



Encouraging Words from the Teacher

FLYING THROUGH THE YEAR OF THE ROOSTER

Gillian Coote

*“For the bird of enlightenment to fly, it must have two wings:
the wing of wisdom and the wing of compassion,”*

Zen Buddhist adage

A few weeks before Christmas, Tony and I were surprised to hear a rooster crowing nearby. In our street - over the last 43 years at least - nobody has kept poultry. So, not only were we surprised but bewildered, as the rooster was crowing all through the day and night. As I write this on a warm sunny January day, the rooster still crows - but perhaps not for long. Over the past few weeks, we have discovered that it is being kept under our neighbours' swimming pool, in the pump room, dark as a dungeon, and that it is to be killed and eaten. After a long period of no-crowing, just as it seems the rooster's gone, it erupts again. Neighbours have even seen two foxes sauntering down the hill towards the pump room in the dead of night, no doubt drawn by the smell of rooster.

While the world celebrated New Years Day on January 1, we have just been offered another fresh start. Chinese New Year began on January 28, coincidentally the Year of the Rooster, the only bird in the 12-year calendar. Roosters are seen as fearsome, wise, courageous, benevolent, loyal and lucky because 'rooster' in Mandarin sounds the same as 吉 jí - 'auspicious, lucky'. Needless to say, it is an honored creature in China and, out of reverence, not killed for meat. But reverence notwithstanding, this rooster may have stopped crowing by the time you read this, having offered himself as the stand-out dish for our neighbours' New Year's feast.

Along with feasts, fireworks, superstition and celebration, the start of any new year is a traditional time to make resolutions. We're faced with a clean slate and keen to make our marks this year different from before, better than before. But, even as the work/school year gets underway and we settle back into familiar routines, our resolutions gradually fading, all is not lost! Make a vow to check out

SZC's 2017 schedule. Decide which sesshin, zazenkai and samu you will go to and commit yourself to being there, no matter what. Because, for the sangha to be alive and flourishing, shared experiences are essential, whether building at Kodoji, working together at samu weekends, sitting at Annandale, taking a leadership role in the dojo, turning up for sesshin. Offering yourself without looking for something in return lies at the heart of the first paramita - dana - generosity. The treasure of sangha cannot be taken for granted, as if it were a 'thing'. It cannot exist without our own input and effort.

Being in a monastic community, an old friend and Buddhist nun, Chi Kwang, once told me, is like potatoes rubbing up against each other in a hessian sack. Gradually your warts and bumps of greed, hatred and ignorance rub off against somebody else's and, in the process, there is pain and laughter. There is intimacy. There are great friendships. The same goes for our lay community. Because when we realize we are not separate from everything else, and experience the suffering of others as if it were our own, we respond, realising that in this Net of Indra, even the smallest act - a smile, an encouraging word, the willingness to listen - has repercussions.

“If you want to travel the Way of Buddhas and Zen masters, then expect nothing, seek nothing, and grasp nothing.” Dōgen Zenji

So, when we practice zazen, we don't practice for something else. When we do kinhin, we just walk, with no thought about arriving anywhere. The destination is this footstep, this breath. And we can choose to offer this attention to everything we do, from queuing in the supermarket to mopping the bathroom. As Torei Zenji

reminds us, ‘each particle of matter, each moment, is no other than the Tathagata’s inexpressible radiance’.

As we mature in our practice, as it gradually permeates our entire lives, we may be less judgemental of others, less dependent on what people think of us, say about us, or do to us, more attuned to our own inner critic, who endlessly scolds us for stuffing up, for not being perfect. There may be more kindness, generosity, and forbearance. Our secret desire to take revenge on somebody may melt away, wrong-doings forgiven. We become more able to let things be. As we absorb the precepts, our behaviour changes.

“There is a simple way to become buddha: When you refrain from unwholesome actions, are not attached to birth and death, and are compassionate toward all sentient beings,



respectful to seniors and kind to juniors, not excluding or desiring anything, with no designing thoughts or worries, you will be called a buddha. Do not seek anything else.”
Dogen Zenji

It is a slow, steady process, this permeation. It can’t be hurried, thus it teaches patience and perseverance. It asks for a willingness to be open. It invites us into the realm of not knowing, of not expecting, allowing us to recognise and own our inadequacies and disappointments.

