



# Water Wheel

*Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.*

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

## The Art of Being Uncomfortable

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



Zen practitioners learn the art of being uncomfortable. Sitting still in spaciousness moment by moment, we experience life arise, come into being, and pass on just as is. Our emotional and mental landscapes are seen more clearly. An old Chinese koan speaks to this witnessing:

*Once, the nun Miaoxin was working in the administrative quarters and seventeen monks on a pilgrimage came to see her master, Yangshan. Miaoxin overheard the monks discuss the famous story of the Sixth Patriarch and the wind and the flag: When the Sixth Patriarch went to Faxing Monastery, the temple flag was waving in the wind. Two monks were arguing about whether it was the wind or the flag that was moving. The Sixth Ancestor, seeing this, said, "It is neither the wind nor the flag that is moving. It's your mind that is moving." The two monks were immediately awestruck. (Mumonkan Case 29)*

*All of the seventeen monks gave their respective opinions, but all were off the mark. Miaoxin overheard their discussion and said, "It's a pity that the seventeen blind donkeys have worn out so many pairs of straw sandals on pilgrimages and still cannot even dream about the Buddhadharma." When the monks later heard of her remark, they were ashamed at their lack of attainment of the Way. They sought her instruction. Miaoxin said, "Please come closer." But before they could come closer, she shouted: "The wind is not moving! The flag is not moving! The mind is not moving!"*

Miaoxin's clear-eyed seeing cautions us about getting stuck in any point of view. You are being warned that your habits are deeply ingrained, and it is difficult to step back and see clearly the habitual ways that you interpret what you see and feel. Like the monks in the koan, you are being challenged to undertake another way of seeing which is not what you think is so, but what is actually so.



We began this year with a series on the "Art of Being Uncomfortable," an exploration of how to be with difficult emotions. An emotion is energy with an overlay of dualistic thought processes which muddy the picture and cause distortions of all kinds. The overlay of thoughts, most often in the form of storytelling about the emotion, takes us out of the realm of experiencing directly. We lack a clear and direct experience of emotional energy. Is it the mind that moves, the emotion that moves, or the body that moves?

Zen practitioners can develop a capacity for experiencing emotions directly through zazen. Unfortunately, you can remain emotionally stunted even after many long years

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of sitting due to bypassing your emotions. In zazen, three important capacities are developed: stability, spaciousness, and a disciplined awareness of what is. Stability develops as you sit upright and breathe deeply into the lower abdomen. This gives you the capacity to remain still in the midst of whatever is arising without suppressing, moving away, or acting out.

The sense of spaciousness naturally arises as well. This is a panoramic sense—you feel yourself widening outward, inclusive and vast like the sky which anything can pass through. You develop a disciplined awareness which is two-pronged: awareness that takes in a panoramic view and also focusses precisely on whatever is arising, but not to the exclusion of anything else in the field of awareness.

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*“...feel the emotion directly as raw energy just as it is...”*

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By developing these capacities through zazen, emotions and feelings can be experienced directly. The following five simple steps can help you master the art of being uncomfortable with emotions:

**Awareness** of the emotion. When you become aware of an emotion in your body, remain still in the midst of it. The key is this: to feel the emotion directly as raw energy just as it is. Direct experience has no residue—it leaves no trace. Find out for yourself what direct experience is. Continue to remain open to experience of the energy for its duration and try not to shut down. Become aware of suppressing, acting out, escaping into story, or disconnecting from the feeling. Become aware of labeling or judging the feeling as good or bad.

**Acknowledge** the emotion. You can identify the emotion by making a simple statement such as, “I am experiencing anger right now,” or “I know that jealousy is arising.” Stay connected to the energy even as you identify it. Continue to feel the energy directly just as it is.

**Accept** the emotion. Staying connected to the energy, you can say, “I accept that I am feeling the hot intensity of anger right now,” or “I accept that I am feeling a sharp pang of sadness right now.”

**Reflect on the impermanence** of the emotion. You can say, “This is a temporary feeling, although I am feeling it very intensely right now.” Continue to stay present to the emotion in a spacious way by using your breath or awareness of your body. Let the energy move through you. Do not become distracted by your thoughts about the

emotion. Drop your story—do not attach to the emotion by conceptualizing or telling yourself a story about it.

**Investigate** the experience after the emotion has subsided. Honestly evaluate how well you did with the first four steps outlined above. You can also ask questions along these lines: Did I experience the emotion as raw energy? If so, what happened? Am I able to distinguish the emotion from my thoughts about the emotion? What do I believe about this emotion? What is my story about how it was triggered—can I go deeply into the underlying trigger? How do I truly want to respond to this situation as a mature person?

