

Fall 2002

Zen Group News

Newsletter of the Bellingham Zen Practice Group

Guiding Teacher: Zoketsu Norman Fisher

Resident Priest: Nomon Tim Burnett

Samish Island Summer Sesshin— August 2002

Photo Janet Martinson



Segaki Ceremony

October 5, 2002

Segaki means "to feed the hungry ghosts" in Japanese. This annual ceremony is a memorial for those who have died in the last year. All Dharma Hall members and friends are invited to attend. The segaki ceremony can also help us to appease our own internal "hungry ghosts" as we enter the dark time of the year. If you would like the name of a loved one read during the ceremony, please contact our Ino (head of the meditation hall): Jay Christensen at (360) 398-1793 or coldmtnfarm@yahoo.com. The ceremony will take place on Saturday, October 5, at 8:00 PM at the Dharma Hall. Please arrive by 7:50. There is no need to pre-register, and there is no cost for this event.

Jukai in Vancouver

On June 30th in Vancouver, sangha members Jay Christensen and Lise Loubert of Vancouver received the Bodhisattva Precepts from their teacher, Tenshin Reb Anderson in a moving ceremony at the end of a weekend meditation retreat.

The jukai ("to receive the precepts") ceremony is also called lay ordination. In our tradition it demonstrates an open-ended commitment to continue practicing and gently formalizes a student's relationship with a teacher. In accordance with tradition, Jay sewed by hand his own rakasu - the bib-like garment that represents the larger priest's robe. On the back of his rakasu, Tenshin-roshi had written his new Buddhist name: Gyo-gi Kai-ka or "Continuous practice, flame of the precepts."

As the ceremony ended, Tenshin-roshi sang his own version of the Irving Berlin classic "Let's Face the Music and Dance."

There may be trouble ahead,
But while there's music and moonlight
and love and romance,
Let's face the precepts and dance ...

We look forward to dancing with Jay for many years to come.

—Nomon Tim Burnett

September 2002

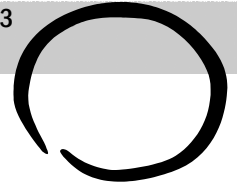
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat		
1	2	3	4	5	30 minute periods Zen work period	6	7	
8	9	10	11	12	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	13	14	Family Dharma Program 10am–11am
15	16	17	18	19	40 minute periods Precepts Ceremony	20	21	
22	23	24	25	26	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	27	28	
29	30							

October 2002

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat			
		1	2	3	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	4	Sangha Practice Meeting— 7:00—Connie's house—see details in newsletter	5	Study Retreat— Zoketsu Norman Fischer— The Lotus Sutra
6	Study Retreat— The Lotus Sutra	7	8	9	10	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	11	12	
13	Sangha Business Meeting—3–5— Nancy's house	14	15	16	17	40 minute periods Precepts Ceremony	18	19	
20	21	22	23	24	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	25	26	Family Dharma Program 10am–11am	
27	28	29	30	31	30 minute periods Zen work period				

November 2002

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat			
					1	2			
3	4	5	6	7	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	8	9		
10	11	12	13	14	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	15	Workshop on Listening w/ Norman, Vancouver	16	Weekend Zen Retreat in Vancouver, Norman
17	18	19	20	21	40 minute periods Precepts Ceremony	22	23	Family Dharma Program 10am–11am	
24	Weekend Zen Retreat in Vancouver cont'd	25	26	27	28	30 minute periods Tea and discussion	29	30	



Upcoming Events

www.BellinghamZen.org for more information

October 4, 2002—Sangha Practice Meeting

October 5-6, 2002

Two-day Study Retreat with Zoketsu Norman Fischer—Bellingham Dharma Hall

October 5, 2002—Segaki Ceremony—8:00 at the Hall.

November 15-17, 2002

Weekend Retreat with Zoketsu Norman Fischer—Vancouver, BC. Contact Kate or Michael at (604) 929-1804 for more information.