During retreats with Thich Nhat Hahn, students would invite a small bell to sound at random intervals. This mindfulness bell is an upaya, a signal to stop what you are doing, smile and breathe. So, as we enter the Year of the Rooster, the epitome of fidelity and punctuality, why not choose to hear birdsong as bells of mindfulness? We’re blessed with songbirds around Sydney so there’s no shortage of Dharma gates. You might choose one in particular - the plangent call of the crow, the raucous cockatoo, the cheep-cheep of the noisy miner – as your bell of mindfulness, making the choice to leave the dark suffocating pump-room of self and unite with that song, stopping, smiling and breathing, faithful to the Great Way.

Song to song, breath to breath, smile to smile, right through this Year of the Rooster –that’s a do-able resolution! Sitting with the sangha, working with the sangha, flying on the wings of wisdom – prajna - and compassion – karuna – in the vast blue sky, our hopes and fears unbound, not always getting in our own way and ready to reach out and respond to suffering - this is how we nurture the Three Treasures.

So, happy new year, bodhisattvas! See you at Annandale!
See you at Kodoji!

Cock-a-doodle-dooooooooooooo!

Reports

Rohatsu Sesshin 2016

Rohatsu is the name given to the observation of the enlightenment of Shakumuni Buddha and it occurs on 8th December each year. In 2016 it fell on a Thursday, so with consideration for the numbers who had signed up, the sesshin took place in two “installments” from Friday to Sunday, then resuming early Wednesday and ending on Thursday morning. This worked well with 6-8 core participants and 13 participants in total.

Several people managed the early morning sitting prior to going to work and we all enjoyed a silent shared breakfast with delicious summer stone fruits. Some days were hot and we donned our hats early in the day to walk around the beautiful local park. Water plants, frogs and stunning red dragonflies greeted us from the White’s Creek wetland. We smelt the roses and admired the myriad of vegetables in the community gardens. Sitting back in the dojo, the cicadas started their waves of summer songs even from the urban streets of Annandale. Maggie gave teishos in the afternoon that



were much appreciated. Soup was shared one evening break. Annandale residents Lily and Sabrina joined many sitting blocks commenting how nice it was to have others there to support daily practice.

Rohatsu sesshin offers flexibility that enables participants to attend while still carrying on with non-negotiable life and work duties. Individuals support one another with the power of their zazen. This solidarity and the meditation hall itself create a wonderful still sanctuary for practice amongst the coming and going.

Jill Steverson

*Aeroplanes, cars
Singing cicadas rhythms
Deafen and fade*

NEURO-SCIENCE Research Weekend - 15-17 Dec 2016

SZC Members participate in Neuroscience Research and Fundraising Project

Over 3 days, 15-17th December 2016 research was conducted at Annandale with 14 SZC members and 2 meditators from the Blue Gum Sangha, Northern Beaches. SZC member Dr Britta Biedermann (Curtin University) has been researching the effects of long term meditation on cognitive processes (e.g., attention, and memory) for some time with some of her colleagues from Macquarie University (MQ) and Western Sydney University (WSU). In April 2016 Britta coordinated a weekend in Kodoji, SZC students also participated in research at MQ and Britta gave a presentation at Annandale of the published results. (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167876016307115>)



The December research was to follow up on certain aspects of the published research, including varying order of the tests that might have affected performance in the first study. Participants were sought who fitted the criteria of 10 years meditation experience and generously gave 3 hours of their time to go through an interesting set of tests. Britta together with Dr Vince Polito and Dr Yatin Mahajan led the participants through the assessments with wonderful encouragement and good humour. Jill co-ordinated with enthusiasm and a Santa hat and the attendees were provided with lunches and refreshments.