As you reflect upon your experience of an emotion, try to identify the misconceptions you may have about emotions. Misconceptions can be identified by listening closely to yourself and asking: What do I repeatedly tell myself about emotions? For example, people often say something like, “I dealt with this emotion and situation in the past already. Why is it here again?” This is the “fixed it” misconception. Emotions arise according to causes and conditions. You have little or no control over these or when an emotion will arise. What you can work with is your behavior and how you respond each time—how you meet each arising as a new experience right now. Saying it is the “same emotion” is a story about it.

“It’s bad to feel” is another misconception. Emotions are part of being human. Although you may often assign the values of good and bad to emotional energies, these values are not inherent in the energy itself. There is no right or wrong to emotions—there is just energy which arises, lives out its life, and passes on.

“Other people make me feel bad (or make me feel good).” People and circumstances influence your emotions; however, it is unskillful and immature to project responsibility for your feelings onto others. When other people trigger emotional states within you, turn the light inward and feel the energy directly. Take responsibility for your feelings by stopping the projection, withdrawing blame, and dropping your story.

Miaoxin said, “Please come closer.” Come closer to your emotions. In the years that I have been so-called teaching, I have observed that a clear relationship to emotional energy is one of the most challenging areas for people, independent of age or years of sitting. I encourage you to sit steady in the midst of emotions—not repressing, escaping, or acting out. Emotional maturity is the essential work we all must do to mature and awaken as human beings.

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*Roshi Egyoku is ZCLA's Abbot & Head Teacher.*

# Buddha Waves His Hand in Space

by Sensei Kipp Ryodo Hawley



*Then the blessed one waved his hand in space and said, Bhikkhus, just as this hand does not get caught in space, is not held fast by it, is not bound by it, so when a bhikkhu approaches families his mind does not get caught, held fast and bound amidst families thinking: 'May those desiring gains acquire gains, may those desiring merits make merits!' He is as elated and happy over the gains of others*

*as he is over his own gains. Such a bhikkhu is worthy to approach families.*

*Bhikkhus, when Kassapa approaches families, his mind does not get caught, held fast, or bound amidst families... Bhikkhus, I will exhort you by the example of Kassapa or one who is similar to Kassapa. Being exhorted, you should practice accordingly.<sup>1</sup>*

A “bhikkhu” is a Buddhist monk, and Buddhist nuns are called “bhikkhunis.” This quote is from the Pali Canon sutra named *Kassapa-samyutta* or “Connected Discourses with Kassapa.” As you may know, the Pali Canon is a group of collections of Shakyamuni Buddha’s dharma discourses comprising part of what is known as the Early Buddhist Texts, considered the earliest known record of Buddha’s teachings.

Kassapa is one of Buddha’s main disciples, whom we name Mahakasyapa and count as the first successor in our lineage. The Pali Canon doesn’t tell the story of Buddha choosing Mahakasyapa as his successor. Instead, it relates how Buddha declared Kassapa foremost of the ascetics among his disciples and that he approved Kassapa’s understanding by telling his sangha:

*Bhikkhus, by the destruction of the taints, in this very life I enter and dwell in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. Kassapa, too, by the destruction of the taints in this very life enters and dwells in*

*the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for himself with direct knowledge.<sup>2</sup>*

Nowhere else in the Pali Canon does Buddha wave his hand in space. This sort of thing is unusual in those texts, unlike scriptures in our Mahayana tradition where we find Buddha twirling flowers in the air and doing other Zen-style things. But the point Buddha is making is non-clinging and how this leads to freedom. In mentioning Kassapa, he’s speaking to his monks (bhikkhus) about how to approach those who are “in the world” without getting stuck in the desires rampant in lay life.

We chant the Heart Sutra during the first section of our morning service. It includes the passage: *No gain and*

*thus the bodhisattva lives prajna paramita with no hindrance in the mind, no hindrance, therefore no fear. Far beyond deluded thoughts, this is nirvana.* “No gain”: Kassapa has clearly seen the impermanence of all things, including gain and loss. “No hindrance in the mind”: like the hand waving freely in space.



It’s interesting that the disciple most accomplished in asceticism becomes the first successor in our lineage, which like many of the Mahayana schools is embraced by lay practitioners. Most

of us at ZCLA are lay students, and those in our modern priesthood live “in the world” along with us. How do the ascetic principles of our ancestor Kassapa’s practice apply to us? How can they help us attain “no hindrance in the mind”?

