



Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

The Buddha's DNA

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao



I was looking at Iwasaki Tsuneo's *Heart Sutra* painting in which he renders the kanji characters in the form of the DNA double helix. Reading Paula Arai's accompanying text stopped me in my tracks. She writes: "With DNA being central to a code for life and the *Heart Sutra* a powerful code to enlightenment, Iwasaki proclaims that the code of en-

lightening wisdom sung in the scripture is embedded in the very code of life, embodied in every living cell. His *Heart Sutra* DNA denotes the biological dimension of interbeing as it affirms that the essence of enlightened wisdom is a cellular reality and that the transmission of wisdom is a fundamental life activity. We are encoded with the Buddha's DNA."¹

Have you ever encountered something that resonated so deeply that you were stopped in your tracks? You stood still at the very spot you were when your entire being registered a profound recognition of something you had not fully known before. This resonance connects to a wisdom that is already deeply imprinted in your being. As Arai says, you are "encoded with the Buddha's DNA."

This felt sense of being stopped—of being claimed by silence and stillness—is well known to Zen practitioners. You train yourself to shift to this quiet, not-knowing place through which the very breath of life flows unhindered. You meet whatever you are encountering—however difficult or challenging it may be—from this felt sense of slowing down, stopping in stillness and quiet. You can actually feel the breath flowing in and flowing out through your nose, your feet, through every pore of the body. Breathing is life—breathing enlivenes the Buddha's DNA.

The pandemic is such a moment of stopping, not just individually, but also collectively. COVID-19, an airborne

¹ Paula Arai, *Painting Enlightenment: Having Visions of the Heart Sutra, The Buddhist Art of Iwasaki Tsuneo*. Shambhala, 2019, p.37.



Reverends Egyoku and Duncan Ryukken Williams offer paper cranes at the Higashi Honganji altar in memory of those killed by racial violence at a Tsuru for Solidarity event.

coronavirus, is loose upon the entire world. In order to not become infected, you must wear a face covering and keep at least six feet physical distance from other human beings. Awareness of the breath has taken on a whole new dimension. Los Angeles scientist Lucy Jones says that the key to not becoming infected with the coronavirus is, "Don't share your air." Roshi Bernie would often point out that we are all breathing the same air. After all, there is no air boundary. Now air has become a danger zone, even more alarming than air pollution, because you and I can actually directly sicken someone else by "sharing our air."

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THE BUDDHA'S DNA (*Continued from page 1*)

How are you breathing right now? Breathing is life itself—everything breathes. When George Floyd begged for his life, he called out for his mother to save him from the full body weight of a knee on this neck and pleaded, “I can’t breathe.” When you watched the cellphone video of the life force being callously and nonchalantly squeezed out of George Floyd in eight minutes and forty-six seconds, what stopped for you? What awakened within you? What stirred in the very depths of your being?

In the moment of his dying, all the countless life forces of Black human beings who have ever pleaded “I can’t breathe,” catalyzed in the cries of George Floyd. All the countless human beings who continue to be murdered for the color of their skin converged in the cries of George Floyd. What catalyzed within you—viscerally in your guts and bones—in that moment of witnessing the murder of George Floyd?

“Every human being is of equal value.”

Awakening has three important aspects. One aspect is the emptiness of the DNA itself—the life-force empty of any fixity, of any conditions. It is so fluid that it can manifest as an eager child, a loving parent, or a cruel White man arrogantly snuffing out a Black man’s life for all the world to witness. Each person, though imprinted with Buddha’s DNA, is unique, each vastly complex and nuanced within the web of the dynamic interconnected relationships of our lives, the One Body reality.

The second aspect of awakening is exemplified by the bodhisattva, the great archetypal being who clearly sees the empty essence of the life force manifesting in an infinitely vast array of forms. The bodhisattva sees that human beings are shrouded in ignorance of their Buddha DNA and, therefore, works tirelessly to wake you up to your Buddha DNA and to relieve the suffering and pain caused by this ignorance. The third aspect of awakening is how you yourself awaken from this ignorance, claim your endowment of Buddha’s DNA, and actively put your life force to good use for the benefit of others.

How do you live the One Body reality? Can you state out loud, with great conviction and determination, that, “I want to activate the Buddha DNA that I am encoded with. I want to know wrongs when I see them; to know the invisible caste system that drives our country; to know the disease of racism when I meet it in myself, and to speak out when I see it in others; to recognize the systemic oppression which I habitually participate in without being aware of it?” How can you be awake and aware of the triggers within yourself whenever you encounter that hard-

wired part of yourself that is driven to create an “other?” The part that all too willingly ignores the suffering of fellow human beings? The part that wants only to protect your own well-being at the expense of others’ well-being?

