



Water Wheel

Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.
—Gate of Sweet Nectar

Zen Center of Los Angeles
Great Dragon Mountain / Buddha Essence Temple

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2011
2553 Buddhist Era Vol. 12 No. 5

One

By Sensei Merle Kodo Boyd

Blue Cliff Record Case 19

Pointer:

When one speck of dust arises, the great earth is contained therein; when a single flower blooms, the world arises. But before the speck of dust is raised, before the flower opens, how will you set eyes on it? Therefore it is said, "It's like cutting a skein of thread: when one strand is cut, all are cut. It's like dyeing a skein of thread: when one strand is dyed, all are dyed."

This very moment you should take all complications and cut them off. Bring out your own family jewels and respond everywhere, high and low, before and after, without missing. Each and every one will be fully manifest. If you're not yet like this, look into the text below.

Case:

Whenever anything was asked, Master Chu Ti would just raise one finger.

Verse:

*For his appropriate teachings I deeply admire old Chu Ti;
Since space and time have been emptied, who else is there?
Having cast a piece of driftwood onto the ocean,
Together in the night waves we take in blind turtles.*

One. Simple and clear, yet already our thoughts have gone to two, three, four ... and so on. We say "this" and immediately "that" arises, say "now" and "then" arises. It

Sensei Merle Kodo Boyd is Abbot Seat Holder for 2011.



*John Plum-Hermit Swanger, Footprint Enso, 2010,
acrylic on canvas, 78" x 78"*

is this way with us, or seems to be. We tend to view ourselves and our lives through comparison and relationship. We try to know ourselves and our lives through thinking and analyzing. Being One, both form and formless, presents us with a challenge. We can sense the truth of our situation without understanding it. Sometimes we try to

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE

- 3 How To Become Spiritual by Rabbi Don Ani Shalom Singer, Sensei
- 5 A Continuous Field by John Plum-Hermit Swanger
- 7 Programs
- 9 Leaving No Trace – An Interview With the Co-Chidens
- 10 Rites of Passage
- 11 Sangha Appreciation

understand by adding “with,” though we could truthfully say “Being Buddha, being Dharma, being Sangha.” We could truthfully say “being.” We could truthfully say nothing.

Even raising one finger, as the verse says, is “having cast a piece of driftwood in the ocean.” Even this practice can be something to cling to and be “with.” Danger and compassion come with the one action. Being One already, how do we come to know and trust that we are? The Pointer says, “Bring out your own family jewels and respond everywhere.” Are we not doing that already? How do we become more thoroughly and intimately what we already are?

Our practice is not to know something particular. Our practice is knowing itself – awareness. The amazing thing is not who we are, but that we are at all. We know the odds of the turtle poking his head through the life ring in the ocean or climbing onto the piece of driftwood floating by. We can sense the miraculous nature of our existence. We can sense the need to manifest Not-Knowing in

“Being One already, how do we come to know and trust that we are?”

order to live the knowing of our being. This vast knowing may be us, but it is not ours. Often throughout our practice, our question is “How?” How do we clarify this One for ourselves? In simply asking the question with great earnestness, we are doing it, and still we ask “How?”

How will we create a Sangha that has and manifests an awareness of its own being? It is not as if we can choose between two ways of practicing – individually focused on our own particular life, or focused on the life of the Sangha. Intellectually, we know they are not two. All of us, appearing as many, are the living and being One Body. How do we live in accord with this reality? How does each of us recognize when we are living as if in opposition to this reality? How does each of us, through our own practice, manifest and benefit this One Body?

In the commentary of this koan found in both the Blue Cliff Record and the Mumonkan, we are told a little of Chu Ti’s (Gutei’s) story. He was living alone on a mountain doing zazen. One day, a nun came by his hut. She had an irreverent manner and did not observe the usual greeting etiquette of removing her hat. Instead, she challenged him: “If you can tell me the word that satisfies

me, I will take off my hat.” Chu Ti could say nothing. He asked her to stay the night. Again, she said, “If you can give me the word...” Again, Chu Ti could say nothing.

In the midst of Chu Ti’s shame, Master T’ien Lung (Tenryu) appeared and taught him with his one finger. We are told simply that T’ien Lung raised one finger and Chu Ti awakened. Having ourselves practiced, we can imagine all of the effort that preceded this effortless breakthrough. One Body is each of us seeking and trying to bring our unique being-life into alignment with itself. We have deep compassion for our own tendency toward desire and delusion. We can recognize our hobbling neediness and greediness because, from our effort in practice, we begin to view it with impartiality. Our effort is to work with our habits and quirks so that we can realize the One Body of awareness itself. ■



On August 15, Kei Snodgrass received jukai from Sensei Shingetsu in a ceremony at the Valley Sangha. Her Dharma name is Myokai, “Wondrous, Mysterious Ocean.” Above: Myokai with her husband, Gojitsu Snodgrass and Sensei Shingetsu. Below: Valley Sangha members, along with Ando Martinez and Sensei Kodo, after the jukai ceremony.