Monks and nuns of Buddha’s time lived in seclusion and devoted themselves to practicing the four *jhanas*, which are different levels of samadhi concentration. Here is one of our connections with the first Buddhists – our term “Zen” is transliterated from the Pali word *jhana*. Many passages in the Pali repeat Buddha’s description of the ascetic life.

*Here, a bhikkhu resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest, the root of a tree, a mountain, a ravine, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw. On returning from his alms round, after his meal he sits down, folding his legs*

1) Bhikkhu Bhodi, *Samyutta Nikaya* (Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 664. 2) Ibid, p. 674

*(Continued on page 4)*



BUDDHA WAVES HIS HAND *(Continued from page 3)*

*crosswise, setting his body erect, and establishing mindfulness before him. Abandoning covetousness and grief for the world... abandoning ill will and hatred... sloth and torpor... restlessness and remorse, he abides unagitated with a mind inwardly peaceful... abandoning doubt, he abides having gone beyond [all these states], unperplexed about wholesome states; he purifies his mind from [them].*

The usual description goes on: *Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhana, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.* It then continues, describing more jhanas, usually three, and in some cases, a total of eight.

Someone like Kassapa, who has accomplished the holy life living this way, and thus freed him or herself from lust, hatred, and delusion, is worthy to be a visitor to families. That's all fine and good for homeless monastics who devote 24 hours of each day to explicit practice of the Dharma and developing mastery of the jhanas, but how about us householders who actually live in those families?

Our model is to plug into that mindset of seclusion even while living in the world. I see this as a cyclical practice, comprising yearly, monthly, weekly, daily, and momentary cycles, each a specific instance of the same general form. Our core practice of zazen is the foundation that lets us do this.

Here is the sequence all those cycles go through, as I practice them. The first step is, as Buddha described, establishing mindfulness before us. Using those archaic yet meaningful terms "abandoning covetousness and grief for the world," we find ourselves alive in this clear moment with our running stories and narratives quieted. This is the critical step that leaves the three poisons of lust, hatred, and delusion behind. Then we take another step back into the wide open samadhi of unadulterated presence, which you'll recognize as Not-Knowing, the first of the Zen Peacemaker Tenets. This is the foundation of our practice, the spiritual realm we inhabit when sitting zazen. Next, we step forward into a spiritual realm I call Discovery, the place where we practice the Peacemaker tenet of Bearing Witness. This is a strictly objective state where we can gather the ingredients of our current situation without the hindrances of emotional attachments. This is where, like Buddha, we can wave our hand in space without getting caught in any details: nothing is excluded, nothing is preferred over anything else, everything is seen just as it is. Finally, we take another step forward, corresponding to the third Peacemaker tenet, Taking Action. I call this Selfless Action, since it arises not from our now abandoned lusts and hatreds, but from the needs of the world as they are in this moment.

What happens next? We continue the cycle of practice. As soon as we've taken action, we naturally spend a period of time digesting what has happened, and as that time concludes, we typically end up back in the mental realm I call Storyland, running our narratives. This is where we get caught by the Three Poisons. As soon as we recognize that we're there, it's time to step back into our spiritual seclusion from the world and begin the next iteration of the cycle.

We can plug this general model into all of our cycles in life. In our daily practice, we step back into the seclusion of Not-Knowing by sitting zazen at a regular time each day, and we step forward into action by going to work and taking care of everyday tasks. Weekly, we return to seclusion on practice days at ZCLA and cycle forward the rest of the week. Monthly sesshin or zazenkaï is our seclusion time, and in our yearly cycle, we have 90-day practice periods.

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*This is how non-clinging leads to freedom.*

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Perhaps the most important level of this cycle is in our moment-by-moment functioning. We begin wherever we are right now, fully accepting our current mental and emotional state. There's nothing wrong with it! Are we settled into equanimity? Fine. Are we filled with anger? Not a problem. How about laughing so hard we're rolling on the ground? Doesn't matter! Completely accept yourself exactly as you are, allowing "Things as it is" as Suzuki Roshi used to say.

After full acceptance of this moment just as it is, we are ready for the first step in the cycle, doing what Buddha described: establishing mindfulness before us. Right now, let out a big sigh and disengage from your internal storytelling. Let your immediate surroundings come into clear focus with no preference for any individual thing. Next, drop into Not-Knowing. Wipe the slate clean and abide for awhile. Now let your surroundings once again appear before you. This is an effortless effort: you see everything appearing on its own with no hindrance. Next, allow relationships between all these myriad dharmas to arise. See what is actually there without projecting anything on them. Does something need to be done? If so, take care of it well. What then? Repeat!

