

Stillpoint, Inc.

444 Olympia Road
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The Newsletter
for
Pittsburgh's
Soto Zen Practice
Community



Receiving the Precepts: (Left) Scenes from the Jukai ceremony; (above) the preceptors with Rev. Shohaku Okumura (left) —Photos by Carrie Abels

Sanshin Zen Community, founded by Rev. Shohaku Okumura, has purchased a parcel of land in Bloomington, Indiana, as a site for a new Zen center. The completed complex will consist of a meditation hall, dormitory/dinning hall and a residence, all surrounding a central courtyard/garden. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in April to celebrate the building of this center. Stillpoint members Don Orr, Tim Kennedy, and Mark Pfaff attended the ceremony. For more information about the new center, visit www.sanshinzencommunity.org.



Stillpoint Notes

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A Message from the President

Dear Stillpoint,

Well, we finally had the first sitting in the new zendo. It was wonderful getting together with 20 sangha members together for a sit.

The day was nice and it was great to have some people from out of town show up (a couple of guys from Steubenville came). We did our normal service—the walking was a little complicated when people couldn't figure out how to do a faster walk after the slow kinhin, but it all worked out. And the chanting was good—we chanted softly so that we wouldn't create the disturbing effect of 'Buddhism wafting out onto the morning streets of Lawrenceville.' We're such good neighbors.

I want to thank those who are responsible for our being able to be in this zendo—those who put in long, long hours of work. There are Don Orr and Jeff Cooper and Jay Hershey; these guys are putting in full days every week. There are others like Mark Pfaff who are frequently seen helping and many more—thanks to all of you. Also, we have some anonymous benefactors who have generously donated monies for our building fund—thanks to you folks. Of course, money is critical.

Also, I want to recognize a very important group of people for the part they played in getting us into the new zendo. Those are the people who sit with us—anyone who sits with us. Of course it is sometimes hard to see how sitting plays a part in getting a thing like this done. It is hard to see how we can appreciate someone for sitting and doing nothing. But we do. That is our practice. That is what keeps our practice going. And it is truly doing nothing. So, it is hard for us to see the value of this part of it.

Why is nothing a thing that we zen folks appreciate? Shohaku so frequently tells us "Zen is good for nothing." I would add to that: "Zen is good for NOTHING" and "a good thing is not as good as NOTHING."

Gassho,

Sangha News

Stillpoint celebrates another Jukai

Eleven more members of the Stillpoint community received the precepts with Rev. Shohaku Okumura at a Jukai ceremony at last November's retreat. They are: Anne Albertson, Jackie Apone, Stephanie Byram, Jeff Cooper, Mark Kasunic, Robert La Bobgah, Barbara Lebeau, Cheryl Massimo, Dennis Moran, Mark Pfaff and Mimi Sherman.

Our dharma sister Stephanie Byram, who passed away last summer and had been preparing receive the precepts, received them posthumously. The group received the precepts, the rakusus they sewed and their lineage papers during the ceremony, which was attended by many family members and friends. Shohaku Okumura was the preceptor, and Rev. Teijo Munnich was assistant. Zuiko Redding spent a weekend with the group, instructing them in the basics of sewing the rakusu garments, and Catherine Gammon also helped with sewing guidance. Many bows to the energy and work this group put into preparing themselves for this step forward in their practice.

September 11 Sittings

There will be two sittings at the Stillpoint zendo on September 11 to mark the first anniversary of the tragic events in New York, Washington DC and Shanksville.

A morning sitting will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 9:40 a.m.—the time during which the attacks occurred, and an evening sitting from 7 p.m. to 8:10 p.m. The evening session will be followed by a taped lecture by Shohaku Okumura on how to meet in our hearts and minds the violence and anger of others.

Volunteers Wanted

Although the new zendo is open, there's still a lot to do on the building in terms of remodeling, cleaning, gardening—you name it. There are plenty of opportunities for work practice. There's a list of jobs to be done posted at the zendo.

A New Home

Stillpoint continues to search for a new home. Sangha member Catherine Gammon has most generously opened her home as a temporary sangha, but we will need to relocate by the end of November. Catherine has left the area to begin her studies and the house has been sold.

Several sangha members are exploring other options, including trying to purchase a property that would serve as a sitting and retreat space.

Your suggestions and support are important. Anyone with ideas for temporary or permanent space can contact any board member.

Many of you have kindly offered pledges to help this become a reality. If you have not yet done so, please send them in so that we can be ready to move forward with this project.