December 5-11, 2002

Rohatsu Retreat with Zoketsu Norman Fischer—Mar de Jade, Mexico. See the Everyday Zen website for more information.

December 8, 2002 Annual Sangha Planning Meeting

if you only go to one sangha meeting this year—come to this one! Location and time TBA.

Winter, 2003 Practice Period

Combined Practice Period: Bellingham Zen Practice Group and Mountain Rain Zen Center—January 7 through March 2, 2003

January 7-12, 2003

Five-day Residential Sesshin with Zoketsu Norman Fischer—Loon Lake, near Vancouver, B.C. The retreat will begin on Tuesday, January 7 at 5:00 and go through Sunday, January 12 at 4:00. There will be Zen priest ordination of Kelly Margulies and Brian Unger on January 12 at 2:00 PM.

February 2, 2003

Sunday Retreat. Bellingham Dharma Hall.

February 27—March 2, 2003

Bellingham Non-residential Retreat with Zoketsu Norman Fischer. The retreat will start on Thursday evening, March 27 at 7:00 PM and go through Sunday March 2 at 4:00 PM.

April 26-27, 2003

Weekend Retreat in Vancouver with Zoketsu Norman Fischer.

June 9-14, 2003

Samish Island Summer Sesshin—5-day residential sesshin with Zoketsu Norman Fischer.

October 3-5, 2003

Three-day Study Retreat with Zoketsu Norman Fischer—Bellingham Dharma Hall.

The Details

Zen Study Retreat - The Lotus Sutra Zoketsu Norman Fischer—October 5-6, 2002

This year's study retreat will focus on the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is revered in all Mahayana Buddhist cultures as a central text, and some schools of Buddhism study this sutra exclusively or make the chanting of its title their main practice. Zoketsu will discuss the sutra with two talks and question and answer periods each day. There will also be sitting and walking meditation. Saturday and Sunday, October 5-6, 8:00 AM—5:00 PM each day. Vegetarian lunch will be served. Priority will be given to those able to attend full time. This retreat is likely to fill. Please register early.

Registration fee is \$35 for Dharma Hall members, \$45 for others. Pre-registration is required. Pick up a registration form at the Hall, download one from our website www.BellinghamZen.org, or contact Nancy Welch at 360-671-3992 or registrar@bellinghamzen.org for registration information.

Sangha Practice Meeting October 4, 2002—7:00 PM

This event is open to everyone who attends the regular Thursday evening sittings with the sangha. We will meet with Norman and focus on our practice as a sangha. How can we work with each other and our guiding teacher to enhance our practice?

Dinner is semi-potluck. If you'd like to contribute something, check with Connie. In any case, PLEASE RSVP, so that we know how much food to prepare. Connie Martin—360-380-4112 or cssmartin@attbi.com.

Directions for Sangha Practice Meeting

From I-5 take exit 260 / Slater Road.

Go west on Slater for 7.6 miles. Stay on Slater as it winds downhill and curves south to become Beach Drive and then Sucia Drive. Stay on the arterial—this section .4 mile. Stay on Sucia Drive for 1 mile. Turn left onto Thetis. In one block Thetis comes to a T with Saltspring. Turn right onto Saltspring. Continue on Saltspring for 1 mile. 4014 Saltspring will be on your left, a grey house with white trim.

Weekend Retreat in Vancouver Zoketsu Norman Fischer—November 15-17, 2002

Norman's visit will begin with a workshop on "Listening" on Friday, November 15, from 9:00 until 4:00 at the Mountain Rain zendo. This is a smaller venue, and the workshop is likely to fill quickly.

The meditation retreat will begin Friday evening, November 15, at 7:00 PM. The retreat continues on Saturday and Sunday, with hours from 9:00 to 5:00, and will be held on the UBC campus. This is a non-residential retreat & Mountain Rain generously arranges some accommodations. Plan to bring a bag lunch. Contact Kate or Michael at (604) 929-1804 for more information.