Do you see Buddha effortlessly waving his hand in space?

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*Sensei Ryodo is a teacher at ZCLA and leads Westchester Zen Circle.*

# Days of Compassion: Homelessness

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao

Los Angeles has 47,000 homeless people, including women, children, and young adults who have aged out of the foster care system. With voters overwhelmingly passing Prop HHH and Measure H, \$1.2 billion has been secured for permanent supportive housing and millions of dollars for supportive services. The city, United Way, and various agencies across the county are collaborating to deliver on these services and to end homelessness and poverty in our region.

The Mayor's Office launched a Civic University class called "Days of Compassion: Homelessness" for the purpose of educating, motivating, and enlisting the faith community to help end homelessness. The education on homelessness is as overwhelming as the encampments on our sidewalks. Kathy Myoan Solomon attended the sessions at the Islamic Center. She said, "I came in not knowing and I left not knowing. It's all a bit daunting with so many complexities. Mostly, my preconceptions were busted and new data was learned. It was especially meaningful because I dragged along friends who were more skeptical than I was, and now we are going to meetings in our neighborhoods armed with some facts and figures and are informing other skeptics."

Faith communities are being challenged to extend beyond their food pantries and look at their underutilized real estate, such as parking lots and buildings. Diane True-Joy Fazio, who attended the classes said, "I was struck by the creativity of some of the immediately available stop-gap solutions: safe parking overnight in church and synagogue parking lots, mobile showers, mobile laundry, short-term storage, and Imagine LA's program where an entire congregation mentors a single family for a year." There is also an interesting program called Laundry Love, in which laundromats allocate nights when volunteers can come and help the homeless do laundry.

Lorraine Gessho Kumpf was part of a group that visited Arlington Square, a 47-unit supportive housing facility which rents to the unhoused. She said, "I was impressed with several aspects of this Community of Friends project, which stresses housing first and community living second. Tenants who go through a vetting process have leases, are responsible for a portion of their rent, and in all other respects are responsible for their tenancy. Though not required to, tenants can make use of many services and referral opportunities in such areas as employment, health, and other social services, helping to ensure a successful transition into permanent housing. Case managers are available. This is a new facility, and I was struck with the attractiveness of the place. From what I saw, I think



*Arlington Square, an affordable housing complex, includes housing for formerly unhoused veterans and persons with disabilities.*

Arlington Square integrates support and the advantages of community with the tools for people to transition themselves into sustained and healthy housing."

Upon visiting Arlington Square, True-Joy said, "I work as a Landscape Architect and our firm has designed exteriors and courtyards for several supportive housing projects. Our involvement is usually completed long before residents move in, so touring Arlington Square with a visit to one of the units was rare and valuable feedback. I was moved to hear what a source of pride it was for all concerned that the projects were attractive, well designed, and normal in that they didn't look like institutions."

When Ty Jotai Webb and I attended the first offering of Days of Compassion, the facilitators asked us to draft a vision for what the Zen Center would do. A bold vision arose that the Zen Center would house a homeless youth. As a result, the Zen Center has partnered with the Sanctuary of Hope (SOH), which aims to end homelessness among youth, ages 18 to 25. After a thorough exploration with the City, our Board, and our Resident Sangha, the Zen Center committed one of its Nilotpala Studio units to house a homeless youth. In February, our youth, who had been homeless for three years, moved in. He is a full-time community college student and works full time as well. He is settling into his first ever apartment and has been warmly welcomed and supported by the resident community.

In addition, using your generous donations to the SOH Pantry Fund, Tom Yudo Burger has been stocking SOH's food-on-the-go pantry. Let's all continue to lean into homelessness in our neighborhoods. How can you help?

## DANA BOOKLET

January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017

Dear Sangha and Friends of ZCLA,

The Zen Center is deeply grateful for the generosity of all our donors whose names appear in this Dana Booklet. In the spirit of Shared Stewardship, these donors have given of their time, energy, material goods, and money to ensure that the Zen Center continues to thrive – providing the space, teachers, and community that encourage the Zen practice of hundreds of people a year.

Our sincere practice together in the Zendo and in all aspects of Shared Stewardship contributes to the overflowing generosity of the Zen Center's Sangha and friends. We realize that our clinging to what we have is based on delusion and we give freely of our time, energy, and money so that each person who walks through the gate of the Zen Center is encouraged to awaken.

This year the generosity of our Sangha and friends has ensured that our two main fundraising campaigns – the Dharma Training Fund and the Annual Fund – surpassed our financial goals. It also contributed to a successful 50th Anniversary Homecoming Celebration. Even in death the giving continues and we honor the 50 members of our Legacy Circle who have included the Zen Center in their estate planning.

