



ENCOURAGING WORDS

Jane Andino

The Great Freedom

After such a quiet period on the roads during lockdown, here in the Blue Mountains since Freedom Day we have had cars streaming up the Mountain highway, heading for Freedom. So I thought it might be a good time to explore what that word 'freedom' means for the follower of the Buddha Way.

In case 1 of the Wu-men Kuan, Chao-chou's Dog, Wu Men writes in his comment, "At the very edge of birth-and-death, you find the Great Freedom. In the Six Worlds and the Four Modes of Birth, you enjoy a Samadhi of frolic and play." He is describing what happens when you have been sitting with Mu for some time. The magpie singing calls Mu, the aromas of cooking in the kitchen engulf you in Mu, looking at the golden Spring moon you find it. The Samadhi of frolic and play expresses the great joy in life that our practice can give. So why call it a Great Freedom?

Being at the edge of birth and death is the key. That sounds very heavy, maybe scary. But what it means is being deeply and intimately with each moment of acting. Acting also includes sitting in zazen, the moment of deeply actualising, turning inwards and seeing clearly into our self-nature. This is being present at the edge of being, and finding the freedom to be open to each moment's joys and sorrows. The self-centered tunnel view drops away, and you feel that the Buddha way, the steps you take along it and all your daily life are one and the same.

If you are not familiar with the Ten Oxherding Pictures, I suggest you look them up online. They were drawn by the 12th century Chinese Zen teacher Kuo-an Shih-yuan, with a commentary and verse for each drawing. They are a beautiful poetic and pictorial account of the search for self-nature, finding it and then in the last picture, as its title says, "Entering the market place with open hands". This tenth picture is a drawing of an old man, simply dressed and barefoot, talking with a younger man. The old man has a bag on his back with fish and wine to take to sell at the marketplace. This picture is depicting a

return to the world, after being at that edge of birth-and-death, with open hands of compassion. It depicts no holy or profane, no temple or marketplace, no enlightened or unenlightened. As it says in the Hsin-hsin Ming (Verses on the Faith Mind), "If you wish to move in the One Way, do not dislike even the world of senses and ideas. Indeed, to accept them fully is identical with true Enlightenment." 3rd Patriarch, Sengtsan, 6th century China.

In his book "Zen Mind , Beginners Mind", Shunryu Suzuki has a chapter called Control with a quote: "To give your sheep or cow a large, spacious meadow is the way to control him." He talks about the experience we all have, especially as beginners, of sitting in zazen and thoughts try to take control. But you just let the thoughts go, they gallop around that spacious paddock, and disappear into the distance. Talking about experiencing Big Mind, he writes: "To live in the realm of Buddha nature means to die as a small being, moment after moment. When we lose our balance we die, but at the same time we also develop ourselves, we grow".

So the freedom that we speak of in Zen is the freedom to see reality as it is and act from that clear seeing. The first step on the Eight-fold path is Right View and, although all the steps evolve together, Right View sets up our path by realising our self-nature and not clinging onto frozen views of reality. When we look at the world around us, we tend to package it into good guys and bad guys, OR good for me or bad for me. Notice that it's all about me and it's all about having neat packages and labels on life. We would rather hold on to what is neat and labelled and feeling like we have some control over it, and not feeling afraid of it, rather than releasing those frozen views and having the awakened view. Right view is fluid, and inclusive, and being free by becoming each moment.

So, back to my initial comment about that surge of traffic up the Mountains, perhaps with that song "Freedom! Freedom!" going from the sound system. For most people, freedom meant the joy of reconnecting with family, friends and school mates. Unfortunately in

our society, freedom is often presented as a freedom of choice of goods and services. There's not much emphasis on responsibilities, and only grudgingly any acceptance of the interdependence of beings. How sad that life and all its creativity can be reduced to profit margins. Fortunately, our Zen Roadmap only leads us to this very place now.

With various friends I have been discussing what we loved about our lockdown time; the things we did differently; what we would include in our new post-lockdown life and what we would discard. I'm exploring Suzuki's words, of finding control within a spacious paddock, and what it means for me to live in the realm of Buddha, and to truly live the reality of Hakuin's words: "This very place is the Lotus Land; this very body, the Buddha." That's our Freedom.

