

Summer 2003

Zen Group News

Newsletter of the Bellingham Zen Practice Group

Guiding Teacher: Zoketsu Norman Fisher

Resident Priest: Nomon Tim Burnett

What's New?



The Bellingham Zen Practice Group follows the Soto Zen style of Shunryu Suzuki. We support practice with a spirit of cooperation, extending the essence of Buddha's teachings into everyday life.

For the past few months members of our group have been meeting frequently in special "processing" sessions to explore decision-making strategies and the underlying structure of our group. For over ten years our little sitting group has done its work and kept moving forward on a "structureless" system—no defined membership and very few defined roles or job titles. In American Zen fashion we have simply done the work that appears before us. However, unlike Japanese Zen, we have not had the benefit and clarity of defined roles, job assignments, and even (gulp!) hierarchy. Quite naturally, things usually got done by the same few dedicated folks, and a measure of definition began emerging over the years, especially with regard to delegating tasks during retreats, the running of which has been our major activity. But frequent questions about authority and clarity in decision making have brought us to exploring who we are as a group and how we want to organize ourselves.

This process began in a small committee that met with a consultant to gain advice and options. The committee then reported back to the group for discussion. An irony began to emerge in our process: deciding how to make decisions! Our group has a character and way of doing business, however undefined, that functions well enough to allow us to make decisions, even to form committees and such, without having a description of how we do it. Accepting this as a given allows us to continue forward, discussing and examining our process while still working within our process—an extroverted form of group meditation. Through discussion it was decided that we all seemed to accept this paradox to a large degree.

To say we "decided," I mean to indicate that consensus decision making, in a rudimentary form, has always been our natural working mode. To continue forward with our processing meetings we made an early decision to continue to operate consensually even while we explored what consensus really is, as well as other decision-making options. Meetings began to flow along an intuitive line, each meeting setting up the requirements for the next without a clear picture of the final outcome. So far we have moved through discussions of group structure, decision-making strategies, and explorations of the frustrations of how we have done things, in a spiral back toward a definition of who we are to begin with. Our new mission statement, printed at the top of this article, is the fruit of these discussions, generated through a very successful and energetic group writing process.

Currently, discussions in our meetings are more clearly separated between processing and decision making, which seems to help participants express themselves more fully than before. Proposals have emerged to expand our traditional "check-in" time at the beginning of business meetings into a whole separate set of "sharing meetings," keeping our business meetings more efficient and streamlined. The topic of "core values" is currently being explored, with the intent of creating further definition of who we are. Concurrently we are discussing group goals and membership options.

Everyone is welcome to participate in these special processing meetings. The next one is scheduled for June 29, from 3pm to 5pm.

Continued on page 2.

Regular Practice

Thursday Practice

Regular Thursday evening practice — 7 to 9 pm at the Dharma Hall.

7:00pm zazen
7:30pm kinhin
7:40pm zazen
8:10pm service
8:30pm tea & discussion
9:00pm clean up



Full Moon Ceremony

The Bodhisattva Precepts Ceremony (futatsu)

We perform this ceremony on the Thursday night closest to the full moon. It replaces tea and discussion.

Samu (Zen work period)

On the first Thursday of each month, we clean the meditation hall. This practice replaces the tea and discussion.



What's New

Continued from page 1.

A sense of direction seems to be emerging: if we define who we are and what we want to accomplish, then the definition of our process of decision making will perhaps itself become clearer. If we declare inclusiveness to be a paramount concern, then a process of consensus, however messy, might be appropriate. If clarity about authority is troubling, then definition of roles, clearly defined committees, and chains of command might be helpful. A key concern is to have a structure that allows newcomers to clearly find their own way to participate and feel a part of the group. Most recently we seem to have identified the "bodhisattva ideal" as a model to guide us, and with this spirit we are continuing forward as a group, finding our way.