Zazen: Emotion and Pain

Zoketsu Norman Fischer

Someone might think that it's rather boring to spend all this time sitting here doing nothing or just being with the breath. But people who do it know that it's actually quite interesting. Even though you try to sit there and be with your breath, all kinds of other things are going on. It's very colorful and spectacular sometimes. Special effects even, once in a while. You would never guess if from reading the Zen literature, but our practice is actually very emotional.

Through our sitting, we experience, and get access to, such a range of our human emotion during the rest of our lives – emotions that we might otherwise not have been open to. We tap into tremendous sadness sometimes, tremendous joy, anguish, delight, confusion – so many emotions come. Still, in the way that we're all brought up, we have a certain kind controlling idea about our emotions. These are the emotions that are good to have; these are the emotions that are not good to have; these are the emotions that are incompatible with these other emotions, and so forth. We have all these very strict emotional structures that we've been brought up with. But when you sit, that's all out the window. For absolutely no reason whatsoever, you'll be weeping with tremendous sorrow over the entire world, and the next minute, you'll be full of joy – with no transition between them. And sometimes you can notice that in the middle of your weeping about your own life and all of the human condition, right in the middle of that, you're also quite happy. And this doesn't make sense in terms of your usual structure of emotions. "How could I be happy, when I'm totally depressed about the human condition? It doesn't make sense to me, but I have to admit that I feel that way at this moment; the next moment, something else." So, it's funny that way – the human heart and how it works.

Then, if you train enough on your cushion, and you pay attention, you realize that in the rest of your life, when a moment of tremendous sadness, or grief, or anguish comes along, you don't have to be afraid of it. You don't have to say, "Oh, I shouldn't be feeling this; this is really bad," or "What if I feel this way for two days or a year?" You're fearless with your own emotions. You realize that one emotion changes into another, and that emotions are something that we go through. They arise according to conditions, and we can make use of, and embrace, everything that arises in our lives without fear. We learn this on our cushions because our sitting holds us in its embrace through all these changes.

One of the things that happens in this interesting journey of attending a retreat is that the body aches and hurts. You sit, and you follow the instructions, trying to sit up straight – it happens. You start to hurt. The knees hurt; the back hurts; the neck hurts; you could have even special exotic hurts that other people usually don't have – the throat hurts, the heart hurts, the chest area – every time you take a breath. Headache – you name it; you can have it. And so you sit there and pain comes. Everybody has to figure out what to do about it.

I've had moments when I've thought to myself, "I will probably never walk again. After this period of zazen, I'll fall off this cushion, and I'll be twisted in a pretzel, and that will be the end. I'll never be able to straighten out my legs." In the early days of Zen Center, people would do some extreme things; and, actually, there were people who did have physical injuries as a result of sitting. That happened. But

Excerpt from sesshin lecture—May 12, 2002, Vancouver, B.C.

we've changed the schedule to make it a little bit more reasonable. So now it's fairly rare for that to happen. Such a thing happening is highly unlikely. Even if you were to do the schedule with your full energy, even sitting when you think it's impossible, probably you would not get any injuries.

However, you'll still be afraid of getting injuries. Or, if you're not afraid on a rational basis, you'll be afraid because pain is scary, and we don't like it. That's a human characteristic, and a good one – not to like pain. But when this becomes generalized through our whole life, it can become quite a problem because we're afraid of so much in life because it might cause us pain.

Much of this fear, we're not really aware of. We just feel it as a kind of timidity, right in the middle of our lives. Better not try that: it might not work out – I'll be disappointed and upset. Better not really love him: suppose it doesn't work out – I'm making myself too vulnerable. Better not really embrace the world as it is: it's too much for me – I might feel pain. Better not really know myself and open to myself: maybe there's something about myself that I don't approve of – so best keep it hidden.

I think all of these things are constellated when we sit down, and we feel pain in our sitting. We feel the huge pressure of avoidance and fear that pain brings up. Usually in life, one can to a great extent, at least apparently, at least on the surface, escape pain by avoidance. Eventually it catches up to us, but it seems as though we could avoid it, avoid pain. But the nice thing about having a pain in your legs during a retreat that you signed up for – especially when the first period of the first day, it starts hurting – is that you cannot avoid it. It is unavoidable, and there is no choice, as there seems to be in life; there is no choice but in the retreat to face the pain, face your fear, and work with it. And that's not easy.