Ground yourself in the Buddha’s DNA and activate it. Buddha’s DNA is something that every person is completely endowed with. This means that, fundamentally speaking, every person, without exception, is of equal value. It is said that when the Buddha was born, he took seven steps, pointed to the heavens with his right hand and to the ground with his left and declared, “Below the heavens and above the earth, the life force has been awakened.” The meaning of this proclamation is profound: every person is of equal value to all other persons.

The pandemic and the murder of George Floyd—and of countless Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color—reveal the deeply ingrained belief that some people are worth more than others. Awakening is an arrow shot deep into this entrenched belief and reveals it as fundamentally false. And yet, it is thoroughly stamped upon your spirit, on your heart, and on your mind. It is deeply stamped upon the pernicious policies of the government and public institutions, upon the press and its narratives, upon those who create and carry out public policy. It is stamped deeply into the cells of your being. For me, nothing exemplifies this more clearly than the callous nonchalance of George Floyd’s murderer’s hands placed casually in the pockets of his police uniform while he puts the full weight of his knee on George Floyd’s neck. The murderer carries out his action deliberately and intentionally because he believes that George Floyd’s life is not worth saving.

How about you? Buddha’s DNA has no preference and has nothing to do with who you like or dislike. But as a person you may act as if your preferences matter, and therefore you may accept and defend systems of oppression based on the idea that not everyone is of equal value. Or, at the very least, you do nothing to challenge and change this way of living. The juxtaposition of pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, which you have directly witnessed, demands that you activate your Buddha DNA.

George Floyd, a bodhisattva in death, may, indeed have “changed the world,” as his young daughter proclaimed. Now, it’s time to do your part and activate your Buddha DNA. You are already encoded, so raise an unshakeable conviction that everyone, without exception, is equally entitled to breathe. What are you doing to ensure that this is so? Do your actions speak to the fact that every person is of equal worth? Your actions will determine whether this is a moment of Great Awakening. May it be so.

Roshi Egyoku is the Head Teacher and Abbot Emeritus of ZCLA.

On Becoming a Dharma Holder

During the months of May and June, Roshi Egyoku empowered four of her senior students as Dharma Holders: Myoho, Jitsujo, Kaigen, and Dharma-Joy. They are in their final years of formal study with her. Three of them are featured below and Dharma-Joy has an article on page 4.



Darla Myoho Fjeld: Roshi Egyoku recently explained that a Dharma Holder has entered the final years of her formal Zen studies with her. I flashed to the first time I entered a zendo in 1996 – those 24 years seemed to have flown by – and here I was about to give my first Dharma talk as a Dharma Holder. I have

benefitted so much from these years with my teachers. As I prepared my talk, I told myself not to waste people's time with empty words and to do my best to manifest the Dharma in a way that would be helpful to practitioners living through a pandemic. The koan I chose from the Denkoroku of the Thirty-eighth Ancestor Tung-shan (Tozan) had deeply enlivened me, and I hoped it would do the same for others. My aim was to remind myself and everyone listening about the inner place in each of us of not-knowing that provides each of us with a calm, cool center from which to take in a world filled with sorrow, grief, fear, and joy. This is the place from which I hope to continue my close training and practice with Roshi Egyoku now that I am taking on more responsibility as a leader and assistant teacher at the Zen Center.



Jitsujo Gauthier:
Fayan Points to the Blinds

Once the Great Master Fayan of Qīngliáng (Temple) was about to give a teaching before the midday meal. He gestured with his finger at the blinds, and at that (moment) two monks went to roll them up.

Fayan responded, "One gains, the other loses."

Women's Comments: Tell me, who has gained and who has lost? If you obtain the eye (of awakening), you will perceive how Fayan himself failed. That being said, don't try to fathom this in terms of gain and loss.

I chose this koan, because I think it reflects individual, systemic, and spiritual perspectives relevant to today.

Each of us understand struggles of gain and loss, i.e., competition, comparison, approval, and condemnation. Our daily life is full of duality. We are all familiar with the roller coaster of gain and loss, winning, and losing. We feel amazing when complimented and life flows in our favor and disheartened when condemned and barriers block the way we hoped things would flow.