Jane Andino

Upcoming Events

Rohatsu Sesshin, Kodoji, 3-8 December



Rohatsu (8 December) is normally the day on which we, together with Zen communities throughout the world, celebrate the Buddha's realisation. This year's Rohatsu will focus on the formation of the zen lineage and the huge influence our distant taoist ancestors had on shaping what later came to be known as Chan.

The Rohatsu sesshin, from Friday evening December 3 to Wednesday midday December 8, will be led by Peter Bursky and Jane Andino. The sesshin will be online, but also will be held concurrently at Annandale during the Saturday and Sunday morning and afternoon blocks. Please check the SZC website for the application form:

szc.org.au/classes/rohatsu-sesshin/

Julie Robinson is the Sesshin co-ordinator at julesandco@live.com.au

Image: 'Zen' calligraphy. www.015supps-netnejpcalligraphy.blogspot.com/2010/02/zen-japanese-calligraphy.html

Reports

Samu, Kodoji, 23-24 October - Fantastic!

Kerry and I arrived about 10 am Saturday morning by which time Stephen had mowed all the lawns with a new landscape variation, more curvaceous than is my normal regular and rectangular set out.

Slowly, slowly the following good Bodhisattvas arrived:

Sue B, Aeveen and Jason; Ameli and Georgie and the two girl dogs (much to Joey's displeasure); William and Heidi (first timers); Will, Sue M, Diana and Lily; Julie and Paul Garcia; Penn and Nick (Bandicoot bush regenerators); Kerry, Brendon and Joey; Greg Carty.

Tasks approached, tasks completed:

- Dunny pit reinforced and prepared for the building.
- The dunny building was lifted from its well settled position and carried over to its new location. The dunny building needed some reinforcement under the floor.
- The old pit was admired and then filled in.
- Lawns were cut and whipper snipped.
- Floors and window architraves painted in glorious "Stephany".
- The shed cleaned out, swept and only functioning items replaced.
- Buildings cleaned and prep for sesshin.
- Old and precariously leaning trees were cut down along the roadway.

The next big problem will be the batteries. Unfortunately, the long Covid lockdown meant we hadn't been able to check on the water levels in the four lead acid batteries; as a consequence, we will have to research the battery situation.

The two Bush Bandicoots went frog hunting at night and reported a great increase in night-time wildlife including many birds at dawn. See what happens when we don't go up there; the batteries fail and the birds and frogs come back. They also reported that our bushcare over the years, including the last big grant campaign has left us with very healthy bush around our property. Well done all those secateur and poison wielding bush regen champions.

We all enjoyed the new driveway up to the land.

Brendon



Spring Sesshin, Kodoji 6-13 November

Seasons of Plenty



Having been postponed from early October, this year's Spring sesshin was really one of Late-Spring-into-Early-Summer. Leafing at Kodoji in November had moved to a deeper green. Insect life was fertile, with butterflies and grass spiders abounding, not to mention mating! There was a happy diversity of bird species, their seemingly augmented population numbers suggesting recovery from the bushfires. Avian individuals offered constant companionship through the day, taking turns on the sound stage, delighting the minds of humans.

The week was not without dramas. One participant experienced symptoms that could have indicated Covid

19. To allay fears and ensure that sesshin continue, bodhisattvas Brendon and Kerry Stewart brought the new Rapid Antigen tests up from Sydney. And bodhisattva Will Moon waded across the creek crossing to receive said tests. The creek was impassable, because there had been plenty of rain, including in the Upper Hunter which affects us downstream. Big wet was a theme through the week. Squelchy shoes, sodden clothes, leaky tents, creek levels as high as anyone could remember, the music of the waterfall. And often simply nothing but RAIN, a solid wall. After that, a most powerful wind came whooshing through the valley, drying it clean, huffing and puffing as if to blow our house down. The dojo survived but, as our tanto indicated, mental constructions were helpfully blown away.

Penetrating teishos and teachings were offered by Gilly and Will. The mood was natural, uncontrived. Layman Pang made an appearance. Zen Master Raven paid a call. All members of the sesshin sangha generously put themselves to the service of the whole, with dedicated practice on and off the cushion. Sesshin is a mysterious business. There's always learning to be had. And it never arrives in the way you might expect. Fortunately.