The researchers were very grateful to have so many participants, they had hoped for 12, so 16 was a very positive number for them. They have a considerable amount of data to analyse from these 3 days. The participants enjoyed the process and a great many generously donated their participant payment back to SZC, plus we were able to be paid for the use of the venue from MQ. Overall it was a very successful collaboration with both sides benefiting. The SZC raised \$5867.75. Thanks also go to the Annandale residents, especially Lily who helped during this time.

above: Jill Steverson in the Hojo at Annadale

Jill Steverson



*above: Janet Selby and Dr Yatin Mahajan
above right: Andrew Judge and Dr Vince Polito*



right: Jason Koh and Dr Britta Biedermann



above, right: Gillian Coote all wired up

Coming Events

Autumn Sesshin 14-20 April

Led by Subhana Barzagli and Maggie Gluek

Pick up your diary and block out these dates! (*Note that this year, we finish on Thursday instead of Friday*). Sesshin is essential for serious students of the Way, affording 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 savored with focused attention, that teachers will offer regular interviews and teisho, 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 Jane Andino, janeandino.yahoo.com.au

Orientations for Newcomers

Third Thursday each month, 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. See website for more details.

Samu at Kodoji 25-26 March

This is a wonderful opportunity for the whole family to spend the weekend at Kodoji. There will be 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

Womens Retreat 11-12 March at Kodoji

Calling all women! The Women's Retreat is open to all, often starting on the Friday evening, and then a weekend of whatever we decide - sit, silence, talk and sharing, poetry, walking, sewing, craft work, song. A great weekend being together. We take food to share. Sleeping bags. Tents if we wish, but there are some beds, and we can sleep on the verandah. Lifts can be arranged. It costs \$20 per night for members, \$25 for non-members. Coordinator is Sally Hopkins, hopkins_sally76@dodo.com.au

Leadership Call

Monday and Wednesday evenings

Migration patterns have affected the leadership roster in recent months. With people moving away and some unable to attend the regular Annandale schedule, we are in need of new leaders in the dojo for both Monday and Wednesday nights. In particular the Ino pool is looking very thin and we could do with some more people stepping in to the positions of Jiki and Jisha also.

If you have been attending the centre for some time and would like to step into a dojo leadership role for the sanghas weekly sits, you would be most welcome.

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

Jiki: Sue Bidwell sue.bidwell17@gmail.com

Jisha: Janet Selby janetselby@bigpond.com

Buddha's Birthday and Baby Naming

Annandale - 9 April 2017 from 9am, with Gillian Coote

This is a day of fun and flowers. Janet provides craft work for the children in the garden from 9am and then at 10:30am there is a ceremony at which any baby – your own or grandchild – can be named, with rejoicing. Bring flowers and food to share for a potluck lunch.

Please contact Janet Selby, janetselby@bigpond.com if you have a baby you wish named on this special day or are going to bring your children to do craftwork.

Books for Sale

at Annandale

There are Robert Aitken books for sale at Annandale. Some have not been around for quite some time, like *The Ground We Share*, *The Practice of Perfection*, *Zen Master Raven*, *The Morning Star*, *Original Dwelling Place*. Very worth checking out. These books can be read, re-read and again re-read through the years, so it is worth owning them - and the money will help SZC.

And don't forget the book of poems by SZC members Sally Hopkins and Glenys Jackson, *The Morning Star*.

News from the Board

Room for Rent

The front room at Annandale is again available as Sabrina is leaving. This is a wonderful opportunity for practice, and for living reasonably cheaply in a quiet, harmonious home.

Fundraising

The Board, now including Sue Bidwell, has been giving serious thought to ways of raising funds for SZC. This will include events on Thursday nights and a benefit concert on 29th July by shakuhachi master Riley Lee, which coincides with Aitken Roshi's 100th birthday. Thanks to Allan Marett for initiating and organising this event, with the help of the Board.

Dana

Deep gratitude to Michael Tierney and Sarah Sherringham for initiating a project to archive all the MMC editions since the beginning. Thanks also to Sally for taking up where they left off and Colin for binding in a most beautiful way, many of the early copies. He organised the later editions of the magazine into ring binders for their safe keeping, and now they are stored in the library. Please feel free to read them there, but they aren't for borrowing, as they are our only archive.

Kodoji

The Board is liaising with Tony Coote about updating sleeping accommodation at Kodoji.