Upcoming Events

June	
6/8-6/14	5-day Residential Zen Sesshin Zoketsu Norman Fischer Samish Island Camp Sunday, June 8, 4pm—Saturday, June 14 at noon
July	
7/11	Public Talk: "Clear Seeing: The Buddhist Path of Calm and Clarity" by Layla Smith Sunday, July 11, 7pm, Fairhaven Library
7/12	1-day Zen Retreat Visiting teacher Layla Smith, Dharma Hall Saturday, July 12, 8am-4pm
August	
8/16	Sangha Picnic Connie's beach house Saturday, August 16, noon—5:00
September	
9/7	Beginner's Mind Retreat: An Introduction to Zen Practice Tim Burnett, Dharma Hall Sunday, September 7, 9am-3pm
9/4—9/7	Hiking Retreat Zazen in the Woods open to all— September 4, 7pm—Hawk Mountain Farm Hiking retreat September 4, 7pm—Sunday, September 7 at 5:00 pm—Hawk Mtn. Farm to Mazama Park
October	
10/11—10/12	Zen Study Retreat Norman Fischer, Dharma Hall Saturday, October 10—Sunday, October 12
November	
11/28—11/30	Zen Weekend Retreat Norman Fischer, Vancouver, B.C. Friday, November 28, 6pm—Sunday, November 30, 5pm
December	
12/7	Buddha's Enlightenment Retreat (Rohatsu) Tim Burnett, Dharma Hall Sunday, December 7, 6am-noon
12/3—12/9	Rohatsu Retreat at Mar de Jade Norman Fischer, Chacala, Mexico Wednesday, December 3, 6pm—Tuesday morning De-

Mountains and Rivers Retreat



Cost for the retreat, which includes breakfasts, dinners, and trail parking passes, is \$70. Participants provide their own lunches and trail snacks. The retreat is from 7pm Thursday, Sept. 4th to 5pm Sunday, Sept. 7th. Pre-trip meeting is 5-7pm Sunday, Aug. 24th. Registration deadline is Sunday, Aug. 24th. To register, or for any questions, please call Bob Penny at 360-398-8834.

Our annual Mountains and Rivers retreat is scheduled for the weekend after Labor Day. The retreat begins at Hawk Meadow Farm, just north of Bellingham, on a Thursday night, with outdoor meditation in a cedar grove. All sangha members are invited for this evening. Later in the evening there will possibly be a sweat lodge ceremony optionally available for those participating in the full retreat.

This combination of backcountry travel and meditation retreat brings together different modes of group experience that have a lot to offer to each other—cooperation, a bare-bones approach to living, silence and communion with the natural world. The hiking for this retreat is gentle to moderate, mostly through a beautiful old-growth hemlock forest. Our base camp at Mazama Park, at the foot of Park Butte, is seldom visited and has two streams running through it. Meditation is set up outside in a grassy patch with Mt. Baker looming above and the Twin Sisters off to the west. The meadows provide ample sites for a short solo exercise, and day hiking is available on the ridges in the afternoons. There is a very sturdy three-sided shelter for meditation if the weather is bad.

The retreat will be a mixture of silence and talking, as we have found that backcountry living really requires more verbal communication than a regular retreat. During our silent hiking we will continue our practice of reciting Dōgen's *Mountains and Rivers Sutra* at stops along the way. The roles of Tenzo (cook) and Tenken (timekeeper) have added importance for this retreat, cooking our meals and keeping everyone safe and together on the trail. Those interested in the retreat should note the pre-trip meeting the week prior to the trip. Our group size limit is twelve, so please register early.

Sangha Picnic

Potluck Picnic! Everyone Is Welcome!