Our life is permeated by issues of White Supremacy and Racism. We live within systems of domination and oppression. This can be hard to see. The challenge here is to make this koan alive for you, to shift out of the intellect, let go of the knowing mind, and become intimate with this. Can you become each person and each perspective in this koan? Do you feel resistance to doing this? Resistance can come in forms of anger, lethargy, confusion, and numbness. Can you turn toward resistance and breathe into it?

As a white queer female, I relate to Fayan's failure, such as, failure to accept my own supremacy and pretension, failure to be truly intimate with gain and loss, be a good loser, practice not-knowing, and failure to care about others' perspectives enough to take action. What about you?



Jonathan Kaigen Levy: My Dharma Holder presentation and talk came right in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The koan, "Master Ma is Unwell" leapt off the page, it seemed the perfect fit. Ma was both ill and not ill. When asked how his health was, he simply answered, "Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha." So even in a time of a raging pandemic,

this is the path we have chosen, this is the journey of our miraculous life. Through thick and thin and sadness and joy, we too can answer, "Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha."

As a temple priest, I will be actively moving into the ceremonial realm, helping to plan, manage, and officiate at services. I am committed to helping support the Sangha any way I can, including assisting in a new start-up ZCLA outreach program that will offer zazen classes via Zoom, reaching out beyond the Center to the wider community. In addition, the time seemed right for me to lead a local home-based sitting group, which had its first meeting just as the pandemic hit. I expect to move this group onto Zoom in the coming week.

“In the midst of all activity, raise the Bodhi Mind.”

by Dharma Holder Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert



In a single day in mid-March, the world shifted. On that day, March 12, every upcoming event on my calendar was cancelled, including my tickets for “Hamilton”—“Hamilton!”—only six days later. And, of course, on that day—the day our Beginner’s Mind Sesshin was scheduled to begin—we received the announcement that Zen Center would also be closing.

While we “cancelled” the Beginner’s Mind sesshin, in fact we have been living it every day since.

Zen Center quickly shifted from an organization rooted in its location, buildings, and grounds to an online organization, anchored by the important service of its resident Sangha. Even as we began to practice physical distancing, we came together—in many instances, our shift to an online practice space has created intimacy and availability that we have not seen before. Amazingly, it was only a few days later that Roshi Egyoku began offering Face-To-Face via Zoom, and our first public Face-To-Face on Zoom happened exactly a week later.

Prior to March 2020, ZCLA was truly a Zoom neophyte. ZCLA didn’t even have a Zoom account! Suddenly, and pretty much overnight, the entire Zen Center shifted; having never streamed a sitting period or a talk before, we embraced a shift, in the course of a single week, to making every activity available online. Roshi Egyoku often says: “Plunge!” Well, we plunged!!

How did that happen? It just happened! There was no magic to it, although there was a lot of work by a few devoted people. We are incredibly fortunate to be living in a time when our technology can allow such a seamless transition. I distinctly remember September 11, 2001—on that morning, I was in a hotel on the island of Kauai, Hawaii. The Internet was still nascent and, over the next week, with air traffic shut down and in an age before smartphones, I would wait in line at the hotel to use its business center computer to check my email and connect with the Sangha. Now, two decades later, we have a technology infrastructure that allows 50 or more people to connect regularly to our Zoom feed for talks, chant circles, online councils, and zazen.

Behind the scenes, many people’s hands and eyes have worked hard to make this transition happen. Jotai, ZCLA’s IT guru, has been instrumental in building our hardware and networking capability to support all this Zoom-ing.



Rev. Jitsujo, along with Kyogen, helped immeasurably in the early days as we got our sea legs under us, and have been an important link to the Board of Directors as we sketch out our plans going forward.

Writing this, at the end of June, I looked back at the original March 12 email closing the Zen Center. It stated that the closure would be in effect until April 1, which was the planned reopening. That was reflective of how many of us thought at the moment—that this would be a momentary inconvenience that would soon pass. Over time, our understanding shifted, and so has our relationship to this online world. It is not a Band-Aid to “get us through.” Now, we see that this is how we will build and nurture our precious Sangha Treasure for the foreseeable future. On the technology side, we are adapting to that reality, as we move from “what works for now” to “what is our new normal.” In some ways, this new normal is quite wondrous—we have people joining us online from all over the country and the world, and we are enriched by their contributions as our Sangha is unbound from the geography of Los Angeles and our offerings extend everywhere. Our teachers are being kept busy with over 100 (!) Face-To-Face interviews offered every week. And our “sesshins from home” and similar offerings are helping us to not leave our practice “at the Zendo door,” but to anchor it in our own homes and daily activities.