We bow deeply to each of you for your sincere and loving practice of Dana Paramita.

With deep gratitude,  
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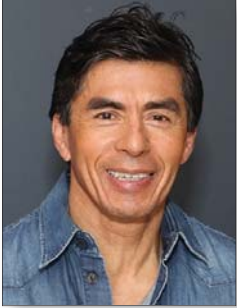
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# Zen Life Goes On

by Laos Joko Chuman



WW: When did you first become interested in Buddhism?

JOKO: I'm 63 years old and I've been practicing since I was 15 till I was 21. In the early 70's, it was with a teacher in New York with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Then when I was 28, I was sent to prison for 30 years and my life sort of collapsed. In prison, I read books and books and books.

WW: How did your spiritual quest begin?

JOKO: It started when I was a young kid because I questioned religion. I come from Peru and a really Catholic background, and I questioned the guilt they imposed on me. But I never felt guilty. Otherwise I would have grown up a mess. When I realized that Catholicism wasn't for me, I sought other religions.

WW: How did you find out about ZCLA?

JOKO: I heard there was a Buddhist group coming to the prison once a week. That was Shogen and Koan. When I met Koan, my first question to him was: "What do you think of homosexuality?" And he said, "So...?" I said, "But all the other places and religions I've been to tell me I'm going to hell because I'm a homosexual." He said, "That's just part of you." When Koan said that to me, I realized that Buddhism is where I belong. I finally found my place. For the last 10 to 15 years, I've practiced with Sensei Koan and Shogen as my teachers.

When I was about to get paroled, Sensei Koan said, "When you come out, why don't you go to the Zen Center," so the first week I was out, I came here and met Roshi Ekyoku and started coming every Sunday. That was the end of March 2013.

When I got off parole, I couldn't live in the half-way house any more. Then Roshi asked me, "Would you like to go through the admission process at ZCLA?" So I did and I've been living here since then. But now I have to leave. My mom lives in Florida. She's 88 years old and needs somebody to look out for her.

Even though she's healthy, she forgets a lot and gets a lot of minor things like colds. So I made my decision and told my mom and Roshi that I was leaving the Center. To be honest with you, I don't really want to go.

WW: Are there any Buddhist teachers nearby in Florida?

JOKO: Lucky for me, at the 50th anniversary, I met

somebody from Florida. When I told him that I'd have to move to Florida to be with my mom, he gave me an email address and said, "When you move, give me a call and an email address and we'll find you a place."

WW: Was it hard for you to adapt to the ZCLA culture after years in an institution?

JOKO: When you live in a prison, you have a regimen every day, one that's much, much harder than outside. It's very strict, very strong, very cold. I don't wish it on anyone. The regimen here is warm, comfortable, and friendly. Roshi helped me a lot through the transition. She gave me a lot of advice, not telling me what to do but for me to make a choice. "This is this and that is that. You're a grown man. You decide what to do."

As for the Zen Center schedule, I'm good at appointments and schedules. Even before I went to prison, I was always very diligent, very punctual. As a matter of fact, I didn't mind the regimen in prison. It's when I don't have anything to do that I feel uncomfortable. When I have responsibilities, I fulfill them.

What was a little difficult was this whole world of computers and everybody holding a cell phone. They don't look at anybody walking down the street. It's so strange; I felt like I was in the Twilight Zone.

WW: Do you have a sense of what you'd like to do with the rest of your life? In terms of career.

JOKO: Since I was a kid, I've wanted to be in the motion picture business. I went to film school before I went to prison. I graduated from AFI. But I didn't get a chance to experience my career because the day I graduated, I got arrested and went to prison. Based on my education in film, the state gave me a grant, bought me equipment, and allowed me to make educational films for the State of California.

The first thing I did when I came out here was go to Los Angeles City College to update my technology. I'd stopped learning 30 years ago. Since then, I've been in the film business off and on. I would love to work every day, but sometimes I do the sound system or work as a production assistant. I love show business, so my goal is to keep working and find a full-time job. That's what I intend to do when I go to Florida.

Meantime, to pay the bills, I'm a server in a restaurant or I do hospice work. In prison, I had over 20 years experience in hospice work, but my main love is show business, but those jobs come and go.

*(Continued on page 9)*



ZEN LIFE GOES ON *(Continued from page 8)*

WW: It's connections, knowing people.