How To Become Spiritual

By Rabbi Don Ani Shalom Singer, Sensei

Hasidic tales and Zen koans have been my heart's delight since the beginning of college days, when I discovered Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidic Masters*. Martin Buber was the first to recognize in writing the similarity of many Hasidic tales to Zen koans. Sometimes I forget to tell tales, as sometimes I forget to sing. Last year, I forgot to sing. I somehow thought that the young couples coming to meet me in preparation for their weddings did not want to hear me sing. It was a thought thing, perhaps the thought of age, or the worried state of humanity.

Then I remembered a saying from a Hasidic tale: "When one is singing and cannot lift his voice, and another comes along who can lift his voice, then the first will be able to lift his voice too." So I lightened up and warmed up, singing to myself. A couple came, they looked inviting, I closed my eyes and sang. When I opened my eyes, I saw them holding hands, tears in their eyes. I trust them, all these visitors. They are lovers and lovers come with song.

The first Zen talk I attended was a teisho by Suzuki Roshi at San Francisco Zen Center. It was to be Suzuki Roshi's last year. He was suffering cancer. He looked a bit tired, his face spotted. I think he was in his late fifties. He said that he liked to go to the little market across the street to buy fruits and vegetables. He found some over-ripe vegetables with brown spots. He bought them and cooked them nicely and ate them. He ate them because they were still nourishing and tasty. And because "I could see that they wanted to be eaten."

While there, at one point I saw him coming out of a room. He looked at me and walked on. He was not pre-occupied with himself. He saw me – isn't that lovely? "A good man is like the light of day!" After that encounter, I stayed on for a few days.

I have thought about him and his teisho over the years. My first impression was to see in his teisho a kind of Zen-like frugality, by realizing without prejudice the goodness of the turning vegetables and not being waste-



Rabbi Don Ani Shalom Singer, Sensei

ful. But now, I realize that he was also talking to us about himself, his condition. He was inviting us to eat his words, taste his presence, and not to demur in the face of his suffering. One of the meanings of suffering is to give passage.

Here is a Hasidic story about a great teacher and his encounter with a good man in need. I do not remember telling this tale before, except to a few friends in conversation. It seems hard to explain in depth, I guess because it is like a koan, something to dwell in, because it points to that "other realm," the realm of Wholeness.

The story is titled "How to Become Spiritual." It takes place in the 1700s, in the Eastern European Yiddish world of Jews and their neighbors living in towns and villages, farmlands and wilderness forests.

Incidentally, wilderness is very important, it gives us the space to wander from ourselves. "You knew me in the wilderness," says God in the book of Amos. The forest Hasidim took Amos' words seriously, and went beyond the practice of austerities and the intense study of texts that sometimes numbs and wearies even the liveliest soul. They let nature be their teacher.

The teacher in this story is Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid (wandering preacher) of Mezeritch, who was healed of "teaching without soul" by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov. The Maggid sensed that for

(Continued on page 4)

Rabbi Don Ani Shalom Singer, Sensei is the guiding teacher of Shir Hadash Community and received Dharma transmission from Roshi Bernie Glassman in 1994.

all his learning and eloquence, something was missing. He thought it might be physical – he limped and he was unaccountably weary.

He journeyed to be healed, and his face-to-face encounter with the Baal Shem Tov awakened him to the fervor and delight of life, the clear vision and kind affection for the other, every other, whether man or woman, frog or tree. At last, the weight of self was lifted from his shoulders. Now he was able to use his gifts and realization to guide the soul to its true nature. That is why he came to be called the Great Maggid.

How To Become Spiritual

In the days of the Great Maggid, a well-to-do merchant, who refused to have anything to do with Hasidic teachings, lived in Mezeritch. His wife took care of the shop. He himself spent only two hours a day in it. The rest of the time, he sat over his books in the House of Study.

“He was vulnerable to life, as we all should be, which means he could drop his opinions and learn.”

One Friday morning, he saw two young men there he did not know. He asked them where they were from and why they had come, and was told they had journeyed a great distance to see and hear the Great Maggid. Then the man decided that, for once, he too would go to the great Maggid’s house. He did not want to sacrifice any of his study time for this, so he did not go to his shop on that day.

The Maggid’s radiant face affected him so strongly that from then on the man went to the Maggid’s home more and more frequently, and ended up attaching himself to him altogether. From this time on, he had one business failure after another, until he was quite poor.

He complained to the Maggid that this had happened to him since he had become his disciple. The Maggid answered, “You know what our sages say: ‘He who wants to grow wise, let him go south; he who wants to grow rich, let him go north.’ Now what should one do who wants to grow both rich and wise?” The man did not know what to reply.

