a combination of Buddhist and Christian or Jewish liturgy. We try to imagine how Suzuki Roshi would approach the many challenges of adapting practice to our culture. His practice is clearly the guiding force and inspiration for our evolving style at Vimala Sangha.

Ed Sattizahn leads the Mill Valley Vimala Sangha and is on the Board of Directors of Zen Center. His practice was shaped by ten years of residence in Zen Center and twenty years as an executive in the computer software business.

NOW, HEAR THE BENJIS

As a former benji (attendant to the shuso, or head monk) twice over, I have a particular soft spot for benji poems and the great spirit they convey—of the relationship between benji and shuso, of the flavor of practice period, the practice place and season, and of the benjis themselves. The call for benji poems is an ongoing one; I'd like a robust collection for the SFZC archives, so please keep them coming to alumnieditor@sfzc.org. *We're particularly short on Green Gulch offerings and pre-2000 poems. —ed.*

I will submit the question to the shuso that Brian LeFevre asked in the fall of 1976. Brian died some years ago.

It was my first practice period and the mood at Tassajara preparing for the shuso ceremony in the old zendo was formidable. First practice period students knew that something momentous was about to occur, but what and how was unknown.

We were silent that morning as the ceremony approached. Steve Weintraub was the shuso and Brian was benji. Seriousness was the feeling of the day. The ceremony began and moved to the first anticipated deep and profound question from the benji. We were all ears waiting to hear what dharma would unfold. The question Brian asked was, "What is a nice Jewish boy from New York doing in a place like this?" The question brought the house down. I learned that serious didn't mean without humor. That message has stayed with me as I have attended many very serious ceremonies over the years, each containing the humor that is part of all human situations.

—Alan Block

Mornings
my nose is filled with the smells of incense
and Simple Green

Every time I hand off the incense
wondering
what will arise this time?

Evenings
while we speak every day, checking in
also exploring non-speaking
which is distinct from non-engagement

A new glimpse into the passing, warm hand to warm hand
it is not simply passing from one hand to another
it is a network of hands
a network of warm hands
giving and receiving
in moments of encounter

like this moment

Now, hear the Shuso!

—*Gail Claspell*

Shuso: Kōnin Melissa Cardenas | Benji: Gail Claspell | City Center | Winter 2012 Practice Period | Shuso Ceremony: March 31, 2012 | Led by Zenkei Blanche Hartman and Shōsan Victoria Austin

Leaving the zendo at night,
Our long ethereal shadows
Cast along the path
By the glow of the just rising moon,
We wonder silently, which one of us
Just took refuge in Buddha,
In Dharma,
In Sangha?

Which body is it?
The one in this black robe,
Or the one together with
The swath of stars in the Milky Way,
And mirrored in the crunching pebbles on the path
And the array of stones in the creek's bed

And what of this enso moon?
The sun's shimmering rays shine
From somewhere unseen, deep beneath our feet,
Instantly through vast space,
To be reflected in this round glow,
Creating shadow, body, path, and feet

Does this luminous moon shine on itself?

Without warning the almond tree in the garden erupts into bloom.
And the ancient voice of the creek cries our,
"All your life, you have only waited for
This moment to be free."

Now, hear the Shuso!

— *Tim Kroll*

Shuso: Kathy Early | Benji: Tim Kroll | Tassajara | Winter 2009 Practice Period | Shuso Ceremony: March 30, 2009 | Led by Abbot Myōgen Steve Stücky

Photo by Shundo David Haye

I forgot to carry the incense for you.
I forgot we were opening the zendo.
Abandoned child, getting angry.
Forgetful boy, afraid of anger.
But composting under longing and avoiding,
Love happens, the leaves spread forth.
Fumbling, chuckling, sighing to Manjushri,
We batbe her with warm water in the cold outdoors.
    How beings with nothing to hold on to
Find Joy, Compassion and Forgiveness—
Is beyond miraculous.
Did these skinbags really survive so long?
I'm glad we did,
So I could pass the incense to you
And bow.

Now, hear the shuso!

—David Coady (1965-2011)

Shuso: Renshin Bunce | Benji: David Coady | Tassajara | Fall 2007 Practice Period | Shuso Ceremony: December 16, 2007 | Led by Abbot Myōgen Steve Stücky

Photo by Judith Keenan

Parting Expressions

For decades now, Zen Center has transformed and illuminated the lives of even those of us who've never been a formal part of it. Though I've never seen the center in San Francisco, or Tassajara, the words (and silences) that have come out of them have nourished and clarified me, and stripped me down to essentials, through friends and poets and discourses and stray meetings. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* is the one book I give to anyone in trouble—or not in trouble—and can return to daily for the rest of my life. I think of Zen Center as one of the forces that has led to the wakening up of America, and the opening of all our hearts.

—*Pico Iyer*

Fifty Years of Beginner's Mind—the Shambhala Sun Foundation thanks San Francisco Zen Center for all you've done for the dharma.

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