



## ENCOURAGING WORDS

Will Moon

### Anybody in? Anybody in?

Freedom comes in those moments when we are truly freed from our conceptual way of experiencing life, we directly experience the moment, no longer looking at everything through the lens of dualism. Those moments can be fleeting and, in a sense, as Zen practitioners it is our life's work to free ourselves from the world of dualism and all the associated suffering. I don't know anyone that is totally freed, there is always work to be done, even for someone whom we might consider fully awakened. As Zen students, and humans with our perfect imperfections we vow to wake to countless dharma gates and vow to save the many beings from the world of suffering. We spend much of our day in thoughts and concepts, like a river they flow almost endlessly until we take our last breath. We need thoughts and concepts to survive, to function, to delight in life. However, we are often owned by the thoughts and ideas. We identify ourselves as the thoughts and ideas. The thoughts behind our rage, anger and fear can quickly take us over in a moment. Someone says something or does something hurtful. We carry old ideas like 'I'm not good enough', or 'my partner is not good enough', 'I don't like this or that.' The list goes on. Where's the freedom then?

There is an interesting koan in the *Wumen Kuan*, 'Chao-chou and the Hermits.' This is taken from Robert Aitken Roshi's translation <sup>1</sup>:

Chao-chou went to a hermit's cottage and asked, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" The hermit lifted up his fist.

Chao-chou said, "The water is too shallow for a ship to anchor." And he left.

Again he went to a hermit's cottage and asked, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" This hermit too lifted up his fist.

Chao-chou said, "Freely you give, freely you take away, freely you kill, freely you give life." And he made a full bow.

At first glance you get the idea that maybe the first hermit just didn't cut it like the second hermit, right? Well this koan is challenging us to go deeper than that. Chao-chou was one of the best, no question. "Anybody in? Anybody in?" Chao-chou is asking, show me the true substance of your existence, right now! Up rockets the fist, 'there it is.' Then Chao-chou says, "The water is too shallow for a ship to anchor." Aitken Roshi describes this as 'abuse beyond aspersion.' Chao-chou is testing the hermit, will he or she take it as an insult, or is their practice mature enough to appreciate the fun of the moment. How many of us could step up and meet Chao-chou here, and appreciate his kindness? He tests the next hermit with praise. How will they respond? There is much more to this koan than the praise and abuse, however it points to something in our own lives, and how we respond to praise and insults. Both the hermits responded in the same way, and Aitken Roshi suggests that old Chao-chou would have taken a glance at each of them to see how or if they had been affected by his words. How would we respond, would we feel dejected by the shallowness of our practice, or perhaps proud of our attainments? Either way there is a catch, we are caught up in the ideas, the concepts, 'too good, not good enough.' The hermit's responses to "Anybody in? Anybody in?" are good, so it is interesting that Chao-chou continues. He seems to be testing the maturity of the two hermits.

Some concepts and ideas can have a particular hold on us. They might relate to a difficult childhood, a trauma, abuse or a loss and can be particularly difficult to work with. An event can easily trigger a strong response that might not be proportionate to the situation. Returning to our koan, or breath, or awareness may not be enough for us to navigate through the rough seas of concepts and emotions. Sometimes a concept is weighty, and the emotion and confusion can be difficult to work with and

it is not easy to find clarity. This is where the pen can be particularly useful. Sometimes if it seems confusing or difficult to work with particular concepts and the reactive emotions associated with them it is useful to write down what is happening. Pick up a pen and, completely uncensored, write down exactly what is happening in this moment, right now. Do it in such a way that there is no disconnect between what is happening in the mind and what is flowing out on the paper. Some people do this every day as part of their Zen practice. They take up the pen and practise with beginner's mind<sup>2</sup>. Writing it down has the benefit of at once allowing us to express what is going on, and at the same time allowing us to see the thoughts,

to see the words. This somehow takes the weight out of them and enables us to see them for what they are. Just a sequence of thoughts, words and feelings. It is a wonderful process of learning about ourselves, observing the patterns of thought and the associated reactions, and it gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves if we need to keep doing what we are doing. Perhaps there is an opportunity to change our pattern of behaviour. We don't have to keep what we write. The writing is the process itself. Natalie Goldberg's book, *Writing Down the Bones: freeing the writer within*, is very instructive on this process. The Upaya Institute and Zen Centre also have podcasts of talks that Goldberg has given on the subject.

1 Aitken, R. 1990 The Gateless Barrier.

2 Goldberg, N. 1998, Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the writer within

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## Upcoming Events

### Walking Weekend Saturday August 1 - Sunday August 2

After having considered the walking possibilities and discussed with the board, we plan to do the following:

The bushwalk will be done on the Saturday. If you can, drive up on the Friday night, or else come up early on the Saturday morning.