Kanzeon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, is represented having 1,000 hands, each with a different tool that can be used to help any particular suffering of the world. On March 12, we learned that those hands include a webcam, a microphone, and a laptop. We all embody Kanzeon energy. Let’s all go forward together, serving each other and the whole world.

Rev. Dharma-Joy is the consummate Zoom Host for ZCLA.

We Are the Fabric of Bodhgaya

by Sacha Greenfield



Bodhgaya is the town built around the site of Shakyamuni Buddha's great awakening under the bodhi tree, and it draws Buddhists of all sorts from all over the world. Three years ago, I studied there for three months through a college program, practicing meditation and studying Buddhist philosophy and culture. This past December, I had the great opportunity to visit Bodhgaya during the season of Tibetan prayer festivals and teachings, when thousands of Tibetan refugees and monks gather. Returning to Bodhgaya, I reconnected with the town in new ways, both deepening old connections and forming new ones.

One of these old connections was Anish Kumar, a local thangka (Tibetan painting) artist born in Bodhgaya. Many mornings and afternoons, I would walk from the Burmese vihara to sit in the Japanese temple, and on the way back I would drop into his shop. We would have chai, and he would explain the process by which he paints thangkas (which are unbelievably intricate), and talk about life in Bodhgaya. He told me about his life as a child, when Bodhgaya was a small, quiet town, and he would bike for hours to take art classes in Patna, 80 miles to the north.



A family in Bodhgaya receives a food package outside their home.

For the nearly four weeks I was there, the energy of the town shifted dramatically. More and more Tibetan refugees were arriving in preparation for the Dalai Lama's teachings. The town became cold, and dusty from increased traffic and beggars from out of town joined others on the streets. More than ever, it became a place of extremes—great wealth is present in the forty-something temples, yet the town is in the poorest state in India. Rickshaw drivers and laborers live day-to-day. In the midst of days of chanting of the



Anish's family takes donation bags to neighboring communities during the pandemic.

Tibetan canon in the presence of rows of Tibetan rinpoches, beggars are turned away for blessed food. To practice in the Dalai Lama's presence amidst these extremes, sitting in the pain of unrelenting and overt poverty, was a powerful experience that is impossible to articulate.

Now, in this pandemic, Anish reached out to me describing his efforts to provide food aid for those without work in the pandemic. Together with friends and family, he made contact with families in surrounding villages, gathering funds and providing food packages that last about a week. Based on his outreach, I reached out to our sangha for donations. India's restrictions are harsh, with armed police enforcing quarantine except for a few hours in the morning and evening. Conditions in Bodhgaya will likely be bad for a long time, given India's severe travel restrictions and Bodhgaya's completely tourism-based economy.

This gap between the aspirations associated with Bodhgaya and its harsh reality have become a deep question for me. These people, the pilgrims and the locals, are Bodhgaya—we are the fabric of this sacred site. The bodhi tree itself is sick, its leaves being eaten alive and its bark graying from the smog. What is the site of Buddha's awakening calling us to awaken to?

Sacha is a resident member at ZCLA.

ZCLA Statement of Solidarity



Whereas, the United States of America has, from its inception, implicitly and explicitly promoted a white-supremacist system, as evidenced in the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the institution of slavery, and

Whereas, this systemic white-supremacist ideology has resulted in the oppression of Indigenous peoples, Blacks, Latinx, Asians, and all those who are deemed People of Color, to the present day, and

Whereas, George Floyd has become a “Bodhisattva in death,” awakening the world to take actions that will end, once and forevermore, the dehumanizing and deluded narrative of “other” and its consequences, and

Whereas, our country is currently experiencing a potentially transformative moment to forever root out this racist ideology as it is manifested in individual, collective, and systemic behaviors, and

Whereas, the injustices that target Black lives in particular have given rise to the undisputed dharma that Black Lives Matter, and

Whereas, white supremacist racism and all forms of racism are the most virulent and dangerous forms of delusion, that of a separate identity of human beings, when in fact, all beings are empty of separateness and are wholly interdependent, and

Whereas, the vow of Zen Buddhist practitioners is to end suffering caused by delusion, including the ways that it manifests in subtle and overt forms of violence such as murder, lynching, torture, unjust treatment under the law, and unequal opportunities of employment, education, and access to health services, public spaces, and opportunities,

Therefore, we, the stewards of The Zen Center of Los Angeles, as practitioners of the Buddha Way, pledge to end these delusions by diligently applying the practices of The Three Tenets of Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action.