As a way of connecting to the people in the Valley and bringing our sangha together, the Board is planning several events: a picnic day (for us and the people who live near St Albans), a walking weekend up to the closer aboriginal cave with Will Moon as our guide, and a family weekend at Kodoji. Dates to be announced.

Website

The website is progressing well as Georgina and Ameli continue to fine tune it. It's at a stage now where information from the old site can be edited and transferred onto the new one. Kerry has offered to help with this process.

Donations

Donations to Asylum Seekers Centre, Newtown need to be put in the special box upstairs in the library at Annandale.

There is a list on the noticeboard in Annadale Zendo. If you have other things that you think could be useful PLEASE CHECK with Lesley, email lesley.treleaven@gmail.com or 0410 621756, as there is limited space for storage and time for disposing of unaccepted items.

Thank you all so much, recycling makes so much sense for people and planet. *Lesley*

Notice Board

Dokusan

Mondays

Subhana: February 6, 20, 27 March 6, 20, 27

Wednesdays

Gillian: Feb 1, 8, 22, 29 March 8, 22, 29

Full Moon Ceremony

February 13 + 15 Not Praising myself, while abusing others.

Dharma Café March 13 + 15, 7-9pm

Zazenkai

February 19 Paul Maloney will give talk and dokusan.

March 19 Jane Andino will give talk and Gilly Coote will offer dokusan.

Orientations for Newcomers 7-9pm

February 16 (Beginners Night following week Feb 23)

March 9 (Dharma Cafe following week March 16)

See website for more details www.szc.org.au

Board Meeting

February 7 and March 6pm for a 6.30 start. All SZC members very welcome.

Womens Group Open to all Women

February 11 Caroline's (*N.B. this is a Saturday*)

March 11-12 Retreat at Kodoji

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 Brendan Stewart, phone 9879 7290

email stewarts34@bigpond.com

Blue Mountains Zen

The Blue Mountains Zen Group meets on the second and fourth Sunday of each month, from 3-5 pm, 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 gcaitcheon@gmail.com

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,

or Kim Bagot kimballb7@gmail.com 0402321277

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
0409712767

or Peter Bursky

mowerman26@hotmail.com 0405 042 236

Members of the Board

Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) stewartkerry4@gmail.com; Helen Sanderson (secretary); Jason Koh (treasurer); Sue Bidwell; Alex Budlevskis; Georgina Reid; Ameli Tanchitsa; Brendon Stewart.

Newsletter Editor: Janet Selby janetselby@bigpond.com

SZC: info@szc.com.au, www.szc.org.au

SZC Calendar February-March 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jan 29	30 ZAZEN 7-9pm	31	February 1 ZAZEN 7-9pm	2	3	4
5	6 ZAZEN 7-9pm	7 Board Meeting 6pm for 6.30	8 ZAZEN 7-9pm	9	10	11 Womens Group - Caroline's
12	13 Full Moon Ceremony "Not Praising myself" 7-9pm	14	15 Full Moon Ceremony "Not Praising myself" 7-9pm	16 Orientations with Brendon	17	18
19 ZAZENKAI Talk + dokusan Paul Maloney 8.30 - 12pm	20 ZAZEN 7-9pm	21	22 ZAZEN 7-9pm	23 Beginners' Night with Paul Maloney	24	25 SAMU at KODOJI WEEKEND
26 SAMU at KODOJI WEEKEND	27 ZAZEN 7-9pm	28	March 1 ZAZEN 7-9pm	2	3	4
5	6 ZAZEN 7-9pm	7	8 ZAZEN 7-9pm	9 Orientations with Sue 7-9pm	10	11 Womens Retreat at Kodoji
12 Womens Retreat at Kodoji	13 DHARMA CAFÉ + Precept Cere- mony 7-9pm	14 Board Meeting 6pm for 6.30	15 DHARMA CAFÉ + Precept Cere- mony 7-9pm	16	17	18
19 ZAZENKAI Talk Jane Andino, dokus- an Gillian Coote 8.30 - 12pm	20 ZAZEN 7-9pm	21	22 ZAZEN 7-9pm	23	24	25
26	27 ZAZEN 7-9pm	28	29 ZAZEN 7-9pm	30	31	April 1