



## *Encouraging Words from the Teacher*

*Gillian Coote*

*No end of toku*



In our tradition, incense ash represents *toku* (Japanese) or *te* (Chinese), a word meaning power or virtue, as well as the strength of character arising from virtue and service. The practice of virtue, Aitken Roshi says in his essay The Way and It Virtue, 'is set

forth in the Tao Te Ching, the central text of Taoism, which could also be called *Te-ism*, for *Te* receives as much attention as *Tao*:

*To obtain trust, put your trust in others.*

*Take care! Speak only when it is essential.*

*Then when your work is done and the job is finished,*

*Everyone will say that it happened naturally → (1)*

It was Yamada Koun Roshi who declared: "The purpose of Zen practice is the perfection of character", on which Aitken Roshi expanded in his essay. 'Many people shy away from the idea of 'perfection'. They know that 'nobody is perfect' and so they neglect their own characters and don't try to

correct themselves. Other people tend to be perfectionistic and are reinforced in their neuroses by moral teaching. 'The word 'perfection', Roshi acknowledges, 'seems to open a can of worms.' (2)

Indeed, perfection is a process. Each of us is a work in progress - forever coming together and falling away. There will always be mistakes - one thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes! (3) Artists often leave a tiny blemish in their work to acknowledge their humanity. It is said that Islamic artists, for example, make deliberate mistakes in their work on the grounds that 'only God is perfect'.

I first encountered Aitken Roshi standing at the back of John and Shirley Cooper's little dojo, a thin, elderly gentleman in a check shirt and baggy jeans. He was reticent, even self-effacing and his glasses were dirty. Where was the great Zen Master John Cooper had promised us? Perhaps *because* he did not fit some notion I might have had of the 'perfect Zen Master', resplendent in swishing black gauze robes, austere and powerful - well, not that day anyway - this was the beginning of my long relationship as Roshi's student, of placing my trust in him.

For Chinese artist, Zhang Huan, blemishes are integral to his work, of things coming together falling away, in this case, *Sydney Buddha*. For five days in early January, 20 tonnes of wet 'incense ash' was packed into a 5.3-metre aluminium mould of a

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Buddha figure for the Sydney Festival installation. *Sydney Buddha* is a work intended to disintegrate, slowly, over three months until March 15 when it will have gradually fallen apart, its particles disturbed by vibrations in the air, climate and other environmental factors.

Zhang Huan spoke of the power and strength - like atomic bombs, he said - of the compacted tonnes of incense ash, which hold the hopes and dreams of millions of Chinese people. Only one day after the aluminium mould was removed at Carriageworks, part of *Sydney Buddha's* nose had fallen off, as well as his left forearm and hand, which the mould shows raised to chest level, with the index and thumb forming a circle, the vitarka mudra. All this toku had slid to the floor where overnight it had become the medium into which contemporary Sydney-siders were placing incense to honour this great ash Buddha, their incense in turn adding toku to the existing hillocks of ash. Fortunately, even without a nose, arm or hand, (or perhaps by the time you visit *Sydney Buddha*, without a head or shoulders either), Sakyamuni's teaching and practice continues, with us, as us.

'The Buddha Way is unsurpassed, I vow to embody it fully', we chant together. Well, we vow to embody it as fully as we can, given that we are all in the process of perfecting our characters. We even say 'The Buddha is only half-way there' and, indeed, no Zen teacher can ever perfect their character, although students may have that expectation - until the scales fall from their eyes - and no Zen student can either.

Teachers vow to serve the Dharma, speak from compassion, bow with humility, treat all beings equally and commit to ongoing practice, remembering Aitken Roshi's frequent admonition: 'Not enough, not yet enough!' Dharma teaching is an intense practice, with the teacher-student



relationship intrinsic to our tradition and always a work in progress. At its best, it is intimate, compassionate and open, which is why dokusan is such a powerful practice, mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart and predicated on the ground of trust. We learn from each other. Honesty and respect is essential and our guidance, we hope, is a matter of encouragement.