Special Events for Friends of Stillpoint

Please join us on Thursday, October 11, when Stillpoint and Peaceful Dwelling Place will cohost "An Evening with Beth Goldring," featuring a talk on the second of the Four Great Vows: "Delusions are inexhaustible. I vow to end them." Exploring what it means to end delusion, Beth will discuss how this vow can help us to find a peaceful heart in the midst of troubling times and terrible conditions.

This will be the third annual visit and talk by Beth with the Pittsburgh community. A student of the late Maurine Stuart Roshi, she began her Zen practice in 1978 and was ordained in 1995. For several years, Beth has worked with destitute AIDS patients in Cambodia.

The event will be held at the Nuin Center, 5655 Bryant Street, one block from N. Negley Avenue in Highland Park. The schedule is

6:30 p.m. Zazen, sitting meditation
7:00 pm. Kinhin, walking meditation
7:10 p.m. Zazen
8:00 p.m. Program:

"What Does It Mean to End Delusion?"

Those planning to take part in the meditation should arrive by 6:20 and bring cushions if they have them (a limited number will be on hand).

Orientation for newcomers will start at 5:45 p.m.

Donations will be used to support Beth's work among the poor in Cambodia. For more information, call Barbara Lebeau at 412-422-3456.

Sensei Janet Jiryu Abels will visit Stillpoint in October. During the all-day sitting on Oct. 13, she will give one teisho in the afternoon on the Evening Gatha ("Life and death are of supreme importance...") Sensei will also be available throughout the day for dokusan (private meetings with the teacher).

On Oct. 14, following the morning sitting and chanting service, she'll give a more informal teisho.

Her lineage is the White Plum Sangha of Soto Zen, which was founded by Maezumi Roshi and carried on by Roshi Bernie Glassman. Her teacher is Roshi Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit priest and author of books on Christianity and Zen. She's also the mother of sangha member Carrie Abels.

Many thanks to:

CATHERINE GAMMON for opening her home to Stillpoint as a temporary home while the sangha searches for a new space.

DON and **CAROLE ORR** for once again hosting a wonderful day in the sun at the third annual Stillpoint picnic and bocci tournament

ANGUS MACDONALD for putting together the chant books we now use on Sundays, and for organizing the Hana Matsuri celebration in May

MARK PFAFF for web site redesign and timely updates

CARRIE ABELS for organizing the Sunday discussion series, and Mark Pfaff for launching a new Sunday evening sitting group

And to **NEAL** and **BEV GRIEBLING**, **TIM KENNEDY** and **DON ORR** for taking on the task of organizing our retreats. There have been three successful and memorable ones so far this year.

— PRACTICE SCHEDULE —

MORNING SITTINGS

9:30 a.m. Sunday

7 a.m. Wednesday*

**Weekday morning sittings are subject to schedule changes. Please check with Barbara Lebeau at 412-422-3456.*

EVENING SITTINGS

7:00 p.m. Tuesday

6:30 p.m. Wednesday

Upcoming Sesshin Schedule:

Shohaku Okumura – November 8-11, 2001

Sangha-led sesshin are generally held the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month. Please contact Don Orr at 412-366-4268 or Jay Hershey at 412-885-6204 for details.

Note: *Please arrive at least 10 minutes early as we begin zazen promptly at the scheduled times. Latecomers are urged to remain in the foyer until a round of zazen has been completed. Newcomers are asked to schedule an orientation with a senior member before attending a scheduled sitting.*

Case 84

by Catherine Gammon

How many lifetimes of fingers will it take
if every hesitation, vacillation and doubt
if every missed moment or opportunity,
every occasion lost, feared or shunned
requires such payment?

Start now—

What is a disciple?

Not the one who steals the teacher's teaching—
the one still standing after the payback



For Jesse on his Jukai

by Catherine Gammon

in a starless sky to see the stars
in this winter to smell the spring

that—or this?—
in firewood just firewood
in ash just ash

or both or neither
not different not the same

we give up stories for this
we are creatures of story

to startle these crows up off their compost piles
and not think of van Gogh
in the dance of wing light and frost melting off pine boughs
and winter grass
not to ask if only madness sees what van Gogh saw

no thought before the thought
after the thought no thought
no thought in the thought—

now what?

Delusion, Enlightenment, Flowers and Weeds

From a talk given by Shohaku Okumura on Dogen's Shobogenzo / *Genj O Kan*

Therefore, flowers fall even though we love them; weeds grow even though we dislike them. Conveying oneself toward all things to carry out practice/enlightenment is delusion. All things coming and carrying out practice/enlightenment through the self is realization. Those who greatly realize delusion are buddhas. Those who are greatly deluded in realization are living beings. Furthermore, there are those who attain realization beyond realization and those who are deluded within delusion.