JOKO: Exactly. That's how I got my first job. My best friend is the mother of a director. When she told her son about me, he said, "Hey, would you like to work with me? I'm doing a film." He hired me as a production assistant for two months. I did my best and since then, he's been calling me. I even got promoted to Second Assistant Director.

WW: What has been your relationship with Roshi Egyoku?

JOKO: It's been very profound. When I moved to Miami for a year, we skyped once a month and talked. She'd give me assignments and we'd talk about them, and she'd give me more assignments. My relationship with her has been profound and very welcome. It helped me stay grounded in this crazy world I've been in.

WW: What is your actual practice?

JOKO: My breath. Sensei Koan always told me: Follow your breath, follow your breath. I can't complain. I'm blessed. I know what to do. Get out and hustle and meet

people. You can't stand around and wait or you'll end up living under a bridge. You've got to go out and look for a job. A lot of good people have reached out and wanted the best for me, and that's what I've felt with Roshi. My connection with her and Koan and Shogen is profound. I'll miss them, but I'll be back.

WW: How about your writing? Do you think you'll be able to keep up with it?

JOKO: I think so. Once I'm settled, I plan to spend a number of hours each week working on my book. It's almost done except for a few prison chapters. Then I'll look for an editor to brainstorm with. Time will tell.

WW: What was your mother's impression of the Zen Center?

JOKO: When she woke up at ZCLA, she told me that she never was able to sleep soundly in another place or bed than her own. But here, she slept soundly. She felt an energy from ZCLA that was very calming and peaceful. She said she was happy that I've been living here under such conditions.

## ZCLA's Prison Chaplancy and Protocol

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao

For almost two decades, the Zen Center has sponsored volunteer prison chaplains primarily in the Los Angeles County Jail and the California Men's Colony. The current chaplains of these programs are Z Zeller in the LA County Jail and Rev. Mark Shogen Bloodgood and Sensei Gary Koan Janka in the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo County. They visit the jail and prison weekly, meeting with the incarcerated both one-on-one and in sitting groups. Recently, Jared Oshin Seide of the Center for Council has introduced Council to the California Men's Colony and other prisons statewide through CFC's restorative and social justice programs.

In 2009, the Zen Center began to grapple with integrating the formerly incarcerated into its fold. During this time, a spiritual seeker who was a convicted child molester came to ZCLA. When the situation became known, Roshi Egyoku facilitated a meeting and Sangha-wide council. At its conclusion, she formed a "Many Hands and Eyes Circle: Prison" to address the many facets of the situation that had emerged. The ZCLA Protocol for

the Formerly Incarcerated was one of several important developments. The purpose of the protocol is to create a smooth path into practice and Sangha life by designating an experienced Sangha member as a mentor to help the newcomer negotiate Sangha life.



Since the Zen Center's chaplains have long relationships with prison programs, it was natural that the long-term practitioners of the CMC prison group were interested in attending programs at the Zen Center upon their release. Joko, who had received Jukai in prison from Sensei Koan, was the first person to be welcomed using the new protocol. Roshi says, "I learned a lot about the challenges faced after thirty years of institutional living and how the Zen Center can best support a serious practitioner during this difficult transition. For instance, simple everyday social remarks such as, "Where do you live?" or "Where do you work?" can be a conversation stopper for the newly released person."

Thank you to the many prison volunteer chaplains over the years and to the Sangha for its big heart.

## Flower Practice Reflections

by Cathy Jikan Sammons



I first volunteered for altar flower duty because I wanted more moments with the Buddha Essence Temple altars. As a new member then, I had very little knowledge about the altar objects – their unique histories, iconographic symbolism, or rationale for arrangement. But I

was curious and seeking a closer look than I normally had during a service or from a zabuton, or while focusing on an oryoki meal. I also had no skills or talents in flower arranging. But the scheduling meshed with my own calendar, and the flower stewards offered mentoring and support, so I stepped up. And, like most other experiences at ZCLA, I entered into a richly nuanced Zen practice.

I was initially anxious to not break a precious stoneware vase, to create arrangements “good enough” for their auspicious settings, to not disappoint residents, senseis and priests, guests. Once again, an “in here” Zen Center experience re-enacts the “out there” daily life, this time related to issues of achievement, excellence, comparisons, and so many other conditioned narratives from early family, school, and career experiences. Noticing these thoughts, breathing through them, returning my attention back to the flowers, hardly noticing when those thoughts fade, because I’ve entered a state of immersive attention.

Like counting the next breath, my eyes return to this stem, these leaves, these petals, these wild or soft colors, these supple textures. The short life of a flower, re-enacted in front of me: bud, blossom, brown flakes. The arc of the stems together, the jolt of rotted water smell as it circles down the drain and gurgles away. The fresh scent of vinegar and the precious gift of clean water refilling the vase.