The Maggid continued, “He who thinks nothing at all of himself, and makes himself nothing, grows spiritual, and spirit does not occupy space. He can be north and south at the same time.” These words moved the merchant’s heart and he cried out, “Then my fate is sealed!” “No, no,” said the Maggid, “You have already begun.”

Perhaps a commentary is in order:

The merchant thought he had it all worked out. He was living a “spiritual life,” a life of study, prayer, and work. Perhaps, if he had not looked up from his books and seen those honorable young men who came from afar to set eyes on the Maggid, he would have been spared this conflict that cost him his fortune. But he was vulnerable to life, as we should all be, which means he could drop his opinions and learn. And when he set eyes on the face of the Maggid, there was no turning back. He had become a different man.

What is the spiritual? How does one become spiritual? And what is it not to be preoccupied with oneself, to be nothing?

The moment he saw the young men, the moment he set eyes on the Maggid, he stepped out of himself and entered into relation. Relation is spirit in action. At the moment of realization he was not self-centered – he saw the teacher and the teacher saw him.

It was like love at first sight. But the self-centered self can transform love’s first sight into an attachment, a memory, another “experience.” Then there is no present in the relation, because there is no relation. Relation is mutual. And so it is with all life – when we enter into relation, we live in the spirit. “Spirit,” in the Latin roots of English, as well as in the Biblical Hebrew, means “breath, wind.” Spirit is the breath of life, the oxygen we breathe, the breeze on our face. “The breath (spirit) of the human being is a lamp of the lord it searches out all the hidden places.”

Once, in my early days of sitting, Maezumi Roshi looked long at me, and tears filled his eyes. “You can do it,” he said. Out of the blue, he said, “You can do it.” Teachers love their students. He used to say, “It is always mutual.”

It is always mutual if it is a relation. Everything is revealed in the face of the other. Roshi was a lovely, graceful, gracious man. He was vulnerable. He meant it when he said, “it is always mutual.” ■

A Continuous Field

By John Plum-Hermit Swanger

When I was a young teenager, I began to work as an artist. I began to explore the world from that vantage point and from that mode of being.

I started looking at the world and at art in a focused, curious way. I visited museums and artists' studios and art supply stores whenever I could. I began to absorb and puzzle over the vast array of meanings and forms that human beings make. I looked at everything and fell in love with artists and artworks and art making, and all the spaces and buildings where these things take place.

I practiced seeing. I made drawings, paintings, sculpture, films, and performances. I pursued and studied art in high school and college. I've continued this practice and exploration for four decades.

The first studio I ever set up was on the third floor of my grandmother's house. I was fourteen. I was staying with her one summer, during my parents' divorce, in her rambling house in the town where I grew up.

The third floor of the house was virtually unused and I stayed up there, undisturbed, under the eaves. I made a workspace – a studio. What I remember most vividly is the absolute stillness of that space. And the silence. I felt at home, free, and ungrounded there. It was a refuge. A place set aside for questioning, reflection, and quiet action. I've been fortunate to have a studio ever since, in many different buildings, in several different cities. They remain among my favorite places in the world.

Similar to my studio experience, I had feelings of seeking refuge when I started spending time in the zendo at Zen Center in 1995. Settling into the stillness and silence, I experienced the world in a new and vivid way. My eyes were opened.

Zazen is a very subtle art. Using nothing to make nothing, the entire spectrum is ever present. I began to

John Plum-Hermit Swanger is an artist currently living in Austin, Texas. He began practicing at Zen Center in 1995 and has functioned in many positions here since. He received tokudo from Roshi Egyoku in 2010. Currently, he serves as the Center's Development Steward and a member of the Board of Directors.

More images can be seen at www.johnswanger.org.



John Plum-Hermit Swanger

experience the boundless nature of life – no me, or you, or we. Without form, and also beyond that.

I see many connections between being a Zen student and making art. Zen practice has changed the shape and course of my life and, by extension, my work in many ways. Foremost, both are rooted in practice. Practice and study are developed through repetition. Doing things over and over is powerful. Repetition is a great teacher and an important muse.

Other connections include paying close attention, seeing what is directly in front of us, whole body-mind involvement, the tendency to lose oneself, and the effort to create methods or rituals that actively promote that, developing a panoramic view, the interplay of inward and outward vision, responding to circumstances, letting go, seeing what is overlooked, and being creative in our own expression. In painting, we study the Old Masters and contemporaries; in Zen they are ancient and contemporary, and we study their works and doings and teachings. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are part of numerous lineages and traditions. Our efforts bring them to life.

