



## ENCOURAGING WORDS

Peter Bursky

### No more searching around



In a couple millennia's worth of meditation instruction we find a wealth of shared experience that has allowed teachers to craft useful teachings that help point students

in the right direction.

In our inherited traditions of Buddhism, Taoism and Ch'an, various approaches to guidance arose out of the insights these traditions collectively experienced. The most obvious approach, which resonates most commonly in the way we approach learning, is to see practice as a gradual process of experiential stages on the way to realisation. In a sense it is practice in the relative world of form, of attainment and accomplishment, practice as a matter of 'getting somewhere' so to speak. However, much of what we do in our tradition is to approach practice as a way of 'getting nowhere' and uncovering what's already there. There is nothing to attain, nothing to accomplish. Mind and body are already full and complete as they are.

In challenging this notion that we attain something through practice and in expressing our zazen as needing no added extras, there's a dialogue in the Gateless Barrier where Ta-mei asks Ma-tsu, "What is Buddha?" to this Ma-tsu replies, "This very mind is Buddha". Amazing. Ma-tsu's response reveals someone of wise character with the open heart that can accept all beings and things just as they are.

You may be familiar with the term "Just Sitting" as a way we refer to zazen practice. It is slightly more subtle but nonetheless in the same spirit as "This very mind is Buddha".

Just to sit adds nothing extra, there is no buddha mind to attain through zazen. The very act of sitting is the point itself. It's already complete. Yet the zazen of this very mind and body finds its embodied expression in our everyday lives as well, and when we make this important shift in our approach to life many ordinary things take on a deeper significance. Dogen often expressed it in the term "*shushō-ittō*" or "oneness of practice & realisation". He said "*To suppose that practice and realisation are not*

*one is a view of those outside the way, in Buddha-dharma they are inseparable. Because practice of the present moment is practice-realisation, the practice of beginner's mind is itself the entire original realisation"*.

Again, practice doesn't just mean sitting on the cushion though. As we see in the opening chapter of the Diamond Sutra there's no fantastical introduction of magical bodhisattvas and mythical creatures raining flowers upon the assembled listeners, it's just a simple scene free of any mysterious embellishment:

*"When it was time to make the alms round, the Buddha put on his robe and, holding his bowl, went into the city of Shravasti to beg for food, going from house to house. When the alms round was completed, he returned to the monastery to eat the midday meal. Then he put away his robe and his bowl, washed his feet, arranged his cushion, and sat down"*.

In this simple scene our own life and practice can be seen too, and we can find our own embodied expression of "This very mind is Buddha" through our own everyday activity.

Wu-men comments on Ma-tsu's response saying, "*If you can grasp the point directly, you wear Buddha's robes, eat Buddha's food, speak Buddha's words, take Buddha's role. That is, you yourself are Buddha. Ta-mei, however, misled quite a few people into trusting a broken scale. Don't you know you should rinse your mouth for three days when you utter the name Buddha? If you are genuine, you'll run away holding your ears upon hearing the words, "This very mind is Buddha."*"

Grasping the point directly you see that everything you do, from putting on clothes to eating, speaking and going about your daily business is nothing but the activity of your own essential nature. From the ultimate standpoint however, Ta-mei's question is out of place. Even the word Buddha hurts our ears. It is still just a brittle concept. Wu-men goes further in a verse...

*The blue sky and bright day -  
no more searching around.*

*“What is Buddha?” you ask.*

*Hiding loot, you declare your innocence.*

Dogen says, “Mountains, rivers and earth mind are just mountains, rivers and the earth. There are no extra waves or sprays (in this mind). The sun, the moon, and stars mind is just the sun, the moon, and stars. There is no extra fog or mist. The coming and going of birth and death mind is just the coming and going of birth and death. There is no extra delusion or enlightenment... This being so, This very mind is Buddha does not divide This very mind is Buddha. Buddhas do not divide Buddhas.” You stop searching around for a buddha when you see things just as they are, when you stop dividing yourself. And when mind, buddha, practice, realisation, the blue sky and bright day pierce you completely, what need is there to ask?

*Peter Bursky*

References: Dogen, Shobogenzo, Fascicle six, pages 43-47 “The Mind itself is Buddha”.  
Andy Ferguson’s ‘Zen’s Chinese Heritage’, pages 72-79 & 102-105.  
Bodhidharma, ‘Bloodstream sermon’ page 9, Red Pine.

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## Upcoming Events

### Autumn Sesshin, Kodoji, 15-22 April

The Bodhisattva Way of Compassion and Care will run from Good Friday April 15 to Friday April 22. Roshis Subhana Barzaghi and Maggie Gluek will guide us to embody this Way fully. Sesshin will be Covid-safe and follow Government Health guidelines. In consequence, for everyone’s peace of mind we require all participants to be double-vaccinated.

Fees: SZC members \$450 full-time and \$65 day.