Specifically, we will:

- hold ourselves resolutely accountable for recognizing attitudes and acts of racism in ourselves and others, and for never turning away from the suffering these cause,
- do the essential inner work of being truthful about our own deluded self which results in individual racism and its consequences and rooting it out, no matter how uncomfortable it may be,
- do the essential work of educating ourselves about the white supremacist history of the United States and its consequences,
- do the essential work together of deep listening, deep learning, and council in order to illuminate the Black Experience and commit to creating spaces to do this,
- do the essential work together of deep listening, deep learning, and council in order to illuminate the experiences of Indigenous peoples, Latinx, Asian and all those deemed People of Color and commit to creating spaces to do this,
- do the tireless work that is required to uproot any and all forms of racism that exist in our Sangha and the larger community of public institutions and government whenever and wherever we encounter it,
- continually affirm our intention that our Sangha does everything it can to safeguard access and inclusion and to uphold the equality and dignity of Black lives and of Indigenous lives and the lives of People of Color,
- create and establish life-affirming and liberating practices, policies, and organizational changes that support the values of equality, equity, and diversity.

Signed by ZCLA Teachers and Board of Directors
June 14, 2020



In June, ZCLA members participate in The Great Awakening Walk in support of Black Lives Matter. The silent walk began in Little Tokyo and ended at City Hall with a memorial service in which each protestor did bows to those killed by police and government violence. Photos by Geri Meiho Bryan.

ZOOM: The New Way to Practice

by Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher



Most important to me is consistency in practice. I can only come to the Zen Center in person, occasionally when it is open. With the online offerings I can take my seat every weekday morning and chant the gatha of atonement with other practitioners. Everyone joining online (from anywhere!) is sitting in the one seat, and that definitely encourages me.

For face to face, instead of the bustling robes and bells and rustling papers, I sit in the energies of my everyday life, which brings the practice home. Practicing the schedule of sesshin together helps to close the gap between the zendo and my everyday life.

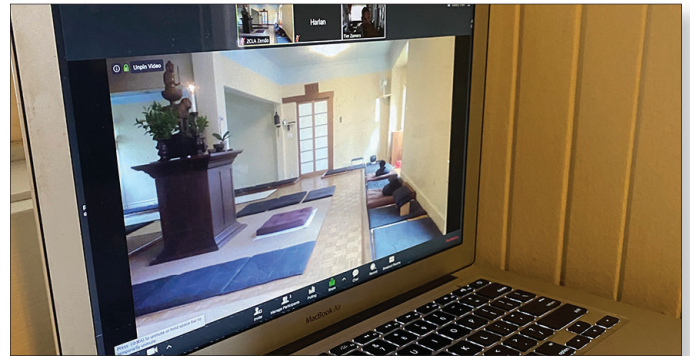
During sharing and Q & A, I have gotten to know more sangha members (and their names!). Something that is missing is the informal socializing and networking that occurs in person. (I've gotten to know some very interesting people rooming with them at sesshin. I got a really good job through someone in my precept class. I met my partner of 20 years at a meditation group.) I am mindful that the Zen Center functions through the committed actions of its members. I'm grateful to those who make the online practice possible. I feel a bit like a "consumer" and miss being able to contribute more.

by Geri Meiho Bryan



Analogous to Vimalakirti's sick room, ZCLA expanded without changing size and brought people from neighboring communities closer together. Zoom has become the umbilical cord, connecting us into a virtual zendo and to the zendos of neighboring sanghas. This is how I have experienced ZCLA's online offerings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A seamless transition of one moment sitting in the zendo, the next sitting in my home zendo on Zoom with the rectangles of buddha faces in sesshin, morning service, or sharing in a day of reflection on my laptop screen. My relationship with my home feels more intimate. A place where until recently I felt like I was passing through, now



settling into myself, feeling completely at home in my home as I listen to the wild parrots in the Zen Center's garden.

ZCLA's offerings have helped me to start new upayas. Working through online technical difficulties has presented opportunities to test practice. Fun for me was my audio dropping out in mid-sentence while I was trying to share. I never thought about my internet speed or considered if my modem was more than just a modem. What world have I been living in that things just show up and I don't even know how to fully utilize them? I found myself on Google drilling down into the topic of modems to make sure I could efficiently stream while using WiFi. I even dug out an Ethernet cable from the "everything" box as a contingency plan to hardwire my way into the virtual zendo.

The online offerings have been plentiful, a Sunday morning from my home zendo looks like the following: 9 am zazen w/SLO, 9:45 a.m. ZCLA Beginners Zazen Class, 11:30 a.m. teisho from Roshi Tenshin at Yokoji. Not even on a good day with a helicopter could one accomplish such a dharma schedule.