When I work in the studio, I begin with an image, idea, feeling or intention. I create conditions from which my work can emerge. The process of how something is

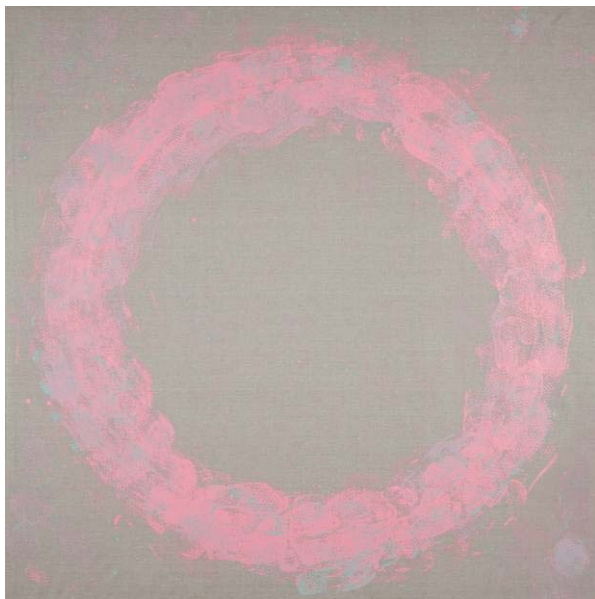
(Continued on page 6)

made is a determining factor in my work. Within my chosen methods and forms, it's also important to me to include the accidental and unintended. There's always an interplay between intention and what actually appears.

In addition to the connections we can highlight between art (or other disciplines and activities) and Zen practice, there are also differences. It's good to appreciate the differences. Shibayama Roshi expounds on these differences in one of his commentaries on *The Gateless Barrier* (Mumonkan).

In his commentary on Case No. 8, "Keichu Makes Carts," Shibayama Roshi writes about the great master cart maker, Keichu. "When he made a cart, he himself was a cart through and through." He explains that even though samadhi, complete unity of subject and object, and forgetting oneself may be achieved in art and other disciplines – and that these have value and beauty – this is not the same as Zen. Shibayama Roshi emphasizes that the essential aim of Zen is complete transformation and "to bring about a fundamental change in the whole personality." This commentary itself is a powerful koan and has stayed with me for many years.

I'd like to describe several on-going series of my work. You can see how they relate (or diverge) from aspects of Zen practice.



Footprint Enso (Labyrinth), 2010, acrylic on linen, 72" x 72"

Footprint Enso. The idea for this series came from, among other things, walking through puddles and leaving footprints on dry pavement. I wanted to make some

larger-scale work (these painting are about six feet square) and to get away from the arm/wrist movements of painting. The circle (enso in Japanese) is an archetypal expression of wholeness. Traditionally, an enso painting is a circle made with a brush in one movement, in one breath. It is a Zen mandala.

These paintings are made by walking in a circle. The circle is comprised of lots of footprints (Vans sneaker treads). The canvas records all of my movements and weight. To make the painting, I must be completely in it. Each point of the circle looks like it is forming and falling apart. I like the connection to practices such as kinhin and circumambulation, as well as to the studio practice of pacing. There is a universal quality to just walking in circles. We leave the house in the morning, we return in the evening. We're always walking in circles. Where's the progress? We're always returning.



Silver Landscape, 2009, aluminum leaf on oil, 16" x 20"

Landscapes and Flowers. In this series, I use "found" or "amateur" paintings of flowers or landscapes as the starting point. I became interested in how such paintings, which are all painted by someone, often anonymously, are found everywhere in thrift shops and Goodwill stores, and how sincere and touching these paintings are. I take them as they are and "recover" them from their overlooked status. I do this by covering them completely – painting, frame, price tags – with aluminum leaf. The whole surface and form becomes unified; silver and reflective. Only the remaining texture of the paint defines the image. They are ambiguous and a little ghostly. The paintings are bright and visually heightened versions of the original. Hopefully, they have new life.

Crumpled Paper Paintings. I started using this process about seven years ago. I crumple large sheets of paper,
(Continued on page 8)

Zen Programs at Great Dragon Mountain

Face-to-Face Meeting Schedule

When she is on campus, Sensei Kodo will offer Face-to-Face meetings for members Wednesday evening, Friday dawn, and Saturday and Sunday mornings during scheduled zazen. Members of the Teachers Circle will offer Face-to-Face meetings on Saturday and Sunday mornings for members and non-members. Their specific schedules will be posted in the weekly Programflash.

Fall 2011 Practice Period

Fall Practice Period. October 1 to December 31. The theme of the Practice Period is One Body: Realizing, Manifesting, and Serving. For more information, please see the enclosed Practice Period Commitment Form.

Practice Period Commitment Agreements. Members are asked to make practice commitments for the Practice Period. ZCLA members should send a completed copy to the office by September 28, so that we can list your name on the Training Board. Participants from other Sanghas may return their commitment forms to their respective teachers.

