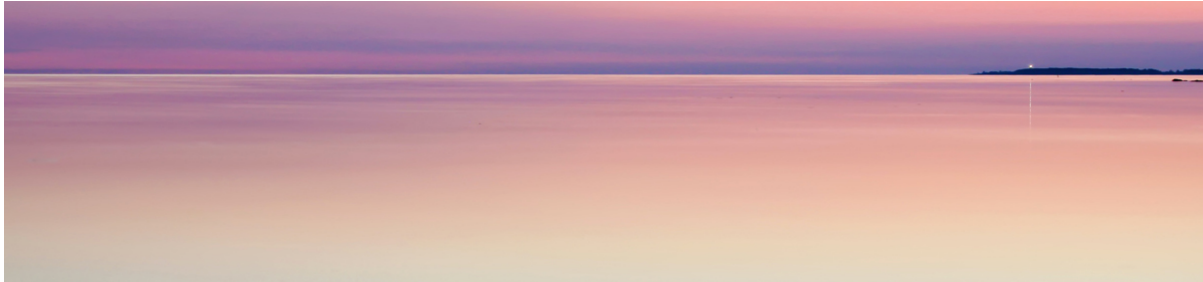


Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

May-June 2020



Being and Doing

I remember years ago at Zen Center San Diego a Dharma talk where we were considering “just being” as a way of living life—an alert stillness of mind, a choiceless awareness where our action is an open response to life and not a reaction coming from mental conditioning. We had a guided meditation aimed to give us some firsthand experience with it. Someone said they felt, in part, an objection to allowing that stillness, along the lines of “just being is not enough.” As I remember, I felt some of that too. Well, it *is* not enough for the ego, that wants more, more, more.

But even early in my practice I experienced an increase in clarity when I could allow that stillness, and that was encouraging. When my high level of thought was quieted, the difference in my life was notable. As long as I can remember I’ve been challenged by a tendency toward obsessive thought. As a younger person, when this tendency was really strong it could literally stop me in my tracks. I remember more than once walking home from high school, becoming aware that I had stopped walking because I was so concentrated on thinking about something. As far as I know that never happened while I was crossing the street—I survived it if it did. Overall, I wasn’t very happy.

Wednesday and Saturday Sitting Programs

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Zen Center of San Diego is conducting two Zoom meetings, one for Wednesday sitting and the other for Saturday. The program will begin at 6:20 pm on Wednesdays and 9:50 am on Saturdays. You can access the meeting on your computer or your phone. You are cordially invited to join us. Zoom has requested organizations not to put links for meetings online. If you would like to join us, please [email us](#) and we will send the links to you.

June 20–21 Sesshin

This online 2-day sesshin will replace the live sesshin that

So when I first heard something like “Get out of your head and into your life,” at least part of me was ready to listen.

As human beings, we are doers, aren’t we? Looking back, my obsessive thinking was my version of doing, and it still can be. I wanted to do something that would help my life. For one inclined to sports, doing is largely physical. For me, thinking was part of my doing. This was not completely amiss, actually—we humans can do amazing things with our thinking minds—scientists, mathematicians, physicists. But it was perhaps a misapplication in my case. When directed towards burning questions like “Who am I?” “What is there to life?” “What is consciousness?” does thinking do much besides pile up strongly-believed-in concepts related to those things, perhaps only increasing the heaviness of our life?

It probably did one thing: set me up to start practicing. Adversity fuels evolution. I’ve heard it said that is true even for plants and animals.

Without those heavy concepts that were being built, would I have taken as positively to the experience of “just being”? Probably not. Experiencing relief while sitting was an impetus to continue practicing. So to find that out was worthwhile, a worthwhile doing.

Practice is for me these days largely about accessing and utilizing that which is within us, from which the next step can come: a step based in intelligence and heart. This comes out of an alert stillness, the Being awareness. Ultimately one realizes it involves more than accessing and utilizing: we become more unified with what we fundamentally are.

If we’ve strengthened our ability to be present in the now over the course of a three- or five-day Sesshin (practice intensive), we might get a glimpse of living more fully and at the same time, with more ease. This is a positive feedback that helps me keep practicing.

From early on, I expected that a diminishing strength of ego would go along with my practice. I anticipated that, over time, the

was originally planned for June. Please note that the dates are now later in the month. Further details will be available soon. Everyone is welcome to attend. [Register here](#) for full-time or part-time.

[Announcements](#)
[Sesshin Application](#)

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ego would be less and less determined to dominate. From what I could see, that's the way it seemed to go with the notable teachers. But was that, or is that, really true?

My experience is more that the ego takes note of everything that happens and seeks to add it to our mental conditioning. For instance, it takes an insight that is accompanied by some enthusiasm and turns it into concepts, words, beliefs, and thoughts. Thus we get the ego's rather shallow version of insight that leaves us feeling like we've lost something fundamentally more important. It can be like we're in the middle of conflicting forces: our spirit wants us to live from a deeper understanding of life and the ego wants to solidify our self-image and have us live more out of our thoughts. I don't see this as evil, it's just what the ego does.

So as a human, we have a strong part of ourselves that puts together and holds to the concept of our self as a separate entity, and it applies itself quite effectively to maintaining that separateness. Our so-called higher self wants to establish more realized and actualized oneness in our life. Between these two there can be a sort of tug-of-war. Back and forth, back and forth, it can seem. Human life just entails this. Perhaps life encourages experience and experiments with both so that we have wide learning opportunities. Practice encourages the learning process and suggests we delve deeper into the nature of our Being.

The grip of the self-centered mind has at times, particularly in the last year for me, facing health and other challenges, been about as strong as ever. And the need for practice continues with the virus-related fear and anxiety we've been experiencing for two months. But this offers us the valuable opportunity to become better acquainted with the potential "grace of adversity": more freedom and clarity.

What we are is stronger than the grip of the egoic mind. We can show ourselves that. When the grip is stronger, we can apply more practice. And what is the practice? Noticing an upset, I often start with the question, "Just what am I up to right now?"

How am I getting in my way?"

Or in other words, "What is this?" I want to make what is happening now the path, and not turn away, to let it be what it is and experience that. Curiosity can be an ally. I can catch those thoughts that I'm believing in, that aren't necessarily true.

Refraining from furthering the thoughts, residing in the breath and noticing physical sensations in the body, then perhaps widening perception to include the environment, there can be a return to presence. An alertness in the moment can quiet the noisy, fearful mind and give us more clarity in moving forward.

We have an opportunity to add heart to the mix: gratitude and appreciation. In this coronavirus environment we can remember our shared experience, our shared challenges and pain. There's lots of folks who are helping.

Early the other morning, with negative thoughts vying for my attention, I remembered with appreciation those connections between us. Breathing into the heartspace and sensing the body, I came to feel unity and equanimity.

Over time, we might see an evolution in our doing—where it involves a little less self-centered agenda and a little more of what we call the angels of our better nature. Ultimately, it seems to me, doing merges with being, in presence—where maintaining our identity in the action is no longer an issue.

Our job is to just be present. We can turn toward that gripping mind that holds tightly to the self-centered thoughts, blocking the flow of life. We can look directly, be curious, and not be taken into the painful story-of-me (or we can notice when we are taken). I like to remember that line from Shakespeare, "Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

Let's keep showing up (persevering). Shedding the light of awareness in our dark corners fuels the process of healing.

We're fortunate to have our practice, this

applied awareness, in the face of the adversity that now may present itself associated with the virus. We may have more time to face and do our practice work, not having to turn away in distraction. This may well be a time of evolution for all of us.

—*Chuck Sweet*

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