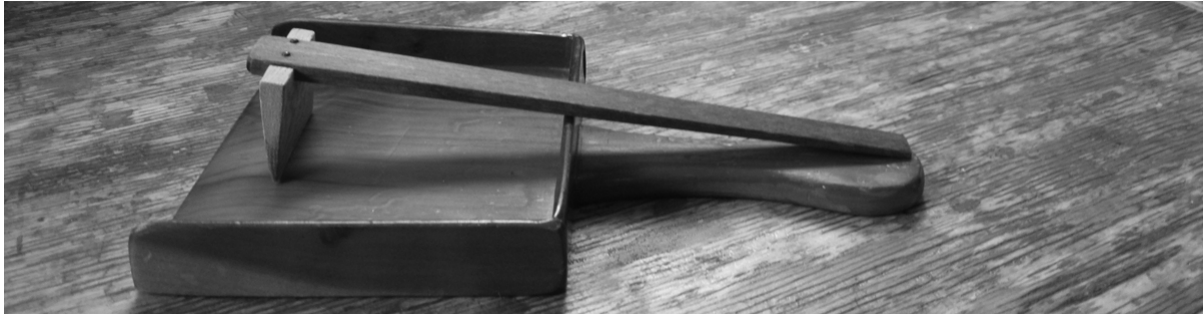


Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

March-April 2020



Sitting Sesshin

Sesshin is a priceless practice opportunity. The word means “connecting with heartmind” or “touching heartmind,” and that is ultimately what this endeavor is all about. In doing the healing work of practicing together quietly, we sit not only for ourselves but for everyone, including those beyond the walls of the zendo.

For several days, we agree to interrupt the everyday activities of our lives. We step away from work, from friends and family, and from the comforts of our home. We set aside our to-do list, turn off our cell phone, and put down the good book that we’ve been reading.

For what? Sesshin allows us to go deeper. It unites us in stillness and silence, with the understanding that we are not here to control what transpires but rather to allow whatever comes up to come up—and to experience all of it within spacious, vivid awareness. In the long hours of extended sitting—with achy knees and little to entertain us—practice asks us to keep making the soft yet meticulous effort to see through our self-centered preoccupations and to settle into our true nature. To come home, as Dogen Zenji said, to our awakened being.

Wednesday Topic:

Generosity In March, Wednesday evening speakers will address the topic of generosity. The questions are below. You may want to reflect on these in your own practice, as well.

In the [January–February newsletter](#), which mailed on January 21, Diane Moore wrote about various kinds of generosity:

- generosity with money
- generosity of mind
- generosity of body
- generosity of heart
- generosity of spirit

It's fair to say that if we are not yet able to recognize when we are thinking, if we are not able to see or hear our thoughts, then our practice has not yet begun in earnest. The soft effort that is needed to wake up requires some ability to notice thought arising in mind and body; some capacity to disengage from thinking without falling into judgment; and some ability to open to the seamless experience of "Just this." All of it: comfort and discomfort, breath and body, shadow and light, bird, traffic, the heater with its clunky percussion, and now the next self-centered thought arising.

Kosho Uchiyama gives—to my mind—one of the most lovely and useful descriptions of this practice in his expression "opening the hand of thought." Uchiyama writes, "We human beings make up illusions and then become lost and confused in the jungle we ourselves have created. How can we awaken from these illusions? The only way is to open the hand of thought, because our thoughts themselves are the source of illusion ... To practice opening the hand of thought concretely with the body and mind is *zazen*."

It's not that thinking is bad, but so much of our thinking is self-centered and distracted, and when that kind of thinking is allowed to run amok, it inhibits our ability to live a considerate and meaningful life—a life that is inherently satisfying, in contrast to the self-centered, distracted life that invariably leaves us restless and wanting. The self-centered thought we are having *is* the hairbreadth of difference that separates heaven and earth. "What is most valuable isn't fabricated in our heads," Uchiyama reminds us. "[What is most valuable] arises when we open the hand of thought."

So what happens, then, if discomfort arises? Are we willing to feel it? Are we willing to be the bristle of anger or the quiver of fear? And if the answer is no, are we willing to feel the resistance that gets in the way?

We don't sit to feel special or wise or pure. We sit to relinquish our agendas and distractions and to reside in the reality of life as it is arising. We sit to connect with

- generosity with time

Please reflect on this article and, speaking from your own experience, describe a few ways in which practice is helping you to live generously. Be specific about how this generosity shows up in the world. Does it fall within the categories that Diane describes? Also, where do you find it a struggle to be generous? And is practice helping you to be more aware of the ways you hold back? Is it more difficult for you to be generous with yourself or with others? Choose an area in which you'd like to seed an intention for greater generosity. Please state this as an aspiration for your practice going forward.

All-Day Sitting (Zazenkai) March 21, April 18 and 19.

Participants should have some practice experience at ZCSD before attending an all-day sitting. We suggest that those who are new to practice limit themselves to one block per day. Food is not provided during all-day sittings. You are welcome to bring your own or eat somewhere nearby.

heartmind. And little by little, this allows our human suffering to settle and be healed.

Some aspects of sesshin may not be to our liking, but for us, as practitioners, there is treasure in that. In the gap between our desires and reality, between reality and our judgments, lies our practice opportunity.

We know what tends to happen: Sitting goes smoothly for a while—we feel pretty good—but then there’s a bumpy patch. And that’s fine. We forget things in practice. I sometimes forget that it’s okay to feel miserable; and when I feel that way, my thoughts get busy trying to fix it. So as soon as I notice that, it’s a good idea for me to remember that, in that moment, residing in the sensory experience of “feeling a bit miserable” is precisely my practice. Not indulging the storyline (“poor me”)—refraining from that—but allowing the discomfort to be felt.

When there is turbulence in body and mind, whatever arises is our practice. We can also notice the requirements we have of sesshin. Is it supposed to give us more insights, greater peace, or less boredom? What is “boredom” in the body, free of concepts?

Let’s remember the reading: “Heartmind has the totality of space—nothing lacking, nothing extra.” Surely, then, within heartmind there is space for experiencing the restlessness of boredom or being the quiver of fear.

Emily Dickinson gave us the line “Forever is composed of nows.” Now... and now ... and now ... *forever*. It’s okay to get caught. It’s okay to have a bumpy ride. What matters is making the diligent effort to be present as often as we can, for as long as we can.

As we engage in this effort together, can we allow for the *possibility* that everything is unfolding within heartmind?

—Kate Watson-Forbess
Adapted from a talk given during the
December 2019 sesshin

Facilities are available for warming food at the Center. These longer sittings can be valuable opportunities to go a little deeper in practice. [Here is the schedule.](#)

[Announcements](#)
[Sesshin Application](#)

*In the gap
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Cultivate mercy towards yourself; compassion towards others will follow.