



ENCOURAGING WORDS

Maggie Gluek

Let go. Turn around. Return home.

I can't remember enjoying an autumn as much as I have this one. The golden light, the cool freshness of the air, the daily colourful progress of liquid ambers on our street, trees we'd actually never fully taken cognizance of before. The virtue of relative confinement has meant coming to appreciate the vividness of the local geography, what is right here. And not just outdoors. Being at home most of the time has brought further into focus the geography of everyday life—the simple beauty of eating a pear, having a conversation, blowing my nose. There never was any need to go anywhere else. Realising this is the virtue of practice. *The storehouse of treasures opens of itself*, writes Dogen. *You may take them and use them as you wish.*

And I've been appreciating zazen as a liberating confinement whose forms hold me present. A prescribed sitting posture. The form of the physical body, its characteristics not discriminated in zazen but *just here*, solid as a mountain. The form of breath, its rhythmic movement, life-giving inhalations and warm exhalations. The form of an embracing, uncompromising question, unique to the Zen tradition. Within the limitations of form, thanks to the limitations of form, and as the limitations of form, limitless essential freedom can be discovered. You realise you are just you, exactly enough, whole right here.

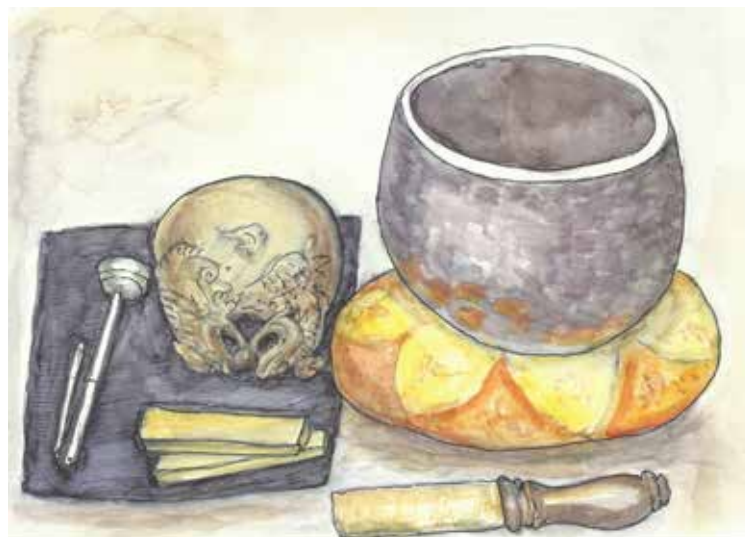
But you need to stay with zazen, until it opens of itself, and then more. When your restless mind wants to travel out with

ideas—looking to sustain itself, fantasizing that better place, that better self – you do well to remember Dogen's counsel: *Put aside the intellectual practice of searching for phrases and chasing after words. Take the backward step and turn the light inward.*

Let go. Turn around. Return home. There never was anywhere else.

Linji has counsel too, these being among the most instructive words in the Zen canon. *If wherever you are, you take the role of host, then whatever spot you stand in will be a true one. Then whatever circumstances surround you, they can never pull you awry.* Simple. The great welcoming, everything gathered in. What is there to pull you awry?

And, from another perspective, what is the host's responsibility? How is the gift extended? What about beings who are pulled awry? Ravaged by suffering, change and loss. These days, with all we know, the dictum "think global, act local" has a new charge.



In an old sesshin notebook I came across a gift from the irrepressible Ellen Davison, friend and teacher at the Kuan Yin Meditation Centre in Lismore. A line from her teisho. *"This moment can never be used up. I think that's wonderful!"*

I bow in appreciation.

Maggie Gluek

Upcoming Events

WINTER SESSHIN

Friday June 5 - Wednesday June 10

This year our Winter sesshin will be conducted online via Zoom, led by Paul Maloney Roshi and Jane Andino, apprentice teacher. Paul is a Diamond Sangha teacher with fifty years of experience in Zen practice in both Australia and Japan and Jane is a leader in the Blue Mountains Zen group and a musician.

The theme of the sesshin is “Sitting alone on Ta Hsiung Peak”. In this time of isolation and difficulty we take the opportunity to reflect on impermanence as a mark of existence and to explore the connections of our zazen to these social changes.

Four blocks of zazen have been scheduled for each day and the teachers will be offering dokusan and evening teishos. Participants can sign up for any block but are urged to take advantage of the long weekend and sign for a full Saturday, Sunday and Monday. It is essential to attend the opening session on Friday evening.

For more information please see our website. Here are the links to the information and application form:

Information: <http://szc.org.au/classes/winter-sesshin/>

All enquiries to Zoe Thurner: zoethurner2015@gmail.com



Reports

This report on our recent A&NZDSTC was written for Diamond Sangha teachers all over the world. The fact that, in spite of all odds, our meeting took place, albeit truncated, was in large part due to so many caring and supportive sangha companions. Thank you all.