If you can figure out how to work with it, though, it becomes something that you can apply to the rest of your life. And the way that you work with it is very simple. You stay close and present. When you try to stay close and present, using your breath to support you in that, you notice how strong and how immediate is your avoidance. You're actually sitting there, trying to crawl away, gradually, from your own body. You sit – the pain is over here – and you notice that you're going like this [shifting position], as though somehow you could elude it. You could get away. But if you sit there, you really see what actually happens. And then you see that when you just exhale, and you stop trying to get away, then the only thing that's there is the pain itself. And that's not so bad.

When we think of pain, what we really mean is pain plus avoidance of pain. Pain itself, suffering itself, is not bad. It's endurable. And there can even be joy in the middle of it. Pain plus avoidance – that's a problem. On the cushion you're forced to sit long enough to see the difference between pain and avoidance, and eventually, out of self-defense or agony, or because there's absolutely no choice, you get to just be present. Let go of avoidance or let avoidance exhaust itself, eventually, and you just sit there. And it's all right. And that's how it is in your life, even if it's the last moment of your life, even if there's pain and sorrow. If you can be close enough, intimate enough, it's all right.



Sangha Voices—A Call for Submissions

Writing about practice is good practice in itself. Laying down words in black and white clarifies, a little, the broad dimensions of our way as Zen students. Writing about practice is not easy. And that difficulty itself is revealing. It's hard not to be self-conscious. Hard not to want to portray yourself in a little bit better light. Or to revel in some feeling of inadequacy and trash yourself. It's also tempting to try to write something that fits some idea of being "zen-like." But when you try to write about practice and it comes out a little off or a little phony, that's great. Balling up that page and throwing it away, or hitting the delete button, is the same as letting go of thoughts in the mind during zazen. That's returning to honesty and returning to awareness.

Starting again, we write from the heart about our actual experience. Remembering that our practice is our life and our life is our practice. There is no need for wit or cleverness. Sharing just a little of what's really up for us helps us to enter more fully into our life. It helps us and it helps others, especially those just starting out, to see that Zen practice isn't some kind of cool self-improvement plan. It's nothing more than being ourselves as completely and honestly as we can. Leaving nothing out.

To make writing practice more available, we have an idea for a feature in the newsletter called "Sangha Voices." The idea is that we start with a loose topic. Someone with a feeling for the topic might write a short introduction, but the bulk of Sangha Voices will be short pieces of writing from all of us strung together. This way you don't have to write a whole article. Just a paragraph. Just a bit of verse. Just a few notes. Just the first thing that comes to mind. Your submission could have your name on it, or your initials, or be anonymous. The idea is to try writing practice and to share with the wider sangha of people who read this newsletter.

Practicing with Emotional Pain—The Dhammapada

This past year has been extremely difficult for me, as I've been moving slowly through the pain of a divorce. My marriage was a long one, and, in comparison, my Zen practice has been relatively short. I know, though, that both my state of mind and my life would be totally different if it weren't for my practice.

Just sitting has helped. Home practice gets me to my cushion on most days. Equally important though, has been a practice of working with the opening lines of the *Dhammapada*. Norman included these in one of his Everyday Zen letters, and the words resonated with what was happening in my life.

I started reading them every time I sat down for a period of meditation. I posted them on the refrigerator. After a while I had them memorized, and they began to assert themselves in my head whenever something difficult came up. "What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow." If I am angry and upset with something that has happened, with something that has been "done" to me – "he insulted me, he hurt me, he defeated me" – then I really will be defeated. I "will not be free from hate," and in the long run, I'll betray myself.