Entering Ceremony and Commitment Circles. Join us as we open the Practice Period with an Entering Ceremony in the Zendo on **Saturday, October 1, at 9:00 a.m.** After morning sitting, we will meet at 11:30 a.m. for a **Practice Period Commitment Circle** where we can discuss our commitments for this practice period and share and receive the support of the Sangha. We will have a follow-up **Mid-Ango Check-In Meeting** on **Sunday, November 6, at 11 a.m.**

Practice Period Sangha Meals. During the practice period, supper is available on Thursday evenings at 6:15 p.m.; on Saturday and Sunday mornings, a buffet breakfast (with the first ten minutes in silence) is available at 7:00 a.m. All members are welcome. There is no fee for meals, but **please sign up in advance** so the kitchen has a head count. **We also need volunteer cooks** for these Sangha meals, so please consider extending yourself in this way! ☎

Fushinzamu: Kitchen Cleaning. Sunday, October 9, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. with Co-Tenzo Coordinators Jonathan Levy and Miguel Rojas. At the beginning of this period of intensive practice (and kitchen use), please join in the practice of the Sangha working together as One Body to clean our kitchen. A lot of fun and good work!

Zazen Programs

See the schedule and calendar sections of our website, at www.zcla.org, for the daily program schedule and for additional program details and updates.

☎ – Please register in advance on the sign-up sheet in the Sangha House through info@zcla.org.

* – Zendo remains open for non-participants.

Wall-Gazing Day In The Garden.* Saturday, September 10, 6:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to join this silent half-day of just sitting in the Zen Center's garden. Zazen is scheduled every hour on the hour, with ten minutes of walking meditation at ten minutes to the hour. Includes breakfast and lunch for registered participants. **Please bring a beach towel or blanket on which to place a zabuton on the grass.** A **Chant Circle**, held at 8:30 a.m., will be dedicated to those suffering and dying from famine in Somalia. Fee: Dana.

Tangaryo.* Saturday, September 10, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. All members are encouraged to join in this silent day, which runs in tandem with the Wall-Gazing Day. The schedule includes 8:00 a.m. orientation, 8:30 a.m. Chant Circle, and unstructured zazen from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with lunch from noon to 1:00 p.m. The unstructured zazen schedule includes no Zendo time-keeper and no timekeeping bells – you set your own sitting and walking schedule. To register, contact Lorraine Gessho Kumpf through the office. (All members are required to participate in one Tangaryo.) Fee: Dana. ☎

Autumn Sesshin.* Sunday, October 16, 6:00 p.m. (supper and registration); 7:30 p.m. (sesshin begins) to Saturday, October 22, 5:00 p.m. Led by Sensei Kipp Ryodo Hawley. "Sesshin" means "to collect one's heart and mind." It is highly recommended for deepening one's practice. The schedule includes zazen, chanting, Face-to-Face meetings with Sensei Ryodo, Dharma talks, work, rest, and three vegetarian oryoki meals daily. Limited overnight accommodations available. Fee: \$240 members, \$450 nonmembers. Housing fees additional. Open to both full- or part-time participation. Please contact Sesshin for more details and to register. ☎

SAVE THE DATES! Upcoming Sesshin:

December 2-10: Rohatsu Sesshin;
December 26-31: Year-End Sesshin.

(Continued on page 8)

Precept Practice

A **Day of Reflection** on the Zen Bodhisattva Precepts will take place on **Saturdays, September 17 and October 15, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.** Open to everyone.

September 17 will be led by Reeb Kaizen Venner on Precept #2, The Practice of Non-Stealing.

October 15 will be led by Tom Yudo Burger on Precept #9, The Practice of Not Being Angry.

Atonement Ceremony. Thursday, October 13, 7:30 p.m. During this ceremony of renewing the vows and Precepts, we each have an opportunity to bear witness to our conduct in thoughts, words, and actions. Everyone is welcome to participate. Those who have received the Precepts are asked to attend on a regular basis. Sensei Shingetsu will officiate.

Dharma Training Fund

Through the generosity of the Sangha, the **Dharma Training Fund** is available to supplement program fees. No serious practitioner is ever turned away for lack of funds. If you wish to take part in a particular program, please do not let financial difficulties keep you from attending. Inquire with Senshin for an application. Do not miss any opportunity to practice the Dharma!

Classes and Workshops

Introductory Zen Practice Classes. Our introductory Zen practice program includes beginning meditation instruction (ZP 1 and ZP 2, offered weekly) as well as a full day of practice at ZCLA (ZP 3, offered monthly). For information on times and dates for these programs, see the “beginners” section of our website, at www.zcla.org.

Vimalakirti Sutra Study Class Series. Sunday, Sept. 11, 1:30-3:30 p.m. Led by Sensei Kodo. Join us for the final class of this series on the Vimalakirti Sutra. Even if you did not attend the first meetings, you are welcome to participate. Required text: *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (Burton Watson translation). Copies available through the ZCLA Bookstore.

