



Encouraging Words

Peter Bursky

Great Balls of Doubt!

In the Rinzai tradition there are three core elements that form the foundation of practice. They are the Great Root of Faith, the Great Mass of Doubt and a Great Fierce Resolve. But why are they “great”?

I have always loved the idea that the character for great, 大, features the pictographic element of someone standing with their arms outstretched. Like someone saying, “It’s this big!”

“Great Doubt”, or more literally the “Great Mass of Doubt”, 大疑團, holds further embodied imagery. The character for doubt, 疑, traditionally imagines a person leaning on a staff, uncertain about which way to go. The final character, 團, refers to something gathered, rounded and compacted into a mass. For me, this points directly to where we hold our practice, our questions, our koans: deep in our belly.

These embodied presentations come to life when we meet our teachers in dokusan, perhaps when expressing the vastness of our true nature, or in pointing out that our uncertainties are it too. Practice happens nowhere else except in this very body. This very body is the Buddha.

We might mistakenly see the vigor of our Rinzai side as a kind of gung-ho push to conquer all of our shortcomings, but the truth is that questions such as “who’s hearing?”, “What is your original face?”, or “what is mu?” create visceral conditions in our practice that will push us around, both mentally and physically. And so the container of zazen needs firm foundations.

In his commentary on the first case of the Gateless Barrier, Wumen instructs us to make Mu into a Great Mass of Doubt. He begins by asking, “Is there anyone who would not want to pass this barrier?” That barrier here is not merely an intellectual problem, but the whole existential predicament opened up by these aforementioned questions. Resolve any one of them, and the implications on our body, mind and the ten thousand things as themselves and us, entails a lifetime of integration.

Not surprising, Wumen’s technique that follows is wholly embodied: “Make your whole body a mass of doubt, and with your three hundred and sixty bones and joints and your eighty-four thousand hair follicles concentrate on this one word ‘Mu.’ Day and night, keep digging into it. Don’t consider it to be nothingness. Don’t think in terms of “has” and “has not.” It is like swallowing a red-hot iron ball. You try to vomit it out, but you can’t”.

Visceral indeed!

But as simply as Yamada Roshi once said, “Great Doubt is the condition of being one with Mu.” And Aitken Roshi writes, “There’s no need to manufacture doubt or to create it from outside. It’s right here: What is Mu?”

Great Doubt is not simply a step along the way. It is the Way itself. We will always be searching, saving, letting go and holding on. Even our greatest breakthroughs must themselves be questioned. Wumen ends his comment with, “A single spark lights your dharma candle”. Yet that candle must be blown out and rekindled, over and over again. Dahui says, “Beneath the Great Doubt, always there is a Great Awakening”. Please taste that great mass for yourselves.

Upcoming Events

Bushwalking zazenkai

29-30 August

The bushwalking retreat, to be led by Will Moon, roshi is planned for the weekend of 29th and 30th of August, with the option of arriving at Kodoji on Friday the 28th.

Our experienced bushwalker and Zen teacher, Will Moon, will be leading a group of interested members through the landscape surrounding Kodoji, our bush zendo. Participants will be spending the evenings and sleeping at Kodoji and walking silently during the day. Will will also do dokusan on the weekend.

The terrain is challenging, so medium to high fitness is required. Weather permitting the plan is to walk into the back country that surrounds the valley. There are no walking tracks in this country. It is rocky and can be steep and scrubby in places. But it is well worth the effort. It is best suited for people who have some experience bushwalking and who are reasonably fit, and without any health issues.

If you don't want to do the walk, or don't feel like you could do the walk, but would like to come up to Kodoji for the weekend and just enjoy nature and do some zazen, you are also welcome to join us at Kodoji for the weekend. Perhaps you could mindfully pull some weeds, paint a picture or write a poem. Alternatively, you may choose to walk one day and rest the other.

It is country that has been walked by the traditional inhabitants for many millennia. Their traces are left everywhere through the landscape as they connected with the earth walking barefoot through the country. The walk is an opportunity to awaken to Dogen's assertion that the “green mountains are always walking”.

If you are interested, email Will at wilmoon@gmail.com or call 0400106163. The numbers for the walk will be limited to 12 people. Please bring food to share.

The fee for staying at Kodoji is: Members: \$25 per night, Non-members \$30 per night.

Please do a Bank transfer via PayID into SZC's Bank account. Use info@szc.org.au as the name to pay into, and in the description line include your last name and the tag “BushZaz”.

Kodoji samu

19-20 September

Don't forget to diary in the next kodoji samu, the weekend of 19 and 20 September, such a beautiful time, spring with the smell of thick grass and bird song. Hopefully most of the winter repairs will be up and working, new water tank overflows and maybe even new solar panels. As per usual to prepare for the spring Sesshin we'll be cutting the grass, cleaning the buildings, tidying up the kitchen and generally enjoying our samu work with laughter and stories together- sangha relations!!

Spring sesshin at Kodoji

3-10 October (Including Labour Day)

SZC Spring sesshin will be led by Gillian Coote, roshi and Will Moon, roshi.

