



Encouraging Words

Gillian Coote

It's Your Path to Walk

The 13th century Zen master Eihei Dogen said that zazen is not a means to an end, not a technique for realisation, but that practice and realisation are inseparably one and the same. And more recently, Soto teacher Sawaki roshi said that Zen is 'wonderfully useless'. And like countless Zen teachers before him, Sawaki particularly discourages any ideas about gaining something or seeking special experiences or states of consciousness. Sawaki's 'wonderfully useless' sets zazen apart from much of what we do in our lives. Dogen again: 'Zazen is not a meditation technique. It is simply the Dharma gate of joyful ease; it's practising realisation of the boundless Dharma way. Here, the open mystery manifests and there are no more traps and snares for you to get caught in.

'Right here it is eternally full and serene, if you search elsewhere, you cannot see it. You cannot grasp it, you cannot reject it. In the midst of not gaining. In that condition, you gain it.' promises Yung-Chia's Shodoka.

Hakuin's Dharma heir, Torei Zenji, put it like this: 'Each particle of matter, each moment, is no other than the Tathagata's inexpressible radiance.' How radical. Nothing is excluded. Nothing's put into brackets. Nothing is suffered or endured, impatiently. We unite with each breath, each moment.

And though it's difficult - and counter-intuitive - to step outside means-to-an-end thinking, gaining thinking, goal-oriented thinking, five-year plan thinking, the moment we sit down to do zazen, we are useless! What we're doing has no point outside of itself, outside of the moment itself. We just *are*, we just *sit*, and in the very act of sitting we actualise the completeness of the act itself and we actualise our own full completeness as useless human beings, useless Buddhas.

A daily zazen practice, weekly zazen with the sangha, monthly zazenkai, seasonal sesshin - these are all formal practice opportunities - and then there's the 24/7 of our own precious, particular lives. Sawaki roshi again: 'You can't even trade a single fart with the next guy. Each and every

one of us has to live out their own life. Don't waste time thinking about who's most talented. The eyes don't say, 'Sure we're lower but we see more.' The eyebrows don't reply, 'Sure we don't see anything, but we're higher up.' Living out the buddha-dharma means fulfilling your function completely without knowing that you're doing it. A mountain doesn't know it's tall. The sea doesn't know it's wide and deep. Each and every thing in the universe is active without knowing it. The bird's singing and the flower's laughter appear naturally, completely independent from the person sitting in zazen at the foot of the cliff. The bird doesn't sing in honour of the person in zazen. The flower doesn't blossom to amaze the person with her beauty. In exactly the same way, the person doesn't sit in zazen in order to get satori. Every single being simply realises the self, through the self, for the self.'

Sangha friends sometimes comment on how their practice of zazen is benefitting their life. From a doctor; even though she may be in the middle of a hectic medical environment with demands coming at her from all sides - she takes a breath and stays present with *this* patient, *this* consultation, letting go of the long list of things to do and focussing on the person right in front of her. So much better for the patient, not to mention the doctor. And this is since taking up a daily practice of zazen. Another friend notices that when he experiences intense feelings of existential angst -anxiety - he remembers metta and reminds himself to breathe self-acceptance and compassion - and the anxiety loses its intensity.

These experiences - being able to maintain focus and pay attention, being able to accept and embrace difficult emotions - from people with a committed daily Zen practice - were not loaded up at the beginning of their practice as goals, as desired outcomes. It's more that as their practice matures, they notice how things change - for the better. Which is what the Buddha insisted on - do the practice, keep the Precepts, and see how it works out in your lives. Above all, don't rely on hearsay or authority - put no other's head above your own. It's your path to walk.

Upcoming events

Kickstart Your Practice 2026

The annual Kickstart program begins again this January. It is a program of morning zazen 7.00 -7.30am on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It will be led by Jane Andino who will drop in some helpful words or a favourite Aitken gatha to support your zazen.

The dates are as follows:

Saturday	Tuesday	Thursday
Jan 3	Jan 6	Jan 8
10	13	15
17	20	22
24	27	29

Reports

Memorial Ceremony 2025

The annual SZC Memorial ceremony was held at Annandale on Sunday morning, November 9, with a full dojo of participants. Maggie Gluek had organised and promoted the ceremony which, in particular, remembered the passing of our dear long-term sangha member, Jean Brick. Sadly, Maggie succumbed to a virus and was unable to attend, so Jane Andino led the morning's ceremonies. Ryan O'Connor was the ino, and Monika Wunderlin was the jiki.