I offer a humble bow to those who have jumped in to make all of this possible. You have kept the home fires burning while we wait for COVID-19 to tell us when it is safe to practice together in each other's physical presence.

by Gemma Soji Cubero del Barrio



COVID-19 hit me in Spain, while attending a film festival premier in my home country. For the last 20 years, I had wanted to bring my mother to live with me in America so she could see my life here. On March 11th, we flew back to LA, the same night that the travel ban from Europe was announced.

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THE NEW WAY TO PRACTICE (*Continued from page 9*)

To avoid the fear of spreading the virus, we self-quarantined in my ZCLA apartment. The initial 14 days merged into the COVID-19 stay at home order, keeping us more in “locked down.” I will never forget the morning I finally sat in the zendo again. The new normal zen robes had emerged: masks, gloves, speaking out loud in the zendo to keep social distancing. Attending the service in the Buddha Hall while staying six feet away felt so cold and bizarre. But suddenly the oddness wore off. I took refuge in this new-normal, became part of this birth in our virtual zendo, and dove into my daily practice. I see the gifts of COVID-19 in my life. In confinement I have gotten to better understand how “not knowing is most intimate.” How to fully accept my mother, I have had to close the gap to fully accept myself. The pandemic has also stripped me of the travelling that has been so much a part of my life, allowing me to journey into my inner landscapes.

For years, Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action have been a guide to navigate the uncertainty and the impermanence of my life. The global situation with COVID-19 has made me feel somehow less alone in the world. And the “uncertainty” that I felt so less personal, and now more shared.

COVID-19 has also opened me up to new ways of living this moment-to-moment zen life. The virtual zendo now reaches all of you, far and wide; the redwood trees in our ZCLA garden are now my new portal to zazen. The pandemic has shown me how the Buddha Field expands and how life is indeed inherently generous.

by John Kyogen Rosania



The Zen Center’s ability to go online overnight in response to the pandemic is a testament to the deep, nimble practice of our board, abbot, head teacher, senior students, and staff. Their response is an inspiration to my own practice to root the dharma in a concrete, joyful, and experimental responsiveness to our actual life.

Rather than cut me off from my zen practice, the increased online opportunities have helped me integrate my practice deeper into my everyday life. My mind often separates what I do at the Zen Center from what I do for work or with friends. Now, our sitting practice, talks, and events are streamed right into my home; how intimate! My office is now where I work, sit, listen to a talk, sit, work, do service, work, no separation to be found!

In these challenging times, I’m grateful that I can lean on the Sangha and Dharma when I need them most by easily accessing a recent talk or sitting period (brought to us by Dharma-Joy’s diligent emailing!). I’m continually inspired by the high attendance at talks and events and love seeing the faces of many Sangha members who are often unable to make it regularly to the Zen Center. I’m also inspired by the possibility that when the Center re-opens in the future, we will develop together a hybrid model of in-person and online events that will serve more, increase ongoing connection in our Sangha, and make zen practice and the Dharma accessible to more people. To me, our on-line practice has been needed long before COVID and I’m very happy that it has arrived!

by Glenn Gikai Davis



Practice on Zoom does present some difficulties. The first Zoom sessions had their technical kinks which the Zoom-masters at ZCLA quickly worked out. I still miss the flavor of physically practicing with others at ZCLA, but it has been wonderful to see the Sangha expand through Zoom. Also, it’s certainly easy to take the practice lightly on Zoom by turning off the video, not being seen, and allow myself to be pulled away by distractions, but I can make the choice to engage in a strong, focused practice on Zoom. After all, I am responsible!

Diving into Zoom practice, I find I get out of it what I put into it. I approach every Zoom session like I’m in the Zendo. Details matter. I wear appropriate clothing; set up a yoga mat on the hard floor for bowing; light a candle; adjust the lighting; and sit on my cushion in stillness. This approach strengthens my practice. I’m grateful for the wide variety of programs ZCLA offers on Zoom, including sesshin, zazenkai, dharma talks, classes, face-to-face, and council. In fact, I have had more opportunities to practice on Zoom than ever before without geographic limitation or traffic.

The quality of practice on Zoom is amazing. I thought it would be “lighter,” but it has been deep and the “Zoom” component has become more transparent. Sesshin on Zoom is just Sesshin. Face-to-face is intimate and powerful, often without feeling any filter. Classes and discussions on Zoom are rich, and I feel the Sangha’s energy and appreciate the interaction. Practicing with ZCLA on Zoom is certainly a different flavor than in-person practice at ZCLA, but I love peanut butter ice cream as well as mint chocolate chip! I’m grateful for the practice on Zoom that has arisen from this pandemic and from the vision and hard work of ZCLA.