Comments following last years event

The most compassionate picnic I've been to in this kalpa. — Avalokitishvara

A *great* day with sangha friends: *this* is what should be accomplished by the one who is wise, who seeks the good, and who goes to the sangha picnic. —Shakyamuni

Standing or walking on the beach, sitting or lying down in the hammock, flying a kite or just hanging out—this way of living is the best in the world. —Sariputra

Sandy Point is *not* a matter of far or near. And last year's sangha picnic was *not* a waste of time. —Sekito Kisen

I had such a good time at the Sangha picnic that I totally forgot myself! Mind and body just fell away. —Dōgen

Cut through all your excuses and just come! —Manjushri

Remember: Good actions have good results!
GO TO THE SANGHA PICNIC! —Zoketsu

Saturday, August 16, 2003

12:00–5:00

RSVP to Connie Martin

Please let us know if you are coming, and what you are bringing, so that we can plan food and parking.
360-380-4112 or cssmartin@attbi.com

Directions to Connie's Beach House

**4014 Saltspring Drive, Ferndale (Sandy Point)
360-380-4112**

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 then Sucia Drive. Stay on the arterial (these are curves, rather than turns onto new roads) – this section .4 mile.

Stay on Sucia Drive for 1 mile. Turn left onto Thetis. In one block Thetis comes to a T. Turn right onto Saltspring. Continue on Saltspring for 2 miles.

4014 Saltspring will be on your left, a grey house with white trim.

Tea & Book Reviews

Our first experiment with having an evening of **Tea and Book Reviews**—the idea of everyone bringing a book or two for “show and tell”—brought out the wide range of people’s interests. This is a *great* way to get new ideas for books to read for study or just for pleasure! Books recommendations ranged from formal Buddhist books to poetry collections. It was interesting to see the huge variety of works that inspired different people’s practice. And, you don’t have to actually have a book in hand to share a book with the group.

* Starred reviews: more than one recommendation.

Sangha Choices

****Taking Our Places: The Buddhist Path to Truly Growing Up* —Norman Fischer

One God Clapping: The Spiritual Path of a Zen Rabbi —Rabbi Allen Lew

Street Zen: The Life of Issan Dorsey

Practice of the Wild —Gary Snyder

Siddhartha —Hermann Hesse

***Going on Being* —Mark Epstein

Zen for Americans —Soyen Shaku
—translated D.T. Suzuki

Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row
—Jarvis Masters

Japanese Death Poems —compiled Yoel Hoffmann

Buddhism Without Beliefs —Stephen Batchelor

Transformation at the Base —Thich Nhat Haan

**Zen Master Raven: Sayings and Doings of a Wise Bird*
—Robert Aitken

The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan—Robert Aitken

The Long Quiet Highway—Natalie Goldberg

Taking Our Places

"Most of us take maturity for granted, as if it were something that comes quite naturally and completely as our bodies grow and our minds and hearts fill up with life experience. In fact, however, few of us really occupy our places. We are merely living out a dream of maturity, a set of received notions and images that pass for adulthood."



What does it mean to truly grow up? Norman Fischer was challenged to answer this question when four San Francisco Zen Center couples asked him to mentor their teenage sons. Norman and the boys met over the course of two years, and their stories and struggles formed the inspiration for this in-depth look at the qualities which support the development of maturity.

While Norman's mentoring work has since inspired many Coming of Age programs, his book explores the issue of maturity for adults of all ages. Our culture has neglected the question of what it means to truly grow up. In *Taking Our Places*, Norman examines what true maturity is and details the qualities that help us cultivate a deep and lively maturity.

Norman's years of Zen practice and his warm-hearted teaching style suffuse this vital contribution to encouraging our engaged practice in the world.

Norman will be reading from *Taking Our Places* on Saturday, June 14th at 7:30pm at Village Books in Fairhaven.

Sangha Voices



Sangha Voices

Writing about practice is good practice in itself.

This feature of the newsletter welcomes members of the sangha to share their practice. Your contribution could be an essay, a poem, a drawing, or simply some thoughts about what practice means in your life. The idea is to write from the heart about our actual experience. Our practice is our life and our life is our practice.

Contributions may be signed or anonymous. If you would like to make a contribution, please call or email

Connie Martin
360-380-4112
cssmartin@attbi.com

Samish Island Sesshin—Thoughts about Practice and Place

Practice is always practice, but sometimes, especially during sesshin, it can feel strongly connected to place. At Loon Lake, this past January, the intensity of koan practice seemed to match the sharp-edged granite rocks and the diamond frost on the staircases. At Mar de Jade, practice is softened by the sound of the ocean and brightened by the sun and the warmth of the Mexican culture.

