

Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

January-February 2023



The Doing of Non-Doing

"A Human Doer is an individual or person who lives on auto-pilot. These are people who prioritize their safety and feeling good by trying to 'fix' every circumstance or road block that comes their way. These are people simply 'surviving life' by keeping extremely busy while feeling extraordinary amounts of pressure. Human Doers live predictable lives. There is very little, if any, time for them to spend creating, exploring, or being curious about new things because there is simply too much to 'do.' Their moments of temporary joy come when they complete a task, but it is then quickly diminished when the next task presents itself."

This is a quote from Corey Collins, who describes himself as a "personal empowerment coach."

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[Sesshin Application](#)

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2023 Sesshin Dates

March 10-13

June 8-12

The quote represents what we might call the first stage of turning toward non-doing. Awakening to that possibility. Getting some initial space around what we're up to, related to this. We'll go a little deeper—into our practice, beyond all personal goals of becoming a “non-doer.”

Zen teachings tell us we're already, fundamentally, a non-doer. This human journey we're on is a marvelous one—life is a wonder. Containing the exquisite perceptions, phenomena, nuances, thoughts, feelings, emotions, challenges, joys, and sorrows of being a human. Our practice and our life are about all of this. We don't need to be lost in our incessant doing, which can be a lifetime of dis-ease, where we miss the wonder of life.

So we can consider “non-doing.” How does this relate to our practice and our life? You might say, what a task for the likes of us humans, being the determined doers that we are.

"Non-doing: to refrain from doing as the basis for allowing the body to function naturally, and for learning to act in such a way that we do not get in the way of this natural element in the performance of living." —*The Dimon Institute*

"The Tao does nothing, yet leaves nothing undone." —*Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching*

"Holding onto thoughts denies reality, and you sink into a stupor of resistance. Holding onto things wrecks your balance, and throws you off course." —*Third Zen Ancestor*

"One's own self is neither existent nor nonexistent. It is non-doing." —*Dogen*

If one is growing a plant, having given it the

September 8-11
December 28-31

Spring Practice Period

The Spring Practice Period will run from March 11 to April 1.

More information will be available nearer the time.

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

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

"Letting the 'me,' the 'I,' the doer, drop away can open us up to Just Being."

right conditions of sunlight, good soil, and water, can one leave it at that? This is the best way to ensure the growth of the plant. We allow ourselves to know and do what is necessary and then get out of the way. And enjoy witnessing and experiencing the natural wonder of the plant's growth.

This applies to everything we do in life. If we can let nature, our nature, take its course, it gets things done.

If we go against this flow, we tend to increase our suffering.

There can be a required intelligent action, where we are part of the natural flow, and then a letting go. There's a sort of balancing act here, and it can be non-trivial. It's likely our self-centered thinking, habits, drama will sustain a condition of imbalance, because that's doing. That's a separate somebody doing something. It is the nature of the human ego to put self and selfing into the picture, spinning instead of flowing. Spinning can be painful.

So just what is the way of nondoing?

It's along the way of our practice. It's doing zazen, having an authentic, committed sitting practice. Nothing new, really. We could say it's "not adding a head to the one we already have," a phrase we've probably heard before.

The teachings suggest, "Be a blank slate," or, "Be like a blank piece of paper." As we sit with this, this is what we might see. The ego, that persona-generating mechanism, might set to work launching ideas of what the blank slate is—there may be thoughts like, "So, just how do I do this? I've got to get a certain state of mind, stop my thinking maybe. How am I going to do nothing?"

We will try to do nothing. We'll go into selfing, employing mental concepts of "nothing," "not nothing," "I'm doing," "I'm trying." More ideas. But we can observe these thoughts and emotions, arising and fading. We might get caught up in them—and believe them. Our practice is to notice what is happening. There's a big difference between being blindly lost in this thinking and conceptualizing and getting some space of awareness around it. In practicing this way, we increase our ability to sense the times and ways that "my doing" enters into the midst of living.

And let's not forget we have a body. We are a physical being. Part of this awareness can be sensing our bodily "doing"—can we notice movement and tension in the eyes, mouth, hands, feet, neck, etc.?

More practice examples might help to bring this home. A useful practice we have here at Zen Center of San Diego is thought labeling. We can do this in a more or less non-doing way.

A core belief for a lot of us is not being good enough. Characteristic of this are thoughts such as, "I am unworthy. I'll never get this. This proves how inadequate I am." Believing in this self can be painful. Casting the light of awareness here can be healing.

If, when we practice with this, we keep the "I" in it—that is, "I am having the believed thought, 'I am inadequate,'"—that is the "doing-I" noticing the thought. Suppose we take out that first "I" and make it, "Having the believed thought, 'I am inadequate.'" Then it's the observer observing the belief (of the doer).

"Having the believed thought that . . ." can objectify what's happening, depersonalize it, if you will, so it's not so much a matter of

identifying as a separate someone doing something. It can become more phenomenal, an interesting thing that is happening, less personal, less doing.

Zazen helps us see our doing. Suppose you're in the middle of a sitting period just being listening. Just hearing the sounds. Then, out of this nowhere, you find yourself congratulating yourself for "just hearing the sounds. Ahh, at last I've done it." Can you catch yourself being the doer here, the shift to doing? Then just return to listening without a listener? Return without any self-judgment?

This can have importance in all our specific practices, not to mention life, letting in more non-doing, less of a personality that is doing, or simply noticing our doing as it happens. We can better see how we might be feeding self-centeredness, maintaining or even building that doer image of ourselves, even in the midst of sitting. Awareness heals.

Letting the "me," the "I," the doer, drop away can open us up to Just Being. Being present as this moment, a quiet alertness, open, experiencing. No one doing. Just Being is non-doing. As more of a non-doer, we can still experience the marvelous phenomena of life in all its splendor, even more so.

—*Chuck Sweet*

"We're either in awareness, which is our natural state, or we're doing something else." ~

Charlotte Joko Beck