Non-members \$590 full-time and \$85 day.

For further info contact: Diana Levy - [diana.r.levy@gmail.com](mailto:diana.r.levy@gmail.com)

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## Reports

### Rohatsu Online Sesshin

Rohatsu sesshin 2021 was held from Friday evening December 3 to Wednesday midday December 8, and was led by the Apprentice teachers Peter Bursky and

Jane Andino. The theme of this year’s sesshin was the Zen lineage, and the influence that Taoism had on the formation of Ch’an Buddhism.

We had 5 full time participants and 21 part time. Most of the participants were from Sydney, Blue Mountains and Wollongong, but we also had a full time person online from Brisbane and Jill joined us online from Darwin. This was the first time that SZC has run a “concurrent” sesshin. With Covid-safe distancing in the dojo, only 9 people plus the teacher can attend at Annandale, so we decided to offer a part-time sesshin at Annandale concurrently with the online sesshin. In addition, the online sesshin catered for those unable to attend in person due to distance or illness.

Participants at Annandale attended in person, with Jane leading, on the Saturday and Sunday morning and afternoon blocks, and then rejoined the online sesshin in the evenings when teishos were offered by the teachers. Meanwhile, Peter ran the full time online side of the sesshin. It was a great joy for those sitting at Annandale to once again sit in zazen in person together, to have live dokusan, and once again enjoy the planes roaring overhead and the passing chatter of the street life. This “concurrent” scheduling seemed to work very well, with all those attending commenting very favorably.

One much-loved feature of sesshins at Annandale is outside kinhin in the Wetlands park. As usual this was a great opportunity for a mindful walk in the beautiful open spaces offered by the park. This year we have been able to spot several long-neck turtles in different ponds. During the Sunday walk we noticed a number of enthusiastic volunteers





working on different areas of the park. Paul Garcia, who attended sesshin with us, is also a volunteer with the group and he introduced us to some of the group members who explained how this permaculture designed garden works. They invited us to stay for a drink at the end of their work, but we politely declined.

The sesshin then shifted to online only from Monday onwards to its conclusion on Wednesday morning, shifting people back into home based practice if they had been attending Annandale over the weekend. The spirit of the awakened ebb and flow of our taoist roots very much permeated this sesshin, and all aspects of our shared practice seemed to hold us in a way that felt like we were being carried down a glitchless cyber stream of online zen. The teisho's riffed on the Tao and virtues of Ordinary Mind, the art of picnicking and Chao-chou's Wu koan, unpacking how the language and imagery of Taoism expressed its own message of wisdom and compassion, nurturing the growth of our Ch'an tradition.

In closing this was a wonderfully smooth sesshin, enjoyed by all. Thanks to everyone who attended.

## ROB SCOTT-MITCHELL

1954 - 2021



Rob was a long-time Zen student and old sangha friend. Early in the '90s he lived at the Annandale zendo and served on the SZC Board. He and Lindy Lee met at sesshin, a Zen romance, and they married in 1996.

A multi-talented artist, animator, and digital media designer, Rob had a particular passion for photography. He won the inaugural National Photographic Portrait Prize in 2011. Another great love was music. His instruments included accordion and many styles of guitar. Indeed, in the months before he died he was just discovering the joy of playing blues on the slide guitar. And he adored his dogs, a succession of Scottish terriers with whom he and Lindy shared their lives.

Some of us will remember his resonant bass voice, a twinkle in his eye, a refined ironic humor and a gentleness of heart.

Farewell, Standing Stone.\* May you rest in deepest peace.

\*Rob's dharma name.



## Farewell Thay

**Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, world-renowned spiritual leader, author, poet, and peace activist—died on 22 January, 2022 at his root temple, Tu Hien Temple, in Hue, Vietnam. He was 95.**



There is an ocean of bright clouds; there is an ocean of solemn clouds.

A great ocean of sadness.

How lucky we are to have witnessed Thay's mission to the world in both his writing and in his courageous social and political work.

It has been said that in his writing Thay was somewhat simple in his approach. I feel this criticism is overstated: I find his simple and down to earth expression brings me back to an essential element or level of the dharma where interfaith practice is possible and appropriate.

His teaching of interbeing is a perfect expression, on the one hand, of his grasp of one of the deepest philosophical teachings of the Buddha (*pratityasamutpada*) and on the other hand of his clear direct insight.

May he rest in peace.

*Philip Long*



*Thich Nhat Hanh led a retreat at Burradoo, NSW, where SZC had had sesshins with Aitken Roshi. These photos were taken in 1986 or 1987.*

*Photos supplied by Diana Levy, courtesy Chris Eade.*

### The Leaf

That autumn day, I asked the leaf whether it was afraid to fall, since it was autumn and the other leaves were falling. The leaf told me, "No. During the whole spring and summer I was very alive. I worked hard and helped nourish the tree, and much of me is in the tree. Please do not think that I am just this form, because this leaf form is only a tiny part of me. I am the whole tree. I know that I am already inside the tree, and when I go back to the soil, I will continue to nourish the tree. That is why I do not worry. As I drop from the branch and float down to the ground, I will wave to the tree and tell her, 'I will see you again very soon.'"