Transcending all obstacles: our miraculous meeting

Last year, the Sydney teachers invited all the Australian and New Zealand Diamond Sangha teachers to come to our first teachers' meeting since 2014. We would gather at Kodoji, our beautiful wilderness retreat centre adjoining Yengo National Park, 2.5 hours north-west of Sydney, meet the new apprentice teachers, catch up with old friends and renew our DS bonds. Planning around transport and accommodation, and the call for agenda items began later in the year.

At this time, NSW was 98.4% in drought, and we were having our hottest, driest year on record. The dams were at all-time lows, and small towns were running out of water. The predictions were for unprecedented bushfires and in September, the fire season began—very early and very frightening. One woman struggled for words to describe what had happened to the landscape. “It’s like an atomic bomb went off”.



On October 26, lightning struck a disused airstrip at Gaspers Mountain that was put in by the Army in 1963 and used for training soldiers for Vietnam. It’s right in the middle of a densely- grown area of the Wollemi National Park, where in 1994, a deep sandstone gorge was found sheltering Wollemi Pines, critically endangered trees whose oldest fossil has been dated to 200 million years ago. The park is vast, with an area of 501,703 hectares.

By the end of that day, the blaze had expanded to an area of 521 hectares. One month later, on November 26, our local St Albans Fire Brigade emailed SZC:

‘A bush fire is burning in the Wollemi National Park area. The fire is more than 189,500 hectares and is also burning in the Wollemi and Yengo National Parks and

Parr State Recreation areas'.

By December 20, the Gospers Mountain fire had combined with several others to form “the monster” and our sangha knew that Kodoji was in trouble. Many of us spent our days glued to the fires near me app watching the monster crawling inexorably towards Kodoji. Friends' houses were threatened, some burnt down, and there were stories of burnt koalas. The skies were surreal, orange and black, the sun a psychedelic crimson. Massive carcinogenic air pollution shrouded the east coast. We were advised against outdoor exercise. The smell of fire penetrated our bedding, our clothing.

But then there was a lull and the fires were able to come up to Kodoji, bulldoze a massive containment line around the property, and back-burn. We were now safe, though our nearest Buddhist neighbour, Wat Buddha Dhamma, lost some of their buildings. A specially deployed team of remote area firefighters meanwhile saved the Wollemi Pines, winched in by helicopter to set up an irrigation system in the gorge. As the fire approached, helicopters water-bucketed the fire edge to reduce its impact on the grove of trees.

Torrential rain began falling on February 7 and, while it was welcome news for firefighters, it created chaos elsewhere, causing flash flooding, power outages and property damage. Evacuation orders were being issued for floods where weeks before they had been for fires. For several days, we used an old gas camping stove, and lit candles.

By the 13th of February, all the fires were finally extinguished, the apocalypse having destroyed more than 18.6 million hectares of land, over one billion trees, shrubs and grasses, and at least one billion creatures, not including insects, bats, fish and frogs. Over 5,900 buildings were destroyed and at least 34 people died. With the drought, fires and floods over and done with, it was time to get on with it! The sangha burst into action. Ahead of the Teachers Meeting, there was a samu weekend at Kodoji; the dirt road in was now water-logged and one car had to be towed out. The firefighters' bulldozers had wrecked our access track, which had to be rebuilt. The kitchen, covered in soot, was scrubbed and washed clean. Now, everything was ready.

But, later that same week there was even more rain, and on the Friday before our meeting was to begin, a neighbour in the valley emailed us her video of one of the creek crossings, now flowing too swiftly for cars to cross. If it stopped raining and the creek went down, all would be well but, if not...well, many of us have been marooned at Kodoji, sometimes for days, after heavy rain. By Monday, just three days before our welcome dinner, we made the decision to relocate from Kodoji to Annandale—it was too big a risk for people travelling from afar. The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry; time to re-schedule and re-jig people's travel and accommodation. After the massive fires and the floods, what else could possibly confound our well-laid plans?

The coronavirus! People started pulling out soon after our decision to relocate, worried about travel, their vulnerable spouses, themselves. Our gathering began shrinking; even on our first full day, another teacher with possible symptoms withdrew. But we are an enterprising and adaptable bunch, and while twelve of us sat in the dojo at Annandale, another five beamed themselves into the room via Zoom, and our meeting went ahead, fed and nurtured by three wonderful sangha members.

On our agenda were koan review of Mumonkan, cases 22–25, primary koans and checking questions of Mu, what is our role as teachers, and how do we respond to the climate crisis? What are the challenges in maintaining membership of our sanghas, how to enable our practice to appeal to people in an increasingly anxious world? How can the work of Zen teaching become more supported/affordable?

The panel on climate change planned for the last night was cancelled, as by then the public health warnings were becoming stringent, and we shortened the meeting by half a day. Nevertheless, we met for three days, miraculously, in spite of everything, and it was a nourishing and heartening gathering.