Koans Now. Saturdays, October 29 and November 5, from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Led by Sensei Ryodo. Join Sensei Ryodo in exploring the koans we use at ZCLA. Where did they come from? How do we work with them? Why? We will spend two interactive and lively sessions rooting out the spirit of our koan system and applying it to our lives right now.

Personal Practice Talks. During September, Zen Center practitioners will offer personal practice talks on Thursday evenings, followed by tea and cookies. Please consult the calendar for additional details.

Dharma Chats. Held on the last Sunday of most months at 11:00 a.m., Dharma Chats are led by Sangha members on various topics of interest. **Sunday, September 25**, led by Mukei Horner, is on “Teachings Of The Earth.” **Sunday, October 30**, led by Dharma-Joy Reichert, is on “Resistance.” ■

A CONTINUOUS FIELD (*Continued from page 6*)

flatten them and then carefully repair them and fix them to canvas. The abstract patterns, the webs and ridges of the paper, can look like many things in nature. But mostly,



September 15 White, 2008, Acrylic on paper on canvas, 48" x 48"

they look like what they are, a crumpled surface. They have fractal qualities – each part reflects the structure of the whole. Sometimes I paint on them, using the ridges to define the composition. Often, I paint them just white. Or just black. Or cover them with gold leaf. The structure, material and surface are very unified. They are one thing and they are “broken” – filled with unique differences. It’s a continuous field and it’s never the same.

I like to think my paintings make themselves. They happen of their own accord, as the natural result of my own effort. Like Zen practice. And, hopefully, in practice and in whatever else we do, we’re able to find some joy and pleasure and share it with everyone else. ■

Leaving No Trace: Ash Is Not Forgiving

This is the second of a series of articles and interviews to give attention to the various groups and individuals who are integral to the daily life and functioning of our temple, but are often unseen. This interview considers the role of the Chiden and the altar cleaning volunteers. Here at Great Dragon Mountain Buddha Essence Temple, Conrad Butsugen Romo and Andy Mugen Handler serve as the Co-Chidens. We interviewed them in June 2011.

Water Wheel – What is the function of the Chiden?

Butsugen – The function of the Chiden is to tend to all the temple’s altars, making sure they are clean and the supplies that are needed are stocked.

WW – How many altars do the altar cleaners maintain?

Mugen – The cleaners take care of four altars in the Zendo, the main altar in the Buddha Hall, the Hakuryusan altar between the Buddha Hall and Dharma Hall, two altars in the Dharma Hall, and three altars in the Sangha House. There are a number of other altars or koro (incense bowls), including those by the various bathrooms and those outside in the gardens, that are also cared for. Finally, the priests separately take care of the altar in the Buddha Hall Founders’ Room. Many of these spaces are cleaned and maintained daily, while others are cleaned weekly, depending on usage.

WW – How many people are participating right now in maintaining altars?

Mugen – Around 15 people volunteer through the Altar Cleaning group, plus several additional people through the priests as well as the residents who handle some of these responsibilities as part of their resident samu.

WW – What is involved in maintaining the altars?

Mugen – First of all, cleaning incense bowls and the hako. We also take care of water bowls and work with the Flower Group to maintain the altar flowers.

Butsugen – Also, picking up the detritus that may collect on the altar, replacing candles as they burn down, and taking care of all of the waste that is generated from using the altars.

Mugen – Because this is a practice position, it is important to make sure that the altars themselves, and all of the



Co-Chidens Andy Mugen Handler and Conrad Butsugen Romo

various tasks required to maintain them, are approached with a mind of practice and that everything is treated respectfully.

WW – If someone wants to be an altar cleaning volunteer, how do they go about doing that?

Butsugen – They should contact one of us. It involves training and practice. We can say this is about cleaning altars, but it is definitely a practice position. It’s a simple thing to pick the incense nubs out of the bowl, but when we clean and level the ash, we try to leave no trace – we want to leave the ash in the incense bowl flat, completely open and ready. Sometimes, it’s not easy. Sometimes it moves quickly and effortlessly, but sometimes not.

When we first started Shared Stewardship ten years ago, I think Gessho Kumpf said they needed a Co-Chiden; she talked to me about it, and I said, “Yeah, I can do it.” I’ve been doing it for ten years now.

Mugen – It’s a sweet practice. I replaced Carla Flowing-Mountain Schmitt as Co-Chiden, and one of the expressions she used was, “There are moments when my heart just isn’t soft enough to do this and leave no trace.” And I totally get that. Because ash isn’t forgiving. It requires me to stop and pay attention. So there are those days I do the best I can and just have to walk away, and then there are those days where it is, “Holy cow, this is beautiful. I did good.” And also it has given me the opportunity to see how the altar is used in our practice. It is a lovely way to practice.