Deepen your practice during Spring Sesshin. Book this space in your calendar if you would like to attend and be rewarded by the depth of intensive practice. Online application is now available on the SZC website.

COST: Full Time SZC member \$630, Non-member \$790

Part time SZC member \$90 per day, Non-member \$120 per day

Application and Payment due Friday 18 September 2026.

Payment after this date incurs a 10% additional fee. Enquiries: ameli.tanchitsa@gmail.com

Reports

Winter sesshin

5-10 June



Winter sesshin was held over the June long weekend from Friday evening June 5 to Wednesday midday June 10. The sesshin was led by Jane Andino and Peter Bursky. It was held concurrently at Annandale Zendo and online via zoom. Peter took the first two full days at Annandale with Jane online, and then they swapped for the last two days. All the evenings were only online so that all could

hear the teishos together. We had 25 participants, attending a record number of blocks compared to other years.

The sesshin took its theme from some lines of Verses on the Faith Mind 'Live neither in the entanglements of outer things, nor in inner feelings of emptiness', and we explored how to bring the teaching of the Middle Way into our everyday life.

Many thanks go to our sesshin coordinator Scott Nelson who was both efficient and friendly in this demanding role. Scott was also our Ino, Monika our Jiki, and Maggie and others took on Jisha roles as needed. Many thanks also to Glenys who filled each room with her special arrangements of flowers, each vase a work of art.

Many people expressed their appreciation of having a sesshin that they could participate with online or attend partly at Annandale or online depending on their needs and schedule. This was particularly so for people living in regional areas, people with illness or those who are carers. As with all sesshin, you could feel the energy and steady effort of all attending which makes this deep practice possible.

Kodoji Winter Intensive

4-5 July

The second coming of the Kodoji Winter intensive saw an extended format this year. Featuring a healthy contingent of twelve eager sitters, none had any reservations about keeping the dual fireplaces burning for the entire schedule, as temperature predictions pointed to overnight sub-zero frost.

We kept to a stripped-back form: zazen, kinhin, zazen, kinhin. No sutras, no incense, no formal meals - no, no, no. "Sesshin without toys", as someone called it.

Meals were a silent dance of BYO by the cottage fireplace, reflective of the shared depth that sitting at Kodoji never fails to cultivate. Those who slept on the verandah may have regretted it, underfoot the morning grass tips shattered like glass. All the while minds glistened, clear and sharp as ice.

We began on Saturday afternoon and ended Sunday afternoon. It was a special mix of old timers and new, some experiencing the valley for the first time.

Thanks to everyone who came and the shared agreement that next year should be a full weekend. Special thanks to Sean, Sue, Monika and Peter for holding us as leaders across the ten directions.

News from the Board

MEMORIALS

Our Dharma sister, Jean's family are organising a wooden pole with engraving of her dharma name on it, to be made. Brendon will transport it to Kodoji on Friday 18 September for our samu. It will be installed in the same area as Tony's pole. And on Sunday 20 September Jean's family and her sangha friends will participate in a ceremony led by Subhana.

The Board and teachers have been writing a Memorial Plan, to make things clearer and easier for the family and friends of a deceased SZC member, who may want to be remembered at Kodoji. Details of the plan will be distributed to our members and will be available on the website when it has been finalised.

KODOJI

Many of the necessary jobs at Kodoji - fixing guttering, tank overflow redirection and first flush addition - have been completed.

We are now in the process of upgrading our electrical system - new solar panels, new batteries and solar fridges. Thanks, Brendon, for all your work in organising the tradies!

NEW FINANCIAL YEAR - MEMBERSHIP

We have closed our CommBank account and alerted everyone of the change to Bank Australia.

We have decided that our membership fees for the 2026/27 financial year will stay the same as last year. The Board will share part of the generous gift Jean has given to us in her Will with the whole sangha. So, there's no need to adjust your periodic payments. Deep bow of gratitude to Jean.

NEWSLETTER UPGRADE

We are in the process of upgrading our Newsletter. So watch out for a delightful new look.

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

Saturday mornings, from 9:30am to 11:30am.

The Meeting House: 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, William Verity.

Newsletter Editor: Janet Selby janetselby@bigpond.com

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

August 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not Misusing Sex 7-9pm Subhana	4	5 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not Misusing Sex 7-9pm Will	6 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	7	8
9	10 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	11	12 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	13 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	14	15
16 Zazenkai Talk by Maggie	17 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	18	19 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	20 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	21	22
23	24 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	25 Orientation	26 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	27 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	28 Walking Retreat	29 Walking Retreat
30 Walking Retreat	31 Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm Subhana					

September 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 Dharma Cafe Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	3 Dharma Cafe Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	4	5
6	7 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Peter	8	9 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	10 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	11	12
13	14 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	15	16 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Gilly	17 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Jane	18	19 Kodoji Samu
20 Kodoji Samu	21 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Subhana	22 Orientation	23 ZAZEN Annandale 7-9pm Will	24 ZAZEN Zoom 7-8:30pm Peter	25	26
27	28 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not Lying 7-9pm Subhana	29	30 ZAZEN Annandale FMC Not Lying 7-9pm Gilly			