Many of us will be heading for Samish Island soon. And practice at Samish seems to me to be rooted in stillness. There is deep stillness in early-morning zazen there, the large zendo dimly lit by candlelight, the dark shapes of people seeming to stretch beyond the end of the room. There seems to be another zendo beyond the one we sit in, and another, going back in time, all the way to Buddha. At dawn, the saltwater lagoon reflects pink clouds. A hundred great blue herons fly across the sky and add their reflections to the still water. And just for a moment, there is deep stillness in my mind. Just for a moment my mind stops. A moment of grace.

—cssm

The following poem was shared at the end of the Thursday Tea & Book Reviews evening. It was written by Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, who died on April 4, 2003 at Shasta Abbey. He was Head of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives.

What Is Important?

I think that these are some of the things that are important:

To know that the Hand of Buddha encompasses everything, and to trust It;

To seek the Truth in all matters, within the limits of my ability, since ignorance is the root of all attachments;

To speak what I believe to be the truth on suitable occasions, without insistence (for only the Eyes of Buddha can discern what is true with certainty), and otherwise to keep silent;

To show loving kindness to all those whom I can find a way to love, without attachment, lust, or embarrassment;

To fear nothing, for out of fear even the good harm one another;

If anger should arise, to refuse it lodging in my heart, nourishment in my mind, and life in my speech and actions;

To accept what I have not the wisdom to change for the better, and to know that it is enough to do what I can;

To abstain from that which fosters ignorance, including indulgence in fantasies, ideals, and notions of what should be;

To deal fairly and honorably with all people; and to have no greater ambition than to be remembered as a halfway decent human being.

Reprinted by permission of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives.



*Newsletter of the
Bellingham Zen
Practice Group*

Bellingham Zen Practice Group
Bellingham Dharma Hall
1101 N. State Street, Suite 300
Bellingham, WA 98225

General Contact: 360-671-6064 (John Wiley)
Email: info@bellinghamzen.org

Retreat questions and registration:

Nancy Welch 360-671-3992
registrar@bellinghamzen.org

Resident Priest:

Nomon Tim Burnett 360-647-2363
tim@bellinghamzen.org

WWW.BELLINGHAMZEN.ORG

Sangha Currents

Thanks to:

Jay Christensen for organizing our paper files, serving on the Dharma Hall Board, and serving as our Ino (head of meditation hall) these last two years.

John Wiley for agreeing to add the processing of dharma talk tapes to his duties as Jisha (teacher's assistant).

Connie Martin for putting together these newsletters, and much processing of sangha input during the sangha reorganization process.

Nancy Welch, Dan Miller, and Bob Penny for serving on the decision-making committee and getting our sangha reorganization process off to a good start.

Nancy Welch for her work as Registrar for retreats.

Marilyn Kratt and John Keith for cooperating so well as our Chidens (altar cleaners).

John Keith for researching digital recording options for dharma talks.

Bob Penny for stepping in as temporary Retreat Manager for the Samish sesshin.

Bob Penny for his help in writing for the newsletter and *Susan Vincent* for proofreading and editing suggestions.

Kelly O'Brien for setting up our new, organized, postering system.

Dan Miller for serving extra long as Materials Manager and reorganizing all of our stuff at the Dharma Hall Spring Cleaning.

Chris Burkhart for the donation of a CD burner for digital recordings of dharma talks.

Tim Burnett for stepping in to help when a job is unfilled and something needs to be done quickly, and for his support for everyone in his role of resident priest.

Everyone who has been coming to our sangha process meetings with such thoughtful input!

Good Wishes to:

Kelly O'Brien for the recovery of her mom.

Kelly Margulies for the recovery of her partner Alan.

John Wiley's wife, Carlyne, whose mother has been ill.

Congratulations to:

Mark Dooley for finishing his training and starting work as a family therapist.