

## Encouraging Words from the Teacher

**Faith** by Allan Marett

We've probably all heard the expression, "The great way is not difficult, it's simply a matter of not picking and choosing." The great Zhaozhou uttered these words, but he was not the first. In Verses on the Faith Mind (Xinxin Ming), the third Chinese ancestor, Sengcan writes, "The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences," and added, "when love and hate are both absent everything becomes clear and undisguised." But the saying is even older than that, and is part of the legacy from Chinese Daoism that Zen integrated into Buddhist practice in the early years of its development in China. The sentiment is even there at the most ancient layers of our legacy. The fundamental meaning of the Sanskrit word, "dharma"—"things just as they are"—resonates with Zhaozhou and Sengcan's words and points us in the direction of radical acceptance. The Four Noble Truths say in essence that picking and choosing, in the guise of attraction and aversion, are the root cause of suffering, and that there is a path to liberation through practice. You might be thinking: this is easy to say, but it is difficult to practice. Who among us can say that we are free of picking and choosing, or free of love and hate? Are we then failing in our practice?

I doubt that there is anyone among us who has not asked this question at some time or other. It's all very well to have clarity and to be able to practice acceptance on a moment-to-moment basis when conditions are good; when we're engaged in some sort of intensive practice, perhaps in sesshin, or involved in some intensive program of zazen, or when, apparently by pure chance, we find that our practice is "going well". But what about when we lose that clarity? What about when we lose that ability to accept things and are gripped by a desire for things to be otherwise? What about when we fall off the bike?

A monk once asked Yunmen, "This is not the present function of mind. This is not the matter before me. What is it?" Yunmen cried, "One teaching upside down!" Here

the monk is asking: if it's not subjective (the present function of mind) and it's not objective (the matter before me), what is it?" You might think that this is a good question, not one that is back-to-front or upside down, and you may be right, but Yunmen didn't see it that way. He scolded the monk: "stop messing around with questions that belong in the relative world (subjective versus objective). That is getting it arse about face. Cut the crap and go directly to the great matter."

When we frame our questions about losing clarity and equanimity in terms of gain and loss—when we set our apparently dismal practice against an ideal of clarity and equanimity—we, like the monk, are getting things arse about face, inside out, upside down, and back to front. An ideal of clarity and equanimity is nothing but a dead cat that we carry around with us, and it stinks to high heaven. In such moments, we are seeing the relative world (what Nagarjuna called "conventional reality") as the true reality and our experience of empty oneness (Nagarjuna's "ultimate reality") as some form of temporary grace that we're able to slip into from time to time, like a comfortable pair of shoes. Upside down! Back to front!

In fact, it is the world of empty oneness that is true and entirely un-constructed, and it is the world of conventional reality that is entirely constructed and contingent. When we fully grasp this truth and hold to it as an article of faith, we can to some degree relax, secure in the conviction that our essential nature is right here, no matter what. It does not come and go.

How do we come by that conviction? Through dedicated practice and through repeated and sustained engagement with what is really true—with that which, when you experience it, is self-evident and unarguably itself.

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# Reports

## Rohatsu Sesshin 8-13 December led by Allan Marett



Our Rohatsu sesshin was graced by the sudden appearance of the Morning Star, as you can see in this sesshin photo, (2nd from right).

There was total of 23 participants, not all are in this photo from the last day. Stuart Solzberg attended in Hobart, keeping the sesshin schedule with us remotely.

Our unexpected guest was a ceremonial exchange pole from North East Arnhem Land, that belongs to Allan; it represents the Morning Star Dreaming. A verse from the Goyulan song series on the Morning Star Dreaming, which also specifically mentions the pole, says in part:

*Morning Star comes up and confronts the dawn/  
Again and again Morning Star comes/  
Morning Star! ...  
Red Ochre comes from her country...  
The Morning Star pole is her bone/  
Red and white feathers are bound to it/  
With human-hair string...*

Throughout the sesshin Allan explored aspects of the ancient wisdom that we inherit from India and that may be present in the traditions of the original custodians of this country.

In his polished and original teishos Allan also included a very lucid and succinct “beginners guide” on “how to do dokusan”, which participants reported cleared away a lot of their delusions and attachments.

Some participants wrote afterward that the retreat was “powerful” and “surprisingly strong”; one participant said how much she enjoyed the strong, (dare it be said) “male” quality of the chanting, as compared with weeknights. Several people said they particularly enjoyed the outside kinhin in the valley and found it refreshing. Shoulder massage was remarked on as an ever popular, voluntary part of the schedule.

Special mention should be made of the sesshin coordinator, Jill “Samantabhadra” Steverson, also the support and participation of Annandale residents, the Sesshin leaders and the evening soup cooks. Robin won the prize for the soup which was not only delicious but an artwork in itself with bobbing green broccoli in a sea of pink.

At the end of sesshin, in an innovative and agile reform very much appreciated by the residents, we organised for volunteers to clean the dojo, hojo and mop out the bathrooms.

