

# Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

November 2017

## Living on the Edge of What Matters Most

In our daily practice life we make efforts, large and small, to commit to sitting with *stillness, clear seeing, perseverance, willingness, and loving-kindness*. During Practice Period we intentionally address the nooks and crannies where we are inclined to hide from ourselves. We commit to leaning into the edginess of our lives rather than running for cover. Experience tells us of the value of this effort. And yet when practice period ends we often begin to turn away from the very thing we found most satisfying.

As we continue experiencing life's unfolding, daily evidence of human suffering—images of victims of natural disaster, gun violence, or war—makes it hard not to turn away. We can forget our tools, lose our focus, and shift to hopelessness and despair at the collective human situation. We are at our edge. We don't want it to be this way. We are tempted to retreat from our commitment to awareness and instead shift to the ever-ready and oh-so-familiar blaming, judging, raging response that we know so well. And while it is understandable that we fall into despair when we are dealing with life's most tragic moments, isn't it also true that we are tempted to do the same thing with relatively minor disappointments or irritations?

The milk spills in the car, our plans get interrupted, someone says something harsh to us, or heaven forbid just says something we disagree with, and it is stunning to observe our own ability to spiral into despair. *As if it was a crisis*. The package didn't arrive—edgy. The appreciation wasn't expressed—edgy. The words came out harsh—edgy. The flight got cancelled—edgy. There was an overcharge on the bill—edgy. The person across from you is sure they are right—edgy.

We live in a world of edges, small and ruffled, large and jagged, and each presents its unique opportunity to bring forward



### December Sesshin

Registration for the December sesshin is open now. If you can't attend the whole sesshin you can apply for the first or last three days. If you are coming from out of town, consider staying for the annual New Year's brunch on January 1, 2018.

### 2018 Sesshin Schedule

The sesshin dates for the coming year are as follows:  
 February 16–19, 2018  
 April 3–8, 2018  
 June 7–10, 2018  
 August 7–12, 2018  
 October 5–8, 2018  
 December 26–31, 2018  
 Please plan accordingly.

### Announcements

### Sesshin Application

Click [here](#) to see this newsletter online.

***We live in a world of edges... each presents its unique opportunity to bring forward awareness of our own personal desire to hide.***

awareness of our own personal desire to hide.

How long will it take this time before we once again bow in *stillness* to our own hurt, defensiveness, heartache, and pain? How long will it be this time before we allow for *clear seeing* to show itself not only in the relentless flood of thoughts, but also in the discomfiture in the body and in the larger texture of the environment around us?

With *perseverance*, we observe ourselves as we fall back to the familiar internal dialogue, and we watch ourselves fiercely proclaim our rage at the injustice of this person or that organization. We experience our own stifled sadness as we acknowledge the urge to turn to food, alcohol, or remember with remorse our expressed irritability toward a family member or friend.

As much as we want to separate ourselves, when we bring forward *willingness*, we once again become aware that we are in fact part of a human collective experience of living. We are one with the other. And they are one with us. And our attempts to separate ourselves out are futile denials of the interconnectedness of life as it is.

So here we are. Back to the beginning of facing another edge. Sitting with just one breath at a time welcoming our sorrows. Witnessing our thoughts, feeling our bodies, noticing the environment that surrounds us. The place where we see that the air that touches our skin, yours and mine, is part of the continuum of a unified whole.

As Naomi Shihab Nye writes:

*You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes...<sup>1</sup>*

When we allow ourselves to sit with our own rage, our own hurt, our own inability to stay with our practice edge, we also allow ourselves to open to someone else's inability to stay with the sometimes unbearable experience of life. We find what we have in common. And while the question "How could he or she do this?" remains, by staying present to the unbearable pain we can see that it too is part of the interconnected whole. *His pain, her pain,*

*my pain—the pain we all share.*

This can only be proven in the experiential world. Someone else's words are not enough. But Naomi Nye's poem and our practice guideposts are encouragement to persevere toward *loving-kindness*. To be willing to clearly see all that blocks our heart from opening, and to stay, stay, stay with our own broken-hearted struggle with life as it is right now. As we watch ourselves experience the futility of rage and blame, we also might just watch ourselves experience the willingness to open to compassion for our own heartache. Compassion for our own struggle.

*And when the veil of separation rises, life simply unfolds as it will<sup>2</sup>.* Our authentic openheartedness prevails. It's what matters most. It is genuinely satisfying. And each time it shows itself, it inspires us to continue to notice that it goes everywhere with us, *like a shadow or friend<sup>3</sup>*, just waiting to be noticed.

*Diane Moore*

<sup>1</sup> Nye, Naomi Shihab, "Kindness." *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*. Eighth Mountain Press, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Bayda, Ezra, "What is Our Life About?" *Being Zen*. Shambhala Publications, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Nye, "Kindness."