In this section, Dogen discusses delusion and realization/enlightenment, and buddhas and living beings as a relationship, the way we relate or connect with all beings.

There are things we like and things we don't like. He uses two examples—flowers and weeds. The flower is a symbol of something we like. The weed is something we don't like. Flowers and weeds are not so different: They are all plants. We pick weeds and we try to grow vegetables. We need vegetables to eat. They support our life. There are some things we have to grow, and some things we have to pick out and throw away. That is our human condition. We cannot eat weeds, so we have to pick weeds.

When I was in Massachusetts, since I had grown up in the city, growing vegetables was a new experience for me. In the beginning, I couldn't tell which were vegetables and which were weeds. We have to make a distinction. We need wisdom to discriminate between which we grow and which we don't need. And we have to pick the weeds. That is our practice when we take care of a green garden.

But somehow, I felt guilty picking the weeds, because vegetables and weeds are not so different. But because we need vegetables, we hate weeds. We don't hate weeds or dislike weeds when they grow in the mountains or in the meadow, but when they disturb our purpose—that is, growing vegetables to keep us alive—weeds become something we dislike. Because we hate weeds, it seems they grow more quickly, and almost always are stronger than vegetables.

In the case of our practice, weeds are like delusion, and flowers or vegetables are enlightenment. We love enlightenment. We dislike delusion. So we try to weed or pick out delusion or deluded ideas. But the more we try to take them away, the more they grow.

So Dogen said, "Therefore, flowers fall even though we love them; weeds grow even though we dislike them." This is the reality we are living in. When I lived in Massachusetts, the first year we cut the trees and took out the stumps, and made the piece of land into our vegetable gardens. The very first year, even weeds didn't grow. We had only a little spinach. The soil was not so rich. At that time I found that weeds are also a crop. When we pick weeds to make them into compost and put the compost back into the soil, the weeds made the soil rich. So actually, weeds help the vegetables to grow if we work hard to make them into compost.

Our delusive ideas or desires, or poisonous mind, are like weeds. Poisonous mind is not really poisonous. It's poisonous when we misuse it. The poisonous mind is also part of our life force. If we know how to take care

of it, the poisonous mind can also help us to live in a healthy way. But in order to do so, we need to work hard.

When we sit in our zazen, our greed and anger/hatred come up. Each time we try to let go. If we try to pick them up and put them into compost, our three poisonous minds—greed, anger and ignorance—makes our life sweet, rich and healthy. I've talked about the sweet persimmon and astringent persimmon. Astringent persimmon is like a weed or delusion or poisonous mind. But in order to make sweet persimmon, we need astringent persimmon. Weeds and vegetables are the same.

Menzan Zuiho, one of the Japanese Soto Zen masters (1683-1769), said when we use greed as an energy to practice, greed becomes a vow of saving all beings, or studying the dharma, doing good things. We use greed to do good things. Anger becomes the vow to avoid bad things, or evil karma. Ignorance functions as nondiscrimination between self and others and embracing all living beings.

Our practice is not to eliminate or kill those three poisonous minds, but pick them and put them in the compost, and those things will enrich our life. When we spray, the weed dies, and it destroys the environment. If we kill the three poisonous minds, there's no way to live. We should think and practice how we can use three poisonous minds as nutrition in our life.

Anyway, there are flowers or vegetables, things we can eat, things we love, and things we don't like, things we can't eat, things which are not valuable. That is our life.

Our life is in relationship with all beings. When we talk about all beings, often we forget we are included in that "all beings." We think we are subject and all beings are objects. That is one cause of the problem. We think "This is flower; we love them. And this is weed; we don't like them." We separate or categorize ten thousand dharmas into two categories. We forget we ourselves are part of ten thousand dharmas. We are not separated from these things. Ten thousand dharmas are not outside. We are part of the network of ten thousand dharmas.

In the next sentence, Dogen says, "Conveying oneself toward all things to carry out practice/enlightenment is delusion. All things coming and carrying out practice/enlightenment through the self is realization." This is Dogen's definition of delusion and realization. He defined delusion and enlightenment as the relationship between self and all beings. Self is not subject, and all beings are not objects.