It’s a redundant task. Each week, a member of the altar flower group repeats this process. Is it therefore a burden, a vicious cycle that goes nowhere? It feels, rather, like a comfortable returning. When I’m mentally or emotionally churning with my own issues, flower care is a welcome opportunity for gathering my attention from elsewhere, and gently leading it back to here.



Becoming intimate with each altar is indescribable. In some ways, it’s a very solitary experience, but in other ways, it’s connecting me to all the other sangha members, past and present.

Walking through the garden, holding a vase, I notice how the golden 4 p.m. winter sun coats the redwood tree’s deeply ridged bark. The garden is so rich with jeweled moments of sensory and emotional clarity. They are brief, and they pass, but their cumulative bounty is unlimited. How reliable and familiar is that persimmon tree next to the Dharma Hall. It’s always there, but never the same, as it morphs from the stark linear sketch of winter branches, to the fluffy puff of summer green leaves, to the heavy clusters of shining orange fruit in fall.

I offer these reflections not as a description of the right way, or even the typical way, that an ordinary activity, repeated many times over years, continues to manifest sacredness. But I’m sharing it with you to encourage more members to join us in the flower circle, to experience this corner of

the Buddha Essence Temple life.

### Freshen The Flowers, She Said

So I put them in the sink, for the cool porcelain  
was tender,  
and took out the tattered and cut each stem  
on a slant,  
trimmed the black and raggy leaves, and set them all---  
roses, delphiniums, daisies, iris, lilies,  
and more whose names I don’t know, in bright new water---  
gave them

a bounce upward at the end to let them take  
their own choice of position, the wheels, the spurs,  
the little sheds of the buds. It took, to do this,  
perhaps fifteen minutes.  
Fifteen minutes of music  
with nothing playing.

*Why I Wake Early: New Poems*, 2004, by Mary Oliver

*Jikan is a practicing member at ZCLA.*



## Your Gifts are Received with a Heartfelt “Thank You!”

*The Zen Center is maintained by the hands and eyes of each one of you.*

To all those who went to the Evergreen Cemetery: **Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert**, **Tina Jitsujo Gauthier**, **Reeb Kaizen Venners**, **Darla Myoho Fjeld**, **George Mukei Horner**, **John Heart-Mirror Trotter**, **Betsy Enduring-Vow Brown**, **Mark Shogen Bloodgood**, **Lorraine Gessho Kumpf**, and **Rosa Ando Martinez**;

To **Patti Muso Giggans**, **Myoho**, and **Enduring-Vow** for facilitating the all day meeting with the CAAW 2 Circle, the Board and Zen Center staff, and to Peace over Violence for the use of their space;

To **Roshi Egyoku** and **Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen** for leading the Jundo rounds to our apartments in January;

To our first quarter Jikodos: **Heart-Mirror**, **Bob Doetsu Ross**, **Jitsujo**, **Peter Ryugen Sample**, **Chris Hackman**, **Jim Dojun Hanson**, and **Tim Taikan Zamora**;

To our Flower Group for all the beautiful flowers on our altars: **Diane Enju Katz** (Flower Group Steward), **Geri Meiho Bryan**, **Betty Jiei Cole**, **Gessho**, **Cathy Jikan Sammons**, **Julie Getsuan Suhr**, and **Pat Suigen Way**;

To our Altar Cleaning Group: **Mukei** and **Conrad Butsugen Romo** (Altar Group Co-Chidens), **Jitsujo**, **Gessho**, **Chris Hackman**, **Harlan Pace**, **Kaizen**, and **Burt Wetanson**;

To our first quarter Introduction to Zen Meditation Instructors: **Kaigen** and **Jitsujo** (Stewards), **Nem Etsugen Bajra**, **Jessica Oetsu Page**, **Frank Genku Martinez**, **Enju**, **Ando**, and **Heart-Mirror**;

To **Etsugen**, **Yoko Bajra**, **Ando**, and **Taikan**, for Saturday snacks for Day of Reflection;

To our first quarter Tenzos: **Nan Reishin Merritt**, **Jiei**, **Enju**, **Don Andres**, **Butsugen**, **Etsugen**, **Yoko Bajra**, **Chris Daian Fields**, **Kane Buzen Phelps**, **Meiho**, **Doetsu**, **Ando**, **Etsugen**, and **Z Zeller**;

To **Jitsujo** for organizing our Beginner’s Wednesdays;

To **Jitsujo** for organizing our Annual Donors Memorial Service;