'When your practice is to reveal the essence, you are teaching without overtly teaching. You forget yourself and trust others, in effect revealing to them their own essence and they themselves turn the Dharma wheel.' (4)

Students have responsibilities too - to serve the Dharma, speak from compassion, bow with humility, treat all beings equally and commit to ongoing practice. Around the Full Moon, we gather to remember that 'reflecting upon the Precepts helps us to remember the dark side of our own, personal, full being. Our dark side is hard to see and acknowledge and yet it is wonderfully rich and fertile. Let us acknowledge those parts of ourselves that are not yet whole, as we extend to each other our loving support and acceptance.' (5)

'Virtue, the six Paramitas and perfection of character are simply labels for an organic process. Breathing in and out, you let go of poisons and establish the serene ground of the Precepts. You release defences of the self and the mind comes forth boldly with the count of one, two and three. Focused and serene, you are ready for instruction by the ten thousand things→.' (6)

Thus, moment by moment, trust in the Way and toku accumulates. I bow in gratitude.

#### Notes:

- (1) Benjamin Lynn Olson, trans., Tao Te Chong, published ms, section 17 (2) *The Way and its Virtue*, from *The Mind of Clover*, Robert Aitken, (pub. North Point Press, 1984) (3) Wu-men's verse for Case 2 of *The Gateless Barrier*, transl. Robert Aitken, pub. North Point Press, 1990 (4) *ibid.*, p.159 (5) SZC Full Moon Ceremony (6) *ibid.*, p.158.

# REPORT

## *Rohatsu sesshin*

Our 2014 Rohatsu Sesshin ran from Thursday December the 4th, till Monday December the 8th. Some twenty bodhisattvas sat during this time, with a good portion sitting full time. Among us were old timers and new members, locals and some who had come from interstate. Rohatsu is always a special occasion, but this year was particularly special as we were lead by Allan Marett who was running his first solo sesshin.

Unlike our regular autumn and spring sesshin, our Rohatsu Sesshin was non residential. This meant that while we were never astray, there was coming and going, with people arriving early in the morning ready for their tea, and leaving after Allan's closing words every night. There was a strong contingent of full time sitters who created a solid container that part timers slipped in and out of easily as they made time for a few hours sitting while still being able to deal with the necessities at this busy time of year.

On top of the availability of good coffee, thanks to the Annandale Annex more commonly known as Clover Cafe, there was another defining feature of this sesshin: public dokusan. After the teisho every day Allan would offer public dokusan, allowing brave bodhisattvas to step up and ask questions about the teisho or their practice. On one occasion Allan's teisho asked us about the morning star, and one courageous student was up to the challenge, bringing the morning star into the dojo, inspiring us

all to realise it for ourselves, and setting the tone for the rest of rohatsu.

Our 2014 Rohatsu Sesshin ended in much the same way it had started. Plumbers tending to a broken toilet that began leaking with the Jiki's first hit of the han. Thankfully Allan was on hand to clean up the mess, and aside from being limited to one toilet for the rest of the retreat, there was little

interruption after the plumbers initial inspection revealed there was no easy fix. Monday's investigations weren't too invasive, and were finished by the time shosan had completed. With some closing words from Allan and



a beautiful dedication from our first time Ino Drew Bourgeois we closed the sesshin, and gathered around for a sharing.

On top of a tremendous amount of gratitude for our dear teacher and the leaders and organisers of sesshin, including Jill Steverson for buying all the food, Jane Andino for organising everything, and Harry Tamvakeras for taking on the tenzo roll like only Harry could, many people shared deep and touching experiences, and indescribable expressed with silence and deep bows. Allan, the leaders and organisers, and everyone who sat during rohatsu is also greatly appreciative of the residents, particularly Diego and Neryl, for their forbearance and support, and for keeping Annandale spick and span before, during, and after sesshin.

## Annual ZEN Arts Sale 13-14 December



Many hours were spent in the lead up to our art show and sale, with footwork the main expense delivering the flyers to local shops, cafes and neighbours.

All this effort brought few non-zen customers. And although we raised a comparable amount of money as the recent Concert, we have learnt a few lessons for next time.

The items that sold the most were small and cheerful gift ideas and cards, rather than the larger artworks displayed as in a professional Art Gallery.

The dojo was transformed. It looked spectacular!

But no paintings were sold, except four small colorful canvasses by Glenys.

Many thanks to the organizers and helpers, as well as those generously donating their beautiful creations.

Artists were Subhana, Glenys Jackson, Barbara Wulff, Caroline Josephs, Yvonne De Haan, Janet Selby, Colin Hopkins, with cards by Womens Group, Glenys, Carl Hooper, Yvonne Hales tanka postcards with Glenys and Janet.