Suddenly I had a kind of insight very much like the insight contained in the Heart Sutra. You have to see life. You shouldn't say, life of the leaf, but life in the leaf, and life in the tree. My life is just Life, and you can see it in me and in the tree. I saw the leaf leave the branch and float down to the soil, dancing joyfully, because as it floated it saw itself already there in the tree. It was so happy. I bowed my head, and I knew that we have a lot to learn from the leaf because it was not afraid; it knew that nothing can be born and nothing can die.

After many months of superb work nourishing the tree, nourishing other species, providing shade, and making life beautiful, the leaf lets go and gracefully falls to the ground, without any fear, because it knows it has gone out into many directions. It does not identify itself with the form that is floating down to earth, because what is floating down is just a small part of itself that will become one with the earth; in the future it may become a leaf or a flower again. There is nothing to attain and nothing is lost.

We should not wait until we are on our deathbed to begin to contemplate that this body is not myself. We should begin right away to look deeply into this truth, so that we can help those who are dying and so that when we ourselves are dying we can be at peace and without fear.

*Thich Naht Hahn, Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*

# News from the Board

## Constant change

Due to the Omicron variant the Board is taking advice from the NSW Health Department and taking a conservatively safe position regarding opening the Annandale zendo for zazen. Zoom meetings will continue so members can continue their relationships with our teachers and community that have been developed over the last year. Check on the website for the latest schedule: [szc.org.au](http://szc.org.au)

## Rohatsu 2021

Thank you Jane and Peter for leading such a successful online sesshin in December last year and adapting so nimbly to the changing situation!

## Kodoji samu – 26 & 27 March

Samu is a wonderful opportunity to extend your practice into your daily life, and an ancient way of giving something valuable back to the sangha through the generosity of your labour. It's also a wonderful chance to spend some relaxed time together with your dharma buddies. All samus at Kodoji are family friendly weekends. Please bring food to share for the weekend. There are plenty of jobs you can share in – mowing, some painting, cleaning and having lots of fun together. Also, as part of our bush regen grant, we will be weeding and cutting back invasive plants. So bring your secateurs and gloves. Please contact Brendon if you plan to come: [stewarts34@bigpond.com](mailto:stewarts34@bigpond.com)

## Women's retreat – 2 & 3 April

This retreat is open to all women with sitting experience. It's a wonderful opportunity to be together over a weekend with birds and trees and weather at our bush zendo, Kodoji. The cost is \$20 a night for SZC members and \$25 a night for others. We sit together, share together, cook, walk, and usually sing. Contact: Kerry [stewartkerry4@gmail.com](mailto:stewartkerry4@gmail.com)

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## 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](mailto:info@szc.org.au) for details.

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](http://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 and Will Moon on alternate weeks

**Zoom** - Gillian and Will on alternate weeks

### Thursdays online

7.00–8.00pm Meditation/walking

8.00–8.30pm 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.

### 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](mailto:stewartkerry4@gmail.com), Stephen Crump (secretary), Jason Koh (treasurer), Helen Sanderson, Zoe Thurner, Julie Robinson, Pablo Scodellaro, Joe Gaebel.

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

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## February 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 ZAZEN Zoom 7-9pm Gilly	3 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	4	5
6	7 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	8 Orientation	9 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Will	10 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	11	12
13	14 ZAZEN Full Moon Ceremony Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana <i>Not praising yourself</i>	15 Board meeting	16 ZAZEN Full Moon Ceremony Zoom 7-8.30pm Gilly <i>Not praising yourself</i>	17 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	18	19
20 ZAZENKAI Zoom Maggie	21 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	22	23 ZAZEN Zoom 7-9pm Will	24 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	25	26
27	28 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana					



## March 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 ZAZEN Annandale 7-8.30pm Gilly	3 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Jane	4	5
6	7 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana  Zoom 7-8.30pm senior students	8 Orientation	9 ZAZEN Annandale 7-8.30pm Will	10 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Peter	11	12
13	14 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm senior students  Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	15 Board meeting 6:30pm	16 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-8.30pm Gilly	17 ZAZEN Dharma Cafe Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	18	19
20  Zazenkai Peter	21 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana  Zoom 7-8.30pm senior students	22	23 ZAZEN Annandale 7-8.30pm Will	24 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Peter	25	26 Kodoji Samu
27 Kodoji Samu	28 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm senior students  Zoom 7-8.30pm Subhana	29	30 ZAZEN Annandale 7-8.30pm Gilly	31 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8.30pm Jane		