

Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

May-June 2021



Practice Principles

At the close of our regular sitting programs and at the end of each evening during sesshin, we recite the Practice Principles. These are not just “our” verses. They are recited in many, if not all, of the Ordinary Mind zen centers.

Here are the lines:

*Caught in the self-centered dream,
Only suffering.*

*Holding to self-centered thoughts,
Exactly the dream.*

*Each moment, life as it is,
The only teacher.*

*Being just this moment,
Compassion’s way.*

Though we chant this verse often, here are some questions for us all: Are we really awake as we say the Practice Principles? Are

June Sesshin The June sesshin begins on the evening of Friday, June 18, and ends on Monday, June 21, around lunchtime. You are welcome to sit full-time or part-time.

Please [sign up](#) if you would like to attend. We will have a small group of locals sitting in the zendo this time, while others participate via Zoom.

Zendo Reopening We are carefully making plans to open up more spaces in the zendo for regular sitting. There will be an announcement about

they alive for us each time we recite them?
Are we paying attention, and do we let them
point us to our practice?

*Caught in the self-centered dream,
Only suffering.*

Right away, here is the dream, our deluded,
self-centered view of life that is inevitably
the root of our suffering. We all develop—to
some extent, inherit—some version of this
dream, and each of us to a greater or lesser
degree is living out of it. We don't have to
call it a dream; we can call it our fixed
beliefs, our conditioning; we can call it
unexamined assumptions and entitlements.
These *are* the dream.

Caught in the self-centered dream...

The *first* word is "Caught." Caught. Caught is
suffering. Caught is nothing but suffering.
From the get-go, we have a clue that the
problem is not the dream itself; the problem
is that we become caught. We cling. And by
clinging, we perpetuate the dream.

*Holding to self-centered thoughts,
Exactly the dream.*

The second principle almost seems to be a
repetition of the first. But there's a
refinement here. Do you see? This time, the
line points directly to the role of thinking,
clearly stating that we maintain our
delusions with a lot of help from our self-
centered thoughts. They are the scaffolding
for the dream that we then get caught in.

Notice that twice in the first two principles
we hear "self-centered." A clear, balanced
mind can contribute to the greater good in
myriad ways, but we engender a lot of
misery by living blindly out of our selfish
appetites, aversions and opinions.

this soon. Seating
arrangements will
continue to evolve. We
are very much looking
forward to seeing people
and being together
again in person.

[Announcements](#)

[Sesshin Application](#)

*We discover our
true home—our
true self—
through the
practice of
experiencing life
directly.*

To recap, we have “caught in the self-centered dream...,” and we have “holding to self-centered thoughts.” The second echoes the first, and yet, “holding to” is more active, is it not? As such, it suggests we have choice. If we can hold to our thinking, we can also disengage from it. Right there is the possibility of freedom.

*Each moment, life as it is,
The only teacher.*

In this third couplet, the attention turns from dream to reality. Life as it is... this life that we are... is our teacher. To insist on the dream is to seek escape. We discover our true home—our true self—through the practice of experiencing life directly. Others can impart knowledge and teach helpful skills, but we access the wisdom of being this changing life only by experiencing it for ourselves. And through the practice of residing in life as it is, we discover that everything we add by way of complaints, demands, refusals and requirements—all of that is extra. All of it kicks us, once again, into the fabricated world of our delusions.

But now it's more apparent that staying there is optional! As thoughts and sensations triggered by fear, hostility and dissatisfaction emerge into the light of awareness, we find that life itself is inviting us to set them down and to open to our deeper nature, the interconnected life that we always are.

*Being just this moment,
Compassion's way.*

Being this moment *is* compassion's way. We don't need anything more or less than the life that we already are. We don't need to

pick holes in it, nor do we need to add bells and whistles to say, "Look over here! Aren't I great? Aren't I swell?"

That doesn't mean we don't act to change things or clarify confusion or provide help where help is needed. But the destructive fight is gone or, at least, it has lessened. We find constructive ways to move forward. And we are not perpetuating suffering for ourselves and others.

Being just this moment... We've talked about using the middle words—*Just this!*—as a wake-up practice for everyday life. For example, this might mean stopping every time you go through a doorway and dropping in the reminder: Just this. Just wake up. Wake up out of whatever reverie you've been in and pay attention: feel your body, your feet; open to sounds and light; open to the child playing with a toy two doors down; open to the cat or dog breathing as it sleeps, to the rustle of leaves.

Just this: All of this. *All of it.* What could be excluded? Nothing. Not even the self-centered thought that skips across the mind, feeling a little sticky. Included, but you let it pass, like a passing car. Having a thought... And now, being the tremble in the belly, the pain in a sore foot, the spring air and the rumble of traffic. Being the intimacy of experiencing but not knowing. Being here without complaint, without adding to the harming in the world.

This is not preparation. Being this moment is self-centered thought arising and passing, unhindered; it is our senses calling us into the community of beings, our insight deepening; it is the door of compassion opening, connecting, appreciating this precious life.

—*Kate Watson-Forbess*

Being this moment *is* compassion's way.