*Kim Bagot*



*From page 1*

Things-just-as-they-are. True dharma. Although we may lose sight of this from time to time, it need not disturb our conviction about the true nature of the universe and ourselves. In time it becomes the basis on which we lead our lives. Yunmen also said, “Within heaven and earth, in the midst of the cosmos, there is one treasure hidden in the body. Holding a lantern, it goes towards the Buddha hall. It brings the great triple gate (Sanmon) and puts it on the lantern.” In the unconstructed realm of our essential nature, placing that enormous temple gate upon the lamp is not so difficult. I once asked a student, “how about when you can’t manage that.” He said, “Holding a lantern, I go towards the Buddha hall.” A lovely response, don’t you think? What else can we do in those difficult moments but return to the dharma hall of our practice.

And how do we sustain this conviction? Well, this is where Faith comes in. Sengcan’s Verses on the Faith Mind expresses that faith in words of deep resonance and conviction: “the great way is not difficult, it’s simply a matter of not picking and choosing.” We live through deep faith that things-just-as-they-are is none other than our essential nature. No matter what!

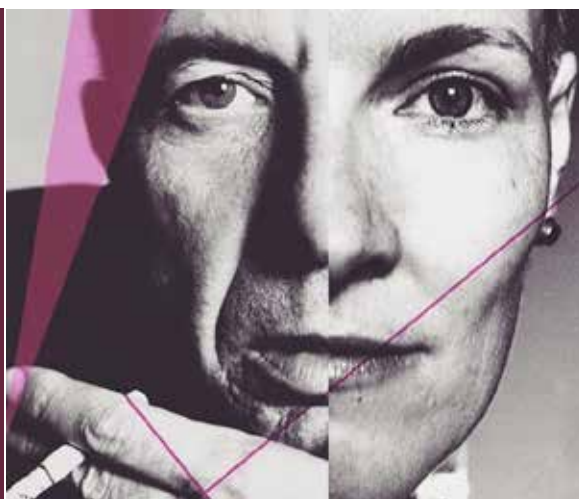
Faith is not what first comes to mind when we think about Zen, but in fact it is fundamental to our ability to sustain our practice. The Faith Mind of the Zen Way does not require us to have faith in something that we have been told is true but have not experienced. Rather it requires us to have faith in what we have directly experienced as unarguably true, and this is what sustains us through difficult times. This is what allows us to climb back onto the bike each time we fall off.

*Allan*

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## Coming Events

### Leonard Cohen Koans



### Leonard Cohen Koans

is an intimate, multi-layered celebration of the spirit of this enigmatic Canadian icon and Poet of the Holy Sinners.

*Babs* (vocals and writer) and *Daryl Wallis* (Keys man, musical director) splice together Leonard Cohen's well loved songs with his poetry and then take you deeper, into Cohen's Buddhist spiritual practice - the Zen Koan.

Friday 9th February 2018

8pm - 10pm (Interval with refreshments)

Old Darlington School Hall

Cost: \$35

Presented by Sydney Zen Centre [szc.org.au](http://szc.org.au)

*design credit for the official show image is Emily Maksimovic*



## SZC Women's Retreat 11-12 March

The date for the SZC women's retreat at Kodoji is the weekend of 10/11 March. Cost for Members - \$25 per night, and non-members - \$30 per night. Please bring food to share. For enquiries and booking, please contact Lesley: [lesley.treleaven@gmail.com](mailto:lesley.treleaven@gmail.com) or mobile: 0410621756.

## Kodoji Samu 24-25 March

This is a wonderful opportunity for the whole family to spend the weekend at Kodoji. There will be the regular building, maintenance, bush care work and fun in wonderful surroundings. Bring food to share. If you intend to go please first contact our veteran Samu coordinator, Tony Coote, [tony@tonycootearchitect.com](mailto:tony@tonycootearchitect.com)

## Autumn Sesshin at Kodoji, March 30-April 6, 2018 led by Maggie Gluek



March 30th may seem far off but it's none too soon now to block out these dates. Sesshin affords a unique opportunity to deepen and broaden practice. It's an adventure too! Who ever knows what will manifest in the Dharma realms? Having said that, we can know that there'll be lots of zazen (*"the dharma gate of great ease and joy"* as memorably described by Dogen), that feet will walk inside and outside the dojo, that meals will be savoured with focussed attention, that regular interviews and teisho will be on offer, that the beauty and power of Kodoji will hold and inspire us all.

Application forms will be available on the SZC website and in hard copy at the Annandale zendo. Inquiries to Diana Levy, [diana.r.levy@gmail.com](mailto:diana.r.levy@gmail.com)

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## News from the Board

### CHANGE OF BOARD

Exciting news for Danny Banyer, who joined the Board at the last AGM. He and his partner have bought their first house and are moving to the Blue Mountains. With all the change this brings, he's decided it's best to not continue on the Board. This isn't a farewell, just a relocation. Danny will still be coming to Annandale, as well as sitting with the Blue Mountains sangha. We wish them all the very best in their new home.

### COHEN'S KOANS

Don't forget to buy tickets to the concert on February 9, performed by Ali Babs and Daryl Wallis, as a fundraiser for SZC. Details on our website. Get in early ... there are limited number of seats and they are selling fast!

