

Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

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Control and Surrender

Sometimes we find our mind awash with thoughts that have a strong pull to them. Not inventive or inspiring thoughts, but painful thoughts. Any life events that get us close to our core belief (basically, an area of strong belief or conditioning) can put us there. It's not fun when it happens. We get caught in a strong reaction—"Oh, I need to do something about this." We're likely to get a visit from our Controller, our need to control what's happening and control our life.

But there is the possibility of just watching these energetic, reactive thoughts. We might recognize that "this is just what-is, this moment." Nothing more than thoughts. Probably thoughts that have played many times before, and likely will again. We don't need to cling to them. Particularly if we allow the feelings and sensations that are part of this to go into and through the body and be experienced there, there can be a shift.

Part of the shift might be finding that "there is nothing really wrong," as we just see the self-centered thoughts for what they are, and relax (you could say surrender, or let go), and gain some distance from the pull of the thoughts. We let ourselves get the larger picture, where

2023 Sesshin Dates

December 28-31

December Sesshin
enrollment
opens November 1st.
<http://www.zencentersandiego.org/schedule/sesshin.php>

The Sexual Misconduct
Complaint Procedure and
Code of Ethical Conduct for
Teachers/Practice Leaders
can be found on the ZCSD
website under "Policies."
<http://www.zencentersandiego.org/Policies/>

we relate *to* our thoughts instead of relating *from* them.

The need to control, fear of loss of control, can shift to a mind-body presence, a wider perspective where we're using a larger part of who and what we are. Again, this does involve something of a surrender—a giving up of that mental notion of being a separate somebody having and believing the thoughts. This is giving up the controller. Or you could say giving up that which is taking identity, the sense of self, from the reaction that is happening. At least for a little while.

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way forward."*

You might have thoughts and feelings that say, "But there really *is* something that needs to be done." There is something to be done, but it's not continuing to be caught up in the spinning thoughts. Getting that space, that larger perspective, is our practice. There is a good opportunity here to see difficult thoughts and sensations that we want to cover up by employing our life strategies. Strategies that we probably know are ineffective.

Of course, we have things we need to do in our life, we have responsibilities—our work, people in our lives, shopping, paying bills, doing the dishes. When we are present, attentive, paying attention as we carry out these things, well, that's living our life. We run into suffering as we add on, and believe, and get carried away by our self-centered thoughts. We become a separate someone who needs to get control of this unpredictable life, thinking more than living. That doesn't serve us.

This isn't about denying anything. It's about the possibility of allowing something to clarify. We muster enough awareness to see through what's happening. And letting what we're seeing go through the body, deeper into the body-mind, can be helpful. We are an intelligence that, when allowed to function, will point us in a helpful direction.

Letting clarity be, we are better able to see the way forward. I've experienced this many times. This inherent ability we all share is something to be grateful for.

Clarity will come as it comes—maybe taking longer than we'd like—but we can stay in there with our attention and intention to be present. We do our best—and we might add some self-mercy. I've found life is pretty merciful and have always appreciated Pema Chodron's words, "Life is a good teacher and a good friend."

This is at the heart of our practice, at the heart of our challenge. We've probably heard this many times, but we tend to forget.

And it's pretty simple—at least, simply stated. The attention of practice can help us see how we're

complicating things. My controller seems to like thinking up complications. These are like tentacles of holding that increase suffering.

And there's the rub. Our controller wants to keep playing its game. We get used to how our game goes, and we tend to identify with it. Whatever our strong conditioning centers around, we're going to encounter a resistance, an inertia—even as we have an awareness of how this makes life more painful. No one says this surrender is easy, but it is possible.

So, enter a patient, persistent, authentic practice. There is good news here if we're willing to do the work. Daily sitting and attending sesshin (intensives), doing our best in daily life and practicing there, is taking our opportunity to clarify this life.

For me there is always a flag that signals that mode of, "This is bad, I need to do something." Simply put, it's anxiety. Maybe for you, too. Experiencing this in the body and noticing the thoughts are effective ways of just residing in what's happening, letting the whole thing reveal itself to us, as it will. If we get the larger picture.

Can we just see and feel what's here now, without our control strategies? Being without them is uncomfortable, to say the least perhaps, but maybe we can do it a little bit. And then, after a while, maybe a little bit more, and then a little more. Again, patience and persistence.

We might remember that we'll all experience our cycling, our arisings and fallings. They are part of our evolution, and they always present a valuable opportunity to see something more clearly, and then to live it.

—*Chuck Sweet*

"We come to sitting practice not to get answers, but to become more aware."

—*Joko Beck*