

Zen Heart Sangha

Issue 15

Fall/Winter 2008 Newsletter

Special Upcoming Events

Guest Speakers:

- Sept. 15: Cornelia Shonkwiler
(Kannon Do)
Sept. 22: Tova Green (SFZC)
Nov. 10: Shaila Catherine (IMSB)

Special Events:

1-Day Retreat

October 18

Segaki (Hungry Ghosts)

Ceremony

October 27

1-Day Rohatsu Sesshin

December 6

Last Monday Evening of 2008

December 15

Last Saturday Morning of 2008

December 20

Monthly Schedule

Monday evenings*

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Service	7:40
Lecture	7:50
Final Bows	8:45
End Evening	9:00

* except 1st Mondays

1st Monday of month: Retreat

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Kinhin	7:30
Formal Tea	7:40
Kinhin	7:50
Zazen	8:00
Service	8:30
End Evening	8:45

1st & 3rd Saturdays of month

Zazen	5:50 am
Kinhin	6:20
Zazen	6:30
Service	7:00
Community breakfast	7:20
Soji (Cleanup)	8:00
Zazen	8:40
Study/Tea	9:10
End program	10:10

Zazen – sitting meditation
Kinhin – walking meditation

A Tender Heart

When Zen Master Dogen returned to Japan from training in China, he was asked what he had attained there. He replied, "A tender heart."

This issue is devoted to reflections and recollections of our first practice period and Dharma Inquiry Ceremony held in June. Dogen spent thirty years of hard training in China before returning to his home in Japan. I'm fairly certain that his reply to the above question was not expected, but it is pure Dogen and points to the true meaning of our practice period. What were we doing here during our month of intensified practice? What are we ever doing other than finding and manifesting our tender hearts?

Suzuki Roshi used to compare Zen students to rocks in a stream, knocking against each other until, over time, all of the rough and hard edges have softened and rounded. This is actually true for everyone; no matter how lovely we are or how many values we share with someone, we eventually come up against places where we do not comfortably meet. The tendency when such difficulties arise is to run away and look for a new situation where we believe there will be no rough edges. A sangha, however, is the group with whom we make a commitment to jump into the dharma stream with all our edges and remain as long as it takes to soften ourselves and every rock in the river bed—our bodhisattva vow. Practice trains us to return again and again to right speech and action, mindfulness and meditation, allowing our tender hearts to emerge naturally with great joy.

The basic structure of all practice periods is similar, but this is just the river bed that supports the rolling rocks. The dharma stream flows through each of us, knocking us around as we figure out where to jump in and how to deal with the current. The Shuso has one experience of the practice period, the teacher has another, and each participant brings his or her own rock to the river bed, making it more rich and varied with each contribution. How can you know in advance which rocks you will rub up against or what place you will have in the stream until you are actually in it? How can you describe a practice period ahead of time, much less afterwards?

All we can know for sure is that the entire sangha jumped into the stream during that month and that is an encouraging thing. Some did it by supplying meals and some did it by committing to come for zazen more often. Some did it by sending supportive notes or by increasing their zazen periods at home. Some did it by attending the final retreat or the ceremony. Nobody worried about whether it would be comfortable or not, but just contributed to the stream bed in whatever way was needed. Tender hearts were our practice, our gift to each other, and our reward. May our tender hearts continue to grow and soften.

With many bows, Misha Shungen