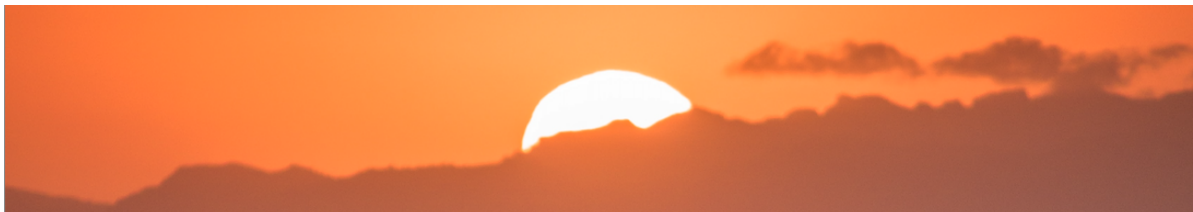


Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

May-June 2022



Experiencing is Key

Soon, we will gather for our June sesshin, taking the opportunity to go deeper in practice. This talk is offered as gentle encouragement between now and the starting bell.

Being just this moment.

Being this moment is always our practice, and in sesshin, this is both easier and more difficult. Easier, because we step away from the busyness of work and family and set aside distractions. More difficult for the same reasons: because we stop our usual activities and forgo escape routes, including our loose chatter. What we are left with is the raw practice of sitting still, being this very moment.

It's tempting to think we should feel a particular way in sesshin. But moments in sitting may, in the everyday sense, be pleasant or unpleasant, peaceful or fretful. Practice asks us to be awake to them all— noticing thoughts (planning, judging, daydreaming, rehearsing, and so on), dropping the story and experiencing each moment, just as it is. Without the story, we rest in not knowing, the intimacy of being our life, arising and passing moment by moment, without our demands that it be different.

2022 Sesshin Dates

June 17–20, 2022

September 16–19, 2022

December 28–31, 2022

June Sesshin

Applications are now being accepted for the June sesshin.

Participants may attend part-time or full-time.

Please apply [here](#).

The Sexual Misconduct Complaint Procedure and Code of Ethical Conduct for Teachers/Practice Leaders

can be found on the [ZCSD website under "Policies."](#)

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

There is a quiet

To see that life around us is changing all the time is effortless. Yet, when it comes to us, we forget or we're blind, and we fall back on ideas of being a fixed self with fixed ways of doing things. And that's a recipe for suffering. If we rest in the moment-by-moment ever-changing experience that is our life, we can attest to the fact that ongoing change is our nature, too, just as it is the nature of all of life, and this gives us perspective on the suffering that is inevitable when we are cramped by the limits of self-centered thought. The scaffolding that props up that fixed notion of self is our self-centered thinking, and if we reinforce that thinking by continuing to believe it, it perpetuates our pain.

Many of us remember ZCSD's founding teacher, Charlotte Joko Beck, saying, "Joy is what's going on, minus our opinion about it." The new book of Joko's teachings, *Ordinary Wonder*, edited by Brenda Beck Hess (Shambhala, 2021), includes that simple teaching, yet the line that follows is even simpler: "[Joy] means that life and me, we're the same thing."

As we sit sesshin—or any time in our life—we have a precious opportunity to experience joy. So if we're caught in thinking, this is our chance to notice: *I like, I don't like, I want, I don't want, it's too hard, this sucks*. Wanting to plan, wanting to fix, wanting to figure out . . .

Our practice is to hear even the whispery, subtle layers of thought below the obvious—and over and over, to disengage, coming to present-moment experience—breath, body, environment. What Elihu Genmyo Smith calls this body-mind-universe that we are. *Refrain, release, decline, disengage, let go, turn away, drop*—it doesn't matter which word you use. It's not about the words. Just make the little shift away from the mental world to the experiential, being careful not to drag your storyline back into the breath with you. Refrain and return. Stop and pop. Being just this unfolding moment, arising and passing . . .

effort in practice. But the effort we make is not to get there; it's to be here.

Also in *Ordinary Wonder*, Joko says: "When we truly experience what we are, whatever it is at every moment, there is freedom. Sometimes, people say to me, 'Oh yes, I'm in touch with who I am. I know my body is tight.' That's not experiencing. For one thing, when we say 'I' know 'my body' is tight, we're already separating us, our knowing, and our bodies. We are assuming there is an 'I' knowing 'something else.' The world is split. When the world is split, there's no peace. There's no freedom.

". . . When you are truly experiencing, you are not feeling the suffering or the anger; you are it. And I say: Be what you are."

Being meticulous helps. Sesshin is designed to challenge us—and on Zoom, without the shared physical presence of sangha, it's easy to cut corners and find ways to take the edge off. If we skirt the discipline of sesshin and get sloppy, we cheat ourselves. Moments of what we call tedium, confusion, anxiety, physical dis-ease—staying present in these is part of our training. In subtle ways, it weakens the self-centered dream . . . and allows our practice to go deeper.

Sometimes, old stuff comes up. We don't go digging for things, but anything can arise. We all have wounds in our lives. Some we share with those closest to us, those we trust most. Some we may not share with anyone. It is important that we share them with ourselves. If something is still unresolved, a week later, 6 months later, 5 or 50 years later, it will keep surfacing. And when it does, that is exactly our opportunity to see what we are believing that holds the hurt in place; it's our opportunity to let that thinking loosen and float free; our opportunity to be the experience of hurting right now and, in this way, to heal into the present moment.

Not, "I am experiencing my hurt now." Not identifying with it all over again. Just being this

present-moment experiencing of the quiver, sorrow, grief, touched by the air on our skin, the sunlight through a window, the sound of a plane . . . As Genmyo says, we are not a bag of blood and bones encased in skin, separate from the universe. We never were.

There is a quiet effort in practice. But the effort we make is not to get *there*; it's to be *here*. It's not to become someone we think we should be; it's to be who we are. In the extended sittings of sesshin, your experience may fluctuate from calm to troubled, bright to sleepy, muddled to clear. Your task is to maintain awareness—to maintain presence—through it all.

May you experience the joy and wonder of being this precious life that you always are.

—Kate Myoku Forbess

Joy is what's going on, minus our opinion about it. —Charlotte Joko Beck