### SURVEY

There is a survey coming your way soon to assess your involvement and connection to what is offered at SZC. There will be room for you to make suggestions about what you value and what you'd like changed or added to what we already do. Please take the time to fill it out, so we can be more sensitive to your needs.



# Notices

## Orientations for Newcomers

### Next Orientation Thursday February 22, 7-9pm

The extended format for offering orientations to newcomers, or indeed as a refresher, has been successful and effective. There are limited places and if you are unable to attend without notice, it might deprive others of a chance to attend. Therefore we require people to confirm their participation a few days before the orientation. Any questions, email [info@szc.com.au](mailto:info@szc.com.au). See website for more details.

## Leadership Call

Dojo leadership is not only a fantastic way to actualise caring for the sangha and merging one's practice with the vast field we all share, it's also a great way to guarantee you'll turn up.

For those interested, please contact the following leaders who can guide you in the form of the roles.

**Ino:** Peter Bursky [mowerman26@hotmail.com](mailto:mowerman26@hotmail.com)

**Jiki:** Sue Bidwell [sue.bidwell17@gmail.com](mailto:sue.bidwell17@gmail.com)

**Jisha:** Janet Selby [janetselby@bigpond.com](mailto:janetselby@bigpond.com)

## Books for Sale

Robert Aitken books for sale at Annandale include:

*The Ground We Share, The Practice of Perfection, Zen Master Raven, The Morning Star, Original Dwelling Place.*

And don't forget the books and CDs by SZC members Sally Hopkins and Glenys Jackson, *Star and Mountain; Zen Leopard* by Brendon Stewart; *Swimming in Sound* by Caroline Josephs.

## Asylum Seekers Centre Donations

The need for basic survival services by those who receive no government help, cannot work and are waiting indefinitely for visa decisions is increasing dramatically, and each week there are 750 clients.

The Centre relies only on donations of:

**Staples:** rice, canned tomatoes, beans, lentils

**Personal hygiene:** shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, shaving cream, toothpaste.

**Devices:** Mobile phones, laptops and iPads can help keep in touch with separated families.

All data is wiped by an IT specialist.

Unfortunately the Centre can no longer take anything electrical (with a plug).

The SZC women's group continues to make a donation each month which is really appreciated.

If you're not sure, please contact Lesley (0410621756) before leaving anything upstairs at the SZC, Annandale.



# Regular Notices

## 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 \$25 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 Sundays of each month, from 2pm - 4.30pm in Lawson. Our teacher is Paul Maloney 9045 3897

or contact Jane at [janeandino@yahoo.com.au](mailto:janeandino@yahoo.com.au)

## Canberra Zen Group

Meets on Wednesday evenings.

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

## North Shore Zen Group

Meets on Thursday nights 7-9pm at the *Quaker Meeting House*, 59 Boundary Road, Wahroonga.

Please bring your own zafu/stool and zabuton.

Contribution \$5 - \$10 towards hiring the venue.

Please contact Maggie Gluek for more details: [magpiewarble@yahoo.com](mailto:magpiewarble@yahoo.com).

## Ashfield Morning Zazen

SZC members interested in morning zazen and dokusan are invited to join a small group that sits regularly on Wednesday mornings from 6.30am - 8.00am.

Please contact Allan Marett [allan.marett@gmail.com](mailto:allan.marett@gmail.com) 0409712767

or Peter Bursky [mowerman26@hotmail.com](mailto:mowerman26@hotmail.com) 0405 042 236



## Members of the Board

Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) [stewartkerry4@gmail.com](mailto:stewartkerry4@gmail.com); Steven Crump (secretary); Jason Koh (treasurer); Jillian Ball; Alex Budlevskis; Helen Sanderson; Brendon Stewart.

**Newsletter Editor:** Janet Selby [janetselby@bigpond.com](mailto:janetselby@bigpond.com)

**SZC:** [info@szc.com.au](mailto:info@szc.com.au), [www.szc.org.au](http://www.szc.org.au)

## February 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				Feb 1 Beginners' night with Allan Marett	2	3
4	5 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Subhana	6 Board Meeting 6pm for 6.30	7 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Gillian	8	9 Womens Group, Sarah's  Concert	10
11	12 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Subhana	13	14 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Gillian	15	16	17
18 Zazenkai 8.30-12 Talk and Dokusan Allan Marett	19 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Subhana	20	21 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Gillian	22 Orientation	23	24
25	26 Dharma Cafe 7-9pm	27	28 Dharma Cafe 7-9pm			



## March 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Subhana	6	7 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Gillian	8	9 Early Bird for Autumn Sesshin	10 Womens Retreat at Kodoji
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18 Zazenkai 8.30-12 Talk and Dokusan Subhana	19 ZAZEN 7-9pm with Subhana	20	21	22 Beginners Night	23	24
25 Samu at Kodoji	26 Full Moon Ceremony <i>Not Misusing Sex</i>	27	28 Full Moon Ceremony <i>Not Misusing Sex</i>	29	30 Autumn Sesshin with Maggie	31 Autiumn Sesshin with Maggie