Apologies if I have left anyone unmentioned.

Janet Selby



## COMING EVENTS

### *Samu at Kodoji 21-22 March*

This is a wonderful opportunity for the whole family to spend the weekend at Kodoji joining with others in caring for Kodoji and getting it ready for the Transmission Sesshin in April. There will be lawn mowing, general cleaning, inventory, knife sharpening. There is also work to be done to complete the cupboard under the stairs, and some guttering to replace. Not to mention weeding! Plenty for everyone, and opportunities for sitting, and talking, and having fun together. Bring food to share, and let Tony Coote, our veteran Samu Coordinator know you are coming: [tony@tonycootearchitect.com](mailto:tony@tonycootearchitect.com) or 02 9817 3466

### *Introduction to Zen Buddhist practice*

SATURDAY MARCH 28, 1-4pm.

PAUL MALONEY

This is a half-day course open to those people who wish to learn some basic elements of Zen Buddhist theory and practice. The course will provide participants with the basics of sitting meditation (zazen) and dojo procedures to enable them to begin practice with the Sydney Zen Centre.

The cost will be \$30.

### *Sacred walking path practice*

*March 15 Meet at 9am*

Join Subhana at the labyrinth in Centennial Park for 'sacred walking path practice' on the labyrinth followed by zazen on the grass and sharing.

## Transmission Sesshin April 3-12 at Kodoji

Led by Subhana Barzaghi and Maggie Gluek ,with the Dharma Transmission Ceremony for Maggie on Saturday April 11.

This is a very special sesshin leading up to the Ceremony for Maggie Gluek to make her a Full Teacher in the Diamond Sangha after all her years of dedicated work for us all as an Apprentice Teacher. There will be much more information about this in the future, but please note the dates.

*Easter Sesshin and Transmission Ceremony Organisers:*

Contact Jillian Ball for Easter Transmission Sesshin : Kerry Stewart for the Transmission Ceremony: Diana Levy is helping both Jillian and Kerry. Please don't hesitate to use the telephone. It's a wonderful invention that enables a conversation, and that sometimes prevents muddles.

Jill – Phone: 02 9665 0172 Mobile: 0407 400 126 Email: [jillianball@bigpond.com](mailto:jillianball@bigpond.com)

Diana - Phone: 02 4751 3935 Mobile: 0432 619 305 Email: [diana.r.levy@gmail.com](mailto:diana.r.levy@gmail.com)

Kerry – Phone 02 9879 7290 Mobile: 0449 707 792 Email: [stewartkerry4@gmail.com](mailto:stewartkerry4@gmail.com)

There is a Googledoc for the Transmission Ceremony Pot Luck Lunch that will be sent out again nearer the time. People can email Kerry if they have lost the address.



## NEWS FROM THE BOARD

Jason Koh and Yvonne Hales have been preparing the necessary documents to change the SZC's constitution from a Company Limited by Guarantee to an Incorporated Association. The board informed the Sangha community of this intention at the recent AGM. Our purpose in doing this is to reduce the annual auditing fees as part of our review of SZC costs.

Jason has contacted the Department of Fair Trading and registered our name: The Sydney Zen Centre. We now have only 7 weeks to finalise the paper work which, at the moment is in the hands of Yvonne. Last night the board decided to call an extraordinary general meeting hopefully on 3<sup>rd</sup> March at 6pm where we will require a majority of Sangha members to support this change.

This note in the current newsletter is fore warning. The old constitution requires the board to notify members of an extraordinary general meeting 14 days beforehand and provide all of the necessary documents. When we get all of the paper work complete and the teachers have agreed on a number of matters concerning their role and a straight-forward statement as to what our Association does we will then send this out to the Sangha.

As this is a fairly tight schedule with a short meeting planned before the monthly board meeting we will include a proxy voting option so everyone can participate without necessarily having to come to Annandale. A very generous donation of money has been recently given to our Sangha which is greatly appreciated.

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The membership secretary Kerry Stewart has taken on the role of reminding people to pay their membership before the end of each financial year, and follow up those who may

have forgotten to do so. Some long inactive members choose to make a donation each year.

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Asking for a donation for left-over food after Rohatsu sesshin proved very successful and it is suggested that this practice be followed after each sesshin.