That expression "practice/enlightenment is a translation of "shu-sho." "Shu" is practice and "sho" is "enlightenment" or "realization," or in Japanese, satori. "Sho" as a Chinese character, means evidence or proof. "Shu-sho" is an abbreviation of a longer expression, a compound of four Chinese characters; "mon-shi-shu-sho", that mean "to hear," "to think," "to practice" and "to verify." That means when you hear someone's teaching, you think about it. And if you think it might be true, you trust the teaching and try to put into practice. This is intellectual understanding.

When we hear the Buddha's teaching, we try to understand it intellectually and if we think it might be true, we put it into practice. And through practice, we find what Buddha taught is really true. That is enlightenment

or verification. To believe in the teaching as a verbal expression is not needed anymore, because we know it's true through our own experience.

That means practice is a cause and enlightenment is a result. When Dogen says practice and enlightenment are one, that means within our practice there is verification. We don't need verification from some other person. Practice is itself verification.

But somehow we think our practice is not enlightenment. We think that after a certain period of practice, we attain something called enlightenment. We separate practice and attainment of enlightenment. We feel practice is difficult and often so painful but we have to go through it.

When we practice in the way we convey oneself toward all beings, there's a separation between things and us. We try to carry this person, the self, toward the object, all other things, the rest of the world, and try to figure out what all things are. We are a kind of observer, and try to see the truth or reality as a kind of object. There is a separation between subject and object. We try to get something from outside. When we study dharma, we often have this attitude. We want to find the truth and make it our possession, and become an enlightened person. That is how we usually think about our practice. When we know nothing about Buddhism, our goal is to become an enlightened person. That is how we usually understand the process of step-by-step practice toward enlightenment.

It's like when we get our driving license. First we study how the car works and how to operate it. And we start to drive. We practice. We get used to driving, and we get a license. Then we can drive. We think our practice of dharma is something like that. But according to Dogen, our practice is not like getting a driving license. Based on such an attitude, our practice is nothing other than delusion.

That is his basic definition of delusion. We think there is some kind of truth or reality objectively, and since we are deluded, we ought to get to that reality. In order to do so, we have to study and get rid of our delusion. Then we can get that reality or truth. Such a practice is based on our basic delusion of separation between self and all beings. We try to control all beings, and we try to control this person.

Dogen said, "All things coming and carrying out practice/enlightenment through the self is realization." In this case, the self is a part of all beings. In that network of interdependent origination, we are supported by all beings, we are produced by all beings. Since we human beings are born in a very immature state, we cannot survive the first years without protection from our parents or our community. We need to learn many things. We learn how to think, how to express our feelings, how to understand things. This is kind of a present from all beings. We can live as human beings only as a part of the network of interdependent origination. We are produced by all beings, and we become part of all beings, and we maintain the network of all beings. Whether we understand that reality of interdependent origination or not, we are part of it.

When we study dharma, as Dogen said, we need to forget the view of separation between self and others. That means our way of thinking and feeling is created by all beings. So our practice is actually done by all things.

We are part of the universe. When we see the universe, the universe sees the universal itself. When we see all beings, all beings see all beings. We are a part of all beings, like eyes are part of our body or mind is a part of our being. The way we see things is the way the universe sees things. Our practice is done by all things, not done by this one individual person. The subject of our practice is not this person, but all beings. Our sitting practice is not my personal practice in order to make this person better, but all beings allowing this person to practice. The subject of the sitting is not this person. The subject of this practice is all beings. Sitting is not for the sake of this person getting something better, but within this sitting practice, we are open to all beings, and we let go of whatever comes up in our mind.

When we grasp, I am Shohaku and I am a Buddhist priest. But when we let go, I am not a Buddhist, I'm not a priest, I am not Shohaku. When we sit facing the wall, without comparing ourselves with anything else, then I'm really nothing. By sitting in this posture, I'm letting go of whatever thought comes up. We become part of the network of interdependent origination, of all ten thousand dharmas. So our practice in a sense allow us to actively participates in the network of interdependent origination. There's no attainment, no gain, but just be there, one hundred percent. That is the meaning of being mindfulness.

The Chinese character for mindfulness has two parts: The lower part of the character means "mind," and the upper part means "present moment." So, mind within present moment.

Our minds can be sometimes in the past or sometimes in the future. I think about something I did yesterday and I think what I should do tomorrow. To be mindful means we are a hundred percent right now, right here. When we sit, we just sit a hundred percent. When we eat, we just eat. When we work, just work. When we sit, we can let go of everything and really just sit. When we work in our daily lives, we can't let go of everything. But we should think only about what we are doing; so we let go of distractions and focus on what we are doing. That is mindfulness in our day-to-day activities.