In the end the sun shone. Thanks to clear thinking/planning and some invaluable heavy duty vehicles, everyone was able to return home. (On Wednesday, once the creek was down and before the deluge returned, small cars had driven out and parked beyond the causeway.) Undoubtedly the mind of sesshin returned home as well and continues to return home drenched in dharma rain.

Maggie



News from the Board

Changing Times We're back at Annandale full time and are very pleased to be experiencing face to face connections as well as the opportunity to softly gaze at the same cream wall while we sit together. Every Monday and some Wednesday Zoom meetings will continue so we can continue the relationships with our teachers and community that have been developed over the last year. Check on the website for the schedule.

Environmental action Thank you everyone who came to Callan Park after our AGM to sit together in protest of the escalating situation of our changing climate. This action was organised by Mari Rhydwen, roshi and Julie Robinson (as well as many others), in association with the Contemplative Rebels and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change.

Spring sesshin What a wonderfully wild and wet time was spent at Kodoji for Spring sesshin. Deep bow of gratitude to everyone who attended and particularly those who helped make it safe in the presence of the rising creek which, for a few days, blocked the exit road.

Kodoji bush regen Thanks to Jill for securing another \$8,000 bush regen grant. Part of the grant requires us to match the grant money in work hours by our members. This means we need to do quite a lot of bush regen work as well as employing a professional. At the samu in October our land was assessed by Julie, who will notify us about specific bush regen weekends in the new year. So, keep your eyes peeled and sign up for a fun weekend with the weeders.

Regular Notices

Return to Annandale Zendo / Continuation of on-line meditation

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

Zazen will be offered at the zendo at Annandale every Monday and Wednesday evening led by our teachers or senior students. There will also be zazen on Zoom on every Monday and the second Wednesday of the month, as well as every Thursday evening and Tuesday morning. Zazen at the zendo will be run according to the latest Covid advice from the NSW Department of Health.

Please go to the website for the latest information about the schedule: szc.org.au/classes/zazen

Mondays

Annandale - Subhana and Peter Bursky on alternate weeks

Zoom - Subhana and senior students on alternate weeks

Tuesdays

Mini morning meditation

6.55–7.00am Join/welcome

7.00–7.25am Meditation

7.25–7.30am Great Vows

Wednesdays

Annandale - Gillian Coote and Will Moon on alternate weeks

Zoom - Gillian Coote on the second of the month

Thursdays online

7.00–8:00 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 for more details.

Dokusan for members

Annandale - Dokusan is offered to members by our teachers on some Mondays and every Wednesday

Phone - Dokusan is offered by Subhana on Thursdays and Gilly by appointment.

Members of the Board



Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) stewartkerry4@gmail.com, Stephen Crump (secretary), Jason Koh (treasurer), Helen Sanderson, Zoe Thurner, Julie Robinson, Pablo Scodellaro, Joe Gabel.

Newsletter Editor: Janet Selby janetselby@bigpond.com

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

December 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	2 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	3 Rohatsu sesshin starts Zoom	4 Rohatsu sesshin Annandale, Zoom
5 Rohatsu sesshin Annandale, Zoom	6 Rohatsu sesshin Zoom	7 Rohatsu sesshin Zoom Board meeting 6:30pm	8 Rohatsu sesshin Zoom ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will Zoom 7-8.30pm Gilly	9 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	10	11
12	13 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm senior students Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	14 Orientation	15 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	16 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	17	18
19	20 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm Subhana Zoom Students 7-8.30pm	21	22 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Annadale 7-9pm Will	23 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	24	25
26	27 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Maggie Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	28 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am	29 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gillian	30 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am	31	

January 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 ZAZEN Annandale closed Zoom 7-8.30pm senior students	4 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30pm	5 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gillian	6 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Jane	7	8 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30pm
9	10 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Peter Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	11 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am Board meeting 6:30pm	12 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	13 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Peter	14	15 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am
16 Zazenkai Jane	17 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm senior students Zoom 7-8.30pm senior students	18 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am	19 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm senior students	20 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	21	22 Kickstart practice 6.50-7.30am
23	24 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Peter Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	25	26 Public Holiday no sitting	27 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Peter	28	29
30	31 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Maggie Zoom 7-8.30pm senior students					