To **Myoho** for leading the February Zazenkai;



*Jiei Cole tending for the Beginner’s Mind Sesshin.*



*Harlan Pace cleaning doors. Thanks Harlan!*



*Heart-Mirror is always out there cleaning around the Zen Center.*

To the **Brown Green Circle** for the movie screening of *Years of Living Dangerously*;

To **Roshi Egyoku** for leading the class *The Art of Being Uncomfortable*;

To **Pam Myogetsu Smith** for leading the Day of Reflection and Precept Council;

To **Faith-Mind** for leading the Bearing Witness Council on the Shadows in Our Families;

To **Enduring-Vow** for leading the February Tangaryo;

To **Muso** for the Dharma Chat on Martin Luther King;

To **Yudo** for organizing the Farewell Gathering for Rev. Fa Yin;

To **Jitsujo**, **Dylan Neal**, **Meiho**, **Dan Wilner**, **Taikan**, **Carol Flowing Mountain Schmitt**, **Burt Wetanson**, **Mukei**, and **Hilda Bolden** for facilitating the Vietnamese visitors from the Dharma Lotus Meditation Center;

To **Roshi Joshin Althouse** for his Dharma Talk on Integral Zen;

To **Roshi Egyoku** for leading the Priest Retreat;

To **Katherine Senshin Griffith** for leading the Beginner’s Mind Sesshin;

To **Suigen** for leading the March Day of Reflection and Precept Council;

To **Flowing Mountain** for her donation to the Zen Center of a painting by Kaz Tanahashi called “Circle of Transformation”;

To **Flowing Mountain** for delivering our Gate of Sweet Nectar food donations to Immanuel Presbyterian Church’s food pantry;

To **Jitsujo** for her donation of bottles of water to Sanctuary of Hope;

To **Susan Yushin Tipton**, **Myoho**, **Dharma-Joy**, **Enduring-Vow**, **Faith-Mind**, **Jitsujo**, and **Shogen** for taking care of our Founders Room and Altar;

To **Butsugen** for his ongoing stewarding of the Dharma Chats;

To **Oetsu** for stewarding the Prayer Chain;

To **Gessho** for her many years of setting up the altars for the Gate of Sweet Nectar.



## ZCLA Affiliated Groups

**The Lincroft Zen Sangha (New Jersey)**

led by Roshi Merle Kodo Boyd

**The Monday Night Meditation Group (Pasadena, CA)**

coordinated by Betty Jiei Cole

**The Ocean Moon Sangha (Santa Monica, CA)**

**The San Luis Obispo Sangha (CA)**

coordinated by Mark Shogen Bloodgood

**Santa Barbara Zen Center (CA)**

led by Sensei Gary Koan Janka

**The Valley Sangha (Woodland Hills, CA)**

led by Sensei Patricia Shingetsu Guzy

**The Westchester Zen Circle (CA)**

led by Sensei Kipp Ryodo Hawley

## Outreach Groups

**CMC Buddhist Fellowship Group**

**California Men's Colony (CMC)**

**San Luis Obispo, CA**

led by Mark Shogen Bloodgood

Contact [info@zcla.org](mailto:info@zcla.org) for information.

## Sangha Rites of Passage

**Welcome New Residents**

Japheth Craig

Lorenzo Ho Shin Garbo

Michael Zenrin Novak

## 2018 Sesshins

**Growing a Plum Blossom Sesshin**

Wednesday May 23 eve. - Sunday, May 27

**Just Summer Sesshin**

Sunday, July 15 eve. - Saturday, July 21

**Autumn Wind Sesshin**

Sunday, October 14 eve. - Sunday, October 21

**Rohatsu (Buddha's Enlightenment) Sesshin**

Friday, November 30 eve. - Saturday, December 8

**End-of-Year Reflection Retreat**

Thursday, December 27 eve. - Sunday, December 30



Come to the ZCLA Bookstore and shop till you drop!



Buddha's Birthday Service April 8th, 2018.

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

**Our mission** is to provide the training and resources for realizing the interconnection of all life, to maintain the precepts and to embody the Three Tenets of Not-knowing, Bearing Witness and taking action that serves these goals. We provide the teaching, training and transmission of Zen Buddhism.

**Our vision** is an enlightened world free of suffering, in which the earth and all beings live in harmony, everyone has enough, deep wisdom is realized and compassion flows unhindered.

*Founding Abbot:* Taizan Maezumi Roshi

*Abbot 1995-1999:* Roshi Bernard Glassman

*Abbot:* Roshi Wendy Egyoku Nakao

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