Innovation and Transformation

by Sensei Mark Kizan Shogen Bloodgood



The suffering of the world is a specific situation, not some big abstraction. It calls us to do this, and this, and this. It calls us to get out of our heads and take concrete actions now, and now again, and now again.

From **The Book of Household-er Koans** by Roshi Eve Marko and Roshi Egyoku

Within a week after our stay-at-home order (whenever that was—I can't remember now) we had moved all our San Luis Obispo Zen Circle (SLOZC) programs onto Zoom. Thrown into Not-Knowing with the Pandemic, Bearing-Witness to our options, and, BOOM, we were on Zoom! It was similar at ZCLA. For us that meant our Tuesday morning zazen, our long-running Thursday evening program, the current Precept/Jukai class series, and our newer Sunday morning program. Ironically, we had been “rehearsing” with new liturgical Services for a number of months during the Sunday program, with just a small group of our members, and were ready to finally open it up to the public. Then Covid-19 hit.

We not only regrouped quickly but then began expanding our offerings. Now, we have 6 a.m. sittings Tuesday through Friday. Now, our members are attending ZCLA Sesshins and Zazenkais where heretofore most had not been able to make the 200-mile trek to Great Dragon Mountain. My own auto mechanic recently called concerned about my absence. Not driving 40,000 miles per year anymore, he wasn't seeing me very often! (LOL) Moreover, prior members who had moved away were now joining us once again online. Yet another silver lining has been not schlepping a Prius-filled cargo of Zen “stuff” every Thursday night and Sunday morning.

Face-to-Face (F2F) interviews had been a concern for our little group. For most of our 17+ years together it hadn't even been an option. But I never stopped hoping we could eventually offer it, motivated by Yamada Kôun's words, “Most important in the practice of Zen is dokusan (F2F)

for without dokusan true practice is not possible. As Harada Roshi also said, if dokusan is taking place, you at least know that practitioners are attempting to transmit the true dharma...please come as often as possible to dokusan if you really want to practice Zen. Unless dokusan takes place, it's not real Zen.” My own 20 years of F2F with Roshi Egyoku and other teachers has been foundational in my own practice. I wanted that for others. Finally, at a certain point in my own training, I got the nod from Roshi Egyoku to offer F2F. It was a huge step. But there were still challenges: on Thursday evenings at Crows End, the interview room, which was in what I call the Thoreau cabin, was over 100 yards away from the zendo. During our one hour of zazen, I was lucky to get three

interviews in. Then we had just started doing F2F on Sundays, before the lockdown occurred, using the office of a psychiatrist which was only ten yards from the White Heron Sangha Meditation Center where we meet.

Now, in this Zoom environment, there's little limit to F2F offering. I am able to meet with members, both here and some from ZCLA, on a weekly basis.

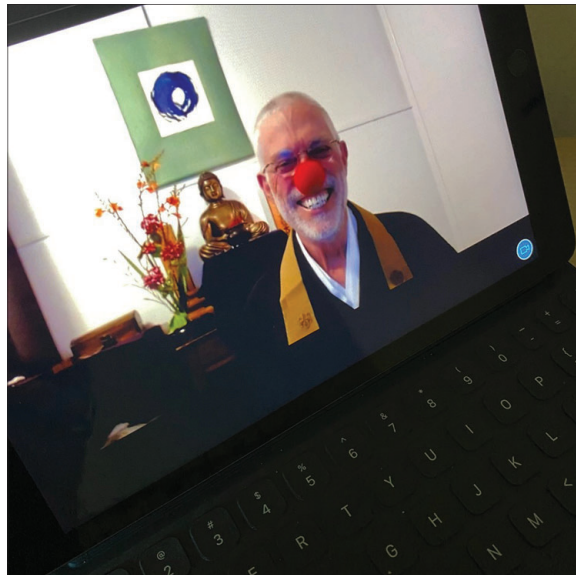
As a result of all these changes, through these past months, many of our members have deepened their practice. As a new teacher, it has deepened my own practice. Real shifts have taken place. A number of

students are now doing koan work. We've been able to spend so much more time together, connecting, practicing. Innovation and transformation!

I've been inspired by ZCLA's vision and creativity with virtual Sesshins, Zazenkais, Teishos and Dharma Talks, online Services, Chant Circles, and Dharma Holder ceremonies. I am currently working with Roshi Egyoku on how best to handle an online entering ceremony for our first SLOZC Head Trainee, Geoff Kanjô O'Quest.