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Glenys Jackson has undertaken to organize our biscuits and teas for Monday and Wednesday evenings.

# Notice Board

## Dokusan

### MONDAYS:

Subhana Feb 9, 16, 23 Mar 9, 16, 23, 30

### WEDNESDAYS:

Gillian Coote Feb 11, 18, 25 Mar 11, 18, 25

April 1

## Dharma Café

February 2+4

## Full Moon Ceremony

March 2+4 (Not discussing the faults of others)

## Zazenkai

February 15

8.30-12 Gillian Coote- Talk and dokusan

## Board Meetings

February 10 & March 3rd Meeting at 6pm for zazen, start 6.30. All members welcome.

## Women's Group

February 13 Helen's  
March 7-8 Women's retreat at Kodoji

## Early Morning Zazen

Ashfield SZC members are interested in zazen and dokusan are invited to join in a small group that sits regularly on Tuesday (6-7.30 am) and Thursday (6.30-8.30pm). Contact either Allan Marett [allan.marett@gmail.com](mailto:allan.marett@gmail.com) 04097127767 or Kim Bagot [kimball67@gmail.com](mailto:kimball67@gmail.com) 0402321277.

# Regular Notices

### Gift recipient status for SZC Building Fund

The Australian Tax Office has confirmed that we are a DGR, or Deductible Gift Recipient for a fund (the Sydney Zen Centre Building Fund). This restores the status of gifts to the building fund as tax deductible for the donor. If you would like to make a donation to the building fund, simply flag it as such and we will issue a receipt against which you can claim a tax deduction from your income.

### Books for sale

*The Roaring Stream. A New Zen Reader*, ed. Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker is on sale at Annandale, along with Robert Aitken's books: *Taking the Path of Zen*, *Mind of Clover*, *The Dragon that Never Sleeps*, *Encouraging Words*, *The Morning Star*, *Vegetable Roots Discourse*, *Zen Master Raven* and *The Gateless Barrier*, plus new titles.

### Use of Kodoji

Kodoji is available for use by members of the SZC and guests (if accompanied by a member). It can also be hired by other groups if approved by the Board. Fees are \$20 per night for members and \$30 for non-members. There is a \$100 booking fee for

non-member groups. Booking of Kodoji is essential and it is also essential to receive instructions about use of the facility before going there. Please note that the local Fire Brigade has advised restrictions during Summer.

Try giving the family a wonderful weekend, or yourself a few days of private retreat. Enquiries to Brendon Stewart, phone 9879 7290, email [stewarts34@bigpond.com](mailto:stewarts34@bigpond.com)

### Blue Mountains Zen

The Blue Mountains Zen Group meets on the second and fourth Sunday of each month, from 3-5 p.m., at Paul Maloney's home, 19 Russell Road, Leura. Phone 4784 2136. The meeting is occasionally held at another venue, so it is best to check some days before.

### Canberra Zen Group

Meets on Wednesday evenings.

Please contact Gary for more details: 0429 635 412 email [gcaitchon@gmail.com](mailto:gcaitchon@gmail.com)

# Contact Information

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## SZC Calendar February-March 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Feb	2 dharma café 7-9 pm	3	4 dharma café 7-9 pm	5	6	7
8	9 Zazen 7-9 pm	10 Board meeting 6 zazen 6:30 start	11 Zazen 7-9 pm	12	13 Women's Group Helen's	14
15 Zazenkaí 8:30-12 Gillian Cooté talk, dokusan	16 Zazen 7-9 pm	17	18 Zazen 7-9 pm	19	20	21
22	23 Zazen 7-9 pm	24	25 Zazen 7-9 pm	26	27	28
1 March	2 Full Moon Ceremony Not discussing Faults of others	3	4 Full Moon Ceremony Not discussing Faults of others	5	6	7 Women's Retreat at Kodoji
8	9 Zazen 7-9 pm	10 Board meeting 6 zazen 6:30 start	11 Zazen 7-9 pm	12	13	14
15 meet Subhana at the Labyrinth in Centennial Park 9am	16 Zazen 7-9 pm	17	18 Zazen 7-9 pm	19	20 Sesshin payments due	21
22	23 Zazen 7-9 pm	24	25 Zazen 7-9 pm	26	27	28
29	30 Zazen 7-9 pm	31	1 Zazen 7-9 pm	2	3 Trasmisión sesshin	4