(Continued on page 10)

Butsugen – There is a simplicity to the ritual that I have come to really appreciate. And I have liked being of service in this way. There were a number of times where I have been here on Friday night at 11 or 12 o'clock at night to do it, or come in really early the next morning, but there is something I have really appreciated about committing to this form of service. There is that paying attention to my breath, slowing down, and doing just this while I'm doing this. I like being able to look at the altar, wipe it, pick up things, put a little attention on something other than my self.

WW – Sensei Ryodo recently said in a Dharma talk that when you sit facing the wall, the wall is like a mirror. For the incense bowl cleaners, the ash is like a mirror.

Mugen – You know those cool toys that are all nails, and you can put them against your body, and then your body leaves an impression in the nails when it is removed – the ash is like that. The ash will leave an impression of where I am.

WW – Or you'll leave an impression on the ash.

Mugen – Yes, there you go.

Butsugen – And our aim as altar cleaners is to leave no trace, no impression.

Mugen – Roshi Egyoku wrote a poem that expresses this beautifully.

In zen, you are instructed to 'leave no traces.'
When you clean an incense bowl,
this is not so easy to do.

The soft incense powder does not readily arrange itself
when you apply too much pressure, or too little.

You must forget yourself,
then your action becomes a beautiful action.
Beauty is revealed when the doer is unknown.
In this way, your liberation ensures
the Dharma for future generations.



Sangha Rites of Passage

CEREMONY FOR RECEIVING THE PRECEPTS

From Sensei Pat Shingetsu Guzy
Valley Sangha, August 15, 2011

Kei Myokai Snodgrass

NEW MEMBERS ENTERING CEREMONY

July 30, 2011

Geoff O'Quest

SHARED STEWARDSHIP LEAVE-TAKING

Zendo Co-Steward

Sensei Gary Koan Janka

Zen Practice 1 & 2 Instructor Steward

George Mukei Horner

Co-Tenzo Coordinator

Gary Belton

Reeb Kaizen Venners

SHARED STEWARDSHIP INSTALLATION

Zendo Steward

George Mukei Horner

Zen Practice 1 & 2 Instructor Steward

Rosa Ando Martinez

Day Manager Steward

Betsy Enduring-Vow Brown

Co-Tenzo Coordinator

Miguel Rojas

Development Steward

John Plum-Hermit Swanger

Facilities Aesthetics Steward

John Plum-Hermit Swanger

Your Gifts are Received with a Heartfelt "Thank You!"

Please let our staff know of the many bodhisattvas to appreciate. Have we missed anyone?

To our altar cleaners: **Conrad Bustugen Romo, Andy Mugen Handler, Miguel Rojas, Bob Gido Fisher, Tom Pine-Ocean Cleary, George Mukei Horner, Betsy Enduring-Vow Brown, Burt Wetanson, Reeb Kaizen Venners, Tara Jiho Sterling, Penelope Luminous-Heart Thompson, Carla Flowing-Mountain Schmitt, Lorraine Gessho Kumpf, Nina Reiju Wasserman, and Rosa Ando Martinez;**

Bonnie Myosen Nadzam, Hannah Seishin Sowd and Kaizen for their tenzo efforts during the summer sesshin;

The people who have helped record talks: **Pine Ocean, Dan Hegarty, Enduring-Vow, Kaizen, John Heart-Mirror Trotter, Don Erway, Katherine Senshin Griffith and Mugen.**

Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert for Thursday night tea and cookies, and **Gido** for making Thursday night cookies for six weeks in July-August;

Our weekend cooks and snack coordinators: **Senshin, Tom Yudo Burger, Reiju, Yoko Bajra, Jikai, Roberta Brehm, Jane Chen, Andrea Bauchowitz, Cassie Riger, Butsugen, Tammy Abell, Susanna Knittel, Diane True-Joy Fazio, Jane Chen, Jeff Hirsch, Denise Acosta and Nicholas Tana;**

Rev. Chisho Fukuda for his visit and the many contributions he provided during his stay;

Neli Koen Cartolin for moving sewing supplies and cleaning up the archives room;

Heart-Mirror and **Joel Mitsujo Latimer** for helping label, organize and dispose of old paint;

Yudo and **John Plum-Hermit Swanger** for putting up the Zendo awnings;

Dr. James Austin for his visit and presentation;

Sensei Kodo, Ando, Yudo and **Plum-Hermit** for hosting Dr. Austin during his stay and helping organize the reception; **Burt Wetanson** for helping with book signing; **Sensei Ryodo** and **Jeff LaCoss** for help with tech set-up for Dr. Austin's talk; and **Jeff LaCoss** and **Yudo** for helping with his transportation;

The Mandala Circle for continued work refining the Statement of Right Conduct;

Darla Myoho Fjeld and the **Executive Circle** for drafting and stewarding the development of the Center's new Dana Policy;

Myoho, the **Executive Circle** and the **ZCLA Residents** for drafting and developing the Center's Security Policy;