So as I often exclaim when talking from my Zoom room, “Welcome to the Los Osos Hermitage! And more specifically, welcome to Sensei Koan's bedroom!” (My Zoom room is where Sensei Koan stays when he visits.)

Sensei Shogen is the guiding teacher at the San Luis Obispo Zen Circle.



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

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

We would also like to thank all those whose names were forgotten or left unsaid.



Painting



Relaxing



Cooking



Trimming



A gift from Roshi Egyoku to ZCLA of a Black female raku Buddha made by Anita Feng.



Face mask washing



Tea time

To **Rev. Jitsujo Gauthier** and **Harlan Jindo Pace** for facilitating the Anit-Racist Group;

To **Geri Meiho Bryan** and **Bob Doetsu Ross** for all their gardening, trimming, and weeding around the Zen Center;

To **John Kyogen Rosania** and **Reeb Kaizen Venners** for the work they're doing on our new website creating new information for our readers and keeping the website up-to-date;

To **Ty Jotai Webb** for all the work installing security cameras in and around the Zen Center and for enhancing and expanding our WiFi network in our buildings;

To **Roshi Egyoku**, our **Teachers**, and the **Board of Directors** for our Statement of Solidarity;

To **Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert** for sending out our ZOOM week emails and the daily sitting ZOOM links. And especially for being our consummate ZOOM Host;

To **Jitsujo**, **Meiho**, **Dharma-Joy**, **Chris Hackman**, and **George Mukei Horner** for the Chant Circle for the health and wellbeing of our Abbot Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen;

To **Darla Myoho Fjeld** for leading the June Virtual Zazenkai;

To **Roshi Egyoku** for organizing the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Group;

To the **Teachers Circle** for offering over 100 F2F to our members on a weekly basis;

To the Zen Center's new Program Circle for facilitating the transition to ZCLA Live: **Sensei Senshin**, **Dharma-Joy**, **Jitsujo**, **Myoho**, **Sensei Faith-Mind**, **Mukei**, **Roshi Egyoku**, **Jotai**, **Kyogen**, and **Kaizen**;

To the **Board of Directors** and **Teachers Circle** for weekly meetings to ensure smooth pivot during the Pandemic;

To the Abbot Seat Circle members: Board President **Patti Muso Giggans**, CFO **Frank Genku Martinez**, Business Manager **Mary Rios**, Resident Steward **Kaizen**, and Resident Teacher **Roshi Egyoku** for holding the Abbot's Seat during the Abbot's medical leave.

To **Roshi Egyoku** for her Sutra class and the Householder Koan class. Also for leading Growing a Plum Blossom On-line Sesshin. And for gifting a Black female raku Buddha made by Anita Feng.

ZCLA Affiliated Groups

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

The San Luis Obispo Zen Circle (CA)
led by Sensei Mark Shogen Bloodgood

Wild River Zen Circle (Nevada City, CA)
led by Sensei Jeanne Dokai Dickenson

The Valley Sangha (Woodland Hills, CA)
coordinated by Marc Dogen Fontaine and
Michael Jishin Fritzen

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

Outreach Groups

CMC Buddhist Fellowship Group
California Men's Colony (CMC)
(San Luis Obispo, CA)
led by Sensei Mark Shogen Bloodgood

Contact info@zcla.org for information.



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 training and resources for realizing the oneness of life, to maintain the precepts, and to embody the Three Tenets of Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action. **Our vision** is an enlightened world free of suffering, in which all beings live in harmony with each other and the earth, everyone has enough, deep wisdom is realized and compassion flows unhindered.

Founding Abbot: Taizan Maezumi Roshi

Abbot 1995-1999: Roshi Bernard Glassman

Abbot Emeritus 1999-2019: Roshi Egyoku Nakao

The Seats: Abbot, Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen;

Head/Resident Teacher, Roshi Egyoku Nakao

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Sangha Rites of Passage

Welcome New Members

Illana Berger

Robert Evans

Rev. Tim Tetsudo Langdell

Amanda Manceri

Alvarez Ricardez

Robert Dokan Sandberg

Nathaniel Schultice

Dharma Holder Empowerments

Darla Myoho Fjeld

Jitsujo Gauthier

Jonathan Kaigen Levy

Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert

In Memoriam

John Lafia

April 2, 1957 - April 29, 2020

Roshi Alfred Jitsudo Mugai Ancheta

1943 - May 9, 2020



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