

Zen Heart Sangha

Issue 18

Fall 2011 Newsletter

Special Upcoming Events

Guest Speakers:

- Sept. 26: Rev. Beth Goldring
(Cambodia)
Oct. 10: Rev. Angie Boissevain
(Floating Zendo)
Oct. 17: Rev. Jill Kaplan (ZHS)
Nov. 21: Rev. Michael Newhall
(Jikoji Zen Center)

Special Events:

Vajrapani 3-day Retreat

Oct. 21-23

Segaki Ceremony

Oct. 3

Rohatsu Commuter Retreat

Dec. 5-10

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 retreat

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Kinhin	7:40
Zazen	8:00
Three Bows	8:40
End Evening	8:45

1st & 3rd Saturdays:

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	9:15
End program	10:15

Zazen – sitting meditation
Kinhin – walking meditation

The Importance of Retreat

Not all who wander are lost...

J.R.R. Tolkien

The tradition of retreat, fundamental to all Buddhist practice, began in the time of the Buddha. He and his disciples would converge in one place and spend the monsoon season practicing together for a period of 100 days, the model for our current 3-month 'practice periods.' In lay practice, we emphasize the necessity of daily *zazen* (meditation) to maintain a flexible mind. We also understand the need for extended periods of meditation as a sangha, both for realizing individual understanding of *prajna* (wisdom) and for developing connection through *karuna* (compassion). Retreats allow us to 'wander' in the Dharma world without getting lost in self-oriented ways.

For most of us, everyday life is filled with the never-ending activities of work, study, play, and family. In the midst of so much activity, it is often difficult to see our habits of mind arising or the ways we may be causing suffering for ourselves or others. In retreat, we deliberately limit our activities to meditation, walking, eating, and sleeping in order to reduce the number of external distractions, choices, and conversations that give rise to analytical thinking, perceptions, and emotional states. The simplicity of our activities enables our ability to remain present, moment after moment, allowing an experience of spaciousness not normally available in our everyday life. As the mind begins to settle into the silence of retreat, we can more easily detect the arising of habitual thought patterns and see more clearly their inevitable passing away—clouds of thought moving across the blue sky of Mind.

However, it is important to realize that something is happening during retreat, beyond our normal understanding or logical reasoning. Zen teacher Katherine Thannas once wrote, "Whatever we think we understand (which is often psychological understanding), isn't as deep as what we don't understand. We trust that what we don't know will bring us to the deepest place." That 'deepest place' is beyond our normal way of thinking; as the sutra of *'The Hsin Hsin Ming'* (*Trust in Mind*) says: "Here thought, feeling, knowledge, and imagination are of no value. In this world of suchness there is neither self nor other-than-self." This world of suchness cannot be understood with our conventional mind, but it is there nonetheless. From it *prajna* and *karuna* arise quite naturally allowing us to experience the interconnectedness of all things.

In April, our sangha sat together for a three-day Buddha's Birthday Retreat at Vajrapani Institute. Many of those who participated shared their thoughts about what retreat means to them, and their wise offerings are included in this spring newsletter. May we share many more retreats, deepening our understanding and fulfilling our vow to end suffering.

In gassho, Misha Shungen