We will aim to be walking by **no later than 9.00am**. The plan is to climb the ridge across the creek behind David's memorial. Once we reach the top we will follow the ridge up to the Womera track. Depending upon how well the party is moving we will cross the Womera and drop into the valley on the south side for a look. Then return to the Womera and descend back down the ridge behind the buildings.

What is needed is a reasonable level of fitness, backpack, water bottle, lunch, snacks, sturdy shoes or boots, and rain coat. Maybe a small first aid kit, if you have one. We will be walking at a steady but gentle pace for most of the day. The idea is to exercise mindfulness while walking. We might also do some short stints of zazen along the walk, but it is also a social walk so we will be chatting along the way as well.

For those that stay the night or weekend up at Kodoji we will also likely do some zazen in the morning and evenings. It gets cold up there this time of year so a good sleeping bag, doona, etc is important. We will exercise all of the precautions associated with Covid 19. Normally there is a bit of a pooling and sharing of the food, so with this in mind bring food to share. It is also possible for people coming from Sydney to do some car pooling.

Families are welcome, though the walk is not suited for small children. If anyone has any questions about the weekend, please email [wilmoon@gmail.com](mailto:wilmoon@gmail.com).

### Spring Samu August 22-23

We are planning a samu at Kodoji on the weekend of the 22-23 August. Our jobs will be tidying up, mowing and preparing for sesshin. The focus of the weekend will include being in contact with each other again but obeying with mindfulness the Covid protocols. There is no constraint on numbers for samu but please express your interest via [info@szc.org.au](mailto:info@szc.org.au)

Put this in you diary. A great chance to catch up with everyone again. All this said, if there is another lock down all plans will change accordingly.

# Spring Sesshin

**Saturday October 3 to Saturday October 10 (including Labour Day October 5)**

*The Board agrees that it would be good to go ahead with Spring sesshin at Kodoji if conditions don't radically change for the worse. There will be limits to the numbers and other safety measures put in place. We encourage people to sleep in tents rather than stay in the cottage, which is a good idea to aid social distancing.*



At Kodoji, in the valley of beauty and wilderness, practising in deep silence and letting go of ideas and preoccupations creates myriad opportunities to wake up moment by moment – to come home to the lyrebird's song, the starry heavens and the vastness of this universe. To come home to your true self.

Enquiries (Sesshin Coordinator) Janet Selby: [janetselby@bigpond.com](mailto:janetselby@bigpond.com)

## Reports

### Women's Retreat 26-28 June



Five Zen Women go adventuring! In mid-June the NSW Covid restrictions relaxed and women travelled to Kodoji for the delayed annual retreat being mindful of social distancing practice. Gilly, Jill B, Jill S, Diana and Julie relished getting back to visit beautiful Kodoji and enjoyed zazen, walking the country, bushcare, yoga, stuffing eight new zafus donated from Maggie, along with sharing plentiful food and even a little wine to wet the whistle. The stars were breathtaking, the planets on show and the wood fires appreciated. It wasn't as cold as other winter retreats, with sleeping on the veranda quite OK, temperatures 4-10°C at night and lyrebirds heralding glorious very warm sunny days. Everyone felt tremendous gratitude the buildings escaped the fires of this past summer.

*Jill Steverson*

### Bushcare report - post fire, flood and bulldozer

In October 2019 SZC managed to obtain a grant from the Greater Sydney Local Land Council because Kodoji is located in the catchment of the Blue Mountains world heritage area. This enabled us to employ a wonderful local bush regenerator, Jacob Philpott, to help us control the blackberry. Fortunately we were able to introduce Jacob to the beauty and diversity of the property before the massive challenges to the country that occurred earlier this year.

The much needed firebreaks have created an entry for weeds around the paddock and the flood in late February ripped along the creek massively eroding the soil and taking out diverse and beautiful vegetation. Following the flood an over-enthusiastic Hawkesbury Council bulldozer further damaged the creek. Due to the damage the Council kindly provided money for Jacob to do extra regeneration and follow up work on this delicate riparian area. Jacob has completed large-scale native grass seeding with *microlaena stipoides* from the paddock and follow-up weeding in the creek area.

Luckily we can report there is gradual but good regeneration of the creek with a huge diversity of tiny seedlings already coming up. Opportunistic native colonisers from the sandstone ridges have come in first and they are stabilising the sandy soils helping the next wave of native vegetation to get a foothold. It was very exciting for Julie and me to meet with Jacob at Kodoji on 26th June and learn from him about the gradual and delicate regeneration happening.