In zazen, to be mindful means to sit one hundred percent and let go of whatever comes up in our mind, even our aspiration to become enlightened. Just be there. According to Dogen, that is enlightenment. This action—sitting in the zendo—is not my personal action, but through this person's sitting or practice, all beings sit zazen. We are sitting together with all beings. That's why Dogen Zenji used the analogy of moon within a dewdrop. Within the tiny dewdrop, the vast moonlight is reflected. It's not a matter of us attaining the moonlight. The moonlight is reflected by itself, because we are part of the moonlight from the beginning.

The next two sentences are Dogen's definition of Buddha. He said, "Those who greatly realize delusion are buddhas. Those who are greatly deluded in realization are living beings." When he says the buddhas are those who greatly realize delusion, that means they see delusion as delusion in practice. He is talking about the buddha way we are practicing. So here, Buddha is not some group of people who have already finished practice and become enlightened and are living in buddhahood. When we see delusion as delusion, that is realization. Our realization does not eliminate the delusion.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Enlightenment is not like spraying and killing the weeds. We pick up the weeds and put them into compost, and the weeds help us to enrich our life. We don't kill delusion. We need that delusion. We need our aspiration, we need our desire to study dharma. But he said buddhas are those who greatly realize delusion. When we see that is delusion, that doesn't mean we stop doing it. We realize that delusion and keep practicing. In order to keep practicing, we need our motivation. Our mind is also a part of all beings: it came from the universal life. If we personalize it and grasp it as my individual possession, then we are deluded. When we realize that is delusion, then we are buddhas—not we, but our practice. Those who greatly realize delusion are buddhas.

The relationship between self and all beings becomes complicated. When we are deluded within realization, when we understand that we are part of all beings, we study and practice the way all beings are and participate with it: that is realization. But we are deluded within this realization and we think, "I have to practice, I have to study. I want to be enlightened or attain something." That is delusion. But this delusion is also within the buddha way. So by using the words such as realization and delusion, or living beings and buddhas, Dogen tries to see the relationship between self and all beings in more detail, in a more complex way. Basically, whether we understand it or not, we are part of the interconnected origination. Even when we act against that, still we are within the interconnection. But when we act in that way and live in the selfish way, somehow we feel our life is not OK. So we try to find the way of life based on that reality. That is our motivation to study not only Buddhism or Zen, but to study some kind of spiritual or philosophical teachings. That is the way we convey ourselves into all beings. According to Dogen, that is delusion. But without this delusion, we can't really start to practice. We need it. And when we see that is delusion, he said, that is realization.

When we start to study and we think we understand what Buddha says, when we see the reality of interconnectedness of all beings, then we feel we've found the truth and we want to practice. When we think in that way, and grasp that this is a wonderful way of life, then Dogen cautions us and says, "that is delusion." But without this delusion, we cannot practice.

So we should keep practicing without grasping that this is enlightenment or this is buddha. We should keep studying, deepening our understanding, and participate in this relationship. When we think this is good or true or I am doing a good thing, then we are already in the trap of self-centeredness. What Dogen wanted to show us is—keep practicing moment by moment, without grasping. We don't need to say we are deluded. Keep practicing without evaluation. Keep practicing, making effort following the Buddha's teachings. Then our path becomes the buddha way.

And Dogen says, "Furthermore, there are those who attain realization and those are deluded within delusion." There are so many different conditions within our practice. Each moment, we have to really let go of even our understanding or our aspiration to practice, or to become buddhas, and become this moment, right now, in which we are really living together with all beings. That is enlightenment or realization and that is buddha. When we practice with such an attitude, we are buddha, or our practice is buddha. But when we think this is buddha, then we miss it. So what we do is keep opening the hand, or letting go of whatever thought arises.

That is Dogen's definition of practice and enlightenment, and delusion and enlightenment, and living beings and buddhas. What Dogen really wanted to say in *Genjokoan* is that those things are not something fixed, but are within our life, in which we have relationship with all other beings and are part of.

RIGHT: (L-R) Don Orr, Teijo Munnich, and Shohaku Okumura chat following the groundbreaking ceremony for the Sanshin Zen Center.

BELOW LEFT: Rev. Shohaku Okumura concludes the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Sanshin Zen Center.

BELOW RIGHT: Rev. Shohaku Okumura celebrates the groundbreaking of the Sanshin Zen Center, with students and practitioners from around the country.

PHOTOS BY MARK PFAFF