The morning began with a period of zazen followed by sutras and dedications. Our teachers Subhana, Gilly and Paul presented incense. As we chanted the Kanzeon sutra, people took photos, poems, and treasured objects which held tender memories of their loved ones, and placed them near the side altar with the statue of Jizo. Jizo is the Bodhisattva who protects children and travellers through the six worlds. Our statue was made by Janet Selby and was surrounded by flowers arranged by Glenys.

We then moved our zafus and chairs into a sharing circle to share the poetic, funny and touching moments of the lives entwined with ours, firstly the many reminiscences of Jean, and then those of other dear loved ones of the sangha members present.

After final sutras, we shared a potluck lunch together with food made specially for the occasion by members. The whole morning was reflective and healing, made so by the many contributions of all the sangha.

Spring sesshin



Spring sesshin at Kodoji came to life in the weeks and days leading up to Saturday October 4, co-ordinated with great care by Janet Selby, with her artwork on the application forms and invitations. Jill did food planning. Will's and my invitation to settle and focus was gladly accepted by all

participants, with a strong leadership team of Maggie, Jane, Helen and Janet. Sesshin mysteries included a fluffy koala, a hungry goanna, an elegant slender python, a turtle in the creek, lyrebirds singing and scratching and countless birds, singing us to daybreak and beyond. The full moon was hazy, then bright, and our robes were the dew, the fog, the cloud and the mist. Our sesshin flowing seamlessly and fruitfully to October 11, when people arrived for Will Moon's Transmission Ceremony in the afternoon, followed by delicious cakes, savory dips and Scott's evocative music. Deep gassho. Gillian Coote

Will's Transmission Ceremony

On Saturday 11 October our deep and settled sesshin ended at midday. We had been sitting with the sounds of the world: birdsong, waving branches in the wind, the night sounds of wombats and koala, the steady gaze of the wondrous stars. Then, from midday, a flow of the human world began to arrive at Kodoji to participate in the Transmission ceremony of Will Moon.

Will has had a long connection with the Sydney Zen Centre for more than 30 years, as well as attending at sesshin with Robert Aitken, both on his first visit to Australia and in Hawaii. Gilly Coote has been Will's main teacher, and in 2019 Will became an Apprentice teacher.



The Dharma Transmission ceremony began with a welcome from Gilly Coote Roshi and then a dharma talk from Will. We then had the Jukai Renewal vows, and Will was presented with his lineage chart, kotsu, and teacher's rakusu. Will Moon's teaching name is Shan Ryu, 'Mountain Stream'. He was then presented with gifts from teachers and sangha friends. Many of these gifts reflected Will's deep love of walking in the mountains, his knowledge of archaeology, and his care for Sangha. The ceremony ended with a musical treat from the Ino for this ceremony, Maggie Gluek.

We proceeded to refreshments, lavish offerings of cakes and tea, accompanied by the unique music of Scott Nelson who played Scottish airs and jigs on his bagpipes for our entertainment. It certainly made many of us dance in celebration as we reflected with gratitude on Will's commitment to walk the Way as a SZC teacher.



Samu Report 2025

Many of us have helped out with two samus at Kodoji and one at Annandale. Samu is always a precious time because we get to share our practice in a very practical and generous way with all our Sangha friends. We get to know each other by getting dirty and tired together.

Maintaining Kodoji will be with us for a very long time, beautiful as it is it's also getting older and wooden buildings require a lot of attention. Our plan is to paint the higher reaches of the buildings over the next year, we can regularly keep the paint up to the lower parts of the cottage, hojo and meditation hall but the tops of the gables and around the high windows will require a professional painter. This hopefully will happen before autumn.

Two big projects were completed this year, new water tanks on new wooden stands and some revised plumbing was finished off before spring sesshin and a new solar lighting system is there in the toilets and wash basin.

Our resident mice families are scratching around somewhere else in their search for a new home, thanks to the endless diligence of Jill S and her Robert.



Oh yes another big job was digging out the toilet pit, all good in the drop zone!

Annandale has had a good tidy up with rooms painted and the front door finished beautifully. The hedge continues to grow and requires trimming regularly, the garden is a delight and provides many of the flowers that Glenys so elegantly arranges for our altar.

The ceiling in the dojo requires some serious attention, checking with the landlord as to what's the best option.