*Above: Jill and Jacob Philpott - bush regenerator*

## Caring for Country

I invited four bush regenerators from Bandicoot Bushcare, whom I work for, to come up to Kodoji for 2 day mini break and weeding up at Kodoji 7th-8th July. Everyone worked hard removing mothvine and also some of plentiful blackberry, nightshade and *Bidens pilosa* (cobbler's pegs) than have invaded post fire. We did a bush walk where we saw epicormic growth post fire and delicate ground cover returning, plus a lyrebird up close for quite some time. We enjoyed good food, the fire, board games in the evening and the visitors thought Kodoji was magical in every sense. It was a successful trip caring for and enjoying country. I hope to encourage more bushcare visits soon.

*Jill Steverson, successful weeder*



## Post lockdown spring clean



Annandale is now welcoming people again with a wonderfully fresh pine-o-cleaned dojo. The new Covid booking and spacing system is in place plus available hand sanitiser and signs. On 6th July, Kerry, Brendon, Helen Sanderson, Julie and Jill S enjoyed a morning seeing each other while thoroughly cleaning the Dojo ready for re-opening with the new precautions.

## Winter Sesshin 5-10 June

The winter sesshin 2020 was conducted online because of the meeting restrictions introduced to fight the covid-19. It was the first time that an online sesshin was held by the Sydney Zen Centre.

The sesshin was led by Jane Andino who offered dokusan and teishos. She was supported by Maggie Gluek who offered dokusan and performed as online Ino. Paul Maloney could not attend the full length of the sesshin but offered two teishos with some stimulating and animated q&a sessions afterwards. Zoe Thurner was the coordinator and Pablo Scodellaro the Jiki.

The theme of the sesshin was “*Sitting alone on Ta Hsiung Peak*” and it was an invitation to reflect on impermanence as a mark of existence put in evidence by the impact of the covid-19 in our daily lives. The teishos also explored the connection of our zazen to these challenges and our response to them in compassionate action.

The sesshin started on Friday 5 June and ended on Wednesday June 10. The schedule included zazen, kinhin, dokusan and teishos. A typical day would start at 5:30am and finish at 9pm. There were four blocks of zazen per day: early morning, late morning, afternoon and evening. The different blocks were a mixture of online and offline. Outside kinhin and some zazen were done offline at set times. Dokusan was offered twice daily in one hour blocks and was conducted online.

We used Zoom to connect online. This was not without some challenges, but Zoom did its job well, and allowed us to see each other, talk and participate in this great event which would have been otherwise impossible to organize.

We had nineteen participants including six full time students and while we missed sitting in our dojo in Annandale this new forum made sesshin accessible to those limited by distance or circumstance. There is interest shown in practising this way in the future.

The ability to integrate Zen practice with our daily life was accentuated because as soon as a sitting block ended we were already in the midst of our home activities interacting with family.

Among the main differences between this type of event and the traditional sesshin format was the lack of face-to-face interaction with other participants. Although sesshins are held in silence there is something strongly personal in sharing meals, samu, zazen and kinhin with others which was obviously missing here.

In most other sesshins during the meal gatha, half of participants are “thankful for this meal” and the other half are “thankful for this food”. However in this case Maggie was in charge of reciting the gatha by herself while the rest of us were muted by Zoom. So any discrepancy passed unnoticed.

In summary, this was a great and energizing sesshin held in an entirely new format which opens new possibilities for the SZC.

# News from the Board

## COMING HOME

The Board and the teachers have arranged a slow return to our sitting practice at Annandale as well as continuing our Zoom meetings. We have cleaned our zendo thoroughly and set up hygiene stations. Thank you to Jill S, Helen, Brendon, Julie for your cleaning energy and good spirit. And Glenys for our first flowers of the winter season on the altar. All zabutons and zafus are safely distanced. There are restrictions on how many people are able to come and it's essential to register and book in with [info@szc.org.au](mailto:info@szc.org.au).

## SCHEDULE

- Changes to the upcoming events scheduled in August & September are all dependent upon the Covid situation not escalating and advice from NSW Health Department:
- Sitting at Annandale has resumed on some Mondays and Wednesdays
- Zoom meetings will still be run on alternate Mondays and Wednesdays
- A new Zoom sitting group has started on Thursday evenings, with apprentice teachers and Subhana leading these groups
- Orientations have returned to the zendo, if the orientator is happy to be face to face
- Samu at Gorricks in late August will go ahead, dependent upon the Covid situation
- Spring sesshin at Kodoji is tentatively going ahead, with restrictions on numbers and adhering to medical advice. A more definite decision will be made in late August, with an understanding that the sesshin will be cancelled if the Covid 19 situation worsens.
- The Fundraising Concert planned for September has been postponed till next year.