The topic for our first Sangha Voices feature is "Practicing with Pain." Maybe the two articles in this issue of the newsletter will provide some inspiration. Send in your submission by mail to Connie Martin (4014 Saltspring Dr., Ferndale, WA, 98248) or email to cssm@attbi.com. We'll need to have your submission by **November 25** for inclusion in the December newsletter. I hope you'll give it a try!

- Nomon Tim Burnett

The Dhammapada (opening lines)

*What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday
And our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow:
Our life is the creation of our mind.
If a person thinks or acts with an impure mind
Suffering follows, as the wheel of the cart follows
the beast that pulls it.*

*What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday
And our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow:
If a person speaks or acts with a pure mind
Joy follows, as a shadow follows the body.*

*"He insulted me, he hurt me, he defeated me, he robbed me."
Those who think such thoughts will not be free from hate
For hate is not conquered by hate.
Hate is conquered by love.
This is the eternal law.*

My way of learning tends to be intellectual: I have some concept about what practice means, or I may think I have some small understanding of some teaching. But this is different. This is experience. I see what happens when I don't let go of harsh thoughts and feelings and don't recognize them for what they are. I see how they play into what the rest of my day is like – into how I treat my son, my friends, and other people; into how I spend my time; into everything I do. And I see how it goes forward from there into creating what my tomorrow is like. When I do let go of those thoughts, and just look to myself and to how I am responding to what is – with what "pure mind" or "impure mind" do I speak or act? – then sometimes I can find, if not joy exactly, at least some measure of peace and some glimpse of awareness that my life really is quite wonderful. And when that happens, I can sometimes really see the incredible dance of a cloud of Sanderlings and the incredible stillness of a Great Blue Heron. Of course, then something else happens, and I lose it and get angry, and . . . back to the beginning.

"Our life is the creation of our mind" still sometimes sounds like total nonsense to me, but I think that's my intellectual mind talking. I know in my bones that it isn't nonsense. This is true, and it's part of that eternal law that says "Hate is not conquered by hate. Hate is conquered by love. This is the eternal law." - cssm



Newsletter of the Bellingham Zen Practice Group

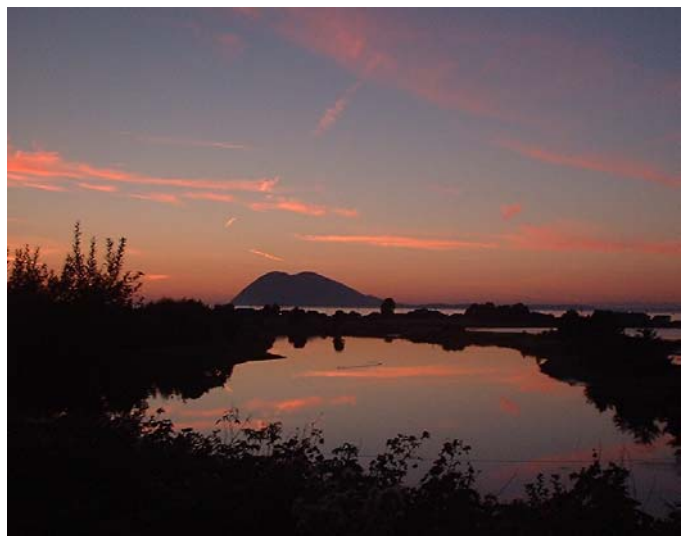
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WERE' RE ON THE WEB:
WWW.BELLINGHAMZEN.ORG

Summer Merging into Fall

As the days get a little shorter, more people seem to come to the zendo for Thursday evening practice. We are maintaining our schedule of varying Thursday evenings: There is always a period of meditation followed by kinhin (walking meditation), then another period of meditation and a short service. After the service, there may be tea and discussion, a work period, or a full moon/precepts ceremony. The calendar on page two shows what to expect on any particular evening. If you'd like an orientation (or a refresher!) to our style of meditation practice—just call or email and we will schedule it with you.



Sunset during Samish Island Summer Sesshin—August 2002

Mailing list: Please let us know if there have been any changes in your address information or if you no longer wish to remain on our mailing list. Thank you.