Kaizen for overseeing the nightly security check program; **Sensei Kodo** for leading the Sangha Forum discussions; **The Brown-Green Group** for their care and oversight of the front Zendo garden and establishing the beautiful butterfly garden;

Mugen for his work on the Pundarika courtyard; Nilotpala gardeners **Lynda Jikai Golan, Heart-Mirror, Flowing-Mountain** and **Enduring-Vow;**

Reiju for getting supplies for our 10,000 Shakyos sutra copying project;

Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen for overseeing work on the resident apartments and Zendo;

Faith-Mind and **Dharma-Joy** for leading the service position training class;

Sensei Koan for providing the new trees for the Nilotpala outer garden;

Enduring-Vow for stepping into the role of Day Manager Steward;

The Priest Circle for their thorough cleaning of the Kaisando;

Burt for his tireless efforts editing and proofing the *Water Wheel* under short deadlines; and

Heart-Mirror and **Jikai** for leading recent Dharma Chats.

Thank you!!! ■

ZCLA Affiliated Sanghas & Sitting Groups*

The Laguna Hills Sangha (CA)
coordinated by Helen Daiji Powell

The Lincroft Zen Sangha (NJ)
led by Sensei Merle Kodo Boyd

The Monday Night Meditation Group (Pasadena, CA)
coordinated by Betty Jiei Cole

The Ocean Moon Sangha (Santa Monica, CA)
led by Sensei John Daishin Buksbazen

The San Luis Obispo Sitting Group (CA)
coordinated by Mark Shogen Bloodgood

The Valley Sangha (Woodland Hills, CA)
led by Sensei Patricia Shingetsu Guzy

The Westchester Zen Circle (CA)
led by Sensei Kipp Ryodo Hawley

Contact us at info@zcla.org for information.

* Affiliated groups are led by Dharma Successors of Roshi Egyoku or coordinated by practitioners actively practicing at ZCLA with a teacher. Those interested in leading a ZCLA-affiliated sitting group may apply to the Teachers Circle.

The *Water Wheel* is published by the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Great Dragon Mountain / Buddha Essence Temple, which was founded in 1967 by the late Taizan Maezumi Roshi.

Our mission is to know the Self, maintain the precepts, and serve others. We provide the teaching, training, and transmission of Zen Buddhism. **Our vision** is an enlightened world free of suffering, in which all beings live in harmony, everyone has enough, deep wisdom is realized, and compassion flows unhindered. **Our core values** are available upon request or on our Web site, www.zcla.org.

Founding Abbot: Taizan Maezumi Roshi
Abbot 1995-1999: Roshi Bernard Glassman
Abbot: Roshi Wendy Egyoku Nakao
Abbot Seat-Holder: Sensei Merle Kodo Boyd
Staff: Mary Rios, Business Manager; Katherine Senshin Griffith, Program Steward; Tom Yudo Burger, Guest Steward; Deb Faith-Mind Thorsen, Grounds & Membership Steward; John Plum-Hermit Swanger, Development Steward.
Water Wheel: Editor, Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert; Assistant Editor, Burt Wetanson. Proofreading and editing: John Heart-Mirror Trotter; Photographer: Dharma-Joy; Publishing and distribution: John Heart-Mirror Trotter.

The *Water Wheel* is published bi-monthly in paper and electronic formats. Contact the Editor at (213) 387-2352 or dharma-joy@zcla.org. The *Water Wheel* is also available through electronic distribution and on the Web at www.zcla.org.



**ZCLA Great Dragon Mountain
Buddha Essence Temple**
923 South Normandie Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90006-1301

Address Correction Requested

Zen Center Sponsors Neighborhood Food Pantry

In 1999, ZCLA adopted one of the 13 Food Pantries serving metropolitan Los Angeles organized by HOPE-NET, a local social service organization.

Over the past 12 years, the ZCLA Sangha has collected non-perishable food items at each Sunday's Gate of Sweet Nectar Service and delivered them monthly to a Food Pantry location.

In recent years, the need for food assistance has exploded in response to worsening economic conditions and government cutbacks. At the same time, food donations have decreased, with demand outstripping supply and some food banks around Los Angeles closing for lack of food to distribute.

In addition to Food Pantries, HOPE-NET now offers a variety of other services, including low-cost housing and a thrift shop that distributes clothing and

housewares at low or no cost. Some Food Pantry sites also offer ESL classes, infant and pre-school programs, programs for at-risk youth, job training, community computer centers, community gardens, and more.

Please continue to bring non-perishable food offerings to the Gate of Sweet Nectar Service each Sunday morning. Preferred foods include those readily eaten from containers with pop-tops.

Place your offering on the altar before service. Thank you for your generosity! ■

Save the Dates! Day of Dana 2011

Friday, November 18: Dinner & Assembly

Saturday, November 19: Delivery