Check 'What's On' or our website for up-to-date details: <http://szc.org.au/upcoming-events/>

## GOODBYE AND HELLO

We'd like to farewell our long term resident Lily and her family, Adrian and Luna from Annandale. It has been wonderful having them live at our Centre bringing a warm and friendly presence. Wishing them all the best for the future. And we welcome Ilona, who has sat with us some time ago and is looking forward to reconnecting with the sangha. Please say hi if you see her at the zendo or on Zoom.

## ROOMS AVAILABLE

We still have 2 bedrooms available for rent at the Centre. Ideally our residents have, or are interested in having a meditation practice and are wanting to engage with our sangha. So if you know anyone who needs a home and you think will fit in with our group, please let Brendon know: [stewarts34@bigpond.com](mailto:stewarts34@bigpond.com)

## MEMBERSHIP DUE

We have updated the membership form and set up a new payment schedule to better serve our community in these uncertain times and attract new members who live a distance from our zendo. Please go to the website to find out the new categories of membership and cost: <http://szc.org.au/membership/>.

## NEW MEMBERS

Welcome Jo and Belinda 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.



## HEALING THE LAND

Jill S and her bushcare group went to Gorricks for a few nights and worked on the never-ending job of controlling moth vine and nightshades. Also, a neighbour of ours, Toby, asked us to be involved in his attempts to save 'every single wombat in the valley' from the deadly disease, mange. We are very excited by this possibility and hopefully we'll meet up with him at some stage soon to discuss how we can be involved.

## 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/>



Left: Our wonderful dojo cleaners, Julie, Kerry, Helen at Annandale.



Right: Wilma the Wombat recovering from mange (Photo: Toby)

## Regular Notices

### Transition back to Annandale Zendo / Continuation of on-line meditation

Please see the regular SZC email reminders for Zoom links, or email [info@szc.org.au](mailto:info@szc.org.au) for details.

We are trialling a limited transition back to the Annandale zendo, with alternate weeks offering Monday or Wednesday meetings. This will be subject to review, depending on the easing (or not) of the COVID-19 restrictions, and our members' and teachers' circumstances.

If you wish to attend the Annandale zendo, **you must pre-register via [info@szc.org.au](mailto:info@szc.org.au)**, and you must comply with our COVID-19 conditions of entry which can be found on [www.szc.org.au/classes/zazen](http://www.szc.org.au/classes/zazen)

The Board is also committed to maintaining an on-line meditation program, with Thursdays being the regular weekly evening. As a trial, we have begun Zoom meetings on Thursdays.

#### **Mondays**

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

#### **Tuesdays Mini morning meditation**

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

#### **Wednesdays with Gilly Coote**

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

#### **Thursdays**

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. All are welcome to join us for zazen with either a talk or Dharma Café.

Please email Jane at [janeandino@yahoo.com.au](mailto: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.

## Members of the Board



Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) [stewartkerry4@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:janetselby@bigpond.com)

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## August 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Family Walking weekend
2 Family Walking weekend	3 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Peter Bursky	4	5 ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian at Annandale	6 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Peter Bursky	7	8
9	10 ZAZEN 7-9pm Peter Bursky at Annandale	11 Board Meeting 6.30pm	12 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	13 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	14	15
16 VIRTUAL ZAZENKAI 10am Paul Maloney	17 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	18	19 ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian at Annandale	20 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Jane Andino	21	22 SPRING SAMU at Kodoji
23 SPRING SAMU at Kodoji	24 ZAZEN 7-9pm Peter Bursky at Annandale	25	26 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	27 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Subhana	28	29
30	31 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm					



*Bandicoot Weeders, Kodoji, July 2020*

## September 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	3 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm  Orientation	4	5
6	7 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	8 Board Meeting 6.30pm	9 ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian at Annandale	10 Beginners night VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	11	12 Early bird for Spring Sesshin
13	14 ZAZEN 7-9pm  at Annandale	15	16 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	17 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	18	19
20 VIRTUAL ZAZENKAI 10am Teisho Peter Bursky	21 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	22	23 ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian at Annandale	24 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm	25	26 Last call for Spring Sesshin
27	28 ZAZEN 7-9pm  at Annandale	29	30 VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm Gillian	1 October VIRTUAL ZAZEN 7-9pm		



Post-fire regenerating *Geebung Persoonia* sp.