Kodoji Open Weekend

The Kodoji Open Weekend was blessed with 10 attendees and generally fine weather. Upon our arrival, we discovered Zen master Bat had entered Samadhi while on the cushion, leaving only his well-preserved body behind, following the lead of the Patriarchs.

This matched the spirit of the weekend as everyone had nothing to do and nowhere to go, which turned out to be quite pleasant and relaxing. When this got too much, Sean demonstrated some very simple Japanese cooking and Will led a walk up the creek as far as the water holes.

The weekend turned out to be far too short for all this non-activity, so it was universally agreed that we should do this again next year. Stay tuned!

News from the Board

Bank matters

Our new account at Bank Australia is working well, but we need all members who pay for membership fees via a periodic payment (monthly, quarterly, bi-annually or annually) to our old CommBank account, to change their details. I have sent out an email to all members with our new BSB and Account number to make this process easier. For sesshin, orientation and facility fees you can do a bank transfer using PayID, using our email info@szc.org.au as the name of the organisation to pay. We are also setting up a Term Deposit account and will close down the CommBank account soon.

Kodoji

In January, Nick our Dharma buddy and expert with a brush, will be painting the high parts of the dojo and cottage. This area hasn't been painted in many years, and the wood is starting to deteriorate. These high sections are very difficult and dangerous for our members to do without the proper equipment. So, next time you're at Gorricks you'll be able to look up and be dazzled by the brightness.

Kickstart Your Practice

Thanks to Jane for leading our regular morning Zoom meditation sessions in January! This is a great way to reconnect with your practice after the busyness of Christmas and the new year, as well as seeing your Dharma friends.

<https://szc.org.au/classes/kickstart-your-practice/>

Sesshin coordinators needed

To spread the joy of volunteering, the Board has collated all the information necessary for a member to take up the role of a sesshin coordinator. Also, experienced members are happy to mentor you. So if you're wanting to help, and haven't done the job before, please contact William: jwgverity@gmail.com or Kerry: stewartkerry4@gmail.com



Regular Notices

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

Mondays

Annandale - Subhana

Tuesdays online

Mini morning meditation

6.55–7.00am Join/welcome,

7.00–7.25am Meditation,

7.25–7.30am Great Vows

Wednesdays

Annandale - Gillian Coote or Will Moon

Thursdays online

With Jane Andino or Peter Bursky,

7.00–8.00pm Meditation/walking,

8.00–8.30pm Discussion/Great Vows

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 Gillian by appointment

The Blue Mountains Zen Group

We usually meet on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month, 3-5 pm.

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

Email Jane janeandino@yahoo.com.au for more details.

Wahroonga Friends, Upper North Shore

The Meeting House is located at 59 Boundary Road Wahroonga

Inquiries to Maggie: 0413 018 100, magpiewarble@yahoo.com

Online opportunities

If you can't come to the zendo because you live too far away, or you have work or family commitments, or you are restricted in your ability to travel, we have a solution for you.

Meditation is available online via Zoom every Tuesday morning (6.55am – 7.30am) and Thursday evening (6.50pm – 8.30pm) led by two of our teachers - Jane Andino and Peter Bursky. And you can even become an online SZC member for a very special price! Go to the website for more details: <https://szc.org.au/classes/online-meditation/>



Members of the Board

Kerry Stewart (Chairperson) stewartkerry4@gmail.com; Zoe Thurner (secretary); Scott Nelson (treasurer); Joe Gaebel; Sean Loughman.

Newsletter Editor: Janet Selby janetselby@bigpond.com

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December 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Peter	2	3 Rohatsu sesshin	4 Rohatsu Sesshin ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	5 Rohatsu sesshin	6 Rohatsu sesshin
7 Rohatsu sesshin	8 Rohatsu sesshin	9	10 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not indulging in Anger 7-9pm Will	11 ZAZEN Zoom FMC Not indulging in Anger 7-8:30pm Peter	12	13
14	15 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not indulging in Anger 7-9pm Subhana	16	17 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	18	19	20
21	22 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	23	24 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	25	26	27
28	29 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	30				

January 2026

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				1 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	2	3
4	5 Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	6	7 Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm Will	8 Dharma Cafe Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	9	10
11	12 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not indulging in Anger 7-9pm Subhana	13	14 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	15 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	16	17
18	19 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	20	21 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	22 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	23	24
25	26 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	27	28 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	29 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	30	31