Today it is just two weeks since we gathered for our first full day. We could not meet like that now. Our Buddha's Birthday ceremony and Easter sesshin have been cancelled. SZC has closed the Annandale dojo for the foreseeable future, and we now sit together using Zoom.



*May all our Dharma brothers and sisters be safe and well.
Gillian Coote*

News from the Board

ADAPTATION

The Board and teachers have made some innovative changes to our sitting schedule over the last couple of months. We've adapted well to being physically separate by offering many things on our schedule using Zoom. So, we now can sit and engage with one another online from the comfort of our homes. We're finding that many people who may be in other states, or unable to travel to the zendo, are able to link in with us now. It's been wonderful to reconnect with distant sangha buddies.

Changes to the upcoming events scheduled in June and July:

June - Orientations are still going ahead via Zoom – in these stressful times it's a perfect time to encourage your friends to meditate.

Winter sesshin – sit in your home with others for 1 or all 4 blocks a day. Details and registration forms are on the website.

Women's retreat at Kodoji – we have decided to wait and see what the situation is like before we postpone or cancel. Contact Jill Steverson closer to the date.

The Board is discussing a return to Annandale in early July, with strict distancing and cleanliness regimes in place. Some Zoom meetings will possibly be run as well.

Please refer to the website or the 'What's On' for up-to-date details.

NEW MEMBER

Welcome, Helen Gould to the sangha! It will be wonderful to get to know you and for you to get to know the other sangha members. We look forward to sharing this wonderful practice with you.

WEEDS AND REGENERATION

After the fires and floods the road to our bush zendo was in very bad repair so the local Council graded it and put some rocks on the road to make it more stable for our cars. Unfortunately, some of the areas near the creek were adversely affected by the workers pushing over dead wattles. This makes the bush regeneration efforts of our sangha members and the bush regen company we have employed, much more difficult. Jacob Philpott, the bush regeneration expert who is working on our land, has gathered seeds from native grasses and planted them to stabilise the affected areas. We look forward to seeing new life in this area soon.

TALKS

Don't forget that we have a huge back catalogue of talks, and more to come, available as podcasts on our website: <http://szc.org.au/podcasts/>



*On the verandah,
there is nothing that is not wind.
Dokusan bell resounds.*

Janet Selby
Kodoji, Spring Sesshin, 2018

Regular Notices

On-line community dojo

Please see the regular SZC email reminders for Zoom links, or email info@szc.org.au for details.

Mondays with Subhana Barzaghi Schedule

7.00–7.25 Guided meditation
7.25–7.30 Walking meditation
7.30–7.45 Encouraging words
7.45–8.15 Inquiry and sharing about practice
8.15–8.30 Plenary and close with Great Vows

Mini morning meditation each Tuesday

Schedule
6.55–7.00am Join/welcome
7.00–7.25am Meditation
7.25–7.30am Great Vows/Close

Wednesdays with Gilly Coote Schedule

7.00–7.30 Meditation/walking
7.30–8.00 Meditation/walking
8.00–8.30 Discussion/Great Vows



The Blue Mountains Zen Group

We will be meeting via Zoom on Sunday afternoons June 14, 28, July 12 & 26. All are welcome to join us for zazen with either a talk or Dharma Café. Please email Jane at janeandino@yahoo.com.au for more details.

Phone dokusan for members

Subhana is offering dokusan to SZC members on Thursday evenings.

Gilly is also offering dokusan to members by appointment.

Please contact info@szc.org.au for more details.



Photo from before the fires, view looking north over Yengo National Park, June 2013

Members of the Board



Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) stewartkerry4@gmail.com; Stephen Crump (secretary); Jason Koh (treasurer); Alex Budlevskis; Helen Sanderson; Brendon Stewart, Zoe Thurner, Julie Robinson.

Newsletter Editor: Janet Selby janetselby@bigpond.com

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

June 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	2	3 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	4 Orientation	5 Winter sesshin starts 7pm	6 Winter sesshin
7 Winter sesshin	8 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana Winter sesshin	9 Winter sesshin	10 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian Winter sesshin	11	12	13
14	15 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	16 Board Meeting 6:30pm	17 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	18	19	20
21 ZAZENKAI 10am Teisho Gillian Coote	22 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	23	24 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	25	26	27
28	29 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	30				



An old photo of Spring sesshin, 2006, Kodoji

July 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	2 Orientation	3	4
5	6 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	7	8 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	9	10	11
12	13 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	14 Board Meeting 6.30pm	15 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	16	17	18
19 ZAZENKAI 10am Teisho Will Moon	20 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	21	22 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	23	24	25
26	27 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	28	29 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	30 Orientation	31	



Frost at Kodoji, Winter sesshin, July 2016 Photo: Jill Steverson?